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I'd Rather See You Dead at My Feet: Familial Failure in "The Well of Loneliness" and "The Paying Guests"

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I'd Rather See You Dead at My Feet:
Familial Failure in *The Well of Loneliness* and *The Paying Guests*

A Senior Project submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
Of Bard College

by
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Annandale-On-Hudson, NY

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for mom and dad

though you are decidedly not “familial failures”

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I. Introduction

Clarissa Dalloway's "whole world might have turned upside down" (Woolf 35) when Sally Seton kissed her on a terrace swathed in starlight. Clarissa, the titular character of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, considers the instant in which "Sally stopped; picked a flower, kissed her on the lips" to be the "most exquisite moment of her whole life passing a stone urn with flowers in it" (Woolf 35). Clarissa deems her feelings for Sally to be those of love, asking herself, "what was this except being in love?" (Woolf 35).

Yet, when Clarissa notices that her daughter Elizabeth may be experiencing something similar with her friend and history teacher Miss Kilman, she is none too pleased, to say the least. "It might be falling in love," she thinks, "but why with Miss Kilman?" (Woolf 11). Clarissa laments Elizabeth's potential romance at length, eventually referring to Miss Kilman as "her enemy"; she almost revels in her hatred of her, thinking "ah, how she hated her—hot, hypocritical, corrupt; with all that power; Elizabeth's seducer; the woman who had crept in to steal and defile" (Woolf 175). Clarissa abhors Miss Kilman and deliberately aligns herself against her because she is "Elizabeth's seducer"—she fears Miss Kilman will "steal" her daughter away from her. Clarissa's excessively strong reaction to Miss Kilman and the possibility that Elizabeth is falling in love with her, specifically her, is *strange* because of Clarissa's similar experience. Readers might expect Clarissa to empathize with her daughter because of their comparable experiences, and yet, she does not.

Peter Walsh, an old friend of Clarissa's, points out something interesting about Clarissa and Elizabeth's relationship, and motherhood as a whole, when he thinks, "probably [Elizabeth] doesn't get along with Clarissa. 'There's my Elizabeth'—that sort of thing—why not 'Here's Elizabeth'"

simply?—trying to make out, like most mothers, that things are what they're not" (Woolf 56). Peter believes that when Clarissa referred to Elizabeth as "[her] Elizabeth," she was overcompensating for her strenuous relationship with her daughter. Peter's assertions potentially problematize this project's analyses of the "strange" and the "normal," by declaring that "most mothers" pretend their relationship with their daughter is better than it actually is. This project analyzes, primarily, two relationships between a heterosexual mother and a homosexual daughter as presented in novels set in the first half of the 20th century. In this project, the words "strange" and "normal" adopt many different meanings, though they typically become interchangeable with "unexpected" and "expected," respectively. For instance, Clarissa's lack to empathy for her daughter despite having been in a very similar situation herself seems "strange" to the reader because it is "unexpected" of a mother. We expect certain traits and qualities of mothers and when they do not meet those expectations, their relationships with their children are "strange"; the words "strange" and "normal," however, imply a minority and a majority. Those relationships that fall under "strange" are in the minority, and those that fall under "normal" are in the majority. What Peter Walsh suggests here is that the majority of maternal relationships include this "strange" aspect where the mother acts as though the relationship is something it is not, thereby contesting my initial conception of the "strange" and the "normal."

What does it mean, however, to be "normal?" In his book *Enforcing Normalcy*, Lennard Davis historically contextualizes the "normal," and though his discussion of normalcy is primarily in regard to bodies and disability, it can apply to families as well. He discusses the normalization of the grotesque, which came to be "a signifier of the people, of common life" because it represented "that all bodies are in some sense disabled" (Davis 25). The grotesque "permeated culture and signified the

norm” (Davis 25). If the majority of mothers, as Peter Walsh suggests, try to hide some facets of their relationship with their child, are not most maternal relationships, in some way, broken? The “normal” as we think of it today “only Enters the English language around 1840,” (Davis 24) in a “particular historical moment. It is part of a notion of progress, of industrialization, and the ideological consolidation of the power of the bourgeoisie. The implications of the hegemony of normalcy are profound and extend into the very heart of cultural production” (Davis 49). The “normal” came into use at a time, not long before the years in which the novels analyzed in this project are set, when the mathematical branch of statistics was burgeoning; most early statisticians were eugenicists (Davis 30). The “normal,” particularly economically, physically and morally, became the ideal, because, with the development of statistics and eugenics, the middle class was “rationally placed in the mean position in the great order of things” (Davis 27) and the “notion of physical beauty as an exceptional ideal becomes transformed into beauty as the average” (Davis 28). The Belgian statistician Adolphe Quetelet wrote that “an individual who epitomized in himself, at a given time, all the qualities of the average man, would represent at once all the greatness, beauty, and goodness of that being” (Davis 27). This ideology and others like it have contributed to the development of the normal as we think of it today. The normal became something to aspire to, something that was not quite perfect, but was good enough. When I say that the relationships analyzed in the following chapters are abnormal, atypical, or strange, I do not mean that the “normal” is a relationship full of perfectly mutual adoration and devoid of disagreements or contention. Rather, I mean that the “brokenness” of the relationships portrayed in *The Well of Loneliness* and *The Paying Guests* surpass that of most mother-child relationships, those that would be considered “normal.”

One of these atypical mother-daughter relationships is that of Anna and Stephen in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*. Hall herself claimed that “to be a good wife and mother is the finest work a woman can do.’ . . . It is ‘the work for which Nature intended [her]’” (Irons 4). Hall believes that the “role of the wife and mother was perfectly natural for most women” (Parkes 441), yet the mother in *The Well of Loneliness* struggles with taking on that very role. *The Well of Loneliness* is very concerned with the ideas of the normal and the natural, as well as their opposites, so Hall's inclusion of a mother-daughter relationship that does not fit into her standard of “natural” helps to emphasize one of the novel's central focuses. Written in 1928, scholars such as Gillian Whitlock consider it to be the first novel written in English centered around explicitly lesbian themes. It was a critical forerunner of lesbian literature, and its import is only accentuated by the fact that it was banned for decades after a trial that deemed the novel to be obscene. Many potential witnesses refused to appear in court, such as Havelock Ellis, who is considered the father of sexology in England and wrote a preface for *The Well of Loneliness*. Others, however, including Virginia Woolf, testified. *The Well of Loneliness* is a *Künstlerroman*, a subgenre of the *Bildungsroman* in which the narrative follows an artist's formation and maturation, centered around Stephen Gordon, the daughter of an aristocratic English family living at Morton Castle.

Prior to her birth, Stephen's parents, Sir Philip and Anna, believe that their unborn child is a son, and decide to name him Stephen. The child is born a girl, and Philip and Anna keep the name despite this. As a young child, Stephen falls in love with Collins, a housemaid at Morton, and is devastated to discover her kissing a footman. This incident inspires Sir Philip begins reading the works of Karl Heinrich Ulrich and Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebbing, who were among the first in

modernity to theorize about homosexuality. The novel puts a particular emphasis on Krafft-Ebbing's theories of sexology, such as the notion of the lesbian as a "sexual invert," or, in his own words, "the masculine soul heaving in a female bosom" (Taylor 288).

Philip, as Anna points out, treats Stephen "as though she were a boy" (Hall 53), and she develops, in a traditional sense, as such; she focuses mostly on her physical strength, fencing, and hunting. Philip, continuing his research, adores and supports his daughter, but as they grow closer, Anna feels more isolated from Stephen. Stephen, at the age of 18, befriends a young man named Martin Hallam. The two become nearly inseparable until Martin declares his love for Stephen, who is repulsed, and a dejected Martin returns to his home in Canada.

Philip longs to tell Stephen and Anna the truth of his daughter's sexuality, but neglects to do so before a tree at Morton crushes him; he takes Stephen's secret to his grave. After Philip's death, Stephen meets a married woman, Angela Crosby, and promptly begins an affair with her. In the meantime, Anna and Stephen's relationship worsens. While Stephen falls deeply in love with her, Angela feels less comfortable with her relationship with Stephen, eventually showing her husband Ralph a letter from Stephen in which she ardently and desperately confesses her love. Ralph sends the letter to Anna, who banishes her daughter from Morton.

Stephen briefly moves to London, where she writes two novels, the first of which is successful, and the second of which does poorly. Her friend Jonathan Brockett, a gay man, convinces her to move to Paris, where she meets Valérie Seymour and her salon, which is likely based on Natalie Barney and her famous salon at Rue Jacob. When World War I begins, Stephen joins an ambulance unit and meets Mary Llewellyn, with whom she falls in love. Mary moves into Stephen's Parisian home after the war.

The two are madly in love with one another, but Stephen, believing that she cannot provide Mary with a “normal” life, starts to doubt their relationship. Stephen throws herself into her writing, and, as a result, Mary becomes lonely; she begins to overindulge in the Parisian nightlife. Martin Hallam returns, rekindling his friendship with Stephen, and falls in love with Mary. Stephen, fully convinced that she can never make Mary happy, feigns an affair with Valérie Seymour in order to force Mary into the arms of Martin.

The second novel analyzed in this project is *The Paying Guests*, written by Sarah Waters in 2014. Waters is a contemporary author who writes mostly about the Victorian and post-World War periods. She received her PhD in English Literature, with a particular focus on gay and lesbian historical fiction. Waters is known for her attention to the details of the time period and ensuring her novels are as historically accurate as possible. In her review of *The Paying Guests*, Carol Anshaw writes that “the story appears not merely to be about the novel’s time but to have been written by someone living in that time, thumping out the whole thing on a manual typewriter” (“Behind Closed Doors”). Waters is an interesting figure to bring into this project because her retrospective knowledge of the time period allows her to draw attention to important aspects of life in the time her novels are set.

The Paying Guests takes place in 1922 in a southern district of London. It centers on Frances, a young, unmarried woman who lives with her mother because of the death of her brothers and father. Frances and her mother, only named Mrs Wray, are in the midst of a financial crisis because of the deceased Mr Wray’s mishandling of the family’s finances. They sublet the upper floor of their home to Leonard and Lilian Barber as a way to support themselves. Frances and Lilian quickly become friends, spending the majority of their time with one another, traveling to London together, and going to

Lilian's family's parties. The night of one of said parties, Leonard returns to the home with a bloody nose after a confrontation with a mugger. That same night, Frances and Lilian admit that they have fallen in love with one another, and begin a romantic affair.

Frances and Lilian struggle to keep their affair a secret from both Leonard and Mrs Wray, and Lilian also reveals to Frances that she is pregnant with Leonard's child. Though Frances warns her against it, Lilian aborts the child, which becomes a grueling, bloody process that Leonard walks in on. He accuses Lilian of sleeping with other men and Frances reveals that it is she who is sleeping with Lilian. Leonard attacks Frances, and, to protect her, Lilian hits him on the back of the head with a large ashtray, killing him almost instantly. Panicked, Frances decides to hide his body in the backyard, where it is later discovered by a neighbor. This begins a long search for the suspect, and the police finally arrest the same boy who mugged Leonard earlier. All the while, Frances and Lilian become increasingly paranoid, convinced that both the police and Mrs Wray know that they are the true murderers. Their relationship suffers under this stress, as does the relationship between Frances and her mother. Lilian moves back into her mother's home while the trial, which eventually rules the defendant not guilty, wears on. Despite the ruling, the police are convinced that the young mugger was indeed the one who killed Leonard, and do not continue their search for the killer. Lilian and Frances, in light of this happy court ruling, are able to reconnect.

Neither *The Paying Guests* nor *The Well of Loneliness* have an extensive critical history. *The Paying Guests*, being contemporary, has virtually none, whereas *The Well of Loneliness* has had several articles written about it; a few books have been written about Radclyffe Hall, as well. Scholars writing on *The Well of Loneliness*, such as Celia Marshik, Adam Parkes, and Leigh Gilmore, primarily discuss

the novel in conjunction with censorship and obscenity. These articles often pair *The Well of Loneliness* with another lesbian or otherwise sexually “deviant” novel, like Djuna Barnes’s *Nightwood*, Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*, or Norah James’s *Sleeveless Errand*. Other scholars, like Laura Green, focus on *The Well of Loneliness* as a modernist work of fiction, and point out Virginia Woolf’s “dismissal of Hall” (Green 277) despite the thematic similarities of their novels. Other scholars analyze *The Well of Loneliness* as a *Künstlerroman*, or in regard to its attention to identity and its status as an activist text. The most unexpected article I’ve come across is Tara Prince-Hughes’s “‘A Curious Double Insight’: ‘The Well of Loneliness’ and Native American Alternative Gender Traditions,” which posits that *The Well of Loneliness* is a novel not about lesbianism, but rather transgender identity¹, and compares Stephen’s definition of her identity through gender roles with Native American two-spirit individuals. As for critical work on the parental relationships in *The Well of Loneliness*, though one scholar, Margot Gayle Backus in her article “Sexual Orientation in the (Post) Imperial Nation: Celticism and Inversion Theory in Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*,” spends more time analyzing Anna, very few of the works on *The Well of Loneliness* have concerned themselves with the parental relationships portrayed by the novel at all. Those that do discuss Anna and Philip, however briefly, mostly mention Stephen’s heteronormative idealization of their marriage and their fulfilment of gender roles. The familial facet of *The Well of Loneliness* is otherwise relatively overlooked; in this regard, this project walks a relatively untrodden path.

¹ Personally, I believe that if *The Well* were written today, or if Hall had access to the language we do in our current social state, Stephen would identify as transgender.

The Paying Guests was largely well-received by reviewers. Michael Dirda for *The Washington Post* began his review of Waters's novel by saying, "some novels are so good, so gripping or shattering that they leave you uncertain whether you should have ever started them" (Dirda). Dirda later likens the darker tones of the novel to something written by Patricia Highsmith, whose *The Price of Salt* is briefly discussed in this project. Many, including Dirda and the aforementioned Carol Anshaw, lauded Waters's ability to make the novel read as though it is a part of the time on which she is writing. Others, like *The Guardian*'s Rachel Cusk, took issue with this aspect of Waters's prose, saying that *The Paying Guests*'s "pastiche propriety and faux-Edwardian prose (people are forever "colouring" and "crimsoning" and "putting themselves tidy") become irritants; and the novel's descent into melodrama as a murder is committed — and the inspector called — turns this engaging literary endeavor into a tiresome soap opera" (Cusk). Cusk does, however, praise Waters's accurate construction of the "transitional social world of postwar Britain" (Cusk). Anshaw notes Waters's strength when it comes to "blueprinting social architecture in terms of its tiniest corners and angles, matters measurable by inches rather than feet — small moments we recognize but have never articulated, even to ourselves" (Anshaw). Waters's uncanny ability to accurately recreate both the time period her novels are set in as well as interpersonal relationships is the reason *The Paying Guests* is an important novel to include in the following analyses.

Many other novels, whether they explicitly, subtly, or implicitly contain lesbian themes, involve similar familial relationships. Some were written as early as the 1920s and 30s, like *Mrs Dalloway* or Gale Wilhelm's *Torchlight to Vallhalla*, or more mid-century like *The Price of Salt*, or in the late 20th century, like Rita Mae Brown's 1973 *Rubyfruit Jungle* or Alice Walker's 1982 *The Color*

Purple. However, I have chosen to focus this project on the novels set in the 1920s because of the effects World War I had on women in regard to their sexuality, freedom, and their roles in the workforce. *The Well of Loneliness*'s status as the first English lesbian novel and the sheer amount of time that is spent on the relationship between Anna and Stephen make it an obvious choice for this project. *The Well of Loneliness* also puts an emphasis on the normal and the abnormal that is particularly useful.

I chose *The Paying Guests* because of two of Waters's greatest skills as an author: her ability to focus on particular aspects of the time period her novel is set in, and her articulation of specific facets of interpersonal relationships. As a contemporary author, Waters is able to hone in on and accentuate certain details of the 1920s, such as the dynamic between mother and daughter.

My first chapter is centered around the mother and her experience with her daughter. I will first delineate the aforementioned normal or expected relationship, mostly by using examples within both *The Paying Guests* and *The Well of Loneliness*, as well as other prominent lesbian novels, such as Fannie Flagg's *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe*, Patricia Highsmith's *The Price of Salt*, and Gale Wilhelm's *Torchlight to Valhalla*. I then discuss the things that are missing from these relationships that cause them to fail to meet these expectations, and what they do to replace these things. I move on to compare both Anna and Mrs Wray's desires for their daughters to regress to either an infant or a fetus, as well as the role obligation plays in their relationships.

The second chapter discusses the daughter herself more specifically. *The Well of Loneliness* takes the forefront in this chapter, primarily because in its pleas for the acceptance of homosexual people, the family takes on a much more important role than it does in *The Paying Guests*. I begin this

chapter by talking about how Stephen and Frances both yearn for the normal, traditional relationship that they cannot have with their mothers. I detail extensively the ways in which they display this desire, from attempting to fill the void left by the mother themselves to something as simple as reaching out for physical comfort. I then discuss how Stephen, after realizing her relationship with Anna is a lost cause, searches for maternal comfort from other people, primarily a woman she and Mary meet in Italy. I then talk about letters and the role they play in the cessation of a relationship in both *The Paying Guests* and *The Well of Loneliness*. Finally, I discuss fathers, starting with Stephen's idealization of her father (as well as Anna and their marriage) and moving into Frances's disdain for her own father.

Peter Walsh's observation that Clarissa and Elizabeth's relationship is dysfunctional and performative yet also similar to most other mother-child relationships is useful for defining the normal relationship. With Clarissa and Elizabeth as an example of the normal maternal relationship, we are able to avoid the potentially problematic assumption that if a mother-daughter relationship is not perfect, it is abnormal and unhealthy. This project seeks to identify what normal or traditional mother-daughter relationships look like and investigate how the relationships portrayed in *The Well of Loneliness* and *The Paying Guests* differ from the norm.

II. The Mother

The mother-daughter relationship, particularly the relationship between a heterosexual mother and a homosexual daughter, is heavily under-theorized historically and in literature. Of these particular familial ties, Sharon Marcus, the author of *Between Women*, argues that though women are central to historical analyses of families, this is “primarily in relation to husbands, fathers, and brothers. The links between women within the middle class have thus been remarkably ignored” (Marcus 9). Similarly, in the preface to her book *Parents Matter*, which is a series of transcriptions and analyses of interviews with gay children or parents of gay children, Ann Muller notes that “most of the existing literature on homosexuality describes gay males. Lesbian experience is sometimes added on like the tail of a kite” (Muller xi). The general exclusion of relationships between women, whether they be platonic, romantic, sexual, or familial, is a strange one, considering that the dynamics between women in literature are oftentimes some of the richest and most interesting relationships. Novels with lesbian characters in particular have a tendency to emphasize the idiosyncratic, peculiar relationships between the heterosexual mother and the homosexual daughter. The relationships between mother and daughter featured in the following analyses are not conventionally “normal”; they do not meet the expectations set for consanguineous ties. Oftentimes, the mother and the daughter will find replacements for the expectations they do not meet. These relationships are, mostly, either particularly strenuous or estranged. As a *Bildungsroman*, Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* is a prime example of this, as the relationship between Stephen and Anna begins in Stephen’s childhood with myriad adversities that lead to their eventual estrangement.

In order to properly assert that these relationships do not meet the expectations had of them, it is crucial to first establish those expectations; to declare a relationship as abnormal, I must first delineate the normal. There are many potential ways to do so. On a psychological scale, Tessa Baradon, in her attempts to answer the question of how we can define genuine maternal love, writes that the relationship between mother and child needs “measure and passion. It contains the temperate—that is, regulated kernels of love and responsivity, and passionate appetite, ownership of the other and capacity to be consumed by the other. ... [The mother’s] identification with her baby and yet her ability to differentiate between herself and her baby and allow individuation (Mahler et al. 1975) are required” (Baradon 48). For a healthy, genuine relationship, the mother and child must, according to Baradon, feel a certain amount of passion for the other, but in moderation. The mother must also be able to see herself in the child, so that she may identify with them, but she must simultaneously understand that she and the child are not one in the same; she must not project herself onto the child, or view the child as an extension of herself. The following analyses, however, are literary; thus it is imperative that the novels are given ample room to speak for themselves. Thus, these norms can also be defined through, primarily, the actions and words of the characters. Anna, for instance, when wondering if she loves Stephen, declares that she does not, because it is not “the trusting devotion that Stephen had always felt for her father” (Hall 34). As Anna here suggests, the relationships between other characters, in this case between the daughter and her father or, in other cases, between the lesbian daughter and her lover, can also provide insight as to what normal relationships are meant to look like. Davis writes that “normativity in narrative will by definition create the abnormal, the Other” (Davis 41). By distinguishing between the relationship between herself and Stephen and that between

Philip and Stephen, Anna herself suggests that something about her relationship with her daughter is atypical. These other relationships become the standard of the normal, the existence of which necessitates the abnormal; they are similar to one another and are qualitatively different from the relationship the daughter maintains with the mother. These other relationships set standards for loving, mutually beneficial relationships that the vast majority of the mother-daughter relationships do not meet.

The first of the standards set by other relationships is verbal professions of love. In *The Well of Loneliness*, Stephen's father says to her, "I love you so much that you can't disappoint me" (Hall 62). Stephen herself frequently tells her two lovers, Angela and Mary, over the course of the novel that she loves them, and Mary reciprocally does the same. Even Martin Hallam declares to Stephen that he loves her. In *The Paying Guests*, Frances and Lilian frequently exchange whispers and vows of love and adoration. Royal in *Torchlight to Valhalla* continually tells Morgen that he loves her, and, while they never say "I love you" to one another within the confines of the pages, Toni says to Morgen, "I haven't said I love you this morning," (Wilhelm 94), implying that they have indeed verbally expressed their love before. Finally, in *The Price of Salt*, Carol and Therese eventually articulate their love for one another, and Carol, a mother herself, frequently tells her daughter that she loves her.

The second standard set by these alternate relationships is a desire to protect and care for the object of one's affections. When he hunts with Stephen, Sir Philip "would be on his guard, very anxious and watchful lest any small incident should occur to distress [Stephen]" (Hall 108). After her father's death, Stephen recalls his "constant protection" (Hall 121). At the very climax of the novel, Stephen decides to protect Mary from the world's animosity towards homosexuals by essentially

forcing her to leave their life together to be with Martin². Frances in *The Paying Guests* does everything in her power to prevent the authorities from learning that Lilian murdered her husband. The mother of the young man accused of the murder, despite the fact that all the evidence presented in court points to him, takes the stand and vehemently defends her son. *Torchlight to Valhalla's* Royal spends a great deal of time looking after and taking care of Morgen after Fritz's death. *The Price of Salt* shows Carol's desires to protect her daughter from the effects of growing up with parents who have gone through a bitter, hostile divorce. She struggles with simultaneously trying to provide for Therese, especially while among people who would disapprove of such a relationship. In *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistlestop Cafe*, familial ties are generally so powerful that there are several instances of protecting one's child, lover, sibling, or parent. Most notably, however, is the extent to which Idgie, Sipsy, and Big George go to protect Ruth and Stump from Ruth's abusive ex-husband, Frank. Idgie and George, for example, threaten Frank several times in an attempt to prevent him from further hurting Ruth. Yet it is Sipsy who is the one to follow through these threats; as an act of defense, she kills Frank when he comes to Whistle Stop looking for Ruth and Stump.

These relationships, even those that do not necessarily end happily or reciprocally, paint a vivid picture of what genuine love looks like. As determined by these other relationships, verbal expressions of love and a desire to protect are the most common expectations had of mother-daughter relationships; they are also the most revealing of the quality of the relationship. Anna's descriptor of trusting devotion can also be taken into account, as well as Baradon's suggestions of the ability to

² Though it is easy to see why, especially in the 1920s, Stephen considers this a way of protecting Mary, this may not seem like the right decision to contemporary readers.

identify and individuate and the combination of measure and passion. The mother-daughter relationships presented in the vast majority of the texts in this analysis, however, do not meet these expectations. In the two relationships primarily focused on in this analysis—those between Stephen and Anna Gordon in *The Well of Loneliness* as well as Frances and Mrs Wray in *The Paying Guests*—love is never verbally expressed. In the case of the latter, love is expressed through other, nonverbal means. Thus, the relationships differ slightly in that while Anna feels no love for Stephen, Frances and Mrs Wray do have some affections for one another. Both share a very particular similarity at the conjunction of the inability to communicate and the daughter's homosexuality; both Anna and Mrs Wray become aware of their daughter's sexual orientation by discovering letters written by their daughters, addressed to their daughters' lovers. Not only is homosexuality something that mother and daughter do not and cannot talk about, but the revelation of the daughter's homosexuality is only through communication with another person, external to the mother-daughter relationship. These two novels also see varying degrees of the mother's desire to protect the daughter. In *The Well of Loneliness*, Anna expels Stephen from her home at Morton, while in *The Paying Guests*, Frances begins to fear that her mother has discovered her involvement in Leonard's murder, thinking that "her mother knew. Her mother had guessed! Or at any rate, she had guessed a part of it. But how long before she worked out more? How long before the whole thing knitted itself together, like one of her wretched acrostics?" (Waters 430). In both novels, the concept of maternal protection often sees a role reversal; Stephen, in her childish ways, acts almost as a guardian for Anna, while Frances makes personal sacrifices in order to be a caretaker to her mother. Flax suggests that in mother-daughter relationships, "the confusion over who is the child and who is the mother is intensifie[s]. Women

patients have reported . . . that they often felt pressure from their own mothers to provide the care the mothers themselves had lacked in their childhood” (Flax 174). Perhaps this role reversal is a result of the mothers longing to be mothered, yet, in the second chapter, I discuss the reversal of roles as it relates to the daughters’ attempts at building a better relationship with her mother. These two narratives also see distinct distrust and betrayals of trust, such as Frances’s fear that her mother suspects her of Leonard’s murder, as well as a lack of moderated passion, and the mothers’ inability to identify with and individuate from their daughters.

It is easy, then, to define these two relationships through the negative, or what is not apparent, what is missing: they do not verbally express love, the mothers do not protect the daughters. There is no trust, no passion, no maternal identification with the daughters accompanied by a healthy distancing from them. These relationships are missing many crucial facets of “normal” relationships, and yet their complexities and nuances are borne from the ways in which these relationships *do* function, rather than the ways in which they *do not*. While some of the expectations are entirely lost in the relationships, such as trust, others are replaced or feigned. In these two relationships, silence and protection are removed but replaced. In the case of *The Paying Guests*, while these replacements are insufficient in regard to meeting the expectations had of mother-daughter relationships, they do, in fact, indicate an underlying familial affection. Such is not the case in *The Well of Loneliness*, in which the replacements construct a guise of a love, or passion, which simply does not exist; it is, however, sometimes forced or feigned.

In *The Paying Guests*, the relationship between Frances and her mother replaces one of the aforementioned crucial aspects of “normal” mother-daughter relationships—verbal professions of

love—with other expressions of love. Not once in the entirety of the novel do either Frances or her mother tell the other that they love her, but affections are expressed through other, more detached means. In the final scene between mother and daughter, Frances expresses her fear of “something” happening to her:

[Frances] felt her mouth grow dry. “Mother—”

Her mother turned back to her, her dark brows lifted. “Yes?”

“If anything were ever to happen to me—”

“Happen to you? What do you mean? Oh, we’ve let ourselves grow morbid! Come back down out of the gloom.”

“No, wait. If something were to happen—I know I haven’t always been kind to you. I know I wasn’t kind to Father. I’ve always tried to do what I thought to be right. But sometimes—”

Her mother’s joined hands made their papery sound. “You mustn’t grow upset, Frances. Remember what Dr Lawrence said.”

“It’s just—You wouldn’t ever despise me, would you, Mother?”

“Despise you! Good gracious! Why would I ever do that?”

“Sometimes things become a muddle. They become such a muddle, Mother, that they turn into a sort of quicksand. You take a step, and can’t get free, and—” (Waters 555-556)

Mrs Wray is taken aback by her daughter’s query and has a rather strange response, saying:

“What a fight you’ve always made of everything, Frances. And all I ever wanted for you were such ordinary things: a husband, a home, a family of your own. Such ordinary, ordinary things. You mustn’t worry about the house. The house has become too great a burden. It isn’t a house for guests, after all. Mrs Barber came here as an unhappy woman, and I’m afraid she took advantage of your—your kindness. But, despise you! I could never despise you, any more than I could despise my own hand. Now, come down with me, will you? Back to the warm.” (Waters 555-556)

The likely response in a more openly affectionate mother-daughter relationship would be the mother telling her daughter that she could never despise her and affirming her love for her. However, Frances and her mother have not “spoken candidly” (Waters 282) with one another in twenty years. Mrs Wray may have answered her daughter’s question in an unexpected way, but it is not entirely devoid of

affection. She urges Frances to come “out of the gloom” and “back to the warm” with her. The mutual offering of certain comforts is a consistent facet of the relationship between Frances and her mother, and functions as a replacement for verbally expressing affection. Frances will often ask her mother what she wants for supper, or she will turn off her mother’s bedroom lights for her as they prepare for bed. One will frequently ask the other to join them in a certain room and, after an earlier argument, Frances asks her mother to “come back into the warm” (Waters 428), much like in this final scene between them. These comforts, though they replace verbal asserations of love, are slightly detached; they are a rather distant form of expressing affection. They are unlike physical affection such as familial embraces and kisses, they keep the other person close, yet still at a distance.

In a similar vein, Mrs Wray also avoids directly protective language regarding her daughter, but there is indeed some semblance of a willingness to protect Frances. Despite Frances’s genuine fear for her own safety about “something” happening to her, Mrs Wray does not say that she would never let that happen, that she would do everything in her power to prevent “something” from happening to Frances, as one would expect of a mother. Of course, this could be the result of her simply not knowing what Frances means by her rather abstract confession of fear. However, Frances’s mother has already expressed suspicions of Frances’s involvement with the murder of their tenant, Leonard, meaning that she can make the inference that the “something” of which Frances speaks is legal action taken against her, perhaps an arrest or an execution. Maternal protection is not lost in the novel—Frances’s lover and the wife of Leonard, Lilian, is urged by her mother to move back home after the murder. Likewise, the mother of the boy accused of the murder defends him to the court, despite the fact that most of the evidence presented points directly to him. Yet Frances’s mother does not

explicitly say she will protect her daughter, nor does she even imply that she will make an effort to protect Frances should legal action be taken against her.

However, Frances's mother, in her own way, does express some desire to protect Frances. Her suggestion that she come "back to the warm" is an example of this, but this primarily lay in her desire for Frances to have "ordinary things" such as a "husband, a home, a family." For Mrs Wray, safety lay in the unextraordinary. She knows about Frances's former affair with another woman, Christina, and their plans to run away together. She knows that Frances's desires are societally perceived as uncouth and thus unsafe. By wishing for Frances to have these ordinary things, she is attempting to protect Frances from her "strange" desires and proclivities. Later, Mrs Wray confronts Frances about her blossoming relationship with Lilian, expressing that Frances has "been rather in Mrs Barber's pockets lately" (Waters 251) and fearing that Frances has been doing Lilian's chores for her. After the conversation, Frances believes that "her mother must be imagining now that she had some sort of crush on Lilian" (Waters 253) and thinks, "[her mother] was warning her—was she? Was she looking into the future, seeing disappointments, tears?" (Waters 253). Mrs Wray's primary mode of caring for or protecting Frances revolves around her daughter's sexuality. While this is not Frances's preference, and is, of course, problematic, it is indicative of some concern Mrs Wray has for Frances's wellbeing.

The role of the protector or the caretaker, however, is often reversed. Frances is the one who looks after her mother and their house, rather than the other way around. After the death of Frances's father, the Wrays found themselves in an economic conundrum, and Frances took it upon herself to provide for her mother as well as keep their near-poverty a secret from her:

“And then, in the August, my father died too; and it all came out about our money being gone. The new society I had planned with Christina began to look rather flimsy. The Armistice came, but what could I do? I couldn’t leave my mother, after everything she’d been through. She and I never discussed it, we never spoke a word about it; she knew what Chrissy was to me, but—no, I couldn’t leave her. I said to myself just what your family said to you: that millions of men had been lost, that millions of women had given up lovers, brothers, sons, ambitions . . . It was one more sacrifice, that’s all.” (Waters 171)

Despite Frances’s relationship and plans with Christina, and her reticent relationship with her mother, Frances puts everything aside to look after her mother. She feels a responsibility for her mother; she chooses to stay with her because of “everything she’d been through,” because “millions of women had given up lovers, brothers, sons, ambitions,” and because she simply “couldn’t leave her.” Not only does Frances use no language of love in describing her reasons for continuing to live and provide for her mother, but her reasoning is that other women give up everything that, in this time period, might structure a woman’s life. She binds together and thus equates lovers, male family members, and aspirations. Frances herself had already lost two brothers to the first World War. To her, losing Chrissy as her lover so that she may care for her mother is just “one more sacrifice.” In other words, she feels obliged to care for her mother, and, as I will discuss later, feelings of obligation play a massive role in many of the mother-daughter relationships presented in lesbian literature.

The protective role reversal between Frances and her mother occurs most frequently through silence and lying by omission. In the passage above, Frances says that she and her mother “never discussed it, [they] never spoke a word about it.” While silence is extremely significant between the two, lies and deceptions, frequently in regard to her sexuality or their financial situation, also serve a particular role, in that Frances frequently lies to her mother in order to comfort her. For instance, a man at a party makes advances towards Frances, who rejects him. The next day, however, in a

conversation with her mother, Frances says, “I was thinking of a man I met at Lilian’s sister’s party, as it happens.’ . . . ‘We talked of making a day-trip to Henley some time. I dare say it won’t come off, though.’” (Waters 230). After the fact, Frances notes that “it was as easy as that, to give a fillip to her mother’s mood. A few days before, she would have despised herself for doing it” (Waters 230). In truth, this is not exactly a lie—Frances did, indeed, speak with the man about making a trip to Henley, and nothing does come of it—but she certainly exaggerates her enthusiasm about receiving a man’s attention. She does so to set her mother’s mind at ease; Mrs Wray frequently worries herself over Frances’s unmarried status. In a conversation with Christina, Frances also admits to lying by omission to her mother about their financial state:

“But you forget,” said Frances, “what an old hand I am at keeping things from my mother. I don’t mean just about—about you and me. I mean things like—oh, stuffing kippers into my handbag, so as to keep up the idea that I don’t carry my own parcels. I mean going about with holes in my petticoats so that hers might be less ragged. You think I’m out to punish her, don’t you, by making a martyr of myself? You don’t know the countless little lies I tell for keeping the worst of our situation from her.” (Waters 240)

In order to prevent her mother from worrying about their financial situation, Frances hides the fact that she has old, worn clothing and that she must carry her own packages. These are sacrifices one might expect a mother to make for her child, yet, it is the child who makes these sacrifices for the sake of her mother. Frances’s modes of protecting her mother, though dishonest, indicate a desire for her mother to content and as carefree as possible, and thus some relatively veiled affections for her mother.

The roles of Frances and Mrs Wray are even further confused. Frances is an adult woman, a completely separate person from her mother, and yet Mrs Wray says she could never despise Frances “any more than [she] could despise [her] own hand” (Waters 556). The comparison Frances’s mother

makes between her daughter and her hand creates a muddled, confused relationship between the family and the self. By equating Frances to a physical part of her own body, Mrs Wray says that she cannot despise Frances because she cannot despise a part of herself. If Frances is naught more than part of her mother, there is then an uncomfortable relationship between Mrs Wray and Frances that does not allow for the daughter to separate and individuate (Flax 172) from the mother. The fact that Mrs Wray conceives of Frances as a part of her physical body, her hand, suggests a maternal desire for her child to regress to an infant or, more drastically, a fetus. An infant or a fetus is metaphorically and literally attached to the mother, as it relies on nearly constant attention or, in the case of the fetus, is physically growing inside her. In equating her daughter to a physical extension of herself, Mrs Wray recalls a time when Frances was dependent on her because she was either literally or metaphorically attached to her. Mrs Wray is unable to individuate herself from Frances; she is unable to separate a single part, either herself or Frances, from the whole, their relationship together. Often in mother-daughter relationships, psychologist Jane Flax argues, “‘it all began to go wrong’ when [the daughter] attempted to individuate from her mother. Autonomy . . . is experienced as a rejection of the mother, for which the daughter will in turn be rejected” (Flax 179). Mrs Wray’s conception of Frances as an extension of herself is derived from a feeling of rejection from Frances. Frances’s sexual orientation is likely a contributor to this feeling of rejection, as Mrs Wray did not take the news of Frances’s homosexuality well:

“ . . . But my mother—” She drew a breath. “My mother went through my things, and found a letter from Christina, and read it. I think she’d known all along that the friendship had something queer about it. She took the letter to Chrissy’s parents. They turned out Chrissy’s

room, and found letters from me. Well, it was clear what the letters meant. I ended up with most of the blame, perhaps because I was a little older.” (Waters 170)

Mrs Wray’s discovery, which is an amalgamation of distrusting Frances and simultaneously breaking Frances’s trust, evokes a vehement reaction. She, of course, does not understand Frances’s “abnormal” romantic interests and thus condemns them. Mrs Wray, however, also lashes out due to a fear that Frances’s romantic relationship with Christina functions as Frances finding a suitable replacement for her. In other words, in Mrs Wray’s mind, Frances’s lover being a woman means that she no longer relies on her mother, as Christina is able to fill the role of a prominent woman in Frances’s life.

Many of the complexities and nuances of the relationship between Mrs Wray and Frances are reminiscent of Anna and Stephen in *The Well of Loneliness*. Much like Frances and Mrs Wray, neither Stephen nor Anna verbally express love for the other. There is a stark difference between these two mother-daughter relationships, however. While Frances and Mrs Wray certainly feel some sort of love for one another, Anna and Stephen feel none. Earlier in the novel, there are some more affectionate moments between the two, such as when Stephen escorts Anna across the street on one of their shopping excursions (Hall 33). Stephen even feels a sense of honor to be seen with her mother (Hall 33). In moments like these, these sparse, brief moments of affection, the “feeling almost amounting to worship” (Hall 15) is only felt by Stephen. Hall provides insight into Anna’s feelings as well; during her shopping excursions with Stephen, Anna wonders, “and yet was this love? ... It was not, she felt sure, the trusting devotion that Stephen had always felt for her father” (Hall 34). Anna does not love Stephen; her personal definition of parent-child love is a “trusting devotion,” which she does not feel towards her daughter. Anna, hailing from a “race of devoted mothers” (Hall 8), expects to love her

child, and yet does not. Stephen, still young, has an expectation that her mother loves her and thus loves her in return. Stephen's feelings for her mother, however, are shattered as their story wears on.

The definitive moment of Anna and Stephen's relationship occurs immediately after Anna receives Stephen's aforementioned letter to her lover, Angela:

Then Anna began to speak very slowly as though nothing of what she would say must be lost; and that slow, quiet voice was more dreadful than anger: 'All your life I've felt very strangely towards you'; she was saying, 'I've felt a kind of physical repulsion, a desire not to touch or to be touched by you—a terrible thing for a mother to feel—it has often made me deeply unhappy. I've often felt that I was being unjust, unnatural—but now I know that my instinct was right; it is you who are unnatural, not I. . . .'

'Mother—stop!'

'It is you who are unnatural, not I. And this thing that you are is a sin against creation. Above all is this thing a sin against the father who bred you, the father whom you dare to resemble. You dare to look like your father, and your face is a living insult to his memory, Stephen. I shall never be able to look at you now without thinking of the deadly insult of your face and your body to the memory of the father who bred you. I can only thank God that your father died before he was asked to endure this great shame. As for you, I would rather see you dead at my feet than standing before me with this thing upon you—this unspeakable outrage that you call love in that letter which you don't deny having written' ...

'Mother—you don't know what you're saying—you're my mother—'

'Yes, I am your mother, but for all that, you seem to me like a scourge. I ask myself what I have ever done to be dragged into the depths by my daughter. And your father—what had he ever done?' (Hall 200-201)

Stephen's letter solidifies Anna's feelings of reproach for her daughter by confirming that she has "unnatural" proclivities, and allows Anna to lay bare all the opinions she has had of her daughter, thereby defining the relationship as one without love. However hard Anna may have tried to love Stephen, she was and ultimately is never able to fill that void. This moment is a consolidation of some of Anna's primary failures at achieving the "normal" relationship between mother and daughter. She obviously feels no love for Stephen and, as a result, makes no attempts to protect her child. She rejects Stephen in more ways than one: emotionally, Anna distances herself from Stephen and reproaches her

for her sexuality. Physically, she obviously expels Stephen from Morton and feels a strange “physical repulsion” from her, but she also explicitly rejects the ways in which Stephen’s body reflects Sir Philip’s. In Stephen’s childhood, Anna would think to herself “that she must be going mad, for this likeness to her husband would strike her as an outrage—as though the poor, innocent seven-year-old Stephen were in some way a caricature of Sir Philip; a blemished, unworthy, maimed reproduction” (Hall 15). For whatever reason, Stephen does not meet the expectations Anna has of a child of Sir Philip. On a similar note, Anna is also both physically and emotionally absent from Stephen. She is entirely unavailable in terms of comforting and supporting her daughter, in both a physical sense, such as offering physical affection, and an emotional sense, such as understanding, sympathizing with, and supporting Stephen. These rejections and absences inherently disable Anna from protecting or even caring for Stephen. Instead, she does the antithesis: rather than allowing Stephen to stay at Morton and attempting to protect her from a world that loathes her for who she loves, Anna expels Stephen from their family home. In this moment, Anna verbalizes all that she has ever felt towards Stephen, and yet her true feelings are incredibly complex and difficult to parse out. Their relationship’s complexity subverts another expectation had of parent-child relationships: simple, unconditional love.

It is easily said that Anna never loved Stephen. She never tells Stephen or even Sir Philip that she loves her daughter. For “all [Stephen’s] life,” Anna has found herself physically repulsed by her. What Anna does, in fact, feel for Stephen cannot simply be boiled down to hatred, disgust, or apathy. Anna begins by speaking to Stephen slowly, quietly, which is “more dreadful than anger.” This discovery does not anger her, perhaps she expected it or something similar, but whatever she does feel is something worse than fury. If Anna had been angry at this revelation, it would imply two things: the

first is that she did not anticipate or previously realize that something about Stephen is different, because she would have been surprised, and her surprise would have turned into this anger. The second implication is that she had some semblance of tender feelings for her daughter and that this incriminating letter was a betrayal of those feelings, a betrayal of a Stephen that Anna could have loved. Anna also makes it explicitly clear that she does not yet hate Stephen, saying that, should they continue living together, she “might grow to hate [Stephen]” (Hall 202). Anna’s rejection of Stephen at this moment not only undermines any potential for maternal protection, but also forces Stephen’s own individuation from her mother, her home, and her childhood. Anna’s feelings for Stephen cannot be described as any of the extremes—love, hate, or apathy—because she feels none of them entirely. Rather, she oscillates between apathy and hatred or disgust. Later, when asking Stephen to leave her alone at the end of their conversation, Anna says that she feels “tired” and that she wants “to be alone for a little” (Hall 202). This conversation with Stephen certainly takes an emotional and physical toll on Anna; if she felt apathetic towards Stephen it would not have been so trying to have this discussion—Anna simply would not have cared. The relationship between Anna and Stephen much more tragic than the relationship between Mrs Wray and Frances because while the latter two find replacements for the standards they omitted, particularly expressions of love, Anna and Stephen are never quite able to do so.

Yet, in a manner very similar to that of Mrs Wray and Frances, Stephen and Anna pervert the concept of maternal protection and care. As previously mentioned, rather than attempting to shelter Stephen from a world filled with vitriol, Anna explicitly denies Stephen that refuge. Prior to Stephen’s

banishment, Puddle, one of Stephen's tutors, notices something rather subtle about Anna's mothering methods:

There was one thing in all this that Puddle found amazing, and that was Anna's apparent blindness. Anna appeared to notice no change in Stephen, to feel no anxiety about her. As always, these two were gravely polite to each other, and as always they never intruded. Still, it did seem to Puddle an incredible thing that the girl's own mother should have noticed nothing. And yet so it was, for Anna had gradually been growing more silent and more abstracted. She was letting the tide of life carry her gently towards that haven on which her thoughts rested. (Hall 155-156)

Puddle and, indeed, many others expect a child's "own mother" to notice the child's feelings—in this case, Stephen's anguish over Angela. This fits well into the previously defined expectation of mothers to protect and care for their child. In this particular relationship, the mother takes no notice of Stephen's emotional decline and feels "no anxiety about her." This is a perfect example of Anna's emotional rejection and absence. Puddle's disbelief that Anna could not notice Stephen's change in demeanor makes Anna's negligence seem almost intentional, as though she is choosing to ignore Stephen's distinct emotional transitions. Whether it is intentional or not, Anna's silence and abstraction, paired with their already unfriendly relationship, serves to deter Stephen from ever approaching Anna about her problems.

In fact, Hall chooses to describe their relationship at one point as "constant . . . open warfare" (Hall 73) and, oftentimes, particularly in Stephen's earlier years, it does seem that way. When it comes to Sir Philip in particular, Anna juxtaposes herself against Stephen, effectively forcing her daughter to compete with her for Philip's affections:

'You care nothing for me any more—you and Stephen are enleagued against me—you have been for years.' Aghast at herself, she must yet go on speaking: 'You and Stephen—oh, I've seen it for years—you and Stephen.' He looked at her, and there was warning in his eyes, but

she babbled on wildly: ‘I’ve seen it for years—the cruelty of it; she’s taken you from me, my own child—the unspeakable cruelty of it!’ (Hall 111)

Anna claims that Philip “and Stephen are enleagued against” her, and that “she’s taken [him] from” her. It is Anna, however, who sets the scene as Sir Philip and Stephen joining forces against her. As Sir Philip says, “it’s you who have thrust her between us, Anna” (Hall 112). There is a sense of paranoia and a self-awareness in the way Anna speaks. She is “aghast at herself” but “she must yet go on speaking . . . babbl[ing] on wildly.” Anna’s “crude, ugly words” (Hall 111) shock her, but their meaning does not. Rather, Anna is shocked that she is actually saying these things; she is shocked that she “let [Philip] see into her tormented spirit; all that had lain unspoken between them” (Hall 111). Anna has a record of silence in her relationships: first with Stephen, and now, in this moment, with her husband. In Anna’s exclamation of her belief that Stephen and Philip are “enleagued” against her, she tacitly reveals that she has expectations of Stephen as her “own child.” Even though Anna’s fears are in reality based on the fact that she is insecure about her own feelings towards Stephen and envious at the relationship between her daughter and Sir Philip, she imagines that it is Stephen who has orchestrated the slow, apparent division of Philip and Anna, thereby making herself Anna’s sole contender for Sir Philip’s affections. In this imagined scenario, Stephen is defying Anna’s expectations of a child—that they will never come between their mother and father. Anna believes that Stephen is obliged to her as her child, despite the fact that Anna has hardly played the role of mother to Stephen. This is but a single feature of the nuanced notion of obligation in these particular mother-daughter relationships, and will be discussed in depth later in this chapter.

It is evident, then, that Anna not only neglects to offer Stephen any form of protection, but she actually perceives their relationship as hostile, as warfare, even before any legitimate conflict such as Stephen's expulsion from Morton. The role of protector or caretaker, as it does in the relationship between Frances and Mrs Wray, falls, then, on Stephen's shoulders. As previously mentioned, Stephen guides Anna across the street in a distinctly protective manner:

Stephen would suddenly spring to attention, especially if they were crossing the street.

. . . "Come with me," she would order . . .

Very protective and careful was Stephen when she and her mother were out alone together . . . [Anna] was forced to submit to a quiet supervision that was painstaking, gentle, but extremely persistent. (Hall 33-34)

Stephen takes on the role of a "very protective," "careful" guardian during these days out with her mother. She is "painstaking, gentle, but extremely persistent," almost as though she is an overprotective parent, attempting to guide her child's every action. Anna, however, is "forced to submit" to Stephen's "supervision," as though she is a child who must obey their parent. In this regard, Stephen literally acts as the parent and Anna the child, but it is not the only moment where Stephen protects her mother.

When Stephen visits the Antrims, she inevitably suffers from Roger's antagonistic ways—in this particular instance, he says, "and my mother said . . . that your mother must be funny to allow you to [ride astride]; she said it was horrible to let girls ride that way; she said she was awfully surprised at your mother; she said that she'd have thought that your mother had more sense; she said that it wasn't modest; she said—" (Hall 52). To this slander of her mother, Stephen has quite a violent reaction. She springs to her feet, saying, "'How dare you! How dare you—my mother!' she spluttered.

And now she was almost beside herself with rage, conscious only of one overwhelming impulse, and that to belabour Roger” (Hall 52). Stephen, upon hearing Roger berating her mother, quite literally jumps to her feet and opposes him. While Anna is never explicitly shown speaking with someone who holds negative opinions of Stephen, Anna receives a letter from Angela’s husband, Ralph, which encloses Stephen’s letter to Angela. Where Stephen stands up and fights on her mother’s behalf, Anna never does on Stephen’s—in fact, she shares Ralph’s “repugnance” (Hall 199) towards her. While this is not as precise a role reversal as Stephen guiding Anna across the street, the daughter’s readiness to defend her mother replaces the complete lack of maternal protection on Anna’s part.

Much like Mrs Wray with Frances, there is a sense that Anna yearns for Stephen to regress to her infant self, particularly in a scene where Anna steals into her daughter’s room and observes her sleeping. She gazes at Stephen and recalls the way she used to feel when similarly watching her daughter when she was a child:

Then something would draw her, not back to her bedroom, but on up the stairs to the room of their daughter. She would open that door very gently—by inches. She would hold her hand so that it shaded the candle, and would stand looking down at the sleeping Stephen as she and her husband had done long ago. But now there would be no little child to look down on, no small helplessness to arouse mother-pity. Stephen would be lying very straight, very large, very long, underneath the neatly drawn covers. Quite often an arm would be outside the bedspread, the sleeve having fallen away as it lay there, and that arm would look firm and strong and possessive, and so would the face by the light of the candle. (Hall 82)

As Anna looks down at her daughter, now grown, she recognizes that there is no “small helplessness to arouse mother-pity.” “Mother-pity,” or a maternal desire to protect Stephen due to her former infantile helplessness, is one of the strongest emotions used to describe Anna’s feelings towards Stephen, as she never feels love for her daughter, even when Stephen was an infant. Stephen’s

infanthood is the only time Anna ever feels inclined to protect Stephen, and this inclination is out of recognition that she is wholly defenseless. Hall's emphasis on Stephen's "large," "long" body and her "firm and strong and possessive" arms accentuates the loss of that helplessness; she is powerful, she is nearly fully grown, and she no longer depends on Anna. Stephen's adult body is contrasted against her infantile form when Anna "scourge[s] her heart and her anxious spirit with memories drawn from this stranger's beginnings: 'Little—you were so very little!' she would whisper, 'and you sucked my breast because you were hungry—little and always so terribly hungry—a good baby though, a contented little baby—'" (Hall 82). Stephen is not an infant anymore; she no longer requires the "mother-pity" Anna formerly felt for her.

When recalling her memories of Stephen's "beginnings," Anna views them as a punishment, a "scourge," on her heart and mind. There is a feeling of loss in the way Anna punishes herself with "memories drawn from this stranger's beginnings." When Stephen grew up, and grew further away from the young woman her mother wanted her to be, Anna lost her idealized Stephen, a Stephen she would have been capable of loving. Anna glorifies the state of potentiality that is inevitable at the beginning of a person's life, before they develop "a range of characteristics, skills, and personality traits which are uniquely one's own" (Flax 172). Anna lost the Stephen who had yet to be molded into a person, and the Stephen who was dependent on her mother for all things. Anna conceives of these memories of a Stephen she could love as a punishment, which in turn insinuates that though Anna does not love the woman her child turned out to be, she wishes she could. Anna feels guilty that when she watches Stephen sleeping, she "feels ... that she looked on a stranger" (Hall 82). The only

circumstance in which Anna ever loved Stephen was when she was an infant; thus, Anna yearns for her daughter's regression.

Anna and Stephen are so far removed from one another that Anna thinks of her daughter as a stranger. Other than literally referring to Stephen as such, the experience Anna has of watching her daughter sleep is incredibly unfamiliar. Anna thinks of Stephen's body as its own entity, thinking that "her body would be drinking in its fill of the refreshment. It would rise up clean and refreshed in the morning; it would eat, speak, move—it would move about Morton. In the stables, in the gardens, in the neighbouring paddocks, in the study—it would move about Morton" (Hall 82). The body that Anna watches sleep does not seem to the reader like that of her daughter; in fact, it barely feels like Anna is observing a human. Anna dissociates Stephen's body from the person inhabiting it, thinking of Stephen's daily actions around their home as the actions of "it," the body, and not "she," the daughter. Anna's struggle with identifying Stephen's body is a consistent facet of their relationship. Here, it is clear that Anna is unable to identify Stephen's body as her daughter's, but this is complicated by the fact that she is frequently, yet bitterly, able to identify Stephen's body as similar to Sir Philip's, as previously discussed. Anna's rejection of Stephen's body, particularly as a reproduction of Sir Philip's, comes alongside a desire to love her child:

Staring at the girl she would see the strange resemblance, the invidious likeness of the child to the father, she would notice their movements so grotesquely alike; their hands were alike, they made the same gestures, and her mind would recoil with that nameless resentment, the while she reproached herself, penitent and trembling. Yet penitent and trembling though Anna might be, she would sometimes hear herself speaking to Stephen in a way that would make her feel secretly ashamed. She would hear herself covertly, cleverly gibing, with such skill that the girl would look up at her bewildered; with such skill that even Sir Philip himself could not well take exception to what she was saying; then, as like as not, she would laugh it off lightly, as

though all the time she had only been jesting, and Stephen would laugh too, a big, friendly laugh . . .

She would think that [Sir Philip's] eyes were pleading, beseeching; she would think: 'He's pleading with me for Stephen.' Then her own eyes would fill with tears of contrition, and that night she would kneel long in prayer to her Maker:

'Give me peace,' she would entreat, 'and enlighten my spirit, so that I may learn how to love my own child.' (Hall 80-81)

The familial dynamics surrounding Anna's feelings about Stephen's body reveals an incredible amount about the "the silence, lack of mutual confidence, and tacit cruelty that exists within this family" (Dellamora 202). In Anna's eyes, Stephen's resemblance to her father is grotesque and worthy of bitter resent, so much so that Anna compulsively taunts her daughter "covertly, cleverly." Again returning to the concept of maternal protection, not only does she agree with people such as Ralph Crossby who act cruelly towards Stephen, but Anna herself also participates in this cruelty. The silence that frequents Stephen and Anna's relationship works its way into the relationship between Anna and Philip. They become unable to communicate verbally; Anna must glean Philip's pleas on Stephen's behalf through his eyes. Most importantly, however, Anna exposes her desire to love Stephen for nothing but Sir Philip's sake. She beseeches God for the ability to love her child. Anna finds herself in Stephen's room late at night after this plea to "her Maker," making an attempt at loving her child.

Upon entering Stephen's bedroom, Anna takes great pains to avoid rousing her daughter from her slumber. She opens the door very gently, shades the candle she carries, and kisses Stephen's forehead "lightly and very quickly" (Hall 82) so as not to disturb her daughter. It comes as a surprise, at first, to see Anna kissing Stephen at all. However, through Anna's introspections, Hall reveals that Anna goes to these lengths to avoid waking Stephen "so that the girl should not wake and kiss back" (Hall 82-83). Anna does not want Stephen to know about nor reciprocate this small, singular display

of affection. Anna does not kiss Stephen's temple for Stephen's sake, rather, she performs this act of feigned affection as a sort of atonement to Sir Philip, and a consolation to herself. In both circumstances, a single act of affection every so often—this happens more than once, as evidenced by Hall's use of the modal verb "would" and the phrase "quite often"—is designed to satisfy Sir Philip's need for Anna to treat Stephen better, and Anna's own need to feel as though she is succeeding as a mother. However, Anna remains physically and emotionally repelled by Stephen, so she kisses her lightly, quickly, and out of obligation. It is this obligation that is the "something" that draws her into Stephen's room in the first place.

This feeling of obligation that Anna experiences becomes a large focal point for both of these relationships, as these mothers tend to favor biological ties over emotional ties; much of the language used between the mothers and their daughters reflect this. The feelings of obligation mostly come from differing sources, however. It is Anna who feels obliged to attempt to love Stephen, yet it is most frequently Frances who feels obliged to look after and care for Mrs Wray. Mrs Wray certainly feels obliged as Frances's mother to care for her daughter, but this is mostly in regard to external influences. Anna attempts to love Stephen on the sole basis that she is her daughter, whereas Frances feels obligated to look after her mother simply because she is her mother. They are socially and biologically expected to meet the aforementioned standards set by other examples of relationships, including other mother-daughter relationships, and thus make efforts to appear as though they have "normal" relationships with one another.

The relatively unspoken nature of the relationship between Frances and Mrs Wray, as well as the fact that when they do speak, they do not speak "candidly" (Waters 282) with one another,

contributes to a dearth of scenes where their obligations towards one another are explicitly clear. In fact, much of the obligatory language is implicit in many of the scenes previously analyzed. For instance, Frances makes her myriad sacrifices for her mother out of obligation, most notably her decision to stay with her mother and leave Chrissy. She says, “I couldn’t leave my mother, after everything she’d been through. She and I never discussed it, we never spoke a word about it; she knew what Chrissy was to me, but—no, I couldn’t leave her” (Waters 171). Frances does not feel that same obligation to Chrissy, even though she later admits that she “let [her] down” (Waters 241). Frances loved Christina, yet their romantic love could not trump the familial obligation Frances feels for her mother. It is not that she would not or should not leave her mother, which both imply varying degrees of decision making, but rather that she could not—she was unable to. Frances did not have to make a choice between Chrissy (or well-kempt petticoats, for that matter) or her mother, because, through obligation, the choice has already been made for her.

The relationship of Mrs Wray and Frances is not one of unrequited obligation. Mrs Wray seems aware of the fact that she is societally expected to maintain a certain kind of relationship with her daughter. Mrs Wray is frequently concerned with the opinions other people, such as neighbors, have of her; she has been known to insist Frances not sweep the porch so that neighbors may not see her and become privy to the fact that they must do their own chores (Waters 109), for example. When Mrs Wray, in her final scene, tells Frances that she “mustn’t grow upset,” reminding her of what “Dr Lawrence said,” it seems as though Frances’s health is not Mrs Wray’s sole concern. Like many other mothers in lesbian novels, Mrs Wray is concerned with others’ perception of her, particularly in her success or failure as a mother. In other words, should Frances ignore Dr Lawrence’s medical

recommendations and fall ill, Dr Lawrence will view this as a failure on Mrs Wray's part as a mother. It is a mother's job to keep her children safe and well. A failure to do so could be interpreted, especially by outsiders such as Dr Lawrence, to be Mrs Wray's failure as a mother.

Mrs Wray is not wholly selfish, however. This same scene is the moment where she tells Frances that she "could never despise [her], any more than [she] could despise [her] own hand" (Waters 556). Other than Mrs Wray's own desires for Frances to regress to an extension of her physical self, it also functions as an admission of the obligation she feels towards Frances. Much like how Frances is unable to leave her mother for Chrissy, Mrs Wray is unable to despise Frances, because she has a biological obligation towards her. As previously mentioned, she does not follow her statement "I could never despise you" with something to the effect of "because I love you"; instead, Mrs Wray replaces that emotional love with a more biological, obligatory love.

In this very same scene, Mrs Wray says that she only wanted "ordinary things" (Waters 556) for Frances. The word ordinary, unsurprisingly, takes on a very heteronormative meaning in Mrs Wray's admission—she means a husband, a family. Earlier, in a conversation with Lilian, Frances says, "It seems I haven't the—the man microbe, or whatever it is one needs. My poor mother's convinced that there must be one in me somewhere. She's done everything to shake it loose save turn me upside down by my heels" (Waters 169). Mrs Wray has done anything in her power to dislodge what Frances deems a "man microbe," as though she feels some sort of responsibility to provide Frances with the "ordinary things" she holds in such high esteem. This could also return to Mrs Wray's self-consciousness with how she is perceived socially; she surely does not want her peers and neighbors to think of her as the mother of the spinster, lesbian daughter. Herein lies the complexity of the

relationship between Mrs Wray and Frances. Unlike Anna and Stephen, there is certainly some kind of familial affection present between them, yet it is complicated by their modes of expressing it as well as their motives—this affection appears to be a product of obligation, whether it is their biological obligations toward one another, or if it is Mrs Wray feeling societally obligated to act the part of the mother.

Obligation is far more straightforward in *The Well of Loneliness*. When Anna kisses Stephen on the head as she sleeps, it is because she feels obligated to feign love for her child. Here, Anna's sense of obligation is centered around her perceived duty to Sir Philip—she must love the child not because it is hers, but rather because it is Sir Philip's, and she loves him. Anna's obligation to love Stephen is different from Mrs Wray's in that while Mrs Wray feels both the pressures of external influences and that of consanguineous obligation, the only moments in which Anna feels compelled to attempt to love Stephen are inspired by Sir Philip. Interestingly, though Stephen never directly expresses any debt to Anna for simply being her daughter, she frequently acknowledges that Anna should feel some sort of obligation to her. In the scene in which Anna evicts Stephen, Stephen's interjects frequently by crying "mother," or by saying, "mother — you don't know what you're saying — you're my mother —" (Hall 201). Stephen's repetition of the word mother acts as a constant reminder to Anna that she is the mother of this woman who she is at this moment treating so viciously. Stephen also objects to what Anna is saying, by interrupting her with the reminder that she is her mother. Stephen is insistent on this obligation she believes Anna must feel towards her. Stephen has her own expectations of motherhood, despite never having had a mother that is capable of setting those expectations, and feels that Anna, as a mother, should feel compelled to meet those expectations. Stephen claims that Anna

“[doesn’t] know what [she’s] saying” because she cannot fathom a mother treating her child in this way.

Stephen believes that this maternal obligation she expects of Anna carries over into motherhood in general. In a moment where Stephen is recalling the night of her eviction from Morton, she thinks, “I would rather see you dead at my feet . . .’ A fearful saying, and yet she had meant it, that ageing woman with the far-away eyes—she had uttered it knowing herself to be a mother” (Hall 334). Once again, it is made clear that Stephen believes a mother should not outright reject her child and even prefer her child’s death to any circumstance of their identity, but there are some crucial differences. Though Stephen initially claimed that Anna “[didn’t] know what [she was] saying,” she now believes that Anna said what she did “knowing herself to be a mother.” This implies a deliberateness to Anna’s rejection of Stephen, and that Stephen has become privy to the fact that Anna never attempted to love Stephen for the sake of their own relationship. In other words, Stephen now knows that Anna ousted her from Morton, despite being her mother, because Anna never felt traditional maternal feelings towards Stephen. There is also the distinction of “a” mother as opposed to “my” (e.g. Stephen’s) mother, which exemplifies that Stephen has an expectation of maternal obligation that does not simply apply to Anna, but to motherhood as a whole. In one late-night rumination on Morton and her mother, Stephen thinks, “what right had a mother to abominate the child that had sprung from her own secret moments of passion? She the honoured, the fulfilled, the fruitful, the loving and loved, had despised the fruit of her love. Its fruit? No, rather its victim” (Hall 235). Stephen questions not whether Anna has any right to “abominate” her child, but rather whether “a mother,” any mother, has a right to do so. She, then, believes that a mother has a duty to, at the very

least, accept her child. Here, much like Anna, Stephen adds Sir Philip into the equation of maternal obligation. Stephen's incredulity towards Anna's rejection of her revolves around Anna's obligation to Stephen as a product of the love she shared with Sir Philip. Sir Philip functions as a mediator between Anna and Stephen in more ways than one. He tends to bridge the gap between them—both Anna and Stephen feel compelled to love the other for his sake.

III. The Child

Fathers in both *The Well of Loneliness* and *The Paying Guests*, as well as in many other lesbian novels, either have been or become, in one way or another, absent. The father also tends to function relationally rather than individually; that is, his function lies within his interactions with his daughter and his wife rather than as his own character. Where Sir Philip bridges the gap between Anna and Stephen, Mr Wray deepens the gulf between Frances and her mother. In this chapter, I will explore Stephen and Frances's feelings towards their mothers as well as their fathers.

In the previous chapter, an array of literary examples and psychological studies provides a model of what mother-daughter relationships are expected to look like. Using this model, I analyzed the ways in which the mother-daughter relationships present in *The Well of Loneliness* and *The Paying Guests* do not meet these expectations, as well as how these relationships replace certain aspects of the model, such as verbal assertions of love and a maternal instinct to protect her daughter. The chapter puts a particular emphasis on the mothers and their thoughts, feelings, and motivations. However, this chapter, as the title suggests, will focus more explicitly on the daughter's own perceptions of her relationship with her mother, as well as her relationship with her father. My main focus in this chapter is the daughter's desire for a maternal relationship that does, in fact, meet the expectations as presented by the model of genuinely loving relationships. I will analyze Stephen's own attempts to salvage her relationship with Anna by taking on the role of the mother as well as her later attempts to replace Anna with other maternal figures. I will also dissect the roles of maternal approval, the desire for mutual confidence, and letters in both novels before moving onto a discussion of Sir Philip and Mr Wray, who are starkly contrasted by one another.

The most heart-wrenching facet of the relationships Frances and Stephen maintain with their mothers is their desire for the standardized relationship as outlined in the previous chapter. They long for true maternal love based in genuine affection for the child rather than the feigned maternal love based in obligation and necessity. In *The Well of Loneliness*, Hall's third-person omniscient narration allows readers to realize both Stephen and Anna yearn for the relationship that they are socially and biologically expected to have. Yet the difference between Stephen and Anna's desires is that Anna's are relatively passive—she prays to God for the strength to love her child and, other than that, does relatively little to forge a stronger bond with her daughter. Stephen, however, takes a more active role in filling the void left by Anna; she guides Anna across the street, makes several attempts to confide in her mother, and, when all else fails, eventually endeavors to find suitable replacements for the mother she always longed for yet never truly had.

As discussed in the previous chapter, there is a distinct role reversal that occurs particularly between Stephen and Anna. Stephen makes attempts to protect Anna physically, as in guiding her across the street, and also endeavors to protect Anna's reputation. Stephen fills the role of the mother or guardian so that she may feel some semblance of the standard mother-daughter relationship, even if it means abandoning the freedom of responsibility that is inherent to childhood. She painstakingly works to reassure and relax both of her parents, but Anna in particular. After Stephen's tirade following her discovery of Collins with the footman, Anna hurries to her daughter's room in what appears to be an attempt to comfort her. However, it is Stephen who ends up consoling her mother:

. . . indeed she actually smiled up at Anna—it was rather a stiff little smile. Anna talked kindly and Stephen listened, nodding her head from time to time in acquiescence. But Anna felt

awkward, and as though for some reason the child was anxious to reassure her; that smile had been meant to be reassuring—it had been such an unchildish smile.”

. . . In the end Stephen took her mother’s hand gravely and proceeded to stroke it, as though she were consoling. She said: ‘Don’t feel worried, ‘cause that worries Father—I promise I’ll try not to get into tempers, but you promise that you won’t go on feeling worried.’

And absurd though it seemed, Anna heard herself saying: ‘Very well then—I do promise, Stephen.’ (Hall 30)

Stephen takes on a precocious, oddly mature character. She smiles an “unchildish smile” and seems, to Anna, “anxious to reassure her,” despite the fact that Anna came to Stephen’s room in order to console her. Anna senses the abnormality of this interaction with Stephen; she begins to feel awkward when she realizes that Stephen is breaking from the role prescribed to her and into Anna’s own. It is Stephen who reaches for Anna’s hand, not the other way around, bringing this consolation onto a physical level. She also reminds Anna that her feelings affect Sir Philip’s feelings, and then proceeds to make a compromise with her mother: “I promise I’ll try not to get into tempers, but you promise that you won’t go on feeling worried.” All of the ways in which Stephen interacts with Anna in this scene—her different modes of consolation as well as her proposal of a compromise—are much more akin to a parent than a child. She is the one to facilitate the consolation. Though “the mother was doing all the talking” (Hall 30), Stephen listens, Stephen reassures, and Stephen reaches for Anna’s hand. Stephen’s actions are indicative of something amiss in her relationship with her mother, and work to fill the vacancy left by Anna’s inability to conform to the traditional maternal role.

As one would expect from a standard mother-daughter relationship, Stephen often seeks to comfort herself and Anna through physical expressions of affection, primarily by taking hold of Anna’s hand. In the weeks that follow this interaction with her mother, Anna takes Stephen on walks through the grounds of Morton and its surroundings in attempts to enliven the child. Yet, “a great

sadness would cloud her eyes for a moment, an infinite regret as she looked down at Stephen” (Hall 32). Stephen, once again, discerns Anna’s need for comfort, and takes hold of “Anna’s hand with small, anxious fingers” (Hall 32). In these moments, Stephen “would long to inquire what troubled her mother, but would be held speechless through shyness” (Hall 32). Once again, Stephen is silent, but attempts to bridge the chasm between her and Anna through a simple touch, a slight show of physical affection. Stephen’s tendency to reach for Anna’s hand becomes less common as they both grow older and more distant from one another, but in one particular moment in Stephen’s adulthood that functions as a sort of concatenation of all the ways in which Stephen attempts to salvage a traditional mother-daughter dynamic from her relationship with her mother, she holds Anna’s hand one final time.

When Angela Crosby travels to Scotland with her husband, Stephen and Anna travel to Cornwall, and Stephen spends the entirety of the trip in throes of sorrow over the fact that she cannot join her lover in Scotland. On one evening of their trip to Cornwall, Stephen experiences what she can only describe as a “preposterous impulse” when sitting outside with her mother:

And one evening there came a preposterous impulse—the impulse to confide in this woman within whose most gracious and perfect body her own anxious body had lain and quickened. She wanted to speak to that motherhood, to implore, nay, compel its understanding. To say: ‘Mother, I need you. I’ve lost my way—give me your hand to hold in the darkness.’ But good God, the folly, the madness of it! The base betrayal of such a confession! (Hall 162)

The sudden desire to confide in her mother is antithetical to the ways in which Stephen interacted with her mother previously. As a child, Stephen “would not discuss her affection for Collins; on this point she was firmly, obdurately silent” (Hall 30). However, Stephen, in her adulthood, suddenly feels the need to reveal all of her true emotions to Anna, but she believes this desire is “preposterous,”

“folly,” or “madness,” as though speaking candidly to one’s mother is an absurd thing to do. Frances in *The Paying Guests*, as will be discussed later, experiences a similar feeling: she also longs to tell her mother everything, yet finds excuses not to do so. In this moment, Stephen does not think of Anna in terms of her motherhood until Stephen imagines what exactly she would say to her. Instead, Anna becomes either “this woman within whose most gracious and perfection body [Stephen’s] own anxious body had lain and quickened” or the theoretical concept of “motherhood.” To Stephen, Anna is not simply “her mother” because she never adequately fills that role, which necessitates detaching Anna from the title of “mother.”

While Anna does not necessarily deserve the title of “mother,” and though her daughter convinces herself that the impulse to confide in her mother is preposterous, Stephen continues to feel the need for some form of physical comfort between her and Anna:

. . . as they sat there together it would seem to Stephen that her heart was so full of Angela Crosby . . . that the mother-heart beating close by her own must surely, in its turn, be stirred to beat faster, for had she not once sheltered under that heart? And so extreme was her need becoming, that now she must often find Anna’s cool hand and hold it for a moment or two in her own, trying to draw from it some consolation. (Hall 162)

Stephen’s need for consolation from her mother becomes “so extreme” that she “must” hold her mother’s hand. Hall’s adds that this is an “often” practice, thus indicating that Stephen’s need to hold her mother’s hand as a replacement for confiding in her is a frequent occurrence. For Stephen, physical affection between her and her mother acts as a replacement for the potentially verbalized emotions that remain unspoken between them. Stephen also comes to believe, desperately, “surely,” that Anna must feel and sympathize with her distress. Stephen reaches out to Anna, emotionally and physically,

as a forlorn plea to recognize her suffering, to perhaps mention it to lift the burden of broaching the topic off Stephen's shoulders.

Yet the touch of Anna's hand does not, in fact, succeed in comforting Stephen. In fact, it is a reminder that this type of affection is not readily accessible to her:

But the touch of that cool, pure hand would distress her, causing her spirit to ache with longing for the simple and upright and honourable things that had served many simple and honourable people. Then all that to some might appear uninspiring would seem to her very fulfilling and perfect. A pair of lovers walking by arm in arm—just a quiet, engaged couple, neither comely nor clever nor burdened with riches; just a quiet, engaged couple—would in her envious eyes be invested with a glory and pride passing all understanding. For were Angela and she those fortunate lovers, they could stand before Anna happy and triumphant. Anna, the mother, would smile and speak gently, tolerant because of her own days of loving.” (Hall 162)

Finally taking hold of Anna's hand incites “distress” within Stephen. It reminds her that she will never be able to love another woman, in this case Angela, proudly and publically because her mother will never approve of Stephen's sexual orientation. Stephen does not necessarily even long for Anna to accept her sexuality with open arms; rather, all she really desires is Anna's tolerance. She yearns for the simple ability to “stand before Anna happy and triumphant” and for Anna to “smile and speak gently.” Stephen compares her and Angela to a passing engaged couple. There is nothing outstanding about this couple—they are “neither comely nor clever nor burdened with riches.” To Stephen, however, their ability to walk together in public, in love, is incredible and unfathomable. Stephen initially reaches out to her mother and takes hold of her hand in order to find solace despite the fact that she cannot find it within herself to candidly speak with Anna, but rather than glossing over that fact, Anna's touch accentuates it.

On one of these nights where Anna and Stephen sit outside and the daughter reaches for her mother's hand, Anna asks a shocking question:

One night Anna looked across at her daughter: 'Are you tired, my dear? You seem a bit fagged.'

The question was unexpected, for Stephen was supposed not to know what it meant to feel fagged, her physical health and strength were proverbial. Was it possible then that her mother had divined at long last her utter weariness of spirit? Quite suddenly Stephen felt shamelessly childish, and she spoke as a child who wants comforting.

'Yes, I'm dreadfully tired.' her voice shook a little; 'I'm tired out—I'm dreadfully tired,' she repeated. With amazement she heard herself making this weak bid for pity, and yet she could not resist it. Had Anna held out her arms at that moment, she might soon have learnt about Angela Crosby. (Hall 163)

The question takes Stephen by surprise because, as she is physically strong and young, she believes that Anna discerns a "weariness of spirit" within her rather than a corporeal exhaustion. Almost against her will, Stephen makes what she believes is a "weak bid for pity" similar to her "preposterous impulse." Stephen uses this opportunity to finally express something about her sexuality, however subtle it is, to Anna. She is exhausted because of the emotional strain of her torrential, illicit relationship with Angela. Stephen tentatively dips her foot in a pool of confidence with her mother, essentially testing Anna to see if she will inquire further about Stephen's exhaustion; Stephen is both seeking evidence that Anna truly cares about why and how Stephen has become so exhausted, as well as attempting to determine how safe it is for her to discuss Angela Crosby with her mother. Had Anna shown any sign of reciprocating Stephen's desire for confidence between the two, "she might soon have learnt about Angela Crosby." Stephen is particularly hopeful that Anna will open herself up to Stephen by reciprocating the latter's desire for physical affection; if Anna had "held out her arms at that moment,

she might soon have learnt about Angela Crosby.” Anna, however, neglects to reach out to Stephen either physically or emotionally, and thus fails Stephen’s “test:”

But instead she yawned: ‘It’s this air, it’s too woolly. I’ll be very glad when we get back to Morton. What’s the time? I’m almost asleep already—let’s go up to our beds, don’t you think so, Stephen?’

It was like a cold douche; and a good thing too for the girl’s self-respect. She pulled herself together: ‘Yes, come on, it’s past ten. I detest this soft air.’ And she flushed, remembering that weak bid for pity. (Hall 163)

Anna either does not recognize Stephen’s bid for pity, or chooses to ignore it. Stephen’s relationship with Anna is so unfamiliar and nonfamilial that Stephen blushes, ashamed of her “weak bid for pity.” This scene is the very last time that Stephen makes efforts to grasp at the traditional maternal relationship she so desperately longs for. After the shame she feels for her “weak bid for pity,” Stephen can hope for nothing more than peace between herself and Anna.

Stephen’s desire to confide is her strongest longing in regard to forging a stronger, healthier relationship with her mother. The same can be said of Frances, who longs to speak with her mother honestly and unencumbered by a fear of intimacy between them. After one of Frances’s deceased brothers’ former fiancée stops by Frances’s home to announce that she has gotten engaged to a new man, both Frances and Mrs Wray take the news rather poorly. After the fact, Frances wishes she and her mother could share in their despair:

‘Oh, Mother,’ she wanted to say, ‘our hearts are breaking. What on earth are we to do?’

But she hadn’t spoken candidly like that to her mother in about twenty years. Even after her brothers’ deaths, the two of them had done their crying in private. (Waters 282)

Frances and Mrs Wray are experiencing the same emotion, yet they cannot share in their grief and disappointment. They cannot because they *have* not; the way they handled their sorrow over Frances’s

brothers' deaths—alone—set the precedent that they can never share their true feelings and selves with one another. Frances justifies not saying what she wants to her mother because she has not said things like it before, at least not recently. Immediately after Lilian accidentally murders Leonard and Frances hides his body, something similar occurs:

Frances felt an urge to step towards her, catch hold of her hand. 'Oh, Mother,' she wanted to say, 'it's frightful! Oh, Mother, make it better!'

She forced herself to turn away, and went, with bowed head, to the kitchen. (Waters 341)

This moment is more distinctly similar to Stephen. Frances feels an urge in the same way Stephen felt an impulse, as well as the desire, which Stephen of course acts upon, to hold her mother's hand. This scene is perhaps the only instance in which Frances actually feels like she is Mrs Wray's child. The words she longs to say to her mother are childish, dependent on her mother to fix it, to "make it better." Frances again does not say this and, instead, forces "herself to turn away," though her reasoning for doing so is logical: Frances and her clandestine lover accidentally murder Leonard and attempt to cover up their crime. This of course relates back to Mrs Wray's failures at providing the parental protection seen in so many other parent-daughter relationships and Frances's inability to trust her mother. Like Stephen, Frances finds safety in keeping her mother distant and not divulging secrets to her.

Frances has an erratic relationship with her mother's approval and disapproval; Mrs Wray's opinion seems far more important when Frances has no one quite so close to her as her mother. Before Frances and Lilian start their affair, Lilian gives Frances a haircut that Mrs Wray admires very much:

'Well—' her mother flushed. 'You can sometimes look a little slipshod as you go about the house; that's all I meant. I don't mind for myself, I'm simply thinking about callers. But this— No, it's very smart.'

Her words caught Frances off guard. Coming so closely on the heels of the awkwardness with Lilian, they left her, absurdly, back on the brink of tears. She crossed to the hearth and stood at the mantel-glass, pretending to pat and tweak the new haircut. Idiot! Idiot! she said to herself, pushing the feelings down again. (Waters 124)

Frances has an “absurdly” strong reaction to her mother’s words. Whether Frances reacts in such a way because of her disapproval of how Frances can “look a little slipshod” when she is in their home or because of Mrs Wray’s approval of her new appearance is not an important distinction, as Frances’s response is grounded in Mrs Wray’s opinion of her either way. The very night Frances and Lilian first confess their love, however, and Lilian replaces Mrs Wray as the most important person in Frances’s life, Frances is significantly less affected by Mrs Wray’s compliments:

But when she made her tentative entry into the drawingroom, her mother was as delighted as she had been that other time.

‘Oh, now, *don’t* you look stylish! So handsome, I shouldn’t have known you!’

‘Yes, thanks.’

‘I don’t recognize that hat. Is it one of Mrs Barber’s? And the gown?’

‘No, the gown’s my own. It’s the one—I’ve had it for years.’

. . . Now Frances was itching to be gone. She felt more exposed than ever with Lilian standing there beside her. (Waters 184)

It is important to note that this particular gown is one Christina convinced Frances to purchase.

Frances stands in front of her mother, feeling “exposed,” dressed in a frock she bought with her former lover while standing beside the woman she has recently fallen in love with. Though Frances was so emotionally overcome by Mrs Wray’s previous enthusiasm, this scene puts Frances’s sexual orientation at odds with winning her mother’s approval. Frances cannot both be open about her sexuality and have Mrs Wray’s approval; they are mutually exclusive. The inability of Frances and Mrs Wray to speak to one another results in this mutual exclusivity—the nature of their relationship forces Frances to choose between herself and her mother. After her father’s death, Frances chooses to stay with her

mother instead of being with Christina, but Frances's apathy to her mother's reaction in this scene is a suggestion that because of Lilian, Frances will begin to choose herself more often.

After Stephen decides to become an ambulance driver for the war, Anna requests to see her before she leaves to join the war effort. Their meeting is awkward and brief, but causes both Stephen and Anna to realize "that all they dared hope for was peace between them—too late to go back—they could not retrace their steps even though there was now peace between them" (Hall 279). There is no more hope for the relationship that Stephen longs to share with her mother. All their trials and Anna's cruelties have made the traditional mother-daughter relationship unattainable for the pair. Not long this, Anna essentially makes an exit from the novel, appearing in very few scenes and extremely briefly. Anna's departure from Stephen's life causes Stephen to seek out new maternal figures. Her tutors, Puddle and Mademoiselle Duphot, both fill the role of Anna to some extent, but Lady Massey, who Stephen and Mary meet in Florence, functions as the main maternal figure, albeit for very little time:

As for Lady Massey she petted Mary, and mothered her as though she were a child, and soon she was mothering Stephen also.

She would say: 'I seem to have found two new children,' and Stephen, who was in the mood to feel touched, grew quite attached to this ageing woman . . . But Lady Massey went further than this in her enthusiastic proffers of friendship—Stephen and Mary must stay with her in Cheshire; she was going to give a house party at Branscombe Court for Christmas; they must certainly come to her for Christmas. (Hall 368)

Lady Massey is literally said to be "mothering" both Mary and Stephen, who are her "two new children." Their relationship goes beyond "enthusiastic proffers of friendship;" Lady Massey truly does treat the couple as though they are family, insisting that they stay at her home or join her for Christmas. Hall's crucial use of the word "must" makes a return here, this time indicating the vigor of Lady Massey's maternal feelings for Mary and Stephen. The relationship, unfortunately, takes a turn

for the worst—it is a repetition of what occurred with Anna. Lady Massey, after discovering that Mary and Stephen are a couple, writes them a letter:

‘If I hadn’t grown so fond of you both . . . this would be much less painful—as it is the whole thing has made me quite ill, but I must consider my position in the county. You see, the county looks to me for a lead—above all I must consider my daughter. The rumours that have reached me about you and Mary—certain things that I don’t want to enter into—have simply forced me to break off our friendship and to say that I must ask you not to come here for Christmas. Of course a woman of my position with all eyes upon her has to be extra careful. It’s too terribly upsetting and sad for me; if I hadn’t been so fond of you both—but you know how attached I had grown to Mary . . .’ (Hall 370)

Lady Massey’s reaction is decidedly less vitriolic and hateful than Anna’s. her decision to cut ties with Stephen and Mary is “painful” and makes her “quite ill,” and she claims she must distance herself from the couple for the sake of her relatively public role in the county as well as her daughter. She only refers to the matter of Stephen and Mary’s relationship as “rumors . . . certain things that [she doesn’t] want to enter into,” whereas Anna, after receiving Ralph’s letter, calls Stephen’s sexual orientation an “unspeakable outrage,” “unnatural,” “a sin against the father who bred you.” Comparatively, Lady Massey’s rejection is rather tame, but perhaps that fact reminds Stephen of how contemptuous her own mother’s response was, making her feel “unendurable pain” (Hall 371). Lady Massey’s letter, like many others, finalizes a relationship.

In both *The Well of Loneliness* and *The Paying Guests*, letters serve as a symbol of a significant change within or the end of a relationship. Such is clearly the case with Lady Massey and Stephen, but more interestingly, this applies to both Stephen and Anna as well as Frances and Mrs Wray. In particular, these pivotal letters that are not addressed to the person who eventually discovers them;

they are instead intended for the lovers of the writers. For instance, Mrs Wray finds a letter from Christina in Frances's room, as Frances tells Lilian:

'My mother went through my things, and found a letter from Christina, and read it. I think she'd known all along that the friendship had something queer about it. She took the letter to Chrissy's parents. They turned out Chrissy's room, and found letters from me. Well, it was clear what the letters meant. I ended up with most of the blame, perhaps because I was a little older.' (Waters 170)

The discovery of Christina's letter is a turning point for the relationship between Frances and her mother. After the revelation of her sexuality, Frances is further compelled to maintain the silence of her relationship with her mother, covertly visiting Chrissy despite the fact that Mrs Wray implores her not to. Though Mrs Wray and Frances were already unwilling to speak candidly with one another prior to Mrs Wray's discovery, a new dimension of distrust forces its way into their relationship. Mrs Wray cannot trust Frances to be the ideal, heterosexual daughter, at least not publically, and to not keep secrets from her. Frances, on the other hand, cannot trust her mother to not invade her privacy.

Stephen's experience with relationship-altering letters is more complex, because her relationship with Anna suffers as a result of more than a single letter. Anna and Stephen's relationship takes a massive blow when Ralph, Angela Crossby's husband, sends Anna a letter concerning Stephen which has, enclosed within it, a second letter, which Stephen writes and addresses to Angela:

'Love me, only love me the way I love you. Angela, for God's sake, try to love me a little — don't throw me away, because if you do I'm utterly finished. You know how I love you, with my soul and my body; if it's wrong, grotesque, unholy — have pity. I'll be humble. Oh, my darling, I am humble now; I'm just a poor, heart-broken freak of a creature who loves you and needs you much more than its life, because life's worse than death, ten times worse without you. I'm some awful mistake — God's mistake — I don't know if there are any more like me, I pray not for their sakes, because it's pure hell. But oh, my dear, whatever I am, I just love you and love you. I thought it was dead, but it wasn't. It's alive — so terribly alive tonight in my bedroom . . .' And so it went on for page after page. (Hall 196-197)

Much like Christina's letter to Frances, this letter finds itself into the wrong hands, resulting in a major upset in Stephen's relationship with her mother. This letter essentially marks the beginning of the end of the relationship on an emotional level. Despite expelling Stephen from Morton, Anna asks her to return to Morton every so often in order to maintain the appearance of a normal relationship, as "normalcy must constantly be enforced in public venues . . . [and it] must always be creating and bolstering its image by processing, comparing, constructing, deconstructing images of normalcy and the abnormal" (Davis 44). Stephen and Anna maintain a relationship for the sake of their reputation, as well as Philip's. For the remainder of Anna's role in the novel, the pair retain this obligatory, societal relationship, but Stephen writes another letter that completely disintegrates any semblance of an emotional relationship that remained between her and her mother:

'Mother, I am going abroad quite soon, but I shall not see you to say good-bye, because I don't want to come back to Morton. These visits of mine have always been painful, and now my work is beginning to suffer — that I cannot allow; I live only for my work and so I intend to guard it in future. There can now be no question of gossip or scandal, for everyone knows that I am a writer and as such may have occasion to travel. But in any case I care very little these days for the gossip of neighbours. For nearly three years I have borne your yoke — I have tried to be patient and understanding. I have tried to think that your yoke was a just one, a just punishment, perhaps, for my being what I am, the creature whom you and my father created; but now I am going to bear it no longer. If my father had lived he would have shown pity, whereas you showed me none, and yet you were my mother. In my hour of great need you utterly failed me; you turned me away like some unclean thing that was unfit to live any longer at Morton. You insulted what to me seemed both natural and sacred. I went, but now I shall not come back any more to you or to Morton. Puddle will be with me because she loves me; if I'm saved at all it is she who has saved me, and so for as long as she wishes to throw in her lot with me I shall let her. Only one thing more; she will send you our address from time to time, but don't write to me, Mother, I am going away in order to forget, and your letters would only remind me of 'Morton.' (Hall 236-237)

Though the implication here is that Stephen will never visit nor write Anna again, she does not follow through with this. She has, however, given up entirely on salvaging her relationship with Anna. She does this in order to spare herself the pain of returning to Morton, because she knows she no longer belongs there. This letter is actually a triumph for Stephen—she finally bares all to Anna, writing that she has “born [Anna’s] yoke” and that she has “tried to be patient and understanding,” and ultimately criticizing Anna for her failures, insults, and rejection in Stephen’s “hour of great need.” She orders Anna to refrain from writing to her, saying that her letters would “only remind [her] of ‘Morton.’” Stephen envelopes the word Morton in single quotation marks, further distancing herself from it by making it seem as though it is a concept, an idea, rather than an actual place. Stephen’s letter “baptizes” Anna “through her child as by fire, unto the loss of their mutual salvation” (Hall 237). Baptism by fire is frequently interpreted as a purification after an excruciatingly difficult series of trials, such as in Dante’s *Inferno*. The narrator equates Stephen’s “baptism” of Anna to that baptism of fire, as being Stephen’s mother was a trial for Anna. Stephen relinquishes her familial ties with Anna here, thus freeing, or “baptizing,” Anna from the responsibility of being her mother, a responsibility that she failed to maintain. In Stephen’s eyes, Anna can no longer commit the “sin” of being a poor mother, because she is no longer truly Stephen’s mother. Stephen makes a martyr of herself here—Anna and Stephen’s “mutual salvation” is lost so that Anna may be saved, so to speak, meaning that Stephen is the one who is beyond saving. Stephen, heartbreakingly, believes she is doing Anna a favor by surrendering the mother-daughter relationship.

In this defining letter to Anna, Stephen writes, “if my father had lived he would have shown pity, whereas you showed me none, and yet you were my mother.” Stephen is right—the only pity

Anna ever showed Stephen is the aforementioned “mother-pity,” the maternal desire to protect Stephen when she was an infant, solely because she was helpless. Stephen mentions that her father would have pitied her if he were still alive, and, in fact, he did sympathize with her in life:

His loins ached with pity for this fruit of his loins—an insufferable aching, an intolerable pity. He was frightened, a coward because of his pity, as he had been once long ago with her mother. Merciful God! . . . He sat there inwardly grovelling before her: ‘Oh, Stephen, my child, my little, little Stephen.’ For now in his pity she seemed to him little, little and utterly helpless again—he remembered her hands as the hands of a baby, very small, very pink, with minute perfect nails—he had played with her hands, exclaiming about them, astonished because of their near perfect: ‘Oh, Stephen, my little, little Stephen.’ (Hall 106)

While Anna pitied Stephen when she was an infant because of her helplessness and dependence on her mother, Philip’s pity of Stephen makes her seem to him “little, little and utterly helpless again.” The difference between the two is that Anna’s strongest feeling toward Stephen, “mother-pity,” came to her when Stephen was physically incapable of caring for herself, but Philip feels an “insufferable aching, an intolerable pity” when he sees Stephen in emotional turmoil. He feels Stephen’s pain as his own and he surpasses the pity he felt for infant Stephen, which Anna is unable to do. Ultimately, Philip feels more in general towards Stephen than Anna ever does because he genuinely loves his daughter. Because Philip is the only person who shows Stephen true parental affection in her childhood, she practically worships him.

Stephen’s idealization of her parents in *The Well of Loneliness* often eventually leads to more emotional agony. In regard to Sir Philip, Stephen places him on a metaphorical pedestal of morality and companionship. When Philip asks Stephen’s definition of honor, she replies “quite simply,” saying, “you are honour” (Hall 62). For childish, naïve Stephen, Sir Philip is the epitome of honor; in her eyes, he can do no wrong. Stephen, as a child, also becomes dependent on him for the majority of

her social interactions. After the death of Sir Philip, Stephen feels deprived “of three things; of companionship of mind born of real understanding, of a stalwart barrier between her and the world, and above all of love—that faithful love that would gladly have suffered all things for her sake, in order to spare her suffering” (Hall 121). While he was alive, Stephen relied on Sir Philip for everything; he was her only real source of comfort, safety, and love. When he dies, Stephen’s life inevitably crumbles around her, as foreshadowed by Hall when she wrote, “[Stephen] adored her father . . . she could not envisage the world without him” (Hall 16). After years of depending on her father and being unable to picture the world without him, Stephen is forced to do so. Sir Philip, aware of Stephen’s sexual orientation, “strongly encourage[s] Stephen in her writing because [he] believes that it will give her a kind of weapon against the world” (Franks 130), in that it is something she can dedicate herself to, as opposed to a heterosexual marriage. She, for a time, loses her ability to write after her father’s death, claiming, “I can’t write any more, it’s gone from me, Puddle—he’s taken it with him” (Hall 124). Sir Philip was not only Stephen’s single source of comfort, safety, and love, but also her creative abilities. *The Well of Loneliness* is a *Künstlerroman*, or a novel about an artist’s development over their lifetime, so the inability for Stephen to make her art is a devastating deprivation. Stephen’s idealization of Philip only makes his loss more heartbreaking, particularly as she learns of everything he could have done to help her in regard to her sexuality and Anna, but did not do. After Philip’s death, Stephen connects many of her favorite aspects of Sir Philip to his death, and formerly happy memories begin to serve as painful reminders of the loss of her father.

There is apparent in Stephen’s family a strange relationship with the body of the other. Anna, as discussed in the previous chapter, laments the development and growth of Stephen’s body and the

loss of her infantile state. She also loathes that Stephen resembles Sir Philip. Stephen, on the other hand, places an inordinately high value and meaning on her father's back:

She would notice with a sudden pain in her heart that he stooped when he walked, not much yet, but a little. And she loved his broad back, she had always loved it—a kind, reassuring protective back. Then the thought would come that perhaps its great kindness had caused it to stoop as though bearing a burden; and the thought would come: 'He *is* bearing a burden, not his own, it's someone else's—but whose?' (Hall 87)

Sir Philip's back, for Stephen, entirely embodies all she loves about Philip as well as all she relies on him for: comfort, safety, and affection. The back has a "great kindness" to it, and it is "reassuring" and "protective." Yet she notices a stoop to it, which she believes is due to his carrying of a burden. Stephen later realizes that this burden is, indeed, her own (Hall 220-221). Stephen idealizes Philip's back just as she idealizes him as a whole, but his back acts more as an impeccable conglomeration of all the facets of her father she worships, "all kindness, all strength, and all understanding" (Hall 42). Sir Philip's back as a symbol of all his qualities that Stephen adores is further expounded upon at his death. While Philip attempts to trim the tree, one of its massive limbs falls and crushes him to death³. While Hall never says that Philip's back was broken and one character insists that it was his chest that was crushed (Hall 115), Stephen later comes to associate memories of her father's back with memories of his death:

And then as though in answer to prayer, to some prayer that her trembling lips had not uttered, came the memory of a patient, protective back, bowed as though bearing another's burden. Came the memory of horrible, soul-sickening pain: 'No—not that—something urgent—I want—to say. No drugs—I know I'm—dying—Evans.' (Hall 236)

³ It is interesting to note that this tree was beloved by Anna, and it was her favorite place at Morton. She even refers to it as her cedar. She is also the one who insisted Philip trim the tree.

Philip's death, or, more specifically, the breaking of his beloved back, becomes representative of the metaphorical breaking of all that Stephen grew up knowing and loving. The breaking also comes to represent her incoming doubts about her father. Soon after Philip's death, Stephen starts to become disillusioned with his alleged perfection; she comes to realize his failures and flaws. Sir Philip's body is literally broken, and Stephen's image of him is soon to follow.

Stephen first accredits Sir Philip's inability to tell Stephen his discoveries about her sexuality to him loving her too much. She says, "If my father had lived, I know he would have helped me. He loved me so much, and he understood—I found out that my father knew all about me, only—' She hesitated, and then: 'Perhaps he loved me too much to tell me'" (Hall 419). The narrator, however, declares Philip's decision the "first cowardly action of his life" (Hall 54). Philip's decision was not based in love for Stephen, but rather an unwillingness to "inflict it on Anna," ultimately "sinn[ing] deeply and gravely against Stephen" (Hall 54). Stephen slowly comes to recognize this fact, culminating in a moment where she, consumed with loss and doubt, questions all she knew and felt about her father:

And now there crept into Stephen's brain the worst torment of all, a doubt of her father. He had known and knowing he had not told her; he had pitied and pitying had not protected; he had feared and fearing had saved only himself. Had she had a coward for a father? She sprang up and began to pace the room. Not this—she could not face this new torment. She had stained her love, the love of the lover—she dared not stain this one thing that remained, the love of the child for the father. If this light went out the engulfing darkness would consume her, destroying her entirely. Man could not live by darkness alone, one point of light he must have for salvation—one point of light. (Hall 235-236)

Stephen's doubts of her father are the "worst torment of all," and threaten to "consume her, destroying her entirely." Sir Philip was Stephen's "one point of light," and without him her life is on

the brink of collapse. Interestingly, Stephen takes responsibility for retrospectively “staining” her relationship with Philip by thinking about his failures, rather than blaming him for those failures. Had Stephen not, as a child, practically worshipped Philip, her realization of his faults would not have been so disappointing; she would not have been “entirely” destroyed.

While Sir Philip’s death brought devastation in its wake, he is still able to posthumously play a parental role in Stephen’s life. Despite his absence, Stephen’s memories of him are moralizing. After Philip’s death, Stephen goes hunting and, coming across the pursued fox, sees fear in its eyes and refuses to kill it. On the ride home from what will become her final hunt, her thoughts never stray from Philip:

“Riding home, she felt utterly spent and bewildered. her thoughts were full of her father again—he seemed very near, incredibly near her. For a moment she thought that she heard his voice, but when she bent sideways trying to listen, all was silence, except for the tired rhythm of Raftery’s hooves on the road. As her brain grew calmer, it seemed to Stephen that her father had taught her all that she knew. He had taught her courage and truth and honour in his life, and in death he had taught her mercy—the mercy that he had lacked he had taught her through the mighty adventure of death. With a sudden illumination of vision, she perceived that all life is only one life, that all joy and all sorrow are indeed only one, that all death is only one dying. And she knew that because she had seen a man die in great suffering, yet with courage and love that are deathless, she could never again inflict wanton destruction or pain upon any poor, hapless creature. And so it was that by dying to Stephen, Sir Philip would live on in the attribute of mercy that had come that day to his child. (Hall 127)

In death, Stephen believes, Sir Philip “taught her mercy.” He “taught her all that she knew,” and death does not stop him. But she does not learn mercy through his actions in life, but rather from the “mercy that he had lacked,” or his inability to tell either Stephen or Anna about the former’s sexuality.

Stephen also learns to detest her own lying in the wake of her father’s death, thinking,

“Lies, always lies! She was growing proficient at the glib kind of lying that pacified Ralph, or at all events left him with nothing to say, nonplussed and at a distinct disadvantage. She was

suddenly seized with a kind of horror, she felt physically sick at what she was doing, her head swam and she caught the jamb of the door for support—at that moment she remembered her father” (Hall 148).

Lying to Angela’s husband causes Stephen to think of her father. Much like how Stephen developed mercy because it was something she thought Sir Philip did not exercise, she perhaps loathes her own lying because it is something her father did that inevitably hurt her and her relationship with Anna. Even after his death, Sir Philip still acts as a mentor to Stephen, though this is mostly through teaching her what not to do.

Sir Philip is not the only person who Stephen idealizes who later gives her reason to doubt that glorification. Before Anna reads Stephen’s letter that lays waste to their relationship, Stephen looks upon Anna as the pinnacle of heteronormative womanhood. Hall subtly juxtaposes Stephen’s femininity against Anna’s through nature, writing, “her mother gathered nature into her arms and embraced it as a friend, as a well-loved companion. But she, Stephen, had never felt friendly like that, which must mean, she supposed that she lacked some fine instinct” (Hall 84-85). The “fine instinct” Stephen lacks in her interactions with nature is this perfect femininity that she supposes Anna possesses. Nature, which seems to represent the societally-enforced natural order, is highly gendered in *The Well of Loneliness*, from the hills at Morton that are “like pregnant women, full-bosomed, courageous, great green-girdled mothers of splendid sons” (Hall 13) to Anna and Mary’s “odd affinities” (Whitlock 570) with animals⁴. Anna embraces nature, gathering it “into her arms” as though they are old companions. Because of the feminization of nature, Anna is the perfect woman because

⁴ Both Anna and Mary share nationalities with an animal. Anna and Raftery the horse both hail from Ireland, and both Mary and David the dog are Welsh.

she is perfectly and wholly entwined with the natural world. Stephen is also “acutely responsive to beauty” and longs to express to her mother “a feeling almost amounting to worship, that her mother’s face had awakened” (Hall 15). Anna’s beauty, her perfectly female visage, causes Stephen to “worship” her. Stephen responds so strongly to Anna’s ideal femininity because it is something she feels as though she lacks. Anna’s perfect womanhood is something Stephen believes is required and expected of her to possess, so she looks to Anna as an impeccable model of what she lacks.

Much like with Sir Philip, but certainly more obviously, Stephen has innumerable doubts about her childhood belief in Anna’s perfection. Anna expels her from Morton, condemns her for her sexuality, and tells her that she would “rather see [Stephen] dead at [her] feet.” After her expulsion from Morton, Stephen frequently articulates her resentment towards Anna. Her frustrations are most clear when she thinks:

“Still with honour, she had borne a child to her mate—but a child who, unlike her, must go unfulfilled all her days, or else live in abject dishonour. Oh, but a hard and pitiless woman this mother must be for all her soft beauty; shamelessly finding shame in her offspring. ‘I would rather see you dead at my feet . . .’ ‘Too late, too late, your love gave me life. Here am I the creature you made through your loving; by your passion you created the thing that I am. Who are you to deny me the right to love? But for you I need never have known existence.’

Stephen, believing herself to be a failure of a woman, begins by comparing her life to Anna’s, declaring herself “unfulfilled” and dishonorable and Anna the opposite, fulfilled and honorable, despite her abuse of Stephen. Stephen then, thinking of the most scathing thing Anna ever uttered to her, inwardly defies her, crediting Anna and her love for Philip with her existence and asking what right Anna has to decline to love her. In spite of her resentment, Stephen’s anger and sorrow often lead to

her feeling remorseful and culpable for Anna's abhorrence of her. When imagining what would happen were Stephen to bring Mary to Morton and Anna, she thinks:

And the ageing woman with the far-away eyes, eyes that could yet be so cruel, so accusing—they might turn and rest with repugnance on Mary, even as once they had rested on Stephen: 'I would rather see you dead at my feet . . .' A fearful saying, and yet she had meant it, that ageing woman with the far-away eyes—she had uttered it knowing herself to be a mother. But that at least should be hidden from Mary.

She began to consider the ageing woman who had scourged her but whom she had so deeply wounded, and as she did so the depth of that wound made her shrink in spite of her bitter anger, so that gradually the anger gave way to a slow and almost reluctant pity. Poor, ignorant, blind, unreasoning woman: herself a victim, having given her body for Nature's most inexplicable whim. (Hall 334)

Stephen believes that she "deeply wounded" Anna with her sexuality and, as a result, her mother became a "poor, ignorant, blind, unreasoning woman." To Stephen, her mother, too, is a victim. However, had Stephen not previously held Anna in such high regard, this feeling would not have been possible. She thinks of her mother's "far-away eyes," which consistently remind her of her mother's cruelty and her potential to hate Mary on the sole basis that she is Stephen's lover. The first time she conceives of Anna's eyes as "far-away," she was thinking about them in relation to her beauty:

Yet looking at Anna's quiet ageing face, the girl would be struck afresh by its beauty, a beauty that seemed to have mollified the years, to have risen triumphant over time and grief. And now as in the days of her childhood, that beauty would fill her with a kind of wonder; so calm it was, so assured, so complete — then her mother's deep eyes, blue like distant mountains, and now with that far-away look in their blueness, as though they were gazing into the distance. (Hall 161-162)

"In the days of her childhood" seems to be directly referring to the aforementioned passage in which Stephen's acute awareness of beauty provokes Stephen to essentially worship Anna. Stephen associates Anna's appearance and how it filled "her with a kind of wonder" with the guilt she feels for

“wounding” Anna. Because of Stephen’s association, this remorse only seems possible with her worship of her mother.

Stephen idealizes Anna and Philip individually, but she considers their marriage, the convergence of the two impeccable individuals, to be the “one perfect thing about” (Hall 84) her. Their marriage is the “only thing that mattered” and a “great glory” (Hall 83); it almost comes to life. Stephen “had lived with it side by side,” as though it is her sibling, and views it as a manifestation of “the serene and beautiful spirit of Morton clothed in flesh” (Hall 83). The marriage of Sir Philip and Anna, for Stephen, becomes “the symbol of perfect fulfilment” (Hall 83). She becomes intensely dependent on their union; it is the fire that lights her life, and “the fire must not die and leave her in darkness” (Hall 84). When the relationship between Philip and Anna begins to waver, Stephen thinks:

She could love them in her turn, possessively, fiercely: ‘You’re mine, mine, mine, the one perfect thing about me. You’re one and you’re mine, I’m frightened, I need you!’ . . . But she dared not stand up before them accusing, and say: ‘I’m Stephen, I’m you, for you bred me. You shall not fail me by failing yourselves. I’ve a right to demand that you shall not fail me!’ (Hall 84)

Stephen claims a right to the perfection of her parents’ marriage. It produced her, so it is an integral part of her, and she is, in turn, an integral part of it— “I’m you,” she says. She demands that this thing that she believes is her “one perfect thing” stays intact, because without it, she is lost. As a product of their marriage, Stephen believes it is her obligation to fix it, thinking, “they were indivisible, one flesh, one spirit, and whatever it was that had crept in between them was trying to tear asunder this oneness—that was why she, their child, must rise up and help them if she could, for was she not the fruit of their oneness?” (Hall 86). Stephen’s relationship with her parents’ marriage is almost like that of a child with their sibling—they develop and mature side by side and feel passionately that they must

protect the other. Stephen's aspirations of helping her parents repair their marriage are torn asunder when she begins to believe, however, that it is her who has come between them. She laments to Puddle, saying, "Oh, Puddle, it's my fault; I've come in between them, and they're all I've got—they're my one perfect thing—I can't bear it—why have I come in between them?" (Hall 112). She, the flawed woman, or the person perpetually frozen in a sort of purgatory of gender, ruins the ideal, heterosexual marriage. Perhaps in order to compensate for her supposed damages to Sir Philip's and Anna's relationship, and because she "regards her parents' life together as providing the model of an ideal marriage" (Dellamora 201), Stephen herself tries to recreate it with her own lovers.

With Angela Crossby in particular, Stephen seems to follow a set of heteronormative regulations, predetermined by the marriage of Sir Philip and Anna. She longs to "lift the sleeping woman in her arms and carry her in through those gates; and carry her in through the heavy white door; and carry her up the wide, shallow staircase, and lay her down on her own bed, still sleeping, but safe in the good care of Morton" (Hall 191), which is very reminiscent of a newly wedded man carrying his bride over the threshold of a room. The heavy white doorway frequently makes its way into descriptions of Morton, such as when Hall describes Anna's first arrival to Morton with Sir Philip, saying "she had passed for the first time through the heavy white doorway under the shining semi-circular fanlight . . . Then, perhaps hand in hand, they had passed beyond the hall, her father a man, her mother a woman" (Hall 85). Stephen envisions herself carrying Angela through the very same heavy white door that Anna passed through with Philip at her side upon her first arrival. Stephen "longs to fall in with 'natural' patterns, to be part of the 'perfect thing' of which her parent's love is the emblem. She desires, then, to bring Angela to Morton as her father Sir Philip brought Lady Anna

‘home’; she purchases a ring for [Angela] and so reenacts her father’s courtship of many years before” (Whitlock 566). As Whitlock correctly observes, Stephen does indeed purchase a ring in order to replicate her father’s courtship of Anna, but Whitlock neglects to mention that the ring Stephen purchases is sold to her by the very same jeweler from whom her father purchased Anna’s engagement ring (Hall 167). Sir Philip went to the jeweler seeking the “purest stones” because only they are “fit to touch [Anna’s] finger.” Stephen learns this from the jeweler and, as he is telling her the story of Philip and Anna’s engagement, she interrupts, asking, “is this pearl as pure as those diamonds?” (Hall 167). Stephen uses the purity of the stone as a gauge through which she compares her relationship to that of Philip and Anna, as though her relationship’s validity is either confirmed or denied by how flawless the stone is. For Stephen, the fact that the pearl in Angela’s ring is “without a blemish,” like the diamond in Anna’s ring, means that their relationship is as perfect and valid as her parents’ marriage.

Though Anna and Philip both individually lose their flawlessness in the eyes of their child, their love is something Stephen never doubts. Its perfection never wavers when it is solely between the two of them, but for Stephen, the relationship’s issues arise from its involvement with her and her presence. At a young age, she realizes that she is not as integral a part of their marriage as she would like to be. When the family sits together in Sir Philip’s study, Philip “and Anna must get talking, amusing themselves irrespective of Stephen, inventing absurd little games, like two children, which games did not always include the real child” (Hall 36). Stephen, frustrated, leaves “the two grown-up children together; secretly divining that neither of them would miss her—not even her father” (Hall 37). She feels as though her parents’ marriage takes precedence over her—neither Anna nor Sir Philip notice when she leaves the room, and Stephen knows that neither will miss her. As previously mentioned,

Stephen comes to believe that she is the sole imperfection in the marriage of Anna and Sir Philip, the single flaw in their “perfect thing.” She realizes that her presence and, primarily, her relationship with Sir Philip, come between her parents. Unlike Stephen’s other idealizations, she never loses faith in the marriage between Anna and Sir Philip; she merely believes that she is their single imperfection.

Though the two father-daughter relationships are similar in that the deaths of the fathers affect their relationships with their mothers, Frances’s opinion of her father is far more negative than Stephen’s. Unlike Stephen, not only does Frances have no respect for her father, but she also considers him to be downright idiotic:

“Father’s collection”, the pieces had been known as, while her father was alive; a year after his death Frances had had them valued and had discovered them all to be Victorian fakes. The dealer who’d bought the long-case clock had offered her three pounds for the lot. She would have been glad to pocket the money and have the damn things carted away, but her mother had grown upset at the prospect. “Whether they’re genuine or not,” she’d know, “they have your father’s heart in them.” “They have his stupidity, more like,” Frances had answered, though not aloud. (Waters 23)

For Frances, “father’s collection” comes to represent both her father’s “stupidity” and his failure to provide for and protect his family. Frances’s deep-seated resentment for her deceased father are the result of his inability to manage the family’s finances; he kept the family’s poor economic state a secret from everyone, leaving Frances and her mother to discover their poverty after his death. For Mrs Wray, these fake Victorian pieces have Frances’s “father’s heart in them,” but Frances does not feel the same. These pieces hold no sentimental value for Frances. She feels a certain disdain for her father’s old furniture, and, interestingly, Stephen has a similar contempt for her father’s furniture after his death, but for different reasons:

And now also she went the desolation of small things, the power to give infinite pain that lies hidden in the little inanimate objects that persist, in a book, in a well-worn garment, in a half-finished letter, in a favourite arm-chair.

She thought: 'They go on—they mean nothing at all, and yet they go on,' and the handling of them was anguish, and yet she must always touch them. 'How queer, this old armchair had outlived him, an old chair—' And feeling the creases in its leather, the dent in its back where her father's head had lain, she would hate the inanimate thing for surviving, or perhaps she would love it and find herself weeping. (Hall 121-122)

Unlike Frances, Stephen resents her father's old furniture because they "outlived him." She hates the armchair because it is a constant reminder that life continues, unimportant things such as furniture continue, even after Philip's death; for Frances, however, the furniture represents her father's economical and familial failures. Whether they were companions or financial providers, the fathers leave behind them a void that the daughters fill with a new target for their emotions: their father's furniture, with which they spent so much of their time before their deaths. Frances is similarly contemptuous towards her father's headstone, as it acts as a similar reminder.

During every visit to her father's grave, Frances thinks to herself, "with resentment," "the stone was plain, solid, handsome—*expensive* . . . for, of course, the funeral arrangements had all been made in the first bewildering days after her father's death, before she and her mother had had a chance to discover just how stupendously he had managed to mishandle the family funds" (Waters 62). The headstone, like "father's collection," comes to represent her father's inability to manage "the family funds." Yet, Frances also treats the headstone as though it is a continuation of her father's corporeal self; she speaks to it, expressing frustrations she was never even aware of prior to her father's death. She scrubs the headstone free of soot and grime, saying:

"Well, Father, there you are, all spruce and tidy for your birthday. It's more than you deserve, I'm sure.'

‘Frances,’ her mother scolded.

‘What? I’d say the same thing to his face if he were here right now. That, and a good many other things. I suppose he’d manage not to hear them. It was about the only thing he *could* manage.’” (Waters 64)

Frances’s father died before she discovered his economics mishandlings; she was thus never able to express her frustrations to him. The headstone replaces her father, and she claims that she would “say the same thing to his face.” Much like “father’s collection,” the headstone functions as an emotional outlet for Frances, to which she can unleash the resentment for her father she carries with her.

Frances’s resentment for Mr Wray is not only a result of his mismanagement of the family’s wealth; they “never got along,” in Frances’s words.

Early on into their blossoming relationship, Frances reveals all about her relationship with her father to Lilian:

‘It’s simply that my father and I—we never got along. He had old-fashioned ideas about women, about daughters. I was a great trial to him, as perhaps you can imagine. We argued about everything, with my poor mother as a referee. Most of all we argued about the War, which he saw as some sort of Great Adventure, while I—Oh, I loathed it, right from the start. My elder brother, John Arthur, the gentlest creature in the world, he more or less bullied into enlisting; I shall never forgive him for that. Noel, my other brother, went in practically as a schoolboy, and when he was killed my father’s response was to have a series of “heart attacks”—to take to an armchair, in other words, while my mother and I ran about after him like a pair of fools. He died a few months before the Armistice, not of a heart attack after all, but of an apoplexy, brought on by reading something he disagreed with in *The Times*. After his death—’ her tone became rueful. ‘Well, it must be obvious to you and your husband, Mrs Barber, that my mother and I aren’t as well off as we might be. It turned out that my father had been putting the family money into one bad speculation after another; he’d left a pile of debts behind him that we’re still paying off . . . Look, you mustn’t let me talk about him! It isn’t fair of me. He wasn’t a bad man. He was a blusterer and a coward; but we’re all cowardly sometimes. I’ve got into the habit of hating him, but it’s a horrible habit, I know. The truth is, the most hateful thing my father ever did to me was to die. I—I’d had plans, you see, while he was alive. I’d had terrific plans—’

. . . ‘Well, my father always did say that my plans would come to nothing. He’d certainly smile if he could see me now, still here, on Champion Hill.’” (Waters 85-86)

Frances's feelings of anger and disappointment towards her father are palpable; they "argued about everything," from women's rights to the war and her brothers' roles in it. There is very little on which Frances and her father did, in fact, agree. Frances even makes light of her father's death, punning on her father's cause of death. He died of an apoplexy, which is a brain hemorrhage or stroke or, alternatively, "a state of intense and almost uncontrollable anger" ("Apoplexy") as caused by "reading something he disagreed with in *The Times*." Despite her apparent hatred of her father, Frances claims that "the most hateful thing [he] ever did to [her] was to die." Despite her father's belief that her "terrific plans" "would come to nothing," his presence was the only thing allowing her to pursue the life she longed for. Mr Wray's death forced Frances to bear the burden of the entirety of the family's funds and property. To Frances, her father's only productive function was his responsibility as the patriarch of the family; Mr Wray took Frances's dreams to the grave alongside him. Frances also concedes that her father "wasn't a bad man" and that her "habit of hating him" is a "horrible habit." While there is clearly no affection between Frances and her father, she does not blindly abhor him. She recognizes the function and uses he had in her life, albeit selfishly, and recognizes that the majority of the issues within their relationship were the result of disagreements.

The father's absence in both *The Paying Guests* and *The Well of Loneliness*, after Philip's death, correlates with the absence of the chapter on the father in this project. These novels subvert the notion of the whole, nuclear family, and this project follows suit. The fact that this project focuses on familial failure, however, has necessitated this discussion of the father and his relationship with the daughter. The father becomes a point of contention between Stephen and Anna as well as Frances and

Mrs Wray. Anna claims that Stephen's sexual orientation makes her a scourge against Sir Philip, while Frances and Mrs Wray are never able to agree on the topic of Mr Wray. The effects the father's absence has on the mother-daughter relationship is, of course, imperative to a project so heavily structured around that relationship. As this chapter discusses, the daughter, despite the failures of the mother, continues to long for the relationship that meets the expectations typically had of mother-daughter relationships. The daughters resist the maternal feelings of obligation by longing for their mothers, but, just as the mothers fail at motherhood, the daughters' attempts to achieve the desired relationship with their mothers fail.

In the first chapter of this project, I laid out the general, societal expectations we have for mother-daughter relationships, such as individuation, passion in moderation, trusting devotion, verbal professions of love, and a maternal desire to protect the child. I then discussed the ways in which both of the mother-daughter relationships analyzed in this project fail to meet those expectations or what they are missing, as well as the ways the relationships work to replace things. We also looked at the maternal desire for the child to regress and the role obligation plays in these relationships. In the second chapter, I began by talking about the daughters' desire for a relationship with their mother that more closely meets the expectations of a normal mother-daughter relationship. I discussed Frances and Stephen's attempts to construct a more normal relationship with their mothers in various ways, such as replicating the role of the mother themselves or attempting to candidly speak with their mothers. I also discussed how Stephen gives up on Anna and seeks to replace her with other maternal figures. Then, I analyzed how letters become a marker of change in mother-daughter relationships before moving on to a discussion of Stephen's idealization of her parents and their marriage, as well as the

collapse of that idealization. Finally, we looked at Mr Wray from *The Paying Guests*, and the role his death played in Frances's life.

IV. Conclusions

This project found its beginnings in a simple discovery—the relationships between mothers and daughters in so many lesbian novels are *strange*. They are unaffectionate, unfamiliar, and seemingly devoid of love. As for fathers, they are almost always absent or dead. The early 20th century was the genesis of lesbian literature in modern history, and has only further developed and grown as a genre. Lesbian novels set outside of this project's time frame have a strong tendency to portray the same or similar familial dynamics. A question remains: why is this? The lesbian literary corpus is still not especially extensive, yet novels with a lesbian daughter and heterosexual parents, or, sometimes, a lesbian mother and a daughter who is either very young or of dubious sexuality, often contain similarly distant child-parent relationships. There are, of course, exceptions, such as Fannie Flagg's *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe*, in which the families of the two lesbian protagonists are extremely loving and supportive, but this novel's lesbian themes are never entirely explicit and the surreal town of Whistle Stop is essentially mythic—nothing in the small Alabamian town seems completely real.

There is no single answer to the question of why so many lesbian novels feature these kinds of familial relationships, and why the early 20th century was the beginning point. The World Wars are likely the most consequential factor. Men were being deployed and dying in combat, leaving women at home to form closer relationships with other women than they normally would have, and leaving many children fatherless. Women who wanted to play a more active role in the war efforts often became ambulance drivers and lived in close quarters with one another. This is not, of course, to say that this lesbianism was circumstantial, but rather that it was opportunistic. The types of labor in which women participated during the World Wars, such as driving ambulances as portrayed by *The*

Well of Loneliness, was liberating; it allowed women “to engage in homosexual . . . activity that would otherwise be prevented by the policing actions of family and local communities. World War I allowed unprecedented numbers of women to engage in non-domestic labor” (Marshik 146). For its contemporary readers, *The Well of Loneliness* became a dangerous indication that “the freedom this labor earned influenced young women’s sexuality. . . [*The Well of Loneliness*] offended because [it] implied for women, as for men, sexual behaviors might be altered by war work” (Marshik 146). The dearth of men left women to individuate, to develop lives that were not primarily focused on settling down with a husband and bearing his children. Women joined the workforce at a higher rate than ever before. They now had the time and freedom to form intimate relationships with other women, which in some cases led to the blossoming of romantic relationships.

The Wars can explain the absent fathers, as well. Obviously, not all the fathers in lesbian literature, even in the early 20th century, died in combat—Philip in *The Well of Loneliness* is killed by a falling limb of a tree, and Mr Wray in *The Paying Guests* dies of a stroke. However, because many men were killed in combat and left many children without fathers, a precedent was set. It became almost normal for one’s father to be dead or absent. Writers, then, perhaps translated their literal life experiences to the page, starting and continuing a tradition of dead or missing fathers.

The peculiar case of the mothers, however, is harder to parse out. Why do the mothers of lesbians tend to fail so distinctly at meeting standardized expectations of motherhood? Perhaps it was a direct result of many men, including fathers, brothers, and sons, leaving for war and never returning. Perhaps this left a particular strain on women, on whose shoulders many responsibilities at this time fell. Women would have had many reasons to be stressed or anxious: new roles socially and in the

workplace, the fear of learning a loved one has been killed in combat or the grief that follows, and perhaps a fear for one's own life. These external pressures could have manifested within the relationships back at home, within the family, causing mothers to lash out at their daughters in one way or another. Anna does, after all, tell Stephen:

Above all is this thing a sin against the father who bred you, the father whom you dare to resemble. You dare to look like your father, and your face is a living insult to his memory, Stephen. I shall never be able to look at you now without thinking of the deadly insult of your face and your body to the memory of the father who bred you. I can only thank God that your father died before he was asked to endure this great shame. (Hall 200)

Anna fixates on Stephen's homosexuality in conjunction with Philip's death, insisting that Stephen's sexuality is an "insult to his memory." Anna believes that if Philip had lived, he would be similarly enraged by the discovery that Stephen is in love with a woman. She is, of course, wrong, for Philip was the only character who knew about Stephen's sexual orientation before Stephen herself. Perhaps Anna's fixation, however, is grounded in the stress of going through this alone, without her husband to support her or mediate—perhaps real relationships between heterosexual widows or divorcées and their homosexual daughters mirrored this. After the death of the father, and because "the mother is the primary nurturer and the father is the symbol of authority" (Flax 171), contention over who now fills the role of "authority" in the family is another possible reason for conflict between mother and daughter, particularly in post-war families where sons, too, may have perished in combat. Frances and Mrs Wray are an example of what this might look like, as many of their conflicts are centered around their opinions of how they should manage their finances, how the house should be looked after and by whom, and disagreements over Mr Wray's mishandling of money.

Flax posits that homophobia is inherent in this patriarchal structure of family, because a homophobic society “makes intimacy between women suspect” (Flax 171). Flax’s suggestion that relationships between mothers and daughters can lack intimacy because of the mother’s fear of appearing to have an incestuous desire for the daughter (Flax 174) seems a little outrageous. She assumes that the mother is conscious of the idea that her treatment of her daughter could be perceived in this way, which does not seem likely, but it is interesting when we consider the mothers of lesbian daughters. If any mother is most likely to be anxious over a Freudian perception of her relationship with her daughter, it would be the mother who knows that her daughter is romantically and sexually attracted to women. Whether the heterosexual mother is or is not tolerant of her daughter’s sexuality, she may internally fear, even against her logic, that her daughter desires her in a non-familial way. A Freudian reading of the family dynamics in *The Well of Loneliness* and *The Paying Guests* could also be in regard to “the Freudian theory that strong mothers and weak fathers could cause a child who would otherwise be heterosexual to become homosexual” (Muller xii). Though I would not necessarily refer to Stephen and Frances’s mothers as strong and their fathers as weak, we can look at them in terms of present and absent, instead. The mothers’ presences are strong, and their fathers’ are weak. This is, of course, questionable in that it seeks to diagnose homosexuality as an acquired or learned quality rather than accepting the role of genetics. That being said, this could lead to an interesting analysis of *why* these relationships function in the ways they do. These Freudian readings of literary relationships similar to the mother-daughter relationships presented by *The Well of Loneliness* and *The Paying Guests* is a potential direction that a continuation of the work done in this project could go, for they

engage with a specific reason why the mother's opinion of the daughter's sexuality might affect their relationship.

Some scholars, such as William Fitzgerald, claim that Stephen is "largely fashioned for [Radclyffe Hall] and [she] simply lifted the character out of real life" (Fitzgerald 50) because of similarities, such as physical appearance, that Hall and Stephen share. Yet some scholars, such as Richard Dellamora and Claudia Stillman Franks, make note of several differences. Dellamora quotes directly from a memoir of Hall written by her lifelong lover, Una Troubridge who wrote, "many of Stephen Gordon's feelings and reactions, though practically none of her circumstances or experiences, were . . . [Hall's] own" (Dellamora 190). Franks compares Stephen's parents to Hall's, writing, "Stephen's mother is a conventional, proper, and aloof woman, while Radclyffe Hall's was a volatile, self-indulgent divorcée. Their only similarity is their dislike and rejection of their daughters" (Franks 137). Herein this single similarity lies the import of lesbian literature that presents parental relationships like those found in *The Well of Loneliness* and *The Paying Guests*. Hall wrote *The Well of Loneliness* as an activist text, intended both to portray homosexuality as natural and as a plea for, in Stephen's words, "the right to our existence" (Hall 437). Through Stephen and her experiences, Hall "speaks caustically against those, including the members of one's own family, who smugly exclude, denigrate, and/or condemn homosexuals" (Dellamora 190). In a letter to Havelock Ellis, Radclyffe Hall claimed that only a homosexual could have written a novel like hers (Franks 137). The lesbian experience can only be accurately portrayed by a lesbian herself, and Hall was compelled to speak against the people who rejected homosexuals, with a particular emphasis on mothers because maternal rejection of lesbian children was a common, shared experience. *The Well of Loneliness* and other

novels that portray similar relationships to those presented in it and *The Paying Guests*, then, suggest that something was broken in the way heterosexual parents interact with their homosexual children; the prevalence of families that distinctly fail because of their cruelty or detachment continues into contemporary lesbian literature, indicating that that which has been broken has yet to be repaired.

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