

ERDEM

SPRING SUMMER 2025

'The Well of Loneliness' by Radclyffe Hall was first published in 1928, and banned from circulation before the end of the same year. It tells the story of Stephen Gordon, a woman living as a man, and her relationship with Mary Llewellyn. Hall herself lived openly as a gay woman with her partner Una Troubridge. She frequently wore men's clothes and latterly renamed herself John. 'The Well of Loneliness' gave voice and form to the love of two women at a time when the idea of gay love between women was not even illegal, its very existence was denied as impossible.

For Spring Summer 25, Erdem explores the push and pull of masculine and feminine dressing and identity. Today 'The Well of Loneliness' is lauded as a queer tract of enduring relevance, relatable to new audiences exploring the boundaries of gender, self-expression and love. In the novel there are moments of great tenderness and timeless beauty alongside the anguish. One episode that stayed with Erdem is when Stephen is being measured for a suit on Savile Row; beyond a fitting it feels like an awakening. Certain looks in the show have been handmade in collaboration with Savile Row tailors Edward Sexton.

The collection pays homage to Stephen and Mary, and also to Radclyffe and Una. The parameters of menswear and womenswear are blurred and juxtaposed, playfully and confidently. Masculine suits appear in dusky pink and pistachio. Tailoring merges with drop-waisted silhouettes of the 1920s. Slouchy men's cardigans and blazers are worn over tea dresses. Cyanotype prints of flapper dresses on loosely structured garments are heavily embellished with jewels. The queer emblem of the carnation appears in different guises, subtle and over-sized, graphic and ghostly. Erdem's first handbag – the Bloom Bag – in calfskin leather with a hammered brass bud handle feels quietly opulent.

The needle swings back and forth with details and shapes, echoes and references that question the strict dictat of gender identity. How we choose to identify and who we choose to love are questions we have been asking ourselves since the dawn of humanity. We stand on the shoulders of figures such as Hall to be able to respond today that beauty and power lie not in conforming to social constructs, but in celebrating individual self-expression.

"You're neither unnatural, nor abominable, nor mad; you're as much a part of what people call nature as anyone else." The Well of Loneliness, Radclyffe Hall, 1928