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NTNU
Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Faculty of Humanities
Department of Language and Literature

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Reading the Victorian and Modern Female Homosexual in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* and Edith Johnstone's *A Sunless Heart*

Master's thesis in English Literature
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Abstract

This master's thesis seeks to explore the representation and depiction of female homosexuality in late nineteenth and early twentieth century literature. By analysing and discussing Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* and Edith Johnstone's *A Sunless Heart* through contemporary reviews, it attempts to understand how female homosexual bonds are constructed, and further perceived by contemporary readers. The thesis will first provide a brief historical background to understand the social and cultural attitudes towards female homosexuality and women's role in society in general. Secondly, the thesis will establish a framework through Wolfgang Iser's theory of "gaps" and the reader's importance in the actualisation of the text in relation to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's "epistemology of the closet," to understand how the female homosexual bonds are constructed in the novels. Thereafter, this thesis will analyse and discuss *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) through this framework to understand how readers could interpret the nature of the bonds within the novel different from one another. Since this novel illustrates female homosexuality in an explicit manner, the purpose here is to explore how society's ignorance of romantic relations between women could influence how different readers perceive them. The idea here is that a heterosexual reader would create different images of the female relations than a homosexual reader, based on their prior knowledge and experiences with the subject. Lastly, the thesis will provide a similar analysis and discussion of *A Sunless Heart* (1894). This novel illustrates female homosexuality more implicitly than the latter and the purpose is thus to explore how friendship is used as a metaphor or "closet" to hide the intimate side of female homosexual bonds.

Sammendrag

Denne masteroppgaven utforsker representasjonen og fremstillingen av kvinnelig homoseksualitet i litteratur fra sent 1800-tall og tidlig 1900-tall. Ved å analysere og diskutere Radclyffe Halls *The Well of Loneliness* og Edith Johnstones *A Sunless Heart* i lys av bokanmeldelser fra samtiden, forsøker oppgaven å forstå hvordan kvinnelige homofile bånd er konstruert, og videre oppfattet av samtidslesere. Oppgaven vil først gi en kort historisk innføring for å forstå de sosiale og kulturelle holdningene til kvinnelig homofili og kvinners rolle i samfunnet generelt. Videre vil oppgaven etablere et rammeverk gjennom Wolfgang Isers teori om «tomme plasser» og leserens betydning i aktualiseringen av teksten i tilknytning til Eve Kosofsky Sedgwicks «episemologi av skapet,» for å forstå hvordan kvinnelige homofile bånd er konstruert i romanene. Deretter vil oppgaven analysere og diskutere *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) i lys av det etablerte rammeverket for å forstå hvordan lesere kan tolke naturen av romanens kvinnelige homofile bånd ulikt. Fordi romanen illustrerer kvinnelig homoseksualitet på en eksplisitt måte er formålet her å forstå hvordan samfunnets uvitenhet om romantiske og intime forhold mellom kvinner kan påvirke hvordan ulike lesere oppfatter dem. Ideen er her at en heterofil leser vil danne ulike bilder av disse forholdene enn en homofil leser vil, basert på lesernes tidligere erfaringer og kunnskap om temaet. Til slutt vil oppgaven gi en lignende analyse og diskusjon av *A Sunless Heart* (1894). Denne romanen illustrerer kvinnelig homofili på en mer implisitt måte enn den andre, og formålet er derfor å utforske hvordan vennskap brukes som en metafor eller som et «skap» for å skjule den intime siden av kvinnelige homofile bånd.

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Vendelin Elise Remmen Thom
Trondheim, May 20

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Introduction

The female homosexual has been a character without recognition in fiction for centuries, but during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century her visibility increased. The views on women and sexuality began to change drastically, where women began to claim more of the world. Financial independency became more prominent among women. As a consequence, women felt a greater need to stick together, as it was challenging for them to maintain a stable economy alone. At the same time, sexologists presented new studies on sexuality which created a vocabulary about men loving men and women loving women. As the new vocabulary entered the world of lesbian fiction, writers got a wider range of terms about their sexual behaviour, but additionally got fewer roles (Vicinus 173). This new language and knowledge also made it more challenging for writers to hide their love and desires for other women, as can be seen in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness.* Hall's novel was published in 1928 and received many critiques for its female homosexual content. However, in Edith Johnstone's novel *A Sunless Heart*, the use of a new language is not as clear. Johnstone's novel, published in 1894, did not receive the same amount of critique as *The Well*, even though female homosexuality is well represented in both novels.

Studies on the representation of the female homosexual in literature have often focused on what constitutes her being, what her characteristics are, and how long she has been present in literature of history. Along with this, the female homosexual bonds have received many different names based on their nature such as "romantic friendship," "intimate friendship," "same-sex desire," and "lesbians," just to mention a few. It is important to search for female homosexual bonds within literature to understand how their portrayals and representations in society have changed. As Terry Castle explains, "for all of its mystifications, literature is (still) the mirror of what is known: and Western civilization, it seems, has always known on some level about lesbians" (9). Therefore, one can argue that female same-sex love and desire became hidden in nineteenth century literature, on the one hand because social and political ignorance made it invisible, and on the other because of the writers' appropriation and adaption of already existing language to represent their love and desires for other women (Vicinus 231-232).

In this thesis, I will argue that where the male homosexual used the closet as a metaphor to hide the homosexual content, the female homosexual used friendship. This can be seen in the works by Radclyffe Hall and Edith Johnstone. Through Wolfgang Iser's reader-response theory and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's "epistemology of the closet," one can analyse and discuss how contemporary readers of the novels would read them differently and why some could locate the female homosexual bonds in the text while others could not. This becomes clear when looking

at how these novels were received by society through contemporary reviews. Even though these novels were published within only thirty years of each other, one can see through their reception that there were large changes both in views on female bonds and sexuality.

The nineteenth century was a time for change for women's role in society with the emergence of the "New Woman" and a change in perspective of women's sexuality which was often represented in literature. In the early nineteenth century, the notion of "separate spheres" developed which encouraged women of the middle-class to stay at home instead of working (Jennings 58-59). This idea of separate spheres was encouraged by Evangelical culture and suggested that women should stay at home and take care of the children, while the men were more suited to take care of the challenging, intellectual work such as politics (Altick 50-54). For women, their main goal in life appeared to be (heterosexual) marriage, which Victorian society idealised (Faderman 206). In these marriages, women were seen as subordinate to men and were less than their husbands in every way.

The separation of spheres appears to have affected an increase in homosocial bonds among the middle class of the time. For centuries women had formed close friendships that were filled with love and passion with other women. This applied to men as well, where the friendships were of great social importance and were celebrated in literature (Jennings 39-40). The friendships between women, however, were not widely acknowledged until the seventeenth century. The bonds women formed have been given many names. The first is what Lillian Faderman in *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendships and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (1985) refers to as "romantic friendship" which consisted of emotional and intellectual bonds between women (83-84). These friendships were first and foremost regarded as asexual because women had no or little knowledge about their own sexuality (155-156). Faderman further states that female friendships were accepted by society and that they were expected and encouraged. Martha Vicinus, on the other hand, has in *Intimate Friends: Women who Loved Women, 1778-1928,* (2004) convincingly argued that many of the friendships which Faderman argued were asexual, were in fact sexual. Therefore, Vicinus rather refers to these relationships as "intimate friendships." William Alger was one of the contemporary writers who encouraged these bonds in *The Friendships of Women* (1869) where he suggested that women would "enrich and embellish their lives" (364) if they form close bonds with each other. While Alger clearly saw value in homosocial friendships between women, this was only seen as preparation for the "real" love that can only happen between man and woman (3-5).

While women were still expected to be domestic and subservient wives to a husband, some shifts were happening. Around the mid-nineteenth century, however, women began to move further away from men, fighting for independence and trying to break free from the roles of the heteronormative society (Faderman 157-158). The feminist movement grew stronger in Britain and the emergence of the term "New Woman" was used to describe what contemporaries believed to be a new, modern kind of woman (Jennings 60-61). She rose to the surface as a result of the confinement of middle-class women to the domestic sphere. The new woman novel was often concerned with feminist ideas, female friendships, sexual morality, and social changes (61-68). In *A Sunless Heart* we see examples of these new emerging ideas, especially through how Lotus Grace challenges the gender norms applied to women at the time, but also through the friendship between the characters. At the end of the century further progress was made, as women were able to find occupations other than being a teacher or governess (Altick 55), which made it easier for women to break from the role of being financially dependant on a husband or father-figure.

The secession of women from the home led to a threat to established gender roles, as did the existence of love between women as it defied the clearly defined social structures (Faderman 238). It was also at this time that sexologists like Havelock Ellis and Richard von Krafft-Ebing became interested in female sexuality and developed theories about their "abnormal" and "morbid" behaviour (Stanley 202-203). At first, they referred to this behaviour by women as "congenital inversion" and pointed towards women who desired other women, but it was not yet seen as unnatural. These women were inversions of the female sex meaning all her emotions were inverted and therefore allowed her to become attracted to other women (Faderman 250-251). Further, the term "lesbian" was introduced and it referred to a woman who refused and found the roles of women inacceptable. According to Rebecca Jennings, it was with the implementation of the term "lesbian" that brought the unnatural sides of it into the light (87). It referred to a woman who was not really a woman, but rather one belonging to "the third sex" (240). In this new fashion, a lesbian was a woman who had gotten all her emotions inverted or turned upside down. This meant that the love between women which had previously been accepted and encourage was now a sign of inversion. The nineteenth-century society was not very familiar with this theory as it did not become common knowledge until the very end of the century and early twentieth century.

In the early twentieth century, there was a shift in the view of sexual object choice which moved further away from the inversion theory. Judith Halberstam write in *Female Masculinity* that female homosexual women began to form visible subcultures around 1910 and into the

1920s (75). Such subcultures can be seen in *The Well* when Stephen Gordon moves to Paris and becomes part of a rather small community with other like herself. At the same time, sexologists' theories became known to the public which, according to Faderman, meant the end of the romantic friendships of the nineteenth century because of the constant presence of a sexual implication to the love between two women. This does, however, not entire align with the representation of female homosexuality in *The Well*. The novel rather presents a Victorian perspective of female homosexuality through a modern approach. This means that it deals with female homosexuality though the ideas of inversion commonly associated with Victorian society and culture through the modernist focus on the interior consciousness (Green 278). When Sigmund Freud began to study sexuality around the 1920s, the public became very interested in sexual expression and perversion (Faderman 315). This also contributed to homosexuality becoming common knowledge. The female homosexual or lesbian had up to this point only been described as a masculine woman which meant that the public would ignore the more feminine partner in a relationship. Esther Newton suggests that it was the masculine character who made the couple visible to the public (575). In *The Well,* Stephen is portrayed as a masculine woman through both her appearance and her behaviour where she is broad shouldered and takes the role as the man in her relationships with other women.

The first chapter of this thesis will establish how one can reconstruct female homosexual bonds through Wolfgang Iser's understanding of "gaps" in relation to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's "epistemology of the closet." To locate female homosexual bonds in *The Well of Loneliness* and *A Sunless Heart* and to understand how they are represented differently in different times, one must not only look at the works themselves, but rather employ different fields like literary theory, queer theory and history about contemporary society. The chapter discusses the position of female homosexuality in history, politics, and society to establish a framework from which I will discuss how the female homosexual bonds in the novels could be interpreted in different ways by readers with the same cultural background.

The second chapter will analyse and discuss how the female homosexual bonds in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) are constructed through its use of language and portrayal of female intimacy. The novel deals quite explicitly with female homosexuality where it both asks for sympathy from its heterosexual readers and depict the female homosexual through stereotypical perspectives. Therefore, this chapter set out to not only unveil the nature of these relationships, but also to understand what heteronormative readers obviously found unsettling about the female relations, and what parts they should have noticed but did not.

The third chapter will provide a similar analysis and discussion on Edith Johnstone's *A Sunless Heart* (1894). Female homosexuality is represented in a more discrete manner in this novel than in *The Well of Loneliness*. A reason for this is that the sexologists' view on sexuality had not become common knowledge it did not receive any critiques or other strong reactions from its contemporary readers. The fact that this novel was published a few years before *The Well*, before the new studies on women's sexuality was established, could also be a contributing factor to the less harsh critiques this novel received. Therefore, by examining the novel's female homosexual bonds in relation to contemporary reviews, the chapter will show how the lack of knowledge about female sexuality led to many contemporary readers failing in locating her. Additionally, the novel deals with several issues of its contemporary society which arguably participated in distracting the reader from the female homosexual content. The novels are analysed out of chronological order as *The Well of Loneliness* is part of the canon and *A Sunless Heart* is not. Beginning with the canon will hopefully provide the reader of this text with a more logical entry to the subject.

Chapter One

How to Reconstruct Female Homosexual Bonds?

There are many theories about the status and availability of female same-sex love in the nineteenth to twentieth century, where some believe they did not have to hide their desires, and others suggest that they had to and that they did. As presented in the historical background above, the nineteenth century was influenced by changes in views on sexuality and social norms. Women had for a long time been able to have close friendships with other women without any suspicion (Marcus 26). Despite the preconceptions of women being harmless, many began to perceive their quest for independence as a threat to the patriarchal society of the nineteenth century. Additionally, female same-sex relationships appeared as hidden because they did not have a language of their own. The language of love, as well as the language and norms of right and wrong had been shaped and controlled by the heteronormative and patriarchal society. Therefore, people who wrote about same-sex love and desire would have to borrow this language and attempt to appropriate it for themselves. When the language and categories of sexologists then came about in the latter half of the nineteenth century, these bonds had explanatory vocabulary about their behaviour. When the Criminal Law Amendment Act was introduced in Britain in 1885, the law only recognised "gross indecencies" between men because many believed female homosexuality was impossible (Castle 6). Later, in 1921, the House of Lords declined to add gross indecency between women to the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 because they were afraid of bringing such "unspeakable filthiness" out into the open (6). When *The Well of Loneliness* was published in 1928, the female homosexual was brought out into the open and became visible which resulted in sending the female homosexual back into "the closet." The female homosexual was sent back into the closet because of the negative attention the novel and later the obscenity trial brought with them. Although the novel deals with female homosexuality quite openly it does, however, attempt to hide some of the more erotic parts through its use of language and structure. *A Sunless Heart,* on the other hand, goes to longer extents to hide the same-sex romance. In order to reveal how the codes could be perceived by its readers one need to understand how the communication between text and reader function.

According to Wolfgang Iser's reader-response theory, a literary text is made real through the reactions it arouses within the reader. This means that a text must be actualised through the knowledge and experiences brought into the reading process by the reader. It is important though, to emphasise that a reader cannot only provide a literary text with whichever meaning it wishes. The text provides the reader with certain "hints" or segments that controls

the direction of the reading process. Regarding *A Sunless Heart,* one can argue that these hints would guide some readers towards the female homosexual content, while others would completely miss the subtext they hint towards. This could also be said to some extent about *The Well,* but because of the explicit segments less of the content would be hidden from its' readers. One can therefore say that these novels would require the reader to read between the lines to fully understand its content. In *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1978), Iser presents a method for understanding a text through the reader. He argues that an object like a literary text cannot exist until it has been experienced by a reader (66-67). It is the reader that evoke and constitute the meaning of a literary text. When analysing a literary work, Iser argues that it is crucial to focus on the communication between text and reader (67). Therefore, it is useful to employ contemporary reviews to understand how readers interpreted the content of *A Sunless Heart* and *The Well.* Thus, one can argue that because of the different frames of references that the reader would bring into the reading process, the novels received very different receptions from their contemporary readers. *A Sunless Heart* was left alone while *The Well* was banned and burned. Since the relation between text and reader is essential to Iser's idea of actualisation of the text, he has established a system referred as "a schematic structure" (Iser 170).

The text is built up as a schematic structure. The reading process is an interaction between text and reader where the text provides the reader with a selection of perspectives and patterns that must be reconstructed in order to establish a frame of reference (166-168). The lack of a common frame of reference creates a blank or a gap in the interaction between text and reader. Put another way, the blanks are formed by indeterminacy of the text or the imbalance between the reader and the text (167). For instance, in *The Well,* if the reader is unable to understand the references towards inversion through Stephen's masculinity and emotions towards other women, an indeterminacy would occur between text and reader. In order to attain balance in this communication the reader must fill the gaps and then establish a common frame of reference. To make this communication process successful, the text provides certain devices to guide and control the reader's direction (169-170). This does not imply that the devices are within the text, but rather that they are exercised by the text. It is therefore not what is actually said that is significant, "it is the implications and not the statements that give shape and weight to the meaning" (168). In order to achieve successful communication between text and reader, one must first establish the situation which this interaction depends on. To establish a situation, certain conventions are necessary. These conventions are strategies referred to as "the repertoire of the text" (Iser 69). "The repertoire consists of all the familiar

territory within the text" (69), meaning it can take several forms such as reference to previous works, social and historical norms, and contemporary culture. One can say that the repertoire allows the reader to reflect her perception of the outside world to the ones of the inner world of the text. In relation to the novels, one must therefore investigate the different norms of the time they were published, namely in the 1890s and 1920s. Because the relationship between text and society is such an essential part in the communication between text and reader, Iser has also referred to another essential aspect to explain this situation, namely the *blank.*

It is the indeterminacy of the text that creates a blank, and they indicate that there are certain perspectives and patterns that are meant to be connected. Iser refers to the blank as an "empty space" in the text that is not actually a clear part of the text itself (Iser 195). The blank is a "no-thing," and it is a vital part in the communication between the text and the reader. This means that the reader must build bridges between the segments and perspectives that the text serves in order to communicate with it which allows her to discover its object, to further create images. The blank serves as "unseen joints" within the text and they mark both schemata and textual perspectives and separates them from one another (Iser 183). At the same time, they activate "acts of ideation" in the reader. The acts of ideation occur when the reader apprehends knowledge as she fills the gaps to create these images (183). As the acts of ideation evolve and the schemata and textual perspectives are linked together, "the blanks 'disappear'" (183). Another way of thinking of these gaps is as sudden abruptions or turns in the text. It is a break in the expected structure of the text, and they can often cause irritations or frustration within the reader. In another view, the text is filled with segments and images that carry the meaning of the text and as they are broken apart an empty space occurs. The reader must then connect them to understand the meaning of the text. There are often several possible connections between the segments which depend on the reader. When the segments are connected, the reader will achieve some kind of meaning which she can bring forth as the narrative evolves. Therefore, one can say that "the blanks mark the suspension of connectability between textual segments" (Iser 195). The readers of the nineteenth and twentieth century would fill in these blanks in different ways based on the knowledge and experience they bring with them into the reading process. The segments which the text provide in order to fill the gaps would be interpreted differently by each reader. The thought here is that some readers would hold the "right" knowledge and experience in order to interpret the homosexual content provided by the novels while others cannot. This means that the gaps which the text provides contain segments that are only available to some readers. There are more implicit, secret codes in *A Sunless Heart* than there are in *The Well of Loneliness* which suggests that there was a lack of a common

frame of reference in the 1890s. One can argue, however, that this is not necessarily the case and that it rather depends on the social norms and knowledges of the individuals of the time.

In the image-building process, the textual schemata allow the reader to build on existing knowledge while at the same time guiding the reader by presenting information that is necessary for her to discover the intended object (Iser 185). By breaking up the text with blanks, the reader must actively use her imagination in order to fill them and connect the segments into images. The more blanks the text provide, the more the reader has to use her imagination which allows for a larger number of images. As the reader uses her own experienced knowledge, she in a way mirrors her own perception of the outside world to the inside world of the text. The norms of the repertoire and the segments of the perspective must not be predictable. If they are structured in a sequence that is too predictable, the text will not be able to present the reader with a new perspective of a familiar world (185). This, Iser sees as an act of "not fulfilling the principle of *good continuation*" (185). The text must provide strategies that guarantee good continuation that will extend into the reader's store of experience (190). If a text contains many blanks, it encourages the activity of ideation with the reader which allows her to constitute an imaginary object (189-190). Both *The Well* and *A Sunless Heart*, are open for several possible interpretations which one can argue as participating to distract the reader away from locating female homosexuality.

Further, the textual segments are presented in various forms, and the most elementary form is found on the level of the story. This can be found as sudden breaks of the plot, for example when the narrative that centres around a specific character is broken off by the introduction of new characters (Iser 196). This can be seen in both novels when the protagonists are one the verge of becoming close with another woman, and the texts introduce male characters which abrupt the bonding process. Additionally, these changes are often signified by chapters and this separation invites the reader to find "the missing link" (196). Other forms of textual segments can be found from the perspective of the characters, the narrator, the plot and the fictitious reader (196-197). These segments can be joined together as the blank creates an empty space between them and thus gives the reader's wandering viewpoint a field of reference. This is regarded as the first structural quality of the blank and gives the segments a common framework. The framework opens for the reader to find the pattern which lies under the connections by allowing her to notice and relate to affinities and differences (197-198). To discover and fill this framework which Iser points out as a blank as well, the reader must have an act of ideation.

The theme comes about when the segments have been connected and the referential field has been established as it allows the reader's viewpoint to focus on one perspective for each moment (Iser 198). As the reading proceeds, the reader's viewpoint shifts between perspective segments and new themes appear. When these new themes come forth, the previous ones are turned into "marginal, thematically vacant positions" (198), and they are referred to as vacancies rather than blanks because they are "nonthematic segments within the referential field of the wandering viewpoint" (198). Thus, one can say that vacancies are guiding devices that condition the reader's view of the new theme which again condition his previous views of the latter theme. This is referred to as the "theme-and-horizon structure."

The theme-and-horizon structure allows the connected segments to establish the reader's expectations further in the reading process. This is what Gadamer referred to as "horizon of expectations" (Jauss 12-13). If these expectations were to be disproved, "negation" occurs. Negation refers to a kind of blank that occurs in the content of the text (Iser 169). This blank can be found in relation to *The Well* and *A Sunless Heart,* as the implications of female homosexuality often are negated to direct the reader away from her suspicions. The blanks discussed till now are part of "the syntagmatic structure" because they refer to blanks between segments and perspectives. Familiar and determinate elements are invoked by the negation, only to be cancelled out (169). The negation guides the reader to adopt a position in relation to the text (169). Negation occurs when the norms of the repertoire are removed from their original context and placed in a new one (212). For example, in *The Well of Loneliness* where Hall has adapted the language of sexologists' literature into her work of fiction. This adaption could become confusing to some readers because the language of sexology has been taken out of its original context. *The Well* seeks sympathy from its heterosexual readers, while at the same time depicting the female homosexual as a morbid, unnatural creature who will inevitably end up alone. These are contradicting messages to convey to the reader which leads to negation. At the same time, these works as double-binds, the abnormal behaviour and appearance of the female homosexual is presented as an innate product. By stating that she is first abnormal, and later arguing that she is born this way, the novel creates a double-bind to either confuse the reader or to allow them to sympathise. The term double-bind is coined by Sedgwick, whose theory will be discussed below.

Iser's theory has highlighted how the contemporary reader fills the gaps within a text with the knowledge and experience she brings into the interaction. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, however, will provide a connection to Iser's idea of actualisation through emphasising how the knowledge and experiences can be seen in relation to homosexuality. In her book *Epistemology*

of the Closet (1990), Sedgwick argues that the "understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition" (Sedgwick 1). She examines how several dichotomous divides are used to categorise epistemologies connected to sexual identity. The focus is on the historical shift in defining, naming and explaining the homosexual in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Around this time, new taxonomies or categories concerning sexuality appeared in the discourse and created a new "world-mapping" which assigned a person with either a homo- or a heterosexual identity similar to the assigning of either male or female gender (2). Her arguments are built around several contradictions about the homo/hetero definition. Furthermore, she challenges the binary oppositions because it does not take into account what lies in between. Even though her study mostly concerns language connected to the male homosexual, some of her aspects concerning the epistemology of homosexuality can be applied to approach the female homosexual. In addition to the categories concerning sexuality there are, as mentioned above, also different categories of female friendships.

When the new categories of sexuality came into the discourse, homosexual acts became one with identity and were seen as a threat to the heterosexual society, according to Sedgwick. The homosexual acts which had previously been regarded as acts in private were made into an issue of the public, and sexuality had become a defining factor of a person's identity (Sedgwick 20-21). As mentioned above, the introduction of the Criminal Law Amendment Act in Britain in 1885, led to the criminalising of male homosexual acts which further resulted in the need to hide such behaviour. This ignorance resulted in a continuation in keeping knowledge about female homosexuality in the dark. Even though the law was pointed towards male homosexuality, one can also apply this to understand female homosexuality, as it to some extent affected them as well. In 1921, there were some suggestions by the House of Lords to include "gross indecencies" among women to the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, but this idea was declined because of the fear of creating awareness around something women might know nothing about (Vicinus xxiv; Castle 6). This fear aligns with Sedgwick's idea of the "homosexual panic" which occurred around the turn of the century. This homosexual panic, she argues, resulted in making male homosexuality the "open secret" (Sedgwick 67-69). Through references to legal discourses, she argues that the male homosexual became widely known in the public as an "open secret," meaning "that which shall not be named." In other words, people knew about it but refused to acknowledge it.

It is thus important to emphasise that even though Sedgwick argues that the "open secret" surrounds the male homosexual, it can also be seen as partly crucial to the female homosexual. Even though sexologists like Krafft-Ebing, Ellis and Freud examined "female sexual inversion," it had not in the latter half of the nineteenth century become "common knowledge" (Faderman 155). This can be seen in relation to Sedgwick's binary oppositions knowledge and ignorance where she suggests that the terms for knowledge are set by ignorance, similarly as with the binary oppositions homosexual and heterosexual. The female homosexual or "female sexual invert" was first seen at the turn of the century as an inversion of the female sex where everything was inverted to the opposite. Women of such tendencies were described as "masculine," "mannish," "morbid," "sentimental," and "dangerous," among other things (Vicinus xxvi). This meant that women who did not carry these visible "markers" of the female homosexual invert were easily missed by the heterosexual public, and because female homosexuality was difficult to prove without the "masculine" tendencies, they were ignored. Sedgwick emphasises that after the eighteenth century, "knowledge" had become inseparable from "sex," meaning all knowledge meant "sexual knowledge" which also meant that all ignorance meant "sexual ignorance" (Sedgwick 73). During the nineteenth century, there was another shift where men refused to acknowledge the existence of sexuality between women. This, Sedgwick argues, resulted in a belief that knowledge indeed meant "sexual knowledge," which further suggested that secrets meant "sexual secrets" by the end of the nineteenth century (73). As these beliefs of oppression became more present, Sedgwick states that the "open secret" took place. The "open secret" is then the secret of the homosexual which is always the secret of the public. It came about as the result of cultural, political and religious oppression and ignorance in society, and led with it the metaphor of "the closet."

As for the female homosexual, she has not been placed in a closet nor is she an open secret. The female homosexual has rather been made invisible or "ghosted" (Castle 4-5). It can also be argued that where the male homosexual used the closet to hide away, the female homosexual used friendship. This can be seen in both novels. *The Well* most likely received much attention because of the masculine appearance of Stephen, as well as using sexologists' language to explain Stephen's emotions and behaviour. *A Sunless Heart*, on the other hand, shows clear resemblance to New Women novels where close bonds between women and curiosity around their sexuality were very common. Therefore, people did either not notice any implications of female homosexuality, or they chose not to comment on it because, as Vicinus points out, "the Victorians were masters of the unspoken and the unsaid, happy to let odd sexual relations flourish as long as no one spoke openly about them" (Vicinus 54). Sedgwick further

regards the "closet" as being a transparent enclosure (Sedgwick 3), meaning that the homosexuality might be hidden in revealing ways within the text. This makes it possible for some readers to identify the homosexuality while others cannot which again refers to the "open secret." *The Well of Loneliness* does not "closet" the female homosexual as it does not attempt to dissimulate the object of sexual desire as Sedgwick argues (Love 499). It does, however, deal with the same-sex desire between women quite discretely where the more important factor is love instead of sexual desire. *A Sunless Heart*, on the other hand, can be argued as containing the "open secret" to some degree as it attempts to conceal the female homosexual. Although, it can be seen as dealing quite explicitly with female homosexuality from a twenty-first-century reader's perspective. The attempts made to conceal or hide the homosexual content can be seen as a grey area which can confuse some readers of the true nature of the female friendships. One can thus regard this as an example of using friendship as a metaphor for same-sex romance instead of the closet.

As pointed out above, Iser suggests that the text provides segments that guide the reader through the narrative. These segments have to be connected because they are abrupted by a gap. The new categories of defining sexuality created new standard binary oppositions in society which also brought with them a new language for speaking about it. Female same-sex love and desire took on many forms in literature before the fixed categorisation of sexuality became part of the vocabulary (Whitlock 560). When these new categories were implemented in the language, a new divide in binary oppositions occurred where one of the binaries would be superior to the other. This also partook in the perception of the language where certain words or expressions would be perceived as more "correct" than the other. Therefore, one can assume that certain words and structures in relation to the epistemology of the closet might increase misinterpretations or result in varying interpretations among different readers of the same society. As some signifiers evoke varying existing experiences and knowledge in the reader, one can argue that people of the nineteenth century were still "in the dark" about the nature of female friendships, meaning not all would be able to connect the homosexual relations found within the novels. This could be seen as a result of a lack of a common frame of reference as some readers would not be able to connect the schematic images concerning the female homosexual. Because of this lack of a common frame of reference, one can say that an epistemological gap occurred, meaning there was a gap between familiar and unfamiliar meanings. By combining Sedgwick's "epistemology of the closet" with Iser's reader-response theory, one can do a historical analysis of how female homosexual bonds could be read in different ways by people of a given society. Sedgwick's queering of a deconstructive

understanding gives insight into different thoughts and knowledge available to the Western culture, while Iser provides a method to understand the text based on its readers' responses to it. This further allows one to explore the epistemology of the female homosexual and the grey area of female homosexual relations that occur in the communication between text and reader.

Chapter Two

Clandestine Sexual Intimacy in *The Well of Loneliness*

The Well of Loneliness (1928) by Radclyffe Hall, is a novel divided into five books, following the life journey of the "queer" girl Stephen Gordon, who received her name because her parents so dearly wanted a boy. The novel deals with female homosexuality quite explicitly and appear to be an attempt to evoke reactions and stop the public's ignorance of female homosexuality. However, Stephen is never closeted, but rather ignorant to her own sexual identity. After its publication, the novel received much attention. At first, the attention came because of the great success Hall's previous novel, *Adam's Breed* (1926), and later it increased because some people found its subject to be scandalous. Due to its contents, it was banned in Great Britain for being too obscene and after the obscenity trial all copies of the book was seized and sent to be destroyed (Duffy ix; Jennings 109).

The female relations in the novel are interesting because they present perspectives about female homosexuality which could be confusing or challenging for the reader to locate. The attempt would then bring knowledge about the invisible female homosexual out into the open. In the novel, Stephen Gordon is painted as a sexual deviant and through her homosexuality is presented as an illness which will doom her and those alike to end up in loneliness. Stephen develops two close friendships of interest which both present different natures. The first is with an older woman named Angela Crossby, an American actress, who is married prior to her friendship with Stephen. The second is with Mary Llewellyn, a younger woman whom Stephen meets during the first world war. These friendships are both of romantic, intimate nature where we can find a presence of the secrecy and ignorance of society.

The language of the novel is interesting in relation to its portrayal of these character, and of their close, intimate bonds. Although the novel deals with female homosexuality quite explicitly, it does not present female same-sex sexual desire as directly as it presents love between women. Following this view, one can argue that the novel is more catered to a heterosexual reader through its choice of words and descriptions of the relationships. The use of language and portrayal contradicts each other where, on the one hand, it asks for sympathy and understanding of the love shared by two of the same sex which society regarded as unnatural. On the other hand, it supports the stereotypical thoughts and beliefs of the times suggesting that there is something wrong with people who feel this way. Hall arguably used this approach to try and achieve sympathy from heteronormative readers, while at the same time presenting a novel that people having these feelings could recognise themselves in. For today's reader, the language used to talk about lesbianism or female same-sex love is arguably

more easily detected because of broader awareness on the subject. Sedgwick does, however, emphasise that our knowledge about sexuality, and especially homosexuality, has been influenced by previous understandings which further led to the definitions we know today. The text is explicit and uses an open approach to the theme. At the same time the text describes sexual intimacy discreetly which allows the reader to fill in the gaps with her own knowledge and experiences. When the novel was published in 1928, it was received different critiques. Some praised it for being courageous, while others criticised it for being tendentious.

Though novel's reviews after publishing were split, it was not attacked for its subject at first but rather received some positive reviews. The day after the novel was published, L. P Hartley wrote in the *Saturday Review* that it had a powerful appeal and carried beautifully written passages, though he found the novel's stance to be rather polemical (Souhami 188). Ida Wylie, in the *Saturday Times,* found it honest and wrote that it had a "lively sense of characterisation" (qtd. in Souhami 188). Another critic, Vera Brittain, wrote that it was passionately and sincerely written, and that she thought it an important book (188). While some people found it a powerful novel, not everyone agreed on its form or dealings with such a theme. One of the people that did not encourage the novel was Leonard Woolf in a review for the *Nation.* He thought the book was a failure and that its form and sense of discourse was absent (188). Woolf continued by saying that he found the novel "long, tedious, absolutely humourless and a melodramatic description of a subject which has nothing melodramatic about it" (qtd. in Souhami 188). Just before the book was published, Havelock Ellis wrote that "it is the first English novel which presents, in a completely faithful and uncompromising form, various aspects of sexual inversion as it exists among us today" (qtd. in Jennings 117). Ellis approved of the publishing of the novel and suggested that there were certain people who were different from "their fellow human beings." Even though he does not explicitly say it, one can still find assumptions towards and understandings of the homosexual as unequal to those he regards as the "normal" part of the population.

August 19th, 1928, James Douglas, the editor of the *Sunday Express,* wrote the headline "A BOOK THAT MUST BE SUPPRESSED" (qtd. in Dellamora 194). Under this headline, Douglas expressed his views on the novel's themes, describing them as "frankly and vividly a subject so utterly degrading that decent people regard it as an unspeakable horror" (qtd. in Dellamora 195). Douglas opposed such filth while also making a scandal that would help sell his newspaper. In the review, he wrote that "its theme is utterly inadmissible in the novel […] I am well aware that sexual inversion and perversion are horrors which exist among us today. They flaunt themselves in public places with increasing effrontery and more insolently

provocative bravado. The decadent apostles of the most hideous and most loathsome vices no longer conceal their degeneracy and their degradation" (qtd. in Souhami 192). The wording chosen by Douglas is quite interesting as he actually divides sexual inversion from perversion, meaning he does not necessarily see them as one and the same, but compares them as equally bad which is seen through the words following "inversion and perversion." People falling inside this category are walking around with "provocative bravado" which suggests that he found their presence in the public to be provocative in itself. He continued to write about *The Well* and suggested that the book must be banished. Further, he stated that "I would rather give a healthy boy or a healthy girl a phial of prussic acid than this novel. Poison kills the body, but moral poison kills the soul […] I appeal to the Home Secretary to set the law in motion. He should instruct the Director of Public Prosecutions to consider whether *The Well of Loneliness* is fit for circulation, and, if no, to take action to prevent its being further circulated" (qtd. in Souhami 193). As Douglas' beliefs about the homosexual came out to the public, his attitudes would arguably affect his readers which would further affect the readers' expectations and understanding as they read the novel. These comments by Douglas can be seen as contributing to a "homosexual panic," which Sedgwick point out in her theory as a crucial factor to the ignorance of the homosexual (Sedgwick 67-69). Further, this means that these attitudes are crucial for the control of what knowledge is seen as "correct."

Douglas' article caught the attention of the Home Secretary, who was Sir William Joynson-Hicks at the time. Joynson-Hicks was an evangelical moralist and did not approve of the content in *The Well.* Therefore, he sent the book around to make sure his colleagues would read it, to further get the novel banned. In a letter from Sir George Stephenson, the Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions, it said that the novel had been described as "sincere, courageous, high minded and beautifully expressed. The fact however remains that it is in effect a plea not only for the toleration but for the recognition of sexual perversion amongst women" (qtd. in Souhami 195). Here, homosexuality or inversion is not even mentioned but expressed through the use of the word perversion. This indicates, in difference from Douglas, that inversion and perversion were one and the same. Since this was expressed by a person of power in society, one can assume that these were views that they saw fit for the public's knowledge. Further in the letter, Sir George explained how the novel in his view "would tend to corrupt the minds of the young persons if it fell into their hands" (qtd. in Souhami 196) and suggested that it must be banned. These homophobic beliefs were shared by several of his colleagues which referred to the novel as dealing with "unnatural practices between women," "practitioners of unnatural vice," and "the most horrible and disgusting obscenity" (qtd. in Souhami 199).

However, in the following obscenity trail, Hall's lawyer stated that "the relations between women described in the book represented a normal friendship." (qtd. in Newton 573). The statement from Hall's lawyer clearly explained that the female relationships in the novel does not present abnormal behaviour. Since this statement was possible, one can assume that he was not alone in thinking that the female relations to be "normal friendships." These words also emphasise the presence of ignorance of the possibility in the nature of female friendships in society. Based on these reviews and the history of the novel, one can further assume that even though it was an attempt to defend the "so-called deviant," it rather unravelled more homophobic attitudes than had been previously present.

According to Martha Vicinus, Hall's novel was surrounded by class-based double standard in the public discourse which was done through hiding the direct reference to homosexuality or inversion in newspapers. Instead, public discourses referred to homosexual behaviour and acts through reference to Oscar Wilde, Decadent art or morbidity (Vicinus 222). As will be discussed later in *The Well,* female homosexuality is dealt with and seen as being morbid or wrong, especially through Stephen Gordon and her self-loathing. Stephen is an educated upper-middle-class woman and because of her respectable position in society, the novel received many harsh critiques. Society did at the time, not worry about those who were well-educated. They rather worried about those who resembled the character Mary Llewellyn who is more naïve and less educated which according to many meant that they wore more vulnerable to be influenced by such works as *The Well* (222). Overall, these reviews suggest that the novel deals with immorality and morbidity. Through the reviews it has become clear that it was the mannish appearance of Stephen that really caught the public's attention. Though the novel wrote very explicitly about the female homosexual or female sexual inversion, it still managed to hide some aspects of it away through certain codes, as will become clear as one analyses Stephen's relationships with other women.

The first female relationship of interest is presented in book two, when twenty-one-year-old Stephen meets an American woman named Angela Crossby. In the bond between Stephen and Angela, there are strong evidences of female homosexuality. Since the beginning of the novel, the reader is made aware of the strangeness of Stephen's being, and as those images are connected with her thoughts about Angela, this strangeness takes on a new form. Stephen and Angela connect after Stephen helps catch her West Highland terrier, Tony, who was running away from the butcher's dog. The women begin to spend more time together after this encounter and develop a bond. Their friendship continues to grow, and it becomes clear that Stephen has grown feelings for this woman. This is exemplified in the descriptions of Stephen's thoughts

and behaviour. After meeting Angela, Stephen "was crumbling at the mere thought of Angela Crossby" (Hall 146), and "it was Angela Crossby's face that persisted as Stephen sat in her father's old chair" (Hall 151). Up to this point the reader is given hints that their friendship might be only a friendship, but there could also be more to it. As the reader meets Angela's perspective, more evidence of a female homosexual bond between the two emerge. Angela, a married woman, acts very flirtatious and bold as she "moved a step nearer to Stephen, then another, until their hands were touching" (Hall 155). This creates an image that these two women have a close bond which can assume the similarity to what Faderman referred to as a "romantic friendship" (154-155). The view is corroborated when "Stephen took Angela into her arms, and she kissed her full on the lips, as a lover" (Hall 155). This passage could be interpreted in different ways where it could arguably be a result of the individual's prior knowledge and experience, as suggested by Iser. For instance, Sharon Marcus points out that it was often common for women to kiss each other on the lips as a form of social greeting (57). However, as Hall uses a language which stresses that she kisses her as "a lover," it is easily argued that such emphasis would make it difficult or impossible for the reader to see the bond as something other than a romantic one, or even as a sign of female same-sex desire.

The word "lover," as mentioned earlier, occurs frequently in the text and appears to be used to emphasise that the friendships in the novel are not merely friendships. The usage of the word increases when Stephen and Angela develop a close bond. In a discussion between Angela and Stephen, the narrator emphasises that "she spoke such words as lovers have spoken ever since the divine, sweet madness of God flung the thought love into Creation" (Hall 190). Similarly to the passage above, "lover" is added to emphasise that they are more than friends. Following this idea, one can argue that "lover" is used as a modifying word, to underline the actual nature of their friendship. This could be a strategy from the text to express to a heterosexual reader that these women are not in "normal" friendship. Since the word "lover" can suggest several things such as "a person who is in love with, or who is enamoured of, another person," ("Lover" n.2.3a), "a person who engages in a romantic or sexual relationship outside marriage" ("Lover" n.2.3b) and "a person in an (exclusive) sexual and romantic relationship with another" ("Lover" n.2.3d). What meaning the reader would ascribe would then depend on her prior knowledge or experience of female same-sex romance. Based on the descriptions of Stephen as manly and queer, a heterosexual reader could read it as a suggestion of the first meaning of the word and that Angela simply plays along. A homosexual reader on the other hand, who would recognise such emotions, could interpret it as the latter meaning of the word.

Further, the text provides perspectives of their relation which can either confuse or contradict the reader's images of the nature of their friendship. The reader is introduced to Stephen's feeling quite early in the novel (Newton 572). This does not, however, create any certainty to the friendships she develops with other women. When Stephen reflects around her feelings for Angela, she thinks that "to her there seemed nothing strange or unholy in the love that she felt for Angela Crossby" (Hall 156). Thus, the adjectives used indicate that one should conventionally find their friendship "strange" or "unholy." "Strange" or "strangeness" are adjectives that occur on several occasions and imply that the text reflects the heterosexist conventions about female homosexuality as "abnormal" or "unnatural." In the early twentieth century, people became more aware of the "unnatural" nature of some female friendships as a result of the rise of theories by sexologists like Sigmund Freud, Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis (Detloff 148–49; Faderman 241–43). The contemporary society viewed people like Stephen, sexual inverts, as "unhealthy" or "immoral" beings both because of their attraction to other women and because of their (often) masculine appearance (298). Masculinity was one of Krafft-Ebing's signs of deviancy in women where he suggested that the more masculine a woman is, the more deviant she is (Newton 566). Therefore, by using this type of language the text conveys to the reader that Stephen is definitely a "sexual deviant" or a "sexual invert" which is what makes female homosexuality explicitly visible in the text. When Stephen later finds a book by Krafft-Ebing in her father's office (Hall 222), the text presents a reference which can either confirm the reader's suspicion of homosexuality or provide new hints. Additionally, the use of such language with negative connotation towards female same sex desire, the text emphasises these stereotypical ideas of "the mannish lesbian." Newton also states that it is through Stephen's "mannish" appearance that the novel's relationships escape the "asexual model of romantic friendship" (560). However, because the sexual implications are hidden within the text without the realisation of many readers, one can rather argue that it does not completely escape it.

Up to this point, the relationship between Stephen and Angela presents similarities with Faderman's asexual "romantic friendship." As previously mentioned, these friendships were filled with passionate love between women where they could depend on each other, and if possible, spend their lives together (Faderman 16). In this case, Stephen is very devoted to Angela and is ready to give up everything to be with her. Angela, on the other hand, shows no signs of such devotion for Stephen, and does not imply any intention of leaving her husband for Stephen. Vicinus states that romantic friendships were built around this devotion and would often start planning their lives together, but this planning could not occur until after a

declaration of love (7-8). Hence, it could conceivably be hypothesised that this friendship falls short. The lack of devotion from Angela's side, could also direct the reader away from seeing her as a deviant, but rather as experimental (Dellamora 200). One can also see her as what some people today refers to as a "tourist," or "bi-curious." This means that Angela is a heterosexual person who is "interested in having a sexual experience or relationship with a person of the same sex" ("Bi-curious" adj.). Since, the word did not exist at the time, one can argue that today's word "bi-curious" shows some similarities to those of school-girl friendships which will be discussed more broadly later. The image of their friendship is further challenged when Stephen threaten to reveal their secret to Angela's husband, and Angela replies,

> 'You *are* mad,' she said slowly, 'you're raving mad. Tell him what? Have I let you become my lover? You know that I've always been faithful to Ralph; you know perfectly well that there's nothing to tell him, beyond rather schoolgirlish kisses. Can I help it if you're – what you obviously are? (Hall 159)

In this passage, Angela clearly states that there is nothing in their friendship that suggests she has been unfaithful to her husband. It presents many examples of gaps which the reader would have to fill in to create images. Through such a statement, the text pivots away from the previous beliefs of the nature of their friendship. First, Angela accuses Stephen of being "mad" for wanting to tell Ralph about their relationship. By calling Stephen mad, Angela suggests that she is the problem which might for some readers be enough to convince them that Stephen is delusional. Stephen is also vulnerable at this point in the novel. Therefore, by saying that she is mad, which she already is afraid of, Angela get the upper hand in the situation. This suggests that Stephen has been influenced society's homosexual panic and their views on homosexuality as something wrong and "unnatural." Moreover, by denying they were lovers, the reader's image of any sexual implication is altered. Because "lover" would be used to indicate that their friendship was more than friendship, it could also take part in any sexual implications. To further refer to their kisses as "schoolgirlish," this implication is emphasised. The reader gets the impression that their bond is similar to the experiences of schoolgirls, and that they are simply playing around. Where some readers would be able to locate the images surrounding schoolgirl friendships, others would struggle because of the lack of experience. The novel's portrayal of Stephen suggests that she never experiences such schoolgirl friendships that Alger celebrated. A reader that finds similarities with Stephen would be able to detect many of the other references to homosexuality, but without the knowledge or experience of schoolgirl friendships, one could argue that they would not successfully read it as it was intended to be read.

Another gap may occur as Angela asks, “have I let you become my lover?” because it up to this point has been some uncertainties to what kind of friendship they have had. If the reader was familiar with Alger’s book, she could see the importance of such friendships in women’s lives, but also understand how these friendships must come to an end. Moreover, the sentence “what you obviously are” indicates that Angela does not identify with Stephen which can create a gap in the reader’s image-building. The gap occurs because of the negation of Angela’s sexual identity where one can at first see her as a homosexual, which is fully negated in the passage above. If there is a lack of knowledge or understanding in the reference of what Stephen actually is, the reader will not be able to clearly follow the intent behind the statement. One possible reason for not being able to fill this gap could be because many heterosexual readers would negate that female homosexuality was even possible because it was a “repressed idea at the heart of the patriarchal culture” (Castle 62-63). This means that the reader could either ignore filling in the gap, or that she is unable to fill it because of a lack of a common frame of reference. The reference “what you obviously are?” falls outside the reader’s frame of reference which leads to an indeterminacy in the interaction between text and reader. This also suggests that female homosexual inversion is treated as “the unspeakable” (Green 288). Thus, one can argue that the heterosexual reader would have more difficulty filling in this gap than a homosexual reader, because they would recognise the feelings and accusations of homosexuality presented. Further, Angela attacks Stephen by implying that there is something wrong with her being what she obviously is. Stephen’s “unnatural” identity also comes to light through simple words used about her by Angela as well as by others, for example “creature,” “freak,” “abomination” and “queer.” These words align with the mind-set presented by the reviews above where female homosexuality is seen as perverse.

As Stephen wants to come out into the open Angela only focuses on how “wrong” it is and asks, “could you marry me, Stephen?” (Hall 160). The text clearly conveys to the reader that Stephen longs to fall in line with heteronormative values and norms. By first introducing Angela to her mother and Puddle, and buying a ring, it presents her attempt to assimilate conventional courtship patterns (Jennings 116). This is when Angela breaks off their bond. The image of marriage between two women as unnatural conveyed by society can be argued as an attempt for the public to force them back into the closet, but as their relationship develops Stephen in particular refuses to be closeted. When their friendship ends because Angela has the affair with Roger Antrim, it could lead the reader into believing that homosexuality is actually a passing phase. Many contemporary scholars emphasised that female homosexuality was only a phase early in women’s lives, and that it should pass as they became older or got married.

Following this view, Vicinus also emphasises that a man or marriage often caused such friendships as Stephen and Angela's to break (xv-xvi). By creating a relationship between Stephen and Angela, Hall corroborates these understandings. When the narrator explains that Angela found Stephen amusing as she was bored, the reader could interpret it as only being a temporary relationship until Angela is able to find something "better."

The second female friendship of interest is the friendship between Stephen and Mary. Later in the novel, Stephen meets the beautiful young woman, Mary Llewellyn. The relationship arguably presents more evidence of consensual homosexual desire than the previous one. Stephen and Mary meet in the Breakspeare Unit, a unit who helps the French Ambulance Corps, during the First World War (Hall 303). During this period their bond or connections grows stronger, where Stephen feels worried and protective of Mary, and Mary looks at Stephen as a security. Their expressions of love and appreciation does not necessarily imply that there is something more than just friendship between them. Women who were friends would often show their gratitude to each other, and as Vicinus explains, some people would regard these friendships as more important than heterosexual love (xvii). Therefore, the examples provided does not necessarily suggest anything unnatural at this point. Later, however, when Mrs. Breakspeare, the woman in charge of the Breakspeare Unit, confronts Stephen about her close friendship to Mary (Hall 316), the reader would react to her suspicious confrontation. Mrs. Breakspeare suggests that Mary should stand more on her own feet because it has become quite visible that these two women had grown very close. Further, when Mrs. Breakspeare says, "I'm sure you'll agree with me, Miss Gordon, in thinking it *our duty* to discourage anything in the *nature of an emotional friendship*, such as I fancy Mary Llewellyn is on the verge of feeling for you" (Hall 317, my emphasis). It is made clear that their relationship portrays behaviour and emotions regarded as unnatural between two women at the time. As the words emphasised suggests, they are not to encourage such feelings. There can however be some confusion to this suggestion because they are at war, where the warning could be interpreted as being directed towards the emotional trauma it could cause if they became to close and one of them dies or gets injured which could "lead to ridicule in the Unit" (Hall 317).

The nature of their friendship does not become clear until later in the novel when Mary comes to live with Stephen at her house in the Rue Jacob in Paris. It was not unusual nor unnatural for unmarried friends to live together in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. At first, Stephen acts very standoffish to Mary's attention. This might be unexpected for some readers as Stephen's masculine qualities would imply that she is the one that would approach Mary and seduce her. It is, however, the young, naïve Mary who is the one trying to seduce or

get closer to the more restrained Stephen. This did in fact cause some disturbance in the public where many would discuss sexual scandals or bad behaviour discretely in order to spare the semi-educated and innocents like Mary (Vicinus 222). Here, Vicinus states that "at the heart of the public debate about the *Well* was a fear that the Marys of the world were able and willing to act on their own desires" (222). Therefore, by presenting Stephen through this evasive behaviour, the text contradicts the reader's, especially the heterosexual reader's, expectations about female homosexuality. Stephen continues to distance herself from Mary "because in this world there is only toleration for the so-called normal" (Hall 330). Through Stephen herself there are strong implications of a repulsive attitude towards her own being which implies that the knowledge she has been dealt about her own identity is a result of the ignorance of female homosexuality. She tries to keep her emotions hidden from Mary because she is afraid of how "the so-called normal" would react to it. By referring to the heterosexual as "normal," Stephen implies that she herself is not normal. This is evident on several occasions talks about herself and "the terrible nerves of the invert." Moreover, this phrase occurs frequently in the narrative and appears to be a reference to Stephen's self-consciousness of how other people perceive her. It is also a reference to sexologists' theories which suggested that the masculine female invert suffered from "nerves" or in some cases "hysteria" (Faderman 241; Vicinus 205). The reference to the invert's nerves would not be available to the everyday reader's frame of reference, but rather only the educated sphere of the reading public. This further exemplifies how different even the heterosexual reader's views on the text might be.

Stephen and Mary share a romantic friendship which reminds of marriage. Vicinus states that women often formed marriage-like relationships which "could look remarkably similar to the ideal companionate heterosexual marriage, reflecting many of its characteristics, including a more powerful, intellectual, "masculine" partner and a milder, more feminine, soul mate" (7). Stephen clearly represents the powerful, masculine, intellectual partner with her "muscular shoulders," her "small compact breasts," and her "slender flanks of an athlete" (Hall 202). She works hard on her novel to be able to take care of her Mary. Mary represents the feminine, soul mate with her "short black lashes which curled back abruptly" and her "lips were well-modelled and fine in texture, having deeply indented corners" (Hall 304). It is interesting, however, that even though one is masculine, and one is feminine in their appearance, they both have qualities fitting the description of the other. Stephen is more secluded as their friendship evolves, and as previously mentioned, Mary is the one who pursues and seduces Stephen. This appears to have been the opposite of what the reader might expect based on the other qualities they possess. Newton argues that it was often the masculine or "mannish" partner that would

reveal them as a couple to the public (574-575), but in this case Mary's behaviour is equally revealing to the nature of their friendship as Stephen's appearance. As discussed in the reviews, is was this behaviour that became one of the major concerns of society as they feared such writing would influence the "weaker" individuals.

Further, their marriage-like friendship takes on its form through the language of love and devotion expressed both between them and by the narrator. One of the first evidences presented which indicates marriage comes after their return to Paris when Stephen says, "Welcome home, Mary" (Hall 351). Marcus emphasises that women often "combined the rhetorics of friendship and of marriage" (52) to express their marital love for another woman. As the narrator says that Mary "was at the stage of being in love when she longed to do womanly task for Stephen" (Hall 353), the reader is presented a more direct perspective of the nature of their friendship, which clearly suggests a marital act. The roles they take on present similarities to conventional roles in a heterosexual marriage where Stephen takes the role as husband and provides for Mary, and Mary takes the role as wife where she is responsible for the home. Both Faderman and Vicinus highlights that even though a romantic friendship presents similarities to marriage, it does not necessarily imply a sexual side to it. The impression of female romantic friendship can, therefore, arguably be dismissed by some readers as there are some sexual implications which according to Faderman rather implies a "lesbian relationship."

In *The Well,* sexual desire can be detected but it is often written quite discreetly, or presented through gaps created by ellipsis. The reader can thus assume more is happening between the lines. This can be seen when Stephen finally admits her love for Mary despite her fear of the "so-called normal." When Mary then declare her love by saying "can't you understand that all that I am belongs to you, Stephen?" (Hall 343), Stephen "bent down and kissed Mary's hands very humbly, for now she could find no words any more … and that night they were not divided" (343). In this passage, some readers would not be able to connect the segments provided through the text. The last section of passage, "that night they were not divided," implies to the reader that they slept together in the same bed, or at least stayed together. Another example can be found later in the novel when,

> they stood very still, grown abruptly silent. […] And although they could not have put it into words, could not have explained it to themselves or to each other, they seemed at that moment to be looking beyond the turbulent flood of earthly passion; to be looking straight into the eyes of a love that was changed – a love made perfect, discarnate. But the moment passed and they drew together… (Hall 354)

In both examples, the use of "…" creates an ellipsis which again generates a gap where the reader would have to read between the lines in order to finds its meaning. To a homosexual reader, who possesses knowledge and experience about what happens between the lines, both examples would imply the consummation of their new found love. As Sedgwick puts it, "it takes one to know one" (225). Heterosexual readers who were coloured by the social and cultural norms would arguably have more difficulty filling in this gap as implying a sexual act because the female homosexual was treated as invisible (Castle 32-33). Additionally, Catharine Stimpson argues that the novel presents the female homosexual in a way that attributes to the "conventional belief about female homosexuality" (371), namely women's preference of love and romance rather than physical consummation. But, because the novel attempts to attain sympathy from the heterosexual reader, one can argue that the physical side of the relationship in conveyed so discretely to prevent excessive provocation, and to only enable those with the "right" knowledge to locate the bond's true nature. As the novel moves towards the ending, Stephen chases Mary away because she feels that she cannot give her the life she deserves and needs because of what she is. Therefore, Stephen makes sure she goes off with Martin, a friend of Stephen, because he can give her what she needs. This makes Stephen into a martyr where she sacrifices her own happiness for Mary's. Thus, Stephen ends up in loneliness.

Chapter Three

Friendship as Metaphor for Female Homosexual Bonds in *A Sunless Heart*

Only some thirty years before the publication of *The Well of Loneliness*, Edith Johnstone published *A Sunless Heart* (1894). It is a novel divided into two books, "The Brother and Sister" and "Lotus". It is not a widely known novel and has therefore not been the subject of many studies. The first book is about Gaspar and Gasparine O'Neill, who try to get through their lives with an abusive, drunk father. The second book is a continuing of Gasparine's story without her brother. Here she exchanges her deep grief and love for her brother with a passionate love or obsession for the beautiful college teacher, Lotus Grace. The novel touches upon several issues of the *fin de siècle*. Some of these issues are connected to politics, sexual identity, and private and public injustice (Harsh 9). It is also a novel filled with curiosities to themes such as to secrecy, friendship, class, private, public and silence. The novel talks quite much and openly about female love and homoeroticism, although it did not at the time become criticised by contemporary critics for containing unnatural or immoral content. Nor was it criticised for being obscene, like *The Well of Loneliness* would be just a few years later.

The relationships of interest occur between three characters, where Gasparine and Mona have a close bond with Lotus. The descriptions of their bonds present both evidence of common friendships of nineteenth century women, as well as implications of female homosexuality which could be confusing for the reader. One can argue that there are several reasons why people were unable to discover the female homosexuality which is so clearly represented (Harsh 22). One reason could be because close relationships between women were very common, and almost expected by society. William Alger was, as previously mentioned, one of the people who encouraged these friendships in *The Friendships of Women* (1879) where he argued that they were important for women's lives (19). He saw them as important to women because they were destined to love, and because husbands and children occupy women's lives, they were unable to continue such friendships. Further, he explains that female friendships are crucial in their early life because when she fulfilled her duty as wife and mother, this passion and devotion will fade away. Men were not capable of such devotion and sensitivity (18) which meant women would have to live without such passions only a female friendship could provide (19-20). Another possibility is because of the time it was published. Its structure is very representative of New woman novels, and the novel deals with other large issues of society which could overshadow the female homosexual content (Neiman 3). Yet another possibility for missing the female homosexual content could be because of the language used within the novel. Certain words and sentences would be interpreted individually from reader to reader and therefore drew

the attention away from the female friendships. One can also see this as a result of the lack of knowledge about female sexuality, or rather lack of knowledge about these forms of friendships. Since sexuality did not become a field of study until the latter half of the nineteenth century, one can assume that female homosexual behaviour had not yet become common knowledge. Therefore, by examining the language and structure used to portray the novel's female friendships in relation to historical factors, one can argue that the novel uses the metaphor of friendship to conceal the female same-sex romances.

As mentioned above, there is evidence suggesting contemporary readers of *A Sunless Heart* did in fact not notice the female homosexual content. The reviews mostly comment on the execution of the novel, and the "new woman" content. Some of the critics admire the content and find the writer to be "one of considerable strength and promise" (Johnstone 200). Others find it a tragic and sad work of fiction, and a badly executed work of literature. It appears as though many of the reviews failed in locating the female homosexual relations represented within the novel, though one can argue that some reviews encode their comments on this behaviour.

In the *Athenaeum* review, a reference to French fiction can be seen as an implication towards sexual impropriety. The reviewer writes of an "unwelcome progress on certain lines" (202) which could indicate the female homosexuality found within the bonds between Gasparine, Mona and Lotus. According to Constance D. Harsh, the "English held French fiction responsible for many ills" (22), and as the novel precedes, Gasparine and Lotus only move further away from male company and spend more time with each other. France, and especially Paris, was seen in relation to homosexuality in general because people there were able to create homosexual subcultures, allowing them to identify themselves (Halberstam 75-76). It can also be assumed that this reference to French fiction rather refers to the sexual abuse of Lotus as a young girl. One can also find a curious passage in the review from the *Spectator* where it says that "many readers will find certain portions of it not merely painful, but repellent" (203). The use of the word "repellent" could be seen as a reaction towards the female bonds and the descriptions of female sexual desire, or one could rather see it as a reference to a badly performed work of fiction. The passage could also be referring to the sexual abuse Lotus was exposed to as a child. Sexual abuse of children, and especially of young girls, was a hot issue for Victorian readers. The issue received its great centrality in the public because of the successful journalist, W. T. Stead. Through his series of revelation in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" (1885), Stead commented on the "social evil" of juvenile prostitution and sexual abuse of children (Gorham 353). These revelations were very

descriptive which caught the Victorian public's attention and led to a moral panic (354-355). According to Deborah Gorham, Stead's goal was to enlighten the British people of the "veritable slave trade" of the "daughters of the people" (354). Stead's comments participated in implementing a new age of consent from thirteen to fifteen in the Criminal Law Amendment Act in 1885. These articles supposedly participated in re-criminalising male homosexuality as well, bringing its attention to the public once more.

Further, a critic in *Bookman* comments on the novels content where he finds it dealing with "German sentiment […] grafted on Irish sensitiveness" (Johnstone 204). Harsh argues, in the introduction to *A Sunless Heart,* that this reference "may be a veiled allusion to *Schwarmerei,* the German word used to describe the romantic feelings of one girl for another." (Harsh 22). The word "schwärmerei" is not used in the novel but was used in the nineteenth century to talk about "religious zeal, fanaticism, extravagant enthusiasm for a cause or a person; an erotic attachment, esp. of one woman or adolescent girl for another" ("Schwarmerei"). In relation to the female bonds in *A Sunless Heart,* this can be seen as a reference to the great enthusiasm for women's rights since the character Lotus is a very independent woman who has great influence on her students. It can also be seen in relation to "erotic attachment" where the narrator often describes Gasparine's emotions for Lotus as one of desire. Thus, there may appear some confusion of whether the reference to "German sentiment" is actually directed towards their close relations or a reference towards their devotion to women's rights. Either way, the *Bookman* review writes about *A Sunless Heart* in such way that not every reader would be able to interpret or understand the reference.

The same can be said of a review published in *The Speaker* in 1894. This review is, however, more interesting in its description of the relationship between Lotus and Gasparine. The reviewer writes that "their sentiments are those of two school-girls" (139). This reference to their bond as similar to two schoolgirls may indicate an understanding of their friendships as a homosexual one. In *The Friendships of Women,* Alger argues that a school-girl friendship was a beautiful and important period in a woman's life (269). Even though Alger encouraged these friendships, he also writes that "no doubt there is often something little grotesque or laughable in these youthful relations" (271) which can be directed towards the nature of female same-sex love. Assuming that the reviewer and other readers of the novel were familiar with this study, one can argue for a possible understanding of the female homosexuality. The review in *The Speaker* moves away from a possible homosexual reading though by comparing the love Gasparine has for Lotus with the love she had for her brother where there is an assumption towards a strange but rather innocent love.

Lastly, in *The review of reviews* in 1894, *A Sunless Heart* is praised for its originality and the strong character found in Lotus. At one point in the review, one can assume that there is a curiosity in the love that Lotus arouse in her students and the bonds she has with both Gasparine and Mona. Moving from the openness and love shared between Gasparine and Lotus, to the awakening of love within Lotus in her friendship Mona, it appears as though the reviewer has noticed a non-platonic love. When reading further, one realises that this is not the case when it says that "the destined man arrived who kindled in Lotus's dead heart the living flame of love" (73). This clearly states that it was a man that made Lotus able of feeling love again. It can be argued, however, that some readers would regard Mona as the true saviour of Lotus' ability to feel love again. Through these different interpretations of *A Sunless Heart*, one can see that there are some indications to their discovery of the female homosexuality, but even in the reviews they hide it well.

The first female relationship of interest in *A Sunless Heart* come to light when Gasparine O'Neill, a weak, rather unattractive girl, finds herself all alone without any friends or loved ones. Lotus Grace, a beautiful, strong woman swoops in to help her in her "friendless and poor" life (Johnstone 104). In the bond between Gasparine and Lotus, one can argue that there is evidence supporting the idea of a grey area between friends and more than friends. After the young, aspiring artist, Gasparine, loses her brother to "the consumption" (Johnstone 60), or tuberculosis, she finds herself all alone in the world. At this moment, the beautiful woman lecturer of the Women's College, Lotus Grace, observes the lonely girl walking down the street and decides to help her. To sufficiently help Gasparine, Lotus invites her to come live with her with the other inmates of the cottage which "formed a strange household" (99), until she feels better. During this period, Gasparine transfers her great love for her brother into a passionate obsession or desire for Lotus.

After Lotus' first visit at Gasparine's room, the narrator invites the reader into Lotus' cottage where she presents the other inmates, Mrs. Grace and Ladybird. Mrs. Grace is Lotus' aunt and is described as a wealthy woman who was "devoted to her niece" (Johnstone 100). Ladybird is a beautiful child which Lotus and Mrs. Grace made the impression of adopting, though it becomes clear later in the novel that she is Lotus' child. In the description of the cottage and its inmates, the narrative's temporality shifts and jumps back in time to present Lotus' perspective on how she found Gasparine. These structural changes generate a gap where the reader has to connect the segments presented through Gasparine's perspective to the segments presented through Lotus' perspective. She was out on a walk with another woman, Mona Lefcadio, who will be discussed more closely later, when she notices Gasparine escorting

her dead brother to the grave. As Lotus notices her, she asks Mona "who is the creature?" (102). Gasparine is not referred to as girl, or woman, or person, but as a "creature." The use of the word "creature" in relation to a person can be used as a modifying word to indicate or express "admiration, affection, compassion, or commiseration" ("Creature" n2a). It could also indicate a person "without qualifications, fellow creature" ("Creature" n2b) or "a reprehensible or despicable person" ("Creature" n2c). One could argue that readers of the novel would most likely interpret in as one of the latter meanings based on the sentence both before and after. In the sentence before, Lotus says "It strikes me, […] the corpse is walking behind" (Johnstone 102). There is a sense of negativity connected to this sentence which can be seen as a reference to Gasparine's sorrow. Lotus continues by asking Mona about the creature, and Mona tells her about Gasparine and her brother where she refers to Gasparine as a "ghoul" and a "scarecrow" in comparison to her brother the "angel" (102). At this point, the reader would not read it as a reference to female homosexuality because there are no other implications of such behaviour. It can, however, refer to Gasparine's rather androgynous appearance which again could imply female homosexuality.

Early in the novel, Gasparine is described in comparison to her twin brother where "he was slender, she was thin; he luminously white, she ghastly pallid; his cheeks were slightly hollow, her cheek-bones showed, and her delicately square jaw seemed to cut the skin almost; his eyes were dark and questioning, hers black as night, eager, restless, with something wild and painful in their glance" (Johnstone 37-38). This description presents Gasparine with qualities that can neither be seen as feminine nor masculine which makes her appearance more androgynous which could give hints towards the presence of a female homosexual. Even though Gasparine's appearance is androgynous, she still present other rather feminine qualities such as desperately wanting to feel the love shared between man and woman. Neither of the women in the novel, appears to have very explicit masculine qualities such as Stephen does in *The Well.* There are, however, some "mannish" qualities connected to all of them. Instead of making one character more masculine than the other, Johnstone has divided some characteristics often connected to men, in each of the characters. Mona and Lotus are very direct in speech and in their movements, and often defy etiquette suitable for women of the times. Gasparine takes control of the financials when she moves in, in addition to having little feminine looks. Seen in connection to *The Well* and Newton's statement of the mannish lesbian revealing the couple, one can see that these women are able to hide behind their more feminine qualities where Stephen cannot.

Whereas *The Well* often uses the word "lover," *A Sunless Heart* rather uses the word "friend." Lotus tells Gasparine again and again that "you *have* a friend" and "I want you for my friend" (Johnstone 110-111). The word "friend" has many different meanings which makes it difficult for the reader to know exactly what meanings it has in this context. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word "friend" may refer to "a person with whom one has developed a close and informal relationship of mutual trust and intimacy" ("Friend" n1a), "a person who takes the same side as another in war, a political contest or debate" ("Friend" n2b), "a close relation, a kinsman or kinswoman" ("Friend" n3), or "a romantic or sexual partner, a lover" ("Friend" n6), just to mention a few. The text may become more confusing as Lotus says, "I mean I want to have you for a friend, for my friend. In a little while you will understand what I mean" (Johnstone 110). The image which is created at first where a kind woman helping another is challenged later in the novel. When Gasparine realises how much Lotus has done to help her, she immediately sees Lotus differently and begs her to "let me love you" (125). Here, Lotus follows up by answering "yes, Gasparine, let us be friends" (125). This interaction between the two characters can interrupt the image that the reader has already developed of their relationship. On the one hand, it can thus be a suggestion of friendship since women at the time often were affectionate towards one another. On the other, it can suggest something deeper than friendship because of the intensity in their utterances. Victorian women such as Edith Simcox, Anne Lister and Vernon Lee among others, would employ or combine other terms such as "mother," "sister" or "friend" when talking about their desires for other women (Marcus 46). Thus, the confusion of "friend's" meaning, and therefore the meaning of their relationship is emphasised when Gasparine says "I do not know what we are; only I love her" (125) to Miss Blurton about her friendship with Lotus. The curiousness about this passage is that even though Gasparine expresses her love for Lotus, Miss Blurton does not react as one would expect. In light of Sedgwick's "epistemology of the closet," one could see the use of the word in opposition to the description and interaction between the women which would create a "double-bind" (Sedgwick 70). The word presented to the reader says that these women are "friends," but through perspectives such as "[t]o Gasparine it soon became the most beautiful face, save one, that she had ever seen" (126) or "[i]f perfect love, unquestioning, will heal you, Lo, you shall be healed. Lo, kiss me, now that I see you with open eyes, as you kissed me, thankless, when my eyes were blind with grief" (Johnstone 132), the word's meaning becomes confusing. The last passage does not only show the desire of one woman for another. It is also a declaration of love which is a clear sign of a "female romantic friendship" (Vicinus 7-8). After the declaration of love by Gasparine, she finds herself thinking that "[a] perfect, unquestioning love

I will give her, and save her. And to think *she*, who was my ideal, and seemed to be happy, and blessed in the mere fact of existence, should suffer!" (Johnstone 133). These feelings create an image that supports the idea of their bond meaning more than merely friendship. But, the nature of their bond is challenged or distracted when Lotus says she does not love Gasparine, "there is *no* love here in this world. There are for us moments of passion, of inspiration, or nearness. There are lives bound together by interest, association, custom. […] No, I do not believe in love" (137). The moving back and forth in their expressions about each other could create gaps in the reader's perception about their relationship. It presents Lotus as a woman who is eager to help and form new friendships, while at the same time depicting her as cold and closed off. This could be seen as a form of negation to distract the reader from the nature of their bond. Such distractions can also participate in leading the reader's wandering viewpoint away from the idea of a homosexual relationship between the two women.

Further implications of female homosexuality come to light as Gasparine begins to care more for Lotus and their friendship reveals more similarities to a romantic friendship. Gasparine is a character that spend much time observing her surroundings which allows her to observe Lotus and the pain and sorrow she carries with her. When Gasparine tries to thank her for helping her deal with her sorrow, Lotus answers "I tell you we are born with abnormal cravings, not natural appetites and desires" (Johnstone 128). Because the novel presents clear similarities to other New Women novels where there were much focus on the exploration of women's sexuality and sexual possibilities, this passage could be seen as a reference to women (Harsh 23). It could also provide the reader with hints towards the understanding of herself and Gasparine are unnatural because of their "abnormal cravings" which could suggest their desire for each other or other women in general. One can, however, still argue for the presence of female homosexual love through Gasparine's passion and devotion to Lotus. It is clear that she loves and even find herself "in love" with Lotus, but as for sexual desire one can mostly find it in her imagination. There are some situations where Lotus and Gasparine kiss which according to Castle could be used as a codeword for an "orgasm" (100). In this case, however, this does not appear to be the case. The situations around the event of kissing does not highlight such sexual intimacy as a possibility. The friendship between Lotus and Gasparine therefore appear to be similar to Faderman's "romantic friendship," but because Lotus never declare her love for Gasparine this implication fails.

Simultaneously with the relationship to Gasparine, Lotus also continues her close bond with Mona Lefcadio. This relationship appears to have been going on since before Gasparine came into the picture and presents stronger evidences of female homosexuality than the

friendship between Lotus and Gasparine. Mona is described as "a creature of flame and water, genius and strung nerves; a mad lovable thing; a West Indian heiress" (Johnstone 101). This description can be seen in relation to Stephen in *The Well,* where the "nerves of the invert" are frequently mentioned. Mona's nerves are also mentioned often and indicates to the reader that she is not very stable. Similarly to *The Well*, including comments on Mona's nerves may imply to a well-read or educated reader that there is a connection to female homosexuality. At the end of the Victorian era, it became more apparent that the homosexual invert had "terrible nerves" (Faderman 321). This idea derived from the moral values of society where it was unthinkable that moral and virtuous women were interested in sexual intercourse. In the analysis of *The Well,* it is argued that the nerves of the invert refer to Stephen's self-consciousness about her own being and about how other people perceive her. In the case of Mona and her "shattered nerves" (Johnstone 131), one can also argue that some readers would fill the gaps to suggest she was suffering of "hysteria." Hysteria was often the diagnosis of women's reactions. Mona is a very passionate and direct character with an enormous range of sentimental emotions, especially toward Lotus. In a dialogue between the two, Lotus makes it clear for Mona that,

> "At present you yearn for sentiment, emotion, passion. I am you lay-figure. In a few years you will find man is the right and legal object if these hysterics – you would have found it out long ago, but your beauty has made you proud and scornful. It will come, however, rest content." There was a long silence. Mona seemed to reflect and puzzle over something. Then she said, – "You mean to say, that in a little while I shall give to men that admiration and love I give to you now?" (Johnstone 107)

This passage suggests that Mona wishes to be with Lotus rather than marrying a man, and this it emphasised once more as Mona answers that "I shall never love any one as I love you – never; man nor woman. No man will teach me life as you will. We shall always be together – in life and death" (Johnstone 107). Mona clearly clashes with the norms of society where it was expected of women to get married, as discussed in relation to Alger above. The idea of Mona being hysteric can be emphasised in view of Elaine Showalter (1987) as she explains that "mental breakdown would come when women defied their "nature," [or] attempted to compete with men instead of serving them" (123). Mona's refusal of marrying a man can thus indicate to the reader that she is on the verge of becoming or that she is hysteric. This can also be perceived as the word "hysteric" is actually mentioned in the text, as well as the fact that Lotus tells her that it is the right choice. The reader could therefore be diverted into seeing Mona as hysterical, rather than seeing her as a female homosexual as desperately and passionately in love with Lotus.

The passion in Mona is also represented through jealousy. The novel presents a great deal of jealousy between these women, and it becomes curious in relation to the reader because of the different degrees of jealousy the text presents. The knowledge around jealousy may create a gap if the reader is unable to understand the extent of it. One can detect some jealousy from Ladybird, Lotus' child, who becomes jealous because of the time Lotus spends with both Mona and Gasparine. Ladybird expresses in a conversation with Gasparine that Lotus "kisses Mona more than she kisses me" (Johnstone 133). In this example, kissing does not appear to be anything other than actual kissing. The tone of this passage indicates that Mona and Lotus are kissing frequently and in front of other people. Therefore, if a reader should find this behaviour queer and connect it to female homosexuality, it could also suggest that they are not hiding their desires from the outside world. Vicinus explains that women in many cases did not hide their love in or from the public. This could further emphasise that the readers of late nineteenth-century society lacked a common frame of reference with the novel. Marcus also emphasises that it was in fact normal for heterosexual women to express their love by kissing each other (58), which suggests that many readers would not react to the kissing in itself, but some could find them odd because of their frequent occurrence. There are also other cases of kissing, but non that suggests any implications of "orgasm" as mentioned above. *A Sunless Heart* does not, in difference from *The Well,* depict sensual surroundings around the kissing scenes which implies they are not of similar importance as in *The Well.*

However, one can find other passages where one can interpret a sexual act between Mona and Lotus. In the following passage, one can argue that a sexual act finds place through its use of ellipsis:

> She meant to go straight upstairs to the study as usual, but the bedroom door, on the left, was open, and the sound of voices made her pause, and look into the room. Lo lay on the bed, her eyes almost closed. The long, white arms of Mona clasped her, with indescribable expression in the clasp. The Creole was in evening dress, and her long silk and lace skirts were trailing on the floor. (Johnstone 133-134)

Though this passage does not say anything explicitly about sex or desire, it is possible to read it as a sexual act, or rather as evidence that a sexual act has occurred because of the tension around the situation. Here, it is curious that Mona and Lotus are in bed together, even though it was not uncommon for women in close friendships to share a bed. The use of the word "indescribable" in this context can cause some confusion as it can suggest several things. First, one can see it at the level of the character whereas Gasparine is the one witnessing them in bed together and cannot describe it because it is difficult to see them together, or that they are so

beautiful together she cannot find words to describe it. According to Oxford English Dictionary, it can suggest something "too great, beautiful, etc. to be adequately described" ("Indescribable" adj2). Secondly, one can see "indescribable" as deliberately used by the author to avoid describing closer what Gasparine actually sees. If she had described it more closely, the situation could have become to revealing and further received consequences. By implying more between the lines, the novel creates indeterminacy and encourages the reader to engage with the text (Iser 185). Lastly, "indescribable" could suggest that there are actually no words to describe such an act because no one actually spoke about it, meaning there is no language to describe what Gasparine sees in the bedroom. This could therefore corroborate the idea that the vocabulary of the sexologists has not yet spread to the public. Thus, one can argue that the reader has to possess knowledge or experience about the sexual nature of female friendships to be able to locate sexual acts as the one presented above.

There are more implications of a physical side to the relationship between Lotus and Mona, than between Gasparine and Lotus. The novel frequently describes passages of them spending much time together, holding around each other and kissing. In addition to the passage above, one can find implications of sexual desire as Mona "gazed back longingly to the room; then, biting her full, red lip, she went away" (Johnstone 135). The sense of eroticism in this passage could be one of the reasons for the reference to French fiction in the review presented above. According to Faderman, lesbian eroticism was during the nineteenth century often seen in relation to the French because of authors such as Théophile Gauntier, who wrote explicitly about sexual acts between women (263-265). This could suggest that some readers who were familiar with such descriptions in French Fiction could fill the gap with these ideas. If the reader were to fill the gaps and create the image of female homosexuality in such sense, then the idea of a "romantic friendship" between these two women would be negated. As Faderman argues, "romantic friendships" were "love relationships in every sense except perhaps the genital, since women in centuries other than ours often internalized the view of females as having little sexual passion" (16). Vicinus' study on intimate friendships shows, on the other hand, that many of the relationships Faderman argued were entirely platonic, were in fact sexual. The implications of female homosexual relations could further be challenged when Lotus' secret of sexual abuse is revealed. Because some believed that such trauma could create a fear of men, they suggested that women were led to seek company with other women.

As discussed above, the words "friend" may imply several things. One can argue that the word "friend" is used as a euphemism for "lover," instead of using the same approach as *The Well* where "lover" is used as a modifying word to emphasise the nature of their bonds.

The Well changes between the words, "friend" and "lover," where "lover" is used in relation to female same-sex romance. *A Sunless Heart* only uses the word "friend" when referring to the connections between women, and there is only one incident where "lover" is used which is in connection to Lotus' aunt, Mrs. Grace and her previous "lover," Professor Raymond (Johnstone 155). It is in fact only these words that are used with such caution. Loving words like "dear," "my darling," "my sweet," "my Genius," and "Beloved," are frequently and openly used (Smith-Rosenberg 5). Women in Victorian era often used words of affection such as "dear," "my darling," and "my sweet" in heterosexual friendships, and therefore one can argue that they do not arouse any suspicion with its readers. "My Genius" and "Beloved" on the other hand, can convey confusing images to the reader. Lotus, for example, begins to call Gasparine "my Genius" after she has moved into the cottage with her. She says "my unrecognised Genius" the first time which can imply that she is either very intelligent, or that she is homosexual. Vicinus emphasises that "genius" has often been seen in relation to homosexuality (12). If a woman was referred to as genius, she would automatically draw attention towards her "because too much intelligence unsexed a woman and made her incapable of fulfilling her maternal duties" (Vicinus 12). In *A Sunless Heart,* however, the reader is reassured that Gasparine will marry a man and have children (164). By reassuring the reader that she will eventually marry a man, heterosexuality is re-established in Gasparine. Thus, the implications of a homosexual bond between Gasparine and Lotus fall into the background, at least for the heterosexual reader. On the word "beloved," Rick Incorvati states that women in close romantic friendships often referred to each other as "my Beloved," or "my sweet love" (176).

The relationship between Mona and Lotus is challenged as Professor Raymond comes back into the picture where he shows a great interest in Lotus. Raymond makes her believe that "from him I might receive *salvation*" (Johnstone 171). Lotus' enthusiasm to the idea of marriage with Raymond, implies to the reader that she could not feel love for the women in question, but can feel such emotions for a man. Because of the strong use of language and passion by Lotus, the reader could easily believe that this is the true love that she has been waiting for. When Lotus says to herself that "I shall live, and be *as others are! As others are!*" (174), the reader could either see it as her fulfilling her womanly duties, or of her wanting to run away from her sexual desires for other women. As presented in the reviews above, one critic suggested that Raymond was Lotus salvation which supports the idea of the strong social norms (171-175). Additionally, through the perspective of this review one can easily imagine that others also saw this rich, handsome man as her only saviour. This idea shatters when Raymond tells Lotus he does not want to marry her, but that he wants to marry Mona instead. Lotus

therefore appears to be "doomed" to live a life in loneliness, since this was the life an unmarried woman could expect.

Mona and Lotus' relationship is showing clear indications of a romantic friendship which can be seen as completely fulfilled when Mona asks Lotus to run away with her. Lotus does not entirely agree but ends up meeting her at the inn. At first, Lotus attempts to convince Mona to marry professor Raymond because she believes that she will have a better life if she does. She tries to convince Mona that her emotions are only "passionate desire into which your imagination has crowded your life. It will pass" (Johnstone 178). This comment emphasises the ideas shared by Alger and several sexologists where they argue that passionate relationships between young women were only a phase. As the narrative moves further this idea is disproved as Mona refuses to marry Raymond because she wishes to be with Lotus. The norms of women's role in society are strongly represented as Lotus, similar to Stephen in *The Well*, tries to convince Mona to marry Raymond:

> Consider seriously what I say, Mona. I want you to answer me the truth, from you heart. *If you had never seen me;* or *if I were about to pass entirely from your life. If I had never loved you;* or *if my love were about to become utterly utterly dead, could you be this man's wife? Could you give him duty, and, later, when his love had won it, love?* (Johnstone 191)

Here, it becomes clear that Lotus wants Mona to marry this man because it will give her a better. Further, she tries to tell her she does not love her to convince her to marry him and says that "romance passes. Be – oh, my child, think well of what I say – *be as others are*" (Johnstone 193). This passage confirms that Lotus and Mona's friendship is or has been a romantic one, but what follows creates a challenge for some readers. When she says, "*be as others are,*" one can argue that she advises her to be "normal." As in *The Well*, where Stephen forces Mary to leave her to live a "normal life," Lotus attempts to persuade Mona to do the same. In this sentence, however, the emphasis on knowledge and experience serves well as one can argue that only some readers would understand Lotus' reference to female deviancy. This idea of not being able to understand the text if one does not have enough knowledge to encode it, aligns with Iser's idea of gaps. When they further end up spending the night together, the experienced reader could interpret the situation as not only referring to sleep, but also sexual acts.

When the night is over, Lotus leaves Mona at the inn and on her way home, the train crashes. As she lies there hurt, she thinks of her Ladybird, Mrs. Grace, and Gasparine, but "Mona she did not think, until, in the darkness, she felt a mouth touch hers, and two wet hands groped over her body" (Johnstone 195). Further, as the women are dying in each other's arms, Mona rouses and,

put her bleeding hand beneath the dear face, and drew it close to hers.

"Lo?"

"Yes, sweet."

"How dark it is."

"Yes."

"Will it ever grow light again?"

"Yes, I think so, when morning comes."

"You think the morning will come?"

"Yes; and sunlight."

"Why?"

"Because you did not leave me. Now I have faith in love."

(Johnstone 195-196)

The notion of these two women dying in each other's arms especially hints toward a romantic friendship. This passage strongly implies that it was not Professor Raymond who made Lotus able to feel love again, but rather Mona. The death of these characters has been foreshadowed several places in the novel which suggests that while the death scene is short and not very descriptive, their death is of immense importance to the content. If the reader then fails to acknowledge this importance, it would seem that there is a discrepancy between reader and text as a result of the lack of the common frame of reference (Iser 166-168). In other words, a gap occurs. In addition, Sedgwick paints a picture of the contemporary reader as "ignorant" where she suggests that this ignorance causes a lack of acknowledgement of female homosexuality and places the homosexual within the closet. Following this logic, one can view the friendship between Lotus and Mona as a metaphor to hide female same-sex love and desire, similar to Sedgwick's closet.

In a similar fashion, homosexual content can be made invisible or "closeted" through the act of "killing off" characters. In *Dangerous Intimacies* (1997), Lisa Moore argues that characters that function as "Others" were "banished, mutilated, or killed off" (12). Such characters could be those that showed homosexual behaviour or desire. Jennings, on the other hand, states that romantic friendships often ended with one of the women marrying a man. Following this view, the text conveys to the reader that the characters would rather die than marry a man. In a sense, these friends are allowed to be together in death, sharing their afterlife and thus eternity together. On this, Kate Thomas writes that the female homosexual found that "death produces a useful echo chamber, an enigmatic region in which she can desire and be desired, beyond the bounds of law and the constrictions of life" (124). Further, Faderman emphasises that it was more common for women in fiction give up everything for each other,

even life, but it was rarely without the influence of heterosexual marriage (108). For a twenty-first-century reader, there is little doubt about nature of their friendships. For some readers, one can also argue that the death scene depicts Mona as the saviour of Lotus' ability to love. Their last words are declarations of love, which is argued as the evidence of true romantic friendships.

At the end of the novel, the final diversion of the female homosexual theme occurs as Lotus and Mona dies, and the other characters moves on to live their lives. The protagonist, Gasparine, marries a kind man, and they have children together. Since she marries a man and the other women die declaring their love, one can argue that this is a situation in the novel where the readers would connect the segments in different ways and further achieve different meanings. The heterosexual reader would interpret it as a punishment for deviant behaviour, if they had any suspicion about their nature, while the homosexual reader would see is as a possible escape from the heteronormative society. This ending can be seen in connection to the ending of *The Well*, where both protagonists ends up in "loneliness." Where Stephen ends up completely alone, but with the possibility of being true to herself, Gasparine rather ends up being lonely in her marriage with a man, still longing for the friendship she once had. Through Gasparine's final painting of Lotus which she names "The Lotus Flower," the novel is able to hide female homosexuality while at the same time suggesting that Lotus would for ever be seen as Gasparine's true love.

Conclusion

Above, I have argued that female homosexuality in literature in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century was hidden behind the metaphor of friendship rather than the male homosexual metaphor of the closet.

Despite the fact that women had formed close (and intimate) friendships with other women for centuries these relationships were not widely mentioned in literature before the seventeenth century. Because of the lack of knowledge about female sexuality close relationships between women were not only accepted but also encouraged by society. Around the mid-nineteenth century, the view on women as harmless started to change. Women began to move further away from men, fighting for independence and trying to break free from the (well-established) gender roles of the heteronormative society. Thus, emerged the New Woman. At the same time, sexologists took an interest in female sexuality, and the loving and passionate friendships between women became a sign of inversion.

With the turn of the century and the sexologists' theories becoming known to the public, came according to Faderman, the end of the "romantic friendships" of the nineteenth century. Faderman suggests that this new knowledge and terminology enlightened the constant presence of a sexual implication between women. The female homosexual bonds in *The Well,* however, are constructed in a way that depicts love rather than sex. When the novel was published, it received strong critiques for its theme. Stephen and her relationships were seen as perverse, abnormal and provocative. Only a few years prior to its publication, the inclusion of female homosexual indecency in the Criminal Law Amendment Act, was denied. The argument for this denial was based on not bringing "unspeakable filth into the open." The reception of the novel does, however, show that homosexuality was an "open secret." This theory is first and foremost related to male homosexuality and can therefore only be transferred to the female homosexual through the views on homosexuality at the time. It was therefore shocking that also feminine women could seduce other women, like Mary does in *The Well.* William Alger suggested that the relationship between women were only preparing them for the "real" love between man and woman, but Stephen presents a different view as she never wishes for the love of a man. She rather wishes for a relationship similar to her parents where she can take on the role of provider and protector which she attempts to do with Mary. *The Well'*s open treatment of the female homosexual theme suggests that it does not attempt to "closet" it. The language expresses the masculine appearance of Stephen clearly and emphasises the nature of her friendships through words such as "lover." This treatment also highlights that the female homosexual is not an "open secret."

Although, the novel's views caught the public's attention, there were also certain parts of the novel which they apparently did not discovered. As discussed above, the heterosexual readers were unable to connect several of the sexual implications provided by *The Well.* This was a result of the readers being unable to fill in the gaps which the text provided. What it does show, however, is that the homosexual reader could arguably recognise the emotions described by the characters and the narrator, while a heterosexual reader would most likely not. This means that the homosexual reader could fill the gaps provided by the text where the heterosexual reader on the other hand would struggle because of a lack of a common frame of reference. *The Well* does not attempt to hide the female homosexual content, but it does in a way use the friendships between women to emphasise the love shared between them rather than sexual desire. Therefore, one can argue that the female homosexual friendship does not hide the love between them, but rather function as "the closet" for sexual desire. Even though Faderman insists that romantic friendships ended at the turn of the century, the analysis of *The Well* has shown that this was not necessarily the case. Since the novel only deals with the romantic side of the relationships in an explicit manner and excludes the sexual side, one can see that *The Well* hides the nature of the female bonds through the earlier model of portrayal of romantic friendships between women.

This model can be found in *A Sunless Heart* where female homosexuality is in fact hidden in the language and structure of friendship. Although the novel was only published thirty-four years prior to *The Well*, its reception indicates that people were more ignorant of female homosexuality and women's sexuality in general. The reception of the novel shows that no one (at least not in printing) explicitly attacked the novel for its female homosexual content which suggests that there was in fact a lack of knowledge about female homosexuality at the time. Through examples from the novel, I have argued that there is a clear presence of romantic and sexual intimacy between the women in question. The sexual implications in this novel are presented with such discretion that one can argue that the reader had to have knowledge about the alternative nature of female friendships to be able to locate the female same-sex desire and sexual acts. These examples, in relation to history and contemporary reviews, explained that presence of ignorance in society participated in the control of what knowledge was made available to the public which further affected the female homosexual by making her invisible.

As women sought more independence and drew closer together for support, readers of *A Sunless Heart* would not necessarily react to the female homosexuality because of its "New Woman"-structure. By dealing with several issues in Victorian society, the novel directs the readers away from the romance between women, and only open for realising the image to those

with knowledge about the theme. Additionally, the characters appearances as mostly feminine women participate in directing the "wrong" readers attention from the novel's subject.

Through *The Well of Loneliness* and *A Sunless Heart*, one can see changes in the representation of female homosexuality in literature between 1894 and 1928. *The Well* still shows some signs of using friendship as a metaphor for female homosexuality, although not to such extents as *A Sunless Heart*. In *The Well*, friendship is used as a metaphor to hide female same-sex sexual desire rather than female homosexuality in itself. The sexual aspect of Stephen's relationships with Angela and Mary is hidden through its use of ellipsis and language about their bonds. This opens for several possible interpretations of the novel's readers where some might be able to connect the segments leading to the image of sexual desire, while other cannot. *A Sunless Heart*, on the other hand, uses friendship more clearly as a metaphor than *The Well* where it attempts to hide the female homosexual content. The friendships within the novel are close and mysterious where the women in question often expresses their love for one another, but by also leaving much of its content between the lines it only opens for those with knowledge and experience about the theme to discover it.

What these novels have shown us is how essential the readers prior knowledge and experiences are to decode and fill the gaps which allows one to build the image of female homosexuality. The different receptions of the novels emphasise the development in the representation of the female homosexual in literature which further highlights how the ignorance of the female homosexual participated in making her invisible to the reading public. These novels have made visible that the epistemology of female homosexual relationships is incomplete. To get a broader insight to them one must take a closer look into the interpretation of contemporary readers to fully understand what views and knowledge that were available. In further research it could therefore be interesting to dig deeper into responses to literary works to understand how views about sexuality in general have been, not only conveyed, but also perceived by contemporary readers. This could reveal people who could identify with homosexuality since, as mentioned, "It takes one to know one."

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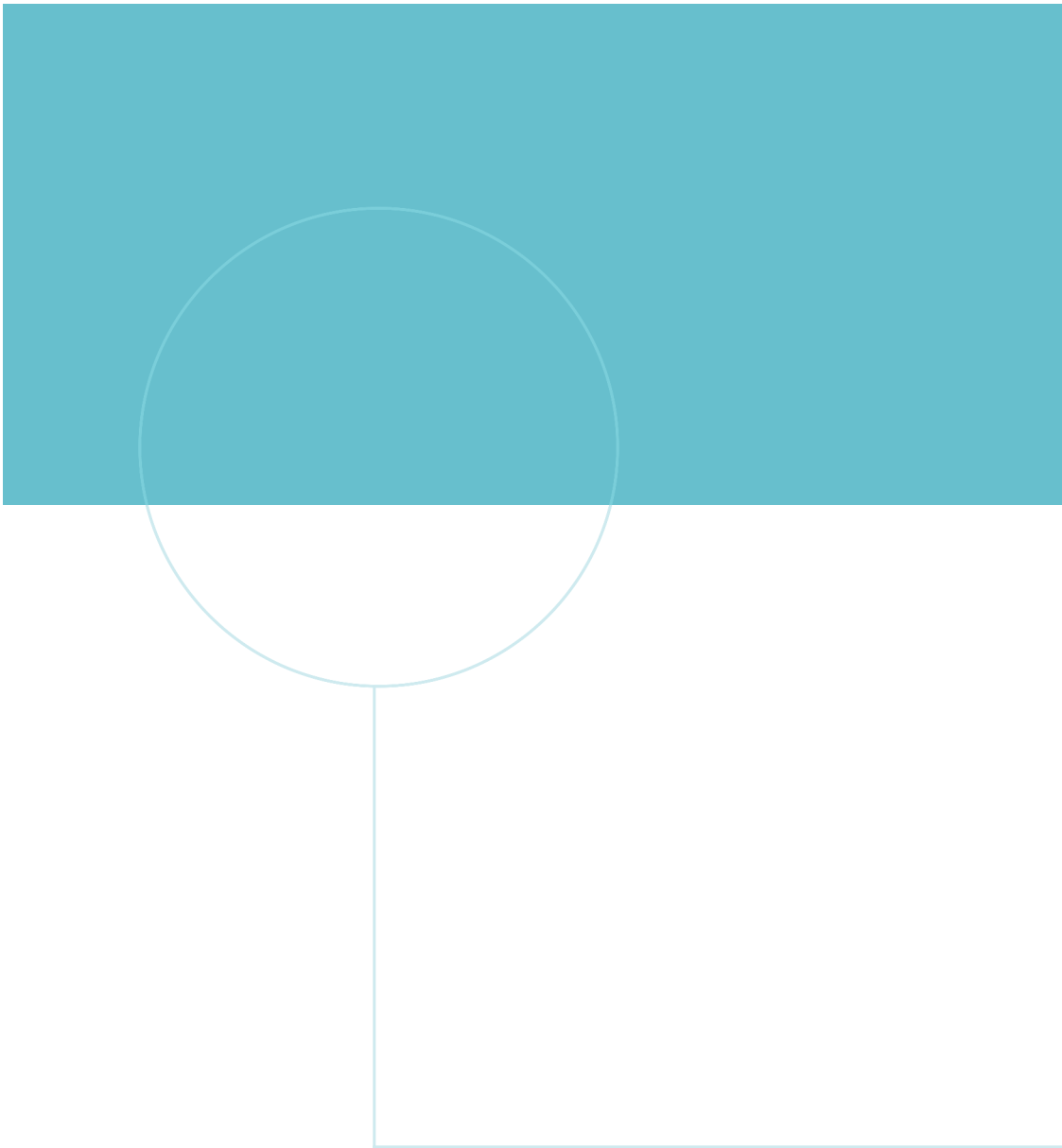
Appendix: The Master's Thesis' Relevance to the Teaching Profession

This thesis marks the end of my five years at the teacher-training programme at NTNU, and it is therefore applicable to reflect around its relevance to my future teaching profession.

The interdisciplinary approach used in this thesis can be applied to the teaching profession as it has enabled me to see the importance of studying literature through more than one lens. By connective several fields we can establish a broader perspective to literature, and history. Through the historical aspect we can understand the perspectives in which the literary work has been influenced. Further, Wolfgang Iser's reader-response theory is relevant to the teaching profession because it is a method that focuses on the reader's relation to the text. Teaching literature should seek to inspire pupils to trust their own interpretations and to dare express their meanings. Therefore, the reader response theory can be used to centre the learning situation around the pupils where they can share their ideas with each other and discuss the different interpretations. This idea aligns with Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory where he argues that interaction with others is essential to learning.

As reading is one of the basic skills in the Curriculum, I find Iser even more useful to employ in the classroom because in addition to be valuable for learning, it also encourages the pupils to enjoy the reading process and to dare them to use their imagination. This will not only be useful to shed light on the literary work itself, but it can also emphasise that there is not only one possible interpretation of the work. Here, it could further enlighten how the different knowledge and experience we attain can influence our perceptions.

Additionally, working on this thesis has strengthened my skills in structuring an essay, as well as providing me with a better understanding of time-management. This will be useful when teaching writing and advising students in the future. Moreover, I feel that I have become more patient regarding the challenges of writing. This also made me reflect around the importance of good feedback and feedforward, which will be helpful when providing students with formative assessment. An essential part of the teacher role is to guide the pupils and help them achieve their goals. As for working with texts, I have learned much from the feedback I have received from my own supervisor during the writing process. This has not only been helpful, but also inspiring as I wish to take this advice with me.



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