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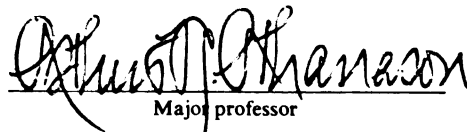
dissertation entitled

THE HOMOSEXUAL NARRATIVE AS OPPOSITION TO
HEGEMONIC INSCRIPTION: REINSCRIPTION OF THE
HOMOSEXUAL BODY IN EDMUND WHITE'S A BOY'S OWN
STORY, JAMES BALDWIN'S GIOVANNI'S ROOM, AND
MELVIN DIXON'S VANISHING ROOMS
presented by

Lawrence William Manglitz

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Ph. D. _____ degree in English


Major professor

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ABSTRACT

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By

Lawrence William Manglitz

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English

1994

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By

Lawrence William Manglitz

The focus of this study is on the reconstruction of homosexuality in three representative contemporary American homosexual texts: Edmund White's A Boy's Own Story, James Baldwin's Giovanni's Room, and Melvin Dixon's Vanishing Rooms. Each of these texts represents the continuous dialectic between the hegemonic, heterosexual sensibility (the definition of homosexuality and the inscription of or effect on the homosexual body that results from this sensibility) and the homosexual sensibility that exists in the homosexual text (the opposition of hegemonic, heterosexual definition and the redefinition of homosexuality and the emancipation of the homosexual body).

In this study the position of hegemonic, heterosexual definition is represented as oppressive and ultimately destructive; the hegemonic, heterosexual definition forms a genocide of homosexual desire and body. All three of the homosexual texts resist such definition and delineate progressions away from hegemonic oppression and recreate new meanings of homosexuality. In each of the texts, initially, the protagonist, whose response to homosexuality is formed

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by external sensibilities, is deformed by those sensibilities. The texts are narratives of reformation and emancipation. In White's A Boy's Own Story, the narrator/protagonist evolves from a romanticizing of the homosexual body and a determination to use sex as a political control to a knowing consciousness that realizes the wrongness of a homosexual act that violates the other. In Baldwin's Giovanni's Room, the narrator/protagonist moves from a homophobic sense of homosexuality to a consciousness of the inevitability of his homosexual body and the need for his articulation of homosexual desire to be happy; his failure to do so has been destructive to himself and others. In Dixon's Vanishing Rooms, the protagonist moves from a double bind -- an ambiguity about his expression of homosexual desire and his subservient racial position -- to both a sexual and racial emancipation.

This study represents these homosexual texts as oppositional narratives that redefine the homosexual experience, explore the paradigms of political oppression and the resulting deforming of the homosexual, and map escape from those forces that would genocide homosexual desire and the homosexual body.

LAWRENCE WILLIAM MARGLETT
1994

I dedicate this work to my grandfather, Schaddelso, and to my grandmother, who first gave me books to read. This work continues. This work is not what I expected, but it is what I needed. I am profoundly grateful to my grandfather, who would bring me books to read. I am grateful to my parents, William and Mary.

I also dedicate this work to my grandmother, who could have loved me more. I am grateful to my grandmother, who has been more free.

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LAWRENCE WILLIAM MANGLITZ
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank the members of my committee for their good teaching and help in directing my committee.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my grandfather, William Schaddelee, and to my great aunt, Bess Rypma, both of whom first gave me books to read. Thus began a long journey that continues. This dissertation is not what they might have expected, but it is a gift from them nonetheless. I am profoundly grateful that long ago they encouraged that which would bring me emancipation. I am grateful for the love of my parents, Wilbur and Dorothy Manglitz, as well.

I also dedicate this work to Owen Clark Taylor, whom I could have loved better before his death, if my spirit had been more free.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank the members of my graduate committee for their good teaching and help: Dr. Arthur Athanason, who directed my committee, Dr. Linda Susan Beard, Dr. Barry Gross, Dr. William Johnsen, Dr. George Landon, and Dr. Roger Meiners.

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Also, I want to thank my dear friend, Dr. Marilyn Brouwer, for hours of conversation, her good questions and comments, all pertinent to my writing, teaching, and living.

Without these all would have come to naught.

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." T.S. Eliot

Society wants its stories; I want to return to
society the story it has made.

Jack the Modernist, Robert Gluck

PREFACE

Chapter It is only the story . . . that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort; without it, we are blind. Does the blind man own his own escort? No, neither do we the story; rather, it is the story that owns us.

Anthills of the Savannah, Chinua Achebe

Beyond the garden wall is hidden a pattern. Each of us is connected to that pattern. The whole world is a work of art; we are parts of the work of art. Hamlet and a Beethoven quartet are the truth about this vast mass we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, no Beethoven. . . . We are the words, the music. We are the work itself.

Taken from the Ten Great Writers Series: Virginia Woolf, Hermione Lee

And I have known the eyes already, known them all--
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
And how should I presume?

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," T.S. Eliot

Society wants its stories; I want to return to society the story it has made.

Jack the Modernist, Robert Gluck

Chapter

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Chapter I. The Inscription of the Homosexual Body:
The Homosexual Text as Representation of the
Homosexual Body and Opposition to
"Compulsory" Heterosexual Figuration

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Chapter I. The Inscription of the Homosexual Body:
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of the Homosexual Body and Opposition to
The "Compulsory" Heterosexual, Hegemonic Figuration

Instead of taking unto itself the gospel according to Rimbaud: *Lo, we are come unto an age of assassins*, contemporary youth would have been better advised to have adopted *Love is to be reinvented* for its motto.

The White Paper, Jean Cocteau

Traditionally the representation in print of homosexuality has been met with opposition. E.M. Forster withheld from publication a collection of short stories, The Life to Come, and his novel, Maurice, until after his death. D.H. Lawrence withdrew the prologue that made clear the homosexual focus of his novel, Women in Love. Alfred Knopf refused to publish James Baldwin's novel, Giovanni's Room. Tennessee Williams revised the final act of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, deleting the definite homosexual focus of the play, to make possible a film version that could be seen by the American public. Lee Edelman, in his essay, "Seeing Things: Representation, the Scene of Surveillance, and the Spectacle of Gay Male Sex," makes reference to the response of a French visitor in England who read a newspaper report of a mob who assaulted several men "after having been convicted of assault with the intent to commit sodomy in the back room of a Vere Street pub" (Fuss, Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories 93) in London. The newspaper account reported

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that the mob pelted the manacled men with "mud, dead cats, rotten eggs, potatoes, and buckets filled with blood, offal, and dung" (93) while they were being taken to the pillory. The great offense taken by the visiting French man, who happened to read the report, was not caused by the report of the assault made on the men but rather with the fact that homosexuality was represented in print, thus, sullyng the mind of the reader:

We have just read in all the newspapers a full and disgusting account of the public and cruel punishment on the pillory of certain wretches convicted of vile indecencies. I can conceive of nothing more dangerous, offensive, and unwise, than the brutality and unrestrained publicity of such infliction. The imagination itself is sullied by the exposition of enormities, that ought never to be supposed to exist. (93)

Acknowledging the irony of the misplaced compassion -- it was the French reader of the report of violence done against homosexual men who was, hopefully, to receive more consideration -- I do not think that my study is "dangerous," "offensive," or "unwise;" although I am certain that to some it will be so. These words are an attempt to construct an understanding from the marginalized, homosexual text, of the profoundly disastrous influence of patriarchal, hegemonic, heterosexual inscription on the formation of the homosexual man, the absolute imperative for a homosexual consciousness of the problematics emerging from that external source of definition, and the requisite for a homosexual reconfiguration of homosexual desire and the

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articulation of that desire, formed out of the knowledge and control of the homosexual legend. Three texts, focusing on the evolution of men toward an understanding of themselves as homosexuals achieved through their struggles, conscious of the hegemonic force that demands conformity to the "normalcy" of heterosexuality, provide the representations of the homosexual and his predicament in this study: A Boy's Own Story, Edmund White; Giovanni's Room, James Baldwin; and Vanishing Rooms, Melvin Dixon. These male texts form the foundation of my consideration; I have not included any Lesbian texts. Although they, too, would represent the predicaments of same-sex desire, the political position of such texts would necessarily be different, as the history of Lesbian women in patriarchal western civilization is different from the history of the male homosexual; such a broad consideration would be an overwhelming task to accomplish in this study.

The texts by White, Baldwin, and Dixon are a genre in the canon of homosexual literature; they are those stories that record, initially, the predicament of the homosexual, defined and restricted by a homophobic society. In this genre, the men, through instruction and definition from within the homosexual sphere, begin to oppose the dominant powers that prohibit their sexuality. This opposition is accomplished through the knowledge acquired from other homosexuals and the protagonists' own intelligent understanding and interpretation of those incidents that

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occur in their lives. It is the task of this study to describe how each narrative represents the dialectic between the homosexual consciousness and the hegemonic element in society, the precise evolution from confinement by that element to a freedom to articulate homosexuality, and how that evolution takes place, indicating precisely what is being abandoned, what motivates the abandonment, what is acquired, and how in such changes new definitions or inscriptions are invented -- how the very meaning and being of homosexuality changes, allowing an emancipation of the body.

The protagonists, in these texts, are motivated to be free and authentic by their own powerful desire and need to express or fulfill that desire. The narratives are authorial accounts that depict men whose initial understanding of themselves as homosexuals is determined by hegemonic forces, but men who ultimately are agents of themselves, in possession of drive and will to become free in their sexual lives, and men who are powerfully influenced by those who have made the journey to freedom already.

I have selected these three texts to represent the coming-out journey, because each represents a different consequence of hegemonic confinement and a different process in the emancipation of the person from that hegemonic domain. These are three different narratives that depict the dilemma of impending assassination and ultimate

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The heterosexual, hegemonic elements in society are those powers -- represented by institutions in a nation or culture that form the ethics, mores, laws, and understood taboos, and institutions that enforce those ethics, mores, laws, and taboos -- that valorize the desires and lives of some people while prohibiting and devalorizing the desires and lives of other people. Such hegemonic elements are not found in one source, but rather the elements spread like a web over and within the entire nation. The task of overthrowing such power is enormous and most of those oppressed by such a system learn to maneuver to particular freedoms within the nation, as is suggested by Ross Chambers in his text, Room for Maneuver: Reading (the) Oppositional (in) Narrative.

Before continuing, it would seem helpful to attempt to identify the homosexual, that man who desires sexual fulfillment with someone of the same sex. In Gaiety Transfigured: Gay Self-Representation in American Literature, David Bergman defines the homosexual as that man who senses an "otherness" about himself; he feels distinctly different even before becoming conscious of his specific sexuality. He, also, is different from the male who may have a temporary or brief homosexual experience ("intramale"). For the homosexual there is a "genuineness of experience" in his expression of sexuality. Also, his

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homosexuality is permanent. In addition, Bergman perceives the homosexual as being egalitarian; specific roles are not given to homosexual men (30-31). This definition should be helpful in understanding the homosexuals in the three texts included in this study.

Certainly for the writer of this study, who during his late teenage years read Hamlet, Macbeth, Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God, "Ode to a Nightingale," Cry, the Beloved Country, The Prince, The Divine Comedy, The Odyssey, The Cloister and the Hearth, and many other canonical texts that comprised the reading lists of high school and early college courses, the absence of the homosexual text and the deforming hegemonic representation in canonical texts were problematic. It seemed that in the stories of human kind, the homosexual did not exist, or if he did, the representation was an adjudication against the homosexual. Bergman, in the introduction to his significant study, Gaiety Transfigured: Gay Self-Representation in American Literature, a discussion of the importance of the text as a source of his understanding of his own homosexuality, makes reference to the significance of printed words in human beings' determination of themselves as homosexual, mentioned in Richard Gilman's book, Decadence: ". . . like so many other categories of the 'abnormal' . . . [homosexuality] makes itself known to us, at least in the beginning, in the form of a legend" (Bergman 6). Certainly, for the homosexual in the 1950s and to a great extent, even now,

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this confrontation of the "legend" is accomplished in private. The homosexual legend, representing and defining the homosexual experience, is itself -- removed from the center of western literary canon -- a closet, read in a closet, by a man who exists in a closet. For this writer, André Gide's The Immoralist, Jean Cocteau's The White Paper, and Baldwin's Giovanni's Room were such texts, ambiguously recommended by friends, never fully discussed with them, read in a private room, and concealed in a drawer. Even now, the recollection remains of the young man trying to understand who he was, how he might live, and how he might moralize his own being. None of the texts pointed the way to an easy life, but were, rather, discourses delineating a great burden: Michel, in The Immoralist, evolves through a series of incidents of gazing on young Arab boys, cultivating the sensations of the flesh, and becoming conscious of his attraction to homosexuality; the intuition of the body, allowed, directs the desire of the being. Then, on the verge of completely abandoning the past, the traditions of French culture, and embracing and articulating his authentic desire, he hesitates and asks his friends -- representatives of hegemonic heterosexuality, privileged with male power, indeed, rulers within French government and finance -- to listen to his story and to speak advice to him as did the friends of Job. The narrative perspective of the novel is that of one of his friends who constructs Michel's discourse into a letter to Monsieur D.R., *Président Du*

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Conseil -- a request for help, to alter the homosexual direction of Michel's life. Gide's construction of the narrative moves Michel completely outside his own cultural environment, a particular ethnography which seems required for the man to be homosexual -- a complete marginalization. The text delineates the protagonist to the point of freedom and hesitation; wealth, property, marriage, an academic career, and a valorized social position within French civilization have all been abandoned for the desires of the body, emblemized in Michel's gesture of holding cool pebbles in the palm of his hand until they warm and then replacing them with those from the shade (107) and developed in the articulation of his homosexual desire as he admits agreement with the prostitute's accusation that he desires her brother, Ali, more than he desires her (107). In Gide's representation, the fact that the protagonist is unable to act decisively and accept morally/socially his homosexual desire, and his request for help from those who are entrenched in hegemonic power jeopardizes the progress of this consciousness and the evolution of fulfillment of the desires of the body. The determining site of progress and evolution has been the body, a site Michel has been able to discover in the removal of his body from that society which has determined particular meanings, functions, and prohibitions of the body.

A similar ethnography exists in The White Paper; the confessing narrator whose homosexual desire has been

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awakened by the dark underarm hair of the gypsy boys climbing a tree, removes himself, after a series of homosexual incidents, to a monastery. In that place he only sees again the faces of other homosexuals, forcing him to flee from society, itself, and to embrace the life of a hermit. The representation in this text is one of the complete dominance of hegemonic, heterosexual "law" over homosexual desire.

The accessibility of the texts is due, in part, to the fact that all of them are the works of writers who have established themselves in the tradition of western literature through other texts of their own, not focused explicitly on homosexual subjects.

Bergman, in the first chapter of his book, Gaiety Transfigured: Gay Self-Representation in American Literature, centers his discussion on the structure of homosexual discourse. He acknowledges the contribution of the larger heterosexual, hegemonic society to the emergence of the representation of homosexuality by homosexual writers, themselves, in a tradition of narrative discourse. Bergman makes reference to a statement by Robert Gluck in his work Jack the Modernist: "Society wants its stories; I want to return to society the story it has made" (Gluck 161). In the three texts by contemporary homosexual writers that I have chosen as paradigms of a homosexual discourse (representing the dilemma of heterosexual, hegemonic figurations on and inscriptions of both the homosexual body

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-- its desire and consummations of that desire -- and the homosexual text), the stories are the stories made by that oppressive hegemonic society: complex dialectics and energetic interactions.

In White's A Boy's Own Story, the narrator's homosexual desire, awakened prior to the narrative, manifested in a series of sexual episodes, does not exist outside an intense conflict: the romantic fantasy and the habit of establishing an object of desire in a stasis of aesthetic configuration, thus distancing himself from a sexual reality -- an actual possession of the flesh and pleasure in the body. The romantic fantasy and aesthetic configuration -- inhibitions and deformity -- are the result of hegemonic prohibition of homosexuality. The narrator's preference for sex with a "heterosexual" male who would be seduced by him on only one occasion would assure him the "reality" of a sexuality that could not be identified as homosexual. The text itself, determined by hegemonic society, represents a particular homosexual dilemma as extreme as that portrayed in Jean Cocteau's The White Paper; the presence of heterosexual prohibition and rejection permeate the sensibilities of the two confessors, shaping equally what they see and know and what they do not see or know. In Cocteau's text, the protagonist, through "choice," removes himself from the scene of homosexuality; the conflict is "the germ" of tension: desire and prohibition. The boy in White's text pursues a political empowerment that will allow

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him a homosexual accomplishment, the seduction and betrayal of an older man -- the prototype of his father, enabling him a revenge against the hegemonic patriarchs who configure/disfigure his sexual desire and prohibit consummation. Simultaneously, the protagonist's desire, arrested, is articulated through romantic invention: the desired object not possessed, but idealized and gazed upon; thus, intensifying desire and providing that object which "safely" becomes the adored. Thus, desire becomes displaced and the body becomes the site of a romantic vision. The consequence of this formula is the engendering of rage, an urge to violate that which is both the reality (the actual source of deception and prohibition) and that which symbolizes that source.

Neither The White Paper nor A Boy's Own Story provides a path of escape from oppression to a refuge where homosexual expression is approved, encouraged, and celebrated, but they do represent a particular historical reality of homosexuality and provide for the homosexual reader "another" who confirms his existence and who acknowledges the reality of the hegemonic opposition that disallows the existence of homosexual fulfillment.

The narrative perspective of A Boy's Own Story is distanced, in/through an intelligent consciousness, from the events of the text. Three years after the narrator has seduced Beattie and betrayed him -- events that give the narrator power over an older man, make himself the desired

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object, provide him with the desired sexual act, but, in his mind, do not make him homosexual -- he sees Beattie again. At the time of his final sight of Beattie he feels he might tell him how much he repents what he has done to him (21). This moment occurs three years after the actual events of the seduction and reveals a significant progress in the narrator's life. He humanizes and makes real his own homosexuality and his connection to another male. But it is significant that his progress lacks the actual accomplishment of his apology. The passage of time and the particular conscience of the narrator contribute to a distance from the actions comprising the discourse and an understanding, initially lacking, that manifest a maturation -- a seeing into the actions comprising the discourse and the narrator's own judgment, which had fabricated a "logic" for the inherited vision and sense of life outside the benefits and curse of dominant society during the actual course of those actions. This distance, survived, is a point of maneuvering, a turning to see and act differently. White does not reconnect the narrator to Beattie, who never gave pleasure or bond to the narrator and who represents that patriarchal world, "adults," with whom that marginalized narrator must live in opposition. Significantly, the text which has narrated a discourse of homosexual confinement out of which the narrator, in conscience, has maneuvered, does not construct a relationship, sexual and whole, for the narrator. The final

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vision of the text, the ultimate position of the homosexual awareness, is a maneuvering in isolation, an awareness of the hegemonically inscribed predicaments: the romantic longing and an empowerment that would enable seduction and rejection -- a political tyranny. The narrator's consciousness of this dual predicament and his compassion for his "victim" are White's (reinscription) of the homosexual body and opposition to "compulsory" hegemonic, heterosexual figuration. Thus, the duration of assassination in the narrative is terminated; the destructive episodes of sexual acts, fetishized ("fetishized" meaning the body is fragmented and the experience of sex is accomplished outside any connection to the whole person; thus, a dehumanizing and objectifying of the sexual organ/act occurs) encounters that brutalize those males who participate in them, are countermanded by the reinvention of compassion -- a single characteristic that has been missing in those relationships described by White in this text of powerful hegemonic figurations.

The novel by Baldwin, Giovanni's Room, represents an evolution in the life of the protagonist from a repressed homosexual desire, which in the youth of David is never intelligently confronted. Periodically, throughout his youth, episodes of homosexuality occur. The desire intensifies and the opportunity -- usually in an environment of drinking -- arouses homosexual desire, focused only on the body, as disconnected from the entire, complex being of

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person. The fact that David does not intelligently confront his homosexuality is emblematic of a dual predicament for the homosexual of the 1950s. Such conversation would manifest a disclosure of his sexuality and no language would exist to enable a positive identification of his sexual realities -- after his sexual experience, as a boy, with Joey. Baldwin represents the impact of the "voices" -- the hegemonic language -- heard by David after his erotic night with Joey:

A cavern opened in my mind, black full of rumor, suggestion, of half-heard, half-forgotten, half-understood stories, full of dirty words. I thought I saw my future in that cavern. I was afraid. I would have cried, cried for shame and terror, cried for not understanding how this could have happened to me, how this could have happened in me. (15)

The passage depicts, through the words "full of rumor . . . half understood . . . full of dirty words," the inability of the narrator to identify, in an affirming language, the erotic experience he has just enjoyed with Joey. Baldwin has the narrator identify the experience with Joey at a later time in a language that affirms the beauty and joy of the experience with his "friend":

I feel in myself now a faint, a dreadful stirring of what so overwhelmingly stirred in me then, great thirsty heat, and trembling, and tenderness so painful I thought my heart would burst. But out of this astounding, intolerable pain came joy; we gave each other joy that night. It seemed, then, that a lifetime would not be long enough for me to act with Joey the act of love. (14)

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This language is a language that describes the experience several years after the incident. The language from the "cavern" is the language that describes the experience the morning after it occurs, and it is the language to which the homosexual, David, listens, abandoning Joey with no language -- explanation -- for fear that his language would lack the resolve or the "reason" for his departure from homosexual love/desire, persecuting the object of his desire, and repressing his sexual desires, with great success, for many years, until his experience with Giovanni in Paris.

The body of Joey, after the sexual incident, "suddenly seemed the black opening of a cavern in which [David] would be tortured till madness came, in which [he] would lose [his] manhood" (14). Within two pages of his text, Baldwin uses the same image of the open body to describe the nightmare that David has of his mother returning from the dead:

My mother . . . straining to press me against her body; that body so putrescent, so sickening soft, that it opened, as I clawed and cried, into a breach so enormous as to swallow me alive [my italics]. (17)

In the passage describing the body of Joey, the narrator confesses his fear of loss of himself -- specifically his "manhood" through the act of homosexuality. The imagery in the nightmare, in its close proximity to the imagery that articulates that narrator's fear of homosexuality, intensifies the sense of the homosexual act as an act of death: it destroys; more specifically, it kills. The

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exercise of the will to consummate desire with another male is positioned, by Baldwin and the mind of the narrator, in death: such a perception is a hegemonic inscription on the homosexual body, genocidal in its motivation; it is an inscription appropriated by the homosexual, David, himself. Later, in the novel, as Baldwin develops the emerging homosexual conscience and consciousness of both David and the text, the execution of Giovanni -- motivated by his murder of Guillaume, emblematic of a decadent homosexuality, but, also, an execution motivated by Giovanni's own wish to escape the vision of homosexuality that he possesses, desire situated within the venue of prohibition -- becomes the central manifestation of hegemonic, genocidal inscription on the homosexual body. The inscription is appropriated by Giovanni, as it is appropriated by David. Giovanni performs the act of "double death": first, against Guillaume and then against himself. Thus, the prohibiting representatives of heterosexuality release the blade that removes the head from the body; homosexual desire is genocided. Baldwin clearly and terrifyingly appropriates the genocidal force in his text, perhaps both representing its presence in the universe and its presence within himself, authorially appropriated. Baldwin does not have David attempt to help Giovanni; his death is "allowed." It is not through the death of Giovanni that David acquires an understanding and acceptance of his homosexuality; it is through his homosexual experience with Giovanni and the words he speaks

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with Hella. It seems profoundly significant that when David, at the conclusion of the text articulates an intellectual resolution of his homosexuality, the perfect object of his desire -- that object (person) which Jacques has warned David he will find seldom in life -- has been killed. It might be argued convincingly that what Baldwin does in this novel is what Thomas Hardy does in many of his novels: that is, to illustrate the irrevocable consequence of action; in this sense the text is a description of "an age of assassins" and love is not reinvented. However, the homosexual body is reinscribed by the narrator; an evolution to a consciousness of inevitable homosexuality is achieved; such knowledge emerging from the body itself -- "the key to my salvation . . . is hidden in my flesh" (Baldwin 223). Tragically, the opportunity/object for the consummation of desire is genocided; and the hegemonic inscription of the homosexual body is depicted to be of large consequence.

The "age of assassins" is the time of Dixon's text, Vanishing Rooms. In this novel, Dixon represents three homosexual evolutions through the lover-relationship of two men: Metro, the white male, and Jesse, the African-American male; and the antagonist, Lonny, who is white and a member of a New York street gang. The white men, Metro and Lonny, in this text, are representations of the appropriation of hegemonic inscription into the homosexual's perception and definition of self. Metro moves into the margins of homosexual articulation which have been provided for the

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homosexual in the large city: the baths, the abandoned docks, the empty warehouses -- significantly, space once inhabited by heterosexuals, but now given to homosexuals, as social changes in industry and transportation have occurred -- derelict spaces, geographic sites, on the edge of the pulsating center of American heterosexual culture. In this text, Metro and Lonny represent the propensity to death. Metro represents this propensity in his sexual fetish which draws him into dangerous places and the use of drugs, and causes him to fail to recognize and protect himself against the homophobia that permeates the streets, the city, and the nation. Lonny represents that youth who is homosexual and who attempts to repress it; also, his friends are depicted by Dixon as having inclination for homosexual expression, as well as a misogyny that unites them into a confraternity of violent homosexual repression and violent "heterosexual" articulation. They seem not to have "objects of desire," but rather sexual objects over which they dominate and toward which they express contempt. They, as a gang, function in a bond of social power and dominance. Although in Dixon's representation of them the reader perceives their attraction to homosexuality, they do not express that homosexual attraction. The gang functions to represent a violent removal of homosexual practice as well as an attraction to it. Dixon's emblemizing of the gang as bonded in power, but "disbonded" in the expression of mutual sexual desire and articulation, is an important

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representation of the continuation of that dangerous "germ": the violent tension that results from desire and repression; and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's question on the matter, in her text, Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire, focuses the enigma: "What does it mean -- what difference does it make -- when a social or political relationship is sexualized" (5)? What happens when two men who are bonded in power (a given privilege) bring into their relationship a sexual union? In Dixon's text and in the other two texts discussed in this study, a sense, on the part of the homophobic characters, of a profound violation of law/order/taboo exists; none of the authors clarifies the precise elements in the motivation of that sense, perhaps because as a society we have not logically clarified that sense or motivation. We only know, as Sedgwick suggests, that "the structure of homosocial continuums is culturally contingent, not an innate feature of either 'maleness' or 'femaleness'" (5). This cultural contingency is represented in the gang, an emblem of the "germ"/tension that is eliminated, in this text, only through genocide. Jesse, the young African-American, doubly marginalized -- through race and sexual articulation -- represents an appropriation of a homosexual model in two senses: first, in his youth his homosexual desire is "feminized" -- to be a homosexual is to imitate a woman. This is a model that he comes to disregard. Second, he appropriates the marginalization of hegemonic, heterosexual, political dominance through his

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imitation of the sexuality of his lover Metro. After ~~up that~~ Metro's murder, Jesse explores those spaces of homosexual desire and articulation in which his lover, Metro, existed, presuming that it is through the intense sexuality of the docks, the warehouses, the baths, and the bars that one becomes a self-fulfilling homosexual. The focus of the narrative discourse is on the young African-American dancer, Jesse, who represents a new paradigm in homosexual expression and being. He refuses to be defined by either of the dominant forces; he refuses to be defined as a homosexual by white, heterosexual hegemony or by white, homosexual hegemony. As Metro is a victim of a heterosexual homophobia, so is Jesse a victim of both heterosexual homophobia and homosexual racism. In a very simple language the question to which this novel gives profound answer is: how does one "be" a homosexual in a homophobic and racist society? The dangers of mimetic modes for the African-American homosexual are extensively delineated and the map for escaping confinement and genocide is constructed; and, in this text, "love is reinvented."

Three years ago I took part in a workshop, at Michigan State University, which addressed the matter of the inclusion of ethnicity in undergraduate courses that traditionally might not have been attentive to ethnicity. I, however, was given the opportunity to talk about ways in which I had begun to include homosexual texts in a college-level course I teach that is an introduction to fiction as a

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genre. I explained to the participants in the workshop that over the past twenty years the course, as I teach it, had evolved to include a variety of texts: African American, Native American, and, certainly, homosexual/gay. When I had finished my presentation the first question was: "Doesn't your reading list represent a political agenda?" The correct answer was "yes," although the phrasing and tone of the question made me think that "yes" as an answer was a problematic answer; "no" would have been a lie. Now, a quick response, to the point, would seem to be: "I would hope that any person who is repressed and in danger of being killed would have a political agenda." The reality is that in my teaching I perform several tricks, and one of them is to read texts with my students, being attentive to political representations and the position of power in the texts.

Jonathan Dollimore addresses this matter in his text, Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault:

... the literature that represents homosexuality is always political. And by that I mean, at the very least, that it is a medium of competing representations which have complicated histories with the potential profoundly to affect people's lives. I do not mean only that reading and writing literature can contribute to the growth of the individual (although it may, and crucially so); it affects those whom it represents in diverse other ways. In the case of homosexuals it has affected their freedom, who or what they are, or are allowed to be, even the question whether they survive or die, metaphorically, spiritually, literally. So it is strange that this insistence on the profoundly political aspects of literature so often meets with the reproach that such a view diminishes literature's importance. To me the reverse is true. (62)

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Thus, the focus of this study is on "competing ~~and with~~ representations": A Boy's Own Story, Giovanni's Room, and Vanishing Rooms, the ways in which these texts, from the margin, reconfigure the reality of homosexuality and narrate the life of the homosexual in terms of definition, confinement, maneuvers, and evolution; the discussion is, rightly, political.

On this nineteenth day of July, 1993, as I begin a revision of my first chapter of this study, the President of the United States has just announced his plan for lifting the ban on homosexuals in the military: homosexuals will not be asked to identify themselves when they enlist in the services; they are not to identify themselves as homosexual to anyone (clergy, doctors, and psychiatrists are exceptions) in private or public; any homosexuals identifying themselves as homosexual will be perceived as having a propensity to homosexual acts which would deem them as unacceptable persons in the military. I consider my revision work and the President's speech as a perplexing, ironic coincidence. After the President concluded his remarks, he shook hands with all of the military commanders on the podium, with an exchange of smiles, what seemed pleasant words, and the nodding of heads in approval. A consensus reigns that something has been accomplished; and as I stare out my window at the overcast sky, I wonder what; I try to determine what it is that I have missed; what has been agreed upon, much to the contentment of the

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heterosexual, hegemonic, military patriarchy, and with little contentment for homosexuals, is an *invisibility*. The tolerance of the homosexual in the military, who agrees not to exist, seems an accomplishment to such commanders of armies, or perhaps in their minds they know they have succeeded in eliminating the "presence" recognizable in their midst; thus, the military institution and the nation returns to a time "after the homosexual" through this successful political genocide. This is what happened this afternoon at three o'clock. Thus, a particular clarity is brought to Leo Bersani's words: "The 'first' or fundamental exercise of power over individuals is their own confessional interpretation of themselves" (Bersani, The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art 30). In Dollimore's text, Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault, the reality is presented that the hegemonic society may feel more threatened by an effort on the part of the minority to become assimilated into hegemonic spheres than when the minority maintains itself outside the centered sphere through obvious, distancing lawlessness:

... at certain historical conjunctures certain kinds of nonconformity may be more transgressive in opting not for extreme lawlessness but for a strategy of inclusion. To be half successful is to lay claim to sharing with the dominant (though never equally) a language, culture, and identity: to participate in is also to contaminate the dominant's authenticity and to counter its discriminatory function. (51)

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This argument leads to the realization that what is happening at this time in the military of the United States is the result of a patriarchal hegemonic institution needing not to be contaminated and needing to be able to distinguish/"discriminate" itself from a devalorized term in the binary conception it has constructed to empower and privilege itself. Dollimore explains the consequences of such a realization of political construct:

If this is correct, gay culture is only likely to be accepted if and when a society undergoes fundamental change. In the interim it remains, almost of necessity, oppositional, contributing to a critique aiming for that change. (52)

In this study, focused on the literary and political matters of three, marginalized texts, lurks the ghost of Forster's novel, Maurice: a text produced with a great burst of energy after Forster, in 1913, at the age of thirty-two, visited Edward Carpenter at Milthorpe, where he met George Merrill. In Forster's own language the source of the energy is described:

George Merrill also touched my backsides -- gently and just above the buttocks. I believe he touched most people's. The sensation was unusual and I still remember it, as I remember the position of a long vanished tooth. It was as much psychological as physical. It seemed to go straight through the small of my back into my ideas, without involving my thoughts. If it really did this, it would have acted in strict accordance with Carpenter's yogified mysticism, and would have proved that at that precise moment I had conceived. (249)

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It might be assumed that Merrill's touch awakened some homosexual desire -- a significant detail as one considers that in Forster's one homosexual novel it is some "urge" from within the body, homosexual desire, that maps the destiny of its protagonist: "the flesh educating the spirit"; it is from within the dream consciousness that Maurice sees the naked body of George, "that garden boy," running toward him in his dreams only to vanish at the moment their two bodies touch (Forster 22). Certainly, Merrill's touch profoundly stirred both the body and the imagination of Forster. In his Terminal Note to the novel, Maurice, he does not record that the incident was followed by any consummation of desire, but that he "returned to Harrogate, where [his] mother was taking a cure, and immediately began to write Maurice" (Forster 250). The task was a preoccupation until the book was finished, in 1914, after which time the text remained "closeted" until 1971, one year after Forster's death. Thus, Forster's homosexuality remained private, both in terms of there not being any actual homosexual experience and in terms of his text being written, but not published for the reading public. As John Fletcher points out in his essay, "Forster's self-erasure: Maurice and the scene of masculine love [sic.]," if the text had been published -- as would have been true if Lawrence's intention to explore homosexual desire in the first manuscript of Women in Love had not been prohibited by his publisher -- there would have existed a

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significant discourse with which the readers of English-language texts would have had access to a homosexual inscription/representation of the homosexual body, countering those detrimental configurations produced through the heterosexual, hegemonic mind:

Had Maurice been published at any point from 1914 until the late 1960s, it might have been an incalculable force for good, not only for its homosexual readers for whom it would have offered an affirmative vision of same-sex love from a culturally authoritative and prestigious source, but also as an ideological contestation of the dominant models of homosexuality, medical and theological, in the wider culture. Not just a liberal appeal on behalf of a minority for sympathy, but an imaginative act of homosexual self-definition, the novel might have opened up a public space for a homosexual discourse to challenge the dominant discourse. (Bristow, Sexual Sameness: Textual Differences in Lesbian and Gay Writing 64)

Thus, for half of a century, Forster's text was most perfectly marginalized and words -- including those words that comprise the homosexual short stories included in the collection of short stories titled, The Life to Come, not actually published until 1972 -- that would have inscribed the homosexual body with the joy of pleasure and human connection, representing the homosexual experience positively, were invisible; and time, in the tradition of English literature, was both after and before the homosexual, only a slight interruption occurring, in 1944, with the publication of Evelyn Waugh's Brideshead Revisited. However, in that text, a sexual relationship between the two men, Sebastian Flyte and Charles Ryder, is not clearly

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represented (the absence of that clarity, although the implications of the sexual relationship exist, is significant) and eventually, Charles has a love affair with Sebastian's sister, Julia. Throughout the text, Charles seems to perceive Sebastian in the images of an aesthetic sexuality, not an actual physical one -- the same romantic distancing one discovers in White's A Boy's Own Story. Before that time when Forster's novel, Maurice, was published in 1971, Baldwin, in America, did publish, in 1956, Giovanni's Room and, in France, Gide published The Immoralist in 1902 and Cocteau published The White Paper in 1958. Certainly, the absence of an authentic homosexual text in the published canon of English literature until 1971 is the result of the content of such a text -- Maurice is not a discourse or narrative inferior to A Room With a View, A Passage to India, Howard's End, or any of the published novels of Forster.

The homosexual text has been pushed to the margins of tradition as the homosexual act, described in those texts, is represented as a sexual articulation that marks the articulator as separate from the "center" of human experience; thus, the marginalized experience is represented in the text that is itself marginalized. What seems to be the motivating power at the center of this "positioning" of both homosexual activity and the authentic homosexual texts is, as Sedgwick suggests in her work Epistemology of the

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It was in the period of the so called invention of the "homosexual" that Freud gave psychological texture and credibility to a countervailing, universalizing mapping of his territory, based on the supposed protean mobility of sexual desire and on the potential bisexuality of every human creature; a mapping that implies no presumption that one's sexual penchant will always incline toward persons of a single gender, and that offers, additionally, a richly denaturalizing description of the psychological motives and mechanisms of male paranoid, projective homophobic definition and enforcement. (84)

Sedgwick identifies a binarism that encompasses the predicament of sexual inclusion and exclusion -- center and edge: "the universal and the marginal," applicable to both the actual sexuality and the text that delineates it.

Most moderately to well-educated Western people in this century seem to share a similar understanding of homosexual definition, independent of whether they themselves are gay or straight, homophobic or antihomophobic. That understanding is close to what Proust's probably was, what for that matter mine is and probably yours. That is to say it is organized around a radical and irreducible incoherence. It holds the minoritizing view that there is a distinct population of persons who "really are" gay; at the same time, it holds the universalizing views that sexual desire is an unpredictably powerful solvent of stable identities; that apparently heterosexual persons and object choices are marked by same-sex influences and desires, and vice versa for apparently homosexual ones; and that at least male heterosexual identity and modern masculinist culture may require for their maintenance the scapegoating crystallization of a same-sex desire that is widespread and in the first place internal. (Sedgwick 85)

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Sedgwick, regarding the matters that I am discussing, is suggesting that what is problematic in society's ~~American~~ understanding of sexuality is a tendency to formulate rigid oppositional terms: heterosexual and homosexual, refusing to see fluidity, universality, or interconnections; for complex moral, economic, and political reasons -- or simply out of ignorance -- it makes a great effort to mark distinctions, and as is true of all binary constructs, it makes an effort to valorize one term over the other. Perhaps, in this simple process, which makes "order" and power establishable, is the "germ" that generates the fear, pain, and tension that are a part of any society that differentiates its people on the basis of race, economics, religions, and sexual orientation.

The problem of the homosexual text can not be that the homosexual writer necessarily produces an "inferior" text: Gide, Cocteau, Forster, Lawrence, Woolf, Cather, White, Baldwin, Dixon, and many others would be argument against such a generalization; what is problematic is the subject itself and the legitimate focus of such texts on the political issues of oppressor and oppressed -- the texts are profoundly disordering. Perhaps, to a certain extent the problem of the matter of political focus being an aesthetic diminishment of the text is a problem we sense in looking at such other kinds of texts in the American tradition: Their Eyes Were Watching God, Zora Neale Hurston; The Bluest Eye, Toni Morrison; The Surrounded, D'Arcy McNickle; The Jungle,

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Sinclair Lewis; or The Disinherited, Jack Conroy -- texts that describe a variety of oppressions, African-Americans, Native Americans, workers in meat packing houses, and workers in coal mines. The successful publication of particular texts and not others, in the history of English language literature, has been a pattern of privilege, dominance, and, ultimately, the marginalization and oppression of certain peoples. John Fletcher is correct when he observes that if Forster's Maurice had been published in 1914, it would have offered a positive representation of homosexuality to the English language world, and not to have published it until 1971 makes Forster's novel a lost text, unable to serve in its own time as an aesthetic representation as well as a discourse for intelligent, dialectical evolutions on the matters of sexuality.

Certainly, in the history of English language literature, the homosexual text has been suppressed; when it has been published, it has often been marginalized: limited publication, not included in the curricula of schools and universities, and devalued as literary work. The representation of homosexuality in fiction, as in other media of cultural expression -- certainly true in American cinema -- and in the representations and constructions of religious, medical, and judicial institutions, has been largely non-existent or distorted, to the great detriment of all people, both homosexual and heterosexual, and has been

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to the violation and mutilation of the homosexual body, even to its genocide. I argue the position in this study that the homosexual text, written by the homosexual, functions to reinscribe or reconfigure homosexuality -- to put it in its own "light"/body and to establish it within its own institution. It knows a great deal about homosexuality, and it knows a great deal about the hegemonic society that prohibits it. A presumption of this study is that the story, in the history of human kind and in its present stage of evolution, serves the species. The legend, myth, and literary text know something; or they, significantly, make a knowledge that constructs the very people who hear the legends and myths or read the texts, as Chinua Achebe states:

It is only the story . . . that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort; without it, we are blind. Does the blind man own his own escort? No, neither do we the story; rather, it is the story that owns us. (Achebe, Anthills of the Savannah 114)

Also, the excerpt taken from the Ten Great Writers Series: Virginia Woolf, narrated by Hermione Lee, emphasizes the idea of narrative as the determining inscriber of human kind. Although both the passages from Achebe and Woolf do not allow for or recognize other social sources of determination, they place value on the influence of the text, legend, the story.

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world is a work of art; we are parts of the work of art. Hamlet and a Beethoven quartet are the truth about this vast mass we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, no Beethoven. . . . We are the words, the music. We are the work itself.

Woolf, in this passage, develops the idea that art has an influence on those people who have contact with it; the institution of literary tradition influences profoundly those who read it. The argument of this study is that texts inscribe or define social roles, class positions, sources and sites of power, the functions of bodies, and the expression of sexuality. In the three texts examined carefully in this study -- White's A Boy's Own Story, Baldwin's Giovanni's Room, and Dixon's Vanishing Rooms -- the authors represent a "minority" sexuality from within the position of that sexuality, constructing narratives that reinscribe the meaning of the male body and the meaning of homosexuality, depicting those elements in hegemonic, heterosexual society that inscribe meanings on homosexuality that are destructive to the homosexual, to the hegemonic society, and distort the complex reality and fluidity of human sexuality. The novels are responses to those texts and institutional positions that -- in the language of T.S. Eliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" -- "fix [one] in a formulated phrase," and they -- the homosexual texts -- are a spitting out of "all the butt-ends of . . . days and ways" (Eliot, Collected Poems: 1909-1935 11). In this sense they are certainly a part of Modernism, that great shifting from one order to another, to a

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redefinition, a turning from the established "sense of proportion," represented and criticized in Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway, to the realities of individual difference, skirting the edges of chaos, looking carefully at the places where people are confined, redefining, reinscribing for the sake of allowing divergence, allowing the pleasure of the body, which neither Septimus Smith nor Clarissa Dalloway know. It seems that there can be little more of greater significance.

The texts that I have selected, with the exception of Baldwin's text, do not come from what I would call the canon of literary tradition -- the center. They represent a continuing of narrations that Lawrence and Forster were forced to abandon; the texts are forthright ventures into a frontier, a moving across the edge into a place of long-time silence. However, in Sedgwick's sense of the universal in human experience and sexuality, the texts are not spaces or representations of confinements particular only to a minority, separated from heterosexual culture, independent, and outside the experience of hegemonic society and not of significance to that society. Dollimore, in his text, Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault, argues that "Western culture has been and continues to be extensively influenced by the cultures of homosexuality, and not least because the homosexual identity is discursively condensed within its heterosexual counterpart" (62). It seems to me that the three novels discussed in this study,

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as illustrations of the phenomena of the reinscription of the homosexual body and the articulation of that sexuality against the prohibition of heterosexual, hegemonic society and the delineations of evolutions away from hegemonic inscription and obstacle, are particularly brave texts that are intelligent contributions to universalizing sexuality/sexualities and the dialectic between and influence of homosexuality on heterosexuality and heterosexuality on homosexuality. They are the "confessional interpretations" of a "minoritized" sexuality, hopefully confessions that will not be used against the confessors, but rather confessions informing readers and motivating them to contribute to the reversal of the inclination of genocide as the solution to homosexual desire, which can only be totally accomplished through "omnicide." Sedgwick introduces her comments on the perpetual obsession of the hegemonic on the matter of homosexual genocide -- clearly illustrated in Baldwin's Giovanni's Room; White's A Boy's Own Story; and Dixon's Vanishing Rooms -- by quoting a passage from "The Princess" by Alfred, Lord Tennyson:

Now slides the silent meteor on, and leaves
A shining furrow, as thy thoughts in me:

Such thoughts are present in the mind of David, in Baldwin's text; in the mind of the narrator, in White's text; and in the minds of Jesse and Lonny, in Dixon's text. Sedgwick speaks powerfully, in Epistemology of the Closet, about the terror of these realities:

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If a fantasy trajectory, utopian in its own terms, toward gay genocide has been endemic in Western culture from its origins, then, it may also have been true that the trajectory toward gay genocide was never clearly distinguishable from a broader, apocalyptic trajectory toward something approaching omnicide. The deadlock of the past century between minoritizing and universalizing understandings of homo/heterosexual definition can only have deepened this fatal bond in the heterosexist *imaginaire*. In our culture as in *Billy Budd*, the phobic narrative trajectory toward imagining a time after the homosexual is finally inseparable from that toward imagining a time after the human; in the wake of the homosexual, the wake incessantly produced since first there were homosexuals, every human relation is pulled into its shining representational furrow. (128)

This study focuses on the representation of these matters in three contemporary texts. Certainly, such a consideration could include many other texts in which homosexuality is represented explicitly (for example, John Osborne's A Patriot for Me, in which homosexuality is doubly killed: Paul Siczynski, the object of Alfred Redl's desire is killed in a duel, and Redl, himself, commits suicide at the end of the play) and those texts in which homosexuality is not represented explicitly or in which the matter is encoded (for example, Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway, in which the "thoughts" that Septimus has of Evans and Clarissa has of Sally signify complex sexual meanings). Also, texts that would represent a hegemonic society destroying different "others" could be included and in doing so connect the homosexual texts to other kinds of texts in which the similar destructions/genocides must be opposed (for example, the dilemma of Stephen Daedalus in James Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as

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a Young Man, who must flee Ireland, "the sow who devours her young," or the narrator in Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man, who, as he attempts a strategy of inclusion, is driven farther from that white society in which he hopes to be included -- so much for "mimetic obedience"). In doing this the study would give evidence of the central dilemma of genocide for "the other" being present in other marginalizations and positions of difference; thus, "universalizing" the matter in another way. Certainly, in the three texts that I have chosen to discuss, the reader will be conscious of representations of the "age of assassins" and the representation of noble attempts to "reinvent," to "reinscribe," to "make new," or more specifically to make of the dark journey, the perpetual presence of death, the terror in isolation, exactly what Cocteau decrees: "love." The solution to the problem of the oppressed and marginalized is often clearly stated by that very voice.

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Chapter II. Romanticizing the Homosexual Body:
Marginalization and Displacement of Desire
in Edmund White's, A Boy's Own Story

. . . the imagination is not the consolation people pretend. It can even be regarded as the admission of some sort of failure.

I think I seduced and betrayed Mr. Beattie because neither one action nor the other alone but the complete cycle allowed me to have sex with a man and then to disown him and it; this sequence was the ideal formulation of my impossible desire to love a man but not to be a homosexual . . . at the same time I was able to punish him for not loving me.

A Boy's Own Story, Edmund White

Edmund White, in his novel set in the 1950s, A Boy's Own Story, constructs a narrative that focuses on the estrangement -- in an environment hostile to the homosexual, prohibiting and confining desire -- of the sixteen-year-old boy who tells his story. In this novel, the discourse evolves an empowerment of the will to dissolve the romantic displacement of the flesh: homosexual desire. The struggle of the boy is a representation of the effect of the inscriptions of homosexuality produced by the hegemonic society which he assimilates into his understanding of himself, allows to define what it means to be masculine, and to place him, because of his sexual desire, outside the sphere of political power and valorization; the young male narrator is made conscious of the danger of his authentic sexuality/homosexuality and the ultimate rejection of his

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whole person by the larger society, although a number of males in the novel are willing to use his body for their sexual gratification. It is a text about the destructive elements of the closet, a creation forced upon characters by the hegemonic milieu, a small space, in this text: a cellar room, the water at a safe distance from the shore, and the front seat of a car. The act of sex itself is shaped by the inscription of the larger community: its history, religion, and its constructed concept of what it means to be "man," -- empowered: not soft, but hard; aggressive, rather than passive/sensitive. The boy's parents within the family are unable to support the authentic nature of the child, because, although they have the advantage of age, they perceive from a limited perspective, also defined by the hegemonic society. Significantly, in addition to the configurations and definitions imposed by society is the great silence of society on the issue of homosexuality, that which can not be mentioned; thus, for the homosexual no instructional discourse exists, no teacher from within or without the family exists for the young boy who senses within himself homosexual desire. This is the dilemma of the homosexual youth represented in this text.

The first paragraph in the initial scene establishes the immediate, familial community of tension:

We're going for a midnight boat ride. It's a cold, clear summer night and four of us -- the two boys, my dad and I are descending the stairs that zigzag down the hill from the house to the dock. "Old Boy, what is it?" my father says, smiling faintly,

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delighted to be providing excitement for the dog, whom he always called his best friend. (White, A Boy's Own Story 6)

The luxury of the boat ride is the entertainment that emerges out of a social commitment the narrator's family has made to the parasitic Cork family. What both families have designed for themselves is a life based solely on commodity and social power; neither of the male leaders of the two families is attentive to issues which might enrich or make healthy the lives of their children, but rather are obsessed with commodities; certainly the issue of sexuality is avoided by the fathers. In the confined space of the Chris-Craft all of the males are disconnected.

In this text White creates a representation of the homosexual, in the narrator, who is "non-masculine"; a consciousness exists in the mind of the boy that he is a "sissy."

Unlike my idols I couldn't play tennis or baseball or swim freestyle. My sports were volleyball and Ping-Pong, my only stroke the sidestroke. (9)

The passage suggests the impact of external definitions of gesture and body movement, a precise distinction made between the gestures and body movements of the male and the female -- all of those movements to which the young male is attentive, especially if he is attempting to construct a masculine image to deceive or is conscious of an image of his own that is more revealing than he might wish:

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A popular quiz for masculinity in those days asked three questions, all of which I flunked: (1) Look at your nails (a girl extends her fingers, a boy cups his in his upturned palm); (2) Look up (a girl lifts just her eyes, a boy throws back his whole head); (3) Light a match (a girl strikes away from her body, boy toward -- or perhaps the reverse, I can't recall). But there were less esoteric signs as well. A man crosses his legs by resting an ankle on his knee; a sissy drapes one leg over the other. A man never gushes; men are either silent or loud. I didn't know how to swear: I always said the final *g* in *fucking* and I didn't know where in the sentence to place *damn* or *hell*. (9)

The narrative voice continues to identify the problematic traits in his father, which signify a connection for him to his father, a task he pursues throughout the text: the father likes classical music, elaborately manicures his nails, and crosses his legs incorrectly, but these "feminine" characteristics, in the mind of the narrator, are balanced out by the fact that he is a courageous man who is athletic, is not frightened, has a temper, knows how to swear and assert himself. These thoughts of the narrator are indications of his consciousness of a separation between himself and the "men" of his society; they are the outward signifiers of his "sexual inversion." Obviously, White constructs a representation of the homosexual that subscribes to the very definitions from which the homosexual sensibility would, necessarily, maneuver away or reconstruct. In this text this is the homosexual: the feminized. However, a different reading is possible which would emphasize the reality of the narrator's concern, fear, and awareness that

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certain gestures might betray an identity that must be concealed. The "masculine" Kevin, who participates in homosexual acts with the narrator, certainly makes no effort to reveal what he has done, or his particular interest and experience in homosexual acts, to anyone in the larger society; these textual incidents -- the narrator's awareness that certain gestures betray his masculinity and reveal a "perverted" sexuality and Kevin's silence -- signal the needed construction of a closet, a place of silence.

The young Kevin, the object of the narrator's desire, is identified as that object while the father, the narrator, Kevin and his brother are out for a boat ride -- a confined space that moves through the water with great power. In this movement White inscribes, at his level of consciousness and for the perceptive reader, onto the four characters a homosocial bond, the camaraderie of men, which, through description of the movement of the Chris-Craft through the water, evolves into images of homo-erotic power, an energy spent on the lake, "ripping it apart into long white shreds" (4), and an energy redirected into a male competition: "Too much for you, young fellow" (4)? The remark is a challenge of masculinity. Kevin retaliates a few moments later: "Those fishermen were mad as hell. I'd've been too, if some guy in a big fat-ass powerboat scared off my fish" (5). The narrator's response to Kevin's criticism is initially a response of "impotent compassion" (5), but this awareness changes into a consideration of his father's power. The

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narrator senses his own superiority in knowledge but determines that the significant position, socially valorized, is not one of knowledge but rather of power:

But knowledge wasn't power. He was the one with the power, the money, the right to read the paper through dinner . . . he was the one with the thirty tailor-made suits, the twenty gleaming pairs of shoes and the starched white dress shirts. . . . It was his power that stupefied me and made me regard my knowledge as nothing more than hired cleverness he might choose to show off at a dinner party. . . . Then why did his occasional faltering bring tears to my eyes? Was I grieving because he didn't possess everything, absolutely everything, or because I owned nothing? Perhaps, despite my timidity, I was in a struggle against him or because he didn't love me? (5-6)

Thus, both the narrator and the young guest, Kevin, have established positions of enmity against their fathers; the early evening boat ride across the small lake takes the four males to no place or experience outside their strong awareness of relationship to each other. The boat, itself, becomes a place of confinement in which a male tension is generated toward other males. White continues this section of the novel through the narrator's consciousness. In his construction of the plot, a series of actions, he does not actually, in the text, terminate the boat ride; there is no formal conclusion to this episode, but rather out of it continues to flow the mind of the narrator, focusing the characteristics of himself and of his father (an independent maleness represented in his economic power and erratic work schedule, but contradicted by his effeminate behavior) that distinguish them from a predetermined definition of

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masculinity as perceived by males: "I was a sissy" (9). White delineates the narrator's assessment of those elements that separate him from those males who are constructed within masculine values, gestures, and actions:

Unlike my idols I couldn't play tennis or baseball or swim freestyle. My sports were volleyball and Ping-Pong, my only stroke the sidestroke. I was a sissy. My hands were always in the air. In eighth grade I had appeared in the class pageant. . . . My sister couldn't wait to tell me I had been the only boy who'd sat not cross-legged on the gym floor but resting on one hand and hip like the White Rock girl. . . . A man never gushes. . . . I didn't know how to swear. (9)

The narrative voice continues, "My father was a bit of a sissy" (9). In the mind of the narrator his father is too careful about his nails and he likes classical music. These details, included by White, are subtle significations of masculinity contended with by the young male in American society, who, in his ambiguity or his sense of difference in his sexual desire and relationship to other males, is conscious of and frightened by those markings which set him and his kind dangerously apart from other males. The narrator's father has the power and independence to carry the markings as if they had no significance. He is also heterosexual, but for the boy such markings are identifiable significations of his sexual desire. Also, the markings socially weaken him at a time when he is concerned about power. White establishes in the mind of the narrator a sense of the sissy, the feminine, as that which is the weaker in the binary construction of the oppositions: man

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and woman. What White is suggesting is the sense of a male existence and a male bonding that is characterized by strength, a hardness, an egocentricity, and an insensitivity to the other person. The narrator identifies in Kevin "the sort of son who would have pleased my father more than I did" (9). The narrator's knowledge of his father interprets the father's approval based on external markings, not on any language that would reveal the issues of sexuality.

At this point White begins to establish the profound sense of separation from the father and essential attraction to him that is a part of the narrator's tension. The father in this text, as in Baldwin's Giovanni's Room, functions as the seminal paradigm of what is to be imitated if one is to be a man. In addition the fathers, representing sources of affection, are powerful manipulators to particular action or deceit for both of the protagonists. In A Boy's Own Story, the lack of blessing from the father, the withheld approval of the son, is central in the construction of the "erring" son. Specifically in the White text, the sins of the son, as perceived by the son, are the constructions that emerge in the vacuous place of the son's existence, the place into which the father will not walk nor give his approval of, the margin from which the father keeps himself; to enter it is to forfeit the powers of man. In this text, as in the text by Baldwin, the father is not killed; there is no freedom from the father, and it is the father who constructs the deceit in Baldwin's Giovanni's Room; in White's A Boy's Own

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Story, it is the father who constructs the desire for power, the needed empowerment, the act of revenge against that system which denies the very existence of the narrative voice. The fathers do not say, "you may speak the truth; you are empowered to exist." The knowledge constructed for both protagonists is that they are not of their fathers' kind. For the protagonist in A Boy's Own Story, that boy who could be a son in his father's image is Kevin:

He was captain of his Little League baseball team. On the surface he had good manners, but they were born of training, not timidity. No irony, no superior smirks, no fits of longing, or flights of fancy removed him from the present. He hadn't invented another life; this one seemed good enough.
(9-10)

The passage articulates the sense of masculinity that the narrative voice perceives he is not; it also articulates a sense of displacement from the real world for the narrative voice. Kevin has a place in the real world; in White's language the young boy, as perceived by the narrator, "wasn't well groomed . . . didn't date girls . . . wore clothes unironed out of the dryer until they got dirty . . . watched cartoons before an early supper. His seven-year-old brother, Peter, was a nervous boy, morbidly eager to be just like Kevin" (9-10). This language suggests Kevin's placement in the real world as a male -- masculinized -- child and worthy of imitation by his younger brother. This real world of boyhood is not the world in which the narrator exists as he intellectualizes. In his world, the place

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where he has invented another world, he constructs a dichotomy: first, he romanticizes the lover who will take him away; second, he yearns for a power that will enable him to seduce an older man whom he will betray. This second yearning is a manifestation of a profound desire to conquer or to bring power against that patriarchal power that is, at this time in the text, represented in his father. The power will allow a successful seduction by the narrative voice and at the same time he will distance the seduced man. The strategy is expressed in the response of the narrative voice to his reading of the story by Thomas Mann, Death in Venice:

I had read Death in Venice and luxuriated in the tale of a dignified grown-up who died for the love of an indifferent boy my age. That was the sort of power I wanted over an older man. (10)

Thus, the urge is to a power that entices, seduces, and brings to submission, but then abandons; the narrator, who desires men, wants to be the object of another man's desire. The urge to power expresses a frustration in desire. That which is not accessible becomes so at its own volition as it is seduced by the young, powerless boy, but the object, become willing, is rejected by the enticer, the narrative voice. The essence of the desire is an inverted Oedipal fixation. Throughout this text White develops the interest of the narrative voice in his father as sexual partner; he desires a love and sexual union with the father, but the urgent motivation to that union is also a complex dissolving of the relationship or union at the moment that it occurs or

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is about to occur, which perversely empowers the narrative voice over the desired object; that which has rejected him or that in reality perpetually rejects him, he rejects. Thus, what is most lovely -- a desire for union -- becomes a perpetual tension and separation, a withholding of that which the other has been enticed to desire, when the other manifests his desire. This metaphorically configures the dilemma of the homosexual youth in White's extended development of him, in the text, as he encounters men who possess him sexually but discard him, do not love him. The political and sexual position of the youth in the first chapter is chronologically later in the time span covered by White in this book. The boy's position has been determined by a number of abusive incidents in which, ultimately, as with Kevin in this chapter, the act of sex is performed, but the narrator's anticipation for love and the continuation of a relationship is not possible. He speaks of his desire for such a continuum, the realization of its impossibility because of the differences and the inevitable possibility that it is Kevin who wants to separate himself from "the other" who has given him a forbidden sexual pleasure:

I was chagrined by this clowning because I had already imagined Kevin as a sort of husband. No matter that he was younger; his cockiness had turned him into the Older One. But this poignantly young groom I couldn't reconcile with the brat he had become today. Perhaps he wanted to push me away. (23)

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In the first sexual encounter between the narrator and Kevin, White establishes a dialogue between the two boys, which has at least two functions: first, it provides a means by which the narrator ascertains the other's willingness to be involved in a sexual act; second, it validates the act by identifying it as a substitute for a legitimate heterosexual act. The following conversation, occurring in the cellar where the narrator is sleeping with the two sons of his parents' house guests, is the careful manipulation of both young boys to seduce and legitimize the homosexual act. Kevin is, significantly, the first to introduce the possibility of homosexual sex:

The silence was thoughtful, as though it were an eyelash beating against a pillowcase.
 "The guys back home? Guys in my neighborhood?"
 "Yes?" I said.
 "We all cornhole each other. You ever do that?"
 "Sure. . . ."
 "Guess you've outgrown that by now."
 "Well, yeah, but since there aren't any girls around . . ." I felt as a scientist must when he knows he's about to bring off the experiment of his career: outwardly calm, inwardly jubilant, already braced for disappointment. (15-16)

The ensuing act is mechanical. The major problem for the protagonist is that Kevin is not interested in any expression of intimacy; the narrative voice understands the predicament:

Since I knew he wouldn't let me kiss him, I put my head beside his and pressed my lips silently to his neck. (17)

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The narrator perceives the incompleteness of the sexual act:

. . . the sensation he was giving didn't seem like something afforded by his body, or if so, then it was a secret gift, shameful and pungent, one he didn't dare acknowledge. (18)

Throughout the sexual encounter Kevin is focused on the mechanical, physical actions that might intensify the sensations of the sexual pleasure, but do not express any intimacy; the act is only a physical expression. Certainly, it does not fulfill the longing that the narrator has for a romantic lover. And, ultimately, it is his consciousness of this reality that motivates his profound antagonism against those elements (personified in the characters of Kevin, the hustler, the Scotts, and Beattie, the music teacher) in hegemonic society that oppress the articulation of affection and desire or abuse affection and desire to their own dishonest, sexual ends, as is true in the incidents involving Kevin, the hustler, the Scotts, and Beattie. However, at this point in the text, the narrator assumes the possibility of a genuine love or permanence in the relationship, and the narrator's fantasies are suspended. The encounter with Kevin is a watershed experience for the narrator. He thinks he has found someone who will return his homosexual desire and affection authentically:

Most of the time I had dreamed of an English lord who'd kidnap me and take me away forever, someone who'd save me and whom I'd rule. But now it seemed that Kevin and I didn't need anyone older, we could run away together, I would be our protector. We were already sleeping in a field under a sheet of

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breezes and taking turns feeding on each other's bodies, wet from the dew. (19)

This passage appears in the opening chapter of the text; however, in the chronological progression of the narrative, it is the last homosexual experience prior to the encounters with the adults at Eton, the private school which the narrator attends and where he is betrayed by DeQuincey Scott, a teacher, and Father Burke, an Episcopalian priest. The two men are themselves homosexual lovers who have constructed a complex position of concealment and confinement: one in marriage and the other in the priesthood and in a particular use of Christianity. However, at the moment of encounter with Kevin, the narrator is hopeful, is indeed convinced that what he has desired he has found; Kevin replaces the urge to betrayal.

. . . I was peaceful and happy because we loved each other. People say young love or love of the moment isn't real, but I think the only love is the first. Later we hear its fleeting recapitulations throughout our lives, brief echoes of the original theme in a work that increasingly becomes all development, the mechanical elaboration of a crab canon with too many parts. (19)

After establishing the narrator's connection to Kevin, who represents a culmination and focus of desire and affection, White delineates, immediately, the narrator's affection and desire for his father, who typifies another independence from hegemonic patterns; it is through an aesthetic mode, music. The father is characterized as independent, "misanthropic and poetic" (20). In all aspects of life as

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delineated by the narrator -- sexual interests, sleeping hours, empowerment, and economics -- the father differs from the son, and the significant difference is in his position of power. The narrative voice senses his unattractiveness to his father: he is not a masculine son. The single connection (or union) is through music, which White constructs in a language that suggests a mystical fulfillment for the narrator -- a yearning for connection. Perhaps, as Bersani states, in The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art, music functions for the narrator as "a perpetuation and elaboration of masochistic sexual tension" (107). Certainly, the language (in the passage cited below: "we bathed in music," "did he feel the same things," and "a shared rapture") might be perceived as a homoerotic language, supporting the idea of the "esthetic"/music as a "masochistic sexual tension" -- "masochistic"/sadistic being the inevitable sexual articulation in the homosexuality formed in the particular hegemonic environment of White's text.

As he worked at his desk and I sat on his couch, reading or daydreaming, we bathed in music. Did he feel the same things I felt? Perhaps I ask this only because now that he's dead I fear we shared nothing and my long captivity in his house represented to him only a slight inconvenience, a major expense, a fair to middling disappointment, but I like to think that music spoke to us in similar ways and acted as the source and transcript of a shared rapture. (22)

This declaration of a mystical union through music is immediately formed into a sexual emblem of intimate physical meaning:

I feel sorry for a man who never wanted to go to bed with his father; when the father dies, how can his ghost get warm except in a posthumous embrace? For that matter, how does the survivor get warm?
(22)

This language establishes the rudimentary focus of the text: the tension between the narrative voice and the desired object in its/his complex duality; the object is to be reciprocal in sexual desire and complementary in living style and interests, that is, having an interest in music, in possession of intellectual curiosity and integrity. What is perpetually problematic for the protagonist's consciousness is that in the history of the narrative he is not able to encounter any man who is dualistically complete or consistent. White establishes a series of sexual encounters and friendships in which no person exists who is able to be homosexual and complement the interests of the protagonist. Extending the problems, White establishes characters who, with the exception of only a few, are misaligned to the intentions of the narrator. Thus, in his many involvements, he is unable to find one person to whom he can relate; and he approaches all of these men with a complete vulnerability and readiness to relate to each. This exposure or offering of his complete being, then rejected, results in the brutalization of his psyche. One

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of his exposures is to his father. Although throughout the text, the narrator's sexual attraction to his father is never re-expressed or acted out -- even when he gives, at his mother's instruction, a back rub to his father. He perceives his father's rejection of him as motivated by his particular non-masculinity; he is unattractive as a male child to his disapproving father. This tense element of desire to be accepted by the father -- the hegemonic contingency of that acceptance based on specified masculine signs, and the ultimate rejection of the son by the father because he lacks such signs -- is developed throughout the text. Certainly, one of the ways the protagonist maneuvers is to construct a rationale for his father's behavior which justifies the father's lack of interest in his son. The father has his own particular rituals of work: he works all night and sleeps during the day; all of his energy is focused on the pursuit of wealth. It is a misreading of the text to assume that White is, in his extensive delineation of the father, developing a parental representation to illustrate and argue a genetic cause of homosexuality; although at the time the book was written the theory of the absent father and the dominant mother were popular psychological explanations for homosexuality, the parental incident is a manifestation of at least two positions: first, the narrator expresses his own desire for his father; second, the incident is illustrative of the lack of communication between the father and the son. The father,

as represented in the text, is not able to communicate with his son on any issue of significance. Even when the son informs his father he wants to see a psychiatrist because he thinks he is homosexual, the father will only accuse him of pretending to have this problem for attention. In this sense the text is one of many homosexual texts that explores the connection of the gay son to the family. The significant observation to be made with regard to the relationship between the father and the son is that it is essentially a silent relationship. The only connection between the two is established by the narrator through music. He imagines that in some mystical way he and his father are united through the classical music they listen to, often listen to at the same time, not talking to each other, but involved in their separate tasks, the boy reading and the father working on his accounts. At the end of this chapter, when the guests have left the family, the narrator has been moved back into his own room, and the violation of the space and being of both the father and the son has come to an end; the father invites his son to go for a walk with him. They walk from the late night into the dawn, covering the distance between the town and the lake, but they walk in silence. The only words spoken are spoken by the father to the dog, Old Boy:

We retraced our steps. As daybreak came closer, the birds began to twitter and the leaves on birches fluttered in the rising breeze. Down the sloped shore the lake slowly took on shape, then color. Behind a door an unseen dog yapped at us,

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and Old Boy became frantic with curiosity. "What is it? Tell me. You can tell me. What is it, Old Boy?" (34)

Language that might be appropriately directed to the son -- who is harboring the pain of his sexual identity and hiding the trauma of his desire for and sexual experience with Kevin who has used the narrator, mocked him and his father and ultimately abandoned him, leaving him in a dilemma of disconnection and isolation -- is spoken to the dog: "What is it? You can tell me." Thus, the space in which the narrator exists becomes a place of no connections: the young, transient lover is gone and the father is known by the narrator to be unable to function as a companion in his predicament and grief. The chapter concludes with imagery that describes the arrival of a new day and represents the dissolution and absorption of the father in the light of his flashlight. The failure represented in this irony is of profound consequence to the narrator and, ultimately, to the school teacher, Beattie. The failure spreads like a contagion, affecting all of society.

As the sun, like life returning to the body, stole over the world, the beam from my father's flashlight grew less and less distinct until it had been absorbed in the clarity of something that was new yet again. (34)

Thus, the fading of the father's light as it blends into the light of the sun -- the natural event of the dawn -- makes clear to the narrator the "new" reality of his solitary position in the world.

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In the structural arrangement of the text, what follows White's establishment of the relationship between the father and the son, prior to the end of the chapter and the walk the narrator has with his father and Old Boy, is the second sexual experience between the narrator and Kevin. This second and major incident of sexual love between Kevin and the narrator is developed in three episodes: first, in the afternoon at the lake, the observation of the body -- "a gazing upon"; second, later that night in the car after the vulgar dinner at "The Big Top" where the adults of both families have "their tongues loosened by martinis," eat "steaks under A.1. Sauce," and pie a la mode, while an organist plays "Zip-a-Dee Doo-Dah" and "Kitten on the Keys," in a room that smells of "kerosene heater and the pine-scented Airwick wafting from out of the toilets" (25-26); and third, in the late evening of the same day, back in the cellar at the summer home. This sexual experience for the narrator is the last in a series of experiences he has had in his youth, and it is prior to his two sexual experiences at the private school: one with DeQuincey and his wife; and the retaliatory sexual act with his music teacher, Beattie. In all of these sexual experiences the narrator is used sexually and betrayed, except for the last experience involving his music teacher, Beattie, in which he becomes the empowered betrayer.

The first episode is the "gazing upon." The narrator and Kevin have been left alone; all others have gone for a

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boat ride. White constructs a romantic predicament of essential, necessary distance. In this episode the narrator controls the separation between himself and Kevin; the possible sexual consummation is delayed, extending and intensifying the time of desire, allowing the easeful "gazing upon" the body of the other, Kevin. The environment becomes a part of the romantic episode, the sun occasionally coming out to warm the bodies of the two boys swimming. The episode centers on the phallus.

We both had erections and we pulled our suits open under the cold water and looked down at them. Kevin pointed out that there were two openings at the head of his penis, separated by just the thinnest isthmus of flesh. I touched his penis and he touched mine. "Somebody might see us," I said, backing away. "So what," he said. (23)

The sexual act does not occur at this moment. The narrator has an accessible partner/"lover," but he deliberately postpones any sexual activity with Kevin. The moment, in its romantic intensity, becomes static: desire exists and is delayed to accommodate the narrator's leisurely moments of looking upon flesh:

One opulent drop of water rolled down his high, compact chest into the hollow between his nipples, the right one still small and white from the cold, the left fuller and just beginning to color. (24)

The narrator knows that if he were to yell "Geronimo!" the tension would be dissolved and in his thinking his "body would become not a snare but a friendly sort of weapon. But [he] couldn't go against the decorum of [his] own fantasies,

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which were all romantic" (White 24). After the initial description of the penis, the nipples -- certainly an erotic beginning to the observation of the desired object -- White removes that object from the gazer; Kevin swims out to a raft toward which the narrator continues to look, his gaze moving from the ant crawling on his arm to the object spiritualized and removed in light; the illumination becomes cosmic. The desired object, thus, remains perpetually suspended: a sexual stasis of intense tension -- a masochistic sexuality. This reality is formed by hegemonic heterosexual prohibition. The social belief affecting Kevin is that to be homosexual is the erasure of masculinity; indeed, it is the erasure of man; so argued and assimilated, he can not have access to the desired object; the created stasis is a romanticizing of the flesh, through which the sexual body is displaced to the margin, -- "no man's land"; the narrator's aesthetic creations are a way "to love a man, but not to be homosexual" (217). In White's construct, nature becomes a theater, situated within the sphere of hegemonic society, from which one gazes at the desired object outside that sphere: the "unnatural" -- which in marginalized displacement can not erase the defined position of the self. To consummate desire is to destroy order; unless the "violation" is able to redefine himself and the act, to reconfigure order -- to maneuver or revolt.

The late sun, masked once more by clouds, did not send its path across the water toward us but hollowed out beneath it a golden amphitheater. The

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light was behind Kevin; when he held up the disk it went as pale and seductive as a pink hibiscus. His head was about the same size as the lid. When he turned his face my way it was dark, indistinguishable; his back and shoulders were carving up strips of light, carving them this way and that as he twisted and bobbed. The water was dark, opaque, but it caught the sun's gold light, the waves dragon scales writhing under a sainted knight's halo. (24)

The passage functions to accomplish at least two impressions. First, the object of desire is temporarily suspended: it is distanced. The image transcends its real source; it is made more lovely and fixed in a particular romantic, historical/spiritual mode. The "knight" is the ancient, romanticized, seducer, penetrant, and protector who acts for and on behalf of the desired object; thus, Kevin is imaginatively transformed, momentarily, and the narrator postpones the act which displaces him from hegemonic society. The light imagery reconfigures the object in spiritual elements; the disk suggests the host, and the shafts of sunlight, radiating from the back, deify the young boy. Second, this romantic construction intensifies sexual desire and prolongs or extends the distance to the moment of sexual consummation. The narrator knows that an aggressive war game action would begin the physical contact that would lead immediately to sexual activity. The stasis arrests that movement in a Keatsian mode similar to that found in "Ode on a Grecian Urn." Thus, the desire is attenuated, the necessary disillusionment is prevented, and displacement is accomplished. It is, also, significant to observe that the

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narrator's romantic vision includes a passive position; his attitude, throughout the text, is that the other must initiate the recognition of lover; the other must be attracted to the narrator -- the narrator must be the desired object; thus, the formula places homosexual desire in that man who looks upon the narrator, valorizing his (the narrator's) own homosexual desire, politically empowering the desire and the possessor of the desire. Of equal significance, at this time in the text, is the narrator's refusal to accomplish the romantic/sexual act through a masculine gesture or game -- pretending to rough house or to play a war game -- to attack the body of the other, to use the hard "weapon" (assault) instead of the soft "snare" (enticement to self or attraction of the other to self). These reasons are important elements in White's delay of the sexual moment. At this point he reintroduces the dilemma this text represents. The romantic vision is an invention of replacement. What is not attainable to the protagonist, because the society in which he exists (and certainly this is a representation of White's predicament and the predicament of every homosexual male) does not allow a space in which to be, is romantically distanced; there is no public space for the homosexual boy/man in White's representation of society; thus, the nature of confinement for the narrator is a place or perspective that necessitates an invention that transcends the confinement, a way to maneuver, to be, but always, in the text that White

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constructs, the maneuver is not into the larger social sphere, nor is it into the reality of history; that space is hopelessly not penetrable. The consequential position is within the "closet," which for the protagonist becomes a place of imagination, fantasy, and the creation and placement of that which does not exist made to exist within his own small space: off shore where still the homosexual act is dangerous because it might be seen -- thus, the invention; or in the cellar, from which sounds might drift up to the ears of fathers; or in the woods with the sex-obsessed camper, removed from the counselors who themselves create secret spaces for homosexual exploration, sitting on the edges of their beds. This is a text that represents the homosexual dilemma of displacement and deferment, as the homosexual continues to perceive himself through the inscriptions/definitions of hegemonic society. No one in the text is more interested in not being "homosexual" than the protagonist; to be thus marked is to be the outcast. But no one in the text wants more than the homosexual protagonist the act of sex with another male, which must not be seen or identified as homosexual. The first episode in the major sexual incident is concluded with the return of Kevin to the narrator:

At last Kevin swam up beside me; his submerged body looked small, boneless. He said we should go down to the store and buy some Vaseline.

"But we don't need it," I said.

"Let's get it."

. . . That little round jar of grease would be a clue for my father to find. Worse, it was the

application of method to sex, the outward betrayal of what I wanted to consider love, the inward state. At last the sun went down and the lake seemed colder and bigger and the two of us seemed bereft. (25)

The jar will become both the signifying mark and the violation of a natural sexual act.

The dinner at the resort restaurant interrupts the narrative of the romantic sexual direction of the protagonist's mind/closet/alienated body; it is the second episode in the second sexual incident with Kevin and functions as a representation of those adults who are at once the source of conformity and the victims, themselves, of that source:

That night the two families, all of us, went out to dinner at a restaurant thirty miles away, a place where the overweight ate iceberg lettuce under a dressing of ketchup and mayonnaise, steaks under A.1. Sauce, feed corn under butter, ice cream under chocolate, where a man wearing a black toupee and a madras sports jacket bounced merrily up and down on an electric organ while a frisky couple lunged and dipped before him in cloudy recollection of ancient dance steps. (25)

Not unlike Elizabeth Bowen in The Death of the Heart, J.D. Salinger in The Catcher in the Rye, Willa Cather in "Paul's Case," David Leavitt in "Territory," or Mark Twain in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, White represents a world of adults who exist in a social construct to which they elect to conform and which they perpetuate as the world which can not raise or direct its young in a venue of freedom which will allow them their authenticity and a joy in life. Their

own lives are shallow, filled with greed, obsessed with power and control, and essentially devoid of either passion or compassion. In this segment of his narrative White establishes a community of adults who are gross, repugnant, unable to communicate with each other, and lack a sense of the aesthetic; it is a community in which the narrator feels an isolation:

When I grew up I would always be frank, loving and generous. We'd feast on iced grapes and wine; we'd talk till dawn about the heart and listen to music. *I don't belong here*, I shouted at them silently.
(27)

This short passage reflects the focus of the narrator on the aesthetic, which is missing in the community of adults, and it reflects his commitment to communication about the essential matters of being -- "talking about the heart." What White is developing, in this text, is a representation of the homosexual's "longing" for connection to other human beings as friends and lovers -- a communion of intimacy:

This longing for lovers and friends was so full within me that it could spill over at any provocation -- from listening to my piano rendition of a waltz, from looking at a reproduction of two lovers in kimonos and tall clogs under an umbrella shielding them from slanted lines of snow or from sensing a change of seasons (the first smell of spring in winter, say). (27)

The aesthetic experience motivates the desire and temporarily replaces that which is desired, but remains absent and not accessible in the hegemonically constructed mind of the narrator; he does not have a map that would lead

him to what he desires; such a map is not provided by any parent, teacher, priest, or psychiatrist in the world of the narrator represented by White. The hand of Kevin intrudes into this world of adult restaurants and adult automobiles. The narrator is looking for an escape from this world that confines him. He has fantasized at one time, in his love for his father, a possible escape with him:

Once, when I was Kevin's age, I'd wanted my father to love me and take me away. I had sat night after night outside his bedroom door in the dark, crazy with fantasies of seducing him, eloping with him, covering him with kisses as we shot through space against a night field flowered with stars. But now I hated him and felt he was what I must run away from. (27)

In the car, in the dark, Kevin takes the narrator's hand. The gesture represents that desired connection to the longed for lover; it is Kevin who extends his hand to touch the hand of the narrator. The extended hand is not unlike that hand Maurice imagines in Forster's novel Maurice. Forster said of that protagonist: "To ascend, to stretch a hand up the mountainside until a hand catches it, was the end for which he had been born" (41). For the narrator, as for Maurice, the hand signifies finding the friend who will become his companion (lover) throughout life, making contact with that which is seemingly hidden, never to be found. For the narrator in A Boy's Own Story, disillusionment will follow this initial connection. However, at the moment of contact, the narrator -- touching "the calloused pads on his [Kevin's] palms where he'd gripped the bat" (24) -- is

transported into a state of romantic anticipation,
contentment, and stasis:

Outside, the half-moon sped through the tall pines,
spilled out across a glimpse of water. . . . We
were in the deep forest. The change from scattered
farms to dense trees felt like an entry into
something chilled and holy, a packed congregation
of robed and mitered men whose form of worship is
to wait in tense, century-long silence. (28)

Thus, in the car with Kevin, the narrator is able to bring
into the same space occupied by those "boring old grown-ups"
(White 28) the moment of homosexual being. The narrator's
predicament at this moment (and also in other moments) is to
misread the immediate adventure and to project on it his own
intention, hope, and desire; the narrator concludes:

Maybe I wouldn't have to run away. Maybe I could
live here among them, act normal, go through the
paces -- all the while holding the hand of this
wonderful kid. (28)

Later that night the narrator continues to project his hope
onto Kevin and for the moment everything is perfect:

As I went in him, he said straight out, as clear as
a bell, "That feels really great." It had never
occurred to me before that sex between two men can
please both of them at the same time. (29)

The moment of desire perceived when the two boys are
swimming, which is both displaced and prolonged at the time
of its inception, through the oppression of the dinner and
during part of the ride home, is consummated in the sexual
act, a moment of physical pleasure, the longed-for goal. In

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the segment that follows this event, White relates those narrative realities that deconstruct the narrator's dream. Even though, until the time the Cork family departs, the narrator and Kevin will continue to have sex together, the event never accomplishes the ultimate desire of the narrator: to kiss Kevin. Throughout the episode he will resist such intimacy, focusing only on the sexual act itself; there is no homosexual bond beyond sex itself. Kevin and his brother, by playing a joke on the narrator's father, making him believe that they have set his boat on fire -- that confined space where the narrator's desire for Kevin has first been awakened -- betrays the family; and their response to the narrator's language directed to them ("You could be more considerate") becomes an object of mockery (30). Kevin and his brother repeat the phrase; it becomes the evidence of his homosexuality, his being a "sissy," and thus, marked not a man, but rather an outcast from the society of men, devoid of the empowerments of masculinity. The narrator attempts to find that moment when he has betrayed himself and slips back into the sphere of his helplessness; he is disempowered.

I replayed a moment here, a moment there of the past days, in an attempt to locate the exact instant when I'd betrayed myself. We motored back over the glassy, steaming lake; everything was colorless and hot and drained of immediacy. In such a listless, enfeebled world the whine of the motor seemed particularly cruel, like a scar on the void. (30)

He relates the disempowerment he feels to the car of the merry black maids sputtering past, who are exiled from their authenticity in "the alien population" where they work (31).

At that moment I really believed I, too, was exuberant and merry by nature, had I the chance to show it. . . . I wanted power so badly that I had convinced myself I already had too much of it, that I was an evil schemer who might destroy everyone around me through the poison seeping out of my pores. I was appalled by own majesty. I wanted someone to betray. (31)

White, at this moment in the narrative, presents the narrator as being capable of a positive, fulfilling life: the child would be happy and express that happiness, but the continued onslaught of young and older men who sexually use the narrator, then betray him, along with his fear of those unidentified persons who would betray him and from whom he must protect himself will, as collected experience and consciousness, intensify and motivate a continuing desire for a power that he can use against those who would oppress him.

In this opening chapter of the text, White focuses on a dual catalyst that generates the increasing desire for power and the focusing of that power on the seduction and betrayal of a man: first, the young friend Kevin, whose transient sexual intimacy with the narrator is abruptly terminated through a mockery of the narrator which feminizes him -- marks him a "sissy," the label he fears most; second, the narrator's father, throughout this chapter, is amiable to the visiting friends: to Kevin and his brother. The

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narrator is included in the events resulting from this attention, but when the visitors leave, the father, although he invites his son on a walk with him, ignores him, as he always has. Thus, the two males, the transient lover and the father, in their spoken and silent rejections and humiliations of the boy, leave him on the margin of human experience, powerless. This predicament chronologically precedes the significant and final events at Eton: the place of violent action brought against the patriarchal, hegemonic force and against homosexuality by the narrator.

In the order of the narrative, White moves the character back in time from age fifteen; all of the chapters between the first and last are a bridge from the experience with Kevin to the final experiences at school with the Episcopalian priest, his teacher and his wife, and the music teacher. All of the intervening chapters are centered on the issues of "longing," not attaining -- accounts of vulnerable exposures of the homosexual self, attempts to connect with the desired object/person and the dangerous obstacles and denigrations experienced by the young boy. The narrator's youth is without map, direction or help from adults; the text is a disturbing representation of a society that fails to know, to be intelligent about and to respond to that which is different, but instead marks, rejects, and condemns such a person to solitary isolation. In this text the adult community is represented as having no compassion. The father is a representation of that man who focuses his

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energy into the making of money; he has no significant or intimate relationships with anyone: no friend, closeness to his wife or son; he interacts with his daughter only in the flirting language of a would-be lover.

The great fear for the narrator is to be identified as a homosexual, which is to be identified as a "sissy," which signifies being a woman: to be homosexual is to be like a woman, which, in the mind of the narrator and in the reality of his environment, excludes him from the society of men. One of the experiences depicted by White that most disturbs the narrator is the incident in which he is identified by the two men at his father's friend's bookstore. As the narrator is about to enter the store one of the men bumps into him and says, "Don't just rush by without saying hello" (42). The event, which is a contact with sexual implications, terrifies the boy. He perceives, in his mind incorrectly, the man who speaks to him as the desired object, and he feels unworthy of the man; what is most troublesome for him is the fact that the man has in some way been able to recognize him. Thus, his fear of being a "sissy" is affirmed.

"Do I know you?"

. . . "Sure you know me." He laughed and his friend, I think, smiled. "No, honestly, what's your name?"

I told him.

He repeated it. . . . "We just blew into town," he said. "I hope you can make us feel at home." He put an arm around my waist and I shrank back; the sidewalks were crowded with people staring at us curiously. His fingers fit neatly into the space between my pelvis and the lowest rib, a space

that welcomed him, that had been cast from the mold of his hand. I kept thinking, these two guys want my money. . . . And I was alarmed they'd been able to tell at a glance that I was the very one who would respond to their advances so readily. I was so pleased the handsome stranger had chosen me; because he was from out of town he had higher, different standards. (43)

It is with this incident that White begins his depiction of the denigrating and dangerous contacts the narrator has with homosexuality, incidents in which he perceives himself identified as a homosexual and ultimately in which not only is he unable to gain access to what he desires, but he is also either diminished or put in danger. In the first incident he is essentially disarmed in the reality of being identified; he contemplates: "He thought I was like him and perhaps I was, or soon would be" (43). The identifier of his homosexuality is perceived by him as "a dandy who hadn't bathed," "a penniless seducer," and particularly critical, "someone upon whose face passion and cruelty had cast a grille of shadows" (43). The authorial voice is prophetic in the description of the "seducer" from whom the narrator escapes. He does not keep the appointment in the park the next day (43). The passages are a prediction of the boy's ultimate act in the text, the seduction and betrayal of Beattie. In the passage cited above, the narrator is also deceived in that what he fantasized the desired object would be, in his romantic envisioning of that man who would come to him for love, is not what the seducer is. What White describes is particular to the homosexual predicament in its

representation of the silence through which the narrator maneuvers -- no one exists with whom he is able to communicate because the very nature of what is to be communicated is socially prohibited -- and distinctly homosexual in the sense of the narrator being moved, by the social prohibition of his homosexuality, into a sphere of danger and being maligned, not unlike that which comprises the sexual life of Metro in Dixon's Vanishing Rooms. The touch of the "seducer" -- "the man's embrace around the waist" (45) -- has awakened a desire for sexual experience that continues to move the narrator into the sphere of danger, that place on the margins of society, the same place depicted in Dixon's Vanishing Rooms (the abandoned warehouse) and the same place depicted in Baldwin's Giovanni's Room (Guillaume's Bar and the suffocating, isolating space of Giovanni's room itself). In White's text the narrator identifies the place: "the shadowy, dangerous city. . . . it was something mysterious and anguished beyond my experience" (46). It is the place of the "circling car," boys who have been picked up by bald men, and the difference in that place "between fantasy and act" (45). Ultimately, it is this place in which the narrator will acquiesce, both to deceit and to promiscuous sex. But first the narrator will befriend the con man who promises him escape to New York and companionship -- "As for love, that, too, I'd win through charm" (55) -- for forty dollars. When the narrator sees him after he has missed the rendezvous and obviously

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been only interested in tricking the narrator out of the forty dollars, no mention is made of the incident. The con-man simply informs the boy that for eight dollars he can get him one of the boys on whom he is gazing:

We sat side by side on the same bench. . . . I took off my tie, rolled it up and slipped it inside my pocket. Because I didn't complain about being betrayed, my friend said, "See those men yonder?"

"Yes."

"I could git you one for eight bucks." He let that sink in; yes, I thought, I could take someone to one of those little fleabag hotels. "Which one do you want?" he said.

I handed him the money and said, "The blond."

(57)

Thus, the source of sex is originated in the world of commodity, that place occupied obsessively by the father and the place which he has either chosen as a means to keep him away from his family and all people, or it may be that his preoccupation with business strategies simply does not allow him time to be with people. The eight dollars which the con artist will use to buy the blond will not fulfill the desire of the narrator's fantasy. White describes a series of events, efforts on the part of the narrator, to articulate himself; all of his efforts lead to the margin or edge of social experience. Within the romantic construct of the narrator is the essence of his desire, a reality consisting of an urgency for escape from an environment in which he can not express his sense of the aesthetic or his sexual desire, or, most significantly, experience an intimate relationship with a male. Certainly, this desire has been manifested in

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other literary perspectives. For example, Lawrence's Women in Love, which, despite its title, is a text in which Lawrence depicts the desire for intimacy between two men and their futile attempts to establish such a relationship, including touch, between each other. Also, Forster's A Passage to India expresses the desire of Forster to construct an intimacy between two men: Dr. Asiz and Cyril Fielding. The attempt fails in an ambiguity of political distancing at the conclusion of the novel. In this text and in the texts of Dixon, Baldwin, Lawrence, and Forster, complex social and political constructs prohibit such desired intimacy; thus, the urgent impetus of the work achieves no consummation in any of the texts; each discourse concludes, almost, where it began. The exception is Dixon's text, Vanishing Rooms; the desired intimacy of the black protagonist, Jesse, with the white man, Metro, is eliminated in the discursive delineation of the racial and social moral issues in Dixon's narrative, and through the evolution of Jesse -- a reconfiguring and redefining of him as a black homosexual and his evolved consciousness of white hegemonic society -- an intimacy is established, free of guilt and mimetic obsession, with a black man, a dancer. This intimacy is centered and egalitarian. Thus, Dixon's text represents a political progression to an emancipation from both the confinements of hegemonic homophobia and racism.

In A Boy's Own Story, White constructs the desire and the specified object of desire through a series of textual

events: primarily, introspective incidents engendered by experiences and objects. Throughout this delineation White establishes the narrator's fixed insistence that this love for a male is not to mark him as homosexual; the motivation for this is his fear of isolation in society and the continued perception of himself as not male, man, or masculine. His own fear -- resulting from social prohibition and an acceptance into community contingent upon a particularized definition of male and masculinity -- forces him into invention, fantasy, the imagined object; frequently the desired object is a living human, but occasionally the object is in a photograph or is a statue -- static objects which represent what is desired, but which in objective stasis are distanced from the potential of actual experience; the object come upon, reveals or represents that which the narrator desires; thus, the desire is intensified by the object and seems on occasion to be substituted for real experience or access to actual body and human discourse. If the narrator or any male child can not be marked, can not be known for fear of the desirer being excluded from society, how then can he be identified and a progress to consummation be made? Without such marking the desirer can only be a stasis, an object of desire to himself; thus, the desire spins back upon him, continuing to isolate him from other humans, from those humans whose submission to a prescribed order prohibits access to the other and from all others who might identify him as their

object of desire; what results for the narrator is invention and deceit from within and without.

At age fourteen the desired object will enable the narrator to escape his confinement and opportune physical intimacy, but the lack of access to such a real person focuses his psyche not on anticipation but rather on sad remembrance of the object, "nostalgia":

I hypothesized a lover who'd take me away. He'd climb the fir tree outside my window, step into my room and gather me into his arms. What he said or looked like remained indistinct, just a cherishing wraith enveloping me, whose face glowed more and more brightly. (39)

The first two sentences would seem to construct a human figure, but in the last sentence that real figure is etherealized. Thus, the desired object is dehumanized, making the object only representative of the human and, simultaneously, distancing it from the desirer:

His delay in coming went on so long that soon I'd passed from anticipation to nostalgia. (39)

This sentence extends the separation of the desired object from the desirer; the once anticipated lover becomes a remembered object of desire:

One night I sat at my window and stared at the moon, toasting it with a champagne glass filled with grape juice. I knew the moon's cold, immense light was falling on him as well, far away and just as lonely in a distant room. I expected him to be able to divine my existence and my need, to intuit that in this darkened room in this country house a fourteen-year-old was waiting for him. Sometimes

now when I pass dozing suburban houses I wonder
behind which window a boy waits for me. (39)

The connection established through the language "immense light was falling on him as well" romantically, mystically, or ethereally fabricates a connection, but in reality no connection exists; such thoughts can keep the desirer in isolation all of his life. The distance between object and the desirer is extended in the final sentence of the passage in which the position of time is altered, moving away from the original time in the passage; also, the final sentence establishes the narrative voice as the desired person, reversing the desired objects and making the nature of the new desirer more problematic because of the narrator's continued powerlessness to connect with what he most desires; the isolation is more intensely established, as a hopeless separation of those who desire each other. So, the space in which the voice maneuvers is romantic, creating for him an aesthetic sense, directed toward fantasized or even real objects of love, but the space, although allowing an imagined connection and receptacle for desire, provides access to no reality -- no body, no spoken words. The narrator's romanticizing of life is motivated by a fear which is determined by the social prohibitions of his sexuality; his alternative is fantasy. In his social predicament he is disempowered, without direction, an object of stasis himself, another effect of marginalization.

Earlier in his life the narrator created imaginary people. One of them, named Tom-Thumb-Thumb, is empowered; he represents one of three of the narrator's fantasy states: Tom defies order; Cottage Cheese, a girl, older than the narrator, who functions within order -- "sensible and bossy" --; and Georgie-Porgie, "a dimwit," for whom the imagined girl and the narrator care (61). This element in the narrative represents the narrator's invention of imaginary friends to replace his own real sister, who torments and frightens him; he has "turned away from her to imaginary playmates" (60-61). The invented friends, also, represent aspects of the narrator's own being: Georgie-Porgie, the child to whom care must be given; and Cottage Cheese, the child who is able to give protection and maintain order. These two elements reflect the narrator's marginalized being -- the roles he must play to maintain himself within the hegemonic society. The imagination becomes a way to deal with, to maneuver, to survive existence. In White's construction of an imagined freedom for the narrator he specifies elements that articulate his predicament: the two imaginary girls are manifestations of the narrator's determined roles that he, the child himself, must play carefully, watched and ordered in the small realm or space that is given to him. The element that represents the impressionable or movable within society, Georgie-Porgie, is not allowed, in the fantasy game-playing, any contact with Tom. When the narrator goes out with his parents, the two

imaginary girls accompany him; Tom, emblematic of the power to revolt and reorder society to his own being is left behind. Thus, within the mind of the seven-year-old narrator is an invention of mental balance; the placement of the individual within the determining and coercive society is a placement within a confinement of imaginary existence -- an altering of society, but an altering of society only within the mind of the child; what he invents is obviously no real place. Central in the invention is the placement of the powerful element and the less powerful: the polarities are the "dimwit" -- Georgie Porgie, who is without power, and the "hellion" -- Tom, who escapes the property boundaries and conventions of hegemonic society, but who simultaneously is forced to exist outside the realm of the controlling society:

the hellion who roamed the woods beyond the barbed wire fence guarding the neighbor's property, off limits to us and to him too, I'm sure, though he ignored this rule and all others. . . . an irrepressible male freedom (all the freer because he was a boy and not a man). He needed no one, he'd listen to no reprimand. . . . and we lectured him at length, but his eyes, the whites flashing wonderfully clear and bright through the matted hair, never stopped darting back and forth looking for an escape route -- and then he was off, leaving behind him only the resonance of the concrete vault and our voices calling Tom, calling, calling out to him, Tom, to behave, to be good, Tom as good as we had to be. (61)

The figuration of freedom, Tom violates the rules and the boundaries of society. He revolts and exists in the forbidden place, "the woods beyond the barbed wire fence,"

an object constructed by confirming members of society intended to do violence to those who attempt to move beyond its confinement. Tom represents that ultimate escape desired by the narrator, a disconnection from the controlling society whose essence is not central to the life of the narrator. The narrator can not be them or like them, and he is not known to them; they can not be him; more significantly, empowered, they will not allow him (the narrator and Tom) to be. The other, the opposite can not be equal, allowed, or accepted into one humanity. The passage cited is a depiction of an imagined empowerment by a narrator who has no empowerment, and, although he is conscious of the wild beauty of the hellion, he, himself, warns against such a rebel, and thus, warns against himself. Ultimately, the lack of approval is the product of the hegemonic society which the other is willing to protect, even at the destruction of himself, the emerging pattern in an internalized homophobia; and a fear of exclusion: to live without that community to which each homosexual person is first introduced and for which most have respect, affection, and an urge to imitate; it is the original connection, as in this text, to the disapproving, remote father and the mother who are self-absorbed and unable to raise healthy children. They are sought, and it is to them the narrator remains faithful. This is the matter to which Leavitt is attentive in the short story "Territory." In that text, Neil, the son of prosperous, privileged parents,

although rejected by them -- the father is removed totally from the action of the narrative -- he returns to the family home in California to establish himself authentically as a homosexual and to establish a connection to his mother. Unable to do so he is obsessed with guilt, feeling that in some way, failing to conform to the sexual definitions and roles of society, he is responsible for the unhappiness of his mother. It is only when he is flying back to New York, with his lover, that he begins to refocus his life away from his mother onto the object of his homosexual desire and love, but there is a strong sense in Leavitt's short story that the tension between a freedom to evolve in life with a homosexual lover and the profound psychological guilt and responsibility to the family makes the well-being of the protagonist, Neil, precarious. The abandonment of social ritual and role, specified within the family, is depicted as difficult to accomplish. In Leavitt's text, the abandonment of the prescribed role requires the abandonment of the defining sphere, itself: the family. Thus, the protagonist does not politically remaneuver within the social sphere, but, to survive as a homosexual, he revolts against the community, moving into some new space. In the evolution, a significant human connection is sacrificed. This is true, also, in White's novel, A Boy's Own Story. The fantasy personage does not approve of the narrator, and the narrator does not approve of Tom:

He never cared for me. Cottage Cheese and I, determined that naive Georgie-Porgie should not fall under Tom's spell, made a great show of listing Tom's faults -- but privately I worried about Tom and at night I wondered where he was sleeping, was he dry, was he warm, hungry. I even envied his sovereignty, though the price of freedom -- total solitude -- seemed more than I could possibly pay. (61)

The language that White employs, in the narrator's articulation of his position to Tom, dismisses the positive values; however, he does admire the empowerment -- "sovereignty" -- but even that is undercut by a realization of cost -- "total solitude." The narrator's position to the imaginary friends changes. Although his mother accommodates the fantasy friends, not understanding their motivation for the boy, the narrator confesses that ultimately the invention is an indication of a failure to possess life; such a realization is a progress:

But the imaginary friends were almost, at times, less real to me than to my indulgent mother -- the imagination is not the consolation people pretend. It can even be regarded as the admission of some sort of failure. (63)

It is possible to identify a series of objects (imagined friends, statues, photographs) and real people who become defined and adored as objects of desire by the narrator; all of the relationships between the narrator and the objects -- animate or inanimate -- are not real life; ultimately he is separated from all, a stranger in a world that offers no space to be nor any human being with whom he might be, powerless to bring into the real world what he envisions for

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himself and what he wills; an empowered order prevails, and the narrator is out of that order. He remains to the very end of the text a manipulator of the nature of his perception of the objects of his desire and the nature of the relationship he has with the objects of his desire; central to his definition and the nature of his relationship to all is that he embraces a definition of himself, not made by people of his kind, but made by those hegemonic genocidal forces which are resolved to the nonexistence of homosexuals -- his very rebellion against hegemonic order is determined by that order.

The narrator identifies his mother's perception of the imaginary friends as being more real to his mother than to him. If parents are to be one of the guides to the child's experience of life, then White constructs a mother who is unable to direct her child from the world of imagination and illusion; she is the woman, who after her husband divorces her, is obsessed with finding another man to validate her life; disempowered by a hegemonic patriarchy, she is unable, in crisis, to perceive and reorder her life in significant options; she will spend most of her time trying to find a new husband to be a source of economic position for her and her children, and she will, significantly, spend most of her evenings drinking and listening to old records, lost in a romantic nostalgia for the past. White makes it impossible for a new order to emerge for her and precludes her inability to be a guide for her son. All adults -- the

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father, the teacher, the psychiatrist, the priest -- are unable to be guides. They all exist within the historical order, though they themselves are unhappy and discontent within that order. They do not see ways out for either themselves or for their children, blinded by the bright light of tradition, specifically, in this text, economic privilege. Certainly, to live in the world of the imagination is "the admission of some sort of failure" (63).

White continues to develop the romantic image through which the narrator intensifies and displaces his homosexual desire. While he is at camp, his counselor shows him "art photographs" the counselor had taken himself. The images are of a naked man on a beach. In his naive understanding of Mr. Stone, the counselor, he does not suspect that he is being seduced (he has become a desired object) and that the photographs, along with the breath on his neck and the hand on his knee, are vehicles of seduction; he, instead, as he looks at the photographs is afraid that Mr. Stone might perceive that his admiration of the naked man goes beyond the artistic: "I hoped he hadn't noticed my excitement" (105). The narrator confesses that until the time of the photographs and the connection Mr. Stone makes of them to art, it "had all been about castles in the sand or snow, about remote and ruthless monarchs, about power, not beauty, about the lonely splendors of possession, not the delicious, sinking helplessness of yearning to possess" (150). Thus, White intensifies the desire and arrests it in a fixed

object -- an image -- that can not perceive the child's admiration, receive or respond to it. But in the construct, White establishes for the first time a connection between desire and love, which he has the narrator define:

-- that young man came toward me with a beauty so unsettling I had to call it love, as though he loved me or I him. The drooling adult delectation over particular body parts (the large penis, the hairy chest, the rounded buttocks) is unknown to children; they resolve the parts into the whole and the physical into the emotional, so that desire quickly becomes love. In the same way love becomes desire -- . (106)

The narrator sees the tan back, muscles, smile, and blond hair; all of the body comprises a whole, a unity of beauty. White, immediately after the narrator's vision of the photograph -- a stasis of perfect beauty -- has the narrator encounter a fellow camper with whom he has sex; the sexual act is separated from the beautiful object; in contrast, the camper is only a phallus -- an erect penis -- to the narrator, no one to whom he is attracted as he is to the "corpus of beauty." The sexual episode is simply a consistency in White's development of fragmentation: the unattainable desired object. Also, the desired object is not sexualized; thus, an innocence, homophobic in origin, is preserved as the desire for the beautiful man on the beach is transferred to the object not desired: the fellow camper who is a walking erection, and who exists in no way other than as penis. The narrator's internalized homophobia is

manifested in his response of repugnance and fear to the fleeting sexual episode involving Ralph:

I wondered. Would someone see us? Would I become ill? Would I become a queer and never, never be like other people?

To overcome my scruples, Ralph hypnotized me. He didn't have to intone the words long to send me into a deep trance. Once I was under his spell he told me I'd obey him, and I did. He also said that when I awakened I'd remember nothing, but he was wrong there. I have remembered everything. (107)

The narrator, at the time of the seduction, is made not guilty of the act; to participate in sex (fellatio performed on Ralph; White omitting a similar pleasure performed on the narrator) the narrator is powerless; the act is not of his volition and the perpetrator not only commands -- "To overcome my scruples, Ralph hypnotized me" (107) -- the victim to act, but also promises he will remember nothing; an aspect of desire satisfied, the narrator does not forget: after all the incident is real -- it is not a dream; the flesh has been touched, but no wholeness exists in the act, which is comprised of only the flesh.

White, after this episode, consisting of two events of romantic stasis and depersonalized sex, moves the narrator to a final personal stasis, a school friend, Tom, with whom the narrator discusses Sartre's Nausea, always able to clarify his friend's thinking for him. All of the elements of their conversation -- atheism and cynicism -- the narrator is able to relate to their friendship, their love:

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For the first time I found it exhilarating to be young and with someone young. I loved him, and the love was all the more powerful because I had to hide it. We slept in twin beds only two feet apart. (116)

In the specific incident of the friend excusing himself from their discussion to urinate, the narrator fantasizes a sexual recognition:

As I listened through the open door to the jet of water falling into the toilet I imagined standing beside him, our streams of urine crossing, dribbling dry, then our hands continuing to shake a final glistening drop of something stickier than water from this new disturbance, this desire our lifting, meeting eyes had to confess. (117)

But the narrator indicates that when opportunity arose to act out such fantasy, he "would smother it" (117). The encounter with the friend becomes one more of White's constructions of inaccessibility or fragmentation, emerging from an internalized homophobia: this time the friend is an intellectual companion, although he is the narrator's inferior. Tom makes clear that he has no interest in any kind of homosexual activity to which the narrator responds, "Nor . . . nor do I" (117). The incident immediately triggers a sense of filth and guilt for the narrator:

The medical smell, that Lysol smell of homosexuality, was staining the air again as the rubber-wheeled metal cart of drugs and disinfectants rolled silently by. I longed to open the window, to go away for an hour and come back to a room free of that odor, the smell of shame. I never doubted that homosexuality was sickness; in fact, I took it as a measure of how unsparingly objective I was that I could contemplate this very sickness. But in some other part of my mind I

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couldn't believe that the Lysol smell must bathe me, too, that its smell of stale coal fumes must penetrate my love for Tom. Perhaps I became so vague, so exhilarated with vagueness, precisely in order to forestall a recognition of the final term of the syllogism that begins: If one man loves another he is a homosexual; I love a man. (117-18)

This language from White clarifies and focuses the source of disruption, fragmentation, and displacement in the narrator's sexual articulation; the fear is of the mark that separates the protagonist from an established empowerment: a particular political definition and role that positions the male within the traditions of modern western civilization. This is the identical predicament for David, in Baldwin's Giovanni's Room and the predicament for Metro in Dixon's Vanishing Rooms. All of these men eventually, violently, emerge from this homophobic cocoon. To be homosexual is to be revolutionary, and in that particular act of sex and embracing the person with the mark of homosexuality is an act of rebellion that places the rebel in a position of dangerous reprisals and exclusions. In the authorial constructions and representations of Metro, David, and the narrator in A Boy's Own Story, each, originally, mimetically moralizes or perceives the homosexual act of sex as an abomination, a defilement. Thus, the intense homosexual urge when fantasized or consummated is a double insurgency: an act against the empowerment of a particular masculine, male position and an existence within that abhorrent sphere of the taboo, a violation of ordering

principles: political power and male morality, both of which fuse into one predicament: anarchy.

For the narrator in A Boy's Own Story this anarchy generates a terror of separation from that framework of relationships, valorized connections between men and women, the large mass of society: "the tribe." When the narrator is at school he decides to contact a psychiatrist, motivated by a dream that articulates his dilemma: if I am homosexual to whom do I belong, with whom do I exist:

But now I was becoming frightened. I was being pushed out of the tribe. I had a dream in which I was a waiter in an elegant restaurant where I served happy, elegant couples. That was upstairs. Downstairs the filthy kitchen was staffed by bald men, convicts, really, mute, bestial with grief. I was one of them and, although I could rise to circulate among the happy diners, I always had to descend back down to the hopeless workers, each suspicious of the others. And then the police van arrived and the help, all of us, were dragged out into the night street ablaze with revolving red lights. We were hauled off to prison, where we'd remain forever. As I was being herded into the van I could feel on my back the eyes of the diners looking down from the windows upstairs. Now they knew I wasn't one of them but one of the convicts. (164-65)

The deep consciousness of the dream articulates the fear of being marked different, separated from the others ("the tribe"), not realizing that "the tribe" is not one's kind, that one is a stranger in the world. This separation, formed by the mark of difference, eventually is punished in an act of perpetual confinement with those the hegemonic society has defined as grotesque, bloody and made to be suspicious, even of each other: the fear, allowed by the

lack of a revolutionary, truthful vision, is to be what one is. The repugnance is of the self: hegemonic homophobia assimilated into the homosexual.

The fantasized act is confined, concealed, "closeted"; it is to this aesthetic closet of safe non-reality that the narrator returns in his relationship to Tom, who becomes for the narrator a static object of beauty and sexual yearning, ultimately the phallus and maleness, gazed upon and impregnated with meaning and power, accomplished from outside the object, within the gazer. The gaze becomes a substitute for real possession: "as for now I could continue to look as long as I liked into Tom's eyes the color of faded lapis" (118). The narrator is able to look at the sleeping figure, the singing boy, who would "wail and shout and moan" as the narrator "was permitted to look at him" (122).

The episode involving Tom, one of many episodes of young men who enter the life of the narrator as friends for whom he eventually has desire, is similar in structure to the episode which involves Kevin -- that episode in the narrative precedes the episode involving Tom, but chronologically they are reversed. White constructs a parallel in object and setting for the narrator. Tom, as object, is not possessed; Kevin, as object, is possessed to the vital disillusionment of the narrator; for Kevin the homosexual act does not have the same meaning as it does for the narrator: eventually Kevin, although he and the

narrator will have sex, will betray the narrator -- taking only a transient homosexual pleasure with him and then mocking the narrator as "sissy": a genocide of desire and a disconnection from the object of desire, once possessed.

Tom functions as the final representation of the romantic stasis of unfulfilled desire, the strange recipient of the narrator's still inarticulated love, his yearning gaze from a position of isolation, predicated by Tom's ultimate, but never explained, rejection of homosexual expression. The setting for the vision is a sail boat, removing the narrator, as White did in the incident involving Kevin, from the "land" dominated by the vast heterosexual species. The incident, "just a father and his teenage son and the son's friend out for a sail, but in my mind, at least, the story was less simple" (123); in retelling the story, the narrator complicates it. The event becomes the receptacle for the universal desire of the narrator, his complete desire. White has developed the father as desired object for the narrator, a simple Oedipal inversion; but in reality, the father is not accessible to the boy. In the scene on the sail boat Tom's father is perceived as having desire for his own son, who is also the narrator's desired object; thus, the father and the narrator are united in their mutual desire for Tom: the son/the friend. The incident is the climatic/central fantasy of the text; it holds all desire: the union of the father and the son made one. Pivotal is the narrative reality that the son

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is the desired object: the son is desired/loved by the father; it is this connection the narrative voice desires. In the incident involving Tom and his father White constructs the receptacle for the intense desire of the text: a union with the father which is stated in the language of fantasy which objectifies and removes it from the actual, real experience of the narrator; it is the ultimate desire, unfulfilled. At this moment the narrator, in an imaginative state, becomes both the desiring father and the desired object:

I found in this Mr. Wellington a version of myself so transformed by will and practice as to be not easily recognizable, but familiar nonetheless. He had never been handsome, I was certain, and his lack of romantic appeal shaded his responses to his glamorous son, the muted, wary adoration as well as the less than frank envy. (123-24)

The narrator perceives in the father his own homosexual desire, carefully concealed. He and the father, together, gaze upon the physical beauty of the son/friend, transforming the body into a phallus:

Here was this boy, laughing and blonded by the sun and smooth-skinned, his whole body straining up as he reached to cleat something so that his T. shirt parted company with his dirty, sagging jeans and we -- the father and I -- could see Tom's muscles like forked lightning on his taut stomach; here was this boy so handsome and free and well liked and here were we flanking him, looking up at him, at the torso flowering out of the humble calyx of his jeans. (124)

The youthful body is the object of beauty. The narrator identifies the body, at this moment in the text, as the

"highest good" (124) and informs that what hegemonic history states as "virtue" is "spleen and deceit" (124). This passage represents the textual focus on the body and a homosexual beholding of it: the young male body most beautiful when it is gazed upon with a lust which can not be fulfilled; it is an iconic construction, an aesthetic rendering of that which is socially prohibited; thus, the icon itself is socially determined; significantly, the moment is the recurrence of the romantic icon through which the imagination passes to a perpetual vortex of sexual desire and being desired; and familial wholeness: prohibition is not violated, desire is intensified, but the actual body -- the object -- is not possessed; the invention of the imagination marginalizes the life of the inventor.

At school, although the narrator is conscious of those other males who surround him and wonders if they might not also be conscious of him, he develops the habit of every afternoon looking at ("gazing upon") a photograph of Rodin's "The Age of Bronze," a statue of a naked soldier for which the narrator develops an obsession of "love." In retrospect he realizes that his quest, at that moment to remain loyal, was complicated by the fact that he was attempting to determine from what perspective -- who/what must I be to love within order? -- other than his own, he should give his love:

No, I loved him and I told him so, again and again,
in whispers that never sounded right because I
could never figure out who I was -- his son? wife?

brother? enemy? husband? friend? . . . I'd neglected to sort out the most essential thing, my own identity. Perhaps that's why I'd become so enamored of a statue, for with it the only amorous activity could be the circle of my steps around that still form. No encounter, no vying for position, no chance of perfect understanding or total confusion. That is, everything suspenseful and mutable about the society of lovers had been eliminated in favor of an embrace as simple and unvarying (as eternal) as it had necessarily to be cold. Or perhaps I worried that if I had a real, living lover I'd wound him, subject him to all the rage I'd been saving up. (155)

The passage suggests two equal motivations for fixation on the statue as the object of affection. The first is the lack of a precise sense of the narrator's own identity, a problem for him throughout the text: the fear of being marked, to be less than a man can be. The second is his fears that perhaps if he were to have a real lover he would vent his rage against him. White indicates two motivations for the inanimate romantic stasis in which the narrator perpetually participates; both of the motivations originate in a social determination. It is significant to note that the author has, at this point of the text, established his central position: the deformity of the narrator is a result of a social conditioning; that history, briefly identified, produces the internal dilemma: just as the determining history outside the text has produced the text itself. What social history has produced it denies. So, the narrator himself would deny the inevitability of who he is and would immerse himself in a religious transcendence, a "begging" to be set free of that which he perceives himself to be. In a

religious posture, contemplating the past, the narrator is able to comprehend an original, innocent self that he now admires and desires:

Tonight as I sat cross-legged on my cot I could see shining out from within me that boy who'd been entranced by the marionette show: his smaller, sweeter body burned through this neglected exile I'd become. Or was I simply at fifteen learning to love myself at four as now so many years later I like the fifteen-year-old (even desire him), self-approval never accompanying but always trailing experience, retrospection three parts sentimental and one part erotic? . . . the child burned through the adolescent and luminous within the child, glowed this shifting cat's cradle of sensation, whether spiritual or physical I'm unable to say.
(115)

White refuses to allow the narrator to mark or identify the precise polarity or opposing term that would establish the nature of what the fifteen-year-old boy remembers as a perfect center of love from which the narrator has already "exiled" himself. Thus, White is able to delineate an evolution of determining, social influences that have moved the narrator from an articulation of his "pure" person to that person who has been perverted and transforms himself, gradually, into a weapon to destroy that which destroys him, homosexual desire -- to be illustrated in the seduction, possession and betrayal of Beattie. In this vision the narrator returns from the present to the innocent earlier child of the past, erotically attracted to the authentic, "pure" desire of that child who is, now, through the evolution of social determinism, perverted. In the locker

room at Eton, the narrator studies the bodies of the young men:

. . . each of these bodies spoke to me with a different music, though all sounded to me unlike my own and only with the greatest effort could I remember I was longing for my own sex. (153)

White's language continues to disallow a term to identify the particular yearning of the narrator; the desire is without definition or analysis and is focused on the other, not perceived as the same, but different from the narrator.

The last two objects of desire for the narrator are adults. The first is Mr. Pouchet, the gym teacher who befriends the narrator and becomes the center of his fantasy. Initially, the teacher and the student go to church together; in the description of such activity White constructs the last romantic stasis, using language that refers to a religious object:

During our field trips I'd sit beside him in a hardwood pew or stand close to him under a dusty chandelier as men's voices chanted behind the iconostasis and I felt as though I were already Mr. Pouchet's lover. (160)

In the narrative history of the text this is the last reference to a fantasy; the language is the final configuration of an imaginative state employed by the narrator in which he fabricates a possession of that which he does not possess; it is an interesting figure of arrested religious objects that form a screen through which none can pass and from behind which emerge the sounds of men's

voices. White throughout the text has developed many such romantic poetic representations of desire held in stasis and intensified, but, ultimately, the desire is repressed. The very language used by White fabricates a valorization of the particular state that is the first revelation and limited expression of the homosexual consciousness as represented in White's vision; and it is to this phenomenon, he confesses, that he as writer has returned: the habit of occupying the marginal space in real history, not requiring action or resulting in disillusion -- the land of romantic sexual image and stasis -- is a habit maintained; that is the space explored in this novel, which the author chooses, in his mind and text, to occupy; speaking directly to the reader White states: "the author you're allowing for a moment to exist yet again" (White 89). Thus, the text becomes, for White, a revisiting of the romantic stasis: the "remembrance of things past"; the text becomes a romantic stasis, itself, an arrested moment of the most intense and repressed sexual desire: a construction of absolute romantic bliss.

White develops the narrator's elaborate fantasy of Mr. Pouchet masturbating and the narrator's desire to be a part of the ardor in Pouchet's act, but not the object itself, which would make the incident homosexual:

. . . I did want to be a character in Mr. Pouchet's head, just a virus of his consciousness from which I could study, even experience, his longing for a woman. I didn't want him to like men, just me, not even me as a man but me as discarnate ardor. (163)

White advances the narrator into a new position of power. The narrator writes a love poem and places it where the teacher will find it, but the teacher never acknowledges the letter, and the friendship comes to an end; it is as if the desire articulated and the desirer are invisible: they do not exist.

The second object is Beattie, the music teacher, who becomes the vehicle for the narrator's total empowerment. But before White introduces Beattie, the narrator survives two more incidents of social, specifically institutional, denigration and exploitation: first, the narrator decides to go to a psychiatrist, hoping to be changed; second, he develops a friendship with DeQuincey Scott (a teacher at Eton), his wife, and their friend Father Burke (an Episcopal priest).

The narrative consciousness identifies the time during which the narrator, at a younger age, sees the psychiatrist, Dr. O'Reilly, as a time during which the narrator is unable to be decoded, either by himself or any other person. The connection between "the fear and pain" and the self, "a code no one could read," is a construction of inter-locked dependence. The fear and pain result from the reality of not being identified and understood by anyone. The fear of being identified and understood motivates the code, designed to "defeat the best cryptographer": the labyrinthian predicament, within which the narrative voice barely maneuvers, is a confinement in response to the feared

hegemonic society, a political force that certainly wills confinement or concealment of that which offends or threatens its empowered position:

The confusion and fear and pain that beset me -- initiated by my experience with the hustler, intensified by Mr. Pouchet's gentle silence and made eerie by my fascination with "The Age of Bronze" -- had translated me into a code no one could read, I least of all, a code perhaps designed to defeat even the best cryptographer. (169)

The narrative consciousness later is able to interpret and define the younger self. The present dilemma, for the narrator, is that of a double isolation: being a stranger in the world and a stranger to himself; no one in the narrative is able to help him identify himself; and he does not seek his own definition because he senses the truth about himself to be a revelation that would destroy him; he would discover that he is indeed that outcast, the no-man, the homosexual; the concept for and the image of is a repugnant mark on the very face of the man:

I see now that what I wanted was to be loved by men and love them back but not to be a homosexual. For I was possessed with a yearning for the company of men, for their look, touch and smell. . . . It was men and not women, who struck me as foreign and desirable and I disguised myself as a child or a man or whatever was necessary in order to enter their hush hieratic company, my disguise so perfect I never stopped to question my identity. Nor did I want to study the face beneath my mask, lest it turn out to have the pursed lips, dead pallor and shaped eyebrows by which one can always recognize the Homosexual. . . . I was not that vampire. (172-73)

He is not that mythicized, demonic homosexual, who, even in the narrator's mind, seems inevitable -- if one is homosexual then "pursed lips," "dead pallor," and "shaped eyebrows" are the configuration; one must be the horror within the "tribe," worthy of exile, understandably a repulsion. These are hegemonic definitions appropriated by the narrator into his own self. That is the sense the narrator has of himself when he is young. Later, after the narrator writes to his father (he writes many pages of notes in preparation for his visits to the psychiatrist and a long letter to his father: strange, terrifying texts of self disclosure, like those notes Maurice Hall makes in Forster's novel, Maurice, which must be concealed when Clive Durham enters the room; Forster's novel, itself, concealed until many years after his death -- hidden notes, hidden texts) he explains in more positive terms the reason for his father's silence about his confession; the focus is on the defined masculine world to which the father has ascribed, essentially a world of competition and commodity:

My father didn't like other men; he had no close male friends and he behaved toward men in his own family according to the dictates of duty rather than the impulses of his heart. He so often ascribed cunning to other men, a covert plotting, that he approached them as enemies to whom he must extend an ambiguous hand, one that when not offering a cold greeting could contract into a fist. I was one of the men he didn't like. (172)

The reality of the narrator is identified by the more mature consciousness through a series of binary constructs, the

valorized oppositions of which contradict the hegemonically determined role of the male, to which the father, in his own isolation, adheres:

Or should I say he simply didn't like my nature -- the fact that I was drawn to art rather than business, to people rather than to things, to men rather than to women, to my mother rather than to him, books rather than sports, sentiments not responsibilities, love not money? (172)

White identifies the father as that man who does not like the "no-man" his son is; eventually, when the son discloses his homosexuality to him, the list of oppositions includes that reality; to be what the son is is to be disempowered, to abandon the power position which is his in western civilization. The narrator, as he continues his therapy, discovers a tension, a duality that is actually one reality; the tension is generated by two different interpretations ("stories") of the sexual urgency and two different responses to it. One interpretation is made by the psychiatrist:

I was wrestling with my unconscious, an immense, dark brother who seeped around . . . sometimes invaded my body, caused my pen or tongue to slip. . . . This *doppelgänger* was determined to confine me to what I'd already experienced. (175)

The other interpretation is made by the narrator, specifically a non-response, an evolution over which he has no control:

While I observed the rounds in this psychoanalytic struggle, a quite different, less lurid, more

scattered sort of story was taking place within me, one that lacked narrative drive or even direction. It sprang up without warning like mushrooms after rain; it came and went, circled around itself, died away and then was crawling like moss over the rock face of my will. Like a whole rootless plantation of algae, it washed in tides of longing and self-loathing. For the real movements of life are gradual, then sudden; they resist becoming anecdotes, they pulse like quasars. . . . Time wears down resolve -- then suddenly violence, something irrevocable flashes out of nowhere, there are thrashing fins and roiled, blood-streaked water, death floats up, on its side, eyes bulging. (175)

Ultimately, the sexual urgency/force erupts; it can not, as psychiatrically desired, be altered or contained. It is at this time the narrator becomes friends with Chuck, who represents rebellion, an anti-system position, and a personage who, in his revolution against the forms of social institutions, does poorly in all of his subjects except English, which is taught by a "genius" who does not conform to a prescribed role. During this time the narrator visits a bordello with Chuck. The visit confirms the narrator's homosexuality; he can not perform sexually. At the same time he identifies with the black prostitute as he has identified with blacks throughout the narrative; he senses that they, too, are excluded from the "tribe" and that their oppression deprives them of joy in life, the innocent happiness that he remembers in himself when he saw the marionette show. White uses the incident of this friendship in two ways: first, it is a time of slow empowerment, the beginning of that sudden violence, "when something irrevocable flashes out of nowhere" (175), and the person

has evolved, has become strengthened, *defined anew*; this text is about such evolution. What follows the incident with Chuck and the progressions in the narrator's political position are the incidents involving Kevin, which have already been discussed, and the incident involving the Scotts and Father Burke; both of the incidents are representations of the narrator's vulnerability, submission and sexual denigration: the wound.

The Scotts and Father Burke represent two institutions: education and religion. White develops all three of the people -- DeQuincey and Rachel and Father Burke -- as deceivers; all attempting to conceal their own realities through religion and a literary expression that is not truthful, a construction in which the individual hides in the stories -- perspectives -- of others. The two men are homosexual and elaborately deny that to the narrator; Rachel, when the narrator will not give up his homosexuality and construct his life in her particular religious narrative, discontinues their friendship. All three of the adults prohibit the actuality of the narrator; and in such prohibition he is devastatingly betrayed. The incidents engender a concept of the political position of sexuality for the narrator:

Sex now seemed a strange thing to me, a social rite that registered, even brought about shifts in the balance of power, but something that was more discussed than performed, a simple emission of fluid that somehow generated religious, social and economic consequences. (198)

At the same time the narrator is conscious of the political position of sexual expression, his own sexuality remains private; the institution of marriage which valorizes particular relationships seems both "magical" to the narrator and a terminal experience, like death:

. . . it never entered my mind to discuss with anyone my fantasies. . . . For other boys, who can legally marry their fantasies, marriage must seem less magical. . . . But for me, who'd never even read about the sort of union I longed for, marriage became more and more impossible, a transubstantiation as eerie and irreversible as death. Perhaps by framing this ideal and funereal homosexual marriage in a prospect of poisonous flowers, I was making it more and more remote, thereby putting off the day when I'd have to decide whether I myself was a homosexual or not. Of course I wanted to love a man and to be heterosexual; the longer I could delay sorting out this antimony the better. (199)

White's language establishes the psychologically marginalized space in which the narrator -- private, disconnected, brutalized, and denigrated -- envisions a perpetual state of conflict and the inaccessibility of a valorized union with his kind, a deliberate choice of his. His actuality, he decides, must remain secret. What he desires is an empowerment within the adult hegemonic society that would enable him to seduce and betray a heterosexual man: establish him as the desired object of an older man and simultaneously, out of determined moral dilemma, deny this man his desire. Thus, he will have sex and deny the reality of the sexuality that is the nature of the act -- it is a forced-upon-game, a product of hegemonic judgment. In

all acts of sex, for the narrator, betrayal and ultimate rebuff are the inevitable conclusions; those who have had sex with him have used him as a receptacle for sexual energy and then devastatingly severed the relationship -- a social castration; thus, all relationships have been transient, not the fulfillment the narrator has desired; he, himself, adapts to the game.

The final episode of the text follows the paradigmatic pattern of homosexual relationships that exist within the historical, hegemonic environment delineated by White. The difference is that the position of the narrator is reversed; he is empowered: the seducer and the betrayer.

Beattie is the music teacher at Eton; he fraternizes with his students and provides them with marijuana. The scheme of deceit developed by the narrator faults Beattie for providing students with marijuana; the narrator implicates the music teacher in his conversation with the headmaster; thus, he is free to seduce Beattie, have sex with him and be free of guilt on that matter; he correctly assumes that Beattie will not confess and accuse the narrator of that sexual incident:

Never before had I wielded so much power over an adult man; the power excited and scared me. Paradoxically, I who didn't much like Eton, I who concealed sexual longings most Etonians would have condemned far sooner than dope peddling, I who had rejected the school's religion and slept with a master and his wife, I who had once bought a hustler ten years older than I and last summer had slept with a boy three years younger. . . . I was the one whom circumstance had chosen to defend this

institution I despised. I was to be the guardian of public morality. (210)

The narrator is successful in establishing the seduction; the plan is formulated:

I who was always conscious of the formlessness of real life now saw it imitate art, though the meaning of this action, which was surely turning out to be tragic, escaped me. He [Beattie] wouldn't be able to discredit me by saying I was a practicing homosexual since we would have practiced homosexuality together. He'd be powerless. I would have gotten what I wanted, gotten away with it and gotten rid of him: the trapdoor beside the bed. At last I could seduce and betray an adult. The heterosexual hipster would be my momentary Verlaine. (215)

The statement within this passage, "I who was always conscious of the formlessness of real life now saw it imitate art," is a revelation of a progress in the thinking of the narrator, of that formless life being constructed into a particular, inevitable discourse -- "art"; the final episode of seduction and sexual consummation, "without desire" on the part of the narrator, is a story returned to that society which has made it, an artifice, "performed"/"written" within patriarchal, heterosexual, hegemonic society: the inevitable discourse. The seduction is perfectly executed; Beattie is fired; the narrator accomplishes his desire and acquires a momentary power. The final consciousness of the narrator, reflective of both conscience and real vision, imparts a final perspective on the matter:

Sometimes I think I seduced and betrayed Mr. Beattie because neither one action nor the other alone but the complete cycle allowed me to have sex with a man and then to disown him and it; this sequence was the ideal formulation of my impossible desire to love a man but not to be a homosexual. Sometimes I think I like bringing pleasure to a heterosexual man (for after all I'd dreamed of being my father's lover) at the same time I was able to punish him for not loving me. My German teacher and Mr. Pouchet had not loved me. Tommy had not loved me. My dad had not loved me.

Beattie was a friend of sorts, or at least an accomplice, but he was also a stand-in for all other adults, those swaggering, lazy, cruel masters of ours. (217)

Three years later, when the narrator sees Beattie playing drums in a band at a fraternity dance, the narrator feels he should tell him how much he "repented" what he had done; he realizes the full extent of what he has done, which is to treat people the way his father treats them: "to use and discard" (White 215-16), but he does not speak to Beattie.

The teacher functions for the narrator as the recipient of both his rage against a society that represses his desire and the narrator's own remaining homophobic desire to possess a man sexually, but not to be a homosexual. First, Beattie is all of "the cruel masters," maintaining a heterosexual image within the dictating hegemonic society, who are fluid in desire, attracted to the homosexual, but who make invisible over and over the reality of homosexuality. They are emblematic of a homosexual genocide. The narrator does not maneuver in this text; White in his representation does not provide a geography for maneuvering. Instead, the narrator revolts in sheer rage, a

devastating revenge against the lie of his own nonexistence. Second, Beattie is the recipient of the narrator's primal sexual urge; he is the long-awaited consummation of sexual power. In the ritual performed (the seduction and the actual act of sex), the narrator has become the object of desire himself -- he accomplishes the sexual act with Beattie without desire -- thus, Beattie affirms, for the moment, the existence of homosexuality -- the taboo which violates the foundation upon which the species is ordered; and he affirms, for the moment, the reality of homosexuality in the existence of the narrator, but, simultaneously, the event, contrived before its actual occurrence to be the opportunity which catapults the dismissal of Beattie, a termination, a making invisible, genociding the homosexual.

The authorial perspective, a vision from outside the text, is a centering of homosexuality. The text as a discourse on homosexuality is offered as a "confession" to all who would read; the story, a representation of the reality of homosexuality and the distortions of that homosexuality, is returned to the society that has, actually, written it: the text becomes a dialectic of configurations and reconfigurations -- of knowing and being known. For many it is that "strange" geography that one visits to see one's self, when one exists in no other place: the text, a closet, which when entered becomes a place of many maneuverings, a kind of emancipation within a great oppression.

Chapter III. The Articulation of the Homosexual Body:
The Thought and Act of Recentering Marginalized Desire
in James Baldwin's Giovanni's Room

*When I was a child, I spake as a child,
understood as a child, I thought as a child: but
when I became a man, I put away childish things.*

I long to make this prophecy come true. I long to crack that mirror and be free. I look at my sex, my troubling sex, and wonder how it can be redeemed, how I can save it from the knife. The journey to the grave is already begun, the journey to corruption is, always, already, half over. Yet, the key to my salvation, which cannot save my body, is hidden in my flesh.

Giovanni's Room, James Baldwin

James Baldwin's novel, Giovanni's Room, represents the dilemma in the tension generated between two polarity positions: first, the homosexual acts urged by dominating, inherent desire within the body of the protagonist, David; second, the heterosexual mode required and valorized by the patriarchal hegemonic society -- the "homophobic foundation" as identified in Bergman's Gaiety Transfigured: Gay Self-Representation in American Literature (5). The first position is a representation of motivation consistent to the essentialist theory of homosexual desire: "the key . . . hidden in flesh" (Baldwin, Giovanni's Room 223); the denouement of tension is possible only through articulation of the homosexual desire within the body. The two juxtapositions are an inherent desire in opposition to a mandatory desire: for the protagonist, homosexuality is

naturally within his body; heterosexuality is historically and socially outside his body. The narrator, David, moves between these two positions. The more potent of the two realities is the homosexual: the inclination for the articulation of homosexual desire is indomitable in Baldwin's representation of the dilemma.

To practice homosexuality is represented as that activity which disrupts the hegemonic male order: David will not have children, his friends will turn against him with menace, his father will not approve, and he will not be a part of the future of the nation, as he envisions that future. He will forfeit the power of his sex, the patriarchal phallus, the emblem of masculinity and empowerment as the dominator of the species. The tension -- "the germ of the dilemma" (16) -- can be resolved only through the expression of the urge of the body, the basic desire, free from the inscriptions imposed by society on that desire and act; the meaning of the act must be reinscribed, rewritten, a different definition delineated -- a new discourse invented. The "germ" (which is not the source of homosexuality, but the dilemma resulting from the clash of homosexual desire and hegemonic value), a viral condition, which contaminates the homosexual body, must be destroyed/cured; the new discourse, the text as opposition, affects the biotic solution; it is a reactive agent.

The poetic language of the first paragraph of the novel identifies the elements that constitute the organic dilemma

-- the "germ" -- and the perspective of the narrator, the vision of the tension:

I watch my reflection in the darkening gleam of the window pane. My reflection is tall, perhaps rather like an arrow, my blond hair gleams. My face is like a face you have seen many times. My ancestors conquered a continent, pushing across death-laden plains, until they came to an ocean which faced away from Europe into a darker past. (7)

The task for the protagonist is to perceive the actuality of self. Baldwin, writing in the early 1950s, authorially distances himself from the protagonist and distances the issues of the text from the African-American experience through his construction of the white protagonist. The novel is not focused on the African-American race; instead, it is focused on the matter of homosexuality incorporated into a white American man and an Italian man, placed, safely, outside the borders of the United States. Through these devices the "germ," with its feared potential for contagion, is not African-American nor is it America, the nation; the problem is white and foreign. This text extends the excluding borders, simultaneously identifying homosexuality and displacing it for the American readers of the 1950s; it might be argued that through racial manipulation homosexuality is displaced for Baldwin himself: the novel is not set in America and no African-American male exists in it. However, the device must, also, be understood as a representation of the intensity of the American homophobic milieu: only through the escape of the immediate

social constraints, the repressive, heterosexually-dominated environment, is the protagonist able to "see himself," to allow the articulation of the desires of his body. Gide's novel, The Immoralist, displaces the protagonist, Michel, for the same purpose: to claim his body and the desires of that body. The displacement is delineated through an interruption of his classical studies, an illness, and a recovery from that illness actuated by the spectacle of the healthy African bodies of young boys who visit the gardens of Biskra with Michel. All of which is the result of his departure from France, which in this text represents the institutional life of property, marriage, an academic career, and an imitation of the life of the aristocratic class. In Gide's text the possibility of discovering and articulating homosexual desire is prohibited within the hegemonic construct. The place of discovery and being is a margin outside the nation itself. Tennessee Williams' play, Suddenly Last Summer, places the protagonist in the same expatriate position. Each summer Sebastian travels, and outside the United States he expresses his desire, which he records in a journal; his very writing is generated by and produced in the most distant margin. Thomas Mann's Death in Venice also displaces the protagonist from northern Europe to southern Europe, enabling his fatal attraction to the young Italian boy. Jean Cocteau's The White Paper is a description of the same emancipating occurrence: necessary movements outside the established social construct, other

cities, other countries; thus, xenophobia is reversed, and it is the foreign place, outside the place of familiar definitions and the enforcers of those definitions, embraced by "the other," which is the land in which the inscription or reinscription of the self occurs: one's own city and country are that which is to be feared. It is significant to observe that such geographical movement is not motivated by the desire for romantic adventure. Rather such displacement beyond the margins of one's own city or nation is solely for the purpose of attaining a freedom to discover and be what one desires; this is the authorial manipulation and intent. This necessary energy and consciousness of self in the familiar environment -- which is actually alien to one's authentic self -- is what the narrator in A Boy's Own Story means when he shouts silently, "I don't belong here" (27). In Vanishing Rooms, it is that consciousness of alienation that forces Metro to the destructive marginal place represented in the warehouse and which motivates Jesse to seek meaning in the same marginal place, but, ultimately, to reject it and articulate himself in the aesthetic -- dance -- and in a relationship that connects him to his political equal, outside the space of white hegemonic valorization.

Thus, Baldwin begins his novel by establishing the initial vision of David, reflected in a mirror that exists outside the United States. It is in southern France that he will be able to allow into existence an actual image of his

authentic self and, as the narrator, confess that actuality to the reader: to know and speak what is known, however terrifying and disordering. Baldwin organizes the physical characteristics of the protagonist: "My reflection is tall, perhaps rather like an arrow, my blond hair gleams. My face is like a face you have seen many times" (7). His body is a construction of the empowered white man: the inscription of the American dream -- a phallus of sexual pleasure and a weapon of political supremacy. The reflected image presents an inscription of hegemonic masculinity, maleness and heterosexuality. The task of the text is a reinscription of the image, a clear definition of the man as homosexual. The image, the face, the person are connected to the history of the nation: "My ancestors conquered a continent, pushing across death-laden plains, until they came to an ocean which faced away from Europe into a darker past" (7). The statement is similar to that made by Marlow in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness:

The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have different complexion or slightly different noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. (9)

Conrad continues to state that what civilization attempts to do is to establish an idea behind the action that justifies conquering the world. The consciousness of the narrator in Baldwin's text states that after all is conquered, the nation rests, "death-laden," peering at the dark enigmas,

older than European civilization: civilization does not answer itself. Also, for the narrator as an heir to the progress of the nation, the "dark self" remains, still to be identified. Ultimately, Baldwin will develop a discourse to delineate his text, borrowing substantially from Christian narrative. The "darker past" extends back to the Biblical story of Eden and the baffling enigma of inevitable departure from that place to a consciousness of the body: desire and the consummation of desire; that, in Baldwin's text, is the pervading, dark past -- man in this text is to arrive at the beginning, an awareness of lust and the fulfillment that is to be acquired in the old knowledge of nakedness. In The Immoralist, Gide constructs a similar historical/mythological view, using the same language. Michel escapes the confinement of a classical civilization, celebrating the anti-history of Altharic, the prince, who rebelled against his Latin education, enjoyed the company of the Goths, rejected "culture like a stallion restive in harness" (41), and was dead from excess at the age of eighteen. Michel, in his own evolution, abandons his classical studies, estate, marriage, and embraces the "old Adam": man cursed; salvation, the new Adam is rejected.

The layers of acquired knowledge peel away from the mind like a cosmetic and reveal, in patches, the naked flesh beneath, the authentic being hidden there.

Henceforth this was what I sought to discover: the authentic being, "the old Adam" whom the Gospels no longer accepted; the man whom everything around me -- books, teachers, family and I myself -- had tried from the first to suppress. (33)

In Baldwin's text, David initially does not want to leave Eden, which is the innocence of man before the fall; eventually, what he realizes he must accept is the loss of Eden and consent to the meaning of living that is hidden in his body. 'The image of "the naked flesh beneath, the authentic being hidden there" is the image and concept developed by Baldwin in the conclusion of Giovanni's Room. David speaks of his naked body: "And I do not know what moves in this body. . . . It is trapped in my mirror as it is trapped in time and hurries toward revelation" (223).

At the beginning of the novel, Baldwin establishes two divergences of male experience of equal signification: the narrator, David, confesses or becomes conscious of the reality of his life; he, also, narrates the events of Giovanni's life, specifically the last night of his life. The narrator speaks the words that construct his inevitable homosexuality and his choice to free himself from the deceit that prohibits and protects him within the sphere of hegemonic society. At the same time, he imagines the events of Giovanni's last night before his execution: the discourse of David's consciousness is a moral emancipation, allowing homosexual life; the discourse of events in the life of Giovanni causes him to despair the confinement of the marginal sphere forced by hegemonic society and determining predicaments. The one discourse (David's) leads to life; the other (Giovanni's) to death. Both are responses to the "germ" which is the tension between desire

and social restriction: the authorial vision is a consciousness of two polarity positions as resolutions to the germinant tension of homosexuality perceived within one mind.

Central to David's narration of his sexual evolution is the *a priori*-event of early youth -- his sexual encounter with the boy, Joey. The incident, his first homosexual experience, is the fulfillment of his desire, preceded by the subtly established restrictions of a homophobic society enveloping his conscience. The incident is comprised of the sense of disconnection from heterosexual desire, the reduction of inhibition, the urge for sexual experience, an awareness of the body of the other, the opportunity for incident, the increase of desire, and the accidental initiation of sexual activity; this is followed by a profound sense of guilt.

The two boys, while together at the beach, deceitfully pretend a heterosexual interest, whistling at the young girls:

I think we had been lying around the beach, swimming a little and watching the near-naked girls pass, whistling at them and laughing. I am sure that if any of the girls we whistled at that day had shown any signs of responding, the ocean would not have been deep enough to drown our shame and terror. (12)

The girls do not pay any attention to them. The two boys spend time at the movies, "making dirty wise-cracks" (12) and drinking beer. When they shower, the narrator is conscious of "something that [he] had not felt before, which

mysteriously, and yet aimlessly, included [Joey]" (12).

David indicates that what he desired was to remain naked.

In the middle of the night, when both boys are awake, they kiss, "as it were, by accident" (12).

Then for the first time in my life, I was really aware of another person's body, of another person's smell. We had our arms around each other. It was like holding in my hand some rare, exhausted, nearly doomed bird which I had miraculously happened to find. I was very frightened; I am sure he was frightened too, and we shut our eyes. To remember it so clearly, so painfully tonight tells me that I have never for an instant truly forgotten it. I feel in myself now a faint, a dreadful stirring, of what so overwhelmingly stirred in me then, great thirsty heat, and trembling, and tenderness so painful I thought my heart would burst. But out of this astounding, intolerable pain came joy; we gave each other joy that night. It seemed, then, that a lifetime would not be long enough for me to act with Joey the act of love.
(14)

This is the remembered incident. The return, in the mind, to the event evokes a profound stirring of desire. The particular narrator/authorial consciousness, confessing a return of desire, is similar to that expressed in White's A Boy's Own Story. White indicates the power and beauty of the remembered body and states that this remembrance is the real essence of the text. Thus, it is the reader who allows the author and the "beloved feature" to exist again:

Like a blind man's hands exploring a face, the memory lingers over an identifying or beloved feature but dismisses the rest as just a curve, a bump, an expanse. Only this feature -- these lashes tickling the palm like a firefly or this breath pulsing hot on a knuckle or this vibrating Adam's apple -- only this feature seems lovable, sexy. . . . may even mean something to you . . . scrupulous reader . . . more respectful of life,

than the author you're allowing for a moment to exist yet again. (84-85)

The narrator/author, White, exists again in the text with his specified body awareness and desire. In Baldwin's text, the remembered first sexual experience with Joey awakens desire through the recollected, specific "beloved feature":

He looked like a baby, his mouth half open, his cheek flushed, his curly hair darkening the pillow and half hiding his damp round forehead and his long eyelashes glinting slightly in the summer sun. We were both naked. (14)

The texts are maneuvers, delineating complex narrative, a part of which is the remembered vision: the once desired body, reconstructed, "gazed upon," desired again by the narrator/author, and, one would imagine, inspiring, making conscious, awakening and legitimizing desire for many readers, however problematic the represented desire might be in these texts. As Bergman clarifies in Gaiety Transfigured: Gay Self-Representation in American Literature, the homosexual text has been for many readers the only social discourse which has given access to homosexuality, referring to research published by Barry M. Dank, "showing the importance of literature for developing homosexual identity." Bergman goes on to indicate that mass media does not present a useful homosexual representation (5-7). Certainly, the homosexual text, frequently inscribed with heterosexual attitudes and values, historical dilemma, and the particular "suffering" history of the author, does

not always give to the reader a hopeful discourse (5). The historical and pathological setting, the powerful determining influences of hegemonic society and "compulsory heterosexuality" (5) have determined the particular reality of the homosexual experience represented in the texts, not always making that reality attractive.

In Baldwin's text, the homosexual encounter with Joey results in a sense of "joy," and the narrator would make the young friend a permanent sexual partner; this conclusion is spontaneous, without any thought that would set them and the incident within the confinements of dominant society. The intense pain and joy that accompany the act of pleasure are replaced, in the reflective moments when David looks at the body of the sleeping Joey, with fear. At that moment, David's own body "seemed gross and crushing and the desire which was rising in [him] seemed monstrous." The reality, impregnated with the restrictions of hegemonic society, dawns on the narrator: "But Joey is a boy." Absolute boundaries exist between male bodies (15). The body which has been the source of desire and pleasure changes:

That body suddenly seemed the black opening of a cavern in which I would be tortured till madness came, in which I would lose my manhood. Precisely, I wanted to know that mystery and feel that power and have that promise fulfilled through me. The sweat on my back grew cold. I was ashamed. The very bed, in its sweet disorder, testified to vileness. (15)

The boy's guilt comes to focus on the feared response of his parents (15), and, in the passage cited, the narrator

constructs the recollected feelings into the psychologically emblematic language of the "black cavern": certainly, suggesting both a response of guilt to an anal sexual act in which he was either the penetrator or the receiver (the language later in the passage developing the incident -- "in me" -- suggests receiver), or the language "black cavern" may suggest a sense of being lost, disordered, and even dead. Perhaps both the physical and psychological meanings function. The language is refocused when Baldwin uses the word "cavern" again as he continues to describe the narrator's fear and guilt. The word represents that source within hegemonic society -- "rumors and stories" -- that subtly and powerfully has constructed an inscription, a definition, a meaning for such acts:

A cavern opened in my mind, black, full of rumor, suggestion, of half-heard, half-forgotten, half-understood stories, full of dirty words. I thought I saw my future in that cavern. I was afraid. I could have cried, cried for shame and terror, cried for not understanding how this could have happened to me, how this could have happened in me and I made my decision. (15)

He leaves Joey and begins his long journey of sexual repression and deceit, creating tragedy in his own life and in the lives of those who have intimate contact with him:

I began, perhaps, to be lonely that summer and began, that summer, the flight which has brought me to this darkening window. (18)

The decision to flee is made at the moment the "germ" of tension -- the conflict between desire and social

prohibition -- comes into play. The source of the sense of social restriction is that political discourse that is articulated through informal incident, not specific address, "the cavern": the collection of misconception, myth, disempowerment, and masculine definition that establishes role and power for the male who adheres, and who is without that desire which violates the history, discourse, and political order of heterosexual supremacy. The "germ" of tension is the ultimate dilemma, paralyzing the protagonist, forcing him into a mimetic role, generating the lie that he, himself, begins to believe. He becomes Joey's persecutor, articulating and practicing an internalized homophobia as dangerous in him as in any other male:

When I finally did see him, more or less by accident, near the end of the summer, I made up a long and totally untrue story about a girl I was going with and when school began again I picked up with a rougher, older crowd and was very nasty to Joey. And the sadder this made him, the nastier I became. He moved away at last, out of the neighborhood, away from our school, and I never saw him again. (16)

This episode is closed with the narrator's contemplation of the sources of his dilemma. Unable clearly to identify and interpret the numerous incidents, influences, the exact moment of homosexual awareness, Baldwin substantiates Bergman's theory that the realization of homosexual desire is complex: no direction is given. Adrienne Rich has termed it, "The child who will become gay conceives his sexual self in isolation." (5) The predicament is more

isolated than for any other minorities who must identify themselves; little or no help exists for the young homosexual child. The observation to be made is that the protagonist in Baldwin's novel is unable to identify the moment of "germination," but he admits that once the germ/tension is present, it can only be resolved through a flight from homosexuality or in being homosexual:

My flight may, indeed, have begun that summer -- which does not tell me where to find the germ of the dilemma which resolved itself, that summer, into flight. Of course, it is somewhere before me, locked in that reflection I am watching in the window as the night comes down outside. It is trapped in the room with me, always has been, and always will be, and it is yet more foreign to me than those foreign hills outside. (16-17)

Once the narrator is conscious of his homosexuality, he is conscious of the hegemonic society that prohibits that homosexuality. The germ is discovered, visible, known for what it is; no anti-biotic exists. If, conscious of homosexual desire, the desirer flees what he desires, he does not free himself of the "germ"; if, conscious of the prohibition of hegemonic society, the desirer embraces the object of his desire, he does not free himself of the "germ." The tension, from one perspective or another, exists; the "germ," a perpetual organism in the consciousness, continues to live, and the sexual and political lives of the man with such consciousness continue in turmoil. The object of desire, neither society, with prohibition, nor the individual, with desire, can cut away:

"it is trapped in the room with me, always . . ." (17). The sense the narrator has of the foreign nature of his dilemma is the effect of his own will to masculine power as defined by the dominant society and his internalized homophobia, urging a separation of his socially prohibited homosexual desire from himself. In the passage cited, Baldwin focuses the vision of the narrator on the inevitable object to be pursued, to be seen, for meaning and resolution: the body itself, reflected in the mirror. The articulation of the desire of the body is the necessary act for resolution of the enveloping turmoil. When the desire of the body is prioritized, the actuality of authentic identity is accomplished, even though social abhorrence and danger continue to exist.

The text represents the denial of homosexuality and the vacuity of the individual, isolated in society. The impossibility of the person to speak his desire and experience is the source of subversion:

The incident with Joey had shaken me profoundly and its effect was to make me secretive and cruel. I could not discuss what had happened to me with anyone, I could not even admit it to myself; and while I never thought about it, it remained, nevertheless, at the bottom of my mind, as still and as awful as a decomposing corpse. And it changed, it thickened, it soured the atmosphere of my mind. (24)

The social prohibition constructs, in this text, a dangerous person who will bring much grief to himself and others: the betrayal of Joey, the abuse of Hella and Susan, and the

death of Giovanni. David's life is contaminated by a perpetual tension: the consciousness of homosexual desire and the forced secrecy imposed on him by a society to which he submits, causing a terrifying homophobia to grow within him. The problem represented in this text is not homosexuality, but rather a homosexuality that is not expressed. Baldwin chooses "decomposing corpse" to identify an optional description of the nature of the homosexual experience: obviously, death. Two of the three texts (Vanishing Rooms and Giovanni's Room) offered in this study as paradigmatic discourse, with positions marginalized in the canon of western literary tradition, are offering descriptions, in turn, of the lives of marginalized men and death -- suicide, genocide, and "omnicide" (Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet 128). Represented is a social/political solution, a treatment for the "germ-infected" homosexual. The homosexual experience, identified as a "decomposing corpse," is an authorial rendering of a hegemonic inscription adapted by the narrator, who is also able to establish a vision of his life that is acceptable to the patriarchy represented by his father: "the vision I gave my father of my life was the vision in which I myself most desperately needed to believe" (Baldwin 30). The vision is an exclusion of the reality of the narrator's being and a mimetic expression of heterosexual desire, which he "wills" to make his authentic self, a "decision of virtue":

This virtue, like most virtues, is ambiguity itself. People who believe that they are strong-willed and the masters of their destiny can only continue to believe this by becoming specialists in self-deception. Their decisions are not really decisions at all . . . but elaborate systems of evasion, of illusion designed to make themselves and the world appear to be what they and the world are not. . . . I had decided to allow no room in the universe for something which shamed and frightened me. I succeeded very well -- by not looking at the universe, by not looking at myself, by remaining, in effect, in constant motion. (30-31)

Thus, the mimetic life, which suspends shame and fear, is an illusion, a facade, and a mask which, when presented to society, successfully deceives. Even the narrator confesses he abandons it occasionally, to participate in "drunken and sordid" "drops": sexual activity (31), placing him in marginalized spaces of dangerous hegemonic reprisal:

. . . one very frightening such drop while I was in the Army . . . involved a fairy who was later court-martialed out. The panic his punishment caused in me was as close as I ever came to facing in myself the terror I sometimes saw clouding another man's eyes. (31)

The narrator has not successfully dispelled desire; the germ remains. He has only been able to construct a mask that allows him to lie safely in the center, "an ennui," of a hegemonic society from which he is estranged. His place in the center is comprised of "constant motion," "meaningless friendships," "joyless seas of alcohol," and "forests of desperate women," of all of which he wearies (31). His departure for France is the beginning of a detribalization, the disassembling of cultural values, and a distancing from

those confinements that hinder the evolution of authentic self: "I think I knew . . . exactly what I was doing when I took the boat for France" (31).

In the second year in France, after David has established a relationship with a woman, Hella, he meets Giovanni and begins his irrevocable movement away from heterosexuality to homosexuality. Baldwin's representation of this journey is accomplished through a discourse formed from Christian mythical language and emblem. The displacement from America to France is an exile from Eden, and the consciousness of the death of Giovanni is an act of redemption. The exile, sacrifice, and redemption comprise a progressive agitation which accomplishes a resolution in the body, the place which contains the impetus of desire and the site of consummation: an accomplished knowledge of which is not possible in Eden. To remain in Eden is to know nothing; the serpent's apple is a gift, indeed, of self-knowledge.

After the arrest of Giovanni for the murder of Guillaume, Jacques and David talk about possible motives for the murder. In this situation David identifies the ultimate motivation for the murder in the essence of a new knowledge that came to Giovanni when he left Eden, the simple life of marriage in a small Italian village:

It might have been better . . . if he'd stayed down there in that village of his in Italy and planted his olive trees and had a lot of children and beaten his wife. . . . maybe he could have stayed down there and sung his life away and died in bed.
(35)

Baldwin establishes in his narrative of homosexual desire and individual response to that desire a *doppelgänger*: David is able to move from that place of confined desire to an intellectual position of freedom. This is accomplished through the narrative, which is David's recitation of those significant elements in his history that focus his sexual inhibition. In speaking the words, he reconfigures his sexual position in society; the result is an emancipation. Giovanni represents an antithesis in evolution; his execution for the murder of Guillaume is, in Baldwin's representation of desire and that marginal place provided for the fulfillment of desire, an abandonment, through death, of that place outside Eden, Guillaume's bar. The bar is another place of confinement, the site of a homosexuality that Giovanni is unwilling to embrace and from which he is unable to perceive any other alternatives. This is perhaps because for him, in his economic dilemma and class immobility, they do not exist. Baldwin represents three venues for homosexual articulation: Giovanni's death, David's continuing evolution, and the relationship that was possible for David and Giovanni, which is rejected by David. The bar, the place of marginalization, is not a venue; rather, it is a place of grotesque deformity.

The response made by Jacques to David's prediction of the preferable confinement for Giovanni in the Eden of agrarian Italy is Baldwin's own urgent choice for realities: "Nobody can stay in the garden of Eden. . . . I wonder why"

(35). The text is the reality; in it he develops the emblematic function of Eden:

Perhaps everybody has a garden of Eden, I don't know; but they have scarcely seen their garden before they see the flaming sword. Then, perhaps, life only offers the choice of remembering the garden or forgetting it. . . . People who remember court madness through pain, the pain of the perpetually recurring death of their innocence; people who forget court another kind of madness, the madness of the denial of pain and the hatred of innocence; and the world is mostly divided between madmen who remember and madmen who forget. (36)

In this text, Giovanni is the madman of remembered innocence; David is the fulfillment of the object/person he desires for love. The world of subculture and the marginalized lives of the homosexuals -- remaking themselves in reactionary, effeminate political postures -- do not exist as options for Giovanni. His history in Italy is one of innocence marred by the stillbirth of his infant son. In his brief self-narrative, he comments on his son's death and his response to it:

I took our crucifix off the wall and I spat on it and I threw it on the floor and my mother and my girl screamed and I went out, and then I left my village and I came to this city where surely God has punished me for all my sins and for spitting on His holy Son, and where I will surely die. I do not think I will ever see my village again. (185)

This passage shadows the actual death of Giovanni, as the passage does in which he speaks to David just before David leaves him to return to Hella in a final attempt to negate

his homosexuality. As David prepares to leave, Giovanni speaks:

If you cannot love me, I will die. Before you came I wanted to die, I have told you many times. It is cruel to have made me want to live only to make my death more bloody. (182)

The passage makes clear Giovanni's unhappiness in the homosexual sphere in which he exists: Paris, Guillaume's Bar, and among those homosexuals whose bodies, specified in a mimesis of the heterosexual woman, are not attractive to Giovanni or to David. Guillaume's Bar is a place of marginalized space, on the fringe of hegemonic society. In it evolves a particular homosexual, symbolic of that being most feared by David -- the man who surrenders his maleness and becomes "like a woman." For Giovanni, France and the bar have not given to him what he desires, although he knows that he will not be able to return to Italy and an earlier innocence. He is the mad man who can not abandon innocence. Giovanni, also, would escape the marginalizing life of the bar. Both David and Giovanni, as men who have had relationships with women and existed in the centered, social space provided for such relationships, are aware of the two different political places. It is significant to observe that Giovanni's room is a construction of space that is substantially distanced (geographically, far removed from the homosexual quarter of Paris), as well as a space that protects the two inhabitants from the disapproving heterosexual elements. Each evening the two men leave the

city behind, which means essentially leaving the homosexual marginalized space and those inhabitants who are absolute reactionaries to hegemonic male definition. Baldwin's depiction of the bar and its inhabitants are a construction of a decentered place, the edge, a place where the dialectic between difference -- heterosexuality and homosexuality, and social class -- is a primary reaction by the devalorized, whose socially motivated gender definitions and roles are configured into "grotesques," mutations that diminish and humiliate the position of the homosexual. In Baldwin this element is not depicted with Susan Sontag's understanding of the political and psychological significance of "camp" as a vehicle for satirizing and surviving hegemonic prohibition. For Baldwin, the bar and the homosexuals who frequent it are both marginalized space and marginalized people. A similarity in vision is shared by Baldwin, White, and Dixon, who represent dialectical politics and places that are not good for homosexuals, specifically the psychological dilemma chronicled in the ultimate marginalized positions of David, Giovanni, the narrator in A Boy's Own Story, and Jesse and Metro in Vanishing Rooms. The marginalized space is the political position which is always a position of paralyzing disempowerment. The distanced geographical place, the psychological space, and the very nature of the homosexual sexual act are profoundly determined by hegemonic society. In Giovanni's Room, Baldwin's consciousness, manifested in the positions of both Giovanni and David, is an opposition

to a hegemonic supremacy that forces the homosexual to both an articulation of sexuality and a place that are genocidal: the corpus dematerialized, vanishes.

To remain in Eden, without a political consciousness, romanticizing the desired object, is fatal. When authenticity is denied the person, the desired object can not be acquired, and the individual homosexual is pushed to a marginalized space of perpetual fantasy and an invented, grotesque non-conformity, a reaction to and product of hegemonic conformity:

There were the usual paunchy, bespectacled gentlemen with David, sometimes despairing eyes, the usual, knife-blade lean, tight-trouserred boys. One could never be sure, as concerns these latter, whether they were after money or blood or love. They moved about the bar incessantly, cadging cigarettes and drinks, with something behind their eyes at once terribly vulnerable and terribly hard. There were, of course, *les folles*, always dressed in the most improbable combination, screaming like parrots the details of their latest love affairs . . . they looked like a peacock garden and sounded like a barnyard. I always found it difficult to believe that they ever went to bed with anybody, for a man who wanted a woman would certainly have rather had a real one and a man who wanted a man would certainly not want one of them . . . [the] utter grotesqueness made me uneasy; perhaps in the same way that the sight of monkeys eating their own excrement turns some people's stomachs. They might not mind so much if monkeys did not -- so grotesquely -- resemble human beings. (38-39)

Donald B. Gibson, in his essay "James Baldwin: The Political Anatomy of Space" (published in a collection of essays assembled by Therman B. O'Daniel, James Baldwin: A Critical Evaluation), identifies these men as "lesser homosexuals who seek only physical gratification" (O'Daniel 9). That

observation is a moral judgment that is itself a significant contribution to those social forces that seek and force the marginalized position for both the homosexual and the homosexual text. Gibson also states, "Hence the plot's resolution stems from the character of the central figure, and his character itself constitutes a judgment of homosexuality" (9). Gibson's essay is a simplistic, homophobic reading of Baldwin's text. Certainly Baldwin, in the passage cited, constructs a negative response to Guillaume's Bar, what it represents and its undesirability to the narrator, and probably to Baldwin himself. What Gibson fails to perceive is the forced political construction of that place by the dialectic between hegemonic and homosexual elements: the distanced position and roles are not desirable. That reality, in Baldwin's text, does not diminish the homosexual desire which is the essence of the major character, David, who as Gibson identifies him is "acutely aware of moral imperatives stemming from his sense of masculine identity" (9). Gibson doesn't understand that Baldwin is focused on the matter of the legitimacy or authenticity of that socially constructed "masculine identity," as one might be concerned about the sense of black identity for the Invisible Man in Ellison's text or the sense of black identity in Morrison's The Bluest Eye. Baldwin's text argues that these homosexual identities are formed in a social context, and they are forced to articulate themselves in marginalized places, which are,

also, socially formed. One is to question this process, which Gibson, unfortunately, does not do. His essay is an internalized homophobic response to a text wrestling with the issues of homophobia. Thus, societies construct particular sexual articulations.

The bar is, also, the place of an accurate reading of the male to determine whether or not he is homosexual. The narrator indicates that he is conscious of the inhabitants of the bar as if "they were the elders of some strange and austere holy order and were watching me in order to discover, by means of signs I made but which only they could read, whether or not I had a true vocation" (Baldwin 39). Obviously, Baldwin's construction of the bar is dualistic in emblematic function: first, it represents that marginalized place created to replace a denied place within hegemonic society; second, he suggests that the space of confinement is also a place of privacy, and however odious the subculture might be to Baldwin's consciousness, it is that place which provides opportunity for David to establish himself in the homosexual milieu and to meet Giovanni, also a man of double displacement, removed from Italy but not situated into the space of Guillaume's Bar. The inhabitants of the bar are social seers, capable of predicting the sexuality of the man and foretelling his future, neither of which is the result of a mystical vision. The predictions are based on the private histories of their own lives. The grotesque, almost toothless stranger warns David about

Giovanni: "*Il est dangereux, tu sais. And for a boy like you -- he is very dangerous. . . . Tu, aura du chagrin. . . . You will be very unhappy. Remember that I told you so*" (55-56). Jacques, who understands correctly the dilemma in which David is caught, warns him:

"Love him," said Jacques, with vehemence, "love him and let him love you. Do you think anything else under heaven really matters? . . . Only five minutes in the dark. And if you think of them as dirty -- they will be dirty because you will be giving nothing, you will be despising your flesh and his. But you can make your time together anything but dirty; you can give each other something which will make both of you better -- forever -- if you will not be ashamed, if you will not play it safe. . . . You play it safe long enough . . . and you'll end up trapped in your own dirty body, forever . . . like me." (77)

No social model exists for the lives that these homosexual men would live; the knowledge of what a homosexual life might be is constructed through the personal histories of the homosexuals. The two men are able to give to David a knowledge that he is unable to accept. It is this knowledge that gives to the bar an ambiguity; it is not represented as one place. Baldwin depicts it as a place of painful wisdom acquired out of profound histories. The inhabitants in the bar are inverted models -- voices that would warn the protagonist away from the marginalized places and the marginalized lives they have lived.

For David and Giovanni, the bar, also, has an economic function. Giovanni takes from it the meager income that supports the two men. However, they have not formed

friendships in that place; they are socially, psychologically, and geographically removed from it. To embrace the bar totally is to move into a realm that is disconnected from all that is outside: history, culture, economic position, and a bond with the rest of humanity. At the same time, to move into Giovanni's room is also to abandon all. That reality represents an historical dilemma that continues from the 1950s to the present time. To be a homosexual in private is to be invisible and no offense; to be identified as a homosexual in public is to be offensive. This text represents the marginalized space of the homosexual: the bar and Giovanni's room. At the conclusion of the novel, the reader is not certain to what place David is going when he leaves the house in southern France. What is important is the marginalized space he is leaving behind. David has made a definite settlement of his identity, which is determined from within. How it will be expressed without, in hegemonic society, is not determined. The novel measures a limited progress: what is abandoned, not what is attained.

Baldwin accomplishes a differentiation between David and Giovanni in their individual responses to homosexuality, emblematic of polarity positions. David hesitates to surrender sexually to Giovanni the first time he meets him in the bar; he asks for time. The delay signifies a fear of having another man know his body and to know another man's body. Giovanni typifies that man who is comfortable having

another man know him sexually and sexually knowing another man. David possesses a phobia of the body in homosexual context; Giovanni does not. Giovanni perceives David's request for and understanding of time as indicative of an American confidence in the idea that all can be solved favorably and that one has choice, even on such matters as sexual predilection. When David states that one "can choose to be eaten and also not to eat." (49), Giovanni responds:

"To choose!" cried Giovanni, turning his face away from me. . . . "To choose!" He turned to me again, "Ah, you are really an American. *J'adore votre enthousiasme!*" (49)

Baldwin metaphorically presents the tension between desire and prohibition in the image of "the germ," the source of unhappiness; in the predicament of infection, David determines to resist or postpone desire. In the conflict between Giovanni and David, it is this resolve that amuses then, ultimately, frustrates Giovanni.

In the progression of David's sexual evolution he comes to live in Giovanni's room. Baldwin's placement of Hella, the young woman David would marry, in Spain provides a safe geographical distance from that person who, when present, will function to affirm in David's mind his heterosexuality. Without her he has a degree of freedom to experiment. Initially that experience is pleasant:

I remember that life in that room seemed to be occurring beneath the sea. Time flowed past indifferently above us; hours and days had no meaning. In the beginning, our life together held

a joy and amazement which was newborn every day.
(99)

It is significant to observe that in the early days of the relationship with Giovanni, the nature of the experience is characterized by a suspension of David's obsession to think, to bring meaning to life, and a suspension of his obsession with the pragmatic solution (a heterosexual relationship that affirms his masculinity) that has denied the reality of his being and postponed any homosexual experience. With Giovanni the days have "no meaning" (99). The time with Giovanni has the same quality as the experience with Joey; the later experience is extended:

. . . for that moment I really loved Giovanni, who had never seemed more beautiful than he was that afternoon. And, watching his face, I realized that it meant much to me that I could make his face so bright. I saw that I might be willing to give a great deal not to lose that power. And I felt myself flow toward him, as a river rushes when the ice breaks up. . . . The beast which Giovanni had awakened in me would never go to sleep again; but one day I would not be with Giovanni anymore. And would I then, like all the others, find myself turning and following all kinds of boys down God knows what dark avenues, into what dark places. With this fearful intimation there opened in me a hatred for Giovanni which was as powerful as my love and which was nourished by the same roots.
(110-11)

The suspension of moral judgment, determined by hegemonic society, allows the homosexual experience to be good. This is in part because the narrator always perceives the homosexual incident to be a single event, existentialistic in nature, an occurrence that is not evaluated, given any

social form of definition. David denies his homosexual involvement with Joey to Giovanni, suggesting that he has never participated in any homosexual activity prior to meeting Giovanni. When he confesses that denial to the reader, he determines the impossibility of a permanent relationship. The homosexual incident is always to be just one night; continuation of the expression of the desire would confirm its reality. Bergman, in Gaiety Transfigured: Gay Self-Representation in American Literature, suggests that "a corollary of the lifelong condition of homosexuality is its genuineness" (31); it is a permanent condition:

[the] stylistics of desire is [sic.] exactly what distinguishes the homosexual from the heterosexual male who engages in periodic sex with other men, what distinguishes in James Baldwin's terms, the "faggot" from the "straight cats" who "sleep with them." The stylistics of desire remains [sic.] a determining factor in sexual identity. (29-30)

Baldwin's narrator, for a time, is the "straight cat" who sleeps with men periodically, but denies all homosexual experience outside the immediate, single, incident. The duration of incident is also a form of permanence and the realization that, for the narrator, would identify him as a homosexual; thus, one knows only this one man, this one night. Baldwin portrays Giovanni as the accurate reader of "the other," David. When Giovanni informs David that when David wants to leave, it is not because he loves or desires Hella: ". . . you are not leaving me for her. . . . You are leaving me for some other reason. You lie so much, you have

come to believe your lies. You are not leaving me for a woman. . . . You know very well . . . what can happen between us. It is for that reason you are leaving me" (Baldwin 186, 189). Giovanni represents a perception of David's predicament throughout the novel. David is a receptacle of homosexual desire, actual "lust," but he does not want to be a homosexual. That is the "germ," the infection of absolute conflict, to be filled with a desire which is prohibited. To continue the relationship with Giovanni is to affirm homosexuality. No place, no room exists for the fulfillment of this desire: this is the dilemma that Baldwin represents. Giovanni awakens the desire, but David will not remain with Giovanni. The only space David can see in which he might be, in the future, is the "the dark avenues," "the dark places." The vision is solely a hegemonic production. The homosexual life of David is defined and limited by hostile external forces, and he doesn't know how else to be what he is or in what non-confined place he might be. The vision Baldwin represents in the narrator is that of perpetual isolation in a dangerous place.

Giovanni's room is a place of such confinement. It is the place that allows and affirms David's homosexuality, but it is also a place of social isolation: "No one ever came to see us, except Jacques, and he did not come often. We were far from the center of the city, and we had no phone" (112). David, however, associates the room with his

authentic identity: "It became, in a way, every room I had ever been in and every room I find myself in hereafter will remind me of Giovanni's room" (112). It is the place of homosexual being. Baldwin constructs a room that is dirty; Giovanni, when he is taking David to his room the first time, says in the taxi that the room is dirty, the implication is physical. David's response is "I'm sure it is," a comment resulting from the union of place and act. Giovanni's response, said with a "shy, bitter smile," is "I must find some poetic figure" (114). That is, the reality of homosexuality is perceived by David as dirty, a hegemonic inscription. Giovanni understands: "You do not want to stink" (187). Jacques also understands this: ". . . the dirty moments" (77). The first night the two men are together Giovanni identifies the problem in David, but he is not conscious of it as a social inscription over which the homosexual must reinscribe a new definition. Giovanni's language ("I must find some poetic image") is a recognition of the dilemma that emerges for the homosexual defining himself and homosexuality with hegemonic inscriptions. However, it is an ironic language, directed sarcastically at David, that intimates an aesthetic illusion as solution, not an actual rewriting of the definitions into a new reality. At the same time, Baldwin represents in David's fear about becoming unclean and Giovanni's response to his fear, arguing a need to embrace a loss of innocence and not to fear "the stink of love" (187), David's larger fear of human

sexuality. David himself observes the other American men as sterile, too clean, when he goes to the American Express Office: "they smelled of soap, which seemed indeed to be their preservative against the dangers and exigencies of any more intimate odor . . . unsoiled, untouched, unchanged."

(118) Giovanni identifies in David an obsession with innocence:

"You love your purity, you love your mirror -- you are just like a little virgin, you walk around with your hands in front of you. . . . You will never give it to anybody, you will never let anybody touch it. You want to be clean. You think you came here covered with soap and you think you will go out covered with soap -- and you do not want to stink. . . . You want to despise Giovanni because he is not afraid of the stink of love. You want to kill him in the name of all your lying little moralities. And you -- you are *immoral*. You are, by far, the most immoral man I have met in all my life. Look, look what you have done to me. . . . Is *this* what you should do to love?" (186-87)

At the time that Hella is expected to return to Paris after her time in Spain, Baldwin constructs the beginning of the end. David does not, at anytime, contemplate his own death, suicide, or murder. However, Baldwin delineates a solution to the tension of desire and prohibition for the object of desire in the form of death. When David is trying to prepare Giovanni for his return to Hella, his attempt to return to the sexual role of man in hegemonic society, he is met with resisting arguments. Giovanni insists on a kiss, which would obviously be his victory: "*Viens m'embrasser*" (157). The narrative consciousness represented in David is

genocidal, perhaps omnicidal -- death would occur for both men:

I was vividly aware that he held a brick in his hand, I held a brick in mine. It really seemed for an instant that if I did not go to him, we would use these bricks to beat each other to death. . . . "Come," he said. I dropped my brick and went to him. In a moment I heard his fall. And at moments like this I felt that we were merely enduring and committing the longer and lesser and more perpetual murder. (157)

The murder of Guillaume by Giovanni, after David returns to Hella, results in Giovanni's arrest and execution. The death of Giovanni is his escape from the marginalized world of homosexuality in Paris. When he returns to Guillaume's bar to ask for the job from which he has been fired, an act of jealous retaliation on the part of Guillaume who has been refused by Giovanni, he surrenders to the grotesqueness of marginalized homosexual life. In fury he kills that which has defiled him; he has embraced, for a moment, that which he hates. The murder assures his own escape through death. David has been told many times by Giovanni that Giovanni would kill himself, if David left him, rather than return to the underground rooms of Guillaume's Bar. Implicit in the death of Giovanni are the consciousness and conscience of not only Giovanni himself but, also, the narrator and the author. The narrative invention employed by Baldwin shifts the events that comprise the conclusion of Giovanni's life from a reported reality to an imagined discourse. No comparable source of information exists for David. On the

night that Giovanni is to be executed, his life moving to a particular rejection of homosexual life as it has been constructed for him, David is not only reconstructing his own life through a truthful recitation of his history, a confession that will refocus the direction of his life, but he is, also, imagining two events in the life of Giovanni: first, the night that he surrendered to and murdered Guillaume; and second, the night of his own execution. Both events are developed through extensive detail. Despite the fact that it would be possible for David intelligently to anticipate both events, the narrative of the two events is the projection of his own consciousness of the one way taken in response to the almost overwhelming, marginalized homosexual milieu constructed as a representation of homosexual experience in this text. Baldwin eliminates Giovanni as the potential lover for David, a lover with whom he could have more than the solitary sexual incident, with whom he could have permanency and with whom he could transcend the world of Guillaume's Bar to what *might* evolve, despite the significant reality that no map exists for such evolution and such maneuvering would be precarious and without model. Giovanni, in a final argument with David, identifies what might evolve as the reality that actuates David's termination of their relationship: "You know very well. What can happen between us. It is for that reason you are leaving me" (Baldwin 189). That evolution would be an affirmation of homosexuality. Paul Monette, in his

autobiography, Becoming a Man: Half a Life Story, addresses the same predicament: "I wanted to kiss Richie. I never came close to verbalizing that, let alone acting on it, because I understood that all romance was forbidden. We could dick around as much as we liked, but a kiss would have bordered on love" (Monette 52). In Baldwin's text, David's representation of himself is a construction of similar deceit; he would be that man who is experiencing his homosexuality for the first time, denying to Giovanni the relationship he has had with Joey and other men. This deceit enables him to maintain his patriarchal maleness. It is an empowered masculinity that, also, places him or keeps him in still another marginalized space, "the closet."

The heterosexual episode with Susan and the reunion with Hella are both attempts for David to prove his patriarchal masculinity. But neither of the two experiences affirms a heterosexuality. Baldwin, in developing the incident involving Hella, uses a language of confinement; Hella, herself, becomes another "room" of confinement for Giovanni:

I kept kissing her and holding her, trying to find my way in her again, as though she were a *familiar, darkened room in which I fumbled to find the light* [my italics]. (163)

The house in southern France that David has taken with Hella is the final place of confinement. It is through David's recitation and interpretation of his history, the confession of truth (the homosexual speaking the truth is always a

momentous discourse) that affects a change in position and motivates irrevocable action. The history of the man is changed through his discourse, resulting in a displacement of margins: "to come out" is to take a place in the center, to move back in from the margin. In this Baldwin text, "to speak the word is to be healed." The final episode of the text depicts David's realization that it is his body that dictates his reality. Baldwin's construction of David's final actions and introspection is focused on both a definition of himself and a definition of Giovanni, who represents an irrevocable demarginalization through death. Giovanni's execution is his assembled suicide, his action, his response to that which confines and humiliates him. David's decision and final movement is actuated by his understanding of himself and his understanding of Giovanni. This offers David, the homosexual who senses an authentic self in conflict with that self he must present in society, two avenues of choice: an evolution into the life of the body or death. David "sees all" and "knows all" in the vision of his own flesh reflected from a mirror: "Take off your clothes something tells me, it's getting late" (221).

In this final episode of the novel, a representation of David's ultimate evolution in consciousness, Baldwin continues the simultaneous delineation of David's awareness of himself in possession of a history which he understands and a future life, and the delineation of Giovanni, going to his execution. This shows Baldwin's consciousness of the

homosexual dualistic dilemma and the two possible maneuvers: first, a maneuver that embraces a homosexual authenticity urged by the essence of the body; second, a maneuver that quits life through violent death, a transcendence of the world and the body. It is significant that for Baldwin two alternatives finally have been established. Homosexuality as perceived, the only possible vision, and solved in death is accompanied with the vision of the body as the teacher of life. The early, undefined sense of difference in David, smothered in nightmares of his mother's corpse suffocating him (death the constant, necessary opposition to homosexual life), is precariously balanced with a vision that resists social opposition and becomes itself a reactive resistance to that which would prohibit homosexual life and an active execution of the flesh. In Baldwin's movement of Giovanni to his place of execution, the language and concept of Catholicism (vehicles, enabling the transcendence of life, and certainly homosexuality) sustain or restrain Giovanni to his death. "Mary, blessed mother of God. . . . He kisses the cross and clings to it" (222), until he arrives at the place of his death:

He knows that beyond the door which comes so deliberately closer, the knife is waiting. That door is the gateway he has sought so long out of his dirty world, this dirty body. (222)

The evil of homosexuality is identified and transcended through a configuring and determining Christian language. Moments after this vision of Giovanni's death as the elected

portal, David walks through the door of the rented house in southern France to return to Paris, another elected portal, but leading to the continued working out of homosexual life.

The novel concludes with the same Christian language that depicts Giovanni's transcendence of life through death. With that language Baldwin now reinscribes homosexuality, describing a consummation of homosexual vision that originates in an inevitable, dictated inscription articulated by the body itself, which rejects death and the deceit of heterosexuality:

The body in the mirror forces me to turn and face it. And I look at my body, which is under sentence of death. It is lean, hard, and cold, the incarnation of a mystery. And I do not know what moves in this body, what this body is searching. It is trapped in my mirror as it is trapped in time and it hurries toward revelation.

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.
(222-23)

In his use of the verse of scripture, Baldwin differentiates between two visions, two different responses to homosexual incident. The first response is the narrator's denial of the self-inscribing dictates of the body. The homosexual desire and consummation of that desire, denied and transcended through an imitation of heterosexual desire, are represented in his childhood experience with Joey. The second response is the hoped for ("I long to make this prophecy come true" (223)) embrace of homosexual desire represented in David's comprehension of the death of

Giovanni. There follows the reinscription of both "man" and homosexuality:

I long to crack that mirror and be free. I look at my sex, my troubling sex, and wonder how it can be redeemed, how I can save it from the knife. The journey to the grave is already begun, the journey to corruption is always, already half over. Yet, the key to my salvation, which can not save my body, is hidden in my flesh. . . . I move at last from the mirror and begin to cover that nakedness which I must hold sacred, though it be never so vile, which must be scoured perpetually with the salt of my life. . . . I must believe, that the heavy grace of God, which has brought me to this place is all that can carry me out of it. (223)

The ultimate consciousness is a precarious ambiguity, determined to find emancipation through a new vision and a reinscription of the body as the source of salvation, but the germ of tension remains. Baldwin constructs, through David's hope that "the grace of God" will lead him out of the place to which he has been brought, the dilemma of actual choices and the dreaded freedom to be (223-24).

After moving the homosexual man through the door, Baldwin determines a final image: David tears up the envelop with the letter which indicates the date of Giovanni's death, throws it to the wind; fragments are blown back on him. As Claude J. Summers states in his book, Gay Fictions: Wilde to Stonewall, Studies in a Male Homosexual Literary Tradition: "Giovanni's Room also envisions a positive solution. It creatively translates pain into compassion and suffering into redemption" (Summers 194). The emblematic final image of the text, the returning paper fragments of "Giovanni's

death," focuses the novel on that which has been offered and sacrificed: a disturbing continuation of grace acquired at great cost. The final reality of the text is that Giovanni, in the discourse of the history of the relationship of the two men, is right; he knows that one loves "who" -- a person, not "what" -- a predicament, and he has devised a place, a room, in which desire is consummated and the body is allowed to be alive. The concluding dual vision is of the homosexual milieu, of life and sexual fecundity or sexual prohibition and death. This is Baldwin's textual vision and the actual choices for himself as a homosexual young man. In his first novel, Go Tell It on the Mountain, Baldwin successfully emancipates a protagonist and himself from the confinement of a Christianity that could not motivate a social reconfiguration for African-American people, only enable them to endure and transcend the burden of a heavy racism. Such endurance and transcendence are certainly a kind of death. Now, in his second novel, Baldwin pushes against the forces of hegemonic, heterosexual dominance for another emancipation. That concluding dual vision is the profound establishment of a dialectic with the self. Two elements are present: one can live in the flesh as Giovanni has, or one can die in the flesh as David has. It is the progression to choice that is Baldwin's accomplishment in this text. The maneuvering allows the homosexual still to breathe. It is quite likely that this narrative constructed, for many homosexuals in the 1950s and

1960s, a textual space, that very small closet, within which the definition of self could begin. For them, as for the writer of this study, the text was/is the very reinscribing of homosexual life. It is an opposition to hegemonic inscription: "the cavern opened in [the] mind: black, full of rumor, suggestion, of half heard, half forgotten, half-understood stories, full of dirty words." Thus, Baldwin's text reconstructs and maneuvers.

Chapter IV. The Emancipation of the Homosexual Body:
The Non-Mimetic Articulation of Desire
in Melvin Dixon's Vanishing Rooms

Outside, the air stung me, blades of sunlight fell from the sky. Metro led me out of the dark rotting warehouse. I missed a step and stumbled against him. He reached to block my fall. I held tight.

The fourth wall broke open into a gathering wave of hands clapping. Pools of sweat dotted the stage. The applause showered over me. The dancers stood proud, erect. Then quickly, the fourth wall burst into light and the room holding us there vanished.

Vanishing Rooms, Melvin Dixon

White's novel, Nocturnes for the King of Naples, and Dixon's novel, Vanishing Rooms, begin with the establishment of a setting for the ritual of sexual pleasure for homosexual men in the inherited sprawl of urban America: the abandoned warehouse, a place which, in the shuffling evolution of American industry and commodity, now exists on the margins of the city (that place which is constructed with definite boundaries: East Side, suburban areas, dumps, ghettos, dangerous neighborhoods, exclusive neighborhoods, and derelict zones), far removed from the homes of families, physically distanced from the lives of men who once worked within the walls, accessible now to men who come not to work but to find the pleasures of their bodies in the dark with other men who are to be unknown to them, not recognized, not named.

To whom does the land belong? Which parcel is given to which man, a place where he might live out himself? What land is public; which is private? What place, the site of invented spectacle, is to be hidden, protecting the innocent, the virtuous, which means those whose sexuality is validated by the tradition of a religion, the determination of an economics and the defined moralities of a culture? The land or place is to remain unidentifiable, without a map to show the way, and what enters is not to come out.

In both White's novel, Nocturnes for the King of Naples (first published in the United States by St. Martin's Press in 1978), and Dixon's novel, Vanishing Rooms (published in the United States by Dutton in 1991), the first pages of the texts identify a marginal place on the edge of society, a gigantic closet where men are confined (never to be understood as free) to express their sexual desires. In White's text the language used to describe the space creates a sense of a temple, seeming to transform the abandoned warehouse near the Hudson River, in New York, into a religious pavilion:

For me there was the deeper vastness of the enclosed, ruined cathedral I was entering. Soaring above me hung the pitched roof, wings on the downstroke, its windows broken and lying at my feet. (White, Nocturnes 1)

The language evokes a sense of freedom, "soaring," a movement upward with erotic energy, a lifting; the entire building moves skyward and in this sense all of the space of

sexual spectacle "flies" away, protecting both those who would be traumatized by such desire and those who find fulfillment in such desire. But the introductory images of the setting evolve to include broken glass "at [his] feet." The deterioration of the building, no longer a part of industrial production in American society, is dangerous, after all not a safe place. The same kind of building, in Vanishing Rooms, is not a safe place, but a place of splinters that penetrate denim and human flesh. Thus, both settings are powerfully invasive of and dangerous to their transient inhabitants.

The religious language that describes the warehouse in Nocturnes for the King of Naples creates a place of the sacred and a connection to those ancient temples where disciples of Dionysus enacted the rites of desire. Dixon's description, in Vanishing Rooms, of the same place does not generate such a religious environment; he restricts his description to that which creates only the sense of decay and self pollution:

We walked on ahead where the Hudson River lapped at soggy wooden piles. The water gurgled and sloshed with delight and the loose, stiff wood swayed in the dim flow. One post cracked free, bobbed in the sucking current, and floated away limp. I brushed off my jeans, more dusty now than blue. Wood splinters fell out of the seams. . . . "Are you mad?" he asked me, brushing tangled brown hair from his face. His hand pulled out splinters. "Are you mad because I made you come here?" (Dixon, Vanishing Rooms 3-4)

This short passage, in the opening of Dixon's text, creates the place from the perspective of Jesse Durand. The question "Are you mad?" expresses the concern of Jesse's lover. Both the description of the place and Metro's question establish a profound conflict for Jesse Durand (the major protagonist of the text); the "closet," land, place, warehouse represent both a space of dangerous confinement and free sexual expression. Three reasons exist for Jesse's discomfort with the warehouse. Dixon's connection of the visit to the warehouse and the sexual history of Jesse, related by Jesse himself, result in the establishment of a character predicament and value. First, Jesse has never been able to be completely open, unfettered, or as passionate in his sexual relationship with his lover, Metro, as both of them think he might be. Second, he would dissociate himself from this place of sexual articulation, bringing against it the judgment and condemnation of the dominant society. It is a marginalized place of dangerous promiscuity, uninhibited sexuality, the place where the homosexual breaks through the restrictions of hegemonic society. The third reason is not made clear until the end of the novel. Dixon delays revelation of the major reason until the end of the narrative. Ruella, Jesse's woman friend, responds to each of Jesse's stories about his lover, Metro, with an understanding that Jesse is withholding information. That withholding is obviously a concealment of Metro's racism. It is a consciousness to which, in Dixon's

structure of Jesse's conscience and awareness, Jesse evolves. He comes to understand and express, in the form of art (his dance), the fundamental tension between himself and Metro. Metro's racist supremacy as the active partner in the sexual relationship of the two men (white over black, a "niggering") and his transference of that "niggering" to himself cause him final trauma. This sense of tension is pivotal in the uncertain identity of both men. The double inscription produced by hegemonic heterosexuality (the external definition of homosexuality and race from a hostile source) progresses from Metro to Jesse. It is similar to that obsession with "filth and guilt" and the homosexual's own belief of his violation of social prohibition that is the essence of the sexual paralysis of David, in Giovanni's Room. The strictures of contact between men are clearly defined in hegemonic society; homosexual act is prohibited, and those men (homosexuals) who violate the sexual order are excluded from the community of humankind, devalorized. The inscription is homophobic, written by hegemonic society, and embraced by Metro. It is then forced by Metro on his lover, Jesse. The warehouse is a representation of this degradation. Thus, for Jesse, the function of the warehouse -- that margined space on the edge of society -- is threefold, generating a complex variety of meanings.

In White's Nocturnes for the King of Naples the opening paragraph creates the same sense of sexual opportunity as that established by Dixon. The narrator in White's text

identifies a young man who leans against a wall of the warehouse:

He turns toward me a look of hope tempered by discretion, eyes dilated by a longing too large -- as large as this briny night panel behind him -- to focus in on any single human being. (1)

The young man does not enter the warehouse, but the narrator does, entering "the deeper vastness of the enclosed, ruined cathedral" (1). The movement or the gesture represents the full participation in sexual opportunity. There is no remaining safely outside, as is the case for Jesse in Vanishing Rooms. There is no being exiled from or deprived of, by the adjudicating order and moral exclusions of a dominant social element, the heart of the matter: the central, particular, "perverse" sexual expression of desire. Thus, both the young man in Nocturnes of the King of Naples and Jesse in Vanishing Rooms are quickly defined and confined by forces other than their own, authentic sexuality. In both texts the place is not limited to merely a setting. Rather, the place is symbolic of a state of mind and sexual articulation that is determined by the hegemonic attitudes toward homosexuality. The very place, the nature of the sexual act, and the attitude of the participant toward that sexual act are inscribed by hegemonic society.

I will now focus my consideration on the text by Dixon. In Vanishing Rooms the sexual expressions of both Metro and Jesse are the products of the "rooms" in which they have existed. As Sedgwick argues in her text, Epistemology of

the Closet, the closet constructs the sexuality and the response to it. I argue that the confinement or "closet" constructs the particular dilemma of the homosexual in all of the texts considered in this study. Homosexual desire and the expression of that desire are not the problem; the "closeting" or confinement of the desire is the problem. Summers states, in his Gay Fictions: Wilde to Stonewall, Studies in a Male Homosexual Literary Tradition:

To arrive at a homosexual identity is to acknowledge a part of the personality that is repressed and denied only at heavy cost. In this sense, homosexuality is not a problem, but a solution to a problem. (14)

However, it is difficult to convince hegemonic society of this reality. In Vanishing Rooms, Metro is constructed by the city streets and the subway, moving fast and underground. Thus, he becomes, symbolically and literally, that which has produced him. For Dixon this construction is comprised of a duality in opposition: Metro is free and open in his sexuality; he "moves underground" both in the sense of intense sexual expression and in the sense of dangerous living, including the use of drugs and promiscuous relationships. The city that has produced him, and in which he lives out or expresses his sexuality, gives him a powerful authenticity, a vibrancy, an intense passion, but it also pushes him to the margins, creating and destroying him simultaneously. Ultimately, this destruction and sense of marginalization are brought against his black lover in a

racist positioning of the lover (Jesse); his "niggering" of Jesse is similar to the homophobic treatment of and violence against Metro by Lonny. Both are forms of human diminishment constructed from attitudes of hatred toward homosexuality. Thus, the text is a strong anti-homophobic and anti-racist discourse.

The warehouse is a metaphorically dualistic representation of sexuality. First, it is a representation of a freedom to possess a space for and a mode of sexual expression, an emancipation. Second (and ultimately), in the consciousness and conscience of Jesse, it represents an antithesis of the first concept: it is a place of psychological and social confinement, an articulation of a sexuality that is not an emancipation but rather an attitude and a position which reflect that substantial impact of hegemonic values on the homosexual's formation of a definition and an articulation of a male homosexuality. It is illustrative of that which is outside the self yet defining the self. Thus, the negative values (homophobic) of the heterosexual system become incorporated into the homosexual's definition/perception and articulation of himself. What initially is perceived as a freedom, the opportunity actually to consummate homosexual desire, considering its forced designation of space and focusing solely on physical eroticism and the sexual act, ultimately must be perceived as an experience of limitation and confinement. Certainly, the social prohibition placed on

homosexual relationships forces marginalization and limitation; thus, within society exist those many men who could not contemplate a permanent relationship with another man. They reinscribe the meaning and articulation of their sexuality, but move outside that prohibiting society for the purpose of the sexual experience. The warehouse is illustrative of that which is outside the self defining the self; thus, the negative values (homophobic) of the heterosexual system become incorporated into the homosexual, resulting in both a tentative freedom and a bondage for the homosexual. The second representation is not clearly established until the end of the novel; Jesse's consciousness evolves to the authentically emancipating awareness of his own efforts to imitate the marginalized behavior of Metro, which is externally formulated by hegemonic prohibition.

In the first metaphorical representation it is significant to observe that for Jesse the "room" of the warehouse is traumatic; his own sexuality is not complete or expansive enough, is not passionate or free enough, to include the intensity of that place/room. The binary structures and the valorizing process firmly in place within American culture play powerfully against Jesse. Not until much later in the novel, in similar contexts, will Jesse begin to explore more fully the pleasures possible to him. Roland Barthes, in his text Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes (cited in Sedgwick's Epistemology of the Closet), discusses

the deconstructing of those entrenched binarisms that restrict the potentials of human experience: "once the paradigm [the fixed binarism] is blurred, utopia begins: meaning and sex become the objects of free play, at the heart of which the (polysemant) forms and the (sensual) practices, liberated from the binary prison, will achieve a state of infinite expansion." (10) That "state of infinite expansion" is not the experience of Jesse at the beginning of the narrative (and at the conclusion of the novel after having experimented with such "expansion," he will reject it). When Jesse arrives at the dance studio, after his time with Metro at the warehouse, he hopes that his experience (that particular sexuality) is not obvious to the other dancers; he is confident it is not:

Maybe I could sweat off the stink of the warehouse, dance with my feet on firm ground, not on creaking floor boards or with anonymous shadows lurking behind crumbling walls. Maybe the aftertaste of sweat, splinters, and Metro's tangled brown hair would go away. The other dancers wouldn't suspect a thing, I hoped, prayed. No one would know where I had been. (Dixon, Vanishing Rooms 5)

The thoughts generated by Jesse might be recast. He hopes no one would know what he had done; that no one would know the particular sexuality in which he had participated, however uncomfortably. The dance becomes a device for fulfillment, an alternative to Metro's sexuality, a dance through which Jesse is able to equalize himself with Metro and diminish his failure to participate with him "expansively." The dance replaces the sexual act:

My thighs eased open in *demi-plié*. Next, *grand plié*. I breathed deeply, calmly, and pulled myself up. On *relevé* I felt as tall as Metro, my hands as broad as his. (5)

This language clearly sexualizes the dance which is a compensation for his inadequacy with Metro. The dance becomes a sexual replacement, simultaneously an eroticizing of the body and a legitimatizing of eroticism.

It is at the dance studio, not the warehouse, that Jesse meets a new partner, a young black woman with whom he dances. The performance achieves the desired response from the other students, approval: "the class erupted into applause . . . grew louder, filling us" (8). The activity of the dance studio, "appropriately" performed with a woman, replaces the activity of the warehouse and contains within it the elements of a sexual act: "our tights made our thighs one black pillar, and our Afros became one huge head" (8). Dixon's language constructs one large, black phallus. The implications of this language are substantial. A profound meaning is found for Jesse outside his connection to Metro, the dance (sexualized) replaces the sexual activity of the warehouse, and a black partner, a woman, replaces the white partner, a man. Thus, very early in his text, Dixon establishes the significant binarism within which Jesse is caught, illustrating the construction of the hegemonic force and the tension between desire and valorized political position offered by that hegemonic force. Dixon's text, in its focus on and development of the character of

Jesse, is an evolution of a shaping of sexual identification that has been determined by external social forces. As Jesse's lover, Metro represents a partial sexual emancipation. That representation, as constructed by Dixon, is not static. Dixon establishes a consciousness, for the reader, of Metro's extension beyond a sexual emancipation to a destructive expression of his sexuality. The very elements of homophobia that characterize the outside, as represented in the gang (Max, Lou, Lonny, and Cuddles), are found in the character of Metro, whose sexual emancipation eventually becomes a means for a self-destruction that is the result of his own deeply positioned self-hatred, and an internalized homophobia, a non-worthy mimetic mode.

What Dixon constructs in this text is various representations of one reality for the homosexual person in American society: a homophobia that essentially affects or causes, in Dixon's representation, the ultimate predicament of death.

First, the gang of white youths (Max, Lou, Lonny, and Cuddles) is itself a representation of a hegemonically-inscribed, internalized homophobia. The text presents four young men who are intrigued with homosexuality, but their own homophobia fixes a binary opposition of terrible tension. That to which they are attracted is that to which they respond in a dual pattern. First, they aggressively affirm their sexuality in heterosexual acts with prostitutes; second, they verbally taunt and abuse Lonny, a

latent homosexual, as he narrates his nonsexual encounters with Metro. Thus, the homosexual urge in them, especially developed in the character of Cuddles, is displaced in heterosexual acts and homosexual persecution. The effect of this duality is the achievement of a particular masculinity. To be masculine, and such naming of self is crucial to the individual males in the gang, is represented in one sexual focus: a heterosexual act in which the man dominates the woman, who is perceived by the man as the lesser and the conquered for the purpose of his own sexual pleasure. He is not attentive to the pleasure of the woman, signifying that the masculine can not be passive; the sexual act is an aggressive act of dominance. Dixon's text is an evolution of this sexual repression to a condition which is manifested in the character of Lonny who, at the end of the novel, acts out his homosexuality through a series of varied experiences. The process of this evolution is energized, however, through the sacrifice of the sexually potent and compassionate Metro. Later in this study I will elaborate on this representation.

Second, the character of Jesse, the dancer, is a representation of a sexual ambiguity. This is developed in his relationship with the young black woman who is also a dancer, Ruella McPhee, although the relationship with her is illustrative of a human relationship which functions to heal and to nurture and is less a relationship of sexual passion. Both Jesse and Ruella, in their presence to each other and

in their ability to teach each other, are significant contributors to the sexual and creative articulation that eventually occurs for both. However, at the end of the text, it is Jesse who is able to leave Ruella and to sense that his departure from her is necessary for him to express his homosexuality. Ruella has been, for Jesse, the visionary and healer; she brings a stability to him and creates the space, the room, in which he is able to recover from the murder of Metro and in which he is able to understand the complex racial and sexual politics of his relationship to Metro. She is similar to May Bartram, in May's relationship to John Marcher in Henry James' "The Beast in the Jungle," and similar to Celia, in her relationship to Nathan in David Leavitt's "A Place I've Never Been." All of these characters are authorial constructions of women who are subservient to the needs of homosexual men. Ruella is different in that she exerts herself against Jesse and receives from him, unsolicited, the vision, healing, and actual sexual fulfillment she seeks. In addition, they each provide for the other new sexual lovers, outside themselves. Their own, brief sexual incident signifies a sexual fluidity in Jesse, as David's sexual relationship with Hella, in Giovanni's Room, signifies the same sexual complexity. Dixon establishes an egalitarian relationship between Ruella and Jesse, which is, as I indicated earlier, ended by Jesse, initially against the will and desire of Ruella. The relationship leads each

of the two dancers to a greater expression of their art and, ultimately, to a complete expression of their sexuality. In addition to the ambiguity represented in his relationship to Ruella, there is the lack of sexual freedom or the vacuity of total homosexual expression or actualization. After the death of Metro, Ruella is even the sexual comfort that enables Jesse to continue to live, survive, and evolve. Jesse, through Dixon's final evolution of his character, becomes a paradigm of that man who has successfully combined his aesthetic articulation with a potent, intense, fulfillment of homosexuality.

Essential to this evolution, functioning as the catalytic event, is the death of Metro. In the structuring of the novel, Dixon conceals the actual identity of Metro and the reality that he is being consumed by a destructive, homophobic sexual articulation until later in the narrative. What initially seems worthy of imitation in him, an emancipated sexuality, is exactly that which Jesse must transcend to a complete revision of homosexuality and its potential articulation: a fructifying relationship with the young, black dancer -- Rodney, a relationship in which the presence of Metro mystically exists, reconfigured. In the narrative elements involving Jesse and Metro, Dixon constructs complex sexual and racial guilt, fear, and hate, all of which are ultimately resolved by Jesse through an emancipating evolution. The text is a deconstructing of the forces that exist in detriment to both the well-being of the

homosexual and a literary reconfiguration of social, racial and sexual dynamics.

Later, I will elaborate more on the deconstruction of a homosexuality based on social and racist reactionism and a reconfiguration of that homosexuality into an authentic nonlimiting, nonconfining, nondestructive expression as it is represented in Jesse.

The novel deals with the evolution of two men to a homosexual expression. Jesse, through his evolution, is freed from the constraints of the hegemonic society; Lonny is able to begin to express his homosexuality. Dixon develops Lonny beyond his identity with the murdered Metro. At the conclusion of the novel, Lonny is about to fall into the hands of the street and bath wise Clementine (Clement). Positioned within these two evolutions is the murdered Metro; without the death of this man, the evolution would not occur for either Lonny or Jesse.

Both Giovanni's Room and Vanishing Rooms are texts in which homosexuals die violent deaths. In both novels the deaths are emancipations from lovers who are manifestations of homosexual realities to which the protagonists are not able to connect, but the two deaths are not equal in meaning or in the dynamic evolution of the texts. For Jesse, in Vanishing Rooms, the murder of Metro allows him an emancipation from a destructively racist and homophobic relationship and an evolution to a relationship, centered, not marginalized; his new lover, black and a dancer, is an

articulation of a homosexuality that is reinscribed. The execution of Giovanni, in Giovanni's Room, is a complex emblem of the consequences of deceit and the embrace of the marginalized life which Baldwin represents, always, as abhorrent; it is, also, emblematic of the significant lost opportunity of a relationship that would have been good.

Vanishing Rooms represents two dominant sexual evolutions/responses to the sexuality of homosexuality. First, in the character of Jesse, Dixon represents a man who has acknowledged his homosexuality, but has not gone beyond the guilt and inhibitions that restrict the actuality of his sexual experience or the political dysfunction that is motivated through his relationship with Metro, whose hatred of homosexuality contaminates the sexual and social dimensions in the relationship of the two men and whose hatred paralyzes his own growth, making his homosexual and social position static. Jesse is also a man who, in his sexual/love relationship with the white homosexual, is caught in a binary trap in which he is defined by his lover as a "lesser," an outcast, one who is less than human. Metro uses "nigger" as a marking for the homosexual, both Jesse and himself; he is an enslavement from which Jesse must escape. I will return to this representation later in this study.

Now, I would like to discuss the second representation which is evolved by Dixon in the character of Lonny. In Vanishing Rooms Dixon makes central the malevolent energies

of a homophobic masculinity in the enunciations and "ritual" of the gang: Lonny, Lou, Max and Cuddles. The gang represents a particular maleness/masculinity that is phallogentric and defined as necessarily expressed in conquest, dominance, and aggressive sexual penetration -- the phallus becomes a weapon with which the bearer brings the other to submission. Ejaculation is the mark of conquest/victory. The gang exists perpetually on the verge of sexual erection/activity and physical violence or in the actual expression of erection in sexual act and violence.

The city, New York, is dangerous in its provision of "closets of freedom" -- pogroms: the warehouses and baths -- in which homosexual men are hidden away. The spectacle of homosexual desire is concealed behind the walls of abandoned space in which only the fleeting sexual act, not the whole person functioning within an environment of connection with other human beings, is only given for the moment. This act is not what is desired; it is what is allowed. In a profound sense, it may be understood as what is constructed to be desired by hegemonic forces. Dixon demonstrates its inevitable power to affect a man to great despair, emptiness and, as is ultimately revealed in the character of Metro, a self-marking of hate and death. Dixon constructs a representation of that position, a space, that dehumanizes the homosexual and forces a homosexuality that is devoid of the possibility of developing a complete human relationship. Most of the sex in this text is without a

total human context; the performers seem not to be aware of a person, someone beyond genitals and the act of sex. The forced marginalization evaporates the human spirit. For many of the homosexuals, in this text, sex exists outside any broad social/humane environment. In a society where heterosexuality is "compulsory," those who violate that order are given little space for that violation, and the "relationship" seems to be totally focused on sex. Missing is any significant connection to institutions and communities which, in actuality, are all places of heterosexual meanings and valorizations.

The city is a place of danger for the homosexual for another reason; the source of that danger is the particularly defining masculinity of homophobic men represented in the gang. Dixon, in his construction of the gang, identifies that opposition in western sexual binaristic conceptualization of heterosexual vs. homosexual. The privilege is not to mark the single term "heterosexual," but rather to mark as dominant a term within that construct: male/masculine. The male role in the sexual act, as represented in Dixon's novel, is to dominate; to be homosexual is to be like a woman, the lesser element in the binarism, the passive, the "bottom," forfeiting the position of "top"/power. The energetic focus of the gang maintains this vertical power construct: up/down, active/passive, cutting/cut, living/dead. Thus, Dixon delineates, in the gang, a political construct which is totally phallocentric.

The phallus, within that construct, functions not for pleasure or as a way of connecting to the other in any social, egalitarian bond, but rather in marking the other as defeated, conquered, lesser and subject to the dominant, "masculine" male. Thus, the phallus becomes the vehicle/ "ride" for power over the other, not an intimate bond of mutuality or equalized pleasure. All outside of self is not humanized; the other is dehumanized, which causes the other's pain to be minimized and his death to be designified in conscience. The priority which Dixon identifies for the gang is violence, a barbaric virus, which organically expands, consuming the body, literally maiming the body and causing death. The violence of the gang directed against the homosexual does not end. Even when the gang is arrested and imprisoned for the murder of Metro, the violence expands into the beating of Lonny, a part of their own community/ body, which must be excluded/severed because it has betrayed the whole. This is a particular, supremacist masculinity, destroying that which is woman or like woman in its perception.

Both of these dangerous realities function in two ways to remove the homosexual. First, it disconnects him from the larger mass of hegemonic society, making him always "the enemy," devalorized, and a contaminator. Second, it causes the homosexual to diminish the value of himself, as homosexual, and to diminish the worth of his object of desire, specifically in Dixon's representation "to lower"

the man by making him woman-like or slave-like ("nigger"-like), a "faggot." The diminishment is thus achieved through a larger, non-egalitarian construction, reflecting the oppression of women and the oppression of race.

Dixon's authorial consciousness encompasses three separate narrative voices: Ruella, Jesse, and Lonny. The perception or representation of the gang is contained within the narrative consciousness of Lonny, who is, himself, a member of that gang, and who ultimately evolves from it (no small accomplishment). However, the other two narrative voices do make reference to the gang and, in their consciousnesses, render interpretations and adjudications. Even so it is primarily through the mind of Lonny and his language that the representation of the gang is constructed. The gang is, for him, the community of mankind -- a homosocial bond to which he is committed. It is this homophobic community which defines and conceptualizes his sexuality. It structures his understanding of women, masculinity, heterosexuality and homosexuality. Thus, that which is within him -- homosexual desire -- he lives with in isolation or privately for only a short time. Ultimately, Lonny brings that desire, not clearly articulated, to the gang for their interpretation and definition, although that dialogue is indirect.

The first inclusion of the gang is in the consciousness of Jesse. The language he uses to introduce the gang and to associate them with the murder of his lover, Metro, is

significant in its identification of the first confinement, the first space or room which, ultimately, must be vanished by Jesse:

Four, five, maybe six teenagers. Maybe they were the ones I had seen before on my way home from rehearsals. Even then their smell of a quick, cheap high had been toxic.

"Hey, nigger."

"Yeah, you."

"Naw, man, he ain't no nigger. He a faggot."

"Then he a black nigger faggot."

. . . the sweat and trembling in my knees would not go away, not even when I reached the door and locked myself in. (14-15)

There is a social connection between the forces that have driven Metro into the warehouse, a place of limitation/confinement, and the forces that drive Jesse back into his room, also a place of limitation/confinement. Those actual voices, from the hegemonic society, name, label, and define, placing the mark upon the homosexual. Then, in that very naming, they threaten the position of the other -- Lonny, Jesse, and Metro. Thus, the language marks and signifies the destruction of the person. The narrative incident that juxtaposes this incident is the love making between Metro and Jesse after Jesse speaks of the incident with the gang: ". . . and we made love slowly, deliberately, believing we were doing something right" (15). In this brief description of the two men making love, Dixon represents a compassionate, sexual expression which opposes the violent, destructive confrontation of that homosexual articulation. The temporary suspension of the gang's adjudication is

short. Jesse realizes that within Greenwich Village (a given space for homosexuals although actually, no safe space exists) the members of the gang are the powerful energy, as Jesse perceives, that "made acid out of every bit of safety" and "had eaten up everything." (15)

The rape and murder of Metro are, for the gang, a fulfillment and denial of homosexual desire. In the mind of Jesse the incident evolves:

I could still hear them, making each prove himself a man -- "I ain't no faggot. Not me, man" -- drawing blood. (15)

What follows at this immediate point in the narrative is Jesse's imaginative reconstruction of what happened to Metro on his return to his apartment in Greenwich Village: the rape and then the mutilation of that very body through a knifing in which every member participates except Lonny. The first stabbing occurs before the rape actually begins: "Who went ahead and stuck him before we all could stick it in?" (16) In this scene Dixon constructs the necessary homophobic destruction of that which the gang members desire and possess. Thus, the hated/desired object is punished for the desire which it has awakened and is, simultaneously, eliminated as evidence of the fulfillment of that desire. Within two pages of the text Dixon has established a tableaux of homophobic language and act. The language is symbolic of all of that language from the hegemonic society that is used both by the aggressor and the victim to

fabricate a terrifying meaning of homosexuality. Such language drives both Metro and Jesse to rooms of confinement. It also enables the gang, dehumanizing the homosexual and the homosexual act, to fulfill and destroy its desire.

In the first section in the text that Dixon constructs as the narrative voice or consciousness of Lonny, the gang is more extensively formulated. After Lonny, in this narrative, confesses the conversation he has had with Metro, indicating his perceptions of Metro's sexual interest in him, Cuddles response is a demand for specific information about possible physical contact: "He touch you, Lonny? He touch you?" (29) Lonny's response is, "Why you wanna know?" (29) The comment to the reader, in direct address, that Lonny makes is important: "You can never tell about Cuddles. Always fucking with somebody" (29). The choice of the word -- fucking -- signifies a political struggle in which Lonny is in the dangerous position of being "had." His guard at this moment is appropriate because Cuddles is the dominant member of the gang. The choice of the word also signifies the politics of "fucking" for Lonny, i.e., sex exists within a political frame. Lonny and all of the members of the gang resist a "passive" position. In that position the lesser loses, destroying his masculinity. Cuddles articulates a disgust for homosexuals in his observation that "faggots" are everywhere: "They think it's their turf, Lonny. We just tourists, you know" (28). The

mind of Cuddles dictates the major dilemma for the hegemonic position: the tolerance of the presence of homosexuals will result in a subversion; the order will be reversed or turned over, and homosexuals will dominate and exclude from the "turf"/space of the nation those who are heterosexual. More significantly, they will be a constant reminder of homosexuality, affirming curiosity and desire within the heterosexual.

Also in this section of Lonny's narrative, Dixon extends evidence of Lonny's homosexuality and a homobonding with Cuddles that includes a physical intimacy which is, supposedly, nonsexual:

I rode around, got Cuddles, and we rode double, Cuddles peddling and me on the seat, my hair blowing into spikes behind me and me holding Cuddles at the waist with my feet spread out from the double chain and derail. He told me not to hold on so tight. (29)

This passage is certainly homoerotic.

Throughout this section of the text there is an interplay among the members of the gang, taunting Lonny about his encounter with Metro. The taunting is an aberrant interest in the very desire they would rebuff. The second element in the interplay is the gang's making plans to have sex. Dixon's construction of this episode depicts a brutal use of a woman solely for the purpose of sex. The word used early in the planning for sex -- "woman" -- is replaced with "snatch," "pussy," and "bitch." This marking of women is described by Sedgwick: ". . . homophobia directed at men by

men almost always travels with a retinue of gynephobia and antifeminism" (Sedgwick, Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire 216). Thus, the homosexual desire which is basic in the sexuality of the gang is repressed through a homophobic energy and, simultaneously, manifests a gynephobia. During the actual time with the prostitute while each member has sex, the others watch. This "gazing upon" the masculinity of each proves the sexual prowess and gender desire of each, while at the same time bonding the men in sexuality; i.e., the woman becomes a triangular point for male-male connection, "the erotic triangle" (12) that Sedgwick describes. The prostitute uses Cuddles' jacket to keep warm while Lonny has sex with her. It is the jacket into which Lonny pushes his head and inhales at the moment of his climax:

The smell of denim and armpits make me tingle all over and tingle again until my whole body heaves and pulls. The jacket lets go the smell of grease and body all in my face, and I can't do nothing but let go myself. The bitch had nothing to do with it. (Dixon 35)

Cuddles acknowledges a masculinity in the observed act and assures Lonny that he is not perceived as homosexual: "I was just shitting you, Lonny, about that faggot stuff. You cool, man. I seen you. You cool" (35). Precisely what Cuddles has seen he does not specify. For the reader the vision is dominated by the connection between Lonny's ejaculation, Cuddles' jacket, and Lonny's own interpretation of the sexual act. It is clear to Lonny that he desires

Cuddles, but the established heterosexual milieu/order prohibits the expression of such desire. Even if Cuddles did not refuse any overture forthcoming from Lonny, homosexual desire is taboo. At this point, Dixon's narrative emphasizes the "initiate's" isolation that is a part of Lonny's experience. This initiation is identified by Bergman, in Gaiety Transfigured: Gay Self-Representation in American Literature, as a common point in the evolution of all homosexual men: "The child who will become gay conceives himself in isolation. I cannot think of another minority that is without cultural support in childhood" (Bergman 5). Certainly in Dixon's characterization of Lonny this is the representation. Not only is there no positive support from the community, the definitions and conceptualizations of the immediate male peers of his community force him to remain in isolation and to prove to them his own imitation and valorization of their sexual mode. Bergman, addressing this phenomenon, states:

The reason a gay man must go beyond this initial construction of his sexuality -- must if he hopes to enjoy any share of the well-being that is the birthright of the individual -- is that his initial construction is fostered by "compulsory heterosexuality" as Adrienne Rich has termed it.
(5)

Dixon carefully constructs and develops the power and impact of this segment of community, the generators of "compulsory heterosexuality," on both Lonny, whose life is abated, and Metro, whose life is destroyed by that despotic power.

The latent/repressed homosexuality of the gang is represented and developed in a later incident involving a drug dealer. Lonny has had an encounter with Metro which Dixon presents not as an attempt to seduce Lonny but, rather, as an attempt to befriend him and to indicate to him that he, Metro, knows that he, Lonny, is homosexual: "To know and to be known become the same process" (Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet 100). This moment of knowing and being known is developed in two passages. In the first passage Lonny's narrative of the incident is incomplete. It is later, when he is in prison, that he is able to "remember everything" (Dixon 146). That remembrance includes Metro's disclosure that he has a lover, certainly, an identifying, "being known" signification. That "being known" is an invitation for Lonny "to know and be known," a coming out in a safe place of egalitarian recognition and succor. But in his homophobia, Lonny flees the mirrored presence of himself to return to the gang to be "saved" from desire and act, forgetting, until later when he is in prison, the conclusion of his conversation with Metro:

"Leave me alone, Metro."
 "Why don't you leave me alone?"
 "I'm waiting for my friends. . . ."
 "You'll come back. Someday, all in leather and denim."
 "You're crazy."
 "Aren't you going to kiss me good-bye?"
 "Shit." (147)

When Lonny returns to the gang, he narrates, specifically addressing the reader, his experience and trauma:

I was not standing there thinking about Metro and hating myself for letting him talk like that to me. Shit, he talked like he knew who I was or who I could be. Like he could actually see into my corduroy jacket, his eyes like fingers in my clothes -- touching me. *You ever get that feeling talking to someone?* [my italics] (58)

Obviously, neither Lonny in his narrative, nor Dixon in his text, is speaking to a reader who "knows and is being know." Each is speaking to the ambiguous who, as Bergman and Delaney suggest (in Gaiety Transfigured: Gay Self-Representation in American Literature), seek to find and understand themselves in texts when that finding and understanding is not possible for them in the hegemonic society of "compulsory heterosexuality." The place/space in which many homosexuals have first seen themselves is a book. At the center of Lonny's trauma is his perception of Metro's understanding of him and his sense of his demasculinization through Metro's desire for him, and ultimately his own desire:

Shit, I hated him for thinking he knew who I was and could come on to me like I was some bitch. . . . But when you realized his eyes were fingers taking hold, you'd hate him even more for pulling it off, undressing you right there with his eyes and laughing at your naked ass or shriveled-up cock. You'd be mad enough to kill him. (58-59)

It is the desire as much as the act that is problematic. Thus, the quick return to the gang functions as his removal of himself from that space and person who affirms the reality of his nature, the place where he perceives himself as homosexual and is aware of homosexual desire. This

narrative point in the text is his consciousness. Although he is able to deflect his own desire as he focuses his awareness on Metro's desire for him, in perceiving himself as an object of desire, Lonny, himself, feels desire. This feeling generates a homophobic hate, with which he would displace homosexual desire. His final words, in the cited passage, articulate his own intense desire to murder in dis/order to dis/avow desire. What Dixon represents in his text is what Sedgwick describes as "homosexual panic" (Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet 20).

The return to the gang places Lonny within the sphere of both a protective homophobia and a subtle, opportunistic setting for acting out of homosexual desire, however limited or disordered; thus, that space/place represses and stimulates same-sex desire. After Lonny has repeated the conversation with Metro, Cuddles fabricates and desires that Lonny has been "touched by"/has been the recipient of anal sex:

"Man, we should celebrate," he yells, looking me over.

"Celebrate what?" I ask.

"Losing your cherry to a faggot, what else?" he says. . . . Cuddles backs off.

"I'll fix your ass," he says. "I'll fix it real good." (Dixon 59)

The final threat that Cuddles makes both represses and articulates homosexual desire. The desire is extended, by Dixon, in the event that follows. The gang goes out "to ride and fuck the night" (59). On 12th Street, a known

homosexual area, Cuddles declares: "Them faggots is just maggots on rotting meat" (60); the language reveals a consciousness of homosexuality and a connection between it and death. This constant association of homosexuality with death is a genocidal concept: "faggots" eat and are eaten; homosexuality is to be killed; to be homosexual is to be a non-being, dead. When the gang encounters a drug dealer in addition to robbing him of his drugs and money, they act out their homosexual desires:

Some guy up ahead is selling loose joints for a dollar. "All our joints loose," says Maxie, laughing and trying to unzip his pants. . . . The flash of metal makes the kid back right into Lou who feels his ass.

Cuddles gets a feel, too. The guy's face goes red and his voice trembles.

"Leave me alone. You got what you wanted."

"You oughta to be glad we don't make you suck us off." Lou says, pushing him away. (60-61)

Dixon develops, in a series of events, an intensifying tension of homosexual desire and the terrifying urge to repress that desire through violence and, ultimately, through murder. It is this paradigm that is addressed by Sedgwick in a chapter titled "Some Binarisms" (in Epistemology of the Closet). She writes of the defeating position that rationalizes a separation of people into binary structures: them/us, the centered/the marginal. The matter of homosexuality is not marginal; it is universal, incorporated into the one corpus of humanity. The trajectory of homosexual genocide is omnicidal; ultimately, it is achieved only through the destruction of the entire

species (130). No margin exists in that the existence of homosexuality as a reality is not marginal; it influences or affects all of the species. Second, as Sedgwick argues elsewhere in her text, the potential presence of homosexuality is within all of the male species:

Most moderately to well-educated Western people in this century seem to share a similar understanding of homosexual definition, independent of whether they themselves are gay or straight, homophobic or antihomophobic. That understanding is close to yours. That is to say, it is organized around a radical and irreducible incoherence. It holds the minoritizing view that there is a distinct population of persons who "really are" gay; at the same time, it holds the universalizing views that sexual desire is an unpredictably powerful solvent of stable identities; that apparently heterosexual persons and object choices are strongly marked by same-sex influences and desires, and vice versa for apparently homosexual ones; and that at least male heterosexual identity and modern masculinist culture may require for their maintenance the scapegoating crystallization of a same-sex male desire that is widespread and in the first place internal. (85)

It is in this sense that Cuddles and the gang have defined themselves out of what they internally are. To be masculine is to be heterosexual and to be heterosexual is not to be like woman in any sense. To desire a male is to be submissive like a woman to a man, which means, in Dixon's construction of the gang's sense of sexuality, to be homosexual is to be phallus penetrated, either orally or anally. Thus, this desire must be repressed by definition of what it is to be man/masculine; to be masculine excludes, in this definition, the option of homosexuality. The internalized, universal desire is reflected from within the

self in any overt homosexual. The reflecting image must, therefore, be destroyed, be genocided. However, that does not remove the internalized desire nor the overt homosexual who, although destroyed, is re/propagated by the heterosexual procreative act. Thus, the pattern is in place for a perpetual genocide or a perpetual repression/oppression. With the introduction of the homosexual to the gang in Lonny's report of Metro's "interest" in him, to the "riding" on 12th Street in New York, encountering the homosexuals of the city, the gang opposes that which it desires:

We count the new joints and money and move in close ranks like an army of our own, the baddest white boys out that night. Everyone else moves off the sidewalk as we approach, some we even push into the street, just close enough to a car to scare them clean out of their designer jeans and alligator shirts . . . here we are doing the combat. (Dixon 109)

From encountering the drug dealer, to the rape and murder of Metro, Dixon's construction of the gang is a paradigm of the Sedgwickian double bind: "internal desire/scapegoating and repressing," a binary pattern that "allows" the male to be masculine within the erected, rigid boundaries of his/social definition. It is this danger that Dixon illustrates; it is this story, generated by modern society, that his fiction narrates. The story is returned to the creator, resulting in the evolving dialectical dilemma.

Cuddles introduces the person of Metro into the conversation of the gang; he eliminates significance to

Lonny's observation that he (Cuddles) has "touched the reefer man" (62) by saying that that is different, because "we was on top" (62); and, spotting Metro coming home, he begins the litany of seduction and attack. Ultimately, each of the members, except Lonny, anally rapes Metro; Lonny is forced by Cuddles to rape Metro orally. Then each member, except Lonny, anally penetrates Metro with knives, causing his death. Each knife is a phallus; each phallus, a knife.

The entire narrative that Dixon constructs, focused on the gang and on Lonny, is a narrative of double element: desire and repression, erupting into violence. All of the language in the long discourse constructs this binary reality. When the desire is consummated, the desired object is eliminated, which eliminates the evidence of homosexuality as well as the possible return of desire, which eliminates the possibility of a permanent state. The incident thus becomes only a temporary experience, and even that experience can be denied. It is as if it hadn't happened: homosexuality, following the death of the possessed object, ceases to exist; one returns to "the time before the homosexual."

Lonny and the other members of the gang, after they are arrested, are in the same prison. The gang beats Lonny for betraying them which, in actuality, he has not done. For the gang the significance in Lonny becoming involved with the police is that the incident involving Metro becomes a

reality. Lonny has allowed homosexuality to exist, and its existence evokes prohibited desire.

Thus, Dixon has represented a major obstacle to the articulation of homosexuality in his novel, Vanishing Rooms: a societal conceptualization and definition through which four young boys articulate their sexuality. The conceptualization and definition are genocidal for a homosexual man, Metro, who is "out." It is repressive for a young man, Lonny, who is tormented to actual madness in his sexual anguish. And it is destructive to the three other gang members who themselves, as constructed by Dixon, are caught in a vortex of violent sexual perversion, men with "craziness . . . stored up inside them" (121).

This text is a narrative of coming-out -- a maneuvering; Dixon elucidates the evolution of Lonny and Jesse. The coming-out motif is itself a homosexual literary genre. Felice Picano, Edmund White, James Baldwin, John Weir, Robert Ferro, George Whitmore, and David Leavitt have all written novels in which the coming-out motif is the focus of the text. In the language of Dixon, formed in the mind of Lonny, coming-out is both "knowing and being known." The assumption is axiomatic: it is possible for a person, himself, not to know his own homosexuality. In the homophobic environment of the American city that Dixon creates, the individual (Lonny) exists during much of the discourse in a mental state of anguish. His sense of his own homosexuality surfaces and is repressed. In the pattern

of Lonny's narrations, when Dixon uses Lonny's voice for the elucidation of the text, Dixon employs three elements in each of the constructions: first, the lyrical expression of the autumn through a series of metaphors (October, the leaves, red, and the missing images of summer) develops the mind of Lonny, his fear and hatred. In this element Dixon represents the delicate and ferocious dilemma of desire repressed and the ambiguous vacuity in which the character moves from cognition to rejection and, ultimately, to a perverted articulation of homosexuality, all of which generate a rage which exists just beneath the action of Lonny. Second, Dixon includes a passage in each of the narratives in which the consciousness of Lonny reconstructs more of the details that comprise his experience and conversation with Metro. Third, in each of the Lonny constructs is an element, an actual passage, in which Lonny returns to Cuddles, who is his fixed, desired object (it is Cuddles Lonny most desires; this fact brings with it a particular tension in the conversations that the two young men have) within his circle of friends. In all of the passages, throughout the development of the text, focused on this return to Cuddles, Dixon makes evident Lonny's desperate effort to deconstruct/diminish the desire that his contact with Metro has conceived, except in the last two passages. In the next to the last passage, Lonny discloses the last remaining details of his encounter with Metro and reveals the prediction made by Metro that Lonny will at some

time return "all in leather and denim" (147), signifying Metro's "knowing" the essence of Lonny's homosexuality. And, ultimately, Lonny reveals the most intimate detail of the encounter, which was Metro's question at the very end of their conversation: "Aren't you going to kiss me good-by?" (147) This disclosure, in the next to the last passage of Lonny's narratives, is the initial step in Lonny's realization and affirmation of himself as a homosexual. This moment in the narrative is followed by the homosexual rape of Lonny in the prison shower, during which he significantly confuses the last attacker with Cuddles. Lonny has combined "knowing and known." His final narrative connects him to the representation of "camp," Clementine, the great visionary and teacher, who will certainly complete his initiation into the reality of his homosexuality.

I would like to examine each of these passages/ progressions more carefully to determine the particular nature of Dixon's representation of the evolution of the homosexual desire, from its repression to its eventual acceptance.

The first section of the text comprised of the voice of Lonny introduces the leaf imagery which Dixon uses to establish the connection between Lonny and the death of Metro, his mental anguish over his desire, and his sense of a social environment which is hostile to himself, an environment which allows him no space. The natural elements are accusatory and emblematic of the violence embodied in

the double bind of the homosexual desire and the betrayal of that desire as it is accommodated in the body of Metro: living and dead. This same torment is developed in Baldwin's Giovanni's Room; the connection is between David, the closeted American, and the out Italian lover, Giovanni. The ghost, the dead object of desire betrayed, embodying the potentials for fulfillment now lost, is a manifestation of conscience and consciousness evolving to an emancipation. In Dixon's novel, that evolution of conscience and consciousness is introduced in startling language:

The leaves are cut off hands curling up like fists. If they grab for my sneaks, I just walk faster and harder to get them off. Like that faggot reaching for me out of the dirt and shedding red like some gray bone tree. You know the trees I'm talking about. You've seen them faggots. (26)

The image of the leaves constructed from the dismembered object is, in the consciousness of Lonny, that from which he would dissociate himself, his homosexuality and the murdered man. Desire and guilt are assembled in a physical representation. Although this is the beginning of his narrative, it is voiced from a knowledge of all the events yet to be reported. In each of the sections reflecting Lonny's consciousness, Dixon initiates a language focused on natural images, followed by the perception that Lonny has of Metro, the desired object. The tentativeness of this perception is admitted by Lonny, arguing an authorial position. There is the projection of desire on the object through the empowerment of that object with a desire for the

man desiring: "We was getting back at him for trying to come on to me like I was some goddamn bitch. He probably wanted all of us, not just me" (26). Thus, the desired object is forced to be responsible for the desire generated within the spectator or gazer. Therefore, the image symbolizing a double death -- autumn and the severed leaf that talks -- designates the successful destruction of the desired object and designates the unsuccessful destruction of the desire which remains and continues to formulate itself. This is because that desire has never been solely within the object upon which the person has gazed, but within the person himself. Thus, destroying the person does not destroy the desire; it is a futile ritual of sacrifice that does not redeem or cleanse. The desire remains, as symbolized in the leaves that reach out and speak, the necessary continuation of the person's projection of that desire outside himself. As the living object, in the thinking of Lonny, generated the desire, so the dead object continues to generate the desire. Lonny will not acknowledge that desire; rather, he keeps it "outside" himself. Metro remains the spectacle that exists which is to be repressed. (I often think that male students of mine who do not want to read a homosexual text and make their protest forcefully, do so because the spectacle evokes those desires which are not to be imagined to exist within themselves. Hence, not to see is not to know or not to feel.)

In Lonny's initial narrative, Dixon describes the nature of the particular gaze Lonny places on Metro. The passage functions to represent the fixity of the gaze, the anatomical specificity of the gaze, and Lonny's fabrication of meanings for that on which/whom he gazes:

I seen him several times and knew where he lived. He wore track sneaks -- real Adidas -- and jeans and a plaid flannel shirt opened from the neck on down. That day you could feel the season change right in the air, so I thought it was funny seeing the open V of his chest like that . . . he didn't swish. . . . Yea I seen him. Lots of times. Sometimes he didn't even know I was seeing him. . . . I don't mean nothing by looking at him close like that. (27)

What Lonny confesses and denies simultaneously is his observation of the clothes, and more importantly, the body -- the exposed chest at the V of the shirt -- and the movement of the body. He disconnects the desired object, and homosexuality in general, from those manifestations that violate a sense of masculinity, and in that transfiguration he defeminizes and legitimizes the object. The abomination is revisioned, reinscribed, transfigured; his consciousness opposes the definitions of homosexuality constructed by heterosexual, hegemonic society. Indeed, in this restructuring there is, for Lonny, the desired belief that what is perceived is not perverse: "he doesn't look like no faggot" (27). Thus, in this irrational formation, homosexuality in Metro is suspended, allowing the desire to be "natural," not contaminated by that which, in the mind of Lonny, is of woman, the submissive, the weaker.

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The use of "you" in all of these sections is Dixon's implication, indictment, and involvement of the reader, a significant maneuver to include the reader in some capacity in the text, or to manipulate response to the narrative. In addition to the powerful intimacy of the word and its function to connect the reader to the narrative is the placement of the reader into the text. The reader might prefer to remain at a safe distance, might, in the sense of the text, prefer to remain unknown. The word "you" includes that reader who knows these desires, who has repressed these desires, and who has oppressed those who express these desires. Lonny is the only narrative voice to use this inculcation of the reader. In this way the reader becomes, in the Baudelarian sense, *mon frère* -- the repressed or the oppressor.

The second section of the Lonny narrative begins with the same autumnal imagery, through which Dixon continues to construct the evolution of a state of mind representing the trauma and panic effectuated by homosexual desire which must be repressed and a state of mind engendered by an act of murder in which the character feels himself an accomplice. It is, simultaneously, an act of killing one's own identity and the object with which that identity might bond:

Like I keep telling you, October is a bitch, a mean, red bitch. . . . Shit, you got the red leaves . . . you got October. What more do you want? You want red leaves clogging the sewers? You want legs and arms splayed out like tree limbs after a storm? You really don't believe in fall, huh, or how people can change too, just as fast? You want all

this? Then you're no better than that faggot who wanted me. (55)

The trauma and vulnerability is represented in October. The month is a time of intensified homosexual desire for Lonny. The narrator offers the double curse generated by the unhingement that he experiences in the intensification of desire at this specific time; he is being brought closer to an expression of his homosexuality: "You really don't believe in fall, huh, or how people can change too, just as fast" (55)? Second, he accuses those who want such vulnerability of being homosexual themselves, like Metro: "You want all this? Then you're no better than that faggot who wanted me" (55). This is a bad season, a bad time during which Lonny is on the verge of being known as a homosexual. In this section of the text Lonny has his first homosexual experience. His partner is Metro, and the sexual act is a forced act for both men: a double rape, a single murder. Lonny does not participate with the other members of the gang in the brutal anal rape and murder of Metro; he is used as a foil by the other members of the gang who conclude Metro's sexual interest in Lonny. Lonny's sexual desire is confirmed in the place of death: the phoenix dying and reborn. The death of one homosexual generates life (expressed homosexual desire) for another homosexual. The irony is that the violent sex perpetrated by the gang is what they have desired. Dixon constructs this as their primary intent, while Lonny has, for their approval,

repressed such desire. The rape and murder brings Lonny to an acknowledgment of his identity and a nervous collapse:

They had the body marked out in chalk on the ground behind some blue sawhorses that said "Police Line -- Do Not Cross." It was right here where we left him. I saw it glowing. "Here's Metro," I told myself. Here's anybody, even me. A chalk outline and nothing inside. A fat white line of head, arms, body, and legs. A body curled in a heap to hold itself. Like a leaf or a dead bird, something dropped out of the sky or from a guy's stretched-out hand. It was amazing. But it was also the figure of somebody. A man. Any man. (68)

The images of fragmentation are again used by Dixon in this passage; the parts of a body -- a man -- the great puzzle which must be pieced together in the mind of Lonny and connected to himself. The chalk line which marks the exact position of the body becomes a body "protected from people or from falling leaves or from the slimy drippings from sides of beef" (68). The body is the homosexual identity that, in Lonny's mind, can not be harmed by those external, violent, social forces that conspire to and against it. In reality, the body can not be harmed because it is a corpse; it is Lonny who, in his imaginative construct, protects, through hallucination, the object of his desire consummated -- a continuation of homosexual desire. In this political allegory, Dixon returns only one character to the scene of the murder, which becomes the place of sexual acceptance and epiphany. Through the death of one man, another comes more fully to life. This pattern of death and "redemption" is a pattern similarly employed by Baldwin in Giovanni's Room.

In Baldwin's text the sacrifice is Giovanni, David's dark-skinned, Italian lover. In Dixon's text it is the white-skinned Metro, the desired object of the young dark-skinned Italian boy, Lonny, and the lover of the black man, Jesse. Thus, the slain generate a new life: a complex, ancient, mythic paradigm, a terrifying religious ritual used by both Baldwin and Dixon in their homosexual narratives. Also, the paradigm is indicative of the profound consequences of homophobia and illustrative of Sedgwick's argument that western civilization has been/is focused on the genocide of homosexuals, a terrifying political pogrom.

The "coming-out" is accomplished through Dixon's construction of a final mad/sane ritual for the narrator. Lonny has returned to the place of the murder: "Once I saw the chalk figure I couldn't get enough of it" (68). His walk around the police barricade provides different perspectives; the movement becomes a dance: "One-two-three, one-two-three. Up-two-three, down-two-three." This physical expression, a rhythmic movement, is connected to the perfection of dance that is the focus of Jesse's efforts. For Jesse the perfected dance occurs when he has also arrived at a sexual articulation that he has not had before. Lonny and Jesse go through parallel evolutions to a sexual emancipation; the dance is one signifier of this. (In Paule Marshall's text, Praisesong for the Widow, the female protagonist, Avitara, ultimately, establishes her authentic African heritage and black identity through

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dance.) Dixon employs dance in a similar function; his characters physically work out/dance out to solutions in rituals of concentration and profound connection. Late at night, when Lonny returns to the chalk circle, he establishes his identity and embraces the space of the dead man, Metro:

I came back that night. The chalk shape was glowing like crushed jewels under the streetlights. I took off my shirt and pants and didn't even feel cold. I crossed the barricade and sat inside the chalk. The glow was on me now. It was me. I lay down in the shape of the dead man, fitting my head, arms, and legs in place. I was warm all over. (68)

Dixon constructs a mystical aura of conciliation and connection; it is a lyrical commingling of life and death, a birth to homosexuality. Strangely, the death of Metro has done its work. In this construction, Dixon also connects the act of homosexuality/the being homosexual to death. In homosexual history in the western world, this is the hegemonic projection onto the homosexual life. The representations of homosexuality in art, specifically in literary form, reflect this projection. The image of Saint Sebastian pierced to death with the phallic arrow seems, at times, to be a fixed paradigmatic mode in western consciousness. Such an image may express western desire for the genocide of the homosexual. It, also, represents and affirms the plight of the homosexual in western history. Certainly, homosexuals have been killed for being homosexuals. Even today some see AIDS as a natural genocide

of that which is, in their minds, an abomination. In this text, even though Lonny will continue to evolve as a homosexual, to assume more defiantly that identity, he will not move beyond any acting out/living out of his homosexuality outside the framework of prostitution, which he argues/perceives to be an act for money rather than sexual pleasure. Certainly Dixon, in this text, offers this reasoning of Lonny's: the attraction and repression in the psycho-rituals of the gang and the young college student who manipulates Metro into a sexual act to force his disclosure of his (Metro's) homosexuality are types of oppression. In doing so, Dixon constructs examples of the fluidity of sexuality, the non-marginalized structure of homosexuality, and the manipulations and deceptions that allow the "straight" male to play out, in concealment, his "homosexuality."

However, Dixon's last incident involving Lonny is his meeting with Clementine, the visionary teacher, the street-wise, sex-wise, life-wise, black "queen," who, like Virgil/not virgin, leads Jesse through the "inferno" of the baths to a complete understanding of the need for a total sexual/sensual emancipation. Jesse arrives at that emancipation; perhaps Lonny will, too. At the same time, Dixon in ultimately removing Jesse from the baths and the warehouse judges against the sexuality constructed by the hegemonic society and concealed by it. What Dixon illustrates in this text is the need for a protest against

the pogrom of homosexuals by this dominant society; what seems like freedom in New York City for homosexual men is actually enslavement.

The rape of Lonny in prison, an act of retribution instigated by prisoners who know that Lonny is part of the gang that has killed Metro, is the first time he is penetrated, a forced passivity that establishes a retribution, connecting him more completely with Metro. Dixon constructs parallels in this text and the effect of the parallel construct is egalitarian, an equalizing and a complete knowledge of the other. The multiple-rape is, also, an evolution/catalyst in his "coming out." In it is revealed Lonny's desired object within the gang, Cuddles. When the two of them meet earlier in the prison, Cuddles participates in a beating of Lonny for betraying the gang. Lonny, disillusioned, tells Cuddles that he always thought the two of them were close; the conversation is a declaration of Lonny's homosexuality -- "knowing and being known." It is also an expression of love:

"I thought you was my friend, Cuddles."
 "Shit."
 "I thought we was tight."
 "Shit."
 "Now I'm the faggot, huh, Cuddles? I liked
 you, man. I trusted you."
 "Shit." (155)

For Cuddles the homosexual act, in Dixon's representation, is outside the sphere of friendship or intimacy. Further, the homosexual act is not a constant; the single experience

of homosexuality for Cuddles has come and gone in the rape and murder of Metro. There is no representation of an intimacy with other men on the part of Cuddles; his relationship with other members of the gang is frequently comprised of conversational games of distancing or diminishment.

The rape of Lonny is the final declaration of his sexual desire for Cuddles. The last man to rape Cuddles in the shower is Jack. Dixon constructs the following conversation:

The man on top was grinning at me, his teeth black and yellow in the cooling steam. Arms twisted mine. Opened my thighs wider and wider. The hand on my mouth eased off. I could breathe. I could look at what he was doing. I told him his name was Cuddles.

"My name is Jack, man."

"Tell me your name is Cuddles, man."

"Nobody here but me. And my name is Jack. Jack."

"Tell me it's Cuddles. Cuddles."

"Shit, man, you crazy or something." . . . I woke up in the prison hospital. . . . Pain sliced through me like a knife tearing up from my thighs.
(158)

The passage verifies Lonny's homosexual desire, his specified sexual desire for Cuddles, and his complete understanding of the suffering of Metro. As he is equalized and assimilated in his ritualistic lying in the chalk circle, so he is equalized, assimilated and made knowledgeable of Metro's ultimate position in the hegemonic society in the prison rape. The chapter ends with the following passage:

Red September lips, red October leaves. Hands with knives of November like old copper. You know why they called him Metro? He was under, like I was. And I told him, if he could even hear me from somewhere else, "You think you got me now, huh? Metro, you think I'm the pussy now?" Shit. Christ Jesus! I never had a chance. (159)

"Under," in the mind of Lonny, is oppressed, marginalized, and, ultimately, genocided. For Lonny, it is the horrible reality of being homosexual. However, Lonny recovers in the prison infirmary from his wound; Metro does not. Dixon's political position is clear: for these two men who possessed/possess homosexual desire, there is no "chance," no "room," no "text," and no "teacher," albeit Lonny will soon have one. Without this help, in the textual world constructed by Dixon, the two men come to great harm. Unable to imitate the dominant mode of masculinity, to be a "man" who expresses sexuality in the required heterosexual act, there is present a self determination for destruction/death. In this narrative, Dixon represents the heterosexual, hegemonic inscription of death which is embraced by Metro and Jesse: genocide. In this text, to be homosexual is to die. Jesse knows this. It is the focus of his final dance; the dance becomes an aesthetic expression of this consciousness/knowledge. To be homosexual is to be defined as dead, but the dance, finally, is a transfiguring of homosexuality, an energy that is life, a force that violates all confinements. In his early homosexual experiences, Jesse was forced to be diminished in the sexual act, manipulated, and humiliated; Metro's last year of

promiscuous life was an acceptance, on the part of both of them, of a lesser sexuality and life. The political focus of these elements in Dixon's narrative is on the danger of the hegemonic mode and definition: the gamut "between darkness and light" (195). The accomplishment is to be redefined by the homosexual self. The hegemonic exclusion and punitive attitude instigates a self-punishment which is particularly tragic. The hope for the hustler Lonny is his encounter with Clementine, whom he assumes to be another hustler:

"Yo, man."
 "It's Clementine, darling."
 "You with the lipstick."
 "Indubitably."
 "Get the fuck away from here. This is my corner."
 "I know. Tonight, I'm buying. Do you speak Italian or French?"
 "Shit. Just let anybody try to mess with me now." (207)

This passage comprises one short chapter of hope and humor. The reference to "Italian" and "French" is an allusion to Clementine's fantasies, which are ultimate sexual fulfillments. The reader also knows, from the passages set in the baths, that Clementine is sexually emancipated -- he does "good sex." He is also the "chance," "room," "text," and "teacher." Clementine is the man from within the marginal sphere who is wise in marginal space. There is no one like him in the outside or "centered" space in Dixon's text. Sadly, there is no heterosexual will or wisdom sufficiently benevolent, no one in the position of privilege

who exists in the text, as there are very few heterosexual professors who are willing to "touch"/read/teach the homosexual text, that very phobia extending the margins farther and farther. The political position of Dixon on this matter is that homosexual desire is universal, not marginal; however society creates centers/norms/valorized sexual behaviors, and that creation establishes margins or, in the concept of Sedgwick, the hegemonic society minoritizes. The act is one of distinguishing/marking, separating, devalorizing, and, eventually, eliminating:

As gay community and the solidarity and visibility of gays as a minority population are being consolidated and tempered in the forge of this specularized terror and suffering, how can it fail to be all the more necessary that the avenues of recognition, desire, and thought between minority potentials and universalizing ones be opened and opened and opened? (Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet (130)

There are "no avenues of recognition, desire and thought" more able to connect or open the potentials of the minority and the universal than the homosexual text/narrative. It constructs/transfigures the homosexual in the definition/perception of the homosexual author: a homosexual consciousness that necessarily reinscribes the homosexual body/experience, making clear the actuality of the homosexual being in a particular historical environment. The homosexual text shifts or remakes the homosexual paradigm; that shift is a redeeming event that opposes the genocide of the homosexual and frees him from the

confinements of external/heterosexual definitions. In such a text the meaning of homosexuality is determined by the homosexual, and the protagonists in such texts are represented as moving through a process of redefinition and expression of themselves.

The character on whom Dixon focuses in this text is Jesse, a young African-American who dances, is involved in a complex relationship with a young white man, Metro, and who is utilized by Dixon as a representation of a type of homosexual who is actively homosexual, meaning that he has a sexual relationship with another man, but a type of homosexual whose relationship remains concealed from all other people: family, students at the college and the dance school, the immediate neighborhood of the apartment, and the other tenants of the apartment building. The relationship that Jesse and Metro have is known by no one but themselves. Dixon thus constructs a relationship between the two men which typifies the homosexual union/partnership that is incognito, unrecognized, an intimacy that receives from the larger, hegemonic society no celebration or valorization. The relationship and the identities of the men as they are eventually revealed generate threats to the very existence of the two men. Early in the text Dixon establishes, within the consciousness of Jesse, the sense of the two men being unknown. The campus in Connecticut, where the two young men attend college, is a confinement, and graduation is, for the two men, an escape from the confinements of that place to

the confinements of Manhattan. This awareness of isolation is developed through a simple incident which involves Metro's parents taking a commencement photograph (a stasis of misrepresentation). Prior to the description of the composition of the photograph, Dixon indicates that Jesse exists in a particular isolation from his black friends at the college. Jesse speaks to Ruella, his woman companion:

"It wasn't easy," I said. "The black students thought I had betrayed them. It was bad enough being a dancer, but a white boy's friend? No way."
(40)

The language is significant in its establishment of a double isolation for Jesse. First, he is a dancer, which his black male friends see as a diminishment of the masculine role. Second, Jesse's friendship with the white Metro, the exact nature of which is not revealed to or discovered by the men of the "black table," isolates him from the other black male students at Wesman College, establishing a racial isolation. Dixon does not go on to develop this situation as representative of potential black male homophobia; instead, he develops the incident of the photograph, a replication of isolation and danger to Metro and his lover: "'Smile, son,' his mother said as her camera reached for him" (41). One of the major critical positions in this text is an exposition of the distorting and limiting definitions imposed on homosexual men by the external hegemonic/heterosexual society which always, in its definition and representation of the homosexual, oppresses/lies. And at this moment, the

camera is symbolic of this hegemonic reduction. The reaching of the "October leaves" for Lonny is an image that is repeated in the text, signifying a danger, and, ultimately a death. Here the reaching out of the camera is another signification of that great danger to the homosexual man. It expresses a fear of the possibility that, in the end, the homosexual will be gotten, destroyed. Also, the language suggests the concept of the camera "reaching out" to fix, to reduce, to compose a representation that is distorted or incomplete. What the images do not reveal is significant. To know the photographic images is not for the men in the photograph "to be known"; they are seen, but not revealed. Indeed, in Metro's construction of his static poise, he temporarily removes himself from Jesse. In Jesse's mind, Metro is detached from him. This becomes a representation of Metro's internalized homophobia and his submission to the hegemonic desire of his parents. Metro is determined not to offend them, or to give any clue of "reality" that would offend:

Metro stepped back away from me, his smile tired and lazy from last night's celebrations. His lips were chapped, his eyes wild and open with no bright luster calling me into them like before. He took a long step back from me, then came close. . . . There was a lot our families didn't know about us.
(41)

The images of the photograph reappear later in the text when it (or part of it) is included in the television news feature covering Metro's murder. The fragmentation, separation, emblematic dismemberment is complete:

Metro's college graduation picture was shown, but it had been cut off at the shoulders, right where another arm could be seen draped around him, a brown hand clutching another diploma rolled with ribbon. That hand was mine. (94)

The lover is made invisible or not to exist. The text develops poignant images of dismemberment signifying both the psychological dilemma of the characters (their mental angst and disorientation) and the violent diminishment and destruction of the homosexual body through the repression of homosexual desire. The images also suggest the failure of heterosexual society and even homosexuals to allow the connection of two male bodies and what that connection signifies, the inability to sexually energize the body (to enjoy intensely the sensuality and sexuality of the body), the physical assault of the body, the brutalizing of the orifices and organs of sexuality, and ultimately, even the murder of the homosexual himself. Of the texts considered in this study, Vanishing Rooms represents most powerfully the violent, murderous energy of homophobia.

Dixon's focus in this text on the problems of social confinement and limitation, the repression of the homosexual, is represented at three different levels. First, Lonny is a representation of a youth who is motivated by homosexual desire; in Dixon's construction of the hegemonic effect in the narrative, this must be repressed. That repression creates or results in a perversion that is destructive to the person himself, to other homosexuals, and to society in general. The repression of homosexuality

requires a great effort on the part of society, and the resistance of that repression, on the part of homosexuals, requires enormous energy that might be used to a greater individual and social achievement. The oppression of all minorities is a terrible dissipation of human energy, energy that could be focused to greater benefit of society. Claude J. Summers, in his discussion of Forster, speaks to this matter as he cites the position of Forster on the oppression of homosexuality:

Forster's acute consciousness of gay oppression, as epitomized in the persecution of Wilde, haunted his imagination throughout his life, fueling his anger at social and political injustice and making him contemptuous of the conventions that separate individuals and impede instinct. When he was almost eighty-five years old, he noted in his diary, "how annoyed I am with Society for wasting my time by making homosexuality criminal. The subterfuges, the self-consciousness that might have been avoided." (79)

The dissipated and redirected energy as the result of those attitudes that prevented Maurice and The Life to Come and Other Stories from being published until 1971 and 1972 (Summers 79) eliminated the literary texts, the homosexual voice, that might have reshaped the canon of modern homosexual literature. The homosexual novel could not exist in England. The great forces of British homophobia and censorship also eliminated a full homosexual rendering in Lawrence's Women in Love, a text in which Lawrence had wanted to explore the matter of homosexual desire but was prohibited from doing so by his publisher. The same

oppression reforms the vision and texts of Tennessee Williams. Cat on a Hot Tin Roof is diminished in the refiguring of the play for the American movie theater audience. What Dixon illustrates in Vanishing Rooms is this dissipation, waste, and death.

Second, Metro represents that homosexual man who is able to express himself sexually -- a man of sexual intensity and prowess. The city has provided a place of sexual emancipation. He celebrates this sexual freedom and encourages Jesse to participate in it. However, there is a reality about him that Jesse conceals from Ruella in his long conversation with her about his connection to Metro. What actually happened in their relationship is revealed at the end of the novel. Despite Metro's intense sexual expression, he is a victim of his own, internalized homophobia; it is Metro who, when he is talking to Jesse, uses the markings that diminish both Jesse and himself: "nigger" and "faggot." Ultimately, Metro reveals to Jesse his own self-hatred and contempt for his homosexuality. This leads to his willingness to deprecate himself and to be deprecated by Jesse. Despite his sexual energy and prowess, which would seem to be an indication of an acceptance of his homosexuality, Metro sexually expresses himself in destructive behavior.

Third, Jesse is positioned with a dual confinement: he is defined by the larger society as well as defined and

manipulated by the internalized homophobia which is a part of Metro's homosexuality.

All three male representations are homophobic. It can be assumed that the homosexual, in the hegemonic environment, is at some stage of his life homophobic.

Early in the novel Dixon establishes the sexual conflict and energy that exist between Jesse and Metro in Jesse's renaming of Jon-Michael Barthé. "Metro" is a name that originally comes from the incident of the quick walk to campus that the two men make after the first time they make love:

The next morning we were late for the same class.
We ran through the snow covering the ground,
slipping and falling along the way. I called him
Metro for the fast, slippery train we were on.
(101)

The specific meaning of the name, assigned to it by Jesse, is dual from the beginning. Not only is there reference to the immediate occurrence of walking to class, there is also the intimation of sexuality. It is this last signification that is developed throughout the text. Metro, moments before his rape, divulges the sexual meaning to the gang:

"Metro. Why do they call me Metro?" he goes,
talking to himself all out of his head now. . . .
"You wanna know why? I'll tell you why." His eyes
dart to all of us, locking us in a space he carries
inside for someone to fill. "You wanna know why,
Lonny? Cause I get down under. Underground.
Metro. Get it?" (63-64)

The sexual dimension of the name is extended throughout the text, signifying sexual energy. It also represents alienation, even the dangers of the city: "There was danger in the subway lights, whizzing by. Suddenly the screech of brakes and a long wail echoing through the dark. . . . The doors wouldn't open. The smoke got thick" (167). Metro/the subway signifies the slippery, sexual emancipation of anal sex. It is the place of isolation, the place, for Jesse, of thinking. Ultimately, he/it is a representation of the city itself: a place of sexual freedom, intense promiscuity, a constant movement without evaluation, and eventually death:

I couldn't help thinking how in just a short time the city had separated Metro and me. . . . I had lofts and mirrors and leotards and dance *barres* bending me one-two-three . . . and opening my thighs in deep *pliés*. Metro had the police files, the city morgue, night court three-alarm fires, subway mugging, and obituaries . . . even after making love, we were withdrawing to the opposite sides of the bed, the tiny bedroom, the three-room apartment, and finally the street. (44)

Metro is an opposition to, an antithesis of, Jesse. He is not to be imitated, but he is to be understood. It is Jesse who is locked into a connection with his mother; in reference to himself he repeats several times in the text: "Boys who are named after their mothers are different" (101). It is Jesse who calls his mother at the very end of the narrative to ask the significance of the name she has given to him:

I asked if she had really wanted a girl. She said no, she hadn't wanted a girl.

"Then why did you give me your name?"
 "Jesse's in the Bible. It's a man's name. My name isn't your name. Don't blame your troubles on me."
 "But our names are the same."
 "I'm Jessica. You're Jesse. You're a man. Act like one." (165)

The significance of the inquiry is Jesse's need to hear the words that will set him free from his obsession with himself as a "feminized" man, to help him interpret and limit the duration of the returning images of his dressing in his mother's clothes and his sense that that has, in some way, marked and prescribed his experience as a man who is homosexual. This is one of the bondages from which Jesse will eventually free himself.

Throughout, Dixon develops several senses of ambiguity and juxtaposition in the non-simplistic sexualities represented in the text. The text depicts the tension generated by male homosexual desire and the definitions of masculinity. This tension seems most clearly represented in the narrative of the character Lonny and in the pattern of intrigue, violence, and repression in the gang. Although the same tension and pattern are delineated in the character of Jesse, the larger tension in him is one of sexual inhibition: the subtle inability fully to participate in the multiple erotic pleasures of the body, to refuse the egalitarian option of partner pluralities, and to define specific geographical places as outside the sphere of his sexual practice. What attracts Jesse to Jon-Michael Barthé (Metro) is a sexual energy that he sees in Jon-Michael

Barthé and in which he participates, but in which, ultimately, he is not able to maintain himself. Clement (Clementine) envisions what it is that forces Metro to move outside the apartment and away from Jesse; it is the sexual inhibition that is not examined by Jesse until after the death of Metro. Jesse's understanding of sensual/sexual potentials is forthcoming from the wisdom of Clement, actually Jesse's guide through an evolution of sexual intensity and option. The dilemma in Jesse is, however, twofold: he is not able completely to express himself in the spaces/rooms used by Metro, but those spaces/rooms to which Metro would and does lead him are actually to be understood by him as a place of confinement. They are also the places of concealment, constructed by the political position of the hegemonic society. For Jesse there is a double bind. Metro, for Jesse, represents a particular sexual freedom and energy; he also represents, ultimately, a hegemonic enslavement.

The first chapter of the text is a narrative within the mind of Jesse. The very first sentence in the novel is a focus on Metro: "Metro wasn't his real name, but I called him that" (3). The meaning of the sentence is threefold: first, the narrative consciousness is focused on a person other than himself; second, what Metro represents is that which remains important to Jesse after his long sexual evolution. He does not abandon Metro and what he represents; they are incorporated into the final dance and

envisioned as the man Jesse will free to himself. Third, the renaming of Jon-Michael Barthé as Metro, and the centering of the text on what that occurrence represents, brings an immediate concentration on the intense eroticism and sexuality that are developed associations and meanings of Metro (who moves fast underground). He represents an emancipation from confinements (multiple sexual partners and the claiming of multiple geographical spaces for sexual activity) and the participator in anal sex, indicative of a subversive politics and an intense eroticism. In these senses the person, Metro, is both a kind of sexuality and a particular political position. The first sentence and the naming of Metro are an articulation of the centrality of sexuality in the text.

The narrative of the novel begins with the event of Jesse and Metro emerging into the air and sun from the warehouse to which Metro has summoned him. Metro is dissipated: "his hands were shaking with a chill" (3). And for Jesse the sexual encounter in the warehouse has not been pleasant; the language subtly suggests an unpleasantness: "The salt flavor of his skin left my mouth and my lips dried" (3). The conversation in this event includes one uttered statement, spoken by Jesse to Metro: "I don't want to meet here again, Metro. Promise me" (4). A second statement made by Jesse is addressed to the reader: "He scared me" (5). What is to be observed in Dixon's introductory representation of Jesse is his separation from

the erotic intensity, freedom in space, and egalitarian spirit of Metro, his actual fear of what Metro, sexually and politically, is. Ultimately, the reader will know that this separation and fear of Metro and the resulting isolation for Metro from Jesse, who is not able to participate in a sexual fullness, contributes to Metro's unhappiness and destruction. Thus, the function of Metro is complex and not static.

The dance is a displacement of sexual energy for Jesse. In his description of himself at the studio we have a language that would seem to be descriptive of a sexual act, specifically that sexual act which is politically problematic for the "masculinized" male. In the displaced sexual ritual, Jesse feels himself equal to the sexuality of Jesse, to which he is not equal in sexual actuality:

I stretched onto the floor for a few warm-ups, then stood with my stomach held in tight. My thighs eased open in *demi-plié*. I breathed deeply, calmly, and pulled myself up. On *releve* I felt as tall as Metro, my hands as broad as his. (5)

Thus, within the safe sphere of the dance studio, the thighs ease open in the aesthetic ritual of ballet. The sexual energy, restrained in the warehouse with Metro, is redirected into the artistic, and Jesse hopes that no one will know where he has been: "The other dancers would not suspect a thing" (5). In this safe sphere of the aesthetic, Jesse becomes equal with Metro. For Jesse, the dance becomes an inversion or reversal of physical direction.

Also, one might argue, that finally (the reality is an evolution), in the novel, the dance is an assimilation of the sexual/sensual into an aesthetic form. At this same time, Jesse connects with Ruella, who will function as a source of succor for him: a person with whom he can dance, the listener for his narration of the nature of his relationship with Metro, the source of questions, and the person who is able to act when Jesse is not. She is similar, but not the same, to Celia, in Leavitt's story, "A Place I've Never Been," and similar to May Bartram, in James' story, "The Beast in the Jungle." Both of the women are sexless companions for male protagonists who are struggling with their homosexuality. In the process of being life-long companions to sexually ambivalent men, they abandon their own sexuality. Ruella is a representation of such a woman. Except when one questions what value there might be in the relationship for Ruella, the reader sees that Dixon has constructed a value. She, with the help of that man to whom she gives help, is able to resolve her conflict with her brother and to be of help to him. What is more, through Jesse and her brother she is able to meet a new lover, Abdul, an African-American who has been in prison. A physical and sexual element also exists, for a short time, in the relationship between Ruella and Jesse. Thus, Dixon's described woman escapes the political position of the other two women who lose out to the men who need them, to rescue and preserve them from their homosexuality.

As Dixon develops the incident, Ruella acquires a lover (Abdul) and compassionately resolves her familial conflicts (specifically with her brother). These two gifts have been acquired through her friendship with Jesse. In Vanishing Rooms, Dixon constructs, between Ruella and Jesse, an egalitarian relationship. It is quite a different representation of a woman than the representation in the stories by Leavitt and James, in which the women are essentially subservient to the male characters, focused on their evolutions into life or nonlife. It is important to note that the dance that is performed by Ruella and Jesse is complex in its representation:

We sank into a pile, rose up close together. Our tights made our thighs one black pillar, and our Afros became one head. . . . Quickly on the beat, we changed sides for the last wailing chord, then held firm as two sides of one body, one voice, both of us dancing from whatever we made visible on the floor. (8)

What is made visible through the language is a phallus and/or an image of androgynous, egalitarian aesthetic expression. That which is to be expressed in the dance can not be expressed without the two dancers, one a man and the other a woman. What connects the two is a sensuality and an artistic form. Eventually, after Jesse begins to make recovery from the death of Metro and through the guidance of Ruella and Clementine, the dance that he desires to perfect, the dance performed by Ruella and Jesse, will be danced with

another male, significantly a black male. (The dance as representational motif will be discussed later.)

Later, when Jesse has been informed of the murder of Metro and he is staying at Ruella's apartment, he will, through his nightmares, be forced to reflect on the incidents of violence against him and, more significantly and completely, against Metro. The violence against him is, essentially, a verbal attack, a marking of difference through language, but the gang is in pursuit of Jesse:

One time they spotted me and yelled, first one, then another until I was trapped.

"Hey, nigger."

"Yeah, you."

"Naw, man, he ain't no nigger. He a faggot."

"Then he a black nigger faggot." (15)

Juxtaposed to this memory is Jesse's memory of Metro assuring him that they were safe. Later, making love: "And we made love slowly, deliberately, believing we were doing something right" (15). The textual proximity of the incident of making love and the incident of verbal attack intensifies the opposition of the two incidents, obviously valorizing the decency and humanity of the act of making love. Love is a consummation of desire, while the verbal attack is a violent repression, in Dixon's presentation, of desire. The violence against Metro is accomplished through this rape and then murder by the gang:

Before the morgue's cold darkness had sucked me in, I had seen the gashes like tracks all over Metro's belly and chest. His open eyes were questions I couldn't answer. I couldn't say a word. The

officer pulled the sheet all the way back and turned the body over where his ass had been slashed raw. I knew why he had been killed. I tried to scream but had no wind. I needed air. That's when I must have hit the floor. I could still see those gashes. They opened everywhere, grooves of flesh and blood, lips slobbering with kisses. (13)

This reflection presents the first images of violence that represent the genocide of the homosexual, the elimination of that evidence which would affirm the homosexual desire of the street gang, the abhorrence on the part of that gang of the passivity in sexual experience, and the complex construction of the sexual act as aggression and dominance, completely object-centered (nonhuman, not centered on a complete person, but on only one anatomical area). The anal rape and the murder destroy, in the minds of the attackers, the feminized male. The victim is the demasculinized male, the male who has lost his dominance, and, thus, betrays all other males. The rape and the murder become the articulation of sexual desire. The text develops the subtle evolution of this desire in the gang members as they hang out, drinking and arousing themselves, focusing their talk on homosexuality, teasing Lonny about the homosexual who has spoken to him. At the same time, the rape and murder function to purge the homosexual desire of the gang and to reestablish the political dominance of the male through a supremacist masculinity. Jesse's projected reconstruction of the act articulates that position: "I could hear them, making each prove himself a man -- 'I ain't no faggot. Not me, man' -- and drawing blood" (15). The homosexual rape

resembles the heterosexual group sex event of the gang, during which members of the gang do not speak to the prostitute. Cuddles makes the financial arrangement with the prostitute, an anatomical object and dehumanized: "'Forget about the woman,' Cuddles says. 'I just want some snatch'" (33).

In the second section narrated by Jesse, Dixon focuses the representation of the relationship on a specific sexuality that is evolving for Metro. Jesse says, "I knew he was cruising and sleeping around. . . . But he started wanting more than I could give" (43). It is at this point in the novel that Jesse relates the incident at the warehouse, specifically indicating what the place means to him as well as to Metro. The question is how is the reader to understand Dixon's attitude toward the warehouse and what it represents sexually. Bersani, in his article "Is the Rectum a Grave?" elaborates on the matter of the life-style of the homosexual as represented in the activities of the baths, bars with back rooms, and warehouses; i.e., those places that provide opportunities of a sexuality that is difficult to define without a judgmental position emerging in the language of the definition.

Bersani makes reference to Dennis Altman's interpretation of "the baths" in Altman's book The Homosexualization of America, The Americanization of the Homosexual. Bersani states:

I do not for example, find it helpful to suggest, as Dennis Altman has suggested, that gay baths created "a sort of Whitmanesque democracy, a desire to know and trust other men in a type of brotherhood far removed from the male bondage of rank, hierarchy, and competition that characterize much of the outside world." Anyone who has ever spent one night in a gay bathhouse knows that it is (or was) one of the most ruthlessly ranked, hierarchized, and competitive environments imaginable. Your looks, muscles, hair distribution, size of cock, and shape of ass determined exactly how happy you were going to be during those few hours, and rejection, generally accompanied by two or three words at most, could be swift and brutal, with none of the civilizing hypocrisies with which we get rid of undesirables in the outside world. (206)

Ironically, is it appropriate to mention the fact that in the warehouse one might not be able to see what is being gotten, perhaps eliminating the rejection, but the "sexual rituals" continue on the outside, in the sunlight out on the piers; certainly there one knows, once again, what is being gotten or rejected. It would seem that, in the mind of Metro, the warehouse is a representation of a sexuality that is egalitarian and erotically intense. He speaks the words that affirm that concept, but Dixon, significantly, tempers or alters the conceptualizing of the words by describing Metro's "stance" as he utters them:

Metro looked away from me, disappointed. Then his eyes brightened. He started to laugh. "Don't you see? All this is part of it, what we came to New York for. The streets, the sweat, beer and cigarettes. And here? You'd walk in, any body would walk in, hands hooked in the belt, your jeans torn just so around the crotch. You'd lean against the wood, and I'd find you, smell you waiting there. I'd kneel just so, and you'd talk dirty to me." He laughed again and his voice chilled me. I

couldn't tell if he was serious or not, and that scared me all the more. (Dixon 43)

The two laughs forthcoming from Metro signify a particular attitude or position of his toward what he has just said. The same type of laugh is reported by Lonny when he tells of the rape and murder of Metro. He is talking out loud to himself about the meaning of his name:

"You wanna know why, Lonny? Cause I get down under Underground. Metro. Get it?" Then he laughs a high, faggoty laugh. And I don't know him anymore. (64)

The reader wonders if this is a "camp" response to the question of identity: an articulation of the anticipated response from the hegemonic society, a humorous diminishment of the homosexual position. If this is the case, the laugh is an affirmation and a celebration of the language and sexual position articulated. An alternative reading of what Metro says would be the reading that Lonny makes. There is a change in Metro; he is a victim of his intense homosexual pursuits and the laugh is a sardonic, bitter assessment of what his life has become. When the reader places Lonny's response next to Jesse's response to the experience with Metro at the warehouse, Dixon's position seems to emerge. Metro's pursuit of intense erotic experience is destructive, but this does not reduce Metro to a constructed type; he is not just two-dimensional, and he certainly represents an acceptance of his homosexuality. He has a friendly openness toward other people (for example, toward Lonny), but his

preoccupation with the marginalized space provided by hegemonic society, and his constant use of drugs, bring him to the dark alley, the literal place of death.

Jesse's perception of the warehouse as a place of communal, erotic sexuality is different. The necessary task for the reader is to determine, if possible, the judgmental position of Dixon on this important matter. Dixon's position will become clearer as he continues to delineate the tension between Jesse and Metro. At this point in the narrative, Jesse's response to the warehouse is negative:

"But this place stinks," I said. "It's dangerous. You can't even see anyone." And I couldn't see anyone, but I heard footsteps and whispers, saw glowing cigarette butts, the fast flame of a match. . . . The whole place looked like it could collapse in a minute. . . . But I was the one who felt empty, filling up with loss. I couldn't help thinking how in just a short time the city had separated Metro and me. (43)

In the next section of the text in which Dixon centers on the consciousness of Jesse, Dixon introduces the complication that has emerged in Jesse's connection to Ruella: "Her hands keep sticking to me. Pulling on me. Holding fast" (87). She has offered herself to him sexually, complicating for Jesse what was to be only a relationship of refuge: "Running away from Ruella who was a refuge no longer, not Rooms anymore" (86). At this point there is a recovery on the part of Jesse, a strengthening of his resolve to understand the sexuality of Metro and his connection to it. He does not return to the warehouse to do

this; he has pursued a sexuality in the back rooms of bookstores, from which he is also running. What he can be to Ruella and what she can be to him is limited, and the encounters in the bookstores are not satisfying for him. At this point, Dixon introduces the Paradise Baths: "this establishment, seven floors and only a subway ride away at the edge of Chelsea and the Village, is different. You have a choice of rooms" (88). At the baths one has a choice of sexual activities.

Dixon introduces at this point Clement (Clementine), who functions as Jesse's guide at the baths. Clementine is "camp," representing an attitude toward all that he does as a homosexual, and all that he knows about homosexuality, that represents the stereotyped attitudes of the hegemonic society. This is a precarious attitude that possesses the dual potential to serve and destroy, simultaneously, the homosexual position; it is a mask, a perspective, put on and off, changed, a complex ritual. "Camp" does not seduce another homosexual, or any man. It is an attitude toward homosexuality manifested when the homosexual is not interested in sex -- "making it." The acting out and speaking in "camp" is a political activity; it is this complex dimension that Dixon introduces in his construction of Clementine who, in essence, is a parody of homosexuality. "Camp" may be an authentic, face-saving device in a sexual world where one may be unattractive, in decline, or no longer anyone's fantasy. Clementine, even with Jesse, slips

out of "camp," becoming a lucid, clear commentator on the personal histories of homosexuals and the grim realities of the baths, themselves, as represented by Dixon. They are stylized sexual rituals, connected in precise ways to the histories of homosexuals, from adolescence to adulthood: a private boys' camp, college dormitory room, military barracks, prison, and culminating in a fantastic room of mirrors in which the image of the coupling men is reflected to infinity. The Paradise Baths are a place of imagination and fantasy, as Clementine indicates:

" . . . you can imagine the steam is the low fog over Lake Deerfield and you rub your canoe up against any shore and hope it takes you in. Like that one, or him, or him. Reach out, honey. Touch ground. Get down and dirty like you want to be under the cover of night or fog or any other dream you have. It's all here." (92)

Certainly in this place, Dixon represents the emancipation of the body. There is a freedom for the participator in the joys of erotic sports, resembling that description of the baths that appears in Michael Rumaker's A Day and a Night at the Baths. However, Rumaker's text does not stylize the ritual. In his text, the experience of the day and the night, which is for the protagonist his first trip to the baths, is a pleasure of great significance. After his final sexual encounter he states:

It hit me that it really didn't matter that I would probably never lay eyes on him again: the sea in his eyes and the salt bite of him, the light he radiated that illuminated me in these brief moments, would stay with me, lighten me in the dark

days. I could hold all the unexpected visitations throughout my day here, like gifts, always, in any dark times to come. (Rumaker 78)

There is not this same representation in Dixon's treatment of the baths; they are not a place of emancipation or a place where one receives "gifts" that will bring repeated pleasure "in any dark days to come."

Soon after arriving at the baths, when he is with Clementine, Jesse imagines that he sees Metro:

We reached the next flight of stairs and there I saw the movement of thick, square thighs, calves, a towel tight on a firm, mushrooming torso. Hair wavy and brown, pale skin glistening in the half dark. . . . "Metro," I said. . . . "That guy looks like Metro." (93)

The significance of this brief passage is in its connection to the meaning of Metro's sexuality for Jesse. What follows is an intense remembrance of the first impression that Jesse had of the body of Metro, obviously that physical and sexual image which drew Jesse to Metro. Thus, Dixon describes the bathhouse as a place that is both the place of imagined fetish -- the place where the ultimate desire from within the imagination is fulfilled (the fulfilling itself is a stylized ritual which diminishes the sexual act because of its human void. All the men are actors. Unless Dixon is suggesting that the fulfillment of intense sexual desire is to be perceived always as something outside the sphere of a bonding human intimacy) -- and the place where Jesse is drawn back to the strong sexuality that he knew with Metro,

but was not able to maintain because of his own inhibitions and fears. It is significant to note that it is in the baths that Jesse encounters the image of Metro. In the final room at the baths, where Jesse sleeps, he dreams of Metro. The dream is represented in a short, imaginary conversation that may be constructed from an actual conversation that Jesse had with Metro early in his relationship with him:

"Why do you call me Metro?"
 "You were in France. Once."
 "Why do you call me Metro?"
 "You've been places where I want to go."
 "Why do you call me Metro?"
 "Take me, baby. Take me underground."
 "Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?" (112)

The answer to this question, in this place of promiscuous sexuality, would obviously be no. The answer that might be given is interrupted by the return of Clementine. However, the significance in the imagined conversation (Metro is Jesse's fantasy at the baths) is that Jesse's sexual desire is connected to what Metro represents: "underground" -- a sexual freedom and an intense eroticism that Jesse has not attained. Also, significantly, the sexual act is put within the sphere of love. When Clementine returns again and propositions Jesse, Jesse leaves the baths, and Clementine shouts from the window "You mine, nigger" (115). This demonstrates the easy transference of the "slavery sexuality" of which Metro accused Jesse and in which Metro himself participated, signifying a non-egalitarian sexuality

and a destructive embracing of the oppositional and destructive attitudes of hegemonic society. It shows that a homosexual can perform homosexual sex without accepting the legitimacy of his act. The baths also signify that stage in homosexual evolution that is sex-focused, seeking the consummation of sexual desire. Evolution continues to a more complete relationship, a relationship, perhaps even public, that is complicated in a society that prohibits it. Nevertheless, little encouragement exists for the homosexual to form a permanent relationship in heterosexual, hegemonic society. Dixon uses "slave" to signify that homosexual whose sexual authenticity is owned and distorted by the dominant society. That society is a "room" of confinement in which Jesse lives, and in which, even though he exercises a sexual prowess, Metro also lives. Society has constructed the response that the homosexual will make to his sexual act: self-contempt and hatred, generating that man who at some perplexing level of consciousness submits to his own, hegemonic genocide. Jesse, in his journey to sexuality, leaves the baths and returns to the warehouse where he last saw Metro alive:

I walked quickly, mindlessly, until I came to the subway. The smell of burning electricity turned me right around, and I was back on the street, not knowing where I'd go next. But there was only one place I could go, the battered room Metro and I shared the last time I saw him alive. I wasn't Metro's nigger, or Clementine's. I was my own beautiful black son of a bitch. (116)

Once he is in the warehouse he experiences the remembered conversation (we are to assume) from his last visit. In his return to that place of splinters, the conversation exists as voices in the present, enabling Jesse to relive the time, and ultimately historically to reconstruct it. In that reconstruction, he sets himself free and sets Metro free: neither will be a community to the other; neither will be the other's slave:

"Jesse, Oh, Jesse. I knew you'd come."
 "Do you love me, Metro?"
 "Call me baby," he said drowsily.
 "Is that why you asked me here? Just to call
 you baby?" (116)

The last line in the conversation implies the desire for sex. The line that follows the conversation indicates both the fulfillment of that desire at that time, and the possible fulfillment of that desire again. It is an anonymous sexual act, revealing the sexuality that was a part or the center of Metro's life. At this moment Jesse participates in a mimetic pattern, reliving the sexual experience with Metro and experiencing the egalitarian erotic with one of the bodies that moves forward in the darkness: "It wasn't always like this, I told myself. A quick fuck in an abandoned warehouse" (116). The paragraph concludes with a reference back in time to the last sexual experience he had with Metro; it is a judgment against Metro.

Then there was something strange and desperate about him. But I showed him, didn't I? I showed him who the real nigger was. I kept my hand closed over my palm. I wouldn't let him smell it. (116)

There are two actualities manifested in this incident as well as the remembered incident. Jesse is not free, and he deprives the object/subject of his desire, punitively, by refusing to grant to Metro that which he knows to be a part of Metro's desire: the scent in his palm -- a fetish -- which always incorporates in the moment of pleasure the desired pleasure from Metro's childhood (when he carried back into the city, after visiting the children of his family's maid in the country, the smell of one of the boys with whom he had shaken hands):

His name was Otis, Berthe [the maid] said, and the boys shook hands. On the ride back home, Metro told me, he kept smelling woodsmoke and tobacco. And when his mother wasn't looking, he sniffed, then tasted, where Otis's hand had touched his.
(41)

Thus, the greater intimacy desired is refused. The sensuality of the palm of the hand, the scent and the taste, is representative of a profound desire and connection that Metro has made to male object/body. The refusal to grant to Metro the sensuality he desires is an act of control and power on the part of Jesse.

From this remembered incident Jesse returns to the present. He has fled the baths and returned to the warehouse, the last place he saw Metro alive. Dixon's purpose in this is to make obvious the remembered

incompleteness in the relationship that Jesse has had with Metro. Dixon shows Jesse's own sexual incompleteness and the non-connection, love and desire, he had with Metro. This section concludes with a voice calling out to him; it is Ruella who has come to find him. Significantly she interrupts any sexual encounter that might have occurred if he had been left alone. After the death of Metro, Dixon does not construct any male homosexual encounter for Jesse, consistent to his sexual ambiguity and diminishment, and also consistent to a focus on his part to understand what his relationship to Metro has been.

In the fourth articulation of Jesse's voice, Dixon focuses on two early sexual elements in Jesse's life. First, there is the connection between Jesse and his mother, including the early acts of cross-dressing; second, Dixon depicts images of early sexual attraction and episodes of sexual violence which include dominance and association of homosexuality with the feminine. The cross-dressing is only briefly developed:

I tried saying things with her clothes. Touching, then wearing them. The feel of nylon on my skin was electric. I'd go into the bathroom when everyone had left the house and search through the hamper for any discarded dress, bra, stocking, or scarves. I wondered how girls grew to fill them with the softest flesh. I tried old socks and underwear. Then I danced. . . . And when I felt almost fully the woman or young girl I had become so magically, I'd dab just a little rouge on my lips and cheeks. . . . And I'd dance again and again until sweat streaked my brown face like an African mask, and I'd stutter in short whimpers of pleasure in a voice not even my own. (161)

The language evidences a metamorphosis, Jesse becoming, essentially, the object of desire for the male. Obviously, for the evolving adolescent Jesse, the earliest longing of homosexual desire is understood to be fulfilled by and accessible through a mimetic accession of a typical gender role/behavior. This behavior manifests itself in gesture and dress which is erotic. More importantly, it is understood to be the only way Jesse is able to gain access to the minds and sexual interests of other men. Jesse also, at this point, relates the incident of "trick or treating" with friends of his, all dressed like women. Their behavior receives recognition and approval by the women who answer the door. Later, in describing this incident, Jesse speaks of the friend, Micki, who submits to anal sex at the crude urging of an older male friend, Al:

"Just relax. It ain't gonna hurt."
 "But . . . but . . ."
 "Look here, punk. You wanna be a bitch you better act like a bitch. Now pull them panties down." (163)

Jesse, at this moment of sexual articulation, hegemonically inscribed and constructed, is witness to male-male sex for the first time, although he can not actually see the boys who have gone behind a truck. The sounds arouse his own desire: "I would spend half my life wondering what was happening behind that truck and wanting whatever it was to happen to me" (163). The following year he has two homosexual experiences. In one he is the recipient in anal

sex; in the other, he is made to dance with a scarf, by a man who masturbates while watching him dance. In both of these incidents the adolescent sexuality is brutal, not humane, compassionate, or loving. In the first, "I didn't even know his name" (164). In the second, Jesse is feminized; the male says: "I want to see how much of a woman you can be. . . . Dance, you bitch. You black son-of-a-bitch" (165). What Jesse perceives is his confinement as a homosexual in this type of gender-mimetic expression: "And I was trapped longer than I cared to know in my mother's hamper heap of bras and panties and flowered blouses. Trapped in imitation silk and rosewater, with no exit from the mirror frosted with the breath from my dance" (165). The language suggests that this imitation of behavior is a part of the evolution of Jesse's sexuality, and that it must be abandoned. It is at this point in the novel, after the subway fire when Jesse leads himself and Ruella to safety, that he realizes he is ready to leave Ruella. The meaning of the incidents is a masculinizing of homosexuality on the part of Jesse (and Dixon). There also emerges a discomfort with the passive and submissive role that leads to degradation and humiliation. This section contains a significant evolution in the consciousness of Jesse: a masculinizing and dignifying of homosexuality. Significantly, also, Dixon disconnects Jesse from women. In the final section of the text, presented through Jesse's sensibility, he will perform his dance with a man, a black

man, not a woman. The text is a narration of evolution (in which a woman has been a significant part of the evolution) to an acceptance of the maleness/masculinity of homosexuality. It is an evolution to a sexuality that is not degrading or humiliating, including a freedom from all of the racist elements in his sexual encounters and relationships with white men. The accomplishment is not a valorizing of man over woman or masculine over feminine; rather, it is a participation in homosexuality without the negative inscriptions of hegemonic society.

In the fifth section of the text, comprised of the changing consciousness of Jesse, the sexual consciousness is articulated through the dance. Dixon uses this aesthetic form throughout the text to signify the evolution in sexuality that occurs for Jesse. However, it is not an alternative to sexual activity; it is a form that expresses the sensuality of the body and the mode through which Jesse is able to express with his body (an art form) the understandings, changes, and awareness that have come to him. Initially, the dance represents an aesthetic distance from the body; it is an escape from the sexuality of the warehouse. In the fifth section of the text, the dance incorporates the body and sexuality, and expresses both elements. The body is the dance; the dance is the body. Through it an art form is constructed, and through that art form a homosexuality is expressed. Dixon focuses the political positions of the text. Justice demands homosexual

articulation; injustice is homophobic repression. There must be complete physical response of the homosexual to his homosexuality: there can be no denial of sexual consummation. Unconsummated homosexuality makes a society unhealthy.

At the beginning of the section, Jesse is unable to communicate to Ruella what the dance is about. Throughout the text Ruella has indicated to Jesse that whatever he has told her about Metro was incomplete. Despite her sensitive inquiries, and the fact that she has listened to Jesse speak of Metro and Jesse's relationship with him, she is excluded from a consciousness of the final understanding achieved by Jesse, of both his sexuality and of Metro. It is the understanding of the dance, the "A Train," that eludes her.

My dance was about the A train, how close it ran
between darkness and light. It wasn't about Metro
dying or wanting to die at all. And it wasn't, as
she said, about the only kind of travel I knew.
(195)

This is a significant disconnection, established by Dixon, between Ruella and Jesse. When Ruella, with whom Jesse has had a sexual relationship as well as a relationship of nurturing companionship, senses the new interest that Jesse has in the other black male dancer, Rodney, she informs Jesse that he must leave her. Dixon, at the same time, has introduced the black man who was in prison with Ruella's brother, and with whom, the text indicates, her brother has had a temporary homosexual

relationship. This new man, Abdul, and Ruella are sexually attracted to each other. In this summation, in the text, Dixon achieves sexual resolution and companionship for the two black characters, Ruella and Jesse. He also, importantly, constructs a sexual fluidity. The oppositional structure of heterosexuality and homosexuality is mitigated. In this sense the text is a construction of sexualities through which the characters evolve and in which they move with comfort, eliminating the political perception of one sexuality or the other. However, for both Lonny and Jesse the evolution must necessarily be to a homosexuality. As for Abdul, the choice of Ruella as a love/sex object is an indication of an emergent, antithetical, dominant desire. It is important, however, to emphasize that for both Abdul and Jesse acknowledging sexuality in other than their dominant-desire mode is not traumatic for them. Obviously, Dixon is diminishing social attitudes and positions pertaining to the matter of sexual fixity.

There is also the language ("my dance was about the A train, how close it ran between darkness and light" (195)), which signifies the absolutely precarious journey of the homosexual in modern society. It is a dangerous trip to self-discovery and expression. Dragons wait by the side of the road. Throughout the text, Dixon develops imagery of the train system in New York; it is a source of transportation, escape (Jesse rides the trains), a place of danger with its smell of hot electricity, and a

representation of sexuality. It is through Metro that the sexual connection is established: he "goes under." Dixon establishes in the train imagery and in the dance imagery the sense of movement, change, and the construction of a different geographical position. The text is about fluidity and movement, about change that is always accomplished in a milieu that is hostile. In the urban fiction of Baldwin, Rumaker, Armistead Maupin, John Rechy, and Dixon (the list is incomplete), there is a construction of the city itself as opposition or danger. The urban centers to which large numbers of male homosexuals have migrated provide opportunity for easier sexual contact than the small cities and rural areas of America. In the work of the writers mentioned, the cities are also places of violence and danger, resulting in part from the way characters express themselves in the city (the assumption is that they would be more discreet and less open in small towns), thus generating a response to their identities. As the male homosexual comes out of the country, the closet, the small town, into the large city, he is "out" -- visible. It is the visibility, never the invisibility, that generates the hostile expression of the homophobic society. Crime and violence put the very lives of such homosexuals in danger. Thus, sexual freedom and encounter, in the societal construct of that freedom and encounter, remains a confinement and threat. Certainly, in Baldwin's Giovanni's Room and Dixon's Vanishing Rooms, both authors construct,

within the urban geography of freedom spaces of confinement, rooms in which all is held back from the darkness which is hostile to and destructive of homosexuality. Such "safe rooms" are places of great deception and illusion; they are, essentially, closets.

In this section of the text, Dixon develops Jesse's perception of Metro's connection to or understanding of black people. Jesse is established as the accurate reader of Metro, who is able to perceive a racist element in Metro which is, in the final section of Jesse's narrative, understood by the reader as a device of deprecation that Metro uses against Jesse and himself. Throughout the text Dixon depicts Metro as being curious about black people, from the initial meeting at the Malcolm X rally, to the incident when Metro calls Jesse a "nigger," to the third (and final) incident when the two of them take the wrong train and arrive in Harlem. Metro wants to stay, but Jesse is uncomfortable and they leave. Later, Metro goes back by himself. The language of the text makes clear three attitudes within Metro toward black people. First, he is sensually attracted to blacks:

Once he had shaken the tobacco-stained hands of a sharecropper's boy, the son of his mother's maid. And he rode all the way home smelling his hand and knowing how hungry he suddenly was for the rough love they held. The first night we spent together, all he wanted to do was sleep with his nose pressed to the part in my hair. He said my smell came from the soil. (209)

The motivation for the sensual and (finally) sexual attraction is not clearly developed. What seems to be suggested is an enigmatic eroticism: it is the black body which is attractive to Metro. Certainly, in the image just cited, there is the suggestion of the oppositional attraction of the urban for the rural. But the attraction seems to be literally deeper than that of the soil -- "underground," an anticipation of sexual profundity, a desire for sexual connection to another man. Second, Metro is curious about blacks. Ultimately, this dimension of attraction may relate to the first. Although Metro covers the Malcolm X celebration where he meets Jesse because it is an assignment for his newspaper, he is not without a curiosity and concern for what has happened to the black students. This same curiosity takes him to Harlem by himself. His desire is to know "the other" -- to become conscious of that which is different from himself. Such pursuit, as established by Dixon, seems noble and a source of enrichment for Metro. But third, in the process of being diminished by the city (a diminishment only suggested, not elucidated by Dixon) Metro, in his contempt for his sexuality, his own mockery of his sexuality, assaults the affections of Jesse, the object of his love and homosexual desire, with the word "nigger." Thus, his hatred of his homosexuality generates a hatred for that which is central in his articulation of that homosexuality; his motivation for the assault is an acceptance of a hegemonic abhorrence

of the homosexual act which he articulates in racist language. In his "evolution" he degenerates.

The final section of the text is comprised of the voice of Jesse. This section is devoted to dance, which is an aesthetic triumph that expresses the acquired understanding that Jesse has of his relationship to Metro (an actual source of white oppression for him). Jesse also understands Lonny (a source of oppression for Metro and Jesse and all homosexuals is that man who represses his sexuality through a violence that assaults and destroys the attracting object). Included is the telling, at last, of the final conversation between Metro and Jesse, presenting information always suspected by Ruella of being withheld, which discloses the destruction of Metro and his transference of the term "nigger" to himself. Thus, Dixon makes clear the acceptance on the part of Metro of the hegemonic vision of the lesser act, that which is to be devalorized. In the homosexual relationship, someone must be bad, the embodiment of the contamination, the representation of the contagion of evil; someone must be the "nigger" in the language, never of Jesse, but always of Metro. In the nonmemitic position, the nonconforming man is perceived by himself to be the outcast, the lesser. This is the predicament of Metro.

These three attitudes are perceived as the essence of Metro, who is the object of Jesse's affection. The three are a mixture of that which both constructs and destroys the

self and others. Metro has not escaped the hegemonic contamination.

In the last section of the book, dealing with Jesse's point of view, Dixon exerts the freedom and the compassion of Jesse. Jesse understands the destructive entrapment of Metro and, at the same time, would free him from his own trap. Metro begins the dialogue:

"I won't call you nigger ever again. I'll be your nigger. I'm not a white mother fucker. I'm not."

"Who called you that?"

"They did. Out there. In here. What's the difference?"

. . . "And what does that make me, huh? Another nigger, huh." And before I realized it I was shaking him, slapping him, knocking him about the head. He started to cry. I felt his mouth curl up, the tears cascade. I licked them dry. I held him in my arms. "You don't need it like this, baby. Not like this."

"Hold me," he said, pressing my hands to his cheek, making me feel him all over. (210)

Dixon parallels the dance that Jesse has created with his final articulation of his political position with and knowledge of Metro. Speaking of the dance, Jesse says:

My muscles panted loudly with the dancers, my spine arched up and wide. "Touch me. Hold me," my body said from the distance. (210)

The source of homosexual self-hatred of the body is heterosexual, hegemonic society. Metro would have Jesse, in his touch, reconfigure the meaning of his body. These are the words that Jesse remembers. The act, accomplished in the warehouse, is ritualized in dance. This short passage

reflects an accomplishment in understanding and mutual compassion. The conflict that Dixon has created between the two lovers -- black and white -- is resolved just prior to the death of Metro; the resolution is initiated by Jesse in response to Metro's great need, a kind of redemption from the hegemonic forces of oppression, marking, diminishing and ultimately, in this text, killing:

The fourth wall broke open into a gathering wave of hands clapping. Pools of sweat dotted the stage. The applause showered over me. The dancers stood proud, erect. Then quickly, the fourth wall burst into light and the room holding us there vanished.
(211)

The focus is on the necessary dissolution of mimetic practice and hegemonic inscription. Jesse is a representation of that homosexual man who turns away from marginalization, racial capitulation, a life concentrated on sexual articulation as fetish. Dixon constructs a new definition and articulation of homosexuality: the presentation of a body that exists in sexual and aesthetic movement, free from the social determination that resulted in the violent genocide of Metro.

Chapter V. The Reinscription of the Homosexual Body:
The Homosexual Text as Maneuver from Assassination
to Reinvention

A social vice makes a vice of my outspokenness. In France, this vice doesn't lead to the penitentiary, thanks to the longevity of the Code Napoleon and the morals of some magistrate. But I'm not willing just to be tolerated. That wounds my love of love and of liberty.

The White Paper, Jean Cocteau

Among those who have contributed to the literature of the western world one can identify many men who have written about homosexuality: Gide, Cocteau, Proust, Genet, Wilde, Forster, D.H. Lawrence, T.E. Lawrence, Orton, Melville, Whitman, Williams, Salinger, and Baldwin, to compile a brief list. Some of them were homosexual themselves. When D.H. Lawrence read the manuscript of A Passage To India, he detected something unclear in Forster's development of "friendship" between Aziz and Fielding and specifically asked Forster what he was trying to do with the two men. Forster could have responded with the same question for Lawrence and his novel, Women in Love, in which the underlying text is an elucidation of Birkin's desire for a union outside of marriage. Certainly, the intimate contact of the two men in the wrestling episode, naked and alone, represents a beginning of intimacy with another man. For Birkin, it is a physicalness, but exactly what this means to him is not clear, because Lawrence was not allowed to

develop this in his text. What Lawrence begins to delineate seems to suggest both a fluidity in sexual articulation and an element in that fluidity that would result in a homosexual union. The argument is that this relationship with another man would bring a balancing to marriage and allow the preservation of the inner being, the necessary polarity as David Cavitch identifies it in his essay, "On Women in Love" (in the anthology of criticism edited by Leo Hamlin (56)). The *Blutbruderschaft* is never allowed to become/to fructify. The rationale for such "thwarting" of what is desired in the life of Birkin and, it must be emphasized, in the "life" of the text, is Gerald's confusion over what it is that Birkin desires and how one goes about forming such a relationship when no model exists and when society prohibits male-male intimacy. Lurking with great energy behind the narrative, as delineated by Lawrence, is the reality of both prohibition and censorship; such desire is prohibited in British society and the representation of such desire is censored from the text. The awareness of such repression and alteration (often an alteration submitted to by such writers as Forster, Williams, and Lawrence, as inevitable necessity to having any work published) of texts representing homosexual desire, itself, might signal an urgent, social propriety to allow the incorporation of these visions into the tradition of the western world, thus enlarging intelligent consciousness. This would lead to recognizing the social tensions and

genocides that are the essence of heterosexual, hegemonic domination. That which is concealed, repressed, hidden, or made invisible is exactly that which must be revealed and included in the evolution of conscience and intelligence in western literary tradition. Thus, there must be creation of those legends that "own us," the "work that we are ourselves" -- that one story that constructs and articulates all human experience.

The texts that have been discussed in this study are narratives that represent, with their own particular clarity, the specificities of homosexual life. That life is marginalized in a society that does not encourage, make legal, tolerate, or provide significant models for imitation. The language Dollimore uses (in Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault, in his chapter on "Becoming Authentic") when he discusses other homosexual texts is applicable to the texts by White, Baldwin, and Dixon:

I do not regard these texts as deriving from a unified "gay" sensibility, nor do I see them as comprising a unique genre; rather they are loosely connected through shared representations of oppression, including self-oppression, desire, consciousness, conflict, misery, and occasionally, liberation. Considering such novels in the light of current preoccupation with marginality, I am struck by how, repeatedly, they focus the recurring dilemmas of the marginal, and especially the dilemma . . . which is the right strategy -- to engage in a radical critique of the dominant and thereby risk political annihilation (or at least permanent exclusion). (45)

Dollimore's comments refer, generally, to that collection of homosexual texts from Wilde and Gide to Baldwin; specifically, to Marguerite Radclyffe Hall's The Well of Loneliness and Rita Mae Brown's Rubyfruit Jungle. They trace the evolution of homosexual consciousness and the journey to "authenticity" represented in his text, Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault. What is true of those two texts by women about women that is true about the three texts by men about men, in this study, is the presence in these three novels of "the radical critique of the dominant" and their possible "permanent exclusion" from most courses in western literature and from any "legitimate" list of texts that represent the American "tradition." One might be hopeful that texts engaged in the representation of hegemonic society and a "radical critique" of that society might inform all readers of the genocidal/omnicidal dominant force and, in so doing, function to maneuver change that brings about a greater justice and allows authenticity and the survival of homosexuals and all humans.

In addition to the list of common characteristics of the texts pointed out by Dollimore, the texts by White, Baldwin, and Dixon are representations of the ways in which "the dominant society" is perceived by homosexual writers as inscribing the meanings of homosexuality on the body of the homosexual, both in the sense of actual understandings/

misunderstandings of homosexuality and the profound effect of those misunderstandings to move homosexual persons from the center of human life and human embrace to a marginal existence and dehumanizing sexual articulation. The texts, also, represent those evolutionary modes, systematic processes of consciousness, and political maneuverings that generate the prioritization and possession of the authentic homosexual body and homosexual desire.

I remain convinced that the literary text, the story, knows something; it then becomes a way of knowing. So, it might be assumed that Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse, Mrs. Dalloway, and "Moments of Being" are texts that know a great deal about women; they are also texts that know a great deal about patriarchal, hegemonic society, and the ways in which men define what women are. Woolf deals with isolation, noble dreams for meaning and connection to other human beings, and sexuality, even homosexuality. Similarly, A Boy's Own Story, Giovanni's Room, and Vanishing Rooms are texts that know a great deal about hegemonic definition and oppression, desire and fulfillment, deceit and honesty: what it means to live with a sense of being inside the stream of humanity and what it means to live with a sense of being outside that stream. To hold up any book to students, to say "What does this text know?" Then to have them indicate a knowledge from the text, makes the text important in the society in which it exists. The knowledge in these texts represents a new stage in the evolution of inquiry,



focusing on the matters of gender-definition and sexual-identity and articulation. The author's source of the legends is the source of particular, significant, knowledge. The homosexual writer's fiction emerges out of his own history and observation of the homosexual life. The texts then become authentic representations of voices missing in the history and literary tradition of the western world -- representations/extensions of those texts that Lawrence, Forster, Williams, and others, known and unknown, were forced, from within or without, not to write.

White, Baldwin, and Dixon represent the contradiction between authentic desire and dominant, external, definitions and prohibitions. The representations of the texts of the experience of sexual evolution and articulation, not codified or minimized, is problematic for some readers, because they, themselves, are products of particular environments of oppression.

Lawrence's essay, "Pornography and Obscenity," printed in 1930, functions well as a lens through which one might look at the homosexual texts forming the frame and essence of this study. The homosexual predicament in the United States as represented in A Boy's Own Story, Giovanni's Room, and Vanishing Rooms is a tension between the "mob" and the "individual," as delineated by Lawrence in his comments on obscenity and the meaning of words:

When it comes to the meaning of anything, even the simplest word, then you must pause. Because there are two great categories of meaning, forever

separate. There is mob-meaning, and there is individual meaning. . . . The public is always exploited and always will be exploited. . . . Vox populi, vox Dei. It has always been so, and will always be so. Why? Because the public has not enough wit to distinguish between mob-meanings and individual meanings. The mass is forever vulgar, because it can't distinguish between its own original feelings and feelings which are diddled into existence by the exploiter. The public is always profane, because it is controlled from the outside, by the trickster, and never from the inside, by its own sincerity. (71-72)

Thus, the individual feeling/desire does not become for most people the seed to be sown and allowed to grow; instead, the member of society grows within the prescribed limits established by the power structure of that society. Such a person defines the meaning of all words, feelings, experiences, and sexuality as the dominant defines such matters. During a class discussion with a group of undergraduate students, at Grand Rapids Community College, of the Merchant Ivory production of Maurice, I asked if anyone wanted to talk about what it was like to watch the movie. Only one student responded to the question. He said that when Maurice began to stroke Clive's hair, he had to look away, because "it" was "obscene." I said, "Do you want to say anything more about that?" He said, "No." It did not seem appropriate for me to ask him to think about why and to answer why, perhaps by writing a study in which he would develop his response. Still, I can guess that what he might have said would have been very important. Each sentence might lead him on to himself and his connection to the sexual "order" of hegemonic society. Perhaps in the

sense of Lawrence's language, he might even come to a realization of the "vulgarity" of his adjudication. But he was too uncomfortable and frightened. Sometimes I allow students their space, hoping that they might, in their futures, revisit the matter and see it anew. This study looks at three texts that would lead readers beyond the "vulgarity" of the masses who inscribe falsely.

Lawrence, addressing the matter of "pornography," states that it is something he would censor:

But even I would censor genuine pornography, rigorously. It would not be very difficult. In the first place, genuine pornography is almost always underworld, it doesn't come into the open. In the second, you can recognize it by the insult it offers, invariably, to sex, and to the human spirit.

Pornography is the attempt to insult sex, to do dirt on it. . . . Without secrecy there would be no pornography. (74, 78)

This passage from Lawrence's text seems to relate to the story I have just told about the student who had to look away from the image of homosexual desire. The meaning of the image and its presentation were already accomplished for him, and he was unwilling to violate "secrecy." It is in this way incidents of tenderness and desire are marked "obscene." The three texts of this study do not have as intention the "insult of sex;" to the contrary, they are representations of the "insult of sex" as it is done by the rigid construct of hegemonic positions.

In each of the texts discussed, the reader perceives the position of hegemonic society and marginal sexuality;

each of the texts functions to reveal the destructive connection between that center and the margin. What each protagonist attempts to do is to find a way in which he might express a most profound experience of sexual intimacy. In each of the texts, the definitions and meanings of sexuality inherited forcefully from the dominant society by the protagonist must be abandoned, and what must be confronted by him is how his authentic difference from the majority of people might be expressed. In that sense of this matter, the texts have much in common with many texts in the tradition of American and European literature that depict resistance against an oppressive power, reconfiguration of self, an emancipation from a way of living which has been determined by a dominant power, concluding with the discovery of ways of establishing relationships with other human beings. This literature is political in its representation, moving it into the exciting place of egalitarian contentions, challenging those oppressive powers, and mapping out ways for the authentic individual to remain alive, to maneuver into a safe domain, or to revolt against the system that enslaves and destroys all possibility of happiness. Dollimore, in Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault, argues the importance of the homosexual text as political representation:

The literature which represents homosexuality is always political. And by that I mean, at the very least, that it is a medium of competing

representations which have complicated histories with the potential profoundly to affect people's lives. I do not mean only that reading and writing literature can contribute to the growth of the individual (though it may, and crucially so); it affects those whom it represents in diverse other ways. In the case of homosexuals it has affected their freedom, who or what they are, or are allowed to be, even the question of whether they survive or die, metaphorically, spiritually, and literally. So it is strange that this insistence on the profoundly political aspects of literature so often meets with the reproach that such a view diminishes literature's importance. To me the reverse is true. (62)

The legitimacy and urgency for such representation is argued by Sedgwick in her text, Epistemology of the Closet:

Unlike genocide directed against Jews, Native Americans, Africans, or other groups, then gay genocide, the once-and-for-all eradication of gay populations, however potent and sustained as a project or fantasy of modern Western culture, is not possible short of the eradication of the whole human species. The impulse of the species toward its own eradication must not either, however, be underestimated. Neither must the profundity with which that omnicidal impulse is entangled with the modern homosexual, say, as a distinct *risk group*, and the homosexual as a potential of representation within the universal. As gay community and the solidarity and visibility of gays as a minority population are being consolidated and tempered in the forge of this specularized terror and suffering, how can it fail to be all the more necessary that the avenues of recognition, desire, and thought between minority potentials and universalizing ones be opened and opened and opened. (130)

Homosexual desire is not a "minority" reality. The fluidity of sexual desire is universal. The homosexual text is not a minority text; it is a text that is part of a universal literature, a literature that is a representation of the human experience which can not be fragmented without the

destruction of the entire body. In actuality, no margins exist. There are no places to which people can be confined with no influence on the "hegemonic" population. All places are interconnected; thus, the homosexual text knows what it is like to be man as well as to be a homosexual. The text becomes a consciousness that is widening and liberating.

The three texts used for this study are oppositional narratives which reinscribe the homosexual body and redefine the homosexual experience. They are "escorts to save our progeny from blundering;" as legends, they reinvent the meaning of homosexual desire and the union of men in love.

In A Boy's Own Story, the energy of the text is a disruption of the romantic-aesthetic displacement of the homosexual body, a position of marginalization occupied by the narrator through the hegemonic, heterosexual dominance that perverts the homosexual child/boy into an obsession for empowerment that will enable retaliation for injustice, reversing the position of desired object, seducing and rejecting. The result is a brutal violation of the bond of bodies in sexual pleasure. The final episode of the novel depicts an evolution in conscience that deters the seeking of revenge, the employment of sexual desire for power dominance, and evolves the narrator to a sense of compassion for the man he has desired to hurt, defeat, and destroy. The text emerges from a particular historical milieu, for the homosexual of political isolation, a time without a

language to conceptualize his desire and body. There is no one to whom he might speak about the matters of "the heart"/body. White represents a desire for union; the series of episodic sex is hegemonic provision of marginal relationships, patterns of sexual articulation "forced" upon the homosexual. It is destructive to the human who desires connection, permanence, honesty, and authenticity. The narrative represents the removal of the homosexual from society. At the conclusion of the text one senses the possibility of the reversal of the marginalized polarization through the narrator's increasing consciousness and conscience.

In Baldwin's Giovanni's Room, the narrator's homophobic obsession with the compulsory order to displace homosexual desire and to imitate a sexual mode that forces him into deceit is, through a series of episodes, brought to a turning point, an understanding acquired through his communication with the man who teaches him the reality of homosexuality. Essentially, the narrator learns the necessity to embrace the authenticity of one's being and to reconfigure a sexuality, which is represented in the heterosexual, hegemonic sensibility as "dirty," into a different meaning. Jacques, one of the homosexuals in the novel, teaches the need for a reinscription of the homosexual body and act; Giovanni urges the same task: what is perceived, in hegemonic language, as "filth" must be reinvented. Thus, "the age of assassination," which makes

invisible, isolates, destroys and genocides, becomes the time for reconfiguration and the invention of love.

In Dixon's Vanishing Rooms, the effects of dominant social influence are represented in two delineations. First, Metro, the white man, has assimilated into his mind the homophobic and racist positions of hegemonic society. Second, Jesse, the black man, allows himself to be subjugated by his white lover, Metro; he also feels that he is sexually incomplete, unless he is able to imitate the particular, marginalized sexuality that Metro practices. Metro's violent rape/death is a homophobic genocide, perpetrated by youths who, through violence, brutalize women and attempt to repress their own homosexual desire. Jesse, after the death of Metro, evolves to an understanding that enables him to free himself from the mimetic practice of promiscuity and to see the significant destructive position of Metro in his own self-definition and articulation.

In these confessional texts exist narratives of confinement and emancipation, assassination and love, static entrapment and evolutions to intelligent consciousness and compassionate conscience. In his most recent book, Becoming a Man: Half a Life Story, Monette comments on the significance of such narratives for the homosexual reader:

Forty-six now and dying by inches, I finally see how our lives align at the core, if not in the sorry details. I still shiver with a kind of astonished delight when a gay brother or sister tells of that narrow escape from the coffin world of the closet. Yes, yes, yes, goes a voice in my head, it was just like that for me. When we laugh

together then and dance in the giddy circle of freedom, we are children for real at last, because we have finally grown up. (2)

The novels discussed in this study are just such narratives of "narrow escape."

Eliot's poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is also an articulation of confinement. The "sorry details" are identified as "butt-ends of . . . days and ways" and the poetic voice, struggling profoundly with the matter of articulating his momentous history of consequence to another, ultimately falters, does not "presume" and "drowns" (Eliot, Collected Poems: 1909-1935 11). The homosexual narrative must be articulated. Through the articulation comes into existence those maps that show the escape from the "spikes," show the new "pattern," and reinscribe the "formulated phrase." To use language to such purpose seems noble and important, not only for the homosexual, but for all of the species that oppresses or is oppressed.

Felice Picano, in his novel, Ambidextrous: The Secret Lives of Children, narrates the story of a man who, in his childhood, wrote a short story titled "Mirrors." In it a boy tells the story of adult violation of children's sexuality: a father has constructed a system of mirrors which enables him to spy on his daughter and the narrator when they make love on the couch in the living room. They are children. When the narrator, as a boy, submits the story in a school writing contest, it is rejected because of its particular sexual revelations and because it is a

critique of adults'/parents' dominance of children.

Eventually, the story becomes Picano's novel. He writes in reference to the story that would have won first place but was rejected:

I did learn to get over the incident; learned to get over other, even more unjust incidents after it. . . . My life would double in years, grow a hundred-fold in experience, before I again consciously sat down to write a story in which some truth I'd learned, felt, earned, was central, embedded, often disguised. . . . Uncertain from beginning to end whether the truth would be malleable, workable in my hands, and whether I could remember it fully enough, transform its details when necessary so that I retained its intensity, its integrity, its ambience intact; so it would become not only my life but your truth.
(195)

These are the stories, the truths, that society itself has made. Why would it not want to read, to hear, to reinscribe, itself? Perhaps the very continuation of the species is dependent on the knowledge of such stories, the knowledge that they are the avenues that open a liberating consciousness:

. . . how can it fail to be all the more necessary that the avenues of recognition, desire, and thought between minority potentials and universalizing ones be opened and opened and opened. (Sedgwick 130)

Through such outspokenness, assassins are exposed; and in such invention, reinvention of love occurs.

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