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*The Spectral Lesbian in
Radclyffe Hall's
The Well of Loneliness:
A Historical Perspective*

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In *The Apparitional Lesbian*, Terry Castle effectively demonstrates that to investigate “the literary history of lesbianism is to confront, from the start, something ghostly: an impalpability, a misting over, an evaporation, or ‘whiting out’ of possibility” (28). As her first example of a lesbian love story, Castle — a specialist in eighteenth-century literature — offers us Daniel Defoe's *The Apparition of Mrs Veal* (1706). In her summary of this ghostly tale, Castle relates how Mrs. Veal pays a surprise visit to her long lost friend, Mrs Bargrave, who, “overcome with joy, . . . moves to kiss her” on the lips (29). But, writes Defoe: “Mrs Veal drew her hand cross her own eyes, and said, ‘I am not very well,’ and so waved it” (Castle 29). Nevertheless, after reading a devotional poem on Christian love, entitled “Friendship in Perfection,” Mrs Veal assures her dear friend, “I shall love you forever,” before leaving (29).

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Although the emphasis on the poem clearly attempts to frame the relation between Mrs Veal and Mrs Bargrave as one of friendship and thereby suspend any suggestion of sexual desire, Castle is quite justified in reminding us "that Defoe sometimes hints at erotic relationships between women elsewhere in his fiction — witness *Roxana*" (30). Yet, as the title of this bizarre story implies, Mrs Bargrave discovers that she has actually been visited by the ghost of Mrs Veal, who died the day before making her unexpected appearance. Significantly, Castle suggests that "to be taken for a ghost is to be 'credited' with unnatural desires;" therefore, it follows that to "'be a ghost' is to long, unspeakably, after one's own sex" (32).

While aware of "dealing in paradoxes," Castle wants "to argue that it is in fact the very ghostliness — the seeming ineffability — of the connection between Mrs. Bargrave and Mrs Veal that makes *The Apparition of Mrs Veal* an archetypally lesbian story" (32). She elaborates:

The kiss that doesn't happen, the kiss that *can't* happen, because one of the women involved has become a ghost (or else is direly haunted by ghosts) seems . . . a crucial metaphor for the history of lesbian literary representation since the early eighteenth century. . . . [For] until 1900 lesbianism manifests itself in the Western literary imagination primarily as an absence, as chimera or *amor impossibilia* — a kind of love that, by definition, cannot exist. Even when "there" . . . it is "not there:" inhabiting only a recessive, indeterminate, misted-over space in the collective literary psyche. Like the kiss between Mrs Bargrave and Mrs Veal, it is reduced to a ghost effect: to ambiguity and taboo. It cannot be perceived, except apparitionally (30-31).

Most importantly, Castle is proposing that "the literary history of lesbianism . . . is first of all a history of derealization," in which female same-sex desire is denied carnality (34). Furthermore, she maintains that "in nearly all the art of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, lesbianism, or its possibility, can only be represented to the degree that it is simultaneously 'derealized,' through a blanching authorial infusion of spectral metaphors" (34). To support her thesis, Castle provides us with convincing readings of Diderot's *La Religieuse*, Théophile Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, and Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*, to name just a few of the numerous literary examples she cites.

Moreover, as consistently as female same-sex desire is only allowed representation as a ghost effect that denies the possibility of bodily fulfillment, Castle maintains that "the demonic opposite is also true: to love another woman is to lose one's solidity in the world, to evanesce, and fade into the spectral" (32).

For “[w]hen we turn to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fiction,” Castle continues:

The apparitional lesbian is equally ubiquitous — even in works such as Henry James's *The Bostonians* (1886) in which the homophobic fantasy that generates (and evacuates) her is disguised within a more realistic and neutral-seeming representational context. . . . The ascetical Olive, who ‘glides’ through rooms and greets strangers with a freezing touch of her slender white hand . . . is indeed the ghost-woman of James's novel, chilling all around her with her preternatural-seeming passion for the lovely and puerile Verena (38-39).

“Unable in the end to compete” — in what Castle refers to as the “most crudely embodied of Jamesian erotic struggles — Olive simply ‘disappears’ on the last page of the novel, retreating to the unseen stage of the auditorium” (38-39), where she, too, fades into the spectral.

Indeed, Castle argues that “the spectral lesbian” of literary culture, like the feminist, Olive Chancellor, “is ultimately expelled from the ‘real’ world of fiction — as if vaporized by the forces of heterosexual propriety” (Castle 7). The ghosting of the lesbian, Castle concludes, proves to be nothing less than an effective means of exorcising “the threat of female homosexuality” (34). Moreover, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg astutely notes that by the early twentieth century, “charges of lesbianism had become a common way to discredit women professionals, reformers, and educators — and the feminist political, reform, and educational institutions they had founded” (372). For lesbian identity, once established, also served as “a politically efficacious phantasm” (Butler, “Imitation” 13). Quite rightly, Castle points out that the “lesbian represents a threat to patriarchal protocol: Western civilization has for centuries been haunted by a fear of ‘women without men’ — of women indifferent or resistant to male desire” (4-5). She adds:

So typically hostile and oppressive are the uses to which the spectral metaphor is put, one might almost speak of a ‘great tradition’ of antilesbian writing — a dubious shadow canon of works in which women who desire other women repeatedly find themselves vaporized by metaphor and translated into (empty) fictional space (45).

Castle's study provides a valuable introduction to just such a history of “antilesbian literature,” in which the possibility of female same-sex desire is subjected to “derealization.”

However, I would like to propose that the literary history of the ghosting of the lesbian may correspond more accurately to the emergence and development of a distinct lesbian identity, that "the apparitional lesbian" Castle uncovers may actually be the faint outline of her first appearance. Significantly, Castle determines that this spectral trend begins in the early eighteenth century. In his ground breaking *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1, Michel Foucault argues that prior to the late seventeenth century, sexual identity was not constituted in the way that it is today; he maintains that sexuality is a modern historical construct, a product of the proliferation of discourses centered on sex that began to emerge over the course of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In these discourses the sexes were redefined much more rigorously as incommensurate, binary opposites (Laqueur viii). Consequently, evidence of so-called masculine characteristics in the female, including bodily desire, came to be perceived as evidence of moral corruption, as witnessed in Samuel Richardson's monumental *Clarissa* (1747-8), in which he defined femininity as the essence of virtue itself. The progressive exclusion of same-sex desire from the newly determined heterosexual ideal eventually culminated in the psychological, psychiatric and medical category of the homosexual by the end of the nineteenth century (Foucault 43). Crucially, this is not to say that same-sex acts did not occur prior to or during this period; rather, Foucault is arguing that homosexuality only became a discrete form of sexual identity when one's sexual practice became interiorized, thereby determining the very source of one's identity (43).

At this point, it seems worthwhile to turn to the feminist philosopher, Judith Butler, whose insights into the founding repudiation of heterosexual identification are particularly relevant. In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler proposes that "the heterosexual imperative enables certain sexed identifications and forecloses and/or disavows other identifications" (3). She maintains that "the materialization of a given sex will centrally concern the regulation of identificatory practices such that the identification with the abjection of sex will be persistently disavowed" (3). In other words, in order to assume an identity that conforms to the established norm, one must disavow the possibility of homosexual identification. Butler argues that it is the force of this "repudiation which creates the valence of 'abjection' and its status for the subject as a threatening spectre." Remarkably, Butler also relies on the ghost metaphor Castle employs so extensively.

But, in her Foucaultian reading, Butler shifts the emphasis significantly, focusing instead on how the specter of the lesbian is produced. As she sees it, "the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, 'inside' the subject as its own founding repudiation" (3). Butler suggests that it

is the enforced, artificial coherence of heterosexual categorization that causes it to be haunted by the "very instabilities that the categories effectively produce and foreclose" (4), instabilities which then threaten to disrupt the fragile construction of heterosexual identity. Thus, we can view Castle's apparitional lesbian as a manifestation of the return of the repressed, the haunting effect of the heterosexual female's repudiated same-sex desire, an effect that became increasingly intelligible over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Significantly, while Foucault maintains that discourse transmits and produces power — engendering the very effects that it names — he stresses how this "complex and unstable process" also creates "a point of resistance," "a starting point for an opposing strategy" (101). Indeed, he suggests that as much as "silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions; . . . they also loosen its holds and provide for relatively obscure areas of tolerance" from which an opposing strategy can develop (101). As Castle demonstrates, it is within these obscure areas that we can first detect the emergent figure of the lesbian; however, Castle focuses on how the concealment of lesbian possibility has been culturally imposed and how society has been less than tolerant when the lesbian attempted to reveal herself. She remarks:

One will search in vain for any unambiguously lesbian heroines in the annals of modern civilization: from Sappho to Greta Garbo, Queen Christina to Eleanor Roosevelt, virtually every distinguished woman suspected of homosexuality has had her biography sanitized at one point or another in the interest of order and public safety. Lesbian contributions to culture have been routinely suppressed or ignored, lesbian-themed works of art censored and destroyed, and would-be apologists — like Radclyffe Hall in the 1920s — silenced and dismissed (5).

Of course, what distinguishes *The Well of Loneliness*¹ is that female same-sex desire is finally granted bodily expression: it is presented as natural — although abnormal. Radclyffe Hall makes an earnest plea for acceptance and inclusion within the existent patriarchal hierarchy by bravely defending Stephen Gordon's claim to "the ultimate male privilege: the enjoyment of women's erotic love" (Newton 290).

Consequently, *The Well of Loneliness* was ruled obscene under the provisions of the 1857 Obscene Publications Act in England and banned shortly after its publication in 1928 (Castle 5). According to this law, the definition of obscenity ran as follows: "whether the tendency of the matter charged as ob-

¹ Radclyffe Hall. *The Well of Loneliness* (New York: Sun Dial Press, 1928).

scenity is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences, and into whose hands a publication of this sort might fall" (Dickson 156). Although the ban on the novel was not successfully challenged until 1949 (Castle 5), *The Well of Loneliness* was immediately reprinted in Paris in 1928 and eventually translated into eleven languages (Troubridge 94). In the United States, some 50,000 copies were sold within the first year of its publication (Dickinson 175). Ironically, the scandal surrounding this novel actually helped promote it.

Castle, however, cuts to the very heart of the matter: "the very frequency with which the lesbian has been 'apparitionalized' in the Western imagination also testifies to her peculiar cultural power. Only something very palpable — at a deeper level — has the capacity to 'haunt' us so thoroughly" (7). Castle proposes that Radclyffe Hall may have grasped this point when she relied on the ghost metaphor at the end of her novel. She writes:

When the melancholy heroine Stephen Gordon imagines herself surrounded by a hallucinatory "legion" of spirits — the ghosts of all women, past and present, who have suffered over their homosexuality — the true canniness of the metaphor abruptly reveals itself. Communing with her 'unbidden guests' in a weird, visionary convulsion, a sort of fantastic orgasm of the spirit, Stephen's own homosexual being is mysteriously affirmed. She undergoes a quickening — her "barren womb" becomes "fruitful." And in the novel's famous last line, the ghosts begin to speak through her, as in one ecstatic and thunderous voice: "Give us also the right to our existence!" (7).

For over the course of the novel, Stephen learns how women who love other women have been hidden from history and excluded from society. Castle concludes that "within the very imagery of negativity lies the possibility of recovery — a way of conjuring up, or bringing back into view, that which has been denied. Take the metaphor far enough," she insists, "and the invisible will rematerialize; the spirit will become flesh" (7-8).

Although Radclyffe Hall makes a bold and powerful case by confronting the stigma of lesbianism head on, in what follows I would like to explore how her particular representation of the overtly masculine lesbian participates in excluding women-identified lesbians by appropriating the phallogocentric discourse of patriarchal authority. Indeed, Catherine R. Stimpson suggests that Hall made an implicit, perhaps unconscious pact with her culture by adopting the narrative of damnation in exchange for the right to write for the public (367). In an attempt to ennoble Stephen through self-sacrifice, Hall allows Stephen's lover, Mary Llewellyn, to be "vaporized by the forces of heterosexual propriety" at the novel's

conclusion, thus perpetuating the pattern of "derealization" that Castle identifies. In her enthusiasm for Hall's accomplishment, Castle glosses over this relevant point.

Without a doubt, Castle is right to argue that the literary representation of female same-sex desire had been relegated to obscurity prior to the advent of Radclyffe Hall's novel. What is problematic is Castle's insistence that lesbianism, "in the flagrantly sexualized sense that we usually understand the term today," is not a recent invention (8). Castle, in fact, refers to the theory "popularized by historians of sexuality influenced by the late Michel Foucault — which holds that lesbianism . . . is by and large a fabrication of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century male sexologists," a theory she flatly rejects. Castle sums up the argument as follows:

Before Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis, Sigmund Freud, and others "invented" the notion of female sexual deviance around 1900, . . . there was no such thing as lesbian identity, nor any self-avowedly 'homosexual' behavior on the part of individual women. The lesbian only became possible, supposedly, after she was "produced" by turn-of-the-century clinicians. The argument is bolstered by the fact that lesbian and homosexual are indeed relatively recent terms, first given currency by medical writers in the later nineteenth century. What did women do who happened to desire one another before the crucial nomenclature appeared? According to the most extreme proponents of the sexological model, they mainly sat about doing needlework, pressing flowers into albums, and writing romantic letters to one another. If they ever got into bed together, it was strictly platonic: a matter of a few cuddles and "darlings" and a lot of epistemic confusion (8).

However Foucault's followers may have (mis)interpreted his work, this is not what Foucault is suggesting. For the purpose of clarity, it seems appropriate to quote him at length.

As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. It was consubstantial with him, less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature. We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized — Westphal's famous article of 1870 on "contrary sexual sensations" can stand as its date of birth — less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself. Homosexuality ap-

peared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species (43).

Foucault is arguing that a significant change took place when the practice of same-sex acts came to constitute a distinct homosexual identity. Despite the fact that she does not address lesbianism *per se*, in her essay, "Discourses of Sexuality and Subjectivity," Smith-Rosenberg points out that "[w]hile early medical students of the perverse had focused almost exclusively upon male homosexuality, by the mid-1880s . . . the lesbian became a critical figure within the new scientific representation of sexuality" (269). Of particular relevance is that according to the early medical model, homosexuality, whether male or female, was characterized as an inversion of gender, which is precisely what we find in Radclyffe Hall's representation of Stephen Gordon: an invert.

Indeed, Foucault's description of the emergent homosexual category parallels Hall's representation of Stephen Gordon to an extent that is most uncanny: for *The Well of Loneliness* reads like a fictionalized case history. To begin with, as absurd as it may seem, we are told how Stephen, with her narrow hips and wide shoulders, resembled a "tadpole" at birth (5) in order to help establish that she belongs to a "species" that is distinct from the heterosexual female "norm." Furthermore, we are informed that as a child, Stephen looks exactly like a boy, a miniature reproduction of her father, Sir Philip (13). Since this likeness defies the culturally determined notion of femininity, her mother considers it an outrage. To make matters worse, Stephen hates "dresses and sashes, and ribbons, and small coral beads, and open work stockings" (14), all the things a proper young lady should wear. She even hates dolls. And because she prefers to dress up to imitate male heroes, Stephen is labeled "a queer kid" (14).

To further arouse our suspicions, at seven Stephen falls in love with the voluptuous and physically demonstrative housemaid (10). In spite of the fact that Collins may represent the only mother figure available to Stephen, since her own mother cruelly rejects her, this is meant to serve as evidence of Stephen's innate sexual orientation. Perhaps most tellingly, Stephen admits to her father that she wants to become a man (21). Sir Philip, who loves her deeply despite having wanted a son — hence her name — buys Stephen a pony for Christmas. However, a minor scandal ensues when Stephen insists on riding astride in breeches, which she finds more natural (37). Stephen is also intensely envious of the son of a family friend, since she perceives all too clearly "that being a boy constitutes a privilege in life . . ." (46). Although this may read more like a feminist critique of

patriarchy, in that Stephen clearly seems to be challenging gender dichotomies, as we shall see, she is not; for "the novel depends structurally on the maintenance of gender difference," in particular, traditional heterosexual codes (Farwell 97).

In her discussion of the nineteenth-century sexologist, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Smith-Rosenberg refers to his canonical text, tellingly entitled, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, in which he "categorizes lesbians into four increasingly deviant and masculine types" (Newton 287).

Each category fused sexual, physiological, and social characteristics. In his first category he included women who "did not betray their anomaly by external appearance or by mental (masculine) sexual characteristics." They were, however, responsive to the approaches of more masculine-appearing and -behaving women. The second classification of lesbians included women with a "strong preference for male garments." By the third state, "inversion is fully developed, the woman so acting assumes a definitely masculine role." The fourth stage . . . represented "the extreme grade of degenerative homosexuality" (Smith-Rosenberg 269).

In this final stage, the only evidence of the female sex are the genital organs. Curiously, Krafft-Ebing identified lesbianism more closely with social behaviors and physical appearance than with sexual behavior; in particular, he considered "masculine" physiological traits and the rejection of conventional female roles as symptomatic of lesbianism (Smith-Rosenberg 269). Although Stephen is still a virgin, we can already begin to see how she bears a resemblance to the more extreme stages of female homosexual "deviance," those which Krafft-Ebing maintained can be recognized in those females "who dress in the fashion of men, or pursue the sports and pastimes of their male acquaintances" (269).

Stephen, in fact, takes up gymnastics and fencing, and becomes a star pupil. Despite her mother's disapproval — she hated "all that sort of thing for girls" (60) — Stephen developed "an interest that centered entirely in her body," having temporarily discovered her body for a thing to be cherished (60). But, as the novel progresses, Stephen comes to hate her body for the very difference it signifies, a difference others perceive as unnatural. As Esther Newton points out, "*The Well* explores the self-hatred and doubt inherent in defining oneself as a 'sexual deviant.' For in doing so, the lesbian accepts an invidious distinction between herself and heterosexual women" (291). In her despair, Stephen finds that "the loneliest place in this world is the no-man's-land of sex" (85); for Stephen occupies that forbidden space that divides the sexes into binary opposites:

as a female invert, she manifests the characteristics culturally attributed to the male gender while being of the female sex. In this sense, Stephen clearly transgresses established gender codes. Stephen's father, who understands and accepts that she is not like other girls, wants her to develop her mind as well as her body and warns her, "you mayn't find life at all easy . . . and books are good friends" (63). For Sir Philip has long taken to locking himself up in his study, where he secretly reads the works of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, Krafft-Ebing, and other nineteenth-century sexologists. Significantly, Krafft-Ebing "maintained that the true invert was born with his or her condition" however abnormal and undesirable that condition may be (Faderman 314).

In order to legitimize her novel's claim that inversion is congenital, Radclyffe Hall relies on what Foucault calls a reverse discourse, in which "homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturalness' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified" as deviant, perverted and degenerate (101). Lillian Faderman, citing Radclyffe Hall's letters, relates how Hall, in preparation for writing *The Well of Loneliness*, compiled a set of notes based on "the latest and revised editions of the works of the highest authorities on sexual inversion, exclusive of the psychoanalysts" who held out the possibility of a "cure" (Faderman 317). Hall's "authorities were all Krafft-Ebing disciples such as Havelock Ellis, Iwan Bloch, and Magnus Hirschfeld" (315). In fact, Lovat Dickson, in his biography of Radclyffe Hall, informs us that she met Havelock Ellis early in 1928, and that he promised to read her novel as soon as it was finished (127). As his brief foreword attests, Ellis endorsed Hall's faithful representation of the congenital invert; for Ellis argued that inversion "was biological, hereditary, and irreversible. The 'invert' was powerless to change her inclination. . . . Genetic anomalies, these women constituted a small percentage of the population. Although aberrant, they should be tolerated and allowed to live out their sexual impulses" (Smith-Rosenberg 270). To further support its claim, the novel also emphasizes that inverts, although "flawed," are created by God.

Newton suggests that Hall and others like her relied on "the discourse of these sexologists about inversion primarily because they desperately wanted to break out of the asexual model of romantic friendship" (283). For "[t]he major current in Victorian sexual ideology," an ideology that can be traced as far back as Samuel Richardson, "declared that women were passionless and asexual, the passive objects of male sexual desire" (283). While gender reversal became a powerful and positive symbol of feminist aspirations, it posed a very real threat to the patriarchal structure of society (287).

Crucially, while Foucault proposes that the appearance of "a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty, and 'psychic hermaphroditism' made the formation of a 'reverse discourse' possible," he stresses that the primary purpose of these discourses was to provide a means of social control (101). In her somewhat peremptory dismissal of Foucault and his so-called followers, Castle overlooks this critical point. For while Ellis "simplified Krafft-Ebing's four-part typology" by "dichotomizing lesbians into 'true invert' and potential heterosexuals" (Newton 288; Smith-Rosenberg 271) he specified that

many women, though not genetically inverted, possessed a genetic predisposition, a weakness, for the advances of other women. For such women homosexuality was an acquired characteristic, preventable and curable. Placed in an unwholesome environment [that is, among other women] the homosexual woman could succumb to the blandishments of the "congenital invert" who sought her as a partner. Kept within a heterosexual world, she would overcome her predisposition and grow up to be a "normal" woman (Smith-Rosenberg 270-71).

Stimpson, in fact, notes how Ellis redefined sexual inversion as "a narrower term than homosexuality, which includes all sexual attractions between persons of the same sex" (368). Strictly speaking, in accordance with Ellis's definition of congenital inversion, *The Well of Loneliness* does not make a case for lesbians or female homosexuals.

Furthermore, Smith-Rosenberg relates how, after reading Ellis, physicians and educators "began to counsel women they now defined as 'latent homosexuals.' Forcefully drawing the young women's attention to their dangerous predisposition for 'inversion,' doctors pressed them to marry quickly and have children," in order to preserve male economic hegemony (272). Moreover, Newton contends that Ellis managed to turn the value earlier feminists had placed on passionate friendships against them: by including such friendships in a discussion of inversion, he "inevitably marked them with the stigma of 'abnormality'" (288). To support her argument, Newton provides us with a highly revealing passage from Ellis, in which he baldly states: "These women differ in the first place from the normal or average woman in that they are not repelled or disgusted by lover-like advances from persons of their own sex . . ." (288). Here we find a clear instance of the convergence of homophobia and misogyny, an insidious effect that undermines Radclyffe Hall's text.

In an essay of particular relevance, "The Dominant and the Deviant: A Violent Dialectic," Jonathan Dollimore proposes:

In novels like *The Well*, the process of authenticating the inauthentic works by merging or replacing the negative representations with more positive ones, appropriated from the dominant. . . . Radclyffe Hall not only appropriates the 'authority' of the medical discourse currently transferring homosexuality from the realm of crime to that of nature; she also brilliantly merges and so transforms the medical model with other positive identifications usurped from the dominant culture. In particular she takes that of spiritual martyr and that of romantic outsider, both offering images of a superior sensibility and integrity being persecuted by the ordinary and the normal. . . . Of course, in *The Well* such transgressive appropriations are . . . conservative and even reactionary alignments. If the abnormal, socially dis-located individual lays claims to being more authentic than the normal, it's nevertheless an authenticity rooted in the selfsame categories, spiritual and moral, which make her abnormal to begin with... (90-91).

Dollimore determines that this is precisely the dilemma in which Hall's novel is caught: "it authenticates both the dominant and the subordinate, unable to acknowledge fully the extent to which the former negates the latter. More specifically, it seeks legitimacy for its deviant hero/ine in the categories of the very order which denies her legitimacy" (92). Dollimore suggests that "[s]uch contradictions are intrinsic to the dilemma of many marginal groups opting for a revisionist rather than a revolutionary politics..." (92). In particular, he points out how "the conservative character of such categories becomes explicit in the novel's endorsement of class privilege and patriotism, both defended according to 'the immutable law of service'" (92) "and in its blind acceptance of the division between masculine and feminine as also an immutable law, this time of nature" (91). For in Stephen's relationship with Mary, Hall replicates the male privileged heterosexual model, thereby restricting Mary to the traditional role of submissively dependent helpmeet within the domestic sphere, while the rich and dominant Stephen assumes the more public role as a writer.

In *The Well of Loneliness* Radclyffe Hall is effectively asking for inclusion of the female invert within the middle class by leaving the patriarchal structure of society intact. In this system, the female invert would occupy a position that approximates the privileged white male. In addition to being sexist, Hall also reveals herself as being essentially racist. Describing the two "very nice negroes" who sing at Jamie's, Hall writes of one: "His eyes had the patient, questioning expression common to the eyes of most animals and to those of all slowly evolving races" (416). Most pointedly, Radclyffe Hall does not argue on behalf of

women's equality or for the Marys of the world. Although she may have been one of the very first to construct a literary representation of the female invert, in so doing, Hall excludes "lesbians." In honor of Stephen's parents' legitimate, heterosexual union, Hall has Stephen deliver her lover into the hands of Martin Hallam before pleading for the inclusion of others like herself, while maintaining that this sacrificial act is meant to spare Mary a life of persecution, "because Mary, all woman, was less of a match for life than if she had been as was Stephen" (490). Mary is not an invert. As Newton aptly suggests at the conclusion of her essay: "Mary's real story has yet to be told" (293). Perhaps we need to view Mary as a female who resisted heterosexual identification; for the implication is that she preferred Stephen sexually, given the choice. In this sense, Mary's position is potentially more subversive. Indeed, Mary's awakened (homo)sexuality may have been the novel's most threatening revelation and the primary reason the book was banned.



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