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GAY MASCULINITIES BEFORE AND AFTER STONEWALL

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THE DIFFICULTY OF INTIMACY: GAY MASCULINITIES BEFORE AND AFTER STONEWALL

By

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ABSTRACT

THE DIFFICULTY OF INTIMACY: GAY MASCULINITIES BEFORE AND AFTER STONEWALL

By

Dominic Ording

This dissertation is motivated by my desire to contribute to contemporary critical discussions in gender studies, American literary studies, and queer theory focused specifically on representations of gay men in the 1970s. The overarching argument of the project is that many gay men at the time of Stonewall felt a sense of the promise of great sexual and emotional freedom after years of stifling oppression. Yet they lacked any satisfactory models according to which they might imagine and go about developing intimate relationships of whatever sort because of the legacy of larger cultural anxieties concerning gender roles, sexuality, and intimacy. They were confused not only about trying to be "men" intimate with each other, but also about how to shape their own desires and behaviors to fit the political demands of the moment. Moreover, they were faced with the complicated task of attempting to negotiate the relation of sex and pleasure with notions of happiness in the seventies in America. While the ultimate project of this dissertation is to examine representations of gay male intimacies in the seventies, between Stonewall in the summer of 1969 and the advent of the HIV/AIDS crisis in the early eighties, such a periodization must not imply that this "window of opportunity" for liberated gay life and sexual abandon took place in a historical vacuum. Rather, gay men and their identities, relationships, and self-representations were situated amidst a long American tradition of discourse about gender and sexuality and desirable intimate

relationships, and especially representations of men and masculinity and the very possibility of intimacy. Thus, the dissertation traces a discursive trail of these representations in exemplary fictional and nonfictional texts in American letters from the Lost Generation to the Beat Generation, through the Stonewall generation, and into the present.

Chapter one examines such representations in pre-Stonewall American literature from Ernest Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises (1926) to John Rechy's City of Night (1963). What emerges is a conspicuous lack of any satisfactory models for how gay men might go about achieving intimate relationships, whether sexual or not. Chapter two analyzes a set of autobiographical gay liberation manifestos from 1969-1972 in which men attempt to articulate what they want in the way of relationships, and how best to go about making them happen given a range of ideological pressures. Chapter three compares Larry Kramer's novel Faggots to Andrew Holleran's novel Dancer from the Dance, both of which evaluate the urban "gay lifestyle" that developed as the seventies wore on. Both end with harsh judgments on the ultimate value of the party scene and its romping promiscuity. Chapter four examines nonfiction texts looking back at the seventies in order to see how the seventies have been represented since then—in short, to see how the gay seventies have been remembered and historicized compared to how they were represented while they were happening by those right in the middle of it all.

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Finally, I must acknowledge the importance of my family in my life and, by extension, to this project. They have valiantly and lovingly put up with me and my weirdnesses for years. I want especially to thank my father, a weird angel, Michael (1939-1992), whose presence resonates throughout these pages. Hugs to you, Pup.

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Introduction

I've built walls,
A fortress deep and mighty,
That none may penetrate.
I have no need of friendship;
friendship causes pain.
It's laughter and it's loving I disdain.
I Am A Rock,
I am an island. . . .

And a rock feels no pain;
And an island never cries.

--Simon & Garfunkel (1966)

This project is motivated by my desire to contribute to contemporary critical discussions in gender studies, American literary studies, and queer theory focused specifically on representations of gay men in the 1970s. In particular, I want to suggest that while "the seventies" is a somewhat artificial periodization, there are important historical reasons for analyzing these years as a discrete moment in time. Similarly, while the label "gay man" carries with it theoretical and experiential difficulties (concerning both gayness and masculinity), it is a label that was tremendously important to both individuals and communities then, and continues to be so today, for emotional and political reasons discussed below.

The overarching argument of the dissertation is that many gay men at the time of Stonewall felt a sense of the promise of great sexual and emotional freedom after years of stifling oppression. Yet they lacked any satisfactory models according to which they

might imagine and go about developing intimate relationships of whatever sort because of the legacy of larger cultural anxieties concerning gender roles, sexuality, and intimacy. They were confused not only about trying to be "men" intimate with each other, but also about how to shape their own desires and behaviors to fit the political demands of the moment. Moreover, they were faced with the complicated task of attempting to negotiate the relation of sex and pleasure with notions of happiness in the seventies in America. They faced, for instance, not only the difficulty of defining "manhood" in America at that time, but they also inherited a legacy of attitudes toward monogamy and promiscuity that might be described as conflicted and hypocritical at best. As Adam Phillips writes in his very perceptive collection of aphorisms, Monogamy (1996), a work which demonstrates the interdependence of the concepts "monogamy" and "promiscuity," : "Guilt, by reminding us what we mustn't do shows us what we want, and what we want to want" (45). The distinction between what we want and what we want to want, when they differ, as they so often do, is crucial in analyzing the relation of political ideals to desire as gay men struggled to be sexual, liberated, and good all at the same time. Not only can you not always *get* what you want, but you sometimes cannot even *be* what you want to be, a frustration that will be discussed in detail below. Gay men in the seventies were thus dealing not only with the challenge of figuring out what it means to be gay and to be a man, but also with moral considerations about how one "ought to" structure one's affectional and social life according to the ideological principles of "liberated sexuality" at the time, including, for instance, the injunction against treating each other as sexual objects. In short, they wanted to be conscientious and to get laid at the same time, a

prospect that was not always as easy as it may have seemed to the authors of the manifestos or the later novelists and their characters, as we shall see below.

While the ultimate project of this dissertation is to examine representations of gay male intimacies in the seventies, between Stonewall in the summer of 1969 and the advent of the HIV/AIDS crisis in the early eighties, such a periodization must not imply that this "window of opportunity" for liberated gay life and sexual abandon took place in a historical vacuum. Rather, gay men and their identities, relationships, and self-representations were situated amidst a long American tradition of discourse about gender and sexuality and desirable intimate relationships, and especially representations of men and masculinity and the very possibility of intimacy. Thus, the dissertation traces a discursive trail of these representations in exemplary fictional and nonfictional texts in American letters from the Lost Generation to the Beat Generation, through the Stonewall generation, and into the present.

Chapter one situates the project historically by examining representations of gender and sexuality, especially masculinity and possible forms of intimacy, in pre-Stonewall American literature (including novels by Hemingway, Vidal, Baldwin, Kerouac, and Rechy).[1] What emerges is a conspicuous lack of any satisfactory model for how gay men, or any men, might go about achieving intimate relationships, whether sexual or not. Some are ostensibly nongay novels, while others are consciously concerned with gay liberation. But they all indicate in various ways the legacy of anxieties in the broader culture regarding gender expectations and sexual mores (for instance, conflicting visions of the appropriate relation of sex to sentiment and confused, often hypocritical, attitudes toward promiscuity, fidelity, and pleasure in general). While

the novels are treated here in chronological order, historians such as George Chauncey in Gay New York and John D'Emilio in Making Trouble point out that we must not presume a linear historical progression of more liberal societal attitudes toward homosexuality. Rather, there was, for instance, greater tolerance in general in the twenties than in the immediate post-World War II period (and more in Paris than in the United States).

Chapter two examines a group of autobiographical texts and gay liberation manifestos in which men attempt to articulate what they want in the way of relationships and how best to go about making them happen. Because of the lack of models for intimacy, newly "liberated" gay men had to make things up as they went along, faced with the freedom to establish entirely new forms of togetherness. These texts all date from 1969-1972, during the heady days of calls for radical gay liberation, and include these men's utopian hopes and their frustrations and not uncommon inabilities to structure their lives according to rigid ideological principles. They all agree on the demand for sexual freedom without shame; but how this should be manifested in specific sexual and affectional practices is hotly debated.

Chapter three compares Larry Kramer's novel Faggots to Andrew Holleran's novel Dancer from the Dance (both published in 1978), both of which are examinations of the urban "gay lifestyle" called "the circuit" that developed in New York and across the country as the seventies wore on. In many ways, these two novels are the most striking literary examples of what became of the experiments with sexual freedom in the decade, and were certainly the most widely read and discussed texts, especially in the gay media. Both novels end with fairly harsh judgments on the ultimate value of the party

scene and promiscuous romping, though through very different literary modes of evaluation. The chapter ends with a discussion of the immediate critical reception of the novels in the gay and mainstream presses.

Chapter four examines nonfiction texts by writers looking back at the seventies, from as early as late-seventies interviews of Holleran, Kramer, and Edmund White to as late as 2000, in order to see how the seventies have been represented since then, and what recent judgments have been made and circulated about that decade—in short, to see how the seventies have been remembered and historicized compared to how they were represented while they were happening by those right in the middle of it all. My contention is that the pervasive view of the gay seventies—that they were a time of, and a luxurious opportunity for, mindless excess and hedonistic abandon—is flawed at least by virtue of oversimplification (regardless of whether one criticizes or celebrates the choices made in light of the opportunity to party granted by a sense of radical new freedom). Indeed, the texts examined in the prior chapters are evidence that a lot of serious reflection about the meaning and importance of various forms of human interaction was going on. Recent retrospections of the seventies, sadly, are all colored by the HIV/AIDS health crisis, which inflects every memory and every memoir, as well as every attempt to do archival research and recovery or objective historical analysis of the period, even work done by those who cling to the notion that some relative objectivity is possible or desirable. Indeed, the appropriate manner in which to look back at—to remember in history—the experience of gay men in the seventies is highly contentious at present, in large part because the project of inventing new lives, and figuring out how to go about living them, in climates that may be more or less tolerant of freedoms and choices

regarding sex and affection is an ongoing one. This dissertation attempts to help clarify what's at stake in this ongoing project of invention.

In doing so, my project attempts to connect questions of gay identity and sexuality to other more "mainstream" elements of American culture such as heterosexuality, friendship, and the entire spectrum of what are considered to be questions of normality and morality. Moreover, I am interested in how things become categorized as "sexual," and who has the right to make such a categorization. (Literary examples of the importance of this question might include whether Jake Barnes's affection for Bill in the Hemingway novel, or Bob's for Jim in the Vidal, or Malone's for Sutherland in the Holleran, are sexual or not. A nonfictional example of extreme importance comes as the men in the Stonewall-era living collective try to negotiate how to be sexual, or not, together.) This project is also concerned with exploring how authors and characters at various historical points have struggled with the question of the relationship between sexuality, happiness, pleasure, and the good life in general; that is, what is the intense connection between sexuality and broader existential questions, and how have people attempted to make sense of it? Another strong commitment of this project is to contribute to the effort to make intimacy and its difficulties more visible as an area of scholarly inquiry, in the spirit of such important contributions as the recent collection Intimacy (2000), edited by Lauren Berlant.

As noted above, one issue facing the Stonewall generation of gay men was the lack of any models for successful intimate relationships, a point that cannot be overemphasized. In the early post-Stonewall manifestos, to be analyzed in chapter two, the most significant debates were over sexism, the legacy of gender roles, and other

sources and consequences of internalized homophobia (e.g., what, if anything, it means to be a man). These were identified as the main elements of the oppression of gay men. The need to confront sexism especially, including their own sexist attitudes, was seen as central to developing gay men's understandings of their own oppression. On the one hand, there was harsh criticism of the "doomed queen" figure—often characterized as the scared, bitchy, self-loathing, self-consumed, pathetic, diminutive man living in a fantasy; such a fantasy might include figures such as Bette Davis and Judy Garland among others, and be more concerned with piss-elegant trappings and being witty than with any deeper search for meaningful human interactions. The demand in the manifestos was to cast off the pathetic fantasy and to become a "normal" (i.e., at least potentially masculine), newly-liberated man.

On the other hand, there was the desperate plea to abolish gender roles, and especially crippling notions of masculinity and manhood, which were seen as prohibiting freedom, compassion, and intimacy between men (and between men and women). And both these criticisms might be asserted by the same critic in the same text. Hence, a great paradox: You must dispense with your old crutches and hiding places, and stand up to fight—be a real man. But you must also reject the very notion of the "real man" entirely, and just "be yourself," free from oppressive gender roles, willing to cultivate and nurture both your feminine and masculine sides (or, indeed, to dispense as entirely as possible with these labels). Thus, you must be a man and not be a man. This paradox would haunt many men through the seventies, and beyond. The novels to be examined in chapter one provide a historical context for how notions and representations of American maleness reached such a paradoxical situation.

This project will discuss masculinity as a broader and potentially more problematic—and ill-defined, contested, and shifty—as well as a potentially more pleasurable category than it is often considered to be for men of all sexual orientations. Regarding sexual identity, homophobia, both for non-gays and perhaps especially for gays, is incredibly bound up in various notions of masculinity. This bind is often at the center of the novels and the other texts discussed here; and their representations of both homosexuals and "masculine" men are linked with problems of intimacy in the texts themselves, and can be seen operating among gay (and straight) men (and women) through today. In fact, I would argue that the question of sex and sentiment and related attitudes toward promiscuity are, at least for many men, similarly bound up in concerns about gender.

Cultural representations of this primacy of gender range from the ideology that naturalizes the claim that "boys *will* be boys" to the claim that they therefore *should* be so, and that their wild oats are part of being masculine; as such, the lack of an active sex life is, in fact, often portrayed as unhealthy and abnormal for heterosexuals.[2] This portrayal is in stark contrast to the suspicion surrounding homosexual male promiscuity, whether actual or imagined. Furthermore, emotional attachment to a sexual partner, or anyone else, might inhibit a man's freedom to roam, to "find himself;" and the journey of self-discovery is associated with manhood throughout these texts. Also, in explicitly homoerotic contexts, the ideal masculine object of appropriately masculine desire should thus be free from the confines and weakness associated with being overly emotional.

Masculinity, as understood here, operates in various contingent ways along the whole continuum from homosociality to homosexuality articulated in the introduction to

Eve Sedgwick's Between Men. Sedgwick argues that whether or not "sex" is involved makes a huge difference in the meaning of male-to-male relationships, but that this difference depends on the individual case. She writes: "So the answer to the question 'what difference does the inclusion of sex make' to a social or political relationship, is—it varies: just as, for different groups in different political circumstances, homosexual activity can be either supportive of or oppositional to homosocial bonding" (6). I would like to extend her analysis of the meaning-making power of the inclusion of *sex* in relationships between men to include the possibility or impossibility of the union of intimacy and masculinity in such relationships. Questions of the *genesis* of masculinity, and the extent to which it is consciously *performed* or not, at any given moment, *in reality*, are questions for a different sort of project. At issue here, rather, are narrative representations--textual constructs in which narrators, characters, and readers interpret the significance of a masculine moment (or indeed name it as such). Furthermore, the category "masculinity" must not be allowed to stand as a monolith, especially since it is rarely defined coherently or indisputably (as I contend that it perhaps cannot be). Yet it is assumed. Even in many of the most sophisticated constructionist analyses of gender, the pre-ordained essence of *that which has been or is to be constructed* is taken for granted.[3] At the same time, these texts suggest that "being a man" has to be enacted moment by moment, and strategies to do so adjusted significantly along the way, according to the comfort-levels of the characters and their narratives. James Baldwin is right to assert that the great variance of what are taken to be masculine and feminine traits makes these gender categories almost useless as tools for rich analysis and description, though they carry huge cultural force in twentieth-century America. But the more

immediate burden of my argument here is that these pre-Stonewall novels situate the problematic of gay liberation in the late sixties. Moreover, what happened in the seventies, as shown in the manifestos and other texts discussed below, had as much to do with contested concepts of gender as with ostensibly liberated sexual identities and sexual freedom (and gender and sexuality are not in any event as easily separable as they are often taken to be).[4]

In these texts, gender largely subsumes other categories of distinction and identity, even sexuality/sexual orientation, which is portrayed mainly as a function of gender differentiation. Masculinity--while it rarely, if ever, receives concrete definition--occupies an unquestioned position in these works as *that by which* standards of human interaction and value are often most significantly measured. For example, in Gore Vidal's The City and the Pillar, Jim Willard is ambivalent about declaring his love for Bob; he assumes that Bob must truly still be attracted to him. Yet, at the same time he wants them to be "normal" to the extent that he convinces himself that their coming together will be even better, at least for Jim, because Bob identifies as heterosexual (274). Hence, wanting to "come out" may be a masculine stance, but so may celebrating the fact that one's beloved is a real man, one who ostensibly doesn't even like men sexually. In Craig Alfred Hanson's manifesto, discussed below, the writer attempts to achieve a posture of masculinity defined in opposition to the purported and unacceptable femininity of "the Fairy Princess." Thus, "masculinity" itself remains still an indeterminate category, and may be experienced, and manipulated by, the particular subject in a particular subject-position to produce both potential pleasure and potential displeasure for himself or any other participant at any given moment in these texts.

Regardless of the evident vagueness of the category "masculine," however, it nonetheless exerts tremendous moral weight and has the potential to attract and repel in powerful ways. In short, it can be fun and sexy to feel, or see oneself, and/or see another, and/or imagine oneself seen as being "masculine." It can be quite problematic, too. Also, what masculinity *means* is most often taken for granted, as though everybody knows it when he or she sees (or enacts*) it*, or its lack or opposite. Yet, it is rarely defined with adequate specificity. At the least, there appear to be multiple masculinities, and perhaps genders. And however they may be tentatively named or experienced at a particular moment, they are always relative terms.

"Masculinity" may be, in the end, an arbitrary term devoid of any specific immutable content.[5] But this unstable category stands as a place of refuge for troubled or ecstatic subjectivities throughout the texts ("subjectivities" understood here as malleable, shifting perspectives of characters, narrators, or persons). When they are aggressive, it is masculine aggression; when stoic, it is masculine stoicism; when they weep, it is masculine weeping. For example, much recent fuss has been made in media representations over the alleged fact that the Bush men hug and cry. Laura Bush is quoted as saying that President George W. Bush is more likely than she to cry. Such an admission is represented as enhancing rather than diminishing his manliness quotient—(if only we all could be so sensitive and compassionate!). Male desire, sexual activity, and orgasm must also be imagined as appropriately masculine happenings according to this picture, as well as must whatever language, sounds or silences that might accompany them.

In this way, masculinity moves from being a descriptive to being a prescriptive term. Masculinity, the ill-defined or indefinite category, becomes The Good. When a subject perceives himself to be slipping toward the other side (to the non-masculine, the not good), the moral imperative for him is to move back to what he has tentatively come to understand to be The Masculine (or else conveniently to shift or expand his notion of masculinity to encompass new realms of experience). Thus, as writers and characters experience shifts in their subjectivities and identities in relation to others and to themselves (e.g., from group spectatorship at a bullfight, to fishing in the wilderness with a buddy, to lying awake at night pondering their existence, to cruising, to S/M, to walking down the street holding hands as a collective), the very definition of masculinity must shift accordingly. And when the conceivable limits of such shifting seem to be reached, a crisis ensues. Indeed, it was not until gender-bending pioneers at the time of Stonewall began proudly to embrace the "femme" aspects of their identities that the fairy figure became possible as an autonomous subject at all, rather than the mere object of ridicule. Prior to that, any notion of the potential feminine within ostensibly masculine subjects was unthinkable at best. One cannot, after all, imagine the unimaginable--that which has not been put forth on one's plate as a possibility. When, for instance, it comes to being truly vulnerable with a buddy, the non-masculine or feminine threshold has been approached, and barriers must be erected.

One goal of this project is to contribute to recent scholarly discussions of masculinity and the seventies. As such, it draws first upon insights from scholars working on issues in the history of gender, including Gail Bederman and E. Anthony

Rotundo. Bederman argues in Manliness & Civilization that gender is a dynamic *process*:

> I don't see manhood as either an intrinsic essence or a collection of traits, attributes, or sex roles. Manhood—or "masculinity," as it is commonly termed today—is a continual, dynamic process. Through that process, men claim certain kinds of authority, based on their particular types of bodies. [. . .]
>
> Individuals are positioned through that process of gender, whether they choose to be or not. [. . .] [R]are indeed is the person who considers "itself" neither a man nor a woman. (7)

One incredibly important point here is that gender status is primarily imposed but may also be rejected or altered by rare individuals who either possess the wherewithal or confront the necessity to do so. The question of this potential dexterity about gender is a point of grave contestation in most, if not all, of the texts examined in my project.

Another important issue raised in recent scholarship on gender is the extent to which homophobia is detrimental not only to homo-identified men but also to bi- and heterosexually self-identified men, and those rare men who might successfully resist such labels entirely. In American Manhood, Rotundo illuminates the damage done to all men (and, one must add, to all people) by the rampant linking of male homosexuality with "unmanliness." Anti-homosexuality (I insert this term because "homophobia" is often imprecise and a misnomer) not only damages all men but also all women because to condemn unmanliness is always in some sense to condemn what is considered to be the feminine. Furthermore, neither homosexuality nor unmanliness nor masculinity nor

femininity nor unwomanliness, as purported by whomever, should ever be damaging to anybody. And everybody suffers when human connections and tenderness are threatened. Rotundo writes:

> The century-old association of homosexuality and unmanliness is another facet of our gender system that harms men. It hurts homosexual males most profoundly because it lays the basis for contempt, persecution, and discrimination against them. In ways that are less deeply damaging but equally real, men who are not homosexual are also wronged by the homosexual stigma. They lose the opportunity for the open intimacy of the romantic friendships that were common in the nineteenth century; more broadly, the fear [or potentially violent hatred] of homosexuality can block men's access to tender feelings and the skills that humans need in order to build connections with one another. (291-92)

Many interesting and instructive books have been published recently in the area of masculinity studies. Much of this work employs the methods of the social sciences and psychoanalysis, whereas my approach is largely informed by interdisciplinary cultural studies and queer theory, as mentioned above. Recent titles most relevant to my project include the following: Michael S. Kimmel's article "Masculinity as Homophobia" in Privilege: A Reader (2003), which analyzes homophobia as a sense of fear and powerlessness among contemporary American men; Timothy Beneke's Proving Manhood: Reflections on Men and Sexism (1997), which diagnoses homophobia as fear of other men, and includes a very helpful discussion of different characterizations of homoerotic desire; Peter Nardi's two recent books on gay men, Gay Masculinities (Nardi,

ed., 2000), and Gay Men's Friendships (1999), both of which are empirical sociological studies of contemporary attitudes among gay men; Brian Pronger's The Arena of Masculinity: Sports, Homosexuality, and the Meaning of Sex (1990), another sociological study, which looks at attitudes toward male homosexuality and masculinity in the particular context of athletics; and, David Plummer's One of the Boys: Masculinity, Homophobia, and Modern Manhood (1999), in which he posits what he calls "homophobic passage" as a stage of homophobia that young males go through in the process of forming adult (and presumably less or non-homophobic) identities as men. While these works provide often important and useful insights into contemporary gay male relations, self-consciousnesses, and attitudes, they are also often ahistorical and universalizing in their approaches (by which I mean that their claims seem to be made about all men in all places and times). They seem to assume at times, for instance, a fairly stable binary between gay and straight adult men (you either are one or the other, or not), thus neglecting the actual experience depicted in the representations with which I'm most concerned here—those moments when such binaries break down entirely, when there is not even the consciousness of a handy Kinsey continuum on which to locate oneself, but rather an identity crisis that calls into question what it means to be human and in close relation with another man. The one study that offers an interpretation of cultural representations of the sort that I'm interested in here is David Savran's Taking It Like a Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture (1998), which, in his own words, "constructs a genealogy of the fantasy of the white male as victim, beginning with his appearance on the U.S. cultural scene in the 1950s" (4). Savran's attention to self-identified homosexual men, however, is focused primarily on

the period since 1980. This dissertation, in contrast, examines the struggle for liberated gay male sexuality and identity before, during, and in the decade after the Stonewall uprising in 1969.

Beyond the realm of studies in masculinity, scholars have recently lamented the lack of historical and cultural research on the seventies. Remarking on the lack of work done on post-Stonewall gay activism in particular, John D'Emilio, in his book Making Trouble, announces his "annoyance at the lack of scholarly attention to what I believe is a critically important phenomenon in the recent history of the United States" (234). In The Seventies, Shelton Waldrep asserts that the time has come for a reorientation in how recent American history and culture are viewed: "[T]he sixties no longer seem to be the inevitable moment of the crisis in the century—hence, the starting point of any discussion of the decades that have come after it. Rather, the seventies have now become a key part of the equation of our millennial anxiety [. . .]. The clue to our own present seems mysteriously locked somewhere in that slippery decade" (1-2). To my knowledge, few books have been published recently that attempt to redress this lack of attention to the seventies, and specifically the gay seventies.

Relevant works include Daniel Harris's The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture, in which he argues that gay culture will disappear with the increasing tolerance of gay men and lesbians and their assimilation into mainstream culture. But Harris only devotes a small space to the seventies, and then he's mainly concerned with the commodification of gay culture. Similarly, Stephen Paul Miller's The Seventies Now touches on gay liberation and culture in a few pages, but his discussion of gayness is mainly limited to a section on John Ashbery and Thomas Pynchon. Charles Kaiser's The Gay Metropolis:

1940-1996 includes a chapter on the seventies, but mainly contains anecdotes and gossip with no systematic analysis of the people or the period. The one book that examines gay male life in particular in the seventies is Martin P. Levine's Gay Macho, a sociological study of the emergence of the "clone" figure. Levine's work is extremely important, though he focuses on an admittedly narrow conception of the gay male experience:

> Clones symbolize modern homosexuality. When the dust of gay liberation had settled, the doors to the closet were opened, and out popped the clone. [...] Aping blue-collar workers, they butched it up and acted like macho men. Accepting me-generation values, they searched for self-fulfillment in anonymous sex, recreational drugs, and hard partying. Much to the activists' chagrin, liberation turned the "Boys in the Band" into doped-up, sexed-out, Marlboro men. (7)

Rather than analyze this "Ramrod" view of the seventies, however, I have chosen instead to compare this one-dimensional view of gay manhood to the more diverse attempts made by gay men to seek a liberated sexual and emotional experience. As such, my project is an attempt to examine masculinity and gay liberation in ways that contribute to a greater understanding of the major cultural transformations that happened in the seventies from the specific perspective of gay men. I examine the various ways in which they envisioned the ideal prospect of gay sexual liberation and tried to figure out how best to live their lives in its aftermath.

Notes

[1] For recent critical treatments of literature by and about gay men, see Bergman (1991), McRuer (1997), and Woodhouse (1998). All three are helpful sources, and treat the authors I discuss with varying emphasis and scope.

[2] This link between heterosexual male promiscuity and notions of "natural" normality and ideal masculinity is articulated by Peggy Reeves Sanday in Fraternity Gang Rape (1990; e.g., pp. 192-193) and by Phillip Brian Harper in Are We Not Men? (1996; e.g., pp. 22-38).

[3] Diana Fuss offers a compelling analysis of the status of the category "essence" in anti-essentialist arguments about gender in the introduction and first chapter of Essentially Speaking (1989). For instance, Fuss asserts that: "[C]onstructionism (the position that differences are constructed, not innate) really operates as a more sophisticated form of essentialism. The bar between essentialism and constructionism is by no means as solid and unassailable as advocates of both sides assume it to be" (xii).

[4] Baldwin writes of the American ideal of masculinity, and the unhelpfulness of such categories, in "Here Be Dragons," collected in The Price of the Ticket (1985). He claims, in particular, that "The American ideal, then, of sexuality appears to be rooted in the American ideal of masculinity" (678).

[5] In the collection Constructing Masculinity (1995), Homi K. Bhabha argues that masculinity is "a prosthetic reality...an appendix or addition," and should not be denied but rather disturbed and drawn attention to (57).

I: Unbearable Intimacies: Fairies in the World of Men

This chapter will analyze the discourse about gender and sexuality in a set of twentieth-century American novels with a specific focus on representations of the apparent difficulty men have figuring out how to go about being intimate with each other, whether or not the characters themselves consciously identify as bi-, hetero-, or homosexual. Moreover, the presence and function of "the homosexual" in such texts provides insight into the logic of this difficulty with intimacy. In fact, this chapter will argue that, in the set of texts to be examined here, the presence of fairies is a central component in the constitution of the masculine self-identities of the protagonists, and the possibilities for intimate relations that might attend such constitutions.

In these books, all to some extent homophobic and simultaneously homoerotic, the *actual* homosexuals (i.e., obvious in the minds of the characters, and often called fairies or queers) are the Other, the foil, against which the protagonists not only measure but imagine and conceptualize their own masculinity, as well as whatever notions they have of what an ideal, deep, authentic connection with another person might resemble. However, their conceptions of masculinity involve the negation of outward, and sometimes even inward, expressions or admissions of vulnerability. And since intimacy (understood here as a close and deeply personal emotional exposure and union) by definition requires vulnerability (the willingness to risk being wounded or "found out"), masculinity and intimacy may be mutually exclusive for these main characters, especially as regards their relations with other so-called masculine men they might like to be intimate with.

As for the fairies (by definition non-masculine, flamboyant or at least obvious homosexuals), they are presumed to be incapable of the emotional strength or seriousness that would be required for an intimate emotional connection, regardless of how vulnerable they might be capable of being with anyone else. They are portrayed as shallow and superficial, as are most women characters in these works, with the exceptions of Hemingway's Brett and some of the characters in the Rechy novel. As we shall see, this sexist linking of effeminacy (and the feminine) to emotional weakness and superficiality, as opposed to the masculine ideal of depth, strength, and invulnerability, becomes one of the main points of contention at the time of Stonewall in the manifestos, and throughout the seventies.[1]

The texts to be examined in this chapter were chosen because of their respective exemplary status in the pre-gay liberation American literary tradition, in which melodrama and tragedy were the only available modes in which to portray gay characters (when they weren't being trivialized, as in the Hemingway, which still turns out to be a melodramatic tragedy of sorts). Indeed, the ostensibly "straight" novels here share in common with the "gay" novels a melodramatic style and a tendency toward pseudo-philosophy about the meaning of life and a sense of doom about living in the twentieth century, and dissatisfaction with the world in general. This pessimism, as we shall see, is also characteristic of the world-view, at least as portrayed by others, of the "old-guard" homosexuals at the time of Stonewall, as seen in many of the manifestos. Moreover, these five novels' characters share a worship of the primitive and/or the pastoral, often accompanied by a nostalgia for an imagined more innocent time, indicating their sense that two main sources of their troubles are puritanical WASPish values and modern

industrial social organization. This purported deep and profound understanding of the human condition would be incomprehensible, of course, to most fairies and most women (again, except in Rechy).[2]

The chapter will be divided into three sections. Part One will examine Ernest Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises (1926), an extremely popular novel highly critical of traditional, puritanical mores and ambitions, one that participated in a discourse about youth, morality, war, and disillusionment. In this Hemingway, the fairies are portrayed as being even more decadent and self-consumed than Jake Barnes and his comrades. A war injury has left sensitive Jake dysfunctional in genital sexual relations. While the exact nature of his injury is never explicitly reported in the published novel (critical consensus has it that he was somehow castrated or at least rendered impotent), this physical tragedy serves in the novel as a metaphor for his difficulty achieving intimacy with either men or women, and calls into question at once the stability of his gender status. For instance, Jake identifies his ostensible love interest, Lady Brett Ashley, as being quite an integral member of the group of homosexual men she hangs out with. And Brett herself is portrayed often as being more of a "chap" than a "broad." The novel is concerned with how to establish and sustain intimate relationships in the Lost Generation. The representations of the fairies indicate the extent to which issues of sexuality and gender identity are at the center of this struggle.

Part Two will look at two then widely read and now canonical gay novels, Gore Vidal's The City and the Pillar (1948) and James Baldwin's Giovanni's Room (1956). Both are tragic melodramas, and bear witness to the reality that, according to the discourses circulating in the early post-war period, the only fate imaginable for a

homosexual character was a tragic fate. This tragic mode of gay self-representation continues through the Broadway production of Mart Crowley's Boys in the Band (1968) and the film version, released in 1970, after Stonewall. It's a mode that becomes contested, but remains viable throughout the seventies, as we shall see. Both protagonists in these novels end up wallowing in self-loathing and despair after being responsible for the demise of their beloveds. The Vidal and Baldwin are similar, as each text offers the beginnings of a gay liberation manifesto. Yet the "obvious" homosexuals are portrayed much as they are in Hemingway, though with significant narrative commentary and more detail; and they do at times get to speak for themselves, including about being homosexual.[3] It is their effeminacy and perceived superficial concerns, as well as their apparently indiscriminate pursuit of sex, that troubles the protagonists, in contrast to their own self-perceived depth and masculinity (and superior morality). Yet it is precisely crises of gender and sexuality that lead to the ultimate impossibility of the main characters' love affairs, and their subsequent tragic demise.

Part Three will examine two novels that, in their respective crucial ways, construct narratives that open up cultural space for both the incredible possibilities for freedom that accompanied the impulse toward gay liberation and also the set of questions confronting men at the time of Stonewall and beyond as they struggled to define gay consciousness and establish gay identities: Jack Kerouac's On the Road (1957) and John Rechy's City of Night (1963). Kerouac's novel and Allen Ginsberg's poem Howl (1956) exploded on the cultural scene and helped provide a cultural framework for the counterculture and sexual revolutions of the sixties and seventies. While Ginsberg's work survived an obscenity trial only to become even more widely-read and infamous

with its unapologetically explicit depictions of homosexuality enacted, Kerouac's book was censored by him and his editors to remove all mention of homosexual behavior by the main characters, based on Kerouac himself and other Beat figures, some of whom did have sex with each other and with other men. Nonetheless, the text becomes an important participant in the ongoing discourse about gender, sex, identity, and intimacy in America. It has been described as a boy's valentine to America (on a recent Morning Edition story on the book), but it is also an adolescent lament. The central significance of the novel here is its portrayal of expanded or alternative possibilities for conceptions of American manhood, and the tremendous struggle between characters Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty to sustain a satisfactory intimate friendship. In the end, they fail.

"Actual" homosexuals make rare but important appearances, and Sal reacts much as Jake Barnes does in Hemingway (the characters in Kerouac actually play-act aspects of The Sun Also Rises)—with inexplicable anger at the fairies that he knows he "should" not only repress but not even feel in the first place. In fact, Sal Paradise (and Kerouac) is often taken to represent the new "sensitive man." But the narrator could have gone much further in his quest for sensitivity about gender roles and gayness, given the ambivalent way women and gay men are represented in the novel. The book is a treatise on, if anything, the troubles entailed by the attempt to construct a masculine and sexual identity in the immediate post-war period. Similar attempts, using some of the same language but with a much more political emphasis and consciousness, come in the gay liberation manifestos and later in the seventies, as we shall see.

John Rechy's texts, on the other hand, participate directly in debates over gay oppression, liberation, and culture through the seventies to the present (including The

Sexual Outlaw [1977]). My concern here, however, is with City of Night (1963), a novel about a hustler on a journey of self-exploration amidst the sort of "homosexual world" that would appear as a major story in Life magazine in 1964. His journey reaches a climax when he confronts the question of whether he is capable of, or even desires, intimate companionship—the very idea of loving someone and being loved in return. Can he imagine wanting, or having, a "partner" for any length of time? Or does he prefer (or is he trapped in) an ongoing series of largely anonymous, promiscuous sexual encounters, often but not always for money?

This is one of the main questions posed in the post-Stonewall manifestos, and through the seventies—the appropriate or desirable relation between sex and sentiment, and how to go about figuring and getting what one desires out of "gay life." It is important to keep in mind here that Rechy's book was published six years before Stonewall, so that he grapples in a similar fashion with similar questions quite a while before either the counterculture or public, affirmative gay liberation had assumed widespread prominence in the minds of Americans of any orientation.

Indeed, an important aspect of my historical argument in choosing these specific texts is that while one cannot safely plot a linear historical progression towards the acceptance and liberation of homosexuality through twentieth century America, representations of men and their relations in these novels do represent a trend of increasing consciousness of the complexity of various notions of masculinity and their relation to sexual identity and possibilities for intimacy. That which is important, thinkable, and utterable for the characters does go through a progressive transformation. In the Hemingway, the performance of, and anxieties surrounding, masculinity and the

desire for intimacy are present but largely unconscious or unspoken. They become increasingly conscious and explicit concerns of the texts until the Rechy, in which the act of performing various versions of masculinity, and commentary on them, is a virtual obsession, as is the search for, and definitions of, intimacies.

Instabilities and Inabilities: Hemingway, The Sun Also Rises (1926)

This novel is an incredibly complicated text in its treatment of issues of gender and sexuality. On the one hand, it seems homophobic in how much true homosexuals and the idea of being homosexual are criticized and feared by some of the characters. On the other hand, it deals explicitly, obsessively, with notions of gender identity and definition, and often attempts to free itself from gender conventions and restrictive roles. It is homosocial, as much of the book is about men trying to figure out how to, and enjoying, spending time together. It is homoerotic at least in scenes where the imagery of masculine men dealing with each other is filled with pleasure and celebration, especially in the bullfighting scenes; and with Jake's adoration for Pedro Romero, and how handsome he is, and the discussion of how good he looks in his tight green pants; and Jake's fishing trip with Bill Gorton, as well as Brett's status as a chap of sorts. Yet, in the end, they all go off, back to their former lives, and even Jake and Brett realize that they can never be together. If she marries Mike, they are both likely to be miserable. And Jake is likely to remain alone, not having achieved any of the intimacy that seems to be the thing that might make him happy.

While there has been a long tradition of reading Hemingway and many of his male characters as involved in a hyper-macho struggle with each other and conquering

the vigorous world, recent commentary reflects a much more ambiguous and complex reading. For instance, in Nancy Comley and Robert Scholes's Hemingway's Genders (1994), the authors rightly argue that "gender was a conscious preoccupation for Hemingway," but urge readers to view gender in Hemingway as more complex than simply as "an embodiment of monolithic masculinity" (ix). Here, they provide a working definition of gender:

> By *gender* we mean a system of sexual differentiation that is partly biological and partly cultural. This system is founded on a basic differentiation of humans into the categories male and female, but it extends into subcategories and cultural roles assigned to people and to literary characters in a given culture, and to categories of sexual practice as well. (x)

There are indeed many indications that The Sun Also Rises is preoccupied with gender; and no thoughtful reading of the text would see it as embodying a monolithic masculinity. This very question is one of Jake's major crises. It seems safe to assert, along with Comley and Scholes, that gender is partly biological and partly cultural, though the use of the terms "sexual differentiation," "male," and "female," if they are understood in their strictest senses, rings as though privileging the biological. It is rather the subcategories, cultural roles, and sexual practices that mainly concern this project at this point. Indeed, the claim that categories of sexual practice are gendered is quite important and not a small one (especially presuming it doesn't merely conflate gender and sexuality, a not rare mistake with serious consequences). But beyond anatomical, positional and act-ual practices, it may be an equally strong claim to assert that sexual

identity is oftentimes a subcategory of gender. This practice (or behavior)/identity distinction is crucial. Who does (or doesn't do) what with whom when and where is at least conceptually distinct from how one identifies oneself or another. The two are, however, always interrelated; yet, which comes first—sexual behavior or identity--may differ from person to person and from time to time. The appropriate manner to articulate and to attempt to live on the basis of figuring this all out for oneself is an explicit concern in texts that come after this Hemingway and especially in the process of publicly debated gay liberation.

Comley and Scholes proceed insightfully to identify a shadow-figure present in the "Hemingway Text," a character very much present in The Sun Also Rises. Here, they consider male homosexuality specifically:

> The usual view of Hemingway's interest in sexuality is that of the locker-room sort, kidding-with-the-guys but fiercely heterosexual in its focus, treating homosexuality as either a joke or a horror. [. . .] But there is also someone else, someone denied but presupposed by that very mentality. The locker-room viewpoint may be found in many places in Hemingway's writing where male homosexuality is coded as a form of femininity that deforms the male body and makes it repulsive to an eye oriented to an essence of manliness that excludes everything female. But the Hemingway Text does not always speak of this pure vision of masculinity or in a single macho voice. (110-11)

There is always the possibility that some locker-room banter may be *merely* (fairly, perfectly mindless) locker-room banter. (In the Kerouac, Sal will describe a moment of

such "male" mindlessness as he watches Dean in the car, with Dean deeply immersed in his own immediate experience, but seemingly unaware of those around him). In fact, to call it a "locker-room viewpoint" is to connect by implication buddy-banter with not only various loaded notions of masculinity but also with exclusively male bodies mingling, and some inherent sexual energy. The point is well-taken about different ways to read the text in different places, but the locker-room metaphor may be imprecise. Rather than opposing the locker-room joker to the "someone else" denied but presupposed, yet presumably to be found outside the locker-room, perhaps instead there can ultimately be no separation between the locker-room and the world outside.

Indeed, what is most significant about The Sun Also Rises, and the focus of my genealogy through these texts, from this 1926 text by Hemingway through the seventies, is those moments confronting those characters when the dichotomy between the locker-room and this "someone else" becomes destabilized. For it is precisely during moments and interactions when gender unravels that these men are faced with difficulties of vulnerability and intimacy, when the question of what it means to be friends comes to the fore. Decisions have to be made, and roles discarded, re-enforced, or re-imagined and performed.

In Waiting for the End (1964), Leslie Fiedler writes about Hemingway the author, but his comments resonate especially well regarding the character Jake Barnes, and, indeed, the attempt of a male to establish and maintain a satisfactory masculinity in relation to others:

> In the barn, perhaps, and just before sleep [i.e. death], Hemingway could become again the Steer he had originally imagined himself--not the

> doomed, splendid victim in the bull ring (this is the role of the celebrity rather than the writer), only the patient nudger of bulls on the way to the ring. In The Sun Also Rises, which seems now the greatest of his novels, it is the image of the Steer which possesses Hemingway, and this is appropriate enough in a book whose protagonist is impotent. (12-13)

Having failed to enact the role of the Bull, and watching those around him, his circle of comrades, attempt to affect the bull-posture, Jake begins to realize the futility of the attempt. Even as he glamorizes the art and struggle of the bullfighter as the dramatic ideal of the heroic life, mere mortals have to settle with plain old sympathy, compassion, and attempts at intimacy. As Brett says at the end of the novel, having spared bullfighter Romero the certain disaster of a relationship with her, "You know it makes one feel rather good deciding not to be a bitch." After Jake says yes, Brett continues: "It's sort of what we have instead of God" (249).

Fiedler goes on to a common reading of the "Hemingway style," placing it in the context of the disillusionment of the Lost Generation. His analysis is astute as regards characters communicating with each other in speech. But he risks oversimplification when it comes to, for instance, Jake's narrative soliloquies. In The Sun Also Rises, the rhetorical flourishes tend to come in physical descriptions, and when Jake talks to himself:

> In the mouths of his early non-heroes, in flight from war, incapable of love, victims of history and helpless beholders of infamy, the famous Hemingway style seems suitable, really functional. Such anti-heroes demand anti-rhetoric, since for them there are no viable, new, noble

> phrases to replace the outworn old ones--only the simplest epithets, and certain short-breathed phrases, not related or subordinated to each other, but loosely linked by the most non-committal of conjunctions: *and. . . and. . . and. . .* . In a world of non-relation, only non-syntax tells the truth as in a world of non-communication, only a minimal speech, the next best thing to silence, gives a sense of reality. (13)

While it is true that they appear to be incapable of love and anti-heroic, without noble phrases, Jake's great struggle, failed though it may be, is precisely to invent new possible, tentative definitions of love and relation using a language appropriate to the task. He comes closest to success in scenes with masculine men in settings far away from the deadening café milieu. Especially important is to be a great distance from the troubling presence of homosexuals.

The most explicit example of such trouble comes with Lady Brett Ashley's entrance onto the scene of the novel, which illustrates a cluster of ambiguities regarding gender and sexuality. Brett arrives in the company of a group of homosexuals, though their sexuality is hinted at rather than named. Jake calls them "them," and describes their appearance and mannerisms as a monolithic group:

> A crowd of young men, some in jerseys and some in their shirt-sleeves, got out. I could see their hands and newly washed, wavy hair in the light from the door. The policeman standing by the door looked at me and smiled. They came in. As they went in, under the light I saw white hands, wavy hair, white faces, grimacing, gesturing, talking. With them was Brett. She looked very lovely and she was very much with them. (28)

He sees white faces and hands and grimacing, rather than individual people. Also, they both "come in" and "go in" simultaneously, making the narrator's position relative to them unclear. Brett looks lovely, but is very much with them. More than that, she is in some sense one of them--*of* them. She also wears a jersey and has a boyish haircut. And she may as well be one of them as far as Jake is concerned, since he and Brett are presumed to be unable to have genital sexual relations, at least intercourse, because of his war injury. Yet perhaps more significantly, she shares with them a sense of humor and parody, and refers to herself as one of the chaps. As Jake says, "she started all that" (30), meaning the fashion of androgyny and by association perhaps also the enjoyment of the company of homosexuals. As she says, it's a safe crowd to drink with, this crowd of effeminate chaps. Indeed, the entire representation of fairies may have been safer for both the characters and their author in Paris in the 1920s than would such a portrayal be in, say, the late forties or fifties in the United States.

While it's unclear exactly what gives rise to the following violent homophobic reaction in Jake's mind, it is clear that it's a scene he's uncomfortable with, probably in part because it makes a mockery of the seriousness with which he instills his attempts at intimate relationships, particularly with Brett. For Jake, friendship is a serious affair, though one might speak of it lightly, sloughing it off as though it were a given, in the superficial manner in which friends, or mere acquaintances, often do. Yet it is not only his passionate feelings for Brett that are at stake here. What he takes to be the superficiality of this group also offends his sense of his relationships with men, to come later in the novel:

> I was very angry. Somehow they always made me angry. I know they are supposed to be amusing, and you should be tolerant, but I wanted to swing on one, any one, anything to shatter that superior, simpering composure. Instead, I walked down the street and had a beer at the next Bal. The beer was not good and I had a worse cognac to take the taste out of my mouth. (28)

This scene is replayed in Kerouac in On the Road--the same sense of violent anger along with the realization that one ought not to feel this way; but Kerouac writes in the wake of the next world war, and his narrator Sal acknowledges knowing lots of gays, and speaks more explicitly about intimate feelings and experiences with male friends than Jake does.

Why is Jake so angry, with violent impulses? And are they potentially serious threats of violence that he might carry out, or are they poses meant for his own viewing of himself that compensate for something? As Habermas says, we are all always on stage for the audience, even for ourselves, even when we are alone, a model of self-consciousness that is crucial to this entire project given the significance of roles and posturing throughout.[4] Jake has had no bad encounter with any individual, but the very presence of the fairies threatens his "real," serious relationships, especially since Brett appears among them. He merely claims dismissively and universally that "they are like that" (28). He has been left with a bad taste in his mouth that he is unable to expunge.

Both Fiedler and Comley and Scholes offer readings of this homophobia. While Fiedler writes in broad strokes about writers, the relevant insight for my purposes has to do with narrators and characters. Two observations he makes here are central to all five novels discussed in this chapter: First, that characters engage in role-falsification and

"travesty"—the public (homosexual) image *from which they find it hard to dissociate themselves*; and second, the representation of the opposite of the noble savage, incapable of raw experience. For Fiedler, homosexual characters and Jewish characters function in much the same way in some American novels:

> To writers like Hemingway, on the other hand, to the devotees of raw experience [like Kerouac and Rechy] who went to Europe to fish rather than to pray [Jake at least tries to pray] (though also, of course, to make books), the Jew stands for the pseudo-artist. Along with the homosexual, he seems to them to travesty and falsify their own real role; to help create in the public eye an image, from which they find it hard to dissociate themselves, of the effete intellectual, the over-articulate, pseudo-civilized fake. For them, too, the Jew [along with the homosexual] represents the opposite of the Negro, Indian, peasant, bullfighter, or any of the other versions of the noble savage with whom such writers, whether at home or abroad, sought to identify themselves. (81-82)

Here are Comley and Scholes on Jake's homophobic reaction to seeing Brett in the company of the fairies:

> Why such anger? Perhaps because the homosexuals are built like "normal" men yet (Jake might think) do not choose to be "normal," while Jake, who has a "normal" male's sex drive, had been left only fragments of sexual apparatus. He cannot perform, though he desires to do so, while the homosexuals can perform and yet do not desire "normal" heterosexual

> sex. The sexually fragmented Jake is thus linked to men he perceives in fragments as unmanly because he himself has been unmanned. (44)

While it may be the case that Jake is "linked" to the homosexuals because of having been "unmanned," another important way to read his anger is in view of the threat they pose to his male-to-male relationships. The homosexuals appear to him to be free of the strict gender codes that prohibit intimacy between, for instance, him and Bill. His "fragmented apparatus" allows him to see the limitations imposed by traditional gender roles, as does the fact that his frustrated woman-lover figure Brett embodies ideal masculine qualities.

For Jake Barnes, another such moment of gender destabilization comes when he and Bill go fishing, just the two of them. This trip away from the city and all its pretensions provides the novel's most isolated and intense moments of the attempt at intimate homosociality; it's just the guys themselves together among other guys they meet along the way. The trip begins with a gorgeous pastoral description of a bus trip they take with a group of Basques. They drink lots of wine, which is described in rich intimate detail, including their friendly, manly conversations and exactly how the wine hisses out of the skins and into their waiting mouths. One of the Basque men lies against Jake's leg. For once, he seems happy and freed from conflict. The countryside is beautiful, and they pass a monastery in the hills. Might untroubled intimacy finally be possible in a monastery? Perhaps so, but not for one whose faith is in crisis. Shortly they arrive to book a room in a hotel at the end of a long day. Jake is pleased with things. "After supper we went up-stairs and smoked and read in bed to keep warm. Once in the night I woke and heard the wind blowing. It felt good to be warm and in bed" (116). This moment in the trip is the time of comfort in the novel—comfort in the pleasures of

masculinity, or even a momentary respite from conscious gender-play. Tension returns, however, when they get back out of bed to face the waking task of figuring out what it might take to be intimate men out in the world.

The next morning they prepare for the day-long fishing trip. Bill wakes up and begins singing a song about irony and pity, made up to the tune of "The Bells are Ringing for Me and My Gal." He chides Jake by saying that: "You ought to be ironical the minute you get out of bed. You ought to wake up with your mouth full of pity" (110). What's significant about their locker-room sort of humorous banter is that it can only take them so far into intimacy, and must be couched in terms of irony and pity—and invocations of heterosexuality--acknowledgements of the difficulties at hand. As they enjoy coffee, Bill further voices these difficulties with attacks on gender and city life:

> Good. Coffee is good for you. It's the caffeine in it. Caffeine, we are here. Caffeine puts a man on her horse and a woman in his grave. You know what's the trouble with you [on rumors about Jake from New York]? You're an expatriate. One of the worst type. [. . .]
>
> You've lost touch with the soil. You get precious. Fake European standards have ruined you. You drink yourself to death. You become obsessed with sex. You spend all your time talking, not working. You're an expatriate, see? You hang around cafes. (120)

These allegations are accusations associated with the unmanly, the homosexual.

Bill then tells Jake that there are reports of his impotency. Bill regrets having mentioned it, but Jake *wants* the banter to continue: "He had been going splendidly. I was afraid he thought he had hurt me with that crack about being impotent. I wanted him

to start again." Jake responds that he's not impotent, but just had "an accident." Here's his veiled explanation: "A plane is sort of like a tricycle. The joystick works the same way" (120). Something happened in a plane, and his joystick doesn't work anymore.

One of the most trying and telling moments in their relationship comes in the following exchange, directly following the talk of impotency, which moves from humor to seriousness, and immediately back to joking of an unusual sort:

> "I think he's a good writer, too," Bill said. "And you're a hell of a good guy. Anybody ever tell you were a good guy [*sic*]?"
>
> "I'm not a good guy."
>
> "Listen. You're a hell of a good guy, and I'm fonder of you than anybody on earth. I couldn't tell you that in New York. It'd mean I was a faggot. That was what the Civil War was about. Abraham Lincoln was a faggot. He was in love with General Grant. So was Jefferson Davis. Lincoln just freed the slaves on a bet. The Dred Scott case was framed by the Anti-Saloon League. Sex explains it all. The Colonel's Lady and Judy O'Grady are Lesbians under their skin." (121)

The talk about American history might be simple joking (especially since Dred Scott predates the Anti-Saloon League and speculations about Lincoln's sexuality are, to my knowledge, quite a recent phenomenon). Bill's declaration of fondness, however, is not a joke, nor is his comment about not being able to say it in New York. These are rather deliberate comments on hypocrisy and Puritanism regarding matters connected to sexuality in the United States. Hence, the men are safer to be explicit about their feelings for each other in this pastoral setting in the Basque region. Here, they are *almost* safe and

able to be men intimate with each other (the desire that lurks under their tough skins). Their pleasure in such masculine banter is being spoken out loud; the danger is that they may be approaching the limit of the imaginable masculine realm.

They then begin their long walk to the appointed fishing spot. Upon arrival, they decide to split up and meet back together for lunch. As Jake waits for Bill's return, he's reading a story about a bride waiting twenty-four years for the return of the frozen body of her husband, "while her true love waited, too, and they were still waiting when Bill came up" (125). They begin the banter again, about famous Americans and chickens and eggs and much fuss about a drumstick. They get a bit drunk on wine, have a delightful nap, discuss dreaming, and return to the hotel. They seem so comfortable with each other, more so than any other characters at any time in the book. But there are consistent barriers to their being able to sustain a conversation about what seems truly important to them. When Bill asks, Jake says he doesn't want to talk about Brett and his feelings for her. Whether this is because it would make him too vulnerable or because it would bring them back to the citified doldrums, it would in any event distract from their precious moment together. Things are so much better when Brett is away, back in town with the fairies.

But they must get back, back to the miserable scene of being superficial and uptight, back to normal gender roles. After all, they have plans with the rest of the gang. Such plans, however, are constantly made and broken and postponed throughout the novel. They *could* stay a while longer. But this would mean extending the harrowing experience of being on the edge, at the limit of their possible intimacy. As they break camp and prepare to leave, they say goodbye to a new friend they've met on the trip, a

Brit named Harris. On the way out, the three of them pass the monastery, and order a final drink together. Harris says:

> "I say. You don't know what it's meant to me to have you chaps up here.
>
> [. . .]
>
> I wish you'd let me pay for it. It *does* give me pleasure, you know."
>
> Bill says: "We call you Harris because we're so fond of you."
>
> Harris says: "I say, Barnes. You don't know what this all means to me.
>
> [. . .] Barnes. Really, Barnes, you can't know. That's all."
>
> Jake says: "Drink up, Harris." (134)

And so, that's all. That's all to be said when they part. And that's all that can be said when Bill and Jake finally part after their excursion together. Back they go to the world in which a certain proper distance separates them. After all, too much pleasure might get them into unknown troubles.

Thus, Jake Barnes is unable to articulate his difficulties with satisfactorily performing masculinity and sustaining intimate connections even in Europe in the 1920s, when it might have been a less scandalous adventure than it would later become; if only he had been able to come up with, and come to terms with, the thoughts and language with which to do so.

Almost Perfectly Normal: Gore Vidal, The City and the Pillar (1948)[5]

By the time we reach Gore Vidal's novel in 1948, the Cold War rigidity regarding gender roles and the attendant hysteria regarding homosexuality has begun to set in. Yet, this novel is remarkable for its conscious deliberation of issues surrounding the roots of

homosexuality, as well as possible reasons for the deep-seated homophobia unique to the American society of the time. In fact, Vidal's characters put forth a set of very important and fruitful treatises or manifestos of gay liberation.

Before turning to the plot and the characters' struggles for self-identity and intimacy in a systematic manner, here is a most sustained and systematic manifesto, right in the middle of it all, put forth by Paul Sullivan, a homosexual novelist who is having an affair with protagonist Jim Willard at this point. In this scene, they are talking with a gay owner of a bar in New Orleans. Here's part of Paul Sullivan's manifesto, quite heady for 1948:

> "One could keep those [other "moral"] conventions; the ones to discard are the sexual taboos, the neurotic fears of frustrated people who don't dare live out their dreams because of self-made conventions and who become zealots of normality--whatever freakish state that is. [. . .]
>
> [Homosexuality is] censured because the others are afraid, afraid for themselves. They're afraid of their own dreams, their unlived past. If this thing were open *they* would be exposed too. [. . .] No, we must declare ourselves, become known; allow the world to discover this subterranean life of ours which connects kings and farm boys, artists and clerks. Let them see that the important thing is *not* the object of love but the emotion itself, it has always existed and always will and probably no explanation can be given for it." (139-41)

Jim ponders all of this, and spots a group of butch-femme lesbians [the butch ones "accentuating" "the man within"]:

"There," said Jim, motioning with his head at the older woman, "there is someone who's honest, who lets everybody know her. You mean be like that?"

"No," said Paul, "that isn't what I meant. I didn't mean defiance and I didn't mean these people; these are exceptions, these are people so hunted that they have, at last, become totally perverse as a defense. No, I was thinking of the thousands like ourselves. Perfectly normal men and women, except for this overdevelopment of the other sex in them. They live in hiding now all over the country; I think that only a few ever practice what they feel. Most of them marry and have children and try to destroy the other sex in them; they never succeed, of course. Those are the ones who should make themselves known, who should be allowed to grow outwardly, to search for love as all humans should." (142)

Paul Sullivan thus stands as a major mouthpiece for the political, intellectual, and emotional framework in which the drama of the novel is played out. Sullivan's speech is remarkable for some of its claims about possible reasons for the persecution of homosexuals, notably the resentment that heteronormative society has for people who attempt to live their dreams, and love each other, outside its own rigid conventions. This is part of the arguments put forward by many cultural theorists today (e. g., Berlant, Bronski, Warner). The society cannot afford to let a significant part of the population pursue lives of pleasure and happiness that threaten the structures of the status quo.

Yet the speech also suffers from a fairly strict adherence to medical-psychological theories of homosexuality as neurosis and the over-development of "the other sex" in the

deviant; these views are shared by most characters throughout the novel. Moreover, there seems to be a dangerous contradiction between the plea for all to be tolerated, even the most visibly abnormal, and the assertion that, rather, it's the "perfectly normal ones like us" who need to come out. But, of course, Jim and Paul aren't really normal under Paul's own characterization of them as having an overdeveloped female within. In fact, the narrator speaks of "the woman" in characters like Paul (though never Jim--he alone among the homosexual characters seems to be "all man").

Along with functioning as a moral mouthpiece for the book, Paul Sullivan acts as Jim's main mentor, his guide into the joys and perils of developing both a normal and abnormal sexual identity, depending on the moment and the person giving the diagnosis. Yet Paul's diagnosis of Jim as a particular case of a "type" of sexual, gay man, is pessimistic at best. Paul tells Jim that he is, in fact, "the unluckiest type" (127). His unluckiness, according to Sullivan, stems, in part, from not following "the usual pattern" of male homosexuals:

> Jim, who had never really thought of himself as one, now regarded himself with wonder and fear and doubt. [. . .] After all, he was able to fool everyone, even those like himself [i.e. straight-acting and appearing]. He began to remove the revelation to that dormant part of his brain where he banished unpleasant things and then, disposing of the unwanted revelation for the time being, he found that he was hurt by something Sullivan had said: he had no feeling in his relationships; he could not love a man. He was hurt that his tenderness had gone unnoticed although it was not quite the same thing as love. He felt he knew what love was

better than anyone who had ever lived. He doubted if anyone had felt as desperate as and as lonely as he when Bob had left. Yes, he was capable of love with Bob and, perhaps, with someone who could affect him in the same way: another brother. [. . .]

And Jim maintained his secret and it grew inside him and became important to him, a part of himself that no one might ever know or share: a memory of a cabin and a brown river. Some day he would relive that again and the circle of his life would be completed. Now he would learn and he would please himself and hide from the outsiders who wanted him to love. (126-127)

There is, of course, a tremendous tension throughout these passages, both in Sullivan's analysis and in Jim's words and thoughts. I will turn to a somewhat briefer discussion of points throughout the plot that detail Jim's journey toward self-understanding, and the final destination of his search for love. For now, though, let us consider the tension between the notion that there are certain patterns, which Jim doesn't fit (according to Sullivan), and the fact that there are multiple types and patterns, which Jim sees aspects of his own experience reflected in. Also, there is the tension between Jim's sense of his own uniqueness, to some degree bolstered by Sullivan's portrait of him as an exception, and his recognition that there are "others like him"--the apparently straight ones, who may be in general less effusive and visibly emotional than the more "obvious," demonstrative crowd. Moreover, he both does and does not wish to discuss and consider these matters further. He wants to deny that he "is one," even as he wishes to discover just how much he might be capable of loving a man. But answers to these

questions may, for Jim, have to wait for the full-circle back to Bob. Some writers, including Rechy and at least one of the manifestos, remark on this tendency to carry the memory of an early sexual experience, and awakening, into our later desires and expectations of our relationships.

The novel begins with a scene of Jim Willard getting very drunk in a bar, trying to forget. This scene will be revisited in the last chapter of the novel, and is the last chronological point in the novel. Chapter Two marks the beginning of traditional narrative time. Jim is getting ready for his big trip to the cabin by the river, "maybe to fish some, but mainly just loaf around" (32). Bob is graduating and plans to head off to sea the following week, so it represents an intense moment in their friendship. It will mean good-bye and the end of an era. The scene by the river is a gradual evocation of the movement of their relationship toward a sexual encounter. They begin swimming, then wrestling. Jim is curious about the sensations he feels. He regrets that they don't talk about much important. They continue to wrestle, and "[s]omehow the violence released Jim from certain emotions and he wrestled furiously with Bob, made free, for the time, by violence" (40). Shortly thereafter they embrace and have sex, which gets little description in the text except that it's intense and a point of contention between the two of them afterward. Bob says that guys aren't supposed to do that sort of thing together, that it's unnatural. Jim admits that he's enjoyed it. They agree to carry on with their affections for the rest of their time together at the cabin, when Bob is planning to leave to go to sea.

Bob leaves. That summer, Jim decides to follow his example and goes to New York to work, winding up first at sea, and then in Hollywood, where he teaches tennis

and discovers the subculture of "abnormal," homosexual men. He enjoys their friendship--they're amusing--but becomes violently defensive when propositioned. This scene is strikingly similar to the moments in the Hemingway and the Baldwin when the narrators encounter and gaze upon a group of fairies:

> He believed that he could identify all of them now. They walked with a tight, slightly mincing and completely self-conscious manner. Their voices had a curious quality, a feminine intonation, and their eyes were searching but wary, continually defending, asking.
>
> He was pleased after the first month or so in the hotel to be able to identify these curious young men. [. . .] [O]nce one of them came to him and asked him to be his lover. Jim was severe and masculine and quite unnerved. [. . .] He refused the young man and he was violent in his refusal. He said furious things that he had never said to anyone before. He felt assaulted and in danger of being destroyed. Jim was confused by these feelings. But still he went to their parties and still, from time to time, he was forced to be severe and masculine, to refuse. (91)

There are several such scenes of his violent masculine, and decidedly hompohobic, streak. Whenever his own manhood is questioned, even in teasing, he has to assert it to himself and the world. In one scene, he looks in the mirror for any traces of the womanly, and is pleased and relieved to see that, with his brown face, he looks like a wild savage.

Yet he continues to wonder about the connection between these men and his lifelong erotic dreams of both men and women, but recently centered almost exclusively

on Bob. Jim worries that his own, pure, natural desire will be corrupted by the fairies, unnatural and nonmasculine as they are. Somehow they and their desire have the power to ruin things between him and Bob:

> He could not imagine himself doing the things they said they did. But he wanted to know more, to understand this twisted behavior, to understand himself, for it was impossible that something that had been so natural and complete to him could be corrupted by these affected womanly creatures. (100)

The following passage raises the questions of masks, passing, identities, and one's confidence in one's ability to appear straight: "Jim had discovered by now that most homosexuals were confident that no one could see behind their mask of normality when they chose to wear that mask" (104). Yet aren't there people who could, or might choose to, go about their daily lives without even considering donning a mask? It depends on who wants to be out how to whom. It also requires a language and sophistication with which to make a decision about sexual identity, or a great luxury—the lack of any pressing need or desire to strike a position. Jim would seem to be a candidate, but he finds himself constantly faced with interrogating himself and his appearance to look for any telling signs. A paradox continues through today: A man desires the almost normal, not obvious gay man, and to be seen himself to fit this description; yet he wants to declare himself, and to let others know of his desires. Hence, there are a cluster of moral and epistemological quandaries. What are one's political responsibilities? How do people presume to know what they know about each other (and themselves)? Is there no escape from the struggles and paradoxes of masks without coming out to the entire

world? Don't "out" and "straight" people continue with masks, though perhaps not always so desperately? These questions are at the heart of the manifestos to come.

Jim then receives a letter from his mother, including the news that Bob Ford has married Sally Winters, his high school sweetheart, and that they have a baby. Jim's mother implores him to come home for a visit, and to contemplate settling down himself. The following ruminations of Jim's indicate the difficulty of giving up on one's fantasies, even when the evidence seems to stack the cards against one:

> He had not thought of this before. He had never before thought of Bob marrying. It never occurred to him that Bob might have changed, that Bob was a grown man and, probably, a normal one. Jim felt very cold and afraid then. The dream he had been constructing for years might be false, a daydream with no reality in it. But he would not believe this; he could not. What had happened by the river had been too important, too large for either of them ever to forget. Bob probably liked women. He rather hoped that he did, because the more clearly normal Bob was the better he would like him. But that part of Bob which Jim had shared would never change; the emotion that they had had transcended such unimportant things as the sexual object. (274)

Once again, Jim is manipulating and being manipulated by his notions of masculinity as they relate to sexual identity and desire. Bob may have changed, become normal, become exclusively straight. He might like Bob better this way. But no, "that part of Bob which Jim had shared would never change." Jim seeks to make Bob's formulation of the relation between sex and sentiment, as well as his own, fit with his political and

emotional consciousness of the world. Sullivan had said that the emotion and not the object was important. Of course, while this judgment may be true for the lover, it can hardly be so for the beloved, to paraphrase Toni Morrison's similar assertion.

Next, Jim finds himself at the dinner table at a visit back home. He begins to formulate his own personal manifesto (in the narrator's voice), molding it much on Paul Sullivan's earlier one. It's articulated in the context of his family's wish that he might one day (soon) settle down and get married like Bob Ford:

> He could never make the slightest contact with these people and this made him sad, for they were, after all, a part of his life, a part that was growing smaller. He was impatient of this masquerade now. [. . .] These usual people were either too much woman or too much man, these conventional people, these people from his past. There was no basis for understanding here. They had never been so emotionally severed from society that they were forced to analyze and understand emotion. [. . .] He wondered what would happen if he were to be honest and natural; if every man like him were to be natural and honest. [. . .] There is not much love in the world but if what little there is were made freer, were less hampered by frightened miserable people, there would be more happiness, more fulfillment. A man should be able to love other men as well as women. And, without the censure of society, he would--as they do in primitive places. For by an open love of other men as well as women wars might cease and a new period might come about; one in which there would be more peace and more self-fulfillment than there is now. (287-88)

In fact, almost all the intimacy in these books takes place in "primitive places," whether in the pastoral scenes of fishing or on the road, or in uncivilized urban spaces--Giovanni's room, New Orleans's more sordid spaces, or under the piers. Natives of such places are imagined to be free of suburban puritan prejudices and hang-ups. The striking thing about this passage, however, is the breadth and intensity of his utopian vision. While it remains naïve in its simplicity (and its very youthful tone), the notion of being forced to analyze and understand because of having been emotionally severed, and the recognition of the sadness involved in making a break from the comfortably normal past, are important and not at all simple-minded considerations. Also, he implicates himself in the problem by admitting that he has not yet been "honest and natural"—which of course recalls the impossible and dangerous burden of attempting to define these terms and to behave according to these norms.

Bob finally comes to town. They have a good dinner and decent chit-chat. Bob says he wants to get drunk. Jim takes him to a "famous fairy bar." Bob begins to question the apparent queerness of the clientele--but doesn't seem particularly bothered or threatened. Jim says that they're in New York, after all: "Jim knew then that Bob was not homosexual; it was better that he was not; it would give more meaning to their relationship." (304)

Bob suggests looking for some women. They go back to his hotel room. The women he knows are unavailable. They continue to drink in the room, begin to undress, and Jim ventures to bring up memories of their time at the cabin. They talk of their youthful "fooling around," Bob chuckling and Jim heart-struck. They finally go to the same bed, turning off the light:

> No longer thinking, but obeying his instincts, Jim reached out in the dark and took Bob in his arms.
>
> "Hey! What's going on?" Bob sat up in bed. Jim said nothing, holding him still. Bob pushed him away. "What're you doing, anyway?" Then, when Jim didn't answer, he understood. "You're a queer," he said, "you're nothing but a damned queer! Go on and get your ass out of here!" Then fury came to Jim, took the place of love. He threw himself at Bob; he caught him by the shoulders. They rolled in the darkness, both drunk but both aware. It was like a nightmare. Jim was the stronger; his rage was the greater. They fell off the bed onto the floor. They fought silently. (306)

Jim goes on to strangle Bob to death, place his body on the bed (and kiss him), and leave for the streets, ending up in the bar scene from the opening of the novel, getting drunk to forget that moment and its implications. In the revised version, Vidal has Jim rape rather than kill Bob; and which fate is worse, darker? In either case, the homosexual (or "homosexualist," as Vidal constructs the noun in subsequent public pronouncements, despite his ideal wish that there remain only the adjective "homosexual" to describe behavior, and not a noun to ascribe sexual "identity," to which he is opposed) emerges as the perpetrator of violence, rather than its victim. One cannot help but read this representation of the murderous/rapist homosexual figure in the context of McCarthy-era witch-hunts, in which heinous gayness was portrayed as being at least as huge a risk to national security and wholesome nuclear family innocence as was communism.

In the Baldwin novel, to be examined next, the setting shifts from New York to Paris. Yet the tragic fate of the lovers, along with the murderous guilt of the protagonist, is carried on. In Baldwin, however, both male figures have participated in "normal" heterosexual relationships, and yearn for the comfort of that normality even in the midst of their current passionate feelings for each other. For Jim Willard, utopian normality would be achieved if he could only find another "perfectly normal" male partner who happened to like to have sex with other guys. Utopia and normality as represented in the Baldwin text, however, can only be found between a man and a woman in a family. At least for David, love between two men is said to be impossible.

The Legacy of Dirty Secrets: James Baldwin, Giovanni's Room (1956)

As we have seen, the Hemingway is an ostensibly straight novel set in the relative openness of sexual Paris in the twenties; the main threat posed by the fairies is to the stability of masculine male friendships and heterosexual identities. In the Vidal, the scene shifts to the United States in the late forties, and the fairies pose a perceived threat to a homosexual man trying to form a sexual identity with an adolescent memory at its center. Giovanni's Room takes us back to Paris, and the fairies represent for narrator David the impossibility of men finding love together. Baldwin's novel is the story of an American male-female couple in Paris trying to figure out whether or not to get married. Hella takes time out for a trip to Spain, leaving David behind in Paris as they sort through their feelings and wishes. David meets an Italian man named Giovanni, and they have a passionate love affair.

As in the Vidal treated above, Baldwin's novel begins with the protagonist getting drunk as he reflects on the recent disaster. For Jim Willard, the event was his having murdered his beloved Bob Ford. For David, it is the imminent death by guillotine of Giovanni, who has been convicted of murdering his homosexual ex-employer; and David feels partly responsible for his fate. Hella has just left him in a rented house in the south of France, she herself headed back to the United States, through with him finally, after discovering his homosexuality. It should be noted that all five of the novels treated in this chapter open in a narrative present after the entire chronology of the story itself has taken place, as does the Holleran in the next chapter. This convention allows for a narrator with hindsight, so that each moment in the text has already been lived through. On the one hand, the reader is given a sense of immediacy once-removed. On the other, especially in first-person accounts, the narrator is put in the position of critical analyst—of rememberer rather than recounter. This makes the endings read as if inevitable.

The next scene in the novel goes back chronologically to the evening David meets Giovanni for the first time at a bar owned by Guillaume, the man he ends up being charged with murdering. In a telling passage, he describes a group of homosexuals (in much the same manner as Hemingway's, Vidal's, and Kerouac's narrators do). There is a limited typology implied, with the glaring lack of anyone attractive in David's eyes--but then along comes Giovanni:

> There were the usual paunchy, bespectacled gentlemen with avid, sometimes despairing eyes, the usual, knife-blade lean, tight-trousered 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 combinations, screaming like parrots the details of their latest love affairs--their love affairs always seemed to be hilarious. Occasionally one would swoop in, quite late in the evening, to convey the news that he--but they always called each other 'she'--had just spent time with a celebrated movie star, or a boxer. Then all of the others closed in on this newcomer and 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*. (38)

The narrator seems to have some sympathy for the gentlemen and the tight-trousered boys, but none is evident for *les folles*--the fairies. Their flamboyance bothers him more than his purported inability to imagine anyone wanting to go to bed with them. They are not men or women--they are a third sex, or a non-sex. They violate gender codes. And they laugh at masculinity, even if perhaps from a defensive posture, for whatever reason. This, too, is a theme in all these treatments of fairies.

Also in line with Vidal, there is a doubt in the reader's mind about who imagines what about whom sexually among the main characters. David is an American football player. Giovanni is a masculine Italian bartender. Jacques is a homosexual known to those who know him. During their initial encounter, however, Giovanni and David certainly wonder about each other (and David and Jacques discuss Giovanni's probable

heterosexual life). But it isn't even clear what Jacques makes of David exactly, or what the crowd at the bar does. It's the old story of the element of mystery, and masculinity, being attractive, not to mention rugged or athletic good looks. The parallels with Bob and Jim in Vidal are numerous and significant, especially because of the historical position of the novels as the two major works of American fiction to treat homosexuality as a major theme in serious terms, in 1948 and 1956 respectively. Both appeared during the period when film and television were helping to inscript extremely rigid notions of masculinity. The two novels thus reflect prevailing discourses about gender and sexuality while at the same time creating new modes of thinking about them.

David and Giovanni fall passionately in love with each other, and David moves into Giovanni's room. They have long discussions of the differences between the people of France, Italy and the United States, which becomes a major force throughout their relationship--their respective accounts of these differences are celebrated and laughed at and, finally, held partly to blame for the end of their affair.

Here, Jacques and David remind and accuse each other of having had purely physical sexual encounters, and the ultimate meaninglessness of them (in their own minds and lives). Jacques must have told David about his; he intuits that David has had them; as readers we don't know about David's history--but the point is that the accusation resonates with David regardless of his actual past experiences. Jacques says:

> "[They are shameful] because there is no affection in them, and no joy. It's like putting an electric plug in a dead socket. Touch, but no contact. All touch, but no contact and no light."
>
> I asked him: "Why?"

"That you must ask yourself," he told me, "and perhaps one day, this morning will not be ashes in your mouth." [. . .]

"Love him," said Jacques, with vehemence, "love him, and let him love you. Do you think anything else under heaven really matters? And how long, at the best, can it last? Since you are both men and still have everywhere to go? Only five minutes [the time David has accused Jacques of spending on his knees in front of young bucks], I assure you, only five minutes, and most of that, *helas!* in the dark. And if you think of them as dirty, then they *will* be 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 only *not* play it safe." He paused, watching me, and then looked down to his cognac. "You play it safe long enough," he said, in a different tone, "and you'll end up trapped in your own dirty body, forever and forever and forever--like me." (76-77)

Jacques thus assumes, predicts, indeed *knows* that their affair cannot, or at least will not, last (since they are both men with still "everywhere to go"). While this may seem a presumptuous judgment to contemporary minds, it represents a sense of the inevitable doom of a love affair between two men, as presented in the Vidal novel, and shared by David here. He feels utterly trapped by his feelings for Giovanni, yet knows that their coming together is dangerous and fated for bad consequences. And while Jacques shares his sense of doom, he insists that their time together, however short, can

be precious and not dirty. Indeed, his warning that David may end up trapped in his dirty body forever is a cruel foreshadowing of the last scene of the novel. Jacques's point now is that he must not be ashamed, and not deny the value of his feelings and their object, whatever the consequences. David claims not to know what Giovanni means by friendship; but this sounds like an attempt to deny his own desire. Much of the anxiety surrounding this desire is a problem with gender. In David's mind, to long for affection, intimacy, and sexual contact with men is considered bad, dirty, and feminine—a violation of the good, the normal, the masculine.

Their love affair, as described by David, ranges from passionate love to bitterness and hatred, but never seems to include mindless bliss--there is always doubt, and fear, present not so far beneath the surface. After learning about David's "mistress" Hella, Giovanni is constantly worried that David will leave him for her, and rightly so, as David often expects to one day. David is constantly worried about "being" or "becoming" a homosexual. His masculinity is threatened, and he often yearns for normality and a heterosexual marriage, and perhaps children. Things fall apart when Giovanni is fired from his job and Hella returns to Paris from Spain. David does leave Giovanni to be with her. Giovanni becomes desperate, hanging out with the fairies--becoming like them--and finally winds up probably murdering his ex-boss; at the end of the book it's not perfectly clear that he is guilty, but the reader assumes this to be the case. It is significant that during his downward spiral, Giovanni *becomes* a fairy, at least in David's eyes. Whether he does it to spite David, or whether it's his punishment for failing in life, or whether David only imagines his transformation into a flippant hussy figure in order to make it

bearable to disown him, David must see Giovanni in this way to survive himself, and to attempt a relationship with Hella.

As the following exchange indicates, representations of sexuality in the novel are almost always connected to assumptions about gender. Furthermore, the assertion of the loneliness of making love "only with the body" calls into question the relation of sex and sentiment, whether it be with a boy in a dark alley or with a woman in a "private" bed of heteronormativity:

> "Oh, women! There is no need, thank heaven, to have an opinion about women. Women are like water. They are tempting like that, and they can be that treacherous, and they can seem to be that bottomless, you know?--and they can be that shallow. And that dirty." He stopped. "I perhaps don't like women very much, that's true. That hasn't stopped me from making love to many and loving one or two. But most of the time--most of the time I made love only with the body."
>
> "That can make one very lonely," I said. I had not expected to say it.
>
> He had not expected to hear it. He looked at me and reached out and touched me on the cheek. "Yes," he said. Then: "I am not trying to be *mechant* when I talk about women. I respect women--very much--for their inside life, which is not like the life of a man."
>
> "Women don't seem to like that idea," I said. (105)

The reader learns later on the tragic story that has brought Giovanni to Paris. He had a wife in his village in Italy, and she had a stillborn child, an event that sent Giovanni

into such sorrow and rage that he renounced God and fled the village. Hence, both men carry with them memories and failed expectations of happiness and normality in a heterosexual marriage. David's ultimate disappointment comes near the end of the book when Hella realizes that he and Giovanni were lovers, and that David seems to prefer sex with men.

David's own realization of his love for men comes and goes at various times. One afternoon they are walking down the street, spitting cherry pits at one another, acting childish and very much in love. Yet David sees a boy walk by. He realizes that he loves this boy as he loves Giovanni. Giovanni notices this, and laughs even harder--it doesn't bother him and, in fact, makes him more passionate. But David can't handle such a feeling:

> I felt sorrow and shame and panic and great bitterness. At the same time--it was part of my turmoil and also outside it--I felt the muscles in my neck tighten with the effort I was making not to turn my head and watch that boy diminish down the bright avenue. 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)

In a later scene, he eyes a sailor dressed in white, and doesn't realize the extent to which his own desire is apparent in his eyes--apparent, at least to the sailor, though perhaps not to David himself. He eyes the sailor, whom he observes "walking with that funny roll sailors have and with that aura, hopeful and hard, of having to make a great deal happen in a hurry. I was staring at him, though I did not know it, and wishing I were he" (121). He so badly wants to be a normal, real masculine man. The fantasy of being in a white uniform as representing an appropriate mode of being a normal man will be replicated almost exactly in the words of Malone in Andrew Holleran's novel, to be discussed below. Sadly, the fantasy will not come true for David, and, worse, he senses that the sailor intuits his longings. Moreover, David understands that his desire for intimacy and affection is even more threatening than mere lust would be, to both the sailor and himself, because such sentiment crosses the barrier of acceptable notions of masculine relations:

> But, hurrying, and not daring now to look at anyone, male or female, who passed me on the wide sidewalks, I knew that what the sailor had seen in my unguarded eyes was envy and desire: I had seen it often in Jacques' eyes and my reaction and the sailor's had been the same. But if I were still able to feel affection and if he had seen it in my eyes, it would not have helped, for affection, for the boys I was doomed to look at, was vastly more frightening than lust. (122-23)

After an encounter with a woman named Sue, in an attempt to bolster his masculine identity, David ponders suicide and his desire for normality, just before returning to learn that Giovanni has lost his job:

> Yet it was true, I recalled, turning away from the river down the long street home, I wanted children. I wanted to be inside again, with the light and safety, with my manhood unquestioned, watching my woman put my children to bed. I wanted the same bed at night and the same arms and I wanted to rise in the morning, knowing where I was. I wanted a women [*sic*] to be for me a steady ground, like the earth itself, where I could always be renewed. It had been so once; it had almost been so once. I could make it again, I could make it real. It only demanded a short, hard strength for me to become myself again. (137-38)

Giovanni finally tells David of his stillborn male child, and the life he left behind in Italy. He accuses David of being one of those fairies who would probably lust after his son, had he lived. Yet he pleads his love for David, and says how he will die if David leaves him. Moreover, he accuses David of being a heartless American of the sort who would take a tourist trip through his Italian village, with no understanding of true love and passion:

> "You do not," cried Giovanni, sitting up, "love anyone! You have never loved anyone, I am sure you never will! 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 as though you had some precious metal, gold, silver, rubies, maybe *diamonds* down there between your legs! You will never give it to anybody, you will never let anybody *touch* it-- man or woman. You want to be *clean*. You think you came here covered with soap--and you do not want to stink, not even for five minutes, in the

meantime." He grasped me by the collar, wrestling and caressing at once, fluid and iron at once, saliva spraying from his lips and his eyes full of tears, but with the bones of his face showing and the muscles leaping in his arms and neck. "You want to leave Giovanni because he makes you 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 of my life. Look, *look* what you have done to me. Do you think you could have done this if I did not love you? Is *this* what you should do to love?"

Inside me something locked. "I--I cannot have a life with you," I said.

"But you can have a life with Hella. With that moon-faced little girl who thinks babies come out of cabbages--or frigidaires, I am not acquainted with the mythology of your country. You can have a life with her."

"Yes," I said, wearily, "I can have a life with her." I stood up. I was shaking. "What kind of life can we have in this room?--this filthy little room. What kind of life can two men have together, anyway? All this love you talk about--isn't it just that you want to be made to feel strong? You want to go out and be the big laborer and bring home the money, and you want me to stay here and wash the dishes and cook the food and clean this miserable closet of a room and kiss you when you

come in through that door and lie with you at night and be your little *girl*. That's what you want. That's what you mean and that's *all* you mean when you say you love me. You say I want to kill *you*. What do you think you've been doing to me?"

"I am not trying to make you a little girl. If I wanted a little girl, I would be *with* a little girl."

"Why aren't you? Isn't it just that you're afraid? And you take me because you haven't got the guts to go after a woman, which is what you *really* want?"

He was pale. "You are the one who keeps talking about *what* I want. But I have only been talking about *who* I want."

"But I'm a man," I cried, "a man! What do you think can *happen* between us?"

"You know very well," said Giovanni slowly, "what can happen between us. It is for that reason you are leaving me." (186-89)

In the midst of all of this tension and even contradiction about gender roles (e.g., which man is most threatened in his masculinity--do they both want to be "the man," or at least "a real man"?), Giovanni "turns back into the room." Not only does his body turn, but he is transformed once again into his room--the room is the prison of homosexuality in which David, though not Giovanni, feels trapped. The room is the vile, filthy, immoral miserable little closet that David has tried to escape from since his first moment of passion there.

David leaves Giovanni to attempt a relationship with Hella. It doesn't work, as first he feels his feelings toward her change dramatically, and begins to find her "stale, her body uninteresting, her presence grating." Hella tries to find out what's bothering him. First, she realizes that it has to do with his sadness about Giovanni waiting on death row; next she realizes that Giovanni was in love with David, and his guilt about not doing more to help him; finally, she discovers him in a gay bar and comes to understand much more about his love for Giovanni and his homosexual desire. In her desperation and passion, she puts the blame squarely on Giovanni, whom she either believes, or wants defensively to convince herself, is the bad homosexual who has corrupted David and ruined their chance at bliss. She seems to forget or deny her earlier sympathy for Giovanni. Now he represents the corrupting influence of sophisticated Europe, ruining the innocence and simple happiness of Americans:

> "I'll never understand it," she said at last, and she raised her eyes to mine as though I could help her to understand. "That sordid little gangster has wrecked your life. I think he's wrecked mine, too. Americans should never come to Europe," she said, and tried to laugh and began to cry, "it means they can never be happy again. What's the good of an American who isn't happy? Happiness was all we had." And she fell forward into my arms, into my arms for the last time, sobbing. (218)

She moves away, trying to articulate her frustration with the trap of her fairly essentialist view of gender, at least of femaleness. This is very similar to the musing about gender to come in Kerouac's On the Road, published the very next year but set in America. Here,

Hella retreats to the tiny mirror in her compact, to inspect, indeed, to apply, the face of the little girl who only wants to be together with a little boy:

> She moved away. "Ah. I don't know anything about happiness anymore. I don't know anything about forgiveness. But if women are supposed to be led by men and there aren't any men to lead them, what happens then? What happens then?" She went to the closet and got her coat; dug in her handbag and found her compact and, looking into the tiny mirror, carefully dried her eyes and began to apply her lipstick. "There's a difference between little boys and little girls, just like they say in those little blue books. Little girls want little boys. But little boys--!" She snapped her compact shut. "I'll never again, as long as I live, know *what* they want. And now I know they'll never tell me. I don't think they know how." (218-19)

In the final passage of the novel, Hella has left David alone, and he begins to fantasize in the form of a vision of Giovanni's final few moments before execution. The guillotine that will kill Giovanni is the knife that would cut off David's sex. The mirror brings his attention back to himself, alone, in the present moment, and he searches for the religious significance of his troubled state. He faces his full body, his troubling sex, trapped in the reflection in the mirror that shows him the trouble with attempting to inhabit a unified self defined as adult and masculine, suffering from the heteronormative imposition of heterosexuality and domesticity. He longs to crack the mirror, to escape the confines of this false unity made up of false identities and labels. Finally, he turns

away from the mirror, back to his real body, back to Giovanni, until Giovanni's moment of death merges with David's own final thoughts:

> 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 hurries toward revelation.
>
> *When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood 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. [. . .]
>
> 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, 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. (222-224)

Thus, Baldwin's narrator leaves the reader with a manifesto that is also a mystery. He knows he must live on with his body and his sexuality, which is sacred and also vile. Jack Kerouac's <u>On the Road</u>, to which I will now turn, is a novel much more

sex-positive on the surface (at least regarding heterosexual sex), but one in which the narrator faces similar struggles with what it means to be a mid-century American man. Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty face the constant task of redefining their friendship, and especially the significance of their attempt at being intimate together.

Eternal Jock Buddies/Soul Brothers: Jack Kerouac, On the Road (1957)[6]

Jack Kerouac's novel On the Road, published in 1957, the year after Baldwin's Giovanni's Room, makes a dramatic and self-conscious contribution to post-WWII fictional representations of masculinity and male intimacies. Moreover, it has perhaps the most obviously problematic and ambiguous relation to questions of homoeroticism and homophobia of all the novels discussed in this chapter, especially insofar as homosexuality isn't analyzed explicitly here as it is in Vidal, Baldwin, and Rechy. The Kerouac and Rechy portray potential ideals of new forms of male intimacy, though both end with the ultimate failure of the ability to sustain such connections.

The Hemingway and Baldwin texts exemplify the troubles males have sustaining intimacies with each other. Vidal's protagonist Jim is in search of a return to or adult replication of his nostalgic vision of a boyhood love, but the adult form of intimacy is devoid of any specific content, and fails to be realized. In Rechy, as we shall see, one possible reading of the text is that true love and intimacy are impossible, and that pretensions to finding them are shams. Another reading, however, suggests that the narrator *chooses* to reject possible intimate connections that come his way. And this question is discussed openly at length. In the Kerouac, the male characters intuitively pursue and inhabit versions of masculinity and intimacy and ecstasy, only to reach crisis

points brought about by a growing understanding that they can't go on like this—that something has come between them—that something has fallen apart.

Too, On the Road marks a departure from the other works in its concerns with family and the pursuit of the possibly mutually exclusive goals of both the transgression of reigning morality and the maintenance of, and nostalgia for, old-fashioned American heteronormativity. In the Hemingway, for instance, it's almost as if the main characters have no siblings or parents. In the Vidal, we get only glimpses of Jim and Bob's families at the start (and then when Bob is married at the end). In Baldwin, there is the odd mention of David's father in the context of rare letters between them, and the poignant description of Giovanni's childhood home in Italy. But the books by Kerouac and Rechy are very much about being separated from family, and the wish for a return to a stable, comforting family "home" life. While Rechy's narrator seems to make deliberate decisions about where to go and what to do, Kerouac's characters are very much torn and consumed with the balance between being on the road and settling down, and seem out of control, wishing to relinquish the responsibility of deliberative action, preferring instead to be swept away, at least until the end of the book, when Sal makes a decision.

The main themes of On the Road that concern me here are as follows: 1) The travels and togetherness of Sal and Dean as they pursue "kicks" and attempt to articulate their version of the American dream; at first glance (and as the public mythology of the book largely has it), they reject middle-class values and proprieties, replacing them with the wild abandon of drugs, booze, sex, and jazz; 2) Sal's nostalgia for a lost America of small-town innocence and family life, which he often describes in terms of lost fathers, and alternately with his desire to find a wife and settle down; 3) Sal's descriptions of

intimacies, whether between the main male characters or with women or with strangers he meets along the way--at times, it appears he might achieve a sort of intimacy and "love" with hitchhiking mates he only knows for a few hours or less; 4) his discussions of relations between the sexes--the narrative contains both misogyny (e.g., Dean breaks his thumb beating a girlfriend) and somewhat essentialist apologies explaining why men and women don't get along; and 5) the apparent conclusion that even he and Dean, the best of buddy-buddies, aren't able to stay together or remain loyal, partly because of their inability to negotiate a sustainable form of masculine intimacy (e.g., at one of the crisis points in their relationship, Dean says he was crying and Sal responds accusingly that Dean doesn't cry). Indeed, while On the Road carries on the tradition of representing troubled if, at times, pleasurable, masculinities of the previous three novels considered in this chapter, it marks a departure because of its treatment of characters obsessed with self-exploration and inwardness. Many of the men in the book are conscious and explicit about exploring the meaning and potential extent of their togetherness, while attempting to transcend some of the hang-ups that hung up men in Hemingway, Vidal and Baldwin as they tried to talk about intimacy. Yet they still confront problems with gendered expectations, both with each other and in their relations with women.

Initial critical reception of On the Road was extremely polarized. Its first review in the New York Times hailed it as a tremendous success, calling it the Beat Generation's version of the Lost Generation's The Sun Also Rises. This single review, written by stand-in critic Gilbert Millstein, assured its immediate commercial success. On the other hand, conservative voices, including one in the Nation, complained first about its literary shortcomings, but more disdainfully about its embodiment of the moral decay of the

young generation of the fifties. Such mixed reception would follow Kerouac and most of the Beat writers for years to come. And the moralizing tendency of the criticism was almost always at the forefront.[7]

Recent scholarship is generally kinder to the novel as a work of literature, including appreciations of its stylistic innovations and huge cultural influence, and much less critical of its purported moral degeneracy. After all, the Beats in general, and Kerouac's On the Road and Ginsberg's Howl in particular, were important participants in the discourse of the beginnings of what have come to be called the sexual revolution and counterculture of the post-war period (as Kerouac's narrator Sal will articulate as he describes Dean Moriarty's single-handedly bringing a new sexuality into being). The portrayal of promiscuity in On the Road, among both men and women heterosexually and with male same-sex relations simmering just under the surface of the published version, was quite unorthodox for the time, especially its portrayal of sexually active women. In Make Love, Not War (2001), David Allyn describes attitudes of the time toward sexual activity and the double standard, and even a curious double standard of sorts toward the double standard itself, as follows:

> In the 1950s, as Americans reveled in the "return to normalcy" after years of depression and war, the double standard was reaffirmed in books, movies, television shows, and popular magazines. American males were told that if they were healthy they should hunger for sex, while young women were advised to resist forcefully and demand a ring. [. . .]
>
> No matter what was really going on behind closed doors, those who publicly criticized the double standard could suffer severe

> consequences. As long as one championed sexual restraint *for both sexes*, there was no need to fear [emphasis added]. But as soon as one advocated sexual freedom for women as well as men, the public responded with outrage. (14-16)

Scholars have also recently put readings of On the Road in the context of fifties discourse about sexuality and gender categories. In Homosexuality in the Cold War Era, Robert J. Corber discusses Sal Paradise's problems with gender in the context of white men in the era mourning the loss of the "pioneer spirit," and their attempts to recover it. In part, it is an issue of class according to Corber:

> One way of reading Sal Paradise's travels on the road is as his search for a masculinity that is commensurate with his fantasies and desires. By taking to the road, he hopes to recover the form of male identity displaced by the rise of the white-collar worker. [. . .] [He] constantly questions whether he is sufficiently masculine. [. . .] Sal does not want to possess the cowboy sexually so much as to inhabit his body, to experience his masculinity as though it were his own. Sal clearly thinks that the cowboy is more of a man than he is. Despite his working-class background, Sal has been pampered by comparison to the cowboy, whose life has been "raw" and austere. (50-51)

If we take seriously the premise that considerations of gender often subsume or at least widely overlap those of sexuality, then the distinction between the desire to possess the cowboy sexually and the desire to inhabit his body and masculinity is not self-evident. To inhabit him would be a form of sexual possession. The more important point is that

Sal is attracted to the idea of becoming more masculine than he perceives himself to be. He wants to be a cowboy--and black, and Mexican, and a hobo, and a lot of things other than what he is, throughout the novel, all of which indicate his association of untainted masculinity and freedom with the Other, as opposed to the conformist, bourgeois white American value system of the time.

Another critic who notes the significance of the Beats and On the Road in post-war American literature and discussions of gender, sexuality, and race is David Savran. In Taking It Like a Man (1998), Savran describes his own book as an examination of what he calls the fear of the feminization of the male subject, as well as the appearance of "the fantasy of the white male as victim" in the fifties (4). He also makes an important claim about the similarities between white masculinities according to which concerns of gender subsume differences between categories of identity based on sexual object choice:

> [This book] also attempts to interrogate the relationship between ostensibly heterosexual and ostensibly homosexual white masculinities in U.S. culture, arguing that they are far more alike than they might at first appear to be. Reacting in remarkably similar ways to anxieties over what they fantasize to be an encroaching feminization of the male subject (and of U.S. culture), they are sometimes almost indistinguishable. (33)

This claim is important to my project because it acknowledges that gay men, too, have anxieties about perceived feminization. This anxiety is present in all the pre-Stonewall texts examined here, whether ostensibly gay or straight. The Stonewall-era manifestos, however, are quite ambivalent about the perceived feminine. Some call for becoming real men, while others embrace an ideal of androgyny and the end of gender. By the late

seventies, though, the fear of the feminine reaches a new crisis in the worship of the hyper-macho clone and leatherman figures. Savran's claim does seem to presuppose an essential white masculinity that ostensible gays and straights could share. It also raises the question of the extent to which claims about gender are claims made by an outsider observing a performance, or a gendered subject making claims about how it feels to be anxiety-ridden about gender.

As for the Beats, Savran sees them as being willing to embrace aspects of the feminine, in contrast, for instance, to the Organization Man, but only on the condition that they can become real men again at will when the feminine becomes uncomfortable. This "retreat" is exemplified by Sal Paradise's homophobic outbursts in the narrative of On the Road.

> [T]he Beats negotiated the treacherous binarism of sexual difference during an era in which both gender and sexual deviance were, to say the least, subject to extraordinary negative pressure. In what passes for American literature, the Beats were the first explicitly to embrace a feminized position—but only on condition that they could beat a hasty and horrified retreat from it. (67)

The book is very much about men falling in love, especially Sal with Dean, and wondering what it means, and how best to deal with it in the context of an ostensibly heterosexual milieu. On the second page, we see what will remain a trinity of Sal's descriptions of Dean: his body, his language, and his soul. It is clearly love at first sight:

> I went to the cold-water flat with the boys, and Dean came to the door in his shorts. [. . .] [T]o him sex was the one and only holy and

important thing in life, although he had to sweat and curse to make a living and so on. You saw that in the way he stood bobbing his head, always looking down, nodding, like a young boxer to instructions, to make you think he was listening to every word, throwing in a thousand "Yeses" and "That's rights." My first impression of Dean was of a young Gene Autry--trim, thin-hipped, blue-eyed, with a real Oklahoma accent--a sideburned hero of the snowy West. (2)

The descriptions of the body are often quite heroic, adoring, and steamy. One thinks forward here to the Dustin Hoffman character upon seeing the Jon Voight character in Midnight Cowboy. This is a striking example of the resonance of representations in On the Road through the 1960s, Stonewall, and beyond. And the relationship in this film also goes back to this novel to register a sense of suspicion from the start—that the rush of the immediate sense of connection can't last, that the object of adoration is too good to be true, the over-the-top cowboy masculine posture somehow dangerous--but in each the sense of excitement and attraction far exceeds any concerns. The difference is that in the film the cowboy learns to con from Ratso Rizzo. In this novel, though Dean approaches Sal under the pretext of wanting to learn how to write, it is Sal who learns from con-man Dean about the joys and perils of unbridled masculine energy:

I was beginning to get the bug like Dean. He was simply a youth tremendously excited with life, and though he was a con-man, he was only conning because he wanted so much to live and to get involved with people who would otherwise pay no attention to him. He was conning me and I knew it (for room and board and "how-to-write," etc.), and he knew

> I knew (this has been the basis of our relationship), but I didn't care and we got along fine--no pestering, no catering; we tiptoed around each other like heartbreaking new friends. I began to learn from him as much as he probably learned from me. (4)

Here we see the basis for a possible ideal of intimacy: compromise and tiptoeing, no pestering, a sense of heartbreak at least on one side, and learning from one another. Also, there's a sense between them of mutual support and excitement about common interests (in this case, literary artistry and intensity of experience):

> As far as my work was concerned he said, "Go ahead, everything you do is great." He watched over my shoulder as I wrote stories, yelling, "Yes! That's right! Wow! Man!!" and "Phew!" and wiped his face with his handkerchief. "Man, wow, there's so many things to do, so many things to write! How to even *begin* to get it all down and without modified restraints and all hung-up on like literary inhibitions and grammatical fears. . ." (4)

There's also a sense of sharing something unique in the world, at least an unconventional perspective (a sort of "you and me against the world" sharing, a sharing of secrets), and most definitely not being "hung-up."

Then Dean meets Carlo Marx, and, in a widely-quoted passage, Sal watches as two others embark on a form of intimacy he is unable to share, however much he might want to. This is one place where explicit reference to their homoerotic and homosexual relationship was removed in the final draft of the novel:[8]

> And that was the night Dean met Carlo Marx. A tremendous thing happened when Dean met Carlo Marx. Two keen minds that they are, they took to each other at the drop of a hat. Two piercing eyes glanced into two piercing eyes--the holy con-man with the shining mind, and the sorrowful poetic con-man with the dark mind that is Carlo Marx. From that moment on I saw very little of Dean, and I was a little sorry too. Their energies met head-on, I was a lout compared, I couldn't keep up with them. (5)

Sal the narrator perhaps deceives himself about his feelings here, especially since the narrative is structured to be looking back in hindsight (back to a time before things had gone sour between him and Dean). Surely he was more than a little sorry to have been replaced as the object of affection and con-job of the "amorous soul" of Dean. And he will later discover that it isn't, as he maintains, only the mad people whom he himself adores. They become too much for him, and he comes to prefer mellower, gentler, perhaps even more stable and predictable, company, at least as an ideal. Indeed, much of the action in the novel has him settling down to serious work, relieved to be home again off the road, only to be swept away again the next time Dean comes courting for kicks.

Indeed, even so early on in the novel, Sal seems to realize potentially irreconcilable differences between him and Dean, but finds Dean nonetheless irresistible:

> [H]e reminded me of some long-lost brother; the sight of his suffering bony face with the long sideburns and his straining muscular sweating neck made me remember my boyhood in those dye-dumps and swim-holes and riversides of Paterson and the Passaic. His dirty

> workclothes clung to him so gracefully, as though you couldn't buy a better fit from a custom tailor but only earn it from the Natural Tailor of Natural Joy, as Dean had, in his stresses. And in his excited way of speaking I heard again the voices of old companions and brothers under the bridge, among the motorcycles, along the wash-lined neighborhoods and drowsy doorsteps of afternoon where boys played guitar while their older brothers worked in the mills. (7)

Clearly the desire for and ideal of adult male friendship and intimacy here is deeply connected to nostalgia for boyhood pals and homosociality, including a large component of bodily sensuality--it is a sensory nostalgia more than a rational or conceptual one. And its strong emotionality is much more physical than linguistic (e.g., it's not the words spoken by the boys, but the sounds of their voices, and their manner of speaking, that are brought back).

Such nostalgia for a less complicated, more seemingly innocent time, free at least from current tensions, ambiguities, and fears, is shared by Vidal's Jim and Bob, Baldwin's David and Giovanni, and Hemingway's Jake (to be back on the football field or the tennis court, before the war, before the injury, away from the present deadening malaise). This nostalgia becomes an overwhelming presence in Holleran's Dancer from the Dance (1978).

Later, while hitchhiking, Sal loves some fellow riders. He appreciates their tenderness and care, their unconditional affection, and his own sense of altruism. In Sal's view of intimacy, a combination of passion and compassion seems necessary. Throughout the book, he describes such feelings of bonding with strangers:

> Meanwhile the blond young fugitive sat the same way; every now and then Gene leaned out of his Buddhistic trance over the rushing dark plains and said something tenderly in the boy's ear. The boy nodded. Gene was taking care of him, of his moods and his fears. I wondered where the hell they would go and what they would do. They had no cigarettes. I squandered my pack on them, I loved them so. They were grateful and gracious. They never asked, I kept offering. (28)

This sort of spontaneous, unself-conscious intimacy happens almost exclusively with males. With females, he mainly describes sexual energy, and his desire to have sex with them, primarily as objects of his desire. Males most often receive the anointment of subjecthood. There appears to be a cultural understanding between men of a pre-existent male-to-male code of buddy-buddy behavior (as there is in Hemingway and Rechy, though in Rechy the parties consciously, explicitly, and mutually understand it to be play-acting according to a script that belies their loneliness and isolation).

Sal then hangs out with Slim, another fellow rider. In an encounter with women, in which there is no talk of tender feelings or nostalgia, and no emotional experience whatsoever, Sal reports having a momentary sense of his "whole being and purpose." Yet it rings shallow and inadequate as an example of what ideal contentment, happiness, and intimacy might mean for him:

> We picked up two girls, a pretty young blond and a fat brunette. They were dumb and sullen, but we wanted to make them. We took them to a rickety nightclub that was already closing, and there I spent all but two dollars on Scotches for them and beer for us. I was getting drunk and

didn't care; everything was fine. My whole being and purpose was pointed at the little blonde. I wanted to go in there with all my strength. I hugged her and wanted to tell her. (33)

But of course he doesn't tell her--anything. No talking necessary. Just to "go in there" with strength. He doesn't ever really have conversations with women, at least not as he does with men. Women may have souls for Sal, and capture his sentimental pining away at the sadness of the universe on occasion, but they don't seem to have minds or agency.

In contrast, the men are getting "turned on" together in a more esoteric mode. In this passage, Sal and Carlo Marx reunite in Denver. Carlo reports on the recent time he and Dean have spent together:

> And he told me that Dean was making love to two girls at the same time, they being Marylou, his first wife, who waited for him in a motel room, and Camille, a new girl, who waited for him in a motel room. "Between the two of them he rushes to me for our own unfinished business. [. . .] Dean and I are embarked on a tremendous season together. We're trying to communicate with absolute honesty and absolute completeness everything on our minds. We've had to take benzedrine. We sit on the bed, cross-legged, facing each other." (41)

Not only is this part of a possible ideal of intimacy (the absolute honesty and completeness), but it reveals an assumption on the part of these men that they know what's going on in each other's minds and souls (as Sal knows what Carlo is thinking about Dean, and they both assume they can intuit what's going on in Dean's mind much of the time).

Another example of this disquietude surrounding gender relations, sentiment, and stuff sexual comes when Sal gets together with a woman named Rita. They have unsatisfactory sex (he's "too impatient" to prove to her how good it can be) and they look at the ceiling, "wondering what God had wrought when He made life so sad" (58).

> My moments in Denver were coming to an end, I could feel it when I walked her home, on the way back I stretched out on the grass of an old church with a bunch of hobos, and their talk made me want to get back on the road. Every now and then one would get up and hit a passer-by for a dime. They talked of harvests moving north. It was warm and soft. I wanted to go and get Rita and tell her a lot more things, and really make love to her this time, and calm her fears about men. Boys and girls in America have such a sad time together; sophistication demands that they submit to sex immediately without proper preliminary talk. Not courting talk--real straight talk about souls, for life is holy and every moment is precious. I heard the Denver and Rio Grande locomotive howling off to the mountains. I wanted to pursue my star further. (58)

Sal thus offers an unconscious apology for his behavior, or asserts a genuine wish that things were different between boys and girls. He gets all weepy and sentimental when it comes to boys and girls together. Yet he *doesn't* get back in touch with Rita; it's the talk of the hobos that is warm and soft. He *doesn't* talk to girls about souls, but does with boys. Yet, no matter how much he adores and rhapsodizes males' spiritual and physical manhood, the idea of men who might have sex with other men is highly discomfiting.

The following scene is telling for its representations of girls and queers, especially given its location in the text, coming as it does in such close proximity to Sal's meetings with his own sexually ambiguous fellows:

> Meanwhile I began going to Frisco more often; I tried everything in the books to make a girl. I even spent a whole night with a girl on a park bench, till dawn, without success. She was a blonde from Minnesota. There were plenty of queers. Several times I went to San Fran with my gun and when a queer approached me in a bar john I took out the gun and said, "Eh? Eh? What's that you say?" He bolted. I've never understood why I did that; I knew queers all over the country. It was just the loneliness of San Francisco and the fact that I had a gun. I had to show it to someone. [. . .]
>
> I wrote long letters to Dean and Carlo, who were now at Old Bull's shack in the Texas bayou. They said they were ready to join me in San Fran as soon as this-and-that was ready. (73)

In addition to the homophobia evidenced here, and the apology for it (so strikingly similar to Jake's in Hemingway), what's significant about this passage is the juxtaposition of its component parts. Directly following the failure with women comes the queer-talk, and then directly to Dean and Carlo at Old Bull's. Old Bull is the character based on William Burroughs, a homosexual writer of the Beat group (as is Allen Ginsberg, fictionalized as Carlo Marx). If Kerouac were truly trying to write things, or his narrator to report them, as they came to mind, just as they happened (Kerouac's self-proclaimed method and aspiration), then the immediate succession of

these images suggests a perplexity in the narrator's mind beyond mere loneliness. Not to mention the "gun" he had to show to *someone* in the john (the *john*). The narrative moves from a failure with a woman to a homophobic crisis to a Sal's reunion with his buddies who, at least according to Savran, are capable of embracing or retreating from the feminine and, hence, the potentially homoerotic.

Sal is reaching out for intimacy of some kind--any kind; but barriers stand in the way of finding it on all sides. Why is it that both Kerouac's and Hemingway's narrators insist on displaying their homophobic moments as they quickly apologize for themselves? Why not either merely leave the scene as homophobic without ambivalence or apology, or portray a scene not so homophobic, or simply leave out mention of the scene entirely? This isn't a rhetorical question included to suggest some knowing-wink reading of the texts. Rather, it illustrates the paradoxical nature of the discourse regarding homosexuality and the complicity of this discourse in textual constructions and representations of masculinity that remains remarkably consistent in significant ways from the twenties through the late-fifties, and does not end with the project now known as modern gay liberation.

In a way, it's easier to understand why Vidal's and Baldwin's characters would want to have their characters distance themselves from "*really* faggy fags" in an attempt to establish their own masculinity and, hence, acceptability as mates in a landscape of masculine intimacy (even as ultimately homophobic as such a scenario reads today). But the insistence of Hemingway's and Kerouac's on attempting to do so implies an important comment on the mutual construction of hetero- and homosexual identities. Apparently, one cannot be a man without negating the non-man. One cannot imagine

male-to-male intimacy, that is, masculine intimacy, without first excluding some lesser, perverted form of desire and desiring subjects.

Shortly thereafter, Sal describes Dean's change into the mad angel he would be till the end. The cause of Dean's madness is never made clear, but the reader gathers that it must come from some combination of drugs and sheer overexertion:

> He had become absolutely mad in his movements; he seemed to be doing everything at the same time. It was a shaking of the head, up and down, sideways; jerky, vigorous hands; quick walking, sitting, crossing the legs, uncrossing, getting up, rubbing the hands, rubbing his fly, hitching his pants, looking up and saying "Am," and sudden slitting of the eyes to see everywhere; and all the time he was grabbing me by the ribs and talking, talking.
>
> It was very cold in Testament; they'd had an unseasonable snow. He stood in the long bleak main street that runs along the railroad, clad in nothing but a T-shirt and low-hanging pants with the belt unbuckled, as though he was about to take them off. [. . .]
>
> I had been spending a quiet Christmas in the country, as I realized when we got back into the house and I saw the Christmas tree, the presents, and smelled the roasting turkey and listened to the talk of relatives, but now the bug was on me again, and the bug's name was Dean Moriarty and I was off on another spurt around the road. (114-15)

Thus, Sal has once more been overtaken by his attraction (and loyalty?) to Dean, even though it is now mainly Dean the body he must accompany (later in the book, Dean

can no longer even talk coherently). But in this scene, at least, the road and the high-energy it promises have won out over the family Christmas in the country. Even though he and Dean can no longer communicate verbally about soul-things, the images of Dean's sexuality so openly and excitedly ("naturally," at least for Dean) displayed and expressed are enough to take Sal away from home-life and work.

Soon after being back on the road, however, he has another crisis of the conflict between the wildness and the quiet life:

> It was a completely meaningless set of circumstances that made Dean come, and similarly I went off with him for no reason. [. . .] All these years I was looking for the woman I wanted to marry. [. . .] "I want to marry a girl," I told them, "so I can rest my soul with her till we both get old. This can't go on all the time--all this franticness and jumping around. We've got to go someplace, find something."
>
> "Ah now, man," said Dean, "I've been digging you for years about the *home* and marriage and all those fine wonderful things about your soul." It was a sad night; it was also a merry night. (116-17)

This conflict between the desire for the new and the normal, the road and the home-hearth, is a constant presence throughout the works treated here, and in representations of the struggle for people to narrate libratory experiences and construct liberated identities throughout the twentieth century.

Later, Sal and Dean are alone in a car, their first chance to talk alone in years, according to Dean. They talk about God, and Sal admits that Dean's talk is incomprehensible, but that he has become a mystic. After Sal's aunt joins them on their

drive to deliver household goods, they discuss gender roles in America. The temptation is to find an essential gender to place blame on for the difficulties men and women face—perhaps as men even to apologize:

> My aunt once said the world would never find peace until men fell at their women's feet and asked for forgiveness. But Dean knew this; he'd mentioned it many times. "I've pleaded and pleaded with Marylou for a peaceful sweet understanding of pure love between us forever with all hassles thrown out--she understands; her mind is bent on something else--she's after me; she won't understand how much I love her, she's knitting my doom."
>
> "The truth of the matter is we don't understand our women; we blame on them and it's all our fault," I said.
>
> "But it isn't as simple as that," warned Dean. "Peace will come suddenly, we won't understand it when it does--see, man?" (122)

Throughout the book, when they pause to consider such questions, Dean and especially Sal try to imagine, and occasionally to negotiate, arrangements between themselves and women that would allow for mutual understanding. Dean, when he speaks, tends in large part to blame the women. Sal does his best to take more responsibility--in words if not actions. But what is the peace that Dean predicts in this passage; and why is it not so simple, but somehow deeply intertwined with gender and sexual relations—a day when there will be no "hassles"? One recalls the narrator's heady liberation manifest in the Vidal book in which "wars would cease" if there were a true

sexual revolution. The proposed relationship between gender and sexuality and broader social and political transformations in these texts is remarkable.

A while later, Dean puts forth a proposal shortly after issuing a manifesto of sorts. The three of them are driving back to California. In his dream of togetherness, it isn't exactly clear how far his wish extends—just to them, or to everyone in their circle, or to people in general. They are passed by a young couple on a motorcycle:

> "Wow! Dig that gone gal on his belt! Let's all blow!" Dean tried to catch up with them. "Now wouldn't it be fine if we could all get together and have a real going goofbang together with everybody sweet and fine and agreeable, no hassles, no infant rise of protest or body woes misconceptualized or sumpin? Ah! but we know time." (159)

The "but" at the end here is ambiguous. At first it appears to mean "but, alas." However, given Dean and his faith that peace will come, it's at least as likely that it means "because we know time," therefore serving as an invulnerable premise in his argument.

His more immediate proposal is that they continue their journey in the nude:

> "Now Sal, now Marylou, I want both of you to do as I'm doing, disemburden yourselves of all that clothes--now what's the sense of clothes? now that's what I'm sayin--and sun your pretty bellies with me. Come on!" [. . .] Marylou complied; unfuddyduddied, so did I. We sat in the front seat, all three. Marylou took out cold cream and applied it to us for kicks. (161)

They are seen, first by truckers, and then when they get out to look at an old Indian ruin (Sal and Marylou don overcoats--Dean does not), by unbelieving tourists.

For Dean, the whole scene is quite an unconscious expression of his desire (i.e., there was no deliberate intent to shock, nor a care in the world for others' reactions). But Sal must become "unfuddyduddied" first, and does notice who sees them. Such are the imaginable narrative options for scenes that depict the attempt at free, and even potentially public, sexual expression, and one form of intimacy, in the post-war period. This raises the question of what attitude might more possibly lead to ultimately satisfactory intimacy—fud or unfud, Sal's or Dean's psyche? For truly liberated intimacy, is one better off with "free love," a version of which I call "full-throttle promiscuity," or with a more confined, and more easily defined and settled context for relationships?

The choice of radical "freedom" may come with costs; it implies a denial of traditional two-mate relationships, and the conscious acceptance of more transient, fleeting possibilities for promiscuity without promises, liaisons that may or may not be impersonal and superficial. Both Sal and Marylou soon express concerns that Dean has crossed some line of acceptability in their minds:

> Marylou was watching Dean as she had watched him clear across the country and back, out of the corner of her eye--with a sullen, sad air, as though she wanted to cut off his head and hide it in her closet, an envious and rueful love of him so amazingly himself, all raging and sniffy and crazy-wayed, a smile of tender dotage but also sinister envy that frightened me about her, a love she knew would never bear fruit because when she looked at his hangjawed bony face with its male self-containment and absentmindedness she knew he was too mad. Dean was convinced Marylou was a whore; he confided in me that she was a

> pathological liar. But when she watched him like this it was love too; and when Dean noticed he always turned with his big false flirtatious smile, with eyelashes fluttering and the teeth pearly white, while a moment ago he was only dreaming in his eternity. Then Marylou and I both laughed--and Dean gave no sign of discomfiture, just a goofy glad grin that said to us, ain't we gettin' our kicks *anyway?* And that was it. (163)

This passage is extremely telling in several ways. In an obvious way, it shows the double-standard of whoredom and liarhood. Both Dean and Sal call Marylou a whore, which means she sleeps with someone other than them, while they get as many kicks as they can. And Dean is surely as big a liar as anyone.

The more subtle and important point to note, though, is that Sal identifies completely with Marylou's view of Dean. It is *he* who provides the diagnosis of particularly *male* "self-containment and absentmindedness," qualities that make the love bestowed by the adoring party destined to fail, or at least go largely unrequited in kind. The qualities of "self-containment" and "absentmindedness," perhaps more precisely denoted as self-concernedness and unawareness, are characteristics often ascribed to the category "masculinity." In fact, Sal has a similar set of revelations about Dean throughout the rest of the book. That's why their friendship is unsustainable in the end. Perhaps it is Sal who wants Dean's head in *his* closet, to be able to gaze on with memories and adoration, but without having to weather the abuse, betrayal, and madness any longer. For in the end even Sal has learned that the flirtatious smile must be false as it accompanies Dean's ultimate selfishness. An example soon hereafter is when Dean leaves Sal and Marylou stuck in San Francisco with no money, no roof, and no plan. In a

sense, Sal distances himself not only from being a whore and a liar, but from this portrait of maleness. This distance may provide an insight into what he wants out of intimacy, and why he can't find it with men or women, and certainly not with Dean Moriarty. He confesses that he has lost faith in Dean (171).

After going back east to get his life in order, Sal is once again captured--stung--by the bug of the road and wondering about Dean. He returns to find the women "chatting about the madness of men" (187). Dean has a broken, infected thumb (from beating a girlfriend, as mentioned above), which the narrator gives significant attention, calling it a symbol:

> That thumb became the symbol of Dean's final development. He no longer cared about anything (as before) but now he also *cared about everything in principle*; that is to say, it was all the same to him and he belonged to the world and there was nothing he could do about it. [. . .]
>
> I was glad I had come, he needed me now. (188-89)

As Dean sinks further into what Sal calls madness, surely at least an even greater obliviousness to the feelings of those around him, Sal offers to pay for a trip for the two of them to Italy. It is a huge gesture of loyal friendship, given what has happened between them. This is a fine representation of their true love for each other, taken to new lengths after having been strained by intense challenges. Sal invites him; Dean responds. This is one of the most striking examples of their attempts at acknowledging their mutual desire for sustainable intimacy on their own modest, humble, and apologetic terms:

> "Why yass," said Dean, and then realized I was serious and looked at me out of the corner of his eye for the first time, for I'd never

> committed myself before with regard to his burdensome existence, and that look was the look of a man weighing his chances at the moment before the bet. There were triumph and insolence in his eyes, a devilish look, and he never took his eyes off mine for a long time. I looked back at him and blushed. [. . .]
>
> I tried to remember everything he'd done in his life and if there wasn't something back there to make him suspicious of something now. Resolutely and firmly I repeated what I said—"Come to New York with me; I've got the money." I looked at him; my eyes were watering with embarrassment and tears. Still he stared at me. Now his eyes were blank and looking through me. It was probably the pivotal moment of our friendship when he realized I had actually spent some hours thinking about him and his troubles, and he was trying to place that in his tremendously involved and tormented mental categories. (189-90)

Sal as narrator describes Dean's "mental categories" as being "tremendously involved and tormented," though not his own, which are obviously also significantly troubled.

Sal names it a pivotal moment—a moment of commitment. He blushes. Sal is brought, brings himself, to tears; Dean looks *through* him, as though looking *at* him would place too much at stake, might make one or both of them too cognizant of their respective vulnerability. Not only is Dean bewildered and moved by the notion that a friend has spent hours thinking about his welfare, but Sal himself realizes something about his own capacity for care, generosity, and commitment. Can they handle the task

of exploring such unknown territory in the domain of their mutual notions of masculinity? According to Sal, they find differing solutions to the problem:

> Something clicked in both of us. In me it was suddenly concern for a man who was years younger than I, five years, and whose fate was wound with mine across the passage of the recent years; in him it was a matter that I can ascertain only from what he did afterward. He became extremely joyful and said everything was settled. "What was that look?" I asked. He was pained to hear me say that. He frowned. It was rarely that Dean frowned. We both felt perplexed and uncertain of something. (190)

Thus, they are back together, trying to cement a fragile peace, the ramifications of which Sal doesn't quite comprehend, and which Dean isn't portrayed as capable of articulating the complexities of. "That look," and the *something* they are uncertain of, remain undefined through the text—after all, On the Road is an exemplary and explicit chronicle of the search for IT—*the* IT. These passages make it clear that IT is at least in part a quest for a new form of intimacy. Indeed, an examination of representations of the IT in American literature would be a most worthy and welcome critical project. For my purposes here, "IT" represents the elusive nature of satisfactory human connection in these texts, a theme that continues through the 1970s. What Sal means by "what" Dean "did afterward" is open to interpretation. My interpretation is that it refers to a later moment of selfishness and betrayal in Mexico, as seen below. Sal attempts to bolster his standing as the good guy, choosing devotion; Dean continues to follow whims. In the end, though, it is Sal who decides that their intimacy has become unbearable.

In any case, they embark on a journey together, only to be thwarted again. Here, they make the sort of pledges that we remember so fondly and painfully from our youth, if we were fortunate or cursed enough to have been through such happenings:

> First thing, we went down to a bar down on Market Street and decided everything--that we would stick together and be buddies till we died. Dean was very quiet and preoccupied, looking at the old bums in the saloon that reminded him of his father. [. . .]
>
> Yes, it was agreed; we were going to do everything we'd never done and had been too silly to do in the past. (191)

Once again, Sal the lover-narrator treads on unstable epistemological ground, presuming to know what Dean thinks and longs for. But some sort of pact has been made, whether or not either party can articulate it. They will do *everything* together they have not yet done.

In the next passages quoted here, Sal the narrator retreats from omniscience to wonder what exactly Dean "is knowing;" Dean tries to tell him. Sal and/or Kerouac, however, go on to make rather grand claims about Dean's life and sexuality. Not only does Dean have (male) disciples, but he has brought a new sexuality and life *into being*. Indeed, Dean's proclivities, purported prowess, and penis-imagined make an enormous contribution to discourses about sex that resonate still today. Dean is the definition of BEAT, with only "pure being" ahead on his journey:

> Now his disciples were married and the wives of his disciples had him on the carpet for the sexuality and the life he had helped bring into being. I listened further. [. . .]

He was BEAT--the root, the soul of Beatific. What was he knowing? He tried in all his power to tell me what he was knowing, and they envied that about me, my position at his side, defending him and drinking him in as they once tried to do. [. . .]

Bitterness, recriminations, advice, morality, sadness--everything was behind him, and ahead of him was the ragged and ecstatic joy of pure being. (195)

As they plan and begin to go toward their Italian dream, their friendship reaches another crisis point, just after they've tried to "work" a "fag" at a hotel. This is another scene that was revised by Kerouac before publication, taking out the sexual activity between Dean and the man, with Sal listening. The man has picked them up hitchhiking and they stop for the night. He begins to proposition them. Dean asks about money. He gets nervous, and that's the end of the published version of the scene. But its significance lies in the crisis it apparently causes to ensue between Dean and Sal.

The crisis occurs when they stop for food at a restaurant, and Sal shows Dean a little dick game of pissing at one urinal, then holding it in, and then continuing at another, which Dean says will be bad for Sal's kidneys, and make him age more quickly. Sal freaks:

It made me mad. "Who's old? I'm not much older than you are!" "I wasn't saying that, man!"

"Ah," I said, "you're always making cracks about my age. I'm no old fag like that fag, you don't have to warn me about *my* kidneys." We went back to the booth and just as the waitress set down the hot-roast-beef

sandwiches--and ordinarily Dean would have leaped to wolf the food at once--I said to cap my anger, "And I don't want to hear any more of it." And suddenly Dean's eyes grew tearful and he got up and left his food steaming there and walked out of the restaurant. I wondered if he was just wandering off forever. I didn't care, I was so mad--I had flipped momentarily and turned it down on Dean. But the sight of his uneaten food made me sadder than anything in years. I shouldn't have said that . . . he likes to eat so much . . . He's never left his food like this . . . What the hell. That's showing him, anyway.

Dean stood outside the restaurant for exactly five minutes and then came back and sat down. "Well," I said, "what were you doing out there, knotting up your fists? Cursing me, thinking up new gags about my kidneys?"

Dean mutely shook his head. "No, man, no, man, you're all completely wrong. If you want to know, well--"

"Go ahead, tell me." I said all this and never looked up from my food. I felt like a beast.

"I was crying," said Dean.

"Ah hell, you never cry."

"You say that? Why do you think I don't cry?"

"You don't die enough to cry." Every one of these things I said was a knife at myself. Everything I had secretly held against my brother

was coming out: how ugly I was and what filth I was discovering in the depths of my own impure psychologies. (213-14)

From out of the blue comes Sal's mention of his brother, whose purported purity he contrasts with his own ugliness and "impure psychologies." Many of the most reflective passages and moral quandaries in the novel are accompanied by teary eyes or contemplations of the sadness of life. The relation of crying to masculinity is especially complicated here. On the one hand, Sal seems to accuse Dean of not being *man* enough to cry. On the other hand, his accusation implies that a recognition that Dean had cried over their relationship would threaten their mutual masculinity by admitting vulnerability. Dean is adamant:

> Dean was shaking his head. "No, man, I was crying."
>
> "Go on, I bet you were so mad you had to leave."
>
> "Believe me, Sal, really do believe me if you've ever believed anything about me." I knew he was telling the truth and yet I didn't want to bother with the truth and when I looked up at him I think I was cockeyed from cracked intestinal twistings in my awful belly. Then I knew I was wrong.
>
> "Ah, man, Dean, I'm sorry, I never acted this way before with you. Well, now you know me. You know I don't have close relationships with anybody anymore--I don't know what to do with these things. I hold things in my hand like pieces of crap and don't know where to put it down. Let's forget it." The holy con-man began to eat. "It's not my fault! It's not my fault!" I told him. "Nothing in this lousy world is my

fault, don't you see that? I didn't want it to be and it can't be and it *won't* be."

"Yes, man, yes, man. But please harken back and believe me."

"I do believe you, I do." This was the sad story of that afternoon. (214)

The admissions on Sal's part that he is wrong, that he doesn't have close relationships "anymore," and that nothing in "this lousy world" is his fault are startling. They are vivid indications of his struggle to come to grips with the unlikelihood of the possibility of intimacy within the confines of masculinity. Admitting being wrong is perhaps a fairly simple, generous gesture. The candid assertion about close relationships would only be made to an intimate of some sort. The indictment of the "lousy world" in this context may be interpreted in part as a desire for intimacies between people of whichever gender, outside the conventions of locker room banter or prefabricated social niceties, whether these potential intimacies be erotic or not.

Next, Sal and Dean find themselves in a squalid layover in Detroit, watching movies. The strange thing about this portion of the novel, however, is Sal's recollection of a night in 1942 spent in a Boston movie theater. The narrator asks what difference the following scene makes, ultimately. One purpose its inclusion may serve is to put forth the argument that every experience is equal in its insignificance. While this may exemplify some form of Buddhistic resignation, it doesn't jibe with Kerouac's overall quest and method in the novel, according to which the distinction between what's vitally important and what doesn't matter is such a crucial theme. While seeming to be an arbitrary memory, the text very self-consciously calls attention to it as highly significant.

The scene is played out in cinematic terms, with Sal transported from being just another bum in the audience to the screen itself, in the starring role:

> In 1942 I was the star in one of the filthiest dramas of all time. I was a seaman, and went to the Imperial Cafe on Scollay Square in Boston to drink; I drank sixty glasses of beer and retired to the toilet, where I wrapped myself around the toilet bowl and went to sleep. During the night at least a hundred seamen and assorted civilians came in and cast their sentient debouchements on me till I was unrecognizably caked. What difference does it make after all?--anonymity in the world of men is better than fame in heaven, for what's heaven? what's earth? All in the mind. (246)

This is a sweet, honest confession of a memory he associates with being in the theater with Dean. But its rhetorical importance is neither merely accidental, nor to advance the plot. Something about the moment in Detroit with Dean wills Sal to describe this scene. Though he was asleep, he recounts so many seamen and a few fewer civilians. They may have shat and pissed on him, but "caked" and "debouchements," and especially that they're "sentient," imply their ejaculating on him. Perhaps Kerouac needed the ambiguity of the French to get it by the censors. Why does Sal/Kerouac include this episode? It's the sort of confession the narrator has to make to clear himself of responsibility for his proclivities and actions. The importance of the scene isn't whether he got off on or was horrified by this moment, or both; rather, the importance is that "he" introduces it into the narrative at all. It is hardly a random inclusion, but rather an admission and assertion that sensuality and matters of the body are important

functions of being human and earthly. Yet their ultimate cosmic significance is limited, and relative to the perspective of the mortal who is being caked.

Toward the end of the book, in Mexico City, Dean abandons sick Sal to go be with his latest woman. This is the explicit articulation of Sal's ultimate evaluation of Dean, which started at the beginning of the novel. It cannot, though, be a final resolution quite yet:

> When I got better I realized what a rat he was, but then I had to understand the impossible complexity of his life, how he had to leave me there, sick, to get on with his wives and woes. "Okay, old Dean, I'll say nothing." (302)

Dean at last visits Sal in New York, where Sal's hooking up with the girl he's been searching for all along, to settle down with. They're headed for a Duke Ellington concert at the Met. Dean asks for a ride to Fortieth Street. One of Sal's other male friends, the driver in charge, refuses absolutely (no ride for that crazy friend of yours). Dean walks off in a moth-eaten overcoat. Sal merely waves from the Cadillac. Laura, Sal's girlfriend, protests and almost cries. While Sal has no doubt told her something about Dean, she seems to intuit much more about the importance of the intense and intimate relationship that Sal has finally decided to reject. In the end, he feels forced to choose between the relentless instabilities of the road and settled heteronormativity; he chooses the girlfriend and the Met.

The cultural weight of <u>On the Road</u> cannot be overestimated, not just because of its continued popularity, but also because of the space it opens up for diverse imagined possibilities for intimacies and masculinities, both potentially liberated and frustrated.

First conceived and drafted in the late 1940s and finally published in 1957, it makes a significant contribution to the discourse about the complexities involved in men's trying to be intimate with men, a discourse that becomes even more self-conscious, articulate, and complex through the sixties, and especially in the post-Stonewall manifestos and in later texts.

Sex and/or Sentiment in the Streets: John Rechy, City of Night (1963)

John Rechy's City of Night follows a male hustler narrator from his very deliberately chosen entrance into the world of promiscuous cruising, almost always though not exclusively for money (a very important qualification), through his journey toward the tentative realization that perhaps some form of love and sustained intimacy might be possible after all, and perhaps even desirable, though this is the big question the novel leaves ambiguous at its conclusion.

In many ways, the book can be read as a revision of Kerouac's On the Road, brought forward now from the Truman years and the question of heterosexual male buddy-buddy intimacy and masculinity to the question of shortly pre-Stonewall, explicitly homosexual forms of intimacy and masculinity. From Kerouac, Rechy inherits the language of the street, eschewing conventional punctuation, and forming new compound words. Their experiments with form and style allow both authors to create new languages that better express their innovative conceptions of human relationships, as we have seen in Hemingway's sparse prose. Rechy is obsessed with notions of family and the loss of childhood innocence and their relation to the state of contemporary America. But his nameless narrator, unlike Sal Paradise, does not long for a return to the

way things used to be, for a return to the innocence of the good old days. Rather, he claims that nothing in this cruel, hateful world justifies innocence. His "America" is taken for granted to be a lonely place; this judgment is thus a premise as well as a conclusion in the novel:

> Later, I would think of America as one vast City of Night stretching gaudily from Times Square to Hollywood Boulevard--jukebox-winking, rock-n-roll-moaning: America at night fusing its darkcities into the unmistakable shape of loneliness. (11)

Like Sal portraying Dean Moriarty and the gang, Rechy's narrator includes portraits of cowboys and women and others, but they are all much more self-consciously presented as portraits (and have sections named after them). And these are not real cowboys (as Dean is, at least in Sal's imagination, in Kerouac), and often not real women. They are fully aware that they play, and even play-act, roles and personas. In Rechy, role-playing and gender-configurations are an explicit theme. While the Kerouac laments the situation and sadness of boys and girls in America, the Rechy mainly laments the sad situation of role-playing, most often between biological males. In On the Road, sex and sexuality are articulated as notions-in-crisis, whereas gender and gender roles are largely portrayed as understood and naturalized. In City of Night, on the other hand, the very notions of femininity and masculinity, and their respective relations to intimacy, are very conscious and explicit points of contention. Such self-consciousness about the role-playing and conflicts surrounding gender, identity, and relationships becomes increasingly explicit and contentious in the pages to follow.

While the theme of the possibility of intimacy between two men (and here, in Rechy, between two "masculine" gay men who may happen to be hot for each other) runs throughout City of Night, it only comes to true fruition in the penultimate section of the book, the section titled "Jeremy: White Sheets." Jeremy Adams is the character who finally challenges the narrator to confront his fear of intimacy, and invites him into an intimate love relationship as they meet during Carnival (Mardi Gras) in New Orleans. Before turning to that moment of decision and realization, let us examine just a few of the experiences the narrator has on his journey that shape his understanding and desires regarding masculinity and intimacy, and which make striking contributions to the discourse on gender and sexuality that resonate still today. Here he voices a host of assumptions about "the scene," as well as some telling value judgments based on gender in the context of an assumed homosexual milieu:

> I found that you cant always tell a score by his age or appearance: There are the young and the goodlooking ones--the ones about whom you wonder why they prefer to pay someone (who will most likely at least not indicate desiring them back) when there exists--much, much vaster than the hustling world--the world of unpaid, mutually desiring males--the easy pickups. [. . .] But often the scores are near-middle-aged or older men. And they are mostly uneffeminate. [. . .] (32)

As in all of the other novels, it seems important here for the narrator to separate fairies into types. He must not only subtly admit to his varying levels of attraction to members of the world of scores (wondering why such a hot guy might choose to pay for what he could presumably get for free—which is a significant comment on the self-identification

of certain scores), but also to put forward an assertion about their gender status with the unusual English word-formation "uneffeminate." It's the necessary word to use because, as in the case where only a double-negative will suffice for meaning and emphasis, "uneffeminate" has no true synonym in more common language usage. "Masculine" doesn't work because it suggests a positive attribute. What matters here is to negate the undesirable—the expected stain, the obviousness, of the effeminate.

Without further analysis by the narrator, it's impossible to fathom how he might *feel* about playing any of the roles described here (i.e., whether one role might be more distasteful or pleasurable than the next):

> I learned that there are variety of roles to play if youre hustling: youngmanoutofajob butlooking; dontgiveadamnyoungmandrifting; perrenialhustler [*sic*] easytomakeout; youngmanlostinthebigcity pleasehelpmesir. There was, too, the pose learned quickly from the others along the street: the stance, the jivetalk--a mixture of jazz, joint, junk sounds--the almost-disdainful, disinterested, but, at the same time, inviting look; the casual way of dress.
>
> And I learned too that to hustle the streets you had to play almost-illiterate. (36)

He meets a "score" who dismisses him after finding out that he reads literature, saying, "I dont want you anymore [. . .] really masculine men dont read!"

> And so I determined that from now on I would play it dumb. And I would discover that to many of the street people a hustler became more

attractive in direct relation to his seeming insensitivity--his "toughness." I would wear that mask. (37)

The notion of masks is so central to questions of gender, sexuality, and intimacy. Not only must one negotiate the masks that one might or might not put on, however consciously or unconsciously. One must also mingle with the rest of the heteronormative world, and its negotiations about masks.

The narrator next meets "PETE: A Quarter Ahead," who doesn't feel like scoring tonight:

> I didn't have any place to go, but I said, "Later," to Pete. This is how it had always been before. "No, wait," he says, "dont split--unless you got something to do." "Nothing," I said. "Lets stick together," he said. "I just dont feel like fuckin around tonight," he said moodily. [. . .]
>
> "Sometimes this whole scene bugs me," Pete said. (52)

Both of them lonely, and becoming friendly, and tired of the scene, Pete asks if he can spend the night with the narrator. Pete sleeps over. All that "happens" is that Pete places and then closes his hand over the narrator's hand. It's a very dramatic moment in the book, and then they part, both aware that such intimacy is beyond their mutual sphere of comprehension or comfort at this point, though they continue to see each other daily from afar on the street. (56-7)

The drama comes because this little "nothing" moment is obviously so significant for both of them--an expression and acceptance of gestures of intimacy that are ordinarily banned from "the scene." It never happens again, and, in fact, they are even more distant and dispassionate from that moment on. There is no analysis here by the narrator. Only

"the action" is reported. This lack of narrative commentary marks a departure from all the other novels considered here. While Rechy may inherit a sparseness of language from Hemingway, and a keen sense of the complexities and crises involved with any notion of "masculinity" from Kerouac, his narrator is unique at least because of his explicit and conscious decision to make an ostensible distinction between sex and sentiment. Indeed, the relation between sex and sentiment, lust and love, is the main obsession of the book, and its richest contribution to the discourse of gender and sexuality in the early 1960s. The novel is an existentialist and fatalistic quest for human connection:

> I had an acute sense of the incompleteness intrinsic in sharing in another's life. You touch those other lives, barely--however intimately it may be sexually--you may sense things roiling in them. Yet the climax in your immediate relationship with them is merely an interlude. Their lives will continue, youll merely step out. (90)

That summer, the narrator meets Dave, whom he thinks is a hustler, and maybe even straight, but discovers that he's neither. Dave says:

> "I cant see just going to bed with a lot of people--different ones every night," he said. "I mean, a person, whether hes queer or not, hes got to find someone. . . . Nothing like a lonely fairy," he said, smiling. I liked him right away. (231)

As though against his will and better judgment, the narrator spends time with Dave over the next while (though never sexually). Note the qualities that "attract" him to Dave:

I began to discover in him an honesty that constantly amazed me, an integrity and decency rare in the world of the bars and streets: It pleased me strangely that soon after I met him, he moved into another apartment, this time alone. Although he openly acknowledged his interest in other youngmen, when it was a mutual interest--and he was a very desirable member of that group--I could tell that his was not the furious hunger that it very often is with others. Since that first night, he hadnt attempted to come on with me, and we rarely ever spoke about that scene. [. . .] [To come on *with*?]

And I found that I was revealing myself to him, letting slide off more than ever the mask I had protectively cultivated for the streets and bars. At times, I felt he knew even more about me than I told him, which alternately pleased and disturbed me. [. . .]

More and more, I was now in the bars or on the hustling streets only when I had to score. I avoided Main Street altogether. The craving for the sexual anarchy began to diminish for the first time since I had begun the journey through nightlives. I felt a great friendship for Dave [again, an unexpected preposition--a friendship *for*] (and an amount of pity for the paradoxical fact of him in a world of furtive contacts; he should be married, the father of adored children). . . . But all this, I told myself, was merely a welcome friendship in a period of ennui with the turbulence of that chosen world. (232)

These unexpected uses of prepositions allow the narrator to maintain a sense of control, however illusory or fleeting, over both people and circumstances: Dave doesn't attempt to come on *with* (as opposed to coming on *to*) the narrator, which makes the narrator a party in the potential seduction; in contrast, he feels a friendship *for* (as opposed to *with*) Dave, which allows him, and only him, to decide whether or not they will be friends.

These attempts to assert his agency raise the question of what he truly wants out of possible relationships with men, and the obstacle that his internalized homophobia presents. Why does he assert that Dave, among them all, "should be" married and the father of children? It's as though because he adores Dave as a friend, and has found rare qualities such as honesty and integrity in him, Dave should be spared "the life" of homosexuality in this period. Thus, lurking beneath this wish he has for his friend is a combination of homophobia and an unspoken nostalgia for some version of heteronormative family values. Why not just be Dave's friend and/or lover/sex partner? It's also as though his respect for Dave is just that element that makes Dave an unattractive sex partner. Is it that Dave is less desirable since a person with integrity? Or is it that sex would somehow spoil the friendship? Or both? While Rechy's narrator doesn't fetishize the normal in the way that Vidal's Jim and Baldwin's David seem to, he nonetheless values it, putting the almost regular guy Dave somehow above, or at least in a separate category from, the run-of-the-mill homosexual.

In any event, as the feelings between them become too tender and almost-perfect, the narrator is driven to escape and end the friendship altogether. In this scene, they watch a circus together. And the sadness comes not just from the treatment of animals in

general, but also from the particular humiliation of a male elephant painted pink and being paraded as a female:

> I see Dave stare solemnly at the elephant being led off the small arena, the flowered hat perched crookedly over one ear. . . .
>
> "It's sad--that great big male elephant painted pink--and that hat on his head," Dave said.
>
> Suddenly Im frighteningly moved by this youngman beside me. I feel that impotent helplessness that comes when, through some perhaps casual remark, I see a person nakedly, sadly, pitifully revealed--as I see Dave now. (233)

His being moved, and his "impotent helplessness" at sensing the vulnerability of his companion, is directly related to his earlier comment that Dave should be married and have kids. It represents his inability to imagine, or to live through or attempt, moments of compassion in the male-to-male homosexual context. If Dave were straight, one might imagine them able to have a continuing friendship. The narrator doesn't say much about straight people, and they don't appear often in the text (except as objects of ridicule in the final Mardi Gras section). They now return, solemnly and in silence, to Dave's apartment:

> Inside the apartment, Dave said unexpectedly:
>
> "It sure is great to be with you!" He put his hand fondly on my shoulder, letting it rest there--the first time he had touched me even this intimately since that first night.

For a long moment, I didnt move, feeling his hand increasingly heavier. . . .I jerked away from him.

The words erupted out of me: "Maybe so--but it's all stopping!"

Even when I saw the look of amazement on his face, even when I wanted to stop, even when I felt that compassion, tenderness, closeness to this youngman--even then, I knew, as much for me as for him, that I had to go on; that although, inside, I was cringing at my own words, in hammerblows I have to destroy this friendship. "I mean--well--I've spent too much time with you--thats all." [. . .]

"Im sorry, Dave," I said at the door, which I was opening now, to clinch the Escape, to get *myself* away from *him*. "Im sorry," I repeated, "but this scene is nowhere!" (234)

Shortly thereafter, the narrator meets a mystery man on the beach, who ultimately turns out to be married and have a nine-year-old child. It is no coincidence that his desire is triggered first by a man whom he thinks *should* be married and have children and immediately after by one who is and has. This description of their fleeting encounter at a bar says so much about the narrator's notions of gender as they relate to homosexuality:

Once, going to Sally's bar, I saw him closely. He looked at me; and realizing I had noticed, he quickly turned away. He resembled a highschool coach: neatly cropped hair, ruddy face, trim build. He was possibly in his late 30s. He didnt look like a score; he didnt look like a masculine homosexual (that is, his masculinity did not seem posed); he looked completely incongruous--and I suppose this is why I had first

noticed him. After seeing him so often, standing in almost the same spot those afternoons--I began to be strongly intrigued by him. (235)

What is the recognizable difference between posed and unposed masculinity? Even given the notion that one might spot its posed version—and it's tempting to assume that anybody can; how would one describe the "real thing"? Is masculinity merely a visible lack of femininity? Of course, these categories are defined in reference to the other. But this makes the definitions circular and hence unhelpful. Is it mere show and play-acting, or is there some indefinite set of signs and symbols that inhabit these categories of being? And if one were to seek to eradicate gender completely, what shape would the work take? In other words, if one made the choice, and had the luxury, of monitoring one's every visible gesture (often a part of the process of being human and perhaps even more so in the world of gay male cruising), what might one be left with as a mode of public being, after the censor-filter had done its work?

The narrator and the mystery man slowly get up the mutual courage, passion and compassion to be together, and wind up in the mystery man's hotel room, where they have sex before the man cuts his vacation short for no obvious reason. He tries to explain his predicament, echoing fears from Vidal and Baldwin about the piercing, horrifying gaze of the knowing fairy:

> "But things--from the very beginning--they didnt go right. Thats mainly why she wanted a kid. . . .And then I started driving to the beaches, I guess to make sure there was a whole world ready to welcome me when I finally decided to join it--if I ever decided to. I always came here with the intention of meeting someone. But then I would see a screaming fairy--

and suddenly I'd be ashamed. It's very strange--but I couldnt bear to look into his eyes, afraid, I guess, that he'd look back at me with recognition. And I didnt want a fairy, I knew that. I didnt even want them to look at me in that strange, piercing way." [. . .]

"Does she know?" It was a square question--the kind of question I would not ordinarily have asked; but, having eased the street pose, Im reacting completely differently to him, responding to that evident struggle within him--the eminent Aloneness. . . . (240-41)

Thus, the narrator himself acknowledges that he is "completely different" (from his usual vision of himself) in his reactions to the turmoil of this "straight" gay man. He begins to blur the boundary between sex and sentiment. Perhaps more properly put, compassion begins to become more important than passion in his mind, at least for the moment. In this passage, the man himself tries to put his own discomfort and perplexity into words--to find the right words is so important:

"Gay people—they—"the man started, interrupting himself: "I hate that word—'gay'—there should be another word: not 'homosexual'—that sounds too clinical—not 'queer', not 'fairy,' either-- . . . Anyway, they seem to cancel out so much that could be. I mean: Ive seen some of them—not all of course, or even the majority—Ive seen them shrieking on the beach—neither men nor women. The effeminate ones—I told you this yesterday, I think—they frighten me. They seem sometimes to know so much. With a look, they can make you feel—so—well—so-- . . . Like youre trapped," he finished. (245-46)

Homosexual men, for him, have such powers—they know so much, and can make you feel trapped.

In the closing sections of the novel, the narrator goes to New Orleans around the time of Mardi Gras. His "mask begins to crumble" as he talks to two potential scores at a bar:

> "I want to tell you something before we leave. Im not at all the way you think I am. Im not like you want me to be, the way I tried to look and act for you: not unconcerned, nor easygoing--not tough: no, not at all."
>
> And having said that, as if those words had come from someone else--someone else imprisoned inside me, protesting now--I felt as if something had exploded inside me--and exploding at last, I went on, challenging their astonished look: "No, Im not the way I pretended to be for you--and for others. Like you, like everyone else, Im Scared, cold, cold terrified."
>
> Predictably, I became a stranger to them. They had sought something else in me--the opposite from them; and I had acted out a role for them--as I had acted it out for how many, many others? (369)

Just as he's slipping into drunkenness amid thoughts of "*something*" about "vulnerability" (370) (a something so akin to the IT present, and absent, in all these works), he is rescued and swept away by Jeremy, the man with whom he will act out the final climax of the book. Jeremy has overheard his previous declaration/confession about playing roles to the two in the bar. Jeremy and the narrator engage in a highly analytical

and emotional discussion regarding who wants what with and from whom and why. Jeremy poses the question of their respective postures and positions this way: "If I told you, right now, that I love you--and you believed it--what would you do?" (380) The narrator attempts to answer the question in his own mind, wondering what has left him without a belief in love. In part, he thinks back to his own struggles with vulnerability and the IT that is, at root, connected to innocence and the faith that intimacy might be possible. He has, for so long, tried to put such thoughts out of his mind:

> I remembered that night in New York when I made the decision that it would be with many, many people [. . .] that I would explore that world. And what, really, had prompted that decision? An attempt to shred the falsely lulling, sheltered innocence of my childhood, yes. But had it also been, at least in part, fear?--a corrosive fear of vulnerability with which the world, with its early manifested coldness, had indoctrinated me; imbued in others: a world which you soon come to see as an emotional jungle; in which you learn very early that you are the sum-total of yourself, nothing more. (380-81)

They then debate—question--whether such a thing as love exists. The narrator expresses his skepticism. Jeremy retorts:

> "But it doesnt have to be like that. No rockets. Just the absence of loneliness. Thats love enough. In fact, that can be the strongest kind of love. . . . When you dont believe it's even possible, then you substitute sex. Life becomes what you fill in with between orgasms. (381)

The narrator is left next to ruminate on his own self-perceived status as compassionate victim and passionate lover-to-be--if only the IT would interrupt his loneliness. He desperately seeks to throw aside the masks, but isn't yet sure how to do so, and whether the risks entailed are worth the great effort. His ponderings in Jeremy's room recall David's at the end of the Baldwin, including imagery of the gallows and the Mirror. This narrator, too, must crack the mirror if he is to be able ever to risk vulnerability. He must disavow the mask of false adulthood and false masculine strength and invulnerability. He asks himself about compassion:

> As an end within itself, when it became impotent pity, was compassion merely another subterfuge to grasp at, to resort to in guilt when we questioned ourselves?--so that we could move away more easily, telling ourselves we could do nothing else. [. . .]
>
> And I felt, suddenly, in that keyed-up, manic mood, as if my heart had begun to listen--to something.
>
> For something. [. . .]
>
> Something about the fact of death--of decay--of swiftly passing Youth: the knowledge that we're sentenced to live out our deaths, slowly, as if on a prepared gallows. . . . And something about the fact that the heart is made to yearn for what the world cant give. (383-86)

The following soliloquy in his final moments with Jeremy is an insightful treatise on the many possible "shapes" that the relationship between the lover and the beloved might take. Indeed, which side we are on in the relation may change from one moment to the next, whether or not we lovers are passionately sexual at times. Or perhaps he also

seeks to articulate a new view of intimate friendship in which vulnerability and the erotic are given new, expanded definitions and manifestations:

> "Isnt it possible that wanting to be wanted . . . or 'loved' . . . could be as much an aspect of what you call 'love' as actually loving back?" I said. "I mean, in choosing someone to 'love' you--to be loved by--while that other person chooses you to 'love'--doesnt one complete the need of the other?" And having said that much, impulsively, not caring to what extent I will reveal myself now, I went on: "I mean that to choose someone to be wanted by--loved by--may be one of the many, many shapes of . . . 'love'--if it exists," I added guardedly. He was looking at me very curiously as I spoke. "If each side could be measured in emotional degrees--the one loving and the other accepting that love," I continued, feeling suddenly as if I had to speak rapidly in order to be able to finish, "each side might balance the other. If someone is able to take 'love'--and take it with intensity--with the full intensity of his ability--and someone else who can give it gives it to the full intensity of his, then one is hardly different from the other. Maybe youll say Im just defending an inability to love back. But if there is such a thing as what you call 'Love,' its shape must be as unpredictable as the patterns-- . . ." I stopped. (392)

Jeremy invites him to New York. He's tempted, but decides on the side of the streets. He has to fuck Jeremy to cleanse himself of all the intimacy that has come to pass. At the end of their togetherness, he leans over to kiss Jeremy on the lips before splitting for good. He thinks to himself: "Maybe youre right. Maybe I could love you.

But I won't" (398). He thus rejects coupledom of any form, and heads back to the streets, out of reach of any semblance of domesticity or fidelity. In contrast to this declaration and escape, however, the last line of the novel provides a sentimental and nostalgic nod to his childhood innocence and his deep love for his mother and his dog: "It isn't fair! *Why cant dogs go to heaven?*" (410) This ending bears a striking similarity to the final paragraph of On the Road, in which Sal thinks of Dean Moriarty and the fathers they never found—"in the land where they let the children cry"—and reminds us that "God is Pooh Bear" (307).

This set of paradoxes takes us into the early seventies, to the manifesto texts that also struggle with questions of normality and transgression, sex and sentiment, innocence and jadedness, and the often uncomfortable sense of radical freedom to create new possibilities for relationships and loves with thoroughly unpredictable patterns, and without any satisfactory models to draw upon from the legacy of representations examined above.

Notes

[1] There is a long tradition of analyses of concepts including "the Other" and "the gaze" going back at least to Sartre. One especially important example for the purposes of this project is Dennis Altman's discussion of homosexuals as minorities, and as both a model and a scapegoat in contemporary society. See, for instance, Altman (1982, p. 204).

[2] See Paul Goodman, Growing Up Absurd (1960) and David Savran, Taking It Like a Man (1998).

[3] An noted in the introduction here, George Chauncey in Gay New York (1994) and John D'Emilio in Making Trouble (1992) comment on the non-progressive history, and the potential regression, of representations and the situatedness of homosexuality in America. This is a reminder of the significance of the publication dates and settings of the novels (e.g., Hemingway in 1920s Paris vs. Vidal, Baldwin et al in post-WWII USA).

[4] This important insight by Habermas is discussed in Lauren Berlant's introduction to Intimacy (2000).

[5] I will be referring to the original version, published in 1948, rather than to the revised version published in 1965, as part of its significance for this project lies in the very fact that it was the only serious gay novel that received wide press and readership for a number of years. As such, its articulation of concepts like gender-in-crisis and gay identity and normality in an explicitly homosexual context stood largely alone in the public and literary mind until Baldwin in 1956.

[6] John Rechy calls Kerouac "eternal jock buddy" in The Sexual Outlaw (1977), p. 195.

[7] For discussions of the initial critical reception of On the Road, see Ann Charters's introduction to the novel (1991) and Ellis Amburn, Subterranean Kerouac (1998).

[8] See the Charters introduction to On the Road, p. xxiv.

II: Liberation and "Lifestyles": The Early Post-Stonewall Manifestos

During the earliest years following the Stonewall uprising, several big issues confronted gay men. First, there were tensions between generations. On the one hand were typically older, closeted men who lived dual lives, along with the assimilationist homophile activists who sought to convince straight society that homosexuals are "just like you," and deserve to be free from discrimination under the law. On the other hand were a new generation of activists who called for an all-out social revolution in solidarity with blacks, feminists, the New Left, and the anti-war movement. They believed that the oppression of homosexuals could not end under the conditions of white, middle-class, capitalist, sexist, heteronormative society; hence, liberation would mean a transformation of the entire society; and this transformation would begin, in part, with a reconceptualization of the possibilities of how gay men relate to each other. There was then and continues to be the obvious need for the end of violence and discrimination by the institutions of the society as a whole; but my concern here is with how gay men sought to transform themselves. As shown in the previous discussion of pre-Stonewall American fictional representations of men and masculinity, there was a conspicuous lack of any satisfactory model for how men might go about establishing intimate relationships.

There was widespread agreement that the most insidious elements of oppression against gay men were sexism and internalized homophobia.[1] An almost unanimous rallying cry was for the rejection of traditional gender roles and the social injunction that the institutions of marriage and the nuclear family produced the only healthy, moral, happy lives. And, given new utopian, yet untested, imagined possibilities for both sex

and other forms of intimacy—such as friendship--if gay men were no longer forced to congregate in bars, and to seek out sexual partners through oftentimes secretive, dangerous encounters in public spaces clouded by a sense of shame, and accusations of criminality and moral and psychological maladjustment, as they sought companions of whatever sort, then the questions arose: How could, would, and should newly liberated men relate to each other? Many of the manifestos examined here try to give provisional answers to these questions, whether through abstract recommendations or autobiographical narratives depicting strategies that were attempted, even if unsuccessfully.

The universal demand was for sexual freedom without shame. But what exactly would this mean in practice, and how would it affect gay male relations not defined simply or exclusively in sexual terms? What is liberated sexuality; what is liberated friendship? And what of love? Romance? Is there any place in post-Stonewall gay consciousness and sexual-political life for monogamy? Promiscuity? Anonymous and/or public sex? These questions were raised and scrutinized in many early manifestos, and would continue to be so through the onset of HIV/AIDS, and, of course, very much so through to the present. Especially in the earliest texts, however, it seemed quite a bit easier to articulate specific critiques of the past--a legacy of "lifestyles" and identities that were no longer desirable. The articulation of positive alternatives, and any common core of values upon which these might be built, was rarer, more contentious, and less concrete.

Criticisms of the Recent Gay Past

Most criticisms of pre-Stonewall gay culture and relationships in the early manifestos were directed at modes of behavior seen as the result of at least acquiescence to, or even wholesale acceptance of, the limited set of options offered gay men by straight society. Men were accused of submitting as victims to a range of possible so-called lifestyles that were unsatisfying, inauthentic, inhumane, lacking in basic respect for self and for others, and, in many cases, ultimately self-destructive. Not only were these homosexuals said to be harming themselves and members of their community (such as it was then), as well as perpetuating the oppressive System, they were also accused of setting a bad example--of in some sense justifying straight society's portrayal of gay men as queeny, femme, hedonistic, narcissistic, superficial, sex-crazed, sad, pathetic, ill, immoral, etc. In general, early gay- liberationist writers were divided between those who appeared to criticize the older generation harshly, holding them responsible in part for society's oppression of gays, and those who called for the universal tolerance of the diversity of lives being led in the homosexual community, at least for the moment.

One area of serious contention for these writers is the appropriate relationship between sex and sentiment. Might sex and sentiment be or become (indeed, should they be or become) unified in the persons of their affection? Should one's lovers and tricks and friends be the same people? Or are sexual desire and emotional attachment, or should they be, quite mutually exclusive, or at least separable at will? This question is closely related to one's attitude toward monogamy and promiscuity. The relation between sex and sentiment, and monogamy and promiscuity, and their relation to various conceptions of gender, are themes present throughout the pre-Stonewall novels, and which become more explicit in the manifestos and especially so in the post-Stonewall

literature to be examined in the next chapter. In any case, the project of putting forth theoretical or political claims about correct behavior assumes the ability of people to control their desires and emotions, and to shape their sexual activities for the sake of abstract principles (e.g., deciding whom one should find attractive as a potential partner, or friend, or not--all of which assumes the possibility of living lives that correspond with these imposed desires): the old theory/practice conundrum. Related to this demand is the implied requirement that men somehow reinvent personas--public faces--to go along with their new sometime, still only semi-internalized identities as liberated gays. Here, the activities of self-monitoring and consciousness-raising are more often assumed and asserted as inherently worthy rather than being explored or debated. If one oughtn't to be a nelly queen or a hyper-masculine butch, then what ought one to be? Again, a central tension here is the requirement that not only must behavior and interactions be reprogrammed, but so must how you feel about yourself--a sort of imposed internal identity. While several writers at least acknowledge the difficulties involved with such self-transformation, many write assuming it to be a very manageable task (e.g., "so just stop chasing after 16-year olds"; "so just stop waving your arms and talking that way"). Few are able to articulate what the new ideal might be like.

One major obstacle facing those who would criticize the widely proclaimed undesirable gay patterns of behavior or desire is the epistemological quandary of saying that such and such necessarily makes a person unhappy. (He should rather do such and such to become liberated and find happiness.) Not only does such an imposition assume that one's own experience and desires, or those of the program, are better for another person, it also assumes to some extent a universality of the phenomena of desire and

emotion. While this is a problem for all ideological attempts to shape the political-sexual relations of any group, it is especially dangerous and untenable given the vast array of different experiences and backgrounds of gay men at the time of Stonewall. To battle such huge problems as gender roles and gay stereotypes requires a flexibility--a self-confident mental and libidinal dexterity--much more readily available to some than others. This is all further complicated by the narrative tension between wanting to be at the center of a radically new society and the often simultaneous urge to be, and to be seen as, the boy-next-door, as perfectly normal.

Here is one of the major difficulties of my task in undertaking such a project as this. Even an attempt merely to describe what was represented in these texts is colored by my own experience (e.g., I can only see possibilities imagined in the texts that I myself can to some extent imagine). And the temptation in some manner to arbitrate or evaluate such representations is intense if not inevitable, so that I need to be extremely conscious and overt when prescription (or taking sides), rather than an attempt merely to describe, enters the discussion. My attempts to summarize, analyze, and criticize claims made by individuals who saw themselves in most cases as members of an emerging community will no doubt fall short because of epistemological difficulties for both them and me. But the failure to generalize at all leaves us unable to say much of anything about culture or history, or the sort of human experience that might make a community possible. This raises the question of whether community-building and a collective political project based on sexual identity is possible or desirable. In these manifestos, however, there is a strong consensus that such a community is an all-important goal indeed.

Given the tremendous excitement about the new range of possibilities for gay men's relating, and the sense of a moral imperative to change the way men treated one another at this time, one might expect to find a wealth of positive descriptions of what this new consciousness, this new sense of a liberated individual and/or communal identity, might mean specifically for relationships. We might expect writers to be eager to describe new personal experiences with friends, lovers, or even so-called fuck-buddies. Instead, with rare but very significant exception, there are mainly abstract celebrations of both sexual and non-sexual freedoms, and a set of negative diatribes against the past—often including huge generalities and stereotypes, and often in the form of biographical or autobiographical narratives of specific, unsatisfactory or ambivalent, encounters and experiences. In fact, many of the texts to be examined contain various abstract claims and negative descriptions, often including significant tensions, ambivalences, ambiguities, and even apparent contradictions in their central arguments.

There is also the possibility that intimacy and friendship are generally harder to articulate readily in plain terms than sex, especially in the context of a manifesto. After all, perhaps we can talk and write about superficial, fleeting, possibly anonymous relationships much more easily, and with less investment, than about people who truly matter in our ongoing life narratives. The memories and the hard, bare "facts" are there in a much less complicated, and perhaps more objective form (e.g., is objectified sex easier to remember, categorize, explain, recount, than relationships that involve subjects instead of "mere" sexual objects?). The delineation between subject-object and subject-subject relations is one of the things these writers want most to interrogate as they begin to establish newly liberated identities and relationships.

How would a writer say "gay male friendships are, or should be, like ____"? In the concrete, particular, it's also hard to talk about an intimate friendship, though maybe not as hard in fiction. And why would one bother anyhow, especially in the context of a gay lib manifesto? "Let me tell you about the day Sergio and I had coffee and went for a walk by the lake and laughed and cried together." It seems highly personal, mundane, and hard to articulate in a meaningful form, and to what immediate political end? Much easier is to describe the love of my life or the day I met a dude at the grocery store and made wild lovesex. And the manifestos do contain strong and diverse representations of attitudes toward anonymity and promiscuity. The analysis of masculine friendship, however, is much more evident in the novels, in Hemingway and Kerouac for instance, than in the manifestos. As we shall see, friendship becomes a more explicit theme in the literature of the later seventies, though often with less than satisfactory outcomes.

Early Gay-Liberationist Revolutionary Texts

The following texts are from writers writing shortly after Stonewall, calling for a radical change in all areas of American society infected with sexism and heteronormative demands for traditional gender roles and relationships. Unless otherwise noted, these quotations are from The Gay Militants (1971) by Donn Teal, or Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation, hereafter abbreviated as OC (first published, 1972), edited by Karla Jay and Allen Young. While several of these writers were intent on radical social revolution on multiple fronts, the Movement quickly came to focus on the narrower issue of gay rights, a shift that has been well documented in many places (e.g., John D'Emilio, Toby Marotta, and Urvashi Vaid).

Indeed, as early as the end of 1969, Marcus Overseth would argue that the Movement was slowing down because of the "dissension over priorities" between those he called the left Gays and the Gay leftists (Teal, 51). But Teal himself sees this distinction as premature, and describes the still-unified agenda, in its most basic and broadest terms, as follows:

> But Overseth oversimplified. Not all [Gay Liberation Front] members were by any means left gays *or* gay leftists. The call of a liberation movement appealed, in summer 1969 as it still does [in 1971], to a variety of young or young-minded American homosexuals whose sole common denominator was impatience. They had shed, or were shedding, all vestiges of homosexual shame, wanted to live in the light. They were ready for a confrontation with anybody who might challenge or even delay their right to do so. (Teal, 51-52)

Thus begins the call to "live in the light," and the struggle of gay men to define exactly how this might best be done. Specific suggestions were slow to come. One revolutionary, cited only as Bronick, early on gave a slightly more concrete shape to what was being demanded, and articulated major differences between the old guard and the new:

> We have been put down by some of our Gay brothers for doing our thing in the streets and pushing revolution. We have had confrontations with all kinds of Auntie Toms who are comfortable living half lives as imitation men and sucking up to the Almighty Dollar to make up for the parts of their lives that are missing. We have seen the effects of years of

> oppression--poor, tired, sickly imitation men and women who would continue their own oppression and the oppression of their brothers and sisters. We've seen the society in which we live . . .
>
> We will build the new society in the streets, not by giving up on our brothers and sisters who have accepted their oppression, but by continuing to hammer at the chains that bind all of us.
>
> The new world will be built by new people who are in the open, free of chains; by proud men and women of all colors . . . by men and women who know love and live it. And it begins in the streets. [These passages are excerpted from the article "In the Streets for the Revolution," November 1969, quoted in Teal, (74)].

Bronick raises a cluster of concerns, which echo through so many texts of the period: a certain level of anger and frustration at those "imitation men" who would just as soon continue to "pass" for straight in straight society, and then perhaps hide away in secret for their homosexual contacts. Note that he assumes they are sickly, with important elements missing from their lives. But he does not want them to be shunned. They must be invited to join the revolution in the streets with those who know how to love and live love (at least in the abstract).

Gary Alinder gets more specific in his call for a revolution against the heteronormative value system of capitalist America. He goes so far as to make recommendations for what new lifestyles might resemble, at least in a call for communal living. And he unabashedly defends the dignity of the diverse members of the emerging community in Teal (56-57), November 1969:

It was Albert Camus who said the ultimate philosophical question is "How do you live your life?"

For us gay brothers and sisters that question is urgent. The plastic two-car suburban married life may possibly still have some meaning for heterosexuals, but for us the traditional roles and patterns can be only an empty sham. If we attempt to copy straight life styles we will only perpetuate the subterfuge, self-hatred and loneliness in which we've wallowed for too long. [. . .]

Beyond self-love, we need love for our brothers and sisters. The butch lesbian, the broken-down old queen, the flower child--they're our brothers and sisters. . . .

Finally, we need to get it together in specific ways. For those of us who are hip, radical or just plain fed-up, a real advance in our liberation will come if we pick up the Alternative Culture movement. [. . .]

Dropping out so decisively is a brave step and we've a lot to learn. Like how to live in communes to reduce rent and get to know each other better. Or like how to get cheap but healthful food. . . . Like making and sharing our clothing. Like organizing more free music, dances; parties, films. Like sponsoring and using free services such as the Free Clinics, Switchboards, crash pads, alternative media. Like forming more communes to provide specialized services to the community. . . . Some people envision an interlocking network of such communes. If this develops, we'll need to give the straight world almost none of our energy.

Power! Power through building our community.

Indeed, it was an era of beginning to imagine and even plan for utopian living situations, and some small-scale experiments have been recounted below, but gay men by and large paralleled the larger society in shifting from a communal, political focus to an internal focus on finding the self within through individual experience as the seventies progressed.

There was also a pervasive view that gay people are different, and this difference was often celebrated; and tensions arose between more assimilationist and constructionist voices. Some still maintained the earlier homophile argument that we're just like you except for what we do in bed. But early on there was an impulse approaching separatism--one that became real in practice in some urban gay neighborhoods and social circles.

Bob Martin (November 1969) here articulates the gay-as-minority viewpoint, and the demand for a community:

> [Gay Power] is refusing to hide by pretending to be that which you are not; it is demanding to be recognized as a powerful minority with just rights which have not been acknowledged; it is an insistence that homosexuality has made its own unique contribution to the building of our civilization and will continue to do so; and it is the realization that homosexuality, while morally and psychologically on a par with heterosexuality, does nonetheless have unique aspects which demand their own standards of evaluation [e.g., ethical and aesthetic, as he says elsewhere in Teal] and their own subculture. (Teal, 76-77).

Such essentialist claims were central to the development of identities, and comings out, and a sense of community, though one cannot help noticing the conservative tone of the

notion of being "on a par" with heterosexuality, as though that were a desirable status in the context of a broad social revolution in which patriarchal power structures were main targets. But many of these earliest manifestoes and tracts were put together in the heat of the political moment, without the benefit of even a few years of hindsight and experience as a somewhat liberated gay community.

Also, it remains to be suggested specifically what these "unique aspects" of gayness might entail, and how they might lead to the formation of new, or improved, relationships between men. Slightly more specific imaginings can be found a few of the texts in the Jay and Young collection (1972), but it would take a few more years for any more systematic and analytical recommendations to appear.[2]

Allen Young describes his own political activity, first with the SDS while still in the closet. Indeed, feeling pressured to pass as straight actually forced him to separate the personal from the political. Then he discovered how sexism is counterrevolutionary in all its manifestations, and how he had internalized sexist ideas about gender roles--surely he himself was a man, as opposed to the queens who went around with such flamboyance on the streets. Here he describes the perils of sexual objectification and the possibilities for transformation and community he sees in consciousness-raising:

> My ideas about revolution and about homosexuals are very different now. [. . .] I have stopped avoiding myself by avoiding my community. I go to Danny's [a "masculine" bar] only occasionally now; my gay brothers and I are trying to build something better. [. . .]
>
> Sexual objectification has to do with seeing other human beings in terms of the superficial alone--face, body, clothes. Phrases like these,

> often heard among gay men, are sexist and sexually objectifying: "I'm only attracted to young blonds." "He has a big cock." "He's too swishy; if I wanted to sleep with a woman, I'd do it with a real woman." I have thought or said all of these things at one time or another. Gay liberation is teaching me how this oppresses me and my brothers.
>
> The consciousness-raising technique--with people talking about their personal experiences--is probably the best-developed small-group method for dealing with sexism among gay people. As a process, it has been basic to the growth and success of the women's movement. Now, we are using it to our benefit. [. . .]
>
> For gay people, the essential point is to see limited sexuality as an end result of male supremacy and sex roles. Gay, in its most far-reaching sense, means not homosexual, but sexually free. This includes a *long-ranged vision of sensuality as a basis for sexual relationships* [emphasis added] (in OC, 6-8, November 1971).

Again, while there are some broad descriptions of just what this "something better" might be like in practice, the early texts tend to contain much more frustration than illumination. While there is a confidence about the aid of consciousness-raising, and the desire to police one's desires and exclusiveness and discriminations regarding what characteristics one finds attractive, there is sometimes a hint of the difficulties involved in such an immense task. One may be able to police one's own utterances or behavior, but can one, or should one, attempt to obliterate one's thoughts or attractions? As will be seen in texts from later in the seventies, with the benefit of some hindsight toward the earliest

days of the modern struggle for liberation, the consensus seems to be that such efforts ultimately failed--there was not a widespread shift to less objectification and roles; if anything, gendered theatrics in the sexual arena became more entrenched in the form of the clone, the rise in popularity of S/M, and the cult of masculinity that seems to prevail through the emergence of HIV/AIDS, and arguably even more intensely in some circles today (the personal ads often still require the prospective partner to be at least apparently normal [e.g., hetero-like], as in 'ISO straight-acting and appearing--no fats, fems need apply'").

At the least, Young has set out a broad program for some of the most basic changes that liberationists were arguing for. Yet in the same tract he puts forth some more definite, and perhaps restrictive, proposals for what newly liberated gay male lives should adhere to. He is concerned not only with banishing sexism from relationships, but also with targeting such deeply-rooted institutions as gay bars and the cult of masculinity. It should be remembered that he is describing a particular population--those who were visible in the early moments of visible gay liberation in New York; there are, of course, lots of men who are attracted to men who have never been in a gay bar and who don't worship or fetishize stereotypical icons of masculinity. But we are analyzing the visible representations, both Young and I; so we are well advised to strive for consistency in our analyses. As such, his strong claims about the need for (and the possibility of) dispensing with roles seem at odds with his analysis of contemporary practices--again, without much in the way of specific alternatives regarding gender identity, though he does provide alternatives to the bar culture:

> Most male homosexuals are still trapped by notions of masculinity. It is a familiar story--the oppressed worships the oppressor. Listen to the names of some of America's gay men's bars--The Stud, The Tool Box, The Barn. What passes for gay men's art [. . .] Body-Builder, Motorcyclist, the Cowboy. What goes on inside most of these gay bars often preserves the notion that the people inside are "real men," too. The billiard table, the sawdust on the floor, the leather vest on the bartender, and, most of all, the men standing around with carefully groomed indifference while quaffing their beer (just like good collegians or dockworkers). The gay man's quest for masculinity, or exaggerated masculinity, cannot be dismissed as mere evidence of his sexism. Beyond that, it is evidence of how a minority is overwhelmed by the values and style of the majority. (11)

Yet even if much progress were made toward eradicating sexism and the possibly distinct problem of the purported quest for exaggerated masculinity, what would this mean for specific relations, whether sexual or not, in practice? Does his notion of a "long-ranged vision of sensuality as a basis for sexual relationships" (not to mention non-sexual ones) imply any preference or mandate for promiscuity as opposed to monogamy? How ought men to re-envision and reconstruct their sex lives and friendships, given this abstract call for an abstract vision?

Then later, in the same piece, Young claims:

> This [newly found] sexual freedom is not some kind of groovy lifestyle with lots of sex, doing what feels good irrespective of others. It is sexual freedom premised upon the notion of pleasure through equality, no

> pleasure where there is inequality. [. . .] Homosexuals committed to struggling against sexism have a better chance than straights of building relationships based on equality because there is less enforcement of roles. We have already broken with gender programming, so we can more easily move toward equality. [. . .]
>
> Most gays accept, in self-defense, the straight man's mythology that says we're sick, immature, perverse, deviant, and that we should hide our love away in tearooms, park bushes, on cruising streets, and in Mafia--or otherwise pig-controlled bars. Those who reject the mythology, developing positive attitudes toward their homosexuality, are even more offensive to straights. [. . .]

On the one hand, he criticizes the continued pervasive worship of masculinity (as several writers here have--The Man , being "a man," is an ominous manifestation of sexist oppression). On the other, he proclaims that gay men have overcome such role-playing (and gender programming). This inconsistency could be overlooked as a comment at a time when such a transition was thought to be under way but not yet complete. But given the ruminations of writers at this time, and later in the seventies, about the often seeming intractability of the cult of the masculine--and given the ongoing contemporary cultural presence of such role-playing, and the continuing popularity of such bars as centers of social and sexual connection through the present--such inconsistent utopian prescription and analysis is a stark comment not only on the state of affairs now thirty years later, but also on the ideological struggle that was going on in the early and later seventies, about just such questions. This raises the question of the very

possibility of a community to rearrange its modes of desire and interaction in practice, even with some firm agreement in theory. In other words, one might be tempted to see the time of Stonewall as a window of opportunity for the end of the domination of The Masculine in the gay imagination that has gone awry since then. But such a window may have only existed in the minds, and perhaps the practices, of a few outspoken activists. Indeed, the cult of masculinity seems not only to have survived, but even strengthened, through the seventies; the androgynous moment of the counter-culture waned rather quickly, and turned out not to have been so anti-sexist or revolutionary as it originally presented itself as being. Moreover, it is unclear whether men who reject the mythology of the heteronormative system of relationships--those who might even "develop positive attitudes toward their sexuality"--are more offensive or less offensive to mainstream, straight society. This struggle between more radical liberationists and assimilationists was very intense at the time of Stonewall, when young and more progressive gays often ridiculed the views of the elder homophile organizations. And it has lasted until today, when we continue to see very similar debates taking place.

Here it should be recalled that most of the revolutionary, organized gay activism and the widely read textual expressions of gay liberation in the earliest days and years following Stonewall appeared in urban centers on the coasts; and even through the end of the decade, the most widely heard and public gay voices came from individuals and groups who inhabited a largely gay world. Thus, it is nearly impossible to speculate about the extent to which the phenomena and attitudes represented in these texts were part of the experiences of, say, rural men who had sex with men. (Although there is much evidence to suggest that, given modern sources of communication, gay liberationist

ideas did not take long to reach small towns and even the most remote corners of the United States.) At any rate, these are the representations put forth by those who participated in, and/or commented on, the early gay liberation movement.

Some writers are quite harsh in their criticisms of what they characterize as what might be called the world-view (as opposed to the mere "lifestyle" or openly expressed attitude) of the older generation of gay men. Yet the following passages from " Open Letter to Tennessee Williams" (published by Mike Silverstein in October 1971, OC 71-72) have the ring of deep gratitude and sympathy, even as they confront what Silverstein assumes Williams's view to be of his own fate and status as a homosexual (and presumably of "the homosexual" in U.S. society) with stinging criticism:

> Tennessee, what you taught was perhaps the best you could offer. Perhaps you spoke for a whole generation of gay men, expressing their humanity in the only way allowed to them. But now we can and must do more, we must refuse to be victims, losers, queers. I will be free. I, only I, will say who I am. I will be gay, I will not accept that I must submit. I will not accept that I am doomed. I will not destroy myself. [. . .]
>
> Stop and fight them. They are lying to you when they tell you you must destroy yourself not to be like them [and] when they tell you that you must be alone. [. . .]
>
> Join us! We don't have to be alone. We still have the ability to love one another. It is very hard. We have been so corrupted by them. We have learned so much of their mistrust, their will for power, their aloneness. But we are struggling to trust one another, to open ourselves up

to one another, to love one another. And before our love, the world will look and wonder. Our love will be a humanity new under the sun, and a new world will be born from it.

Tennessee, look, an army of lovers is beginning to arise. It is being born from among the victims, the queers, the women you were among the first to love. We were queer like you, victims like you. But now we are gay, no longer accepting our victimization, and proudly proclaiming our humanity. We can give you back your love. The world will tremble, fall and be reborn before the love we former losers have for one another. An army of lovers cannot lose.

Love,

Mike Silverstein

July 23, 1971

Tennessee Williams was clearly an important figure in the development of Silverstein's sense of himself as a gay man who strove to become free to love himself and others, despite his personal experience of social prohibitions and oppression. What isn't clear is how Silverstein arrives at the conclusion that Williams sees his own fate as doomed and inevitable. (Williams's Memoirs and his gay novel Moise and the World of Reason would not be published until 1975, four years after the date of this letter). If Silverstein reaches his conclusions about Williams from his creative work (Silverstein mentions empathizing and identifying with the victimhood of some female characters, including Blanche DuBois), he does so at a huge risk to accuracy, since Williams often commented on the fictional nature of his work. As for treatments of homosexuality in Williams's

work prior to 1971 (Silverstein makes no mention of them), they are rare, poetic, and fictional, and highly ambiguous; they hardly constitute any but the sketchiest portrait of the fate of "the homosexual in society," and seeing them in this manner is still risky and speculative.

Perhaps it is more significant that Silverstein makes his plea to a famous figure in such a personal yet public mode and forum as an "open letter" (published first in People's Gay Sunshine). It serves as a powerful rhetorical vehicle for expressing care and concern for a whole generation of older (and ultimately all) gay men. It is a call to loving arms, as well as an indictment of the impoverished morality of patriarchal society. For whatever reason, from whatever source, Silverstein chooses Williams as a point of reference to confront the notion "that the source [and beauty] of my humanity lies in the endurance of my victimization, the price of my humanity is my submission to the strong and the soulless, the Men." Whether or not this is an accurate depiction of the mind or work of Williams (the former perhaps an unanswerable question), it serves as a powerful indictment of a mindset that was widespread at the time of Stonewall--indeed, many gay men did see themselves as victims and losers, on account of factors including mainstream assertions that homosexuality was sinful and pathological. In fact, the will to overcome this self-perception of gay men as victims was a force that helped to make Stonewall (and the hope of liberation in general) possible at all.

Silverstein's letter also contains two further implications, one toward the beginning and one near the end, that have produced a central tension for gay men through the present: the tension between wanting to assimilate into mainstream society and wanting to instigate a radical break from the mainstream. On the one hand, he claims that

his parents, and straight critics of Williams, find him interesting "just to the extent that the people you write about have nothing to do with them, the human experiences you describe have nothing to do with theirs, and above all, you are not like them at all." Regardless of Silverstein's intention here, or whatever universality one ascribes to Williams's work, one possible implication is that, for better or worse, the critics are right--the human experiences described by Williams are quite alien from these spectators. More likely, though, is that they are not alien, but speak quite directly to the insecurities, passions, suffering, ambiguities, and desires that are surely very widespread and comprehensible, even if not universal, in one form or another, in all human experience. If such is the case, then Silverstein undermines his own claim that Williams holds that only victims cling to humanity.

Later in the letter, Silverstein makes a more ambitious (and abstract) claim, a utopian prediction: "Our love will be a humanity new under the sun, and a new world will be born from it [. . .]. An army of lovers cannot lose." How the new humanity and world would differ from the present ones is left to the imagination. Such is often the case with revolutionary rhetoric; and it was the project for gay men in the decade to come to experiment with just how to give concrete content to such abstract visions.

Even harsher than Silverstein's criticism of what he takes to be the victim-complex of Tennessee Williams is the scathing critique by Craig Alfred Hanson, "The Fairy Princess Exposed" (OC 266-69). Hanson describes a type of gay mentality--very delusional and destructive--in the most vivid, specific, and accusatory detail:

> It used to be that when most male homosexuals came out of their closets they headed straight for that gay fairyland somewhere way over

> Judy Garland's rainbow and set up housekeeping as fairy princesses. The gay liberation movement has been an escape from the old fairyland, and Judy Garland, and from the traditional gay subculture. [. . .]
>
> Fairyland is still alive and well in Hollywood and for most of those half-de-closeted gays over 30, and I don't think most of our older gay brothers will ever escape from it. Those aging princesses will simply linger on unto death as past relics of a bygone era in their fantasy world of poodle dogs and Wedgewood teacups and chandeliers and all the fancy clothes and home furnishings any queen could ever desire; but it is a world of would-be princes and princesses living on a shoestring; a phony world of countless impersonators of Judy Garland, Bette Davis, Mae West, and of plastic midnight cowboys from Brooklyn cruising Times Square. And it is that same tired old fantasy world peopled by bitchy male hairdressers, snobbish antique dealers, and effete ballet masters, a sham world of egophilic actors turning women on before the camera and turning tricks over behind the camera. [. . .]

At first glance, this rant could be seen as merely the displeasure of one individual directed at a particular stereotype of homosexual men (regardless how widespread in reality). In this scenario, we have one writer rejecting the Judy Garland cult and its associations with femme-identification and fantasy. Perhaps such energy and time could be directed toward more productive activities? Maybe the man is personally unattracted to or repelled by these "princess"-types. Perhaps he thinks they give homosexual men a bad name (an implied call for masculinity and normality?).

On a closer reading, however, the passage contains a lot of problematic cultural work regarding gender, and identity conflation, not to mention an outrage and the sense of a looming threat—of a huge trap to be avoided at all cost. To regard a segment of one's fellows as culturally conservative, and even egocentric, and to identify a certain pattern of tastes and behavior as "a tired old trip" seems fair enough. But Hanson packs in a long and highly politicized list of enemies here, and calls their fate *inescapable*, while appearing to blame the victims for their deep malaise. Moreover, he identifies the princesses and the princes ("the plastic midnight cowboys") as inhabiting the same conservative trip. Surely the cult of masculinity and the cult of femme-identification are not the same trip, even if they may share the charge of being involved in playing gender roles.

Also, the charge against what was widely known as "piss-elegance"--living beyond one's means in order to achieve the appearance of wealth and good taste, whether for one's own benefit or that of one's guests, is an entirely separate and economic one. Moreover, to lump together various stereotypical gay careers as he does, if his logic holds, is to criticize all gay participation in the arts. And his charge against gay actors playing straights might point to some hypocrisy in the society in general, but it is the craft and paycheck of actors to act--many more would go hungry than already do (and did then) in consequence of the ideological requirement that men who have sex with men only act in gay plays, or play only gay characters.

Hanson proceeds to redirect some blame toward the larger society, but also engages in a curious shift of narrative point of view (from referring to "them" to "us"), which occurs at several places in the essay:

> We did not really create our fairyland; the hets did. But we had no other place to go after we came out of our closets. It was reserved for us as our very special place to live our very special way of life. [. . .]
>
> I suppose one would call us cultural conservatives who fed luxury to the establishment; and we were selfish, petty, and vain little men who dedicated their lives to preserving the past and serving our masters, the rich. We called ourselves "artists," but greatness in art depends on innovation, not repetition of the old. For that reason, if none other, the fairy princess is an evil demoness because she stifles and smothers those creative urges deep within us. [. . .]

Here, Hanson's diagnosis of the history of a "gay sensibility" resembles that of Daniel Harris's 1997 book, except that, for Harris, such a sensibility was a neutral fact that would disappear as oppression waned (a disappearance that some might even lament because of fond nostalgia for the "old gay trip"). For Hanson, in contrast, "our very special way of life" is reactionary, and poses a great threat to the prospects for gay liberation. And to call homosexual artists "vain little men," and the princess an "evil demoness" with such power to stifle and smother the rest of us, is again to conflate manhood and maidenhood, and more dangerously, to essentialize the reality of past vocations and oppression, while conflating such a real past with the fantasy realm he wants to eradicate; hence, the perpetrators of the syndrome are both helpless victims and blameworthy monsters at once.

Hanson's criticisms are not, however, restricted to mere gender betrayal, or the pandering of gays to their straight masters. He goes on to pathologize men who participate in any of these cultural traditions:

> The fairy princess creates a romanticized, egocentric, and spurious inner world--fairyland--set against outer reality because he lives a frustrated life of emotional deprivation and isolation due to feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness in the real world. [. . .]
>
> Because they cannot rationalize why they are gay (except in context of sin or sickness), gay traditionalists tend to believe that mysterious forces quite beyond their immediate control guide their lives. [. . .] They are unable to imagine that gay is good. [. . .]
>
> This faith that he is the predestined victim of determinism explains why gay traditionalists are drawn towards astrology, the occult, and superstitious ideals of every sort. They desperately want to be heterosexual, but they believe the hand of cruel fate is set against them. [. . .]
>
> Since the fairy princess cannot explain his life rationally, he tends to view everything irrationally, and irrationality and superficial emotionalism and sentimentality become a hallmark of the princess. Rather than using reason, he emotes, and he emotes on stereotype and ceremony because these produce order and certainty in an otherwise disordered, irrational world. He simply refuses to either accept or

understand science because it demands that rational and ordered mind which would cause chaos in his egocentric world. [. . .]

All of this talk of the inability to imagine that "gay is good," and of a desire to be heterosexual, and "cruel fate," and sense of worthlessness, commits an epistemological fallacy of the most presumptuous and abusive sort. Beyond the risk of overgeneralization, how could Hanson possibly know to this extent how men feel about their own experience? Indeed, how could one know anything about another's "spurious inner world" unless it described one's own to some extent? And why is a fantastical inner world spurious? Surely all so-called inner worlds are somewhat at odds with so-called outer reality. It is one of the frustrating aspects of the human condition that we will never know whether our consciousness corresponds in any degree to the Kantian in-itself of ultimate reality, which is hardly a useful concept, especially in debates about cultural representation. Furthermore, these comments about "irrationality, superficial emotionalism, and sentimentality" hark back to the worst sort of misogynist conceptions of the feminine in general. But perhaps Hanson's greatest injustice is to assume that all these men are not only self-deluded but miserable through and through and wholly beyond redemption, even at the hands of such an expert realist-rationalist as himself.

Hanson's final portrayal of his pathetic brother relies on a logical impossibility in the guise of progressive psycho-political intervention. He claims that some men want to be prince and princess at the same time, due to gender identity confusion. But whether butch or femme, the gender role/fantasy is not due to confusion, but to desire (however reactionary one might want to argue such a desire may be):

> The fairy princess lives in romanticized and traditional settings, and he tends to romanticize past class and sex role differences. Above all, his is the egocentric imagination of one living in a make-believe fantasy world, a world where some young, handsome, and masculine prince clad in white will ride up on his noble steed and sweep him up in his strong arms; and he sometimes imagines that he is both prince and princess, a duality which reflects on the gender identity confusion of the princess. [. . .]
>
> We cannot really expect most fairy princesses to rip down their chandeliers, smash their plaster statues of David, kick their poodles out, or flee from fairyland to reality. Most are simply too old for that. But we should expose our Princess Floradora Femadonna so that our younger brothers will not fall into the lavender cesspool and be swept down the sewers of fantasyland. We must make our gay brothers realize that the princess trip is a rotten one, a self-deluding flight into a past that never was, an artificiality, and an escape from reality. It is a selfish, self-serving, irrational and materialistic journey which shuns real human relations for past images and things material, and human relations are what being gay is all about.

Hanson also claims that the hyper-masculine icons and costumes in gay culture are part of the *same* fantasy-trip, which seems somehow untenable--do they co-exist in the same individuals simultaneously; does it matter? This is the epitome of the epistemological trouble--how would he possibly know this portrayal unless it was his

own trip; what is he so bitter and threatened about? And what of possible positive relationships?

Why is he so bitter, and what is the grave danger he hopes to save gay men, especially the young, from? Are they really so susceptible, and the princesses so cunning, as to have young men "fall," unwittingly and unwillingly, into the syndrome (which Hanson insists on describing in the language of sickness and filth)? While it is true that young gay men, perhaps confused, especially during a time of such upheaval and rhetoric surrounding all matters sexual, needed positive role models and choices as to how they might see themselves and their community, and run their lives, might there not be something to be learned from and cherished about these elders?

Hanson himself provides very little guidance in the way of possible alternatives. What was wrong with the princess, except that a person like Hanson might argue that she (he?) was suffering from a number of delusions of grandeur? She misread reality. But who would she really be capable of hurting but herself? What impact might she have on relations with others or the development of a positive gay community? And what would it take, by way of a cultural shift, to satisfy Hanson's demands? If all older gay men suddenly stopped listening to Judy Garland, and began to identify with the hip movement, listening instead to Jimi Hendryx, as many of them did, would this be enough? Perhaps it would be, and was. Perhaps embracing the counter-culture and its egalitarian and revolutionary ideology did help the project of gay liberation, at least for a short moment. But perhaps it was just another fantasy world--the anti-establishment hipster instead of the fairy princess--yet another spurious inner world, yet another escape from reality. Yet if Hanson is right, at least the hipster could say that "gay is good," and engage at least to

some degree in dialogue, out of the closet, with the dominant society (or at least a temporary subculture within it).

Hanson himself says little about relationships at all, except that they "are what being gay is all about." This last assertion is far from self-evident, and what being gay is all about remains an intense debate among writers, some of whom might take quite a different, and more complicated stand (e.g., Berlant, Bersani, Warner).

The following is a short, dense chunk taken from a much longer manifesto from Chicago, which is remarkable not only for the intensity of its declarations and the breadth of it demands, but because it focuses in very clear and forceful terms on issues like sexism and monogamy.

"Gay Revolution and Sex Roles," Third World Revolution (Chicago) and Gay Liberation Front (Chicago), (June 1971) (OC 258-9):

> A higher level of gay is good is as a tool to break down enforced heterosexuality, sex roles, the impoverished categories of straight, gay, and bisexual, male supremacy, programming of children, ownership of children, the nuclear family, monogamy, possessiveness, exclusiveness of "love," insecurity, jealousy, competition, privilege, individual isolation, ego-tripping, money-tripping, people as property, people as machines, rejection of the body, repression of emotions, anti-eroticism, authoritarian, anti-human religion, conformity, regimentation, polarization of "masculine" and "feminine," categorization of male and female emotions, abilities, interests, clothing, etc., fragmentation of the self by these outlines, isolation and elitism of the arts, uniform standards of beauty, dependency on leaders, unquestioning submission to authority, power hierarchies,

> caste, racism, militarism, imperialism, national chauvinism, cultural chauvinism, class chauvinism, adult chauvinism, human chauvinism, domination, exploitation, division, inequality, and repression as the cultural and politico-economic norms, all manifestations of non-respect and non-love for what is human (not to mention animals and plants)--maybe even up to private property and the state. For sexism was the founding oppression--the original inequality, the original domination, the original isolation, competition, and division among people, the original relation to people as property, the original rejection of humanness. And sexism has remained within people to fuck up their efforts to build collective societies, both abroad and in America's own communities. The individual's relationships with other individuals, in the erotic sphere and in other areas, creates her relationship to the world. The society's relationship to love and sexuality and to all human interaction builds the patterns for the economic system, the political structure, and the culture--which in turn set patterns for individual self-relations and relations to other human beings. The personal is the political, the economic, and the cultural. Gay is the revolution.

Thus, sexism is seen as the root of the rest of the oppressive system. And monogamy is directly attacked as inherently sexist, as being heterosexist in its conception. Few among the manifestos are so stridently against monogamy, though the opposing position doesn't receive much argumentation or analysis here. Clearly, though, it is a member of the greater list of oppressive mechanisms, one central historical contributor to contemporary unhappiness and inequality. Moreover, it is claimed that sexism "was the founding oppression [. . .] the original rejection of humanness."

Somehow, collective societies are inherently more human, so the argument goes, than individualistic ones with monogamy and the nuclear family at their ostensible core. And sexuality is a key component in the struggle for liberation here and around the world. The final sentence of the piece is powerful precisely because of its ambiguity. "Gay is the revolution," with the adjectival form of "gay" left to stand as, and refer to, the whole.

The following analysis and bitter rejection of "cruising" by Perry Brass in "Cruising: Games Men Play" (OC 264-65) is especially valuable because of its insightful and especially vivid characterization of a familiar set of scenes--a familiar set of "types" in a hugely populated "scene" present in the seventies, and long before and since. While it is no doubt a troubling commentary on an often painful, frustrating, and perhaps generally oppressive institution in gay male life, one important thing to keep in mind is that many men seem to have thoroughly enjoyed the game of cruising, and often its successes ("scores"). Recall the discussion of the potentially pleasurable aspects of being "masculine" above. Perhaps Brass had especially unlucky or inhuman experiences, or sought satisfaction in the search for an experience or partner unlikely to be found in the cruising scene. He faces the recurrent epistemological problem of generalizing experience too far; although, there are many corroborative texts and stories, and Rechy's analysis of cruising is one of the best examples of struggling with these issues. Maybe Brass played unfortunate roles in the wrong places; or maybe he's right on with his critique of the entire "enterprise."

> The games people play go on and on. This is especially true of that cruelest of human games known as cruising. In cruising, the hunt is on and the hunter becomes the hunted. Eventually the tension becomes so

> high that the whole aspect of meeting someone with the prospect of an evening, a week, or even a lifetime of satisfaction, or even pleasure, becomes lost in this confrontation of wills. Cruising is one of the great male chauvinist games: I can be tougher than you can be. I can hold out longer than you can hold out. I don't need you. I can't open up to you until you open up to me.

In this opening paragraph, it seems very possible that the desired outcome of the activity can never be achieved, given the participant's understanding of the nature of the game—and to call it a game may be a rhetorical misnomer that strips cruising of some of its desperate and often exciting centrality to many gay men's lives. At least both or all parties would need to be imagining an outcome within certain parameters, or be open to whatever might happen for any sort of mutual satisfaction to be achieved. Clearly, if one party wanted a brief moment of satisfaction (whether sex or conversation or whatever) and another wanted, say, a week together, somebody would be disappointed. But the more pressing problem is that the narrative is set up so as to ensure failure--the great male chauvinist egos, however frail and self-protecting, will not relent. They are unwilling to submit to the slightest vulnerability.

Brass goes on to describe several "types" of cruisers and encounters, many of whom have "types" of desires, "types" of partners they look for. These types are eerie in their resemblance of the "types" that appear in the earlier novels, so many years prior. The attempt to "act" masculinity is incredibly steadfast:

> Most men try to set up their own roles in the first moments of this contest of wills. Whether the playing ground be some street in the Village,

> one of the avenues, or any bar or beach, there are always the same roles, often enough being played by the same men only wearing different faces. We could begin with the extreme caricature of masculinity who believes that it is below his masculine dignity to ever approach anyone else. He will usually stand like the steadfast tin soldier for hours on end, wondering why this isn't his particular night. [. . .]
>
> Next to him is the aggressive animal, the tiger stalking his way through the situation, looking at everyone but not looking at anyone. He is really looking for that perfect fulfillment of some adolescent sex fantasy (referred to as his "type") who was possibly his first love at the age of twelve (his first "type") and whom he expects to walk by momentarily.

One of the most poignant and, one might even hope, instructive moments in the piece comes as Brass describes the fear involved in gay male role-playing, and a fear of vulnerability that I would argue is similar in many gay and straight men, though perhaps due to a different host of factors, though it's not at all clear that they are so different. There may be a connection with the problems gay men have getting together and the problems straight male friends have being emotional (or intimate) together, and the problems both gay and straight men may have with women. Is there a difference between gay and straight misogyny? What of straight male homophobia and gay male heterophobia? Here's how Brass puts it:

> All of these men add up to a frightening lack of self-understanding and self-confidence. They cannot face up to a situation without the roles pre-defined, the definitions rolled out. We are all too afraid to find out that

that certain gorgeous "number" over there is just like we are inside: afraid and alone. Trapped in the role that he has learned how to play very successfully, but has outgrown years ago, whether it be the gorgeous "number" role or the twittering little boy of thirty. [. . .]

Gay roles are designed by fear. Just as we act in straight society out of fear that they will discover us, we react with each other out of fear that we will discover ourselves also.

It is no small wonder that from out of this self straight-jacketing, many gay men develop a real hatred for men, just as many straight men hate women because of the roles they must act out. Because we are forced to live in a society that condemns us as half-men, many of us feel that we must become men-and-a-half. This means to shut out all of the real tenderness and sensitivities associated with femininity. [. . .]

Gay life is a drag when it forces a man to reject most of himself and only leaves him a shell or role he must show in order to live with the reality of our situation: that we are *all* outcasts. We must reject what straight society has straight-jacketed us with and form our own life as real people, not merely imitating the old male chauvinist roles left over from dodo society. It's very simple, men. It's just a matter of getting together or falling apart.

Brass is somewhat specific about what it will take to achieve his notion of this "getting it together" by men--much rests on the recovery and celebration of qualities he follows the dominant narrative in associating with femininity, including "real" tenderness

and sensitivities. These are the qualities that might help us to deal with our own fears, and the fear "that that certain gorgeous 'number' over there is just like we are inside: afraid and alone." While he is not specific about the ideal relationship, nor explicit about his views concerning monogamy or promiscuity, the implication is that "mere," anonymous sex would not satisfy his personal desires or his political program for a truly liberated gay community. And it seems safe to say that some cruising has always resulted in these sorts of encounters; although, of course, the possibilities are endless.

Such a pessimistic analysis brings with it huge epistemological problems and universalizing tendencies. Recall Rechy's commentary on the potential pleasure, as well as dangers inherent, involved in choosing roles to play. Also, Brass here assumes the possibility of entirely reprogramming our field of desire. If one wanted to look for partners in public, as all should be able to contemplate doing, and do, then what would be the appropriate manner in which to cruise? Lots of people speak highly of the activity, for example, as fun, and do meet sex partners and future lovers that way.

While Brass's depiction of cruising seems to imply his desire for something more like exclusivity or monogamy, or at least "getting to know the person," Konstantin Berlandt's saga of the vanishing of his soul, "My Soul Vanished from Sight: A California Saga of Gay Liberation" (OC 38-55, December 1970), begins to illuminate the sheer pleasure and excitement of anonymous sexuality (another perspective on cruising), though in a narrative filled with ambivalence. Beyond its refreshing honesty and lack of any obvious polemical agenda, the power of Berlandt's story, and its keen ability to portray the complexity and ambiguity of various sorts of intimate encounters, comes in large part through its form. It is a highly personal autobiography with a freedom of form

that allows the text to imitate the flux of moving from encounter to encounter, and back into the straight world, and from guilt to exaltation, from normality to radicality, from hot sex (only?) in the moment to the wish for love in bed the morning after--and, ultimately, to gay liberation. Indeed, the form itself--the lack of traditional, rational argumentative structure--is part of what allows the text to do this so successfully.

The narrator begins as a college student interviewing homosexuals for a project, and discovers himself surprised--"I'm going back next week to interview another one"--using the ugly yet somehow quaint pronoun, "another *one*"; but soon he becomes all "too involved."

> I left the bar high, excited, jumping, running. I greeted my friends with a huge grin. I've just discovered a whole new world: Homosexuals are people, beautiful people who really exist, party, rap, hold each other tight when riding motorcycles. I'm going back next week to interview another one.
>
> But the following Saturday afternoon I am an intrepid boy on an AC Transit bus from Berkeley.
>
> I'm too involved. My cock starts to rise. Just an interview for a sociology project and a newspaper article, but my cock starts to rise. The fear climbs up around me. I have always loved going to San Fransisco. Now it is frightening, crawling with homosexuals, old men who want to make me. I don't want anybody to see me, and yet I've worn a bright shirt

and tight Levis. The city is dark, the shadows hanging over the patches of sun.

Berlandt provides such a poignant, and utterly realistic portrait of the transformation involved in coming out--to himself first (gradually, almost unconsciously), and then to other gay men. *Now*, San Francisco is frightening, and crawling with lusty homosexuals (as opposed to the last time he visited)--this may be the beginning of a libratory epistemological victory. This is how it feels to be at once attracted and repelled--the whole scene (or one's imaginary vision of it) is at once so dirty and so inescapably magnetic. How are we supposed to feel when our cocks start to rise in new environments, with new, and maybe longtime, objects of desire suddenly (or gradually) thrust into full relief?

This must have been the experience of so many in the post-Stonewall period--different from earlier experiences of coming into one's own homosexual desires because there had then been virtually no widely publicized debate with one side saying that one should be proud to be gay, that gay might perhaps be good. No, this personal moment is not unique in the intensity and ambivalence of its emotions and desires, but unique in that it now includes the ("sociological") knowledge that a whole community of people is being public and political about it.

I'd be ashamed for people to know I jacked off in the john, I blew a man through a glory hole, I blew a man at all.

I like making it in a restroom. There's romance in the fear of being caught, the excitement of making it with a complete stranger, someone you don't know, and you can be so close, so sexually intimate

and unafraid to put your cock in his mouth and taking his in yours and feeling strong because you can fuck. If I can't ever show my cock in public now, I can show it to a public stranger who loves it.

The dichotomies are telling; they are not placed in opposition, but act in concert in the service of a restroom sexual experience at once shameful and pleasurable: romance in fear and romance in being unafraid; romance in anonymous cocks and romance in intimacy; and (masculine?) strength.

The poem directly following the passage above cannot be broken up into distinct narrative or chronological sections, and should not be interrupted because it depicts a single flash of insight into the almost, but not quite yet, unbearable duplicity between sexual liberation with its ambivalent relationships, and passing as straight, even at crucial times to one's own mind:

And make the world all sex.
No piss-elegant romantic trappings
(No bed, no fucking million dollar diamond ring

to prove our forever love for each other)
just cold tile floor
and cold ceramic toilet bowl,
just what we are with no pretensions
now without future involvements to pretend other things for

But on the other hand, when I'm loving myself for longer periods of time I'd like to make it with you in bed and smile in the morning without putting it on.

There's honesty in fucking fast and fearful.

Having to perform is such a drag.

that morning smile after sex
that morning smile to your boss
that morning smile to closest friends
--"Didn't do nothin' wrong last night,
except it was with a guy."
How could I have loved you last night
--sorry about that.
Good morning.
what suit should I wear today,
what smile and opening lines for the friends downtown.
Good morning boy.
was I really attracted to you last night?
was I really such a pervert as to like your cock and your body?
Funny, I don't feel that this morning.

Feeling straight,

giving you my plastic appreciation smile.

Well, I proved I'm not gay myself anyway.

The poem might be titled "And Make the World All Sex," as this seems to be the ultimate destination yearned for at this point in the narrator's process of coming out into sexual liberation. Yet it's not clear whether there has truly been any sex enacted in the poem. There is a celebration of the *idea* of simple restroom sex without pretension, and the accompanying recognition of the occasional desire for something less anonymous. There are reflections on the return to the closet after sexual encounters. But the morning in the narrative does not occur in the actual presence of the sex partner, except in the imagination. The apology, the "Good morning boy," and the denial of the perverse attraction are mere reflections cast away in the real morning at the office, as the "you" in the last stanza switches from the recollected-then-rejected partner to the person downtown who gets the plastic appreciation smile. And finally, it's left ambiguous both whether "feeling straight" means truly feeling straight or just seeming straight enough to continue to pass (sweet relief!), and to whom he has proven his nongayness, himself, his sex partner, or the straight world.

In the following return to prose form, the fear becomes confused, its object vacillating. And the sentiment that promises release from fear is regrettably vague:

> Afraid someone might be interested in my cock, afraid if I can't make it work now while the spotlight is on me I'm not a man. And then, while I stand there unable to pee, I start to worry that instead of another

faggot at the next urinal it might be a vice squad officer who will accuse me of soliciting while I hold out my cock.

Finally, I flush, pretending I have used it, wash my hands, comb my hair, dry my hands, and walk out planning my return in a few minutes when these people will all be gone.

But then I smile at a hippie girl at the lavatory door who is waiting for her boyfriend and I remember that I'm strong and wonderful and beautiful like she is and no one is going to keep me from peeing. I go back in.

This is a moment of incredible internalized homophobia ("another faggot"), but also a moment of more general masculinity-in-crisis that often afflicts men who identify as heterosexual. There is the fear of a potentially sex-charged scene, though it would be the imaginary other who would sexualize it, whether a gay man or a vice officer. There is the fear of not being able to pee in public, with others present, which is extremely widespread throughout the male population in the United States. And it may often be equated with a lack of real manhood. But in the case of gay men, we often wonder whether our gayness, and the potential sexualization of standing at urinals, even if only in the realm of fantasy, may be to blame for our pee-inadequacy. I have no evidence from oral histories whether or not hetero-identified men ever have any sort of sexual component to their sense of inadequacy related to side-by-side urination at urinals--just some of them experience anxiety and "dysfunction." Thus, we see what Foucault calls "sexuality" entering the body, upsetting even so "natural" and innocent a function as urination.

What gives him confidence to return to the lavatory? Seeing the beautiful, heterosexual hippie girl, it would appear. Is it the relief of her female presence, or the strength and wonder of her hipness that boosts his feelings? Or is it the reminder that he can pass as he wishes, and a recollection that he can convince even himself that he himself isn't gay when it's inconvenient to be so?

This passage shows the tension between participation in a culture (and subculture) that often seems to value genital contact and orgasm above all else, on the one hand, and wanting to make longer-lasting contact, on the other. The object of attraction changes from "it" to "him," and from the narrator's penis to the other's. And is the cup of coffee for getting to know one another, or just to make sure they're not cops? Does the narrator even distinguish between these, or choose in his mind, as he contemplates asking?

> Exercise: Stand at the urinal and look at the cock of the man standing next to you. Is it ugly? Is it beautiful? Do you want to make it feel good? You'll never see him again. You might be in love with him. Let him look at your cock. Is it ugly? Is it beautiful? Do you want to make it feel good? Is it getting hard? Yes, it is. Let's go get a cup of coffee and reassure each other we're not cops.

The saddest part of Berlandt's story is the following tale of lost love. It's such a common experience in gay male relations, and was perhaps much more so in the rush of the early days of liberation. What keeps them from getting together? They both seem to want to, and each presumably only knows his own limitations logistically and emotionally. It's as though something deep and common prohibits closeness and

emotional vulnerability—as if we don't know how to do it, not only a problem for heterosexual men. This is the moment in the piece where it sounds as though he might want monogamy on some level, might be capable of what society tends to call love:

> My last night in New York I met a man who had just gotten out of the army. He had a wife and three children. It was 3 a.m. and we talked by the sunrise on the Hudson River until 9 a.m. when my father had gone to work and we went to my house and made love. Six hours of anticipation as he became more and more beautiful and then he fucked me and it felt so good.
>
> I wrote him three letters from California. He finally answered one pledging that while "most gay relationships don't last, our love would last forever." I don't remember answering his letter.

But he concludes with a rousing call for taking blatant and proud sexuality to the streets in spite of the cops and the scared conservative gays:

> The bars are havens for the until-that-day crowd.
>
> Standing in the Stud watching 500 men, lots of them stoned, squeeze together, holding hands, hugging each other, groping each other, opening up in the closet. Limits: No dancing except in the back, no dancing close, no kissing. The bar is owned by a gay commune who work together to keep it open. Jim, one of the partners, pulls Neil and me apart. "If you want to do that, go home and do it." Your kiss is obscene! Alcoholic Beverage Control is hassling you, and you're hurting me.

> Outside on the street the men from the bar separate, no touching, they walk off passing as straight men. The bedroom is a closet, the bar is a closet, the closet is a jail cell. You're let out if you can go straight, act straight and don't get caught. Let's get out of here. The Tenderloin queen stands in the middle of the street shouting at the cars going by. Why don't we all do it in the road?

Mike Silverstein's second contribution to the early gay liberation manifesto literature, "The Politics of My Sex Life" (OC 270-75), is a testimony that coming out and gay sexual liberation and consciousness is not always a unidirectional narrative with more and more freedom and happiness from one point in the past through the present. Often, shifts in one's identity and behavioral patterns and choices can be excruciatingly painful and frightening. He starts out pretty well on his way to being a satisfied gay man, but then confronts an identity crisis and confidence breakdown:

> As a teacher I could really make it with my students. I never had a class where four or five of them didn't think I was the grooviest guru going. Perhaps this is the main thing that kept me going for the last few years. But once I got into bed, I couldn't play my role any more; I didn't believe in the game. I needed something from them, I wanted them to love me, and I showed it. I came off as too weak to support anyone, and they freaked. Either way I lost, though for a while I thought I was getting something just by getting my rocks off with them.
>
> Meanwhile, as I got more and more into gay liberation, I began to unlearn the lies I had been taught about filthy faggots and silly queens, and

started really seeing the people about me. At first I was relieved--they were just men--like other men. Then I started to panic. My God! They really were other men--competitors, rivals, not to be trusted. We could go to bed together--sex between men works fine--but how can men love each other, how can we get to know each other, when we always have to be on our guard?

To the contemporary and even slightly open-minded ear, these last two claims sound so sad and, one hopes, old-fashioned: first, that other men are necessarily rivals and not to be trusted; and, secondly, that because of this it is impossible for two men, who might have even the slightest sexual history or interest together, to love each other. But in 1972, these were very conscious hang-ups for a lot of men, and continue to be so to a much less conscious degree. Things become even more miserable for Silverstein:

> So after six months out of the closet, as a reasonable success in the gay world, that is, having a fair amount of sex with relatively desirable guys, I discovered I was as lonely and isolated as ever. Then I started to freak. My cover started to fall off, my game playing got ragged around the edges, and finally what I was always afraid of happened. People could see what I was really like. All my needs, fears, and weaknesses were out there for everybody to see--all my friends, all the other men. They could all see that I needed them, I wanted them to love me, I wanted them to go to bed with me to prove it. And I wanted them to do it even if I had nothing to offer in return. [. . .]

> But usually when two gay men get together, both want to be men. Men can ball together fine, and as long as things are kept casual gay men can partially avoid the power games that characterize straight sex, but there is still no place for a deeply committed love between two equal human beings. To the straight world, and ultimately to themselves, gay men aren't "real" men. I used to be afraid of the concept [which concept?], but now I know it's our only hope for survival, as "real" men drive themselves to extinction. But we're too much like men; we're male impersonators. Like men we haven't learned how to love each other.

These are the paradoxes: we're not real men enough and we're too much like real men; we both are and are not that which we at once strive most to be and desire, but understand ideologically that we must work not to be. Silverstein ends facing the possibility that there may never be a solution for him personally, but he holds out hope that perhaps for him as well as for others there may be ways to get beyond the problems of gender roles, stereotypes, unrealistic expectations, and isolation:

> Now there is no utopian farm, no gay liberation community, no army of lovers [in direct contradiction to his more hopeful, impassioned letter to Tennessee Williams]. There is just me sitting by myself at a typewriter, trying to figure out how I can survive, and occasionally flashing on real hope. [. . .]
>
> I'm fighting for my life, because I know this society doesn't offer me a life worth living. If I fail I'll die so I've developed the politics of my sex life. First of all, the whole idea of a sex life--separated and under

> different rules than a "real" life, has to go. My politics are to make a whole person of myself including sex, to combine intellect and emotion, weakness and strength, "masculine" and "feminine." And I know I can't do this in my own head. The core of humanity is found in my relationships with others, and I can only recover that humanity in the context of loving, human relationships. I can only struggle toward humanity if I can find other gay men, with whom I want to create a new humanity.

Along with rejecting gender dichotomies, he sees the first step of his process to be the integration of "sex life" with "real life"--they are one and the same. This rejection of the concept of "a life" in any pigeon-holed conception contributes greatly to the battle against the whole notion of "the gay lifestyle" that continues until today. The idea of a "lifestyle" is destructive to the actual living of autonomous, creative lives. Adopting styles, or being seen as instantiating a certain style, is an almost unavoidable aspect of life in contemporary culture; but having them define a life is a dangerous, reductive mystification, either for the person living the life or for his commentators. It should be noted here that the media, both gay and mainstream, instituted a monumental campaign to cultivate the notion of a "gay lifestyle" (e.g., The Advocate and After Dark in the seventies, and so many others since), as have anti-gay forces throughout the post-war era, and even earlier. This brings to mind the current "Get a life" sound-bite phenomena, which along with so many of these periodic coinages may be as harmless as they seem, but probably reflect huge anxieties about the meaning of life, or one's own status in this

life, or at least something quite more significant than this week's television mantra might suggest without further consideration.

While ostensibly and apparently focused more than Silverstein on a single issue of contention with the emerging gay liberation movement, the following piece by Ralph Schaffer, "Will You Still Need Me When I'm 64?" (OC 278-79, January 1971), ultimately portrays a man in a similar state of disillusion, except that he opts out of participation in "the movement" because, in his eyes, it refuses to meet his needs as an "older" gay man. His sense of isolation and loneliness, though, very much echo Silverstein's experience, though for different reasons, at least on the surface:

> Gay liberation has covered wide terrain--geographically and intellectually. We gay people have recognized our oppression and, in different ways, are dealing with it. We are also confronting our male chauvinism toward women and each other, and our racism. We are coping with gender identities and gender chauvinism.
>
> At hundreds of gay liberation meetings in four cities, I have quietly raised my voice to speak of the youthism of gay life--the chauvinism of people (young and old) against the older gay male. People listen and move on to the next topic.
>
> Now I'm beginning to get a little pissed. I think it is about time that gay liberation come to grips with youthism. It is the most vicious and entrenched of our fuck-ups left over from our oppression. It is tragic because it leaves half our gay people lonely, alienated, and unwanted.

Schaffer's claim that "youthism" is the most vicious of all oppressive fuck-ups is important. While there can be no fruitful quantitative or qualitative comparison to adjudicate between all the various "fucked-up-nesses" of gay oppression, nor a hierarchy of blame put on gay liberation activists for not considering the needs of everybody, his point is well taken in that youthism does affect so many people (as do racism, classism, fashionism, culturism--e.g., fairy princesses vs. hipsters). But the oppression against the elder brothers was especially divisive and short-sighted, not only because it made so many feel left out, but because it neglected the potential contributions of such wisdom of experience, and role models (as has been mentioned above). And his point that all gay men will some day be in their late thirties and older is incredibly important in 1971, when the hipster sentiment, as represented in the popular media, was "never trust anyone over thirty"--and, Schaffer might add, don't sleep with them; besides, they're unattractive by that age.

> Youthism is the unconscious belief that older people are inferior. We older gay men [he writes at 42] are looked upon as inferior in appearance, attractiveness, intelligence and sexual prowess. Many of us have unwittingly accepted our alleged inferiority. Consequently, we cannot relate to other gay men our age--we must pursue the eternal 18-year-old Adonis. [. . .]
>
> All the aims and goals of gay liberation are for the young gays. Nothing is for older gays--not even those who are hip and in the movement. [. . .]

Who is the older person? Well, I remember two sweet young guys complaining to me at a gay liberation dance that this dirty old man was bothering them. The "dirty old man" was 24 years old! And why is it when an older man cruises he is dirty? [. . .]

And so what if a guy does have a pot belly? A pot belly has its own kind of beauty, if you would look for it. So does baldness, grayness, wrinkledness, etc.

The older man has a beauty that is inaccessible to youth. His life story is written in his body, in his gestures, his facial expressions. His body is the history of victories and defeats, moments of joy and moments of sorrow. We've had them all. Every man has a story to tell about life. He has visited places and traveled roads the young have not yet imagined.

The young cannot be blamed for not seeing this beauty. But older gay men have no excuse for overlooking the beauty and attractiveness of their peers. [. . .]

The young person who concerns himself with the busy fate of older gays is planning for his future. But, of course, young people don't really believe they will someday be a hoary 33 years old! Believe me, it comes faster than you think.

I have quit the gay liberation movement after being extremely active for a full year. In gay liberation, I've known more gay people than in all my life. I have never been so lonely. What a tragic comment on gay liberation.

Gay liberation is masturbation.

[Ralph Schaffer was murdered on August 27, 1972, while working on the GayWill Funky Store project of the Gay Community Services Center in Los Angeles. He was 44 years old. "Despite the feelings expressed in this article, Ralph Schaffer was too committed to gay liberation to quit it. He remained a movement activist and made the ultimate sacrifice for his convictions--his life" (Gay Roots 236). There is no evidence one way or the other whether Schaffer's murder was a hate crime.]

While Schaffer writes from the perspective of a lonely "older" man alone, John Knoebel writes of the loneliness he experienced as a member of a group of younger men in "Somewhere in the Right Direction: Testimony of My Experience in a Gay Male Living Collective" (OC 301-15). Age doesn't seem to be an obstacle in the way of this group's becoming intimate though there is a slight gap between the youngest and eldest. Rather, major obstacles include their diverse life experiences and, more crucially, the difficulty of molding their desires and behavior to fit the ideological imperatives they have set for themselves.

> My first task in the collective was, obviously, to get to know the others and to find out what they expected of me. [. . .] Before Robert joined the collective, he had had a lover. During the six months the collective was together [beginning in late July, 1970], Robert had a couple of rather stable affairs with men outside the collective, while the rest of us had sex only infrequently. [. . .]
>
> I found out quickly enough that the others' ideas about collective living were just about as vague as mine. This was not difficult to

understand: we were the first gay male living collective in the country. We were creating something that had never been tried before, and this meant we largely had to create it as we went along. Of course we thought of collective living as sharing everything equally: expenses, housework, ideas and feelings. [. . .]

We knew from consciousness-raising that "the personal is political" and that we had to examine our experiences together in order to understand our oppression and accomplish change. We knew that changing was called "struggle." We knew that our oppression as gay people had been to live in a world totally defined by heterosexuals and that our collective would be a small world we could define ourselves. But these ideas were as yet only rhetorical and abstract. We had to test them out in the reality of gay men living together. [. . .]

We brought every aspect of our lives to group discussion. If I was reading a good book, it was my responsibility to share it with the group, as well as my mother's letters. If I had to make a decision about something that affected me alone, like an argument with a friend, I still brought it to the group. As it turned out, almost nothing that happened to me did not in some way affect the group. Yet as this loss of individuality became part of our experience, we recognized that the need to spend time alone once in a while was legitimate and tried to provide for it.

Knoebel was by no means alone in his scepticism about the loss of individuality and privacy. Several voices in texts from this period raise concerns about feeling stifled by

socialistic, consciousness-raising ideology--e.g., that utter candor and forced sharing of all thoughts and feelings was a trap, and that confessions were sometimes used later as weapons. And Gary, a member of Knoebel's 95th Street Collective, "often talked about wondering what it would be like to live alone" (303).

> We were a tight group. We spent as much time as we could together and were constantly telling each other what had happened to us while we were apart. In the evenings we often took walks in Riverside Park, all of us holding hands. It was romantic, in a very different way than any of us had experienced before.
>
> Whenever there was a disagreement between any of us, everyone would gather together. We never allowed any two members to argue by themselves. This sometimes meant getting dragged out of bed or off the phone, but it was something we all agreed to do. In the presence of the group, arguments soon turned into reasonable discussions. Everyone's opinion was solicited.

Such idealistic aspirations (and one might say naive expectations) of conflict resolution and the group process ultimately led to the dissolution of this collective, as well as the swift disintegration of the Gay Liberation Front, the organization at whose meetings the members of Knoebel's group first met.

> None of the relationships inside the group were sexualized. [. . .] Having no internal sexual outlet, we were forced to go outside the collective for sex and the exception to the rule [which allowed for unannounced guests to be brought home only in the case of sexual

> partners] protected our ability to do so. But since we were almost always together as a group and felt our emotional involvement to be with the collective, this did not say much for the nature of the sexual encounters we had outside. For myself, I often thought it strange that living in a gay male collective in the midst of a busy gay movement, I had so little sex. I complained that I began to feel like a professional homosexual: being gay was my work, not my life.

This passage includes several important implications regarding whether the group had expectations that were impossible to satisfy. The mandate that all visitors be scheduled ahead of time *except* for sexual partners imposes incredibly harsh restrictions on how such liaisons might be known to be sexual before the fact of the visit, as though the member and his sex partner would have had to negotiate the nature of their encounter *beforehand* (that it would be understood that they would be fuck-buddies of some sort, nothing more and definitely nothing less, or the rule would be violated). It's a bizarre manner of separating sex and sentiment ahead of time, and deciding theoretically that they, in fact, *are* separate and separable. Moreover, though the members of the collective recognized the need for privacy and time alone, they didn't manage to have much of either, and such time couldn't be spent with a nonmember unless it was sexual time. And presumably they would be required to tell the group about their sex lives, and confess to any emotional attachments that might develop with a nonmember; and what if the nonmember fell in love with the member sex-partner? And was it stated, or merely assumed by the author, that their emotional involvement was with the collective? How can rules be made about such things, and how could they be enforced, either for oneself

or another? Finally, why might he have had so little sex, if he really wanted to have sex more often? Is this something one can decide ahead of time, and keep consistent, or change so voluntarily or easily in any direction?

The group was well aware of some of these difficulties, and tried various strategies to work them out, but in the end was unable to solve enough of the serious problems to remain together:

> Of course, we often discussed the need to be sexual together. This was something we did not expect to accomplish right away, as it meant coming to understand the nature of our sexuality and attempting to change our sexual programming. We tried to be physical together: holding one another, kissing each other in greeting. We learned to be naked together, around the apartment and sitting at meetings. This in itself was difficult, for it meant we had to overcome being shy and ashamed of our bodies. Several times we moved mattresses into the living room and slept together. But we were very afraid and hesitant to do much more. We knew we should be in theory, but theory was not supported by our feelings. [. . .] [It should be noted here that Knoebel and a member, Robert, had a brief sexual affair at the very start, but that the attraction, at least in Knoebel's telling, disappeared for them both.]
>
> Besides, the alternatives to the group becoming sexual were all too present. Many times we put up gay men from out of town who needed a place to stay, and this would lead to sexual encounter. Or men who came to the collective for [political, noncollective] meetings would end up

> spending the night with one of us. I always felt dissatisfied and slightly ashamed after spending the night this way with someone, since it always felt to me like trapping someone in my "home territory" with whom I had no intention to form a responsible relationship--and, indeed, could not without breaking my commitment to the group.

So many tensions and contradictions swirl amidst these ruminations. On the one hand, they want to be sex-positive and sexual both with members and also outsiders; they want to have "healthy," active sex lives. But there are tremendous ideological and emotional pressures on many sides. They want to be open and unashamed with each other, and their politics says they should be sexual with each other--to avoid hetero-scripted monogamy and to bring sex and sentiment together. But they are not able to do so, in part because sex and sentiment do seem to separate for them, and in fact some of their provisions imply and almost require that they be separate. In fact, they do not seem capable of being attracted to each other, whether by some cruel coincidence, or because the nature of the intimacies they have established and worked hard to achieve and to sustain have undone whatever sexual tension and attraction may have existed among them earlier.

Thus, sex and sentiment must be both separate and united simultaneously. And the collective's members must be both promiscuous enough with outsiders *and* devoted and loyal enough to each other. As for their inability to be sexual with each other, the mind is dazzled by possible strategies they might or might not, should or should not have employed (or did employ) *while* they were all lying on a mattress together in the nude, or milling around the apartment together. Were they incapable of actually touching each

other's penises, asses, nipples, earlobes, or whatever zone imaginable and sexualizable, or unable to garner or sustain erections? What is the definition of the sexual that Knoebel laments they were unable to achieve? The point here is not to expect Knoebel to be more explicit or descriptive, but to explore the realm of the possible, which the collective may have underestimated or failed to experiment with sufficiently. Why wasn't it enough simply to sleep together and be physically intimate and affectionate? In some ways, their nonsexual togetherness seems to fulfill many liberatory ideological requirements (working against obvious roles, inequalities, or oppressive modes of exclusivist coupling).

Also, one important prerequisite to some of the consciousness-raising they were attempting is that one be able to control one's sexuality, one's attractions, and to change one's oppressive "programming." Clearly, this proved to be difficult at best. Moreover, Knoebel often speaks in the first-person plural (e.g., our sexuality, our encounters, our programming), as though all of the members were the same in these regards, or as though they could somehow manifest a collective agency in matters sexual. The former is plainly and simply untrue, and commits the dangerous fallacy so widespread in thinking about sexuality--both in theory and in practice: that people function the same way erotically (a mythical assumption, whether explicitly stated or not, that Sedgwick has done such a marvelous job to dispel). Whether we might or should attempt to reprogam ourselves in order to become more similar, according to some morally compliant orthodoxy, is quite another matter. This, too, seems to be an assumption underlying the efforts at consciousness-raising in this collective, and much more widely in the early post-Stonewall and second-wave feminist period. The second possibility, that of a collective

agency and sexual identity, is a very important concept to consider whenever communities attempt to speak with one voice about appropriate practices and mindsets with a single voice (e.g., Silverstein's letter to Tennessee Williams above--*we* are an army of lovers who are transforming ourselves from the old guilt-ridden type to the new liberated type; or in debates regarding safer sex since HIV--*we* are cleaning up our *collective* act).

Through the process of consciousness-raising and continued experimentation with living arrangements and the management of daily tasks, members of the collective attempt to develop strategies for dealing with issues that are central concerns in many of the manifestos, whether practical, theoretical, political, emotional, or material—and part of the challenge they face is that these categories are not always cleanly distinct. They quickly decide they need another member to help with the workload, as basic household upkeep and their extensive community service work becomes overwhelming. John Knoebel falls in unrequited love with a man named Lane, whom they all agree should be the new member. Lane moves in and begins an affair with Robert, which violates collective principles. John is jealous. Robert and Lane have problems with their need for privacy and their undemocratic manipulation of the group decision-making process. They all agree that it no longer feels like a collective but like a pair of lovers with three hangers-on. The decision is made that Robert should leave. His sudden departure breaks the idealistic spirit in which the collective began. John Knoebel asks himself what principles are any good for if they force people apart and make everybody feel awful. The remaining members begin to criticize each other in new ways. Quickly, the collective falls apart and they decide to disband in a heartbreaking goodbye scene. In the

end, they were overcome by conflicts between personal and political pressures, including the need for privacy, for personal lives.

The struggles of this group of men to achieve intimacy within the confines of politically appropriate nongendered identities and attitudes towards sexuality echo throughout the manifestos. They had no role models to begin with, a lack evidenced in the representations of the pre-Stonewall novels; and they were very conscious of their experiment of making it up as they went along. But sustaining intimate relationships proved, at least for them, an impossible task, even in such a thoughtful and dedicated community, on account of members' intractable desires, and their ultimate need to express or maintain their individuality, even at the expense of what may have been best for the collective.

Yet for all their disappointments and frustrated ideals, representations in these manifesto texts contributed to the discourse of what might be possible and desirable. They helped establish the terms of the debate for the post-Stonewall community concerning the relationship between gender and sexuality, and the importance of these categories to intimate relationships between self-identified gay men. This complicated debate would be a central concern of voices from this community through the seventies. Given this host of new possibilities, however ideal and hard to achieve, how ought one to live one's life, and what does it all mean? While such existential questions may seem profound or banal depending on the context, they are at the explicit core of the two novels to be treated in the next chapter. In fact, the issues of morality and meaning are brought together in the questions "Is that all there is?" and "Why do we do this?" Characters in Holleran and Kramer spend their "prime" years partying, cruising, and fucking, all the

while looking for beauty, love, and intimacy. In the end, they ask themselves and their fellows whether the journey has been a waste or the ultimate search for pleasure, self-realization, and intimacy with others.

Notes

[1] The perceived insidiousness of sexism and internalized homophobia comes up in several of the manifestos to be discussed in this chapter. More recent discussions can be found in Altman (1982), Duberman (1996) and Warner (1999).

[2] While more systematic assessments of the state of gay life continued to appear throughout the seventies, it would take some time and hindsight for writers to digest the tremendous changes that happened first in light of Stonewall and then the HIV/AIDS crisis (e.g., see the Edmund White texts discussed below).

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III: The Life of the Party: These Are the Good Old Days?

Gay male urban culture in the United States in the seventies (as well as heterosexual culture) is widely represented as a period of radical freedom and self-exploration that often took the forms of hedonistic excesses and an obsession with fashion and appearances manifested in bars, baths, disco culture, orgies, S/M and the like. As we have seen in the manifestos discussed in the previous chapter, early activists were already debating what might be politically conscientious, or at least humane, attitudes toward sex and sentiment, and monogamy and promiscuity. They were very concerned with the tyrannies of sexism, gender roles, and sexual objectification. Their sensitivities to these issues do not, however, seem to have permeated the larger gay male culture as the decade proceeded, at least not in representations that gained wide currency and prominence in the media.

Two novels published in 1978 deal explicitly with this urban gay male culture and its often deeply conflicting values: Andrew Holleran's Dancer from the Dance and Larry Kramer's Faggots. Both books feature a handsome protagonist who arrives in New York thinking of himself as exceptional in the gay scene. They are, after all, normal, decent guys who just happen to be in search of an all-American young man to settle down with in a blissful love affair and sexual relationship. They quickly discover, though, that gay culture in the city doesn't always make such a connection easy to find. Moreover, they encounter respective casts of characters who have a multitude of notions about what they might want out of life. Each realizes that he is not so unusual after all. While Jim in Vidal's novel and David in Baldwin's novel discussed above never develop alternatives to their single impossible life's dream (monogamy with a particular beloved man), and

school student in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.) Both narratives are at times explicitly conscious of their particularity in telling the story of men on "the circuit" of the New York scene.

This chapter will compare and contrast Faggots and Dancer in regard to the following central and interrelated concerns. My first concern is the explicit and implicit attitudes of the narratives toward notions of gender and gender roles, and their complicated relation to promiscuity, monogamy, and the possibility of love. These texts appear on the surface to be less obsessed with gender than were either the manifestos or the novels that preceded them under consideration here. This may be due to the decline of visible feminist and liberationist consciousness among many gay men as the seventies progress. While gender is not problematized in obvious ways as such, gendered terms and roles are pervasive, if taken for granted. Characters may fall into nebulously gendered postures—false femme, faux butch, or regular, "real" guys caught up in the alien scene--but roles and role-playing are generally accepted as the norm on the circuit. Second is the trope of the "queen." This category may or may not be primarily about gender, as we shall see. The protagonists both attempt to distinguish themselves from the figure of the "doomed queen"; but it remains to be shown exactly what they wish to escape identification with. Third, the characters go back and forth between the desire to be the normal, all-American, young man, which may or may not include monogamy, and to be the wildly promiscuous, radically liberated "new" gay man. Fourth, I will compare the ultimate rhetorical judgment made by the narrators and/or protagonists on any intrinsic value of life on the circuit, and what alternatives to this so-called decadent mode

of living might look like. Finally, I will examine the reception of the novels in the contemporary gay and mainstream presses.

Faggots is not a subtle narrative text, and rarely is it ambiguous in its portrayals of characters and attitudes. Rather, it is most often a moralizing polemic about what's wrong with the contemporary state of affairs in urban gay male America. While there is the occasional nod to a sense of collective ecstasy in sexual liberation, and perhaps even community solidarity, in the end, even these are judged to be unworthy and unfulfilling goals, in themselves, for a thoughtful, grown-up man. All of the action in the novel takes place during what the narrator retrospectively describes as the season in which gay men on the circuit became confused, with no sense of direction, no rationale for doing one thing instead of another, a constant theme in the book—the apparently complete freedom to act selfishly and impulsively:

> Later, it would be recollected as the False Summer. Everything had bloomed too quickly. Fire Island, this Memorial Day, would be like the Fourth of July. Too much too soon. Everyone was caught in the never-never land of City? Capriccio? The Tubs? Balalaika? The Pits? The Toilet Bowl? Fire Island? All cups runneth over. The weather was no help either—the glorious summer sun now obviously out to stay—and thus useless in defining and dictating destinations and activities, as it usually did when cold meant dancing and very cold meant television, joints, and bed.
>
> And here it was only May. (4-5)

From the beginning of the novel, such is the narrative judgment on this moment of mid-seventies gay liberation: too much too soon with no moral, political, or emotional compass by which to set one's course of action, or to ground one's reflections on all that was happening, so relatively short a time after Stonewall opened up a new sense of freedom.

In a curious rhetorical maneuver, the protagonist asserts the stakes of his own participation in the scene that false summer at the very start of the novel, thus at once implicating and vindicating himself with respect to the controversies he will confront as the narrative progresses. Fred Lemish is thirty-nine years old and looking for real love with a real man—looking to settle into a long-term monogamous relationship. Kramer's narrative is unusual because the protagonist does not go through a journey of learning for the first time about the paradoxes of various notions of love, sex, and gender through the novel. Rather, many of the points of contention and the positions in the arguments are articulated quite clearly at the start. While Holleran's protagonist Malone stumbles into the gay world knowing virtually nothing about it, Kramer's characters dive into the false summer knowing the potential pleasures and risks and pain ahead of time. This bold assertion from the top certainly lessens the dramatic impact of whatever revelations characters may have at the end (as when Fred decides to bid the whole scene a final farewell); but this novel is a satirical polemic, not the romantic, existential tragedy written by Holleran.

Kramer's main man Fred Lemish is writing a script that he hopes will become a film to show the world what homosexuals, and the circuit scene, and its alternative, are really like, "the first respectable faggot movie" (9). In this passage, he attempts to justify

his position to his friend Gatsby, who happens to be writing a novel about homosexual men, a novel he refers to as "an exercise in self-loathing." Gatsby and his novel sound remarkably like Holleran and Dancer, especially given the tributes paid by Dancer to F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel. Gatsby accuses Fred of being dishonest about his motives, and Fred replies, purportedly quoting from a book of literary criticism, to defend himself and his sense of his own uniqueness among the circuit crowd:

> "There you go again, Lemish. You govern your emotions to fit the scene just like everyone else. You want to be a part of things and go to all the parties and disco openings and Fire Island and have a lover more than anyone I know. Don't give me that Artist/Hero-as-Outsider shit."
>
> "Not true. 'Alienation, however, does not lead our hero out of society, but deeper into it, for he is impelled by a curiosity to know, down to the smallest detail, the corrupt world that he wishes to escape. Concealing his opposition, he takes part in the intrigue of his day with the secret aim of proving to himself, by the very falseness of his conduct, the distance that separates him from his contemporaries.' Story of my current life." (9)

Thus, he justifies his own apparent violation of his own good sense, desires, and morality, in order to be able to illuminate their value to the world. He plans to sacrifice himself for an art that will rescue homosexuals themselves from themselves and vindicate them in the eyes of the world.

Shortly thereafter, he argues with his best friend, Anthony Montano, about the contemporary state of faggotry. They discuss their own unrealistic expectations, the games faggots play, including gender roles, and the (im)possibility of love. Fred says:

> "It is possible for two intelligent men to be turned on to each other in totality: emotionally, physically, and intellectually. Though I am about to become middle-aged, I shall not become a bitchy, middle-aged queen. I shall not turn sour." [. . .]
>
> "All I want is someone who reads books, loves his work, and me, of course, and who doesn't take drugs, and isn't on unemployment." [. . .]
>
> "Fred, they don't want us. We just don't know how to play. How to pretend. They're all out there playing. Sometimes they're Cliffs and sometimes they're Cecilias, but they're playing, and all we are is Fred and Anthony. Who would want me? I want to play house, too. I'm hungry, possessive, insecure, successful, a dissatisfied hubby. I'd run from me. Become a martyr to your work. Work is the only thing that matters."
>
> "You *are* a martyr to your work. You work twenty-five hours a day at a job you don't even like. What has it got you? You don't even have time to get laid. Anyway, faggots don't want to know about success. It reminds them of what they're evading." [. . .]
>
> "No, no, *we're* the evaders. Nothing's good enough for us. Work is the only thing that matters. Life is a compromise. I'm going to become straight. It's not possible for two men to get it together." (10-11)

Gender terms are present here and throughout the novel, but it is not always clear that they necessarily connote points on a continuum of perceived femininity to masculinity (as they do most often, for instance, in Baldwin and Vidal). To become a bitchy, middle-aged queen in Fred's lament is to become resigned to superficial, fleeting relationships and to become sour, not necessarily feminized. It is to accept the fate of promiscuity (which Fred implies would be undesired and unhappy) as a substitute for love. Anthony's retort about Cliffs and Cecilias does imply imagined gender roles, but the more significant assessment is that the others are all *playing*, playing games and roles of whatever sort, while the two of them are just Fred and Anthony, boring heterosexual-like husbands-to-be who have successful careers. The crucial question is who is evading what? Fred accuses the faggots of being adolescent and running from grown-up jobs and responsibilities. Anthony responds that they themselves are the evaders, with a delusional ideal of perfect love. Anthony wants to play house, too, though with a similarly grown-up man. He decides it is impossible, and claims he will just become straight instead. In fact, what distinguishes men along lines of gender identity in the novel is whether their nicknames are traditionally female or male, and some of them (e.g., Boo Boo) are fairly androgynous.

At a first glance, gender is everywhere in these seventies novels (e.g., in costumes ranging from Nazi regalia to sequined gowns), but it is somehow understood that it is all a charade, and reflects the person very little except as a persona and gender/sex object. Here Fred reflects for a moment on the significance of costume, gender, and fantasy:

> If clothes make the man, what were they making? A way of insisting they were men, more men than men? And why was the same guy Hot and

> fuckable in a Pendleton and not in a Polo? And why did black boots on Christopher Street lure more fellows than brown? And were leather and jockstraps and football jerseys and satin boxing shorts all a send-up *and* a turn-on, and was this a clue to the faggot sensibility? (32-33)

Indeed, the notion that something could serve both parody and titillation (both a send-up and a turn-on) might seem both unlikely and politically reprehensible to authors of some of the manifestos. They sought to de-objectify desire, sex, and intimacy. Yet, such objectification is often the totality of what many of Kramer's characters are portrayed as being for each other, except in the rare places in which some emotional bond or sense of abstract communal solidarity sneaks into the narratives; in also rare cases, friends even speak of loving one another. One complaint of the self-proclaimed exceptional protagonists is that nobody ever wants to be, or is capable of being, serious. This becomes a major crisis in the Holleran, to be discussed shortly, as Malone pleas for seriousness just before his final exit, and as the nameless narrator attempts to define what it means to be a queen.

Seriousness and frivolity may in fact be synonyms for, or replacements for, gender terms in these two novels, in part because women make rare appearances in Kramer—one is a housewife seduced by a lesbian and another a woman obsessed with seducing homosexual men, and in Holleran only appear in passing references. This is, of course, itself a huge statement about the concerns with "real" gender issues on the circuit as portrayed here. Yet it is not a matter of seriousness being masculine frivolity other feminine. It may more resemble the distinction between gay and non-gay homosexual men, those who identify with some version of a gay culture/sensibility and those who

want to be practically straight but married to men. It appears, in any case, that the pervasiveness of gender posturing is taken for granted by this time, just a few short years after the manifestos were raging against the confines of gender and the oppression of sexism, and just a few more years beyond the time when a novel like Rechy's City of Night had been obsessed with the utter seriousness of the pleasures and paradoxes of playing the impenetrable tough-guy role, while gravely aware of the potential risks of such a role, including the sorts of intimacy it excludes by definition.

In Faggots, Fred Lemish proceeds to enter into the false summer scene, joining in the experimental romp of drugs and promiscuity, though Fred, like Malone, seems to be the only one who does not do drugs. All along, his critical judgment is ambivalent about such often anonymous sex, and he vacillates between his desire to solidify a love affair with Dinky Adams and his constant disappointment and recurring sense that it will never work, at least not with Dinky (who seems incapable of monogamy), or while he remains in the chaotic atmosphere of the circuit. Throughout both protagonists' exploits in the city and on Fire Island, they always return to their sense of themselves as exceptions among the crowd. In Holleran's text, this sense of exceptionalness ends with a sad recognition of the humanity and lostness of the characters on the circuit (to be discussed in a moment). In Kramer's text, Fred's sense of himself as an exception ends in a harsh and triumphant critique of all those around him, a moralism and self-righteous posture that troubled critics, gay critics (and those who knew Kramer) especially, as we shall see in the early reception of the novel. But first the narrator and Fred must acknowledge the beauty and allure of aspects of the scene, if only to explain for the reader's benefit why so many choose to stay, without going so far as to condone this choice.

Although confident at the start of the novel, after ten summers on Fire Island, that the circuit scene is not where he wants to settle into middle age, Fred Lemish plunges into another season, whether or not motivated by his research project alone. The bulk of the book narrates his interactions and reflections, although the narrative point of view is omniscient, going into the minds of all the characters. It shows Fred's process of compiling evidence on both sides—whether to stay or leave—in order to convince not only others but himself that the sane decision must be to leave: the freedoms and pleasures are not worth the waste and emptiness that so often accompany them.

At several junctures, characters pause for an instant to ask "Why do we do this, year after year?" and "What does it all mean?" but are swept away again into the action before even the most tentative answers can be articulated clearly. In the following passage, friends debate the virtues and drawbacks of the scene on beautiful Fire Island. On the one hand, they exercise the freedom to establish their own version of the Woodstock Nation, out of reach of mainland responsibilities and the oppressions of mainstream society. Yet they do so in the context of a much more highly commercialized and less political utopia than many imagined Woodstock to be; indeed, the manifestos examined in the last chapter share more with the thoughtful elements of the counterculture than do these representations of life on Fire Island. At any rate, it is here that these later-seventies men are free to practice what is often referred to as their religion, the worship of sex and sensibility. There is, however, also the recognition by some that it may be ultimately superficial, banal, and unsatisfying (and perhaps even reprehensible in its disregard for contributing to the betterment of society, a concern raised by Fred early on). But there can be no denying the beauty of the place just outside

the confines of New York City, separated from the city by distance and water—it takes a considerable effort to get to the island:

> For, if God were to take a ribbon of land and sand and wave His Magic Wand over it, proclaiming: "You're beautiful!," the result would be Fire Island Pines. [. . .]
>
> Dancing is more fun and eating is more fun and sex is much, much more fun, and strolling under the moon at three o'clock in the morning or watching tangerine sunrise or popsicle sunset—everything, EVERYTHING!, is more fun. And filled with hope. Which is more fun. For everything, naturally, must always have Hope.
>
> "If the Outside World is ugly and not many laughs and doesn't want us anyway, what's wrong with making our very own special place, with our dancing and drugs and jokes and clothes and music and brotherhood and fucking and our perfectly marvelous taste!" [. . .]
>
> "We have created our own aesthetic!"
>
> "You mean our own Ghetto."
>
> "This place is all about belonging, the love of friends, Togetherness!"
>
> "And the Quest for Beauty."
>
> "And the search for Mr. Right."
>
> "Oh, I don't know about that."
>
> "We play here too much."
>
> "Never too much."

"I think we come here to be hurt and rejected."

"Oh, I don't know about that."

"But don't we talk about it endlessly."

"What it all *means*."

"What does it all mean?"

"Oh, stop it!"

Yes, everyone talked about its essence endlessly. [. . .]

For if, as 'tis said, it takes a faggot to make something pretty, they have outdone themselves on this Island of Fire. (264-66)

Here we see the narrative voice slip rhetorically from belonging as a member of the community to being an observer at a distance, as does Fred himself. The voice goes from "Dancing is more fun [here]," from the perspective of a knowing fellow-dancer, to "*they* [the faggots] have outdone themselves." This slippage allows Kramer's text to be at once critical of the circuit and sympathetic, at least insofar as it situates itself as a voice from within the community, thereby positioning its critique as constituting friendly-fire. This inside-outside posture is part of what got Kramer in trouble with some friends as well as some gay critics, as we shall see shortly.

First, though, it is necessary to examine how and why Fred Lemish decides finally that he must take his leave. Two crucial cultural phenomena pervasive in late-seventies representations of gay men contribute to his decision, phenomena present in both Faggots and Dancer from the Dance—the figure of the homosexual man passing in and out of identities and the apocalyptic sense of forthcoming doom. In Dancer, Malone falls uncomfortably in and out of identities, in some sense against his will. In Faggots, Fred is

very conscious of his desire to construct a solid and desirable self-identity. His sense of losing control over his identity is a crisis for him, along with his suspicion that the circuit is quite unhealthy, both psychologically and physically; the narrative makes this plain with rhetoric of death and things being perilously out of control. In eerie moments, the text speaks of promiscuity and the wild party scene in terms of the end of the world, and includes a death from drug overdose (as does Holleran's narrative) and a near-death public fist-fucking performance. In one conversation, a character laments how silly everybody is, wanting too much (e.g., simultaneous sex and love, monogamy and promiscuity), and that, so, "being gay isn't fun anymore" (257). In another, quite prophetic in light of the HIV/AIDS crisis of the decades to follow, one character asks, amidst all the fucking and sucking going on around him, "Oh, Dom Dom, what's happened to kiss and cuddle?" Another responds, "They're coming back in the eighties" (252). Such dark commentaries on the circuit scene back then reveal how relevant these novels and their concerns are to ongoing debates about health, promiscuity, and intimacy in gay male circles at present (as I write today, twenty-five years later).

Specific current controversies include the fate of bathhouses, exemplary sites of co-mingling identities and their disintegration, and the ongoing debate between pro-sex activists and advocates of monogamy—gay marriage—as the most rewarding and responsible life choice. Fred Lemish experiences two moments of identity crisis that contribute to his decision to pursue a new way of life. One happens at a bathhouse, the other in a discussion with Dinky Adams about whether or not their relationship can or should be salvaged and "worked on," and under what specific terms, as lovers or friends or something. In the following passage, Fred finds himself at the Everhard Baths. (The

real-world establishment was named Everard [renaming it "hard" is an example of Kramer's parodic use of names throughout]; and the nonfictional deadly fire there in the seventies is yet another example of similar events included in both Holleran and Kramer.) At the bathhouse, it's not the sordid physical atmosphere, or even the concept of democratic promiscuity that bothers Fred, but his loss of identity, and the sense of objectification that may come along with anonymous sex. He feels like a Frito-Lay, a very apt symbol of the mass-production and consumption of the very notions of personal identity and human interiority as junk, both in the seventies and in the new millennium:

> Rancid and ratty would best describe the atmosphere of the Everhard Baths at this prime hour. In this outpost of civilized behavior and democracy in action, the redolent smell combined the distinct odors of popper, dope, spit, shit, piss, and a bevy of lubricants. Hundreds of assorted bodies paraded through refuse and puddle-spotted floors, barefoot, bare-chested, protected only by sarongs of towel from complete usurpation by passing eyes. [. . .]
>
> Perhaps the place was a world on microcosm, human life reduced to its most simplistic, that awful moment when a name and an identity were no longer essential. If somebody didn't want you, forget it, and find somebody who would take the merchandise as is. He could now feel like a Frito-Lay, laid or unlaid, depending on his shelf age, freshness, spoilage retardation, and understand where chemicals might help. (156-57)

Recall that Fred doesn't ingest recreational drug-chemicals himself, but at this moment at the baths he can imagine how they might help a fellow tolerate the impersonality of the

circuit. Perhaps an up or a down or a trip would redeem the fact of being merchandised and the loss of identity into a transcendence of the ego—a spiritually justifiable experience. Such a loss of identity is how Holleran's narrator describes Malone's becoming "one of us"—finally a circuit queen, albeit of a still exceptionally thoughtful sort.

Later, just before his final decision to exit the scene, Fred makes a last-ditch try to make a relationship with Dinky work. They argue about how they might stay together. Dinky thinks they would make it better as friends; Fred wants love or nothing at all. Dinky insists that sex is meaningless, a mere sensation. "Stick a popper up your nose and you might as well have a dildo up your ass as me" (313). He accuses Fred of wanting a heterosexual marriage, which Fred admits to. Fred retorts that Dinky and other faggots grow up not liking themselves, and that to escape such self-loathing, they may, instead of finding a long-term mate, fuck themselves to death. Dinky replies, "You know, you analyze too much. You want to know too much. I don't want to know." (Holleran's Malone is also accused by his incompatible lover Frankie of thinking too much, whereas Frankie himself just *does*.) Fred replies, first to himself, in a rhetorical gesture in the narrative that encapsulates, as it were, the moral of the story:

> OK, Lemish. You hear that? You want somebody who doesn't want to know? All your life has been a journey to find an identity. Why are you letting this loser help you lose one? He sure is a vision, standing up in all that leather. Your crotch, please note, wants a return engagement of that admiration. "You don't want to know why you do the things you do?"

"No. Why should I?"

"So you might stop doing them."

"I like doing them. If I knew why I did them, I might not like doing them anymore. Come on," Dinky was now trying to get past Fred in the narrow space, "let's go to Irving's party."

"Irving's? What kind of party?"

"Who knows? If it's in The Meat Rack, it's probably the whole lot. Leather. Piss. Shit. Your outfit isn't right, but no one will notice. We'll start work on improving your wardrobe next week." He clapped Fred on the shoulder with his hand, like an officer encouraging the enlisted man out into battle. (317-18)

This is an example of Kramer's high satire. In what might be the climax of a romance, or the pinnacle of an existential didactic treatise, the two would-be lovers go off to leather-piss-and-shit-land, with a keen eye on improving the wardrobe.

Yet Fred Lemish has known all along that this is no longer the life for him. While the alternative is not so clear, he must move on to a *something* better, or at least other, than the Meat Rack. Kramer's narrator thus positions Fred for the final farewell that signals his triumph over mere faggotry. In the last few pages of the book, he says goodbye in a rhetorical mode of mixed feelings that aren't really mixed at all. He pays tribute to a scene and community that is not truly a tribute. It's the moment when you say "goodbye, I love you" to an old friend you stopped loving a long time ago, and don't expect ever to see again:

Good-bye old shit. I don't know who's shitting on whom. But I do know we've got to stop and change. One of these days we must stop shitting on each other. And go out into the world and try to live with a bit of pride. Whether they want us or not. But thanks. I've learned a lot from you. [. . .] Try to stop being naïve. Try to grow up. Try to make a commitment to adulthood. Yes, you were my dress rehearsal for the real thing. [. . .]

Yes, so long, Dinky. What did that fine old gentleman, Eric Hoffer, say? Anger's a prelude to courage? It takes courage not to be a faggot just like all the others. [. . .]

Now I must fight hard not to let them bring me down and back to thingdom. And what if none of them is the right one? Or there might be others. Yes, I've examined. Now it's time to just *be*. Just like I have brown eyes. I'm here. I'm not gay. I'm not a fairy. I'm not a fruit. I'm not queer. A little crazy maybe. And I'm not a faggot. I'm a Homosexual Man. I'm Me. Pretty Classy. [. . .]

Together. Yes, we have braved and passaged all these rites together. Though we may not know each other's names nor will we necessarily speak when next we meet.

The beach is filled with all my friends. [. . .] All sitting on the sand. Arms around each other. Touching. Holding. But not too close. Please no hassles or involvements. Sharing this moment. No one speaking.

Yes, all my friends are here. It's hard to leave you. All this beauty. Such narcotic beauty. Yes, it's hard to leave.

What I want is better though!

No. Just different. I'm going to have enough trouble changing myself. Can't change everyone else too. Can't change those who don't want to change. I want to change. I must change myself. Be my own Mom and Pop. [. . .]

. . . and and and the group keeps growing, friends, and new friends, joining every moment . . .

Fred stands and watches them. Yes, it's hard to leave.

Then his eyes turn toward land. (360-63)

Thus does Fred, with the narrator close at his side, in his camp of one, declare his final separation from the vast, growing group of "friends." While this last section of the novel is less scathing and bitchy, and more sentimental and "serious," than most of the rest, it is hardly a happy resolution, especially with respect to Fred's feelings about the group of men he's leaving behind. He has decided to make a commitment to adulthood, and to summon the courage not to be a "faggot just like all the others," but to embrace his new identity as a Homosexual Man, presumably now free of the messy trappings that go along with those other men who like to make it with men.

He must change himself. This Rilkean bravado includes the credo that he must become his own parents. Hence, the quest is for normality, which can only be attained with a clean break from his faggot past. This course is directly opposite the one taken by Rechy's narrator, who is determined to stay in the sexual underworld with a revolutionary

zeal. Kramer's Fred admits of no regrets at the end, claiming to have learned some lessons during his time on the circuit. Yet after his stint of rigorous Socratic examination, "it's time to just *be*," to steadfastly inhabit his new, adult identity (in contrast also to Malone's Frankie, who "just *does*"). While this new un-Socratic mode may have its spiritual and emotional merits, recalling perhaps what Sal Paradise admired most about Dean Moriarty in On the Road, it's unclear what narrative options await Fred at the close of Faggots. What's an ex-faggot to do after he has renounced the life he has known, and all of the people who have peopled it? What will his normal life be like? He is convinced that it is a better life. It must include, in Fred's mind, at least the prospect of a heterosexual-style marriage, which is imagined to be monogamous and stable, including relationship-work and growing together. Yet he has no models of how he might enter into such a marriage. His parents' marriage was unhappy. He has, in fact, no model at all for the sort of trust and intimacy he desires.

From his ten years on the circuit, he certainly has no evidence for the possibility of a satisfactory relationship. Given this lack, and the fact that the narrator and Fred have become virtually identical in voice at the end, it is especially difficult to interpret the narrator's and Fred's depiction of the mass of men he calls friends. They don't want to be too close, and may not speak when next they meet, but they are his friends nonetheless. It's a curious notion of friendship, often anonymous and without intimacy as I have defined it here, as requiring some emotional closeness and potential vulnerability. And yet they murmur generic, quasi-universal, disembodied *I love you*s on the white sand as the narrative closes. He would like to change them, but sees the futility (if not the paternalism) of such an attempt. On the one hand, he celebrates the group as it

keeps growing, with new members coming out into faggotry; on the other hand, he rejects the entire basis of their community as he defines it, based as it is on juvenile escapism, sex, and shallow connections. While Andrew Holleran's Dancer from the Dance ends with a similarly ambiguous perspective on the circuit and its meaning and the lives of its inhabitants, Holleran's narrative avoids such a glaring paradox, refusing to make such a harsh judgment on its characters, and resisting such an effusive, though ultimately empty, celebration of the community in the abstract.

Holleran's novel, also published in 1978, begins and ends with a series of letters between two friends. One has retired from the circuit (now a "retired faggot") to the Deep South; one stays in the city to continue to tell the story (he is writing a novel about life on the circuit); both self-identify to some extent as doomed queens, although the former seems to have succeeded in finding what Kramer's Fred Lemish left in search of—a marriage with a man surrounded by small-town simplicity and stability. In between the bookend letters is the story of the beginning, middle, and end of Malone's years spent in the New York scene, comprising much of the decade of his thirties and much of the 1970s. The overarching concerns and obsessions, the parties and cast of characters, and perhaps even the conclusion, are similar to Kramer's. The major differences are in style, tone, and rhetorical mode of evaluation. For one thing, Holleran's narrator resembles the narrator of The Great Gatsby in perspective. He is a minor character observing Malone's experiences, as is Nick Carroway. He may or may not be strictly identical to the New York writer of the letters, since the letter-writer is, after all, a novelist, and thereby open to fiction's proclivities about point of view; but at one point the narrator speaks of writing about Malone. Holleran thus constructs a

complicated and clever relation between author, narrator, letter-writers, and protagonist that blurs notions of identity and subject-position throughout.

This blurring allows for a shifting and ambivalent commentary on the circuit scene, for instance, on the relation of promiscuity to the ongoing search for "love," which may at different times be interpreted to mean anything from hot anonymous sex to a brief affair to a long-term relationship, whether with strict expectations of fidelity or not. Whereas Kramer's satire oftentimes reads like one vast ongoing orgy, in the Holleran very little actual sex is depicted, though it is talked about and certainly assumed to be going on all around. Instead, the bulk of Holleran's narrative, and much of the dialogue, is concerned with the possibility, or impossibility, of romantic love, the sadness of contemporary life, and the physical beauty toward which gay culture often aspires—we are informed that the gay men depicted here are a highly visual lot. In this exchange of letters that opens the novel, the two friends discuss the allure and sadness of gay life, and what might be an appropriate fictional story to tell about it. First, the man who has left New York for the quietude of a small southern town writes. His voice and gender language remain that of a queen (he signs the letter "Agathe-Helene de Rothschild"):

> *It's finally spring down here on the Chattahoochee—the azaleas are in bloom, and everyone is dying of cancer.* [. . .]
>
> *I cannot tell you where I am, because I want to make a clean break with my former life.* [. . .] *I would rather die like a beast in the fields, amigo, with my face to the moon and the empty sky and the stars, than go back; expire with the dew on my cheeks.* [. . .]

Do write. We pick up our mail in Atlanta once a week, when Ramon goes up to buy fertilizer, pumps, and things like that—big girl stuff. (9-11)

The New York writer replies that he's beginning to think that cancer is contagious, which Kaposi's sarcoma lesions, in some sense, turned out to be, as a commonly manifested condition associated with HIV infection. This is only one of many references to infection, disease, and death associated with "the circuit" and homosexuality in general found throughout both Kramer and Holleran's texts, a few years before anybody had heard of AIDS. In Faggots, such references to mortality and illness suggest warnings of the perilous psychological and physical toll taken on the minds and bodies of gay men by the quantity of drugs and sex they subject themselves to. As Reynolds Price notes in his introduction to the 2000 Grove paperback edition, all of this sexual activity "made the stated goal of much of that activity literally impossible—if the goal, that is, was love or psychic intimacy between men of good sense and reasonable vigor." This is, in fact, the stated goal of many of the characters in Kramer. Moreover, Price continues, the sexual body is mortal. If it has too much sex without any emotional connection or human care, it will at some point "turn against the mind that propels it and reduce that mind to some less than desirable thing" (xii-xiii). Thus, promiscuity and anonymous sex are, in this view, not only most often time wasted that that could be spent in search of "real" love and/or a responsible adult life; they can also ruin a person's mind and body.

In Dancer from the Dance, in contrast, references to death, dying, and disease are more often symptomatic of an existential human condition in which the romantic spirit of

the characters amplifies confrontations with age and nostalgia, and the sense that gay life, like all life, is not quite what we were prepared for; we are bound to have some of our dreams disappointed. Despite the earlier claim to the contrary, the novel is a product of its historical context, and reflects the decline of idealism and rise of commodification in American culture in the late seventies, here in gay culture in particular. (As noted below, at one point, Sutherland laments that people no longer have souls.)

Here is the advice sent along from the South to the city on what might be a timely novelistic treatment of gay life that seeks a wider audience. Not only does "the world" demand that gay life be sad, in part as punishment for its departure from heterosexual normality; but "gay life does have its sadness," some of which is the sadness of life itself, while some may be unique to gay life, at least on the circuit. Whether or not Dancer is violent or tragic is open to debate, as is the relevant definition of these terms. Punches are thrown, innocent people are beaten, and characters die sudden, unnecessary deaths. In what ways gay life might be *better* than non-gay life is not articulated:

> *Also you would have to make your novel very sad—the world demands that gay life, like the life of the Very Rich, be ultimately sad, for everyone in this country believes, deep down in their heart, that to be happy you must have a two-story house in the suburbs and a FAMILY—a wife and 2.6 kids and a station wagon and a big dog and an elm with a tire hanging from it on a rope.* [. . .] [T]*he whole world wants to be like* My Three Sons. *So (a) people would puke over a novel about men who suck dick (not to mention the Other Things!), and (b) they would demand it be ultimately violent and/or tragic, and why give into them?*

> *Anyway—contrary to the activists who want the world to believe not only that Gay Is Good, but Gay Is Better—gay life does have its sadness.* [. . .]
>
> *However, I don't think a novel is a historical record; all a piece of literature should do, I think, is tell you what it was like touching Frank Romero's lips for the first time on a hot afternoon in August in the bathroom of Les' Café on the way to Fire Island. If you can do that, divine!* (15-16)

This is an assertion that the novel should not be written as a sociological or historical treatise, nor as a polemical judgment on the politics or morality of gay life in the seventies (all of which Kramer's novel attempts to be at various points). Rather, it will be an evocation of sensual experience, an expression of the romantic visions that keep men coming back again and again—as well as making these important moments and feelings available to be experienced by readers.

While much of the romance and sadness is found in encounters, connections, and disappointments in the city or on the island, many poignant moments in the novel involve nostalgia or longing for an imagined ideal of quiet existence, perhaps including a mate and a family, free from what the narrator refers to as the "false social organism" of the circuit—what is often called normality (with echoes of Kramer's narrator describing the "false summer"). Holleran's narrator describes Malone's longing as follows:

> Kids were playing football in the town park [. . .] and families were out in their backyards raking leaves. [. . .] He always looked back as he went through [Sayville, on Long Island], saying this might be that perfect town

> he was always searching for, where elms and lawns would be combined with the people he loved. But those summer taxis drove inevitably through it, like vans bearing prisoners who are being transferred from one prison to another—from Manhattan to Fire Island—when all we dreamed of, really, in our deepest dreams, was just such a town as this, quiet, green, untroubled by the snobberies and ambition of the larger world; the world we could not quit. (24)

In many ways, Holleran's narrative is an instantiation of the debate between Biddy Martin and Lauren Berlant/Michael Warner about anti-normativity and the ordinary. In their piece in Intimacy, Berlant and Warner take issue with Martin's charge that some queer theorists neglect the potential value of attachments to some traditional forms of social and familial organization (i.e., the normal). They quote Martin writing thus about the risks of dispensing entirely with reverence for such attachments:

> Radical anti-normativity throws out a lot of babies with a lot of bathwater. [. . .] An enormous fear of ordinariness or normalcy results in superficial accounts of the complex imbrication of sexuality with other aspects of social and psychic life, and in far too little attention to the dilemmas of the average people we also are. (321)

Berlant and Warner reply that they are not opposed to the recognition of the dilemmas of average people in which to be average means only to be ordinary descriptively. They are concerned with prescriptive heteronormativity, according to which deviating from a "statistically imagined norm" becomes prescriptively taboo. Against the tyranny of such

norms, they envision a project they call queer "world-making," in which new forms of intimacy would be not only imagined but lived. In fact, they cite Dancer from the Dance as an example of such a project. The Holleran text is an example both fitting and curious for them to choose. For while characters like Malone and Sutherland do experiment with new forms of togetherness (non-sexual and ultimately as something like best girlfriends), the narrative throughout highlights Malone's deep sense that something is missing that he isn't likely to find in the superficial world of the circuit:

> Malone worried that he had wasted his [life]; and many felt he had. [. . .] Malone only wanted to be liked. Malone wanted life to be beautiful and Malone believed quite literally in happiness—in short, he was the most romantic creature of a community whose citizens are more romantic, perhaps, than any other on earth, and in the end—he learned—more philistine. (34)

Even Sutherland, stepping out of the queen persona for a serious moment to be a mentor to Malone, diagnoses his friend's sadness in the search for love and happiness as a condition that will not be cured on the circuit, if it ever could be cured anywhere. Sutherland knows that Malone's romantic longings are deeply connected to the ordinary, and ironically mentions the very ordinariness of the search for love amidst their queer milieu of parties and promiscuity. Yet he places the disappearance of souls in a larger historical context; it's not only on the circuit that people no longer have souls:

> [Sutherland] looked at Malone, tender and serious for a moment. "It's not like Plato, is it?" he said, taking down a volume of the *Symposium* from his bookshelf. "It's not like Ortega y Gasset, or even

> Proust, is it?" he said. "Or, for that matter, Stendhal. It's so hopelessly ordinary—I don't even think people have souls anymore. And not having souls, they cannot be expected to have love affairs . . ." (108)

A short while later, Holleran's narrator ponders what it means to identify oneself as a queen. "Queen" here is not a gendered term, except insofar as superficiality is often marked as feminine in several of these novels. A queen is never allowed to be serious, unless she is so about music, dancing, clothing, or a handsome face like Malone's. There is no apology, no regret, for being a queen. Perhaps it is this sense of aliveness and happiness--apparent sheer ecstasy--that Berlant and Warner appreciate about this niche of queer culture:

> We had all seen Malone, yet going home on the subway no one spoke of him, even though each one of was thinking of that handsome man—and he had seen us. What queens we were! [. . .] We lived only to dance. What was the true characteristic of a queen, I wondered later on; and you could argue that forever. [. . .] No one was allowed to be serious, except about the importance of music, the glory of faces seen in the crowd. We had our songs, we had our faces! We had our web belts and painter's jeans, our dyed tank tops and haircuts, the plaid shirts, bomber jackets, jungle fatigues, the all-important shoes.
>
> What queens we were! With piercing shrieks we met each other on the sidewalk [. . .] I was on my way to dance, so happy and alive you could only scream. I was a queen ("Life in a palace changes one," said another). (113-14)

Malone himself, however, demands some degree of seriousness, and has a decidedly masculine, and ordinary, fantasy. Sutherland accuses him of betraying queer gender ambiguity, of wanting to be "a man." Malone responds that he doesn't know what he really wants, that the freedom that comes with gay liberation leaves him with no solid ground on which to build a decent fantasy. This is too serious for Sutherland, who slips back into queendom and the frivolity of a Valium recommendation to a nonuser:

> "Actually I'd like to be an air traffic controller at a tiny airport in the Florida Keys," Malone said as if dreaming aloud. "I want to wear white pants and a white shirt. And a pair of silver airplane wings on my pocket. [. . .] That would be heaven."
>
> "Is that what you really want?" said Sutherland. "You want to be a man?"
>
> "How do I know," sighed Malone. "We are free to do anything, live anywhere, it doesn't matter. We're completely free and that's the horror."
>
> "Perhaps you would like a Valium," said Sutherland. "I happen to have four or five hundred with me in my pocket." (146)

Further narrative commentary on the horror that accompanies such a sense of freedom, as well as an acknowledgement that the enchantment of the circuit remains a mystery, comes in the few final letters at the end of the novel. The friend in the South tries to articulate why he, and Malone finally, had to escape the lure of the nameless "it." He returns to the disease metaphor, and concludes with the heteronormative diagnosis

and demand that homosexual men in particular are doomed because they can't reproduce and are destined to be lonely:

> Raison d'Etre,
>
> *The novel is more* vivid *than I had expected, and frankly brought back things that are a little too close to me still. I had to leave New York, you know, not for any practical reason but for a purely emotional one: I simply couldn't stand to have it cease to be enchanted to me. How could it?* [. . .] *Those streets, those corners, every one of which I loved, were just streets, just corners. Malone was possibly more committed to it than any of us—whatever "it" was—for to be perfectly honest, I cannot name the disease, the delirium of the last ten years* [. . .] *it was for the same reason a man as reasonable as Malone goes out into the street at night: because he is handsome, infertile, and lonely.* (240-41)

He goes on to suggest an alternative to the madness and loneliness, the solution he himself has chosen, to settle down in an admittedly imperfect monogamous relationship. In his view, this is the only possible realistic escape from the illusory utopia of the queen:

> *You can't love eyes, my dear, you can't love youth, you can't love summer dusks that washed us out of our tenements into the streets like water falling over rocks—no, dear, that way madness lies. You must stick to earth, always, you must love another man or woman, a human lover whose farts occasionally punctuate the silence of your bedroom in the morning and who now and then has bad moods that must be catered to.* [. . .] *We were lunatics, I'm sorry to say. Our lovers weren't real.* [. . .]

We were just queens in the end. [. . .] *You know, we queens loathed rain at the beach, small cocks, and reality, I think. In that order.* (244-45)

In the penultimate letter, the New York friend writes of life on the circuit in the past tense. He speculates that Malone left because his dreams failed him. (Malone once told him that dreams decompose, giving off poisonous gases.) The letter announces that "it's over [...] though I hate to admit it"—the end of an era, the failure of an experiment. This comment on gay liberation in the seventies is not metaphorical or subtle. But it does refrain from self-victimization and putting blame on "the victim," as Kramer's narrative blatantly does. It's more a judgment on the human propensity to dream of perfect romantic love than it is a criticism of gay men's behavior in the seventies.

The last sentences of the novel are the final words of advice from the South to New York. The only moral is to persevere in spite of the sadness of life, and these sentences recommend a form of intimacy between these friends not so easily prone to the hazards of the circuit. The writer signs the letter "Paul," the last word of the book. It is the first time the reader sees a male, "real" name in the letters. He has evidently cast off the queen persona in order to be serious for a moment:

No, darling, mourn no longer for Malone. He knew very well how gorgeous life is—that was the light in him that you, and I, and all the queens fell in love with. Go out dancing tonight, my dear, and go home with someone, and if the love doesn't last beyond the morning, then know I love you. (250)

Thus, Kramer and Holleran portray a group of men trying to devise alternatives to the promiscuous party scene that was such a huge presence in the gay male experience in

the seventies. They were writing in the heat of the moment, as it were, of this scene. The next chapter will examine retrospective evaluations of the seventies, beginning with interviews with Holleran and Kramer themselves. By way of transition to later, nonfictional representations of this period, though, I will first turn to receptions of these two novels in the gay and mainstream presses at the time of their publication.

In many ways, the reviews of the novels are as much assessments of the state of gay America in the late seventies as they are critical appraisals of the works themselves as literature or as political statements. While this is significant in itself, as it affords a historical perspective on representations of gay men in the media, some reviewers verge on conflating authors and characters, and many take Kramer and Holleran to be spokespeople for the gay community, providing a picture of how things really are in gay life. In some cases, the reviewers' attitudes toward gay men and homosexuals risk overshadowing their opinion of the books. Some reviews are sarcastic, some are angry. Those who treat the books as works of art tend to prefer Dancer to Faggots; those who pass judgment on gay life as portrayed in the novels tend to emphasize the sadness in the Holleran and the squalor in Kramer.

While it might be tempting to discuss the reviews of the novels by treating separately those that deal with artistic and political issues, such an artificial dichotomy would do little justice to the reviews. And though the distinction between art and politics is coherent and often necessary to make, things are quite blurry when dealing with these gay novels from 1978, at least as they are portrayed in the media. In fact, as we shall see, the attempt by reviewers to distinguish aesthetic from political concerns most often breaks down. Mainly, they all wind up passing judgment, for better or worse, on the

portrayal of gay life in the novels. And one of the main topics they treat, at least in the subtexts, is promiscuity, and the subculture that often seems to celebrate it. This focus reflects the broader societal anxieties about sex, fidelity, and marriage at the time.

The mainstream reviews range from glowing praise to utter disgust. Paul Robinson in The New Republic (September 30, 1978) gives Dancer a ravishing review, maintaining that anybody who reads fiction will appreciate its merits. He mirrors an ambiguity in the novel itself. It is, on the one hand, he says, almost entirely apolitical.

> It is also a novel of some political consequence. If I am not mistaken, it marks an important shift in the homosexual community's self-image, a kind of coming of age, in which concerns of political expediency have been set aside for the sake of art. [. . .] [It] is a post-liberation document. It lacks political shrewdness—it tells the truth. [. . .]

While Robinson is clearly aware of the stakes involved in a "gay novel" in 1978, and the crucial distinction between men engaged in a new gay culture, as opposed to those men who merely like to get it on with men, he overlooks the paradox that a queen could be both narcissistic and self-loathing, as well as moments in the novel when Malone in particular does seem to subscribe to some version of heterosexual values:

> Homosexuals, we know, are really just like everybody else, or would be, if only they were left alone. Holleran's novel is a brilliant rebuttal of this liberal trivialization. Here homosexuals have a style and tragedy of their own, which make them infinitely more interesting and valuable than those bland creatures who differ from their fellow men only in their sexual preference. The novel celebrates homosexual narcissism—

> that love of one's own body that is the obvious corollary to the love of one's own sex. [. . .]
>
> The novel isn't the slightest apologetic; there is no sense among the characters of answering to anyone beyond themselves. They may be tragic, but they are never pathetic. [. . .] [This suggests] an unexpected security in a style of sexual life that makes no pretense to modeling itself on traditional heterosexual values. (33)

In Library Journal (August 1979), S. H. Wolf agrees with Robinson's tragic interpretation of Holleran's rendering of the "post-gay liberation lifestyle," going further to speak of "the pathos of lives squandered beyond salvation," making no allowance for the unapologetic confidence of the men living this gay life.

Among the most thoughtful and insightful critics in the mainstream press is John Lahr, writing for the New York Times Book Review (January 14, 1979). He likes Dancer but not Faggots. He is more sympathetic than most to the celebratory qualities of Dancer: "As in all festivals, this orgy holds the hope of renewal. While the characters go through these sad rituals, they know that, as for Dionysus, a career of pleasure exacts a violent price" (15). While presuming the price that may accompany pleasure in general, a presumption surely open to debate, Lahr makes a striking comment on both the gay and straight worlds, arguing that the laughter of queens contains within it a seriousness that the straight world is unprepared for: "In this style of laughter is a seriousness that much of the straight world is afraid to hear, that registers a lack of faith in both the peace it seeks and the pleasure it finds" (39). On the other hand, Lahr calls Kramer's book exploitive and some of the worst published writing he's ever seen, claiming that even

though Kramer wants it to be a farce, "his frivolity isn't earned and so it becomes an embarrassing fiasco" (40). Martin Duberman, writing in The New Republic (January 6, 1979), agrees, calling it a foolish, stupid book. "It is a plastic, trashy artifact of the worst aspects of a scene to which it high-mindedly condescends" (30-31).

By far the most hostile review to the very idea of books being published about homosexuals is Jeffrey Burke's in Harper's (March 1979). Likening the struggle for gay rights to the women's movement (lamenting that people have to get used to these things), he complains that the simultaneous publication of six books about homosexuals is all about profit, like the books and television specials about the Jim Jones Guyana horror. He dismisses not only the works of fiction as works, but also the authors ("rumor has it that these are romans a` clef"). He doesn't appreciate what many of the reviewers do—the realistic and honest portrayals of the circuit scene. "Both Kramer (intentionally) and Holleran (artlessly) present a gay world worthy of little more than disdain. They do nothing for the cause of literature and less for the cause of gay rights" (122-23). Yet it isn't clear how any book about the circuit would promote gay rights without apologizing for its inhabitants and their behavior or blaming this behavior on social forces that oppress gay men, a victimization that both authors refuse to engage in.

Reviews in the gay press were less likely to focus on the novels as political works, but paralleled the mainstream reviews in their general preference for Holleran over Kramer, often for ostensibly aesthetic reasons. Byrne Fone, writing in The Advocate (September 20, 1978), at times uses the plural first-person voice, embracing Dancer as "our" novel. It's tempting to read his gay exceptionalism and essentialism as sarcasm, but it is quite genuine throughout the whole review. Invoking writers from Plato to Oscar

Wilde, Fone places Holleran in a great literary tradition, and is comfortable generalizing that all gay men are romantics and that all gay men are actually boys, which may or may not be the case for all males in this culture; this project is not the place for a discussion of the psychology of male maturation, though it is important to note how common it is to find representations of gay men as eternal adolescents, as well as narcissists. Fone seems to agree nonetheless that Gay is Good in many respects, though his mention of responsibility indicates at least a bit of sarcasm and doubt. Fone is extremely careful to distinguish author from characters, if not fictional representation from reality:

> [Dancer] delineates our mythic life and tells us what we had always hoped: that we are rare creatures beyond responsibility and inhabitants of a realm unknown to mortal men. [. . .]
>
> Lest it seem that I found this [portrait of the literally or figuratively dead queens consumed with dancing and fashion] superficial, silly, endlessly self-involved, I did; but it is not the book that merits such description, but rather the people it so remarkably defines. [. . .]
>
> Holleran knows a basic truth: gay people are romantics, only romantics, that they have always been and always will be so. (40-42)

Richard Hall, in his 10 favorite books of 1978 (The Advocate, January 11, 1979), also praises Dancer for its literary depiction of the lives and sensibility of men on the circuit. He agrees with the mainstream reviewers who suggest that the book is best evaluated as a work of fiction—that perhaps the time has come to judge a gay novel on its literary merits, regardless of whether a depiction of self-loathing may seem out of step with current notions of the political expedient. If it is retrograde politically, this is mainly

because the lives it narrates fail to live up to the ideals set forth in the early post-Stonewall manifestos, ideals that, it is important to remember, were also unrealized, and perhaps ultimately unrealizable, at the time of the writing of the manifestos themselves:

> This brilliant book is noted chiefly for its felicity of style. [. . .] The novel has many admirers, many detractors, the latter objecting to it for depicting so many self-hating queens. My advice is to check your ideology at the door and enjoy the novel as a work of art, however retrograde politically.

If Dancer and Holleran were described sometimes in the gay press as retrograde or silent politically, Kramer and his Faggots found the gay community polarized along very political lines about the novel's portrayal of the circuit, a polarization that still holds today. One nameless former friend of Kramer's echoes Martin Duberman's sentiments about the recklessness of the portrayal of gay men in the novel, but puts his criticism in much more personal terms (in a letter to Christopher Street, April 1979), shortly after the novel was published:

> Aside from the damage his negative portrayal may have done to the gay community as a whole, what he did to his friends is disgusting. [. . .] They once loved, cared about, and respected him as an individual. In return, he portrayed them as just so much vacuous, doped-up trash. What he failed to say about those "friends" was just as harmful as what he did say. To have passed so lightly over the positive sides of those lives was not only thoughtless, but a true literary sin. (2-4)

This letter is a poignant example of the very mixed feelings among members of the gay community about how they understood the constitution of their "community," at least in

New York, in the late seventies. It is evidence of the great contestation surrounding such issues as promiscuity and health that continue to resonate today. The next chapter will examine voices from the end of the seventies and later, including such persistently vocal representatives of the community as Holleran, Kramer, Rechy, and Edmund White, as they attempt to make sense in retrospect of this pivotal decade in the experience of gay men.

IV: Retrospections on the Gay Seventies

The earlier manifestos, written in the heady days of talk of gay liberation, attempted to articulate ideals of what liberated relationships between gay men would be like. Later fictional representations of such relationships in the two major literary texts of the period, the Holleran and Kramer, called into question what progress had been made toward these ideals, or how they had been recast in the context of gay men having the chance to experiment with a new sense of radical freedom. The reception of these novels indicates the controversies about interpreting sexual and affectional practices in the seventies. Were people really as mindless and superficial as Kramer's characters suggest? Were they as sad, romantic, and resigned as Holleran's? This chapter returns to the realm of non-fictional representations of gay male life in the seventies. While the reviews of the novels at the end of the last chapter were concerned with appraising and contesting representations understood to be attempts to reflect and contribute to self-critical perspectives in the community, texts in this chapter are more widely concerned with where the community stood in historical relation to the time of the manifestos.

The first section will examine texts from the mid-seventies through the early eighties, just before the initial acknowledgement that some sort of health crisis was emerging. These texts are assessments of the current state of the "gay movement" by gay men who saw themselves as being in the middle of it. The texts are a very mixed bunch. On the one hand are texts that continue to hail full-throttle promiscuity as not only a revolutionary act, but also by implication as the most appropriate political and theoretical stance, given the conservative backlash against gay liberation, given social

transformation in general, and given the tendency of many gay men to model themselves on heteronormative ideals of constricting monogamy and complacent domesticity. These writers include John Rechy and Charley Shively. On the other hand are neoconservative voices from the gay movement itself, including Holleran and Kramer in interviews with the gay press, who often seem to call for just such domestic models. A third group of texts attempts to put the conversation in a broader historical context of social changes in the seventies, and to provide a more balanced, and perhaps even more optimistic view of where the movement stands at the decade's end. There was a general consensus that an era was ending, in two important senses. First, gay liberation as articulated in the Stonewall manifestos was seen to be over, and largely to have failed, as a collective political project. Second, the circuit scene was seen to have become passé for many possible reasons, depending on the interpreter; whether because it was boring or deadly or had become commodified, or ultimately empty of hopes for love or intimacy, something was on the wane. The question was what would take its place.

The second section will examine texts from the eighties into the new millennium, assessments of the period prior to the realization of the existence of what came to be called "AIDS," from those who look back on the seventies from a perspective necessarily shaped by subsequent rhetoric about and experience with the HIV/AIDS epidemic. These texts tend to be self-conscious of their role and responsibilities as retrospective representations and contextualizations of the seventies. They acknowledge that they are looking back through the lens of HIV/AIDS. They attempt to mediate between two possible versions of looking back that way. One version tends to blame participants in the circuit party for excesses that contributed to the epidemic, seeming to say "You had

all the fun and too much freedom and look what happened." The other version tends to see gay men of that generation as victims of a nasty accident that ruined the party. Both of these versions often characterize the health crisis as a wake-up call, in some sense transforming a community of hedonistic, adolescent narcissists into a community of emotionally sensitive, dedicated, and politically astute members. It was, without doubt, a wake-up call that demanded immediate response and dramatic changes in behavior for many. But it is false that the later seventies were a time of blissful slumber for gay men. I want to suggest, rather, that such characterizations of the seventies are vast, naïve, and harmful oversimplifications about a complex group of people struggling with complex issues from the time of the manifestos through the decade to follow. Early retrospective texts like those of Edmund White and Dennis Altman are already struggling to make sense of the changes in the entire American society, and how gay men and their relations with each other might fit into this milieu.

These two groups of texts will allow for a comparison between representations of the seventies from the seventies with representations of the seventies as remembered and historicized some years later--pre-AIDS and post-AIDS perspectives, as it were. In many ways, the terms of the debate have remained the same over the span of thirty years. Issues such as the relationship between gender perceptions and roles, promiscuity, notions of love, intimacy, and friendship, and heteronormative ideals of monogamy (which themselves have gone through considerable transformation since the sixties) still dominate commentaries by those who question what they see as the realities of contemporary gay life, and their ideals for what may still be possible.

The Early, Pre-HIV/AIDS Assessments from the Decade Itself

Early assessments of gay life in the seventies share a sense that significant changes have taken place since Stonewall, but their diagnosis of what *has* changed, and their recommendations for what *should* change, are far from unanimous. Recall that the Stonewall-era manifestos strove to create new types of relationships between and among men--without the benefit of any satisfactory models to follow--that would take place in the context of a larger social revolution in which gay experiences liberated from sexism and internalized homophobia would play a central role. This project continues in the imaginations of later writers, but with a less utopian perspective, as it becomes clear that the revolution has not come about, and that experiments with new types of relationships have thus far proven less than satisfactory for many men. Many see experiments with promiscuity and the new entrenchment of gender role-playing—as exemplified by the Fire Island circuit scene but already taking place across the country—as having not only failed the promise of full liberation, but as having become tiresome, unfulfilling, and even dangerous to bodies and psyches. Thus, gay liberation is, in many minds in the seventies, *over*, as is whatever imagined value the wild party and orgy once may have promised. As Holleran put it in a July 1978 interview in Christopher Street, "I don't know what's beyond gay life. I've no idea. But I think we're all finding out together" (56).

There continued (and continues) to be disagreement about some aspects of "gay life" in the seventies. Some texts maintain that promiscuity serves a political purpose, as well as being potentially liberating for the individuals involved. Charley Shively, in his

1974 "Indiscriminate Promiscuity as an Act of Revolution" (anthologized in Gay Roots), admits to the "shortcomings of the gay liberation fronts," but hails them for trying to "break down roles." He insists that the only way to create and sustain new sexual and emotional freedoms is to eroticize and sexualize every aspect of social interaction, from the business meeting to school to shopping. He calls for a sexual socialism as opposed to the fraudulent capitalistic notions of monogamous love or the objectifying meat market:

> People (particularly menpeople) have tended to classify love as changeless, timeless, natural, and as unavoidable or indefinite as death. This mystification is a fraud meant to prevent any questioning or change in the so-called "reality." Why should there not be a socialism of love and sex no less than of work and money? Should not equality and freedom extend to our bodies and their physical relationships as well as to the economy?
>
> We need to be *indiscriminate*. No one should be denied love because they are old, ugly, fat, crippled, bruised, of the wrong race, color, creed, sex or country of national origin. We need to copulate with anyone who requests our company; set aside all contraptions of being hard to get, unavailable—that is, costly on the capitalist market. (260-62)

In another piece from the Gay Roots anthology, John Rechy also defends and, by implication, promotes public promiscuity, whether anonymous or not, as an important source of empowerment in the face of the oppression of gay men and others, given the conservative political movement of the later seventies. He identifies the repression of sex, and talk about sex, as a symptom of a much larger phenomenon. In describing the

status and reception of his book The Sexual Outlaw (1977), he emphasizes its genre, form, and content. While not much more sexually explicit than his fictional works, according to Rechy, this book at first was expected to be an immediate best-seller, but advertisements were pulled when its political statements were recognized. This was a documentary (i.e., "real") account of public sex as a revolutionary act. As one ad man said, Henry Miller might be acceptable (as were Rechy's other works). But The Sexual Outlaw was said to be "more than [merely] dirty." It was, rather, subversive, and aimed at the entire power structure and its ideology of what acceptable modes of human intimacy were allowed to resemble. Rechy writes:

> The Sexual Outlaw is a nonfiction documentary which defines public sex as revolutionary. Its locale is the late-night sexhaunts of Los Angeles. It documents three days and nights in that underground by a sometime male hustler. Interspersed throughout are essay-type voice-overs defining the political context of these many sexual encounters. As the book's real content became known, a ban occurred among the media—and not in small "backward" communities but in the major, reputedly liberal cities. [. . .]
>
> [The] time when the *New York Times* refused ads for Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar* is not as remote as we want to think: well into the '70s a new and dangerous reaction has been shaping. Out of that miasma of repression Anita Bryant has emerged. Although her attacks are now aimed overtly at homosexuals in teaching jobs—and increasingly at liberal women—by implication she is attacking an open education. It is with sex

> that general repression starts. What happens on the sexual front provides a barometer for general repression. (287-88)

Some in the gay movement agree that Rechy's book should be reviewed and even read, and that homosexual teachers do indeed need to be protected, but that public and promiscuous sex as acts themselves don't deserve protection, and contribute to bad portrayals of gay men in the eyes of straight society. Shively and Rechy would probably reply that it is precisely all sexual taboos, at least those against sex between consenting adults, that contribute to the atmosphere of larger cultural repressions, not only of gay people but of all freethinking and free-acting members of the society.

One consistently loud and polemical voice against rampant promiscuity continues to be Larry Kramer. In an interview in The Advocate (February 8, 1979) shortly after the publication of Faggots, Kramer goes so far as to claim that there are more happy heterosexual couples than homosexual ones, and implies that ultimately most if not all gay men realize that they really do want to "play house" after all. Kramer firmly rejects claims that promiscuity means more love to go around, and may reflect "emotional health":

> Health, schmelth. If you want to fuck around, that's fine; I'm not going to be an old auntie and say, "Don't fuck around." But if you're going to make fucking around your be-all and end-all, don't complain that you haven't found the lover you want. Don't complain when you're 40 or 50 years old and you're all alone and feeling sorry for yourself because you're not playing house somewhere. [. . .] I'm just saying I see precious little love around me. I see very few homosexual relationships that are

> working, or working for a very long time. Incidentally, I do know a lot of happy heterosexual relationships; I'm tired of hearing, "It doesn't work for them, either." (27)

In Christopher Street (February 1979), Kramer makes the even more controversial claim that it is more important to explain why gay men are making such, in his eyes, irresponsible sexual choices than it is to fight the conservative backlash. "Isn't it healthier for [all of this promiscuous and unorthodox sex, including S/M] to be discussed to find out why it's happening? I'm not so much concerned with Anita Bryant as I am with the people who are doing all this. That's sadder and more important" (59). While sadness and importance are nebulous and unquantifiable terms in the context of such highly charged debates, if this is Kramer's true prioritization, then his is a minority opinion among prominent activist voices in 1979.

Andrew Holleran also claims that his own novel was written somewhat out of anger at how gay men treat each other, and he makes claims similar to Kramer's about a wish for more humane intimate relations. Yet he sounds much more tolerant of divergent and qualified judgments on gay life. Indeed, he's a fence-sitter on issues like promiscuity, though he claims that everybody is really looking for love. Also, he claims that writing Dancer was, for him, a chance to leave a historical record, after all (contradicting the letter-writer in the novel who says that literature should do something else entirely). Holleran wants to portray and thus preserve *a past way of life* (the seventies), plainly asserting that it's over now (already, in July 1978, in Christopher Street). Holleran notes, "Other people said it was a 'down' book, that it was not a portrait of gay life that people would want to read. I'm sure it will get a lot of flack. But the

satisfaction of writing the book was in portraying a past way of life so that it would not be lost" (53). Holleran agrees that there's a place for promiscuity, but that promiscuity shouldn't be the ultimate goal. In fact, he agrees with Shively that we should even go to bed with people we're not attracted to, but doesn't hold out much hope for this as a realistic strategy, reasoning that it probably wouldn't work, as the manifestos seemed to suggest it wouldn't:

> We're obviously all looking for power and adulation and other things too, but there isn't anyone *not* looking for love.
>
> I know there's a place for the zipless fuck, the anonymous person. That's very thrilling. [. . .] So many gay people are able to live on that level alone. I don't want to knock promiscuity. We all love to go to the bars, the pier, but my God, if there's no hunger for any other thing. . . . (54)

He goes on to make a perhaps unique and unverifiable yet sympathetic and hopeful claim—that gay men only *act* shallow, but actually have rich emotional lives that might be shared with others if the opportunity only presented itself. But like the large and unnecessary claim that everybody looks for love, here he assumes a notion of (presumably more mature and responsible) human personhood that isn't so clear or uncontroversial in definition. "Too many people behave as if they are shallow. I don't think they really are. [. . .] They've got resonance, they've got emotions. I only want homosexuals to become more human. I think then they'll be even sexier. [. . .] But you want to shake some people by the shoulders and say, "'Some day you've got to be a person'" (56).

Holleran continues his ambivalent, ostensibly nonfictional commentaries on the gay seventies, though maintaining his pseudonym (as he does through the present day). One interviewer (in The Advocate, March 8, 1979), comments thus on Holleran and his assertion of the end of the era: "If he is jaded [and melancholy], he is also a Jeremiah about the failure of the gay sensibility" (29). Holleran responds that superficial sexual encounters are somehow inherently wrong in moral terms: "I looked around and I thought, 'Why do gays have such a lousy deal in terms of human relationships? Why are we always operating on this lousy level! Why do I sleep with someone, walk away and have it mean nothing? It's not right.'" He characterizes Dancer as a record of the ideals of love, of gay liberation, "turning into something else in the end" (29-30). Precisely what they have turned into is not made explicit. Perhaps this is where he and Edmund White disagree on the details, if not the sense that a dramatic shift is underway.

Holleran goes on in the same interview with a scathing critique of the clone fashion outfit, with none of the sympathy shown by Edmund White's comments below:

> "I'm not going to wear that fucking uniform. I'm not going to wear a bomber jacket with a plaid shirt when I walk down the street. If one of those guys passes me I don't care how good-looking he is. It's as if he's invisible; it's as if I'm looking at a Barbie Doll. The person has no personality for me whatever. He is in fact utterly erased by dressing in this stupid goddam uniform." (30)

Holleran doesn't specify what he might prefer to see somebody wearing on the street. Given the tremendous conformity he and others complain about in the gay community then (and throughout the country during that time and through the present), the choices

are limited. Perhaps he would have preferred the "preppie" look that was beginning to sweep the national imagination and body right about then. Not too many years later a generation of younger gay men would begin to protest against the "clone" look Holleran complains about, and facial hair, ushering in yet another neo-macho fashion rage, this time a tribute to skinheads rather than Paul Bunyan. Holleran continues his ostensibly nonfictional commentary on the seventies in four pieces collected together in The Christopher Street Reader (1983). In "Fast-Food Sex," a friend of the first-person narrator complains about the boring ravages of promiscuity, claiming that gay men should not be supposed to be any different from all other human beings who "need" fidelity and intimacy:

> "We already have [destroyed sex]! My orgasms don't interest me any more! Why do these assholes praise promiscuous sex, say there's nothing wrong with it, that because we're gay we're leaders in a brave new world who will set new patterns of behavior, and all that crap, when even sex, on that basis, ceases to be erotic? [. . .] I feel as if I've developed a disease or something, and I'm doomed to wander as a ghost, alienated from my own kind." (72)

In "Dark Disco: A Lament," he complains that disco has become commodified to the extent that it no longer has the erotic and mysterious power that united gay men as a community set apart, that it's become bright and sunny for the roller-skate crowd to enjoy. This development is yet another indication that gay life as they have known it is over. What next, Holleran asks himself:

> Will we give dinner parties again? Stay home and form book clubs? When I arrived in New York, there were no back rooms and no discotheques; now there are many of each. In five years perhaps they will both have vanished, and what will we have in their place: Betamax societies? Will we all go to bed at eleven, and do something in the morning? What? Not having been awake before noon in seven years myself, I am at a loss to say. (76-77)

In his December 27, 1978, interview with The Advocate, Edmund White calls for the acceptance of gay male diversity, of drag queens and clones alike. His diagnosis of the hatred of drag queens is that it comes from fear—not the fear of the vulnerability associated with intimacy, but the fear of being identified as "other," an internalized homophobia that may or may not be directly linked with misogyny in the no-longer-feminist gay male community. Of clones, he argues that to judge a person harshly because he wears the fashion of the moment is superficial:

> All the hatred that's directed against drag queens is something useful for all gay people to explore, because that hatred has to come out of some kind of fear and that fear is very real. It shouldn't be ignored; it should be looked at, and drag queens should be embraced as part of the gay community. [. . .]
>
> A lot of these dictates [e.g., about too much public sex and too many drugs] are coming from middle class bourgeois groups of people who happen to be gay. They're insisting that everybody be middle class. A set of attitudes and expectations that are geared only to extremely

intelligent and psychologically mature homosexuals would be unrealistic. [. . .]

Most people are overhasty in condemning the flannel shirt, workboots, blue jeans look. It is simply the costume of the moment that is most effective in bagging the most number of tricks. [. . .] (31-32)

In White's essay "Fantasia on the Seventies" in The Christopher Street Reader, he writes in fairly neutral terms about the seventies, noting that people seemed to be waiting for something startling and revolutionary to happen. Yet it didn't, he claims. Rather, the project of gay liberation ended as a "militant sameness" set in, including the dissipation of feminist consciousness among many gay men and the institution of the worship of machismo. White goes on to put the experience of gay men in the context of the larger culture of the "study of self" replacing shared social goals. He also claims that perhaps sex and sentiment *should* be separated, since sex so often involves jealousy and isn't a self-evidently safe basis for intimacy or friendship. He provides a concrete description of the new gay model of marriage:

What actually set in was a painful and unexpected working-out of the terms the sixties had so blithely tossed off. Sexual permissiveness became a form of numbness, as rigidly codified as the old morality. [. . .]

Indeed, the unisex of the sixties has been supplanted by heavy sex in the seventies, and the urge toward fantasy has come out of the clothes closet and entered the bedroom or backroom. The end to role-playing that feminism and gay liberation promised has not occurred. Quite the reverse. Gay pride has come to mean the worship of machismo. No longer is sex

> confused with sentiment. Although many gay people in New York may be happily living in other, less rigorous decades, the gay couple inhabiting the seventies is composed of two men who love each other, share the same friends and interests, and fuck each other almost inadvertently once every six months during a particularly stoned, impromptu three-way. [. . .]
>
> A general American rejection of the high stakes of shared social goals for the small change of personal life (study of the self has turned out to be a form of escapism) has left the [gay liberation] movement bankrupt. (31-32)

Yet the bankruptcy of the movement as one of the sort of full liberation from gender roles envisioned by the Stonewall manifestos does not leave White entirely pessimistic about the project of establishing satisfactory gay relationships. Rather, he maintains the hope that the thoughtfulness imposed on gay men because of their status as outsiders will allow them to continue to experiment with new and alternative affectional structures. Here he writes in a speech called "The Joys of Gay Life" given in 1977 and collected in The Burning Library:

> [W]e are introspective [and philosophical] about such basic things as love, sex, and friendship. The exigencies of our lives, the fact that we become gay in a way that other people do not become straight, make us all reflective. We have the advantages of the outsider, of the foreigner and of the pioneer. (36)

Dennis Altman, in The Homosexualization of America (1982), supports White's views about the failure of the liberation project, the potential positive aspects of promiscuity,

and the analysis of gay life in the context of more general historical conditions in the larger society. He notes that "encounters at the baths, in parks, even in public toilets can lead to long-lasting relationships and intimate friendships" (175). He also comments on the decline of proud feminism among gay men (going so far as to claim that men who once called themselves feminists no longer do so), and the ambivalence of the gay male community about changes in the seventies; but he most certainly disagrees with Larry Kramer about the relative sadness of "impersonal" sex and the conservative backlash exemplified by Anita Bryant's crusade:

> It is not just that gay relationships are a threat to the dominant family structures that conservatives are desperately trying to bolster up. [. . .] The attempts of homosexuals to create new forms of relationships can also be seen as a part of a more general search to resolve universal problems. Under present conditions no one can be sure of having solved the problem of how best to order one's personal life. (190) [. . .]
>
> American society today is suffering from an enormous national neurosis about sex, brought about by the conflicting messages from traditional teachings and the constant barrage of advertising extolling hedonism and sexual adventure. As sexuality becomes more open but also more problematic, homosexuals become both a scapegoat and a model--a specific group that can be defined as "the other." (203-04)

In another Christopher Street Reader piece, Michael Denneny also laments the failure of the utopian revolutionary impulses of the sixties to come to full fruition, but puts it in the

even larger context of the purported nihilism rampant in the West as a whole, calling for a Nietzschean revaluation of all values:

> The gay "revolution"—if that term should even be used—can only be made in the daily lives of each of us. [. . .] For better or worse, we create the face of gay liberation in every sexual encounter and love affair we have. With every circle of loyal gay friends established we are manifesting the gay world. [. . .]
>
> [W]hat may seem at times overly theoretical or abstract is nonetheless an attempt to come to grips with the dilemmas that structure our sexual experience, shape our patterns of socializing, and all too often distort our psyches and blight our loves while simultaneously bringing us a reckless joy at being alive. These are matters that our writers and artists think about, as well as philosophers and gays on the street—whether they know it or not. They are important. For if we do not measure up to the unprecedented novelty of our current situation, we will piss away our lives in the confusion and evasions of a darkened epoch. (421-24)

In fact, the linking of the failure of some aspects of the revolution to the decline of Western civilization and the potential for other aspects of it to live on in concrete, daily relationships hardly seems too abstract at all, but is rather a welcome broadening of the perspective from which to view the project of gay liberation.

Thus, throughout the early retrospections on the seventies, we see debates about appropriate sexual behavior (and the relation of sex to sentiment), a concern with what images of gay men are being made visible to other gay men and to the mainstream

society, and how to respond to an increasingly conservative backlash against sexual freedom. For better or worse, these are the same questions being debated today, as well as the question of whether gay liberation ever happened, and what it has or has not accomplished to make the lives of men and women any better.

More Recent Retrospections on the Gay Seventies

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, 1990s texts looking back at the 1970s tend to be self-consciously and explicitly aware of their location after the HIV/AIDS epidemic became central to gay men's lives; their strategies for remembering or reconstructing the period before the epidemic was announced, however, differ not only in rhetorical form but also in their judgments or conclusions about the earlier period. Christopher Castiglia, in his essay "The Way We Were," collected in Waldrep, The Seventies (2002), describes the stakes of negotiating how to represent the seventies:

> I want to pursue the idea that the "killing" of the 1970s, the move from a cultural representation that valorized sexual adventure, expansion, and optimism to one that stressed harrowing guilt, isolation, and despair, was not a "natural" or a historical inevitability, but the result of changes in representation that in turn have had crippling social and political consequences for gay men today. At the crux of that change, I want to suggest, is how we talk about what happened in the 1970s and what impact that culture—and the ways we talk about it now—has on our lives today. Our historiography, I will argue, is changing our history. (207)

Castiglia contrasts the conservative and damaging mode of representation he calls "counternostalgia" with a more optimistic and empowering strategy he finds in what Foucault calls "counter-memory." Here, Castiglia defines these representational strategies:

> [As] this story goes, the culture these [gay] men produced, centered on reckless perversion and unthinking abandon, contained the seeds of death and dissolution. [. . .] Such narratives rely on a strategy I will call counternostalgia: a look back in fury at the sexual "excesses" of the immediately pre-AIDS generation as immature, pathological, and diseased. The danger of counternostalgia is not that it represents the past inaccurately, but that it proscribes the present normatively by limiting the options for identification and pleasure, for public intimacy. (206)

This contributes to what Castiglia calls "the renewed politics of [heteronormative] conformity," according to which the gay political movement focuses on such issues as gay marriage and domestic partnership benefits rather than on, for instance, the protection of sexual freedoms. The "counter" in counternostalgia presumably opposes it to plain old nostalgia, a form of memory that might look back to the seventies with a sense of longing and sadness at the passing of the good old days.

The notion of counter-memory that Castiglia finds useful differs from nostalgia at least insofar as it is set in opposition to counternostalgia—a sort of double negation that recognizes "difference" in memory, and acknowledges that there are multiple possible historical narratives, none transparently more "real" than another:

> Arguably, the most effective response to counternostalgia has come in the form of what Michel Foucault calls *counter-memory*, a competing narrative of the past composed from memories that exceed official history. Gay counter-memory finds in the recreation of the past opportunities for oppositional pleasures that nevertheless acknowledge the difference necessarily at the heart of memory. Some gay men have rejected counternostalgia by generating alternative narratives of gay history that augment the conventional focus on the monogamous private couple with options such as communal life, multiple and anonymous sexual partners, shifting ownership and occupancy of space, and non(re)productive sex. (214)

Edmund White, as seen earlier, has suggested specific forms that this communal life and multiple relationships might take, writing before the health crisis. Castiglia, following Berlant and Warner, recommends social and sexual configurations like those found in Holleran's Dancer from the Dance. Interestingly, all of these nineties texts refer either to Dancer or Faggots, but are much more celebratory of the senses of freedom and solidarity in the Holleran book than Holleran is in his interviews or than I am in my analysis of the text above. Perhaps the darkness and sadness portrayed in the Holleran novel pale compared to what would come in the decades to follow. But it may verge on plain old nostalgia to recall the Fire Island circuit scene with unmitigated fondness.

The characters and experiences in Dancer are also remembered fondly in Gregory W. Bredbeck's article "Troping the Light Fantastic: Representing Disco Then and Now" (GLQ, 1996). Writing in a spirit of unapologetic nostalgia for the seventies, he begins by

interviewing people at "Queer Retro Chic" discotheques in New York. In fact, Bredbeck speaks of the utopian aspects of representations of the disco experience in both Holleran and Kramer's novels. Bredbeck's main argument is that disco creates an opportunity for the construction of gay identities and community. One young man gives the example of Dancer, a book in which, in his eyes, characters learn how to be gay by going to dance at the discos. But he's concerned that now, in the nineties, the campy disco scene may be disappearing, having been just another retro fad. He provides one common version of the seventies—that AIDS ruined all the fun:

> "Here it seems, you know—like how those clubs used to be, maybe. But it's really not the same thing. I guess that's part of why it's camp. It's like watching *Nick at Nite* [a cable station that specializes in rerunning old television shows]. [me: "Is that why you come here?"] I guess. And I always feel like I missed something, you know? My ex was older than me, and he was always telling me about how great it was, and then AIDS changed it all. And maybe that's right. But I don't think if we cured it tomorrow that things would go back. There's just something I missed, and I get tired of hearing about it all the time. And besides, there's a pretty hot crowd here usually." (76)

The omissions here are striking; and they are omissions rather than *non sequiturs*. He comes for a glimpse of what he missed, though it's not really the same. And things wouldn't go back even in light of a cure. He has an attraction/ repulsion to the nostalgia. He comes because the crowd is hot. So what's missing? Why wouldn't things go back

with a cure? What would they go back to that he doesn't find now in the hot crowd? He senses something about an imagined time of innocence prior to HIV/AIDS.

Bredbeck's own conclusion is that such nostalgia for disco and the seventies is important for contemporary gay identity and community formation, as was disco in the seventies:

> If nineties retro-disco uses the practice of nostalgia to appropriate and accommodate seventies eroticism, this really is not much different from disco in the seventies. For what is clear in the representation of disco in the seventies is that music and glitter were the convenient occasion to choreograph a very complicated number called gay identity. Disco then and [seventies] disco now reflect the fact that the process of an "us" or an "I" is just that: a process that must be continually rehearsed and continually replayed, sort of like a great disco song. For it is through this process of movement that "we"—*any* "we"—learn how to be strong and get along. "We" come here to dance, you know? (101)

Moreover, seventies disco, as represented in Dancer, shares with nineties retro-disco a perspective on community and identity formation that is *already* nostalgic in the seventies. Malone is nostalgic for the innocence of his small-town family life, and days past when his ideal of love had not yet been tainted and jaded by his years on the circuit. In fact, whatever pleasure, freedom, and community his disco experience may have provided him with, he, along with Fred Lemish in Kramer's Faggots, feel trapped in the circuit by the novels' ends. Similarly, so many on the circuit, as attested to by the retrospective texts in this chapter, have become, by the late seventies, nostalgic for the

heady (and naïve) days of gay liberation, when so many changes seemed possible. The next text to be examined here, by Martin Duberman, is an example of one of the most thoughtful historians of gay life in the seventies as he struggles to articulate his ambivalent feelings about what went on then, and where we have come since then.

In his memoir, Midlife Queer: Autobiography of a Decade: 1971-1981 (1996), Martin Duberman attempts to express how it felt to be making decisions and judgments about how to live the seventies in the seventies from his vantage point fifteen years after the end of the decade he describes. He traces his personal journey as an academic and activist watching the energy of gay liberation surge and then dissipate. Like Holleran and Kramer, he is critical of the insularity and mindlessness of much of the circuit scene, but never denies that it allowed for some positive opportunities for sexual liberation in light of the oppression that gay men had grown up with. He notes how he attempted a balanced critique while right in the middle of the gay seventies, and wrote a very unsympathetic review of the puritanism of Faggots (noted above). Duberman recognizes that many men involved with the scene were themselves ambivalent about its ultimate value, and spent time pondering the extent to which it was a desirable place to inhabit:

> I was unsympathetic both to the harshest critics of the Fire Island-bathhouse-backroom bar scene simplistically to summarize that lifestyle as unbridled, hoggish, male (over)indulgence, *and* to the insistence of its most admiring fans that its participants were heroic spelunkers, plunging into previously unexplored caves of the unconscious, daring to let their fantasies rather than their habits, rule their erotic lives. [. . .]

> Most of the gay men I knew moved on and off the Fire Island-backroom bar circuit without wholly committing or succumbing. [. . .] For many, programmed to view unconventional sexual behavior of any kind as "sin" or "disturbance," the Meat Rack Experience became a genuine seeding ground for liberation. [. . .]
>
> After the onset of AIDS in the early eighties, some in the gay male world were heard loudly to lament their own "foolish" sexual histories; I knew any number of men who rushed to embrace and patriotically to celebrate the "wisdom" of monogamous pair-bonding. (19-20)

Like Castiglia above, Duberman is extremely cautious to remind the reader that how you read and reconsider the seventies depends on how you lived them and the vantage point from which you look back, noting that many sixties activists decried the seventies as a complacent retreat while in the eighties conservatives would complain that the seventies were "*too* residually subject to the utopian pieties of the anti-authoritarian sixties" (15). He is also intent on recalling that this revolution in gay sexual behavior did not occur in a sub-cultural vacuum, but that "earlier formulations of the acceptable boundaries of sexual pleasure" (20) were also being challenged by heterosexuals. At the end of the memoir, following heart trouble, Duberman wonders what will become of his own journey as a liberated gay man, now that Reagan has been elected. He wonders if he could stand to be away from the energy of New York, and if things would be any different or better in Iowa. "I was well aware that in my head, at fifty, I still clung tenaciously to the insatiable fantasy needs and emotional strategies of a young man starting out. But I *knew* better, having had more than a glimpse of opportunities

curtailed, energies diminished. And knew, too, that I wasn't entirely uneducable" (226). Thus, Duberman imagines himself to be somewhat "educable," that is, able perhaps even to adjust his general outlook and particular behaviors to suit new personal and historical conditions. He feels the need to reimagine himself as an older gay man, and human being, in a new historical decade, and to modify his fantasies and "emotional strategies" to better match this new self-identity.

Conclusion

One contribution that this project aims to make is to further open up spaces for comparative discussions of emotionality and intimacy in academic discourse that are more analytical than narrowly personal or autobiographical. Opening up such spaces involves the continuation of ongoing debates about, for instance, the appropriate relationship between intimacy, sexuality, and politics at various historical moments. This project originally grew out of my emotional and intellectual curiosity about the cultural significance of the seventies as a distinct period, and what appears to be at once a uniquely promising and confused time in gay men's historical experience as a group. But it quickly became clear that representations of this seventies experience are deeply connected to a long tradition of paradoxes for American manhood and cultural anxieties about sex and gender.

As I write now, just a few years into a new century, we find ourselves in what is described by many as a queer moment in thinking about issues like intimacy, sexual orientation and identity, sexual activity, and politics. In some ways, the debates about possible essences of gender and sexuality sound similar to those put forth in the

Stonewall manifestos; in some ways, they sound quite different. Views remain quite polarized, for instance, about the innateness of gender and affectional/sexual orientation and desire. One development is that constructionist arguments have become more sophisticated and widely held in the queer community itself, though no less emphatically challenged by essentialists at present, who continue to argue that they were born "that way," and therefore work toward a place at the political table, embracing what Sedgwick calls the "minoritizing" view in the introduction to Epistemology of the Closet (1990). (Sedgwick contrasts this view to the "universalizing" view of the whole question of the homo/heterosexual "divide," according to which all human beings, at least in the modern West, participate simultaneously in constructing discourses about various notions of sexual identity, regardless of how they may self-identify; [e.g., p. 1].)

In order to emphasize the relevance of contemporary scholarship to looking back at the seventies and to show how debates in the seventies can continue to illuminate contemporary discussions, I will end by examining a text that raises issues of the viability of seeing the personal (at least the sexual-as-personal) as political. John D'Emilio delivers a wistful look back at the seventies in his introduction to the twentieth-anniversary edition of the Jay and Young collection Out of the Closets (1992). He also laments the waning of the revolutionary gay liberation movement of the very early post-Stonewall months and years, as well as the narrowing of the understanding of sexism by gay men (it's now about women and their status, not about the way that sexism had been seen earlier as a central element of men's own oppression). But he attempts to remain pragmatic about the limitations of a social critique based almost entirely on debates about sexual practices:

> I mourn the loss of this aspect of radical gay liberation [e.g., the projects and desires articulated in the manifestos] even as I recognize its flaws. The prescriptiveness [e.g., that gender must be entirely done away with; that sex and sentiment should become identical] was of no value. There was also a naivete about the dynamics of sexual desire; change was assumed to be easier than it was. Yet, in reacting against that, it often seems as if we have given up any possibility of thinking critically about sexuality.

In the following passage, he pays tribute to Foucault's insight into the importance of sexuality to the contemporary notion of the self, but also seems himself to retreat from the basis of feminist critiques, and those of the men in many of the manifestos in the Jay and Young collection, that the personal is political. "Our sexual politics often reduces to a campaign against prohibitions. Perhaps this is for the best. In a culture in which sexuality has come to define the truth about the self and in which sexual desire appears coterminous with who we are, perhaps it is too divisive, too volatile, to subject something so personal to political scrutiny" (xxvii-xxviii).

On the other hand, perhaps the notion of the political and the means of scrutiny need to be reimagined. Perhaps political scrutiny should be made more local, more personal. One of the risks inherent in the practice of many identity politicians, besides the risk of splintering whatever broader coalition of progressive work might be possible, is its tendency to promote group-think, to encourage homogeneity while attempting to celebrate and protect difference, as though, for instance, all or most gay men have, or should have, the same wants and needs either in human relationships or in the political

sphere. While this may seem like an obvious and shopworn point, it is at the heart of contemporary debates between assimilationist and less orthodox gay thinking today no less than it was in the seventies.

From the outset, this project has aimed to fill a void in contemporary scholarship by tracing textual representations of what have been imagined as possible sorts of relationships between men at key points of cultural transformation in twentieth-century America. The ability even to imagine such possibilities involves the challenge of being willing and able first to contemplate and then to attempt to make changes in our lives of the sort that D'Emilio and Duberman embark on above. The task of evaluating our desire and capacity to change ourselves in matters having to do with the difficulty of intimacy requires us to position ourselves in relation to what we understand to be the dominant moral discourses and norms of the society in which we find ourselves.

Authors and characters alike in all of the texts analyzed in this project have engaged in such self-positioning, with often conflicted or inadequate results. The pre-Stonewall novels are largely obsessed with traditional notions of gender and the male hetero/homo identity divide that break down as they attempt significant moments together as men. Hemingway's Jake exemplifies the sense of impotence often experienced by the Lost Generation as they sought to redefine morality and intimacy after World War I, beyond mere nihilism or hedonism. With Vidal's Jim and Bob and Baldwin's David and Giovanni, the reader is privy to apparently futile and failed attempts at early experiments with gay liberation that end in tragedy and the conclusion that satisfactory intimate relations between men, at least of the sexual sort, are impossible. Kerouac's Beat men fare little better in the late forties and early fifties, except that the

debilitating effects of their troubles with Cold War gender roles are analyzed in great detail, even if Sal and Dean are unable to release themselves from the prison of these roles. Finally, in Rechy's City of Night, the focus is almost entirely on how gender expectations affect homosexual men, and the incompatibility for the narrator between "proper" masculinity and any intimacy that involves commitment or vulnerability.

Thus, as we reach the Stonewall manifestos beginning in 1969, even given the new sense of sexual and affectional freedoms brought about by the prospect of modern gay liberation politics, and the broader cultural consciousness and purported loosening of gender roles of the counterculture, gay men face radical possibilities for intimacy without the aid of successful models according to which to build new types of relationships. And in spite of early feminist political protestations (among both women and men), gender roles only became more firmly entrenched in much gay male culture, as represented in the later seventies novels by Holleran and Kramer, as well as even later commentators on the period. Indeed, the difficulty of intimacy continues today (as we all face the horrifying prospect of becoming more and more rock-like whether with our consent or against our will), as does its connection to concerns about gender and received notions of the relation of monogamy and promiscuity to intimacy, and to possibilities for happiness in contemporary culture.

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