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CHAPTER FOUR

Friendship as threat: Janice Elliott's Secret Places

Janice Elliott's 1981 novel Secret Places, set in a girls' high school in a Midlands town during World War Two, occupies a unique place in this study. Its adolescent protagonists, red-haired, outwardly stolid Patience and exotic, forlorn Laura, have a brittle, intense friendship which develops briefly into what is quite clearly a physical relationship, a source of pleasure and comfort; but ultimately of guilt and fear. Like Frost in May, The Lost Traveller and No Talking After Lights, Secret Places is set in the past. Janice Elliott was born in 1931 and Secret Places, like several of her novels, is set during the Second World War of her childhood. The school community, 'a society without men is shown replicating the hatred and the scapegoating of the public war.'¹ Its messages about female communities and the complexities of female relationships seem to combine the awakening of interest and broadening of mind of the 1980s with an acknowledgement of the suspicion, ignorance and fear likely to have been experienced by 1940s girls who could not always reconcile their deep, confusing feelings with their society's attitudes towards women loving women. During the Second World War, partly because of the absence of men, partly because of the women's services, women had considerable opportunities to spend time together,



and in this novel both positive and negative aspects of this are stressed.

I first read Secret Places as an adolescent, attracted by its school setting, and rather disturbed by the physical passion between the girls. If the intensity of Patience's friendship with Laura seemed to link her with the heroines of *Angels Brazil*, the tortures she suffered because of those feelings set her apart. When Patience, at the end of the novel, becomes safely engaged to the sensitive and attractive Stephen, I was reassured that this passion was merely an adolescent 'phase' and did not preclude the eventual adoption of a 'normal' heterosexual position. Patience did not after all have to fear being 'a woman like that'².

When I reread Secret Places as an adult, having in the meantime reached a more confident feminist awareness and a less naive and limited attitude to sexuality, I was no longer reassured by Patience's apparently happy adoption of a heterosexual position: I wondered about her motives. I worried about Laura, her friend and former lover, who has ominously cut her hair and become a teacher by the end of the novel. I was no longer reassured that happiness lay ahead for either of them. Dismissing such an attachment as being merely an adolescent 'phase', is, as we have seen, a common and convenient way to dismiss adolescent homosexual

experience; it certainly reassures Patience: but what ideological problems does it pose?

The equation of homosexuality with immaturity, and in particular with the emotional turbulence and sexual experimentation of adolescence is fairly widely accepted.³ It is problematic, I believe, for several reasons. Firstly, as we have seen, it goes hand in hand with the assumption that heterosexuality is the only valid expression of adult sexuality. This clearly devalues homosexual experience. Secondly, it endorses a narrow and label-bound concept of sexuality, dividing people into binary-opposed sexual categories of 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual', categories which are regarded as fixed, once decided upon, and clearly delineated. Of course, many critics and theorists now accept that sexuality cannot be so rigidly defined, subscribing rather to the view that it is fluid and shifting. Adrienne Rich's description of a 'lesbian continuum'⁴ is a more practicable one, especially when we are dealing with such a fragile and complex relationship as Patience and Laura's.

As feminist historians like Lilian Faderman have pointed out, and as I have maintained throughout this study, the twentieth century tendency to sexualise all intense emotional and physical contact has led us to be suspicious about relationships which were once considered normal and

desirable:⁵

Throughout most of the twentieth century... the enriching romantic friendship that was common in earlier eras is thought to be impossible, since love necessarily means sex and sex between women means lesbian and lesbian means sick.

Faderman and others have been challenging this view for some years now, and definitions of lesbianism within feminist scholarship have widened considerably, so that experience of genital sexual contact with another woman is no longer the fact on which a lesbian identity need rest. Adrienne Rich's rejection of 'limited, mostly clinical, definitions of "lesbianism"'⁶ in favour of what she calls the 'lesbian continuum' of women whose primary commitment in life is to other women, has been influential in the attempt to establish a new definition of lesbianism. Not that this has been without its problems, as there are many lesbians who would not consider themselves feminists, and many feminists who do not identify themselves as 'lesbian'. In fact, this dilemma has been an important issue within the Women's Movement for some time, and the complexities and contradictions which surround it suggest that there will never be consensus within feminist politics about what constitutes lesbian identity.

We must remember, however, that as far as most people in our society are concerned, a lesbian is simply a woman who relates sexually and emotionally to women instead of

men. I cannot tell to what extent Janice Elliott, born in 1931 and married, was aware of and influenced by feminist discussions of lesbianism and women's relationships: her representation of lesbianism in Secret Places is sympathetic up to a certain point, but she is limited by the need for historical accuracy. For Patience and Laura to be able to feel confident about their relationship after the first thrill has worn off would require either the sort of sophisticated sexual and social awareness that few adolescents would have even today, or the nineteenth-century 'innocence' which would tell them that romantic, even physical expressions of love between women are acceptable. For all Patience's insistence that "'I can't believe this is wicked. I know it isn't"⁷, she is clearly, on another level, convinced that it is. Like Jennifer in Dusty Answer she has just enough awareness of society's opinion of 'women like that' to dread the implications of being one, while glorying in the delight of what her love for Laura gives her.

Although Secret Places was published in the eighties, it is set during the Second World War, when Elliott herself was a girl. Clearly, there are certain problems associated with writing about a period forty years afterwards, and these are related to, and compounded by, the fact that an adult is writing about adolescent experience. To what extent will the influences of a later era anachronistically creep

in and destroy the authentic forties attitude of the novel? Can a writer writing about adolescence really express adolescent emotion, or is she bound to be influenced by her adult experiences and understanding? How likely is she to impose an inappropriate modern and/or adult awareness on her characters? This is, of course, something I have emphasised throughout this study, along with the further complicating fact that that we as critics are equally products of a particular era, and to some extent bound or at least influenced by prevailing ideologies. I have already suggested the limitations which these ideologies can place on our understanding of friendships and texts from former eras. I think the difficulties are particularly apparent in Secret Places where Elliott, adopting a more subjective and involved narrative viewpoint than Angela Lambert, is less self-conscious about 'looking back'.

The publication of Secret Places in 1981 coincided with the beginning of feminist interest in women's friendships and awareness of the way in which certain kinds of female friendship had come to be seen as deviant in the wake of increased sexual 'knowledge' in the early part of this century. As we have seen, feminists in the 1980s were concerned with challenging received ideas about lesbianism, and interested in the intense female friendships which were such an accepted feature of nineteenth century society in both Britain and America. Perhaps Elliott followed the

discourse: certainly the characters' need to find an appropriate context for their feelings reveals a deep interest in the complexities of female friendship.

At the beginning of Secret Places, Patience Mackenzie is about fifteen, a rather quiet girl, generally liked by her classmates and by the school authorities who consider her sensible and reliable ('that sensible Patience Mackenzie.'⁸) Like Nicola Marlow in Antonia Forest's Kingscote sequence, Patience hides a poetic soul beneath her stolid exterior:⁹

She never talked to anyone about her passion for theatre and opera, because she knew they'd laugh, or not believe her - she simply didn't look that sort of person. She looked like someone who was good at geography.

She is, in short, on the face of it, the perfect English schoolgirl, straightforward and sensible.

When Laura Meister arrives as a new girl on the first page of the novel, Patience is immediately attracted to her, although for a time she tries to deny and suppress the intensity of her interest, because she knows 'instinctively' that 'Passion is dangerous, it betrays, leaves one vulnerable...'¹⁰ The fact that she uses the language of passion from the very beginning suggests that her initial reluctance to befriend the new girl stems from something more complex than her unwillingness to 'take sides' (for

Laura is German and this is the early part of the Second World War):¹¹

Something about this odd girl disturbed her in a way she could not understand and even resented.

In the end, however, Patience cannot deny her interest in Laura, and her innate kindness (another quality she shares with Nicola Marlow) as much as anything else, leads her to take the new girl 'under her wing', for she feels 'anxious...that she was lonely, that she was peculiar, that she might not fit in.'¹²

Laura is lonely, and, by the other girls' standards, peculiar, and she is never given the chance to fit in, although she desperately wants to. Not only is she 'foreign' in the usual sense but she comes from a completely different world, a world which I shall refer to as 'Abroad' ("This is Laura. She has come from Abroad," said Miss Trott.'¹³) Laura is the archetypal outsider: conveniently seen by her peers and by the school authorities as 'the German girl', she is in fact only partly German, a stateless European refugee, whose family have had to flee from Nazi Germany. She is the object of vicious persecution throughout her time at the Albert Lodge School for Girls, but the 'reasons' for this persecution are inconsistent:¹⁴

...someone chalked on her locker: 'Juden raus.' Also, inside her desk lid, a swastika.

'Well, she can't be both,' said Nina.
'That's ridiculous.'

In fact, Laura is neither a Nazi nor a Jew, but this is irrelevant: Laura herself knows that 'being different' is enough to make her a universal scapegoat:¹⁵

No-one actually called Laura a Jerry to her face: in a way, it was nothing to do with the war. She was different. That might have been enough for them to peck her to death.

And this difference consists in much more than being 'foreign': the 'Abroad' that Laura comes from is a world where the barriers and constraints that order life in the safe and English world of 'Spring Gardens' have broken down.

Early in their relationship, Patience realises that her new friend is in some way a part of the adult world of tragedy and suffering and responsibility, a world of which Patience herself has only caught glimpses. She already has to shoulder formidable responsibilities, which mount as the years pass and her mother, a morphine addict, becomes increasingly disturbed and dependent. Laura's difficult home situation has forced her to grow up too quickly, but Patience learns throughout her adolescence that being grown up does not mean, as children suppose, being free to do what you want. Her mother's loneliness, Nina's acceptance of her unwanted pregnancy and marriage, Doktor Meister's imprisonment, all show Patience that adults too can feel

insecure and constricted and that Laura's precocious maturity makes her not less but more vulnerable:¹⁶

She seemed to Patience to be both very old and very young: that is, Laura could be hurt, terribly, and at the same time a part of her belonged to the mysterious adult world, had been claimed already by pains and griefs and possibilities as distant to most of them as a view across an impassable valley.

Apart from belonging - or half-belonging, because part of Laura's tragedy is that she does not belong anywhere - to this 'mysterious adult world' Laura is different from the other girls because of her sexual ambiguity. There is no happy marriage planned for Laura at the end of the novel. It is possible that she is indeed a lesbian, a 'woman like that', but this solution appears rather too simplistic. Laura's sexual identity appears to be as confused and ambivalent as her nationality. She has one heterosexual affair in the novel - with Stephen Marlowe, the man to whom Patience becomes engaged - but Laura loves Stephen only for his uncanny physical resemblance to her brother Heini, to whom she has been very attached, and who has betrayed her father to the Nazis. Laura's love for Heini is presented as overtly incestuous, and she herself recognises that she has loved him 'too much', although she tries to resist guilt: "I think that was a sin, to love my brother so much. But I can't believe that, can you, that any love can be wicked?"¹⁷ Laura's refusal to believe that 'any love can be wicked' appears to sanction the love between her and

Patience, for as soon as she makes this declaration of defiance : 'At the same moment, the two girls moved together. It was hardly even a kiss.'¹⁸ But the juxtaposition of her love for Heini and her love for Patience - and there are times when she confuses the two in her mind - is also ominous, partly because Heini has betrayed his father, and partly because to equate passionate love for a friend with incest is to place it firmly on the side of forbidden love. All Laura's attachments (she is also very jealous of her father's love for her mother) are forbidden in some way. ('"Lolly steals love,"' hisses Laura's mother.¹⁹)

Laura's sexual ambivalence, her lack of any particular religion, the fact that she seems both young and old, reflect and underline her statelessness; she belongs nowhere, a fact of which she is painfully aware:²⁰

'Sometimes I wish I were. A Jew. A proper one, then I'd know who I was... it would make you feel real, as though you had a country you carried in your head.'

Laura needs to feel 'real' and for a time her relationship with Patience does help to validate her existence, for Patience is kind to her in the tradition of the practical, helpful English schoolgirl, but Patience, terrified by the implications of loving Laura, fails her too in the end, and she attempts suicide.

Patience is both attracted and repelled by Laura's world. When she first sees Laura's house, dark and old, promising beauty and mystery behind the Pre-Raphaelite glass in the door, she runs home, 'enchanted and pursued'²¹: Laura's world threatens even while it tempts, and Patience will ultimately try to escape it by marrying Stephen Marlowe, thereby both asserting her heterosexuality and confirming that she belongs not to the mysterious and frightening world of 'Abroad', but to the comparative security and orthodoxy of 'Spring Gardens', the cosy, middle-class suburbia in which both she and Stephen have grown up.

Throughout the novel 'Abroad' is contrasted with 'Spring Gardens'. At first, Spring Gardens is to Patience the embodiment of all that is safe and unthreatening. It stands for values she has grown up with and never questioned, for the safety of childhood and a particular, English way of life. 'Spring Gardens' is as secure as the Chalet School. Just as Laura, fleeing the nightmare of 1930s Europe, has a childish notion that 'nothing bad could happen in England'²², Patience, at the beginning of the novel, is still young enough to see Spring Gardens, which clearly also represents her childhood, as a refuge, a place where nothing bad can happen. Contact with Laura has made her aware that there is another world, but she clings for as long as she can to the idea that Spring Gardens is inviolate: Laura's bewitching but disturbing world can 'pursue' her, but she

does not yet realise that it can chase her as far as Spring Gardens:²³

Then she ran up the hill, she ran, enchanted and pursued, home to Spring Gardens, where the pavements shone, sensible dogs walked about, and hedges were privet, gold or green.

In fact 'Spring Gardens' is constantly under attack from 'Abroad', and just as Laura learns that England is not simply a land of pastoral beauty and safety, but a place threatened with invasion and destruction, where she is persecuted as she was in Europe, albeit on a more personal level, Patience has to come to terms with the fact that Spring Gardens cannot protect her. Once she has reached a certain level of awareness, she cannot retreat to her former innocence and ignorance. By choosing to marry Stephen Marlowe, she is opting for the values of Spring Gardens over those of Abroad, but the very existence of Abroad has shown her that these values are no defence against pain. Spring Gardens represented childhood securities and values to Patience, but in the end she has to grow up: she may appear to be rejecting Laura and Laura's world at the end of the novel, but she cannot forget what has happened between them.

When Patience first befriends Laura she realises that:²⁴

It was going to be complicated being Laura's friend...The values of school and her peers she had never questioned seriously. Now she might have to take sides, or at

least, to dissemble.

Initially the main complication facing Patience does indeed appear to be a case of divided loyalties. She is attracted by Laura and the glimpse she offers of 'another world that might be dangerous but would certainly prove richer than her own',²⁵ but her own group of friends, 'the gang', and being accepted by them, is also very important to her. Like many school story characters she has a respect for the conventions of school which can dictate whom one might befriend. In fact it is only Barbara Baxter, Laura's main adversary among the pupils, who disapproves strongly of Patience's friendship with the new girl. Barbara is almost a caricature of the 'hoydenish' schoolgirl, typifying the very British, unemotional, unfeminine, sporty girl. Hard, hockey-playing and hearty, Barbara hates asthmatic, pinafore-clad Laura from the start, and has an uncanny knack of being able to attack Patience through Laura. She senses something of the nature of Patience's interest in Laura, and is spiteful enough to use this to hurt Patience:²⁶

'Well, anyhow, Laura Meister's a Hun. And Patti's got a pash on her.'

Barbara is not an attractive character, but she is clearly used to being a person of some standing and influence among her peers. She is jealous, perhaps, of the effortless way in which Laura has attracted so much attention, and her best defence is to attack Laura and anyone who dares to take

Laura's part. Barbara's insight into her feelings disturbs Patience profoundly; her remark that Patience has a 'pash' on Laura makes Patience feel 'lonelier and angrier than she ever had in her life',²⁷.

Had Patience's interest in Laura not had the traits of a 'pash', had she liked the new girl in the same uncomplicated way that she likes Nina and Rose, it might have been possible for her to make a firm stand in Laura's defence from the beginning. But she is frightened, partly of losing her friends, but mainly of making herself vulnerable by showing the strength and the quality of her attachment to Laura:²⁸

It was to hide the intensity of her interest in the new girl that she dissembled. Passion is dangerous, it betrays, leaves one vulnerable.

The schoolgirl crush, rave or 'pash' (short for 'passion') was, as we have seen, a widely recognised phenomenon, the more or less acceptable face of intense feeling between schoolgirls. In girls' schools it had become an institution, but schools differed in their attitudes, as Gillian Avery describes in The Best Type of Girl²⁹. Commonly, the pash was a form of hero-worship, "little girls running after big girls," as Nina Cherry describes it contemptuously³⁰. Nina's precocious interest in the opposite sex has protected her from 'the general mooning and swooning that went on',³¹ but most of the other

girls - even Patience, who 'thought pashes stupid...had been a little in love herself'³² - fall victim to this sort of infatuation at some stage in their adolescence and it is tolerated, if slightly despised. Naturally, the girl most affected is Rose Delane, the gentle, sentimental Irish girl who 'until she fell for Miss Lowrie, had a new unrequited passion every week. Flowers, apples, Valentines, tears, servitude and longing: oh, poor Rose!'³³ But what characterises these pashes is that they are always focused on an older girl or a mistress. As Martha Vicinus points out in 'Distance and Desire: English Boarding School Friendships, 1870 - 1920:'³⁴

Although similarly strong and complex emotions may have been felt by those involved, both the psychic and public structures of this relationship differed from the well-established model of adolescent friendship between girls of the same age.

The key word here is 'public': the fact that intense friendships between girls of the same age did not, after the late 1920s or so, fit into a public structure which allowed the expression of intense feeling, made it hard for girls who felt such powerful emotions for other girls the same age to place their feelings into any sort of context. You were not supposed to feel for a 'chum' what you felt for your 'rave', but of course, some girls did. Barbara calls Patience's interest in Laura a 'pash' because there is no available alternative terminology. But Patience knows that what she feels, although it has elements of the pash, is

something altogether more disturbing: she wants to keep it private and Barbara's insistence on making it public angers Patience and makes her feel alienated from the others. Rose's passion for Miss Lowrie is quite public: she is teased for it, but no more, because it can be accommodated within acceptable behaviour. Rose expresses her admiration for the young teacher quite openly. She can even decide to 'wean'³⁵ herself off Miss Lowrie, suggesting that she remains in control of her feelings (like Miranda in the Kingscote novels) and there is never any suggestion that her feelings put her beyond the pale of heterosexuality: she longs for marriage and children. Patience does not have the reassurance of this sort of longing ('"I'm not sure I'd really like a baby."³⁵) and her passion for Laura confuses and distress her. She cannot control her feelings for Laura, only try to deny them.

So, just as Spring Gardens shows itself not to be a real refuge, Patience's gang does not offer a safe haven from the potential danger of her interest in Laura, for she feels alone in the crowd, and Barbara is always there to defile her most personal feelings. Poor Patience is torn: she lacks the courage to stay with Laura, thereby making it even clearer to Barbara that she has a 'pash' on her, and she is relieved when Laura refuses to come with her to the boiler room, or the Arboretum, the 'secret places' where the gang meet to eat sweets and smoke and gossip:³⁷

Patience was relieved and ashamed. She knew Barbara didn't want Laura in the boiler room and she was hurt for Laura; but at the same time she would have found it hard to exile herself. So she went, but did not enjoy herself, and that was the worst of both worlds.

She tries to keep everyone happy, but ends up pleasing nobody, least of all herself.

Loyalty to the gang is considerably less demanding than loyalty to Laura: allegiance to her peers offers at least some degree of protection and group identity but loyalty to Laura means standing alone, feeling frightened and hunted by a terror which takes on the shape of a 'wolf':³⁸

It seemed to Patience that ... she was stranded with Laura Meister on some wolf-threatened hillside in winter, with no place to hide.

There is no place to hide, because not only does Patience fail to hide her passion from Barbara and the others, but she cannot deny it to herself either. And ultimately it is her own desire and guilt rather than fear of censure from her peers which prevents her from giving Laura the support she so desperately needs in an environment which becomes increasingly hostile. In fact, although Barbara remains Laura's main adversary, the other girls in the clique, Nina and Rose, are willing to defend Laura, especially as they grow older and begin to command some influence within the small society which is Albert Lodge School for Girls.

"Any society has its natural victims," says Claire Winterton the headmistress³⁹, trying to exonerate herself for her part in the persecution of Laura. Laura is a victim because she is different and 'That might have been enough for them to peck her to death' but the situation is more complex than this. It is the form of Laura's difference which makes Claire so reluctant to protect her. Laura is a threat: she makes the school authorities uneasy and the fact that she is German is no more than an excuse. It is Laura's failure to fit into any category, her tendency to inspire passionate feeling ('"She's... the sort of person you can only love or only hate and it's not her fault...she doesn't fit in, she's not like anyone else,"' Patience explains in a letter to her father.⁴⁰) and above all her sexual ambiguity which is so disturbing to 'Winterboots and Trotty'. They may recognise something of themselves in Laura: she is the embodiment of dangerous potential and passions, passions to which they themselves are also prey, and for this reason she must be cast out. Laura represents to them what they have been taught to fear in themselves. Nina Cherry is also a sexual transgressor but Nina gets away with it ('Nina could get away with anything'⁴¹) because her crime is so blatantly heterosexual. Even her surname suggests heterosexual passion. Claire and Lucy do not want to have to take responsibility for Laura ('I believe that Laura Meister must sink or swim.'⁴²) and refuse to use their positions in

the school to protect her. In fact, Claire deliberately makes the situation worse, clearly deriving some sort of vicarious thrill from watching the frenzied behaviour of the little girls, whose violent battles (between the 'hearties', Barbara's supporters, and the 'aesthetes, the 'triumvirate of Laura, Patience and Nina'⁴³) replace 'English and Germans' as their favourite game. Only when the situation becomes intolerable, following the death of Barbara Baxter's father in the war, does authority take action, ostensibly for Laura's protection. She is given an attic room to work in alone: becoming the 'princess in the tower', her passion and danger locked away and rendered unthreatening. Desperate for Patience to come to her, she becomes increasingly confused and distressed until, in fine 'madwoman in the attic' tradition, she slits her wrists.

Why does Patience continue to 'cast...the stones of silence'⁴⁴ in the face of such glaring injustice towards her friend? She feels ashamed that she does not rush to Laura's defence in the way, for example, that Rose Delane does:⁴⁵

But she was not blameless because in this little world of the school she was not small, she could speak, act. The others...were puzzled...by her silence.

When Patience's friendship with Laura was still in its early stages, she had conventional fantasies about rescuing Laura: 'I wish I could help her now. If she were in trouble, if I

could rescue her from a burning house.'⁴⁶ but now that she really is in a position to rescue 'the Princess in the tower',⁴⁷ she is incapable of action. Once again, it is not censure that Patience fears, but her own passion and its consequences: 'Were she and Laura women like that? Was it discovery she feared?'⁴⁸

Both Patience and Laura are frightened of losing 'that time when I was a child',⁴⁹ and their relationship is, on one level, as the ultimate denial of 'adult' heterosexuality, a retreat into childhood. But as we have seen, the world which Laura represents is so threatening, despite its obvious romanticism and attractiveness, that loving Laura, while it makes Patience feel beautiful, loved and wanted, forces her to confront a complex and frightening view of adult sexuality. Adolescence is often characterized by an ambivalent attitude towards growing up. Patience, at adolescence, feels big and awkward and unlovely; she yearns for the security of childhood, which meant not only Spring Gardens, but the certainty that she was loved, by her father, who is fighting in the war in the Middle East. Laura, as we will see, gives Patience something of this feeling of being loved (just as Patience and Stephen are substitutes for Heini) but this is undermined by Patience's guilt, and her resistance to the possibility of being a 'woman like that'.

Marriage and having babies do not hold a particularly strong appeal for Patience, either, especially after Nina's failed attempts at abortion:⁵⁰

It was as though poor Nina had shown them something of significance they had yet to fathom: both her pain and acceptance, a view of a world, of their bodies, of their sex, to which they had never before given consideration. And would prefer now to shrug off.

Nina, although she assures the other girls that "'Sex is spiffing. Really spiffing."⁵¹, is trapped, at the age of eighteen, into a shotgun marriage to a man she does not love, her body invaded by an unwanted child and carried off to America where she does not particularly want to live. Heterosexuality, as demonstrated by Nina, may be 'spiffing' but it implies the passivity of women. Nina's wedding is the symbol of 'normal' heterosexual destiny, but it is presented in deeply ambivalent terms, as empty and rather dispiriting:⁵²

Patience ...thought, suddenly and bleakly: is that all? Is that all there is?

Sex - that is, heterosexual sex - is generally feared by the girls (this is of course common in novels about adolescence, particularly those set before the 1960s, when sex began to be presented as enjoyable) and, apart from Nina, they resist it as long as possible. When Nina tries to tell the gang how 'spiffing' sex is, she is prevented from going into graphic detail by a scream from Posy: "'There's a wasp on my

doughnut!"⁵³. The wasp is symbolic enough: even more symbolic is the intrusion of a boy (Stephen Marlowe) in search of a lost cricket ball, both clear indications that however long they try to resist it, however they fear its sting, the intrusion of sex into their lives is inevitable. Their bathing pond at the farm camp is similarly invaded, by naked German prisoners, and on the whole they find 'the male anatomy...interesting, though a little disappointing.'⁵⁴ Like the wasp on Posy's doughnut sex is potentially deadly, but there is also the possibility that it will be disappointing, like the male anatomy, an anticlimax; like poor Nina's wedding. Growing up and accepting heterosexuality is thus seen as losing something: Nina, who loves sex with men but recognises that the quality of friendship they provide falls far short of that offered by 'the gang' admits: "You know, men are all right, but you can't really talk to them."⁵⁵ She is acknowledging that female friendship provides emotional support which a male/female may not.

However, the alternative to marriage - being "Ugh. Like Winterboots and Trotty"⁵⁶ - is even less attractive. Here we see Patience forced to choose between two adult sexual roles, neither of which appears unequivocally desirable.

Being a 'woman like that' is the worse of two evils,

though, Patience decides. If positive images of homosexuality are thin enough on the ground in the 1990s, for girls of Patience Mackenzie's generation and background they scarcely existed. Rachel Pinney, a contributor to Women Like Us, a collection of accounts of growing up lesbian in twentieth-century Britain, remembers that, around 1943 (when she was in her thirties):⁵⁷

I felt really bad about it and never, ever thought about it as anything good. What I really felt was that it was something awful like dirt, filth, slime - all the things that were bad.

This is personal and anecdotal, certainly, but the unmitigated negativity of Pinney's attitude to her sexuality, her internalising of the fact that it is 'dirty', suggests a society which remained largely unaccepting of lesbianism. Lesbianism is positively not, as far as Patience can see, something to celebrate. She has no positive lesbian role models. She is vaguely aware that 'Trotty and Winterboots' are probably 'women like that' but since they are the generation whose men were lost in the First World War their sexual orientation is seen as rather a bitter acceptance of second best, instead of as a conscious decision based on personal preference. Besides, there is no suggestion that the sexual tension between Claire and Lucy has ever been allowed physical expression. Laura's old governess, Scotty, has told Laura that there are 'women like that' but these women too are presented in a pathetic

light:⁵⁸

'There are women like that, Patti. Scotty explained to me. I think they're often lonely.'

Are they lonely because they are 'women like that', or have they become 'women like that' to assuage their loneliness (ie. their lack of a man)? Elliott leaves this deliberately ambiguous. Patience's greatest fear, throughout the novel, is that she might be a 'woman like that'. Despite being attracted to Stephen Marlowe, her primary attachment for her whole adolescence is to Laura, and it is mainly fear of being a 'woman like that' which prevents the relationship from becoming physical long before it actually does.

In fact, Laura and Patience are friends for several years before they become lovers, although there is considerable sensual tension between them from the very beginning. When Miss Trott, aware of the intensity of Patience's adoration, warns her "against sentimental attachments",⁵⁹ her language echoes closely the nuns at Lippington, as well as that of Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, whose Chalet pupils, almost to a girl, shudder at the very idea ('Sentimental grande passions were severely sat on at the Chalet School.'⁶⁰) Patience realises, however, that what Trotty is talking about is something not merely sentimental but sexual, and her disgust and horror are expressed in language which closely echoes that of Rachel Pinney, quoted above: 'They make it sound filthy.'⁶¹ She feels violated

and exposed, and there is no escape from the implications of Trotty's words:⁶²

It was foul, it was horrible. She ran and all she could think was Laura. Laura!... She wanted to bath, to scrub herself all over and then bath again. Even Spring Gardens, that had always been so consoling, so sure, with its clipped hedges and good dogs, was as dark now as the rest of the world.

At this stage in their friendship, despite its intensity, the girls have not so much as embraced but Patience's reaction suggests awareness of a potential sexual relationship, even if she lacks the language to express this.

There is a sense of inevitability, even of relief, when the tension between Laura and Patience is finally allowed to be expressed physically, and the 'urge that made Patience shiver'⁶³ is satisfied. Some of the most lyrical and passages in the novel describe their passion and clearly the sexual expression of their love satisfies much more than desire:⁶⁴

Then the world was this very small overdraped room of winking bibelots and firelight, which diminished further to the size of the bed and their content, each recognising in the other's body their own and yet the difference between one flesh and another. Dark and light. A matter of scent and taste: sweet and sharp. Till Laura was quietened; she lost the edge of hysteria that followed her from the hospital bed. And Patience felt beautiful for the first time in her life. She loved.

The language of recognition echoes Simone de Beauvoir's suggestion of the 'narcissistic'⁶⁵ pleasure of lesbianism, and yet the use of contrasts suggests that there is more than this involved, and there is certainly a therapeutic element, with the lovemaking calming Laura and reassuring Patience.

Although their love is described as something beautiful and enriching, a source of delight and comfort to both girls, we cannot forget the context of their friendship, against a background of war, suspicion and fear. The mood of tenderness and joyful confidence that characterises their first time in bed together, in the farm which is removed from both Spring Gardens and Laura's house with its overtones of *Abroad*, ('Laughing, they kissed and slept.'⁶⁶) cannot last, is already overshadowed by the need to return to everyday life, a world away from the farm camp where they have danced in the moonlight together and first found the confidence to exchange more than a fleeting kiss. The farm, too, is no mere rural idyll: the work camp, although fun, is for the war effort, and the friendly Italian prisoners contribute to the novel's recurring motif of imprisonment, reminding us of the girls' incarceration in the prison of their adolescence and their femininity.

Patience, although she can think 'I'm happy, that's what's so wonderful'⁶⁷, cannot relax and enjoy her new-found

happiness. When they return from farm camp to find that Sophy Meister has been committed to a psychiatric hospital she worries that they are being punished: "'I thought of that too. If we were wicked, and this was - you know - a punishment.'"⁶⁸ Laura rejects the idea, but Patience becomes obsessed with the notion that what they have enjoyed is sinful, and will somehow be 'spoiled'. When Laura is incarcerated in the little attic room at school, supposedly for her own safety in the atmosphere of vengeful xenophobic hysteria which follows the death of Barbara's father in the war, she sees this as confirmation of her fears, and is afraid to go to Laura, even though she longs to see her and knows that she is letting her down by staying away. Patience feels that: 'I'm being watched, they're waiting for me to do the wrong thing. They don't approve of me any more.'⁶⁹ She is afraid for Laura, but even more afraid for herself. She is growing up, on the point of leaving school, and fears that 'the real person coming out' is a 'woman like that':⁷⁰

Women 'like that', Laura's Scotty had said, were often lonely. Were she and Laura women like that? Was it discovery she feared?

Patience has always, as we have seen, tried to fight the possibility that she might indeed be a 'woman like that', and the 'discovery' she fears refers as much to what she might find out about herself as what others might discover. When Miss Trott tells Nina that "'there are many kinds of

love"⁷¹, Patience thinks of 'Laura's Scotty': 'That must be fearful. Patti's mind approached the idea and slid away, not even to imagine. It would surely be terrible to be a woman like that.'⁷² She has determined at the time to be kissed by a boy - preferably Stephen - that summer, but Stephen falls in love with Laura instead and Patience is kissed by no-one at all for some time. When she is kissed, it is by Laura, and now what is happening to Laura seems to prove to Patience that is indeed 'terrible' to be a 'woman like that'. Expressing even orthodox sexuality seems to invite punishment - Nina has certainly been punished for being '"the American Army's daftest tart"⁷³ - and Patience decides that she cannot cope with the surely much more alarming consequences of being sexually unorthodox: 'Laura is different. I am frightened to be different.'⁷⁴

When she finally 'hammer[s] at the door she should have broken down long ago'⁷⁵ - the physical symbol of the psychological barrier that Patience has constructed between herself and Laura, and perhaps of the constraining demands of heterosexuality, it is too late. Their love has indeed been 'spoiled', and by Patience herself, who learns now that 'unacknowledged love can cause more suffering, even, than hate.'⁷⁶ Patience's fear of being 'different' is not surprising, when the only available examples of this difference are so negative, and when society, represented by the fighting pupils and the uncaring headmistress, seems

absolutely determined to cast out Laura - who is different - in such a brutal way, locking her up out of sight and mind, and then dismissing her anguished suicide attempt as a 'hysterical incident',⁷⁷.

Laura does not die but her relationship with Patience is over. This is symbolised by the flowers which Patience brings Laura in the convent nursing home, but which she crushes in her lap, 'every stem...broken, every bloom spoiled',⁷⁸ before she remembers to give them to her. These flowers are like the love and desire which Patience undoubtedly has for Laura but which she does not have the courage to give her until it is too late for them to flourish. When Laura says: '"Il faut partir, Patti Patti,"'⁷⁹ she is acknowledging that the relationship must end and that they must both leave childhood, which for Patience must mean giving up Laura. Even the use of French reinforces Laura's difference.

After this the two girls meet on only three more occasions, all of them significant. Nina's wedding, symbolising the logical outcome of heterosexuality, is not, as we saw, an occasion for unmitigated joy, and Patience senses that Nina is 'making the best of it',⁸⁰ Marriage is what Patience herself is going to choose, because she is 'frightened to be different', but Stephen is presented as an attractive character, quiet and thoughtful, who has known

Patience for years and shares many of her characteristics, unlike Nina's anonymous soldier whose individuality is masked by his uniform ("they all look the same in that damned sexy uniform."⁸¹) and whose relationship with Nina has clearly been more physical than emotional.

They meet again in the ruins of the school, which has been symbolically destroyed by a German bomber: all the 'secret places' of Patience and the gang's girlhood, their past, their childhood, Laura and Patience's love - blasted to pieces, leaving a wasteland behind with the pathetic figure of Trotty, whose emotional life has centred on the school and on headmistress Claire who has deserted her, poking for books in the rubble.

Their final meeting is something of an epilogue. Against a pastoral background, Patience tells Laura, whom she has not seen for two years, of her engagement to Stephen Marlowe, the seal on her decision to return to what remains of Spring Gardens, and on her heterosexuality. Laura gives Patience her blessing: "'I'm so glad, Patti. He's right. You're right together."⁸² Stephen may well make Patience very happy: he is certainly presented in a positive light throughout the novel. But Patience has destroyed something in order to achieve this happiness, just as the longed for peace which seems finally to have come has been achieved only at the expense of thousands of innocent Japanese lives.

The gentle Doktor Meister, it is implied, has helped develop the atom bomb.

Love between women is certainly presented in an ambivalent light in Secret Places, but no more so than heterosexual love. The love between Patience and Laura is seen as something which is beautiful and positive in itself, but which, like Patience's flowers, is ultimately destroyed, 'every bloom spoilt', because of society's refusal to accommodate passionate love between women. Patience and Laura's instincts tell them that "all love is good",⁸³ but Patience cannot hold on to this belief when she is forced to consider the wider implications of her love for Laura. The image of 'women like that' is an immensely powerful symbol in the novel: the implication, as far as Patience can see, is that lesbians are pathetic and lonely and ugly: 'Winterboots and Trotty' and 'stupid old Mallard and Drinkwater',⁸⁴. She wants to distinguish between her love and their petty staff-room power struggles but she lacks any positive context for her feelings.

This has been a problem for women ever since the sexualization of practically all same-sex love: this provides a context, but one which society has stigmatized and despised. I am not suggesting that Patience is a lesbian who is denying her true feelings by forcing herself into a heterosexual relationship. What I am proposing is

that because she knows there are 'women like that' but has no access to any positive images of these women's lives she assumes, first of all, that any sexual contact with another girl must mean that she is potentially a 'woman like that' and, secondly, that if you are a 'woman like that' you are necessarily lonely and pathetic, rejected by society in the brutal way that Laura is banished by the school authorities. Elliott's portrayal of this dilemma, which continues to confront girls and women today, is the most sensitive and revealing account of such a friendship that I have encountered within British fiction⁸⁵. The fact that it stops short of presenting an entirely positive picture of a sexual relationship between adolescent girls is wholly consistent with the attitudes of the period in which it is set as well as with the more open-minded but essentially problematic discourse of the 1980s.

Pat O'Connor, in Friendships Between Women, A Critical Review, discusses the social construct of lesbianism as 'a distinct sexual identity, indicating a particular type of person'⁸⁶ (a 'woman like that') and suggests that:⁸⁷

Since the identity of lesbian is a stigmatized one, the fear of being labelled in this way acts as an important control on women's relationships with each other - and in particular on their physical demonstrations of affection.

If this is a valid assessment of social attitudes in the 1990s and I think we must accept, however sadly, that it is

- then how much more true it was for Elliott's characters in the Britain of fifty years ago. The fact that Elliott, writing in the 1980s, has not endowed her characters with a sophisticated 1980s sexual awareness and confidence adds to the conviction of their portrayal, remembering that what is appropriate here are the general attitudes which adolescents might have internalised, rather than academic or theoretical ones.

Of course, Patience and Laura's friendship, although it is the pivotal relationship in the novel, is not the only model of female friendship offered by Elliott. Patience's group of friends, 'the gang', share cigarettes and confidences in a variety of 'secret places' around the school. Patience recognises the important role this gang has played in her adolescence, recognises too the impermanence of the bond:⁸⁸

The gang, thought Patience - we know each other better than we know our families, yet it will change, it will end, that will be sad.

Relationships within the gang fluctuate and develop as the girls mature. This developing of relationships to keep pace with the changing needs of girls was a frequent theme in the school story too. The Chalet School in the 1950s is dominated by the 'Gang' of Mary-Lou and her friends, but as the girls grow up, their need for the corporate identity of this group lessens:⁸⁹

The Gang could hardly go on in its present form when all its members were so scattered now.

'But that,' said Miss Annersley... 'will be all to the good. It has served them well while they were children. Now they are growing up, I think they will find they have outgrown it it to a great extent.'

Similarly, as Patience and her friends grow up, the gang assumes less importance. Early in the novel, Barbara is a dominant figure who is largely responsible for the exclusion of Laura. Towards the end of their schooldays, however, Barbara leads her own sporty followers and Laura is largely accepted by the others, Nina, Rose and Posy. The masculine presentation of Barbara, and her strong identification with the overtly lesbian Miss Mallard, suggest that, in her cruelty to Laura she is attacking her own potential lesbianism, once again indicating the perceived negativity of lesbianism as an identity.

Nina and Rose are Patience's closest friends apart from Laura. Rose Delane, Irish and Catholic, sweet and sentimental, embodies a sort of naive innocence but has a strength which helps her support Laura when Patience is frightened to identify with her. The inherent goodness of Rose seems to reassure Patience:⁹⁰

Rose is the sweetest, Rose will change the least. I hope Rose never changes.

Rose loves flowers and poems and babies and her artless

application of Catholic doctrine to some of the complex moral problems encountered throughout the novel provides some of Elliott's humour, but this is gentle, never bitter, like Rose herself.

Nina is, superficially, a type: the 'fast' girl, interested in clothes and film stars, who is the first to sport breasts and boyfriends. But Nina has a sophistication which is more than skin deep, allowing her to understand something of Patience's complex reactions to Laura.⁹¹ With the success of the schools' production of 'The Three Sisters' behind them, Nina, Laura and Patience become for a while a 'triumvirate' (a friendship grouping much loved by Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, who created several notable triumvirates in the 'Chalet School' series) admired by those of the little girls who do not follow Barbara. The junior school's division into aesthetes and hearties is in school story tradition, but the violence of the ensuing drama, the impaling of a child on the railings, is not.

Secret Places, like Lambert's No Talking After Lights is a school novel which is darker and more disturbing than anything within the girls' school story genre. Her world, with its wartime context, contains violence and the threat of violence, which is mirrored by the relationships between her characters ('As an establishment for girls the school was naturally a violent institution'⁹²). Like Lambert she

exploits the idea of adults being prisoners, symbolised throughout the novel by the presence of the prison camp. Madness, betrayal, incest, suicide and abortion attempts are important elements of the novel, but, unlike Lambert's novel, Secret Places presents a view of friendship which, while it includes threat and betrayal, also includes beauty, loyalty and sweetness. Elliott's touch is more delicate than Lambert's and her vision more ambivalent. Certainly, the peace at the end is undercut by our knowledge of Hiroshima, but we take from the novel not just the sadness of Patience's inability to help her friend, the victimisation of Laura, callously sanctioned by the authorities who should protect her; we take also the memory of the 'secret places' of the girls' friendships.

CHAPTER FIVE

The college friendship (1920s): Rosamond Lehmann's Dusty Answer

An enduring focus of interest in the novel is the large family, with all its scope for complex relationships and self-sufficiency. In the days before girls went to school outside the home, the family was one of the few acceptable environments for fictional explorations of girls' interests. Charlotte M. Yonge's family stories, though largely forgotten now, were among the most popular of Victorian fiction for girls and some notable writers for girls in the twentieth century acknowledge their debt to Yonge's large families in the unusual fecundity of their adult heroines (Jo of the Chalet School grows up to produce eleven children; Abbey girl Jen has nine). There are eight Marlow children in what Marcus Crouch maintains is the 'best of fictional families',¹ and Antonia Forest, their creator, was like Judith Earle, heroine of Rosamond Lehmann's Dusty Answer, an only child fascinated by a large neighbouring family.

Of course, one of literature's most popular families must be the March sisters, four 'little women' growing up in an impoverished but loving family in Civil War New England, wistfully observed by the rich but lonely boy next door:²

'I can't help looking over at your house, you always seem to be having such good times...it's like looking at a picture to see the fire, and you all round the table with your mother...I can't help watching it.'

In Rosamond Lehmann's first novel, Dusty Answer (1927), described by Alfred Noyes as 'the most striking first novel of this generation'³, Judith Earle, a solitary, dreamy child, is similarly attracted to the family of five cousins who come and go to their grandmother's house next door to her. Like the Marches, the Fyfes seem to be self-sustaining: Judith sees them as a unit into which she knows she can never be fully integrated ('But they were all alike!'⁴) The Marches welcome lonely Laurie into their home and family, but the Fyfes' acceptance of Judith is only partial; even as a child, although they play together, she is always an outsider:⁵

Once Judith heard them whisper: 'Let's all run away from Judy ' - and they all did.

Like Laurie, Judith falls in love with several of her neighbours in turn at different stages of her childhood, adolescence and young adulthood, and these relationships and the fantasies which Judith weaves around them have been the focus of much critical discussion of the novel.

Surprisingly, her friendship with fellow Cambridge student Jennifer Baird has excited somewhat less interest. Certainly, this friendship must be seen in the context of

Judith's relationship with the Fyfes, and it does repeat aspects of that relationship, but despite the fact that Jennifer, like the Fyfes, is a romantic and ultimately elusive figure to Judith, theirs is a much more reciprocal relationship than any entered into with the cousins. For most of Judith's three year college course, Jennifer consumes her energies and passions to the virtual exclusion of anyone else. The Fyfe cousins come and go in Judith's life and they do appear intermittently while she is at college, but Jennifer, for the first couple of years, is a constant:⁶

Always Jennifer. It was impossible to drink up enough of her; and a day without her was a day with the light gone.

When Judith, after being educated at home until the age of eighteen (as was Lehmann herself), arrives at her Cambridge college, she is disorientated, apprehensive and disillusioned. For the first time in her life she has to live with many other people, in surroundings which, after the rural idyll of her beautiful riverside home, appear ugly and utilitarian. 'But I can't live in ugliness!' is her horrified reaction to her college room.⁷ Venturing into the dining room on her first evening she feels, naturally, lost and terrified, the 'immense yelling'⁸ of the girls' conversation reaching her unaccustomed ears as 'pleasant idiocy'⁹. There is no sense that she can ever be integrated into this clamorous community, especially as she commits the

faux pas of sitting at a second year table. That she is somehow different from these girls is an understandable way for Judith to feel - it is the normal response of a sensitive person finding herself in such a situation. Her apparently dismissive attitude towards the other girls - 'commonplace female creatures in the mass. How boring it was!',¹⁰ is largely a defence: she attacks them because she is at a loss. She fears being ignored but she also fears becoming 'dull' like the rest of the 'herd'. When her thoughts fly to Mariella Fyfe, the only other girl she has known ('If you could see Mariella's clear thorough-bred face among them, - would that too get merged?')¹¹ it is for her own identity that she really fears.

In the midst of Judith's discomfiture, her first glimpse of Jennifer excites and delights her. Seen at a distance across the hall, Jennifer is bright, warm and vivid, noticeable in the crowd because of her sunny 'fiercely alive'¹² golden hair, the first thing of beauty Judith has seen since her arrival in Cambridge. Best of all, Judith's interest in Jennifer is clearly reciprocated:¹³

It seemed to look at Judith with sudden eager attention and then to smile. The eyes were meeting her own, inquiring deeply.

This gives Judith sudden 'courage to eat her pudding',¹⁴ the juxtaposition of the dazzling and the domestic hinting already at two important aspects of the female world Judith

is now to encounter for the first time. When Judith leaves the dining hall she is still homesick and friendless in a confusing environment, but at least there is now a hint of deliverance. This episode, Judith's first dinner at college, is familiar to readers of girls' school stories: it is fairly standard for the shy heroine to have to undergo just such a trial on her first evening at school.¹⁵

Patty followed, rather nervous...The refectory was almost full ... She was between two girls rather older than herself, neither of whom spoke to her... Patty ate her supper...in silence, feeling exceedingly shy... she was yet an absolute outsider to everyone else...

Judith's disorientation may be more stylishly conveyed, but her feelings closely resemble Angela Brazil's Patty's.

Before meeting Jennifer, Judith must undergo two more trials. First of all, wandering along the corridor outside her room she hears a crowd of girls discussing her in unfavourable terms. This tendency for the sensitive heroine unwittingly to give the wrong impression is by no means unusual in the girls' school story, and we can understand how Judith has given these girls the suspicion that she is 'haughty' and superior,¹⁶ Someone is sensitive enough to suggest that Judith might be shy; and a voice which Judith feels sure must be Jennifer's declares: "She's the most beautiful person I ever saw. I adore her."¹⁷ The reader takes heart, as does Judith, from Jennifer's championing of her, and the extravagance of Jennifer's praise gives us an

idea of Jennifer's personality and of the passionate nature of the friendship she will offer Judith.

Before this friendship can be forged, however, Judith has her first encounter with a girl who is as unappealing as Jennifer is irresistible - Mabel Fuller. Earnest, repulsive, probing, Mabel seems determined to attach herself to Judith because the latter, unlike herself, is attractive and clever. In her pink flannel dressing gown, with her cocoa and her doughnuts, her greasy skin and ugly china ornaments, Mabel is grotesque and the friendship she offers Judith inspires no delight whatsoever:¹⁸

'We must stick together till we've got our bearings... Do come to my room and work whenever you like... I'm a very hard worker myself. I shan't mix much with the other students ... We must go to lectures together at first - keep each other company.'

Mabel may seem merely pathetic and she is certainly to be pitied, but as Judith quickly senses, she is far from harmless: she wants to prey on Judith, to pick her brains, to devour her beauty like a dirty old man:¹⁹

Her eyes yearned at Judith...They had in them a sort of avid glint - almost like the eyes of old men in railway carriages.

Judith's despair at the prospect of 'black Mabel-haunted days and nights'²⁰ is comically exaggerated, but it is tragic too, and underlines her vulnerability in this community of strangers:²¹

No hope. No escape. Three years of Mabel settling down like a nightmare-bat, blotting out the light. Nobody but Mabel was going to speak to you for three years.

Again, this despair at having attracted an undesirable sort of friend and being too kind, or too shy, to discard their attentions, is a common theme in the girls' school story, where it is often harder to rid oneself of an unwanted friend than to gain for oneself the desired friend.

Thankfully, Judith's fears prove unfounded as the meeting with Jennifer finally takes place. Crying in her room, Judith is thinking of how different this world is from the Cambridge which her recently dead father had known and loved, when Jennifer arrives. If Mabel filled Judith with understandable dread, the sight of Jennifer at her door fills her with 'uncontrollable rapture'²². Their meeting is like that between two lovers: 'They gazed at each other, blushing and radiant'²³, and this lover-like response to each other will characterise the whole of their subsequent friendship and estrangement. Like Mabel, Jennifer keeps up a brisk monologue on this first meeting with Judith ('She talked on so rapidly that her words ran into each other and got blurred.'²⁴) Her bright chatter, unlike Mabel's depressing, earnest attempts, is, like Jennifer herself, amusing and irresistible, and Jennifer is well aware of the effect she is creating. She may appear delightfully natural and spontaneous but she is playing for effect, to an

admiring audience:²⁵

'I'll tell you another thing. I believe she's [Mabel] got sex-repression.' She stared impressively at Judith; then broke into loud whistling. 'Have you got a cigarette? Never mind...I've just learnt to blow smokerings. I'll teach you.' More whistling...

She flung her head back on its round white throat and took a deep sighing breath. 'O colours! ... I could eat them. I'm awfully sensuous - I look it, don't I? Or do I mean sensual? I always get them muddled; but I know it's unladylike to be one of them.'

Judith is understandably enchanted by this girl who offers her the prospect of a very different and more inspiring college life than the eight hours' work a day and cocoa offered by Mabel:²⁶

'Oh, there's lots of things to look forward to,' said Jennifer, turning round and smiling full at Judith. Their eyes sparkled and flashed: sympathy flowed like an electric current between them.

So begins Judith's first real experience of female friendship and her life at college, which soon becomes 'a pleasant habit',²⁷. Wiktorina Dorosz in Subjective Vision and Human Relationships in the Novels of Rosamond Lehmann suggests that Jennifer 'takes the place of the cousins, whom Judith sees only sporadically now',²⁸. In the sense that Jennifer becomes the focus of Judith's emotional life, and that she is for Judith a romantic figure, this is true. However, Judith has always seen the cousins only 'sporadically' and the friendship with Jennifer, despite its inherent fragility, which I shall look at in due course, is

very much more solid and intense than the relationships with the Fyfe cousins. More intense because it has a single, rather than several objects, and more solid because, whereas Judith remains in doubt as to the feelings of the Fyfes towards her, Jennifer makes her adoration of Judith clear to everyone. It was common until recently for criticism of Dusty Answer to focus mainly or even exclusively on the relationship with the Fyfe cousins, Jennifer receiving comparatively little attention. Dorosz, despite the fact that Judith's time at college takes up three years of her life and about a third of the book, asserts that: 'In Dusty Answer the subject of the story is the emotional involvement of Judith with the five Fyfe cousins'²⁹. Gillian Tindall, in her 1985 study, Rosamond Lehmann: An Appreciation trivialises the relationship rather, dismissing it and Jennifer's more overtly lesbian attachment to Geraldine as examples of the 'schoolgirl crush'³⁰. A more recent study, Judy Simons' Rosamond Lehmann, shows more awareness of the nature and significance of Judith's 'passionate involvement ... with Jennifer'.³¹

Gabriele Griffin, in Heavenly Love? Lesbian Images in Twentieth Century Women's Writing, does focus on Jennifer and Judith's relationship, suggesting that:³²

It is made clear that [Judith's] friendship with Jennifer is undermined by the absence of a sexual component within it and their dyad is broken up by Jennifer meeting an older lesbian, Geraldine, with whom she has a sexual relationship.

I would not agree that the the absence of a sexual component is what undermines the relationship: the text would seem to suggest other possibilities, as I shall outline. Jennifer's confusion about her sexuality and the clear equation, throughout the novel, of homosexuality with corruption are clearly relevant to any such discussion.

This comparative neglect of Judith's friendship with Jennifer, which is for me the most vividly conveyed of all the passions in the novel, seems to indicate a more generally dismissive attitude towards female friendships: in a novel like Dusty Answer, where there is no shortage of heterosexual (and therefore somehow 'real') passion, critics seem to feel their neglect of a 'mere' female friendship is vindicated. Another strategy is to approach the central female friendship heavy-handedly, imposing inappropriate 'modern' insights onto the text and failing to acknowledge what is actually present. As we have seen, similar approaches have until recently dominated critical responses to the girls' school story, reinforcing, I would suggest, the relationship between such texts.

Judith's isolation is temporarily assuaged by her friendship with Jennifer, but the exclusive nature of the relationship also serves to cut her off even more from her contemporaries at the college. Although Jennifer and Judith

'gradually ... drew around them an outer circle of about half a dozen'³³, and although out of a sense of duty Judith tries to be kind to the despised Mabel, these relationships receive only cursory attention and mean very little compared to the all-consuming passion for Jennifer. We have seen how Nanda Grey was not only discouraged from, but actually forbidden to, form 'exclusive' friendships at her convent school, and Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, in her popular 'Chalet School' series, also warned against the too jealous, one to one friendship. Angela Brazil, on the other hand, specialised in just such feverish passions as that between Judith and Jennifer:³⁴

It was so sweet to be the very centre of Mabel's adoration, to be placed on a pinnacle, and loved with such a rapturous devotion.

This is just the sort of extravagant friendship from which the Chalet School girls, the earliest of whom were exactly contemporaneous with Jennifer and Judith, were discouraged, as we have seen. Jo Bettany, in The Princess of the Chalet School (published in the same year as Dusty Answer) is relieved that sentimental Simone 'no longer insisted that they two should be all in all to each other.'³⁵

Jennifer and Judith, however, for the first year or so at any rate, are 'all in all to each other'. Jennifer's love for her friend is jealous ('"You mustn't love anybody ... I should want to kill him. I should be jealous ... I love

you."')³⁶, solicitous and profoundly anxious. She both craves and fears Judith's growing dependence on her, and Judith is acutely aware of this anxiety. Despite Jennifer's bright personality and popularity ('everyone fell madly in love with her'³⁷), Judith feels that she herself, quiet as she is, is ultimately the stronger of the two:³⁸

Jennifer had the strength of day, and you the strength of night. By day, your little glow was merged in her radiance; but the night was stronger and overcame her. You were stronger than Jennifer in spite of the burning life in her.

Even in these early stages of the friendship Judith realises that Jennifer is liable to flee ('One day when you most needed her, she might run away out of earshot, and never come back.'³⁹) but this insecurity, the inability to take Jennifer for granted, seems to enrich their friendship, adding to its intensity and its peculiar love-affair fragility. Besides, Judith still regards Jennifer as a temporary fixture in her life. She thinks of Roddy and looks forward to the night when he will declare his love for her, and then dismisses thoughts of him because 'meanwhile there was Jennifer to be loved with a bitter maternal love, because she was afraid.'⁴⁰ This 'meanwhile' does not in any way diminish her love for Jennifer, for Judith is not merely passing time with her: she seems rather to see their love as an apprenticeship to 'real' union with a man (a very common way, as we have seen, to see intense feeling between young, sexually inexperienced women in a homosocial environment)

just as her time at Cambridge, after the unusual seclusion of her childhood, is an apprenticeship to full integration with the outside, adult world. However, relationships are not so simple: Roddy is an inappropriate object of Judith's desire, for he seems to prefer men, and loving Jennifer proves to be fraught with unimagined complications.

Judith has nothing against which to measure or compare her feelings for Jennifer, apart from her one-sided love for Roddy and her earlier infatuation for Charlie, who, in addition to dying glamorously young in the war, shared something of Jennifer's shining blonde beauty. She has never been intimate with Mariella and has never had the chance to mix with girls in an everyday way. "'My mother and father don't believe in girls' schools,'" she tells Mariella sadly. "'But I do. It's awfully dull by myself.'" ⁴¹ Compare Laurie's admission to Jo in Little Women: "'It's dull as tombs up here "' ⁴² and the thoughts of many fictional girls who have not mingled much with others: ⁴³

'I ought to be at school like other girls ...
I've no friends of my own age - not a single one!
I just haven't had the chance to make friends.'

'Daddy! It's so lonely, all by myself! ...I only
want to do the things other girls do! Oh, daddy!
I want to go to school!'

'I want to go somewhere where there are ever so
many girls who will play with me; I am so tired
of being only one!'

Judith does not of course, wish for 'ever so many girls',

but her yearning for friendship with the Fyfes does indicate that she is lonely. Because of her long isolation Judith is less likely than Jennifer, who has been to school and presumably experienced a range of female friendships, to be afraid of the strength of the bond between them, to find it in any way excessive or unconventional. She is free, in her naivety, to love and worship her friend:⁴⁴

'Glorious, glorious pagan that I adore!' whispered the voice in Judith that could never speak out

and to immerse herself in the delicious warmth and sensuality of Jennifer's personality. Jennifer is the first person in Judith's life actually to seek her out, to seem to need her.

Thus, for the first year at least, their life in college together is a romantic idyll, a golden time of poetry and punting, conversation, music and 'strange beauty'⁴⁵. The sense of impermanence only adds to its charm:⁴⁶

She roused herself at last as Judith bent to kiss her goodnight.

'Goodnight my - darling - darling - ' she said. They stared at each other with tragic faces. It was too much, this happiness and beauty.

The end of the first year.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, friendships such as that between Judith and Jennifer would undoubtedly be seen in sexual terms - a passing adolescent

homosexual phase; the substitution of a female object of desire in the absence of male company, or simply as a lesbian relationship. In the nineteenth century it would have excited no such definition for the convention of 'romantic friendship' between women and girls was generally acknowledged, and, women being popularly supposed to have no active sexual desires, a more overtly sentimental and emotional love between women was accepted. When Lehmann wrote Dusty Answer the twentieth century 'passion for categorising love', as Lilian Fadermann describes it in Surpassing the Love of Men⁴⁷ was already looking askance at such attachments and labelling them as sexual and lesbian:⁴⁸

Love between women in a post-sexologist age has become either sex between women or non-existent, despite the fact that in many of the lesbian case histories presented by the sexologists ... the women had never had genital contact... Since the twentieth century carried for so long the burden of Victorian antisexuality, love between women, assumed to be sexual, was therefore shameful.

Dusty Answer, after all, was published only one year before the trial of The Well of Loneliness.

Jennifer, frank and fairly sexually enlightened for a girl of her generation and class, would probably have had a nodding acquaintance with the popularised theories of Havelock Ellis and Freud (her reference to Mabel's 'sex repression' suggests that this is so) which would have contributed to the anxiety which she certainly feels about her love for Judith. Much later, after her rejection of

Judith and a nervous breakdown, Jennifer admits in a letter that the strength of her feelings had disturbed her:⁴⁹

'I began to absolutely afraid of my feelings for you, they were so extremely strong. I couldn't understand them.'

It is closer to the truth, perhaps, to say that Jennifer does half understand her feelings, or rather that she has internalised and been repelled by the theories of male sexologists on the subject. Judith, on the other hand, while she fears losing Jennifer, on whom she has become dependent, ('You could not do without Jennifer now.'⁵⁰), never seems to worry about the nature of their love.

The girls' school story, of course, was enjoying its heyday in the early years of Lehmann's success. In these stories emotional friendship between girls was still acceptable to a certain extent. Indeed it was the focal point of many of these books, particularly those of Angela Brazil. As Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig point out in You're a Brick, Angela, 'The theme of bosom friends is one which she used in her books, over and over again.'⁵¹ Cadogan and Craig stop short of labelling these bosom friendships 'lesbian', suggesting - a fairly standard late twentieth-century response - that these girls are simply reacting against their all-female environment:⁵²

Girls were always falling madly in love with one another ... but ... Angela Brazil keeps all this firmly on a sentimental plane; there is no

suggestion of the physical ... In terms of real life behaviour, the girls were at an age when they had to fall in love with someone; to pick on members of their own sex may have been just a matter of expediency.

In their 1978 study Women and Children First: the Fiction Two World Wars, however, Cadogan and Craig refer simply to the 'underlying homosexuality in the majority of highly-charged school friendships that were chronicled...before the 1930s.'⁵³

Even within the school story genre, however, there was a growing sense of the danger or at least the foolishness of intense emotional friendships. In Dorita Fairlie Bruce's popular 'Dimsie' series, Dimsie - the embodiment of the perfect English schoolgirl - and her schoolfriends form the 'Anti-Soppist League' 'to protest against - against a lot of silly rot'⁵⁴. Rule III of the League was: 'Every member must solemnly promise not to kiss anyone at all during the term unless absolutely obliged to.'⁵⁵ Chalet School girls are similarly scornful of 'sentimental' friendships, extolling instead the virtues of unemotional, 'healthy' chumminess, as we have seen, forming bond which are of relatively limited intensity and complexity, but amazing longevity. Both Fairlie Bruce and Brent Dyer would have frowned upon Jennifer's intense and passionate love for Judith (which after all does not survive as a 'healthy' friendship would) but Angela Brazil would surely have recognised and understood it, as would Elsie J. Oxenham, the other doyenne

of the 1920s girls' story.

Dusty Answer, of course, is not a story for schoolgirls, but a self-consciously intellectual novel, and it may seem facile to discuss it in the context of a genre often (although not always, as we have seen, fairly) despised for its absurdity. But the college setting of Part III of the novel has undeniable affinities with the traditional school story, in just the same way that the other novels in this study have. Judith's preoccupations at Cambridge - her disorientation and disillusionment on arrival, her academic and personal development, her relationship with the community as a whole and with one individual in particular - are essentially the concerns of any school story, albeit given a more sophisticated expression. And these concerns are not in themselves trivial but, in the enclosed world of school or college, of considerable importance to the individuals concerned. It should also be stressed that Dusty Answer, like the school stories mentioned above, was extremely popular and widely read in the late 1920s.

Many young women reading Dusty Answer for the first time in the twenties and thirties must have graduated from Angela Brazil and her ilk, and the college setting would have been familiar to them, as would the more overtly sentimental aspects of Jennifer's friendship with Judith:⁵⁶

Jennifer lifting you in her arms and carrying you upstairs, because she said you looked tired and were such a baby and too lovely anyway to walk upstairs like other people.

'Other people' in this section of the novel means the college community as a whole. Jennifer and Judith have a group of about half a dozen friends who join them in the evenings to smoke, eat and talk - an 'outer circle'. Judith is usually an onlooker (as she is with the Fyfes), her contributions to these conversations about 'sex, philosophy, religion, sociology, people and politics; then people and sex again',⁵⁷ sporadic. Largely uninvolved, Judith's awareness is so heightened that she feels she is more 'conscious' than the other girls: conscious at any rate of herself and - always - of Jennifer. This group which surrounds Jennifer is vaguely drawn and remains shadowy. We never learn any of their names and none of them is given a separate identity. This is because Judith, satisfied with Jennifer, makes little effort to get to know them as individuals.

As we have seen, Judith's first impression of the college students as a whole is that they are rather silly - 'pleasant idiocy... idiotic pleasantries',⁵⁸. Adolescent girls - and most of these young women are still adolescent - have traditionally been seen as foolish, trivial-minded, frivolous creatures. Cadogan and Craig partly blame Angela Brazil for the modern 'joke image' of the schoolgirl:⁵⁹

[Her] energetic form captains and prefects are silly, exuberant and intense in a way which is highly caricaturable.

but the 'silliness' of young girls and women was recognised and frowned upon long before Angela Brazil's contribution. While the adage 'boys will be boys' seems to excuse a variety of male - even adult male - folly, no such allowances have traditionally been accorded girls. Silly behaviour is seen as evidence of inherent foolishness and weakmindedness: if it is excused it is excused on the grounds that girls are silly and nothing better can be expected of them. Of course, until the present century, many young women, denied access to education, had every excuse for being full of 'pleasant idiocy'. It is interesting to note that the girls seen as foolish by Judith represent the most educated young women of their time! But Judith, of course, is preternaturally serious, devoid of irony or objectivity. One of her American predecessors in fiction, also serious as a result of an unusual childhood, is Katy Carr, who reacts with dismay to the foolish and flirtatious behaviour which is the fashion in her boarding school. Unlike introspective Judith, but exactly like Dimsie Maitland, whose Anti-Soppists may well have been inspired by her, Katy possesses the spirit of reform, and she and her sister Clover found the Society for the Suppression of Unladylike Conduct to promote a healthier and more serious tone.⁶⁰ As Nina Auerbach points out in Communities of

Women⁶¹, throughout the nineteenth century communities of young women in schools and colleges were regarded with intense suspicion. To some extent this can be seen as a fear of the possibly subversive effects of women's education - a threat to the status quo - but there was also a firmly held conviction that many women locked up together would infect each other with silliness and vulgarity and that unhealthy attachments would form as a result. Even the feminist Mary Wollstonecraft objected to 'many females being shut up together in nurseries, schools or convents' because, women's minds being at this stage in history 'not cultivated' they could only infect each other with vulgar 'jokes and hoiden tricks'⁶². One would presume that the young women in Judith's Cambridge college had minds which were at least beginning to be 'cultivated' but Judith is struck by their silliness nonetheless, a silliness which seems mainly to find expression in facile and sentimental flutterings about admired teachers. Again the echoes of the school story resound:⁶³

'My dears! Do you think they saw me giggling? Bunny, you were a beast to make me giggle! Did I do it all right? I thought I'd never get it open in time. Miss Thompson looked so severe: but did you see what a sweet smile I got from Miss Ingram? Oh, what an experience! Hold me up someone!'

This passage could have been lifted from any one of Angela Brazil's stories, a fact of which Lehmann was possibly aware. Such behaviour, foolish and giggly, seems

particularly offensive to Judith because she has never been to school, has no experience of females en masse and has been led to believe that all college girls are 'clever'.

When, in a sudden wild hope of seeing Roddy, Judith lingers after a lecture in his friend Tony's college, she has to run to catch the college bus, and the convivial clamour of the other girls strikes her suddenly as more real than Roddy, thoughts of whom once more recede, more real than the alien, unwelcoming city and university. These girls are affectionate and call her Judy; they are unthreatening, and their warmth is described in physical, comforting terms:⁶⁴

They welcomed her. Their little voices and gestures seemed to stroke and pat. They were so glad she had come on time, so considerate and kindly, so safe.

Roddy is not 'safe' to love, and neither is Jennifer, but Judith, romantic and naive, cannot be content with the more mundane friendship offered by these girls. It is not until after her estrangement from Jennifer that Judith realises how many opportunities of friendship she has allowed herself to miss because of that all-consuming passion. In fact, several interesting young women have made friendly overtures to Judith but all have been discouraged by Jennifer - either by her jealous presence or by the realisation that Judith is clearly too emotionally involved with her to give time and attention to other relationships:⁶⁵

It had come to nothing after all. She had retired very soon, shrinking from Jennifer as if she were afraid.

There had been the girl with the torturing love affair that had gone wrong...She had said, 'You won't tell Jennifer, will you?'

Too late Judith looks at the 'circle' which for three years has surrounded her and is able to realise that these girls too have individual and admirable qualities.:⁶⁶

They were so charming, so gentle, so sensitive and intelligent: fascinating creatures: how fascinating she had never troubled to realise and would never know now. To all, save Jennifer, that had offered itself, she had turned an unheeding ear, a blind eye. And so much that might have been of enduring value had offered itself: so many possible interests and opportunities had been neglected.

Like the Talbothays dairy maids in Tess of the D'Urbervilles who, despite their envy, remain loyal to Tess⁶⁷, these girls do not reject Judith but remain quietly friendly when in fact they owe her nothing and have reason enough to resent her. But they can never mean what Jennifer has meant and, in the end, only remind Judith of how in many ways her time at Cambridge has been wasted. In a sense, Judith's attitude towards the friendship of the college community exactly contradicts that of Patience, discussed in the previous chapter. Patience, as well as fearing her own feelings about loving Laura, worries about losing the support of the 'gang', which is important to her. Judith is not at all worried about the nature of her love for Jennifer and cares little about the potential support of the wider college

community until she realises, too late, that she has lost it.

This realisation is an important landmark in Judith's personal development: certainly she would never have admitted a year or two before that these girls could offer or teach her anything of value. Although she has seen them as 'unconscious' ('They were all unconscious; and she herself could never be unconscious'⁶⁸) Judith's consciousness is more an absorption in Jennifer and a dreamy, somewhat distracted observation of the life around her than a true awareness of herself and her environment. There is a sense in which she is unconscious, in which her understanding is cripplingly limited. This has less perhaps to do with her character than with the environment in which she has grown up, a rarified and privileged background which has failed to prepare her for the real world.

Her gentle, academic father and elegant, distant mother may have disapproved of girls' schools, but they seem never to have questioned Judith's right to a good education. The Fyfe cousins, it is true, tease her about wanting to be 'a young woman with really intellectual interests'⁶⁹, but she has not experienced the discouragement and disapproval faced by many young women of her generation who aspired to higher education (Vera Brittain's struggles spring to mind here as a case in point). Neither has money ever been a problem, as

it is, for example, for Mabel. For Judith, being at college is not a preparation for the serious business of earning her living; she simply wants 'to learn everything about literature',⁷⁰ - a worthy ambition but which necessarily sets her apart from many of the other students. ('"I've got to teach brats algebra,"' says one of 'the circle' regretfully.⁷¹) As Judith tells Geraldine Manners:⁷²

'I'm luckier than most girls here. I have more money.'

but it is not merely the fact of being wealthy that partially blinds Judith to the realities of life as experienced by 'most girls here': it is the unusual isolation of her childhood, her unfamiliarity with female communities, the dreams she has woven around the idea of Cambridge - dreams which, like her fantasies about the Fyfe cousins, will be shattered.

Judith's father, who dies just before she starts college, loved Cambridge and had infected Judith with his enthusiasm:⁷³

..he had shown her the colleges and the Backs and promised to come often to see her when she came up.

On her first evening at her women's college, which, even geographically, is some miles distant from the 'real' Cambridge, Judith is forced to realise that the Cambridge her father knew and the one she will be permitted to

experience have very little in common:⁷⁴

If he could have known how very unlike his Cambridge this place was! Too late now... There was not a spire, not a light of Cambridge to be seen, not a whisper to be heard... even its unseen nearness was no comfort.

Early women university students often felt that their presence in those ancient bastions of male supremacy was at best grudgingly tolerated, and the comparative freedom enjoyed by the male students was not granted them. As Carol Dyhouse sums it up in Girls Growing Up In Late Victorian And Edwardian Britain:⁷⁵

The higher a girl pitched her aspirations to academic success the more she was likely to feel that she was a trespasser in male preserves. Women students at Oxford and Cambridge at the turn of the century could not call themselves 'undergraduates': they were there on sufferance.

Observing fellow students during a lecture, Judith perceives a marked difference between the male and female students. The undergraduates are relaxed and blase, 'young looking ...bored...restless', while the women students are 'attentive [and] rather anxious ...well-behaved'⁷⁶. Earnest and studious, they hold little appeal for Judith who is naively unaware of the battles many of them will have fought to secure this education. Christopher Hobhouse, writing in 1939, dismissed the female students at Oxford in disparaging language which closely echoes Judith's:⁷⁷

The women, docile and literal, continue to flock to every lecture with medieval zeal...

The assiduity of the woman undergraduate is astounding.

Mabel Fuller is of course the most extreme example of the stereotyped unattractive, unsexed 'educated woman', and poor Mabel is so anxious that academic success eludes her in the end. Although Judith can see these differences in attitude she fails to understand why the women, unlike the men, cannot take being at university for granted - or at least give the appearance of such an attitude. Carol Dyhouse and others have remarked on the strong feeling of solidarity which grew up among early women students⁷⁸, but Judith remains unaffected by any such notion of identity. Instead her attitude to the other female students en masse can seem patronising, dismissive and rather impatient. When the final exams come round the difference between the men and women students is again striking:⁷⁹

A troop of undergraduates passed on the way from their examination room. They looked amused and exhilarated... The girls came out in twos and threes, earnestly talking, comparing the white slips they carried...

Girls should really be trained to be less obviously female students. It only required a little discipline.

Judith's frustration at the lack of confidence of her own sex may appear disloyal, but we must remember that her peculiar upbringing has made her in many ways an innocent. There have been so few people in her life until now that every individual has had the quality of a divinity: to be confronted with ordinary people has been a shock to her:⁸⁰

[Mabel's] colourless face had nothing of youth in it. Perhaps that was what really clever girls looked like.

Again, the fear of her own identity being lost in the mediocre herd is partly to blame for her apparent hostility. She may not want to be identified with these earnest young women but she is officially one of them. Subconsciously she perhaps recognises in them something of her own insecurity, and hostility is her best defence against having to accept this.

It is not until the final pages of the novel that Judith is able to articulate her feelings about being in a woman's college in a man's world. Here at last her anger is directed not against her fellow women students, but at the system which has discriminated against her, the men who perpetuate that system and the unwelcoming city which symbolises it. Finally a note of female solidarity creeps in, an awareness of what it means to be, despite all her privileges, one of an oppressed and marginalised class:⁸¹

Farewell to Cambridge, to whom she was less than nothing. She had been deluded into imagining it bore her some affection. Under its politeness, it had disliked and distrusted her and all other females; and now it ignored her. It took its mists about it, folding within them Roddy and Tony and all the other young men, and let her go.

Roddy in fact has never even been a student at Cambridge, but because of his sex he is more readily accepted than

Judith, who has been excluded from the real Cambridge as wholesalely as was Jude from Christminster.

To Judith, then, Cambridge has not been the experience that it was to her father, to Martin Fyfe and countless generations of young men. Nor is she really part of the 'women's Cambridge' occupied by Mabel and others like her. It is of course quite usual for the sensitive protagonist of a novel, particularly such an introspective novel as Dusty Answer, to feel herself something of an outsider. Complete identification with a group can destroy to some extent the qualities of detachment and self-awareness necessary to convey a sense of the individual's relationship with the group. Judith has felt an outsider from the beginning, encouraging her to devote herself to Jennifer, which although it makes her happy for a while perpetuates her isolation so that she is never totally assimilated.

When, stung by Jennifer's rejection, she imagines jealously that the other girls in the circle hate her, she is mistaken. Her own obsession with Jennifer makes her feel that the other girls must feel the same way, and the language of sexual jealousy ('they all want her') demonstrates her possessiveness and insecurity:⁸²

She thought with awful jealousy; 'Ah, they all hate my coming. They thought they were getting rid of me at last. They come here secretly without me, to insinuate themselves. They all want her. They have all hated me always.

Judith is wrong to imagine that the other girls have resented her intimacy with Jennifer. As we have seen, it has discouraged them and other girls from forming closer friendships with Judith, but there has been no indication that they resent the relationship. Judith's hurt pride, the misery of rejection and the rational knowledge that she is on the outside cloud her judgement on this issue. In fact, it is only the usurper Geraldine who is really jealous of Judith: the other girls are angry at Jennifer for the way she has discarded Judith.

Judith has always been aware of the fragility of her love idyll with Jennifer, of Jennifer's possible, even inevitable flight. Nevertheless the intrusion of Geraldine Manners is a shock. Dark, strong, short-haired and masculine, some years older than Judith and Jennifer, she has dazzled impressionable Jennifer. In many ways Geraldine, physically strong and insanely jealous, is the stereotypical predatory lesbian against whom contemporary social psychologists liked to warn. We remember Mary Chadwick's warning in Adolescent Girlhood⁸³:

A great many women ... because of various inhibitions, have never been able to derive any normal gratification to their impulses. They are only able to gain satisfaction from contacts with other women.

Such women, Chadwick suggests - and she is expressing a view

commonly held at the time - are very often attracted to younger women or young girls. The perception of the lesbian as predator, as corruptor of the young and innocent, was widely accepted between the wars, when there was considerable discourse on female sexuality, including homosexuality. Novels such as Clemence Dane's Regiment of Women did little to discourage the reading public from believing that lesbians were corrupt and malevolent creatures (often teachers) posing a threat to innocent girlhood with their deviant desires.

Why is Jennifer attracted to Geraldine Manners? Certainly she is impressive, but if the intensity of Jennifer's feelings for Judith have terrified her, as she claims, into running away from their relationship, why should she run straight into the arms of a woman who is quite obviously a lesbian? The question may at first puzzle the reader of Dusty Answer, who assumes that it is the fear that her love is lesbian which drives Jennifer away from Judith in the first place. If she wishes to deny or forget these feelings why does she not seek the help of a convenient young man?

Jennifer herself provides the answer in her explanatory letter to Judith at the end of the novel:⁸⁴

'You are pure and ethereal and I am not. Nor was Geraldine.'

Jennifer's love for Judith has made her feel guilty, as if she were the predatory lesbian: 'I suppose ... you're still an innocent baby, while I feel like the most corrupt disreputable I don't know what.'⁸⁵ 'I don't know what': Jennifer is, as she realises, in 'a hellish muddle'⁸⁶; she does not understand what she is, what the implications of her love for Judith ('I was in a fever about you.'⁸⁷) make her. She can only, in her half knowledge of the contemporary sexologists' theories, speculate, and her speculations hardly comfort her. In the 1920s there were few role models available to women, gender roles were clearly defined and positive images of women loving women seem not to have existed. Mutually exclusive, rigid binary opposites defined women's actions and identities. They were either 'pure' or 'fallen', virgin or whore, natural/normal (ie. heterosexual) or unnatural/abnormal (ie. homosexual or 'invert', to use contemporary terminology.) Jennifer sees Judith as unequivocally pure and 'natural' ('I always used to think there was a man you were on the verge of loving.'⁸⁸) and is terrified of defiling her. Despite the physical intimacy and sensuality of their relationship, Jennifer seems never to have regarded Judith's love for her in sexual terms ('You used to look after me and kiss me as if you were my mother.'⁸⁹) and the mother/daughter imagery has been commented on by critics. Geraldine, presumably, has kissed her like a lover, gratifying her desires without making her feel like the guilty instigator of passion. Geraldine is

older, more experienced. She has already made decisions about her sexuality, and will not be influenced by Jennifer. Perhaps in their relationship, Jennifer is able to feel innocent: by loving Geraldine, a 'real' lesbian, Jennifer is paradoxically rediscovering her own innocence as well as giving Judith back hers.

To Judith, Geraldine is a dark and threatening presence. When she hears of her existence she immediately feels disadvantaged and frightened:⁹⁰

You were seeing that girl plainly, tall, dark and splendid, striding on the lawn with Jennifer,... a match for her in all magnificent unfeminine physical ways, as you had never been. Her image was all at once there, ineffaceably presenting itself as the embodiment of all hitherto uncoordinated and formless fears, the symbol for change, and dark alarms and confusions.

The 'dark alarms and confusions' which Geraldine represents to Judith are not only the loss of Jennifer's love, but 'confusions' at last about the nature of that love. Judith has always known that the relationship with Jennifer could not continue indefinitely, not only because Jennifer was bound to 'flee', but also because, deep down, Judith believes that women cannot be everything to each other, as she and Jennifer have been for two years. For Judith, Jennifer was to be loved 'meanwhile', while she waits for Roddy. Judith has always seen her future in terms of a husband and children: like Rose Delane in Secret Places her

love of children and her highly-developed maternal instinct are frequently asserted. She knows that this future cannot be reconciled with a passionate absorbing love for another woman. Geraldine, as the embodiment of a woman who seems to have rejected this conventional future, forces Judith to face up to this.

It is in Judith's nature to love unreservedly and unquestioningly, but Geraldine forces her to question the love for Jennifer. Loving Jennifer may not in itself have been problematic, but only because of its idyllic, unreal quality - they have existed together outside convention, outside Cambridge, outside time and, for Judith, outside the influence of contemporary sexual ideology. Once it becomes necessary to emerge from the idyll of 'meanwhile' and to place the relationship into a definite social and sexual context, Judith, like Jennifer, becomes frightened. Fear has always been present but 'formless'. Now it has taken on the definite form of Geraldine and everything she represents.

The confrontation scene between Judith and Geraldine is like a traditional duel between rivals in love. Judith is outraged at the insolence of Geraldine's demand to see her, but Geraldine's physical presence disarms her:⁹¹

The woman was so magnificent, so mature and well dressed; if there was to be a fight, what chance was there for a thin young student in a woollen jumper?

Geraldine's attitude reveals that she is fiercely in love with Jennifer and bitterly jealous: "Anything, however slight, that comes between me and Jennifer, is important."⁹² Through the anger she is experiencing for the first time in her life Judith feels 'something like pity'⁹³ for this woman who, like her, has discovered 'the terrible insecurity of loving Jennifer.'⁹⁴ Geraldine possessively claims to understand Jennifer completely but Judith has learned that it is impossible to know a person completely because of the 'core' which 'can't ever be stirred at all'⁹⁵. Although Judith is smaller, younger, less experienced than Geraldine, her understanding is more sophisticated and, although Geraldine may have won Jennifer for the minute she is to lose her soon and bears her loss with none of Judith's quiet stoicism.

As Geraldine and Judith part, Judith suddenly sees the older woman as both hideous and beautiful:⁹⁶

She thought suddenly: 'But she's not beautiful! She's hideously ugly, repulsive.' ... In spite of all, she was beautiful: her person held an appalling fascination....You would never be able to forget her face, her form. You would see it and dream of it with desire: as if she could satisfy something, some hunger, if she would. But she was not for you. The secret of her magnetism, her rareness must be forever beyond reach, but not beyond imagination.

Does Geraldine represent lesbianism itself to Judith? This passage suggests that she does. She symbolises something which is at once attractive and repellent; an idea which

cannot be allowed to develop into reality. In her physical being, which is both splendid and ugly, she bears a striking resemblance to Stephen Gordon, the prototype lesbian of the inter-war period. Lehmann's novel, of course, was published the year before The Well of Loneliness, but Radclyffe Hall drew on stereotypical images of the 'invert', the same images which Lehmann used to produce Geraldine Manners:⁹⁷

She stood up, very tall, very strong, yet a little grotesque....there was something rather terrible about her.

This could be a description of Geraldine as perceived by the fascinated, horrified Judith but it is in fact a description of Stephen Gordon.

When Jennifer, just before she leaves Cambridge, tells Judith that she has been wanting to tell her something which she cannot say, Judith both longs for and fears the truth:⁹⁸

'There are things in life you've no idea about. I can't explain. You're such a baby, really, aren't you? I always think of you as the most innocent thing in the world.'
'Jennifer, you know you can tell me everything.'
Yet she knew, while she pleaded, that she shrank from knowing.

Judith must always have half known about lesbianism: if she had been, as Jennifer supposes, 'the most innocent thing in the world' Jennifer's secret would have held no fear for her. Geraldine, therefore, is the confirmation of desires and dreads already dreamed of.

The fact that Judith and Jennifer's attachment to each other does not seem to be regarded as particularly unusual by their peers suggests that the college was the breeding ground for many such emotional friendships or love affairs. Cut off from the male world of Cambridge itself, operating strict chaperonage rules, the college is an intensely homosocial environment. Those of the students who had been to school would have been accustomed to such an environment. Interest in friendship within these institutions often seems to me to be obsessed with a desire to label intense passion as either lesbian or not, defining 'lesbian' as involving genital contact. This definition is narrow and not very useful, applying as it does a particularly masculine way of identifying sexuality. Judith and Jennifer clearly do not have such a relationship; whether or not Jennifer has with Geraldine is debatable. Lehmann herself is quoted as saying 'Oh, I should think she [Jennifer] became a lesbian after Cambridge, wouldn't you?'⁹⁹ Within the context of the college, the nature of Jennifer and Judith's friendship appears to be recognised and accepted. Indeed, Geraldine's attack on Judith is based on her anger that one of Judith's friends - one of 'the circle', presumably - has chastised Jennifer for neglecting Judith in favour of Geraldine.

In the wider social context of the 1920s, it is certainly true to say that attention was being focused on

such friendships. Martha Vicinus, in 'Distance and Desire: English Boarding School Friendships, 1870 - 1920',¹⁰⁰ suggests that contemporary sexologists defined such intense homoerotic passion as either congenital (ie. the inevitable emotional/sexual response of the 'invert' such as Stephen Gordon) or, more usually, a passing adolescent phase, heightened by the fact of living in an all female institution. The equation of homosexuality with immaturity is of course an idea which has flourished throughout the twentieth century, with friendship between adolescent girls in particular often seen as an apprenticeship for 'real' love with a man. Judith herself may have internalised this view with her conviction that Jennifer was to be loved 'meanwhile'.

Certainly, sex, desire and yearning permeates the Cambridge section of Dusty Answer, revealing themselves in more aspects than simply Judith and Jennifer's relationship. The pitiful, grotesque Mabel may seem utterly sexless in her pink flannel dressing gown, but her parasitic need to feed off Judith does not stop at the craving to pick her brains. As Jennifer has observed, 'She makes straight for the pretty ones',¹⁰¹ and Mabel is attracted to Judith from the beginning. Unlike the girls of Jennifer and Judith's 'circle' she is terribly jealous of Judith's attachment to Jennifer, to the extent that she delights in telling Judith all about the Miss Manners who is 'more of a match' for

Jennifer than Judith can be, recounting the news with a 'snigger':¹⁰²

And the unbearable image of Mabel was there too, watching by herself, gloating from the window with glistening eyes that said, 'At last.'

It was not unusual in the early part of the twentieth century for educated women to be seen as unfeminine and sexually repressed (Clara Batchelor worries that her 'famous brains' make her unattractive to men¹⁰³), and Mabel, whatever her orientation, certainly is. But the forces which have repressed her are aesthetic rather than educational. Much of Mabel's resentment of Jennifer is based on the sad fact that Mabel herself is physically ugly ('her skin was greasy...and her lank hair smelt..'104; 'her skin glistened unhealthily..'105; 'repulsive'¹⁰⁶; 'grotesque ... it was impossible to think of her or look at her without revulsion'¹⁰⁷). The same inspired and economical use of detail which makes Antonia Forest's presentation of Marie Dobson so vivid helps us respond to Mabel with something of the same 'revulsion'. Judith and Jennifer, lithe, graceful, one dark, one fair, are acknowledged beauties in the idealised tradition of Oxenham's Abbey girls. (Jennifer, indeed, with her vibrant golden colouring and ability to attract people, is reminiscent of the original Abbey girls, Joy and Joan, whose 'bright bronze hair shone in the sun'¹⁰⁸.) If Nanda and her friends during the 'measles idyll' at Lippington are described in terms reminiscent of a

pre-Raphaelite painting, then the account of Jennifer and Judith's naked swimming has the quality of a delicate Impressionist picture.

Everyone in Dusty Answer, particularly Judith, is very influenced by appearances: beauty assumes a profound importance. Mabel epitomises all that is 'ugly and vulgar',¹⁰⁹ about college life, and Judith is torn between sympathy, revulsion and horrified fascination at the older girl's total lack of physical charm:¹¹⁰

Supposing you looked like Mabel, would you love beauty even more passionately, or be so jealous of it that you hated it?

Everything associated with Mabel, from her clothes to her china ornaments, is ugly. Jennifer, on the other hand, is identified with beauty, and with charming, lovely things - her own rich golden hair, the copper bowl which Judith sees as a symbol of Jennifer herself, the 'attractive childish hats' which only she could wear¹¹¹. Again, the extension of Jennifer's beauty into the objects with which she chooses to surround herself is reminiscent of Oxenham, who dwells lovingly on the colour and texture of everything from pottery to handwoven dresses. The russet gleam of Jennifer's copper fruit bowl is similar to the golden brown pottery which glows in Mary Devine's room: 'Ruth exclaimed at the depth and size and beautiful curves of the big golden bowl, the rich glossy brown...'¹¹²

With the confidence of those who have always known they were attractive to look at, Jennifer and Judith display their nakedness freely and touch each other without restraint: a contrast to Mabel's 'laborious modesty',¹¹³ and tortured attempts at physical contact:¹¹⁴

And there followed the flush and the hungry gleam while awkwardly she touched Judith's cheek.

Mabel's 'hunger' (another word beloved by Oxenham) is not unnatural: it is the fact that her physical unsightliness has condemned her to continual rejection which makes the very normal desire for intimacy and love become a parasitic preying greed. She is imprisoned by her own ugliness just as Judith is 'enslaved' by Jennifer's beauty. Rejected by Jennifer, Judith wishes she were blind, so that she could 'learn to be indifferent to Jennifer; never to be enslaved again by ... her physical appearance.'¹¹⁵

Of course the unattractive girl who 'tries too hard' to win friendship is a familiar character in the girls' school story. We are reminded of the unfortunate Marie Dobson, the 'Caliban' figure in Antonia Forest's 'Kingscote' novels which are discussed in detail in Chapter Seven. Marie, like Mabel, is pathetic and grotesque in her efforts to gain attention and affection. Traits of behaviour which are excusable in young adolescents, however, become

inappropriate and potentially dangerous when they are displayed by older characters - and Mabel is in her late twenties.

In the end, as I have already asserted, it hardly matters whether or not we decide that Jennifer or anyone else in Dusty Answer is a lesbian. As with Leonie in Frost in May we can only speculate, and we must be careful about how we define lesbianism. What is important in our analysis of Dusty Answer is that we understand the implications of the relationships depicted as they appear to the characters and as they would have been received by a contemporary readership. The intense friendship between Judith and Jennifer belongs to a period in our history and culture when such friendships were beginning to be regarded with suspicion and labelled according to contemporary theories of sexuality. Lehmann, alone of the writers discussed in this study, was part of an explicitly 'high literary' group, engaged in a conscious cultural/fictional mission, and aiming her writing at a more than usually literate public. It is likely that many of the first readers of Dusty Answer would have been at least half aware - as Jennifer clearly is - of these sexual theories.

It is the social construction of femininity and female friendship which makes the love she bears Judith problematic for Jennifer, rather than the quality of the friendship

itself, which gives both girls much pleasure. It would seem that young women, particularly in institutions, have always had intense friendships, sharing many of the characteristics of heterosexual relationships - or perhaps it is truer to say that all passionate relationships between people, regardless of gender, will share some common qualities. Judith's attachment to Jennifer may be more emotional than sexual - Jennifer, endowing Judith with a rather Victorian 'purity' assumes that it must be - but it bears all the hallmarks of sexual attraction/love: the insecurity, the sensual delight in Jennifer's appearance, the jealousy:

In Dusty Answer the young women have more or less total freedom to pursue their female friendships (relations with the other sex are of course a different matter), unlike the girls in Frost in May, for example, or Patience and Laura in Secret Places who are made by their teachers to feel that there is something 'filthy',¹¹⁶ in their friendship. However, these friendships are still subject to outside pressures as I have shown. Jennifer flees from the knowledge that if she loves a woman then she must be unnatural and depraved, internalising the conviction that she is corrupt:¹¹⁷

'Why did you ever waste your time over me? I'm rotten and I always shall be.'

Throughout the novel, in fact, homosexuality is linked with moral corruption, a fairly common strategy and one we see repeated in Newman's A Share of the World, which will be

discussed in the next chapter. Roddy, who would appear to be having a homosexual relationship with his friend Tony, also sees himself as degenerate: "I'd much better be dead, only I'm too lazy to shoot myself...Nobody can do anything with me."¹¹⁸ Obviously homosexual characters, such as Geraldine and Tony, are presented as pathologically jealous and insecure. Those who, like Jennifer and Roddy, love them and, because of their love, face the possibility that they might themselves be homosexual, cannot escape from society's equation of homosexuality with perversion and depravity, and this turns into a hatred of self. Roddy presents himself as cynical, full of ennui and self-deprecation, while Jennifer, more seriously, suffers a breakdown which puts an end to her career at Cambridge.

The opinion, fairly widely held as we have seen, that adolescent same-sex friendships were harmless 'apprenticeships' to the adoption of a more appropriate heterosexual object, at least has the benefit of not being hysterical or outraged. It may have been reassuring for young girls to feel that their friendships were natural and nothing to be ashamed of. (In previous generations the reassurance would hardly have been necessary.) The problem with this attitude is that by dismissing such relationships as merely indicative of a developmental phase it is easy to ignore their intensity and the pain they can cause. Also, girls would have been expected to outgrow this tendency by

the time they reached late adolescence, regardless of the fact that social contact between the sexes was still, for girls of Judith and Jennifer's class, fairly limited. Even in the comparative freedom of Cambridge the women were very strictly chaperoned and Judith's easy social intercourse with the Fyfe cousins was the exception rather than the rule. Carol Dyhouse's 1995 study of women in British universities before the Second World War, No Distinction of Sex, emphasises that:¹¹⁹

Careful supervision and the chaperonage of the female students was an ever-present feature of life in the early years of the coeducational universities.

This attitude also assumes that the eventual adoption of a heterosexual position is inevitable, and the only possible 'natural' outcome for a girl. Judith and Jennifer are slightly too old for their friendship to be seen as simply an unproblematic adolescent phenomenon, nor does it develop into what we might today term a 'real' lesbian affair. Here we see quite clearly the difficulty of categorising love. It is this need to categorise, and the limited models available to her, which cause Jennifer so abruptly and confusedly to renounce Judith. Her failure to meet Judith in Cambridge at the end of the novel suggest that her conflicts have not been resolved: she is still running away.

When Judith is left alone at the end of Dusty Answer she has made some important realisations: about Cambridge and the patriarchal establishment to which she was 'less than nothing'; about the Fyfe cousins ('None of the children next door had been for her',¹²⁰) and about Jennifer whose decision not to meet her she forces herself to consider wise, despite the fact that it has hurt her. Most importantly she has made a decision about herself and the way she relates to people, seeing her former tendency to fall unrestrainedly in love as a weakness - 'the futile obsession of dependence on other people',¹²¹. As a defence against the heartbreak this tendency has caused her, Judith resolves in future not to become emotionally involved with people. In the past her involvements have been problematic because she has recognised no distinction between friendship and love. All her relationships have been extreme: she either loves passionately or fails to make connections at all (her 'lost' friendships with the other girls, the lack of intimacy with Mariella, the emotional numbness which makes her contemplate marriage to Martin). The only exception to this rule is her kindness to Mabel, which is inspired by a sense of duty and pity, and which forces her to recognise that despite being grotesque and sinister Mabel is after all 'interesting, human, gentle and simple',¹²².

Judith's early training has not prepared her adequately for 'normal' social intercourse: it is as if she can see the

pure white of absolute detachment, the intense black of total involvement, and no grey areas in between. We do not know whether, in time, she will learn to discern this grey area and to build successful relationships, or whether she will hold fast to her bitter, pathetic resolve to remain aloof. Viktoria Dorosz points out that most of the characters in Dusty Answer experience isolation, so that Judith (who at a very early age accepts 'being alone...as the natural stuff of life',¹²³) 'came to accept her own isolation in a world where it seemed to be an inescapable ingredient of [the] human condition.'¹²⁴ The only alternative offered to this isolation is the friendship and solidarity which do exist in the college, but this solidarity eludes Judith and is, anyway, hardly strong enough to counteract such widespread and profound loneliness.

Judith has, too late, learned to value the friendship of other women ('Much that might have been of enduring value had offered itself',¹²⁵), but in her isolation at the end of the novel she seems to have forgotten this, her pain at finally losing Jennifer and the last link with her girlhood dominating her feelings. In the same way, although it was not the only model of friendship available to her, the relationship with Jennifer dominated her life at college and, I would argue, dominates the whole novel.

CHAPTER SIX

The college friendship (1960s): Andrea Newman's A Share of the World

Judith Earle, at college not long after World War One, experiences Cambridge as a man's world which admits her, as women, on sufferance and on its own grudging terms, withholding its degree and keeping women at a safe distance ('Under its politeness, it had disliked and distrusted her and all other females; and now it ignored her.'¹). Her college, with its physical distance from the centre of Cambridge and its strict chaperonage rules, is a female world offering Judith a sisterly comradeship she rejects in favour of the all-consuming relationship with Jennifer but which she recognises nevertheless: 'They were ... so considerate and kindly, so safe.'² Cambridge's prevailing masculine culture is so hostile to female students (women were not awarded degrees from Cambridge until 1948), and Judith and her colleagues have so little to do with the male undergraduates that it is no surprise to find their college a place where female friendship can flourish.

Discourse on the friendships of girls and young women - especially before the 'second wave' of feminism this century - often emphasised the fact that these friendships, and especially the 'crush' which would commonly have been on a

girl occupying a superior position in the school, were a preparation for relating to a male suitor (who occupied, of course, a superior position within society). This observation, from the quaintly titled The English Miss, Today and Yesterday, a 1939 study of the education and socialisation of girls in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is fairly typical:³

Those who throw about such 'psychological' terms as 'Lesbianism' need to study both in theory and in practice the development of the growing girl, and to realise how often and how naturally these friendships and enthusiasms pass into the next stage...

That this next stage is heterosexual attachment leading to marriage is implied. For many of the girls at Judith's college, however, the 'really clever girls'⁴ who have come to college to prepare themselves for (usually) a teaching career, marriage is unlikely to be an option. College life, to some extent, is removed not only from the outside world of Cambridge proper, but from the whole gamut of courtship and marriage. Women who had fought hard to secure the right to be educated and to choose a career were often unwilling to give up their hard-won independence for marriage. For these women, friendships with other, like-minded women were not a preparation for marriage, or a second-best alternative, but a real source of love and support, hence the prioritising of such friendships in many novels and stories of school/college life. Lilian Faithfull wrote in 1900 that 'College life offers to women unique opportunities

of lifelong friendships.'⁵

Already, in the years following World War One, Judith's passionate relationship with Jennifer is open to suspicion. When the novel was published in 1927, it received rave reviews and was immediately controversial, not the least because of its lesbian overtones. Rosamond Lehmann claimed to be surprised by contemporary reactions to the novel. ('It is curious that some people have been shocked.'⁶) Clearly, however, she was well aware of contemporary attitudes to homosexuality, which are suggested in the text's equation of both male and female homosexuality with corruption. Lilian Fadermann, in Surpassing the Love of Men⁷, suggests that in Victorian times women, denied any real expression of sexual desire, would have been innocent of the sexual potential of their romantic feelings for other women, a view challenged recently by Chris White⁸:

It seems hardly credible that because women did not have penile erections they would not have recognised how sexual arousal felt and what it meant.

It was quite possible, however, that although what we would now call 'sexual arousal' might have been experienced, most of the women involved totally lacked a language to express to themselves, let alone to other people, that this is what they were experiencing - particularly as many of these women would not have experienced sexual arousal with a man. Jennifer Baird, with her carefully offhand references to

'sex-repression' and her internalisation of the conviction that homosexuality = corruption/disease, belongs to a superficially more sophisticated generation, beginning to learn such a language, but finding it inadequate to express the varieties of love they were experiencing. Jennifer is not 'fluent' enough in this language to articulate her feelings entirely. The only language available to her is the vocabulary of corruption and self-hatred. Even today our language is limited in this regard, or perhaps it is fairer to say that we have become so obsessed with categorising emotion that we have become lazy about developing an appropriate language of love, relying instead on the over-simplified language of sexual feeling.

The characters in Andrea Newman's first novel, A Share of the World (1964), have become fairly fluent in the language and practice of sexuality. Our popular view today of the 1960s is of free love and flower power, but in the first years of the decade, when the novel is set, the social/sexual revolution which produced these stereotypes had scarcely begun. Britain was emerging from a decade characterised by conservatism: ironically the Welfare State had, by the 1950s, spawned an essentially materialistic consumer society. The contributors to Truth, Dare or Promise: Girls Growing Up in the Fifties, who would have been roughly contemporaneous with Andrea Newman and her student characters, generally paint a picture of growing up

in a conservative society.⁹

The women students at Lois Mitchell's London college, although they have gained half a century's sophistication and experience on Judith and Jennifer, are not, sexually or politically, radical. The student riots and sit-ins, and the general politicisation of the young throughout Europe and America, are still almost a decade away. Liz Heron, at Glasgow University from 1964 (the year A Share of the World was published) until 1967, remembers that 'In no sense did it correspond to the experience of student activism that so many of my generation were to go through elsewhere over the next few years.'¹⁰ If there is political activity on campus Lois and her friends are neither involved nor interested. Their lives revolve around the personal rather than the political, and the politics of personal relationships are not seriously considered. Andrea Newman's subsequent novels bear out the view that it is essentially the personal - particularly sexual relationships between men and women - which concerns her. Marge Piercy's 1982 novel, Braided Lives, which describes the college experience of a working class Detroit girl in the 1950s, is political, not only in the sense that Jill Stuart, the protagonist, is politically active, but also in its overtly feminist narrative position and the consciousness of its characters:¹¹

'Female sexuality bugs people. We're supposed to produce babies on request and not otherwise and orgasms on request and only in both

cases with our proper wedded husbands.'

The personal, in Marge Piercy's oeuvre, is political: but then Piercy is a feminist writer, writing about the 1950s from the vantage point of the 1980s, whereas Newman, in A Share of the World, is a young writer of twenty six, writing about the present day.

For Lois and her friends the personal is all-important, and almost all-consuming. Early women students were often making, consciously or otherwise, a radical political gesture simply by going to university and claiming for themselves 'a share of the (public/male) world'. Even if they were merely seeking to fulfil personal ambitions the fact is that their 'infiltration' of higher education caused immense consternation and public debate of which they must have been aware. Vera Brittain, for example, a student at Somerville, Oxford, in 1914, had to fight considerable family opposition to her ambitions, working more or less alone for her entrance examinations while her brother was supported by a public school tradition which regarded time at university, not as a right to be demanded, but as a matter of course:¹²

She [Vera Brittain's mother] admitted today that she would much rather have an ordinary daughter - living & sleeping & dying & leaving no impress behind! I suppose I have all the share of enterprise and ambition... Of course E[dward] will go to Oxford in any case.

Vera's determination to be educated was considered odd, not only by her mother but by provincial Buxton society, the embodiment, to Vera, of everything old-fashioned and narrow-minded. In Testament of Youth she describes a typical reaction:¹³

'How can you send your daughter to college, Mrs Brittain! ...Don't you want her ever to get married?'

The idea that too much education unsexed a woman and rendered her unattractive and threatening to men has already been discussed extensively, in this study and elsewhere. By the 1960s, attitudes had changed to a certain extent: Lois and her friends can in no way be considered 'bluestockings', and a college education was no longer considered an impediment to fulfilling woman's 'natural' destiny of marriage. In 1962, 26,192 women were at university in Britain and many of them married soon after graduating.¹⁴

When Judith Earle arrives at Cambridge from the privileged isolation of her riverside home, unworldly, desiring the experience of college essentially for the pleasure of study ("Well, I want to learn everything about literature - English literature - from the very beginning," she said earnestly.¹⁵), it is a sobering revelation to her to realise how single-minded many of the students have to be, needing their university certificate to help them in careers absolutely essential for their economic survival as

single women. In the 1960s, more women than ever before entered higher education, and Lois and her friends represent middle class girls who are happily availing of the opportunity offered them, but who, for the most part, are motivated less by fierce academic ambitions than by the desire for:¹⁶

Time to look around, which we might never have again, a breathing space in which to study books, people, life, ourselves -what we will.

The fact that Lois's thoughts are echoed closely by Angela Holdsworth in Out of the Doll's House, a study of women in the twentieth century, suggests that Newman is articulating a fairly widely held opinion:¹⁷

Thousands of girls seized the chance for reflection as well as qualification that the three years at college offered.

Lois, like Judith, is dismayed by really serious girls. At a lecture she feels sorry for a girl who is diligently scribbling, 'because she was trying so hard to get every word down when she obviously couldn't succeed.'¹⁸

Although the norm in England was still for single sex colleges or halls of residence within co-educational universities, women students naturally had a good deal to do with young men, and it was not unusual to marry immediately after graduation. As Margaret Drabble documents in her 1987 novel The Radiant Way, 'that is what young women did in

those days: educated young women married, straight out of college.¹⁹ The strict chaperonage of Judith's Cambridge days, and the formality of college life, where women students had to be invited to use each other's Christian names (these practices reflecting, of course, the protocol of the wider social context), had all but disappeared by the 1960s, although the freedom accorded students of both sexes nowadays, in mainly mixed colleges and residences, was still to come. Indeed, Lois's college, where all visitors must leave the premises by 10 p.m., and students have to sign out for evenings and weekends, would seem repressive to a present day student. Of course the rules were frequently flouted but, as Lois's boyfriend Peter points out, a double standard operated in the treatment of those who were caught:²⁰

'Only the other day I read about a girl at Oxford. They only rusticated the boy, but they sent the girl down.'

For Lois and her friends, college, despite these restrictions, represents a freedom from home and a temporary refuge from adult life and decisions, and unlike earlier women students they can buy this freedom without having to pay the price of being socially stigmatised. Although for working class women like Liz Ablewhite in Margaret Drabble's The Radiant Way a university education, being hard fought for, might be regarded as the Holy Grail Vera Brittain considered it some generations earlier, there is no evidence

in Newman's novel that her middle-class characters regard it as much more than an interlude. Lois and her friends do study but their academic work does not involve the same energy as their personal lives. Anne, Lois's first year roommate, from an upper-class home counties family, is a competent student but admits that her parents "only sent me to university to meet the right type."²¹ (In fact, this being the 1960s, she marries Keith, a product of the Welfare State and the 1944 Education Act, a working class Northern boy made good.) Lois, like Judith an English student, spends hours laboriously translating Old English but never seems to progress beyond this. Penny Brown, in The Poison at the Source, comments that little is said of Judith's studies or intellectual development in Dusty Answer, reflecting 'the priorities she places upon levels of experience.'²² It is interesting to note that Newman, like Lehmann before her, 'dwells almost exclusively on the events related to...emotional life.'

Lois's real education at college, the one with which she is most concerned, is in fact an 'education sentimentale'. Of course, even for the most academically gifted and ambitious of Judith and Jennifer's generation, personal relationships at college, possibly the first place where attachments could be formed with any degree of autonomy and privacy, were immensely important. Lilian Faithfull highlights the importance to such women of 'the

freedom of choice' which they might have enjoyed for the first time²³. In Newman's novel, friendship between women students is accorded some importance but, despite a real closeness between Lois and her friends Anne and especially Marty, it is their relationships with men which are given priority. The female friendship is sustaining and important, as I shall go on to demonstrate, but it is, for most of the novel, a fairly uncomplicated background to the sexual dramas which we feel are Newman's real concern. One might argue that a novel which deals with female friendship in so limited a way is an inappropriate focus for this study, but that, of course, is the point. The fact that heterosexual relationships are prioritised in A Share of the World suggests that Newman was influenced by the ideologies of the 1960s, where there was a 'growing attention paid to sex'²⁵ and a decrease in female space.

The female characters in this novel are defined primarily in relation to their heterosexual propensities. Like the characters in Enid Blyton's school stories and Angela Lambert's No Talking After Lights, Newman's women are, to some extent, well-drawn stereotypes and the way they relate to men determines their relationships with women and their whole personalities. The main characters can roughly be labelled: Mother/Wife (Anne), Whore (Marty), Virgin (Jeanne) and Deviant (Ruth). Only Lois, the narrator, is given a rather more complex identity.

Anne, happily engaged at the beginning of the novel and married before the end of her second year at college, is always seen as sensible and stable, as if her assured status as a 'proper' woman who has fulfilled her 'natural' role gives her the wisdom to relate compassionately to her less fortunate friends. Anne is the archetypal wife/mother and it is in this role that she relates to the other girls in the novel. As early as the second page of the novel we are introduced to the fact that she is methodical ('Anne read slowly',²⁶), gentle ('her lovely soft voice',²⁷), kind and unselfish, even self-sacrificing ('"Never mind about me."',²⁸). An 'ideal' woman, Anne is rewarded by a happy heterosexual love ('The affection between them was tough and bright and obvious',²⁹) which leads to marriage. Or perhaps she is so perfect because she has the security of Keith's love? Either way, the implication is the same. Anne is not a virgin when she marries but Keith has been her first lover, enabling her to combine a measure of virtue/innocence with valuable experience.

Kind and sensible, a good listener, Anne offers perpetual succour throughout the novel. Lois, upset by the news of her parents' separation in the opening pages of the novel, realises that in her need for comfort she is treating Anne as a mother substitute: 'Back in our room (very womb-like now) Anne made coffee for us.'³⁰ It is Anne who

provides not only coffee but alcohol when Lois seeks oblivion as a respite from having to think about her family situation, which has come, despite the vague realisation that her parents have for years had a less than perfect marriage, as a terrible shock. Even providing this potentially dangerous solution, however, there is a sense that Anne knows what she is doing and that Lois is safe with her: 'I remember thinking Anne was very like a doctor.'³¹ When, late the same evening, Anne comforts Ruth, an extremely disturbed girl who is suffering from a tortured, unrequited passion for her room-mate Marty, Lois is embarrassed at the role into which Anne has been thrust, but Anne, a very embodiment of the maternal instinct, seems not to mind.³²

Anne put her arms round her and rocked her back and forth. I knew Anne was doing the right thing but I was embarrassed. Anne had been very good to me, but now it seemed that she was becoming a kind of universal mother. Poor Anne, I thought.

Very seldom, however, need Lois think 'poor Anne', for Anne, of all her friends, is the happy one, the golden girl for whom everything works out well, the one to be envied her secure, loving relationship. In the first year examinations 'Anne did very well. Her life was happy and on an even keel. Everyone was very pleased with her.'³³ Anne's life is kept on an even keel by Keith, of course. There is no suggestion that she needs anything else. Nor is she given any credit for being intelligent! She does well because she is happy:

her emotional well-being determines her achievement, not her own ability. Of course it is reasonable to suggest some sort of correlation between personal happiness and academic achievement. However, to make a simple equation between happiness (and such a narrowly defined happiness) and success, as Newman appears to do - not only here but throughout the novel - suggests that the personal is the single dominating influence in a woman's life.

When Anne suggests to Lois, recently jilted by her fiance Peter, that: "You need an emotional centre to your life...You're swinging round without a pivot or something."³⁴, it is accepted by both girls that this 'emotional centre' should be a heterosexual relationship. Judith Earle's need for an 'emotional centre' is the central and organising theme of Dusty Answer. However, it is not suggested that her infatuation with the Fyfe cousins, couched as it in the respectability of heterosexual desire, is intrinsically more satisfying or acceptable than the brief but happy immersion in Jennifer's love and friendship. In Newman's novel, however, there is a definite hierarchy of relationships, and the (potential) marriage relationship is the one which counts. It is Anne's successful attainment of that which makes her, it is suggested, a balanced person, a 'buoy of safety'³⁵, who 'had the answer to everything'³⁶. After Anne's marriage, 'Everything was coming right for her, of course, just as it should be.'³⁷ Even though Anne's

parents disapprove of Keith, even though they sometimes fight and have very little money, Anne is happy - and deserves to be, it is implied, not only because she is an attractive and generous character, but because she has fulfilled society's expectations of her. Newman rewards her with married contentment and an Upper Second.

Because Anne's own life is emotionally stable she is in a position to offer help to her friends, and in her relationships with other women we see her, as we might expect, in a caring role, offering advice, comfort and nurturing. Anne is slightly older than Lois and her other friends but what makes her seem more mature is not the fact of an extra year or two, but her successful finding of what everyone in the novel is looking for, a compatible mate. Just as homosexual desire has often been seen as immature, the successful adoption of a heterosexual position is, in this novel, regarded as the mark of true maturity:³⁸

'I'm afraid this party made us feel awfully old,' Anne said. 'Married and middle aged and all that.'

Anne's relationship with Lois, with whom she shares a room in their first year, is easy, honest and uncomplicated, and Anne is Lois's main source of comfort in the difficult months after her parents separate and Peter leaves her. "'It's been nice sharing a room with you,'" Lois tells Anne warmly at the end of their first year.³⁹ Their friendship

enjoys a slight reversal of roles during Anne's only crisis: the months preceding her wedding to Keith, the announcement of which causes her snobbish parents to abuse and berate her. For a short while it is Lois who is in the caring role, vetting her parents' vituperative letters before Anne passing them on to Anne, and sitting up late with her to talk 'endlessly round the subject'⁴⁰. Anne suffers at this time in an archetypal feminine way, losing weight and developing a harsh cough. 'I teased her that she was going into a decline like a Victorian lady,' Lois tells us⁴¹, thus making explicit a comparison which the reader has perhaps worked out for her/himself. This is Anne's only emotional crisis in a successful college career:⁴²

Poor Anne...It was the first time anything had really hit her. But it would not last long.

Not only that: Anne, throughout the crisis, has the love and protection of Keith, and the promise of marriage. Of course Lois is right: Anne's parents soon capitulate and she is rewarded with a lovely 'society' wedding. Newman herself had married while still at college, although the marriage did not survive.

Lois is envious of Anne's happiness and its fairy-tale outcome ('Anne, the girl with too much, who lived happily ever after.'⁴³) but, having a genuine fondness for her friend, she realises that she is being unfair. The feeling

throughout the novel is that Anne is generous and caring because she can afford to be. ('They [Anne and Keith] had so much they did not mind sparing me one of their evenings.'⁴⁴) Just as Anne is not given proper credit for doing well academically, her kindness to her friends is undermined rather by this suggestion that it is a natural adjunct to the wifely role she fulfils so well.

Anne values her female friendships but her primary attachment, her real 'emotional centre' is Keith. Perhaps because of this Lois's friendship with Anne, close and sustaining as it is, is never the source of such intense feeling - both positive and negative - as her relationship with Marty. Anne's kindness is warm and constant: Marty 'blows hot and cold'. Involved in a tortured, on/off relationship with French Louis, Marty is often totally absorbed in her affair, but when she does have time for Lois, Lois values her friendship highly and Marty is the woman to whom she becomes closest during her college days. If Anne is the archetypal mother/wife, Marty, dark, exotic and mysterious, functions as the novel's 'whore'. She is not as promiscuous as the priggish Peter believes her to be ('"Your friend Marty seems a bit of a tart."⁴⁵) but, like Nina in Secret Places, to whom she also bears a physical resemblance, Marty embraces and delights in her own sexuality in a way which, in the early 1960s, was not yet considered appropriate in a woman. To first-year Lois,

looking forward to marrying her first lover Peter, Marty's attitude to sex is shockingly sophisticated, just as Nina's 'fastness' is to her schoolgirl friends. While Anne puts her own concerns on hold to comfort Lois on the news of her parents' separation, Marty is characteristically too wrapped up in her own affairs even to notice that something is wrong. Self-dramatising, like Jennifer in Dusty Answer, Clare in Frost in May, Charmian in No Talking After Lights and Lawrie in the 'Kingscote' novels, Marty is, in direct contrast to Anne, 'a good listener only when her funds were exhausted.'⁴⁶ The implication is that Anne, as a 'good' woman, is self-sacrificing, with time for everyone, while Marty, a 'bad' girl, is self-absorbed. Anne's sexuality is positive and makes her a better person, whereas Marty's is self-gratifying and dangerous, making her selfish.

Anne's life is calm and ordered, but 'Marty's world was permanently a little crazy.'⁴⁷ The complex, sado-masochistic relationship with Louis causes Marty as least as much pain as pleasure, but for Marty, 'The only really important thing is to be alive.'⁴⁸ Loyalty to her friends - Lois is the closest - and time spent on her studies - to which she claims to be devoted - are all subjugated to her considerable sexual appetite. Staying with Lois one Christmas vacation, enjoying for the only time an easy, girlish companionship, Marty leaves early when she meets an attractive boy. She works feverishly at her books when Louis

is not around, to leave herself free to go to him at a moment's notice. Anne devotes her life to one man and is rewarded for it, but Marty, involved with Louis, hankering after her first love, Ray, prepared to run after almost any new sexual experience, so long as it is heterosexual, devotes her life to a single goal - the pursuit of pleasure - and is punished for it.

Like Nina in Secret Places and Donna and Jill in Braided Lives, Marty falls unexpectedly and disastrously pregnant - the classical punishment for a 'bad' girl and a fairly common occurrence in any novel about young women. Anne and Lois are sexually active, but it is Marty who is 'caught' and this is no mere coincidence. Although Newman is not by any standards a conventionally moralistic novelist (her later novels, such as Alexa (1968), A Bouquet of Barbed Wire (1969) and A Sense of Guilt (1988), revolve around the most convoluted of love affairs in which the just and the unjust suffer equally) in this first novel, published when she was only twenty six, a fairly standard sexual morality is adhered to. Virgin brides, like the naive Jeanne, are seen as faintly ridiculous, but having sex purely for pleasure, or desiring other than heterosexual sex, is dangerous. Anne is the ideal: sexually active (Newman seems to approve of characters with healthy appetites) but within a safe context. Logically Anne could become pregnant as easily as Marty - but she does not.

The problem of an unwanted pregnancy in the days before the 1967 Abortion Act was even more devastating than today. When Rosamund Stacey, one of Margaret Drabble's early heroines, a bookish, inexperienced graduate student, finds herself pregnant:⁴⁹

the prospect before me seemed so appalling that even I, doom-suspecting and creating as I have always been, could not look at it...Gin, psychiatrists, hospitals, accidents, village maidens drowned in duck ponds, tears, pain, humiliations. Nothing, at that stage, resembling a baby.

Rosamund, more by default than through any conscious decision, decides to keep the child, and in doing so she is taking a very radical stance, for illegitimacy still carried a huge stigma in the mid 1960s, and it was certainly not expected of middle-class Cambridge graduates. When Clare O'Brien is 'caught' in Maeve Binchy's popular novel Echoes⁵⁰ she marries immediately and the baby's premature arrival puts an end to her hopes of a first class degree. Clare's situation is complicated by the fact that she lives in Ireland, where abortion continues to be outlawed today, but even in 1960s London, procuring an abortion involved subterfuge and danger:⁵¹

We had to pass from contact to contact and be screened in case we were police agents involved in undercover work aiming at the exposure of those persecuted public benefactors.

The woman's health was also at risk, partly because there was no guarantee of hygiene, and also because, in the not uncommon event of complications, women were frightened to go to hospital. Luckily Marty's abortion is carried out hygienically and she recovers, but not all women were as fortunate.

In Marge Piercy's feminist novel Braided Lives, unwanted pregnancy is not restricted to 'bad' girls. It strikes randomly - even the cat has been thrown out of her home for being pregnant, and the hypocrisy of a society which exploits women as sex objects but denies them the right to make decisions about the inevitable results of that exploitation, forcing them into 'backstreet' abortions, is seen as the real evil. Jill becomes pregnant with her first lover, Donna once as the result of a brutal rape and once by her husband (she too marries before finishing college). Jill's abortion, performed at home with help from her mother, almost kills her ('I survived it but barely.'⁵²) and Donna, in the dreadful climax of an intense and unsettling novel, is found dead by Jill, her cousin and devoted friend, having bled to death alone, watched by the cat:⁵³

What do you do with a dead friend? I feel she is mine, yet I reject her death, I will not forgive it. Not this stupid, stupid dying into meat; not the people who killed her with their law-armored hatred of women.

In A Share of the World, Marty's experience does not

provoke this sort of political reaction. Her friends' attitudes never go beyond the personal. Lois is uncomfortable with the idea of abortion but her real concern is for Marty, whom she loves dearly. Anne's reaction, too, combines pragmatism with wisdom and characteristic compassion:⁵⁴

'We can't talk Marty out of it so we can only believe she's doing the right thing for her, and get her through it ... We're not in the situation and we don't know. Marty is and she's made up her mind. I think we have to settle for that.'

Together they do 'get her through it'. Anne provides her home as a safe haven for Marty to go to after the clinic, and Lois is Marty's mainstay through the whole drama, from the worrying news of a late period, through the brief and unhappy pregnancy to the 'endless night and declining day of animal pain and pills and mopping up'⁵⁵.

This is the only sequence in the novel where female friendship is actually highlighted and celebrated. Lois has always valued her friendship with Marty above all others, despite Marty's 'part-time' involvement with her women friends and the reserve which makes it difficult to get close to her. Disarmingly frank about sexual matters she is reserved about her deeper feelings, being essentially a solitary person:⁵⁶

I said, 'I came to see you yesterday...' hoping for information but without much

confidence, for Marty had long ago disrupted my cherished notion that friendship involved confiding everything, and immediately.

Marty's air of mystery may partly explain why she fascinates not only Lois but Ruth and Tom as well. What Lois particularly responds to in Marty, however, is her vulnerability, for Marty, despite a veneer of toughness ("You don't get born with a skin as tough as mine, you know; you grow it carefully, day by day.."⁵⁷) is pursuing a lifestyle which leaves her open to being hurt and abused. Her relationship with Louis is sado-masochistic:⁵⁸

'Finally he started banging my head against the wall. He was screaming rude French words at me all the time...In the end I fainted and when I came round he was kneeling on the floor beside me weeping. You can imagine the rest for yourself ... It was such a lovely reconciliation,' she said tenderly. " I don't want to discuss it."

and although this gives her excitement and gratification when things are going well, she spends a lot of time in despair. Her relentless, exhausting pursuit of pleasure ("I just do what I want to. But even that can get quite complicated."⁵⁹) and her inability to fall out of love with Ray, her first lover, make her life chaotic and her emotional well-being very fragile. Seeing Louis treat her disdainfully, Lois feels a rush of love for her difficult friend:⁶⁰

I was very fond indeed of Marty. It was as if I had never realised how much until that evening. She seemed more vulnerable than ever...

Marty's pregnancy is the ultimate evidence of her vulnerability and it gives Lois a rare opportunity to play the supportive, maternal role which is more usually Anne's. The endearments she uses on being first told of Marty's pregnancy echo Anne's language ('darling'⁶¹; 'you poor love'⁶²; 'honey'⁶³) and affection Lois accepts that her duty as a friend is to support Marty through her ordeal:⁶⁴

'Of course I'm staying with you...That's what friends are for.'

Although the following weeks are a 'nightmare' for both girls it is also made clear that Lois welcomes this chance to act out her love for Marty and, for once, to get really close to her:⁶⁵

I knew then that Marty - moody, preoccupied, uncommunicative, was more than a friend; she was the sister I had never had or the other self I had never become and I loved her and wanted to protect her and take a knife to anyone who tried to hurt her.

In a novel where the friendship relationship, although important ('"I have some very good friends and they were marvellous."⁶⁶), is secondary to the pursuit of a compatible man ('There will be someone I can share it all with, if I wait...I shall meet the right person one day.'⁶⁷) Lois finds the word 'friend' inadequate to express her feelings for Marty. Her socialisation as a young middle class girl in a society which prioritises and idealises

heterosexual coupling, while at the same time trivialising female friendship relationships, 'portraying them as 'two-faced', 'gossipy' or as a juvenile phase in the progression towards 'normal' psychosexual development'⁶⁸, has led her to internalise the conviction that friendship has strict limitations. Although she longs for a more confidential, reciprocal relationship with Marty, she believes that the intense, protective love she feels for her cannot be assimilated in 'mere' friendship. At the same time she is eager to avoid any language which might suggest a sexual or even sensual element to her attachment, and the language of kin ('the sister I had never had') expresses closeness in a safe sexless context, using an archetypal metaphor: as Pat O'Connor reminds us in Friendships Between Women, A Critical Review: 'the sister idiom is often used to indicate fictive kinship within friendship relationships.'⁶⁹ In fact it is Marty, not Lois, who, as a child, wished for a sister, even inventing 'a twin'⁷⁰ to whom she used to talk in the mirror, rather as Anne (of Green Gables) talked to her imaginary 'bosom friend'⁷¹. It is in these terms that Lois now sees Marty. As 'the other self I had never become', Marty is a projection of the wanton side of Lois's sexuality. Having sex for the first time with a stranger, Lois feels at once excited, relieved and 'depraved, like Marty.'⁷² Marty's pregnancy is evidence of the potential danger of this sexuality, and it serves as a further warning to Lois not to explore that 'other self'.

When Lois supports Marty through the nightmare of her pregnancy and abortion, the two girls are sharing an ancient female ritual, the drama of childbirth/avoiding childbirth. Fathers' attending ante-natal clinics and witnessing the birth of their children is a very new phenomenon: traditionally men were banished at such times, leaving women to cope with the help of female relatives and neighbours:⁷³

He stood by the bed, white-faced, ill at ease with the female smell of the room ... She closed her eyes, withdrawing from him as the next pain started.

She was with child, and there was again the silence and distance between them. She did not want him nor his secrets nor his game, he was deposed, he was cast out.

This is the drama shared by Patience, Laura and Nina in Secret Places, when the girls try without success to abort Nina's baby with gin and hot baths; by Jill and her mother in Braided Lives, and again by Jill and Donna:⁷⁴

This litany, this litany. I go through it every four months with some woman and I have gone through it with Donna before. How much money, what shall we do, who do you know, and will they do it and how much humiliation and pain will it cost and will they do it in time?

Louis is excluded from the drama: he cannot share Marty's pain and, unlike Lois, he cannot easily imagine himself in her position. Matthew, the married lecturer with whom Lois is having an affair, summons her in vain: for once she is

wholly absorbed in an exclusively female world and being Marty's friend must take precedence over any lover. For Marty, most of whose energies have previously been expended on men ('Marty never wasted time on girls when [Louis] was available.'⁷⁵) Lois's support is a revelation:⁷⁶

'You know,' she said. 'You're the first real girlfriend I've ever had. I never liked girls very much.'

For Lois this has been the most intense experience of her life:⁷⁷

I remember thinking at the time, I'll never be this close to anyone else again. In all my life everything else will be an anticlimax.

There is a recognition here that, despite her prioritising of heterosexual relationships, Lois realises that they, too, have their limitations.

Marty is certainly the person to whom Lois becomes closest in the course of her university career and the novel, but it takes a crisis, and one precipitated moreover by heterosexual sex, to produce that closeness and allow the girls to explore a deeper relationship. In A Share of the World the women students do not seem to have the time or the inclination to spend much time simply being together, enjoying each other's company and conversation, as do the students in Dusty Answer, and the schoolgirls in Frost in May and The Lost Traveller as well in the traditional girls'

school story. Of course, for Lois and her friends, educated probably in all girls' schools, there is no novelty in being 'all girls together': the great novelty is sex. Many of their conversations are about sex and relationships: these girls, despite being at educated and housed in 'one of London's convents',⁷⁸ are functioning within a very heterosexual environment and in a social context where heterosexual desires were foregrounded. In the sixties 'Sex was regarded as natural and liberating...Without a boyfriend you were nobody...you felt you were missing out..'⁷⁹

This is not to say, however, that homosexuality does not feature in the novel. In fact, both lesbianism and male homosexuality occur, the treatment of the latter being rather more sympathetic. Marty's first-year room-mate, Ruth, appears as a 'token' lesbian and she is less a fully realised character than an embodiment of stereotyped notions about lesbianism. Even her appearance is typical of what Patience and Laura, in Secret Places, call 'women like that'. When we first meet her she is ominously androgynous:⁸⁰

She was very tall and thin but large-boned so that she appeared rather more clumsy than elegant.

By the following term - oh dear! - 'She was wearing slacks and looked taller than ever.'⁸¹ Ruth suffers from an unrequited passion for Marty. Lois, when she realises this,

is shocked and embarrassed: 'I felt that we ought not to be hearing what she said'⁸², whereas Anne's reaction is calm and judicial:⁸³

'Poor Ruth. It's very sad. But it may only be only a delayed adolescent phase. She may grow out of it...[If not] then I suppose her only hope is to meet someone like herself.'

But in three years Ruth does not meet 'someone like herself': happiness, fulfilment and approval are totally withheld from her. Anne's response may seem sympathetic, but of course it is heavily value-laden, dismissing lesbianism as pitiable ('sad') and immature ('an adolescent phase'). We see that she is reflecting attitudes which were common at the time. Ruth graduates from being pathetic and faintly disturbing into a fully fledged monster of depravity. Insanely jealous, she takes a triumphant delight in Marty and Louis' frequent quarrels ('"What a ghoul you are," I said furiously.'⁸⁴), stooping to the ignominious level of reading their letters and spying on them. After a year or so of frustrated, bitter desire, she turns hysterically to religion, eventually converting to Catholicism, from which vantage point she takes a morbid delight in imagining Marty in hell.

Marty, with her own liberal attitude to sex ('"You're perverted," I said. She shrugged. "What does that mean? Only that it doesn't appeal to you."⁸⁵) accepts the fact of Ruth's passion with equanimity, talking of it with a

somewhat blase callousness: 86

'Like that, was it?' she said. 'True confessions. "I was a teenage pervert" and all that.'

Anne's attitude to Ruth is value-laden and patronising ('poor Ruth'), but she is concerned and sympathetic. Marty, although she claims to be 'very fond of Ruth'⁸⁷, has no compassion for her as such, claiming that, by treating Ruth badly, she is giving her at least a taste of what she wants:⁸⁸

'If I can't love her, at least I can make her suffer. From her point of view it's the next best thing.'

Marty, a boarding school girl, has evidently had some sort of lesbian experience at school which, in view of the fact that she regards Lois as her first 'real girlfriend', is more likely to have been purely carnal than emotional - something akin to Anne and Fiona's game of 'horses' in No Talking After Lights. Characteristically, Marty focuses on the physical/sexual rather than the emotional aspects of Ruth's attachment.⁸⁹

'I'm very fond of Ruth. But I'm not a queer so I can't help her. I haven't played those little games since I was at that convent boarding school you always make fun of.'

Although Marty's language is strong ('pervert'; 'queer') and dismissive ('those little games'), her attitude is actually less value-laden than Anne's sympathy. As far as Marty is

concerned, any sexual behaviour is valid so long as it is pleasurable for the people concerned. There can be no doubt that Marty exploits Ruth's feelings nor that she derives pleasure from the unequal balance of power between them. Possibly this compensates in some way for her own weak position in her relationship with Louis. Marty has obviously some interest in lesbianism, lending Lois The Well of Loneliness to read. When Lois gives up before the end ("It's such heavy going. So much self-pity and steaming emotion."⁹⁰), Marty claims, like her, to be 'out of sympathy with the whole set up'⁹¹ but her interest in the subject suggests that, despite her assertion that she has grown out of such 'little games', she derives a vicarious thrill from thinking about it.

Lois's reaction to Ruth is markedly different. Ruth frightens, disturbs and disgusts her. She confides in Lois ("I can't talk to anyone else, except Anne, and she's out."⁹²) but Lois sees Ruth as corrupt and unclean ("Get out before you make the whole room stink."⁹³). Again, this is a not uncommon response to homosexuality, and more so in the 1960s than today. In his biography of Mary Renault, David Sweetman outlines her publishers' reluctance to publish her first overtly homosexual novel, The Charioteer, despite her established success as a novelist:⁹⁴

Morrow, still Mary's publishers in New York, flatly refused to bring out the book on the ground that it would lay them open to prose-

cution. Mary never doubted that their decision sprang from McCarthyism, which had placed 'sexual perverts' on a level with Communists. Eisenhower's Executive Order of 1953 would bar homosexuals from federal posts, and the Burgess and Maclean scandal in the British Foreign Office would reinforce the connection between homosexuality and treason.

If this seems irrelevant to a 1964 novel about young women at college, we should remember that these are the popular attitudes with which Newman would have grown up. Her portrayal of the treacherous Ruth certainly suggests that she had, to some extent, internalised them. Although it seems to be Ruth's invasion of Marty's privacy rather than the fact of her passion which so enrages Lois, the fact that the only lesbian in the novel should be so dishonourable implies that her 'deviant' sexuality has put her morally beyond the pale. In Dusty Answer, too, an implicit connection between homosexuality and corruption is made: in this case, however, the characters have internalised the belief ("I suppose you're still an innocent baby, while I feel like the most corrupt disreputable I don't know what," writes Jennifer to Judith.⁹⁵) while the author appears more accepting. In A Share of the World Newman's sympathies definitely do not lie with Ruth, who, in a novel where the main characters tend to fall into female archetypes, is more stereotyped than most. In fact Ruth is a classical lesbian in the predatory tradition we have already examined: unfulfilled, pathological, warped, not merely deviant but positively insane:⁹⁶

I felt so disturbed that I could not be alone.
I wanted to be with someone who could share my
doubts about Ruth's sanity.

Ruth is completely obsessed with Marty and there seems no chance of her meeting a woman with whom she could have a normal, reciprocal lesbian relationship. Her interest in Catholicism, which Marty sees as a classic case of sublimation ("Lots of queers find religion a great comfort."⁹⁷) and her eventual conversion place Ruth firmly within an out-dated Radclyffe Hall-ean mode. Ruth 'had come to college as a brilliant scholar, the winner of an Exhibition'⁹⁸, but graduates with a paltry third class degree, the outward symbol of the failure she has made of her university career and her life.

Marty considers Lois's unsympathetic attitude towards female homosexuality 'perfectly normal'⁹⁹, suggesting that she might prefer to read about male homosexuals: "I think you'd have far more sympathy with them...Try Mary Renault."¹⁰⁰ Whether or not Lois does read one of Renault's celebrated novels about love between men in ancient Greece we do not know (although Antonia Forest's Nicola Marlow certainly does, to the surprise of her form-mistress¹⁰¹). Certainly her response to the male homosexuality she encounters within her own family is both more sympathetic and more complex than her abhorrence of the unattractive Ruth. Lois has tacitly assumed that her brother Martin is homosexual, because of his infatuation with Rick, a fellow

student: 'I had consigned my brother to one fixed category.'¹⁰² When he becomes involved with, and eventually engaged to, a rather dull girl, Lois can understand his motives ('So Martin at least had saved himself'¹⁰³), seeing a homosexual lifestyle and identity as one to be avoided if at all possible. Martin's 'salvation' is marriage, Ruth's religion. But Lois, although she has wished for her brother to be 'normal', cannot rejoice at his marriage, not only because she is convinced that his motives are suspect but also because, having met the shy, attractive Rick, and witnessed his 'real human misery'¹⁰⁴ at Martin's defection she is angry at the unhappiness her brother has caused. Lois recognises that her confused feelings ('I could not explain myself'¹⁰⁵) are 'illogical'¹⁰⁶ but they are proof of Marty's theory. Rick makes only a fleeting appearance in the novel but he is presented as attractive and worthy of love, whereas Ruth, token lesbian, is a preying madwoman. The purpose of the incident may be to show another stage in Lois' 'education sentimentale', as she finds out that love cannot be easily categorised and that human relationships are more complex than she has realised, but this understanding attitude never extends to lesbianism: Ruth's lack of any lesbian relationship, as such, is a further indication of Newman's dislike of lesbianism and this attitude undermines the lip service she pays to the validity of male homosexuality, suggesting a version of the sexual double standard. Often, of course, it is homosexuality in

one's own sex which is feared, while homosexuality in the opposite sex because it is irrelevant to one's own experience and therefore unthreatening - appears exotic and fascinating.

If the object of Ruth's desire were other than Marty, would that affect Lois's attitude to her? Lois's own feelings for Marty, as we have seen, are strong and complex. It is possible that she feels jealousy and she must be relieved by Marty's utter rejection of Ruth's love. But Lois's love for Marty is essentially protective and Ruth represents a threat: 'The image of Marty crying on her bed and being questioned by Ruth really upset me.'¹⁰⁷ It is interesting, in light of Lois's insistence on describing her feelings for Marty as sisterly, to speculate on Newman's choice of names for her characters. 'Marty' is very nearly 'Martin', Lois's brother, while 'Louis' (Marty's lover) and 'Lois' are remarkably similar. Coincidence? Or is Newman suggesting, consciously or otherwise, more complex possibilities for the Lois/Marty relationship?

Lois's other female friend at college is the virginal Jeanne. Ruth to the contrary, Jeanne is ultra-feminine in a very traditional mould:¹⁰⁸

She was very dark, pretty and excessively feminine...She was one of the few girls in college I had never seen wearing slacks.

Like Anne, Jeanne is engaged but, although tempted, she refuses to sleep with her fiance John until they are married. Jeanne is a colourless character: girlish, sweet, not particularly intelligent ('[Marty] worked much faster than Jeanne...Jeanne was slow',¹⁰⁹). There seems little point in her refusal to consummate her relationship, which is stable and happy, but her presence in the text shows that it was still not generally considered acceptable for girls to be sexually active before marriage. Like Ruth ('"it may only be a delayed adolescent phase"',¹¹⁰) Jeanne is presented as rather naive and not quite adult, but after graduating (with, again like Ruth, a third class degree) she is rewarded with that symbol of maturity, a wedding:¹¹¹

I have just had some cake from Jeanne's wedding so I don't suppose she's worrying about not having done better.

There can be no doubt that female friendship has been important to Lois's experience of university life. However, apart from the abortion drama which she shares with Marty, her relationships with women lack the intensity of her interactions with men, not because the women involved are less interesting or have less to offer, but because Newman does not prioritise homosocial relations, being mainly interested in heterosexual love. Lois, who is perhaps the least complex heroine in any novel in this study, is very much an embodiment of the attitudes of her time. Her relationships, like her friends, fall into more or less

stereotypical patterns: she has a practically declared Oedipal relationship with her father ("When you marry you'll put that person before me. It's the only way. It doesn't mean I love you any less."¹¹²) and a cool relationship with her mother who naturally prefers Martin. She and Tom, Marty's old boyfriend who is still in love with Marty, have a rather passionless affair based on mutual need and a shared absorption on Marty. Her first real emotional attachment after the break-up with Peter is with a married lecturer with a conveniently absent wife. Matthew is practically a cardboard cutout:¹¹³

'Lois, if you stay around a man in my situation long enough you get what you ask for. Be very sure you really want it.'

Working out her jealousy at her father's relationship with Philippa, a girl of about Lois's own age ("This is a stereotyped situation. It's corny. It happens all the time in life and to make it worse people read books and articles about it and see it in films."¹¹⁴) and attempting to get over Peter's rejection ("I don't believe I could ever want a man again."¹¹⁵) involve most of Lois's time and energy, certainly more than she gives to her female friends who are likewise, apart from Ruth, primarily concerned with their own heterosexual relationships. This hierarchy of relationships is entirely consistent with contemporary mores. As Pat O'Connor argues:¹¹⁶

Until relatively recently, there was a strong

tendency to trivialise and derogate friendships between women - seeing them as culturally 'suspect'.

Lois's friendships are important, but their significance must be given limitations, except in the abortion crisis which in itself is the working out of an archetypal situation.

When Lois graduates she has, like many heroines of her day (Margaret Drabble's Sarah (A Summer Birdcage, 1963), for example), little real sense of purpose:¹¹⁷

I'm doing a secretarial course in the autumn. It's always useful if you're not going to teach.

She has gained a very average degree, still thinks of her friends - with some longing, where Marty is concerned ('I wish Marty would write...Anne writes regularly, bless her.'¹¹⁸) - but her main preoccupation remains the finding of a suitable man. Aside from the reference to her secretarial course she sees the future in terms of meeting and marrying Mr. Right:¹¹⁹

I suppose I'm just waiting...It will happen sometime, I know. One stage of my life is over and another must begin. There will be someone I can share it all with...

Her position here is in direct contrast to Judith Earle's determination at the end of Dusty Answer to eschew emotional attachments in future: 'She had nobody now except herself,

and that was best.'¹²⁰

Lois's adoption of a cliched feminine position - helping Mother at home, learning secretarial skills and waiting passively for the right man - places her, despite her education, within a very traditional mode.

Although A Share of the World is a more recent novel than Dusty Answer, Newman's vision is much more convention bound than Lehmann's. The latter has a fluid, open approach to sexuality, even while she reflects the theories of her time, but Newman's characters and their situations are stereotypical, their relationships trammled by her rigorous adherence to a heterosexist code. Writing at the outset of the 'permissive society', Newman's primary concern is with heterosexual sexuality. Beatrix Campbell has suggested that 'The Permissive Era's object was consonant with the twentieth-century theme...to recruit women into an active engagement with heterosexuality.'¹²⁰ Newman's ideology and her distrust of lesbianism would seem to be consistent with this.

Although female friendship is accorded some importance, it is subjugated, in the wider context, to heterosexual love and marriage. The girls in A Share of the World exist within a much less homosocial society than Judith and Jennifer, and their primary concern with heterosexual relationships

affects every aspect of their lives at college, not least their attitude to their female friends and to friendship itself.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The school story proper: Antonia Forest's 'Kingscote' novels

Elizabeth Bowen , in her introduction to the Virago edition of Frost in May, suggests that:¹

Frost in May deviates from the school-story proper only in not having a happy ending.

More recently, writers of 'school novels' deviate from the school story formula in other ways, most notably their more explicit emphasis on the sexuality of the girls and their teachers, as we saw very clearly in the discussion of Lambert's No Talking After Lights.

While school stories and school novels (Bowen's terminology, although simplistic, is useful) tend to develop certain themes in varying depth - loneliness, the relationship between the individual and her society, the desire (and often the inability) to conform, love for a particular friend, often discouraged by authority or peer group, were largely the concerns of White and Lehmann and they are too the stuff of schoolgirl fiction - one theme which is always of central importance is that of friendship. Commonly, as we have already seen in Frost in May, friendship is an organising device within the novel, other themes being introduced primarily in the context of personal relationships, and this is as true of the average Angela Brazil story as of a sophisticated novel like Dusty Answer.

As I outlined in the Introduction, non-fictional writing on adolescence in the first half of the present century tended practically to ignore girls and their friendships. The same can certainly not be said for the school stories which were so hugely popular at the time: in this genre the significance of one's contact with other women, at adolescence and beyond, was never underestimated. Although the plots of these stories are sometimes contrived and predictable, and although, set in the world of the girls' (usually boarding and 'exclusive') school they are limited in their social relevance (but surely no more so than the novels of Rosamond Lehmann, for example) schoolgirl fiction is central to this study. It is perhaps unique in the emphasis it places on friendship between adolescent girls.

Antonia Forest is not the first writer most of us think of in connection with the school story genre. (Auchmuty mentions her only in passing in A World of Girls².) Written between 1948 and 1982, twelve of her thirteen novels are all about one family, the Marlows. There are eight Marlow children and they live a comfortable, upper-middle-class life, initially in Hampstead, and then, from the third novel onwards, at Trennels, their ancestral family farm in the south west of England. Some of the books describe the family's life during the school holidays but the four most

popular are school stories. Autumn Term (1948), End of Term (1959), The Cricket Term (1974) and The Attic Term (1976) describe life at Kingscote, the girls' boarding school which all six Marlow girls attend. As a young girl I discovered the Marlow stories at about the same time as I was devouring Chalet School books. In a childhood and adolescence characterised by voracious reading, Forest was a writer to whom I returned time and again, always recognising something complex and satisfying in her work.

Generally, Antonia Forest has fared rather better than the average school story writer at the hands of the critics. When Autumn Term, her first school story and the first book about the Marlows was published in 1948, the school story was presumed to be moribund. Angela Brazil had died the year before and Dorita Fairlie Bruce and Elinor Brent-Dyer had written their best work and were merely cruising along on their well-established reputations, churning out mediocre books to what had become a formula. There seemed nowhere left for the school story to go, but, as Marcus Crouch enthuses in The Nesbit Tradition, his review of twentieth century children's fiction:³

Happily, genius is not predictable. Antonia Forest, using the old outmoded framework, wrote a school story of outstanding and unusual brilliance in 1948.

High praise indeed, for a novel in which nothing happens that might not have happened in any of the other school

stories of that or any time.

At face value, Autumn Term is just another tale of new girls - twins - at boarding school. The success the youngest Marlow girls, Nicola and Lawrie, have dreamed of at Kingscote, where four older sisters have already distinguished themselves in various ways, eludes them in the classroom, on the playing field and in the Guides. Finally they manage to make their mark by taking the lead roles in their class play, having learned some valuable lessons along the way. ('Lawrie...had learned not to protest that they had settled long ago that Nick was to be head girl and herself games captain...'⁴) What sets Autumn Term and its three sequels apart from the bulk of schoolgirl fiction is the quality of Antonia Forest's writing and in particular her concern for character.

'The characters are flesh and blood,' said a reviewer in The Listener⁵ and Marcus Crouch, who is obviously a keen admirer of Forest's work, declares that for him, 'the most convincing of fictional families are the Marlows.'⁶ Other critics have paid tribute to the 'unusual reality' of the stories⁷ and Forest's 'positive flair for characterisation'⁸. When characters are convincing enough to generate this sort of enthusiasm, we as readers are happy to read about anything they might do, even when their activities are subject to 'the crippling limitations' of the

school story'⁹. In fact these very limitations clearly have an appeal of their own: Antonia Forest's school stories were more widely published and stayed in print longer than the other stories about the Marlows. As Margery Fisher, in Intent Upon Reading, says: 'Because Antonia Forest concentrates on character I can absolutely accept her limited sphere of action.'¹⁰ The concerns of the twins and their friends seem as important to us as readers - even as adult readers - as they are to the girls themselves. When Nicola is left out of the Junior netball team because of Lois Sanger's malicious deviousness, we feel, as the girls do, that a serious miscarriage of justice has taken place. As Ginty Marlow, who also loses her place in one of the school teams, reminds her sister Ann: '"Yes, that's all when it's not you it's happening to."¹¹

In their attempts to account for the enduring popularity of the girls' school story, critics have often focused on their element of fantasy, the romantic allure of the Abbey or the alpine Chalet School. As I have shown, the readers who continue to enjoy these books in the 1990s often cite this romantic quality as a major aspect of their appeal. This can hardly be said to apply to the Kingscote, described by Bob Dixon as 'grimly authoritarian'¹². The restrictions and disadvantages of boarding school life are brought out in the novels: in The Cricket Term, Nicola thinks of the advantages of going to a day school and an

unhappy Ginty in The Attic Term thinks of the comparative freedom and privacy of being at home with her pony and her own room. In books such as the Chalet School series the young reader can be so carried away by the glamour of the Chalet School world that it is easy to ignore the privations and restrictions of the life they describe - cold baths (in Switzerland in the winter?), having to speak French and German much of the time, as well as the usual inconveniences of communal, institutional life.

The Chalet School, as an institution, is romantic and idealised: Kingscote does not offer the same escape - as a school. Its attraction is its people - maddening Lawrie; resourceful, irrepressible Tim; timid, panicky Esther; vindictive, unbalanced Lois (as Nicola reflects in The Cricket Term: 'In a complicated way, it had been interesting, knowing Lois Sanger: not a good thing, like knowing Jan Scott, but interesting - ¹³); pathetic, unappealing Marie Dobson; Nicola's vivacious, clever friend Miranda, and of course Nicola herself. Nicola dominates the novels, even when Forest seems to intend otherwise. Margaret Meek notes in a review of The Attic Term that 'Nicola always steals the show, although it's Ginty's book.'¹⁴

Good at games, good at schoolwork, effortlessly popular and confident, Nicola Marlow could easily become the irritating, all-round model schoolgirl who dominated the

earlier school story and which Tim, accuses her of trying to be: "very very competent and awfully awfully keen",¹⁵, were it not that we, as readers, are privileged to know what goes on in Nicola's head. Lawrie's fears and dreads are public property: she loves an audience and to be the centre of attention, but Nicola, like Patience Mackenzie, tends to be stoical and reserved. She has her fears, but unlike Lawrie or Esther, she keeps them to herself.

The main characters in Antonia Forest's novels are very fully realised indeed, and remarkably consistent considering that the series was 34 years in the writing! Janet Todd considers that:¹⁶

There is a complex psychology in her all her work that indicates a writer as worthy of adult as of juvenile attention.

The Marlows and their friends all have the potential for considerable development throughout the series: all the key people mature and develop in a most satisfactory way.

This character development is played out against a background at once stable and shifting: that is, each of Forest's novels is set roughly in the time of writing, which, as the series began in 1948 and ended in 1982, presents interesting problems. In Autumn Term the war is not long over; in The Attic Term there is mention of pot-smoking and 'Star Trek', but the characters are only two years older. As a child, I hardly noticed this: as an adult, I can

see the ideological issues which might be raised, particularly in the treatment of relationships. In 1948, girls still operated within fairly strict and homosocial environments; by the 1970s co-education was the norm, and girls were encouraged to prioritise their heterosexual relationships rather than their friendships with other females.

What is striking about the Marlow series is that, although it is easy enough to tell when each title was written because of the background details, Forest's attitude to friendship seems to remain constant: in all the books female friendship is important, whatever the prevailing ideology about it at the time. In The Attic Term, Ginty is preoccupied with her isolation and focuses her feelings on her boyfriend Patrick. However, it is made clear that it is only the absence of her friend Monica following an accident which makes her lonely and therefore focus so much on Patrick. When Monica is there, Patrick's importance recedes.

The fact that Antonia Forest defied contemporary theories about suitable settings for children's books has been much commented on by critics: in the 1970s her books were often dismissed, as we have seen, despite their 'sound literary style',¹⁷ because the Marlows are fairly well-off. This determination to ignore fashion may have attracted adverse criticism from critics obsessed with a narrow

definition of 'relevance', but it freed Forest to concentrate on the issues she considered relevant. In doing so, she has produced a telling monument to the enduring importance of female friendship: her 1970s schoolgirls experience crushes and value their friends just as unself-consciously as any pre-1920s Brazil heroine. The difference is in the increased reserve of both characters and writer - the quality of the relationships is testament to what Sheila Egoff has called 'the unchanging heart.'¹⁸

The timing of the series, then, is problematic, but if details about the outside world change to reflect the times on which each novel was written, the details of Kingscote do not. Background characters, staff and girls, anchor the series and produce the stability which is perhaps demanded by the complex timing. Unlike Brent-Dyer, for example, who deals with a cast of thousands, Forest actually mentions rather few characters by name, but the way she presents those she does single out creates the impression of a community intimately known. Few details are given about cameo figures such as 'dreary' Val Longstreet, head girl in End of Term and The Cricket Term, or Bunty Penfold, a cheeky junior girl, but these details are evocative and entirely consistent. Val, for example, is introduced more or less in passing in the first novel. We may not remember her at all, but if we do it will be as the 'humourless' Sixth former who tries to hold on to her chair when all the chairs in the

room are commissioned for use at the final assembly of the term, because she feels it beneath her dignity to 'be reduced to perching on the edge of the table with the rest.'¹⁹ When we meet Val again as head girl in End of Term she is just as pompous as the chair episode would lead us to expect: 'all turned-out feet and turnip-faced disapproval'²⁰ In The Cricket Term she is exactly the same, padding seriously up on stage on Speech Day. Val does not need to be developed in the same way that the more pivotal characters are, but Forest's meticulous prose ensures that when she does appear she always does and says exactly what we have been led to expect from her. In this way, the secondary characters become as identifiable as the main ones.

It is not only Antonia Forest's sophisticated treatment of character that sets her apart from the general run of school story writers, and indeed of children's writers in general, although this is probably the most notable aspect of her work and the one most frequently cited by critics, if, that is, they manage to see beyond the fact that the Marlows have the audacity to be upper middle class. Margery Fisher's comment that 'Because Antonia Forest concentrates on character I can absolutely accept her limited sphere. I mind very much whether Nicola or the spoilt Pomona gets the new desk'²¹ is fairly typical.

Forest's attitude to the institution she has created is refreshingly unromantic and pragmatic. Here we have the authorial ambivalence lacking in both the traditional school story and in novels like No Talking After Lights, where Raeburn is a breeding ground for evil and vice. The Marlows and their friends are happy enough at their school - being threatened with having to leave is a terrible blow to Nicola - but Kingscote, unlike the Chalet School or Malory Towers, is never seen by anyone as the best school in the country and the centre of the universe. Of course it is the centre of the characters' lives while they are actually there, but it is always accepted that there is life outside and beyond Kingscote. When Rowan Marlow leaves school unexpectedly at the age of seventeen to take over the family farm she soon adjusts to her new life. Even though she is not fulfilled by farming ("I don't actually mind it"²²), she is not nostalgic for school: returning to Kingscote to collect her sisters at half term she is amused to realise that: "Everyone looked so frantically young. I felt as if I'd left for years...It's no use making noises as if I were being Disloyal To The Old School. I've left."²³ How very much more credible is Rowan's attitude than that so frequently found in other school stories where the favourite characters are dragged back to school on the flimsiest pretexts, as an alternative to life 'outside'.²⁴

As we have seen, it was common for many writers who set

their novels in girls' schools to be aware, at some level, of the relationship this forged with the girls' school story. Within the school story genre itself, authors often tried to distance themselves from the genre, highlighting the difference between the 'fantasy' schools in the stories and the 'real' schools they created. Many a plot has revolved around the naive heroine's discovery that her school is not like the story schools²⁵. (It is, of course, always superior.) Possibly, in denouncing the weaker aspects of the genre, the author is setting her own novels apart, demanding that they be accepted on their own terms, not merely as part of a genre which was widely despised even while it enjoyed its greatest popularity. An awareness of, and an implied or overt denunciation of, the school story genre, is common enough, but what Forest does is to use the cliches of the genre to subtly comic effect. Hence Rowan's ironic remarks about being 'Disloyal To The Old School' and her admonition to Ginty not to talk "as though you were the tomboy of the Remove...that still doesn't make you the naughtiest girl in the Fourth."²⁶ Tim Keith, teasing Nicola about being 'a terribly sporting type' to watch the junior netball team play after she has been inexplicably left out, reminds Nicola that "in a book, about ten minutes from time someone would sprain their ankle, and you'd rush on and win the game in one magnificent burst. Wouldn't you..?" No, she wouldn't, replies Nicola prosaically, "because all the subs are here."²⁷

The conventions and ideologies of the more traditional school story are often subverted in the sequence, so that the contrast between Kingscote and, say, the Chalet School, is obvious to anyone familiar with the genre. As an illustration of this point we need look no further than the time-honoured tradition of the prefect system. Prefects, in most school stories, are terribly important individuals with a highly developed sense of their own worth. In the Chalet School series we are often told that, on the whole, 'sinners' preferred to be dealt with by the staff than by the much more ferocious 'prees':²⁸

Like most of her kind she would, on the whole, rather have fallen into the hands of the mistresses than the prefects!

There are senior girls at Kingscote who would like to see themselves in this glamorous light, and who take themselves over-seriously as a result, notably Val and Lois. But their attitude is undermined by Miss Cromwell, who despises the institution of prefects and by the fact that neither character commands the reader's respect. Janice Scott, an attractive character, cherishes no illusions about what it means to be a prefect: as she tells Lois Sanger:²⁹

Prefects are a useful institution for saving the staff wearing out their old bones doing playground duty and shooting brats out of classrooms. The Tone of the School and all that nonsense talk is to make us think we like doing it. But we're not unpaid spies. At least I'm not.

It is impossible to imagine such a view being expressed - let alone endorsed - in the more conventional school story.

But Forest's most dramatic departure from the traditional school story is in her treatment of 'big' themes such as religion, anti-semitism, death and divorce. These issues are facts of life which many people have to face at some stage, and girls at school are no exception. Forest has been criticised, as I indicated in Part One, Chapter Three, for the 'exclusive' nature of the world she describes. As I have already suggested, many critics, demanding that children's literature be 'relevant' (and of course there is a growing need for books which reflect harsher social realities) seem to ignore the fact that middle-class children have problems too. Certainly, Forest's school novels are set in a well-to-do environment, but it would be ridiculous to allow them no social relevance because of this. Critics who cannot see beyond the fact that the Marlowes live in a big farmhouse, ride ponies and are privately educated are as guilty of stereotyping as the middle-class dominated literature they condemn.

Happily, the more discerning critics do realise this and praise Forest for the way she tackles weighty issues:²⁹

Miss Forest has always been concerned with social and moral issues.

Forest's treatment of these questions is never crude: there is never any sense that, for example, Esther is the 'token' child from a broken home, or that Miranda is a 'token' Jew, or that Marie Dobson is killed off in the third book simply to give Forest the opportunity to deal with death. On the contrary, the issues appear to arise very naturally, through the characters themselves. As in Frost in May, themes are often introduced through the more inclusive and absolutely central theme of friendship: it is through their contact with other people that the characters are forced to confront certain issues. Peter Marlow, for example, knows that anti-semitic is something 'you mustn't be'³⁰ but this seems to be something he has been told, rather than anything he has ever really thought about. When Nicola's friendship with Jewish Miranda West makes her aware of the issue as something real, affecting people she cares about, she is appalled:³¹

She had a muddled feeling she ought to apologise for the stupidity and bad manners of her countrymen, only, since they were Miranda's too, it would sound pretty silly.

Nicola is only thirteen at this stage and her reactions tend to be confused ('muddled'), instinctive and difficult for her to articulate, but she does gain at least an awareness that issues such as this are somehow more important than many of the matters which school life makes seem important.

When Forest does need to deal with these moral and

social issues she always does so in a way which recognises their full complexity, leading critics to assert that 'her themes and interests are not always accessible to the child reader.'³² Elinor Brent-Dyer's Chalet School books are unusual among school stories in that religion is not presented from a purely Anglican point of view: many of the key characters are Catholics, Joey converting to Catholicism when she marries. (Brent-Dyer herself was a convert to Catholicism.) The interdenominational consciousness of the books is, however, limited: it is accepted that there is 'more than one way to God' and there's an end to the matter. That people may not want to find a way to God is out of the question and any character with agnostic tendencies is soon put firmly on the road to salvation. Naomi Elton, in Trials for the Chalet School (published in 1959, the same year as End of Term, the second Kingscote novel) holds out longest against the evangelising ethos of the school, but Naomi is a cripple (sic) and her agnosticism is seen as a symptom of a mind which her physical pain and disability has allowed to become 'warped'.

Antonia Forest allows her characters a rather more ambivalent approach to religion. It is as acceptable to believe as it is not to, and equally acceptable - even for as determined a character as Rowan Marlow - not to be able to make up your mind: '...for quite long stretches I do, and then for quite long stretches I don't. It just depends.'³³

The only thing which is not acceptable seems to be hypocrisy. When Nicola asks to attend Mass at the Merrick's private chapel 'to know what my lot went to when that was all there was' it is important to her that Patrick understand her motives: 'what I mean is, I wouldn't be being religious or anything.'³⁴ Forest, like Brent-Dyer, clearly has an interest in Catholicism but her awareness of the differences and divisions not only between the churches but within the Catholic church (after Vatican III) and the effect these can have on adolescents (particularly in The Attic Term) is substantially more profound than anything attempted by Brent-Dyer or any other juvenile author of which I am aware. There is throughout the sequence a willingness to acknowledge the complexities of faith.

As this brief introduction to her work highlights, Forest's Kingscote novels, while that have qualities which set them apart from the traditional girls' school story, are absolutely consistent with the latter's prioritising of adolescent female friendship. She uses friendship rather as Antonia White does in Frost in May and The Lost Traveller, as an important relationship in its own right, and as a device through which other themes can be explored. This acknowledges the significance of contact with other girls in developing the adolescent girls' awareness of the world around her. Kingscote is a narrow, cloistered environment, but through the people they meet there, the Marlows learn a

good deal about themselves and about the world outside.

As I have asserted throughout this study, the girls' school and the girls' school story were the natural place for friendship among girls to thrive, and Kingscote is no exception. Antonia Forest, as I have shown, is not a writer to shy away from difficulties and, predictably, adolescent friendship is presented in all its complexities. Auchmuty contends that school stories were for many young women a unique source of strength, validating their friendships and their love for other women, reassuring them that these relationships were worthwhile and important. This can be said for the Kingscote novels, although friendship is presented in a characteristically understated way, and Forest's work is quite free of the sentimentality which is sometimes a feature of the more traditional school story, despite the frequent insistence of the latter on its 'anti-soppist' or unsentimental ethos.

Reading of Monica Eliot's involvement in a car accident at the beginning of The Attic Term, and of her best friend Ginty Marlow's response to the news, we cannot help imagining the very different treatment such an incident would have received in one of the more traditional stories. That Ginty cares for Monica, insofar as she is capable of caring about anyone, is not doubted, but Marlow does not need to spell it out as the earlier writers tended to do.

Instead, she shows us how upset Ginty is, by describing her in a state of near-hysteria, irrationally convinced that Monica is dying. Nicola, accustomed to Ginty's panics, realises that this is a more serious matter: 'Looking at her sister [Nicola] saw the panics were for real.'³⁵

Without Monica's steady influence Ginty, although she has always been popular, finds herself isolated and dissatisfied, eventually getting herself (as well as Patrick and Nicola) into serious trouble when she is caught using the office telephone to telephone Patrick. Monica is what makes life at Kingscote endurable for Ginty (when her boyfriend, Patrick Merrick, asks her what she likes about school: 'Monica, thought Ginty involuntarily.'³⁶) and when they are not together she feels disorientated and adrift. Patrick assumes an unaccustomed importance to her in Monica's absence. Normally his image recedes in term time as she is too involved with Monica and school concerns to think about or miss him very much: 'For some reason she'd never identified, Ginty never talked of the one to the other - 'a friend at school', 'a friend at home', were the nearest she got to doing so.'³⁷ There is no sense of a hierarchy of relationships here: Patrick and Monica are equally important to Ginty in the respective contexts in which their relationships exist.

When Nicola is threatened with having to leave Kingscote because her parents can no longer afford to keep

all four girls at boarding school, she is plunged into despair, but less at the prospect of going to a different school than at the thought of leaving her friends behind:³⁸

'Actually I wouldn't loathe being at day school - not if the o-others were there too...Tim and M-Miranda and - and p-people - ' and then her voice turned suddenly untrustworthy and she frowned furiously After a little while Nicola said in a bruised-sounding voice, 'I think p-people ought to stay friends for - for ever - '

As Janice Scott, the senior girl in whom she finds herself more or less accidentally confiding tells her (kindly), this is a naive desire (although it is frequently enough achieved in the Chalet School and Abbey series): "Truthfully speaking, I think lifelong friendships come along about as frequently as unicorns."³⁹ But the point is that for fourteen-year-old Nicola, involved as she is in every aspect of school life ('Nicola...liked to be doing things'⁴⁰), her friends are absolutely crucial to her happiness there. She can imagine another school with much more equanimity than she can the prospect of losing her best friends. Nicola, at this point on her development, is vulnerable where friendship is concerned: having recently come to terms with the loss of her friendship with Patrick, she knows quite well that friendships do not often last for ever or even for very long - she just wishes, stubbornly, that they did:⁴¹

And she needed comfort, having just made the shattering discovery that the people she

thought of as her best friends always seemed to go off with someone else. There had been T. Keith at school who was now Lawrie's buddy; there had been Patrick who was now Ginty's; at the moment there was still Miranda West, but with Miranda you never knew...

Nicola is popular, not shy, and finds it easy enough to make friends, but with adolescence come more complex relationships, loyalties and insecurities. There is naturally a strong bond between her and Lawrie, but as the series progresses and the twins grow older, the sister relationship diminishes considerably in importance, as the twins move outside the family. "You surely don't expect to have Nicky on a string for ever?" Mrs Marlow tells Lawrie.⁴² Tim, the headmistress's niece, is established as Lawrie's friend about the same time as Miranda West becomes Nicola's, with Esther Frewen a quiet, rather devoted hanger on. In Autumn Term, however, arrogant Miranda is the sworn enemy of everyone in the Third Remove and Esther has not yet arrived at the school so the twins, while friendly enough with most of their class and still functioning primarily as a couple, are both 'best friends' with Tim.

Relations between Tim and Nicola, strong characters both, are inclined from the beginning to be strained, breaking down at times into open hostility. Like Nicola, Tim is resourceful and determined, but she is a more ruthless and flamboyant character with none of Nicola's

innate kindness:⁴³

Tim..., on the infrequent occasions when she lost her temper, surprised herself unpleasantly by the things she found to say...

From the beginning there is rivalry between Tim and Nicola - for Lawrie's affection, and for unofficial status as form leader: when Nicola and Miranda are appointed form prefects in End of Term Tim is coldly furious:⁴⁴

Tim was stationery monitress. Nicola gave her a little, side-long grin ... But Tim stared back haughtily, and Nicola flushed suddenly. Of course, she and Tim had been IIIA's prefects last term - but Tim couldn't actually mind, could she?

Initially Tim is attracted to Nicola because she recognises in her a strength of character and a vitality to match her own, but in a key passage in Autumn Term she begins to find the fact that Nicola can and does stand up to her and the twins have their own lives independent of their relationship with her rather disconcerting:⁴⁵

Tim felt in her bones that the occasional person on whom she bestowed her friendship should not ask any more of life...But Nicola, although most friendly with Tim, was also friendly in a casual, unemotional fashion, with everyone in Third Remove except Pomona and Marie Dobson ... [Tim] didn't much care for any of the Third Remove except Nicola - Nicola and Lawrie. You couldn't have one without the other.

In fact, a year later, Tim does have one twin without the other and it is Nicola who is rejected. Although she and Tim have always had a prickly relationship, it comes as a

genuine shock to Nicola to realise that 'Tim was no longer her friend as she was Lawrie's.'⁴⁶ When Nicola is given the part Lawrie wants in the Christmas play, both Tim and Lawrie blame Nicola for Authority's decision and Tim's contemptuous attack on her ('"there are times when I could hit you, you're so stupid"') 'left Nicola breathless'.⁴⁷ For probably the first time Nicola sees herself from the outside: not much given to introspection, she has always taken popularity as her due:⁴⁸

She sat very still. Even her legs stopped swinging. Because it nearly always was like that, she took it for granted that people liked her better than Lawrie. Only Tim didn't. Tim liked Lawrie best.

Of course, the shock of realising that Tim does not much care for her is compounded by the fact of Lawrie's rejection. Not only does Tim prefer Lawrie, but Lawrie, sometimes, prefers Tim. Nicola is learning here that friendship can be a source of conflict as well as of joy, that both she and her sister, in choosing friends outside the dyad of their twinship, and learning to make autonomous choices, are growing up. She is also experiencing the pain of rejection on two counts: from sister and friend. The tension with which Nicola's realisation is conveyed, the terseness of the language, give this moment of self-awareness an almost epiphanic significance in the development of Nicola as a character:⁴⁹

Even her thoughts seemed to stop. And then she

was ashamed - a cold, squirming apprehension that probably she'd butted in, often, where she wasn't really wanted. Had other people known?

Discovering how Tim feels about her helps Nicola to sympathise with other people's points of view: even in Autumn Term she has felt a grudging sympathy for the unpopular Marie Dobson, but now, having experienced at first hand how it feels to be despised she can identify with Marie to a much greater extent, and consideration for Marie's feelings takes a leap forward: 'With another uneasy twist of imagination, Nicola wondered what it was like being Marie. If everyone felt about one, as Tim seemed to feel about her...'⁵⁰ End of Term is in many ways a book about growing up and learning to consider other people, a level of perception which is only being felt towards in Autumn Term, and the theme of self-awareness is a recurring one. The row between Tim and Nicola blows over in time but from this point on Nicola treats Tim with some caution: 'It was queer and difficult being friends with someone who disliked you so much. At least, she supposed they were friends and she supposed it was dislike, although neither seemed quite the right word.'⁵¹ Elsewhere in this study we have noted that language is sometimes inadequate to express the complexities of relationships. Here we see Nicola's frustration with the inadequacy of the term 'friend' - the only one available - to describe a relationship which is characterised by such contradictory emotions. There is a recognition here that the friendship relationship is a complex one, dependent on more

than mutual liking.

Nicola's 'best' friend, from End of Term onwards, is Miranda West, introduced in Autumn Term as IIIA's form prefect, 'a bossy, conceited person, who made no bones about despising the lowly worms of Third Remove.'⁵² By End of Term she has mellowed somewhat and we learn that her friendship with Nicola has been developing slowly, 'off-stage' as it were. In many school stories the heroine meets her bosom pal on the first day of the first term and they go up the school together side by side and arm in arm, but mutual antipathy is not uncommon. It is most usually overcome, however, through some dramatic incident - saving one's enemy's from death, especially by drowning or in a fire, was always popular⁵³. There is no place at Kingscote for such drama and Forest has the relationship between Miranda and Nicola develop in a rather more subdued vein, albeit with a sense of excitement and anticipation:⁵⁴

It was odd how people changed - or else you did - Nicola wasn't sure which ... Now, suddenly, they were swinging along the path together as if they had liked one another all their school lives. Nicola looked curiously at Miranda's vivid, clever little Jewish face ... She might be rather an interesting person to be friends with.

Even when their friendship is established, Nicola retains a good deal of her customary reserve. For example she does not tell Miranda all about the events of the summer holidays (described in Falconer's Lure) which have led to

Rowan's leaving school to take over Trennels, the family farm, feeling that 'she didn't know Miranda well enough to tell her all the family ins and outs of that decision.'⁵⁴ Neither does she tell her why she detests Lois Sanger so much, even though Miranda too, to Nicola's delight, dislikes the games captain. She never confides in Miranda when she thinks that she will have to leave Kingscote, although Miranda guesses that something is wrong. It is not, however, that Nicola does not trust Miranda. It is simply not in her nature to talk about her problems, particularly when they are family concerns: Nicola has a very strong sense of family loyalty even though she can be objective about its individual members, and she is intensely private. Forest seems to approve of reserve: her most sympathetic characters are undemonstrative, as were many earlier school story heroines.

Miranda, intelligent, artistic, attractive, generous, dynamic and strong-minded, does indeed prove 'an interesting person to be friends with.' Until she becomes 'best friends' with Nicola she has had a variety of friends, chosen mainly for rather superficial reasons, hence Nicola's feeling of insecurity in The Ready Made Family: 'at the moment there was still Miranda West, but with Miranda you never knew; next term she might decide that her Best Friend must have red hair and freckles.'⁵⁵ But Miranda, once she has formed a strong attachment to someone, is fiercely loyal

and constant. She reveals in The Cricket Term that she has admired Janice Scott, a sixth former, for many years. ('Partly teasing, but more in admiration, Nicola said, "You have been faithful, haven't you?"'⁵⁶) Miranda is one of the few girls prepared to stand up to Tim: their relationship is thorny at the best of times, since they are both forceful and outspoken characters and have only the twins in common - their quarrel in End of Term is about the twins, each sticking up for her own friend. When Tim and Miranda do collaborate over the carol service in The Attic Term they prove a force to be reckoned with, as Nicola discovers: 'For the first time she found herself up against Miranda and Tim united and she knew she couldn't win.'⁵⁷

Nicola's friendship with Miranda is close but unemotional. As we have seen, they are both intensely loyal by nature, but neither is demonstrative and they respect each other's privacy. There is a reserve here rather akin to that shown by Leonie in Frost in May, and Forest is never explicit about it, unlike many school story writers who tell us how their characters feel about each other:⁵⁸

The pair had had a chummery of contented peace, for they thought alike in many ways and neither was over-demonstrative.

Tim finds it amusing that Nicola, unlike her twin ('"honestly, Lawrie is a gabby drip,"' says Nicola in disgust⁵⁹) does not automatically tell her friend

everything. There is no sense of rivalry or tension between them: when Esther Frewen arrives she is accepted by both girls, although she never becomes as intimate with either as they are with each other. Although she does not, unlike Brent-Dyer, say so, it seems that Forest would agree with her that friends are for sharing. Despite the unemotional style in which the friendship is rendered, it is clear that Miranda and Nicola think a great deal of each other and understand each other fairly well. When Nicola, faced with the prospect of leaving Kingscote, contemplates the prospect of Miranda's sharing their newly-established tradition of greeting each other on the school roof at the beginning and end of every term with some new friend, she finds the thought 'almost more misery-making than anything else she'd thought of, so far.'⁶⁰

Nicola and Miranda's friendship is contrasted with that of Lawrie and Tim. Lawrie, unlike Nicola, allows Tim to take the dominant role in their friendship - she has been used to letting Nicola take that role all through their childhood - but, being the best actress in the school and obviously destined for great things, she has gifts which Tim can admire. There is a sense of novelty and patronage in Tim's attitude to Lawrie, especially in End of Term: as Miranda succinctly puts it: '"She does a bit do my-friend-the-genius about Lawrie, doesn't she?'"⁶¹ Tim has ambitions on the production side of theatre, so their relationship has a

symbiotic nature. As the series progresses and the girls mature Tim becomes more realistic about Lawrie's faults, and develops an amused detachment towards them.

Esther Frewen, Nicola's other friend, is dramatically different from either Tim or Miranda. The only child of divorced and evidently rather selfish parents (it is interesting to note that all the Marlows seem to be attracted to only children, just as Antonia Forest, an only child, was intrigued by large families), Esther has none of the natural competence and common sense of Nicola, Miranda and Tim. "They do expect the divorced ones to go a bit mad sometimes, don't they?" says Nicola kindly if rather crudely.⁶² Esther says little about her parents' being divorced ("Of course, I'm absolutely used to it now," she says firmly when she first meets Nicola, making it quite clear that she is not⁶³) and her friends are similarly reserved, Nicola being rendered 'confused and scarlet' when Esther tells her that she has a stepfather. End of Term, the novel which introduces Esther, was written in the late 1950s when divorce was both less common and less acceptable than it is today, and children then were far less likely to come into regular contact with divorced families.

Anxious, timid and panicky, and despising herself for being this way, Esther longs to be capable and brave like Nicola, for whom she cherishes a secret and deep-felt

admiration. Nicola, for her part, is fond of Esther and always treats her with consideration, realising that Esther cannot accept teasing in the same way that her other friends can:⁶⁴

To anyone else she would probably have said,
'Honestly, you are a nutter, but not, about this,
to Esther.

Esther, however, probably unknown to herself or anyone else, has an obscure hold over Nicola, for she is - or at least Nicola believes her to be - fascinatingly beautiful.

The physical charm of the adolescent girl was very much a feature of the earlier school stories. Many writers had a tendency to eulogise about the beauty of their characters and girls would be drawn to each other very much on the basis of appearance. The same can be said, indeed, for most of the books I have looked at in this study: Nanda is very much attracted to what Leonie and Clare look like, and Judith and Jennifer's relationship is partly rooted in physical attraction. There was also, bound up with the 'games cult' of the early twentieth century and the desire of many girl's public schools to imitate boys and their values as far as possible, the popular image of the beefy, hockey-stick wielding Eton-cropped schoolgirl which has to some extent endured until the present day. Drawing perhaps more on popular ideas than on textual analysis, as I have suggested, some critics tended to assume that schoolgirl

heroines were beefy and androgynous even when this was not the case. It was much commoner to read of pretty schoolgirls and heroines who were not conventionally pretty - like Joey of the Chalet School - tended to be allowed a certain distinction of appearance:⁶⁵

Mabel had a very fair complexion, with cheeks pink as apple blossom, a pair of frank, thoughtful blue eyes, and a remarkably pretty mouth, a firm round chin, and beautiful red-gold hair.

Shirley was slender and dark, her short hair curled and waved round her small, vivacious face, making her pale clear skin seem even paler.

Jacynth thought she had never seen a prettier girl. Eyes of periwinkle blue sparkled under long dark lashes; a generous mouth smiled, showing a dimple in one cheek;... her firm little chin was deeply cleft.

Antonia Forest refrains from saying very much at all about what her characters look like. We know that the Marlows are, in the words of Patrick Merrick's mother, "'all quite nice-looking children in their fair-haired, blue-eyed way",⁶⁶ that Miranda has a dark, vivid face which reminds falconer Nicola of a hawk, that Tim is 'disconcertingly neither absolutely pretty nor absolutely plain',⁶⁷ and that Ginty Marlow is generally regarded as unusually attractive: "'the face that launched a thousand ships before she's much older, my husband says,'" comments Mrs Merrick rather drily in The Attic Term.⁶⁸ But Forest never dwells on anyone's appearance in the way that earlier school story writers did, and it is rare indeed for her to describe anyone. When she

does it is through the eyes of another character. It is noteworthy that the most detailed indication of what Nicola looks like is in actual fact a description of her identical twin, when Lawrie contemplates her appearance in a mirror. The passage where Nicola, looking at Janice Scott, notices that 'her face had the delicately modelled look of her mother's favourite Dresden figurine, her hair the ashen shine of silkworm's cocoon, and her eyes the transparent grey of water over pebbles',⁶⁹ is unusually lyrical, occurs at a time when Nicola is upset, and her awareness heightened, and establishes Janice as physically attractive, which is interesting in terms of Miranda's enduring admiration of her.

Esther Frewen's face is never described: we do not even know if she is, by any objective standards, beautiful. The only thing that matters - and hence the only thing we are told (apart from Patrick's suggestion that she has "'the sort of face you ought to see in a painting"',⁷⁰ - is the effect of Esther's appearance on Nicola. At their first meeting Nicola decides with shock and more than a little discomfort that Esther is beautiful:⁷¹

For the first time she looked at a real-life face and thought not 'that's pretty' but 'that's beautiful.'

Nicola is not used to talking about such things and rarely does. She feels awkward even thinking about Esther's

appearance: 'She still thought Esther awfully pretty, beautiful, she amended shyly..'72 and never mentions it to anyone else. The word 'shyly' reinforces her discomfort, which is interesting in the light of Antonia Forest's complete lack of self-consciousness, even in the 1970s, in writing about the schoolgirl crush. All the 'crush' relationships, however, are characterised by the distance and difference in status typical of the convention: perhaps Nicola's confused response to Esther's beauty is compounded by the fact that she is a peer. This is underlined in the text by her ability to talk without embarrassment of sixth-former Janice as beautiful. When, unusually for them, Nicola, Tim, Miranda and Esther are having a discussion about beauty, Nicola finds it hard to agree with the accepted view that her own sister Ginty is 'more than pretty'. This has a lot to do with sibling rivalry - there are strong undercurrents of jealousy between Ginty and Nicola over Patrick Merrick - but it may also have something to do with the fact that Ginty seems to be beautiful in a conventional way: everyone agrees that she is lovely. As we have seen, Nicola is a thoughtful girl and it is quite likely that her tastes will be more original. '"Who do you call beautiful then, if not Ginty?"' asks Tim:73

Esther, thought Nicola, but it wasn't something you could say with her sitting there: and suppose Tim or Miranda said 'Nonsense.'?

So we never find out whether the others share Nicola's

opinion about Esther's appearance: we only know its influence on Nicola, who 'wondered occasionally whether she wouldn't find Esther's panics a touch irritating if her face weren't so fascinating.'⁷⁴

Esther would probably be very surprised to know that Nicola is intrigued by her appearance. She has a low opinion of herself. Self awareness is a significant theme in these novels and Esther, more than most, is conscious of her own shortcomings. Diffident, nervous and timid, she is like Nicola a talented singer but she never manages to conquer her nervousness sufficiently to sing in public. The one time she offers to sing in public, in place of Nicola, she finds herself at the last minute totally incapable of making a sound - with tragic results for her friendship with Nicola. Esther, ashamed of her feebleness, cannot face Nicola again, although Nicola, initially annoyed, realises with characteristic insight that:⁷⁵

Infuriating as Esther's defaulting had been, she, Nicola, should have known that however much Esther meant it at the time, she'd never be able to go through with it...she'd better say something...Had it been Tim or Miranda, one could probably have got by, just being extra friendly, but Esther needed things said.

But Nicola never gets a chance to reassure Esther, for Esther, mortified at having failed her heroine, has sneaked home by an earlier train and Nicola realises that 'by next term, it mightn't just have blown over, they might have

stopped being friends', which she has to admit to herself, after some thought, 'she wouldn't mind too much so long as Esther latched on to someone reasonable instead.'⁷⁶

That the prospect of Esther's having another friend does not bother Nicola while the thought, a term before, of Miranda's having one filled her with misery, and the reality of Ginty having ousted her in Patrick's affections still hurts when she lets herself think about it ('She told herself she wasn't thinking about Patrick.'⁷⁷), is proof that fond as Nicola is of Esther, she has not really become one of 'the people she thought of as her best friends'⁷⁸. Nicola cannot respect and rely on Esther as she can Miranda. Esther has shown herself on more than one occasion, despite the best of intentions, to be completely unreliable, whereas Miranda, called upon at the last minute to be an angel in the Christmas play (because Esther has run away, leaving a gap in the cast) rises to the occasion more than admirably. Nicola and Miranda's friendship, as we have seen, is based on mutual regard, whereas the friendship between Nicola and Esther is less balanced. Nicola may be entranced by Esther's face but that is no basis - as Nicola herself knows and, perhaps, as Patrick is beginning to discover? - for a real friendship.

Esther, for her part, cherishes a deep admiration for Nicola who seems to be everything that she aspires to:⁷⁹

After Daks, she cared more for Nick than anyone she knew, but she was humbly sure she didn't come very high on Nick's list.

which is why her failure to carry through her self-imposed task for Nicola is so demoralising. For Esther, having a secret with Nicola and promising to help her is 'the most wonderful thing that had happened since her mother had said they would have to leave their hateful Daks-less flat.'⁸⁰ Daks is Esther's poodle: that Nicola should come second in Esther's affections to a dog might seem rather strange, but in fact it is an honour, for Esther adores Daks with an intensity of emotion that Nicola, who has herself been accused of 'car[ing] too much for animals'⁸¹, finds 'not affected, as Ginty said, or babyish, as Ann thought - more a bit scary, really.'⁸² The implication, of course, is that coming from an dysfunctional family background, Esther's life is lacking in parental love and security: her parents have let her down so it is safer for Esther to pour all her affection into Daks who, being a dog, is happy enough to repay it demonstratively, and into Nicola who is far from demonstrative - even if she had any idea how Esther felt about her - but who, apart from being the embodiment of what Esther would like to be, has actually saved Daks from having to be sold, by letting him live at Trennels in the school holidays, when Esther's mother thoughtlessly moves into a flat where animals are not allowed.

It would be fair enough to say that Esther has a crush on Nicola, although this term is more often used, as we know, to describe the feelings of a younger girl for an admired older girl or even teacher. The schoolgirl crush, a more or less institutionalised relationship, was already attracting a fair amount of attention and criticism in the early part of this century, as I have outlined throughout this study. Widespread acceptance of the views of sexologists such as Havelock Ellis had cast doubt and suspicion on relationships which had generally, until then, been accepted as perfectly natural. School story writers like Elinor M. Brent-Dyer and Dorita Fairlie Bruce responded by pointing out ad nauseam the difference between 'healthy' hero-worship which could be beneficial to both parties, and unhealthy 'sentimentality' which was considered unnatural and potentially dangerous. Angela Brazil's schoolgirls tended to indulge in overtly emotional friendships but Brent-Dyer and Bruce allowed their heroines no such excesses of emotion: 'If there was one thing the school at large looked on with scorn it was sentimentality.'⁸³

The place of the schoolgirl crush in Antonia Forest's work is extremely interesting. I have already shown that in her response to present-day concerns (if not in her chosen setting) she is a more modern writer than most school story writers, and critics emphasise the 'noteworthy freshness'⁸⁴ of the Kingscote novels compared with more conventional

school stories. Margery Fisher, in a review of the most recent Marlow novel, Run Away Home (1982), praises Forest for her 'firm grasp of the contemporary scene.'⁸⁵ Given this, it may come as something of a surprise to some readers to realise that the schoolgirl crush plays a very important role in her books. Felicia Lamb and Helena Pickthorn, in a study of schoolgirls in the late 1960s, are so confident that the 'time-honoured crush or pash' belongs very definitely to a bygone era that they assert:⁸⁶

In later school stories all are just good friends ... Anyone 'gone' on anyone else is the target for healthy mockery and extra torture at the dreaded fielding practice.

but perhaps Lamb and Pickthorn had not read Autumn Term and End of Term, the two Kingscote novels available when they wrote their book in the late 1960s. If they had they could hardly have made such a generalisation. For in all the Kingscote novels, even the latter two which were written in the mid-1970s, Forest finds herself able to write about schoolgirl crushes perfectly unselfconsciously.

And why not? I contend that Forest's interest in the crush as late as the 1970s is further proof of both her modernity and her insight into adolescent girls. As the twentieth century progressed, as we have seen, girls were increasingly encouraged to focus on relationships with boys, but Antonia Forest knows quite well that girls at school will always have the potential to develop passionate

admiration for other girls whatever prevailing social attitudes have to say about it. It was fashionable, at the time when she was writing, to prioritise heterosexual teenage relationships in what Adrienne Rich has labelled the 'compulsory heterosexuality' of our society⁸⁷, but Forest's understanding of adolescents goes deeper than merely highlighting fashionable and socially acceptable relationships: she recognises that adolescent emotional experience is multi-faceted and complex. The fact that she writes without apology about schoolgirl crushes sets her apart from writers who merely follow fashions: Alison Hennegan, in an essay 'On Becoming a Lesbian Reader' contrasts Forest's Kingscote sequence, 'which seems to me exemplary'⁸⁸, with the more popular but less complex 'Trebizon' series by Anne Digby, whose sophisticated, boy-mad schoolgirls repel her. Forest does write of boy/girl friendships too, of course, the Nicola/Patrick/Ginty triangle being an ongoing story in the novels. By showing female friendships within this wider context, I would argue that Forest is according them more value than if she simply wrote of girls in 'polarised' homosocial environments. Vivienne Griffiths' acknowledgement that boarding school girls, at least, even in the 1990s, still experience crushes⁸⁹ in the 1990s, would seem to vindicate Antonia Forest's determined focusing of them, even if this is one of the elements which led critics to dismiss her books as 'dodo-like', ie. old-fashioned.

Antonia Forest writes about schoolgirl crushes in the unemotional but revealing way that is characteristic of her work. At the beginning of End of Term Miranda tells Nicola about an outbreak of overt sentimental behaviour some years before, which was sternly dealt with by authority. Two senior girls had become the focus of some unwelcome and probably intensely embarrassing attention from some girls in the Lower Fifth. (When Forest writes of behaviour which she, and Nicola, find mawkish and silly it tends to be perpetrated by girls in the Lower Fifth - presumably they are thought to be at a difficult age. The twins have only reached the Upper Fourth by the last book in the series!) Miranda remembers the incident with ghoulish glee:⁹¹

'There was a terrific row....Nick, it was simply gorgeous, you can't think. We all absolutely sat and shuddered...and afterwards no-one spoke, practically, for the rest of the day, and you couldn't move without falling over Lower Fifths in floods. I wish she'd do it again some time.'
'So do I,' said Nicola with perfect sincerity.
'It must have been super.'

This sort of gushy devotion to someone ('giving her roses in silver paper and sleeping with her kirbigrips under my pillow'⁹²) is seen by Nicola and Miranda, sensible if sensitive girls, as ludicrous. It is contrasted with Miranda's attraction to Janice Scott, an aloof Sixth Former. "'Of course I'm not cracked on her,'" insists Miranda⁹³, who identifies being 'cracked' on someone as having the sort of roses-and-kirbigrips obsession which the school authorities

have sought to suppress, but she admits that she likes looking at Janice and her deep and rather romantic admiration for the older girl is obvious. This attraction is dealt with in a very matter-of-fact way. Miranda, as we have seen, is a strong-minded and intelligent individual, quite devoid of foolishness, and Janice is presented as worthy of anyone's admiration, although she is as far removed as possible from the jolly decent head girl type that was the conventional object of schoolgirl admiration. There is never any suggestion that Miranda should suppress or deny her feelings, although she is fairly reticent about them, talking of Janice only to Nicola and then with a certain shy reserve. Nicola accepts Miranda's feelings, as, clearly, does Forest, as perfectly reasonable:⁹⁴

'She's your person,' said Nicola, who also liked Janice Scott, though without sharing Miranda's particular attachment.

Nicola is much less accepting of the crush which Lawrie develops on Lois Sanger in Autumn Term. Lois, Nicola knows, is not a worthy object of anyone's admiration, and for Lawrie to be 'cracked' on her, given the well-publicised row between Lois and Rowan, and Lois's jealous disdain for the Marlows ('I always feel it must be so gratifying to be a Marlow.'⁹⁵) is seen by Nicola the faithful as not only foolish but disloyal. After the fiasco of the twins' short-lived Guiding career, when Lois's dishonesty and anxiety to save her own skin leave them to take the blame

for a crime they did not commit, she finds Lawrie's liking for Lois even more preposterous: "Even if you are cracked on her, which I don't see how you can be, anyway, you know just what kind of a low hound she was over the hike..."⁹⁶ In the most orthodox school story tradition, Lawrie's crush on Lois is shared by most of the Third Remove, but, unlike Nita Tomlinson, for example, one of Dorita Fairlie Bruce's favourite villains, she never, through the younger girls' admiration, realises the error of her ways, nor does she redeem herself by saving any lives. ("I know ...you...think I'm a pretty average villain, but I could scarcely leave one of you to drown..."⁹⁷)

Nicola herself is not prone to having crushes, but she fulfils the need to have someone to admire through her passion for the Navy and in particular Nelson, an enthusiasm for which she is often teased. So she can understand the impulse in other people so long as she feels they are not admiring someone unworthy. Hence the difference in her attitude to Lawrie's crush and to Miranda's. Nicola can see why Miranda is so keen on Janice, who is far and away the most interesting and original of the older girls. She has the added virtue, as far as Nicola is concerned, that she can see through Lois Sanger's wiles and is not afraid to let Lois see that she despises her, in much the same way as Rowan Marlow does. Rowan, whose opinion carries considerable weight with Nicola, likes and respects Janice.

Lawrie, inclined to be dreamy and to give herself the starring role in her fantasies that she likes to take in real life (in this she is not unlike Lois but luckily without Lois's deviousness and potential for harmful action, although she comes close to it in End of Term when she persuades Nicola to take her place in the netball team) fantasises about Lois in a fairly conventional way, endowing Lois 'with the romantic haze which had previously belonged to Margaret Jessop.'⁹⁸ She 'devis[es] fantasies in the course of which Lois was reinstated in the team owing entirely to Lawrie's courage, ingenuity and self-sacrifice'⁹⁹ - all qualities in which Lawrie is conspicuously lacking! Lois is not Lawrie's first crush at Kingscote ('"You never like the same person for two minutes together," [Nicola] said scornfully.'¹⁰⁰): when she arrives at school she already has a crush on her sister Karen's friend, whom she has met at home. Margaret Jessop, the games captain, is a very conventional object of schoolgirl devotion, and Nicola accepts Lawrie's attachment with equanimity, seeing no reason to keep it secret: '"Lawrie's awfully keen on her..She's all right, you know. Quite matey."¹⁰¹ When Lawrie admits to a disapproving Nicola that she has indeed abandoned Margaret to go 'cracked on Lois' it is significant that she has to do so in bed, after lights out, tapping out her confession in morse code! The necessity to discuss Lois under cover of darkness is partly

because Lawrie is naturally shy of exposing her feelings and therefore making herself vulnerable, but Forest allows Miranda to discuss her 'person', Janice, in daylight, albeit in the context of private conversation. The implication is quite clearly that there is nothing intrinsically wrong or embarrassing about having a crush on another girl.

It is possible that Miranda fantasises about Janice in much the same way as Lawrie does about Lois, this being a common outlet for the intense emotions often involved in the crush, but somehow it is hard to imagine Miranda prey to this sort of dreaming. We do know that she imagines playing Ariel to Janice's Prospero in the school production of The Tempest : when, as understudy, she is given the chance to take over from Lawrie, it is obvious that she has spent a lot of time and thought in privately rehearsing the part to perfection, using the formality of art as an outlet for her emotions rather as Leonie does in Frost in May. This is not quite the same, however, as weaving elaborate and improbable fantasies about Janice herself. Although her feelings are strong, Miranda makes an effort to keep them controlled and dignified: despite betraying herself with an occasional blush, she normally manages to retain her usual poise in front of her heroine, and only to Nicola does she reveal the extent of her liking for Janice. Forest clearly approves of this self-control: the most intensely felt passions in her novels are those which are kept as private as possible.

Janice Scott is an extraordinarily private individual; labelled unco-operative by authority, she is reserved and aloof, indifferent to the pettiness of school life. She does not make friends easily but is obviously not unpopular, merely a cat who prefers to walk alone. Like Nicola, however, Janice has an innate kindness which she does not always find easy to express. When Nicola is inexplicably left out of the junior netball team Janice, as her table prefect, notices that she is close to 'the unspeakable humiliation of tears in public'¹⁰² and tactfully diverts attention from her. At the end of the meal she makes a point of telling Nicola, 'a little stiffly, almost as if she felt she might be interfering' that she must not worry too much: "They do these things from time to time, you know. And there's rarely any rational explanation."¹⁰³ Janice, 'always passed over' despite her competence at most things, understands how Nicola feels better than her contemporaries. Coincidentally, she is the only person at Kingscote to know that Nicola may have to leave, and although she never intrudes or treats Nicola any differently from the rest of Lower Four A, her quiet sympathy is there in the background. Miranda, sensitive to moods where both Nicola and Janice are concerned, has noticed that Janice seems to have a special regard for Nicola:¹⁰⁴

'I do think Jan - notices you more than the rest of us.'... 'I wish she'd notice me.'

Nicola denies that Janice 'keeps an eye on [her]' but Miranda is absolutely right in her observation. Janice appears to identify with Nicola, responding to qualities in her which she recognises in herself. It is typical of Miranda that her longing to be 'noticed' by Janice as Nicola seems to be does not in any way damage her relationship with Nicola. Strong though her attachment to Janice is, Nicola is her best friend and she is not jealous by nature. She is helped, I think, by the fact that she can talk candidly to Nicola about her feelings, and does not internalise them in the way that Nicola tends to.

After Janice leaves Kingscote Miranda is understandably rather lost - she has, after all, admired her since she was in the Kindergarten. Nobody else will take Janice's place, either, for unlike some girls, who need an object - any object - for their respect and devotion (Alison O'Sullivan of St. Clare's comes to mind), Miranda, if Janice is not available, will not have a crush on anyone else just for the sake of it. Her language suggests that she is very much in control of her feelings - not for her the experience of losing herself in 'excess emotion' in the way of some earlier schoolgirl heroines: 'I've arranged with me not to be interested in any of this year's lot, dim poops that they are.'¹⁰⁵ The implication may just be that she has grown out of the stage of being 'cracked on' another girl, just as Nicola no longer seems to be so keen on Nelson and the Navy

(it is Patrick that Nicola thinks of now) but Miranda does wish that Janice were still around to be admired. Some would say that she is resisting the implications of growing up by harking back to younger days when it was perfectly acceptable to admire another girl in this way. But given the sophistication of Forest's presentation of both Janice and Miranda and the relationship between them, it seems inappropriate to dismiss Miranda's feelings as merely indicative of an early adolescent phase, soon to be grown out of and forgotten: there seems nothing in the least immature about her crush (unlike Lawrie's on Lois which is presented with not a little humour.).

Janice Scott, through her own choice, is a loner, but it is unusual, in school stories as in reality, to find girls who genuinely do not want to belong to and be accepted by the school community at large and their own peers in particular. Nicola and Lawrie and their friends can afford to take popularity for granted: they know quite well that the quieter members of the class look to them for leadership. Group identity is important, particularly in Autumn Term where Third Remove, under Tim's influence, refuse to accept their traditional underdog role, establishing instead a reputation as 'brilliant eccentrics'. Their successful production of The Prince and the Pauper helps to unite the form, gives the twins - especially Lawrie - a chance to shine, and makes the class accept Pomona Todd,

who for most of the term is the butt of Third Remove, the victim of teasing instigated mainly by Tim. Pomona does improve throughout the novel, but in the end, in a departure from the traditional school story ethos where conformity was everything, she is accepted more or less on her own terms.

There are, however, in every society, outsiders who for one reason or another will never be accepted. I have looked at how Laura Meister becomes a scapegoat in Elliott's Secret Places. As Nicola explains to Karen's young step-children in The Cricket Term: "There just are people like that and you can't like them."¹⁰⁶ She is referring to Caliban, but it is of Marie Dobson that she is really thinking. Like Nicola, the reader can feel sorry for Marie while withholding sympathy from her. She is, like Mabel in Dusty Answer, pathetic and grotesque. As Miss Redmond, one of the teachers, admits: "She's certainly not a likeable child. She's far too eager to please."¹⁰⁷ By the beginning of the series she has already made herself disliked ('Marie Dobson had bossed the Second the year before and they were all rather tired of her.'¹⁰⁸) and this develops into a much stronger loathing. With the callousness and lack of imagination typical of the younger adolescent girl, her classmates assume that because they do not consider her 'one of them' she cannot feel things as they do. When the junior netball team does not tell Marie that Nicola and Lawrie have secretly swapped places to give Nicola the

opportunity to play in a match, Marie having a well-deserved reputation as a tell-tale, she finds out what they have done and is very upset that she has been left out, much to everyone's surprise:¹⁰⁹

But what really surprised them, as they watched her cry, was that a low type like Marie Dobson should mind so much. They'd have thought she was much too louse-ish to care as any of them would have done.

Nicola, of course, has always had the vague recognition that Marie was more to be pitied than blamed, which develops, in End of Term, to a more complex awareness of what it might feel like to be universally despised. After the netball team incident, she makes a careful effort to be polite to Marie, and tells Lawrie that they should be 'careful', because Marie does have feelings, but it is impossible for her to go any further, either in understanding or in action.

Marie is presented with the economic use of detail characteristic of Antonia Forest's style. She makes the reader supremely uncomfortable. She is so deftly portrayed that she reminds us of all the Marie Dobsons we have known and loathed and left out of our fun. We understand why she is an outsider, not in an intellectual way, as we understand why Laura Meister is made into a scapegoat, but with the same embarrassed loathing that she inspires in twelve year old Nicola: 'Nicola felt a squirm of discomfort.'¹¹⁰

We noted how, in No Talking After Lights, the girls were so insecure that their cruelly rigid pecking order reinforced their sense of identity and self-worth. There is much less sense of this in the Kingscote novels, but it is certainly apparent that girls wishing for acceptance are eager to dissociate themselves from the pariah: "I didn't [like her]..It was only because of sitting next," Pomona excused herself.¹¹¹ Accepting Marie as human is somehow to lose status themselves. Forest, however, will not allow this complacency, but nor does she ever allow Marie to be assimilated. Marie's sudden death in The Cricket Term (this chilling, incredible happening'¹¹²) is the ultimate proof to the girls that she is as human as they, and, moreover, a frightening reminder of their own mortality.

Just as Judith, in Dusty Answer, is forced to recognise that Mabel, for all she is grotesque and repellent, is also 'interesting, human, gentle and simple'¹¹³, Nicola, throughout the series, has been approaching a realisation that Marie is every bit as human and vulnerable as anyone else. Her death is the ultimate proof:¹¹⁴

She wasn't - Marie wasn't - not - not enough of person to die. Just as, last Christmas term, she hadn't been enough of a person to mind that she hadn't been told about the switch for the match. Only they'd been wrong about that too.

I have already touched on the sanitised, euphemistic treatment of death in the more conventional school story.

Forest's treatment is startling in its honesty, as she shows the hypocrisy of the girls' reaction. (A review of another of the Marlow novels, Peter's Room, describes it as 'true to life rather than to the narrower conventions of fiction',¹¹⁴ and the same could certainly be said of the handling of Marie's death.) Nicola faces death in Falconer's Lure, when her cousin Jon dies in a plane crash, but she is able to be 'properly sorry' about Jon's death; it is the ambivalence of her response to Marie's which makes the incident so remarkable. Some writers, wishing to address the issue of death, take the brave decision to kill off an attractive and popular character. In choosing to kill Marie, the unattractive outcast, Forest is much braver. There is no sense that death is presented for its own sake: what matters is the girls' various responses to the death of an individual they have so studiously despised. Again we see a writer using the friendships of adolescent girls - in this case, the refusal to befriend - to explore much wider issues.

Antonia Forest's Kingscote sequence of novels are not the best-known girls' school stories and sadly they have recently gone out of print. In my hunt for copies of the books I found that readers who had discovered Forest's novels had tended, like me, to recognise a rare complexity in them and to continue to enjoy them well into adulthood. Forest herself says, 'I've long since ceased to be surprised

at hearing from people in their twenties - thirties - forties - even retired'¹¹⁵ and the fact that her books 'do not fit easily into the category marked Books For Children...'¹¹⁶ has been noted. They are the most sophisticated girls' school stories of which I am aware and their literary quality has in general been recognised by critics (those who can look beyond the 'exclusive' setting), who focus on the exceptional realism of the books and the excellence of the characterisation, qualities which are of course inextricably linked, since it is the credibility of the characters which makes the novels so realistic:¹¹⁷

Strange how much one cares for these people, who enormously transcend the outmoded setting of a conventional boarding school for middle class 'gels'. Socially significant they may not be... but, my goodness, they have human significance in great measure...Here are girls to get to know, and following knowledge comes warm affection.

The enthusiasm of this acclaim is not unusual. I know several educated adults who can spend hours discussing the finer details of Forest's novels, reminding me of what Aidan Chambers calls 'the development of the implied reader into the implicated reader, one so intellectually and emotionally given to the book, not just its plot and characters but its negotiation between author and reader of potential meanings, that the reader is totally involved....He finally becomes a participant in the making of the book.'¹¹⁸ Like the readers of older girls' school stories (and romances) Antonia Forest's readers seem to be drawn in to her world to an

unusual degree, and this need not, as I have suggested, be dismissed as escapist and therefore 'passive', but may actually be, as Chambers suggests, a very active and creative way of reading,

Like all writers of girls' school stories, Forest recognises the central role that friendship, in all its richness and confusion, plays in the life of the adolescent girl. Because the Kingscote novels are not complete in themselves, forming part of a larger series, she also has the scope to explore family and other relationships, but for the purposes of my study I have concentrated on the school friendships. Forest never tells us anything she can more usefully show us, but her characters are so fully realised that we have a good idea of the dynamics of their relationships without authorial comment having to intervene.

Rosemary Auchmuty, in A World of Girls, has written very fully of the schoolgirl friendships of the more traditional school story writers, contending that it was helpful for girls to see their single-sex relationships prioritised. The school stories of Antonia Forest, written more recently and dealing with a world of girls which is not so far removed from reality as those created by her forbears, also show the extreme importance of friendship between adolescent girls very convincingly and in more depth, in my view, than any other writer within the genre

and many 'adult' writers too. She has resisted prevailing ideologies and fashions, firstly by writing school stories at all, and secondly by continuing to highlight female friendship, including the crush, even when her characters have boyfriends as well. She shows school as part of a wider experience, and female friendship within the wider context of human relationships. Her refusal to adopt fashionable attitudes may have prevented her books becoming as widely read as others in the genre, but, at least in her treatment of girls' friendships and crushes, she has remained true instead to what Sheila Egoff calls the 'unchanging heart',¹²⁰.

Conclusion

The world of adolescent experience is one over which, at the beginning of this century, adults had considerable control. Similarly, the right of men to control the destiny of women was, although challenged by feminists, still widely accepted. An adolescent girl at the beginning of the twentieth century was, therefore, in a double bind: both as an adolescent and as a female, she was not given any real autonomy over her fate.

The rapid expansion of education for girls provided, in schools and colleges, a focus of interest outside the family. Although these institutions functioned within a society which was still patriarchal and often antipathetic to what they were trying to achieve, they were, as communities of girls and women, the ideal forum for female friendship. When co-education became widespread in the 1960s and 1970s, this 'female space' was lost: its survival, in fictional terms, in both the girls' school story itself and in recent novels which repeat the girls' school context, suggests, as evocatively as academic discourse or statistical surveys, that its loss is lamented by many women.

As this study has demonstrated, friendship, in this context, could be more than simply an emotional

relationship. It had a functional role, for example in the development or defining of character, or in the individual's assertion of her autonomy. In fictional terms, friendship is often used to develop other important themes. Thus, Nicola's friendship with Miranda makes her aware of anti-semitism, which alters her perspective on her own society; Nanda's friendship with Leonie helps develop her appreciation of art and literature; Patience's fragile and threatened love for Laura makes her question her suburban values and forces her to see the fear and cruelty which is part of the adult, as well as the child's condition.

In all these novels, friendship has been accorded the pivotal role it deserves (but has not always been given) in any treatment, fictional or otherwise, of adolescent experience, but it is not the only focus of the novels. Presented as part of the wider experience of adolescence, it is given power partly by its context. In the Kingscote novels, for example, one of Nicola's most important relationships, is with Patrick: her friendship with Miranda is in no way diminished by this, however. In fact, by presenting the Nicola/Miranda relationship as one element in Nicola's life, one which is important, but not overwhelming, Forest shows the strength of that relationship much more effectively than if Nicola and Miranda had no other emotional focus.

Some of the authors discussed here have clearly been aware of the various discourses on adolescence and friendship outlined in Part One, and these have informed their writing to a certain extent. This is most apparent, probably, in Dusty Answer, where knowledge of contemporary theories of sexuality is displayed in Jennifer's internalised guilt and in the stock figure of Geraldine.

When I began this study, it was with no intention of identifying similarities between these novels beyond the obvious one of their school/college situation and the implications this had for themes and concerns. The strikingly close relationship between the novels written for children (although enjoyed, obviously, by many adults) and those written for adults (and encountered, no doubt, by many adolescents seeking novels which might reflect their own concerns) seemed to vindicate my determination at the outset to approach both 'adult' and 'children's' fiction identically, that is, to try to accord equal status to both. This approach is novel, because until recently, critics have, on the whole, dismissed the girls' school story as trivial. I have suggested some reasons for this, and indicated, as have other recent scholars, that the reverse could be argued. The very longevity of the genre, against the odds, is proof that a considerable body of readers of all ages continue to find something of value in the girls' school story.

One major difference, however, between the 'school novel' and the 'school story' is that, without exception (and leaving aside, for the moment, the 'college' novels of Lehmann and Newman) the novels written for children have contemporary settings, whereas those written for adults 'look back'. Thus, Frost in May, published in 1933, is about an Edwardian childhood; The Lost Traveller, published in 1950, is set in the First World War; Secret Places, published in 1981, in the Second World War, and No Talking After Lights, published this decade, is set in the 1950s. In the case of Antonia White, whose writing is heavily autobiographical, she is merely reflecting her own experience, and Elliott and Lambert are also writing about the eras in which they grew up. But I wonder if there is also an implicit belief that a novel which concerns all-female environment and which thus prioritises inter-female relationships is somehow not quite 'modern' enough to be located in a contemporary (1980s/90s) setting and therefore needs to be looked back on? We have seen how Forest has been criticised for continuing to write about a girls' school as late as the 1970s.

All the novels described here, even those of White and Lehmann which have enjoyed considerable critical acclaim, tend to be pigeon-holed as 'women's books', with everything that implies about the narrowness of their focus. Certainly,

the focus of all these novels, being an institution, is narrow, even cloistered. Without trying to claim the novels as sociological or historical documents, however, it is fair to suggest that these insular societies - Lippington, St. Mark's, Kingscote, the Chalet School, a Cambridge women's college in the 1920s, a London college in the 1960s, Raeburn, the Prince Albert School for Girls - reflected to varying extents the changing world outside their gates. In that changing world, as we have seen, scholars were not unduly concerned with the dynamics of adolescent female friendship (unless they joined in the 'crush' discourse). Inside the gates, this was not the case, as I have shown, and novelists throughout the twentieth century have given us a valuable account of a relationship they and their many thousands of readers considered of central importance to the development of the individual girl.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. **Why study fictional friendships?**

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2. Bobbie Ann Mason, The Girl Sleuth, 1995, p. xii
3. Angela Lambert, No Talking After Lights, 1991, p. 35
4. Antonia White, The Lost Traveller, 1979, p. 154
5. Elizabeth Bowen, Introduction to Virago edition of White, Frost in May, 1978, p. vi
6. See, for example, Hunt, The development of criticism, 1990
7. Ibid.
8. Maria Nikolajeva, Children's Literature Comes of Age, 1996, pp. 153-4
9. Eliza Lynn Linton, 'The Girl of the Period', The Saturday Review, 1880s
10. Janice Raymond, A Passion for Friends, 1986
11. Patricia Craig, ed., The Oxford Book of Schooldays, 1994
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13. Vivienne Griffiths, Adolescent Girls and their Friends, 1995
14. Pam Gilbert & Sandra Taylor, eds. Fashioning the Feminine, 1991
15. Wini Breines, Young, White and Miserable, 1992
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17. Tania Modleski, Loving with a Vengeance, 1988
18. Penny Tinkler, Constructing Girlhood, 1995
19. Ibid., p. 83
20. Penny Brown, The Poison at the Source, 1992
21. Ibid., p.3
22. Louisa May Alcott, Little Women, 1868; Little Men, 1872
23. Although there was a growth in girls' education at the end of the nineteenth century, this was by no means widely welcomed by public opinion. See, eg., Dyhouse, Girls Growing Up in Late-Victorian and Edwardian England; No Distinction of Sex? and Avery, The Best Type of Girl
24. Paulina Palmer, 'Antonia White's Frost in May: A Lesbian Feminist Reading' in Susan Sellers, ed. Feminist Criticism: Theory and Practice, 1991
25. See, eg. Rosemary Auchmuty, A World of Girls, 1992; Rosemary Auchmuty & Juliet Gosling, eds. The Chalet School Revisited, 1994; Penny Tinkler, Constructing Girlhood, 1995
26. Margaret Robertson, 'Residential Schools' in Sara Burstall & M.A. Douglas, eds., Public Schools for Girls 1911

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28. Ibid., loc. cit.
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31. Angela Lambert, No Talking After Lights, 1990
32. Antonia White, Frost in May, 1933
33. Antonia White, The Lost Traveller, 1950
34. Janice Elliott, Secret Places, 1981
35. Rosamond Lehmann, Dusty Answer, 1927
36. Andrea Newman, A Share of the World, 1964
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38. Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, Exploits of the Chalet Girls, 1933, 1961, p.59
39. D.L. Kirkpatrick, Twentieth Century Children's Writers, 1978, p.174

2. Background

I. Adolescence

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45. Ibid., p.229
46. Ibid., p.234
47. Ibid., p.228
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50. Leta S. Hollingworth, The Psychology of the Adolescent, 1930
51. Alicia G. Percival, The English Miss, Today and Yesterday, 1939
52. Simone de Beauvoir, Le Deuxieme Sexe, 1949; English edition 1953
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54. Ibid., p. 364
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II. Friendship within the discourse on adolescence

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61. Elizabeth Bowen, 'The Mulberry Tree' in Graham Greene, ed., The Old School, 1934, 1984
62. See, eg. Barbara Miller Solomon, In the Company of Educated Women, 1985, p.44
63. Annabel Farraday, 'Lessoning Lesbians: Girls' Schools, Coeducation and Anti-lesbianism Between the Wars' in Carol Jones & Pat Mahony, eds. Learning our Lines, 1989, p.31
64. Clemence Dane, Regiment of Women, 1917, 1996
65. Chadwick, op. cit., p. 255
66. Ibid., p. 256
67. Ibid., p. 257
68. Ibid., loc. cit.
69. Many factual accounts exist of the 'institutionalised pash'. See eg. Avery, The Best Type of Girl, 1991; Theodora Benson, 'Hot water bottle love' in Greene, ed., The Old School, 1934, 1984
70. Chadwick, op. cit., p. 243
71. see, eg. Lilian Fadermann, Surpassing the Love of Men, Emma Donoghue, Passions Between Women
72. Percival, op. cit., p. 223
73. Radclyffe Hall, The Well of Loneliness, 1928
74. Oxford Concise English Dictionary, 1990, p.1299
75. 21. Havelock Ellis, Studies in the Psychology of Sex: Sexual Inversion, 1897. Quoted in Martha Vicinus, 'Distance and Desire: English Boarding School Friendships, 1870-1920' in Dubermann, Vicinus & Chauncey, eds. Hidden From History, 199
76. Rosamond Lehmann, Dusty Answer, 1927
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78. Ibid.
79. Ibid., p. 367
80. Ibid., loc. cit.
81. Havelock Ellis, op.cit., p.227
82. Rosemary Auchmuty, A World of Girls, 1992, p. 134
83. Vicinus, op. cit., p.134
84. Angela Brazil, A Fourth Form Friendship, 1911, p. 34

III. Female Friendship Rediscovered

85. Pat O'Connor, Friendships Between Women, 1992, p. 1
 86. Fadermann, op. cit.
 88. O'Connor, op. cit., p. 96
 89. Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' in Signs, 5 (4), pp.641-60
 90. Raymond, op. cit.
 91. Angela McRobbie, Feminism for Girls: An adventure story, 1981; Feminism and Youth Culture: From 'Jackie' to 'Just Seventeen', 1991
 92. Vivienne Griffiths, Adolescent Girls and their Friends, 1995
 93. Ibid., p.166
 94. Ibid., p.170
 95. Ibid., p. 170
 96. Ibid., p.184
 97. Ibid., p.26
 98. Ibid., p.152
 99. Ibid., p.13
 100. Auchmuty, op. cit.
 101. Nina Auerbach, Communities of Women, 1978, p.5
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87. See, for example, Emma Donoghue, Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668-1801, 1993; Gabriele Griffin, Heavenly Love? Lesbian Images in Twentieth-Century Women's Writing, 1993; Elaine Hobby & Chris White, What Lesbians Do In Books, 1991.

111. (cont'd) Of course, individual taste must be considered, and the market value of a book need not correspond to its literary merit. Copies of 'Abbey' and 'Chalet' stories were once cheap on the second-hand market. At the same time, it should not be forgotten that it is demand for books which makes them expensive: the school story reading and collecting public, in privileging certain texts, has indicated that its interest in titles like The Latimer Scholarship (Olivia Powell, Blackie, no date) and One Glorious Term (Margaret Lisle, Purnell & Sons, 1961) is minimal. I stress that these examples are entirely arbitrary, being titles from my own shelves, bought very cheaply because they were school stories, read once, and kept only because I find it impossible to discard a book once acquired.

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103. Ibid, p. vi
104. Thomas Hughes, Tom Brown's Schooldays, 1857
105. Isabel Quigly, The Heirs of Tom Brown, 1982, p.214
106. Sue Sims, 'The Series Factor', in Rosemary Auchmuty & Juliet Gosling, eds. The Chalet School Revisited, 1994
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108. D.L. Kirkpatrick, op. cit., p.964
109. Ibid., p.192
110. Christabel Marlowe, Shirley at Charterton (no date, but clearly, judging by the illustrations and the details of domestic and school life, a 1920s story)
111. Examples are legion, and any second-hand bookshop will usually yield up some copies. They are distinguishable because, unlike the 'collected' authors, they are very cheap.
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113. David Bathurst, Six of the Best, 1994
114. Auchmuty & Gosling, op.cit.
115. Jeffrey Richards, 'The School Story' in Dennis Butts, ed., Stories and Society, 1992, p. 11
116. Jeffrey Richards, ed. Imperialism and Juvenile Literature, 1989
117. See boys' school stories by, eg. Harold Avery for comparison
118. Richards, 1992, loc. cit.
119. There are many examples. The most striking can be found in Quigly, op.cit., and Lamb & Pickthorn, Locked Up Daughters, 1968
120. Rosemary Auchmuty, op. cit., explores in detail the reasons for this.
121. See texts noted in note 119
122. Nicholas Tucker, Suitable for Children?, 1976
123. Ibid., p.13
124. Nicholas Tucker, 'School Stories 1970-1980' in Children's Literature in Education, vol. 13, no. 2
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126. Peter Hunt, Children's Literature: Contemporary Criticism, 1992, p.2
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129. Ibid., p.14
130. Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig, You're a Brick, Angela is the most noteworthy example of this tendency within a substantial study.
- 131.16. C. S. Tatham, 'Yesterday's Schoolgirls' in Junior Bookshelf, vol. 33, 1969
132. Peter Hunt, Children's Literature: The Development of Criticism, 1990, p.5
133. John Rowe Townsend, quoted in Leeson, op. cit., p.122

134. 'M.R.H.', Review of Antonia Forest's The Cricket Term, Junior Bookshelf, vol. 13, no. 1 (February 1975)
135. Nicholas Tucker, The Child and the Book, 1981
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137. C.J. Driver, 'The relevance of relevance' in Children's Literature in Education, Winter, 1976, p.170
138. Leeson, op. cit., p.131
139. Morag Styles et al, eds. After Alice, 1992, p.30
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141. In the past few decades, British children's writers come from more diverse backgrounds, reflecting a plural society, eg. Rukshana Smith, Jamila Gavin, Narinder Dhani, etc.
142. Kirkpatrick, op. cit., p.469
143. John Rowe Townsend, Written for Children, 1983, p. 111
144. Fred Inglis, The Promise of Happiness, 1981, p.177
145. Arthur Marshall satirised Angela Brazil's stories in various articles, focusing especially on Brazil's use of admittedly rather ridiculous slang: eg. 'The Games Mistress', recorded monologue, 1937: 'Oh My! Bertha's got a bang on the boko. Keep a stiff upper lip, Bertha dear.' See also Girls Will Be Girls (1974) and Life's Rich Pageant (1984)
146. eg. 'The Belles of St. Trinians' (1954); 'The Great St. Trinian's Train Robbery' (1966)
147. Denise Deegan, Daisy Pulls It Off, 1983
148. Avery, Childhood's Pattern, p. 210
149. Tatham, op. cit.
150. Kirkpatrick, op. cit., p.171
151. Peter Hollindale, 'Ideology and the Children's Book', in Hunt, 1992, p.18
152. 'M.C.' (clearly Marcus Crouch), review of Antonia Forest's The Attic Term, Junior Bookshelf, vol.14, no.1 (February 1977)
153. The 'Trebizon' series, published by Puffin, eg. Boy Trouble at Trebizon 1980, 1988
154. Griffiths, op. cit., p.3
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158. Wayne Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, quoted by Felicity Hughes, loc. cit.
159. Ibid.
160. Ibid.
161. Gillian Avery, Childhood's Pattern, 1975, p.231
162. Fred Inglis, 'Reading Children'n Novels: Notes on the Politics of Literature' in Geoff Fox et al, eds. Writers, Critics and Children: Articles From CLIE, 1976, p.165

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164. Janice Radway, Reading the Romance, 1981, p.91
165. Sheila Egoff, Thursday's Child, 1981, 28
166. Lorna Rutter in Friends of the Chalet School Newsletter No. 41, August 1998, p.15
167. Radway, op. cit., p.112
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169. Auchmuty, op. cit., passim
170. Joanne Richardson (aged 15) in Friends of the Chalet School Newsletter, No. 32, May 1996, p.31
171. The Chalet Club Newsletters, published by Chambers between 1959 and 1969
172. Hollindale, op. cit., p.33
173. Ibid., p.27
174. F. W. Farrar, Eric, or Little By Little, 1858
175. Hollindale, op. cit., p.29
176. Ibid., loc. cit.
177. Ibid., p.31
178. Ibid., p.32
179. Ibid., p.33
180. Michael Benton, 'Children's Responses to the Text' in Hunt, 1990, p.115
181. Hunt, 1990, p.1
182. Marcus Crouch, The Nesbit Tradition, 1972, p.3
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184. John Rowe Townsend, quoted in Hunt, 1990, p.57
185. Jane Gardam, A Long Way From Verona (1971) is published by both Sphere (Abacus) and Puffin, as is Bilgewater (1976). Both were originally published by Hamish Hamilton.
186. Richard Adams, Watership Down (1972) is published by Penguin and Puffin. It was originally published by Collins.
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190. Victor Watson in Styles et al, eds. After Alice, 1992, p.23
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**Chapter 1: Exploding the myths of the girls' school story:
Angela Lambert's No Talking After Lights in relation to
Elinor M. Brent-Dyer's 'Chalet School' series**

1. Angela Lambert, No Talking After Lights, 1990, 1991, p.1
2. Ibid., Author's Note
3. Isabel Quigly, reviewing No Talking After Lights in 'The Financial Times' (quoted on back of Penguin 1991 edition)
4. Avery, The Best Kind of Girl, 1991, p. 221
5. Marcus Crouch, review of Antonia Forest's The Ready-Made Family, in Junior Bookshelf, vol.31, 1967, p.408
6. Lamb & Pickthorn, Locked Up Daughters, 1968, p.73
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9. Janet Todd, ed., A Dictionary of British Women Writers, 1992, p.225
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Marcus Crouch, The Nesbit Tradition, 1972, p.164
13. Auchmuty, op. cit., 99
14. Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School Does It Again, 1955, p. 10
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16. Cadogan & Craig, 1976, p. 97
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20. Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, The New Mistress at the Chalet School, 1957, p.223
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30. Elizabeth Bowen, Introduction to Virago edition of Frost in May, 1978, p. v
31. Tatham, op. cit.
31. Hunt, ed., 1990, p. 2
32. Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, the 'Chalet School' series, passim
33. Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, the 'Chalet School' series, passim

34. J. D. Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye, 1951
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36. Alison Hennegan, 'On becoming a lesbian reader' in Radstone, ed., Sweet Dreams, p.10
37. Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, A Problem for the Chalet School, 1956, p. 134
38. Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, Prefect of the Chalet School, 1969, 1993 p. 143
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44. Auchmuty, op. cit., p. 108
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46. Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, Tom Tackles the Chalet School, 1955, 1988, p. 43
47. Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School Reunion, 1963, p.50
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49. Ibid., p. 90
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53. Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, The Coming of Age of the Chalet School, 1958, p. 32
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62. Ibid., p. 107
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68. Ibid., p. 72
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- p. 57
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 84. Ibid., p. 120
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 92. Enid Blyton, Second Form at Malory Towers, 1947, 1967, p. 152
 93. Evelyn Simms, Stella Wins the School, 1933, p. 97
 94. Christabel Marlowe, Shirley at Charterton, p. 208
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Chapter Two: The school novel: Antonia White's Frost in May

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3. Ibid., p. 24
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5. Ibid., p. 106
6. Gabriele Griffin, in Elaine Hobby & Chris White, eds., What Lesbians Do In Books, 1991, p. 147
7. Antonia White, Frost in May, 1933, 1978, p. 72
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9. Ibid., p. 61
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11. Ibid., p. 27
12. Ibid., p. 28
13. Ibid., p. 15
14. Ibid., p. 32
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21. Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, The School at the Chalet, 1925, 1948, p. 134
22. Paulina Palmer, 'Antonia White's Frost in May: A Lesbian Reading', in Susan Sellers, ed. Feminist Criticism: Theory and Practice, 1991, p.97
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25. Antonia White, Frost in May, 1978, p. 79
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43. Ibid., p. 107
44. Chadwick, op. cit. p. 212

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57. Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Dimsie, Head Girl, 1925, p.229
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61. Ibid., p.95
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63. Ibid., p. 112
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68. Ibid., p. 187
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77. Ibid., p. 123
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91. Ibid., p. 198
92. Ibid., 201

93. Vera Brittain, Testament of Youth, 1933, 1981, p. 76
94. Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, the New House at the Chalet School, 1935, 1963, p. 29
95. Paulina Palmer, op. cit., p.94
96. Penny Brown, op. cit., p.124
97. Antonia White, Frost in May, 1933, 1978, p. 212
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103. Ibid., p. 220
104. Ibid., p. 176
105. Ibid., p. 122
106. Ibid., p. 205
107. Ibid., p. 205
108. Ibid.
109. Ibid., p. 105
110. Ibid., p. 157
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115. Ibid., p. 168
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117. Ibid., p. 169
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119. Edna O'Brien, The Country Girls, 1960, 1988, p. 10-11
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123. See, for example, Emma Donoghue, Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668-1801, 1993; Gabriele Griffin, Heavenly Love? Lesbian Images in Twentieth-Century Women's Writing, 1993; Elaine Hobby & Chris White, What Lesbians Do In Books, 1991.

Chapter 3: Friendship as Rebellion: Antonia White's 'The Lost Traveller

1. Although Antonia White herself asserts that 'of course Clara is a continuation of Nanda' and Carmen Callil, in her introduction to the Virago edition of the novel, says that 'In every other respect, this novel begins where Frost in May ends', this is not quite true. The novels differ on several admittedly minor details (the nationality of Leonie/Nicole - French in The Lost Traveller, French/German in Frost in May; Nicole declares in The Lost Traveller that she has 'just got on to Baudelaire', but in Frost in May she quoted from Les Fleurs du Mal; Clara's edition of Francis Thompson's poetry is, in Frost in May, a gift from Leonie, in The Lost Traveller from her father, etc) and in one very major one: in Frost in May Nanda is expelled from the convent; in The Lost Traveller she has to leave because Claude can no longer afford the fees. In her diary, White says, 'It is a great pity that I did not make The Lost Traveller a proper sequel to Frost in May (Antonia White, Diaries, 1926-1957, ed. Susan Chitty, Virago, 1991, p. 235)
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21. Ibid., pp. 64-5
22. Ibid., p. 163
23. Ibid., p. 115
24. Ibid., p. 77
25. Ibid., p. 174
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27. Griffiths, op. cit., p. 3
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38. Ibid., p. 150
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40. Ibid., p. 170
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44. Ibid., p. 209
45. Ibid., p. 179
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47. Ibid., p. 212
48. Ibid., p. 170
49. Ibid., p. 160
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51. Ibid., p. 304
52. Ibid., p. 170
53. Ibid., p. 98
54. Ibid., p. 81
55. Ibid., p. 97
56. Ibid., p. 97
57. Angela Brazil, The Nicest Girl in the School, 1909, p.147
58. Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, Three Go To The Chalet School, 1948, p.136
59. Griffiths, op. cit.
60. Antonia White, The Lost Traveller, 1979, p. 112
61. Ibid., p. 75
62. Ibid., p. 282
63. Ibid., p. 304
64. Ibid., p. 83
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70. Ibid., p. 143
71. Ibid., p. 142
72. Ibid., p. 143
73. Ibid., p. 126
74. Ibid., p. 174

**Chapter 4: Friendship as Threat: Janice Elliott's
Secret Places**

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2. Janice Elliott, Secret Places, 1981, p.96
3. There are many references to homosexuality being an immature phase. See, for example, the works on adolescence cited in the Introduction, 2, I.
4. Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', in Signs, 5, Summer 1990
5. Faderman, op. cit., p. 311
6. Rich, loc. cit.
7. Elliott, op. cit., p. 152
8. Ibid., p. 32
9. Ibid., p. 64
10. Ibid., p. 14
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., p. 15
13. Ibid., p. 9
14. Ibid., p. 90
15. Ibid., p. 53
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27. Ibid., pp. 24-5
28. Ibid., p. 14
29. Avery, The Best Type of Girl, 1991, Ch. 12
30. Elliott, op. cit., p. 123
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32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Vicinus, op. cit., p. 215
35. Elliott, op. cit., p.22
36. Ibid., p. 167
37. Ibid., p. 153
38. Ibid., p. 17
39. Ibid., p. 89
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43. Ibid.
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45. Elliott, op. cit., p. 174

46. Ibid., p. 48
47. Ibid., pp. 175-6
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51. Ibid., p. 36
52. Ibid., p. 186
53. Ibid.
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55. Ibid., p. 134
56. Ibid.
57. Rachel Pinney, quoted in Suzanne Neild & Rosalind Pearson, eds. Women Like Us, 1992, p. 24
58. Elliott, op. cit., p.96
59. Ibid., p. 121
60. Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, A Problem for the Chalet School, 1956, p. 145
61. Elliott, op. cit., p. 72
62. Ibid., p. 73
63. Ibid., p. 138
64. Ibid., p. 160
65. Simone de Beauvoir, op. cit., p.366
66. Ibid., p. 152
67. Ibid., p. 169
68. Ibid., p. 157
69. Ibid., p. 187
70. Ibid., p. 174
71. Ibid., p. 96
72. Ibid., p. 97
73. Ibid., p. 167
74. Ibid., p. 181
75. Ibid., p. 182
76. Judy Cooke, 'Losing Innocence': Review of Secret Places in The New Statesman, vol.101, no.2607, March 6, 1981, pp.22-3
77. Elliott, op. cit., p. 184
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid.
80. Ibid., p. 186
81. Ibid., p. 167
82. Ibid., p. 191
83. Ibid., p. 152
84. Ibid.
85. Two excellent novels on the subject which spring to mind are American 'young adult' novels, Hey Dollface (Deborah Hautzig) and Annie on my Mind (Nancy Jardine). Being American, these are outside the scope of this study, but should certainly be read by anyone interested in girls' school friendships.
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87. Ibid.
88. Elliott, op. cit., p. 150
89. Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, Mary-Lou of the Chalet School, 1956, p. 198

90. In the 1984 film Secret Places Nina, who is quite clearly described in the novel as very dark, with long straight black hair, is portrayed with a blonde 'Bubbles' haircut and a silly, high-pitched voice. The complexity of her character is thus somehow denied, as she becomes a very obvious 'bimbo' caricature, a high spirited 'good time girl' with none of the depth of the original character. This is a pity, because Patience, Laura and Rose are very aptly rendered.
91. Elliott, op. cit., p. 23

Chapter 5: The college friendship (1920s): Rosamond
Lehmann's Dusty Answer

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3. Review of Dusty Answer in 'The Sunday Times', quoted in Peter Parker, ed., The Reader's Companion to the Twentieth Century Novel, 1994, p. 121
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34. Angela Brazil, A Fourth Form Friendship, 1911, p. 114
35. Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, The Princess at the Chalet School 1927, p. 123
36. Lehmann, op. cit., p. 130
37. Ibid., p. 132
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid., p. 133
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41. Ibid., p. 31
42. Alcott, op. cit., p. 48
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- 1951, p. 13; The Princess of the Chalet School, 1927, p. 19; Gerry Goes to School, 1922, p. 18
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 46. Ibid., pp. 140-1
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 50. Ibid., p. 137
 51. Cadogan & Craig, You're A Brick Angela, 1976, p. 212
 52. Ibid., p. 122
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**Chapter 7: The school story proper: Antonia Forest's
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6. Crouch, op. cit., p. 165
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