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Seduction Rhetoric, Masculinity, and Homoeroticism
in Wilde, Gide, Stoker, and Forster

by

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation employs the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan and Jean Laplanche in order to analyze the role of the “rhetoric of seduction” in masculine self-identifications and in transformations of the meaning of masculinity between 1890 and 1918. Seduction is understood as simultaneously a process of disrupting the subject’s illusion of a stable masculine identity and a process through which that illusion is regained and sustained. Chapter 1 discusses the competing discourses of corruption and the Platonic model of male bonding in the Oscar Wilde trials and the unstable boundary between self-development and influence in The Picture of Dorian Gray. Chapter 2 focuses on Andre Gide’s construction of an “authentic,” masculine homosexual identity in his memoir If It Die and in The Immoralist, arguing that such an identity necessarily contains the impulse of its own internal disintegration. Chapter 3 argues that the vampire in Bram Stoker’s Dracula resembles the psychoanalyst in facilitating the subject’s access to his unconscious but also serving the subject’s retreat within the boundaries of a stable ego formation. Finally, Chapter 4 explores E. M. Forster’s Maurice as an account of the development of a masculinity appropriate for a “liberal individualist,” through an emphasis on the role of sexuality and personal relationships in Forster’s political vision.
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Introduction:

Seduction as Cultural Anxiety and Theoretical Concept

The very etymology of the word "seduction," coming from Latin "se-ducere," meaning "to lead astray, to divert from one's path" (Webster), encourages us to imagine it as an asymmetrical relationship in which one person exerts power over another person with the effect of transforming or suspending that person's identity. Even in the most literal sense of sexual seduction – to take the example of a rake seducing a maiden into engaging in a sexual intercourse with him – the act of seduction implies that the maiden was led into doing something that, really or initially, she did not want to do, something that was incongruous with who she was before the seduction. In other kinds of seductions, with or without explicit sexual content, even more can be at stake: the seducee becomes a different person as a consequence of seduction. According to this commonsensical understanding of seduction, the seducer is the one who exercises his agency over the seducee, who is a passive recipient of the seducer's action. If the seducee can be said to engage in any activity, it is only in response to seduction, either by resisting it or by acquiescing to it. If the seducee successfully resists the seduction, his identity does not change. If he acquiesces to it, he betrays or transforms his original identity by turning it into something else. In other words, the assumption within this understanding of seduction is that the seduced person already has a coherent identity which precedes seduction and which is endangered by it. In short, this commonsensical understanding of
seduction implies both a clear distinction between the seducer and the seducee and a clear distinction between the seducee’s identity before and his identity after seduction.  

However, such commonplace understanding of seduction greatly simplifies the dynamics of many relationships which the participants in them perceive as seduction. Here is an example of such simplification from Jane Miller’s book *Seductions: Studies in Reading and Culture*:

Seducers are possessed of powers: sexual, magical, verbal, musical, political or intellectual powers; and those who are seduced consent to the exercise of such powers [...]. The seducer tempts. The one who is seduced yields to temptation. (21)

The assumption of this passage is that tempting is entirely a function of the seducer’s agency while yielding is the seducee’s passive exposure to that agency. However, the real dynamic of tempting and yielding, which constitutes seduction, is by no means that simple. One should take seriously here Oscar Wilde’s famous paradox that “the only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it.” In what sense does one get rid of that to which one yields? Precisely by constructing the “yielding” as a cusp in time which creates the appearance of a transformation of identity from its pre-yielding to its post-yielding state. According to Wilde, it is only by accepting something as a feature of one’s post-yielding identity that one can deny it (“get rid of it”) as a feature of one’s pre-yielding identity. It is by yielding to corruption, for example, that one construes one’s previous state as that of
innocence. But the difference is not merely temporal. The moment of yielding is also the moment of construing the difference between self and the other since the notion of temptation presupposes an outside influence and, thus, designates some qualities or impulses as not originating within the self. After all, in commonsensical terms, one can only be seduced into becoming something that one is not already.

What makes relationships of seduction worth studying, then, as long as we resist the most literal and simplistic understanding of them, is that such a study can reveal much about the processes through which a human subject constructs his perception of the internal, temporal divisions within him (Who I Was Then versus Who I Am Now) as well as his perception of the external divisions between his self and the other (Who I Am versus Who He Is). A subject’s perception of a relationship he engages in as seduction frequently signals that the relationship in question plays a significant role in the subject’s self-understanding or self-construction. Whether the subject verbally articulates that perception or not, his very understanding of a relationship as seduction constitutes a “rhetoric of seduction,” which has its characteristic effects on the subject’s positioning toward himself and toward others.

In order to explore this “rhetoric of seduction,” in its various forms, it is necessary to resist reducing it to any of the three usual ways of understanding seduction. 1) Seduction is not simply a matter of victimization in terms of one-directional conquest or corruption of a victim by a victimizer. 2) Seduction is not simply a matter of the suomite losing his or her “true” identity as a consequence of external influence. 3) Neither is seduction merely a matter of awakening something always already existing but up-to-then
unrecognized and unacknowledged in the subject. Rather, in my analysis, seduction is the process which stabilizes a subject’s identity by jeopardizing it. In other words, it is not an enforcement of a radical transformation (making a virtuous person corrupt, for example) but the process through which a change within a subject acquires meaning by establishing a conceptually tenable link between his pre-seduction and post-seduction identities. That process creates a contained, controlled identity crisis, which, at the same time, initiates the healing of the self in crisis and preempts any more radical identity dissolution.

The specific analysis in this work focuses on the role of the “rhetoric of seduction” in individual masculine self-identification and in transformations of the public understanding of masculinity at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, as it figures in the works of four prominent writers whose texts reveal a high level of anxiety over the meaning of masculinity at this time of major cultural changes related to gender and sexuality. More specifically, these authors strive to articulate masculine identities capable of reacting to – whether through resistance or endorsement – such diverse phenomena as the emerging homosexual identity, colonialism, middle-class professionalization, and democracy. These men, both the authors and their characters, engage in relationships that receive their meaning from these phenomena and describe these relationships, more or less explicitly, as relationships of seduction through which they articulate – at least partly – their own masculine self-identification. In an effort to understand their use of the “rhetoric of seduction,” I employ certain psychoanalytic insights that seem particularly helpful in this context. At various moments throughout my discussion I draw from the work of Freud and Lacan, but the
theoretical framework I rely on most is Jean Laplanche’s “specific theory of seduction,” which re-affirms and expands Freud’s original “seduction theory” and posits seduction as one of the fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis. A substantial part of this introduction is dedicated to an explanation of Laplanche’s theory, including a comparison between Laplanche and another influential theorist of seduction, Baudrillard. But before that, I want to point to the fact that different forms of seduction or variations on seduction relationships virtually obsessed late-Victorian culture. The turn of the century in England is a period frequently described as ridden with anxieties, and the seduction anxiety was one of the more prominent among them.

Turn-of-the-Century Seduction Anxiety

The literary texts and cultural events I discuss in this work all belong to the period between 1890 and the end of the World War One, a period framed by two big scandals which both manifest the extent to which late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century British society was plagued by a very strong seduction anxiety. The first scandal I have in mind is Oscar Wilde’s trials and imprisonment for the crime of “gross indecency” with other men in 1895. As I will discuss in detail in Chapter 1, Wilde’s public persona constructed during the trials was emphatically the one of a dangerous corrupter of English young men. The public outcry against Wilde was so enormous that it is clear that he was not condemned merely for his sexual acts but also for his unorthodox ethical and philosophical ideas as well as for his transgression of certain class boundaries. A more
thorough explanation of these assertions can be found in Chapter 1, but at this point I merely want to emphasize that the seduction anxiety in the 1890s focused, so to speak, a number of other anxieties caused by the cultural changes related to gender, sexuality, class, and even the traditional notions of personal identity. All of these anxieties were very visible at and around the Wilde trials, and it is in the fear of corruption or seduction that they find their perhaps most vehement manifestation.

Twenty odd years later, the same fears still pervaded English society, as was powerfully manifested when on January 26, 1918, the conservative London newspaper *The Imperialist* startled its readership with an article entitled “The First 47,000,” which claimed:

There exists in the cabinet noir of a certain German Prince a book compiled by the Secret Service from the reports of German agents who have infested this country for the past twenty years, agents so vile and spreading debauchery of such a lasciviousness as only German minds could conceive and only German bodies execute. [...] In the beginning of the book is a precis of general instructions regarding the propagation of evils which all decent men thought had perished in Sodom and Lesbia. [...] Then more than a thousand pages are filled with the names mentioned by German agents in their reports. There are the names of 47,000 English men and women.

It is a most catholic miscellany. The names of privy councilors,
youths of the chorus, wives of Cabinet Ministers, dancing girls, even
Cabinet Ministers themselves, while diplomats, poets, bankers, editors,
newspaper proprietors and members of His Majesty’s household follow
each other with no order of precedence. (quoted in Kettle 152-53)

No proof was ever offered that this book really existed, and this was most certainly a
deliberate hoax or a product of a deeply paranoid imagination, but that did not prevent the
British public from taking it very seriously indeed. The absurdity of the claim that 47,000
English men and women indulged in vices that “only German minds could conceive and
only German bodies execute” did not seem illogical to most of the readers of The
Imperialist because the anxiety about sexual and political corruption, not to mention the
crossing of class boundaries by these perverts listed in “no order of preference,”
overpowered rational thinking. Just as in the Wilde scandal, multiple anxieties come
together and crystalize in the figure of the seducer.

In between these two scandals, many other variations of the seduction anxiety
plagued England, and in particular its middle classes. It is not accidental that Bram
Stoker’s Dracula, published in 1897, was an immediate and overwhelming success. It
depicts a supernatural creature whose main power is to seduce humans into becoming like
him and into committing both terrible crimes and perversely lascivious acts. The vampire
takes control over his victims through a kind of hypnosis, but that particular skill was the
least supernatural of his powers. Exhibitions of hypnotic powers, real or faked, were
among the most popular late-Victorian entertainments, especially if the hypnotist claimed
the power to induce individuals to commit acts they would never commit otherwise (Pick 76-77). The fear of people's susceptibility to harmful influence was enhanced at the time by the ubiquitous discourse of degeneration. If one believed that some groups of people (criminals, madmen, the poor, the Irish) were marked by characteristics typical of a less developed humanity, and if one believed that all people had the potential to devolve as well as evolve, then one had a good reason to dread the possibility of becoming a victim of a degenerate's fatal influence. All these various fears related to the possibility of being induced to do something incongruous to who you perceive yourself to be are manifestations of the seduction anxiety.

Whether the seducer takes the shape of an immoral pervert, an evil supernatural force, or a foreign agent, fears of being seduced, corrupted, led astray pervaded both literature and wider culture of the period. This widespread seduction anxiety can be seen as a symptom of a waning sense of coherent and stable individual and national identity, due to the profound Victorian religious crisis, the gradual dissipation of the British Empire, radical transformations of gender relations and of the role of sexuality in people's lives, to mention just a few well-known reasons. My primary interest is in how these multiple transformations engendered a crisis of masculinity which is manifested as, but also, in a sense, resolved through the seduction anxiety.

Most of the examples of seduction I discuss are relationships between men which the seducee perceives as endangering his sense of self, but which ultimately work to reaffirm his sense of identity. The sense of selfhood, I argue, can only be maintained through this dual process of disruption and reaffirmation, of tempting and yielding.
Seduction is simultaneously a process of disrupting the subject's illusion of a stable identity and a process through which that illusion is regained and sustained. In the turn-of-the-century accounts of masculinity crisis on which my analysis is focused, the rhetoric of seduction helps facilitate modern transformations of the meaning of masculinity while ensuring a limit to these transformations and creating meaningful links between older and newer masculine identities which make the transformations more easily acceptable.

Chapter 1 discusses in more detail the Oscar Wilde trials in order to show how they mark the partial transformation of one figure relevant for masculine self-identification into another, the dandy into the homosexual, and how two kinds of the "rhetoric of seduction" – corruption and the Platonic model of male bonding – compete for the power to assign meaning to the emerging identity of the homosexual. Then I look at Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in order to highlight Wilde's critique of the unstable boundary between two concepts crucial both for the rhetoric of seduction and for the masculine identity: self-development and influence. Chapter 2 addresses the ways in which the French writer Andre Gide’s perception of Wilde as well as Arab boys Gide meets during his travels in Algeria as his seducers allows him to construct for himself an "authentic" and masculine homosexual identity which helps him establish cultural authority as a writer and intellectual. But then I also analyze Gide’s semi-autobiographical novel *The Immoralist*, in which Gide’s “double,” Michel, undergoes a similar discovery of an “authentic being” which initially brings him strength and health, but ultimately leads him to self-disintegration. I argue that in the novel Gide allowed himself to suggest what he preferred to leave unsaid in the accounts of his own life: that
any essentialized ("authentic") identity necessarily contains the impulse of its own internal disintegration. Chapter 3 focuses on the hero of Bram Stoker's Dracula, Jonathan Harker, and argues that Harker's initial masculinity crisis, occasioned by his professional and romantic situations, reaches its climax but also initiates its resolution through Dracula's seduction of Harker. I interpret Dracula as a figure who, like the psychoanalyst in the therapeutic situation, facilitates the subject's access to his unconscious but also, in the moment of transference, can serve the subject's retreat within the boundaries of a stable ego formation. Finally, Chapter 4 explores E. M. Forster's efforts to articulate a kind of masculinity that would be appropriated for a "liberal individualist," the kind of person he admires, and I argue that in Maurice, the main character achieves that kind of masculinity through a double process of seduction which enables him to accept "the flesh educating the spirit" (Maurice 133).

In each chapter what I call the rhetoric of seduction is discussed in the specific terms used by the authors under consideration. Not all of these authors actually use the term "seduction." In fact, in the texts and events discussed in the dissertation, a whole variety of concepts function as elements or forms of the rhetoric of seduction: influence, corruption, contagion, and even, in the last chapter, friendship. Some of the male-male relationships I discuss are more explicitly described as seductions; others less so. However, I hope to show that it proves analytically productive to look at these diverse situations as examples of seduction because it allows me to point to the ways in which certain universal psychic processes play a crucial part in a great variety of specific historical, biographical, and literary contexts.
The specific analysis in all the chapters is based, to various degrees, on the psychoanalytic ideas about seduction and related concepts developed in the theories of Jacques Lacan and, in particular, in Jean Laplanche's "general theory of seduction." Therefore, the remainder of this introductory chapter will provide an account of that theory in the context of its development from Freud's original "seduction theory." There is no more appropriate way to begin an explanation of the concept of seduction in psychoanalysis than to give an account of Freud's "seduction theory" or, more precisely, of his abandonment of it. This dual moment of Freud's establishing only to abandon a theory of seduction exemplifies the turn-of-the-century seduction anxiety, while at the same time it marks the beginning of the development of a critical apparatus that enables us today to understand that anxiety more comprehensively.

From Abuse to Fantasy: Freud's Abandonment of the "Seduction Theory"
as the Foundational Moment of Psychoanalysis

Freud's abandonment of the seduction theory has been long considered the foundational moment of psychoanalysis, but it has also been criticized as a way of ignoring the "reality of seduction." In what follows, I summarize Freud's seduction theory as it was articulated in the famous 1896 paper "The Aetiology of Hysteria" and his reasons for renouncing it in an even more famous letter he wrote to his friend Wilhelm Fliess in 1897 and then, more officially, in his 1914 work "On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement." Then I look at two diametrically opposed efforts to
reestablish the seduction theory as the foundation of psychoanalysis. While Jeffrey Moussaieff Mason’s book *The Assault on Truth: Freud’s Suppression of the Seduction Theory* (1984) discusses Freud’s abandonment of the seduction theory as a sign of Freud’s toeing the line of his society’s ethical expectations, Jean Laplanche’s *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis* (1989) interprets this abandonment as a failure of vision and a theoretical compromise that left psychoanalysis vulnerable to the kind of simplifications that Laplanche believes Mason’s ideas are. Ultimately, Laplanche develops Lacan’s critique of the so-called ego school of psychoanalysis, which, in their view, reduces Freud’s radical ideas to a few banal precepts of self-help. More significantly, Laplanche also develops a theory of seduction which posits the moment of seduction as the very foundational moment of subjectivity as well as the key relationship between the self and the other. I find Laplanche’s notion that a subject’s very self, or the subject’s self-understanding, depends on some form of seduction very useful for a more specific analysis of the significance of seduction for the establishment of certain masculine identities. But in order to clearly explain Laplanche’s complex theory, it is necessary to turn to Freud first.

In “The Aetiology of Hysteria,” Freud refutes his teacher Jean Martin Charcot’s theory that the exclusive cause of neurotic symptoms is “hereditary disposition” (SE III 252) and agrees with his colleague Josef Breuer that “the symptoms of hysteria [...] are determined by certain experiences of the patient’s which have operated in a traumatic fashion and which are being reproduced in his psychical life in the form of mnemonic symbols” (253). What Freud adds to Breuer’s theory is that this traumatic experience is
always a premature sexual experience. Freud is careful to include certain distinctions in this theory, which he will name “seduction theory” only once he has abandoned it. First of all, he distinguishes the experience which triggers the symptoms and which may occur in adulthood from the much earlier infantile experience, which causes the symptom and the memory of which is repressed into the unconscious. It is only due to this repression that hysteria emerges because “hysterical symptoms are derivatives of memories which are operating unconsciously” (272). Freud also points out that such infantile experience can range from “severe traumas,” such as attempted rape or involuntary witnessing of sexual acts between parents, to “astonishingly trivial,” such as stroking the hand or hinting at something obscene (260-61). He also mentions that these experiences can occur between children, but he is “inclined to suppose that children cannot find their way to acts of sexual aggression unless they have been seduced previously. The foundation for a neurosis would accordingly always be laid in childhood by adults, and the children themselves would transfer to one another the disposition to fall ill of hysteria later” (269).

What these various aspects of Freud’s theory amount to is that it is sexual seduction – innocent or not – of children by adults which causes hysteria, but also, by implication, that sexual seduction by an adult is the way in which a child is initiated into the realm of sexuality, which for both Lacan and Laplanche is the realm of the symbolic – that is, the realm in which the subject acquires a sense of identity and in which that identity acquires certain meanings (for example, in terms of gender, sexual orientations, etc.). In other words, the possibility of the subject perceiving his self as endowed with meaning, such as “masculinity,” is necessarily predicated on a form of sexual seduction.
Freud knew that this theory would make him “one of those who had disturbed the sleep of the world” (SE XIV 21). Masson details many ways in which Freud was “ostracized by medical society” (9) for insisting on the unpleasant fact that, as Freud explicitly put it, “our children are far more often exposed to sexual assaults than the few precautions taken by parents in this connection would lead us to expect” (SE III 268). Freud also did not hesitate to specify some of the adult seducers of children: “a nursery maid or governess or tutor, or, unhappily all too often, a close relative” (268). He did stop short of saying what he must have known from his study of criminal records if not from his own cases – that far from rarely that “close relative” was a parent.

The turn-of-the-century seduction anxiety was double-faced. On the one hand, it frequently took the form of fearing the possibility of being seduced, but on the other, it sometimes manifested itself as the fear of the possibility of becoming a seducer. The prominence of incest and child abuse was one of the nineteenth century’s most tightly guarded and most reluctantly acknowledged secrets, as Masson’s book establishes in the case of France. Without denying that there are debauched criminals whose seduction of children takes the form of brutal violence, Freud suggested that the line between adults’ solicitous love for children and their seduction of them was a blurred and troubling one.

The importance of this insight becomes clearer when one considers Freud’s reasons for abandoning his theory. In “The Aetiology of Hysteria” Freud insists that the analyst should not just assume that the patient’s illness has hereditary causes but should listen carefully to the patient’s accounts of his or her experiences because, even though these accounts are bound to be colored by the patient’s very neuroses, they contain some
traces of the actual events. Soon afterwards, however, Freud qualifies his argument by emphasizing the element of fantasy in the patients’ accounts of childhood seductions. His strongest statement of this renunciation of the seduction theory comes from the 1925 work “An Autobiographical Study”: “I was at last obliged to recognize that these scenes of seduction had never taken place, and that they were only fantasies which my patients had made up” (SE XX 34). Unfortunately, this emphatic, isolated statement is often taken to be the summing-up of Freud’s conceptual move away from the original theory of seduction by those who criticize Freud for turning a blind eye on the real suffering of the patients who were actually seduced as children. Such critics see Freud’s move either as conforming to the demands of the turn-of-the-century scientific establishment (Masson 110) or as pursuing his theoretical dream into an ever more intricate elaboration of a mythical psychodrama at the cost of neglecting the reality of the patients’ personal histories. But such interpretations overlook the fact that Freud’s move from the seduction theory to its abandonment is a move from an exclusive study of pathology to the study of human psyche as such or, one could say, a study of the very structure of normality. At the same time, this move is a foundational moment of psychoanalysis leading to the radical theory of the unconscious.

In order better to explain these assertions, I will take a careful look at the documents in which Freud explained in detail his reasons for abandoning his original seduction theory. The earliest such document is a letter to Fliess of September 21, 1897, in which Freud lists four reasons for renouncing the theory. The first one:
The continual disappointment in my efforts to bring any analysis to a real conclusion; the running away of people who for a period of time had been most gripped [by analysis]; the absence of the complete success on which I had counted. (108)

What this sentence suggests is that the original seduction theory was bound up with the illusion of a completely successful analysis, with the fantasy of the cure, as opposed to the more modest clinical goal of relieving neurotic symptoms. If the cause of hysteria existed unambiguously on the level of historical reality, if each seduction were simply “real,” then psychoanalysis would make sense as an intervention purely on that level, that is, as a process of restoring the patient’s mental health. In other words, psychoanalysis would guarantee the distinction between the pathological and the normal by exemplifying the possibility of a complete move from one to the other. But Freud’s crucial, at this point barely articulated insight, is that such a move is not possible, as his second reason for abandoning the seduction theory begins to suggest:

Then, the surprise that in all cases, the father, not excluding my own, had to be accused of being perverse – the realization of the unexpected frequency of hysteria, with precisely the same conditions prevailing in each, whereas surely such widespread perversions against children are not very probable. (108)
All Masson sees in these words is Freud’s supposed denial of the fact that child abuse—perhaps especially child abuse committed by fathers on their own children—was in fact much more widespread than most people were willing to admit. But what Freud was really dealing with here was a growing realization that there was an unacknowledged link between love and seduction. While the difference between the father and the child molester may be obvious on the level of everyday reality, the difference between parenting and pedophilia on an unconscious level is perhaps less obvious. This kind of insight about the unconscious links between apparently very disparate phenomena would have been inaccessible to psychoanalysis if Freud had not switched the emphasis of his work from “real” seduction to unconscious fantasy. The question is, however, whether fantasy is, as Masson assumes, the same as lying. Freud’s third reason for abandoning the original seduction theory makes it clear that the answer to that question is negative:

Then, third, the certain insight that there are no indications of reality in the unconscious, so that one cannot distinguish between truth and fiction that has been catechized with affect. (108-09)

As a number of psychoanalysts pointed out, renunciation of the seduction theory led directly to the “discovery” of the reality of the unconscious as different from the commonsensical everyday reality. A key characteristic of the reality of the unconscious is that in it there is no meaningful difference between truth and fantasy. As content of the unconscious, fantasy is every bit as “truthful” as an unconscious memory which is the
trace of a real seduction. And, as Freud’s fourth reason for abandoning the seduction theory suggests, there is a sense in which fantasy can be more productive in the psychoanalytic process than unconscious memory:

Fourth, the consideration that in the most deep-reaching psychosis the unconscious memory does not break through, so that the secret of the childhood experiences is not disclosed even in the most confused delirium. If one thus sees that the unconscious never overcomes the resistance of the conscious, the expectation that in treatment the opposite is bound to happen to the point where the unconscious is completely tamed by the conscious diminishes. (108-09)

The first part of this passage states explicitly that in the case of some patients the unconscious memory and, by extension, the everyday reality of seduction may remain inaccessible to psychoanalysis. Are such patients to be pronounced hopeless? Or is it possible to work with their fantasies, even with the “most confused delirium,” distorted as that may be, in order to relieve the neurotic symptoms? This psychoanalytic strategy may not reach the “truth” of the patient’s childhood experience or tame the unconscious by making it completely accessible to the subject’s consciousness, but it has its clinical value as well as far-reaching theoretical implications.

This clinical value and these theoretical implications are entirely lost upon those whose understanding of psychoanalysis is limited to the level of historical reality and its
defining concepts of victimization and injury. For example, Masson summarizes his critique of what he perceives as Freud’s cowardly and opportunistic retraction of the original seduction theory in these words:

[…] by shifting the emphasis from an actual world of sadness, misery, and cruelty to an internal stage on which actors performed invented dramas for an invisible audience of their own creation, Freud began a trend away from the real world that, it seems to me, is at the root of the present day sterility of psychoanalysis and psychiatry throughout the world. (144)

While there is no doubt that Freud’s world was as full of “sadness, misery, and cruelty” as is ours today, it is misleading to believe that psychoanalysis can or should strive to alleviate these misfortunes, not even on the level of individual experience. This is the illusion of ego-psychology or, as Lacan calls it, “an orthopaedic, conformist therapeutics, providing access for the subject to the most mythical conception of happiness (Four Concepts 135; “happiness” in English in the original).

Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory is to a large degree dedicated to rescuing Freud’s ideas from such simplified and tendentious uses. He is particularly opposed to what he calls “obscurantism […] characterized by the revival of notions long since refuted in the field of psycho-analysis, such as the predominance of the functions of the ego” (127). While Freud did, indeed, see psychoanalysis as a kind of “talking cure,” he insisted that the analyst’s sole goal is to remove psychotic symptoms by making the desires and events
that caused the symptoms accessible to the consciousness. Even though it is fairly easy to point to Freud’s dependence on the values and norms of his culture, he does not articulate psychoanalytic treatment as an essentially normalizing process.  

According to Lacan, the object of the psychoanalytic process is not the integration of the ego or what is popularly called “mental health” but the subject’s increased awareness of his unconscious resistance to his own ego. Neurotic symptoms are psychosomatic displacements of such resistance (for example, paranoia as a displaced homoerotic desire resisting the heterosexually constructed ego). Whether particular forms of that resistance are created by real seduction or by fantasy does not significantly change the way they function or the way they should be treated in psychoanalysis. In this context, the analyst’s knowledge of the historical reality of seduction is not necessary, and in fact it can be harmful because it can trigger transferential feelings which are bound to disrupt the analytic process. Thus, real seduction, which according to Masson should have been the foundation of a truly productive psychoanalysis, is in fact of little consequence for psychoanalysis as we know it (while, of course, it may be of utmost significance in the realms of ethics and law). As Laplanche explains, the problem with Masson and a number of authors who treat the issue in a similarly reductive way is their “falling back upon a crude opposition between reality and fantasy, the whole point of the theory being that it allows us to go beyond that opposition” (New Foundations 122).
Internal Alien-ness (the Unconscious) and External Alien-ness (the Other):

Laplanche’s “General Theory of Seduction”

Laplanche is himself critical of Freud’s failure to stick to his original insight and to theorize seduction as “the major generative factor in psychoanalysis [...] both at the initial level of childhood and at the level of psychoanalytic practice” (New Foundations 104). But Laplanche is not so much interested in what he calls the “special theory of seduction” (Freud’s original seduction theory), which depends on and is too easily reduced to historical reality. His effort, instead, is to push Freud’s insights further into the “general theory of seduction,” which is “no longer restricted to pathology, which was an essential feature of Freud’s pre-1897 period; it is intended to found the structure of the psychical or soul apparatus in general; and it invalidates the appeal to biology and phylogensis” (New Foundations 129), to which, according to Laplanche, Freud was too susceptible.

In order to articulate his own theory, Laplanche emphasizes the temporal aspect of Freud’s seduction theory, that is, the fact that there are “two stages to trauma.” In Laplanche’s words,

this theory postulates that nothing can be inscribed in the human unconscious except in relation to at least two events which are separated from one another in time by a moment of maturation that allows the subject to react in two ways to an initial experience or to the memory of that experience. [...] If it remains latent, the memory is in itself neither
pathogenic nor traumatic. It becomes pathogenic and traumatic when it is revived by a second scene which can be associated with it. (New Foundations 112)

What has happened in the subject in between these two scenes is the appearance of the ego, or the differentiation between the conscious and the unconscious registers. Now, “the subject is attacked [...] from within by a memory and not by an event,” and the “historical” distinction between what is exogenous (“real” seduction) and what is endogenous (fantasy) is rendered meaningless because “the efficacy of the process stems from the moment of the endogenous reactivation of a memory which obviously derives from a real external event” (113). To insist on the primacy of real events over fantasy is, therefore, to misunderstand the theory. More than that, while so-called “primal seduction” is a real, external event, Laplanche is not concerned with, as he dismissively puts it, “anecdotal scenes a la Nabokov,” but with a sort of “inevitable” reality which “takes us beyond contingency and peripetia” (120-21).

Laplanche defines “primal seduction” as “a fundamental situation in which an adult proffers to a child verbal, non-verbal, and even behavioural signifiers which are pregnant with unconscious sexual signification” (126). He calls these signifiers “enigmatic signifiers” because their meaning is inaccessible both to the child and to the adult who proffers them. “[W]hat is important in the scenes of seduction,” Laplanche insists, “is that the adult transmits a message in it, that he ‘makes a sign’ from his own unconscious” (“Theory” 660). In other words, the delivery of this “message” is by no
means a deliberate, conscious action. The adult seducer is not acting out of an intention, as would be supposed within a commonsensical understanding of seduction. These adult messages, Laplanche explains, “are not transparent to themselves, but compromised (in the psychoanalytic sense of the term) by the adult’s relation to his own unconscious, by unconscious sexual fantasies set in motion by his relation to the child” (“Theory” 661). But these sexual fantasies do not normally lead to child abuse. This seduction is traumatic “only in so far as it manifests the presence of the parental unconscious” (125). It has “nothing to do with ‘sexual assault’. The enigma is in itself a seduction and its mechanisms are unconscious” (128).

Primal seduction, then, is the child’s initiation into the realm of sexuality, which is the realm of the unconscious. The adult’s enigmatic messages set the child, “whose psycho-somatic structures [at this point] are situated predominantly at the level of need,” the task of symbolization, which “inevitably leaves behind unconscious residues” (130). These residues, which found the child’s unconscious, are “the source-objects of the drives.” According to Laplanche, “a drive is not, as Freud suggests all too often, some unknown form of [psychic] energy” (142), but a repressed trace of the enigmatic signifiers from the scene of primal seduction. If that is so, avers Laplanche, “we have to conclude that there is no initial or natural opposition between the instinctual and the intersubjective, or between the instinctual and the cultural” (137). At the same time, this means that the “human sexual drive is not initially biological, even if it does become biological at the later stage of genitality” (141).

For Laplanche, the theory of seduction is crucially related to the relationship
between the self and the other, which he addresses in his article "The Theory of Seduction and the Problem of the Other" (1997). In this article, Laplanche reminds us of the meaning of Freud's so-called "Copernican revolution": the discovery of the alien-ness within (the unconscious) and the alien-ness without (the other). This discovery offers an alternative to the traditional "Ptolemaic" vision of the relationship between the subject and the other, "in which access to reality and to the recognition of the other is secondary, derivative, in relation to a single, primary testimony - that of the ego" (653). The ego's tendency is to imagine itself as fully coherent and self-sufficient, not dependent on the other in any crucial way. On the other hand, however, "the dimension of otherness can never be effaced for an adult, even if it tends again and again to be covered over" (654). In other words, the ego can never fully detach itself from the other within or the other without, and it actually needs occasionally renewed encounters with the "enigmatic message" of the other in order to sustain itself.

Another important aspect of this double otherness to which the ego has such an ambiguous connection is that its two aspects are crucially linked to each other. Laplanche explains:

In my view, there are two facets to the Freudian revolution, in the radical de-centering it offers. The first is classical: the discovery of the unconscious in so far as it is precisely not our centre; the other facet - the seduction theory - is hidden but indispensable to the first, for it maintains the unconscious in its alien-ness. (657, emphasis in original)
In other words seduction “guarantees” the unconscious as well as the alien-ness of the
other, in spite of the ego’s tendency to incorporate it into some projection of itself.
Laplanche makes another important comment about the Freudian revolution:

In reality, its de-centering is double: the radical alterity of the other-thing
(das Andere), the unconscious, is only guaranteed by the other person (der
Andere): briefly, by seduction. The otherness of the other person is
blurred, re-absorbed in the form of my fantasy of the other, my “seduction
fantasy”, and the otherness of the unconscious is put at risk. (659,
emphasis in original)

One of my main goals in this work is to trace various effects of the “seduction
fantasy” of the subject who appropriates the other for the purposes of his own self-
perception and self-construction in several turn-of-the-century texts, but for such an
analysis to be possible some link must be developed between the “two realities” insisted
upon by psychoanalysis, between the synchronic explanation of psychic structures and
diachronic contingencies of a historical moment. Laplanche’s insistence on
distinguishing psychic reality from historical reality (“anecdotes a la Nabokov”) is of
crucial importance for developing the analytical potential of psychoanalysis beyond
“talking cure” and its reductive extension: the self-help mythology of ego-psychology;
however, for that analytical potential to be made useful beyond the most technical
psychoanalytic discourse – useful, for example, for the kind of literary and cultural
analysis I offer in this work – it must be possible to establish a connection between psychic reality and historical reality. Laplanche’s “general theory of seduction” offers such a connection, which I will elaborate in the last part of my introduction, but first I want to point to the limitations of the kind of analysis which insists too schematically on keeping these “two realities” distinct and resists elaborating links between them. Jean Baudrillard’s theory of seduction is an example of such a rigidly dichotomous analysis, the practical use of which is hard to see, and it will serve here as an instructive comparison to Laplanche’s more flexible theory.

Seduction versus Sexuality: Baudrillard’s Theory of Seduction

While for Laplanche seduction is that which initiates the individual into sexuality, for Jean Baudrillard seduction is opposed to sexuality. Seduction “is a game, sex is a function” (21), Baudrillard insists in his book called Seduction, and “it is seduction that prevails in the long term” (22). For Baudrillard, seduction “never belongs to the order of nature, but that of artifice – never to the order of energy, but that of signs and rituals” (2). He is establishing here the very same distinction that Laplanche establishes between psychic and historical realities, but unlike Laplanche, Baudrillard seems to perceive sexual desire as necessarily and entirely relegated to the level of historical or biological reality. That is why he contrasts the truth of desire, whose supposed authenticity emanates from the depths of either biology or psychology, to “the secret of all seduction,” which lies in “transubstantiation of sex into signs” (13). Accordingly, Baudrillard believes that
the disruptive strength of seduction is in that it “breaks the referentiality of sex and provides a space, not of desire, but of play and defiance” (21). This rejection of depth and truth that seduction offers and the concomitant exaltation of surface and play, Baudrillard explains, is the reason why both traditional religious ethics and “that ethical truth of desire which obsesses us” today perceive seduction as something evil and deceitful (10).

What Baudrillard calls the “ethical truth of desire” is the assumption that sexual desire has some kind of privileged authenticity as a manifestation of the self which makes it the basis of the “inner truth” of the self, which, in turn, makes sexual liberation appear a crucial ethical imperative. Baudrillard discusses certain feminist demands for sexual liberation as a form of those oppositional discourses that struggle to gain the power of which they were traditionally deprived by winning for themselves those privileged positions of power which were previously inaccessible to them, such as political leadership, sexual assertiveness, or verbalization of experience. But, according to Baudrillard, such oppositional discourses do little to unnerve the structure that disenfranchised them in the first place. “It is the eternal illusion of enlightenment humanism,” Baudrillard explains, “which aspires to liberate the servile sex, race, or class in the very terms of its servitude” (17). To insist on acquiring that which you are forbidden to have, according to this position, is to deny the fact of that interdiction only to endorse the values imposed by it. In other words, women may indeed be freer today than ever before to express themselves sexually, but the evaluation of sexual expression as something highly desirable is an intrinsic part of the patriarchal logic that oppressed women to begin with. Baudrillard concludes that “it is when pleasure seeks openly to be
autonomous, that it is truly a product of the Law” (24).

In Baudrillard’s theory, it is precisely because seduction is not sexual that it escapes being implicated in the patriarchal logic. Unlike sex and sexuality – and Baudrillard does not distinguish between the two – which are aligned with nature, bourgeois production, masculinity, and the depth model of desire, seduction is aligned with artifice, ceremony and ritual, femininity, and play of appearances. In other words, he maintains that seduction and sexuality exist on two separate levels of reality and allows no intersection or overlap between them. The problem with this categorical duality is that it leads Baudrillard to severely reductive conceptions of gender and desire.

Perhaps the most glaring problem with Baudrillard’s meditation on sexuality and seduction is his unexamined reliance on the metaphorical binary between the masculine and the feminine. For Baudrillard, masculinity is virtually synonymous with truth, depth, and power, while femininity stands for indistinctness, surface, and seduction: “The masculine is certain, the feminine is insoluble” (11). Baudrillard employs gender as a synecdoche for the structural relations that constitute gender. In the circular logic of that argument, the masculine and the feminine, conceptual products of the power structure we call patriarchy, are used as shorthand in describing that structure. The result is the impression that the power structure is a product or a consequence of certain primordial masculine and feminine principles rather than the generator of the illusion of the primordial character of the masculine and the feminine.

Baudrillard is quite aware of the conventionality of such use of gender terms: “To be sure, one calls the sovereignty of seduction feminine by convention, the same
convention that claims sexuality to be fundamentally masculine” (7). In other words, Baudrillard is implying that, when he talks about “the feminine” and “the masculine,” he is not referring to “real” men and women but to certain structural, theoretical positions. It is insufficient, in his view, to limit one’s analysis to the level of historical reality, on which the desirability of certain goals is taken for granted (the right to vote or to express one’s sexuality, for example). Baudrillard insists on developing his analysis on a structural or theoretical level, on which such goals are irrelevant because easily granted without any significant transformation of the power structures which made them appear desirable. While this insistence on going beyond thinking of reality in terms of practical politics or sexual release is a productive one, Baudrillard’s negotiation of the relationship between the two levels is too haphazard and somewhat vacuous. For example:

This entire history of patriarchal domination, of phallocracy, the immemorial male privilege, is perhaps only a story. [...] All that we have been asked to believe – the universal discourse of inequality of the sexes, the theme song of an egalitarian and revolutionary modernity [...] – is perhaps one gigantic misunderstanding. The opposite hypothesis is just as plausible and, from a certain perspective, more interesting – that is, that the feminine has never been dominated, but has always been dominant. The feminine considered not as sex, but as the form transversal to every sex, as well as to every power, as the secret, virulent form of in-sexuality.

(15-16)
While this latter perspective may indeed be “more interesting,” the neglected point is that it is a different perspective. Even if, in a certain sense, the feminine can be theorized as that which transverses sex and power, and even if the “history of patriarchal domination” cannot but be “a story” (whose effects on historical reality, of course, must not be ignored), are these two ways of looking at gender really just two opposite hypotheses, each of which may or may not be true? Can we do no better than establish a radical separation between them and then slide in analysis from one to the other at will? Is there no way in which these two levels of analytical engagement can speak to each other more productively? Baudrillard’s failure to theorize the precarious line between women as sex and the feminine as “the form transversal to every sex” betrays his inability or unwillingness to think with more rigor and specificity about the complex meaning and function that gender has on both synchronic and diachronic levels. Instead of addressing the ways in which the interplay of sexuality and seduction might help us understand that complexity, Baudrillard is satisfied to maintain an absolute distinction between the two levels while at the same time, as in the passage just quoted, collapsing them into each other rather willfully. This is the kind of simplification that an analysis which employs a structural theory to make historical claims, like the one developed in this dissertation, needs to try to avoid, and I believe that Laplanche’s “general theory of seduction” provides a structural theory which is far less susceptible to such simplification that Baudrillard’s.

But before leaving Baudrillard, I want to demonstrate briefly how his theory simplifies another concept significant for my project, in addition to gender, that of
sexuality. In psychoanalytic terms, it could be said that Baudrillard reduces sexuality to the level of demand for sexual release, without trying to theorize its character as a symbolizing system. Thus, sexual liberation appears to him simply a devaluation of desire into demand, and he turns a blind eye to the ways in which the demands for sexual liberation can be seen as involving desire as well. To explain this better by way of an example, I will discuss a passage that Baudrillard quotes in his book as an example of the pro-sex position of the 1970s feminism in France. While in its historical specificity this position may be somewhat dated, its basic impulse is very much alive today in certain forms of queer theory and politics in the United States. Therefore, this position is still relevant today in the context of articulating a productive practical and analytical notion of sexuality. The passage is from Judith Beladona Barbara Penton’s *Libe*, published in 1978:

Within our body we experience not one sex, not two, but a multitude of sexes. [...] Our bodies are tired of all the stereotyped cultural barriers, all the psychological segregation . . . We are male and female, adults and children, fairies, dykes, and gays, fuckers and fucked, buggers and buggered. We do not accept the reduction of all sexual richness to a single sex. Our sapphism is only one facet of our sexuality. We refuse to limit ourselves to what society demands of us, that is, that we be either hetero, lesbian, gay, the whole gamut of promotional products. We are unreasonable in our desires. (quoted in Baudrillard 24)
While this position does rely for its rhetorical effect on an exuberant—almost orgasmic—exaltation, which makes it susceptible to the charge of flirting with Utopianism, it is by no means simply a call for having sex whenever, however, and with whomever one wishes. It involves a critique of the depth model of gender and sexual identities enforced by "stereotypical cultural barriers" and authenticated by "psychological segregation." It clearly employs the notion of "sexual richness" as a refusal to define desire in the clear-cut terms of sexual demand, such as "I want a woman, not a man" or "I want to fuck, not to be fucked." And its desires are "unreasonable," not because they are simply reduced to some kind of sexual addiction, but because they try to elude the "promotional products" of cultural identities, such as heterosexuality or homosexuality. In brief, this position is seductive precisely in Baudrillard's sense of the word: it privileges play over truth.

Yet Baudrillard's take on this position is strangely narrow-minded. He sees in it merely the "frenzy of unlimited sex, an exacerbated ventilation of desire onto demand and gratification" (24), and he has a "presentiment of the catastrophe that the channeling of all desire into the demand for gratification constitutes" (26). Baudrillard overlooks the fact that, if anything, the proliferation of sexual possibilities in the passage questions the notion of sexual gratification as purely and merely a matter of biological discharge. Instead of confining desire to sexual demand, as Baudrillard fears, this "frenzy" extracts the notion of sex from its biological mooring and brings it much closer to the notions of play and ritual, which Baudrillard wishes to reserve as exclusive attributes of seduction.

Baudrillard's rigid dichotomies between sexuality and seduction, masculine and feminine, depth and surface, make his theorizing of seduction less than useful for the kind
of analysis which makes at least some claim to historical specificity and accuracy.

Laplanche’s theory, although focused on establishing what he sees as the universal and
necessary apparatus of psychic functions, also gestures toward establishing a link between
the structure of the psyche and the specific functioning of the psyche of a particular
person at a particular time and place. I will close this introduction by briefly explaining
this link.

Primal and Other Seductions

Laplanche’s theory “locates the origin of unconscious desire in the primordial
relation to the sexual message of the ‘other’” (“Theory” 664). And this effort to articulate
a comprehensive theory of how the subject exists as a subject only as a consequence of
the other, so to speak, (that is, Laplanche’s emphasis on relationality) is what makes
Laplanche’s work so significant for my purposes. The “otherness of the unconscious,” as
precisely not the center of the subject but the displacement from the center, is both
founded and maintained by external otherness. In other words, “the unconscious is only
guaranteed by the other person: briefly by seduction” (659). But this other person’s
seduction is not a manifestation of his conscious agency, nor is it even known to him as
seduction, because it is a manifestation of his own unconscious. And this is the meaning
of what Laplanche calls Freud’s Copernican revolution, or the revolution of the de-
centering of knowledge: “Internal alien-ness [the subject’s unconscious] ‘held in place’
by external alien-ness [the other]; external alien-ness, in turn, held in place by the
enigmatic relation of the other to his own internal alien [the unconscious of the other]” (661).

Significantly, seduction is not only the initial act through which the child becomes the subject by becoming split into the ego and the unconscious, but it is also a repeated occurrence through which both the coherence of the ego and the de-centering effects of the unconscious are maintained. Laplanche claims that “primal seduction is a support for, or the motor behind precocious seduction, infantile seduction, adult seduction and even analytic seduction” (134-35). In other words, the subject’s encounters with the other throughout life constitute seductions which have a similar effect to the primal seduction: they re-establish the subject’s ego in the ways necessitated by the subject’s circumstances. They open up for a moment the subject’s communication with the alien-ness within and the alien-ness without and then allow the subject to close in on itself again. In this important passage, Laplanche suggests the inescapability of this perpetual pulsation of the ego:

[...] the Ptolemaism of the human psyche is a conviction acquired by the psyche itself: its narcissistic re-centering follows [...] a “Copernican” stage, in which the infant nursling is caught in the orbit of the other and has a passive relation to its messages.

But there is more: if the human being closes in on itself, as if ineluctably, at a very early stage, one can affirm that theory – the way man thinks (about) himself – is ceaselessly impelled, as if by some irresistible
force of attraction, to close in on itself, even if then to try to reconstruct
otherness, in a secondary moment, on the basis of an ego alleged to be
narcissistic from the outset.

So it is through an endless renewal of effort, a sort of ceaseless
conversion, that we have to try to think of ourselves as not being,
ourselves, our own centre.

[...] the priority of the other, and the complex play between the
external and the internal other, have concrete, practical repercussions in
our psychoanalytic approach to the adult human being. Fortunately, adults
are never totally closed off, as they include an unconscious as an oyster
encloses its pearl. ("Theory" 662)

What this passage suggests is that the child’s transition from a “Copernican” into a
“Ptolemaic” stage upon the establishment of the ego is never fully complete. Even though
the subject’s psyche has the tendency to close in on itself, it never becomes totally closed
off. This is what enables psychoanalytic treatment, in which the subject establishes a
communication with its unconscious. But this is also what suggests that later seduction,
later “fantasies of seduction,” have a similar dynamic to the primal seduction. If that is so,
then an analysis of the various instances of seduction, such as those I discuss in the other
chapters, can reveal the ways in which this interplay of centering and de-centering of the
subject occurs in specific contexts, in which structures of the ego (gender, sexuality,
class, nationality, etc.) intersect in varying ways. Such an analysis might, then, be able to
articulate productive links between psychic structures and historical reality and contribute to a more thorough understanding of the specific aspects of masculine seduction anxieties in the period under investigation.
Chapter 1

Self-Development, Influence, and Corruption in

The Picture of Dorian Gray and the Oscar Wilde Trials

In spite of his simplifications of gender and sexuality, Baudrillard's notion of
seduction as related to surface and ritual and as inherently opposed to depth and truth
remains relevant for my project of exploring the meaning of seduction in turn-of-the-
century negotiations of the relationship between masculinity and homosexuality, partly
because one figure significant for understanding these negotiations practically embodies
seduction in Baudrillard's sense. That figure is the dandy, whose typical privileging of
surface and ritual over depth and truth makes him, in the words of Jessica Feldman, "the
figure who casts into doubt, even while he underscores, the very binary oppositions by
which his culture lives" (4). Oscar Wilde, the ultimate nineteenth-century dandy, went
beyond implying such a critique in his appearance and behavior and made it the very
basis of his philosophy. Perhaps the most memorable expressions of that philosophy are
his famous paradoxes, like this one from Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the
Young: "It is only the superficial qualities that last. Man's deeper nature is soon found
out" (Complete Works 1206). But his aphorisms are just the most conspicuous products
of Wilde's sustained efforts, throughout his literary work as well as in various aspects of
his life, to undermine a traditional, essentialist notion of subjectivity based on believing
in the existence of some authentic truth of the self, which is supposedly accessible to the
subject if he only looks sufficiently deep inside himself. In his book *Sexual Dissidence*,
Jonathan Dollimore offers a detailed analysis of what he calls Wilde's "transgressive
aesthetics" in which "insincerity, inauthenticity, and unnaturalness become the liberating
attributes of decentered identity and desire" (14).¹ This aesthetics undermines the
essentialist understanding of subjectivity or "the depth model" (73) of the subject and
develops instead an anti-essentialist understanding of identity by substituting surface for
depth, difference for essence, persona/role for essential self, and style/artifice for
 authenticity, to cite just a few binaries from Dollimore's list (15).

My analysis in this chapter focuses on a binary that Dollimore does not discuss
but which is one of the main ways in which Wilde undermines the depth model of
identity: influence versus self-development. The opposition between these two notions,
which ultimately turns to be false, is one of the main themes in *The Picture of Dorian
Gray*, and the efforts to construe certain kinds of "good" or "bad" influence as a crucial
aspect of the emerging homosexual identity informs significantly the opposing discourses
in Oscar Wilde's trials for "gross indecency." In both cases, however, the relationship
between influence and identity turns out to be more complex than traditional assumptions
would allow. In Wilde's novel, the ostensibly radically opposed notions of identity ("I am
myself") and influence ("I am what others make of me" – with its double meaning of
creation and interpretation) turn out to be inextricably interlinked and indeed virtually
synonymous. The opposition is resolved not merely as the rather obvious "I am myself,
but my self is what others make of me," but more radically as: "I have a self only through
what others make of me and through what I make of others." On the one hand, this kind
of relational understanding of identity is eminently Foucauldian. Foucault states: "If I tell the truth about myself, as I am now doing, it is in part that I am constituted as a subject across a number of power relations which are exerted over me and which I exert over others" (Politics 39). On the other hand, Wilde’s exposure of the processes by which the "truth about self" is constructed and naturalized is rather close to Laplanche’s idea that it is seduction, a subject’s exposure to the other, which is crucial for creating – and then, as I argue, for maintaining – the subject’s identity. Similarly, the discourses of the Wilde trials show that, to the extent in which these trials “helped to produce a major shift in perceptions of the scope of same-sex passion” (Sinfield 3) and effected a transference of some of the content of the dandy identity into the newly forged homosexual identity, it was seduction (whether interpreted as “good influence” or as “corruption”) that plays a crucial role in the emergence of the homosexual identity. As Alan Sinfield has shown in The Wilde Century, before the trials, “the Wildean dandy – so far from looking like a queer – was distinctively exonerated from such suspicions” (71) because he developed from the figure of the aristocratic rake, whose debauchery, in its various representations, was emphatically heterosexual.² Even though effeminacy, together with “conspicuous idleness [and] moral scepticism” (69), was the dandy’s main characteristic, at this point gender deviance did not imply sexual perversion. What might be added to Sinfield’s analysis is that before the last decade of the nineteenth century, the increasingly powerful Victorian middle class perceived the dandy as an isolated, eccentric figure – a kind of aberration or anomaly – and accordingly reacted to him with either fascination, bafflement, or ridicule. Regardless of the differences between these reactions, they all
emphasize difference and distance. Such a figure was at a safe distance from the mainstream, unable to have an impact on it, and therefore acceptable as an eccentricity or a freak show. But what made it impossible for the homosexual to be regarded in the same way was precisely the perception of him as a seducer, an identity which undermines difference and distance (between the mainstream and the margin, the self and the other). Therefore, as the dandy turns into a homosexual when and inasmuch as he is perceived as a seducer, the public reaction to that figure also transforms from bafflement and ridicule into fear and hatred. The Wilde trials make this painfully obvious, but they also reveal specific historical conditions which caused this particular construction of the homosexual identity.

Death of Aestheticism, Birth of the Homosexual

The potential of the dandy to question the binary opposition at the very core of Victorian culture (true/false, moral/immoral, masculine/feminine) found its philosophical expression in the last two decades of the nineteenth century in the aesthetic and ethical propositions of the movement we have come to call Aestheticism, which originated largely in the ideas of Walter Pater and were elaborated in the essays of Oscar Wilde. In this context, it became increasingly clear at this time that the dandy and the doctrines of Aestheticism related to him were far from any politically naive and innocuous indulgence in fancy clothes and exotic flowers, as they may have been initially perceived. Their potential cultural – even directly political – consequences were becoming more apparent,
even as they assumed a seemingly apolitical attitude. In fact, their very insistence on art’s independence from society and its morality had the power to undermine Victorian emphasis on civic responsibility and personal care for the well-being of the state. Beyond that, Aestheticism explicitly rebelled against Victorian prudery in behavior and didacticism in literature. They also promoted openness and tolerance rather than prohibition and religious gravity in considering the issues of sexuality. Even before the trials, merely on the basis of his published work and his public persona, Wilde, the leading aesthete and the most conspicuous of the London dandies of the period, was accused by the press of subverting the “wholesome, manly simple ideals of English life” (quoted in Hyde 12). As Dollimore explains, such accusations were inspired by a deep anxiety about the potential seductiveness of these ideas:

What kept those “wholesome, manly simple ideals of English life” in place were traditional and conservative ideas of what constituted human nature and human subjectivity, and it was these that Wilde attacked, not so much conventional morality itself as the ideological anchor points for that morality, namely notions of identity as subjective depth which manifest themselves in these newspaper reports as wholesomeness, right reason, seriousness, etc. (68)

The viciousness of the public attack on Wilde testifies to the precision with which his critique hit the very nerve of the traditional essentialist ideology of subjectivity. However,
no esthetic creed or philosophical critique would have encountered such a reaction if it
had not implied an erosion of the boundaries between the mainstream and the margin and
between the self and the other.

Public sensitivity to this critique of the traditional notion of individual identity
was increased by contemporaneous social events which themselves contributed to the
strengthening of related anxieties. Unrest and uprisings in various parts of the British
Empire led to widespread public lamentations over the decay of the British national
identity as the major colonial power and fears concerning its future. Problems at home –
poverty, crime, class upheavals – fueled even more the feeling of impending social decay,
and “degeneration” became a key-word of the period. And this overwhelming anxiety
about the danger of individual and racial degeneration was increasingly linked to the so-
called “decadent” literature and art of the 1890s, which had close connection to
Aestheticism. Both Aestheticism and literary decadence were beginning to be perceived
as both a symptom and a cause of social decay, perhaps most famously and influentially
in Max Nordau’s widely-read Degeneration. Nordau was the first to directly link the
figure of the dandy, and specifically Oscar Wilde, to turn-of-the-century moral and social
degeneration. So, when Wilde was tried for “gross indecency,” less than a month after he
reached the peak of his prominence as a public figure and popularity as a dramatist with
the premier of The Importance of Being Earnest, that trials became an ideal occasion to
condemn Aestheticism and blunt the critical potential of the dandy by representing the
apostle of Aestheticism, the ultimate dandy, as degenerate whose particular kind of
corruption threatens to spread throughout English society.
The trials provided an opportunity for using the prejudice against certain sexual practices for the purposes of neutralizing the cultural power of a set of esthetic and philosophical ideas by demonizing the person who had articulated these ideas into a coherent “transgressive aesthetic.” In the process of replacing the public image of Oscar Wilde the dandy with the image of Oscar Wilde the homosexual corrupter, the artistic and cultural movement he symbolized was inexorably linked to what, in most people’s minds, was “the worst sin in the calender.” The naturalization of this imposed connection of the anti-Victorian attitudes of Aestheticism with sodomy effectively neutralized the impact and prevented any further development of that movement. There is no doubt that Wilde’s condemnation and imprisonment were among the main reasons that, by the end of the nineteenth century, this potentially powerful cultural force gradually petered out of the cultural scene.³

But if the trials had an immense effect on the fate of Aestheticism and the figure of the dandy, they also played a decisive part in the formation of the public perception of the newly conceptualized homosexual identity. Both Wilde’s appearance and his ideas about art and culture were linked in the course of the trials to his sexual activity. Before this event there was no easily perceiveable connection between the dandy and sex between men. As Alan Sinfield points out, before his trials “homosexuality was not manifest from Wilde’s style” (1). Until the scandal broke out, there was “no suggestion, at all, on grounds that we might expect today – dandyism, effeminacy and aestheticism” (2) that Wilde was homosexual. According to Sinfield,
the trials helped to produce a major shift in perceptions of the scope of
same-sex passion. At that point, the entire, vaguely disconcerting nexus of
effeminacy, leisure, idleness, immorality, luxury, insouciance, decadence
and aestheticism, which Wilde was perceived, variously, as instantiating,
was transformed into a brilliantly precise image. (3)

This image became perhaps the most prominent public image of the homosexual.
Ironically, Wilde, a critic of the idea of stable identity, had to endure this identity being
imposed on him.

Of course, the word “homosexuality” was not a part of Wilde’s vocabulary, nor
did his contemporaries use that word to describe him. Coined in 1870, that word was for
several subsequent decades mostly limited to the scientific (or pseudo-scientific)
discourse of contemporary sexology. But the late nineteenth century was the time when
the concept of “homosexuality” was gaining the power to create a new identity – the
homosexual, who, as Michel Foucault puts it in the first volume of The History of
Sexuality, “became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to
being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and
possibly a mysterious physiology.” Foucault concludes: “The sodomite had been a
temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (43). By facilitating the
transmission of this nascent idea from medical books into the public mind, Wilde’s
writings and trials both reflected and contributed to the creation of this new identity as
well as the “reverse discourse” of modern gay subculture. Of course, the Wilde trials mst
be seen as only one among many sites in which the homosexual identity was created, but the special interest of this particular site is in how explicitly it reveals the momentary confusion of an older conception of male-male sexuality and at least two modern versions of it.

Wilde vs. Queensberry: Posing as Somdomite

It could be said, somewhat flippantly, that the construction of Wilde’s homosexual identity began when on February 28, 1895 Wilde received in his club a note which read “For Oscar Wilde Posing as Somdomite [sic!]". The note, with its misspelling of the word “sodomite,” was written by the Marquess of Queensberry, the father of Wilde’s friend and lover Lord Alfred Douglas. Douglas, who was sixteen years Wilde’s junior, had met Wilde in 1891, and they had become intimate in practically no time.² Queensberry had objected to their relationship and had repeatedly forbidden his son to socialize with Wilde. Douglas’s telegraphed answer to his father was: “What a funny little man you are” (Ellmann 418). Involved against his will in this bitter quarrel between the father and the son, Wilde decided to stand up against Queensberry’s vulgarity and, hoping to destroy the rumors once and for all, he launched an action for criminal libel against the Marquess.

Queensberry’s misspelling of the word “sodomite” may have been a simple slip of the pen or plain ignorance, but it can also be seen as symptomatic of a certain reluctance to know the precise form of the word as well as its precise meaning. The misspelling is
indicative of the Victorian preference to understand the content of this concept as a
vague, almost unspeakable, sin — *peccatum illude horri bile non nominandum inter
christianos* ("horrible sin not mentioned among Christians"; quoted in Cohen 84) — rather
than a set of specific sexual practices that can be rationally considered and discussed,
even if merely for the purpose of legal prohibition. For the London press of the time even
the incorrectly spelled word was too offensive to be published. The *Evening Standard*
reported that Queensberry’s note was: “Oscar Wilde posing as __________” (quoted in
Sinfield 3). The word “so(m)domite” was replaced with a blank.

But what is even more interesting about Queensberry’s specific accusation of
Wilde is the use of the word “posing.” It is Wilde’s “posing as” rather than being a
sodomite that bothered Queensberry, who explains in a letter read in the trials that “if I
was quite certain of the thing I would shoot the fellow on site, but I can only accuse him
of posing” (Hyde, *Oscar Wilde* 155). Wilde also claimed that Queensberry had told him:
“I do not say that you are it, but you look it” (119). This may imply that Queensberry used
the word “posing” simply because his suspicions were as yet unproved. But in another
letter, Queensberry offered what today almost seems as a kind of a postmodernist insight
as he wrote: “in my mind to pose as a thing is as bad as to be it” (153). Now, this is not
the way in which the acts of sodomy would have been regarded in an earlier period. One
either did or did not commit those acts; it was hardly possible to pose as having
committed them. Queensberry, however, accused Wilde of posing as something the word
for which he does not know yet; he really accuses him of posing as a homosexual. On his
card, the homosexual as a kind of person already replaces sodomy as a set of sexual acts,
even though Queensberry has no choice but to use the old-fashioned word. In fact, his misspelling of it might also be seen as a trace of his sense that this is not quite the word he wants.

But this ambiguity in Queensberry’s accusation was not merely a matter of his personal ignorance or insight. On the contrary, this duality between sexual behavior and various signs of an identity characterized the Wilde trials in their entirety. Throughout the trials, Wilde had to answer not only for being a sodomite but also for posing as such, to the extent that one has to raise the question: What is the society more interested in sanctioning: posing or being, and why? From the very beginning, the trials were based on two questions: 1) Did Wilde commit the sexual acts which he was accused of committing? 2) Did Wilde, in his writing and appearance, spread an unwholesome influence on the youths of England? At first clearly distinguishable, these questions became in the course of the trials gradually and steadily conflated, to the extent that it appeared that the sexual act itself is what is corrupting. But a careful look at what a lawyer involved called “the literary part of the case” reveals that it was not so much the sexual acts themselves that were troublesome as it was certain aspects of Wilde’s work and his appearance.

The first trial, in which Wilde prosecuted Queensberry for libel, focused completely on Wilde’s “posing” or the so-called “literary part of the case”. The Picture of Dorian Gray, The Proverbs and Philosophies for the Instruction of the Young, and a letter Wilde wrote to Douglas two years before the trials and called a “prose poem” were extensively discussed. Wilde was also invited to pronounce his opinions on some other
literary works of "dubious morality." Throughout this discussion, Queensberry’s lawyer made every effort to show that Wilde’s writings and his literary taste betray signs of immorality, that they are ways in which he “posed” as sodomite. At first, Wilde was successful in this verbal fencing, charming the audience with his witty paradoxes. His argument was the same one he had used to defend *The Picture of Dorian Gray* against the accusations of immorality at the time of its original publication. In the preface to the second edition, Wilde writes:

> There is no such things as a moral or an immoral book.
> Books are well written, or badly written. That is all.
> ... 
> It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors.

*(Complete Works 17)*

At the trials, Wilde tried to counterattack in a similar way, emphasizing that, if a book seems immoral to a reader, it is the reader who brings the immoral meaning into the book. It was precisely the paradoxical inversions of traditional ethical assumptions like these that caused the perception of Wilde’s work as immoral and potentially harmful even before the trials, as is obvious in many early reviews of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Perhaps Wilde should have been more prudent, but at this point he was the one complaining against Queensberry’s insult, and for a while it seemed that Wilde’s eloquence and confident demeanor would win the day. However, the moment
Queensberry’s lawyer announced that he can summon to the court some half a dozen working-class young men who would witness that Wilde induced them to have sex with him and paid them for it in presents and money, elegant paradoxes sufficed no longer. Wilde’s lawyer was forced to drop the libel case and admit that Queensberry’s statement was “true in fact and substance” and made “for the public benefit” (Hyde, *Oscar Wilde* 175), but he emphasized that this is so only in “reference to the word ‘posing’” (174). His hope was to preserve a clear distinction between “posing” and “being” and thus to save Wilde, if not from scandal, than at least from imprisonment. However, once the distinction between sexual acts and the aspects of his work and appearance that supposedly implied immorality and corruption had been blurred, it was impossible to force the genie back into the bottle. Therefore, Wilde was arrested as a matter of course and charged on several counts for committing “acts of gross indecency” with other male persons (179). The first trial against Wilde ended in hung jury, but at the second trial Wilde was found guilty and sentenced to two years of imprisonment with hard labor.

At this point already, before the gritty details of soiled sheets and paid caresses were even brought up, that Wilde’s identity was pinned down as that of a corrupter, whose seduction endangered wholesome English masculinity. This seduction with the potential to disturb the sense of stable masculine identity, therefore, had more to do with the “enigmatic message” of Wilde’s “transgressive aesthetic,” apparent both in his work and his appearance, than with the unlawful acts Wilde committed. As an example of how much more than actual sexual acts was considered objectionable in the trials, one can look at the letter Wilde wrote to Lord Alfred Douglas in 1893, which engendered more
discussion during the proceedings than any of the sexual escapades described by Wilde’s “renters”:

My Own Boy, Your sonnet is quite lovely, and it is a marvel that those red rose-leaf lips of yours should have been made no less for music of song than for madness of kisses. Your slim gilt soul walks between passion and poetry. I know Hyacinthus, whom Apollo loved so madly, was you in Greek days.

Why are you alone in London, and when do you go to Salisbury?
Do go there to cool your hands in the gray twilight of Gothic things, and come here whenever you like. It is a lovely place – it only lacks you, but go to Salisbury first. Always, with undying love, yours

Oscar (Letters 326)

The letter clearly glorifies the male body of Lord Douglas in a way which can be perceived as poetic or sexual, depending on the reader’s own inclinations. But what is even less ambiguous in the letter than homoerotic desire is its placement of the male body in the position of an idealized, adored, celebrated, and therefore passive object – the position that Victorian gender ideology reserved for the female body. This gender inversion of a kind easily evoked two great, interrelated fears in the minds of many Victorian men. First, the fear of the emasculation of the male positioned as the passive object rather than the active subject, as the one who receives rather than delivers
affection, and potentially penetration. And second, the fear of the liberation of the female from the position of the ideal which effectively kept her passive in the role of the “angel in the house,” a fear largely exacerbated by late-Victorian strengthening of the suffragist movement and the ever greater visibility of the so-called New Woman. These ultimately sexist fears had much to do with the fact that Wilde’s letter to Douglas offended and repulsed the men in the jury at least as strongly as did the possibility of Wilde having committed the actual sexual acts of sodomy.

Queen vs. Wilde:

Class, Corruption, and the Platonic Model of Same-Sex Bonding

The extent to which the public perception of Wilde at this point was not simply that of a man who committed illegal acts but as type of person dangerous for society, and particularly dangerous for the masculinity of that society’s men, becomes clear when one looks at the newspaper accounts of the Wilde trials. This one can serve as a characteristic example:

The man [Wilde] himself was a perfect type of his class, a gross sensualist veneered with the affectation of artistic feeling too delicate for the appreciation of common clay. To him and such as him we owe the spread of moral degeneration amongst young men with abilities sufficient to make them a credit to their country. At the feet of Wilde they have learned
to gain notoriety by blatant conceit, by despising the emotions of healthy humanity and the achievements of wholesome talent.

(From Evening News; quoted in Hyde 12)

Not only does this passage define Wilde as a “type” whose main characteristic is that he corrupts the men around him, but it also makes obvious that late-nineteenth-century concerns with sexuality and efforts to control it had to do with wider social issues of men’s duty to their country and with the worries about the country’s prosperity. In fact, what is fascinating about this passage is that it collects and condenses all those powerful anxieties of the 1890s mentioned earlier and directly links them to both Wilde’s secret sexuality and his public persona. The Aesthetic movement, with its “affectation” and “blatant conceit” and its inspiration in decadent French literature and its promotion of an anti-Victorian sensibility, endangered in the eyes of many the “healthy humanity” and “wholesome talent” of English literary tradition and the patriotic, conservative values it espoused. These values relied on a political and class structure that was shaken by increasing poverty of the working classes and occasional class disturbances, which were often seen as results of “moral degeneration.” Anxieties about the state of the nation were aggravated by the continuous problems in the British colonies, which only strengthened the public feeling that young Englishmen were losing the “abilities sufficient to make them a credit to their country.” All these intricately related issues point to one crucial problem: the threatened integrity of English manhood. The homophobic perception of Wilde as an unscrupulous debauchee with an almost magical power of seduction had
everything to do with Wilde’s anti-essentialist critique of depth, naturalness, authenticity, and normality, as the anchors of personal identity. Wilde’s “transgressive aesthetic,” as well as his unconventional sexual practices, provoked strong gender and class-related anxieties among those whose social position most depended on a stable self-identification in terms of class and gender – namely, middle-class men. The rhetoric of seduction and corruption they employed to condemn Wilde and “such as him” worked to soothe the gender and class anxieties that Wilde’s anti-essentialism provoked.

It is important to emphasize that Wilde’s seductions were of a decisively cross-class character. In fact, even though it must have been apparent that Wilde probably committed sodomy with his intimate friend Lord Alfred Douglas, the friendship with whom brought him into trouble in the first place, as well as some other middle-class men, that was never discussed in the court. The sexual acts relevant for the case rested on the working-class youths who testified that Wilde committed sexual acts with them. This is an interesting example of how, to use Eve Sedgwick’s formulation, “sex [is] an especially charged leverage-point, or point for the exchange of meaning, between gender and class” (11). On the one hand, intense bonding between men was encouraged by the patriarchal power structure because it ensured the persistence of patriarchy. On the other hand, sexual expression of such bonding was condemned. However, as Sedgwick explains, the phenomenon of “men-loving-men” and that of “men-promoting-the-interests-of-men” are significantly interlinked and, indeed, exist as parts of an uninterrupted “homosocial continuum” (1-3). Victorian society, as Richard Dellamora puts it, simultaneously engaged in both “prescription and proscription of intense male bonding” (Masculine
Desire 208). This tension between masculine solidarity and homophobia was relieved through the issue of class. As Jeffrey Weeks claims, many Victorian gentlemen had “a feeling that sex [with another man] could not be spontaneous or natural within the framework of [their] own moralistic and respectable class” (113). Such a gentleman could, “naturally” and lawfully, love another man of his class more than any woman (the famous love of Lord Tennyson for his friend Arthur Hallam is a good example), but if he happened to feel any sexual – “unnatural” and criminal – desire for a person of the same sex, that desire was, as a rule, satisfied with men of the lower classes.

The split between emotions and sexual behavior in terms of class is an extremely significant characteristic of Victorian socio-sexual attitudes, and it is both reflected and resisted in Wilde’s life and writing. In the trials against Wilde, it was assumed by the prosecutor that a gentleman would never buy dinners and clothes for young men socially and educationally inferior to him for any noble or charitable reasons. To some extent, Wilde was a victim of a widespread contemporary campaign for taking greater care of working-class morality and preventing the corruption of youth. Therefore, Wilde’s sexual crossing of the class boundaries was another evidence of his “bad influence,” another aspect of his behavior which was bound to repel and infuriate many upper-class Victorians.

Wilde’s efforts to convince the jury that he had enjoyed the company of young men innocently and that he did not care for social barriers was based on an inversion of the accusation of corruption into the notion of positive, even pedagogical, influence. One way in which he tried to make his relationships with working-class youths seem
respectable was by placing them in the context of his domestic life. Wilde repeatedly used his wife and children as a guarantee of the decency of his relationships with some of the working-class young men who testified against him. "I invited him to my house and he dined with myself and my wife," Wilde said about one of the young men, and a couple of sentences later he emphatically repeated, "I invited him to meet my wife and my family" (Hyde, *Oscar Wilde* 137). Another of these young men, Wilde said, "became a great friend of my sons. He used to go out fishing and sailing and bathing with me and my sons and my sons' friends" (160). And to another one Wilde allegedly promised that "before I left Worthing I would take him somewhere, to some place to which he wished to go, as a reward to his being a pleasant companion to myself and my children" (138-39). In addition to sanitizing his relationship with these working-class youths, Wilde's domestication of these relationships also infantilizes these young men by representing them as his children's playmates. Such infantilization was meant to help him construct for himself an identity of a youth-lover whose goal is to educate and better his youthful companions. The strategy failed, however, as the jurors clearly saw that meeting the wife and children would not prevent the "renter" from committing sodomy with the husband and father.

What is also interesting about the failure of this strategy is that it suggests that the possibility of same-sex bonding becoming a basis for an identity was facilitated by the waning power of a venerable Victorian institution to define a person's identity—the institution of marriage. In all his texts, Wilde assumes a cynical attitude toward marriage. As a critic pointed out, "what makes his drama work is the spirit of anti-marital wit"
which disrupts the dramatic "tradition of bringing human affairs in order of courtship and marriage" (McGhee 269). Even more tellingly, although in 1895, at the time of the trials, Wilde was eleven years married and the father of two sons, not once was he reprimanded in court for insulting the institutions of matrimony and family with his sexual behavior. The only times when his wife and children were mentioned were the ones when he brought them up himself in order to make his relationships with working-class youths appear decent and respectable. However, the fact that Wilde was married told little to the jurors about his identity and proved to be no proof that his aim in regard to these young men was to exercise over them some kind of good influence.

A more successful way in which Wilde tried to create that identity of an older lover of youth whose knowledge and experience meet the energy and enthusiasm of the youth is his famous description of the "Love that Dare Not Speak Its Name" which he offered in the court:

"The Love that dare not speak its name" in this century is such a great affection of an elder for a younger man as there was between David and Jonathan, such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy, and such as you find in the sonnets of Michelangelo and Shakespeare. It is that deep, spiritual affection that is as pure as it is perfect. [...] It is beautiful, it is fine, it is the noblest form of affection. There is nothing unnatural about it. It is intellectual [...] (Hyde 236)
This is a characteristic use of the Platonic pedagogical model of male bonding with the intention to legitimize homosexual desire, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 4. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* Wilde uses the same model to make that desire representable. As Kevin Kopelson claims, “the early gay activists who conflated Victorian inversion/homosexuality and classical pederasty did so, in part, because their audience construed Platonic love as chaste” (19). In such a relationship the sexual intercourse seems superfluous; the carnal is seen as accidental, a station on the road to the ideal. The older man is superior to his younger companion in experience and education — and in the turn-of-the-century version in class — so that he leads his younger companion to the World of Ideas. In other words, Wilde tried to link his sexual acts to, even if by covering them as, a sort of positive influence, a seduction into a more desirable state of being.

That claim, as one of the present lawyers said, “began to ring terribly hollow” (Hyde 2) as a series of uneducated and jobless young men told their stories of how Wilde had given them to eat and drink and then induced them to commit acts of “gross indecency” with him. The prosecutor kept calling these young men “boys” and “lads,” who were “in the hands of Mr. Wilde, [....] dominated, misled and corrupted by Mr. Wilde” (170). Wilde, prosecutor said, “endeavoured in the most systematic way to influence [their minds] towards vicious courses and endeavoured to mould [them] to his own depraved will” (Hyde 191). Wilde’s lawyer’s largely justified claim that these “boys” were really “a horde of blackmailers” was unconvincing in comparison to the prosecutor’s emphasis on the young men’s presumed innocence and victimization by Wilde. It is also important to note that, as H. Montgomery Hyde emphasizes, “the solitary
count on which the jury found him not guilty was the only one on which he was accused of committing an offense with a young man of any social standing and respectability” (85). Just as it seemed doubtless to the jurors that being exceedingly nice to poor, uneducated boys meant preying upon their bodies, it seemed incredible to them that the same “vicious” desire could be directed towards another man of the same social status. They may have also been unwilling to acknowledge, because that was a major source of anxiety throughout the proceedings, that a middle-class man would succumb to such seduction. The judge who sentenced Wilde, in his self-righteous anger, confirmed that the perception of corruption was the most important reason for condemning Wilde so harshly:

It is no use for me to address you. People who can do these things must be dead to all sense of shame, and one cannot hope to produce any effect upon them. It is the worst case I have ever tried. [...] that you, Wilde, have been the centre of a circle of extensive corruption of the most hideous kind among young men, it is [...] impossible to doubt.

I shall, under such circumstances, be expected to pass the severest sentence that the law allows. In my judgment it is totally inadequate for such a case as this. The sentence of the Court is that [...] you be imprisoned and kept to hard labour for two years. (Hyde 339)

The court and the English public did not believe in Wilde’s notion of the “good
influence” that an older man can exercise over his younger companions and condemned him as a dirty old pervert who corrupted wholesome British lads. The trials showed clearly that what was disturbing for the jury, the judge, and the public – especially for the middle-class men among them – was not so much mere sexual acts between men as it was the idea of the corruption of English masculinity through a seductive influence of Wilde’s blurring of boundaries – the boundaries of class and gender, as well as the ones mentioned earlier as crucial for Victorian culture: true/false, moral/immoral. Yet Wilde explicitly stated in court: “I do not think one person influences another” (Hyde 132). That these issues of identity and influence intrigued Wilde even before the trials becomes obvious upon reading The Picture of Dorian Gray, published in 1890, five years before the trials. It is not accidental that the tension between the idea of “influence” and the idea of “self-development” (with its implication of a stable identity) is at the core of the novel. But the novel both posits a radical difference between “influence” and “identity” and exposes that gap as false.

Three Men and a Painting:

Influence and Self-Development, Influence as Self-Development

Ever since Walter Pater stated in an 1891 review that the interest of The Picture of Dorian Gray “turns on that very old theme [...] of a double life of Doppelganger” with an addition of the theme of “the devil’s bargain” (Beckson 85-86), critics have most frequently read Wilde’s novel as a combination of the story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde
and the story of Faust. Dorian’s identity is usually seen as split between good and evil, body and soul, himself and the painting, lost in his self-indulgence, and perhaps recuperated in his final act. But Wilde’s complex story is by no means limited to such simple binaries. Dorian’s “identity” cannot be understood without an understanding of the “identities” of Basil Hallward and Lord Henry Wotton. A triad, rather than a binary, is the principle of the novel’s structure. Furthermore, these three identities cannot be fully distinguished as separate entities because the three men incessantly influence and interpret each other. It is through these two activities that their identities are constructed. Each of the three men is a creation of the other two, and it is through the act of creating the other’s characters’ identity that the identity of each of them is created. The picture of Dorian Gray is at the same time the picture of Basil Hallward and Lord Henry Wotton.

It is tempting to see this infamous painting, which is at the center of the story, as an unlikely “child” of these three men. It could not have been created without any of them. Dorian is a necessary and irreplaceable model; Basil’s talent makes the creation possible; but Henry’s presence and his words to Dorian are also indispensable in this nativity scene. It is Henry’s doctrine of “New Hedonism” (Complete Works 32) that makes Dorian such a perfect model by making him so susceptible to Basil’s artistry and desire. After the painting is finished, Basil comments to Dorian:

“And you have set splendidly to-day. I am awfully obliged to you.”

“That is entirely due to me,” broke in Lord Henry. “Isn’t it, Mr. Gray?”

(33)
No, not entirely, but to a large extent. Without Henry’s presence Basil could have created a beautiful portrait but not a magic one. This masculine *menage a trois* is not only a fantasy of an all-male birth-giving but also a break with the romantic logic of the procreative couple. It takes the labor of three men for the infant-painting to be delivered. When Basil sees the change that his work, in conjunction with Henry’s words, produced on Dorian, he is willing to destroy the painting: “I will not let it come across our three lives and mar them” (35, emphasis added). Although the painting portrays only one of the three men, it “reflects” the identities of all three.

On the other hand, however, while being one of the three “fathers,” Dorian is simultaneously one of the two “children” in the “nativity scene” of the novel. In this dual reading, not only the painting of Dorian Gray, but Dorian Gray himself is a creation of Basil and Henry. As a part of the love triangle, Dorian is an object of Basil’s and Henry’s desire; as their “child,” he is its product. Of course, as Richard Dellamora points out, “homosexuality exists [in this novel] within a heterosexual framework which demands that desire between men be negated” (“Representation” 28). Therefore, the desire between Henry and Basil can be represented in Wilde’s text only symbolically – by the final stage of the creation of Dorian’s portrait. This act of creation is at the same time a (re)creation of Dorian himself, who, still under the impact of Henry’s words, sees Basil’s painting and undergoes a transformation:

The sense of his own beauty came to him like a revelation. He had never felt it before. Basil Hallward’s compliments had seemed to him to be
merely the charming exaggerations of friendship. He had listened to them, laughed at them, forgotten them. They had not influenced his nature. Then had come Lord Henry Wotton with his strange panegyric on youth, his terrible warning of its brevity. That had stirred him at the time, and now, as he stood gazing at the shadow of his own loveliness, the full reality of the description flashed across him. (34)

However, after he kills Basil, Dorian will say that Basil “had more to do with the making or the marring of [my life] than poor Harry has had” (130). In fact, these passages make clear that only the combined effects of Henry’s words and Basil’s art produce the change. Basil has been working on the portrait for a while, but it is only with Henry’s assistance that he manages to complete it, and with such miraculous effect. Both images of Dorian, the physical and the artistic, can be seen as products of the never-consummated love affair between Basil and Henry.

But even within the realm of the symbol, Henry and Basil are not allowed to express their mutual desire. Dorian is not a “child” of their intercourse but of their denial of the intercourse. Conspicuously, Basil and Henry do not communicate with each other during the act of creation. Henry does not look at the painting while Basil is working on it, and Basil is so concentrated on his work that Henry’s words to Dorian do not penetrate Basil’s ears. They both communicate in this scene only with Dorian; or rather, the two of them communicate in this scene only through Dorian. Both Henry and Basil repress their homoerotic desire through different forms of sublimation, creating in themselves a
potential painful split between their sexual desire and its artistic or intellectual expression. The split of their “child” into “Dorian Gray” and “the picture of Dorian Gray” is a symbolic expression of the split within his two “fathers.” From that moment of creation until the very last moment of destruction at the end of the novel, Dorian’s alternating self-indulgence and self-castigation, which lead him first into crime and then into self-destruction, reflect the suppressed psychological turmoil of his two “fathers” caused by their forced sublimation of homoerotic desire.

Inasmuch as Dorian is a “child” of Henry and Basil, he obviously cannot avoid being “influenced” by his “parents.” But inasmuch as he is the third lover in the menage à trois, the question of influence is more complicated. Dorian’s strong influence over Basil is emphasized from the very beginning. Basil’s portrait of Dorian is not a painting like any other, and he does not want it to be publicly exhibited: “The reason I will not exhibit this picture is that I am afraid that I have shown in it the secret of my own soul!” (21). This secret has almost explicitly homoerotic overtones. Basil’s reluctance to speak to Dorian about it, his fear that “the world might guess it” (24), and his appeal to Henry not to set himself as a rival (“Don’t take away from me the one person who gives my art whatever charm it possesses”; 27) all point to the fact that this “curious artistic idolatry” (24) is a sublimated expression of Basil’s homoerotic desire. It is made even more explicit in his later confession to Dorian:

“I was dominated soul, brain, and power by you. You became to me the visible incarnation of that unseen ideal whose memory haunts us artists
like an exquisite dream. I worshiped you. I grew jealous of every one to
whom you spoke. I wanted to have you all to myself. I was only happy
when I was with you.” (93)

The “unseen ideal” Basil is really talking about is the ideal of his own homosexual desire,
made unseen by self-repression. The homoerotic implication was not lost upon the late-
Victorian audience, and this passage figured prominently in the Wilde trials as a proof of
his “posing” as a sodomite.

Lord Henry’s desire to influence Dorian is parallel to Basil’s sublimated
homoerotic desire: “Yes; he [Henry] would try to be to Dorian Gray what, without
knowing it, the lad was to the painter who had fashioned the wonderful portrait. He
would seek to dominate him [...]” (41). If Dorian is to Henry what Basil is to Dorian, then
Dorian serves, in his function as the third lover as well as in his function as the “child,” as
a mediator through which the desire between Henry and Basil is simultaneously
expressed and repressed by means of sublimation. Henry also transmits onto Dorian his
own suppressed desire to rebel against the propriety and disrupt the social norm of
compulsory heterosexuality. Henry himself, as it is stressed in the text by both Basil and
Henry’s aunt (23, 42, 46), is merely a poseur who “never means anything that he says”
(42). If Henry does mean what he says about “New Hedonism,” the need to “seize the
day” and constantly enrich oneself through an openness to new sensations rather than
follow the society’s precepts of morality and propriety, his behavior is not fully
compatible with his ideas. Having limited his hedonism mostly to verbal paradox, Henry
encourages Dorian to go further. If we accept that “New Hedonism” alludes strongly to homosexual behavior, then theorizing about it in clever epigrams is Henry’s way (as it was to some extent Wilde’s) of both voicing and sublimating his homoerotic desire. Just like Basil’s artistry, Henry’s paradoxical wit is a means of both the expression and the sublimation of homoerotic desire. Just as the artistic image of Dorian Gray is primarily a product of Basil’s sublimation, the physical image of Dorian Gray (his behavior after the painting is completed) is primarily a product of Henry’s sublimation. But the two constantly reflect each other and eventually merge into each other, not unlike the way in which the influences of both parents merge in the identity of their offspring.

The repression of subversive desire produces a sense of guilt and defeat in both Basil and Henry. Since Dorian is, in a sense, a product of Basil’s identity, a symbolic image of Basil’s ideal of beauty and innocence, Dorian’s murder of Basil can be seen as a displacement of Basil’s suicidal drive. There is no external motivation for this murder. Basil poses no danger to Dorian. He shows no intention to betray Dorian’s secret because it is Basil’s own secret. It is the sight of the painting after Basil’s confession that compels Dorian to kill its/his creator:

> Dorian Gray glanced at the picture, and suddenly an uncontrollable feeling of hatred for Basil Hallward came over him, as though it had been suggested to him by the image on the canvas, whispered into his ear by those grinning lips. The mad passions of a haunted animal stirred within him and he loathed the man who was seated at the table, more than in his
whole life he had ever loathed anything. (122)

This is readable as a description of Basil’s internal conflict. Since the “image on the canvas,” which suggests the feeling of hatred for Basil, is, according to Basil himself, the image of Basil’s own soul, it is really Basil’s self-hatred that results in violence in this scene. Moments before the murder, Dorian explains to Basil the changes of the portrait by crying that “each of us has Heaven and Hell in him.” In this scene, Basil’s “Heaven” (his ideal of the good embodied in Dorian) is urged by Basil’s Hell (the evil of Basil’s self-repression embodied in the painting) to kill the author of both. Basil’s inability to balance “good” and “evil” within himself ends with self-loathing and self-destruction. When Dorian later tells Alan Campbell about Basil’s death that “it was suicide” (129), in a sense he is telling the truth. At the end of the novel, Dorian himself virtually commits suicide by stabbing the painting, which has become an inseparable part of himself.

Kopelson points out that “suicide was very much on the minds of fin-de-siecle writers and readers,” and in particular, “‘gay’ suicide was [...] in the air” (34). He adds that “homosexuality and suicide coincided phenomenologically as well as sensationally” (36-37). Therefore, Dorian Gray’s unfortunate ending is another hint at the homosexual nature of his “crimes.”

Lord Henry is apparently less inclined to self-reproach and self-hatred. At one point, however, his mask of cynicism gets transparent enough to reveal, behind his witty remarks, his own fear of aging and jealousy over Dorian’s eternal youth:
“Don’t stop [playing the piano, Dorian]. I want music to-night. It seems to me that you are the young Apollo, and that I am Marsyas listening to you. I have sorrows, Dorian, of my own, that even you know nothing of. The tragedy of old age is not that one is old, but that one is young. I am amazed sometimes at my own sincerity.” (162)

The most revealing detail in this lament is hidden under one of Henry’s frequent allusions to Greek mythology. Marsyas did not simply listen to Apollo’s music; he challenged the god by claiming that he could play the flute better than Apollo himself. When it was judged to the contrary, Marsyas was flayed alive by Apollo for punishment. Henry, whose melancholy in this scene is an expression of his regret for the omissions in his life caused by self-repression, feels flayed by Dorian because Dorian was the means by which Henry, like Basil, simultaneously expressed and repressed his homoerotic desire. Henry sees Dorian as less repressed than he knows himself to be and, at the same time, sees in him the symbol of his own repression. Basil’s and Henry’s sublimation of their homoerotic desire through Dorian inexorably links their identities to his. It can even be said that their identities are in him and his identity in them.

The narrator’s defense or justification of Basil’s love for Dorian is very similar to Wilde’s defense of his relationships with working-class youths. This is how, in an internal monologue, Dorian reasons about Basil’s love for him:

The love that he bore him – for it was really love – had nothing in it that
was not noble and intellectual. It was not that mere physical admiration of beauty that is born of the senses, and that dies when the senses tire. It was such love as Michael Angelo had known, and Montaigne, and Winckelmann, and Shakespeare himself. Yes, Basil could have saved him. But it was too late now. (97)

Whereas Basil plays the role of the Platonic Lover to Dorian’s Beloved, Henry plays the one of the corrupter. Since the Platonic model of male bonding as “good influence” (that is, an influence that prepares the influenced person to assume the role[s] the society expects him to assume) is so central for the turn-of-the-century representations of homoerotic desire, Lord Henry’s peculiar inversion of this model is particularly significant. While according to Plato’s theory, the Lover leads his Beloved to a contemplation of the ideal beauty and, therefore, ideal good, Henry leads his “beloved” Dorian, or at least Basil fears he might, to a contemplation and commission of evil deeds. The good pedagogical influence implied in Basil’s overly moralistic attitude toward Dorian is opposed to Henry’s presumably bad influence. However, inasmuch as Dorian’s disfigurement, apparent in the painting, and self-hatred can be seen as reflective of Basil’s own self-hatred caused by self-repression, Basil’s efforts to exercise a “Platonic” good influence over Dorian is inverted. Instead of moving from an admiration for the beautiful body to a contemplation of ideal beauty and ideal good, Basil’s love for Dorian leads to Dorian’s commission of evil deeds and to a disfigurement of his soul and body, caused by Basil’s all too hasty repression of his admiration for Dorian’s body and its forced
sublimation into an artistic ideal.

The idea of influence, however, is not merely inverted but completely undermined in the novel by Henry's ambiguous attitude toward it. On the one hand, Henry indulges in a dream of an absolute influence, which is, as the following passage makes manifest, based on sexual desire:

Talking to him [Dorian] was like playing upon an exquisite violin. He answered to every touch and thrill of the bow.... There was something terribly enthralling in the exercise of influence. No other activity was like it. To project one's soul into some gracious form, and let it tarry there for a moment; to hear one's own intellectual views echoed back to one with all the added music of passion and youth; to convey one's temperament into another as though it were a subtle fluid or a strange perfume; there was a real joy in that — perhaps the most satisfying joy left to us in an age so limited and vulgar as our own, an age grossly carnal in its pleasures, and grossly common in its aims. (41)

“Touch and thrill” from the opening part of the passage points to the sexual basis of Henry’s “most satisfying joy,” but his repudiation of “an age grossly carnal in its pleasures” at the end of the passage hints at his alienation from that sexual basis. Just as Basil has transformed his desire into an artistic expression, Henry has transformed his into an intellectual expression. On the other hand, Henry seems to contradict himself in
claiming that all influence is negative:

“There is no such thing as a good influence, Mr. Gray. All influence is immoral – immoral from the scientific point of view.”

“Why?”

“Because to influence a person is to give him one’s own soul. He does not think his natural thoughts or burn with his natural passions. His virtues are not real to him. His sins, if there are such things as sins, are borrowed. He becomes an echo of some one else’s music, an actor of a part that has not been written for him. The aim of life is self-development. To realize one’s nature perfectly – that is what each of us is here for.” (28-29)

This important passage is a subtle but incisive critique of the Platonic model of male bonding as “good influence.” What is “immoral” about it is that this model facilitates societal determination of a person’s identity, thus severely limiting the ideal of “self-development.” Of course, Henry himself commits this “immoral” act of influence even as he addresses this little tirade to Dorian for the purpose of an intellectual seduction. If Henry’s influence is “bad,” that is, aimed at disrupting the society’s ideas of what a man like Dorian should be like, it nonetheless strives to determine Dorian’s identity by imposing limits to the ideal of “self-development” not unlike the ones imposed by social norms and expectations.
But this ideal of “self-development,” of “realiz[ing] one’s own nature perfectly,” is in itself problematic. Does this “self-development” preclude or resist all influence? Or does it, on the contrary, thrive on influence? A few instances in the text seem to suggest that “self-development” is the direct opposite of influence. One example is the moment when Basil, having witnessed Dorian’s narcissistic outburst upon the completion of the painting, accuses Henry: “This is your doing, Harry.” Lord Henry shrugs his shoulders and denies that Dorian’s narcissism is a result of his influence: “It is the real Dorian Gray – that is all” (35). Dorian himself will later reiterate this attitude when refusing to accept blame for having corrupted his friends (118). It would appear that the reader is forced to choose between two interpretations: either Henry’s influence on Dorian is to blame for Dorian’s sins or that is the way Dorian really is; either Dorian has corrupted his friends or they were already essentially corrupted. This gap between the two possibilities – influence versus a core of identity – is also evident in Henry’s explanation of why being influenced is bad for a person: “His virtues [as well as his sins] are not real to him” (28, emphasis added). If an aspect of my behavior, or even a trait in my character, has been gained through someone’s influence on me, then, somehow, Henry’s statement seems to imply, it is not really mine. But if it is “immoral” of the person who exercises an influence to create this gap, it is also “immoral” of the person who undergoes that influence to maintain it. This attitude implies that it is “immoral,” after having been influenced and having accepted that influence, to fail to see your subsequent actions as your own and to justify your behavior instead by claiming that you have been corrupted by “bad influence.” Wilde himself was a victim of such an abuse of the idea of corruption
in his trials.

In a pivotal moment in the novel, however, this gap, in addition to being immoral, is exposed as false. Dorian’s feelings as he is being intellectually seduced by Henry clearly show that there is no telling where influence ends and authentic identity (or self-development) begins:

For nearly ten minutes he stood there, motionless, with parted lips, and eyes strangely bright. He was dimly conscious that entirely fresh influences were at work within him. Yet they seemed to him to have come really from himself. The few words that Basil’s friend had said to him—words spoken by chance, no doubt, and with willful paradox in them—had touched some secret chord that had never been touched before, but that he felt was now vibrating and throbbing to curious pulses (29-30, emphasis added).

As this passage suggests, a truly successful influence, which is the only kind worth calling that, produces identity by becoming naturalized even as it is being exercised. In other words, a true influence is the one that seems to the influenced person to have been always already within himself, the one that seems to be a part of self-development. In this sense, identity equals influence; they cannot be distinguished from one another.

The three men in The Picture of Dorian Gray do not merely influence each other; they exist in each other. In this way, Wilde’s novel seeks to redefine the concept of
identity, which is not understood any longer as an intrinsic core located somewhere inside one’s self, but rather as being always outside one’s self; it is seen as existing at the points of contact of one’s self with other human beings, or at point in which the self is seduced by the other.

It is this kind of anti-essentialist ideas that contributed, as I have discussed earlier in this chapter, to Wilde’s condemnation in the trials. At the same time, however, the Picture of Dorian Gray can be read as a deconstruction of the very identity of the “corrupter” that was imposed on Wilde at the trials. Just as Basil’s and Henry’s influence on Doran was neither one-directional nor predictable in its outcome, so was Wilde’s exchange with his working-class sexual partners neither the matter of simple victimization nor did they constitute a form of seduction in any merely commonsensical way. The seduction rhetoric that informed the Wilde trials, in its form of the discourse of “corruption,” served to construct a particular kind of the homosexual identity as dangerous and socially harmful. It is intriguing, though, that such seduction rhetoric informs not only the homophobic discourse in Victorian England but also the writing of an author who deliberately positioned himself as an apologist for homosexuality: the French writer Andre Gide.

The Measure of the Soul Is to Destroy It: Andre Gide and Wilde’s Anti-Essentialism

From their very first meeting in Paris in 1891, Gide felt that Wilde’s ideas were destroying something central in Gide’s self-understanding up to that point. Gide’s texts
about Wilde (collected in a short book called *Oscar Wilde*, 1910) provide many details that indicate how powerfully affected Gide was by what Jonathan Dollimore calls Wilde's "transgressive aesthetic," his anti-essentialist critique of depth, naturalness, authenticity, and normality (15). Considering his strict Puritan upbringing and classicist bent, and his somber concern with gaining a clear understanding of his self, it is hardly surprising that Gide felt threatened by such anti-enlightenment philosophy and that he saw Wilde's influence as fatal. Gide's journal from that period is full of the emphatic expressions of this anxiety over Wilde's seductive power over the younger writer's mind:

Wilde did me nothing but harm, I believe. With him, I had forgotten how to think. I had more varied emotions, but I no longer knew how to keep them in order. Above all, I was no longer able to follow other people's conclusions. (January 1, 1892)

It is the threat of disrupting the "order" structured by "other people's conclusions," that is, the threat of de-naturalizing conceptual categories culturally acclaimed as factual, that upsets Gide. Indeed, it upsets him so much that in a letter to Paul Valery written at about the same time (Christmas Eve 1891), Gide exclaims: "since Wilde, I hardly exist at all" (all passages from journals and letter quoted in Fryer 33-34).

But perhaps the most revealing passage from one of Gide's journal entries is the following one, in which he reveals some of Wilde's ideas about identity that disturbed Gide so profoundly:
Wilde is piously setting about killing what remained of my soul, because he says that in order to know the essence of something, one has to suppress it. He wants me to deplore my soul. The effort to destroy it is to be the measure of it. Everything is made up only of its emptiness, etc.

(Friday 4 or December 11, 1891)

Wilde’s anti-essentialist ideas about human identity are easily recognizable here. His point here is not that “essence” does not exist but that it can exist only as a paradox or an oxymoron. Because it is not expressible in positive terms (A=x+y+z), essence can be “reached” only through suppressing any momentarily stable-seeming appearance of it. To “know” it means to be able to perpetually deconstruct and reconstruct it. It is in this sense that “the effort to destroy it is to be the measure of it.”

In psychoanalytic terms, Wilde’s insight translates into the idea that the subject’s impulse to “close in on itself” (Laplanche, “Theory” 662), to understand himself in terms of an apparently stable ego formation, necessarily represses out of that formation much important content of that subject’s psyche. It is through seduction, through an exposure to the otherness of another human being’s “enigmatic message” or to the otherness of the subject’s own unconscious, that the subject goes beyond the ego’s momentary falsification and reconstructs its identity in a new way. As a matter of fact, that is the only way in which a subject can survive change without suffering from pathological symptoms. In other words, the subject has both centripetal and centrifugal impulses; on the one hand it tends to close into a construction of a stable identity, but, on the other, it also needs to
stage a crisis of that identity in order to reconstruct it in a way that accommodates certain new circumstances.

Gide’s accounts of his relationship with Wilde, which I discuss at the beginning of the following chapter, dramatize precisely this dual need of the subject to expose itself to seduction, to an ego-disrupting encounter with the other, but only for the purpose of re-stabilizing the ego on somewhat altered terms. Because of this dual need, Gide, who was never able or willing to subscribe fully to Wilde’s anti-essentialism yet continued to address it, almost obsessively, in his work, consistently stresses, to the point of exaggerating, the link between Wilde and such anti-essentialist ideas. In both Oscar Wilde and in his memoir If It Die, Gide describes Wilde as, not only critical of, but even somehow lacking an “authentic being.” For example, in If It Die, Gide writes: Wilde […] would never cease from acting – could not, no doubt; but the character he acted was his own: the role itself […] was a sincere one” (296, emphasis added). In this passage, Gide concedes that there is something that is Wilde’s “own” and “sincere,” but that something can only exist as an “acted” “role.” “To act” is a vexing verb, of course, because one of its meanings – to exercise one’s agency – is undermined, in a way, by its other meaning – to perform a role. The ambiguity of this verb could symbolize an anti-essentialist outlook because it implies that, while there is such a thing as agency (and the self in which that agency originates), that agency is always a performance. If Wilde acts out his own identity, if he poses as himself, then for Wilde, as Gide sees him, acting is identity or, ipso facto, identity is acting. This is precisely the ambiguity that informed the Wilde trials and was condensed so effectively in the Marquis of Queensberry’s notorious articulation of Wilde’s
sexual persona: “posing as somdomite.”

The next chapter will chart the way in which Wilde, the very man who makes Gide question his very essence and practically causes him to lose his very existence, plays a central role in Gide’s psychosexual adventure of (re)discovering his “authentic being.” Paradoxically, as we will see, it is precisely Wilde’s anti-essentialism that Gide needs in order to construct for himself an essentialist homosexual identity. If there is a paradox here, it lies within Gide’s representation of his homosexual identity itself. Gide’s account of Wilde’s much praised conversation skills as not so much self-expressive as reflective of the personalities of the people Wilde talked to is revealing in this context:

Of his wisdom or indeed of his folly, [Wilde] uttered only what he believed his hearer would relish; he saved each, according to his appetite, his taste; those who expected nothing of him had nothing, or just a bit of light froth.

(Oscar Wilde 3)

If Gide received from Wilde more than just light froth, that is because he was ready for it. Practiced and self-conscious performer that he was, Wilde was able to recognize the fertile ground in his audience. Gide’s youthful reaction against his strict, ultra-ordered upbringing already contained the germs of the attitudes to which Wilde appears to introduce him for the first time. Accordingly, Wilde’s “influence” on Gide is not unlike Lord Henry’s influence on Dorian Gray: Gide’s “self-development” would have been impossible if it were not for Wilde’s seductive anti-essentialism.
Gide never accepts these attitudes as his own, however, because too much is at stake for him in believing in the stability and knowability of his own identity. Personal agency, sense of cultural authority, and gender security might all be jeopardized if he were to endorse Wilde’s conspicuous and his own dormant anti-essentialism. Instead, Gide projects his own anti-essentialist potential onto Wilde in order to be able to articulate and claim for himself an essential homosexuality, which he sees as empowering and reconfirming his masculine agency. This is precisely why Wilde is such a convenient and appealing seducer figure for Gide. Wilde’s resistance to essentialism, hyperbolized by Gide’s displacement of his own unacknowledged resistance to it, allows Gide to see any anti-essentialist doubt as a result of Wilde’s influence rather than something genuinely his own at the very moment when he essentializes his homoerotic desire into a homosexual identity. It is in this sense that Gide opens up to seduction in order to allow for a limited identity crisis for the sake of actually maintaining his identity.  

I begin the next chapter by discussing the seduction rhetoric Gide employs in order to stabilize for himself as a homosexual precisely the kind of masculine identity that Victorian middle-class men feared might be threatened by Wilde’s increasingly visible homosexuality. In Gide’s case, however, the seduction scene is as triangulated as the one in The Picture of Dorian Gray. In addition to Wilde, Gide’s accounts emphasize the significance of a third partner in this exchange – the Arab boy, in his various incarnations – and reveal the significance of colonialism for the construction of Gide’s particular kind of homosexual identity.
Chapter 2

“Normal Homosexuality,” Colonialism, and Mastery

in Andre Gide’s If It Die and The Immoralist

Andre Gide’s memoir If It Die (Si le grain ne meurt; 1920/1924), especially the section in which he describes his adventures in Algeria, partly shared with Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas, and his largely autobiographical novel The Immoralist (L’Immoraliste, 1921), can be read together as parts of Gide’s exceptionally intricate and staunch effort to present homosexuality as his “natural propensity” (If It Die 271), as the true self behind the internalized heteronormativity of his upbringing and education. His insistence on the naturalness and authenticity of his homosexual desire is ultimately related to his efforts to establish cultural authority as a writer and an intellectual. Unlike most modernist writers who went to great lengths to distance themselves from any suspicion of homosexual desire,¹ Gide laid claim to being considered a serious writer not by shying away from same-sex desire but, on the contrary, by placing his homosexual desire at the very center of that claim. In order to do that, he had to distance his homosexual identity forcefully from the late-Victorian dandy nexus of same-sex desire, corruption, and effeminacy. Since this particular version of the dandy-cum-homosexual identity was established to a large degree by the Wilde trials, the post-trials public image of Oscar Wilde was probably the most public embodiment of that figure. Accordingly, Gide exploits the public image of Wilde as the effeminized seducer-dandy as a foil to his
construction of a homosexual identity that, unlike the one of the dandy, would remain compatible with his ambition of becoming a socially responsible intellectual creating work of cultural authority.

The dandy’s power to disrupt “the very binary oppositions by which his culture lives” (Feldman 4), which I discuss at the beginning of Chapter 1, largely manifested in the indeterminacy of his sexual desire and his gender identity, effectively marginalized this figure, draining it of any mainstream cultural authority. In Dandies and Desert Saints, James Eli Adams documents the ways in which Victorian “men of letters,” such as Carlyle, rejected the figure of the dandy in order to avoid tainting the cultural authority of their work by endorsing or exhibiting traits of that marginal figure. The dandy’s penchant for making himself a spectacle, for insisting on his own “superficiality,” does not fit, in this view, the mainstream notion of writing as serious work expressive of the artist’s very essence.

In a culture invested in the depth model of human identity, Gide could establish such cultural authority without denying his homosexuality only by claiming homosexual desire as the very essence of his being, the true self behind the internalized heteronormativity of his upbringing and education. Gide performs this conceptual work in a number of his autobiographical texts by employing a complex rhetoric of seduction, in which both Oscar Wilde and Arab boys play indispensable roles. However, although Gide is at pains to show that his homosexuality is natural, instinctive, and – unlike heterosexuality – independent of any kind of socialization, putting analytical pressure on Gide’s use of the seduction rhetoric in his texts reveals that in them homosexuality is not
simply a name designating a type of sexual instinct but a complex way of positioning the subject within an intricate web of various cultural determinants, in particular gender, colonialism, and the intellectual need for cultural authority.

Effeminacy, Colonialism, and the Role of Arab Boys in the Construction of Western Homosexual Identity

Gide conceptually organizes his would-be natural homosexual identity specifically around the rejection of effeminacy as a necessary ingredient of homosexuality because he wishes to maintain the cultural authority and agency which, in spite of his alleged feminism, are for him masculine prerogatives.² He was adamantly opposed to the inversion model of same-sex desire, which prevailed in the fin-de-siecle Europe, and according to which the invert (or the homosexual) has a female soul in the male body and homosexuality necessarily implies effeminacy. In Coral, Gide’s famous apologia for homosexuality, he strictly distinguishes the “inverts,” whom he describes as “degenerates, people who are sick and obsessed” (119-20; cf. Lucey 73) from “normal homosexuals” who, he insists, are in no way effeminate. Because Gide wants to distance his own homosexuality from the inversion model and its threat of emasculation, he establishes this non-effeminate homosexual identity around relationships that would not jeopardize his precarious sense of masculine agency and mastery. Arab boys, inferior to Gide in age, class, and, according to the colonial logic, race, and fantasized by Gide as submissive and eager to please, thus emerge as privileged objects of Gide’s desire. This enables Gide’s
psychological denial of any danger of emasculation, through either effeminacy or the loss of Puritan control over sexual desire, the need for which Gide never outgrew, as he translates his economic and political colonial privilege into sexual agency and, according to the patriarchal logic, gender mastery. In a move that is by no means unique or even unusual, Gide employs the colonial situation to facilitate his articulation of “normal homosexuality” as different from inversion.

This entanglement of Gide’s distaste for effeminacy and his fear of losing both masculine and colonial mastery is easily detected in the Algerian sections of his memoir If It Die. A good example is this passage expressing Gide’s surprisingly vehement disapproval of the relationship between Lord Alfred Douglas and Ali, a boy Douglas bought from his poor parents and kept as a minion:

I expected just a modest little caouadji, [...] ; it was a young prince who stepped out of the train, in brilliant garments, with a silken sash and a golden turban. He was not sixteen, but how stately his bearing, how proud his glance! What condescending smiles he bestowed on the hotel servants as they bowed before him! How soon he had realized that, humble as he had been the day before, it was now for him to come into the rooms first, to sit down first [...] . Douglas had found his master, and in spite of the elegance of his own clothes, he looked like an attendant, waiting on the orders of his gorgeous servant. [...] 

Ali was certainly beautiful; [...] but his beauty had no power over
me; a sort of hardness in his nostrils, of indifference in the too perfect curve
of his eyebrows, of cruelty in the scornful curl of his lips, checked every
trace of desire in me; and nothing put me more off than the effeminacy of
his whole appearance [...].” (309; emphasis added)

While Gide is most emphatic in his outcry against Ali's effeminacy, what disturbs and
repulses him even more powerfully here is the inversion of both gender and colonial status
allowed by Douglas's behavior. By assuming a submissive attitude toward his own
servant, Douglas himself becomes effeminate in Gide's eyes, whereas Ali, in spite of his
superficial effeminacy and his economic disadvantage, maintains an air of mastery that
Gide finds intolerable.

Another reason that Douglas's treatment of Ali jars Gide so strongly may be that
Arab boys play a very different role in his own conceptualization of homosexuality. Far
from being willing to put them on a pedestal, Gide needs Arab boys precisely because he
feels that their submissive position prevents them from jeopardizing his masculinity and
mastery. Gide's discovery of what he perceives as his true homosexual self pointedly does
not, and apparently could not, take place in France but in the French colony of Algeria. It
is as if only Arab boys could satisfy this particular kind of homosexual desire and as if
only in the colonized Orient this particular “authentic being” can be conceived. The fact
that the emergence of Gide’s “natural propensity” seems to require a colonial context
makes the naturalness and innateness of his homosexual identity questionable, but it also
invites us to consider colonialism’s involvement in the formation of a particular kind of
Western homosexual identity.

Contemporary critical discussions on sexuality and colonialism, when they venture to address homosexuality at all, have tended to assume that homosexuality, as a conceptually coherent Western form of sexual desire, precedes colonialism, while the possibility that colonialism actually participates in the production of a particular homosexual identity has not been much entertained. For example, Joseph Boone’s essay “Vacation Cruises; or, The Homoerotics of Orientalism” expands Edward Said’s notion of the Orient as “a psychic screen on which [Westerners] project fantasies of illicit sexuality and unbridled excess” so that it “mirrors western psychosexual needs” (89). Boone stresses colonial inequality and exploitation which lie concealed behind the fantasy of Arabs’ willing sexual involvement with the Westerners. Gide’s descriptions of Arab boys as always available and, indeed, eager to satisfy Europeans’ desire or even to seduce the hesitant Westerner offer abundant evidence in support of Boone’s claims. Gide fails to see Arab boys as independent subjects and appropriates them instead as the means of satisfying his desire and of awakening him to his “natural propensity.” But in its reliance on the idea that colonialism simply provides a safe outlet or a convenient opportunity for Westerners to express their homoerotic desire, Boone’s analysis overlooks the part colonialism plays in producing an identity organized around that desire. Gide’s encounters with Arab boys are more than just taking advantage of, as he puts it, “their frivolous company which cost no more than a half-franc piece a day” (The Immoralist 45). Colonial inequality inherent in these encounters also enables Gide to negotiate power and agency for the non-effeminate homosexual identity he wishes to promote.
There is a sense in which the Arab boys serve as objects of exchange, as a necessary token of the seduction that, in fact, has less to do with them than with the relationship between middle-class European men themselves. Although the homosexual identity Gide wants for himself depends on the availability and accessibility of Arab boys, the purpose of establishing that identity is really to negotiate agency and desire in the relationship with other European men. Many late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century European homosexual men preferred sexual relationships with younger men of lower classes and other races. This certainly was not a mere matter of taste. The inability or unwillingness of many middle-class homosexuals of the period to establish love affairs with men of their own age, class, and/or race is related to their anxiety about preserving masculine agency equal to other men of comparable standing. This goes a long way to explain why such love affairs as the one between Wilde and Douglas often manifested themselves at least as much in sharing sexual partners of a different class and race as they did in having emotions for and sex with each other. After all, European (homo)sexual tourists as a rule did not travel alone. Wilde explored the Orient and young, male Orientals with Douglas, and Gide usually with his friend Paul Laurens. It seems probable that the Arab boys that European men had sex with and often shared or passed on to each other frequently mediated the disavowed or unacknowledged desire that the European men felt for each other. In this sense, colonialism did not only provide European men with willing and affordable sexual partners, but it also facilitated the complex, still under-analyzed displacement of the desire European men felt for each other as a way to assuage the emasculation anxiety that such desire fostered. However, this sort of displacement was
available to those European male homosexuals who never left Europe as well. In their case, it was working-class youths who carried the burden of this displacement.

Even though in his own relationships with Arab boys Gide insists on maintaining his colonial/masculine mastery, his need to ease his Puritan conscience by appearing to be seduced into the sexual act complicates the exchange of power in these encounters. Gide has to present himself as somehow both seduced and a seducer if these encounters are to fulfill his psychosexual needs. This paradox is very obvious in Gide’s description of his first unambiguously sexual encounter. In this scene, Gide and the boy, whose name also happens to be Ali, are alone in the dunes, when Ali suddenly throws himself on the ground, arms spread out, smiling at Gide, who describes his own reaction in these words:

I wasn’t such a simpleton as to misunderstand his invitation; but I did not respond immediately. I sat down, not far from him, but in any case not too close, and, pointedly staring at him in my turn, I waited, immensely curious to see what he was going to do. [...] And I saw his laughter slowly fade, his lips close over his white teeth; an expression of disappointment, of sadness darkened his charming face. Finally he got up:

“Good-bye, then,” he said.

But, seizing the hand he held out to me, I pulled him back down to the ground. At once he began laughing again.

(If It Die 268; fuller and better translation in Lucey 28-29)
As Michael Lucey, whose discussion of this scene I partly follow, explains, the passage reveals “a desire that it be unclear with whom the sexual encounter originates, an uneasiness with the concept of seduction and the discrepancies in power it implies” (Lucey 28). In the typical gesture of psychosexual projection, Gide presents the boy as his seducer. The boy is the one who has no scruples about sexual exchange. In fact, so unlike Douglas’s disdainful Ali, Gide’s Ali is saddened when he is unable to please and becomes immediately happy again when he is pressed against the ground by the manly European. This construction allows Gide to act against his deeply internalized Puritan inhibitions without having only himself to blame for the breach of sexual purity.

While it would be ever so comforting to Gide if he could assign all seductive agency to Ali and see himself as the victim of the Arab’s unabashed sexuality, he still refuses to cast himself simply as a victim of seduction because Ali is a poor Arab servant. Depicting himself as succumbing to his servant’s seduction would imply precisely the emasculating relinquishment of agency and colonial privilege that he finds so objectionable in the behavior of Lord Alfred Douglas. Consequently, Gide is initially unresponsive to Ali’s invitation, only to assert roughly both his masculinity and his colonial privilege a moment later by manhandling the boy. Inasmuch as this first sexual encounter is an important step in Gide’s discovery of his “true” homosexual identity, it becomes apparent that his would-be “natural propensity” is closely related to his negotiation of his identity in terms of class, race, and gender.
“The Amusement of a Child and a Devil”:

Wilde’s Seduction of Gide into Endorsing a Homosexual Identity

Gide’s construction of homosexuality as innate and natural is further debunked by his need to see himself as seduced not only into homosexual acts but also into endorsing a homosexual identity. Poor, uneducated Arab boys will not do for this kind of seduction. But it is a different story with a famous European artist and renown wit, Gide’s intellectual senior at this time, whose influence, therefore, would not put Gide’s masculinity in question so profoundly as the influence of an Arab boy would. Accordingly, Gide finds his seducer in Oscar Wilde. Although Wilde’s “seduction” of Gide started in 1891, when they met in Paris, the crucial act of seduction, as Gide describes it in If It Die, occurred in Algeria in 1895, just a few months before Wilde was to be imprisoned for acts of “gross indecency” with other men. Gide’s account of this encounter is another complicated web of negotiations of agency and identity.

The most significant events that occurred in Algeria in 1895 began with a moment which illustrates Gide’s characteristically ambiguous attitude toward Wilde. About to check out of a hotel in Blidah, Algeria, Gide spots Wilde’s name on a slate with the list of hotel guests. His first impulse is to wipe out his own name and to rush to the station in an effort to avoid meeting Wilde. On his way to the station, however, Gide worries that Wilde, who may have already seen Gide’s name on the slate, could consider Gide’s running away “cowardly,” so he returns to the hotel and waits for Wilde (If It Die 293). They spend a few days together ogling Arab boys in bars and on the streets. The crucial
event occurs after Gide and Wilde spend an evening in a café entertained by Mohammed, a handsome flute player. Having noticed Gide’s excitement and admiration for the boy, upon leaving the café Wilde asks Gide straightforwardly: “Dear, would you like the little musician?” Gide’s response to what he perceives as an earthshaking question is extravagant: “Oh! how dark the alley was! I thought my heart would fail me; and what a dreadful effort of courage it needed to answer: ‘Yes,’ and with what a choking voice” (304). Gide describes Wilde’s amused reaction to this exaggerated anguish as the pleasure of the seducer with a successful seduction:

Wilde burst out laughing – a resounding laugh, more of triumph than of pleasure, an interminable, uncontrollable, insolent laugh; [...] it was the amusement of a child and a devil. The greatest pleasure of the debauchee is to debauch. (305)

The sexual encounter Wilde then arranges, in which, significantly, he and Gide both sleep with the boy, is not Gide’s first homosexual experience, yet he colors it with particular drama and meaning: “Every time since then that I have sought after pleasure, it is the memory of that night I have pursued” (307). This complex exchange with both Mohammed and Wilde assumes a special status in Gide’s mind because it allows him more than merely to blame somebody else for a temporary lapse into “sin” which would be followed by repentance and abstinence. More drastically, Wilde’s presence enables Gide’s definite acceptance of a homosexual identity. This experience acquires a certain originary
value, the quality of a new beginning for Gide, because now, for the first time, he accepts his desire not as an occasional temptation but as a basis for an identity.

Apparently, it takes three to be “natural.” The crystallization of Gide’s allegedly natural homosexual identity requires the presence of both Wilde and Mohammed. Wilde “seduces” Gide simply by asking the question to which Gide can give the groundbreaking, identity-forming (even if “choking”) positive answer. Gide confesses that homosexual desire must have “already triumphed in my imagination and my thoughts over all my scruples, [but] I didn’t know it myself; it was only, I think, as I answered ‘yes,’ that I suddenly became aware of it” (305). If Gide’s “natural propensity” has to be called into being by another person, then its existence is possible only relationally; that is, his sexual desire is always already social.

What is also interesting in this exchange is Gide, a homosexual and self-proclaimed homophile, employs the same homophobic tropes of “corruption” and “debauchery” used by Wilde’s prosecution, and for a similar purpose – to assuage the gender and class anxieties that Wilde’s words and behavior produced in him. Gide’s description of the scene with Mohammed implicitly insists on a separation between sexual and intellectual seductions. On the one hand, Gide submits to Wilde’s intellectual seduction. Wilde’s offer to arrange the encounter with Mohammed and his laugh “of a child and a devil” have more to do with Wilde’s “transgressive aesthetics” than with the actual sexual acts he and Gide commit with Mohammed. Describing himself as a victim of Wilde’s corrupting influence helps ease Gide’s Puritan conscience. At the same time, any sexual aspect of that seduction (any sexual desire on Gide’s part for Wilde) is denied by
Gide’s insistence that he is exclusively attracted to Arab boys. On the other hand, the fact that Gide places the conceptual burden of the event (the meaning of what happened) on Wilde — in other words, Wilde, and not Mohammed, is the one who causes Gide’s endorsement of a homosexual identity — empties Gide’s sexual intercourse with Mohammed from any meaning in Gide’s mind, thus comforting Gide’s fear of having a younger, uneducated, poor Arab be a significant part of his self-understanding. It is precisely because Gide wants both to divorce his identity-formation from mere sexual acts and, at the same time, to form that identity around sexuality, that he needs both Wilde and Mohammed in this triangulated scene of seduction and identity formation.

“The Naked Flesh,” “The Authentic Being,” and an Interpretative Disagreement

The paradox that Gide comes to conceptualize homosexuality as a natural and authentic sexual desire through his exchange, fantasized as seduction, with Oscar Wilde, a man whom he recognizes as critical of such an essentialist belief in identity, suggests that Gide’s efforts in If It Die to establish for himself an essentially stable, coherent, and authentic homosexual identity reveal that this identity is partly dependent on traces of anti-essentialist doubt. An even more explicit example of this dependence of essentialist identity formation on an anti-essentialist element is found in the character of Michel, the hero of Gide’s novel The Immoralist, who can easily be read as Gide’s fictionalized double. This largely autobiographical novel engages with many of the same issues that pervade his memoir If It Die, and the homosexual awakening of the novel’s hero Michel
parallels Gide’s own homosexual awakening in Algeria. Of course, a complete conflation of the author with the character would lead to an interpretative fallacy. Rather than assuming such a conflation, I want to examine the space between the authorial position and the representation of the character as the space in which the internal contradictions of Gide’s essentialism become most clearly discernable. It is precisely the ever-changing distance between the author and the character, the ways in which Gide can both project himself into and assume a critical distance from his fictional double, that allows him to create a character who simultaneously is and is not himself. This allows Gide to reveal more openly in Michel’s story the ambivalence of an essentializing construction of the homosexual identity, which in his autobiographical work he felt compelled to obscure.

Michel’s ambiguous story of identity-discovery and identity-dissipation is minutely detailed in Gide’s precisely structured, three-part narrative. After the introductory material concerning Michel’s friend’s letter asking for help for Michel, who, at the end of the narrative finds himself baffled and directionless, and the brief history of Michel’s youth and wedding, part one of the novel is dedicated to Michel’s first encounter with the Orient, on his rather unorthodox honeymoon. It describes his “newfound sexual awareness” (The Immoralist 37) through his encounters with Arab boys and his awakening to the ideals of health and strength, so different from his bookish, overwhelmingly proper upbringing, as well as to a powerful desire for living. Even in this early part of the novel, however, one finds hints of the decay and weakness that will later prevail. In fact, whatever it is that Michel gains on his first trip to the East both empowers him and engenders in him something that he considers prudent to restrain and control. Part two of the novel is
dedicated to his efforts to achieve such control. Michel can exercise this restraint only if he succumbs to Western norms and values and, accordingly, this part of the action takes place in France. This central section of the book is itself divided into three parts, the first and the last of which describe Michel’s experiences on his country estate La Moriniere. While in the former part La Moriniere provides Michel with relative and temporary harmony, in the latter part it only precipitates his downfall. The actions of the central section of part two, which is also the center of the whole narrative, is set in Paris. This is the section in which Michel makes his most sustained endeavors to balance the opposing urges of his personality. Finally, part three takes Michel back to the Orient, but this time, in contrast to the initial gaining of health and strength, the East is the scene of Michel’s collapse into the abyss of weakness and degradation. In short, the structure of The Immoralist is chiasmal: the Orient - La Moriniere - Paris - La Morinier - the Orient. This is the trajectory of Michel’s life, through which the dynamics of a paradoxical mixture of his will for mastery and his will for submission are elaborated.

But before I follow this trajectory in more detail in order to unpack some of the paradoxical complexity of Michel’s character, I want to turn briefly to two diametrically opposed critical readings of that character in order to emphasize from the very beginning the high theoretical stakes involved in Michel’s paradoxes. On the one hand, Jonathan Dollimore points out in Sexual Dissidence that Michel discovers “the real self, a new self created from liberated desire” (13). According to Dollimore, this discovery empowers Michel’s resistance to social norms and endows him with a certain mastery over his “self.” On the other hand, Leo Bersani is intent on showing, in his book Homos, that Michel
entirely loses his “self” and all psychological content of his ego in an act of sublime submission to purely impersonal sexual experience.

The critical disagreement spins around the question of just how far Michel’s rejection of his civilization’s institutions goes. The narrative makes it clear that, in a purported effort to gain self-knowledge and achieve authentic self-development, Michel renounces property, religion, education, family, and marriage, in order to gradually endorse his nascent identity of an outcast. Colin W. Nettleback summarizes deftly Michel’s relentless transgression:

All definition of individual and social identity becomes blurred as the erudite archeologist turns his back on books and on other monuments of the past, as the philologist rejects words, as the husband is metamorphosed into a homosexual pedophile, and the rich land-owner ruins his own farm, squanders his fortune, and takes to sleeping with lice-infested destitutes. Barriers of all kinds are demolished: between male and female, rich and poor, master and servant, high and low culture, intellect and sensuality, rational consciousness and instinct. (106-07)

However, for Dollimore, this transgression does not put in question the notion of identity itself. “For Michel, as for Gide,” Dollimore writes, “transgression does not lead to a relinquishing of self but to a totally new sense of self” (13) The passage in the novel which would seem to support this reading most conspicuously, and which is probably Gide’s
most striking articulation of an essentialist homosexual identity, is the one in which Michel, awakened to what he calls his “newfound sexual awareness” (37) through a series of encounters with Arab boys in Algeria, discovers his “true self.” Michel compares himself “to a palimpsest” because, in his words, “beneath more recent script [he] discovers, on the same paper, an infinitely more precious text.” Michel develops this notion:

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

Henceforth this was what I sought to discover: the authentic being, “the Old Adam” whom the Gospels no longer accepted; the man whom everything around me – books, teachers, family and I myself – had tried from the first to suppress. [...] I scorned henceforth that secondary, learned being whom education had pasted over him. Such husks must be stripped away. (51; emphasis added)

The context in which these assertions appear in the novel makes it clear that for Michel the “recent script” or “that secondary, learned being” is a product of heteronormative socialization, which needs to be discarded in order for the “infinitely more precious” authentic homosexuality to emerge. While, according to Dollimore, a more radical position, which he recognizes in Oscar Wilde, would be to insist that all being is
“secondary” and “learned” and authenticity a mere illusion, Michel remains a firm believer in a stable, essential identity. Bersani, however, uses the same passage from The Immoralist to come to an entirely different conclusion, in support of his theoretical project in Homos, which is to argue for the liberating power of relinquishing the illusory stability of identity. The crucial part of Michel’s extended metaphor for both critics is his statement that what he discovers under the peels of his acquired, “secondary” being is “the naked flesh beneath, the authentic being hidden there” (51). While Dollimore stresses the latter part of the sentence, Bersani emphasizes the former and, choosing to understand it literally, claims that Michel’s authentic being is his naked flesh. “It is the surface that is hidden; the authentic is the superficial,” claims Bersani, sounding much like Oscar Wilde, and adds that, when Michel touches the naked flesh of an Arab boy,

his [Michel’s] authentic being – his naked flesh – extends itself into the world, abolishing the space between it and the soil, the grass, and the air. He is, briefly, the contact between himself and the world, and he has simultaneously become nothing but a bodily ego and has broken down the boundaries of that ego. Outside himself, he has lost himself. The narcissistic expansion of a desiring skin is also the renunciation of narcissistic self-containment. (120, emphasis in original)

Whereas in Dollimore’s view Michel’s discovery of his “authentic being” means mastery over his self, for Bersani it means the loss of that very self.
Bersani's project is an intriguing and inspiring effort to articulate some ways in which certain forms of homoeroticism (promiscuity, anonymous sexual exchange, etc.) can be theorized as going beyond the traditional gay goals of resisting oppression and struggling for assimilation (the demand for "gay marriage," for example) and might be able to effect a more significant disruption of the institutions and concepts (such as the "self") on which hegemonic heteronormativity is based. For Bersani, the renunciation of self, achieved through a renunciation of personalized relations, is an act of liberation from the restricting impositions of both ego psychology and society. There is much appeal in a passage like this:

Michel's pederasty is the model for intimacies devoid of intimacy. It proposes that we move more irresponsibly among other bodies, somewhat indifferent to them, demanding nothing more than that they be as available to contact as we are, and that, no longer owned by others, they also renounce self-ownership and agree to that loss of boundaries which will allow them to be, with us, shifting points of rest in a universal and mobile communication of being" (128)

But if there is in it much that is appealing as a theoretical proposition, there is also much that is objectionable as an interpretation of Michel's character. While Bersani's critique of relationality and his theorizing of radical, impersonal promiscuity as a desirable act of breaking the bonds of the psychology of the self and of resisting the urge to define human
relations as property relations is a fascinating and welcome effort to rescue this form of (homo)sexual behavior from being too easily condemned as immoral and/or unhealthy in the age of AIDS, his interpretation of The Immoralist simplifies Michel’s character by radicalizing it. It is true that Michel is critical of the “appearance of life” (The Immoralist 90) in Paris and of the hypocrisy of “restriction, convention, timidity” (146) in Switzerland. It is also true that at times Michel makes statements that might support Bersani’s reading. For example, in one instance, Michel describes his “longing for a more spacious and exposed life, a life less constrained and less concerned for others” (92, emphasis added). However, Michel is no prophet of a radically different life but a subject struggling with his own contradictory impulses.

One way in which Michel is less than a perfect rebel is his continuing reliance on colonial privilege for in his struggle for personal liberation, whether we see that liberation as the discovery of his true self or as the radical dissipation of selfhood. In whatever sense his personal liberation may be seen as transgressive, it also leaves him deeply dependent on and in compliance with the power structures he seeks to transgress. Michel’s compliance is particularly conspicuous in his failure to reject the colonizing impulse and in his reluctance to overcome the Westerner’s habit of using Orientals, rather like aphrodisiacs or sex-toys, as a convenient means of liberating and expressing his suppressed sexuality. As Boone puts it,

Michel’s awakening also depends on his refusal to see the actual foreign others who embody his desire as anything other than objects: boys, once
Michel realizes he desires them, form an endless chain of anonymous, available bodies, the means to his awakening, never subjects of their own stories. (101)

Unlike both Dollimore and Boone, however, Bersani believes that Michel’s very colonizing impulses “were perhaps the precondition for a potentially revolutionary eroticism. By abandoning himself to the appearances of sexual colonialism, Gide was able to free himself from the European version of relationship that supported the colonialism” (122-23). Bent on discovering a radical, anti-communitarian erotic pleasure in Gide’s novel, Bersani calls Michel’s pederasty “nonrelational” because “it eliminates from ‘sex’ the necessity of any relation whatsoever” (122, emphasis in original). For Bersani, Michel’s “eroticism is uncontaminated by a psychology of desire, [...] unaccompanied by an essentially doomed and generally anguished interrogation of the other’s desires” (123).

While Boone’s postcolonial reading of the novel is at times somewhat didactic and sentimental in its sympathy for the “abused” boys, Bersani’s reading occasionally becomes too propagandist and utopian. For example, he interprets Michel’s travels as nothing less than a mission of spreading “his superficial view of human relations, preaching [...] a community in which the other, no longer respected or violated as a person, would merely be cruised as another opportunity, at once insignificant and precious, for narcissistic pleasures” (129). He praises Michel’s pederasty as “self-less.” Michel’s sexual preference, according to Bersani, is “without psychic content; there are no complexes, no repressed conflicts, no developmental explanations, only the chaste promiscuity of a body repeatedly
reaching out to find itself beyond itself” (125). Bersani projects onto Michel’s experience and psychology so much of his own theoretical and political claims that he begins to resemble those “occidental travelers” who project their own needs and desires on the Orientals. What does it mean, for example, to say that Gide abandons himself to the “appearances of sexual colonialism” (123)? How could any interpretation of The Immoralist, however focused on the hero’s psychology rather than his social surroundings, disregard the fact that Michel usually buys his “points of rest” and that his “chaste promiscuity” is based on taking advantage of a privileged position in an asymmetrical relationship of economic and political power? While sexual exchanges between gay men in various gay cruising grounds today may indeed be independent of any financial consideration, money is never absent from Michel’s relationships with Arab boys: “I still relished their frivolous companionship which cost no more than a half-frank piece a day” (The Immoralist 45). That in itself certainly compromised the “purity” of Michel’s flesh “extend[ing] itself into the world” (Bersani 120) and belies the equality implied in Bersani’s notion that in such exchanges we demand of the other “nothing more than that they be as available to contact as we are” (128, emphasis added).

Bersani also exaggerates when he says that “there are no complexes, no repressed conflicts” (125) in Michel’s promiscuous pursuits. Both fear and guilt are Michel’s constant companions, and Michel himself says at the end of the narrative: “I’m afraid that what I have suppressed will take its revenge” (170). Whether this alludes simply to his homosexuality or to something more complex, Bersani’s claim that Michel’s sexual behavior is devoid of all psychical content does not stand. As a matter of fact, it is
precisely the ambiguity and contradiction of his impulses toward mastery and toward dissipation that characterize Michel most strongly, and that ambiguity is for him nothing if not painful and intimidating.

The sharp contrast between Dollimore’s and Bersani’s readings of the novel can be partly explained by their very different theoretical and political projects. Dollimore strives to show that there can be some empowerment and political resistance in the currently disfavored essentialist understanding of identity, while Bersani seeks to articulate resistance through a critique of the notion of a psychologically stable and discreet identity. But how is it possible that both diametrically opposed theories of identity can be elaborated in the context of one and the same character? A part of the answer may be that Dollimore and Bersani focus on Michel in two different phases of his development/degeneration. Dollimore has in mind primarily the Michel of the first part of the novel, the one who discovers his “authentic being” and strives to achieve strength and health, while Bersani leans toward the Michel of the last part of the novel, the one who abandons himself to dissipation and debauchery. However, a developmental explanation falsifies the complexity of Michel’s character. The point is not that Gide’s representation of Michel reveals both essentialist and anti-essentialist elements at different moments in the trajectory of Michel’s experience. The point is that these elements feed off of each other and that, in the character of Michel, Gide articulated and expression of this interdependence, which remains unacknowledged and unrepresented in If It Die. On the one hand, Michel’s desire to achieve health and mastery of his own identity confirms his need for an essentialist identity based on an unambiguous masculine homosexuality, like
the one Gide constructs for himself in the memoir. On the other hand, Michel’s inclination
to abandon himself to a dissipation of both his health and his stable masculine identity
reveals the anti-essentialist impulse within his struggle for personal liberation from any
“learned, secondary being.”

Poaching One’s Own Property: The Outcast with Cultural Authority

One of the most striking examples of Michel’s perpetual self-contradictory
impulses to both establish and undermine his position as someone who is in control of his
life and who strives to liberate and fully understand his identity is the following
conversation from the middle part of the novel between Michel and the son of the
caretaker of Michel’s estate La Moriniere, Charles. This exchange follows Charles’s
reproaching Michel for allowing, indeed assisting, some poaching activity at the estate:

“Oh, you’re the master here, all right. You do whatever you please.”

“Charles, [...] If I do what I please, it harms no one except myself.”

[Charles] shrugged slightly. “How can you expect us to protect your
interests if you undermine them yourself? You can’t defend both the
poacher and the gamekeeper.”

“Why not?” (137)

In fact, not only does Michel defend both the poacher and the gamekeeper, but he actually
poaches his own property. This desire to assert his mastery while at the same time undermining it is typical of Michel’s actions throughout the novel. In various ways, Michel positions himself as a transgressor but also insists on preserving the privileged position against which he transgresses, including a stable, coherent sense of his very identity. According to one critic, “Michel’s unconscious project is to become both accomplice and authority-figure simultaneously” (Pensome 835). He wants to achieve a “synthesis between the dialectical opposites of his personality, (a) the law-abiding adult and authority figure, governed by the Reality principle, and (b) the infantile accomplice, guided by the Pleasure principle” (837). As part of this psychological dynamic, Michel “procures for himself simultaneous heterosexual and homosexual identities” (838). While this assessment of the character rings true and informs to some extent my own reading of the novel, I want to emphasize the ways in which this paradoxical dynamic functions as a prolonged identity crisis through which, and only through which, Michel can establish a strong sense of identity. That crisis is instigated through relationships which the narrative frequently represents as seductions.

Michel’s psychological indeterminacy pervades the narrative, as he ponders the opposed notions of health and disease, strength and weakness, and moves, paradoxically, toward both extremes in each of these binaries. His peculiar behavior is a mixture of the will for mastery, expressed in his desire to achieve health and strength, and the will for submission, expressed as his abandonment to decay and weakness. Michel’s efforts to position himself as both the master and the transgressor have a decidedly sadomasochistic flavor.
While Michel initially tries to fulfill his contradictory desires in France, he soon discovers that the Orient makes a far more convenient ground for such paradoxical striving. In a manner habitual for European colonizers and travelers, Michel posits the Orient and Orientals as an Other through which to express and on which to project his psycho-sexual fantasies. As Edward Said explains, “the Orient was almost a European invention,” and it is one of Europe’s “deepest and most recurring images of the Other” (1). Such othering of the Orient has often had a sexual dimension. Joseph Boone claims that “the geopolitical realities of the Arabic Orient become a psychic screen on which to project fantasies of illicit sexuality and unbridled excess” so that it “mirrors western psychosexual needs” (89).

While in a previous section of this chapter I emphasized how colonialism participates in the construction of a particular kind of homosexual identity, here it is worth pointing out that this kind of psychosexual colonization that Said and Boone talk about makes the Orient even more convenient for the “personal liberation” of the Western homosexual because there he can be both an outcast, flaunting his transgressive sexuality, and still a preserving the advantages of his colonial privilege. In Gide’s case, it enabled him to endorse homosexuality yet preserve, even strengthen his cultural authority as a writer, and in the case of his fictional counterpart Michel, it allowed him engage in this peculiar psycho-sexual dynamic of mastery and submission. Boone’s analysis of several texts about the Orient written by European male writers with homosexual inclinations offers the following conclusion:
In narratives where the occidental traveler by virtue of his homosexuality is already the other, the presumed equivalence of Eastern homosexuality and occidental personal liberation may disguise the specter of colonial privilege and exploitation encoded in the hierarchy white man / brown boy. (104)

Michel is one such “occidental traveler” who, blinded by his self-idealization as an outcast from Western civilization, overlooks the colonizing complicity of his homoeroticization of the Orient. Boone’s analysis, however, doesn’t tackle the psychological complexity of the interaction of homoeroticism and orientalism in Michel’s experience. To say that homosexuality already makes him “the other” and to assume that Michel unequivocally strives for “personal liberation” simplifies his contradictory tendencies. The Orient is more than just a place where Michel can take advantage of the availability and affordability of Arab boys while ignoring the fact that taking this advantage makes him complicit with the colonialist project; it is also an enabling factor in Michel’s desire to be both homosexual and heterosexual, authority and its transgressor, engaged in striving both for mastery and for submission, establishing a stable, authentic identity for himself yet undermining it at the same time.

To understand better the paradoxically two-directional nature of Michel’s psychosexual trajectory, it is important to emphasize that The Immoralist, while primarily a psychological study and a confessional narrative, is also much more political than it may appear at first glance. Although the structures of a colonialist society are merely sketched in it, the novel is, according to James T. Day, “thoroughly preoccupied with ethics and
values in the larger social context” (30). Day reads it as a bildungsroman or a “story of social apprenticeship” (24). As far as we can tell at the end of the novel, Michel’s “social apprenticeship” fails, as he desperately invite his friends to come to a tiny Algerian village, where he dwells having lost all sense of what he wants to do or how to do it, and begs them: “Tear me away from this place now, give me some reason to live” (169). However, the reader is not left to assume that Michel is likely to end his days as an outcast. The novel opens with Michel’s friend’s letter to his “dear brother” Monsieur D. R., “president du conseil” (3). According to Nettleback, this request for help for Michel is addressed “to no less a personage than the head of the French government” (105). Not only does this detail emphasize Michel’s high connections, but it also links Michel’s personal sexual exploration and exploitation of the Orient with the politics of his country. If the prime minister of France himself is invited to find a job for Michel and thus condone, or at least forgive, his behavior, then Michel’s trade with Arab boys can be seen as a form of French economic colonization of the Orient.

There are ways in which Michel’s simultaneous self-development and self-disintegration parallel the transformations of his society. On a certain level, Michel’s dissipation is represented as a symptom of the decay of his Frenchness. According to Nettleback,

Michel starts out very French. His marriage in the village church near Angers [...] is only the first of many signs of organic attachment to his homeland. It is reinforced by his roots in Normandy, and the long-standing
family distinction that gave him such access to the College de France and to a luxurious Passy house. (107)

But Michel’s links to his national heritage rapidly break in the second half of the novel, as he puts La Moriniere for sale, abandons his position at the Collège de France, and settles in an obscure Algerian village. The reverse proportionality between Michel’s increasing decadence and his decreasing sense of national identity and belonging seems to imply that his alienation from France is one of his irrational acts of dissipation or that dissipation is in itself non-French (or even anti-French). On the other hand, it is possible to read Michel’s decay as an allegory of the decay of many traditional French values. Nettleback reminds us that “France, in its role of nation-state and ‘owner’ of a great colonial empire, sought to maintain in its international stance the very notions of authority, hierarchy and tradition that, in its internal cultural world, were being displaced” (109). This insight helps us understand better Michel’s (and Gide’s) need to articulate his transgression in the context of the colonized Algeria, where his homosexual “authentic being,” which would be pressured into assuming a marginalized, subcultural position in Europe, can develop without completely bankrupting his cultural authority and privileged position. Just like Gide in his triangulated negotiation of identity through the exchanges with Wilde and Arab boys, Michel toys with the role of an outcast, but in spite of his genuine personal strife and psychological turmoil, his very transgression reconfirms his embeddedness in the fundamental psycho-social coordinates of the society that engendered him.

The question of the relationship between the society and the subject who
deliberately positions himself as an outcast from that society and a transgressor of its norms is raised in Michel’s friend’s letter to the president du conseil:

[...] more than one man today, I fear, would venture to recognize himself in this narrative. Can we accommodate so much intelligence, so much strength – or must we refuse them any place among us?

How can a man like Michel serve the state? (3)

Two related questions emerge from this passage: Can a society afford to disown the sheep gone astray, or should it endeavor to bring it back to the flock? Can a self-willed outcast serve the power structures he defies by that very act of defiance? These are very important questions for Gide, who, as I argued earlier, wishes to establish for himself a homosexual identity which would not be an outcast identity but, on the contrary, guarantee the subject a position within the cultural mainstream. To an extent, this is simply the question of the society’s inclusiveness, but, beyond that, it is also the question of the mutual co-dependence of the society and the outcast for their respective self Definitions.

That a simple rejection of individuals who do not comply to social rules is not possible [?] is confirmed by what happens to Michel’s friend Menalque, a Wildean figure in the novel. After temporary ostracism for an unspecified transgression, Menalque is forgiven and sent on a mission important for the state. Michel’s transgression is perhaps more radical than Menalque’s apparently mostly verbal critique of social hypocrisy, but even he seems to be incapable of an entirely uncompromising resistance to the pressure of
his society. At the point when he is in danger of completely “going native,” Michel virtually changes his mind. It is all very well to be an “outcast” while, on a certain level, one maintains one’s privileged position of authority, but to actually “become” an Oriental is more than Michel’s transgressive desire can reach.

The Journey to Health: Self-Discovery and Self-Disintegration in The Immoralist

It is important to notice that the initial point of Michel’s trajectory of transgression (self-development and self-dissipation) is the position of an excessively proper citizen. At the very beginning of the narrative, Michel’s friend points out that Michel used to be a “learned Puritan [...] whose gestures were clumsy in their very earnestness, whose gaze was so guileless that our loose talk often ceased in his presence” (4-5). Michel himself emphasizes the extent to which he was influenced by his mother’s Huguenot austerity, which his father, then, directed toward education rather than religion. Michel used to be what Menalque would later call the “blind scholar,” “Bookworm,” and “routine pedant” (96). Michel’s initially highly orderly and intellectual living makes his fall into voluptuousness and sensual abandon appear even more drastic.

Although Michel never fully abandons the spiritual and material strength of his social position as a well-to-do, upper-class European, he incessantly seeks to diminish this kind of strength by setting himself as an outcast in a number of ways. This complex interplay between strength and weakness, as well as between the parallel oppositions of health and illness, pervaded Michel’s understanding of himself. While throughout the
narrative Michel strives to represent his experience as an effort to achieve strength and health, these ideal are always conflated with his fascination for weakness and decay, both his own and that of others.

Both Michel’s social and his spiritual strength are initially parts of his family inheritance and upbringing, and so is his purported dislike of weakness: “I have kept, I think, from my puritanical childhood this hatred of any surrender to weakness; I immediately called it cowardice” (17). But he does not seem to realize that his will for submission is rooted in his family relations as well. After all, Michel’s own father is the first person to whose will Michel readily and entirely submits. It is his father who directs the austerity and fervor Michel has been brought up with by his mother toward scholarly pursuits. Not only does Michel make no choice of his own as to how to spend his early youth, but he even allows his first scholarly work to be appropriated by and published under the name of his father (9). More than that, he marries Marceline “without loving her; mostly to please my father” (8). This submission to the will of the father symbolizes Michel’s initial submission to tradition and convention.

His heterosexual union with Marceline is a part of that acceptance of tradition. This is underlined by the fact that Michel and Marceline are childhood friends and that their “families had been connected as long as [Michel] could remember” (12). The marriage itself, therefore, brings little change to Michel’s life, but his honeymoon journey to Africa leads him to a revelation. On the ship, he begins “to reflect, at last. And, it seemed, for the first time” (11). Upon the arrival in Tunis, Michel experiences an awakening which is described in Paterian-Wildean terms: “At the contact of new
sensations, certain parts of myself stirred, dormant faculties which, not having functioned yet, retained all their mysterious youth” (14). He starts losing interest in ruins and other scholarly pursuits and becomes increasingly open to sensual impressions. Michel’s awakening to a new life is emphasized by his sudden illness, which brings him to the verge of death. Symbolically, this is the death of his old, proper, and undisturbed Michel. “Till now,” he concludes, “I never realized that I was alive. Now I would make the thrilling discovery of life” (21). He abandons even his books because “being is occupation enough” (22).

But Michel’s illness and his initially willing submission to Marceline’s devoted nursing also introduce the theme of the asymmetry of strength and weakness in their relationship. Marceline is clearly the stronger of the two in the first weeks of their marriage. While Michel faints, bleeds from the nose, and has to be confined to bed, “Marceline was magnificent. [...] Her confidence was complete, her zeal never flagged for a moment. She supervised everything, managed the departures, arranged the lodgings” (20). Marceline successfully nurses her patient-husband back into health, which is more than can be said for Michel’s own half-hearted nursing efforts later on when Marceline gets sick. Marceline, in a way, replaces Michel’s mother as a strong – nursing but also imposing – figure in Michel’s life, which may be one of the reasons why he eventually resents her.

While Michel’s return to health owes a lot to Marceline’s nursing, it would have been impossible without his encounter with Arab boys. After their arrival in Biskra, Michel concentrates his attention on the handsome and healthy boys they meet there, while
Marceline is primarily interested in the “weak, sickly” ones, assuming toward them the same protective attitude she cultivates toward her husband. “I lost my temper with her and with them,” Michel recounts, “and finally drove them away. To tell the truth, they frightened me” (43). The reason why the sickly boys inspire Michel with not only contempt but also fear is that he initially identifies with them, effectively infantilized by his sharing Marceline’s nursing with them. As he gets more and more attracted to healthy boys, however, Michel begins to resent Marceline’s motherly power:

But what upset me, I admit, was not the children but Marceline. Yes, however slightly, I was upset by her presence. If I had stood up, she would have followed me; if I had taken off my shawl, she would have offered to carry it; if I had put it on again, she would have asked if I felt cold. And then, I dared not speak to the children in front of her. (32-33)

Michel does not feel as free to have his pleasure with the boys in Marceline’s presence, but even more importantly, Marceline’s concern makes him look like a child who needs protection rather than a grown up man whom the boys should look up to and whose needs they should eagerly meet.

As his nascent homosexual desire inspires in Michel the desire to be healthier and stronger, he starts to defy actively Marceline’s nursing power over him. The moment when he finally frees himself from it is the moment of his first, and apparently only, sexual possession of Marceline. What precedes Michel’s display of virility is an exhibition of his
masculine power over another man, as Michel beats the drunken coachman. Turned on by his asserted strength, Michel “possessed Marceline” that night, and while she sleeps afterwards, he ponders: “It seemed to me now that I was stronger, that she had become even more delicate, as if her grace were a kind of fragility” (63-64).

Although Michel’s health and strength culminate in an apparently heterosexual passion, they are born and developed through his homoerotic desire. Ironically, it is Marceline herself who brings to him Bachir, the first Arab boy to whom Michel feels attracted. At first, Michel is embarrassed by the boy’s presence and hostile to him. In response, Bachir “turns back to Marceline and with a movement of caressing animal grace, snuggles against her, takes her hand and kisses it with a gesture which exposes his bare arms. I notice that he is naked under his skimpy white gandoura and patched burnous” (22). The moment is eroticized both by Bachir’s kissing Marceline, thus stepping into Michel’s role, and by Michel’s gaze at Bachir’s barely covered nakedness, which, in a sense, puts Bachir in Marceline’s role. In this short scene of erotic triangulation, a pattern is established which will recur many times in the novel. Michel’s homosexual desire is as a rule expressed through the mediation of a woman, who serves as a mask or an excuse.

But what follows in the Bachir scene leaves no room for doubt about Michel’s sexual interest. While Bachir is trying to make a whistle, with its all too obvious phallic symbolism, Michel notices that “his feet are bare, his ankles lovely, as are his wrists.” And Michel’s gaze does not stop there:

The gandoura, sliding down, reveals his delicate shoulder. I must touch it. I
lean down; he turns and smiles at me. I hold out my hand for his whistle, 
take it and pretend to admire it extravagantly. Now he wants to leave. 
Marceline gives him a cookie, I give him two sous. (23) 

The way Michel pays for handling and admiring the boy’s whistle is an anticipation of his 
later, more explicit sexual bargains. The eroticized relationship between Michel and 
Bachir continues the next day when Bachir, working on his whistle, cuts his thumb and 
“lick[s] the wound with delight.” At this moment, Michel is enchanted with Bachir’s body, 
but he translates that as a fascination with Bachir’s health: “How healthy he was! That was 
what beguiled me about him: health. The health of that little body was beautiful” (24). It 
could be said, indeed, that health stands for homosexuality in the novel. Just as in Corydon 
and If It Die Gide eliminates effeminacy, theorized as a necessary part of sexual inversion 
by sexologists, from his conceptualization of a natural homosexual identity, here Gide 
replaces the sexologists’ and degeneration theorists’ link between homosexuality and 
disease with a newly forged link between homosexuality and health. From this encounter 
with Bachir on, Michel’s desire to be healthy and strong is always linked to his 
homosexual desire. It is as a consequence of his nascent sexual urge that he feels: “I was 
beginning, alas, to love life” (25). 

On the other hand, Michel’s homosexual desire is also linked to submissiveness 
and illness. After initial assertion in touching the boy’s body, Michel relinquishes the 
initiative to Bachir in their subsequent encounter. In fact, Michel unambiguously enjoys 
his submissiveness:
The next day, [Bachir] brought marbles. He wanted me to play with him. Marceline was out; she would have stopped me. I hesitated, looked at Bachir; the child grabbed my arm, thrust the marbles into my hand, forced me. I soon began to wheeze from bending over, but tried to play all the same. Bachir’s pleasure enchanted me. At last I could bear no more. I was covered with sweat. (24)

Marceline’s welcome absence, Bachir’s aggressiveness, Michel’s bending over and sweating, all endow this passage with unmistakable sexual connotations. Similarly to the scene of Gide’s ambiguous seduction by/of Ali in the dunes discussed earlier, it is the Arab boy who is represented here as not only willing to engage in a sexualized encounter with a European man but indeed as eager to initiate and even “force” that encounter onto the European. But there is an important difference between Gide’s ultimate manhandling of Ali and Michel’s submission to Bachir’s pleasure. While Gide must never allow himself to appear passive and submissive in a relationship with an Arab boy, Michel, in contrast to his assertive masculine “possession” of Marceline (the violence of his exchange with the coachman might be a displaced representation of this assertion), positively indulges in such passivity and submission. The scene could even be read as Michel’s fantasy of being penetrated by the boy, which would signify for Michel the loss of his masculine identity. On some level, Michel might desire such a loss; however, the idea of it also engenders the fear which immediately leads to Michel’s feeling even more ill.

Michel’s unacknowledged desire to relinquish his masculine identity is manifest in
various other details in this part of the narrative. For example, in response to his
“tormenting need to express outwardly the inmost change of [his] being,” Michel decides
to shave his beard, clearly a symbol of adult manhood. It “bothered me,” he says, “it was
like a final garment I could not strip off” (58). If the beard is a symbol of masculinity, and
if it is described here as just another of those “husks” of “secondary, learned being” that
“must be stripped away” (51), than Michel implies here something that Gide never allows
himself to contemplate in his memoirs — that even his masculine identity is a role, acquired
through socialization, and not a natural and necessary core of his self. And even more
strikingly, that a part of him wants to shatter and disrupt that illusory truth of his being.
Perhaps in a semi-conscious recognition of that need to relinquish masculinity and endorse
its opposite as a part of himself, “in compensation [for his shaved bearded, Michel lets his]
hair grow” (59).

But having denuded his face, as in another scene he denudes his body as a crucial
stage in his sensual awakening, Michel develops a new anxiety: “others could read my
thoughts now, thoughts which to me seemed suddenly fearful” (59). Since Michel
simultaneously strives to establish a strong virile identity for himself, these “fearful
thoughts” of emasculation through the acts of sexual submission to another man engender
in him — pace Bersani’s claim that Michel’s desire knows “no complexes, no repressed
conflicts” (125) — a strong sense of guilt, which finds expression in the attack of
hemorrhage Michel endures only a few hours after playing with Bachir’s marbles. He spits
blood and compares it to Bachir’s blood: “The blood was ugly, blackish — something
slimy, hideous. I thought of Bachir’s beautiful, quick-flowing blood. And suddenly I was
seized by a desire, a craving, something wilder, more imperious than I had ever felt before: to live!” (25). Michel’s “thirst for existence” (25) is here explicitly linked to his homosexual desire, which, however, remains tainted with illness. In this manner, Michel’s acquisition of vitality and strength contains traces of his eventual collapse into weakness and dissolution. At first, while his strength completely depends on his social position and acceptance of tradition, Michel is both psychologically and physically weak and requires Marceline’s nursing. Later, as he makes his first steps toward rejecting tradition and making himself an outcast, Michel appears to gain a more personal kind of strength, based on a sense of discovery of his “authentic being,” even though this appearance of stable identity will not last long.

Health Covered with Vermin: The Journey to Dissipation

The first sign of Michel’s rejection of traditional values and institutions, such as property, is the scene in which he allows Moktir, another boy he fancies, to steal for him a pair of scissors. The object in question is interesting for a couple of reasons. First of all, the scissors belong to Marceline, and Michel’s complicity with Moktir’s theft seems to indicate his acceptance of the boy’s replacing Marceline in Michel’s desire. Secondly, the scissors, as phallic as Bachir’s whistle, allude to the scissors Michel used to cut his manly beard, thus linking this unlawful act that Michel condones with his desire for emasculation. The main significance of the scene, however, is in Michel’s fascination with the unlawful act: “the most prudent rationalization could not produce in me the slightest
feeling of disgust.” On the contrary, he feels only “delight” and, “from that day on, Moktir becomes his favorite” (44). Michel is aware that this incident is “a curious revelation” about his character. This scene establishes both Michel’s increasingly strong urge to relinquish his property – or, more specifically, to submit to victimization through theft – and his ever-growing sympathy for irrespectability and unlawfulness. These newly realized traits will remain with him until the very end of his adventures. “The worst things,” Michel ponders, “are hard to do only when you have never done them; but [...] each of them becomes, and so quickly! easy, pleasant, sweet in the repetition, and soon a second nature” (60).

As the same nascent sensations that bring him health and strength threaten to take him down the path of abandon to dissipation and social decay, Michel abruptly decides to leave Africa and return to his French estate La Morinière. His hope is that, in the ordered and surveyed limits of a French garden, he will be able to cultivate the wild Oriental flowers blooming inside him without allowing them to grow out of control. Michel’s descriptions of African and French earth are telling of the difference he sees or imagines between the Orient and the Occident.

African earth, submerged for days at a time and now awakening from winter, drunk with water, bursting with new juices; it laughed in this springtime frenzy whose echo, whose image, I perceived in myself. (45)

This is as explicit an example as any of how a Westerner projects his psychosexual
feelings onto Eastern “reality.” In contrast to the Oriental “frenzy,” the “temperate Earth” of France, Michel hopes, will cool him down:

No doubt about it, I decided, the example of that earth, where everything is preparing for fruition, for the good harvest, must have the best influence upon me. [...] From this orderly abundance, from this happy subservience, from this smiling cultivation, a harmony was being wrought, no longer fortuitous but imposed, a rhythm, a beauty at once human and natural, in which one could no longer tell what was most admirable, so intimately united into a perfect understanding were the fecund explosion of free nature and man’s skillful effort to order it. What would that effort be, I thought, without the powerful savagery it masters? What would be the savage energy of that overflowing sap without the intelligent effort which channels and discharges it, laughing, into profusion?

(71-72, emphasis added)

Michel himself calls this fantasy of balance and harmony a “dream” from which he “sketched an ethic which would become a science of self-exploitation perfected by a disciplined energy” (72). In order to fulfil this dream and follow this ethic, Michel counters his urge to dissipate property by assuming his role of the landowner, and he also counters his urge to abandon himself to irrational joy of sensations by reassuming his scholarly pursuits.
But even these rational efforts of self-control are instigated and temporarily sustained by Michel's homoerotic desire that he is trying to suppress. Michel's playing at land-ownership is encouraged by the presence of his bailiff's son Charles, "a strapping, handsome boy," whose friendship with Michel is initiated as they are catching eels (one remembers Bachir's whistle and Moktir's scissors), an entertainment from which Marceline is explicitly excluded: "it seemed to me she might have spoiled our fun a little" (75). Unsurprisingly, Michel soon becomes submissive to Charles, allowing Charles to tell him how to govern his estate without resenting Charles's irritation at Michel's ignorance in the matter: "'You don't know what you're talking about,' [Charles] ventured to answer – and I immediately smiled" (76).

In another scene symbolizing savagery put under control, Charles tames a wild colt for Michel. At first "excessively nervous," rather like Michel himself, the colt soon calms down as Charles gets "astride it" and his skillful hands "caress it." The colt's submission to Charles parallels Michel's submission to the handsome youth. Michel's comment that "even Marceline might have ridden [the tamed colt] had her condition [she is pregnant at this time] permitted such exercise" (81) is far from casual. It completes the parallel between Michel and the colt, both of whom are available to Marceline only after their exertions with Charles.

The culmination of Michel's submission to Charles is his decision to leave La Morinière and entrust its management to Charles's old father, "supposing it was indirectly to Charles that I would be giving it" (84). This gesture also signifies the resurgence of Michel's urge to relinquish property as well as a version of Michel's habit of giving
material reward to the youngsters who please him. His leaving La Moriniere may also be partly inspired by his fear that the “savage energy” of his homoerotic feelings might be reawakened by Charles’s presence.

Michel therefore accepts the professorship at the Collège de France and moves to Paris. But Michel’s choice of scholarly subject matter reveals that his newly discovered feelings shape even his rational scholarly interests. While lecturing on the “over-prudent Cassiodorus,” he is really interested in “the young king Athalaric,” who, “rebelling against his mother Amalaswintha, balking at his Latin education, rejecting culture,” enjoys “with unruly favorites his own age a violent, voluptuous, unbridled life, dying at eighteen, utterly corrupted, glutted with debauchery” (66). Michel explicitly identifies with Athalaric, and his temporarily acquired self-control falls to pieces: “even as my life was assuming an order and a shape, even as I delighted in ordering and shaping everything around me too, I grew increasingly enthusiastic about the crude morality of the Goths,” and in his lectures Michel insists on “exalting and even justifying savagery” (82-83). Clearly, the Goths have the same role in Michel’s imagination as Arab boys do. Abandoning any scholarly objectivity, Michel projects onto his field of study the same psycho-sexual urges he habitually projects onto the Orient.

Michel’s increasing defiance of social norms becomes obvious to everyone for the first time when he publicly embraces Menalque, who, in an allusion to Oscar Wilde, is ostracized by society because of “an absurd, a shameful, lawsuit” (93). Indeed, just as Wilde helped Gide overcome his self-repression and timidity, Menalque helps Michel articulate his as yet vague urges and desires. At the same time, Menalque is another man
who disrupts Michel’s apparent conjugal harmony. The rivalry between Marceline and
Menalque is established right away when Michel responds to Menalque’s invitation to
dinner by saying that he is “a married man” (94). But if at that moment Michel gives
precedence to Marceline, in a much more symbolically important moment, he puts his
friendship with Menalque above his love for Marceline. In spite of Marceline’s difficult
pregnancy and decaying health, Michel decides to spend the night before Menalque’s
departure from France with his friend rather than with his suffering wife. The arousing
conversation he has with Menalque that night reawakens in Michel the ”savage energy” he
was trying to subdue, and the consequences are similar to the attack of hemorrhage Michel
experienced after his playing with Bachir’s marbles. Marceline gives birth to a dead child,
which symbolically severs any remaining link Michel had with tradition and productive
heterosexuality and encourages him to go even further toward the state of an outcast.

As before in a crisis, Michel retreats to La Moriniere and tries once again “to play
the landowner, a role [he] no longer enjoy[s]” (120). His efforts of “propping, on this
semblance of work, my disheveled life” (118) fail as Michel plays the role of the
landowner as poorly as that of the university professor: “My two farms, I had to admit to
myself, no longer interested me so much as the workmen I employed on them” (122). He
spends a great deal of time with his workers but hardly for the sake of work: “Not content
to oversee their work, I wanted to watch them at play; their clumsy thoughts were of no
interest to me, but I shared their meals, I listened to their jokes, lovingly observed their
pleasures” (119). Again, as in Biskra, he is attracted by young males’ physical life and
fascinated with their pleasures. This association is accentuated when one of the men
“cut[s] his thumb deeply,” as Bachir once did. But Michel is no longer satisfied merely to watch the men. He fantasizes about them:

What did they do when I was no longer there? I refused to believe they had nothing better to do, and I ascribed to each man a secret I was determined to learn. I lurked, prowled, stalked. I deliberately attached myself to the crudest natures, as if out of such darkness, I expected to be shown the way by a sudden light. (120)

As he did with Arab boys and the Gothic king, Michel now projects his decadent fantasies onto his workers. But his homoerotic desire seems increasingly oriented toward irrationality, irrespectability, and decadence. Charles interests him no more because “he [is] much too reasonable, much to respectable” (123). Michel satisfies his decadent thirst by indulging in the stories – soaked in incest, seduction, and rape – about the family life of one of his employees: “the house of Heurtevent [seemed] a lurid, sulfurous place around which my helpless imagination circled like a blowfly” (127).

Michel’s attraction to Charles is replaced by an attraction to Charles’s younger brother Alcide, the poacher. While Charles helped Michel work on the improvement of his estate in an earlier section of the novel, Alcide helps Michel dissipate his property. But in addition to this curious self-poaching, Michel’s relationship with Alcide also has clearly sexual connotations, and poaching serves as a substitute for sexual transgression. Their secret meeting place is in the woods, once the symbol of the energy of nature controlled by
human reason, but now standing for the unleashing of illicit desire. (Heurtevent's daughter meets her many lovers there.) With the help of Bute, who serves as a pimp of sorts, Michel sets a trap for Alcide and experiences "the poacher's voluptuous dread" (129) as he waits for the young man. Alcide is caught, verbally flirted with, his naked flesh gazed at as he frees his leg from the trap, and he is given money (130-31). Michel's catching the poacher and then poaching his own land creates a dynamic of submission and mastery similar to the one in the scene with Bachir. It alludes to Michel's desire to experience both active and passive sexual pleasure, which is yet another sign of his relinquishment of respectability and stable masculine identity. From this moment on, Michel exclaims, "I despised my bed, and would have preferred the barn" (133).

But the position of a self-destructive landowner does not enable Michel to exercise both mastery and submission to the degree that he desires. Charles puts pressure on him to respect property; Alcide double-crosses him. The asymmetry of power between the landowner and his employees turns out not to be radical enough. This radical asymmetry, Michel remembers, can be found only in the Orient, so he sets off for Africa again and drags the unfortunate, sick Marceline with him.

In contrast to their first journey, it is now Michel who nurses Marceline. That is indeed all that remains of their relationship: "it was to heal her that I loved her" (141). But his care for Marceline includes no sympathy. "I detest sympathy," Michel exclaims, "only the strong deserve sympathy" (143). As in part one, nursing is really a sign of mastery. Only by insisting upon Marceline's weakness requiring his care can Michel sustain the illusion of his own strength. That is why it is only after her death, when this illusion can be
maintained no longer, that he invites his friends to help him. When Marceline has passed away, the opportunity of achieving mastery through nursing vanishes and nothing is left to sustain Michel’s illusion of his own strength. At her death-bed, Marceline proves to be stronger than Michel has tried to make her seem. She deliberately drops the rosary and is prepared to die calmly with no need of religious consolation.

Simultaneously with trying to preserve the illusion of his strength, Michel abandons himself even more resolutely to debauchery and the disintegration of his masculine identity. His second journey to the South and the East is a process of gliding into his chosen state of the outcast. It starts with Sorento, the place of his heterosexual mastery during the previous journey. Now, however, this place is “disenchanted” and “dreary” (152), just like his marriage. In Naples he indulges in some “vagrant debauch” (153); in Palermo he breaks his resolution not to do it again; on the train for Taormina he kisses “a boy from Catania, lovely as a line of Theocritus” (154); in Syracuse he longs “to roll under the table” with “stevedores, tramps, drunken sailors” whose “brutality of passion assumed in [his] eyes a hypocritical aspect of health and vigour” (155) Finally, at Kairouan he spends the night with “a group of Arabs [...] lying in the open air on the mats of a little café” and returns home “covered with vermin” (159).

It is fascinating that hardly any critic fails to mention this last fact as the culmination of Michel’s degradation. Michel’s dissipation of property and his practically dragging his wife to death seem almost more acceptable and understandable to some readers than his “sleeping with lice-infested destitutes” (Nettelbeck 106). Perhaps the reason for this emphatic response to lice is that they represent a literal invasion of the
human body. These disgusting, small creatures crawling all over its human host erase any
distinction between the human and the bestial, debase any notion of dignity, and even
signify a rejection of such a basic, everyday symbol of humanity as hygiene. If Michel
rejects such a primary principle of human behavior as that of keeping his body clean, then
the disintegration of his culturally acquired “husks” must be very thorough indeed.

Michel’s final acceptance of irrespectability and unlawfulness occurs upon his
return to Biskra, the scene of his initial awakening to new sensations. A great
disillusionment awaits him there. The Arab boys he admired so much have grown up, like
Charles, to be ordinary, respectable working men. “How stupid respectability makes a
man!” Michel laments, “Would I find among these boys just what I most hated at home?”
(161). Only Moktir, the scissors-stealer, who, unsurprisingly, remained an outcast and has
just been released from prison, appears to Michel still worthy of his fancy and fantasy:
“No! this one hadn’t failed me. Even my memory hadn’t pictured him so splendid: his
strength and his beauty were fulfilled, perfect” (161). Michel takes Moktir with him,
preserving his fragile mastery by paying for Moktir’s company, but it is Moktir who is
“happy as a king” and who stands for Michel’s “new God” (163). At this point, Michel’s
attitude toward Moktir is much more similar to Lord Alfred Douglas’s attitude toward Ali
than to Gide’s attitude toward his Arab boys, which emphasizes the growing gap between
the Michel from the first part of the narrative, doubling Gide’s project of personal
liberation through mastery and self-discovery, and the Michel from the last part of the
story, whose pleasure in submission gains the upper hand. Although Michel makes love
with Moktir’s mistress, while Moktir plays with a rabbit in an allusion to the voluptuous
poaching from the previous section, this sexual displacement only serves to underline Michel’s purchase of Moktir’s sexual services. The effect of this escapade is similar to the effect of the night Michel spends with Menalque. The morning after Michel cheats on her with Moktir, Marceline dies. Just as Michel’s nights with Menalque has “killed” their child, Michel’s night with Moktir “kills” Marceline herself.

A similar triangulation occurs at the very end of the novel where Michel gets involved with another Arab boy, Ali, and his sister. The way Michel describes the arrangement tends to conceal its economic base. Ali brings food to Michel “in exchange for a few sous and a few caresses” (170). Money and sensual satisfaction are brought together as always, but Michel inverts the real state of things by pretending that his caresses are part of the payment rather than to be paid for. This kind of displacement is possible only in the East where, it goes without saying, Ali’s and his sister’s livelihood depends on Michel’s few sous. This is not exactly the revolutionary “chaste promiscuity” that Bersani glorifies in his reading of the novel. Even Michel himself doubts the value of his own emancipation: “I might have liberated myself, but what does it matter? This useless freedom tortures me” (169). This freedom is “useless” and it “tortures” him because it was supposed to signify his “authentic being” from the husks of learned behavior, but Michel’s experience reveals that neither a complete riddance of the husks of the “secondary, learned being” is possible nor does what seemed like the “authentic being” really prove to be that. Although Michel’s transgressive denial of Western institutions is deep, he can never fully escape being the kind of puritanical, rational, self-mastery-seeking Westerner that he was brought up to be. He still thinks in the Western terms of “crime”
and "rights" and feels a need to defend himself against self-dissipation and to recover his "steadfastness" (169), which, he still believes, "makes real men" (170). Accordingly, he begs his friends to "tear [him] away from this place now [and] give [him] some reason to live" (169). After all, Michel still "feel[s] nothing in [himself] except nobility" (158). All his friends believe that, in spite of his excess, Michel has not irreversibly crossed the boundaries, and, no doubt, easily agree with him in putting the blame for Michel's crisis on the Orient: "this climate, I believe, is what's responsible for the change. Nothing discourages thought so much as this perpetual blue sky. Here any exertion is impossible, so closely does pleasure follow desire" (170). One might add that pleasure follows Westerners' desires so closely because they can afford to buy it so easily, but Michel chooses to overlook that.

In addition to the economic disparity between Westerners and Arab boys, however, another distinction between them emerges as significant at the end of Michel's narrative: the fact that such a narrative even exists. Michel praises Arabs because "they live their art, they sing and scatter it from day to day; they don't cling to it, they don't embalm it in works" (158, emphasis in original). Michel himself, on the other hand, cannot refrain from recounting his story to his friends, who feel that "by relating it, Michel had somehow legitimized his action" (169). The very fact that Michel has the urge to recount his experience points to his surviving dependence on the need for a stable and socially sanctioned identity. Telling your own story is always intellectualizing, self-constructing, and dependent on narrative and conceptual paradigms of a particular culture. At the very beginning of his storytelling, Michel is explicit: "I no longer understand. I need ... I need to
speak, I tell you” (7). Michel’s need to understand himself and his experience is the need to reconfirm for himself some kind of stable identity. Far from being the ultimate prophet of the power of self-loss, as Bersani would have him, Michel is intent upon regaining a coherent “psychic content.” He may have defied the norms, rules, and ideas through which his self is constructed. He may have even succeeded in peeling off some of the husk of his “secondary, learned being.” But what then? Any effort to express himself, any effort to say anything about himself or understand anything about his experience, would necessitate (re)constructing some kind of, at least contingent, identity. To let Michel have the last word: “The capacity to get free is nothing; the capacity to be free, that is the task” (7).
Chapter 3

Vampiric Seductions and Vicissitudes of the Masculine Subject in Bram Stoker’s Dracula

If Gide’s novel The Immoralist depicts a hero whose masculine self-identification falters between the strength and health he believes he finds in the “authenticity” of his homoerotic desire and the weakness and corruption into which he is thrown by his need to relinquish the mastery implied in that authentic masculine self-identification, the hero of Bram Stoker’s novel Dracula (1897), Jonathan Harker, undergoes a process through which he substitutes his initial gender instability with a properly masculine self-identification of a middle-class professional, husband, and father. The threat that homoeroticism comes to represent for masculine identification at the turn of the century, made public in such a spectacular fashion by the Wilde trials, figures differently in each novel. Gide’s efforts in If It Die to establish a kind of “normal homosexuality” which would, by virtue of its authenticity, strengthen rather than undermine the homosexual’s masculine identification based on mastery and self-knowledge are somewhat belied by the implication he allows in The Immoralist that such happily self-assured homosexual masculinity may not be quite so immune to intrinsic unraveling. Stoker’s novel, on the other hand, suggests that the very threat of homoerotic desire may also work to (re)stabilize a conventional masculine identification.

The role of the vampire as the seducer in Dracula bears some resemblance to the role that Wilde as the seducer has in Gide’s If It Dies. In both cases, these seductions have a
paradoxical effect of both undermining and re-stabilizing the masculine identities of the seductions’ “victims.”

At least one critic, Talia Schaffer in her insightful essay “‘A Wilde Desire Took Me’: The Homosexual History of Dracula,” suggests that Stoker’s novel is a response to the Wilde trials and that Count Dracula might owe something to Wilde himself. Whether Stoker did or did not have Wilde in mind as he was creating the character of his master vampire, Dracula’s power is reminiscent of Wilde’s “transgressive aesthetic” in its ability to put into doubt some crucial binaries of the Western culture, including the ones of alive/dead and human/inhuman.

Stoker’s narrative is extremely complex and, as various critical readings have testified, raises a whole series of important turn-of-the-century issues, including the changing role of women in society, English anxieties about Orientalization and “reverse colonialization,” the emerging taxonomies of criminology and psychology, and the rising significance of middle-class professionalization for the British society. My analysis builds on some recent work in this last category, as well as on the readings of Dracula focusing on its pervasive sexual connotations, in order to explore the ways in which the encounter with Dracula first exacerbates the crisis of Harker’s masculine identity at the threshold of his professional and sexual maturity, but then actually allows him to contain that inevitable crisis and establish for himself a stable heterosexual, masculine identity necessary to make him a symbolic savior of England. Dracula’s seduction of Harker in the first part of the novel, then, functions as a contained, limited identity crisis which is necessary for the spectacular healing and consolidation of his identity that the rest of the novel dramatizes.
Ever since scholars “rediscovered” Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* in the 1970s, vampirism has been frequently discussed as a type of seduction and the monstrous Count Dracula as a type of seducer. Dracula has been described as “a derivative of the rake in English fiction” (Fry 35), who “has much in common with the corrupt but gentlemanly seducers of popular fiction and drama whose archetype is Lovelace in Richardson’s *Clarissa*” (Bentley 31). The feminist critics who established this parallel between Dracula and the narrative of virginal ladies seduced by rakish gentlemen were primarily interested in the ways in which Dracula’s invasion of England takes the form of his seduction of Englishwomen. In such readings, regardless of their various interpretations of the symbolic meaning of seduction itself, Lucy and Mina become Dracula’s central victims, whose fates represent the danger of succumbing to seduction in the case of Lucy and the possibility of resisting it in the case of Mina. The project of Dracula’s antagonists, then, becomes to reclaim Mina’s temporarily tainted purity, and the symbols of their victory are the disappearance of Dracula’s mark from Mina’s forehead and her giving birth to a child at the end of the narrative.

It has not gone unnoticed, of course, that the two main female characters are not the only objects of seduction in the novel. Jonathan Harker’s sensational experience in Dracula’s castle has also been discussed in such terms, whether with the focus on Harker’s suppressed illicit heterosexual desire or on the novel’s homoeroticism. Harker’s experience, however, is usually seen as merely an introduction to the main seductions in the text. Thus, Phyllis Roth, in her influential essay “Suddenly Sexual Women in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*,” claims that the novels “two major episodes [are] the seduction of Lucy and Mina, to which the experience of Harker at Castle Dracula provides a preface, a hero, one whose narrative
encloses the others and with whom, therefore, one might readily identify. This, however, is a defense against the central identification of the novel with Dracula and his attacks on the women" (61-62). Because of the spectacular nature of Dracula's seductions of the women and because of the fact that Harker in the second part of the novel becomes only one among several men chasing Dracula, it is easy to overlook the central part Harker plays in the narrative. Even though the seductions of Lucy and Mina are crucial for understanding the novel, in the ways in which Roth and other feminist critics have established, it is not accidental that the novel opens and ends with Harker's words. Rather than just a cardboard figure used to hide the novel's "real" investment, Harker is certainly a key character for understanding the novel's complex commentary on sexuality, gender, and middle-class professionalization.

Odd Man Out: Jonathan Harker and the Band of Vampire Hunters

My reading of Stoker's novel emphasizes Harker's role in the narrative by analyzing his seduction by Dracula as crucial for the meaning of the whole novel rather than contained in its first part, presented in the form of Harker's diary. The whole narrative could indeed be read as a kind of bildungsroman, in which Harker, the hero of the piece, acquires the kind of masculine identity required for a membership in the group which stands for England's ability to stand united and strong in the face of danger and for fathering a child who symbolizes the transmission of that strength and unity into the next generation. Other critics have already observed that Dracula is not only a novel about
saving women from corruption but also about the education of men. For example, Alan Johnson believes that in addition to “the psychological allegory of Lucy’s and Mina’s rebellion,” symbolized by Dracula’s vampirism, Stoker’s narrative is also “a bildungsroman or education-novel structure in which the young men and their mentor, Van Helsing, learn to identify and eradicate their own masculine and aristocratic pride. Dracula serves double duty as a projection of the women’s rebellious egoism and of the men’s oppressive egoism” (237). Johnson’s emphasis is on the need for “the young men” to work together, pooling their various resources – their different cultural and professional backgrounds and knowledge – in order to save the women and confirm the strength of their own manhood.

However, not all of the men who end up gathering their forces in the valiant band of vampire hunters are in the same position from the very beginning of the narrative. All of them are described from the start as being very closely attached to each other, with the exception of one: Jonathan Harker. Dracula is, among other things, a narrative about the initiation of this young man into a group the membership in which signifies that his masculinity is of a kind on which England can rely for its future. Harker’s masculinity is at least as much at stake in the novel as the fate of English womanhood is. At the outset of the story, Harker’s professional and personal situation places him at the threshold of this initiation: he has just become a full-blown solicitor and he is engaged to be married. But his masculinity at that point is by no means stable and self-assured. In fact it is just as tainted and uncertain as his wife’s feminine purity. If it is true, as Johnson claims, that Count Dracula serves as “a literary double for the unconscious or only partly conscious rebellious
egoism experienced first by Lucy and then by Mina in reaction to the constraints and
descension which have been inflicted on them by their society” (236), that is equally
true for Harker, who initially shows as much rebellion against social expectations as the
women but eventually toes the line by joining the group of vampire hunters. His
encounters with Dracula and his gradual acquisition or endorsement of the kind of
masculinity necessary for membership in the group of valiant men who eventually destroy
the vampire is one of the most significant aspects of the story.

The fact that the members of this group represent the progressive elements of
English society has been emphasized by numerous critics. Glover, for example, explains
that “when the protagonists of Dracula come together to swear a ‘solemn compact,’ they
are effectively renewing the social contract, pledging allegiance not simply to each other as
comrades in arms but as members of a liberal bourgeois order” (44). They represent the
professions and classes that carry that bourgeois order, combining tradition with progress.
The group includes one aristocrat, Lord Arthur Godalming, whose name, as Burton Hatlen
explains, “evoking as it does the memory of King Arthur, suggests that he embodies
England’s heritage,” but who is linked more to the bourgeois professionals than to his own
class; in fact he is a “bourgeois aristocrat” who seeks to “join the haute bourgeoisie, by
marrying into it” (121). On the other hand, “if Godalming represents English tradition,
Harker [a lawyer] and Seward [a doctor] represent the groups which, to their own eyes at
least, keep English society functioning” (Hatlen 121). The other men are Quincey Morris, a
wealthy Texan adventurer, who dies at the end of the novel, and Dr. Van Helsing, a learned
Dutchman, whose name (H-E-L-S-I-N-G) is nevertheless an anagram of the word
“English.” Different as their backgrounds are, these men have shared intense bonding in the past. Here is, for example, Morris’s invitation to Arthur to a kind of bachelor’s party, following Lucy’s acceptance of Arthur’s proposal and rejection of Morris’s and Seward’s:

My dear Art, –

We’ve told yarns by the camp-fire in the prairies; and dressed one another’s wounds after trying a landing at the Marquesas; and drunk healths on the shore of Titicaca. There are more yarns to be told, and other wounds to be healed, and another health to be drunk. Won’t you let this be at my camp-fire tomorrow night? [...] There will only be one other, our old pal at the Korea, Jack Seward. He’s coming, too, and we both want to mingle our weeps over the wine-cup, and to drink a health with all our hearts to the happiest man in all the wide world, who has won the noblest heart that God has made and the best worth winning. [...] 

Yours, as ever and always,

QUINCEY P. MORRIS (83-84)

This epistle, of course, marks Morris’s (and, by extension, Seward’s) acceptance of the fact that Arthur won Lucy’s hand, but it also informs us of the long and adventurous history these men have shared. Van Helsing shares the same kind of deep bonds with at least one of them, Seward, who has saved Van Helsing’s life in the past by sucking from his “wound so
swiftly the poison of the gangrene from that knife that our other friend, too nervous, let slip” (148). We never find out who this intriguing “other friend” who endangered Van Helsing’s life was, but this comment by Van Helsing makes clear the strength of the bond between them and why, in Seward’s words, “Van Helsing would, I know, do anything for me for a personal reason” (147). The only person in the group that destroys Dracula who does not have these kinds of bonds with any other man in the group is Harker. In fact, his initial link to them is only through his wife Mina, Lucy’s best friend. It becomes clear, therefore, that destroying Dracula, is yet another in a series of adventures creating bonds between these men, and that Transylvania can join the list of exotic places (Marquesas, Titicaca, the Korea) where these men have forged such bonds. This particular adventure is Harker’s initiation into the group and, accordingly, he is the one who actually kills Dracula at the end of the story.

To insist on Harker’s importance in the novel is in no way to deny the symbolic importance of its female characters. On the contrary, an understanding of Harker’s relationship to the other men and the kind of masculinity they have in common helps explain further the link between male bonding and the victimization of women in the text. As others have discussed, the destruction of Lucy is a key scene in establishing the united purpose and determination in the “heroic band” of Dracula-chasers. In his letter quoted above, Morris says that he, Arthur, and Seward will mingle their tears while drinking for Lucy’s health. However, their bonding is confirmed even more strongly as they mingle another liquid – their blood – after they all undergo transfusions of their blood into Lucy’s body, weakened by Dracula’s seduction. That bonding is further strengthened when they
destroy her body in order to, according to Van Helsing’s theory, save her soul from Dracula’s influence.³ Harker is, very significantly, excluded from both these bonding rituals based on the double-faced activity of saving/victimizing the women. Such activity plays an important role in articulating the kind of masculine identity the narrative promotes, and perhaps the most consistent line of the narrative, the only one that develops from the very beginning to the very end of the story, is the one detailing Harker’s initial resistance to and ultimate endorsement of that masculine identity. The specific form through which the narrative expresses Harker’s oscillation between solidification of masculine identity and its transgression is seduction.

My discussion of the seduction of Jonathan Harker in the novel partly concurs with those recent critics who are critical of the interpretative tendency to overstate the role of repressed sexuality as the ultimate theme of the novel. For example, Jennifer L. Fleissner suggests that the novel is “as much about secretarial work as it is about sex” (417) and argues that it is restrictive to assume “that the novel is ‘really’ pointing to a repressed sexuality at every turn, rather than mobilizing discourses of the sexual in order to explain potentially even more outre technological phenomena” (417). She adds that we should be attentive to “the way in which the discourses of the sexual may proliferate precisely in order to mask the part played by other discourses […] in organizing gender” (442).⁴ Fleissner uses this insight to develop a reading of the novel as representing clerical work as proper rather than irredeemably corrupting for a bourgeois woman (419) through Mina’s role as the gatherer, organizer, and interpreter of the information about Dracula, but there are certainly other ways in which sexual discourses in the novel, rather than being its
hidden or not-so-hidden essence, are actually instrumental in articulating something else. In my reading, sexual anxieties and repressed desires in the text function to stage but also contain a crisis of Harker’s gender and sexual identity as a way of ultimately preserving – if seemingly disrupting – his ego.

In other words, the crisis of Harker’s masculine and heterosexual self-identification, I argue, is not the bottom line of his encounter with Dracula. His temporary feminine identification and the glimpses of his homoerotic desire are the surface manifestations of a deeper psychic dynamics in which Harker’s ego, in response to external pressures of his impending initiation into business and marriage, allows its own de-stabilization – in a limited, contained way – in order to be able to re-stabilize in a somewhat modified form, which can accommodate these external pressures. This process, in psychoanalytic terms, is the process of seduction. In Laplanche’s specifically psychoanalytic understanding of the concept, seduction remains necessarily sexual, but it plays a more crucial role in establishing and maintaining personal identity than it is usually perceived. According to Laplanche’s “general theory of seduction,” seduction is a moment of an encounter with the unconscious of the other. The original seduction, as I explain in more detail in the Introduction, is the moment of a child’s exposure to the enigmatic, sexual message of an adult – enigmatic because it originates in the adult’s unconscious – and which founds the child’s own unconscious. This is the moment of the formation of the subject’s ego, and from then on, the subject maintains two contradictory tendencies: to close in on itself into a an illusion of a stable, authentic identity, but also to open itself up to the “enigmatic messages” of the others (cf. Laplanche, “Theory” 657-62). Seduction, therefore, both stages
a contained, controlled crisis of the subject’s identity and enables the resolution of that crisis and the re-consolidation of that identity. The nature of the crisis depends on the culturally available anxieties of the moment: xenophobia, homophobia, castration complex are some of the anxieties that clearly play a part in Stoker’s novel and give a variety of faces to the psychic crisis that is at the novel’s center. It is important to see that none of these anxieties has a privileged position as the source of the crisis. For example, homoerotic desire certainly pervades the novel, as Christopher Craft persuasively established, but it is in no way the source or the core of Harker’s identity crisis. In fact, as I will explain in detail later, it is an aspect of the resolution of the crisis.

What then is the cause of Harker’s identity crisis? Nothing spectacular or out of the ordinary. Nothing more than his internal resistance to establishing a stable ego. This resistance becomes prominent because Harker’s is pressured by his circumstances to endorse and fully internalize certain parameters of the ego: heterosexual romance, professional advancement, climbing up the social ladder, entering a tight social circle of professional men, who lead the society. In order to incorporate these parameters without getting overwhelmed by their pressure, Harker’s ego needs to undergo a contained crisis through which it will restructure itself. For that to happen, it must be exposed to the alien-ness of the other. Dracula embodies that alien-ness.
The Vampire, the Analyst, and the Beauty Behind the Shutters:
Transference and the Subject’s Communication with Itself

Before I chart Jonathan’s initiation into the proper masculinity shared with his peers, I will turn to the figure of the vampire himself in order to delineate with more precision my understanding of its symbolic role of the seducer. My effort here is to resist the temptation to which many psychoanalytic readings of Dracula yield, which is to posit a simplistic equation between the vampire and the unconscious or to interpret his power as the power to bring to surface the repressed desires of human protagonists threatening to shatter their ego identifications. It is not necessarily that these readings are incorrect; it is that they tell merely a part of the story. Dracula is as much a ruse of the ego conjured up for the purpose of protecting the ego against disruptions as he is the initiator or facilitator of such disruptions. If in some relatively obvious ways Dracula stands for transgression, he also stands for — or, paradoxically, enables — a recuperation of stability and order. Ever since Maurice Richardson’s 1959 essay “The Psychoanalysis of Ghost Stories,” in which he reads Dracula as an expression of Stoker’s repressed fantasies and calls it, memorably, “a kind of incestuous necrophilous, oral-anaal-sadistic all-in wrestling match” (427), interpretations of this story informed by various psychoanalytic insights and concepts have abounded. Most of these interpretations link Dracula and everything related to him to the psychoanalytic idea of the unconscious, sometimes in glib phrases — such as “Transylvania is Europe’s unconscious” (Geoffrey Wall, Quoted in Johnson 237) or “Dracula acts out the repressed fantasies of the others” (Roth 61) — and sometimes with more nuance and
complexity. Two psychoanalytic readings that particularly inspired my own analysis are those of Burton Hatlen and Dennis Foster. In "The Return of the Repressed/Oppressed in Bram Stoker’s Dracula," Hatlen argues that "all the sexuality in Dracula is sadomasochistic" (124), meaning that it is not simply a matter of repressed illicitly extra-marital or homosexual desire but of the death-drive or jouissance:

There is in the book no 'clean' sexuality which can constitute an alternative to the 'unclean' sexuality of the Count. In him, our sexuality confronts us as irreducibly alien, irreducibly 'other.' We can re-posses this sexuality only violently, by ecstatically surrendering ourselves to the dark hunger for death, or by standing above the beloved and driving a stake into her heart. That is to say, we cannot recover our lost sexuality, for in the very act of recovering it, it turns into something else. Nevertheless, insofar as Count Dracula incarnates our lost sexuality, he becomes the shape not only of our most terrible fears but also of our deepest desires. He is the other that we cannot escape, because he is part of us. He is the other that we loathe and love (125, emphasis in original).

It is more insightful to see Dracula as the other whose inescapable otherness both fascinates and terrifies the human subject than as a projection or embodiment of any particular repressed psychic content. If the vampire is a projection at all, he is most likely, as Foster suggests, "the projection of the childlike immortality onto an adult body: vampires
experience the rage for pleasure that we see in a child, but they suffer from neither the 
child’s incapacity nor the adult’s sentence of death” (492). In other words, the vampire is 
the projection of that sense of immortality the child has before he forms an ego and enters 
the symbolic realm. In other words, the vampire stands for the lack of a sense of 
disconnection between one’s self and the world. That lost state of complete fulfillment, 
what Lacan calls jouissance, is also the state that precedes the existence of the ego because 
it precedes the subject’s initial self-identification. Therefore, the impulse to return to it 
perpetually jeopardizes the adult subject’s precarious self-identification. Foster elaborates 
this Lacanian insight:

The French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan argues that sexual desire is 
ultimately a desire for that missing thing that would make us immortal. 
Leaving childhood implies our discovering that we lack something in our 
being: we are divided into male and female, and so we will never be whole. 
Our most intense pleasures, of which the orgasmic climax of intercourse is 
only the most obvious, are in some fashion a more or less momentary 
overcoming of that sense of being divided, separated. Sexuality is what we 
have instead of being complete, immortal, but for that reason our sexuality 
leads us inevitably to a confrontation with our mortality. Because we lack 
that immortal thing, we die. Because we lack, we desire – but not happily. 
(491)
The vampire’s seduction is partly a trace of, or a promise of a return to, that pre-symbolic, pre-ego-formation state of complete fulfillment. However, it is important to insist that the vampire’s seduction is also that which guarantees the re-configuration and re-stabilization of the subject’s ego after the glimpse of “immortality.”

One way to explain why the vampire cannot simply and exclusively embody that pre-symbolic state of fulfillment is to wonder why that state would—or whether it could—be embodied in an ultimately anthropomorphic figure. What does it mean that a human subject, say Jonathan Harker, glimpsing the terrifying invitation of jouissance, facing a desire to shatter the fortifications of his own identity, encounters a human-like embodiment of that desire? Is that just a narrative necessity, merely a way for a novelist to involve such non-figurative elements into his text? That answer does not suffice. There is something quite unsatisfying in reading Dracula as an embodiment of a human subject’s impulse toward jouissance because that impulse is in itself an anti-figurative impulse; it is the impulse to disrupt the figurations of the ego. Following thoroughly the logic of this psychoanalytic approach to the figure of Dracula, we must come to the conclusion that Dracula’s functioning is twofold: on the one hand, he is the embodiment of the unconscious inasmuch as he is an immortal, inexplicable, shape-shifting force whose presence is mysteriously felt by humans, but, on the other hand, as soon as Dracula acquires a particular shape, is assigned a particular motivation as well as a set of positive characteristics (things he can or cannot do, for example)—in other words, as soon as Dracula is diagnosed, primarily by Van Helsing—he becomes a figuration conjured up by the ego for the purposes of forfending its further destabilization.
So, while the usual assumption is that the vampire is the seducer who actively disrupts the victim’s ego, his or her illusion of a stable identity, perhaps as a manifestation of the victim’s unconscious, I would argue that this coherent, monstrous other exists as a unified image and self only in the transferential gaze of the victim. After all, one of the most horrifying attributes of the vampire is that there is “no reflection of him in the mirror” (Stoker 34). A reader of the novel familiar with Lacan will immediately recall that, according to Lacan, it is precisely the moment of an individual’s first perception of himself in the mirror as a spatially unified being that is “formative of the function of the I” (Écrits 1) by manufacturing for the subject “the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject’s entire mental development” (4). Now, if Harker cannot see Dracula in the mirror, then presumably neither can Dracula. In other words, we can conclude that Dracula has never seen himself. Accordingly, Dracula does not know himself, and his visual and conceptual unification into a monstrous identity exists only in his victims’ gaze and rationalization.

The narrative form of the novel emphasizes the impossibility of Dracula’s identity by denying Dracula a narrative voice. Most of the story is recounted (through diaries, letters, memos, etc.) from the points of view of the characters bent on explaining Dracula, his opponents determined to define him. Dracula’s voice is always mediated by another character’s voice, with the effect that the reader as well is unable to see Dracula’s image in the “mirror” of the novel unmediated, stable, and clear, but only as it is reflected by the gaze of the other characters. In other words, we as readers do not really have interpretative access to Dracula as a ego-disrupting force, though we can theorize him as such. The only
Dracula we can know is the one produced by the egos of his victims.

This "image" of an abject other, with its spectacular monstrosity, reassures the victim of his or her own stable, coherent, human identity. In short, while the vampire’s shape-shifting presence – baffling, elusive, undefinable – threatens to pry open the victim’s ego and enforce its exposure to unconscious desires and anxieties (thus exposing the indeterminacy of ego-forming structures, such as gender and sexual orientation), the imaginary, unified image of the vampire as a knowable, diagnosable, and therefore destroyable monster is a defensive mechanism by means of which the victim’s ego protects itself against the disruptive forces of its own unconscious. Daly makes a related point which can help clarify my argument here: “In the vampire we confront a monster whose primary usefulness depends on his capacity to embody threats, not so much in his own body, which remains elusively Protean, but in the bodies of his victims. Once a threat has been properly embodied, it can be dealt with.” (194). Daly focuses on how the female body embodies such a threat in the novel: “It is only when the vampire-threat comes to be located within the female body that it can be properly treated.” Similarly, it is only when the female body has been infected by vampirism that it can be a proper object of expert treatment: where there is no crisis, there can be no intervention” (198, emphasis mine). The same is true for the crisis of Jonathan’s gender and sexual identity. It is only through the encounter with the monster and through the drama of being vulnerable to the monster’s seductiveness that the victim can distinguish himself or herself from his or her own monstrous desire. To put it differently, the victim’s ego fantasizes a monstrous selfhood, in which it can invest feelings of hatred – or indeed love – in order to distract itself, as it were, from the encounter
with the unconscious. In this sense, the seduction makes the victim’s ego possible by jeopardizing it.

I described the image of Dracula in the gaze of his victims as transferential in a previous paragraph because the relationship between the vampire and his victim is rather analogous to the relationship between the psychoanalyst and his patient. Lacan explains that the analyst is “a manifestation of the unconscious”1 (Four 125) inasmuch as he enables a pulsation which momentarily opens an interstice in the tightly woven fabric of “the armour of an alienating identity” which marks the ego. The aim of the communication between the analyst and the patient is to ease the symptoms of that alienation when it acquires some pathological form: neurosis, paranoia, etc. For that to happen, the patient must keep open some channels of communication between his ego and his unconscious. He must, as it were, compromise the ideal of self-sufficiency and self-transparency of his ego in order to keep it healthy. Ideally, the analyst has no positive role in this dialogue between the patient and his unconscious; he does not participate in it. He does not have a substantive function in this communication but a phatic function of ensuring the openness of these channels and of facilitating the patient’s self-communication. Transference occurs when the patient’s ego begins resisting this conversation by dragging the analyst into it.

At the moment of transference, the patient’s ego resists analysis by imagining the analyst as a “self” whom the patient can love or hate rather than a figure which “is itself a manifestation of the unconscious,” a function of the patient’s encounter with his unconscious.2 Freud defines transference as the feelings, positive or negative, that the patient acquires for the analyst in the course of the analysis. These feelings are repetitions
of the feelings the patient has previously experienced for a parent or some other important figure. Freud insists that this repetition is entirely "provoked by the analytic situation" (TT 177) and has nothing to do with "the charms of [the analyst's] person" (TT 169). These feelings are "greatly intensified by the resistance that dominates this situation" (177). In other words, precisely because the patient resists the analysis, the patient may fall in love with the analyst, which, according to both Freud and Lacan, is bound to disrupt and disable the analysis. As Lacan puts it, "[t]he transference is the means by which the communication of the unconscious is interrupted, by which the unconscious closes up again" (130). By filling the ego with an overwhelming emotion which the patient experiences as the truth of his or her relationship with the analyst, transference precisely prevents the exposure, in the analysis, of emotions as signifiers rather than simply genuine expressions of the subject's self.8 As Lacan explains in "Intervention on Transference": "the transference is nothing real in the subject other than the appearance, in a moment of stagnation of the analytic dialectic, of the permanent modes according to which it constitutes its objects" (FS 71). In other words, while the analysis aims at exposing emotions as signifiers and strives to enable the subject to "behold" the indeterminacy behind the fixity of the signifying systems of the ego (for example, the fixity of gender, sexual orientation, etc.), transference is a way for the subject to maintain the grip of fixity ("the permanent modes") in an act of resistance to the destabilizing effects of psychoanalysis. Dracula is similar to the analyst in that he both pries open the shutters of the unconscious, as many critics have claimed, but also by being easily transformed into a transferential figure with the help of which the subject prevents those shutters being pushed dangerously wide-open.
But while Dracula seems to – or is interpreted by Van Helsing as someone who wants to – corrupt people and lead them to evil, the analyst would appear to strive to “cure” his patients and ensure their well-being. Depending on your views on psychotherapy, you might see this “cure” either as a recovery of the patient’s “true self” or as a production of a “self” which the patient is encouraged to internalize as his own. In either case, the goal of psychoanalysis would seem to be the (re)socialization of its human object into a culturally predictable and desirable (“healthy”) form. However, Lacan avers that he is true to Freud in his adamant critique of what he calls “an orthopaedic, conformist therapeutics, providing access for the subject to the most mythical conception of happiness” (135; “happiness” in English in the original). According to Lacan, the effect of psychoanalysis is not to restore or to establish a “healthy,” that is, stable, socially acceptable identity but to enable the unconscious resistance to such identity to come to the patient’s consciousness. Lacan identifies the ego of both the analyst and the patient as “the point of resistance to the analytic treatment, against those theories which see the integration of the ego as the objective of the psychoanalytic process” (61).9

For Lacan, the psychoanalyst’s role is not to seduce the patient to health, as it were, thus reconfirming his ego, but to allow unconscious resistances to the ego-formation to become manifest. It is crucial to emphasize that these unconscious resistances (desires, anxieties, etc.) – which themselves can become constitutive of the ego – are not suppressed instincts existing within the subject but signifiers existing within the symbolic systems of language and culture. After all, not only culturally approved forms of being and desiring, but also those forms that are culturally repressed and transgressive of cultural norms, are
created in terms of that culture. This insight belies the idea, which we have seen expressed by Gide for example, that the culture can make someone play a heterosexual whereas his true, inner desires are that of a homosexual. Homosexual desire is not the “real” desire buried under internalized heteronormativity, but itself a signifier which can be variously positioned in relation to the ego and the unconscious. In other words, it can be repressed or it can be a core element of a subject’s self-identification, but in both cases it is equally a signifier. Both heterosexuality and homosexuality are, of course, signifiers within the discourse of the Other and whether either or both of them are parts of the subject’s ego or repressed into his unconscious depends on the subject’s positioning in the symbolic order (the culture) and not on some mysterious sexual instinct or drive.\(^\text{10}\)

The fallacious assumption that what the subject represses is somehow hidden within him and thus more authentic than the “layers” of his “learned, secondary being,” which are the products of the subject’s socialization, originates partly in the stereotypical understanding of the unconscious as “veiled presence” or “instinct,” located somewhere within the subject. In the “Presence of the Analyst” section of The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, Lacan defines the unconscious, instead, as “the sum of the effects of speech on a subject, at the level at which the subject constitutes himself out of the effects of the signifier” (126). Emphatically, the unconscious is not “that which is inside the subject, but which can be realized only outside, that is to say, in that locus of the Other in which alone it may assume its status” (147). Lacan elaborates this idea in various ways in his work, but I just want to dwell for a moment on the following passage because it employs the same trope of captivity that Harker employs in the descriptions of his
experiences in Transylvania:

To appeal to some healthy part of the subject thought to be there in the real, capable of judging with the analyst what is happening in the transference, is to misunderstand that it is precisely this part that is concerned in the transference, that it is this part that closes the door, or the window, or the shutters, or whatever — and that the beauty with whom one wishes to speak is there, behind, only too willing to open the shutters again. That is why it is at this moment that interpretation becomes decisive, for it is to the beauty one must speak.

I can do no more than suggest here the reversion involved in this schema in relation to the model one has of it in one’s head. I say somewhere that the unconscious is the discourse of the Other. Now, the discourse of the Other that is to be realized, that of the unconscious, is not beyond the closure, it is outside. It is this discourse, which, through the mouth of the analyst, calls for the reopening of the shutter. (Four Concepts 131)

But if the unconscious is outside and if the ego is that which closes the shutters, then what is the beauty hidden behind the shutters? Characteristically, Lacan chooses to speak metaphorically at this point, drawing on the folk tales of a beauty held captive behind the seemingly indestructible walls of some seducer’s castle. It might be possible to understand Lacan’s enigmatic words as saying that the beauty is “outside” and wants to be let in, but answering a question posed to him after he delivered this particular lecture,
Lacan says: "What there is beyond, what a little while ago I called the beauty behind the shutters, this is what is in question [...] It is a question of mapping out how something of the subject is, behind the screen, magnetized, magnetized to the profound degree of dissociation, of split" (134). One plausible interpretation of Lacan’s tale is to say that the walls are the walls of the ego, which have to be opened by the unconscious from the outside in order for the beauty to peep out for a moment, “for it is to the beauty one must speak” (131). This beauty is not any particular desire or identity that wants to “come out.” In fact, the beauty neither can nor should come out from behind the shutters. It is precisely its presence within the ego that makes the ego tolerable. The point of opening the shutters is merely so that the ego can behold this beauty. One could say that this beauty is the only part of the ego that does not belong to the discourse of the Other (which is precisely why it cannot be named), but has to be spoken of only periphastically and that its effect is to reveal parameters of the ego (feelings, anxieties, etc.) as signifiers. This beauty reminds one that, to quote Lacan one more time, “man’s desire is the desire of the Other” (158).11

It is worth keeping in mind this peculiar tale of the “beauty behind the shutters” as we explore in some more detail now Jonathan Harker’s encounter with the other in Transylvania. While Harker emphatically describes himself as a Gothic heroine held captive behind the walls of a mysterious seducer, his explanations in his journal of the baffling events he experiences are desperate efforts to order and assign meaning to the protean presence of Dracula and of his abode and thus to cover up the incision that they create in the armor of Harker’s own ego. But before Harker’s ego manages to close the shutters, the beauty behind them peeks out long enough to reveal the necessary
indeterminacy of gender and sexual identity, two among the strongest parts in the armor of the ego.

Into the Whirlpool: “Herr Englishman” in Transylvania

The first part of Dracula consists of the traveling journal of Jonathan Harker, a young English solicitor who travels to Transylvania to assist Count Dracula in the business of buying a house in London. Harker describes Transylvania as a liminal space, positioned on the very borderline between what he perceives as the familiar and ordered West and the mysterious and disordered East. Numerous details in the first part of the narrative establish Transylvania (literally, “beyond the forest”), with Dracula’s castle at its core, as a geographically, ethnically, and temporally unruly place which overruns boundaries of various kinds. Dracula’s home is “on the borders of three states” (12), in a place that is a “whirlpool of European races” and languages (34), “one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe” (12). The local population calls the area “Mittel Land (17; “middle land”), and entering it takes Harker into a realm wholly different from civilization as he knows it.

Just as Dracula defies being visually organized as an image in the mirror and conceptually defined as “self,” Transylvania defies both crucial ways in which humans organize experience: spatial and temporal. In spite of Harker’s conscientious effort to gain “foreknowledge of the country” (12) by researching about Transylvania in both the British Library and the British Museum, “he was not able to light on any map or work giving the
exact location of the Castle Dracula, as there are no maps of this country as yet to compare with our own Ordnance Survey maps” (12). His traveling is equally hindered by the fact that “the further east you go the more unpunctual are the trains” (13). (The significance of punctuality for the Westerners’ ability to comprehend and conquer the mysterious East is later emphasized by the importance that Mina’s predilection for memorizing train schedules has for fighting Dracula.) These details indicate that conceptual liminality of Transylvania cannot be contained – spatially and temporally mastered for the sake of a “civilized” traveler – into a stable and safe form of the map and the train schedule. Ken Gelder puts it well in his book Reading the Vampire: “Transylvania [...] is not so much unknown or unknowable as a place that throws what can be known into crisis. To enter Transylvania is to encounter a representational problematic” (6). Dracula himself puts it rather more succinctly: “Transylvania is not England” (30).12

Harker begins his journey as a typical Western traveler, “The Herr Englishman” (14), as a native calls him. Boone explains that “Harker represents rational English masculinity; he is both ‘a good specimen of manhood’ and a ‘quite, business-like gentleman” (78), but the deeper he goes into this unsettling land the more unsettled his own identity becomes.13 Distanced from the culture whose symbolic order has organized his identity and isolated from any other Westerners – or indeed humans – who could reflect back to him who he is and the reality or unreality of his experience.14 Harker is desperate to maintain as much as possible his reason and his ability to control his own imagination. Seed explains that the first part of the novel “dramatizes the gradual breakdown of rational explanation before mystery. [...] Harker constantly tries to normalize the strange into the
discourse of the nineteenth-century travelogue” (197), with its familiar strategy of appropriating foreign content by subjecting it to Western paradigms and of defining what cannot be appropriated as local peculiarity.

At first, he believes that he can easily appropriate the exotic culture he encounters. After having an unusually prepared chicken dish just before entering Transylvania, he writes in his journal: “(Mem., get recipe for Mina)” (11). On the one hand, this parenthetical remark indicates Harker’s instinctive placement of his fiancée Mina into the domestic sphere, which she will slyly reject throughout the novel, but it can also be seen, according to Fleissner, as the beginning of the crisis of Harker’s masculine identity as he “assumes a quasi-domestic role” himself (430) by jotting down recipes. On the other hand, the remark also signifies both Mina’s and his own interest in assimilating and domesticating the exotic and the extraordinary, which is one of the novel’s central themes. But the mysteries of Transylvania are not so easily appropriated, as Harker promptly learns when the chicken dish, which he immediately imagined being prepared and served in a respectable English home, starts causing him “all sorts of queer dreams” (12). The dish also makes him terribly thirsty, with a thirst that is quenched only as he tastes the local wine, “which produces a queer sting on the tongue, which is, however, not disagreeable” (15-16) and listens to “queer words” (16) spoken in many languages by the crowd in and in front of his inn. The queerness of Harker’s experience, in both the conventional sense of the word and in the sense assigned to it by contemporary theory as a term signaling intrinsic instability or intentional disruption of clear-cut categories, will only expand during his visit in Dracula’s castle. Transylvania’s liminality makes it, to quote Gelder again, “the realm
queerness' inhabits: it is neither real nor not-real" (62).

As Harker observes with increasingly suspicious curiosity the landscape, vegetation, and the customs in this strange land, instead of providing a seemingly detached description in the manner of Victorian travelogues, he concludes that this country gives the impression of being "the center of some sort of imaginative whirlpool" (12), without realizing that, in this place which brings civilized Western concepts into crisis, it is his own imagination that is thrown into a whirlpool, weakening the stability of his self-identification as a rational, self-disciplined English gentleman. Throughout his description of the strange events he witnesses in Transylvania, Harker is increasingly uncertain whether the danger he gradually perceives comes from Dracula or from his own imagination: "imagination must not run riot with me," he writes, "If it does, I am lost" (34). Harker repeatedly doubts his own senses and reason, not merely because of the supernatural and frightening events he witnesses, but also because of the feelings and desires they arouse in him: "I think strange things, which I dare not confess to my own soul" (28). In that situation, Harker looks for help in writing. His journal constantly tries to move away from crises into rational explanation, but "the language of proof and evidence breaks down before the gaps and ambiguities in Harker's experiences", so that, "keeping his journal [...] becomes a therapeutic act of self-preservation" (Seed 197).

"Born a Man, Died a Clerk": Emasculating Work of the Bourgeois Professional

Harker's meticulous, conscientious describing of his experiences for the purpose of
keeping his sanity, his dependence on writing in order to maintain his sense of who he is, is another trait that characterizes him as a typical Westerner, but even more significantly, it also marks him in terms of his occupation, that of a solicitor’s clerk. Pardon me, the profession of the solicitor. It is Harker himself who is uncertain of his professional identity at this point and keeps forgetting that he is not a solicitor’s clerk any longer but a full blown solicitor (25). Just before leaving for Transylvania, Harker becomes a solicitor, but he remains in the service of his teacher and master Mr. Hawkins. Instead of asserting his newly gained independence, Harker still thinks of himself as a solicitor’s clerk, and corrects himself only after realizing that “Mina would not like that” (25). This indication that Harker’s professional ambition appear less strong than that of his fiancee’s is only the first in the series of gender inversions in which, until late in the narrative, Harker’s fiancee, and then wife, will appear stronger, more resourceful, and more active than Harker himself.

It is significant that the first such inversion, an early sign of Harker’s gradual emasculation, is related to his professional situation. As Hall points out, “it is Harker’s profession which is central to an understanding of the novel’s representation of the threat of sexuality and the blurring of gender roles” (99). This link between Harker’s unstable professional situation and his unstable gender identification develops as his presence in Dracula’s castle is described as a mere move from one “master, employer, what you will” (40) to another. Indeed, in his somewhat odd letter to Dracula, Mr. Hawkins describes Harker as a disciple exchanged between two masters: “He is discreet and silent, and has grown into manhood in my service. He shall be ready to attend on you when you will during his stay, and shall take your instructions in all matters” (27, emphasis added). This
letter explicitly puts Harker in a subservient position beyond what is necessitated by his professional task, but it also implicates his manhood in this homosocial exchange between Hawkins and Dracula. In other words, Harker’s position in this exchange is not unlike Lucy’s position in strengthening the bond of the men who loved her as they are getting ready for their own, in a sense “professional,” task of destroying Dracula. In this way, instead of being one of the valiant adventurers like Morris, Seward, and Arthur, at the beginning of the narrative Harker’s position is markedly effeminate.

Several critics have commented on Harker’s feminization through his business relationship with Dracula, and more generally, on the ways in which Dracula relates to, as Hall puts it, “the radical reconstruction of gender roles as the emergent ideology of professionalism comes into conflict with the Victorian construction of man as the independent, self-sufficient breadwinner, and woman as the dependent guardian of the hearth” (100). On the one hand, as Daly explains, Dracula enhances that “ideology of professionalism” because it provides a “myth of origins” for “the culture of the expert”(186) by using anxiety to produce as both necessary and natural a particular form of professional male, homosocial combination – the team of experts” (181). The fears engendered by the vampire – corruption, disease, degeneration, invasion – “established a mission for a new group of professionals in human management, whose area of expertise would extend into that which liberal ideology had once designated as the private sphere” (183). So, for Daly, Dracula is a “fantasy of control through expertise” (194). On the other hand, however, Hall points out the ways in which the novel indicates an anxiety about the servile, emasculating position in which some of these professionals must place themselves.
She describes Harker as having “an increasingly dissociated identity, an identity which is put under pressure by the female role of subservience which Harker must adopt as a solicitor in relation to his client, Dracula” (99). “The solicitor survives by soliciting,” Hall explains, “by placing himself in the female position as object of desire. Like women who solicit, however, the solicitor is not ‘indispensable’ but infinitely replaceable, and he is replaceable not only by others who offer a similar service, but also by the client himself, if that service involves passing on one’s training and expertise” (101). Thus, Dracula “sucks Jonathan’s mind rather than his heart” (101). Hawkins’s letter, according to Hall, “first reinforces the idea that the professional man is dispensable – his place can be filled by those that he trains in his service – and then attempts to make that service indispensable through the qualities of loyalty, silence, and complete obedience (putting in question the kind of ‘manhood’ that one grows into in ‘service’). Like the Victorian wife, the professional is only valuable if he is faithful” (102). “Harker as solicitor can have no interest of his own; he is not ‘the man himself’ but a stand-in. Lacking this agency, he must obey his ‘master, employer, what you will’ for he, again like the Victorian woman, needs the financial support of the male. In the nightmare version of professionalism that Harker faces in Castle Dracula,” Hall concludes, “the professional’s role is always that of subservience” (103).

Fleissner contributes to the analysis of Harker’s feminization through his professional position by focusing on the Victorian attitudes toward clerks. She develops Daly’s argument that “Dracula’s turn-of-the-century vampiric threat might be viewed historically as a mythic rationale for the construction of a corporate body of
professionalized men" by adding that "such a consolidation requires not only the assertion that these are men, not clerks, but the presence of a woman who can step into the role of secretary-cum-vampire-victim: Mina Harker" (436). The only man who actually grows from the position of a clerk into the position of a man is Harker. His position as a clerk (as he still sees himself and as Dracula forces him to continue to be) is in itself feminized; Fleissner quotes a popular 19th century phrase: "Born a man, died a clerk" (434). Clerking was "a job inherently at odds with masculinity" but only "were one to perform it until death, never rising any higher in the company ranks" (434), so "a fear of clerkship as stagnation clearly haunts [the] novel's hero" (435).16

While Harker is in Transylvania, his professional stagnation is perpetuated and it becomes part and parcel with his gender ambiguity. Both Jonathan’s fiancee and his employer view "occupational advance as synonymous with becoming a full-blown man" (Fleissner 435; emphasis in the original). This is why, as we shall see, Harker’s recuperation from the destabilizing experience in Transylvania must include not only a speedy wedding but also a fast-track promotion. But before I discuss these two related methods of Harker’s recuperation, I will take a closer look at the seduction scene itself – the most perilous moment for the “health” of Harker’s ego, yet also the one that initiates its healing.

Male Shahrazad: Herr Englishman’s Feminine Identification and Homoerotic Desire

If Harker’s gender identity is cracked by his servile professional position in Castle
Dracula, it is even further destabilized through Harker’s consistent articulation of his position as analogous to that of an imprisoned and endangered gothic heroine. One can easily imagine the following exclamations uttered by Clarissa, or Pamela, or Emily in the depths of Udolpho: “The castle is a veritable prison, and I am a prisoner” (35); “Then the horror overcame me, and I sank down unconscious” (48); “I came back to my room and threw myself on my knees. It is then so near the end? To-morrow! To-morrow! Lord, help me, and those to whom I am dear!” (59). In fact, however, these are all sentences from Harker’s journal. The first part of the novel performs a gender inversion of the generic motif shared by both gothic romances and Samuel Richardson’s epistolary novels: the heroine is kept captive by an aggressive masculine figure who proclaims to wish her well but whom she sees as a threat to her integrity. In the cases of these heroines — and one thinks of Clarissa in particular — the integrity is symbolized by the heroine’s virginity, and the threat these ladies dread is that of sexual molestation. Harker also sees himself as molested: “It has always been at night-time that I have been molested or threatened, or in some way in danger or in fear” (55). He even faces the threat of penetration, of compromising his bodily integrity, even if, on the surface, it is only his neck that is in danger. But it is primarily the integrity of his masculine identity that is endangered by these cross-gender self-identifications.

Harker explicitly and repeatedly places himself in a feminine role. First, he compares himself to Shahrazad by commenting that “this diary seems horribly like the beginning of the ‘Arabian Nights’” (39). Then, in spite of Dracula’s warning not to sleep in any other part of the castle but his own rooms because “there are bad dreams for those who
sleep unwisely” (42), Harker ventures beyond his quarters and discovers a room which, by decorations and furniture, he judges to have been “occupied by the ladies in bygone days” (44). Hall remarks that here “Harker also plays the female part, that of Bluebeard’s overly curious wife” (103), but as he remains in the room he discovered, his feminine identification strengthens even more: “Here I am sitting at a little oak table where in old times possibly some fair lady sat to pen, with much thought and many blushes, her ill-spelt love-letter, and writing in my diary in shorthand all that has happened since I closed it last” (44). This emphatic juxtaposition of the image of the lady with the image of Harker, both writing about their feelings and awaiting their destiny, is immediately reinforced by Harker’s move from the lady’s seat into her bed: “I determined not to return tonight to the gloom-haunted rooms, but to sleep here, where, of old, ladies had set and sung and lived sweet lives whilst their gentle breasts were sad for their menfolk away in the midst of remorseless wars” (45). This sentence, which starts with Harker as a protagonist and ends by substituting the ladies for him, confirms Harker’s strong identification with these ladies. It also implies that Harker begins to cultivate feelings for Dracula other than those of repulsion and fear. Dracula has emphasized to Harker that he comes from a tradition of warriors and that he sees himself as an heir to that tradition, which makes it possible to see Harker’s thoughts about the ladies being sad for the warriors as an expression of his own sympathy, and perhaps desire, for Dracula. After all, fearing that he may be going mad, Harker admits to himself: “If I be sane, then surely it is maddening to think that of all the foul things that lurk in this hateful place the count [Dracula] is the least dreadful to me” (45). At the same time, however, Harker’s fantasizing about the ladies expresses his
suppressed heterosexual desire, which then finds its manifestation in the dream/event with the three vampiric women which he experiences while in the ancient ladies’ room.

This complicated scene of seduction, in which Harker describes himself as being desired both by three vampiric women and by Dracula himself, defies any easy, ego-driven categorizing, such as heterosexual or homosexual. Also, the castration anxiety involved in Harker’s “dream” further increases his gender indeterminacy. As a manifestation of a desire that cannot be easily classified, Harker’s “queer dream” is both real and unreal, interweaving what we call heterosexual and homosexual desires to the point of making these categories meaningless. Even though what happens later in the novel encourages us to understand the events described here as real, Harker’s journal itself leaves it entirely uncertain if this is a description of an event or of a dream, which further supports a reading of the scene in terms of the processes in Harker’s psyche. When he encounters the vampiric women again a little bit later in the narrative, their appearance is described more decidedly as a figment of his unconscious: “I felt myself struggling to awake to some call of my instincts; nay, my very soul was struggling, and my half-remembered sensibilities were striving to answer the call” (53-54). That his reawakened “half-remembered sensibilities” are sexual in nature is underscored by the hallucinatory quality of his experiences, which Harker persistently describes as either being or verging on a dream. According to Lacan, “it is only on account of the sexualization of these [dreamed] objects that the hallucination of the dream is possible” (155).

Lying in the ancient lady’s bed, whether awake or asleep, Harker is first visited by three voluptuous vampire-ladies, who instigate in him “a wicked, burning desire that they
would kiss [him] with those red lips” (46). As Christopher Craft influentially explains, “Harker awaits an erotic fulfillment that entails both the dissolution of the boundaries of the self and the thorough subversion of conventional Victorian gender codes” (73). Away from his fiancée and from the moral and social norms of England, Harker’s ego loosens control over his desire, which initially seems hyper-heterosexual: he wants to be illicitly kissed by no less than three women, which clearly parallels Lucy’s wanting to marry all three of her suitors. Very much like Lucy, “Harker is the fallen woman who, walking out of her assigned boundaries, offers herself to strangers in the middle of the night” (Hall 103).

Significantly, as Boone points out, these are women who do not comply to his ideal of femininity (80) and whom Harker emphatically distinguishes from Mina, whom he sees as being “in diametrical contrast to ‘those awful women’ who seem to be ‘devils of the Pit’ as they dine on children and are ‘waiting to suck [his] blood’” (Johnson 243). Bentley supports this distinction: “the vampire women offer immediate sexual gratification, though on illicit and dangerous terms, a tempting alternative to the socially imposed delays and frustrations of his relationship with the chaste but somewhat sexless Mina” (26).

Weissman, however, comments that “the whole book reveals the fear that they [Mina and the vampire women] do indeed have something in common. There is always the possibility that the chaste Victorian wife will become the kind of woman that her husband both desires and fears” (75). Mina, indeed, may not be as “sexless” as some critics see her, but she certainly is not a woman who would offer “immediate gratification,” one of the psychic needs that Jonathan must deny in order to become a member of the band of professional men who will save England from Dracula.
But the heterosexual character of Harker’s desire for the vampiric women is further troubled by the fact that his dream can be interpreted as Harker’s fantasy of fellatio that threatens to turn into castration:

The girl went on her knees, and bent over me, simply gloating. There was a deliberate voluptuousness that was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal [...]. Lower and lower went her head as the lips went below the range of my mouth and chin and seemed about to fasten on my throat. [...] I could feel the soft, shivering touch of the lips on the super-sensitive skin of my throat, and the hard dents of two sharp teeth, just touching and pausing there. I closed my eyes in a languorous ecstasy and waited – waited with beating heart. (46-47)

The emphasis on the woman’s mouth, lips, and teeth, as well as her going on her knees and moving her head lower and lower, connote oral sex, even though Harker’s weakened ego is still strong enough to substitute the throat, with its “super-sensitive skin,” for the penis, but the woman’s sharp teeth and her impending bite clearly endanger the throat/penis and suggest castration, which Harker, less and less invested in maintaining his own masculinity, almost welcomes, in an ultimately masochistic impulse (cf. Hatlen 124 and Griffin 138).

If the first part of the scene seems to stress the heterosexual character of Harker’s unruly desire, although complicated by gender-threatening desire for castration, it is Dracula’s sudden bursting in upon this bizarre foursome that makes the circulation of desire
in the scene even more Protean. Dracula hurls the woman away from Harker, thus saving him from castration, and pronounces the words that provoked so much critical discussion: “How dare you touch him, any of you? How dare you cast eyes on him when I had forbidden it? Back, I tell you all! This man belongs to me!” (47). And when the women accuse him of not being able to love, “the Count turned, after looking at [Harker’s] face attentively, and said in a soft whisper: ‘Yes, I too can love; […] I promise you that when I am done with him you shall kiss him at your will’” (47). As the women disappear and Dracula remains next to the bed with the aroused Harker in it, Harker puts in use a self-defensive and self-denying mechanism worthy of Clarissa and faints. The next thing he is aware of is awaking in his own bed and realizing that Dracula must have carried him there and undressed him. This makes him rather glad because “nothing can be more dreadful than those awful women, who were – who are – waiting to suck my blood” (49; emphasis added). Harker’s apparent oblivion to the fact that Dracula as well might wish to suck his blood – or do whatever else the women were about to do – goes hand in hand with his denial of his own preference to be Dracula’s “victim” rather than the women’s.

Christopher Craft’s brilliant analysis of the novel, dwelling substantially on the scene of Harker’s seduction by the three vampire women and on Dracula’s interruption of it, shows how homosexual desire in Stoker’s novel is both heterosexually mediated, through a homophobic displacement of homosexual desire into the inversion of gender roles (“sexual inversion explains homosexual desire as a physiologically misplaced heterosexuality” 77), and how it is displaced into homosociality, a gynophobic reinforcement of homosocial bonding through a shared violence toward women, in Stoker’s
novel. For Craft, homosexual desire is a masked but crucial motivating energy in the story. He believes, for example, that "the narrative’s originary anxiety [...] derives from Dracula’s hovering interest in Jonathan Harker; the sexual threat that this novel first evokes, manipulates, sustains, but never finally represents, is that Dracula will seduce, penetrate, drain another male” (74). Instead, “this desire finds evasive fulfillment in an important series of heterosexual displacements” (75). More specifically, through the appearance of the three vampiric women, “whose anatomical femininity permits, because it masks, the silently interdict homoerotic embrace between Harker and the Count [...] an implicitly homosexual desire achieves representation as a monstrous heterosexuality, as a demonic inversion of normal gender relations” (75). Statements like these imply that homosexuality is somehow a primary or real desire in the novel, suppressed and masked because of the homophobic taboos of Stoker’s culture. In my reading, however, Harker’s imagining that Dracula loves him and wants to seduce him is not so much a displaced momentary acknowledgment of his own homosexual desire as it is a defensive mechanism by means of which Harker’s ego forfends any more radical identity crisis by manufacturing this transferential emotion, which his “rational self” can then condemn and deny.

After all, what is the usefulness of concluding that in his unconscious, exposed in this hallucinatory scene, Harker makes a homosexual object choice when, as Freud famously puts it, “all human beings are capable of making a homosexual object-choice and have in fact made one in their unconscious” (Three Essays 11n, emphasis added). What is more interesting is the effect that this homoerotic recognition has of abruptly interrupting Harker’s ego-dissolving hallucination. Just as a psychoanalytic patient resists analysis by
falling in love – or beginning to hate – the analyst, so does Harker’s ego tentatively entertain the monstrous idea of desiring a monstrous male in order to avoid further exposure to the destabilizing effects of the shape-shifting, inexplicable un-dead. And also, just as the patient can easily renounce his feelings for the analyst as imposed on him by the analyst’s authoritative position and might use that as an excuse to give up the analysis, the momentary recognition of Harker’s desire for Dracula pushes him into a transformative illness from which he emerges a reconfirmed manly man ready for marriage, as the next step in the process of reclaiming his masculine identity. Harker’s ego needs a kind of monstrosity which can be expunged, denied, rejected, by virtue of being clear and defined enough in cultural imagination in order to be perceived as a specific threat which can be removed in its entirety. One such “monstrosity” is homosexual desire. Homosexual desire, then, is not Harker’s suppressed instinct which finds disavowed expression under Dracula’s “corruptive influence”; it is a signifier which scratches his ego so as to provide an overture for the spectacle of its healing.

Inasmuch as homoerotic desire becomes an element in this complex scene of Jonathan’s seduction involving both Dracula and the three vampiric women, it actually serves to strengthen Jonathan’s masculine rationalism and self-discipline, which have been dissipating throughout his previous experiences in Transylvania. If anything, Dracula in this scene prevents Harker from abandoning himself to his emasculating desire for the aggressive women, or as Pick puts it, “Dracula protect[s] Harker from himself” (83) and actually helps him turn back toward self-disciplined masculinity. As Holden explains, “Harker’s episode with the female vampires, then, does not so much disrupt a process of
bourgeois, specifically masculine, individualization, as provide a new exemplum of it. [...] A crisis has been superceded by discipline, and the disciplinary process emerges from it strengthened, even if the subject is himself somewhat enfeebled” (477). The moment of homoerotic desire is such a crisis which alerts additional self-control. As Holden points out, “in the last two decades of the nineteenth century the growing presence of a homosexual identity on the mental horizon of many middle-class men [...] resulted in a guarded masculine subjectivity, subject to ever more discipline” (481). In other words, the appearance of homosexual identity disrupted masculine identification only to insure its more guarded, more self-disciplined maintenance. Harker’s crisis of the heterosexual identification and a momentary entertaining of homoerotic desire, which then is violently rejected, may work to ultimately ensure his renewed self-discipline.

But for this renewed masculine self-discipline and self-control to be achieved, it must remain uncertain whether Jonathan’s seduction by Dracula is ever completed. Harker never makes it clear in his diary whether Dracula has feasted on him or not. There are, however, several reasons to believe that Dracula has sucked Harker’s blood. About to fall asleep for the last time in Dracula’s castle, Harker overhears Dracula’s words to the vampiric women: “Your time is not yet come. Wait! Have patience! To-night is mine. Tomorrow night is yours” (59). In the light of what Dracula said in the previous scene, these words clearly refer to Harker. It is Harker who is Dracula’s that night and the women’s the next night. Harker then falls asleep, and we never learn what, if anything, happens during that night. However, when he wakes up and before he flees the castle, Harker ventures to Dracula’s room only to find him in his coffin bloated with blood and rejuvenated, “like a
filthy leach, exhausted with his repletion” (60). Obviously, Dracula has feasted on somebody, and since there are no other humans in the castle and Dracula’s leaving the castle that night is not mentioned, it is fair to conclude that Harker has become Dracula’s victim after all. Harker’s long illness that follows his escape from the castle supports such a conclusion.

Another piece of evidence that some form of exchange between Harker and Dracula has occurred is Harker’s method of running away by imitating Dracula’s crawling down the walls of the castle. When he first sees Dracula moving about in this manner, Harker is overpowered with “repulsion and terror” (43), but later he reasons: “Why should not I imitate him” (55). This imitation is a sign of identity confusion between Harker and Dracula, which is increased by the fact that Dracula has stolen Harker’s clothes and gone about wearing them, so that some of his victims actually believe that Harker is the monster (54). Craft also interprets the fact that, when Harker tries to see Dracula in a mirror, he sees “no sign of a man in it, except myself” (38) as pointing to Harker’s identification with Dracula. And Senf insists that “[b]ehavior generally attributed to the vampire – the habit of attacking a sleeping victim [Harker hits Dracula], violence, and irrational behavior – is revealed to be the behavior of the civilized Englishmen also” (98 in Carter), but the Englishmen don’t have enough self-knowledge to realize that, and that’s what enables them to conceal “their lust for power under the rubric of religion, their love of violence under the name of imperialism and progress, their sexual desires within an elaborate courtship ritual” (99). Harker certainly exercises enough self-denial and displacement to conceal from himself his own resemblance to Dracula.
While Harker never describes or admits to anyone his victimization, there are indications that he is aware that something occurred to him, whether in reality or in his dreams, which may disturb the middle-class, heterosexual future awaiting for him in England. He writes a letter to his fiancée Mina, but “without the horrors which I may only surmise. It would shock and frighten her to death *were I to expose my heart to her*” (51, emphasis added). It is not even Harker’s queer experience (“queer” partly because indefinable in terms of heterosexuality or homosexuality), but his queer feelings (his “heart”) that would shock Mina, as indeed many a Victorian woman would be shocked to learn that her fiancé’s self-identification may not be uncompromisingly heterosexual, masculine, and monogamous.

Even though Harker must immediately conceal it from himself, Dracula’s presence reveals to him for a moment the precarious and artificial nature of his masculinity, heterosexual desire, and his middle-class, professional rationality and self-discipline, in a way which is not unlike how the analyst’s presence enables the patient to behold his emotions (acknowledged and unacknowledged) as signifiers rather than instincts. This “insight” is, of course, just a momentary opening of the shutters, which close as soon as Harker’s ego resorts to illness as a way of restoring the apparent coherence of Harker’s gender/sexual identity. As soon as he gets well again, Harker must immediately marry and join the gang dedicated to destroying Dracula, in order to avoid ever having to face that “insight” again, to behold again the beauty behind the shutters. The rest of the narrative must remove this “insight” in order for Harker to join the band of men who save England by killing Dracula. It is in that sense that their struggle is not only about saving Mina,
which they openly avow, but also, more tacitly, about saving Harker as well. The society, represented by the gang, has to reclaim Harker, in a way, and to help him recover his masculine, heterosexual, and professional identities. In the case of Gide’s hero Michel, this process of re-socialization is only about to begin at the end of The Immoralist, but in Stoker’s novel the longest past of the narrative is dedicated to Harker’s re-socialization. Harker never allows himself to reach the intensity of self-disintegration that Michel reaches, but the lengthy, gradual, and somewhat hesitant nature of Harker’s recuperation suggests the remaining ambivalence with which he endorses his re-socialization.

His Own Master: Marriage and/as Business

The nun who nurses Jonathan in a Hungarian hospital after his escape from Dracula’s castle and who informs Mina about his state has a sense of how difficult Jonathan’s recovery must be: “he has had some fearful shock [...] and in his delirium his ravings have been dreadful” (131-32). The nun advises Mina to be “careful with him always that there may be nothing to excite him of this kind for a long time to come; the traces of such illness as his do not lightly die away” (132). Jonathan’s decision to risk his life by crawling down the walls of Dracula’s castle believing that, even in the event of death, “at its foot a man may sleep – as a man” (73), actually takes him out of danger, but it is the ensuing “violent brain fever” (131), which translates into somatic symptoms the identity crisis he has experienced in Transylvania, that ultimately saves his life by foreclosing that crisis and by turning it into something that can be healed. Complete
healing, however, depends on Jonathan’s not being exposed to such excitement any time soon. Since his crisis, as we have seen, was primarily a crisis of his masculine identity, related both to his professional situation and to his sexuality prior to marriage, the first steps in his recovery must be to replace his old Master, Mr. Hawkins, and to marry Mina.

From the very beginning, Mina and Jonathan’s improvised wedding, which occurs in a hospital with Jonathan barely recovered from his brain fever, appears to be very much an effort to neutralize or suppress Jonathan’s experiences in Transylvania. Jonathan makes Mina’s agreement with this suppression practically a part of their wedding vows. Here is Jonathan’s solemn address to Mina just before their wedding, regarding his Transylvanian journal:

“Wilhelmina” – I knew then that he was in deadly earnest, for he has never called me by that name since he asked me to marry him – “you know, dear, my ideas of the trust between husband and wife: there should be no secret, no concealment. I have had a great shock, and when I try to think of what it is I feel my head spin round, and I do not know if it was real or the dreaming of a madman. You know I have had brain fever, and this is to be mad. The secret is here, and I do not want to know it. I want to take up my life here, with our marriage. [...] Are you willing, Wilhelmina, to share my ignorance? Here is the book. Take it and keep it, read it if you will, but never let me know; unless, indeed, some solemn duty should come upon me to go back to the bitter hours, asleep or awake, sane or mad, recorded here.” (138-39).
Even though Jonathan leaves Mina the option to read his journal at her will, he makes it clear that he wishes she would share his ignorance. Indeed, in spite of the ideal of absolute openness in marriage, for this marriage to work, the husband’s sexualized adventures with multiple women and a mysterious man, whether real or fantasized, would seem better kept secret. Inasmuch as the marriage guarantees Jonathan’s stabilized masculine identity, his gender and sexual ambiguity must be external to it.

Not only does Mina accept Jonathan’s terms, but she makes this secret about his pre-marital experiences, or about his unconscious fantasies, her “wedding present” (139), the very symbol of their union. As Jonathan is resting after the wedding ceremony, Mina does the following:

[...] I took the book from under his pillow, and wrapped it up in white paper, and tied it with a little bit of pale ribbon which was round my neck, and sealed it over the knot with sealing-wax, and for my seal I used my wedding ring. Then I kissed it and showed it to my husband, and told him that I would keep it so, and then it would be an outward and visible sign for us all our lives that we trusted each other; that I would never open it unless it were for his own dear sake or for the sake of some stern duty. (139)

While the wedding ring literally seals the secret of Jonathan’s faltering masculinity preceding the marriage, the whiteness of the wrapping paper and the paleness of the ribbon should symbolize the innocence of Mina’s wifely gesture of trust and submission to her
husband’s wish. Characteristically for Mina, though, she indicates that she may suspect
more than she avows to know when she writes to Lucy that Jonathan “does not remember
anything that has happened to him for a long time past. At least, he wants me to believe so,
and I shall never ask” (137, emphasis added).

It is important that both Jonathan and Mina anticipate that their pact of secrecy
might be breached for the sake of “some solemn duty,” “some stern duty” (139). The
implication is that this private marital pact would suffice to insure Jonathan’s recovery only
if the marriage were sufficient to guarantee Jonathan’s recuperation as a rational, self-
disciplined, self-controlled English middle-class gentleman. However, if Jonathan is to
acquire the necessary standing and an appropriately masculine image in the bourgeois
society of professional experts, he needs to become a part of yet another union – that of the
valiant band of men whose stable masculinity, shored up by their appropriate attitudes
toward professions, class, and money, guarantees the stability of the very nation. In other
words, Mina cannot do the whole work of recontaining Jonathan’s gender ambiguity by
accepting her role of a dutiful, trustful wife, who would not dream of questioning her
husband’s masculinity. He must show himself equal to Lucy’s suitors, if he is to be worthy
of becoming a husband, a father, and a Master. In order for that to happen, he cannot
merely forget about Dracula, the symbol of his early faltering, but he must destroy him.

But before Jonathan can even begin to fight Dracula, his submissive professional
situation as a man in another man’s service must also change. Therein lies the enormous
symbolic significance of the sudden death of Mr. Hawkins, Harker’s employer, who leaves
his whole business to Harker. All of a sudden, Harker becomes, in Mina’s proud words,
“Jonathan Harker, a solicitor, a partner, rich, master of his business.” Smart explains that the “money inherited by Jonathan Harker from Mr. Peter Hawkins, his generous employer, revitalizes the sick young man [...] and makes it possible for him to strike the final blow against Dracula” (254). “Harker’s vigorous opposition to Dracula,” Smart concludes, “comes only once he is in a financial position to compete with the Count. Before this, he is always powerless and prostrate before the vampire, unable to match his economic and psychological power” (260).

At the same time, Harker, now a master of his own business, acquires an employee in his service: his wife. According to Hall, “the last section of the novel will replace the male professional Harker with his wife Mina as the center of circulation, thus constructing a new ideal version of womanhood – the feminized clerk, the professionalized wife” (100). Now Mina holds “the position of ‘Solicitor’s Clerk’ from which Jonathan has just been promoted when the novel opens. In this position, Mina acts to recontain all the feminine attributes which had threatened to emasculate her husband” (109). This allows Harker to move on to a more independent professional position as well as a more unified, stable subjectivity. The crucial piece of work that Mina does in Jonathan’s service is to type out his journal, thus transforming his personal experiences, with all their ambiguities and contradictory impulses, “into a public text, a text which presents the professional man as the unified liberal subject, both knowledgeable and powerful” (Hall 110). Harker himself, initially reluctant to remember his Transylvanian adventures, remarks that reading Mina’s text has “made a new man of me.... I felt impotent, and in the dark, and distrustful. But, now that I know, I am not afraid, even of the Count.” Mina, therefore, aids Jonathan’s
recovery not only by marrying him but also by working for him.

Indeed, the relationship between Mina and Jonathan, the Harkers, is described more as a rapidly successful professional team than as a sexual union. Mina sees her work, in Fleissner’s words, “as an extension of her marital duties” (428). She insists that she is learning stenography “in order to be useful to Jonathan” (74), which proves to be true in more ways than one, as her typescript of his diary helps him overcome his crisis. On the other hand, as Bently points out, “the sexual elements that presumably exist in their relationship are never revealed, much less discussed” (26). Indeed, sexual fulfillment of this marriage seems to be deliberately postponed, first by Harker’s illness and then by Mina’s seduction and marking by Dracula. Only at the end, when both Jonathan and Mina are reclaimed as the middle-class couple they need to be, do we know for sure that their marriage has been consumed because Mina gives birth to a son.

Mina’s Seduction: The Heroine Loses Her Mark, the Hero Achieves His

The actual consummation of the Harkers’ marriage, the Harkers’ final assumption of the symbolic role of the proper bourgeois family, cannot occur as long as Mina is clearly the stronger of the two. So far, by rushing to Hungary to marry him, by typing out his diary, by using her “male brain” (Van Helsing’s words) to plan a strategy against Dracula, Mina has proved to be more of a man than her husband. What the last part of the narrative does is to invert this situation and allow Jonathan to be the savior and healer of his wife, rather than the other way round. Dracula’s seduction of Mina enables this inversion, but it can be
seen as the final stage of Dracula's seduction of Jonathan as well. In this remarkable scene, Dracula serves as a kind of mediator between husband and wife, seemingly jeopardizing their newly acquired marital bliss, but actually paving the way for a more appropriate union between them. Here is the striking tableau vivant, presented as "a literal defilement of the marriage bed" (Seed 196), as described by the appalled Dr. Seward:

The moonlight was so bright that through the thick yellow blind the room was light enough to see. On the bed beside the window lay Jonathan Harker, his face flushed and breathing heavily as though in a stupor. Kneeling on the near edge of the bed facing outwards was the white-clad figure of his wife. By her side stood a tall, thin man, clad in black. His face was turned from us, but the instant we saw we all recognized the Count – in every way, even to the scar on his forehead. With his left hand he held both Mrs Harker's hands, keeping them away with her arms at full tension; his right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom. Her white nightdress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man's bare breast which was shown by his torn-open dress. The attitude of the two had a terrible resemblance to a child forcing a kitten's nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink. (362-63)

This scene is different from the scenes in which Dracula seduces Lucy in at least two significant ways: 1) Here Mina drinks Dracula's blood rather than the other way round, and
2) Mina’s husband is a part of the scene, whereas Dracula’s interactions with Lucy involved nobody else. The first fact has been interpreted by critics in a variety of ways. Craft, for example, observes that Mina’s drinking from Dracula’s breast “introduces her to a world where gender distinctions collapse, where male and female bodily fluids intermingle terribly” (91). He agrees with Bentley that this act can be seen as “enforced fellation” (Craft 92), “where blood is [...] a substitute for semen” (Bentley 29), just as in the scenes of Lucy’s blood transfusions.

It is also worth noting, however, that this scene is reminiscent of the scene of Jonathan’s seduction, except that now Mina is in the position analogous to the three vampiric women. Even though Seward describes her as being forced to drink Dracula’s blood, Mina’s position here is more active than Lucy’s in the scenes when she is victimized by Dracula. Therefore, this act may suggest that a terrifying aspect of this scene is Mina’s aggressive sexuality, which she, unlike Lucy, never acknowledges in her writing, but which might actually explain her husband’s stupor. It may be possible to read this scene as describing Mina’s seduction of Jonathan or at least its effects. Weissman reads the scene in a similar way, but she seems to suggest that Mina is already a vampire at this moment: “Flushed and tired, Jonathan seems to have just had intercourse, and we do not know whether Dracula produced this state in order to have access to Mina, or whether Mina, during what she thought was normal intercourse with her husband, produced the stupor. [...] As the women in Dracula become vampires, they become too sexual for their husbands or fiances to endure” (75). However, everything indicates that Jonathan fell into the stupor before Dracula’s appearance, in which case both his stupor and Dracula’s appearance may
well be read as consequences of Mina’s sexual assertion. This scene, after all, is the first and only scene in which Mina and Jonathan appear together in a clearly sexualized context, and so it can even be seen as the scene in which their marriage is first consummated. Mina’s “white nightdress” is “smeared with blood,” but while we must assume that that is caused by Dracula, it is Mina who smears Jonathan’s virginally white nightgown. After they both wake up from the stupor, horrified Mina puts her head on her husband’s breast seeking comfort.

When she raised it, his white night-robe was stained with blood where her lips had touched, and where the thin open wound in her neck had sent forth drops. The instant she saw it she drew back, with a low wail, and whispered, amidst choking sobs:

“Unclean, unclean! I must touch him or kiss him no more.” (365-66)

As Griffin explains, “Mina’s own purity is befouled now that she has crossed the border into sexuality, and by association, her husband’s is tainted as well” (146). But what this moment also implies is that Mina, in a sense, deflowers Jonathan rather than the other way round. The scene of Mina’s seduction clearly sets the stage for Jonathan’s defense of his wife’s purity and soul, which will finally establish him as manly enough to be one of the valiant band of men. As Smart points out, “once Mina is violated, Jonathan Harker pursues Dracula with a fervor that is matched only by the vampire’s greed and inhumanity. ‘He was never so resolute, never so strong, never so full of volcanic energy as at present’” (257). In
other words, Mina’s violation is necessary in order for Jonathan to reassert and re-solidify his masculinity.

It appears, then, that this scene is as double-edged in its implications as the scene of Jonathan’s seduction in Dracula’s castle. On the one hand, it suggests that Mina – the competent, active, courageous woman with a “male brain” – at this moment still threatens the consolidation of Jonathan’s masculinity; but on the other hand, this very scene turns her into a helpless victim whose salvation now depends on her husband’s manly heroism. In other words, Dracula’s presence is once again ambiguous. It puts Harker in the same passive position in which he found himself in the scene with three vampiric women, indicating that Harker’s wife, the guarantor of his masculine recovery, is not free of all similarity with those women. At the same time, Dracula’s victimization of Mina serves to place her in the position necessary for the recovery of her husband’s masculine identity: a lady in peril. Since neither the wedding itself nor Mina’s assumption of the subordinate clerk’s position sufficed to fully recuperate Jonathan from his initial gender ambiguity, this second seduction is necessary. Once again, while seemingly tainting Jonathan’s masculine self-control – in this case by threatening his marriage – Dracula’s appearance also allows him to regain it.

Now that Dracula has usurped Jonathan’s marriage bed and his bride, Jonathan’s destruction of Dracula is more significant to him than it would have been had he killed Dracula the first time he plunges the knife at him in a previous scene. By killing Dracula, Jonathan both earns his position in the group of professionals whose manhood saves England’s future and finally becomes the kind of husband he needs to be in the bourgeois
family depicted at the end as a happy outcome of the narrative. In fact, what he needs to do is to kill the other kind of husband, the one whose secrets would have always threatened the marriage and whose weakness forces his wife to be the more active partner in the marriage. While this is the husband Jonathan used to be, by this point in the narrative, Dracula has come to represent that husband. The final chase in the novel is explicitly represented as the fight between these two husbands. Mina, who has had a telepathic connection with Dracula ever since she drank his blood, reached Transylvania with Van Helsing before the others, and as she awaits the cart with Dracula’s coffins pursued by Jonathan and other men, she ambiguously tells Van Helsing: “Let us go meet my husband who is, I know, coming toward us” (477). Both Van Helsing and the reader know that this can refer to either Jonathan or Dracula. So, when Jonathan cuts Dracula’s throat, he finally cuts his own links to the monster who crumbles into dust in front of their eyes.17

With Dracula’s death, Harker’s proper masculinity – heterosexual, rational, self-disciplined, profession-oriented – is finally fully restored. His and Mina’s son, whose birthday is the same day when his father achieved this feat, stands for the transition of such stable, middle-class masculinity into the next generation, indeed the next century. Of course, since Dracula’s blood runs through Mina’s – and perhaps Jonathan’s – veins, Dracula is inside the boy as well. The novel maintains the possibility that the man of the next bourgeois generation might have to struggle with his own masculine self-identification all over again. It is partly because of the strict demands of this particular kind of masculine identity, because of its rigidity, that it is so susceptible to crisis. In the next chapter, I discuss E. M. Forster’s efforts to articulate a different, “softer” type of middle-
class masculinity, which would be less based on reason and the internalization of social pressure and more on openness to personal feeling and less-restricted sexual behavior. While Jonathan Harker's development is from an initial resistance to the rigid, socially proscribed type of masculine identity toward the acceptance of it, the development of Forster's hero Maurice, in the novel of the same name, goes in the opposite direction: from an initial dependence on the expectations of his society toward a rebellion against some of its most categorical demands.
Chapter 4

Two Cheers for Masculinity:

Liberal Individualism and Homoerotic Desire in E. M. Forster’s *Maurice*

In his celebrated essay “What I Believe” (1939), E. M. Forster explains that in his view democracy deserves only two cheers: “one because it admits variety and two because it permits criticism. Two cheers are quite enough,” he added, “there is no occasion to give three. Only Love the Beloved Republic deserves that” (*Two Cheers* 70). While Forster makes abundantly clear in that essay that what he appreciates in democracy is its tolerance of diversity and its openness to criticism, it is less clear what he perceives democracy as lacking, causing her to be worthy of only two cheers. What exactly is “Love the Beloved Republic,” and what does it have that democracy does not?

Forster provides a part of the answer within these “reflections of an individualist and a liberal” (76), as he characterizes his essay. He indicates that democracy, no matter how progressive in protecting the rights of various social groups as well as in cultivating the idea of the equality of all individual citizens, has not fully acknowledged and incorporated the values of what he calls “personal relationships” (67), which are at the very core of his liberal individualism. The most striking expression of Forster’s privileging of personal relationships over social concerns is his famous statement, which also indicates a fair amount of courage considering that it was uttered at the beginning of World War Two: “I hate the idea of causes, and if I had to choose between betraying my country and
betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country” (68). Forster does not “believe in belief” (67), as he puts it, because “there lies at the back of every creed something terrible and hard” (69) whereas what makes personal relationships flourish is a kind of “natural warmth” that allows a liberal individualist to “be fond of people and trust them” (68), thus creating some order in the chaos of the social world. It is significant to notice here Forster’s emphasis on the qualities that evade political rationalism – warmth, fondness, and trust – because his vision of what democracy needs in order to deserve the third cheer is precisely something that rational categories of politics and social theory cannot capture.

Forster’s use of the attributes of “hardness” and “warmth” indicates that it is the presence of feeling that distinguishes “Love the Beloved Republic” from democracy based on social creeds rather than personal feelings. What is interesting is that the same problem of the presence or absence of feelings lies at the core not only of his thoughts about democracy but also of his ideas about masculinity. In fact, although Forster never says explicitly that the liberal individualist he describes is male or that the personal relationships he praises are primarily relationships between men, his political essays convey a strong sense that this is so. In his wide-ranging reflections on various aspects and transformations of modern society, Forster hardly ever touches upon any aspects of the women’s movement, and he never addresses any gender-based differences relevant for understanding the position of the individual in that society. As a rule, his concern is implicitly with men and relationships between them. In fact, Forster’s anxiety about democracy can be read as an anxiety about masculinity, and in particular, about whether the rigidity of the traditional
upper- and middle-class masculinity, based on assertion of power rather than on feelings, could be loosened up by an affirmation of a different, softer masculinity based on sexual expression.

Because of this concern, subtly blending sexual desire and social relations, Forster’s political ideas are never quite free of sexual undertones. Even in his crucial political essay “What I Believe,” sex makes a timid, defensive, but pivotal appearance. Right after he elaborates his description of liberal individualism as “an aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate and the plucky” (73), Forster includes the following passage:

I give no examples – it is risky to do that – but the reader may as well consider whether this is the type of person he would like to meet and to be, and whether (going farther with me) he would prefer that this type should not be an ascetic one. I am against asceticism myself. I am with the old Scotsman who wanted less chastity and more delicacy. I do not feel that my aristocrats are a real aristocracy if they thwart their bodies, since bodies are the instruments through which we register and enjoy the world. Still, I do not insist. This is not a major point.

(73-74, emphasis in original)

Forster’s very defensiveness about rejecting asceticism suggests that perhaps this is not exactly a minor point either. If his praiseworthy liberal individualist becomes “real aristocracy” only upon denouncing asceticism, then the sensations and pleasures of the
body play an important role in what makes the liberal individualist go beyond the two virtues of democracy—tolerance of diversity and openness to criticism—and seek “Love the Beloved Republic.” And if so, it is possible to claim that Forster’s hopes to raise democracy to a level on which it would endorse “personal relationships,” rather than merely creeds, as its key foundation, and thus deserve the third cheer, constitute a kind of sexualizing of social relations, both in the sense that it brings eroticized relations between men to the very center of his political speculations and in the sense that it discovers sexuality at the very core of social relations between individuals.

Seduced into Liberalism: Transformations of Middle-Class Masculinity

While Forster’s political essays only implicitly suggest this possibility, it is his posthumously published novel Maurice (written mostly in 1914, published in 1971) that elaborates the interplay of liberal individualism and male homosexuality in describing the parallel sexual and political maturing of its eponymous hero. Maurice’s political development into a liberal individualist and his sexual development into a self-acknowledged homosexual occur simultaneously, and they are both facilitated by two homoerotic relationships, each of which is described in the narrative as a kind of seduction, the initial resistance to which implies Maurice’s original lack of maturity, and the final acceptance of which signifies his sexual and political growth. Through these two seductions, Maurice develops a kind of masculinity that Forster perceives as desirable for a liberal individualist. Maurice’s first seducer is the aristocratic Clive Durham, a
representative of a masculinity based on an assertion of superiority, whether sexual, social, or intellectual. His second seducer, however, is Clive’s gamekeeper, Alec Scudder, a representative of a working-class masculinity, whose openness to change and growing independence from middle-class norms and expectations increasingly threaten one of the key forms of the upper- and middle-class masculine superiority: their superiority over working-class men. Maurice Hall himself, the only son of a successful middle-class businessman, belonging to the gentlemanly tradition of public schools and Cambridge but not burdened by aristocratic heritage, is a kind of English Everyman, whose social and sexual dilemmas, Forster implies, are crucial for the political and cultural future of England. In his essay “Notes on the English Character” (1920), Forster insists that “the character of the English is essentially middle-class,” characterized by “solidity, caution, integrity, efficiency,” but also lack of imagination and hypocrisy (Two Cheers 3). And “just as the heart of England is the middle classes,” Forster continues, “so the heart of the middle classes is the public-school system” (3-4), which produces men “with well-developed bodies, fairly developed minds, and undeveloped hearts” (5). Above all, the Englishman’s problem is that “he is afraid to feel” (5).

The challenge Maurice faces is precisely to follow his feelings rather than social and sexual conventions into which he has been raised. In his “Terminal Note” to the novel, written in 1960, Forster makes it explicit that it is Maurice’s homosexual desire that liberates him from conventions. He describes Maurice as “someone handsome, healthy, bodily attractive, mentally torpid, not a bad businessman and rather a snob. Into this mixture,” Forster adds, “I dropped an ingredient that puzzles him, wakes him up, torments
him and finally saves him” (Maurice 218). This description of Maurice obviously corresponds to Forster’s description of the typical Englishman in his “Notes on the English Character.” The quality that he lacks the most is a developed heart, and his most paralyzing characteristic is that he is afraid to feel. Forster leaves no room for ambivalence: the ingredient that will help him grow out of these limitations and save him from remaining an example of the old, hard, rigid type of English masculinity, is his homosexual desire.

However, it is not merely his homosexual desire as such that saves Maurice from remaining a “suburban tyrant” (93) like his father was. Such desire, in fact, also existed in his father, the very epitome of narrow-minded suburbia, just as it did in many English boys in public schools and universities whose strong emotional bonds with each other verged on and often slipped into homoeroticism.¹ At one point in the novel, as Maurice debates with himself whether to yield to his desire for Alec or, as he characteristically puts it, “to stick to his class,” the voice within that pressures Maurice to conform to social conventions says: “Night is coming – be quick then – take a taxi – be quick like your father, before doors close” (188). The part of Maurice’s mind that fears feelings and depends on moral conventions encourages him to follow his father’s steps in disavowing any emotions or desire that might take him into the night of experiences unregulated or proscribed by social convention, lest he should find himself shut outside the doors of social respectability. Therefore, the main difference between Maurice and his father is not that the son feels a desire that the father could never feel, but that, as the narrator explains, Maurice accepts “the flesh educating the spirit, as [his father’s] has never been educated, and developing the sluggish heart and the slack mind against his will” (133). It is this education of the spirit by
the flesh that ultimately makes Maurice a liberal individualist. His father, on the contrary, remains a "suburban tyrant" because he allows his spirit to be guided by social conventions instead: "Mr. Hall senior had neither fought nor thought; there had never been any occasion; he had supported society and moved without a crisis from illicit to licit love" (133).

Creed of "Platonic Love" versus "Personal Relationships"

The privileging of social conventions over personal feelings due to the inability to allow one's spirit to be educated by one's flesh, which was the fate of Maurice's father, is also what Maurice's first seducer, Clive, represents in the novel. Clive is intellectually superior to Mr. Hall senior, and his spirit is partially nourished with reading Plato and other classics. Also, unlike Maurice's father, Clive undergoes a very serious crisis as he moves from illicit to licit love. However, fearful of jeopardizing his masculinity by allowing his feelings to undermine the sense of social superiority on which his sense of his masculinity relies, Clive ultimately betrays his flesh in several ways: 1) He rejects the sexual aspect of male-male bonding; 2) He downplays sexuality in general and refuses to verbalize sexual desire; and 3) He insists on sublimating his sexual desire, first in intellectual pursuit, and then in his concern for social status.

It is in these three ways that Clive fails to live up to Forster's ideal of liberal individualism, and it is by rejecting these aspects of Clive's masculinity that Maurice approaches that ideal. The kind of love that Clive and Maurice feel for each other at
Cambridge was by no means uncommon there, and, as the narrator tells us, "society received them, as she receives thousands like them" (91). In order to earn this acceptance, however, Maurice and Clive have to sublimate homosexual desire and channel it into an ultimately heterosexual framework. As Clive explains to Maurice, "surely – the sole excuse for any relationship between men is that it remain purely platonic" (213). Clive, who has a "Hellenic" temperament (218)², models his relationship with Maurice on an idealized and sanitized version of Plato's pedagogical interpretation of male-male desire, so readily available to Victorian students of bowdlerized classical texts. Using the phraseology that echoes Wilde's defense of the Love that Dare Not Speak Its Name at the trials, Clive claims that his love for Maurice is "the love that Socrates bore Phaedo [...] , love passionate but temperate, such as only finer natures can understand" (91). However, it soon becomes clear that Clive's use of this rhetoric not only reveals his intellectual vanity and self-importance but also effectively negates his alleged defiance of social rules. Although he flirts with the idea of defying society – "I'm a bit of an outlaw, I grant" (84) – Clive is really loyal to most traditional social norms. He employs the Platonic model of male-male bonding, with its asymmetrical relationship between the Lover and the Beloved, to facilitate the imposition of an essentially heterosexual matrix onto his relationship with Maurice and reassure himself of his own stable masculinity.

The Platonic model of male bonding, in its Victorian incarnation, presumably both excludes sexual intercourse and preserves the essentially heterosexual power structure of the relationship. This is how W. H. Auden describes succinctly the Platonic relationship:
[...] it is only approved of as the necessary first stage in the growth of the soul. The ultimate good is the love of the impersonal as universal good; the best thing that could happen to a man would be that he should fall in love with the Good immediately, but owing to the fact that his soul is entangled in matter and time, he can only get there by degrees; first he falls in love with a beautiful individual, then he can progress to love of beauty in general, then to love of justice, and so on. (22-23)

In such a relationship the sexual intercourse seems superfluous; the carnal is seen as accidental, a station on the road to the ideal. The "Platonic" love is based on a firmly defined power structure of inequality between the Lover (erastes) and the Beloved (eromenos). The Lover is superior to the Beloved in both age and education — and, in the turn-of-the-century version, in class — so that he leads his younger companion to the World of Ideas. In other words, he assumes the active role, traditionally considered masculine. The Lover’s love for the Beloved is inseparable from his love for his own power to lead, while the Beloved’s love for the Lover is an idealized form of the adoration of the leader. The Beloved grows in virtue thanks to the Lover’s presence, and thus is coded feminine. When the Beloved grows equal to the Lover, their relationship is no more possible. Finally, this model has a social role of reproducing and reconfirming the existing power structure because it serves as a means for the younger man to learn how to play the dominant role when his turn comes. In this sense, the Platonic model is a wonderful example of how inseparable “men-loving-men” and “men-promoting-the-interests-of-men” are within an
undisrupted “homosocial continuum” (cf. Sedgwick 1-4).

This version of “Platonic love” suits perfectly both Clive’s distaste for carnality and his need to feel intellectually superior. It also makes Clive’s sexual alienation inconspicuous because it represents sexual intercourse as superfluous, an accidental station on the road to the ideal. Above anything else, this love is impersonal, and therefore necessarily egotistic. If Clive loves the idea of beauty or friendship rather than Maurice’s particular beauty and friendship, then what he really loves is his idea of beauty and friendship, his ability to have such an idea and to worship it; he really loves himself. In other words, this is not a kind of love that counts as a “personal relationship” but rather as a kind of creed, and Forster’s distrust of it is quite evident.

At the same time as it allows Clive to de-sexualize his relationship with Maurice, the Platonic model of male-male bonding also enables him to preserve in it the power asymmetry, not unlike the one that structures a typical Victorian heterosexual relationship, through which Clive can maintain his sense of superiority and, thus, stable masculinity threatened by his homoerotic desire. Clive sets himself up as the Lover to Maurice’s Beloved, emphasizing his superiority to Maurice in age, education, and class, and articulating his seduction of Maurice as a way of leading his younger companion to the World of Ideas. In other words, Clive assumes the active, intellectually superior role because it assures him of his masculinity by coding Maurice, the Beloved, as the inferior, effeminized follower. Clive is so sure of his influence over Maurice that even when Maurice has far outgrown him in his emotional development, Clive, rather absurdly, worries: “Had he corrupted an inferior’s intellect?” (214) This insistence on seeing Maurice
as his inferior is a crucial part of their "Platonic" relationship. Clive twists Plato's teaching enough to sublimate his own homosexual desire, trying to do the same with Maurice's, not so much in the direction of the World of Ideas but primarily in the direction of assuming his role as a masculine autocrat, bent on preserving a sense of his own superiority. Using the idea of Beauty as an excuse, the turn Clive makes is really from a beautiful person to "beautiful conventions" (144). However, in this model of male-male bonding, as soon as the Beloved grows equal to the Lover, their relationship is no longer possible, and this is exactly what happens, sooner than Clive was prepared for, as Maurice begins to assert his resistance to this model and gradually starts allowing his feelings and desire — his flesh — to complement the nourishment of his spirit offered by Clive.

Clive, who throughout the first part of the novel sees himself as Maurice's teacher, does indeed help Maurice out of his adolescent emotional confusion. However, Maurice quickly outdoes his teacher by far in the sincerity and courage of emotional and sexual development. Soon enough, to Clive's Platonic love, Maurice opposes his "athletic love" (100), but his efforts to assert a non-Platonic kind of desire meets with Clive's resentment and silencing. When Maurice tells him that he loves his beauty, Clive is genuinely shocked. When Maurice adds, "I love your voice and everything to do with you, down to your clothes or the room you are sitting in. I adore you," this is much more personal than Clive can handle. He goes "crimson" and proper and instructs Maurice, "Sit up straight and let's change the subject." And then he immediately tries to sublimate Maurice's desire: "He did not change the subject but developed it into another that had interested him recently, the precise influence of Desire upon our aesthetic judgements" (86-87, emphasis added). This
is how Clive’s idealization and aesthetization of Maurice’s desire works throughout their relationship.

This is not to say that homoerotic desire does not exist in Clive himself, but he will only allow such expressions of his homoerotic desire that, in one way or another, remain under the auspices of heterosexuality and do not threaten to undermine his masculinity. Even when he is honest to himself about the pleasure he experiences in Maurice’s caresses and in the warmth that strikes through the flannel of Maurice’s trousers, Clive must reinsert heterosexuality into the picture: “He knew what kind of pleasure he was receiving, and received it honestly, certain that it brought no harm to either of them. [Maurice] was a man who only liked women – one could tell that at a glance” (69). Clive’s assumption here is based on the belief that a man who desires men could not be a manly athletic person like Maurice is but either an effeminate invert (exemplified in the novel by the character of Risley, based on Lytton Strachey) or someone whose desire is ultimately intellectual, as Clive believes his own to be. At the same time, however, this is a remarkable example of denial and rationalization, as Clive reasons that his own homoerotic pleasure is acceptable as long as it is occasioned by a man who cannot feel such pleasure himself.

However, Clive misjudges Maurice both in believing that his desire is ultimately heterosexual and in expecting him to passively follow Clive’s “Hellenic” teaching. In fact, the contrast between Clive’s rejection of the flesh and Maurice’s gradual acceptance of its “education” is symbolized in their diverging attitudes toward Greece, the cradle of the Platonic model of male bonding. The Greek deity that Clive worships is, not accidentally, Pallas Athene, “motherless and a virgin [...] who had lifted him out of the mire” (104). The
least sexual of all Greek deities, not only by virtue of her virginity but also by her asexual birth (she sprang from Zeus’s forehead, grown-up, and fully clad in the warrior’s attire), Pallas Athene is the symbol of spirituality overcoming the “mire” of sexual desire. In contrast, Maurice is identified with the most sexual aspect of Classical Greek culture. After a scene in which he accidentally bumps into his future lover Alec in the park “and was held for a moment by both elbows” – their first physical contact – Maurice is described as “bacchanalian” (164). But this is the narrator’s comment, not a way in which Maurice would describe himself. Maurice himself, tellingly, “had no use for Greece” (99). In fact, “Maurice hated the very word, and by a curious inversion connected it with morbidity and death” (100), which indeed it threatens to be – the death of Maurice’s nascent education of the spirit by the flesh, which initiates him into a masculinity less rigid than Clive’s and less dependent on the assertion of social superiority.

Clive, on the other hand, increasingly rejects the call of the flesh in favor of social conventions. He regrets ever having loved Maurice, even if only Platonically, because their love puts them both at odds with society: “Would that we had never been lovers! For then, Maurice, you and I should have lain still and been quiet. We should have slept, then had we been at rest with kings and counselors of earth [...]” (101). In order to ensure himself a peaceful position on the same side with “kings and counselors of earth,” Clive needs to switch from illicit to licit love, and this move is marked by two significant events: his passing the bar exam and his farewell journey to Greece. The first event, similarly to Jonathan Harker’s becoming a full-blown solicitor in Dracula, signifies Clive’s full initiation into the social position he inherits and his acceptance of the social obligations that
position demands, such as having an heir. The second event symbolizes Clive's departure from the "Hellenism" of his youth, necessary in order to establish himself in his proper social role. When he finally visits the land that engendered the ideas that inspired his youth, "he saw only dying light and dead land. He uttered no prayer, believed in no deity and knew that the past was devoid of meaning" (104). Forster's tone here is rather elegiac – as opposed to the passage describing Maurice's contempt for Greece, which is basically ironic – because, while Maurice's rejection of Greece signifies his going beyond the limited homoerotic expression authorized by the Greek ideal, Clive's rejection of it signifies a rejection of even such limited expression of homoerotic feelings. It is in Greece that he writes to Maurice: "Against my will I have become normal. I cannot help it" (104). His denial of his "Greek" sexual inclinations is explicitly linked to his social compromising: "Greece had been clear but dead. He liked the atmosphere of the North, whose gospel is not truth, but compromise. He and his friend would arrange something that should include women" (108). Indeed, wasting no time, it is in Greece that Clive meets his future wife Anne (128), who becomes "the whole world to him, the Acropolis included" (144). This outcome brings home Forster's point that Clive's Platonic love, with its exclusion of sexual expression and its perpetuation of the heterosexual paradigm of relationship, far from being a vehicle of sexual emancipation, has only served to facilitate the transition from illicit to licit love, and thus to confirm Clive's endorsement of a rigid, self-centered, power-based masculinity.

But Clive's sexual alienation is not limited to his rejection of homoeroticism. His heterosexual relationship with Anne is as much based on his assertion of superiority and
care for conventions as was his relationship with Maurice. Anne exists in this relationship on the same level as Penge, the estate that Clive inherits – they are both symbols of his social position. Clive’s love for Anne, however emphatically asserted, is in fact not any more personal than his love for Maurice: “The center of his life was Anne. Would Anne get on with his mother? Would Anne like Penge [...]? Would she regret the lack of religious opportunities there? And the presence of politics“ (143). Even these words, which supposedly express Clive’s love and concern for Anne, actually reveal his real concerns – his mother, his estate, and his engagement in politics – all of them emblems of his social position.

Anne suits Clive as a wife because of her own sexual alienation and ignorance: “When he arrived in her room after marriage, she did not know what he wanted. Despite an elaborate education, no one had told her about sex. Clive was as considerate as possible, but he scared her terribly, and left her feeling she hated him” (144). Anne is willing to accept that alienation and ignorance, and sexual desire plays a minimal part in their marriage. Clive and his wife duly exercise their marital and procreative function of sex, but the activity remains “unmentionable”:

[...] it was always without a word. They united in the world that bore no reference to the daily, and this secrecy drew after it much else of their lives. So much could never be mentioned. He never saw her naked, nor she him.

[...]

Secrecy suited him, at least he adopted it without regret. [...] though
he valued the body, the actual deed of sex seemed to him unimaginative, and
best veiled in night. (144)

Clive’s sexual alienation, his refusal to have his spirit educated by his flesh, clearly plays a
major role in his endorsement of a masculinity based on the silencing of sexual desire and
on the substitution of social conventions for personal feelings. But it is also important to
him to keep his wife in ignorance in order to ensure her self-effacing respect for his
masculine superiority. The novel ends by emphasizing Clive’s need to “devise some
method of concealing the truth from Anne” (215). The truth he has in mind here is the truth
of Maurice’s elopement with Alec, but that is at the same the truth of his own ambiguous
sexuality and fragile masculinity. Clive, who is described by the narrator as a “misogynist”
(92), feels that this truth must be inaccessible to Anne so that her acceptance of his
masculine superiority would be ensured. It might be possible to explain Clive’s misogyny
as a displacement of the guilt he feels for being insincere about his homosexual desire.
Having forced himself into heterosexuality, Clive subconsciously blames women for his
own self-repression. More importantly, however, Clive’s proper functioning as a member
of the upper class requires both the sublimation of his homoerotic desire and the
affirmation of a heterosexuality based on masculine supremacy. Indeed, the more Clive’s
body and sexuality is enveloped in secrecy for Anne the more likely she is to see him as the
Husband, with all its social implications, rather than as the Lover, which implies a very
different relationship, one that Maurice tries to establish with his second “seducer,” Alec
the game-keeper.
Speaking Out: The Necessity of Verbalizing Desire

But for this relationship of lovers, based on personal feelings and equality rather than a creed or convention, to be possible, Maurice has not only to reject Clive’s “Hellenism” but also to break through the kind of silencing and alienation that Anne accepts. Anne’s and Clive’s willingness to silence sexual desire, their reluctance to allow it any verbal expression, is both a symptom and a consequence of their sexual alienation. As a part of his development into a liberal individualist, therefore, Maurice has to enable himself to speak his desire. In order to complete his education of the spirit by the flesh, he needs to express his homosexual desire both physically and verbally. This is by no means easy for a man who has never been told about any other but the condoned kind of sexuality. “To love a noble woman, to protect and serve her [is] the crown of life,” explains one of his teachers (19). “Man that is born of woman must go with woman if the human race is to continue,” insists the family doctor. Nor is there a positive name for this illicit desire which would be readily available to Maurice, who has heard it referred to only indirectly and negatively at Cambridge as “the unspeakable vice of the Greeks” (50) or “the temperament, to quote the legal formula, ‘not to be mentioned among Christians’” (68). All these are signs of the conspiracy of silence against homosexuality, partly stemming from the belief that knowing about homosexual desire necessitates being tempted by it (cf. Weeks 105). No wonder, then, that the only way Maurice has of indicating his problem to the family doctor is by referring to an infamous scandal by saying that he is “an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde kind” (139). Unsurprisingly, the doctor prefers not to verbalize in any way such a desire, so
he refuses to discuss the “evil hallucination.” “The worst thing I could do for you is discuss it,” he assures Maurice (139). Paradoxically, Dr. Barry admits here the potential power of something the existence of which he virtually denies. The two sexual problems that he implies he is willing to discuss, syphilis and impotence, were both more visible and more recognized at the time. While impotence would be a pitiable misfortune, syphilis is, for Dr. Barry, a sign of a gentleman’s slight indiscretion with “bad women,” for which he shows understanding and, indeed, an inclination. If Maurice’s desire were directed toward female prostitutes, his society would have been quick to tacitly condone it, but his homosexual desire must not find verbal expression.

Blackmailer Against Himself: Overcoming Class Prejudice

But Maurice does discuss his homosexual desire, and what is more, he discusses it – and fulfils it – with a social inferior. Maurice’s second seduction, the second part of his political and sexual development consists of a gradual, halting, uneasy, but ultimately triumphant affirmation of a masculinity based on unashamed homosexual expression and free of the need to assert social superiority. This political education through sexual emancipation does not come easy to Maurice, for whom homosexual desire and class have been linked to each other from the earliest childhood, but in rather ambivalent ways. On the one hand, his strongest emotional bond as a child is the one with his father’s stable-boy. On the other hand, he does not easily escape the pressures of his upbringing. Initially, his attitude toward lower classes is typical of his own class and not very different from Clive’s:
a mixture of haughty superiority and the resentment stemming from a sense of insecurity about that superiority. For example, when he is invited by Clive’s employees to be their captain in a cricket match, Maurice refuses, out of awareness that he is not very good at playing cricket. “He dislike[s] playing with his social inferiors” (175) because he fears that, even if only in this irrelevant way, he would appear inferior to them.

Maurice is by no means exceptional in having this fear, which, in fact, is typical of upper- and middle-class men in the novel. When Maurice and Archie, Clive’s brother-in-law, lose a ferret during an unsuccessful hunt, Alec is pert and honest enough to suggest that the hunters are to blame: “The keeper made out this was their fault, Archie knew better, and explained the matter to Maurice in the smoking-room with the aid of diagrams” (151). Archie, as a gentleman, cannot bear a mere gamekeeper telling him that something is his fault, so he is ready to go to absurd lengths to prove that the gamekeeper is wrong.

It is important to observe that the lower classes are not necessarily immune to platitudes about class relationships either. Servants are sometimes as willing as their masters to believe that social superiority necessarily implies every other kind of superiority. Thus, Simcox, Clive’s servant who is delegated to ask Maurice to be their captain in a cricket match, claims that “things always go better under a gentleman” (175). Similarly, Maurice’s own servants like to be bossed around and patronized by their young master. They are impressed by the power that subdues them: “They had been servants all their lives, and liked a gentleman to be a snob” (23). Maurice obliges them, as indeed he could hardly avoid doing as long as he is surrounded by haughty-yet-insecure gentlemen and servile servants.
Even after his homosexual desire leads him to transgress class boundaries, it is not easy for Maurice to emancipate himself from the attitudes of his class. His efforts to speak in favor of the lower classes are always cut short by the people who surround him. Thus, to Maurice’s “suggestion that servants might be flesh and blood like ourselves his aunt opposed a loud ‘They aren’t’” (188). Of course, by this time Maurice is much more familiar with at least one servant’s flesh than his aunt would ever dream of becoming, and his attitude toward the lower classes begins to change. However, Alec is not entirely free from his own class-based prejudice, which further delays and threatens the relationship between him and Maurice.

The main complication between Maurice and Alec is one that would be expected at the turn of the century between a gentleman and his working-class male sexual partner: blackmail. Legal prosecution and social ostracism of homosexuals in England of the time has enabled the blackmailing of homosexuals to flourish. In particular, the 1895 trials of Oscar Wilde, which were based on Henry Labouchere’s amendment to Britain’s 1885 Criminal Law Act commonly known as the “Blackmailer’s Charter” (Weeks, Coming Out 14, 22), as Edward Carpenter observed, “opened wider than ever before the door to a real, most serious social and evil crime – that of blackmail” (quoted in Nadel 184). No wonder, then, that Maurice can hardly read Alec’s ambiguous letters to him as anything other but a threat of blackmail: “Butcher’s sons and the rest of them may pretend to be innocent and affectionate, but they read the Police Court News, they know.... If he heard [from Alec] again, he must consult a reliable solicitor [...]” (182).

Some critics have seen this threat of blackmail in the novel as undermining
Forster’s claim in the “Terminal Note” that “a happy ending was imperative” (250). Thus, for example, Christopher Lane writes: “Whatever fantasy this conveys about the implied treachery or opportunism of working-class lovers, we can ignore neither the historical frequency of this scenario nor [...] the attempt’s internal impact on Forster’s accounts of love and friendship. The attempted blackmail belies Forster’s subsequent wish to ignore internal obstacles to homosexual love” (178). According to Lane, “Scudder’s conflict of interest suggests [...] that unconscious elements of [Forster’s] fictional relationships eluded his narrative control. These elements underpin and often ruin – through ambivalence and retribution – the fraternal idealism prevailing in most Forster’s novels” (169). In other words, Alec’s impulse to blackmail Maurice might return at any moment in their relationship and destroy any kind of happy ending that the reader may imagine for them (since Forster, as I discuss later, refuses to do that for us). For Lane and similarly minded critics, the blackmail motif would then seem to be an almost inadvertent trace of realism in Forster’s romanticization of cross-class homosexual relationships.⁴

On the contrary, however, I see this element of the story as precisely a sign of the realism with which Forster develops the relationship between Maurice and Alec. Their relationship would have been romanticized indeed if Alec were a symbol of pure independence from social norms and roles seducing Maurice out of his own dependence on them. But if Maurice’s fear of blackmail, as one critic explains, “is a conditioned, middle-class reflex” (Nadel 184), then Alec’s half-hearted effort at blackmailing Maurice is a conditioned reflex of his own class. As Maurice comes to realize, “Alec [is] not a hero or god, but a man embedded in society like himself” (206). In blackmailing Maurice, Alec
does what the society expects him to do; he plays a role assigned to him – that of a greedy cad who wants to cash in on the pretense of being an innocent lower-class youth corrupted by an upper-class man: “I’ve always been a respectable young fellow [he tells Maurice] until you called me into your room to amuse yourself. It don’t hardly seem fair that a gentleman should drag you down. At least that’s how my brother sees it.” He faltered as he spoke these last words” (193-94). These words could have been spoken by one of the young men who testified against Oscar Wilde in 1895, but unlike them, Alec is not really guided by greed. His blackmailing act is primarily caused by his uncertainty, at this point, about Maurice’s feelings and intentions concerning him.

The letter that Alec writes to Maurice after the first night they spent together reflects very well Alec’s mixture of tenderness, vulnerability, desire, and class-consciousness:

Mr Maurice. Dear Sir. I waited both nights in the boathouse. I said the boathouse as the ladder as taken away and the woods is to damp to lie down. So please come to “the boathouse” tomorrow night or next, pretend to the other gentlemen you want a stroll, easily managed, then come down to the boathouse. Dear Sir, let me share with you once before leaving Old England if it is not asking to much. I have key, will let you in. I leave per Ss Normannia Aug 29. I since cricket match do long to talk with one of my arms round you, then place both arms round you and share with you, the above now seems sweeter to me than words can say. I am perfectly aware I am only a servant that never presume on your loving kindness to take
liberties or in any other way.

Yours respectfully,

A. Scudder.

(gamekeeper to C. Durham Esq.)

(207, all spelling and grammatical errors in original)

Alec’s language in this letter is indicative of the confusion in his mind between the rhetoric of his class and his own impulse to allow his spirit to be educated by his flesh. He wants to “share” again the intimacy with Maurice, which clearly means much more to him than mere sexual pleasure, but only “if it is not asking too much,” as he says in a phrase a servant might use when asking his employer for a reference letter. Indeed, Alec describes himself as “only a servant,” but one whose relationship with his superior is personalized in the phrase “loving kindness.” Even though Alec insists that he would “never presume on [Maurice’s] loving kindness,” the mere fact that this “servant” is in the position to articulate his relationship to that “loving kindness” clearly signals the erasure of a clear boundary between a class-based relationship and a personal relationship between the two men. Therefore, Alec is at this point still unable to distinguish between these two kinds of relationships because his desire is still as mired in his social circumstances as Maurice’s is in his.

When Maurice does not respond to Alec’s invitation out of fear of being discovered and because at this point he is still uncertain whether he can follow his desire, Alec’s
“muddle,” as Morris calls it, grows even further. His second letter to Morris, in which he hints at the possibility of blackmail, is a striking expression of the confusion in which a working-class young man would find himself if he fell in love with a middle-class man, and his Master’s friend, no less. Even though the letter is lengthy, I quote it in its entirety because Forster does a masterful job of conveying in it the combination of threatening, pleading, self-justification, pride, guilt, and small talk, all fused in Alec’s mind, since he is not quite sure what he wants and even less sure of what Maurice expects:

Mr Hall, Mr Borenius has just spoke to me. Sir, you do not treat me fairly. I am sailing next week, per s.s. Normannia. I wrote you I am going, it is not fair you never write to me. I come of a respectable family, I don’t think it fair to treat me like a dog. My father is a respectable tradesman. I am going to be on my own in Argentine. You say, “Alec, you are a dear fellow”; but you do not write. I know about you and Mr Durham. Why do you say “call me Maurice”, and then treat me so unfairly? Mr Hall, I am coming to London Tuesday. If you do not want me at your home say where in London, you had better see me – I would make you sorry for it. Sir, nothing of note has occurred since you left Penge. Cricket seems over, some of the great trees as lost some of their leaves, which is very early. Has Mr Borenius spoken to you about certain girls? I can’t help being rather rough, it is some men’s nature, but you should not treat me like a dog. It was before you came. It is natural to want a girl, you cannot go against human nature. Mr
Borenius found out about the girls through the new communion class. He has just spoken to me. I have never come like that to a gentleman before. Were you annoyed at being disturbed so early? Sir, it was your fault, your head was on me. I had my work, I was Mr Durham’s servant, not yours. I am not your servant, I will not be treated as a servant, and I don’t care if the world knows it. I will show respect where it’s due only, that is to say to gentleman who are gentleman. Simcox says, “Mr Hall says to put him in about eight.” I put you in fifth, but I was captain, and you have no right to treat me unfairly on that account.

Yours respectfully, A. Scudder

P. S. I know something.

(216, emphasis and all spelling and grammatical errors in original)

This letter speaks volumes about the fact that Alec’s difficulty in overcoming his own class-consciousness as well as the roles imposed on him by his social standing is not a bit smaller than Maurice’s. It also makes clear that Alec’s blackmailing impulse is not likely to prevail. His threat is quite incoherent and interrupted with the elements that really motivate this letter: a plea for affection and an effort to deal with his hurt feelings. While this plea is obviously a plea for love, it can also be seen as a plea for help to overcome his psychological dependence on his class position. These sentences are symptomatic of Alec’s ambivalence concerning his social standing: “I am not your servant, I will not be treated as a servant, and I don’t care if the world knows it. I will show respect where it’s due only,
that is to say to gentleman who are gentleman” (emphasis in original). It is precisely in the apparent rejection of his servitude that Alec confirms his lingering dependence on it because what he claims he rejects (without quite knowing what he is saying) is to be a “servant” to his own desire for Maurice while he remains a servant to the repudiation of homoerotic desire (“to gentleman who are gentleman” - a doubtful distinction which Maurice lost as soon as he expressed his desire for Alec). In other words, Alec still has not allowed his flesh to educate his spirit, and on a deeper lever his letter to Maurice is a call for help in changing that. Alec needs Maurice as much as Maurice needs Alec in order to prevent having their lives guided by convention rather than desire. Alec is explicitly seen by Maurice “not as a hero, but as a comrade” (198), which could never be understood by Clive who, when Maurice told him he was in love with the gamekeeper Alec Scudder, “supposed that ‘Scudder’ was a façon de parler, as one might say ‘Ganymede’” (212). But Forster does not represent Alec as a symbol, whether of Platonic sexual attraction or of socially transgressive sexual liberation, but as a man fully embedded in his society. Accordingly, Maurice’s decision to accept Alec as a lover, and not a secret, paid-for object of lust (as was a more typical option in his society at the time), could never be simply a personal decision based on sexual desire. It necessarily involves making decisions concerning social position and prospects. Maurice’s decisions in this regard are the opposite of Clive’s. Instead of shoring up his position by going into business and marrying, Maurice accepts the unavoidable difficulties that he and Alec will encounter. Maurice knows that to accept Alec’s offer – “and now we shan’t be parted no more, and that’s finished” (210) – is to become an outlaw. In order to preserve this comradeship, “they must
live outside class” (208).

The Gamekeeper: A man or a Symbol?

Even though Maurice’s and Alec’s life “outside class” may have been difficult for Forster to imagine, since he ends the novel with the scene of the final farewell between Maurice and Clive and refuses to write an epilogue about Maurice’s and Alec’s future life together⁴, I do not think that the notion of Alec and Maurice disappearing into the Greenwood as a way of escaping social condemnation of their relationship is necessarily a Utopian idealization based on a nostalgia for the England of Robin Hood and on a romanticization of the freedom and independence offered by the woods and unspoiled nature. Alec’s occupation of the gamekeeper links him to that familiar trope in English literature, but Forster avoids reducing him to merely an embodiment of that ideal. A brief comparison between Alec and Mellors, the gamekeeper in D. H. Lawrence’s novel Lady Chatterley’s Lover should clarify the extent to which Forster, unlike Lawrence, refuses to make his gamekeeper a symbol of any particular creed and, instead, makes him an active participant in a kind of personal relationship that Forster valued so much more than any creeds.

While Alec is obviously as entangled in his class position as Maurice is, Mellors, whose role in helping Connie (Lady Chatterley) express her sexuality and reject the bonds of her marriage is in some ways similar to Alec’s relationship with Maurice, appears to be somehow above any class distinctions. His uncanny ability to behave and talk like a
gentleman is repeatedly stressed. He seems to Connie “so unlike a gamekeeper, so unlike a working-man anyhow” (70). She resents her husband's inability or refusal to recognize in Mellors “a really exceptional human being” (71). Mellors himself dislikes all classes. He detects “a curious rubber-necked toughness and unlivingness about the middle and upper classes,” while “his own class,” to his mind, exhibits “a pettiness and a vulgarity of manner extremely distasteful” (151). Mellors’s radical individualism and independence from class concerns is emphasized by his self-imposed loneliness — “He had reached the point where all he wanted on earth was to be alone” (92) — which impresses Connie, who admires his self-sufficiency. That, of course, is a far cry from the neediness and vulnerability that Alec exhibits in his letters to Maurice. In fact, it is enough to compare Alec’s half-illiterate, muddled letters with Mellors’s lengthy, highly rhetorical epistle at the end of Lady Chatterley’s Lover in order to see that these two gamekeepers have really little in common.

In accordance to their different characters, the love that Mellors feels for Connie is very different from Alec’s love for Maurice. While Alec’s love is very personal and thus complicated by the personal positions in which Alec and Maurice respectively find themselves, Mellors’s love for Connie is really as impersonal as Clive’s love for Maurice. Connie is understandably concerned that Mellors “might be kind like that to any woman” (129). Unlike Clive, Mellors refrains neither from sexual acts nor from sexual language, and he does to some extent help Connie have her flesh educate her spirit by emancipating her from being ashamed of her body and her desire. He teaches her the “tenderness of the penis” (187) and the value of “fucking with a warm heart” (222). On the other hand, Mellors’s effort to initiate her into “the mystery of the phallus” (227) resembles in its
idealization of the sexual act the kind of de-personalizing rhetoric also exemplified in
Clive’s Hellenism. Thus, when Connie touches Mellors’s penis, it is as if she had
encountered a deity: “And now in her heart the queer wonder of him was awakened. A
man! the strange potency of manhood upon her! [...] And now she touched him, and it was
the sons of god with the daughters of man” (187). Furthermore, in this cosmogony, it is the
phallus that makes a woman what she is: “She was gone, she was not, and she was born: a
woman” (187). Their relationship is what Lawrence describes in “A Propos of Lady
Chatterley’s Lover“ as the phallic marriage. “Marriage is no marriage,” writes Lawrence,
“that is not basically and permanently phallic, and that is not linked up with the sun and the
earth, the moon and the fixed stars and the planets, in the rhythm of days, in the rhythm of
months, in the rhythm of quarters, of years, of decades and of centuries” (349). Such
inflated, idealizing rhetoric is completely absent from Forster’s descriptions of the
relationship between Maurice and Alec, whose concern is not to be at one with the universe
but to help each other overcome their very personal social and psychological constraints.
For Lawrence, that is insufficient: “Oh, what a catastrophe, what a maiming of love when it
was made a personal, merely personal feeling, taken away from the rising and the setting of
the sun, and cut off from the magic connection of the solstice and the equinox” (348). This
view is certainly shared by Mellors who “hated mouth kisses” (135), no doubt because they
seemed too personal, and who “was kind to the female in [Connie], which no man had ever
been. Men were very kind to the person she was, but rather cruel to the female [...] , not to
her womb they weren’t kind” (129). Ultimately, this essentialization of the female works to
place her as a function of male desire rather than an autonomous agent of her own desire.
"I love thee that I can go into thee" (189), Mellors says to Connie, or rather to her "good cunt" (191). Although Connie's cunt and her womb are elated to a mythic and mystifying level, by that very move her desire is kept subdued to "the mystery of the phallus." On the contrary, Alec helps Maurice make his desire less dependent on any idealization, whether Platonic or based on the conventions of middle-class masculinity.

It is also worth noting that Mellors's phallic mysticism is essentially religious in character. In "Letter to a Young Critic," her introduction to The Selected Letters of D. H. Lawrence, Diana Trilling, after referring specifically to Mellors, writes that Lawrence "wants neither sex nor love but some combined transcendence of both, a transcendence that has its source and fulfillment only in phantasy. This transcendence he calls marriage" (xxxii). She also talks about Lawrence's "profound sexual puritanism, the fact that he licenses sex only as a sacrament" and concludes that "he was all religion, after all, even though he wasn't theological" (xxxiv-xxxv). All this is especially true for Lady Chatterley's Lover, and it is no wonder that even some clergymen defended the book against the charges of obscenity. Thus, The Right Rev. John Arthur Thomas Robinson, the Bishop of Woolwich, witnessed in court that, to his mind, "what Lawrence is trying to do is to portray the sex relationship as something essentially sacred, [...] in a real sense as an act of Holy Communion" (quoted in Hyde, The Lady Chatterley's Lover Trial 126-27).

While in Lawrence's novel sexual relationships are turned into a kind of religion, in Maurice religion serves as a counterpoint and an obstacle to sexual awakening. The rebellion against sexual prohibitions is at times displaced in the novel into the rebellion against religious orthodoxy. Both Clive's and Maurice's religious orthodoxy prefigures and
parallels sexual unorthodoxy. Before meeting Clive, while he is still very confused about his feelings, Maurice “held unorthodoxy to be bad form” (43). It is through exposing the falsity of Maurice’s religious beliefs that Clive begins his education/seduction of his Beloved. For example, when Clive tells Maurice about Dante seeing God’s face in *Paradiso*, Maurice immediately links that with his homoerotic dream about the face of the ideal friend (49). It is the discovery of sexual unorthodoxy that encourages first Clive and then Maurice to “come out” with their religious unorthodoxy to their families. Indeed, this religious “coming out” serves them as a substitute for a sexual “coming out.” Clive was inspired to do it after meeting Risley, the effeminate invert figure in the narrative, and Risley’s circle of friends: “He was glad to know that there were more of his sort about, and their frankness braced him into telling his mother about his agnosticism; *it was all he could tell her*” (68, emphasis added). The words Maurice uses to justify his agnosticism, nascent only after his intimacy with Clive had begun, might have been the same if his “coming out” were related to his homosexuality: “I knew you would be upset. I cannot help it, mother dearest. I am made that way and it is no good arguing” (51).

Another role that religion plays in *Maurice* is that of a policing force, embodied in the character of Reverend Borenius, whose seeming concern for Alec’s soul and the need for communion masks his real function of controlling Alec’s desire. He is the one who closely observes Alec’s behavior and probably guesses the nature of Maurice’s interest in Alec. Also, Rev. Borenius contributes to the difficulty Maurice feels in accepting his homoerotic desire by linking non-procreative sexuality with sin and heresy in his religious exclamations: “Where there is heresy, immorality will sooner or later ensue” and “when the
nations went awhoring they invariably ended by denying God, I think, and until all sexual irregularities and not some of them are penal the Church will never reconquer England” (207-08). Forster reveals Rev. Borenius’s real aim when, in the “Terminal Note,” he writes that “Mr Borenius is too incompetent to catch” (218) the lovers, Maurice and Alec. The Church, as one of the mind-policing forces of the society, tries in vain to prevent or transform socially disruptive desire. Just like Mellors’s phallic “Holy Communion,” Rev. Borenius’s concern for Alec’s communion is in effect an effort to neutralize illicit sexual desire and channel it into socially acceptable behavior. But while in Lady Chatterley’s Lover the gamekeeper represents the symbol of that idealizing, naturalizing, de-personalizing force, in Maurice the gamekeeper is just a man who is subjected to and tries to resist such force. Lawrence’s gamekeeper is much closer to the stock character of the “noble savage” and much more a figure of a romanticized, Utopian independence from social norms and constraints than Forster’s gamekeeper is. Far from being an embodiment of a creed, Alec is very much a complex, realistic character, mired in – but also in the process of being freed through – personal relationships.

Comradeship Model of Male Bonding and Poetics of Disidentification

The personal relationship that Maurice and Alec strive to achieve through overcoming their class-based prejudices and anxieties is not the one between the Lover and the Beloved of the Platonic model so prevalent in Victorian conceptualizations of male-male bonding, but the one of lovers as equals and comrades. While the Clive-Maurice
relationship belongs to, as Tariq Rahman terms it, "ephelophilic tradition," which "share[s] many features of courtly love, romance and ordinary heterosexual relationships" (272), the Maurice-Alec relationship does not preserve the same power structure; on the contrary, it is based on equality. Perhaps a more useful way of distinguishing between Maurice's two homosexual relationships is in terms suggested in Robert Martin's influential essay "Edward Carpenter and the Double Structure of Maurice":

It has regularly been supposed that the novel is concerned primarily with an opposition between homosexuality and heterosexuality [...] In fact, the novel opposes two kinds of homosexuality – one that is identified with Cambridge and Clive, and one that is identified with Alec and the open air – and uses the opinions on homosexual love expressed by Clive to indicate a stage in Maurice's development, but one that does not represent the author's concept of the final stage of development: this Maurice can achieve only through the encounter with Alec. [...] The first [kind of homosexuality] is dominated by Plato and, indirectly, by John Addington Symonds and the apologists for "Greek Love"; the second is dominated by Edward Carpenter and his translation of the ideas of Whitman. (35-36)

Obviously, my analysis of Maurice follows Martin's thesis to a certain extent, although my goal is to link more closely Forster's dramatization of these two competing discourses of homosexual desire to his liberal political vision. I am also not sure that Forster saw Maurice's encounter with Alec as "the final stage of development," and the
inconclusiveness of the novel's ending probably indicates Forster's sense that the
development in question does not have a final stage. What is particularly valuable in
Martin's account, however, is the elaboration of Forster's indebtedness to the late-Victorian
radical socialist Edward Carpenter for the type of equality-based homosexual relationship
which Maurice and Alec falteringingly embody. Influenced by Walt Whitman, Carpenter
developed in several of his works a theory of a pointedly non-heterosexual democracy in
which homosexuals - or in his sexological parlance, "Urnings" - would play a special role.
The link between sexuality and social life, which I see as so essential for Forster's political
philosophy, is quite evident in this characteristic passage from Carpenter:

Anyhow, with their extraordinary gift for, and experience in, affairs of the
heart - from the double point of view, both of the man and the woman - it is
not difficult to see that these people have a special work to do as reconcilers
and interpreters of the two sexes to each other. [...] It is probable that the
superior Urnings will become, in affairs of the heart, to a large extent the
teachers of future society; and if so that their influence will tend to the
realization and expression of an attachment less exclusively sensual than the
average of today, and to the diffusion of this in all directions. (188)

With its heavy reliance on the nineteenth-century inversion model of homosexuality and its
Utopian faith in the social value of homosexuality, Carpenter's theory may seem to
represent a kind of idealization of homosexuality which, for all its good intentions, fails to
offer a nuanced analysis of its relationship with more explicitly political aspects of social reality. In fact, at least one critic, Gregory Bredback, sees this type of idealization as participating in the stereotyping of homosexuality:

In contrast to dominant strains of British homophobia, which constructed homosexuals as stigmatized deviants, both Carpenter and Maurice [in his “fantasies of Robinhoodesque homosexual life,” as Bredback calls them] fetishize the homosexual, positing him not as the debased other, but as the valorized other. Carpenter and Maurice in these instances, in other words, deploy a method of stereotyping that attaches different values to hegemonic denigrations of homosexuality, but that, in so doing, preserve the essential rhetorical form of the discourse of the stereotypical. (34)

This account of double-sided homosexual stereotyping is reminiscent of Baudrillard’s critique of “enlightenment humanism” because it “aspires to liberate the servile sex, race or class in the very terms of its servitude” (17), thus failing to truly undermine those terms and that servitude (see my discussion of this claim in the Introduction, 24-25). To assign a privileged value to homosexuality, as Carpenter does, is to maintain its alienating position of the other. However, while Carpenter may have fallen into this trap, I would claim that Forster’s account of the relationship between Maurice and Alec escapes it. Even though Forster’s novel is clearly a story about personal development, the “final stage” of that development remains unrepresented. The finish line of Maurice’s (and Alec’s) education of
the spirit by the flesh is appropriately relegated to an ideal future, and Forster – perhaps unlike Carpenter – is quite aware of the ideal nature of that point of completion. The fantasy of it, the “happy ending,” may be necessary for the development itself to occur, but the really significant character of that development is not teleological but deconstructive. In other words, “the flesh educating the spirit” is not so much about the ultimate form that Maurice’s identity may acquire as it is about maintaining its capability for recurrent destabilization and restructuring. In psychoanalytic terms, the desirable result of Maurice’s and Alec’s seduction of each other is not the ego’s approximation of the state of perfect coherence and stability but, quite the contrary, its lasting openness to the destabilizing communication with the unconscious. Bredback offers another way of articulating this complex characteristic in Forster’s work:

Forster’s representational politics, therefore, revolve partially around a poetics of identification – a strategy of selecting and promoting options for change and for being – but primarily around a poetic of disidentification – a strategy of embedding identifications within an epistemological framework that questions the entire apparatus of “identification,” “identity,” and “politics.” (56)

I would argue that this “poetics of disidentification” is a crucial element of Forster’s insistence on the value of personal relations over creeds. It is in this light that one should interpret Forster’s famous statement: “Two people pulling each other in salvation is the
only theme I find worthwhile” (quoted in Scherer Herz 55). In other words, the key to the kind of personal relationship that is worthy of the third cheer, that may lead to “Love the Beloved Republic,” is the one in which each person helps the other – seduces the other – to question and destabilize his identifications. As it should be clear from the first part of this chapter, it is certain aspects of masculine identifications that are particularly important for Forster. But if Maurice is a novel about a young man’s development into a tolerant, liberal, male subject whose self-understanding is informed by his desire, then that development is largely a process of that subject’s dis-identification from the conventions and codes which threaten to disable any communication between the subject’s ego and his desire.

That Forster understands sexual and political development of a liberal, masculine subject as a form of recurring disidentification suggests that his efforts to sexualize social relations for the sake of approaching “Love the Beloved Republic” rely on seeing sexuality as a force of disidentification. In other words, Forster’s insight is that sexuality necessitates and enables a desirable destabilization of the ego formations encouraged by social relations. An ideal liberal, masculine subject, for Forster, is the one whose self-identification is not entirely determined by his social relations, the one whose ego is not entirely unresponsive to the otherness of the unconscious, the one whose masculinity is not rigid but “soft” and malleable, the one who allows his spirit to be educated by his flesh – in short, a subject open to seduction.
NOTES

Introduction

1. I talk about the seducer’s agency as “his” agency deliberately. The aim of this dissertation is to analyze the role of the rhetoric of seduction specifically in relationships between men (fictional and real) and, in particular, in those situations where that relationship plays an important part in a subject’s masculine self-conceptualization. Accordingly, this specific kind of the rhetoric of seduction has much to do with male homosexuality and homosociality, and I discuss various forms and aspects of these categories throughout the dissertation. Of course, relationships of seduction between women or between a man and a woman would have very different conceptual implications, which I do not address here.

2. I use the masculine pronoun to refer to both the seducer and the seducee because my specific analysis focuses on the relationships of seduction between men and, indeed, explores the ways in which such relationships – or perceptions of relationships between men as seductions – influence a subject’s masculine self-identification. Seduction relationships between women or between men and women necessarily inform the subject’s identifications in different ways, which I do not address in this work.


Chapter 1

1. For a very interesting discussion of how “transgressive aesthetic” should be understood as a paradoxical or an oxymoronic phrase, see Wilson.

2. Sinfield also points out that the “dandy figure served Wilde’s project because he had a secure cross-sex image, yet might anticipate, on occasion and in the main implicitly, an emergent same-sex identity” (73).
3. The story of the relationship between Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas has not been often told from Douglas’s point of view. Douglas Murray’s recent biography *Bosie* (New York: Hyperion, 2000) begins to remedy that situation.

4. For a more detailed account of the “literary part” of the case see Cohen, especially pages 117-121. In addition to Hyde’s *Oscar Wilde: Three Times Tried*, a comprehensive account of the trials can be found in Ellmann, 440-478.

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**Chapter 2**

1. For an elaboration of this modernist denial of homosexual desire, see Cassandra Laity’s discussion of Eliot, Pound, and Yeats in Chapter 1 of *H. D. and the Victorian Fin de Siècle*.

2. On Gide’s mixture of feminism and misogyny, see Lucey.

3. Of course, there were exceptions, but a multitude of documents from the period testifies to this cross-class and/or cross-race fascination of gay middle-class European men.

4. Such insistence makes one wonder to what extent the Orient serves as a projection screen not only for colonial authors and their characters but for some postcolonial critics as well.

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**Chapter 3**

1. An excellent summary of these various approaches to *Dracula* can be found in Senf, *Dracula: Between Tradition and Modernism*.

2. Van Helsing, more than anyone else, is a character whose ego is in crisis: he’s hysterical, he’s the one who insists on bringing together occult and modern knowledge in order to understand and explain Dracula, to weave stories and diagnoses about him; in other words, he is the one who needs Dracula as a coherent identity, the one who can’t really stand the fluid and protean character of the vampire, even though he insists that he is the one with the open mind. In this context, the fact that his name is the anagram of the word “English” – an observation made by Riquelme (564) – is extra telling: his hysteria
is very English. Also, Van Helsing’s relationship with Seward can be seen as a kind of seduction, biting and all. In fact, Craft calls their bonding “homosocial/ pederastic” (92). It is possible to read the novel as the “case” of Jonathan Harker as analyzed and “solved” by Van Helsing and his assistants. There are signs that Van Helsing wants to turn Jonathan’s experience into a “case,” which needs explaining out and transferential emotion in order to be cured.

Intriguing comments on Quincey Morris are offered by Moretti.

3. For significant discussions of this homosocial bonding over Lucy’s dying and dead body, see especially Bentley, Roth, and Craft.

4. Hall and Holden also question in interesting ways the interpretations that reduce the novel to its sexual components.

5. In addition to Richardson’s essay, significant early psychoanalytic interpretations of Dracula are Bierman, Twitchell, Bentley, Byers, and Roth, among other. Two more recent significant psychoanalytic readings, Hatlen and Foster, I discuss in the main text.

6. Hence Lucy is the only English vampire destroyed in full process (cf. Daly 196).

7. The analyst is a function of the patient’s encounter with his unconscious because he allows the patient to encounter the analyst’s own unconscious. This is an example of Laplanche’s notion of seduction. Laplanche insists that the alien-ness of the other and the alien-ness of the unconscious guarantee each other and are a part of the same decentering of the subject’s ego (cf. “Theory” 659-63).

8. It is worth nothing that, in a way, a transferential emotion is really as genuine as any other emotion, inasmuch as all emotions are somewhat transferential.

9. Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory is to a large degree dedicated to rescuing Freud’s ideas from such simplified and tendentious uses. He is particularly opposed to what he calls “obscurantism [...] characterized by the revival of notions long since refuted in the field of psycho-analysis, such as the predominance of the functions of the ego” (127). While Freud did, indeed, see psychoanalysis as a kind of “talking cure,” he insisted that the analyst’s sole goal is to remove psychotic symptoms by making the desires and events that caused the symptoms accessible to the consciousness. Even though it is fairly easy to point to Freud’s dependence on the values and norms of his culture, he does not articulate psychoanalytic treatment as an essentially normalizing process. See Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose’s introduction to Lacan’s essay “Intervention on Transference” in Feminine Sexuality for further discussion.

10. This insight can be seen as a major point of queer theory expressed in psychoanalytic terms.
11. The beauty behind the shutters could be theorized as standing for the Lacanian Real, which, while not a part of the ego or the symbolic order, guarantees their very existence.

12. An intriguing, more politically oriented take on the East-West tensions in the novel is Wasson’s observation that Dracula feels betrayed by the West because he “sees himself as having performed an important political function for the West: [...] he and his ‘race’ kept the Turks at bay and finally defeated them” (20).

13. Boone offers useful observations on the dangers of scientific rationalism, which is so important for the gender identity of the men in Stoker’s novel. He claims that “scientific rationalism makes England vulnerable to the incursion of vampirism” but that “the text retains an ironic stance relative to such scientific progressivism” (80).

14. The only exception are the Gypsies, whose interesting role as Dracula’s assistants has not been accounted for by Dracula’s critics.

15. Several critics make useful comments about the transformations of the status of professional knowledge in the novel. Hall further argues that the unstable status of knowledge in the legal profession is replaced later in the novel with a more hierarchically organized knowledge in the medical profession (105). “In the practice of medicine, knowledge is passed on only through specialized training, and, as represented in the novel, is never given to the client/patient” (106). “Thus relations between men become a highly regulated and disciplined means by which one acquires knowledge through training from experts – experts who, unlike Jonathan Harker, only give the knowledge to men like themselves – while the position of complete dependence is filled by those to whom knowledge is never allowed, the madman and the woman” (106). These shifts cleanse the workplace of the associations of emasculating servility which initially dominate Harker’s professional life. Smart points out that later in the novel Harker uses his knowledge differently: “Through with his apprenticeship, Harker uses his experience and knowledge to track the coffins” in which Dracula sleeps (257). In fact, as Wasson points out, “Harker’s legal knowledge [in the second half of the novel] enables the group to evade the law” (22).

16. Fleissner adds that “such worries about potential occupational immobility had disturbed Stoker himself, who gratefully escaped his own clerking position for a more exciting theatrical and literary career in London” (434) Stoker was determined to escape the fate of his father who spent all his life in a low-level clerk position in Dublin.

17. What is also interesting in that scene is that another man must die in order for Jonathan to fully stabilize his masculinity: Quincey Morris. Some critics see Morris as dispensable because, unlike other men in the group, he is a “non-professional” (Daly 190). Indeed, Morris is the man of the American frontier, independently wealthy, whose masculinity is not as dependent on rational self-control and discipline as that of the professional men. Jonathan, in a sense, replaces him in the band of men, which confirms the novel’s investment in a particular kind of middle-class, professional masculinity.
Chapter 4

1. For useful information about this, and in particular about the role “Hellenism” played in such relationships between male students, see Dowling.

2. Since Forster himself calls Clive’s temperament “hellenic,” putting the word under quotation marks, I find it appropriate to use “Hellenic” and “Hellenism” to refer to Clive’s ideas and behavior, even though, strictly speaking, it is a somewhat arbitrary use of the word.

3. Nadel also refers to Magnus Hirschfeld, who “reported that out of 10,000 homosexuals he studied, nearly one-third had been blackmailed” (184). Jeffrey Weeks also discusses the prevalence of homosexual blackmail in the nineteenth-century England in Coming Out.

4. Another interesting account of Forster’s romanticized relations between men can be found in Bristow, who discuss the connection between Forster’s “fraternal pastoral” (128) and the Cambridge Apostles.

5. In “Terminal Note,” Forster explains that he “was encouraged to write an epilogue. It took the form of Kitty [Maurice’s sister] encountering two woodcutters some years later, and gave universal dissatisfaction. Epilogues are for Tolstoy” (221).

6. For an intriguing critique of Martin’s account of the novel’s “dual perspective” see Bredbeck, who suggests that the “dual perspective’ between Symonds’s platonic homosexuality and Carpenter’s socialist Uranism is not, in actuality, the governing binary of Forster’s thought in the novel; the governing binary is between this system in its entirety and [...] the possibility of an unknowable and unrepresented space outside of the text” (53, emphasis in original).
BIBLIOGRAPHY


