

**90 years since *The Well of Loneliness*:
A Radclyffe Hall Symposium**



**27 July 2018
Birkbeck, University of London**

**Confirmed Keynote:
Jo Winning (Birkbeck, University of London)**

On the 27 July 1928, Radclyffe Hall published *The Well of Loneliness*. By November of that year Hall's publisher was on trial and the novel found guilty of obscene libel. The Chief Magistrate's judgment that all copies of the book be destroyed was subsequently upheld at the December appeal. Hall's novel would not be legally republished in the UK until 1949, and yet this did nothing to curb the lasting appeal or cultural impact of the work. The book is now hailed as 'The archetypal lesbian novel, the one whose title, at least, is familiar to everyone' (*Times Literary Supplement*). As this soundbite suggests, Hall's novel has survived due to its notoriety, but its literary style is often mocked—originally by modernist writers who, whilst eager to defend freedom of speech, were unimpressed by the literary qualities of the novel (Virginia Woolf bemoaned the book's 'dullness': 'one simply can't keep one's eyes on the page') — and modern readers often struggle with its allegedly less than affirmative ending.

Nevertheless Hall's novel remains a touchstone for the history of lesbian/queer writing as well as debates around literary freedom and censorship. Our symposium aims to explore new understandings of *The Well of Loneliness*. For instance, much has been said about Hall's engagement with sexology, especially the concept of 'sexual inversion', in the novel, and we invite new perspectives on Hall's negotiation of sexology. However, we also seek to read her work beyond the lens of sexological identity categories or even the lens of lesbian identity. For instance, more recent scholarship has begun to read Hall's life and work in relation to transgender identities and narratives. In our discussions, we aim to confront and work through the ongoing question of whether we

read Hall as trans or lesbian (or neither/both). We also hope to examine how *The Well of Loneliness* and her other writings articulate an even wider range of sexualities and gender expressions beyond lesbian and trans identity. We are also keen to explore how other forms of knowledge, such as religion and spirituality, shaped *The Well of Loneliness*.

As well as reconsidering *The Well of Loneliness*, we invite scholarship exploring other works by Hall, including her early poetry, her late novels, her short fiction and her unpublished writings. We hope that papers will examine the very wide range of genres across which Hall wrote in her published and unpublished works (hagiography, the supernatural, the gothic, speculative fiction, realism, historical fiction) and raise new questions about her stylistic and generic choices and investments.

We also invite papers considering the many conflicted legacies of *The Well of Loneliness* and the shifting reception of Hall as a prominent figure in lesbian and trans history. We seek to revisit scholarship that has sought to demonstrate that Hall and *The Well of Loneliness* played a prominent role in shaping a modern understanding and image of lesbian identity. To this aim, we invite scholars to consider the shifting reception of Hall's life and work in LGBT communities, literary criticism and popular culture in the UK and beyond.

This symposium seeks to mark the 90 year anniversary of Hall's novel and to reconsider the impact of this important work from a variety of different angles, including in its literary context, historical and sociological contexts, and in terms of gender, sexuality and medical humanities, and to reflect upon its place within literary history. Equally, we hope to consider and contextualise the novel in relation to Hall's wider oeuvre and to revisit Hall's place in early twentieth-century literature and culture (including modernism) and reconsider her gender, sexual, class, racial and national politics in light of new archival evidence and methodological approaches.

Please send abstracts of no more than **300 words** together with a short biography (no more than 100 words) to **radclyffehall90@gmail.com**

Deadline for abstracts: Friday 27 April 2018

Possible paper topics may include (but are not limited to):

- *The Well of Loneliness* in relation to Hall's wider oeuvre
- Hall and literary modernism
- Hall and Decadence and Aestheticism
- Hall and queer sexual identities (including lesbianism, bisexuality, male homosexuality, asexuality)
- Hall and gender identity (including transgender and non-binary identities)
- Hall and heterosexualities, including marital heterosexuality
- Hall and reproduction, eugenics and maternity
- Una Troubridge and her role as Hall's collaborator
- 'Britishness', national identity
- War/inter-war contexts

- Hall's self-fashioning (especially before and after the late 1920s/1930s, which have been much discussed by Laura Doan and others)
- Hall and genre
- Hall and the middlebrow
- Religion and/or spirituality (e.g. Catholicism, Spiritualism, Theosophy)
- The history of censorship in relation to Hall
- The reception and translation of Hall's work
- Hall's and Troubridge's biographers and biographies
- Hall and the archive

Organisers:

Sarah Parker (Loughborough University)

Elizabeth English (Cardiff Metropolitan University)

Jana Funke (University of Exeter)