

Masculinity, Modernism and the Ambivalence of Nature: Sexual Inversion as Queer Ecology in *The Well of Loneliness*¹

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I

In his compelling genealogical history of twentieth century English understandings of landscape, David Matless offers a number of shrewd observations about the relationships between nature and modernism. Particularly in the chapter concerning the interwar years, he documents a significant current of thought and politics in which, in the wake of World War I, calls to preserve rural English landscapes were articulated as much with a modernist project as an anti-modernist one. Against monolithic accounts focused on English anti-modern longings for a “rural idyll” in which traditional village-and-manor land uses occupy a purely nostalgic position in relation to industrial and political “progress,” he emphasizes that many advocates of rural landscape preservation in the 1920s and 1930s saw no particular contradiction in the articulation of “a nostalgic evocation of past village order with an imagery of modern settlement networks.”² Particularly in the face of widespread postwar suburban expansion,³ a significant preservationist element called not for a “return” to a past countryside ideal of dispersed villages and estates, but rather a harnessing of the moral fabric of “traditional” rural English landscapes toward ideals of “good grouping and community.”⁴ Planners and politicians alike raised their voices against disorganized, laissez-faire countryside development in favour of what Matless calls a “moral modernity,” a modernism “of orderly progress driven by planning”⁵ This modernity was highly disciplined; not surprisingly, the ideal way of perceiving the moral character of the “true” English countryside was in regular and planned open-air exercise, which cultivated through hiking and observation a morally modern *body* in articulation with a preserved and organized rural landscape.

The moral modernist landscape of carefully organized rural “tradition” was, of course, born of a longing for an idea of the countryside that was far more the *product* of suburban development than it was a genuine opposition to it. As Raymond Williams documents extensively, literary depictions of English landscape in the period generally evacuated the realities of, for example, agricultural work, urban migration, and persistent poverty from the harmonious manors and villages of the imagined past.⁶ Rural England became residential, a place (as in colonialism) from which one came and a place (as in urbanization) to which one returned for a segregated, composed retreat; in Williams’ words, “a traditional and

surviving rural England was scribbled over and almost hidden from sight by what is really a suburban and half-educated scrawl.”⁷⁷ Although the tendency to abstract the idea of the countryside from its constitutive labour is, for Williams, much older and larger, a key issue in the Georgian period was that its country writers so often

*came to the country. The nerves were already strained, the minds already formed.... If they could have gone and only looked, as at times happened, it would have been a different mode. But they had brought with them from the cities, and from the schools and universities, a version of rural history which was now extraordinarily amalgamated with a distantly translated literary interpretation.*⁸

This paper begins, then, with the observation that the “neo-pastoral” English literary landscape of the 1920s and 1930s, to use Williams’ term, is not only very much consistent with a particular set of modernist ideals, but can also be understood as largely the creation of those ideals. In this creation, the countryside becomes a site of nativity to be appreciated for its unique ability to cultivate morality, beauty and tradition (i.e., its abiding “nature”), but the correct way of going about understanding and observing that nature lies necessarily in an experience of having been formed *outside* of the country. Appreciation is reflective, not immanent. As Williams writes, “the pull of the idea of the country is toward old ways, human ways, natural ways. The pull of the idea of the city is towards progress, modernisation, development”⁷⁸; with the urban and the progressive firmly conjoined as futurity, it is hardly surprising that the proper truth of English rurality was something to be written by cosmopolitan outsiders, its care something to be planned elsewhere.

It is in this context that Radclyffe Hall published her now-infamous (1928) novel *The Well of Loneliness*. To say the least, it is not especially common to read *The Well* as a work of English landscape representation, let alone environmental history or eco-criticism (Williams doesn’t mention it despite the fact that the entire novel turns on a relationship between country and city). The voluminous critical literature that exists on *The Well* tends to focus on the novel’s central depiction of Stephen Gordon, the novel’s protagonist, as a *sexual invert*—defined by early twentieth century sexologist Havelock Ellis as a person whose “sexual instinct [is] turned by inborn constitutional abnormality toward persons of the same sex.”⁷⁹ Indeed, *The Well* tends now to be judged quite harshly for Hall’s enthusiastic embrace of such sexological theories of inversion, emphasizing as they do the *congenital* nature of sexual identity; indeed, an interrogation of this “nature” lies at the heart of some of the more interesting scholarly readings of the novel. Some excellent recent work problematizes, among other things, the attachment of Stephen’s inversion to a specifically naturalized, nationalist, colonial and class-infused rhetoric in which Hall’s overall plea for tolerance for the invert is deeply conservative, and likely self-serving, even as it redraws sex/gender boundaries in

quite radical ways for its time.¹¹ Very little of this work, however, explores the question of the *nature* that is invoked in the service of Hall's views on inversion. Exceptions include Trevor Hope, who has written with great intelligence about the persistent Romantic organicism in *The Well*, focused on its intertwined tropes of trees and wounds;¹² in addition, Lorelee MacPike has identified the centrality of Stephen's sense of place to her self-concept, sexual and otherwise, and the resonance of her alienation from Morton with the post-World War I dislocations of Hall's own milieu.¹³ But I would like to suggest an additional direction: *The Well of Loneliness* turns on a very particular nature, namely an articulation of a powerful view of naturalized class and gender privilege with a notion, equally powerful, of the individual achievement of *transcendence* of nature in order to achieve understanding and mastery that is—as Matless' and Williams' arguments move us toward seeing—part of the rhetoric of neo-pastoral landscape preservation characteristic of the modernist nature imaginings of the period. This articulation places the novel not only in a tradition of Romantic organicism, but also more specifically in a particular mode of nature writing in which it is precisely distance from “rude” nature—in this case, from a virtuous but ultimately unreflective rurality—that allows the modern subject to truly understand nature's finer and more inspirational qualities, in Stephen's case, her own “nature.” As I will discuss below, this argument suggests that *The Well* is an important articulatory text that ties environmental history with queer history; indeed, Hall's positioning of Stephen as an exemplary modern “nature-subject” suggests something like a nascent “queer ecology” in which the cosmopolitanism and self-understanding of the exiled Stephen serves as a privileged vantage point for reflection on the moral landscape of the English countryside.

II

In the final scene of *The Well of Loneliness*, Stephen Gordon has just painfully driven her lover, Mary Llewellyn, into the waiting arms of Martin Hallam, Stephen's old friend-turned-arch-rival. For Stephen, Martin embodies everything that she cannot give Mary: “children, a home that the world would respect, ties of affection that the world would hold sacred, the blessed security and the peace of being released from the world's persecution.”¹⁴ Crucially, and as an integral part of this ideal hetero-normal package, Martin also offers Mary *nature*, in the form of “several farms and a number of orchards”¹⁵ amid the coniferous forests and clear lakes of British Columbia. Because Mary is entirely unwelcome at Morton, Stephen's ancestral estate in the Malvern Hills of England, one of Stephen's greatest causes for sadness is that she cannot likewise furnish Mary with the forests and lakes that are Stephen's birthright, her proper home, and unlike the “degenerate” Paris lesbian nightclubs of Hall's portrayal, an appropriate place, in her eyes, for the innocent and delicate Mary. Stephen is, of course, a sexual invert; although her mas-

culinity is thoroughly steeped in the rituals of the landed gentry, and in the ideas and ideals of nature with which these rituals are articulated, heredity included, she is barred from taking her rightful place as Morton's lord and inheritor because her desire for women conflicts with the heterosexual imperative that is so crucial to the class, race, gender and nature relations constituting this landscape. Stephen is thus a sexual exile, and because she maintains the belief that the traditional marriage between natural space and upper-class heterosexuality is absolute, she must offer Mary Martin instead of Morton.

In this final scene, Stephen watches Mary leave their Paris house en route, we presume, to Canada, and is suddenly possessed of a calling. Legions of the "marred and reproachful faces with the haunted, melancholy eyes of the invert"¹⁶ crowd Stephen's consciousness and propel her, from her position of self-sacrificial misery, to write the story that, we also presume, is the book *The Well of Loneliness*. In Stephen's estimation—and clearly in Hall's own¹⁷—this is a book designed to offer the world the truth of the sexual invert, to demand for the sexually outcast the possibilities of love, happiness, and personhood that are routinely denied by an intolerant and ignorant world. Stephen is already a successful writer, her exile from Morton having sharpened her literary talent: "so the pain of Morton burning down to the spirit in Stephen had kindled a bright, hot flame, and all that she had written she had written by its light, seeing exceedingly clearly."¹⁸ Thus we must note that in Stephen's earlier passage from Morton to London, and later to Paris—from home, nature and aristocratic ritual to urbanity, enlightenment, and individual creativity—we also see a passage into a decidedly modern subjectivity.¹⁹ But it is in *The Well's* final moment—the point at which the invert comes to speak, to demand appearance and recognition through Stephen's writing—that she finally comes to articulate her sexual nature with her individuality. Stephen speaks for the first time of the inverted as a "we" and, called and possessed by the inverted legions of which she is a part, she simultaneously experiences the painful clarity of the singular author even more intensely than before: "And now there was only one voice, one demand; her own voice into which those millions had entered."²⁰ Thus here, Stephen's self-becoming an invert-subject is finally accomplished in the realm of the modern: the "right to our existence" that is the culminating demand of the novel signals Stephen's desire—and again in this case, Hall's²¹—for a cosmopolitan society in which the natural and categorical "we" of the invert and the singular and self-made "I" of the supposedly modern subject might coincide without the prejudice Hall locates squarely in "tradition."

The final scene of *The Well* thus contains an interesting juxtaposition, the intelligibility and effectiveness of which turns on a set of ideas of gender and nature that lie at the heart of early twentieth century moral modernism. In the first place, the external natures of Morton and Canada are understood as spaces of exclusive, authentic and "natural" heterosexuality. As I will describe more fully below, although the parks and woods of Morton are Stephen's childhood refuge,

and indeed are also places and relations instrumental to her self-formation as an appropriate bearer of English masculine privilege, they are overdetermined by an idealized heterosexuality to which Stephen may aspire but which she cannot, because of her inversion, achieve. At the same time, however, sexual inversion is understood by Stephen, and by Hall, as itself a fact of nature. Although unsteadily portrayed in the novel as either an evolutionary bonus or a congenital abnormality, reflecting ambivalences in sexological discourses of the period, the actuality of invert-nature is layered with ideas of immutability, even divine ordination. Indeed, in *The Well*, inversion appears as a facet of the same *noble* nature embodied in Morton and Martin, the very nature that appears to exclude the invert.

Clearly, this contradiction is the one that Hall wishes us to see, and the one that got her into trouble with the censors. As Judge Chartres Biron stated in his 1928 judgment banning *The Well* in Britain as obscene, “there is not a single word from beginning to end of this book which suggests that anyone with these horrible tendencies is in the least blameworthy or that they should in any way resist them. Everybody, all characters who indulge in these horrible vices are presented to us as attractive people.”²² The problem with the novel, in Biron’s view, is that there is nothing at all obscene about Stephen: the invert is *not* inherently degenerate as a result of her congenital abnormality. In Hall’s portrayal, Stephen’s exile from Morton is unjust precisely because her inversion does not in any way undermine her inborn ability to maintain upper-class English masculinity. She is, in all respects but one, her father’s ideal son. This position is underscored by Hall’s choice to have Havelock Ellis write an opening commentary to the novel as a way of emphasizing the credibility and gravity of her portrayal of the invert. According to Hall in a letter to Ellis soliciting his expert commentary on the work’s merit, *The Well* is a book that traces “the life from infancy to maturity of a congenital invert, treating inversion throughout not as a perversion or an unnatural occurrence, but as a condition which, since it occurs in nature must, even if unusual, be recognised as a natural fact.”²³ Writes Ellis in his resulting commentary:

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 unresolved 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.²⁴

What is interesting here is that although nature is sacrosanct—and, noting the complications of the word, I include as an intertwined knot the natural space of the landed gentry and the pastoral social rituals that maintain heterosexual, race, and class privilege, and the rightful place of the “fine” invert in both—Stephen can neither understand nature, nor write about its truth, nor struggle for

its recognition, until she has finally and completely accepted that she can never return to it. She understands the act of sacrificial deceit by which she tricks Mary into going away with Martin as the moment of her fleshly death; in a not-unfamiliar Christian turn, Stephen is then reborn, fully a creature of the spirit and the (written) Word. Perhaps more importantly for our purposes, Stephen cannot pick up the pen to write the story of the inverted “we”—in other words, does not turn the naturalized category of her belonging into a call for justice on its behalf—until she has cast *herself* out of nature, out of the fantasy of natural heterosexuality and “blessèd security” that then departs for a new home in Canada in the bodies of Mary and Martin. In this turn, Hall writes Stephen into a form of social advocacy that is associated with liberty and equality, not landedness and heredity.

The disavowal of nature and tradition en route to individual enlightenment and heroic individual achievement is, in twentieth century literature and politics, hardly an original position. Liberation from tradition and the realm of necessity, from the unreflective processes and biases of biological and social reproduction, engenders, in many strands of modern moral and political thought, the possibility of freedom. For Stephen, enlightenment involves transcendence of nature, and politics, to borrow a formulation from Hannah Arendt, involves the appearance of a singular “who” that is the bearer of public action—Stephen’s recognition of her “one voice”—distinct from the collective “what” that is the biological and social self of categorical being and doing, related as Stephen’s complex bio-social inheritance including both inversion and racialised class belonging.²⁵ It is hardly surprising, then, that we see in *The Well* an association among nature, tradition, ritual and reproduction, that is then counterposed to newness, individuality, achievement and the possibility of justice. But, also common to modernism (and indicated in English relations to landscape in the 1920s), there is also the contradictory position: for Stephen, nature is the thing that is to be recognized in and through public appearance in *The Well*. She has no wish to challenge the traditional rights and rites out of which her inversion, no less than her aristocratic inheritance, has emerged and been shaped, as *this* is the nature that underscores her claims to nobility, truth and justice. Hall thus reflects her era’s ambivalence about the loss of nature, and the loss of naturalized class and race hierarchy, that goes along with the claim to justice and recognition that she so clearly contrasts to the irrational prejudices of exactly this naturalized tradition. The right of inverts to take their place in nature, *as* nature, is the ultimate demand of the novel, but the nature that is the space of that recognition appears to remain fundamentally hostile to such claims. Here we have, then, an interesting tension between Hall’s insistence on Stephen’s freedom from nature as the site for her sexual and individual self-recognition, and a naturalization of sexuality as the site from which claims to justice are made on behalf of the invert. On the one hand, nature underscores and justifies a claim for morality; on the other hand, it is the seat of intolerance and prejudice that need to be transcended in order for justice and reflective indi-

viduality to occur.

This tension is particularly clear in light of Hall's apparently contradictory embrace of the invert as a product of nature, and her rejection of the equally naturalized proto-evolutionary understanding, common to the period, of homosexuality, inversion and the like as modes of sexual degeneracy.²⁶ Hall's (overdrawn and historically suspect²⁷) contrast between the bleak social decay of an emergent Parisian underground lesbian culture, and the "green and pleasant land" of an England mired in nineteenth century ritual, is hardly subtle and is articulated with understandings of race and class that underscore a profoundly conservative, even colonial, social and natural ideal. Yet it is clear that, in Hall's view, this ideal is open to the possibility of the invert; Stephen is the natural bearer of white-colonial privilege, even as her invert-nature is elsewhere read (by Judge Biron, for example) as a sign of exactly the decline of that heredity associated with, pace Wilde, urbanity, modernity, and artificiality. Indeed, Hall writes Stephen in several places as *more* worthy of her natural inheritance than those non-inverts who are able, by virtue of their unproblematically sexed and gendered selves, to remain in the land of the gentry.

What I would like to suggest is that *The Well* is able to perform this feat because it is immersed in and produces a particular appreciation of nature, one steeped in the articulations of nature and modernism outlined at the outset of this paper but, in fact, attenuated by the strategic literary recourse to discourses of nature, morality and heredity employed by Hall throughout the novel. It is precisely Stephen's exile from nature, and her emergence into the apparent freedom and reflexivity of modernity, that allows her to be a *privileged* observer of nature, a superior advocate for a natural morality, and even, interestingly, an exemplary model *of* nature. *The Well* is thus a text that firmly inserts both sexual and spatial nature into the production processes of modern landscape appreciation; although this legacy has problematic effects for sex/nature articulations, as is the focus of much of the critical literature on *The Well*, it is also interesting to read the novel as a text in the history of environmental ideas, as it is in the relations between Hall's invocation of a *moral* nature and her insistence on a *queer* nature that we find important insights about the intersections between sexual and environmental history.

III

The Well of Loneliness begins in the garden, "the country seat of the Gordons of Bramley; well-timbered, well-cottaged, well-fenced and well-watered, having, in this latter respect, a stream that forks in exactly the right place to feed two large lakes in the grounds."²⁸ We are introduced, in almost the same breath as we encounter Morton, to the apparently perfect heterosexual desire that emerges from and sustains such noble estates: the pairing of Sir Philip Gordon and Lady Anna, whose love comes to rest in the bosom of the land as Sir Philip's does in

Anna's, "as a spent bird will fly to its nest."²⁹ When Anna becomes pregnant with what they assume to be a son, she finally feels in her body and her stirring child all the fullness of Morton's landed lineage, and sees in the land the fruition of her desire. "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."³⁰ As Anna's body is pressed into the service of aristocratic patriarchal tradition, so too are Morton's trees and hills overdetermined by a feminized ripeness that is the timeless and cyclical body out of which splendid sons emerge: the stuff, of course, of both British masculinity and British nationalism.

When Stephen is born a girl, we feel the first rumblings of trouble in the garden: Anna's body has, in her view, failed in its repetition of the land's patrilineal imperative. As Noble points out, "the first time the word 'unnatural' appears, it is not in relation to Stephen; rather it is articulated in relation to notions of maternity and describes Anna's inability to love Stephen"³¹: "she would lie awake at night and ponder this thing, scourging herself in an access of contrition, accusing herself of hardness of spirit, of being an unnatural mother."³² Sir Philip, by contrast, appears to accept that his longing for a son has been realized in his little girl who, from the very beginning, looks like him. He insists on calling her Stephen, as planned, and enlists her early on into the homosocial rituals of masculine initiation that are to distance the male progenitor from the mother. "Sir Philip would come home all muddy from hunting and would rush into the nursery before pulling off his boots, then down he would go on his hands and knees while Stephen clambered on his back.... Anna, attracted by the outlandish hubbub, would find them, and would point to the mud on the carpet.... 'Now, Philip, now Stephen, that's enough!'"³³

I emphasize this opening dynamic for several reasons. First, the naturalization of British aristocracy through a feminized and heterosexualised relation of Anna's body and Morton's landscape is almost immediately met with that "other" nature of *The Well*, the actuality of Stephen's inversion, a nature that not only precedes the name "invert"—this self-knowledge is to come much later—but, indeed, precedes birth: Stephen is naturalized male before she is born female. Second, even as Anna's body and hetero-maternal desire are of the same nature as, and are foundational to, the maintenance of the aristocratic British landscape, her maternal failure is the site of the tension that marks Stephen's childhood. Even as Hall is careful not to make Anna *too* horrible a mother—as Margot Gayle Backus points out, to do so would have been to court environmental rather than congenital explanations for sexual inversion³⁴—it is clear that Anna's maternal-feminine response is the flawed and unnatural one against which Sir Philip's own paternal-masculine tolerance is coded healthy and, by implication, more natural. We see at the outset, then, that the masculine is established as the morally superior view of

nature, even as the feminine may be its ground and embodiment.

From this point at which the unnatural has appeared, and with it an inequality of moral ability, Stephen's development as a sexual invert—which is variously understood in contemporary criticism as a form of female masculinity (Halberstam) or transgender subjectivity (Prosser)—emerges through a number of narrative threads, many of which reinforce Stephen's simultaneous joy in her increasing attachment to and potency in the natural world, and also the increasing ill-fit of this embodiment in the social world that maintains and is maintained by that nature. One crucial narrative concerns the ways in which Stephen realizes “an urgent necessity to love”³⁵ in the manner of Philip and Anna's—and the landscape's—perfect heterosexuality, and is repeatedly thwarted in her understanding of herself as the masculine partner in that idyllic encounter. She develops a crush on Collins, a housemaid, the heterosexual pastoral fantasy of which is violently ended by Stephen's eventual witnessing of a rough sexual encounter between Collins and a footman. Prefiguring Stephen's later encounter with Angela Crossby, a brash, *nouveau-riche* American neighbour, and even with Mary, a young, orphaned Welsh woman, the inappropriateness of Collins as an object-choice is simultaneously figured as a problem of gender and a problem of class. Clearly, however, Stephen's desire to love as her father loves—and thus to pass on that love to her own son and heir—is interrupted by the fact that the nature of this love, including the landscape that nurtures and is nurtured by it, is eternally and essentially heterosexual.

A second narrative, and the one on which I will focus here, concerns the fact that, simultaneous to Stephen's increasing recognition of the failure to realize her fantasy of male heterosexual desire, she becomes increasingly adept at other aspects of upper-class masculinity, becoming her father in all respects but one. Perhaps not surprisingly given the historical location of *The Well*, the coterminous superiority of that masculinity and the credibility of Stephen's achievement of it is iteratively accomplished in the novel through the homosocial rituals of the *mas-tery* of nature, including (as Matless would have us note) both those associated with the production of the virile body and those directly involved in the subjection of the landscape or other species. Stephen becomes an adept fencer under the tutelage of ex-Sergeant Smylie,³⁶ and is greatly pleased by her trained and muscular body even as she later expresses, in a significant (and much commented-upon) scene in front of a mirror,³⁷ a hatred for the relationship between its muscularity and her sense of sterility in relation to Angela Crossby's ultimately heterosexual desires.

Perhaps most importantly, though, Stephen's masculinity is cultivated in the traditional outdoor rituals of the landed aristocracy: in horsemanship, and especially in hunting. Through Stephen's iterative achievement of outdoor proficiency, Hall not only establishes Stephen's (socially impossible) ability to be the master of the land, but also her maturity and readiness to steward that land with

understanding, compassion, and respect. Early on in the novel, Hall establishes that Stephen is born to ride: “the child’s hands were strong yet exceedingly gentle—she possessed that rare gift, perfect hands on a horse.”³⁸ Some of her earliest personal and social triumphs occur in and around horses; horsemanship is a site of paternal approval from Sir Philip, and indeed, it is one of the only sites in which Stephen is offered social approval from anyone else, particularly from Colonel Antrim, the Master of the Hunt, who offers Stephen the fox’s brush on her first, very successful hunt. At this first moment of masculine acceptance, Stephen is still clearly a child even if the successful hunt is a clear step up the ladder. And so there is some ambivalence:

Just for an instant the child’s heart misgave her, as she looked at the soft, furry thing in her hand; but the joy of attainment was still hot upon her, and that incomparable feeling of elation that comes from the knowledge of personal courage, so that she forgot the woes of the fox in remembering the prowess of Stephen.³⁹

Two things are especially interesting about this equation of nature-mastery with masculinity. In the first place, Hall juxtaposes the possibility of Stephen’s acceptance in the realm of the masculine by the men themselves—Colonel Antrim being a clear example—with the clear rejection of her masculinity by women. Violet Antrim and her mother, for example, are a constant source of feminine torment for Stephen, not least because their dogmatic insistence on Stephen’s necessary femininity directly challenges her otherwise unproblematic and socially superior masculinity. Again foreshadowing Angela Crossby’s apparently selfish comparison of Stephen with the bourgeois men who are the true subjects of her desire, the Antrim women selfishly read Stephen as a challenge to their feminine potency. In broad strokes, femininity does not fare well in the process by which Stephen increasingly rejects it en route to masculine achievement, and Anna’s failed maternity, Violet’s selfish exclusion of Stephen’s difference, and Angela’s calculating rejection of Stephen’s love, are all testament to the moral weakness of the feminine that is eventually also apparent in Mary’s merely “childish” devotion (if Mary had really loved Stephen, she would have seen through Stephen’s ruse). As Hall writes, not so subtly, men “were oak-trees, preferring the feminine ivy. It might cling rather close, it might finally strangle, it frequently did, and yet they preferred it, and this being so, they resented Stephen, suspecting something of the acorn about her.”⁴⁰

In the second place, and unlike her rejection of the (strangling) feminine, Stephen’s mastery of nature is not tied to a stance of repudiation, but rather to what Hall carefully portrays as a deepening attitude of benevolent and enlightened understanding, in which participation in outdoor virility is tempered and enriched by the learned contemplation in which her father already excels. Stephen graduates from a pony—not insignificantly named Collins after her first crush—to a

full-sized horse named, in a higher-level Romantic gesture, after Irish poet Anthony Raftery, and continues to ride and hunt (against the pettiness of those who criticise her stance astride) with increasing skill. Soon after Raftery's appearance, however, Sir Philip engages the bluestocking Miss Puddleton as Stephen's tutor: "three years under Puddle's ingenious tuition, and the girl was as proud of her brains as of her muscles."²⁴¹ At this point in the novel, in fact, Stephen has a revelation about hunting, in which she rejects it after identifying with the fox being pursued: education, it seems, enables mercy. But Stephen does not reject Raftery as she emerges from her childish ways into Puddle's mentoring; she is still devoted to the ever-accepting Raftery, confiding in him her new-found respect for the intellect: "it's very important to develop the brain because that gives you an advantage over people, it makes you more able to do as you like in this world, to conquer conditions, Raftery."²⁴² Raftery, significantly, knows better. Bearer of "the wisdom come down from the youth of the world", he "would want to say something about a strong feeling he had that Stephen was missing the truth. But how could he hope to make her understand the age-old wisdom of all the dumb creatures?"²⁴³

Stephen's hubristic belief that her increasing mastery of nature and intellect places her close to the realm of masculine acceptance reaches its zenith with the arrival of Martin to Morton; as Noble puts it, his "offer of friendship [is] an invitation into the companionship of men."²⁴⁴ This companionship is performed and solidified, not surprisingly, through rituals of nature appreciation: "she taught him the country-side that she loved,"²⁴⁵ and their conversations demonstrate a shared appreciation of natural beauty. In particular, they both venerate trees, admiring their courage, fortitude, and masculinity, especially the "tough, manly wood"²⁴⁶ of the red pines of Martin's British Columbia,⁴⁷ and seriously discuss the relationships between arborescent loyalty and closeness to God.⁴⁸ At last, it appears, Stephen has found a soulmate who is able to look at her acorn-ness as a strength rather than an irritation: "She who had longed for the companionship of men, for their friendship, for their good-will, their toleration, she had it all now and much more in Martin, because of his great understanding."²⁴⁹ But Martin does not understand; eventually deciding that he is in love with Stephen, he betrays her cherished offer of homosocial nature appreciation with an invitation of marriage. She is repulsed and outraged; Martin returns to Canada (to return, at the end of the novel, with a renewed promise of love among the trees, this time for Mary).

Although two other rejections (Angela's and Anna's)—three, if one counts Philip's death⁵⁰—are required for Stephen to finally leave Morton, Martin's traumatic misrecognition of Stephen's friendship, love, and especially gender is one of the most significant violences of the text. Despite her undiminished riding and hunting prowess, masculine friendship is permanently denied Stephen from this point on in the novel, and along with it, the possibility of any genuinely egalitarian relationship in nature. The trees may nurture Stephen's spirit, and

Raftery may speak to her the dumb truth of “plains and primeval forests,”⁵¹ but there is nobody at Morton, including Philip, who can acknowledge Stephen as an equal, and who can offer her through masculine companionship a mode by which she can be an individual, an acting subject, a “who” rather than a “what.” But there is more: Martin betrays Stephen because he does not, after all, understand her nature; indeed, his stupid misattribution of love proves that genuine understanding is not to be found among the trees at all, but in the library, both metaphorically and literally. Philip has, all along, surreptitiously been reading sexologists such as Krafft-Ebing, even though he protectively denies Stephen this knowledge of her deviance. On the day that Stephen is to leave Morton, she goes to sit in Philip’s library, and in finding the sexologists she takes that final step beyond Martin, and beyond the trees, into the understanding that was, until that point, Philip’s secret trouble. She says to Philip’s ghost: “You knew! All the time you knew this thing, but because of your pity you wouldn’t tell me. Oh, Father—and there are so many of us—thousands of miserable, unwanted people, who have no right to love, no right to compassion because they’re maimed and ugly—God’s cruel; He let us get flawed in the making.”⁵²

The distinction is clear and absolute. Stephen cannot find who she is at Morton, but has received, at last, a solid indication of *what* she is from the sexual library. Exiled from Morton, but admitted into Truth, she has to learn (her) nature from a new standpoint: that of the outsider. Standing in the library in the immediate wake of Stephen’s epiphany, Puddle foreshadows the rest of the novel:

You’ve got work to do—come and do it! Why, just because you are what you are, you may actually find that you’ve got an advantage. You may write with a curious double insight—write both men and women from a personal knowledge. Nothing’s completely misplaced or wasted, I’m sure of that—and we’re all part of nature. Some day this world will recognise this, but meanwhile there’s work to be done.⁵³

IV

After Stephen’s exile, there are several other chapters in her life which she continues, iteratively and successfully, to achieve masculinity against and above nature: as a writer, as an urbanite (in London and then Paris), as an aesthete (and sartorial fetishist, about which Halberstam has written at greater length), and eventually (if problematically) as a lover. One of the most overwrought scenes concerns the demise of Raftery, who has accompanied Stephen to London; as he is dying, Stephen has him transported by train in a private loosebox back to Morton where, in an utterly unsubtle gesture of putting to death an older, natural self, she shoots him in the head.⁵⁴ One of the more important scenes, however, concerns her participation in an all-female ambulance brigade during World War I (the Breakspere Unit, modeled on the one organised by Hall’s friend Toupie Lowther). In this

chapter of her life, Stephen is both tentatively and temporarily included in the realm of masculine nation-building—she takes away a facial scar from a mortar shell—and has as a result an opportunity to ponder the ways in which this new, modern experience enables a more reflective experience of nature. She juxtaposes the bodies of dead young men from the prairies with the corpses of “murdered trees, cut down in their hour of most perfect flowering”⁵⁵; she thinks again about Martin Hallam, allowing him to enter her thoughts as she occupies a temporary place of masculine equality. In all of these cases, nature is loved, revered, protected, and certainly romanticized, but all of these actions and sentiments occur from a distance, and from a stance of transcendence and mastery.

Stephen also meets Mary Llewellyn during the War—they are in the same ambulance unit—and this stance of distanced, benevolent protection is especially true of Stephen’s relationship to her. Indeed, Mary comes to represent Stephen’s nature-ideal in the last third of the novel.⁵⁶ Although she is in the same brigade, Mary is not admitted into Stephen’s wartime masculine privilege. Despite what must have been intelligence and competence in the face of danger (“Mary was neither so frail nor so timid as Mrs. Breakspere had thought her”⁵⁷) and later her courage in the face of the social rejection of her relationship with Stephen, Mary remains a child, in Hall’s portrayal, throughout the novel (and not least because of her inferior class status). Her innocence, her Welsh “Celtic soul,” her identification with an injured horse that has to be shot (again!) on the battlefield; her soft-hearted rescue of small birds and dogs: Mary is “of” nature, but only sentimentally so and—in the same manner as Lady Anna or the Antrim women—not destined to understand or reflect on it in a truthful and mature fashion. Says Stephen: “Bless that blackbird for letting him see you, Mary.’ She knew that Mary loved little, wild birds, that indeed she loved all the humbler creatures.”⁵⁸ Picturesque, to be sure, but not adult, and certainly not equal: Mary can’t offer Stephen the individual recognition of a masculine friendship any more than can Morton.⁵⁹

In many respects, then, the end of the novel comes as no surprise. Stephen has just challenged Martin to a contest for Mary’s love, and she has won. But she knows that, in an unjust and hostile world, Mary will never, with Stephen, be able to achieve the perfect, peaceful, and cyclical femininity that is her right: here, a femininity as natural and *unreflective* as Mary’s cherry tree in the garden, “pushing out leaves and tiny pink buds along the length of its childish branches.”⁶⁰ Stephen must, instead, “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. Never before had she seen so clearly what was lacking to Mary Llewellyn.”⁶¹ Having won the ultimate masculine recognition, having proven her nature, Stephen can return Mary *to* nature, to Martin, and step beyond it knowing that in her mastery of nature she understands and can protect it better than it could possibly know or protect itself. And thus also, Stephen can write the story of her own life that is *The Well*, knowing that “the whole truth”

that is known “only to the normal invert”⁶² is really only known once the promise of its nature is fully attained, in its realization in the “I” that is the modern, clearly masculine, individual. We thus read *The Well* from the point of Stephen’s final mastery of the nature that has produced her; it is a privileged retrospection, the key to which knowledge is revealed in the moment of Stephen’s sacrificial transcendence.

Stephen’s ultimate achievement of sacrificial, heroic masculinity comes at exactly the moment where at which she transcends her own nature; just as she has been exiled from Morton, and knows from distant reflection the precise contours of its ideal state (apparently better than any of the people who live and work there), she achieves an exile from her own nature, removing with Mary all fleshly, private desires from her life and transforming herself fully into a creature of the word, a writer whose “barren womb became fruitful”⁶³ in her final ability to speak a language of justice on behalf of a whole category of persons. One can, of course (and, regarding Hall, with some biographical certainty), read into this metamorphic conclusion a Christian renunciation of the flesh in favour of the spirit. And one can also read into the sort of transcendent subjectivity Hall portrays a fairly common or garden Romanticism, in which the illumination of the privileged Romantic imagination is necessary to bring into relief the divine perfection of the natural world. But what I want to emphasise here is the importance of a modernist (and still certainly Romantic) convention of nature appreciation to this narrative production of the natural truth of the invert, and the invert’s ability to tell the truth of nature. Simply, what we have in *The Well* is an epistemological stance that not only claims to reveal nature from a position of enlightened privilege, but claims to do so as a *result* of nature, in this case, Stephen’s own inversion, which gives her not only the impetus to distance herself from the world, but the disposition that allows her to do so. The tension between a view *to* nature in order to understand its truth, and a simultaneous renunciation *of* nature in order to find a place to stand from which to do the viewing and speaking, is a logic that permeates *The Well* and enables it to portray a privileged epistemological stance that one can, perhaps, call a nascent queer ecology.

V

In 1909, as he was also writing his landmark work *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897-1928), Havelock Ellis wrote an essay in the *Contemporary Review* on the origins of the love of nature. The essay traces the embrace of wilderness to early Christianity, during which time, Ellis insists, men (sic) were not only driven into the wilderness out of necessity in order to find spiritual beauty away from the temptations of “the excitements of urban life”⁶⁴ but also were able to nurture “a sensitiveness to the attraction of the wild that lay in the special temperament of many of those who were most strongly drawn into the fold of Christianity.”⁶⁵ Echoing

his later work on sexual psychology in which he specifies inversion and other “aspects of sexual life” as specific, congenital psychic conditions, Ellis invokes Pierre Janet, who names the psychic condition of such wilderness lovers as “*psychaesthesia*.” Writes Ellis:

Such people are often of the finest character and the highest intelligence.... [They] are instinctively repelled by the ordinary social environments in which they live; they cannot adjust themselves to the ordinary routine of life; its banalities crush and offend them; the “real world” of their fellow-men seems to them unreal, and they are conscious of a painful sense of inadequacy in relation to it; they seek for new and stronger stimulants, for new and deeper narcotics, a new Heaven and a new earth.... It was among such that the love of the wild found its earliest Christian apostles; it has been among such that in later centuries the fuller and more complete forms of that love have been first of all proclaimed.⁶⁶

Ellis goes on to trace *psychaesthesia* back to the Romans (Seneca, Lucan, Cicero) and forward again into (among other places) the Franciscans, Dante’s appreciation of mountain climbing, Rousseau, the Romantic poets and, latterly, Thoreau, “who had the abnormal temperament, the instinctive antagonism to the society of [his] time, which we found among the mountain men of the earlier love of wild Nature.”⁶⁷ For Ellis, such individuals are products of their time, but they are also congenitally predisposed:

The appeal of wild Nature can only be perfectly felt by men who are, by temperament and circumstance, rebels against the laws and conventions of their time. It is a passion that arises in ages of splendid individualism... That is why, in an age like the present, when the instincts of social and urban development are dominant over those of revolutionary individualism, the search for wild nature sometimes seems to be a spiritual adventure which constitutes an almost closed chapter in the history of the human soul.⁶⁸

What is particularly interesting in Ellis’ account of the *psychaesthetic* in the wilderness is the dance between the congenital and the chosen. On the one hand, certain individuals are predisposed to love wild nature; on the other hand, only in conditions in which that nature is not part of routine, everyday consciousness is the “splendid individual” (generally, a man of nobility, refinement and education) able to make the *choice* to travel away from his fellow human beings in order to develop the unique appreciation of the sublime that differentiates the love of wilderness from, say, a liking for the picturesque (for Ellis, the mountains are now so thoroughly “picturesque” that the *psychaesthetic* will have to go elsewhere to find spiritual adventure). Ellis’ individual *must* be a rebel, must not only be thor-

oughly familiar with the conventions of his time, but must be able to reject them consciously in light of a reflective process that gives name to the inadequacy and discomfort he feels in light of those conventions. The discomfort, however, is congenitally-produced, and stems not only from a refusal to “fit in,” but a constitutional inability to do so.⁶⁹

Hence the significance of Ellis’ opening commentary on *The Well*: “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 unresolved problems.”⁷⁰ This passage could have as easily been written about the psychaesthetic as the invert and indeed, Ellis was not alone in considering the possibility that the sexual invert, as a “species” of sexual being, might be possessed of a special character that predisposes him or her to certain refinements and activities (a position with which socialist and gay advocate Edward Carpenter was also strongly associated⁷¹). But the dance of the congenital and the chosen is absolutely crucial for Hall, and helps us understand her apparently contradictory stance on nature. Stephen is a fact of nature but *not* in a degenerate form; as a result of her congenital difference, she can neither be accepted in nor herself accept the “crushing banalities” of the world around her—particularly those she associates with the feminine—and thus, in order to become a splendid individual, she must attempt to find spiritual adventure in the natural world of Morton. But the social relations in which she is mired deny her exactly that adventure (perhaps because Morton, like the mountains, is no longer wild enough?), exactly the possibility of her individuality; these relations require that she renounce the possibility—in the form of Mary, Martin, nature, trees, Morton, and every other potential site of her happiness in the world (especially Paris)—of “fitting in.” She must turn away from the country, from nature, to find the impetus toward genuine understanding; this understanding is to be found in the library, in the works of men (like Ellis, we presume) who have also sought understanding against “the moral and aesthetic ideals of their time.”⁷² As a modern intellectual/ascetic, Stephen has to go, at least metaphorically, into the desert in order to find a space in which she can approach the sort of transcendent consciousness of herself, and of nature, that is the splendidly individual result of her congenitally-predisposed inversion. She must read and write and create, according to her now-cultivated predisposition, reflective knowledge about the “true” value of the nature that lies underneath the unreflective rituals of its daily manifestations in rural England.

Given the considerable volume of scholarship on *The Well*, one might well wonder what further contribution this small, ecocritically-infused insight makes to understanding the particular articulation of modernity, nature, and inversion embodied in the novel. In the first place, I would like to argue that the juxtaposition of psychaesthesia with inversion suggests that, for Hall, Stephen’s achievement of noble mastery over nature, including eventually her own, is strate-

gically suited to a historical context in which ideas of heredity, individuality, tradition, modernity, degeneracy, and moral fitness were hotly debated, and in multiple and conflicting articulations with ideas of nature. Although there are certainly other reasons why *The Well* was banned as obscene, and not several of its contemporaries written on similar themes (e.g., Woolf's *Orlando*, Djuna Barnes' *Ladies' Almanack*, and Compton Mackenzie's *Extraordinary Women*), it remains that Judge Biron's negative assessment of the novel was caused largely by *The Well's* recourse to a naturalizing discourse that, in fact, elevated Stephen *above* the obscenity with which, in his view, the invert should be associated. More broadly, I would like to place *The Well* in a slightly different literary and historical context than is usual. As I have suggested, the work is not only part of a history of depictions and contestations of sexual and gender diversity (variously lesbian and transgendered), but it is also part of a history of *nature literature* and thus a text that adds to our understanding of the relationships between modernism and landscape in the early twentieth century. Specifically, Hall's choice to place nature so much at the centre of Stephen's journey to individuality and reflection offers an interesting perspective on the whole question of nature appreciation and depiction as they inform, and are informed by, a project of moral modernism.

To reiterate Williams' observation, many writers representing rural England in the early twentieth century "*came to the country*. The nerves were already strained, the minds already formed."⁷³ Williams would probably not have liked *The Well*; like many other texts depicting rural conditions drawing solely from the experience of an urbanized outsider (Stephen may have been born to the land, but Hall was not), it romanticises rural class relations and generally obscures the conditions of labour and agricultural production that are so central to Williams' literary desires. But what *The Well* does do well is document precisely the process by which an outsider's perspective comes to be read as superior in the context of the emergence of a modernist understanding of preservation; Stephen is of the land, but is not able to reflect on it appropriately until she has accepted the heroic individualist conceit—such as expressed by Ellis—that she must first accept exile from it. As in modern primitivism, the true connoisseur of "the folk" is one who can comment knowledgeably on a beauty that lies underneath its superficially-understood appearance. Although Williams would likely dismiss Hall's depiction of rural England as neo-pastoral "suburban scrawl"—Hall's Morton flirts dangerously with a set of discourses naturalizing rural class relations at the same time as it evacuates rurality of its constitutive agricultural relations in favour of a nationalist and largely residentialized "home"—it is important to reiterate that her depiction of Stephen's passage to modern subjectivity makes clear the kinds of process by which a cosmopolitan perspective on nature comes to be valued more highly than an organic one. This kind of view is, I think, very much part of the fabric of twentieth century environmental preservation: urban aesthetic, recreational and ethical desires (say, for parks and conservation) give rise to particular

kinds of environmental values, and it is these values that appear as more enlightened, modern, and universal than the apparently particular and self-interested ones that might emerge more organically from a life or living and working in a place, especially a rural place coded as “traditional.” Matless underscores this point: the difference between modern and anti-modern views on landscape preservation turns on the degree to which the former understands rural values as in need of preservation through judicious, modern planning, the process of which is necessarily external to the landscape that is to be planned.

As a further consideration of Matless’ work shows, however, Hall also offers us something more specific: for many moral modernists of the 1920s and 1930s, suburbanization was not simply a question of the disorganization of the landscape; it was also a question of its *emasculat*ion, in which the virile countryside (apparently an appropriately public, national space of orderly estates, villages and commerce) was being encroached upon by private, feminine, irrational spaces of family housing.⁷⁴ Indeed, Matless cites planner Thomas Sharp’s description of the suburbs, in their “revolting” combination of the “virility” of the town with the “fruitfulness” of the countryside, as “debased into one *hermaphroditic* beastliness.”⁷⁵ These two genderings of rural and suburban spaces both point to the fact that issues of masculinity, heredity, and morality were very much at play in developing preservationist discourses of the period and were a significant concern in modernist calls for rural planning. Sexual anxieties—and racial ones as well, to be sure—intersected with spatial ones in calls for rural order, and sexual tropes were powerful ways of configuring and justifying the need for interventions into the daily—and according to Sharp, degenerating—unfoldings of rural life. Hermaphrodites, here, were poster-children of degeneracy, disorder, and lack of clarity and purpose.

At one level, of course, Hall works entirely within these modernist articulations of unambiguous masculinity with enlightened planning. Not only is her rationality and erudition unassailable because of her achievement of modern subjectivity, but also her masculinity is bred and iterated in a way that places it beyond any of the questions that might arise from an urban (or damaged, or feminized) upbringing. There is no particular hermaphroditism in Stephen Gordon: she is not a third or “intermediate” sex,⁷⁶ but rather a perfect masculine subject to keep paternal watch over the rural England into which she was born. The trouble, of course, is that Stephen isn’t the man she seems to be: imagine Sharp’s horror at the suggestion that she would, in fact, be an ideal proponent of his views against suburbanization (and indeed, in her considerably athletic prowess, a damned good advocate for the open-air exercise that was also part of modernist landscape desires)! And that, of course, is the novel’s contribution: Hall cannot help but disrupt sexualized modern understandings of landscape and rural appreciation because her bodily nature and desire openly and “naturally” defy the spatial nature that she embraces, appreciates, and otherwise knows so perfectly.

Hall may pay scant attention to class and labour, then, but she does pay a great deal of attention to sex and gender, and it is precisely the naturalized account of sexual inversion she employs to underscore Stephen's moral superiority that is of interest when we consider the novel's relevance to environmental history. In addition to the fact that the novel clearly demonstrates the sexual and gender politics of some modernist landscape conventions, I consider that Hall's Stephen Gordon embodies what one might call a "queer ecological" perspective and thus highlights the importance of understanding some of the intersections between histories of sexuality and environment. To be sure, it would not be easy to call *The Well* a particularly "ecological" novel, although it does embody a healthy opposition to industrialism, war, and cruelty to animals (one could easily argue that these values are part of Hall's portrayal of the rural masculinity of Stephen's upbringing, and not part of any special "queer" appreciation). At the end of the novel, the nature into which Stephen channels her creative agency is that of the congenital invert, the justice she pursues for that "we" and not a more-than-human one. The fit between Ellis' psychanaesthetic and Hall's invert is thus not perfect, and the "wilderness" into which the latter is exiled to pursue enlightenment is metaphoric, not literal.⁷⁷ Indeed, Stephen fails to live up to her promise as Morton's nature-steward, and I might go so far as to say that Stephen, by failing to come to protect this nature that she is overdetermined to understand and to serve, actually has us question an environmentalist project that relies with such heavy-handed confidence on the assumption that genuine nature appreciation is to be found in enlightened understanding over situated experience.

But what Hall does well—at least, did well enough to invoke the legal ire of Judge Biron—is both reveal and pick away at a particular knot of relations tying together ideas about sexuality and nature at the time of its publication. Although Hall may be arguing (following Ellis) for an understanding of sexual inversion as a morally-privileged vantage point on nature, what she actually does is reveal some of the sexual boards by which the moral modernism of landscape preservation was erected in the first place. Her queer ecology, then, takes a culturally and historically-specific position on nature landscape and subjects it to an imaginative queering: What happens when the invert uses nature to push against the boundaries of sex? What happens when she turns out to be the ideal subject of a naturalizing discourse that denies her inclusion in nature? What happens, in other words, when she takes nature so seriously that she reveals it to be an unstable fiction rather than a solid ground? This kind of deconstructive work may not be easily understood as an environmentalist project, but particularly in its historical context, it effectively calls into question some of the ideas about nature and preservation on which modern environmental ideas were founded. In this regard, to read *The Well* as a nascent queer ecology is to remind us to take questions about sexuality to more contemporary environmental ideas as well.⁷⁸

NOTES

- 1 The author wishes to thank the editors of *Left History* for understanding this article as a work of environmental history, and the three anonymous reviewers who read it for helping to make it (I hope) a much better one.
- 2 David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London: Reaktion Books, 1998), 43.
- 3 Matless notes that “between 1927-8 and 1933-4, an average of 38,000 acres of land were developed each year for housing,” *Ibid.*, 34.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 43.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 51.
- 6 Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 252.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 258.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 256, emphasis in original.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 297.
- 10 Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Volume II: Sexual Inversion* (Project Gutenberg, 1927), 1. This definition stands at some contrast with Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s earlier (and rather more florid) one: a “masculine soul heaving in a female bosom,” in *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1903). The difference between the two is actually important: Ellis’ emphasizes *sexual attraction*, where Krafft-Ebing’s highlights *gender identity*. Where in more recent understandings of gender and sexuality the two concepts are understood as separable, early sexology tended to explain lesbian attraction as a question of (in this case congenital) gender identity. The gender invert was “masculine” and *therefore* attracted to women (which left feminine lesbians’ attraction for the likes of Stephen Gordon fairly enigmatic – such women as Mary were often portrayed as innocent “prey” for masculine lesbian predators).
- 11 See, for example, Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); Jean Bobby Noble, *Masculinities Without Men: Female Masculinity in Twentieth-Century Fictions* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004); Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).
- 12 Trevor Hope, “Of Trees and Politics, Wars and Wounds,” in Laura Doan and Jay Prosser, eds., *Palatable Poison: Critical Perspectives on The Well of Loneliness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 255-273.
- 13 Lorelee MacPike, “A Geography of Radclyffe Hall’s Lesbian Country,” *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 20 (1994): 217-242.
- 14 Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), (New York: Avon Books, 1981), 430.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 92.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 436.
- 17 Hall writes in a letter to Havelock Ellis that she certainly understands *The Well* to speak on behalf of the invert, “one that deserves a better fate than the indiscriminating persecution generally accorded to those who, being from birth different from their normal brethren, are already heavily handicapped in the struggle for a useful and happy existence.” Radclyffe Hall to Havelock Ellis, Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Lovat Dickson Fonds, MG 30, D 237 Vol. 4, April 18, 1928.
- 18 Hall, *TWL*, 213-4.

- 19 As this essay argues, Hall's novel turns on Stephen's passage from her upbringing as part of a rural, landed aristocratic family to her emergence into "morally" modern individuality. On the one hand, the novel is full of the virtues of the (English) aristocracy in comparison to the crudeness of the (American) bourgeoisie, the solid merits of (Christian) tradition against the disruptions of (secular) modernity, the sentimentalities of war and nation, etc. On the other hand, the only tiny glimmers of hope for lesbians offered in the novel are entirely cosmopolitan (and continental), the "truth" of the invert lies in medical science and universalist claims to natural truth, and the novel inserts itself directly into politics by claiming to be an instrument of a very rational conception of justice. Stylistically, however, the novel is not at all *modernist*; it is interesting to note that Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, published the same year, was sufficiently modernist and abstract to evade the censors.
- 20 Hall, *TWL*, 437.
- 21 In a letter to Norman Flowers at Cassels requesting that he publish *The Well* (he did not), Hall wrote that "this book has been undertaken by me at the request of my American agent and at the promptings of my own heart – it is a book that I have long had in mind. Having attained literary success I have put my pen at the service of some of the most persecuted and misunderstood people in the world. In a word, I have written a long and very serious novel entirely upon the subject of sexual inversion." Even if the position in the letter should be read as partly strategic on her part, it is clear that Hall understood the novel as a work of public advocacy. Radclyffe Hall to Norman Flowers, LAC, Lovat Dickson Fonds, MG 30, D 237 Vol. 4, April 16, 1928.
- 22 *The Director of Public Prosecutions v. Jonathan Cape and Leopold Hill. Judgment.* LAC, Lovat Dickson Fonds, MG 30, D 237 Vol. 5, File 19, November 16, 1928.
- 23 Radclyffe Hall to Havelock Ellis, LAC, Lovat Dickson Fonds, MG 30, D 237 Vol. 4, April 18, 1928.
- 24 Havelock Ellis, "Commentary," Flyleaf to *TWL*, n.p.
- 25 See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).
- 26 Of which Oscar Wilde was the paradigmatic example as a result, among other things, of his (complicated and highly publicized) 1895 conviction and imprisonment for gross indecency.
- 27 It is a particularly suspect characterization given Hall's friendship with many key figures of the literary and artistic lesbian community in Paris in the 1920s, including Natalie Barney, Romaine Brooks, and Renée Vivian, although Barney's salon is portrayed relatively favourably by Hall (Barney herself appears as Valérie Seymour), Stephen's clear rejection in the novel of the choice to live in an openly lesbian (and probably happy) urban existence with Mary is a careful narrative choice on Hall's part designed to draw a firm line between Stephen's nature (of the country) and lesbian self-acceptance (in the city). Hall herself, of course, lived openly with her lover Una, Lady Troubridge. For a fuller biography of Hall that also includes attention to her own shifting desires to live in the country (especially Rye) and the city, see Sally Cline, *Radclyffe Hall: A Woman Called John* (London: John Murray Publishers, 1997). Una Troubridge's diaries are also an excellent record of their urban/rural indecision (LAC, Lovat Dickson Fonds, MG 30, D37).
- 28 Hall, *TWL*, 11.

- 29 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 13.
- 31 Noble, *Masculinities*, 54.
- 32 Hall, *TWL*, 15.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 14.
- 34 Margot Gayle Backus, "Sexual Orientation in the (Post)Imperial Nation: Celticism and Inversion Theory in Radclyffe Halls *The Well of Loneliness*," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 15 (1996): pp. 255.
- 35 Hall, *TWL*, 16.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 58.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 186-7.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 40.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 43.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 77.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 71.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 71.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 72.
- 44 Noble, *Masculinities*, 57.
- 45 Hall, *TWL*, 94.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 96.
- 47 As Hope documents extensively, trees are symbolically overloaded throughout the novel: The manly oak meets the strangling, feminine ivy; the "faithful" tree is rewarded with a special place in heaven; a snow-covered cedar, strong and ancient, falls on and kills Philip because Anna is worried about it "and he loved Anna who loved the cedar" (115); the trees are visible victims of World War I trench warfare even as they are emblems of the persistence of British nobility in its face (291); Stephen is the tree left standing once Mary's "childish" cherry-tree branches have lost their charm (431), etc.
- 48 Hall, *TWL*, 95.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 96.
- 50 Four, if one counts Stephen's rejection of her sexed body in the mirror.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 72.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 204.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 205.
- 54 In a review of *The Well* written shortly after the book was published, Cyril Connolly writes: "The most embarrassing parts are the sentimental animal passages. In particular the episode of the old hunter that Stephen insists on taking down in agony, all the way from London to Worcestershire, so that he may be shot outside his own loose-box, seems ridiculous in the extreme. No country family could be expected – quite apart from the morals – to regard as normal such a crank as that." Cyril Connolly, "Review of *The Well of Loneliness* by Radclyffe Hall; *Vasco* by Marc Chadbourne; *Pas de Quatre* by Basil Creighton; *Far Enough* by Helen Ashton," *The New Statesman* (August 28, 1928), 614.
- 55 Hall, *TWL*, 291.
- 56 Mary is that enigmatic figure, the feminine invert. As Clare Hemmings writes in her intelligent discussion of femme narrative in *The Well*, "the feminine invert poses a

problem for sexology, since her desire for masculine women cannot be understood as the result of a gendered inversion and therefore attributable to a fault of nature, as can the masculine woman's perverse desire. If the properly gendered feminine invert desires masculinity, why is her desire not restricted to men?" Clare Hemmings, "All My Life I've Been Waiting for Something..." : Theorizing Femme Narrative in "The Well of Loneliness", in ed. Doan and Prosser, *Palatable Poison*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001) 182.

57 Hall, *TWL*, 285.

58 *Ibid.*, 281.

59 I am, here, leaving out several significant dynamics. In particular and as noted above, Hall is careful to depict Parisian lesbian culture as strangled and uncomfortable. Although it remains the only site in the novel in which the sexual invert can remotely hope for recognition and affirmation, Hall discounts its lasting potential in the novel. There can be no alternate sanctuary to nature, in this narrative, in a world in which invert-nature is despised.

60 *Ibid.*, 431.

61 *Ibid.*, 430.

62 *Ibid.*, 390.

63 *Ibid.*, 437.

64 Havelock Ellis, "Havelock Ellis on the Psychological Roots of the Love of Wilderness" (1909), in ed. David Mazel, *A Century of Early Ecocriticism* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 176.

65 *Ibid.*, 177.

66 *Ibid.*, 177.

67 *Ibid.*, 192.

68 *Ibid.*, 193.

69 Ellis' interest in individuals who make a conscious choice to live in Nature with an appreciation of its "true" aesthetic and moral power predates 1909. In particular, his 1890 essay on Whitman (which includes an extended discussion of Thoreau) places a strong emphasis on the idea of the "original," heroic individual who lives in the natural world *already* equipped with the appropriate temperament and education necessary to appreciate it. He emphasises, for example, Thoreau's literary and classical background, which he suggests cultivated in him a quality of being "in love with the things that are wildest and most untamable in Nature" (91) and allowed him to live "a life in harmony with Nature, the culture of joyous simplicity" (93). Although he noted both Thoreau's and Whitman's close attention to the natural world itself, what really interested him was the temperament they *took* to that attention. See Havelock Ellis, *The New Spirit* (New York: The Modern Library, 1890).

70 Ellis, "Commentary," n.p.

71 There is not space in this paper to consider Carpenter's work in any detail, although—like Ellis in some respects (if definitely not in many others)—he also develops an understanding of the congenital nature of the homosexual (or "Uranian," following Plato) into a sense that "the Uranian temperament" is predisposed toward the pursuit of particular social goods, including art, literature, education, philanthropy and "service in affairs of the heart" (240). As he writes, "it is possible that the Uranian spirit may lead to something like a general enthusiasm of Humanity, and that the Uranian

people may be destined to form the advance guard of that great movement which will one day transform the common life by substituting the bond of personal affection and compassion for the monetary, legal and other external ties which now control and confine society.” Edward Carpenter, “The Intermediate Sex” (1908), in ed. Noël Greig, *Edward Carpenter: Selected Writings, Volume 1: Sex* (London: Gay Men’s Press, 1984), 238. Particularly deserving of more extensive consideration is the intersection between Carpenter’s gay advocacy and his commitment to a rural socialist project emphasizing vegetarianism, voluntary simplicity and manual agricultural labour. There are, for example, interesting parallels between his argument that Uranians have a “special” role in social transformation, and his meditation on weeds in which he expresses admiration at their vitality and adaptability. See “Weeds,” in *Sketches from Life in Town and Country and Some Verses* (London: George Allen and Sons, 1908), 220-236.

72 Ellis, “Wilderness,” 192.

73 Williams, *The Country*, 256.

74 Matless, *Landscape*, 36.

75 *Ibid.*, 33, my emphasis.

76 Which makes her significantly different from Carpenter’s Uranian.

77 I am grateful to one reviewer for reminding me that, in fact, Stephen actively fails to enter (let alone protect) the “real” wilderness, in this case, the one to which she sends Mary and Martin: British Columbia. Martin is the good steward after all, not Stephen.

78 My “queer ecological” reading of Hall is part of an emerging body of work that takes questions of sexuality and gender to a variety of nature discourses, practices and institutions. Some of the recent works in this vein most closely tied to environmental history are: Peter Boag, *Same-Sex Affairs: Constructing and Controlling Homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Catriona Sandilands, “Where the Mountain Men Meet the Lesbian Rangers: Gender, Nation and Nature in the Rocky Mountain Parks,” in eds. Melody Hessing, Rebecca Raglon and Catriona Sandilands, *This Elusive Land: Women and the Canadian Environment* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004), 142-162 and “The Importance of Reading Queerly: Jewett’s *Deephaven* as Feminist Ecology,” *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment* 11, (Summer, 2004), pp. 57-77; Virginia J. Scharff, ed. *Seeing Nature Through Gender: New Perspectives on Environmental Justice: Gender, Sexuality and Activism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002).