

# Henry Handel Richardson and Olga Roncoroni 1919–1924: An Entanglement

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In her essay, ‘Some Notes on My Books’ (1940), Henry Handel Richardson (1870–1946) wrote of various impediments to her writing in the ten years between completing *Australia Felix* in 1915 and the publication of *The Way Home* in 1925. Her express purpose in revealing these difficulties was to dispel the notion that the second volume of her famous trilogy, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, was the product of a prolonged and laboured writing process. To this end, she revealed only what was necessary by way of personal detail. Unfortunately, her reluctance to share much of what occurred during this period has allowed for misguided conjecture about her circumstances and her character.

Richardson portrayed the decade as encompassing two separate and distinct periods of disruption. The first period spanned approximately the years of the First World War. During this time, her state of mind, together with her domestic situation and, consequently, her ability to write, were compromised.<sup>1</sup> In respect of the second period, she was more evasive:

It was not till 1919 that I was able to begin *The Way Home*. And I had hardly done so when I became caught up and entangled in a private matter of such urgency that, for three out of the four years the writing took me, the book was a secondary consideration. (‘Some Notes’ 16–17)

In a letter of 1 October 1924 to her closest friend in Australia, Mary Kernot (1868–1954), she was similarly reticent about the cause of the disruption. She was, however, more forthright about the personal impact: ‘the last four years have been among the most difficult & trying of my life. I got hopelessly entangled in things that had nothing to do with my work; disheartened & discouraged; & even the wish to write to my friends left me’ (Probyn et al. vol. 2, 379<sup>2</sup>). At the time of her death in March 1946, Richardson still had not delivered the often-promised back story to this statement to Kernot.<sup>3</sup>

It was not until 1953 that Olga Roncoroni (1893–1982) revealed in a talk at Australia House in London that she was the source of Richardson’s distraction and despondency (Gyde). Her disclosures were designed only to be heard by ‘a friendly group of people.’ Roncoroni was taken aback to discover that they were subsequently broadcast ‘to all Australians.’<sup>4</sup> Three years later, she chose to publish a version of this account in *Henry Handel Richardson: Some Personal Impressions* (1957). This is the only written first-hand account of the initial meeting and ensuing friendship between Richardson and Roncoroni.

Roncoroni wrote this essay as a tribute to her late friend and companion. It was never intended to fulfil the role of a full autobiography or biography. Roncoroni goes some way to explaining how she and Richardson became ‘entangled.’ However, she reveals little of her illness, treatment, or how, by 1924, she was sufficiently independent to allow Richardson to return to her former writing habits.

Further to Roncoroni's revelations, this essay explores the challenging period of 1919–1924 for both Richardson and Roncoroni, and its immediate aftermath. Clinical records, diaries, notebooks, and letters that recorded some of the most intimate details are mainly lost or destroyed. Nevertheless, information from the years 1919–1924 that can be recovered or reliably reconstructed reveals a more complete story. It challenges unsupported suggestions, first refuted in 1982 by Dorothy Green, that Roncoroni was a besotted 'handmaid to a genius' desiring no independent life of her own ('The Fortunes' 17).

Roncoroni first featured in commentary on Richardson's life story in Brian Penton's obituary essay, 'Henry Handel Richardson: Great and Lonely' (1946), and Nettie Palmer's *Fourteen Years* (1948), where she appeared among the unnamed 'servants' and as the 'faithful secretary' respectively (Penton; Niall 245; Green 543). After Roncoroni added her own voice to the story, the narrative shifted to allow her an active role in Richardson's personal as well as professional life.

In *Henry Handel Richardson: A Life* (2004), Michael Ackland wrote: 'For a quarter of century, Olga would be a permanent part of Henry's household. During that time she is not known to have wished to marry, nor to have had outside friendships. Instead Richardson became the all-consuming focus of her life' (222).<sup>5</sup> In her 2014 essay in *Australian Book Review*, Ann-Marie Priest acknowledged Roncoroni's independent spirit, yet misconstrued and invented some elements of Roncoroni's story to cast Richardson as the powerful older woman who set out to ensnare and manipulate the willing and besotted younger woman for her own erotic pleasure. She described Roncoroni's memoir as 'a love story—even a coded tale of seduction' (26).

Putting aside the far-fetched idea that Roncoroni embedded a coded message within her text, both Ackland's and Priest's interpretations are unsubstantiated. Green's revised analysis, written after meeting and corresponding with Roncoroni, pre-emptively challenged the assumptions upon which these interpretations might be based (Green 543–556).<sup>6</sup>

The question of why Richardson, at the age of 49 in 1919, set aside so much of her own life for the severely ill, 26-year-old Roncoroni has never been sufficiently answered. Green wrote: 'What must have appealed to Richardson, with her own tragic childhood in her memory, not to mention the emphasis on work in her own married life, was Olga's gaiety of spirit, her readiness to have a go, when the odds were against her, and their common perception of the comic' ('The Fortunes,' 17). Elsewhere, Green wrote of Richardson's intolerance to solitude as a cause of her sacrifice (499–500). Ackland surmised that the attraction was based on mutual anxiety relating to their respective 'parental figures,' as well as loneliness, flattery and a shared sense of fun (222–23). The themes of childhood anxiety, loneliness, and fun identified by both biographers no doubt contributed to Richardson's empathy and connection with Roncoroni.

However, the decisive factor in creating an 'entanglement' lies elsewhere. Roncoroni's account suggests that Richardson was driven by a sense of obligation, duty, or perhaps even guilt:

I asked her why she, to whom her work was so important that she sacrificed practically everything else in order to be fit for it, had undertaken this heavy task. She replied that she felt she had done little to help others during her life, and she looked upon my case as something given her to do in order to make good this omission. (74)

This construction of Richardson's sacrifice as a passive act 'given her to do' is far from 'pious (and frankly implausible)' as Priest asserted (27). In fact, it aligns with Richardson's expressed feelings of being caught in a situation that was not of her own making. In her self-described 'transferences' of feelings from her mother onto Richardson, Roncoroni had delivered Richardson a heavy burden (Purdie and Roncoroni 70). Furthermore, with the closure of the residential annex of the Medico-Psychological Clinic in Brunswick Square (also known as the Brunswick Square Clinic), it might follow that Richardson felt an obligation to keep Roncoroni on the difficult course that she had initiated for her.



Fig. 1. Richardson and Roncoroni in Lyme Regis. (Probyn et al. vol. 2, between letters 132 and 133).

Roncoroni begins her essay in *Henry Handel Richardson: Some Personal Impressions* with her first encounter with Richardson at the Assembly Rooms Cinema run by her father, John Baptist Roncoroni (alias Jack Ferdinand Raymond, 1866–1926), in the English seaside town of Lyme Regis in the Spring of 1919. One evening, Richardson approached Roncoroni to ask about a piece that she had played in accompaniment to a silent movie. Finding much to talk about, Richardson invited Roncoroni to tea. Roncoroni was forced to disclose to her new acquaintance that she suffered from a form of acute anxiety which prevented her from leaving one or other of her parents' sides.

In part one of the memoir, Roncoroni describes her gradual transference of trust and reliance from her mother to Richardson. In October, when Richardson returned to her London home, Roncoroni experienced a severe state of anxiety and despair. In late November, Richardson returned to Lyme Regis.<sup>7</sup> She brought promising news to the Roncoroni family of a low-cost

residential clinic in London that offered treatment for nervous disorders. This facility was the Medico-Psychological Clinic.

In guiding Roncoroni towards a course of psychological help, especially as Roncoroni had only minimal financial means, Richardson needed knowledge, if not influence. Clark's observations on Richardson in *Finding Herself in Fiction* give more context to Richardson's capacity to help Roncoroni in her battle with mental illness. Although Clark's study did not reach into the years when Roncoroni came into Richardson's life, his observations on Richardson's own struggle with 'nervous strain, irritation and severe depression,' along with her interest in psychology and psychological states, might explain her heightened empathy and understanding of Roncoroni's condition (Clark 30, 56–57). There is no evidence or suggestion that Richardson ever received treatment for her conditions.

Nevertheless, in a circumstance in which psychoanalytical thought was only beginning to emerge into the popular public realm from its earliest manifestations among the educated elite in Britain, Richardson was well placed to advise Roncoroni and her parents on the latest thinking and treatments for psychological disorders (Rapp 225–26). More specifically, Richardson's cultural, intellectual, and social environment provided her with a network of connections to the relatively small and publicly funded Medico-Psychological Clinic.

Roncoroni wrote of Richardson's insight into her condition:

H. H. was the first person who realised that my fears were very real to me: something which I could not help having, not something to be treated with ridicule or contempt. In forming this opinion, she had, of course, the advantage of being far more widely read than anyone else I had known, and consequently aware of the theories formulated by Freud and his followers: that such nervous fears were a form of illness and not mere fancy, as had been the general idea up till then. Her sympathetic understanding of my plight opened the door I had closely guarded for so long, and to her I confessed the misery of the past years, and, indeed, of the then present. (65–66)

Later in life, Richardson claimed to have 'read Freud & his works so early in life—before his *name* was even known in England—that his theories have become a commonplace to me' (Probyn et al. vol. 3, 1197). The surviving papers from when she was living in Germany (1889–1903) demonstrate her early encounters with Freud's ideas, if not his primary works.

Beyond her early literary encounters, Richardson engaged with many of the cultural and social manifestations of Freud's theories as they began to appear in London (Hinshelwood 135–51). By 1919, when she first met Roncoroni, she stood within a network of progressive thought and practice that gave her access to the most liberal and affordable facility for psychoanalytical therapy available in England: The Medico-Psychological Clinic.

Possible connections between Richardson and the Medico-Psychological Clinic are found in the Society for Psychical Research, and its associated Medical Section, the women's suffrage movement, the University of London through J. G. Robertson (1867–1933) and, more tenuously, the progressive education movement through her sister, Lillian Neustatter (1871–1944). Members of the management and staff of the Medico-Psychological Clinic, including the founders, Dr Jessie Murray (1867–1920) and Julia Turner (1863–1946) and the Clinic's main financial backer, the progressive novelist May Sinclair (1863–1946), were variously

linked to these movements and institutions.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, a specific set of events or encounters that would explain the pathway from the fateful meeting in the Spring of 1919 between Richardson and Roncoroni to Roncoroni's interview at the Medico-Psychological Clinic in October 1920 cannot be established.

The Medico-Psychological Clinic began in 1913 out of Dr Murray's home in Bloomsbury with the aim of helping people who were without the means or access to private consultation.<sup>9</sup> In 1914 it claimed to offer treatment at:

about one-tenth the ordinary cost. The Institution does not cater for the ordinary hospital class, because a higher average of intelligence and education is demanded than the majority of such patients possess, but for patients of the middle classes to whom the specialists' fees would be an insuperable obstacle. ('Psycho-Therapy and the War' 316)

By 1914 the Medico-Psychological Clinic had moved to 30 Brunswick Square. Until 1920 it was the only public clinic offering psychoanalytical treatment in London (Boll 312).

Roncoroni's mother, Nella Phillips Roncoroni (1866–1940), was persuaded to put aside her initial reluctance and to accept, subject to financial considerations, Richardson's offer to assist in her daughter's admission to the Clinic. In October 1920, after a successful season in which Roncoroni continued to play piano accompaniment to the silent films showing at her father's cinema and work at the adjoining restaurant owned by her mother, her parents decided that the treatment program was feasible.



Fig. 2. 32–40 Brunswick Square, 1920. London Picture Archive.  
The entrance to the residential annex (number 34) is the third door from the left.

Roncoroni, along with her parents, travelled to London, where they were hosted by Richardson and her husband, Professor J. G. Robertson, at 90 Regent's Park Road. Prospective patients of the Medico-Psychological Clinic were interviewed and assessed by specialists for physical and psychological suitability. The proof Prospectus for 1914 states: 'All those [illnesses] due to organic disease are outside the sphere of work of the Medico-Psychological Clinic, which is prepared to treat only those which are of psychic origin' (Boll 314). Roncoroni was sent to a dentist to have an infected wisdom tooth extracted before beginning psychotherapeutic treatment.

A list of the sorts of disorders that could be assisted at the Medico-Psychological Clinic was published in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* in December 1914. It confirms the inclusion of agoraphobia (the condition that Roncoroni could not name when she met Richardson in the Spring of 1919) (313). Roncoroni's suffering, as will be seen, extended well beyond agoraphobia to include what was likely manic depression (Green, 'The Fortunes' 17). Securing a bed at the residential annex at 34 Brunswick Square at this time evidences Roncoroni's good fortune. In 1918, there were 189 outpatients and only 36 inpatients, many of whom were soldiers discharged for nervous conditions (Boll 319).

Roncoroni concludes part one of her account at the end of her first month in residence. At this time, Nella Roncoroni had, on instruction, returned to Lyme Regis, leaving her daughter in the trusted care of her treating doctor. Although the primary responsibility for Roncoroni's daily care shifted from Nella Roncoroni to medical professionals, Richardson's role as a concerned and supportive friend continued.

Roncoroni begins part two of her memoir with a brief account of her time at the Medico-Psychological Clinic:

The first three months I spent at the clinic passed without any event worth recording. H.H. came almost every day to take me out, and at that time she asked her first favour of me: would I keep a written record of my dreams (I had to write these out anyway for my analyst to study), and also of what transpired during the hours I spent 'on the sofa.' (72)

Her account underplays the extent and nature of the treatments and activities of the Clinic. The type of analysis employed was not strictly Freudian, and treatment was not restricted to analysis.

In 1913, the Clinic offered psychoanalysis in the methods of Pierre Janet, Morton Prince, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Jules-Joseph Dejerine, Paul Dubois and others (Boll 317).<sup>10</sup> Suzanne Raitt observed that the eclectic influences and psychotherapeutic methods employed at the Clinic were problematic: 'Almost all the major techniques of early twentieth-century psychotherapy were on offer there, even though some were ideologically and functionally incompatible with one another ('Early British' 72). From its founding in 1913, the eclectic approach to analysis and other forms of therapeutic treatment was subject to criticism, particularly by staunch Freudians, notably Ernest Jones (1879–1958).

In 1920, five of the original six departments of the Clinic—Medical, Psychological including Hypnosis, Psycho-Therapeutic, Physical Exercise, and Educational—continued to operate within tightened financial constraints (Boll 314). Electrical treatments, such as those Roncoroni

was subjected to after Richardson's death, had been removed as a cost cutting measure (Boll 320). A crucial component of 'restoring health and usefulness' to patients of the residential annex was 'Occupation-therapy':

It was realized that any plan of re-education which does not take into account the provision of resuscitated energies, or fails to encourage by suitable means the liberation of energies locked up in morbid inner pre-occupations, is to that extent incomplete. The proper use of training in handicrafts, the plastic arts, music, recitation, dancing, games, gardening &c., promises to be in the hands of the psychological expert, an instrument of precision in the treatment of many functional nervous disabilities. (Boll 318)

In the final months of 1920, with Roncoroni occupied in full-time care, Richardson should have been able to return to her writing.

Roncoroni wrote how Richardson began to furnish her imaginative world again. Instead of returning to *The Way Home*, she began to amass material from Roncoroni's experiences in psychoanalysis, along with other sources including a murder trial and a boxing match, for a proposed novel: 'a psychological study of a person, with London and its life as the background' (72). Priest ascribes cruel and selfish motivations to Richardson's interest in Roncoroni's therapy: 'perhaps unconsciously, she sought to "supervise" the therapy, in order to make sure that whatever else Olga was cured of, she would not recover from her desire for Henry herself' (27).

Although the sharing of details concerning the psychoanalysis may have been unorthodox, it in no way substantiates the idea that Richardson sought to deliberately undermine any aspect of Roncoroni's treatment. Moreover, there is no reason to suspect that Richardson's request to use material from Roncoroni's experiences for her writing was disingenuous. Richardson was already a successful translator and author of psychological fiction. What, if any, use she made of these notes cannot be determined as neither the notes nor the eight draft chapters of the unfinished novel have survived. Furthermore, any influence on *The Way Home* or any of Richardson's other fiction is indiscernible given Richardson's prior knowledge of psychology.

At the time that Roncoroni was admitted as a patient, the Medico-Psychological Clinic was suffering from increasing uncertainty and economic strain. Wartime had forced the Clinic into debt and, on 25 September 1920, only days or weeks before Roncoroni's interview, Dr Jessie Murray died. Julia Turner and James Glover (1882–1926) were left in charge as co-directors of the Clinic, with the assistance of Ella Sharpe (1875–1947) (Raitt, 'Early British' 80).

In late 1920, Glover went to Berlin to be analysed by Dr Karl Abraham. On his return, he insisted that the Medico-Psychological Clinic apply strictly Freudian psychoanalytic treatment that necessitated the abandonment of the hitherto eclectic therapeutic approaches. He convinced the board that residential treatment breached the standards of pure psychoanalysis. The board accepted his advice and closed the residential annex (Boll 320). When this was announced in early 1921, Richardson and Robertson invited Roncoroni to stay at 90 Regent's Park Road to continue outpatient treatment (Purdie and Roncoroni 73).

Having brought Roncoroni this far from home, it fell to Richardson to take up the role that might otherwise have fallen to a parent. This included comforting and reassuring Roncoroni through what she described as the 'abominable treatment' which she 'loathed' at the Clinic

(Gyde). Roncoroni wrote that for some time after the residential facility closed, Richardson's burden was to escort her by bus to and from her analyst's home in Chelsea each weekday afternoon until she could travel alone. However, the nature of Richardson's statement to Kernot suggests that her role in supporting Roncoroni through these days was more onerous than the physical toll of the journeys or the hours lost in travel and waiting. With the Medico-Psychological Clinic formally closing on 15 August 1922, it is not known if Roncoroni's analysis continued.

In Roncoroni's telling of events, it appears that at the end of her residential care, she was all but cured of her problems. She began a course at the London Dalcroze School of Eurhythmics and came to enjoy and participate in the regular running of the Richardson/Robertson household. The truth, however, was more complex than Roncoroni disclosed. Roncoroni's friend and executor Margaret Capon was more candid about Roncoroni's progress: 'The treatment did not cure all of Olga's deep-seated nervous troubles, but at least it got her able to go about on her own' (12).

In 1921, Richardson was optimistic about Roncoroni's future progress. She wrote to Kernot:

I think I have come through a very distracted time. I can't go into it now, but it has been enough to make letter-writing impossible, & book writing all but. However now I think I am safely around the corner & shall hope to do better in future—with regard to the former (if not the latter). (Probyn et al. vol. 2, 367)

Roncoroni's records from the Dalcroze Certificate Register show that for the first two terms of 1921, she participated in twice-weekly rhythmic classes at the London School of Dalcroze Eurhythmics (LSDE). Later that year, she dropped down to 'Half term rhythmic once a week.' There is no entry for 1922 or 1923 and no other source of information about Roncoroni's activities or state of health.

The benefit for Roncoroni of studying Dalcroze Eurhythmics, a fully integrative method of teaching music through movement, including for the benefit of resolving 'disorders' of the 'physical, mental and emotional faculties,' cannot be underestimated (Cooper). Roncoroni's Dalcroze friend and colleague, Desirée Martin (1908–1996), recalled: 'Alas, she [Roncoroni] either had, or inherited a mental illness, and it was at the instigation of a friend that she came to do Dalcroze Eurhythmics with the idea that this in itself might give her happiness and stability' (Capon et al.).<sup>11</sup> In some measure, Roncoroni's hopes were realised. However, Richardson's extant correspondence reveals that Roncoroni's struggles were ongoing (Probyn et al. vol. 2, 805; vol. 2, 839; vol. 3, 1001; vol. 3, 1049).

In May 1923, Richardson wrote to Carl van Vechten: 'Yes, this 2<sup>nd</sup> volume of Mahony has taken far too long, but I have been through an all but crushing experience since beginning it, and am only now slowly coming out of the deeps' (Probyn et al. vol. 2, 375). In feeling that she was 'coming out of the deeps,' Richardson was most likely responding to Roncoroni's state of health. In April 1924, Richardson and Roncoroni took a twenty-four-day cruise to Lisbon, Madeira, and the Canary Islands. Robertson and Richardson's nephew, Walter Neustatter (1903–1978), remained at home in London, occupied with their respective work and study ('Names and Descriptions'). Although it is likely that Richardson completed *The Way Home* before setting out on this trip, there is insufficient evidence to confirm that she did.

Roncoroni began the intense teacher training program in music and movement for the Dalcroze Certificate in October 1924 with her parents' financial backing. This required attendance at eighteen to twenty lessons per week, completion of course papers, participation in sight-seeing excursions, and attendance at concerts and ballet performances, during three eleven-week terms per year. In addition, students were involved in performances, demonstrations, and summer schools (Odom 130–38; Odom and Pope 12–13; Pope, *Dalcroze Eurhythmics* 193–219). Roncoroni evidently had become a lively and entertaining part of the London Dalcroze community (Pope, 'Dalcroze Teacher' 12).

In 1925, 'Ronc' or 'Ronnie' as she became known to her Dalcroze friends, along with Jean Wilson (later Vincent) a half-scholarship student from Perth, spent some time in Brittany. After that, they made their way to the First International Congress of Rhythm at the Geneva headquarters of the Jaques-Dalcroze Institut. Wilson's letter precis book suggests that Roncoroni suffered bouts of illness during the trip. She noted that Roncoroni was 'the life of the party,' but suffered from an unidentified mental health disorder, and occasionally needed to spend time resting in convalescent homes' (Wilson).

Janet Oppenheim describes such facilities: 'If patients were unable to look after themselves and needed trained attendants, doctors might be obliged to dispatch them to the home of a medical practitioner who took lodgers, or to one of the rest-homes that began to appear around the turn of the century' (125). Respite in a home of this sort would have allowed Roncoroni to partake in holidays with friends and also given Richardson a reprieve from her role as Roncoroni's carer.



Figure 3. Roncoroni's Dalcroze friends taken at the LSDE in Store Street, London, 1925. Wilson front left, Thelma St John George front right, Morwenna Ward top left, and Dorothea Michel top right. (Joan Lawson Pope, 'A Dalcroze Teacher.')

In 1926, Roncoroni was invited to sit the Dalcroze Certificate examination after two years, rather than the usual three. Roncoroni implied that her elevation was a function of her age and former teaching experience.<sup>12</sup> Sheila Macintosh (1906–1997, later Rowley), a fellow student and friend, recalled that Roncoroni was ‘quite outstanding’ (Capon et al.) With the exam fees lent to her by Richardson, Roncoroni sat and passed the requirements in full.

In the same way that she was a gregarious and enthusiastic composer, improviser, and performer at the Assembly Rooms in Lyme Regis and earlier village and seaside entertainment venues (Capon, *LINQ* 7–10), Roncoroni thrived in the atmosphere of Dalcroze Eurhythmics. Macintosh wrote:

Her classes that followed later at Store Street were packed out with teachers and various others too. I remember teaching one term in the room under the one in which she was teaching and sometimes my class and myself would remain motionless for some seconds while we listened to the uncontrollable laughter going on overhead. Wit—as well as original and fascinating exercises—and playing that shot one into spontaneous movement—were among her attributes. (Capon et al.)

In 1927, Roncoroni began teaching at the progressive Moira House School in Eastbourne, East Sussex run by Gertrude Ingham (1868–1957), sister of the co-founder of the LSDE, Percy Ingham (1870–1930). She likely lived independently of Richardson during term time, perhaps in the school’s new boarding facility.

Roncoroni also passed the Licentiate Examination in Aural Training and Sight Singing for the Royal Academy of Music in 1927 and was registered with the Royal Society of Teachers (‘Royal Academy’; ‘Dalcroze Certificate’). In 1928, she (and Macintosh) joined the Queenswood School staff in Hatfield, Hertfordshire. She taught alongside the Director of Music of the LSDE, Ernest Reed (1879–1965). Roncoroni’s part in the Dalcroze Eurhythmics program at the school was conspicuous and valued, as evidenced in documents in the Queenswood School Archive.<sup>13</sup>

Having established herself as a teacher of the LSDE, Roncoroni’s care and management shifted significantly away from Richardson. Martin wrote that Roncoroni’s relapses reduced in number and severity for several years after she began teaching (Capon et al.). Where she had previously relied on Richardson, she now had a community of friends and colleagues and a congenial environment to support her through her setbacks.

In other circumstances, Roncoroni’s mother, rather than Richardson, might have helped her to progress to this next stage of independence. As it was, Nella Roncoroni, even if she had had access to the knowledge and resources to help her daughter, would not have been in a position to move to London. Furthermore, there is some intimation that the vexed relationship between mother and daughter contributed to or exacerbated Roncoroni’s mental health issues (Capon TS 2).<sup>14</sup>

From Richardson’s perspective, Roncoroni had settled in as a cheerful and entertaining presence in the scholarly household. After seven years, in mid-1921, Lillian Neustatter had returned to her husband and pre-war home in Hellerau, Germany with the intention of setting up a progressive school with A. S. Neill (1883–1973). Richardson’s nephew, Walter Neustatter, remained in the household while completing a Bachelor of Science (Psychology) at University College, London (1921–1924).

After Robertson's death in 1933, Roncoroni returned the goodwill that Richardson had shown her by sacrificing her own career to support Richardson and her writing. Richardson wrote to Kernot on 27 November 1935: 'Where shd I be, J.G.R. gone, without her? That I cannot answer. She is a girl in a thousand. Full of life, energy, brains, very musical, & as vivid & entertaining as her Italian name promises' (Probyn et al. vol. 3, 986). As Richardson's health declined in the difficult war years and the immediate aftermath, Roncoroni stoically and devotedly supported her friend. As well as shouldering the load of nursing Richardson, Roncoroni attended to the complex domestic tasks and issues relating to Richardson's works. Green described her efforts as 'heroic' (544).

Following Richardson's death, she collapsed with nervous and physical exhaustion. Despite enormous personal obstacles, Roncoroni displayed faithful and untiring devotion to Richardson's legacy in her role as literary executor. On several occasions, she attempted to resurrect her teaching career. However, her increasing struggle with mental illness made this all but impossible.

On 19 May 1982, Roncoroni passed away. Capon observed: 'it was a quiet and gentle passing—one could have wished it for her after the mental torments of her life.' Martin also wrote of Roncoroni's release from her struggles and added: 'But we who knew and worked with her had much fun and pleasure, and we are fortunate to have known her' (Capon et al.)

The available evidence surrounding the critical early years in the relationship between Richardson and Roncoroni puts to rest two unsupported characterisations: of Roncoroni, as an obsessed supplicant or besotted victim; and of Richardson, as a domineering benefactor or wily predator. Instead, Roncoroni emerges as a vigorous and independent figure who suffered from severe episodes of mental illness throughout her lifetime. Richardson appears as a progressive and generous friend who took on the critical role for Roncoroni that Roncoroni's own mother did not have the knowledge or the capacity to perform.

From late 1919, Richardson invested time and energy that might otherwise have gone into her writing into her friendship with Roncoroni. Moreover, from 1921 to 1924, she compromised her own well-being when unexpectedly she became further entangled in the care of her very ill younger friend.

The full extent of Richardson's (and Robertson's) generosity in the face of unforeseeable circumstances could not be told by Roncoroni without revealing more of her own story and the personal lives of her host family. As stated above, this was not the purpose of her memoir. Roncoroni's ongoing struggle with mental illness and Richardson's assistance were private matters that neither Richardson nor Roncoroni wished to share publicly or, in Richardson's case, widely among friends.

Details now available about the Medico-Psychological Clinic's program, the intense course for the Dalcroze Eurhythmics Certificate, Roncoroni's ongoing struggles with mental illness, her achievements at Queenswood School, and her social life independent of Richardson, validate Green's assessment of the two women and their friendship. Much remains unknowable about their relationship and the events of 1919–1924. Nevertheless, putting together the available evidence provides a more solid basis from which to reassess Richardson, Roncoroni, and their separate and shared experiences.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Issues relating to domestic help were not resolved until mid-1922 when Richardson's former housekeeper/secretary, Irene Stumpp (b. 1883) returned (Probyn et al. vol. 2, 370).

<sup>2</sup> Numbers in the Probyn et al. volumes refer to letter numbers, not page numbers.

<sup>3</sup> Richardson acknowledged to Kernot that she had not yet shared the story in April 1929 (Probyn et al. vol. 2, 434), July 1932 (Probyn et al. vol. 2, 751), and September 1939 (Probyn et al. vol. 3, 1230). In October 1933, Kernot reminded her that she had not explained how Roncoroni came to live with her and her husband (Probyn et al. vol. 2, 847). In May 1946, Kernot wrote to Roncoroni that Richardson had never written the promised story (ALS: Mitchell Library MSS 6092).

<sup>4</sup> An abridged version of this event was broadcast on ABC radio to mark Richardson's birthday anniversary on 3 January 1954. This was the first time that Kernot learned the truth of 'the urgent private matter' which had consumed Richardson's time and energy (Kernot to Roncoroni ALS ML MSS 6092). Roncoroni wrote to Ian Bevan on 14 December 1953: 'I don't want "Mr Sidney Baker"—or another of his limited mentality—writing that H. H. R. evidently "consorted with lunatics." And I was very frank about my illnesses.' (Series 02: Ian Bevan Literary Papers, 1942, 195–, 1976, 1980, ALS MLMSS 7822/Box 2).

<sup>5</sup> Although there is no evidence that Roncoroni did wish to marry, there are suggestions of relations or flirtations with men. In December 1925, Jean Wilson wrote: 'Olga gone to Riviera with Ivan' (unidentified). In 1932, Richardson noted Roncoroni spending time with several men on board a cruise ship, including one who visited her in London who transpired to be married (Green 551).

<sup>6</sup> Priest takes issue with Green's responses to claims of a sexual relationship between Richardson and Roncoroni. Green's conclusion is not, as stated by Priest, that the relationship was probably not sexual, but rather that there is no 'hard evidence about her own [Richardson's] preferences' to support such a theory (554). Green wrote: 'To be cynical about love and loyalty or make deductions from them that cannot be substantiated by any evidence seems, to say the least, insensitive' (544).

<sup>7</sup> It seems that Roncoroni was mistaken about the length of time that Richardson was in London. She wrote that it was a three-month period. However, Richardson's correspondence suggests that she was likely away from Lyme Regis for just over one month (Probyn et al. vol. 2, 361, 363).

<sup>8</sup> Richardson was elected an Associate of the Society of Psychical Research (SPR) in 1905. The SPR did much to advance the work of the Medico-Psychological Clinic. In the SPR's Council Report of 1914 it asserted its influence in admissions to the Clinic: 'This has, of course, no connexion with the Society, but so much has been done through the work of the S.P.R. both to advance knowledge and to arouse interest in hypnotic and allied states from a psychological as well as a therapeutic point of view, that the new developments of this kind under the direction of properly qualified persons are always especially welcomed by the Council. Six members of the medical staff of the Clinic belong to the S. P. R., and the Chairman of the Board of Management is a member of our Council [Sir Lawrence Jones (1851–1940)] We have already found occasion to send to the Clinic several persons who have come to the S.P.R. Rooms for advice and help in regard to mental or nervous symptoms.' *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 17, February 1915, p. 25. [Journal of the Society for Psychical Research. : Society for Psychical Research \(Great Britain\) : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#). The names common to the consulting staff at the Medico-Psychological Clinic and the SPR are Dr Jessie Murray (joined the SPR in July 1914), Dr Hector Munro (joined the SPR in May 1913), Professor William McDougall, Dr T. W. Mitchell (Honorary Secretary of the Medical Section of the SPR), C. S. Myers, Dr Agnes Savill.

Richardson and Neustatter were both ardent supporters of women's suffrage. Within the staff and board members of the Medico-Psychological Clinic active supporters of women's suffrage included Murray, Turner, Dr

Agnes Forbes Blackadder Savill (1875–1964 Consultant Physician), Mona Caird (1854–1932, Board of Management), Mary Chadwick (d. 1943, Matron of the residential annex, trainee psychologist, and on the medical staff); Dr Hilda Clark (1881–1955, Medical Doctor), and Constance E. Long (1867–1923, role unknown). See also Elizabeth R. Valentine “‘A Brilliant and Many-Sided Personality’: Jessie Margaret Murray, Founder of the Medico-Psychological Clinic.’ *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences*, 45, 2009, pp. 148–50. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jhbs.20364>.

The association between Murray, Turner, and other foundational members of the board and staff with the University of London cannot be overlooked in a discussion of possible links between Richardson and the Clinic. J. G. Robertson held the Chair of German Language and Literature at Bedford College. Within the Medico-Psychological Clinic, there were a number of people associated with the University of London. From November 1912 to June 1915, Dr Jessie Murray continued her studies in Psychology at University College. From 1918 until June 1920 when illness prevented her continuing, she was preparing for the degree of Doctor of Science in Psychology at this same institution (Boll 311). Turner was an Arts graduate from University College, London, London; Prof. Charles E. Spearman, Dr William McDougall, Prof. Charles S. Myers, and Prof. Carveth Read each held academic positions at in Psychology at the University of London.

<sup>9</sup> The papers of the Medico-Psychological Clinic were destroyed during WW2. Theophilus E. M. Boll discovered documents related to the Clinic in the papers of May Sinclair. Boll’s paper, ‘May Sinclair and the Medico-Psychological Clinic of London,’ is the most detailed account of the Clinic. More recent and helpful considerations of the Medico-Psychological Clinic include papers by Suzanne Raitt, Philippa Martindale, Elizabeth R. Valentine, and Elaine Showalter.

<sup>10</sup> It is not known if Roncoroni’s analyst was a trained psychoanalyst or one of the supervised students of Orthopsychics, the training program for new analysts. Raitt observed that ‘almost all the best-known names in early British psychoanalysis—James Glover, Ella Freeman Sharpe, Mary Chadwick, Marjorie Brierly, Nina Searl, Sylvia Payne, and Susan Isaacs—trained there and received their first analysis from Julia Turner’ (*May Sinclair* 139).

<sup>11</sup> There were several pathways by which Roncoroni might have found Dalcroze Eurhythmics. For instance, Neustatter and her future husband, A. S. Neill, together with Christine Baer-Frissell, a former student of Jaques-Dalcroze, opened their progressive International School at the former site of Dalcroze Eurhythmics in Hellerau, Dresden in 1921. Neill is recorded as having been an enthusiast of the Dalcroze Eurhythmics method (Jonathan Croall. *Neill of Summerhill: The Permanent Rebel*. ARK, 1983, p. 117). Alternatively, Roncoroni may have been directed towards Dalcroze Eurhythmics from within the Medico-Psychological Clinic. Susan Isaacs (1885–1948) was affiliated with both organisations (Odom 2). Ideas of women’s health and empowerment through movement were brought to the Clinic by Madame Martina Bergman Österberg (1849–1915), named as Director of Psychical Exercises in 1914. Another possibility is that Richardson knew Charles or Percy Ingham (founder of Moira House and the LSDE respectively), both of whom were fellow Associates of the SPR. Of course, other connections may have presented.

<sup>12</sup> While at school, Roncoroni attained the Certificate of the Associated Board of the Royal Academy and of the Royal College of Music for elementary and lower division examinations (Dalcroze Certificate Register).

<sup>13</sup> See Works Cited for references to relevant documents in the Queenswood Archive. In 2015, Roncoroni and her classes were fondly remembered by a former student, Stella Ross-Collins.

<sup>14</sup> Capon’s crossed-out draft TS describes the circumstance in which the dissipation of the Roncoroni fortune meant the loss of Olga’s nanny: ‘She [Nella] was now more in charge of Olga, who was developing into a highspirited and hyperactive infant, and she gave vent to her pent-up frustrations by administering severe corporal punishment on her daughter. Olga never forgot the harshness of the beatings she endured.’

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