

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: Two Is the Oddest Number:  
Same-Sex Marriage and the Victorian Afterlife

James M. Goodwin, Doctor of Philosophy, 2011

Dissertation Directed By: Professor William A. Cohen  
English

This dissertation reads today's same-sex marriage debate in United States in relation to the English debates over marriage reform in the 1850s. In particular, it focuses on the postmodern afterlife of the Victorian, arguing that the Victorian afterlife merges deeply suspicious readings with reparative ones. Starting with John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women*, it examines the manner in which today's readings of Mill's treatise repeat the responses of Mill's contemporaries. The paranoid reactions of today's readers attempt to show the inadequacies and contradictions of Mill's liberalism. At the same time, they highlight the paradoxical quality of Mill's "ideal of marriage," which involves "two persons of cultivated faculties, identical in opinions and purposes, between whom there exists that best of equality, similarity of powers and capacities with reciprocal superiority." In other words, "I am superior to you at the very same time that you are superior to me." So the desire for reciprocal superiority to embrace the supposedly non-paranoid, utopic celebrations surrounding the phenomenon of same-sex marriage, while it also reminds us not to dispense with paranoia, since these promises are pure fantasy.

The volatile relationship between these opposing reading practices (the paranoid and the reparative) helps us to identify the impossibility of true marriage equality. In order to highlight their dialectical relationship, subsequent chapters focus on the paranoid and reparative qualities of two contradictory critical readings of Charles Dickens's David

Copperfield; on *Little Dorrit* and its same-sex couple (Miss Wade and Tattycoram); on Walter Pater's hagiography of Winckelmann; and, finally, on Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* and what I call Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's "reparative avunculate," that is, the alternative familial relations that flit upon the play's surface but get ignored by paranoid scholars focusing solely on the psychoanalytic triad of the father-mother-child. While the "reparative avunculate" is comprised by Algernon's cynical, paranoid insistence that "two is none," it is a necessary addition to Wilde's farcical portrayal of bourgeois marriage. Taken together, paranoid and reparative analyses demonstrate there is no such thing as an anti-hierarchical, egalitarian, non-zero-sum, two-person partnership, although we continue to desire such partnerships.

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SAME-SEX MARRIAGE AND THE VICTORIAN AFTERLIFE

By

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
2011

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**Preface**  
**Independence vs. Sharing**

For in marriage a little license, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house; which Richard gave her, and she him...But with Peter everything had to be shared; everything gone into. (7)

In the opening pages of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), the thought of the eponymous heroine's old flame, Peter Walsh, pops into her head, and with it the reader is presented with two distinct, alternative versions of married life: one founded on a modicum of independence, and another on intense sharing with "everything gone into." Clarissa chose the former exactly because Peter's demands were too intense, for their marriage (she imagines) would be a test in which everything is gone into.

I highlight this difference at the outset not to censure Clarissa for not being brave enough to marry Peter, for while most people are comfortable with sharing, essentially no one is comfortable with sharing *everything* – assuming that it is even possible. Sharing everything, however, is an ideal that is very much with us late moderns, since our idea – or our ideal – of marriage is, when at its most progressive, founded on perfect egalitarianism. We rarely admit this fact because, as each of us knows from personal experience, "a little license, a little independence," a room of one's room, etc., is a necessary release-valve for those who choose to cohabit. Yet, pragmatic maneuvering aside, the last 150 years of marriage reform has had as its aim the abolition of institutional hierarchy and the establishment of perfect egalitarianism, or what John Stuart Mill calls "reciprocal superiority." That regular, everyday individuals should shrink from this intensity, this absolutism, is not surprising; however, removing gendered

attributes and anatomical sex are, importantly, the last impediments to perfect egalitarianism, and the logical outcome of reform dedicated to reducing the two individuals involved simply to their right to choose.

The following dissertation reads today's same-sex marriage debate in the United States through the English debates over marriage reform in the 1850s. Serious parliamentary-level debate about gender equality within the bonds of marriage coincided with the rise of Great Britain as the greatest superpower of the nineteenth century; similarly, constitutional debates about sexual orientation coincided with the rise of the U.S., one hundred years later, as the prevailing superpower of the twentieth. Specifically, from the mass immigrations of the late nineteenth century and the concomitant rise in industrialization to the first U.S. imperial endeavors in places like Cuba and the Philippines through to the aftermath of the Second World War – that is, the Cold War and the McCarthy era – coincided with the transatlantic importation of the sexological distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Unlike comparable European nations, however, the U.S. became a major international player with this distinction already intact, meaning that the modern hetero/homo definition played a unique role in shaping the U.S.'s post-war attitudes toward gender and sexuality. Today in the U.S. the desire for and the fear of same-sex marriage are exemplary, just as in Victorian England the reform debates over coverture (the subsuming of a woman's legal rights by her husband) were exemplary. It is through the latter lens, I argue, that we should confront the former, and ask, What *is* marriage?

To flesh out the implications of reciprocal superiority, this dissertation focuses on what has been called the Victorian afterlife, that is, late modernity's relationship to – its

deeply invested interest in – the Victorian. In particular, I focus on manifestations of the Victorian that appear in literary, feminist, and LGBT studies. While men wrote all the primary Victorian texts featured in this dissertation (Mill's *The Subjection of Women* [1869], Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* [1850] and *Little Dorrit* [1857], Walter Pater's 1867 essay on German art historian Johann Winckelmann, and Oscar Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest* [1895]), it is not these men and their texts (with the exception of Mill's essay) that draw me to focus on same-sex marriage alongside the Victorian afterlife. Rather, it is issues involving late modern U.S. scholarship, first from feminist scholarship and then from scholarship that variously employs paranoid readings and reparative readings of literary texts, that is, readings devoted to exposing what the text represses versus readings that pride themselves on being unsystematized, personal and, from a paranoid perspective, uncritical. The interpretive impasse between these two styles of reading reduplicates the essence of marriage reform. The dream of anti-hierarchical, egalitarian partnerships is thwarted by marriage reform's own goal because its goal is to provide the basis for a two-person partnership founded on perfect equality, thereby providing in the starkest terms the impossibility of authentic reform. To understand the most pressing civil rights issue of the early twenty-first century (and its latent *and* manifest contradictions), we should examine the interpretative strain evident in late modern interest in the Victorian literary material.

In terms of the Victorian afterlife, I would like to address the bases for the two historical leaps I make in the following pages. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," T. S. Eliot argues that "poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality" (43).

Individual talent, according to Eliot, should not be wasted on the romantic idiosyncrasies of any one particular writer; instead, the writer should focus on connecting talent to the vast poetico-religious tradition that is humanity's lifeblood. Eliot found it expressed in anthropological texts like James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890) and Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* (1920), and his *The Waste Land* (1922) represented the ultimate modernist attempt to commune with this lifeblood's variegated yet highly interconnected tradition. Whatever supersedes modernism must, therefore, profoundly distrust the tradition the poet obsessively alludes to.

Thinking of Septimus Smith's suicide, Clarissa longs to connect, even if it is through death, for death, she thinks, "was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the center which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death" (180). Even this embrace, however, is impossible. As Hamm says in Samuel Beckett's quintessentially "postmodern" play, *Endgame* (1957), "You're on earth. There's no cure for that!" (53); that is, Eliot's appeal to tradition and Woolf's appeal to communion with the dead, are not cures, *for there is no cure*. Our longing for a cure remains, of course, which is why throughout this dissertation late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century criticism will be referred to as "late modern" rather than "postmodern." Following Frederic Jameson's *A Singular Modernity* (2002), I contend that modernity has never been superseded, that so-called "postmodern" thinkers like Gilles Deleuze remain thoroughly modernist, for they remain "committed to the eruption of the genuinely new, the radically, and dare one even say, the authentically New" (4). For Jameson, our inability to escape from the modern manifests itself in a "simple" imperative: "you talk of 'alternate' or 'alternative'

modernities” (12). Jameson continues: “Everyone knows the formula by now: this means that there can be a modernity for everybody which is different from the standard or hegemonic Anglo-Saxon model [such as Eliot’s ‘tradition’]. Whatever you dislike about the latter, including the subaltern position it leaves you in, can be effaced by the reassuring and ‘cultural’ notion that you can fashion your own modernity differently” (12). For this reason, Jameson renames the period in question “late modernism” (13). So here “late modern critics” and “late modern interpretations” are to be understood as individuals and readings that operate within a singular tradition rather than as various attempts to circumvent it, especially in regard to the modern hetero/homo definition.

The second leap is a transatlantic one. Why directly connect 1850s English marriage reform to today’s same-sex marriage debate in the United States? Many countries have legalized same-sex marriage, in both Europe and North America, so why this specific connection? First, England (and Germany) led the way in creating the modern hetero/homo definition. When it crossed the Atlantic, it arrived in the United States at a formative moment in this nation’s history. In *The Straight State* (2009), Margot Canaday argues that “unlike comparable European states, which were well established before sexologists ‘discovered’ the homosexual in the late nineteenth century, the American bureaucracy matured during the same years that scientific and popular awareness of the pervert exploded on the American continent” (2).<sup>1</sup> In his review of *The*

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<sup>1</sup> Another key difference between Europe and the United States – and one on which, at this point, I do not focus enough attention – is their similar yet divergent “scientific racism.” In *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American* (2000), Siobhan Somerville “argue[s]...that the simultaneous efforts to shore up and bifurcate categories of race and sexuality in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were deeply intertwined” (3). For Somerville, *Plessey v. Ferguson* (1896) and the US fascination (obsession) with the Alice Mitchell and Oscar Wilde trials is more than

*Straight State*, Henry Abelove asks, “Why couldn’t their shifting conception of homosexuality have derived rather, or primarily, from their experience of the shifting representations of it in the culture all around them -- from fiction, poetry, film, journalism, advertisement?” His criticism: “Canaday gives hardly any attention to shifts in cultural representations and doesn’t ask how they may have influenced or even shaped concurrent shifts in bureaucratic perspective” (340-41). This is a valid critique; however, instead of choosing between Canaday and Abelove, it is more fruitful to think of “fiction, poetry, film, journalism, advertisement” and bureaucracy mutually feeding off each other. Late modern LGBT studies and literary criticism, for instance, often find themselves working in between these two (ostensibly divergent) discourses.

Regardless, the narrative is this: the maturation of the United States from the mass immigrations of the late nineteenth century to its rise to global dominance after World War II is colored by the fact that, unlike Europe, this country came of age with this definition always already colonizing every conceivable behavior. The modern hetero/homo definition played an integral role in the formation of the post-war zeitgeist in the United States, as amply documented by John D’Emilio in *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* (1983), so that, again, today in the United States desire for and fear of same-sex marriage is exemplary, just as in England in the mid-nineteenth century the reform debates over coverture were exemplary – and it is through the former lens, I argue, that we confront the latter, and ask, What *is* marriage?

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mere coincidence. Across the Atlantic, issues of “race” also permeated the burgeoning discourses on sexuality; however, their central concern was the “Jewish” other rather than the “black” other. See, in particular, Sander Gilman’s *Freud, Race, and Gender* (1995) and Daniel Boyarin’s *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (1997). Also, lest we forget, “homosexuality” and “anti-Semitism” were both coined in the 1860s and in German. This too is not a coincidence.

Dedicated to director extraordinaire,  
William A. Cohen,  
for his intelligence and his patience

& to my parents,  
Michael and Elizabeth Goodwin,  
for their unconditional love

with  
special thanks to  
Jason Rudy, Orrin Wang,  
Marilee Lindemann, Katie King,  
Jennifer Singletary,  
Aditya Chopra  
&  
my sisters,  
Susan, Mary, & Katie

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## **Introduction**

### **The Importance of *Being Married***

At the end of *The Subjection of Women* (1869), John Stuart Mill, highly influenced by his life partner, Harriet Taylor, defines “the ideal of marriage”: “Two persons of cultivated faculties, identical in opinions and purposes, between whom there exists that best of equality, similarity of powers and capacities with *reciprocal superiority* in them so that each can enjoy the luxury of looking up to the other, and can have alternately the pleasure of leading and of being led in the path of development” (575; emphasis added). At first, reciprocal superiority may appear to conform quite easily to stereotypical Victorian, “separate spheres” mores, where the husband-wife relationship is predicated on “marital sympathy.” To borrow Rachel Ablow’s succinct formulation, for example, “the wife’s principle role came to be defined in terms of her ability to redeem her husband...[to] enable[] him to persist in those labors [in the marketplace] without being entirely corrupted” (4). This essentially means: partner 1 can provide X, partner 2 can provide Y; partner 1 needs Y, partner 2 needs X – therefore, they form a partnership. This, however, is not the ideal described in *The Subjection*: “Two persons of cultivated faculties, identical in opinions and purposes, between whom there exists that best of equality, similarity of powers and capacities.” Notice these partners are not sexed. Plus, Harriet Taylor (one of these “two persons”) could never be mistaken for the proverbial angel in the house. Finally, this passage’s use of the adverb *alternately* highlights an internal tension, of how taut this relationship must be in order to maintain “equal” superiority.

Reciprocal superiority identifies the fact that egalitarianism is impossible except as fantasy because, here, *alternately* is intimately tied to egalitarianism. Our inadequate vocabulary concerning sexual matters highlights the problems the concept of reciprocal

superiority raises, particularly when it comes to same-sex passion – where, writes Alan Sinfield, “confounding...the distinction between desire-to-be and desire-for is endemic” (40). Mill’s *On Liberty* (1859), published just after Taylor’s death and dedicated to her memory, presents this problem most explicitly. It is impossible, therefore, to maintain individual freedom, one’s “liberty” (one’s ability to choose), in a hierarchical relationship. Mill resorts, therefore, to a conception of reciprocity that, supported by desire’s support (fantasy), preserves one’s superiority. In other words, it preserves hierarchy, while at the same time it negates desire’s chief motivation: lack. To rephrase this supposition: You are better than me, *and* I am better than you, *and* vice versa

In lines reminiscent of *On Liberty*, Mill repeats this sentiment in *The Subjection*: “freedom of individual choice is now known to be the only thing which procures the adoption of the best processes, and throws each operation into the hands of those best qualified for it” (489). Most crucial here is the emphasis on individual choice: in its purest form, it is “the only thing” capable of establishing an anti-hierarchical, egalitarian relationship. For this reason, Mill viewed England’s ever-strengthening capitalist system not as the end of history, but rather a moment *in* history that would give rise to greater cooperation between individuals, leading to (what we might dub) the superior reciprocity of market socialism. Regenia Gagnier observes that, in the final chapters of the *Principles of Political Economy* (1848), Mill stresses that “Once women are liberated to participate freely in market relations and thus be self-supporting...wage-labor itself ought to ease in favor of workers’ control of markets (what today we could call market socialism)” (31). The problem, however, is that market socialism is as contradictory as reciprocal superiority, and for the same reasons: reciprocal superiority is marriage *without* marriage;

market socialism is capitalism *without* capitalism. Are marriage and capitalism, we should ask, still marriage and capitalism if one removes inequality? The immovable stumbling block appears when Mill concedes that the liberty or “individual freedom of choice” that is the promise of all human beings must be protected by governmental institutions that impede capitalist expansion. In other words, can the law privilege two-person partnerships without impeding the individual rights of one of the two parties?

This is why this dissertation is about the number 2, its relation to marriage and coupledness, and how it provides a basis for today’s debate concerning same-sex marriage. Unlike attempts to provide the *historical* background of this debate,<sup>2</sup> this dissertation attempts to provide its *theoretical* background – meaning that I am principally interested in what marriage *is*, in the *essence* of marriage, in *being* married. So while *Victorian* stands for the nineteenth-century English texts (by John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor, by Charles Dickens, by Walter Pater and by Oscar Wilde) that are being read and interpreted, their *afterlife* (late modern critical preoccupations) is equally important, if not more so. These Victorian texts serve, therefore, *both* as text *and* as pretext, since my emphasis on the “Victorian afterlife” focuses more on *how* these texts operate today than on the creation of newer or better historicizations of, say, *Little Dorrit* (1857) or *The Subjection of Women* (1869) – unless, in a sense, these objectives are one and the same.

If homosexuality is a Victorian phenomenon, then it is important to *always* remind ourselves of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick states in her essay on Wilde’s *The*

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<sup>2</sup>See especially George Chauncey’s *Why Marriage?: The History Shaping the Debate over Gay Equality* (2004), E.J. Graff’s *What Is Marriage?: The Strange Social History of Our Most Intimate Institution* (1999), Nancy Cott’s *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (2000), and Margot Canaday’s *The Straight State* (2009).

*Importance of Being Earnest* (1895): “It is startling to realize that the aspect of ‘homosexuality’ that seems in many ways so immutably fixed – its dependence on a defining sameness between partners – is of so recent a crystallization” (57). Ever since the publication of Michel Foucault’s first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1976), scholars embraced the idea that “the sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (43). Scholars quickly absorbed what was first eagerly embraced, became dissatisfied with its ostensible simplicity, and dedicated their time to complicating, criticizing, or overturning what had become received wisdom. I highlight Sedgwick’s words because the shock that they express has long since passed. Two recent special issues from leading academic journals attest to this fact: *Social Text*’s 2005 *What’s Queer about Queer Studies Now?* and *South Atlantic Quarterly*’s 2007 *After Sex?: On Writing since Queer Theory*. Neither issue shuts down LGBT inquiry; rather, each issue’s goal is to expand on a parenthetical remark Sedgwick makes immediately after being startled: “The process,” she adds, “is also still radically incomplete and geoculturally partial” (57). And expand on it we have. Instead of being startled by the aforementioned fact, scholars have been encouraged by it and by the fact that its crystallization is incomplete and partial. And, without a doubt, great scholarship has followed;<sup>3</sup> however, this has been at the expense, I argue, of this original “startling” fact.

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<sup>3</sup> This scholarship has most often been part of the “transnational turn” in queer studies or “queer of color critique” or “transgender studies,” or a mélange of all three. For what is admittedly an incomplete list, see the following texts: Jose Esteban Munoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1999); Samuel Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (1999); Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Towards a Queer of Color Critique* (2004); Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (2005); Martin Manalansan IV, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (2003); Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005); Jasbir K. Puar,

To answer the deceptively-compact question, “Why marriage?” (Chauncey’s book title), we must first ask the ontological question, “What *is* marriage?” rather than, for example, the operational question, “What is marriage *for*?” (E.J. Graff’s book title). While the answer to this question, “What is marriage?,” may strike many as commonsensical, I claim that it is not. Beginning in the mid-Victorian period, marriage was being unmoored from the legal statutes dictating the disappearance of one of its two parties, that is, coverture. This gradual, imperfect unmooring, ranging from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day, is another way of describing this dissertation’s scope,<sup>4</sup> for the manner in which these two individuals were now supposed to relate to one another, to conduct themselves (in public and in private), required re-imagining. If marriage was no longer to be a relationship “between men,” where women were no longer objects to be trafficked, then, in theory as well as in practice, egalitarianism must

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*Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007), David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (2007), and Scott Herring’s *Queering the Underworld: Slumming, Literature, and the Undoing of Gay and Lesbian History* (2007). In addition, it should be noted that these texts aren’t in any way “against Foucault,” but that they do often show a pronounced interest in his late interviews, especially those with the gay press, because (as Sedgwick hoped for) these interviews begin to envision ways of obviating the modern homo/heterosexual definition and the influence of the repressive hypothesis. In *In a Queer Time and Place*, for instance, Halberstam opens with the following quotation from Foucault’s “Friendship as a Way of Life”: “How can a relational system be reached through sexual practices? Is it possible to create a homosexual mode of life?...To be ‘gay,’ I think, is not to identify with the psychological traits and the visible masks of the homosexual, but to try to define and develop a way of life” (138). For more on this mantra-like statement, see Leo Bersani’s 2002 essay, “Sociability and Cruising.”

For important recent reevaluations of Foucault’s work, see Didier Eribon’s *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self* (2004), specifically Part 3, and Lynn Huffer’s *Mad for Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory* (2009).

<sup>4</sup> See especially Mary Poovey’s “Covered but Not Bound: Caroline Norton and the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act,” in *Uneven Developments* (1988), 51-88; and Chapter 1 of Mary Lyndon Shanley’s *Marriage, Feminism, and the Law in Victorian English* (1993), 22-48, which also focuses on the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act.

overtake hierarchy, shifting the relationship from one of subordination to one of compromise, of “no subordination” – and this, indeed, is the narrative with which progressives are most comfortable. The problem arises, however, not because compromise is difficult to accomplish or that hierarchy persists (although these are also the case), but because it throws into relief the inherent contradictions at the heart of all two-person partnerships; because, that is, it lays bare the very structure of coupledness. Hence, the number 2 was (and still is) our problem.

My most immediate late modern interlocutors are Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, especially her distinction between paranoid and reparative reading, and Sharon Marcus, her book *Between Women* (2007) and her follow-up 2009 *SAQ* article “At Home with the Other Victorians.” In the latter, Marcus writes, “A historiographical emphasis on community, visibility, and plebeian sexual culture...[has] made it almost impossible to imagine gay men [of the nineteenth century] embracing the domestic values of coupledness, privacy, and middle-class respectability” (120). Although Alan Bray’s posthumously published *The Friend* (2004) did attempt to find relationships between men that seemed to resemble marriage, Marcus is certainly correct that recent scholarship (her own as well as Martha Vicinus’s *Intimate Friends* [2004]) has documented the degree to which marriage rhetoric dominated the lives of female homoerotic relationships, and that, in many important ways, their use of this rhetoric pre-dated, anticipated, and provided the stage for bourgeois marriage reform. In chapter 5 of *Between Women*, “The Genealogy of Marriage,” Marcus states, “Forced by necessity to construct ad hoc legal frameworks for their relationship, nineteenth-century women in female marriages not only were precursors of late-twentieth century ‘same-sex domestic partners,’ but also anticipated

forms of marriage between men and women that were only institutionalized decades after their death” (206). I wholeheartedly agree. This dissertation, however, is not an attempt to rectify the situation, to fill this “historiographical” gap; rather, while I grant (I even take for granted) this precursor status, this places Marcus’s work squarely in the company of Graff, Cott, Chauncey, and others. Although I do not wish to neglect the historical exigencies that have driven these scholars working on the side of angels (and although I draw much inspiration from this scholarship), my path is different. Take Marcus’s assertion above as a case in point. Instead of focusing on “precursors,” I focus on a theoretical problem: the status of the number 2 has been foregrounded, thereby calling into question the meaning of two-person partnerships. Instead of documenting (however ingeniously) historical antecedents, the trouble with the number 2, I argue, is what drives the entire debate.

Elizabeth Freeman, for instance, has argued that the late modern emphasis on marriage’s transhistoricity may derive not so much from marriage as an institution per se, but rather from the desire to construct public forms of attachment, a desire she identifies as “the wedding complex.” This complex, she contends, contains the possibilities of reimagining forms of public attachment outside the union of one man and one woman. In short, these would be the queer possibilities of public attachment. The first epigraph from Freeman’s book is drawn from Michael Warner’s *The Trouble with Normal* (1999), and it is worth examining here:

One can *easily* imagine ceremonies with a difference – in which people might solemnize a committed household, ironize their property sharing, pledge care and inheritance without kinship, celebrate a whole circle of intimacies, or dramatize independence from state-regulated sexuality. (133; emphasis added)

Warner's answer is that one "would need not only ceremonies," for this is "not merely a theoretical question *about* marriage," but a new narrative. Warner concludes:

Although marriage has layers of meaning that are relatively resistant to spin, it is worth noting that the subject of same-sex marriage is so thoroughly mediated by public-sphere discourse that few can think about the topic apart from some kind of narrative about long-term social change, usually on the national scale. (134)

This way of thinking, I argue, is dictated by what it is *about* marriage that resists spin, though it is unclear where, for Warner, this resistance would originate. As we will see, it is precisely a theoretical question about what marriage *is*. For Mill, the concept of "reciprocal superiority" (as the *reductio ad absurdum* of marriage reform) urges us to comprehend the contradictions inherent to marriage as both public practice and private engagement, to understand why ironizations or dramatizations of it "get no press," or when they do, why such performances have little effect in destabilizing that which is "resistant to spin." I call this "the marriage paradox," and I derive it, in particular, from the relationship between Mill and Taylor, and the place where they formulated this concept, *The Subjection of Women*; that is, the culmination of their personal, intellectual, and highly public collaboration, and their explicit ode to this marital paradox: the reformist desire to enter into a two-person partnership, an attachment in which both partners are equal but both parties are free *not* to compromise, since they *must* exercise their individual autonomy.

To flesh out this definition, let us contrast it to Freeman's wedding complex. Most important for Freeman is the performative quality of the wedding, with all its unpredictability, that is, with its ability to decouple itself, so to speak, from the formal institution of marriage. In Freeman's words, "the desire for the symbolic apparatus that is

the wedding and the legal apparatus that is marriage cannot be reduced to one another” (5). It is this desire, separate from the legal institution, for which Freeman chooses the word *complex*, a psychoanalytic concept reminiscent of Freud’s Oedipus complex. In other words, there is something that is (ostensibly) universally desirable about the Anglo-American stylized wedding (Freeman cites Asian co-optations of various elements of Western weddings which create provocative, even queer, admixtures [226n17]); as Freeman makes clear, however, what this intangible something is is difficult to discern; in other words, it is seemingly ephemeral.

To concretize this ephemerality, Freeman turns to J. L. Austin’s *How To Do Things with Words* (1955) and to Eve Sedgwick’s critical appropriation of Austin. “I do” is the ultimate performative, for as an utterance it is both a saying and a doing; but, as Freeman asserts, “the possibility of infelicitous or unhappy performativity, of nullification caused by extenuating circumstances” means “the marital performance continually misfires” (34). Here, the potential for misfire is what provides the marital performance with its allure, for it is the idea, as we will see, that the letter might not reach its destination that queers the deal, so to speak. Despite this potential, however, the union of the couple remains central. It is the presence of a third – or, as we will see, with Jacques Derrida, a fourth – position, which here we might designate as the “priest” and “audience,” respectively, that have the potential to lead to queer misfires that keep weddings from being subsumed by marriage. Yet, this potential is by definition limited because all participants are necessarily complicit in the sanctity of the couple. In this respect, Freeman and Sedgwick, like Derrida, are asking (Jacques Lacan), what if the letter doesn’t arrive? This, however, is the wrong question: the real misfire occurs *within*

*the couple itself*, in the ineluctable quality of its form. In other words, it creates a deadlock: one between the sacrosanct quality of an individual's sovereign autonomy and the cultural imperative to cohabit with another, to sacrifice one's autonomy, to compromise for the sake of another person.

Because of the Oedipal triangle, 3 is most often the number people associate with psychoanalysis; however, psychoanalysis's main concern is the number 2. After all, its main concern is, first and foremost, the relationship between the analyst and the analysand. During Barbara Johnson's synthetic analysis of Lacan's and Derrida's disagreement over Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter" (1844), she observes that "[i]f the face-off between two opponents or polar opposites always simultaneously backfires and misfires, it can only be because 2 is an extremely 'odd' number" (221). Since this is a conditional statement, this observation begs the question: Is misfire/backfire unavoidable? Is this a zero-sum relation? If not, then maybe two is *not* an extremely odd number, but rather, as commonsense would dictate, the most even, the most symmetrical of all numbers, therefore making it, as most couples would like to think, a non-zero-sum relation. (Is the analyst/analysand relationship zero-sum?) Since this dissertation rests on the assertion that *misfire/backfire is unavoidable*, it behooves us to explain why Johnson makes this claim in the first place. In 1966, Lacan published *Écrits*, a massive 900-page tome collecting a majority of his writings. These articles, which had previously appeared in obscure psychoanalytic journals, were arranged chronologically, with the exception of the "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" (1956), which Lacan chose as the book's introduction. That Lacan placed this text front and center is significant in itself, but for this dissertation its significance derives in particular

from its focus on the number 2 and this number's relation (in Lacanian terminology) to the imaginary and symbolic registers. In addition, when the essay became the impetus for Derrida's own (and essentially only) face-off with his near contemporary, it should come as little surprise that Derrida's critique of Lacan is all about the numbers.

Beginning with Poe's short story, however, one should recall the game of "even and odd" as it is related to the reader by C. Auguste Dupin, the amateur detective in Poe's story. The game consists of holding marbles in one's closed hand and asking another whether the amount is even or odd. Dupin, possibly speaking of himself, relates the story of an eight-year-old schoolboy who won all the marbles at his school, and when asked how he had accomplished this feat, replied:

'When I wish to find out how wise, or how stupid, or how good, or how wicked is any one, or what are his thoughts at the moment, I fashion the expression of my face, as accurately as possible, in accordance with the expression of his, and then wait to see what thoughts or sentiments arise in my mind or heart, as if to match or correspond with the expression.' (16)

Here, identification is the key to the face-off; but, for Lacan, the game is more complicated. Identifications of this sort, while it helps Dupin retrieve the Queen's letter from the Minister D— (the Prefect of the Paris police could not identify with the Minister, which is why he could not retrieve the letter for the Queen), does not explain the importance of the letter's symbolic role, which Lacan illustrates with the story of the three ostriches. Here is how Lacan explains the analogy:

In order to grasp in its unity the intersubjective complex thus described [between King, Queen, and Minister], we would willingly seek a model in the technique legendarily attributed to the ostrich's attempt to shield itself from danger, for that technique might ultimately be qualified as political, divided as it here is between three partners: the second believing itself invisible because the first has its head stuck in the ground, and all the while the third can the calmly pluck its rear; we need only enrich its

proverbial denomination by a letter, producing *la politique de l'autruiche*, for the ostrich itself to take on forever a new meaning. (32)

The problem, however, as I identify it, is that this is not a situation involving three ostriches, but rather two, for the third ostrich always fails to remain in the position of the third, just as Dupin fails when he leaves a note for the Minister that identifies Dupin as the retriever of the purloined letter; instead, the third ostrich (now Dupin) sees the second, oblivious to its presence, and therefore assumes the role of the second ostrich who believes the first is oblivious to its presence. The point here is that, essentially, *there is no third position*: once the third, thinking it has the perfect opportunity, pounces, it necessarily assumes the position of the second: Dupin's actions prove that this pull is irresistible. In short, the third position always slips into the second – or, again, there is no third position, although this does not mean that the third position is not always seemingly looming on the horizon of the possible.

If we have only two, as I assert, then this is how we ought to interpret the most famous assertion from Lacan's seminar: "a letter always arrives at its destination" (53). This assertion may sound deterministic and hopelessly teleological, which is what led Derrida to ask, what if the letter doesn't arrive? This, however, misses the point of the assertion on two levels: first, in terms of imaginary misrecognition; the second, in terms of symbolic recognition. Johnson sums up the first as follows: "The letter's destination is thus wherever it is read: the place it assigns to its reader as his own partiality" (248). As Slavoj Žižek observed in *Enjoy Your Symptom* (1992), this phenomenon is similar to Althusserian ideological interpellation, where an individual misrecognizes herself as the subject of address (10). That the individual believes this to be the case has nothing to do with the facts of the case (these facts, at the level of the imaginary, are actually

irrelevant), but with the “fact” that the individual believes she is the addressee. This misrecognition, however contingent the circumstances, attests to the fact that from the individual’s perspective – but from that perspective alone – this is the only way to interpret the situation. Symbolic recognition enters the fray when, as Žižek phrases it, “the concealed truth [of the imaginary misrecognition]...emerges in the ‘blind spots’ and flaws of the imaginary circle” (18). The difference between the two is minimal, but significant. The second explanation refutes the first (the recognition is false; the “facts” were merely contingent, accidental, and incidental), but instead of providing a better alternative, say, the correct recognition, it reveals that the contingent factors speak to the truth of the situation, which is, in sum, the arbitrariness of the signifier.

As I have said, Derrida’s critique of Lacan is all about the numbers, and I am now in a position to say why that critique has been rendered moot. According to Derrida, Lacan sees the number 3 everywhere, as in the Oedipal triangle, while Derrida asserts that there is always a fourth, that the triangle is actually a quadrilateral. For Derrida, this fourth position is occupied by Poe’s narrator, something Lacan, according to Derrida, fails to take into account. The point is moot, however, because, as ostrich politics makes clear, the third position is unsustainable, impossible. 2 is Lacan’s concern, not 3. This means that we are always left with a couple, with a face-off, an even number that’s odd.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> I do not wish, however, to imply that Derrida’s contribution to this debate – or, more generally, to his contribution to contemporary philosophy – is irrelevant to this dissertation, for, especially relevant here, are his pieces *Politics of Friendship* (1994) and *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* (1997). Rather, like Andrea Hurst’s argument in *Derrida Vis-à-vis Lacan* (2008), I seek compromise, but not over this philosophical-psychoanalytic tête-à-tête over Poe’s short story. Instead, it is Derrida’s interrogation of Levinas’s ethics as first philosophy, with one’s being always-already responsible for the Other, and with, as Derrida writes of Levinas, “the third arrives without waiting. Without waiting, the third comes to affect the experience of the face in the face to face” (29),

Highlighting this point, Adam Phillips asserts that psychoanalysis “is about what two people can say to each other if they agree not to have sex.” Leo Bersani opens their co-authored book, *Intimacies* (2008), with this quotation, and at first blush, Phillips’s statement would seem to be patently false. As Bersani observes, nothing here conforms to what we commonly understand to be the psychoanalytic setting. As just noted, psychoanalysis’s main concern is that between the analyst and the analysand, and this relationship is defined by its inequality. It is precisely this type of provocation that animates Phillips’s writing, however, and, as we will see in the next chapter, makes it so very useful, for the reason why John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor are this dissertation’s exemplary couple is that what they produced, reciprocal superiority, is a direct result of what two people can say to each other if they agree not to have sex.

To conclude, Lacan’s most-cited illustration (besides the mirror stage) is one found in “The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason since Freud.” Two children, brother and sister, are riding on a train. As it pulls into a station, they bicker: “‘Look,’ says the brother, ‘we’re at the Ladies!’; ‘Idiot!’ replies the sister, ‘can’t you see we’re at Gentlemen.’” This amusing anecdote, where the children confuse the name of their location with the signs above the lavatory entrances, creates for Lacan an

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where Derrida enters this meditation on the face-off between 2. “Oh my friends, there are no friends,” writes Aristotle, and this paradoxical phrase becomes the impetus for Derrida’s investigation into how, politically, one can – *and* cannot – relate to another. This is all to say that, while Johnson is right (because Derrida is “consistent[ly] forcing Lacan’s statements into systems and patterns from which they are actually trying to escape” [227]), Derrida, along with Lacan, is vital to answering the question: Why is 2 an extremely ‘odd’ number? Or, to rephrase this question: What about the apparent insistence of the third? Is this always a face-off or might we be always-already in the middle of a *ménage à trois*? As Algernon says in Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*, “in married life three is company and two is none” (302). See chapter 4.

antagonism illustrative of Johnson's emphasis on 2's oddness and Mill and Taylor's paradoxical concept of reciprocal superiority. Lacan concludes:

For these children, Ladies and Gentlemen will be henceforth two countries towards which each of their souls will strive on divergent wings, and between which a truce will be the more impossible since they are actually the country and neither can compromise on its own superiority without detracting from the glory of the other. (116)<sup>6</sup>

Truce is impossible because a compromise would diminish both parties' superiority, and as Gayle Salamon reminds us, it is no accident that these signifiers are *gendered*; however, the example is "inverted," for the brother declares LADIES, the sister GENTLEMEN. "The doors," Salamon concludes, "are not gender itself, yet they are enacting proper gendering through their specificity" (187). Their specificity, however, is precisely what is undermined. Lacan instead illustrates the taut, maddening quality of reciprocal superiority, of 2's oddness, by withdrawing gender from the equation, even as he makes it central to his example.

If the HIV/AIDS crisis helped to fuel the paranoid, deeply suspicious readings that became the hallmark of queer theory, then we should consider the possibility that queer theory's interest in the reparative or in "just reading" is its attempt to find relevance in the wake of the supposedly non-paranoid, utopic celebrations surrounding the phenomenon of same-sex marriage. The reparative, writes Sedgwick, "will leave us in a vastly better position to do justice to a wealth of characteristic, culturally central practices...that emerge from queer experience but become invisible or illegible under a

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<sup>6</sup> I have used here Alan Sheridan's earlier 1977 translation for he uses the word "superiority," while Bruce Fink's 2006 translation uses the bulkier "unsurpassed excellence" (417). Lacan's own word is *précellence*, which functions similarly in French and English and means excellence or superiority.

paranoid optic” (147). Sedgwick’s own *Between Men* (she later admits) is a perfect example of the operations of the paranoid optic. Through readings of (mostly Victorian) literary texts, Sedgwick calls our attention to the embedded structure she calls “male homosociality,” which is a form of male bonding within a triangular relationship, where a woman’s presence facilitates the bonds between men. This facilitation, however, disguises the fact that what may appear to be two men competing for one woman’s affections is in fact a display of the two men’s attraction for one another. Under the (direct or indirect) influence of Sedgwick, late modern scholars spent the latter half of the 1980s and early 1990s disinterring homoerotic relations in canonical literary texts, suggesting that the homophobia accompanying the HIV/AIDS crisis is similar in kind to dominant, hetero readings of the canon.

As the political situation worsened, ACT UP or other groups radicalized, as did their academic counterparts. Queer theory sought not just to disinter but also to disturb if not to demolish the foundations that support homophobia. As David Halperin states in his biography of Foucault, “Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. ‘Queer’ then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative” (62). In other words, queer theory is a full-frontal attack on “heteronormativity,” which Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner define as “the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent – that is, organized as a sexuality – but also privileged.” Moreover, “Heteronormativity is thus a concept distinct from heterosexuality. One of the most conspicuous differences is that it has no parallel, unlike

heterosexuality, which organizes homosexuality as its opposite. Because homosexuality can never have the invisible, tacit, society-founding rightness that heterosexuality has, it would not be possible to speak of ‘homonormativity’ in the same sense” (548n2).

By the first decade of the twenty-first century, however, the political situation had drastically changed. Marriage equality replaced HIV/AIDS as the driving force behind political activism, leading Lisa Duggan to claim that such a thing as “homonormativity” did indeed exist as “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (50). The goal, therefore, is (as Sedgwick indicates) “to do justice to a wealth of characteristic, culturally central practices, many of which can well be called reparative, that emerge from queer experience”; that is, to focus on what becomes “invisible or illegible” when so much political capital is spent on homonormativity’s central concern: marriage equality.

For Sedgwick, the paranoid optic is no longer adequate to the task in an age of homonormativity. In “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading,” Sedgwick says that, up to a point, paranoid reading has served LGBT political causes, but that its characteristics tend now to limit its conclusions, if not (at times) to undermine them. Paranoid reading, she asserts, has five characteristics: (1) it is anticipatory (“There must be no surprises” [130]), (2) it is reflexive and mimetic (“Anything you can do (to me) I can do first – to myself” [131]), (3) it possesses a “strong theory” (that is, “a strong insistence on seeing everything in terms of its central suspicions” [Warner 17]), (4) it focus on negative affects, and (5) it places faith in exposure (“trust...depends...on an

infinite reservoir of naïveté in those who make up the audience for these unveilings [141]). In lieu of exposure and demystification, Sedgwick proposes the reparative, which is characterized as a weak rather a strong theory. Its emphasis is on “attachment, investment, and fantasy” with stress placed on the “local, detailed, and unsystematized” (Warner 17). To further explain the reparative as a political tactic, Ann Cvetkovich has recently meditated on the Public Feelings project, an informal group of academics (including Duggan) “explor[ing] the role of feelings in public life” (169). For instance, one group, Feel Tank Chicago, has focused on depression with the goal of “depathologiz[ing] negative affects so that they can be seen as a possible resource for political action rather than as its antithesis” (170). For Cvetkovich herself, emphasis on public feelings has helped to recast her earlier work on trauma:

My work with the category of public feelings builds on my efforts...to create an approach to trauma that focuses on the everyday and the insidious rather than the catastrophic and that depathologizes trauma and situates it in a social and cultural frame rather than a medical one...Situating trauma within the larger context of public feelings offers a more flexible approach to the unpredictable linkages among violence, affective experience, and social and political change. (174-75)

In addition, the Public Feelings project has become an important outlet and resource for veteran AIDS activists who “feel politically depressed when confronted with a mainstream gay and lesbian political agenda that consists of gay marriage and civil rights” (171). Hence, the subtitle of the *After Sex?* collection in which Cvetkovich’s essay appears: “on writing *since* queer theory.” In sum, while queer theory’s paranoid optic is a full-frontal attack on “heteronormativity,” the reparative proposes to be an indirect, lateral, affective, and unsystematized response to homonormativity.

I have traced this shift from paranoia to the reparative because the historical phenomenon known as the Victorian afterlife merges paranoid readings with reparative ones. The Victorian afterlife, that is, seeks to unearth the perverse concealed within the ostensibly prudish while, at the same time, it hopes to sympathize with this Victoriana, to touch without suspicion, without the belief that what is most important is repressed or hidden inside. I flesh out the implications of reciprocal superiority by focusing on our contemporary interest in the Victorian, claiming that to understand this pressing civil rights issue, we should examine paranoid and reparative analyses of the Victorian period. For instance, the paranoid reactions of today's readers of *The Subjection of Women* set out to show the inadequacies and contradictions of Mill's liberalism, but instead they highlight the potency of Mill's concept of reciprocal superiority: that is, the desire for reciprocal superiority encourages us to seek out the reparative, to embrace the utopic, non-zero-sum promises of same-sex marriage and perfect equality, but it simultaneously reminds us *not* to dispense with the paranoid, since these promises are (and will always be) pure fantasy. By calling this "pure fantasy," I am not denigrating the desire for reciprocal superiority, nor am I claiming that those who indulge in it are the dupes of false consciousness. Jacques Lacan said, "Fantasy is the support of desire," that we cannot desire without fantasy; however, it is important to understand that, when we embrace fantasy, we remain paranoid.

Stressing the dialectical relationship between paranoid and reparative analyses, I focus first on two seminal readings of Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*. One of the most important texts in LGBT literary studies, D.A. Miller's "Secret Subjects, Open Secrets," an "aegis-creating essay" (Eve Sedgwick's words), establishes that open secrets

create an incurable paranoia, while Rachel Ablow's "wifely" reading of Dickens's novel argues (*contra* Miller) that *David Copperfield* functions as an ideal wife for its male reader. Taken together, these two late modern literary analyses demonstrate that marriage and homosexuality are intimately linked by a common ideal: the creation of anti-hierarchical, egalitarian relationships. The impossibility of actualizing this ideal leads us to a central epistemological problem: our inability to understand the number 2. The open secret of the wifely text is that, while the wifely text coddles its reader like a dutiful Victorian wife, it simultaneously undoes its own ability to produce the ideal partner, for the ideal partner vis-à-vis the text is everywhere and nowhere, nothing but a specter, a fetish substituting for something that, in fact, does not exist.

Next, I turn my attention to Miss Wade, a minor character in Dickens's *Little Dorrit* who in recent years has garnered more critical attention than any other of Dickens's memorable minor creations. Centering on Miss Wade's (lesbian) sexuality, these nuanced articles employ Victorian political economics, sociology and psychology, narrative theory, and LGBT studies; however, each misses the significance of Miss Wade's relationship with the servant, Tattycoram. When Tattycoram flees from Miss Wade and returns to the Meagleses, she is actually fleeing from the intensity of her own reflection, from Miss Wade as "an analogous case," in order to return to the safety of hierarchy and servitude. Their alternative domesticity is the antithesis of what is imagined by a separate-spheres ideology. When Tattycoram tells Miss Wade, "You seem to come like my own anger, my own malice, my own – whatever it is – I don't know what it is," she is describing reciprocal superiority, but (like Mr. Meagles who asks, "What can you two be together?") we are unable to conceive of their situation as

anything other than what Sharon Marcus calls “a pathological female household.” For this reason, Miss Wade’s story, what Dickens calls “the history of a self-tormentor,” repels reparative embraces.

Similarly, Walter Pater’s early essay “Winckelmann” repels reparative embraces because his meditation on love between men smuggles in a modicum of egalitarianism into what is supposed to be a hierarchical relation. Manifesting itself in a peculiar scholarly omission, no one has observed either that Pater’s description of Winckelmann’s murder, while it contains a surprising amount of forensic detail, omits the stabbing or that (with one exception) Pater invents a child who discovers the mortally wounded Winckelmann and calls for help. Pater’s construction of the murder scene complicates each and every attempt to incorporate it into LGBT history. Ostensibly a champion of pederastic love, Pater gestures toward a reproductive future incompatible with this type of love; at the same time, however, Pater undermines this reparative hope by inserting it into a scene where one man murders another. The celebration of anti-hierarchical, egalitarian relationships is subtended by a primal scene that cannot be realized, which is why today’s scholars have missed Pater’s own omission.

Finally, in Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Algernon explains to Jack, “You don’t seem to realize that in married life three is company and two is none.” On the one hand, Algernon wants Jack to understand that, if a couple does not look outside itself for sexual titillation (if not for actual sexual affairs), then they are not worthy of our attention. On the other hand, if we take Algernon’s statement more literally, we see that without the introduction of a third person, two really is none because the couple in-itself is nothing, is unrepresentable, unthinkable. Although I focus on a

number of LGBT readings of Wilde's play, Eve Sedgwick's is the most germane because she focuses on the alternative familial relations that flit upon the play's surface. While her "reparative avunculate" is comprised by Algernon's cynical, paranoid insistence that "two is none," a line Sedgwick does not analyze, it is a necessary addition to this farcical portrayal of bourgeois marriage. Taken together, paranoid and reparative analyses demonstrate that à la reciprocal superiority there is no such thing as an anti-hierarchical, egalitarian, non-zero-sum, two-person partnership, which is why 2 is, indeed, the oddest number. Nevertheless, we continue to desire such partnerships.

To be clear, however, I am also not asserting that the Victorian term *homosexuality* is the "hidden kernel" of marriage reform; rather, homosexuality turns our attention to the *form* of marriage and the couple; that is, the Victorian afterlife is defined by its central concern: interpretation. See, for instance, the subtitle of John Kucich and Dianne F. Sadoff's collection *Victorian Afterlife* (2000), "postmodern culture rewrites the nineteenth century," and then turn to the subtitle of Jay Clayton's *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace* (2003), "the afterlife of the nineteenth century in postmodern culture." Even though Clayton is a contributor to *Victorian Afterlife*, these subtitles do not say the same thing. In fact, they seem to work against each other. Rewriting the nineteenth century is certainly different than the persistence of the Victorian in later modern culture, which is not to say that we must choose between these two definitions, but rather, methodologically, to see them operating in tandem. Nancy Armstrong highlights this operation in her afterword to the *Victorian Afterlife* collection. She stresses that "postmodern culture" is both "not at all Victorian" *and* "very Victorian," by which Armstrong means, first, that "postmodernism assumes that Victorian men and women

were every bit as enchanted with alluring surface of commodities as modernism claimed” (315). They were not. In fact, the world-view of “Victorian realism” remained obsessed with the fact that objects in the world were primary and not constituted by their representation. In other words, Victorians were not the superficial dullards modernists claimed them to be. Second, however, “very Victorian,” because, despite their emphasis on primacy, the vast expansion of consumer culture threatened to reveal that society was founded on nothing but itself, that representation is all there is. “In this respect,” Armstrong concludes, “postmodernism is perhaps more Victorian than even the Victorians were” (319).

This, however, is not to imply that there is a symbiotic relationship between the Victorian and “the postmodern,” or what I’ve called the late modern. In his recent book *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses* (2008), William A. Cohen argues that he is not simply applying the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and George Bataille (along with queer theory) to his literary analyses; “rather,” he says, “I rely on them in combination, as they bear affinities with, help to explicate, or are illuminated by nineteenth-century texts” (23). This is an effective methodology; however, I draw attention to it to contrast it with my own. Cohen says that Victorian literature and French theory can have a productive relationship, and his book is a testament to this fact. By contrast, my focus is on the contradictions *within* late modern literary analyses of Victorian texts. Armstrong’s argument is indicative of these contradictions.<sup>7</sup> That “postmodern culture” is *both* “not at all Victorian” *and* “very

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<sup>7</sup> John McGowan’s contribution to *Victorian Afterlife*, “Modernity and Culture, the Victorians and Cultural Studies,” is the collection’s more reflective and most provocative piece, and it had aided the thinking of such fellow travelers such as Jay Clayton and Alan

Victorian” is a problem with our own critical methodologies, even if it is our inheritance. In particular, this both/and logic underlies the recent trend preoccupying Victorianists and queer scholars, and most often queer Victorianists.<sup>8</sup>

Exemplary here is the logic at work in Marcus’s *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (2007), where she proposes an alternative to current textual interpretation she calls “just reading,” one that she defines in opposition to symptomatic reading as exemplified by Frederic Jameson. For Marcus, “just reading” seeks to side-step the depth-model inherent in symptomatic readings. “Interpretation proper,” writes Jameson in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981), “always presupposes, if not a conception of the unconscious itself, then at least some mechanism of mystification or repression in terms of which it would make sense to seek a latent meaning behind the manifest one, or to rewrite the surface

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Liu. In his essay, McGowan identifies “zeitgeist thinking” as essentially a Victorian enterprise, and one that “marks our own Victorianism” (3). He focuses particular attention on Mary Poovey’s reading *David Copperfield*. I would here like to distinguish myself from McGowan, since I too focus on Dickens’s novel. McGowan highlights Poovey’s reading because he finds her both/and logic to be exemplary; in other words, she posits *David Copperfield* as both the product of its historical moment and as exceeding it, that is, as exposing the ideological structures that produced it. I find nothing to fault with this reading; however, I am completely uninterested, at least as my present argument is concerned, in bestowing “Literature” with this sort of power and with criticizing those who do or do not. Instead, I am interested in placing seemingly contradictory late modern readings of, say, *David Copperfield* in conversation with one another with the goal of demonstrating the power of the Victorian afterlife, which McGowan defines as the “aim[] to intervene in...society by explaining the age to itself” (3). In addition, I should mention that McGowan is also skeptical of critique qua exposure: “Must exposure always threaten ideology? Is an ideology consciously held always more vulnerable than one that is unexposed?” (5).

<sup>8</sup> For a related example of this both/and logic, but from a non-Victorianist, see Scott Herring’s *Queering the Underworld* (2007), where Herring combines slumming literature’s desire to expose (what he calls “the hermeneutics of sexual suspicion”) with a method of queering this desire, that is, with a refusal to endorse exposure (what he calls “the suspicion of sexual hermeneutics”) (4-20).

categories of a text in the stronger language of a more fundamental interpretative code” (60).<sup>9</sup> Marcus cites this passage, stating that, while “this method for excavating what societies refuse to acknowledge” helps when “the twentieth century...define[d] gay and lesbian existence through repression and the resistance to it,” it is not always the best method to interpret nineteenth-century novels (75). Marcus employs *just* in two complementary ways: *just* meaning simply, or straightforward, as in “just the facts”; and *just* as in doing justice to the text, not treating it simply as a symptom of the society that produced it. Marcus does not deny the utility of symptomatic readings, however, because “just readings...depend on a symptomatic reading of novel theory, since only by attending to what other critics have been unable to explain can subsequent critics build a more capacious interpretive framework” (76). Why this admission concerning the supplemental quality of just reading? In order to guard against an accusation that Marcus clearly anticipates (“To pursue just reading is...not to make an inevitably disingenuous claim to transparently reproduce a text’s unitary meaning” [75]), she admits that she is engaging, in part, in a symptomatic reading of those who engage in symptomatic interpretations of Victorian novels. While, at first glance, Marcus is avoiding the act of “plumbing the depths” of the texts being interpreted, her admission demonstrates why

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<sup>9</sup> In “Reading on the Left,” Christopher Nealon takes issue with Marcus’s characterization of symptomatic reading à la Jameson. While Jameson is famous among literary critics for his “Always historicize!” mantra, Nealon argues that these critics usually ignore his Marxist motivations. “Jameson’s great obsession,” writes Nealon, “the problem of the nonrevolutionary character of the twentieth century (or of the nonliberatory character of its revolutions), is easily set aside when” his Marxism is ignored (23). Nealon concludes that, if understood within this context, Jameson is not as antagonistic towards texts as some seem to think. I would add, however, that even though Jameson is in these cases used as a strawman, he is still not easily pushed over.

one cannot avoid the surface/depth model when it comes to textual interpretations themselves, that the reparative should not dispense with paranoid.

This is the critical legacy that constitutes the Victorian afterlife. Attempting to avoid a paranoid optic, Marcus *just reads* Victorian texts in order to demonstrate that in Victorian England relations between women were openly erotic. Her exigency is the current political movement surrounding same-sex marriage, but Marcus does not offer her book as support for this movement; rather, she hopes that readers will see the institution of marriage in genealogical terms that focus their attention on the affective relations it has created. In short, Marcus offers a reparative reading of marriage as a non-zero-sum relation, where “Victorian marriage plots depend on maintaining bonds of friendship between women [that were]...neither repressed...nor policed...as rigorously as...heterosexual relations” (75); but, all the same, it is an offering plagued by the threat of repression, paranoia, and the inequality inherent in marriage because “the twentieth century...define[d] gay and lesbian existence through repression and the resistance to it.” But, I ask, what about the twenty-first century?

The narrative providing the exigency for reparative/just readings, however, should consider, for example another LGBT political phenomenon of the early twenty-first century, one many wish did not exist: barebacking. Placing side-by-side what should be the polar extremes of the LGBT political movement (same-sex marriage and the subculture of gay male barebacking), I place the phenomenon of bareback sex squarely in the realm of the Victorian afterlife. In *Unlimited Intimacy* (2009), Tim Dean writes,

The emergence of a subculture of bareback sex is not merely coincident with but directly related to the campaign for same-sex marriage that has occupied so much attention in recent years...Gay men have discovered that on the basis

of viral transmission they can form relations and networks understood in terms of kinship – networks that represent an alternative to, even as they often resemble, normative heterosexual kinship. (ix)

Before continuing, permit me to add three more intimately related quotations. In 1970, Mike McConnell and Jack Baker applied for a marriage license in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Asked by a reporter about who was the wife in their relationship, their reply was “We don’t play those kinds of roles” (qtd. Chauncey 90). In 1997, in *POZ* magazine, porn-actor Scott O’Hara claims, “I believe in exchanging bodily fluids, not wedding rings” (67; qtd. Dean, “Breeding Culture” 82). The last, from Warner’s *The Trouble with Normal*, was quoted above, but it’s worth repeating: “One can *easily* imagine ceremonies with a difference – in which people might solemnize a committed household, ironize their property sharing, pledge care and inheritance without kinship, celebrate a whole circle of intimacies, or dramatize independence from state-regulated sexuality.” I bring these four quotations together because they collectively express an issue that resides *beneath the surface* of the same-sex marriage debate: alternative kinship formations. Same-sex marriage purports not to be an alternative, but immediately we see that this assertion *conceals* the myriad attempts that would subvert same-sex marriage’s political viability such as an affirmative focus on bodily fluids and viral transmission, on ungendering roles and rethinking the household outside of state regulation.

The refusal of gender roles and the substitution of blood, semen and saliva for wedding bands might seem wholly “postmodern” and completely divorced from bourgeois marriage reform, but in fact they highlight how, in retrospect, bourgeois marriage reform provides the foundation for same-sex marriage *and* for barebacking. Dean’s caveat is telling: “networks that represent an alternative to, *even as they often*

*resemble*, normative heterosexual kinship.” While barebacking may be an alternative to the current emphasis on same-sex marriage (Dean says it is “directly related to” it), its resemblance to marriage is unavoidable. O’Hara’s proud declaration implies that exchanging bodily fluids is more like marriage, more intimate (two truly becoming one vis-à-vis fluids and, potentially, a virus), than the exchange of jewelry could ever be. At stake is marriage’s ontological status, the uniting of two individuals, who do not play those kinds of roles, one new role being the moment of viral transmission. If Armstrong is right, that “postmodernism is perhaps more Victorian than even the Victorians were,” then our best understanding of this fact is through the analysis of the Victorian quality of same-sex marriage and, ultimately, of barebacking.

## Chapter 1

### *The Subjection of Women: Reciprocal Superiority and the Ideal of Marriage*

What marriage may be in the case of two persons of cultivated faculties, identical in opinions and purposes, between whom there exists that best kind of equality, similarity of powers and capacities with *reciprocal superiority* in them – so that each can enjoy the luxury of looking up to the other, and can have *alternately* the pleasure of leading and of being led in the path of development – I will not attempt to describe. *To those who can conceive it, there is no need; to those who cannot, it would appear the dream of an enthusiast. But I maintain, with the profoundest conviction, that this, and this only, is the ideal of marriage.* (Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, 575; emphasis added)

Based on a few genealogical facts that, in the end, turn out to be wrong, Hilary Fraser has recently fantasized about the possible existence of a Mill-Taylor lovechild that was put up for adoption. Visiting their graves in Avignon, France, she stumbled upon a note ostensibly written by the couple's 73-year-old great grandson. In part, the note reads: "I, Simon Michael Mill of Masterton, N.Z., Great Grandson of John Mill of Fifeshire (?) (who was the lovechild of John Stuart Mill and Mrs. Harriet Taylor – brought up by Dr. Lang of Tayport as 'an orphan' & emigrated to Dunedin at 18 years of age) regret the crass refurbishment of this grave" (123). When reading Fraser's article, however, one suspects that this fascination is propelled by a desire to normalize the Mill-Taylor relationship, to resituate one that, in her own words, "was notoriously chaste – even, it is speculated, after their marriage" (115). This speculation runs both ways: during their lifetimes, their notoriety was based on speculations that their friendship was a cover for infidelity and adultery; for today's critics, like Susan Mendus and Nadia Urbinati, their new notoriety is based on an image of their marriage as intentionally – if not perversely

or abnormally – sexless. This inversion, we will see, is vital to understanding Mill-Taylor’s conceptualization of “reciprocal superiority.” While it is the express purpose of this chapter to demonstrate how they *queer* marriage, or rather how they themselves reveal marriage’s essential oddness (especially – or especially – when viewed through reformist eyes), it is also interested in explaining why today’s critics inherit *and* maintain this *odd* image of Mill and Taylor from Victorian critics who professed to have diametrically opposed agendas.

A child, of course, would silence such modern day critics as Mendus and Urbinati, who, respectively, see Mill-Taylor as either eschewing sex altogether or creating some sort of androgynous ideal. Despite endorsing scholars such as Alice S. Rossi and J. Ellen Jacobs who place Mill and Taylor on a level, non-gendered – even queer – playing field, Fraser “could not resist the puzzle that had presented itself to me, and I set out to unravel the scholarly but also personal mystery that I had stumbled upon in the graveyard in Avignon” (123). Fraser, however inadvertently (though, again, she admits that this is “personal”), attempts to redeem Mill and Taylor from today’s criticisms of their liberal feminism, bringing them into the heteronormative fold by normalizing their complementariness, and letting the world know that they had flesh-and-blood progeny, and that their relationship was not sterility personified.

At the heart of this controversy is the status of *The Subjection of Women*. For today’s scholars, the problem of interpreting Mill’s feminist treatise begins with Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics* (1970), where Millet pits the “rational” Mill against the “chivalrous” John Ruskin (88). Today, no scholar is comfortable with this distinction. Deborah Epstein Nord, for instance, states: “Millet’s understandable enthusiasm for Mill

may have obscured for her the ways in which he romanticized companionate relations between the sexes and celebrated the notion of sexual complementarity...[while] she also missed...that Ruskin's views...propelled many young women out of the sphere of family and into the wider world and gave them the necessary rationale for extending their duties" (xvi-xvii). While re-examinations of Ruskin's "Of Queens' Gardens" (1865) will be addressed at the end of this chapter, my initial focus is on feminist scholars such as Zillah Eisenstein and Susan Moller Okin, who have been particularly alert to Mill (and Millet's) masculinist blind-spots. Mill's essay begins: "The principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes – the legal subordination of one sex to the other – is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other" (471). So why, after such a promising start, does the essay fail so miserably to support these claims? Today's critical responses are split between two separate yet related answers to this question – related because both are, in essence, predicated on methodological limitations. The first focuses on the limits of liberal feminism, that is, on liberalism's assumptions concerning the public and private spheres (liberalism's implicit gender politics), while the second focuses on the limits of Mill's empiricist precepts (rights cannot be simply given, a priori). Between these two poles fall all other scholars, creating a spectrum of discontents. I have sympathy with both positions; however, here I am more interested in interrogating interpretative limits themselves. I begin, therefore, with the reactions of Mill's contemporaries because, despite certain striking differences, a common thread runs through this entire discontentment, through the uneasiness today's scholars also feel

when approaching *The Subjection of Women*. I claim that this discontentment or uneasiness – captured by the concept of reciprocal superiority – results from the fact that *ungendering* power relations, even if it is ultimately impossible, remains the only way to achieve “perfect equality” because *gendered power will always produce inequality*.

Composed (in the strictest sense) in France in 1861, *The Subjection of Women* is Mill and Taylor’s response to contemporary debates on marriage reform. Mill waited eight years to publish the essay, possibly modifying it in ways that Taylor, deceased since 1858 and buried on the site of the essay’s (formal) composition, would have countered, but these differences tend to be exaggerated. For this reason, it is important to situate the essay’s argument within these reform debates. According to Mill, he did not publish it immediately because he wanted “to publish it at the time when it should seem likely to be most useful.” This time arrived after he had served three years (1865-68) in the House of Commons, where Mill’s most significant piece of legislation was to give women the right to vote. The measure lost, which is why, when he says “most useful,” Mill, as Alice Rossi points out, “meant politically expedient” (4).

The genesis of *The Subjection of Women* is the early 1830s, when (at the beginning of their prolific partnership) Mill and Taylor exchanged in written form their ideas on marriage, culminating in Taylor’s 1851 publication, “The Enfranchisement of Women.” Jo Ellen Jacobs, editor of *The Collected Works of Harriet Taylor Mill* (1998), writes that her goal in collecting Taylor’s writing is “not [to] replace the myth of ‘the overbearing shrew who bewitched poor John Stuart Mill’ with a myth of ‘the martyr genius woman’ who was the source of all the importantt ideas John published as his own.” Instead, she concludes, “The truth lies somewhere in the murky middle” (xii). I am

not satisfied with this image, however, for our confusion, our inability to see through the murky waters is *our* problem, epistemologically speaking. Mill and Taylor introduced the concept of reciprocal superiority as an explanation for why the number 2 is the queerest or oddest number. They anticipated our confusion by grappling with philosophical and social problems that have only recently begun to be perceived as such.

Scholarship's problem, here, begins with the inconsistencies in Mill and Taylor's work. French feminist philosopher Michele Le Doeuff strenuously argues for the existence of *two* John Stuart Mills, but only *one* Harriet Taylor. By this Le Doeuff means that Mill harbored two conflicting sentiments at once: first, the belief that male privilege was the result of cultural – and not natural – forces; second, his habit of letting this *cultural* privilege, which he himself benefited from, be sometimes described in *natural* terms. This conflict, we will see below, may explain many of the contradictory conclusions reached in *The Subjection*. Although Taylor too often blurred this distinction, Le Doeuff argues that, while Mill remain conflicted for his entire life, “By 1851 [when “The Enfranchisement of Women” by published] she had already rejected definitions of peculiarly feminine attributes” (205). The conclusion is that, unlike Mill, Taylor had evolving, progressive attitudes; but this difference only becomes truly distinct if one has decided to privilege one figure over the other; however, emphases like this – conflicted vs. evolving – keep the water murky.

There is no reason, though, to dismiss this distinction out of hand; rather, we should embrace it, for it is more helpful to see Mill and Taylor possessing both conflicted *and* evolving attitudes toward sexual difference. Penelope Deutscher, for instance, cites Taylor's class-based rhetoric as a continuation of gendered distinctions that had

supposedly disappeared from Taylor's writing. Her 1851 essay, writes Le Doueff, "does not make a single allusion to sexual duality. The concepts it uses are valid for both sexes – people, persons, character, individuals, we, *everyone*, the universal *you*, every mind, and so on" (203; emphasis in original). The absence of sexual duality, however, does not mean the absence of difference. "Taylor...only looks like the less 'differentialist' thinker," writes Deutscher, "if one looks away from every sense in which she was committed to differentialism – of knowledge versus ignorance, of class, of blood, of type, of race, of breeding, of quality, of development – on perhaps every one point *except* sexual difference" (146). In a sense, what is murky is everything else, and the same goes for Mill, since every time in *The Subjection* sexual duality makes an appearance, Mill's argument comes in contact with these other differences. Deutscher concludes, quite rightly, that "Feminist history should be committed to reading for feminism's blind spots" (147); in the process, however, we should not dismiss the enormous effort Mill and Taylor made *to except* sexual difference because, I would argue, liberal – and, later, neoliberal – change is predicated on this exception.

Their friendship is a biographical illustration of this fact. Beginning around 1833, the first topic they dilated on was the nature of marriage; meaning in a sense that their friendship was founded on debating what marriage *is*, in that theorizing on marriage became the basis of their friendship. Mill writes to Taylor: "How easy would it be for either me or you, to resolve this question for ourselves alone. Its difficulties...are such as to obstruct the avenues of all great questions which are to be decided for mankind at large" (68). Mill and Taylor know this cannot be, not so much because it would be selfish (if they simply solved it for themselves) as it would be impossible, since marriage is not a

private affair. From the beginning, it is apparent that their personal struggle will be a public one. In the same correspondence, Mill writes: “There is no natural inequality between the sexes; except perhaps in body; *even that admits of doubt*: and if bodily strength is to be the measure of superiority, mankind are no better than savages” (73; emphasis added). So if marriage is to exist after we take for granted the idea that there is no natural inequality between the sexes, then it was up to Mill and Taylor to show us what marriage is once we have excepted sexual difference.

Resistance to this idea was fierce. In 1857, MP Alexander James Beresford-Hope stated, “Let them [that is, those advocating marriage reform] amend the law, but at the same time steadfastly resist the breaking down of the distinguishing characteristics of Englishmen – the love of home, the purity of husband and wife, and the union of one family” (qtd. in Poovey 73). The “distinguishing characteristics” Beresford-Hope has in mind were also on the minds of those reviewing *The Subjection of Women*. Most representative among the essay’s many contemporary critics is conservative essayist Margaret Oliphant. What embarrasses Mill (and Taylor), according to Oliphant, is that the majority of actual women, the ones the essay proposes to liberate by law, do not see any similarity between its description of their subjection and the realities of their married lives. The “gloomy image conjured up in the philosopher’s study” (113-14) must not simply disregard the majority’s opinion, but must in fact portray them as deluded, as the very product of women’s subjection, therefore begging the question: if proof of women’s subjection resides in the fact that most women do not regard their subjection as subjection, then how can one prove that this subjection really exists?

Oliphant, fully aware of the “vocal few,” views these women as part of a minority, who, for one idiosyncratic reason or another, deride the current conditions that women face. On this other side of the Atlantic, for example, the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention in Seneca Falls, New York, culminated in Elizabeth Cady Stanton penning *The Declaration of Rights and Sentiments*. Modeled explicitly on *The Declaration of Independence*, the opening sentence reads:

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one portion of the family of man to assume among the people of the earth a position different from that which they have hitherto occupied, but one to which the laws of nature and of nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes that impel them to such a course. (52)

Likewise, Taylor’s (and Mill’s) explicitly transatlantic document, “The Enfranchisement of Women,” opens by calling British attention to the women’s rallies taking place in the United States, as evidence of the fact that this “is a movement not merely *for* women, but *by* women” (11). For Oliphant, however, the *actual* state of things is nothing like what Mill, Taylor, and other feminist contemporaries describe. “[W]e agree,” writes Oliphant, “to a great extent as to the injustice of some existing laws which press very hardly upon women; and are perfectly disposed to accept the alterations he suggests, believing that they would furnish a real remedy for a distinct grievance”; however, Oliphant concludes, “[t]o say that a woman loses all rights, all property, all identity, as soon as she is married – although it is the merest legal fiction and idle breath – is in its actual words an insult to every woman” (116). If one removes the sarcastic tone (which is not without its own significance), Oliphant’s argument differs little from Beresford-Hope’s; however, Oliphant makes an important qualification to her essay’s argument when she states that she would be perfectly willing to accept “a *real* remedy for a *distinct* grievance.”

Fundamental change, though, would be not only unwarranted, but also catastrophic. It is here where the contradiction in Oliphant's argument lies, for she strips the law of its power by saying that the law provides men with only a "virtual authority" (117) over women that is not represented in *actual* marriages, since these actually "nullify the law" (116). At the same time, she resists overhauling what she has already called "the merest legal fiction." The law, she insists, "cannot enter into the privacy which secludes husband and wife from the world" (117), for "[t]he bond of marriage is too intimate, and the parties are left too completely at each other's mercy, to make any external code absolutely supreme between them" (118). What Oliphant appears to be unwilling to consider is that the marriage's distinguishing characteristics (its privacy, its intimacy) might actually be – and, in fact, are – legal byproducts.

While Oliphant certainly backs herself into a corner, it is not without reason. She raises – and implicitly answers – a question that Mill acknowledges but hopes, however wistfully, to answer in the affirmative. "Is there such a thing as equality," Oliphant asks, "not only between men and women, but between two creatures in the whole world round?" (114). *The Subjection* implicitly answers this question by stating that the abolition of various sorts of slavery has overlooked one that casts a pall over all other expressions of liberty; that is, it holds out hope that there is such a thing as equality. By asserting that the answer is and will always be "no," however, Oliphant's conservative, pessimistic objection is that it is not possible to achieve "perfect equality" within not just marriages, but also within *all* types of two-party relationships. As we will see, this pessimism returns as a critique of liberalism's shortcomings, in its overemphasis on the law at the expense of other vital concerns.

Another of Mill's contemporaries, James Fitzjames Stephen, who called *The Subjection* "a work from which I dissent from the first sentence to the last" (243), argues that no law should impose equality on individuals, since nowhere can it be proven that individuals are in fact equal. It would be detrimental, for example, for many individuals if minors were considered the same in every way as adults. Mill's essay, Stephen is quick to point out, agrees; but Stephen finds it absurd that the same goes for women. "This general truth," that men "have greater muscular and nervous force, greater intellectual force, greater vigor of character" (249), is something the essay denies. This denial becomes particularly significant when the topic turns to marriage. Of special concern is divorce, for, Stephen asserts, "if the parties to a contract of marriage are treated as equals, it is impossible to avoid the inference that marriage, like other partnerships, may be dissolved at pleasure" (250). Stephen fears this because men and women are simply *unequal*. Like Oliphant, he does not believe that partnerships of any type are truly equal, and this is what is so irritating about *The Subjection*: it assumes that, despite no supporting evidence, a good empiricist could argue for something that is experientially wrong. Here, Mill has committed a sin against his father, James, and against England "herself": "Whoever first gave the command or uttered the maxim, 'Honour thy father and thy mother, that their days may be long in the land,' had a far better conception of the essential conditions of permanent national existence and prosperity than the author of the motto Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" (248).

Oliphant's and Stephen's objections remain important because, despite a shift in focus, they remain integral to today's critics. This shift is not about the fact that nature thwarts liberalism (as Oliphant claims), but because of the "nature" of liberalism itself.

The concentration on the legal mechanisms that subjugate women, writes Eisenstein, “reflects Mill’s inadequate understanding of how women’s inequality exists within the patriarchal institutionalization of public and private life through her role as mother” (137). The public/private divide is so entrenched in Mill’s thinking (and in the tenets of liberalism) that he is ignorant to the ways in which enfranchisement fails to address fully women’s plight. Like Oliphant (but for different reasons), Eisenstein asserts that one must recognize “not only the legal but the extralegal patriarchal privileges men enjoy through the sexual division of labor” (138). We must therefore recognize, Eisenstein asserts, that the individual’s autonomy, that is, one’s ability to choose freely (the basic tenet of classical liberalism), rests upon what Elizabeth Maddock Dillon calls “the gender of freedom.” In this sense, the failures of *The Subjection* can be summarized as follows: first, it supports a division of labor based on anatomical sexual difference; second, its adherence to the tenets of empiricism make it impossible to envisage women as different than what they appear to be; and third, it has a class bias.

First, Mill (in his *Autobiography* [1873]) reduces liberalism to “the freedom of production and exchange,” where the economic sphere is “the *dernier mot* of social improvement” (117). For this reason, Mill was sympathetic to socialist critiques of liberalism; yet Mill never wished to sacrifice the individual autonomy (liberalism’s defining tenet) that he championed most emphatically and most eloquently in *On Liberty* (1859). (And neither did Taylor. Already in 1831, she writes, “Every human being has a right to all personal freedom which does not interfere with the happiness of others,” which is something she explicitly connects to marriage as “the only contract...of which a necessary condition in the contracting parties was, that one should be entirely ignorant of

the nature and terms of the contract” [19]). Dillon argues that “[t]he notion that a woman’s reproductive system is an undue burden for citizenship indicates, most obviously, that the male body is taken as normative for citizenship” (14), and, therefore, it is the male body’s right to choose freely. From this, Dillon concludes that, for liberalism, women represent (both in theory and in practice) pre-political subjects incapable of exercising the autonomy that defines liberal capitalism’s autonomous individual. This autonomy, moreover, cannot be established without relegating women, along with people of color, the poor and the majority of working-class white men, to the realm of the pre-political. It is important to note, however, that Mill might identify autonomy with the masculine, but he does not confine it to the male body per se. Eisenstein sums up Mill’s “elitist” position as follows: “Mill pleads in defense of the extraordinary woman. Those few exceptional women who...in another life should have the liberty to [exercise their freedom]” (137). For Mill, the freedom to choose might be perceived, culturally, as a masculine attribute, but he divorces it from the sexed body, and this is a separation that makes all the difference.

The solution, therefore, is to transfer marriage wholly to the public sphere. Mill freely admits that, in the marriage partnership, the wife unfortunately garners “the larger share of the bodily and mental exertion by their joint existence” (522). Plus, the duties of a responsible wife (“the physical suffering of bearing children, and the whole responsibility of their care and education in early years...[and] the careful and economical management of the husband’s earnings to the general comfort of the family”) are, if the proper conditions are met (“in an otherwise just state of things”), simply those of an occupation (“to choose their occupation” [526]). Despite this admission, the

damage is apparently already done. First, as Dillon suggests, this admission irrevocably ties women's duties within marriage to the "mere physical fact" of parturition. Used earlier to describe "her inferiority in muscular strength" (475), however, Mill also downsizes the importance of this sexual difference, one to which, for example, Thomas Paine and Karl Marx, before Mill and Taylor, remain completely devoted. The former states in no uncertain terms: "It is wrong to say that God made Rich and Poor: He made only Male and Female" (474), while the latter emphasizes in *The German Ideology* (1845) that "there develops the division of labor in the sexual act" (72). By contrast, *The Subjection* goes so far as later (in reference to Greeks, Amazons, and Spartan women [484]) to completely trivialize this difference. To drive the point home, Mill directly addresses the "anatomical evidence of the superior mental capacity of men compared with women" (540), dismissing it not only because "the precise relation which exists between the brain and the intellectual power is not yet well understood," but also because much depends on the naïve assumption that the brain "exercised influence by magnitude only" (541). Despite Mill's being (ostensibly) the largest Victorian brain, the essay couldn't be clearer: size doesn't matter.

In short, Mill not only trivializes sexual dimorphism, but also – and more crucially – he erases it altogether, at least hypothetically. This qualification is the point: "I repeat that this speculation is entirely hypothetical" (542). If certain conditions were met and "given to both sexes alike," there is no reason, according to Mill, to assume that "there would be any material difference, or perhaps any difference at all, in the character and capacities which would unfold themselves" (532). In *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick cautions her readers against such a reduction: "a great

deal depends – for all women, for lesbians, for gay men, and possibly for all men – on the fostering of our ability to arrive at an understanding of sexuality that will respect a certain irreducibility in it to the terms and relations of gender” (16). By contrast, Mill disrespects the irreducible nature of gendered difference, disrespects those characteristics that, for better or for ill, are the effect of sexual dimorphism; he respects his empiricist method, however, which is to say that he reserves irreducibility for something other than gender. This *reservation* is liberalism’s central tenet: the right to choose freely.

The second, and perhaps more devastating, failure occurs when, by way of a conclusion to the essay’s second section, Mill states why “it is not, therefore, I think, a desirable custom, that the wife should contribute by her labor to the income of the family,” even when it is a “just state of things” (540). This is based on a series of conditional statements, ones that define what a “just state of things” is: “*if* marriage were an equal contract, not implying the obligation of obedience; *if* the connection were no longer enforced to the oppression of those to whom it is purely a mischief, but a separation, on just terms...could be obtained by any woman who was morally entitled to it; and *if* she would then find all honorable employments as freely open to her as to men” (541; emphasis added). If all these conditions were met, then we could, presumably, state that, like any man’s profession, a woman (ideally) chooses marriage and accepts its obligations, accepts that which is necessary, if it is defined by this just state of things, to follow it to its logical end. Recall Beresford-Hope: “Let them amend the law, but at the same time steadfastly resist the breaking down of the distinguishing characteristics of Englishmen – the love of home, the purity of husband and wife, and the union of one family.” This is certainly a far cry from “reciprocal superiority,” since Mill seems to be

taking Beresford-Hope's concession, "Let them amend the law," far more seriously than Beresford-Hope did; but this concept actually concludes *The Subjection*, so it is this incongruence that we must grapple with. Why would Mill still be content with woman, hearth and home, when he is at the same time writing such things as: first, "I deny that any one knows, or can know, the nature of the two sexes"; second, "what is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing"; and third, "no other class of dependents have had their character so entirely distorted from its natural proportions by their relation to their masters" (493)?

To reconcile the ostensibly irreconcilable, we should turn to Mill's *Logic* (1843) because Mill's empiricist methodology is at odds with Jeremy Bentham's. At the other end of our spectrum, we find not the limits of liberal feminism, but rather the inability of empiricism to address the question of sexual difference. The problem is that, if all knowledge is based on the experience of phenomena, and all concepts are the temporary, merely useful coalescing of these experiences, then "the uniformity of nature," as a fundamental principle or general axiom, undermines the tenets of "Induction" or pure inductionism. Mill, however, claims not to accept this conclusion, basing this uniformity of nature on "the inverse deductive method," that is, on the fact that all deductions are derived from inductive experience, and that our knowledge of nature's uniformity, its ability to correspond to a principle or axiom, is founded on laborious inductions. While Mill's argument for induction has at this point "clearly collapsed," Jennifer Ring observes that "Mill recognizes the difficulty but believes he has solved the problem with his new terminology" (34); it is this invention, this new terminology, that will be returned to when he wants to justify, on solid, empirical grounds, a principle of "perfect equality."

Like inverse deduction, reciprocal superiority is meant to highlight an inconsistency. When one attempts to balance empiricism and rights, these infamous words of Jeremy Bentham should never be far from our minds: “Natural rights is simple nonsense: natural and imprescriptible rights, rhetorical nonsense – nonsense upon stilts.” Mill never argues in the *Subjection* for the “natural rights” of women because, as an empiricist (or, perhaps, as an inverse deductionist), he lacks the data on which to build his case. If women’s nature, her character, has been “entirely distorted,” if it is “an entirely artificial thing,” then on what basis are we to argue for replacing the subjugation of women with a principle of perfect equality? While Mill states that existing social relations are inherently wrong, he knows that, given his own presuppositions, this cannot be the basis of his argument. (This is Oliphant’s complaint.) The novelty of Mill’s argument lies in his attempt to sidestep the temptation to focus on women’s “intrinsic qualities” and focus instead on her “slantwise position” within society. Mill ultimately succumbs to this temptation and speaks, at least implicitly, of women’s characteristics *as if they were intrinsic*, but this is not ruinous for *The Subjection*. This formulation is borrowed from Michel Foucault’s late interview, “Friendship as a Way of Life,” where he states that “Homosexuality is a historic occasion to reopen affective and relational virtualities, not so much through the intrinsic qualities of the homosexual but because the ‘slantwise’ position of the latter, as it were, the diagonal lines he can lay out in the social fabric allow these virtualities to come to light” (138). Analogously, I contend that, like Mill with women, Foucault succumbs to the temptation to ascribe characteristics to male homosexuals *as if they were intrinsic*. The problem is not with Mill’s method (or with

Foucault's) because its shortcomings aided him in reaching his essay's conclusion, that is, the concept of reciprocal superiority.

The third failure returns us to what Eisenstein calls Mill's "defense of the extraordinary woman." "Hardly anything can be of greater value to a man of theory and speculation," writes Mill, than "the criticism of a really superior woman." Why? Because "a woman seldom runs wild after abstraction"; that is, she has a sobering effect on men: "there is nothing comparable to it for keeping his thoughts within the limits of real things, and the facts of nature" (534). How, one might ask, can Mill even pretend to make this argument? Even if it is empirically true, that is, experientially verifiable, that women do not run wild after abstraction and that they keep the men who do in check, why should we conclude that this is anything but the effect of distortion, that this complementary benefit is not simply one of her artificial characteristics? While Mill's point seems to be that a superior woman's criticism is supposedly beneficial to a good empiricist, a good empiricist cannot claim from this that "he" observes the real essence of woman. On the surface, this is a methodological problem: an empirically based liberalism cannot justify its claims about equality because eventually one needs a non-empirical, rationalistic justification, that is, recourse to abstract rights. Mill's refusal to succumb to this temptation, however, is what makes his rhetorical performance so intriguing.

As Elizabeth Smith notes, Mill's concentration on the past and present behavior of women only lends to "possible" not "necessarily" predictive models of what future reform would bring about (187); nevertheless, the behaviors that do catch Mill's eye are particularly significant: "What [women] have done," writes Mill, "that at least, if nothing else, it is proved that they can do" (528). Mill emphasizes here not what women are, but

what women have done and continue to do; however, the abstractness of many of his observations suggest that he is speaking about essential attributes, even though he is not. In particular, he calls his reader's attention to acts of "intuitive perception" (532) and "quickness of apprehension" (535); yet, Mill states that, because women are deprived of almost all forms of proper education, these attributes are essentially the same as those of "a clever self-educated man" (533), thereby once again trivializing sexual difference. In *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces* (1993), Amanda Anderson says of *The Subjection*: "The more telling point of Mill's remarks about Victorian feminine character is a not fully examined assumption of women's greater susceptibility, malleability, and artificiality: less that they need to recover their nature than that they are too easily manufactured" (38). While we are all certainly easy prey when caught unawares, this description of the feminine subjection-position is unwarranted given Mill's own precepts. Anderson leaps from the *fact* that women's nature is distorted to the *presupposition* that women's nature is easily distorted. Mill, however, emphasizes the former in order not to imply the latter. This is necessary, for Mill, so that he can maintain his agnosticism concerning sexual difference.

This continued trivialization of sexual difference amounts to a refusal of nature itself, so permit me to quote from the following passage at length.

It may be remarked by the way, that Englishmen are in peculiarly unfavourable circumstances for attempting to judge what is or is not natural, not merely to women, but to men, or to human beings altogether, at least if they have only English experience to go upon: because there is no place where human nature shows so little of its original lineaments. Both in a good and a bad sense, the English are farther from a state of nature than any other modern people. They are, more than any other people, a product of civilization and discipline. England is the country in which social discipline has most succeeded, not so much in conquering, as in suppressing, whatever is liable to conflict with it. The English, more

than any other people, not only act but feel according to rule. In other countries, the taught opinion, or the requirement of society, may be the stronger power, but the promptings of the individual nature are always visible under it, and often resisting it: rule may be stronger than nature, but nature is still there. In England, rule has to a great degree substituted itself for nature. (543)

This Anglo-centric observation, I contend, is sexual difference's death knell; it extends Mill's agnosticism to humanity's "original lineaments." In its place, and even in lieu of feelings, we instead find rules, social discipline, and civilization. While a rueful tone certainly permeates the passage, it also – and most crucially – reminds us of the legalistic paradox the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act failed to resolve. When Mill states that "Englishmen are in peculiarly unfavorable circumstances for attempting to judge what is or is not natural," it is precisely this distance from "the natural" that puts Mill in a favorable position from which to judge this situation. Since Mill's argument is predicated on the fact that nothing can be known about the true nature of the sexes, this makes nineteenth-century England (and London, in particular, the capital of nineteenth-century capitalism) the place where the legal trumps what is ostensibly extralegal, and where the market and the law penetrate all sectors of everyday life.

The 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act meant to address the following paradox: the law was being viewed as *both* the ultimate arbiter of rational decision-making *and* as incapable of expunging from itself the irrational prejudices derived (supposedly) from nature. Therefore, the goal was to remove nature from the equation, and Mill accomplishes this (at least in theory) with his radical claim: again, no one knows, *or can know*, the nature of the two sexes. This claim cannot be proven, but it has the benefit of de-naturalizing sexual difference; that is, sexual difference cannot be reduced to observable, experiential data. (If this were the case, then, *contra* Jacques Lacan's famous

dictum, the sexual relation would exist; however, Lacan's point is that focus on such data misses the crux of the issue: we are dealing with a structural phenomenon because the subject's presence is caught within, and produced by, language.) Reducing marriage to a profession; de-naturalizing "female" attributes; construing women as distortions – these are the accomplishments of *The Subjection of Women*. Instead of fixing woman's nature, as Eisenstein contends, Mill converts women into the autonomous individuals of liberal capitalism. This recognition entails understanding what makes freedom of choice so alluring, and so alluringly axiomatic. Government's role, according to *On Liberty*, is to promote this freedom and not to interfere except "to prevent harm to others" (14), which is where *On Liberty* and *The Subjection of Women* come into conflict. One might ask: Does not an egalitarian relationship require the sacrifice of at least a modicum of autonomy? In *On Liberty*, Mill is quite explicit: "To justify [deterrence], the conduct of which it is desired to deter him, must be calculated to produce evil to some one else. The only part of the conduct of any one, which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his body and mind, the individual is sovereign" (14). While the male pronouns may lead the reader to believe that Mill is only considering the actions of men, he makes it clear in the next paragraph that he is "not speaking of child, or of young persons below the age which the law may fix *as that of manhood or womanhood*" (14; emphasis added). (Recall Stephen's criticism above.) In other words, the sovereign individual is unsexed. Furthermore, the sacrifice of one's absolute independence is only warranted if one's actions were "to produce evil to some else," which means that for an individual to sacrifice its sovereignty the action's impact on others must be substantial.

As any good communitarian would remark, it is precisely this emphasis on the absoluteness of an individual's sovereignty or autonomy that makes this individual unsuitable for communal existence because it ignores all the little sacrifices individuals must make when living with others, and this is especially true in two-person partnerships. Choice, it would seem, must be curtailed, delimited in some way; otherwise, an overabundance of choice would deprive choice of its allure, for choice only functions as choice when something is excluded, when something cannot be chosen – and this something is the self's destruction, its self-annihilation. One cannot freely choose to degrade either oneself or another's self, and it is the government's duty, according to Mill, to intervene in this two-party relation if self-degradation occurs.

Whereas people may well invest in values such as equality and reciprocity in their political lives, they may not want those same values to dominate their sexual lives. (113)

Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*

How, then, can two people enter into a relationship of “perfect equality”? Mill's answer, as I have been arguing, is to embrace the concept of reciprocal superiority. To sharpen our focus on this concept, I will now situate it in what should at first appear to be a foreign debate. I insert here into this chapter a discussion of Michael Foucault and sadomasochistic sexual practices, which may strike the reader as incongruent or simply perverse; to a degree, however, there is not only scholarly precedent, but also very good reason to do so. Lauren Goodlad, for instance, has been foremost in turning Mill and Foucault into intellectual bedfellows, though her focus tends to be governmentality and so while she stresses some of Foucault's late essays, she does not, unfortunately, connect these late essays to Foucault's late interviews with the gay press.

The trajectory of Foucault's oeuvre, it has been said, consists in a dramatic revision of his earlier work; Foucault made a return to subjectivity, as evidenced in the second and third volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, and especially in late essays like "Power and the Subject" and "What Is Enlightenment?" Unlike Jeffrey Nealon's masterful study, *Foucault beyond Foucault* (2007), I do not wish to question this critical consensus, but to use it to my advantage. In terms of "a new subjectivism," Amanda Anderson in *The Way We Argue Now* (2006) summarizes this position as follows: "While Foucault's previous work has been interested in the forms of subjectivity engendered by modern disciplinary power, the later Foucault was interested in the manner in which individuals understood, conducted, and therefore in a sense owned, their moral, social, and physical lives" (4). If this is true, Nealon observes, then "the later Foucault" has nothing to offer us because "if in the end Foucault is a thinker of artistic self-fashioning as ethical resistance, then Foucault would seem to have very little to say about the present, especially the *economic* present, as it seems supersaturated with these practices of endless, fetishized self-creation" (11). This is not the case, however, because what follows is not so much the formulation of a new subjectivism than a radicalization of the liberal subject Mill describes in *On Liberty* – and the texts that make the most vital contribution to this radicalization are Foucault's late interviews with the gay press. Mill and Foucault certainly make for unexpected bedfellows, but if the neoliberal subject is a quantitative intensification of the classical liberal subject (and not some fundamental break with it), then Mill and Foucault should be able to function as synecdoches for these two subject-positions, respectively. For Mill, the marriage of two persons requires that both maintain their superiority, their integrity of self, so that they "can have alternately

the pleasure of leading and of being led in the path of development.” By keeping superiority in the equation, Mill retains lack; that is, he retains the erotic dimension of hierarchy while, in a sense, doing away with it. The pastoral element here is the implicit belief that one can have both perfect equality and superiority *at the same time*. And while Mill does speak of alternation (similar, as we will see, to the master-slave dialectic of S&M sex practices), what makes 2 such an odd number is that, by definition, the alternation is *never* quick enough. Each second one is led – rather than leading – is one second too long. Marriage *without* marriage indicates the desire to retain an institution and a social practice, yet to deprive it of its defining feature: inequality.

Before Mill and Taylor married, Mill penned the following declaration:

The whole character of the marriage relation as constituted by law such that both she and I entirely and conscientiously disapprove, for among other reasons, that it confers on one of the parties to the contract, legal power and control over the person, property, and freedom of action of the other party, independent of her own wishes and will; I, having no means of legally divesting myself these odious powers...feel it my duty to put on record a formal protest against the existing law of marriage, in so far as conferring such powers; and a solemn promise never in any case or under any circumstances to use them. (168)

While they were certainly not the only ones who disapproved of Victorian marriage law, Mill’s exceedingly formal declaration is nothing short of extraordinary. For these two to marry, both formally and legally, Mill (as the party with the legal power) rescinds, just prior to the marriage itself, the authority this social institution is supposed to confer on him. In marrying one another, Mill and Taylor together deprive marriage of its essential characteristic by using their union as a “formal protest against the existing laws.” For this reason, it is not a coincidence that reciprocal superiority anticipates sex-same marriage, for the foundations of this political movement are built on the bedrock of this ostensibly

egalitarian relationship. “Homosexual relations,” David M. Halperin argues, “[have] cease[d] to be compulsorily structured by a polarization of identities and roles...[and] Exclusive, companionate, romantic, and mutual homosexual love becomes possible for both partners” (112). For Alan Sinfield, Halperin’s characterization should not be confused with “monochromatic sameness” (132); however, difference, by definition, is a contagion from which the subject cannot be inoculated or against which it can be indemnified. When differences appear (as they inevitably, invariably do), “these differences,” Sinfield observes, “are usually – and not by accident – hierarchies” (132). Sinfield, expanding his argument in *On Sexuality and Power* (2004), demonstrates that these differences manifest themselves as differences of age, class or race or, more usually, as complex combinations of these symbolic differences. But most important is Sinfield’s caveat: the appearance of these hierarchical differences is *not* accidental. Hierarchy always already reappears because “perfect equality” is impossible in reality, which does not mean it is not worth attempting.

As noted at the opening of this chapter, Susan Mendus reasons that Mill’s emphasis on such concepts as reciprocal superiority are indicative of his aversion to sex and the physical, while Nadia Urbinati suggests that such conceptions are indicative of Mill’s androgynous view of sexual difference. In a recent collection of critical essays devoted to Mill’s essay, editor Maria Morales pairs Mendus and Urbinati so that the reader can bear witness to these contrasting points of view. Instead, I would suggest that not only do these two positions not contradict one another, they are in fact quite complementary: both, although possibly for differing reasons, see Mill dissolving – or, at least, attempting to dissolve – sexual difference qua hierarchy. Whether this endeavor is

noble or foolhardy is beside the point (it is probably both); more importantly, it is difficult to argue that this was not Mill's goal.

This leads us to sadomasochistic sex, that is, to connecting it to Mill's *On Liberty*. In "Sexual Choice, Sexual Act," Foucault speaks of the usefulness of S&M practices. "Today homosexuals still have this problem," he tells his interlocutors. "Most homosexuals feel that the passive role is in some way demeaning. S&M has actually helped alleviate this problem somewhat" (152). This does not disprove the initial assertion; rather, it underscores the difficulty of adhering to it. Of particular interest, as noted above, is that Foucault oscillates between the meaning-effects of the homosexual and the homosexual as person. Moreover, this occurs during a discussion of "the question of freedom of sexual choice" and "the liberty to manifest that choice or not to manifest it." The limitation Foucault puts on "absolute freedom or total liberty of sexual action" is, of course, self-protection: coercion, rape, and the violation of another person's integrity (143). The 2003 ruling in the US Supreme Court case of *Lawrence v. Texas* supports this analogue between Mill and Foucault, between marriage and homosexuality. In order to overturn *Bowers v. Hardwick* (1986), the ruling focuses not on sodomy or sodomitical acts (as *Hardwick* did), but on intimacy. (By Teemu Ruskola's count, "In terms of its relative emphasis on sodomy, rather than intimacy, the majority opinion in *Hardwick* finds occasion to use the term *sodomy* a total of thirty-three times, whereas it resorts to the word *intimacy* only once. In contrast, the *Lawrence* majority opinion uses the words *intimate* or *intimacy* a total of twelve times" [246n12]). This shift is all-important. Homosexuality is no longer a forensic issue. Now it is officially, legally what it is always been: an abstraction. In effect, *Lawrence* bestows on two consenting adults the right to

engage in reciprocal superiority. So what's wrong with that? Maria Morales, in her aptly titled *Perfect Equality* (1996), challenges attacks on liberalism, especially those affiliated with Mill. Her introduction brings together liberalism's most vocal, feminist critics in order to pin down why exactly liberalism falls short of other's expectations. All criticisms are essentially variations on the one voiced by communitarian Michael Sandel; that is, "What is denied to the unencumbered self is the possibility of membership in any community bound by moral ties antecedent to choice; he cannot belong to any community where the self itself could be at stake. Such a community -- call it constitutive as against merely cooperative -- would engage the identity as well as the interests of the participants, and so implicate its members in a citizenship more thorough going than the unencumbered self can know" (87). Representative critics here are Catherine MacKinnon and Susan Okin. For example, the former states that liberal feminism reduces women to "abstract persons with abstract rights, without scrutinizing the content and limitations of these notions in terms of gender" (160), while the latter stresses that, for liberalism, the family is "beyond justice" (25), meaning that the gendered roles family-structures create and preserve remain beyond the scope of the abstract, legalistic theories that essentially relegate questions of gender to the private sphere. In opposition, Morales responds by reminding her readers that "this liberal approach is far more promising than the communitarian focus on membership in families, households, clans, tribes, cities, nations, and kingdoms" (7). Instead of leaving these untouched, liberalism focuses on bringing these "natural" kinship relations into the light of day, and demands that they justify themselves not on the basis of tradition but by the standards of the modern legal system.

That this system is imperfect and biased is not a reason to throw the baby out with the bathwater; it is to persevere, to continue to de-fetishize murky kinship relations.

Returning to S&M practices, Pat Califia, who is, in Leo Bersani's words, "one of the most intelligent writers" on the subject, claims that "the uniforms and roles and dialogue become a parody of authority, a challenge to it, a recognition of its secret sexual nature." Yet, in a direct response, Bersani asks if "any of this suggest[s] much more than a nonhypocritical acceptance of power as it is already structured?" (84-85). Bersani's argument in *Homos* (1995) is that not only is there no way to transcend hierarchical power-structures, but that "nonhypocritical acceptance" provides no relief. The antagonism remains alive and well, for the real alternative is to expose hierarchical power-structures that adhere to two-person relationships, while showing us there is no "safe word" that can allow us to escape this fact. It is here, strangely enough, where Bersani, the originator of the "anti-social thesis of queer theory," meets Mill, where Mill becomes a theorist of reciprocal superiority rather than of reciprocal tolerance. Perfect equality is not a solution but a problem; it is reciprocal superiority's shadow, the ghost haunting marriage, its paradoxical characteristic.

To come full circle, Millet pitted the "rational" Mill against the "chivalrous" John Ruskin, and (representative of many others) Nord disagreed with this oversimplification. In this final section, I embrace Millet's position, despite the change in the critical tide. Nord (like Eisenstein and his other late modern detractors) says Mill is guilty of "romanticiz[ing] companionate relations between the sexes and celebrat[ing] the notion of sexual complementary." This is not true, and I will finish proving this by briefly contrasting Mill's essay with Ruskin's "Of Queens' Gardens," where the latter states, in

full compliance with Millet, that “We are foolish, and without excuse foolish, in speaking of the ‘superiority’ of one sex to the other, as if they could be compared in similar things. Each has what the other has not: each completes the other, and is completed by the other: *they are in nothing alike* (§ 67; emphasis added).

What tends to get lost in this conversation is not that Millet was wrong, but rather that she was wrong about Ruskin. As Francis O’Gorman has convincingly argued, Millet’s opinion of Ruskin is an inverse reaction to a public-relations campaign started near the end of Ruskin’s life – namely, to turn this particularly unconventional man into a model of Victorian masculinity. Painter, antiquarian and professor of fine arts, W.G. Collingwood, is, according to O’Gorman, “the villain” of this campaign (11), and for Millet, Ruskin “was, as Collingwood had tried to suggest, a sure representative of the middle-class male...the spokesman of patriarchy *par excellence*” (23). Much work has been done to save Ruskin from Collingwood, Millet, and many others, and such work is certainly necessary and full of merit. Doing justice to “Of Queens’ Gardens” is obviously important for our understanding of Victorian gender politics, especially after over a hundred years of trying to understand this prominent Victorian’s ostensible eccentricities. The problem, however, is that this delicate reclamation campaign is (and largely because of the initial success of Millet’s argument) at the expense of Mill.

As O’Gorman admits in *Late Ruskin* (2001), “Many Ruskinians may well wish this lecture had never been written” (31), if only because so much time would not have been spent defending him against Millet’s angry accusations such as “a concoction of nostalgic mirage, regressive, infantile, or narcissistic sexuality, religious ambition, and simplistic social panacea” (107). In “How the Victorians Read *Sesame and Lilies*,” Seth

Koven stresses that, however paradoxical it may now seem, many Victorian readers saw Mill's essay and Ruskin's lecture not as antithetical but as companion pieces. Koven elaborates: "The *Women's Herald* [in 1888] saw no contradiction or editorial inconsistency in alerting its readers that a new edition of Mill's *Subjection of Women* would soon be available at low cost while devoting an entire column of the same page to what it called 'Gems from Ruskins.'" Koven concludes: "No reader of these 'gems' could imagine for a moment that *Sesame and Lilies* even hinted that women should subordinate themselves to men in any aspect of public or private life" (174).

That readers of *Women's Herald* didn't find this contradictory does not, however, mean Mill and Ruskin weren't actually contradicting one another. While the latter asserts that men and women are "in nothing alike," the former could not disagree more. "Each has what the other has not," writes Ruskin; but this is precisely what reciprocal superiority is *not*. Ruskin argued for the expansion of women's responsibilities, yet he argued for them *as women* – that *The Subjection of Women* sometimes seems to say the same is to miss completely the essay's import. Thomas Laqueur describes in meticulous detail the slow, laborious, and often contradictory paradigm-shift in European thinking (completed, roughly, by the early nineteenth century) from sexual hierarchy to sexual dimorphism. The problem is not with the details; it is with this deceptively simple fact (and one with which I do not think Laqueur would necessarily disagree): sexual dimorphism *never* overtakes sexual hierarchy. There is no sexual dimorphism, in fact, for sexual difference always remains a question of hierarchy, and is always outside of meaning. This, therefore, is the difference between Mill and Ruskin. Ruskin believes in sexual dimorphism; in fact, it is Ruskin who celebrates sexual complementarity,

celebrates reciprocal tolerance. Conversely, Mill stresses the paradoxical fact that perfect equality retains hierarchy but, simultaneously, refuses – or must also refuse – subordination.

Before focusing on LGBT readings of Dickens's *David Copperfield* and *Little Dorrit*, and of Pater's "Winckelmann" and Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, I want to highlight the work interpretation has done in this chapter. We have established our current emphasis on the relationship between paranoid/depth and reparative/surface reading, and I will continue this emphasis in the chapters that follow; however, what we should glean from the critical legacy of *The Subjection of Women* is that marriage – or, most accurately, marriage reform – is at the center of these issues involving interpretation. These concerns migrate from Mill's contemporaries to us, but it is only in retrospect that we have begun to understand this, for our critical fascination with the Victorian is by definition retrospective. If Mill and Taylor are heroes, it is because they were, in part, not of their time. They are the intellectual heroes of same-sex marriage. Moreover, the connections here made between Mill and Foucault, and between S&M and *On Liberty*, set the stage for my afterword on "Victorian barebacking."

## Chapter 2

### Dickens and the Marriage Paradox: *David Copperfield* and *Little Dorrit*

In *Queer Dickens* (2009), Holly Furneaux calls the title of her book, along with its overall thesis, an “(apparent) oxymoron,” for what could be less “queer” than, say, *David Copperfield*, a novel so innocuous that, as Virginia Woolf claimed, no one can remember reading it for the first time. Of course, the brackets around *apparent* indicate that this only appears to be an oxymoron if we “place[] marriage and the biological family as central to thinking about the Victorian and the Dickensian” instead of “explor[ing]...other forms of intimacy, affinity, and family formation” (9-10). In other words, the near omnipresence of bachelor dads, male nursing, etc., demands that we see Dickens through a queer lens. Furneaux’s “queer optimism,” however, gets in the way of recognizing the mutually-dependent nature of paranoid and reparative readings.

Queer theory’s emphasis on negative affects, argues Furneaux, has made it blind to positive affects. In “Queer Optimism,” Michael Snediker writes: “queer theory, for all its contributions to our thinking about affect, has had far more to say about negative affects than positive ones” (6), so that what he calls queer optimism “insists on thinking about personhood (as opposed to subjectivity) in terms of a durability not immediately or proleptically subject to structuralist or post-structuralist mistrust” (5). This dissertation, however, remains thoroughly invested in the subject; Snediker’s “personhood,” like Berlant’s “ordinariness,” remains inadequate to the task of competing with the power of subjectivity and sovereignty because the former are always already parasitic on the latter; they are never actual alternatives. By focusing on “an abundance of gentler, not less erotic, same-sex encounters,” Furneaux says she is “strongly committed to demonstrating the fallacy of the influential paradigm that the homoerotic emerges most

strongly...through violence” (16). As I argued in the introduction, however, reparative/surface readings cannot stand on their own, since their attachment to paranoia undergirds this “gentler” interpretative process; which is also to say that emphases on positive affect, surface readings, and alternative forms of intimacy, instead of side-stepping the institution of marriage, remain bootstrapped to it.

For this reason, I engage *readings* of Dickens – specifically readings of *David Copperfield* and *Little Dorrit* – first to demonstrate more thoroughly the relationship reparative readings have with paranoia, and second – and more importantly – to demonstrate that this attachment is the key to understanding the function of what I have called the marriage paradox: the reformist desire to enter into a two-person partnership, an attachment in which both partners are equal but where both parties are free *not* to compromise, since they *must* exercise their individual autonomy. This chapter’s goal, therefore, is to show that the marriage paradox arises from a problem in interpretation itself, one that is particularly present in late modern readings of the Dickensian.

My first question, therefore, is: How did *David Copperfield* serve as the inspiration for one of the most important essays in gay/lesbian literary analysis and, in an explicitly reparative reading, as an instruction manual on how to be a good Victorian husband? While I’m interested in a host of readings of Dickens’s novel, two stand out. In 1985, *Dickens Studies Annual* published D.A. Miller’s reading of *David Copperfield*, “Secret Subjects, Open Secrets,” an “aegis-creating essay” (Eve Sedgwick’s words [67]) that inspired the writing of *Epistemology of the Closet*, and made Miller “the first addressee and the first reader of most of [its] chapters” (ix). Then in 2002, Rachel Ablow’s “wifely” reading of *David Copperfield*, also published in the *Dickens Studies*

*Annual*, argued (*contra* Miller) that the novel functions as an ideal wife for its male reader. Both essays would go on to become important parts of critical studies on sexuality and Victorian fiction: *The Novel and the Police* (1988) and *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot* (2007), respectively. But, rather than viewing these essays as simply contradictory (assuming, for instance, that great novels naturally give rise to disparate interpretations), I argue that these two late modern literary analyses re-enact the marriage paradox, for this paradox is responsible for the coexistence of a paranoid focus on homosexuality and a reparative focus on marriage.

My second question: Why *David Copperfield*? James Eli Adams argues that the novel “has become something of a *locus classicus* for the study of Dickens and sexuality, largely through the influence of D.A. Miller’s scintillating reading” (239), but this is only half the story. “We read,” Adams writes, “for the pleasure of scandalous exposure – a pleasure borne out in the titles of a number of important studies: ‘Caught in the Act,’ ‘Secret Subjects, Open Secrets,’ ‘Sex Scandal’” (231). Adams is also referring to Joseph Litvak’s *Caught in the Act: Theatricality in the Nineteen-century English Novel* (1992) and William A. Cohen’s *Sex Scandal: The Private Parts of Victorian Fiction* (1996). (An example of paranoid reading appears in *Sex Scandal*, where Cohen, writing of Dickens, keenly observes that “the novel...had to find ways of managing the erotic reveries it was accused of arousing in its readers,” which meant that, most importantly, the novel managed its potential to arouse by “encrypt[ing] representations of sexuality” [27]). Yet, as we’ll see, Ablow’s reading does not fit this mold. Rather than exposing something (else) that has been submerged in the text, she remains *on the surface*. “The goal of the wifely text,” asserts Ablow, “is to help us see ourselves in new ways: as endlessly

improvable, limitlessly lovable, and as capable of enormously virtuous yet profitable acts of generosity” (21). The wifely text, in this sense, is not about accuracy or realism; it is not a *bildungsroman*; it does not teach the reader to view the world in a more mature, complex way; and, finally, it does not repress, and we are not here to expose. Instead, the wifely text does just the opposite: it pampers, it soothes, it encourages, just as a Victorian wife was supposed to do, making Dickens “the paradigmatic wifely novelist of the nineteenth century...and *David Copperfield*...the novel in which he explains and defends that characterization most clearly” (19).

The wifely text, therefore, is reparative in that the reader need not be concerned about its motivation. Its accuracy is beside the point. Focusing on the psychological nuances concerning a maturing character is now irrelevant. Moreover, the reader is not suspicious, not worried that what is important is obscured, or hidden from view. By ignoring the text’s unconscious, the reparative/surface reading gives pride of place not to knowledge (and all its complexities) but to comfort. Employing this distinction between paranoid/depth and reparative/surface readings, where Miller represents the former and Ablow the latter, I will demonstrate that Ablow’s reading could not exist without Miller’s, and that Miller’s focus on the homosexual subject prefigures Ablow’s focus on marriage. In addition, I want to make it clear that Miller’s reading is not a straightforward, paranoid reading, and this will help me demonstrate why Sedgwick’s distinction (outlined in the introduction) does not hold.

Miller begins his essay with a breech of scholarly etiquette, or what Michael Warner would designate as an example of “uncritical reading.” (This, I think, would be an instance of the reparative, according to Sedgwick.) He speaks of his identification – or

overidentification – with the novel’s eponymous character. In short, this is personal. Early in the novel, David ventures out with Mr. Murdstone, his step-father-to-be, when another man asks, “So who’s this young shaver?” Mr. Murdstone replies, “That’s Davy,” to which the man again asks, “Davy who?” (35). Here, writes Miller, “the text raises the possibility that David might be any David; for a moment, it so happens, it invites me to imagine that he might be myself” (192). While Sedgwick drew much inspiration from this essay, she never mentions this moment of overidentification, which in her terms is the exact opposite of paranoia, for as Miller’s own words indicate the novel quite literally invites him to imagine this. We immediately find, however, Miller backing away from this pleasure of his childhood reading, not out of embarrassment or some similar emotion, but because in examining what led to his confession (being hailed by the text), Miller discovers what he calls “the double bind of a secrecy.” He identifies how the secret – and, in particular, the homosexual secret, if this is not already too redundant – constitutes the subject’s individuality: “The double bind is not at all the same thing as a dead end, and if I cannot speak of myself without losing myself in the process, I can keep myself secret and...change the subject: convinced of my indeterminability in the safety of silence, as I speak of – and seek to determine – somebody or something else” (195). So Miller too “changes the subject.”

To accomplish this change, Miller turns to the preface of *David Copperfield*, where Dickens addresses the relationship between himself as author, his readers and his main character. That Dickens strongly identifies with his protagonist is a critical platitude; what usually isn’t observed, Miller observes, is how “Dickens nonetheless courteously refrains [in the preface] from elaborating on it” (196). Just as Dickens

refrains from elaborating and says, in essence, that if the reader wishes for an elaboration, read my book, this pattern is repeated within the novel itself. Citing both the nighttime scene in Steerforth's bedroom and David's experience of working in Murdstone and Grinby's warehouse, Miller stresses the importance of a three-part maneuver within the novel's narrative. First, David alludes to the emotions stirred up by the particular scene. Then he elides them by stating that it is beyond his ability to accurately describe them: "No words can express the secret agony of my soul." Finally, David compensates for this elision by regaling others with recitations of (novelistic) stories – that is, his escape into the world of fiction, as a storyteller.

Moreover, this three-part maneuver mirrors David's story as a whole, for this is the meta-pattern that structures his entire "autobiography": allusion, elision, and substitution are homologous to secrecy, sexuality, and marriage. David's escape into storytelling "encrypts" himself in the text, but, Miller notes, "[w]riting the self, then, would be consistently ruled by the paradoxical proposition that the self is most itself at the moment when its defining inwardness is most secret, most withheld from writing – with the equally paradoxical consequence that autobiography is most successful only where it has been abandoned for the Novel" (200). The paradox here is that the self who creates the text is also, at the same time, an effect of that text, making even Miller's autobiographical pronouncement simply another textual effect. Rather than being a breach of scholarly etiquette, of an example of "uncritical reading," Miller's opening re-performs the paradoxes highlighted by Dickens's three-part maneuver. By highlighting this maneuver, Miller exposes the intimate relationship between surface and depth, of the structure of the open secret, especially as it pertains to the homosexual subject.

Conversely, Ablow also begins her essay with uncritical readings, but at one remove. At the time of Dickens's death, eulogies often read like uncritical readings of literature, for the eulogists identified with Dickens's characters and gave them a life of their own. Warner, speaking of his undergraduates, says they "identify with character...[and] fall in love with authors" (13). Similarly, Ablow sees "the 'reality' of the novelist's characters is an effect of our attachment to them – an attachment that results, too, in our sense of intimacy with their author" (18). Invoking Miller's reading specifically, Ablow continues: "[U]nlike critics who have assumed that readers internalize this discipline through identification with David [i.e., that Dickens's novel follows a 'disciplinary agenda'], I argue that [*David Copperfield*] attempts to mold readers by making the reader feel like both the subject and the object of an attachment able to supplement or even substitute for the relationship a husband might have with a wife" (19). Remarkable, here, is the similarity of Miller's and Ablow's argument – that is, novel-reading doesn't simply create its reader/subject; rather, through treating the reader as an object of the text, it produces the subject. And yet, the undeniable difference between these arguments is that Ablow's is couched in marital rhetoric. Why is the difference not greater?

Unsurprisingly, Ablow's reading (unlike Miller's) focuses on David's marriages, first to Dora and then to Agnes, whom Ablow calls "the epitome of all legless angels" (38). More specifically, Ablow identifies a three-part maneuver that mirrors Miller's, linking the homosexual subject to marriage. First, one must dispense with the need to reconcile the actual object and its ideal. Like allusion in Miller's argument, in this epistemological refusal to decide between object and ideal, the subject latches on to a

figure that accommodates such a refusal – again, Agnes. Second, this apparently steadfast refusal to reconcile the differences between the actual and the ideal mirrors elision, for instead of reconciliation, David’s subjectivity is defined by an inability to become a better reader. David’s maturity doesn’t hinge on his ability to penetrate appearances in order to discover things as they really are (that is, “not by providing David with a new way to see” [38]); rather, it presents David with an object. Finally, substitution, that is, providing an alternative story: in Ablow’s words, “the sublime narrative of Agnes’s emergence as the object of David’s love constitut[es] a way to evoke that experience in us, the novel’s readers” (38). Instead of enlightenment, that is, instead of providing the reader with a better way to see, the novel serves as a narratological helpmate. Rather than resolving the epistemological problems that result from David’s poor (social) reading skills, the novel substitutes Agnes for resolution. The subject’s maturity is not the novel’s goal; rather, its goal is to become the subject’s better companion.

One example, David’s inability to read Steerforth, to discover his duplicity and to guess at his real intentions (to seduce Emily), is less an epistemological failure, according to Ablow, than it is a failure of attachment. This productive “stupidity” (Ablow’s word) is most evident, for Ablow, when we contrast Agnes with David’s first wife, Dora. If David ever actually experiences a moment of cognitive clarity, of seeing better, it is when he realizes that his marriage to Dora was “the first mistaken impulse of an undisciplined heart” (Ch. 45); but this realization is undermined not merely by the fact that as soon after it is pronounced Dora dies, but that, for Ablow, such realizations are of secondary importance. More important than David’s realization and, in turn, his decision to help compensate for Dora’s deficiencies as a wife (such as her inability to manage household

affairs) is that, now, Agnes as ideal helpmate “is also...an ideal text, in relation to whom the goal is not understanding of some hidden interiority, but attachment to something like a directional signal or a narrative arc” (43). David describes Agnes’s influence as wholly supportive: “She gave me no advice; she urged no duty on me; she only told me, in her own fervent manner, what her trust in me was.” David continues:

She knew (she said) how such a nature as mine would turn affliction to good. She knew how trial and emotion would exalt and strengthen it. She was sure that in my every purpose I should gain a firmer and a higher tendency, through the grief I had undergone. She, who so gloried in my fame, and so looked forward to its augmentation, well knew that I would labour on. She knew that in me, sorrow could not be weakness, but must be strength. As the endurance of my childish days had done its part to make me what I was, so greater calamities would nerve me on, to be yet better than I was; and so, as they had taught me, would I teach others. She commended me to God, who had taken my innocent darling to His rest; and in her sisterly affection cherished me always, and was always at my side go where I would; proud of what I had done, but infinitely prouder yet of what I was reserved to do. (Ch. 58)

Like the stories David tells to Steerforth and to the workers at Murdstone and Grinby’s warehouse, the story he pens immediately after receiving Agnes’s inspiring letter doesn’t result from personal growth but from attachment to a new wife as an ideal text, one that is not in need of interpretation, for being influenced (literally: being moved) is enough. Personal growth, the essence of a *Bildungsroman*, is here inessential.

The novel’s “essential drama,” writes Miller, “stems from David’s desperate attempt not to be boxed in” (211), but as Miller concludes his essay, he freely admits that “David is ultimately no different from the boxed-in characters he seeks to transcend” (220). For David to escape from the disciplinary (“carceral”) agenda, one is led to the phenomenon Miller calls the “open secret,” and it is with this that Ablow’s reading complements and complicates Miller’s. Secrecy (whether or not it concerns

homosexuality, but especially when it does) would seem, by definition, to exclude the domestic rhetoric of marriage. As Sharon Marcus asserts in “At Home with the Other Victorians,” however, “Like domesticity, homosexuality is eminently Victorian” (119), by which she means that, while domesticity and homosexuality were *and* are considered mutually exclusive and diametrically opposed, their histories are deeply intertwined.

In the oft-cited passage from Miller’s essay (and the one that greatly *influenced* Sedgwick’s thinking), Miller focuses on how secrecy operates out in the open, on how it steers discourse and constructs subjects. Let us read the entire passage:

Instead of the question “What does secrecy cover?” we had better ask “What covers secrecy?” What, that is, takes secrecy for its field of operation? In a world where explicit exposure of the subject would manifest how thoroughly he has been inscribed within a socially given totality, secrecy would be the spiritual exercise by which the subject is allowed to conceive himself as a resistance...Secrecy would thus be the subjective practice in which oppositions of private/public, inside/outside, subject/object are established...And the phenomenon of the “open secret” does not...bring about the collapse of these binarisms and their ideological effects, but rather attests to their fantasmatic recovery...[R]eminiscent of Freudian disavowal, we know perfectly well that the secret is known, but nonetheless we must persist, however ineptly, in guarding it. The paradox of the open secret registers the subject’s accommodation to a totalizing system that has obliterated the difference he would make -- the difference he does make, in the imaginary denial of this system “even so.” (207)

This passage ties Ablow’s reading to Miller’s because, according to the marriage paradox, the subject is defined in terms of resistance, by its ability to transcend its social environment. At the same time, however, the “open secret” mitigates this resistance by attesting to its “fantasmatic” nature, to the fact that, rather than undermining that which constrains it, it perpetuates itself through Freudian disavowal, also known as “fetishistic disavowal.” Miller highlights: “we know perfectly well that the secret is known, but nonetheless we must persist...in guarding it.” This act of disavowal is crucial for the

subject to couple without at the same time losing its defining characteristic (resistance), for it follows the perfect have-one's-cake-and-eat-it-too logic: disavowal allows for autonomy and attachment to coexist, subtending the paradoxical nature of marriage.

Ablow's "wifely" reading furthers these claims by explaining the paradoxical phenomenon of the open secret qua fetishistic disavowal, but in marital terms. Concerning the novel's form, Ablow argues (like Marcus) against deep interpretation, against analysis that seeks to find what the text represses; rather, as with "just reading," Ablow sees the actual function of the text operating at its surface: the text is obviously not a wife (because "unlike real wives, the novel cannot conceal, disappoint, or be mistaken" [43]); but, as with fetishistic disavowal, the reader proceeds – that is, the reader reads – as if it were. Yet, if Ablow speaks of the reader being *uncritical* – that is, the reader (over)identifies with the text instead of maintaining the necessary *critical* distance – then we must reconcile this with the surprising fact that Sedgwick's creation of "reparative reading" uses Miller's *The Novel and the Police* as its foil, since it is fetishistic disavowal that links Miller's and Ablow's readings of *David Copperfield*. Why is Sedgwick now accusing Miller of being a paranoid reader, if the book's final chapter had been such an integral part of her own critical enterprise? While Sedgwick has herself disavowed much of her past critical work – or at least its methodology – to focus on the last chapter of *The Novel and the Police*, especially when, as we have seen above, it hardly conforms (lock, stock and barrel) to paranoia, is counterintuitive at best. Faith in exposure is certainly a problem, especially since (in Sedgwick's words) "a hermeneutics of suspicion would appear so trusting about the effects of exposure" (138) and that it "rel[ies] on the prestige of a single, overarching narrative: exposing and problematizing

hidden violences in the genealogy of the modern liberal subject” (139). Our response, however, must not be “But Officer...” (as it is in *The Novel and the Police*’s forward), but with something like “guilty as charged,” as it is when, at the end of Miller’s book, David overidentifies with David. We must be proud of our paranoia. We must *embrace* it, for like it or not we are attached to it. When, in *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick declared that “all literary analyses are deficient if they do not contain a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition” (1), the precision of her words must be respected. Instead of placing *David Copperfield* within “the history of sexuality,” we are forced to take into account our own perspective, that is, one dominated by the modern homo/heterosexual definition. For better and for worse, this is our lens.

This is why Oliver S. Buckton’s essay, the most prominent reading of David’s (latent) homosexuality, falls short. In a footnote to “‘The Reader Whom I Love’: Homoerotic Secrets in *David Copperfield*,” Buckton notes that “in literary terms, the relationship between David and Steerforth deserves to be recognized as one of the earliest examples of schoolboy romantic friendship in nineteenth-century English fiction,” and that few have noted this, the principal exception being Eve Sedgwick’s *Between Men* (220n41). For Sedgwick, David’s romantic attachment to the older Steerforth, to someone who affectionately calls him “Daisy,” is understood as “part of David’s education – though another, later part is the painful learning of how to triangulate from Steerforth, and finally, though incompletely, to hate Steerforth and grow at the expense of his death” (176-77). This triangulation, “two-stage progression from schoolboy desire to adult homophobia” (177), is the story *Between Men* tells; as already noted, however, it is one from which Sedgwick wishes to distance herself. Sedgwick does not admit she was

wrong *per se*, for she does not have to; her later essay is not a plea for stopping exposure and the pleasure it affords, but for greater awareness of it. Hence, the potency of Miller's use of the phrase "open secret." Deciphering "homoerotic secrets" is the beginning – if, that is, we must begin there – not the end.

In his 1990 essay on Alfred Hitchcock's 1948 film *Rope*, Miller provides the context in which homosexuality, his reading of *David Copperfield*, and Ablow's "wifely" reading can be combined. It is assumed that the film's two main characters, Brandon and Phillip, are homosexuals, but (Miller asks) how do we know? Taking this ostensibly naïve question seriously, Miller points to the fact that connotation and denotation are essential to understanding how the modern homo/heterosexual definition functions, and it is with this fact that we'll see that the homosexuality and marriage are one. Can homosexuality ever be verified empirically? "Every discourse that speaks," writes Miller, "every representation that shows homosexuality by connotative means alone will thus be implicitly haunted by the phantasm of the thing itself, not just in the form of the name but also, more basically, as what the name conjures up: the spectacle of 'gay sex'" (123). Miller might as well have said "the specter of 'gay sex,'" however, because the haunting phantasm never actually appears (in *Rope*), and even if it did, it would not be – because it cannot be – the thing itself. In words Miller borrows from Roland Barthes, the opposite of connotation would be "something simple, literal primitive: something true" (118), but we never get this, even when we simply concentrate on the surface; instead, we get a way of knowing that often seems to find what it's looking for only to find that, because we're looking for "it," we now find "it" everywhere.

This is what Miller calls “the problem with connotation”: the perfect example of paranoid reading, but one that we are condemned to reenact as subjects in the prison-house of linguistic meaning; it is with denotative meaning, therefore, that homosexuality and marriage are linked. The question is: what if the thing itself actually did appear? Since it cannot, we find that *if* homosexuality is the hidden truth of marriage equality, it is (as noted by Žižek in regards to Freudian dream interpretation) a matter of interpretation. The paranoid/reparative relationship the reader has with the novel repeats, from a late modern perspective, the modern homo/heterosexual definition, so instead of excluding marriage, we find that marriage – understood as a paradox – is deeply implicated in this relationship. Marriage is not simply the social form of heterosexuality; it (plus homosexuality) constitutes the entirety of the colonizing hetero/homo binary.

At the outset, I defined this paradox as the reformist desire to enter into a two-person partnership in which both partners are equal but both parties are free *not* to compromise, since they *must* exercise their individual autonomy. The problem marriage confronts is how to maintain an egalitarian partnership without compromising each partner’s individuality. At first, it might appear that Ablow isn’t concerned with this problem, since her reading of *David Copperfield* depicts it vis-à-vis the (male) experience of reading as something that upholds the sex separatism of Victorian society. In other words, the novel is certainly not reformist, at least as far as marriage is concerned. And yet, like Hitchcock’s film, it engages in a game of connotation and denotation that traps the reader. Again, writes Ablow, “unlike real wives, the novel cannot conceal, disappoint, or be mistaken.” This ideal, the partner who cannot conceal, disappoint, or be mistaken, is what the reader knows very well doesn’t exist, but will continue reading as if it did. The

first decade in which *David Copperfield* was read (the 1850s) is also the decade in which England witnessed the first solid challenge to the marital practice of coverture, that is, the Divorce and Marital Causes Act (1857), which provided the backdrop for the last chapter of John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women*. The disappearance of the wife upon marriage was contested as a legal absurdity, akin to the invocation of the ideal wife via the reading of a novel.

Reading *David Copperfield*, in this sense, presented a challenge to marital sympathy. It provokes the reader at the same time that it makes obvious that what it invokes is just a chimera. This fetishistic disavowal, however, contributes to coverture's solution. If one partner wasn't to be subsumed beneath the other, then how should married couples relate to one another? This produces a paradox because every legal version, except what John Stuart Mill calls "perfect equality," is just a different – albeit lesser – version of coverture. Same-sex marriage is the logical outcome, since this newest version of marriage reform removes anatomical sex from the equation.

To recapitulate, I said the marriage paradox – or, more precisely, "reciprocal superiority" – is responsible for the continuity between Victorian marriage reform and same-sex marriage campaigns, between marriage and homosexuality, and ultimately between Ablow and Miller. Let us take each one separately, and then tie them into a bow. Victorian marriage reform leads to same-sex marriage. For this reason, marriage and homosexuality become linked by an ideal: the establishment of anti-hierarchical, egalitarian relationships. The impossibility of actualizing the ideals leads us to interpretation itself, to our ability to understand, to decipher these stumbling blocks. So in the place of ideals, we have instead Miller and Ablow, two astute scholars struggling with

*David Copperfield*. The open secret of the wifely text is that, while the wifely text coddles its reader, it simultaneously undoes its own ability to produce the ideal partner, for the ideal partner vis-à-vis the text is everywhere and nowhere, nothing but a specter, a chimera, a fetish the reader must disavow.

“What can you two be together? What can come of it?” asks Mr. Meagles, the (now) former employer of the domestic Tattycoram (349). *Little Dorrit* contains an unimaginative, if inevitable answer: *nothing* can come of it. Miss Wade, the character alluded to, has garnered more critical attention than any other of Dickens’s memorable minor creations. While an abundance of critical energy has been spent on Miss Wade, my intention, however, is not to contribute more but to ask the question that has gone unasked: Why has so much critical energy been spent? Gesturing towards an answer, Holly Furneaux devotes the last five pages of the introduction of her *Queer Dickens* (2009) to Miss Wade. Quickly reviewing the extant analysis of this minor character, Furneaux concludes that through a focus on negative affect Miss Wade “becomes legible as a proto-lesbian through a familiar twist of the queer tragedy trope in which the homosexual, if not fatal, is bad, mad, and dangerous to know” (19). Unfortunately, Furneaux does not have the space to rectify the situation, since her focus, as her book’s subtitle makes clear, is on “erotics, families, masculinities.” I do not propose to complete this task; rather, I am interested in seeing if Miss Wade is in fact open to a reparative reading. To anticipate a bit, my answer is that she is not; this, however, is not necessarily a bad thing. Miss Wade and the recent critical fascination with her presents us with paranoia at its most acute. Rather than criticizing paranoia, however, we should embrace it; moreover, we should embrace Miss Wade’s inflexible relationship to Tattycoram, for

even though their alternative domesticity is the antithesis of what is imagined by a separate-spheres ideology, it also (because of its inflexibility) fails to conform to the egalitarian, anti-hierarchical relationships imagined by the late-twentieth century, particularly in the social imaginary of mainstream same-sex-marriage politics.

Is Miss Wade a lesbian? This question has been eschewed in favor of more nuanced readings involving Victorian political economics, sociology and psychology, narrative theory, and LGBT studies – all in order to fight the presentist urge simply to label her a lesbian. To begin, I would like to present two brief, overlapping stories. The first is Annamarie Jagose's. During the doldrums of dissertation writing, friends invited her to the movies to see Christine Edzard's 1988 film adaptation of *Little Dorrit*. Edzard's version omits the character of Miss Wade. According to Jagose, this was not immediately clear to her, since the novel's famously complicated – if not convoluted – plot obscured this omission; the film, however, left Jagose with a *feeling*, as if “I had missed something, a niggling something that sent me back to the novel for what I was still thinking of as clarification” (423).

The second story occurs some twenty years later with another adaptation of *Little Dorrit*, this time by Andrew Davies and the BBC. If Edzard “forgot” Miss Wade, we might say that Davies overcompensates for this past oversight. “Dickens didn't write her as a lesbian,” Davies tells the *Telegraph*, “but she just is.” While Furneaux suggests that Davies is being especially naïve, falling back on “powerful stereotypes of Victorian and Dickensian prudery” (20), it is worth our while to consider Davies's (historical) simplicity along side Edzard's erasure. Ontologically, we have either something or nothing: Miss Wade “just *is*” a lesbian, or (in Edzard) she is, quite literally, nothing at all.

These late modern filmic interpretations of *Little Dorrit*, rather than contradicting each other, in fact become each other's complement, at least as it concerns Miss Wade; that is, as it concerns the difficulty of reading Miss Wade. This difficulty can be categorized under four headings. First, there is denial. Second, that she may be spoken of as a lesbian, *assuming the proper cultural and historical caveats are made*. (How often caveats are to be made when speaking of Miss Wade, of course, becomes its own problem.) Third, there is the desire that we should, against the critical tide, "unsex" Miss Wade. Fourth, there is historical inevitability: in Davies's words, "she just is." This bluntness defies the second category by doing away with nuance and caveats.

Despite these differences, all the articles acknowledge the central role played by "the Woman question": the figures of the domesticated woman (the bourgeois wife/mother or her daughter, that is, the bourgeois wife/mother-to-be) and the undomesticated or, rather, the undomesticatable woman (the prostitute) constitute binary opposites, but opposites that blend together, especially in the Victorian marketplace. (In addition, we have the governess, a profession Miss Wade once occupied, which is a socially awkward admixture of these binary opposites: a woman paid to be a mother.) In *City of Dreadful Delight* (1992), for instance, Judith Walkowitz writes,

In the mid- and late-Victorian period, even as police cleared the streets and theaters of prostitutes to make room for respectable women, these two categories constantly overlapped and intersected at the juncture of commerce and femininity...In the elegant shopping districts around Regent Street, prostitutes, dressed in 'meretricious finery,' could and did pass as respectable, while virtuous ladies wandering in the streets, 'window gazing at their leisure,' often found themselves accosted as streetwalkers. (50)

As distressing as it may be not to be able to distinguish between a prostitute and an angel (not) in the house, Miss Wade represents neither a bourgeois wife nor a prostitute, for she

is something else entirely – and, interpretatively speaking, this is even worse. This “something else entirely,” while it is difficult to define, is best viewed within the confines of the marriage paradox – that is, again, the imperative to couple that is irrevocably linked to the ability, simultaneously, to preserve each partner’s autonomy. Miss Wade is more than one of lesbianism’s historical antecedents, more than one or two or three of its literary or cultural tropes; instead, *Little Dorrit* presents readers, especially its late modern ones, with a direct challenge to marriage and the couple, for as Sharon Marcus asserts, Dickens’s “image of a pathological female household anticipates” later Victorian fictions. Here in this pathological female household we find the marriage paradox at its most exposed, its contradictory impulses most apparent. I link this exposure to the transition in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) from Lord and Bondsman to his concept of the unhappy consciousness. The unhappy consciousness is the subject stripped of its characteristics, reducing it to one of the opponents described by Barbara Johnson apropos of Lacan’s reading of Poe’s “The Purloined Letter.”

Before turning to the readings themselves, however, I want to rehearse Miss Wade’s situatedness in *Little Dorrit* because, despite the popularity of this character within late modern Dickens studies (and unlike *David Copperfield*’s cultural omnipresence), it is important to rehearse the specifics. Alex Woloch suggests that “a minor character’s very importance, as an affective space within the novel, might work *against* his or her incorporation into the larger thematic or analogic structure [of the novel]” (127). This is especially true of Miss Wade. Three-fourths of the way into the novel, Dickens provides this minor character with an entire chapter in which she becomes a first-person narrator. Not even the novel’s eponymous heroine (whose forays into first-

person narration are limited to two letters written to the male protagonist, Arthur Clennam) is afforded such a prized character-space. The appearance of the Miss Wade chapter is unexpected and disruptive, for it calls unwarranted attention to itself; it is for this reason, however, that it is emblematic of what Woloch calls “the fundamental achievement of Dickens’s depiction of minor characters: he dramatizes the *écartement* between a minor character’s function and his or her own fictional being, showing how the very subordinated nature of minor characters catalyzes new kinds of affective presence” (127-28).

“Try this uncertainty and this not-putting of them together, as a new means of interest” (23), Dickens writes in his notes for the novel, referring specifically to the first three chapters (settings: prison, quarantine, Mrs. Clennam’s house), which despite some common motifs (such as claustrophobic confinement) appear at first blush to be disorientingly unrelated. The appearance of Miss Wade in the second chapter is a case in point. Dickens introduces a mysterious character, about whom even the narrator seems in doubt: “a handsome young Englishwoman, traveling quite alone, who had a proud observant face, and had either withdrawn from the rest or been avoided by the rest – nobody, herself excepted perhaps, could have quite decided which” (36). Apparently, the uncertainty with which the narrator ends his description, where only Miss Wade herself could resolve this uncertainty, is the best that the narrator can give the reader, for he fashions his second, more detailed description of her in similar terms, beginning with “it would have been difficult as to say, positively, whether she avoided the rest, or was avoided” (38). “Nobody, herself excepted perhaps” is, perhaps, the best way to describe Miss Wade, at least until she herself becomes the narrator. As a new means of interest,

the reader is instead offered two hints: first, a disturbing description of Miss Wade's personality vis-à-vis her outward appearance; and second, an unnerving exchange between Miss Wade and Tattycoram, where the latter accuses the former of having an inexplicable power over her: "You seem to come like my own anger, my own malice, my own – whatever it is – I don't know what it is" (42). Concerning this exchange, the reader relies on the narrator to describe Miss Wade's manner of looking at Tattycoram, that is, in terms of her gazing on "an analogous case," that she also must have suffered as the result of a "dependent position" (42). (Moreover, this is what unites the two: despite their age difference and despite Miss Wade's dominant personality, they are analogues, even equals: "You seem to come like my own...whatever it is – I don't know what it is.")

This is enhanced, of course, by the aforementioned description. Expanding on what he had just called her "proud observant face," the narrator indulges in a striking physiognomically-based reading of Miss Wade's visage. According to the narrator, one could not look at her face "without wondering what its expression would be if a change came over it" (38). While sifting through possible meanings that the face might convey, there is something "it said plainly," and it says it, surprisingly, in the first-person: "I am self-contained and self-reliant; your opinion is nothing to me; I have no interest in you, care nothing for you, and see and hear you with indifference" (38). Up to a point, this begins to elucidate the first conversation in which Miss Wade participates, where she strenuously disagrees with the consummate family man, Mr. Meagles, concerning the relationship between prison and prisoner. Mr. Meagles thinks that one ought to be able to forgive one's prison, while Miss Wade replies, "If I had been shut up in any place to pine and suffer, I should always hate that place and wish to burn it down, or raze it to the

ground. I know no more” (37). This “strong” and “forceful” response links Tattycoram’s anger, malice or “I don’t know what it is” to Miss Wade, but Dickens keeps the details about this minor character from the reader, and this is Dickens’s “new means of interest.”

Now Dickens knew this “means” had its limits, since he had introduced this startlingly enigmatic female character he would have, at some point in the novel, to flesh her out, and that (because of the possibly unwarranted build-up) this fleshing out would necessarily need to be tethered to what Dickens will later call “the blood of the book” (Forster 162). As we know from his notes, Dickens had trouble deciding when and what to reveal. In preparation for the third installment of the novel, Dickens writes, “Miss Wade. Her surroundings and antecedents?” after which appears an underlined “No.” Even more surprising (particularly in retrospect) is that Dickens writes, “Miss Wade in the prison? Not yet. Her father? Not yet” (27). Of course, neither incarceration nor a paternal figure will be introduced to explain who or what Miss Wade is; we see instead Dickens struggling with his minor character.

Regardless, what is clear is that prison and father soon drop out of Dickens’s plans; instead, he continues to obscure. In chapter XVI of Book I we learn that Tattycoram has not only met with Miss Wade, but that Miss Wade has invited Tattycoram to live with her if she again feels that the Meagles family has mistreated her. And in Chapter XXVII we learn that Tattycoram has absconded, while at the same time we are finally presented with another encounter with Miss Wade, an encounter that only increases her obscure nature. When Mr. Clennam and Mr. Meagles find Miss Wade, it quickly becomes apparent that Tattycoram has no intention of returning to the Meagleses to serve their daughter, Pet. In exasperation, Mr. Meagles states that Miss Wade is a

“mystery” and that “I don’t know what you are, but you don’t hide, can’t hide, what a dark spirit you have within you” (351). “What can you two be together? What can come of it?” he asks (349). These are questions, however, that go unanswered, at least explicitly. All the reader is given is Miss Wade’s retort: she and Tattycoram have “common cause,” they are both mistreated orphans and dependents, and she has “nothing more to say” (351). And yet, Mr. Meagles suspects that Miss Wade is “a woman, who, from whatever cause, has a perverted delight in making a sister-woman as wretched as she is” (351). Supposedly, Mr. Meagles is “old enough to have heard of such” (351), but here the narrator only further whets the reader’s appetite, meaning that once again Dickens is putting increased pressure on himself to deliver something worth the wait. More importantly, however, this something, by sheer dint of its enigmatic position within the narrative, begins to take on a fictional being that the narrator cannot control, for until Miss Wade is pinned down (by being burdened with a “fictional” past) she remains a narratological nuisance. Purposefully withholding information incites interest, but the longer Dickens withholds it the more difficult it is to integrate it into the narrative, that is, to put Miss Wade together.

As is well known, Dickens’s friend and biographer John Forster considered the attempt to flesh out Miss Wade’s character-space to be “anything but attractive,” since “The History of a Self-Tormentor” had “really little to do with the tale itself,” even though “the failure nevertheless had not been for want of care and study, as well of his own design as of models by masters in his own art” (161). Before we consider the chapter’s narrative content, one that designates Miss Wade a self-tormentor, a brief description of Dickens’s overall structural solution is necessary. Late in the writing

process, Dickens decides to “change this to two chapters, getting the Self-Tormentor narrative by itself.” Mr. Clennam seeks out Miss Wade hoping that she might have information in regards to his past. While Miss Wade does clarify the details concerning her acquaintance with Rigaud, the foreign man who has had mysterious dealings with Mr. Clennam’s mother, Dickens’s notes again state: “No information – Clennam goes back” (50-51), but not before Miss Wade confesses, “I have for some time inclined to tell you what my life has been – not to propitiate your opinion [of course!], for I set no value on it; but, that you may comprehend...what I mean by hating” (690).

“I don’t see the practicability of making the History of a Self-Tormentor, with which I took great pains, a written narrative,” writes Dickens. “But I do see the possibility of making it a chapter by itself, which might dispense with the necessity of the turned commas.” As insignificant as disposing of quotation marks or “turned commas” may sound, Dickens has something much more significant in mind, that is, “Henry Fielding’s reason for the introduced story.” The need for the “introduced story” is predicated on the physical constraints of novel writing: “it is sometimes really impossible to present, in a full book, the idea it contains...without supposing the reader to be possessed of almost as much romantic allowance as would put him on a level with the writer.” The introduced story, in other words, attempts to fill in an (impossible) gap between reader and writer, one produced by the writer’s romantic allowances (Dickens’s ostensible access to aspects of his characters to which his readers are not privy) that at times, and for reasons spelled out above, need to be minimized. Needless to say, Dickens had high hopes for the Miss Wade chapter: “In Miss Wade I had an idea, which I thought a new one, of making the introduced story so fit into the surroundings impossible of

separation from the main story, as to make the blood of the book circulate through both” (161). Forster felt that he had “not exactly succeeded in this.” Dickens, Paul D. Herring suggests, “lost the opportunity of fully exploiting the dramatic irony of her narration,” despite the fact that “the reader realizes one of the main theses in *Little Dorrit*: that the individual himself is to some degree responsible for his position in the prison that Society has built around him” (51). While Dickens supposedly fails to exploit the “dramatic irony” of Miss Wade’s narration, it would appear that, regardless of the artificiality of the narration’s introduction, Dickens thought that the “introduced story” was the best method, maybe not to make it circulate through the book’s vital arteries, but at least to provide the reader with her surroundings and antecedents.

As Herring’s statement implies, Dickens’s narration does not fully exploit the fact that Miss Wade shares some of the responsibility for her isolation, misery, and vindictiveness. Either way, she is “to some degree responsible,” but Dickens fails to make full dramatic use of this fact. Why then did this master of the novel choose this tactic? The answer rests partly on the material constraints of the Victorian novel: due to serialization, earlier parts of the novel are published before later parts are even written (at least in Dickens’s case), which plays a significant role in the development of Miss Wade. It is clear that, for example, when Dickens scrawls “Miss Wade in the prison? Not yet. Her father? Not yet,” he has not yet decided on who/what Miss Wade is. More important, though, is the decision that is made.

In “Master and Servant in *Little Dorrit*,” Avrom Fleishman applies Hegel’s Lord and Bondsman to Dickens’s novel, but he does so with only minimal success, for Fleishman focuses on the fact that the master achieves only a “dependent consciousness”

because he is beholden to the servant for his ostensible independence; conversely, the servant achieves “self-existence” by laboring for his master, thereby acquiring a modicum of “freedom” vis-à-vis the “consciousness that he himself exists in his own right and on his own account” (576). In other words, “just where the master has effectively achieved lordship,” writes Hegel, “he really finds that something has come about quite different from an independent consciousness. It is not an independent, but a dependent consciousness that he has achieved” whereas the servant’s “self-existence comes to be felt explicitly as his own proper being, and he attains that consciousness that he himself exists in its own right and on its own account” (§ 196). On Fleishman’s account, Miss Wade’s narrative demonstrates her inability to achieve independence or freedom, for as a servant desirous of being a master, she wars against the dialectical relationship described by Hegel. “The more Miss Wade rebels and asserts her independence...[and] the more she claims equality with masters by spurning them,” writes Fleishman, “the more she proves her inferiority, her inability to live a normal life around them.” “[H]ers is not a free choice of freedom,” Fleishman concludes, “but a compulsive drive to be free which only increases her bondage and her bitterness” (578). He misses, however, what Judith Butler has called “one of the least interrogated of Hegel’s philosophical movements,” that is, the transition from the “Lord and Bondsman” section to “The Freedom of Self-Consciousness: Stoicism, Skepticism, and the Unhappy Consciousness” (173). This transition greatly informs Miss Wade’s critical legacy.

Our recourse to Hegel provides added nuance to our critique of Victorian marital sympathy. Recall the formula [established in chapter 1]: party 1 can provide X, party 2 can provide Y; party 1 needs Y, party 2 needs X: therefore, they form a partnership. For

Hegel and for Victorian society, the parties are unequal, since for the former the parties represent the master and servant and for latter husband and wife. Borrowing from Hegel's above observation, we see that the husband's independence (in the marketplace) is in fact dependent on the service his wife provides at home, while the wife, by producing her husband's independence, acquires her own modicum of freedom vis-à-vis the production of the home. Fleishman's argument is that Miss Wade cannot break free from the dialectic, since her desire is simply to become the master. Following Hegel (and Butler), I argue that Miss Wade sublates the dialectic and encounters what Hegel calls "the freedom of self-consciousness." And, via Miss Wade, so does Tattycoram.

To put this into perspective: J. Hillis Miller refers to "the narrow circle of [Miss Wade's] sadism toward others and her masochism toward herself" (230; qtd. in Jagose 448n28). Miss Wade's sadism, however, is very particular, for it is more precise than simply taking pleasure in causing pain in others. In fact, her sadism takes the form of a rabid skepticism obsessed with finding the contradictions inherent in others' actions. According to Miss Wade, she had not only "the misfortune of not being a fool" but also the ability to "detect[] what those about me thought they hid from me" (693). Miss Wade's treatment of her childhood friend, Charlotte, serves as the aptest example. Charlotte's kindness, what others "called an amiable...affectionate temper," Miss Wade saw as Charlotte's "little perfidy" and would therefore "throw[] her [Charlotte] into tears by showing her that I read her heart" (694). Another such example comes from Miss Wade's interaction with her first mistress, where she states, for instance, "If there happened to be anything choice at table, she always sent it to me: but, I always declined it, and ate of the rejected dishes. These disappointments of her patronage were a sharp

retort, and made me feel independent” (696). Apology equals condescension; kindness equals vanity; sympathy equals hatred. Self-tormentor is not an appellation Miss Wade chose for herself, of course, but the narrator’s title, which implies that Miss Wade misreads her surroundings and suffers the consequences of faulty interpretations. Yet, it is too simple to dismiss Miss Wade as neurotic or socially illiterate, which is not to say, for instance, that Charlotte actually was perfidious; rather, what makes Miss Wade intolerable is her refusal to consent to calling things by their socially accepted names.

It is when “the skeptic becomes self-conscious of the constitutive contradiction of his own negating activity,” Butler observes, “that the unhappy consciousness emerges as an explicit form of ethical reflexivity” (183). What Hillis Miller calls “her masochism toward herself” takes the form of (in Butler’s words) “berat[ing] itself constantly, setting up one part of itself as a pure judge aloof from contradiction, and disparaging its changeable part as that which is inessential, although ineluctably tied to it” (184). To make the leap from skeptic to unhappy consciousness, however, the skeptic must confront another skeptic, which is what she finds in Tattycoram, who, Miss Wade explains, is beginning to see “swollen patronage and selfishness” in what others call “kindness, protection, benevolence, and other fine names” (702). Here is the true meaning of Mr. Meagles’ questions: “What can you two be together? What can come of it?” Clennam imagines that Miss Wade and Tattycoram “must be constantly tearing the other to pieces” (691), and to a certain extent he is right: alternatives are difficult to imagine. Plus, the Miss Wade chapter hardly answers Mr. Meagles’s queries, and Tattycoram reinforces this image during the novel’s confused denouement. ““Oh! I have been so wretched,” cried Tattycoram, weeping much more, ‘always so unhappy, and so

repentant!” and notes that Miss Wade “find[s] no pleasure in anything but keeping me as miserable, suspicious, and tormenting *as herself* [my emphasis].” She concludes, “I used to think...that people were all against me because of my first beginning” (844).

To clarify: like Fleishman, I am not asserting that Hegel’s philosophical treatise directly influenced Dickens (in the sense that he read it, which he did not), but rather that the “Lord and Bondsman” section, because it is “a kind of master-key to the pattern of modern history from the French Revolution down,” is a template on which Dickens cannot help base his story (575). The problem, however, is that the transition that Fleishman misses and to which Butler draws our attention is not such a template, that outside early twentieth-century French intellectual circles (Butler names Jean Wahl, Jean Hyppolite, and Alexandre Kojève) the unhappy consciousness is precisely that which has been overlooked, and it is precisely that which links Miss Wade’s “introduced story” to “the central paradox of Hegel’s anthropology” (195n2).

Again, Sharon Marcus calls their relationship an “image of a pathological female household,” while Mr. Meagles (anticipating Marcus) asks the rhetorical question: “What can you two be together? What can come of it?” None of our late modern attempts to pin this down have succeeded; however, each contributes a crucial aspect of what Miss Wade and Tattycoram *being together* means, that is, the *what* of the “what can come of it.” As I noted above, the extant literature provides us with four possible responses. First, there’s denial. Representative here is by John Lucas: “I think it is a mistake that Miss Wade should be spoken of as a lesbian. Dickens’s daring does not lie in any suggestion of her sexual desire. Miss Wade hates society as a whole, not just men” (269). Lucas’s categorical denial presumes that reducing Miss Wade to “her sexual desire” would reduce

“Dickens’s daring.” Plus, Lucas is certainly correct: “Miss Wade hates society as a whole, not just men”; however, Lucas errs both when he depicts lesbianism as hatred of men and when he depicts sexual desire as personal and, therefore, not relevant to “society as a whole.” In other words, Lucas’s denial highlights all our key terms (sexual desire, society in its entirety, male dominance, and hatred), but he wishes to keep them separate instead of seeing them as the warp and woof of the same imbricated fabric.

Second, we have those who think Miss Wade should be spoken of as a lesbian, assuming the proper cultural and historical caveats are made. This position is variously taken up by Annamarie Jagose, Sharon Marcus, Anna Wilson, Mary A. Armstrong, and Holly Furneaux. Representative here is Jagose, who claims that the reason why Miss Wade “seems legible within contemporary tropes of lesbianism follows from a retrospective misordering of cause and effect in which her as-if-nascent lesbianism is read as the origin of the modern category toward which it then seems unerringly to gesture” (424). “Retrospective misordering” is certainly the largest stumbling block when contending with the modern homo/heterosexual definition, for it cannibalizes a vast array of past social practices, thereby forcing these diverse social practices (and their remnants) to occupy one half of a binary prison: lesbian tropes or characteristics have disparate origins whose coalescence into a sexual identity that postdates Miss Wade’s appearance in *Little Dorrit*. Yet, in the same breath, Jagose reminds her readers that “one of the least productive aspects of the recent attention to the historicity of categories of sexual identification...[is] a scrupulous refusal to allow the possibility of any meaningful continuity in the construction of sexualities across historical periods” (428). Such rigidity

can, of course, be stultifying; however, it bespeaks the frustration late modern scholars experience when confronting the modern hetero/homo definition.

Third, there is Janet Retseck who argues, instead, that we should, against the critical tide, “unsex” Miss Wade. For Retseck, we share this burden with Miss Wade, whom she calls a “delusion[al]...misreader.” While Retseck extirpates lesbianism from Dickens’s pathologizing, she preserves the fact that Dickens locates “her anger and defiance...in her personality” (223). Her “personality” is central to understanding why Miss Wade is “something else,” but according to Deirdre David, whatever this “something else” is (Retseck calls it “political rebellion” [217]), it “is clearly resistance to normative heterosexual domesticity” (263n16), which is what brings *us* to Miss Wade’s inevitable lesbian status. So, sexed or unsexed, Miss Wade stands against the domestic, something that even Lucas’s anti-social pronouncement would support. For this to be true, however, we would have to conclude that in Miss Wade’s war against normative gender roles, against heterosexuality, and against domesticity, Tattycoram is simply a victim, simply collateral damage; but this view of Tattycoram only works if we disregard the reason why they became a couple in the first place: Miss Wade is not looking to master a dependent (as Fleishman implies); instead, she sees herself, her own “unhappy consciousness” in Tattycoram. If, therefore, we are in fact presented with a pathological female household, then we must address the fact that even without normative heterosexuality, domesticity remains, even if it is being redefined. In other words, we witness, however briefly, *the desire of unhappy consciousnesses to be a couple*.

Fourth, there is inevitability. Most recently, Deirdre David concludes, “Inevitably, Miss Wade must be read as a lesbian” (263n16). These words are strikingly similar to

Andrew Davies's "she just is [a lesbian]," though in context David's are more nuanced, and more fitting. Jagose calls our late modern confusion "retrospective misordering," which is similar to David's "inevitability," but not entirely the same. The bluntness of David's *must* is undergirded not by a nuanced dissecting of historical misordering but rather something more akin to what in *Female Masculinity* (1998) Judith Halberstam calls "perverse presentism," which she describes as "not only a denaturalization of the present but also [as] an application of what we do not know about the present to what we do not know about the past" (53). Miss Wade is not a lesbian because Dickens thought she was, or because we think she is, but caught in the present, caught in the modern hetero/homo definition, that is, more better and more worse, that is how she "must be read." Together, these late modern responses are the evidence we must sift through, since this is quite literally the material instantiations of the Victorian afterlife. Mr. Meagles says that "I am old enough to have heard of such," implying that who Miss Wade *is* and what she and Tattycoram cannot be together is an open secret, but are we late moderns old enough to know this secret? With time, has it gotten more obscure or less?

That Miss Wade and Tattycoram's relationship proves unsuccessful (with the latter returning to the Meagleses and blaming Miss Wade) doesn't mean that we succumb to a tragic reading of it. Furneaux (following Armstrong) argues, albeit regretfully, that "Miss Wade becomes legible as proto-lesbian through a familiar twist of the queer tragedy trope in which the homosexual, if not fatal, is bad, mad, and dangerous to know" (19). This is only true for Miss Wade, however, if we believe Tattycoram without question. The structure of their relationship, writes Armstrong, "nontraditionally domestic, socially and economically independent, articulately scornful of both middle-

class life and female subservience...requires the definition of a new female homoerotic subject” (71-72). It is more productive, therefore, to introduce reciprocal superiority and the marriage paradox, along with Hegel’s unhappy consciousness, into the equation because, if only for a brief instance, we may be glimpsing what Mill is describing.

2 is the oddest number: Miss Wade and Tattycoram’s proto-same-sex marriage and the late modern critical responses to it is proof of this essential oddness because, in essence, the response of Dickens’s characters, especially Mr. Meagles and Arthur Clennam, are reduplicated by late modern critics. Again, Clennam can only imagine these two “constantly tearing the other to pieces.” This ferocity, Furneaux and Armstrong both surmise, has brought undo attention to Miss Wade. Interest in negative affect has, for instance, blinded scholars to Esther Summerson’s erotic desire for Ada Clare in *Bleak House* because it is not seen as pathological (Armstrong 62-69). Even Marcus’s *Between Women*, observes Furneaux, devotes its most extended reading of Dickens to the “imbalanced sadomasochistic relationship” between Estella and Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations*. This focus, Furneaux concludes, “unhelpfully passes forward the widespread belief that same-sex desire is most legible as violence and pathology in Dickens’s work” (19n52). And yet, Miss Wade and Tattycoram’s alternative domesticity is the antithesis of what is imagined by a separate-spheres ideology, but it also (in its inflexibility) fails to conform to the egalitarian, anti-hierarchical relationships imagined by the late-twentieth century, particularly in the social imaginary of mainstream same-sex-marriage politics. That the relationship fails does not mean that the egalitarian, anti-hierarchical relationship is by definition doomed; rather, it means that the latter encounters conceptual difficulties that remain unaddressed. If we take seriously the ideal

of marriage described at the conclusion of *The Subjection of Women*, then we should be less squeamish when we encounter the result. What we have here are two unhappy consciousnesses, two individuals possessed by the desire to enter into a two-person partnership, an attachment in which both partners are equal but where both parties are free *not* to compromise, since they *must* exercise their individual autonomy. The pressure is clearly too intense for Tattycoram, but who can blame her? Earlier, Tattycoram said, “You [Miss Wade] seem to come like my own anger, my own malice, my own – whatever it is – I don’t know what it is.” Ultimately, Tattycoram flees from the intensity of her own reflection – back to the Meagleses, back to safety in hierarchy.

### Chapter 3 “Omissions Are Not Accidents”: Pater and Pederasty

There is nothing more hierarchical than (Greek) pederasty, right? Well, not exactly. In Victorian Oxford, pederasty (figurative, metaphoric, philosophical, or physical) undergirded many discussions concerning relations between men because Benjamin Jowett placed particular emphasis in the mid-century on both Plato and one-on-one tutoring, where a don and an undergraduate would spend time alone reading (in the original Greek) such erotic dialogues as the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*. In *Homosexuality and Hellenism in Victorian Oxford* (1994), Linda Dowling contrasts the effectiveness of the *Blackwood's* attack on the Cockney School of Poetry with the ineffectiveness of Robert Buchanan's attack on the Fleshly School. Both attacks focused on “vain, luxurious, and selfish effeminacy,” but two things had changed between 1817 and 1872 to the point that, observes Dowling, “[b]y the time Buchanan mounted his attack...he would speak as a lonely, isolated, no longer intelligible voice” (25).

One was Jowett's curricular reform, while the other involved economic liberalization. Concerning the latter, the basic premise is that the republican rhetoric of “positive liberty” is based on a closed, zero-sum, cyclical metaphor, emphasizing the constant need to return to origins. Therefore, all exuberance must be contained, for excess means anarchy, it means destroying tradition and, worst of all, it means sending society careening off course on a non-zero-sum venture of no return, an odyssey without destination. By 1872, political rhetoric had by necessity accommodated itself to the fact that excess (the unbridling of human wants) is endemic to laissez-faire capitalism, and that instead of fighting this excess society should take it for granted. In short, excess went from being corrupting to being productive. In other words, negative – rather than positive

– liberty was now embraced. In Isaiah Berlin’s classic 1958 lecture, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” he defines “liberty in the negative sense” as “the area within which the subject – a person or group of persons – is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons” (34). In this sense, negative liberty concerns freedom from interference, while positive liberty concerns one’s ability to do something, and this shift places pederasty in a different light because we are no longer concerned with an individual’s ability but with an individual’s freedom.

Against this backdrop, Walter Pater began describing love between men by combining the hierarchy endemic to pederasty with the egalitarianism implicit in marriage reform. As we will see, this was accomplished – if it was accomplished at all – only with great difficulty. “Virtually every representation of love between men in Pater,” Ellis Hanson claims, “is haunted by the grave – and the stronger the suggestion of homoerotic desire, the more eagerly Pater seems to want to see one of the two men dead” (184). While this accounts for almost every representation in Pater’s oeuvre, it does not fit the first, “haunted” homoerotic representation Pater publishes, that is, Pater’s representation of Winckelmann and his murderer, Arcangeli. Simply put, Pater is not eager to see Winckelmann die, despite the fact that often he depicts love between men in a hierarchical rather than egalitarian fashion. Why is he not eager? What makes this first relationship different? The answer, for us, resides in the Victorian afterlife, but this time in a crucial omission within this late modern phenomenon: that is, Pater’s omission of Winckelmann’s stabbing and the concomitant appearance of a child have gone unnoticed by late modern interpreters both because our paranoid optic has focused too much attention on what Pater *consciously* omitted (due to “homophobic” pressure) and because

Pater provides us with the child, a reparative move that has been “invisible or illegible.” To be clear, this is not a reparative reading of Pater; rather, inspired by the concept of reciprocal superiority I seek out the reparative *but not at the expense of the paranoid*. The poet Marianne Moore claims that “omissions are not accidents.” As we will see below, however, omissions are either conscious or unconscious, and it is the latter kind that interests us because emphasis shifts from the author’s intent to the relationship between language and interpretation. If what appears – or, in fact, does not appear – to late modern scholars as the absence of Winckelmann’s fatal stabbing, if it tells interpreters something of import, it is that Pater’s descriptions of love between men are haunted by the concealment of this stabbing. Language fails Pater as he struggles with the essential oddness of the number 2. Late modern scholars miss this omission because either we are not paranoid enough, or we were too paranoid and, therefore, we miss both what is *conspicuously* absent and what is *actually* present.

When Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, writing of Oscar Wilde, observes that “[his] eros was most closely tuned to the note of the pederastic love in the process of being superceded” (57), this is even truer of Pater’s “eros.” By examining Pater’s first depiction of love between men, that is, his anonymously published 1867 essay on the eighteenth-century German art historian Johann Winckelmann, we find a text attempting to establish a modicum of egalitarianism. This modicum only becomes visible or legible when we pay particular attention to the absence of the art historian’s stabbing and the concomitant appearance of a child, which demonstrates that “pederastic love” is not as hierarchical as Sedgwick suspects. This stabbing does eventually appear, however, though not in one of Pater’s texts; instead, it appears in Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian*

*Gray* (1890/91), making Pater's review of Wilde's novel an important supplement to the murder scene in Pater's "Winckelmann" because it becomes a text that can be read as a return to the relationship between death and the love between men.

Before turning to the omission and late modern criticism, it is important to keep in mind the broad strokes of Pater's aesthetic itinerary. "Winckelmann" is Pater's strongest endorsement of what Linda Dowling calls "spiritual procreancy," that is, a form of metaphysical, intergenerational reproductivism à la Plato that toes the line between hierarchy and equality. The eighteenth-century German art historian of Greek sculpture, writes Pater, is "the last fruit of the Renaissance," despite the fact that usually "the Renaissance is represented as a fashion which set in at a definite period." Winckelmann's status as the "last fruit," as Pater himself admits in the final sentence of "The Preface" to *The Renaissance* (1873) "explains in a striking way [the Renaissance's] motive and tendencies" (xxxiii). Pater explicitly links this "striking way" to what he calls Winckelmann's "temperament," which he "nurtured and invigorated by friendships which kept him in direct contact with the spirit of youth" (123). Such a temperament and such "friendships" gain Winckelmann special access to an aspect of Greek culture that later cultures, despite their numbness to it, are unable to suppress: "moral sexlessness, a kind of ineffectual wholeness of nature, yet with a true beauty and significance of its own," which denotes a human perfection devoid of "shame" or "intoxication," making it a healthy, reproductive expression of love between men. This is a delicate maneuver, since Winckelmann "fingers those pagan marbles with unsinged hands, with no sense of shame or loss" (143).

To emphasize this fact, Pater stresses that Winckelmann ignores philosophy, although Plato “is excepted from Winckelmann’s proscription of the philosophers” because, as opposed to a carnal lust for young flesh, the spiritual procreancy described by Socrates in his speech in Plato’s *Symposium* appeals to Winckelmann, and to Pater. In Plato’s dialogue on the nature of love (between men), Socrates asks his listeners:

What if man had eyes to see the true beauty...the divine beauty...pure and clear and unalloyed, not clogged with the pollutions of mortality and all the colors and vanities of human life – thither looking, and holding converse with the true beauty simple and divine? Remember how in that communion only, beholding beauty with the eye of the mind, he will be enabled to bring forth, not images of beauty, but realities...and bringing forth and nourishing true virtue to become the friend of God and to be immortal, if mortal man may. (582)

The crucial distinction here is between beauty’s particularity, “this or that special manifestation of it” (xxix), and beauty’s “sexlessness.” By stressing beauty’s sexlessness rather than its androgyny, Pater associates beauty with “a kind of impotence,” a phrase that he omits from the publication of “Winckelmann.” The phrase originally appears in “Diaphaneitè,” Pater’s earliest known piece of writing, and it reads: “a moral sexlessness, a kind of impotence” (253). While attempting not to abstract from “this or that,” Pater’s reading of the *Symposium* keeps beauty at arm’s length because it is introduced through the mind’s eye and through de-emphasis “on the pollutions of mortality and all the colors and vanities of human life.” As Christopher Craft has argued, this aesthetic itinerary is exceptionally arduous. Craft paraphrases:

Start with your purblind passion for the radiant beauty of that golden boy; realize next that nothing gold can stay and that your favorite can radiate so seductively only because he has already been irradiated by a lucent source as yet invisible to your enchanted eye; now proceed toward the precluded source by transferring your ardor for golden youth to airier, more abstract forms and in this way continue your strident climb upward through ascending degrees of difficulty; as you climb remember to pause long

enough to recast that now abstracted beauty in perduring forms of art, thought, or law; then resume your ascent, mounting higher still, until you bathe at last in the cool radiance of pure Idea. (117)

I have quoted Craft's long paraphrase for in one sentence he captures, rather humorously, the true difficulty of detaching beauty from the flesh.

Winckelmann follows these instructions. When he touches Greek sculpture, he must remain calm, sober, and unpolluted. Echoing Plato's *Symposium*, Pater elsewhere writes: "The end of life is not action but contemplation – *being* as distinct from *doing* – a certain disposition of the mind: is, in some shape or other, the principle of all the higher morality. In poetry, in art, if you enter into their true spirit at all; you touch this principle, in a measure: these, by their very *sterility* [my emphasis], are a type of beholding for the mere joy of beholding" ("Wordsworth" 62). Like Plato, Pater stresses being over doing, Being that is only to be beholden for its own sake, for the mere joy of beholding. While pleasure is the central concern of the aesthetic critic, who "regards all the objects with which he has to do, all works of art, and the fairer forms of nature and human life, as powers or forces producing pleasurable sensations," Pater then adds that "What is important...is not that the critic should possess a correct abstract definition of beauty for the intellect, but a certain kind of temperament, the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects" ("The Preface," xxx).

This is what the Hellenic ideal teaches us. For, although every culture contributes to its successors by being absorbed and hidden beneath their surfaces, the Hellenic spirit and culture, its manner, because "the standard of taste...was fixed in Greece" (140), refuses to lie dormant. Therefore, the Greeks are not simply one culture among others, not merely a significant moment in the history of man, but rather the very origin of

historicity. Before the mind began to entertain the idea of its own freedom and agency, “to boast its independence of the flesh,” the Greeks were the fortunate receivers of “some supreme good luck”: an elegant pause, where action is limited, passion plays flirtatiously with the rigid surface, and all that is “common,” “accidental,” “grotesque,” and “earthly” is “purge[d] away.” The underlying message of “Winckelmann” is that man’s sex is no longer nature’s tool, no longer clogged with the pollutions of mortality and all the colors and vanities of human life. By putting aside excremental odors, unseemly fluids, and the animal need to procreate, man in his “moral sexlessness,” which is not to be confused with infertility per se, disregards baser practices. True fecundity (spiritual procreancy) follows from an elevated impotency. Man must worship himself as the thing-in-itself: “motion in stillness,” which “begins and ends with the finite image, yet loses no part of the spiritual motive” (131). In “The School of Giorgione” (a late addition to *The Renaissance*), Pater famously asserts that all art aspires to “the condition of music”; however, it is fair to say that, ten years earlier, art, for Pater (and for Winckelmann before him), aspires to the condition of sculpture (“the Greek ideal expressed itself preeminently in sculpture”), which Pater later reiterates in his sparkling 1889 essay, “Style”: “For in truth all art does but consist in the removal of surplusage, from the last finish of the gem-engraver blowing away the last particle of invisible dust, back to the earliest divination of the finished work to be, lying somewhere, according to Michelangelo’s fancy, in the rough-hewn block of stone” (19-20). “The tact of omission,” as Pater later calls it, means that all great artists know when, where, and what to omit, for certain omissions at certain times have maximum effect. This “removal of surplusage” is always an incomplete project, however, not only because aspiration hardly guarantees success, but, and more

importantly, because the aesthetic process itself is initiated by a surplusage that, while it cannot be eliminated, also cannot be made present.

Such “tact” plays a key role in the composition of “Winckelmann,” both because it whitewashes the unseemly, anti-Platonic quality of Winckelmann’s death and because it omits the means by which Winckelmann seeks to foment the rebirth of Greek society; that is, to reproduce the conditions wherein a great and highly-developed culture not only tolerated male homosexual passions, but deemed them of spiritual value and attempted to employ such passions for the benefit of society as a whole. Arcangeli, Winckelmann’s murderer, has no place in this narrative. This surplusage initiates the essay, forcing it to take the shape that it did. Winckelmann’s biography fails to conform, and Pater’s essay attempts to remedy this failure – or, at least, that is what the Winckelmann myth is designed to accomplish.

In the first paragraph of the essay, Pater mentions the “strange pregnancy” contained in Goethe’s references to Winckelmann, where Goethe “speaks of the teacher who had made his career possible, but whom he had never seen, as of an abstract type of culture, consummate, tranquil, withdrawn already into the region of ideals, yet retaining colour from the incidents of a passionate intellectual life.” Pater then quotes Hegel: “Winckelmann, by the contemplation of the ideal works of the ancients, received a sort of inspiration, through which he has a sense for the study of art. He is to be regarded as one of those who, in the sphere of art, have known how to initiate a new organ for the human spirit.” Finally, Pater concludes this opening paragraph: “That it has given a new sense, that it has laid open a new organ, is the highest that can be said of any critical effort. It is interesting then to ask *what kind of man* it was who thus laid open a new organ. Under

what *conditions* was that effected?" (114; emphasis added). From the first paragraph on, Winckelmann becomes "a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood," even though, unlike the jurists and psychologists to whom Pater's contemporary, John Addington Symonds, wanted to explain Greek (and Victorian) homosexuality, Pater is obviously a sympathetic ear. The "indefinitely active principle" motivating Winckelmann is not something Pater wants to eradicate; he wants to analyze and understand it because this man "laid open a new organ" for other men. These phrases, of course, come from the famous passage in Michel Foucault's Volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality*, where he declares that "the sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (43). As noted at the outset, Pater's writings exist at this turning-point, functioning (one might say) as the semi-colon in Foucault's assertion. While deeply influenced by the hierarchical thinking of Greek pederasty, Pater was also invested in individual temperament and biographical details. Again, Pater's endorsement of spiritual procreancy is him toeing the line between hierarchy and equality.

What kind of new organ does Pater have in mind? This new organ is a metaphor for how, under the right "conditions," men might find new ways of relating to one another. While "German literary history seems to have lost the chance of one of those famous friendships [between Winckelmann and Goethe], the very tradition of which becomes a stimulus to culture, and exercises an imperishable influence," Pater certainly feels that his essay is another attempt – a lineage that connects Pater to Winckelmann, Goethe and Hegel – to lay open this "new organ." In fact, when it was initially composed, Pater was much more explicit about how new organs are laid open. In 1867, the *Westminster Review* published an anonymous review essay on Winckelmann. When its

author, Walter Pater, included it in the first edition of *The Renaissance* (1873), he omitted the following passage: “[T]he Hellenic manner is the blossom of the Hellenic spirit and culture, that spirit and culture depend on certain conditions, and those conditions are peculiar to a certain age.” While Pater later wrote that meeting the people of another age face to face “is as impossible as to become a little child, or enter again the womb and be born” (196), he initially asserts that “the blossom of the Hellenic spirit and culture” could be fully re-experienced, and not just “throw[n]...into [historical] relief,” for the passage concludes: “Reproduce those conditions, attain the actual root, and blossoms may again be produced of a triumphant color” (107).

Why did Pater omit this passage? Scholars such as Linda Dowling and Richard Dellamora ask this question, but their answers are not entirely satisfying. Reproducing the Hellenic “spirit and culture” meant one thing more than any other in Victorian Oxford: code for Greek pederasty, which is, observes Regius Professor of Greek Ingram Bywater, Pater’s “certain sympathy with a certain aspect of Greek life” (qtd. Dowling 95; Dellamora 61). The ostensible subtlety of Bywater’s remark shouldn’t be construed as evasiveness; that is, he said all he needed to say, for his remark is meant to be perfectly legible. Following Frank Turner and Richard Jenkyns, Linda Dowling stresses that, while J. S. Mill, Matthew Arnold, and Benjamin Jowett made the Greeks (especially Plato) central to a liberal arts education at Oxford, it was the students of this new curriculum (Pater, Symonds, Wilde, etc.) that highlighted the male-male eroticism (the Platonic eros) endemic to Greek thought, making “a certain sympathy with a certain aspect of Greek life” emblematic, as it indeed was, of Greek thinking in its entirety. In this sense, Oxford Hellenism was nascent “homosexual code” (Dowling 27-28). Not only is Pater’s essay on

Renaissance Hellenism moving out from underneath the cover of technical anonymity, but, even worse, it now dons explicit institutional affiliation: “Fellow of Brasenose College, Oxford.” Dowling cites Pater’s colleague, John Wordsworth, who stresses the fact that since “you [Pater] had reprinted it with your own name,” Pater explicitly connects Oxford to his statements (99), while Dellamora asserts, rather optimistically, that even though it is no longer explicit, “the utopian intent and the implicit relation in 1867 to the need for legislative reform remain” (114). This omission, in other words, can clearly be interpreted as an act of conscious self-censorship, of remaining “in the closet,” of burying the explicit intention, despite the fact that, as we will see, Pater apparently didn’t omit enough. With this, there is perhaps little to argue, for anonymity, omissions, and defensiveness describe Pater’s intent. For this reason, Heather Love (following Jacques Khalip) “links Pater’s embrace of anonymity to his experience bearing a marginalized sexual subjectivity” (69). Finally, Will Fisher also establishes, with great precision, the relationship between the Victorian interest in the Renaissance (even, to a large extent, its creation of this historical and artistic period *qua* concept) and the creation of the homosexual subject, inviting the reader to understand homosexuality in terms of birth, rebirth, and generativity. Fisher, however, does not include Winckelmann and Greek pederasty as part of this equation.

This conspicuous omission, this lack of transparency and this embrace of anonymity, however, has allowed these scholars – in fact, all scholars – to overlook what is apparently an inconspicuous, though not an accidental, omission:

With characteristic openness, Winckelmann had confided his [travel] plans to a fellow-traveler, a man named Arcangeli, and had shown him the gold medals received at Vienna. One morning he entered Winckelmann’s room, under the pretense of taking leave. Winckelmann was then writing

‘memoranda for the future editor of the *History of Art*,’ still seeking the perfection of his great work. Arcangeli begged to see the medals once more. As Winckelmann stooped down to take them from the chest, a cord was thrown round his neck. *Some time afterwards, a child with whose companionship Winckelmann had beguiled his delay, knocked at the door, and receiving no answer, gave the alarm.* Winckelmann was found dangerously wounded, and died a few hours later, after receiving the last sacraments. It seemed as if the gods, in reward for his devotion to them, had given him a death which, for its swiftness and its opportunity, he might well have desired. (126; emphasis added)

Between 1867 and 1873, this passage remains the same: Winckelmann stoops down; Arcangeli approaches him from behind; he places a cord around Winckelmann’s neck; and then, full stop. Pater continues: “Some time afterwards, a child,” omitting the stabbing. Like Goethe, Pater could not *not* know the facts of the murder, for as Hans Mayer asserts “the court [i.e. public] records of Arcangeli’s murder trial report in ample detail Winckelmann’s slow hemorrhaging from the puncture wounds, the vigorous man’s struggle with his murderer, the ugly death in a public inn surrounded by stupid and indifferent waiters and cleaning girls” (168). Additionally, while Pater says of Winckelmann’s death that “it seemed as if the gods, in reward for his devotion to them, had given him a death which, for its swiftness and its opportunity, he might well have desired,” he is surely echoing Goethe’s own description: “[I]n a sense we can count him happy, that he rose up to the blessed from the topmost point of human existence, that a short horror, a speedy pain took him from the living. The frailties of age, diminution of the intellect were spared him...He lived as a man and went forth from this world as a man in his fullness” (qtd. in Mayer 168). Pater’s reader, however, finds in its place the “beguiling” child. Is Winckelmann’s death scene capable of being translated into Pater’s narrative? The answer, I am arguing, is that the translation is impossible.

The absence of the stabbing in Pater's description of Winckelmann's death provides us with an opportunity to rethink the relationship between birth, rebirth, and the Victorian origins of male homosexuality. Pater expunges the horrific violence of Winckelmann's murder by instead presenting the reader with the child, pointing to the fact that this might be the residue of the primal scene of Pater's nascent homosexuality. Freud's establishes the concept of the "primal scene" in "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis" (SE 17: 1-122). In his definitive study of the relationship between Freud's concept and its relation to literature and philosophy, Ned Lukacher characterizes the primal scene as "an ontologically undecidable intertextual event that is situated in the differential space between historical memory and imaginative construction, between archival verification and interpretative free play" (24). Specifically, the "scene" consists of the child's witnessing parental *coitus a tergo*, which causes (castration) anxiety in the witness because he believes violence is being committed on the person "taking it from behind." When the child initially "witnessed the *coitus a tergo*," writes Slavoj Žižek, "nothing traumatic marked this scene; the scene acquired features only in retrospect, with the later development of the child's infantile sexual theories, when it became impossible to integrate the scene within the newly emerged horizon of narrativization-historicization-symbolization" (31). We do not then have access to the exact moment when Pater bore witness to this scene; that is, when he learned that Winckelmann had been violently murdered. We have no need for such access, however, because trauma acquires meaning "only in retrospect" (tethered to "later development"). We must focus on what is said, on what reaches the vector of speech.

So the reader is presented with two types of omission. The first type we might classify as conscious self-censorship. The second type, however, is more difficult to classify. If Winckelmann, as Pater saw him, were to be anointed the Victorian patron saint of all things Greek, then describing his murder in lurid, forensic detail would certainly sully Pater's hagiography – and would be strikingly incongruous with Pater's prose style. In this respect, Pater *knows* that such a description would connote something akin to a pervert's comeuppance. “[W]ithin a specifically Victorian context,” writes Dellamora, “Winckelmann's death appears to be an outcome nearly predictable in a society hostile to sexual difference” (114). Textually speaking, it is unwarranted to assert that Pater consciously removed anything from this passage, not only because there is no alternate draft (the passage remains the same in all subsequent editions), but also because there is in fact nothing missing, for there is simply the child. It is clear, moreover, that Pater provides the reader with a precise explanation for why this opportunity, and “its [ostensible] swiftness,” presented itself to his assailant: because the child delayed the departure of the art historian “still seeking the perfection of his great work.”

So why include the scene at all? If describing Winckelmann's murder in lurid, forensic detail is antithetical to Pater's florid prose style, we could conclude that any mention of the murder is remarkable “within a specifically Victorian context.” But the appearance of the child is not corroborated by the evidence and testimony collected for Arcangeli's trial. Furthermore, this reference to the child, as Billie Andrew Inman notes, does not even appear in Otto Jahn's biography of Winckelmann – and Pater's 1867 essay is, in part, a review of Jahn's biography. While there is a possible source for the child's inclusion (See Volume One of the Fernow, Meyer, Schulze edition of Winckelmann's

*Werke*), the significant fact remains, Inman continues, that Pater's description of Winckelmann's murder is "almost a translation" of Jahn's (111). It would, therefore, be reasonable to conclude that the child's appearance is a stylistic revision, particularly noteworthy because Pater's essay provides its reader *with* the appearance of the child and *without* even a cursory reference to the nature of the assault; that is, there is no penetration, no blood, no torn flesh. If the outcome of Winckelmann's life is as legible as Dellamora claims why not simply omit the scene entirely? The first, much-discussed omission of the "Hellenic manner" passage was necessary (its meaning too legible, lacking requisite subtlety, etc.); but the second, of the stabbing, is qualitatively different. The nature of this "ugly death" – the street hustler's brutish, pockmarked complexion; Winckelmann's moaning, panting, and cursing; his right lung filling with blood; the stupid, gawking bystanders – remains in stark contrast to the future-oriented pederastic eros expressed in "the Hellenic manner" passage. Moreover, the study most attuned to these issues, Kevin Ohi's *Innocence and Rapture: The Erotic Child in Pater, Wilde, James, and Nabokov* (2005), does not discuss the child's appearance. In his first chapter, "Doomed Creatures of Immature Radiance': Renaissance, Death, and Rapture in Walter Pater," Ohi pays particular attention to the importance of Winckelmann for Pater's conceptualization of the Renaissance, and in doing so he focuses on the "dead, dying, indifferent, or precociously melancholic children" (13) that populate Pater's texts. However, the "child with whose companionship Winckelmann had beguiled his delay" goes mysteriously unremarked. It is possible that this child goes unnoticed by Ohi because he really isn't of the same order as Pater's other dead, dying, indifferent, or precociously melancholic children; rather, the child in "Winckelmann" is lively and

interested, and if he has beguiled the art historian, one imagines it would have been with a vibrant rather a melancholic disposition.

We cannot simply assert that Pater consciously removed this “ugly death” in favor of the enthralling child. Goethe’s intellectual pregnancy takes precedence over Winckelmann’s untimely death because it effectively gives meaning to it; but something more complicated undergirds this precedence-taking. Biographically speaking, it was not until the 1874 disclosure of Pater’s relationship with William M. Hardinge that Pater, in Inman’s word, “recogni[zed]...the circumscribed boundaries within which he would be constrained to live if he were to remain acceptable to polite society” (19). Pater’s first, full-blown encounter with institutional “homophobia,” which Inman describes in great detail in “Estrangement and Connection,” led to Benjamin Jowett passing Pater over for a University Proctorship. All of this, however, post-dates both the original scripting of “Winckelmann” and its inclusion in *Studies in the History of Renaissance*, which is to say that, according to this timeline, Pater’s knowledge of Winckelmann’s murder had yet to crush his optimism, for it is with Hardinge that Pater violates Oxford’s unwritten rules about conduct between men.

We cannot, then, explain the omission of the stabbing and the appearance of the child with reference to Pater’s biography. Years before *The Renaissance* made him the most notorious don of Victorian Oxford, we find Pater revising Winckelmann’s death scene. The difference between the two omissions is that caution motivates the first, while something *beyond* Pater’s control, something that resists symbolization, causes the second. If we are to understand Pater’s essay in terms of a primal scene, this scene is not itself the essay’s cause; rather, the essay represents the failure to integrate

Winckelmann's stabbing into the newly emerged horizon of Pater's nascent "sexual theories." This failure calls for a strengthening of said sexual theories, a strengthening centering in Pater's essay on certain mythical objects: new organs, male pregnancy, and unsinged hands. As with Goethe, Winckelmann "made his [Pater's] career possible" (Davis, 275-76), but if this is the case, then the condition of possibility for Pater's writings is locked in this essay.

According to Pater, Winckelmann desired his own death, for he was afforded one that, as Pater writes, "he might well have desired." Pater's non-description of Winckelmann's stabbing, however, is an attempt to neutralize his desire, to safeguard Pater and his likeminded readers from the self-destructive quality of his desire, his apparent desire to be brutally murdered by an avaricious miscreant. Again, this doesn't mean the historical Winckelmann actually wanted to be murdered by a male hustler; it only means that Pater is unable to reconcile the myth of Winckelmann with the "historical" man. If Winckelmann's desire – constituted by Pater's relation to it – were to emerge, it would ruin the essay's central goal of "narrativizing-historicizing-symbolizing" Winckelmann's *agalma*, his innermost dignity and essence, turning it instead into stinking offal. In order to depict Winckelmann's *agalma*, Pater discovers – in writing his essay – that, if he is going to maintain the myth of Winckelmann's unsinged hands, that *je ne sais quoi* "temperament" that allowed Winckelmann to touch youth in ways others could not, Winckelmann's desire must be contained.

Moreover, his desire simultaneously causes Pater to worry about what Winckelmann desires from him, which is again why Pater creates a mythic portrait of Winckelmann *qua* homosexual saint and avoids getting too close to the actual

relationship between Winckelmann and Arcangeli. Hence, the appearance of the child is a stopgap. While the Greeks expressed, in a free and open manner, the moral uprightness – as well as the ethical superiority – of male-male sexual relations, this fact is far from straightforward, especially because, as Foucault observes in *The Use of Pleasure* (1984), pederasty hinged on the “allowance for *the other’s freedom*, his ability to refuse, and his required consent” (199). The male citizen (*erastes*) dominated the *polis*, along with its women and slaves, but he could not dominate the (male) child (*eromenos*), since the boy was himself a male citizen in training and that playing “hard to get” was crucial to his transition to adulthood. Therefore, we have a situation that resembles what I have called the marriage paradox: if he gave in too easily, he would be prostituting himself, and this would disqualify him from citizen status. For, maintaining the boy’s freedom – a responsibility that, while it concerned both parties, constituted the citizen’s main concern because he was liable to be persecuted if the boy’s family caught wind of any impropriety – safeguarded the boy’s personal integrity and autonomy.

All these social conventions surrounding pederasty, which effectively dictated whether the boy was acting honorably, also concealed the secret that made such conventions necessary in the first place: the body is never enough, or put differently, the body is always too much, too recalcitrant, always ready to encourage desire. Unlike dietetics (the maintenance of equilibrium, regulation of inside and outside) and economics (the maintenance of hierarchy, regulation of man’s domination over woman), erotics required additional modification because it called attention to the fact that the same body needed to serve as both the object of another man’s sexual affections and as the marker of the boy’s personal freedom (221). For this reason, the citizen doubts

whether the boy's body in-itself provides enough stability for the transference of authority, especially after it has been physically penetrated. Unlike initiatory rituals, where participation is obligatory, Greek pederasty constitutes for the lesser party a voluntary relationship, "the other's freedom." The uneasy compromise is an ontology of love à la Plato, since the major concern is "the extent that he [the citizen] is able to resist their seduction; which does not mean that he feels no love or desire from them, but that he is moved by the force of true love, and he knows how truly to love the truth that must be loved" (241). The process of doubt is now enmeshed in the experience of the male body. Through resisting the boy, the citizen takes the place of the boy, since *ascesis* is now the citizen's concern.

With *ascesis* being the citizen's concern, the aesthetic itinerary, as Christopher Craft humorously outlined it, is his path. Winckelmann, however, seems to have deviated from this path, since "with characteristic openness" his murderer "had given him a death which, for its swiftness and its opportunity, he might well have desired." Openness? Desire for death? And, in this context, what is the appearance of the child? Pater – in search for his spiritual father (Davis 261-85), for the one who fuses philosophy and Eros, as he phrases it in "Diaphaneité" – discovers Winckelmann, a man who shows to him, through his biography as well as through his writings, the rebirth of the Greek spirit. And yet, in the process of being nourished and nurtured by Winckelmann, Pater, still in his academic infancy, discovers the hideous details of Winckelmann's death. The thirty-one-year-old Arcangeli is the antithesis of the young men Pater's newfound spiritual mentor had previously described (Winckelmann "has known...many young men more beautiful than Guido's archangel," with irony now duly noted); but, as Pater doubtless discovers in

his research, Winckelmann willingly – at his own request – spent his final days conversing, dining, and strolling around the city with an ugly commoner. If there is something to be repulsed, it is the intense explosion of Winckelmann’s ability to articulate his desire, to enjoy himself with an ugly, pockmarked male prostitute nowhere accounted for in his aesthetics. Hence, the logic: if Winckelmann is left to do as he pleases, he, who is ineluctably attracted to dangerous men who will rob and murder him, will destroy himself, along with many others who might follow his example, so Winckelmann must be kept in check for his own good and for the good of those he inspires. Pater’s devotion to Winckelmann, to his masculine eroticism, is precisely a devotion that says, “I’m ready to celebrate all your virtues, from your unsinged hands to your fiery friendships, just in order to prevent this explosion of desire.” One assumes, with Dellamora, that Pater removes the “Hellenic manner” passage because it drew explicit attention to those Victorian men (Pater being particularly suspect) who believed that they, with the aid of spiritual forefathers like Winckelmann, could reproduce triumphant-colored blossoms. The reason why Pater’s description of Winckelmann’s murder remains the same in both versions, however, should by now be clear: it needs no revising, no omitting, because it was already a successful safeguard against this explosion of Winckelmann’s desire.

The child, rather than promising a beneficent, reproductive future, represents instead the contradictions of Greek pederasty, the odd alignment of hierarchy and equality, desire and *ascesis*, body and mind, activity and passivity. Inman speaks of “the effects of the trauma of 1874 upon Pater’s works” as the best way to discover what Pater himself had discovered about the society in which he lived. When faced with the

disclosure of the Hardinge affair, an affair (between an ascetic don and a precocious undergraduate) based on rumors, hearsay, erotic sonnets, and letters signed “yours lovingly,” Pater did not just discover the circumscribed boundaries within which he would be constrained to live if he were to remain acceptable to polite society. Instead, he *rediscovered* the contradictions of Greek pederasty. Not until 1874 and Pater’s (unofficial) censure, however, did Winckelmann’s murder and Pater’s inability to describe it explicitly become Pater’s (homosexual) primal scene.

I would be remiss, however, if this examination of the Victorian afterlife sidestepped the late modern interest in the invention of the child. How does Pater’s child (the we have missed) fit into what Michael Cobb calls “queer theory and its children”? Cobb writes: “It would be a mistake...to call the current moment ‘queer theory’s turn to the child.’ Nevertheless, some exciting books [he is reviewing] have been devoting much ink to the linking of children and queerness” (119). Certainly, interest in the child’s “queerness” predates queer theory, which is the mistake Cobb warns of; however, there has been a noticeable uptick, one that could certainly be described as a “turn,” especially when so much of it has a common inspirational source: late modern interest in the Victorian period created this focus on the child, and its principal source is James Kincaid’s *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (1992). If this is the case, then why have scholars, all of whom are adept paranoid readers, missed Pater’s omission of Winckelmann’s stabbing and the concomitant appearance of a child? Is mine simply the most paranoid yet, which according to Eve Sedgwick is not an especially great achievement, or is it that the future is always already heteronormative? While these are not the same questions, they are inextricably linked. Paranoid reading’s most distinctive

feature is its faith in exposure, but it is also “anticipatory” in that, in Sedgwick’s words, “there must be no bad surprises.” Therefore, “bad news must always already be known,” which is what constitutes paranoid reading’s “future-oriented vigilance” (130). This vigilance reaches its apex in Lee Edelman’s *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), where Edelman declares that all news about the future is bad, heteronormative news and that we should drop all outlooks that are future-oriented and embrace the death drive. Two prominent queer theorists have attempted to challenge Edelman, but with only partial success because they are both paranoid readings of what Edelman calls “the image of the Child.”

In *Cruising Utopia* (2009), José Esteban Muñoz acknowledges the seductive quality of Edelman’s thesis (“I agree with and feel hailed by much of *No Future*” [91]), yet he insists, “as strongly as I reject reproductive futurity, I nonetheless refuse to give up concepts such as politics, hope, and a future that is not kid stuff” (92). For Muñoz, Edelman concedes too much, if not *everything* that is worth fighting for; however, his book’s epigraph highlights the paradoxical situation in which paranoia places the critical reader. Borrowed from Oscar Wilde’s “The Soul of Man under Socialism,” *Cruising Utopia* begins, “A map of the world that does not include utopia is not worth [even] glancing at.” While rejecting each and every instance of political futurity, Muñoz holds out hope, for “queerness is the not yet here.” Queerness’s not-yet-here, in other words, has *no place* in the present. Moreover, Muñoz does not wish to give up on the child, for despite anticipating this criticism Edelman’s child “is indeed always already white.” While Muñoz says that attacking Edelman vis-à-vis his ostensibly “white gay male

crypto-identity politics...is besides the point,” he makes it clear that we are “not to hand futurity over to normative white reproductive futurity” (95).

If Muñoz refuses to give up hope, especially when it concerns disenfranchised children of color, Tim Dean refuses to give up on Freud’s death drive. Unlike Muñoz, Dean does not feel hailed by Edelman’s book and so instead sets out to show “how Edelman’s use of the notion of the death drive might be reframed for a different – one might say queerer – vision of futurity” (123). Yet, Dean too cannot resist particularizing Edelman’s “Child.” Even though Edelman insists “the image of the Child not be confused with the lived experiences of any historical children” (11), it is precisely these lived experiences, according to Dean, that make children queer. Referencing Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley’s collection *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children* (2004), Dean accuses Edelman of “overlook[ing] all those ways in which, far from being the antithesis of queerness, children may be regarded as the original queers” (128). Edelman, however, does not disagree that “the lived experiences of any historical children” are at odds with our fetishistic investment in “the image of the child” (like Tiny Tim), an investment that has its roots in late-modern studies of Victorian England. In this sense, even if we accept the strongest social constructionist assertion, that the child is a Victorian creation, this is not a Victorian assertion, but rather one *about* the Victorian; this is a late-modern fetish. More to the point, what does Edelman’s emphasis on “the image of the Child” and Muñoz’s and Dean’s criticisms of it mean for Pater’s child?

As I have already said, the child in “Winckelmann” is lively and interested, and if he has beguiled the art historian, one imagines it would have been with a vibrant rather than a melancholic disposition, but beyond that, that is all he is. Is it possible that, like

Edelman (but for a different reason), Pater is only interested, at least here, in “the image of the Child”? Pater’s child can only be enjoyed through the dictates of Plato’s *Symposium*, so instead of representing the future, it represents the difficulty of imagining egalitarian love between men. Otherwise, he (like the stabbing) disappears. Looking back, we see that the child has never been more of a construct, that the late modern scholars who focus on Pater are in fact too paranoid and, paradoxically, have missed Pater’s reparative move. Once again, it is a matter of interpretation. On one level, we have what the text ostensibly represses: (sexual) trauma. On the other, we have the text. And once again, we have a choice, and our choice is not to choose, but to accept the late modern interpretations *and* their shortcomings, the paranoid along with the reparative. If there is a secret, it is an open one: as we look back at Winckelmann and Arcangeli, at pederasty and Pater, we see that (structurally speaking) egalitarian relations presume homosexuality, that marriage reform calls attention to the sex of each partner only to find it of no importance, and that this fact has deadly consequences.

Some twenty years later in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the vicious stabbing finally appears, however, allowing Pater to return, we might say, to the scene of the crime. The passage reads as follows:

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 hunted 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. He glanced wildly around. Something glimmered on the top of the painted chest that faced him. His eye fell on it. He knew what it was. It was a knife that he had brought up, some days before, to cut a piece of cord, and had forgotten to take away with him. *He moved slowly towards it, passing Hallward as he did so. As soon as he got behind him, he seized it and turned round. Hallward stirred in his chair as if he was going to rise. He rushed at him and dug the knife*

*into the great vein that is behind the ear, crushing the man's head down on the table and stabbing again and again.*

*There was a stifled groan and the horrible sound of some one choking with blood. Three times the outstretched arms shot up convulsively, waving grotesquely, stiff-fingered hands in the air. He stabbed him twice more, but the man did not move. Something began to trickle on the floor. He waited for a moment, still pressing the head down. Then he threw the knife on the table, and listened. (278; emphasis added)*

Dorian maneuvers around Basil, for (like Arcangeli) Dorian approaches his victim from behind. But then Wilde's corrections: the appearance of the knife, and the scene's horrific violence. His melodramatic prose is in full force. Such descriptions are precisely what does not appear in Pater's essay. Why here in Wilde, but not in Pater? Craft suggests that in the opening chapters of Wilde's novel desire comes in two different forms and from two different characters: "Basil's [desire] by idealizing Platonism that disdains the call of the flesh and calls instead for its sublimation into art, thought, and prayer; Lord Henry's [desire] by the counterposed 'new hedonism' that repudiates this Platonic disdain and promises instead a renascent being-in-the-flesh, one that refuses to all limitations as it seeks 'to give new form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream'" (122). The picture in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Dorian's relationship to it are created out of this struggle, these forces warring (between spirit and flesh) inside Wilde, as he himself summed up in an 1894 letter to Ralph Payne: "Basil Hallward is what I think I am: Lord Henry what the world thinks me" (*Letters* 352). Wilde closes this summary with: "Dorian is what I would like to be – in other ages, perhaps." Wilde's caveat is telling. In his novel, Dorian momentarily transcends the Basil-Henry deadlock, but only momentarily. This transcendence is of another age, be it antique or of the distant future – regardless, though, Wilde implies, it is certainly not of the present. Meaning that,

ultimately, we are left with only two options: Basil's Platonic sublimations or Henry's disdainful refusals of this oblique method.

It should not surprise us then that in Pater's review, "A Novel by Mr. Oscar Wilde," the central focus is neither Dorian nor Lord Henry, but Basil. As Pater observes,

In contrast with Hallward, the artist, whose sensibilities idealise the world around him, the personality of Dorian Gray, above all, into something magnificent and strange, we might say that Lord Henry, and even more the, from the first, suicidal hero, loses too much in life to be a true Epicurean – loses so much in the way of impressions, of the pleasant memories, and subsequent hopes, which Hallward, by a really Epicurean economy, manages to secure. (130)

While Pater is quick to point out that Wilde "seems not to have identified himself entirely with any one of his characters" (130), this cannot be said so easily of the reviewer, for Pater proceeds to quote a lengthy portion of the text (here truncated): "He [Dorian] is much more to me than a model or a sitter...his beauty is such that art cannot express it...the work I have done, since I met Dorian Gray, is good work, is the best work of my life. But in some curious way his personality has suggested to me an entirely new manner in art, an entirely new mode of style. I see things differently, I think of them differently. I can now recreate life in a way that was hidden from me before" (131). This is the only quotation in this brief, four-page review, and it is worth drawing the reader's attention to it because these words are, of course, Basil Hallward's. While it is Lord Henry who speaks explicitly of "the Hellenic ideal" (19), it is Basil who actually embraces the erotic "economy" that Winckelmann (along with Pater) helped Europeans rediscover. Here, Pater's sympathy for Basil is quite palpable, a sympathy based on male homosexuality's fraught relationship to representation and physicality, settling somewhere between art and sex, between (re)production and death.

Following in the footsteps of Pater's reading of Winckelmann, Basil stresses the fact that at the heart of Dorian's portrait lies a "terror" that may or may not be legible to others. Basil fears that it is legible, that it is a repetition of his first encounter with Dorian: "When our eyes met, I felt that I was growing pale. A curious sensation of terror came over me. I knew that I had come face to face with some one whose mere personality was so fascinating that, if I allowed it to do so, it would absorb my whole nature, my whole soul, my very art itself" (189). We, however, receive only the symbolic residues of this encounter, the artistic attempts to allude to what ultimately cannot be realized: the terror around which "Winckelmann" and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* revolve, the terror that equality is impossible, that hierarchy is all there is. The Wildean twist, of course, is that it is Basil, the Platonic sublimizer, the real Epicurean, who is brutally murdered, not the hedonistic Henry. This twist, though, belies the appearance of a child; that is, it belies the need – one that Pater recognized – to maintain the difference between hierarchy and equality, physicality and representation, sex and art, but also the need to keep this difference in play, to flirt with it without collapsing it. This maintenance continues to be this dissertation's goal. The differences in play are ultimately those of interpretation, of paranoid/depth and reparative/surface readings, differences that inform the essential oddness of two-person partnerships.

## Chapter 4 “Two Is None”: *The Importance of Being Earnest*

In Oscar Wilde’s most successful play, both commercially and artistically, Algernon explains to Jack, “You don’t seem to realize that in married life three is company and two is none” (302). What does “two is none” mean (here)? This is the question this final chapter answers. In short, Algernon wants Jack to understand that, if a couple does not look outside itself for – at the very least – sexual titillation (if not for actual sexual affairs), then they are not worthy of our attention. For Algernon, there’s nothing more distasteful than married people who flirt – with each other. “It’s like washing your clean linen in public,” he says. However, what if we take Algernon’s statement more literally; that is, what if, without the introduction of the third, two really is none because the couple in-itself is nothing, is unrepresentable, unthinkable? If this is the case, the historical linkage between Wilde’s farcical portrayal of bourgeois (heterosexual) marriage and his trials for “gross indecency” make explicit what has remained implicit in other nineteenth-century texts (but explicit in late modern criticism of them): that while the imperative to couple is irrevocably linked to the ability to preserve each partner’s autonomy, the problem with the number 2 is its unrepresentability.

W.H. Auden, himself no stranger to the intricacies of (male) homosexuality at the turn of the century, once wrote of Wilde’s last play:

Like all works of art, it drew its sustenance from life, and, speaking for myself, whenever I see or read the play I always wish I did not know what I do about Wilde’s life at the time he was writing -- that when, for instance, John Worthing talks of going Bunburying, I do not immediately visualize Alfred Taylor’s establishment. On rereading it after his release, Wilde said, ‘It was extraordinary reading the play over. How I used to toy with that Tiger Life.’ At its conclusion, I find myself imagining a sort of nightmare Pantomime Transformation Scene in which, at the touch of the magician’s wand, instead of the workday world’s turning to fairyland, the

country house in a never-never Herfordshire turns into the Old Bailey, the features of Lady Bracknell into those Mr. Justice Wills. Still, it is a masterpiece, and on account of it Wilde will always enjoy the impersonal fame of an artist as well as the notoriety of his personal legend. (323)

If, as Christopher Craft observes, Wilde's play is "a withering critique of the political idea, exigent in the 1890s, that anyone's sexuality, inverted or otherwise, could be natural or unnatural at all" (112), then it becomes easier to understand the conundrum Auden encounters as it is captured by his wish "not [to] know what I do about Wilde's life at the time he was writing [the play]." In retrospect, Auden asserts, it is impossible to disassociate Bunburying from acts of gross indecency and a "confirmed Bunburyist" from a (male) homosexual. The play, however, is not about deciphering a code in Wilde's text, in determining, for instance, how closely Wilde toyed with that Tiger Life when he wrote *Earnest*; instead, it is about marriage. It can easily be said (and it has been) that Wilde denaturalizes hetero marriage by equating it with farce, although one might say (yet more anachronistically) that so do most Restoration comedies. The difference, however, between Wilde's play and, say, William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675) is its timing. *The Country Wife* is a farce about cuckoldry (which, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick observes, "is by definition a sexual act, performed on a man, by another man" [*Between Men* 49]), whereas *Earnest* is a farce about marriage *per se*, about the couple. Wilde's play (it was on stage when his trials commenced) intimately links the institution of marriage with "that Tiger Life," placing this life at its center, something that Auden wishes he had not done.

I invoke here three seminal, LGBT-studies readings of the play: Joel Fineman's 1980 "The Significance of Literature: *The Importance of Being Earnest*"; Craft's 1990 "Alias Bunbury: Desire and Termination in *The Importance of Being Earnest*"; and

Sedgwick's 1993 "Tales of the Avunculate: Queer Tutelage in *The Importance of Being Earnest*." I invoke these readings of because *Earnest* is both a play about marriage and about "that Tiger Life," but all three readings predate LGBT activism's ("neoliberal") turn towards same-sex marriage, so all three articles engage Wilde's marriage farce without the presumption that same-sex marriage will soon take LGBT politics' center-stage. (For each, marriage and homosexuality are diametrically opposed.) Just as Wilde said after his release from prison that "it was extraordinary reading [*Earnest*] over," it is similarly extraordinary to reread this play – along with late modern critics Craft, Fineman, Sedgwick and a few others such as Jeff Nunokawa, Jonathan Dollimore, Kevin Ohi and Shelton Waldrep – in conjunction with the debate over same-sex marriage. Therefore, I bring these three late modern critics together in order to place the central issue raised by this dissertation – the problem of the number 2 – by demonstrating that 2 is, in fact, *none*; that is, that 2 is, in the end, an unthinkable number. Sedgwick's reading is the most germane for this dissertation because it resists the temptation to turn Wilde into a queer theorist content with exposing (in a paranoid fashion) the hidden elements in Wilde's text. Instead, Sedgwick remains content with its surface, where the uncles and aunts reside, thereby introducing us to what I call Wilde's reparative avunculate.

In "Tales of the Avunculate," Sedgwick's goal is to resist the temptation to view the equation (hetero/homo equals difference/sameness) as the secret of Wilde's play. For instance, writing first of Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1849), Craft asserts: "Since the homo is lost or banished only to be rediscovered in and as the hetero (which is itself thus constituted as a memorial of a former undifferentiated sameness), all longing remains for the homo even as it submits to the mediation of the hetero. Difference itself thus bespeaks

a desire for sameness – speaks, like the poet, in memoriam” (98). The poem’s earlier, more youthful homoeroticism is radically abandoned in Tennyson’s “evolutionary narrative,” and this abandonment allows Craft to “identif[y]...the homosexual with the general category of sameness, and, correlatively, of the heterosexual with the general category of difference,” which is “compactly performed in Craft’s [“hetero”/“homo”] abbreviations” (Nunokawa “Extinction” 473n8). Thus, in “Alias Bunbury,” Craft can write: “So decisive is the descent of the father’s name, so swift its powers of compulsion and organization, that (at least seemingly) it subdues the oscillations of identity, straightens the byways of desire, and completes – *voilà* – the marital teleology of the comic text” (131). Sedgwick criticizes Craft, Fineman (who sees the play as an analysis of the working of the signifier), and Dollimore (who, more generally, sees Wilde perversely, queerly inverting all binarisms) by emphasizing the fact that Wilde does *not* structure his play around a hetero/homo binary based simply on sameness and difference; according to Sedgwick, we are not “to admire Wilde for being Derrida or Lacan *avant la lettre*...[where] ‘inversion’ and the ‘homosexual’ are hailed as magically exact precursor-supplements to a line of modernist/postmodern phantasmatic” (55).

At the outset of this dissertation, I called reparative reading *supplemental*: in Sedgwick’s case, she ostensibly supplements Craft et al. “I find these deconstructive readings of Wilde,” writes Sedgwick, “indispensably interesting and, to an almost tautological degree, ‘true’”; however, she stresses, “it also seems urgent as it is difficult to find some alternative approaches” (55). Her alternative approach (what I have called the reparative avunculate) attempts to sidestep the fact that “two is none,” that the claustrophobic logic of the marriage paradox is not the only way individuals can (fail to)

relate to one another. Again, the concept of reciprocal superiority encourages us to seek out the reparative, to embrace same-sex marriage's promise of perfect equality, but it simultaneously reminds us not to dispense with the paranoid, since this promise is (and will always be) pure fantasy. In this sense, the reparative is a response to a "true" situation: the seductive yet illusionary promise of same-sex marriage. Sedgwick, therefore, embraces the avunculate as an escape from these binary prisons, from these stultifying pairings, but as we will find, a letter always arrives at its destination.

Sedgwick begins her alternative approach by emphasizing that Wilde remains rather securely within the realm of nineteenth-century sexuality, for his pronouncements and his actions coincide with male-male sexual relations that are based explicitly on hierarchies, ones attached to the ancient Greece formulated by Victorian Hellenism. In words already cited in the previous chapter, Sedgwick claims, "Wilde's own eros was most closely tuned to the note of pederastic love in process of being superseded – and, we may as well as say, radically misrepresented – by the homo/hetero imposition" (57-58). These hierarchies – be they of age, class, race/ethnicity, nationality, or of sheer experience or "initiatedness" (57) – define these "same-sex" relations in terms of difference rather than, after the homo/hetero imposition, in terms of sameness. By focusing so heavily on the last moments of the play ("let's begin – but only because everyone else does – with the Name of the Father," writes Sedgwick [52]), or, in other words, with the psychoanalytic fascination with "the Name of the Father!" (58; Sedgwick's exclamation point), these other essays overlook the erotic role (whether actual or euphemistic) that uncles and aunts play, overlook the fact that the play does not conform to the parent-based Oedipal triangle, and overlook, finally, any alternative

readings to this imposition. It is for this reason that in *Tame Passions of Wilde* (2003) Nunokawa coins the term “Earnestosexual” (43). This term invokes what Nunokawa calls “desire-lite,” that is, Wilde’s “tame passions,” a reference to the ninth episode of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), where one character states that “the very essence of Wilde” is “the light touch” (163). For this reason, Nunokawa argues for a middle ground:

Wilde’s brand of desire-lite will be both familiar and unfamiliar to those schooled in contemporary theories of dissident sexualities: familiar because of its egregious artificiality – cutting itself off from Nature where passions eccentric to the marriage-plot...have found their grass-roots support...unfamiliar, though, when we consider that this performance of desire works not to subvert heterosexual normativity, but rather to cooperate with it. (44-45)

And yet, Sedgwick can hardly agree, for this reconciliation would be at the expense of her criticism of psychoanalysis. Desire-lite’s flexibility brings together “egregious artificiality” and “heterosexual normativity,” allowing them to exist in a symbiotic relation too similar to the equation that Sedgwick rejects and, according to her, that psychoanalysis supports. For instance, in her criticism of Kaja Silverman’s psychoanalytic reading of Henry James, she begins by quoting Silverman: “The Jamesian phantasmatic can...be said to enclose homosexuality within heterosexuality, and heterosexuality within homosexuality” (73; Sedgwick’s ellipsis). For Sedgwick, there must be alternative approaches to engaging with sexual difference.

Sedgwick spends much energy not to destroy the Oedipal triangle, but to provide a viable alternative to it. (Derrida’s critique of Lacan also targets the triangle.) Hence, tales of the *avunculate*, an anthropological term used to denote a patrilineal relationship between a man and the sons of his sister, which Sedgwick eventually employs to include relations “across and perhaps therefore within generations” (63). She begins her essay

with an enigmatic quotation from E.M. Forster (“There have always been aunts in my family, and Uncle Willie also had his aunts” [52]) that provides the basis for thinking outside the triangle. “Forget the Name of the Father!” (58), Sedgwick demands, for only then can we see what is in plain sight, that is, what a “deconstructive” reading of the play misses. “Uncle” and “aunt,” common nineteenth-century sexual slang where the former could mean “patron, friend, literal uncle, godfather, adoptive father, sugar daddy” and the latter “a passive sodomite” (as in Marcel Proust’s “La Race des tantes”), “don’t add up to two complementary male roles, as for instance a ‘masculine’ and a ‘feminine.’” “Even if you wanted to,” Sedgwick concludes, “you couldn’t pair an uncle up with auntie and bundle them off for a happy, heterosexually intelligible honeymoon” (59). Sedgwick here has two express goals. One is to show how uncles and aunts, literal *and* figurative ones, disrupt the psychoanalytic triad, while the other is to show how disrupting the triad unsettles the modern hetero/homo definition. Uncles and aunts disrupt the holy trinity of the father-mother-child family “[b]ecause aunts and uncles...are adults whose intimate access to children needn’t depend on their own pairing or procreation, it’s very common, of course, for some of them to have the office of representing nonconforming or nonreproductive sexualities to children.” Sedgwick continues: “The space for nonconformity carved out by the avunculate goes beyond the important provision of role models for proto-gay kids....[I]f having grandparents means perceiving your parents as somebody’s children, then having aunts and uncles...means perceiving your parents as somebody’s sibs – not, that is, as alternately abject and omnipotent links in a chain of compulsion and replication that leads inevitably to *you*; but rather as elements in a varied, contingent, recalcitrant but re-forming seriality” (63). This is the “queer tutelage” in the

subtitle of Sedgwick's essay, and a highly personal one at that, with Sedgwick's own beloved aunts becoming part of the lesson: "Aunt Estelle and Aunt Frances ['the best loved people in my family'], sisters who slept in the same room for most of their eight decades" (63). Through such passages, we come to understand Forster's observation that "there have always been aunts in my family." Queerness starts at home, and it starts specifically with the extended family rather than with the father-mother-child triad. Uncles and aunts disrupt this triad that constructs one's parents as the source that "leads inevitability to *you*"; instead, the influences are exceedingly variable, fungible.

In Wilde's play, these queer possibilities are there for everyone to see, that is, if psychoanalysis does not rush us to its final line. Sedgwick's demand that we forget means not losing sight of what is right in front of our eyes. Two of her examples should suffice. The first is Algernon's interrogation of Jack concerning the inscription in his cigarette case. The inscription reads: "From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack" (299); and thus ensues a hilarious exchange (based on Jack's blundering subterfuge that Cecily is his aunt) about how "some aunts are tall, some aunts are not tall. That is a matter that surely an aunt may be allowed to decide for herself" (299). Plus, as Sedgwick notes, in the original four-act version, Jack continues: "There is a great variety of aunts. You can have aunts of any shape or size you like. My aunt is a small aunt" (360n10). The clincher, however, and the remark that explains Sedgwick's observation that "you couldn't pair an uncle up with auntie and bundle them off for a happy, heterosexually intelligible honeymoon" is Algernon's exquisite response: "There is no objection, I admit, to an aunt being a small aunt, but why an aunt, no matter what her size may be, should call her own nephew her uncle, I can't quite make out" (299). By

forgetting the Name of the Father, we are allowed to embrace this wonderful confusion, for here the child is not the telos of the heterosexual couple, but rather the creation of multi-directional collisions.

The second example involves the practice of Bunburying:

ALGERNON: A man who marries without knowing Bunbury has a very tedious time of it.

JACK: That is nonsense. If I marry a charming girl like Gwendolen, and she is the only girl I ever saw in my life that I would marry, I certainly won't want to know Bunbury.

ALGERNON: Then your wife will. (302)

When Sedgwick cites these lines, her purpose is to show that Bunburying hardly conforms to male homosexuality, at least as Algernon is describing it here, since here he ascribes the same desire ("to know Bunbury") to his cousin Gwendolen. Here, as with the first example, Sedgwick is stressing the fluidity that the play endorses, arguing against Fineman, where he concludes that "we may rechristen the autological as the autosexual, or rather, the homosexual, and we may equally revalue the heterological as the heterosexual. This leaves us with the psychoanalytic conclusion that the fundamental desire of the reader of literature is the desire of the homosexual for the heterosexual, or rather, substituting the appropriate figurative embodiments of these abstractions, the desire of the man to be sodomized by the woman" (88-89; 66n20). Sedgwick is arguing against such psychoanalytic fixity, as when (in a passage cited at the beginning of this dissertation) she states that "it is startling to realize that the aspect of 'homosexuality' that now seems in many ways most immutable...[is] its dependence on defining sameness between partner" (57). Her challenge to us is to find alternative ways of engaging in relations not defined by sameness, not defined by the psychoanalytic triad that in a claustrophobic manner cancels out alternatives.

Sedgwick proposes, therefore, an alternative reading of the play's dénouement, one based on her "tales of the avunculate," but one that in good reparative fashion, she is not eager to endorse as a "strong theory":

Supposing we wanted to ask whether the play, as a play, narrows or extends, "stabilizes" or "destabilizes," the holy name of the family as our culture hands it to us: we would have to ask conclusively, at this point, a difficult question: what it means that the play's central marriage, the one between Jack and Gwendolen, can't take place until Jack is demonstrated to be, not only Algernon's "true" brother, but (as Ernest) his *own* "true" brother; Aunt Augusta's "true" nephew; at once Algernon's big nephew and big uncle (as Algernon is also marrying his "little aunt" cum "little" niece" Cecily) – and, finally, his own wife's first cousin, mediator between the sibship and the avunculate, in the chiasmic, diagonal relation that in most cultures even now forms the immediate defining demarcation, from one side or the other, of the boundary legally called "incest": that between inside and outside the family. (70)

What worries Sedgwick is that this alternative reading really is not one, that it "frames the play yet again in terms of its conclusion" (70). Rather, Sedgwick wishes to argue for a notion of family that is "elastic enough to do justice to the depth and sometimes durability of nonmarital and/or nonprocreative bonds, same-sex bonds, nondyadic bonds, bonds not defined by genitivity, 'step'-bonds, adult sibling bonds, nonbiological bonds across generations, etc." (71). In other words, she adds on a personal note, "the people I like to spend Thanksgiving with" (71). For Sedgwick, this adds an "avunculate angle" to the psychoanalytic triad, showing that this "heterosexist" triangle is "always already awash" with queer potential. Moreover, she does this not by being more paranoid than, say, Craft, not by anticipating Craft's response before he or anyone else can respond, but by being generous to Wilde's play.

Yet, this generosity has its limits, and we encounter these limits when we attempt to understand Algernon's assertion that "two is none." This is a phrase that Sedgwick

does not incorporate into her analysis, which she in fact (intentionally?) excises from it. Sedgwick stops the block quote with Algernon saying “Then your wife will [want to know Bunbury],” but he continues: “You don’t seem to realize that in married life three is company and two is none.” When Algernon says that “three is company,” it is difficult not to be reminded of Sedgwick’s earlier argument in *Between Men* (1985), where desire is, in essence, always triangulated, always bifurcated outwards, extended in more than one direction in order to soften its blow; that is, where men’s desire for one another is tempered by the presence of a woman as a necessary third party. Two alone (of whatever sex) is more difficult to imagine. The importance of *being* married means exactly this: the imperative to couple despite – or, more accurately, because of – marriage’s irresistible (and fantasmatic) promise of perfect equality.

Why does everyone begin with the Name of the Father? While Sedgwick is more interested in the creation of siblings at the end of the play, she admits that “the glitteringly implausible cross-gender marriages...dramatically, *inevitably* arrive to cement the glitteringly implausible cross-gender courtships” (68; emphasis added). Generically, a comedy must end in marriage, but the inevitability that cements this play’s ending (its last line) remains unexplained. “Let’s begin – but only because everyone else does – with the Name of the Father,” says Sedgwick, but is this caveat (“but only because everyone else does”) an innocent one? Sedgwick’s principal criticism of psychoanalysis is that it endorses a developmental narrative of the individual that “tacitly installs the procreative monogamous heterosexual couple as the origin, telos, and norm of sexuality as a whole” (“Rectum” 74). Worse yet, Sedgwick regrets, “psychoanalysis, profoundly as it has been shaped by homophobic and heterosexist assumptions and histories, has

nevertheless not become dispensable as an interpretative tool for any project involving sexual representation” (73-74). Sedgwick’s tortured grammar (“nevertheless not become dispensable”) accentuates her difficulty – and, I would add, her desire – in thinking sex outside of psychoanalysis, even if (as she herself seems to admit) the letter always arrives at its destination. Despite this (ostensible) admission, Sedgwick clearly – and, I think, purposefully – ignores the role the unconscious plays in psychoanalysis, an elision highlighted in Tim Dean’s vitriolic review of *Tendencies* (1993), Sedgwick’s collection where “Tales of the Avunculate” originally appeared.

I will not belabor the point that Sedgwick views Freud-Lacanian psychoanalysis as being “shaped by homophobic and heterosexist assumptions and histories,” nor do I wish to contest this portrayal; rather, I will focus on one aspect of Dean’s review: the assertion that Sedgwick’s view of sexuality is itself developmental. In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick asks (rhetorically): “where would the whole, astonishing and metamorphic Western romance tradition (I include psychoanalysis) be if people’s sexual desire, of all things, were even momentarily assumed to be transparent to themselves?” (26). From this, we can conclude four things: first, Sedgwick believes that, if only “momentarily,” individuals should have the ability to understand their “sexual desire”; second, that robbing an individual of this ability is possibly “the most intimate violence possible,” that it is “a terribly consequential seizure” (26); third, psychoanalysis (and its formulation of the unconscious) “alienate[s] conclusively, definitionally” the self from its desire; and fourth, while (in this adumbration) I have neutered the individual subject with a gender-neutral pronoun, this is a sacrifice Sedgwick is not willing to make, for (she asserts) “a great deal depends – for all women, for lesbians, for gay men, and possibly for

all men – on the fostering of our ability to arrive at an understanding of sexuality that will respect a certain irreducibility in it to the terms and relations of gender” (16). As Dean rightly observes, Sedgwick “pictures psychoanalytic interpretations of people’s ‘own’ desire as felonious, tantamount to kidnap or rape” (122), for it not only impedes individuals’ access to their sexual desires and dismisses gender’s “irreducibility,” but more consequentially, it also *violently* impedes, it *mercilessly* seizes hold of individuals, marring their access to their own sexual desire. So the problem is that Sedgwick asserts that one has – or, at least, can have – a direct relationship to desire, as if (as Dean indicates) one’s desire were actually one’s own. Yet, “without the psychoanalytic concept of the unconscious,” Dean concludes, “Sedgwick reinstates the kind of normative, ego-based model of subjectivity – the self – that led to the pathologizing of perverse desire in the first place” (122).

Moreover, Sedgwick collapses the history and theory of psychoanalysis with the crystallization of the modern hetero/homo definition. The best counterarguments are Henry Abelove’s “Freud, Male Homosexuality, and the Americans” and Arnold Davidson’s “How to Do the History of Psychoanalysis.” (Both essays predate Sedgwick’s and she would have doubtlessly been familiar with both, especially Abelove’s.) From the beginning, Sedgwick contends that psychoanalysis is tainted, and if “from the beginning” means Freud, then things look quite different and inevitability should be something that psychoanalysis might be able to explain rather than be blamed for. Starting with the latter, Davidson’s concern is to differentiate Freud from other turn-of-the-century sexologists. While their terminology may have been similar, Freud’s “conceptual space” differs greatly from theirs. For the sexologists’ “conceptual space,” “the class of diseases

that affected the sexual instinct was precisely the sexual perversions” (258). Late-nineteenth-century psychiatry conceptualized that “the sexual instinct,” which (it metaleptically asserts) fell under its purview, could be negatively affected (diseased), and the result were “the sexual perversions.” Coming from within this discourse, Freud begins *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* with the following sentence: “The fact of the existence of sexual needs in human beings and animals is expressed in biology by the assumption of a ‘sexual instinct,’ on the analogy of the instinct of nutrition, that is of hunger.” This is the position of late-nineteenth-century psychiatry: the sexual instinct was like a “sixth sense,” and operated like the other five. When it came to the sexual instinct, its unquestioned end was propagation so that a normally operating sexual instinct’s object (the opposite sex) and its aim (coitus) were inextricably linked. When writing about “inversion,” Freud calls this entire assumption, which is the basis of the definition of the sexual instinct, into question:

It has been brought to our notice that we have been in the habit of regarding the connection between the sexual instinct and the sexual object as more intimate than it in fact is. Experience of the cases that are considered abnormal has shown us that in them the sexual instinct and the sexual object are merely soldered together – a fact which we have been in danger of overlooking in consequence of the uniformity of the normal picture, where the object appears to form part and parcel of the instinct. We are thus warned to loosen the bond that exists in our thought between instinct and object. It seems probable that the sexual instinct is in the first instance independent of its object; nor is its origin likely to be due to its object's attractions. (qtd. in Davidson 264)

This observation (that “the sexual instinct and the sexual object are merely soldered together”) leads us to Abelow’s article, which usefully highlights Freud’s most homophile assertions. For brevity’s sake, I will only quote the most profound one: “All human beings are capable of making a homosexual object-choice and, in fact, have made

one in their unconscious.” When Dean speaks of “the kind of normative, ego-based model of subjectivity – the self – that led to the pathologizing of perverse desire in the first place,” this is what he is speaking of: essentially, there is, for Freud, no such thing as perverse desire because desire can only be perverse if its aim is consciously understood. Freud is not responsible for crystallizing the modern hetero/homo definition. In fact, this definition thwarts some of his most radical assertions.

Freud implicitly explains why the marriage paradox (the reformist desire to enter into a two-person partnership, an attachment in which both partners are equal but where both parties are free *not* to compromise, since each *must* exercise its individual autonomy) is so vexing: marriage equality à la reciprocal superiority requires soldering, but the joint or seam will never hold. The delicious, punning absurdity of the play’s ending has less to do with the superiority of the Name of the Father than it does with its undoing. Along with Sedgwick, we take comfort in the company three affords (where the number three only means “more than two”), but it is also the same reason that “two is none.” When Jack finally says “I’ve now realized for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being Earnest” (358), we see that now, in the twenty-first century, the joke is on us. Marriage reform is at its most absurd (in the sense of the Latin phrase *reductio ad absurdum*) when earnestness of purpose loses all sense of proportion, and this is why Wilde’s play is so well suited for the same-sex marriage movement. It is not that Bunburying is code for anal sex (between men), as Auden feared; rather, it is that marriage thrives on Bunburying, thrives on the company of three, thrives (we should add) on the avunculate – and not on egalitarian, anti-hierarchical twosomes. The role of psychoanalysis here is to explain why 2 is the oddest number, why reciprocal superiority

is the *reductio ad absurdum* of marriage, and why the modern hetero/homo definition operates in the nefarious ways it does. In addition, while psychoanalysis (like Sedgwick) can provide an alternative to these terrible twosomes (a different alternative, of course, one relating to the protean nature of the drive [*Trieb*]), it too is shackled by this number.

One final word on Sedgwick and psychoanalysis. The best evidence that Sedgwick is fully aware of Freud's assertions concerning objectless desire (and Davidson, Abelow, and others) is that *protean* is her word, though in *Epistemology of the Closet* it is not without qualification: "the *supposed* protean mobility of sexual desire," Sedgwick writes, "where Freud's antiminoritizing account only gained...in influence by being articulated through a developmental narrative in which heterosexist and masculinist ethical sanctions found ready camouflage" (84; my emphasis). Not only is Sedgwick skeptical about Freud's account of sexual desire's "protean mobility," it is unclear who is to blame, and what they are to be blamed for. It seems as if Sedgwick's real enemies are those who found cover there, but as Abelow demonstrates, Freud argued vociferously against the pathologization of homosexuality, and spent great energy (much of it wasted) in trying to convince American psychoanalysts and psychiatrists to do the same, with one of his conclusions being, in part, that "sexual morality as society – and at its most extreme, American society – defines it, seems very despicable to me. I stand for a freer sexual life" (qtd. in Abelow 11). In the end, however, Freud is to blame, but that is because his name is, for Sedgwick's "consumerist" account of psychoanalysis, a synecdoche for a vast array of "homophobic," "heterosexist," "masculinist" writings that are only tangentially related to psychoanalysis. As Dean summarizes:

[S]he treats psychoanalysis as if it were woven from a single cloth, seamless, and therefore tainted in the whole by damage in the

part...Treating psychoanalytic theory as essentially continuous, her implicit epistemology of science is – like her implicit ontology of subjectivity – developmental. That is, what she calls “origins damaged by homophobia” produce outcomes that are, necessarily, likewise damaged. Sedgwick’s rhetoric of “damage” implies that the cultural biases infecting Freud’s theory of sexuality haunt all psychoanalytic accounts of sexuality to the present day. (125)

For Sedgwick, the exception to this rule is Melanie Klein, the psychoanalyst not irreparably damaged by Freud’s legacy. In one of her last publications, “Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes” and, more generally, in her 2003 collection *Touching Feeling*, Sedgwick demonstrates how focusing on affect helps us to see the alternative relations on the surface (of Wilde’s play), bringing (we might say) all those people and their myriad ways of relating to one another together for Thanksgiving dinner. Particularly attractive are Klein’s use of *positions* rather than *stages*, for “Klein [that is, unlike Freud] wanted to convey, with the idea of position, a much more flexible to-and-fro process” (Hinshelwood 394). In “The Difference Affect Makes,” she states, “that’s the way I now am about ideas. I like them pretty chunky. Not dramatic or caricatural, certainly not dualistic (never dualistic), but big, big and palpable; big enough so there’s no swallowing risk, and also so I won’t forget them, which hasn’t become any less of a danger as I’ve gotten older” (628). Flexible, palpable, chunky – descriptors of alternative relations, ones that compelled Sedgwick to rethink a mainstay of LGBT history and theory: Foucault’s “repressive hypothesis.”

Foucault, writes Sedgwick, “seems to me to be far more persuasive in analyzing this massive intellectual blockage than in finding ways to obviate it” (635). As for Volume 1 of his *History of Sexuality*, this is true (though it ignores his subsequent writings, especially those relating to “self-fashioning”); however, it is the circular nature

of the repressive hypothesis – and of Foucault’s analysis of it – that Sedgwick too seeks to obviate. (Interestingly, the same can be of Sedgwick’s analysis of paranoid reading, that it “seems to me to be far more persuasive in analyzing this massive intellectual blockage than in finding ways to obviate it.”) Sedgwick’s argument is not again “this massive intellectual blockage”; rather, it is that full-frontal attacks are wholly ineffective. (Foucault, I think, would agree.) Because LGBT paranoid reading’s heyday was in many ways a response to the HIV/AIDS crisis, Sedgwick says, “I found myself at this point [in the mid-1990s] increasingly discontented with the predominance of the self-perpetuating kinds of thought that I increasingly seemed to be recognizing under the rubric of paranoia” (640). Sedgwick’s use of the avunculate is her early attempt to break free of this vicious circle. “Two is none,” however, remains untouched. Sedgwick’s search for alternatives begets a paranoid reading that concludes that this search revolves around the unacknowledged fact that these alternatives are merely farcical. They tickle us, we laugh, but ultimately we are left with the bond of marriage, and nothing more.

What does this assessment do for our image of Oscar Wilde? What, in other words, is Wilde’s Victorian afterlife? The scholastic (and wholly appropriate) answer: there are two Oscar Wildes. Kevin Ohi argues that “the subversive Wilde grounds his social critique in the undermining of linguistic conventions, while the sentimental Wilde teaches by example, earnestly testifying to or symptomatizing a spirit crushed by sexual oppression...or to art’s exorbitant failure to compensate for the miseries of the flesh” (310). While Ohi’s article is a wonderful reading of Wilde’s nearly unclassifiable text, *De Profundis*, it does not solve the problem it highlights at its beginning; that is, late modern readers support (sometimes tacitly, sometimes overtly) this two-Wildes opposition by

favoring one and dismissing, denigrating, or ignoring the other. Ohi suggests that this opposition should not exist, but the problem is that it does, and Ohi's article perpetuates it even while it scolds us for having maintained it. Appropriately enough, Shelton Waldrep's contribution to the *Victorian Afterlife* collection, "The Uses and Misuses of Oscar Wilde," provides the perfect response, complete with the ambiguity between, given two options, what is the proper way to use Wilde. Waldrep's options – ones he does not embrace, but instead sees as part of our current understanding of Wilde – are similar to the ones Ohi describes: "Wilde as both a flamboyant rogue and, *paradoxically*, a tragic figure" (56; my emphasis), though Waldrep sees these opposing images as not only incongruent (as Ohi does), but irreconcilable. Neil Barlett surmises that it has something to do with marriage: not only Wilde's own, but that *The Importance of Being Earnest*, "his best and most successful play," "celebrates the triumph of marriage over adversity, brings down its curtain on a trio of engagements, and was deliberately premiered on St. Valentine's day." This leads Barlett to ask, "If I read this story in a certain light...in what sense of the word was this most famous of homosexuals actually a homosexual?" (34; qtd. in Waldrep 59). The Wilde paradox, that is, the coexistence of the subversive and the sentimental, of the flamboyant and the tragic, reflects the interpretative problems concerning marriage and homosexuality. Their close proximity is disconcerting, and calls out for reconciliation; instead of reconciliation, however, one perpetuates the paradox, asserting one half only to imply the other. Wilde, in this sense of our late modern struggles to define him, is a synecdoche for the marriage paradox, which is on greatest display not in *De Profundis*, but in *The Importance of Being Earnest* and Sedgwick's attempt to reinterpret it reparatively. Sedgwick's late modern encounter with Wilde's

play demonstrates that its perversity is more perverse than others (even LGBT others) had thought. At the same time, however, the alternative queer possibilities that Sedgwick describes revolves around two things: first, the sentimental, fantastic marriage resolutions and, second, the grimmer fact that these possibilities add up to nothing.

Let us turn then to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and, specifically, to Sedgwick's reading of the novel – or, rather, to her summary in “Tales of the Avunculate” of her argument in *Epistemology of the Closet*:

The novel takes a plot that is distinctively one of male-male Desire – the competition between Basil Hallward and Lord Henry Wotton for Dorian Gray's love – and condenses it into the plot of the mysterious bond of figural likeness and figural expiation between Dorian Gray and his own portrait. The suppression of the original defining *differences between* Dorian and his male admirers – differences of age and initiatedness, in the first place – in favor of the problematic of Dorian's *similarity to* the painted male image that is and isn't himself, seems to reenact the discursive eclipse in this period, by the “homo”-sexual model, of the Classically based *pederastic* assumption that male-male bonds of any duration must be structured around some diacritical difference – old/young, for example, initiator/initiate, or insertive/receptive – whose binarizing cultural power would be at least comparable to that of gender. (57; Sedgwick's emphasis)

It only “*seems* to reenact the discursive eclipse in this period,” however, since Sedgwick will then go on to say that this is not the case, which is what allows her to engage Wilde's later play in a reparative fashion. In “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading,” she admits that her own past work has been deeply paranoid (126). Her above paraphrase is an interesting example of this admission because in *Epistemology* this hetero/homo reading is paranoid, while the avunculate-angle reading, which puts the hetero/homo reading to the side, is not. More importantly, we perceive a certain alignment: the paranoid reading perpetuates the crystallization of the modern hetero/homo definition; the reparative one seeks to embrace the many relations this definition obscures, *and nothing*

*more* for that would return the reading to paranoid exposure. However, if one wishes to see how closely these two reading styles are related to one another, how one is always already implying the other, the proof is in Sedgwick's paraphrase: it all depends on *seems*, that is, the uneasy coexistence of the paranoid and the reparative.

It is worth our while finally to return to Wilde's statement regarding the three main characters of *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*: "Basil Hallward is what I think I am: Lord Henry what the world thinks me. Dorian is what I would like to be – in other ages, perhaps." As I said in the last chapter, Pater clearly identifies with Basil Hallward, but Wilde makes it much more difficult for us to know whom he identifies with. I suggest that this enigmatic observation is written on the seam, between the paranoid and the reparative, for Wilde appears to be embracing all three of characters. Alan Sinfield says that desire-for and desire-to-be is endemic in sex-same relations, but he also says that narcissism, much maligned by LGBT studies, deserves another look:

On Freud's account, narcissistic love is far less limited than the name suggests. Like anaclitic [other directed] love, it requires two people, and only in one variant are they supposed to be the same; otherwise there is a significant difference. In practice, a relationship with an individual who represents the person you have been, or might become, is likely to involve ceaseless negotiation. You are faced continually with both the distinctiveness of the other person (the extent to which s/he does not embody your ideal self) and the contradictions and failures in your own yearning (your ideal self is not as likeable, coherent, or attainable as you might wish to suppose.) In fact "anaclitic" doesn't mean independent, but attached; specifically, "leaning-on"...Narcissism, then, may operate in an anaclitic way. (14)

Is Dorian "your ideal self...not as likeable, coherent, or attainable as you might wish to suppose"? Is Basil the "one variant [where]...they [are] supposed to be the same"? "Ceaseless negotiation" – is this why others identify Wilde with Lord Henry? I have asked these question (though not answered them) to explain more fully what I mean by

“it all depends on *seems*.” Under the spell of paranoia, Sedgwick describes the novel’s “problematic of Dorian’s *similarity to the painted male image that is and isn’t himself*” as its central feature, brushing aside Basil and Lord Henry’s influence. There is, however, much truth in this condensation. For in one reading, the novel is ultimately about Dorian’s relationship to his portrait. In another, one suggested by Wilde’s remarks and by Sinfield’s emphasis on the capacious nature of narcissism, we should keep the first alongside a more reparative reading, soldering them together if necessary.

Plus, these options should come as no surprise to us late modern readers who see Wilde as a bifurcated figure. Ohi observes that parts of *Dorian Gray* contribute to our vision of the subversive Wilde, while others contribute to our vision of the sentimental one – or, for Waldrep, the flamboyant rogue and the tragic figure. The point, I think, is not that the opposition should not exist, but that it should be embraced. Returning to the beginning of this dissertation, once scholars embraced the idea that “the sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (43), they quickly embraced this dictum, then became dissatisfied with its ostensible simplicity, and finally dedicated their time to complicating, criticizing, or overturning what had become received wisdom. The dismissal has been too quick. In many ways, large portions of second-generation queer scholars are working in a reparative mode, thanks in large part to Sedgwick; however, by doing so we miss the reasons why we are operating in this mode in the first place: the modern hetero/homo definition begets paranoia, and it is a paranoia that we cannot wish away, for no matter how capacious LGBTQQIA inquiry becomes it still must contend with this definition.

## **Afterword**

### **Barebacking and the Victorian Afterlife**

The Victorian afterlife, I have argued, merges the paranoid optic with the reparative in that it seeks to unearth the perverse concealed within the ostensibly prudish and, at the same time, it hopes to sympathize with Victorian literary material, to touch it without paranoia, without the belief that what is most important about this material is repressed or hidden inside. This is how we have read 1850s marriage reform and the same-sex-marriage politics of the early twenty-first century; it is also how, looking to the future, we should read the subculture of barebacking.

If queer theory, Tom Boellstroff argues, offers “a critique of marriage that draws on concerns with its politics of recognition (and disrecognition of the unmarried), the place of marriage in capitalist production, and the inequalities and violences so often found within marriage and so often linked to hierarchies of gender, race, and class,” then queer theory is in a “tricky” position in regards to same-sex marriage because proponents of same-sex marriage often argue that marriage “will ‘civilize’ gay and lesbian persons into upholding ‘traditional’ norms of monogamy and propriety” (227). In this afterword, instead of proposing that queer theory is not necessarily opposed to marriage (as Boellstroff argues), I propose that marriage (in terms of reciprocal superiority) can directly benefit queer theory.

One conspicuous place where HIV/AIDS and paranoid reading retain their relevance in LGBT studies and politics is in recent discussions of “barebacking.” For instance, at the Gay Shame conference in 2003, Leo Bersani noted the absence of HIV/AIDS and barebacking as topics of conversation, which seemed conspicuous given the conference’s emphasis on shame. “When I mentioned this at the conference,” writes

Bersani, “I was dismissed as having bought into the homophobic media propaganda, which, I was told, has transformed a few isolated incidents into a general practice” (*Intimacies* 34). In other words, Bersani was dismissed for being paranoid and for perpetuating homophobia. Citing Tim Dean’s research, Bersani sees this response as willfully naïve, for the question remains: Why, despite sex education programs spearheaded by gay men, are gay men still having risky sex? And the answers remain singular, simplistic, and all too familiar, which is to say that, regardless of who one talks to, the reason why is always “pathology,” for what causes gay men to make pathological decisions is internalized homophobia. This presupposition, according to Tim Dean, has been detrimental to our understanding of the phenomenon of bareback sex because it colors every conclusion, for every question presupposes the configuration of its answer. Asking “what do gay men want?” (as David Halperin does) tends to elicit answers that turn gay male subjectivity into a false consciousness that closely resembles the homophobic and anti-gay sentiments that prompt people to ask this question in the first place. We conclude, once again, that gay men are, in the words of an infamous 2003 *Rolling Stones* article, “in search of death.”

This conclusion is derived not simply from the fact that gay men are engaging in bareback sex – that is, unprotected anal intercourse – but that some gay men are *intentionally* doing this. Moreover, the intent does not derive from lack of education or the fact that condoms reduce physical sensation and a sense of intimacy or from substance abuse or from simple social awkwardness; rather, it is indicative of a desire to receive HIV+ semen (bug chasing) from a “gift-giver.” Gregory Tomso asks, “Can we speak of bug chasing and barebacking at all without perpetuating some form of

homophobic violence?” For Tomso, the answer is “no,” but he adds that “this ‘no’ is not the endpoint of ethical inquiry” (92). Dean responds to this dilemma by outlining what he calls an “impersonal ethics,” which criticizes the need to identify with someone in order to treat that person ethically. For Dean, identification itself is the problem. Since each one of us experiences the imperative to live up to an ideal and to identify with it, the problem is not with the shortcomings of a particular ideal, even though history is littered with racist, homophobic, misogynistic, and xenophobic ideals. “No solution,” writes Dean, “is to be found in new imaginaries or less exclusionary identificatory images” (23); rather, we must resist this imperative. This means that barebacking – and, in particular, bug chasing – are porous phenomena that should not be separated from one another, which is why what Dean calls “unlimited intimacy” is of global import; that is, it affects, not infects, much more than a few (ostensibly aberrant) individuals.

This impersonal ethics comes into focus when we think of bareback sex as a political right, as a choice. Warner opens *The Trouble with Normal* with the following observation: “Sooner or later, happily or unhappily, almost everyone fails to control his or her sex life. Perhaps as compensation, almost everyone sooner or later also succumbs to the temptation to control someone else’s sex life. Most people cannot quite rid themselves of the sense that controlling the sex of others, far from being unethical, is where morality begins” (1). John Stuart Mill would regretfully acknowledge the accuracy of this observation. For Mill, individual autonomy is sacrosanct; however, it is not without limits. He did not think one should be absolutely free from interference, for the law must protect (when necessary) others from the exercise of one’s own individual autonomy, and vice versa. Nevertheless, Mill thought that interference is only warranted

on a very limited basis. Our question: Does bareback sex and bug chasing justify interference? My answer will lead me back to the subject on this dissertation: same-sex marriage, its relation to the Victorian afterlife, and to the quasi-reparative quality of Dean's impersonal ethics.

According to many state laws, the answer to this question is clearly "yes." According to the Lambda Legal website, in 2008 one-third of the lower forty-eight states consider it a felony for a person who knows he is HIV+ to have sex with another person without disclosing this information. (While each state law has its own peculiarities, it is important that, as Dean notes, if the other person willingly consents, then the first person can legally use an affirmative defense; however, such a case, if brought to trial, would mean the burden of proof is on the defendant.) What these statutes highlight, however unwittingly, is, again, the matter of *intention*. The impetus behind most of the available scientific – that is, quantifiable – research is, unsurprisingly, HIV containment. In other words, it asks why gay men are having risky sex not because we might learn something about how intimacy functions in the twenty-first century, not because it might be illustrative of how institutional homophobia operates thirty years after the virus's outbreak, but rather in order simply to find ways of stopping these risky acts. But by what right? Public safety? Imminent death? Entrenched homophobia? From the public's point of view, are not all these interrelated, if not variations on the same theme?

In *Principles of Political Economy* (1848), Mill excludes what he calls "merely constructive or presumptive injury" from those acts that justify interference; meaning that merely imagining that, if present to witness the act, one believes that interference is justified is not enough to justify interference. Something much more substantive is

necessary, but how far is tolerance, legal or otherwise, supposed to extend? As Martha Nussbaum argues, it is far beyond the home, so it is important not to think of tolerance of an individual's autonomy in terms of public vs. private. Dean's challenge "represents an attempt to think *publicly* about bareback sex without resorting to the moralism of trying to legislate others' sex lives" (26), that is, without succumbing to the temptation to control others' behavior. Missing from Mill's argument is any reference to abstract concepts like "public decency," something that can only be concretized if one somehow imagines what the "average citizen" finds objectionable, that is, worthy of interference. Sensationalist popular depictions of bareback sex, like with the *Rolling Stones* article, would lead one to believe that, with doubt, the average citizen is horrified, *and rightly so*; however, the reason Mill avoids discussion of public decency is because it is simply a way to make the "merely constructive" seem more substantive. Now HIV/AIDS, barebacking and bug-chasing might seem to be of a different order, since we are talking about actual viral transmission, and not something that is merely imagined; but this distinction is less secure than it might at first appear. Public safety, while seemingly more quantifiable than public decency, is often buttressed by the same sensationalism. The cleansing of the public sphere – of, for instance, New York City's Times Square – is analogous to the way in which information about this subculture has been transmitted. Fear begets hyperbole, but instead of revulsion, disgust, and knee-jerk condemnations, we must approach the issue publicly *and* personally in order to de-pathologize it.

While the issue cannot be ignored, it is, as Bersani rightly observes, "politically messy": "Since the political credo of the gay men likely to participate in an academic conference on Gay Shame includes being a good feminist, they would probably feel

uncomfortable publicly investigating, first, homophobic shame associated with being HIV-positive, and, second, the involuntary misogynistic shame of being exposed to others (gay and, even worse, straight others) as having succumbed to, or actively sought, the sexual “position traditionally associated with female sexuality” (33). If there is a phenomenon that troubles the apparent historical shift from the paranoid readings of a burgeoning queer theory in the 1980s and 90s to queer theory’s more recent interest in the reparative as an attempt to find relevance alongside the supposedly non-paranoid, utopic celebrations surrounding the phenomenon of same-sex marriage (the historical shift on which I have based this dissertation), it is barebacking. If there is a phenomenon that begs us to revisit the relationship between paranoid and reparative readings, it is barebacking. While to my knowledge none of the practitioners of reparative reading have grappled with barebacking, it is worth noting that HIV/AIDS was, quite literally, there at the beginning. In the opening paragraph of “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading,” Sedgwick recounts a conversation she had with Cindy Patton about the conspiracy theories then circulating about the origins of HIV/AIDS. Curious to know Patton’s thoughts on the subject, she asks her directly and receives the following reply:

Any of the early steps in its spread could have been either accidental or deliberate, but I just have trouble getting interested in that. I mean, supposed we were sure of every element of a conspiracy: that the lives of Africans and African Americans are worthless in the eyes of the United States; that gay men and drug users are held cheap where they aren’t actively hated; that the military deliberately researches ways to kill noncombatants whom it sees as enemies; that people in power look calmly on the likelihood of catastrophic environmental and population changes. Supposing we were ever so sure of all those things – what would we know then that we don’t already know? (123)

After ruminating for many years on Patton’s response, Sedgwick comes to see a central tenet of her thinking (and that of many, many others) as much less effective than she has

previously thought. The hermeneutics of suspicion, what Sedgwick will from then on describe in details as “paranoid reading,” promises much more than it can deliver, for “hav[ing] an unmystified, angry view of large and genuinely systemic oppressions does not intrinsically or necessarily enjoin that person to any specific train of epistemological or narrative consequences” (124). This is true enough; however, HIV/AIDS then drops completely from the rest of the essay. Surely, this is a curious fact given that it was its impetus. This move, I think, leads Sedgwick to present these two reading styles as incompatible; for Sedgwick, they are not even strictly antagonistic, since, for her, they operate on completely different planes. Throughout this dissertation I have suggested that reparative readings supplement paranoid readings, that taken together they are stronger than each is individually, and that (despite Sedgwick’s lambasting of paranoid reading) it remains an invaluable style of analysis.

For this reason, I conclude with Dean’s “impersonal ethics,” which I see as threading the needle or stitching the seam between these two styles of readings. While Dean’s emphasis on impersonality might seem like the antithesis of the personal nature of reparative reading, his emphasis actually widens our ability to relate to others in that rather than empathizing with other people, that is, simply reducing them to beings like myself, we “bas[e] ethics on the *failure* to identify others as persons” (25). Dean here identifies the paradox at the center of reciprocal superiority. Dean does not deny the fact that we yearn for “alternative imaginaries” that will help us to love and respect one another; such a quest, however, “is doomed from the start” because “as soon as there’s an ideal, no matter how progressive, there’s an aperture into which the superego insinuates itself and starts making us miserable” (23). This can certainly be said of Mill’s ideal of

marriage: if one does not recognize that it is an ideal founded on the impossibility of its own realization, then one is doomed to a endless, miserable quest.

Mill and Dean, however, also recognize that highlighting this possibility is not the end but the beginning. Dean emphatically states that every ideal will fail to measure up, while Sedgwick might have said that this dooms us to the vicious circle of paranoia; but, like Sedgwick, Dean is open to alternatives, although ones that are differently formulated. Sedgwick criticizes the paranoid optic for missing alternative queer relations because it is focused on the nefarious underpinnings of the homonormativity of same-sex-marriage politics. Conversely, Dean's focus on barebacking queerly aligns it to the utopic promises of same-sex marriage, for "unlimited intimacy" is another way of saying "I am superior to you at the same time that you are superior to me": again, "the emergence of a subculture of bareback sex is not merely coincident with but directly related to the campaign for same-sex marriage that has occupied so much attention in recent years." Rather than sidestepping the paranoid optic, Dean looks right through it in order to see what queer alternatives await us, for how different, really, is exchanging bodily fluids and exchanging wedding bands? Queer alternatives based on viral transmission are important manifestations of the desire for reciprocal superiority, but attempts to comprehend such manifestations require the paranoid and the reparative to work together.

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