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Radclyffe Hall

Richard Dellamora

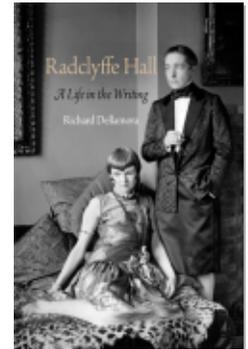
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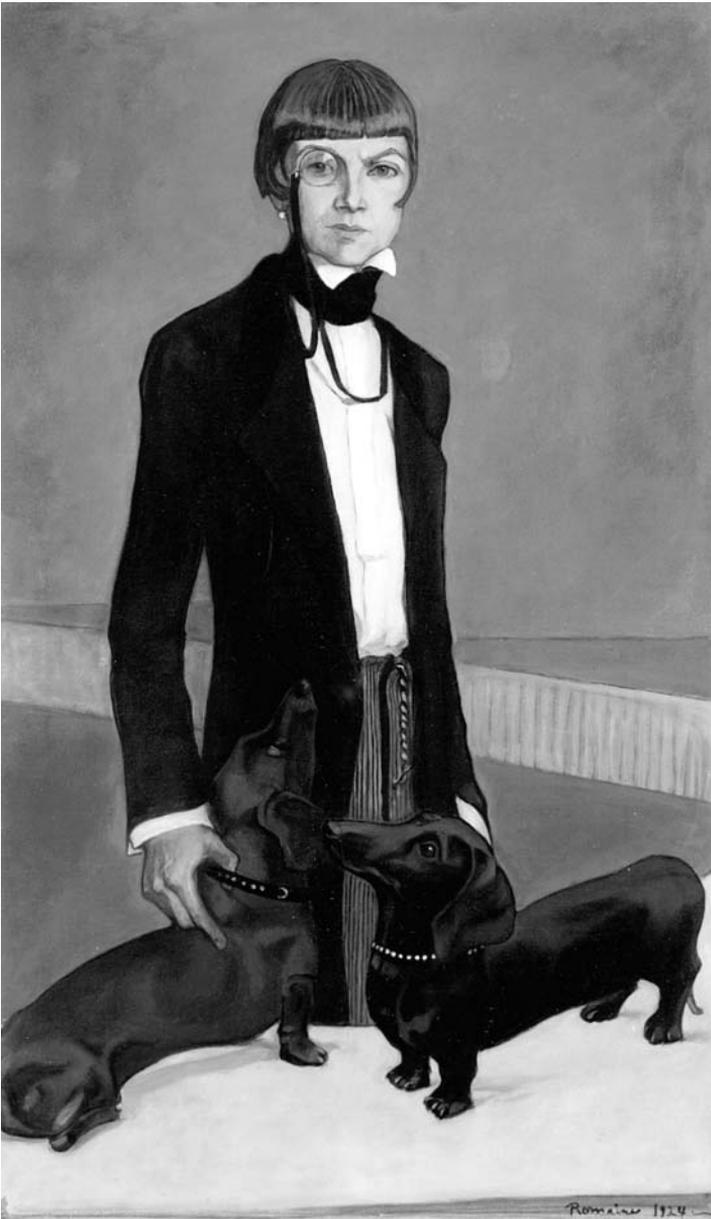
Una Troubridge and Gender Performativity in *A Saturday Life*

This chapter begins and ends with a discussion of the reflexive relationship between Hall's next novel, *A Saturday Life* (1925), and emergent lesbian public culture. Beginning with a discussion of personal agency within the project of modernist self-fashioning, the chapter moves outward to consider how the novel is mediated by an unfolding culture of sexual dissidence: namely, the emergence of Noël Coward as a presence in West End theater in the early 1920s; the continuing impact of Colette's outspoken experiments in sexual self-figuration; and, finally, the material provided by a series of unpublished memoir-like essays written by Hall's partner, Una Troubridge. The trajectory of Hall's fictional biography of Sidonia Shore in *A Saturday Life* lines up with that of young Troubridge. Key aspects of Troubridge's life—the various arts in which she trained, her rejection of male mentors, her ambivalence about her failure to develop fully her potential as an artist, her bisexuality, her ambivalence about being a mother, and her highly self-conscious sense of gender performance—provide the novel with its thematics. The end of the chapter returns to the question of agency through an account of the reception of Hall's novel by a Sapphic readership.

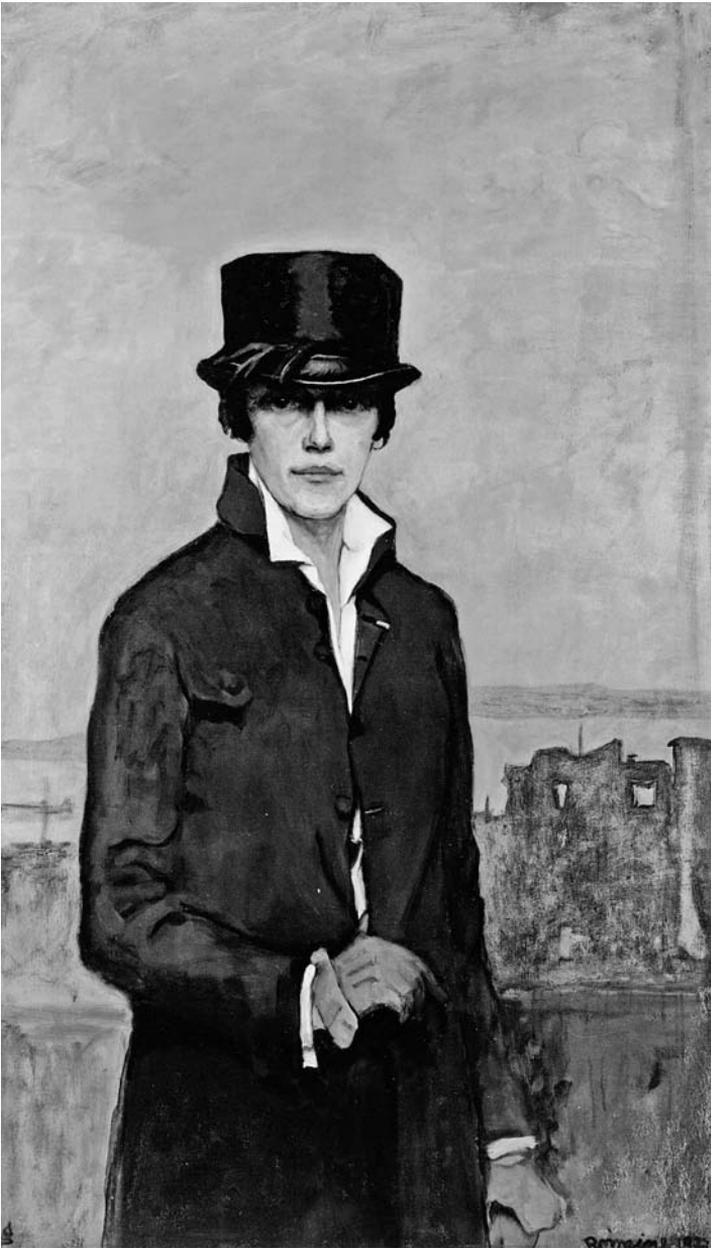
As an adolescent student of art, Troubridge had been fascinated by gender masquerade both in West End theater and in her own experimental approach to dress. A self-blazoned female masculinity characterizes a number of contemporary visual representations, most notably Romaine Brooks's sympathetic but observant 1924 portrait. Brooks appears to have felt a close identification with the younger woman if one is to judge by the close relationship in pose, tonality, and gender-inflection between Brooks' self-portrait of a year earlier and the approach that she chose to take to Troubridge. Even the gesture of Brooks's gloved left hand resembles the torsion of Troubridge's bared right hand, firmly gripping with one finger a prize dachshund by the collar. Troubridge's challenging gaze, directed straight at the observer and monocled no less, declares her "out" inversion while her elongated slenderness suggests the tense sense of vulnerability that accompanies her bravado. At the same time, the eyebrow, arched in concern, and the pursed but slightly askew line of the lips suggests that the performance is not free of care.

Brooks imagines Troubridge as part of a couple, whose other half is slyly signified by the pair of dachshunds before her. The upturned gaze of the one that she holds onto suggests the control that she managed to exercise over Hall for nearly twenty years, while the other dog's lifted gaze, directed toward an object beyond the edge of the picture plane, suggests that Hall has not yet been completely subdued. Troubridge appears more directly as part of a couple in one of the plates prepared by Beresford Egan for *The Sink of Solitude*, a satirical pamphlet published in 1928 at the height of the controversy over *The Well of Loneliness*. In its title, *Similier Similibus*, the work invokes the notion of the attraction of like to like that was crucial to the telepathic model of Sapphic pair-bonding.¹ In this case, Egan satirizes a well-known 1927 photographic studio double portrait of Hall and Troubridge.² Hall stands, "unlit cigarette and monocle"³ in hand, with gaze directed to the left beyond the edge of the photograph. She is dressed in a stock, upturned white collar, patterned smoking jacket, and straight skirt. Troubridge plays the part of a high femme. Her flowing, patterned dress spreads across a leopard skin laid on a divan as she sits, with gaze turned inward, facing away from Hall.

Egan, however, does not see a butch-femme couple in this pair. Rather, he sees two very different kinds of female masculinity. Reversing the position of the two women, Egan places "Hall" reclining on cushions and facing upward toward "Troubridge," who stands. Their linkage as a couple is



10. Romaine Brooks. *Una, Lady Troubridge*, 1924. Smithsonian American Art Museum. Gift of the artist.

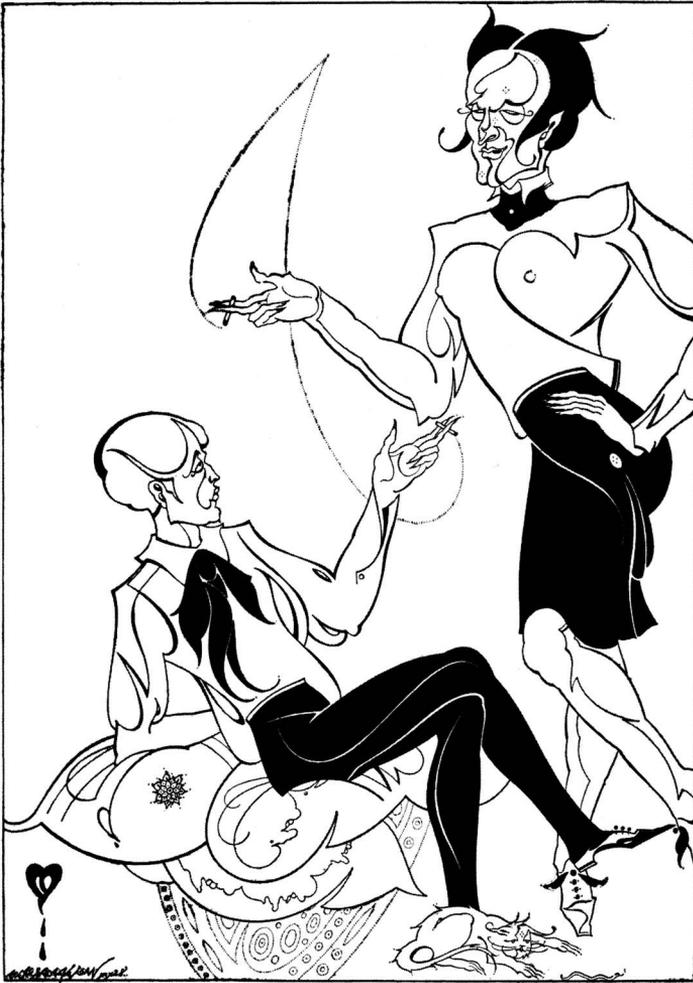


11. Romaine Brooks. *Self-Portrait*, 1932. Smithsonian American Art Museum. Gift of the artist.



12. *Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge*, detail, 1927. Hulton Getty/Liaison Agency.

graphed by the arabesque line that joins their two outstretched cigarettes. (Troubridge has no cigarette in the photograph.) Hall's is a middle-aged boy/man/woman's face. The white shirt has become a flowing blouse. The stock too flows. And the side view of the trim thigh is attractive. The S-curve of "Troubridge's" jacket and tight skirt likewise suggests femininity, but her exaggerated bosom resembles a breastplate for Brünnhilde, a prosthetic substitute for female primary sexual characteristics. And her arms



13. Beresford Egan. *Similier Similibus*. In Percy Reginald Stephensen et al., *The Sink of Solitude*. London: Hermes, 1928.

akimbo stance is anything but feminine. The face bears the mask of a middle-aged male. Egan’s reversal of the two women’s positions and his inversions suggest a difference between Hall’s so to speak natural perversion and her partner’s highly manipulated combination of conflicting semi-otic signs. In psychoanalytic terms, Egan’s “Troubridge” may be read as an allegorical figure of Freud’s concept of the female masculinity complex

discussed in Chapter 4 while “Hall” might figure what Hall regarded as female virility. Both Brooks’s sympathetic fascination with Troubridge’s masculinity and Egan’s implicit negativity about Troubridge’s performance of femininity are worth keeping in mind in reading this chapter, which emphasizes the reflections on performance and performativity that living with Troubridge prompted for Hall.

Hall wrote *A Saturday Life* at a time when her partnership with Troubridge appeared to be flourishing and when Hall was enjoying commercial and critical success as an author while surrounded by a friendly circle of literary collaborators. Talented female couples participated with Troubridge and Audrey Heath, Hall’s literary agent, in “red-penciling” the manuscript of the novel.⁴ Readers owe to this cooperation the economy of the book and its blithely Sapphic ending. One such pair was Rachel Barrett and her lover, Ida Wylie, a successful writer of fiction. Wylie was an outspoken feminist, suffragette, and Sapphist. Another friend was the novelist Vere Hutchinson. She and her partner, the illustrator Dorothy (“Budge”) Burroughes-Burroughes, also lent a hand.⁵ This mutually supportive environment accounts for the casual feminism of the novel and its direction from Sapphic perspectives.

During the period when Hall was writing the novel and preparing it for publication, Noël Coward was enjoying his first great success as a playwright and actor in London with *The Vortex* (1924), a *succès du scandale*.⁶ Teddie Gerard, who replaced Gertrude Lawrence in the London run of Coward’s earlier review, *London Calling!* (1923), was a close friend of Hall and Troubridge at the time.⁷ The social exhilaration attending a string of contemporaneous early theatrical successes by Coward that starred acquaintances of Hall such as Tallulah Bankhead likewise contributes to the insouciant tenor of the novel.⁸ The absence of plot, the shortage of conventional action, and the emphasis on dialogue share features of Coward’s approach in early hits such as *Hay Fever* (1925).

As a Sapphic fiction, *A Saturday Life* has an oblique but powerful referent in the figure of Colette.⁹ “Sido,” Sidonia’s nickname in the novel, was Colette’s pet name for her mother. And “Mummy,” Sidonia’s epithet for her own mother, indexes the appearance of Colette in the guise of a revived mummy in *Rêve d’Égypte*, a key moment both in the self-invention of Colette as an artistic celebrity and in the formation of early twentieth-century Sapphic public culture.

A Saturday Life focuses on the relations between three women: Sidonia; her mother, Lady Shore; and Frances Reide, a “happily unmarried,”

middle-aged woman who plays the role of mentor to the other two.¹⁰ Although Mozartian in tone, the novel is shadowed by troubling suggestions of maternal indifference; by the implication of incestuous desire in Sidonia and her mother's triangulated emotional bonds with Frances; by feminine and feminist recoil against heterosexual marriage; and by repeatedly expressed concerns about how women's ambitions, capabilities, and education are shaped by men. The most prominent formal feature of the novel is Hall's use of the theosophical machinery of the "Saturday life" to structure the fictional biography of Sidonia. Readers of *The Well of Loneliness* tend to associate Hall with naturalistic conceptions of gender and sexuality. Naturalism, however, is only one component in Hall's outlook. In *A Saturday Life*, invocation of the theory of reincarnation provides her with a way to project the very different idea of gender and sexuality as performative. Sidonia's continual variability is key to her appeal. Nonetheless, while Hall portrays in Sidonia an ever-changing protagonist, basic questions concerning the conditions of personal agency hover around her performativity.

In the novel, performativity often looks like caprice or willfulness. These aspects of Sidonia's personality are contextualized in two conflicting ways. On the one hand, she is continually subjected to complaints by others that her behavior is egoistical. For example, Einar Jensen, her most influential artistic mentor, complains that her talent as a sculptor is limited by "in the end one sin, just only one sin—Self" (148). On the other hand, Jensen recognizes a contrary quality in her work, "genius": "To me it seems so strange that your work is what it is. Where do you get genius, all shut up as you are?" (148). Genius in this sense means what it does in the work of Frederic Myers, whose views helped motivate Hall's early efforts as a poet. To Myers, genius means the ability of the artist to draw upon unconscious mental processes in her work, a process that he also regards as analogous with the openness of the psyche to communications from the spirits of the deceased.¹¹ In a moral register, this permeability counters Sidonia's pride and self-love; in this way, openness to otherness enables performativity. But this capability exists in tension and conflict with Sidonia's ego-driven impulses and behavior.

The preoccupation with genius implies difficult questions about aesthetic form and agency. If the abrupt changes in direction that characterize Sidonia's early life result from the incursion of other selves into her ego, to what extent can she be said to be responsible for her actions or, indeed, to be capable of choice? And, without choice, what shape can fictional narrative in the form of biography take?—only the naturalistic one, powerfully

traced by Hall in her first completed novel, *The Unlit Lamp*. Naturalism is never far from the lives portrayed in *A Saturday Life*, but Hall makes use of Theosophy to avoid producing a naturalist text.

As we will see later in the chapter when we consider readers' responses to the novel, the question of choice is an important one for a novel whose composition and circulation work to fashion a lesbian public culture. If, in the words of the correspondence of one reader, Grace Spencer, with Hall, her novels demonstrate that it is necessary to "act," what does *action* mean when the very possibility of self-directed action is put in question by the theosophical premise of *A Saturday Life*? Hall answers this question within the framework of popular speculative psychology. Female solidarity is enacted by means of telepathy, a belief in unmediated thinking with and as another that was axiomatic across the spectrum of such psychology, including Freudian psychoanalysis.¹² From this vantage, the chief value, personal and political, instanced by the novel is its performance of transparent communicability.

Sidonia's eccentric path can be understood in both psychological and sociological terms. Her inability to persevere in her artistic pursuits can be assigned to her upbringing as the spoiled child of a deceased father and a detached mother. Sidonia's willfulness in adolescence and early adulthood can likewise be attributed to her status as a trust-fund child, who comes into "a thousand a year, perhaps more," at the age of twenty-one.¹³ And her inclination to believe in reincarnation is doubtless influenced by her parents' absorption in Egyptology. The novel itself poses, ironically and lightly but persistently, the possibility of understanding the action in terms of theosophical myth. The latter mode of explanation might account for the formal incongruities of the narrative. First of all, Sidonia, like the representations of vacant modern men that I describe in the preceding chapter, is undefined as a character. In this respect, the novel lacks action in the Aristotelian sense. Instead, from early childhood, Sidonia is successively possessed by a number of different artistic affinities and aspirations. For example, we first see her as a young child improvising a Greek dance. Her next phase is as a Classical pianist; next, she shows the aptitudes of a Renaissance or Rodinesque modeler of wax and clay, and, finally, she undergoes vocal training after learning that she has "a wonderful voice, a fine dramatic soprano" (185). With no prior training, Sidonia performs with virtuosity in all of these ways. However, in each instance, her passion and skill fade as quickly as they begin. In this way, the text experiments with the characterless, actionless form of the modern novel.¹⁴

Near the end of the novel, Frances finds “a queer old book one day in a second-hand bookshop” in Florence that seems to be “a kind of simple treatise on the different theories held in the East regarding re-incarnation” (212, 213). Glancing through it, she is surprised to find a chapter that appears to address Sidonia’s situation:

According to an Eastern tradition, whose origin is lost in antiquity, there are certain spirits who incarnate seven times only on Earth. The seventh incarnation of such a spirit is known as “The Final Path,” but among those in the West who hold this theory it is sometime referred to as “The Saturday Life.”

People who are living a “Saturday Life” are said to have no new experiences, but to spend it entirely in a last rehearsal of experiences previously gained. They are said to exhibit remarkable talent for a number of different things; but since they have many memories to revive, they can never concentrate for long on one. (213)

Sidonia is both excited and relieved since, if valid, the theory, in her words, “would explain *me!*” (214). It would also relieve the guilt that she feels for having let down Jensen. Were this “theory” (215) to be true, it would also negate questions of individual agency, responsibility, and cause and effect for the “Saturday Lifer.” In that case, as Frances says, Sidonia “would be something very like a convict, chained to . . . [her] previous experiences” (215). The end point of this notion of the interfusion of diverse egos is the same as that of the single individual caught in the toils of modern life in the novel of literary naturalism as criticized by such literary modernists as Virginia Woolf.¹⁵ In both cases, fictional biography is the effect of something else, of the manifestation of prior selves in the present personality in one view, of sociobiological law in the other. Both approaches, the metaphysical and the materialistic, negate personal agency.

Readers today are likely to respond to the myth of a Saturday life with skepticism. It is worth keeping in mind, however, that Hall was attempting to formulate an understanding of psychology in vernacular terms for a female readership in the face of male authority and, in particular, of Freud’s attempt to offer an exclusively oedipal analysis of female homosexuality.¹⁶ At the same time, many of the axioms that she derived from her years of psychical research are shared with those from psychoanalysis.¹⁷ For example, Freud too rejected the identification of the ego with the concept of the

cogito. Two years before the publication of Hall's book, he wrote, "The character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes and . . . it contains the history of those object-choices."¹⁸ Both Hall and Freud believed in spectral inhabitants of the psyche.

Hall attempts to resolve the conundrum of agency by means of the modern—and modernist—theory of aesthetic impersonality that she had worked out in her preceding novel, *The Forge*.¹⁹ For the painter, Venetia Ford, in that novel, subject and object in art and life are joined by their share in what Ford calls "spirit," something that grounds all forms of existence²⁰—hence too the potential transparency of the relationship between art and its producer or between one mind and another. Just as Hall in 1906 had dedicated her first book of poetry to "MY INSPIRATION," she dedicates the new novel "to Myself" [*sic*], namely, to a self that is permeable to the experience of others. The reliance on the concept of telepathy in *A Saturday Life* likewise echoes the epigraph to the earlier work:

I know that through the waves of air,
Some part of all I feel for you,
Must surely travel swift and true,
Towards the heart for which I care
So dumbly, and before it lay
The words my lips shall never say.²¹

The myth of a Saturday life is only the most explicit form that theosophical thinking takes in the novel. Hall repeatedly turns to theosophical temporality in structuring the novel. For example, at the beginning of the novel, she uses theosophical suggestion in order to provide a Sapphic frame for the action. In this way, Theosophy, as in the lines of poetry quoted above, provides a structure for female-female desire. As I mention in Chapter 1, in addition to *The Forgotten Island* (1915), an imitation of Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper's late Victorian literary impersonation of Sappho in *Long Ago* (1889), Hall in other poetry frequently fashions a Sapphic pastoral landscape. Writing under the pseudonym of Michael Field, Bradley and Cooper developed a phenomenology of woman's desire that is both homo- and hetero-erotic.²² Hall adapts this structure in organizing her own novel, which begins in an equivocal Sapphic register, continues through Sidonia's adolescent fixation on Frances, then detours into a heterosexual episode before coming to a point of rest at the end of the novel by reestablishing Sidonia's tie with Frances on a more intimate and adult basis.

The novel begins with Hall's usual introduction of a slim-hipped, young heroine, in this case one whose untutored grace as a classical dancer "suggested something perfect in freedom, that belonged to the youth of the world" (10). Encouraged by Frances, Lady Shore accedes to Sidonia's wish to study dancing. As it happens, the Rose Valery School for dance that she attends is run by the spinster daughter of a clergyman, who indulges herself in the delusion that—like Sappho—she once lived as a courtesan and teacher of dance in ancient Greece. Valery lives in a third-floor flat in Fulham, decorated to look like a Grecian interior. In her account, Hall underscores the materialism of late Victorian popular belief in reincarnation. Valery's fantasy depends on the doubtful authenticity of a Greek lamp, which allegedly has triggered her memory of an earlier life: "'I *am* a Greek reincarnation,' she said doubtfully; 'I feel that I simply must be!'" (35). Valery's reliance on this material sign touches on the obsessive preoccupation within psychical research, including Hall's own, for physical evidence of the continuing existence of human personality after death. The text recognizes that such convictions are driven by subjective need—and this motive Hall rejects.

If the individual psyche does in fact manifest itself in selves that exist in various times and places, then these variations are liable to occur to or even to possess (220), in Frances's word, the present self. None of these selves are effects of her majesty, Ms. Ego. The multilived self is impersonal. For Hall, the notion of this variable selfhood is supplemented by the notion of material disability just as, in the early poem, "The Scar," she attributes her creativity as an artist to the "deep wound" of sexual inversion.²³ The idea that genius depends upon wounds, psychic and physical, is not uncommon, both in nineteenth-century Romanticism and in psychoanalytically inflected modern criticism, such as Edmund Wilson's use of Philoctetes as a type of the artist in *The Wound and the Bow* (1941). Feminist ideology of the early twentieth century endorsed the Freudian notion of activist and artistic sublimation.²⁴ Hall further links this complex of ideas with Theosophy and the possibility that the crossgendered bodily ego may be perfected as another self in a future incarnation.

Hall mythologizes herself as artist in the person of Jensen, whose work is by his own account "inferior" (149). Blocked in the creation of his art, he also suffers from the physical deformity of a crooked back, which he hopes he may be relieved of in a future life. Conversing with Sidonia, he says:

“What will happen when I die? Shall my back grow straight, you think? That is what I ask the books—that, and other things.”

“Then you believe in an after life?”

“Oh, yes, but I am certain.”

“Why, mon maître?”

“I cannot tell you; myself has told myself.” (149)

This “myself” is the same condition of selfhood to which Hall dedicates her novel.

In England in 1925, a well-known instance of short-lived versatility in an artist of apparent genius existed in Lord Berners, an avant-garde composer and ambivalent homosexual. Berners produced his final major work, a camp ballet entitled *The Triumph of Neptune*, to a scenario by Sir Sacheverell Sitwell, for Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes in 1926, with choreography provided by the twenty-two-year-old George Balanchine. In February 1925, Virginia Woolf comments in her diary on how Berners described himself to her: “One day he wrote two [three actually and it is not clear they were his first] marches for fun. Stravinsky saw them, thought them good, and they were published. So he was accepted as a serious musician with only four lessons from [Sir Donald] Tovey in counterpoint. He had an astonishing facility. He could write things that sounded alright. Suddenly, last year, all his pleasure in it went. He met a painter, asked him how you paint; bought ‘hogsheads’—(meant hogs’ bristles) and canvas and copied an Italian picture, brilliantly, consummately, says Clive Bell. Has the same facility there: but it will come to nothing, he said, like the other.”²⁵ Coward focuses on a similar flaw in Nicky Lancaster, the young male lead played by Coward in *The Vortex*.²⁶ Nicky is a classical pianist.²⁷ In Act 1, Helen and her friend “Pawnie,” “an elderly maiden gentleman,”²⁸ anticipating the young man’s arrival home after a year of study in Paris, discuss the progress—or lack thereof—that he has made while away. Pawnie complains that Nicky’s playing is “erratic—one or two things perfect, but he’s slovenly.” Helen replies: “He only takes things seriously in spurts” (99).

In the play, Coward emphasizes sexual and gender fluidity in a trio of young characters. Later in the act, Nicky returns to his parents’ home, followed shortly by his new fiancée, Bunty Mainwaring, “more attractive than pretty in a boyish sort of way” (122). Upon arriving, Bunty encounters an old flame, Tom Veryan,²⁹ young, athletic, and currently involved in an affair with Nicky’s mother, Florence, a famous but fading beauty. Bunty’s former

attachment immediately throws cold water on the notion of her marrying Nicky:

Tom: It seems so funny you being in love with that sort of chap.

Bunty: What do you mean by “that sort of chap”?

Tom: Oh—I don’t know, that type seems so unlike you.

Bunty: Type?

Tom: Yes, you know—up in the air—effeminate.

Bunty: You’re more bucolic than you used to be, Tom.

Tom: Here, I say . . . (127–28)

Perhaps Tom in the past has been not quite as straight as he now presents himself to be. Regardless, he succeeds in touching a nerve since Bunty has already told Nicky that he suffers from “hysteria” and “temperament” (125); meeting Tom, she tells him that her fiancé suffers from “nerves” (127).

Act 2 finds the characters translated to Florence’s country home for a soggy summer weekend. On Saturday, Tom and Bunty rendezvous privately and renew their relationship. Characteristically, this key action, rather than being dramatized, is casually disclosed in conversation with Tom at the end of the act. Bunty, who in Paris had briefly broken from her philistine background, returns to normalcy now that she is in London and Tom has reappeared. Breaking off her engagement, Bunty echoes Tom’s words when she says to Nick: “Well, we’re not very suited to one another are we?” (146). To Tom, she observes that he and she are “reverting to type, don’t you see?” (154).

With Florence and Nicky both abandoned by their lovers, Coward is in position to fashion a self-consciously modern psychoanalytic set piece in an Act 3 bedroom scene in which Nicky challenges his mother at long last to recognize the destructive effects of her narcissism. He argues that only in this way will it be possible for either of them to change; only in this way does he have any prospect of achieving an adult sexuality.³⁰ In *A Saturday Life*, the suggestion of incest is touched on intensely but with humor. In adolescence, Sidonia becomes passionately attached to Frances, her mentor at this stage of her life. Like Sappho’s pupils, however, Sidonia moves on to marriage and maternity. The novel ends with the birth of her first son on Christmas Day. His given name will be Noel (319), an homage to the young playwright, who was born on December 16, 1899.

Sidonia's desire for a middle-aged woman is complicated by triangulation with Frances's dotting regard for Sidonia's mother. At age seventeen, Sidonia tells Frances: "If you were a man I'd marry you" (104):

"I ask you to kiss me and you won't!" she said furiously. "Oh, you! You're all mother's! Mother this, mother that! God! I'm sick of it! Don't I count at all?" She was childish now, stamping her foot. "What does mother need? Just a mummy, that's all; but I need someone real, I need *you!* Why can't I have you? Aren't I younger than mother? Aren't I attractive? Don't I interest you enough? Frances"—she began to speak softly now—"Frances, look at me! Don't you love me? Frances, *won't* you be my friend? All, *all* my friend? I don't want to marry anyone, I tell you; I just want to work and have you, all of you. Frances, mother would never miss you." (105)

The mummy referred to in the passage is the major archaeological find of Sidonia's father, Sir Godfrey, which, unfortunately, he may have misidentified. The word also signifies in another way: Sidonia implies that her mother wants Frances to be "a mummy," that is, a passive and asexual object to be possessed. In contrast, Sidonia desires an older woman as lover.

Lady Shore's penchant for a mummy obliquely references the mummy best known to Sapphists of Hall's generation: the one played by Colette in *Rêve d'Égypte*, a pantomime for two characters performed for one night only at the Moulin Rouge on January 3, 1907. Estranged from her husband, Colette took the role of a beautiful young mummy. Her protector and lover at the time, the crossdressing marquise, Mathilde de Morny, performed as the archaeologist who restores the mummy to life with a kiss, at which point Colette "comes back to life in a jeweled bra, slowly and seductively unwinds her transparent wrappings, and at the climax of the dance, passionately embraces the archeologist."³¹ The performance caused a sensation, less because of the kiss exchanged between two women, since, as Michael Lucey points out, advertisements and articles in the press before the premiere capitalized on Sapphic titillation, than because the Moulin Rouge broke a taboo by reproducing the arms of the de Morny family in publicizing the performance. In protest, an aristocratic clique disrupted the premiere. But when the police ordered that a male actor replace the marquise at the second performance, another disturbance broke out as the audience clamored for de Morny's appearance.³² Not intimidated, later that

year, Colette appeared successfully in another pantomime, *La Chair*, in which she gained further notoriety in a scene in which an angry lover stripped off Colette's shift, thereby exposing her left breast.³³

Implicit reference to *Rêve d'Égypte* in *A Saturday Life* suggests the power of crossgendered female-female desire, which motivates the main relationships in the novel while remaining confined within respectable contexts. Reference to the Colette-de Morny liaison suggests something of the subliminal character of Frances's appeal, at once masculine and feminine, maternal and phallic, to both Sidonia and her mother. Colette understood de Morny's gender-transgressive behavior primarily in psychoanalytic terms. She believed that de Morny's masculinity developed in response to her beloved mother's attraction to her faithless husband. To Colette, de Morny's femininity enacted the maternal devotion to young females that her mother had flamboyantly denied her. De Morny's phallicized sexuality expressed not masculine aggressiveness but feminine solicitude. As Colette recalls, "If the rocking of your arms doesn't suffice to calm me, your mouth will become fiercer, your hands more amorous, and you will grant me sensual pleasure like a form of succor, like a sovereign exorcism of the demons within me: fever, rage, uncertainty. . . . You will give me pleasure bending over me, your eyes full of maternal anxiety, you who seeks in your impassioned friend the child that you don't have" (quoted in Thurman, 160).

The framing of the novel with reference to the encrypted knowledge of the East is ambivalent. On the one hand, it provides a powerful cultural framework for the concept of reincarnation. Lady Shore and Sir Godfrey first meet Frances in Egypt, and it is Frances who finds the book of ancient wisdom at a stall in Florence. On the other hand, Sidonia's parents have fallen victim to the past: Lady Shore and "her frail, somewhat small Sir Godfrey, with his retrogressive yet adventurous mind, had turned, as it were by common consent, to the past for romance and freedom. They had sought among the ruins of a dead civilisation for the beauty they missed sub-consciously in their own" (12). Tellingly, Lady Shore remains captive throughout the novel to the task of producing her husband's biography.

When, in the final section of the book, Sidonia in her early twenties meets David, her future husband, she finds that he elicits a very different response than had Frances. After watching him play superbly at a polo match, Sidonia reflects: "She had found old Frances quite exciting, but that had been ages ago. In any case, none of those emotions had been the same; their quality had been different. What she had felt this afternoon was more

humble yet more exalted; it had seemed to thrust her down and down, and then to sweep her triumphantly upwards” (247). The power that May Sinclair calls Freudian libido or “the Life-Force, the Will-to-live and to-make-live,”³⁴ quickly issues in marriage and then childbirth. As Sidonia declares to a dismayed Frances: “I’ve had no life until now. . . . David . . . *is* my career! The trouble is you’ve never been in love” (252, 253).

In *A Saturday Life*, however, maternity provides no reliable basis for female femininity. Not a gender naturalist, Frances warns Sidonia that her interest in marriage and family, far from revealing to her the meaning of womanhood, will likely prove to be yet one more passing phase. There are repeated reminders in the novel of Lady Shore’s unsuitability as a mother, a deficiency that it is left to Frances to compensate for. During Sidonia’s stay in Italy in her early twenties, however, she has seen a very different model of motherhood—and femininity—in the person of Liza Ferrari, the fecund, beautiful wife of Sidonia’s vocal teacher. Going to stay at the Ferrari villa outside Florence, Sidonia abandons herself to what seems to be the altogether natural existence of the Ferrari household. Of Liza herself, Sidonia says: “She’s like Ceres the Mother, she ought to have a sheaf of corn. I believe if she went out and smiled at the garden things would begin to bloom” (176–77). Perhaps it is her summer idyll with the Ferraris that gives Sidonia the idea of becoming a mother, since, before she meets them, she shows no interest in the opposite sex. Indeed, when David seeks Lady Shore’s permission to propose to her daughter, she replies: “My dear young man, of course you may propose, but I don’t think Sidonia likes men. She’s got her career—” (249).

Young David, a Colonel Bogey in the making, believes that the career of “marriage” (250) will suit Sidonia just fine. But Hall suggests the fragility of marriage in her description of the wedding: “It was really a great and desperate adventure dressed up in ridiculous clothes; an adventure of the body, but also of the soul, an adventure concerning the ages that had gone, the ages that were yet to come” (263). The service itself is “all very neat, very British, very proper, in spite of the vicar’s exhortations. It was all very like the cut of David’s coat, irreproachable, expensive and good” (262). Cutting across this propriety, however, “through the stained glass windows came the sun, throwing shifting, harlequin patterns across the carpet in the chancel” (262). Harlequin, of course, is a figure of fun, folly, masquerade, and deception. “Harlequin patterns” suggest both the psychological perspectivism that undercuts the official meanings of public occasions and the vagaries of human desire that place lifelong commitments at hazard.

Frances's own psychic intimations involve masculine recollections of love for a mother and child:

Pictures, quiet pictures vaguely tinged with sadness, hidden away in the deeps of Frances, drifting across her mind all unbidden, bringing a smile that was somehow not quite a smile to her hard-bitten, whimsical mouth. Pictures of things seen and half forgotten—sometimes of things imagined. Pictures of rooms looking out on old gardens; pictures of gardens folded up in twilight; pictures of evenings beside a pleasant log-fire; pictures of nights filled with soft, contented breathing; pictures of a woman with a child at her breast. Frances would smile and wonder where they came from, these pictures that belonged to somewhere and someone that had nothing to do with Frances Reide. Would wonder at the strength of the diaphanous things to stir in her a feeling of longing, a sudden discontent with . . . [her] little house in Young Street, a sudden rather fierce resentment against life, a vague, uncomprehending pity for herself, a desire to lift up her voice in protest and ask, “Why? Why? Why?”

But Frances was not a dreamer, nor was she introspective, by choice at all events. (99–100)

In this passage, Frances has an experience of second sight that could explain her double gender to herself and, under other circumstances, enable her fully to live her female masculinity. Hall recalls the passage at the end of the novel, when Frances is with Sidonia and her new baby: “Frances’ eyes filled with difficult tears, not because of Sidonia’s ‘Saturday Life,’ but because of her beauty, lying there—a woman with a child at her breast” (319). As the narrator observes, however, Frances chooses *not* to see what otherwise she possibly might see. This double bind explains Frances’s melancholy as it also explains her ability to love both Sidonia and her mother. Indeed, in the pages that describe how Frances and Lady Shore come to share their lives after Sidonia’s marriage, Frances finds contentment and something close to happiness.

In the final words of the novel, Sidonia tells Frances that she believes her days of changeability are now over: “‘I think it’s over—I’m in my last act now, Frances.’ She stared at the top of the baby’s head. ‘There can never be anything after him; he’s an end in himself, he’s *the* end. I’ve a feeling that it’s always ended like this. And, you know, he was born on a Saturday too, the last day of the week’” (319). Florence demurs, suggesting that

Sidonia call him “Monday” instead. She remembers that already at age seven Sidonia showed a streak of pagan self-affirmation comparable with that of Colette. Inadvertently provoking a scandal, Sidonia had carried her naked dancing from home to Miss Valery’s school.

Appositely, in *Les Vrilles de la vigne*, an early collection of vignettes, Colette says: “I want to do as I please. . . . I want to perform in pantomimes, even plays. I want to dance naked if a leotard bothers me or mars my figure.” These, though, are the words of Colette as quoted by her dog, Toby-Chien, in “imaginary conversation” with her cat Kiki-la-Doucette. The citation offers one example of Colette’s continual formal inventiveness in citing her “I” in quotation marks, a practice that Lucey suggests is “part of a project of impersonation—a project of taking up a person” that she uses in this and other books to permit her to assume “same-sex sexualities” and other differences for herself while remaining free to resituate herself in other vignettes. Colette’s approach in *Les Vrilles* (a slang term for female subjects of same-sex desire)³⁵ is to “assign” minority sexualities “to a particular first-person figuration rather than” to assume them “in any definitive way.” Key here, even more than sexual rebelliousness, is the insistence on individual choice, made present in the text by continual experiments in pronominal “self-figuration” (Lucey, 94, 100, 98). In her performances as dancer, painter, artist, Sapphic ephebe, married woman, and mother of a newborn infant, Sidonia too continually refigures herself. It is likely this project, broaching but likewise eluding specific sexual identification of the self, that captivated the novel’s Sapphic readers.

In addition to Coward and Colette, Troubridge is another self-consciously experimental figure shaping *A Saturday Life*. The adaptation of material from Troubridge’s unpublished essays in structuring the narrative complicates the novel generically by drawing it into the sphere of fictional biography. *Such Was Life* constitutes a kind of personal memoir in the form of short essays by Troubridge—a generic twist that recalls Colette’s use of the same genre in structuring *Les Vrilles*. The title page of the typescript bears the following dedication: “FOR JOHN, Who made me write them.”³⁶ Subsequently retitled *I Remember*, Troubridge added further topical essays to expand the series.³⁷

Hall uses material from the essays in a number of different ways. For example, details of Sidonia’s experience at dancing school recall aspects of Troubridge’s account of her own school in “The Dancing.” Like Sidonia, Troubridge in youth aspired to become an artist; like Sidonia too, her attention shifted from medium to medium. For example, at the early age of thir-

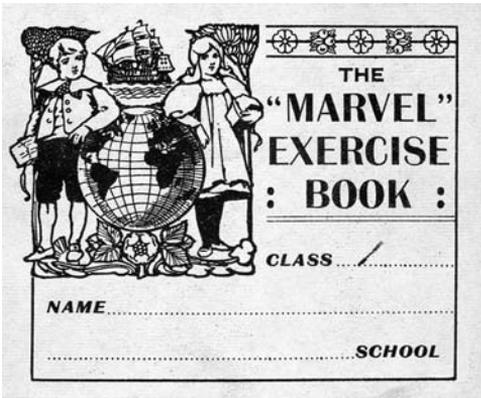
teen she passed “the stiff entrance examination”³⁸ and entered the Royal College of Art. Troubridge developed significant talent as a sculptor, most notably seen in a bust from the life of the bisexual, gender-crossing Russian dancer Vaslav Nijinsky, in the role of Debussy’s faun.³⁹ In the novel, Sidonia eventually drops without explanation her work as a sculptor in order to pursue vocal lessons. Later in the same year in which she sculpted Nijinsky, Troubridge, a mezzo-soprano, debuted as a salon singer in a recital on Malta, where her husband was stationed (Ormrod, 30). Pleased with her reception, for the next several years, she “continued to nurture dreams of an operatic career” (54), another ambition shared with Sidonia and likewise relinquished.

The borrowing of such details is in itself incidental. There are, however, significant matters that Hall parses in the novel, one of them being Troubridge’s disposable heterosexuality. One might almost read these essays without noticing that Troubridge had married, given birth to, and raised a child. In “Clothes,” for example, she mentions in passing that she had “chosen for my husband a man old enough to be my father.”⁴⁰ And in “Hero Worship,” she writes, “It was after I had seen Mr. Fred Terry nineteen times in the *Scarlet Pimpernel*, and had wished my sixteen-year-old self nineteen times in the enviable position of Miss Julia Nielson as Lady Balkeney that I met Captain Troubridge, and married him, chiefly, it must be admitted, because I discerned in his snow-white hair and rather Terryish cast of countenance a likeness to the beloved and for ever unattainable *Scarlet Pimpernel* of my dreams.”⁴¹ The emphatic sense in the novel that there is no direct connection between being a mother and being suitable to play the role of one correlates with Troubridge’s equivocal attitude toward the upbringing of her daughter, Andrea. Likewise, Sidonia’s repeated acts of rebellion against male authority-figures in the world of art, especially Jensen, whom Hall models on Edouard Lanteri, Professor of Sculpture and Modelling at the Royal College of Art, points to a double bind faced by Troubridge and other promising young women between their own skills and aptitudes as artists and the efforts of gifted male instructors to shape them. In a long passage in “My Teachers,” Troubridge writes of her and Lanteri’s mutual dedication but also of her decision to drop him: “He did not live to be an old man or even to lose his striking and unusual good looks. . . . He died of influenza while I was still quite a young woman, but he lived long enough for me to disappoint him. He lived until I had added yet one more to his many disillusionings. He lived to see me throw overboard with complete indifference the talent that he had nurtured and on which he had built such high and unselfish hopes.”⁴²

Although the essays that constitute *I Remember* are not chronologically continuous, two biographical emphases occur, both of which Hall draws on in *A Saturday Life*. The first is Troubridge's strong sense of sexual and gender performativity, which emerges in the essays on theater and dress, the latter of which she regarded as a mode of "playacting."⁴³ Photographs of Troubridge in the biographies show her attired in many different ways, often suggesting an element of gender-crossing, boyish, masculine, or butch. She regarded all of these modes, including high-style feminine, as forms of "masquerade."⁴⁴ These texts, however, also provide fragments of a very different life story, one of intermittent surges of female same-sex desire in the protagonist that can be pieced together so as to read *I Remember* as a coming-out narrative. For example, immediately before the passage describing her relationship to Lanteri is another, relating how Una developed a crush on an older girl in one of her art classes; this passage offers the first hint of Troubridge's attraction to other females.⁴⁵ The juxtaposition of these two passages suggests that it was perhaps this other desire that disinclined Troubridge from submitting to the role of Galatea to Lanteri's Pygmalion.

In contrast to *A Saturday Life*, which freely explores its protagonist's attractions, both same-sex and opposite, Troubridge denigrates heterosexual marriage and family while defensively effacing the decade-plus that she passed married to a man. In contrast, *I Remember* ends in the recreation of marriage and family in the realized friendship of her second and true marriage with Hall. In the final essay, "Christmasses" [*sic*], the feasts to be contrasted are those spent in the "Tyranny of Kinship" at the home of her sister-in-law versus "Christmas together with the dearest friend of all."⁴⁶ The typescript ends with Troubridge and Hall on Christmas stopping at a People's Restaurant in a distant part of London—where they were joined at table by "three strangers," all solitary. When one began to weep over his meal, Troubridge reached under the table to the hand of "Radclyffe Hall" for comfort in face of "the worst of all" Christmases, "Christmas Alone" (9, 10). The account is condescending to Hall's fellow diners and falsely humorous. Inadvertently, however, the incident may indicate what Troubridge feared most: isolation, penury, and the loss of her friend all together. This is the sole passage in *I Remember* where her friend's name, Radclyffe Hall, is given—handwritten into the typescript atop the crossed out phrase "the friend."

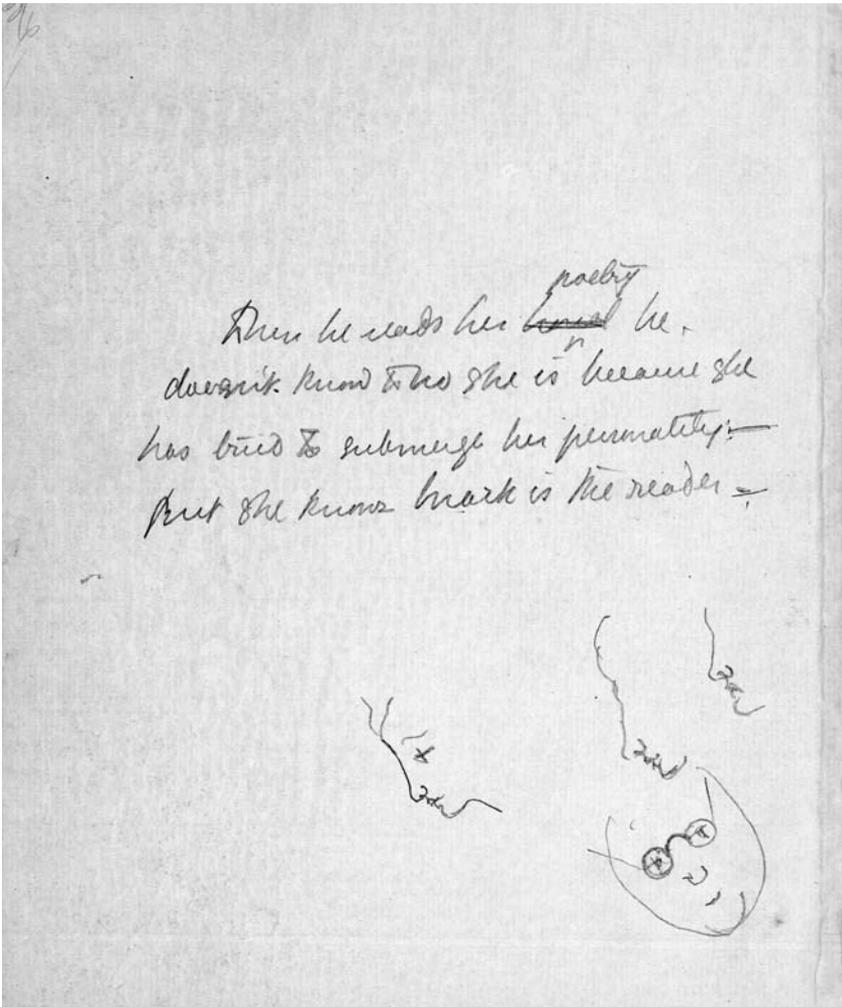
Hall's novel breaks off with an indeterminate, implicitly Sapphic ending. When Frances visits Sidonia and the baby, also at Christmas, Sidonia's



14. A *Saturday Life*. Notebook no. 1, cover. Radclyffe Hall collection, 8.3. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin, Texas.

every comment to David is dismissive, irritable, or rude, hinting that Sidonia's adult heterosexual phase may be running its course. The last page of the novel finds Sidonia and Frances's close connection restored, only now the female couple has been endowed with a child to raise. The casualness of the ending is characteristic of Hall's general approach, whose tone is likewise suggested by a notebook that she chose for use in writing the novel. The notebook is a child's school exercise book, with a bright red cover and a drawing of a boy in a Buster Brown collar and a girl in a frock. The pair stand on either side of a globe, topped with a sailing ship and supported at bottom by a Tudor rose.⁴⁷ The iconography identifies the pair as young British subjects. On the inside of the cover, verso, are affectionate caricatures of Frances Reide and Sidonia.⁴⁸ In the drawing, Hall makes three attempts at Sidonia's profile. One is like a profile in a print by Hogarth or Rowlandson; another, with downturned mouth, suggests Sidonia's frustration and puzzlement as she is deserted in turn by each of her artistic inspirations. In the third and most defined profile, her eye is indicated by a cross (+), suggesting her blindness both to the future and to herself.

Above the drawings appears a handwritten sentence: "When he reads her poetry he doesn't know who she is because she has tried to submerge her personality:—But she knows Mark is the reader—."⁴⁹ In the completed novel, the adult Sidonia does not write poetry, and there is no character named Mark. Sidonia's effort to "submerge her personality" in her writing brings to mind Hall's modern ideal of aesthetic impersonality, though it also suggests other ways of looking at Sidonia from spiritualist or theosophical points of view. In her artistic vagaries and tendencies to pick up, then drop,



15. A *Saturday Life*. Notebook no. 1, inside cover, verso. Radclyffe Hall collection, 8.3. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin, Texas.

friends and intimates, Sidonia perhaps channels other selves (or personalities) as a medium might in a trance. In a theosophical view, perhaps her present self is possessed for a time by other selves that she has been at other times and places. Sidonia's capacity for second sight, however, is much weaker than Frances's. Insofar as Sidonia shares characteristics with Trou-

bridge, Hall may be commenting on her partner as a person of fluid and uncertain selfhood, gender, and genius. Ambiguous herself, in the quotation Sidonia makes a point of being ambiguous in her writing. As will become clear in a moment, the mysterious “Mark” referenced here resembles Troubridge in her function as literary collaborator, a role in which she submerged her personality in the joint performance of Hall’s literary genius.

Finally, the sentence suggests a practice of double writing. One is for a potential reader who will be unable to see beyond the mask of impersonality in the poetic text; the second writing, however, is directed to a reader who is envisaged, even *marked*, in the text. This double direction can be associated with another sentence, this one scrawled in a flyleaf of the notebook in Box 8, Folder 2. Scribbled in pencil, it precedes the final chapter of Hall’s incomplete novel, *The Cunningham Code*, but appears to date from the time of composition of *A Saturday Life*: “Let us tread delicately through the morass of ambiguity, lest they presume to understand us!”⁵⁰ This sentence comments on the way in which highly naturalized notions of selfhood, sexuality, and gender are casually but continually undercut in the novel. “They” signifies a world indifferent or hostile to “us,” that is, to Hall and Troubridge, to the sexually flexible Sidonia, and to a celibate invert such as Reide.

Leaving aside for now the question of autobiographical reference, who is the “Mark” who will read Sidonia’s poetry? Hall provides an answer to this question in the outline of Sidonia’s life after marriage written on the first page, recto, of the notebook in folder 3. Readers of the novel have wondered what happens to Sidonia after the birth of her baby and the reestablishment of her friendship with Frances. The outline gives the ages at which Sidonia pursues her various crazes.⁵¹ It also reports that Sidonia’s husband and child both die in 1917, killed in World War I. The following year Sidonia joins an ambulance unit on the front. Sidonia marries a second time to a man named Mark, “who helps her at arms [*sic*] length” in her writing (her “inspiration” is “not good enough”) until a son is born. In the two final lines on the page, Hall writes a direction to herself: “Leave her—,” a good idea since the action indicated in the outline is now repeating itself. Hall risks falling into her chief shortcoming as a novelist, namely, the tendency to write her novels in the form of fictional biographies with protagonists whose life stories have long, unaccentuated middles followed by abrupt endings. It is likely that Heath, Troubridge, and the manuscript’s other readers suggested to Hall that she end it where she did. The resulting suspension of the action works perfectly,

bringing back into balance the Frances-Sidonia relationship, which provides the novel's main affective thread. It also provides an ending at once radical and traditional, even Victorian, with its establishment of a domestic triad of two women and son.⁵²

The feminine/feminist/Sapphic politics of Hall's novel, shaped by the women who helped her fashion the book, communicated with immediacy to receptive readers, among them Grace Spencer. Cline speaks of Spencer as one of a group of women who began writing fan mail to Hall following the critical and commercial success of her next novel, *Adam's Breed* (1926).⁵³ Spencer found it easy to locate herself affectively in the tie between Hall's boyish female heroines and the celibate middle-aged women who could fall in love with one of them. In one of her letters, Spencer cites characters from three of Hall's pre-*Well* novels: Joan Ogden the protagonist of *The Unlit Lamp*, who sacrifices her desires for independence, work as a professional, and life with Elizabeth Rodney to the selfish demands of her mother;⁵⁴ Sidonia Shore and Frances Reide; and Gian-Luca, the feminine man, too sensitive to survive in a postwar world, who is the questing protagonist of *Adam's Breed*. Spencer wrote to Hall:

May a friend of Joan, & Frances, & Gian-Luca write to thank you, even at this late hour, for all that your books have meant to her since the "Unlit Lamp" was first published?

They are old friends now; they have been read & re-read, but always with an uneasy sense of a debt unpaid—a great gift for which I have never thanked the giver. You must have had so many grateful letters, & I have hesitated to add to their number. . . .

The reading of each book left me all aglow with appreciation, & criticisms, & questions as to the ultimate destiny of certain characters—; bitter deprecation of Joan's final self-immolation—(did her crushed & defeated personality ever revive again?)—doubts of the placid life of motherhood in which you leave Sidonia—surely only another of many succeeding & fresh adventures of her temperament? Above all, *great* delight in Frances. Frances should be the patron saint of all us happily unmarried women!—wise, gallant, full of that detached and dry humour which can transform life and keep alive the spirit of adventure.⁵⁵

Spencer sounds like a celibate female homosexual with an observantly skeptical view of the heterosexual institution of marriage.

The lesbian subtext becomes more evident in the next paragraph, in part vectored through a passion for the protection of animals, in this case the blind pit ponies of the British coal-mining industry, thought of whom distresses Gian-Luca in his final days wandering in the New Forest:

We cannot have enough of such books as the “Saturday Life”—That delicate & discerning humour which you can give is so rare in modern literature, and so badly needed. Humour & imagination—isn’t lack of imagination at the root of all that cruelty of which you write in “Adam’s Breed”? One can scarcely bear to read—it has haunted me continually, especially perhaps in the case of the pit ponies—; but how can one help? Grief over such wrongs is mere waste unless one can *act*, and yet I fear only the great tide of public opinion can alter things. Surely it will come, one day; but how one longs to hasten it by personal effort. Your pen will do great service; but what can the rest of us do?⁵⁶

Hall’s novels bring the question of the fate of her crossgendered protagonists very much to Spencer’s attention. Spencer realizes that what is in question is the need to “*act*”—although in the letter the question gets displaced onto Hall’s interventions on behalf of the ponies.⁵⁷ Spencer laments that, not being a writer or public speaker as Hall is, she herself can do nothing. The letter points in two directions: toward the facilitation of Hall as an activist and consciousness-raiser and Spencer’s hope, implicit as well in the ending of *A Saturday Life*, that women will be able to live beyond marriage and motherhood as currently defined, indeed will learn fully to express their love of one another. For a reader like Spencer, the greatest attribute of Hall’s novel was its communicability. This cognitive and affective immediacy brought into focus the very topic about which Hall’s novel is persistently ambiguous: namely, the capacity for misfit individuals to achieve both a shared intimacy and a capacity to change the world in which they live.