Two Novels

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INTRODUCTION

Write a book. And find she had a friend.
—Bryher, Two Selves

BOTH Development and Two Selves have been absent from the literary landscape since the period of their first publication during the early 1920s. This is a result partly of the larger marginalization of the texts written by the women of the modernist period, but also partly because their author, as critics have only recently begun to note, remains one of the least recognized figures in the modernist landscape.¹ In accounts of the modernist period Bryher has been acknowledged primarily only in relation to her partnership with the key female modernist H.D. and her assistance of other female modernist writers, including Dorothy Richardson and Marianne Moore. Yet the range of her interest and her energetic intellectual engagements with the art, literature, and discourses of her time are quite simply phenomenal and deserve more rigorous critical discussion in their own right. As Nancy, Bryher’s central protagonist in these novels, realizes above there is a profound correlation between writing and a keen sense of friendship between women.

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Nancy, as a young woman in these novels, has yet to fulfill either her literary or her emotional potential, but Bryher herself was undoubtedly a figure central to the community of female modernists in Europe in the early twentieth century and their writing, promoting friendship and enabling literature and its creation in a number of different ways. She also, along with so many of her peers, engaged in the process of locating definitive literary language and form with which to represent female and lesbian subjectivity—as both Development and Two Selves prove. The reprinting of these two autobiographical novels in this volume represents an important step in the recentralization of Bryher in discussions about and readings of the burgeoning body of female modernist texts. Development and Two Selves were written in 1920 and 1923 respectively. Together with the later novel West (1925), they form the trilogy of autobiographical fiction that maps Bryher’s coming to consciousness as a woman and artist, culminating in her meeting and subsequent partnership with H.D.

BRYHER IN CONTEXT

Bryher was born Annie Winifred Ellerman in 1894, daughter of the British shipping magnate John Ellerman and his common-law wife Hannah Glover. She was brought up in wealthy but rigidly constrained circumstances in the family homes in Mayfair in Lon-
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don and in Eastbourne. After a trip to the Scilly Isles with her school friend Doris Banfield, she adopted the name of the most remote of the five inhabited islands, symbolically associating the landscape of this small outcrop of islands in the Atlantic Ocean with her own freedom from familial ties. She finally changed her name simply to Bryher by deed poll in 1951, at last throwing off all vestiges of paternal control and identity at a time when her own career as a historical novelist was becoming established. Nancy’s story, which is traced through Development and Two Selves (and on into West), is a fictionalized account of Bryher’s own childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. When not living in either of the family homes, Bryher was taken traveling with her father across Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Her childhood was unconventional; she did not attend school until the age of fifteen. Queenwood, the boarding school to which she was sent, prompted a traumatic shift in her sense of self and autonomy. The experience, which she later described as “a violation of the spirit,” left her with fervent feelings about the nature of education and intellectual and emotional development.

In 1913 at the age of nineteen Bryher bought a copy of the first Imagist collection, Des Imagistes. Reading this new poetry made her “drunk with joy,” since this work heralded, in her words, “the approach of a new age.” She had been writing poetry herself since her adolescence and, inspired by Imagism’s re-
invigoration of poetic form, persuaded her father to fund the publication of her first collection, *The Region of Lutany*, in 1914. Three years later in 1917 Bryher obtained copies of the two Imagist anthologies edited by Amy Lowell after Pound’s departure for Vorticism, as well as a copy of Lowell’s own critical work *Six French Poets*. Lowell’s work impressed Bryher greatly and prompted her to produce her first piece of extended literary analysis, *Amy Lowell: A Critical Appreciation* (1918). Lowell proved to be an all-around inspiration to Bryher, who with typical forwardness, wrote her an enthusiastic letter and followed it up with samples of her own poetry. Lowell responded encouragingly, providing Bryher with suggested readings from amongst the very best innovative modernist works, including the first three novels of Dorothy Richardson’s *Pilgrimage* series and *Sea Garden* (1916), the first collection of poems from the American Imagist poet H.D.

H.D.’s poetry was to profoundly captivate Bryher. In *The Heart to Artemis*, she records the significance with which this work soon became imbued for her:

There will always be one book among all others that makes us aware of ourselves; for me, it is *Sea Garden* by H.D. I learned it by heart from cover to cover. . . . I began the morning and ended the day repeating the poems. It was not until some months later that I discovered from Amy Lowell’s *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry* that H.D. was a woman and American.
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Bryher also learned that H.D. lived in Cornwall. Obtaining H.D.’s address from Clement Shorter, the publishing husband of her childhood friend Doris Banfield, Bryher took the audacious step of writing to H.D. and requesting a meeting. Both H.D. and Bryher, along with biographers and critics, have documented and fictionalized this meeting and the resultant life-long partnership that arose from it. It is clear in these writings that both women felt to some degree “saved” by the other. Bryher’s clear desperation at the degree of parental control she was still experiencing at the age of twenty-four and her overwhelming feelings of wasted desire and talent are articulated in Development and Two Selves. Only the very slimmest of hopes of “finding a friend” remain for Nancy. Yet, in a prevision of the importance this meeting will hold, Nancy recognizes that this “adventure” is worth one last risk. In the subsequent novel West, Nancy acknowledges that Helga Brandt, the fictional H.D. “saves” her life: “only an American had bade her live.”8 H.D. herself, pregnant as a result of her affair with Cecil Gray and estranged from her husband Richard Aldington at the time of the meeting, explores the extraordinary advent of Bryher’s arrival in her life in the two posthumously published novels, Paint It Today and Asphodel.9 In these texts Bryher appears respectively as Althea and Beryl de Rothfeldt. In Asphodel Beryl’s arrival signals to Hermione Gart (H.D.’s fictional self) that “a light is shining at the far end of a long, long tunnel.”10 Yet
also in this fictional account Bryher’s promise to take care of both H.D. and her daughter Perdita Schaffner is balanced by the promise H.D. extracts from Bryher to move beyond her suicidal feelings and take up the reins of her life.

Bryher’s ensuing life with H.D. was one characterized by wide-ranging intellectual and literary endeavor. In addition to offering, at the least, emotional and physical companionship, and perhaps as important, H.D. also provided Bryher with a literary context. Through H.D.’s contacts Bryher was asked to translate Antipater of Sidon’s “Six Sea Poems” for the Poets Translation Series of the Egoist Press. Perhaps more important, her ensuing friendship with Harriet Shaw Weaver, editor of the Egoist, proved to be the start of her prodigious career as literary patron. In 1921 she edited and funded Marianne Moore’s first collection, Poems, and also provided subsidy for the publication of H.D.’s Hymen. Bryher’s patronage was to extend across publications, publishing ventures, bookshops, and personal subsidy for friends and acquaintances experiencing financial hardship while writing. Not least, she was committed to utilizing her inherited wealth to sustain many different female modernist projects; perhaps one of her most notable beneficiaries through the 1920s and 1930s was Dorothy Richardson. Bryher’s regular “loans” undoubtedly secured the ongoing production of Richardson’s lifework, Pilgrimage.
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During 1921 Bryher and H.D. met Robert McAlmon, with whom Bryher entered into a marriage of convenience to sustain her freedom from parental control. While McAlmon proved to be a complicated choice of marriage partner in emotional terms, his interest in literature and avant-garde writing provided Bryher with the most fascinating contacts and literary projects. Together with McAlmon, Bryher founded and funded the Contact Publishing Co., which ran in Paris until 1928. Throughout its history the Contact series published many of the most important modernist writers: H.D., Mina Loy, Mary Butts, Djuna Barnes, Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, and James Joyce. McAlmon’s Contact Collection of Contemporary Writers, published in 1925, included work by Bryher, H.D., Mina Loy, Dorothy Richardson, May Sinclair, Djuna Barnes, Mary Butts, and Gertrude Stein. McAlmon stayed in Paris, eventually becoming estranged and later divorced from Bryher.

Her interests, however, extended beyond book publishing to the dissemination of avant-garde writing through books and magazines. To this end she provided financial support for Sylvia Beach’s Shakespeare and Company bookshop in Paris, a nexus for modernist writers and a point of contact for the reading public interested in new, experimental material. As Andrea Weiss has shown, throughout the 1920s Paris became an identifiable center for the overlapping communities of lesbians and female modernists. Bryher, more so
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than H.D., took the opportunity to immerse herself in this subculture, although her reception into the expatriate literary community in Paris became increasingly compromised as relations with McAlmon became acrimonious.15

In 1927 Bryher and H.D. met the young Scot, Kenneth Macpherson. H.D. and Macpherson began an affair, and Bryher, desperate for a divorce from McAlmon, suggested another marriage of convenience with Macpherson. This partnership, perhaps more suitable from the start, was to work a good deal better than that with McAlmon. The meeting with Macpherson coincided with Bryher’s interest in the emerging art of cinema and the growing field of psychoanalysis in the late 1920s. As Laura Marcus has argued, the new art of cinema and the discourses of psychoanalysis map one another as “twin sciences and technologies of fantasy, dream, virtual reality and screen memory.”16 For Bryher, both provided innovative ways of thinking about human subjectivity and progress. Macpherson, who had already been analyzed briefly by the German psychoanalyst Hanns Sachs, introduced Bryher to him in 1928. She subsequently underwent four years of analysis with him in Berlin.17 In addition to what proved a productive and enervating analysis, the connection with Sachs also provided Bryher with access into the European psychoanalytic community and its ideas. Bryher argues in The Heart to Artemis that her experience of the repression at
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school in Queenwood (documented so articulately in Development) was to make her an “adherent” to Freud even before she had encountered psychoanalytic thinking. Ten years later, she notes, she became one of the first subscribers to the British Journal of Psychoanalysis and read Freud in translation as soon as new works became available. Bryher finally obtained an introduction to Freud through the sexologist Havelock Ellis, whom she had known since the early 1920s. She was to remain an enthusiastic advocate of psychoanalysis, seeing it as a transformative discipline with great potential for social good, and believing it should be widely accessible to all: “I don’t want to preach communism, I only want it to be possible for workers, and this includes badly paid intellectuals, to come in contact with p.a.”18 Committed to questions of access, Bryher donated money to various psychoanalytic schemes, including setting up the Hanns Sachs Training Fund for trainee analysts. She was also keen to fund the analyses of friends. Through the late 1920s it is also clear that she considered undergoing analytic training herself; a process she called getting “a dog-collar.”19 In 1933 she approached Freud about the possibility of H.D. undergoing analysis with him. Freud’s subsequent acceptance and the ensuing analysis are movingly documented in H.D.’s Tribute to Freud (1956).

Bryher’s interest in film centered on its social, educational, and political potential. Together Bryher, xiii
Macpherson, and H.D. started the film journal *Close Up* (1927–1933), which as Jayne Marek has argued was to become “the chief contemporary forum for debate about the social implications as well as the theory and practice of cinema.”\(^{20}\) Edited by Macpherson and Bryher, and funded by Bryher, the journal published reviews and articles by an international list of contributors, including writers such as Dorothy Richardson and filmmakers such as Sergei Eisenstein and G. W. Pabst.\(^{21}\) Important for Bryher, it offered an outlet for her political articles about war and its effects. During the early 1930s she wrote several articles that called attention to the worsening political situation in Europe and argued for constructive debate about the nature of war. In her pamphlets *Film Problems in Soviet Russia*, published in 1929, and *Film in Education*, published in 1937, she expressed her view of film as a unique cultural form through which political and social ideals could be mobilized. Another of the key interests of the *Close Up* group was the production of film. To this end the POOL film group was also set up in 1927, producing three short films and one full-length film *Borderline* (1930) in which Paul Robeson and H.D. play central roles and Bryher appears as “a cigar-smoking proprietress.”\(^{22}\)

Until 1939 and the outbreak of World War II, Bryher spent most of her time in Territet, Switzerland, in the Bauhaus-influenced home, “Kenwin,” which she designed with Kenneth Macpherson. Her interest in
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patronage and editing remained strong. In 1935 she bought the review *Life and Letters*, merging it with the left-wing magazine the *London Mercury*. Under her control its title changed to *Life and Letters Today* and published many distinguished European writers: André Gide, Jules Romain, Jean-Paul Sartre, Paul Valéry, and Franz Kafka. Its British contributors included Dorothy Richardson, Mary Butts, Siegfried Sassoon, and the Sitwells; and its American contributors included Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop, May Sarton, Muriel Rukeyser, and T. S. Eliot. One of Bryher’s most notable discoveries for *Life and Letters Today* was the Australian writer Patrick White. Despite the disruptions and deprivations of war Bryher managed to keep the magazine afloat and functioning as an organ of innovative literature. Throughout the 1930s her political life also remained central. Her base in Switzerland provided an ideal conduit for the escape of Jewish refugees from Germany. In all, Bryher helped over one hundred people flee the Nazi regime in Germany, amongst them notably Walter Benjamin. She left Switzerland for her own safety just as war was declared in August 1939, returning to London and H.D. to survive the war years there.

At this time, while H.D. was working on her own poetic response to the war, *Trilogy*, Bryher began the body of work which was to dominate the remainder of her career—the writing of historical novels. The intense experience of war witnessed firsthand through
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the Blitz in London prompted Bryher’s literary explorations of nationality and Englishness. Questions of history and identity seemed to crystallize for her in the time of war. In all, Bryher went on to produce nine historical novels, which explore real historical events through fictional “minor” characters. No doubt in the writing of historical fiction Bryher was to some degree revisiting a passion from childhood, in which the boys’ adventure stories and particularly the work of the nineteenth-century writer G. A. Henty fired both her imagination and her sense of injustice at being born a girl. As an adult Bryher created an archive of manuscripts and materials on nineteenth-century “boys’ books” and adventure stories titled “Dusty Diamonds,” which was exhibited at the Grolier Club in New York in 1965. Her keen interest in boys’ fiction and her eventual creation of historical persona through male characters can be read suggestively alongside her own thinking on gender identity and sexuality, which I shall come to discuss.

After a breakdown at the war’s end, H.D. retired to Kusnacht in Switzerland, supported as ever by Bryher both financially and emotionally. Bryher herself returned to Kenwin to continue to produce her novels. In 1961 after a period of worsening health, H.D. suffered a stroke and died. Bryher, traveling from Vaud, arrived shortly before her death. For whatever reasons, H.D.’s death seems to have freed Bryher to turn finally to the recording of memory through
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READING *DEVELOPMENT* AND *TWO SELVES*

Amongst contemporary audiences, *Development* and *Two Selves* attracted very different critical receptions. *Development* was published in July 1920 in Britain and in December 1920 in America. It was reviewed very widely for a first novel, prompting responses in both newspapers and literary periodicals.\(^{24}\) *Two Selves* was published through the Contact Press in Paris in 1923 and received only one review in the *Manchester Guardian*. Other than this it seemed to escape the notice of literary reviewers, though Marianne Moore, who had previously reviewed *Development* in the *Dial* in 1921, wrote to Bryher at the time of its publication regretting that she had nowhere to place a review of what she regarded as a good novel.

Amy Lowell’s preface to *Development* ensured that the novel was read (by readers familiar with such terms) in the context of the literary movement of Imagism. The reviewer for the *New York Times Book Review* comments: “since it would appear that the espe-
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cial form of authorship which Nancy, the heroine of the book, is to adopt will be that of free verse, who more fit than Miss Lowell to tell us what we ought to think about W. Bryher’s book.”25 Indeed Bryher’s devotion to Imagism and its techniques clearly inflects her prose style throughout the novel. Constance Mayfield Rourke, writing for the New Republic, regards this as the strength of an otherwise “difficult, inverted book” and argues that Bryher’s construction of Nancy displays “the typical imagistic power to startle, the typical cerebral intensiveness without intensity, the same fatal abundance.” Though she has “the poet’s sensuous equipment” it is used indiscriminately and thus becomes “tortuous.”26 Writing in her preface, Lowell regards the novel as “a singular book,” rightly identifying it as a Bildungsroman and placing it within the same tradition that produced Jane Eyre and Obermann. Lowell reads Nancy as an Imagist born. She has, from the first, “all sorts of intuitions and understandings” that lead her to view color and words in Imagist terms. Words, indeed, become “pigment” and “tone” to Nancy who then struggles to realize this artistic calling as a girl in the midst of late-Victorian society. Recognizing the novel as thinly disguised autobiography, Lowell regards both author and protagonist as “a baffling and intriguing personality.” Lowell suggests this partly because of Nancy’s dogged attempts to “free her spirit” in both artistic and social terms;
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this eccentricity arises, in part, out of her sense of herself as a boy and her grief at the lost opportunities in her childhood as a girl.

While no contemporary reviews fully take up this latter point (though I shall do so in subsequent analysis), all Bryher’s contemporary reviewers acknowledge her attempt to record the struggle of both the artistic temperament and femininity—with varying degrees of praise and criticism of the picture of “personality” that results. In “The Making of a Vers-Libriste,” the reviewer for the Nation regards the novel as providing “access to a literary psychology which, in this special form, is both new and important.” By contrast, the reviewer for the Saturday Review regards its focus on Nancy’s stifled and frustrated psyche as “a warning against the danger of too close a preoccupation with the analysis of one’s emotions.” Such self-absorption results, for the Times Literary Supplement reviewer, in a central character who has “an inhuman priggishness.” Similarly, the Athenaeum’s reviewer regards Nancy at fourteen as “an awful example of what . . . indulgence may end in.” Certain reviewers of the novel felt uncomfortable with Bryher’s use of autobiographical fiction. The reviewer for the Times Literary Supplement argues that “Miss W. Bryher is not really entitled to call Development a novel,” while the Saturday Review notes that “genuine autobiography is not easy to disguise.” Such discom-
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fort with the uneasy boundaries between “life” and “text” are reminiscent of the mixed responses to Dorothy Richardson’s Pilgrimage series. The resonance between Development and Richardson’s work is instructive since Bryher was a fervent advocate of Richardson’s modernist project. The reviewer for the New Republic identifies a clear link between Bryher’s Nancy and Richardson’s Miriam Henderson: “Development is not a novel, as it is called. It is a personal record. It belongs more particularly with Miss Richardson’s Pilgrimage.” Yet unlike Miriam Henderson, who is simply “not worth writing about,” Bryher’s Nancy is of more interest: “Inarticulate as she is, here is a personality of complicated power. Thwarted and divided, she makes war.” Nancy’s “war” is primarily waged against society and the strictures it places upon her as a young woman. As the reviewer for the Bookman notes, Nancy is not “an ordinary girl” but rather “a very modern girl.”

Responding to the novel’s inherent feminism, Marianne Moore’s review in the Dial questions Bryher’s construction of discourses of femininity and women’s role:

One’s dress is more a matter of one’s choice than appears; if there be any advantage, it is on the side of woman; woman is more nearly at liberty to assume man’s dress than man is able to avail himself of the opportunities for self expression afforded by the variations in colour and fabric which a woman may use. Moreover, women are no longer debarred
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from professions that are open to men, and if one cares to be femininely lazy, traditions of the past still afford shelter.33

Moore’s rejection of Bryher’s feminist commentary on girls’ upbringing was echoed to some degree in the twelve-day-long furore about education in girls’ schools that took place in the Daily Mail after publication of Development. Picking up on Bryher’s account of Nancy’s time at Downwood girls’ school, the Daily Mail ran two articles on the novel entitled “Cramped School Girls.”34 Both identified Bryher as an ardent critic of the system of girls’ education in England, who in her “remarkable little book” makes “a vigorous onslaught” on the establishment. Over and above the caliber of Bryher’s writing, which the paper regards as marking her out as an artist, it regards “the school chapters” as the most important, conveying as they do the “dull cramping formalism” of girls’ education. The reasons for the Daily Mail’s interest in sparking debate about Development undoubtedly arose out of general debates about the education of girls in Britain during 1920. Both articles on Development followed on a contentious debate about the caning of girls by male teachers that had raged in the paper, both in articles and readers’ letters, throughout May 1920. Readers of this commentary on Development duly took the bait and letters proceeded to appear in the paper over the following week.

For the most part Bryher received vehement criti-xxi
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cism from headmistresses, schoolteachers, and parents for her ignorance about the current realities of girls’ education, arguing that she evidently had knowledge of nothing other than a dated nineteenth-century system. After several days of outraged and indignant attacks, Bryher herself responded in defense of her account of Queenwood insisting on the veracity of her portrayal: “I went to ‘Downwood’ in May 1910 and left in 1912. Every incident in the school portion of my book ‘Development’ is founded on actual fact.”

Despite the consternation which Development caused both to contemporary readers, and indeed the Ellerman family themselves, the book sold well (perhaps because of this consternation), and Bryher was pleased with its reception. Writing in The Heart to Artemis she states:

My instinct about writing had been correct. I knew that Development was not a book of which Mallarmé would have approved but I really objected to the human wastage of school. My family bowed to the inevitable. I had committed the unpardonable Victorian sin and made myself ‘conspicuous’. (I enjoyed this very much). I was allowed to join H.D. in a small apartment that she had rented in Kensington, not far from where the Pounds and Mrs Shakespeare were living and where I tried, without success, to write my second book.

This second book, billed at the end of Development as a sequel entitled Adventure, was to become Two Selves.
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Unlike Development it caused no ripples in the world of education. Its review in the Manchester Guardian notes the autobiographical link with Bryher herself and, like certain reviewers of Development, finds Nancy an egoist whose struggle towards artistic identity becomes “tiresome.” Her emotions are “too storm-wracked” to be legible either to herself or the reader. This reviewer fails to take up the major and undoubtedly engaging themes of the novel: Nancy’s continuing “war” with society as a woman, her engagement with the new modernist movements of Imagism and Futurism, her readings of H.D.’s poetry, and her exploration of confused gender identity. It has thus fallen to late twentieth-century critics to explore these questions to some small degree in their scholarship.

Being a Boy

Towards the end of Development Nancy undergoes a transformative and epiphanic experience that takes place on a midnight shrimping trip off one of the Scilly Isles. While preparing to go out to fish, Nancy achieves a previously impossible sense of selfhood: “The lance hooks jangled in the darkness. Nancy followed the others up the road, knowing she was a boy.” It is clear that from the outset of Development, which opens with Nancy at the age of four years, that her subjectivity has been characterized by an internal split
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between male and female identities. Yet it is during this trip to the Scillies that Nancy seems to come to a point of understanding about herself, a kind of self-knowledge symbolized by the night: “It was her first adventure with night; a strange, a wonderful experience, full of the mingled dream and reality she desired.” Nancy’s encounter with “the night” might perhaps be suggestively read alongside a later modernist text, Djuna Barnes’s *Nightwood* (1936), in which lesbian sexuality is complexly overwritten by the signifier of “the night.” Robin Vote, one of the novel’s key characters and the object of the frustrated desires of Nora Flood (Barnes’s fictional self), has special connections to the night, which symbolize both her enigmatic sexuality and her dangerousness. Throughout her affair with Robin, Nora characterizes the night as a place of sexual excess and desire.\(^\text{38}\)

Such a conflation of darkness, nighttime, and lesbian desire may well also be at work in Bryher’s *Development*. What is clear is that this epiphany does little, subsequently, to help Nancy’s sense of gender dysphoria. By the beginning of *Two Selves*, the split between surface femininity (however compromised) and internal masculinity has become entrenched:

Two selves. Jammed against each other, disjointed and ill-fitting. An obedient Nancy with heavy plaits tied over two ears that answered ‘yes, no, yes, no,’ according as the wind
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blew. A boy, a brain, that planned adventures and sought wisdom.

Nancy’s desire for “adventure,” articulated throughout both texts, will of course culminate in the event that seems to form the teleological purpose of Nancy’s desire—the meeting with the enigmatic woman poet, who has eyes “with the sea in them” and who has awaited Nancy’s arrival. Such an ending suggests that both texts represent a pilgrimage to identity.

Yet the question remains what kind of identity? Nancy’s “split” subjectivity is based both upon a profound gender dysphoria and the desperate and overwhelming need for “a friend” who will ultimately prove to be a woman. These novels seem to articulate narratives of identity that can be read either in terms of lesbian sexuality or transsexuality. Susan Stanford Friedman has read the duality of this image of two selves as a motif through which to articulate the “Victorian trap of feminine obligation”; a trap which prohibits women from any kind of creativity. As such, Friedman regards Bryher’s “splitting” of subjectivity as an attempt to register the tension between exterior capitulation and interior rebellion. Undoubtedly Friedman is right to identify questions of social and cultural constraint as being imbricated in Bryher’s configuration of Nancy’s subjectivity here. Throughout both novels Nancy is acutely aware of the de-
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limitations that patriarchal society places upon her cultural and social landscapes.

It seems to me, however, that it is necessary to consider this configuration of subjectivity in the light of Bryher’s avowed lesbian identity. In her important article on Two Selves, Diana Collecott reads the text as a lesbian “quest narrative” and contextualizes it amongst other material Bryher was producing in the early 1920s, notably her essay “The Girl-Page in Elizabethan Literature” and her draft prose-poem “Eros of the Sea.” Collecott argues that it is clear from the material that Bryher produces during this period that she is exploring the boundaries of gender and sexual desire through her writing. In this regard it is extremely useful to read Bryher’s construction of lesbian sexuality through the contextual frames of sexological and psychoanalytic discourses of inversion and female homosexuality.

Within the discourses of sexology, lesbianism and male homosexuality are rendered through the term “inversion.” Two of the notable theorists of inversion, Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis, both locate a powerful correlation between lesbian desire and gender identity. For Krafft-Ebing inversion is a pathological condition. However, Ellis through his theorizations of both male and female homosexuality seeks to find a way of interpreting inversion which will prove, incontrovertibly, that such a condition is innate and to
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some degree “natural.” Despite their differing agendas both Krafft-Ebing’s and Ellis’s notions of the female invert inevitably map masculinity onto the lesbian body and personality, using case histories to work up their theories of “confused” gender identity. Throughout the case histories recorded in his chapter on female inversion in his *Sexual Inversion* (1897), Ellis records childhood “masculinity” as an early indicator of innate inversion. In the case history of “Miss M,” he notes the following:

As a child she did not care for dolls or for pretty clothes, and often wondered why other children found so much pleasure in them. “As far back as my memory goes,” she writes, “I cannot recall a time when I was not different from other children. I felt bored when other girls came to play with me, though I was never rough or boisterous in my sports.” Sewing was distasteful to her. Still she cared little more for the pastimes of boys, and found her favourite amusement in reading, especially adventures and fairy-tales.41

Here Miss M’s adult sexuality is interpreted through the masculine identifications and behaviors of her childhood, implying that her “condition” is one that has been with her since birth. The influence such theories might have had upon Bryher is perhaps made clear, even in this short extract, by its interesting resonance with the account of Nancy’s childhood recorded in *Development*. The degree to which Ellis’s theories
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were important to her is made even clearer by the details of her friendship with him.

Bryher met Havelock Ellis in 1919 through H.D.’s friend Daphne Bax, maintaining a correspondence with him that was to last until 1939. As Bryher was later to conclude in The Heart to Artemis, “Ellis opened new ways and relieved the anxieties of hundreds of uneasy minds.”42 Ellis’s sexological investigations into human sexuality were to be amongst the first sympathetic theorizations of male and female inversion. Bryher and H.D. were to form a close friendship with Ellis, renaming him “Chiron” (healer of Achilles) and inviting him on a trip to Greece with them in 1920.43 During her first meeting with Ellis in London, Bryher raised the question of her gender identity and her lesbian desire. Recording this conversation in a letter to H.D., she writes:

Then we got on to the question of whether I was a boy sort of escaped into the wrong body and he says it is a disputed subject but quite possible and showed me a book about it. . . . We agreed it was most unfair for it to happen but apparently I am quite justified in pleading I ought to be a boy—I am just a girl by accident.44

There is a curious mirroring between Ellis’s act of introducing Bryher to sexological narratives, which provide a kind of revelation about her sexual identity, and the revelation experienced by Stephen Gordon in Radclyffe Hall’s The Well of Loneliness (1928) as she
unwittingly stumbles across a copy of Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* in her father’s study:

Then she noticed that on a shelf near the bottom was a row of books standing behind the others; the next moment she had one of these in her hand, and was looking at the name of the author: Krafft-Ebing—she had never heard of that author before. All the same she opened the battered old book, then she looked more closely, for there on its margins were notes in her father’s small, scholarly hand and she saw that her own name appeared in those notes—She began to read, sitting down rather abruptly. For a long time she read; then went back to the book-case and got out another of these volumes, and another. . . .45

Hall’s text, certainly the most famous and infamous lesbian novel of the 1920s, provides a useful parallel to Bryher’s novels. Hall was similarly influenced by Ellis’s sexological pronouncements on inversion, and her protagonist shares with Nancy a profoundly unsettled gender identity, regarding both her body and her emotional constitution as masculine. Making a new and innovative reading of *The Well of Loneliness*, Jay Pros- ser has argued that Hall’s text is read most legibly as an early narrative of transsexual identity.46 Like *Two Selves* it collapses lesbian desire and gender dysphoria in a way that may well seem problematic in terms of late twentieth-century formulations of lesbian identity. The difficulty encountered in trying to prise the two narratives of lesbianism and transsexuality apart in these texts is explained by the entanglement of these
identities during the first part of the twentieth century. As Judith Halberstam notes in her recent formulation of the term “female masculinity,” the discourses of both lesbianism and transsexuality were conflated, both in the minds of theorists and of lesbians themselves, until the 1940s when medical and surgical advances made gender reassignment surgery and effective hormonal treatment possible.47

It is certainly clear from Bryher’s papers that both transsexuality and homosexuality were areas that continued to trouble and intrigue her. From 1929 until the 1970s, she collected newspaper articles and reports on “sex-change” operations and stories of individuals who crossed gender identities. Indeed these stories seem to arrest her attention in a way that homosexuality did not since she was not to supplement this collection with articles on homosexuality until 1949.48

In utilizing sexological theories of inversion that construct the lesbian as a figure defined primarily through her masculinity, Bryher places both Development and Two Selves in what I would argue is a legible tradition amongst lesbian modernists. In a range of ways Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, and Djuna Barnes (amongst others) all use codified masculinity and gender dysphoria to delineate lesbian identity within certain of their texts. Woolf’s Orlando (1928), for instance, “dodges” the imposition of masculinity upon the lesbian body (glorified through the charac-
terization of her sometime lover Vita Sackville-West) by staging a fantastical and explicit sex change in its main character. Within the early novels of Dorothy Richardson’s *Pilgrimage* series (1915–1967), Miriam Henderson’s body becomes a screen on which masculinity is projected in her large hands “like umbrellas” and her “lack” of femininity. In Barnes’s *Nightwood* the inversions of masculinity and femininity in the characters of the cross-dressing Dr. Matthew Mighty-Grain-O-Salt O’Connor and Robin Vote, who is at times described as a boy, evoke sexological constructions of inversion and homosexuality.

In addition, versions of lesbian masculinity can also be located in lesbian artists of the modernist period. In Romaine Brooks’s portrait of the lesbian painter Gluck, entitled *Peter (A Young English Girl)* (1923), Gluck is represented as a cross-dressing figure marked by a certain aristocratic masculinity. At this time Brooks also painted a portrait of Radclyffe Hall’s partner, Una Troubridge, that is similarly codified through masculinity. Gluck’s own work itself utilizes the signifier of masculinity as a marker of lesbian identity. Her *Medallion*, painted in 1937 to celebrate her relationship with Nesta Obermer, represents the heads of both herself and Nesta on a stylized background, both with short, slicked hair and strong masculine facial features.49

The uses that Bryher makes of the discourses
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of sexology in order to reach some kind of self-understanding are supplemented by her readings of the discourses of psychoanalysis, which were to provide her with other useful narratives of gender identity and sexuality through which to read both herself and her friends. Freud’s most sustained analysis of lesbian sexuality and his last case history was “The Psycho genesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman.” This case history was published in the *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* in 1920 and was translated by one of Bryher’s acquaintances, Barbara Low. While we cannot be sure that Bryher read this case history when it came out, we certainly do find reference to it in the correspondence between Bryher and H.D. at the time of H.D.’s analysis with Freud. As Susan Stanford Friedman has argued, Freud seemed to use his theoretical apparatus from this case history in his work with H.D., regarding her symptoms as arising out of the same psychic configuration as the “beautiful girl” of the case history, who has repudiated her desire for the father in favor of a resurgence of pre-Oedipal desire for the mother. Writing of her “mother-fix,” H.D. writes to Bryher: “F. says mine is absolutely FIRST layer, I got stuck at the earliest pre-OE stage, and ‘back to the womb’ seems to be my only solution.”

Reading this case history alongside Bryher’s sense of her own gender identity is instructive. In his analysis Freud attempts to move away from what he regarded
as the crude biological narratives of sexological “inversion” and to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the identifications and desires of the female homosexual. Yet despite this intention, he still utilizes the signifying index of masculinity to construct lesbian identity. In psychic terms the young homosexual girl seems to have performed a transsexual leap in the re-routing of her desire from father to mother:

This girl had entirely repudiated her wish for a child, her love of men, and the feminine role in general. It is evident that at this point a number of very different things might have happened. What actually happened was the most extreme case. *She changed into a man and took her mother in place of her father as the object of her love.* [emphasis mine]52

While undergoing analysis with Hanns Sachs, Bryher reached a “block” in the analysis because of a similar transformative “switch” in her early psychic history. Writing to H.D. about her analysis with “Turtle” (her nickname for Sachs), Bryher explained, “my analysis sticks because almost as far back as memory I am ‘male’ but there must have been a point Turtle says, where I decided to be ‘male.’”53 Working with Sachs, Bryher finally recognized that this switch takes place at about three years of age, though she was ultimately unsuccessful in locating the event that caused it. This sense of psychic and physical masculinity continued to be the most profound factor in Bry-
her’s understanding of her identity. During H.D.’s analysis with Freud, H.D. was to discover that within her unconscious, Bryher was figured as a man. Bryher’s reply to this revelation was that it made her “glad.”

Freud himself was to pass judgement on Bryher’s gender identity during this analysis. In *Tribute to Freud*, H.D. records that Freud himself characterized Bryher as a masculine figure, exclaiming upon being shown her photograph: “She is *only* a boy.” The importance which Bryher attached to this crossing of the gender divide and the terms of lesbian desire is made clear in a letter to Walter Schmideberg in which she indicated the pressing areas of investigation into which psychoanalysis should move in order to grow as a discipline. She noted with disappointment that:

> No research has been made in p.a. with regard to the girl who is really a boy. Freud made one study, and there are a few occasional references, that is all. . . . Turtle knows much but never writes about it.

Within her reference to Freud’s “Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman,” it is clear then that Bryher conflates some kind of transsexuality with lesbian sexuality, seeing the two perhaps as a seamless continuum. What is also clear is that in her own fictional accounts of her coming to identity, the dominant discourses of inversion and female homosexuality provide important points of reference through
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which to construct this record of the journey to lesbian identity.

The “Ends” of Writing

As a coda to this reading of Development and Two Selves, it is important to note, as Susan Stanford Friedman does in her reading of Two Selves, that masculinity must also be read for women in the early twentieth century as something evoked through the act of writing. Friedman suggestively links Amy Lowell’s “The Sisters” with Bryher’s Two Selves, noting that for both to write was to act “manwise.” Here again, Bryher’s complex correlation between lesbian sexuality, masculinity, and writing can be seen to work within a tradition of lesbian modernism. We can trace the complex signification of lesbian sexuality and writing through the works of Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, Djuna Barnes, H.D., and Gertrude Stein, amongst others. Writing, indeed, becomes the “end” of Nancy’s quest, imaged both in the body and the poetry of the fictional H.D. There is, indeed, a kind of textual causality at work in Nancy’s final journey in Two Selves, up the “Phoenician path” to the “grey cottage that faced the south-blue sea.” H.D. has already “entered” the text, embodied through her poetic voice, three chapters before the chapter “Meeting.” She is, indeed, woven into Nancy’s consciousness prior to the
point of their meeting when she finds “strong, satisfying music” in a poem that is given no title:

I saw the first pear
As it fell—
The honey-seeking, golden-banded,
The yellow swarm
Was not more fleet than I
(Spare us from loveliness).58

These lines, from H.D.’s poem “Priapus,” appear in the first Imagist collection *Des Imagistes*—the collection that provided Bryher’s first introduction to H.D. at the age of nineteen. There is, in this unacknowledged quoting of H.D.’s lines, a kind of circularity at play within the text, a sense of a previsioning of final union that foregrounds the importance of writing and poetry. Nancy, we understand, must “write a book. And find she had a friend.” Yet the hope of either endeavor is waning dreadfully by the end of *Two Selves*: “Cycles and cycles of days. Nothing happening. Words beat in her head. She could not say them.” In this despairing “wordless” state Nancy takes a chance on “adventure” and decides to keep the appointment with the poet who might become a “friend.” Then, chastening her desire outside the door to the cottage, she reminds herself that “poets, of course, were not what they wrote about.” Yet the figure beyond the door—who is young, beautiful, entrancing—will ultimately allow her to find a way to vocalize the words she cannot say. We
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know this because Bryher herself finds this language in the texts of Development, Two Selves, and West, in the self-reflexive recording of the real-life meeting that shaped her life to come. Her “development,” which is brought to fruition by her union with H.D., is memorialized in fictional form and brought to a point of ending by writing:

*If she found a friend, an answer, the past years would vanish utterly from her mind.*

Words, friendship, desire: all infinite possibilities which open out the future, and make sense of the past.

NOTES

1. Evidence of Bryher’s key position in the networks of modernism is provided by the sheer breadth of her correspondence, spanning many of the major literary and intellectual figures of the first half of the twentieth century. This correspondence is held in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.


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4. Ibid., 157.

5. This was followed by a second collection, Arrow Music, published by J. and E. Bumpus in 1922.

6. Both introductions turned out, in their own ways, to be important. Bryher was to go on to become a longstanding friend and patron to Dorothy Richardson, providing sufficient financial assistance to allow parts of Pilgrimage to be produced in times of hardship.

7. Bryher, Heart to Artemis, 187.


11. For a fuller account of Bryher’s editorial and financial support of “little” magazines, see Jayne Marek, Women Editing Modernism: “Little” Magazines and Literary History (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1995). The terms of Bryher’s patronage and questions of cultural production remain to be theorized.


16. Laura Marcus, “Cinema and Psychoanalysis,” in Close xxxviii
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17. For an excellent account of Bryher’s involvement with the psychoanalytic community and her own plans to become an analyst, see Maggie Magee and Diane C. Miller, “Superior Guinea-Pig: Bryher and Psychoanalysis,” in *Lesbian Lives: Psychoanalytic Narratives Old and New* (New York: Analytic Press, 1996), 1–33.


19. For an account of Bryher’s attempts to begin training, see Magee and Miller, *Lesbian Lives*, 1–33.


21. The most important articles from *Close Up* can be found in the excellent annotated collection *Close Up, 1927–1933: Cinema and Modernism*, ed. Donald, Friedberg, and Marcus.

22. Anne Friedberg, “Borderline and POOL films,” in *Close Up, 1927–1933*, 218. Donald, Friedberg, and Marcus include stills from *Borderline* in their discussion of the film, including one of Bryher.


24. *Development* was reviewed in the following papers and journals in Britain and America: *The Times Literary Supplement; The Saturday Review; The Athenaeum; The Bookman; The Spectator; The New York Times Book Review; New York Evening Post; Boston Evening Transcript; The New Republic; The Nation; The Dial.*


30. Indeed Bryher provides some of the most insightful and
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nuanced contemporary commentary on Pilgrimage in Heart to Artemis, regarding the book as “a searchlight” amidst the gloom of the Great War.

32. Bookman, August 1920, 172.
33. Marianne Moore, Dial, 21 May 1921, 589.
34. See Daily Mail, 26 and 28 June 1920, 3 and 5 respectively.
36. Heart to Artemis, 194.
38. Another characterization of sexual excess and deviance through “night” can, of course, be found in James Joyce’s “Circe” section of Ulysses (1922).
42. Bryher, Heart to Artemis, 287.
43. This trip was to end in disaster after H.D. experienced her famous “visions” in Corfu. Ellis was to travel back to Britain alone, while Bryher brought H.D. home overland. H.D. later recorded this experience in Tribute to Freud (1956).
47. See Judith Halberstam, Female Masculinity (Durham,
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N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998). Though, as Prosser notes in his detailed historical account, certain transsexual subjects called upon medical help (and received it) as early as the 1860s; see Prosser, Second Skins, 140–55.

48. These clippings are taken from a range of papers including The Times, The New York Times, The Evening Standard, and The Illustrated London Times; the sources of some are not attributed.


50. See Friedman, Psyche Reborn, 121ff. See also Lisa Appignanesi and John Forrester, Freud's Women (London: Virago, 1993), 389–90.

51. Quoted in Appignanesi and Forrester, Freud's Women, 390.


55. H.D., Tribute to Freud, 170.


57. Friedman, Psyche Reborn, 43.

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