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Abstract

Henry Handel Richardson's satiric story cycle 'Growing Pains: Sketches of Girlhood', traces the emotional and sexual growth of a composite protagonist, from early childhood in 'The Bathe' to marriageable age in 'Two Hanged Women'. Jeannette Foster's opinion that the stories are integrated and constitute an etiology for a homosexual woman is unarguable. However, Foster's view that they represent a 'trial flight towards a novel centred on a woman' is a less productive insight, and her brief description takes no account of Richardson's satirical purpose, or the fiction's perspective of value.² The stories, which dramatise the pressures on girls and women towards heterosexual conformity, parody conventional representations of heterosexual romance, while writing against contemporary sexual theory. Richardson's developmental cycle, published between 1929-1934, is innovative in form as well as in the degree to which it values its sex variant protagonists. Female sex variance is viewed not from a biological but from a socially critical perspective very much in advance of other contemporary literature on the theme in English.

CAROL FRANKLIN

H.H. Richardson's 'Two Hanged Women'. Our Own True Selves and Compulsory Heterosexuality

Henry Handel Richardson's satiric story cycle 'Growing Pains: Sketches of Girlhood',¹ traces the emotional and sexual growth of a composite protagonist, from early childhood in 'The Bathe' to marriageable age in 'Two Hanged Women'. Jeannette Foster's opinion that the stories are integrated and constitute an etiology for a homosexual woman is unarguable. However, Foster's view that they represent a 'trial flight towards a novel centred on a woman' is a less productive insight, and her brief description takes no account of Richardson's satirical purpose, or the fiction's perspective of value.² The stories, which dramatise the pressures on girls and women towards heterosexual conformity, parody conventional representations of heterosexual romance, while writing against contemporary sexual theory. Richardson's developmental cycle, published between 1929-1934, is innovative in form as well as in the degree to which it values its sex variant protagonists. Female sex variance is viewed not from a biological but from a socially critical perspective very much in advance of other contemporary literature on the theme in English.

Most commentators on 'Two Hanged Women' have applied the term 'deviant' to the protagonists, confirming the very kind of exclusion and bigoted labelling against which Richardson was writing.³ 'Two Hanged Women' concerns a decision which no young woman ought to make by recourse to convention: whether and whom to marry. It is also a specific attack on Radclyffe Hall's position on female homosexuality in her 1928 novel, *The Well of Loneliness*.

No one could have lived in London in 1928 and 1929 and been unaware of the *Well* furor: the reviews, the censorship, the two trials followed by the U.S. case, the enlistment of most major literary figures against its banning. Debate entered the literary journals, and newspapers were full of it.⁴ Because of its banning *The Well* became, says Blanche Wiesen Cook, 'the archetype of all things lesbian'.⁵

Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, also published in 1928 (as was *Orlando*, a tribute to her lover Vita Sackville-West), has oblique references to *The Well*.⁶ Woolf's famous point about the unwritten lives of women, and especially women's friendships, appears too: 'So much has been left out, unattempted ... almost without exception they are shown in their relation to men' (p. 82). External pressures on women writers ('a legacy of our sexual barbarity' (p. 88)), she said, would make it difficult for them to treat variant sex as a subject. Woolf's rational attitude towards bringing 'buried things to light', making 'one wonder what need there had been to bury them' (p. 92), is shared by Richardson, who had read *A Room of One's Own* (she sent a copy to Mary Kernot in 1931).

The Well of Loneliness had, unfortunately, revived the 'third sex' theory to explain homosexuality. On her final page Hall's lesbian hero, Stephen, raises a maudlin cry to God to acknowledge her, and to heterosexuals for tolerance on the grounds of 'congenital freakishness'. To make matters worse, Hall added the old stereotype of masculine traits in the victim protagonist, and mysterious influences while in the womb, without in any way questioning a basic heterosexist division of the sexes in the culture. Richardson's stories subvert Hall's histrionics and the congenital freak theory, which, Lillian Faderman said, 'had such a devastating effect on female same-sex love':

It reinforced the notion that some women would not marry not because the institution was often unjust ... that they loved other women not because such love was natural - but instead because they were born into the wrong body. ... Many a woman must have decided to tolerate even the worst heterosexual inequities rather than to view herself [as a freak].⁷

The book remained *the* lesbian novel in people's perceptions for four decades.

Social and literary context is almost as important as the text itself in 'Two Hanged Women', a story of reversals of expectations that ask to be read back into the culture. The story is ultimately about truth to oneself, whatever that truth may turn out to be. But it is just as clearly about the forces ranged against people of a different sexual inclination from the usual sanctioned, even enforced by society, what the lesbian poet and critic Adrienne Rich calls the institution of 'compulsory heterosexuality'.⁸ Rich considers that a lesbian girl is induced to see her sexual destiny as being inevitable heterosexuality against her own instincts because of 'the ideology of heterosexual romance, beamed at her from childhood out of fairy tales, television, films, advertising, popular songs, wedding pageantry...' (p. 19). The choice of heterosexuality 'may not be a "preference" at all but something that has to be imposed, managed, organized, propagandized, and maintained by force' (p. 23).

Adrienne Rich believes that many commentators and theorists neglect economic and 'other material realities that help to create psychological

reality' (p. 7), including the 'silences of literature' (p. 8). Richardson's story illustrates the process whereby material reality creates in the unnamed younger girl protagonist a psychological situation driving her toward 'compulsory heterosexuality'.

'Two Hanged Women' examines the effect on lesbian love of unequal pressure on women to marry. The younger girl's bravado and her self-destructed argument for marriage: her burying her face in Betty's lap: 'deeper into warmth and darkness' (p. 140) – a physical embrace sought and maintained by her against the hurt coolness of her friend (viewed in contrast to her physical repugnance for Fred, whom she otherwise likes and admires), is inescapably suggestive and significant.

There is no *authorial* 'special pleading' nor peculiar self-loathing in the protagonists of 'Two Hanged Women' such as that which caused such anger and revulsion in contemporary readers of *The Well of Loneliness*. Richardson shows her lesbian protagonists as normal but benighted, opposed and derided by others.

The text opens with an incident that reverses 'natural' expectations: one moonless night a boy and his girlfriend discover that their secluded trysting place is already occupied. So to 'frighten off' these 'intruders' they engage in loud 'love-making' (p. 134) – only to discover when they are successful that the two dark figures, whom they had assumed to be lovers like themselves, are women.

A clever verbal trick loaded with literary and cultural significance, and put into the mouth of the normative male lover, Pincher, embodies the sexual theme: 'Well I'm damned! If it wasn't just two hanged women!' (p. 134) The usage invites the reversal: 'Well I'm hanged if it wasn't two damned women', two *femmes damnées*, two Sapphists, two lesbians.

It is significant that the author gives the role of labelling to the male character. This mental disclosure combines with the physical disclosure, the emergence of the women from the shadows just prior to Pincher's outburst giving us a couple exposed, a judgment expressed, a surprise revelation by a male onlooker which prepares us culturally and socially as readers for the predicament that is to follow. (The author ironically also has Pincher 'damning' himself.)

The term *femme damnée* has something of a literary and artistic history, including in English fiction. Baudelaire's is the best-known literary name associated with the use of the term, resultant upon the notoriety of his volume *Les fleurs du mal*.⁹ One of these poems was 'Femmes damnées' (subtitled 'Delphine et Hippolite'.)

In Richardson's story the elder girl Betty, with defiant scorn, confronts the younger one's wavering under pressure towards marriage, thus: 'Marry your Fred, and you'll never need to [see me] again' (p. 139). (In 'Femmes damnées' Delphine says almost the same to Hippolite, who is fearful and reluctant in their love.¹⁰) To Betty's challenge the younger one responds at first with hopeful talk of weddings and social acceptance,

until (in a skilfully handled passage of monologue), having been let run her narrative course by her silent older friend, she gradually finds herself undercutting her own assertions of 'normality', and completely contradicting her own defiant opening statements. Her thoughts lead her to speculate confidently on each step towards the desired social approval via marriage, until: 'And when he came back at night, he'd ... I'd ... I mean I'd -' (ellipses in original, p. 139). At this point she becomes distressed and agitated, for she cannot bear his nearness, his touch, even his looking at her: 'I feel I shall have to scream ...' She describes her own reaction to his attempt to kiss her ('I could have died with the horror of it') and her revulsion at his physical traits ('His breath ... his breath ... and his mouth - like fruit pulp - and the black hairs on his wrists ...' (ellipses in original, p. 139)). To her the man's physicality is gross, yet in non-sexual ways she likes this man and the reader is given no reason to suppose that heterosexual women would share her reaction. At the end of the story she clings with fervour to the embrace of Betty, her face buried in her lap.

Baudelaire dwells on the horrors of what he considered would be ultimate perdition for his lesbian couple. Richardson lets her unnamed character reveal her sexual distaste for the male, and abjuring the usual stereotyping of such a girl as a helpless *victim* of an older woman, ends her story on a note of helpless *appeal* from this younger girl to the older Betty. Betty herself, reversing the stereotype, remains silent, watchful and brooding.

The introductory scene wherein licensed heterosexual lovers discover the usurpation of their 'rightful' place by a same-sex couple is a structural device which prefigures the problematical situation of the younger girl, unnamed, and not yet twenty-five. Her intimate bond with the older Betty includes physical warmth and comfort. Heart and mind are in conflict, her true instincts are confused by powerful socially imposed strictures, focused chiefly through her mother.

During their argument the younger gives as reasons for marrying Fred social pressure and social acceptance (as opposed to ridicule) of them as a couple; pressure from, and the desire to please her mother; also a personal liking for Fred. But the deciding factor is that she sees marriage as freedom from both conflict and her mother. This is the point at which she reveals her sexual aversion to Fred, thus startlingly undermining her own arguments. Like the protagonist of an earlier story she is repelled 'even in thought'.

As is usual in Richardson's fiction the sub-text of emotional value is conveyed through touch. During the girl's account of how she is determined to have all the 'normal' things, 'a proper wedding like other girls' (p. 139), her voice falters, she breaks down, her affected bravado failing her at the point of recall of heterosexual touch: physical intimacy in marriage.

The story is set apart from the rounds of daily life: beside the sea at flood tide at the dark of the moon.¹¹ There are graduated sets of symbolic

sites: one sanctioned for heterosexual couples (Pincher and Baby, and Fred and herself); the other to which the same-sex couple is relegated. The first (usurped) heterosexual site, a seat in the sexually suggestive 'velvety shade' (p. 134) of the overhanging sea wall, from which the women are driven by the couple, represents the farthest degree to which the heterosexual couple need go for courting privacy. The homosexual pair are driven out first from the sea wall then to the breakwater, both places representing the community's defences against elemental nature. Their relative distance from public acceptability is thus metaphorically established from the beginning.

All the lovers' sites are dark. As the younger girl relates, for heterosexuals there is a public level of courtship darkness, licensed by society: the back seats at the pictures where Fred takes her. The homosexual couple is driven 'out on to the breakwater' at two removes from the everyday by Pincher's derision. The remoteness is not a factor of privacy, but of pariah status, exclusion: 'On this remote seat, with their backs turned on lovers, lights, the town, the two girls sat and gazed wordlessly at the dark sea, over which great Jupiter was flinging a thin gold line' (p. 135).

The heterosexual couple throws words at these women, they themselves must remain 'wordless'. The reader has the sense of their being increasingly isolated, driven to the edge, outcast and at risk. Here they are not just turning their backs on the literal 'lovers', 'lights' and 'town', but on the daylight world of received opinion. It is here that the younger woman confesses how she hates being laughed at. Marriage to Fred would buy social acceptance: 'And other people, when they see us, look ... well I don't quite know how to say it, but they look sort of pleased; and they make room for us and let us into the dark corner seats at the pictures, just as if we'd a right to them.' (ellipsis in original, p. 137)

The 'wispy' moon has already set. The female moon principle is represented by its dark phase, linked with women outside the social pale. The sea, also female, is at flood-tide like a peaceful animal: 'slothfully lapping the shingle' (p. 134). The natural setting suggests the configurations of social power. The sea is still, but over it 'great Jupiter is flinging a thin gold line.' Ascendancy is contested between the dark of the moon and Jupiter: the chief of the male gods, associated with public morality, oaths, and the most solemn form of marriage – (*confarreatio*) a state ceremony, transferring the control of a woman from the father to the husband; the bond of union of the community, but in essence a male business. The thin gold line is reminiscent of the wedding ring, and of a chain of control.

The motif of the tide is very important in the story. The younger girl complains of having no peace, of suffering an 'eternal dragging two ways' (p. 139): mother and marriage one way, Betty the other. Jupiter is linked threateningly to the sea, the 'stealthy' sea that ebbs and flows, and which is due next to turn on the ebb tide may have the inevitability of society

and 'Mother' (who has been characterized as 'sly' by Betty), in separating the lesbian couple.

Since one major outraged criticism of *The Well of Loneliness* was that it showed 'a normal young girl who became a helpless subject of perverted influence' from an 'invert',¹² it is worth noting that it is the younger girl, not Betty, who initiates and maintains physical contact. The text will not sustain the hackneyed convention of an 'evil' older lesbian 'seducing an innocent girl' against her will. It does invoke the reigning stereotype lesbian couple: dark, tall older girl, fair, shorter younger girl; but by making the younger girl initiate action Richardson reverses conventional expectations.

The emotional and sexual story is told symbolically through characters' hands which permit us to evaluate each situation. The two women are linked hand in hand as they walk. Ridicule has made the younger girl decide to go home: 'Mother will be angry' (p. 135). At this the older Betty tries to withdraw her own hand. Her friend anticipates her intention and holds her fast, gradually working her own hand more closely into Betty's. However, when Betty sarcastically points out that the girl's mother doesn't mind how late she stays out with Fred, the girl does relinquish Betty's hand. She pushes it aside, and it lies 'palm upwards, the fingers still curved from her hold, looking like a thing with a separate life of its own; but a life that was *ebbing*' (emphasis added, p. 135). The power of the mother is also conveyed by hands. According to Betty she has a 'stranglehold' on the younger woman (p. 138). As we have noted the text uses Fred's hands (the 'black hairs on his wrists' (p. 14)) to convey the younger girl's sexual disgust.

Given this sub-text, the implications of naming the heterosexual male 'Pincher' are self-evident. His name and that of his partner, 'Baby', constitute a savage authorial evaluation by which the 'normal' couple of licensed lovers consists of an immature female, and a crude, sexually hurtful male. Their behaviour reinforces the picture: a vulgar display of 'loud, smacking kisses, amatory pinches and ticklings' to, in their words, 'frighten off' the women. The boy's 'damned' and 'hanged' speech, whose terms connote retribution, violence and suffering, is followed by punitive military language: 'Retreating before a *salvo* of derisive laughter' (emphasis added, p. 134), representing 'normal' attitudes to same-sex love.

The sea figures in the first and the last of the eight stories of 'Growing Pains'. In 'The Bath' 'the alarming ferocious surf had withdrawn' (p. 71), leaving behind it 'large pools, some shallow and safe, others deep, hiding strange things'. These sea images correspond to psychic events in the child who discovers that there is more than one face to the feminine sea, the sea *as mother*. It was by the sea that she saw Eros travestied, lost the lap of the mother and saw what it meant, in gender terms, to become a woman, 'a mother'. In 'Two Hanged Women' the sea again embodies human states or attitudes. The sea is kept back from the esplanade by a 'sea-wall', and

the same-sex lovers who do not follow society's preferred pattern are hedged about by restriction and driven by society's ridicule to the breakwater, further out, and nearer to risk and buffeting.

However, when the young women go out on the breakwater the sea is no threat to them: 'There was no sound but the lapping, sucking, sighing of the ripples at the edge' (p. 136). This is a sensuous, even sensual, animal evocation. Behind them is heard the 'screech of an owl in the tall trees on the hillside' (p. 136) (perhaps a reference to Athene, with whom the owl is associated in mythology and who is variously associated with home and hearth, the family bond, a symbol of the community itself, but allied to male power in this role).¹³ The metaphoric link is made between the sea and their relationship. But the sea is also linked to the mother, as later in her agonized one-sided argument, the younger girl declares:

If I only think what it would be like to be fixed up and settled, and able to live in peace without this *eternal dragging two ways* ... just as if I was being torn in half. And see Mother smiling and happy again, like she used to be. Between the two of you I'm nothing but a punch-ball. (emphasis added, p. 139)

The buried tidal metaphor highlights the fact that it is not Betty and Fred, male and female, competing for the younger girl – but two women, the mother and Betty, who represent two possible ways of being. Both try to claim the girl; Betty does not use enticement or forceful pressure, the mother (and society) does. Sustained persuasion, arguments and inducements are clearly shown to come from the heterosexual side. This is dramatized vitally and very effectively by the girl's monologue during which Betty neither argues nor intervenes by pleading, and the girl betrays her own declared position, exposing the social inducements, and her mother's moral blackmail. The mother tries to claim the girl for marriage, following her own, and conformist society's expectations: claiming her for 'culture', failing to account for difference. Earlier Betty had declared that her friend should follow her own inclinations, her 'nature', but in voicing her congenital theory (p. 138 – this crucial aspect is discussed later) Betty fails to locate the real problem, she is being simplistic and irrational in her jealousy and hurt. It is, ironically, the younger girl who unintentionally locates the problem herself.

Their predicament seems insoluble to them – and locked in a time and a place, both culturally inimical, it probably is. The reader may wonder why one cannot just as easily 'be settled' with the person of one's inclinations without such fuss. The story ends on a note that might suggest 'nature', a 'stealthily heaving sea', is not to be so easily denied. 'Stealthy' recalls Betty's more pejorative description of the socially conformist mother as 'sly' (p. 138). If lesbian sexual preference has had to be kept secret, the elaborate means used to deny or control it have also often been underhand.

This last scene is visually significant, being a traditional representation, a mother-and-child tableau: Betty holds the younger girl in her arms, to her breast in silent comforting, her chin resting on hair 'silky and downy as an infant's' (p. 141). It dramatises a notion common among modern feminists, an alternative model for 'mothering', nurturance: (lesbian) women mothering each other – since their natural mothers give no protection for their 'true selves', but deliver them up to a hostile world. This scene of shared tenderness, however beleaguered, compares favourably with the courting scene of the vulgar, derisive and punitive heterosexual 'control' couple, Pincher and Baby, whose interactions leave something of tenderness to be desired. If the latter is a paradigm for heterosexual couplings, Betty and her friend do not suffer by comparison.

Several, perhaps coincidental, textual echoes exist between 'Growing Pains' and *The Well of Loneliness*. The final scene contrasts with a similar one in the novel. 'Mary slipped a small, cool hand into Stephen's and they walked on towards the edge of the headland. For a long time they gazed out over the sea'.¹⁴ Stephen, the male-identifying lesbian protagonist, puts an arm around Mary, saying: 'Are you tired, you little child?', which in keeping with her general behaviour as the 'male' is more paternalistic than nurturant (p. 311).

The last scene of this last story in 'Growing Pains' reverses the situation in the first story. The tide was out in 'The Bathe', it is in in 'Two Hanged Women'; it was a bright sunny day in 'The Bathe', it is a dark moonless night in 'Two Hanged Women'. Closing the circle, 'Two Hanged Women' restores the girl to the lost lap of the 'mother' (lost in 'The Bathe' where Eros was travestied and the meaning of 'mother' was exposed as problematical) – restores comfort love, and confirms lesbian erotic love.

Food (sex) symbolism reinforces the idea of the younger girl's homosexual nature, or difference: her revulsion from Fred's kiss: 'his mouth – like fruit pulp' – she 'could have died with the horror of it' (p. 140), also her social pride at having a suitor: 'One they'd [other girls] eat their hats to get, too!' (p. 136) An earlier typescript had the less effective: 'they'd give their best silk stockings to get too', where dress conveys socialisation, but lacks sexual implications, Richardson's deliberate substitution of a cliché improves the text, wittily undercuts the character, and alienates the reader from the subject (marriage) at hand: Fred is as unappetizing to this girl as a hat, viewed literally as food, is. The frustrated girl is 'fed up to the neck' (p. 139). Throughout 'Growing Pains' examples abound where the protagonist cannot eat, or chokes, in sexual situations.

The younger girl's testimony makes it clear that the problem for same-sex relationships is neither congenital defect nor arrested sexual development, but social pressure. Derision, being laughed at, prevents the girl from attaining equanimity in her relationship with Betty. The chance of peace from her mother, of achieving acceptance: 'such a warm cosy comfy feeling' (p. 137); and status through being with a male: 'like other girls'

(p. 136) propel her towards conformity. Fred's objective value – he dances well, he doesn't drink – is never more than that, never personalised, she expresses no emotional feeling for him. Especially seductive for her is the wedding pageantry, the social inducement to have a 'proper wedding like other girls, with a veil and bridesmaids and bushels of flowers. And I'll live in a house of my own, where I can do as I like, and be left in peace...' (p. 130).

Two of three earlier signed typescripts in the National Library have a stronger version of the cultural source of the romantic view of marriage as an ending, 'happily ever after' claimed by the younger girl. The text reads: 'and have a proper wedding like *the girls in the pictures*' (emphasis added).¹⁵ Richardson's final text maintains the wedding pageantry reference, for this is 'normal'; but for 'girls in the pictures' she substitutes 'other girls' which stresses the ordinary, average quality or 'normality' of marriage. An emphasis on 'glamour' would be a textual *distraction*, rather than a reinforcement of ideas. Richardson's textual changes variously work to point up the meaning with subtlety, wit or greater sting. They are not seemingly pointless, as some of her early critics claimed.

The parodic treatment of rudimentary congenital theory in Betty's reference to the 'same blood in two sets of veins' appears to be a deliberate engagement with Radclyffe Hall's novel. Betty's speech, assigning a cause for her friend's wavering in her emotional allegiance against her and towards men, is on the surface of it silly; yet it is no sillier than the theories often proposed as causes of sexual preference, and is obviously designed to recall them mockingly to the reader. Hall espoused the Krafft-Ebing version of the congenital freak theory. As 'causes' of her heroine's 'tragic' condition Hall irrationally claims the father's wish for a male heir and the pregnant mother's desire for a male baby. Here is Betty's speech from 'Two Hanged Women' blaming the mother of her friend, not, ironically, for the friend's preference for women, but for her recent involvement with a male, her suitor Fred: 'Oh! mothers aren't fair – I mean it's not fair of nature to weigh us down with them and yet expect us to be our own true selves. The handicap's too great. All those months, when the same blood's running through two sets of veins – there's no getting away from that, ever after.' (emphasis added, p. 138)

Dorothy Green claims 'Richardson must have considerably revised this passage for the collected stories: it is much stronger than that of the typescript in the National Library collection, where there is no reference to the "same blood running through two sets of veins"'.¹⁶ This isn't true. There are three typescripts of 'Two Hanged Women' one begins at NL MSS 133/5/61 and is signed; it contains the passage in full. A second, also signed, begins at NL MSS 133/5/66. The passage here has two lines missing. These are: 'All those months when the same blood's running through two sets of veins – there's no getting away from that, ever after. Take yours.' (The passage is on NL MSS 133/5/70.) However, these two lines

exactly fill two lines of typescript happening also to begin at a capital letter and end at a stop, but interrupting the flow of 'Take yours. As I say, does she need to open her mouth?' (p. 138). This is clearly an error by the typist copying from the first typescript, and not immediately picked up by Richardson, for the typescript of the whole book restores the missing slab of text ('Two Hanged Women' begins at 210, the passage is on 214).¹⁷ Whatever may be implied in Green's comment, the passage was in two of three signed typescripts as well as the final collection, and is indeed the parodic cornerstone of the story.

This part of Betty's speech, as a theory of why her friend should be influenced strongly by her mother, and why she should now consider becoming involved with a man, is an ironic reversal of Hall's theory about why a woman loves a woman, i.e. is an 'invert', Richardson uses it to 'show' why a woman might marry a man, i.e. be 'normal', heterosexual. It is deliberately quite nonsensical in the same way that Radclyffe Hall's was. Literally everybody, male and female, of whatever sexual preference, is subject to the same biological experience in the womb to the extent of having 'two sets of veins' and the same blood supply linking mother and child, and obviously not everyone alive feels the same sort of compulsion and guilt felt by Betty's friend. The claim is illogical in the very simplest way, and could not be the specific cause of any particular thing *other than an inherited disorder*.

But if the girl's mother is disposed towards sexual ties with men then the girl has not inherited her 'disorder' from her. In this part of Betty's speech her theory is clearly not a valid one, but a caricature of Radclyffe Hall. It is in fact a *reductio ad absurdum* of specious and irrational sexual theories. Even in accounting for their own sex-variance, the text implies, women are inadequately knowledgeable, subject to wild speculation and pseudo-science. Yet the very silliness in claiming that a so-called *normal* propensity (to please her mother, to respond to men's courtship) is influenced for in the womb calls the reader's critical attention to it in a way that is not threatening. Out of this emerge both the implicit comparison with *The Well of Loneliness* and an invitation to the reader to search for what the mother's *actual* role in her daughter's choice of sexual partner might be.

Richardson's first audience would have thought of the superficially more plausible, yet equally silly causative sequence claimed for Stephen's sexual preference in *The Well*. Readers who may never have read *The Well* will still have their attention directed to the mother issue, and from other details in the story be able to form a more rational judgment *which still implicates the 'mother'*, but by nurture, social attitudes of mothers, not by a particular mother, mysteriously engendering a particular *nature* in her offspring.¹⁸

For the operative phrase in Betty's speech, the one that allows us to pose the real question, is the phrase 'our own true selves'. What *is* each girl's

'true self'? How does the girl (and the reader) discover it? And once 'discovered', how is its validity in this literary artifact tested? The answer to the last question is by Richardson's habitual test – by touch. For both girls take their physical contact with each other naturally, intimately: their hand contact, the younger one burrowing her face deep into Betty's lap – Betty holding her friend to her breast (and this is the same girl who can not bear Fred to be even near her, could scream in fact at his very look).

So what is the role of the mother in sexual preference? No mysterious link of blood emerges, but massive pressure from mother and society combined to follow conventional patterns of life, while ridicule damages trust in same-sex physical instinct and comradeship. 'Two Hanged Women' shows homosexual preference in these women to be a physical response: it is 'natural'. Wavering is due to societal pressure: it is 'cultural'.

If the reader ceases to look on the two women as 'real' people, and to read them conceptually as elements of literary structure, they become two incomplete parts of an emerging idea. Betty is bitterly aware of the 'maternal': the complex cultural forces against them, yet espouses (*faute de mieux?*) an irrational and emotional theory to explain her friend's problems. The younger girl is acutely aware of these forces also, but only as very persuasive reasons for conforming. She does not analyse them as things to resist because they imprison. Ridicule is a powerfully persuasive incentive for one's rationalization of an unsatisfactory position. Most importantly, the younger girl in the story serves as the 'control' character (for sexual repugnance for the male, experienced as innate), because she is otherwise so 'normative': attractive, dutiful, and so on. Both girls represent partial understanding; they are both casting about, literally and figuratively, in the dark. As usual, it is the reader who must recreate the whole picture, and recognize the great visual serenity of the last scene of mutual physical comfort.

NOTES

1. A group of eight stories, first published under this title in *The End of a Childhood* (London: Heinemann, 1934). All page references are to this edition and are included in the text.
2. *Sex Variant Women in Literature* (1956; rpt. Baltimore: Diana Press, 1975), p. 303. In Foster's account of sixty lines there is no evidence that she recognized Richardson's satirical project of 'writing against' the prevailing view of sex variance in women. Foster's book aims more at descriptive listing of sex variant literatures from many languages, and is not concerned with sex variance *per se*.
3. The extent of this irrational hostility is now very well documented in numerous journal articles and in Lillian Faderman's *Surpassing the Love of Men*. Authors such as D.H. Lawrence, Wyndham Lewis and Clemence Dane, for example, saw sex variance as foolish, sick, and potentially evil, and punished their fictional variant characters by death. Leader-writers were not tolerant either. The *New Statesmen* leader

- for 24 Nov. 1928 declared 'people who desire tolerance for pathological abnormalities certainly should not write about them'.
4. For a brief account see Vera Mary Brittain, *Radclyffe Hall: A Case of Obscenity?*, intro. C.H. Rolph (London: Femina Press, 1968). Also see *The Nineteenth Century and After*, 105, No. 626 (April 1929), pp. 433-450, for the aftermath, a debate on censorship with contributions from, among others, E.M. Forster and Virginia Woolf.
 5. "'Women Alone Stir My Imagination": Lesbianism and the Cultural Tradition', *Signs. Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 4 No. 4 (Summer 1979), p. 718.
 6. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1928; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1945), p. 81. Further page references are to the Penguin edition and are included in the text.
 7. *Surpassing the Love of Men* (New York, 1981; rpt. London: The Women's Press, 1961), p. 323.
 8. In *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* (Chicago, 1980; rpt. London: Onlywomen Press, 1981). Further page references are included in the text.
 9. Six poems in the original edition of 1857 were suppressed. In the edition of 1861 Baudelaire instead of re-inserting the poems in the order of the original manuscript retained the format that had resulted from the bowdlerization of his 1857 edition, and thus drew attention to the six by grouping them together under the title: *Pieces condamnées*. Number four of these is 'Lesbos' and number five is 'Femmes damnées'.
 10. The passage beginning 'Va, si tu veux, chercher un fiancé stupide ...', Charles Baudelaire, *Les fleurs du mal*, ed. De A. Adam (Paris: Garnier Freres, 1961), p. 171.
 11. Since Richardson's one superstition was to take obeisance to the new moon seriously, perhaps a reference to Hecate's rule is intended here.
 12. For contemporary critical responses see Brittain's *Radclyffe Hall: A Case of Obscenity?*.
 13. See Patricia Monaghan's *Women in Myth and Legend* (London: Junction Books, 1981), pp. 34-5.
 14. *The Well of Loneliness* (London: Virago, 1982), p. 311.
 15. NLA MS 133/5 contains typescripts of 'Two Hanged Women', one of which begins 133/5/61 (the phrase is on /65). It is also found in a second typescript at NLA MS 133/5 beginning at 66.
 16. *Ulysses Bound* (Canberra: Australian University Press, 1973) p. 408, footnote.
 17. This typescript begins at NLA MSS 133/6/3.
 18. In a proof copy of *The End of a Childhood* - stamped on the cover 'First Proofs (once read only)' - the text of the younger girl's speech read: 'Without it having to be *all my mother's fault*' (emphasis added), which is particularised to the character's own mother. Richardson corrected this to read: '*... all Mother's fault*' (emphasis added), which conveys a more general and inclusive, abstract idea, a cultural force. Proof copy of *The End of a Childhood*, 'First Proofs'.