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Shadows in a Cracked Mirror: The Spectre in *The Well of Loneliness*

This article is concerned with tracing the authorial production of deviant subjectivity by means of a reading “against the grain” of Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*.¹ The analysis presents a critical textual exegesis of Stephen Gordon, Hall’s tragic character, and rethinks the *apparently* restorative moment of “self-identification” that occurs when, following a scene of total despair in front of a mirror, Stephen locates, in a sexologist’s treatise on sexual deviance, a description of a “mannish woman.” This reading troubles the representation of a mannish woman by examining the culturally limited sexual frame constructed in order to render her existence intelligible to an audience situated in a particular time and place.

The primary purpose of this analysis is to examine Radclyffe Hall’s use of sexology as an apparently explanatory discourse for representing the queerly gendered character of Stephen Gordon. It is culturally and historically significant to note the particular location that *The Well* has held in the imagination of generations of lesbians; as Love notes, though “still the most famous and most widely read lesbian novel, [it] is also the novel most hated by lesbians themselves.”² As the most read and hated novel by lesbians, it is

worth examining how the discourse of sexology has historically come to resonate in critical accounts of *The Well* through the textual production of Stephen Gordon. The category of invert, to which Hall ascribed her own sexuality, belonged, at best, to a problematic taxonomy. In this paper my aim is to examine the significant tensions that exist between historical representations of the invert, related medical models, and discursive spaces of resistance in *The Well* presented through the character of Stephen Gordon.³

The community of inverts reflected in the library of Sir Philip is, for Stephen at the time, a textual community, a discursive reflection created largely in the imaginings of sexologists. In 1869, an earlier generation of homosexuals had come to the attention of a German psychiatrist, Carl von Westphal. Westphal published a case history of a young woman who, from childhood, preferred to dress as a boy, play boy's games, and, later in life, was sexually attracted to women. Westphal identified her as a "congenital invert" because her blatant propensity for masculine behaviours was evidence of an out-of-place masculinity in a female body; nevertheless, she, seemed, to Westphal, an "innate" pathology.

An early determining moment in the evolution of the congenitalist model was the 1886 publication of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*,⁴ which was developed following Westphal's model of congenital homosexuality. Krafft-Ebing's text proclaims itself as a "medico-forensic study" of the "abnormal" with a sub-title assuring its reader that "especial reference to the Antipathic Sexual Instinct" would be made.⁵ Krafft-Ebing's studies of "the antipathic sexual instinct" in women argued, without physiological evidence, that lesbianism was a result of pathological brain irregularities

that indicated a marked degree of degeneration.⁶ Lesbianism, which Krafft-Ebing repeatedly referred to as a “taint,” was, in his estimation, an inherited diseased condition of the nervous system.⁷

In her novel, Radclyffe Hall takes up these terms and struggles with them. Her work wavers between the various positions that read homosexuality as both a product of an atavistic generational throwback *and* divine retribution, in the scene in which Sir Philip wants to cry out to God in distress about his daughter’s homosexuality: “You have maimed my Stephen! What had I done, or my father before me, or my father’s father, or his father’s father? Unto the third and fourth generations....”⁸ Sir Philip’s conviction that something exists in the family history that has led to Stephen’s homosexuality specifically refers to a warning repeated no less than four times in the Bible.⁹ The congenital taint of Stephen Gordon, connected in the novel with the hereditary model of the congenitalists, is posited as a spiritual atavism; it is not only the physical ills of the fathers, but also their spiritual ills, which may be brought to bear upon generations to come. In this example, not only is Stephen the carrier of an atavistic affliction, but also she is divinely punished for a sin of ages past.

As Lillian Faderman comments, several subsequent congenitalist writers such as Iwan Bloch, Magnus Hirschfeld,¹⁰ and John Addington Symonds concurred that homosexuality was indeed an inborn characteristic, but refused Krafft-Ebing’s assertion that homosexuality was pathological and the morbid result of tainted heredity.¹¹ Havelock Ellis, however, as another follower of Krafft-Ebing, does insist upon the congenital taint. The chapter entitled “Female Inversion” in Havelock Ellis’ 1897 *Studies in the Psychology of Sex: Sexual Inversion* begins with three stories of lesbian murder

and mayhem. The first is the story of Alice Mitchell who, thwarted in her attempts to adopt a male persona and marry her lover Freda Ward, slits Ms. Ward's throat in order to confirm their eternal love. The second narrative of female inversion offered by Ellis is the story of the Tiller sisters, who shot a man because he was seeking the affections of a woman to whom they were attracted. The third story he tells is the tale of a nurse who, again, shoots a man because he was the individual for whom her female lover of fourteen years had left her. After each story Ellis reminds his readers that these women showed no evidence of insanity; they were simply typical inverts. The hereditary taint, the pathological deformity, that marks the lesbian, it would seem, according to Ellis' model also marks the degenerative criminal. Indeed, the one might become the other.

How might such a model as the congenitalists propounded appeal to anyone? Specifically, why might Hall adopt such a model? Krafft-Ebing confirms that female inverts are hereditarily afflicted and neurologically diseased. Ellis assures his readers that the female invert is prone to violent crime, unusually predisposed to murder, and that "a considerable proportion of the number of cases in which inversion has led to crimes of violence... has been among women."¹² Ellis's female invert seems a disturbing category to which one might be relegated. Why did Hall choose Ellis's invert as an identificatory model, a textual reflection, for Stephen Gordon, when other less damning models were already available?

In July 1926, having decided to write a literary appeal for social compassion and understanding for sexual inversion, Hall began the accumulation of notes based on what she describes as "the latest and revised editions of the works of the highest authorities on sexual inversion, exclusive of the psychoanalysts."¹³ Hall's protagonist in her literary

appeal, Stephen Gordon, considers herself a congenital invert—a translation of the term used by Carl von Westphal, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, taken up by Havelock Ellis and other sexologists to describe the situation of women who seemed innately to prefer to dress, speak, and behave in a “masculine way.” In his Introduction to *The Well*, Ellis asserts that Hall’s novel “presents in a completely faithful and uncompromising form, one particular aspect of sexual life as it exists among us today.”¹⁴ Ellis’s statement perhaps implies that Hall’s depiction of Stephen Gordon’s lesbian identity did not waver from that propounded by Ellis himself, although it is also possible that Ellis may have simply assumed that the portrait of Stephen Gordon was accurate because Hall was an *out* and mannish invert herself. Lillian Faderman considers it was Radclyffe Hall who, more than any other writer, brought the congenitalists’ theories to popular fiction and, importantly, to popular culture.¹⁵ However, as Esther Newton contends, Hall, unlike the sexologists, presents the “pathology” from Stephen’s point of view.¹⁶

From Hall’s point of view, Stephen Gordon was intended to be read as a *true* invert: the invert destined to reveal the truth of lesbian identity and existence to a heterosexual audience. The revelation of truth, it would seem, was also aimed at putting an end to what Hall referred to as “the conspiracy of silence” surrounding lesbian existence. For example, in 1921, a bill intended to make lesbian practices illegal in Britain was voted down in the British parliament; female homosexuality was a worthy legal issue, but certain members of the House did not want to make public policy of a female deviance which they believed to be unknown to their wives and daughters. Other proofs of this conspiracy of silence (and the accuracy of Hall’s aim at it) might be deduced from a letter Virginia Woolf wrote to her sister Vanessa Bell that mocks

Leonard Woolf's mother's reaction to *The Well*. In Woolf's letter, her mother-in-law appears to speak a fractured re-iteration of Queen Victoria's fabled denial of lesbian existence:

And you may think me very foolish—I am seventy-six—but until I read this book I did not know that such things went on at all. I do not think they do. I have never heard of such things. When I was at school there was nothing like that. I was at boarding school for two years and I never heard of such a thing....¹⁷

Hall promised more than mere lesbian existence was to be proven by the pages of *The Well*; the very truth of female inversion was to be revealed.

In *The Life and Death of Radclyffe Hall*, Una Troubridge, Hall's long-time lover, recalls that before Hall undertook to write *The Well*, she approached Troubridge with the idea of a novel with an overtly lesbian hero. Troubridge, rather dramatically, remembers encouraging her lover to write "what was in her heart" about the plight of the invert, and that she would be pleased to "dwell with her in the palace of truth."¹⁸ Hall herself claimed in a June 1934 letter to Gordon Munson that she had written the novel to tell "the truth about one of the greatest tragidees that exists in the scheme of nature."¹⁹ Repeatedly throughout her correspondence to supporters and detractors alike, Hall refers to *The Well* as a repository of the truth, which needs to be exposed. One such letter was written to James Garvin, Troubridge's brother-in-law and editor of the *Observer*. In her letter, Hall petitions for Garvin's and the *Observer*'s support of her just-published novel, claiming "I have tried to bring the thing out into God's air and light—for the *Truth* must never be feared, since it is the truth."²⁰

Radclyffe Hall's novel became the subject of public and legal prosecution due to the incommensurability between sexual norms and the book's content. In attacking Hall's

novel, and indeed Hall herself, the detractors of *The Well* made it quite clear that they were defending themselves, and the vulnerable British populace, from the possible nefarious consequences which would result when the susceptible reader was lured by the seductions of the novel into the sexually unnatural practice or state of inversion. Prosser adds that by “broadcasting the unspeakable crime that it set out to censor, *The Well*’s trial crucially set in motion its history of being read as a lesbian novel.”²¹ Several feminist critics have agreed with Faderman’s contention that generations of lesbian readers were psychologically harmed by the gloom and doom of *The Well*; Faderman has further argued that, following the trend set by Hall, lesbian literature, until the 1960s, was full of self-doubt and self-loathing.²² Within the public and critical claims made around *The Well* it is not difficult to find homophobic claims. Indeed it is difficult to read the novel itself, criticism relating to the novel, or biographies of Hall without becoming acutely aware of this consistent refrain: everywhere here, sexual stigmatisation is charged, incurred, or suffered. However, Doan and Bland challenge some historians’ reading of sexology as only a disempowering model: “It is clearly the case, that sexology has contributed to the control of certain sexual behaviours and sexual subjectivities but it has also proved positive for many in its offer of identities and a language of expression.”²³

The language of expression of female inversion from Stephen’s point of view, would not appear to be in any way appealing, certainly not appealing enough to make *The Well* amongst the most infamous lesbian books since its publication in 1928. Only when the alternatives, those alternatives also propounded by the sexologists in question, are considered, can we gain an understanding of the specific and problematic impact of this book. Ellis’s definition, for example, of a *normal* woman suggests that average women

enjoy being sexually humiliated, raped, beaten, and physically and emotionally overpowered.²⁴ In defence of his absurd position, Ellis replies:

I am well aware that in thus asserting a certain tendency in women to delight in suffering pain—however careful and qualified the position I have taken—many estimable people will cry out that I am degrading the whole sex and generally supporting the “subjection of women.” But the day for academic discussion concerning the “subjection of women” has gone by. The tendency I have sought to make clear is too well established by the experience of normal and typical women—however numerous the exceptions may be—to be called into question. I would point out to those who would deprecate the influence of such facts in relation to social progress that nothing is gained by regarding women as simply men of smaller growth. They are not so: they have the laws of their own nature; their development must be along their own lines, and not along masculine lines. It is as true now as in Bacon’s day that we only learn to command nature by obeying her. . . . We can neither attain a sane view of life nor a sane social legislation of life unless we possess a just and accurate knowledge of the fundamental instincts upon which life is built.²⁵

Drawing upon anthropological sources, such as the works of Cesare Lombroso and Max Nordau,²⁶ Ellis introduces his meditation on modesty with the notion that “normal” women always have something of the primitive fear of the hunted about them and “that the woman who is lacking in this kind of fear [manifested in the western world as modesty] is lacking, also, in sexual attractiveness to the normal and average man.”²⁷

Resolving that “the normal manifestations of a woman’s sexual pleasure are exceedingly like pain,” Ellis condones rape as he paraphrases De Sade, and assures his readers that cries of pain and tears “are not so different from those of woman in the ecstasy of passion when she implores the man to desist though that is really the last thing she desires.”²⁸

Ellis effectively confirmed the *normal* woman as an innately frightened victim. In such a schema, the inverted woman appeared as victimiser—certainly a more powerful and active position. Interestingly, Noble’s historical account contextualises Ellis in the larger discourses of race and class: “the female invert was not merely a sexual subject but

always already a race- and class-specific entity. Thus, the threat of female deviance was safely displaced onto women who were always already considered to be socially marginal.”²⁹

Hall’s socially marginalised women leave a lot to be desired. Lilian Faderman has pointed out in *Surpassing the Love of Men*, “‘normal’ women are silly, evil, or weak in *The Well of Loneliness*.”³⁰ Faderman’s point is well taken, as it is made blatantly obvious in *The Well* that Lady Anna Gordon is definitively not a good enough mother, Collins the housemaid is cheerfully selfish, Violet Antrim is a rather dithery simpleton, Mrs. Angela Crosby is evilly manipulative, and Lady Massey is more concerned with keeping up appearances than friendships.

However, it also needs to be noted that the lesbian women of the novel fare little better. Puddle, Stephen’s governess is a stalwart support for Stephen during childhood, but when Stephen grows to an adult she finds her former governess without any direction of her own, and, really, rather tiresome. Some of the other models of female inversion, offered in the novel at Valérie Seymour’s Paris salon, are equally depressing portraits. At the Quai Voltaire salon (a thinly disguised portrait of Natalie Barney’s infamous salon) Stephen and her partner Mary meet a group of women who, although “the percentage of brains was generally well above the average,”³¹ seem rather bedraggled. There is Pat from Boston, whose demeanour “still vaguely suggested a New England school-marm,” whose “ankles were too strong and too heavy,”³² and whose time is spent collecting insects and muttering vaguely about General Custer’s last ride. There is Jamie from the Highlands of Scotland who was “a trifle unhinged” and whose “eyes were red-rimmed and strained in expression.”³³ There is Jamie’s girlfriend Barbara, also from the

Highlands, but who evidences little Scottish hardiness, and instead displays an unfortunate propensity for “a woman’s clinging dependence.”³⁴ There is Wanda, an alcoholic Polish painter, who daubs at huge canvases to suppress and repress her sexual desire and is metaphorically transsexual in so far as “if she dressed like a woman she looked like a man, if she dressed like a man she looked like a woman.”³⁵ There is Margaret, a poet who “seemed likely enough to end up in the workhouse.”³⁶ Finally, there is Valérie herself who brings all of these people together, but “did nothing, and at all times said very little, feeling no urge towards philanthropy.”³⁷ To Stephen, who is in her author’s mind, “the finest type of inverted woman,” this motley crew of women was second-rate. Even though, in her fear of isolating Mary, Stephen

to her own kind [...] turned and was made very welcome, for no bond is more binding than that of affliction... her vision stretched beyond to the day when happier folk would also accept her.³⁸

The masculine, wealthy, handsome, morally upright, religious, and faithful Stephen is a cut above not only the “normal” women of the novel, but also, it would seem, *all* women in the novel.

What I would like to suggest here is that Radclyffe Hall, in imaginatively creating a hero to be the finest type of inverted woman, took great pains to point out the innate masculinity of her hero and did so through externalising from Stephen all characteristics that were feminine and investing them within other female characters. Complicit in that externalisation, that de-feminisation, of Stephen is a demonisation of the feminine. The women of *The Well* are a sad and sorry lot. The characteristics that seem to be included on the roster of feminine traits, according to the evidence offered by the behaviours of the female characters of *The Well*, are a terrible list of frailties, inconstancies, immoralities,

and idiocies. Radclyffe Hall's portrait of women as offered in the book suggests that the only valuable option for Stephen is indeed the masculine inverted woman. To create the "true" and "finest" type of inverted woman, Hall felt impelled to celebrate the masculine woman and denigrate the feminine one: "[Stephen's] disavowal of the community of inverts is in fact underwritten by her support of masculinist, aristocratic, nationalist norms—the very stands by which she is judged an outcast and a freak."³⁹ Stephen is admirable, because she is *like* her father—honest, moral, caring, intelligent, devout—and *unlike* her mother who is seen as selfish, uneducated, manipulative, and intolerant. The positive characteristics of characters in *The Well* are implicitly and explicitly labelled "masculine." What seems to emerge is that masculinity is given value and femininity is violently disparaged.

Shelly Skinner argues that as an emerging identity, early twentieth-century lesbianism had no lexicon for its own self-definition, and could therefore only name itself with the derogatory terms that heterosexual society provided.⁴⁰ For example, until Stephen discovers the word "invert" in her dead father's library she has no language to name herself. It is within that first recognition of herself as a member of a larger group that Stephen Gordon's adult character development is based. Esther Newton furthers such an argument when she suggests that Hall and other feminists embraced the congenitalists' image of the "mannish lesbian" and the discourse of the sexologists because they wanted to break free of the asexual model of nineteenth-century romantic female friendship.⁴¹ In fact, at the trial of *The Well*, Radclyffe Hall became furious when her solicitor, Norman Birkett KC, suggested that *The Well* described only normal friendship between two women, that it was sentimental, rather than physical, in nature. Faderman argues that the

reason that Hall seized on the congenitalists' theories was that of all the sexologists—and there were quite a few of them—the congenitalists were the only group who did not propose or purport to “cure” lesbianism.⁴² And, indeed, Hall's use of the congenitalists' theories creates Stephen Gordon as a “mannish lesbian,” pitiable perhaps, but not reformable; Stephen is active, moral, and sexual.

Stephen disowns identification with the present and future potentiality of her body to embrace a snipped and parsed medical model created and completed in the past. This troubling turnabout from potential to prescription signals Stephen's willingness, perhaps even her eagerness, to bow to what she imagines to be her preordained fate. Because Stephen gratefully accepts that her fate has already been authored by sexologists and subsequently authorised by her father, there is little, if any, room for Stephen to differ from the paternal model. She will be the invert that her dead father believed her to be. She will, in effect, live up to the fragmented and fragmenting ideality of the medical model of the invert. Stephen's story does not end there. The interpellating frame of the sexologists' model is a limited frame that cannot encompass Stephen's identity; it only has the capacity to fragment her character further.

Upon viewing her seventeen-year-old nude body in the mirror, Stephen feels an overwhelming desire to injure that reflected body. Immediately following this unhappy episode at the mirror, Stephen goes into Sir Philip's library. She is looking for solace and comfort, but instead she finds one of Krafft-Ebing's books, possibly *Psychopathia Sexualis*, on the bottom shelf of a locked bookcase:

Krafft-Ebing—she had never heard of that author before. All the same she opened the battered old book, then she looked more closely, for there on its margins were notes in her father's small, scholarly hand and she saw that her own name appeared in those notes.... Then suddenly she had got

to her feet and was talking aloud—she was talking to her father; “you knew! All the time you knew this thing, but because of your pity you wouldn’t tell me. Oh, Father—and there are so many of us—thousands of miserable, unwanted people, who have no right to love, no right to compassion because they’re maimed, hideously maimed and ugly—God’s cruel; He let us get flawed in the making.”⁴³

In the text of a scientific treatise, Stephen Gordon finds herself; she sees her own life represented in her father’s marginalia. If she will experience life as a mismatched soul and body, Krafft-Ebing and her father’s notes nevertheless offer her a unifying scientific definition of herself. Stephen’s identity is named, but what is ultimately more significant in this moment of identification are the gaps of resistance that occur.

In “The Mirror Stage” Lacan writes: “development [at the mirror stage] is lived like a temporal dialectic that decisively projects the formation of the individual into history.”⁴⁴ The infant’s anticipated future, therefore, becomes history; in effect, the infant’s development of identity is no longer a “natural” progression but determined in that moment of identification by “the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject’s entire mental development.”⁴⁵

Lacan’s mirror stage is a parable of the developing child’s initial recognition and identification of itself as a whole being, distinct and separable from, but reflected in, the mirror image. In that recognition are bound the future possibilities of independence that distinction holds. The promise of those possibilities incurs what Lacan calls “jubilation.”⁴⁶ Stephen, however, never experiences such reflective jubilation; indeed there is a distinct lack of jubilation when considering her own textual reflection. In fact, it is left to her beloved governess Puddle to respond jubilantly with the possibilities that inversion may hold for Stephen. In *Reading Lacan* Jane Gallop comments: “the jubilation, the enthusiasm is tied to the temporal dialectic by which she [the infant]

appears *already* to be what she will *only later become*.”⁴⁷ If the infant in Lacan’s parable is captivated by the misleading independence of the mirror image (an independence which the infant has not yet achieved) and anticipates the pleasure of that independence to the extent that she is willing to suspend her disbelief, the infant begins to experience the pleasure of the future in the present. In Stephen’s case, assuming her textualised mirror image, identifying herself with and through the solidifying reflection there in *Psychopathia Sexualis*, she does not pleasurably experience what “she will only later become.” Rather, she despairs at seeing herself the way that others have always seen her, and, on the contrary, sinks into despair. Still one may see, in this emblematic moment of reading, that Krafft-Ebing’s text goes some distance towards determining not simply who Stephen *is* at the moment of discovery, but who she will become. The jubilation of the mirror stage is suddenly cast as the anxiety and defensiveness of the mirror stage, which demands the donning of unwieldy psychic armour. Reading Stephen’s experience in the library as an episode somewhat analogous to Lacan’s “mirror stage” it becomes evident that in writing *about* the life of the female invert of the past, Krafft-Ebing wrote the life *of* the future invert. In *The Well of Loneliness*, the mirroring of Stephen Gordon in her father’s textbook not only reveals that Philip Gordon knew before Stephen Gordon that Stephen was an invert, but also interestingly suggests that in finding herself already written, already known, by God, Krafft-Ebing and Sir Philip, Stephen’s development might actually be a *natural* progression, though over-determined and fraught.

In “The Lure of the Mannish Lesbian,” Teresa De Lauretis suggests that the mirror scene dramatically depicts a failure of narcissism, which De Lauretis attributes to Stephen’s inability to manifest the normative feminine body that her mother might have

been able to love.⁴⁸ Taking a step outward from de Lauretis's argument, which focuses on Stephen, it seems productive to posit Stephen's fantasy of violence upon her own body as constituted by Radclyffe Hall's reproduction of homophobic violence

Read as Hall's authorial trope rather than as Stephen's psychological truth, the mirror scene is readable as Hall's response to a projected lesbian image, stained and contained in the distorted fun-house mirrors of sexology and cultural prejudice. I am not arguing that Stephen Gordon is Radclyffe Hall; what I want to insist is that Stephen Gordon is an important fantasy of inversion created by Hall which offered her some sort of satisfaction. Stephen Gordon is not Radclyffe Hall's symptom, but rather an imaginative fabrication created in the transitional space of the novel, which is thus available to us to read, not so much biographically as philosophically. Among other things, Stephen Gordon is a textual object which offers Hall (and her readers) a space in which to play with the ways in which her (and their) fantasies of a gendered identity of invert might be lived. And it is in this space of identity formation and play, that what becomes most apparent is the impossibility of capturing that depiction firmly.

What does it mean for Stephen Gordon to find herself a part, or to project herself as a part, of a group of "miserable people," a group defined, and indeed presented to Stephen, by the masculine medical authority of texts, which have, in effect, been validated by her father's marginalia? In *The Well*, after Stephen Gordon is seen reading various texts of the sexologists, she emerges from her father's library with a new lexicon, a new authoritative ideology which binds her own experiences into the sexologists' model—in effect locks her reflection in the homophobic sexologists' mirror: the mirror that, far from innocently "reflecting" Stephen, reinserts and refracts a stigmatising gaze

that Stephen, Hall and we as readers are, paradoxically, condemned simultaneously both to take up and to reject. Importantly, Stephen, who was previously scrambling for an understanding of her identity without the framing discourse of sexology, is now given an over-determined model which erases, expels, and elides parts of her self and its relationships to the outside world.

The reader reading of Stephen's discovery in the library, in 1928, 2006, or the years in between, thus sees a doubled reflection. Stephen might see herself reflected in the margins of the sexologists' texts, but the reader sees Stephen Gordon and *Psychopathia Sexualis* reflecting back and forth into and onto each other imperfectly. Indeed, the reader is not given any portion of the sexological texts; we are simply told that Stephen's name is written in the margins, and that Stephen sees an echo of her own experiences in the texts. What the reader is presented with is a complex reflection of Stephen: Stephen as the sexological double, Stephen as invert, and Stephen as textual production. Unlike the reflections of lesbianism presented to Stephen by the sexologists' texts, and Anna Gordon's narrow and hateful vision of the lesbian, Radclyffe Hall, in *The Well*, provides not only a discursive production of the invert but also of the invert struggling to perform as human within a narrow conception of femaleness and maleness. Stephen Gordon is a textual object, which offers Hall (and her readers) a space in which to play with the ways in which her (and their) fantasies of a gendered identity as invert might be lived. And it is in this space of identity formation and play, that what becomes most apparent is the political risk of any attempt to read that depiction as providing a moment of salutary recognition.

Notes

¹ Hereafter this text will be referred to as *The Well*.

² Heather K. Love, "Spoiled Identity: Stephen Gordon's Loneliness and Difficulties of Queer History" (*GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 7.4, 2001), 487.

³ In this article, I make use of the term "invert" as a product of an historical account of medical discourses. Current debates locate Stephen Gordon in discussions of transgender/transsexual models. For further reading on these debates please see Jean Bobby Noble, *Masculinities without Men? Female Masculinity in Twentieth-Century Fictions* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004); Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

⁴ Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, reprint (New York: Surgeons Books, 1925).

⁵ The antipathic sexual instinct is roughly equitable with Benkert's 1869 category of "homosexuality" or Carl von Westphal's 1870 notion of the "contrary sexual impulse." It might appear somewhat perverse that Krafft-Ebing offers a medical opinion on female inversion as it related to courts of law, as most countries in which his book was distributed had nineteenth-century legislation outlawing male homosexuality but ignored lesbianism. However, in Austria, where Krafft-Ebing resided and wrote, lesbianism was subject to the same legal restrictions and penalties as male homosexuality. Ruthann Robson, *Lesbian (Out)law: Survival under the Rule of Law* (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand, 1992) and Louise Crompton, "The Myth of Lesbian Impunity" (*Journal of Homosexuality* 6.1-2, 1980, 11-25) are excellent historical examinations which challenge the notion that lesbianism has existed through the centuries with legal impunity.

⁶ The threat of degeneration was an anxiety which plagued Victorian and early modern social scientists. The anxiety stemmed, in part, from a belief in a "forward" or "progressive" Darwinian model of evolution. There was seeming proof amongst the poor, the syphilitic, the alcoholic, and the criminal that man might also "de-evolve" or degenerate. In 1892 Max Nordau, in a book entitled *Degeneration*, characterises the last decades of the nineteenth-century:

One epoch of history is unmistakably in its decline, and another is announcing its approach. There is a sound of rending in every tradition, and it is as though the morrow would not link itself with today. Things as they are totter and plunge, and they are suffered to reel and fall because man is weary, and there is no faith that is worth an effort to uphold them (Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, New York: Fertig, 1968, 5-6).

For an interesting and wide-ranging examination of the impact that notions of degeneration enacted upon literature and the social sciences, I would recommend Edward J. Chamberlain and Sander Gilman, eds. *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985)—a text quite distinct from Nordau's book of the same title.

⁷ In its original version of 1886, *Psychopathia Sexualis* was a modest 110 pages comprised of 45 case-histories, but by 1903, the twelfth edition of the study had swelled to 238 case-histories which were described on 437 pages. The twelfth edition of Krafft-Ebing's case-studies was prefaced with the author's remark that the book's "commercial success is the best proof that large numbers of unfortunate people find in its pages instruction and relief in the frequently enigmatical manifestations of sexual life."

⁸ Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* (Toronto: Doubleday, 1990), 106.

⁹ See Exodus 20.5, Exodus 34.7, Numbers 14.18, and Deuteronomy 5.9

¹⁰ Magnus Hirschfeld, *Sexual Anomalies and Perversions, Physical and Psychological Development and Treatment: A Summary of the Works of the Professor Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, Compiled as a Humble Memorial by his Pupils* (London: Torch, 1948).

¹¹ Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: William Morrow, 1981), 241.

¹² Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, vol. 6 (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis Co., 1913), 119.

¹³ Hall's notebooks, qtd. in Faderman, 317.

¹⁴ Hall, ii.

¹⁵ Faderman, 317.

¹⁶ Esther Newton, "The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman" in Martin Duberman, et al., eds., *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York: Penguin, 1989), 290.

- ¹⁷ Virginia Woolf, Nigel Nicolson, and Joanne Trautmann, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, 1st American ed., vol. 3 (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 525.
- ¹⁸ Lady Una [Vincenzo] Troubridge, *The Life of Radclyffe Hall* (New York: Arno, 1975), 82. Troubridge's recollections of her advice to her lover were written years after Hall had died, and it is possible that her willingness to dwell "in the palace of truth" was a rather over-the-top poetic notion which emerged *after* the publication and trial of *The Well of Loneliness*.
- ¹⁹ Quoted in Diana Souhami, *The Trials of Radclyffe Hall* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1998), 146. Hall was dyslexic, so occasionally her spelling is erratic, as in this spelling of "tragedies."
- ²⁰ Hall's emphasis; quoted in Souhami, 172. Garvin, in the end, did not offer his support to *The Well*, and *The Observer* did not review Hall's novel.
- ²¹ Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 136.
- ²² Faderman, 322-333.
- ²³ Laura Doan and Lucy Bland, eds., *Sexology Uncensored: The Documents of Sexual Science* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), 4.
- ²⁴ Ellis, *Studies*, vol. 3, 84.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 103.
- ²⁶ Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (New York: Fertig, 1968).
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.
- ²⁹ Jean Bobby Noble, *Masculinities without Men? Female Masculinity in Twentieth-Century Fictions* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004), 14.
- ³⁰ Faderman, 320.
- ³¹ Hall, 349.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 350.
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 353.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 351.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 352.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 356.
- ³⁹ Love, 3.
- ⁴⁰ Shelly Skinner, "The House in Order: Lesbian Identity and *The Well of Loneliness*" (*Women's Studies* 23, 1994), 19-33.
- ⁴¹ Newton, 283. Esther Newton estimates in "The Mythic Mannish Lesbian" that, from about 1900 onward, the public symbol of the new social/sexual category of lesbian was the "mannish lesbian" who dressed and behaved in a manner which had been hitherto designated and jealously guarded as exclusively masculine. Currently, a debate still simmers over the significance of the "Mannish Lesbian" and present day "butch" aesthetics. Was the "mannish lesbian" a distorted representation produced by anti-feminists and sexologists intent upon shaming and frightening the new women out of her trousers and the work-force, and back into skirts and the home, as Lillian Faderman suggests (Faderman, 239-240)? Or is Sandra Gilbert more accurate in her assessment of the mannish lesbian as, at least in part, a strategically deployed representation of self that some new women used to assert their refusal of the bourgeois Victorian feminine role? See Gilbert, "Costumes of the Mind: Transvestism as Metaphor in Modern Literature" (*Critical Inquiry* 7.2, 1980) 391-417. The question still lingers as to whether the sexologists created the mannish lesbian, or whether she, in a meaningful way, constructed herself.
- ⁴² Faderman, 317.
- ⁴³ Hall, 204.
- ⁴⁴ Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage As Formative of the Function of the I As Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), 4.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1-2.
- ⁴⁷ Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 78.
- ⁴⁸ Teresa De Lauretis, *The Practice of Love* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).