

Writers & Typists: Intersections of Modernism and Sexology

by

Brad Jenkins

B.A., McGill University 1997

M.A., McGill University 2000

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the Department of English

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University of Victoria

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the intersection of Modernism and sexology. To date, most studies of sexology's influence on literature have focused on the importance of inversion in the lesbian salons of interwar Paris and, specifically, on Radclyffe Hall and her associates. The central question in these studies is whether inversion was ultimately beneficial or detrimental to the larger struggle for sexual equality and gay rights. This is an important question and key elements of the debate are reviewed. Sometimes lost in this discussion, however, is sexology's influence on the creative process of different Modernist writers. By purporting to explain the origins and function of desire, sexology raised the prospect of engineering response, of literally seducing the reader into new aesthetic experiences. These prospects arise not from a literal application of sexological precepts but from a process of critical revision that transformed sexology without undermining the objectivist pretensions upon which the discourse was founded. The dissertation is directed toward explaining the nature of this exchange and its influence on the work of Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, and Djuna Barnes.

Theoretically, the study follows Bruno Latour in rethinking the arts/science divide. It suggests writers were able to occupy seemingly self-contradictory positions—embracing both the objective authority of science and the perspectivism of the arts—by exploiting a disavowed hybridity at the heart of the modern condition. This discursive sleight of hand empowered these writers to reinvent both their own identities and the forms in which they worked. Proceeding more or less chronologically, the study begins by looking at Gertrude Stein’s efforts to incorporate the mechanics of attraction into her writing, guided by the work of Otto Weininger. It next examines Virginia Woolf’s exploration of androgyny with reference to Edward Carpenter’s advocacy on behalf of the “intermediate sex”. Finally, attention shifts to Djuna Barnes and the limits of sexology and other attempts to theorize desire. Ultimately, the goal is not to explain sexual difference or to advocate on behalf of any one position. Instead, the dissertation examines how sexology inspired the Modernist imagination in further challenging artistic conventions.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks to Stephen Scobie, with whom this project was begun, and Luke Carson, with whom it was finished. Thank you to my committee: Evelyn Cobley, Christopher Douglas, and Christine St. Peter. A warm thank you to the Jenkins and Fedoruk families for their support and encouragement. I would especially like to thank Daphne Fedoruk without whom this would not have been possible. Thank you all.

for daphne

Introduction

The slender monocled woman, elegantly dressed in gentleman's attire, has become a defining figure in feminist histories of Modernism. Proud, independent, and devoted to an ideal of Sapphic chivalry, the "mythic mannish lesbian" has been celebrated as a pioneer by some for shattering stereotypes of feminine sexual passivity and laying the foundation for an alternative literary tradition. Others take a different view, criticizing such women for aping masculine traits that contribute to sexual inequality. The divide is attributable, in large part, to divergent understandings of what is now an all but forgotten theory of sexual difference—sexology. Sexology explained homosexuality in terms of inversion, a state in which "trapped souls" inhabit bodies of the other sex. Though the language of "souls" may suggest mind/body or sex/gender dichotomies, inversion is the result of an organic, constitutional anomaly. Accordingly, lesbians are essentially male beings living in the bodies of women. Rather than bemoan their difference, women like Radclyffe Hall who self-identified as inverts embraced the new category, perceiving themselves neither as masculine women or feminine men.

Critical studies of sexology's influence on Modernism tend to focus on this limited group of self-identified inverts and whether their public embrace of sexological theories was ultimately beneficial or detrimental to the larger gay rights movement. Inevitably, this debate is coloured by more recent theories of sex and gender, in particular theories of performativity. Sexology's focus on essential biology conflicts with the current emphasis on performance and discursive production. By reducing sexual identity to physiology, sexology appears to limit what Judith Butler calls the "framework of intelligibility". This apparent threat is magnified by sexology's historical and methodological proximity to eugenics. By medicalizing homosexuality, sexology raises the spectre of a prescribed "cure". While the cures proposed were basically behavioural modification strategies, the prospect of simply eliminating those definitively identifiable as degenerates looms large. Current advances in genetic identification and manipulation make this concern seem even more real. In effect, there continues to exist a lingering distrust of science in relation to sexual difference.

While sexology's legacy is a valid topic of debate, this almost singular focus on political utility obscures the proper position of sexology in the history of Modernism. Inadequate attention has been paid to sexology's influence on theories of literary creation and reception, on the ways in which these women understood themselves not only as gendered subjects but as *writers*. By purportedly explaining the mechanics of attraction, sexology raised the prospect of engineering a literary response, of shaping and directing the reader's desire. Whether such a thing is possible can be debated. What is less debatable, upon further examination, is that sexology inspired writers to make such efforts. In so doing, however, they did not rigidly apply sexological maxims but adapted

the theories to suit their needs. Importantly, these revisions were not postmodern strategies of subversion intended to invalidate the cultural authority of the discourse. Instead, the nature of the engagement is decidedly modern; scientific authority is not challenged but enlisted in furtherance of the writer's vision. This dissertation aims to explore the nature and workings of this inter-discursive exchange.

Chapter One begins by briefly charting the development of sexological discourse and the process by which society's understanding of sexual behaviour comes to be understood in increasingly scientific, if not scientific, terms. With this framework in place, attention shifts to a discussion of perhaps the period's most overtly sexological novel, Radclyffe Hall's The Well of Loneliness. I suggest Hall's novel, though undeniably important in the history of the gay rights movement, is an artistic failure. Though painfully earnest, the book fails to engage the reader. This is attributable, at least in part, to the overly literal approach to sexology within the novel. Because Stephen is defined so completely by her unique constitution, she is presented to the reader as a sacrificial martyr, an inevitable outcast. On one level, this dour depiction stands in contrast to the evident pleasure Hall was able to find in her life as an invert. More importantly, Stephen is one dimensional, a slave to the theories that define her. Unfortunately, there is a tendency to read Modernist treatments of sexology through the lens of Hall's very literal, if not literary, novel. The following aims to challenge this convention by chronicling a more dynamic, creative approach to sexology.

The tendency to frame literary approaches to sexology in overly literal terms can be attributed both to the influence of Hall's book and, even more importantly, the enduring influence of the arts/science divide. Chapter 2 begins by looking at the history of this

divide with reference to the infamous debate between F.R. Leavis and C.P. Snow, a debate that occurred in spite of both men's stated desire for interdisciplinary exchange. Building upon Bruno Latour's position, I argue this divide is a false one and that both scientific and humanistic discourses are driven by a process of disavowed exchange. Foreign ideas are adopted and integrated into individual discourses without challenging the apparent "purity" or distinctiveness of those discourses. Accordingly, sexology and literature are in a position to borrow from one another without having to acknowledge the inheritance. I then consider how the development of modern medicine fits into this larger dynamic with reference to the works of George Canguilhem and Michel Foucault. The chapter concludes by looking at the conceptual mobility and shifting definitions at the heart of Richard von Krafft-Ebing's sexological typologies.

Chapter 3 focuses on the most famous sexologist writing in English, Havelock Ellis. Ellis' work is of particular importance in understanding the literary interest in sexology. Aside from his prominent status, Ellis was himself a literary critic and his work reflects a writerly sensibility. While professing the values of objective observation and scientific detachment, Ellis's sexological writings are deeply informed by his understanding of narrative and symbolism. These artistically influenced explanations do not threaten science nor are they complementary to science. Rather, Ellis believed imagination to be an essential aspect of the scientific process. The basis of this belief is explained with reference to the work of James Hinton, an iconoclastic thinker who played an enormous role in Ellis' intellectual development. The chapter proceeds to a discussion of Ellis' politics and the importance of both scientific and artistic treatments of sex for community. In showing the literary subtexts present within Ellis' work, the applicability

or attractiveness of his writings for later authors should become evident. Phrased somewhat differently, Modernist treatments of sexology exploited a literary subtext that was already present in some of the most influential works.

Chapter 4 looks at sexology's influence on the early works of Gertrude Stein. While it would perhaps be possible to analyse Stein's sense of herself as a "masculine genius" in terms of inversion, the chapter places sexology alongside other scientific influences in the development of what Steven Meyer calls a "neuraesthetic" literature—a literature of orchestrated seduction. Seduction was merely one of the ways in which Stein sought to reinvigorate language, creating a literature that reflected the vitality of the new century. In explaining Stein's attraction to sexology, the chapter examines the formative influence of William James on Stein's education. Drawing upon "Q.E.D." and "Melantha", Stein's cautious first steps towards an affective literature, a literature based on "knowledge of acquaintance", are explored. These initial ideas are shown to be further developed in the characterological typologies of The Making of Americans and the experimental poems of Tender Buttons. These attempts to write desire are tied back to the sexological writings of Otto Weininger in whom Stein was very interested and, in particular, to his calculus of desire. Ultimately, I suggest Stein failed in her efforts by producing texts that, at best, were too limited in their appeal.

Chapter 5 examines ideals of androgyny and sexual ambiguity in the work of Virginia Woolf. While Woolf is often discussed as either "sexless" or a lesbian who married only to meet social expectations, her writing displays a more nuanced sexuality that is neither heterosexual nor homosexual in orientation. Woolf's longing for sexual connection and even community is evident in Mrs. Dalloway, in which the invert, exemplified by Doris,

is an unacceptable alternative. Yet rather than read this dissatisfaction solely in terms of a missing lesbian community, the chapter suggests Woolf addressed a more fundamental sense of alienation, a lack of personal connection in which masculine and feminine traits present in each individual lack fulfillment or complete expression. Sexology provides an alternative by blurring the lines of distinction between male and female and placing sexual identity on a continuum. The sexual intermediate, a sort of invert described by Edward Carpenter, is able to capitalize upon his or her mixed constitution to bring the sexes closer together. This idea is developed in Orlando in which sexual intermediacy exists not as inversion or homosexuality but, rather, as a textual effect. Orlando's sex change exposes the reader to two separate perspectives united by a common narrative arc. In effect, Woolf succeeds in fully incorporating sexological insights into her narrative technique.

The final chapter considers the limits of sexual discourse in writing as manifested in the work of Djuna Barnes. Barnes' grandmother and father were sexual revolutionaries and the author was raised in an environment that was sexually liberated but also abusive. As a result, Barnes was ambivalent towards sex and any attempt to explain its "truth". In Ladies Almanack Barnes mocks the sexologically inspired affectations of her friends. In her assessment, such theories are contrivances, elaborate excuses employed to justify what would otherwise be considered questionable behaviour. The self-serving aspect of these theories is a central theme in all her work, most especially Ryder—her attempt to come to terms with her father's excesses and shortcomings. Yet for all these misgivings, Barnes is unable to ignore the question of origins entirely. In Nightwood, Barnes struggles to understand the animal sexuality of Thelma Wood, her former lover. To do so,

Barnes employs a densely layered structure, creating images and symbols that resist definitive understanding. In other words, the truth of sex is beyond language. Barnes does not necessarily deny its existence but, rather, questions our ability to access it.

***Erotic Enticements:
Indeterminacy and Sexual Discourse***

Religion or the desire for the salvation of our souls, 'Art' or the desire for beautification, Science or the search for the reasons of things—these conations of the mind, which are really three aspects of the same profound impulse, have been allowed to furrow each its own narrow channel, in alienation from the others, and so they have all been impeded in their greater function of fertilizing life.

-Havelock Ellis,
The Dance of Life

Eros is a great leveller. Perhaps the true Democracy rests, more firmly than anywhere else, on a sentiment which easily passes the bounds of class and caste, and unites in the closest affection the most estranged ranks of society.

-Edward Carpenter,
The Intermediate Sex

I.I
Mixed Beginnings

In 1926, Radclyffe Hall published Adam's Breed, the story of a young man's trials and tribulations growing up in London's Italian expatriate community. With the identity of his father unknown, Gian-Luca is taken in by his grandparents after his mother dies during childbirth. His grandmother resents him and blames him for her daughter's death, giving rise to powerful feelings of alienation and estrangement that become a dominant theme throughout the novel. When he is old enough, Gian-Luca goes to work, first in his

grandfather's delicatessen and later in a popular Italian restaurant. He marries a local girl but is unable to love her. His angst and frustration continue to grow until he finds he can no longer bear to be surrounded by food—a difficult prospect for a man in his profession. He flees the city and takes up residence in the woods where he struggles to understand God and his place in the world. Ultimately, Gian-Luca finds grace through suffering and, though he dies of starvation, he realizes “The path of the world was the path of His sorrow and the sorrow of God was the hope of the world, for to suffer with God was to share in the joy of his ultimate triumph over sorrow” (Adam's Breed 377).

The conservatism of Hall's Christian moralism is echoed in the novel's staid approach to narrative. Adam's Breed takes few risks and mostly conforms to the conventions of the traditional *Bildungsroman*. Yet, Hall's willingness to embrace convention likely accounts for much of the book's success. For a reading public often alienated by the challenging formalism of modernist writers, Hall's novel was a welcome tonic (Souhami 143). Adam's Breed offers simple melodramatic pleasure while still maintaining a sense of literary seriousness—a formula that sold well with what Virginia Woolf called “middlebrow” readers. Positive reviews were followed by two prestigious awards: the *Prix Femina* and the *James Tait Black Memorial Prize*. Hall was not a modest woman and her success, both critical and commercial, inspired and emboldened her. She immediately set to work on her next novel. Like Adam's Breed, the new book would tell the story of an outsider searching for love and belonging. Themes of alienation and despair would be revisited. There was, however, a major difference. Whereas Adam's Breed told the story of an orphaned boy, Hall's new novel centered upon a young *lesbian*. This one point of contrast made all the difference. Instead of winning awards, The Well

of Loneliness was subject to a police investigation ordered by the Home Secretary's office. On November 16, 1928, it was declared obscene in an abbreviated trial in London.

The Well of Loneliness is by no means lurid or even remotely pornographic. With the exception of one rather chaste kiss, there is, in fact, no overtly sexual content in the book. Nevertheless, Hall knew her subject was controversial. Sexually suggestive novels were frequently targeted by government censors—Jane Heap and Margaret Anderson had been convicted eight years earlier for serially publishing Ulysses. Expressions of homosexual desire constituted particularly egregious transgressions of the law. While not scrutinized to the same extent as male homosexuality, lesbianism was, in its own way, “unspeakable”, as it was feared public discussion of the subject might stir otherwise unimaginable longings in vulnerable women. In fact, a 1921 attempt to criminalize lesbian relationships in Britain failed when the House of Lords determined the law would only publicize a practice of which most women were completely unaware. Though not codified, a looming threat faced anyone considering publishing a lesbian narrative. Accordingly, Hall and her publishers could not have been surprised by the government's actions. Though she was outraged by the charges of obscenity, Hall knew from the beginning that she would be “rousing up a storm of antagonism” (qtd. in Souhami 146). She saw herself as a social crusader and, in her own words, wanted the book “To bring men and women of good will to a fuller and more tolerant understanding of the inverted” (qtd. in Souhami 151).

Hall's desire to confront the prejudice she encountered is not surprising. What is more surprising, from today's perspective, is that she interpreted her sexuality and that of her protagonist in terms of “inversion”. Sexual inversion is a theory purporting to explain

homosexual desire as the manifestation of a “contrary sexual instinct”.¹ It argues the invert possesses sexual desires more characteristic of the opposite sex and figures the homosexual as a “trapped soul”. The theory came into prominence with the growth of sexology during the latter half of the nineteenth century but is now almost universally discredited. Scientifically, inversion is, at best, speculative and empirically unsupported. Politically, sexology² is often judged a repressive discourse that codified biases and prejudices in an attempt to identify the “essence” of the homosexual. As such, it is difficult to comprehend Hall’s enthusiasm. Simply put, Hall phrased her plea for tolerance and understanding in the language of power. Critics disagree as to the implications of Hall’s appeal to sexological authority. For some, the language of inversion was necessary to facilitate a culturally intelligible lesbian subjectivity. For others, inversion obscured or negated alternate forms of identity. To better understand this debate and transcend simple characterizations of sexology as either simply a progressive or regressive influence, it is first necessary to consider the conditions under which the discourse emerged.

Questions of sex and sexuality have intrigued writers from time immemorial. While it is perhaps inadvisable to speak generally about so broad a field, it bears noting that early treatises on sex addressed a variety of subjects, ranging from techniques of seduction and titillation to advice on conception and child delivery. In fact, these various concerns were held to be interrelated. For instance, the Roman physician Galen (129-210) believed men and women must simultaneously experience orgasm in order for a child to be conceived.

¹ The term was coined by Carl Westphal in 1870.

² My critique of sexology addresses the discipline only as it was practiced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The more recent, scientifically rigorous work of well-known researchers like Kinsey, and Masters and Johnson fall outside the scope of this project and are not discussed.

As a result, medical texts not only explained anatomy and physiological processes but also offered insight into the art of sexual pleasure. More simply, there was a certain ambiguity as to the exact object of sexual knowledge. Even the difference between the sexes was not precisely determinable. Thomas Laqueur argues the classical understanding of sex focused on the existence of only one sex: the male. The female was seen as merely a lesser form of the male in which the penis and testes are trapped inside the body (i.e. the vagina as an inverted penis). Sexual dimorphism did not exist as an absolute difference in kind. Rather, men and women occupied different places on a sexual continuum; sexual difference was relative. With the expansion of scientific specialization in the nineteenth century, new discourses emerged promising to uncover the fundamental truths of sex. Nevertheless, underlying ambiguities and uncertainties continued to inform these new disciplines.

Foremost among these new discourses on sex was Darwin's theory of evolution. Interestingly, Darwinism is only infrequently mentioned in studies of nineteenth century sexuality. At the very least, Darwinism's influence on the development of sexology is underappreciated. When Origin of the Species was first published in 1859, it marked a dramatic shift in the understanding of human motivation and social organization. In lieu of a civil society governed either by divine morality or enlightened humanism, Darwin painted a picture of strife and naked self-interest. At the heart of this struggle was sex. Influenced by Malthus' work on scarcity, Darwin argued that all animals compete for limited resources and sexual partners. Those best able to compete thrived and produced healthy, prosperous off-spring; weaker animals died without significant descendents. On a more macrocosmic level, Darwin noted that interspecies competition also exists. Thus,

the competitiveness of the individual became connected to the general well-being of the broader community; if resources were diverted to the weak at the expense of the strong, the entire species faced a competitive disadvantage compared to more efficient rivals. Led by men like Herbert Spencer, Darwin's insights were soon applied to human affairs, including sex. As Carolyn Burdett argues, "Biological heredity made sex the court at which the future would be decided, a future which would be one of improvement and progress or one of degeneration and decay" (44). To address these concerns, eugenics emerged as a way to intervene in matters of sex, controlling reproduction and ostensibly ensuring the success and prosperity of the nation.

Basically, eugenicists cited Darwin's views on scarcity and competition as evidence of the need for objective standards of reproductive suitability. They sought to identify which sexual practices were socially beneficial (reproductive intercourse) and which people should be encouraged to engage in those practices (upper-class, Caucasian men and women). Quite literally, eugenics hoped to breed *uniformity*. At the same time, Darwinism was also instrumental in accounting for the origins of biological *diversity*. Apparent anomalies could be explained by the intrinsic dynamism of nature. Under unique evolutionary circumstances, new forms of life could emerge with traits and behaviours that deviated significantly from earlier ancestors. While eugenics could condemn homosexuality as an anti-reproductive practice that tended toward self-extinction, Darwinism implicitly raised the possibility that homosexuals might play a unique role in society, blessed with particular abilities and exceptional insight denied heterosexuals (Terry, 36-7). Thus, efforts were made to understand both the origins of

unconventional sexual practices and the social repercussions stemming from those practices.

The second major subtext underlying the development of sexological discourse was the question of degeneracy. As a concept, degeneration dates from at least the early seventeenth century when the word first entered the English language. Initially, degeneration referred to a process of regression or reversion whereby a person or thing declined in character and quality. With the growth of modern science, the term developed a more specific meaning. Degeneration denoted a reversion to a simpler, less sophisticated state of biological complexity. By the time sexology was emerging, the term had evolved yet again, acquiring a distinctly pathological connotation that suggested not just reversion but degradation and disease. Degeneration now implied “a morbid change in the structure of parts, consisting in a disintegration of tissue, or in a substitution of a lower for a higher form of structure” (OED). Since homosexuals contravened the Darwinian imperative to reproduce, their behaviour seemed morbidly degenerate, a violation of the natural order. Yet, the portrayal of inversion as a form of degeneracy was not simply nosological. By identifying the morbidity of the invert, sexologists echoed longstanding characterizations of homosexuals as morally weak. Underlying medical conceptions of degeneracy is a theological language of sin.

In many respects, sinfulness is the gravest form of degeneracy. When Adam and Eve defy God, they are expelled from Eden and forced to live an imperfect life; they are debased. In both sexological and religious contexts, the question of corruption is central to questions of degeneracy. To reject the temptation of sin, the devout must live godly lives so they may know sin when they see it and not stray from the path of righteousness.

Physically healthy individuals must similarly guard against corruption or contagion. The body had to be fortified in order to stave off infection (concurrent with the development of sexology, there was an explosion of public interest in diet and exercise as salutary practices). While not directly related, both religious and medical discourses developed notions of the body or soul in peril, threatened by outside influences. If one engaged in risky behaviour or failed to fortify oneself through righteous living, one practically invited misfortune. Accordingly, the failure to act preventatively could be seen as a sort of complicity in one's own demise. In the case of sexology, the most self-destructive behaviour one could engage in was masturbation. Masturbation weakened the organism and lead to degeneracy. In this way, religious and sexological concerns coincided; the *moral* strength to resist the temptation of self-abuse was essential to one's *physical* well being. Constancy was the only way to resist the threat of contagion or corruption.

As a discourse, sexology reflects both a Darwinian interest in the origins and implications of sexual difference, and a moralistically informed concern over the perceived threat of degeneracy. The first major work in the field was Psychopathia Sexualis, written by the Russian physician Heinrich Kaan and published in 1843. Ostensibly, the book was a medical text addressing sexual disorders and is notable for its taxonomy of sexual perversions. In 1870 Carl Westphal published his famous case study of a woman sexually attracted to her sister's schoolmates. In assessing the woman's condition, Westphal concluded the desires were the result of a *neuropathic* condition. That is to say, her behaviour was connected to an underlying *physiological* problem and was more than an instance of poor judgement or lapsed morality. The work of Kaan and Westphal was followed by the publication of Richard von Krafft-Ebing's book, also titled

Psychopathia Sexualis, in 1886. In addition to dealing with inversion and other forms of same-sex attraction, Krafft-Ebing addresses many different and rather obscure sexual proclivities. Fetishism, including such extreme practices as coprophagy and necrophilia, are covered in remarkable detail (Krafft-Ebing was the first to identify sadism and masochism as specific sexual practices). Though certain differences exist, all three writers believed the “pervert” represents a distinct type, constitutionally different from the “normal” sexual subject. Deviance was viewed as a pathological disorder requiring medical intervention. Sexologists sought to cure the invert/pervert of his or her misplaced desire. Like the eugenicists, they were interested in promoting an objective standard of sexual normalcy.

During this same period, a somewhat different approach to sexual difference was advocated by another group of writers and thinkers, many of whom were homosexual. While their work is not explicitly scientific, they were influenced by many of the same ideas as Kaan, Westphal, and Krafft-Ebing. Furthermore, they borrowed language and concepts developed by the clinicians. As such, this parallel group should properly be considered as part of the broader field of sexology. The major point of divergence is their refusal to see homosexuality as a morbid condition. Instead of portraying the homosexual as an afflicted or wayward heterosexual (as deviant, in the most neutral sense of the word), proponents of this rival strain of sexological thought argued that homosexuals constitute a “third sex”. Like the negative pathologies of Kaan, Krafft-Ebing, and others, the idea of a third sex is fundamentally essentialist. However, it does not demand uniformity nor fear difference. Rather, proponents of the “third sex” encourage the acceptance of diversity. If homosexuals were congenitally distinct from heterosexuals, it

made little sense to judge the homosexual according to heterosexual standards. As unique beings, homosexuals were fully justified to act and behave as nature dictated.

Instead of promoting a cure, advocates of these rival theories demanded freedom and equality before the law. One of the most important figures behind this fight for equality was a young lawyer named Karl-Heinrich Ulrich. Ulrich was motivated by a desire to overturn Prussian laws forbidding sexual relations between men and secretly published his opinions from 1864 to 1879. Ulrich mirrored Westphal's language of inversion and described gay men (whom he dubbed *Urnings* after *Venus Urania*, the Greek goddess of homosexuality) as possessing female souls trapped in male bodies³. Nevertheless, he believed Uranians⁴ were healthy and needlessly suffered under the law. Others went so far as to claim homosexuals were uniquely gifted and played essential roles in society. John Addington Symonds (who collaborated with Havelock Ellis on the first volume of Studies in the Psychology of Sex) surveyed Western history, drawing attention to distinguished homosexuals in politics and the arts. Edward Carpenter went even further, claiming "sexual intermediates"⁵ were blessed with a unique double perspective and had an essential role to play mediating disputes between the sexes. All these men employed the sexological language of inversion. However, they did so for progressive, rather than restrictive or repressive ends.

It is tempting to posit a dialectical relationship between these parallel branches of sexology. On one hand, therapeutic sexology⁶ is fundamentally reactionary; the works of

³ Ulrich referred to lesbians as *Urninds* and believed them to suffer similarly from a discrepancy between body and soul.

⁴ A collective term referring to gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals.

⁵ Carpenter's term is virtually synonymous with the "third sex".

⁶ I use the term "therapeutic sexology" to distinguish efforts to "cure" homosexuality from "advocatory sexology," which I define as a discourse using the language of inversion to present homosexuality as a non-pathological or, even, salutary sexual alternative to heterosexuality.

Kaan, Westphal, and Krafft-Ebing are all geared toward restoring the homosexual to an objective standard of “normalcy”. In proffering his diagnosis, the doctor also reaffirms his authority—he alone is capable of interpreting the hidden truths of sex. Essentially, therapeutic sexology subordinates individual autonomy or agency to the moral, economic, or hygienic⁷ exigencies of institutional power. As such, it is often viewed as oppressive. On the other hand, advocacy sexology is a critical response to the medicalization of sex. It rejects the notion that the homosexual is perverted or degenerate and expands the parameters of sexual intelligibility by appropriating the language of the dominant discourse to provide alternate sexual identities. By refuting medical diagnoses and challenging legal prohibitions, writers like Ulrich, Symonds, and Carpenter, however reluctantly, adopted revolutionary postures. Accordingly, the debate is often structured in binary terms as a battle between forces of oppression and liberation. Most simply, society becomes divided between those who wish to control sex and those wanting to free desire. While these tensions are undeniable, such stark dialecticism obscures the complex exchanges binding together these ostensibly divergent discourses.

Though tensions exist between therapeutic and advocacy models of sexology, the relationship between the two is not one of pure opposition. Both schools of thought are influenced by the ambiguity of pre-modern thinking on sex and the paradoxical interest in both uniformity and diversity derived from Darwinian thought. As already noted, the two also share a common vocabulary of inversion, though interpretations and inflections differ depending upon the particular context. In effect, advocacy sexology exploits fundamental incongruities and omissions at the heart of therapeutic practice⁸; sexual

⁷ In the context of a eugenic concern for national or racial health.

⁸ More attention will be paid to these structural incongruities in the following chapter.

reformers appropriate the language and prestige of the clinic in order to bring about desired change. Michel Foucault describes these acts of appropriation as a form of “reverse discourse” (History 101). Rather than merely challenging the veracity or objectivity of dominant discourse, the reverse discourse weaves itself into the fabric of that which it seeks to critique. By appropriating both its terminology and methodologies, the reverse discourse undermines the supposed objectivity of the master discourse; the ideal of scientific precision is replaced by ambiguity and doubt. In the case of sexology, Foucault argues that

homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or “naturalness” be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified. There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy (History 101-2).

Because the terms of the debate remain largely the same, it becomes difficult to distinguish between rival theories. The therapist becomes but one voice among many dedicated to explaining the mystery of sex.

While Foucault’s work can be and has been attacked on numerous grounds, his insights into reverse discourse remain important. Most importantly, Foucault prompts critics to reconsider the possibility of an essentialist counter-discourse. Traditionally, critics and theorists have been skeptical of essentialist accounts of sexuality. They are

reluctant to endorse any theory portraying the homosexual as congenitally different from the average heterosexual subject. Building upon Freud's discussion of infantile sexuality in Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex, they prefer to see homosexual attraction as but one possible object choice available to the polymorphously perverse libido. In such a context, heterosexuality appears just as perverse as homosexuality. Both preclude the individual from considering alternative sexual possibilities. If the notion of a "natural" sexual disposition is invalidated, "perverse" sexuality must similarly be compromised. The terms can only exist as paired opposites; you can't have one without the other. In The Psychic Life of Power, Judith Butler offers a slightly different take on this paradigm. Butler argues that heterosexual interpellation (the process by which one becomes a "normal" sexual subject) necessarily involves an incorporation of homosexual "otherness" as a lost and mourned sexual possibility. Thus, to attack the homosexual as perverse is to attack a vital, yet unacknowledged, aspect of the self. Essentialism, of any variety, imposes arbitrary limits on the possible range of sexual interests and denies the fundamental plasticity or malleability of the libido.

While intelligently and persuasively argued, such critiques valorize positions of marginality, often simply because they are marginal. If institutional authorities define homosexuality essentially (in terms of sin or deviation), advocates for sexual freedom or tolerance might appear obligated to provide an anti-essentialist response. There is a tendency to conflate the political position of the speaker with the form of his or her address. More simply, certain ideas and concepts seem to be co-opted by power and unavailable to insurgents. Foucault's articulation of reverse discourse aims to correct this misimpression. He rejects the idea that there is "a world of discourse divided between

accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between dominant discourse and the dominated one”. Instead, he maintains there are only “a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies” (History 100).¹⁰ If ideas and opinions can be deployed and redeployed according to different strategic imperatives, it is wrong to label certain forms of speech either inherently subversive or conservative. Though essentialist speech has often served repressive or restrictive ends, Foucault’s work suggests that essentialism might also be used strategically in a campaign for greater equality.

I.II

Radclyffe Hall & “The Myth of the Mannish Lesbian”

In reference to The Well of Loneliness, critics disagree as to whether Hall’s use of sexology is a positive example of reverse discourse or a self-defeating concession to authority. At the centre of the controversy is Hall’s treatment of Stephen Gordon, the heroine of the novel. Stephen is born to Sir Philip and Lady Anna Gordon, aristocratic landowners and heirs to the country seat of Bramley. Upon finding his wife pregnant, Sir Philip suddenly realizes his own profound desire for a male heir. In fact, the prospect of having not a son but a daughter is apparently never considered. Sir Philip, so sure of his child’s gender, even christens the unborn infant “Stephen”, in honour of the saint whose “pluck” he admired. The arrival of a girl upsets Sir Philip’s dreams and challenges the established social order of an aristocratic society structured around patriarchal privilege. In fact, Stephen seems to defy a deeper, “natural” order. From the remarked upon cleft in her chin to the physical play she engages in with her father, Stephen displays both physical characteristics and personality traits more normally associated with young boys.

¹⁰ Foucault maintains “resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (History 95).

More concisely, Hall suggests that Stephen is sexually inverted and should have been born a boy.

At the same time, Hall also suggests some of Stephen's masculine habits are the result of socialization. In imaginative play, Stephen rejects traditional gender roles. She has no desire to play "mommy", preferring instead to dress as a young Admiral Nelson, fighting the nation's great naval battles. Importantly, Stephen's boasts are intended to impress Collins, the Gordons' maid. Aside from claiming male privilege, Stephen's boyish play is linked to a nascent sexual identity. Acting as a man serves as a way to win affection from women. As the gallant male hero, Stephen is able to take an active role in courtship—a role otherwise denied her as a girl. In her education and leisure pursuits, she continues to reject traditional gender roles. Her father encourages her to perfect her skills as a rider. Unlike other young girls, Stephen does not ride side-saddle but straddles the horse like her father, eventually joining him in the hunt. Later, Stephen hires an instructor and embraces weightlifting. She is drawn to the activity largely because of the physical change she comes to see in her own body. With effort, she more and more resembles a man. Stephen's transformation becomes even more pronounced when she cuts her hair and begins to wear more masculine clothes.¹¹

Sir Philip and Lady Anna disagree about how to respond to their daughter's boyish behaviour and their arguments are representative of the historical debate surrounding homosexuality. Lady Anna believes Stephen, encouraged by her father, is making choices ill-suited to a young lady of breeding. She claims Stephen lacks feminine delicacy and grace, and believes her job, as a mother, is to correct such inappropriate behaviour. For

¹¹ Jay Prosser argues that Stephen's inversion is more representative of transgenderism than lesbianism. The reading is controversial as it challenges the novel's standing within the lesbian canon.

Lady Anna, Stephen's difference is a result of Sir Philip's inability to accept the sex of his child. Essentially, Sir Philip has corrupted Stephen by treating her as though she were a boy. Lady Anna confronts Philip:

‘So far you’ve managed the child your own way, and I don’t think it’s been successful. You’ve treated Stephen as though she were a boy—perhaps it’s because I’ve not given you a son—’ Her voice trembled a little but she went on gravely: ‘It’s not good for Stephen; I know it’s not good, and at times it frightens me Philip.’ (53)

Such comments suggest gender specific behaviour is not the expression of an inborn or innate constitution. Rather, gender appears to be the result of social conditioning. However, Anna does not seem to believe that Stephen's inappropriate behaviour can be either modified or corrected.

When somewhat older, Stephen becomes involved with Angela Crosbie, an American heiress. Stephen falls in love and soon the relationship develops a physical component. When Angela's husband discovers a love letter penned by Stephen, he promptly sends the letter to Lady Anna. In turn, she angrily confronts Stephen. In voicing her shock and disgust, Lady Anna expresses a more pathological, degenerate understanding of inversion. She exclaims:

It is you who are unnatural, not I. And this thing that you are is a sin against creation...In that letter you say things that may only be said between man and woman, and coming from you they are *vile and filthy words of corruption—against nature, against God who created nature* (200, emphasis added).

In Lady Anna's revised opinion, Stephen's difference is no longer the result of her father's misguided influence or her rather unusual education. Nor does she condemn Stephen, at least not primarily, for her sexual acts with Angela. First and foremost, she upbraids Stephen for being "unnatural", an aberration "against God". In other words, Stephen is attacked not so much for what she has done as for what she is ("this thing that you are"). In a gesture that Foucault argues is typical of modern sexual discourse, Lady Anna makes the "sinner" consubstantial with the "sin". In her mind, Stephen is now fundamentally different and, as such, beyond redemption.

Sir Philip's understanding of his daughter's difference is equally essentialist. Yet, he differs from his wife in that he does not believe Stephen is in any way morbid or pathologically tainted. He accepts Stephen's difference because he understands the potential costs of her conformity. When Anna approaches Philip regarding Stephen's rejection of a suitor, Philip responds that, if Stephen were to marry, it would be a "disaster" (110). Anna is bewildered by her husband's opinion, especially at a time when marriage was the supposed pinnacle of a woman's life. Yet for Philip, encouraging marriage would force Stephen to betray her constitution, as well as sacrifice her educational and career ambitions. That is to say, marriage would go against the core of Stephen's being. As Hall reveals, Sir Philip's beliefs are rooted in his own readings in modern sexology. After her father's death, Stephen enters his study and begins to examine a locked bookcase. In it, she finds a text by Krafft-Ebing (presumably *Psychopathia Sexualis*). The fully annotated book connects the sexologist's observations to aspects of Stephen's own character.

Upon finishing the book, Stephen experiences paradoxical feelings of dread and relief. On one level, Stephen feels stigmatized by what she has read and associates her plight with that of Cain, who was similarly marked by God. Criticizing her father for not having conveyed what he had learned, she states:

You knew! All this time you knew this thing, but because of your pity you wouldn't tell me. Oh, Father—and there are so many of us—thousands of miserable, unwanted people, who have no right to love, no right to compassion because they're maimed, hideously maimed and ugly—God's cruel; He let us get flawed in the making (204).

Many critics have taken issue with the extreme negativity and self-loathing evident in the passage. Krafft-Ebing never describes the invert as "maimed" or "ugly" and, particularly in later editions of the book, is quite sympathetic to the invert's plight.¹² Moreover, biographical accounts suggest Hall was comfortable with her sexuality and directed her anger and frustration towards those who questioned her character. While Stephen is certainly entitled to her response, there are moments in the book where Hall appears to magnify Stephen's suffering for dramatic effect. She clearly sees Stephen as a martyr and emphasizes her suffering as a test of character.

Though Stephen is shaken by what she has read, she is also positively affected by the experience. Her readings in sexology mark the beginning of a political sensibility. By acknowledging the “thousands of miserable, unwanted people” who share her condition, Stephen sees the beginning of what is essentially a *gay community*. It is towards furthering this community's interests that she directs her efforts. She takes as her starting

¹² In all likelihood, Hall would have had access to one of these later editions. Even the early editions are not as negative as this passage would suggest.

point Krafft-Ebing's congenital explanation of inversion. However, she refuses to see inversion in terms of disease or malfunction. Instead, she uses her skills as a writer to explore the invert's special place in society. In these efforts, Stephen is guided and encouraged by her governess Puddle—herself an invert. Puddle challenges Stephen:

You've got work to do—come and do it! Why, just because you are what you are, you may actually find that you have an advantage. You may write with a curious double insight—write both men and women from a personal knowledge. Nothing's completely misplaced or wasted, I'm sure of that—and we're all part of nature. Some day the world will recognize this, but meanwhile there's plenty of work that's waiting. For the sake of all the others who are like you, but less strong and less gifted perhaps, many of them, it's up to you to have the courage to make good... (205).

As Laura Doan argues, Puddle's comments are strikingly similar to the opinions of Edward Carpenter ("Outcast" 168). The notion that "Nothing's completely misplaced or wasted" is distinctly Darwinian and suggests the invert fills a unique niche in society. In particular, Puddle echoes Carpenter in suggesting the invert, by virtue of his or her mixed constitution, has special insight into both men and women. The Well of Loneliness, like Stephen's writings within the novel, is an attempt to voice this double perspective and win acceptance for a marginalized group.

As though to prove Stephen worthy of the task to which she has been appointed, Hall spends the rest of the novel testing her heroine's moral strength and courage. Stephen is celebrated as an author and distinguishes herself as a volunteer in an all-woman ambulance core in the First World War. Perhaps most importantly, Stephen's selflessness

is made clear when she surrenders Mary, her true love, to a male suitor in order to spare Mary the sorrows she has had to suffer. Again, the terrible sacrifices Stephen endures can appear sensationalistic or, perhaps, melodramatically excessive. Yet, in context, Hall's actions are understandable. Homosexuals were frequently accused of debauchery and lasciviousness. They were criticized for succumbing to base desires and not exercising proper self-restraint. Stephen's stoicism is intended to respond to all these charges. She is the model of self-control and foregoes personal happiness in order to honour and protect the woman she loves. She models herself after the proper English gentleman and seeks to inherit, both literally and figuratively, her father's position within the community. Though born a woman, she works to embody a recognizable male ideal.

Ultimately, it is the variety of different perspectives on inversion that make Hall's novel truly remarkable. She does not merely recite the arguments already put forward by "advocatory" sexologists; she also incorporates ideas drawn from more therapeutic models. Her representation of inversion draws equally upon Carpenter and Krafft-Ebing. Moreover, Krafft-Ebing's work is not included simply as a negative precedent to which Stephen must respond. On the contrary, it is Krafft-Ebing, despite his focus on morbidity, who validates Stephen's difference by giving it a name. It is only by reading his work that Stephen gains a definite sense of who or what she is. Hall, for her part, seems untroubled by mixing various, sometimes contradictory strains of thought. She never explains how one might logically marry the insights of both the therapist and the advocate. Rather, she moves between various schools of thought according to the narrative demands of a given moment. At times, she even seems to question the congenital origins of inversion. As Alison Hennegan argues, Hall's account of Stephen's childhood often emphasizes

environmental factors influencing the girl's sexual development (qtd. in Doan "Outcast"). Basically, Hall is inconsistent in her use of sexology and her novel is marked by an ideological or conceptual mobility.

Despite some notable exceptions, critical accounts of The Well of Loneliness tend either to ignore or underestimate this mobility. In her influential essay, "The Mythic Mannish Lesbian", Esther Newton laments the novel's inability to imagine a distinctly feminine form of desire. Newton argues Hall and other women adopted the persona of the mannish lesbian because it offered an alternative to the model of chaste female friendship predominant in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Since desire was a stereotypically masculine attribute, "[t]o become avowedly sexual, the New Woman had to enter the male world, either as a heterosexual on male terms...or as a lesbian in male body drag" (Newton 100). Newton further suggests this masculine identity limits other forms of identification. In particular, feminine lesbians could only be recognized as sexual beings by attaching themselves to more masculine partners (100). Because sexologists tended to view the feminine woman as less committed to her sexuality than the masculine invert, the "myth" of the mannish lesbian perpetuates a patriarchal model of desire and either obscures or erases other lesbian identities. Accordingly, Newton declares "Hall's vision of lesbianism as sexual difference and as masculinity is inimical to lesbian feminist ideology" (102). Clare Hemming similarly contends Hall's masculine imagining of desire fails to address a more "femme" sensibility. For both Newton and Hemming, Hall's identity as an invert and her depiction of inversion in The Well of Loneliness are too rigid and exclusive to represent the diversity of women's experiences.

In contrast, Judith Halberstam argues inversion in The Well of Loneliness is neither synonymous with nor a distortion of lesbian desire but, rather, a unique form of identification capable of encompassing a variety of different sexual possibilities. She maintains

Stephen's repudiation of nakedness or the biological body as the ground for sexual identity suggests a modern notion of sexual identity as not organically emanating from the flesh but as a complex act of self-creation in which the dressed body and not the undressed body represents one's desire (148).

By emphasizing Stephen's love of fine men's clothes (a passion shared by Hall), Halberstam's reading reflects Judith Butler's description of drag as hyperbolized gender performance. If gender is enacted or conveyed through dress, it is nonessential and always open to revision. Upon first glance, Halberstam's argument seems to restore the important element of mobility missing from Newton's assessment. However, this victory is won at the cost of distorting Hall's text. The earnestness with which Hall describes Stephen's heroism is diminished or even invalidated if Stephen were simply able to “pioneer” a new identity when confronted with discrimination. By figuring inversion as a form of drag, Halberstam denies the allure of essentialism. Sexology promised to deliver absolute truth—to objectively and definitively explain the origins of sexual difference. If inversion is simply refigured as a form of postmodern, performative gender play, the attraction of essentialism is lost.

Newton and Halberstam are both troubled by the apparent contradictions inherent in Hall's approach to sexology. While Hall positions herself as a lesbian advocate, her reliance on theories of inversion perpetuates essentialist misconceptions. Newton believes

inversion distorts lesbian experience by presenting desire as an exclusively masculine attribute. If the mannish figure of the invert is accepted as the definitive representative of lesbianism, Newton worries other modes of lesbian identity will be disqualified. Rather than fully consider the attraction of inversion, Newton attempts to justify Hall's interest in terms of pragmatism or necessity; inversion is the only way to make Hall's desire, and that of her protagonist, intelligible. Halberstam's position presents the opposite side of the same coin. Like Newton, Halberstam worries about the essentialism of sexual inversion. Rather than directly confront Hall's attraction to essentialism, Halberstam defers the question, presenting inversion as a form of masquerade. In so doing, Hall's extraordinary earnestness is refigured as a sort of ironic detachment. More simply, Halberstam refuses to take the writer at her word, to read Hall literally. In their respective ways, Newton and Halberstam each seek to circumvent the import of Hall's interest in sexology—either by criticizing it as politically inexpedient or denying altogether the essentialism of inversion.

Instead of evading the question of essentialism, one is better served by reconsidering the relationship between the various strains of thought that inform Hall's understanding of inversion. In particular, the notion of a reverse sexological discourse needs to be reconsidered. As noted, Foucault's work prevents the reader from prematurely dismissing essentialist counter discourse. Despite this important benefit, there are, however, problems with the theory. As Jennifer Terry argues, Foucault's formulation of the reverse discourse contains an implied chronology: clinicians first analyzed sexual difference and produced various diagnostic typologies which were then seized upon and appropriated by sexual reformers (17). In other words, advocacy sexology emerges as a *post facto*

response to the rise of therapeutic sexology. To repeat, the relationship between these two branches of sexology is far less adversarial and, in fact, is quite complementary. In Terry's words,

the scientific and medical construction of homosexuality was and is a collaborative process involving sexual dissenters who appraised science and medicine as enlightened, unbiased, and potentially benevolent avenues for producing knowledge about homosexuality (18).

If science and medicine were viewed as conducive or, indeed, essential to the push towards greater sexual equality, sexology's essentialist character need not necessarily be a cause for concern.

On its own, the collaborative nature of the relationship between different branches of sexological thought is not enough to dismiss the concerns raised by Newton and Halberstam. That is to say, the fact scientists working in the field of sex research were well-intentioned does not change the fact their findings may have adversely impacted homosexual men and women. Indeed, Newton argues precisely that Hall fails despite her good intentions. More significant is the impact of this collaborative approach on the character of sexological pronouncements. It is undeniable that sexology sought to identify the essence of sexual difference. However, it is a mistake to conclude that this interest in essentialism somehow arbitrarily predetermines the limits of sexual intelligibility or social acceptance. Sexology, as practiced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was never an exact science. As noted, the philosophical and scientific influences which gave rise to sexology are marked by numerous internal contradictions and inconsistencies. These inconsistencies were embraced and became part of the fabric

of sexological discourse. Similarly, the contrasting voices and perspectives that contributed to the growth of sexology were not homogenized (as Newton implies) but continued to push discussion productively in a variety of different directions.

Though perhaps rather counter-intuitive, the “essence” of sexual difference is a dynamic, ever changing concept. Though sexologists sought to uncover the ultimate truth of sex, their findings were evolving moment to moment, context to context. Rather than diminishing the value of sexology as a science, this ideological mobility only enhanced sexology’s appeal. The purported objectivity of sexological discourse was, in effect, a sort of rhetorical flourish—a way of emphasizing the conviction of one’s beliefs and persuading others of one’s righteousness. Importantly, this is not to suggest those drawn to sexology as a means of advocating tolerance were cynical or opportunistic. Their beliefs were certainly heartfelt. What I am suggesting is that, on a structural level, sexology was open to revision and reformulation while ostensibly maintaining the impression of objective distance. Accordingly, Hall’s piecemeal approach to sexology—her tendency to selectively borrow those elements of the discourse that suited her needs while ignoring those she deemed less advantageous—is not a corruption of sexology but, rather, entirely consistent with the flexibility at the heart of the discipline. If the truth is always changing, it makes little sense to attack sexology for excluding a given perspective; the truth can always be changed.

I.III

Palatable Poison

By selectively borrowing elements of different theories of sexual inversion, Hall was able to produce a tragic, yet ultimately hopeful, account of same-sex attraction. However, The Well of Loneliness was itself never intended to be a sexological work. The novel is

not a case study of inversion. Instead, Hall sought to buttress her own opinions with the support of scientific opinion. Accordingly, she wrote to Havelock Ellis asking him to validate her account of inversion. Despite some initial trepidation, Ellis wrote back, commending the novel for “present[ing], in a completely faithful and uncompromising form, various aspects of sexual inversion” (qtd. in Souhami, 169).¹³ Hall was pleased Ellis verified the accuracy or authenticity of her depiction. She also hoped his authority would protect the book against charges of obscenity. Hall reasoned if inversion were attributable to a congenital condition, her story could not be considered lurid or obscene. Unfortunately, when the trial of Hall’s publisher began, Ellis refused to testify on account of severe anxiety. Even had he volunteered and been allowed to testify, it is unlikely Ellis would have swayed the judge’s thinking. The court was convinced The Well of Loneliness constituted a grave threat to the public. Interestingly, the court’s reasoning suggests a sexological influence. More precisely, narrative was attacked for facilitating degeneracy.

The scandal surrounding The Well of Loneliness was unquestionably the product of a vitriolic editorial published in the *Sunday Express* on August, 19, 1928. James Douglas, the conservative editor of the *Express*, lambasted Hall’s novel and called for the work to be censored. While Douglas’ rage is abundantly clear, the specificity of his language warrants further analysis. In condemning Hall, Douglas employs a vocabulary laden with religious and medical resonances. Homosexuality is discussed in terms of “plague”, “contagion”, “contamination”, and “corruption”. Whereas Hall seeks acceptance and understanding by portraying her heroine as an abnormal but, nevertheless, upstanding

¹³ Ellis’ comments were revised at the request of Hall’s publisher. The reference to “various aspects of sexual inversion” was replaced with the phrase “one particular aspect of sexual life”.

member of the community, Douglas uses a language of sin and disease to advocate a different response. He sees society as faced with “the task of cleansing itself from the leprosy of these lepers” (37). Typical of the convoluted thinking on degeneracy, Douglas shifts from the language of disease to one of moral failing. Referring to invert, Douglas writes: “they are damned because they choose to be damned, not because they are doomed from the beginning” (38). Whether pathological or theological, Douglas’ accusations foreground the supposed danger of homosexuality. Douglas is especially concerned with the effect of such a book on vulnerable populations. As such, Douglas famously or, perhaps, infamously asserts: “I would rather put a phial of prussic acid in the hands of a healthy girl or boy than the book in question”.

According to Douglas, the style in which Hall writes makes her message even more dangerous. As mentioned earlier, The Well of Loneliness is hardly a lascivious or bawdy book and prosecutors never claimed the book was sexually explicit. Instead, Hall was attacked for intellectually misleading her readers. Specifically, Douglas argues intellectual misdirection is *a form of seduction*. Language and style are used to entice people into entertaining thoughts and ideas clearly proscribed by church and state. Douglas contends the novel’s reserve and lack of explicit content were strategically intended to seduce unwitting readers. Accordingly, he rejects any suggestion that the work’s status as art modifies or redeems its message. On the contrary, the novel is damned for its *artfulness*. In Douglas’ own words:

It is no use to say that the novel possesses “fine qualities,” or that its author is an “accomplished” artist. It is no defence to say that the author is sincere, or that she is frank, or that there is delicacy in her art. The answer is that the

adroitness and cleverness of the book intensifies its moral danger. It is a seductive and insidious piece of special pleading designed to display perverted decadence as a martyrdom inflicted upon these outcasts by a cruel society (37-38).

For Douglas, the unmerited publication of The Well of Loneliness was representative of an undesirable shift in the direction of contemporary literature. He argues Hall's novel jeopardizes literature as well as morality by bringing the writer's profession into disrepute. This is a particular danger since "literature has not yet recovered from the harm done to it by the Oscar Wilde scandal" (38). Douglas' support of censorship is based upon a circular logic that condemns perverse sexuality for corrupting literature and perverse literature for corrupting sexuality. Douglas is most threatened by Hall's audacity in marrying sex and literature. It is this point of contact that is truly unsettling.

Hall's artful "deceptions" were once again attacked when The Well of Loneliness was brought before court on charges of obscenity. After the publication of Douglas' editorial, Hall's British publisher Jonathan Cape (in what has been seen as both an act of cowardice and a stroke of marketing genius) first sent his type moulds to Paris and then submitted the novel to the Home Secretary for consideration. The Secretary then referred the matter to the Director of Public Prosecutions who initiated proceedings against both Cape and Leopold Hill, a bookseller who acted as the novel's distributor. Cape and Hill were ordered to appear before Chief Magistrate Sir Chartres Biron. In preparing their defence, the lawyers for Cape and Hill assembled a collection of literary luminaries who would testify as to the artistic merit of the book. This collection of cultural elites included figures like Arnold Bennett, E.M. Forster, and Virginia and Leonard Woolf. While many

of these people had reservations about Hall's talent, they agreed to appear on her behalf in order to protect the principle of literary freedom. As it turned out, their opinions about both Hall's book and larger questions of artistic autonomy were never heard.

Biron argued the opinions of these literary experts were irrelevant. Whether the novel had literary merit had no legal bearing on whether or not the work was obscene. In Biron's words: "The book may be a very fine piece of literature and yet be obscene. Art and obscenity are not dissociated. This may be a work of art. I agree it has considerable merits, but that does not prevent it from being obscene" (Souhami 205). Despite Biron's ruling, Norman Birkett, Cape's lawyer, was allowed to call Desmond McCarthy, editor of *Life and Letters*. Birkett asked McCarthy whether he felt The Well of Loneliness was an obscene novel. Before McCarthy could respond, Biron again interrupted, refusing to allow the witness to answer. He proclaimed the opinion of an individual had no bearing on the charge of obscenity. This, of course, was in spite of the fact the prosecution's case was based upon the opinion of Police Inspector Prothero who first declared the book obscene.

Having excluded all literary witnesses, Biron proceeds in his judgment to address the language and style of the novel. Like Douglas, Biron believed the novel's literary quality adds to the danger of its message. Hall's skilful use of language allows her to reach a broader audience. In turn, this audience may be deceived, convinced by the propriety of Hall's writing that the behaviour she describes is somehow excusable or even desirable. Biron writes: "It is quite obvious to anybody of intelligence that the better an obscene book is written the greater the public to whom the book is likely to appeal. The more palatable the poison the more insidious" ("Judgement" 42). Thus, a reader drawn to

Hall's novel in search of intellectual or aesthetic satisfaction may, unwittingly, be tempted by sexual desire. Biron himself draws this exact connection in his judgment. He looks at what he sees as Stephen's "inducement" of Angela in the novel. Biron worries Hall might similarly encourage her reader to engage in illicit acts. By conflating Stephen's sexual seduction of Angela and Hall's textual seduction of her reader, Biron implies a connection between reading, writing and perversion. By extension, he also justifies the court's role as censor.

While Biron's decision may appear unjust and prejudicial, it faithfully adhered to the law of precedent. British obscenity law derives from the case of *Regina v. Hicklin*, heard in 1865. In evaluating an accused text, the court had to determine whether "the tendency of the matter charged as obscenity is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influence and into whose hands publications of this sort might fall" (de Grazia 193). The test provided by *Hicklin* obliged the court to look beyond the presence or absence of explicitly offensive content when evaluating a potentially obscene text. Rather, the court had to consider the text's possible effect or, more precisely, its *affect* on readers. Obscene texts were not merely distasteful; they were potentially injurious and could corrupt or pervert audiences. In reality, this "vulnerable" audience exists only as a hypothetical possibility. Though numerous copies of Hall's novel had been purchased prior to the trial, the prosecution did not present witnesses who had actually been harmed by reading the book. Instead, action was taken on behalf of those who *might* be adversely affected at some later time. Because the court chose to pre-emptively censor the book, the vulnerability of future readers is never actually tested. In effect, *Hicklin* proposes the

existence of a morally vulnerable readership in order to validate the corrupting influence of a text and, in turn, the court's authority to regulate sexual discourse.

The intricacies of the court decision are important because they weave together questions of sex and text within the broader framework of a culturally pervasive fear of degeneracy. For men like Douglas, the idea of sexual inversion was misguided. It obfuscated the individual's responsibility to live a moral life and refrain from sinful behaviour. In Douglas' estimation, homosexuals were not born; they were corrupted and lured into an "unnatural" lifestyle. Language, when used irresponsibly, facilitated this slide into corruption and degeneracy. Literature could entice and seduce in a way that other forms of discourse could not. For those who fear its power, literature circumvents rational thought, appealing directly to the emotions and giving rise to sensations and experiences capable of leading readers astray. Once aroused by the text, titillated readers risked acting upon those impulses. The great unspoken fear was readers might masturbate, thus physically harming their bodies and beginning the descent into degeneracy. Hall hoped her emphasis on the congenital origins of inversion would allay such fears. Unfortunately, the discourse on which she depended also laid the groundwork for her undoing. By emphasizing the dangers of degeneracy, critics successfully shifted attention from the benign message Hall sought to deliver.

While Hall makes productive use of the many inconsistencies and contradictions inherent in sexological discourse, these discrepancies detract from the forcefulness or efficacy of her critique. Hall wanted to write a definitive account of inversion, a book capable of correcting societal misimpressions. In Diana Souhami's words, The Well of Loneliness was to be "a manual for the world on what not to do to these weird ones in

their midst” (151). Ultimately, Hall’s selective approach to sexology compromises this agenda. From a political perspective, The Well of Loneliness is susceptible to critical revision. That is to say, dissenters could easily prioritize negative elements of the narrative while ignoring other more favourable passages. The inconsistencies Hall exploited in her sexological sources could be exploited as a means of discrediting her message. From a strictly narrative point of view, the lack of a singular perspective in Hall’s writing can frustrate the reader. Though her intention is to celebrate the moral rectitude of the invert, Hall feels obligated to emphasize the pathological theories of Krafft-Ebing as a means of establishing the congenital origins of inversion. As a result, Stephen’s “predicament” is especially dire and difficult to embrace. The book is so self-consciously miserable it can alienate otherwise sympathetic readers. On a most basic level, Hall’s selective approach to sexology clashes with the earnest tone of the novel.

While The Well of Loneliness is perhaps the most famous example of sexology’s influence on literature, Hall was not the only writer to draw upon the field. Though perhaps less pronounced, sexology’s influence is evident in a number of Modernist texts. In contrast to Hall’s earnestness, these texts are formally experimental and willing to take risks. Rather than cite sexology as evidence of some underlying truth, these writers explore the possibilities raised by quasi-scientific investigations into sex and desire. Sexological insight is, at times, drawn upon as a means of structuring narrative. Having been schematized by sexologists, the mechanics of attraction are translated into narrative in an attempt to facilitate desired sensations or experiences. In other instances, sexual intermediacy is seized upon as a means of bridging the divide between men and women, advancing both feminist and queer agendas. This dissertation examines the constantly

evolving relationship between sexological and literary discourse in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I begin by exploring the implications of Latour's challenge to modernist orthodoxy and its implications vis-à-vis the development of a scientific discourse on sex. From there, I examine the importance of literary narrative on the sexological work of Havelock Ellis. The paper then looks successively at sexology in the work of Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, and Djuna Barnes. Attention is given to the productive exploitation of sexological theories and the growing discord between sexological normativity and the authors' commitment to individual freedom. Ultimately, the dissertation explores the dynamic middleground where sex and text, body and mind, essentialism and non-essentialism come together in the pursuit of a feminist/lesbian politics and literature.

***Beyond “Two Cultures”:
Revisiting the Arts/Science Divide***

Love is profoundly animal; therein lies its beauty.

-Ezra Pound,
The Natural Philosophy of Love

Mixed modes of writing which enlist the reader’s feeling as well as his thinking are becoming dangerous to the modern consciousness with its increasing awareness of the distinction. Thought and feeling are able to mislead one another at present in ways which were hardly possible six centuries ago.

-I.A. Richards,
Principles of Literary Criticism

II.I
Two Cultures

The marriage of clinical sexology and literary modernism is, in many respects, a rather unlikely pairing. Though frequently dismissed as prejudicial and scientifically unsound, sexology was born of basically good intentions. Reflecting the influence of Comtean positivism, early sexologists believed sexuality could be studied empirically, leading to the identification of universal behavioural norms. Therapeutic programmes could then be designed for those deviating from the norm. Sexology’s ultimate goal was to produce

healthy, well-adapted citizens.¹ Accordingly, sexology should be seen as one of many historically contemporaneous movements advocating “better living through science” and emphasizing the progressive direction of modern society. In contrast, literary modernism has frequently been read as a predominantly negative re-evaluation of that collective dream of progress. While more recent analyses have illuminated some of the positive, productive interchanges between the arts and sciences, earlier critics tended to stress the ways in which many modernist writers depict conventional notions of progress as assaults on individual creativity. These studies focus primarily upon modernism’s inward turn—its almost exclusive interest in the intricacies of subjective experience. In short, a false dichotomy was established between a scientific model of rationally empiricist, objective fact (science/sexology), and a subjectivist model of enlightened humanism (the arts).

Today, there is nothing particularly remarkable about simply calling attention to this false divide. Indeed, there are numerous recent publications detailing science’s influence on the development of Modernism. For instance, Daniel Albright has shown how Yeats, Pound, and Eliot were all influenced by debates between particle and wave physicists. In work more directly related to the subject at hand, Tim Armstrong details ways in which scientific reconfigurations of the body (sex reassignment surgery, the development of prosthetic limbs, etc.) impacted the way in which Modernist writers imagined the human body. Such works provide compelling evidence of productive interdisciplinary exchanges and dispel the notion that Modernism was a singularly aesthetic movement and otherwise intellectually disengaged. In light of such evidence, prior theorizations of the arts/science

¹ That such efforts ultimately proved harmful or disadvantageous to the communities involved does not detract from the idealism motivating many early sexologists. Even more progressive theorists willing to accept some version of congenital inversion (i.e. Havelock Ellis) did not entirely abandon the prospect of “rehabilitation” for certain subjects.

divide might seem of little use to contemporary scholars and easily disregarded. Yet, it would be wrong to dismiss such arguments entirely. Though certainly misrepresentative, these theories provide valuable insights into the *perceptions* governing such exchanges. While there was, in fact, no real barrier separating humanistic and scientific discourses, exchanges between the discourses proceeded *as though* such barriers actually existed. In practice, interdisciplinary exchanges occurred despite—and even because of—official disavowal. Indeed, the efficacy or fruitfulness of such exchanges was dependent upon perpetuation of the ostensible dichotomy. To better understand this contradiction, it is helpful to briefly re-examine the intricacies of the apparent divide.

The antipathy between the arts and sciences has a long history in Western thought. At the core of the conflict is the belief that poetry distracts from the pursuit of scientific truth while science effaces our essential humanity. Whether one looks to Plato's condemnation of poets or Keats' charge that science "destroyed the poetry of the rainbow by reducing it to a prism", the relationship between the arts and sciences has been characterized by a mixture of anxiety and disgust. Such antipathy suggests the arts and sciences are not merely simple, paired opposites but, rather, opposing factions, vying for position on the battlefield of ideas. For proponents of science, art belongs to a bygone world of myth and enchantment—a hazy fog from which the pure light of science will lead us to reason. To others, science undermines individuality and imagination, extinguishing the flame of genius in a sea of conformity and standardization. Only art can rekindle the creative fires and restore dignity and vitality to humankind. While this rhetoric may seem overblown, it is true to the sources from which it is drawn. Perhaps the most bombastic of such exchanges occurred in 1962 when F.R. Leavis challenged C.P. Snow in a remarkable

clash of minds that captivated and divided members of the British intellectual elite and shaped academic debate on both sides of the Atlantic.

The controversy began in 1959 when Snow, a trained physicist who later worked as both a novelist and public servant, delivered the Rede Lecture at Cambridge University. The lecture, entitled “The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution”, warned those in attendance that “a gulf of mutual incomprehension” had grown to separate the arts and sciences in Britain (15). Snow describes the divide:

The non-scientists have a rooted impression that the scientists are shallowly optimistic, unaware of man’s condition. On the other hand, the scientists believe that the literary intellectuals are totally lacking in foresight, peculiarly unconcerned with their brother men, in a deep sense anti-intellectual, anxious to restrict both art and thought to the existential moment (16).

While Snow tries to position himself as an impartial observer, he believes the current state of affairs stems primarily from a “total incomprehension of science” on the part of literary intellectuals, whom he describes as “natural Luddites” (19, 26). Their failure to appreciate the ramifications of industrialization and potential technological remedies to society’s ills limits writers and critics from making a positive contribution to the world. In particular, Snow singles out Modernism for its lack of brotherly concern, positing a connection between “some kinds of early twentieth-century art and the most imbecile expressions of anti-social feeling” (17). Snow argues that only the scientist has society’s best interests in mind, suggesting “Scientists are the most important occupational group working in the world today” (187). Despite his obvious bias, Snow concludes by setting aside the question of blame and magnanimously states: “Closing the gap between our two

cultures is a necessity in the most abstract intellectual sense, as well as in the most practical. When those two senses have grown apart, then no society is going to be able to think with wisdom” (44).

Reflecting later upon the lecture and its subsequent publication, Snow claims he had hoped his argument would provoke new discussion but expected his words to pass largely unnoticed (47). Instead, the lecture catapulted Snow into the limelight both within and beyond the walls of the academy. While acclaimed as a prophet by many, Snow also attracted his share of detractors. The most forceful and famous of these was F. R. Leavis. In 1962, Leavis published a critique of Snow in *The Spectator*. Incensed by what he believed to be Snow’s arrogance, Leavis attacked both the argument and its author. His personal criticisms of Snow were so scathing as to bring about public condemnation (one critic chastised Leavis’ “reptilian venom”). He mocked Snow as “portentously ignorant” and “intellectually as undistinguished as it is possible to be” (41, 42). In addition to criticizing Snow’s superficial readings of certain canonical figures and his failure to appreciate the importance of modern literature (most notably the genius of D.H. Lawrence), Leavis took issue with Snow’s willingness to embrace an uncertain and ever-changing future. Snow’s fulsome celebration of technological possibility fails to consider the impact of such change on the human spirit. In Leavis’ own words:

the advance of science and technology means a human future of change so rapid and of such kinds, of tests and challenges so unprecedented, of decisions and possible non-decisions so momentous and insidious in their consequences, that mankind—this is surely clear—will need to be in full intelligent possession of his full humanity (60).

Rather than facilitating the growth of the spirit, technological advances, according to Leavis, actually inhibit society's ability to respond to change.

By embracing technological change, people begin to valorise ideals of uniformity and standardization. Only that which can be easily assimilated and integrated into the existing social structure is valued. This discourages original, creative thought. Basically, Leavis laments the declining authority of the cultural elite and the growing power of a mass culture disconnected from its own history. Leavis writes:

There is an implicit logic that will impose, if not met by creative intelligence and corrective purpose, simplifying and reductive criteria of human need and human good, and generate, to form the mind and spirit of civilization, disastrously false and inadequate conceptions of the *ends* to which science should be a means (94).

Whereas Snow celebrates technology for potentially levelling the divide between the advantaged and disadvantaged of the world, Leavis worries Britain's culture legacy will be lost in the process. As with Snow, Leavis' biases and prejudices are immediately apparent to the reader. And, just like Snow, Leavis intently frames his argument as a call for balance and moderation. He concludes by envisioning universities reflective of

the collaboratively created human world, the realm of what is *neither* public in the sense of belonging to science (it can't be weighed or tripped over or brought into the laboratory or pointed to) *nor* merely private and personal (consider the nature of a language, of the language we can't do without) (98).

Despite this final plea for a free and fair exchange of ideas, Leavis, like Snow, is unable to relinquish the authority or control he believes is the privilege of his discourse.

Given that Snow and Leavis both conclude by calling for greater interdisciplinary dialogue, one wonders what animated the debate in the first place. Both Snow and Leavis truly believed society was threatened by a lack of balance or reciprocity between the disciplines (or so it would appear). Indeed, there is a great deal that is similar in their arguments. Both believe in the uniqueness of the particular historical moment. In their opinion, modern society faces daunting and unprecedented challenges to which those in positions of leadership must respond. Indeed, it is the specialist or expert who is most revered in both models. The perceived lack of respect for these specialists motivates both Snow and Leavis to write their critiques. More practically, both are concerned modern life has been trivialized or degraded. Prevailing social conditions have denied people a full and complete existence. In each case, a loss must be redressed either by revealing some hidden truth or recovering elements of a lost past. Snow wants scientists to eliminate malnutrition and other forms of material inequality. Though less egalitarian, Leavis also seeks to redeem society; he wants to restore a sense of cultural continuity or awareness he believes must inform social action. Only when these fundamentals have been addressed can society begin to work productively in its own best interest. Based upon these shared concerns, the two should have been allies rather than adversaries. Why, then, is their exchange so full of animosity and mistrust?

Undoubtedly, the feud was partly attributable to the enormous egos of the men involved. In particular, Leavis detested the challenge Snow posed to his authority. Yet, their antipathy is more than just an instance of petty jealousy or professional rivalry. It is reflective of a deeply entrenched social structure committed to an antithetical or mutually exclusive reading of the arts and sciences. Despite their shared ideals and individual calls

for rapprochement, Snow and Leavis did not actually want a free and equal exchange of ideas. At least, they could not fully commit to this ideal. Rather, they pressed for what is, in effect, a form of discursive subsumption—a process whereby conflicting positions are discretely integrated into the principal discourse. Snow welcomed literature *as long as it conformed to the progressive ethos of science*; Leavis welcomed science *provided it ceded authority to the social culture from which it emerged*. Ultimately, by emphasizing or prioritizing one discourse over the other, both Snow and Leavis bolstered the apparent divide between the arts and sciences. Having said as much, it should be noted that subsumption is, itself, a form of exchange. The exchange is merely disavowed in order to preserve the appearance of discursive integrity. In this respect, the “Two Cultures” debate is quintessentially modern in character.

While Snow and Leavis suggest society has become unbalanced in its treatment of the arts and sciences, Bruno Latour argues such disparity is not a recent development but the defining feature of the last four centuries of Western thought. More simply, modernity is predicated upon a total separation of the arts and sciences. Whereas Snow and Leavis believe this divide inhibits progress and social development, Latour argues the incredible success of the modern project is, in fact, attributable to the distinction between Nature and Culture (broad categories that contain the sciences and arts). In Latour’s words, the distinction “provided the moderns with the daring to mobilize things and people on a scale they would have otherwise disallowed” (41). To their detriment, premodern cultures make no such distinction. For example, a premodern society may decide when to plant crops according to a system based both upon their observations of seasonal weather patterns *and* the demands of an agricultural deity. From the modern perspective, such a

system confuses scientific fact and cultural belief. This serves to enslave premodern societies, rendering them unable to appreciate either the extent of their powers or their limited agency. In contrast, modern societies are empowered by the distinction between Nature and Culture. This power stems ultimately from the ability to either emphasize or diminish the role of human agency in the world.

Nature and Culture occupy distinct positions and serve different functions in modern discourse. The natural world exists independently of our perceptions of it and consists of empirically verifiable phenomena. More simply, the natural world consists of “facts”: fundamental truths that condition or delimit the range of possible experiences. Natural facts have enormous rhetorical weight, as they are ostensibly free from human error or bias. The natural world simply exists and does not reflect any ideological imperative. To underline this point, Latour argues the natural world consists of “non-human” objects. In his own words, non-human objects are

inert bodies, incapable of will and bias but capable of showing, signing, writing, and scribbling on laboratory instruments before trustworthy witnesses. These nonhumans, lacking souls but endowed with meaning, are even more reliable than ordinary mortals, to whom will is attributed but who lack the capacity to indicate phenomena in a reliable way (23).

More than denoting an ontological difference in kind, Latour’s definition of non-human objects also draws attention to the different ways in which objects signify. Indeed, Snow values scientific facts not simply for the truth they possess but for their ability to *convey* truth. He writes: “Accuracy in verbal statements is better than inaccuracy. Try to pretend otherwise, and we shall find pretty soon that our lives become grittier and dirtier than we

can bear” (86). It is the value of the “statement” that inspires Snow as much as anything else. Science’s greatest strength is its ability to persuade and lead people along the path of truth.

Given the centrality of science and technology in modern life, it is tempting to declare Nature a winner in its war against culture. Yet, Latour demonstrates such proclamations are, at best, premature. While lacking the objective distance claimed by science, culture is a powerful force in its own right. Since it cannot claim the objectivity of Nature, cultural discourse does the exact opposite and emphasizes the importance of subjectivity. Instead of non-human objects, culture is manifested in human objects—things and ideas directly attributable to individual or group consciousness. If natural objects are discovered already made, cultural objects are socially constructed. The allure of culture is that its power is virtually unlimited. If the world as we know it is the product of human endeavour, it can be made and remade according to society’s needs. This is not to say that modern society is, in any given moment, capable of effecting any desired change. However, the prospect of such a change is never disavowed. While practical limits may exist, there is no innate developmental threshold beyond which we cannot pass. The material limitations of the world in which we live matter less when the world and, perhaps even more importantly, those limitations are seen to be human inventions.

As stated earlier, the tremendous success of modern society stems from our ability to keep nature and culture distinct and separate entities. If such separation can be achieved, Nature and Culture can avoid being brought into dialectical conflict. More simply, there is no need to consult culture when considering scientific dilemmas and no need to consult scientists when discussing a cultural predicament. Sheltered from criticism, the authority

of individual discourses grows, becoming ever more firmly entrenched in the public mindset. For instance, if drought can be explained solely by reference to weather patterns, there is no need to consider cultural factors such as development policies that may have impacted the water table. Similarly, if social development can be strictly correlated with access to educational opportunities, genetic factors limiting an individual's intellectual development can be overlooked. Latour assesses the power of the moderns more broadly:

If you criticize them by saying that Nature is a world constructed by human hands, they will show you that it is transcendent, that science is a mere intermediary allowing access to Nature, and that they keep their hands off. If you tell them that we are free and that our destiny is in our own hands, they will tell you that Society is transcendent and its laws infinitely surpass us. If you object that they are being duplicitous, they will show you that they never confuse the Laws of Nature with imprescriptible human freedom (37).

Basically, distinctions between Nature and Culture present a daunting façade. However, that is all they are: façades. The purity which moderns so fervently avow is merely an illusion. Beneath the surface, Nature and Culture are actually involved in an elaborate system of exchange.

The extraordinary, simultaneous expansion of Nature and Culture can seem, upon first glance, rather counter-intuitive. If Nature and Culture are locked in a battle for discursive supremacy, it would seem only logical that the growth of one would come at the expense of the other. For example, scientific discoveries regarding the origins of life would seem to threaten traditional, folkloric wisdom. Though he would reject the characterization of tradition as simply folkloric, Leavis wrote in the hopes of countering a similar threat. The

debate continues today, as evident in the backlash against Darwinism occurring in certain sectors of American society. Yet, that backlash, itself, represents an explosion of cultural development. New theories of creationism have developed to counter scientific theories and refocus attention on supernatural origins. In the end, Nature and Culture are able to offer such radically different explanations of phenomena because their objects of enquiry are not strictly human or non-human; they are *hybrids*. Latour argues Nature and Culture are not truly distinct. Citing historical examples, he describes how scientific “facts” are produced under artificial laboratory conditions. Facticity is attributable to confirmation of proper methodology on the part of likeminded individuals—a distinctly *human* variable that is rarely, if ever, explicitly addressed. Similarly, cultural arguments often attempt to bolster their authority by way of scientific argumentation. However, these facts are only selectively deployed and science remains subordinate to social constructivism. In both instances, discursive integrity depends upon a selective reading of reality or what Latour calls “works of purification”.

While purification demands the hybridity of objects never be acknowledged, Latour asserts it is impossible to describe all objects as either purely natural or cultural in origin. Some measure of hybridity is evident in almost everything. The question becomes how to represent this hybridity. Rather than abandon the Nature/Culture divide, moderns evade the question by “*conceiving every hybrid as a mixture of two pure forms*” (Latour 78). As we shall see, this strategy is essential to sexology, which treats homosexuality as both a congenital condition *and* a deviant behavioural choice. For the moment, I would like to emphasize the ideological or conceptual flexibility gained by this approach to hybridity. Depending upon one’s circumstances and ideological orientation, a hybrid object can be

refigured to emphasize either its natural or cultural attributes. In effect, this multiplies the number of objects available to the modern mind. The same object can be represented in myriad different ways, each one ontologically distinct from the next. Phrased somewhat differently, the process of purification actually produces new hybrid objects. These new objects are then seized upon and subjected to the work of purification. In effect, the system is self-sustaining. This process of exchange and negotiation occurs concomitantly with works of purification and is referred to by Latour as “translation” or, sometimes, “mediation” and is the engine that drives modern society. Latour writes: “Everything happens in the middle, everything passes between the two, everything happens by way of mediation, translation and networks, but this space does not exist, it has no place. It is the unthinkable, the unconscious of the moderns” (37).

There are points when Latour’s analysis appears too simplistic or reductive to actually represent the complexities of the modern world. In framing his modern “constitution,” he appears, at times, to force the issue by shaping facts to fit his critique. Yet, Latour does not suggest the modern world, in any way, resembles our depiction of it. Indeed, Latour maintains “We have never been modern”. In Latour’s reading, the grand promises of modernity have always been based upon an elaborate illusion, a clever use of “double language”. Since critiques of modernity tend, for the most part, to replicate the modern divide between Nature and Culture, there is never any serious threat to the authority of the modern paradigm. Though Latour never considers Snow and Leavis, he cuts to the core of their argument when he writes that the more hybrids emerge, “the more the major philosophies treat the two constitutional poles as incommensurable, even while they assert that there is no task more urgent than their reconciliation” (56). Even postmodern

critiques, which seek to transcend the limitations of modernity, replicate this logic.

Latour:

The postmoderns believe they are still modern because they accept the total division between the material and the technological world on the one hand and the linguistic play of speaking subjects on the other—thus forgetting the bottom half of the modern Constitution; or because they relish only in the hybrid character of free floating networks and collages—thus forgetting the upper half of that same Constitution (61).

If, as Latour suggests, we have never been modern, it is impossible to suggest that we are now *post*-modern. Ultimately, the greatest threat to modernity comes not from without but within.

It is premature to mark the passing of the modern moment. As I have tried to show, contemporary discourse frequently returns to the Nature/Culture divide. One might even argue, contra Latour, modernity is still in its ascendancy. Yet, regardless of whether it is growing or waning, there is a definite sense in which modernity is threatened by its own success. In Latour's assessment, this threat comes from "quasi-objects" which are found "between and below the two poles, at the very place around which dualism and dialectics had turned endlessly without being able to come to terms with them" (55). Quasi-objects are a particular form of hybrid. Whereas most hybrids are assimilable into the prevailing paradigm, the quasi-object remains problematic, resistant to purification. It is resolutely human *and* non-human in nature. Latour continues:

Quasi-objects are much more social, much more fabricated, much more collective than the 'hard' parts of nature, but they are in no way the arbitrary

receptacles of a full-fledged society. On the other hand they are much more real, nonhuman and objective than those shapeless screens on which society—for unknown reasons—needed to be projected (55).

As hybrids proliferate as a result of translation, ever more quasi-objects are produced. These expose the tenuous foundations upon which modernity is built. More precisely, the quasi-object is inseparable from the circumstances of its creation. It calls attention to processes of mediation hidden beneath the outward work of purification. In Latour's opinion, modernity "collapsed under its own weight, submerged by the mixtures it tolerated as material for experimentation" (49). While there is ample reason to believe the modern moment has not yet passed, the problem Latour identifies is valid. In many respects, the challenge posed by hybrid objects is a recurrent theme in twentieth century history. The challenge is even more pronounced in relation to sexology and modernism. To better understand the implications of this dynamic, it is necessary to consider briefly the relationship between sexology and modern medicine.

II.II

The Normal and Pathological

Sexology developed as both an extension of medical discourse and a challenge to its authority. As previously noted, early sexologists adopted a therapeutic orientation; their primary goal was to prevent or correct "corruption of the sexual instinct". In order to do so, normative parameters had first to be established or reaffirmed. Without a sense of how the body *should* function, it is impossible to establish how it *should not* function. Medicine provided the basis for such judgements. By distinguishing between normal and pathological states of being, medicine informs our understanding of the body's potential and its limits. Because medicine has been so successful in prolonging and improving life,

its discursive authority has remained largely unquestioned. Medical *opinion* has, for many, become medical *fact*. To build upon Latour's argument, medicine has transformed the body into a distinctly "natural" or "non-human" object—an elaborate machine which may be objectively studied and, if need be, restored to a state of optimal performance. Within this framework, individual consciousness was often either ignored or reduced to a function of physiology.² The patient's own sense of well-being became subordinate to the doctor's analysis of his or her body. As a non-human object, the body began to speak its own truth. Sexology's supposed ability to access this truth was meant to distinguish it from other discourses on sex.

In his preface to Psychopathia Sexualis, Krafft-Ebing attempts to distinguish his work from other efforts to understand the same subject. He discounts most earlier work as either too poetic or too metaphysical. In particular, he singles out Paolo Mantegazza, a contemporary who penned a popular volume on sexual hygiene entitled "Physiology of Pleasure" (1854).³ While Mantegazza aspired to write a scientific analysis of pleasure, he frequently resorts to poetic descriptors, as when he observes "Joy is pleasure wearing a spring dress, dancing lightly among the flowers" (Pireddu 6). Krafft-Ebing suggests such language provides valuable insight into the *sentiment* of love but fails to uncover the *truth* of the matter. While respectful of Mantegazza, Krafft-Ebing writes:

the "Physiology of Love" provides inexhaustible material for the poetry of all ages and all peoples, nevertheless the poet will not discharge his arduous task

² Obviously, there is today a sophisticated body of research challenging the position of medicine in society. Indeed, there have always been counter-discourses of some form or another (i.e. religious or folk beliefs). My comments are intended only to reflect the extraordinary authority accorded to medicine within modern societies.

³ The title has also been translated as "Physiology of Love". Krafft-Ebing's reference to the book uses this translation. The more accurate translation is "Physiology of Pleasure" which I have chosen to use myself, as it better captures Mantegazza's true subject.

adequately without the active co-operation of natural philosophy and, above all, that of medicine, a science which seeks to trace all psychological manifestations to their anatomical and physiological sources” (xxi).

It is, ultimately, the subjective character of Mantegazza’s analysis Krafft-Ebing rejects. To be meaningful, objectivity must be maintained; the sexologist must distance himself from his subject. For Krafft-Ebing, medical methodology helps ensure this distance; medicine is a means of accessing truth. Krafft-Ebing writes: “It is from the search for truth that the exalted duties and rights of medical science emanate” (xxii). In effect, Krafft-Ebing bolsters his authority by distinguishing between Nature and Culture—by engaging in works of purification. However, as Latour argues, Nature and Culture are not distinct. The line between the normal and pathological is not a modern discovery but a modern invention.

The strict demarcation between the normal and pathological, between states of health and states of disease, is one of the most enduring and influential instances of modern purification. Concerned with our own mortality, we have become almost obsessed with the science of prolonging life by treating or eliminating the illnesses threatening our own wellbeing. We take dietary supplements to fend off sickness, undergo surgical procedures to remedy existing debilities, and push the limits of human understanding in a quest to rectify the body’s failings—to achieve an optimal state of health. In many respects, this is quite understandable. While we may go too far in our search for perfection, it would be foolish to suggest that life is somehow better with cancer, that research into an AIDS vaccine is little more than human vanity. However, we err in thinking such conditions are somehow *innately* pathological, violations of a “naturally” preordained order. Disease is

not the antithesis of life; it is a form of life. When Georges Canguilhem suggested as much in 1943, he launched a volley over the bow of established medicine. At the outset of The Normal and the Pathological, Canguilhem asserts “there is not in itself an *a priori* ontological difference between a successful living form and an unsuccessful form” (31). In large part, the distinction rests upon Canguilhem’s clarification of the *normal* and the *normative*. He writes:

There is no fact which is normal or pathological in itself. An anomaly or a mutation is not in itself pathological. These two express other possible norms of life. If these norms are inferior to specific earlier norms in terms of stability, fecundity, variability of life, they will be called pathological. If these norms in the same environment should turn out to be equivalent, or in another environment, superior, they will be called normal. *Their normality will come to them from their normativity*. The pathological is not the absence of a biological norm: it is another norm but one which is, comparatively speaking, pushed aside by life (144, italics mine).

More simply, “the sick man is not abnormal because of the absence of a norm but because of his incapacity to be normative” (Canguilhem 186).

Canguilhem’s comments are part of the ongoing debate inaugurated by Darwin’s work on evolution.⁴ Like those before him, Canguilhem attempts to understand both the origins and implications of biological difference. As evident in the above passage, Canguilhem adheres to the Darwinian notion that certain forms of life will flourish while others are “pushed aside by life”. However, he refuses to equate “success” with “normalcy”. He argues our evaluations of success are contingent upon ever changing circumstances. In

⁴ See Chap. 1.

other words, there is no objective standard of normal life but only those we construct for ourselves. Anticipating Latour, Canguilhem writes: “*The living being’s functional norms* as examined in the laboratory are meaningful only within the framework of *the scientist’s operative norms*” (145). Within the laboratory, subjective criteria underpinning standards of success are ignored or disavowed. The body, exposed to the mastering gaze, is subconsciously granted the power to speak for itself. While normativity is a quantitative observation of statistical predominance, normality suggests a qualitative difference in kind. By designating forms of life “normal”, scientists claim the authority to reengineer society in an attempt to promote what is valued while eliminating anything abnormal or pathological.

Though Canguilhem deliberately attempts to limit the scope of his enquiry, his critique of the normal and pathological anticipates Latour’s sense of modern purification. As noted, the body’s social, subjective dimension is obscured or negated by an exclusive focus on the normal and the pathological. The importance of imposing a dichotomous structure is evident in Canguilhem’s assertion that “norms, whether in some implicit or explicit form, refer the real to values, express discriminations of qualities in conformity with the polar opposition of a positive and a negative” (240). The normal/pathological binary arbitrarily establishes the worth of certain forms of life, while claiming scientific neutrality or objectivity. The dynamic’s modern character is even more evident in the provisional definitions of normalcy. Ostensibly, the normal is a trans-historical category. It is intended to express a base truth, a natural and immutable state of being. The normal is life as it should be. Deviation from the norm is a form of regression or, in more properly sexological terms, degeneration. As such, the definition of normalcy should not

significantly change. However, definitions of normalcy are subject to constant revision and reinterpretation.

Canguilhem argues the measures of an organism's success are constantly evolving in accordance with shifts in social circumstance. This, in turn, impacts our definition of the normal. When these changes are considered, it becomes apparent that the normal and the pathological are not merely descriptive markers of health and ill-being. Rather, they are elaborate signifiers capable of expressing both the anxieties and aspirations attached to our experiences of our bodies. Phrased somewhat differently, anatomy, physiology, and nosology are components of a broader system of cultural representation. Amongst other things, they provide means of imagining the body and its relationship to the environment. The emphasis lies on the act of creation. Canguilhem argues "Normal man is normative man, the being capable of establishing new, even organic norms" (139). As definitions of normativity shift and evolve, so too does our understanding of the normal. In introducing The Normal and the Pathological, Michel Foucault claims Canguilhem's genius lies in recognizing that "Error is not eliminated by the muffled force of a truth that gradually emerges from the shadow but by the formation of a new way of 'speaking true'" (15). Foucault, quite rightly, suggests the normal and pathological are, fundamentally, modes of representation—ways of "speaking true". Yet, these new modes of representation do not correct or eliminate error. Error or the possibility of error is the creative wellspring from which new ways of speaking emerge and is indispensable to modern discourse.

Though Latour does not discuss error per se, his analysis suggests error is an essential component of the modern paradigm. As noted earlier, modernity is defined by the parallel emergence of ontologically distinct discourses. Certain discourses purport to address the

“natural” world and are ostensibly objective in character. Others focus upon “cultural” concerns and address the subjective quality of experience. Because natural and cultural discourses are separated via acts of purification, there is little direct contact. Non-human considerations need not be taken into account when analysing objects from a humanistic perspective. The same exclusivity holds true in reverse. As a result, there are a minimum of two distinct ideological perspectives from which any object may be viewed. Neither perspective is absolutely authoritative; the naturalistic or humanistic quality of the object can always be challenged simply by redefining the object. If the object in question is determined to have been misidentified as either a human or non-human object, all subsequent theorizations of the object can simply be ignored as irrelevant. Since all objects are hybrid and contain recognizably human *and* non-human elements, redefinition always exists as an *a priori* possibility. As a result, the applicability of a discursive approach can be established simply by attributing *error* to another methodology. Since these findings of error are never definitive, the process is self-perpetuating and generates more and more ways of “speaking true”.

If the normal and pathological do not represent absolute categories of being but rather shifting standards of normative value, error can never be eliminated from the evaluative process. In other words, the history of medicine is an ongoing process of trial and error. As society’s definition of normative body function changes over time, medicine responds accordingly, developing new techniques and procedures reflective of these new realities. Invariably, such change is depicted as progress. New medical technologies improve upon previously existing technologies or, just as often, correct the errors of the past. A brief survey of medical history reveals many practices that would be judged not simply crude

but morally or ethically misguided by today's standards. However, the majority of these repudiated practices were seen as progressive in their day. This suggests it is not just technology that has changed but also our subjective understanding of the ethics of medical intervention. Many forms of pathological difference have now been accepted as either normative or insignificant deviations requiring no medical intervention. One might look toward debate over cochlear implants within the hearing impaired community as evidence of revised notions of "disability". Canguilhem raises a similar point when he asks: "To the extent that living beings diverge from the specific type, are they abnormal in that they endanger the specific form or are they inventors on the road to new forms?" (144). The point is not to suggest that medical advances have not significantly improved the standard of life for many people. Rather, I want only to suggest that medical science is motivated by a form of subjective evaluation of error. As prevailing conceptions of the normal and pathological change, medicine responds in kind. Error drives medicine forward.

The second key component Foucault identifies within Canguilhem's analysis is the notion of "speaking true". While Foucault refers broadly to modes of representation, the specific question of speech or narration is important. In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault discusses the transition from a diagnostic procedure centred around *listening* to patients' complaints to one concerned with examining or *seeing* their bodies. Prior to the birth of the clinic, doctors trained by apprenticing with senior physicians. They travelled to the sick and learnt how to diagnose illness by *listening* to what patients told them. With the advent of teaching hospitals, students were taught to *see* illness in the body and tell the patient what was wrong. In effect, the patient went from an active subject who articulated

his or her symptoms, to a passive object awaiting the interpretive gaze of the doctor. In Foucault's words: "a way of teaching and *saying* became a way of learning and *seeing* (The Birth of the Clinic 64). In so doing, the teaching and practice of medicine became standardized. Upon graduating from various teaching hospitals, doctors shared a common ability to read disease in the body. Doctors could come together to confer and reaffirm one another's diagnoses. This lent authority to medical discourse by limiting where and how medicine could be practiced. Reconceived as a way of seeing the body, medicine became self-validating, determining both what constituted disease and what the proper treatments might be. In Foucault's words: "the medical gaze circulates within an enclosed space in which it is controlled only by itself" (Birth 30-1).

Essentially, Foucault describes a process of purification. From a holistic perspective, illness has both an objective and subjective component. Most visits to the doctor begin with an experience of pain or some other form of ill-being. Accordingly, Canguilhem defines health as "a feeling of assurance in life to which no limit is fixed" (201). Admittedly, there are asymptomatic medical conditions that may threaten one's life. Yet, Canguilhem's point remains valid. The non-normative presence or absence of a given physiological feature is not, in and of itself, evidence of an illness or other pathological condition. As Canguilhem notes, a condition becomes pathological only at the moment it interferes with life as we think it should be lived. In Canguilhem's own words, "Disease reveals normal functions to us at the precise moment when it deprives us of their exercise" (101). Basically, Canguilhem suggests patients' subjective experiences of their conditions are integral to evaluations of the normal and pathological. Lacking modern diagnostic equipment, early physicians necessarily relied upon subjective experience and

built their practices around it. Unfortunately, subjective impressions can be unreliable. To address this shortcoming, modern medicine sought, as much as possible, to isolate or even eliminate the patient's input. If disease could be identified in the body (in the form of a tumour, fracture, etc.), the process of diagnosis would, at least theoretically, be more accurate. In other words, the body had to be made a non-human object open to objective scrutiny. Foucault writes:

If one wishes to know the illness from which he is suffering, one must subtract the individual, with his particular qualities...at this level the individual was merely a negative element, the accident of the disease, which, for it and in it, is most alien to its essence (14-5).

As Latour and Foucault directly and indirectly suggest, this process of purification—of separating the disease from the diseased—contributed to medicine's discursive authority.

Not surprisingly, sexology sought to portray itself as a form of medical specialization. Beyond reflecting the therapist's sense of mission or purpose, sexology's affiliation with medicine lent the fledgling discourse an important measure of discursive credibility. As a branch of medicine, sexological findings could be presented as scientifically deduced facts and not merely biased supposition. In most instances, these "facts" were based upon careful scrutiny of the homosexual body. For example, small hands were taken to be a likely sign of inversion in men. A pronounced Adam's apple suggested lesbianism in women. In the absence of visible "pathological divergences" such as these, sexologists postulated the existence of invisible structures influencing sexual orientation. Although genetic science was in its infancy and unknown to the vast majority of early sexologists, many postulated the existence of some sort of cellular or sub-cellular sexual determinant.

Otto Weininger, a young Austrian whose work influenced Gertrude Stein's theories of attraction, theorized the existence of different "plasms" that sexually encoded individual cells. In all these instances, it was hoped the body would reveal its secrets, that behaviour could be understood in reference to physical characteristics.

Despite these pretences, sexology obviously lacked the scientific rigour of other fields of medicine. There was, of course, no direct correlation between isolated physiological features and identifiable sexual predispositions. Even though some researchers continue to work towards isolating a gay gene, this current work bears almost no resemblance to the outlandish theories of Weininger and others. In fact, the work of most sexologists was not at all predictive. On the contrary, physiological features became important only *after* inversion was diagnosed by other means. The physiological examinations conducted by Krafft-Ebing, Ellis, and others only occurred *after* an individual's homosexuality was identified during an interview.⁵ In this sense, sexology was reactive; a physiology of inversion was mapped, *post facto*, onto the homosexual body. In this way, the clinical practice of sexology differed from that of mainstream medicine. While other doctors genuinely sought to transcend the patient's subjective experience of his or her illness in search of an underlying pathology, the particulars of the invert's experience remained central to sexological practice. Inversion could not be diagnosed without reference to these experiences. However, once a "confession" was obtained, the subjective component of inversion was hidden behind physiological observations. The way in which men and women recounted their homosexual thoughts and experiences influenced the way in which their difference was diagnosed. Similarly, the emphasis placed by sexologists on

⁵ In other instances, homosexuals (usually adolescents and women) were brought to clinicians by concerned parents and spouses. As with those who voluntarily sought counselling, the sexual orientation of this group was, more or less, established prior to examination.

different aspects of the homosexual's experience influenced the nature of the diagnosis. Again, *this process of selective articulation and reception was officially disavowed*. Despite the emphasis on seeing difference, sexology remained dependent upon a form of narration.

The central importance of narration in the diagnosis of inversion becomes apparent in considering Krafft-Ebing's methodology and the categorical schemas he develops. It is important to note at the outset that Krafft-Ebing did not diagnose inversion or perversion in unsuspecting patients. Krafft-Ebing was a specialist whose patients sought his advice in the hopes of either correcting or confirming their difference. Alternately, concerned family members would bring patients to see the doctor in the hope they might be cured. Accordingly, Krafft-Ebing knew what he was looking for before he ever examined his patients. Diagnostically, Krafft-Ebing based his findings on the results of a physical examination and, even more importantly, an interview with the "afflicted" individual. In a manner that seems to anticipate Freud, Krafft-Ebing sought to establish the aetiology of perversion by isolating the behavioural factors that corrupted normal desire. Often, the defining moment could be traced to childhood. For instance, Krafft-Ebing suggested that masochistic desire resulted from early childhood discipline. When taken over the father's knee for punishment, the child's genitals would rub against his father's lap, resulting in stimulation. In that moment, a psychic connection was established between pleasure and pain. Treatment consisted of breaking this psychic connection and re-channelling desire in more appropriate directions (a process that often involved hiring prostitutes to facilitate normal heterosexual desire). Though purportedly a rigorous medical discipline, sexology

was still dependent on eliciting the patient's narrative of his or her affliction. It was a decidedly hybrid discourse and, as such, fundamentally modern in character.

The way in which one told one's story helped determine the doctor's diagnosis. If an individual had a good memory and could recall the different stimuli present during the moment in which his or her desire first manifested itself, the origin of the desire could be externalized. In other words, the strange desire was held to be *perverse*, attributable to some environmental factor. However, if the patient could not or would not provide a convincing account of how his or her desire first manifested itself, the diagnosis was more likely to be one of *congenital inversion*. Simply stated, if the behaviour could not be connected with some sort of external factor, it must have originated in the individual. Whether individuals were determined to be inverts or perverts had little to do with who or what they were. What mattered most was *how they told their stories*. In some instances, the doctor would be active in framing the narrative through the use of leading questions. In others, patients were able to phrase their accounts in language derived directly from the discourse itself. The longest case study in Psychopathia Sexualis is presented as a first person narration by a doctor who actually cites some of Krafft-Ebing's earlier work (Case 129, Psychopathia Sexualis 200-14). The interest in sexology amongst some members of sexual subcultures may have actually resulted in sexual difference taking the form of an established archetypal paradigm. This might help explain the prominence of the mannish lesbian in interwar society.⁶

To summarize, diagnosis depended not merely on the presence or absence of certain physiological indicators but also on differing narratives of desire and attraction. While

⁶ Consider Stephen's discovery of Krafft-Ebing's writings in her father's study in The Well of Loneliness (Chapter 1).

the general form of these narratives was broadly shaped by a socially constructed vision of homosexuality, the specific quality of an individual's account impacted the clinician's findings. In order to maintain a pretence of scientific or medical credibility, sexology had to find a way of accounting for unpredictable findings and incorporating the diversity of sexual experience into fixed diagnostic types. Krafft-Ebing did this by further refining the established categories of perversion and inversion. Within the category of inversion, there are, in Krafft-Ebing's account, four distinct sexual orientations. Basically, the different categories are based upon the relative strength of the homosexual attraction and the degree of deviation from gender norms. Merl Storr describes these categories as follows: the first category includes individuals who basically conform to heterosexual gender norms (active men and passive women) but are, nevertheless, sexually attracted to the same sex; the second category includes people who are both attracted to members of the same sex and adopt the gender norms of the opposite sex (the archetypal congenital invert); the third category includes people who perceive themselves as members of the opposite sex and experience the world, both physically and psychologically, from the perspective of the opposite sex; the fourth and final category is comprised of a rare group of individuals who wholly believe themselves to be members of the opposite sex (Storr 16).

The key to understanding Krafft-Ebing's typology is appreciating the relationship between the different categories. The first two categories described are manifestations of a sexual "instinct". The latter two categories are sexual "personalities" (Storr 15). The former are experienced as *urges* that prompt the individual to act in a certain manner. The latter are *types of being*, gendered personas which guide and inform every aspect of the

individual's existence. The distinctly modern character of Krafft-Ebing's thinking is apparent in this dichotomy. While all four categories may ostensibly be traced back to the body (as varying forms of physiological degeneracy), the manner in which difference is manifested and experienced continues to reflect the same Cartesian mind/body dualism undergirding the foundational distinction between perversion (psychosexual deviance) and inversion (corporeal difference). In other words, the mind/body dualism is not discarded but merely displaced in Krafft-Ebing's revised formulation of inversion.

The persistent re-emergence of dichotomous structures within Krafft-Ebing's writing is indicative of the quintessentially modern character of his thought. As noted, the initial distinction between perversion and inversion is an act of purification, distinguishing between mental and physical origins of same-sex desire. Yet, the invert, as a sexological and ontological category, is insufficiently determinate. It cannot contain the diversity of sexual experience encountered by the clinician. In a Latournian sense, the invert is a quasi-object, a hybrid construction straddling Nature and Culture. Since such hybridity cannot be formally acknowledged, it is subjected to further acts of purification. Krafft-Ebing's quadripartite division of inversion is an attempt to further enforce the distinction between subject and object, mind and body, sense and substance. Admittedly, these new distinctions are imperfect and the divide remains porous. If anything, Krafft-Ebing's intervention further complicates the matter, muddying the waters instead of clarifying things.

Perhaps sensing as much, Krafft-Ebing described these new categories not as discrete, monadic entities but, rather, as points on a continuum of desire. In effect, Krafft-Ebing's efforts to further purify his discourse actually multiplied the number of different points

within the constellation of possible sexual identities. As the objects of his enquiry grew in number, the barriers between objects became porous, developing decidedly soft edges. Of course, this conceptual blurring or hybridization was officially disavowed. By conceiving of these hybrid objects as mixtures of pure forms (in the manner described by Latour)⁷, Krafft-Ebing is actually able to claim a measure of victory. In Storr's words:

By invoking the model of 'gradation' or continuum, Krafft-Ebing is able to contain the disruptive potential of all this diversity: what would otherwise be extremely troublesome disjunctions between 'personality' and 'instinct' are smoothed over as merely endpoints of a single scale (17).

Attempting to portray sexology as a rigidly codified science, Krafft-Ebing creates categories that are so flexible that they cease to be distinct categories at all. In effect, this allows Krafft-Ebing to compartmentalize his observations within the parameters of a very loosely defined topology. Though clearly imperfect, this system of sliding values allowed Krafft-Ebing to maintain his standing as a therapist and clinician. As Storr notes: "it is precisely the gravity and import of sexology as a clinical practice which impels Krafft-Ebing to insist on the distinction of sexual categories even when he himself is aware of the difficulty of the enterprise" (21).

To the scientifically trained observer, the ever-shifting positions in Krafft-Ebing's account of sexual deviance must call into question the veracity of his findings. They may even challenge the possibility of real sexological knowledge. Yet, Krafft-Ebing's efforts to isolate causes in his primarily descriptive accounts of sexual difference may have added to the growing reputation of sexology. By accepting the superficial truths of description as evidence of underlying, substantive differences, Krafft-Ebing aligned

⁷ See Latour p. 78.

himself with other contemporary scientists who were content with knowing things as they appeared. Rather than an admission of inadequacy, “the sacrifice of depth was calculated to yield an increase of certainty” (Porter 151). These scientists did not abandon their roles as experts, they merely advocated a “less dogmatic form of expertise” (Porter 151). By shifting both the terrain of the debate and the standards of judgement, Krafft-Ebing was able to present narratives as scientific facts. Or, from a slightly different perspective, scientific facts could be given a narrative emphasis. Either way, sexology drew upon both science *and* narrative as means of directing or regulating sexual behaviour.

In summary, sexology emerged at a point in history defined by extremely productive, albeit disavowed, interdisciplinary exchanges. Building upon monumental advances in the human sciences, sexology positioned itself as a vehicle of progress; through rigorous scientific study, the plight of sexually “deviant” men and women would be explained and, ideally rectified. Yet, despite extraordinary emphasis on taxonomical precision and exhaustiveness, the objects of sexological enquiry continually exceeded the definitional parameters imposed by practitioners. In contrast to the medical trajectory outlined by Foucault, the subjectivities of the men and women seeking sexological counselling never faded from view. On the contrary, it was the uniqueness of these individual stories that propelled sexology forward. Narration and observation were brought together in a veiled system of exchange, each aspect of the relationship conditioning the other. The following chapters narrow the focus of this study and consider first the ways in which modernist or proto-modernist forms of narration influenced the development of sexology and then, in greater detail, the ways in which different strains of sexological thought influenced Stein, Woolf, and Barnes in their efforts to express a new literary voice and change the shape of

modern literature. Hopefully, what follows will draw attention to some of the hidden exchanges that made the period in question so productive in the development of both the arts and sciences and, in so doing, perhaps bridge the “two cultures”.

***The Beat of Different Drummers:
The Literary and Artistic Subtexts of
Studies in the Psychology of Sex (1897)***

We can neither attain a sane view of life nor a sane social legislation of life unless we possess a just and accurate knowledge of the fundamental instincts upon which life is built.

-Havelock Ellis,
Studies in the Psychology of Sex

The diversity of the Many is balanced by the stability of the One. That is why life must always be a dance, for that is what a dance is: perpetual slightly varied movements which are yet always held true to the shape of the whole.

-Havelock Ellis,
The Dance of Life

III.I

A Meeting of Minds

By the time the groundbreaking first volume of Studies in the Psychology of Sex appeared in 1897, Havelock Ellis had already established himself as a progressive scholar and thinker. In addition to editing both a collection of popular scientific writings and a series of unexpurgated Elizabethan dramas, Ellis had published two books on topics ranging from criminology to political appraisals of Zola and Ibsen. Yet, it was his bold defence of homosexuality that cemented the reputation of the thirty-eight year old Ellis.

Despite having been declared obscene during the bizarre prosecution of a hapless English bookseller, copies of Sexual Inversion were sought after by readers drawn to Ellis' frank treatment of sexual difference. In the years that followed, the studies were revised and expanded. With each subsequent edition, Ellis' stature grew until, at the height of his fame, Ellis was reaching an audience of thousands in a weekly column published by the Hearst media empire. While the volume on sexual inversion won him fame, it is ironic to note that Ellis was not initially drawn to the subject (Grosskurth, The Woeful Victorian 285). In fact, the study on inversion may never have been published if not for the passionate conviction of Ellis' often overlooked collaborator: John Addington Symonds. To understand fully Ellis' sexological methodology, Symonds' important, albeit limited, influence must be appreciated.

Though his name is but a minor footnote in the history of sexology, it was, in fact, John Addington Symonds who first approached Havelock Ellis in 1892 about the possibility of collaborating on a study of sexual inversion. Initially, the proposed project was attractive to both men. Motivated in part by the recent *Labouchere Amendment* which criminalized homosexual acts between men, Symonds wanted to redress public misconceptions about homosexuality. Having already completed two separate defences of inversion (A Problem in Greek Ethics (1883) and A Problem in Modern Ethics (1891))¹, Symonds was now looking to reach a broader audience. At the time, Ellis was acting as editor of the Contemporary Science Series. Symonds hoped that, once Ellis expanded his own sexological critique, the new volume would be worthy of publication in the series (Ellis disagreed). Essentially, Symonds believed that, by recasting his moral and ethical

¹ The dates listed correspond to the date of private publication. Symonds' interest in the subject was long-standing.

arguments in scientific terms, his position would gain credibility. Addressing the matter in a letter sent to a friend, the sexual reformer Edward Carpenter, Symonds wrote: “I need somebody of medical importance to collaborate with. Alone I could but make little effect—the effect of an eccentric” (Symonds 149).

Ellis, for his part, had vowed at an early age to make the study of human sexuality his life’s work. Just three years removed from medical school, Ellis had only taken minor steps in this direction and had yet to publish anything of note on the subject of sex. Like Symonds, Ellis believed it was wrong to equate inversion with degeneracy and disease. Similarly, he also understood that inverted men and women suffered because of this stigmatization. Yet, Ellis’ decision to work with Symonds was not entirely altruistic. At the very least, Ellis must have realized that he stood to benefit personally from his association with Symonds. More precisely, Symonds was in a unique position to help Ellis launch his career. Symonds, himself an invert, was acquainted with numerous other homosexuals, many of whom had sent him accounts of their own inversion after having read A Problem in Modern Ethics. If he agreed to work with Symonds, Ellis would have access to these accounts. At a time when it was extremely dangerous to speak frankly and openly of sexually “deviant” behaviour, Symonds’ correspondences were an invaluable source of material that Ellis could not turn down. The two set to work deciding how the labour would be divided.

Naturally, Ellis would deal with the majority of the scientific literature and the “cases” provided by Symonds. The bulk of Symonds’ work would be devoted to charting the history of homosexuality in different cultures. It quickly became apparent, however, that each man had a different vision of the final product. Ellis wanted a rigorously scientific

account of inversion. Symonds, on the other hand, was sceptical of much of the scientific literature and objected to this strict focus on neuropathology, claiming in a letter to be “whittling that away to a minimum” (Symonds 149). Though the collaboration and the debate continued, Symonds’ influence on the final draft would be limited by his sudden death. Having battled tuberculosis for many years, Symonds found himself suddenly on the verge of death, suffering from an aggressive case of influenza. His condition deteriorated quickly and Symonds died April 19, 1893. Ellis, no longer encumbered by Symonds’ many objections and concerns, continued on with the project. Perhaps not unexpectedly, the final version of Sexual Inversion displays more interest in sexological models than the cultural antecedents favoured by Symonds. In fact, Symonds role in the production of Sexual Inversion is downplayed in both the volume itself and in Ellis’ autobiography.

By almost any standard imaginable, Ellis’ decision to minimize the importance of Symonds appears cold and unjust. While Symonds may have impeded Ellis in his drive to produce a properly scientific account of inversion, it is equally true that the study could never have proceeded without the contributions made by Symonds. Yet, by rearticulating Symonds’ role in the development of Sexual Inversion we do more than simply right a historical wrong; we begin to appreciate the true nature of the work itself. As the collaborative effort of a politically minded cultural critic and an aspiring scientist, Sexual Inversion is, to speak anachronistically, an *interdisciplinary* effort. While even Symonds hoped the work would be accepted as a scientific finding of fact, the original plan for Sexual Inversion would have balanced that scientific character against a less regimented cultural critique. If sexological typographies had the effect of conferring and fixing

identity upon an individual, Symonds' focus on more humanistic disciplines would have maintained a measure of unpredictability and individual autonomy.

By employing a sexological model, Ellis and Symonds benefited from the cultural prestige associated with scientific discourse. If their findings were rooted in a scientific method, the results at which they arrived were, at least theoretically, reproducible and independently verifiable. More simply, their conclusions about sexual inversion could be presented as objective facts. On one level, Symonds aimed toward the same sort of results in his studies of history, literature, and philosophy. If Symonds could show that many of the paragons of Western culture were themselves homosexual, then society would have to acknowledge that the stereotype of the effete, immoral homosexual was also inaccurate. In the words of one critic, "to show that homosexuality is 'natural' and therefore universal, one must reveal where it is hidden and has passed as straight and 'natural'" (Sulcer 237). In "revealing" the hidden history of homosexuality, Symonds was himself conferring an identity on figures who could express neither their permission nor dissent. Effectively, Symonds was involved in what must have been one of the first cases of "outing".

Yet if Symonds' actions arbitrarily inscribed identity, we must acknowledge that such inscriptions were themselves always open to revision or refutation. For obvious reasons, the history of homosexuality is not written plainly. If it is written at all, it exists between the lines—a veiled intertext hidden from the scrutinizing gaze of judges and politicians. To uncover such a text, a reader must have special knowledge. He or she must know where to look. Analysing Symonds' method, Robert Sulcer writes:

the impartial critic, nevertheless employing the very partial method of queer formalism, excavates the text's secrets and reconstructs its larger textual contexts—not just the reading of the lines but the larger textual and political patterns they reveal (247).

Sulcer's subtlety is especially astute. In uncovering traces of homosexuality, Symonds is engaged in a very deliberate, politically informed act of reading. What Sulcer identifies as Symonds' "queer formalism" is indeed a "partial" reading practice governed by his particular sexual identity. However, this specificity is obscured when his findings are presented as the work of a professional scholar and critic. By maintaining the appearance of critical distance, Symonds could present his findings as uncovered *truth*—the product of measured research and not simply the self-interested suppositions of an advocate and reformer.

Having said as much, it is important to realize Symonds' readings were still subject to revision. Since they were based upon acts of reading, Symonds' conclusions could always be re-read and reinterpreted. The inherent openness of the text prohibits any attempt to foreclose on meaning. As long as acts of reading are based upon a process of interpretation, there can be no absolute, definitive explanation of a text. Though Symonds would have no doubt shied from this decidedly post-structuralist approach to textuality, this in no way changes the way text and textuality function in his defence of inversion. On the contrary, Symonds' critique depends upon both the open-endedness of the text *and* our own paradoxical need for closure and definite meaning. As Sulcer argues, the emerging field of literary studies was driven by a desire to produce a strong sense of progressive English national culture in contrast to the degeneracy of other nations (240).

Accordingly, the role of the critic, as explicator of that culture, necessarily acquired a measure of authority and prestige. Symonds was able to exploit that authority while producing readings that directly challenged the basis upon which that authority was founded (Sulcer 246). In other words, Symonds exploited both the malleability of the text *and* the sense in which the professional critic's findings were absolute. In terms of his defence of inversion, this paradox enabled Symonds to challenge heterosexist cultural histories while still claiming that his own readings represented the true nature of things.

Though perhaps unintended, the decision to include cultural and historical analyses in what was ostensibly a sexological study of inversion appears to have changed the nature of the work. No longer a work of pure science, Sexual Inversion would be subject to the scrutiny of historians and literary critics and not just those within the small community of sexological writers. Inevitably, the conclusions reached by such a study would be more debated than those produced in a more strictly sexological investigation. For inverted men and women seeking to define themselves both through and against socially constructed sexual archetypes, Symonds' studies promised a sense of agency and even the possibility of self-definition. As such, there is a temptation to see Symonds' death as disempowering, halting the progressive politics for which he stood. If Symonds and Ellis argued as to what form their study should take, it would be easy to conclude that Ellis' control over the final form of the work was won at the expense of Symonds' vision. In other words, Ellis' determination to produce a properly sexological account of inversion may be seen as undermining the revolutionary possibilities inherent in Symonds' turn to narrative.

Without directly referencing Symonds, Jeffrey Weeks has made similar claims. Weeks criticizes Sexual Inversion for arbitrarily circumscribing the limits of homosexuality, thereby denying many men a coherent, socially intelligible sexual identity. Despite its radical impetus, Studies in the Psychology of Sex, in Weeks' opinion, is a "diffidently elegant monument to past prejudice and ignorance" (141). In particular, he rejects Ellis' description of inversion as "abnormal" (162). As stated previously, Ellis was careful to qualify his use of the term. Inverts were abnormal in so far as they differed from the statistical majority. Abnormality was definitely not the same as deficiency or degeneracy. In fact, Ellis was a strong supporter of Edward Carpenter who argued for the special place of homosexuals in society—an argument that at many points advances the actual *superiority* of the "intermediate sex". Nevertheless, Weeks assails Ellis for promoting a view of homosexuality based on organic difference. In contrast, Weeks seems to favour Freud's conception of infantile bisexuality as a less prescriptive alternative². In this respect, Weeks is reflective of much contemporary queer criticism which is largely hostile to any account of homosexuality rooted in physiology or genetics.

The preference for psychological models of homosexual desire is quite understandable. If sexual orientation is ultimately a matter of happenstance—the result of myriad social forces influencing an individual's development—there is then no basis for distinguishing between different sexual types. Rather, all sexual identity is contiguous. That is to say,

² Interestingly, Ellis maintained his own theory of foundational bisexuality. Whereas Freud stressed the psychological basis of sexual desire, Ellis saw bisexuality as physiologically based. In the early phases of development, the foetus is not yet sexed. Seizing upon this, Ellis draws a parallel with Freud's theory of bisexuality. Like Freud, Ellis maintains that early bisexuality is resolved during development. Yet in his own model, masculine or feminine traits become physiologically predominant. Forms of inversion arise when significant remnants of the second sex exist in the organism. In effect, Ellis imagines a very literal, form of Freud's aetiology of desire where desire becomes ideally focussed on the opposite sex. The example is important because it shows Ellis creatively mixing his own beliefs with other contemporaneous developments.

homosexuality and heterosexuality are but two easily identifiable points within a broad spectrum of sexual possibilities. If this is so, it is nonsensical to suggest that one form of sexual behaviour is natural and another unnatural. If all human sexuality is fundamentally polymorphously perverse, the normal and the pathological have no bearing. In essence, such a model seems to guarantee radical equality.

Ellis, by focussing instead on organic, physiological explanations of homosexuality, appears to undermine the egalitarianism of the other model. By articulating a seemingly exhaustive taxonomy of different sexual types, Ellis appears to provide scientific proof of substantive difference and, by extension, a biological foundation for discrimination. That is to say, if sexual inversion was determined to be an unfortunate congenital condition, it could theoretically be corrected through applied eugenics—a truly terrifying prospect. Accordingly, it would be easy to concur with Weeks that Ellis’ work, despite his best intentions, further undermines the position of homosexual men and women in society. Yet while such concerns are understandable, we should nevertheless ask whether these fears are justified. Unquestionably, Ellis’ work is marked by biases that are today unacceptable to most readers. Yet, was Symonds right to resist Ellis’ use of sexology in his attempt to alleviate the suffering of inverted men and women? Is sexology, as Weeks suggests, inimical to modern theories of performativity and polymorphous perversion? To answer these questions, we must begin by examining the important role of narrative in Ellis’ thought and politics.

While Ellis may be remembered primarily for his work on sex, it would be wrong to reduce such a complex man to a single accomplishment. Though Symonds saw him as a man of “medical importance”, Ellis in fact struggled through his studies, taking eight

years to qualify as a doctor. Of all his courses, Ellis excelled in just one: midwifery. Though Ellis was by no means inept, there is no indication that Ellis was an especially gifted or insightful physician. If anything, Ellis appears to have never truly dedicated himself to the practice of medicine. Instead, he continued with the wide ranging, self-directed study he had begun as a child. While still a youth and working as a teacher in the Australian outback, Ellis turned to books to fill the void caused by his isolation. He read voraciously across a number of fields. For the young Ellis, books became a way of understanding and engaging with the world. They taught him both how to think and how to express himself. In short, Ellis' years in Australia were formative and the books he read became the basis of the views and beliefs that distinguish his later work. In Ellis' words: "there has never been a moment when the foundation and background of my life had not been marked by the impress they received at Sparkes Creek" (My Life 167).

The revolutionary politics underlying Studies in the Psychology of Sex and, possibly, Ellis' interest in working with the literary Symonds, can be traced back to Ellis' rather unique "education" in Australia. Of all the changes that mark Ellis' time in the outback, perhaps the most important was his turn away from organized religion (Nottingham 19). While still a child, Ellis was heavily influenced by his mother's devoutly evangelical beliefs. Not surprisingly, Ellis was preoccupied with sin and became "firmly resolved to train [him]self in the paths of righteousness" (My Life 80). While in Australia, Ellis reread the Bible and found himself rather unmoved by the book's religious message. However, he did experience a sense of "splendour" and "rapturous pleasure" when reading the Bible's poetry (My Life 159). This was a monumental moment for the young Ellis. He began to experience spirituality divorced from the limiting strictures of

organized religion and became determined to explore the world, deciding for himself what was worthy of admiration and disgust. Most basically, Ellis became immensely curious, full of wonder about the world around him.

It was this newfound freedom to indulge his curiosity that shaped who Ellis was to become as a man. Ellis was by no means programmatic in his reading. He read solely what interested him. Instead of specializing as he may have done were he enrolled in a university, Ellis read across disciplines, learning languages and literatures. He studied theology and natural history. He found this intellectual freedom liberating. He writes: “I had acquired the power of seeing the world freshly, and seeing it directly, with my own eyes, not through the dulling or disturbing medium of tradition and convention” (*My Life* 159). Excited by this influx of information, Ellis drew connections and conclusions between his many sources. His observations on country walks were weighed against his readings in theology. Literature was filtered through his knowledge of science. In his own words: “I was eager to grasp the whole rather than the parts; it was synthesis I was drawn to rather than analysis” (*My Life* 159).

While there is a tendency on the part of critics to distinguish between Ellis’ literary interests and his more famous work on sexology, it is more than evident that Ellis himself would have rejected such sharp distinctions. Though he never went so far as to conflate his literary and sexological writing, it is clear that he acknowledged what might be called a process of cross-fertilization. That is to say, Ellis was a dialectical thinker who brought a wide variety of sources and materials into his thought. In the context of the *Studies*, he recognized that his understanding of art and culture conditioned his study of sexuality:

I can see now how well it is that my thoughts never turned in that direction till now: that *culture* has been my aim, that I have striven, in so far as may be, to put myself in sympathy with literature, religion, science, art, and thought in their different forms, and that my tastes have never been more for one than for another. For I know now that such culture, little though it may have been, was not wasted, and that I can never become a *mere* ‘medical practitioner’ (qtd. in Grosskurth, Havelock Ellis 46).

Since Ellis was not a “mere medical practitioner”, the exchanges or syntheses that define his thought must properly be understood if Ellis’ ambitions in the *Studies* are to be truly appreciated. For Ellis, dialectical “synthesis” provided a means of preserving intellectual or ideological flexibility. In his search for the “whole”, Ellis was reluctant to abandon any idea or method that contributed to a more complete understanding of the world. Since life was both spiritual and physical, full of imaginative musing *and* objective truth, Ellis argued that those committed to interpreting the world must have access to both of these poles. Critics must be versed in both art and science.

For Ellis, this dedication to inclusivity posed a problem. In many instances, art and philosophy were at odds with science. This was especially true in the natural sciences where Darwinism had emerged to challenge both divine progeniture *and* enlightened humanism. For Ellis, it was essential to bridge these apparent divides. To explain the world satisfactorily, Ellis needed to draw upon science, imagination, *and* religion. Dialecticism seemed to provide the answer. However, Ellis stopped short of true dialectical thought. He never crafted any real treatise revaluing the arts/science divide. Instead, Ellis adopted a simpler approach. He embraced what Chris Nottingham calls a

philosophy of “earnestness” (97). In other words, Ellis was able to smooth over inconsistencies in his thought by simply redoubling his sense of conviction. The synthesis in Ellis’ dialectical model takes the form of a reaffirmation of both thesis and antithesis. Rather than reasoned analysis, Ellis retreated into what might best be described as *faith*. Having said as much, it is important to understand that this faith was itself grounded in intellectual reflection. To understand how this is so, it is worthwhile examining how Ellis bridges two apparent divides: the gap between science and imagination, and the conflict between individualism and socialism.

III.II

Science and Imagination

It has been argued that sexology in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was by no means a “pure” science. In Nottingham’s words, sexology is “an essentially hybrid subject in which sociology, cultural anthropology, social history, and ethics compete with medical science, human biology and psychology” (161). In Ellis’ case, this hybrid quality helped reconcile the new science with his established political beliefs. In Studies in the Psychology of Sex, scientific method and observation were always balanced against the need to produce a specific political argument. In Grosskurth’s assessment, Ellis “was seeking support for something he already believed, namely, the congenital nature of inversion and the fact that the invert was leading a furtive, often tragic existence because of the guilt imposed upon him by collective prejudice” (186). Since his final results were predetermined, Ellis’ approach to science had to be sufficiently malleable so as to accommodate the actual findings uncovered during his investigations. While preserving an appearance of scientific objectivity, Ellis had to allow for non-scientific considerations

such as dignity and love. Even before the influence of Symonds, Ellis was guided in these respects by the work of an English aural surgeon named James Hinton.

Ellis describes his exposure to Hinton as a “revelation” or “religious conversion” (My Life 164, 166). In particular, Ellis was inspired by a curious book entitled Life in Nature. Ostensibly, it is a study of man³ in relation to his environment. No doubt influenced by the recent publication of Darwin’s pioneering work on evolution, Life in Nature (1862) focuses somewhat predictably on the importance of physiology and its role in behaviour. Most basically, Hinton argues man is affected by various environmental factors which, in turn, condition or even determine his possible responses. In this distinctly mechanistic model, the body is depicted as a sensitive instrument responding to external stimuli in a more or less predictable manner. Hinton believed the body accumulated force which was then transformed into action (59). This led Hinton to conclude that man is ultimately a “machine” (62). Accordingly, it is tempting to place Hinton alongside earlier materialist thinkers like Julian Offray de La Mettrie, the 18th century physician and philosopher who saw the body as a clock waiting to be wound.

Certainly, there seems to be a materialist element in Hinton’s thought. However, if he were a true materialist, Hinton would have focussed exclusively on directly observable phenomena. Metaphysical questions about spirituality or divinity are beyond the scope of materialist investigation since the existence of God or the soul can never materially be proven. In contrast, Hinton’s entire philosophical and scientific system is based upon a profound faith in God. Though he suggested man is a machine, Hinton believed all such machines are “divinely made” (62). In studying these “machines”, Hinton found what he

³ The use of gender specific language here is intentional and reflective of the biases inherent in the works considered.

believed to be evidence of a precise cosmic order. According to Hinton, the physical world is basically the expression of God's will. Only when this fundamental fact is recognized does science become meaningful. Hinton writes:

Viewed as the appearance of the spiritual, Nature becomes intelligible: Life, which science seemed to banish, returns to it; its mysterious capacity to move us receives its explanation; the powers of the soul find it a fitting sphere for their exercise, and prove their claim to be its best interpreters (202).

For Hinton, science must do more than explain the world. It must explain our sense of wonder and astonishment in the face of the world. Even more importantly, science must uncover the rules or codes of human conduct and interaction. If each person is but a cog in a larger machine, each must properly understand his or her role if the machine is to function effectively. By enlarging the focus of scientific enquiry to include matters that would otherwise be considered aesthetic, political, or theological, Hinton's argument clearly extends or even negates the boundaries of conventional science. In effect, Hinton appears to sacrifice the objectivity and integrity of scientific research. Ultimately, this may be true. Yet, it is important to realize that, for Hinton, any scientific account of the world that failed to consider such matters was itself incomplete. Hinton's argument did more than reassert the primacy of God; it granted scientists the right to interpret and reinterpret the world according to personally held beliefs and sentiments.

Epistemologically, interpretation is central to Hinton's understanding of science. For Hinton, the Cartesian subject/object binary obscures what is, in effect, a more relational dynamic. Since the individual is dependent upon his or her environment as a source of both insight and energy, it is impossible to adopt a position of exteriority in relation to

one's environment. In other words, one cannot extract oneself from one's surroundings in order to effect a true study of the world. Despite our best efforts, we can never see the forest for the trees. Along these lines, Hinton argues that all knowledge is the result of an interaction between subject and object. As such, the world can only be understood as a *process*—a dynamic engagement between observer and observed. Since the terms of this exchange are ever shifting, our understanding of reality must accommodate this flux. Instead of objectively documenting reality, the observer focuses on how one *experiences* the world, how one *interprets* reality. Anything which conditions that interpretation or response—feelings of beauty, awe, terror, etc.—becomes the proper subject of scientific consideration. In Hinton's opinion: "No conception of nature which does violence to the emotions can be accepted as true" (194-5).

Hinton's consideration of emotion raises some difficult questions. Foremost among these is the challenge to both the predictability and replicability of scientific findings. If people differ greatly in their emotional responses to a situation, is it possible to produce scientific results that are in any way universal? Though at times vague, Hinton addresses this question in a rather ingenious manner. He argues that, while all activity is governed by a dynamic relationship between people and their environment, the nature of these relationships remains more or less predictable. If relationships in nature are defined by the transfer of energy from one object to another, these relationships can be explained, in theory, by uncovering the basic principles governing such a transaction. Hinton suggests that since the body functions mechanically, its processes can be explained in terms of physics. Like Newton, he argues that the exchange of energy between two entities tends to follow the path of least resistance. Since the path of least resistance can theoretically

be determined through applied physics, the nature of the exchange is also predictable. This process is so predictable that it actually comes to define the thing itself. Hinton writes: “Organic form...is the result of motion in the direction of least resistance” (151). In other words, living beings can be defined by the way in which they interact with their environment and the other living things which exist within that environment.

Of course, the real workings of such an exchange are impossible to determine. Hinton is decidedly vague as to how precisely spirit is communicated from one object to another. The Newtonian model does not actually lend scientific legitimacy to Hinton’s argument. Rather, it functions more as a loose metaphor than a governing scientific law. That is to say, experience in Hinton functions only *as though* it were governed by physical laws. The reality is quite different. Yet, Hinton never makes this concession. By ignoring the metaphoricity of his invocation of Newtonian physics, Hinton elevates what is essentially a personal judgment to the status of scientific truth. It is essential to understand how Hinton’s argument functions if one is to understand its appeal to Ellis. Hinton presented Life in Nature as a work of scientific thought. For the young Ellis, seeking to understand the world and his place within it, the certainty of Hinton’s argument must have been especially appealing.

Hinton purported to have uncovered the hidden truth of the world. He wrote with a sense of scientific certainty and authority. Yet, Hinton’s model was also especially liberating. It allowed for individual speculation and invention. It was imaginative. It accommodated both Ellis’ early interest in spirituality and his burgeoning interest in art and literature. In effect, Hinton provided the bridge that would later allow Ellis to push the boundaries of science. Interested in both literature *and* sexuality, Ellis was able to

avoid choosing between a life of science and a life of art by rejecting this divide as falsely dichotomous. Ellis admired Hinton because: “it was with the naked wand of imagination that he struck the rock of nature and the refreshing water gushed forth. *Such imagination is one with scientific vision*” (Ellis, Introduction, Life in Nature, xiii, italics mine). Since Ellis maintained an important place for imagination within science, any attempt to see his editorial control over the *Studies* as an attempt to limit the range of individual experience appears misguided. While Ellis longed to produce a definitive study of sexuality, this in no way precluded the possibility of freely interpreting and understanding his own scientific findings. Though Ellis may have disagreed with the opinions and insights of his critics, his own approach to science guaranteed that Ellis was open to the possibility of dissent and revision.⁴ Though perhaps not fully appreciated even by the men involved, the divide between Symonds and Ellis in the orientation of the *Studies* is less pronounced than it might seem on first inspection.

III.III

Individual and Community

Ellis’ mingling of scientific insight and imaginative musing is only part of the subtext informing Studies in the Psychology of Sex. On its own, Ellis’ decision to incorporate a more humane, impressionistic element into his study of sex stops short of vitiating the criticism levelled against him. Weeks, for instance, acknowledges that Ellis worked to foreground the cultural relativity underscoring notions of sexual normalcy (156). Still, Weeks remains unsettled by Ellis’ assertion that homosexual behaviour is an expression of a congenital predisposition. If sexual identity is an exclusive function of physiology—if biology is indeed destiny—sexology limits both the scope and pace of change and must

⁴ The many revisions and reissues of Studies in the Psychology of Sex would seem to confirm this fact.

be discounted as reactionary (Weeks 148). Similarly, Nottingham writes that “by adopting a biological approach to questions of sexual differentiation, Ellis implanted an ideological conservatism in his work” (147). In many respects, Weeks’ and Nottingham’s arguments resemble those of Ellis. Neither man dismisses Ellis’ argument on the basis of his own scientific findings. Rather, Ellis’ position is ultimately discounted because it is incompatible with contemporary queer politics.⁵ Since Ellis proposes a system for differentiating between people, his work is seen as hindering the drive towards integration and broader social acceptance. That is to say, by creating scientifically sanctioned sexual minorities, Ellis appears to be divisive rather than a positive force for change—he builds walls rather than tearing them down. Yet if one examines Ellis’ understanding of the relationship between individual and community, the divisiveness of his work becomes less certain.

As in many other areas of his thought, Ellis’ understanding of the individual’s place in society is marked by a dynamic tension. First and foremost, Ellis believed himself to be a committed individualist. In particular, he was proud of his autodidacticism. Determined to see the world with his “own eyes”, Ellis was a self-styled intellectual rebel. He felt that people must uncover truth independently, rather than having a belief system foisted upon them (*Affirmations*, 72). In his own words: “Every man must be his own philosopher” (*My Life*, 202). In this respect, Ellis echoed the opinion of Nietzsche—a major influence on Ellis’ early thought. For Ellis, Nietzsche is an almost Romantic figure, a Miltonic Satan celebrating imagination and enabling free thought. Nietzsche provided Ellis with a

⁵ This is not to say that Weeks may not ultimately be correct in his suspicion of congenital theories of inversion. It is merely to suggest that his assessment of Ellis frequently ignores the question of scientific veracity in favour of a more overtly political critique. Like Ellis, Weeks does not separate science and politics. Rather than criticize Ellis and Weeks for this indiscretion, it is far more fruitful to examine the precise relationship between science and politics.

philosophical justification of his own unique path to prominence. Ellis' decision to abandon religion and seek his own way in the world coincided nicely with Nietzsche's critique of slave morality. Even more attractive was the fact that Nietzsche's attack on morality was itself rooted in an interpretation of the body and its natural desires and tendencies.

Nietzsche's radical approach to morality both builds upon and challenges the example set by Darwin. Like Darwin, Nietzsche believed man is motivated by instinctive drives that developed early in the history of evolution. Nietzsche's master morality represents his attempt to incorporate a biological understanding of the human organism into a discussion of personal and social responsibilities. That is to say, Nietzsche argues that "morality is the social organism's capacity for self-regulation, the exact analogue of the controlling mechanism by which the physiological organism governs and maintains itself" (Moore 16). Ellis reflects a similar position when he asserts that social structure must be based upon an understanding of man's physiology. In his own words: "it must be among our chief ethical rules to see that we build the lofty structure of human society on the sure and simple foundations of man's organism" (New Spirit 8). Most basically, both Nietzsche and Ellis based their study of human behaviour and social interaction, at least partly, in the science of physiology.

Nietzsche and Ellis were not alone in considering the relationship between evolution and social structure. Yet, the manner in which each man approached this relationship was decidedly unique. While thinkers like Spencer were busy trying to reconcile evolution and goodness, Nietzsche rejects the very notion of absolute goodness (Moore 6-7). In particular, Nietzsche denies any instinctive interest in the preservation or perpetuation of

the species. Unless such interest existed, there would be no biological basis for altruism. All action would be self-interested. Nietzsche maintains man is motivated by a crude pleasure principle, a basic desire to sate one's hungers. In other words, pleasure serves no social purpose or utilitarian function. For Nietzsche, pleasurable acts are merely "playful expressions of the impulse toward action" (qtd. in Moore 6). Accordingly, Nietzsche ridicules attempts to find a moral imperative underlying evolution (Moore 5). Instead, Nietzsche sees only the will to power. Personal subordination to the "herd" must give way to the realization that one must maximize one's own standing, regardless of broader social consequences. For Nietzsche, this realization is liberating, freeing the individual and driving forward a truly progressive evolutionary process.

Superficially, Ellis agrees with Nietzsche's assessment. He decries the conventions and traditions that limit the range of man's enquiry. His protest is framed in the distinctly Nietzschean terms of moral transgression. Ellis writes:

In an age when many moralists desire to force moralists into every part of life and art...the 'immoralist' who lawfully vindicates any region for free cultivation is engaged in a proper and wholesome task (qtd. in Nottingham 126).

Though perhaps attracted to such rhetoric, it is nevertheless clear that Ellis remained a profoundly moral thinker. Whereas Nietzsche felt it necessary to subordinate communal interests in favour of individual development, Ellis thought individuals were most fully realized when contributing to the community. In this respect, Ellis was guided once again by the work of Hinton. Hinton believed that "the distinctive character of living things is the exhibition in them of a 'principle of individuation' which constitutes them as units, separated from, while yet partakers in, that which is around them" (174). It is important

here to pay special attention to Hinton's language. He deliberately emphasizes the need to understand the relationship between the individual and the community as a symbiotic exchange rather than as, in more Nietzschean terms, an antagonistic juxtaposition. In his introduction to Hinton's book, Ellis frames the matter by arguing that "though [man] owns his individual soul, it in turn owns him by being in touch with something larger and more abiding" (viii).

The symbiotic relationship between the individual and the community was at the heart of Ellis' involvement in an early socialist society called "The Fellowship of the New Life". Founded in 1883, the fellowship was devoted to radically transforming British society. It stressed above all else simple living and the full development of individual talents. In Seed-Time, the official press organ of the fellowship, the position was stated as follows:

Our fundamental doctrine is the sacredness of the human personality, as that which alone possesses ultimate value as an end to, and in, itself. The true end of each individual is thus perfection, or the complete development of all his faculties in a natural and healthy human life. But such development is only possible for each in that organic union with his fellows, which we call society (Individualism 1).

Of particular significance is the idea that the relationships between individuals in society represent an "*organic*" union. In other words, a social structure predicated upon mutual goals of self-development *and* communal responsibility was not a surrender to the herd instinct (as Nietzsche would suggest) nor evidence of the essential goodness of human evolution (as Spencer argues). Much more simply, the symbiotic relationship between

self and other is a simple scientific fact and, as such, is actually without normative moral value. In his own mind, Ellis' socialist views were little more than the simple statement of an observable fact: "[Man] is in organic relations with his fellows, and only through these relations does he realize himself" (Editorial 1).

At first glance, Ellis' stance towards individuality seems self-contradictory or even disingenuous. It is questionable whether Ellis truly believed in individual autonomy. In fact, Ellis' views seem reminiscent of the Christian charity he learned while still a boy in England. At the very least, Ellis appears to stop far short of the radical independence espoused by Nietzsche. Having said as much, it would be wrong to deny the importance of individualism and the specific importance of Nietzsche in Ellis' thought. For Nietzsche and Ellis, evolution was an open-ended, ongoing process of change. Since humanity is ever-changing, it is beyond our ability to determine which form of social structure or organization most benefits society at large. That is to say, "evolution is open-ended; there is no 'absolute goal' and there can be therefore no 'absolute morality' (Moore 8). Since we can never arrive at an absolute morality upon which a utopian society could be built, we must instead endeavour to produce a structure characterized by flexibility and change. If society strives to protect individual freedoms and rights, individuals will grow and develop most fully, producing the most complete understanding of what it means to be human. This new understanding, still subject to constant revision and change, would then become the basis for any form of organized social planning or engineering.

In his approach to both science and imagination, and the relationship between the individual and the community, Ellis displays an extraordinarily supple mind. While relying upon science to provide him with the authority of objective facts, Ellis is careful

to preserve within science a place for imagination and freethinking. While emphasizing the importance of the individual, Ellis works to establish communal involvement as the apex of individualism. In other words, Ellis is marked by a parallel desire for both fixity and change, stability and revolutionary possibility. One needs to be able to act as though the world were true and ultimately knowable, while recognizing that truth and knowledge are themselves convenient fictions shrouding a never-ending process of chaotic change. Ellis is, in every sense, a man on the cusp of modernity with one foot planted in the past and the other striding towards the future. Above all else, Ellis' personal philosophy allows him a remarkable freedom to navigate the waves of change that were remaking the world around him.

In short, Ellis placed his faith in what the German thinker Hans Vaihinger called the "Philosophy of As If". People believe in self-created, self-serving fictions *as if* those fictions were actually true. When the fictions we have embraced cease to serve a purpose, when we become encumbered and not empowered by the theories and philosophies that govern our lives, we freely imagine the world anew. More importantly, we can trumpet our achievements *as if* our new findings represented progress, the final phase in a long journey towards truth. Ellis succinctly reiterates Vaihinger's position when he writes that "though we make our reckoning with a reality that we falsify, yet the practical result tends to come out right" (Dance of Life 96). Epistemologically and ontologically, such a position undoubtedly raises as many questions as it answers. How does one reconcile the indeterminacy of Ellis and Vaihinger with a philosophical tradition based upon rigid principles of non-contradiction and mutual exclusivity? More simply, how was Ellis able to balance his commitment to objective analysis in sexology with his broader sense that

the world was ever-changing and ultimately only accessible through acts of imagination? Hopefully, my discussion of Ellis' readings of Hinton and Nietzsche have gone some way towards answering these questions. Yet to fully understand the philosophical structure undergirding Ellis' efforts in Studies in the Psychology of Sex, a third element must still be considered. If the world was composed of fictions, one needed to understand how fictions worked; one needed to understand art and literature.

III.IV *Art and the Absolute*

Ellis' most sustained and broadly theoretical treatment of the place of art and literature in society is The Dance of Life, first published in 1923. Appearing relatively late in Ellis' publishing history, the book is an amalgam of the author's shifting positions and beliefs. One can clearly see in it the influences of Hinton, Nietzsche and others, as well as Ellis' now distinct approach to criticism. As the title suggests, dance holds a prominent place in the book. Dance is for Ellis the embodiment of vital living, a literal and figurative guide to being in the world. In his own words, "dancing is the loftiest, the most moving, the most beautiful of the arts because it is no mere translation or abstraction of life; it is life itself" (Dance of Life 62). Perhaps more than anything, dance provides a balance between action and reaction. Receptive and responsive to the suggestions of those around them, dancers are able to adjust their movements in harmony with others. Yet, these responses also contribute to the total shape of the dance. In other words, the dancer is both active and passive—an individual and a member of a larger collective. It is no wonder that Ellis held dance in such high esteem. It perfectly mirrors his vision of society. Commenting on

this, Ellis writes: “life must always be a dance, for that is what a dance is: perpetual slightly varied movements which are yet always held true to the shape of the whole” (Dance of Life vii-viii).

More than simply emblematic of an ideal social structure, Ellis sees dance as actively contributing to the realization of that ideal. While individuals may simply enjoy dance as spectators, even greater benefit can be gained by actively participating in the dance. Ellis sees such participation as the glue which bonds together society. To support this position, he looks at the role of dance in religious ceremonies and courting rites. In both cases, “their aesthetic pleasure is a secondary reflection of their primary vital joy” (48-9). That is to say, dance responds to a deeply held desire in the organism. It is the expression of a primal energy and desire. The Kantian ideal of aesthetic disinterestedness is replaced by Ellis with a more complete model in which cerebral pleasure and bodily satisfaction must be considered in tandem. Yet, bodily interest in dance is more than a simple expression of sexual longing or lust. Instead, Ellis suggests that dance builds upon the basic rhythms of the body in activities like work, as well as sex (58).⁶ By appealing to both the mind and the body, dance is a complete art form. It is the source of aesthetic contemplation and interpersonal engagement. More precisely, the aesthetic interest of dance and the bodily responses it engenders are, for Ellis, inseparably interconnected. The dichotomies we maintain between self and other, body and soul, are false. If a new society is to be built, it must be built upon this realization. Dance communicates these essential truths. This leads

⁶ Ellis interest in the body’s response to rhythm coincides with other similar attempts on the part of modern artists and thinkers. Pound and others sought to understand rhythm as a means of engineering poetic response. In a more pronounced form, eurhythmics emerged as an attempt to heal and guide the body through the use of applied rhythms.

Ellis to conclude that dance has had “a decisive influence in socializing, that is to say in moralising, the human species” (60).

Despite the high praise Ellis lavishes upon dance, his discussion of the form lacks a serious critical vocabulary. Though certainly appreciative of dance, it seems unlikely that Ellis possessed anything resembling a choreographer’s understanding of the medium. As such, it is difficult to engage with Ellis’ position in a sustained manner. However, Dance of Life also considers the social function of literature—a subject Ellis was more qualified to discuss. Like dance, literature works to unite disparate thoughts and ideas, bridging the many gaps in science and philosophy. In other words, literature is a point of synthesis, a dialectical rendering of otherwise antithetical points of view. Ellis believed “in art lies the solution of the conflicts of philosophy. There we see Realism, or the discovery of things, one with Idealism, or the creation of things. Art is the embodied harmony of their conflict” (Dance of Life 78). Most simply, literature both uncovers *and* invents truth. It is the ideal meeting point of science and imagination. The nature of the exchange between Realism and Idealism, between discovery and invention, is what enables both individuals and communities to relate to a world defined by constant change.

The world needs fictions, stories of origins and endings, in order to frame action. If life is a journey, it must be undertaken with a sense of destination. Otherwise, society would be stuck wandering aimlessly. For the politically minded Ellis, this aimlessness is insufferable. Yet since the terrain of our lives is ever-shifting, we can never actually know our destination in advance. We can only approach life *as if* the destination was knowable. In other words, the ultimate end of action is at best an estimation of reality, a useful fiction by means of which we orient our lives. For Ellis, “the Thing-in-Itself, the

Absolute, remains a fiction, though the ultimate and most necessary fiction, for without it representation would be unintelligible” (Dance of Life 95). Yet having said as much, Ellis is careful to qualify his comments. Importantly, not all fictions are equal. Some fictions correspond better with “reality” than others. It is the job of thinking individuals to modify and refine these fictions in order to produce more and more workable models. “It is the choice and regulation of our errors, in our readiness to accept ever-closer approximations to the unattainable reality, that we think rightly and live rightly” (Ellis, Dance of Life 97-98).

In crafting the fictions that shape our lives, poets and writers obviously play important roles. Yet before considering the place of poets in more detail, it is necessary to examine the role of scientists in the production of fictions. While emphasizing the importance of imagination, one should not forget that Ellis was a firm believer in science. Furthermore, it would be wrong to simply equate science and imagination. Science represents a distinctive way of knowing and approaching the world. Science aims towards a precision, an analytical certainty, that is often absent from other forms of knowledge. It is this drive towards clarity and definite meaning that makes science valuable. It is what helps us understand our errors and achieve the “ever-closer approximations” of reality that guide us in the construction of our fictions. For Ellis, “the representative world is a system of fictions. It is a symbol by the help of which we orient ourselves. The business of science is to make the symbol ever more adequate” (Dance of Life 91). In Ellis words, science remains “a symbol, a means of action, for action is the last end of thinking” (Dance of Life 91-2). It remains for the artist to determine the form in which action is realized.

For Ellis, the artist is a visionary, sensitively in tune with human longings and ambitions. The artist is an interpreter, speaking clearly the desires of an inarticulate society. Though the figure is easily recognizable, the Romantic character of Ellis' artist is coloured also by his reading of Hinton. Living within society, the artist is necessarily impacted by the actions and reactions of those surrounding him or her. In this respect, the artist is no different from any other person. What distinguishes the artist is his or her ability to interpret those exchanges. How the artist interprets and represents what he or she senses is, for Ellis, the basis of what we know as style. Ellis writes:

style in the full sense is more than the deliberate and designed creation, more even than the unconscious and involuntary creation, of the individual man who therein expresses himself. The self that he thus expresses is a bundle of inherited tendencies that came the man himself can never know whence. It is by the instinctive stress of a highly sensitive, or slightly abnormal constitution, that he is impelled to instil these tendencies into the alien magic of words (Dance of Life 181).

Building upon science and reflecting back to the reader a concise and compelling vision of human society, the writer becomes truly an “unacknowledged legislator”. More simply, the poet's remarkable grasp uniquely positions him or her to direct and guide society.

In articulating the poet's role in society, Ellis was particularly influenced by the example of Whitman. The revolutionary spirit of Whitman's poetry was the source of much idealized longing at the time. It was, in fact, Whitman's depiction of homoerotic attachment in the “Calamus” section of Leaves of Grass which inspired Symonds in his

defence of inversion. For Ellis, Whitman was important for a variety of reasons. Firstly, Whitman's poetry was based upon an organic understanding of nature or "the absolute unity of matter and spirit" (Ellis, The New Spirit 106). Though lacking any real formal education, Whitman was, for Ellis, "indebted to those scientific conceptions which, like Emerson, he had absorbed or divined" (The New Spirit 110). This depiction of Whitman as a keenly intuitive autodidact is no doubt yet another attempt on the part of Ellis to legitimate, if not glamorize, his own path to prominence. Just as importantly, Ellis saw Whitman as equally committed to a view of the world predicated upon the centrality and inescapability of change. Ellis saw particular evidence of this in Whitman's acceptance of death as a natural and unavoidable part of life (The New Life 111-112).

Having grasped the truth of an ever-changing universe, Whitman developed a poetic style that served to communicate this fact. More precisely, Whitman made himself the focus of his poetry. Whitman's decision to sing a "Song of Myself" is, for Ellis, a perfect embodiment of Nietzschean individualism. Yet, the poet's commitment to individualism does not mean that he is in any way self-similar or consistent across time. Rather, the poet's virtue is his ability to embrace difference and change (Ellis, The New Spirit 113-14). The gaps resulting from the poet's constantly changing perspective are compensated for by a stylistic insistence on speed and vitality (The New Spirit 116-17). In a sense, Whitman is able to persuade the reader of anything by the sheer exercise of his will. Ellis claims the vitality and exuberance of Whitman's poetry are almost oppressive. Whitman seems at times to impose himself on his reader, leaving little room for the reader to engage personally with the poet. This insistence on the poet's authority or autonomy is

most manifest when Whitman famously writes “Do I contradict myself?/ Very well then I contradict myself/ (I am large, I contain multitudes.)”.

What redeems Whitman and ultimately marks him as a modern master is, for Ellis, the poet’s ability to balance this rugged individualism with a sense of the possibility of communion. To Ellis, Whitman’s poetry demonstrates the need for the individual to find himself in community and thus experience a sense of unity. It is in merging with the other the individual is fulfilled. In Ellis’ own words, “[Whitman] finds the roots of the most universal love in the intimate and physical love of comrades and lovers” (The New Spirit 117). Simply put, sex becomes a bond uniting individuals. While Ellis values Whitman for communicating this fact to the reader, he seems to suggest further that the reader may actually experience sexual stirrings responsible for feelings of community and belonging.

Ellis writes:

The chief and central function of life—the omnipresent process of sex, ever wonderful, ever lovely, as it is woven into the whole texture of our man’s or woman’s body—is the pattern of all the process of our life. At whatever point touched, multiplexly charged with uses, meanings, and emotional associations of infinite charm, to the sensitive individual more or less conscious, spreads throughout the entire organism. We can no longer intrude our cruel distinctions of high and low (The New Spirit 125).

The passage suggests that by arousing the sexual instinct, one can spark a process of experience and reflection culminating in an appreciation of the bonds supporting society. Individual pleasure and social responsibility are not antithetical but are, in fact, dependent upon one another. This was an idea Ellis was already familiar with from his reading of

Hinton who maintained that by understanding your own pleasure you come to understand your neighbour's as well (Edith Ellis, 133). Most basically, sexual union is the beginning of social union.

III.V

Narrative in Sexology

In contemporary discussions of sexology, attention tends to centre on categories of normal and pathological behaviour. Critics, in so far as they are interested in the work of Ellis and his peers, have largely restricted their investigations to critiques of congenital inversion and its place within a broader cultural discourse on sex. In many respects, this rather singular focus is quite understandable. Since we have not uncovered any definitive aetiology of homosexual desire, the question of inversion, though now certainly suspect, remains somewhat relevant. It is possible to see discussions about isolating a gay gene as correlative of earlier attempts to locate sexual difference in the structure of the body. That other aspects of sexology have been more or less forgotten is also not surprising. Putting aside for the moment the many socio-cultural advances that have radically undermined the foundations upon which sexology was built, conclusions drawn by Ellis and others have been either scientifically disproven or modified beyond recognition. For example, our present understanding of how sexual arousal functions has benefited from scientific advances in endocrinology and biochemistry. Today, Ellis' reliance on unqualified biometrical analyses seems almost naïve—a quaint reminder of times past.

Though of little use to today's sexual researchers, the less frequently studied aspects of Ellis' work shed important light on the political colour of his work. In particular, the notion that Ellis' delineation of sexual typologies somehow limits the free range of sexual expression becomes suspect when one considers the relationship between the typologies

and the other mechanisms governing sexual behaviour. Of all these mechanisms, perhaps the most important is the role played by modesty. Revealing a sexual bias typical of his time, Ellis posits two essential sexual positions. The female is an essentially modest creature, guarding her sex and surrendering it only selectively. The male is, in response, an aggressor, initiating feats of strength and bravery in order to win the female's approval. Ellis finds evidence of this modesty throughout the animal kingdom and many races of men. This leads Ellis to conclude:

civilization tends to subordinate, if not to minimize, modesty, to render it a grace of life rather than a fundamental social law of life. But an essential grace of life it still remains, and whatever delicate variations it may assume we can scarcely conceive of its disappearance (Studies 1: 82).

Yet, Ellis suggests that modesty is more than a simple biological imperative. Modesty has become central to our understanding of love and courtship. Ellis goes so far as to suggest that the challenge to overcome modesty is the source of love's splendour.

Modesty is not indeed the last word of love, but it is the necessary foundation for all love's most exquisite audacities, the foundation which alone gives worth and sweetness to what Senancour calls its 'delicious impudence'. Without modesty we could not have, nor rightly value its true worth, that bold and pure candour which is at once the final revelation of love and the seal of its sincerity (Studies 1: 82).

In a sense, Ellis employs an almost economic model; love and sex are valued, in part, because of their scarcity.

Clearly, there is much that is objectionable in Ellis' account of modesty. The fixed gender positions reflect what has been dismissively called a "Victorian" mindset. Ellis goes so far as to argue that the male's need to conquer the female suggests that "in the struggle for life violence is the first virtue" (Studies 1: 33). Statements such as these raise serious questions about Ellis' status as a progressive. Emphasis on fixed gender positions ultimately leads Weeks to condemn Ellis as an "ideologist" (168, 180). I do not want to redeem Ellis (though I suspect his comments in this instance represent an ill-advised rhetorical flourish. Ellis' many positive relationships with women suggest he was not a misogynist). Nevertheless, the implications of Ellis' comments on modesty must fully be explored if his sexual politics are to emerge. Only then can we properly critique his work.

Modesty is important in Ellis' work because it brings about the need for courtship. It is Ellis' unique approach to courtship that truly marks his thought as revolutionary and full of possibility for change. Courtship is not merely the established social customs by which a man wins a woman's favour. Though such customs are part of courtship, there is also another more biological side. Courtship must also be understood in terms of arousal. Arousal occasions courtship and courtship in turn facilitates arousal. The two ideas are intimately connected. Ellis believed the processes of arousal or courtship were either misunderstood or entirely overlooked by other scholars. In particular, Ellis rejected what he thought was an excessive emphasis on the need for sexual release—what in the sexological literature is referred to as "detumescence". In his study of arousal, Ellis builds upon the counterpart of detumescence, what his predecessor, Albert Moll, called "contractation".

Contractation refers to the impulse to approach or touch another person. The primary form of contraction is physical. Simply, there is a basic desire to gain access to bodies of the opposite sex. Yet, contraction is also behind the desire to build an emotional or intellectual bond with another person. While Ellis rightly notes that emotional bonds serve to facilitate sexual relations, there is a sense in which Moll begins to blur the line between love and sex. Contraction may serve a broader social function of bringing people together in some form of social, as well as sexual, union. Building upon Moll's ideas, Ellis developed his own theory of attraction and arousal: tumescence. Tumescence resembles contraction but is a more diffuse process. Tumescence is the mechanism by which desire is triggered in the individual, initiating a process that may ultimately lead to sexual activity (though this is not necessarily so). In the materialist language of Hinton, tumescence serves to prime the mechanism for action; it represents the winding of the spring. It is also a state of intense emotion. Importantly, men and women, under the influence of such emotion, become open to suggestion and conditioning.

Tumescence is an extremely complicated process. On a most basic level, it is an animal response. Instinctive behaviour, spurred on by massive releases of hormones, causes the individual to act in a more or less predictable manner. In Ellis' model, the male seeks to display his power and virility while the female remains more or less passive, guarding her modesty and evaluating the worthiness of her suitor. Needless to say, much of this behaviour occurs on an unconscious level. It is because of this that Ellis is seen by some as deterministic. However, there is more to the equation. While the general processes that make arousal possible may be predictable, the precise behaviour of the aroused individual is much less predictable. That is to say, different individuals may,

and often do, respond to the same sexual stimuli in different ways. Different features of the desired's anatomy may hold different significance for different individuals. While one woman may value a man's strength, another may value the tenderness of his touch. This process of evaluation can even extend beyond immediate, obvious sources of desire or excitement. One may find oneself stimulated by a smell or an object of clothing. The possibilities are almost limitless.

Others have postulated similar ideas about the wandering aim of sexual desire. Most basically, Ellis describes a form of sexual fetishism. Once triggered, sexual desire is diverted from its normal path and becomes attached to some secondary feature. Ellis calls this process of deviation "erotic symbolism". In his own words, erotic symbolism is "that tendency whereby the lover's attention is diverted from the central focus of sexual attraction to some object or process which is on the periphery of that focus, or is even outside it altogether, though recalling it by association of contiguity or of similarity" (Studies 3: 1). Like both Krafft-Ebing and Freud, Ellis tends to depict erotic symbolism, itself a form of fetishism, as a mostly negative force. It is a corruption of the normal sexual drive. Ellis writes that "every sexual perversion, even homosexuality, is a form of erotic symbolism" (Studies 3:2). Like Krafft-Ebing's insistence on corporal punishment or Freud's sense of the child's horror in the face of his mother's castration, Ellis seems to agree that fetishism or erotic symbolism is a result of an early experience. He writes:

Erotic symbolism is not intellectual but emotional in its origin; it starts into being, obscurely, with but a dim consciousness or for the most part none at all, either suddenly from the shock of some usually youthful experience, or more

gradually through an instinctive brooding on those things which are most intimately associated with a sexually desirable person (Studies 3: 6).

Yet despite these assertions, there remains a sense in which Ellis indeed believes sexual perversity or, perhaps more accurately, diversity may be based, at least in part, upon intellectual conditioning.

The first sign of this disavowed intellectual element can be found in Ellis' decision to name this process of cathexis "erotic symbolism". It seems at many points that Ellis' position is based as much upon his reading of literature as his readings in psychology or sex. In claiming that the object of perverse desire is a "symbol of the normal object of love" (Studies 3: 2), Ellis appears to be describing a sort of metonymic relationship—the fetish as a form of synecdoche. That is to say, fetishes arise from a selective reading of the sexual moment. Evidence of an intellectual component to sexual selection and the specific importance of art and literature become even pronounced when Ellis addresses the question of sexual initiation on a phylogenic level. Ellis suggests that humankind has lost its innocence regarding sex. Where sex was once a matter of spiritual communion, intellectual processes have since intervened, compensating for shame and embarrassment (Studies 4: 89). Unable to act simply according to our nature, we are now in a position where the truth of sex must be learned. Art is central to this process of education. Ellis writes:

the youth becomes acquainted with the imaginative representations of love before he becomes acquainted with the reality of love so that, as Leo Berg puts it, 'the way to love among civilized people passes through imagination.' All

literature is thus, to the adolescent soul, a part of sexual education (Studies 4: 89-90).

Accordingly, it is difficult to accept Ellis' assertion that erotic symbolism is strictly a biological response, lacking an intellectual component.

It is possible that Ellis merely lost control of his material—an understandable failing given the immense scope of his project. Yet, it seems more likely that Ellis, on either a conscious or unconscious level, was actively blending a variety of influences and ideas. In fact, it may be erotic symbolism which allows for successful sexual relationships. Contrary to what his critics assert, Ellis believed in an almost limitless number of sexual possibilities and positions.

So far from the facts of normal sex development, sex emotions, and sex needs being uniform and constant, as is assumed by those who consider their discussion unnecessary, the range of variation within fairly normal limits is immense, and it is impossible to meet with two individuals whose records are nearly identical (Studies 1: 277).

In the face of such radical singularity, that is to say the extreme individuality of sexual identity and preference, a bridge between individuals was required. Erotic symbolism provides this bridge. The strong emotions aroused during tumescence and the tendency to read sex through a cultural filter allows for a single stimuli to resonate differently in each sexual partner. Thus in Ellis' example of the sado-masochistic relationship, the violent act is interpreted differently by the two partners. In the face of radical difference, a union is formed because the act in question responds to the divergent needs of each participant.

Framed in this manner, Ellis' work in Studies in the Psychology of Sex parallels his work in literature and politics. Though ostensibly drawing distinctions between normal and pathological behaviour, the studies also show how difference is bridged in sexual relationships. The individual and the community are not antithetically opposed ideas but are rather two different forms of expression, alternating modes of being in the world. Sex marks a point where individual self-interest and union with others are simultaneously realized. It would be convenient if one could simply categorize and contain these various trends in Ellis' thought. Criticism of Ellis would be easier to read if one could merely determine that art informs science or science conditions art. In other words, it is tempting to posit direct cause and effect relationships in Ellis' work. Yet, it is misguided, if not impossible, to differentiate between these various influences. Ellis' writing is marked by a robust dynamism, a constant blending of the ideas and movements that surrounded Ellis as he wrote. Ellis attempted to incorporate everything into his thought. While this incredible ambition may lend itself to an intellectual disorderliness, it must be understood if the politics of Ellis' sexology are to be properly conceived.

The notion that Studies in the Psychology of Sex arose as a battle of wills between a freethinking humanist and a dogmatic scientist is a pure misrepresentation of the facts. The very idea of pure science and pure philosophy, though so typical of earlier attempts to understand modernism, is a misguided one. Both the excitement and enthusiasm about the astounding rate of change *and* the trepidation and concern with which that change was met influenced Ellis in his analyses of art, society, and sex. Like his hero Whitman, Ellis contains multitudes. Even more nuanced criticism focussing on Ellis' failure to realize his own ideal of tolerance fails to give full credit to the diversity of Ellis' thought.

Without question, there are passages in Ellis' many books which call for serious criticism and concern. Yet, the general spirit of Ellis' writing is one of radical possibility. It is along these lines that Ellis must today be read.

If writers and thinkers were attracted to the work of Ellis and his kind, we must not assume these people were somehow short-sighted or ignorant, possessed of a lamentable false consciousness. Considered broadly, Ellis' writings are marked by an incredible sense of promise. Rather than questioning what is implied or decreed in these early sexological texts, it is better to ask how these texts might have been *used*. Ultimately, Ellis' work and the work of other earlier sexological thinkers were tools to be used by their successors. Today, we have abandoned these tools. They have been either outmoded or are otherwise no longer suitable to our needs. However, to judge retrospectively sexology and the writers and thinkers drawn to its promise by today's standards seems a mistake. The goal is not to redeem sexology or argue for its present relevance. Sexology, as it was practiced by Ellis and his peers, is, today, a relic of an earlier day. Yet once we concede this point, there is still work to be done understanding the place of sexology in the culture into which it emerged. The second half of my dissertation attempts to do just this, probing the attractiveness of a scientific account of sex and desire to a group of revolutionary women pushing the boundaries of text and narrative.

***Wanderings After Wisdom:
Sex, Science, and Understanding
in Gertrude Stein's Early Writings***

No one is ahead of his time, it is only that the particular variety of creating his time is the one that his contemporaries who also are creating their own time refuse to accept.

-Gertrude Stein,
Composition as Explanation

Well, what, you think you can do it better with all your literary effects you are so proud of? Well alright, in a few years now we will see who knows best about you then, I say, you can show me what these new fangled notions and all your modern kinds of improvements and all your education business you and your mamma are now all so fond of can do for you.

-Gertrude Stein,
The Making of Americans

IV.I

Appointment with History

Ensnconced in her salon at 27 rue de Fleurus, Gertrude Stein collected iconoclasts. Like the paintings that hung on her walls, the visitors who passed through Stein's home were bold, flamboyant, and destined to revolutionize the world of art. As Alice entertained their wives, Gertrude held court amidst the "geniuses, near geniuses, and might be

geniuses” who enlivened Saturday evenings at the Stein’s (Stein, Autobiography 87). Though very much interested in particular developments in arts and letters, Stein seems to have revelled equally in the sheer imaginative exuberance of her assembled guests. Describing these extraordinary nights, Leo Stein claimed that “the place was charged with the atmosphere of propaganda” (Mellow 19). Writers, painters, sculptors, and composers gathered in the Stein home to plot a course that would change not only art but possibly even the world. It was both the audacity and the enormity of the project that fascinated Stein. Surrounded by artists and admirers, Stein saw herself at the head of an international avant-garde, leading a bold assault on tradition. It was a fascination with the new, the extraordinary pace of and potential for change in modern times, that truly inspired Stein.

It is not surprising, then, that Stein found herself drawn to the work of an ambitious young Austrian named Otto Weininger. Weininger was not a painter or writer but rather an aspiring philosopher and scientist. Nevertheless, his work was marked by a similar audacity or irreverence towards the established order. In his first published book, Sex and Character (1903), Weininger attacked the bipartition of humanity into the limited categories of “man” and “woman”. Instead, Weininger proposed qualities of “maleness” and “femaleness” that were variably present in each individual. The very boldness of such a claim would have no doubt interested Stein, who had herself studied anatomy and biology during her time at Johns Hopkins. However, Weininger’s book is also blatantly misogynistic and anti-Semitic. Presumably, such qualities would have deeply troubled Stein as both a woman and a Jew. However, this was not the case. Stein felt Weininger’s book in fact confirmed many of her own beliefs and opinions, and strongly recommended

the work to her friend Marion Walker Williams—an ardent feminist (Katz 140; Mellow 152). While Stein’s interest in Weininger suggests a deep self-loathing, such assumptions are, at best, premature. More precisely, Stein’s attraction to Weininger must be placed within the larger context of her emerging philosophical system. While questions of sexual and religious identity are certainly important, they are but two points in a much larger constellation of ideas. It is only by exploring this broader context that Weininger’s influence can be properly understood and appreciated.

Perhaps more than any other writer of her time, Gertrude Stein saw herself as a truly *modern* figure. Born in Allegheny, Pennsylvania in 1874, Stein came of age during a period of enormous change in America. For Stein, the catalyst of that great change was the close of the Civil War and the sweeping economic and political upheavals undertaken during Reconstruction (Autobiography 78). More than simply transforming American life, post-war reforms constituted, for Stein, what would now be called a radical paradigm shift. Not merely advancement in material living conditions, the changes following the war altered one’s very experience of the world. Change was pervasive, penetrating every corner of one’s existence. Attempting to capture the sheer scope of it all, Stein would proclaim that, “in the sixties of the nineteenth century...America created the twentieth century” (Autobiography 78). The dawn of the new century was for Stein more than an arbitrary event on the calendar; it was a moment to mark a definite break with past, a line of demarcation that would both define the past and direct the future. America was the birthplace of this revolution and Stein was to be its herald.

For Stein, the key to understanding the uniqueness of twentieth-century life was to be found by re-examining the role of memory in consciousness. Stein believed that previous

generations lived their lives largely unaware of the passage of time. In part, this lack of temporal awareness resulted from the prevalence of tradition. For example, Stein argues in Paris France that, though they were surrounded by science and technology, the French remained a traditional people, rooted in “the family and the soil of France” (17, 101). More than just a coincidence of geography and history, the French emphasis on tradition was, as Stein saw it, reflective of the organic tendencies of the mind. On a most basic level, our minds are structured to focus on what is most immediately available to the senses. Temporal awareness is a secondary response, the product of balancing immediate sensation against the memory of past experience. Only by apprehending the difference between immediate experience and prior memory could time be experienced. Stein makes this point much more concisely when she writes “the strange thing about the realization of existence is that like a train moving there is no realization of it moving if it does not move against something and so that is what a generation does it shows that moving is existing” (Portraits 99). That is to say, previous generations had to work to experience change. Looking only to the traditions of the past, one might never appreciate the full force of historical change.

Stein believed that the influence of tradition waned at the beginning of the twentieth century. Transformations in daily life rendered change more immediately perceptible. Both the pace and nature of change were such that one no longer needed to weigh experience against memory in order to appreciate shifts in reality. In her own words, “this generation has conceived an intensity of movement so great that it has not to be seen against something else to be known, and therefore, this generation does not connect itself with anything, that is what makes this generation” (Portraits 99-100). Later in the same

essay, Stein makes a similar point, claiming “we have now, a movement lively enough to be a thing in itself moving, it does not have to move against anything to know that it is moving” (102). In such a fast paced environment, the passage of time is not experienced through memory or “repeating” but in terms of what Stein calls “insistence” (Portraits 100). Faced with a dynamic, ever-shifting environment, one can only seize upon isolated moments within this stream of flux. Consciousness can pay only selective attention to various objects within the phenomenal field. In this way, our choice of “insistence” (those elements to which we dedicate our attention) makes or, more precisely, narrates our reality.

The question for Stein then became one of how to communicate one’s experience in this ever-changing environment. Stein writes: “I kept wondering as I talked and listened all at once, I wondered is there any way of making what I know come out as I know it, come out not as remembering” (Portraits 109). If language was the medium through which we reconstructed and subsequently communicated our knowledge to those around us, Stein reasoned that language would have to undergo a similar revolution in order to keep pace with the many other changes in society. The task was to make language as dynamic and immediate as the events and things language sought to describe. For Stein, like so many other modernist writers, this meant re-examining the role of memory in language. In a broad historical survey, Stein describes the earliest English literature as “the daily, the hourly description of this island life” (“What Is” 33). Distinguished from “what happened [or] what is thought or what is dreamed”, early English literature sought only to capture the immediate reality of a limited local culture. In this way, early English

literature was organic, connected to the land from which it arose. It was a literature in which “the thing written is completely contained within itself” (“What Is” 34).

The insularity of English literature began to change as England’s position in the world grew more prominent. Confronted by an influx of foreign influences, writers had to adapt their techniques in an attempt to evoke more than just the “daily island life” to which they had previously been accustomed. For Stein, this point of contact—the friction between the strange and familiar—added to the richness of the literature. Writers were compelled to reinvent language in order to capture the reality of the new. It was a period of “constant choice constant decision and the words have the liveliness of being constantly chosen” (“What Is” 40). Under the pressure of this constant “choosing”, the literature of the period remained vital, subject to re-evaluation and transformation. However, this emphasis on word choice, over time, began to diminish. Writers became interested more in ideas than objects. Language became increasingly conceptual, further distancing the word from the thing. Subjected to such utilitarian ends, the creative power of language became stagnant. In Stein’s own words,

confusion comes when there is a giving up choosing, words next to each other are no longer so strictly chosen because there is intention to say what they are saying more importantly than completely choosing the words next to each other which are to be chosen (“What Is” 44).

For Stein, this “confusion” detracts from the power and beauty of language. To punctuate the difference between these two phases of literature, Stein claims that, while the early writer wrote for the pleasure of god, later writers serve only mammon (“What Is” 44).

Like her analysis of historical experience, Stein's critique of literature is built upon a dichotomy between mediacy and immediacy. What Stein valued most was a sense of direct presence or authenticity. In the face of either historical change or literary brilliance, one should not have to search for context or external references. The inherent quality of the object should be immediately appreciable. Memory frustrates immediacy by weighing a given moment against either similar or contrasting moments from one's past. In the words of one critic, "To remember...is to represent other moments. Remembering is precisely the condition of *not* being completely in the moment" (Webb 227). While remembrance may help aid in one's understanding of an experience, memory can also distort experience, grafting a historical veneer onto the reality of the present. In contrast, Stein valorizes first impressions and sensual response. American literature delivers the reader a sense of the newness and immediacy that English literature had lost. In fact, Stein draws a comparison between new American writing and much older Elizabethan literature ("What Is" 56). For Stein, both make an impression upon the reader without resorting to abstract description. While the Elizabethans achieved this effect by focussing on the specifics of a "daily island life", American literature achieves a similar effect by describing precisely the opposite—a world devoid of familiarity and parochial charm. American literature is discontinuous, constantly evolving and adapting to the forces of change which Stein saw as uniquely American. In her view, "the disembodied way of disconnecting something from anything and anything from something was the American one" ("What Is" 57).

The relationship between geographical/national identity and literary technique is central to Stein's approach to writing. Though she saw herself as part of an American

tradition that flowed from Poe to Whitman and James, Stein nevertheless believed she was the first writer to really address the vigour and frenzy of modern America. Writing in the first of her autobiographies, Stein famously proclaimed that Three Lives (1909) was “the first definite step away from the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century in literature” (Autobiography 54). While certainly indicative of Stein’s monumental sense of self-importance, there is, however, a measure of truth in the author’s claim. The stories in Three Lives, particularly its centrepiece “Melanctha”, demonstrate an extraordinarily imaginative approach to literary form. On a most basic level, all three pieces provide the reader with a definite sense of setting, a regionalist flavour that is uniquely American. In large part, the sense of cultural specificity in Three Lives is achieved through Stein’s use of vernacular dialogue. The characters in the stories, a collection of German immigrants and African Americans, speak in a manner appropriate to both their class and limited social station. Often painfully ineloquent, these characters struggle against language, fighting to articulate the powerful emotions governing their lives.

Importantly, Stein’s use of vernacular adds more than local colour to the characters she creates. As each woman struggles to express herself, to communicate both her desire and despair, a unique form of narrative temporality begins to emerge. This is perhaps most clear in “Melanctha”, Stein’s account of frustrated love in the fictitious African American community of Bridgepoint¹. On a most basic level, the story documents the troubled relationship between Melanctha Herbert and Jeff Campbell. Melanctha lives life impulsively and for the moment. Though Stein claims that Melanctha is intelligent, she tends to relate to the world in an emotional, sensual manner. In contrast, Jeff Campbell, a

¹ The town is a fictional representation of the poor black neighbourhoods of Baltimore where Stein practiced obstetrics while still a student. Stein cites the experience as the background informing “Melanctha”. (Autobiography 81-2).

young doctor, is excessively cerebral. He wants to understand experience intellectually and is constantly analysing himself and those around him. While the couple is initially able to overcome this difference in personality, problems continue to arise. Though Jeff makes strides towards relinquishing some of the control he craves, it is not enough to sustain the relationship and Melanctha begins to stray, ultimately dying in a home for consumptives.

Stylistically, the story is distinguished by what Stein has called “a constant recurring and beginning...a marked direction of being in the present”—what she termed a “prolonged” or “continuous” present (“Composition” 25). Stein conveys this sense of the present through the use of two principal techniques. The first of these techniques is constant repetition. As her affair with Jeff flounders, Melanctha increasingly comes to depend on her friend Rose Johnson. Though she longs to be continually closer to Rose, Melanctha is unable to voice her desire.

It could never come to Melanctha to ask Rose to let her. It never could come to Melanctha to think that Rose would ask her. It would never come to Melanctha to want it, if Rose should ask her, but Melanctha would have done it for the safety she always felt when she was near her. Melanctha Herbert wanted badly to be safe now, but this living with her, that, Rose would never give her. Rose had strong the sense for decent comfort, Rose had strong the sense for proper conduct, Rose had strong the sense to get straight always what she wanted, and she always knew what was the best thing she needed, and always Rose got what she wanted (152).

As Richard Bridgman argues, the passage works to contrast the subtle complexities of Melanctha's character with the straightforward simplicity of Rose—a character Stein often describes as “lazy”, “sullen”, and “childish”. In Bridgman's view,

Melanctha is a passive element in her sentences. The initial phrases concerning her vary slightly with each repetition, and periods isolate her thoughts in separate units. But Rose's mind goes straight to the point three times, so that as the paragraph ends, it is perfectly clear why Rose always got what she wanted (358).

Through her use of slight variation in repetition, Stein is able to elaborate on the different natures of two characters. More precisely, Stein examines the underlying psychological conditions that prompt a character to respond to a given circumstance in a more or less predictable way. In other words, Stein attempts to provide a glimpse into the inner workings of her characters' minds—a first step towards the elaborate typologies she would develop in her later work.

Stein's interest in the different thought processes governing the lives of her characters is especially evident in regard to Jeff Campbell, the most fully developed character in “Melanctha”. When he is introduced to the reader, Jeff appears unable to act without first having intellectually considered all the possible ramifications of his actions. He desires complete control and, as such, is extremely suspicious of sensual response or what he terms “excitements”. Yet as his attraction to Melanctha grows, the reader becomes aware of a subtle change in his beliefs. Defending his decision to avoid “excitements”, Jeff states

I know Miss Melanctha...it ain't very easy for you to understand what I was meaning by what I was saying to you, and perhaps some of the good people I like

so wouldn't think very much, any more than you do, Miss Melanctha, about the ways I have to be good. But that's no matter Miss Melanctha. What I mean Miss Melanctha by what I was just saying to you is, that I don't, no, never, believe in doing things just to get excited. You see Miss Melanctha I mean the way so many of the coloured people do it. Instead of just working hard and caring about their working and living regular with their families and saving up all their money, so they will have some to bring up their children better, instead of living regular and doing like that and getting all their new ways from just decent living, the coloured people just keep running around and perhaps drinking and doing everything bad they can ever think of, and not just because they like all those bad things that they are always doing, but only just because they want to get excited (85).

The most obvious form of repetition in the passage is the constant use of proper names. Within the narrative, the formal style of address suggests an idealized Southern propriety, a gentility expected of proper ladies and gentleman. This sense of propriety contributes to the feeling of exoticism in Stein's treatment of African American sexuality.

Yet on another level, Jeff's constant use of Melanctha's name foregrounds her position as listener in relation to his own passionate appeals. Though Jeff intends to persuade Melanctha of his own righteousness, his constant revisions and qualifications suggest that he is, in fact, introspectively rationalizing the motivations underlying his own desire. By constantly re-phrasing his opinion, by trying to clarify exactly what it is he "means", Jeff reveals precisely how conflicted is his own opinion. While his professed aims and his style of address remain relatively constant throughout the passage, his desire for more acceptable forms of excitement begins to emerge. Ultimately, what the reader sees in any

given moment are the multiple perspectives and longings that define Jeff's character. It is precisely this duality—the simultaneous presence of conflicting impulses and ideas—that Jeff battles to overcome as the story advances. Through repetition, Stein is able to evoke the synchronic quality of the human mind, an ambivalence in which attraction and repulsion are experienced not successively but simultaneously.

The effect of repetition is compounded by Stein's extensive use of gerunds and the present participle. For the reader, the present participle focuses attention on the precise moment in which an event occurs. By rejecting the past tense as the traditional narrative mode, Stein is able to delay the process by which the reader evaluates the text. The use of past tense narration often implies a form of mediation (events are recounted from some point in the future and most likely, though not necessarily, with the benefit of hindsight). The reader assumes that events are included because of their necessary place within the larger narrative. By making extensive use of the present participle, Stein is able to frustrate such assumptions. A sentence may point only to a character's immediate response to a given event without pointing to the event's broader significance. Indeed, much of Stein's writing is, in this limited sense, profoundly insignificant. Actions and descriptions signify nothing more than their bare fact of existence. That is to say, the reader is forced to evaluate a character's response on a basic, almost empathetic, level while resisting the desire to attribute any sort of overriding narrative meaning or worth. What matters most are "words next to each other" and not an "intention to say what they are saying".

Stein's use of the gerund only magnifies this effect. Used in conjunction with the present participle, the gerund works to blur the line between active verbs and passive

nouns. While verbs represent actions that necessarily exist in and across time (even the limited time of Stein's present participle), the gerundial noun can represent an abstract state of being that is itself outside of time. Since the gerund and the present participle both end in "-ing", the reader must pause over the text in order to derive Stein's meaning. In effect, meaning is briefly postponed or deferred. Explaining his own hesitancy, Jeff addresses Melanctha:

You see it's this way with me always Miss Melanctha. I am always so busy with my thinking about my work I am doing and so I don't have time for just fooling, and then too, you see Miss Melanctha, I really certainly don't ever like to get excited, and that kind of loving hard does seem always to mean just getting all the time excited" (86).

Confronted by his emerging feelings for Melanctha, Jeff attempts to intellectualize his desire, transforming an active moment of courtship into an abstract discussion about the relative merits of "loving". In essence, Jeff externalizes his desire so that he might study it objectively while avoiding excitement. Yet, the reader is aware of both the immediacy of the moment *and* Jeff's desire to gain distance. What emerges is a halting succession of individual moments. Moments of intense action are juxtaposed against Jeff's abstract evaluations. If the reader is confused as to Jeff's true feelings, this confusion only mirrors the character's own state of mind. Effectively, the reader begins to experience the same feelings of ambivalence and frustration as the characters in the story.

Stein's efforts to expand the possibilities of literary form were part of an attempt to keep literature relevant amidst the extraordinary change occurring all around her. Stein believed that America would revitalize literature, compensating for what she felt was a

decline in English letters during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The continuous present was capable of representing the new reality of modern life in ways that earlier forms and techniques could not. For Stein, the continuous present recreated life in a disjunctive, fragmentary world, a world in which perception and belief were continually in flux. Speaking in 1926, Stein proclaimed that “a composition of prolonged present is a natural composition in the world as it has been these thirty years” (“Composition” 25). Though reflective of her deep faith in the power of the avant-garde, Stein’s suggestion that the prolonged present was a “natural” response to change is, perhaps, rather surprising.

Despite stressing the ineluctability of change and the importance of perspective, Stein maintained that the continuous present was, in some respect, an automatic or inevitable response to the world as she viewed it. Stein writes: “I knew nothing of the continuous present but it came naturally to me to make one, it was simple it was clear to me and nobody knew why it was done like that, I did not myself but naturally to me it was natural” (“Composition” 25). If the world is constantly made and remade according to our shifting perceptions of reality, it seems problematic to suggest that any given form of expression constitutes a “natural” response. The very word seems deterministic, rooted in a sort of stimulus/response causality at odds with Stein’s radical conception of modernity. It is possible that Stein intended only to suggest that her discovery of the continuous present occurred *organically*, without a great deal of intellectual mediation. If this were true, her creative process would reflect the sort of psychological immediacy Stein saw as representative of her age. While this actually seems quite likely, there is nevertheless a certain conservatism in Stein’s outlook. By purporting to speak for all “modern” people,

Stein positions herself as a universal interpreter of modernity. The continuous present is not merely natural *for Stein* but is “a natural composition *in the world as it has been these thirty years*”. In stressing the organic quality of the imagination, Stein resorts to what is, in effect, a distinctly Romantic rhetoric.

The point is not to challenge Stein’s position within the history of Modernism or to suggest that her innovative approach to writing masks a far more conservative agenda. It would be foolish to suggest that Stein was anything other than “modern” in her outlook. However, it is important to delve more deeply into precisely what constitutes this advent of the modern. While Stein and many of her earlier critiques focussed on those moments of historical disavowance which served to mark a definite break with the past, more recent efforts aim towards re-establishing the sense of continuity between modernism and the paradigms which preceded it. The goal is to understand how modernist writers and thinkers accepted, rejected, and transformed the intellectual tradition they had inherited. In the specific case of Stein, attention must be paid to the socio-historical context in which Stein worked. Though Stein’s stylistic innovations clearly represent a radical aesthetic and linguistic departure, the scientific and philosophical insights that prompted such advances were very much consistent with late nineteenth century programmes of change.

As many critics have demonstrated, Stein’s time spent studying under William James at Harvard had a formative influence on her later work as a writer. In particular, Stein’s writing builds upon an epistemological distinction James made between “knowledge of acquaintance” and “knowledge-about” (Principles 1: 221)². Though difficult to define,

² Though many critics cite the influence of James, the work of Lisa Ruddick, and Steven Meyer have been of particular use to me.

knowledge of acquaintance might be described as the most basic means of knowing an object. It is an overwhelmingly sensorial or corporeal way of knowing the world. As examples of such knowledge, James cites one's knowledge of the colour blue or the particular taste of a pear (221). Such knowledge exists prior to any kind of intellection. In fact, knowledge of acquaintance diminishes as one begins intellectually to scrutinize the object. Importantly, James argues that it is impossible to convey representatively "this dumb way of acquaintance" (Principles 1: 221).

In contrast to knowledge of acquaintance stands knowledge-about. Knowledge-about is gained by studying and reflecting upon an object. In short, knowledge-about consists of all the conclusions that we draw about an object when that object is weighed against our cumulative understanding of the world. For James, the difference between the two can be captured by the difference between "feeling" and "thought". James writes: "Through feelings we become acquainted with things, but only by our thoughts do we know about them. Feelings are the germ and starting point of cognition, thoughts the developed tree" (Principles 1: 222). As evident in his choice of metaphor, James believed knowledge of acquaintance to be both anterior and inferior to knowledge-about. The reason for his belief is simple. Though certainly a radical in his day, James was still very much a man of science and committed to ideas of reason and progress. Intellect or knowledge-about facilitated progress by helping to make behaviour predictable. For James, the ability to predict behaviour is a form of habit. Confronted by a familiar stimulus, habit is able to intervene and direct action without having to relive the processes that brought about one's initial conclusions. In Darwinian fashion, acquired habits enable the individual to thrive in a given situation. Accordingly, James concludes "*we must make automatic and*

habitual, as early as possible, as many useful actions as we can, and guard against the growing into ways that are likely to be disadvantageous to us” (Principles 1: 122).

Though ostensibly the product of objective scientific analysis, it is apparent James’ advocacy of intellection and positive habit formation has a definite moralistic tenor. Mirroring the age-old antagonism between Passion and Reason, James suggests positive habits must be continuously cultivated lest we succumb to the folly of unstructured, undirected sentiment. Pressing his case, James writes:

The psychological study of mental conditions is thus the most powerful ally of hortatory ethics. The hell to be endured hereafter, of which theology tells, is no worse than the hell we make for ourselves in this world by habitually fashioning our characters in the wrong way (Principles 1: 127).

By physically altering the brain structure, negative habits not only subject the individual to momentary failings; one becomes, in fact, predisposed to fail.

Every time a resolve or a fine glow of feeling evaporates without bearing practical fruit is worse than a chance lost; it works so as positively to hinder future resolutions and emotions from taking the normal path of discharge. There is no more contemptible type of human character than that of the nerveless sentimentalist and dreamer, who spends his life in a weltering sea of sensibility and emotion, but never does a manly concrete deed (Principles 1: 125)³.

Essentially, James suggests that we must study our behaviour in order to remain master of it. At once optimistic and pessimistic, James’ position—suffused with both Darwinian anxiety *and* an unflappable faith in the possibilities of modern science—is very typical of

³ It is interesting to note the gendered language James employs. The antithesis between sensibility and “manly concrete deeds” is at the core of Weininger’s work.

his age. More than anything James desires or even requires control. In James' view, "if we suffer the wandering of our attention, presently it will wander all the time" (Principles 1: 126).

James' warnings about the inherent dangers of "wandering" attention clearly made a strong impression on Stein and feature prominently in "Melanctha". As Lisa Ruddick notes, "James' science pervades [Stein's] early writing. 'Melanctha, in particular, is so close, in its characterizations, to James's theory of the mind as to approach psychological allegory" (Reading 15). The struggles endured by the lovers are, in Ruddick's estimate, "a battle of rival modes of perception" (Reading 15). More precisely, Jeff and Melanctha reflect very different "habits of attention"⁴ (Reading 16). For James, the world contains an almost unlimited number of objects and sensations. Yet of these many stimuli, few are ever seized upon and raised to the level of consciousness. James suggests the majority of stimuli pass largely unnoticed because "they have no *interest*". James argues that "*My experience is what I agree to attend to. Only those items which I notice shape my mind—without selective interest, experience is an utter chaos*" (Principles 1: 402). Most basically, "habits of attention" are a form of "selective interest"—the ways in which an individual filters experience through consciousness. In "Melanctha", this question of attention appears "not as a theoretical debate between the lovers but as a half-articulated source of strain and attraction between them" (Ruddick, Reading 15-6).

When the reader is first introduced to Jeff, the character is very careful to avoid the utter chaos of undirected attention. Jeff vows to approach experience practically or, in a more Jamesian sense, pragmatically in the hopes of understanding how "to be regular in all your life" and "to always know where you were, and what you wanted" ("Melanctha"

⁴ The phrase is taken from Stein's lecture "The Gradual Making of The Making of Americans".

81-2). In other words, Jeff is interested in how he might benefit from his experience. His interest is in the utilitarian benefit to be found in knowledge-about. Experience, for Jeff, is valuable in so far as it brings one closer to accomplishing one's goal. Prior knowledge is used to predict future expectations. In this way, Jeff's habits of attention function identically to any other form of Jamesian habit—as a tool developed to aid in one's labours. By limiting the scope of his interests and avoiding unnecessary “excitements”, Jeff hopes to make his life more efficient. The habits of attention Jeff both cultivates in himself and recommends for others are directed towards maintaining focus and avoiding diversion. On a most basic level, Jeff seeks simplicity.

It is important to appreciate the inherent conservatism of Jeff's narrow pragmatism. By stressing the virtues of hard work and simple living, Jeff merely reiterates a mantra at the heart of American ideology. Playing the part of a black Horatio Alger, Jeff argues that success is found through restraint and perseverance. In fact, Jeff appears to exemplify the ideal which he preaches; he is a respected young doctor and apparently holds a position of prominence within his community. Having said as much, it is Jeff's very singularity that calls into question the validity of his message. None of the other characters in the story share Jeff's success. While Sam Johnson is described as “a decent good man” who “worked hard and got good wages”, his modest success seems far from the American Dream. By encouraging his people to accept their lot, Jeff fosters a sense of complacency that limits social mobility. For William James, these perceived limitations were essential in society. In his view, habit prevented one from looking too far beyond one's proper social station. Habit is “the enormous fly-wheel of society, its most precious conservative agent. It alone is what keeps us all within the bounds of ordinance, and saves the children

of fortune from the envious uprisings of the poor...It keeps different social strata from mixing” (Principles 1: 121). Though Stein never expresses it in such stark terms, Jeff’s conservatism becomes apparent in contrast to Melanctha.

In contrast to Jeff’s earnest sense of direction, Melanctha appears largely directionless. By no means lethargic or unmotivated, Melanctha seeks only a different kind of wisdom. While Jeff’s attention is focussed, Melanctha is profoundly unfocussed. Jeff desires knowledge that is practical, reasoned, and directed; Melanctha seeks only acquaintance—a sensual, corporeal knowledge of experience. For Stein, Melanctha’s sensuality is rooted in her femininity and is distinctly sexual in its nature. Stein writes that “Melanctha now really was beginning as a woman. She was ready, and she began to search in the streets and in dark corners to discover men and learn their natures and their various ways of working” (67). There is something both titillating and shocking in Stein’s description. Melanctha, though unburdened by shame, must act discretely since the knowledge she desires is socially proscribed. Stein writes that “Melanctha’s wanderings after wisdom she always had to do in secret and by snatches, for her mother was then still living and ‘Mis’ Herbert always did some watching, and Melanctha with all her hard courage dreaded that there should be much telling to her father” (68). Paradoxically, the feminine sexuality that supposedly causes Melanctha to “wander” is at the same time attacked as “unladylike”. The patriarchal voice in the text, James Herbert (Melanctha’s father), vows to kill Melanctha if he finds her with John, a local coachman. Melanctha is cast as both sinner and saint—by nature sexually lascivious yet constrained by notions of womanly virtue.

Melanctha's sexual transgressions become magnified when she begins to stray outside the boundaries of her own racial community. When her relationship with Jeff seriously fails, Melanctha begins once again to wander with other men, including white men. Rose confronts Melanctha about her behaviour. Though she does not disapprove of Melanctha being in the company of men, Rose believes it is wrong for Melanctha to associate with white men. While trying not to make racial generalizations, Rose claims that the type of white men Melanctha has been seeing cannot be trusted to "act decent to you" (147). In Rose's opinion, white men expressing interest in a black woman must have questionable motives. Importantly, Rose's opinions are based on the unique insights she has apparently gained as a black child raised by a "real nice kind of white folks" (147). In effect, Rose is a racial interlocutor able to communicate the reality of the white world to Melanctha who, herself, "don't know no better" (148). Indeed, it is Melanctha's ignorance or naiveté that most endangers her. As the narrator notes, "Always Melanctha Herbert wanted peace and quiet, and always she could find only new ways to get excited" (147).

As Melanctha emerges from her relationship with Jeff, Rose becomes a friend and teacher—a positive role model to counteract Jane Harden's earlier negative influence. Where as Jane taught Melanctha how to embrace and exploit her feminine sensuality, Rose acts as an inhibitory force, shaping and directing Melanctha's life. What Rose aims to correct is not merely Melanctha's ideas and beliefs but her very nature. Rose seeks to define for Melanctha the natural order by which she must abide. Having lived amongst whites, Rose has discovered not the artificiality of race but rather its inevitability. To be both safe and successful, one must embrace one's prescribed position within society. One must learn to inhibit the drives and desires that might otherwise lead one astray. In this

way, the social injunctions proposed by Jeff and, later, Rose are suggestive of Jamesian habit formation. Melanctha's struggles are the result of her inability to direct her attention (Ruddick, Reading 28-9). More precisely, Melanctha fails to develop habits that would mediate or temper her overwhelming desire for pure experience. Melanctha remains stuck in a "primitive" state of nature.

The conservatism of such a position is self-evident. Melanctha's demise is attributable to her inability to accept a gendered model of sexual propriety and to her transgression of racial boundaries. In both cases, Melanctha's failure to develop the "useful" habits that might help her conform to society's expectations leads to ostracism and loneliness. If one places the story in its proper historical context, Melanctha's inability to conform to social standards appears inherently dangerous. Jeff's inability to accept Melanctha's free-living past is entirely predictable. Unable to secure a good marriage, women in Melanctha's position could easily face lingering economic hardships. The potential repercussions for engaging in an interracial affair, especially given the story's Southern setting, are even more dire. Stein's rather abrupt ending to the story seems to suggest that Stein shared such views. As Lisa Ruddick notes, Melanctha's death seems to follow her actions as "a matter of course". Ruddick suggests that

In Stein's heroine one observes a character unfit for the world who is weeded out by a brand of natural selection. In James's psychology the person who has no mechanism of selective attention is ill suited for the business of self-preservation. The survival of the fittest militates against those 'exuberant non-egoistic' individuals who, careless of their own personal safety, diffuse their attention equably over experience (Reading 29).

More simply, there is a sense of inevitability or even appropriateness when Melanctha suddenly dies of consumption.

Stein's treatment of Melanctha's death might seem to suggest that the author herself was disapproving of Melanctha's sensuality. Even if Stein morally objected to the sexist and racist barriers impeding Melanctha's pursuit of happiness, the conclusion of the story is decidedly deterministic. Melanctha fails because she is unable to appreciate the effects of her actions. Having said as much, the fact remains that Melanctha receives a more or less sympathetic treatment from Stein. In particular, Melanctha's "mind wandering" is shown to have a positive effect on Jeff. When he first meets Melanctha, Jeff is unable to experience any real, deep emotion. Jeff states: "No I don't stop thinking much Miss Melanctha and if I can't ever feel without stopping thinking, I certainly am very much afraid Miss Melanctha that I never will do much with that kind of feeling" (93). Yet as he "learns" from Melanctha, Jeff becomes more capable of loving. "Sometimes Jeff would lose all himself in a strong feeling. Very often now, and always with more joy in his feeling, he would find himself, he did not know how or what it was he before had always been thinking" (108). Basically, Jeff gains access to James' "dumb way of acquaintance", a mode of relating to the world that is both prior to and outside of language. When the relationship has ended, Jeff is able to take away "the things she taught him to be really understanding" (146). Essentially, Stein suggests that "Mental conservatism requires the aid, then, of the progressive tendency if it is ever to recover a sharp sensational focus" (Ruddick, "Melanctha" 551). What Jeff truly acquires is *balance*.

Though embodied in two different characters, alternate modes of knowledge-about and knowledge of acquaintance are not mutually exclusive but present in each individual.

As Ruddick rightly notes, “Melanctha and Jeff are not only contrasting character types but also personifications of warring principles that exist *in every mind*” (Reading 20). The goal is to balance these competing and complementary tendencies. Accordingly, “Jeff and Melanctha work upon each other to achieve that ‘compromise’ of perceptual attitudes that is integral to the functioning of the Jamesian mind” (Ruddick, “Melanctha” 552). Whereas Jeff succeeds in arriving at such a compromise, Melanctha fails to heed the cautions of Jeff and Rose. Unfocussed and undirected, Melanctha “virtually drowns in the continuum of the world” (Ruddick, “Melanctha 556). Though both characters are treated more or less sympathetically, it seems clear that, ultimately, Stein privileges Jeff’s steady and measured approach to life.

Nevertheless, the reader is left with a lingering sense admiration for Melanctha. There is a rather appealingly romantic quality to Melanctha’s refusal to abandon the sensual and emotional profundity of life. One sees in Melanctha, the beginnings of a “hazily defined wisdom”, a mode of relation and engagement rooted in one’s innate sense of one’s own body. In Ruddick’s assessment, Stein’s tentative first steps toward a new language of experience mark the beginning of the author’s break with Jamesian philosophy and the other prevailing orthodoxies of nineteenth century thought. Ruddick notes there begins to emerge in Stein’s writing “an emphasis on bodily experience” that is both “sacred and taboo” (Reading 32). Indeed, if “Melanctha” marks the beginning of Stein’s break with her aesthetic and intellectual precursors, this break is by no means clean. In the words of one critic, “Melanctha” is an “ambiguous farewell to the forms of authority proclaimed by the nineteenth century” (Chessman 22). The writing in Three Lives is both radical and conservative, rooted in the past and striding boldly towards the future. Stylistically and

often thematically, Stein assaults the conventions of her inherited literary tradition. At the same time, Stein's radical technique is based in large part on her creative re-reading and re-writing of her "forefathers". Accordingly, any meaningful assessment of Stein's work must take into account both of these characteristics. Stein self-confidently embraced the possibility of new forms while also clinging tentatively to the Jamesian ideal of self and social betterment.

The simultaneous presence of revolutionary and conservative impulses in Stein is representative of a broader cultural anxiety at the heart of modernist practice. Neither entirely progressive *nor* reactionary, modernism is more properly an ambivalent response to a rapidly changing social landscape. Marianne DeKoven argues that, while it tends to be defined as "a repudiation of, and an alternative to, the cultural implications of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century feminism and socialism", modernist formal practices emerged as "an adequate means of representing their terrifying appeal" (Rich 4). For the female writer in particular, this ambivalence centred around a fascination with the possibility of sexual subversion and a fear that such transgressions may be punished (DeKoven, Rich 20). Accordingly, the juxtaposed manners of Jeff and Melanctha convey a sense of Stein's own ambivalence. "Melanctha" was an attempt by Stein to understand her own complex sexuality⁵. Stein's sensuality is projected through a racial filter so that Stein could "simultaneously idealize and depreciate it" (Ruddick, Reading 33).

Again, little is gained by portraying Stein as either fundamentally liberated *or* frightened by her growing sense of sexual difference. As DeKoven notes, it is a mistake

⁵ "Melanctha" revisits one of Stein's earliest attempts at fiction, the posthumously published "Q.E.D.". The work grew out of Stein's tumultuous college affair with May Bookstaver. Through the character of Adele, Stein attempted to analyse why the relationship failed. The character of Jeff in "Melanctha" is based upon Adele/Stein.

to reduce a text like “Melanctha” to a unified pronouncement or to resolve its many contradictions. In fact, such a text

enacts precisely the modernist moment of simultaneity, of dualism that seeks neither a unitary resolution (one term over the other) nor a transcendent third term, a dialectical synthesis, but rather a simultaneity that, from within dualism, imagines an alternative to it (DeKoven, Rich 25).

It was this alternative Stein sought—a way of “making what I know come out as I know it”. Stein aims to expand the parameters of language, to write in a continuous present that captures the complexity of ambivalence, the co-existence of revolution and tradition. Stein did not merely reject the past and all it had taught her. Nor did she perpetuate the mistakes of the past, blindly expounding a discourse that inhibited her as a woman, a lesbian, and a writer. Rather, Stein’s writing marks a profound engagement with modernity. It is an attempt to convey both the positive and the negative not from a position of exteriority but from the inside, amidst all the confusion, hopes, and fears. It is only by simultaneously considering both the power of tradition and the possibility of change that the nature of Stein’s attraction to Weininger’s sexology becomes clear.

IV.II

Designing Desire

In 1877, Gertrude Stein, just three years old at the time, embarked with her family upon her first voyage to Europe. Driven by Daniel Stein’s business interests, the family settled briefly in Vienna. Three years later in the same city, Otto Weininger was born on April 3, 1880. Like Stein, Weininger was a precocious child and a voracious reader. Bored with school, Weininger took control of his own education, learning numerous languages and pursuing interests that ranged from the natural science to the humanities.

In 1898, Weininger enrolled at the University of Vienna and, much like Stein, studied philosophy and psychology, as well as courses in medicine, zoology, and biology. In 1902, Weininger submitted his doctoral thesis, a work that would be published a year later as Sex and Character. Far ranging in its scope and ambition, the book draws upon its author's many interests and influences. Ignoring any sort of generic constraints, Sex and Character blends scientific observation, metaphysical speculation, and moral dogmatism. Lacking clarity and precise scientific evidence, Weininger's book cobbles together a wide range of intellectual traditions through sheer force of will and insistence. Weininger's emphatic iconoclasm, a trait that would lead many to dismiss his ideas as unfounded, was in all likelihood the very quality to which Stein was most attracted. As Leon Katz notes, Stein's interest in Weininger is likely "a reflection on the blunt, dogmatic, unshaved, and unqualified clarity of his reasoning. Stein would easily have been held by his flamboyant way of sweeping aside, in compact and violently lucid paragraphs, centuries of common belief" (141). Weininger's fearlessness, his intense sense of conviction, and his desire to remake the world were all qualities that would come to define Stein's work.

At its core, Sex and Character is an attempt to understand human behaviour and the factors that combine to influence behaviour. Weininger believed that one's behaviour is governed by one's character or consciousness. Rejecting Lockean empiricism's exclusive focus on experience (the mind as *tabula rasa*), Weininger believed that consciousness guides or directs the manner in which sensation is perceived. In effect, consciousness is more than simply the product of one's cumulative experience; consciousness intervenes and structures experience. Weininger believed the empiricist model was a result of the disproportionate influence of physics on modern psychology (82). Simply put, empiricist

psychology was too mechanistic. Weininger premised his critique, at least in part, on his reading of William James. James maintained that the phenomenal field contains a superabundance of potential stimuli. Of these many potential stimuli, the mind seizes upon only a limited number. Which stimuli are noticed and which are overlooked is, for James, ultimately governed by consciousness. Accordingly, James claims consciousness is “primarily a selecting agency” (Principles 1: 139). For both James and Weininger, the task is to determine where consciousness originates, if it is not a simple product of experience.

James believed that consciousness was a function of the interrelation between a guiding intelligence and those external objects seized upon by the mind and raised to the level of awareness. More simply, consciousness is something that is *experienced* during daily interactions with one’s environment. In James’ own words, consciousness is

No *mere ens rationis*, cognized only in an intellectual way, and no *mere* summation of memories or *mere* sound of a word in our ears. It is something with which we also have direct sensible acquaintance...when it is found, it is *felt*; just as the body is felt, the feeling of which is also an abstraction, because never is the body felt all alone, but always together with other things (Principles 1: 299).

While some form of consciousness structures perception (selecting objects and alerting the mind to their existence), consciousness is only revealed through such engagements. Though consciousness may exist *a priori* to experience, it can never be known as such. Accordingly, theories of this sort are beyond the scope of pragmatist enquiry and are quite simply dismissed by the author. James concedes that the self may, in fact, be very similar to both Transcendentalist *and* Empiricist claims. Yet, both philosophies fail to

engage the question of consciousness on the all important level of experience. Subject and object are, for James, fundamentally two sides of the same coin; each is dependent upon the other for definition and validation.

Citing James as an authority, Weininger aims to reintroduce philosophy into the study of psychology. By focussing exclusively on directly observable stimuli at the expense of more abstract mental processes, positivist approaches to psychology are incapable of addressing profound questions of “murder, friendship, loneliness and so forth” (Weininger 83). Accordingly, Weininger writes that “If anything is to be gained in the future there must be a demand for a really psychological psychology, and its first battle-cry must be: ‘Away with the study of sensations.’” (83). Though he saw his work as an extension of Jamesian thought, Weininger ignored the important role of experience in revealing consciousness. In the words of one critic, “[Weininger] cites the interface between individuals and their environments as determining character, yet throws out the study of sense impressions or feelings that would count for true individuation” (Arens 126). While trying to couch his argument in the language of contemporary psychology, Weininger really advocates a return to a Kantian transcendental intelligence based upon a perceived correlation between distinct mental types and various observable character traits (Arens 122). In many respects, Weininger merely replicates the dichotomy between empiricism and rationalism that James sought to surmount⁶.

While divergent in his interests, Weininger’s professed affiliation with the work of James is important. By citing James as an influence, Weininger hoped to provide a sense of context and thereby add credibility to his work. Having said as much, it is likely that

⁶ James wrote: “I offer the oddly-named thing pragmatism as a philosophy that can satisfy both kinds of demand. It can remain religious like the rationalisms, but at the same time, like the empiricisms, it can preserve the richest intimacy with facts” (The Present Dilemma in Philosophy” 33).

the majority of Weininger's specialized readers would have recognized the divergences that distinguish Sex and Character from the work of James. For Stein, however, the connection to James was likely more compelling. When she first discovered Weininger's work in early 1908, Stein was still interested and following James' work. Yet, as Lisa Ruddick notes, Stein did so with "a new detachment" (Reading 95). Though seemingly still interested in his ideas, Stein was troubled by the utilitarian quality of James' pragmatism. In particular, his emphasis on the possible application of knowledge was seemingly at odds with her own emerging aesthetic practice. As Stein writes in her notebook, "When Leo said that all classification was teleological I knew I was not a pragmatist I do not believe that...I believe in repetition" (qtd. in Ruddick, Reading 95). For Stein, repetition facilitates a knowledge of acquaintance, information that is both experienced and inferred. As James himself noted, such knowledge resists language and is thus decidedly "unpractical".

While Stein rejected pragmatism, it would be a mistake to assume that she was, therefore, necessarily opposed to *all* forms of classification. While Ruddick is right to suggest that Stein was beginning to emerge from under the influence of James, Stein was still very much scientifically oriented, interested in structuring and arranging knowledge in accordance with some system of classification. In Sex and Character, Stein found just such a system. In a sense, Weininger provided a bridge between Stein's own scientific training and the more radical aesthetic possibilities she was contemplating. Increasingly, Stein was drawn to questions of essence. This is particularly evident in her enormous study of the American family, The Making of Americans. Begun in the summer of 1906, The Making of Americans was conceived as an epic account of a immigrant family's life

in America. Yet, the trajectory of the book changed after Stein's discovery of Weininger in 1908. Soon, The Making of Americans was to become "a history of every one of every kind...a history of every one who ever was or is or will be living" (175). In approaching this Herculean task, Stein proposed to distinguish these many types by isolating each person's "bottom nature"—the quintessential core that governed how people behaved and interacted with one another. While "Melanctha" appears to be a psychological allegory demonstrating Jamesian habits of attention, The Making of Americans is more properly *characterological*, interested in placing people within an overarching categorical schema.

Weininger's characterology is predicated upon the hypothetical existence of two ideal character types: the absolute male and the absolute female. The actions of the absolute male are strictly governed by Kant's Categorical Imperative—that is to say, "on the basis of a logical analysis of his projected course of action" (Janik 67). The absolute male is almost completely autonomous, guided only by intelligence and reason. Unsurprisingly, the absolute female is the exact opposite of the absolute male. The absolute female is described as excessively sensual, interested only in the pleasure to be gained from pretty things. Whereas the absolute male considers only the greater good of his community, the absolute female is exceptionally narcissistic, interested most in the compliments paid to her by suitors. She is particularly obsessed by the pleasures gained from sexual relations. Rejecting popular belief, Weininger asserted that the absolute male is uninterested in sex since he refuses to view women as simply a means by which to satisfy his own desire. In contrast, Weininger believed woman "takes no real interest in the things for themselves" and is interested solely in seeking and obtaining pleasure (89). Woman is incapable of higher thought and is completely amoral.

Weininger attempts to qualify his obvious prejudice by claiming that neither absolute man nor absolute woman actually exist. Instead, each individual exists on a continuum spanning these two poles. In Weininger's own words, "males and females are like two substances combined in different proportions, but with either element never wholly missing. We find, so to speak, never either a man or a woman, but only the male condition and the female condition" (8). Accordingly it would be possible to classify a given individual as, for example, 75% male and 25% female. The apparent simplicity of Weininger's model is its most attractive feature. All behaviour is a result of the relative degree of maleness and femaleness an individual possesses. Theoretically, it would thus be possible to produce an exhaustive characterological account by simply isolating the exact proportional distribution of gender in a given individual. Essentially, Weininger aims at limiting the number of variables by which personality can be assessed. Whereas James emphasized the irreducibility of experience (the essence of his stream of consciousness), Weininger posits gender as the ultimate determinate of behaviour.

Of course, there is a price to be paid for such simple convenience. Weininger's model is obviously untenable. While science can chart the relative development of different primary and secondary sexual features, the much more abstract qualities of "maleness" and "femaleness" cannot directly be observed. Though such qualities may be inferred from behaviour, such an approach is deeply tautological and contrary to the dictates of positivist, empiricist science. Setting aside the question of scientific proof, Weininger's proposal raises other difficult methodological problems. Since behaviour is variable—one might be generous one moment and selfish the next—the psychologist is put in the impossible position of determining which moments are truly representative of one's

underlying constitution. Perhaps recognizing these problems, Weininger qualifies his argument. Though behaviour is predicated upon gender, Weininger claims “every human being varies or oscillates between the maleness and femaleness of his constitution” (54). For Weininger, this variability is important since it lays the foundation for self-betterment and social progress. One could attempt to develop masculine traits while suppressing feminine tendencies. It is this possibility of change and improvement that lead Weininger and many of his early readers to see Sex and Character as a “classically liberal” work of emancipation (Beller 101).

On the surface, Weininger’s work appears substantially different from the sexological thinkers already discussed. Though he attacks laws prohibiting homosexual relations and makes brief comments about the sexual proclivities of mannish lesbians and effeminate men, Weininger is primarily concerned with broader ethical and moral considerations. Yet in terms of the structure of its argument, Sex and Character resembles work by Ellis and Krafft-Ebing. All three men believed that the origins of sexual behaviour (both direct and indirect) could be found in some form of physiological structure. More than selective behaviour, sexuality was an expression of an organic condition. Yet, all three qualified their beliefs by incorporating an important element of variability into their theories. Krafft-Ebing distinguished between perverse “personalities” and perverse “instincts”; Ellis suggested that sexual stimuli are “erotic symbols” subject to personal interpretation; Weininger conceded that gender was dynamic and in constant flux.

As noted earlier, the presence of both exhaustive description *and* free interpretation accounts in large part for the allure of these theories. While marshalling the perceived authority of scientific discourse, those coming to sexology from other perspectives easily

refashioned the discipline to their own liking. In effect, it is the *imprecision* of sexology that accounts for its wide spread appeal. Even if we choose to accept that sexology was a fundamentally conservative development aimed at regulating emerging sexualities, its very malleability meant that it could be appropriated and used for revolutionary purposes. Accordingly, Judy Greenway notes that Weininger's work was seriously discussed in the early anarchist-feminist paper Freewoman. Dora Marsden, the paper's publisher, excerpted long passages from Sex and Character and provided an editorial that both criticized and praised Weininger. Other contributors to the paper were equally selective in their reading of sexology:

The *Freewoman* articles and correspondence and private letters and diaries all show their writers using terms interchangeably from quite different conceptual frameworks, referring for example to intermediates, urnings, homosexual and homogenic feelings, sapphists, inverts, the third sex and bisexuality, without seeming to be troubled by theoretical incompatibility (Greenaway 39).

More than careless scholarship or ideological blindness, such liberal reading practices merely replicate the open-endedness employed by the original authors. "What matters above all is what tales a text makes possible" (Greenaway 40).

Stein's attraction to Weininger tends to be read in just such a manner. As Leon Katz has noted, Gertrude was uninterested in engaging her brother in a rigorous analysis of the book. Rather, Gertrude felt that Weininger's argument did not require much elaboration; his conclusions were more or less self-evident. In fact, Stein believed that Weininger's work merely confirmed many of her own beliefs (Katz 140). This is not to say that Stein independently arrived at the all same conclusions as Weininger. Rather, Stein likely read

Weininger selectively, focussing on certain favourable aspects of his argument and ignoring others. While there is some evidence that she sympathized with Weininger's deterministic account of male genius⁷, Stein was interested primarily in Weininger's attempt to remedy psychology by producing a "broad and deep characterology" (Katz 142). Similarly, Wendy Steiner claims that Stein's attraction to Weininger was based on "a purely methodological affinity and a simultaneous disregard of virtually every substantive claim made by the book" (38). Stein and Weininger both saw characterology as a means of isolating "a synoptic vision of the ego of each character so inclusive that the character's every act and sensation could be observed in its whole relevance to the complete field of his ego" (Katz 143). Confronted by an overabundance of evidence, Stein and Weininger attempted to simplify characterology by reducing multiple potential behaviours into a lowest common denominator, a readily determinable element upon which all other behaviour was contingent.

Whereas Weininger's characterology was structured around the essential dichotomy of male and female essence, Stein developed her own foundational archetypes; people were either "dependent independent" or "independent dependent" personalities. As descriptive adjectives, Stein's categories tell the reader little. The juxtaposition of antithetical terms within each category effectively negates all meaning. The obvious logical incongruity of such pairings proves an almost insurmountable barrier for any reader seeking to engage meaningfully with Stein's ideas. At the very least, the challenge is so formidable as to dissuade most readers from making the necessary effort. By simply inverting her terms, Stein does little to clarify her position. As one continues reading, one must constantly

⁷ In a notebook compiled during her writing of *The Making of Americans*, Stein commented that "Pablo & Matisse have a maleness that belongs to genius. Moi aussi perhaps" (qtd. in Mellow 152).

refer back to the author's initial distinctions in order to follow the tenuous thread of the argument. While there are many reasons to reject Weininger's theses, his use of gender provides a common reference point by which readers might possibly orient themselves. In contrast, "dependent independence" and "independent dependence" appear to be "virtually empty signifiers" (Walker 61).

Somewhat more meaningful is the distinction Stein makes between "attacking" and "resisting". "Dependent independence" and "independent dependence" are identifiable only by observing interactions between different people. As they interact, people either attack or resist one another. That is to say, the attacker initiates contact while the resister alternately parries and welcomes those advances. Importantly, attacking and resisting are most prominent in "loving". Stein writes:

In all loving, in all the many millions always loving mostly there is one of them one of the two of them who is of the kind of them who have independent dependent nature in them, this one always in the two of them in loving does attacking in loving, sometimes it is in the man sometimes it is in the woman, and the other one then is of them who have dependent independent nature in them and these can have sometime more or less resisting in them, this makes the pair of them and this is always true in loving (Making 178).

More than just characterological, Stein's model is overtly sexological. Suggesting that character is revealed through loving, Stein reiterates the centrality of sex and sexual identity in establishing character types. The connection is only strengthened when one considers Stein's sense of sex as conquest. Havelock Ellis describes a similar dynamic when he suggests that female modesty is "an inevitable by-product of the naturally

aggressive attitude of the male in sexual relationships” (Studies 1: 40). For her part, Stein reaffirms Ellis’ belief that apparently antagonistic sexual behaviours may be, in fact, complementary. However, Stein rejects Ellis’ suggestion that desire is necessarily a male attribute.

True to Weininger’s example, Stein favours a more dynamic conception of gender in which sexual roles are far less prescribed. For Stein and Weininger, the presence of both male and female qualities means that a given individual may display a range of different behaviours beyond the conventional gender limitations imposed by Ellis. Since the relative distribution of maleness and femaleness is variable, behaviour will show a similar variety. For Stein, the challenge was to balance both the variety of observable behaviour with her belief in a “bottom nature”. Stein writes:

Other kinds of natures are in almost all men and almost all women mixed up in them with the bottom nature of them, and this mixture in them with the amount they have in them of their bottom kind of nature in them makes in each one a different being from the many millions always being made like him (Stein, Making 137).

Despite expressing behaviour similar to others within a group, the presence of a distinct bottom nature serves to differentiate individuals from one another. In effect, bottom nature confers identity⁸.

Though Stein claimed that The Making of Americans was “a history of every one of every kind”, the book actually contains very few case histories. The majority of the book is more methodological than taxonomical; it is a statement of technique. In other words,

⁸ Stein’s connection between sexual behaviour and individual identity is precisely what Foucault attacks in his critique.

the main subject of Stein's book is the author herself and the various ways in which she came to know her subject. The few case studies Stein does provide are often vague and imprecise. Aside from her protagonists, Stein's characters are roughly drawn and almost completely indistinguishable. Referred to only as "this one" or "that one", these brief characterological sketches tend to blur together in the reader's mind. Given the book's extraordinary length, it might be argued that such brevity is a practical necessity. Yet if such sacrifices are truly necessary, Stein's choice to undertake such an impractical task becomes even more questionable. As the reader struggles through the text, it becomes clear that even Stein doubts the viability of her project. Stein writes:

I am having uncertainty in my feeling and always more and more I am certain and always more and more there are distinct kinds of them kinds of men and women, and then sometimes there are so many ways of seeing each one that I must stop looking (*Making* 337).

Lingering doubts about the feasibility of her project and the improbability of finding a readership appear and reappear throughout the book. Rather than concede defeat, Stein once again shifted her focus.

In an essay entitled "The Gradual Making of *The Making of Americans*", Stein draws a connection between her work and scientific method. Stein says that while working with James she learned that the goal of science was "complete description". Yet, she qualifies this by saying that very few people ever dedicate the time necessary to produce such an exhaustive account of anything. As each person abandons their subject in favour of new interests, another person inevitably comes along and begins anew the task of description. Accordingly, "description is really unending" (96). Each subsequent account of an object

or event becomes coloured by the writer's own experience. This is the essence of what Stein calls "insistence", the natural form of narration in the modern world. Insistence does not negate the ideal of complete description; it merely renders it unnecessary. Stein writes: "Certainly a complete description is a possible thing. But as it is a possible thing one can stop continuing to describe this everything" ("Gradual" 96). Along these lines, Stein claims that The Making of Americans is a success. Having proved that it is indeed possible to write a history of everyone, Stein felt it no longer necessary to do so. Though such an account is deeply unsatisfying and provides evidence of Stein's own power of self-deception, her rationale nevertheless allowed her to begin a new phase in her career as a writer.

Increasingly, Stein shifted attention from questions of precision and verisimilitude to the possibilities resulting from error. Though seemingly antithetical to the Jamesian goal of precise description, Stein begins in The Making of Americans to consider how error may, in fact, contribute to a more complete understanding of her subject. Stein writes:

I get to be more able more and more to know of them what will be the quality of living of working in them what on the whole will be the quality of succeeding and failing in them and always then I want to be mistaken I want to make mistakes so that I can see something in them which makes of that one a more complete one (Making 538).

In a rigorously scientific framework, error is an admission of defeat. Errors are the result of oversights that occurred at an experiment's inception. Alternately, errors may arise from faulty execution, by failing to conduct an experiment according to a set method or protocol. In both instances, error results from excess; the researcher's attempts to delimit

his or her subject are invalidated by the presence of extraneous, unintended influences. For Stein, the exact opposite is true. The multiple and even contradictory insights one may gain through error provide a more complete understanding of the object. Whereas classical science synthesizes divergent information in order to produce results that are definite and logically consistent, Stein embraced variety and difference. Having concluded that knowledge could not be teleological, Stein saw no need to simplify her results dialectically. In a truly Whitmanesque manner, Stein determined that character could contradict itself; it contained “multitudes”.

IV.III *Back to Beginnings*

Perhaps because of the many years it took to complete and the numerous philosophical and stylistic changes it contains, The Making of Americans is looked at as an important transitional work in Stein’s oeuvre. The novel tracks the progression from Stein’s belief in traditional narrative form and scientific objectivity to a more formally experimental style that embraces repetition and error. When Stein began The Making of Americans, she shared both James’ interest in complete description and Weininger’s need to produce a new science of character. Yet as the novel proceeds, Stein’s commitment begins to wane. The novel concludes almost entropically, its initial impetus having long since been abandoned by Stein. In the opinion of Donald Sutherland, The Making of Americans, though it provided a glimpse into the future, ultimately contained “too much 19th century science and history” (65). Similarly, Ruddick claims that “by the end of the novel Stein is altogether discouraged with formulas, and makes what proves to be a lasting break with science” (Reading 132). Though emphasis somewhat varies, the majority of Stein critics

seem united in the belief that the works following The Making of Americans mark a definite break with the past and the emergence of Stein as a distinctly *modern* writer.

The apparent evolution in Stein's writing is most evident in Tender Buttons (1914). In this collection of poems, Stein's style becomes less analytical and more evocative. Rather than describe the "bottom nature" of a given character, the pieces in Tender Buttons aim to recreate the experience of given things: notably, objects, food, and rooms. Again, Stein's intent was not to describe her subject but rather to depict it in such a way as to render it immediately perceptible to the reader. To this end, Stein began to alter radically the conventional relationship between signifier and signified. In her portraits, the power of words lies not in their denotative meaning but in their allusive possibility. Stein was interested in what language might point toward, in how the mind freely receives and interprets the written word. In an essay entitled "Poetry and Grammar", Stein wrote that "in doing very short things I resolutely realized nouns and decided not to get around them but to meet them, to handle in short to refuse them by using them... Poetry is doing nothing but using losing refusing and pleasing and betraying and caressing nouns" (137-8). Accordingly, Stein describes a carafe as "A kind in glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing strange a single hurt color and an arrangement in a system to pointing" (Tender 3). As Stein's curious phrasing works to convey a sense of the poet's unique vision of her subject, each word also frustrates readers, leading them away from any preconceived notions. The titles of the poems, though ostensibly fixing their subjects, appear almost arbitrary, an ironic nod towards the impossibility of absolute meaning. In effect, Stein insists upon a form of phenomenological presence that can, ultimately, be experienced only as absence.

To describe this experience of dislocation, critics tend to employ a poststructuralist vocabulary of rupture and bliss—what Roland Barthes has called *jouissance*. According to this model, the specific meaning of the poem is of, at most, secondary importance. The true pleasure of text results from interruptions in the process of signification. It is, in fact, the tenuity of meaning, our inability to master or control the text, that accounts for its appeal. In the face of this quasi-sexual pleasure, the self is destabilized or unmade. Not entirely pleasurable, the experience of *jouissance* calls into question the foundations upon which our conceptions of self-hood are based. No longer constrained by the impress of society, the individual is, in effect, remade through this process of unbecoming. In the opinion of Marianne DeKoven, writing such as Stein's

can liberate, for both genders, the non-linearity, pluridimensionality, free play of the signifier, the continuity of the order of things with the order of symbols—in sum, our pre-Oedipal experience of language—an experience which is repressed by the institutions of patriarchy (*Different* 22).

It is the liberative quality of this language that has made *jouissance* so important for feminism—particularly the French Feminism of Kristeva, Irigaray, and Cixous. To write *jouissance* is to engage in an act of resistance that is both aesthetic and, more broadly, political.

Accordingly, Shari Benstock sees Stein's writing as an effort to reclaim language and express forbidden lesbian desire (188). Stein's emphasis on linguistic indeterminacy is, for Benstock, in contravention of conventional High Modernist practice. In her view, the many faces of Modernism all share a common "sacred belief" in "the indestructibility of the bond between the Word and its meanings" (158). The many different challenges to

language “only reinforced the linguistic claims on meaning” (158). By subverting both the language that sought to define her difference and the phallogocentric assumptions upon which patriarchal power was based in favour of what Catherine Stimpson calls an “antilanguage”, Stein played the role of early feminist pioneer and revolutionary (qtd. in Benstock 162). In a most basic and limited sense, Stein was *post*-modern, providing a critical response to the governing paradigms of her day. Having said as much, it is important to understand the extent to which this language of liberation is itself a part of the discourse of modernity. The notion of sequential change and better living through the implementation of new technologies (writerly innovations in this instance) undergirds the larger modern project. What Stein represents is not so much a revolution against the prevailing structures of power but, rather, an evolution within that structure. If *jouissance* has the power to free individuals from repression, it does so from within the constraints of power. More precisely, Stein’s revolt against the arbitrary limitations of sex and gender succeeds to the extent that it capitalizes upon the inherent instability of the power structure it seeks to overthrow.

While her experimental writings lend themselves well to poststructuralist readings, it is obvious that Stein had no such explicit theoretical orientation. If her work does indeed contain an element of *jouissance*, it is most certainly rooted in some other motivation. It is possible that our tendency to read Stein in terms of textual bliss is a result of our practice of reading all literature through contemporary theoretical filters. Rather than uncovering *jouissance* as an inherent element within Stein’s work, we may have only retroactively projected such qualities onto the writing. While there may indeed be some truth to this suggestion, there are points within Stein’s oeuvre that are charged with an

undeniable sense of erotic pleasure or, even, excess. The driving repetition of “As a Wife has a Cow”—“In came in there, came in there come out of there. In came in come out of there” (543)—seems overtly sexual. The word “cow” was, in fact, commonly used by Stein as a synonym for orgasm. Similar style can be found in Stein’s many love letters to Toklas and in Lifting Belly, a prolonged love letter of sorts. Though these expressions of lesbian desire are certainly provocative and disruptive, it is important to recognize that are not properly post-structural.

Stein’s intention was not simply to challenge the referentiality of language but to expand it. The pleasure of poststructuralist *jouissance* derives from confronting those moments in which language is unmade, instances when signification begins to fail. That is to say, the poststructuralist critique proceeds from a position of posteriority; it delights in exposing the gaps and fissures running through the foundation of an ideal language of presence. In contrast, Stein returns to a position of anteriority; she attempts to recapture a sense of pre-symbolic acquaintance with the world. Somewhat paradoxically, Stein uses language as a means of recreating the very phenomenological experiences from which language is born. Whereas post-structuralism expounds the ineffability of pre-symbolic, pre-linguistic experience (the silence of madness, the irrevocable loss of the real), Stein is determined to reinvent language capable of speaking to this forsaken reality.

For Stein, the pre-symbolic is always directly accessible in the form of a Jamesian knowledge of acquaintance. Sensual corporeal experience is fundamentally pre-symbolic. For Stein, the key is to take “this dumb way of acquaintance” and to make it speak. If intellection proceeds from experience (James’ notion that thoughts grow from the “germ” of feeling), bodily pleasure could theoretically be harnessed as a means of redirecting

thought. Yet, for such a strategy to be effective one would have to appeal *directly to the body*. If engaged, the mind would intervene and prompt habitual responses that would diminish the purely sensual quality of the experience. It has already been shown that Stein's stylistic innovations serve to defamiliarize the reader, interrupting the process by which texts are made to conform to one's pre-existing notions and beliefs. What critics have largely overlooked is the extent to which this aesthetic practice (be it modernist or postmodernist) was informed or augmented by Stein's faith in science and the scientific process. More precisely, the idea of predicting and structuring desire had been with Stein since 1908 when she first discovered Weininger.

While scholars have rightly noted the many shifts and changes in Stein's thought and approach to writing, points of continuity have frequently been overlooked. While Tender Buttons undoubtedly marks a departure from her work in The Making of Americans, it is wrong to assume that Stein therefore abandoned all interest in her early scientific training in favour of an oppositional aesthetic. As Steven Meyer notes, "Although she characterized the shift as a wholesale rejection of science, it actually only represented a disillusionment with the dominant vision of science" (4). Stein still remained fascinated with different systems and structures of knowledge. Instead of producing complete description, Stein became more interested in examining experiences of contiguity. Stein devoted herself to the analysis of not just discrete ideas but the way in which ideas and experiences relate to one another. Rather than abandoning the pursuit of science, Stein worked instead to expand its scope, bringing consideration to other less definable forms of experience. Instead of rejecting James (as Ruddick suggests), Stein took the Jamesian ideal to a new extreme.

Towards the end of his career, James had become more and more interested in what he called “radical empiricism”. Though not opposed to pragmatism, radical empiricism was not limited to producing knowledge that could be serviceably acted upon in the world. In “A World of Pure Experience”, James wrote that

to be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced. For such a philosophy, *the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as ‘real’ as anything else in the system* (qtd. in Meyer, 12).

By expanding the scope of scientific enquiry to consider emotions and feelings that may have otherwise been overlooked, James sought to understand the larger phenomenal field which affects us but to which we are not always conscious. Having said as much, James felt that it was important to intellectually comprehend these experiences. In fact, he doubted that experience could ever be systematically understood *as experience*. Writing of pure perceptual experience, James claims that “it is probable that to all eternity no interrelated system of any kind will ever be made” (“A World” 66). Ignoring James’ warnings, Stein set out to develop just such a system.

As already noted, the difficulty in producing a somatic account of experience is that language is primarily an intellectual, representational medium of communication. In order to circumvent the mind and facilitate access to knowledge of acquaintance, it would be necessary to reshape the medium. This is precisely what Stein did, expanding upon work she had begun in Three Lives. She worked towards using language in a manner that

conveyed both a sense of intimacy and immediacy. Meyer describes this new language as “neuraesthetic” (58-9). Derived from the 19th century diagnosis of *neurasthenia* (a form of nervous exhaustion), a “neuraesthetic” response is typified not by loss or inadequacy but by a sense of pleasurable excess. Confronted by Stein’s neuraesthetic texts,

the reader is obliged to reproduce the recursive act of reading which, in line with the parameters under investigation, was part and parcel of the original process of writing. Such *experimental reading*, as it were, is not a matter of reductively decoding Stein’s writing word for word or phrase for phrase but of neuraesthetically reproducing her ‘stud[ies] of the relation of words in meaning sound and volume’ in ways specified by the compositions themselves (Meyer 83).

Unlike feelings of *jouissance* which predominantly decentre the subject, neuraesthetic texts balance excess with precise direction. Though perhaps experienced as excess, it was an exact, definite experience which Stein sought to convey to her reader.

Weininger’s work is important because it provided a guide to how the body responds on a sensual, sexual level. Aside from developing a system of characterological analysis, Weininger proposed a more rigorously sexological model of desire. As already noted, every individual contains elements that are either male or female. In terms of desire, these elements seek out their opposite in a sexual partner. Accordingly, a man who is 80% male and 20% female seeks a woman who is 80% female and 20% male. Extraordinarily deterministic in its outlook, Weininger’s model leaves little room for individual choice or caprice. Perhaps even more than other sexologists, Weininger saw desire as an inevitable expression of an underlying, organic constitution. Each individual cell is sexually coded by the presence of a sexually specific ether, what Weininger calls idioplasm. In his view,

“Actually existing protoplasm is to be thought of as moving from an ideal arrhenoplasm [coded male] through a real or imaginary indifferent condition (true hermaphroditism) towards a protoplasm that approaches, but never actually reaches, an ideal thelyplasm [coded female]” (16).

For the modern reader, the notion of such sexual essences likely appears absurd. Yet, for Stein, Weininger’s decision to root desire in the body meant his subsequent theories were universally applicable. Since these two “plasms” were present in every individual, one needed only to isolate their relative distribution in order to calculate how desire functioned in any given instance. To this end, Weininger saw fit to express his findings as a mathematical equation (a curious choice for someone opposed to the undue influence of physics). He expressed the matter thusly:

$$A = \frac{K}{a - b} f^t$$

Attraction (A) is equal to the presence of male and female qualities (a and b) in relation to a given time factor (f^t). The remaining element in the equation is its most interesting and salient feature. “K” is held to modify “a – b” and represents “all the known and unknown laws of sexual affinity” (Weininger 37). The very immeasurability of this factor negates the mathematical form in which it is expressed. Since it would be impossible to consider all the laws governing “sexual affinity”, it would therefore be impossible to ever solve Weininger’s equation. However, this does not detract from its appeal.

Weininger’s theory aims to be precise and exact, producing scientifically controlled, objective facts. At the same time, it endeavours to be all encompassing, the final and definitive statement on questions of desire. The “K” factor facilitates this by appearing to

quantify the unquantifiable. Reduced to a simply algebraic notation, the vast universe of different sexual possibilities and permutations is reduced to a single, manageable element. In a sense, it is form that matters more than content in Weininger's theory. It is the very prospect of control that matters more than the concrete results that may or may not derive from the theory. Clearly, it would not have been possible for Stein to use Weininger's theory as a means of structuring desire in her own writing. Nevertheless, Weininger's writing suggested that the very idea of controlling desire was possible. Indeed, in one her notebooks Stein wrote that "That thing of mine of sex and mind and character all coming together seems to work absolutely" (qtd. in Katz 142).

Given Stein's interest in error, the imprecision of Weininger's theory likely increased its appeal. Stein wanted her literary experiments to have an impact on society. She hoped to change the world through her writing. Stein writes that "this passion for knowing the basis of existence in each one was in me to help them change themselves to become what they should become" ("Gradual" 85). Yet, Stein never wanted absolute control. Ideally, this program of self-improvement would be collaborative. She suggests that "The changing should of course be dependent upon my ideas and theirs theirs as much as mine at that time wanted" ("Gradual" 85). The dynamics of engineered desire helped to facilitate such an interaction. Writing for a broad audience, Stein had to create a sense of pleasure with a transcendental appeal, speaking to more than a select group with a specific constitution. If Weininger's theory could *approximately* predict desire, it might then be possible to foster a sense of *partial* attraction. Since gender was dynamic, a perfect pairing of instincts could only ever be a theoretical ideal. Yet, if writing were a seduction wherein the reader responded to certain textual enticements while ignoring or

overlooking others, it would be possible to provoke a variety of different affective responses within a single text. In effect, Stein was able to exploit the indeterminacy of Weininger's model so as to marry a sense of biological determinism with her own interest in error, misreading, and rereading.

More than providing a less deterministic counter-balance to the objectivist pretensions of science, language was, for Stein, a medium that could be scientifically manipulated. Stein's goal was to convey to the reader a sense of knowledge of acquaintance, a sensual corporeal understanding of the world that was communicated *as experience*, not merely re-presented or recreated. James, despite his concern for intellectual order and direction, conceded that language facilitated this connection with a pre-symbolic self. Though it is a mediated form of communication, language nevertheless awakens ineffable experiences and feelings. James writes that "words, uttered or unexpressed, are the handiest mental elements we have. Not only are they very *rapidly* revivable, but they are revivable as actual sensations more easily than any other items of our experience" (Principles 1: 266). In contrast to the post-structuralist emphasis on the arbitrary quality of the signifier words are, for James, directly correlative of inner states. Nevertheless, the correlation between words and inner states is not exact. In his view words are not "discrete" but, rather, "fringed", imbued with a certain "transitive consciousness" (Principles 1: 271). One's experience of a word's "fringe" is dependent upon individual consciousness, a selective act of attention from within the broader stream of experience. Essentially, James balances the evocative, referential potential of language with the constant process of interpretation and translation that informs any act of consciousness.

Stein takes a similar approach. In an essay entitled “Plays”, Stein talks about her love of “lively words” (70). As noted earlier, she venerates early English literature because the words were “lively chosen” (“What Is” 47). When reading lively words, one experiences the object described as immediately, directly accessible. Steven Meyer suggests that, by praising words as “lively”, Stein intended to convey not just a sense of exuberance but the idea that language itself may be living. He writes:

to the extent that any utterance, and in particular any piece of writing, is experienced as *lively* and therefore, paradoxical as it may sound, as something *concrete* (so that, like the language of poetry, it requires explicit attention to its compositional features in order for one to grasp how it functions “as explanation”), this autopoietic entity isn’t just like a living organism. It is every bit as much a living organism as a living organism is (110).

Though perhaps pushing the comparison a bit too far, Meyer’s assessment rightly situates language within what might be called a “psychological ecosystem”. Language and experience are inextricably imbricated; language informs experience and experience conditions language. Ultimately, textual experience is mediated. Structural elements of language (consonance, dissonance, rhyme) blend with both the writer’s unique vision and reader’s own personal history to produce a synchronic reading of the text. In this way, the text stays lively, open to endless interpretation—the essence of what Stein called *insistence*.

Though perhaps a long journey, it is important to look at how the relationship between text and desire develops over the early years of Stein’s career as a writer. There has been a tendency in Stein scholarship (and Modernist studies more generally) to focus on those

points of rupture and transition that distinguish the past as distinct from the present, that mark the divides between pre-modern, modern, and post-modern thought. Clearly, Stein herself believed deeply in the uniqueness of her age, fashioning her own self-image in accordance with that change. Thus, we can track Stein's development from the naturalist quality of early works like "Q.E.D.", through the psychologically allegorical stylistic experiments in "Melanctha, to the characterology of The Making of Americans and finally the radical disjunctions of Tender Buttons. Yet in assessing these changes, we must also never lose sight of the different strains of thought, the persistent themes and ideas, that demonstrate an important sense of continuity binding these various phases together. The general cultural importance of sexology as a means of governing desire—particularly the influence of Weininger—is one such common thread.

The question of desire is never absent in Stein's writing. Instead, Stein experimented with various ways in which desire could be represented. In "Melanctha", the effects of desire are shown in relation to two different modes knowledge. Jeff, an example of strict self-control, learns to experience desire while subjugating it to higher ideals. Melanctha remains a slave to her desire, indulging in deep sensual experiences but lacking a means of intellectually directing her response. The reader tends to respond sympathetically to both characters, suggesting that Stein advocates a balanced response of the sort that occurs when the two protagonists come together. In The Making of Americans, Stein draws upon Weininger as a means of further theorizing how desire functions as a form of "bottom nature" that is most evident in "loving". This knowledge is then employed in Tender Buttons. The fundamental interdependence of knowledge-about and knowledge of acquaintance—the essential truth behind Jamesian radical empiricism—come together in

the reader's experience of the objects described in the text. Inspired by Weininger's (unintended) ability to balance exactness and error, Stein was able to unite the opposing elements displayed in "Melanctha" in a single textual experience. Instead of alternating between ideas, Stein creates a heteroglossic, polysemous form of address. Drawing directly and indirectly on sexological discourse, Stein worked toward inventing language capable of conveying both desire and abstract ideas.

The extent to which Stein succeeded in her task can be debated. While critics remain fascinated by the originality of Stein's thought, the fact remains that Stein never attained the type of readership she desired. Even at the height of her fame, Stein remained a writer more written about than read. If Stein's works were truly capable of delivering the sort of "neuraesthetic" pleasure or *jouisissance* that critics have claimed, one wonders why more readers have not embraced Stein's message. Rather than deny altogether the presence of such pleasure, it is perhaps more useful to remember that textual pleasure of this sort is never unqualified. Textual pleasure disorients and unsettles the reader. If it is any way "orgasmic", it is pleasure as *petit mort*, pleasure that can not be separated from loss. For this reason, Barthes claims "Boredom is not far from bliss" (Pleasure 26). By pushing the experience of dislocation to new extremes, Stein necessarily risked alienating her audience. However, Stein never wanted simply to please her reader. Of reading Stein, Jayne Walker notes that "not all have found the experience equally blissful". Yet, she also notes that "Stein never intended this effect; she wanted repetition to render the 'last touch of being' of her objects" (76). While we may admire her conviction, it seems likely that Stein's fascination with the limits of representation have contributed to her relative obscurity.

***Dynamic Differences:
Virginia Woolf and
Androgynous Seduction***

[I]n each of us two powers preside, one male, one female; and in the man's brain the man predominates over the woman, and in the woman's brain the woman predominates over the man. The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually co-operating.

-Virginia Woolf,
A Room of One's Own

[A]s the ordinary love has a special function in the propagation of the race, so the other has its special function in social and heroic work, and in the generation--not of bodily children--but of those children of the mind, the philosophical conceptions and ideals which transform our lives and those of society.

-Edward Carpenter,
The Intermediate Sex

Different though the sexes are, they intermix. In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is the very opposite of what it is above.

-Virginia Woolf,
Orlando: A Biography

V.I
Sexless or Seductress?

On November 9, 1928, Virginia Woolf arrived at the Bow Street Magistrates' Courts to testify on behalf of Radclyffe Hall's novel The Well of Loneliness in the obscenity trial of Hall's publisher, Jonathan Cape. The case had become something of a *cause*

célèbre amongst both Woolf's Bloomsbury compatriots and a broader coterie of writers and intellectuals living in London. Initially organized by Leonard Woolf and E. M. Forster, a group came together to lend their names in support of Hall's cause. When Forster visited Hall to inform her of the efforts being made on her behalf, Hall was confrontational. In Virginia Woolf's own words, Hall "screamed like a herring gull, mad with egotism and vanity" (qtd. in Bell 2: 138). Deeply resentful of Bloomsbury's intellectual snobbery, Hall insisted that no letter be written on her behalf that did not also proclaim the artistic greatness of her book. Hall felt that to support The Well of Loneliness only as a means of opposing government censorship risked compromising her "in the eyes of her public" (qtd. in Souhami 185). Perhaps not surprisingly, Hall's heightened demands caused a problem.

Though supportive of Hall's right to self-expression, many of her initial defenders felt The Well of Loneliness to be a ham-fisted work of middling quality and that to suggest otherwise would be "too large a sacrifice in the cause of freedom" (Bell 2: 139). Quickly, support for Hall's book began to wane. In a letter to Vita Sackville-West, Woolf declared that, rather than offering to reprint The Well of Loneliness, she was "beginning to wish it unwritten" (Letters III Aug. 28, 1928). Nevertheless, a signed letter did appear in the September 8, 1928 issue of Nation & Athenaeum. Rather than adding their voices to Hall's demand that the inverted be treated with respect and dignity, the signatories of Forster's letter offered little more than "a tepid defence of literary freedom" (Souhami 186). By focussing on the more abstract and far less controversial question of authorial freedom, Virginia Woolf and others (in the opinion of Hall's biographer) evaded their responsibility to speak out on behalf of the inverted. Given that many of those behind the

letter were either personally involved in homosexual affairs or closely acquainted with those who were, Souhami concludes that “the guarded manner of their protest spoke of their lack of candour and their vanity for the social show” (186).

Souhami’s argument, though perhaps rather simplistic, is not entirely without merit. At the time of the trial, Virginia Woolf was in the midst of concluding her own three year love affair with Vita Sackville-West—an affair which, by all accounts, was one of the principal joys in Woolf’s life and a tremendous source of artistic inspiration. While it can be debated as to whether either woman ever considered abandoning her marriage in favour of the affair¹, social strictures all but ensured (as in the case of Angela Crosby in The Well of Loneliness) such a turn of events would remain, at most, a fanciful longing. On some level, Woolf must have been able to relate to Hall’s indignation at having to conceal her affairs, to hide her love as though it were a dirty secret. However, it is precisely Hall’s candour that seems to have most bothered Woolf. The plaintive, pleading quality of Hall’s writing appears to have struck Woolf as inappropriate and unbecoming. She complained The Well of Loneliness was “a meritorious dull book”, “that Well of all that’s stagnant and lukewarm and neither one thing or the other”. Hall’s writing was coarse and unadorned; it lacked the skill necessary to transform the mundane into art. The novel came off as melodramatic and overly sentimental. According to this reading, Hall’s literary failings are inseparable from her social improprieties, her refusal to embrace Bloomsbury’s unspoken need “to demarcate between private indulgence and public discomfort” (Souhami 186).

¹ On the eve of a voyage abroad together, Virginia wrote to Vita that “I would not have married Leonard had I not preferred living with him to saying goodbye to him” (qtd. in Bell 2: 139).

In essence, Souhami castigates Woolf and her colleagues for keeping their sexuality closeted and, unlike Hall, failing to attest publicly their own private convictions. Though perhaps a less accomplished writer, Hall's courage and conviction is lauded by Souhami. While Souhami may be justified in emphasizing the unacknowledged social conservatism of Bloomsbury, her argument remains too narrowly focussed and overly protective of Hall's work. It must be admitted that Hall's novel is not particularly well-written. Aside from its lack of formal innovation, what alienates most readers, including Woolf and many of her contemporaries, is the novel's overwhelming bleakness. Hall's protagonist suffers rejection after rejection in a life seemingly devoid of real happiness. The writer Naomi Mitchison claimed the novel was so depressing as actually to deter youths from acting on homosexual urges (qtd. in Souhami 196). To expect Woolf to embrace a book so seemingly at odds with her own experience of lesbian love is misguided. While the argument might still be made that Woolf should have more vigorously defended The Well of Loneliness on principle, it is equally reasonable to assume that her reluctance to do so stemmed, at least in part, from Hall's miserable treatment of her subject.

Souhami also fails to consider fully the social pressures that discouraged dissent. It was very risky for a woman to come forward and publicly announce her lesbianism in the face of such public scrutiny.² The harm to one's reputation could be immense and, for a writer largely dependent upon the public's goodwill, such a provocative gesture could lead to personal ruin. Without detracting from Hall's remarkable courage, it should be noted that her personal fortune helped insulate her from the potential repercussions of her actions. The same could not be said of Woolf. In fact, Leonard discouraged his wife from testifying at Hall's trial, fearing Virginia would "cast a shadow over Bloomsbury" (qtd.

² As a result of the Labouchère Amendment, men faced even more serious consequences.

in Souhami 198)³. As Karla Jay argues, the government's heavy-handed treatment of Hall made clear the need for discretion. In her words, "the trial of The Well of Loneliness signalled to Barney, Woolf, Barnes, and other lesbians that the era of studied blindness to Sapphism had drawn to a close and that they were as likely as any other group to suffer the consequences of public pressures for conformity" (qtd. in Cramer 119). Patricia Cramer makes the same point even more simply and definitively: "External censorship—not personal inhibition—is the primary cause for Woolf's circumspect treatment of lesbian themes in her writing" (120). Rather than criticize Woolf for her vanity and lack of candour, commentators like Jay and Cramer focus instead on how Woolf expands the boundaries of literary representation and creates a lesbian eroticism which surreptitiously challenges and even subverts dominant misogynist/homophobic power structures.

Since the writer must always balance her desire for free expression with an awareness of institutional censorship and control, the feminist tenor of such works is not necessarily self-evident upon first reading. Instead, feminist/lesbian content is covertly embedded in the work. This latent material is made manifest during the act of reading when seized upon by an informed, sympathetic reader. This process of coding and decoding binds the reader and writer together in what Jane Marcus describes as an act of "conspiracy". In her words, "Woolf needs her audience's assent and she courts us unashamedly to participate in the plot against phallogentric language" (138). In Marcus's account, Woolf is anything but the cold and reserved persona Quentin Bell once described as a "sexless Sappho" (2: 185). Instead, Woolf appears a sly temptress, flirting with her reader so that she might be "seduced into sisterhood" (Marcus 176). Such readings emphasize Woolf's embrace of

³ To her credit, Virginia arrived at court determined to testify. The presiding judge subsequently determined that Woolf (as well as all the other defence witnesses) possessed no unique understanding of obscenity and disqualified her testimony.

feminine difference and her use of a corporeally based language similar to that outlined by Hélène Cixous in her famous essay “The Laugh of the Medusa”. Since such writing is categorically opposed to phallogocentric forms of communication, strict close readings are both impossible and undesirable. Instead, the reader must build upon inferences drawn from the text, seizing upon the author’s promptings and completing the text.

This model of sex and text transcends the limitations of more authoritarian systems. Previous emphasis on binaries of dominance and submission or action and passivity are replaced by a more collaborative, equitable dynamic. Both textual and sexual encounters depend upon relinquishing control, allowing the other to play a role in completing the self. In Woolf’s writing, this invitation to share takes the form of leading questions and pregnant pauses. The ellipsis becomes a central literary device; it is a moment when narrative is suspended or abandoned and the reader is invited to fill the void. Through the use of cues placed within the text, the writer is able to guide the reader’s response but, ultimately, it is the reader herself who supplies the missing information. This both limits the writer’s authority over the reader while simultaneously assuring the reader’s assent and complicity in the act of subversive creation (if the reader is unwilling or uninformed the empty space will remain blank). Accordingly, Jane Marcus argues that by engaging in this act of narrative completion, we “seal the pact of our conspiracy” (169). While Woolf may have been constrained by patriarchal power, she was nevertheless able to develop a distinctly feminist form of address, thereby evading censure and better capturing the reality of feminine sexuality.

By uncovering traces of Woolf’s sexuality embedded in her writing, this generation of feminist scholars and critics have worked to disprove depictions of Woolf as either frigid

or repressed. Referring specifically to Quentin Bell's depiction of his aunt as congenitally inhibited in regard to "the crudities of sex", Cramer argues that Woolf's biographer was limited by his "stereotypes about what constitutes the sexual" (120). In other words, Bell is constrained by his need to understand sex in terms of phallic presence. Rather than seek presence, Cramer instead celebrates the radical Otherness of feminine sexuality. Though intellectually intriguing and politically expedient, attempts to read Woolf's work as a critique of phallogocentrism are, at times, overreaching. While Woolf's work may contain an erotic component, that eroticism is typically balanced against or overshadowed by other socio-political concerns. Conveying a unmitigated sense of *jouissance* is rarely, if ever, Woolf's primary objective. Furthermore, Woolf would have had great difficulty relating to current theories regarding the socially constructed nature of sex and gender. As a work like Orlando makes clear, Woolf was fascinated by the *essential* differences of bodies and the profound connection between sex and destiny.

The key is not to judge Woolf as either revolutionary or reactionary, sexually liberated or repressed. Instead, Woolf's understanding of sexuality and its influence on her writing must be understood in reference to the predominant theories and ideas of her day. Though lacking a formal education, Virginia Woolf was a true intellectual, a woman who read widely across a great number of disciplines. Rather than limiting her in her endeavours, Virginia's autodidacticism may have in fact freed her—allowing her to draw connections overlooked by a more rigidly structured mind. Instead of limiting herself to categories of maleness and femaleness, masculinity and femininity, Woolf explored new possibilities of androgyny and intersexed identities, borrowing liberally from both sexological and psychoanalytic thinkers. What she learned was balanced against her own understanding

of narrative and emerged transformed in her work. This chapter aims at exploring this productive union of sex and narrative, while ideally striking a balance between the two predominant critical models already discussed.

V.II

Trapped Souls & Free Spirits

Virginia Woolf was born into a home she would later describe as “a complete model of Victorian society” (Moments of Being 147). In Woolf’s account, Sir Leslie Stephen adhered to a simple moral code, a “black and white world” in which there were “things to be destroyed” and “things to be preserved” (Moments 115). He valued simple qualities of “restraint”, “sympathy”, and “unselfishness” and worked to inculcate these in his children (Moments 150). In these efforts, he was aided by his wife who supported her husband in both raising his family and continuing his work. Virginia greatly admired their marriage, claiming it was based on mutual respect and admiration. Woolf goes so far as to claim that each found in the other “the highest and most perfect harmony which their natures could respond to” (Moments 37). While Woolf describes a sense of the palpable “delight” her parents felt when together, there is no real sense of an underlying sexual passion. Of course, this is not at all surprising. Woolf’s parents would have diligently shielded their children from any exposure to such things. As a result, Woolf grew up believing men and women were drawn together by bonds of companionate love. When a teenaged Woolf was approached by her brother-in-law, Jack Hills, and told that men often engaged in sexual relations with successive women, Woolf was incredulous. In recounting the exchange, she writes: “I knew nothing about ordinary men’s lives, and thought all men, like my father, loved one woman only, and were ‘dishonourable’ if unchaste” (Moments 104).

While Woolf's life at Hyde Park Gate seems to conform to stereotypes of Victorian prudishness and repression, there is one notable and important exception. While Leslie Stephen structured and guided most aspects of his children's lives, he was rather liberal in respect to their education. Both Virginia and her sister Vanessa were schooled at home. After early lessons given by their parents and two rather ineffective governesses, Virginia and her sister began to guide their own studies. Virginia was a voracious reader and, by the age of fifteen, borrowed freely from her father's substantial library. Sir Leslie made clear to Virginia that there were certain books he felt inappropriate reading for a girl of her age. Nevertheless, he allowed his daughter to make her own decisions as to what she read. In Quentin Bell's account, Sir Leslie believed that Virginia must freely embrace literature with all its "risks", in order to become a truly discriminating reader (1:51). These readings formed the foundation of Woolf's early understanding of the world. In particular, Woolf appears to have gleaned what limited knowledge she had about sex from the books she borrowed.

A primary source of Woolf's knowledge about sex appears to have been her readings in classical Greek literature. In recounting the aforementioned encounter with Jack Hills, Virginia admits to having known "all about sodomy" from reading Plato (Moments 104). Her initial interest in Greek appears to have been inspired by her brother Thoby and his enthusiasm for the subject during a visit home from school (Bell 1: 27). However, Bell speculates that, even at this early point, Virginia may have realized that "the Greeks belonged to Thoby in a way that they didn't belong to her" (1: 27). For him, the study of Greek formed "a part of the great male province of education ... from which she and Vanessa were to be excluded" (1:27). Bell's exact meaning here is somewhat vague.

Presumably, he is alluding to Virginia's persistent disappointment at having been denied a formal education. Yet, there is arguably more to Bell's comments than the author may have intended. In the late nineteenth century, the example of classical Greece played an important role in England's public schools and universities. Student relationships often mirrored the classical example with its emphasis on mentorship and tutelage. The Greek example was also used to justify the homosexual affairs that frequently occurred while students were at school. Indeed, the ideal of "Greek Love" was espoused by members of the Cambridge Society of Apostles, of which many Bloomsburians were once members. More than just an education, Virginia Woolf lacked an early sense of sexual community of the sort that often coincided with a formal education. As Jane Marcus notes, Woolf's later interest in Sappho may be read as her attempt to establish an alternate tradition rivalling the closed society of the Apostles (qtd. in Blackmer 87).

Interestingly, one of the principal influences on the Apostles also played an important role (albeit indirectly) in Woolf's sexual awakening. John Addington Symonds—revered by the Apostles for his writings in A Problem in Greek Ethics and A Problem in Modern Ethics—was a close friend of Leslie Stephen and in 1889 enjoyed a prolonged stay at the Stephen residence where he was affectionately known to the children as "The Chief". While Woolf would later learn of Symonds' homosexuality and his work with Havelock Ellis, the more important influence at this early point in Woolf's life was her meeting with Symonds' daughter Margaret, whom she lovingly called Madge. As Bell notes, Madge inspired tremendous longing in Virginia and was "the first to capture her heart" (1:60). While the relationship remained innocent and chaste, Virginia would later declare that "she had never felt a more poignant emotion for anyone" than what she felt for

Madge. Madge later married William Vaughn, Virginia's cousin on her mother's side. Perhaps still harbouring her own desires, Virginia thought poorly of William and disapproved of the match, believing Madge was "yet another of the women whose lives were to be sacrificed to their husbands" (Bell 1: 92).

The sense of sexual frustration and the lack of true community Woolf experienced eventually became the focus of her first major success as a novelist, Mrs. Dalloway. The novel follows Clarissa Dalloway as she prepares over the course of a single day for a party she is to give that evening. When a childhood friend, Peter Walsh, unexpectedly returns from India and calls upon Clarissa, her thoughts turn to the past. As a young man, Peter vied for Clarissa's affections and had even proposed marriage. Believing Peter would insist on complete disclosure and thereby deny her independence, Clarissa rejects Peter in favour of Richard Dalloway, an affable but unremarkable man who eventually comes to sit in Parliament. While Clarissa is certain she has made the right decision in marrying Richard, it is clear she is also dissatisfied and intrigued by what might have been had she chosen differently. To this point, the novel appears to be a conventional heterosexual romance about a woman torn between passion and her desire for material comfort and a position in society.

Behind this rather conventional narrative façade, a far more provocative story unfolds. The true love of Clarissa's early life was neither Peter nor Richard but, rather, her friend Sally Seton. As Vita Sackville-West first recorded in her journal, Woolf based the character of Sally on her early feelings for Madge Symonds (qtd. in Bell 1: 61). When Clarissa, excited by Sally's visit to her childhood home of Bourton, breathlessly exclaims "She is beneath this roof ... She is beneath this roof!" (37), the lines are lifted almost

verbatim from an entry Virginia had made in her diary during one of Madge's visits to Hyde Park Gate (Bell 1: 61). In the novel, Clarissa's attraction to Sally stems in large part from the latter's free-spirited, almost bohemian ways. While Sally is visiting, Clarissa feels naïve and sexually ignorant. She admires Sally for her many experiences and her willingness to shirk the conventions of femininity, smoking cigars and running naked to the shower. As Bell suggests in his biography, Virginia saw Madge as a similarly romantic figure. Owing to her father's struggles with tuberculosis, Madge spent much of her childhood in the mountains of Switzerland and had read a great deal. Virginia was smitten.

The innocence which Bell attributes to Virginia's love for Madge is paralleled in the novel. Woolf describes Clarissa's feelings for Sally in language that reflects the Greek spirit of camaraderie, but rendered in distinctly feminine/feminist terms.

The strange thing, on looking back, was the purity, the integrity of her feeling for Sally. It was not like one's feeling for a man. It was completely disinterested, and besides, it had a quality which could only exist between women, between women just grown up. It was protective, on her side; sprang from a sense of being in league together, a presentiment of something that was bound to part them (they spoke of marriage always as a catastrophe), which led to this chivalry, this protective feeling which was much more on her side than Sally's (37).

Indeed, there is very little sense of any sexual longing in the passage. The feelings that Clarissa has for Sally seem typical of a deep and abiding friendship. Yet, it soon becomes clear that there is a more distinctly sexual element to the friendship. While walking in a garden together, Sally stops to pick a flower and proceeds to kiss Clarissa on the lips.

Clarissa responds by feeling that she had “had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not look at it—a diamond, something infinitely precious, wrapped up, which, as they walked (up and down, up and down), she uncovered”. It was “the most exquisite moment of her whole life” (38-9).

Despite her assertion that the experience shared between Sally and Clarissa could only be understood by women, Woolf describes Clarissa’s attraction to women in distinctly masculine, almost orgasmic, language. She writes:

she did undoubtedly then feel what men felt. Only for a moment; but it was enough. It was a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush which one tried to check and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which split its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores! Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed. But the close withdrew; the hard softened. It was over—the moment (34-5).

The pleasure Woolf describes is intense, almost transcendental in its effect. With Sally, Clarissa experiences a moment of “illumination”. Their kiss is described by Woolf as a “revelation”, a “religious feeling” (39). In what becomes a recurrent theme in the book, religious ecstasy blends with a vocabulary of sexual excess. Pressure mounts only to be released in a sudden flood. This emphasis on the fleeting moment is juxtaposed against the more enduring quality of romantic companionship. Whereas Clarissa’s love for Sally is “disinterested” and based upon a “presentiment” of what is to come, her passion is

profoundly corporeal (therefore *interested*) and of the moment. In effect, Woolf creates a dichotomy between feminine love and masculine sexuality.

Significantly, Clarissa seems unable to relive her brief moment of passion. Due to Richard's long hours at work and the effects of her recent illness, Clarissa now sleeps alone in the attic where she ponders "a virginity preserved through childbirth" (34).⁴ Once married to Richard, Clarissa either foregoes sexual pleasure or adjusts to life in its absence. This is not to suggest Clarissa becomes somehow "sexless" or devoid of sexual feeling. Rather, Clarissa is, despite her marriage to Richard, still drawn to women. Woolf writes that Clarissa "could not yet resist sometimes yielding to the charm of a woman, not a girl, of a woman confessing, as to her they often did, some scrape, some folly" (34). Many critics have interpreted these passages to suggest that Clarissa is, in fact, a lesbian who entered into a marriage of convenience. While this may be true, it should be noted that Clarissa does not view herself as a lesbian. Clarissa is constrained by more than just social prohibitions and her love of the good life. She is deeply conflicted and even scornful of the possibilities of same-sex love. This becomes clear when one considers Clarissa's relationship with Doris Kilman, the woman hired to act as Elizabeth Dalloway's governess.

Doris Kilman appears in the novel as a mirror image of Clarissa (Moon 150). Whereas Clarissa is celebrated for both her beauty and sophistication, Doris is hopelessly uncouth, perspiring in her worn green mackintosh coat (12). Clarissa can charm everyone in a room. Doris unsettles people with pious superiority. Clarissa's vanity finds its opposite in Doris' asceticism and self-denial. While these obvious class differences form part of

⁴ The question of Virginia's own sexual "frigidity" was a source of anxiety between her and Leonard (Bell 2: 5-6).

Clarissa's complaint, what most upsets her is Doris' strong influence over her daughter, Elizabeth. Despite Richard's assurance that Elizabeth is just in the midst of an adolescent "phase" (12), Clarissa worries that her daughter has fallen in love with Doris.⁵ However, it is not the inaccessibility or remoteness of Elizabeth's desire that most troubles Clarissa. What truly angers her is the extent to which she herself has experienced similar desire. Doris is, in fact, a deeply ambivalent figure for Clarissa. In Doris, Clarissa sees a possible vision of herself had she chosen differently and not married Richard (Jensen 174). Woolf alludes to this when she writes: "no doubt with another throw of the dice, had the black been uppermost and not the white, [Clarissa] would have loved Miss Kilman! But not in this world. No." (13). Clarissa's hate serves to protect her from confronting her own repressed desire. Yet, such repression comes at a cost; Clarissa finds herself "never to be content quite, or quite secure", consumed by her hate—"a monster grubbing at the roots" of friendship and love (13).

Eileen Barrett argues that Clarissa's disdain for her daughter's relationship with Doris, as well as her own repressed desire, stems from an overwhelmingly pathological account of lesbianism derived from sexological discourse. Sexological theories were well-known and the subject of much speculation amongst members of the Bloomsbury group. Writers like Ulrich, Krafft-Ebing, and Ellis were all read with great interest and ideas drawn from their works provided the basis for what Barbara Fassler has categorized as a distinctly Bloomsburian theory of sex. It should be acknowledged that the positions espoused by these various sexological writers often differed. In fact, writers like Krafft-Ebing and

⁵ Richard's assertion is itself reflective of sexological thinking. Havelock Ellis notes the tendency of schoolgirls to develop romantic attachments to their teachers but qualifies his comments by claiming that this is not usually evidence of inversion and most women grow to be normal heterosexual women with a "distaste" for lesbian attraction (Studies 2: 2: 219).

Ellis substantially modified their own positions over the course of time. Nevertheless, the majority of thinkers were, as Fassler notes, united in their belief that homosexuality was the likely result of a hereditary or congenital influence. This led to the popular conception of the homosexual as a “trapped soul” (Fassler 241). Simply put, the trapped soul theory sees homosexual men as female spirits who have been wrongly born into male bodies. Similarly, lesbians are depicted as male souls inhabiting female bodies. Radclyffe Hall and her fictional alter ego, Stephen Gordon, can be seen as shaped by the trapped soul theory of sex.

Perhaps inspired by Hall’s example, Barrett reads the trapped soul theory as inherently negative. Due to the apparent discrepancy between biological sex and gendered identity, inverted men and women must struggle to be fully self-realized, freed from the prison of their bodies.⁶ By allowing the body to over-determine identity, the trapped soul theory treats homosexuality as an aberrant medical condition inhibiting the proper course of sexual development. In effect, any form of sexual longing or self-identification that fails to conform to the normative model of monogamous, heterosexual reproduction is rejected as pathological and requiring either rehabilitation or reproach. Along these lines, Barrett argues that:

Clarissa’s erotic fantasies reflect the ideal of romantic friendship. But by echoing the imagery of Clarissa’s fantasies in her descriptions of Doris’s and other characters’ lesbian desires, Woolf also illustrates the power of the sexologists to pervert the erotic language of romantic friendship into the language of homophobia and self-hatred (148).

⁶ It is interesting to note the continued influence of the trapped soul theory in certain contemporary discussions of transsexualism.

Indeed, the portrait Woolf paints of homosexuality is far from positive. While Clarissa's ambivalence has already been discussed, Barrett's argument is most forceful when one considers Doris' own self-loathing.

Doris is often described in reference to her many physical shortcomings. Quite simply, Doris is an ugly woman. While she lacks the money needed to adopt a more stylish mode of dress, Doris is shown by Woolf to be also physically unbecoming. Of Doris, Woolf writes that, "Do her hair as she might, her forehead remained like an egg, bald, white" (141). While Woolf is only describing Doris' forehead, the use of the word "bald" is leading. It suggests a distinctly masculine problem—one closely associated at the time with a loss of virility. Woolf also describes Doris as having "large hands" and "thick fingers" (144). These too are distinctly masculine features and, when found in women, were associated with inversion by Havelock Ellis and others. Importantly, Woolf draws attention to Doris' hands immediately after Doris vows that she loves Elizabeth and must not "let her go" (144). In effect, Doris' mannish hands suggest the presence of an underlying masculine sexual possessiveness. True to Barrett's critique of sexology, Woolf posits a connection between Doris' physiology and her outward behaviour.

Aware of her own physical failings, Doris vows to transcend her bodily needs. When Clarissa appears to laugh at her ugliness, Doris is struck by feelings of jealousy and inadequacy. In response, she condemns herself for having "not mastered the flesh" (140). Clarissa's insult had "revived the fleshly desires" (140). On one level, Doris is castigating herself for feelings of vanity, her desire to inhabit a different body (a feeling very much in keeping with the trapped soul theory). At the same time, her vanity stems from her desire to resemble Clarissa, to be deemed acceptable in her eyes. Her apparent hatred is,

in fact, a defence mechanism developed to mask her own desire. In order to strengthen her resolve, Doris leans upon her faith, struggling to accept Rev. Whitaker's promise that "Knowledge comes through suffering" (142). As Barrett notes, this turn towards God as a means of sublimating one's desire is actually something prescribed by Ellis in his writing ("Unmasking" 160). By conquering her desire, Doris hopes to win both grace and, even more importantly, a sense of moral superiority.

While Barrett is right to acknowledge the importance of religion in sublimating same-sex desire, she fails to consider the extent to which religion is also shown to be a form of seduction. Clarissa is resentful of Doris' influence on the religious education of her daughter. She sees Elizabeth's taking of communion as yet another undesirable habit she has learned from Doris, listed alongside her inattention to fashion and her lack of social grace (12). These complaints become part of what Clarissa fears is Doris' "conversion" of her daughter. Woolf implies that Doris is corrupting Elizabeth, steering her toward both religion and homosexuality. In this sense, conversion is almost synonymous with perversion. For Clarissa, love and religion are "detestable" because they force people into betraying their true selves (138). Woolf writes: "Had she ever tried to convert anyone herself? Did she not wish everybody merely to be themselves?" (138). In Clarissa's mind, Doris has tried to turn Elizabeth into something she is not: a lesbian. Clarissa sees Doris as "Elizabeth's seducer; the woman who had crept in to steal and defile" (191).

In depicting Doris as a predator, Woolf plays upon a relatively common fear of hired help and their sexual influence on children. Both Krafft-Ebing and Ellis cite numerous instances of servants corrupting their master's children, reflecting a widespread belief in the sexual impropriety and impulsiveness of the working classes. Though governesses

were often drawn from a somewhat higher economic class, they were not immune to such musings and even inspired their own set of fears. Indeed, the governess is an easy target for homophobic suspicion. Since most governesses were slightly older, unmarried women, they were easily construed as predators acting out their sexual frustrations with the children in their care. James' Turn of the Screw is perhaps the most famous literary example of the pernicious, sexually deviant governess. Even in more positive accounts, the stereotype is maintained. In Hall's first novel, The Unlit Lamp, it is Joan's governess who first causes her to feel lesbian desire. Stephen Gordon's governess in The Well of Loneliness is a lesbian who encourages Stephen (admittedly a true invert) to embrace her sexuality. The fear inspired by these characters is reflective of the Victorian tendency, identified by James Kincaid, to eroticize children while simultaneously endeavouring to protect their sexual innocence from adult aggression. By suggesting that Elizabeth may have been victimized by Doris, Woolf (deliberately or not) taps into broader cultural fears about a perceived connection between homosexuality and paedophilia.

Perhaps reflecting Woolf's own sexual anxieties, the inverted figure of Doris is mostly treated with contempt. She is viewed neither tragically nor sympathetically, in contrast to accounts of inversion provided by writers like Ellis and Hall. In fact, Doris is presented, at times, as more of a pervert (in a sexological sense) than congenital invert. Commenting again on Doris' unbecoming appearance, Woolf writes that "for a woman, of course, that meant never meeting the opposite sex" (141). This may suggest Doris is attracted to women, at least partially, because of her inability to secure a man—Doris believes that "Never would she be first with anyone" (141). Viewed in such a light, homosexual desire does *not* appear to be congenitally predetermined but, rather, a conditioned response to

social circumstances—namely the absence of an appropriate sexual partner. Lesbianism of this sort is a form of substitution or compensation—a deviation from the normal course of sexual development. In effect, Doris' seduction/conversion of Elizabeth diverts the girl from the normal course of development. Instead of helping Elizabeth discover her true identity, Doris is shown to mislead her.

Mrs. Dalloway does not offer a definite, unified statement on either the origins or the morality of same-sex desire. Instead, the novel vacillates between varying perspectives, reflecting perhaps the ambiguity or even ambivalence of Woolf's own sexual identity. Barrett is correct in noting Woolf's dissatisfaction with prevailing notions of lesbianism derived from a sexologically informed view of the congenital invert as a trapped soul. Yet, Barrett's critique replicates the exclusive, essentialist logic that Mrs. Dalloway calls into question. The novel mourns not so much the prohibition of a specific sexual identity (romantic friendship in Barrett's account) but the arbitrary restrictions and definitions placed upon sex and love. What is attacked is the need to conform to *any* fixed identity. Barrett's account is not entirely incorrect but merely incomplete. While Woolf plays with different definitions of lesbianism, the novel also suggests the extent to which these definitions are always inadequate or subject to constant change and revision. By showing that sexual instinct can be altered or, more precisely, "perverted", Woolf implies that sex may be dynamic, engaged in an ongoing process of transformation and change.

If the "trapped soul" theory of sex posits a fundamental discrepancy between mind and body, Mrs. Dalloway refuses to resolve this divide or pronounce a winner. The novel does not concede the ultimate authority of the body (the contemporaneous belief that biology was indeed destiny). Sally Seton is very successful in her roles as mother and

wife and Elizabeth's future loves have yet to be determined. At the same time, Woolf does not entirely deny the body and its influence on behaviour. Doris' problems stem from her unique physiology and she suffers from her inability to "master the flesh", to transcend the influence of her body. Considered individually, these characters apparently conform to sexological distinctions between inverted and perverted models of desire. Yet, these lines of demarcation begin to blur when the characters are seen in relation to one another. To understand Clarissa's complicated sexuality, one must consider the negative example provided by Doris. In effect, Clarissa is defined through contrast and juxtaposition to Doris. However, Woolf depicts Doris as not merely the opposite of Clarissa but, rather, her *mirror image*. The relationship is not one of pure difference but *obverse relation*. In addition to communicating distance, Woolf's use of mirroring also suggests proximity. By emphasizing both similarities and differences, Woolf at once affirms *and* challenges the essential differences that define the women and their desires. In so doing, Woolf leaves the reader with a paradoxical sense of the limitations of the body and the unboundedness of desire—a tension at the very heart of sexological discourse itself.

This dichotomy between sex and gender, body and mind, has a dual significance in Woolf's writing. As Barrett contends, Woolf's steadfast adherence to "medicalized" accounts of same-sex desire, in spite of her own doubts and misgivings, is indicative of the pervasive influence of sexological discourse as an instrument of social control. Yet, what Barrett fails to consider adequately is the extent to which Woolf exploits the instability of the discourse as a form of critique. Rather than challenging the existence of different sexological types, Woolf questions the permanence or immutability of such

designations. While accepting that sexual identity may be physiologically influenced or even predetermined, Woolf takes the radical step of wondering whether the body itself may be subject to periods of change and transformation. While the body exerts a definite influence on the mind, identity is never fully circumscribed and evolves in accordance with changes in the body. At various points in one's life, one might experience different sexual predispositions. Neither an experimental "phase" nor evidence of closeted false consciousness, each successive identity would be congenitally determined (expressive of a unique physiology) and deserving of respect and social acceptance. In Mrs. Dalloway, there is a nascent understanding of the body in change and the dynamism of sex as well as gender. Woolf would more fully develop these ideas during her discussion of androgyny in A Room of One's Own.

V.III

Androgynous Ambitions

While Barrett focuses primarily upon the rigidity and exclusiveness of sexological discourse (i.e. the extent to which sexology forecloses upon identity), Fassler qualifies her critique by also noting the important ways in which sexology empowered individuals. In particular, Fassler examines how writers were able to portray homosexual difference as an effective force for change in society. She notes that, within certain circles, people persecuted for homosexuality were seen to have been ennobled by their ordeals (249). Doris' aforementioned belief in the knowledge to be gained through suffering suggests Woolf's familiarity with this train of thought. Fassler also notes that homosexual unions, based on mutual affection and admiration, were held out as an important counter-example to the monetary and legal obligations attached to heterosexual marriage (249-50). Perhaps most importantly, Fassler notes the important role homosexuals were deemed to play in

facilitating *heterosexual* relationships. Building upon Plato's argument in *Symposium*, writers maintained that the two separate sexes once existed in a state of primal unity. The job of the homosexual is to draw upon both sides of his or her divided soul in order to help men and women come together and recover this lost unity. The sexual invert plays an important "integrative role", bridging the sexual divide and interpreting the sexes for one another (Fassler 250). Woolf's articulation of androgyny in *A Room of One's Own* is directed towards a similar reintegration or reconciliation of the sexes.

Still the author's most enduring and compelling work of non-fiction, *A Room of One's Own* was born out of two lectures Woolf gave at Cambridge University on the subject of women and fiction. In his biography, Bell describes the book as "that rare thing—a lively but good-natured polemic" (2:144). Indeed, *A Room of One's Own* is shaped both by the force of Woolf's convictions and the allure of her charm. On these strengths, the book quickly became a critical and commercial success. The tragic hero of the piece is Judith Shakespeare, William's imaginary sister. Like William, Judith possessed extraordinary literary skill. However, her talents were never fully realized. While William was sent to school and was free to roam London in pursuit of his fortune, Judith's future appeared sealed when her father promised her hand in marriage to the son of a neighbour. When Judith refuses, she is beaten and eventually takes flight to London. Barred from making a living in the theatre, Judith becomes pregnant and ends her life on a winter's night. In Judith, Woolf sees the common plight of most women seeking to write. Constrained by both financial limitations and social obligations, women must hide their art, depriving the world of a much needed voice. In order to redress this situation, Woolf concludes that "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (6).

By suggesting women require a separate, protected space in which to write, Woolf draws an important connection between the social/material conditions of women and the establishment of an alternative literary tradition that speaks directly to the reality of their lives. Marcus believes Woolf, in demanding women be allowed their own room, espouses “a feminist territorial imperative” designed to reclaim “space in which the feminist historian can investigate men’s opposition to women’s freedom” (“The Niece” 9). Indeed, Woolf effectively creates just such a space in the course of her lecture. Before discussing the desire that binds the fictional characters of Chloe and Olivia, Woolf asks the audience: “Are there any men here? Do you promise me that behind that red curtain over there the figure of Sir Charles Biron is not concealed?” (78).⁷ In interpreting this passage, Marcus notes how Woolf draws together her audience by emphasizing the gendered quality of the space, working to unite them against a common enemy that exists outside the sheltered confines of the lecture hall. In essence, Marcus sees Woolf’s questions as facilitating a nascent sense of feminist community.

Importantly, Marcus defines this new sense of community in terms of a distinct sexual identity. She argues that “women gathered in a room to discuss women and writing are, at least symbolically, lesbians, and the Law is the enemy” (Marcus, Virginia Woolf and the Languages 166). This notion of “symbolic” lesbianism is almost certainly derived from Adrienne Rich’s argument in “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence”, in which Rich directly references Woolf’s depiction of Chloe and Olivia. In the essay, Rich argues women are conditioned to understand their sexuality solely in terms of masculine desire. In turn, this inhibits or even prohibits women from building relationships with women that may or may not include genital stimulation. This range of alternate

⁷ As mentioned earlier, Biron was the presiding magistrate at the trial of The Well of Loneliness.

possibilities constitutes what Rich calls the “lesbian continuum” which spans “many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support” (27). Many forms of lesbian identification do not, in fact, seem to have any identifiable sexual component. Yet, Rich aims precisely to blur the line between the sexual and asexual, articulating a distinctly feminine model of desire free from the exclusive emphasis on genital pleasure. Nevertheless, she cleverly exploits the socio-political resonance of the term “lesbian” as a means of marking her difference and distance from patriarchal structures. The lesbian continuum is thus both inclusive and exclusive—open to all women but still critical of heterosexuality as a form of “false consciousness” (26).⁸

It is to the supposed exclusivity of Woolf’s vision that many feminist critics frequently return. Whether discussing Woolf’s critique of marriage or the seduction of her audience, critics emphasize moments when the author adopts what we might call an “oppositional” aesthetic. In these moments, Woolf appears to foreground difference, to position herself at a remove from the dominant, hegemonic position of power. There are passages in *A Room of One’s Own* in which Woolf appears to anticipate Cixous in calling for writing that is “adapted to the body”, a special “treatment” that reflects the fact that “the nerves that feed the brain would seem to differ in men and women” (74). She claims that “It would be a thousand pities if women wrote like men, or lived like men, or looked like men” (84). Upon even the most cursory reading, it is clear Woolf strongly distinguishes

⁸ It should be noted that Rich uses the term in a more sophisticated way than some of her critics would admit. She explicitly rejects the idea that heterosexual women are somehow “brainwashed” (39). Still, Rich argues that the spectre of normative heterosexuality conditions the formation of sexual identity, which raises questions as to why women engage in sexual relations with men.

between male and female or, more accurately, masculine and feminine modes of being. However, these categories are not absolute and one's status as either a man or a woman does not necessarily predetermine the manner in which one relates to a text. While Woolf believes that writing must be reinvented in order to reflect women's realities, she also makes clear that anyone can read not just *like* a woman but *as* a woman. This apparent paradox is at the heart of Woolf's conception of androgyny.

Woolf maintains that androgyny is the ideal position from which to write. Androgyny is not the absence of sex nor the negation of sex owing to the equal presence of opposing instincts. Instead, androgyny is a pure, unmediated expression of sex. Woolf states that Mary Carmichael (the imagined author of the Chloe and Olivia episode) "wrote as a woman, but as a woman who has forgotten that she is a woman, so that her pages were full of that curious sexual quality which comes only when sex is unconscious of itself" (88). In other words, androgynous writing may still be gendered but the author writes as though he or she is unconscious of gender. By refusing to write in a specific sexed voice, the androgynous author is able to address a more universal truth. Rather than parroting essentialist gender stereotypes, the androgynous mind blends masculine and feminine elements to create a unique perspective. In fact, the androgynous mind is fundamentally imaginative; since the androgyne cannot accept a world divided along strict gendered lines, she or he must always rethink reality. Borrowing from Coleridge, Woolf writes "the androgynous mind is resonant and porous...it transmits emotion without impediment...it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided" (94).

Though simply and directly argued, Woolf's definition of androgyny is remarkably complex, focussing alternately on physiological questions of sex and more abstract issues

surrounding imagination and artistic creation. Critical appraisals often selectively focus on one of these two poles. For her part, Marcus tends to see androgyny in terms of sex. Though claiming “androgyny is a privileged fifth sexual and literary stance”, Marcus, with some justification, concludes Woolf is “biased in favour of women” (Virginia Woolf and the Languages 138, 174). For Marcus, androgyny is a “good idea for overly masculine writers to try, though the opposite does not hold true” (Virginia Woolf and the Languages 174). In other words, androgyny is a concession Woolf offers to male readers as a means of engaging with feminist texts; it is a way of temporarily escaping some of the trappings of power. Women, by virtue of their difference, do not require such an escape. Positioned on the margins of patriarchal power, women have an almost innate understanding of both phallocentrism and the revolutionary potential of a more decentred, organic discourse. More simply, Marcus, despite her comments to the contrary, tends to treat androgyny as merely one example of the radical alterity at the heart of feminine sexuality.

In her influential study, Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision, Nancy Topping Bazin takes a rather different approach. Bazin tends to see masculinity and femininity as two poles on a continuum of psychological experience ranging from mania to depression. Masculinity is equated with depression and is experienced as solipsism or an almost exclusive emphasis on the self as it changes over time. In contrast, femininity represents a state of mania in which the individual is consumed by a sense of “oneness” and permanence or timelessness. From a clinical perspective, mania and depression are paired opposites. Bipolar individuals experience each state in succession; manic highs are followed by depressive lows. In this sense, mania and depression are mutually exclusive

conditions. Yet, Bazin argues that Woolf believed life could only be understood if one bridged this apparent divide. In Bazin's view, Woolf concluded "life is both transitory (ever changing) and whole (never changing)" (21). As in the Platonic model, androgyny symbolizes the longed for union of these extremes. It is an attempt to inhabit an apparently excluded middle. Whereas Marcus risks subsuming androgyny under the catch-all of female Otherness, Bazin preserves a sense of Woolf's ambiguity and presents androgyny as a truly interstitial alternative. Yet, the specifically sexual component of Woolf's argument is largely lost. For Bazin, androgyny is primarily a metaphor, a way of figuring an abstract psychological dynamic. Though mania and depression are presented as gendered modes of existence, Bazin's argument is more concerned with describing a state of mind than types of bodies.

To properly understand Woolf's position in A Room of One's Own, equal attention must be paid to questions of art, psychology, physiology, and feminist resistance. While the book is primarily a feminist tract, Woolf's feminism must be understood in reference to these other concerns. The key is not to attack Woolf's argument, paring away what appears to be extraneous information and resolving apparent contradictions until one arrives at a logically consistent core belief. Instead, these inherent tensions and paradoxes must be maintained. Woolf's belief in essential feminine difference (the need for writing adapted to the uniqueness of women's "nerves" and "brains") must be weighed against her articulation of androgyny as an ideal state of being. Androgyny should not be subordinate to femininity or feminism (the fault, at times, in Marcus' reading). Nor should androgyny be taken as a simple metaphor, at a remove from questions of sex (as with Bazin). Instead, efforts should be made to understand how Woolf negotiated this

dynamic middle ground. As Pamela Caughie rightly notes, Woolf sees androgyny “not as a metaphysical theory, not as a resolution to or a synthesis of contrarities, but as a way to remain suspended between opposed beliefs” (486). For Woolf, androgyny is dynamic; it marks her refusal to live within prescribed parameters and adhere to conventional expectations. For Woolf, “It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly” (99). Most simply, “Androgyny is a refusal to choose” (Caughie 486).

By framing her argument in terms of sexual intermediacy, Woolf was clearly drawing upon sexological discourse. As Fassler notes, Weininger’s influence was far-reaching and discussions of his work were likely common in Bloomsbury (243). The notion that people are either “woman-manly” or “man-womanly” is almost certainly based, at least in part, on Weininger’s theories. Though Woolf’s particular opinion of Weininger is unknown, her interest would have to have been qualified. It seems unlikely that Woolf would have shared Stein’s enthusiasm for a formula capable of predicting sexual attraction. Woolf would have certainly been repulsed by Weininger’s deranged misogyny. If anything, Weininger’s work likely confirmed ideas Woolf had already drawn from a more reliable and respected source: the poet and sexual reformer, Edward Carpenter.

Carpenter was a member of the older generation, replacing Leslie Stephen as a fellow of Trinity Hall, when Stephen left Cambridge in 1867. He was a close friend of both John Addington Symonds and Havelock Ellis and his writings on sex represent an amalgam of the former’s interest in culture and the latter’s attention to science. For the young men of Bloomsbury, Carpenter was an important and revered figure, with whom many were personally acquainted. A portrait of Carpenter painted by Roger Fry hangs today in the

National Portrait Gallery. Even more significantly, E. M. Forster once called Carpenter a “saviour” and cites a visit to Carpenter’s home as important moment of sexual awakening and the genesis of his posthumously published novel, Maurice (Maurice 217). While extolling the virtues of male camaraderie and homosexual love, Carpenter also devoted some of his time to feminist concerns. Like many before him, Carpenter believed that women were emotionally sensitive, yet intellectually undeveloped. However, Carpenter argued that this shortcoming resulted from the sexual and domestic disadvantages foisted upon women. Woman’s true abilities would emerge only when freed from her servitude. Almost anticipating Woolf’s writing in A Room of One’s Own, Carpenter argues that “Not till our whole commercial system, with its barter and sale of human labour and human love for gain, is done away, and not till a whole new code of ideals and customs of life has come in, will women really be free” (Love’s 60). Woman must be able to provide for themselves, to have a source of income other than her sex. Only then could she find the space to develop her mind. In other words, feminism was inseparable from a broader socio-economic transformation.

Carpenter’s feminist vision should not be overstated. Like Ellis, Carpenter believed that the ideal woman was a mother who raised children with a sense of community and civic duty. Though perhaps “liberated”, Carpenter’s ideal still resembled the Victorian model of woman as a guarantor of virtue—with an interesting eugenic twist. Carpenter claimed, in freeing women from the demands of masculine desire, “the more dignified and serious aspect of women towards sex may give to sexual selection when exercised by them a nobler influence than when exercised by the males” (Love’s 71). While radical in his day, Carpenter was by no means an ideal feminist model for Woolf. Carpenter did,

however, attempt to take seriously the question of femininity and devoted a significant amount of his writing to the subject. While men like Forster denied lesbians a place in the larger discussion of homosexuality (Woolf's diary notes that Forster "thought Sapphism disgusting: partly from convention, partly because he disliked that women should be independent of men"), Carpenter argued questions of masculinity and femininity were inseparable and that "The two halves of the human race are complementary, and it is useless for one to attempt to glorify itself at the expense of the other" (Woolf, Diary 3: 193; Carpenter, Love's 54). Carpenter's writing helped to broaden the parameters of the discussion and allowed women like Woolf a voice in the debate.⁹

Carpenter's exact influence on Woolf is difficult to determine. Woolf's many letters and diary entries do not make any specific mention of his work. Nevertheless, in reading Woolf, Carpenter's influence is undeniable. In particular, Carpenter manages to balance a belief in the uniqueness of lesbian experience with an overarching commitment to sexual intermediacy—his own form of androgyny. Like many feminist critics who see Woolf's desire for women as stemming, in part, from the mistreatment and abuse she suffered at the hands of her step-brother, Carpenter believed that men's oppression of women has caused "womenkind to draw more closely together and to cement alliances of their own" (Intermediate 79). Echoing Rich, Carpenter claims that these "alliances" may be coloured by "homogenic passion" but this passion is inseparable from other political concerns. Like the soldiers in Whitman's Calamus passage, women fighting for equality benefit from their experience of comrade-love (Intermediate 78). Carpenter even goes so far as to say, again like Rich, that sexuality may be secondary in such relationships. In fact, such

⁹ This more positive account of Carpenter is in contrast to Barrett's reading which sees Carpenter's views on the "mannish" lesbian as an irritant to which Woolf was forced to respond.

love may be purely emotional in character and based upon common interests and shared beliefs (Love's 129).¹⁰ This is the precise sentiment expressed by Woolf when describing Clarissa's love for Sally as naïve and "disinterested". Not as restrictive or prescriptive as Barrett suggests, Carpenter's definition allows for multiple forms of lesbian experience, each valid and necessary in the larger struggle for equality.

Carpenter's influence is most evident in Woolf's search for an alternative to absolute categories of masculinity and femininity. More simply, Woolf's androgyny bears a strong likeness to Carpenter's vision of sexual intermediacy. As Fassler notes, Carpenter was drawn to the idea of a "trapped soul". Of inverted or homogenic people, Carpenter writes that:

while belonging to one sex as far as their bodies are concerned they may be said to belong *mentally* and *emotionally* to the other; that there were men, for instance, who might be described as of feminine soul enclosed in a male body...or in other cases, women whose definition would be just the reverse (Love's 123).

Importantly, Carpenter found the idea of the trapped soul to be a useful *theory*, but by no means a definitive, exhaustive account of homosexuality. He merely suggests the theory is "perhaps not without merit, and may be worth bearing in mind", in so far as it helps to explain homosexual attraction from a biological or physiological perspective (Love's 130). In Carpenter's words, society must have "the sense to recognise and establish the innumerable and delicate distinctions of relation which build up the fabric of a complex social organism" (Love's 154-5). Most basically, Carpenter seeks a fuller, more complete

¹⁰ Building upon the distinction between congenital inversion and perversion, Carpenter claims that this emotional interest distinguishes the invert from the "libertine".

picture of sexuality and its place in society—a demand very much in keeping with both scientific and literary attempts to refine and expand the limits of representation.

A similar impetus can be found in Woolf's writing. Lamenting the absence of women in the literary tradition, Woolf writes that "if two sexes are quite inadequate, considering the vastness and variety of the world, how should we manage with only one?" (A Room 84). She continues:

Ought not education to bring out and fortify the differences rather than the similarities? For have we too much likeness as it is, and if an explorer should come back and bring word of other sexes looking through the branches of other trees at other skies, nothing would be of greater service to humanity (84).¹¹

Like Carpenter, Woolf aims not to dictate the terms of the debate but rather to broaden its scope by exploring the possibility of a sexual middle ground. This middle ground does not negate heterosexual desire but simply augments it. While watching a man and woman enter a taxi, Woolf experiences a "profound, if irrational" sense that men and women instinctively belong together, working together in a spirit of co-operation (93). Though this heterosexual union gives Woolf a sense of satisfaction, she nevertheless finds herself wondering "whether there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body, and whether they also require to be united in order to get complete satisfaction and happiness" (93).

Building upon this intuition, Woolf begins to "sketch out a plan of the soul" based upon the idea that "in each of us two powers preside, one male, one female; and in the man's brain the man predominates over the woman, and in the woman's brain the woman

¹¹ Interestingly, this anthropological impulse—the notion of an explorer going abroad and bringing back evidence of alternative sexual practices—was at the heart of a great deal of sexological writing. Much of Ellis' work focuses on "lost" or "primitive" tribes.

predominates over the man” (93-4). In language even more evocative of Weininger and Carpenter, Woolf goes on to state that “The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually co-operating. If one is a man, still the woman part of his brain must have effect; and a woman must also have intercourse with the man in her” (94). Woolf’s use of the word “intercourse” is telling. For her, the union of masculine and feminine impulses is germinal, planting a seed from which future social and artistic advancements will grow. Continuing with this metaphor of fecundity, Woolf argues that “It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine” (94). “Some collaboration has to take place in the mind between the woman and the man before the art of creation can be accomplished. Some marriage of opposites has to be consummated” (99). Woolf’s play upon the idea of coition resembles Carpenter when he writes that:

as the ordinary love has a special function in the propagation of the race, so the other has its special function in social and heroic work, and in the generation—not of bodily children—but of those children of the mind, the philosophical conceptions and ideals which transform our lives and those of society (Intermediate 71).

Desiring some form of union or reconciliation, both writers were forced to consider how best to bring about this end.

While excited by the possibilities of androgyny or sexual intermediacy, both Woolf and Carpenter believed that society was either ignorant of or reluctant to embrace such a possibility. Carpenter believed that prejudice and intolerance prohibited people from fully

appreciating the benefits of sexual intermediacy. It was only with the advent of sexology that these preconceptions were redressed and a frank and honest discussion of sexuality became possible (Intermediate 66). As a result of this new found freedom, Carpenter argues that “at the present time certain new types of human kind may be emerging, which will have an important part to play in the societies of the future” (Intermediate 12). This new “type” is the sexual intermediate or, borrowing from Ulrich, what Carpenter calls the “Uranian”. The job of the Uranian is to mediate between the two sexes. In Carpenter’s view:

It is a common experience for [intermediates] to be consulted now by the man, now by the woman, whose matrimonial conditions are uncongenial or disastrous—not generally because the consultants in the least perceive the Uranian nature, but because they instinctively feel that here is a strong sympathy with and understanding of their side of the question (Intermediate 122-3).

While those who seek the council of Uranians may not recognize their own divided spirit, Carpenter suggests that a true and fruitful union of the sexes is nevertheless dependent upon recognizing the extent to which the other sex is constituted in the self. In his view, Uranians cannot play their role unless “the capacity for their kind of attachment also exists—though in a germinal and undeveloped state—in the breast of mankind at large. And modern thought and investigation are clearly tending that way—to confirm that it does so exist” (Intermediate 117-8). Most basically, Uranians must raise awareness of the sexual multiplicity that exists in everyone.

Like Carpenter, Woolf desires a greater understanding of sexual difference. However, her position differs in one significant respect. Carpenter argues that men and women will

naturally be drawn to sexual intermediates based upon an “instinctive” feeling of “strong sympathy”. Essentially, Carpenter sees intermediacy as a form of equilibrium, a moment in which tension is resolved and the organism is able to achieve a state of rest. Woolf’s conception, in contrast, is more dynamic. For her, the mind is already able to shift focus, to alternate between different modes of recognition and identification. Women can feel themselves part of the larger culture, only to feel isolated and alienated a moment later. Both perspectives are important if women are to improve their lot. Yet, Woolf claims these shifts in perspective require an act of repression; to feel as though she is part of society, a woman must actively suppress her feelings of anger and frustration. In Woolf’s words, “one is unconsciously holding something back” when one attempts to consider radically different perspectives and “gradually the repression becomes an effort” (A Room 93). This extra effort can become an encumbrance, limiting one’s desire to think outside the parameters of the already familiar. Whereas Carpenter claims individuals are instinctively drawn to the idea of intermediacy, Woolf believes we are, at least initially, reluctant to relinquish the sense of security derived from a fixed, stable gender identity.

Unwilling to abandon such an enticing and potentially revolutionary prospect, Woolf asks whether there is “some state of mind in which one could continue without effort because nothing is required to be held back” (93). She finds her answer in androgyny, a free and far-ranging orientation in which one is capable of effortless transitions. If a conscious awareness of gender leads to repression and inhibition, androgyny must be, as noted earlier, an *unconscious* state of mind—when one thinks and writes as a woman, “but as a woman who has forgotten that she is a woman”. The difficulty becomes one of how consciously to encourage the adoption of an unconscious position. Like Stein, Woolf

believed this was accomplished by first abandoning habit. When Woolf claims that “the mind is always altering its focus, and bringing the world into different perspectives”, she is almost certainly building upon a Jamesian stream of consciousness. Individuals, guided by previous experience, selectively focus on certain elements within a broad field of potential sensations. In other words, we habitually seek out the familiar. If this habit can be broken, the individual is free to focus on new possibilities and experiences. When, in Mrs. Dalloway, Peter returns for the first time to Trafalgar Square, he experiences an exhilarating sense of dislocation. He finds himself asking “What is it? Where am I? And why, after all, does one do it?” (56-7). He senses his mind operating, as though “strings were pulled” and “shutters moved”, although he himself had “nothing to do with it” (57). Woolf writes that “He had escaped! was utterly free—as happens in the downfall of habit when the mind, like an unguarded flame, bows and bends and seems about to blow from its holding” (57). In this unguarded and primitive state, the mind is unbiased and arbitrary limitations such as gender expectations begin to recede.

The question remaining for Woolf was how to recreate Peter’s experience for her reader. More precisely, how could writing work to transcend the limits of habit? Since Woolf was particularly interested in changing perceptions of gender, sex and desire were potential tools to be exploited. Carpenter wrote that “Eros is a great leveller. Perhaps the true Democracy rests, more firmly than anywhere else, on a sentiment which easily passes the bounds of class and caste, and unites in the closest affection the most estranged ranks of society” (115-6). In an almost proto-Freudian manner, Carpenter sees desire as a wild, undirected force that issues forth from the individual seeking contact and cathexis. It is this spontaneity of desire that likely attracted Woolf to Carpenter’s vitalism. That is

to say, Carpenter provided an important response to Jamesian determinism (Gordon 32). At the same time, Woolf could not entirely abandon the Jamesian model. In order to harness the power of desire, desire itself had to be somewhat predictable. It had to be subject to the influence of habit. To the extent that Woolf could predict these habitual responses, she could guide her reader in the experience of the text. Having “seduced” the reader into erotically investing in the text, Woolf could begin to alter expectations, injecting new and unanticipated elements into the narrative. According to the Jamesian model, these new experiences would *physically* recondition the body, creating new habits which could then be seized upon and used to best advantage by the writer. It is the circularity of this logic which is so powerful. By producing works that cater to the unique needs and desires of specifically sexed bodies, the writer is able to encourage new forms of identification that transcend the idiosyncrasies of the individual and give rise to the construction of community.¹² This joint appeal to both individuality and community is at the heart of Woolf’s most sexually charged work, Orlando.

V.IV *Adventures in Androgyny*

When first published in 1928, Orlando was an instant success, selling more than eight thousand copies in six months. In his biography of Woolf, Quentin Bell attributes much of the book’s popularity to the topicality of its subject¹³ and the relative simplicity of its prose. Woolf had gained a reputation as a notoriously difficult writer, though “a novelist who must be tackled if one were to lay any claims to intellectual alertness” (2:139). For those readers disoriented or intimidated by Woolf’s formal experiments, Orlando’s direct approach and dynamic pacing seemed like “an answer to prayer” (Bell 2:140). Even the

¹² Gordon makes a similar, though not identical, argument in his reading of The Waves.

¹³ Orlando was published a mere six days after Hall’s trial.

author thought the book a playful indulgence, a “treat” she granted herself as a diversion from the difficulties she experienced while compiling The Common Reader (qtd. in Bell, 2:131). In the afterword to a later edition of the novel, Elizabeth Bowen claims that “it is among the glories of *Orlando* that it is in some ways a foolish book...a novelist’s holiday, not a novel” (219). Yet, this playfulness and whimsy does not detract from its artistic value. As Bowen notes, Orlando is a highly structured and formally experimental work of art, what she calls “a miracle of ‘build’” (219). She connects the book with Woolf’s larger aesthetic concerns, going so far as to cite it as an important step towards Woolf’s monumental accomplishments in The Waves (221). Though unlike any other work in her *œuvre*, Orlando is still animated by Woolf’s constant desire to engage her reader and achieve a sense of psychological connectedness.

Woolf’s seduction of the reader begins with her choice of genre. Orlando is a fantasy, a romantic tale of lost love and exotic locales. Beyond the famous sex change episode, the novel contains many other extraordinary events. Early in the novel, England plunges into an immediate and lasting period of intense cold. Birds fall from the air, frozen in mid-flight. A woman is blown to dust when hit by a gust of icy wind. Though rather dire, this unexpected event becomes the basis of a festival where people come to skate and play on the frozen river. The temporality of the novel is similarly fantastic. When we are first introduced to Orlando, he is a young courtier to Queen Elizabeth. When the narrative concludes in 1928, Orlando is still quite young, not yet middle-aged. These breaks with realism give the book a carnivalesque quality and encourage the reader to make an imaginative leap. The seven day sleep preceding Orlando’s transformation is, as Constance Hunting notes in a relatively early reading of the book, “the conventional

device of the fairy tale to which instinctive acceptance harks back” (435). In other words, we are naturally inclined to accept Orlando’s remarkable story because it reminds us of stories told to us as children. Most basically, Woolf’s use of genre disarms the reader and enables the writer to push the boundaries of believable representation.

It is essential that Woolf build this sense of trust or understanding between herself and the reader. Orlando is a romance and, as such, the reader is encouraged to relate to the protagonist, to see the world through his eyes and live vicariously through him. In other words, the protagonist becomes both the focus of and the vehicle for the reader’s desire. In the traditional romance or fairy tale, this most often involves the hero proving himself in some test or battle, then emerging with fame and the love of a woman. This archetypal story is, in fact, central to a patriarchal mythology in which women are seen as men’s reward. Indeed, when the reader is first introduced to Orlando, he is swinging his sword at the head of a Moor hung from the rafters. This serves to identify Orlando with ideals of courage and adventure and creates expectations of what is to come. At court, Orlando’s life seems destined to follow a predictable course. Woolf alludes to these expectations when she writes: “From deed to deed, from glory to glory, from office to office he must go, his scribe following after, till they reach whatever seat it may be that is the height of their desire” (8). Accordingly, the biographer’s task appears to be an easy one, charting familiar terrain without need to “invoke the help of novelist or poet” (8).

Despite the biographer’s reassurances, it soon becomes clear, however, that Orlando’s story will be rather different. Having raised conventional expectations, Woolf carefully begins to dismantle this model, offering in its place a far more unfamiliar, disorienting story. At the outset, Woolf makes clear that the hero of her story is a masculine figure. In

the first line, she claims that “there could be no doubt of his sex”. Yet, she immediately qualifies this by admitting that “the fashion of the day did something to disguise it” (7). The line serves to call into question possible discrepancies between surfaces and depths, a technique that becomes central to Woolf’s treatment of sex and gender in the novel. This effect is magnified when Woolf describes Orlando’s physique. She comments upon his downy red cheeks, almond white teeth, fine nose, and small ears. These characteristics give the sense of an, at most, adolescent sexuality. Orlando is not yet fully formed, still caught in a period of transformation and change. Orlando’s delicate features may even suggest a certain feminine quality to his character. In effect, a contrast is drawn between Orlando’s decidedly masculine behavior and his somewhat feminine appearance. While this contrast in no way foreshadows Orlando’s later transformation, there is a sense, even at this early point, that sex and gender may not be absolute. More simply, Woolf begins to build a sense of ambiguity.

This ambiguity becomes even more pronounced when Orlando first encounters Sasha, a Russian princess traveling with the Muscovite ambassador. From a distance, Orlando perceives “a figure, which, whether boy’s or woman’s, for the loose tunic and trousers of the Russian fashion served to disguise the sex, filled him with the highest curiosity” (22). Initially, Orlando is attracted to the figure in the absence of obvious sexual markers or characteristics. Instead of segmenting the body into sexually distinct components, Woolf locates Orlando’s interest in “the extraordinary seductiveness which issued from *the whole person*” (23, emphasis added). Yet, Woolf makes a concession to her potential critics and censors. When Orlando sees the figure gracefully and energetically skating upon the river, he assumes it must be a man. In response, “Orlando was ready to tear his

hair with vexation that the person was his own sex, and thus *all embraces were out of the question*” (22, emphasis added). While this may seem a conservative gesture on Woolf’s part (i.e. refusing to raise the prospect of same-sex desire), the passage is actually more complicated. Just as Orlando is unable to relinquish his desire easily, the reader remains similarly engaged in the developing dynamic. In a sense, the prohibition can be seen as actually raising the specter of such an attraction. That is to say, the act of proscribing desire also defines it and marks it as a potential course of action—the very concern raised in response to the dissemination of sexological writing. Woolf, in effect, plays upon the double resonance of the injunction. Having planted this seed of doubt, Orlando’s desire is, ultimately, reaffirmed and rendered acceptable when it is revealed that Sasha is indeed a woman. Still, it is clear that Orlando’s affairs will push the boundaries of conventional attraction and the reader, if s/he is to remain engaged in text, must modify his or her expectations. In the words of Jane de Gay, “the unruly bodies of Orlando and Sasha threaten to disrupt the conventional narrative the biographer is trying to construct” (34).

Despite its somewhat unusual beginning, the relationship between Orlando and Sasha soon begins to follow a more typical trajectory. The lovers spend a great deal of time together and, despite occasional moments of jealousy, grow ever closer. Predictably, an obstacle soon emerges to separate them. While Orlando is waiting to meet Sasha, the ice melts and frees the trapped ships. Before he realizes what has happened, Orlando looks to sea and finds the Russian vessel setting off with Sasha aboard. Orlando is devastated and slips into deep depression. Seeking solace, he turns to poetry but finds himself unable to write. Seeking guidance and inspiration, he builds a friendship with Sir Nicolas Greene, a famous 17th century poet, only to be exploited and made the subject of a satiric poem.

Finally, Orlando is doggedly pursued by the amorous Archduchess Henrietta¹⁴ and, to escape, accepts a post as Charles II's emissary to Constantinople. Specifically, Orlando is asked to engage in "the most delicate negotiations" leading to treaties between England and Turkey (78). Though Orlando plays the role of statesman rather than soldier, the apparent tension underlying his visit to Turkey echoes earlier accounts of crusaders sent to the East to fight for king and country. Orlando's life is, in fact, threatened during an armed rebellion. Most basically, the journey to Turkey marks a challenge for Orlando from which, according to tradition, he is to emerge transformed.

While Constantinople is a site of danger and intrigue, it is also strangely alluring. For Woolf and her early readers, perceptions of the city were likely colored by an Orientalist bias. Turkey was a gateway to the East and seen as exotic, mystical, and deeply sensual. At the same time, Constantinople was also, in some respects, a European city. For Woolf, this dual heritage gave Constantinople a liminal or interstitial quality (Boxwell 312). As Karen Lawrence notes, this liminality carries over to questions of sex and challenges the validity of expected gender norms. Woolf's impressions could only have been reaffirmed by Vita's published recollections of Jane Dieulafoy's experiences cross-dressing in Persia to secure an audience with the Shah (Boxwell 315). Along these lines, D. A. Boxwell argues that "[b]y displacing both gender and sex transformations to the orient, Woolf's satiric agenda enables her to invent a fantastic and utopian space for such transformations to occur" (323). In other words, Constantinople becomes, for Woolf, a site of new sexual possibilities. Yet, this sense of liminality does not supplant notions of the city as place of great battles and heroes born. Instead, Woolf plays each impression against the other. In so far as the city evokes specific gender identities, Constantinople is both traditional and

¹⁴ Henrietta/Henry will be more fully discussed in the following pages.

transgressive—supportive of the status quo, while simultaneously providing a vehicle for subversive rereading and redefinition. Both these impulses inform and enable what is unquestionably the novel's most famous episode: Orlando's sex change.

While he is still in Turkey, Orlando learns he is to be made a duke upon arrival of the next English frigate. To celebrate, he arranges "an entertainment more splendid than any known before or since in Constantinople" (83). Witnessing the spectacle, the locals begin to believe that a miracle is imminent and "a shower of gold was prophesied to fall from the skies" (85). Described by way of fantastic, almost breathless, accounts taken from the diaries of people in attendance, the party seems yet another example of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque. However, Woolf, in a now familiar manner, frustrates this expectation. There is no real inversion of power or authority. When the Turks suddenly begin to storm Orlando's residence, the revolt is quickly put down by British soldiers. Order seems to be restored—though only for the moment. Orlando retires to his room and falls into a deep sleep lasting seven days. On the seventh day, hostilities once again flare up and soon the ambassador's house falls to invaders. Orlando, still asleep, is mistaken for dead and left unharmed. When he finally wakes, he discovers that he is now a woman. Again, Woolf moves back and forth between generic expectations and novel diversions. The reader is constantly kept off balance, alternately pulled in opposite directions.

The biographer's reluctance to discuss Orlando's transformation further develops this dynamic. Having already mentioned the numerous gaps in the record of Orlando's time abroad, Woolf claims that, at the moment of his transformation, "obscurity descends" (87). Rather than uncover the truth behind this remarkable event, the biographer longs to embrace this obscurity. He writes: "Would that we might here take the pen and write

Finis to our work! Would that we might spare the reader what is to come and say to him in so many words, Orlando died and was buried.” (87). Had Orlando died, the narrative would have logically and recognizably concluded; Orlando’s story, though unusual, would be yet another historical tragedy. This desire to limit or control the text—to make it conform to expectations—is echoed by the classical figures of Purity, Chastity, and Modesty. Inventions of the biographer, the three vow to conceal the nature of the change but are quickly ordered away by the trumpets of Truth. Unable to wholly admit defeat, they announce their retreat and close ranks around

those who prohibit; those who deny; those who reverence without knowing why; those who praise without understanding; the still very numerous (Heaven be praised) tribe of the respectable; who prefer to see not; desire to know not; love the darkness; those who still worship us (90).

Though ostensibly the voice of reasoned discretion, the three “sisters” actually encourage the reader to continue on with the text. As censors, their appeal is to ignorance and their constituents appear foolish and obdurate. Furthermore, they build anticipation about the nature of the still undisclosed secret. In effect, Woolf’s treatment of the three is intended “to mock and seduce” (Hankins 183). That is to say, the reader begins to appreciate the actual impossibility of ever totally limiting desire; the text begins to slip beyond control of the biographer/censor.

Remarkably, Orlando is not particularly surprised or perturbed by his transformation. Upon first discovering he is a woman, Orlando merely “looked himself up and down in a long looking-glass, without showing signs of discomposure” (90). In fact, the mundanity of the transformation, the simplicity with which it is accomplished, seems to minimize

the sense of disjunction one might expect to feel when faced with such an occurrence. In Woolf's own words, the change happened "painlessly and completely and in such a way that Orlando showed no surprise" (91). Yet, Woolf acknowledges that others may not be as easily persuaded. She continues: "Many people, taking this into account, and holding that such a change of sex is against nature, have been at great pains to prove (1) that Orlando had always been a woman, (2) that Orlando is at this moment a man" (91). The discrepancy between the ease with which Orlando accepts his change and the difficulties it poses for others mirrors the challenge faced by the reader. As Gillian Beer argues, "In reading we readily shift gender—until the activity is pointed out to us and then it seems strange" (57). In terms of the narrative, the sex change is yet another fantastic element, following upon Orlando's extraordinary longevity and his remarkable experiences in Constantinople. When seen from a distance, however, the change seems bizarre and even unsettling. Having developed both these responses in counterpoint to one another, Woolf then appears to impose closure. She writes: "It is enough for us to state the simple fact; Orlando was a man till the age of thirty; when he became a woman and remained so ever since" (91).

Despite her comments to the contrary, it is clear that Woolf does not see Orlando as a typical woman. More precisely, Woolf demonstrates that such a simple designation can not capture the complexity of Orlando's character. Woolf writes that "Orlando remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity" (90). The use of the plural pronoun is telling; it implies that Orlando possesses multiple identities, both masculine *and* feminine. Since we lack an adequate vocabulary to express such mutuality, Woolf writes of individuality that can

only be understood as duality or dichotomy. The effect is deliberately incongruous. The lack of grammatical accord offends the ear, implying the need for a new vocabulary of sex and gender. At this stage in his/her life, Orlando is a definite sexual intermediate. Woolf writes: “His form combined the strength of a man and a woman’s grace” (90). When he dresses, Orlando dons distinctly androgynous Turkish dress, “coats and trousers which can be worn indifferently by either sex” (91). Leaving the palace, Orlando is immediately accepted into a tribe of rustic gypsies. Though this is accounted for by Orlando’s dark hair and complexion, it is also possible that Woolf is playing upon the idea that sexual dimorphism is less pronounced amongst less developed species—i.e. androgyny as a return to a state of nature. Woolf, in fact, claims “gipsy women, except in one or two important particulars, differ very little from gipsy men” (100) Basically, Orlando rediscovers happiness while living in this intermediate state and convening with nature. Unsurprisingly, this new found happiness is short-lived. Cultural differences arise and create tension between Orlando and the tribe, leaving Orlando no alternative but to return to England.

Having left the company of the gypsies, Orlando finds herself once again in the company of Englishmen and her behavior begins to change accordingly. When the ship’s captain gazes at Orlando lounging on deck, she is struck by a sudden awareness of her body and “the penalties and privileges of her position” (100). She recognizes that the trappings of femininity will encumber her (she sees it would be impossible to swim in her thick skirts) but she also sees that she can exploit her femininity to best advantage. When, at dinner, the captain offers her an extra slice of fat, Orlando is thrilled and determines “nothing...is more heavenly than to resist and to yield; to yield and resist. Surely it

throws the spirit into such a rapture that nothing else can” (101). Orlando’s delight in submissiveness is stereotypically feminine and seemingly at odds with Woolf’s feminist politics. Yet, Woolf ties this desire to the feelings Orlando experienced while courting Sasha. Woolf writes: “Which is the greater ecstasy? The man’s or the woman’s? Are they not perhaps the same?” (101). While the possibility is ostensibly rejected in the next line, the idea lingers and continues to inform the text. While its focus and manifestations may differ depending upon one’s sex, the underlying nature of desire remains more or less constant. Gillian Beer makes a similar point when she states that “In *Orlando* the central self endures the vicissitudes of translation—through time, through gender, through changing language—not itself much changed.” (60). More simply, “[t]he form of desire is peremptorily inscribed at the start” (60).

Woolf emphasizes this sense of continuity during a passage reflecting on the nature of love. Delighted by the new found attentions she receives, Orlando is about to commit the “extreme folly” of “being proud of her sex” when she suddenly begins to think of love (105). Her reflections suggest the ineluctability of gender *and* its relative insignificance. Woolf writes:

‘Love’ said Orlando. Instantly—such is its impetuosity—love took a human shape—such is its pride. For where other thoughts are content to remain abstract nothing will satisfy this one but to put on flesh and blood, mantilla and petticoats, hose and jerkin. And as all Orlando’s loves have been women, now, through the culpable laggardry of the human frame to adapt itself to convention, though she herself was a woman, it was still a woman she loved (105).

Orlando's inability to relinquish her desire for Sasha demonstrates that, though we seek to find love embodied in the physical form of others, there are no limitations on which form that body might take. Though Woolf writes of the "culpable laggardry" with which we adapt, she is actually exploiting the reader's willingness to make just such a change. As Beer rightly argues, "[t]he writing assumes that we will need to change our relation to Orlando and yet points to the absurdity of doing so, since we made no bones about participating in his earlier adventures, whether reading with men's or women's eyes" (57). Though Orlando's love is now, strictly speaking, a lesbian desire, the reader is able to embrace this shift because of the continuity that connects this potentially unfamiliar development with the tradition of romantic love developed earlier in the novel.

It is Woolf's ability to maintain a sense of continuity in spite of significant narrative disruptions that confirms the genius of the novel. Even more importantly, the ethical and political dimensions of the novel are revealed during the reader's negotiation of this expertly constructed dynamic. Peter Brooks has argued that reading plot is "a form of desire that carries us forward, onward, through the text" (Reading 37). He continues: "The ambitious hero thus stands as a figure of the reader's efforts to construct meanings in ever-larger wholes, to totalize his experience of human existence in time, to grasp past, present, and future in a significant shape" (39). In effect, plot reflects a desire for totality and integration. Following a structure that moves from beginning to middle to end, the story prompts us to look ahead toward that moment when "everything comes together" and all "loose ends are tied". In Brooks' account, "We read the incidents of narration as 'promises and annunciations' of final coherence, that metaphor that may be reached through the chain of metonymies: across the bulk of the as yet unread middle pages, the

end calls to the beginning, transforms and enhances it” (93-4). Every time that moment of resolution seems to recede, we are simultaneously reminded that it must, at some point, arrive (103). This is the essence of the archetypal structure to which I have been alluding. Every voyage abroad is predicated upon an anticipated return. Love lost foretells love not yet found. We read seeking reaffirmation.

For Brooks, this moment of resolution is unattainable and is perpetually deferred. What we are left with is, instead, the possibility of limitless re-readings. Indeed, the fact that Orlando ends at the exact moment the protagonist begins to find success as a writer suggests that what we have just read is simply a prelude to a story not yet written. This process of rereading or, perhaps more accurately, narrative completion falls to the reader. In effect, we impose our own conclusions in collaboration with the author. In Brooks’ words, “The narrator alone is insufficient to narrative; there must be a narratee as well. There must be a validated narrative contract for the narrative to take place” (225). Thus, we make the psychological adjustments needed to reconcile the expectations developed at the outset of the novel with altered position in which we eventually find Orlando. At the same time, there is another sense in which our desire *is* fulfilled. Joseph Allen Boone suggests that

there is a sense in which both the act of sex and the art of fiction are not only *overpowering* but expressions of absolute *powerlessness*, enacting the intense human desire to let go—to be released, to yield to an ‘other’ (a lover, a text) that ceases to remain other in the imaginary intercourse that is constitutive of sexual and fictional exchanges alike (1-2).

In addition to our imaginative embrace of successive gendered subject positions, we also experience a sense of being libidinally unmoored, set adrift in a sea of “multiple forms of desire” (Olin-Hitt 494).

Our relation to the body, particularly the androgynous body, encompasses both these desires—the epistemophilic desire to know and confer meaning upon the body, and the desire to submit to the unboundedness of the polymorphously perverse. As Brooks notes elsewhere, the body is both “a cultural construct and its other, something outside of language that language struggles to mark and to be embodied in” (*Body Work* xiii). The androgynous or sexually intermediate body further emphasizes this divide by failing to conform to the binary language of gender. Intermediacy calls for a new form of relation and representation. As such, it is transformational. If the text brings us into contact with “the multisexed being that is Orlando” then we must, argues Jessica Berman, “acknowledge the demands that this being-together makes upon us” (“Ethical” 163). Faced with the “otherness” of Orlando’s body and desire, we are left to confront “its ethical challenge to our response to sexual difference” (Berman 163). Thus, the act of aesthetic contemplation naturally commences a process of ethical re-evaluation. Berman again:

We may take pleasure in our apprehension of Orlando when she is transformed into a woman and becomes able to judge as a woman/man, but it is in our imaginative leap toward that subject position and its possibilities that we understand the ethical demands placed upon us by this moment in the text. The aesthetic demands of this image and of the surrounding text insist on an imaginative leap that is, from its outset, an ethical one (165).

By inviting the reader to bridge sexual distance while, at the same time, foregrounding its presence, Woolf practically demands a new form of ethical engagement.

The benefits of this new ethic are visible in Orlando's eventual marriage to the rather fantastically named Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine. Having been rescued by Shel after having fallen from her horse, Orlando is immediately smitten and within minutes the two are engaged. There is a sense that the two understand each other on an almost innate, unconscious level. Woolf writes that "they had guessed, as always happens between lovers, everything of any importance about each other" (164). While Woolf claims that all lovers are capable of such feats, it is clear that this relationship is remarkable. More precisely, Woolf implies that this incredible sense of sympathy stems from their similarly mixed constitutions. At one point, the two are simultaneously struck by the notion that they have been mistaken as to the other's sex. That is to say, Orlando is convinced that Shel is a woman and Shel believes Orlando is a man (164). The question is raised once again since both were "so surprised at the quickness of the other's sympathy, and it was to each such a revelation that a woman could be as tolerant and free-spoken as a man, and a man as strange and subtle as a woman" (168). In this environment of mutual understanding, Orlando is finally happy and able to pursue her dream of writing. She finds both the freedom and passion that elude Clarissa Dalloway and finds the space that Woolf desires in *A Room of One's Own*.

Orlando's marriage represents the ideal espoused by Carpenter, a partnership wherein the couple is bound together by ideals of love and respect. Yet, Orlando is more than just a model of intermediacy. Over the course of the narrative, Orlando plays the important role of sexual mediator. Carpenter sought not just freedom for the homosexual but, also, a

recognition of the intermediate's essential role in society. In other words, the intermediate offers a twin perspective that can help those whose genders are more static and uniform. As the reader follows Orlando through the text, s/he is exposed to numerous perspectives and beliefs. Yet, the force of Orlando's character and the conventions of plot prompt the reader to integrate these perspectives, building a composite gender that reflects and even encourages difference. Orlando embraces her dual insight; "For now a thousand hints and mysteries became plain to her that were then dark. Now, the obscurity, which divides the sexes and lets linger innumerable impurities in its gloom, was removed" (105). Through the act of reading, the text ideally produces a similar moment of illumination in the mind and, perhaps, even body of the reader. When the biographer wonders aloud whether Orlando was "most man or most woman", he conveniently leaves the question unanswered. By doing so, Woolf refuses to fix identity, preferring to leave the matter open ended. "In *Orlando*, all desire is 'natural'; no desire is deviant" (Olin-Hitt 494).

In conclusion, I would like to return to the dichotomous view of Woolf, raised at the outset of this chapter, as either sexually inhibited or slyly harnessing lesbian eroticism as feminist response to the repressive limitations of phallogocentric power. Whatever her inhibitions, it should be clear by now that Woolf was not an asexual woman nor afraid to explore alternate sexual possibilities. Yet, to claim Woolf as lesbian writer seems equally inappropriate. That Woolf was attracted to women is not in question, as can be seen in her oft-quoted diary entry claiming "Women alone stir my imagination" (qtd. in Hankins 188). Having said as much, there is similarly no reason to believe that such desires lead Woolf to foreclose on other possibilities. One cannot simply ignore the important and often erotic (if not explicitly sexual) relationships Woolf had with various men—most

notably her husband Leonard and her brother-in-law Clive Bell. While these relationships do not necessitate a change in perceptions of Woolf's sexual identity, they do, at the very least, challenge the value of such designations. If Woolf was any one thing, she was a *writer* and, as such, she was constantly in search of a broadest possible audience. Thus, the idea that she wrote coded texts that implicitly excluded half her potential audience, including most of her closest friends, seems simply untenable. If Woolf used sexuality in her writing (as I believe she did), she did so in a way that both reflected the spirit of her time and granted her broadest appeal. For these reasons, her work should more properly be read in terms of androgyny and sexual intermediacy.

Androgyny and intermediacy do not foreclose on the text but facilitate a wide variety of aesthetic, erotic, and ethical responses. The body becomes a gateway into the text. It provides a universal point of comparison. Whether one experiences feelings of familiarity or feelings of dislocation, the text remains resonant. The task of the author is to mediate these responses, bringing them into closer contact. This is why Lisa Carstens is right to argue against efforts to interpret Orlando as reflective of a performative theory of gender (39). More than historically anachronistic, these readings distort the narrative mechanics of text. Woolf's approach more closely resembles Brooks assessment of the body as both in *and* beyond language. Woolf refuses to resolve this divide and instead exploits it as a site of creative production. Sexological discourse, particularly the work of Otto Weininger and Edward Carpenter, provided both an example of mediated gender and even an approach to writing. While Stein worked as a scientist might have, exploring the possibility of influencing behavior through the use of rhythm and repetition, Woolf, in

contrast, adapted sexological insights and refigured them in narrative. Her approach is perhaps more mediated but, I would argue, ultimately more engaging and effective.

***Divided Nature:
Djuna Barnes and
the Ambiguities of Sex***

The very Condition of Woman is so subject to Hazzard, so complex, and so grievous, that to place her at one moment is but to displace her at the next.

-Djuna Barnes,
Ladies Almanack

If I should try and put it into words, I mean how I did see her, it would be incomprehensible, for the simple reason that I find that I never did have a really clear idea of her at any time. I had an image of her, but that is not the same thing. An image is a stop the mind makes between uncertainties.

-Djuna Barnes,
Nightwood

I'm not a lesbian. I just loved Thelma.

-Djuna Barnes

VI.I
Diagnosing Distempers

Years after returning to New York from Paris, Djuna Barnes and a friend reflected upon the heady days of their youth. When talk turned to her tempestuous relationship with a young American sculptor named Thelma Wood, Barnes qualified her attraction, proclaiming: "I'm not a lesbian. I just loved Thelma." (qtd. in Field 37). The comment

has since sparked a flurry of speculation on the part of critics interested in Barnes' place within feminist and lesbian canons. Citing a letter Barnes wrote to Ottoline Morrell, Shari Benstock contends that Barnes did not actually disavow her lesbianism but was merely protecting her privacy (245). Yet, there is reason to believe that Barnes was not merely guarded but, in fact, harbored a vaguely homophobic antipathy. Late in life, Barnes told one of her attendants that she "could never abide 'those wet muscles' that one had to love to love women" (qtd. in Benstock 245). As her biographer notes, Barnes also felt women were too "mushy" and lacked the intellectual seriousness she so highly valued. She was outraged when they came calling in praise of her work and "sought to bind her to a sisterhood of which she was contemptuous" (Herring 302). Though no one was spared her rapier wit, Herring notes that homosexuals suffered particular "vituperation" (302).

Ironically, much of Barnes' writing is frankly sexual and often autobiographically informed. The privacy to which Barnes clung in ordinary life is notably absent in her books. Whether discussing her family's unconventional values or her own feelings of loss and betrayal, Barnes' writing is remarkably candid. What then accounts for this apparent discrepancy? Why was Barnes reluctant to be labelled a lesbian when her work openly challenges sexual norms and conventions? One could argue Barnes was able to express feelings and sentiments in her fiction that she was either unwilling or unable to express in life. In other words, Barnes safely hid behind her characters. The problem with this explanation is that, in portraying the author as essentially closeted, Barnes' own sense of her identity is obscured or denied. To fully appreciate the uniqueness of the author's writing, readers must resist the temptation to "diagnose" Barnes as belonging to one or another readily recognizable sexual types; she was, in fact, adamantly opposed to the

arbitrary labels that serve to fix sexual identity. In a conversation with her friend Emily Coleman, Barnes once claimed: “I might be anything. If a horse loved me, I might be that” (qtd. in Herring 58).

Nor should we assume, in contrast, that Barnes saw desire as queer, performative, or even polymorphously perverse (a more contemporary formulation). While she may have sympathised with such concepts had they been presented to her, Barnes was still very much involved in the project to define sex and sexuality. Though some of her comments might lead one to suggest otherwise, Barnes did not abandon the broader social impulse to identify and classify different forms of desire. Instead, she directed herself towards addressing the gaps within the dominant sexual discourse—the very same motivation that propelled the early sexologists to undertake their work. What distinguishes Barnes is the extent to which she was willing to consider both flux and contradiction. She recognized that sex and desire are disorderly and chaotic and sought to reflect this in her work. To do so, she had to reinvent writing, changing the relationship between signifier and signified to allow for greater ambiguity and breadth of meaning. At points she succeeds; at others, she fails. Yet, it is this challenge embodied in her writing that is most noteworthy and deserving of deeper consideration. While Barnes’ work points to the potential limits of representation, she does not yet concede its defeat.

Barnes’ ambivalence towards the project of sexual definition is perhaps most evident in Ladies Almanack, a satirical *roman à clef* privately published in 1928. At the centre of the book is Dame Evangeline Musset, a lusty character based upon Barnes’ close friend Nathalie Barney. Musset holds court amidst a colourful group of predominantly lesbian women, each a thinly veiled portrait of the writers and artists who attended Barney’s

famous salon. The politics of the group are decidedly gynocentric and talk often revolves around the beauty and wonder of women. Some of the talk focuses upon the need to gain social approval of lesbian unions. This argument is made most forcefully by Lady Tilly-Tweed-in-Blood and Lady Buck-and-Balk, characters fashioned after Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge. They argue: “Just because woman falls, in this Age, to Woman, does that mean we are not to recognize Morals? What has England done to recognize these Passions? Nothing!” (19). Their concern might seem motivated by a 1921 parliamentary motion that would have extended the purview of the Labouchère Amendment to cover acts of “indecent” between women.¹ However, Barnes suggests the two may also have an interest in limiting or controlling lesbian desire. They continue: “Should One or the Other stray, ought there not to be a Law as binding upon her as upon another, that Alimony might be Collected; and that Straying be nipped in the Bud?” (19-20). In effect, they aim to legislate monogamy, thereby replicating the sense of ownership or possession that many feminists and sexual reformers criticized in heterosexual unions.

Barnes treatment of Hall and Troubridge suggests they are rather silly and priggish. Their constant talk of sin and evil seems antithetical to the atmosphere of freedom and liberty espoused by other members of their circle. Nevertheless, Tweed-in-Blood and Buck-and-Balk’s opinions begin to resonate when set against Barnes’ portrait of Musset. Musset is a pure seductress. Barnes describes her as “one Grand Red Cross for the Pursuance, the relief and the Distraction, of such girls as in their Hinder Parts, and their Fore Parts, and in whatsoever Parts did suffer them most” (6). The Spencerian allusion is ironic in that Musset crusades not to protect virtue but to encourage vice. Shari Benstock

¹ The law was rejected by the House of Lords on the grounds that it would have publicized a practice of which most British women knew nothing.

suggests, further, that Musset's given name alludes to her "evangelistic intentions" (250). From a sexological perspective, Musset's behaviour is deviant and perverted. She does not seek out like-minded or similarly constituted women but endeavours to "convert" seemingly heterosexual women to her cause.² When Nip and Tuck report to Musset that they have potentially spied "a Sister lost," Musset responds by proclaiming: "To scent, we will chase her into a very Tangle of Temptation!" (31-2). The language is distinctly that of the hunt, negating the idea that Musset is merely helping a "lost" woman find herself. Nip and Tuck describe Musset's interest as an attempt to "repair what has never been damaged" (31). Musset's perversion is even more evident when she recalls "one dear old Countess who was not to be convinced until I, fervid with Truth, had finally so floored her in every capacious Room of that dear ancestral Home" (34-5). By her own admission, Musset is a predator.

In accounting for Musset's extraordinary sexual appetite, Barnes raises the spectre of inversion. She writes, at the outset, that Musset "had been developed in the Womb of her most gentle Mother to be a Boy, when therefore, she came forth an Inch or so less than this, she paid no heed to the error" (7). The passage seems disparaging in that it suggests lesbianism is the result of a congenital deformity. The lesbian is presented as merely a lesser, underdeveloped man (Jay 187). The corollary drawn between the clitoris and the penis also repeats the early patriarchal assumption that lesbian sexuality depends upon penetration by means of an abnormally elongated clitoris. In other words, lesbian sexuality is only intelligible when rendered into patriarchal terms. This bias resurfaces

² In sexological literature, these acts of "enticement" are distinguished from true inverted attraction and are roundly condemned as immoral.

later in the book when one character bemoans sexology's misrecognition of women. She complains that:

These scriveners said of her but that she must have had a Testes of sorts, however wried and awander; that indeed she was called forth a Man, and when answering, by some Mischance or, or monstrous Fury of Fate, stumbled over a Womb, and was damned then and forever to drag it about, like a Prisoner his Ball and Chain, whether she would or no (53).

However, the initial passage is double-edged and contains its own critique of patriarchal discourse. If Musset's clitoris is only "an Inch or so less" than the penis she would have had were she a boy, she can be read as usurping the traditional authority attached to the phallus. While seeming to mirror the phallus, the image distorts the patriarchal order by presenting a rival vision of hyper-femininity—the woman not as lack but as abundance. Alternately, the passage can also be read as diminishing the importance of the phallus altogether. If Musset is a normally proportioned woman, then it is the myth of the phallus that begins to appear "over-inflated".

Musset similarly appeals to the ambiguous authority of sexology. Inversion first surfaces in a conversation Musset has with her father. It is important to note that Ladies Almanack appeared in the same year as The Well of Loneliness, and Barnes' story of Musset's youth borrows heavily from Hall's experience. In Hall's book, Stephen's father comes to terms with her inversion after having read sexological writers in his study. In turn, the findings he communicates to his daughter become central to her self-identity. In Ladies Almanack, the situation is slightly but significantly altered. It is Musset who goes

to her father, seeking to allay his concerns by offering a sexological explanation for her boyish behaviour. She addresses her father:

“Thou, good Governor, wast expecting a Son when you lay atop of your Choosing, why then be so mortal wounded when you perceive that you have your wish? Am I not doing after your very Desire, and is it not the more commendable, seeing that I do it without the Tools for the Trade, and yet nothing complain?” (8).

On the surface, the narrative is quite similar to Hall’s; Musset is simply more defiant and self-assured than Stephen. However, the exchange takes on a different dimension when one considers that Barnes is attributing Hall’s childhood to Barney—a gesture that would have been instantly recognizable to the close coterie of friends for whom the book was written. Barney was nothing like Hall and was, in fact, quite a feminine woman. Thus, Barnes’ decision to explain Musset’s lesbianism in terms of inversion seems a clever ploy, an attempt on Musset’s part to free herself from her father’s concern that she be married. In this instance, sexology does not limit nor circumscribe homosexual identity; it is a trope that can be cleverly and creatively deployed to one’s own advantage.

Though Musset is largely free to live life as she wishes, Barnes implies there is a cost to employing sexological language. Once defined as inversion, lesbianism can not escape definition in medical terms as a sickness or ailment. In particular, themes of loneliness and alienation (familiar from Hall’s book) resurface in Ladies Almanack. The lesbian begins to seem frustrated or, even, doomed. In a chapter entitled “April,” Barnes writes that “Acute Melancholy is noticeable in those who have gone a long Way in this Matter, whereas a light giggling, dancing Fancy seems to support those in the very first Stages” (27). More than just psychological distress, the afflictions suffered by lesbians are said to

include distinctly physical or physiological infirmities, including problems breathing, circulatory problems, and even a distended spleen (28). The implication, again, is that lesbianism is either a form of sickness or an unhealthy behaviour that leads to disease. The lesbian is reduced to a pathological type; all individuality is denied. Indeed, the very form of Barnes' book—an almanac—suggests that the future is, to some degree, predictable or discernable based on limited observation. By designating the individual as being of a certain type based solely upon evidence of a particular behaviour, Barnes' risks dehumanizing her characters in manner similar to that decried by Foucault and others in their critiques of sexology.

Despite wavering between narratives of liberation and damnation, Ladies Almanack would seem to close on a note of transcendence. When Musset finally dies at an old age of natural causes, the women in her entourage begin to mourn her. After carrying her body through the city, they return and cremate her atop a great pyre. The fire finally dies down and the women are surprised to discover that, despite the fact Musset's body has been reduced to ash, her tongue has not burned and continues to flicker. Musset's measure of immortality challenges the morbidity associated with pathological accounts of inversion. Her sexuality does not cause her death but, in a sense, actually outlives her and testifies to her being once she is gone. The riotous wake that follows Musset's death can be read as bringing women together; differences separating characters during Musset's lifetime are erased when her death is considered. Accordingly, Susan Sniader Lanser sees Ladies Almanack as binding divergent notions of *woman* and *lesbian* within a more inclusive "lesbian continuum" (161). Similarly, Fran Michel notes that the tongue does not merely provide sexual gratification but is also capable of speech. In her words, the

burning tongue “symbolically links specifically female, lesbian passion and the power of women’s language” (182). Shari Benstock sees Musset as a saint and Ladies Almanack as a book that

helps woman understand her longing for the lost Eden of her existence, when woman was praised and venerated rather than belittled and despised; she learns that it was her strength, her ‘impudence,’ her beauty and knowledge that affronted man, in punishment for which ‘the Earth sucked down her generations, Body for Body’ (250).

In all these instances, Musset’s fierce pride and unabashed commitment to lesbianism are seen as empowering women and helping bring about a sense of community.

In foregrounding the question of female sexual agency and desire, feminist readings of Ladies Almanack challenge earlier accounts of the book that focussed only upon satirical elements while overlooking the fondness with which Barnes treats her subject. Sniader Lanser takes issue with James Scott’s reading of the book as attacking “‘the absurdity of female promiscuity,’ ‘the sterility of sisterhood,’ and ‘the absence of decent restraints of privacy’” (164). Scott’s views are echoed by Andrew Field who sees the book similarly as “a protest against the indelicacy of sexual manners of the time” and a rebuke of Musset’s “vulgar brazenness” (126). While Scott and Field likely overstate Barnes’ sense of outrage or disgust, their attention to the critical component of Ladies Almanack is not without merit. While Sniader and Benstock are largely unequivocal in their support of the book, other feminist critics have been more careful to address the darker side of Barnes’ writing. Having celebrated Musset as a potentially revolutionary figure, Michel rightly notes that “for all its symbolic affirmation, the image of the tongue remains troublingly

ambiguous on a literal level: a tongue without a mouth cannot speak” (182). In other words, the final triumph of the tongue is, ultimately, a reductive over-simplification and presents only a distorted image of the lesbian. Karla Jay goes much further and dismisses the final scene as inadequate recompense for the many indignities Barnes inflicted upon her friend: “this reductionist vision of Barney as a conscienceless nymphomaniac negates much of what she most valued in life: friendship” (Jay 189). Jay notes that Barnes herself is notably absent in the Almanack and concludes that this oversight demonstrates Barnes’ unwillingness to confront her own sexuality and provides evidence of “a strong element of self-denial” (192). Once again, we return to the idea of Barnes as closeted.

What then accounts for this discrepancy? How is it that the same book can be read as everything from a celebration of lesbianism to a prurient attack motivated by the author’s own feelings of guilt and opprobrium? Part of the answer is that Ladies Almanack is by no means one of Barnes’ major works and it lacks the sophistication and consideration typical of her other writing. Barnes, in fact, wrote the novel as a joke and described it as a “piece of fluff”. Accordingly, critics may be unreasonable in seeking a careful, unified statement of belief in its pages. Having said as much, Barnes was far too demanding of herself to have ever written a book without some significant attention to detail and Benstock may be right in assuming such “disclaimers” do not tell the whole story and that “the comic cloak may hide a more serious subject” (249). At the very least, it seems reasonable to assume the book, on some level, reflects something of its author’s beliefs and opinions. To unpack these opinions, it is useful to turn to a more considered work published during the same year as the Almanack—Barnes’ bawdy family history, Ryder.

VI.II
The Race Called Ryder

Ryder is a strange book, an odd amalgam of different styles, characters, and authorial perspectives. Ostensibly, the novel tells the story of Wendell Ryder, a reluctant farmer and prodigious lover of women, who seeks to change the world by advocating free love for everyone. Yet, Marie Ponsot suggests the true centre of the novel is not Wendell but, rather, his eldest daughter Julie. In following Julie as she attempts to reconcile her father's unusual beliefs with her own sense of injustice and betrayal, Ryder presents "a portrait of the artist as a young girl" (Ponsot 111). Admittedly, there are some problems with this reading. It is questionable whether Julie is more important than Wendell in the text. She appears far less frequently than her father and Ponsot's suggestion that Wendell's irresponsibility defines him as the "opposite or absence of hero" is rather reductive. The inadequacy of such a simple designation adds to, rather than detracts from, Wendell's importance as a character. Furthermore, there is no real indication that Julie is destined to become an artist. However, Ponsot is right when she suggests the novel marks an artistic coming of age. She merely mistakes Julie for the figure she is meant to represent: Barnes herself. Ryder is, by the author's own admission, an autobiographically informed novel (Field 185) and can be read as Barnes' first major effort to express the complicated influence of her family on both her life and her writing. Thus, a measure of biographical information is required if the book is to be properly understood.

Though it is the remarkable sexual exploits of her father that would come to feature so prominently in Barnes' later writing, the true sexual radical in the family was Barnes' paternal grandmother, Zadel. Zadel was the daughter of a relatively affluent builder who

also worked for a time as a book dealer. The family home was full of poetry and prose and Zadel appears to have been an avid reader. By thirteen, she was publishing in local newspapers and by fifteen had placed poems in a large periodical. Zadel's life became more complicated at sixteen, when she was involved in an affair with her tutor, Henry Aaron Budington, and was forced into marriage by her family. Budington was an abusive man and, in 1876, Zadel took the bold step of leaving him and filing for divorce. Out of necessity, the experience made Zadel more self-reliant and her writing in the years following the divorce are defined by a nascent feminism. As Herring notes in his biography of Djuna, Zadel's journalism "displayed a passion for social justice, a love for humankind, and a desire to call attention to the talents of notable American women" (6). For the young Djuna, dreaming of a career in journalism, her grandmother's early success was an example to be emulated and only strengthened the bond between the two.

Sexual politics were a natural component of Zadel's larger interest in social justice. When she was sent to Europe in 1880 by *McCall's* magazine, she was drawn to "radical, literary, and reformist circles" where marriage was critiqued as a form of social bondage and free love was advocated as a form of redress (Herring, *Djuna* 12, 56). Love was seen as adequate grounds to enter into a sexual relationship. Though there is no evidence of an actual meeting, the political concerns addressed by Zadel and her circle in London bear a striking resemblance to positions articulated by Havelock Ellis, Edward Carpenter, and other members the Fellowship (discussed in Chapter III). Zadel appears to have practiced what she preached and, despite having remarried shortly after her divorce, seems to have engaged in numerous extra-marital affairs (Herring, *Djuna* 17). Unfortunately, there is no published record of Zadel's precise reasons for supporting sexual freedom. Herring cites

a letter referencing a rejected manuscript on the subject but nothing more was ever found. As Djuna herself reported, Zadel simply believed in “free love—everybody screwing each other” (qtd. in Herring, *Djuna* 58).

Clearly, Zadel was an heroic figure for Djuna and her message of sexual equality and female empowerment resonated with the young woman. Yet, there is evidence that Zadel’s influence on Djuna’s sexual development may have been more direct. Djuna and Zadel often shared a bed—though, as Herring is quick to note, this practice was not at all uncommon in large, economically disadvantaged families (56). What is more peculiar are remaining letters that suggest a rather bizarre form of sexual play between grandmother and granddaughter. In particular, it appears as though the two had pet names for one another’s breasts and engaged in some form of physical contact. Zadel’s letters to Djuna are written in playful baby-talk which can be read alternately as attempt to maintain the young woman’s innocence or, more sinisterly, as Zadel’s attempts to disarm Djuna and overcome her potential discomfort. While the relationship may have been coercive, there is reason to believe Djuna was receptive, as she also appears to have written letters continuing this sort of sexual play.

Ultimately, there is not enough evidence to know anything for certain. In his account, Herring suggests that “perhaps the word ‘incest’ is too strong a word for what passed between them, which may have been nothing more than good-natured fondling” (57). He claims that, in a family that enjoyed joking with each other, Zadel may have simply been trying to “treat the normal anxiety of girlhood with generous portions of humour, so as to make the idea of free love more palatable” (57). Mary Lynn Broe is even less critical of this apparent impropriety and actually reads the episode as a valiant attempt to shelter

Djuna from her father's advances (of which more will be written momentarily). Broe writes that Zadel provided a reprieve for Djuna and the two "played in their symbolic, marginalized world, a queendom of 'nanophilia'" (53). While the underlying sentiment may be acceptable (a grandmother wanting to protect her grandchild from abuse), Broe fails to acknowledge the potential repercussions of introducing a sexual component into an otherwise parental or custodial relationship. If Djuna was indeed dependent upon her grandmother, the power imbalance of such a relationship risks compromising the spirit of sexual equality in a manner analogous to Zadel's critique of marriage. If Zadel was indeed Djuna's "first love" (as Barnes herself claimed), it is not surprising that so many of Barnes' later relationships followed a similar pattern whereby a free sexual exchange became complicated by personal needs and demands (Herring, *Djuna* 22). Attempting to live a sexually open life, Barnes could not help but feel betrayed when her lovers found their attentions directed elsewhere. In the case of Zadel, this betrayal occurred when she agreed to cast out Djuna and her mother in favour of her son's continued cohabitation with his mistress.

The relationship between Zadel and her son Wald was similarly unusual. As might be expected, Zadel encouraged her son to embrace her own belief in free love and the social benefits of polygamy. Unsurprisingly, Wendell was a ready convert to the cause. What is more unusual is the role Zadel played in facilitating her son's sexual affairs. Herring claims that Wald's marriage to Elizabeth Chappell (Djuna's mother) was enabled by Zadel's promise to tutor the young woman in poetry (27). Having forged this initial bond, Zadel continued to strengthen her influence by mothering the parentless girl, telling Elizabeth that, if she just followed her advice, the Barnes family would return her

love (Herring 28). Djuna addresses Zadel's influence in Ryder when she writes that Sophia (the Zadel character) "held women as she got them, in every walk of life, by the simple magic of the word 'mother'" (12). When Fanny Clark, Wald's mistress, came to live with the family, it was at the invitation of Zadel. That these bound women were then subjected to Wald's sexual advances is disturbing. Zadel failed to distinguish between the parental love she offered these women and the more explicitly sexual love pursued by her son. In effect, the line between mothering and pandering was blurred. She even seems to have taken personal delight in Wald's conquests, writing in a letter that "I simply shrieked when I read that Papa had made a whole in Mrs. Jones" (Herring 19).³

Doted upon by his mother for his entire life, Wald saw himself as truly exceptional. At home, he devoted more time to artistic pursuits than he did to farming and, as a result, the family was often reduced to penury. During these difficult times, Zadel refused to chastise her delinquent son and, instead, undertook a letter writing campaign asking friends for charitable contributions. Somewhat insulated from the effects of his actions, Wald grew increasingly convinced that it was his duty to spread the gospel of polygamy. It is important to recognize that Wald was by no means a simple opportunist and truly believed in the righteousness of his cause. Like James Hinton (whose Life in Nature so greatly influenced Havelock Ellis), Wald believed that ethics and morality had to be rooted in nature if they were to be in any way meaningful. Since animals are rarely sexually exclusive, Wald concluded that monogamy was an *unnatural* state of affairs (Herring 31). Despite having to lie on occasion to avoid scrutiny or social sanction, Wald

³ Zadel's reference to her son as "Papa" in such an explicitly sexual context is further evidence of the bizarre confusion of sexual and familial relationships.

was, in the words of James B. Scott, a man with “a messianic impulse to reform” (qtd. in Herring 25).

It was perhaps this sense of missionary zeal that lead, at least in part, to one of the darkest and most psychologically scarring events in Djuna’s life. Barnes did not leave a definitive account of what happened and what is known is based primarily upon second-hand accounts and readings of excised passages from the initial drafts of The Antiphon. Basically, it seems that Djuna’s father was somehow involved in her defloration. In some tellings, Wald attempted to force himself on his daughter. An early draft of The Antiphon contains a scene in which Titus (Wald) approaches Miranda (Djuna) and “tried to make her mutton at sixteen—/ Initiated vestal to his ‘cause’!” (qtd. in Curry 290). Frustrated by her protestations, Titus hangs Miranda on a hay hook and visits a neighbour, trading her virginity for a goat. In discussions of the play, Barnes was “anxious to counter the notion that Titus had raped Miranda” and denied any incestuous relationship between her and Wald⁴ (Herring 270). However, Wald’s enlistment of his neighbour did, in all likelihood, occur. In Herring’s account: “Convinced that sex was beautiful, Djuna allowed herself to be manipulated into a humiliating sexual encounter” and was “astonished that the pain, the humiliation and the sense of violation, were not what her father had promised her” (268). In his biography of Barnes, Andrew Field similarly writes that “Djuna Barnes was not exactly seduced or raped but rather ‘given’ sexually by her father like an Old Testament slave or daughter” (43).

Regardless of whether Wald personally raped his daughter or delegated the task to a neighbour, his actions are reprehensible and unjustifiable. Accordingly, it may seem

⁴ In a conversation with George Barker, Barnes suggested that she had been raped but this account contradicts her other recollections (Herring 268).

inadvisable or inappropriate to “interpret” what transpired. Such fine distinctions seem to be little more than a question of semantics and do not mitigate Wald’s culpability. That being said, the distinctions made by Herring and Field are important when considering the implications of the event on Barnes’ writing. In addition to understandable feelings of violation and betrayal, Barnes seems to have been disenchanted or disillusioned by her experience. Wald was not a simple cartoonish monster and had a strong influence over his wife and children—an effect only reinforced by Zadel’s constant praise. Despite the outlandishness of his beliefs, it seems more than likely that many members of the family were persuaded by his charms. In the years after this episode, Djuna still wrote to her father in an effort to convince him of her love (Herring 41). When Wald’s promises and pronouncements were contradicted by her own experience, Djuna faced a crisis in belief. She remained sexually uninhibited throughout her life but negative experiences with her father and grandmother left Barnes deeply conflicted and sceptical of grand claims about the revolutionary potential of sex.

Ryder is an effort to balance these divergent inclinations. Stylistically, the novel is full of sexual humour and bawdy playfulness. When the U.S. Postal Service intervened and censored the work, Barnes insisted the expurgated passages be replaced by asterisks so the reader might be left wondering as to the author’s true intentions. At the same time, Ryder is an acerbic attack on the sexual excesses of Barnes’ father, a man who also saw himself as a sexual revolutionary. The essential difference lies in Wald/Wendell’s desire to codify his beliefs, to state definitively the essential truths of sex. While Djuna was open to all sorts of different sexual possibilities, she was also very attentive to the repercussions of one’s behaviour on others. Personal freedom should not be won at

another's expense. Wald failed to consider others when formulating his ideal. This is most evident in relation to questions of reproduction and childrearing. While Wendell desires multiple children who will remember him and attest to his virility and drive, it is his wife, Amelia, who must bear the burden of repeated childbirth. Wendell also fails to provide adequately for his children once they are born. Convinced of his righteousness, Wendell imposes his beliefs on his family despite overwhelming evidence that he is misguided. What emerges is a critique of patriarchy as both a repressive sexual hierarchy and an overarching philosophy that would grant man the authority to impose his will through a series of pronouncements and decrees.

The patriarchal pretensions underlying the prerogative of speech are a central line of critique in Ryder. Wendell's authority to speak is guaranteed by the patriarchal order or, more precisely, the tradition of patrilineal descent. Wendell is consciously positioned at the end of a long line of Ryder patriarchs. In the second chapter, Wendell's maternal grandfather is on his way to meet his wife on their wedding night when he stops before twelve framed engravings of his forefathers. He looks upon these portraits with pride and determines that "I shall not be found wanting!" (7). This assertion is verified a few lines later when Jonathan asks Sophia how many children he now has and the girl replies: "Thirteen and me" (7). For her part, Sophia's mother absolves her husband of the hardship he has forced her to endure by proclaiming him a "penitent" and "nature lover" (7). Authority is tied to continuity; Jonathan is shown to have been faithful to both his ancestors' legacy and to nature's calling. The uninterrupted continuity of the system adds to the illusion of authenticity. In other words, patriarchal order is self-sustaining and self-replicating.

The importance of lineage and inheritance is even more pronounced in Sophia's story about Wendell's conception. Speaking directly to Wendell, Sophia claims she detested her first husband and, after conceiving Wendell's older brother, refused to "give him access to that place that so heartily complained of its first intrusion" (36). She proceeds to tell Wendell that he was conceived during a dream in which the spirit of Beethoven

came toward me, melted into me on my human side, and came out upon my marvellous, without so much as a 'by your leave,' or 'if it please you, madame,' or a pass at the weather, and in nine months, by the Christian calendar, I was delivered of you" (36).

Wendell is flabbergasted and asks his mother whether she "hast cohabited with a mirage and brought forth a son" (36). When she affirms that she indeed experienced a spiritual "infusion", Wendell is seemingly quite proud and proclaims: "I shall inscribe this...upon my razor" (37). The story is almost blasphemous in the transparency of its allusion. Beethoven's role in impregnating Sophia mirrors that of the Holy Spirit in the conception of Jesus. The implication is that Wendell, like Jesus, is specially anointed and entrusted to deliver a message to mankind. At the very least, Wendell is positioned as a sort of prophetic figure, by virtue of his connection with the supernatural.⁵ As with Jonathan, it is Wendell's patrimony that signifies his importance.

If Wendell feels distinguished and empowered by his strange provenance, the reader is left with an altogether different perspective. Sophia's supposed encounter with the

⁵ Interestingly, Zadel Barnes was also deeply interested in the supernatural and often channelled the spirits of Liszt, Chopin, and, most notably, Beethoven to encourage her grandson to practice at the piano. She also channelled other spirits, including Lord Kitchener, in an attempt to influence British foreign policy—a practice of which Wald was very supportive, going so far to submit Zadel's visions to a newspaper. The implication in both instances is that the spiritual was for both Zadel and Wald a meaningful source of authority.

spirit of Beethoven is ridiculous and clearly without merit. No reasonable reader would believe such a wild claim. Accordingly, Wendell's enthusiastic response to the story suggests he is both gullible and self-deceiving. The sheer absurdity of the story actually casts doubt on all claims of lineage. If patrimony can successfully be attributed to the ghost of a dead composer, one wonders whether such claims have any merit whatsoever. As Sophia's story also makes clear, the legitimacy of a bloodline depends ultimately upon the chastity and faithfulness of a woman. A man must trust that the child his wife has borne is indeed his and not the product of some extramarital affair. Sophia inspires just such a doubt. If Sophia's husband was not Wendell's father, then it is clear that Wendell is, in fact, a bastard. This poses a problem for Wendell who is committed to the idea of sexual freedom but desires to be recognized as a father and the progenitor of his own race. Empowered by Sophia's radical views, Wendell's attempts to establish himself as the patriarch of a new sexual order are frustrated by his paradoxical need to exploit and delimit the destabilizing force of feminine sexuality. In Bonnie Kime Scott's words, Wendell is "the father who has partially disrupted patriarchy but kept himself at the center of creation" (2: 112).

Barnes' critique functions most effectively when she focuses on these moments of paradox or self-contradiction. Admittedly, there are times when female characters attack Wendell's selfishness, often in the most bitter of terms. Yet, the force of these attacks is occasionally diminished by the caricatural quality of the complainants. While Amelia is more than entitled to lament her lot in life, she refuses to act on her anger and, thus, her protests can sound shrill and unconvincing.⁶ When Amelia and Kate-Careless (Wendell's

⁶ I recognize that it may be unreasonable or unrealistic to expect an abused woman to leave her husband, especially during this historical period. However, I believe this reading of Amelia is warranted as there is

mistress) jealously fight one another for Wendell's attentions, they both seem absurd or even grotesque. Clearly, Djuna felt herself superior to both her mother and her father's mistress and this is evident in their treatment in Ryder. In contrast, Barnes' critique is piercing when she allows Wendell to freely indulge his fancies and speak for himself. By charting the trajectory of Wendell's deluded ambitions and showing their "natural" endpoint, Barnes exposes the inconsistencies, omissions, and exclusions underlying Wendell's patriarchal vision. Upon closer inspection, the façade of Wendell's ideal crumbles under its own weight.

Wendell's misguided efforts to intervene in the natural world are a prime example of Barnes' strategy at work. It should be remembered that man's supposed pre-eminence in the natural world is a right bestowed upon him by God.⁷ In Genesis, God decrees that Adam must "replenish the earth, and subdue it" and shall have "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (1:28). Barnes alludes to this prerogative in the first chapter of Ryder which is written in a prose style reminiscent of the King James Version. Addressed implicitly to Wendell, a godlike voice defines and delimits the scope of man's power on earth. In contrast to God's role in Genesis, the voice in Ryder does not seek to empower Wendell or reinforce his authority. Instead, it urges humility in the face of nature, beseeching Wendell to

Think not, when thou risest in the dawn and goest among the green things, and
the coloured fruit, and the hard wood, making thyself and thy people a safety

evidence to suggest that Barnes was critical of her mother for not mounting a more serious protest. The mother in The Antiphon is even depicted as a villainous character who served as an accomplice to her husband's misdeeds.

⁷ Barnes may also be challenging the Darwinian position that man sits at the top of the evolutionary scale, his pre-eminent position guaranteed by his superior adaptability (Scott 2: 107)..

against the time of snow, that thou couldst advise the fig, or question the wheat, or bargain with the tree; for thou bindest them and slayest them against the Judgment. Canst thou know what the Judgment had been, had the corn given forth barley or the barley put forth figs? Art thou not part and parcel of thy pastures? (4-5).

Barnes does not necessarily suggest that man is no greater than the plants and animals around him. The voice merely points out the limitations of man's knowledge; we are too much a part of nature to ever completely understand it.

Wendell fails to recognize any such relativism and believes nature's secrets can be uncovered through careful study. He believes in a form of mastery whereby an attentive subject can expose and explain the hidden knowledge within a passive subject—an epistemological conceit feminist critics believe to be at the heart of patriarchal power. Wendell's son explains his father's views in a conversation with Dr. O'Connor:

'Dad says,' Hannel went on, 'one should regard all the miracles of nature with an impartial eye; 'observe,' he says, 'that slaughter makes the shoulders rise and the head descend. See,' he says, 'the little girls stumbling to school; it's their future maternity that makes them stare into the hedges like that. Mark,' he says, 'the squirrels lifting their tails unabashed;' he calls that pure reason and unobstructed inner vision (162).

The irony is that there is nothing clear or reasonable about Wendell's pronouncements. The comment about the slaughter is so dense as to be all but meaningless. Similarly, one wonders what wisdom can be gained from watching young girls walk absentmindedly to school. If anything, Wendell shapes truth to reflect a limited reality that he himself has

constructed. In Dr. O'Connor's view, such ideas are "deviltry," "the coming forth of that discomfort he has sown in himself" (162). Most simply, Wendell's philosophies are little more than self-serving fictions.

Wendell's commitment to understanding nature is called into further question in a letter to Amelia from her sister Ann, in which the latter writes: "[man's] nature is never of a certainty with him, because of his notions of chemistry and such logic, and when he leaves it, it is with such a conviction (born of this philosophy) that he is stalking it" (73). The insight is profound. Though she is deeply suspicious of Wendell and resents him for taking Amelia from her, Ann recognizes that Wendell is not merely some Machiavellian conniver, cleverly and consciously exploiting language to his advantage. She understands that he is completely convinced of the validity and righteousness of his cause. Moreover, she suggests that it is science that facilitates such a misreading of nature. In a manner analogous to that identified by Latour,⁸ Wendell purports to pattern his behaviour and beliefs upon his "impartial" observations of nature, while failing to realize the extent to which those beliefs and opinions influence or, even, construct the object of his enquiry. More simply, Ann's comments expose Wendell as utterly incapable of looking beyond himself—a deep seated egoism that is his greatest failing.

At first, it is Wendell's family that suffers from his unconventional assessments of nature. When he has neglected his farm and is unable to provide for his family, Wendell is forced to feed his children with grain that previously had been fed only to the animals. He dedicates himself to learning "How bread from bran he might roll and bake" (55). He justifies his actions by proclaiming "That child and cattle fodder from one bin / For kine, he held, were kith, and infants kin" (55). The equivalence is absurd and suggests

⁸ See Chap. II.

that Wendell has little respect for his children. Yet, Barnes remarks that such behaviour is typical of Wendell. She continues: “And other ways he’d twist to save a coin; / While spendeth he most lavish of his loin” (55). Rather than mend his ways, Wendell shifts the burden of his excesses onto his family; he theorizes and expostulates in an effort to rationalize his behaviour. As such, Wendell’s philosophies seem contrived and self-interested. He appears to lack the “impartial eye” with which, he counsels his son, the natural world must be seen. Most simply, Wendell seems to be a fraud.

Unquestionably, Wendell is deeply misguided and Barnes is careful not to present her father as a romantic visionary or misunderstood genius. However, Wendell is not, as Ann and Dr. O’Connor make clear, a simple fraud. To repeat, Wendell is a deeply committed idealist. Though he may be a charlatan, Wendell is a charlatan who has bought into his own ruse. After proclaiming man and animal to be “kith” and “kin”, Wendell lavishes attention on his cows. He decides that, having adorned his wife and mistress with earrings “For making of them comerly,” he should make “the samē office for his cow” (56). He does so, ostensibly, in order to heighten his bull’s interest in the cows. Though purporting to understand the nature of the bull’s desire, it is evident that Wendell is, in fact, projecting his own desire onto the animal. Phillip Herring even suggests that Barnes implies some sort of bestiality in Ryder—a transgression that seems even more possible given Wendell’s strange decision to name two of his cows “Sweet Dolly Sodam” and “Gamorra” (Djuna 168; Ryder 56-7). At the very least, Wendell’s interest in his cows is evidence of his confusion or conflation of natural reproductive processes and a more culturally informed sense of the erotic. This point is emphasized in a parallel scene in which Wendell penetrates his mistress with a phallus he has shaped from an ox bone,

only to be surprised when she finds the experience painful and not pleasurable. In both instances, Wendell seeks to augment nature by way of imaginative interventions. While the inherent contradictions of such an agenda are obvious to the reader, Wendell remains oblivious.

To this point, Wendell is content to be an interpreter of nature. He is happy to deduce nature's hidden secrets by observing the outward manifestations of those inner workings. Wendell explains this approach when, bespeaking his scatological obsession, he states that "of the banquet doth the turdē tell" (65). Yet, he regrets that animals remain largely silent and "speak but little gossip undertail" (65). Instead of recognizing this as the natural order of things, Wendell "set a plan a crawling up the maze / Of his mind's wit, a wizardry to seek / That every beaste in kindē mightē speak" (65). Beginning with his horse Hisodalgus, Wendell seeks to inspire his animals to speak by telling each animal about its lineage and parentage, "For nothing so the very soul outflares / And brings to speech, as flattery of breed" (66). The scene is an obvious parody of the connection between patriarchal authority and the prerogative of speech that Barnes has to this point developed. In light of the animals' inability to appreciate Wendell's elaborate accounts of their pedigree, Wendell's fascination with his own forebears seems rather arbitrary, rooted in his vanity and human weakness. Once again, Wendell projects his own desires and anxieties onto his animals and man's interest in patriarchal continuity is shown to be entirely *unnatural*.

The absurdity of Wendell's ambition is obvious to everyone but Wendell. The reader can not help but feel superior to Wendell as he struggles to realize his bizarre ambitions. Indeed, it is this well-honed sense of irony that truly distinguishes Barnes' writing. By

allowing Wendell to speak for himself, Barnes reveals Wendell as the author of his own undoing. His views and beliefs are exposed as internally inconsistent and doomed to fail. In desiring to include his animals in his patriarchal order, Wendell actually forsakes his own patriarchal privilege. In the Edenic narrative to which Barnes alludes, God bestows upon Adam the right to name the different animals he encounters. The power to name establishes and demonstrates Adam's primacy in the garden; he alone defines the manner in which the animals shall be known. In Ryder, Wendell seeks to give this power back to his animals. He calls upon the power and prestige of patriarchy to empower his animals but, in so doing, betrays one of the original sources of that authority. Thus, the reader sees both "Ryder's kinship with animal nature as well as his failure to understand the full implication of that identity" (Plumb 78). Wendell's intentions here are not malicious or self-serving. He seeks to work on behalf of his animals, believing that, if they could speak, they might be spared slaughter. He merely fails to consider the ramifications and repercussions of such novel actions.

Clearly, there is much more that can be written about Ryder and this reading merely scratches the surface of the book. By looking exclusively at Wendell's paradoxical relationship to patrilineage and the privilege of speech, I hope to have captured some of the subtlety or, even, ambivalence of Barnes' approach. Barnes was not unsympathetic to her father's desire for sexual freedom or his belief that social progress could be won through changes in sexual mores. The bawdy, visceral quality of her writing mounts its own challenge to convention and conformity. Barnes' critique is *not* ideological but, rather, rooted in more pragmatic concerns. In Ryder, "The principle of a sensual reality is never denied; it is, however, presented as limited, yet powerful in distorting human

nature” (Plumb 87). This is not to say that sensual reality is distinct from human nature; it is merely one aspect of a far more complex, all encompassing whole. The question is one of balance—how to indulge in sensual pleasure without being controlled by it. Wendell fails to find such balance. His many musings are little more than sophistries, imaginative but incomplete justifications of his insatiable sexual appetites.

Barnes resists the temptation to provide her own rival vision. It is true, as Sheryl Stevenson suggests, that female characters intrude and disrupt Wendell’s fantasy (88). Yet, their power is limited and they are still more or less bound by Wendell’s authority. There is no matriarchal alternative to the patriarchal model espoused by Wendell. Barnes does, however, draw upon the destabilizing influence of feminine sexuality. That is to say, she calls attention to the disavowed gaps and absences upon which patriarchy and male sexuality are founded. Even more importantly, Barnes shows the allure of such sexuality for men. To repeat Scott’s argument, Wendell desires the sexual alternatives made possible by “disrupting” patriarchy. He fears only the concomitant loss of stature that such a radical gesture would entail. This is exactly what DeKoven describes in her writing (Rich and Strange). Barnes preserves the essence of a truly feminine sexuality, an ineffable sexuality that is beyond the control of men and women. In many respects, Barnes is far more faithful to the idea of feminine sexuality than most of the critics who have followed in her wake. She looks at sex as unmitigatedly polymorphous, a deep dark sea of desire that is constantly shifting shape and form. While sex remains a powerful force in society and a constant creative wellspring, any attempt to isolate its truth is ill-conceived and destined to fail. It is with an eye towards this distrust of absolutism that Ladies Almanack and, indeed, Barnes’ larger approach to sexology must be considered.

VI.III
The Almanack Again

In light of Barnes critique of ideology in Ryder, the ambivalence evident in Ladies Almanack is much easier to understand. The notion that Barnes was somehow afraid or ashamed of her own attraction to women is unfounded. To dismiss Barnes as closeted is to diminish the complexity of her writing in favour of greater critical or theoretical unity. Barnes' writing is categorically opposed to just such gestures. What Barnes resists in the Almanack is the notion that the complexity of an individual's character or the nature of interpersonal relationships can be reduced to a simple sexual pronouncement or equation. Barnes did not object to personal freedom of choice or the right of the individual to have multiple partners of either gender. She refused only to draw sweeping conclusions based upon the caprices and idiosyncrasies of given individuals. While Barney's salon was unquestionably a radical environment, it is clear Barnes felt that a measure of conformity or obeisance was expected. In many ways, it paralleled the home in which Barnes herself was raised. Accordingly, numerous commentators draw connections between Musset and Wendell.

Susan Sniader Lanser argues that "*Ladies Almanack* counters *Ryder's* heterosexual mythology—with Dame Musset the lesbian counterpart to Wendell" (167) Similarly, Cheryl Plumb writes that "[Musset's] messianic zeal in converting women to her creed parallels *Ryder's* espousal of his procreative philosophy, but because she advocates love of woman for woman, her actions parody his" (91). There is, however, an important difference between the two positions. Lanser sees Musset as an example of feminine strength and an important corrective to the patriarchal privilege claimed by Wendell. The two characters, despite their superficial resemblances, are, diametrically opposed in

intention. Plumb, in contrast, gives greater weight to the similarities tying the characters together. She rightly notes that “while middle-class attitudes toward sexuality continue to be satirized, Barnes pointed also the danger of adopting sexual freedom as the liberating principle of sexual freedom” (103). Musset’s sexual fixation is not a sign of perversion. Nor, for that matter, is it a cause for celebration. Instead, Barnes sees Musset as limited, blinded by her obsessive preoccupation with sex. More simply, Musset lacks depth. In Plumb’s words, Ladies Almanack “explores not just lesbian or heterosexual love but the limitations of physical love as opposed to such characteristic virtues as wisdom and stoic indifference” (92).

Since Musset’s preoccupation with sex is so obviously limited, the definitions of woman emerging from her salon are, predictably, incomplete or inadequate. In response, Barnes does not offer to fill in the gaps or augment existing definitions. Instead, Barnes wonders whether women can be collectively understood and challenges the classificatory impulse that underlies such a project. After listing the many maladies to which lesbian women are susceptible, Barnes continues to note “there have been some and several who hold the Sickness and the Signs of such are diverse to the Point where Classification becomes almost impossible, an whole Anatomy would needs be penned to get at so much as the smallest Tendril of the Malady, Grief and Agony” (29). In another passage, she writes that “The very Condition of Woman is so subject to Hazzard, so complex, and so grievous, that to place her at one moment is but to displace her at the next” (55). These passages suggest Barnes has lost faith in science’s ability to dissect and order the world. More specifically, Barnes’ willingness to embrace flux and indecision seems distinctly at odds with sexological practice.

By suggesting that woman may be ineffable or somehow beyond definition, Barnes appears to have much more in common with contemporary queer theorists than with the pseudo-empiricist thinkers of her own day. Her insistence that sexual categories displace, rather than fix or determine, the objects of their inquiry seems congruent with theories of performativity or polymorphous perversion. Accordingly, it might be tempting to read Barnes as one of the first French feminists—albeit of American extraction. However, one must be careful not to rush to conclusions. While Barnes was dissatisfied with some of the opinions and beliefs held by family and friends, she was not entirely unsympathetic to their causes. The bawdy humour of both *Ryder* and *Ladies Almanack* is evidence of Barnes' faith in the power of sexuality to challenge or disrupt prevailing orthodoxies. Barnes' technique does more than simply attempt to *épater le bourgeois* by transgressing social boundaries. Barnes attempts to manipulate readers through the use of both desire and disgust. For her, the body and its desires are distinctly real, *a priori* objects to which the writer can appeal. The challenge for the writer is not to explain away the body or to deny its existence as anything other than a socially constructed object. The real challenge is to find a way to expand our vocabulary to capture the diversity and contradiction that characterizes our experience of our bodies or, to use Barthes' formulation, "to confront the muck of language". In Scott's words, Barnes "expands the field of possibilities, making simple definition or dismissal equally impossible" (1: 253). In *Nightwood*, she attempts to come to terms with this contradiction.

VI.IV *Navigating the Night*

In 1931, Djuna Barnes ended her tempestuous eight year affair with Thelma Wood, an American sculptor and silverpoint artist. Needing to distance herself from the past they

shared, Barnes left France and took up residence at Hayford Hall, a summer home Peggy Guggenheim and John Holms had rented in England. Barnes was devastated by Wood's infidelities and her own inability to secure her lover's attentions. She felt betrayed and angry, and, as she had in the past, Barnes took up her pen to give vent to her frustrations. The writing process did not go smoothly. Hindered by drink and insecurity, Barnes took years to finish the novel. In the end, Nightwood was only published after a prolonged and painful editorial revision undertaken in collaboration with T.S. Eliot. Financially, Barnes was pressured into signing a less than favourable deal with Faber & Faber who promoted the book only reluctantly. Critically, it was either ignored or dismissed as dense, convoluted, and impenetrable. Barnes was exhausted by the entire experience and it was over twenty years until she again wrote anything of significance. Nevertheless, it is Nightwood for which she is best remembered and the novel remains, unquestionably, her finest work.

The story centres around a group of diverse characters who are all attracted to the same woman: the largely silent and decidedly animalistic Robin Vote (Thelma Wood's fictional counterpart). The first to pursue Robin is Felix Volkbein, a wandering Jew who has disavowed his heritage in favour of a fraudulent ancestry. He marries Robin and has a son with her, only to be later abandoned. Robin is then discovered by Nora Flood while visiting a circus in the United States. Nora (Barnes' alter ego) takes Robin back to Paris where the two women set up home together. Their happiness is soon compromised when Robin begins to wander, drinking heavily and cavorting with random men in bars. The relationship finally ends when Robin leaves with Jenny Petherbridge (Henriette Metcalf, the woman for whom Wood left Barnes). Predictably, Robin soon leaves Jenny like all

the rest. Struggling to understand both their initial attractions and subsequent losses, the characters seek the guidance of the novel's most interesting and bizarre figure, Dr. Matthew Mighty-Grain-of-Salt-Dante O'Connor, renegade gynaecologist and closeted transvestite.

Much of the critical response to the novel focuses upon Nora and whether she is the hero or villain of the piece. Though Phillip Herring may ultimately be right in claiming that Nightwood was "fundamentally, written out of love," Barnes' depiction of Thelma as Robin was, at the very least, indiscreet (165). Wood was devastated by what Barnes had written. She is reported to have threatened suicide and even physically assaulted Barnes during a public reading of the book. Barnes, for her part, experienced feelings of guilt for what she had done (Herring 165). Having said as much, it would be foolish to suggest that Barnes failed to appreciate how readers might respond to Robin or that the offending passages were merely written in a fit of pique. The prolonged writing period and numerous revisions offered Barnes ample opportunity to temper her depiction. More significantly, Barnes' treatment of Wood was similar to the satirical critiques she had written of her family and, to a lesser extent, Nathalie Barney. Barnes even includes a line in The Antiphon in which Augusta (the literary counterpart of Barnes' mother Elizabeth) exclaims to her daughter: "May God protect us! I wonder what you'll write when I am dead and gone" (115). It seems quite clear that, in writing Robin, Barnes was exorcising her own feelings of frustration and betrayal.

In and of itself, the story of a jilted lover is not unique. What distinguishes Barnes' account from others is not simply her negative characterization of Wood but her apparent indictment of the desire that brought about the affair in the first place. Robin is not

merely selfish or uncaring (though she is both); she is portrayed as deviant, debased, and corrupt. She seems almost physically incapable of love and is motivated only by a need to satisfy her base desires. In this limited sense, Robin is subhuman—representative of a primal space from which we have emerged but to which, Barnes contends, we must return so that its influence can be acknowledged (the novel's working title was the seemingly imperative "Bow Down"). This baseness is conveyed through the extensive use of natural and, more specifically, animal imagery. Robin is first introduced when she is attended to by Dr. O'Connor after having fainted in her apartment. Her room is decidedly lush, the bed surrounded by potted palms and cut flowers. Her body exudes the smell of fungi, and her flesh is described as having "the texture of plant life" (34). In Barnes' words, "Like a painting by the *douanier* Rousseau, she seemed to lie in a jungle trapped in a drawing room" (35). The analogy is apt in that Rousseau's work is defined by a blurring of the animal and human, and an omni-present tension between seduction and predation.

When Nora first encounters her in America, Robin is again cast in distinctly animal terms. The two women are at the circus when the lions are brought out by their tamer. A lioness proceeds to the edge of the cage in front of Robin. The animal lies on the ground, extends a paw towards Robin, and begins to cry. The scene suggests that, in Robin, the lion has identified a similar spirit. Like the lion, Robin is not suited to live amongst people and must prostrate herself if she is not to appear threatening. In this instance, Robin seems to disavow the resemblance and leaves in the middle of the performance feeling uncomfortable. Nora soon recognizes Robin's instinctive animality and, though

she can not abandon her desire to redeem her lover, Nora begins to make concessions.

Barnes writes:

Unconsciously at first, she went about disturbing nothing; then she became aware that her soft and careful movements were the outcome of an unreasoning fear—if she disarranged anything Robin might become confused—might lose the scent of home (56).

At this point, the animal has begun to supersede the human. By the end of the novel, Robin either embraces or entirely succumbs to her instinctual, predatory impulses. In perhaps the novel's most infamous passage, she is found lying on the floor of a ruined chapel near Nora's country home. She begins to crawl on all fours, both terrifying and arousing a dog that is also present. This continues until the two collapse in a heap and the novel ends. Though Barnes denied any such intention, the episode is commonly read as an act of bestiality.

Cheryl Plumb argues this emphasis on “decay” and regression is evidence of Barnes' symbolist inheritance (17). Barnes shares the symbolist's desire to see through pretension and face the naked truth of humanity's fallen state. While the symbolist connection is persuasive, Barnes' treatment of Robin's debasement can also be traced to a more overtly sexological concept: sexual degeneracy. As noted in the first chapter, sexual deviance was long understood in terms of a fall or relapse into primitive behaviour. The perverted individual fails to adapt and is incapable of transcending base desires. To prove oneself beyond the reach of such desires, the individual must display characteristic virtues of restraint, temperance, and self-denial. For women, these different values coalesce around the figure of the mother. The mother, as opposite of the fallen whore, is both a model of

consistency and guarantor of her family's righteousness. In Nightwood, Robin's selfish disregard for those around her is made manifest in regard to her failures as a mother.

When Felix marries Robin, he does so with an eye towards fathering a male heir who might continue his father's name and add legitimacy to the illusion Felix has constructed. The child that is born, however, is not an example of strength but is weak and struggles to survive. In Barnes' words, "The child was small, a boy, and sad. It slept too much in a quivering palsy of nerves; it made few voluntary movements; it whimpered" (48). Guido is "Mentally deficient and emotionally excessive, an addict to death" (107). Many of these traits are typical of the sexual degenerate and Guido's failings can be attributed to his mother's constitution and her ill-suitedness to reproduce. More than psychologically afflicted, the degenerate is physically lacking and deemed to suffer from hyperaesthesia which taxes the organism and drains it of vital energy. Melancholy was another condition commonly thought to afflict the degenerate. Guido's condition can thus be related to Robin's fallen or debased state. Guido's sensitivity is similar to Robin's waywardness and her inability to control her emotions, resulting in tantrum-like outbursts. Both mother and son are tainted. Rather than nurture her son, Robin adds to his difficulties as evinced in an episode in which Felix returns home to find Robin holding their infant aloft as though she were about to "dash it down" (48). Though she does not harm the child, the scene is disturbing and casts Robin in a distinctly negative light.

Robin's animal lust, her failure to conform to societal expectations, and her obvious shortcomings as a mother all combine to create an image of her as debased, grotesque, or, perhaps, even somewhat monstrous figure. However, this is not the only possible reading. To judge Robin negatively, one must tacitly approve of the standard against

which she is measured. Barnes did not. Because of her experiences as a child, Barnes thought that reproduction and child rearing were horrible burdens foisted on women. In a letter to her friend Emily Coleman, Barnes wrote that “father and his bastard children and mistresses had thrown me off marriage and babies” (Herring 33). In this light, Robin’s refusal to conform to the expectations of motherhood are radical and motivated by a desire for liberation. It is Felix who wants a child to calm his own patriarchal anxieties. Like Wald, Felix wants a child who might testify to his existence and through whom he might achieve a measure of immortality (Nightwood 112).⁹ His motivations are purely selfish and narcissistic. Thus, Guido’s obsession with death is deeply ironic as it represents the exact opposite of his father’s ambition. As such, “Maternity becomes the means by which Robin understands her distance from femininity” (Harris 75). At the very least, Robin’s relationship with Felix and Guido challenges patriarchal conceptions of what femininity should be.

While Robin’s rejection of motherhood is reflective of Barnes’ own misgivings, the problem of sexual licence is not so easily redeemed. This is not to say that many have not tried. Numerous critics have addressed Robin’s animal nature. Karen Kaviola writes of the animal world: “Because it pre-exists language, it cannot be known through language. It is a place unstructured by hierarchy: difference is horizontal not vertical. Therefore there are no clear distinctions between good and evil, humans and beasts, or masculine and feminine” (69). Kaviola argues that since Robin cannot easily be classified (though, as I have argued, she does fit the profile of the degenerate) she remains “a criminal outsider” who manages to break away from mechanisms of social control (99). Dana

⁹ Interestingly, Otto Weininger was also obsessed with immortality as an ideal masculine trait though he had no interest in procreating.

Seitler offers a similar reading. She writes that “the human-beast hybrid performs the unnaturalness of sexual alterity, acting as a persistent and threatening reminder of how far society could fall if perverse sexual activity is allowed to continue unhindered” (530). Though unsettling, this threat is welcomed since it points to the internal inconsistencies within sexological discourse, facilitating hybrid identities necessary for a full expression of “sexual personhood” (531). What Robin does is attack our sensibilities, disorienting or de-familiarizing the reader so that new conceptions of sex and gender may be considered.

Importantly, Kaviola and Seitler both contend that this process of de-familiarization is seductive but also unsettling. Kaviola calls the book “deeply disturbing” and “alternately alluring and terrifying” (60, 99). Seitler argues that the fascination with sexual perversion is always attended by a concomitant sense of fear (530). More simply, both agree Robin is an ambiguous, ambivalent figure. Others are less circumspect and read Robin as an heroic figure of female defiance. Shari Benstock sees Robin and Nora’s relationship as a conflict between competing visions of womanhood, one liberated and one repressed. In Benstock’s estimation, Nora is not simply the aggrieved but, rather, the perpetrator of her own crimes. “A product of a culture that has suppressed female *difference*, Nora Flood sees Robin as a man would see her: as an object of desire” (Benstock 259). More simply, Nora “never realizes that she is not only a victim of patriarchal law but an agent of it” (Benstock 258). Jane Marcus similarly argues that Nora “cannot give up her posture, derived from patriarchal conceptions of love, of the abandoned wife” (Laughing 238-9). There is some merit to these arguments. Much of Nora’s despair seems to stem from her own frustration, from her inability to come to terms with Robin’s difference. In seeking Dr. O’Connor’s counsel, Nora wants to understand her own desires as much as she wants

to understand Robin. This is yet another way in which Barnes resembles Nora; Barnes also longed to embrace the sexual freedom espoused by her friends and family members but found herself unwilling to abandon virtues of fidelity and exclusivity.

While Robin's character is alluring and her desire for independence compelling, her many failings should not be overlooked or minimized. For instance, Benstock argues that in Nightwood "The victim...has been mistaken for the victimizer" (255). Nora's anger and frustration stem not from Robin's infidelities but from her own inability to see her body as a source of pleasure. She remains blinded by a "puritan ethic" and fails to see Robin for what she really is—"a former prelapsarian self" (262). Marcus makes a similar argument. Rather than condemn Robin's treatment of Nora, Marcus celebrates Robin's wild ways. She claims that "Robin is the androgynous ideal, the archetype of the savage virgin Diana, a feminist version of the Noble Savage" (Laughing 248). This reading is somewhat surprising in that Robin quite often appears *ignoble*. She is drunken, loud, and often violent. Yet, these traits are redeemed when Robin's actions are read as a response to patriarchal ideals of feminine passivity and restraint. Nora, in seeking to limit Robin's excesses, comes to be seen as repressive. Kaviola even suggests that Nora's attempts to save Robin from the men who seek to exploit her drunken state are evidence of "Nora's puritanical and controlling influences" (64).

Surely, such readings stray from anything Barnes might have intended or supported. Kaviola, for example, takes a seemingly feminist gesture whereby one woman saves another from sexual exploitation and refigures it as an oppressive manifestation of patriarchal control. While Nightwood pushes the boundaries of sexual propriety, it does entirely disavow the culture from which it emerged. It is a deeply nuanced text and it is

with an eye towards these nuances that criticism must proceed. Barnes' portrait of Robin is undeniably harsh. Even if the novel's sexological overtones are largely lost on today's readers, a historically contemporary audience could not have helped but notice these suggestions of deviance and depravity and form their opinions accordingly. If Radclyffe Hall's dour novel could be met with outrage, Barnes could have no illusions that her portrait of Robin would be judged by many as scurrilous. At the same time, the novel is by no means some sort of moralizing sermon. Nora is unapologetic about her love of Robin. She merely wishes to understand her lover so that the two might live peaceably together. To merely prioritize one side of this equation is to ignore half the novel. At the same time, it is not enough to categorize the novel as ambivalently shifting between two opposing points of view. Such a reading focuses on successive experiences. The genius of Nightwood lies in its efforts to capture the *simultaneity* of desire and loathing, the hunger for freedom and the longing for restraint. To help understand the profound implications of this shift in perspective, Barnes provides the reader with a guide: Dr. O'Connor.

VI.V
With a Grain of Salt

Dr. Matthew O'Connor is the improbable anchor grounding the diverse stories that constitute Nightwood. Barnes modelled O'Connor after her friend Dan Mahoney, an unlicensed doctor and celebrated raconteur. Born of Irish-American stock, Mahoney was an outlandish character who delighted in entertaining shocked crowds with ribald stories of his sexual exploits in gay Paris. He was a droll and gifted talker and, according to the poet Edouard Roditi (who knew him), had "more gab, more blarney to him than even appears in Nightwood" (qtd. in Field 141). The comment is rather surprising given the

extraordinary wit and garrulity Barnes attributes to O'Connor. There are moments when O'Connor's logorrhoea threatens to overwhelm the novel, burying meaning beneath a tidal wave of brilliant, yet apparently vapid, prose.¹⁰ While Felix and Nora come to the doctor seeking answers, O'Connor's obscure and enigmatic responses seem to invite only more questions. At times, the doctor borders on complete incomprehensibility. This apparent paradox—the centrality of the doctor's bizarre musings in the deeply personal story of Barnes' troubled affair with Wood—has generated an enormous amount of critical response.

There is an understandable temptation to dismiss much of what the doctor says as meaningless. When Nora first encounters Felix and the doctor in conversation at a party, she asks: "Are you both really saying what you mean or are you just talking?" (18). More than just an expression of shock or bewilderment, Nora's rather indecorous question is quite astute. There is a definite sense in which the doctor's grandiloquence compensates for deep feelings of insecurity and even self-loathing. Though he often appears ridiculous or pathetic, O'Connor's silver tongue ensures a charismatic appeal. Like Maloney, the doctor is not afraid to play the fool when needed and, in Shakespearean fashion, he fills an essential social role. Despite O'Connor's obvious shortcomings, his advice is sought by those confused by their own desires. By speaking freely and unabashedly, O'Connor provides a rhetorical balm for the afflicted. In his famous introduction to the novel, T. S. Eliot argues that, through talking, the doctor helps "to drown the still small wailing and whining of humanity, to make more supportable its shame and less ignoble its misery" (xiv). O'Connor's unreserved willingness to discuss his own "afflictions" both qualifies

¹⁰ This is especially true of the early drafts of the novel in which O'Connor's diversions consume many more pages.

one's own sense of inadequacy and points towards the universality of "human misery and bondage" (Eliot, Intro. xv).

Since he cannot provide a cure and points only to the prevalence of the affliction, O'Connor's status as a doctor becomes ironic. When Nora visits O'Connor at his home, she finds his room cluttered with stacks of medical books "waterstained and covered with dust". On his dresser, she sees "a rusty pair of forceps, a broken scalpel" and "half a dozen odd instruments she could not place" (78). These various objects suggest that the doctor no longer has any legitimate claim to being a clinician. The precision instruments of his trade have been neglected and abandoned. Though once an obstetrician, O'Connor now attends not to women's bodies but to the far more ambiguous realm of their desires. Simply stated, the doctor's practice is more properly *sexological*. For Barnes, this shift in focus seems to mark something of a regression or devolution. Whereas Krafft-Ebing and Ellis aspired toward a sort of scientific rigour, O'Connor's diagnoses are, at best, abstract and often metaphysical. By removing the cloak of scientific objectivity, Barnes exposes sexology as a mere pseudo-science that arbitrarily prescribes the identities of those it seeks to "cure". O'Connor's inability to rectify his own deviance shows, furthermore, that he is unable to follow the physician's injunction to first "heal thyself". Accordingly, Jane Marcus argues that "[O'Connor] lampoons all of the male sex doctors whose own sexual identity was so troubled" ("Laughing" 230).

O'Connor's homosexuality and transvestism, combined with his dubious medical credentials, form the basis of a broader critique of phallic privilege. As Andrea Harris suggests, "Matthew speaks with the authority of his masculine subjectivity and his status as a doctor. But these traditional bases of authority are blatantly undercut by the fact that

he is a would be woman and an unlicensed quack” (63). Barnes mocks the notion of male mastery by feminizing or emasculating the phallic subject. She does this most powerfully in a startlingly literal scene in which the doctor exposes himself in a church. O’Connor visits the church after a brief meeting with Father Lucas in which the priest counsels him to live simply. The doctor finds this charge contradictory and ponders how to “be simple like the beasts and yet think and harm nobody” (131). In effect, O’Connor rearticulates one of Barnes’ recurrent concerns: the apparent antithesis of primal, instinctual desire and reasoned, moral thought. It is the same struggle Wendell confronts in Ryder when he asks: “[W]hat does one do with nature?” and Sophia responds “A humane man...would occasionally give it a respite” (172). However, there is an important difference between the two texts. In Ryder, a feminine voice intervenes and shatters Wendell’s patriarchal narcissism. In Nightwood, it is the inverted doctor who conveys both the masculine *and* feminine perspective.

Once in the church, O’Connor kneels in a dark corner and takes out his penis which he has named “Tiny O’Toole”. He does so as an act of desperation. Barnes writes: “There was nothing for it this time but to make him face the mystery so it could see him clear as it saw me” (132). Crying now, he continues to ask “What is this thing, Lord?”. On one level, the question alludes to the doctor’s inversion. Convinced he should have been born a woman, the doctor questions his malformed body—a practice common in many personal accounts of inversion (Musset does the same in the Almanack). O’Connor asks in reference to his genitals, “what is permanent of me, me or him?” (132). These questions challenge the basis or locus of sexual identity. By interrogating God’s design, Barnes revisits our understanding of the “natural”, just as she had done in Ryder. Yet,

there is an additional element in the scene. The doctor claims that he is crying “because I had to embarrass Tiny like that *for the good it might do him*” (132, italics mine). Rather than simply disavow his faulty genitals, O’Connor seeks to “redeem” his penis or, more accurately, his phallus through an act of prostration. In seeking divine guidance, the doctor humbles himself and relinquishes his authority as ultimate interpreter or arbiter of events—a prerogative he relishes throughout the rest of the book. This humility is made manifest in his degradation of the phallus which is never erect but lies “in a swoon” like “a ruined bird” (132, 133). Thus, Barnes accomplishes a dual function; she challenges the equation of gender and physiology, while simultaneously undermining the phallic authority upon which such pronouncements are grounded. As Laura Veltman argues, the doctor’s belittled penis “questions rather than affirms the phallogocentric order” (219).

Barnes’ challenge to O’Connor’s authority is the apparent feminist cornerstone of the text and helps qualify the difficult relationship between Nora and Robin. If Robin is the true victim of the text, Nora’s hostility can be explained as an effect of the pathologizing influence of sexology. Nora is unable to accept Robin’s liberation because she is blinded by patriarchal bias. By attacking O’Connor, Barnes assails the true culprit responsible for her failed relationship. Sarah Henstra is far more succinct. She argues: “As the parodic embodiment of masculine authority, Matthew must fail for the feminist text to succeed; his self-absorption thus becomes the symptom of a pathology inherent in the master discourse he is said to espouse” (127). Ultimately, this reading is rather unsatisfactory, as Henstra acknowledges. It denies Barnes’ agency by downplaying the legitimate sense of frustration she experienced. Quite simply, it defers personal responsibility. Perhaps even more importantly, such a reading fails to appreciate the true depth and complexity of the

novel by prematurely dismissing the doctor's insights. By reducing him to a comic fool, readers fail to appreciate the unique challenge issued by the doctor. In a conversation with Nora, O'Connor reaffirms: "I have a narrative, but you will be put to to find it" (97). To uncover that narrative, the reader must undertake "a reevaluation of the way language expresses identity in general" (Henstra 127).

Henstra makes O'Connor the focus of her re-evaluation. She maintains that his gender problems call attention to the difficulties inherent capturing both the body and desire in language. More precisely, she reads his monologues as "a mimesis of subjection"—"a textual performance of regret both for a safety he cannot find in symbolic categories and for what is barred from desire in order to exist as a legitimate social subject" (135, 132). The doctor's flamboyance calls attention to the performative nature of gender identity and, ultimately, reveals identity as "relational, unstable, and vulnerable to the possibility of imaginative redrawing" (Henstra 144). Henstra is right to cite O'Connor's undeniable trauma brought about by his feelings of social, or even personal, unintelligibility. Yet, she mistakenly attributes a sort of postmodern relativism to the doctor. O'Connor does not abandon the ideal of complete and exhaustive description. The inevitable absences and elisions inherent in Henstra's account of subjection (rooted as it is in Butler's theory of gender melancholy) are never conceded by O'Connor. Instead, the doctor seeks only to expand the parameters of language, to facilitate new modes of representation that might capture all the complexities of character. This is what he tries to teach Felix and, more particularly, Nora.

Robin functions as an enigma in Nightwood. In his introduction, Eliot says that Robin is "most puzzling" because "we find her quite real without understanding the means by

which the author has made her so” (xiv). She constantly seems to exceed the intellectual grasp of her lovers and, as Eliot notes, the reader. The reader’s advantage is that s/he has the privilege of multiple points of view. We may weigh Felix’s perspective against Nora’s and, though to a lesser degree, Jenny’s. In so doing, a composite picture begins to emerge. The difficulty is in integrating these discrete images into something resembling a unified whole. The challenge is a temporal one: how to convey a sense of simultaneity by way of the essentially linear mediums of speech and writing. For Barnes, this is not exclusively a problem for the artist. Rather, she suggests that we all suffer, in one way or another, from our limited perspectives. Felix makes this quite clear in the novel. Barnes describes Robin as both ancient and timeless and “[b]ecause of this, Felix found her presence painful, and yet a happiness. Thinking of her, visualizing her, was an extreme act of the will; to recall her after she was gone, was as easy as the recollection of a sensation of beauty without its details” (41). The point is made even more forcefully by Felix when he states:

If I should try to put it into words, I mean how I did see her, it would be incomprehensible, for the simple reason that I find I never did have a really clear idea of her at any time. I had an image of her, but that is not the same thing. An image is a stop the mind makes between uncertainties (111).

In Dr. O’Connor’s words, she is “the eternal momentary” (127).

If Felix fails to see Robin as anything more than a fleeting image, it is partly because he is a man. To repeat a point made earlier, Felix believes that man desires immortality. In his own words, “[Man’s] basic idea of eternity is a condition that *cannot vary*. It is the motivation of marriage. No man really wants his freedom. He gets a habit as quickly as

possible—it is a form of immortality” (112).¹¹ This desire for stability can be read as the pervasive need for phallic mastery, to assert oneself over one’s environment. Nora, in turn, is more open-minded and O’Connor endeavours to teach her how she might come to terms with Robin’s multiplicity. He does so by metaphorically re-conceiving the divide between passion and reason as the difference between night and day or, as he states it, “the peculiar polarity of times and times” (80). By repeating the word “times”, O’Connor introduces an element of similarity into what he otherwise describes as a polarity. While he does not deny there is a difference between night and day, he does suggest the two are inextricably intertwined or “related by their division” (80). He hopes to draw attention to the hybrid nature of twilight—the way in which night and day briefly mingle. Importantly, he acknowledges that such hybrid constructions can be threatening and inspire “fear, fear bottom-out and wrong side up” (80). Because the hybrid is “impure”, it threatens the stability that, according to Felix, man desires. In other words, the hybrid requires constant re-evaluation.

In the doctor’s opinion, most people are unwilling or unable to relinquish control and embrace the flux and incongruities that shape the experience of hybridity. Instead, we act reductively and negate the true complexity of the thing in favour of a more comfortable simplicity. As the doctor puts it, “we tear up the one for the sake of the other” (82). However, he does not believe that such a response is inevitable. O’Connor claims it is possible to know both night and day and points toward the French who “alone leave testimony of the two in the dawn” (82). The dawn represents a point of convergence when propriety and impropriety, the superego and the id, find simultaneous expression.

¹¹ In stating as much, Felix reiterates Jeff’s Jamesian position in “Melanctha” that the cultivation of positive habits is essential and prevents the mind from “wandering”.

Yet, the doctor makes clear this unique perspective is not easily gained. The French are only successful because

they think of the two as one continually and keep it before their mind as the monks who repeat, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me!” Some twelve thousand or more times a twenty-four hours, so that it is finally in the head, good or bad, without saying a word (83).

The process itself is rather paradoxical, beginning with a deliberate act of will and, culminating in a state of quasi-religious enchantment or transcendence. Citing “Indian gurus”, the doctor similarly argues that “To think of the acorn, it is necessary to become the tree” (83). Like the Buddhist koan, O’Connor’s suggestions are meant to interrupt logic and habitual thought processes and allow the mind a new perspective.

Importantly, O’Connor is not simply advocating a hedonistic surrender. He is not trying to shock Nora out of the puritanical habits of her American past.¹² For Barnes, such responses are entirely too easy and reduce the complexities of desire to a simple question of permissiveness—a fault she had already condemned in her father. Rather, the doctor tries to offer a new way of thinking about difference. As Jean Gallagher argues,

in its representation of the "inverted" characters of Robin Vote and Dr. O'Connor, Nightwood also attempts to model an "inverted" observer who is, as the etymology of the word suggests, "turned in" to the novel's visual field rather than occupying a privileged, transcendent, voyeuristic position outside of it (280).

In other words, Barnes expands the scope of her novel, transforming the instances which she chronicles from highly specific, highly individual affairs of the heart into something

¹² J. Gerald Kennedy sees Nora as encumbered by the “moral instincts” she has tried to leave behind and, as such, cannot fully embrace her exile. While not entirely wrong, this reading overlooks other non-moralistic dilemmas raised by Barnes’ relationship with Wood.

far more universal. She tries to show the extent to which we are all forced to suffer in the way in which Nora suffers. Eliot makes a similar point in his introduction when he states that “the book is not a psychopathic study. The miseries that people suffer through their particular abnormalities of temperament are visible on the surface: the deeper design is that of human misery and bondage that is universal” (xv). Diane Chisholm rightly rejects the idea that Nightwood is “the tortured and muted expression of a lesbian relationship” insisting, as I have argued, that Barnes “resists the tendency that animated her amazonian contemporaries to elaborate and glorify ‘inversion’” (176). To the extent that inversion is present in the novel, it serves to centre larger questions of self and other, similarity and difference. It is a critical lens that focuses Barnes’ larger concerns.

Specifically, inversion draws attention to the relationship between self and other in love. In the standard heterosexual romance, tradition holds that “opposites attract”. The strong man of action finds his match in the demure, caring woman. Differences are held to complement one another. In theorizing inversion, sexologists replicated this sense of complementarity. The masculine woman seeks out a feminine woman in a butch-femme relationship. While admitting a greater constitutional variance of masculine and feminine attributes, Weininger’s theories emphasize a similar reciprocity. Barnes challenges these theories and, instead, stresses sameness in homosexual attraction. Nora experiences this resemblance as a source of anxiety. She claims: “You do not know which way to go. A man is another person—a woman is yourself, caught as you turn in panic; on her mouth you kiss your own” (143). On one level, her response is typical of somebody who is only just awakening to a new sexual possibility. Since recognizable models of lesbian love are

suppressed by society, the experience of same-sex attraction is disorienting. This fits with many lesbian readings of the book. There is, however, more to the comment.

Nora claims that in kissing Robin she encounters not just another woman but *herself*. This suggests, in a Freudian manner, that lesbianism is a form of narcissism (Barnes describes lesbianism in the Almanack as “a Kiss in the Mirror” (23)). However, there is a sense in which such narcissism is not pathological but rather an inevitable response to an inequitable gender system. The doctor argues that we have been conditioned to accept stereotypical gender roles. He states that “in the girl it is the prince, and in the boy it is the girl that makes a prince a prince” (137). Thus, the woman is dependent upon a man for fulfillment and, even then, her identity is largely predetermined. The invert addresses this imbalance by promising access to both subject positions. He states that “the pretty lad who is a girl” is “but the prince-princess in pointlace—neither one and half the other” (136). The invert is “the painting on the fan”, composed of many different, individual components but giving the impression of a unified whole (136). This idea of the invert as a more complete being blessed with both masculine and feminine traits was culturally resonant and central in the writings of Symonds, Carpenter, and others I have discussed. However, Nightwood marks an interesting departure. Whereas Woolf’s Orlando builds optimistically upon this inheritance, Barnes’ novel introduces serious doubts.

Paralleling the scene in which Felix comes home to find Robin holding Guido above her head, Nora tells the doctor about a night in which Robin smashes a doll the two had looked upon as their “child” (147-8). While reemphasizing Robin’s lack of maternal instinct, the scene also casts lesbian unions as artificial and barren. O’Connor responds by drawing a connection between the doll and the invert. He states:

The last doll, given to age, is the girl who should have been a boy, and the boy who should have been a girl! The love of that last doll was foreshadowed in that love of the first. The doll and the immature have something right about them, the doll because it resembles but does not contain life, and the third sex because it contains life but resembles the doll (148).

The choice of terms is telling. Rather than using any of the other available descriptors, Barnes refers to the “third sex”—something that is neither male nor female but a mixture of the two. The third sex is by nature indefinite. Accordingly, it is also very difficult to represent. The doctor claims the third sex “should be seen only in profile, otherwise it is observed to be the conjunction of the identically cleaved halves of sexless misgiving!” (148). The passage challenges the unity of the Platonic hermaphrodite by suggesting that such difference can not be reconciled. The totality of the invert can never be captured in a single image or formulation. S/he can only ever be known symbolically through a succession of different, often divergent, images. In this way, the invert magnifies the difficulties inherent in all loving relationships. The lover can only be partially known and his or her actions can not ever be predicted.

What Nightwood ultimately points towards are the limits of representation. Barnes reflects back upon the recent history of sexology and literary appropriations of sexology and concludes that the truth of sex is beyond language. The theories which so many of her friends clung to are, for Barnes, mere approximations, at best, and misrepresentations of the truth, at worst. As Chisholm suggests: “Discursivity, as much as prudery, is the target of transgression” (172). It is not that Barnes denies there may be an underlying truth about sex. She does not point towards a post-structural, performative theory of sex,

as Andrea Harris suggests (88). As Chisholm so well argues, Barnes raises questions of representation. She questions the value of trying to say anything definitive about sex. The irony is that, while probing the limits of language, Barnes still manages to produce a remarkably perceptive psychology of desire. Robin, though perhaps ineffable, is very much present in the novel. All critics, regardless of their political orientation, are struck by the power of her depiction. As Catherine Whitley argues, Robin “remains an enigma, never quite coming into focus as a person, because the images which Barnes uses to portray her never quite add up, but seem instead to be pointing beyond themselves to an unknown and unknowable referent” (90). In effect, Barnes has written a sexology *sous rature*, a taxonomy of impossible, unknowable types. It probes the difficult conditions of subjection where one must enter into language in order to be understood, even though much is lost in translation.

Conclusion

Assessing the relationship between sexology and modernism, there is a temptation to draw definitive lines of connection and to pronounce conclusively upon the perceived social impact of these various responses. For the writers directly involved and for critics subsequently studying their work, one's position vis-à-vis sexology's influence becomes the foundation of community. Sexology is seen as a cipher through which the divergent experiments of different modernist writers may be read and underlying conceptual unity found. This is particularly so with many feminist efforts to explore what Shari Benstock has dubbed "Sapphic Modernism". The predominance of self-identified sexual inverts or what Newton has called the "mythic mannish lesbian" has lead critics to see sexology as a defining force in modernist women's writing. Sexology is either a liberative philosophy enabling self-definition or, more commonly, an overly prescriptive sexual typology that denies the diversity of lesbian experience. Sexology is either an ideal rallied around or an enemy railed against. Effectively, sexology continues to define and position people, producing not physiological typologies but critical and political affiliations, providing the backdrop against which the ongoing struggle to articulate gay identity is performed.

While critics disagree as to the place of sexology within feminist modernist literature, these varying assessments share a common utilitarian emphasis. That is to say, criticism has tended to focus on the usefulness of sexology in the larger struggle for gay rights and social acceptance. Debate centres on the utility or appropriateness of sexology as a tool for change. Though there is value in asking such questions, meaningful answers cannot be given without first adopting a more nuanced understanding of both the relevant sexological writings and the literary works they have inspired. It must first be recognized that sexology is by no means a unified school of thought. Aside from the stark differences between writers, the work of individual writers varies over time and, as with Havelock Ellis, occasionally within the same work. As Doan notes: “The collapsing of multiple and often divergent positions into the monolithic construction of ‘sexology’ glosses over key differences” (*Fashioning* 151). On a basic level, this oversight raises questions about the accuracy of any overarching pronouncement and, perhaps, even the advisability of such singular judgments. Even more importantly, this reductive focus on the political value of sexology, drawn from a straightforward reading of the original texts, obscures the ways in which internal inconsistencies were seized upon and exploited by poets and novelists in a process of creative exploitation and adaptation. Sexology’s utility cannot be assessed with reference exclusively to the texts as they exist; one must consider how sexological concepts were transformed during their creative rendering into fiction. Along these lines, Doan argues: “Literary negotiation of the dominant writings on sexuality and intersecting theories became the site of a sophisticated and complex refashioning, in effect, a wildly eclectic free-for-all” (144).

While Doan does well to call attention to the process of creative “refashioning”, she overstates the point in categorizing this process of transformation as a “free-for-all”. The allure and appeal of sexology are products of its scientific pretensions. In turning to the new science of sexology, writers were attempting to ground their call for tolerance and acceptance in the objectivist authority of the natural sciences. As Doan notes elsewhere in her book:

For these lesbian novelists the literature on female inversion and Uranism was not an outmoded pseudoscience but a dynamic and ground-breaking body of knowledge, brimming with useful ‘scientific’ information, ‘medical’ explanations, actual case histories, and philosophical rationales (163).

While historical retrospection may warrant the use of ironic inverted commas around terms like “scientific” and “medical”, it would be wrong to assume the men and women originally drawn to sexology shared this ironic detachment. As The Well of Loneliness makes abundantly clear, the invocation of sexological concepts is often marked by a dire earnestness. Even in more whimsical treatments like Orlando, scientific authority is never entirely undermined but, rather, refigured. This being the case, it is important to realize that, while a process of creative “refashioning” most certainly occurred, that process was both informed and constrained by a governing or prevailing paradigm or, perhaps even more accurately, episteme.

To understand properly the nexus of sexology and modernism (and the nature of the exchange between the two), the distinctly *modern* character of both discourses must be appreciated. To paraphrase Bruno Latour, modernity is marked by the proliferation of disavowed hybrid objects in an intellectual environment emphasizing the need for

discursive purification. In respect to sexology and modernism, this “modern constitution” (as Latour calls it) shapes the internal structure of each individual discourse *and* positions sexology and modernism in diametrical opposition to one another. The challenge for the sexologist and the novelist was to bridge these divides while simultaneously preserving the categorical distinctiveness of their respective discourses or disciplines. While borrowing occurs, it must be disavowed; writers must find ways to take what is borrowed and, in Pound’s words, “make it new”. As Latour suggests, this process of disavowal is imperfect and, in a quintessentially modern way, the repressed frequently resurfaces. For modernist writers and, to a lesser extent, sexologists, this can result in an ambivalent response to one’s work. Yet as Latour notes, these creeping doubts are not fatal but drive creative production. It is the dynamic of disavowed borrowing and subsequent refashioning that defines the work of the writers studied.

To strike a chord and resonate with the modern audience they sought to reach, the writers in question were bound by the cultural logic of their age. This was not merely a matter of choice or necessity but rather an historical reality. In a more Foucauldian sense, this modern framework was the epistemic precondition of all knowledge, humanistic or scientific. As moderns, it is only natural these writers wrote with a modern sensibility. As such, the nexus of sexology and modernism cannot be described in terms of unregulated exchange or the “free-for-all” Doan suggests. Instead, it is more properly seen as a site of “circumscribed creation”. This insistence upon foregrounding institutional or epistemic parameters and constraints may be dissatisfying for some. The present tendency to see sex and gender as performative appears far more liberating. However, performativity is itself not entirely open-ended and must fall within a “framework of intelligibility”. If we

today live in a postmodern reality in which the framework of intelligibility regulating the articulation of sexual identity has been expanded (by no means a foregone conclusion), it must be recognized that this is a relatively recent development. By returning to consider modernist women's writing on sex through a distinctly *modern*⁷ lens, we either gain a greater understanding of the path by which we have arrived at our present reality or, perhaps, uncover the persistence of the old paradigm.

To recognize these epistemic constraints is by no means to downplay the contributions made by the writers discussed. While Stein, Woolf, and Barnes are all modern writers and reflect a decidedly modern sensibility, their engagement with the prevailing paradigm is marked by a undeniable feminist consciousness and need to critically engage with the prevailing orthodoxy. That being said, the manner in which each woman approached this task of transformation varies. Stylistically and ideologically, they differ greatly from one another. Not surprisingly, this diversity of opinion and approach is also evident when considering the place of sexology in their respective oeuvres. For the most part, Stein was drawn to sexology as a means of understanding desire. In *Weininger*, she found a wildly ambitious, though tragically flawed, approach to predicting desire. This enabled Stein to develop what Steven Meyer has called a "neuraesthetic" approach to language, a way of using language to incite desire, directing and controlling the reader's response to the text. This very mechanistic, rather literal, approach to sexology was a product of Stein's own medical training and, in particular, her studies under William James. As a self-appointed spokesperson for all things modern, Stein reworked sexology to fit her ever-changing literary pre-occupations but never did she abandon the conviction that modernization, in

⁷ In a Latournian sense.

science and literature, was essential. Though possibly dismissed as arrogance, there is a profound sense of optimism in Stein's attempt to lead her readers into the future.

For her part, Virginia Woolf was far less literal and far more *literary* in her reading of sexology. Her understanding of sexology appears to have come more from friends and acquaintances rather than deep immersion in the subject (though she was almost certainly familiar with at least the seminal works in the field). Instead, sexology seems to have fit with her own conflicted views of sex. Though a great deal of ink has been spilled trying to sexually identify Woolf, Woolf herself appears to have resisted categorization. Instead, one sees in Woolf's writing a basic desire for acceptance and a need to transcend such limiting descriptors. She blurred not only the line between homosexual and heterosexual but, perhaps even more importantly, the line between sex and friendship. The failure to do so is evident in works like Mrs. Dalloway with its tragic focus on sexual degeneracy and repression. Perhaps needing to find another way to speak sex and desire as she knew them, Woolf created Orlando in which she was able to guide readers towards alternative dispositions. In so doing, she borrowed from the sexological literature on intermediacy and created a unique character capable of bridging the male/female dichotomy. Sexology, in this case, is less an authority than a complementary counterpart. The literary and the sexological are contemporaneous expressions of a society no longer able to live with traditional conceptions of sex and desire but, as yet, incapable of completely abandoning that which came before. Thus, the radical and conventional exist side by side, begging the individual to engage personally and perhaps come to a novel realization.

In Barnes, one sees a much greater scepticism and perhaps frustration that the grand ambitions of the past had yet to be realized. This is perhaps owing to the central role that

sexual dialogue and discourse occupied in her life. Long before she became immersed in the culture of inversion at Natalie Barney's Paris salon, Barnes was already acquainted with radical sexual politics and philosophical efforts to justify non-conformity. Under the guidance of her grandmother and father, Barnes was taught at an early age to embrace the full diversity of sexual possibilities. Looking back upon her life, there is ample evidence to suggest Barnes was indeed unencumbered and open to different types of relationships. Yet, she was also deeply sceptical of efforts to theorize desire. Over her entire body of work, there is a deep ambivalence about sexology, in both its concrete and more abstract formulations. From her sarcastic treatment of her friends in The Ladies Almanack to her dark account of her time with Thelma Woods in Nightwood, Barnes' writing is marked by a deep ambivalence. Though sympathetic to the sexual revolutionaries with whom she was surrounded, Barnes realized that the rhetoric of liberation could be abused and that certain truths could not be disposed of with even the most clever rhetorical flourish. For her, values of decency and fidelity were threatened by a climate in which any appetite or desire could be justified by recourse to science or some other form of "objective" truth. In a sense, her work is plea for personal responsibility, for an awareness of the repercussions that stem from certain lifestyle choices.

In chronologically charting literary treatments of sexology from Stein through Woolf and culminating in Barnes, one begins to see a progression that is perhaps symptomatic of all modern discourses. When cracks in the façade of modernity begin to emerge, we do not immediately jettison the philosophical and ideological inheritance into which we have been born. Instead, we struggle to reconcile what we experience with what we know. Unfortunately, many critics have failed to consider fully the implications of this simple

fact. To see sexology as simply imposing meaning on the lives of gay men and women is overly reductive and fails to consider the many forms of resistance mounted in response. At the same time, one must not overstate such resistance, emptying sexological concepts of their ostensible scientific objectivity and filling them with self-generated, performative meaning. The reality lies somewhere in the middle. Instead of prioritizing one discourse or another, bemoaning the science or celebrating creative transgression, it is better to examine the point of contact and the conditions of the exchange. What becomes evident is a process of mutual modification and exchange. New subjects of enquiry and methods of addressing these subjects emerge. In Barnes' later writing, the usefulness of sexology as a way of understanding sexual difference had diminished, strained by this on-going process of change. Yet, the transition to new modes of thinking and writing about sex is not marked by a clean break. The legacy of the past lives on and must be confronted if we are to understand where we are today.

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