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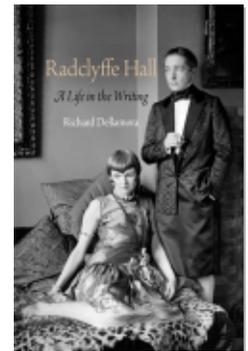
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4

The Unlit Lamp

A Feminist Experiment

The first novel completed by Hall and the second to be published, *The Unlit Lamp* (1924), is a feminist work that focuses on the impossibility of lesbian desire. To say impossible is to speak paradoxically because during the post-war decade Hall lived in an open same-sex relationship while contributing to the construction of a lesbian public culture in England. The impossibility to which the novel refers then is theoretical, specifically in the difficulty that psychoanalytic theory in the 1920s and early 1930s, whether practiced by men or women, had in articulating and grounding adult female sexuality.¹ As Hall indicates, however, the difficulty was also practical since the development of lesbian existence depended upon financial independence for women, which depended in turn upon their access to intellectually stimulating, well-compensated work. In a departure from the psychoanalysis of the day, Hall locates the becoming-possible of lesbian existence in women's entry into areas of life, such as the medical profession, that were largely restricted to male practitioners. Moreover, she posits this possibility without basing female agency in envy, rivalry, or disaffection from men as psychoanalytic theorists, both male and female, did. To say as much is not to deny Hall's competitive attitude toward men. She recognized, however, that

envy was not a good basis on which to construct female psychological and professional autonomy. Nonetheless, it was precisely on envy—envy of the missing penis—that psychoanalysts based what they referred to as the female masculinity complex.²

The novel shows Hall to have been equally aware of the dangers of inhabiting the sort of pre-oedipal sexuality that leading female psychoanalysts began theorizing in the 1920s and that Freud would attempt to integrate within his theoretical work early in the following decade. Instead, she looked to the possibility of a female virility disabled neither by absorption in a maternal dyad, on the one hand, nor by masculine ambition and aggression against males on the other. Hall locates this possibility fictionally in the potential of Joan Ogden, the protagonist of the novel. While this promise remains unfulfilled, it constitutes the novel's desire, propelling the reader forward with increasing frustration and chagrin as Joan's attempts to attain autonomy are repeatedly blocked by conditions both external and internal.

This pattern of repetition is ultimately disclosed to be the book's real subject. In order to trace this process, Hall adapts to her purpose the genre of the bildungsroman, the novel of individual self-development in the first or the third person, familiar in both nineteenth-century and early modernist fiction.³ While writing the novel, she read an important piece of feminist experimental fiction in this genre: May Sinclair's *Mary Olivier* (1919).⁴ Sinclair's novel is preoccupied with the struggle of its protagonist to escape her mother's love and conventional expectations.⁵ In addition to reading this and other works of fiction concerned with the im/possibility of female autonomy and same-sex intimacy, such as Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (1915),⁶ Hall's approach to the genre drew upon her experience in psychical research, which had required careful attention both to circumstantial detail and to unconscious mental operations.⁷ Within a naturalist style, Hall explores the entanglement of socioeconomic with unconscious factors in individual development.⁸ For Hall, the active connection between early childhood relationships and later ones is shaped equally by sociological and psychological factors. Psychologically, the operation of the mother-daughter relationship at the unconscious level is determinative. Leading sociological factors are limited access to professions for women and the unintended consequences of social-purity female friendship among New Women.

Joan's mother, Mrs. Ogden, occupies a failed marriage to Colonel Ogden, a martinet, who is forced to retire on a reduced income from his

post in India as a result of a weak heart. Ogden compensates for this failure of phallic potency by continually bullying his wife. In reaction, Joan from the outset rejects the possibility of marriage and, implicitly, any other long-term partnership with another human being. She also reacts against the gender-based authority that entitles men to subject women. In oedipal terms, she becomes an early and alas too successful rival for her mother's emotional and physical attentions. On the mother's side, desire for her daughter arises in the context of a phobic reaction against sex with her husband. Mrs. Ogden "remembered her wedding night; it had not been at all like her slightly guilty dreams; it had been—she shuddered. Thinking back now she knew that she herself, that part of her that was composed of spirit, had been rudely shaken free, leaving behind but a part of the whole. It had not been her night, but all James's, a blurred and horrible experience filled with astonished repugnance."⁹ Mrs. Ogden's disappointed desire attaches to her daughter, who enjoys her own illicit pleasure as her mother's companion. In the opening chapter, after Mrs. Ogden has spent a miserable morning over the grocery accounts with her husband, she comforts herself with her twelve-year-old daughter's embraces. At such moments, "Joan's strong, young arms would comfort and soothe, and her firm lips grope until they found her mother's; and Mrs. Ogden would feel mean and ashamed but guiltily happy, as if a lover held her" (13).

Joan is the sort of coltish young girl whom Hall frequently chose to put at the center of her novels: she "was large-boned and tall for her age, lanky as a boy, with a pale face and short black hair. Her grey eyes were not large, and not at all appealing, but they were set well apart; they were intelligent and frank. She escaped being plain by the skin of her teeth; she would have been plain had her face not been redeemed by a short, straight nose and a beautiful mouth. Somehow her mouth reassured you" (11). The citation, with its insinuated intimacy between author and reader, assures the reader that Joan's appeal is both masculine and feminine. Within the domestic triad in which Joan finds herself, however, she early reacts against her femininity: "They had cut her thick hair during scarlet fever, and Joan refused to allow it to grow again. She invariably found scissors and snipped and snipped, and Mrs. Ogden's resistance broke down at the final act of defiance, when she was discovered hacking at her hair with a pen-knife" (11). In this brief opening passage, Hall already signifies the complex mystery of the boyish girl, at once self-determined and shaped by physical, social, and psychological factors.

As the passages cited above suggest, one basis of the impossibility of lesbian desire has to do with incestuous ties to one's mother. Hall, however, devotes significantly more attention and thought to female friendship as it is figured in Joan's close ties with her tutor, Cambridge-educated Elizabeth Rodney. As they are with the maternal dyad, matters are further complicated by female socioeconomic subordination and by anti-sex attitudes among women, which Hall, in tune with the temper of youthful fashion in the 1920s, regards as destructive. Bourgeois women such as Mrs. Ogden and Mary Olivier's mother attempt to enforce mid-Victorian norms of femininity upon young women in search of autonomy. In revolt is the first generation of New Women. Born for the most part in the 1840s and 1850s, these women founded the single-sex institutions that first provided middle-class women with opportunities for female friendship outside of family settings, communal living, professional development, and service outside the home. "A second generation, born in the 1870s and 1880s . . . took the cause [of women's rights] one step further, demanding political and social changes."¹⁰ They became leaders of the suffragist movement in England in the years leading up to the outbreak of World War I. Following the war, however, members of both groups found themselves abruptly sidestepped by the emergence of yet another generation of young women who rebelled against the "dowdy," "high-minded," female homosocial culture that prevailed at such places as Newnham College. Some rebelled by affirming an interest in boys, marriage, and maternity.¹¹ Others, women whose sexual interests were in other women or who were bisexual, turned from female-centered to androgynous or crossgendered conceptions of aesthetics, gender, and sexuality. Hall, a sometime supporter of female suffrage, was one among this sexually experimental group who were already visible in the early 1910s, that is, before the massive dislocations of World War I, to which the emergence of a lesbian public culture in England is usually attributed.

Regarding this last development, psychoanalysis was behind the curve. It was only in the 1920s that leading male figures within the psychoanalytic movement, such as Freud and Ernest Jones, his leading English disciple, turned their attention to female sexual development. Previously, it had been assimilated to Freud's view of the development of the Oedipus complex in young boys. Freud believed that the first love-object of females was not their mother but their father.¹² Only in his essay "Female Sexuality" (1931; trans. 1932), published seven years after Hall's novel, did he come to recognize the importance of what he called "the pre-Oedipus phase in women."¹³

Along with this recognition, he became aware of how the symbiotic relationship between mother and daughter could threaten the individuation and sexualization of young women. In this essay, Freud also gives greater weight than previously to the importance for a young girl of what he calls the masculinity complex, namely, her wish to possess a penis and along with it the benefits enjoyed by children born with one. Freud writes: “To an incredibly late age she clings to the hope of getting a penis some time. That hope becomes her life’s aim; and the phantasy of being a man in spite of everything often persists as a formative factor over long periods. This ‘masculinity complex’ in women can also result in a manifest homosexual choice of object” (229–30).

These shifts in Freud’s thinking resulted from pressures both external and internal to psychoanalysis: on the one hand, the sort of social development in which Hall was participating; and on the other hand, the need felt by both Freud and Jones to respond to the increasing significance of female analysts and the case studies they were reporting. During the 1920s, such analysts as Helene Deutsch and Jeanne Lampl-de Groot (both mentioned by Freud, 21: 226–27), Melanie Klein, and Joan Riviere drew attention to the lack of a specific theory of female sexuality in the psychoanalytic canon and began to remedy that lack. Likewise, the growing importance of lesbian public cultures after World War I necessitated analytic and theoretical work. For example, when Jones published his essay on female sexuality in 1927, he reported that “the immediate stimulus to the investigation on which the present paper is mainly based was provided by the unusual experience, a couple of years ago, of having to analyse at the same time five cases of manifest homosexuality in women. The analyses were all deep ones and lasted from three to five years; they have been completed in three of the cases and carried to a far stage in the other two.”¹⁴ In other words, Jones was working intensively with female homosexual and bisexual patients at the time when Hall’s novel appeared. Similarly, the exponential jump in the public exposure of female homosexuality that resulted from the trial of Hall’s publisher, Jonathan Cape, at the time of publication of *The Well of Loneliness* provides part of the setting in which Freud determined that this topic was one on which he needed to weigh in.

Both lesbian visibility and female psychoanalytic practice put male analysts on the defensive regarding their overemphasis on the penis. Jones concedes as much at the beginning of his essay when he acknowledges Karen Horney’s complaint that a “bias” in favor of attention to male primary

sexual characteristics has resulted in deformations in psychoanalytic theory of early female development. However, in words that indicate how focused on biological difference he continued to be, Jones writes: "There is a healthy suspicion growing that men analysts have been led to adopt an unduly phallo-centric view of the problems in question, the importance of the female organs being correspondingly underestimated" (459). He continues with a snide remark about female fixation on the penis: "Women have on their side contributed to the general mystification by their secretive attitude towards their own genitals and by displaying a hardly disguised preference for interest in the male organ" (459). Perhaps the most interesting implication of the increasing importance attached to the female masculinity complex is the fact that it underscored the importance of bisexuality in females (Freud, 227), while greatly complicating the question of girls' "normal" (230) development toward heterosexuality. Indeed, Freud remarks that "the feminine form of the Oedipus complex . . . is all too often not surmounted by the female at all" (230).

Emphasis on the female masculinity complex resulted in yet another departure within psychoanalytic theory during the 1920s, namely, the emergence of the concept of "womanliness as a masquerade." In her 1929 essay of this title, Riviere argues that the pursuit of masculine ambitions by women is often accompanied by a compensatory masquerade of conventional womanliness. This notion widens the scope of the masculinity complex well beyond the question of the origin of female same-sex desire, since any woman with interests that go beyond the performance of traditional female gender roles might be said to exhibit signs of an unresolved masculinity complex.

Riviere's essay is based on the case study of an American woman, a successful lecturer, who compensated for her competitiveness with men both by flirtatious behavior with older male colleagues and by excelling in the skills of wifely homemaking and female mentorship. Riviere argues that both the seductive behavior and the practice of womanly virtues were motivated by the woman's unconscious anxiety that she would be punished by her father for usurping his prerogatives. The case led Riviere to an insight that undermines the very notion of constitutive gender:

Womanliness . . . could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it—much as a thief will turn out his pockets and

ask to be searched to prove that he has not the stolen goods. The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the “masquerade.” My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing. The capacity for womanliness was there in this woman—and one might even say it exists in the most completely homosexual woman—but owing to her conflicts it did not represent her main development and was used far more as a device for avoiding anxiety than as a primary mode of sexual enjoyment.¹⁵

If Riviere is correct and womanliness is in this sense a masquerade, then the predominance of heterosexuality in women begins to look like a phantasm. There is no essential distinction to be drawn between a successful female professional and the alternately dreaded and ridiculed figure of the “mannish” lesbian. Riviere’s case study bears out this contention. She reports of her patient: “Once, while for a period her husband had had a love-affair with another woman, she had detected a very intense identification with him in regard to the rival woman. It is striking that she had had no homosexual experiences (since before puberty with a younger sister); but it appeared during analysis that this lack was compensated for by frequent homosexual dreams with intense orgasm” (39).

Riviere’s radical perception of the indeterminacy of gender had troubling implications for male analysts. As will become evident below in my discussion of Hall’s portrayal of Joan’s younger sister, Milly, Hall registers the complexity of female psychology in relation not only to the mother-daughter dyad and the female masculinity complex but also to the practice of womanliness as a masquerade. Under the force of these concerns, the notion that either gender *or* sexuality can be determined by primary sexual characteristics yields to an awareness of the psychological *and* social factors that shape biological females.

By attending to relationships in time, Hall avoids what in retrospect appear to be three of the leading weaknesses within male psychoanalytic theory of female sexuality in the 1920s. The first is to take early childhood relations with one’s parents, particularly one’s father, as the structural template of the adult psyche. Although there is an oedipal component to Joan’s incestuous involvement with her mother, nonetheless the unconscious internalization of her relation with her mother is more important than her antagonistic rivalry with her father. Second, the dynamics of the

nuclear family do not suffice to account for Joan's failed promise. Hall again parts from psychoanalytic theory and case studies in her emphasis on how other factors, both external and relational, in this case, a double bind within female friendship, limit Joan's ability to achieve a necessary degree of personal autonomy. A third weakness of psychoanalytic theory that Hall avoids is the relentless biological determinism of Jones's and Freud's writing. Freud, with his frequent references to "bisexuality" as an aspect of "the innate disposition of human beings" (227–28), likely would reject this criticism. Despite disclaimers, however, the importance attached to the penis and to penis-envy grounds male psychoanalysis in the presence or absence of two bodily organs: the penis and the vagina (Jones, 464–65).

The main action of the novel involves the struggle between Elizabeth and Mrs. Ogden over Joan. One aspect has to do with Joan's desire for emotionally and intellectually rewarding work and financial independence. After Joan at age fifteen witnesses Elizabeth seriously hurt in an accident, she decides that she would like to become a doctor. Her father is shocked that she would consider pursuing "an unsexing, indecent profession for a woman"; her mother rejects this path as both "masculine" and vulgar: "There are things that a gentleman can do and things he cannot; no gentleman can enter the medical profession" (110). The other aspect of the conflict is personal. In different ways, both Mrs. Ogden and Elizabeth seek to possess Joan.¹⁶

At his wife's instigation (she does not want her children to attend school with "the offspring of the local tradespeople" [17]), the Colonel has made what both parents eventually see to be a mistaken decision to hire Elizabeth as private tutor for their daughters. At the time, Elizabeth is twenty-six. Born in 1863, she belongs to a generation that falls between the pioneering women born in the 1840s and 1850s and the generation born in the 1870s and 1880s that agitated to win civil, social, and political rights for women. Elizabeth is a member of the first generation of women to enroll in the new foundations for women at Cambridge. Girton College had been founded in 1869 and Newnham in 1871. In 1881, women were permitted for the first time to take the tripos examinations, although they were still denied degrees (Vicinus, 126). Elizabeth, who "had done well at Cambridge," presumably passed the exams: "There were posts open to her." But the jobs didn't pay well. Faced with the option of "life on a pittance" (42) in London or accepting an offer to live with her much older brother, Ralph, at their deceased

uncle's home in Seabourne, she chooses the latter. She recognizes, however, that she has chosen a dead end.

Her predicament reflects a number of limitations faced by young middle-class women of the time. One was what Sir Almoth Wright, Professor of Experimental Pathology at the University of London, regarded as the surplus of women arising from the fact that more female than male infants were born in England. In *Feminism*, a suffragist pamphlet of 1912, Sinclair quotes Wright's complaint that "'the recruiting field for the militant suffragists is the half-million of our excess female population,' the half-million of the unmated."¹⁷ Wright believed that the ranks of feminists were swelled by the sexually "FRUSTRATED" and "THE INCOMPLETE. . . . One side of their nature has undergone atrophy, with the result that they have lost touch with their living fellow men and women" (16).¹⁸ Similar attitudes infected male psychoanalysis. Jones, for example, describes as one of two dominant types among female homosexuals "those who retain their interest in men, but who set their hearts on being accepted by men as one of themselves. To this group belongs the familiar type of women who ceaselessly complain of the unfairness of women's lot and their unjust ill-treatment by men" (467).¹⁹

The number of women receiving higher education continued to be small. For example, at Girton in 1897, 109 women were enrolled, and at Newnham, 166. Employment opportunities were also limited. As late as 1901, fewer than half of spinsters over forty-five were gainfully employed. Of those who were employed, "slightly over 12 percent . . . were in middle-class jobs," mainly in teaching and nursing. In 1901, when Joan is twenty-four, there were only twenty female physicians in England; ten years later there were sixty.²⁰ Given Joan's parents' opposition to her becoming a doctor, the figures indicate how extremely unlikely it is that her ambitions will ever be fulfilled. Likewise, it becomes easier to understand why Elizabeth permits herself to be sucked into life in a dull town with a brother twenty years older than herself and whom she scarcely knows. Vicinus writes: "From 1871 to 1893 Girton, Newnham, Somerville [at Oxford], Royal Holloway, and Alexandra College (Dublin) had matriculated a total of 1,486 students; 680 became teachers, 208 married, and 11 entered medicine. Over half the students at Newnham had become teachers, but the college also had the highest percentage who had married. Education was not an opening up of wider opportunities, . . . but a narrow staircase leading to more education as an ill-paid—but respected—teacher" (177).

In view of these statistics, it is surprising that Joan's initial interest is in becoming a doctor rather than a nurse. Despite the challenges, however, Hall makes Joan's aspiration seem both normal and appropriate. And by representing her within the genre of the bildungsroman, Hall pulls the reader along. The implied expectation that the reader will see the process of the protagonist's successful self-fashioning plays against continual reminders of the odds against Joan's survival, much less her triumph.²¹ Similarly, although economics alone could account for Elizabeth's decision to come to Seabourne, she offers too many explanations for her decision. It is as though she is trying to rationalize behavior that is in fact overdetermined.²² Elizabeth's lapse into domesticity and financial dependence runs counter to the self-conscious ideology of the women's colleges, as does her later decision to marry a man she does not love but who offers her wealth and position in the colonies. Remember that in the decades in question fewer than 20 percent of female matriculants at the new women's colleges chose marriage as a career. Elizabeth is an exception to the rule. She fails to heed Caroline Emilia Stephen's warning to students at Newnham: "One thing which all who live alone certainly need is the power—mainly I believe imaginative—to outline their own lives. And by this I mean the power of marking out distinctly the channels into which one's energies should flow, and for which they should be reserved. People are but too ready to make demands on time and strength not obviously appropriated; and without a distinct outline in one's own mind it is doubly hard not to yield to such demands."²³

Like Joan, but in different ways, Elizabeth is not a conventional young woman. She too is a gender-crosser, though her style differs from that of Joan, who, even at age thirteen sees her as a figure of crossgendered energy: "Joan was thinking: 'She looks like a tree. Why haven't I noticed before how exactly like a tree she is; it must be the green dress. But her eyes are like water, all greeny and shadowy and deep looking—a tree near a pool, that's what she's like, a tall tree. A beech tree? No, that is too spready, a larch tree, that's Elizabeth; a larch tree just greening over'" (34). Even as a prepubescent girl, Joan imagines Elizabeth in terms recognizable as both phallic and vaginal. And on ordinary days, this Daphne-like figure, capable, disciplined, and ascetic, dresses in tailored clothes.

Later, Joan associates this double-gendering with both male virility and female fecundity. One day when Elizabeth is in town with the girls, she is seriously burnt in an unsuccessful attempt to save the life of a serving

woman who rushes into the street with her clothes afire. Joan accompanies Elizabeth home after she receives initial treatment for severe burns to her hands. When they arrive, the young general servant at the house panics, and Joan realizes that she will have to help Elizabeth to bed. In Elizabeth's bedroom, a surprise awaits the girl: "The room was very austere in its cold whiteness; it was like Elizabeth and yet it was not like Elizabeth; like the outward Elizabeth perhaps, but was it like the real Elizabeth? Then her eyes fell upon a great tangle of autumn flowers, standing in a bright blue jar on the chest of drawers; something in the strength and virility of their colouring seemed to gibe and taunt the prim little room; they were there as a protest, or so the girl felt. . . . Elizabeth . . . smiled as she followed the direction of Joan's eyes. 'A part of me loves them, needs them,' she said" (99). Conservative feminists of the Victorian period plus many of the celibate, independently living members of the first generation of New Women advocated social purity: that is, male sexual self-control, monogamy, and infrequent sexual intercourse.²⁴ The austerity of Elizabeth's room suggests an aversion to male-female sexual contact. The flowers, however, suggest that Elizabeth is by no means averse to a double-gendered desire.

Elizabeth and Joan's friendship takes the form of a "rave," the type of friendship that Vicinus suggests characterized relationships between mentors and protégés in the collegiate residences and private schools for girls established and staffed by New Women.²⁵ Raves were embodied, emotional, even passionate relationships but not explicitly sexual. New Women defined their public missions in terms of the purity, compassion, and maternal instinct that characterized them as women. Sexuality was something beastly, to be associated with male desire and vaginal coitus.²⁶ Joan gives a glimpse of this outlook later in the novel when she uses the word *beastly* (160) to characterize her sister's affair with a young tradesman.²⁷ Raves focused on the moral and intellectual fashioning of the student. Discipline and self-discipline were of the essence, with worshipful subordination on one side and loving direction on the other.

Defined at the outset as asexual friendships, the institution of the rave inhibited the possible development of a sexual tie as the younger member approached adulthood and a more nearly equal relation with her superior. The possibility hovers tantalizingly on the horizon of Joan's relationship with her tutor. When Elizabeth's injuries, for example, reduce her to dependence on Joan, Joan reacts with a pleasurable sensation: she "felt that in this new-found intimacy something was lost and something gained. Never

again could Elizabeth represent authority in her pupil's eyes; that aspect of their relationship was lost for ever. . . . But in its place there was something else, something infinitely more intimate and interesting" (100).

For years, Elizabeth fantasizes about living with Joan in a flat in London. Unfortunately, New Woman social relations leave Elizabeth in a state of false consciousness about the full implications of her wish. Construing the plan exclusively in terms of a collaborative enterprise to help Joan achieve the aim of becoming a physician, Elizabeth declares to her:

"Listen. I want you to work as we are doing until you come of age, then I want you to go to Cambridge, as I've often told you, but after that—I want you to make a home with me."

"Elizabeth!"

"Yes. I have a little money put by, not very much, but enough, and I want you to come to London and live there with me. We could jog along somehow; I'd get a job while you studied at the hospital; we'd have a little flat together, and be free and very happy. I've wanted to say this to you for some time and to-day somehow it's all come out; it had to get said sooner or later. Joan, I can't stand Seabourne for many years, and yet as long as you're here I can't get away. . . . How long will you make me stay here, Joan, . . . when we might get free and hustle along with life, when we might be purposeful and tired and happy because we mean something?" (131–32)

The eruption of Elizabeth's desperation speaks to an otherwise unsayable need. Joan, responding, agrees to the proposal, but the warmth of her attachment to Elizabeth is frustrated and befuddled by Elizabeth's insistence on representing their attraction as sexless.

The younger woman, however, is open to taking another view. One of the key moments within Hall's oeuvre is the passage at the end of Book 2 of *The Well of Loneliness* where the protagonist, Stephen Gordon, finds a term for her sense of herself as a masculine woman while reading Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*. A similar occasion arises in *The Unlit Lamp* a few minutes before Elizabeth asks Joan to live with her. In this case, too, a medical textbook provides the opportunity for the two women to make the same sort of discovery that Stephen does. But Elizabeth's recoil against the possibility that there might be something abnormal

about their closeness prohibits either woman from recognizing their relation in a new way. Instead, as they are working together one day, Elizabeth bursts out:

I'm trying to take a scientific interest in the disgusting organs of our disgusting bodies, to learn how and why they act, or rather how and why they don't act, to read patiently and sympathetically about a lot of abnormal freaks, who as far as I can see ought all to be shut up in a lunatic asylum, to understand and condone the physical and mental impulses of hysterics, and I'm doing this all out of scientific interest! Scientific interest! That's why I'm slaving as I never slaved at Cambridge—out of pure scientific interest! Well, I tell you, you're wrong! I don't like medical books and I particularly dislike neurotic people, but it's been enough for me that you do like all this, that you feel that you want to be a doctor and make good in that way. It's not out of scientific interest that I've done it, Joan; it's because of you and your career, it's because I am mad for you to have a future—I've been so from the first, I think— . . . ,” she paused. (130)

Elizabeth's unwillingness to think about her own desires in relation to sexology, her body hatred, and her aversion to sexual touch could not be expressed more clearly than in this passage. It discloses why the offer of a room shared with Elizabeth is not an outcome with which Joan will be able to live. Also as clear is Elizabeth's lack of intellectual curiosity, indeed, her contempt for a certain kind of intellectual desire. This willful limitation of her selfhood is just as deadly to the prospect that she and Joan might spend their future together.

Later, at the moment of crisis in the novel, when Joan at twenty-four has one last chance to leave for London with Elizabeth, the younger woman recognizes how unconventional the step is. She realizes that if she were leaving home to marry a male friend, such as Richard Benson, her mother would not object to her departure. It is because Joan is going to live as a single woman with a female that her mother opposes the move; hence, Elizabeth and Joan

must swim against the current; it was ridiculous, preposterous that because she did not marry she should be forced to live a crippled existence. What real difference could it possibly make to her mother's

loneliness if her daughter shared a flat with Elizabeth instead of with a husband? No difference at all, except in precedent. Then it was only by submitting to precedent that you could be free? What she was proposing seemed cruel now, even to herself; and why? Because it was not softened and toned down by precedent, not wreathed in romance as the world understood romance. “Good God!” she thought bitterly, “can there be no development of individuality in this world without hurting oneself or someone else?” She clenched her fists. “I don’t care, I don’t care! I’ve a right to my life, and I shall go in August. I defy precedent. I’m Joan Ogden, a law unto myself, and I mean to prove it.” (247–48)

Joan’s desire for a life of her own is compromised by the paradoxical sense that she can be “free” only if she remains subservient to her mother.

This double bind is compounded in the relationship with Elizabeth, who offers to support Joan’s personal and professional growth but only on the condition that they take a flat together in London. There is a further double bind insofar as Elizabeth speaks clearly about the full extent of her love—and demands—of Joan too late in the game (190–91). With Elizabeth’s intellectual, emotional, and sexual support, Joan might have succeeded as did other female couples. But the structure of the pair’s relationship in terms of an asexual romantic friendship dictates that Joan will miss the opportunity that Elizabeth seems to be holding open to her. To this reality, one may add Joan (and Hall’s) judgment that female intimacy required a social form as public and normal as marriage if women were to be able to achieve personal and professional fulfillment together. This social transformation would have enabled Elizabeth, personally and publicly, to realize the character of her desire.

One approaches then the conviction so important in *The Well of Loneliness* of the need for the institution of female same-sex marriage. Radical though this insight is, however, in Joan’s attractive, musically talented sister, Milly, who dies at a young age of tuberculosis, Hall presents gender and sexuality in a yet more radical way. Hall represents gendered and sexual difference in Joan as though they are inherent aspects of selfhood. In psychoanalytic terms, this proposition makes sense in terms of Freud’s concept of the bodily ego.²⁸ Much more challenging both to psychoanalysis and to “centuries of custom, centuries of precedent” (*Unlit Lamp*, 247), is the concept of womanliness as masquerade. Milly is as ambitious as Joan and probably a lot more envious of the penis, but she knows “feminine” ways

of achieving these goals: first, in the narcissistic display of concert performance, her chosen field, and, second, in her ability to please men. At home, Milly is her father's favorite. Later, when she learns that her father has squandered in a bad investment the money bequeathed to her and her sister, she embarks on a rash affair with a young admirer. She abruptly drops him after Joan ensures that she will still be able to fulfill her dream of entering the Royal College of Music. Milly's femininity is anything but natural. Rather, it is calculated, in behavior that she learns from her father, to enable her to get what she wants in a world in which daughters seem otherwise to be caught in subjection.

Unlike her sister, Milly actually does manage to leave Seabourne to study in London. In one of the rare glimpses provided by Hall into the lives of female subjects of same-sex desire at the time, when Elizabeth and Joan visit Milly at the Royal College, they find her living among a circle of music students that includes a talented young singer, Harriet Nelson, and her infatuated "youthful admirers" (192). One of them, Rosie Wilmot, later becomes hysterically jealous because Harriet takes an interest in Joan. When Joan subsequently returns to London to retrieve her sister, who is being sent home because of her failing health, Harriet, ignoring the seriousness of the situation, first teases and then propositions Joan: "Come up and see me sometimes" (215), she purrs.

In its final section, the novel jumps forward nineteen years to 1920, when Joan Ogden is forty-three and female subjects of same-sex desire have not only emerged in public but have succeeded in becoming fashionable. The passage of time permits Hall to mark the transition to the postwar period; it also provides an opportunity for her to assess the change in manners. Shortly after arriving with her mother for their annual vacation at a hotel at Lynton in North Devon, Joan sits alone in the lobby:

Two young girls with bobbed hair and well-tailored clothes had come on to the veranda from the garden.

One of them was in riding-breeches. They sat down with their backs to the open window, through which their voices drifted. "Have you seen that funny old thing with the short grey hair?"

"Yes, you mean the one at lunch? Wasn't she killing? Why moiré ribbon instead of a proper necktie?"

"And why a pearl brooch across her stiff collar?"

"I believe she's what they used to call a 'New woman,'" said the girl in breeches, with a low laugh. "Honey, she's a forerunner, that's what

she is, a kind of pioneer that's got left behind. I believe she's the beginning of things like me. Oh! hang it all, I've left my gloves in the garden; come on, we must look for them." And they went down the steps again.

Joan laid down the newspaper and stared after them. Of course they had not known that she was there. "A forerunner, a kind of pioneer that's got left behind." . . . She saw the truth of this all round her, in women of the type that she had once been, that in a way she still was. Active, aggressively intelligent women, not at all self-conscious in their tailor-made clothes, not ashamed of their cropped hair; women who did things well, important things; women who counted and who would go on counting; smart, neatly put together women, looking like well-bred young men. They might still be in the minority and yet they sprang up everywhere; one saw them now even at Seabourne during the summer season. They were particular about their clothes, in their own way; the boots they wore were thick but well cut, their collars immaculate, their ties carefully chosen. But she, Joan Ogden, was the forerunner who had failed, the pioneer who had got left behind, the prophet who had feared his own prophecies. These others had gone forward, some of them released by the war, others who had always been free-lances, and if the world was not quite ready for them yet, if they had to meet criticism and ridicule and opposition, if they were not all as happy as they might be, still they were at least brave, whereas she had been a coward, conquered by circumstances. (284)

Joan is aware of the waste of her potential, an awareness made the more painful as a result of her momentary exposure to how others see her. More painful, too, because of the semi-cruel carelessness of a pair of young women with whom she identifies. The *new* New Women see themselves as the heirs of New Women who were forerunners, pioneers, and prophets. But the young couple also regards these women as having proven themselves unable to overcome the duties required of them as daughters and sisters. They have lacked the courage to dress as women who are the equals of men. And they have not called a female friend on vacation with them "Honey" in public.

The passage signifies in other ways as well. For one thing, it indicates how large a part semiotics played in the lifestyle of young women who competed with men and chose other young women as their intimates.²⁹ And it indicates the part that money and status played in their boldness. They required advantages in order to play the new parts that they scripted

for themselves. Joan responds in these terms. Minutes before closing time, she runs into town to make a purchase of “some stiff collars, the newest pattern . . . and . . . some neckties.” On the way back to the hotel, however, she despairs: “Pioneers that got left behind didn’t count; they were lost” (285).

If the passage situates Joan as a representative of the generation born in 1880 and the young women as representatives of those born in 1900, where is Hall situated as author of the book in which they appear? Joan is almost exactly the same age as Hall, who was born in 1880. During the years in which she completed the novel and searched for a publisher, Hall was preoccupied with reinventing herself, with the help of Troubridge, as one of those “women who did things well, important things; women who counted and who would go on counting” (284). In this respect, Hall can be more closely associated with the young couple, whose peers she saw at first hand in the Soho restaurants and night clubs that she and her partner frequented during these years. Hall identified with these women’s smartness and ambition. As a woman who had recently won a lawsuit against a man who had accused her of gross immorality with other women, she also shared their boldness.³⁰

Asymmetries in the relation between the two young women, however, register a degree of skepticism on Hall’s part regarding the stability of Sapphic pair-bonding in the 1920s. For one thing, the young woman in riding breeches refers to the new breed of independent women as “things like me,” not us. Her friend evidently has not yet come out; she is likely bisexual, perhaps primarily heterosexual or at least was so until the breeches-wearer came along. Is she in Devon to test the waters? Her cutting remark, spoken where Joan can overhear, likewise has a defensive air—as if the young woman needs to establish her bona fides with her new (?) lover (?) at the expense of a failed older woman. Moreover, while the first woman clearly has spirit, it also seems likely that she has yet to win her spurs as part of the vanguard. There is promise here, but accomplishment waits on a future date.

Richard Benson is an acquaintance of Joan’s childhood, who at the time had encouraged Joan’s ambitions for a career in medicine. Both youngsters wanted to become doctors, and Richard showed interest in her as a friend, an intellectual equal, and as perhaps exactly the right life-partner for him. As a young woman, Joan was drawn to Richard, but she rejected his proposal of marriage. When she meets him again at the resort after having lost

track of him for many years, he renews the proposal; again she rejects it. Benson understands Joan and her predicament well. He seems like an ideal match—except for the fact that he is of the wrong sex. Nonetheless, Hall writes him into the novel in order to show that the competition between men and women does not mean that affection, understanding friendship, and collaboration are impossible between them. His inclusion also demonstrates by contrast why “marriage,” so to speak, to Elizabeth is not possible: because although she is of the right sex and may love Joan, she lacks Richard’s intellectual curiosity and commitment to public service and because he at least knows the object of his desires.

Benson’s presence also helps make a theoretical point. Hall brought to the topic of female sexuality in the 1920s the concept of a masculinity that she calls female “virility” and that she conceptualizes not through the available Freudian models but in terms of a dynamic process that occurs within the phenomenology of engenderment. She would continue to consider the possibilities of female virility in a number of different contexts in her subsequent novels, including the possibility of heterosexual female virility. As for *The Unlit Lamp*, it is the first major accomplishment of her long-wished-for career as a novelist. It fulfilled a promise that she had made to Batten in 1913,³¹ when Batten had attempted to forward Hall’s prospects by sending her draft short stories to a sympathetic editor. The step led to an invitation from William Heinemann to lunch, at which, Troubridge reports, he told Hall, “You will set to work at once and write me a novel, and when it is finished I will publish it” (41). It took more than a decade for Heinemann’s prediction to be fulfilled. When it was, Hall dedicated the novel “TO MABEL VERONICA BATTEN in deep affection, gratitude and respect.” The term *virility* is significant here as well because the writing of the novel depended on Hall’s collaboration with two long-term lovers: first Batten and subsequently Troubridge (69). For Hall, virility, though it is public in character and in this context connotes professional achievement, is also inherent, something of one’s core sense of selfhood. Were this perception to be received with full seriousness, female sexuality would need to be completely rethought. Only with the development of the discussion of transgendered and transsexual existence in the final decade of the twentieth century did this fact come into focus.

Hall brings both to feminist and to psychoanalytic discourse of her day a willingness to see sexual desire between women not as a problem but as a necessary promise of modern life. Desire offered a motive both for building committed relations and for grounding middle-class women’s efforts to

enter the professions. The pro-sex drive of the novel is likewise evident in the title finally chosen for it, at Troubridge's suggestion, as she reports (69). The phrase "the unlit lamp" appears in "The Statue and the Bust," a poem by Robert Browning about two lovers who, for reasons of convenience, delay the consummation of their mutual desire until the possibility of its realization is foreclosed by the death of both. The book's most powerful and lasting concern is not the naturalistic struggle for survival implied in *Octopi*, Hall's first working title for the novel, nor the ironic moralizing of the second, *After Many Days*,³² but the "sin" of unrealized love and the failure to build a life together.³³ On this point, Hall is in conversation with the young couple on the veranda.