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THE WELL OF LONELINESS | LENT W1



Adapted by Bella Phillips / Based on the novel by Radclyffe Hall

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Director’ Note

Hi, my name is Bella! I am a second-year Engling at Phouse. I am so thrilled to be adapting ‘The Well of Loneliness’ into a play. I first discovered the Well when I was 17 years old; it was one of the first queer books I ever read. As queer stories tend to do, it has always stuck with me.

The novel, written by Radclyffe Hall, was published in 1928. Almost 100 years old, and it feels so engaging, current, important. In a flippant way, if you've ever had a disastrous queer situationship or been infatuated with a teacher growing up, it might feel oddly modern and relatable. However, on a more important note, the play is entwined with its political history. Upon being published in 1928, a media storm and trial swirled around its reception. As book bans are

constantly rising in the US, there feels no better time to be putting on this play.

The adaptation has emerged from an anxiety surrounding the access and skewed neutrality of some books in the current political climate. James Douglas labelled the novel as 'a book that must be suppressed'. He argued that 'prussic acid would be better administered to a child than the novel'. Arguments such as these caused the novel to be one of the most banned books ever published in England.

However, no adaptation can be 'singular', especially an adaptation of a book which means so much to different communities. An adaptation cannot be singularly created. Luckily, we've got lots of time to create this project. I want to create an environment where the play can be shaped, developed, devised together.

Ethos + Accessibility Note

The Well of Loneliness has often been criticised for being overly depressing or - well - a well of loneliness. However, I want to create a project which is in refutation of its name.

My reading of the novel has always been one focused on community. I am reminded of the part of the novel where Stephen, the protagonist, hosts a group of queer friends in their home. Whilst they share the trauma of existing in a world not built for them, they also share joy. They dance. They come together, roll up the rug, put on the gramophone, and dance together.

My experience of queer groups in Cambridge is one focused on community. I've seen the beauty, power and joy which comes when queer people join together, whether to raise money, protest or have fun, to dance. In this vein, one of the pillars of this production will be an orientation around community.

Through hosting a read through of the script in which feedback can be given, a team of script editors, giving back to the local community through raising money for The Kite Trust through show launch parties, I really aim for this project to be a way to get involved in theatre, yes, but also in Cambridge's wider queer community.

And an integral part of community is diversity and intersectionality. The play is a product of its environment of 1928; likewise, the adaptation will always be a product of its environment in 2026. I really want to encourage those not normally represented in the queer archive to get involved in this project, especially QPOC and those who are disabled, through all levels of the cast, prod and crew.

A vital part of the novel is themes of gender-queerness and its importance and resonance to the trans-community. If you relate to these themes, I would especially encourage you to get involved. The script will be formed and edited throughout this term based on the entire company's feedback.

This play is a labour of love, but one which keeps in mind the demands of student life and the confines of student theatre. I do not want this to become an overbearing or stressful thing, but a way to socialise, get together, and help create a lovely play.

If you have ANY questions about time commitment/the project/roles, please do not hesitate to email/message me:

@bkrphil / @the.wellofloneliness / ikrp2@cam.ac.uk

https://pin.it/5wfq0I7FG

Vision for the Project

The adaptation is deeply concerned with the multi-faceted power of literature. Literature as a way in which norms are interpolated and socialises how we view our identity. Literature as a way to breathe life into memory. Literature, finally, as a form of resistance against repressive normativity.

Stephen Gordon, the protagonist, ends the book crying out: 'give us also the right to our existence!'. Stephen's cry is not only to God, but to literature itself. It is a plea to us. We must remember Stephen's 'existence', the 'existence' of the queer community they carve out in Paris, and the 'existence' of their love for Mary, their love interest. Through the act of reading and writing, existence is enshrined.

Stephen's childhood has shaped the way in which they see themself. Growing up in the 1890s, the strict gender roles accentuated by their

mother, Anna, have led them into a confined idea of what womanhood is. Positioned as an outsider, Stephen is socialised into a martyr, believing themself to be born different, or unnatural. The contemporaneous teachings of sexology in Hall's day forms how Stephen sees themself as an 'invert'.

The play will follow the dissecting and unpacking of Stephen's martyrdom. The queer community they meet in Paris puts their world-view under strain, until the end of the play, where Stephen uses their writing to record their existence, forming an archive for the next generation, which Stephen did not grow up with.

The play will be repeated and echoed with repetitions of memory, literature and storytelling which has formed Stephen's self-perception. We will be incorporating shadow puppets, film, projection in order to suggest the layers in Stephen's psychology. As we pull back the gauze which will surround Stephen's study, the play invites us to lift up and question Stephen's martyrdom as a reflection of society, not truth.

While concerned with psychology and socialisation, I also want to highlight the beauty of the text, not imbed the play in being too academic. Central will be the beauty of Stephen's love of Mary, and queer love more generally. The play has big ideas, but at its heart I want it to feel as 'pulling' as the novel does for me. Highlighting the soft, intimate, small moments of queer love, moreover, emphasising the joy, camaraderie and love which is shared between Stephen and the community they form.

N.B: In academic discourse, there is debate about whether the book is a trans novel or a lesbian novel. There can be no concrete answer and any answer likely hides between a mid-point. Casting for Stephen, however, and the depiction of them, is not concrete and the script will be subject to change after discussions with actors, script-editors etc.

Synopsis of the Novel

Trigger warning: [redacted]

(The play will focus on one part of the novel)

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‘The Well of Loneliness’ is a coming of age story of Stephen Gordon. It follows their story as they grow up in Morton, a wealthy estate in England. We are led through their childhood as they grow infatuated with a maid in their household, their mother’s perfect harnessing of ‘womaniliness’ casts as distance in their relationship and Stephen’s self-perception, and their close connection with their father who reassures them there is nothing abnormal about them.

We see Stephen meet Martin Hallam, who later confesses his love to Stephen, and is rejected. After their father dies, Stephen then falls in love with Angela Crossby, a married neighbour (world’s worst situationship). Crossby’s treatment of Stephen and later cheating on them with another lover, causes Stephen and their mother into confrontation. Stephen leaves Morton, a place she leaves dearly, into ‘exile’ in London and Paris.

During this ‘exile’, they become an acclaimed author, and later, join an ambulance corp in France. In this corp, they meet Mary Llewlyn. Over the next two years, they fall in love; after the armistice, Stephen and Mary move in with each other in Paris. Their love is strong, though confronted with challenges by the world. They meet a group of friends through a queer saloon party. They find community here.

In the last part of the book, the community starts to fracture as one of their friends dies. Shocked by the loss, Mary and Stephen cling to each other. However, Martin Hallam, Stephen’s former friend, reenters into their life. Stephen, in a culmination of martyrdom, sacrifices Mary to Martin, in the belief of providing a better life for Mary. Stephen ends the novel with a call to arms, ‘give us also the right to our existence’. The novel records the existence of those easily forgotten and erased.

Wider PROD ROLES:

Applications will close Thursday 12th November, 23:59, however applications will be accepted on a rolling basis. Please send your application to **ikrp2@cam.ac.uk**. Please message me if you need an extension.

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PUBLICITY DESIGNER

I'm looking for someone to coordinate the publicity of the show; this ranges from running our social media, reaching out to local news sources, organising the flyering and postering of the show. You would be working with our photographer and cinematographer to coordinate the posting of publicity images, rehearsal photos and our trailer. This role has a lot of flexibility; for example, I want to organise a queer social/events in the run up to the show in January, so this could be a responsibility to help our Producer help with this! Moreover, the publicity can be led by your ideas; for example, as this book is queer history, we could create zine-like publicity material, which you could lead!

1. Why do you want to be a part of the Well?
2. What experience/skills do you have which makes you well suited for the role?
3. Do you have any initial ideas for the publicity?
4. Favourite gay icon?

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

I am looking for someone proficient in graphic design to help create artwork which will be projected throughout the show and used in our publicity material. The play explores how literature has the effect of creation, summoning memory through the act of writing; therefore, the use of line drawings, animated to 'grow' through projection, will help create the world of the play. Those are my ideas, but I would love to implement design into the heart of the publicity for the play.

1. Why do you want to be a part of the Well?
2. What experience do you have/what is your art style like? It would be amazing if you could attach some examples of it.
3. Do you have any initial ideas for the publicity?
4. Favourite gay icon?

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COSTUME DESIGNER

I am looking for a costume designer to bring the audience into the 1920s. I want the costume to feature realism of the period - changing dresses to mark time shifts, jewelry which is gifted from other characters. A big part of the costuming will be the 'masc' fashioning of Stephen - think a three-piece suit. I am also interested in integrating modes of queer signalling through the costuming.

1. Why do you want to be a part of the Well?
2. What experience/skills do you have which makes you well suited for the role?
3. Do you have any initial ideas for the set?
4. Favourite gay icon?

MAKE-UP ARTIST

I am looking for a make-up artist for this low-commitment role! Stephen has a scar down their face after WW1. I want to have make-up which shows this in a realistic, subtle, not-cartoony, way. Also, I'm looking for someone to design/organise the makeup for the other characters in the play based on 1920s trends, and potentially ways of queer signalling through make-up.

1. Why do you want to be a part of the Well?
2. What experience do you have which makes you well suited for the role? Any photos of previous work would be amazing!
3. Do you have any initial ideas for the make-up?
4. Favourite gay icon?

SET DESIGNER

Like gauze? I'm looking for a set designer for an ambitious set at Corpus Playroom. Current ideas are gauze/scrim surrounding the stage, the stage transformed into Stephen's office -

wallpaper, armchairs, desks, a gramophone. The script is really concerned with how objects hold memory, so I want the set to feel lived in and tell a story in itself - filled with paintings, photos, books, which all mean something to Stephen.

These are my ideas but I would love to hear yours!

1. Why do you want to be a part of the Well?
2. What experience/skills do you have which makes you well suited for the role?
3. Do you have any initial ideas for the set?
4. Favourite gay icon?

PHOTOGRAPHER

I am looking for a photographer to be involved in our publicity campaign. One of the things I most want to highlight about the novel is the beauty of the text; likewise, I want the photography/publicity to mirror this beauty. I am really interested in playing with light in the play through the use of shadows; I would really like to explore this in concept shoots.

1. Why do you want to be a part of the Well?
2. Do you have any initial ideas for the set?
3. Please may you send some examples of your style?
4. Favourite gay icon?

INTIMACY COORDINATOR

I am looking for an Intimacy Coordinator to help facilitate the scenes of intimacy between Stephen and Mary. There is nothing major in the play, but the play also revolves around quiet moments of intimacy so having someone to help with this would be amazing. I also am conscious of the heteronormativity which is often impressed on moments of queer intimacy, and would like to combat this as much as possible.

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Experience for this role is heavily, heavily encouraged.

1. Why do you want to be involved in the Well?
2. What experience do you have?
3. How would you approach intimacy coordination rehearsals to make sure all parties are comfortable?

CINEMATOGRAPHER

I am looking for a Cinematographer to lead the film aspect of the production. In the script are excerpts from Stephen's previous relationship (..situationship), which will be filmed during Michaelmas in different filming locations. These scenes will be projected onto the Corpus Playroom during performance - and, at the end of the play, layering themselves over each-other in the climax.

I'd be really interested in exploring the cinematography of memory, it being something hazy, blurred, golden. These are my initial ideas - but I would love to have the cinematographer involved in the process! Theatre and film is such a cool combination which isn't explored nearly enough in Cam Theatre!

Film experience is encouraged for this role.

1. Why do you want to be a part of the Well?
2. What experience/skills do you have which makes you well suited for the role?
3. Do you have any initial ideas for the film dimension of the play/how would you approach it?
4. Favourite gay icon?

PROJECTIONIST

I am looking for a Projectionist who can work closely with the cinematographer/set/lighting designer to help incorporate projection into the heart of the play. I would like to experiment with projection mapping onto the set. We have the

time to experiment and play around with projection, so this is a project for you if you're interested in developing these skills. Another idea that I have is, is the project of writing in moments onto the stage - so an interest in digital graphic design would be ideal here.

1. Why do you want to be involved in the Well?
2. What experience/skills do you have which makes you well suited for the role?
3. Do you have any initial ideas for incorporating projection into the play?
4. Favourite gay icon?