



PROJECT MUSE®

---

## Radclyffe Hall

Richard Dellamora

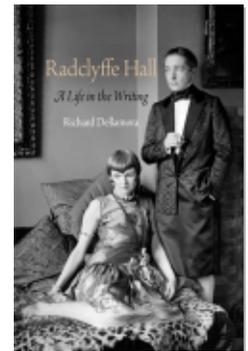
Published by University of Pennsylvania Press

Dellamora, Richard.

Radclyffe Hall: A Life in the Writing.

University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.

Project MUSE.[muse.jhu.edu/book/2222](https://muse.jhu.edu/book/2222).



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/2222>

# 11

---

## Oneself as The Other

### Hall, Evguenia Souline, and the Final Writing

**The final chapter** of this book focuses on three sets of writing, each of which is premised on Hall's involvement with Evguenia Souline: Hall's letters to Souline, published for the first time more than half a century after Hall's death; the incomplete manuscripts of *Emblem Hurlstone*, a novel that Hall undertook during the period of suspense after she and Souline had met but before they became lovers; and the typescript and printed versions of *The Sixth Beatitude* (1936). Hall repeatedly assured Souline that she provided the inspiration for both novels. But the letters also include the only meta-commentary on her approach to the writer's work that Hall has left us. She offers insight into the various roles that she believed auto/biography plays in the work of a novelist. She also provides insights into a philosophy of Greek desire grounded in Sappho's lyric utterance. Likewise, Hall reflects upon the connections between romantic passion and her sense of the unification of existence in mystical experience.

In this late work, Hall continues to expand her sense of crossgendered experience, both her own and that of others. *The Sixth Beatitude* includes new experiments in cross gender, for example in the "faithful friendship"

of Watercrease-Bill and Jumping-Jimmie, the sole portrait of a male homosexual couple to appear in her novels. She emphasizes female virility, a concept foregrounded in *The Well of Loneliness* but signs of which can be found as early as the manuscript of *Michael West*. But now female virility is perceived to be variable in relation to sexual object-choice. Hannah Bullen, the female protagonist and Souline-figure of *The Sixth Beatitude*, is a highly sexuate single mother strongly attracted to manly men.

### *Emblem Hurlstone*

Hall met Souline at the spa of Bagnoles de l'Orne in Normandy in July 1934. She had been hired from Paris to nurse Troubridge, who was suffering from an attack of enteritis.<sup>1</sup> Una recovered, and Souline was soon back in Paris. Hall, however, was falling in love. By the time that Hall and Troubridge reached the northern Italian resort town of Sirmione on July 31, Hall was determined to see Souline again when she and Troubridge returned to England at the end of their vacation. When Troubridge refused Hall permission to visit Souline alone in Paris, Hall reluctantly permitted her partner to accompany her but left her cooling her heels alone at their hotel while Hall was elsewhere becoming Souline's lover. About this encounter, Hall later wrote to Souline: "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."<sup>2</sup>

In Sirmione, Hall's sexual frustration found release in writing as she began work on the manuscript of a new novel, *Emblem Hurlstone*. Hurlstone, the protagonist, is a scholar and successful popularizer of classical Greek culture. Traumatized by his mother's painful final illness and finding himself blocked as a writer after her death, Emblem sells the family home and departs for Venice, where he has arranged to meet a pedantic German scholar. Traveling by rail through northern Italy, he glimpses the town of Alcione (Sirmione) across Lake Garda and on a whim decides to stop there.

Ambivalent about her reputation as the author of a scandalous best seller, Hall in a letter to Souline referred to the new work as "a perfectly normal love story—thanks be" (88). Nonetheless, there are hints of sexual abnormality. For instance, though nominally heterosexual, Hurlstone, repelled by the prospect of marriage with its accompanying sexual demands, is celibate. Continuing in her letter, Hall notes without elaborating that the manuscript reflects her interest in "abnormal psychology" (89). The

The  
MASTER of the HOUSE

To Evgenia, in memory of someone  
called Sorchina that I met in Bagdad  
in 1934.

The quiet of the evening sky,  
The throbbing silence of the night,  
Secured upon the Indian air sword,  
Day after dawn, complete, fulfilled;  
All merciful and gracious things combined  
in the eternal thought made visible & set  
through her —

At least I dreamed that it was so . . . . .

Radclyffe Hall.

Paris. July 24<sup>th</sup> 1936.

21. Holograph inscription by Radclyffe Hall to Evgenia Souline. Half-title page. *The Master of the House*. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin, Texas.

location of Alcione/Sirmione likewise touches on this preoccupation since, as Hall points out in chapter 2, Sirmione was the home of Catullus, “a pagan poet,” well known as a translator of Sappho and a lover of women and boys.<sup>3</sup> Also significant is the implicit analogy drawn by Hall between Hurlstone and Johann Winckelmann, a classical Greek archaeologist who became the chief critical theorist of “Anacreontism” within late eighteenth-century Neoclassicism. This aesthetic favored references to erotic themes in Greek mythology over the strenuous subjects associated with Republican Rome. The tendency is named after Anacreon, an early Greek lyric and pastoral poet often linked with his contemporary, Sappho. Cicero said of him what might have been said of both poets: “The poetry of Anacreon deals solely with love.” His vogue lasted well into the nineteenth century with such poets as Gautier and Baudelaire both writing verses in his honor. Winckelmann’s particular contribution was to elevate the ephebic male youth of classical Greek sculpture, vase drawing, and poetry “to the apogee of male beauty,” indeed as the apogee of beauty in general.<sup>4</sup> His sculptural ideal was the androgynous youth, sometimes female but usually male. In his criticism and in the contemporary art that it influenced, gender and sexuality shift with opposite-sex, male same-sex, and male age-differentiated desire all being signified in gentle polymorphosis.<sup>5</sup>

In Alcione, Hurlstone accepts an invitation to stay at the lakeside villa of a new acquaintance, Paolo, a young Italian doctor and lover of the classics, who quickly becomes devoted to him. The intensifying relationship is steered in a conventional direction after Hurlstone meets Paolo’s wife, Felia, a Polish refugee.<sup>6</sup> “Normal” desire clicks in, though there is nothing normal about the intensity of the obsession to which Hurlstone quickly surrenders himself. The remainder of the text deals with his predatory pursuit of the young woman, whose own desires remain masked until nearly the point at which the manuscript breaks off. What Hall had in mind for the couple is not specified except for an enigmatic remark in a letter of December 1, 1934, to Souline: “I knew what my people would do, and when they would end it, and how they would end it.”<sup>7</sup> Likely, the couple “would” commit adultery, which they would subsequently renounce out of regard for Paolo. “How they would end it” sounds ominous but most probably by Hurlstone deciding to leave town.

Hall describes Hurlstone’s first view of Alcione in a crossed-out paragraph that conjures it as a sort of beautiful mirage rising from the surface of the lake.<sup>8</sup> As such, it becomes another of those places of fulfilled desire,

somewhere out of this world, referenced by Baudelaire in *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857).<sup>9</sup> Hurlstone's consciously unmotivated stopover speaks to Hall's view of the character of sexual desire as unconsciously driven. Hurlstone "just happens" to be drawn to Alcione much as Paolo "just happens" to be attracted to him and Hurlstone "just happens" to be attracted to Paolo's wife.<sup>10</sup> For Hall, such apparent misdirections switch her characters out of the dead routines of ordinary existence and thereby open the possibility of personal transformation.

The manuscript of *Emblem Hurlstone* ends shortly after Felia confesses her love for Emblem: "She . . . realized to the utmost his weakness, and souted [*sic*] to fall back upon her own strength, only to find that this also was weakness. . . . For nothing was strong in them now . . . but . . . their love, . . . and the terrible and . . . urgent need that they felt to see each other, to hear each other, to be able to touch each other's hands— . . . , only that, to be able to touch each others [*sic*] hands. Anything, . . . so long as they two were not . . . parted."<sup>11</sup> It makes sense that the manuscript cease here since, as Hall says in the letter, the question on her mind when the story came to her was whether Souline would respond to Hall's desire. Once Hall received a positive answer in Paris in September, the manuscript had served its psychic purpose and Hall left it unfinished. Souline's secret (and, for Hall, that of eternal Woman) had been unveiled.

Emblem and Felia share an adulterous desire that must be sacrificed in the name of loyalty to the husband whose idealism Felia admires but for whom she feels no sexual attraction. Felia's marital status and Emblem's friendship for Paolo block the pair from becoming lovers in an impasse resembling that which occurs in the popular film *Casablanca* (1942).<sup>12</sup> In the stand-off, the subject-positioning of Felia-as-Souline/Woman shifts from one reflecting Hall's obsessive desire and uncertainty to the subject-position to which Troubridge called Hall, namely, that of the mate who would choose not to violate her marriage vows. The novel could not be finished for two reasons: a) because Emblem/Hall later in 1934 received a positive response from Souline/Felia; and b) because Hall, the celebrity activist, was unwilling publicly to expose and thereby to affirm her infidelity. The marriage vow needed to be maintained—even after it had been decisively broken in Paris in September and in Souline's passionate sojourn with Hall in England two months later. Nonetheless, the manuscript served its psychic purpose in delivering to Hall a Felia/Souline corresponding with Hall's needs at a time when matters were in doubt.

## Redirected Desire

Even though Hall would eventually announce that she was abandoning *Emblem Hurlstone* in order to undertake a new novel, she remained convinced that Souline was revitalizing her work. In an important letter, dated significantly Easter 1935, Hall writes: “As you know, before I met you I was dry—as dry as bones—then I fell in love and that stirred the fluid again, that awoke me, energised me, made me come alive—and I began writing” (121).<sup>13</sup> She acknowledges, however, that *Emblem Hurlstone* had turned out to be not “the right book” (121). Instead, she had begun another, eventually titled *The Sixth Beatitude*, that was completed in October 1935 and published the following year. “Darling, I am working as though possessed—and so I am possessed by inspiration—thanks be. But darling, I have a great surprise for you—it is not the book about Sirmione, no, it is quite another book and quite another story. This is a story that I have had in my mind for a long, long time; it is about the very poor, the very poor of this Sussex. You see, having lived among them I know them inside out, and the book is my best work—yes it is that. For some years this book has been nagging at me, and now it has taken me completely” (120).

The new book was to chart the decline and extinction of yet another traditional community in the face of modern life. Crofts Lane, the locus of the lower working-class types described in the novel, is based on Hall’s experience of Hucksteps Row, a lane of slum housing near her home, the Forecastle, in Rye.<sup>14</sup> The major event that occurs during the year traversed in the novel is the announcement that the row of half-timbered, Elizabethan cottages is to be razed and the impoverished inhabitants moved to newly built Council houses facing the railway line. In December, the process is accelerated when a fire sweeping through the lane during a gale destroys the cottages.

An analogue to Hall’s approach to this community may be found in Michael Powell’s 1937 film, *The Edge of the World*, which explores the removal of Highlanders from the isle of St. Kilda in the Outer Hebrides. The film begins with the following title:

The slow shadow of Death is falling  
upon the Outer Isles of Scotland.  
This is the story of one of them—and  
of all of them.<sup>15</sup>

Powell and other ethnographic filmmakers of the 1920s and 1930s found a “clean, primitive honesty”<sup>16</sup> in the remote communities where they filmed. Hall emphasizes not only the spontaneous vitality of her characters but also what she sees to be their biological, social, and cultural degeneracy, characteristics troped in the novel in terms of the “gipsy” blood that taints the members of Bullen family.<sup>17</sup> While the unself-conscious racialism and classism of Hall’s portrayal of the people of Crofts Lane is impossible to ignore or excuse, she also details objective grounds of their immiseration: inadequate income and job opportunities, low wages for long hours of labor, unsafe working conditions, inadequate access to medical care, dependence on the dole, the humiliation of being forced into the Union house, and the reliance of entire families on the Old Age Pension as their sole source of income. She also sees positive aspects of lower working-class life, in particular, in domestic and communal solidarity. And there can be no doubt of Hall’s compassion, condescending though it sometimes is.

Hannah Bullen’s labor as a maid-of-all-work supports her extended family. Like a number of protagonists in other novels by Hall, Hannah is an attractive, sexuate woman with a slender, boyish physicality. Out of the ordinary for Hall, however, in this novel the sexual desire of the boy-woman is directed not toward other women but toward men. In addition to Hannah, the chief presence in the novel is Romney Marsh, a leading feature of the landscape of East Sussex. In keeping with the naturalism and simplification of narrative form in the novel, Hall structures the chapters in terms of the months of a single calendar year. Hannah finds pleasure and a reason for existence in the familiar world of marsh, sea, sailing ships, wind and tides, and lunar and seasonal cycles that surround her. At the same time, she is shamed by the feckless poverty of her family and by her own out-of-wedlock motherhood. The mother of two young daughters at the start of the novel, during its course, she becomes pregnant yet again. Because of her reverence for life, she is unwilling to consider an abortion. As a result, by year’s end she faces the certain loss of her job at the home of the local vicar and the consequent financial desperation of her family, including the possible loss of her children to state care.

If Hall was pleased with the normal sexuality of the protagonists of *Emblem Hurlstone*, she must have been even more so with Hannah and her lover, a local gardener and male of bullish physicality named Michael Paine. Troubridge certainly was.<sup>18</sup> Hall’s publisher appears to have seen the novel in similar fashion. The cover design and text of the wrapper ignore the

novel's transgressive and sexual force. Instead, the book is presented as a heterosexual romance directed to female readers. On the cover appears a drawing of a high-waisted, slender, young rural woman, with wash basket in hand and clothes flying in the wind on a makeshift clothesline. She looks across the marsh, in which a river serpentine its way to the sea.

The publisher has done everything possible to make the book seem safe, high minded, and a bit dull. Except for the title, selected at Troubridge's suggestion, he also plays down the novel's mythic resonances: classical, Christian, and Wagnerian. The text on the wrapper further positions the novel in the descriptive, rural/naturalist/radical mode of Thomas Hardy and late Victorian humanist dissidence generally.

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* This, the sixth beatitude of the Scriptures, must indeed embrace Hannah Bullen, the woman whose thirty-first year Radclyffe Hall describes in this new novel. For she assuredly was as pure in heart as she was honest of mind, simple of speech and straight of limb. . . .

. . . Thus Hannah Bullen rises from the pages of this book as the very spirit of the Romney Marsh, a living monument of that English life which has wrested a living from its green stretches this thousand years.

“Thus” is a non sequitur.

Only when the reader arrives at a passage in the novel where Hall identifies Hannah with “the life-force” does one realize that the novel is not operating as a mode of moral discourse. Defending Hannah against her hardworking, respectable, upwardly mobile brother, Hall writes: “He saw Hannah as a loose-living, shameless woman, who had taken her pleasure where she could find it; nor did he perceive that her gravest faults were one with her highest and noblest virtues; that the life-force, be it ardent enough, may flow into many and divers channels, so that her fine generosity, her will to work, her will to endure, her will to indulge the desires of her flesh, her will to be fruitful, her will to mother were all one and the same—the outcome of that force that she could not control because it lay far beyond the range of her poor understanding” (*SB*, 44).

The sole signals in the jacket blurb of Hall's unconventional take on Hannah's desire occur in the description of her as straight-limbed and in the phallicism of the verb “rises.” In these allusions to what I will later term Hannah's female virility, Hall uses opposite-sex sexual desire to interweave

RADCLYFFE HALL  
The Sixth Beatitude



22. Jacket cover. *The Sixth Beatitude*. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin, Texas.

male virility, female fecundity, and same-sex desire in ways that undermine the novel's heterosexual publicity. In its unfolding, Hall's novel will negate common-sense gender distinctions.

### Thinking Sex and Gender Otherwise

The chapters of *The Sixth Beatitude* are named after the months of the year, but in some instances more than one chapter bears the name of a particular month. For instance, the novel opens with three chapters entitled "January." At the end of the third of these, Hall introduces two old men, Watercrease-Bill and Jumping-Jimmie. Although the two have no connection with the main action of the novel, Hall emphasizes them by placing their inset story at the end of the novel's first movement. "A queer couple," who "passed their days in an almost complete isolation," the pair are virtual chthonic guardians of the lane, near whose entrance they live in a "tumble-down shed . . . , not fit for pigs."<sup>19</sup> No one can remember when Bill and Jimmie first came to live there, and despite contradictory rumors, no one knows where they came from: "They themselves said never a word that could throw the least light on their previous history. Precisely how they lived was a puzzle, for apart from the old-age pension they had nothing" (*SB*, 32–33). The narrator provides one hint that the dwellers of Crofts Lane ignore: "They spoke as men speak in far better conditions, they had not a trace of the Sussex accent" (34).

When introduced, Jumping-Jimmie, so-called because of his St. Vitus's Dance, is suffering from the cold, lice, and hunger. Arguing with Bill over their meager dinner, he laments: "I wish I were dead." Watercrease-Bill responds anxiously: "'Oh, come on, I'm sorry I nagged,' he told him; 'it's the cold, it always gets on my nerves—blessed are they who live in the tropics! Come on, don't sulk, I've apologised and no one can do more than that, now can they?' Very neatly he divided the fish from the bone, then he covered a thick slice of bread with dripping: 'Eat,' he coaxed, 'eat your supper to please me, Jim.' And he fed his despondent friend with his fingers, thrusting the food deftly into his mouth as occasion offered between the twitchings" (35).

In March, Jimmie dies and Bill, removed to a Union house, fasts to death. In describing Jimmie's death, Hall comes closest to adopting the

tone of public rhetorical address that one hears often in *The Well of Loneliness*. The narrator, however, also witnesses Jim's death from Bill's vantage. The lines suggest that the lives of the two men have been shaped since youth by a sexual scandal that ostracized them from work and family. The passage also suggests that their transgression has been not only sexual but gendered. Both—or at least one—have been “womanish.”

Death was smoothing the lines out of Jimmie's face and rubbing the distortions of age from his features, so that Bill saw him as he had been in the earliest years of their faithful friendship. Saw his nose with its delicately formed nostrils and its aquiline bridge; saw his heavy eyelids; saw his mouth, rather full in the underlip, rather womanish-weak and inclined to be wilful. At least Bill fancied that he saw these things—and who shall presume to say that he did not?

Death was wiping the work stains from Jimmie's hands, so that they looked very white and useless. His almond-shaped nails were no longer torn, they had grown, or so it appeared to Bill. Very beautiful hands they appeared to Bill—and who shall presume to say that they were not?

Death was gradually straightening Jimmie's limbs. He seemed a long man, lying there on his pallet. A long, slim, elegant man he seemed, or rather that was how Bill now saw him; a long, slim, and finely proportioned man—and who shall presume to say that he was not? (*SB*, 62)

Hall often associates the psychic isolation of male homosexuals with a compensatory overinvestment in physical beauty. For example, Hurlstone, the sexually ambiguous, middle-class professional, betrays this feeling-complex. Here, however, Hall shows how an emphasis on the beauty of the upper-class male body can become something else as a result of pair-bonding of long duration in the midst of punitive deprivation and ultimate loss. Representations of effeminate men in Hall's novels tend to be highly ambivalent. In this passage, however, a “womanish” character is redeemed by commitment and sacrifice.

Transgressive engenderment is something that Jimmie and Bill share with the novel's female protagonist. Hall marks it in the first of several verbally similar descriptions that occur in the novel. Hannah is described as “tall: her body suggested a branch denuded of leaves, it was stark and strong. The beauty of her body lay in this strength which gave it a kind of

gaunt dignity. The dignity of toil—that was what you felt about Hannah, that was why you looked at her twice: at her large gnarled hands that held with precision, at her large sure feet that trod masterfully, at her grey steadfast eyes that saw life as it was, and seeing life neither feared nor despised it” (*SB*, 2). The typescript of the novel in the National Archives of Canada includes few emendations. One that does appear, however, is highly significant. In chapter 9, “May,” Hannah meets Michael Paine for a possible lover’s assignation. As with Bill, Hall enters Hannah’s subjectivity: “He smelt good, she thought. He smelt of the earth that still clung to his clothes and discoloured his hands; she could feel the dried earth embedded in the furrows at the back of his neck where her own hands clasped him, and she knew that his skin had been roughened by it. A proper man, lusty and masterful; a man claiming his birthright, that was what he was. She could understand this, it seemed natural to her—she herself had been one who had claimed her birthright. It was good, very good to stand close to a man, to feel his strength, his vitality. . . . She herself had been one who had claimed her birthright.”<sup>20</sup> In the typescript, Hall crosses out the word *vitality* and writes in the word *virility*. The substitution is a key one, revealing her sense that virility, in men and women, is synonymous with life itself.<sup>21</sup>

The novel affords a more ambiguous instance of gender-crossing in an incident involving Hannah’s favored young daughter, Ermie. In August, Michael’s mother-in-law, Mrs. Osborne, arrives to care for her daughter, who has failed to regain her strength after the birth of her third child. Mrs. Osborne, who decides to rent the one good cottage standing in Crofts Lane, quickly registers her disapproval of the other inhabitants, particularly the Bullens. She is especially cruel to Hannah, with whose illegitimate children Mrs. Osborne forbids her grandchildren to play. When Ermie, confused and hurt, one day asks her mother why young Walt has been forbidden to play with her, Hannah, bursts out: “ ’Cause she’s a bloody bitch!” (*SB*, 143). Later Ermie and Sid, a neighbor’s child, get into mischief:

That evening, when Ermie was feeling more cheerful, she went off by herself in search of Sid who usually had a nice bit of chalk by him. And she borrowed his chalk, after which she and Sid crept round to Mrs. Osborne’s side wall. And more out of fun than resentment Ermie drew a grotesquely hideous face under which she printed in large, crooked type:

“This bloody bich is Mrs. Osbin.”

“Yer aren’t spelt bitch proper, yer aren’t,” Sid told her. “Now I’m going to write somethin’ what’s worse than bitch—it’s somethin’ as our old cat’s always doin’.”

A fearful upheaval there was the next morning. (*SB*, 143–44)

But the neighbors stand by the children.

The incident turns on the question of the maternal function of females. Mrs. Osborne condemns Hannah because she has sex—and bears children—out of wedlock. In this respect, it is Hannah who is a bitch. But Mrs. Osborne is a bitch in the more significant sense of failing properly to nurture her young ones. Her daughter is sickly as are her grandchildren. The likelihood that Mrs. Osborne has been a neglectful parent is reinforced by the fact that when Mrs. Paine falls ill with double pneumonia and Mrs. Osborne is called to help her, she “put a young niece of hers in charge [of the children]; a scatter-brained girl. Hannah didn’t trust her” (*SB*, 254). On the night of the disastrous fire, the children are placed in danger because the girl has left them alone at home while she has gone off to “the pictures” (*SB*, 259). Hannah, responding instinctively, dies trying to rescue the children from the flames. Indirectly, Mrs. Osborne is responsible both for endangering her grandchildren and for Hannah’s death.

This vignette also functions in an auto/biographical register. Ermie publicly protests against the mistreatment that she and her mother have received from Mrs. Osborne. The incident speaks to Hall’s protective identification with daughters and abused young girls; it also speaks to her self-identification as such a daughter. As though Ermie’s action were an image in a dream, individual figures signify severally. In her letters to Souline of the time, Hall frequently refers to Souline as *her* child. At the same time, Hall regarded herself as an object of abuse at the hands of her own mother. As cat/bitch/witch/substituted mother/bad mother, Mrs. Osborne parallels Hall’s own mother. Likewise, the misspelled word, *bich*, calls to mind Hall’s dyslexia. Curious in this series of superimposed rhetorical figures is Ermie’s alliance with a young member of the opposite sex. Sid supplies the chalk with which Ermie draws and writes. Such alliances are rare in Hall’s life or fiction. And when one is attempted, the woman in question usually resists support from a male. In terms of Hall’s thinking about crossed gender in this novel, Sid as sidekick suggests an attempt by Hall to integrate opposite-sex relations and paternal potency with the experience of female gender-crossing.<sup>22</sup> Ermie/Sid functions in effect as a composite

figure of the he-she. As I have suggested, however, the composite also draws Sid into a web of phantasmatic female relations, both fictional and autobiographical. Experimenting, Hall works along both lines in the novel. Finally, the public character of Ermie's protest against females put at a disadvantage echoes Hall's characteristic posture as an activist. In *The Sixth Beatitude*, she defends Ermie and Hannah as she had earlier defended both herself and "my own poor kind" (33).<sup>23</sup>

### Autobiographical Registration: The Self as Other

The preceding paragraph exemplifies the license involved in auto/biographical recontextualizations of fictional material. Literary texts are subject to conscious control, although Hall's ideology of literary production, which finds a powerful analogy in unconscious communication "coming through very fast" (*Your John*, 121), provides a historical basis for the kind of reading I have suggested. As we will see in this section, Hall was highly aware of the shifting boundary between conscious and unconscious meaning in her work. Indeed, as a psychologist, she may be at her best in tracing this wavering border. Nonetheless, for the literary critic or biographer such readings are necessarily speculative. They do, however, have a heuristic value, and they are pertinent to the political project of Hall's work and more generally of later feminist and queer critique. In this instance, the reading offered above reinforces the need to protest against abuse—of children, of daughters, of transgressive women (in the novel, out-of-wedlock or alcoholic mothers), of gender-transgressive individuals, of members of sexual minorities, including feminine males, and, in this novel, of the economically impoverished. Responding to an early letter in which Souline commented that Hall writes about outsiders, Hall connects this identification with her own self-identification as a he-she: "My work and why is it that the people [*sic*] I write of are so very often lonely people? Are they? I think that perhaps you may be right. I greatly feel the loneliness of the soul—nearly every soul is more or less lonely. Then again: I have been called the writer of 'misfits.' And it may be that being myself a 'misfit,' for as you know, beloved, I am a born invert, it may be that I *am* a writer of 'misfits' in one form or another—I think I understand them—their joys & their sorrows, indeed I know I do, and all the misfits of this world are lonely, being conscious that they differ from the rank and file" (78).

In a series of letters written to Souline, Hall takes a number of different positions as to how autobiographical *Emblem Hurlstone* and *The Sixth Beatitude* are. In a letter written on October 29, 1935, while “some of the old cottages” in Hucksteps Row were being torn down, she responds to a question from Souline by flatly denying that her fiction is autobiographical: “I never write my own life—I could not, though my own life often gives me ideas which are used up in a different set of circumstances. This must surely be so with all authors” (137). The actual situation, however, is more complex. First of all, as the letters indicate, Hall’s autobiographical “I” cannot be defined in terms of a single gender. Rather, hers is a continually varying performance of gender. At one point, she regrets the physiological limits that prevent her from inseminating Souline: “Had I been a man I would have given you a child” (97). But at another she speaks in the idiom of the male lover: “You belong to me and don’t you forget it. . . . I took your virginity” (140); “I kneel down and worship you my most blessed woman—you who for my sake became a woman” (71). More frequently, however, Hall casts their relationship in terms of the dyad of mother-child or mother-daughter; she addresses Souline as “Beloved child” (87), “beloved child of my body, beloved child and woman in one” (121). Earlier, Hall describes their connection as procreative: they have given birth to a child, namely, the manuscript of *Emblem Hurlstone*: “Our child is sleeping for the moment; its trouble lies in the cutting of its third tooth. In other words while I have re-written that Chapter III and like it much better, I am still not perfectly content” (85).

In contrast to the presentation of her own engenderment, Hall attempts to fix Souline as singularly feminine. She even identifies her with the New Stone Age woman that Miss Ogilvy dreams of in “Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself.” This primitive woman presumably is all natural. But New Stone Age man names her woman in the language of poetry. Hall does so likewise: “As the man of the stone-age says to his mate in . . . ‘Miss Ogilvy’ so I say to you: ‘Hut of peace for a man after battle’” (81). Hall believes that early language was metaphoric; likewise, Souline’s womanliness is a metaphoric construction. But Hall also believes that a woman becomes a woman by being initiated into sexual love—as she has taught Souline to love. Referring again to their first lovemaking in Paris, Hall writes, “You . . . for my sake became a woman” (71). And when Souline expresses fear that in having succumbed sexually to another woman she has revealed herself to be abnormal, Hall, rejecting the idea, tells Souline to say to herself: “I’m a normal

woman, and when my John loves me my response is normal—my body loves John and John gives it joy—and will give it that joy many, many times” (69). Normal women, however, as the sexologists and Hall believed, experience sexual attraction primarily to men. From the beginning of the relationship, then, Hall feared that Souline would betray her with a man. Hence, even when Hall prefers to think of gender as single, doing so provokes immediate distrust of the other and lack of confidence in Hall’s own gendered hybridity.

The unstable performative and rhetorical engenderment registered by the “I” of the love letters indicates that even in genres that may appear to be straightforwardly autobiographical, a text in the “I” may be no simple thing. The ontological and epistemological uncertainty attending gender, moreover, is trumped by uncontrolled psychological projection. Over and over again, Hall claims that she and Souline are one. “I feel as though I were you, as though I had lost my innocence to love, as you lost yours, my Souline. I felt that first day [in Paris] when I came to your room as nervous [*sic*] and shy as a boy of 16” (100). And later, “I am so much yours that I am no longer myself” (107). You are “my other heart” (138), the “heart of my innermost being” (120), “*my* body” (109). “My body (your body) is as soar [*sic*] as a boil” (115); “You and I are one flesh, one Spirit” (130). To this conflation of self and other is added the admixture of manifestations of the self in other times and places: “It may be that we two have met before—I think I believe in re-incarnation” (82).

Hall explicitly addresses the question of the relation between autobiography and fiction in an unpublished letter of December 1, 1934. In the letter, she discloses that the idea for *Emblem Hurlstone* came to her on the way from France to Sirmione shortly after she and Souline had met for the first time in July but before they became lovers. Hall suggests that the content of fiction is based in the autobiographical experience of the writer, in particular in his/her “suffering,” but in achieved art, the personal element is sublimated “quite critically and calmly.”<sup>24</sup> In this way, subjectivity becomes objectivity.

Other parts of the letter, however, offer a very different view of artistic composition. First of all, the condition of anxiety in which Hall habitually writes is at odds with the claim that the manuscript is being written “quite critically and calmly”: “Last night I worked very late again—until 1. am, and this morning I have worked with my typist, and I am tired as always when a big spell of work has taken me in hand—thats [*sic*] how I do it, big

chunks at a time & little sleep while the storm[']s at its heights [*sic*]. ‘Not good for my Johnnie’s health?’ you will say—I know, darling, but its [*sic*] hopeless [*sic*] to try to repress me, I must write and write when the spirit moves me—its [*sic*] like that that all my books have been written.” Later in the letter, she describes *Emblem Hurlstone* as the collaborative result of their lovemaking:

I know this book to be one of my best, you see we have had a mental child you & I—a kind of mental—imaculate [*sic*]—conception. This book is entirely the result of our love, the result of its joy and its desperation. I conceived the story that terrible night when I was in the train on my way to Sermione [*sic*], and while I was in torment during the summer I found the details flooding into my mind. I *felt* the awfulness of unfulfilled love—The awfulness of longing, the awfulness of living. Then it was that I knew what my people would do, and when they would end it, and how they would end it. Now, thank God, I have you and so I can write—I can use my own suffering quite critically and calmly because [*sic*] the worst suffering is over and done with—out of ourselves I will make a book, I am making a good one for you, Soulina.

The passage suggests the question, if the writing of fiction is auto/biographical, whose auto/biography is being written here: Hall’s, Souline’s, or both?

*The Sixth Beatitude* has been admired for its descriptions of the landscape of the southeast of England. In a letter written a few days after Souline had left the Forecastle to return to France at the end of her first intimate vacation with Hall, Hall sent her a description of Romney Marsh, which they had walked across just a few days earlier: “I walked across the marsh to Lesam Hill, and up Lesam Hill & home by the road that leads through the old Land Gate. . . . Over everything was an English blue sky, very pale and pure, and that queer strong light that one only seems to get on Romney Marsh—a kind of other-worldly light, strong & yet soft, & so beautiful, Soulina” (79–80). The perception is suffused with memory of the other, of walking together, of making love together. How is one to classify auto/biographical registration here? No one term, no single temporality will do. “Soulina—but its beauty, indeed all beauty these days, is almost too painful to be endured when you are not near to share it with me. And so I walked on full of thoughts of you—full of regrets that you could not have see[n] the loveliness that I saw this morning, but full also of the determination

that you shall see it, my beloved” (*Your John*, 80). The letter offers an example of autobiographical writing as an attempt to describe the experience of actuality with another whom one loves and as the other might be able to experience it. Although there is necessarily an element of projection, the text is not solipsistic but relational. In it, autobiographical writing becomes plural.

In chapter 7, “April,” spring arrives, and Hannah, still disturbed at the death of Jimmie, feels “the physical urge that is part of living” (*SB*, 75). Hall’s extended description of Romney Marsh at lambing time along with the immediately following description of Hannah offer instances of how the reverie that Hall experienced walking across the marsh in November can be reshaped as fiction:<sup>25</sup>

A heron made his magnificent progress: heavy powerful wings beating with dignity, slender powerful legs stretched out stiffly behind him. In a little while he would have reached his goal, a certain wide dyke that provided good fishing. Plovers circled and screamed above their young; moor-hens paddled in and out of the rushes; larks dropped like plummet then soared up and up, seeming to shatter themselves with singing; while the thorn trees that grew at the edge of the Marsh were so heavy with blossom that their boughs were hidden.

Life, everywhere life, and the will to give life. Nests in the trees, in the grass, in the hedges; the warm lambing-pens with their rush-thatched sides, awaiting those cumbrous-bellied ewes who, their time being near, might lamb that evening. Life, everywhere life now on Romney Marsh—on the whole length and breadth of Romney Marsh. Life in the air and life on the soil; life coupling and striving under the soil, and in the mud banks that bordered the dykes, and in the water that flowed between them. (*SB*, 78–79)

The text continues directly into a description of Hannah that echoes the reader’s introduction to her in chapter 1 (*SB*, 79). In this passage as in the preceding paragraphs describing the marsh, both it and Hannah are permeated by Hall’s intensely physical sense of her new lover. Hannah is herself *and* Woman *and* Souline. Equally important, Hannah incorporates the confident virility that Hall rekindled by contact with Souline. Hannah’s “thin, muscular thighs” express the same energy that the narrator evokes in “the slender powerful legs stretched out stiffly behind” the heron (*SB*,

79). Hannah, in one register, functions in the passage as a rhetorical figure of the vitalized double engenderment that Hall experienced in sex. In another, Hannah in fiction and Souline in liaison empower Hall as mother—mother to Souline and mother to the texts that she attempted to birth during the first year of the relationship. As she wrote in December, while still working on *Emblem Hurlstone*, “That my meeting with you and all I suffered before we became everything to each other inspired the book there is no doubt whatever. You woke me up and the process was very painful indeed, and out of the pain this book was born” (*Your John*, 89).

### Sapphic Mythmaking

If one seeks something in these texts that is not autobiographically suffused, it will be found in aspects that, while no less personal, realize what is personal in terms of multiple and overlaid Sapphic mythmaking. Sapphism in this context refers not only to female-female desire but also to dissident engenderment, not so much the female masculinities of later twentieth- and early twenty-first-century activism but the particular styles of feminine virility espoused in *Emblem Hurlstone* and *The Sixth Beatitude*. As the quotation at the end of section IV indicates, this virility was expressly painful; but the pain was a source of great joy—because it was perceived to be coextensive with the very sense of being alive.

In the final book of *The Well of Loneliness*, Valérie Seymour advises Stephen Gordon that instead of attempting absurd conciliations with conventional religion, Sapphists need to create a metaphysics, mythology, and metaphysics of their own: “It was quite true that inverts were often religious, but church-going in them was a form of weakness; they must be a religion unto themselves if they felt that they really needed religion.”<sup>26</sup> In *The Sixth Beatitude*, Hall joins the effort of fashioning a Sapphic mythography that women in Paris, such as Natalie Barney, had pursued since 1900.

The text of the novel is conceived as a prose poem, with a limited vocabulary, rhythmic, repetitive, motivic, and patterned. First is the organization of the chapters in terms of the months of the year, beginning with Hannah’s thirtieth birthday on New Year’s Day and ending with her death exactly one year later. Second is Hall’s imitation of the form of Greek tragedy with the women of the lane serving as chorus and Hannah as heroic protagonist driven by fate. Third is Hall’s adaptation of the figure of Brunnhilde from

Wagner's Ring Cycle. Fourth is the novel's reliance on formal elements of fairy tale, including the long tale of sacrificial female love that Hannah tells Ermie early in the novel. Fifth is Hall's heterodox association of Hannah's maternal love with that of the Virgin Mary.

The mythmaking focuses in the first instance on Hannah, who like Brünnhilde is pure, ardent, transgressive, and endowed with heroic qualities, both masculine and feminine. In Wagner, Brünnhilde is a warrior-maiden, prepared to violate the prescriptions of male power in Wotan in order to protect Sieglinde, the heroic Siegmund's wife and sister, and their son Siegfried from Wotan's judgment. Hannah, despite her irregular sexual life, is her family's provider, defender, and protector. As *genius loci* of Crofts Lane and the marsh it overlooks, Hannah is both daughter of the earth—as Brünnhilde is of Erda in Wagner's libretto—and the embodiment of natural vitality, figured repeatedly through the novel by her fascination with fire. In the apocalypse with which the novel ends, she sacrifices herself in the flames of Mrs. Osborne's home in order to save the lives of two children and an infant while the cottages of Crofts Lane burn to the ground.

The fairy tale is in part confessional, in part an apology or defense by Hannah of her choices, in part instruction and a gift to her daughter. In Hannah's primary desire to be cleansed, she acknowledges her shame to her illegitimate child. But in the magical landscape that Hannah describes, she communicates to her daughter the strength and beauty of her love for her daughter's sailor father, a very young man who had arrived in port one spring along with a shipload of timber from Scandinavia.

The metaphors of Hannah's tale is drawn in turn from the first description of Ermie in chapter 1. Again, Hall works in terms of a double gendering. On the one hand, Hannah's intense, quasi-incestuous relationship with her daughter is thoroughly feminine; on the other, Hannah identifies her daughter's uncanny, spritelike temperament with her Nordic father, the Siegfriedlike young Scandinavian, innocent, naïve, passionate, highly imaginative, and absorbed in the forest landscapes of his childhood. "Sometimes he had told her fabulous stories; half in jest, half in earnest, he had told her of fairies. And legends he had told her, legends conceived in the hearts and the minds of his own Norse people. . . . And Hannah had listened attentively, smiling while not always understanding, yet queerly happy because this man was awakening in her work-benumbed soul its first timid realisation of beauty" (*SB*, 10, 11).

And there are intimations of a Marian, Christian narrative in the old ballad sung by the carolers who walk through the lane on Christmas Eve.<sup>27</sup> Like Christ at the time of his birth, Hannah's children soon will be depending upon strangers for their protection:

Mary the Mother, sat rocking her child:  
 "Now who will be kind to my little Jesus?"  
 The beasts gathered round and their eyes were mild  
 As they rested on Mary the undefiled,  
 On Mary the Mother who rocked her child:  
 "Now, who will be kind to my little Jesus?" (SB, 251)

But, as in Wagner, Christian mythography is subordinated to pagan. At the end of *Götterdämmerung*, Brünnhilde, having despaired at the death of her lover, Siegfried, prepares to throw herself upon his funeral pyre:

I shall share that pure, holy flame  
 with the hero;  
 we both shall blaze in the fire.<sup>28</sup>

The stage direction reads, "She . . . leaps with a single bound into the blazing pyre" (*Ring*, 328). At the end of *The Sixth Beatitude*, Hall writes: "Hannah Bullen leapt forward. She leapt like a flame. Her body was lighted up by the flames. Her body was a thing to marvel at. It was purpose personified. It was action. Her mind was empty of all but one thought that beat like a hammer upon her brain: Ermie—it was Ermie she was going to save, because Ermie was every child in the world, and every child in the world was Ermie" (SB, 259–60).

### Masochistic Jouissance

*The Sixth Beatitude* articulates philosophical Sapphism in the form of an extended meditation on the character of eros. The novel insists upon human desire, despite its recalcitrance, as a self-validating phenomenon. It need not attend to the exigencies of the other; it need not do good and avoid evil; it requires simply to be. At the end of her career, Hall returns to

the amoral world of primitive Greek pastoral that she had embraced in her early poetry—poetry that insists on the primacy of blind attraction/repulsion over attempts to impose conventional morality on the movements of desire.<sup>29</sup> Sappho's translator, Anne Carson, points out that the first Greek lyric poet is the inventor of the term *glukupikron*, translated as "sweetbitter," to describe the experience of desire. In Fragment 130, Sappho writes: "Eros once again limb-loosener whirls me / Sweetbitter, impossible to fight off, creature stealing up."<sup>30</sup> Desire happens. In Sappho's phenomenology, it is a mysterious factor, external to the self, whose advent issues in masochistic jouissance. Such pleasure in pain is neither moralized nor understood in medical terms as perverse; rather, it is an epiphenomenon of the tripartite structure of desire: first the pleasure or delight of experiencing attraction to something or someone other; second, the perception of a third term that inhibits or limits that pleasure. The third term checks pleasure—and that check is experienced as pain. Phenomenologically, the three aspects may be experienced virtually simultaneously. Because of the inescapable character and immediacy with which pain is experienced, it provides as great a source of pleasure as does the initial pleasure itself. Beyond the experience of the sensation of pleasure/pain, at an intellectual level the check prompts awareness of psychic self-division, a temporal differentiation of states of desire, and a reinforced sense of the inescapable separateness between subject and object of desire.<sup>31</sup>

To Hall's mind, this structure of experience is both an aspect and a driver of "the life-force." As such, the experience is by definition beyond good and evil. To be alive is to be subject to this force, which is not subject to the operations of human judgment. In the metaphors of Greek verse, desire is blind to the human beings through whom it courses; conversely, individuals are blind to the forces that move them in surprising and unanticipated fashion. Desire understood in this way constitutes what the Greeks—and Hall—recognize as destiny or fate. In Hall's version of Greek tragedy, it is Hannah's susceptibility to this force that ennobles her existence at the same time that it determines her death. In the letters, Hall invites Souline into this play of sensation:

Evguenia—beloved—my life, my all, write quickly, and give me some peace until you come. I want you—I am all on fire with longing, I'm crazy to feel you in my arms—to feel your body against my mouth, to hear you cry out with the pain of passion. Oh, my God—its [*sic*] not

safe to play with me just now. Suffer—suffer—why not? Don't I have to suffer? I wanted to spare you and not write of these things, but now I have no more the desire to spare you. There are times when I could cut my body to pieces because of the longing that's [*sic*] in it for you. Times when my nerves are tortured with longing. Times when I cannot sleep for longing. As I write this I don't know what to do with myself for the craving I feel to have your hand on me, your body pressed hard, hard against my own, your mouth on my mouth. I could kiss you till you bled—I could tear you to pieces Evguenia. (*Your John*, 140–41)

Souline's rather literal objections to this sort of demand compelled Hall to attempt to parse the inescapable admixture of pain in their pleasure. Responding, Hall was required not simply to express desire but to attempt to articulate an understanding of the operations of desire at a meta-level. "Love is a strange thing," she writes; "it intensifies all beauty, turns joy into pain, and pain into joy—if the pain is endured for the sake of the beloved" (*Your John*, 129). A few days before Souline joined Hall for the summer of 1935, Hall asks:

You ask me why our love is so intense? That I cannot say, my honey-sweet—some force in us both that having come to life is doubled in strength because we are lovers? It may be so. But falling in love and loving is one of this world's greatest mysteries. We meet hundreds of people & then comes the *one* person and the thing has happened and nothing can stop it and nothing can ever undo it. But the pain of such love—that makes you ask why? I think because all great emotions are one. This is hard to explain but I know what I mean. The circle meets in all great emotions—its [*sic*] a part of the curious Oneness that I feel—that I tried to write of in *The Master of the House*, and probably wrote of extremely badly because its [*sic*] a thing that lies just beyond the conscious mind—its [*sic*] always just out of reach, yet its [*sic*] there—in us, of us, and all around us. The placid, contented and painless love is not love at all as you & I know love. (*Your John*, 131)

Like Hannah's, Hall's desire is transgressive, anarchic, even nihilistic. Against it, social conventions don't count. Troubridge certainly felt its annihilating force. In February 1943, Souline visited the ailing Hall, who had sought rural refuge from wartime London in Lynton, where she was living

in seclusion with Troubridge. Upset as usual when Souline was on the scene, Troubridge was cast back upon bitter memories of the days she had spent alone in Paris in September 1934, when Hall and Souline first became intimate. In a passage crossed out in Troubridge's Day Book, she writes: "In a way I am relieved that I *can rest* while the woman is here, & know that John is doing what she wishes, and yet, I suppose because of the memory of those dreadful and desolate days in Paris when the clock crawled round, hour after hour while I tried to kill time & drug my misery with walking, reading, patience, anything & everything, the memory of when John's one thought was to find *all* her relaxation & pleasure away from me, I still feel a sick little sadness when, as soon as this heartless & worthless woman comes over the horizon, I feel that John wants to know me safe & well, but *not there*; that when I *am* there her pleasure is spoiled."<sup>32</sup> In Troubridge's words, one hears nemesis at work: the destructive desire of another that one's own transgressive desire can release.

And what, Troubridge might have asked, of marriage? Logical contradictions aside, Hall continued to affirm same-sex marriage in *The Sixth Beatitude*, which she observes in the union to the death of Watercrease-Bill and Jumping-Jimmie. After Bill slips away in his sleep, Hall concludes, "These then were the only claims to distinction of Watercrease-Bill and Jumping-Jimmie: they had lived in a verminous shed in Crofts Lane for more years than the Rother folk could remember; they had loved each other for better or for worse, in sickness and in health to the end and beyond, and their epitaph had been composed by children: 'Watercrease-Bill went up the 'ill to fetch a pail of water. / 'E tumbled down and broke 'is crown and Jim come tumblin' after!'" (SB, 67, 66) Hall continues to emphasize loyalty. Marriage too can express desire heedless of cost. But Hall finds in it no promise of happiness.

Published in spring 1936, by summer *The Sixth Beatitude* had sold over six thousand copies in England and two thousand in the United States. While the U.S. numbers were disappointing, sales of the novel in the United Kingdom compared favorably with those of Hall's early novels. Nonetheless, Hall once again judged the publication of a new novel to be a commercial failure. Having published what proved to be an international best seller in *The Well of Loneliness*, she was unwilling to recede to a more modest celebrity. And yet the desire to be a best-selling author was unsuited to her actual ambitions, which were to write for her people while continuing to be well regarded as an author of literary fiction. In that light, a more suitable

aim would have been to attempt to achieve something like the commercial and critical success of *Adam's Breed*, which had sold close to 9,500 copies in its first four months of publication in the United Kingdom. In its "poetic intensity" and strong emphasis on self-sacrifice, *The Sixth Beatitude* closely resembles the earlier novel.<sup>33</sup> For general readers who had admired *Adam's Breed*, however, the mingling of these features with the portrayal of a heterosexual but crossgendered female protagonist may have been disorienting. As for Hall's sizable Sapphic readership, those familiar with Hall and Troubridge are likely to have recognized the ways in which Sapphic romance shaped the materials of the novel. As Troubridge's biographer, Richard Ormrod, observes, "The Rye novel, originally called *Hannah*, . . . was heavily imbued with aspects of . . . [the] relationship with Souline."<sup>34</sup> Those in the know accordingly may have found the emphasis on Hannah's heterosexuality to be puzzling at best. At the same time, Hall's Sapphic readership would have been better positioned to embrace the affirmation of transgressive desire in the novel had its author not been attempting simultaneously to maintain a public façade of monogamy. If anything makes this novel, it is passion. But Hall believed that her position in lesbian public culture required that she continue to exemplify a life of chastity. As a result, she sent mixed signals to both components of her readership.

In late 1936, Hall began working on her final, unfinished novel, *The Shoemaker of Merano*, while the triangle shared an unhappy, enforced vacation together at Merano in the north of Italy. Again, Hall attempted to refigure in fiction the complex of emotions in which she was caught. After her death in 1943, Troubridge destroyed the manuscript in order, as she said, to fulfill a promise to Hall:

The true reason for the destruction of the book was a simple one: she had, during the closing years of her life, been very deeply hurt by someone and when she knew that her days were numbered she had forgiven both the injury and the person concerned. But she felt that into the writing of that book she had almost unconsciously allowed the intrusion of a measure of her personal suffering and natural resentment and, as she said when she told me to destroy it: "It isn't forgiveness if one leaves a record that might be recognized and give pain . . . ."

I know she regretted the sacrifice of her work; no one knew better than she how good it was and no one knew better what it had cost her.

But she was in no doubt as to what she wished; I gave her my promise, and after her death I lost no time in carrying out that promise.<sup>35</sup>

The shift between quoting her partner and assuring the reader that “I know” her view of the matter opens a space between reportage and projection on Troubridge’s part. From Troubridge’s vantage as Hall’s longtime literary collaborator, who better than she would know “how good” the manuscript to be destroyed was? Who was better positioned to take in the “cost” of the relationship with Souline—even if Hall should choose not to voice this price? The final act of Troubridge’s literary collaboration with Hall occurs in Troubridge’s memoirs as she writes Hall’s demand that the manuscript testifying to her infidelity be destroyed. The penultimate act was to arrange to have prepared for her dying partner’s signature a brief will, rescinding the bequest of half her property to Souline.<sup>36</sup>

In its final working out, the triangulated relationship between Hall, Troubridge, and Souline failed to conform to any of the three social forms of female same-sex relations discussed in this book: Hall and Troubridge’s public position as proponents of life-long, single pair-bonding; the option of marriage with exceptions, on behalf of which Barney and Coward argued; and the quasi-domestic Victorian and Edwardian form in which a circle of “belongings” gathered around a particular woman. While it is not necessary to look further than the particular personalities and histories involved to account for this fact, it is also the case that the very fact of the call for public recognition of female monogamy transformed the norms that had governed earlier forms of female marriage while complicating twentieth-century efforts to articulate non-strictly monogamous forms of female union. This effect may be one reason why, at the time of publication of *The Well of Loneliness* and subsequently, radical subjects of female same-sex desire have reacted negatively to the sexual politics of the book. One may anticipate that tensions will continue to exist between female monogamy and other forms of sexual relationship between and among women in the twenty-first century even as the practice of legal female same-sex marriage continues to expand.

Part of Radclyffe Hall’s writing is known only by its absence. One regrets the conflagration of *The Shoemaker of Merano*. *The Sixth Beatitude* had been an important indicator of continuing growth on the part of Hall. In writing it, she found that she did not need the form of the bildungsroman to show how her characters have become what they are. The narrative

functions economically with an emphasis on the sort of “pattern,” the absence of which Leonard Woolf had complained of in *The Well of Loneliness*.<sup>37</sup> In the novel, Hall embraces her own fate as a “misfit” writing about other misfits. She provides a powerful, highly sympathetic portrait of a male homosexual couple faithful until death, despite the persecution that they have endured.<sup>38</sup> And her sense of the multiform character of crossgendered existence expands to include the effeminate Jimmie, the nurturing Bill, and the plebeian Amazon, Hannah. Hall once again shows herself to be a gifted nature writer with a strong religious sense in her evocation of Romney Marsh. Finally, she offers a direct, nonmoralizing take on the necessities of desire in human life and the unforgiving world in which it is set.

In the letters to Souline written between 1934 and 1943, Hall gave her “kind,” as she termed them, a new creed, one very different from the program of monogamous marriage proposed in *The Well of Loneliness*. In all three sets of texts discussed in this chapter, Hall affirmed the body in its needs and the impulses of the heart as justification in their own right. She turned from the Christic rhetoric of “the intolerable load” (33) that must be borne to a classical emphasis on the overpowering force of passion that derives from Sappho’s poetry. For many years, this Sapphic doctrine remained private to a degree, quoted by such biographers as Richard Ormrod and Michael Baker in their books, but published in extenso only in 1997. Hall’s final Sapphic doctrine is, however, consistent with the Aestheticist Epicureanism of her first published work. Moreover, the focus on extreme, self-lacerating pain that one finds in the letters and the embrace of martyrdom and a self-consuming love of the other in *The Sixth Beatitude* both carry strong, if heterodox, overtones of the central mystery of Christianity. In this respect, Beresford Egan’s *St. Stephen*, however irreverent, caught a real paradox at the center of the writing of Radclyffe Hall.

*This page intentionally left blank*