

## Michael Ackland: A School of Authority: Richardson's Personal Investment in "The Getting of Wisdom"

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Why did Henry Handel Richardson write *The Getting of Wisdom*? Given its thinly veiled depiction of life at her old school, the question seems at first sight superfluous, and if further explanation were required, the author herself provided it voluntarily in "Some Notes on my Books". There she recounts that it was begun to relieve the increasing gloom of *Maurice Guest*, and that the writing of the first three chapters overlapped with the work required to complete her first novel. No other motivation is offered and, to judge from ensuing commentary, nothing further is needed. Yet readers have noted Richardson's unexplained tendency to identify her school career with that of Laura rather than with the far more successful progress of Ettie, her younger self at the Presbyterian Ladies' College. And the peculiar interaction between author, PLC and the novel did not end there. Its publication led to an apparently fabricated anecdote about how she was denied access to her old school in 1912, and to an unremarked discrepancy between the novel's actual reception and Richardson's account of it. "The lack of understanding, the coolness, hostility even, which has greeted my other books on their appearance, began with *The Getting of Wisdom*". It was "pronounced a 'pity', a 'mistake' ", or dismissed "with a sniff of contempt".<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, despite alleged incomprehension and even after the long-awaited international recognition which followed the completion of her Mahony trilogy in 1928, this slim volume remained, as she avowed, "still the favourite among myflock".<sup>2</sup> Clearly *The Getting of Wisdom* meant a great deal to her, but why? The answer lies, I believe, in the pivotal place which it holds in the sequence of her novels and in her self-imaging. With *Maurice Guest* Richardson moved decisively from translator to creator. During the exhaustive, two-decade-long composition of *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, which became the central act of her life, she struggled imaginatively with her parents' story. Between these works came *The Getting of Wisdom*. It enabled her not only to find emotional relief by painting a specific, youthful milieu but, more importantly, to establish implicitly through Laura her own intrinsic value as a prelude to confronting the traumatic events of her childhood in the trilogy.

Of crucial importance to Richardson's first decade, and to the incidents recast in *The Getting of Wisdom*, is what was most absent from them—a strong and admirable father figure. Although the novelist would later depict her progenitor as a man of distinguished physical presence and culture, either reading *The Times* over breakfast or struggling home laden with books, the most indelible event of her infancy was his sudden decline as a result of tertiary syphilis. It reduced this once affluent and able medical practitioner to a demented, incontinent figure, whose career was cut short by institutional incarceration, followed by general paralysis and a gruesome death at home when Ettie was nine. His deterioration was accompanied by frequent shifts of residence, by acute social embarrassment, and by his wife Mary's fall from the status of a leisured lady to the menial toil of a country postmistress. Mary now became the sole breadwinner of the family, filling the power vacuum left by her husband's eclipse. The future author, however, never accepted this devolution of authority. She clashed frequently with her mother, and her growing ungovernability was one reason for sending her as a boarder to PLC. Humiliated and deprived of emotional support by both parents, Ettie, like Laura, became at school an exhibitionist, desperately seeking love and approbation, and earned an unenviable reputation for lying. A facial twitch attested to profound disturbance, inwardly the scarring went deeper. Even in the wake of the catastrophic Great War Richardson could assert: "I know nothing more awful than to see a place one has loved cut up & desecrated & taken possession of by strangers".<sup>3</sup> And to Mary Kernot she confessed that her childhood was "bitten into her memory with acid".<sup>4</sup> The noticing elder daughter, who dreaded disclosure of her family's secrets, would develop into a novelist who sought her origins and *raison d'être* in fictionalised variations on these shattering events.

This legacy produced a lifelong quest for mastery and security in her private dealings and in her writing. Her marriage to a mentor-cum-father-figure, in John George Robertson, has often been commented on, as has the daily ritual of composition behind sound-proofed doors which structured her existence.

Similarly, she threw herself into sport to keep mind and body in peak condition, remarking tellingly in 1939: "I am very, very fed up with life, & the stupidity of my body. I like to be the master not the slave".<sup>5</sup> This same desire for control underlay her choice of a pen-name, and much of her fiction. No mere pseudonym, Henry Handel Richardson was a rebaptism which signified self-formation. She adopted it initially for *Maurice Guest*, both as a licence to transgress and as a rebuttal of gender stereotypes: the novel "appeared at a time of feminist agitation, and I wanted the book to be a test. No one, positively no reviewer, spotted it as 'just a woman's work' ".<sup>6</sup> Apart from signalling a claim to male authority and, with time, hard-won self-esteem, her pen-name also reflected an urge for integration: "It's so much easier to be a man, & saves so many complications. I always feel half one, & am sure I went wrong in the making".<sup>7</sup> A corrective, self-vindictory impulse is discernible, too, in *The Getting of Wisdom*. There memories from an adolescence overshadowed by family tragedy are reworked in the story of a girl's halting progress towards a fairy-tale ending—a vocation in which "seeming unfitness" is revealed to be the sign of "a peculiar and special fitness" (p.189).<sup>8</sup>

Feeding into Laura's depiction is undoubtedly Richardson's powerful urge to analyse, and hopefully exorcise, the confused feelings aroused by her parents' shame. They colour the girl's overwhelming wish for normality and acceptance, which inspires alternately despair and ingratiation. On this point the author is categorical. "The desire to please, to be liked by all the world, was the strongest her young soul knew" (p.31). It underlies her behaviour during lessons, at the piano, with the opposite sex and even her scandal-creating fictions, while she quickly grasps "that the unpardonable sin is to vary from the common mould" (p.72). Nor is this drive lessened by her refractory acts: "Like most rebels of her sex, she ardently desired to re-enter the fold of law and order" (p.146). Similarly, Laura's recurring dream is not of a brilliant career but of irrevocable banishment. This is linked to Annie Johns being expelled from school for theft, supplemented by unease caused by the heroine's dubious background. Empathy with this "sinner" highlights the gulf which separates her from her classmates. They are described as "nice-minded", unable to see themselves in Johns's role, whereas Laura, who "longed to see eye to eye with her comrades", feels mentally tainted and readily imagines sharing Annie's fate:

*Below all this, in subconscious depths, a chord of fear seemed to have been struck in her as well—the fear of stony faces, drooped lids, and stretched, pointing fingers. For that night she started up, with a cry, from dreaming that not Annie Johns but she was being expelled; that an army of spear-like first fingers was marching towards her, and that, try as she would, she could not get her limp, heavy legs to bear her to the schoolroom door.*

*And this dream often returned. (p.90)*

Evidence of its recurrence comes on the eve of Mary Pidwall exposing Laura's lie about a liaison with Mr Shepherd:

*That night she had the familiar dream that she was being "stood up" and expelled, as Annie Johns had been: thousands of tongues shouted her guilt; she was hunted like a wallaby. She wakened with a scream, and Marina, her bedfellow, rose on one elbow and lighted the candle. Crumpled and dishevelled, Laura lay outside the sheet that should have covered her; and her pillow had slipped to the floor. (p.130)*

Stripped of the reassuring trappings of domestic life, the girl is left face to face with the terror of "being branded...and an outcast" (p.90)—a predicament painfully familiar to Richardson. "Detection and exposure, she knew it now, were the most awful things the world held" (p.130). Only the absence of rope or poison forestalls suicide, as she savours her last moments of "untarnished honour".

Despite the almost comic excess of her ordeal, the psychological convergence between heroine and author is clear, which made the novel's composition a potential act of sublimation and empowerment. Certainly Richardson sought to distinguish sharply between herself and Laura. "All the characters & events

are seen through the eyes of the child itself, & not through those of the author". She also insisted that the protagonist was a "wicked brat", whose "trips & blunders" are "never spared". But these failings no more preclude authorial than reader identification with Laura. Similarly, although the work presents a portrait of an artist-in-the-making and a critique of female socialisation, less obviously, its iterated references to brand, sin, taint and heinous crime bear witness to the novelist's own obsession with an irremediable stain, which is diversely refracted in incidents and characters. The novel opens with Laura's romantic narrative of heterosexual fulfilment—embrace by Prince Charming in a "beautiful glade"—only to have the idyll disturbed by a trace of psychological disfigurement: "The bottom of the lovely silk dress was all dirty". On that detail the dream-romance shatters. This disruption foreshadows Laura's failure to approach the hallowed land of wedlock, or to achieve a status-conferring relationship with males of her age. Instead, and sometimes contrary to the evidence, she describes them sweepingly as dirty, boorish and conceited, or as monstrous creatures who leave women to bear the burden of their cruel, unbridled appetites. Mentally fleeing these putative agents of annihilation (p.93), the heroine, like Ettie before her, is drawn physically to selected young women. Richardson, admittedly, mocks some of these views gently, attributing their excesses to inexperience; nevertheless, her persistent association of male company with the spectre of defilement, no less than the dirt on Wondrous Fair, has an unexplored prehistory, which is silently bracketed off from the narrative proper.

Laura, like Richardson, was fated to stare jealously at the safety and normality of her peers, as well as to live in terror of the seemingly irreversible verdict that she "came of a thoroughly degenerate family" (p.147). The source of this anxiety is identified with her mother's actions, and mirrored accusingly in a classmate's fate: "Leaning against the palings Laura watched the latter come puffing up to join her—Bertha with the shameful secret in the background, of a mother who was not like other mothers" (p.55). In Laura's and Ettie's cases, however, it is not just demeaning maternal work which set them apart, but a father's unexplained absence which dogs each girl's career and guarantees her perpetual difference. Laura fails the initiatory peer-group test, the regulation school interrogation on patronymics, just as her later argument about the nature of truth founders on the lie and concealment which her self-imaging demands: "'But M.P.... The Bible isn't quite all truth, you know. My father—' here she broke off in some confusion, remembering Uncle Tom" (p.151). The taboo surrounding her parentage immediately deflects family guilt on to the drinking of Uncle Tom who, in a further act of distancing, is located in a different country town to Laura. His comparatively venial offence is greeted as "dreadful" by a young custodian of respectability from the aptly named Wantabadgery (p.128). Two chapters later Richardson's surrogate, Laura, unconsciously exposes the real roots of her "dread" by magnifying this charge into one of degeneracy (p.147). Like an invisible incubus, a father's unspeakable fate weighed heavily on both of them. It lay at the core of each girl's rebellion against the order of things, and afforded good reasons for developing a novelistic technique whose verisimilitude defied disbelief.

In response to the dual trauma of home and school Richardson created, in effect, a myth of self-origination, which demanded the denial of formative influences, whether on herself or on Laura.<sup>10</sup> Disingenuously she maintained the contrary, as in a letter to Kernot written not long after the publication of *The Getting of Wisdom*:

*I am grateful to you for not suspecting me of an attempt to libel the good old College. Nothing was further from my mind. I am always ready to acknowledge how much I gained there, &, in spite of their many ups & downs, I thoroughly enjoyed my schooldays, & all they brought me. My aim in the book was to be truthful & sincere...and I am ready to vouch, with my whole heart, for the truth—the ideal truth, of course, not the truth of the facts represented in the book—of what I say.*<sup>11</sup>

But neither in the novel nor elsewhere did she do justice to the college's fostering of gender debate and the advanced educational opportunities it offered—or to her own success there.<sup>12</sup> Laura, unlike Ettie but like her later avatar in *Myself When Young*, is academically undistinguished, disinterested in class, and only gets by thanks to a good memory or desperate tactics. The Ladies' College is portrayed as a prison presided over by an unfeeling autocrat and frustrated governesses. Subjects are uninspiring, and Richardson repeatedly skews the facts to her old school's detriment, as when she attributes a feminist leaven only to Miss Hicks, "the visiting governess for geography" (p.64). Such ideas were not restricted to the casual staff,

and Mrs Boys, the actual superintendent of the Ladies' College as distinct from her fictional counterpart in the "brimstone Beast" Mrs Gurley, specifically encouraged Ettie to pursue a career in music as the best assurance of future independence.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Laura's mother proves to be a liability rather than an aid. The girl's hairdo and clothes are mother's invention, and mark her as hopelessly behind the times, as do secondhand school books and her piano technique. Laura soon realises that she must unlearn home lessons if she is to make her way in the wider world, while her mother's advocacy of female gentility ("I'd much rather have you good and useful than clever" [p.63]) runs counter to the child's true genius. In the novelist's preferred version of events, Laura and Ettie's education is largely self-conducted. Each learns from experience rather than in class, gathering knowledge intuitively, randomly, from unorthodox sources. Without an identity-conferring male, and failed by mother and *alma mater*, each must become self-fathering, seeking what she requires within herself as well as contending there with nagging fears and self-doubts.

The path beyond conventional social and literary fictions depends on foreshadowing Laura's career as a Richardson-like novelist, inspired by the contemporary naturalist credo—a solution wrought ingeniously out of the author's preoccupation with degeneracy. In context, the girl's swerve from romance to realism is associated with her discovery of Ibsen. The other great apostle of naturalism, Emile Zola, is mentioned only in an apparently casual reference to clandestine reading: "'As if truth were a soap!' remarked Cupid, who was already in bed, reading *Nana*, and trying to smoke a cigarette under the blankets" (p.151). The passage serves primarily to underline an irrepressible drive for carnal knowledge and youthful experimentation, as well as the lure of the forbidden. Ettie, however, can hardly have shared Laura's experience of Ibsen as a schoolgirl, nor perhaps did she even advance beyond the sway of romance at this stage. When she entered the boarding-school in 1883 only two of the Norwegian's plays had appeared in English, and his true colonial notoriety came at the end of the decade, after the sensational staging of *A Doll's House and Pillars of Society* in London on respectively 7 June and 17 July 1889, coupled with the publication of William Archer's translation of his plays between 1890 and 1891.<sup>14</sup> But given her particular sensitivity to the topic of degeneracy, Ettie would almost certainly have heard of the Frenchman. During her second year as a boarder, a furore erupted over Zola's *Nana*, copies of which were confiscated from a Sydney bookshop because of their shocking depiction of the degenerate, immoral nature of French society. This seizure on 2 October 1884 was widely reported in the local press, and the *Bulletin* came out strongly in defence of Zola's novel as a purveyor of unpalatable but necessary truth: "[it] is a work of absolute genius. It presents no spurious concoction of impossible morality, but pictures aspects of life which it is probably useful should be recognised and fairly faced."<sup>15</sup>

Through this coverage the future novelist would have been apprised of the prickly laurels in store for the realist, and of the need for self-defensive stratagems. Colonial critics invariably emphasised Zola's audacity and unpleasantness. Some accused him of a depraved concentration on the wanton, obscene and demeaning. Others saw in the same scenes an unsparing, almost scientific revelation of universal laws operating in the particular instance. In fact, the reception of *Nana* anticipated in detail that of *The Getting of Wisdom*, singling out Zola's novel for "the repulsive element from which even his best work is never free" and for a "photographic transcription of actual conditions of the life depicted".<sup>16</sup> An implicit acknowledgement of sources as well as an anticipatory wink at her reviewers, Richardson's allusion to *Nana* deftly evokes a celebrated precursor who also sought to pierce social pretension and lay bare human motivation, even if it meant taking liberties with facts or disdaining decorous expectations.

The key to the author's rewriting of "her-story", and to her move from fear of outrage to courting it actively, was to make the source of Laura's invincible otherness not a disfigurement issuing from home, but an innate talent destined to elevate her above a once-threatening milieu. At the Ladies' College and beyond its gates, compliance is at a premium. "Thou shalt confirm" is the eleventh and overriding commandment. Laura's egregious ideas and deeds are treated as "highly ridiculous" (p.40) or greeted with opprobrium, while she stands in awe of M.P.'s capacity to move "among the rules of the school as safely as an egg-dancer among his eggs" (p.127)—a simile which makes plain the ludicrously Lilliputian aspect of these codes and conduct.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, a pronounced imaginative tendency tells against the heroine's academic prospects. Facts are revered as the basis of true knowledge, and their acquisition by rote entails a mini-crucifixion: "Thus did Laura apply herself to reach the school ideal, thus force herself to drive hard nails of fact into her vagrant thoughts" (p.66). Although to the end she concedes the justice of the group's verdict, her failure to conform

to the prescribed behaviour of a young lady underlines its artificiality, as does her reflection on the male of the species: “And they never need to pretend anything, I suppose? No, I think they're horrid” (p.164). Femininity, too, must be learned and mimicked, unless an irrepressible native bent prevents an individual from succumbing to its delusive goals. Without shaping model or debt, Laura discovers her own path, assuming through trial and error a form proper and truly natural to her, based on emancipated life and narrative codes which hold out the promise of turning a lack or “seeming unfitness” into its inverse.

This penchant for self-affirmative fictions, which deny formative influences, emerges also in the controversial account of her failed attempt to visit PLC after the publication of *The Getting of Wisdom*. In 1912 Richardson made her sole return to Australia, specifically to gather information for the trilogy. During her stay she was allegedly “refused admittance” to PLC because the novel was held to be “offensive and derogatory”.<sup>18</sup> She therefore “had to content myself with peering [at it] through cracks in the paling-fence”—presumably the same paling-fence associated in *The Getting of Wisdom* with the strategic deflection of personal guilt on to a third party, in this case “Bertha with the shameful secret in the background, of a mother who was not like other mothers” (p.55). Again the autobiographical anecdote, like other treatments of the writer's dealings with the Ladies' College, recalls Laura's creative adage: “not a word of her narrative was true, but every word of it might have been true” (p.158). Commentary has been perplexed as to how the school knew Richardson was the author of this unflattering novel, but has found no substantial reason for her to invent this incident. After all, she left Australia in 1888 and *The Getting of Wisdom* appeared in 1910 under a pseudonym, and Richardson disclaimed any animus towards her *alma mater*. The solution is closely linked to Isobel (“Tibby”) MacDonald. A former classmate of Ettie, she was the first woman to graduate with First Class Honours in Arts from Melbourne University, and afterwards had a distinguished career as a school principal in Australia and New Zealand. By 1910 she was a well respected teacher at the Ladies' College, and would have had little difficulty penetrating Richardson's pen-name. For the same MacDonald has left a memoir which shows that Ettie as a schoolgirl shared Laura's negative attributes, being especially given to “romancing about every subject she mentions” and consequently was “a very unpleasant girl, and a great liar”.<sup>19</sup> Richardson, who was “not a good forgetter”,<sup>20</sup> bore grudges. Reputations are freely traduced in *The Getting of Wisdom* and old scores settled, whether in portraits of individual pupils who were her enemies or of her teachers, such as Dr Wilson. A gifted senior mathematics master and later vice-principal of the school, he is known to have made Ettie a butt of classroom jokes. Richardson, however, had the last laugh, depicting him in the novel as the physically grotesque Dr Pughson—and Wilson felt the injustice of the attack keenly. Similarly, the opprobrium which Ettie's “romancing” drew upon her undoubtedly rankled, and she would have savoured using the same talent years later to provide a vindictive but credible account of the institution which had been the scene of her “many ups & downs”, as well as of her haunting fear and emotional instability.

This capacity, so evident in the novel, to reshape events in ways which extract a subtle revenge while leaving her seemingly spotless as a lamb is exemplified by the 1912 incident. Kernot, in her first letter to Richardson, reported that “the College people” were acting “like outraged turkeys”. Tibby MacDonald feared that “her innocent little scholars” would be contaminated by *The Getting of Wisdom*, another teacher wanted “to collect every copy & burn them all”.<sup>21</sup> From this Richardson concluded that the “visit to the P.L.C., I always meant to pay if I returned to Melbourne, will have to be given up. I am sorry they are all so touchy”.<sup>22</sup> In short, she decided of her own accord to abandon her original plan—though Kernot subsequently inquired on Richardson's behalf about the possibility of seeing over the school. She received “the College refusal” in writing from MacDonald.<sup>23</sup> Two decades later the Principal asserted that he had not been applied to personally, and that Richardson could simply have entered the school as other former pupils did without formal permission. Instead the novelist preferred to condense these incidents into a story which emphasised complete severance, and added the credibility-bestowing detail of the paling-fence which had actually been removed in 1907, five years before her visit.<sup>24</sup> Reciprocating the distaste of “the Tibby M[a]cDonalds of this world”, and imagining that the same self-righteous indignation which had met her as a pupil would render inadvisable, or block, any future endeavour of hers to revisit PLC, she settled for another delayed jab at those whose stinging judgments she had once been unable to challenge publicly. By 1929 Richardson had virtually elevated this fiction into fact: “I wonder if the old school wld [*sic*] still shut me out

if I knocked at its doors!”<sup>25</sup> On the issues of interweaving truth and fantasy, or of refashioning reality to suit her own ends, there is not a lot to choose between the mature author and Laura, that “wicked brat”.

The same overwhelming desire to portray herself as a self-originating talent, who had to struggle against adversity and incomprehension, resurfaces in her insistence that the critical reception of her novels was uniformly bad. Thus she asserted a lack of understanding of *The Getting of Wisdom* on the part of its first readers, that “schoolmistresses rose up in fury” and that “the educational press...reviewed it ponderously; my old school outlawed me”.<sup>26</sup> Yet Richardson knew better, having kept a comprehensive collection of reviews in a personal scrapbook which she updated and consulted from time to time. These stress the audacity, penetration and uncanny insight into female adolescence displayed in the novel, and include ringing joiners calculated to excite interest: “This is a book that everyone should read and no one can like. Its cleverness is astonishing.”<sup>27</sup> Certainly Richardson's frank treatment of sexual issues divided reviewers into two camps: those who saw it as a libellous portrayal of girlhood, and supporters who held it was a book “to be read by those who can endure reality”.<sup>28</sup> Both groups agreed that the novelist's vision was amazingly convincing for an allegedly male author, and unrelenting. The focus was “almost pathological in its ruthless sincerity”. It dwelled “a little unnecessarily upon the unlovely...[in its] curious mania for telling the literal truth”, while the whole was conveyed with detachment and “a quietness that defies disbelief”.<sup>29</sup> Nor were its Continental antecedents overlooked: “her method is microscopic, Zolaesque in this, and in its disregard of the ordinary canons of what is and what is notfitting for publication.”<sup>30</sup> On balance, the reviews were perceptive, while in invoking pathology and Zola they touched on the well-springs of *The Getting of Wisdom*. Repeatedly, too, the book was recognised as a new departure in fiction, with the *Daily Chronicle* concluding that it was “the first really very fine piece of fiction which Australia has given us.”<sup>31</sup> Years later the novelist chose to focus exclusively on the negative comments and to give them representative status—her compulsive need to assert her autonomy and self-reliance no more admitted an appreciative reception than it had Mrs Boys’ or her mother's sound and well-intentioned advice.

Fittingly, Richardson's solution to her former dilemmas in *The Getting of Wisdom* conforms to the original meaning of education as *e-ducare*, to lead forth. The book, she told Kernot, was written with the freedom of a departed spirit, severed from her past by the dual facts of expatriation and altered vocation. “You ask me if I thought all these good people I draw from life were dead, that I treated them so frankly: no, not exactly that. But, at the time I wrote Laura...I seemed as far away as if I were dead, from all the people & places & incidents of my youth. I wasn't in touch with a single Australian any more, & it seemed more than unlikely that I would ever see or hear anything of any one of them again.” That is, she felt at liberty to treat events as she saw fit, to dramatise the foibles and acculturation of a generation on the brink of modern change, and to begin a crucial phase of self-imaging in preparation for confronting the site of primal anguish in the trilogy. The undaunted author, she added, although “still thin & hungry-looking, & as stupid in many things as the Infant you knew”, had little in common with her schoolgirl self who, she implies, had been left chrysalis-like behind her. As usual, the novelist was telling only part of the story, as she did years later in “Some Notes on my Books”. There she depicted Laura's acute alienation in terms of the stock Romantic conception of the gifted but cursed artist, perpetually out of step with her fellows because, “even thus early, the taint of her calling was in her”.<sup>32</sup> In Richardson's case, however, the taint she felt was not merely of authorship but of her parentage, and in *The Getting of Wisdom* she rehearsed and perfected strategies enshrined decades later in *Myself When Young*. In both, subterfuge and displacement enabled her to elide her family's shame, while through her portrayal of Laura she established vicariously a myth of self-creation which conferred on her independent authority. Here, then, was ample proof of that Zarathustrian capacity to “dance over yourself and away” invoked in the book's final epigraph. As Richardson claimed, her favourite novel depicted “ideal truth”—ideal not in the sense of viewing life through rose-coloured glasses but of responding to psychological rather than biographical actualities, in ways which preserve an element of compensatory romance even in a work renowned for its unrelentingly realism.

1. “Some Notes on my Books” (1940), rpt. in *Soutberly*, 23, (1963), p.13.

2. Letter to Mary Kernot, 11 March 1929, MS 45/1, Mitchell Library, Sydney.

3. Letter to Kernot, 20 March 1921.

4. Quoted in Dorothy Green, *Henry Handel Richardson and Her Fiction* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1986), p.172.
5. Letter to Oliver Stonor, 5 June 1939, MS 546, Mitchell Library.
6. Edna Purdie and Olga M. Roncoroni (eds), *Henry Handel Richardson: Some Personal Impressions* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1957), p.48.
7. Letter to Kernot, 22 December 1912.
8. Page references are to the second edition of the novel, rpt. in Susan Lever and Catherine Pratt (eds), *Henry Handel Richardson: The Getting of Wisdom, stories, selected prose and correspondence* (St.Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1997).
9. Letter to Kernot, 27 August 1911.
10. The interplay of fact and fiction, as well as Richardson's attempt to manipulate her past in her writings, has of course been noted by many commentators, most recently by Lever and Pratt, who speak of an "ongoing process of self-construction [which] should warn us against reading either *The Getting of Wisdom* or *Myself When Young* as strictly factual", p.xx.
11. 27 August 1911. Unless otherwise indicated, ensuing quotations referring to the novel are from this letter.
12. These and related matters are discussed in Michael Ackland, "'Not a good forgetter': Richardson's recasting of the past in *Myself When Young*", *Australian Literary Studies*, 18 (1998).
13. As she noted perceptively, matriculated students would soon be plentiful "as thorns on rose trees", whereas "musicians will always be few & far between because talent is absolutely necessary for them to be proficient" (Axel Clark, *Henry Handel Richardson: Fiction in the Making* [Sydney: Simon & Schuster, 1990], p.139).
14. See Gerhard Stilz, "Nationalism before Nationhood: Overseas Horizons in Debates of the 1880s", *Australian Literary Studies*, 14 (1990), p.486, which also discusses the local controversy surrounding Zola.
15. 11 October 1884, p.4.
16. *Australasian*, 7 July 1882, p.8.
17. The image seems a conflation of two of Swift's notorious satires in *Gulliver's Travels*, Book One.
18. *Myself When Young* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1948), p.70.
19. Memoir quoted in Clark, *Fiction in the Making*, pp.141-42.
20. Letter to Kernot, 8 July 1927.
21. 23 October 1911, MS 325, Mitchell Library.
22. Letter to Kernot, 20 December 1911.
23. Letter to Richardson, 12 February 1929.
24. This point concerning the fence is made in Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *PLC Melbourne: The First Century 1875-1975* (Melbourne: PLC, 1975), p.91.
25. Letter to Kernot in the wake of her success with *Ultima Thule*, 20 May 1929. She could, however, also refer to "the story of the 'barred door'" in a preceding letter to Kernot from 11 May 1929.
26. "Some Notes on my Books", p.13.
27. *Academy*, 19 December 1910. This and ensuing reviews quoted are preserved in the Richardson Papers, MS 133/13/2, Australian National Library, Canberra.
28. *Health and Home*, 8 December 1910.
29. Respectively *Daily Chronicle*, 1 November 1910, *Saturday Review*, 5 November 1910 and *Manchester Guardian*, 19 October 1910.
30. *Athenaeum*, 19 November 1910.

31. 1 November 1910.

32. "Some Notes on my Books", p.13.

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