

7

Educating Daughters: The Melbourne Girls

The daughters of University of Melbourne academics Alexander Leeper and his colleague Orme Masson lived with their families in provided residences within or adjacent to the grounds of the university. Their families were the least wealthy of those in this study and the most urban. In the Leeper household, the education of Katha and Kitty, Valentine and Molly was a shared enterprise based on mutual agreement between their parents, though Alexander was always the dominant influence. In the Masson household the maternal influence was the strongest force shaping the instruction of Flora Marjorie (Marnie) and Elsie. Three of the four Leeper girls undertook university degrees at the University of Melbourne; the Masson girls did not attend university formally, though Elsie underwent professional training as a nurse during World War One. The thinking that lay behind the type of educational experience received by these six girls captures something of the complex array of attitudes held by men and women towards the relatively new phenomenon of the female university graduate and the professional woman during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century.

The debate that developed about the appropriate social role for daughters of the new professional classes was, as we shall see, embedded in discussions of gender and class. Support for equal educational opportunities was not always accompanied by support for women's rights to complete political, legal and social equality.

Orme Masson supported the suffrage movement and favoured university education for women; his wife did not. Alexander Leeper championed women's right to university education, supported women's entry into the medical profession and agitated in favour of the ordination of women in the Church. He was slow, however, to accept women's suffrage, until women had proven their capabilities in World War One.¹

The Leeper Girls: Kitty and Katha, Valentine and Molly

'A fair Home of religion and learning.'² Alexander Leeper used this phrase to characterise the type of environment he wished to provide for female university students at Trinity Women's Hostel. It could just as easily have described the family environments he created with both of his wives: Adeline Allen Leeper, 1853–1893 (mother of Kitty, born 1881, and Katha, born 1882), and Mary Moule Leeper, whom he married in 1897 (mother of Valentine, born 1900, and Beatrice 'Molly', born 1901). Within these marriages, Leeper's wives took on important but largely subordinate roles in shaping the content and form of their daughters' education. Any differences in the educational experiences of Kitty and Katha, Valentine and Molly largely stemmed from changes in the availability of secondary education for girls in Melbourne. When Kitty and Katha were at secondary school age, the Presbyterian, Methodist and Catholic churches offered such an education, but the Anglicans did not. Leeper was, as Marjorie Theobald points out, a 'key figure' in making good this deficiency by persuading the Anglican Church to purchase Merton Hall, a private girls' school, in 1903.³ Lyndsay Gardiner discusses the role of Leeper in these developments within the context of the provision of accommodation for women

1 In relation to Alexander Leeper's views on women's rights see Lyndsay Gardiner, *Janet Clarke Hall*, pp. 1–6; Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, pp. 133, 136, 241, 337, 409–10, 428.

2 Alexander Leeper to Lillian Alexander, 4, 30 August 1888, Trinity College Council Minutes, 1883–1961 and Janet Clarke Hall Archives, cited by Gardiner, *Janet Clarke Hall*, p. 8.

3 Theobald, *Knowing Women*, p. 79. Merton Hall was established in 1893 by a former principal of the Trinity Hostel, Emily Hensley, after a falling out with Leeper. In 1898 it was purchased by Leeper's friend, W. E. Morris, for two of his daughters, Mary and Edith, to run. The school, at Leeper's suggestion, came under the provisional supervision of an Anglican Church council in 1900 and was purchased by the Church in 1903. See Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, p. 302.

at the University of Melbourne.⁴ Whatever Leeper's role, for him personally, the establishment of such an Anglican church-run school opened up the prospect of a school-based education for Valentine and Molly, the daughters of his second marriage.⁵

Eldest daughters Katha and Kitty's education may be briefly summarised: tuition at home until their mid-teens, two years studying at a girls' secondary school in London, followed by a return to Melbourne, where they undertook arts degrees. It was carried out in a manner that replicated their mother's own education. Daily tuition from a governess was supplemented with teaching by their parents, and specialist tutors were engaged for music and dance lessons. This pattern continued beyond their mother Adeline's death in 1893 and ended with their father's remarriage in 1897. They were then escorted to London by their maternal aunt, Ida, and uncle, Boyce, with whom they lived while they studied for two years at a private girls' secondary school. This arrangement had been settled with Adeline as she faced imminent death from cancer. The decision reflected the Allen family's persistent and at times insistent role in the education of their granddaughters and nieces; it was based on a realistic assessment of family circumstance and probably not one that would have been considered had Adeline lived. The lack of an Anglican girls' school equivalent to Melbourne Grammar for boys, which Katha and Kitty's younger brothers attended from the age of seven and eight, might have been a decisive consideration, however. Given his steadfast Anglicanism, Leeper would have found it difficult, if not intolerable, to send his girls to schools of other denominations.⁶

Anglicanism and Trinity College dominate the upbringing of Katha and Kitty. Their childhoods were spent within the principal's residence, a three-storey, sandstone, 'Late-Gothic'-style building in the grounds adjoining the University of Melbourne.⁷ Near Tin Alley, with its entrance and driveway facing onto Sydney Road (later Royal

4 Gardiner, *Janet Clarke Hall*, pp. 1–69.

5 Rosslyn McCarthy and Marjorie Theobald (eds), *Melbourne Girls' Grammar School: Centenary Essays, 1893–1993*, Hyland House, Melbourne, 1993, pp. 38, 57.

6 See Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, pp. 260–62, 265, 279–81; Alexander Leeper to Mary Moule, 31 December 1896, ALP, T1, box 21d; Alexander Leeper's diary for 1897: 10 April 1897, ALP, T5, box 38; Alexander Leeper to Boyce Allen, 28 August 1898, ALP, T1, box 30/68; Boyce Allen to Alexander Leeper, 11 October 1898, ALP, T1, box 30/68.

7 Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, p. 64.

Parade), the building consisted of 19 rooms; the three largest served the Trinity College students as dining room, library and chapel and were entered by a separate entrance from that of the Leeper's family home.⁸ The size of the residence facilitated, to all appearances, some separation of parents from children, and of work from family life, thus replicating, in some degree, the patterns of upper-class family life in Britain. Alexander Leeper's study was located on the third floor—visiting students were announced to Leeper by a maid via a hose which stretched from the ground floor to the top level.⁹ His wife's quarters occupied the second floor; two nurseries and a schoolroom were on the first floor.

In the day-to-day lives of the two girls, these apparent lines of demarcation blurred. The nature of the children's relationship with their mother meant that they had no qualms about entering her domain uninvited and frequently did so.¹⁰ The family attended daily morning services in the chapel with the Trinity College students.¹¹ Meals were brought to the Leeper family from the college kitchen and the college porter also served the Leepers. A live-in maid, nurse and governess completed the Leepers' array of domestic help. Adeline did not engage in domestic work and was not involved in the basic day-to-day physical care of her children, though she tended conscientiously to them when they were ill.¹² Absolved from the constraints of domesticity, the Leeper family created a home that was, even more so than the household of the Macmillan Browns, a site of learning.

Within this confined setting, Alexander Leeper's personality and educational philosophy dominated. In the judgement of his biographer John Poynter, Leeper was scholarly and charming, possessed a lively sense of fun, but was also intense and emotionally demanding in his relations with his family.¹³ His world-view centred

8 Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, p. 78.

9 Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, pp. 322–33.

10 For examples, see Adeline Leeper's letters from Trinity College, Melbourne, to Alexander Leeper in Britain: 12 August 1889, 30 June 1889, 5 July 1889, 19 July 1889, ALP, T1, box 23, envelope 52, 53.

11 The Trinity College students dubbed the tall, thin figure of Alexander Leeper 'Bones', while his children were affectionately called 'the Ossicles'. Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, p. 282.

12 For examples, see Adeline Leeper's letters from Trinity College, Melbourne, to Alexander Leeper, Britain: 30 June 1889, 5 July 1889, 23 August 1889, 29 August 1889, ALP, T1, box 23, envelope 52, 53.

13 Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, pp. 232–33.

upon a devout Anglicanism, a deep reverence for the values and literature of the classical world, but also a deeply ingrained belief in women's intellectual equality and their right to the same educational opportunities as men. They were beliefs formed in the Ireland of his youth. His mother was a strong, unusually well-educated woman, and his scholarly elder sister, Jeannie, frequently made him aware of her deeply held sense of grievance that she had been denied the education received by her brothers.¹⁴ Consequently, Leeper supported the entry of women into degree courses at the University of Melbourne, and established the first women's residential university college in the southern hemisphere at Trinity College, in order to ensure that female university students could enjoy the educational advantages available to men. He later became involved, as noted, in the establishment and running of Melbourne Church of England Girls' School.¹⁵

Like John Macmillan Brown, Leeper greatly admired the writer George Eliot. He turned to her when seeking to sketch out his ideal of the educated woman. Was it not a 'staggering fact', he asked in a lecture on 'University Women':

to those who hold that higher education tends to unfit women for domestic duties that Marian Evans during the years that she was proving herself an accomplished housekeeper, and organiser of charitable movements in her parish, was also mastering Latin, Greek, German, Italian and Hebrew, and was absorbing the multifarious knowledge with which her books overflow.¹⁶

If Eliot stands here as a rejoinder to those who saw the educated woman as a danger to the home and family, the classics assume the role of lodestar. For Leeper, immersion in classical studies would lead inevitably to an appreciation of the foundation of the liberal democratic ideal and 'would furnish the community with its best leaders and thinkers'.¹⁷ In this belief, at least at the theoretical level, he drew no gender distinction. The Hellenic belief in the ultimate perfectibility

14 Gardiner, *Janet Clarke Hall*, p. 2; Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, pp. 14, 80, 131–32.

15 Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, pp. 131–50, 202–23; Gardiner, *Janet Clarke Hall*, pp. 1–69; Theobald, *Knowing Women*, pp. 75–80.

16 Lecture delivered by Alexander Leeper, 'University Women', cited by Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, p. 327.

17 Alexander Leeper, *A Plea for the Study of the Classics*; Marion Poynter, *Nobody's Valentine: Letters in the Life of Valentine Alexa Leeper, 1900–2001*, Miegunyah Press with Trinity College, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 2008, pp. 19–20.

of humanity became in the Leeper household the basis for a moral injunction for Alexander's daughters: to cultivate industriousness and make strenuous efforts in all things.

More than any of the other girls in this study, Katha and Kitty grew up in a household steeped in the poetry, literature and values of the ancient classical world. As youngsters they listened to their father's stories drawn from the myths and legends of Greece and Rome and attended the Greek plays he produced at Trinity College. Kitty, in particular, became an enthusiastic student of the classical world and, at the age of 12, asked to be taught Latin by her father.¹⁸ Some months before, Leeper announced simply in his diary that he had that day given his wife and daughters 'a little preliminary lesson in Greek grammar'.¹⁹ The brevity of the statement should not obscure its wider import. Greek was a subject traditionally thought too difficult for girls. In nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain, knowledge of Greek was regarded as a marker of scholarly and gentlemanly status, and this belief was well established in colonial Australia. Since it was a compulsory component of an arts degree at the University of Melbourne, it followed that Greek was embedded in the curriculum of the city's private boys' schools.²⁰ Leeper's diary entry may thus be read as indicating the path that he felt his daughters' education should take.²¹ Kitty was perhaps a more willing participant in the lessons than Katha. Writing to her father from her mother's family in Sydney, 12-year-old Kitty was 'very very glad to be coming back to Trinity. I want to begin Latin and Greek as soon as ever I get there ...'.²² In confirming her sister's enthusiasm, Katha complains that she had sat down to her Latin at Kitty's insistence, 'although the Georgics and Medea always make me dead with sleep, which shows I can't have much love for Classics'.²³

18 Kitty Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 10 September 1893, Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, p. 231.

19 Alexander Leeper's diary for 1893: 4 January 1893, ALP, box 38.

20 Greek ceased to be compulsory for entry to the University of Melbourne in 1913. See Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, pp. 355–56.

21 As an optional component of the arts degree in New Zealand universities, Greek was often avoided by the early generation of women students who lacked the preparation for it. Gladys Wilding chose not to study the subject. Mathematics and Latin were, however, compulsory subjects in the BA course at the University of New Zealand until 1911 and 1917 respectively.

22 Kitty Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 10 September 1893, Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, p. 231.

23 Katha Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 2 February 1899, ALP, T2, box 21d; Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, p. 281.

Leeper's biographer depicts him as a man permanently locked in a struggle with his conscience between Hellenism's 'sweetness and light', a belief in the presence of 'noble and divine' elements in humans, and Hebraism's deep sense of the presence of sin.²⁴ Whether his children absorbed this sense of moral struggle from their highly religious upbringing is unclear, but there can be no doubt that Leeper demanded a high level of moral accountability from them. Religious instruction was an important part of their education and religious observance part of their daily life. They attended morning prayers in the Trinity College chapel with the students from Monday to Saturday and St Mary's Church service on a Sunday morning, before going to a Sunday school class conducted by their mother.

Leeper's role as the definer of a strict and demanding moral code, fixed within an orthodox Anglican framework and buttressed by certainties derived from the classical world, is an important dimension of his influence in his daughters' upbringing. It is not, however, the only one. Despite a busy professional life, his active involvement in their education reached beyond teaching them Latin and Greek. Signs of intellectual development prompted delight and were followed by efforts to extend and encourage. When Kitty 'wrote a sonnet on Faith in wonderfully short time after [he] showed her the structure from Matthew Arnold's Sonnets', he recorded the event excitedly in his diary.²⁵ He was enthused similarly when 'Thea [Kitty] wrote a beautiful little poem "Day and Night" in irregular metre' and judged it 'Very full of promise'.²⁶ He helped her prepare poems for recitation at the Daffodil Club, which she attended regularly on Saturdays, and watched plays that she produced and inveigled friends and siblings to act out.²⁷ On occasions he acted alongside them in performances of scenes from Shakespeare's plays, produced for the family's entertainment.²⁸ He also made outings to the theatre and musical concerts a feature of family life. Indeed, these demonstrations of paternal involvement

24 The phrase 'sweetness and light' comes from Matthew Arnold's essay, *Culture and Anarchy*, (1869). For Alexander Leeper's views on classical values and studies see, for example, Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, pp. 1–6, 355–58, 418, 429–30.

25 Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, p. 233, fn 28 29 October 1895, 8 March 1896; Alexander Leeper's diary for 1895: 29 October 1895, diary for 1896: 8 March 1896, ALP, box 38.

26 Alexander Leeper's diary for 1892: 7 February 1892, ALP, box 38.

27 See, for example, Alexander Leeper's diary for 1892: 4 June, 25 July, 20 August, 10 September, ALP, box 38.

28 Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, p. 261.

reveal a capacity to be charmed by his daughters in ways that seem to be less evident, as we shall see in Chapter 8, in his relations with his sons.²⁹

There can be little doubt that the Leeper household was a patriarchal one. And within its recorded remnants, we glean a less complete picture of the maternal influence. Educated, refined and musically talented, Adeline shared her husband's belief in the importance of a classical liberal education for her daughters. On a practical level, it was she who engaged the governess and watched over her work, and organised the children's attendance at music, dance, French and gymnastic class lessons outside the family home. Above all else, she encouraged and fed the girls' voracious reading habits. Her birthday and Christmas presents to them were 'principally books', on one occasion 'about 9 or 10'.³⁰ She showed little inclination to measure and record the stages of her daughters' intellectual development, as Julia Wilding had done so meticulously. Such comments as we may glean are made most commonly in letters to her husband during times when they are apart and, more rarely, in a personal diary. In both these Adeline strikes a note of affectionate bemusement and pride in the different enthusiasms and achievements of her two girls. Katha's mania for sums and Kitty's for spelling and poetry draw special mention:

Katha has spent a great part of the day doing sums—I never saw anything so funny as her craze for sums. She is always begging people to set her addition & subtraction sums and when she can get no [one else she] plods through Kitty's not very intelligible rows of figures & when I went up to kiss her in bed this evening she was sitting up ... doing an addition sum that she had persuaded Mary [maid] to set up for her. Kitty says 'how can Katha like those horrid things'—& I am amused too—she is evidently going to be mathematical.³¹

29 Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, pp. 232–33, 324, shows how Leeper 'doted' on Kitty and Katha.

30 Adeline Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 3 July 1889, 9 July 1889, 21 July 1889, ALP, T1, box 23, envelopes 52–53.

31 Adeline Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 30 June 1889, ALP, box 23/52.

In another letter Adeline told her husband that eight-year-old Kitty had been spelling words out loud on a tram, to the general amusement of the passengers.³² She recorded in her diary, with amusement and amazement, that Kitty 'wrote a lovely little poem' while waiting 'to be allowed to go & help scramble eggs!!'.³³

As well as being an attentive mother, Adeline was also a powerful and demonstrative role model. She continued after marriage to dedicate much of her time to self-improvement. She read widely and frequently studied literary and religious texts with her husband.³⁴ Shakespeare and George Eliot were constant companions, and Adeline's German was with some persistence good enough to translate German texts into English for easier discussion, or, as in the case of some admired German prayers, for spiritual enhancement. She studied, for example, various literary works based around the classic German legendary figure of Faust, a dissatisfied intellectual who bargains with the devil, as well as the novel by German playwright and novelist Gustav Freytag, *Soll und Haben* (*Debit and Credit*), published in 1855, which championed the German middle classes.³⁵ That she spent much time perfecting her German language skills and approached the task of self-improvement earnestly is abundantly clear.³⁶ After attending an 'at home' that turned out to be a 'dull affair', she 'worked hard at German all this evening to make up' for the wasted time.³⁷ In the quest for personal betterment she was also prepared to give convention a nudge:

I am going to have some singing lessons from Herr Hasting & begin tomorrow. I hope I shall like him & that he will teach well & be strict & very particular. I cannot bear those ordinary society teachers who don't like to find fault too often—I am not going to tell anyone about it but you (Ida of course knows & I daresay has told mother) for it looks rather ridiculous for such an ancient matron as I am now with four children too!³⁸

32 Adeline Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 11 July 1889, ALP, box 23/52.

33 Adeline Leeper's diary for 1892: 2 February 1892, ALP, T5, box 38.

34 For example, see Alexander Leeper's diary for 1892: 3 July 1892: 'AML read the first chapter of Hatch's lectures to me', 20 August 1892: 'Read *Paradise Lost* c AML in the drawing room', ALP, box 38; Adeline Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 21 June 1889: 'I have been reading a book that I want to talk to you about. But I want to tell you everything that interests me', ALP, box 23/52.

35 Adeline Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 14 July 1889, ALP, box 23/52.

36 Adeline Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 14 June 1889, 21 June 1889, 14 July 1889, 4 August 1889, 29 September 1889, 6 October 1889, ALP, box 23/52.

37 Adeline Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 4 August 1889, ALP, box 23/52.

38 Adeline Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 28 July 1889, ALP, box 23/58.

Adeline recognised the tension between this desire for self-improvement and her role as a mother: 'I am trying to work at German but don't get much chance [on these] damp foggy days. The children cannot go out & I do not like to leave them too much in the nursery.'³⁹ Her preference was, as she wrote to her husband, to make her children happy and their demands on her time were willingly and cheerfully borne.⁴⁰ The terms of her relationship with her children were less demanding than that between the girls and their father. There was also a more balanced approach to their education. She sanctioned complete holidays from lessons for her daughters, when she judged it necessary, reporting to her husband on one such occasion that the girls were 'jubilant over it'.⁴¹

The fact that she set high standards for her daughters is also evident from her letters to Alexander: 'I enclose a very badly written letter from Kitty—don't show it to anyone. She can do & write so much better, dear careless little thing but she scuttled it off in two minutes.'⁴² Her attitude to Katha and Kitty's music lessons similarly reveal strictness and high expectations.

[Katha] is at the moment practising away very industriously. She is such a good child about her music much better than dear flighty Kitty who hates overcoming difficulties & wants everything to come by inspiration. She would never practise properly if we did not look after her—however they are both getting on very well and can play a great many tunes.⁴³

Adeline also sought and admired strictness in those engaged to teach her daughters. She approved a particular teacher of dance precisely because he was 'strict', and liked to attend the dance classes with her children so that she could observe and later reinforce the lessons: 'Unless I go with the children I cannot know what they are to practise for next time.'⁴⁴ When the teacher scolded the entire class for 'not practising properly', Adeline took it as personal affront to her

39 Adeline Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 14 July 1889, ALP, box 23/58.

40 Adeline Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 30 June 1889, 5 July 1889, 10 July 1889, 21 July 1889, 26 July 1889, 4 August 1889, ALP, box 23/58.

41 Adeline Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 10 July 1889, ALP, box 23/58.

42 Adeline Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 16 August 1889, ALP, box 23/58.

43 Adeline Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 14 July 1889, ALP, box 23/58.

44 Adeline Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 4 August 1889, ALP, box 23/58.

mothering skills, resolving 'to make my two practise up well for the next lesson. They have brought home their poles & blocks for their heads & I am determined that they shall do better next time.'⁴⁵

The strictness and maternal oversight extended to social relationships. Her reluctance to allow her daughters to enrol at the private school Merton Hall was grounded as much in her unwillingness to countenance her daughters travelling across the city to South Yarra as it was in her husband's insistence upon a definitively Anglican school. Her keenness to accompany her daughters to dance classes grew in part from a desire to act as a type of social gatekeeper for them. From a wealthy legal and political Sydney family (of convict origin), she found lack of education and social refinement distasteful.⁴⁶ After attending a fund-raising meeting in Melbourne with the mayor and town clerk, she told Alexander that 'the want of education in the one and the prosiness of the other is almost unbearable'.⁴⁷ Her daughters' social circle consisted largely of other university professors' children living within the university grounds. At times, the social acceptability of some of them was sharply questioned. After holding a party for Katha's birthday, attended by 10 children from university families, Adeline declared she had seldom seen children so 'ugly and common' as those belonging to the Cambridge-educated mathematician Professor Edward Nanson.⁴⁸ Similarly, she judged the Australian-born children of the Yorkshire Methodist Professor Sugden, Principal of Queens College, to be 'warm-hearted but certainly not refined with terrible accents'.⁴⁹ For these reasons, she was reluctant at first to allow her daughters to attend dance lessons along with the Nansons and Sugdens, but relented because her girls 'like[d] the strange children'.⁵⁰

Adeline's death in 1893 of cancer and their father's remarriage in 1897, when Kitty and Katha were 16 and 14 years of age, had dramatic consequences. The reconstitution of family life that followed was

45 Adeline Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 17 August 1889, ALP, box 23/58.

46 Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, p. 27.

47 Adeline Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 26 July 1889, ALP, box 23.

48 Adeline Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 21 July 1889, ALP, box 23; Selleck, *The Shop*, pp. 141–42.

49 Adeline Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 21 July 1889, ALP, box 23; Selleck, *The Shop*, pp. 239–41.

50 Adeline Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 26 July 1889, ALP, box 23. Penny Russell, 'A Wish of Distinction', ch. 1–2, examines women's role in upholding class distinctions and social standards of femininity in Melbourne for an earlier period.

shaped within the wider context of the extended Leeper–Allen families. Adeline’s death had been preceded by a lengthy illness. She approved a decision that should Leeper remarry, the girls would complete their schooling in London and live with their mother’s unmarried younger sister Ida, brother Boyce and his family. Above all else, this would allow them to continue their studies. Leeper could but reluctantly assent. These were, as Janet McCalman has written, ‘terrible years in Victoria’ and hard economic times brought ‘a recognition of necessity’.⁵¹ Adeline had brought an allowance to their marriage, and this had been used to fund the children’s education.⁵² But it was also a decision that grew naturally from a marriage in which the maternal extended family had played a significant role. During sicknesses and pregnancies, at times when Alexander was absent from Melbourne and for holidays, the Allen family home in Sydney had become an accepted part of childhood. Similarly, Ida had spent considerable periods of time helping her sister Adeline at Trinity College during Leeper’s lengthy absences overseas pursuing college business. Her constant presence in the Leeper household after Adeline’s death and as a companion on the journey to England and at the home of her brother Boyce Allen in London represented another continuity in the lives of the two girls.⁵³

Precisely what impact this experience was to have on Kitty and Katha psychologically and emotionally remains unclear, but here we may briefly summarise the external markers of this transition from childhood to adulthood at the completion of schooling. During their two years in England (1897–99), both girls sat the Oxford and Cambridge Joint Board Higher Certificate Exam, though Kitty did not pass. They returned to Melbourne in November 1899 as planned, although Kitty had continued to express a desire to attend Oxford University.⁵⁴ Back at Trinity College, after coaching from their father,

51 Janet McCalman, *Journeyings: The Biography of a Middle-Class Generation 1920–1990*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria, 1993, p. 55, citing Brian Fitzpatrick, *The Australian People, 1788–1945*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria, 1951, pp. 217–18.

52 Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, pp. 120, 230–31, 234–35, 238–39, 261, 280.

53 See Davidoff, *Thicker than Water*, pp. 153–57, for a discussion about interdependence between unmarried, married siblings and their spouses.

54 Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, pp. 280–81; Alexander Leeper to Boyce Allen, 28 August 1898; Boyce Allen to Alexander Leeper, 11 October 1898, ALP, T1, box 30/68; Kitty Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 2 February 1899, ALP, T1, box 21d; Katha Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 6 April 1899, ALP, T1, box 21d; Rex Leeper’s diary for 1899. Kitty and Katha Leeper left Australia on 10 April 1897 and returned in late November 1899.

both sat and passed the University of Melbourne matriculation exams in 1900. The following year, Kitty began an arts degree and Katha enrolled in the university's music conservatorium, having won an Exhibition in performance. In the blended family they now entered, new roles needed to be negotiated; without Adeline's presence, Leeper struggled to adjust to daughters, now 20 and 19 years of age, used to greater independence than he remembered. He was shocked, for example, at Katha's behaviour at university dances they attended, when she allowed particular men to dominate her dance card, and at her habit of staying out until 2.00 am after attending such dances. After initial success at university, sharing an exhibition in 1902, and having two songs she had written published the same year, Katha failed her course in 1904. Stimulated by her experiences in amateur theatricals, Kitty wanted to abandon university studies and become an actress, but, despite failing her course in 1902, continued at her father's behest and graduated in 1905.⁵⁵

Throughout these years of awkward transition, the maternal extended family offered other possibilities. The Allen family had sailed back to Australia with the two girls and took up residence again in Sydney. Their Sydney home continued, as it had in their childhoods, to be regarded by Katha and Kitty to be as much a part of the family they belonged to as Trinity College.⁵⁶ Both girls spent a great deal of time singly and together with the Allens, and it is tempting to see them as a greater influence in these transition years than that now able to be exerted from within the blended Leeper family. Like the Boyce Allens, Katha and Kitty were increasingly leaning towards Anglo-Catholicism and away from the Anglicanism they had imbibed from their father.⁵⁷ In 1906 Katha (24) and Kitty (25) followed their maternal family to London, where their uncle Boyce Allen had now settled permanently, representing the legal firm Allen, Allen & Hensley. Ostensibly their trip was to continue their studies—Katha music in Berlin, Kitty to improve her German and pursue her literary interests.⁵⁸ Their lives would be lived out in the old world, not the new.

55 Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, pp. 283, 297, 322–25; Alexander Leeper's diary for 1902: 30 July 1902, 1 August 1902, ALP, box 37.

56 Poynter in *Doubts and Certainties*, p. 324, notes that when visiting the Allen household in 1905 Alexander Leeper had commented that 'family affection in this house almost takes the place of religion'.

57 Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, p. 281.

58 Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, p. 325.

What, if any, differences existed in the education of Alexander Leeper's twentieth-century daughters? Valentine Alexa was born in 1900 and Beatrice Mary (Molly) in 1901 to his second wife Melburnian Mary Moule, the mature-aged and not previously married daughter of the late Frederick Gore Moule, a partner of a prominent legal firm. Mary was, like Adeline, a scholarly and cultivated member of what John Poynter has described as the 'narrow world of Melbourne society'. At 37 years of age, she moved comfortably within that society, more comfortably than Sydney-sider Adeline ever had. Well-versed in the philanthropic activities of the city, she fitted quickly into a life at Trinity College.⁵⁹ By the turn of the century, governesses were hard to find, and Mary assumed the mantle of teacher of both daughters, relinquishing the responsibility only when she and Alexander visited England in 1908. From that point, until mid-1912, the two girls were taught within their home by Miss Cornwall, the sister of the college registrar. In its form and content there was little divergence here from the educational experience of their half-sisters, Katha and Kitty. Just as he had done a decade before, Leeper taught them Greek and Latin and read them stories from the *Odyssey*. When the girls reached secondary-school age, they were enrolled at Melbourne Church of England Girls' Grammar School. It had by then been receiving students for nearly a decade.⁶⁰ Leeper had played a major role in the purchase of the school by the Church and taken his place on the inaugural school council; he remained on its governing body until his death in 1934. Mary, thought to have possessed advanced views on women's education, shared her husband's enthusiasm for such a school and was to take her turn on the school council in 1915, while the girls were students. They helped create a school that would provide an educational pathway to university within an Anglican environment.⁶¹

In retrospect, and measured against the norms of time and circumstance, we can see in the childhood education and subsequent lives of Valentine and Molly Leeper the reproduction of two strains of late nineteenth-century middle-class thinking about women's place in society and in the family. Both were provided with an education

59 Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, pp. 246–65. Poynter's comment about the narrowness of Melbourne society is on p. 264.

60 Marion Poynter, *Nobody's Valentine*, pp. 19–29.

61 Theobald, p. 79; Marion Poynter, *Nobody's Valentine*, pp. 25–28; Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, pp. 383, 411.

thought progressive and modern by contemporaries. Described as possessing a keen intellect, Valentine took her place amongst the small group of young women who progressed through to an academic degree, winning a senior state scholarship to university and completing a BA at the University of Melbourne in 1921. As the eldest daughter of ageing parents, expectations and loyalties combined in ways familiar to her generation.⁶² Financial constraints experienced by the family after Leeper's retirement in 1918 meant that they could not employ domestic servants, administrative assistants or carers. Parental expectations and Valentine's sense of duty to others, combined with her mother's failing eyesight and her father's physical ailments, meant that Valentine and her sister shouldered the burden of household work. At times Valentine's domestic duties had interfered with her university studies and affected her marks; such demands suggested a future which would continue to be held within the family environment that had shaped her.

Valentine became her father's secretary in 1922 and, along with her sister Molly, carer for both her ailing parents until their deaths—Leeper's in 1934 and Mary's in 1952. Soon after her mother's death, Valentine, aged 53, began a career as a teacher to supplement the sisters' small inheritance. In Molly's case, the circumstances of time, place and gender can be seen in a future that was to mimic that of her mother: unlike Valentine she did not proceed to university after leaving Melbourne Church of England Girls' Grammar School but became immediately immersed in domestic chores and joined her mother in philanthropic and civic activities.⁶³

These were constrained choices, limited by family obligations and financial difficulties, and ones that seemed to embrace the norms of the day rather than the liberating notions implicit in the idea of the 'new woman' that point more to independent careers.⁶⁴ They were an indication, perhaps, that over 40 years after the University of Melbourne's first female students graduated, the pursuit of higher education and paid employment in the professions by middle-class

62 Carol Dyhouse, *Feminism and the Family in England 1880–1939*, pp. 25–27, 30–36.

63 Marion Poynter, *Nobody's Valentine*, pp. 28–42, and passim; Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, pp. 411, 430.

64 Kay Whitehead, 'The Spinster Teacher in Australia from the 1870s to the 1960s', *History of Education Review*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2007, pp. 1–17.

females still required significant emotional and financial support from their families. It also suggests the degree of difficulty involved in following pathways that were less than traditional for women.

This is not to imply that philanthropic and civic activities were somehow lesser than academic and professional ones. Valentine and Molly certainly did not see it this way. Moreover, such an interpretation would fly in the face of the importance that the Leeper family attached to familial and social duty, as well as adult lives of activism and social involvement that speak of civic commitment. Through Valentine's letter-writing to newspapers and influential public figures, and her involvement in a number of organisations, including the local League of Nations and the Victorian Aboriginal Group, she became a 'fearless champion of social justice'.⁶⁵ Molly worked for the Victoria League and the English Speaking Union, and, like Valentine, belonged to a range of organisations, including the Classical Association and the Australian Institute of International Affairs. The childhoods examined in this study suggest that the educated and cultured middle-class young women of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were at one and the same time constrained by circumstances and liberated by the childhoods that had shaped them.

Marnie and Elsie Masson: 'The last of the Mohicans'.⁶⁶

Like the Leeper girls, Marnie and Elsie Masson were born and raised within the vicinity of the University of Melbourne. Unlike them, neither pursued a degree there. Explaining why this was so takes us to the heart of contemporary debates amongst upper middle-class families about two interrelated questions: what social role might their daughters be expected to play and what form of education would this role require? Throughout the childhoods of Marnie and Elsie, we observe Orme and Mary Masson answering these questions within the privacy of family in increasingly different ways. Their answers might be characterised as mirroring the public struggle between

65 Marion Poynter, *Nobody's Valentine*, front jacket cover, passim; Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, pp. 411, 430.

66 Marnie Masson, Heronswood Log Book, 27 February 1906, Flora Marjorie (Marnie) Bassett Papers, UMA, 7/26/13, Rickard, *H. B. Higgins*, p. 207.

those who envisaged greater involvement by women in the public and professional spheres, and those who preferred middle-class women to devote their energies to charitable and philanthropic activities. It has become common to label these arguments progressive and traditional, and to link the former with the campaign for providing women with the same educational opportunities as men. Such a characterisation does less than justice to the subtleties within the conservative argument, which seems at first glance to require little change in the education of young women, yet which was, as discussed below, sometimes infused with an ambition to contribute to social progress and looked as much forward for its rationale as it sought legitimacy in the past.

The childhoods of Flora Marjorie Masson (Marnie, born 1889) and Elsie Masson (born 1890) have been viewed, from the perspective of adulthood, as ones of thwarted or delayed realisation of potential. That characterisation was endorsed in Len Weickhardt's *Masson of Melbourne*, in which the author accepts that it was Mary Masson's beliefs regarding girls' education and the social role of upper-middle-class women that 'denied' her daughters a formal university education.⁶⁷ That Orme and Mary developed conflicting views on the subject is clear: Orme supported women's right to equal educational opportunities, his wife wished to qualify her support. The fact that her qualification was to involve a denial of opportunity is also clear. It was Mary who prescribed that Marnie and Elsie's education should be one of tuition at home with a governess, followed by travel in Europe, finished by a stint of formal education at Melbourne's Church of England Girls' Grammar School and attendance at university lectures in French as cultural students only.⁶⁸ What is not so clear is how and why she came to hold this viewpoint, and how it came to be that her views prevailed.

On the face of it, the position adopted by Mary Masson regarding her daughters' education seems at odds with her own Scottish experience and her parents' beliefs. Born and raised in Aberdeen, she was a governess-educated, cultivated young woman with considerable

67 Weickhardt, *Masson of Melbourne*, p. 72. Weickhardt bases this analysis on an interview with Marnie Masson, n.d., and uses the word 'denied'. See DOMFP, box 6/10/1; Marnie Bassett, 'Notes', Marnie Bassett papers, 7/26/13. Selleck, *Finding Home*, concurs (see pp. 82–84, 98–99).

68 Weickhardt, *Masson of Melbourne*, pp. 72–74; Marnie Bassett, 'Notes', Marnie Bassett papers, 7/26/13; Selleck, *The Shop*, p. 651.

musical talents, and sat in on classes at the University of Aberdeen.⁶⁹ The university had extended its local exams to girls in 1880 and opened its courses to women in 1883, but it was a further nine years before women were admitted to degrees in Scotland. Both male sides of the family were prominent in the Scottish medical profession. Mary's uncle James Struthers, a Leith medical practitioner, had facilitated women medical students' entry to Leith Hospital. Her father Sir John Struthers (1823–1899), anatomist and Professor of Anatomy at the University of Aberdeen from the 1860s, was the lone authority supporting Miss Garrett Anderson in her unsuccessful attempt to obtain medical admission when he had been a lecturer at Surgeon's Hall, Edinburgh.⁷⁰

Mary's mother, Lady Christina Alexander Struthers was an unusually well-educated woman for her times, taught by her mother, a former governess, and by her father, a country medical practitioner in Wooler, Scotland. In the 1860s she was an active member of the women's movement in Aberdeen. An outspoken advocate of higher education for women, she was a foundation member of the Aberdeen Ladies' Educational Association, launched in 1877 to provide a program of lectures delivered especially to women by university professors. She came to the realisation, however, that such classes were dominated by leisured women, who, because of their social class and gender, were ill-prepared for serious study. Lady Struthers consequently campaigned for a 'systematic' and 'continuous' teaching of girls and women.⁷¹ She also believed it was important for women to gain university degrees: 'We must have attainment stamped and certified by the granting of degrees. [We are] training the future educators of the community.'⁷² Whether Lady Struthers was referring to the more middling class of girls who would have to earn a living or included upper middle-class girls and women in her vision is unclear.

69 Marnie Bassett, 'Notes', Marnie Bassett papers, 7/26/13. Mary Struthers Masson was born in 1862.

70 *In Memoriam: James Struthers, M. D. of Leith*, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh (n.d.) (pamphlet), DOMFP, box 7/10/3, John Struthers, *Memoir of Dr. Alexander Wooler* (published pamphlet, n.d.), DOMFP, box 7/10/3.

71 Jenny Young, 'Mary Struther's Family Tree', ms, 1973, 'Mamma's Forebears', ms, n.d. or author given, 'Lady Struthers' (Obituary), *Journal of Education*, September 1907, pp. 602, 604, DOMFP, box 7/10/3.

72 'Lady Struthers' (Obituary), DOMFP, box 7/10/3.

Measured against these family attitudes, the position adopted by Mary Masson towards the education of her own daughters in Melbourne is a complex and seemingly ambiguous one. That it was not one based on any notion of women's innate inferiority, or an acceptance of a subordinate position, is abundantly clear from the influence she was able to assert within the family (most notably, in the education of her daughters) and in the more public roles she played. She was largely responsible for bringing university wives into the social life of the institution; hitherto, they had been all but excluded. As a founding member of the Lyceum Club established in Melbourne in 1912, she insisted that membership be awarded to women solely on the basis of individual merit, rather than that of their husbands or fathers.⁷³ Along with her husband, she supported the efforts of Helen Sexton, one of the first female medical students at the university.⁷⁴ Together with Mary Moule Leeper, she helped Lucy Archer, a widowed gentlewoman fallen on hard times, to obtain the principalship of Trinity College Hostel for Women (1906–18) despite her lack of formal university qualifications.⁷⁵

For Mary Masson the issue of appropriate education for girls seems to hinge upon issues of class and gender. She drew a distinction between the 'gentlewoman' and 'the new woman', and the woman who needed to be educated in order to earn a living and the woman who did not. There were other dualities in her thinking: the value of working to support oneself and one's family as set against the worthiness of voluntary, unpaid work for the betterment of the community and society; the value of the pursuit of higher learning for its own sake, as opposed to the pursuit of formal qualifications. It is within this framework of ideas that Mary Masson's educational philosophy was given practical expression in the management of her daughters' educations. Put in its simplest terms, her answer to the question of what role should her daughters play in the Melbourne of the early twentieth century was unambiguous: as upper middle-class

73 Weickhardt, *Masson of Melbourne*, pp. 74–75; Marnie Bassett, 'Once upon a Time', Address to the Lyceum Club, 21 November 1972, Marnie Bassett Papers, 7/26/13. See also Marnie Bassett to Elsie Malinowski, 6 December 1921, p. 5, DOMFP, box 5/5/2; Selleck, *The Shop*, pp. 524, 669; Joan M. Gillison, *A History of the Lyceum Club*, Melbourne Lyceum Club, Melbourne, 1975, pp. 26–28.

74 Weickhardt, *Masson of Melbourne*, pp. 39, 177. See also Helen Sexton to Mary Masson, 1 November 1935, DOMFP, box 5/6/2.

75 Weickhardt, *Masson of Melbourne*, p. 75; Gillison, *A History of the Lyceum Club*, pp. 32–33; Gardiner, *Janet Clarke Hall*, pp. 56–59.

and privileged girls, they should busy themselves alongside her in a life of philanthropy and good works until their marriage. It followed naturally from this answer that her daughters should be educated in ways that best prepared them for this social purpose. A university degree was unnecessary and interpreted by Mary as an exercise in selfish individualism, when pursued by young women who did not need to fashion a career. Furthermore, on a deeper psychological level, to encourage her daughters to pursue a lifestyle different from her own would possibly have been seen by Mary as undermining the validity of her own activities.

Mary Masson's strongly held views met muted opposition from her husband. Like Mary, Orme came from a family of highly educated, path-breaking women sympathetic to the objectives of the women's movement. Soon after his arrival at the University of Melbourne in 1887, he supported the successful attempt to have women admitted to Melbourne's medical school, the only course still denying women entry at the university. He subsequently gave much assistance to one of the first female medical students, Helen Sexton.⁷⁶ He is reported to have announced to his class at the time: 'Gentlemen, the ladies have come to stay.'⁷⁷ His support for women students was couched in terms that made clear that he expected their arrival to occur decently and with order. He saw Bella Lavender (née Guerin), Melbourne University's first woman MA graduate (1885), as someone who 'flaunts her MA degree', had a 'craving for notoriety' and was not a suitable role model for his 'impressionable daughter', Elsie.⁷⁸ Despite caveats he placed on his support for women within the university, his preference was that his daughters should take advantage of the opportunities that lay before them at the University of Melbourne. That he deferred to Mary flowed naturally from his more supporting than active role in the education of his daughters.

76 Weickhardt, *Masson of Melbourne*, pp. 39, 146, 177.

77 Selleck, *The Shop*, p. 650.

78 The first two quotes are direct ones from Orme Masson written in a letter from Melbourne to daughter Marnie Masson, England from Melbourne, 24 June 1917, DOMFP, box 6/9/1; the last quote is from Selleck, *The Shop*, pp. 651–55. Julia Margaret (Bella) Lavender née Guerin (b. 1858), the daughter of Irish-Catholic parents, became in 1883 the first female graduate of an Australian university when she graduated with a BA from the University of Melbourne in 1883. She went on to become a teacher, writer, suffragist, rationalist, anti-conscription campaigner and social feminist, and was briefly married in 1909 to George Lavender. See Selleck, *The Shop*, pp. 264–65. It was perhaps Lavender's involvement in the anti-conscription campaign that most upset Orme Masson.

Unlike their older brother Irvine, who attended Melbourne Church of England Boys' Grammar School, Marnie and Elsie Masson were for the most part taught at home by a 'daily governess' (usually a University of Melbourne graduate). Presumably for reasons of economy as well as social contact, they shared their lessons with the daughters of the biology professor Walter Baldwin Spencer, who had arrived at the University of Melbourne from Lancashire with his wife in January 1887.⁷⁹ The two families became close friends.⁸⁰ Mary Masson, who preferred a sheltered environment for her daughters, was uncomfortable with the Carlton in which the university stood, recalled later by Marnie as a 'down-at-heel area with a pub at every corner—a Dickensian squalor with drunken men reeling from pub to pub doors at any time of day'.⁸¹ She rejected the idea that Marnie and Elsie travel across town to attend Melbourne Girls' Grammar School, though both girls would have welcomed the opportunity to make more friends outside their small university community.⁸²

Marnie Masson later characterised her childhood education years and those of her sister as out of step with the times. She and Elsie were, as she put it, the 'last of the Mohicans'.⁸³ Home-based tuition from governesses was certainly becoming less and less common. As Ann Larson demonstrates, between 1871 and 1891 the percentage of Melbourne girls being educated at home (a category wider than that of governess) had fallen from 16 to 7 per cent.⁸⁴ Their education was as traditional in content and form as it was in its locale: dancing and music lessons (Marnie was a talented violinist) and drawing sat alongside the study of languages: French, German and Italian, English grammar and literature, history, geography, biology and mathematics.

The childhoods of Marnie and Elsie were, conversely, less driven by parental agendas than was apparent in the Wilding, Macmillan Brown or Leeper families. Here, we neither see a mother pouring her energies and anxieties into life events diaries that track all progress

79 Selleck, *The Shop*, pp. 287–89; D. J. Mulvaney, 'Spencer, Walter Baldwin (1860–1929)', *ADB*, vol. 12, 1990, pp. 33–36.

80 Weickhardt, *Masson of Melbourne*, p. 51.

81 Weickhardt, *Masson of Melbourne*, p. 35, quoting Marnie Masson, 'Once upon a Time', Address to the Lyceum Club, Melbourne, 21 November 1972, p. 24.

82 Weickhardt, *Masson of Melbourne*, p. 51.

83 Rickard, *H.B. Higgins*, p. 207.

84 Larson, *Growing Up in Melbourne*, p. 77.

towards a desired goal, as Julia Wilding did, nor is there any attempt for mother to become teacher, as in the case of Helen Connon; nor do we see a father as demanding as John Macmillan Brown or as impelled by enthusiasms as Frederick Wilding. What we observe is a mother keeping a watchful and careful eye over the education of her daughters, while maintaining a space between herself and them, and an attentive father absorbed in university affairs and prepared to leave the education of his daughters in the hands of his wife. Insofar as this was a conscious choice, it was one that reaffirmed a gendered approach to the education of the Masson children; as we shall see, a different pattern is evident in the education of their only son. It is possible also to interpret Mary Masson's approach to the education of her daughters as being an expression of a nostalgic yearning for Scotland. It took many years for her to adjust to life in colonial Melbourne, and it may have been a comfort to her to mould her daughters' education as close to that of her own as she could.⁸⁵

The cloistered, gendered and traditional elements of the education of the Masson girls were vividly recalled by Marnie. This account accords with her view as a 17-year-old on the eve of the sojourn in Europe that would complete her education, and was recaptured just as vividly in verse. The occasion that prompted the reflection was both typical and special. Elder brother Irvine's friendship with Mervyn Higgins at Melbourne Boys' Grammar had led to invitations for both Masson girls to stay at Heronswood, Dromana, the country home of Henry Higgins. There, as Marnie recalls, they became part of the self-named 'Heronswood Push', a group that brought together the teenage children from the three middle-class, professional Melbourne families that constitute this study and a cluster of their contemporaries: Mervyn Higgins; Rex Leeper; Irvine, Marnie and Elsie Masson; Esmond Lillies;

85 Mary Masson's 'sense of loneliness in a still alien setting was to persist for years, until expanded interests took an affectionate grip on her being. She could not agree in later life with another expatriate wife that the happiest years of a woman's life were those when her children were young. "No", she said, "those years can be very lonely."' (Weickhardt, *Masson of Melbourne*, p. 36, quoting Marnie Basset's address to the Lyceum Club, 'Once upon a Time', pp. 39–40.) In 1916 Masson unsuccessfully applied for the principalship of Edinburgh University (Weickhardt, pp. 85–86) and remarked to Lady Ramsay that 'in a few years we hope to go home for good' (Weickhardt, p. 129). By 1921 they had changed their minds and decided that it would be 'miserable living at Home' (Marnie Masson to Elsie Malinowski, 6 December 1921, DOMFP, box 5/5/2).

Robert Bage; and Hester and Nancy Mitchell, daughters of barrister Edward Mitchell and granddaughters of Dr Alexander Mitchell, Headmaster of Scotch College (1857–1903).⁸⁶

At the close of 1906, the Heronswood Push was about to disband. Mervyn Higgins was bound for Oxford, and the Masson girls were joining their mother on a European tour early the following year. In the Heronswood log book Marnie recorded her thoughts:

One more day at Heronswood
 One more day in which to view
 The dark outstanding pines against
 The water's shimmering blue.
 One more day to gather fruits
 That in the orchard valley grow
 To rest upon the terrace top
 Where the flowers blow.
 After this we separate
 Each will follow his own way
 Boys to Varsities to work
 And the girls to play.
 But however wise they grow
 With Engineering, Science, Arts
 Or Civil work, dear Heronswood
 Will never leave their hearts.
 The girls will travel half the world
 And many famous places see
 But still the charms of Heronswood
 Will fresh as ever be.⁸⁷

86 Rickard, *H.B. Higgins*, pp. 206–7; Heronswood Log Book 1903–1916, Marnie Bassett Papers, 7/26/13; Nancy Adams, *Family Frescoes*, p. 52; E. M. Finlay, 'Mitchell, Agnes Eliza Fraser (1890–1968)', *ADB*, vol. 10, 1986, pp. 528–30; E. L. French, 'Morrison, Alexander (1829–1903)', *ADB*, vol. 5, 1974, pp. 295–97. Edward Frederick Robert Bage (born 17 April 1888), also a pupil at Melbourne Boys' Grammar, was the son of a chemist and junior partner in Felton, Grimwade & Co., and brother of Frederika Bage, University of Melbourne science graduate (BSc, 1905; MSc, 1907) and later biology demonstrator at the university (1907–12) and biology lecturer at the University of Queensland (1913–46). Robert Bage undertook a degree in civil engineering at the University of Melbourne, graduating in 1910. He was part of the Mawson Antarctic expedition in 1910–13 and died at Gallipoli in May 1915. See Jacqueline Bell, 'Bage, Anna Fredericka (Freda) (1883–1970)', *ADB*, vol. 7, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria, 1979, pp. 131–32. Esmond Lillies was also a pupil at Melbourne Boys' Grammar.

87 Poem by Marnie Masson, 1906, written in the Heronswood Log Book, 27 February 1906, Marnie Bassett Papers, 7/26/13, quoted by Rickard, *H.B. Higgins*, pp. 206–7.

And so 'to play'. The 17-year-old Marnie and 16-year-old sister Elsie spent most of 1907 travelling through England and the Continent, sightseeing in Scotland and studying languages, architecture and art informally in Germany and Italy. Their education was 'finished' with a period of formal schooling at Melbourne Girls' Grammar School. Elsie thrived on the experience. Marnie, tired and rundown, lasted only 12 weeks. Both succeeded in passing the matriculation exams that paved the way for university study—Elsie between 1907 and 1908 at Melbourne Girls' Grammar, and Marnie previously, in 1905, under the guidance of a governess. In deference to their mother's reservations, neither proceeded to formal university study but as 'cultural' students they attended 'French Part I' lectures at the University of Melbourne.⁸⁸

As two educated and cultured young women, Marnie and Elsie now faced the transition from childhood to adulthood. The pathway each followed illustrates the confining and liberating aspects of their education and social position. Denied by maternal decree and family loyalty from pursuing a university education, Marnie took shorthand and typing lessons with the hope of finding employment in Sydney before 'secretly' and 'very reluctantly' abandoning her plans when her father, now president of the Professorial Board, offered her the position of secretary to the board.⁸⁹ Encouraged by the Professor of History, Ernest Scott, of Melbourne University, she attended his lectures (c. 1909–15) despite her mother's views. An article she subsequently wrote on the foundation of Melbourne University for the *University Review* revealed, as Ann Blainey has observed, an 'unusual historical aptitude', and she was subsequently invited to give five lectures to third-year history students on French colonial policy in the Pacific.⁹⁰ In 1915 she was awarded a government research scholarship to undertake research on 'the Scottish Political Exiles to Australia

88 Marnie Bassett, 'Cooling Streams', a Catalyst Paper, 10 November 1969, pp. 22–24, Marnie Bassett Papers, 7/26/13; Marnie Bassett, 'Notes', 8 February 1974, Marnie Bassett Papers, 7/26/13; Marnie Bassett to Weickhardt, DOMFP, box 6/10/1; Weickhardt, *Masson of Melbourne*, pp. 72–73.

89 Marnie Bassett, 'Notes', quoted by Weickhardt, *Masson of Melbourne*, pp. 72–73.

90 Weickhardt, pp. 72, 76; Ann Blainey, 'Bassett, Lady Flora Marjorie (Marnie) (1889–1980)', *ADB*, vol. 13, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria, 1993, pp. 127–28; *University of Melbourne Review* 1913.

1793–1794'. The research was disrupted by the war during which she worked in secretarial and administrative positions in Australia and London arranged by her father. Married in Melbourne in 1923, she raised three children before returning to history. Between 1940 and 1969, she published five histories and received honorary LLD degrees from Monash University and the University of Melbourne in 1968 and 1974 respectively.⁹¹

After returning from Europe at the end of 1907, Elsie Masson spent several years at her mother's side as companion and assistant. At the age of 21 she moved to Darwin as tutor and companion to the daughter of the former professor of veterinary pathology at the University of Melbourne, John Anderson Gilruth, who had been appointed Administrator of the Northern Territory. The letters that she wrote home from Darwin formed the basis of a book published in 1915, *An Untamed Territory: The Northern Territory of Australia*.⁹² Returning to Melbourne on the outbreak of World War One, Elsie trained as a nurse at the Royal Melbourne Hospital from September 1914 until February 1919. She married the Austrian anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, against her parents' wishes, on 6 March 1919, and, in 1920, the pair sailed for England, where Bronio had been appointed to a post at the London School of Economics. Motherhood and illness dominated her later life. She died in Natters, northern Italy, in September 1935 aged 45.⁹³

These two thumbnail sketches of life between schooling and marriage suggest, as Marnie's telling phrase 'the last of the Mohicans' does, something of the tension that existed within the lives of young women equipped by education and social position to fashion independent careers, yet in other ways constrained by family and custom. Marnie and Elsie were not so much students at the gates clamouring to get in

91 Weickhardt, *Masson of Melbourne*, pp. 75–76, 90–93, 98–105, 127, 191; Marnie Masson, 'Letters Home' (typescript), 6 December 1916 – 18 November 1918, DOMFP, box 3/2/1, pp. 1–11, 70–74, 179–83, 143, 216, 378–80, 389, 450, 558, 566–67; Blainey, 'Bassett, Lady Flora Marjorie (Marnie)', pp. 127–28.

92 Elsie Masson, *An Untamed Territory: The Northern Territory of Australia*, Macmillan, London, 1915.

93 Weickhardt, *Masson of Melbourne*, pp. 73, 75, 92–93, 99–100, 102–5, 131, 133, 146–47, 167–68, 170, 175–77; Selleck, *The Shop*, pp. 565, 590, 650–51; Wayne (ed.), *The Story of a Marriage*.

as raised within the cloistered walls of academe. Neither were they confined by the accomplishments that defined a different education for girls nor free from the constraints of maternal expectation. In their individual negotiation of different pathways through these tensions, they demonstrate both the continuities and the changes that shaped their lives.⁹⁴

94 Elsie Locke, *Student at the Gates*, Whitcoulls, Christchurch, 1981; Elizabeth Plumridge, 'Labour in Christchurch: Community and Consciousness, 1914–1919', MA thesis, University of Canterbury, 1979.

This text is taken from *Family Experiments: Middle-class, professional families in Australia and New Zealand c. 1880–1920*, by Shelley Richardson, published 2016 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.