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# **The Beginning of Queer Literature: The Representation of Homosexuality in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* and Forster's *Maurice***

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**Table of contents**

<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Chapter I: Homosexuality at the Turn of the Twentieth Century</b> .....	4
- The Origin of (Homo)sexuality	
- Sin and Crime: Sex between Men	
- Sexology and Same-Sex Desire	
<b>Chapter II: Life and Homosexuality: Two British Authors</b> .....	21
- Radclyffe Hall	
- E. M. Forster	
<b>Chapter III: <i>The Well of Loneliness</i> and <i>Maurice</i></b> .....	58
- The Power of Fiction: Living Another Life	
- The Relationships between Sexology and the Novels	
- Speaking the Unspeakable: A Plea for Existence	
<b>Conclusions</b> .....	110
<b>Bibliography</b>	



## Introduction

Nowadays, the recognition of the rights of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT+) community and the positive representation of queer people in the media are steadily increasing, at least in the Western world. In particular, homosexuality seems to have become an accepted part of everyday life. Nevertheless, episodes of homophobia and acts of violence against this community still occur. The shooting at the nightclub Pulse in Florida, in June 2016, is probably the incident that most people still remember; however, discrimination and violence against individuals or same-sex couples appears in newspapers on a daily basis. Therefore, it is evident that, although the fight for rights and equality has come a long way, its results should not be taken for granted and the struggle that many have faced should not be forgotten. For this reason, this study focuses on the period of time straddling the nineteenth and twentieth century, when the fight for the acceptance of homosexuality began.

The first step towards equality was speaking out. Since non-heteronormative realities were tabooed, it was necessary to bring them to the foreground and force society to acknowledge their existence. Consequently, Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* and E. M. Forster's *Maurice* have been chosen as case studies because they are considered forerunners of the modern gay and lesbian novel: for the first time, openly homosexual characters were the protagonists of works of fiction by authors who were homosexuals themselves. Although *Maurice* was posthumously published in order to prevent an undesired coming out, and its first reception was fairly negative

in comparison to Forster's previous works<sup>1</sup>, the novel is now a pillar of the gay literary canon. Similarly, Radclyffe Hall's novel was considered *the* lesbian novel for decades despite the initial ban in Great Britain and the later critical response. As a matter of fact, feminist and lesbian critics were generally not pleased by the strongly masculine heroine of the novel: such a representation was accused of identifying lesbian as a category completely detached from that of woman, thus consolidating sexist stereotypes as well<sup>2</sup>. However, it needs to be considered that at the time of writing, a different image of lesbian was impossible to conceive because a feminine woman attracted to women was considered an inherent paradox<sup>3</sup>. Bearing this in mind, Radclyffe Hall's novel cannot not be praised for its outspokenness.

The aim of this thesis is to show that Radclyffe Hall and E. M. Forster advocate the acceptance of homosexuality by demonstrating through their novels that gay men and lesbian women are completely normal people who suffer because of the unjust rejection and oppression of society. In order to demonstrate the early activism of these ground-breaking novels, different aspects will be taken into consideration. The first chapter of this dissertation will provide the necessary theoretical background. In particular, the most important events in the legal treatment of homosexuality in Great Britain and the numerous theories concerning same-sex desire will be summarized. Chapter II will encompass the biographies of Radclyffe Hall and E. M. Forster in order to have better insight into how they lived their own

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<sup>1</sup> Gary D. Pratt, 'Ideal Friends: Forster and Narratives of Male Relations' (1999), PhD, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, pp. 89-90.

<sup>2</sup> Esther Newton, 'The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman' (1984), *Signs*, vol. 9, no. 4, pp. 560, 574.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 575.

sexuality. Finally, the third chapter will focus on the analysis of their novels, starting with the identification of the autobiographical elements that are present in them. Secondly, the influence of sexology will be demonstrated and compared in *The Well of Loneliness* and *Maurice*. Finally, the representation of the living conditions of the homosexual community will be analysed together with the undermining of society's prejudices.

# I. Homosexuality at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

## The Origin of (Homo)sexuality

Before analysing homosexuality from the legal and scientific point of view, it is important to spend a few words on the term itself. The noun is of rather recent coinage, since it was created by the Hungarian Karoly Maria Benkert in 1869<sup>4</sup>. Prior to that period, the very concept expressed by the term did not exist. As Weeks explains LGBT identities crystallised in modern form only in the late nineteenth century<sup>5</sup>. The same can actually be said about the larger category of sexuality. As a matter of fact, the word sexuality had been in use with completely different meanings, and it only gained the current one when anthropological, scientific, and sociological studies of sex were flourishing in Europe and America. Thus, only in the 1890s did its derivative forms heterosexual and homosexual become associated with types of persons and sexual desires<sup>6</sup>. The two terms, which are strictly connected in a binary opposition, given that each category depends on the other<sup>7</sup>, entered the English language at the same moment, namely in 1892 through a translation of *Psychopathia Sexualis* by Richard von Krafft-Ebing<sup>8</sup>, whose work will be discussed in more detail in the following section. However, as will be shown, at the turn of the twentieth century, other terms such as “Urning” and “invert” were more frequently used than

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<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: The Emergence of LGBT Identities in Britain from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to the Present* (2016), London: Quartet Books, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Bristow, *Sexuality* (1997), New York: Routledge, pp. 2-3.

David Glover & Cora Kaplan, *Genders* (2000), New York: Routledge, p. xvi.

<sup>7</sup> George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (1994) cited in Robert A. Nye, *Sexuality* (1999), Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 199.

<sup>8</sup> J. B. *Sexuality*, cit., p. 4.



homosexual, which only gained currency well into the twentieth century when the minority itself started embracing the word and identifying with it.

As both Weeks and Halperin suggest, sexuality and its subcategories are historical constructs, consequently they should be used carefully, if at all, when talking about persons and relationships prior to the century of their creation<sup>9</sup>. Before the late-Victorian period, when such words were created to describe emerging realities, categories of identification were different, and they would not coincide with what is now labelled as either heterosexual or homosexual. For instance, affectionate letters between women, written in a highly pathetic and sentimental tone, might be read as expressions of lesbian love today<sup>10</sup>; or again, masculine men having sexual intercourse with effeminate men would be classified as gay in modern society, whereas they were considered 'normal' although morally stained, before the emergence of the hetero/homo opposition, since they were male individuals looking for a female partner, although in a substitute form<sup>11</sup>. This is important to remember for the analysis of the juridical view of same-sex desire that follows, since the term homosexual might be used to describe sexual acts between persons of the same sex, who should not be classified according to modern standards.

### **Sin and Crime: Sex between Men**

In the history of the legal persecution of homosexuality in Britain, there is a watershed, namely 7<sup>th</sup> August 1885, when the Labouchère Amendment was passed.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 5-6.

<sup>10</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Discovery Conduct: Vision of Gender in Victorian America* (1985) cited in Robert A. Nye, *Sexuality* (1999), Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 107-109.

<sup>11</sup> G. C., *Gay New York*, cit., pp. 200-201.

Before that date, what we would now call homosexual acts were only affected by the legislation referring to sodomy or buggery, dating back to 1533. In that year, Henry VIII introduced sodomy in the statute laws for the first time through The Buggery Act, since sexual matters had been under ecclesiastical jurisdiction<sup>12</sup>. The punishment for this crime against nature was death. However, this was not a specifically homosexual offence, because what was understood by the term sodomy was any sexual act that was deemed unnatural or immoral, which included anal sex, oral sex and bestiality, no matter the gender of the persons involved<sup>13</sup>. Consequently, even a man engaging in anal intercourse with his wife could be convicted of sodomy.

According to Weeks and Wilper, this sort of laws and the consequent demonization of homosexuality are due, first of all, to the traditional Hebraic and Christian condemnation of all forms of sex which do not lead to procreation, more than same-sex desire *per se*<sup>14</sup>. As Weeks specifies, anal sex, whether the recipient is a man or a woman, is by definition incapable of resulting in pregnancy, contrary to rape or fornication; consequently, it was considered one of the most serious sins. Secondly, the fact that both ecclesiastical and temporal laws of this kind were applied to men more than women is a consequence of the belief that the procreative capacity lay exclusively in the male semen. Since the existence of the ovum was still ignored, and women were considered as passive receptacles, only men could actually be guilty of unnatural behaviour through their sexual actions<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> James Patrick Wilper, *Reconsidering the Emergence of the Gay Novel in English and German* (2016), West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University, p. 18.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

J. W., *Coming Out*, cit., p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> J. P. W., *Reconsidering the Emergence of the Gay Novel*, cit., p. 18.

J. W., *Coming Out*, cit., p.5

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

The Buggery Act of 1533 underwent different re-enactments and modifications up until 1828 when it was repealed and replaced by the Offences Against the Person Act. 'When Mary I ascended the throne, she repealed her father's buggery act, but Elizabeth I re-enacted the law in 1563'<sup>16</sup>. One of the following changes that are worthy of note is the introduction, in 1781, of the need to prove both penetration and the emission of semen, which resulted in a decline in the number of convictions. However, less than fifty years later, in 1826, this modification was cancelled, making it easier again to indict someone of buggery<sup>17</sup>. In 1861 the death penalty for this crime was abolished and substituted by penal servitude of at least ten years<sup>18</sup>.

Nevertheless, the situation for men-loving men was still to worsen. On 7<sup>th</sup> August 1885, section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act was passed and all sexual acts between men, including masturbation, which had been considered lawful up to this point, were made illegal:

Any male person who, in public or private, commits, or is a party to the commission of, or procures, or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of, any act of gross indecency with another male person, shall be guilty of a misdemeanour, and being convicted thereof, shall be liable at the discretion of the Court to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years, with or without hard labour.

This situation would not change until 1967, when homosexuality was partly decriminalized in Britain for the first time, as a consequence of the Wolfenden Report

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<sup>16</sup> J. P. W., *Reconsidering the Emergence of the Gay Novel*, cit., p. 19.

<sup>17</sup> J. W., *Coming Out*, cit., p. 14.

<sup>18</sup> J. P. W., *Reconsidering the Emergence of the Gay Novel*, cit., pp. 16, 19.

in 1957. The result was that homosexual intercourse became legal between two consenting men of at least twenty-one years of age, only if in private<sup>19</sup>.

The introduction of such sharp legislations in the late nineteenth century is to be inserted in a particular social background<sup>20</sup>. In the last decades of the century, as a matter of fact, homosexuality was interconnected to other issues, such as prostitution and the double standard. During the morality campaigns of the 1880s, unregulated male lust was identified as the engine of both homosexuality and prostitution. In both cases, the final result was the same: the decay of the nation, through the plague of venereal diseases and the degeneracy of the people. The former did not afflict solely the prostitutes and their clients but also innocent wives and children, victims of the double standard of morality. In the 1880s and 1890s, family and childhood, and the gender roles associated with them, had become the foundations of society. Childhood, in particular, became longer and was seen as something to be protected and preserved as much as possible. This is why laws were made to raise the age of consent – which was the main and original aim of the Criminal Law Amendment Act<sup>21</sup> - and great attention was paid to properly direct the sexual energy of the youngest. In fact, public schools, in particular male ones where homosexual relationships developed among students, were the origin of great sexual scandals throughout the nineteenth century<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>20</sup> J. W., *Coming Out*, cit., pp. 16-19.

<sup>21</sup> J. P. W. *Reconsidering the Emergence of the Gay Novel*, cit., p. 19.

<sup>22</sup> Havelock Ellis, *L'inversione sessuale* (1970), trans. Alessandra Ozzola, Roma: Newton Compton Editori, pp. 71-75.

As the title of this section suggests, sexual relationships between women were never taken into consideration in the making of such laws<sup>23</sup>. The reason for this is that female sexuality was thought to be completely dependent on the male one. If men were characterized by an active and violent sexual feeling, on the contrary, women were believed to be passive and receptive. While boys were thought to develop their sexual instinct automatically by growing up, girls were considered to be almost asexual, that is to say only until a man would awaken their sexuality after marriage, in order to have children. Therefore, lesbianism would be inconceivable at that time, for it implied that women had a sexuality of their own, which did not need, or rather would escape, the control of a man. All of this would contradict the basic beliefs of Victorian society: 'in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the idea that the sexes were polar opposites magnetically attracted to each other had such a tight ideological grip on the culture that it was believed to be an indisputable fact of nature'<sup>24</sup>. Nevertheless, according to Ellis, the frequency of female homosexuality was not to be underestimated. In fact, he believed that it was as common as among men, but that it attracted less attention exactly because of the indifference of the law towards it<sup>25</sup>. Krafft-Ebing was of the same opinion, but he added that the scarce amount of information and cases of lesbianism was due to the sexual nature of women itself:

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<sup>23</sup> In 1921 Parliament attempted to bring lesbianism within the scope of the criminal law through an extension of the Labouchère Amendment. However, the proposal was rejected for two reasons: one being the spreading of the theory of homosexuality as a sickness, and the second being the fear of it becoming popular because of its public mention. See: J. W., *Coming Out*, cit., pp. 106-107.

<sup>24</sup> J. B. *Sexuality*, cit., p. 25.

<sup>25</sup> H. E., *L'inversione sessuale*, cit., p. 133.

since women had a less developed sexual instinct and a passive role in intercourse, it would not be difficult for them to adapt to a heterosexual lifestyle<sup>26</sup>.

However, the British case was not the only one. According to Paragraph 175 of the German penal code, which was applied in 1870 after the establishment of the German Empire, homosexual intercourse between men was considered a crime, punishable by imprisonment and loss of all civil rights<sup>27</sup>. Once again, homosexual relationships between women were not taken into consideration. Contrary to what happened in Britain, however, a heated debate soon took place, together with attempts to obtain a repeal of the law. This is why many of the writings on the subject published at that time were by German authors, some of whom will be discussed in detail in the next section of this chapter. On the other hand, in France, homosexuality had been decriminalized since the Revolution<sup>28</sup>. As the separation of state and religion was at the base of the nation from Napoleon's time onwards, religious crimes had been left in the hands of the church. The only cases in which homosexuality could be punished by the state were:

- When public indecency was committed;
- When there was a lack of consent from one of the parties;
- When a minor was involved.

According to Havelock Ellis, whose attitude towards homosexuality was more sympathetic, this was the model that should have been applied in Britain as well<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Albert Moll (ed.), *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1952), trans. Pietro Giolla, Milano: Carlo Manfredi Editore.

<sup>27</sup> J. W., *Coming Out*, cit., p. 15.

J. P. W., *Reconsidering the Emergence of the Gay Novel*, cit., p. 22.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>29</sup> H. E., *L'inversione sessuale*, cit., pp. 234-235.

## Sexology and Same-sex Desire

The attention that homosexuality received in the legal field was one of the reasons why a great deal of writing was produced on it. As a matter of fact, a large part of the eighteenth and nineteenth century discourse on homosexuality was created for a purely medical and legal application. Many of such texts had the aim to help identify the homosexual, in order to either attempt to cure his madness or convict him. Other texts, especially towards the end of the nineteenth century, were published as actual studies of the phenomenon, which tried to explain its causes and consequences. Nevertheless, studies of this sort were not carried out only on the theme of same-sex desire; many other aspects of sexuality were examined. Thus, a new discipline called sexology originated. 'Sexology initially designated a science that developed an elaborate descriptive system to classify a striking range of sexual types of person (bisexual, heterosexual, homosexual, and their variants) and forms of sexual desire (fetishism masochism, sadism, among them)<sup>30</sup>. On the one hand, the final aim of this thorough classification was to divide normality, which meant heterosexual intercourse with its reproductive function, from abnormality. On the other, however, it is interesting to notice that the only phenomena that were carefully studied were the ones outside the norm, for the reproductive function of the sexual instinct 'was often taken as so natural as not to need explicit statement'<sup>31</sup>. Only with this premise can one understand why homosexuality, fetishism, and

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<sup>30</sup> J. B., *Sexuality*, cit., p.13.

<sup>31</sup> Arnold I. Davidson, 'Closing up the Corpses; Diseases of Sexuality and the Emergence of the Psychiatric Style of Reasoning' in Gerge Boolos (ed.), *Meaning and Method: Essay in Honor of Hilary Putnam* cited in Robert A. Nye, *Sexuality* (1999), Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 148.

masochism were all labelled as perversions, since the three have nothing in common otherwise.

Among the many sexologists who wrote about homosexuality, some of the most influential were Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, the already mentioned Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis, and Sigmund Freud. Before exploring their theories, it needs to be highlighted that the thought of all these writers developed throughout their career, therefore it might have changed in the course of time. They even influenced one another, as was shown by the differences between the several editions of their writings. The only one whose theories remained crystallized could perhaps be Ulrichs, for temporal reasons, since he was the first who attempted to explain homosexuality without pathologizing it.

Ulrichs started writing about the conditions of homosexual love in Germany in the 1860s, under the pseudonym of Numa Numantius. His intention was to defend homosexuality or Uranism, to use the term that he coined. He drew on the Symposium for this, and made a distinction between Uranism (from the god Uranus) and Dionism (from the goddess Dione), i.e. heterosexual love. In his studies, he claimed that 'the 'germ' of same-sex desire is implanted *ab ovo* in the very physiology of the man-loving man'<sup>32</sup>. According to him, born Urnings, as he called men who felt same-sex attraction, had the sexual drive of women, but a male body – *anima muliebris in corpore virile inclusa*<sup>33</sup>. Consequently, Urnings were considered neither completely masculine nor feminine. They constituted a third sex or a sexual species *per se*, whose prime characteristic was a marked effeminacy. The contrary was

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<sup>32</sup> J. B., *Sexuality*, cit., p.21.

<sup>33</sup> H. E., *L'inversione sessuale*, cit., p. 61.



hypothesised for women who loved women (Urningins): they had the sexual drive of a man; therefore, they were masculine in their behaviour<sup>34</sup>.

If he thought this would explain and justify the existence of homosexuals, however, it also had the negative effect of producing the stereotypes of the effeminate homosexual and the butch lesbian, which still haunt the categories to these days. Furthermore, he did not possess any actual scientific knowledge since he had studied law and theology; and his theories became increasingly complicated as he continued to add subcategories in order to explain different sexual behaviours, i.e. activity and passivity during intercourse, for which he needed partners to differ. As a matter of fact, at the basis of his thought there still was the belief that sexuality needed two polar opposites that attracted each other in order to function, as happened in heterosexual relationships. Nevertheless, he had the merit of being the first to notice a discordance between the sexual mind and the sexed body, whereas previous researchers had never doubted the congruence of sexed body and sexed being<sup>35</sup>. In addition, it was he who attracted the attention of Karl Friedrich Otto Westphal, who was the first to carry out a scientific study of same-sex attraction through the case of a young lesbian in 1870<sup>36</sup>.

Starting from the late 1870s, Richard von Krafft-Ebing studied homosexuality, and in 1886 he published the first edition of *Psychopathia Sexualis*, which would undergo multiple revisions until 1903, the year of his death. The fact that many editions were published is indicative of the development of Krafft-Ebing's theories on

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<sup>34</sup> J. B., *Sexuality*, cit., p. 22.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>36</sup> H. E., *L'inversione sessuale*, cit., pp. 59-61.

homosexuality. He initially classified it as a disease induced by psycho-pathological conditions, which resulted in paraesthesia<sup>37</sup>, i.e. a perversion of the natural sexual instinct. He underlined that perversion was to be distinguished from perversity: the former was an umbrella term under which he 'assembled a vast range of sexual desires that differed from the heterosexual norm [emphasizing] that perversion was not a criminal behaviour'<sup>38</sup>; the latter, on the other hand, could be conceived of as the perverse act per se, in other words a vice<sup>39</sup>. In the latest editions of his work, however, 'he moved towards a more tolerant view of homosexuality'<sup>40</sup> and stated that homosexuality was neither a disease nor a psychic degeneration; it was rather a congenital phenomenon due to cerebral anomalies<sup>41</sup>. On the other hand, he believes homosexuality could also be acquired, although he himself could not find any clear explanations and only made some hypotheses.

In accordance with the typical desire for classification of sexology, Krafft-Ebing created a detailed list of the different stages of homosexuality based on the history cases he had collected. According to his scheme, congenital homosexuality has four levels or degrees<sup>42</sup>:

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<sup>37</sup> Paraesthesia is one of the possible anomalies of the sexual instinct. The others are: anaesthesia (decrease or lack) and hyperaesthesia (abnormal increase). Similar anomalies can occur for the other human instinct, that of preservation. See: A. I. D., 'Closing up the Corpses', cit., p. 148.

<sup>38</sup> Heike Bauer, 'Richard von Krafft-Ebing's Psychopathia Sexualis as Sexual Sourcebook for Radclyffe Hall's The Well of Loneliness' (2003), *Critical Survey*, vol. 15, no 3, p. 23.

<sup>39</sup> Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis, with Especial Reference to the Antipathic Sexual Instinct* (1965), trans. Franklin S. Klaf cited in Robert A. Nye, *Sexuality* (1999), Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 149.

<sup>40</sup> H. B., 'Richard von Krafft-Ebing's Psychopathia Sexualis as Sexual Sourcebook', cit., p. 23.

<sup>41</sup> H. E., *L'inversione sessuale*, cit., p. 64.

<sup>42</sup> R. K.E., *Psychopathia Sexualis*, cit.

- I. *psychical hermaphroditism*: those belonging to this category feel sexual attraction for both sexes, although proportions might vary; they correspond to the modern bisexuals;
- II. *pure and simple homosexuality*: this group of individuals are only attracted to their own sex, but the anomaly does not affect their character or their psychic personality; their interests and behaviour are still in compliance with their anatomical sex;
- III. *effeminacy* and *viraginity*: men and women at this stage have the appearance of their anatomical sex, but they do not feel they belong to it completely; this anomaly manifests itself from childhood, when these individuals show interest in the activities of the opposite gender instead of their own's; they are not attracted to each other, but only to those belonging to the first two levels; Krafft-Ebing underlined that only a minority belonged to this group, although they were taken as the model for homosexuality because the difference with heterosexual people was more evident than in the previous levels;
- IV. *androgyny* and *gynandry*: in this final degree, individuals are closer to the opposite sex not only on a psychological and psycho-sexual level, but also on a physical one, for example in the shape of their faces or in their bones structure.

The German psychiatrist Albert Moll, who would later revise an edition of *Psychopathia Sexualis*, agreed with Krafft-Ebing on most points. However, he studied the phenomenon from a more psychological point of view, rather than a medical and

pathological one, and reached the conclusion that the hypothesis of acquired homosexuality, or contrary sexual feeling as he called it<sup>43</sup>, was to be discarded<sup>44</sup>. Furthermore, he only recognized the two categories of psychical hermaphroditism and homosexuality, thus rejecting the other degrees described by Krafft-Ebing. According to Moll, those could be considered as clinical cases rather than the different degrees of a single phenomenon<sup>45</sup>. Nevertheless, his ideas on homosexual individuals corresponded to the third level of Krafft-Ebing's scale, since he believed that these men were actually women, looking for the masculine ideal. Consequently, he thought that homosexuals could not have intercourse with each other because of their effeminacy, which destined them to an unfulfilled desire for a real man<sup>46</sup>.

All of the experts who have been examined so far were not largely known in Britain, where 'the sexual knowledge was disseminated in a somewhat conspiratorial manner, as it was ostensibly directed solely at medical and legal practitioners'<sup>47</sup>. Consequently, the general attitude towards homosexuality was not actually influenced: the most accredited theory was still that of sickness or madness in the best cases, of vice and crime in the worst. It was in such a climate that *Sexual Inversion* by Havelock Ellis was first published in 1897. According to Grosskurth:

*Sexual Inversion* was an unprecedented book. Never before had homosexuality been treated so soberly, so comprehensively, so sympathetically. To read it today is to read the voice of common sense and

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<sup>43</sup> *Die Konträre Sexualempfindung* was the title of his first book on the subject, published in 1891.

<sup>44</sup> H. E., *L'inversione sessuale*, cit., pp. 65-66.

<sup>45</sup> R. K. E., *Psychopathia Sexualis*, cit.

<sup>46</sup> Albert Moll, *Perversion of the Sex Instinct: A Study of Sexual Inversion Based on Clinical Data and Official Documents* (1931), trans. Maurice Popkin cited in Robert A. Nye, *Sexuality* (1999), Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 153-154.

<sup>47</sup> H. B., 'Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* as Sexual Sourcebook', cit., p. 23.

compassion; to read it then was, for the great majority, to be affronted by a deliberate incitement to vice of the most degrading kind.<sup>48</sup>

In fact, the book did not have an easy life. Only one year after its publication, the book was deemed indecent, the scientific nature of it being ignored, because of the portrayals of sexual acts between persons of the same sex. Indignant at such a judgement, Ellis decided never to publish his *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* in Britain again. The whole series, including a new edition of *Sexual Inversion*, were published in the United States.

What was so revolutionary in this book? It was an apologia for homosexuality, or inversion<sup>49</sup>, as Ellis named it. Moreover, he was the first to write in English about the subject, treating homosexuality as neither a disease nor a crime. The aim of the book was to argue 'the congenital nature of inversion and the fact that the invert was leading a furtive, often tragic existence because of the guilt imposed upon him by collective prejudice'<sup>50</sup>. He suggested that a simple change of the Labouchère Amendment, making same-sex intercourse lawful in private and between consenting adults, would have been sufficient to ameliorate the living conditions of the British inverts<sup>51</sup>. However, not all of Ellis' beliefs were as modern as they may seem. Ellis highlighted differences in male and female inversion based on those between the sexes, allegedly rooted in biology; and, just as Krafft-Ebing did, he distinguished between congenital and acquired inversion. Although he sustained that the former

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<sup>48</sup> Phyllis Grosskurth, *Havelock Ellis: A Biography* (1980), New York: Knopf, p. 185.

<sup>49</sup> Ellis makes a distinction between homosexuality and inversion: the former was the general phenomenon, the acts per se, while the latter a variation due to a congenital anomaly. See: H. E., *L'inversione sessuale*, cit., p. 62; J. W., *Coming Out*, cit., pp. 62-63.

<sup>50</sup> P. G., *Havelock Ellis: A Biography*, cit., p. 186.

<sup>51</sup> H. E., *L'inversione sessuale*, cit., pp. 235-236.

could not be cured or suppressed in any way, thus disagreeing with Krafft-Ebing, he believed it was hereditary. Furthermore, he suggested that social hygiene would prevent the latter, which he did not condone since it was a deviation from the natural aim of reproduction without justification. Nevertheless, he admitted himself that the distinction between the two was difficult to make and required a thorough knowledge of the life of a person<sup>52</sup>.

Turning to details, Ellis agreed with Moll's recognition of only sexual inversion and psychical hermaphroditism, which he considered less common, but which could also be both congenital and acquired<sup>53</sup>. As for the causes of the congenital form of the two phenomena, he discarded the suggestion theory, arguing that not everybody reacts to an experience in the same way. Therefore, the cause must be deeper, thus biological. According to Ellis, the cause for sexual inversion was to be found in an anomaly, probably during the development of the foetus, which made it easier for an individual to feel attraction towards their own sex and difficult or impossible towards the opposite one<sup>54</sup>. As for the differences between male and female inversion, Ellis seemed to have two different attitudes: while he tried to debunk the stereotype of the effeminate man, he stressed the masculinity of the inverted woman. Actually, he pointed out two models for women, which could be called active and passive<sup>55</sup>. The former implied a marked masculinity, both in behaviour and appearance, due to the greater divergence from female nature, i.e. passive and receptive, only responding to a male's sexual advances. Passive female inverts, on the other hand, were

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.76.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 219.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 148-149.

characterized by a scarce sexual drive and a cold attitude towards men, but they still retained their natural femininity. Moreover, Ellis attributed female inverts a greater devotion in comparison to male ones, who tended to be promiscuous<sup>56</sup>. Again, this was due to the masculine nature, which was characterized by a stronger sexual drive.

The term inversion was the most common at the end of the nineteenth century, at least among the higher strata of society, because it described the coeval ideas about homosexuality, namely an inverted sexual attraction, if compared to its normal expression. The same can be said of the different words that have been used:

These terms all convey the notion that same-sex love involved an apparent disjunction between anatomy and instinct. Contrary instinct contradicted the anatomical semiotics of the body, particularly the genitalia, which historically had been the first and last resort of sex determination for legal and medical purposes.<sup>57</sup>

The realization that a person's sexual desires could not be deduced from their anatomy was slow in coming, 'for medical researchers clung to the notion that the human sexual instinct was essentially a psychological phenomenon, initially thought to be localized in the reproductive organs or, on a slightly later view, in the brain's cerebral cortex'<sup>58</sup>. All the theorists who have been taken into consideration also never doubted the congruence of anatomical sex and sexual instinct. It was one of the allegedly biological truths at the base of early sexology. The first to undermine this conviction was the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, who managed to reveal that the sexual instinct functioned in a more complex way than was thought.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp. 170-172.

<sup>57</sup> Robert A. Nye, *Sexuality* (1999), Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 150.

<sup>58</sup> D. G. & C. K., *Genders*, cit., p. xv.

In his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud argued that the sexual object and the sexual aim<sup>59</sup> were not naturally contained in the human sexual drive, as was demonstrated by homosexuality and other so-called perversions which involved non-sexual organs or acts. According to him,

[...] the sexual instinct and the sexual object are merely soldered together [...] It seems probable that the sexual instinct is in the first instance independent of its object; nor is its origin likely to be due to its object's attractions.<sup>60</sup>

In other words, he detached sexual aim and object from a person's anatomy, thus redeeming homosexuality from its categorisation as a pathology or biological degeneration. Even more, 'to pursue Freud's argument to its logical conclusion necessarily means dislodging 'the normal picture' [heterosexuality], undermining its customary dominance by seeing it as just one contingent form of sexual desire among many'<sup>61</sup>. However, Freud also argued that an individual's sexual libido was shaped during their childhood by the impressions and stimuli they received<sup>62</sup>. Consequently, the conviction that homosexuality was not completely innate but still a perversion which could be "cured" through a psychoanalytic intervention on the unconscious got a foothold in the first decades of the twentieth century. The way to the acceptance of homosexuality as a simple variation of nature, then, was still rather long.

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<sup>59</sup> The sexual object is the person from whom sexual attraction proceeds, while the sexual aim is the act towards which the instinct tends.

<sup>60</sup> Sigmund Freud, James Strachey (Ed.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 7, *A Case of Hysteria, Three Essays on Sexuality and Other Works* (1953), London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, p. 148.

<sup>61</sup> D. G. & C. K., *Genders*, cit., p. xvii.

<sup>62</sup> R. A. N., *Sexuality*, cit., p.184



## II. Life and Homosexuality: Two British Authors

### Radclyffe Hall

#### The Formative Years

Marguerite Radclyffe Hall was born on 12<sup>th</sup> August 1880 in Bournemouth in a house called Sunny Lawn. Her parents were Radclyffe Radclyffe-Hall and Mary Jane Sager. He was a member of a gentry family, had studied law at Oxford without qualifying, had a large allowance but no desire to work. His time was taken up by women and hunting. She was an American widow who had an aspirational regard for the English gentry. The two had married in 1878, a few months after meeting each other. The reason behind such a rash was the legitimization of the birth of their first child, Florence, who would die a week after her sister was born. Radclyffe and Mary Jane's marriage, however, did not last. The couple parted forever a month after Marguerite was born.

From that moment onwards, she would not see much of her father and his family. Mary Jane started court proceedings and was granted judicial separation, custody of the child and substantial maintenance<sup>63</sup>. The premises for a happy life were not there: she was left with an unwanted child she had tried to abort and without a house. For the first six years of her life, Marguerite Radclyffe Hall was entrusted to Nurse Knott and shunted about. Her mother's 'moods were unsettling, her temper short. Household problems enraged her. She screeched at the servants, withheld their wages and summarily turned them and their possession out of the

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<sup>63</sup> Diana Souhami, *The Trials of Radclyffe Hall* (2013), London: Quercus, p. 8.

house'<sup>64</sup>. The only happy memories Radclyffe Hall had of her childhood were connected to Grandmother Diehl, in whom she found the ideal motherly figure. Unfortunately, she moved back and forth from America.

In the meantime, Mary Jane delayed divorce fearing that Radclyffe might remarry and his father's money pass to other legitimate children. In a second hearing, a third of his inheritance was awarded to Marguerite to be administered in trust<sup>65</sup>. This made the relationship between mother and daughter more complicated than it already was, since Mary Jane thought only herself entitled to the money. Probably for this reason, young Marguerite did not receive the special tuition she needed: she was dyslexic, consequently she had difficulty reading and writing, although she had some musical talent.

Due to her mother's changing moods, even residences did not last much during Radclyffe Hall's childhood. This constant movement would be a pattern in her adult life as well, due to her restlessness. The only constants were her mother's beatings, which happened quite often. Thus, in the autumn of 1880 she was happy when she was told she was going to school. However, the experience turned out to be humiliating: because of her dyslexia, which was neither recognized nor understood, she was teased and put in the lowest class.

In 1887 Mary Jane sued for divorce on grounds of adultery. She had ascertained that Radclyffe was living with another woman, thus the decree absolute was made on 4<sup>th</sup> December 1888. 'His subsequent efforts to see Marguerite were

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

blocked. She was told he was wicked and that she should say he was dead'<sup>66</sup>. Mary Jane, however, wanted to re-establish her social position and lost no time in wooing her singing teacher, Alberto Antonio Visetti. He was a founding professor at the Royal College for Music in London and a respected teacher, whose pupils were rather successful. After the marriage, she changed her name in Madame Maria Visetti and the whole family, including Grandmother Diehl, settled in his house in London. The new situation did not bring much change: Mrs Visetti was still violent and Mr Visetti used his marriage as a cover to continue seducing his students. 'His sexual overtures were directed at his ten-year-old stepdaughter, too'<sup>67</sup>. Radclyffe Hall would refer to him as 'my disgusting stepfather' for the rest of her life. She hated them both deeply and viewed herself as special and misunderstood and started identifying with Christ in martyrdom.

Growing up, she always pined with desire for some girl or woman. In her teens, she wooed the star pupil of her stepfather, the soprano Agnes Nicholls. The girl treated her as a property and was jealous when Marguerite would flirt with other pupils. However, 'Marguerite's interest was not chaste and pure. It was the prospect of sex that obsessed her thoughts, made her tramp from home and neglect her studies'<sup>68</sup>. The fact that this first relationship turned sexual was the reason why she did not leave her mother's house in October 1898 when she could have. Her father had died and she inherited his estate, making Mrs Visetti vicious with envy: 'all the family money, by the term of his father's cautious will, was to pass to Marguerite

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

when she was twenty-one. Until then, she was to draw a generous allowance<sup>69</sup>. She left as soon as her inheritance of £100.000 came within her control. Nevertheless, she would quarrel with her mother about money for the rest of her life: she resolved to give Mrs Visetti an allowance of £200-300 in order to have to deal with her the least possible.

### **Becoming John**

With money, freedom and her sexual orientation clear, Marguerite changed her image. [...] She swept her hair back from her face, wore tailored clothes, wide-brimmed hats and plain but expensive jewels. She was opinionated and vulnerable. [...] She collected stamps, rode horse, hunted foxes, kept dogs and budgerigars. Unmistakably lesbian, she was not going to pretend a passing interest in men.<sup>70</sup>

Radclyffe Hall was determined to always obtain what she wanted, especially when it came to lovers. She used her money to woo them with allowances and gifts. 'She bought her way into their beds'<sup>71</sup>. The first love affair of this sort occurred in her early twenties with Jane Randolph, her mother's cousin. In a way, this was a form of vengeance for her miserable childhood. Jane Randolph was ten years older, married with three children, and was sailing home in a fortnight when they met for the first time. Soon after her return to Washington, her husband died and Radclyffe Hall wasted no time: she moved there and provided for her and for her children, just like the typical stepfather. After a year, she brought the whole family back to England to live with her and Grandmother Diehl. On her next visit to the States, however, she

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

started a love affair with Dolly Diehl, the daughter of her mother's brother. When Jane remarried to a wealthy Texan, Dolly moved in with Radclyffe Hall and their mutual grandmother before touring central Europe.

In 1906 Radclyffe Hall paid to have a collection of her poems published, *Twixt Earth and Stars*. It was dedicated to and talked about Dolly. No reviewers picked up on the sexual content behind the poems, thus it was generally well received. In August of the same year, she went with Dolly to Homburg to see the women's tennis tournaments because one of her friend, Toupie Lowther, was playing. They all booked at the Savoy where Mabel Veronica Batten was staying as well. She was a fifty-year old colonial expatriate who had married out of financial and social necessity. Her lovers had been numerous and among them there was Edward, the Prince of Wales. Her husband George was a retired civil servant for whom she had no interest at all. They became friends, and back in London Mabel copied out Radclyffe Hall's poems, catalogued them and corrected her spelling. For her part, Marguerite wooed her with money, poems, and jewels.

In August 1908, they went on holiday together and, on their return, they were lovers. 'From then on Mabel called her John. More than a on nickname, this was a rechristening. It released Marguerite from the hated name her mother had given her and from her discomfort at being a woman'<sup>72</sup>:

By reconstruction she was not the same gender. She was an English squire from a time-honoured family, with horses, hounds and a wife. For Mabel too it defined the partnership in society's terms. It was John who opened the doors, carried the bags, hired the servants and of course paid the bills.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

In autumn 1908, John paid to publish *A Sheaf of Verses*. The following year, Dolly married, giving her the freedom to be alone with her new love, Ladye.

Mabel seemed to offer the stability that Radclyffe Hall had needed and even convinced her to convert to Catholicism (she would be formally received into the Roman Catholic Church in 1912). Despite the Vatican's condemnation of same-sex love, they thought they were blessed and respectable. 'They were royalists, patriots, Conservatives, Christians, with allegiance to country, God and class'<sup>74</sup>. Thanks to Mabel and the peace she brought with her, Radclyffe Hall started to seriously focus on her literary career and, in May 1910, she published another volume of poems called *Poems of the Past and Present*. In October, both Grandmother Diehl and George Batten died. While the first death was an important loss for Radclyffe Hall, the second was not: Ladye received a £400 rental income a year, the house, and £8.000 capital; besides there were no more impediments for their relationships. They considered themselves married and moved in together. The result of such happiness was a fourth volume of poems, *Songs of Three Counties*. In their bliss, they were untouched by the outer world: socially, they were part of a group of other lesbians of their class who had money and cultural interests and the only worries they knew were domestic. The pain of childhood was over for Radclyffe Hall who was now loved, protected and praised<sup>75</sup>.

Unfortunately, the age difference between them was not irrelevant. Ladye was limited by the pains and frailties that came with elderly age and this made John's attitude towards her change. In 1913 she started a love affair with Phoebe Hoare,

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

who was also married. However, she was not able to keep it secret but was open about it to Ladye. Her sense of guilt resulted in compensatory gifts and gestures which, however, were not enough to prevent Ladye's wretchedness. She had been accustomed to being wooed all her life and now she felt marginalized and forgotten. The affair with Phoebe was brought to an end by the outbreak of the war: in order to save money, Radclyffe Hall and Mabel Batten leased their city flat and fired the maid to move to Malvern. Stuck there with Ladye only, without the possibility to actually fight and die like a hero because of her gender, John tried to convince neighbouring young men to enrol, made her house available for wounded soldiers and donated money and clothes. Then, one day, there was a car accident. Ladye was seriously hurt and her health became the focus of Radclyffe Hall's life due to her constant need for assistance.

As a consolation for her feeling of entrapment, John turned to writing prose. She began writing short stories and felt 'she was a genius with a gift from God'<sup>76</sup>. She imagined herself as a martyr whose word was to be spread all around the world thanks to the selfless devotion of a woman. Such tragic intensity was one of the basic elements of her writing, which was always about misfits, consequently in a certain way about herself. Ladye edited the stories, had them typed and John sent them to literary magazines, but they were always rejected. Following the advice of a publisher who was Ladye's friend, she started writing a novel: *Michael West* was an autobiographical *roman-à-clef*, but it was left unfinished for lack of inspiration.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

## The Eternal Trio

15<sup>th</sup> August 1915 was the beginning of the end for Ladye and John's relationship. That day they met Una Troubridge, Ladye's cousin. She was the second wife of a naval officer who was twenty-five years older than her and from whom she received syphilis and an undesired daughter, Andrea. Moreover, he objected to her artistic and intellectual pursuits and wanted her life to focus on him only. For all these reasons, she resented him and his presence, thus she spent all her time in England while he was abroad for work. However, she did not despise was John, who shared many of her beliefs, especially political and religious ones. She set her eyes on her and on the life she could obtain with her: through Radclyffe Hall she could achieve glory, have money, and no responsibility.

On her part, Ladye chronicled every meeting between Una and John in her diaries, which are the evidence that her cousin's intrusion affected her to the core. John rationalized her infidelity to her. 'She assured her she would never leave – but nor was she going to change'<sup>77</sup>. Thus, the relationship continued as well as Ladye's suffering. Her health was affected, too: in May 1916, during one of the many arguments about John's affair, she had a stroke. At the end of the same month, she died.

As for Una's husband, when Troubridge had come back to London in January 1916 and asked for explanations about his wife's relationship to this woman named John and her stay in England, she had told him she would not follow him and that

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 100.



'she would stay married only in name'<sup>78</sup>. Being Catholics, divorce was not an option; consequently, Troubridge had no alternative but to accept this fact.

The death of Ladye gave Una the possibility to have Radclyffe Hall for herself. She, however, was haunted by guilt and all her thoughts were focused on her deceased lover. She wanted to reassure Ladye, justify her relationship with Una and ask for forgiveness, consequently she searched for a way to get in touch with her. Una contacted Sir Oliver Lodge, former President of the Society for Psychical Research, who suggested they join the society and visit the medium Gladys Leonard of Maida Vale. John followed the advice, since it seemed a solution to her problem. Una, who wanted to be with her as much as possible, accompanied her. Between 1916 and 1920, they went to Mrs Leonard at least once a week in order to talk to Ladye's spirit. Thanks to the medium, Radclyffe Hall found the reassurance and forgiveness she was looking for. As for Una, she contented herself with being able to stay in the life of the woman she wanted, although not at the centre of it. She did everything her beloved required and consequently, Radclyffe Hall grew dependant on her.

The quest for Ladye became a full-time occupation for the both of them, consequently they moved in together and Una's daughter, Andrea, was sent away to be taken care of by someone else. However, the focus shifted from grief about Ladye to documenting what she was up to, in order to publish their research in the journal of the Society for Psychical Research. After submitting a two-hundred-page essay, Radclyffe Hall was asked to read it at a meeting. The reception was generally good:

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

'it was to be published in the Society's journal and John was nominated for election to the council'<sup>79</sup>. Nevertheless, quite a few knew the background story of lesbian love and jealousy and were not happy about the connection that would be established between the Society and the couple.

The war ended in November 1918, and at the beginning of 1919 Radclyffe Hall started looking for a house to share with her lover. Troubridge, however, was not in the past yet. He threatened legal action and accused her of having wrecked his home. As a counterattack, Una and John asked for help to a solicitor and prepared a deed for separation which gave Una the custody of Andrea. Troubridge signed it in order to avoid any more adverse publicity and because he could not afford litigation<sup>80</sup>. This, nevertheless, did not stop Una from benefiting of the title of Lady when a few months later Troubridge was knighted.

'News spread that Radclyffe Hall was a lesbian, a seducer of wives and addicted to sorcery'<sup>81</sup>. St George Lane Fox-Pitt, who was among those who were not pleased by Una and John's psychical research paper, found it the proper occasion to complain about their recommendation as members of the Society's council. When Radclyffe Hall was informed of the word that was used to criticize her, i.e. immoral, she took out a slender action after his refusal to withdraw such accusations. She was not afraid of the court's judgement and she knew her money gave her power. The trial started six months later and lasted merely one day: Radclyffe Hall won and was awarded £500 with costs.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

## The birth of a Novelist

In the comfort of their new shared home, she started writing a novel: the title she chose was *Octopi* and it was the story of a lesbian daughter denied life by a manipulative mother. The archetype for this motherly figure was obviously her own, and the book was 'about herself, her precarious identity, her lack views of mothers. Her alienation from men, her desire to find a compensatory replacement for Mrs Visetti, whom she loathed'<sup>82</sup>.

In her fiction and fantasy she was drawn to themes of martyrdom and heroic tragedy. In reality she was never alone, indulged all whims of purchase and travel and took the best suite in all the Grand Hotels. Nothing was too good for her and money gave her power.<sup>83</sup>

Since she had no publisher or agent yet, her work was sporadic and procrastinated for any reason. The major one was looking for a new house: merely one year after moving into Chip Chase, she wanted to move out in order to be closer to the London lesbian scene and its connections. Some of the names of this circle were: Toupie Lowther, Gabrielle Enthoven, Ida Wylie, May Sinclair, Romaine Brooks, Natalie Barney and Vere Hutchinson. Through such women, Radclyffe Hall moved towards self-expression; however stylistic innovation was not her thing. She was as conservative in art as she was in politics: she liked accessible narrative, devotional paintings and portraits of her relatives as much as she pledged allegiance to the ruling class, inherited status, antipathy to communism and Jews as well as feminism<sup>84</sup>.

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., pp. 161, 169.

At the end of 1922, *Octopi* was finished and retitled *The Unlit Lamp*. However, it was rejected by the publisher for its disconcerting themes and lack of wit. A more marketable first novel was suggested; thus, in six months, she wrote *The Forge*, which was published in January 1924. The book was acclaimed and even reprinted. Una took care of all the details concerning editing and promoting and made the building of Radclyffe Hall's career her occupation. On the private side, however, she was the contrary of what Ladye had been: she was possessive of John and her time and preferred to be alone with her, rather than participating in the lesbian scene. She 'was the brake on excess. She promulgated a myth of austere respectability'<sup>85</sup>. This, together with their conservative political views, might seem a contradiction since Radclyffe Hall rejected the defining rules of society and personified subversive sex, coded references to which insinuated through all her work. Nevertheless, following the success of her first novel and of *The Saturday Life*, in June 1924 she received an offer for the publication of *The Unlit Lamp*: despite her friends' initial doubts about its reception, it obtained only good reviews. Surprising was also the success of her following book in 1926: those were years of literary innovation, but *Adam's Breed* was resistant to it and focused on redemption, suffering and Jesus Christ. The book was shortlisted for the Femina Prize, and Radclyffe Hall won.

### ***The Well of Loneliness and the Trials***

The success she was experiencing made her confident that God's plan for her was to change the world through her books. For this reason, she resolved to write a book about female homosexuality.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

I wished to offer my name and my literary reputation in support of the cause of the inverted. I knew that I was running the risk of injuring my career as a writer by rousing up a storm of antagonism; but I was prepared to face this possibility because, being myself a congenital invert, I understood the subject from the inside as well as from medical and psychological text books. I felt therefore that no one was better qualified to write the subject in fiction than an experienced novelist like myself who was actually one of the people of whom she was writing and was thus in a position to understand their spiritual, mental and physical reactions, their joys and their sorrows, and above all their unceasing battle against a frequently cruel and nearly always thoughtless and ignorant world.<sup>86</sup>

Initially titled *Stephen*, this ground-breaking book was to be *The Well of Loneliness*. It told the story of Stephen Gordon, a sexual invert, and it was to be a sort of manual for the world on how to deal with this category of individuals, who were part of God's creation despite the stigma imposed on them by society. Radclyffe Hall claimed the book was fictional and that she had drawn upon her own life only for the emotional and psychological aspects. However, in *The Well of Loneliness* she invented even less than she had been used to: the places in which the story develops are the English countryside, London, Paris, even the Spanish islands where she went on holidays with Ladye; whereas the characters are renditions of real life friends, such as Noël Coward and Natalie Barney<sup>87</sup>. As for the representation of sexual inversion, she took only the parts that suited her from her reading of the works of Havelock Ellis, Magnus Hirschfeld and Richard von Krafft-Ebing. She mixed these pieces of information with her spiritualism, Catholicism, and her own ideas about endocrinology and race. Thus,

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<sup>86</sup> Radclyffe Hall, letter to Gorham Munson, 2 June 1934, cited in Diana Souhami, *The Trials of Radclyffe Hall* (2013), p. 197.

<sup>87</sup> D. S., *The Trials of Radclyffe Hall*, cit., p. 217.

she created a model of the sexual invert, with specific characteristics. To sustain her alleged scientific objectivity and to pass the exam of censorship, she wanted scientific authority. Consequently, she repeatedly asked Havelock Ellis to write a preface to the novel until he accepted to do so.

At first it was difficult to find a publisher for the book, since many rejected it because of its theme. However, Jonathan Cape accepted because he knew her sales figure and liked innovative work. His plan was to publish *The Well of Loneliness* in a sober manner fitting the seriousness of the subject: 'the book would have a black binding and plain jacket and be priced at twenty-five shillings – about four times more than the average novel'<sup>88</sup>. All the details were meticulously studied and nothing was left solely to the publishers, since Radclyffe Hall knew the importance of such a work. She identified with Oscar Wilde, for she knew that she was now articulating a female homosexual identity, just like he did for the male one. The book was published in England on 27<sup>th</sup> July 1928<sup>89</sup>, however 'the subject matter was not a problem. The fears of publishers appeared misplaced. Reviews accrued over the next four weeks. Many were favourable, some were critical, all were unsensational'<sup>90</sup>. 'Many reviewers praised the courage and restraint with which Hall handled the material'<sup>91</sup>.

It looked like a complete success, until on 19<sup>th</sup> August 1928 James Douglas, the editor of the *Sunday Express*, published an editorial of five columns which demanded the suppression of the book for the immorality and obscenity of its theme.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>89</sup> Nancy J. Knauer, 'Homosexuality as Contagion: From the Well of Loneliness to the Boy Scouts' (2000), *Hofstra Law Review*, vol. 29, iss. 2, Article 2, p. 431.

<sup>90</sup> D. S., *The Trials of Radclyffe Hall*, cit., p. 237.

<sup>91</sup> N. J. K., 'Homosexuality as Contagion', cit., p. 431.

'In case there was any doubt about what a lesbian looked like, the *Sunday Express* also printed a photograph of Hall to accompany the editorial'<sup>92</sup>. Jonathan Cape reacted in haste sending a copy of *The Well of Loneliness* to the Home Secretary stating that the book would be withdrawn from public circulation if he deemed it necessary. The Home Secretary was Sir William Joynson-Hicks and he was an evangelical moralist. 'Even the Bishop of Durham called him a "dour fanatic" who proceeded against one cause after another with "dervish like fervour"'<sup>93</sup>. As a matter of fact, he thought the book was inherently obscene and asked Cape to withdraw it. Jonathan Cape, however, contrived a devious strategy: he cancelled the third reprint of the book and planned to ship the moulds to Paris in order to have the book printed there. The moulds were delivered to John Holroyd-Reece, the proprietor of the Pegasus Press, who instructed a London solicitor, Harold Rubinstein, to act for him, Cape and Radclyffe Hall. Within three weeks, pirate copies were printed and sent to British booksellers.

Nevertheless, things were not going to be as easy as Cape thought. The book uncovered the homophobia of 'the ruling class, the men of establishment, the government that made the rules, the judiciary that enforced them, the press that disseminated them'<sup>94</sup>. What men like Joynson-Hicks were concerned about was not literature, but passion between women. 'They feared its acceptance if Radclyffe Hall was heard. They had their view of a woman's place and they intended to legislate against this affront to it'<sup>95</sup>. Consequently, when a journalist informed Joynson-Hicks

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 432.

<sup>93</sup> D. S., *The Trials of Radclyffe Hall*, cit., p. 244.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

that pirate copies were circulating in the country, warrants were issued by Chief Magistrate Sir Chartres Biron to impede the crossing of the borders and to seize all the copies of the bookseller Leopold Hill, who was acting as a distributor. Summonses followed: Jonathan Cape and Leopold Hill were commanded to appear in court to 'show cause why the said obscene books so found and seized [...] should not be destroyed'<sup>96</sup>.

The proceedings started on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1928. The relevant legislation was the Obscene Publications Act of 1857 and, according to Sir Chartres Biron who was the presiding magistrate, the question was whether the book defended unnatural practices between women, 'which between men would be a criminal offence, and involve acts of the most horrible, unnatural and disgusting obscenity'<sup>97</sup>. Biron's mind was already set: no witnesses were allowed despite the great number of experts and specialists that Rubinstein and Birkett, the representatives of the defence, had summoned; according to Biron all that these people could say would only be a matter of opinion, whereas *he* represented the law, the only element that mattered. Thus, it was no surprise when on 16<sup>th</sup> November he ordered the destruction of the book. Radclyffe Hall insisted on an appeal to a higher court, but once again the case was prejudged and the result was the same: the case was lost and *The Well of Loneliness* was destroyed. It would remain banned in Great Britain until 1949<sup>98</sup>.

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<sup>96</sup> Radclyffe Hall, handwritten notes for lecture on trial (1928) cited in Diana Souhami, *The Trials of Radclyffe Hall* (2013), p. 262.

<sup>97</sup> Jenny Cooper Frye, *A Study in Censorship: Radclyffe Hall's 'The Well of Loneliness'* (mss) cited in Diana Souhami, *The Trials of Radclyffe Hall* (2013), p. 274.

<sup>98</sup> N. J. K., 'Homosexuality as Contagion', cit., p. 404.



Afflicted, Radclyffe Hall needed to leave Britain, so she travelled to Paris with Una, where she was acclaimed as a heroine. Nevertheless, she was waiting for the result of another trial: the book had been published in America as well and sales figure were constantly increasing; however, the Society for the Suppression of Vice formally complained on 29th February. Luckily, freedom of speech was guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States, consequently it was easier for the appointed lawyer to defend *The Well of Loneliness*: on 19<sup>th</sup> April 1929 the verdict was announced, and the book was found not to be in violation of the law<sup>99</sup>. By the time Hall died, the book would be selling 100.000 copies each year in the US, giving innumerable women a sense of identity and the knowledge that they were not alone<sup>100</sup>. Nevertheless, despite the success she enjoyed outside Britain, Radclyffe Hall would never write about lesbian love in her novels again.

### **A New Chapter, Another Woman**

After the pressure of the trials and a few months spent travelling around Europe, she needed some peace, therefore she moved to Rye. There, she bought a house for Una, called the Black Boy, and took interest in a nearby Catholic church: it was dedicated to St Anthony of Padua and it was small and still unfinished. She decided to pay for all its debts and the work needed to finish it, which granted her and Una a special treatment by the priest Father Bonaventura. Religion seemed a refuge after the hardships of the obscenity trial, consequently it was not surprising that her next novel, *The Master of the House*, was imbued with it. The book was

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<sup>99</sup> D. S., *The Trials of Radclyffe Hall*, cit., p. 310.

<sup>100</sup> N. J. K., 'Homosexuality as Contagion', cit., p. 451.

finished in November 1930, after they had settled at the Black Boy in Rye. The couple initially integrated well into the new neighbourhood, getting on well with the local gay and lesbian group. Old friends were thus replaced by new ones: Edy Craig, E. F. Benson, Francis Yeats-Brown, Paul Nash, Lady Maud Warrender, and Sheila Kaye-Smith. John and Una were perceived as a married couple, which satisfied the latter who, after the trial, became more concerned with respectability: 'she extolled her own abstinence and fidelity'<sup>101</sup> and felt at ease in such a peaceful place as Rye. However, Radclyffe Hall was not as content as her partner was. The emotional toll caused by the trials and its consequences made itself manifest after another series of misfortunes: in 1932 *The Master of the House* was published but was definitely not successful, Una underwent a hysterectomy to remove fibroids, and the community of Rye became their enemy.

During the aftermath of surgery, Radclyffe Hall had to constantly take care of Una for almost a month, during which she saw nobody else. All their friends, on the other hand, were changing partners or having love affairs. She complained that the only romance left in her life was the church which, unfortunately was taken away as well. Father Bonaventura was not living up to Radclyffe Hall's standards, consequently she officially complained about him to his superiors. This action, apart from being completely ignored by the appointed authorities, gained her the aversion of the whole Catholic community of Rye. In the end, feeling offended and ostracized after all her financial support of the church, she decided never to set foot in there again. All these controversies affected her a great deal and, in order to avoid a

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<sup>101</sup> D. S., *The Trials of Radclyffe Hall*, cit., p. 332.

breakdown, Una convinced her to leave for the summer after having sold the Black Boy.

Thus, in July 1934 they were in France, where a new chapter of Radclyffe Hall's life was to begin. Unfortunately, it started with both being sick, for which reason a nurse was requested. Evguenia Souline was a thirty-year-old victim of the Russian Revolution who had no country, no money and no family. Radclyffe Hall was intrigued and 'saw herself as Evguenia's saviour'<sup>102</sup>. She started her obstinate courtship, which as usual involved money. Una obviously made a scene when she understood John's interest for Evguenia, and reminded her of the years she had been by her side and of her own poor health. However, she had to soften 'when John pleaded that without Evguenia she was too desolate to go on living, could neither eat nor sleep and would never write another book'<sup>103</sup>. Una, who was aware that she had been living through Radclyffe Hall and her career and was not willing to lose everything it granted her, had to accept the start of this relationship. What she did not know was that it was not going to be a fleeting attraction: she was going to have to fight for the rest of Radclyffe Hall's life in order to keep her position and its benefits. The truth was that John had not been in love with her for many years already; she only felt gratitude, respect and duty towards Una. Besides, she needed the allegedly selfless devotion and validation she had received from her.

Evguenia was John's consolation for the trial of *The Well of Loneliness*, the failure of *The Master of the House*, the dead end of her feelings for Una. She

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 355.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 360.

said Evguenia had brought her back to life and because of her she could again work. But she needed Una to affirm this work.<sup>104</sup>

Needless to say, the life *à trois* which resulted from this relationship proved hard for all the women involved. Una suffered the same pain she had previously inflicted to Ladye and made Evguenia's life impossible as much as she could. On her part, the Russian woman had to bear Radclyffe Hall's possessiveness and inability to compromise: every time she said or did something that was not in compliance with her will, John's rage would erupt. As a matter of fact, Radclyffe Hall thought she was the master of her lovers and treated them in a way that today might be defined abusive.

You belong to me, and don't you forget it. You are mine, and no one elses in this world. If I left for 20 years you'd have to starve. No one but me has the right to touch you. I took your virginity, do you hear? I taught you all you know about love. You belong to me body & soul, and I claim you. And this is no passing mood on my part – it's the stark, grim truth that I'm writing.<sup>105</sup>

As for Radclyffe Hall herself, her obstinacy was her ruin. Although spending time alone with Una became an annoyance, she would not leave her. She was determined to have both Una and Evguenia in her life even though they could not tolerate each other. In the long run, this inability to compromise would physically weaken her to the point of being lethal.

### **The Final Calvary of Radclyffe Hall**

As a matter of fact, the last nine years of her life were spent travelling around for health reasons, both Evguenia's and hers. Winters were to be spent in warm

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 372.

<sup>105</sup> Radclyffe Hall, letter to Evguenia Souline 3 November 1935, cited in Diana Souhami, *The Trials of Radclyffe Hall* (2013), pp. 289-290.

climates due to Evguenia's tuberculosis because Paris was too cold<sup>106</sup>, and Florence was the chosen destination because of Una and John's appreciation of the Duce and his regime, besides the inexpensive life Italy granted. Meanwhile Radclyffe Hall, who was in her late fifties, suffered various illnesses and pains. 'She was pale and intermittently weak and exhausted'<sup>107</sup>, then she 'had cystitis, an abscess under a tooth and a nervous spasm in her eyes'<sup>108</sup> because the lashes on her lower lids curled inwards and scratched against her eyeballs; in addition, she slipped on the doorstep and fell on her right ankle and had multiple fractures<sup>109</sup>. She was on the verge of a complete breakdown, which started in November 1938 when Evguenia told her:

She was more normal than John thought and she did not want to have sex with her any more. She felt uncomfortable at being in a same-sex relationship and wanted if possible to marry a man. She hoped they would stay friends, go on seeing each other and writing letters but she was adamant about not being in the same town with Una for more than brief periods.<sup>110</sup>

Radclyffe Hall was desperate and Una understood that this was not a victory for her: she knew that, if Evguenia left, her relationship with John would be so intolerable that she would have to let her go<sup>111</sup>. And she was determined not to do so, because she knew the life she had been accustomed to depended on their relationship. For this reason, she tightened her grip on John in the last years of her life and sickness. She was always by her side, trying to assert her control and to undermine Evguenia's position. Thus, she followed Radclyffe Hall through all her medical predicaments: first

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<sup>106</sup> D. S., *The Trials of Radclyffe Hall*, cit., p. 394.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 400.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 403.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 415.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 428-429.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 424.

there were laryngitis and infected gums, followed by high blood pressure, an underactive thyroid and toxic poisoning of the aorta caused by nicotine; then she had gastric troubles, pneumonia and pleurisy, she broke her other ankle, and underwent a disastrous eye operation<sup>112</sup>. However, the *coup de grace* was rectal cancer, diagnosed in April 1943 after a colostomy. It was widespread and inoperable. However, Radclyffe Hall's 'demise was protracted and terrible. She was given Omnopon, an opium preparation, and Diamorphine – heroin'<sup>113</sup>. Thus, she remained alive for six more months until on 6<sup>th</sup> October 1943 she went into a coma. The following day she was declared dead.

Una adapted well to John's death and the inheritance of all her money, which amounted to £118.000 excluding book royalties. She was ecstatic because she had managed to convince Radclyffe Hall to modify her will a few days before she died. In fact, according to the previous draft of the testament, Evguenia was to receive an allowance for the rest of her life. In a certain way, Radclyffe Hall honoured her promise to take care of her Russian lover even in the final will that she signed under the influence of Una:

I appoint Margot Elena Gertrude Troubridge (known as Una Vincenzo Troubridge) to be Sole Executrix of this Will and I Devise and Bequeath to her all my property and estate both real and personal absolutely trusting her to make such provision for our friend Eugenie Souline as in her absolute discretion she may consider right knowing my wishes for the welfare of the said Eugenie Souline.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., pp. 431-432, 435, 455, 459.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 470.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p.471.

As difficult as it may seem, Radclyffe Hall seemed not to have understood the hatred that Una bore against Evguenia. What she could definitely not know, however, was how Una would use the will at her advantage: using money as a means of control, she prevented Evguenia from making her relationship with Radclyffe Hall public. As a matter of fact, after John's death, Una's plan was to build a myth around her and their relationship. She destroyed all the letters Evguenia had sent to John and burnt the manuscript of *The Shoemaker of Merano*, the last thing she ever wrote, due to its obvious references to the Russian woman, because she wanted to create the image of a perfectly happy and faithful lesbian couple whose love had been blessed by God. *The Life and Death of Radclyffe Hall*, which she wrote using her own diaries, was the result of the editing of a woman who 'had a psychopath's skill to convince herself of the truth or her lies'<sup>115</sup>.

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 490.

## E. M. Forster

### A Solitary Childhood

Edward Morgan Forster was born on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1879 at his parents' house, 6 Melcombe Place, Dorset Square, London. His father, Edward Morgan Llewellyn Forster, called Eddie, was an architect and a descendant of the Thorntons, a family of rich bankers, who were members of the Evangelical Clapham Sect. Forster's mother, Alice Clara Wichelo, known as Lily, was the daughter of a drawing master. The two had met in 1867, when she was twelve years old: after her father's death, Marianne Thornton, Eddie's aunt, had taken the girl under her wing as her protégé<sup>116</sup>. Consequently, Lily spent a great deal of time around the family, and the two had the chance to get closer. They married on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1877 and settled at Melcombe Place to avoid any interferences from both their families, especially from Marianne whose affection for her favourite nephew, Eddie, tended to trespass the limits<sup>117</sup>.

The role of favourite one was passed on to Morgan, as he was called by his family, when his father died of typhus and pulmonary consumption in October 1880. The child was not yet two years old, thus he never knew his father properly. The lack of a fatherly figure is a recurrent element in Forster's fiction, in which fathers often die prior to the start of the narrative<sup>118</sup>. After Eddie's death, Lily became overprotective of her child's health and, in 1883, she moved to Rooksnest in Hertfordshire. Although she claimed that the countryside would be beneficial for the

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<sup>116</sup> John Colmer, *E. M. Forster: The Personal Voice* (1975), London; Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, p. 1.

<sup>117</sup> Nicola Beauman, *Morgan: A Biography of E. M. Forster* (1993), London; Sydney; Auckland: Hodder & Stoughton, p. 10.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.



child, another reason for her choice was to escape from Marianne, whose grip on the family had become too strong. It is important to note, however, that Marianne's grip was of a moral kind rather than financial, since Eddie had left £7,000, which would allow Lily to take care of herself and her child rather comfortably<sup>119</sup>.

The decade spent at Rooksnest had a strong influence on Morgan because it created an ideal for him: the perfect life was in the countryside, in a house that one could call one's own because one's roots were there. This was a realer life, not to be understood as the simple life of the farmer, in which Morgan was never interested, but in philosophical terms<sup>120</sup>. Morgan's childhood at Rooksnest was rather typical for the time, although it was solitary. He virtually had no friends except the garden boy, Ansell, who was allowed to play with him on Wednesday afternoons. This solitude was due to the fact that his mother and he kept apart. Lily, as a matter of fact, was not sociable and allowed contacts only with two of the families that lived nearby. This seclusion was a protection: having been looked down upon by some of her husband's relations for being the daughter of a poor drawing master, she now wanted to defend her middle-class status from any accusations. In so doing, she would, however, condemn Morgan to feel an outsider for the rest of his life.

### **The School Years and the Comfort of Middle Class**

In 1890 Morgan started preparatory school at Kent House, near Eastbourne. The first year was rather difficult, as some of his letters testify: he did not integrate into the community of students and mourned the lack of a friendly connection.

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40-43.

Furthermore, in the spring of 1891 an incident occurred: having been excused from football, he went for a walk on the Downs and met a man who was urinating; the two sat down together, and the older man had Morgan play with his member, paying him a shilling afterwards<sup>121</sup>. Obviously, the young Morgan wrote about this meeting to his mother. Shocked, she asked him to talk to the headmaster, nobody else, and then to try and forget everything about it. She never explained to Morgan why the incident was so scandalous as to need being kept secret, nor did she ever explain anything concerning sexual matters, which would take Morgan a long time to understand. The second year, however, Morgan's situation improved: he was able to create a connection with one of his classmates first and then with the rest of them as well. In the end, he remained at Kent House for two semesters more than usual, leaving when he was already fourteen with the reputation of being a prankster. Being one of the older boys had made it easier for him to find his place in the school and had given him the confidence to socialize.

Unfortunately, when the Kent House experience ended, things changed again. He was to spend the summer term at a local school for boys before entering public school at Uppingham. However, after some weeks, Lily had to let him come back home and spend the rest of the summer with her. Alone in a new environment, Morgan had not been able to integrate into an already established community with its own equilibrium: he was teased and felt completely miserable. Taking this into consideration, Lily had to change her plans about Morgan's future and consequently discarded the option of another boarding school. The decision fell on Tonbridge, a

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

public school that, besides being inexpensive and respectable, was attracting many day boys. After some house hunting, Lily rented a house that was only a five-minute walk away from the school, which made the years spent at Dryhurst, Dry Hill Park Road, so comfortable that Morgan would be reluctant to ever escape suburbia, independently of his future aversion to its values and restrictions. As far as the school was concerned, however, Lily could not know that the teaching 'was often pedestrian and uninspired and that the sporting ethic was supremely important. [...] [Besides,] day boys, although an ever increasing group [...] never quite felt they belonged'<sup>122</sup>. All these characteristics contributed to Morgan's later claim that he was rather unhappy during his four years at Tonbridge. However, his passion for the classics was nourished and it seems that he was not as friendless as he would claim. It is a fact that he did not keep in touch with anyone from Tonbridge, but it was later revealed that he had at least two close friends at the time. Only one of them was mentioned in his diary though, probably because the other friendship did not match Morgan's expectations. This is only one of the many instances of self-censure Morgan imposed on the records of his life. Nevertheless, the experience of public school left its mark: it opened his eyes to 'the shallowness of middle-class culture, the rigidity of its constricting conventions, its neglect of the emotional and spiritual life'<sup>123</sup>.

### **The Happiest Years**

'Cambridge liberated Forster from a world he despised and provided him with a symbol of the good life'<sup>124</sup>. He entered King's College in the autumn of 1897.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>123</sup> J. C., *E. M. Forster: The Personal Voice*, cit., p. 4.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

Although at the time it was common for sons to follow their fathers' steps, he did not choose Trinity College as Eddie had, probably because he followed the advice of Ida Darwin, a family friend, who thought the values of Kingsmen were more suitable for someone like Morgan.

What would her Cambridge acquaintances have said about King's? Firstly, and perhaps most famously, they would have pointed to its reputation for the cult of friendship between don and undergraduate, its tradition of easy intercourse between old and young. Dons at King's do not live in one box and students in another. Then they would have defined its anti-public school reputation and the fact that King's values were the reverse of those of muscular Christianity and Tory imperialism (when Morgan arrived at Cambridge he fairly soon shed his lingering religious faith and any vestiges of conservatism). The acquaintances would have known that the existence of God was called very much into doubt at King's [...] and that personal relations, philosophic discussion and aesthetic appreciation were what mattered. They would have explained that the authoritarian ethic was despised not revered, that sport was unimportant and that the tripos was valued not shrugged off as something irrelevant [...].<sup>125</sup>

All these values would become Morgan's starting from his second year at Cambridge. The first year, in fact, was a transitional one during which he lived in lodgings and continued what he had done at Tonbridge: he tried to fit in and to avoid being noticed both in a positive and in a negative way. During his second year, the change occurred. Morgan left Tonbridge and its acquaintances behind and embraced Cambridge completely, thus starting some of the happiest years of his life. These were characterized by friendships that would contribute enormously to his intellectual development: Lytton Strachey, John Sheppard, Hugh Meredith, Leonard Woolf,

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<sup>125</sup> N. B., *Morgan: A Biography*, cit., p. 72.

Malcolm Darling, George Barger, Edward Dent<sup>126</sup>. Morgan concluded his studies in 1901 receiving a Second in History after obtaining the same result in the Classics Tripos the previous year. He studied under some influential dons, such as Nathaniel Wedd, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, and Oscar Browning. The latter was a negative influence inasmuch as it made Morgan realize he did not want to become like him in the future. On the other hand, Dickinson and Wedd became pivotal figures in his life: the former later became one of his closest friends, whereas the latter encouraged him to become a writer<sup>127</sup>. Also of importance was Morgan's election on 9<sup>th</sup> February 1901 to the Society of Apostles, a private society founded in the early nineteenth century. The members of this group would meet on Saturday nights, read a paper and then speak in turns, thus sharing and comparing their ideas. Due to his shyness, Morgan was always on the fringes and contented himself with listening rather than participating.

At the end of September 1901, being unemployed, Morgan set off for Italy with his mother. During this grand-tour experience, they visited the Lake Como, Milan, Florence, Cortona, Perugia, Rome, Naples, Sicily, and on the way back Siena, San Gimignano, Volterra, Pisa, Lucca, and Verona. The journey deeply affected Morgan: the contrast between the English middle class and the disinhibited Italy awoke his imagination and shook his suburban soul. It was during that winter that he started to think of himself as a writer. While in Sicily, he started to work on what would later become *A Room with a View* and completed his first short story, 'Albergo

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., pp. 79-80.

J. C., E. M. Forster: *The Personal Voice*, cit., pp. 6-7.

Empedocle'. However, he would later reject the latter because it seemed too obvious in its autobiographical references, which would make his homosexual desires overt<sup>128</sup>.

Once he was back in England, he was offered a post as a teacher for a weekly Latin class for the Working Men's College. He gladly accepted, not because he needed money, which he would never be in need of thanks to Marianne's inheritance, but out of a feeling of duty: his relatives placed great importance on him having a job, even unpaid, for reasons of respectability. Nevertheless, in the spring of 1903 he managed to join a cruise to Greece organized by and for Kingsmen. The three weeks spent in Greece gave him the opportunity to experience the atmosphere of Cambridge again, making him realize its value and importance. An essay titled 'Cnidus' and a short story, 'The Road from Colonus' were the results of this trip.

### **The Start of the Novelist's Career**

Back in England, Morgan continued teaching, writing short stories and working on *A Room with a View* while searching for a house. In September 1904, he and his mother moved to Weybridge, where his novelist career would start. As a matter of fact, it was there that he wrote all his novels; and he stopped writing fiction after moving out<sup>129</sup>. This might be a coincidence, but it is noteworthy that Weybridge was a suburban place and that the middle class was to be Morgan's theme par excellence: he knew it so well because he was part of it. By the late autumn, Morgan finished writing his first novel, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, and two short stories. The

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<sup>128</sup> N. B., *Morgan: A Biography*, cit., pp. 109-112.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

themes of the novel, whose protagonist is to be considered and alter ego of the author, were the contrast between the inhibition of suburban values and its lack in Italy, as well as the importance of the physical and spiritual elements in life besides duty. These topics would be recurrent in his fiction.

During the summer of the following year, Morgan worked for six months as a tutor in Nessenheide, at that time in Germany. This was his first time travelling alone without his mother, whose presence would constrict him until her death. However, the reasons why he went was his interest in learning German as well as in having an occupation. He was to tutor the daughters of a friend's aunt, Elizabeth von Arnim, who was also a novelist. The months spent there were rather happy but so was the return to England, since *Where Angels Fear to Tread* had been well received by readers and critics. On a personal level, however, a significant event occurred in 1906: for the first time, Morgan felt something as close as love for another person, Syed Ross Masood<sup>130</sup>. He was an Indian boy who had come to Weybridge in order to be prepared for his entrance at Oxford, and Morgan had been asked to tutor him in Latin by his mentor, Theodore Morison, the retired principal of the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College. Unfortunately, nothing happened between the two for various reasons, one being that Morgan kept his troubled sexuality as a private grief because he still hoped he could become "normal" and eventually marry<sup>131</sup>.

Soon after the publication of his second novel, *The Longest Journey*, in 1907, Morgan went on a trip with his friends H. O. Meredith and George Barger and their wives. After departing from them, he visited his old house at Rooksnest and its new

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

owners: this excursion in the countryside inspired much of the subject of *Howards End*, which would be published in 1910. While he was working on this book, however, *A Room with a View* was published in 1908 after many years of reworking and three different versions. Both the protagonists of *The Longest Journey* and *A Room with a View* can be said to represent a part of Morgan: many of their characteristics and of their actions create similarities and parallelisms with his own life and circumstances. Of the latter, Lucy is the best example: the only difference between her author and her is that she can escape through marriage, which was denied to Morgan<sup>132</sup>.

Despite his success as a novelist, the following years were miserable for Morgan. On 8<sup>th</sup> July 1909, Ernest Merz committed suicide. The two had met that night at a dinner with a common friend and they had walked home together; thus, Morgan was the last person who saw Merz alive. He could never comprehend the reason behind such a gesture. However, researches have shown that Merz felt hopeless because of his own homosexuality which, just like in Morgan's case, was making his life complicated: he would never be able to live up to his parents' expectations and he would never marry and have a normal – according to Edwardian social standards – life<sup>133</sup>. Being sensitive, Morgan was to be immensely impressed by this tragedy and he only knew one method to exorcise his feelings of guilt and misery, i.e. writing a novel. This is how *Maurice* was born. Although many years later he affirmed in a terminal note to the text that the occasion which originated the novel was a visit to Edward Carpenter and his partner George Merrill at Millthorpe in 1913, his older manuscripts corroborate the hypothesis that the text was written some years before,

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., pp. 205-206.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., pp. 226-230.



around 1910. This fact is then sustained by the correspondences between Merz and Maurice's lives: many incidents and dates are, if not identical, rather similar; and the only way Morgan had to know these details was to have read Ernest's letters that were privately printed by his family after his death. Thus, *Maurice* can be seen as a rewriting of Merz's life but with a happy ending: a sort of tribute and apology for not being able to help<sup>134</sup>. The novel, however, was not considered publishable due to the laws on homosexuality. Consequently, it was published posthumously in 1971.

### **India and World War I: A Turning Point**

In the years 1910 and 1911, Morgan's state did not ameliorate. Besides Merz's suicide, there were other reasons for him to feel miserable: he was almost the same age his father had been when he died, which caused a sort of mid-life crisis; his love for Masood, who had now returned home, was still unrequited; and he was finding it increasingly difficult to bear his suburban life with his mother, who curtailed his freedom<sup>135</sup>. A remedy for all these afflictions was found in 1912: his friend Goldsworthy had been awarded a travelling fellowship, and Traveyan had decided he wanted to visit India without his wife, thus the three agreed on travelling together. So it was that Morgan visited India for the first time. It was during this first travel that the future *A Passage to India* started to take shape in his mind, especially in Bankipore and in the Barabar Caves, which he visited in January 1913. Furthermore, in Chhatarpur, he met the Maharajah and spent two weeks in his palace. When he

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 234-235.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 239-249.

returned to India for a second time in 1921, it was because the Maharajah asked him to, offering him the position of secretary<sup>136</sup>.

When he was back in Weybridge, he felt stuck. After months away on his own, it was difficult to live again under Lily's influence. Moreover, he could not write: *Maurice* was the only text he could work on, although intermittently, and its first version was finished by the time the First World War broke out. The war was a cause of divergence between Morgan and his surroundings: everyone was either a supporter of the conflict or a pacifist, like his friends from Bloomsbury, whereas he did not seem to take any side, at least at the beginning. His opinion on the subject would form during the war years, while in Alexandria: he had decided to join the Red Cross and left England in November 1915. His job was to help trace missing soldiers, and he was supposed to stay there only for three months. The feeling of being useful and the people he met made the years he spent in Egypt rather happy for him. Among the people acquaintances he made, there were the poet Constantine Cavafy, who became a friend and confidante, and an eighteen-year-old tram conductor named Mohammed el Adl, who would become his first lover. The relationships between the two was not a consuming passion: despite the fact that Morgan left Alexandria in 1919, they could meet rarely and were careful not to be seen together in public, so that their meetings, especially sexual ones, were not frequent<sup>137</sup>.

Once the conflict was over and he had returned to England, his political consciousness had awakened: 'the war had increased Forster's hostility to the complacency and arrogance of the English middle classes and to the gross inequalities

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<sup>136</sup> J. C., *E. M. Forster: The Personal Voice*, cit., p. 20.

<sup>137</sup> N. B., *Morgan: A Biography*, cit., pp. 300-301.

of society'<sup>138</sup>; consequently, he became a prolific writer of essays and reviews. On the other hand, his production of novels had apparently come to a halt with the work on his Indian novel being still. His second journey to India would be the necessary stimulus for the creation of *A Passage to India*. This second visit took place in 1921, although it could have happened before. As a matter of fact, the Maharajah had offered him a job as secretary already in 1919 and again in 1920, but Morgan had refused because of his mother. He still was not able, nor willing, to leave Weybridge. The reason he finally accepted was the temporariness of the job inasmuch as in 1921 he was only to substitute someone else. Therefore, he spent little more than six months in Dewas, from March to October. During this period, he actually didn't work on *A Passage to India*, although the text was always on his mind. He managed to finish it after his return to England, but only thanks to the opportunity of visiting India again as an insider rather than a tourist. Since the first drafts of the novel were written in 1913, and the publication of the book occurred in 1923, it took him a total of ten years to create his final masterpiece.

### **Life After Literature**

The publication of his last novel coincided with the moving out of Weybridge. After his aunt Laura's death, Morgan and Lily moved to West Hackhurst, the house Eddie had projected for his sister before dying. The life they led here was a great deal like the days of Morgan's childhood at Rooksnest, with the only difference that now he had many friends, and sometimes lovers. For this reason, he rented an apartment in Bloomsbury, so that he could escape from Lily when necessary, finally gaining some

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<sup>138</sup> J. C., *E. M. Forster: The Personal Voice*, cit., pp. 20-21.

independence at the age of forty-five. The life in West Hackhurst, however, made Morgan feel fulfilled because it was the realization of his life-long ideal. Thus, when Lily died in 1945 and he was asked to leave by the landlords, what he felt was rage. Fortunately, in the January of 1946 King's offered him an honorary fellowship and, knowing that he had nowhere to live, also offered him a room<sup>139</sup>.

Although he had stopped publishing fiction and concentrated on essays, reviews and sometimes biographies, 'during the Second World War and afterwards, Forster's novels became better known in America and reached a new public in England'<sup>140</sup> making him one of the most widely read modern novelists. Greater recognition in America led to invitations to lecture there, thus in 1947 he made his first visit, returning once more two years later<sup>141</sup>. Nevertheless, his figure became more than a literary one: from the 1940s onwards, he became a symbol of the liberal conscience of England:

The very name E. M. Forster symbolised the importance of personal relations, art, the inner life, the traditions of rural life, the individual; and hostility to the impersonal, the exploitative, the patriarchal, the capitalist and imperialist. Exactly the same themes that had been encapsulated in the novels were now defined by the fact of Morgan's existence, at King's, in the post-war world.<sup>142</sup>

In the meantime, during the 1920s and 30s, Morgan had come to terms with his homosexuality. This did not mean he became outspoken about the theme, for he kept his sexuality as private as possible. However, he managed to accept himself and

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<sup>139</sup> N. B., *Morgan: A Biography*, cit., p. 365.

<sup>140</sup> J. C., *E. M. Forster: The Personal Voice*, cit., p. 22.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>142</sup> N. B., *Morgan: A Biography*, cit., p. 368.

was consequently able to have numerous love affairs with men from the working class, for whom he had a preference. The most important relationship was to Bob Buckingham, a police officer. Their relationship lasted until Morgan's death, despite the fact that Bob was bisexual and eventually married a woman and created his own family<sup>143</sup>. Although initially jealous of Bob's wife May, in the end Morgan became a close friend of the whole family and even performed the role of grandfather for their son and grandchildren.

[T]he domestic intimacy for which Morgan had longed all his life had become his. It was not, of course, the intimacy of a marriage, whether homosexual or heterosexual, but it was as close as Morgan would ever get to one [...] and he was therefore perfectly content [...].<sup>144</sup>

Their relationship was so close that, in 1970 he went to Bob and May's house in Coventry in order to rest after having a stroke. Although it was not lethal, it was his last one. As a matter of fact, on the morning of 7<sup>th</sup> June he relapsed into unconsciousness and died, holding May's hand<sup>145</sup>.

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 347.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p. 351.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 372.

### III. *The Well of Loneliness* and *Maurice*

#### The Power of Fiction: Living Another Life

‘If we cannot write books about ourselves then I ask about whom may we write them?’ Radclyffe Hall said during a lecture<sup>146</sup>. Such a remark is even more relevant when her novel *The Well of Loneliness* and Forster’s *Maurice* are taken into consideration. The theme of homosexuality, which is the main topic of these texts, was not openly dealt with in the English literary tradition available to the authors, at least not in a positive way. As Forster highlights in the Terminal Note to his novel, only negative representations of homosexuality were acceptable in England during the early twentieth century, which is the reason why the publication of *Maurice* occurred only after his death<sup>147</sup>. As for same-sex desire *per se*, it had always existed in literature, but it tended to be hidden so that only those who could read between the lines would know it was there, behind the surface. The only case in which homosexuality could be directly and overtly dealt with was in the science field, consequently homosexuals could only be represented in medical or psychological texts, which were the forerunners of those mentioned in Chapter I. However, in such writings, homosexuals were the passive objects of studies and research which aimed to define and categorize them in opposition to “normal” heterosexual people.

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<sup>146</sup> D. S., *The Trials of Radclyffe Hall*, cit., p. 186

<sup>147</sup> He thought a happy ending was imperative for his novel, but he also knew that it would cause problems to the book and to himself because it would be read as a condonation of homosexuality in a time when it was still a crime. See: E. M. Forster, *Maurice* (2005), London: Penguin Group, p. 220. Henceforth all quotations will refer to this edition and will be given in parentheses in the body of the text. The name of the volume will be abbreviated to M.

Consequently, Radclyffe Hall and Forster did not have an actual positive queer tradition they could draw upon: their novels were ground-breaking because they depicted openly homosexual characters, their stories, and their relationships. According to Franks, *The Well of Loneliness* 'was the first serious and sympathetic fictional study of lesbianism in English'<sup>148</sup>. More importantly, it was the first 'popular articulation of a positive lesbian identity'<sup>149</sup> which, as Whitlock claims, started the process of producing a "reverse discourse"<sup>150</sup>, a space for other lesbians to speak for themselves and so move toward self-definition<sup>151</sup>. In other words, it was a way to become the self-defining subject of the discourse on homosexuality instead of the passive object of an external process. As for *Maurice*, in his comparative study, Wilper defines it one of the first modern gay novel, a forerunner of the coming-out narrative, i.e. the gay version of the Bildungsroman with which readers are acquainted nowadays<sup>152</sup>. This labelling is due to the mode of desire represented in the novel: it is no longer the pederasty model of pre-modern and Oriental texts in which one of the lovers is an effeminate younger boy who takes the feminine role in the couple, both physically and psychologically; it is androphilia, in which both lovers are men, more or less of the same age, and they do not have roles defined according to age or any other characteristics<sup>153</sup>.

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<sup>148</sup> Claudia Stillman Franks, 'Stephen Gordon, Novelist: A Re-Evaluation of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*' (1982), *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, vol. 1, no. 2, p 125.

<sup>149</sup> N. J. K., 'Homosexuality as Contagion', cit., p. 404.

<sup>150</sup> According to Foucault, it is the process whereby the subjects of study appropriate the language of their observers and turn it into a positive identity.

<sup>151</sup> Gillian Whitlock, 'Everything is Out of Place: Radclyffe Hall and the Lesbian Literary Tradition' (1987), *Feminist Studies*, vol. 13, no. 3, p. 560.

<sup>152</sup> J. P. W. *Reconsidering the Emergence of the Gay Novel*, cit., p. 88.

<sup>153</sup> Tariq Rahman, 'Maurice and The Longest Journey: A Study of E. M. Forster's Deviation from Representation of Male Homosexuality in Literature' (1988), in John H. Stape (Ed.), *E. M. Forster:*

If there was no tradition for Radclyffe Hall and Forster to look up to in writing about homosexuality in England, then where did they find the material for their novels? Being homosexuals themselves, there were no better sources than their own lives. Belonging to this group of outlaws more or less openly<sup>154</sup>, they had the point of view of the insider on all the aspects of the life of a lesbian woman or of a gay man in the early twentieth century. It would be reductive to describe *The Well of Loneliness* and *Maurice* as mere autobiographies, for it would mean to denigrate the imaginative power of the authors. However, behind the editing permitted by fiction, elements of Forster and Radclyffe Hall's lives can still be found in the texts so as to allow readers to assume that Stephen Gordon and Maurice Hall might be their creators' alter egos.

In the case of Stephen Gordon, besides the obvious parallelism created by the sexuality of the character, similarities can be found starting from Stephen's childhood. The first part of the novel is set in Morton Hall, the Gordons' family house, which is located in the countryside near the Malvern Hills<sup>155</sup>. In the same area, Radclyffe Hall had bought a house for her lover Ladye and herself, thus she knew the place quite well<sup>156</sup>. Stephen is given birth to right at the beginning of the narrative, and a few pages later the reader is already informed of the strange relationship that has developed between mother and daughter: shyness reigns between the two, and Lady Anna has to force herself to love her own child because there is something that

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*Critical Assessments*, vol. 4, *Relations and Aspects; The Modern Critical Response, 1954-90*, Mountsfield: Helm Information, pp. 428-429.

<sup>154</sup> Whereas Radclyffe Hall could be defined as unapologetically lesbian even for her times, Forster kept his homosexuality as private as possible, revealing his secret to few selected friends during his life.

<sup>155</sup> Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* (2015), London: Penguin Group, p. 3. Henceforth all quotations will refer to this edition and will be given in parentheses in the body of the text. The name of the volume will be abbreviated to WL.

<sup>156</sup> D. S., *The Trials of Radclyffe Hall*, cit., p. 79



upsets her about Stephen. This antipathy towards her daughter is triggered by her appearance, which is strangely reminiscent of her father's:

It would seem to Anna that she must be going mad, for this likeness to her husband would strike her as an outrage – as though the poor, innocent, seven-year-old Stephen were in some way a caricature of sir Philip; a blemished, unworthy, maimed reproduction – yet she knew that the child was handsome. But now there were times when the child's soft flesh would be almost distasteful to her; when she hated the way Stephen moved or stood still, hate a certain largeness about her, a certain crude lack of grace in her movements, a certain unconscious defiance. (WL, 8)

A similar feeling was the root of Madame Maria Visetti's hatred for Radclyffe Hall: since she was born, she was for her mother an unrequited and constant reminder of the unfaithful husband from whom she could not obtain the money and prestige she had aspired to<sup>157</sup>. Needless to say, the final hatred between mother and daughter has different causes: in *The Well of Loneliness*, the resemblance between Stephen and her father is a sign of the girl's sexual inversion, which is the actual reason for her mother's instinctive repulsion; whereas in Radclyffe Hall's case, her bad relationship with her mother was due to her only interest laying in the money of her father.

The next similarity between Stephen and Radclyffe Hall is connected to their homosexuality, namely their first romantic interest for another woman. When she is only seven years old, Stephen falls in love with Collins, one of the housemaids of Morton Hall (WL, 9). When she understands that she loves Collins, the young girl attempts to impress her and to spend as much time as she can with her. This is Stephen's first infatuation and already sets her gender preferences. Something

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

similar is present in Radclyffe Hall's biography: since her childhood, writes Souhami, she was always interested in some girl or woman<sup>158</sup> and never did she express any sexual or romantic interest towards men. The same can be said about Stephen who rejects the only suitor she has out of a sense of repulsion (WL, 101).

Apart for women, the only interest Stephen feels is towards nature and animals, especially horses. When Collins is sent away by her father, she transfers her feelings on her new pony and gives it the housemaid's name. However, the most intense and interesting relationship she develops is with Raftery, the Irish stallion sir Philip buys for her to go hunting. Their connection is so strong, they develop a sort of language made of little gestures to speak to each other and Raftery identifies Stephen as its God (WL, 58). Radclyffe Hall was also passionate about animals, especially dogs, but even more about being a sort of God-like figure to them. Una and she became quite famous breeders, but they also had very high standards: if one of their animals did not comply, it was returned to the shop or to the vet, and a new one was bought without many scruples<sup>159</sup>.

Money is another point of contact between Stephen and Radclyffe Hall. When the heroine of the novel is nineteen, her father dies in an accident involving a falling tree. According to his will, she is to inherit 'quite a considerable income' on her twenty-first birthday (WL, 128). Radclyffe Hall herself was to inherit a huge amount of money on her twenty-first birthday according to her father's testament<sup>160</sup>. The only difference being that Radclyffe Hall left her family home as soon as she inherited

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

the money, while Stephen was turned out by her mother some years later, when her homosexuality was discovered (WL, 220).

When money makes her independent, Stephen decides to finally present herself to the world in the way she wants. Consequently, she starts dressing in a more masculine manner by wearing 'tailor-made clothes' (WL, 136). This desire to be masculine has always been part of her since her childhood: as a child, she would dress up as Nelson and pretend she was a boy, claiming that she felt like one (WL, 12). The same feeling characterized Radclyffe Hall for her whole life. When she became independent, she started to dress like a man and named herself John, finally rejecting the name her mother had given her, i.e. Marguerite. She always felt it inadequate because of its femininity, and she despised everything connected to it – she knew and felt that being a woman was a constriction<sup>161</sup>.

Nevertheless, the major point of connection between Stephen and Radclyffe Hall is their desire to change the world's attitude towards homosexuality through their writing. Radclyffe Hall actively decided that this was her aim when she started writing *The Well of Loneliness*, knowing that it would be a scandal to bring such a topic to the foreground. Stephen, on the other hand, is initially forced to undertake this enterprise. When she discovers her identity in the books in her father's study after she is turned out, Puddle tells her:

'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 the world will recognize this, but

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

meanwhile there's plenty of work that's waiting. For the sake of all the others who are like you, but less strong and less gifted perhaps, many of them, it's up to you to have courage to make good, and I'm here to help you to do it, Stephen.' (WL, 224)

However, after Stephen finds happiness with Mary, she seems to forget her paramount task. Only when the couple feels ostracized from society because of their "abnormal" love, does Stephen realize that what she has been said is true. Therefore, she actively puts all her efforts into her writing, her aim being the protection of her beloved Mary. When they are rejected once more, the two start to isolate themselves so much that Stephen loses her focus. Again, she needs to be reminded of her mission by another invert who claims that she is the one who can change the attitude of 'the so-called just and righteous' (WL, 429) because 'the whole truth is known only to the normal invert. The doctors cannot make the ignorant think [...], only one of [them] can some day do that' (WL, 430). In the end, fully aware of the importance of her mission, she will let Mary go in order to work harder for the inverts' cause.

Besides these elements that might make Stephen the alter ego of Radclyffe Hall, the author's biography is present in the text also in the form of secondary characters and events. Stephen's experience in the ambulance unit during World War I, for example, is inspired by Radclyffe Hall's friend Toupie Lowther, a rather famous lesbian at the time, who actually did drive an ambulance in war areas but was displeased with the depiction of the group of women in *The Well of Loneliness*. Finally, the characters of Jonathan Brockett and Valérie Seymour are based on two members of the queer scene Radclyffe Hall took part in: their real-life counterparts

are, respectively, the playwright Noel Cowards and the American Natalie Barney, who held a salon exactly in Rue Jacob, the same street named in the novel<sup>162</sup>.

As far as *Maurice* is concerned, although the novel covers a shorter period in the life of the protagonist and in a less detailed manner than *The Well of Loneliness* does, parallelisms with Forster's biography are still abundant and evident. Once again, the first commonalities can be found in the period of childhood. Just like Forster lived surrounded by female relations, which included his mother, grandmother and aunt, so does Maurice: in the very first chapter, readers learn that he lives with his mother and his two younger sisters, Ada and Kitty (M, 8). The absence of a male figure is due to the death of Mr Hall as is understood a few pages later. The loss of a father at a young age is the second element inspired by Forster's own life, but with the necessary shift in time which justifies the presence of two younger sisters: in fact, Maurice is fourteen years old when the novel starts (M, 6), whereas Eddie Forster died before his son's second birthday. A further transposition of Forster's experience is also connected to the deceased parent: both Maurice and Forster's fathers are suspected to have been homosexual as well<sup>163</sup> (M, 132).

The most significant element of comparison between Forster and Maurice's childhood, however, is their friendship with the garden boy. As a matter of fact, Forster's only friend when he was a child at Rooksnest was the garden boy who was allowed to play with him one afternoon a week. This first friendship was at the base of Forster's belief in personal relationships. The same can be said of the one between Maurice and George, the Halls' garden boy: this will become the symbol of the perfect

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>163</sup> N. B., *Morgan: A Biography*, cit., pp. 14-18.

companionship, which will be later found with Alec, through his appearance in the protagonist's dreams (M, 16).

Furthermore, Maurice lives in the suburbs as well and receives the exact same education that Forster did<sup>164</sup>. It starts with preparatory school, where he is popular among his classmates. At fourteen, he leaves to attend public school: here he completely blends in and never makes himself noticeable, both in the academic and the sports field. 'In a word, he was a mediocre member of a mediocre school, and left a faint and favourable impression behind. 'Hall? Wait a minute, which was Hall? Oh yes, I remember; clean run enough' (M, 15). Then he studies at Cambridge, where again he follows the same steps as Forster: his first year is spent among the students from his old school and nothing special seems to happen, but during his second year everything changes, and the atmosphere of Cambridge takes over him (M, 22-23). It is during this period that he participates in discussion meetings similar to those of the Apostles and rejects religion (M, 27, 41).

If at Cambridge Maurice meets Clive and has his first relationship, this did not happen to Forster. Thus, the next analogies with the author are found in the section following the end of Maurice and Clive's love affair. The first one is the immense loneliness that Maurice feels after losing the only person who knows about his sexuality, thus the only real confidant he has ever had. Being homosexual, in fact, he feels cut out of society. That Forster felt lonely as well is not only inferable from his diaries: in the Terminal Note to the text he clearly states that he turned to Carpenter, by whom the novel is inspired, because of his loneliness (M, 219).

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<sup>164</sup> Mark Lilly, *Gay Men's Literature in the Twentieth Century* (1993), Basingstoke; London: Macmillan, p. 61.

Connected to the loneliness caused by his situation, there is Maurice's hope to become "normal" so that he might marry and have children. Since Clive turns to heterosexuality after his twenty-fourth birthday, at first Maurice hypothesizes that he will naturally do the same (M, 140-141). When this does not happen, he attempts asking for help and turns to science and medicine. Needless to say, it is all futile, but this attempt to close his eyes so as not to see the truth allows one to make another connection with the author. As a matter of fact, it took Forster a long time to come to terms with his sexuality, and before doing so, he also cherished the possibility of "becoming normal" in order to comply with society's expectations, marry, and have children.

Before analysing the last analogy between Maurice and Forster, there is a specification to be made. Although the novel was written between 1910 and 1914, depending on the different theories about it, its publication occurred in 1971. During the large amount of time between the two events, Forster worked on the text more than once, therefore it is possible to assume that even events that happened later than 1914 might have influenced his writing. Thus, the last element that can make Maurice into Forster's alter ego is his first sexual experience with a man. Maurice first experiences homosexual intercourse with Alec, Clive's gamekeeper, a man from the working-class who is some years younger than him. Similarly, Forster's first lover, Mohammed el Adl, was an eighteen-year-old tram conductor. His preference for working-class men would be confirmed by all his following love affairs.

In conclusion, although *The Well of Loneliness* and *Maurice* cannot be classified as mere autobiographies, it can be stated that a large part of their content

was inspired by Radclyffe Hall and Forster's own experiences. However, this does not diminish the literary value of the texts. On the contrary, their connection to reality is an added value: firstly, they are a perfect representation of the condition of homosexuality in England at the beginning of the twentieth century, and secondly of the universal struggles and feelings that young homosexual still face nowadays.



## Are They Right about Us?

### The Relationship between Sexology and the Novels

As already stated, scientific texts were the only ones in which homosexuality could be spoken of. However, the first texts of this sort were attempts to define and categorize human sexuality in order to create a norm, in which same-sex desire was not encompassed. When sexology was born, some advances were made since case studies no longer came from hospitals and asylums only. New theories were formulated on the subject in order to explain the phenomenon without pathologizing it. The most evident instance of this shift was the already mentioned Richard von Krafft-Ebing, whose opinion underwent a complete reversal in the numerous editions of his work. The group of authors who have been mentioned in Chapter I was a watershed: for the first time, homosexuality was being treated as something natural; maybe an anomaly, but only in the sense that it was a minor deviation from what was considered the norm. This was certainly a more positive attitude in comparison to the previous one. Thus, it is easy to understand why homosexual men and women embraced it: an identity was offered to them which finally did not stigmatize them. Was this model accepted by Radclyffe Hall and Forster as well? Besides taking themselves as models, did they also incorporate these theories in their novels?

In the case of *The Well of Loneliness* the answer is quite obvious. Radclyffe Hall herself asked Havelock Ellis to write an introduction to the first edition of her novel.

So far as I know, it is the first English novel which presents, in a completely faithful and uncompromising form, various aspects of sexual inversion 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 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.<sup>165</sup>

As can be inferred from this paragraph, Ellis thought the book was a perfect representation of his theories and consequently commended it. According to Knauer, Hall based her novel primarily on the work of Krafft-Ebing and Ellis<sup>166</sup>. However, she was acquainted with the work of Magnus Hirschfeld<sup>167</sup> and Karl Heinrich Ulrichs as well (WL, 20).

How did Radclyffe Hall use the work of these sexologists for her novel? All their theories are personified by Stephen Gordon<sup>168</sup>. As a matter of fact, she has all the features that sexologists ascribed to the active female invert, both physical and psychological. The first signs of inversion, as Ellis and Krafft-Ebing suggested, are visible from early childhood. Thus, Stephen is depicted as an odd or queer creature from the moment she is born: she is 'a narrow-hipped, wide-shouldered little tadpole of a baby' (WL, 5). Growing up, her 'sexuality is inscribed upon her body in terms of masculinity'<sup>169</sup>. Her features are not the soft ones of femininity: she is too tall and her shoulders are over-broad, her hands are strong and large, her feet bigger than other girls', her jaw and chin pronounced, her voice husky, her eyebrows 'too thick and wide for beauty', and her breasts are small and compact (WL, 19, 47, 50, 72, 90, 160,

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<sup>165</sup> D. S., *The Trials of Radclyffe Hall*, cit., p. 230

<sup>166</sup> N. J. K., 'Homosexuality as Contagion', cit., p. 414.

<sup>167</sup> D. S., *The Trials of Radclyffe Hall*, cit., p. 210.

<sup>168</sup> H. B., 'Richard von Krafft-Ebing's Psychopathia Sexualis as Sexual Sourcebook', cit., p. 24.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid*, p. 26.

202). It is not surprising that Hall focuses on such details, because all these features were considered important markers of sex and sexuality by Krafft-Ebing<sup>170</sup>. Besides, her masculine appearance is repeatedly highlighted by a rather strong resemblance to her father and contrast to her mother, who is depicted as 'the archetype of the very perfect woman' (WL, 3).

Staring at the girl [Lady Anna] would see the strange resemblance, the invidious likeness of the child to the father, she would notice their movements so grotesquely alike, their hands were alike, they made the same gestures [...]. (WL, 81)

[Sir Philip] would notice the gracious beauty of Anna, so perfect a thing, so completely reassuring; and then that indefinable quality in Stephen that made her look wrong in the clothes she was wearing, as though she and they had no right to each other, and above all no right no Anna. (WL, 20)

Nevertheless, during childhood, psychological aspects of inversion can also be observed, and Hall does not forget to insert these elements in Stephen's formative years. When she is a child, she is not interested in any feminine activity; she hates playing with dolls and wearing dresses (WL, 13). She prefers to run, climb and ride astride. This might seem a simple preference if it was not juxtaposed to the image of the Antrim children, who are the Gordons' neighbours. As a matter of fact, Roger and Violet are the representation of the perfectly manly boy and feminine girl. Whereas he is a teaser who shows off his strength and dominance over his sister, she is a submissive and fragile girl who likes to take care of the house and of her dolls like a mother (WL, 43-44). The scene in which the three children meet to play together

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

highlights the contrast between Stephen and Violet and the rivalry between her and Roger, thus suggesting that the Gordons' daughter is more similar to a boy than to a girl not only on a physical level, but also on a psychological one. While a "normal" girl would passively bear the bullying of a boy and cry if her dress was torn, Stephen is not afraid to answer to Roger's teasing and she is also willing to fight him when her family's honour is attacked.

The Antrim siblings represents the standard gender roles recognized by society in the novel even when they grow up. When Violet gets engaged to her future husband, she visits Morton Hall to boasts about it to Stephen and talk about marriage and womanhood.

It's a terrible pity you dress as you do, my dear [...] a young girl's so much more attractive when she's soft – don't you think you could soften your clothes just a little? I mean, you do want to get married, don't you! No woman's complete until she's married. After all, no woman can really stand alone, she always needs a man to protect her. [...] I was talking to Alec and Roger about you, and Roger was saying it's an awful mistake for women to get false ideas into their heads. He thinks you've got rather a bee in your bonnet; he told Alec you'd be quite a womanly woman if you'd only stop trying to ape what you're not. (WL, 186-187)

After this, she talks about Angela Crosby, with whom Stephen is in love. She suggests that the American woman and her brother have started a love affair while they were both away visiting common friends. Violet's speech serves as a reminder of Stephen's non-conformity: she is not completely a woman, but she cannot be a man, despite the fact that she acts like one. Thus, Stephen does not fit in the gender binary – as Ulrichs would suggest, she belongs to a third sex which is in between male and female.

This undefined state of Stephen's being is particularly evident when she is forced to interact with other people at social events. She is not able to socialize with either women or men because she always feels ill at ease with both. With the former she has no commonalities because she does not share their interests. Moreover, her discomfort with her own female body prevents her from taking part in conversations that might interest her for biological reasons, because she feels mortified by the fact of being female<sup>171</sup>. As for men, she would love to be friends with them because she shares their interests. Nevertheless, her attitude upsets them: she wants to be their equal, which of course she cannot be since she is biologically a woman; therefore, they feel she is presumptuous and they become defensive (WL, 75-77). This behaviour is congruent with Ellis' theories about the active female invert. According to him, the female invert feels at ease with men because she has much in common with them but no sexual attraction. Being indifferent to them, she treats them as comrades.

This sort of relationship is exactly what Stephen experiences with Martin Hallam, a young man she meets at a dinner party. A beautiful friendship develops between them, and they spend much time together because they enjoy similar things. However, when Martin realizes he is in love and proposes to Stephen, she has an unexpected reaction:

She was staring at him in a kind of dumb horror, staring at his eyes that were clouded by desire, while gradually over her colourless face there was spreading an expression of the deepest repulsion – terror and repulsion he

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<sup>171</sup> In the text, there is an indirect reference to menstruation, whose vagueness can be read as a sign of Radclyffe Hall's discomfort as well.

saw on her face, and something else too, a look as of outrage. [...] she wheeled round and fled from him wildly [...]. (WL, 101)

Taking into consideration this episode, her infatuation with the housemaid, and her psychological features, it can be stated that 'on Krafft-Ebing's scale, Stephen would likely rate at least a three'<sup>172</sup>. However, she can surely be defined as a stage four because of her physical appearance, which is naturally more masculine. If her cross-dressing is added to this, then she is the perfect representation of Both Krafft-Ebing and Ellis' congenital, active, female invert. As a matter of fact, the stronger her inversion, the more detached a woman feels from her biological sex. And in Stephen's case, her discomfort with being female is clear from the first pages of the novel. When she is a child, she dresses up as Nelson because she feels more comfortable, more natural in masculine clothes (WL, 12-13). In addition,

[...] when the child's heart would feel full past bearing, she must tell him her problems in small, stumbling phrases. Tell him how much she longed to be different, longed to be someone like Nelson. She would say: 'Do you think that I *could* be a man, supposing I thought very hard - or prayed, Father?' (WL, 19)

Growing up, this desire does not disappear and she models herself as a man: when she becomes independent after her father's death, she starts wearing masculine clothes regularly and, after being turned out, she even has her hair cut short. Nowadays, Stephen would probably identify as a heterosexual transgender male: all her psychological characteristics and behaviour, in fact, can be read as signs of gender dysphoria. However, at that time, the concepts of gender identity and sexual orientation were not separated, but unified and encompassed by the category of sex.

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<sup>172</sup> N. J. K., 'Homosexuality as Contagion', cit., p. 424.

Stephen is not the only invert depicted in *The Well of Loneliness*. As a matter of fact, she is involved in the Parisian queer community. She is introduced to this world by Jonathan Brockett, a fellow writer who is the stereotypical gay man. He is described as too interested in his clothes, fond of pleasures and gossip, and a little childish. However, the most accentuated aspect of this character is his effeminacy: more than once his hands are said to be a woman's, his small gestures contrast his larger physique, his laugh is too high and his voice tends to rise, especially when he is excited (WL, 246-247, 248-249, 266-267). His description is congruent with that made by sexologists of the inverted man.

There are other inverted characters who are described when Stephen and Mary visit Valerie Seymour's salon for the first time. To Stephen's expert gaze, signs of inversion soon stand out: a larger ankle, a deeper voice or an incoherent gesture (WL, 388). Among those who are at the salon, two are singled out: Jamie, a musician from the Highlands, and Wanda, a Polish painter. These two women are the most similar to Stephen, for they are stuck between the sexes as well. Whereas Jamie has almost the same background as the protagonist, the narrator says of Wanda that 'if she dressed like a woman she looked like a man, if she dressed like a man she looked like a woman' (WL, 388).

There is one thing, however, that all the inverts of Valerie Seymour's group have in common, namely an artistic aptitude.

So pleasant it was to be made to feel welcome by all these clever and interesting people – and clever they were, there was no denying; in Valérie's salon the percentage of brains was generally well above the average. For together with those who themselves being normal, had long put intellect above bodies, were writers, painters, musicians and scholars, men and

women who, set apart from their birth, had determined to hack out a niche in existence. (WL, 384)

A higher sensibility and a consequently greater ability to express themselves artistically are characteristics that Ellis ascribed to all inverts in *Sexual Inversion*. According to him, these are due to the fact that inverts embody both sexes, thus they have both their qualities and faults.

Nevertheless, inversion is not the only theme that Radclyffe Hall took from the science of sexology in general and from the theories of Krafft-Ebing in particular<sup>173</sup>. If Stephen Gordon is the personification of theories about same-sex desire, she manifests other so-called perversions, such as childhood masturbation and masochism. If it is known that Freud studied the manifestations of sexuality in the period of childhood, it is a less famous fact that researchers such as Krafft-Ebing and Ellis had already observed such phenomenon<sup>174</sup>. As a matter of fact, the issue of children's masturbation was taken into consideration in their works about sex and especially in their writings on homosexuality. During the nineteenth century, autoerotism had been highly demonised<sup>175</sup> as it was thought to cause various diseases. One of the negative consequences ascribed to it was homosexuality. In the first studies on same-sex desire, this connection was not eliminated, on the contrary it was given "scientific" support. Masturbation was thought to consume a man's sexual drive, thus turning him feminine, whereas it had the opposite effect on a

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<sup>173</sup> Both Bauer and Knauer suggest that Krafft-Ebing is the major source for *The Well of Loneliness*, although other sexological texts were influential as well.

<sup>174</sup> H. B., 'Richard von Krafft-Ebing's Psychopathia Sexualis as Sexual Sourcebook', cit., p. 27.

<sup>175</sup> As Armstrong highlights, during that period there was a persistent panic over masturbation, and the British purity movement was at its zenith. See: Mary A. Armstrong, 'Stable Identity: Horses, Inversion Theory, and The Well of Loneliness' (2008), *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, vol. 19, no. 1, p. 55.



woman, since it created a drive where there was allegedly none. Krafft-Ebing and Ellis did not make such suggestions, but they did treat early masturbation, especially if frequent, as a sign of inversion<sup>176</sup>. Since it was a perversion itself, it was thought to be the first sign of deviance. As for masochism, it was Krafft-Ebing himself who coined the term and studied this sexual phenomenon in his *Psychopathia Sexualis*<sup>177</sup>.

Although not explicit, references to self-pleasure in childhood have been found in the text of *The Well of Loneliness*. According to Bauer, Stephen's prayers for Collins and her imagining their future together can be read as autoerotism because of their depiction. The girl is said to drip 'perspiration in a veritable orgy of prayer' and to keep awake at night in order to create a 'very intimate picture' which makes her feel happy<sup>178</sup>. Armstrong, on the other hand, claims that in the novel 'masturbation as a locus of pleasure is grounded in the potential sexual stimulation inherent for a woman riding astride'<sup>179</sup>. As a matter of fact, Armstrong reads Stephen's first ride to the hunt as the description of an erotic experience which culminates in the stillness of an orgasm after a series of fast and rhythmic movements.

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 passing; the smell of damp leather, of earth and bruised herbage—all

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<sup>176</sup> Both Krafft-Ebing and Ellis stressed the importance of masturbation as a sign of inversion. As a matter of fact, the case-studies that are present in their writings often mention the presence or lack of this habit just as much as they do for mental health issues in the family history.

<sup>177</sup> H. B., 'Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* as Sexual Sourcebook', cit., p. 24.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., pp. 28, 30.

<sup>179</sup> M. A. A., 'Stable Identity', cit., p. 53.

sudden, all passing—then the smell of wide spaces, the air smell, cool yet as potent as wine. (WL, 38)

Such a reading is 'confirmed by her satisfaction in the ride and the unremitting panic of others'<sup>180</sup>. The adults' opposition to her riding, in fact, is caused by 'the sexual possibilities involved in the configuration of a horse's body relative to the riding female body'<sup>181</sup>.

As far as masochism is concerned, the major example of this sexual behaviour is once again connected to the character of the housemaid Collins<sup>182</sup>. When she tells Stephen that her knee hurts, the girl decides that she wants to take her pain on herself. Her first attempt to achieve this is through prayers: she asks Jesus to transfer Collins' housemaid's knee to her body because she 'would like to be awfully hurt' and to 'bear all Collins's pain' (WL, 14-15). When her prayers are not answered, she decides to inflict pain upon herself on her own. Consequently, she kneels on the floor of her room until her knees hurt. 'However, it was really rather fine to be suffering' (WL, 16). Consequently, she does not only choose to suffer, but also enjoys the pain, since she can control it.

Moving on to *Maurice*, the situation is rather different. If Radclyffe Hall's novel is virtually a dramatization of Krafft-Ebing's theories on inversion, Forster's does not seem to be influenced by sexology. Therefore, it has been claimed that there is a complete absence of inversion theories in the text<sup>183</sup>. However, Forster himself connects the writing of *Maurice* to the figure of Edward Carpenter (M, 219). Certainly

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> H. B., 'Richard von Krafft-Ebing's Psychopathia Sexualis as Sexual Sourcebook', cit., pp. 28-30.

<sup>183</sup> J. P. W., *Reconsidering the Emergence of the Gay Novel*, cit., p. 117.

not a sexologist, Carpenter had nevertheless written about homosexuality before his first encounter with Forster. *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women*<sup>184</sup> was a collection of his essays on the theme of “homogenic love”<sup>185</sup>, the nature of Uranism, and its role in society. Although a large part of the essays consists of Carpenter’s own views on the subject, the studies of some of the most famous sexologists are cited in his analysis. Thus, there is no doubt that Forster was at least acquainted with the theories of researchers such as Krafft-Ebing and Ellis, even though they were filtered through Carpenter’s apologetic discourse. Therefore, ‘the third-sex theory is not overt in *Maurice*, and sexological language does not play a key narrative function’ as in *The Well of Loneliness*. ‘Maurice and Alec do not employ the taxonomical structures of sexology to understand and discuss their sexual drives toward other men [...] nonetheless, the intermediate sex interpretation of homosexual desire is present in the text’<sup>186</sup>.

The fact that homosexuality can manifest itself already at a very young age is the first element of sexology that appears in the novel. As a matter of fact, there are subtle hints of Maurice’s sexual interest as early as in the second chapter<sup>187</sup>. When he discovers that George, the garden boy, has been dismissed, he seems to have no reaction at first. However, when he is in bed at night, ‘he remembered George.

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<sup>184</sup> This volume was published in 1908, whereas Forster first visited Carpenter around 1910. Consequently, he was likely to have read his essays before the “official” date of the writing of *Maurice*. See: Beauman, *Morgan: A Biography*, cit., pp. 233-234.

<sup>185</sup> This is the expression favoured by Carpenter. In his opinion, “homosexual” generally used in scientific works, ‘is of course a bastard word’. He suggested the use of homogenic ‘as being from two roots, both Greek, i.e., “homos,” same, and “genos,” sex’. See: Edward Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Type of Men and Women* (1921), London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, p. 40 in the footnotes.

<sup>186</sup> J. P. W., *Reconsidering the Emergence of the Gay Novel*, cit., p. 133.

<sup>187</sup> M. L., *Gay Men’s Literature*, cit., p. 60.

Something stirred in the unfathomable depths of his heart. He whispered “George, George.”” (M, 14). Besides, when he is attending public school at Sunnington, he repeatedly has dreams in which George appears completely naked (M, 16). However, his attraction to his own sex is not limited to the garden boy alone, ‘it is also present in his schoolboy crushes’<sup>188</sup>. As a matter of fact, ‘as he rose in the school he began to make a religion of some other boy. When this boy, whether older or younger than himself, was present, he would laugh loudly, talk absurdly and be unable to work’ (M, 17). However, these teenage infatuations alone do not mean much if considered on their own. They need to be added to Maurice’s indifference towards women and marriage, namely heterosexual intercourse. In the very first scene of the novel, fourteen-year-old Maurice is given a private lecture on the ‘mystery of sex’ by his preparatory-school teacher Mr Ducie. Although he is attentive and responsive to what his teacher is saying, Maurice feels that ‘it bore no relation to his experiences. [...] He could not himself relate to it; it fell to pieces as soon as Mr Ducie put it together, like an impossible sum. In vain he tried’ (M, 9). As Siler suggests, his detachedness from the topic causes Maurice to dismiss what he has been told as untrue: ‘And suddenly, for an instant of time, the boy despised him. ‘Liar,’ he thought. ‘Liar, coward, he’s told me nothing’ (M, 10). This moment of clarity foreshadows his inversion<sup>189</sup>, and it will be experienced again years later during a conversation with Dr Barry, a neighbour.

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<sup>188</sup> Robert K. Martin, ‘Edward Carpenter and the Double Structure of “Maurice”’ (1983), in John H. Stape (Ed.), *E. M. Forster: Critical Assessments*, vol. 4, *Relations and Aspects; The Modern Critical Response, 1945-90* (1998), Mountsfield: Helm Information, p. 33.

<sup>189</sup> Drew Siler, ‘Representations of Inversion: The Modern Alien in the Works of E. M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, and Djuna Barnes’ (2013), PhD, Middle Tennessee State University, p. 24.

'[...] Man that is born of woman must go with woman if the human race is to continue.'

Maurice stared after the housemaster's wife, underwent a violent repulsion from her and blushed crimson: he had remembered Mr Ducie's diagrams. [...] Dr Barry went on lecturing him, and under the cover of a friendly manner said much that gave pain. (M, 21)

The incomprehension of childhood, at nineteen, becomes repulsion and pain. The former comes from the lack of sexual interest for women, the latter from the recognition of what this disinterest might mean.

The second aspect of sexology that is found in the text is autoerotism. Contrary to *The Well of Loneliness*, where this activity is hidden behind the surface of the text, in *Maurice* there are almost explicit references to it. The protagonist is said to discover masturbation as soon as he enters puberty, during his school days. As a matter of fact, as his mind gets clouded with dirty thoughts, he longs for an outlet; however, books and thoughts do not satisfy him. Consequently, he turns to acts, but 'he desisted from these after the novelty was over, finding that they brought him more fatigue than pleasure' (M, 17). He resumes masturbation many years later, after the heart-breaking end of his relationship with Clive. During their relationship, he can sublimate his lust, but now that he is alone he succumbs to it.

Now every avenue seemed blocked, and in his despair he turned to practices he had abandoned as a boy, and found they did bring him a degraded kind of peace, did still the physical urge into which all his sensations were contracting, and enable him to do his work. (M, 142)

The next feature of the invert that is depicted in the text is effeminacy. According to third-sex theories, homosexuals present characteristics of the opposite sex, because they do not belong to their own completely. Even from Carpenter's

apologetic point of view this is considered a fact. For instance, a homosexual woman would be extremely practical, whereas a homosexual man would be more sensitive<sup>190</sup>. However, Carpenter stresses that there are many variations among Uranians<sup>191</sup>, exactly as within the rest of the population. Therefore, they can manifest different levels of inversion. *Maurice* follows this belief in the representation of male homosexuality. As a matter of fact, contrary to *The Well of Loneliness* where all male inverts seem the same, there are four gay characters representing different types or models. The most stereotypical of this figure is Risley, who is described as effeminate and adopting the Wildean model<sup>192</sup>. He is described as 'dark, tall and affected' but the text focuses primarily on his manners: 'he made an exaggerated gesture when introduced, and when he spoke, which was continually, he used strong yet unmanly superlative' (M, 23). If this is not enough to establish his homosexuality, he is said to shiver when he first hears Maurice's voice, which is described as very masculine, being 'low but very gruff' (M, 24). Thus, his feminine side is soon highlighted by this perceptiveness to masculinity<sup>193</sup>.

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<sup>190</sup> Edward Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex*, cit., p. 27.

<sup>191</sup> Carpenter follows Ulrichs in using this term to refer to homosexuals and homosexuality.

<sup>192</sup> After the 1895 trials, Oscar Wilde became the face of male homosexuality. The scandal, in fact, brought same-sex desire into public discourse and merged it with the public figure of Wilde. The image he had cultivated was that of the dandy-aesthete, which had nothing to do with sexuality until that moment, but was connected with effeminacy, idleness, immorality, luxury and decadence. This model, which had been associated with the aristocracy, was a way of rebellion against the middle-class morality and masculinity typical of the Victorian period. During the trials, these characteristics came to be regarded as part of homosexuality, which was turning into a definite identity precisely in those years. Consequently, the stereotype of the male homosexual was formed, and Wilde became the only available signifier of this category for the following decades, as is demonstrated by Maurice. See: J. P. W., *Reconsidering the Emergence of the Gay Novel*, cit., pp. 137-152.

<sup>193</sup> Although the novel attempts to present homosexuals as masculine, it should not be seen as a rejection of effeminacy. It is true that Risley's part is small and his depiction is ambivalent, especially at the beginning when he triggers other characters' suspicion, nevertheless he plays an important role in the narrative. As a matter of fact, he is necessary for Maurice to realize his identity. Even though there is no romantic interest between the two, Risley offers Maurice a model to follow, consequently taking the role of a sort of mentor. The protagonist decides that Risley's model is not fit for him, but still recognizes a fellow homosexual in him. Moreover, Risley has a significant impact on the plot

The second homosexual character is Clive Durham, who is not as 'odd' or 'queer' as Risley, but is still not completely in compliance with the masculine ideal. When he is first introduced in the narrative he is described as 'a small man – very small – with simple manners and a fair face, which had flushed when Maurice blundered in' (M, 28). His physique is not as developed as Maurice's, as a matter of fact when they jokingly fight, he is hurt because he is the weaker (M, 37). He has a reputation for 'brains and exclusiveness' (M, 28) which means he is timid and not into sports. When he and Maurice spend time together, Clive shows that he is interested in music and literature, especially the ancients (M, 40). All these characteristics make him the perfect example of Carpenter's "normal type of the Uranian man"<sup>194</sup>, although on the psychological level only.

As far as the physical level is concerned, Maurice is the real personification of Carpenter's model. He is described as the typical British man, nothing about his appearance or his demeanour does not conform. He is described as 'powerful and handsome' and he is said to be 'a man who only liked women – one could tell that at a glance', in other words 'the healthy normal Englishman' (M, 61, 62). However, he is not completely masculine either. He is characterized by the typical psychology of the Uranian of Carpenter's *Intermediate Sex*, as is demonstrated by 'his sensitive nature and his willingness to sacrifice for his friend'<sup>195</sup>. Both characteristics are quite overt in the scene of Clive's breakdown, when Maurice is willing to defy gender roles and

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inasmuch as through him Maurice first meets Clive Durham. Finally, later in the novel he provides the protagonist with information that greatly influences his actions. See: G. D. P., 'Ideal Friends', cit., pp. 99-100 and J. P. W., *Reconsidering the Emergence of the Gay Novel*, cit., pp. 149-152.

<sup>194</sup> E. C. *The Intermediate Sex*, cit., pp. 32-33.

<sup>195</sup> J. P. W., *Reconsidering the Emergence of the Gay Novel*, cit., p. 174.

class constraints to take care of his beloved. He proposes and attempts to nurse Durham himself, because 'now that Clive was undignified and weak, he loved him as never before' (M, 93). This type of compassion towards the weakest is also listed by Carpenter among the characteristics of a male Uranian that are engendered by his feminine side<sup>196</sup>.

Finally, there are some aspects of sexological theories that appear in the second half of the book, although in a less evident manner since they are only hinted at. The first one is the belief that heredity plays a pivotal role in the determination of an individual's sexuality. As a matter of fact, Dr Barry, who is a representative of the medical field in the novel, rejects Maurice's admitted "abnormality" based on his family history (M, 140). However, there is also an implicit reference to heredity in the suggestion that Maurice's deceased father was not as conforming as he appeared during his life<sup>197</sup>. As a matter of fact, after Maurice recounts the night he has spent with Alec the hypnotist, 'the perfection of the night appeared as a transient grossness, such as his father had indulged in thirty years before' (M, 189). The second aspect that could also derive from the theories of Havelock Ellis is the fact that (heterosexual) marriage is not a cure for homosexuality; on the contrary, it should be avoided. The character who reveals this truth is Risley. When they meet at a concert, he informs Maurice that Tchaikovsky's marriage ended in disaster because of his sexual preferences. Aroused by curiosity, Maurice reads the composer's biography to

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<sup>196</sup> E. C. *The Intermediate Sex*, cit., pp. 33-34.

<sup>197</sup> Elizabeth Wood Ellem, 'E. M. Forster's Greenwood' (1976), *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 5, no. 1, p. 97.



learn more about this incident and understands that marriage to a woman is not the solution he is searching for (M, 141-142).

To sum up, it can be stated that sexology is present in both *The Well of Loneliness* and *Maurice*, although in quite different proportions. Radclyffe Hall seems to completely accept the models proposed by sexologists such as Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis, as is demonstrated by her characters. Stephen Gordon identifies herself as a female invert and utilizes the sexological taxonomy to describe herself and her fellow queer artists. On the other hand, Forster is more selective in his acceptance of third-sex theories. If it is true that his characters can in a certain way be representations of Carpenter's theories, he also never makes them completely adhere to a specific model.

## Speaking the Unspeakable: A Plea for Existence

If the sexological model followed by Radclyffe Hall and Forster was liberating for homosexuals because it did not stigmatize or pathologize same-sex desire, unfortunately, it was never 'accepted as the dominant discourse on homosexuality'<sup>198</sup>. Knowledge of the field was reserved for an elite of medicine and psychology experts. Consequently, the opinion of the majority of the population was unaltered. This means that homosexuality was still considered unnatural, a vice, a form of madness, or a sin against God and its creation according to the most religious beliefs. This is the climate in which *The Well of Loneliness* and *Maurice* were written, and its influence is present in the texts. As a matter of fact, some of the characters in the novels are representatives of this attitude towards homosexuality and, at times, even the protagonists demonstrate, through their inner conflicts, that they have internalized such beliefs.

In *The Well of Loneliness* these views on homosexuality are used by Angela Crosby when she betrays Stephen. Since she thinks her reputation is in danger after Stephen has discovered her unfaithfulness, she decides to reveal the girl's secret to her husband in order to protect herself. When doing so, she declares 'I'm not a pervert; [...] I'm not that sort of degenerate creature'. Thus, she implies that Stephen is a pervert and a degenerate creature. Moreover, to justify their friendship, she pretends her intention has been 'to reform her'. However, she has not been able to do so because 'it's quite mad – I believe the girl's half mad herself' (WL, 215).

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<sup>198</sup> N. J. K., 'Homosexuality as Contagion', cit., p. 412.

Consequently, she adopts the vision of homosexuality as a vice first, and then moves on to that of madness.

However, the most evident instance of the common attitude towards same-sex desire is Stephen's mother, who repudiates her daughter after discovering her homosexuality. The speech she gives to her daughter is the perfect representation of how the common early-twentieth-century upper-class woman might have reacted to a lesbian daughter or a gay son. She compares, obviously in a negative way, her daughter's feelings to her own, and cites God and nature to justify her feelings of repulsion.

It is you who are unnatural, not I. And this thing that you are is a sin against creation. Above all is this thing against the father who bred you, the father whom you dare to resemble. You dare to look like your father, and your face is a living insult to his memory, Stephen. I shall never be able to look at you now without thinking of the deadly insult of your face and your body to the memory of the father who bred you. I can only thank God that your father died before he was asked to endure this great shame. As for you, I would rather see you dead at my feet than standing before me with this thing upon you – this unspeakable outrage that you call love in that letter which you don't deny having written. In that letter you say things that may only be said between man and woman, and coming from you they are vile and filthy words of corruption – against nature, against God who created nature. My gorge rises; you have made me feel physically sick [...] you seem to me like scourge. I ask myself what I have ever done to be dragged down into the depths by my daughter. And your father – what had he ever done? And you have presumed to use the word love in connection with this – with these lusts of your body; these unnatural cravings of your unbalanced mind and undisciplined body – you have used that word. I have loved – do you hear? I have loved your father, and your father loved me. That was *love*. (WL, 218-219)

However, instances of this sort of beliefs are present in *Maurice* as well. In particular, they are expressed by two characters that are representatives of the medical field, Jowitt and Dr Barry. When Maurice asks the former about homosexuals, his reaction represents the medical vision of homosexuality as a pathology, which is antecedent to the sexological model. As a matter of fact, Jowitt defines homosexuality as a mental illness by answering: 'No, that's in the asylum work, thank God' (M, 135-136). As for Dr Barry, he represents an even older model adopted also by Stephen's mother, namely the religious one. When Maurice asks to be visited and defines himself 'an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort' (M, 138), Dr Barry's reply is:

Rubbish, Rubbish! [...] Now listen to me, Maurice, never let that evil hallucination, that temptation from the devil, occur to you again. [...] Who put that lie into your head? You whom I see and know to be a decent fellow! We'll never mention it again. No – I'll not discuss. I'll not discuss. The worst thing I could do for you is to discuss it. (M, 138)

Nevertheless, not only secondary characters represent the coeval theories. Maurice has also internalized the official opinion on the subject. As a matter of fact, when Clive unexpectedly confesses that he is in love with him,

Maurice was scandalized, horrified. He was shocked to the bottom of his suburban soul, an exclaimed, 'Oh, rot!' The words, the manner, were out of him before he could recall them. 'Durham, you're an Englishman. I'm another. Don't talk nonsense. I'm not offended, because I know you don't mean it, but it's the only subject absolutely beyond the limit as you know, it's the worst crime in the calendar, and you must never mention it again. Durham! a rotten notion really –' (M, 48)

These ideas are abandoned once Maurice realizes his true nature and starts his relationship with Clive. However, when the affair ends because Clive becomes normal, he also turns into the representative of 'the conservative society that

alienates Maurice'<sup>199</sup>. In the last scene of the novel, during his last conversation with Maurice, Clive expresses the common views on homosexuality in both words and feelings. He is said to feel 'depressed, and offended' by the revelation that Maurice has not actually become normal as well. Moreover, he refers to his interest for Alec as 'morbid thoughts' (M, 215) and begs him to resist 'this obsession' (M, 216). When Maurice confesses that he has had sex with Alec, 'Clive sprang up with a whimper of disgust' and adds that he is going mad (M, 217).

Another aspect that both novels illustrate is the silence imposed on homosexuality during the nineteenth and twentieth century. As a matter of fact, in an attempt to ignore its existence, it was not considered at all<sup>200</sup>. An instance of such behaviour being the fact that the proposal to expand the Labouchère Amendment so as to involve women was rejected. The reason behind this decision was that the public discussion of such a topic as lesbianism would allegedly cause the spreading of the practice among the impressionable women of England. A similar attitude is visible in the already cited reply of Dr Barry, who believes 'that Maurice had heard some remark by chance, which had generated morbid thoughts' (M, 140). However, the treatment of silence reserved to same-sex desire can be found in other passages of both novels. In fact, circumlocutions are used. Again, in *The Well of Loneliness* the example is given by the character of Angela Crossby. During one of her arguments with Stephen, she asks: 'Can I help it if you're – what you obviously are?' (WL, 159). Apparently, although Stephen's nature is obvious, it cannot be named because it would become too real. In Angela's case, moreover, defining Stephen as a

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<sup>199</sup> D. S., 'Representations of Inversion', cit., p. 42.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., pp. 30-31.

homosexual woman would imply that she, too, is participating in the same crime or is affected by a similar illness, since they have an affair.

However, it is in *Maurice* that the imposition of silence is more evident. If it has already been mentioned that characters do not want to talk about homosexuality, it is rather telling that this subject cannot be mentioned even when it would be necessary. During a translation class, the Dean orders one of the students to 'omit: a reference to the unspeakable vice of the Greeks'. As Clive himself observes, it is hypocritical to study the ancients and to avoid mentioning such an important part of their civilisation. Maurice's reaction to this incident and to Clive's observation is even more telling: he is surprised by the fact that Clive talks 'in the middle of the sunlit court' of such a 'delicate subject' because 'he hadn't known it could be mentioned' (M, 42).

This way of (not) dealing with homosexuality is the cause of the first hardships that Stephen and Maurice have to face in their lives. Since same-sex desire is ignored and never discussed, the first problem they encounter is understanding their sexuality. The possibility that something different from what is considered "normal" might exist has never been mentioned to them during their formative years<sup>201</sup>, consequently they do not know how to deal with their own feelings and desires. This causes them to feel different from the people around them and excluded from society in general<sup>202</sup>. Maurice's confusion about his sexuality is described through the image of darkness: when he reaches puberty and does not understand his desires, he

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., pp. 26, 37.

N. J. K., 'Homosexuality as Contagion', cit., p. 428.

feels as if he was lost in 'the Valley of the Shadow' (M, 17). It is for this reason that Maurice is first intrigued by the character of Risley, whose queerness is quite evident. He wants to become his friend because 'he did feel that he might help him – how, he didn't formulate. It was all very obscure, for the mountains still overshadowed Maurice. Risley, surely capering on the summit, might stretch him a helping hand' (M, 26).

Stephen Gordon, on the other hand, does not have the opportunity to turn to anyone for help because of her social isolation. She ponders on her diversity on her own, asking herself 'Where am I? I am nothing – yes I am, I'm Stephen – but that's being nothing' (WL, 70). This is the only answer she can give herself because she has no knowledge at all concerning homosexuality or any other deviance. Actually, she is not aware of the fact that her diversity is connected to her sexuality. Only after Martin Hallam's proposal does she realize that something inherent in her makes her different from the average girl<sup>203</sup>. She consequently turns to her father who, despite knowing the truth about her nature, does not mention it to her out of pity. Her questions resurface during her first relationship with a woman, when she is confronted by the impossibility of their love being socially recognized.

'What am I, in God's name – some kind of abomination? And this thought would fill her with a very great anguish, because loving much, her love seemed to her sacred. [...] So now night after night she must pace up and down, beating her mind against a blind problem, beating her spirit against a blank wall – the impregnable wall of non-comprehension: 'Why am I as I am – and what am I?' (WL, 163)

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<sup>203</sup> C. S. F., 'Stephen Gordon, Novelist', cit., p. 130.

Both Stephen and Maurice obtain the answer to their question through their first same-sex relationships. Maurice accepts his homosexuality when he realizes that he can be loved by another man, specifically by Clive Durham; whereas Stephen can give a name to her identity due to Angela Crossby's betrayal.

However, after reaching self-awareness, their life is still complicated, although for different reasons. This difference is caused by their biological sex. As a matter of fact, the main difficulty encountered by Stephen in her subsequent relationship with Mary Llewellyn is the lack of social recognition and the consequent ostracism. Unlike Maurice, being two women, Stephen and Mary cannot be legally prosecuted because their relationship is not considered a crime. Nevertheless, they are not recognized as a couple either, because women cannot stand alone; they are considered incomplete without men. Therefore, Stephen's frustration is a result of her inability to provide for Mary completely: although she is not inferior to any man - being rich, famous, and physically strong - she is always defeated only because of her being female<sup>204</sup>. She cannot offer Mary the ultimate protection that she needs as a woman, i.e. she cannot marry her officially.

Stephen has been aware of this issue since the end of her relationship with Angela Crossby, and it is the reason why she initially suppresses her feeling towards Mary. She thinks it would be 'cruel', 'a dastardly thing' to drag Mary into the degraded conditions of the invert. Mary needs to know 'of the price she would have to pay for such love' and to 'form a considered judgement' (WL, 330). Therefore, when Mary confronts her on the matter of their relationship, Stephen warns her:

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<sup>204</sup> N. J. K., 'Homosexuality as Contagion', cit., p. 424.



I am one of those whom God marked on the forehead. Like Cain, I am marked and blemished. If you come to me, Mary, the world will abhor you, will persecute you, will call you unclean. Our love may be faithful even unto death and beyond--yet the world will call it unclean. We may harm no living creature by our love; we may grow more perfect in understanding and in charity because of our loving; but all this will not save you from the scourge of a world that will turn away its eyes from your noblest actions, finding only corruption and vileness in you. You will see men and women defiling each other, laying the burden of their sins upon their children. You will see unfaithfulness, lies and deceit among those whom the world views with approbation. You will find that many have grown hard of heart, have grown greedy, selfish, cruel and lustful; and then you will turn to me and will say: "You and I are more worthy of respect than these people. Why does the world persecute us, Stephen?" And I shall answer: "Because in this world there is only toleration for the so-called normal." And when you come to me for protection, I shall say: "I cannot protect you, Mary, the world has deprived me of my right to protect; I am utterly helpless, I can only love you". (WL, 330)

All Stephen's premonitions turn out to be true. The first person to treat them in the manner described by the heroine, is her mother Lady Anna. Although she knows that the couple lives together, she does not extend her invitation to Mary when she needs Stephen to visit her. Stephen immediately feels the omission is 'an intentional slight upon Mary' (WL, 366), and her intuition is confirmed during her stay at Morton. Out of exasperation for her mother's ignoring of Mary's existence, Stephen decides to mention her. However, 'she stopped, seeing Anna's warning face-expressionless, closed; while as for her answer, it had been more eloquent far than words – a disconcerting, unequivocal silence' (WL, 373).

Nevertheless, Lady Anna is not the only one who repudiates the couple. The situation repeats itself with a British woman, Lady Massey, whom Stephen and Mary

meet during their holidays in Italy. They seem to become very good friends, and the couple is invited to the coming Christmas party. However, the invitation is revoked a week before the event because of the rumours Lady Massey has heard about Stephen and Mary.

'[...] I must consider my position in the county. You see, the county looks to me for a lead--above all I must consider my daughter. The rumours that have reached me about you and Mary--certain things that I don't want to enter into--have simply forced me to break off our friendship and to say that I must ask you not to come here for Christmas. Of course a woman of my position with all eyes upon her has to be extra careful [...]'. (WL, 408)

Mary is devastated by this second rejection. As the narrator says, 'the world had achieved its first real victory' (WL, 409). As a matter of fact, Mary decides to react by delving into the nightlife of the Parisian queer community, making the couple even more detached from the rest of society. The existence of these people, whose faces bear the signs of their despair, is depicted as degrading and hopeless<sup>205</sup>. Stephen is filled with 'deep depression and disgust' at the conditions which are imposed on her fellows. On the other hand, the wounded and enraged Mary pretends to be happy because 'beggars can't be choosers in this world' (WL, 431).

Stephen immediately recognizes that this degraded lifestyle affects Mary, who only pretends to be strong enough to bear it. She is made miserable by the hopelessness of the invert's life and her rage coarsens her (WL, 438). For this reason, when her friend Martin Hallam falls in love with Mary and challenges her, Stephen is eventually defeated. After a strenuous fight for Mary's love, Stephen decides to let her go. She becomes aware of the fact that Mary has indeed grown fond of Martin as

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<sup>205</sup> G. W., 'Everything is Out of Place', cit., p. 574.

well, and that she longs for the life that he could offer her, which means 'children, protection, friends whom she can respect and who'll respect her' (WL, 470). She understands that

[...he] was a creature endowed with incalculable bounty, having in his hands all those priceless gift which she, love's mendicant, could never offer. Only one gift could she offer to love, to Mary, and that was the gift of Martin. (WL, 476)

However, Mary would never leave by her own choice. Consequently, Stephen has to force her towards Martin through deceit, by pretending that Valérie Seymour is her lover.

This ending, however, is not unannounced. As a matter of fact, all Stephen's romantic interests are ended by the presence of a man: before Mary falls in love with Martin, the housemaid Collins kisses the footman, and Angela Crossby has an affair with her rival, Roger Antrim. A pattern can be identified in which Stephen is always in competition with a man, and is eventually defeated. Therefore, the novel does not only depict the miserable conditions in which the inverts are forced to live, but also stresses the impossibility for them of having a thriving relationship, especially between women due to society's prejudice and rejection. Although the cause of Angela's unfaithfulness can be debated<sup>206</sup>, Stephen's decision to forego Mary in order to allow her to be happy and have a respectful life is undoubtedly due to society's attitude towards homosexuals and the lack of recognition of their relationships<sup>207</sup>.

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<sup>206</sup> Bauer argues that Angela is pressured by society to choose Roger over Stephen, because only the former would be recognized as an actual substitute for her husband (See: H. B., 'Richard von Krafft-Ebing's Psychopathia Sexualis as Sexual Sourcebook', cit., pp. 35-36). However, the narrator explicitly state that she is not in love with Stephen, but considers her an anodyne for boredom (WL, pp. 257, 161).

<sup>207</sup> C. S. F., 'Stephen Gordon: Novelist', cit., p. 134.

In *Maurice*, on the other hand, the main problem is quite different. After the acceptance of his homosexuality, the protagonist has to face the fact that male homosexuals are considered criminals because of the Labouchere Amendment. The recognition of his relationship by society is a secondary preoccupation because a single man is already considered independent and complete on his own. Consequently, to use Stephen Gordon's words, he does not need protection. The fear of crime and punishment, however, haunts Maurice throughout the novel. Although 'the text provides no palpable representation of the police, legal authority, or particular laws [...] still, such a fear is given narrative worth'<sup>208</sup>. As a matter of fact, 'the language of law crops up at various points'<sup>209</sup>. The first appearance of the legal discourse is triggered by Clive's declaration of love. As has already been seen, Maurice, caught off guard, defines it as 'the worst crime in the calendar'. The next few times the episode is mentioned between the two, the legal reference is kept and Clive refers to his sexuality as 'criminal morbidity' and is thankful to Maurice because he has not 'reported [him] to the Dean or the Police' (M, 49, 54).

However, the awareness of the law is not lost after the start of the relationship. Numerous times Maurice and Clive refer to themselves using the term 'outlaw'. For instance, after exchanging a furtive kiss at Penge, Clive says: 'I'm a bit of an outlaw, I grant, but it serves these people right. As long as they talk of the unspeakable vice of the Greeks, they can't expect fair play' (M, 77-78). If Clive uses the term in an act of disdain for the system that oppresses them, Maurice does in order to remind him of the precariousness of their existence. When Clive states that

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<sup>208</sup> Gary D. Pratt, 'Ideal Friends', cit., p. 106.

<sup>209</sup> J. P. W., *Reconsidering the Emergence of the Gay Novel*, cit., p. 39.

he wants to end their relationship, Maurice points to the middle-class comfort that surrounds them and answers: 'You can't trust anyone else. You and I are outlaws. All this [...] would be taken away from us if people knew' (M, 112).

The threat of the law is constantly present, although it might be in the background. When the narrator describes how Maurice and Clive are received by society because they have nothing different from other men outwardly, it is also specified that 'behind Society slumbered the Law' (M, 86). Therefore, the police and the law become a sort of conscience for the protagonist. That's why when Maurice attempts to seduce Dr Barry's nephew and fails, he is soon caught by fear: 'he saw the boy leaping from his embrace, to smash through the window and break his limbs, or yelling like a maniac until help came. He saw the police' (M, 131). Considering this element, it is also justifiable to read Clive's conversion to heterosexuality in the same way as Wilper does: although it is portrayed in mystical terms, it can be assumed that societal pressure plays a major role in his change<sup>210</sup>.

Nevertheless, the presence of the law manifests itself in the strongest way through the fear of blackmail. This is a clear reference to The Labouchere Amendment, although it is never explicitly mentioned in the text. As a matter of fact, the bill was also known as 'The Blackmailer's Charter' because it virtually enabled the practice of blackmailing and made it lucrative<sup>211</sup>. Blackmail does not enter the text through a specific threat, 'but through Maurice's fear of it before there is a clear indication of it happening'<sup>212</sup>. He first thinks of blackmail when he decides to be

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>211</sup> G. D. P., 'Ideal Friends', cit., p. 107.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

visited by the hypnotist, because he had read of the occurrence of similar incidents in the newspaper (M, 159). However, this possibility is never taken into consideration again after his first visit. The fear resurfaces once he has spent the night with Alec. Soon afterwards, he becomes paranoid and examines everything that happens around him in fear of being discovered. When he receives a telegram from Alec asking him to meet, the first thing that comes to his mind is that 'it contained every promise of blackmail' (M, 183). This first note actually contains no threat, but Maurice 'has internalized the law into his own interpretative process, and expects it from Alec'<sup>213</sup>. The same occurs when Alec sends a second message, a letter. Maurice, in his paranoia, analyses every small detail of the text and decides it is a trap because 'butchers' sons and the rest of them may pretend to be innocent and affectionate, but they read the *Police Court News*, they know' (M, 184). Blackmail actually starts with the third message by Alec. In this final letter, exasperated by the lack of an answer from Maurice, Alec claims to know about him and Clive and threatens to make him sorry for treating him badly.

Sir, you do not treat me fairly. I am sailing next week, per s.s. Normannia. I wrote you I am going, it is not fair you never write me. I come of a respectable family, I don't think it fair to treat me like a dog. My father is a respectable tradesman. [...] *I know about you and Mr Durham*. Why do you say 'cell me Maurice', and then treat me so unfairly? Mr Hall, I am coming to London Tuesday. If you do not want me at your home say where in London, you had better see me – I would make you sorry for it. [...] I am not your servant, I will not be treated as your servant, and I don't care if the world knows it. I will show respect *where it's due only*, that is to say to gentleman who are gentleman. [...] *P.S. I know something*. (M, 192)

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid, p. 108.

The difference created by the genders of the protagonists can also be found in the story of the publication of the novels. Whereas Forster decided not to publish *Maurice* precisely because of the criminalization of male homosexuality, Radclyffe Hall attempted to make the most of the specificity of the law. Considering that the Labouchere Amendment affected men only, *The Well of Loneliness* could not be accused of representing acts of gross indecencies. Moreover, 'the sexual relationships in the novel are handled with utmost discretion, and the people most shocked by its revelations in 1928 were some sanctimonious public officials'<sup>214</sup>. However, this was a double-edged sword. As a matter of fact, during the trials, the parallelism was not ignored. On the contrary, it was used by the prosecution to obtain the ban of the book.

Despite the different difficulties that the protagonists have to encounter because of their genders, the aim that both authors want to achieve through their novels is the same. Both *Maurice* and *The Well of Loneliness* attempt to present homosexuality to the reader in a positive way. As a matter of fact, both texts demonstrate that same-sex desire is neither a choice, nor a vice, or a disease. On the contrary, it is a mere variation of nature on a par with heterosexuality, although contemporary society does not seem to comprehend it<sup>215</sup>. The means through which Radclyffe Hall and Forster attempt to redeem homosexuality are also similar. First, they both follow the sexological model to highlight that homosexuality is a congenital

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<sup>214</sup> C. S. F., 'Stephen Gordon: Novelist', cit., p. 126.

<sup>215</sup> Radclyffe Hall's intention was to 'compose a novel on sexual inversion that would be accessible to the general public who did not have access to technical treatise'. See: Margot Gayle Backus, 'Sexual Orientation in the (Post)Imperial Nation: 'Celticism and Inversion Theory in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, vol. 15, no. 2, p. 254.

condition<sup>216</sup>, thus an inherent characteristic of an individual which cannot be changed<sup>217</sup>. The following statement is that same-sex desire is not the consequence of any disease. As a matter of fact, Maurice and Stephen are in perfectly good health. Finally, their morality is not affected by their sexuality. Consequently, the protagonists are presented as normal people who are not tainted with vice, but actually want to conform and be accepted by the rest of society.

As far as sexological theories are concerned, the difference in their use by Radclyffe Hall and Forster in their novels has already been examined. Nonetheless, their decision to follow this model was made for the same reason: the theories of Krafft-Ebing, Ellis, and Carpenter were the only ones that did portray homosexuality as a fact of nature that could not be modified<sup>218</sup>. Therefore, as these researchers stated, inverts could not be blamed or punished for something that was not under their control. It followed that these individuals should be understood and accepted by society, not stigmatized and rejected.

This vision is present in both *Maurice* and *The Well of Loneliness*, inasmuch as nature is invoked when talking about the sexuality of the protagonists, thus implying that it is the only responsible for their attraction towards their own sex. In Radclyffe Hall's novel, it is said of Stephen Gordon that, 'had nature been less daring with her, she might as well have become very much what [normal people] were – a breeder of children, an upholder of home, a careful and diligent steward of pastures' (WL, 113). Moreover, when she falls in love with Angela Crossby she is said to have done it

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<sup>216</sup> G. W., 'Everything is Out of Place', cit., p. 557.

<sup>217</sup> J. P. W., *Reconsidering the Emergence of the Gay Novel*, cit., p. 116.

<sup>218</sup> According to the writings of Krafft-Ebing and Ellis, this is true only in the case of congenital inversion. As far as Carpenter is concerned, he does not identify any other type of Uranism.



‘naturally’ and ‘in accordance with the dictate of her nature’. She is among ‘those whom nature has sacrificed to her ends – her mysterious ends that often lie hidden’. However, to balance such a fate, they ‘are sometimes endowed with a vast will to loving, with an endless capacity for suffering also, which must go hand in hand with their love’ (WL, 156).

Moreover, remarks about nature and its variety are not only made by the narrator. Stephen’s fencing teacher Buisson affirms: ‘We are all great imbeciles about nature. We make our own rules and call them *la nature*; we say she do this, she do that – imbeciles! She do what she please and then make the long nose’ (WL, 281). This statement is an obvious reference to society and its rules, which are considered natural only because they are accepted by the majority. However, nature and society are two distinct entities, and the former is certainly not affected by the latter. The statement gains even more importance because it comes from a heterosexual male, i.e. someone who is part of the society of normal people.

Nevertheless, remarks of this kind are also pronounced by Stephen and Valérie Seymour during a conversation after Barbara and Jamie’s death. In this passage, Stephen presents the argument the author intended to advance through the novel: ‘if inversion is a fact of nature, then inverts are creatures of God, and, as such, they are entitled to their passions’<sup>219</sup>.

‘How long was this persecution to continue? How long would God sit still and endure this insult offered to His creation? How long tolerate the preposterous statement that inversion was not part of nature? For since it

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<sup>219</sup> N. J. K, ‘Homosexuality as Contagion’, cit., p. 427.

existed what else could it be? All things that existed were a part of nature!  
(WL, 447)

Valérie tries to console her by answering that 'Nature was trying to do her bit; insects were being born in increasing numbers, and after a while their numbers would tell, even with the fools who still ignored Nature' (WL, 448).

In *Maurice*, similar remarks are less numerous but still present. The first one appears after Maurice has been visited by Dr Barry and is thinking of trying hypnosis to "cure" his homosexuality. In this passage, he is described as 'an average man', but 'Nature had pitted him against the extraordinary, which only saints can subdue unaided' (M, 142). The extraordinary that he is trying to subdue is his sexuality, consequently the blame for his "abnormality" is apportioned to nature, not to him. The second comment of this sort is not explicitly about Maurice's sexuality, but it is a reprimand to Nature for her failures and indifference.

Blossom after blossom crept past them, dragged by the ungenial year: some had cankered, others would never unfold; here and there beauty triumphed, but desperately, flickering in a world of gloom. Maurice looked into one after another, and though he did not care for flowers the failure irritated him. Scarcely anything was perfect. On one spray every flower was lopsided, the next swarmed with caterpillars, or bulged with galls. The indifference of nature! And her incompetence! He leant out of the window to see whether she couldn't bring it off once [...]. (M, 158-159)

Since Nature has been identified as the responsible for Maurice's deviance, it is possible to read this passage as an indirect reference to his sexuality. The irritation that he feels while looking at the flower is actually his own frustration for the impossibility of combining his homosexuality with the respectable middle-class life he has lead up to this point. Consequently, he identifies with the flowers which,

despite having been created by Nature, are not being treated fairly. As a matter of fact, he is the personification of the British male and a perfect representative of the middle-class. Nevertheless, his homosexuality ruins this image in the same way as caterpillars destroy the beauty of the flora.

However, *Maurice* does not only portray homosexuality as a natural condition, it also demonstrates that it is impossible to modify an individual's sexual preferences. The first element in favour of this position can be found in the break-up scene between Clive and Maurice<sup>220</sup>. When the former affirms that he has become normal and is no longer attracted by men, the latter simply asks: 'Can the leopard change its spots?' (M, 111). Nevertheless, Maurice seems to change his mind after the end of this relationship. As a matter of fact, he decides that he needs to change in order 'to be married, and at one with society and the law' (M, 141).

In the hope of becoming "normal", Maurice decides to see a hypnotist, Mr Lasker Jones. Initially doubtful, Maurice is relieved when Lasker Jones appears as 'an advanced scientific man ought to be': he is expressionless, his hand bloodless, and his manner detached (M, 159). Moreover, he is not a 'quack' inasmuch as he honestly admits that he 'cannot promise a cure' and that he has been successful 'in only fifty per cent' of such cases. However, there is a contradiction in his diagnosis, which undermines the credibility of the whole treatment<sup>221</sup>. Although he declares that Maurice is affected by 'congenital homosexuality', he then refers to it as a mere 'tendency' whose rootedness he needs to check (M, 160). Needless to say, the treatment results in a failure. Even though a second appointment is arranged, the

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<sup>220</sup> D. S., 'Representations of Inversion', cit., p. 32.

<sup>221</sup> J. P. W., *Reconsidering the Emergence of the Gay Novel*, cit., p. 131.

first one has already foretold the impossibility of change. As a matter of fact, Maurice is not affected by Lasker Jones' attempts to impress female attractiveness on him. Despite the fact that he can make Maurice see a crack in the carpet and a picture on the wall, he is not able to make him associate beauty with femininity.

'Isn't [Miss Edna May] beautiful?'

'I want to go home to my mother.' Both laughed at this remark, the doctor leading.

'Miss Edna May is not only beautiful, she is attractive.'

'She doesn't attract me,' said Maurice pettishly.

'Oh Mr Hall, what an ungallant remark. Look at her lovely hair.'

'I like short hair best.'

'Why?'

'Because I can stroke it –' and he began to cry. (M, 161-162)

This failure is not surprising considering that before the first meeting starts, it is stated that Maurice 'wanted a woman to secure him socially and diminish his lust and bear children. He never thought of that woman as a positive joy [...] and sought not happiness at the hands of Mr Lasker Jones, but repose' (M, 159).

Nonetheless, this scene is a strategic element in Forster's plea for homosexuality as an immutable characteristic. Contrary to *The Well of Loneliness*, in which inversion is simply presented as a natural element, in *Maurice* this assumption is also demonstrated. Whereas Stephen Gordon accepts herself from the beginning because she has always felt attracted to women, Maurice Hall does not. This initial refusal makes the final acceptance even more incisive because it attacks society's position from within. The fact that Maurice tries to change through science, which is supposed to be objective, and fails, definitely debunks the idea that homosexuality is a matter of choice.

Once it has been established that inversion is a natural phenomenon, only the disease theory remains to be undermined. Both authors do this by making their protagonists perfectly healthy. Even in her childhood, Stephen Gordon is said to possess a healthy body (WL, 41). This is due to her father's plans for her future. Being aware of his daughter's diversity, he wants her to develop both her body and mind (WL, 52, 60). Consequently, Stephen starts to take care of her physique diligently from a young age and develops a 'splendid young body' (WL, 57, 83). Her passion for training bears its fruit so much that she is surprised when her mother enquires about her physical state because 'Stephen was not supposed to know what it meant to be fagged, her physical health and strength were proverbial' (WL, 174). Although she stops her physical activities after being turned out of Morton, once she moves to Paris she resumes her habits, and her body is reinvigorated (WL, 281).

As far as Maurice is concerned, he is repeatedly defined as healthy by the narrator and by other characters, such as his mother, Clive, and Dr Barry (M, 62, 108, 140). However, his good health is not only an inherent quality, but also the result of physical activity, similarly to Stephen's case. As a matter of fact, his body is said to be modelled by 'much exercise' (M, 44), and he is described as 'powerful' (M, 61). Maurice himself recognizes that he has been gifted with health and a strength. When he looks into the mirror, he thinks 'A mercy I'm fit.' because 'he saw a well-trained serviceable body and a face that contradicted it no longer. Virility had harmonized them and shaded either with dark hair (M, 100).

Finally, the last myth that the novels need to deal with is the lack of morals in homosexuals. As a matter of fact, homosexuality was connected with immorality and

promiscuity. In this sense, Stephen and Maurice are good representatives of their community for, were they not homosexual, they would be respectful members of society. In particular, Stephen is 'morally above reproach'<sup>222</sup>. Her sense of honour is rather strong, due to her father's upbringing (WL, 61, 133). She has such a 'highly developed moral sensibility'<sup>223</sup> that she feels guilty for the lies she and Angela have to tell Ralph when they are together, despite the fact that they are necessary (WL, 157). Moreover, she gives so much importance to honour and loyalty that, although Angela betrays her, she never does the same. Even years later, when she recounts her story to Martin Hallam, she omits 'no detail save one that honour forbade her to give--she withheld the name of Angela Crossby' (WL, 463).

As far as promiscuity is concerned, there is no trace of it in Stephen. She is said to be a selfless lover and her devotion is defined as faithful and loyal (WL, 214, 218). Her loyalty to her partner is reflected in her envy of the unions of "normal" people, for instance of the marriage of Williams, the groom, and his wife.

And Stephen, seeing those two together, could picture them as they must once have been, in the halcyon days of their youthful vigour. [...] And because they were old yet undivided, her heart ached; not for them but rather for Stephen. Her youth seemed as dross when compared to their honourable age; because they were undivided. (WL, 184-185)

Her envy is caused by the fact that they can be proud of their relationship, whereas she and Mary cannot. Despite the lack of difference in the affection and faithfulness of the couples, Stephen and Mary's relationship is not considered respectable. This is the cause of the heroine's frustration: she knows she has all the characteristics that

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<sup>222</sup> N. J. K., 'Homosexuality as Contagion', cit., p. 423.

<sup>223</sup> C. S. F., 'Stephen Gordon, Novelist', cit., p. 136.

are necessary to conform, even Valerie Seymour confirms it<sup>224</sup>, nevertheless her desire is never to be fulfilled because of society's prejudice.

As for Maurice, he is presented to the reader as the perfect specimen of middle-class Britishness<sup>225</sup>. He is the average man both on the outside and the inside<sup>226</sup>. His political and social views as well as his job are typical of his class. There is nothing in him that does not conform to society's standards, apart from his sexuality. From the moral point of view, he can definitely be defined as a good person. Although he increasingly despises society in the course of his self-acceptance, he never neglects the well-being of those around him. It is true that he does not treat his sisters fairly in the rage following the end of his relationship with Clive (M, 117-118), however he apologizes and tries to make it up to both of them when the moment has passed (M, 124-125). Moreover, he discards the idea of exposing Clive because of the consequences that his own family would suffer (M, 118). Although he says they do not matter to him, he never loses consideration for them.

As far as promiscuity is concerned, Maurice is on a par with Stephen Gordon. The first proof of this is the fact that his relationship with Clive neglects physicality so much that they almost abstain from caresses as well (M, 85). As a matter of fact

It had been understood between them that their love, though including the body, should not gratify it, and the understanding had proceeded – no words were used – from Clive. He had been nearest to words on the first evening at Penge, when he refused Maurice's kiss [...]. (M, 132)

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<sup>224</sup> Valérie says to Stephen: 'you've all the respectable county instincts of the man who cultivates children and acres – any gaps in your fences would always disturb you; one side of your mind is so aggressively tidy' (WL, 449-450).

<sup>225</sup> J. P. W, *Reconsidering the Emergence of the Gay Novel*, cit., pp. 150, 152.

<sup>226</sup> D. S., 'Representations of Inversion', cit., pp. 23, 33.

It is true that Maurice abandons this idealistic attitude when Clive leaves him, nevertheless he never yields to sensuality either. Although his body craves for human contact, Maurice does not seize the opportunities to gratify it. When one of his clients invites him to lunch because he has sensed that Maurice is interested in men, he declines (M, 131). Something similar happens on the train as well:

He had been brooding in an ill-conditioned way, and his expression aroused the suspicions and hopes of the only other person in the carriage. This person, stout and greasy-faced, made a lascivious sign, and, off his guard, Maurice responded. Next moment both rose to their feet. The other man smiled, whereupon Maurice knocked him down. (M, 135)

The fact that he finds it 'disgusting and dishonourable' (M, 135), and consequently decides not to go further, is the ultimate proof that Maurice is not controlled by his sexual drive or his attraction towards men.

Moreover, to highlight the fact that Stephen and Maurice are not afflicted by morbid thoughts, moments of intimacy with their partners are depicted in the same way as those of heterosexual couples. This is true especially for Stephen and Mary, who live as a married couple. Stephen, the more masculine, takes on the role of the man and works, while Mary, naturally more feminine, takes care of the housework (WL, 374). On their first day of living together, Mary asks:

'Who's been looking after your clothes – sewing on buttons and that sort of things? [...] Because I'm going to do it in future. You'll find that I've got one very real talent, and that's darning. When I darn the place looks like a basket, criss-cross. And I know how to pick up a ladder as well as the Invisible Mending people! It's very important that the darns should be smooth, otherwise when you fence they might give you a blister.' Stephen's lips twitched a little, but she said quite gravely: 'Thanks awfully, darling, we'll go over my stockings.' [...] Finally she discovered the stockings where they lay [...]. Thrusting a fist into toes and heels she looked for the holes that were non-existent. [...] Mary rolled up the stockings with a sigh of regret; alas, they



would not require darning. She was at the stage of being in love when she longed to do womanly tasks for Stephen. (WL, 352-353)

In the following months, they enjoy the typical activities of lovers: walking arm in arm around the city, going shopping for clothes, and dining at restaurants (WL, 356-357). 'On those evenings when they did not go out, Stephen would now read aloud to Mary' (WL, 363).

As far as *Maurice* is concerned, there is one scene in which the relationship between the protagonist and Clive Durham is presented in the same terms of a "normal" one: the trip in the countryside. 'Forster's portrayal of this idyllic afternoon suggests that love between men is possible and even scandalously similar to the love between man and woman'<sup>227</sup>. As a matter of fact, Maurice and Clive can act naturally as a couple because 'they were outside humanity' and 'man [...] was nowhere to be seen'. Consequently, they picnic and then 'laid their cheeks together' (M, 65), they play up among the trees and bathe (M, 66). At the end of the scene, to strengthen the suggestion that their love is normal, the day is described as ordinary: 'When they parted it was in the ordinary way: neither had the impulse to say anything special. The whole day had been ordinary' (M, 67).

In conclusion, *The Well of Loneliness* and *Maurice* can be defined as accurate representations of the lives of male and female homosexuals in the early twentieth century. As a matter of fact, they portray the different obstacles that gay men and lesbians encountered because of their relationships. Moreover, the novels are also pleas for the recognition and integration of these individuals whose only fault is the desire to love and be accepted by the rest of society.

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<sup>227</sup> D. S., 'Representations of Inversion', cit., p. 28.

## Conclusions

The term homosexuality was created in the second half of the nineteenth century, when it became a category of identification with a set of specific characteristics in opposition to that of heterosexuality. By the early twentieth century, homosexuality had become a topic of heated debate. Both science and law were concerned with it, as is shown by the passing of the Labouchere Amendment in 1885 and the great deal of scientific writing that was produced all over Europe on the subject. The two fields, however, did not communicate in the best way possible. As a matter of fact, whereas scientific research led to new results and consequently different views from the first religious, medical, and psychological ones of the early Victorian period, law remained more or less unvaried for the following century. Only in the nineties were homosexual relationships decriminalized in Great Britain, despite the fact that sexology had already demonstrated the naturality of this sexual orientation at the turn of the century.

Sexology originated in the late nineteenth century, when the interest for sexuality and its deviances increased. Among the most famous researchers in this field, Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis were the most influential, especially as far as homosexuality is concerned. As a matter of fact, they were among the first writers to argue for the naturality of homosexuality. Their works sustained that sexual inversion, as they used to call it, was neither a vice nor a disease, but a congenital condition, that is to say an immutable characteristic of the individual. Although their studies were still imbued with biologic determinism and did not

differentiate sex, gender, and sexual orientation, nevertheless, they were groundbreaking for their epoch.

Satisfied enough with the liberating perspective of these theories, many homosexuals embraced them, in particular in the higher strata of society within which this information circulated more freely. This is how sexological theories found their way into art, especially into literature where characters could be inspired by them. Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* is maybe the best example of this reworking. As a matter of fact, the heroine of this story, Stephen Gordon, is the personification of the results of studies on female inverts. From her childhood, she shows all the signs of inversion, such as the interest in manly activities and the desire to be treated as a boy. The same can be said of Maurice, the protagonist of the eponymous novel by E. M. Forster. He features the typical characteristics that Carpenter ascribed to the male invert: he is only attracted to his own sex and possesses a higher sensitivity in comparison to heterosexual men.

Nevertheless, the stories of Maurice Hall and Stephen Gordon were not only inspired by sexology. As has been shown, the lives of the authors were a source of material as well. This is visible in the many parallelisms that can be traced between the lives of Radclyffe Hall and Stephen as well as Forster's and Maurice's. The fact that the writers decided to rework their own experiences to create these novels increases their merit. Besides being fine works of literary fiction, in fact, they are also historical representation of the way homosexual men and women lived in Great Britain during the first two decades of the twentieth century. In particular, *The Well of Loneliness* and *Maurice* accurately portray the hardships that homosexuals had to

face because of society's prejudices and ignorance. As has been highlighted, although the judgment on homosexuality was independent from the gender of the individual, a bias was still present. Gay men and lesbians had different obstacles to overcome beyond the lack of general acceptance.

The final purpose of the novels is to present homosexuality in a positive way in order to eradicate society's prejudices and to plead for its acceptance. In order to do so, the major myths about inversion are debunked: the pathological model and the vice theory are both undermined by Stephen and Maurice as well as their stories, which present them as completely normal people who unjustly suffer because of the rejection and hostility of those who surround them.

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