"EVERYTHING IS OUT OF PLACE":
RADCLYFFE HALL AND THE LESBIAN
LITERARY TRADITION

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"Chloe liked Olivia," I read. And it struck me how immense a
change was there. Chloe liked Olivia perhaps for the first time in
literature. . .

For if Chloe likes Olivia and Mary Carmichael knows how to ex-
press it she will light a torch in that vast chamber where nobody
has yet been. It is all half lights and profound shadows like those
serpentine caves where one goes with a candle peering up and
down, not knowing where one is stepping.

These comments, from Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own
(1929), suggest a sense of being poised upon an artistic frontier.
That Chloe liked Olivia was nothing new, yet in the 1920s the
issue of how these relationships could and should be represented
in the novel became the subject of debate in both public and
private spheres. Not only the salons of Bloomsbury and Paris but
also the English courts concerned themselves with ways of repre-
senting love between women. Lillian Faderman has suggested that
in the 1920s there was a kind of loss of innocence;¹ a more
prevalent acknowledgment and labeling of lesbian sexuality made
it far less acceptable for women authors to show strong feelings
between female characters.

Recent feminist scholarship has identified the 1920s as a key
decade of struggle in the area of sexuality. Sheila Jeffrey's argues
that the triumph of "sex reform" in the 1920s was concurrent with
a general decline of militant feminism.

The 1920s witnessed a concerted campaign through marriage advice literature
and clinics, as well as the works of "progressive" and conservative sex-
reformers, to conscript women into participation in sexual intercourse with

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men, combined with a sustained assault by the sex reformers on "the spinster," the "frigid" woman, militant feminists, "manhaters" and in particular, women campaigners who were launching a critique of male sexuality.3

The sex reform movement challenged feminism in a number of ways. It defined "scientifically" male sexuality as active, female sexuality as passive, and it recognized the importance of heterosexual intercourse in the maintenance of male domination. It categorized women's passionate friendships with each other as lesbianism, thus limiting what was considered acceptable in female friendships.3 The lesbian, like the spinster and the "frigide," was defined as a problem by the sex reformers because she was not incorporated into "normal" female-male relations organized around heterosexual activity and therefore gained access to an "improper" kind of autonomy and independence outside the family sphere.

A number of novels published in 1928 took the recently developed category of "lesbian" as a theme. Compton Mackenzie's satire, Extraordinary Women, and Elizabeth Bowen's comedy, The Hotel, provoked no controversy. Djuna Barnes's frolicsome romp, The Ladies' Almanack, was privately printed for a selected audience and not republished until 1972. Virginia Woolf's Orlando, a fantastic biography of a timeless androgynous changeling, was enjoyed by a coterie "in the know" and mystified those outside. Radclyffe Hall's The Well of Loneliness alone became notorious, the object of courtroom debate and legal scrutiny.

Certainly Hall made no attempt to obscure or mask the controversial subject of her novel. On the contrary, she took an open and polemical stand on the subject of female homosexuality which endeared her to neither the lesbian nor the heterosexual community. Hall publicly associated her novel with the naturist point of view, a theory of homosexual love associated with, among others, the sex reformer Havelock Ellis. The naturists argued that women do not become lesbians by choice or circumstance but are born with an affliction which they dubbed "congenital inversion." In fact, Hall invited Ellis to write a preface to the first edition of The Well of Loneliness. In doing so Ellis recommended the novel as a representation and exemplar of his theories.

I have read The Well of Loneliness with great interest because—apart from its fine qualities as a novel—it possesses a notable psychological and social significance. So far as I know, it is the first English novel which presents, in a
completely faithful and uncomprising form, one particular aspect of sexual life as it exists among us today. The relation of certain people—who, while different from their fellow human beings, are sometimes of the highest character and the finest aptitudes—to the often hostile society in which they move presents difficult and still unsolved problems. The poignant situations which thus arise are here set forth so vividly and yet with such complete absence of offence, that we must place Radclyffe Hall's book on a high level of distinction.

What did Hall gain by promulgating the discourse of the sexologists and embracing the label of "invert"? It was, after all, clearly heterosexist. Medical sexology depicted the invert as a man in a woman's body, a masculine persona that will always be attracted to the female. It represents the lesbian as "abnormal" "in a mode that absolutely preserves the terms of reference of the 'normal.'" Lillian Faderman argues that as a defense against demands for alteration and "cure," Hall's assertion of inversion as immutable and God-given can be seen as strategic.6 Similarly, Sonja Ruehl points out that before 1928 lesbianism had commonly been situated within a rhetoric of sin. The sexology point of view presented it as neither sin nor sickness; what was inborn could not be helped nor could it be passed on to others.7 More recently, Esther Newton, in considering why the "most infamous mannish lesbian, Stephen Gordon..." was created not by a male pornographer, sexologist, legislator, or novelist but by Hall, herself an 'out' and militantly tie-wearing lesbian," suggests that the discourse of the sexologists and the image of the mannish lesbian allowed Hall to break out of the asexual model of romantic friendship. In this, Newton sees Hall as part of the second generation of "New Women," who rejected the "passionless" ideology of the first generation in favor of a more sexual and physical notion of the female body. Through the label of "invert" the lesbian could lay claim to the passionate, physical desire the sexologists associated with masculine behavior. Thus the true invert was a being between categories, neither man nor woman, a "third sex" or "trapped soul." Krafft-Ebing, Ellis, and Freud all associated this figure with female lust and with feminist revolt against traditional roles; they were at best ambivalent, at worst horrified, by both. But some second-generation feminists, such as Frances Wilder, Gertrude Stein, and Vita Sackville-West, associated themselves with important aspects of the "third sex" persona. None did so unconditionally and—this must be said—as bravely as Radclyffe Hall did by making the despised mannish lesbian the hero of The Well of Loneliness... Hall's creation, Stephen Gordon, is a double symbol,
standing for the New Woman's painful position between traditional political and social categories, and for the lesbian struggle to define and assert an identity.9

Despite its status as the lesbian novel—"it is the one novel that every literate lesbian in the four decades between 1928 and the late 1960s would certainly have read"9—many lesbians, no less than the justice who passed judgment on the novel, have been concerned about its social effects although for quite different reasons.

Instead of applauding the fact that lesbianism was being brought out in the open and discussed publicly, almost to a woman they decried its publication. One woman, seemingly typical, felt that the novel caused people who before had never heard of lesbianism to try to classify as a lesbian every woman who wore a suit (with a skirt) and was seen more than once in the company of another woman.10

Most recently, Lillian Faderman and Ann Williams have continued to read The Well of Loneliness prescriptively, concerned about its effect on behavior and attitudes. They have noted that the saddest piece of irony in Hall's noble gesture was that she—perhaps more than Krafft-Ebing, Ellis, Freud—helped to wreak confusion in young women who, knowing themselves to love other women and having no other role models but Stephen Gordon, learned through Hall's novel that if they were really lesbians they were not women but members of a third sex, and that they need not expect joy or fulfillment in this world.11

Why is Hall in particular singled out here? One reason, clearly, is that her novel gained particular authority and power because she wrote as a lesbian herself. A second reason is the shift in discourse. Hall uses the scientific and medical concepts of inversion in a quite different kind of discourse, a literary and fictional one. Here these concepts achieve a different currency, of a very personal and intimate kind, which Alison Hennegan describes in her introduction to the Virago edition of The Well of Loneliness.

In countless novels and autobiographies schoolgirls have been expelled for reading it and mistresses have been sacked for discussing it. Tremulous daughters have given it to their mothers, preparing the ground for revelations yet to come; mothers have given it to daughters to indicate that personal revelations will be sympathetically received. Close female friends have given it to each other as a delicate hint that friendship could include yet more.12

As Beverly Brown has suggested, "The Well trial . . . was largely
about the protocols of naturalising the 'ugly' facts of medical pathology in a popular novel form which could offer identification and ungoverned discussion" [my emphasis].

It was the appearance of this subject in a middle-brow novel in particular which was deemed "obscene," for this sort of popular fiction can achieve the kind of circulation and "identification" which Hennegan describes and which Faderman and Williams recognize for its particular power. This is why of all the novels of 1928 that took lesbianism as their subject, The Well of Loneliness was singled out for particular attention. It alone undertook the domestication of scientific, medical knowledge, placing it on the agenda of household conversation in an unprecedented way.

One example of such a conversation has been preserved in The Letters of Virginia Woolf, 1923-1928. Virginia Woolf wrote her sister about an exchange between Leonard Woolf and his mother in which she asked her son:

Have you read Radclyffe Hall's book? I have got it from Harrods. She was a friend of Bella's. They went to Mrs. Coles' school together and she used to come to our house sometimes—a regular society girl. . . . It is a dreadful pity I think that such a book should have been published. I do not mean for ordinary reasons. What I mean is that there are many unmarried women living alone. And now it is very hard on them that such a book has been written . . . until I read this book I did not know that such things went on at all. . . . When I was at school there was nothing like that. . . . So it shows that we did not do things like that at my boarding school. Leonard: We did at my boarding school. It was the most corrupt place I have ever been in. And you let me go there when I was twelve without knowing a thing. . . . Mrs. W.: Oh, Len, how can you say that when you know what a splendid man your father was? And when your father died I said to myself that though I could not be to you what he was, I would do my best to bring you up good men and women, and sometimes, do you know, Virginia, I would take a large basket of their socks to bed with me so that I might start mending them directly I woke in the morning. . . . But I think much of Miss Radclyffe Hall's book is rather beautiful. There is the old horse—that is wonderful . . . . And William is a splendid character. He is the old groom. All that about the horse and the old groom is very beautiful. But the rest of the book I did not care for.

Brown points out that here we see how The Well of Loneliness is open to family revelation and self-interrogation, to the discussion of how people will think about women living on their own. Finally, the conversation also makes that characteristic move from the general revelation of specialist knowledge—that such things ex-
isted—to the moment of personal speech, with the son's sudden talk about school. It is just this sort of dangerous, seductive conversation that can get a book into trouble.14

Thinking about the form of Hall's novel, then, gives us a key to its particular career and distinction and allows us to see that rather than merely reproducing Ellis's theories, Hall transformed them into a quite different discourse that generates quite different effects. Along with Ruehl, I would argue that the book is a political intervention in which Hall starts the process of producing a "reverse discourse," a space for other lesbians to speak for themselves and so move toward self-definition.15 A closer reading of the novel, including its use of literary language and narrative conventions, produces a sense of ambiguity and complexity denied by less literary interpretations. In sketching out such a reading of Hall's novel and shifting the terrain of debate I do not intend to place it in any suprapolitical or transcendent aesthetic category. Literary texts have played and continue to play a key role in shifting definitions and perceptions of homosexuality and, ironically, the lesbian novel does present a constrained depiction of lesbian relationships. The Well of Loneliness is also a sentimental and at times florid and clumsy in its prose and characterizations. I hope to show here, however, that when Hall's prose is at its most awkward she is often trying to put language into a new cast and to revise some traditional literary forms. The novel is not "great" literature, but it is a curious book and one that is rarely "read" in the fullest sense of the term. As Virginia Woolf wrote to Vita Sackville-West in 1928: "no-one has read her book."16 Now, nearly sixty years later, there is still some truth in her remark.

For many of us, reading literary texts from a feminist perspective has produced not only different readings but also a whole new agenda of authors, canons, and literary traditions. Although the project to develop a feminist literary criticism is by no means homogeneous or united, as Bronwen Levy has demonstrated:17 only recently has it become clear that much feminist criticism has reproduced a bourgeois, heterosexual, Anglo-Saxon view. Although we have come a long way in decentering and exposing gender-based bias, other assumptions remain. Lesbians, blacks, and working-class women are now beginning to challenge mainstream feminist criticism, to propose alternative canons and points of view.18 Bonnie Zimmerman, in her excellent overview

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of lesbian feminist criticism, argues that key feminist readings such as Ellen Moers's *Literary Women*, Patricia Meyer Spacks's *The Female Imagination*, and Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* tend to propagate a heterosexist perspective which casts lesbian women as outsiders. Zimmerman's article sketches a lesbian canon which challenges language and literary conventions, which picks up the task of trying to represent the relationship between Chloe and Olivia, that "vast chamber, all half lights and profound shadows." I want to read *The Well of Loneliness* via the idea of a lesbian canon. Rather than setting it apart from other lesbian writings I will suggest that it, too, is preoccupied with issues of language, literature, and sexuality in a distinctive way. *The Well of Loneliness* begins to carve out a space for the lesbian writer.

Bonnie Zimmerman has argued that the lesbian canon tends to celebrate picaresque romances such as Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* or Rita Mae Brown's *Rubyfruit Jungle* (1973), which develop the joyful aspects of the Lesbos myth and place to one side less happy or "politically correct" and desirable depictions from the contemporary lesbian perspective. Yet *Orlando* and *The Well of Loneliness* have much in common from a literary point of view. Both novels are *Künstlerromanen*, portraits of an artist. Yet, in their case the artist is a lesbian or, in Orlando's case, bisexual and so is in an ambiguous relation to literary convention. One of the only threads that holds the changing selves, the male and female, Elizabethan and Romantic Orlando, together is the attempt to finish a poem, "The Oak Tree." The completion and public reception of the poem is rejected as a symbol of coherence and "falling into place," as the biographer ruefully remarks. "It is decomposing that this culmination to which the whole book moved, this peroration with which the book was to end, should be dashed from us on a laugh casually like this; but the truth is that when we write of a woman, everything is out of place—culminations and perorations; the accent never falls where it does with a man." In this female discourse words are inadequate, flung out to sea like nets they may return to shrivel "as I've seen nets shrivel drawn on deck with only sea-weed in them; and sometimes there's an inch of silver—six words—in the bottom of the net." Characteristically, there is no conclusion here, only punning, only six words—"in the bottom of the net." Orlando rejects the traditional certainties. Woolf uses the novel to deconstruct categories of gender and biography, to play and fantasize about them.
At one level nothing could be further from The Well of Loneliness; Stephen Gordon is neither playful nor fantastic. As Newton remarks, "Unlike Orlando, Stephen is trapped in history." Yet Hall's novel also can be placed at a frontier where traditional literary categories are being reworked in the light of the protagonist's ambiguous relationship to gender and sexuality. For Stephen Gordon, too, "everything is out of place." She has no "natural" or "given" relation to the natural world, family, society, language, or culture. Of course a sensitivity to language and art, an acute self-consciousness, and careful "placing" of oneself in the world are all key elements of the Künstlerroman form and part of its concern with the revelation and shaping of artistic personality. Like James Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, Orlando and Stephen Gordon experiment with words, sounds, and their relationship to things. Yet we can see that these features of the Künstlerroman assume a new importance in the lesbian tradition, for here both heterosexual and patriarchal norms and codes are open to question. To return to Orlando again: "everything is out of place, new relationships must be developed."

The lesbian becomes, as it were, the artist writ large. The protagonist's relation to nature, language, and art assumes new poignancy and urgency because sensitivity to heterosexist bias in language and artistic convention is acute. Stephen Gordon, Hall's protagonist and "invert," is not a lesbian and a writer; her sexuality and her relationship to art are fused and interdependent, all of a piece. For both Stephen Gordon and Orlando, an ambiguous relationship to sexuality demands that different forms of expression be developed. Hall and Woolf demonstrate that most forms of self-identification and expression reflect a gendered heterosexual orientation that is policed by conventions within existing forms of language and art. Thus, some categories of feminist literary analysis are also brought into question by The Well of Loneliness; recurrent patterns and motifs often discerned in women's writing are cast in a new light that suggests their inappropriateness for the lesbian writer. The archetypal patterns discerned by Annis Pratt and by Ellen Moers, for example, do not necessarily hold for women's writing in general. Indeed, the "femaleness" they discern and celebrate tyrannizes Stephen Gordon in the person of her mother, Lady Anna.

We can pursue this by looking at the presentation of nature and
the protagonist's relationship to the natural world in *The Well of Loneliness*. Both Moers and Pratt have argued persuasively that female characters tend to assume a special relationship to nature in women's writing. Pratt suggests that in the female *Bildungsroman*, the "novel of development," women usually find solace, companionship, and independence in nature. "Nature... becomes an ally of the woman hero, keeping her in touch with her selfhood, a kind of talisman that enables her to make her way through the alienations of male society.... In most women's novels the green world is present in retrospect, something left behind or about to be left behind as one backs into enclosure—a state of innocence...." Now this pattern both appears and is questioned in *The Well of Loneliness*. An archetypal pattern is shown to have heterosexist connotations that cannot be appropriate for Stephen Gordon's relation to the world.

Stephen's home, the country seat of Morton, is quintessentially English. As the lynchpin of a hierarchical, patriarchal order it is "well-timbered, well-cotted, well-fenced and well-watered." Yet, like E.M. Forster's Penge estate in *Maurice*, or Hardy's D'Urberville seat, "The Slopes," in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, its well-being and order is deceptive, superficial. In this sense, Hall's novel belongs to a tradition well established in the English novel by the end of the nineteenth century; the degeneracy of the aristocracy and the national heritage, its inability to create a thriving authentic lineage, and its need to seek rejuvenation from outside stock reflect a broader concern with degeneration and pathology which became a central preoccupation of the sexologists. Two strongly gender-determined kinds of identification with the natural world around Morton are presented; both house and surroundings are compartmentalized in terms of gender. The "perfect proportions" of the mother's drawing room and her absorption, emotional and intuitive, in the natural world contrast with the "menacing, prophetic" domain of the father's study, imbued with reason and learning, and the mastery over nature symbolized by the ritual of the hunt. Stephen's relationship to both is ambivalent and, in turn, her parents perceive her homosexuality in quite different ways. The mother finds it "unnatural" and emotionally rejects out of hand her daughter's sexuality; the father reads all he can to try to understand "inversion."

The presentation of the mother's relationship to the natural
world is very much akin to the archetypally female mode discerned by Pratt and Moers. Stephen's mother, "the archetype of the very perfect woman," is "imported" from Ireland to rejuvenate and propagate the Gordon lineage. At the very beginning of the novel the landscape is seen and shaped via her perceptions: "From her favourite seat underneath an old cedar, she would see these Malvern Hills in their beauty, and their swelling slopes seemed to hold a new meaning. They were like pregnant women, full-bosomed, courageous, great green-girdled mothers of splendid sons!" (Pp. 8-9).

Lady Anna and the natural landscape come together, a meeting of female essences. Anna's beauty is to Stephen like "the breath of the meadow-sweet under the hedges," [p. 29] and the landscape is seen in terms of Anna's femaleness: buxom, voluptuous, and fruitful. The mother is like Stephen's very feminine lover Mary, both "gathered nature into her arms and embraced it as a friend, as a well-loved companion." (P. 83)

However Stephen, a lesbian woman, does not fit into the natural world in this archetypally feminine way. In nature she finds not confirmation of self but condemnation; try as she might to find Morton responsive to her, to lose herself in its bounty, she cannot. This is because this female relationship to nature is strongly heterosexual—"swelling slopes," "great green-girdled mothers of splendid sons." All are paired and fruitful. Stephen's attempts to enter and feel at one with nature always culminate in a sense of exile, loss, and barrenness.

The peak of the Camp stood out clearly defined by snow that had fallen lightly that morning, and as they breasted the crest of the hill, the sun shone out on the snow. Away to the right lay the valley of the Wye, a long, lovely valley of deep blue shadows; a valley of small homesteads and mothering trees, of soft undulations and wide, restful spaces leading away to a line of dim mountains—leading away to the mountains of Wales, that lay just over the border. And because she loved this kind of English valley, Stephen's sulky eyes must turn and rest upon it; not all her apprehension and sense of injustice could take from her eyes the joy of that seeing. She must gaze and gaze, she must let it possess her, the peace, the wonder that lay in such beauty; while the unwilling tears welled up under her lids—she not knowing why they had come there. (Pp. 46, 96, my emphasis)

As Hennegan has pointed out, one of the most overworked adverbs in the novel is "must," the imperative which drives home
Hall's belief in the ineluctable nature of her character's destiny. The possession Stephen desires here never occurs. Unlike Forster's homosexual protagonist in *Maurice*, Stephen is never christened by pollen, made golden and fecund, lost in the greenwood. To the contrary, she disrupts the natural order and has done so from the moment she was born, 'a narrow-hipped, wide-shouldered little tadpole of a baby.' Rather than finding solace in green world visions, Stephen is threatened and excluded by 'pregnant' slopes and 'mothering' trees. Here a female archetype is used to exclude, and declare unnatural and sterile, the lesbian woman. For Hall, then, this convention seems to have a strong heterosexual bias and need not be appropriate for lesbian women.

Stephen's father's mastery of nature is symbolized in the hunt. The strange, implacable heart-broken music of hounds giving tongue as they break from cover; the cry of the huntsman as he stands in his stirrups; the thud of hooves pounding ruthlessly forward over long, green undulating meadows. The meadows flying back as though seen from a train, the meadows streaming away behind you; the acrid smell of horse sweat caught in the passing; the smell of damp leather, of earth and bruised herbage—all sudden, all passing—then the smell of wide spaces, the air smell, cool yet as potent as wine. (P. 39)

Here, Anna's placidity finds its antithesis—a male ritual that is all speed, 'bruised herbage,' and, ultimately, a killing. The ritual of the hunt reproduces the hierarchical order of social relationships at Morton; horseflesh and demeanor reflect privilege and prestige. This ritual, in which the male principle is supreme master, is enjoyed by Stephen in her role as surrogate son, although this, too, breaks down after Sir Phillip's death. With paternal protection and prestige gone, Stephen recognizes that the hunt, no less than Lady Anna's quiet absorption, is part of a society in which all relationships to nature are heterosexual and rigidly policed in terms of gender. Here, too, "normality" is preserved, defined, and defended.

In this *Künstlerroman*, then, there is never the Edenic phase of integration with nature that we find in much women's writing. The end of childhood, death of the father, betrayal of first love, and her mother's rejection and exiling of her do not bring to a close a phase of idyllic integration as some readings of the book suggest. Rather, they confirm Stephen's alienation and awkward location between female and male patterns of behavior and perception. Although it is true that, as Pratt has argued, in many women's
novels of development, the green world of innocence tends to be present in retrospect, in Hall's novel this vision is seen to be quite inappropriate and heterosexist. For Stephen Gordon there can be no 'fall' from the green world of authenticity into a social world of enclosure because this implies a division between what is perceived as "natural" and "the social" which Hall refuses to draw. Nature is not Stephen's ally and solace; it is a reminder of her failure to fulfill norms of femininity that seem to be "natural." The sense of oneness with nature as it is usually conceived is a prerogative of the very perfect woman Stephen cannot become; it is a part of the dominant discourse.

Hall sets herself the problem, then, of trying to alter the romance mode to express Stephen's desires for other women. We can see this most obviously in the deflation of the conventions of representing romance that occur throughout the novel.

Came a day when winter must give place to spring, when the daffodils marched across the whole country from Castle Morton Common to Ross and beyond, pitching camps by the side of the river. When the hornbeam made patches of green in the hedges, and the hawthorn broke out into small, budding bundles; when the old cedar tree on the lawn at Morton grew reddish pink tips to its elegant fingers; when the wild cherry trees on the sides of the hills were industriously putting forth both leaves and blossoms; when Martin looked into his heart and saw Stephen—saw her suddenly there as a woman. (P. 96)

Martin is caught in the tropes and conventions of the heterosexual romance: all is budding and fruitful, the daffodils come, and the cherry blossoms and Martin sees...a woman! His perceptions here are totally inappropriate and a denial of the reality of Stephen. After rejecting Martin's vision of her, Stephen turns again to the gardens and lakes around her home, only to find again exclusion: "a mysterious and wonderful thing this oneness, pregnant with comfort could she know its true meaning."

We can examine this more fully by considering how Hall describes Stephen's relationships with Angela and Mary. In both cases the representations of romance are marked by dissonance. Stephen longs to fall in with "natural" patterns, to be part of the "perfect thing" of which her parent's love is the emblem. So she desires to bring Angela to Morton as her father Sir Philip brought Lady Anna "home"; she purchases a ring for Anna and so reenacts her father's courtship of many years before. At Morton, where "all
things [are] accomplished in their season" (p. 120), it is spring; the sap rises and Stephen loves like a "curious, primitive thing" (p. 149). Yet as Angela brutally points out, Stephen cannot marry her; the pattern of courtship cannot fall into a "natural" place. There is an implicit contrast between Stephen's love, which cannot be consummated in the terms of "honorable living," and the courtship of the "charming young couple," "man and maiden," Violet and Alec. Despite Stephen's ardor her summer of love is a fantasy; as the omniscient narrator observes, "love is only permissible to those who are cut in every respect to life's pattern" (p. 168).

The contrast between the "natural" world at Morton and Stephen's instincts is sharp. Significantly, her relationship with Mary blossoms in France during the war and in postwar Africa and Paris—spaces where ancient English traditions so omnipresent at Morton can be held in abeyance. Yet here again the omniscient narrator draws our attention to the courtship as something "out of joint"; the patterns of romance cannot cohere. So the courtship between Stephen and Mary at Orotava takes place in "a veritable Eden of a garden; obsessed by a kind of primitive urge towards all manners of procreation. It was hot with sunshine and the flowing of sap, so that even its shade held a warmth in its greenness, while the virile growth of its flowers and its trees gave off a strangely disturbing fragrance" (p. 309). My emphases here draw attention to the double-edged quality of this Eden. Throughout the two chapters at Orotava there is an ambivalence; the enchantment which traditionally marks courtship has a quality of delusion. Like all lovers, Stephen and Mary are "in the grip of Creation," "the urge that will sometimes sweep forward blindly alike into fruitful and sterile channels" (p. 317). Orotava is marked with images of fruitfulness (sweet/honey/glory) and sterility or ambiguity (illusion/strange/rancid/crude/insolent). As the narrator comments at the end of this phase, "And thus in a cloud of illusion and glory, sped the last enchanted days at Orotava" (p. 321). The qualities of traditional courtship are present and omnipresent; dream becomes illusion and delusion.

Furthermore, the traditional inarticulateness of lovers assumes special significance here. Stephen is aware of the taboos, of the words which "must not be spoken," and of the "foolishness" of vows: "Even to themselves their vows would sound foolish" (p. 320). Their love both conforms to traditional patterns and yet takes
them to breaking points where the female/male romance fractures. A final instance of this dissonance is apparent when the descriptions of interrelations between this female/male/Mary/Stephen couple break into two pronouns and Stephen's proper name disappears, to produce "her" and "her."

Thus it was that when Stephen returned from Morton, Mary divined, as it were by instinct, that the time of dreaming was over and past; and she clung very close, kissing many times—

"Do you love me as much as before you went? Do you love me?" The woman's eternal question.

And Stephen, who, if possible, loved her more, answered almost brusquely: "Of course I love you." For her thoughts were still heavy with the bitterness that had come of that visit of hers to Morton, and which at all costs must be hidden from Mary. [P. 342]

The extent to which Hall refuses to transpose the language and conventions appropriate to depictions of heterosexual romance in her presentation of Stephen Gordon's development as a lesbian woman is clear if we take further the contrast between The Well of Loneliness and Forster's radically different representation of the relationship between homosexual love and nature in Maurice, written in 1914. For Forster does not question literary conventions at all and, in granting "to one's creations a happiness actual life does not supply," he concludes his narrative of homosexual relationships with a green world fantasy, and points out in his Terminal note:

A happy ending was imperative. I shouldn't have bothered to write otherwise. I was determined that in fiction anyway two men should fall in love and remain in it for the ever and ever that fiction allows, and in this sense Maurice and Alec still roam the greenwood... If it ended unhappily, with a lad dangling from a noose or with a suicide pact, all would be well, for there is no pornography or seduction of minors. But the lovers get away unpunished and consequently recommend crime. Mr. Borenius is too incompetent to catch them, and the only penalty society exacts is an exile they gladly embrace.55

Maurice and The Well of Loneliness are similar in a number of respects, although it is worth noting that Forster refused to have his novel published until after his death, no doubt to avoid the kind of notoriety Radclyffe Hall received. Like Morton in The Well of Loneliness, Forster's Penge estate is symbolic of a decaying, leaky English aristocratic order that is unable to rejuvenate itself. Within this fortress of the English order Maurice finds his gamekeeper
who lures him into the forest, much as Mellors seduces Lady Chatterley. Like Hall, Forster used his novel to damn efforts to "cure" homosexuality through psychoanalysis. Yet unlike her, he is prepared to damn considerations of class and creed too and present Penge and England as a place where a new bacchanalian order can flourish. As we have seen, he does not balk either at transposing the norms of heterosexual romance to the homosexual; by contrast, in The Well of Loneliness when Stephen indulges in these as dreams, the reality mocks and rejects her. As Claudia Stillman Franks points out, Stephen is fated to "search for metaphors" to convey the quality of her love. Yet this "metaphor-seeking imagination" and the experience of writing as a struggle is not simply the mark of the artist; rather it is the particular inheritance of the lesbian artist, an outsider to conventional romance narrative.

The Well of Loneliness, which has for so long been labeled the lesbian novel while being castigated by lesbian critics because it denies joy and choice in lesbian relationships, in some ways meets with recent lesbian criticism at its most radical—in consideration of the nature of language and literary forms. Sheila Rowbotham argues that "language conveys a certain power. It is one of the instruments of domination. . . . Ultimately a revolutionary movement has to break the hold of the dominant group over theory, it has to structure its own connections. Language is part of the political and ideological power of rulers. . . ." Language is infused with power and with moral terms, and a number of feminist critics have argued that the challenge to the dominant discourse requires that new forms of articulation need be developed. Mary Daly, for example, sees herself as creating a new language, the old being so male-dominated that it alienates the female who attempts to speak or write in its terms. She argues that lesbians can learn from the language of dumb animals whose nonverbal communication seems to be superior to androcratic speech and in Gyn/Ecology cites several such conversations she has had with animals. Another lesbian writer, Monique Wittig, also attacks phallogocentrism and writes with the intention of reorganizing metaphor around the female body as opposed to the existing central metaphor, the phallus. In a reading of Wittig's work, Namascar Shaktini points out that a key effect of phallogocentrism is a gender-based signifying system of rigid binary concepts: female absence/male
presence, female margin/male center; "This organizing principle regulates a set of systems that maintain the male-identified subject at the center of words." Wittig argues that lesbian writing must challenge and reveal this dichotomizing organizational mode based upon gender/sex; for the lesbian cannot be contained within this binary system: "Lesbian is the only concept that I know of that is beyond the categories of sex [woman and man]. . .because the designated subject [lesbian] is not a woman either economically or politically or ideologically." So Wittig's sense of the lesbian project is to refuse both the masculine and feminine ends of the gender polarity and to confound the dichotomizing principle of gender. "She positions herself, her text, and her readers outside the system which makes female and male into polar opposites."²⁹

Wittig pursues this reorganization of metaphor and language with an assertion and confidence that contrasts starkly with the rather tentative and reluctant, although related, sense that "everything is out of place" which we find in The Well of Loneliness. Yet Hall's sense of the inappropriateness of the rigidly gender-determined order of Morton, and Stephen's displacement from both extremes of this gendered order, and the criticism of the conventional representations of heterosexual romance brings the book into a surprising relation with a text produced fifty years later—Wittig's The Lesbian Body (1973).

I have mentioned Daly in this context because, quite unexpectedly, this reference from Gyn/Ecology can also give us an entrée into the awkward question of Stephen Gordon's relationship to animals in the novel. For indeed, animals play a significant part in this work, too. Leonard Woolf's mother quite rightly senses the importance of the old horse and the old groom. Animals assume almost mythic proportions—Raftery (a somewhat refined precursor of Mister Ed), Peter the swan, and David, the dog-with-a-tail-like-a-sickle. Why these anthropomorphized animals should carry such importance in the novel is curious. They seem potentially to stand apart somewhat from the feminine or masculine perceptions of nature and so become another avenue of search for identification with the natural world. Odd affinities occur: Raftery the horse, like Anna the mother, comes from Ireland to replenish the decaying bloodstock; both David the dog and Mary the lover come from Wales. In this way the tendency of sexology to identify and be preoccupied with character via nationality is apparent in the novel.
Raftery, Stephen's Irish hunter, in particular, opens the way to new forms of communication. Horse and rider communicate in a language ordered around sounds rather than words, each "divines" the feelings of the other, they converse "in a quiet language having very few words but many small sounds and many small movements, that meant much more than words" [p. 168]. As Hennegan points out, this is the kind of description that can as easily apply to satisfactory lovemaking, a silent code of signals, gestures, and glances. This language significantly evades words for, as we have seen, the spoken word frequently seems inappropriate for Stephen and no more so than when she tries to articulate deep feelings and passion. Spoken words are "mere language," inadequate; the wisdom and truth which she perceives are too "big" for language, "which at best must consist of small sounds and small movements" [p. 339]. It is no coincidence that Stephen destroys the aged Raftery at Morton in springtime. As we have seen, the season conventionally seen as one of fruitful promise is frequently a harbinger of pain and loss for her. Her language and relationship with Raftery alone is free of the imperative, the "must," which haunts her actions. It is also not marked by the illusion and betrayal that shape her other encounters with nature and society. Between Stephen and Raftery is a sense of what Daly calls "otherness," which creates a mythic, semantic, and physical space in which their likeness and "wild otherness" grows.

At other times animals and birds in the novel—fox, swan, dog, dove—reject Stephen for her ambiguity and reinforce her sense of being an outcast. Peter the swan hisses his disdain and turns away once he is part of a mated pair. David [the dog-with-the-tail-like-a-sickle] is attracted to Stephen's maleness but (like Mary) rejects her once Martin, a "real" man, appears. Stephen's sense of affinity with another victim, the hunted fox, is not recognized by the animal itself. Throughout the novel a kind of transference between protagonist and animals takes place. Animals are anthropomorphized throughout The Well of Loneliness and all but Raftery have proper names, which suggests at another level their position outside the heterosexual order. This may all sound rather absurd, but Hall is not being ironic; she is trying to find alternatives to a language that she finds inadequate, for it imbeds a set of gender determinations that cannot contain what she is trying to portray. Again, we come back to the importance of this novel as a lesbian Künstlerroman—
the relationship to things achieves a new importance.

The stress on labeling and naming throughout the novel is relevant to this; indeed, they tend to introduce some ambiguity about the naturist point of view to which Hall publicly associated her writings. The very first pages are concerned with labeling, naming, and establishing that perceptions of Stephen as a "narrow-hipped, wide-shouldered little tadpole of a baby" relate not only to terms of congenital inversion and the naturist point of view but also to the parental expectations and predetermination that have preceded the birth. By naming her Stephen, the parents reassert and sustain the wish for a son even as it is clearly unfulfilled; the naming suggests that Stephen Gordon's ambiguous relation to gender is produced by environmental as well as congenital circumstance. The way in which medical discourse, the labeling of Stephen as an invert, is introduced in the novel suggests a sinister and destructive point of view. For the "truth" of Stephen's condition has been held in the father's rational domain, the study. Here he has pored over Krafft-Ebing and other medical texts that label Stephen as abnormal and deviant. Stephen "discovers" this "knowledge" hidden in a secret compartment of his study only after her father's death; the "menacing prophetic" aspect of the father's domain produces a hitherto unknown process of naming herself. In context, then, this appears as part of a patriarchal order of labeling and policing nature and society. Revealed as a hidden unspoken thing, this medical discourse emerges not as enlightenment, the means of understanding herself which Stephen needs, but as part of her victimization and exclusion. She knows now the patriarch's deceptiveness and power: "He had known and knowing he had not told her; he had pitied and pitying had not protected; he had feared and fearing had saved only himself" (p. 237). At the moment of discovery, the medical texts are immediately placed alongside the Bible, which translates their language into that of another patriarchal discourse and process of labeling—the mark of Cain. So this knowledge is placed in the domain of the "constructed," rather than the innate, and is another level at which the dominant discourse-power relationship is revealed.

In its awareness of the issue of sex and gender, language and literary forms, The Well of Loneliness stands as a precursor of later works in the lesbian canon, indicating not only a precedent but also a part of a tradition that later writers both confirm and define
themselves against. Subsequent lesbian writers have sought to review Hall's depiction of the "invert," yet, as is clear, the poetics of the novel place it within the lesbian literary tradition, which is characteristically concerned with gender bifurcation. It seems to me that we find in The Well of Loneliness an awareness of these issues but little emergent sense of how to produce a renewal for an alternative discourse. I began by suggesting that Virginia Woolf's quotation implied a sense of being poised on a frontier; Radclyffe Hall is there too, aware of the possibilities for "immense change" if Mary Carmichael can find a suitable way to express it.

The artist in Hall's Künstlerroman must find another way of locating herself. She is in a "no-man's land: I'm lost, where am I? Where am I? I'm nothing — yes I am, I'm Stephen — but that's being nothing." A new tradition, language, and means of self-identification must emerge: "It is all half lights and profound shadows like those serpentine caves where one goes with a candle peering up and down, not knowing where one is stepping." The Künstlerroman protagonist is, of course, generically subjective and self-conscious, yet, for Stephen Gordon, the problems of self-expression and perception are all the more acute for there are no existing traditions within which she can assume her place. Her sexual identity and creativity are interwoven, yet traditional forms of language, genre, and convention must be reshaped if her sexuality is to find expression. It is precisely these perceptions that led writers such as Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, and Djuna Barnes and, later, Monique Wittig, to experiment with language and genre.

On the other hand, both Radclyffe Hall and her inscribed author, Stephen Gordon, try to put new wine into old bottles. We can see this if we compare the form of Hall's rather conventional middle-brow novel with Woolf's fantastic biography, Orlando. We can see it at another level in the fact that Stephen Gordon becomes a novelist. Unfortunately, Hall tells us little about Stephen's art beyond the fact that she writes novels (including The Furrow!) but it is clear that she rejects, as Hall herself did, the more avant-garde and experimental forms of artistic expression.

Although we might wish that Radclyffe Hall had addressed the problems of using conventional literary forms explicitly in her novel, she does present an examination of the social problems faced by the homosexual artist in an indirect way. In the second
part of *The Well of Loneliness*, after Stephen's expulsion from Morton and England and the defeat of her rural idyll, she goes to the antithesis of the English rural manor—a salon in Rue Jacob, Paris. The Rue Jacob became famous during the 1920s via Natalie Barney's salon, a mecca of the homosexual artistic subculture in Paris. Hall refuses to present the retreat to a subculture as an adequate resolution to the problems of communication and creativity which she has presented in the first part of the novel. It is a commonplace of analyses of the novel to comment on how Radclyffe Hall's own career was less traumatic than Stephen Gordon's, and recollections of Natalie Barney's salon have offered a more balanced image. Yet in the context of *The Well of Loneliness*, Hall is concerned not so much with verisimilitude as an examination of whether a retreat to a deviant subculture is the best response, or the only response, for the homosexual artist to make. Again, we must remember her determination to reject simple endings or resolutions to Stephen's dilemma.

Her approach to this is quite political and didactic. For example, the thoughts of Stephen's mentor, Puddle:

Like to like. No, no, an intolerable thought! Such a thought as that was an outrage on Stephen. Stephen was honourable and courageous; she was steadfast in friendship and selfless in loving; intolerable to think that her only companions must be men and women like Jonathan Brockett—and yet—after all what else? What remained? Loneliness, or worse still, far worse because it so deeply degraded the spirit, a life of perpetual subterfuge, of guarded opinions and guarded actions, of lies of omission if not of speech, of becoming an accomplice in the world's injustice by maintaining at all times a judicious silence, making and keeping the friends one respected, on false pretences, because if they knew they would turn aside, even the friends one respected. (P. 244)

Puddle might well be reflecting on her own choice here, for she seems to be a type of what Newton calls the first generation of "New Women" and an invert whose preferences never found physical expression.

The analysis of the Parisian subculture is structured as a descent into hell. The first portal is Valérie Seymour's salon:

The first thing that struck Stephen about Valérie's flat was its large and rather splendid disorder. There was something blissfully unkept about it, as though its mistress were too much engrossed in other affairs to control its behaviour. Nothing was quite where it ought to have been, and much was where it ought
not to have been, while over the whole lay a faint odour of dust— even over the spacious salon. The odour of somebody's Oriental scent was mingling with the odour of tuberoses in a sixteenth century chalice. On a divan, whose truly regal proportions occupied the best part of a shadowy alcove, lay a box of Fuller's peppermint creams and a lute, but the strings of the lute were broken. (P. 246)

There are suggestions of dissolution, taintedness here (like Orotava), and these later become more explicit: "So now they were launched up the stream that flows silent and deep through all great cities, gliding on between precipitous borders, away and away into no-man's land— the most desolate country in all creation" (p. 360). This voyage is completed in spring (again, the ritual patterns are mocked) with a tour of homosexual bars where painted cupids are sullied by flies, kitchens stand in proximity to the toilet (Hall's touch is often far from deft), and Stephen acknowledged as "Mon frère," one of the "battered remnants of men whom their fellow-men had at last stamped under" (p. 393).

Stephen Gordon is presented as a puppet of Fate and prisoner of both her own determination to be the martyr and a rigorously heterosexual socialization. Much like Joan Ogden, in Hall's The Unlit Lamp, Stephen finally lacks the courage and the vision to make the break with old orders. As in the earlier novel, the patriarchal law and the England of the colonels, the majors, the rose gardens, and the decaying traditions has its way; convention defeats the desire for personal happiness in a character who is still so much a creation of this kind of society.

And now she must pay very dearly indeed for that inherent respect of the normal which nothing had ever been able to destroy, not even the long years of persecution—an added burden it was, handed down by the silent but watchful founders of Morton. She must pay for the instinct which, in earliest childhood, had made her feel something akin to worship for the perfect thing which she had divined in the love that existed between her parents. (P. 438)

These are other choices for Stephen, although I would suggest that Hall cannot find a way forward from the artistic problems she raises in the novel. We do Hall an injustice if we take Stephen as the archetypal lesbian, for as an artist and an English aristocrat, her situation is class bound and quite specific. What Hall is trying to achieve in her analysis of the homosexual subculture is a critique of perhaps the best known mode of behavior available to the lesbian artist. As Faderman points out, the role of the "character"—
flamboyant actresses, artists, and subculture types who conducted themselves outrageously in the big cities, public celebrities who lived under different rules—had always been one response for lesbians. An exotic image of the lesbian, largely a product of male fantasy, was developed by French aesthetes in the nineteenth century, and Hall's glance at the paternal bar owner Monsieur Pujot, the voyeur, the collector of inverts, suggests that she is not unaware of the ways in which homosexual libertinism can be a response to the fantasies and expectations of the heterosexual community.

The examination of the Parisian artistic community also allows Hall to extend her analysis of the problems of language, the communication and articulation of a nonheterosexual point of view. The two members of Valérie Seymour's salon to whom Stephen becomes close are Jamie, a composer, and Wanda, a painter. Jamie and her lover Barbara are, like Mary and Stephen, exiled from England, and Hall contrasts the two couples in a way that draws attention to the fact that Stephen's class, aristocratic background, and wealth privileges her even in exile. Both artists, Jamie and Wanda, although working in very different modes, cannot communicate their vision effectively and, in both cases, this is related to an inability to translate emotion and feeling into the traditional forms of their art: again, new wine, old bottles. So Jamie is "a trifle unhinged because of the music that besieged her soul and fought for expression through her stiff and scholarly compositions," and Wanda is "struggling to lose herself in her picture, struggling to ease the ache of her passion by smearing the placid white face of the canvas with ungainly yet strange forms" (p. 354). These other attempts to create in established artistic forms and genres reflect, in different media, Hall's own sense that "mere language" is not enough, that the very tools and modes of artistic expression speak of heterosexual norms and values that need to be deconstructed and rethought by the lesbian writer who wishes her art to make the connection between feeling and expression, private and public. Indeed, as Stillman Franks has suggested, Stephen's own failure of courage and vision at the end of the novel, her inability to carve for herself a life-style between the decaying Morton orthodoxy and the decadence of M. Pujot's bar, is due to a failure to connect the two aspects of her personality: the sensitivity of the invert and artist and the conservative, respectable country instincts.
that are the legacy of her socialization at Morton.

That Stephen is unable to mediate between these two extremes that confront her and chooses the role of artist as martyr (a role that was ridiculed so convincingly when as a child she tried to induce housemaid’s knee in empathy with the maid, Collins) is a failure of courage and audacity. For each of her loves—Collins, Angela, and Mary—Stephen chooses to be the martyr; the pattern is repeated thrice. That Stephen does not break into a new mode of living and thinking does not, in my view, suggest that Hall cannot imagine anything different. The tension between the depiction of lesbian passion and the romance conventions of the popular realist novel, nevertheless, suggest that anything other than the present resolution could be imagined but not expressed.

Reading both of the Künstlerromanen of 1928, Orlando and The Well of Loneliness, within a lesbian paradigm suggests ways in which they extend the form of the apprenticeship novel in a distinctive manner. For, whereas the struggle to maturity as an artist traditionally takes place against an inhospitable environment with uncertainty about the creative mission, both Orlando and Stephen Gordon face additional difficulties caused by their ambivalent relation to traditionally gendered and heterosexual perceptions of the world. Significantly, Hall takes her protagonist beyond that hope for freedom in the pulsating, glowing city where Lawrence can leave Paul Morel, or the flight to Paris where Joyce projects Stephen Dedalus. The lesbian artist will not find a path through life or language ready-made; there are no traditional roles to assume. Akin to their inscribed artists, Orlando and Stephen, both Woolf and Hall were aware that, if the relationship between Chloe and Olivia were to be expressed in art, the challenge was not only to the domain of moral standards and censorship but also to the deeply gendered and heterosexist presumptions of language, literature, and criticism.

Clearly Woolf and Hall chose to make that challenge in different terms. Catherine R. Stimpson proposes a schema that may be used to spell out this difference via her argument that

lesbian novels in English have responded judgmentally to the perversion that has made homosexuality perverse by developing two repetitive patterns: the dying fall, a narrative of damnation, of the lesbian’s suffering as a lonely outcast attracted to a psychological lower caste; and the enabling escape, a nar-
rative of the reversal of such descending trajectories, of the lesbian's rebellion against social stigma and self-contempt. 36

Stimpson suggests that The Well of Loneliness is the paradigm of the narrative of damnation whereby Radclyffe Hall, "as if making an implicit, perhaps unconscious pact with her culture," rejected silence or excessive coding and made a plea for the understanding of the heterosexual community. She presents Orlando as the paradigm of lesbian romanticism, the "enabling escape"as opposed to Hall's "dying fall." This allows Stimpson to clarify important differences between the two novels although perhaps obscuring the similarities that I have tried to focus upon here.

From the very beginning of Orlando ("He—for there could be no doubt of his sex...") Woolf clothes her character in ambiguity; the androgyne's ever-intrusive biographer lets "other pens treat of sex and sexuality; we quit such odious subjects as soon as we can." 36 Although Vita Sackville-West's son and biographer confirms that Woolf was fancifully depicting his mother's lesbian adventures in the novel, the fantasy is such that Orlando slipped easily past the censors, and "it was for years considered only a slight and negligible work by most Woolf scholars, and a tantalizing little joke by lesbian readers." 37 In this oblique way Virginia Woolf, like Djuna Barnes, addressed her work to a private and silent audience and in both theory and practice urged other women writers to eschew "pleading and protesting"in their writing, to avoid the "too heavy, too pompous"modes of male discourse. 38 Radclyffe Hall, of course, resolutely opposed the tradition of lesbian fantasy and romanticism; she openly took up her pen "in defense of those who are utterly defenseless," seeking "impartial justice and understanding towards a very unfortunate section of the community" 39 via the medium of the popular novel. Ironically (but not accidentally, for history frequently chooses to bury and ignore rather than publicly examine what it chooses to reject), the most notorious and publicly vilified of the novels of 1928 was in some ways the most accepting of heterosexist norms and values, refusing the kind of affirmative and fantastic vision that we find in homosexual romances such as Maurice and Orlando. Labeling and publicly examining Hall's novel became part of a political process in which a more radical lesbian literary tradition was obscured and ignored. The reluctance of many contemporary critics to accept The Well of Loneliness into the newly defined lesbian canon
must be seen in the context of strategies to redefine and expand a
lesbian literary tradition in terms other than those of "the dying fall" paradigm which ostensibly accepts heterosexual norms.

It is for this reason Stephen Gordon stands as a martyr "re-
luctantly canonized" in the lesbian tradition. The romantic, pica-
resque mode of *Orlando* has emerged as the favored lesbian nar-
rative of the 1970s and 1980s; its humor and evasiveness re-
emerges in *Rubyfruit Jungle, Six of One*, and *Sister Gin*, for example. The modern lesbian novel has avoided the problems of characteri-
zation associated with Hall's realism by recreating fantastic pro-
tagonists like Orlando—women who are, in the style of the
picaresque, free to roam and only tenuously embedded in the trapp-
ings of everyday life. Such heroic novels of rebellion, escape, and
fantasy reach back to myths of the original isle of Lesbos. Like
other writers on the periphery of the White Anglo-Saxon Prote-
tant patriarchal literary establishment—here I am thinking of male
postcolonial writers such as Salman Rushdie, Gabriel Garcia Mar-
quez, and G. Carera Infante—lesbian writers use the comic myth
to encode highly political and contentious narratives that subvert
and mock the dominant traditions. I have argued elsewhere that
lesbian writers in particular are at the forefront of feminist
humorous writing. In this way they are developing modes other
than the solipsistic quests and narratives of defeat that have
reigned in the heterosexual feminist novel. Ironically, the "nar-
rative of the dying fall" has emerged as the major tradition in
mainstream feminist realism through the writings of novelists
such as Marilyn French and Joyce Carol Oates rather than in les-
bian writing.

It may well be that the problems of language and self-
identification that are presented in *The Well of Loneliness* are best
resolved in the fantastic and humorous modes that have become
the mainstream of lesbian writing. Nevertheless, we do Hall an in-
justice if we ignore the extent to which her novel attempts to use
realist fiction and to find a language in which to say "I, a women-
loving woman, exist." Like Willa Cather and Gertrude Stein,
Radclyffe Hall's reactionary and un feminist politics have deterred
close and sympathetic readings of her novel by feminist and les-
bian critics alike. Yet, clearly, as this analysis of the novel sug-
gests, a lesbian canon and aesthetic will not emerge ready-made;
significant contradictions remain. Nevertheless, there are par-
ticular problems and issues that bring lesbian writings together and set them apart within the broader category of "Women's Writing." For all their differences, even antipathies, bringing *The Well of Loneliness* and *Orlando*, Hall and Woolf, together in the half lights of a lesbian literary tradition begins to reveal the shape of a subculture within feminist writings that uses language and genre and seeks the "Mother Tongue" in its own distinctive ways.

NOTES


The quotation is from Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1973). Note the congruency here with not only *The Well of Loneliness* but also with Radclyffe Hall's earlier novel, *The Unlit Lamp*, and the connotations of female physiology that are implicit in the topography.

9. Lillian Faderman and Ann Williams, "Radclyffe Hall and the Lesbian Image," *Conditions*, no. 1 (April 1977): 32. I am grateful to Bonnie Zimmerman for this and a number of other references unavailable to me in Australia.
11. Faderman and Williams, 40.
12. Alison Hennegan, Introduction to *The Well of Loneliness*, by Radclyffe Hall (Lon-
don: Virago, 1983), vii. Subsequent references are to this edition with page numbers supplied in parentheses in the text.
18. See, for example, Barbara Smith, "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism," Conditions, no. 2 (October 1977); see also, Bonnie Zimmerman below.
23. Pratt, 21-22.
24. Hennegan, x.
29. Namsar Shaktini, "Displacing the Phallic Subject: Wittig's Lesbian Writing," Signs 8 [Autumn 1982]: 30; Monique Wittig ("One Is Not Born a Woman"), quoted in ibid., 37; and 41.
30. Hennegan, xii.
31. Daly, 383.
33. Faderman, 61.
34. Claudia Stillman Franks offers a sympathetic rereading of the novel which argues that "the real value of the book ... derives not from its treatment of homosexuality, but from its portrayal of a woman's imagination." In my view this distinction cannot be sustained.
36. Woolf, Orlando, 87.
37. Quoted in Faderman and Williams, 31.
39. Radclyffe Hall, quoted in Faderman and Williams, 32.