THE FORTUNES OF POLLY MAHONY
HENRY HANDEL RICHARDSON'S WOMAN IN A MAN'S WORLD

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> *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* remains ***his*** story. It is ***his*** fortunes that are its subject.[1]

Readers and critics of Henry Handel Richardson's trilogy cannot forget the author's penetrating portrait of her central character, the Anglo-Irish émigré to Australia, Richard Mahony. Less attention has been devoted to Polly cum Mary (née Turnham),[2] yet *her* story, *her* fortunes are also traced over *Australia Felix, The Way Home* and *Ultima Thule*. She is witness to, a beneficiary and victim of the fortunes of her husband (from Chapter 9 of Part I of AF[3]) until the latter's death. Moreover, in Part III of the final volume of the trilogy, UT,[4] she comes to occupy the role of the protagonist, as a result of Richard's internment in a mental asylum.

It seems to me that Richardson's portrait of the woman is no less memorable than that of her male protagonist and that through it she illustrates the potentially precarious nature of existence for women when they are bred for male consumption. Although Richardson takes us back to

1.- Leonie Kramer in her introduction to *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, vol. 1, *Australia Felix*. Penguin Books, 1977, p. xiv. First published 1971. The trilogy is referred to in abbreviated form as *The Fortunes* ...

2.- In her study "The Portrayal of Women in the Fiction of Henry Handel Richardson" in *Lund Studies in English*, 64, edited by Claes Schaar and Jan Svartvik, Liber Forlag Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1983, pp. 1-183, Eva Jarring Corones observed that no comprehensive study of Richardson's female characters had been produced until Anne Summer's article "The Self Denied: Australian Women Writers - their Image of Women." in *Refractory Girl* No.2 (1973), pp. 4-11. However, Jarring is critical of Summers for such claims as the following: "Nowhere in any of Richardson's novels do we find a woman who departs in any way from the traditional male-drawn conceptions of women." (E. Jarring Corones, op. cit., p. 39) There is no doubt that Mary in *The Fortunes* ...contradicts the above claim made by Summers. Corones also alludes to " ... a superficial study of the women in *The Fortunes* ..." (E. Jarring Corones, op. cit., p. 31, note 42) in a German doctoral thesis of 1934.

3.- The abbreviation AF will be used throughout the text to refer to H. Handel Richardson, *Australia Felix*. Penguin Books, 1977. First published 1971. Page references to this edition will be supplied in the text following the quote.

4.-The abbreviation UT will be used throughout the text to refer to H. Handel Richardson, *Ultima Thule*. Penguin Books, 1976. First published 1971. Page references to this edition will be supplied in the text following the quote.

the nineteenth century to stage her account of Richard Mahony and wife's fortunes, her three novels were published in England (1917; 1925; 1929), where she was resident, within the context of the women's suffrage movement. This time of heightened social awareness of and controversy over woman's role should not be overlooked in an assessment of the other central character in the novel. Richardson is never so radical as to suggest that Mary might have been wiser never to have married the fickle Anglo-Irishman. Indeed, she shows that in spite of Richard's increasing withdrawal from society and his wife, the bond of affection between them remains firm. However, we are led to ponder the wisdom of a society which foments beliefs and expectations in relation to gender which are crippling rather than creative. In this connection, it would seem significant that Polly is repeatedly associated with Australia, with the new world where old structures might be broken but, in fact, have not been. Even so, Richard does observe when he and Mary go back to England that Mary: "... stood up to members of the other sex (himself expected) as women emphatically did *not* do here, ..." (WH, 80)[5] At this stage in their marriage, and in spite of "... her tottering faith in Richard's judgement" (WH, 78), Mary has still not liberated herself from subjection to her husband's whims.

In the present paper, I wish to take up two comments drawn from seminal critical work on *The Fortunes...* with a view to refocussing the analysis of Polly Mahony. Leonie Kramer has claimed the following: "The forces ranged against Mahony are immense -the country, its people, his temperament, his wife..."[6] and Dorothy Green has assessed Mary as: " ... the feminine conserving principle, the earth, the flesh, the settler ..."[7] in contrast to Mahony: " ... the masculine, destructive principle, the pilgrim spirit, the nomad, ..."[8] I do not see that Mary is a force ranged against Richard: in different ways, from the immature state in which she marries to the maturity she has attained in middle age at Richard's death, she is always working for her husband; or that she simply represents all that Green awards her. Those 'qualities' are, indeed, what a male chauvinist society has shackled her with and both Richard and herself suffer in consequence. It is when she becomes unfeminine, mobile and rational (which does nor mean that she becomes a force ranged against Richard either) -unfortunately only when she has no alternative and late in the day to avert tragedy- that she acquires fuller stature

5.- The abbreviation WH will be used throughout the text to refer to H. Handel Richardson, *The Way Home*. Penguin Books, 1978. First published 1971. Page references to this edition will be supplied in the text following the quote.
6.- L. Kramer, op. cit., p. xxv.
7.- D. Green, *Ulysees Bound*. Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1973, p. 256.
8.- Ibid.

as a human being, showing herself to be able to answer independently the challenges in her path, not merely be dragged in her husband's whimsical wake. Polly is emancipated through tragedy. I suggest that Richardson may seek to impress upon the reader the need for women's emancipation so that the descent to such desperate depths might be avoided. It may well be claimed that the particular tragedy of Richard Mahony (who is not exclusively a destructive principle, is he? One recalls, for instance, his tenderness in dealing with patients and his own dying child) might never have occurred had Polly not been denied the opportunity for self-possession and eloquence which Mary subsequently acquires. This claim is explicitly substantiated in the novel, moreover, when Mary discovers her hidden potential on having to learn to be postmistress in an attempt to support the family:

> Directly it came to book -or head- learning, she thought of herself as dull and slow. Though here, oddly enough, the thought perked up and declined to be quenched that, if Richard had only let her have a say, however small, in the management of his affairs, these might never have got into the muddle they had. Figures didn't come hard to her. (UT, 227)

At the beginning of AF, in the proem, the reader is plunged into a tough, physical world as work in the Gravel Pits on Ballarat is described. Sound and meaning convey a harsh picture (slam; jammed; pinned; pressed; roar; staggering; belch; tore; kicking; hauled; ice-cold water; stank; blind stupid from their booze; dysentery (AF,1,2)) and the women who are subsequently introduced constitute a grotesque gallery, an underworld of " ... old harridans ..., dirty Irish mothers; ... "(AF, 14), drunk and shabby women. Even the "respectable women" (AF, 14) are presented as more intent on gossiping than looking after their children, in no hurry to return home. The opening paragraph of Chapter 1 of the novel is an arresting description of a woman whose apparent purpose is to warn her menfolk of the arrival of Commissioner and troopers, keen to check the diggers' licences. In the rendering of the suddenness with which she appears, in the way she moves her arm and the sound she emits, the woman acquires almost mechanical proportions and this sense is reinforced when her prompt response to the instruction given to her by the man to whom she "[belongs]" is reported:

> On the summit of one of the clay heaps, a woman shot into silhouette against the sky. An odd figure, clad in a skimpy green petticoat, with a scarlet shawl held about her shoulders, wisps of frowsy red hair standing out round her head, she balanced herself on the slippery earth, spinning her arm like the vane of a windmill, and crying at the top of her voice: 'Joe, boys! - Joe, Joe, Joey!' ... One of (the group of Chinamen), to whom the warning woman belonged, raised his head and called a Chinese word at her; she obeyed it instantly, vanished into thin air; ... (AF, 9)

The woman never re-appears and the reader has no sense of a real existence. As the novel begins, then, a male-orientated universe is portrayed, where women are adjuncts to men, at best, and, throughout the novel, Richardson will provide evidence which reinforces the picture of male dominance.

Already, in the proem, we have a glimpse of the rudimentary existence of womenfolk through the reference to Long Jim's wife, abandoned in the old country, unable to correspond with her husband through lack of basic skills:

> ... leaving the old woman wringing her hands, he had taken every farthing of his savings and set sail for Australia. That was close on three years ago. For all he knew his wife might be dead and buried by this time; or sitting in the almshouse. She could not write, and only in the early days had an occasional newspaper reached him on which, alongside the Queen's head, she had put the mark they had agreed on, to show that she was still alive. (AF, 3)

The placing of the cross next to Queen Victoria's head throws into relief the paradoxical nature of a political system, presided over by a woman (though male operated, of course), which tolerates the misery of female ignorance. Subsequently, comments by a variety of characters will reveal attitudes to women in this society and, thus, their limited lot, in the context of a full human existence.

Early on in the novel, Richard will tell Mr. Ocock that the latter needs a woman: " ... to make [your place] a bit more homelike, ..."(AF, 25). Hence, the woman is projected as a domestic boon. Her role of mother, pleasing to the male, is presented through the picture of the household lorded over by Polly's brother John Turnham. Wife Emma arrives, infant in arms, and is set upon by her two year-old son, leading husband John to be transported as he contemplates mother and offspring in a cluster: "What a picture! ... What a picture! My love. I positively must carry out my intention of having you painted in oils, with the children round you." (AF, 74)[9] Emma is summoned to look over Polly's prospective husband, allowed to contribute a view in this family matter. As Turnham pompously concedes in addressing Richard: "There are cases, you will admit, in which a female opinion is not without value." (AF, 73) Emma's servitude, albeit mollified by middle-class comfort, harks back to that of the warning woman at the beginning of the novel as she takes her leave: " ... (obeying) with ... good grace her husband's command to rest for an hour, before dressing for the ball." (AF, 74) Later on in the novel, Turnham will reveal his dictatorial conviction that women are naturally equipped for things domestic even though the example of his own

9.- Compare Richard's reflections, AF, 75.

sister Zara would appear to prove otherwise, as Mary points out to him, though her observation is met by contemptuous dismissal:

> ' ... Zara is not at all fitted for a post of this kind. ... young children ... don't seem to take to her ...'
> 'Not fitted? Bah! ... Every woman is fitted by nature to rear children and manage a house.' (AF, 370)

And Mary's diplomatic reserve does nothing to lessen her brother's intransigence:

> 'They should be, I know,' yielded Mary in conciliatory fashion. 'But with Zara it doesn't seem to be the case.'
> 'Then she ought to be ashamed of herself, ... -ashamed of herself-and that's all about it!' (AF, 370)

In UT, clergyman Thistlewaite's reaction to Mary's eagerness to take on the organisation of the Bishop's visit provides a further illustration of the way in which the man's world smugly accomodates itself around woman's labour and works it to their own advantage: "And ... Thistlewaite hummed aloud in ever greater good humour, mentally cracking his fingers to the tune of: 'That's the ticket ... women for ever! The work for them and the glory for us, ..." (UT, 140)

Since the greater part of the narrative viewpoint in *The Fortunes ...* is filtered through Richard's consciousness, it is through his attitudes and beliefs and, in particular, in relation to Polly cum Mary that the myths and prejudices of male supremacy are conveyed. Before Richard meets Polly, his idealized vision of a future wife is relayed to us, an echo of the ethereal being of the courtly love tradition: " ... there descended to him ... from some shadowy distance, some pure height, the rose-tinted vision of the wife to be which haunts every man's youth." (AF, 32) Having found "a lady" (AF, 53) in Polly, he finds her shyness attractive, fitting, given that she is a woman. He reflects complacently: "How ... bashfulness impressed one in the case of the weaker sex! There, it was altogether pleasing." (AF, 56) Polly appears to conform to the bourgeois stereotype: she is "maidenly and refined" (AF, 57), able and ready to sew a flag at Richard's request and, following their first encounter, Richard will adopt the paternalistic, patronising attitude towards her which will become characteristic of their relationship. The way in which he dreams of the future sublimates the projection of himself as hero and master and sixteen year-old Polly as the maiden saved by him -a fairytale landscape, indeed. Having made his fortune, he will return to the old world and : " ... what a joy to have a wife to carry with one -a Polly to rescue, to restore to civilization!" (AF, 62) Significantly, he is described on the day he proposes

as looking down on her. It is not simply a question of physical height but a metaphor for the authority Richard is assuming with regard to Polly's future:

> When once she was his wife he would not consent to her remaining intimate with people of the Beamishes' kidney: what a joy to get her out of their clutches! Nor should she spoil her pretty shape by stooping over a wash-tub. (...) How young she was ... how young and innocent! Every feature of her dear little face still waited, as it were, for the strokes of time's chisel. It should be the care of his life that none but the happiest lines were graved upon its precious surface. (AF, 64)

Thus, throughout their married life, Richard will excercise the role of protector, anxious not to distress Polly, that delicate object of which he has taken possession. When they take up residence on the store premises in Ballarat, Richard sets up a partition between the living room and store in order to prevent Polly's ears from being polluted by the language of the customers in Ballarat. When Richard goes to Melbourne: "Little Polly had to stay behind" (AF, 96) since the law-courts are not considered the place for a woman and she cannot be left sitting alone in a hotel either. Richard chooses not to tell Polly certain facts about the court case in Melbourne because: " ... of the dark side of life he greatly preferred little Polly to remain ignorant." (AF, 106) It would seem that what Richard desires from Polly is the repose which according to Nietzsche, the warrior should have provided for him by woman: " ... after business hours, there was little Polly herself. He loved to contemplate her." (AF, 107) Therefore, Richard will not appreciate Mr. Ocock's assessment of Polly, which threatens the established order:

> 'That little lady o' yours 'as got 'er 'eadpiece screwed on the right way. It beats me, doc, why you don't take 'er inter the store and learn 'er the bizness. No offence, I'm sure,' he made haste to add, disconcerted by Mahony's cold stare. (AF, 108)

When Polly begins to ask questions about their finances, Richard will not allow her to involve herself:

> Richard's invariable answer, did she venture a word, was not to worry her little head about such things. (...) Now child, that won't do. I didn't marry to have my girl puzzling her little brains where her next day's dinner was to come from. Away with you, to your stitching! Things will be all right, trust to me. (AF, 180, 181)

He does his utmost to keep her "sunny" and "girlish" (AF, 194). In this connection, Eva Jarring Corones has commented on the repetition of "little" in relation to Polly, and observes:

> Only at [about] the beginning of Part IV of AF ... [does] the repetition of the word "little" [cease].[10] In emphasizing Mary's littleness in the first part of the trilogy, it seems likely that Richardson is merely trying to give a realistic portrait of a girl who is very young and small in height. It is also possible that she is trying to satirize Mary before she develops into a mature and interesting character. However, the repeated use of "little" also has the effect that the reader associates Mary with the desexualized "child-wife" of Victorian fiction.[11]

It seems to me that only the last of the three reasons presented by Jarring is acceptable. Richard's moeurs are Victorian. He considers women intellectually inferior, which is why he is so struck by the divorced Mrs. Marriner: " ... Mrs. Marriner read [his books on spiritualism] with what seemed to him rare and unfeminine insight: that is to say, she was neither alarmed, nor derisive, nor stupidly obstinate: ... " (WH, 186). To account for Richardson's repetition of "little" as the writer's attempt "to give a realistic portrait of a girl who is very young and small in height" is to overlook, more importantly, I think, the characterization of Richard as the Victorian husband for whom the wife is a species of pet rather than an equal. Neither do I think that Richardson's intention was satirical. The "little" comes from Richard and is indicative of his condescending attitude to his wife. Jarring's claim would seem to indicate that she has misinterpreted Richardson's deployment of the point of view.

When Richard returns to Australia alone in the early 70s, at the age of forty-nine and financially ruined, we see him still inclined to protecting Mary, bent on underestimating her and unfair in his judgement:

> ... he felt most thankful Mary was not with him. *How* she would have got on his nerves! (...) Women paid dearly for their inexperience: when it came to a matter of business, even the most practical could not see beyond the tips of their noses. (...) ...by keeping his own counsel, he would spare her many an hour's anxiety - ... (...) It became a matter of vital importance to him that the walls should be standing and the roof on, before Mary saw it: Mary needed the evidence of her senses: could grasp only what she had before her eyes. (UT, 5. The underlined word appears as italics in the original.)

However, as the final volume of the trilogy progresses, so Richard's decline intensifies and roles are reversed. When Richard is possessed by the urge to leave Melbourne for " ... a flourishing place to be had for the asking ..." (UT, 40) in Baramboogie in the Ovens District, Mary is amazed to discover a

10.- Richard still thinks of "Poor little Mary, ... " (AF, 318) in Chapter 7 of Part IV of AF, i.e. more than half way through the final part of the novel, and in Chapter 5 of Part I of WH, he thinks of her as " ... the poor little soul." (WH, 60)
11.- E. Jarring Corones, op. cit., p. 115.

child-like quality in her husband: "But he's got the eyes of a child! ... for all his wrinkles and grey hair." (UT, 41) By this time, moreover, Mary is no longer the meek maid who married Richard. Although she never becomes the book lover Richard is presented to us as, her mind does develop.[12] She learns discernment independently of her husband's views, *malgré lui.*

"Pretty little Polly Perkins" (AF, 48), as Polly is first introduced to Richard by Purdy, perfectly fulfils Richard's dream of a wife. Unlike the Beamish sisters and the Goyesque figures on display around Ballarat, Polly is gentle, blushing, domesticated and, to boot, is totally receptive to his ideas: " ... little Polly agreed with everything he said -was all one lovely glow of acquiescence. He thought no happier mortal than himself trod the earth," (AF, 65) Indeed, Polly considers Richard to be: " ... the kindest, handsomest, cleverest man in the world, and would willingly have humbled herself to the dust before him: ... " (AF, 64-5). Thus, Richard departs, having proposed to Polly and: " ... with a sense of leaving his most precious possessions behind ..." (AF, 66) The pattern of male possessor and female possessed is, then, established from the beginning of Richard and Polly's relationship, to the satisfaction of both parties. Once they are married, Polly will accept that she has to stay behind when Richard goes off to the law-courts in Melbourne and reacts as is to be expected: " ... in proper wifely fashion, [she] proposed to give her house a good red-up in its master's absence." (AF, 96) She soon adapts to life with Richard, taking on the Patmore Angel in the House dimension:

> ... it was second nature to Polly to efface herself, to steal mousily away. Unless, of course, someone needed help or was in distress, in which case she forgot to be shy. To her husband's habits and idiosyncracies, she had adapted herself implicitly - but this came easy; for she was sure everything Richard did was right, and that his way of looking at things was the one and only way. So there was no room for discord between them. (AF, 107)

Nonetheless, and in spite of Polly's prosaic reaction to the poetry read to her by Richard (though one can hardly blame her to judge from " ... the swing of the couplet ... " (AF, 110) we are provided with), Polly does reveal an analytical capacity equally early on in their relationship [13] and Richard recognises: " ... *a certain* native sturdiness of opinion ..."(AF, 109) and " ... *a dash of* native shrewdness ..." (AF, 111) in her. [14] However, these measures

12.- The way in which Richard is wont to withdraw to his books is reminiscent of Mr. Bennet in J. Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and there are some similarities in the manner in which the husbands treat their wives. However, Polly cum Mary is presented as possessing greater potential for development than Mrs. Bennet and is a younger person in any event.
13.- See, for instance, AF, 108 -her insight in connection with young Tom's father.
14.- The italics in both the quotes contained in the sentence are mine.

of steadfast judgement and astuteness do not prevent her from replying to Richard "meekly" (AF, 117) but she will come to observe behaviour in him which leads her to contemplate what she might have done in the given circumstances, in spite of herself. She would have mustered the drive which Richard, now in a new practice on Ballarat, lacks:

> He really did not seem to care whether he had a practice or not. All the new instruments got from Melbourne, lay unused in their casings; and the horse was eating its head off, at over a pound a week, in the livery barn. Polly shrank from censuring her husband, even in thought; but ... she could not help reflecting what she would have done at this pass, had she been a man. She would have announced the beginning of her practice in big letters in the Star, and she would have gone down into the township and mixed with people and made herself known. (AF, 179)

When she summons the courage to confront her husband, she does so: " ... a little imploringly and very apologetically, ... " (AF, 181) -and to no avail. Polly is dismissed to concern herself with her stitching. Thus, Polly will discover the unexpected in her husband: "How strange Richard was ... how difficult!" (AF, 183) and she will see him placing obstacles in her path as he asserts his authority, in such trivial instances as not allowing her to deal with a cheaper, more punctual vegetable man. After eight years of marriage, then, Mary will come to realise that her thinking has been absorbed from Richard (AF, 291), and following her husband's reaction over Purdy at the ball, she will draw the revolutionary conclusion that Richard is "silly" (AF, 325). This discovery will mark a turning point in her relationship with her husband and determine her adopting a management strategy observed in other women's handling of their husbands but which she had not expected to be adopting herself:

> As time went on, she suffered strange uncertainties where some of Richard's decisions were concerned. In his good intentions she retained an implicit belief: but she was not always satisfied that he acted in the wisest way. Occasionally it struck her that he did not see as clearly as she did; at other times that he let a passing whim run away with him and override his common sense. And, her eyes thus opened, it was not in Mary to stand dumbly by and watch him make what she held to be mistakes. Openly to interfere, however, would also have gone against the grain in her; she had bowed for too long to his greater age and experience. So, in seeing no other way out, she fell back on indirect methods. To her regret. For, in watching other women 'manage' their husbands, she had felt proud to think that nothing of this kind was necessary between Richard and her. Now she, too, began to lay little schemes by which, without his being aware of it, she might influence his judgement, divert or modify his plans. (AF, 326)

Therefore, Mary seeks to subvert her master's rule. Significantly, she is subsequently described as answering to the growing burden of Richard's inflexibility and pessimism "manfully" (AF, 339). Yet, in conversation with Tilly, who declares men to be "queer fish" (AF, 363), she doubts the rightness of pitting her will against Richard and reveals that she is now aware of life as complexity; the simplicity she had expected has been undermined: "Life was not, after all, going to be the simple, straightforward affair she had believed." (AF, 363)

Over WH, tension is created as Mary veers between suppressing her feelings and becoming more vocal in her protest before Richard. There are two references over this second novel of the trilogy to women's rights: when Mary is in conversation with her sister Lisby in England and the latter claims she wants to " ... go out into the world and stand on (her) own feet ..." (WH, 27) then, again, when Mary is in conversation with Richard and her brother John and highlights prejudiced male attitudes to the unmarried woman (WH, 114). It is ironic that on both occasions she voices disapproval and in a manner which belies the flexibility she reveals elsewhere. Thus Richardson illustrates the extent to which Mary has been prey to a dominant ideology, male orientated and hostile to the whole question of female emancipation. The women's rights movement seeks to remedy the imbalance of power which she is a victim of in her everyday existence yet Mary is not equipped to make the liberating associations.

We now see her voicing caution (WH, 32; 104), lamenting over Richard's neurotic temperament (WH, 105), attempting to guide her husband " ... gently and imperceptibly ..." (WH, 106) yet having to " ... hastily [swallow] her dismay, ..." (WH, 106) as he reacts unfavourably. However, we shall witness her making an eloquent, suffragette-style stand for her independence in answer to Richard's opposition to her collaborating in bringing Tilly and Purdy together:

> 'No, really Richard! this is too much,' cried Mary and bounced up from her seat. 'For goodness' sake, let me manage my own affairs! To hear you talk anyone would think I was still a child, to be told what I may and mayn't do -instead of a middle-aged woman. I'm quite able to judge for myself; yes! and take the consequences too. But you blow me up just as if I wasn't a person for myself at all, but only your wife. Besides, I think you might show a *little* confidence in me.' (WH, 169)

By the end of WH, Mary is facing the prospect, given Richard's financial ruin, of: " ... having to emerge from her womanly seclusion and rub shoulders with the world." (WH, 268). She meets the challenge with mettle and a determination to survive which makes a champion of her for women's rights willy nilly!

It is in the last volume of the trilogy, then, as Mary adjusts to Richard's disturbed mind and final insanity, that she acquires a masculine independence and brings into focus the prejudices of the man's world in which she moves. Following the family's return to Australia, she will continue to employ: " ... an underground way ... " (UT, 18) in order to avoid wearing confrontation with Richard but we shall also find her rejecting Richard's views, taking the power of decision into her own hands. Hence, she will not take transport in Melbourne as he would have her do:

> This ... was one of the numerous little economies she felt justified in practising ... and holding her tongue about. Richard, of course, would have snorted with disapproval. *His* wife to be tramping the streets! But latterly she had found his grandee notions about what she might and might not do, wearing a little thin. In the present state of affairs they seemed, to say the least of it, out of place. She had legs of her own and was every bit as well able to walk as he was. If people looked down on her for it ... well, they would just have to, and that was all about it. (UT, 20. The underlined word appears as italics in the original.)

Nonetheless, Mary realises, however, that no matter how assertive she may feel herself, she has a world's norms to tackle, another stage in the would-be independent women's battle. We are told following the above:

> These brave thoughts nothwithstanding, she could not but wish -as she sat waiting in a public coffee room, the door of which opened and shut a dozen times to the minute, everyone who entered fixing her with a hard and curious stare- wish that Tilly had picked on a quieter hotel, one more suitable to a lady travelling alone. (UT, 20)

The remainder of Mary's married life with Richard will bring little joy: she will live midst desperation (UT, 39), dismay (UT, 53), a more intense self-sacrificing (UT, 53) and an aching heart (UT, 59) as Richard heads towards his final breakdown. In these dire straits, however, she will also come to assert herself with increasing force. Following the death of her daughter Lallie, she will insist on taking her two remaining children to the coast for the sake of their health. Richard hesistatingly concedes: "I suppose you're right." (UT, 94), to which Mary forcefully replies: "I know I am!" (UT, 94)

Whilst Mary is staying with Tilly and their children on the coast, the latter concludes that: " ... marriage is sent to try us women, ... " (UT, 112). There is no reply from Mary at this point but following her early return to Baramboogie she will reflect on her own marriage, revealing how her expectations have been defeated:

> Could she have foreseen all that marriage was to mean: how Richard would change and the dance he would lead her; all the nagging worry and the bitter suffering; then, yes, then, poor young inexperienced thing that she was, full of romantic ideas, and expecting only happiness as her lot, she might have been excused from shrinking back in dismay. (UT, 145)

After Richard's attempted suicide, we shall hear Mary preaching courage to herself: "I must be brave ... I must be brave." (UT, 178) and from this point on, we shall see her making decisions which Richard would not have allowed his "little" wife scope for. She decides that they shall leave Baramboogie and she shuts herself up in Richard's surgery to inform herself as to the true state of their finances. Furthermore, we shall see her rescuing Richard as he wanders out of bed (UT, 217) and when he sets fire to the deed box (UT, 222). Thus, Mary comes to play the role of rescuer which Richard had cast for himself in relation to his wife. Moreover, she will rescue him from the male establishment into whose hands she gave him thinking that she was acting for the best. Mary's encounter with Dr. Bowes-Smith (UT, 224) highlights the force of prejudice in relation to women, as do her interview with the doctor at the mental asylum, who sees Mary as: " ... bold (and) bouncing ... " (UT, 249), and her experience as she struggles to become a post mistress at the age of forty -two (UT, 229). It may be said that a redeeming feature in all this tragedy is that son Cuffy's lofty ideals with regard to his mother are punctured following her being demoted to: " ... the working classes." (UT, 228) Thus, Cuffy might not grow up with those notions which may lead a young man to approach his female counterpart as something less than himself: " ... he felt as if his world was turning upside down. And that it was one's *Mamma* who did it ... who ought to know better; be perfect, without sin ..." (UT, 240.) His new experience is going to call for a re-assessment of such views!

> As Richard's character weakens, so Mary's gains in strength, until finally their roles are reversed and he ends in the kind of dependence on her that, from the beginning, he expected to be her relationship to him.[15]

Here, Kramer highlights a concept of central importance to *The Fortunes ...* , that of expectation. Richard expected to be Mary's keeper, Mary expected to be kept; Mary will become her husband's keeper following his

15.- L. Kramer, op. cit., p.xv.
Apart from the texts referred to in the above notes, the following has also been consulted: William D. Elliot, *Henry Handel Richardson. A Critical Study*. Angus & Robertson Publishers, 1977.

decline into insanity - the tragically unexpected. My reading of Richardson's trilogy leads me to deduce that the novelist wished to expose her awareness of how a society which strikes an imbalance of power between the sexes creates inappropriate expectations and unexpected surprises, which can lead to tragedy. Richardson does not want a woman to find herself in a man's world -thus, man is the keeper; or a man in a woman's world -lest the woman become the keeper. She would have us strive for a new order, beyond Australia and England in her own time, one in which responsibility is shared between the sexes. Thus, Henry Handel Richardson´s trilogy acquires a utopian dimension.