

Boyish Narratives: The Art of Not Acting Your Age

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(English Language and Literature)
in the University of Michigan
2013

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For Little Father Time and other boys who are hanging

Acknowledgements

Gratitude grows as I trace the genealogy of this dissertation. I am grateful for the patience and support of my chairs, David M. Halperin and Patricia Yaeger. I am also thankful for David Caron, Jarrod Hayes, and Valerie Traub for their comments and suggestions at different stages of this project. Michael Awkward, Adela Pinch, Martha Vicinus, and Jennifer Wenzel had inspired me to ponder questions of time, modernity, sexuality, and intimacy mediated by writing or objects. Among my friends at the University of Michigan, I give my particular thanks to Alex Beringer for introducing me to the article on 20-somethings in the *New York Times Magazine*; to Roxana Galusca for her exemplary scholarship; to Dina Karageorgos and Brian Matzke for hugs and quips at hard times; to Rostom Mesli for organizing the workshop of my chapter on Henry Blake Fuller; to Nate Mills for his passion for American literature and country music over my first sip of Guinness; to Mei-Chen Michelle Pan and Yu-Chung Li for their hospitality; and to Katie Will for her welcoming smile in one late August of 2005. Finally, I am indebted to my family, whose playful digs and ridiculous love helped me ride out moments of uncertainty.

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Abstract

“Boyish Narratives: The Art of Not Acting Your Age” challenges identitarian views of sexuality, narrative, and time. Although recent studies of queer temporalities and queer diasporas argue that queers may resist the straight timeline of marriage and reproduction, such queer-inflected views often produce new timelines of transition, maturation, and growth. As a result, queers who once were pathologized as cases of arrested development are now normalized by reference to regulatory notions of coming out, getting married, and having children. In literary studies, developmental expectations obscure non-normative uses of time by characters who defy hetero/homo models of progress without necessarily identifying themselves as sexual nonconformists. Developmental assumptions also miss the way some authors use temporal suspension, deferral, or repetition to counter various progress narratives.

In order to critique identity-based temporal norms, I take a transnational, backward-glancing approach to several works of twentieth-century U.S. fiction, and highlight two types of narratives that can be described as “boyish.” First, I study male characters who are deliberately constructed as *not yet* (re)productive or sexually definite, and who do not mature by the end of the narrative. How do texts like Willa Cather’s “Paul’s Case” (1905), Henry Blake Fuller’s *Bertram Cope’s Year* (1919), and Tennessee Williams’s “The Mysteries of the Joy Rio” (1941)

use, respectively, an adolescent's suicide, a youth's insistence on friendship, and a protégé's intergenerational relationship with his master-lover to reconfigure normative modes of growth? Second, I study characters whose transnational connections, postmemories, or "outdated" practices undo the inevitability of Western modernity and maturity. How do texts like Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* (1977) and David Wong Louie's "Pangs of Love" (1991) shatter the teleologies of liberation, white assimilation, and gay visibility, when their main characters become susceptible to the past in the context of the black Atlantic, the Asian Pacific, or camp aesthetics? Together, these two types of boyish narratives complicate issues of queer temporality and subjectivity. Although the discourse of belated maturity can represent boyish characters as immature for now and yet tending to eventual maturity, boyish narratives challenge various temporal norms, thereby highlighting the stakes in progressivism and American exceptionalism.

Introduction

Boyish Narratives: The Art of Not Acting Your Age

Belated Maturity

A 2010 article in the *New York Times Magazine* discusses the phenomenon of 20-somethings in the contemporary United States and other industrialized societies: why does it take longer for young people nowadays to reach adulthood?¹ Listing reasons like higher education, delayed marriage, birth control, prolonged life expectancy, and economic recession, the report addresses the phenomenon from the perspectives of sociology, psychology, and neuroscience. In particular, the term *emerging adulthood* spurs the exposition. According to psychologist Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, the term *emerging adulthood* refers to people who postpone marriage and childbearing to experiment with love and work in their twenties; they face a new life stage marked by identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and a sense of possibility.² Arnett coins the phrase by analogy with adolescence: just as psychologist G. Stanley

¹ Robin Marantz Henig, "The Post-Adolescent, Pre-Adult, Not-Quite-Decided Life Stage," *New York Times Magazine*, August 22, 2010, 28-49.

² Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 8. Also see Jeffrey Jensen Arnett and Jennifer Lynn Tanner, eds., *Emerging Adults in America: Coming of Age in the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2006); Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood: A Cultural Approach* (Upper

Hall invented the term *adolescence* in 1904 to highlight an age group that depends on family, attends school, and yet strives for individual autonomy, so too does Arnett create the term *emerging adulthood* to capture the prolonged transition from adolescence to adulthood, pushing the threshold of adulthood up to the “age 30 deadline.”³

Accommodating individual differences, Arnett’s view of maturity is nevertheless normative and progressivist. Even though emerging adults may be as various as those who are sexually active but single, those who move from job to job to find the perfect niche or experience all walks of life, and those who postpone marriage or childbearing to finish graduate school, developmental psychology as a discipline upholds an arc of maturity: people need to grow up, however belatedly or at their own pace. Insofar as milestones such as finishing school, leaving home, earning income, getting married, and having children still define adulthood, Arnett’s “age 30 deadline” not only translates those in their twenties into adults in the making but also pronounces thirty-five-year-old bachelors slow in their progress. Moderating the rate of maturation, Arnett allows people to fool around or search for self, as long as they reach adulthood in the end. Not demanding that everyone act his or her age like clockwork, he converts life into a flexible yet mandatory checklist: take your time, but make sure you meet all the requirements eventually.

Seeing maturity as a matter of time, developmental psychology affects more than those in their twenties. The tacit principle of life stages presumes children to be innocent and dependent, adolescents to be sexually aware and contemplating autonomy, emerging adults to be experimenting with love and work, and adults to be (re)productive. In a society regulated by such

Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001); and Christine Hassler, *20 Something Manifesto: Quarter-Lifers Speak Out about Who They Are, What They Want, and How to Get It* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2008).

³ Ibid., 98.

a progress narrative of maturity, an eight-year-old should be protected from child labor and exposure to graphic sex and violence, an eighteen-year-old might be leaving home for college or starting work to pay his or her own bills, a twenty-eight-year-old might be studying at graduate school in order to become a professional or still looking for the perfect job or/and life partner, and a thirty-eight-year-old should be considering setting down—it is already a little bit late. In each stage, maturity dictates individual behavior, interpersonal relations, sex education, parenting styles, work-life balance, birth control, social welfare, state legislation, and life forms. Insofar as intelligence, ability, sexuality, sexual consent, gender behavior, career, marriage, and (re)production all figure as matters of time, concepts of prematurity, immaturity, belatedness, underdevelopment, and proto-ness prevail in interpretation of daily lives. And it is difficult for people to suspect such an enterprise because, operating through institutions like family, school, and government, it claims to cater to individual differences.

To be sure, Arnett's concept of emerging adulthood needs qualification. First, emerging adulthood usually happens in urban, industrial regions, and it implies straight people who postpone marriage, career, and childbearing. When Arnett mentions gays and lesbians in relationships, he does not go beyond Internet dating services. And his idea of emerging adulthood has a limited currency in rural, agricultural regions, where straight people still tend to marry and have children early. Second, emerging adulthood is not just a recent phenomenon: some baby boomers had delayed their career and marriage themselves. To see emerging adulthood as a phenomenon in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries overlooks people who had similar experiences in earlier historical periods. Third, the statistics of delayed marriage obscure lifelong bachelors and spinsters altogether. While some people may decide not to marry until they secure a job and save enough money, others may prefer singlehood. It is

arbitrary to see marriage as part of the equation of adulthood. The idea of estimating and projecting individual life goals based on population statistics creates the illusion of honoring individual choices, but it actually implements governmentality: even though some people do not—and are encouraged not to—follow norms, the technique of biopolitics (through such data as the average marital age) translates their behavior into deviation or particular identity.⁴ The lifelong bachelors and spinsters may be depathologized, but they do not escape norms.

Yet the most damaging premise of developmental psychology is its drive to mature, a drive that rationalizes a future-oriented temporality and turns a blind eye to the past. When maturity is all about the future, it implements a periodical or instrumental relation to the past: one must forget or overcome the past in order to thrive and prosper; one must remember the past in order to have a better future. When the drive to mature imposes a progress narrative on individuals (in ideas of graduation, marriage, or adulthood), identities (in events like Jewish teens' Bar or Bat Mitzvah or gay men and lesbians' coming out), movements (black slaves' emancipation and autonomy or Asian immigrants' assimilation and citizenship in the United States), and nation-states (postcolonial nations' independence and democracy), it renders Western modernity and its ensuing ideas of enlightenment, liberation, and self-realization “universal,” “global” values.⁵ Counting on the future, developmental psychology works in concert with discourses of self-realization, nation-state, and the American Dream. Together, they

⁴ On the correlation between the statistics and governmentality, see Michel Foucault, “Rights of Death and Power over Life,” in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), and “The Birth of Biopolitics,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, vol. 1 of *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley et al. (New York: New Press, 1997), 73-79; and Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

⁵ Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan have critiqued the progressivism in positing immigrants, migrants, or diasporic subjects in the trajectory of Western modernity: it is as if becoming Western (in terms of migration and/or mentality) were inevitable. See, for example, Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); and Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, “Global Identities: Theorizing Transnational Studies of Sexuality,” *GLQ* 7, no. 4 (2001): 663-679.

regard current “underachievers” as potential late bloomers and translate their past into a stage to be improved on and left behind.

Arnett’s example indicates why it is urgent to pry open the correlation between maturity on the one hand and spatiotemporal coordinates, life stages, historical moments, and temporal orientation on the other. *Boyish Narratives*, accordingly, analyzes a number of works of twentieth-century U.S. fiction featuring male characters who evade norms of maturity. I show how ideas of adulthood, identity, assimilation, modernity, and self-realization combine to produce a mode of “progress” that naturalizes life stages, historical periods, and topographical divisions. Such a progressivist mode, while respecting individual differences, describes and regulates people’s degrees of maturity through a logic of sequence (from adolescence to adulthood or from premodern periods/spaces to modern periods/spaces) and opposition (adolescence versus adulthood; premodern periods/spaces versus modern periods/spaces).⁶ Such progressivism appears in literary criticism as well, where it exhorts characters to catch up with the modern and the advanced, predicts their development by invoking a notion of belated maturity, or dismisses their “traditional,” “untimely” behavior as a petty anachronism or temporary deviation.

To critique various temporal norms, I highlight two types of boyish narratives. First, I study characters who are deliberately constructed as *not yet* (re)productive or sexually definite, and who do not “mature up” by the end of the narrative. How do authors like Willa Cather, Henry Blake Fuller, and Tennessee Williams use an adolescent’s suicide, a youth’s insistence on friendship, and a protégé’s intergenerational relationship with his master to reconfigure

⁶ On the polarization between Western, “modern” subjects and their non-Western, “premodern” counterparts, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000 [2008]). On the topographical division between “modern” spaces and their “premodern” counterparts (usually ethnic enclaves), see Martin F. Manalansan, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

normative modes of growth? Second, I study characters whose transnational connections, postmemories, or “outdated” practices undo the inevitability of Western modernity. How do authors like Toni Morrison and David Wong Louie shatter the teleologies of liberation, white assimilation, and gay visibility when their main characters become susceptible to the past in the context of the black Atlantic, the Asian Pacific, or camp aesthetics? Although the discourse of belated maturity can represent such characters as immature for now and yet tending to eventual maturity, I show how these boyish narratives engage with and elude various temporal norms in order to bring out the stakes of progressivism.

In other words, I do not use *boyish* to refer to ontological facts about prepubescent children and tomboy girls. I am not interested in the psychological profile of boy-like characters (with attributes such as innocence, gullibility, mischief, and irresponsibility), nor do I identify characters in a certain age range (between twelve and thirty) or address the sexual taxonomy of pedophilia (attraction to prepubescent youth), ephebophilia (attraction to youths from puberty to the early twenties), androphilia (attraction to persons between the early twenties and fifty), or gerontophilia (attraction to older men, up to senile old age).⁷ Rather, I examine characters at odds with temporal norms. I argue that ideas of life stages, historical periods, and topographical divisions often consign boyish characters to states of immaturity, indeterminacy, or intermediacy and yet anticipate their upcoming or belated maturity in the unknown and somehow predetermined future. When progressivism permeates notions of time and space, boyish characters are often positioned at varied points of a linear progress narrative (usually the marriage plot, the coming-out story, the achievement of proprietary and/or procreative

⁷ On the taxonomy of homosexuality and age, see Magnus Hirschfeld, *Sexual Anomalies: The Origins, Nature and Treatment of Sexual Disorders. A Summary of the Works of Magnus Hirschfeld* (New York: Emerson Books, 1948 [1956]).

masculinity, Western modernity, white assimilation, or self-realization), and the dominant progress narrative tends to iron out boyish characters' own ambivalence toward the concept of progress, their entanglement with the past (with embodiments of earlier generations or practices, historical events, or collective memories), the conflicts between different arcs of maturity or kinds of modernity, and/or the authors' complicated representations of characters through narrative manipulation. Although there is always a clock in each narrative, not each character feels the same way about time, progress, and the temporal divisions of history, space, and social difference.

The term *boy* in literature often represents social anxiety about—and tolerance of—reckless youths (playboys), lower classes (houseboys), social nonconformists (cowboys), or colonized subjects (Vietnamese servant boys in French Indochina).⁸ Often described as scandalous and yet superfluous, complacent and yet duplicitous, rebellious and yet moral, boys are simultaneously railed at and dismissed: boys will be boys. In *Boyish Narratives*, however, I do not simply point out how people feel ambivalent about boyish characters or how boyish characters get away with their waywardness. I call the characters at issue *boyish* in order to register and critique the operation of norms.⁹ Boyish characters may demonstrate their unique subjectivities by their nonnormative uses of time or nonnormative attitudes toward relationships.

⁸ On French colonial constructions of servant boys in Vietnam, see Frank Proschan, "Eunuch Mandarins, *Soldats Mamzelles*, Effeminate Boys, and Graceless Women: French Colonial Constructions of Vietnamese Genders," *GLQ* 8, no. 4 (2002): 435-467.

⁹ Norms do not make people normal. Rather, they empower docile subjects by recognizing their utility; they subjugate unruly subjects not by repression, but by exclusion. According to Michel Foucault, "[T]he art of punishing, in the régime of disciplinary power, is aimed neither at expiation, nor even precisely at repression. It brings five quite distinct operations into play: it refers individual actions to a whole that is at once a field of comparison, a space of differentiation and the principle of a rule to be followed. . . . It measures in quantitative terms and hierarchizes in terms of value the abilities, the level, the 'nature' of individuals. It introduces, through this 'value-giving' measure, the constraint of a conformity that must be achieved. Lastly, it traces the limit that will define difference in relation to all other differences, the external frontier of the abnormal. . . . The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it *normalizes*." See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 182-183 (emphasis in original).

But they may also elude norms altogether. Sometimes, boyish characters seem unable to make up their mind: should they assimilate to white, middle-class ideas of maturity and modernity or should they honor African American separatism, creolized genealogies, or the Chinese diaspora without translating them into non-white versions of maturity and modernity? Sometimes, the authors craft narratives to let boyish characters occupy a nebulous position that is not necessarily of the characters' doing. As a result, boyish characters do not always undergo a transitional phase; they do not always claim alternative subjectivities. While some stake out new paths, such paths—because they do not generate offspring, advocate prosperity, or hew to the idea of longevity—are dismissed as “boyish.” Even though the discourses of maturity recognize individual differences, they position boyish characters in linearized, integrated arcs of development, put them down by hegemonic or revisionist ideals of maturity, seduce them with the discourse of belated maturity, and translate their struggle with different norms of maturity into a “transitional” or “temporary” state. My goal is to point out the progressivist underpinnings of norms and the conflicts among different arcs of maturity, not to discredit or lionize boyish characters for their constructed immaturity.

Centering on issues like the queer adolescence in Cather's “Paul's Case” (1905), the indefinitely delayed marriage in Fuller's *Bertram Cope's Year* (1919), the reproduction of homosexual beings in Williams's “The Mysteries of the Joy Rio” (1941 [published 1954]), the creolized genealogy in Morrison's *Song of Solomon* (1977), and the spatiotemporal displacements in Louie's “Pangs of Love” (1991), I highlight these authors' literary interventions in various progress narratives. Such interventions are especially important in the face of the egalitarianism in identity politics, the translation of Japanese or Hong Kong modernities into doubles of Western modernity, the understanding of people of color in terms of white

assimilation or their resistance to white supremacy, and the expansion of the American Dream (everyone can make it: it is only a matter of time) to non-U.S. territories. The Western ideas of modernity, maturity, progress, and enlightenment are not limited to the West; they often naturalize a Western-bound migration, mentality, or movement in a transnational context. But the stories in *Boyish Narratives* counter such a trajectory by suspending the progress of time, looking backward, and disrupting the privileged concepts of adulthood, marriage, nation-state, reproduction, and self-realization.

What Can *Boyish Narratives* Do?

Boyish Narratives aims to reconfigure concepts of time, sexuality, and maturity in eight ways. First, it redirects attention from anxiety about growth, futurity, liberation, and crises to an investment in the past. Too often anxieties about inheriting troubled pasts, about passing on tradition, about children's future, about achieving freedom and equality shape ideas of (im)maturity. African Americans, for example, often feel obligated to claim a collective memory of slavery, whether or not they themselves had been slaves or have any knowledge of or feeling for Africa.¹⁰ At the same time, it seems better for victims to forget their tragedy and for listeners "not to know too much" in order to avoid an engulfing trauma.¹¹ Immigrants in the United States

¹⁰ Ron Eyerman, "Cultural Trauma and Collective Memory" in *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1. Eyerman, however, does not limit his argument to the community or identity formation of African Americans through the remembrance of slavery. He recognizes that trauma is often more about mediated impacts (through newspapers, radio, television, or books) than about direct experience. On collective trauma and history, also see Jeffrey C. Alexander et al., eds., *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); and Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

¹¹ Dori Laub, "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening," in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, ed. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (New York: Routledge, 1992), 61.

are often encouraged to leave their harrowing past behind and embrace the American Dream ahead of them. But their past often comes back to haunt them and their American-born offspring. Some parents respect sexual diversity in society, but they still want their children to grow up straight and normative. When the correlation between sexuality and life trajectory is at issue, even gay-affirmative advocates have to face the punitive association between homosexuality and HIV/AIDS: if you are homosexual, you deserve or at least should gear up for such catastrophes.¹² Taken together, these future-driven discourses often promote a progressivist or instrumental relation to the past: look back on your past so as to overcome the plights of slavery, immigration, or homosexuality. But the operations of ethnic or racial progress, nation-state, and self-realization also cause problems: generation gaps, monumental periodization, failure to assimilate to norms, and excessive concerns about futurity. The past matters, but it is the future that is mostly at stake.

In *Boyish Narratives*, boyish characters are susceptible to the past. But they do not aim to outgrow their past (at least not by the end of the stories). Coming to terms with transnational histories, practices, or memories, they undo the progress narratives of adulthood, manhood, emancipation, citizenship, and autonomy in a nation-state. An African American man in a boyish narrative remembers the history of slavery not to see how he is entitled to freedom in the postslavery era, but to open himself to the creolized genealogy of the black Atlantic. Such a

¹² On the idea of child-centered futurity, see Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). On the pathologization of effeminate boys, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay: The War on Effeminate Boys," in *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 154-164. On the representational crisis of gayness in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, see Paul Morrison, "End Pleasure," in *The Explanation for Everything: Essays on Sexual Subjectivity* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 54-81. On narratives that address and/or evade the apocalyptic closure of dissident sexual identities, see Richard Dellamora, *Apocalyptic Overtures: Sexual Politics and the Sense of an Ending* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994); Neil Bartlett, *Who Was That Man?: A Present for Mr Oscar Wilde* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1988); Alan Hollinghurst, *The Swimming Pool Library* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989); Mark Merlis, *An Arrow's Flight* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998); and Geoff Ryman, *Was* (New York: Knopf, 1992).

transatlantic genealogy does not see African Americans as the end point in a linear lineage or migration; it registers interracial contacts, communal networks, and past-oriented affiliations that reconfigure biological kinship and generational relays. Likewise, a Chinese American man in a boyish narrative remembers the history of Japanese imperialism in Asia not necessarily to spurn Asian American coalition, but to open himself to different modernities of the Asian Pacific. Hong Kong and Japanese modernities are not always in concert with or in opposition to Western modernity. As a result, it is impossible to envision an integrated progress narrative and decide whether a boyish character is immature. At the same time, boyish characters are open to relations that are often disavowed in order to fulfill normative progress narratives. If a progressivist or instrumental relation to the past emphasizes how one has risen above paternal emulation, generation gaps, and the ordeal of emancipation, immigration, or coming out, a boyish character's relation to the past emphasizes how he is indebted to a man-boy relationship, mother-son attachment, posthumous bonding, or diva worship. Such a past-oriented temporality does not mean to serve a better future.

Second, *Boyish Narratives* counters the developmental discourse in identity-inflected neoliberalism. To be sure, sexual dissidents and people of color may now seek their own versions of maturity (such as gay marriage, racial/ethnic equality, and individual autonomy).¹³ But the diversity celebrated in neoliberalism often aims at social integration and assimilation: if you are bi-curious, you have to decide to be straight or gay eventually; if you are Asian, you have to know your ethnic histories and roots before you claim to be equal with the white, middle-

¹³ On the neoliberal ideas of equality across social variables, see Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003); David L. Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); and Chandan Reddy, "Asian Diasporas, Neoliberalism, and Family: Reviewing the Case for Homosexual Asylum in the Context of Family Rights," *Social Text* 23, no. 3-4 (Fall/Winter 2005): 101-119.

class mainstream and other minorities. Beneath the hype about diversity and difference is the pursuit of sameness: we all want the same things (love, family, marriage, and prosperity), we all want to be modern, and we all will get there sooner or later. In contrast, boyish characters tango with arcs of maturity. While boyish characters seem to fall short of various criteria of maturity (marriage, career, reproduction, etc.), the complexity of their fictional narratives rejects the neoliberal idea of customizing different arcs of maturity to accommodate different identities. The question is not that boyish characters need more time to mature up or that they are inherently backward, slow, or childish. It is that they expose the uneven, heterogeneous materiality of histories from a transhistorical and transnational perspective or that they simply renounce maturity. Ambivalent about normative *and* alternative arcs of maturity, boyish characters gesture toward the poverty of progressivist discourses—discourses that sometimes exhort characters to see the past as cautionary tales and then move forward. In boyish narratives, boyish characters’ connections to the past do not reconcile with or give way to an integrated future.

Employing the sense of disorientation, Sara Ahmed proposes a queer phenomenology that reorients the self and takes up new space and time: “I want us to think about how queer politics might *involve* disorientation, without legislating disorientation as a politics. . . . The point is what we do with such moments of disorientation, as well as what such moments can do—whether they can offer us the hope of new directions, and whether new directions are reason enough for hope.”¹⁴ In *Boyish Narratives*, I share Ahmed’s skepticism about the future. Some boyish characters have a clear sense about where they are going, and they are quick to pronounce other “more advanced” or “less sophisticated” characters normative or displaced, but they come to realize that their sense of progress does not hold as well. In such cases, these boyish characters

¹⁴ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 158 (emphasis in original).

are not in need of new directions; they start to question whether the new directions are copies of the old ones, and in accepting the new directions whether they burn their bridges with the past and earlier generations. Often boyish narratives end in suspension—sometimes because different arcs of maturity conflict with one another, sometimes because the narratives do not allow any normative or alternative arc of maturity to make the final call.

Third, *Boyish Narratives* complicates recent explorations of queer temporalities. Critics have studied queer affiliations across time, queer subjects' nonnormative uses of time, queer historiography, queer futurity, the orientation toward the past in queer subcultures, and the construct of normative temporalities.¹⁵ Along the same lines, I distinguish effeminate boyhood from protogay boyhood, unpack bachelorhood beyond homo/heterosexual definition (that is, a bachelor may be more than a closeted or connotative gay man or a straight man prior to marriage), study cruising not as a gay man's transitional stage prior to a domestic relationship or his propensity for promiscuity but as a way of being transmitted from a man-lover to his boy-beloved, and undo the progress narratives of emancipation, citizenship, autonomy, and self-

¹⁵ See, for example, Edelman, *No Future*; Dianne Chisholm, *Queer Constellations: Subcultural Space in the Wake of the City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Ben Davies and Jana Funke, eds., *Sex, Gender and Time in Fiction and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Carolyn Dinshaw, Lee Edelman, Roderick A. Ferguson, Carla Freccero, Elizabeth Freeman, Judith Halberstam, Annamarie Jagose, Christopher Nealon, and Nguyen Tan Hoang, "Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion," *GLQ* 13, no. 2-3 (2007): 177-195; Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Dustin Bradley Goltz, *Queer Temporalities in Gay Male Representation: Tragedy, Normativity, and Futurity* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Annamarie Jagose, *Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Dana Luciano, *Arranging Grief: Sacred Time and the Body in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2007); E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen, eds., *Queer Times, Queer Becomings* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011); José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Christopher Nealon, *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion before Stonewall* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Valerie Rohy, *Anachronism and Its Others: Sexuality, Race, Temporality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009); and Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

realization by opening a person of color in the United States to the black Atlantic or the Asian Pacific. The boyish characters are queer not necessarily because they are sexual dissidents (some are), but because their relations to, or uses of, time are at variance with the normative and alternative timelines of maturity.

Fourth, I intervene in masculinity and boyhood studies. In the last few decades, critics have promoted men's affiliation with feminist politics, critiqued hegemonic masculinity and male privilege, and complicated the idea of manhood in relation to male homosexuality and male homosociality.¹⁶ Taking cues from such initiatives, periodicals like *Thymos: Journal of Boyhood Studies* address issues like bullying, hazing, sexual consent, gay teenagers, father-son relationships, boys in sports, and representations of boys in the media. Although such projects aim to unsettle normative adulthood and masculinity in an effort to promote tolerance and diversity of male subjectivities, they often uphold the inevitability of growth in forms of coming of age, coming out, or belated maturity. Akin to men's studies, boyhood studies seeks to discover how minors can develop alternative masculinities and become worthy of manhood.

¹⁶ On men's studies, see, for example, Richard Avramenko, *Courage: The Politics of Life and Limb* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011); Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, and Simon Watson, eds., *Constructing Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Chris Blazina, *The Cultural Myth of Masculinity* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003); Susan Bordo, *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999); Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman, eds., *Theorizing Masculinities* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994); Raewyn W. Connell, *The Men and the Boys* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Tom Digby, ed., *Men Doing Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Tim Edwards, *Erotics & Politics: Gay Male Sexuality, Masculinity, and Feminism* (London: Routledge, 1994); Judith Kegan Gardiner, ed., *Masculinity Studies & Feminist Theory: New Directions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); Michael S. Kimmel, Jeff Hearn, and R. W. Connell, eds., *Handbook of Studies on Men & Masculinities* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005); Michael A. Messner, *Politics of Masculinities: Men in Movements* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997); Myriam Miedzian, *Boys Will Be Boys: Breaking the Link between Masculinity and Violence* (New York: Doubleday, 1991); Bob Pease, *Recreating Men: Postmodern Masculinity Politics* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000); Steven P. Schacht and Doris W. Ewing, *Feminism with Men: Bridging the Gender Gap* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); Mark Simpson, *Male Impersonators: Men Performing Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 1994); John Stoltenberg, *Refusing to Be a Man: Essays on Sex and Justice* (Portland, OR: Breitenbush Books, 1989); and Stephen M. Whitehead, *Men and Masculinities: Key Themes and New Directions* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).

But literature represents life; it does not unmediatedly record life. Nor does it always aim to have characters obtain the laurels of normative adulthood or alternative lifestyles. Not all literary characters give readers transparent reasons for their behavior; not all narrators access characters' train of thought; not all characters realize or care for arcs of maturity. Sometimes authors deliberately bypass, suspend, elude, or disrupt the aesthetics of character development by killing the characters, giving readers open endings, or leaving the issues in the stories unresolved. Sometimes the characters are represented in ways that call into doubt their ideas of maturity. As a result, boyish characters do not live their lives out (dying of old age) so as to give a complete account of their being; they do not come up with revisionist models of maturity to counter conventional models. Boyish narratives do not justify nonnormative identities, existences, or subjectivities. Nor are they cautionary tales or negative examples that advocate "right" ways of living. To judge whether boyish characters become manly enough at the end of the stories or to use them as models of alternative adulthood is to evade the challenges they pose to norms of maturation and development.

Fifth, I complicate gay hermeneutics and gay historicism, which assume that every character in the twentieth century must be gay or straight, and that every gay character in the post-Stonewall era must be "out" and proud or suffer from internalized homophobia.¹⁷ True, literary characters may disclose their sexuality by engaging in ambiguous forms of male intimacy (friendship, patronage, or apprenticeship), adorning themselves with emblematic objects (green or red carnations), or professing extravagant sentiments (diva worship or acting

¹⁷ On gay hermeneutics and homo/heterosexual definition, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990 [2008]). On the critique of the compulsion to come out and be proud in the post-gay liberation era, see John D'Emilio, "Cycles of Change, Questions of Strategy: The Gay and Lesbian Movement After 50 Years," in *The World Turned: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 95; Didier Eribon, *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self*, trans. Michael Lucey (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); and David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub, eds., *Gay Shame* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

like a drama queen). But to identify them once and for all as gay on the basis of those criteria is colonizing: it is to treat them as too backward, too underhanded, or too jittery about homophobia to come out (as they should). Instead, I highlight the temporal suspension in boyish narratives. What if an effeminate boy kills himself before he grows up into a homo/hetero man? What if a story ends with the male protagonist insisting on friendships with both genders, so that any interactions in the story never “mature into” homo/hetero relationships? Do the regimes of homo/heterosexuality and gay liberation have to constitute historical watersheds in literary analysis and representation? In *Boyish Narratives*, I historicize boyish characters, but I also recognize the occasional incongruity between literature and the history of sexuality. Literature does not have to be true to history or politics.

In *Queering the Underworld*, Scott Herring argues that some slumming literatures—at odds with sexologist discourses—resist compulsory hetero/homosexuality. Instead of offering readers a nuanced sexual taxonomy, such literatures dwell on “scripted fantasies that think outside the ongoing calcifications of modern U.S. sexual history”:

[S]ince these minor literatures refuse to articulate a politics of sexual recognition or a politics of sexual visibility, it is best to view these works as fantastic tours that enable readers to remystify their cultural moments. By refusing subcultural affiliation and by offering something other than what mainstream audiences want to know or desire to see, these slumming literatures make strange—one meaning of the word “queer”—what was presented as spectacular to modern U.S. urban cultures both yesterday and . . . today.¹⁸

Also cautious of translating unknown, deliberately ambiguous queer characters into “connotatively gay,” “protogay,” or “unconventionally gay” characters, I resist the preordained arcs of homo/hetero maturity. While Herring argues that a group of American writers (Jane

¹⁸ Scott Herring, *Queering the Underworld: Slumming, Literature, and the Undoing of Lesbian and Gay History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 17, 17-18.

Addams, Willa Cather, Carl Van Vechten, and Djuna Barnes) manipulate the genre of slumming literature to evade gay identification and legibility, I argue that effeminate boys and boys who prefer friendships to relationships are not necessarily protogay or closeted. Acknowledging the publication taboo around the representations of homosexuality in early-twentieth-century U.S. literature, I nevertheless draw attention to some authors' uneven engagement with gay hermeneutics and their resistance to the discourse of gay maturity. There are crucial differences between being queer, being implicitly gay, and being homonormative. The idea of gayness has generated discourses of life forms to codify gender expression, aesthetics, and other nonsexual practices, but literary representations of characters may or may not mirror such discourse. They may court and foil gay hermeneutics at the same time.

Sixth, I am skeptical about the liberationist discourse of queer failure. In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Judith Halberstam defines her project as “an art of unbecoming,” as a “narrative without progress”: “The queer art of failure turns on the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable. It quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being.”¹⁹ Resisting normative teleology, Halberstam stakes out queer alternatives to cynical resignation and naïve optimism, arguing that amnesia, forgetting, and silliness may lead to new forms of relation, action, or knowing.²⁰ But boyish characters are subject to the discourse of belated maturity, which insists on seeing their failures as occasional setbacks, not as permanent fiascos. Some boyish characters claim to forget the past in order to control their own

¹⁹ Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 88.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 54. While I agree with Halberstam that forgetfulness stalls the heroic narrative of the dominant, the happiness of forgetfulness often comes at the cost of others' suffering or labor. According to Halberstam, in the movie *Dude, Where's My Car?* “the idle pleasures of life as [white hetero dudes] are afforded by the hard labor of the people who employ them, clothe them, feed them, and sexually service them, and yet it turns out that in the land of bland blondes and dumb jocks otherness is not such a bad place to be” (62). It is the overarching notion that “white male stupidity not only means no harm but actually saves the world” that licenses—if not justifies and rewards—ignorance. The comedy genre allows the main characters to get away with stupidity.

lives, but such historical undoing has dire consequences. Even though they seem to obtain the freedom to do whatever they want to do, to be whoever they want to be, to be with whomever they want to be, forgetting may too readily embrace the tropes of liberation and periodization, as if the self, the present, and the future had nothing to do with the past. To the extent that boyish characters may be on their way to (re)productive adulthood but do not reach it at the end of the stories, I recognize their potential to be late bloomers but question such proleptic readings. To the extent that boyish characters may be “boyish” ironically because of their wish to depart from history, to succeed by flying solo, I recognize the need to see the past more than as baggage to be disposed of. The point is not to look for alternative routes for failed subjects or enroll in history-undoing narratives of queer futurity; it is to resist the redemptive discourse of queer triumph, take the sweet bliss of forgetfulness with a grain of salt, and put the past into perspective.

Seventh, I defuse the concept of generation gaps in ethnic and diaspora studies by rendering visible the principles and contradictions of modernity, as well as the transnational circulation of history and memory. Too often the master narrative of generational conflict in diasporic literatures pits fathers or mothers as outdated, displaced immigrants against sons or daughters as modern, assimilated citizens. Although home is often the locus for social forces to play out, to have two generations represent warring ideologies and periods—and to privatize ethnic and diaspora studies within the domestic domain—obscure several issues. First, the stress on generation gaps in ethnic and diaspora studies may lead to the impression of perceiving family issues as “people of color” problems. It is as if white, middle-class families were exempt from major generational rifts, as if their history were a homogeneous entity punctuated by

generational relays.²¹ Second, the emphasis on age difference reduces the complexity of race, gender, sexuality, class, national citizenship, and cultural belonging to a matter of assimilation and periodization. Not all immigrant parents are heteronormative and traditional; not all their children are liberal and open-minded. Third, since the younger generation is often perceived as more amenable to new ideas, the older generation is unfairly held accountable for clinging to “premodern” values or practices. Even though the younger generation respects tradition, it often connotes passive containment or indifference instead of active participation and transmission.

Fourth, the schematic division between a “premodern,” older generation and a “modern,” younger generation obscures the impact of slavery, imperialism, colonialism, or other historical events on the younger generation. In fact, the younger generation may be subject to the postmemory or afterlife of some historical event, even though it does not directly experience it. Alienated from historical events in real time, the younger generation may still undergo the erosion or return of the past through spaces like archives, libraries, museums, and memorial parks, as well as mass media like photography, film, and historical fiction.²² Sometimes such systematic exposure to history ironically makes the younger generation more cognitive inheritors than the first-hand witnesses who connect to the events only on a personal level or develop screen memories as defense mechanisms.

²¹ This certainly is not true. See fictions by Margaret Atwood, William Faulkner, Jonathan Franzen, Philip Roth, and Eudora Welty.

²² Michel Foucault coins the term *heterotopias* to refer to spaces that exist as sites “absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about.” Archives, libraries, museums, and memorial parks fall in this category. See Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 24. On the concepts of postmemory or afterlife of the Holocaust, slavery, colonialism, or/and imperialism, see, for example, Arnaldo Cruz and Martin F. Manalansan, eds., *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Marianne Hirsch and Nancy K. Miller, eds., *Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); and Jennifer Wenzel, *Bulletproof: Afterlives of Anticolonial Prophecy in South Africa and Beyond* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

Fifth, the emphasis on white assimilation and Western modernity may eclipse other competing forms of modernity (like Japanese and Hong Kong modernities) or trivialize non-Western forms of modernity (like Chinese modernity) as inferior duplicates of Western modernity. As a result, the temporal renditions of the Westernized, “modern” generation and its non-Western, “traditional” counterpart frame the diaspora as an extension of—or as a site of freedom from—the “premodern” country of origin. Even though the diaspora is supposed to be transnational, nationalism, imperialism, and colonialism may extend their tentacles, exact their aftermaths, or assert their afterlives in forms of global capitalism, immigrant policy, racialized identity, trauma, and memory of previous regimes. Employing the logics of arrival, belonging, and incorporation, the progress narrative of assimilation and modernity respects, creates, and aims to bridge gaps between whites and people of color, between newcomers and settlers, between different ethnicities, races, or other identity-inflected groups in a multiracial, immigrant country like the United States. But the linear progressivism also irons out the uneven, contradictory, and incoherent materiality of ethnic and diaspora histories.²³

With the intricate matrix of time, sexuality, and maturity in view, *Boyish Narratives* finally sees women as more than upholders of tradition, objects of marital trafficking, props for men’s heroic exploits, or litmus papers for boyish characters’ sexuality. According to

²³ On diaspora studies and its way of treating issues of modernity or progressivism, see, for example, Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996); Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*; David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom, eds., *Q & A: Queer in Asian America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg, eds., *Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); Rachel C. Lee, *The Americas of Asian American Literature: Gendered Fictions of Nation and Transnation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú, eds., *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Manalansan, *Global Divas*, and “In the Shadows of Stonewall: Examining Gay Transnational Politics and the Diasporic Dilemma,” *GLQ* 2, no. 4 (1995): 425-438; and Cindy Patton and Benigno Sánchez-Eppler, eds., *Queer Diasporas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

homo/heterosexual definition, boyish characters' disinterest in women or their attachment to their mothers connotes homosexuality. But such an interpretation misses three issues. First, not all heterosexual men realize the marriage plot the moment a woman initiates romance. The prevalence of the marriage plot not only assumes that every boyish character is heterosexual but also dismisses scenarios where the boy is not ready for marriage, where he abhors the marriage institution, or where he finds no perfect female partner in the story. Second, women may desire boyish characters despite the boys' unknown sexuality, indifference, or preference for friendship. In boyish narratives, women may approach boyish characters under the pretext of female sympathy. Exploiting the discourse of maternal femininity, they may disguise their romantic interest and shower the boy with care. And third, women are not necessarily overprotective mothers or clinging partners. In boyish narratives, women trouble such Oedipal scripts; they open boyish characters up to transnational connections and interracial contacts. To define boyish characters' maturity as departing from women naturalizes mother-son separation, father-son identification, the Bildungsroman aesthetics of male entrepreneurism and independence, and the inevitability of mourning and melancholia.

Temporal Norms

Describing some boyish characters as *queer*, I do not use the word as a synonym for *gay* or *homosexual*. Rather, I use it as a strategic term, opposed to *normative*. Since part of my project critiques the enterprise of homo/hetero maturity—an enterprise that reconfigures married gay couples as normative, mature, and progressive—it is crucial to distinguish *queer* from *gay*. I use the term *queer* to capture an adolescent boy's effeminacy without perceiving him as

“protogay” and to recognize a youth’s preference for same-sex friendship without reading him as “connotatively gay.” I recognize the gay implications in such narratives without imposing gay hermeneutics and trajectories of gay maturity on deliberately ambiguous characters. A queer may be straight in terms of sexuality, but his use of time or his attitude toward relationships is nonnormative. When the characters’ homosexuality becomes certain, I discuss their offbeat or unconventional ways of being gay: for instance, having an intergenerational relationship in the mid-century South or remaining in the closet in the post-Stonewall era. In such cases, the word *queer* takes on another boyish valence. Such boyish characters might be slow in their development into normative (“out” and masculinist) gay men, but they might also resist such an arc of maturation. When I refer to straight or people of color as queer, I do not mean that they are actually gay, bi, closeted, transgender, or sexually ambiguous. Instead, I highlight the normative construct of maturity at the intersection of various social differences.

Concerned with connections to the past, *Boyish Narratives* nevertheless does not exhaust queer relations to the past. Sometimes characters undo development not because they refuse to grow up, but because they renounce adulthood in retrospect. In Cather’s *The Professor’s House* (1925), history professor Godfrey St. Peter wishes that he and his wife Lillian had been “picturesquely shipwrecked when [they] were young” instead of “having a family and writing histories and getting middle-aged.”²⁴ Godfrey’s wishful thinking does not necessarily entail his latent homosexuality; it may denote a moment of romantic feeling, a regret for marriage, and/or a tendency to backwardness. As Heather Love argues, “What [Godfrey] shares with [Lillian] in this moment is not only an orientation toward the past or a shared set of losses but also a new closeness grounded in a fantasy of early death; he imagines a catastrophe that might have

²⁴ Willa Cather, *The Professor’s House* (New York: Vintage Books, 1925 [1990]), 78.

relieved them from the need to go on living.”²⁵ But Godfrey may also renounce adulthood; he wishes he had escaped the onus of marriage, career, and offspring. He wishes he had been marooned on a desert island with Lillian, without the social obligations of being a husband, father, and breadwinner. Renouncing maturity does not necessarily suggest dying young; it challenges the norms of (re)productive adulthood.

A middle-aged man’s retrospective renunciation of adulthood is different from an adolescent’s renunciation of his prospective adulthood: Godfrey may wish to remain boyish, but he is not. When he later encounters his childhood self—the Kansas boy—during meditation, Godfrey does not see his middle-aged self as a more mature version of the adolescent self. Rather, these two selves and life stages are not in sequence: “The Kansas boy who had come back to St. Peter this summer was not a scholar. He was a primitive. . . . He seemed to know, among other things, that he was solitary and must always be so; he had never married, never been a father.”²⁶ The Kansas boy is a boyish character: he does not marry or grow up. Although Godfrey renounces his adulthood, he remains middle-aged. In *The Professor’s House*, Godfrey’s different life stages do not amount to an integrated identity. Instead, the narrator and Godfrey question the inevitability of development. Although *Boyish Narratives* does not foreground adult characters who renounce their adulthood, it pays attention to characters’ engagement with the past and their reflections on progressivist maturity.

As Godfrey and the Kansas boy indicate, I use the word *queer* to question temporal norms. Queers trouble time and space. The epistemology of the closet, for example, concerns as much the moment of disclosure as the phenomenon of double takes: I knew you were gay when you proclaimed yourself a confirmed bachelor, when you said Marcel Proust’s *À la recherche du*

²⁵ Love, *Feeling Backward*, 82.

²⁶ Cather, *The Professor’s House*, 241.

temps perdu was your Bible, when you glanced backward at the guy passing by. The recognition is often instantaneous (right away) and yet belated (I have been in the dark and I only realized what it all meant just now).²⁷ At the same time, the closet is a space where the gay man or character paradoxically conceals and reveals his sexuality: it is transparent to those in the know and yet enigmatic to those in the dark. Sometimes the gay man or character does not hide in the closet or see his closet as a temporal stage to be outgrown. Rather, he employs the closet as a theatrical stage on which to perform his sexuality. Such creative uses of the closet not only pervert the conventional function of the closet—storage or containment—but also critique the arc of gay maturity, which represents the closet as a chronotope awash with shame or infantilism.²⁸

Sometimes queers' nonnormative uses of time attest to their unique sexual subjectivities. Whereas many straight people inherit their biological ancestors' histories and identities, and look forward to marriage and childbearing, non-straight queers may develop affinity for past individuals (such as Oscar Wilde), communities, or objects outside the environs of their immediate families. Collecting antiques, gay author Will Fellows identifies with Charlotte von Mahlsdorf, invert and founder of the Gründerzeit Museum in Berlin-Mahlsdorf, arguing that

²⁷ Focusing on the chance encounter between M. de Charlus and Jupien in Proust's *Sodom and Gomorrah*, David Caron argues that the backward glance of gay street cruising is not merely an opportunity to be "seized upon immediately"; it is also "a look to the past": "After all, [the backward glance] evokes Lot's wife Ildeth who disobeyed the angels' injunction, looked back at Sodom, the home her family was leaving behind, and was changed into a pillar of salt. Sodom is also what Proust would call this past, a name that, for him, conjures ancient times but also signifies community in the (diasporic) present. Sure enough, as soon as they are finished with sex, Charlus and Jupien begin exchanging notes . . . about who 'is' (queer like them) among the regular visitors of the Guermantes residence where the two men have just met. Community, it appears, was present all along in the random, anonymous sexual encounter of two strangers and their sex act a corporeal indexing of it." See David Caron, "Things Past," in *My Father and I: The Marais and the Queerness of Community* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 116.

²⁸ The term *chronotope* is from Mikhail M. Bakhtin. According to Bakhtin, "We will give the name *chronotope* (literally, 'time space') to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. . . . In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope." See Mikhail M. Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics," in *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84.

queers are cut out for historic preservation.²⁹ Although straights may also devote themselves to historic preservation, Fellows taps into a communal imaginary where he belongs with other gay men as keepers of culture: “Charlotte von Mahlsdorf attributes his culture-keeping propensities to being a woman in a man’s body. I attribute my own to being a male with a decided dose of feminine sensibilities.”³⁰ The point is not that queers tell themselves from straights by their desire or tendency to be historians, archivists, or antiquarians; it is that sexual nonconformity plays a vital role in Fellows’s relation to the past.

In contrast to Fellows’s preservation of the past, gay playwright and writer Neil Bartlett loses himself studying Wilde and gay histories. Instead of perceiving his own time period as more advanced than—and apart from—the past, Bartlett learns how to be gay by cruising Wilde’s London and his texts. In this light, being gay is not about acquiring or recognizing an identity, about knowing oneself in a psychological manner; it is about inheriting particular histories and subcultures, about losing oneself in a transhistorical manner. Taking in the gay subculture in late nineteenth-century London, Bartlett finally makes “a present for Mr Oscar Wilde.”³¹ Writing a literary biography to pay tribute to Wilde, Bartlett undoes the temporal architecture of periodization, making Wilde relevant to the present. And if queers have been considered too slow to catch up with time, they are also sometimes too fast to be confined by the

²⁹ Will Fellows, *A Passion to Preserve: Gay Men as Keepers of Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 10-12.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

³¹ Neil Bartlett, *Who Was That Man?: A Present for Mr Oscar Wilde* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1988). For more of Bartlett’s relation to the past, see David M. Halperin, “Small Town Boy: Neil Bartlett Learns How to Be Gay,” *Tiresias* 3 (April 2009): 3-35. On lesbians’, bisexuals’, transgenders’, and other queers’ relations to time and space, see, for example, Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*; Clare Hemmings, *Bisexual Spaces: A Geography of Sexuality and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Love, *Feeling Backward*; and David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

rhythm of the reproductive apparatus. Recruitment and friendship travel far more rapidly and widely than paternity.

Gay men like Fellows and Bartlett assert nonprogressivist, nonprocreative uses of time. But sexuality does not always determine one's relations to time. In *Boyish Narratives*, I highlight the new teleologies attendant on the age of homo/heteronormativity to critique gay progressivism and emphasize nonprogressivist relations to the past. According to Halberstam, a self-identified queer would go to a drag king club or engage in other activities "that probably seem pointless to people stranded in hetero temporalities": "Queer time for me is . . . the perverse turn away from the narrative coherence of adolescence—early adulthood—marriage—reproduction—child rearing—retirement—death, the embrace of late childhood in place of early adulthood or immaturity in place of responsibility."³² Halberstam shows how queers—as nonheteronormative sexual subjects—assert their unique uses of time and space. But queers' relations to time and space are far more intricate than Halberstam's dualist scheme (queer immaturity and nonconformity versus hetero maturity and domesticity) implies. Building on Guy Hocquenghem's critique of the Oedipal family, David Caron addresses another type of queer temporality: "liv[ing] *with* the past rather than *in* the past."³³ Here, the word *queer* does not refer to non-straight sexual identities; it refers to nonprogressivist relations to the past: that is, not leaving the past behind. According to Caron, a Jewish ex-POW like his father may treasure his days with other *copains* (buddies) in the stalag. Such a group friendship is queer not because inmates turn gay in prison, but because wartime camaraderie defies the progress narrative of heterosexual families by "serv[ing] no purpose other than [itself] and go[ing] nowhere in

³² Dinshaw et al., "Theorizing Queer Temporalities," 181-182.

³³ Caron, *My Father and I*, 205 (emphasis in original). Also see Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, trans. Daniella Dangoor (Durham: Duke University Press, 1978 [1993]).

particular.”³⁴ Even though Caron’s father later marries, has children, and loses contact with his *copains*, he treasures his wartime friendship in a way more complicated than sheer nostalgia.

Caron’s father proves that a straight man may develop a queer, nonteleological group friendship with his *copains*. Conversely, some lesbians and gay men want to prove that they are no different from their straight counterparts. Nowadays, lesbians and gay men are becoming assimilated to the hetero timeline of career, marriage, and reproduction: they too can claim adulthood by securing a job, owning a house, dismissing cruising as less mature than monogamy, and having children.³⁵ Taking on board the timeline of homo/heteronormativity, which models the homo timeline of coming out—gay pride—gay visibility (parade)—gay marriage—gay adoption after the hetero timeline, I underscore boyish characters’ resistance to such teleology of homo/hetero maturation. The point is not to disqualify normative homosexuals from the epithet *queer* (though one may wish to argue that); it is to critique how the new gay teleology incorporates lesbians and gay men into the enterprise of (re)productive adulthood at the cost of discriminating against other sexual nonconformists and dismissing nonprogressivist connections to the past.

Given the teleology of homo/hetero maturation, I critique the progressivism implicit in the division of life into younger and older stages, history into earlier and later periods, and space into premodern and modern sectors. As a chronological norm, the stratification of life stages often simultaneously stigmatizes and tolerates boyish characters: it dismisses their unproductive behavior or status (cruising or bachelorhood) as immature and yet temporary. Expecting them to become (re)productive eventually, the idea of belated maturity translates boyish characters’

³⁴ Ibid., 203.

³⁵ See William N. Eskridge and Darren R. Spedale, *Gay Marriage: For Better or for Worse?: What We’ve Learned from the Evidence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); and Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (New York: Free Press, 1999).

current immaturity into a prolonged adolescence prior to prospective adulthood. As a historical norm, periodization also simultaneously discredits and exhorts boyish characters: it dismisses their undesirable behavior or sentiments (ambiguous friendship or diva worship) as archaic and yet urges them to catch up with time. Again, the idea of belated maturity constructs these characters as archaisms in need of updating or treats them as relics of the past. And as a topographical norm, the compartmentalization of space simultaneously establishes and repudiates ethnic enclaves and the inner city in the United States, and non-Western places around the world: it dismisses their inhabitants as “premodern,” “traditional,” “less sophisticated,” or “unassimilable” beings and yet encourages them to join Western modernity. In such Western grids of national and transnational terrains, boyish characters are often forced to choose between preserving tradition along with their cultural roots and adopting modernity so as to be assimilated. The idea of belated maturity reconfigures boyish characters’ dilemma as an intermediate phase before they finally move out of their ethnic enclaves, update their “premodern” spaces, and live up to Western modernity. Otherwise, they are dismissed as throwbacks or anachronisms incapable of maturity.

Together individual, historical, and spatial progressivisms naturalize the concepts of life stages, historical periods, and topographical divisions. However stagnant he wants to remain, a boyish character feels compelled to become a man. If he is not or has not become one, he is often considered a “failure” who nevertheless still has the chance to be a late bloomer. However accomplished already, a boyish character is pressured to catch up with the latest zeitgeists and the next big thing. If he is not or has not been in sync, he is often infantilized as a boy who is arrested in the past and needs more time to shed his paradoxically “archaic” and “childish” behavior or sentiments. However blessed to be a free black man in the postslavery era or an

admirable Chinese American in the post-Civil Rights era, a boyish character incurs the imperative to leave his ethnic past behind and look forward to a far more “modern” time and space. Even though he has made significant progress in contrast to his forefathers or his counterparts in Africa or Asia, a boyish character tends to see his family or earlier generations as baggage to be disposed of and yet has problems with such desertion. When these three progressivisms converge, a middle-aged Chinese American bachelor in the late 1980s New York Chinatown becomes “boyish” because he is supposed to settle down with someone (male or female), have children, become assimilated to whites, and move into a more “modern” space in the age of homo/heteronormativity and Western modernity, where Asian Americans figure as the model minority. The naturalization of life stages, historical periods, and topographical divisions projects an arc of maturity that obliterates or subsumes the discourse of the Chinese diaspora, non-Western modernities, the character’s intricate attachment to his immigrant mother, and the troubled histories and relations among different ethnic groups in Asia and the United States.

Studying an adolescent who does not want to grow up into a (re)productive man in 1900s Pittsburgh, a bachelor who clings to friendships instead of embarking on a homo/hetero relationship in the 1910s Midwest and East Coast, a Mexican immigrant and apprentice who mimics his German American master and lover’s ways of being instead of becoming an entrepreneur himself in the mid-twentieth-century South, a black playboy who would abandon his family and past in favor of a brand new future in early 1960s Michigan, and two Chinese American sons who have generation and cultural gaps with their Chinatown-dwelling immigrant mother in the late 1980s New York, *Boyish Narratives* highlights the stakes of naturalizing life stages, historical periods, and topographical divisions. While I situate these boyish characters and narratives in their particular spatiotemporal settings, I do not restrict them to the publication

years or historical periods of the stories. Nor do I use the chronological ages or geographical locations of the characters to produce interpretative templates. Instead, I discover nonnormative possibilities in these characters' renunciation of maturity, their affinity for the past, their inheritance of interracial, intergenerational, and transnational histories, as well as their involvement in diasporic imaginaries. Although such an approach might seem universalist or ahistorical at first glance, it insists that boyish characters are not always fixed by nation- or period-based spatiotemporal coordinates. Their "indeterminate," "transitional," or "boyish" status shows how the progressivist mode positions them in terms of norms or/and how different arcs of maturity cannot coalesce into a revisionist yet totalizing narrative to contain them.

Compulsory Historicism and Compulsory Maturation

With the heterogeneous materiality of time and space in view, I interrogate two interrelated compulsory historicisms—*rigid historicism* and *progressivist historicism*—and the discourse of compulsory maturation in literary history and criticism. While I will elaborate on these three ideas shortly, it is important to recognize that boyish characters and boyish narratives do not always call for alternative temporalities. Scholars have problematized historical periodization by exploring different scales of time (such as "deep time," "deep history," and "the long nineteenth century"), proposing different spatiotemporal epistemologies (such as transoceanic, transatlantic, transpacific, multiethnic, and diasporic imaginaries), connecting to the dead, and shifting the focus from chronology to the evolution of the media, media

representations of time and memory, and transhistorical objects.³⁶ In *Boyish Narratives*, I particularly highlight the sequential and sequestering logics of periodization—that is, how periods are defined in succession and against one another—in naturalizing individual, historical, and spatial progresses on the one hand, and constructing such temporal ideas as paradigm shifts and anachronisms on the other. Instead of creating new temporal units to measure time and analyze texts, I render visible the progress narrative implicit in the methodologies of periodization.

In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault makes one of most influential statements about the genealogy of sex between men. Distinguishing early modern sodomy from modern homosexuality, Foucault argues,

As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subjects of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. . . . Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a

³⁶ See, for example, Wai Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature across Deep Time* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Daniel Lord Smail, *On Deep History and the Brain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); David Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century: A History of Germany, 1780-1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*; Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Elizabeth DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007); Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer, with Chris Cullens (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*; Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*; and Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). Also see the special issue of "The Long and the Short: Problems in Periodization" in *PMLA* 127, no. 2 (March 2012).

hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.³⁷

Contrasting these two sexual regimes, Foucault translates sodomy into a premodern counterpart of modern homosexuality— even though he does not mean to approach the history of sexuality in terms of historical (dis)continuity. When read on its own terms, sodomy encompasses transgression as varied as “bestiality, lesbianism, heterosexual anal intercourse, adultery, minority and alien status, heresy, political insurgence, witchcraft and sorcery, ad infinitum.”³⁸ If one studies the history of treason, sodomy has nothing to do with homosexuality (though the Cold War consensus aligns homosexuals with spies).

As the contrast between early modern sodomy and modern homosexuality indicates, the periodization of sexual regimes sometimes risks rigid historicism. Premised on historical alterity, rigid historicism not only defines sexual regimes like classical pederasty, early modern sodomy, and modern homosexuality in succession and against one another, justifying such an alignment by their different attitudes toward male intimacy. It also homogenizes sexual representations within the same time period, repudiating some people’s identification with a past regime and preempting their disidentification from their contemporaneous regime.³⁹ Under the rubric of rigid

³⁷ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 43.

³⁸ Gregory W. Bredbeck, *Sodomy and Interpretation: Marlowe to Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), xi-xii. On the nebulous definition of sodomy, also see Margaret Hunt, “Afterword,” in *Queering the Renaissance*, ed. Jonathan Goldberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 360; Jody Greene, “‘You Must Eat Men’: The Sodomitic Economy of Renaissance Patronage,” *GLQ* 1, no. 2 (1994): 185; Jonathan Goldberg, *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 23; David M. Halperin, “How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality,” in *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 113-117; Michael Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Randolph Trumbach, “Renaissance Sodomy, 1500-1700,” in *A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex between Men Since the Middle Ages*, ed. Matt Cook, H. G. Cocks, Robert Mills, and Randolph Trumbach (Oxford: Greenwood World, 2007), 45-75.

³⁹ On the stakes of queer historiography, also see Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*; Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*; Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Love, “Emotional Rescue: The Demands of Queer History,” in *Feeling Backward*, 31-52.

historicism, it becomes unthinkable for a twentieth-century man to practice pederasty; the regime of homo/heterosexuality can only recognize him as straight or gay. If people call a gay man in the twenty-first century a “sodomite,” they use the term anachronistically.

When readers or critics apply rigid historicism to literary characters, more issues emerge. As Christopher Lane argues, “Fiction is often at odds with, not divorced from, society and history. . . . One cannot obviate the problem [of historicizing literature] by defining all writing as socially embedded, historically determined, and politically motivated.”⁴⁰ Sensitive to distinct sexual regimes, critics sometimes impose rigid historicism on literary analysis, obscuring scenarios where characters do not identify with their coeval sexual paradigm. But untimely characters and feelings do exist. Acknowledging literature as a historical artifact, I historicize stories without subordinating them to the dominant sexual paradigms of their time periods. Archaic as it is for a post-Stonewall gay man to practice pre-Stonewall diva worship, I recognize such a practice as multivalent: the man may use diva worship to “come out”; he may inherit a gay tradition or subculture instead of priding himself on being more advanced than his pre-Stonewall counterparts; he may simply have fun being gay. Allowing boyish characters to establish their affinity for past cultures, practices, or even sexual regimes, I study the implications of their nonprogressivist relations to time without writing them off as backward.

With all due respect to historical periodization, I do not yoke literary representations to rigid historicism. Critiquing the Great Paradigm Shift from early modern sodomy to modern homosexuality in Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick highlights the “unrationalized coexistence” of different models of same-sex relations within one time period.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Christopher Lane, “The Poverty of Context: Historicism and Nonmimetic Fiction,” *PMLA* 118, no. 3 (May 2003): 452.

⁴¹ Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 47.

To address the instability of homo/heterosexual definition, she explicates two contradictory views: the “minoritizing view,” which sees homo/heterosexual definition “as an issue of active importance primarily for a small, distinct, relatively fixed homosexual minority,” and the “universalizing view,” which sees such definition “as an issue of continuing, determinative importance in the lives of people across the spectrum of sexualities.”⁴² But Sedgwick’s methodology obscures the notion that some past sexual practices were ahead of their time (they match our present sexual paradigm) and others repro-futuristic (they envisioned some future paradigms in the past, but such paradigms are not realized at present).⁴³ It also erases scenarios in which some people or characters deliberately practice a past paradigm at present. If rigid historicism treats some current sexual practices of which we do not approve as throwbacks to some earlier period, Sedgwick drowns out the issue of anachronism by discussing homosexuality in terms of sexual act (sex between men), sexual identity (a social minority like people of color), and same-sex feeling (homosocial/homosexual friendship). Underscoring the asynchrony between some characters’ sexualities and their supposed sexual regimes, I study the implications of a post-Stonewall gay man who practices mid-century diva worship instead of coming out to his mother. The point is not to see how diva worshippers alienate themselves from the contemporary gay community. It is to show how normativity and maturity figure in the discourse of sexuality, reinforcing notions of authenticity, legitimacy, maturity, and periodization.

⁴² Ibid., 1.

⁴³ I borrow the term *retro-futuristic* from science fiction, architecture, and fashion. One of most famous examples is the jetpack, which graced the cover of *Amazing Stories* in 1928. Imagined as the common suit in the future, the idea has not been realized at present. On retro-futurism, see Daniel H. Wilson, *Where’s My Jetpack?: A Guide to the Amazing Science Fiction Future That Never Arrived* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007); Norman Brosterman, *Out of Time: Designs for the Twentieth Century Future* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000); and Joseph J. Corn and Brian Horrigan, *Yesterday’s Tomorrows: Past Visions of the American Future* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

The transitions from classical pederasty to early modern sodomy to modern homosexuality are a back-formation from contemporary gay history. Dramatizing the similarities and differences among sexual regimes, such a homosexuality-inflected history creates the illusion of a lineage (even though the lineage is fraught with twists and turns). Pederasty designates a brief, institutionalized male relationship between an adult lover (*erastēs*) and an adolescent boy (*pais*), but contemporary gay historians or homophiles may translate pederasty into a “gay phase” prior to opposite-sex marriage, understanding ancient Greeks as bisexuals attracted to beautiful women and boys. Such an understanding, however, obscures the assignment of bottomhood to the *pais*: a *pais* does not claim his sexual subjectivity through bottomhood. It also privileges the gender of sexual object-choice, discounting bestiality, masturbation, and any other sexual practices unrelated to the gender of the sexual object.⁴⁴ And most important, reading classical pederasty through the lens of modern homosexuality shores up a contradictory view of historical divisions. People might see ancient Greeks as technically ex-gays in modern terminology, but they do not suspect their marriages of being fake or insincere. By contrast, they hardly believe that a contemporary gay man can marry a woman and leave his homosexuality behind. To the extent that pederasts were open to same-sex desire, they all would seem to have left their boys dutifully and ungrudgingly, as if their sexuality had been compatible with state institutions. But why does a contemporary gay man have to choose between genders or be thought notoriously bi and immature? Instead of limiting contemporary sexualities to the regime of homo/heterosexuality, I call into question the naturalization of life stages, historical periods, and the politics of queer object choices.

⁴⁴ On the protocols of pederasty, see David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990); William Armstrong Percy, *Pederasty and Pedagogy in Archaic Greece* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996); and James Davidson, *The Greeks and Greek Love: A Radical Reappraisal of Homosexuality in Ancient Greece* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007). On the limitations of homo/heterosexual definition in studying sexualities, see Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 8.

A second common historicism is progressivist historicism. To be sure, it is not wrong to regard the coinage of the term *homosexuality* in 1869, the Wilde trials in 1895, the homophobia of McCarthyism from the late 1940s to the late 1950s, the Stonewall riots in 1969, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s as different watersheds in gay history. But such event-inflected historicism creates problems of its own. First, not every gay man or queer owns or identifies with this Euroamerican, metropolitan history. Martin F. Manalansan IV, for instance, questions the meaning of Stonewall from a diasporic perspective: since Filipino “gay” men living in the Philippines and New York City experience and transform “disjunctive and syncretic engagements” with U.S. and diasporic politics, they “deploy multiple formulations (hegemonic as well as counterhegemonic) as they declare affinities and differences in response to global gay and lesbian agendas.”⁴⁵ Second, the construct of gay history ignores generation gaps among gay men. For gay men born in the 1990s and after, HIV/AIDS is more often simply a disease (for better or worse) than a trauma charged with collective memory. Third, not every gay man catches up with time. As D. A. Miller and other critics point out, gay liberation does not deliver gay men from stigma once and for all. Although the rise of militant gay activism depathologizes homosexuality, it sometimes renders show queens, opera queens, and effeminate sissies “monstrous” throwbacks to an age of “excessive sentimentality.”⁴⁶ To the extent that disco acrobats and butch gay clones took over the scene of gay representation in the 1970s, swish queens were deemed outdated.⁴⁷ Even though the gay world may accommodate effeminate queens, they are often overshadowed by young, muscular gays.

⁴⁵ Manalansan, “In the Shadows of Stonewall,” 426.

⁴⁶ D. A. Miller, *Place for Us: Essays on the Broadway Musical* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 26. Also see David M. Halperin, “Homosexuality’s Closet,” *Michigan Quarterly Review* 41, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 21-54; Halperin and Traub, *Gay Shame*; and Love, *Feeling Backward*, 18-21.

⁴⁷ See Alice Echols, *Hot Stuff: Disco and the Remaking of American Culture* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010); Martin P. Levine, *Gay Macho: The Life and Death of the Homosexual Clone*, ed. Michael S. Kimmel (New York:

When progressivist historicism applies to literary criticism, it judges literary figures and characters according to their supposed degrees of maturity in the progress narrative of repression—revolution—liberation. From the vantage point of gay liberation, Walt Whitman is hailed as a prophet of contemporary butch camaraderie. Even though he inhabits the “repressive” nineteenth century, Whitman appeals and belongs to the “modern,” “mature” epoch of sexual liberation. In contrast, Tennessee Williams is dismissed as a goner in the post-Stonewall era, for he does not celebrate his sexuality and assume gay masculinity. Although events like gay liberation inaugurate new zeitgeists, the post-gay liberation era is not necessarily more advanced than the pre-gay liberation era. Nonetheless, many gay thinkers or literary historians subscribe to such a progress narrative. Encouraging gay men to come out and butch up, the current homonormativity even encourages gay marriage and gay adoption.⁴⁸ Such progressivism identifies a closeted character in the late 1980s as “backward,” as if being “out” and proud were the only way to be gay in the post-Stonewall era.

If rigid historicism and progressivist historicism naturalize periodization, the discourse of compulsory maturation imposes another arc of development on individuals. In light of compulsory maturation, a pederast is supposed to leave his boy and marry a woman by the age of thirty, whereas a gay man is supposed to be aware of his sexuality in adolescence and come out by his late teens or early twenties. Even though a middle-aged adult in ancient Greece might still be fond of boys, he was supposed to be married. Likewise, boys in the age of homo/heterosexuality are encouraged to be homosocial, but romantic friendship or bromance should yield to straight/gay identity eventually. As the credo of compulsory maturation shapes

New York University Press, 1998); and Mike Silverstein, “An Open Letter to Tennessee Williams,” in *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation*, ed. Karla Jay and Allen Young (New York: New York University Press, 1972 [1992]), 69-72.

⁴⁸ On how gay male couples now feel pressured to have children, see Rachel L. Swarns, “Male Couples Face Pressure to Fill Cradles,” *New York Times*, August 9, 2012.

alike the trajectory of biological growth (incipient childhood—transitional adolescence—mature adulthood), the formation of sexual identity (innocence—awareness—consolidation), and the progress of history (repression—revolution—liberation), individuals feel pressure to keep up with every historic moment and life stage. A midlife bachelor may enjoy being single, but his bachelorhood leaves him susceptible to speculations about his possible homosexuality, accusations of immaturity, and expectations of further development. It is as if bachelorhood must not be an end in itself; there must be something behind or after this “boyish” status. In the post-gay liberation era, a closeted gay man cannot blame anyone but himself for lacking age-appropriate behavior prescribed by homonormativity. By the standard of gay maturity, the closet is at best a transitional phase; being closeted for life is culpably retrograde.

In *Boyish Narratives*, however, the characters I study elude norms of maturity; they are out of sync with the progress narrative of life stages, historical periods, and topographical divisions. In Willa Cather’s “Paul’s Case,” Paul’s wish for permanent boyhood and his suicide suspend adulthood; the queer, effeminate adolescent does not grow up to be a gay man. In *Bertram Cope’s Year*, Henry Blake Fuller also manipulates the narrative: he ends the novel with two characters’ speculations about Cope’s friendships with Arthur Lemoyne and Carolyn Thorpe without resolving the issue, thus leaving Cope’s ultimate sexual outcome indeterminate. While such an ending might suggest that Cope is in a transitional phase prior to straight marriage or same-sex domesticity, Fuller’s open ending does not advance the homo/hetero teleology embedded in the marriage plot and the coming-out story. In Tennessee Williams’s “The Mysteries of the Joy Rio,” Pablo Gonzales’ intergenerational relationship with Emiel Kroger constructs him as a permanent boy. Although he ages, Pablo is forever Emiel’s boy: in the mirror he does not recognize himself as a middle-aged man, but as “the boy loved by the man [Emiel]

whom he loved.”⁴⁹ In the final scene of Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*, Milkman Dead leaps into the air to encounter his friend and enemy Guitar Bains. Frozen in time, these two black bachelors do not attest to the “arrested development” or “crisis” of African Americans. Instead, they open themselves to the genealogy of the black Atlantic. Riding the air, Milkman connects to the past, to the ghosts and people in and outside his immediate family. He learns that maturity is not about looking forward, but about riding backward. Finally, in David Wong Louie’s “Pangs of Love” the Pang family tangoes with spatiotemporal displacements. At first glance, the American-born Chinese sons Ah-Vee-ah and Bagel seem to represent Asian Americans as the model minority in contrast to their “premodern,” Chinatown-dwelling, immigrant mother Mrs. Pang. But Ah-Vee-ah has trouble with his white girlfriends and experiences the postmemory of Japanese imperialism; Bagel remains closeted to his family and practices a predominantly pre-Stonewall diva worship. Although the Pangs seem boyish or displaced for failing to live up to Western modernity or gay teleology, Louie invokes Mrs. Pang’s affinity for Hong Kong modernity, Japan’s superpower status in the 1980s, and Bagel’s diva worship to disrupt such progressivism. The point is not that the Pangs should move out of the Chinatown, marry white women, and come out; rather, the story’s translational context defies attempts to integrate arcs of maturity in the United States as a nation-state.

Although I focus on twentieth-century American literature, I do not argue that boyish narratives are a twentieth-century phenomenon—in contrast, say, to the Victorian bildungsroman. Such a reading yields again to simple historical periodization. Instead, I trace and critique the teleology of (re)production, assimilation, and modernity in discourses of life forms, time, and space. Discourses like sexology, psychology, psychoanalysis, topography, and

⁴⁹ Tennessee Williams, “The Mysteries of the Joy Rio,” in *Collected Stories* (New York: New Directions, 1985), 106.

Western modernity often seize upon confirmed bachelors and other boyish characters; they fault boyish characters for being attached to their mothers, clinging to the past, and failing to be sexually or/and financially productive. Although the discourse of belated maturity seems far more accommodating, it still dictates maturation. In this context, I highlight characters who are deliberately constructed as *not yet* mature for three goals. First, I critique the progressivist logic of sequence and sequestering by opening boyish narratives and boyish characters to the possibility of renouncing maturity, indefinitely delaying marriage, connecting to the past, and becoming susceptible to transnational heritage and memory. Second, I critique the back-formation of sexual development and history: boyish characters look back not to outgrow the past, suffer from trauma, or fall prey to arrested development, but to challenge the progress narrative of adulthood, the nation state, the American Dream, and Western modernity. And third, I foreground characters whose damning, redemptive, or liberating moment has not, or does not, come. Boyish narratives and boyish characters' temporal suspension or their orientation toward the past counters the teleology of enlightenment, emancipation, citizenship, and autonomy.

Transitional Adolescence, Anachronistic Drag, and Renounced Past

Having addressed temporal norms and ideas like premodern and modern periods/spaces, historical (dis)continuity, historical paradigms and regimes, the tripartite structure of past, present, and future, and the proleptic idea of belated maturity, I would like to discuss another three concepts of time—adolescence, drag, and renunciation—before I end this introduction with a map for each chapter. Associated with boyish characters, these three concepts have distinct implications. When it comes to the matrix of time, sexuality, and maturity in a transhistorical and

transnational context, the point is not how adolescent, how draglike, or how inclined to renunciation boyish characters are. It is how the arc of maturity stipulates a linear trajectory of development in terms of Western modernity or other progress narratives, makes room for transitional status and temporary deviation (so long as the subjects will outgrow their transitional immaturity or later renounce their deviation as a childish phase or mistake), dismisses “unfit” subjects as archaic, anachronistic, or displaced, and codifies eventual maturity.

A predetermined phase between childhood and adulthood, adolescence is often depicted as a period of sexual awakening in line with physical development. Due to this tripartite division of life stages, adolescence also symbolizes a transitional period prior to full maturity. If a thirty-year-old bachelor is still hanging out with his friends instead of pursuing a career and partner, he is often reproached for being “too adolescent.” And to complicate the picture, the discourse of belated maturity may frame his “adolescent” behavior as a temporary state, not as a permanent condition. As a result, the “adolescent” bachelor is seen as at once immature and inhabiting a transitional phase: he may firmly resist domestic couplehood and other milestones of adulthood, but the teleology of maturity foresees eventual development. His resistance is translated into “prolonging adolescence” or “indefinitely delaying adulthood”: it is tolerated for now and maybe for a while, but not for life.

Phrases like “prolonging adolescence” and “indefinitely delaying adulthood” imply that adolescence may last for a long stretch. Even though adolescence comes right after childhood, the primacy of adulthood constructs adolescence as a transition through a process of back-formation. According to Angus Gordon, the narrative of adolescence resembles that of fiction in two respects:

First, it understands its object by means of what Peter Brooks calls the “anticipation of retrospection.” That is, the meaning of adolescence is always understood to become apparent only in hindsight; it is structured throughout by a foreshadowed denouement, which is the subject’s arrival at adulthood. Second, however, this denouement must never occur too soon; the narrative must be allowed to run its course, resulting in an array of what Roland Barthes refers to as “dilatatory” strategies: detours, digressions, red herrings, and the like. These strategies are particularly important in the treatment of same-sex desire or experience during adolescence; the discourse of adolescence typically recuperates them as detours (even, at times, as *necessary* detours) on the path to an eventual heterosexual consummation.⁵⁰

In contrast to psychological or sociological framings of maturity, which define adulthood largely in terms of identity formation or material accumulation, I agree with Gordon in underscoring sequence and transition. A married man with children and property fulfills the psychological and sociological definitions of maturity. But if he comes to realize his attraction to men later in life, what had been his presumed “adult,” “straight” identity now becomes an “adolescent” transition to an even more “mature” gay identity. And to complicate this scenario, heterosexism often dismisses such a gay awakening as temporary deviation: it will blow over.

The debates about hetero and homo denouements may last forever. But they come down to the difference between chronological and logical sequences. Although adolescence predates adulthood chronologically, adulthood precedes adolescence logically. As Gordon puts it, “Just as the generically constrained denouement of fictional narrative structures the reading of its dilatatory ‘middle,’ the perpetually foreshadowed fixity of adult sexual identity informs the purported liminality of adolescent sexuality at every point of its discursive articulation.”⁵¹ Although adolescence may be associated with such attributes as innocence, ignorance, sexual apathy, sexual experimentation, paternal emulation, or maternal attachment, it is the endpoint of mature

⁵⁰ Angus Gordon, “Turning Back: Adolescence, Narrative, and Queer Theory,” *GLQ* 5, no. 1 (1999): 3 (emphasis in original). Also see Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 23; and Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 75-76.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

adulthood that defines adolescence in retrospect. A “foreshadowed denouement,” adulthood does not mark an exact moment of maturity like a timer. It structurally and discursively anticipates the end of adolescence in advance.

Like Gordon, I see the difference between chronological and logical sequences. But we emphasize different sorts of belatedness. Gordon regards a gay teen’s sexual awareness as a delayed formation of “retrospectively assigned immanence.”⁵² To the extent that individuals often come to realize their same-sex attraction during adolescence, it is always already a belated awakening.⁵³ By contrast, I describe the permanently delayed and yet reachable adulthood in boyish narratives as belated. Here, adolescence figures as a period where one has not settled down in a monogamous relationship, owned real estate, started a stable career, become fully assimilated, or/and grown as mature as one would be. If the gay teenager in Gordon’s timeline has to renounce his “straight” past before he belatedly takes on gay identity, my idea of belated adulthood refers to the ever-evolving endpoint of maturity in identity-inflected progressivism. Under the banner of homo/hetero maturity, a gay man often has to go through a series of “adolescent,” “transitional” stages, such as struggling with straight identity, coming out, cruising, and dating, before he feels comfortable in his skin, finds a partner, and consolidates his identity. If the norm of gay masculinity has rendered opera queens and show queens archaic and infantile, the prospect of gay marriage now translates cruising and dating into intermediate phases. The

⁵² Ibid., 5.

⁵³ Kathryn Bond Stockton employs a similar logic of transition to describe the “backward birth” of the protogay child: it comes into being only when the individual has passed childhood and buried the straight self. According to Stockton, “The protogay child has only appeared through an act of retrospection and after a death. For this queer child, whatever its conscious grasp of itself, has not been able to present itself according to the category ‘gay’ or ‘homosexual’—categories culturally deemed too adult, since they are sexual, though we do presume every child to be straight. The effect for the child who already feels queer (different, odd, out-of-sync, and attracted to same-sex peers) is an asynchronous self-relation. . . . That is to say, in one’s teens or twenties, whenever (parental) plans for one’s straight destination have died, the designation ‘homosexual child,’ or even ‘gay kid,’ may finally, retrospectively, be applied. . . . The phrase ‘gay child’ is a gravestone marker for where or when one’s straight life died.” See Stockton, *Queer Child*, 6, 6-7.

teleology of gay maturity ushers in gay liberation, gay pride, and other trappings of gay progressivism not necessarily because they are more sophisticated, but because they are seen as more “developed,” further along on a constructed continuum of personal and historical progress. Before one reaches the envisioned endpoint, all the “indecision,” “deviation,” or even “complacency” is seen as “transitional”: it all will be belatedly but eventually outgrown.

Correlating adolescence with immaturity, I do not mean that teenagers are ontologically immature or that gay adolescence is just a phase. Rather, I mean that homo/hetero teleology expects further development from gay teens and sexually ambiguous people or characters, and that it frames an “out” gay man’s previous marriage or straightness as “adolescent.” Tackling the conflation between “gay” and “boy,” Daniel Marshall questions discourses that peg ephebophiles (that is, homosexuals attracted to adolescents) as suffering from arrested development and dismiss same-sex relationships during adolescence as a passing phase.⁵⁴ It is as if ephebophiles must outgrow their object-choice and that gay teens must turn straight. In contrast, I focus on the tricky logic of transition in constructing “immature” subjects. When I argue that effeminate adolescence does not necessarily lead to gay adulthood, I do not validate masculinity as the only endpoint of adulthood. Rather, I tell gender behavior and sexuality apart: an effeminate boy might grow up into a gay man, but he is not necessarily protogay. To insist on such a connection is to police gender and impose the arc of homo/hetero maturity.

⁵⁴ According to Daniel Marshall, “[T]he segregation-narrative of the adolescent and the homosexual—so desperate as it is to separate the two figures—relies, paradoxically, on their insistent rhetorical *coupling*.” Marshall employs the term *ephebophilic* to avoid the highly codified operations of other terms, such as pedophilia, boy-love, intergenerational intimacy, Platonic love, and child abuse or molestation. By “ephebophilic,” Marshall means “the homosexual desire for adolescence which is commonly addressed as pedophilic since, strictly speaking, pedophilia is incorrect, designating as it does erotic interest in *pre-pubescent* children.” Embarking on such an ephebophilic turn, Marshall argues that “homosexual desire is regulated not through its relationship with pre-pubertal childhood, but through one with an adolescent sexuality that, by merit of its constitutive developmentality, presents itself as a perennial site for influence and recruitment in a homophobic conception of homosexuality.” Daniel Marshall, “Ephebophilic Desire: A Queer History of Male Homosexuality” (PhD diss., University of Melbourne, 2004), 19, 20 (emphasis in original).

When it comes to American literature, the idea of transitional adolescence dallies with time. Instead of commending a Good Good Boy who already behaves like a mature adult in his childhood or adolescence, the discourse of belated maturity prefers a Good Bad Boy who experiences wayward adolescence and commits juvenile delinquency prior to achieving a conforming adulthood. As Leslie A. Fiedler argues, “The Good Good Boy does what his mother must pretend that she wants him to do: obey, conform; the Good Bad Boy does what she really wants him to do: deceive, break her heart a little, be forgiven.”⁵⁵ Defining the Good Bad Boy as “a roughneck . . . reformed by the right woman,” Fiedler reinforces not only the divide between mischievous boyhood and mature adulthood but also a heteronormative vision of maturity: sexual nonconformity (homosexuality, S&M, adultery, etc.) is utterly out of the question.⁵⁶ According to Fiedler, an American brat like Tom Sawyer is “a child who will outgrow his mischief.”⁵⁷ To avoid discussion of sex, Mark Twain tactfully ends *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) in adolescence: “So endeth this chronicle. It being strictly a history of a *boy*, it must stop here; the story could not go much further without becoming the history of a *man*. When one writes a novel about grown people, he knows exactly where to stop—that is, with a marriage; but when he writes of juveniles, he must stop where he best can.”⁵⁸ Regarding adolescence as an age of innocence and mischief, Twain allocates sexuality to adulthood. Even if Tom grew up into a thug, the discourse of belated maturity would forgive and forget his misdeeds as a prolonged spell of boyish indiscretion. Looking forward, compulsory maturation is

⁵⁵ Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1960 [2008]), 270.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 271.

⁵⁸ Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (Hartford, CT: The American Publishing Company, 1875 [1881]), 275 (emphasis in original).

demanding and yet magnanimous: one may turn out to be one inch short of adulthood, but one can always try again.

In correlation with the concept of adolescence, drag also operates in a progressivist sense of time. Here, boyish characters are not too young to be mature; they are too old-fashioned to catch up with time. In public culture, drag often refers to cross-dressing: a drag queen impersonates Mae West, Marlene Dietrich, or Joan Crawford. But when one deliberately embodies an outmoded sentiment, behavior, or feeling, such cross-timing entails what Elizabeth Freeman calls *temporal drag*: it “fails” or deliberately decides not to catch up with time, to live up to the expected degree of maturity.⁵⁹ In “Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations,” Freeman coins the term *temporal drag* to describe a potluck-giving lesbian student who clings to an old set of social coordinates: “The temporal incongruity of her body suggested that she simply did not identify with what I would have taken to be her own emergent peer culture of neopunk polymorphs, Queer Nationals, Riot Grrrls, and so on—nor with my culture of neo-butch/femme, consumerist sex radicalism.”⁶⁰ When queers are supposed to catch up with the latest trend, the potluck-giving lesbian student at best signifies a crude predecessor. At worst, she becomes a curio from a bygone era, meant to be extinct by now.

But temporal drag does not just refer to backward, nostalgic individuals. It also relieves the present of the burden of progressivism. As Freeman argues elsewhere, “[W]hat makes a drag show ironic and draglike (rather than an earnest attempt to pass) is the performer’s play with anachronism, ungainly or exaggerated gesture, off-beat timing, and peek-a-boo suspense.”⁶¹

⁵⁹ Elizabeth Freeman, “Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations,” *New Literary History* 31, no. 4 (Autumn 2000): 727-744.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 728. The article later appears in *Time Binds*, with the example of the potluck-giving lesbian student deleted.

⁶¹ Elizabeth Freeman, “Introduction [to Queer Temporalities],” *GLQ* 13, no. 2-3 (2007): 161. Rohy also uses the term *anachronism* to address particular sexual identities or practices, but she focuses on the analogical relationship

Impersonating archaic Hollywood divas, drag queens entertain and perplex their audience with their embodiment of a supposedly obsolete past: “Here, belonging is a matter of pleasurable cathexis across historical time as well as across the space between stage and audience.”⁶² When historical periodization comes undone, the backwardness associated with temporal drag can become chic and engaging rather than outdated and alienating. As Jean Baudrillard argues, “[A]dvanced peoples seek out signs extrinsic to their own time or space, and increasingly remote relative to their own cultural system (a phenomenon which is the converse of ‘underdeveloped’ peoples’ attraction to the technological products and signs of the industrialized world).”⁶³ Although Baudrillard’s temporal scheme is crudely dichotomous, anachronism does sometimes grant its performer or audience cultural capital and taste. Just as antiques often signify their collectors’ social distinction, so too does drag often attest to its performers’ and audiences’ temporal mobility.

Between the urge to catch up with time and the pleasure in releasing the present from its position of supremacy, temporal drag swings between the interpellation of belated maturity and the plea against periodization. From the perspective of eventual maturity, drag can be a phase prior to perfection, a step short of completeness, or a flaw in need of improvement. Proposing a big, sexy future, the discourse of belated maturity dismisses boyish characters, feelings, and practices as temporary drag to be outgrown. But drag is not just tangled in temporalities or bogged down in the past; it is multitemporal. In *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Diana Taylor uses *archive* to refer to enduring materials (texts, documents, buildings, bones, etc.) as opposed to *repertoire*, which designates ephemeral, embodied practices or knowledges (spoken language,

between homosexuality and blackness and their association with such “backward” notions as primitivism, regression, and arrested development. Freeman and I focus on how anachronistic beings or practices unmoor historical periodization. See Rohy, *Anachronism and Its Others*.

⁶² Ibid., 164.

⁶³ Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 1996), 75.

dance, sports, ritual, etc.).⁶⁴ Taking my cues from Taylor, I use drag not only as an archive to indicate a particular historical juncture but also as a repertoire to unsettle periodization. To locate the historical facts about the Hollywood star to which a drag queen refers does not preclude our present enactment, appropriation, and adaptation of the drag routine. From the camp perspective, drag makes use—and fun—of anachronism. Multitemporal, drag denaturalizes periodization: the past does not have to be an entity alienated from, or inferior to, the present.⁶⁵

Attuned to anachronistic drag, *Boyish Narratives* historicizes characters without imposing compulsory historicism and compulsory maturation. The point is not to locate drag temporally, but to counter progressivism. And to counter progressivism does not mean to reject maturity altogether; it means to stop using the future or the idea of development to spurn temporal drag. If queer progressivism dismisses potluck-giving lesbians, closeted gay men, diva worshippers, and other “immature” subjects or characters as embodiments of temporal drag, a multitemporal take on drag enables performers, spectators, and boyish characters to deploy drag as both a historical archive and a transhistorical repertoire. Drag is not against futurity and maturity; it is against their conflation.

The third temporal concept—renunciation—refers to the repudiation of a former life stage, gender expression, sexual experience, historical era, or cultural practice. To reach gay maturity, for instance, a gay man often has to come out of the closet, get rid of his effeminacy,

⁶⁴ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 19.

⁶⁵ On multitemporality, also see Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 75. According to Latour, the collectivity of people and things defies strict historical periodization: “I may use an electric drill, but I also use a hammer. The former is thirty-five years old, the latter hundreds of thousands. Will you see me as a DIY expert ‘of contrasts’ because I mix up gestures from different times? Would I be an ethnographic curiosity? On the contrary: show me an activity that is homogenous from the point of view of the modern time. Some of my genes are 500 million years old, others 3 million, others 100,000 years, and my habits range in age from a few days to several thousand years. As Péguy’s Clio said, and as Michel Serres repeats, ‘we are exchangers and brewers of time.’ It is this exchange that defines us, not the calendar or the flow that the moderns had constructed for us.”

and outgrow his opposite-sex experiences. To claim self-autonomy, an African American in the postslavery era often decides to leave the past of transatlantic slavery behind. To be assimilated, Asian immigrants often have to move out of their ethnic enclaves and consign their tradition to the older generations in the family. Ultimately, the urge to be modern and mature generates generational rifts, historical amnesia, and identity crises among those who fail to measure up. When renunciation is built into the arc of maturity, it enforces ideological divisions across time and space, creating unwanted anachronisms or displacements.

In the transnational context, the progress narrative of migration, immigration, and assimilation often require subjects to renounce their past. But such renunciation becomes problematic when subjects travel back to their (or their ancestors') earlier places of residence or entertain histories and memories at odds with the integrity of the nation-state. In view of such dilemmas, Marianne Hirsch and Nancy K. Miller embark on a nonteleological reading of diaspora, proposing "alternatives to the celebration of rootlessness and diasporism by making space for the persistent power of nostalgia, and the magnetism of the idea of belonging, even while casting a critical eye on the obsession with roots."⁶⁶ Taking cues from Hirsch and Miller, I also emphasize a past-oriented temporality, questioning the march from uprootedness to resettlement. But I do not see boyish narratives and boyish characters as creating alternative belonging. More often, boyish narratives are marked by ambivalence toward progress, and boyish characters come to realize the poverty of renouncing their past or simply resist the teleology of maturation. Suspended in time or displaced in a nation-state, they either evade normative milestones of maturity (such as marriage and reproduction) or demand new spatiotemporal matrices (such as the black Atlantic and the Asian Pacific).

⁶⁶ Marianne Hirsch and Nancy K. Miller, "Introduction," in *Rites of Return*, 5.

To drive the issues of renunciation home, let us use the dilemma of bisexuality as a tool to pry open the progressivism embedded in the formation of sexual, racial, and ethnic identity. In “Bisexual Theoretical Perspectives,” Clare Hemmings debunks the consistency of sexual object-choice implied in homo/hetero identity. According to Hemmings, the crystallization of sexual identity relies on the coherence of one’s sexual history: “The present can be validated only by the anticipated future, which can be validated only by a past that is retrospectively given meaning according to the present.”⁶⁷ To be sure, a straight man, by definition, is attracted to women only. But what really consolidates sexual identity is not the same gender of object-choice over time; it is the renunciation of any sexual experiences or feelings at odds with one’s professed identity. As Hemming argues, “The actual events of the past are less important than the retrospective meaning they are given. One is allowed ‘mistakes’ as long as they are seen as mistakes, or as an interruption to the narrative of one’s true sexual identity.”⁶⁸ In other words, a straight man can claim heterosexuality despite same-sex experiences or feelings. As long as he renounces sex between men, he can retain his straight identity.⁶⁹

Although Hemmings focuses on the irreconcilable sexual inconsistency of bisexuals, my critique of the progress narrative of Western modernity resonates with her critique of the progress narrative of sexuality. To the extent that bisexuality often figures “as part of a conventionalized, linear, lesbian [or gay] coming-out narrative,” it is yet another “transitional,”

⁶⁷ Clare Hemmings, “Bisexual Theoretical Perspectives: Emergent and Contingent Relationships,” in *The Bisexual Imaginary: Representation, Identity and Desire*, ed. Phoebe Davidson et al. (Cassell: London, 1997), 18.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ “Gay for pay” sex workers and prison inmates may also deploy sexual renunciation; they renounce their same-sex experiences in favor of straight identity. See Chris Cagle, “Rough Trade: Sexual Taxonomy in Postwar America,” in *RePresenting Bisexualities: Subjects and Cultures of Fluid Desire*, ed. Donald E. Hall and Maria Pramaggiore (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 234-252; and Regina G. Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy: Prison and the Uneven History of Modern American Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). Sometimes a man can even have sex with both genders without identifying himself as straight, gay, or bi. It is finance and filiation that matters in his sexual relationships. See Chung-Hao Ku, “The Kid Is All the Rage: (Bi)Sexuality, Temporality and Triangular Desire in Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*,” *Journal of Bisexuality* 10, no. 3 (2010): 309-349.

“immature” phase constructed by homo/hetero teleology.⁷⁰ Likewise, boyish characters often find that event-stratified, adult-projected, and identity-inflected progressivism consigns them to a transitional phase while seducing them with the prospect of belated maturity. Emphasizing the urgency for boyish characters to connect the past without outgrowing it, I open them to nonteleological, transnational memory, feeling, and contact. The point is to not to embrace nostalgia, melancholy, regret, and other unwanted affects or to settle the conflict between spatiotemporal divisions, but to get over the self defined by acquisitions of citizenship, adulthood, and autonomy in a nation-state and to unsettle temporal norms.

Boyish Narratives

Dwelling in spatiotemporal suspensions and displacements, *Boyish Narratives* studies the art of not acting one’s chronological and historical age. Chapter 1 argues that queer adolescence does not entail gay adulthood in Cather’s “Paul’s Case.” According to gay hermeneutics, Paul’s effeminacy, his troubled family relations, and his dalliance with male acquaintances all allude to his homosexuality.⁷¹ But such a reading is not only inflected by gay sensibility and gay historicism but also prone to the preordained discourse of life forms: it is as if a sissy boy must suggest implicit or latent homosexuality. Acknowledging the correlation between gender and sexuality, I nevertheless suspend the temporal and sexual sequence between adolescence and adulthood. Although Paul’s effeminacy evokes the medical discourse of inversion and

⁷⁰ Frann Michel, “Do Bats Eat Cats? Reading What Bisexuality Does,” in *RePresenting Bisexualities*, 64.

⁷¹ See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Willa Cather and Others,” in *Tendencies*, 167-176; Judith Butler, “‘Dangerous Crossing’: Willa Cather’s Masculine Names,” in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge: 1993), 143-166; and David M. Halperin, *How to Be Gay* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012).

homosexuality, there is no grown Paul to confirm the character's gay identity. To the extent that Paul desires to be "exactly the kind of boy he had always wanted to be," his suicide does not necessarily imply a protogay teen's angst about his upcoming ordeals as a gay man; rather, he loathes maturity itself.⁷²

Chapter 2 ponders Cope's friendships with Lemoyne and Carolyn in Fuller's *Bertram Cope's Year*. To be sure, Cope may be Lemoyne's lover. But Fuller manipulates his narrative in ways so as to suggest such a reading without confirming it. As the story indefinitely delays Cope's marriage, it suspends the denouement of homo/hetero identity. Cope may use his friendship with Carolyn as a cover for his homosexuality or savor his friendship with Lemoyne as an indefinitely prolonged phase prior to marriage, but there is no final call on his sexual subjectivity. Without fully considering Fuller's design, a gay reading at best picks up the gay hermeneutics in the story and at worst consolidates them by highlighting the epistemology of the closet. But such interpretations subordinate literature to gay historicism. When readers wish Cope to have been more sexually assertive or assume that Cope could not have been upfront about his sexuality, they subscribe to gay historicism, envisioning something more affirmative or more homophobic than the carefully constructed sexual ambiguity that Fuller devises for Cope.

Chapter 3 tackles the homosexual reproduction of the beloved-boy Pablo by his late lover-man Emiel in Williams's "The Mysteries of the Joy Rio." Instead of writing off this man-boy relationship in terms of sexual exploitation, anachronistic pederasty, same-sex domesticity, or what Gayle Rubin calls "'bad' sex," I argue that Pablo and Emiel's intergenerational

⁷² Willa Cather, "Paul's Case: A Study in Temperament," in *Coming, Aphrodite! and Other Stories*, ed. Margaret Anne O'Connor (New York: Penguin, 1999), 130.

relationship undoes Oedipal temporality and gay maturity.⁷³ In “Mysteries,” Pablo does not compete with his father, marry, and have children, as one expects of Oedipal temporality. Nor does he cruise and finally settle down with another man, as one expects of gay maturity. Instead, he inherits and recreates Emiel’s being: suddenly aging and becoming a second Emiel when his lover passes away, Pablo repeats Emiel’s profession and cruising, and slims down to his former figure when he catches the same illness as did Emiel. It is as if these two take in each other’s bodies and fold each into the other both physically and temporally. Reproducing Emiel’s being but not pursuing wealth or looking for an heir, Pablo spurns marital teleology. In a time when homosexuality is dismissed as temporary, degenerate, and ungenerational, or imagined as identical to a heterosexual relationship, Pablo’s homosexual reproduction of Emiel counters homo/hetero maturity.

Chapter 4 addresses the creolized genealogy in Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*. Although the novel reads like a story of Milkman’s belated maturation from a ruthless playboy to a compassionate black man, such a reading rounds up progressivist senses of self, history, and freedom, maps Milkman onto the Solomon-Jake-Macon-Milkman male lineage, and reduces women and any other characters to supporters or antagonists on Milkman’s way to manhood. In fact, Morrison’s narrative is much more complicated. Although women like Milkman’s mother Ruth and his aunt Pilate do help Milkman grow up, maturity does not rely on looking forward or learning from past mistakes. Rather, it relies on connecting to the past, to the community in and outside Milkman’s male lineage and immediate family, to the black Atlantic. Such an interracial,

⁷³ According to Gayle Rubin, “[S]exuality that is ‘good,’ ‘normal,’ and ‘natural’ should ideally be heterosexual, marital, monogamous, reproductive, and non-commercial. It should be coupled, relational, within the same generation, and occur at home. It should not involve pornography, fetish objects, sex toys of any sort, or roles other than male and female.” See Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,” in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 13-14.

transatlantic, and backward-turning network forms a creolized genealogy: it enables Milkman to get over himself, acknowledge his attachment and indebtedness to the disavowed, and see his ancestors as more than heroes to be mimicked or baggage to be disposed of. When Milkman finally jumps into the air to face Guitar, the narrative does not build everything up to a crisis of black futurity. Instead, it transforms Milkman into a “lodestar [that] wheeled toward Guitar and it did not matter which one of them would give up his ghost in the killing arms of his brother.”⁷⁴ A star in a constellation of transatlantic relations, Milkman leaps not into the precarious future, but into the collective past.

Finally chapter 5 studies four displacements in Louie’s “Pangs of Love.” According to the progress narrative of white assimilation and Western modernity, the American-born Chinese bachelor Ah-Vee-ah, his younger gay brother Bagel, their immigrant mother Mrs. Pang, and New York’s Chinatown all “fail” to catch up with time: Ah-Vee-ah has problems with white women; Bagel does not come out to his family; and Mrs. Pang and her Chinatown are relegated to the status of “premodern” immigrants and a “premodern” ethnic enclave. But a closer look at the narrative defies such a progressivist sentiment. Mrs. Pang’s affinity for Hong Kong modernity complicates the logic of assimilation and citizenship in the United States. Ah-Vee-ah’s postmemory of Japanese imperialism and his awareness of Japan’s superpower status in the late 1980s counter the hype of Asian American coalition and the national containment of Asian Americans as the model minority. And Bagel’s practice of a predominantly pre-Stonewall diva worship undermines the gay maturity and teleology embedded in the coming-out discourse. Together, the three Pangs’ displacements in the late 1980s United States open them to transpacific connections and memories, as well as the critique of periodization as temporal drag.

⁷⁴ Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (New York: Plume, 1977 [1987]), 337.

Overall, *Boyish Narratives* defies spatiotemporal norms and emphasizes connections to the past. Maturity is a back-formation that renounces the past as “immature,” “transitional,” or “backward,” not a developmental trajectory that progresses from one stage or period to another. And the past is certainly more heterogeneous and more relevant to the present than a primitive stage or a benighted period. Embarking on nonteleological, transnational readings of boyish narratives and boyish characters, I pay attention to various authors’ literary representations in evading arcs of maturity. Boyish characters may be on their way to manhood, they may still try to figure out what they want, and they may be “immature” according to some norm (procreative adulthood or white assimilation, for example). But to position them in such transitional, progressivist, identity-inflected modes of development overlooks the nonnormative subjectivities and temporal manipulations in boyish narratives. Some boyish characters like Paul and Pablo refuse to mature; they claim their nonnormative subjectivities by their queer uses of time. Others like Cope are so implicated in discourses of homo/hetero maturity that any move or gesture of theirs is impregnated with meanings. Such meanings do not necessarily express who the boyish characters are; rather, they register the operation and knowledge production of identity-inflected maturity. And still others like Milkman, Ah-Vee-ah, and Bagel do not relish the art of living askance or claim to be refuseniks. Instead, they cannot be contained by such hegemonic discourses as white assimilation, Western modernity, and procreative adulthood, or such alternative discourses as gay teleology, Hong Kong modernity, and the construct of Asian Americans as the model minority. Susceptible to spatiotemporal suspensions and displacements, *Boyish Narratives* is anything but normative.

Chapter One

“A Boy under the Ban of Suspension”: Renouncing Maturity in Willa Cather’s “Paul’s Case”

Gay Maturity

In *Boyhoods: Rethinking Masculinities*, clinical psychologist Ken Corbett studies effeminate boys not in terms of gender identity disorder (GID) but in terms of transition. According to Corbett, an effeminate boy may turn out to be a loving father, a gay man, or a transgender woman: “For some [boys] the femininity is a mere trace; as they move into adulthood, perhaps they are seen as particularly loving fathers. For some the boyhood femininity may be the harbinger of adult homosexuality For some the femininity . . . may deepen and develop toward a transgendered subjectivity.”¹ In contrast to earlier alarmist views of boyhood effeminacy (which aim at correcting sissy boys) or later normative views of gay masculinity (which argue that gay men are no different from straight men), Corbett argues that boyhood

¹ Ken Corbett, *Boyhoods: Rethinking Masculinities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 124.

femininity may become a nonissue (if fatherhood is the goal of normative adulthood) or lead to nonnormative sexual beings.²

Corbett accommodates different gender and sexual expressions, but the transitional view of boyhood effeminacy generates two major questions. First, it naturalizes the correlation between boyhood and adulthood, effeminacy and homosexuality, and male effeminacy and trans womanhood. Even though a sissy boy does not necessarily grow up into a queeny gay man, the logic of (dis)continuity reinforces a link between present and future. If an effeminate boy may turn out to be a masculine man, why does boyhood effeminacy need to be a transition to begin with? And if an effeminate boy kills himself, where does the transitional view of boyhood effeminacy stand? Second, the transitional view of boyhood effeminacy does not prevent the paranoid discourse of GID. Because of the link between effeminacy and homosexuality, a sissy boy is sometimes translated into a protogay child. Although the idea of proto-gayness is a back-formation constructed from the perspective of an “out” gay man, it generates proleptic or preventive readings of queer children.³ On the one hand, normative parents and authorities police boyhood effeminacy in order to prevent future homosexuality. On the other, liberals equate boyhood effeminacy with protogay boyhood in order to welcome gay men in the making.

It is the crucial difference between boyhood effeminacy and protogay boyhood that I would like to study in Willa Cather’s “Paul’s Case: A Study in Temperament” (1905). In this

² On an alarmist view on effeminate boys and a revisionist view of gay masculinity, see Richard Green, *The “Sissy Boy Syndrome” and the Development of Homosexuality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); and Richard C. Friedman, *Male Homosexuality: A Contemporary Psychoanalytic Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

³ On protogay experiences from the perspective of grown gay men, see, for example, Funny Gay Males (Jaffe Cohen, Danny McWilliams, and Bob Smith), *Growing Up Gay: From Left Out to Coming Out* (New York: Hyperion, 1995); Patrick Merla, ed., *Boys Like Us: Gay Writers Tell Their Coming Out Stories* (New York: Avon, 1996); and Marlene Fanta Shyer and Christopher Shyer, *Not Like Other Boys: Growing Up Gay: A Mother and Son Look Back* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996). On a theorization of the back-formation of gay identity or subjectivity, see Angus Gordon, “Turning Back: Adolescence, Narrative, and Queer Theory,” *GLQ* 5, no. 1 (1999): 1-24; and Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009.

short story, the adolescent Paul provokes questions of gay maturity—not whether homosexuals are as mature as their heterosexual counterparts, but what is at stake in linking boyhood effeminacy to future homosexuality. Critics and scholars have studied child and adolescent sexuality in issues like adolescent psychology, boyology (the character building of boys), the age of consent, the trials and tribulations of coming of age and coming out, or the concept of children as sexual subjects.⁴ In contrast, I read Paul as a boyish character in order to bring out the stakes of converting boyhood effeminacy into protogay boyhood. Since Cather does not construct Paul as a gay man recalling his adolescence, she does not necessarily have in mind a (proto)gay character who conceals his sexuality so deliberately and so badly that he becomes additionally so.⁵ In addition, the story is not told from the perspective of Paul. Even though the narrator and other characters try to read Paul, his subjectivity remains opaque.

To be sure, reading Paul as a boyish character seems insensitive to the history of gay representation. (Here my boyish reading is not to be confused with Carol Mavor's "reading

⁴ See Steven Angelides, "Feminism, Child Sexual Abuse, and the Erasure of Child Sexuality," *GLQ* 10, no. 2 (2004): 141-177; Jeffrey Jensen Arnett and Jennifer Lynn Tanner, eds., *Emerging Adults in America: Coming of Age in the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2006); Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley, eds. *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Jon Davies, "Imagining Intergenerationality: Representation and Rhetoric in the Pedophile Movie," *GLQ* 13, no. 2-3 (2007): 369-385; Sigmund Freud, "Infantile Sexuality," in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1962 [1905]), 39-72; Henry William Gibson, *Boyology; or, Boy Analysis* (New York: Association Press, 1916); G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence; Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1904); Gilbert H. Herdt, *The Sambia: Ritual, Sexuality, and Change in Papua New Guinea* (Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wassworth, 2006); Kenneth B. Kidd, *Making American Boys: Boyology and the Feral Tale* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); James R. Kincaid, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), and *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Willem Koops and Michael Zuckerman, eds., *Beyond the Century of the Child: Cultural History and Developmental Psychology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Judith Levine, *Harmful to Minors: The Perils of Protecting Children from Sex* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilisation* (New York: Perennial Classics, 2001); Kevin Ohi, *Innocence and Rapture: The Erotic Child in Pater, Wilde, James, and Nabokov* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), and "Molestation 101: Child Abuse, Homophobia, and *The Boys of St. Vincent*," *GLQ* 6, no. 2 (2000): 195-248; and Stockton, *The Queer Child*.

⁵ D. A. Miller captures the paradox of concealment and disclosure: one may aim to "conceal—or rather, by concealing badly, to disclose—a radically pathetic subject, who by letting us see that he is trying to hide his sufferings, becomes additionally so." See D. A. Miller, *Place for Us: Essay on the Broadway Musical* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 8.

boyishly,” which addresses mother-son attachment.)⁶ After all, how could Cather write about homosexuals if not by connotation? Why would Paul kill himself if not for his repressed homosexuality? And Cather—a queer herself—might end Paul’s life out of self-hatred or gay martyrdom.⁷ Now that we are equipped with the epistemology of the closet, we should not ignore the “gay hints” in Cather’s story and deny Paul’s homosexuality. But such interpretations are gay-inflected speculations. Given the possibility that Paul may be gay, I nevertheless argue that Cather manipulates Paul’s age and his ambiguous behavior to evade the trajectory of gay adulthood. In other words, the question is not whether Paul is gay and how well Cather disguises Paul’s homosexuality, but how the discourse of wayward adolescence (dis)avows homosexuality as a temporary deviance and how Paul’s suicide preempts the telos of (re)productive adulthood. Putting to task the proleptic reading of homosexuality, I distinguish boyhood effeminacy from protogay boyhood and see Paul’s suicide as renouncing homo/hetero teleology.

I also want to use Paul to address a number of progress narratives in the Progressive Era. In the early twentieth century, evolutionist Herbert Spencer, psychologist G. Stanley Hall, capitalists Andrew Carnegie and J. P. Morgan, and YMCA leader and boyologist Henry William Gibson all champion gradual maturity. Upholding the discourse of recapitulation, with its insistence that ontogeny repeats phylogeny, they posit boyhood as a primitive, stormy stage prior to refined, (re)productive adulthood.⁸ When the discourse of recapitulation applies to education, adolescence is pictured as a period of instruction, discipline, and rectification. In “Paul’s Case,” the institutions of the family, school, religion, media, and work tolerate Paul. When the news of Paul’s theft breaks out, the local community in Pittsburgh tries to shepherd him: “The firm of

⁶ Carol Mavor, *Reading Boyishly: Roland Barthes, J. M. Barrie, Jacques Henri Lartigue, Marcel Proust, and D. W. Winnicott* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

⁷ On the representation of homosexuality in modern literature in the context of homo/heterosexual definition, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990 [2008]).

⁸ See Hall, *Adolescence*; Gibson, *Boyology*; and Kidd, *Making American Boys*.

Denny & Carson announced that the boy's father had refunded the full amount of his theft, and that they had no intention of prosecuting. The Cumberland minister had been interviewed, and expressed his hope of yet reclaiming the motherless lad, and Paul's Sabbath-school teacher declared that she would spare no effort to that the end."⁹ They all wish Paul to repent and grow up. But this queer boy would rather lose himself in arts and "revolt against the homilies by which the world is run" (136). Instead of attributing such behavior to Paul's boyhood effeminacy or protogay boyhood, I argue that Paul renounces maturity. In a time when rags-to-riches industrialists and character-building boyologists both espouse eventual maturity, Cather ends Paul's life to check "the immense design of things" (136). If boyology makes room for juvenile delinquency as a transitional phase to be rid of, Paul's queerness resides not so much in his suggestive homosexuality or wayward boyhood as in his renunciation of adulthood.

Four Ways of Looking at a Boy

To show the stakes of boyhood effeminacy, I would like to distinguish five different yet related terms: gay connotation, protogay boyhood, gay identity, queer adolescence, and suspended adolescence. While the implications of each term will become clear when I contrast my reading with other critics' in the following two sections, it is important to bear two things in mind. First, I do not mean to discredit other critics. Instead, I show how their arguments are based on various disciplines or assumptions, and how Paul remains elusive at the end. To historicize "Paul's Case" in terms of aestheticism, literary representation, and gay history is

⁹ Willa Cather, "Paul's Case: A Study in Temperament," in *Coming, Aphrodite! and Other Stories*, ed. Margaret Anne O'Connor (New York: Penguin, 1999), 133. Hereafter references to this edition will be incorporated parenthetically in the text. Unless otherwise noted, all italics that appear in quoted extracts from this story are Cather's own.

crucial, but that does not necessarily generate truth about Paul. Literary characters do not always wear their hearts on their sleeves, the narrator does not always speak for characters, and allusions to Oscar Wilde do not always entail homosexuality. Consequently, it is problematic to translate Paul's actions and people's observation of him into expressions of his sexual agency or subjectivity. The point is not to know who Paul is, but to see how Cather's creation of Paul suspends readings that derive from, or contribute to, discourses of maturity, identity, or disidentification.¹⁰

Second, I delve into history, psychology, cultural studies, and gay hermeneutics not to find the perfect niche to situate Paul or to treat literature as derivative "bundles of historical and cultural content," but to see how literature engages or eludes other discourses of life forms.¹¹ The historical or discursive readings of literature tend to reduce literature to a mirror that reflects the "transparent," "unmediated" history or culture of a specific period and locale. Even though such readings sometimes show that history and culture are heterogeneous and constructed (and thus not "transparent" or "unmediated"), they still largely overlook how multitemporal and multivalent literature could be. To say that literature is a geo- and bio-political artifact does not mean that literature has to be subordinated to the spatiotemporal coordinates and discourses of its publication year. With this in mind, I argue that Cather manipulates time and narrative in such a

¹⁰ David M. Halperin reads "Paul's Case" in terms of gay male subjectivity and sensibility. According to Halperin, "Cather grotesquely lards her text with every sign and marker of gayness she can think of—except homosexual desire." Alone at the Waldorf, Paul is about "gayness not as perverted sexuality but as solitary queer sensibility." But such a reading is based on the life form of homosexuals in sexology and on Wilde's iconography, not on Paul's confession or identification. It uses the sexological discourse of homosexuality and Wilde's gay persona as the "hidden truth" about Paul. In fact, Paul is not a gay man who looks back on his adolescence and pegs it as protogay; he is a queer boy whose effeminacy does not necessarily entail homosexuality. While I emphasize the narrative problems of a legible and legitimate gay identity in "Paul's Case," it is useful to see Judith Roof's discussion of the narrative problems of visibility, identification, and identity in the literature and politics of outing or coming out. See David M. Halperin, *How to Be Gay* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 212, 214; and Judith Roof, *Come As You Are: Sexuality and Narrative* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 144-87, particularly 148-52.

¹¹ Mark David Rasmussen, "Introduction: New Formalisms?," in *Renaissance Literature and Its Formal Engagements*, ed. Mark David Rasmussen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 1.

way that Paul eludes the taxonomy of character archetypes (prodigal sons) and conventions (coming of age) in usual genre studies. As we see throughout *Boyish Narratives*, the more we say about boyish characters, the less we are sure about them. Instead of using events or plots to exhibit and develop Paul's character, Cather shows how literature—when representing characters in opaque, nonteleological styles—undermines the discourses of life stages, juvenile delinquency, and self-revealing aestheticism. Although the correlation between boyhood effeminacy and protogay boyhood remains, there is no grown Paul to write the adolescent Paul down or off as a transitional phase. Cather's narrative simply does not pin Paul down as a nascent gay teen or as a temporarily deviant feminine boy.

People familiar with gay hermeneutics immediately recognize “Paul's Case” as a gay text. Paul's red carnations, his effeminacy, and his “theatrical” eyes are gay signs or symptoms in fin-de-siècle literature and sexology (116).¹² His artistic propensity and worship of the soprano soloist at Carnegie Hall resonate with what one critic calls “opera queendom.”¹³ His “champagne friendship” with a Yale freshman from San Francisco might have involved slumming in the Lower East Side of New York, where working-class fairies, sailors, and tourists look for sexual encounters on “the night side of the town” (32).¹⁴ And his suicide at the end of the story evokes a gay teen tragedy: a runaway high school boy steals money to flee home, and he kills himself

¹² On the discourse of homosexuality in sexology, see Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis: With Especial Reference to the Antipathic Sexual Instinct: A Medico-Forensic Study*, trans. Franklin S. Klaf (New York: Arcade, 1886 [1998]); Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds, *Sexual Inversion* (London: Wilson and MacMillan, 1897); and Edward Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1908 [1921]). On fin-de-siècle literature allusive to homosexuality, see Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (New York: Modern Library, 1890 [2004]); and Robert Hitchens, *The Green Carnation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1894 [1970]).

¹³ Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1993), 29. On the correlation between homosexuality and artistic proclivity, also see Miller, *Place for Us*; and Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex*.

¹⁴ On fairies, see George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

because his family and school do not understand him. Like one of the carnations he buries beneath the snow, Paul finally withers under the tyranny of compulsory heterosexuality.¹⁵

True, Paul can be historicized in various gay discourses. But there are crucial differences among reading Paul as a closeted gay boy who reveals his sexuality through codes, as a protogay boy who cannot reach his adulthood because of social pressure, as a sexual outlaw who resists the cosmopolitan, communal idea of gay identity, and as a queer boy who refuses to grow up. These four readings approach homosexuality from distinct angles: the first one highlights the correlation among gender mannerisms, the gay subculture, and sexual orientation; the second taps into the discourse of gay teen suicide; the third critiques the norm of gay identity/identification; and the last challenges the progress narrative of adulthood. Before I explicate Paul's various deferrals—his academic suspension, his prolonged looking in the hotel mirror, and the slow-motion sequence of his suicide—in terms of queer and suspended adolescence, let us take a look at three other readings and tease out their temporal premises, structures, and implications.

The first reading of “Paul’s Case” is symptomatic. Attuned to gay historicism and the epistemology of the closet, it sees Paul’s idling, effeminacy, and abhorrence of marriage as gay codes, and highlights homosexuals’ plight at the turn of the twentieth century. According to Sharon O’Brien, “Paul’s Case” represents an inaugural, encrypted stage of Cather’s maturation

¹⁵ On the “gay codes” in “Paul’s Case,” also see Larry Rubin, “The Homosexual Motif in Willa Cather’s ‘Paul’s Case,’” *Studies in Short Fiction* 12, no. 2 (Spring 1975): 127-131; Claude J. Summers, “‘A Losing Game in the End’: Aestheticism and Homosexuality in Cather’s ‘Paul’s Case,’” *Modern Fiction Studies* 36, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 103-119; Jane Nardin, “Homosexual Identities in Willa Cather’s ‘Paul’s Case,’” *Literature & History* 17, no. 2 (Autumn 2008): 31-46; John P. Anders, *Willa Cather’s Sexual Aesthetics and the Male Homosexual Literary Tradition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999); and Marilee Lindemann, *Willa Cather, Queering America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). In contrast to such gay readings, Rob Saari calls Paul a prototype of narcissistic personality disorder simply because he meets all the psychiatric criteria: “it seems that Willa Cather intuitively set forth the diagnostic criteria for a narcissistic personality disorder about ninety years before scientists reached a firm, empirically validated consensus.” But such psychiatric readings risk ahistoricism and prioritize social conformity. See Rob Saari, “Paul’s Case: A Narcissistic Personality Disorder, 301.81,” *Studies in Short Fiction* 34, no. 3 (1997): 390.

as a lesbian author: “Throughout her literary career, Cather was both the writer transforming the self in art and the lesbian writer at times forced to conceal ‘unnatural’ love by projecting herself into male disguises.”¹⁶ In a similar vein, Claude J. Summers argues, “This lack of explicitness reflects both the difficulty of writing about homosexuality in 1905 and Cather’s own preference for insinuation and implication.”¹⁷ Situating “Paul’s Case” in the context of the Wilde scandal and Cather’s changing relation to aestheticism, Summers ferrets out suggestive objects and passages in the story—not to condemn Paul’s effeminacy, but to compare Paul to Wilde as a victim of gay bashing and to critique Paul’s failure of imagination. In this framework, Paul is seen as an untimely gay: he embodies “gender liminality” (effeminacy) or “a certain sign of transient homosexuality” (ambiguous male intimacy) in a time of harrowing homophobia.¹⁸ Had Paul been born in the post-gay liberation era, he would have simply come out and identified himself as gay.

The second reading is gay-affirmative. And by “gay-affirmative,” I do not mean that such a reading lets Paul do whatever he wants to as a gay character, but that it assumes Paul’s gay subjectivity. Although the second reading, like the first one, is premised on gay maturity, it shifts the emphasis from the progress narrative of gay historicism (Cather’s “inaugural” emergence as a lesbian author and Paul’s “repressed” existence as a gay character in early-twentieth-century American literature) to Paul’s untimely death as a gay teen. According to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Paul—like Wilde a decade earlier—is “hounded to exhaustion or death for a crime

¹⁶ Sharon O’Brien, *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 215. On the cross-identification between Cather as a lesbian author and Paul as an effeminate, connotatively gay boy, also see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Willa Cather and Others,” in *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 172; Judith Butler, “‘Dangerous Crossing’: Willa Cather’s Masculine Names,” in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 163, 162; Christopher Nealon, “Feeling and Affiliation in Willa Cather,” in *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion before Stonewall* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 61-97; and Jonathan Goldberg, *Willa Cather and Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

¹⁷ Summers, “‘A Losing Game in the End,’” 108.

¹⁸ Sedgwick, “Willa Cather and Others,” 172; and Butler, “‘Dangerous Crossing,’” 165.

that hovers indeterminately between sex/gender irregularity on the one hand and, on the other, spoilt sensibility or bad art.”¹⁹ Here, Paul is mourned for being nipped in the bud: he could have grown to be a gay man. Although Sedgwick does not use the term *protogay* to describe Paul, she reads Paul as an effeminate, connotatively gay boy who commits teen suicide.²⁰ In this context, Paul’s sexuality is fatedly homosexual and tragic: when gay boys reach adolescence, their failure to pursue girls or their awareness of same-sex desire becomes excruciating. Between their alienation from straight society and their imposed or internalized gay shame, gay teen suicide becomes almost inevitable.²¹ Even though Sedgwick focuses on the damage of compulsory heterosexuality to gay teens, it seems impossible for a feminine boy like Paul to be straight.

While the first two readings revolve around the strictures and damage of compulsory heterosexuality, the third reading distances Paul from what Scott Herring calls *compulsory homosexuality*.²² Regarding Paul as “a lost boy [who] goes incognito tramping to make his perverse behaviors inconspicuous to the paranoid others that surround him,” Herring argues that Paul estranges himself from gay belonging.²³ According to Herring, Paul flees to New York to escape the sexual exposure of his teachers in Pittsburgh, and his dabbling in the urban gay underworld as an uncommitted tramp finally makes his sexuality “unreadable.”²⁴ In this context, it takes time, effort, and a community to be perfectly gay. Under the banner of compulsory

¹⁹ Sedgwick, “Willa Cather and Others,” 170.

²⁰ Sedgwick uses the terms *proto-gay childhoods* and *proto-gay kids* elsewhere. See Sedgwick, “How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay: The War on Effeminate Boys” in *Tendencies*, 154-164.

²¹ While Sedgwick frames gay teen suicide as a social issue, Summers singles out Paul’s alienation. According to Summers, “the cause of Paul’s unhappiness and suicide is not his homosexuality but his inability to integrate his homosexuality into real life. This inability is itself the result of the homophobia that pervades his society and that he himself internalizes.” See Summers, “A Losing Game in the End,” 110.

²² Scott Herring, *Queering the Underworld: Slumming, Literature, and the Undoing of Lesbian and Gay History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 17.

²³ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 19. Elsewhere, Herring shifts the focus from urban slumming to regional male friendships, which “both confirm and interrogate gradual alterations in modern American sex-gender systems.” See Scott Herring, “Catherian Friendship; or, How Not to Do the History of Homosexuality,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 52, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 68.

homosexuality, gay men are often marshaled and mobilized by the idea of metronormativity, which “demands a predetermined flight to the city; a mythological plot that imagines urbanized queer identity as a one-way trip to sexual freedom, to communal visibility, and to a gay village (or at least a studio apartment) whose streets are paved with rainbow pride.”²⁵ For Herring, Paul does not seek shelter among other gay men or settle down in a gay Mecca. Despite his gay desire, he is not homonormative.

These three readings all make valid points, but they are also laced with premises. In the symptomatic reading, the “gay clues” may be red herrings after all. To be sure, Paul’s musical appreciation, his abhorrence of home decors and kitchen odors, his antagonism toward the family-oriented Cordelia Street, and his male friendships with the local actor Charley Edwards and the Yale student met in New York all suggest his homosexuality. But to see the artsy Paul as an American copy—or caricature—of the aesthete Wilde does not entail his homosexuality. Whereas gay aesthetes often create or critique art, Paul simply takes it in. If aesthetes’ exquisite taste sometimes betrays their gay sensibility, Paul’s gauche juvenility is characteristic of an antisocial, escapist snob. In addition, male inverts are often versed in cooking, sewing, knitting, and female toilettes.²⁶ Paul cares little about home economics. He hates his homely bedroom, shabby bathroom, and unkempt father, but he does nothing to refine them. He feels that he is above his surroundings. Even though Paul cringes at his English teacher’s approach, the

²⁵ Scott Herring, *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 15. For a critique of metronormative gay identity and maturity, especially in the construct of coming-out stories, also see Kate Weston, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), and “Get Thee to a Big City,” in *Long Slow Burn: Sexuality and Social Science* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 29-56; John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); and John Howard, ed., *Carryin’ on in the Lesbian and Gay South* (New York: New York University Press, 1997). On the construct of gay migration to cities and the emergence of urban gay identity, see John D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 100-113.

²⁶ On male inverts and their tendency for feminine activities, see Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 253.

repulsion does not necessarily denote gay misogyny. Their age difference and power disparity already make their relation volatile. Last but not least, Paul's male friendships are more ambiguous than homosexual: Edwards never states what he means by "recogniz[ing] in Paul something akin to what churchmen term 'vocation'" (125), and the Yale student might have been a straight boy looking for easy women and an accomplice in merrymaking. They both could have used Paul for fortuitous company. Such ambiguity yields meaning more complicated than the gay subculture of theatergoing and cruising. Given that effeminacy, the theater, misogyny, the red carnation, and male friendship have become gay codes, Cather might have inserted something jarring here and there to preclude a perfect match. She might have concocted a literary hoax to mock the medical and cultural discourses.

Reflecting on gay hermeneutics, Cather's literary biographer Hermione Lee argues, "To account for Cather's fiction by reading it as an encoding of covert, even guilty, sexuality . . . assumes that the work is written only in order to express homosexual feelings in disguise; it makes her out to be a coward (which was certainly not one of her failings); and it assumes that 'openness' would have been preferable."²⁷ When the epistemology of the closet is seen as the answer to all of Paul's eccentric behaviors, it renders the story a symptomatic text and imposes the closet on Paul. According to Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus,

When symptomatic readers focus on elements present in the text, they construe them as symbolic of something latent or concealed; for example, a queer symptomatic reading might interpret the closet, or ghosts, as surface signs of the deep truth of a homosexuality that cannot be overtly depicted. Symptomatic readings also often locate outright absences, gaps, and ellipses in texts, and then ask what those absences mean,

²⁷ Hermione Lee, *Willa Cather: Double Lives* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 11-12.

what forces create them, and how they signify the questions that motivate the texts, but that the text itself cannot articulate.²⁸

Symptomatic readings aim at “bringing out” closeted texts. But they may also translate characters into people in transitional states, regarding boyhood effeminacy as a sign of protogay boyhood. Dandyish and feminine, Paul is not necessarily gay.

The gay-affirmative reading is paranoid about gender deviance and gay viability. Although Sedgwick agrees that effeminacy and homosexuality are not always related, a gay-affirmative reading exhorts sissy boys to accept what their gender deviation *may* mean: homosexuality. When the retrospective construct of gay childhood becomes proleptic, boyhood effeminacy becomes exchangeable with protogay boyhood. While some feminine boys really grow up to be gay men, the conflation between boyhood femininity and protogay boyhood obscures gay men who did not play with dolls in their boyhood, effeminate men who are heterosexual, and those whose gender expressions have nothing to do with their sexualities. Using gender as a litmus test for sexuality, the gay-affirmative reading polices effeminacy not from a preventive, homophobic perspective, but from a liberal, positive perspective. Rehearsing a predetermined sexual discourse, it imposes the trajectory of gay maturity on the text.

In symptomatic and gay-affirmative readings, Paul’s unproven homosexuality is treated as a given. In the third, gay-disidentificatory reading, homosexuality becomes a matter of degree. Although Herring is right about the emergence of gay norms, some questions remain: What exactly does it take to be gay? Does Paul have to be a fairy in the Bowery and sleep around to be really gay? And why does his nocturnal excursion in New York have to be sexual tramping? Is it even appropriate to describe Paul as a tramp, a term with the connotation of homelessness and

²⁸ Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best, “Surface Reading: An Introduction,” *Representations* 108, no. 1 (Fall 2009): 3.

wandering? According to Alice Solenberger, “Almost all ‘tramps’ are ‘homeless men’ but by no means are all homeless men tramps. The homeless man may be an able-bodied workman without a family, he may be a runaway boy, a consumptive temporarily stranded on his way to a health resort, an irresponsible, feeble minded, or insane man, but unless he is also a professional wanderer he is not a ‘tramp.’”²⁹ Fleeing Pittsburgh, Paul is nevertheless no migratory tramp. Lodging in Waldorf-Astoria, he actually travels in style. While Herring calls Paul a tramp because the word is associated with male intimacy, Paul does not fit in the usual sociological axes of work and mobility.³⁰ To say that there are thousands of ways to be gay is one thing, to distinguish same-sex sexual acts from homosexual identity or identification is another, and to assume Paul’s gay desire is yet another. From the perspective of gay historicism, gay suicide, or gay identification, these three readings translate “Paul’s Case” into a detective story in search of the hidden gay boy, a cautionary tale about gay viability, or a critique of urban, communal homonormativity.

In contrast, I argue that Cather constructs Paul as a queer adolescent not sexually mature or consolidated enough to accord with the regime of homo/heterosexuality, for there is no grown Paul to acknowledge his adolescence as an initial gay phase (if he turns out gay) or to renounce it as a deviant gay phase (if he turns out straight). Since the discourse of homo/heterosexuality

²⁹ Alice Willard Solenberger, *One Thousand Homeless Men: A Study of Original Records* (New York: Charities Publication Committee, 1911), 209. On the classifications of tramps, hobos, and bums, see Nels Anderson, *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1923), 87; and Tim Cresswell, *The Tramp in America* (London: Reaktion, 2001), 80-86. According to Anderson, “There are three types of the genus vagrant: the hobo, the tramp, and the bum. The hobo works and wanders, the tramp dreams and wanders and the bum drinks and wanders.” Sometimes the bum is defined as a “stationary non-worker.”

³⁰ As Nels Anderson points out, “Homosexuality is a subject as much talked of and joked about among the tramp population as among men in jails and prisons or the men of the sea. It was in existence centuries before there was a tramp class in this country. Whenever men have been segregated apart from the association of women, whether as soldiers, sailors, or as inmates of penal institutions, there has been sex perversion. The tramp boy is such a womanless group, closed out from most ideal associations with women and without the funds to patronize the prostitute.” See Nels Anderson, “The Juvenile and the Tramp,” in *On Hobos and Homelessness*, ed. Raffaele Rauty (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 111.

depends on a straight- or gay-identified adult man to look back on his past same-sex intimacy and define it as a deviant or protogay phase, to call Paul protogay without the confirmation of a future, gay-identified Paul subscribes to gay teleology. Even though Paul's effeminacy is a gay sign, not all sissies grow up to be homosexuals.

Seen in this light, Paul is a "bad case" of queer adolescence (127): it is "bad" not only because the boy defies authorities and gender norms, but also because he eludes sexology, psychiatry, and other discourses of life forms. Although Paul idles, acts effeminate, and steals money, he may eventually outgrow his gender deviance and juvenile delinquency to become a compliant, normal adult. He may even marry and have children despite his effeminacy. Susceptible to the telos of maturity, adolescence is queer not necessarily because it generates multivalent, contradictory meanings in and of itself (that is, Paul cannot decide whether he wants to be straight or gay as a teenager), but because it is subject to the future self's renunciation or revision in retrospect (that is, the gay- or straight-identified Paul in the future looks back on his adolescence and gives it meaning).

Suspended Adolescence

With the distinction between boyhood effeminacy and protogay boyhood in view, I now turn to Cather's meticulous construction of Paul's suspended adolescence in order to understand Paul's queerness. In the Pittsburgh High School, the faculty classifies Paul as "a boy under the ban of suspension" (116). But the abeyance refers not only to Paul's halting academic progress but also to people's inability to name Paul's temperament. Throughout the story, Paul does not come out as an explicitly gay boy, an utterly bad student, or an incorrigibly vile son. Instead, he

perplexes people with his inscrutable smile: “Paul was always smiling, always glancing about him, seeming to feel that people might be watching him and trying to detect something. This conscious expression, since it was as far as possible from boyish mirthfulness, was usually attributed to insolence or ‘smartness’” (117). In sizing Paul up, both the narrator and the faculty embody the medical and criminological gaze: “[Paul’s] pupils were abnormally large, as though he were addicted to belladonna, but there was a glassy glitter about them which that drug does not produce” (116). Unable to locate Paul’s queerness, their assessments wind up in vague accusations: “Disorder and impertinence were among the offences named, yet each of his instructors felt that it was scarcely possible to put into words the real cause of the trouble” (116-117). Conscious of people’s inquisitive gaze, Paul refuses to be read and placed: “Older boys than Paul had broken down and shed tears under that [pedagogical] ordeal, but his set smile did not once desert him” (117). Frustrated, the teachers finally begin to feel sorry for their treatment: “One of them remembered having seen a miserable cat set at bay by a ring of tormentors” (118). Inscrutable, Paul at once invites and defies people’s readings. And the discourse of protogay childhood and gay hermeneutics are only two of the futile attempts to place him.

The medical and pedagogical discourses tend to read Paul’s eccentric behavior as symptoms of his homosexuality or juvenile delinquency. But what if Paul deliberately foils such constructs of knowledge? What if he purposefully thwarts the progressive enterprise of adulthood, (re)productivity, and maturity? After a week of suspension, Paul comes back to the faculty room “to account for his various misdemeanors” (116). He shows up with a dandyish air and a red carnation in his button-hole: “This latter adornment the faculty somehow felt was not properly significant of the contrite spirit befitting a boy under the ban of suspension” (116). Although the red carnation has become a blatant gay sign after the Wilde trials, a closer look at

Paul's relation to art, luxury, family, and friends yields a more elusive interpretation of suspended adolescence. Highlighting Paul's prolonged looking into the hotel mirror and his wish to be "exactly the kind of boy he had always wanted to be" at the splendid Waldorf (130), I argue that Paul is more a material boy than a gay boy, and that his suspension interrupts the rags-to-riches narrative of rising from an usher to a clerk and finally to a steel magnate like Carnegie.

If sexology often portrays homosexuals as artistic, Paul's relation to art is perfunctory, passive, and superficial. As his teachers ascribe his queerness to the influence of some "garish fiction," the boy frustrates their educated guesses:

Several of Paul's teachers had a theory that his imagination had been perverted by garish fiction; but the truth was, he scarcely ever read at all. The books at home were not such as would either tempt or corrupt a youthful mind, and as for reading the novels that some of his friends urged upon him—well, he got what he wanted much more quickly from music; any sort of music, from an orchestra to a barrel organ. He needed only the spark, the indescribable thrill that made his imagination master of his senses, and he could make plots and pictures enough of his own. It was equally true that he was not stage-struck—not, at any rate, in the usual acceptance of that expression. He had no desire to become an actor, any more than he had to become a musician. He felt no necessity to do any of these things; what he wanted was to see, to be in the atmosphere, float on the wave of it, to be carried out, blue league after blue league, away from everything. (126)

Alluding to *Dorian Gray* and his "poisonous book," Paul's teachers picture Paul as a Wildean aesthete queered by his friends and reading.³¹ But Paul actually prefers music. Omnivorous, Paul's musical taste evinces not so much his gay sensibility or a discriminating choice of artistic

³¹ In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), Lord Henry Wotton introduces Dorian to a fascinating book: "The hero, the wonderful young Parisian, in whom the romantic and the scientific temperaments were so strangely blended, became to him [Dorian] a kind of prefiguring type of himself. And, indeed, the whole book seemed to him to contain the story of his own life, written before he had lived it." Enraptured, Dorian not only procures from Paris nine copies of the first edition and has them bound in different colors. Under the influence of the "poisonous book," he also feels music in words: "The mere cadence of the sentences, the subtle monotony of their music, so full as it was of complex refrains and movements elaborately repeated, produced in the mind of the lad, as he passed from chapter to chapter, a form of reverie, a malady of dreaming, that made him unconscious of the falling day and creeping shadows." See Wilde, *Picture of Dorian Gray*, 143, 142.

vehicle as his consuming subjectivity.³² Granted the correlation between homosexuality and music, Paul does not create or critique art: he has no intention of becoming an artist of any sort. Instead, he is a consumer—a tourist—who takes it all in without committing himself to his objects: “what he wanted was to see, to be in the atmosphere, float on the wave of it, to be carried out, blue league after blue league, away from everything.” Paul’s desire to travel does not mean to explore uncharted territories, transcend nationalism, or become sophisticated and cosmopolitan; it means to be away from his familiar community. Such desire is not necessarily a mechanism induced by a gay teen’s alienation from society; it depends on a certain degree of social privilege. Paul wants the leisure and luxury that often comes with wealth, but he does not want to work his way up.

Transported by art, Paul does not want to work for art. If Dorian has to read an exquisite book to get lost in words, Paul takes wing with whatever art is available. When excited, Paul enters “the portal of Romance” with a stale tale: “It was very like the old stories that used to float about London of fabulously rich Jews, who had subterranean halls, with palms, and fountains, and soft lamps and richly apparelled women who never saw the disenchanting light of London day” (126). His fantasies lean to pedestrian romance rather than passionate courtship. Even though the narrator claims that “[i]t was at the theatre and at Carnegie Hall that Paul really lived; the rest was but a sleep and a forgetting” (125), Paul’s relation to art is touristic rather than artistic. All he wants is to get away from Pittsburgh, from reality. For Paul, art is about what he has (distraction and luxury), not about who he is (gay sensibility). The women in his imagination may be sensual, but they above all suggest extravagance, exoticism, and inhumation. “[R]ichly

³² Koestenbaum reads Paul as an opera queen, a “pure receiver”: “Once you decide that your finest experiences will come from listening to opera, you have given up on reciprocity, and you’ve become a phantom, a haunting.” See Koestenbaum, *The Queen’s Throat*, 28.

apparelled,” they may as well be trophy wives, attesting not to Paul’s virility or lasciviousness but to his desire to possess women as décor. Instead of searching for Beauty and Truth, Paul suspends himself from the production line of school, work, art, and family.³³

Along with his suspension from academic and artistic production, Paul also suspends himself from the institution of the family. On his way home from Carnegie Hall, where he works part-time as an usher, Paul dreads his neighborhood, Cordelia Street:

It was a highly respectable street, where all the houses were exactly alike, and where business men of moderate means begot and reared large families of children, all of whom went to Sabbath-school and learned the shorter catechism, and were interested in arithmetic; all of whom were as exactly alike as their homes, and of a piece with the monotony in which they lived. Paul never went up Cordelia Street without a shudder of loathing. (121)

In “Paul’s Case,” Cordelia Street represents a community bent on numbers: arithmetic, geometry, manufacturing, scores, prices, income, stock, children, and all other trappings of “petty economics” (125). On seasonable Sunday afternoons, Paul’s father and other patriarchs gathered on their front stoops, “occasionally looked over the multitude of squabbling children, . . . smiling to see their own proclivities reproduced in their offspring, and interspersed their legends of the iron kings with remarks about their sons’ progress at school, their grades in arithmetic, and the amounts they had saved in their toy banks” (123). Driven by career and (re)production, Paul’s father sees his son’s stint as preparatory for his later, real career: “a boy ought to be earning a little” (125). The idea that Paul would want a vacation from the doldrums of domestic life does not occur to his father. In a middle-class community, all the education and

³³ Although Loretta Wasserman and I agree that Paul has a limited imagination, we disagree on Paul’s use of art. According to Wasserman, Paul heeds the call of Beauty: “Paul is that most familiar of Romantic figures—the yearner for an ineffable world, beauty in this one as the promise of the truth of the other. We may say that Paul is on the first rung of Plato’s ladder—rather, considering where and who he is, reaching desperately for the rung.” See Loretta Wasserman, “Is Cather’s Paul a Case?,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 36, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 125.

recreation are meant to support a decent living. During their leisure hours, the inhabitants on Cordelia Street still compete with one another over their sons' accomplishments. They want their children to get ahead—the sooner, the better.

When Paul proves to be indifferent to school, his father uses a neighbor clerk as a model to promote the idea of eventual maturity. Formerly a prodigal, the clerk “had taken his chief’s advice, oft reiterated to his employés, and at twenty-one had married the first woman whom he could persuade to share his fortunes” (124). Now a father of four children and “a young man with a future” (124), he has caught up with the (re)productive timeline, dismissing his dissipation as the bygone past. But Paul is impatient with social climbing: “he was interested in the triumphs of cash boys who had become famous, though he had no mind for the cash-boy stage” (124). In Horatio Alger’s novel *Frank Fowler, the Cash Boy* (1887), the fourteen-year-old Frank works as a cash boy in a New York retail store, carrying the money received by salesmen from customers to the cashier’s desk and returning the proper change. Despite his scanty wage (three dollars a week) and other hardships, he finally reunites with his wealthy family. In contrast to such a rags-to-riches story, which rewards diligence and perseverance with wealth, Paul dreams of becoming rich overnight. When he drops out of school and starts working at Denny & Carson’s office, Paul does not turn over a new leaf. He steals money and flees to New York.

A material boy, Paul nevertheless hates to earn a living. When he first gazes into the posh Schenley near Carnegie Hall, Paul wants what the soprano soloist has in the hotel: “There it was, what he wanted—tangibly before him, like the fairy world of a Christmas pantomime; as the rain beat in his face, Paul wondered whether he were destined always to shiver in the black night outside, looking up at it” (121). Instead of identifying with the diva, Paul identifies with the splendid “pantomime.” When he finally lodges in the ritzy Waldorf, Paul sends the bellboy for

some violets and jonquils, so that his suite looks exactly like the advertisement described on Sunday papers. Fetishizing “the glaring affirmation of the omnipotence of wealth” (131), Paul takes in New York City like an omnivorous consumer: “The boy set his teeth and drew his shoulders together in a spasm of realization; the plot of all dramas, the text of all romances, the nerve-stuff of all sensations was whirling about him like the snow flakes. He burnt like a faggot in a tempest” (131).³⁴ Although the inhabitants on Cordelia Street share Paul’s materialism, they dismiss his idling and stealing as boyish dissipation. Under the banner of capitalist adulthood, it is never too early for a child to start saving money. But it is strange for a boy like Paul to crave money so excessively. The capitalist idea of maturity encourages an early start, but it frowns upon Paul’s suspension and upstart theft.

If Paul’s materialism seems premature on Cordelia Street, the crowded yet lonely New York City suits him. Imagining that the assorted rooms in the Waldorf are “built and peopled for him alone” (131), Paul readily renounces his children-ridden hometown: “Cordelia Street— Ah, that belonged to another time and country!” (131-132). In Pittsburgh, Paul has to lie “to make himself noticed and admired, to assert his difference from other Cordelia Street boys” (133). Now at the Waldorf, he feels “a good deal more manly, more honest, even, now that he had no need for boastful pretensions, now that he could, as his actor friends used to say, ‘dress the part’” (133). Although Paul’s sense of masculinity and honesty is false, his tourist eye/I does expand in a city of strangers. As Zygmunt Bauman aptly describes it, “a meeting of strangers is unlike the meetings of kin, friends, or acquaintances—it is, by comparison, a *mis*-meeting. . . . The meeting of strangers [in a city] is *an event without a past*. More often than not, it is also *an event without*

³⁴ According to *OED*, the word *faggot*, recorded in Louis E. Jackson and C. R. Hellyer’s *A Vocabulary of Criminal Slang*, started to refer to “homosexuals” in the context of drag balls. Whether Cather already knew the connotation of this word in the early 1900s remains a question, as there might be a time gap between the use of the word and its entry in the dictionary. It is also unknown whether this word had a wider currency outside the drag ball event. Although Paul is not cross-dressed, he is surely flamboyant.

a future (it is expected to be, hoped to be, free of a future.)”³⁵ Suspended from the communal sense of time and being on Cordelia Street, Paul gravitates to the novelty of chance encounters and cameo appearances in New York City—especially in a grand hotel like the Waldorf.³⁶ Free from appointments and routines, Paul “had no especial desire to meet or to know any of these people; all he demanded was the right to look on and conjecture, to watch the pageant” (132). Away from the tight community on Cordelia Street, Paul enjoys cosmopolitan individuality: “He felt now that his surroundings explained him. Nobody questioned the purple; he had only to wear it passively. He had only to glance down at his dress to reassure himself that here it would be impossible for anyone to humiliate him” (132). Dumping Cordelia Street, Paul clings to New York as a suspended if not everlasting present.

In capturing Paul’s elation, Sedgwick compares the second half of “Paul’s Case” to coming out: Paul “himself at last the seeing consciousness of the story, even the past of his life and his body are, as in coming out, re-knit with the new authoritative fingers of his own eyes.”³⁷ But Paul’s sexuality is moot, his claim on manhood is stolen, and his sense of freedom is momentary. Instead of catching up with a gay counterpart of the model clerk’s (re)productive timeline, Paul postpones stages of education, career, marriage, parenting, and prosperity. When he wakes up at his hotel suite at four o’clock in the afternoon, Paul feels that “[e]verything was quite perfect; he was exactly the kind of boy he had always wanted to be” (130). Spending “nearly an hour in dressing, watching every stage of his toilet carefully in the mirror” (130), Paul is no narcissist. He is not in love with his own image. Rather, he wishes to hold on to every second he steals from the Cordelia community. In contrast to the gradual stages of psychological,

³⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 95 (emphasis in original).

³⁶ Mark Goble has a wonderful reading of the star-studded film *Grand Hotel* (dir. Edmund Goulding, US, 1932), the section entitled “The World of Cameo Appearances.” See Mark Goble, *Beautiful Circuits: Modernism and the Mediated Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 90-97.

³⁷ Sedgwick, “Will Cather and Others,” 170-171.

sociological development, Paul's "stage" in front of the vanity is theatrical and tenacious. He does not want to end it.

Suspended, Paul hits it off with a local actor in Pittsburgh and a Yale freshman met in New York. To be sure, Paul and Edwards are close: "For more than a year Paul had spent every available moment loitering about Charley Edwards's dressing-room. He had won a place among Edwards's following not only because the young actor, who could not afford to employ a dresser, often found him useful, but because he recognized in Paul something akin to what churchman term 'vocation'" (125). As if the theater were not suggestive of homosexuality enough, Edwards's appropriation of the religious term "vocation" implies that homosexuality is a calling. But such gay insinuations do not amount to reality. Paul's father forbids Edwards to consort with his dropout son. At best a cameo appearance in Paul's life, Edwards provides him with a meaningful yet temporary friendship. Now that Paul—coerced by his father—has to pursue his career, Edwards becomes more an obstacle to Paul's way to (re)productive adulthood than an outlet for his troubled adolescence.

Paul's friendship with the Yale freshman is also contingent. A "wild San Francisco boy," the Yale student "offered to show Paul the night side of the town, and the two boys went off together after dinner, not returning to the hotel until seven o'clock the next morning" (132). Of course, San Francisco at the turn of the twentieth century had not become a gay haven. But it was already thronged with immigrants and bachelors. According to Howard P. Chudacoff, "In San Francisco in 1890, single men between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four outnumbered single women in that age range by almost four to one, and the ratio was still high at two to one in

1920.”³⁸ Suspended from the institutional constraint of family, the “wild” Yale student provides Paul with another temporary yet much-desired homosocial outlet. While Cordelia Street is all about family, stability, and (re)production, San Francisco exudes chance and brotherhood. Even though San Francisco has its own sad immigrant stories, Paul and the Yale student are up for an escapade.

But this “champagne friendship” ends on a “singularly cool” note in the elevator (131). Is it a gay fling? While there is such a possibility, the obscured details of Paul’s nocturnal excursion make room for at least four other interpretations. First, the Yale student might be straight, and the gay Paul is disappointed with their uneventful relationship. Second, the Yale student might be gay, and the straight Paul has misled him with his effeminacy and eagerness. Third, they simply hang out as friends. Whether they are straight or gay does not matter. And finally, they might have slummed together as two (sex) tourists, and Paul now shakes off his debauch. In contrast to Cordelia Street, the nightlife in New York City caters to patrons looking for opposite-sex prostitutes, same-sex encounters, and sheer spectacles. It serves not only the existing gay underworld but also the emerging heterosocial dating pool and curious tourists.³⁹ As Chad Heap points out, by the early 1890s the red-light districts of Chicago and New York had been staging an exclusive “circus,” or live sexual performances, in local brothels and parlor houses to attract rich whites: “at costs ranging from \$15 to \$75, these performances were not only outside the social boundaries of what was permissible for slumming women, but they were also priced well beyond the budgets of most local men. They were designed, instead, to appeal to

³⁸ Howard P. Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 58.

³⁹ On the correlation between the rise of commercial amusements (such as dance halls, vaudeville, saloons, theaters, social clubs, red-light vice districts, cafés, and cabarets) and the phenomenon of heterosocial dating, see Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor*, 65-74; and Kathy Lee Peiss, “The Homosocial World of Working-Class Amusements,” in *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

the affluent white businessman or the visiting tourist out to see the sights.”⁴⁰ The Yale student may be Paul’s guide, showing him some “circus” or other restricted sectors of the city. Their cool parting does not have to be about homosexuality; it could be about the unspeakable thrill and shame of slumming.

And the sexual suspension has to end—if not in explicit homo/heterosexuality, in death. Knowing that his father is coming to drag him back home, Paul jumps in front of a locomotive: “He felt something strike his chest,—his body was being thrown swiftly through the air, on and on, immeasurably far and fast, while his limbs gently relaxed. Then, because the picture making mechanism was crushed, the disturbing visions flashed into black, and Paul dropped back into the immense design of things” (136). To be sure, Paul’s death attests to the triumph of capitalist modernity, with the locomotive symbolizing not only “the iron industrialism and grinding materialism of the age” but also the demand for keeping up with the times.⁴¹ Epitomizing the relentless passing of standard time, the locomotive of modernity either leaves late passengers behind or runs over those who are in its way.⁴² But Paul would rather die a free boy who “gets spirited away” by a speedy train than be taken prisoner in Pittsburgh. To complicate this ambiguous ending, Cather plays Paul’s death in slow motion. Hit, Paul’s body keeps floating “on and on, immeasurably far and fast, while his limbs gently relaxed.” Forever suspended, Paul refuses to move forward or settle down. Although slow motion was just patented in 1904 by August Musger, Cather already employed the technique in writing.⁴³ Ending the story with the

⁴⁰ Chad Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 43.

⁴¹ Wasserman, “Is Cather’s Paul a Case?,” 121.

⁴² On the enactment of standard time, the moralization of punctuality, and the rallying call of efficiency in Taylorism, see Michael O’Malley, “Keep a Watch on Everybody,” in *Keeping Watch: A History of American Time* (New York: Viking, 1990), 145-199.

⁴³ Josef Maria Eder, *History of Photography*, trans. Edward Epstean (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), 523-524.

crushing of the picture making mechanism, Cather emphasizes not only Paul's obscure death but also the failure of any photographic device to capture his death. The camera obscura cannot encrypt Paul spatially and temporally.

Throughout the story, Paul constantly feels that he is under surveillance. At school, he has been glancing about him, "seeming to feel that people might be watching him and trying to detect something." During his stay at the Waldorf, he again reflects: "There had always been the shadowed corner, the dark place into which he dared not look, but from which something seemed always to be watching him—and Paul had done things that were not pretty to watch, he knew" (129). Even when he finally decides to kill himself, Paul still "once or twice . . . glanced nervously sidewise, as though he were being watched" (136). True, Paul may be paranoid: his skittishness may result from his nervous temperament, clean conscience, or suspect homosexuality. But it also attests to the institutional power of school, home, and community. As the dictum of maturity keeps track of Paul's every move, Paul cannot even assert his freedom through suicide. A corpus/corpse, he is subject to discourses of sexology, criminology, and pedagogy. Still, Paul's suspended adolescence is unsettling: alluding to Wilde, he is no sophisticated aesthete; attached to other boys, he does not come out; committing suicide, he is not necessarily a gay teen. Crushing the picture making mechanism—the gaze of his father, teachers, and society at large—"Paul dropped back into the immense design of things." A dead boy cannot, and does not have to, defend himself.

Recapitulatory Boyology

Having addressed Paul's suspended adolescence, I would like to contextualize his queerness in the discourse of recapitulatory boyology, a discourse that sees juvenile delinquency and same-sex experience as a transitional or deviant phase prior to boys' eventual maturity. If Paul's boyhood effeminacy does not necessarily entail gay adulthood in the future, the discourse of recapitulatory boyology can also renounce his sexual ambiguity and other "bad" deeds as temporary deviation in retrospect. In the early twentieth-century United States, compulsory education and recapitulation theory together shore up a transitional, contradictory view of adolescence: while an industrial boyhood will usher in an early, successful adulthood, it is also tolerable for boys to be idle and wayward during adolescence—as long as they come clean later in adulthood. In "Paul's Case," Paul's father lets his son usher because the odd job could help him understand the value of money at a young age. But when the news of Paul's theft breaks out, the community is ready to forget him. Ready to see adolescence as a paradigmatic *and* deviant stage prior to mature adulthood, the logic of recapitulatory boyology conceptualizes adolescent boys as simultaneously old enough to know the way of the world (materialism) and too immature to take the consequences (crime and male intimacy). Benign yet paternalist, it banalizes juvenile delinquency as an inevitable phase to be outgrown. Between the goal of (re)production and the tolerance of indolence, adolescence becomes a placeholder for things undesirable.

Before I elucidate Paul's adolescence in the context of recapitulatory boyology, let us first historicize the term *boyology*. According to Kenneth B. Kidd, boyology—together with the narrative form of the feral tale—constructs boys as savages inclined to maturity: "By the [nineteenth] century's end, the boy had become an important social as well as literary subject, appearing at the expense of the 'vanished' native. According to its champions, who subscribed to the doctrines of recapitulation and progressive diversification, boy culture was analogous both to

earlier stages of civilization and to contemporaneous primitive societies.”⁴⁴ Evolving from Bad Boy stories like Thomas Bailey Aldrich’s *The Story of a Bad Boy* (1870), Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), and William Dean Howells’s *A Boy’s Town* (1890), writings on boyhood took an institutional turn in the twentieth century. Roughly starting with William Byron Forbush’s *The Boy Problem* (1901), publications like G. Stanley Hall’s *Adolescence* (1904), Robert Baden-Powell’s *Scouting for Boys* (1908), George Walter Fiske’s *Boy Life and Self-Government* (1910), and H. W. Gibson’s *Boyology or Boy Analysis* (1916) underscored the character-building of white, middle-class boys. In fields as varied as biology, psychology, anthropology, criminology, and education, boyologists aimed at guiding youths in the delicate stage of adolescence and the treacherous age of modernization. Thanks to a vibrant synergy among modernization, imperialism, and evolutionism, boyhood became a trope of transition in phylogeny (the evolutionary relatedness among species) and ontogeny (the biological development of an organism), and the boy embodied the tension between the primitive and the modern. With the intervention of boyology, the boy was supposed to be transformed from a wild savage to a civilized adult.⁴⁵

Whereas earlier conduct books teach boys social manners to become gentlemen, boyologist treatises assert scientific authority in their views of maturity. Hall, for example, situates human beings in the era of rapidly changing modernity, appropriating the theory of evolution from biologist Charles Darwin and sociologist Herbert Spencer in his study of human psychology. According to Hall, “[A]daptive plasticity to new environments . . . was never so great [as in modernity]; and in the changes which we hope are . . . progressive, more and more

⁴⁴ Kidd, *Making American Boys*, 67.

⁴⁵ On adolescents as cultural hybrids, see Don Randall, *Kipling’s Imperial Boy: Adolescence and Cultural Hybridity* (New York: Palgrave, 2000). On scouting and character-building, see David I. Macleod, *Building Character in the American Boy: The Boy Scouts, YMCA, and Their Forerunners, 1870-1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983).

human traits are too partially acquired to be permanently inherited. All this suggests that man is not a permanent type but an organism in a very active stage of evolution toward a more permanent form.”⁴⁶ Hall’s progressive, phyletic take on life constructs adolescence as at once atavistic and proleptic. In his psychological scheme, adolescents should make progress despite their traces of savagery:

Adolescence is a new birth, for the higher and more completely human traits are now born. . . . The child comes from and harks back to a remoter past; the adolescent is neo-atavistic, and in him the later acquisitions of the race slowly become prepotent. Development is less gradual and more saltatory, suggestive of some ancient period of storm and stress when old moorings were broken and a higher level attained.⁴⁷

Comparing adolescents to “primitives” in transition, Hall projects an arc of development dotted with failures: “The momentum of heredity often seems insufficient to enable the child to . . . complete maturity, so that every step of the upward way is strewn with wreckage of body, mind, and morals. There is not only arrest, but perversion, at every stage, and hoodlumism, juvenile crime, and secret vice seem not only increasing, but develop in earlier years in every civilized land.”⁴⁸ From Hall’s perspective, adolescents are prone to maturity and degeneration.

Hall’s atavistic view of adolescence is not unique among boyologists. Across disciplines, the prevalence of recapitulation theory normalizes a temporarily deviant and primitive adolescence. Originally an evolutionary hypothesis about ontogeny repeating phylogeny, the theory of recapitulation posits that advanced organisms go through an embryonic stage that shows features of less advanced organisms. When the theory is applied to adolescents in psychology, anthropology, education, and other developmental discourses, boys are compared to

⁴⁶ Hall, *Adolescence*, 1: vii.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, xiii.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, viv.

primitive savages.⁴⁹ According to Hall, juvenile delinquents are often highly adaptive to their surroundings for survival, but they are “almost always unusually sly and cunning, childish, and even animal.”⁵⁰ Using parameters such as atavism, heredity, degeneration, race, climate, temperament, and anthropometry to explain juvenile crime, Hall views adolescence as “[b]y nature . . . more or less morally blind” and yet “deserving of both pity and hope.”⁵¹ In popular discourse, the boy-savage analogy implies that Caucasian boys are temporarily equal to adult barbarians but will outgrow their savagery. As Kidd points out, “Such sentiments are not incidental to boyology; they form its ideological center. Key to boyology is the boy-savage trope, and his most genteel incarnation in America literature, the Bad Boy.”⁵² Intervening in adolescents’ development, boyologists claim to help Bad Boys grow out of their savagery through scouting and character building. Under the rubric of recapitulation theory, boyish dissipation and juvenile delinquency become something to be expected and got rid of.

In “Paul’s Case,” Paul embodies boyologists’ anxiety in the Progressive Era. At school and at home, the authorities expect Paul to outgrow his “misdemeanors.” The Principal of Pittsburgh High School, for example, asks Paul “whether he didn’t think that a way it [Paul’s impertinence] would be well to get rid of” (118). Upset, the faculty members barrage the boy like a cornered cat. But they do not expel him. Suspending the problem student, the school system holds that Paul is (being) too boyish to mature in a timely manner: he needs more time to shed his insolence. When Paul’s theft is exposed, the locals make a sensational story out of it, but they—particularly those in religious institution—decide to give him another chance. Portraying

⁴⁹ On recapitulation theory, see, for example, Ernst Heinrich, *The History of Creation*, trans. E. Ray Lankester (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1868 [1883]); and Stephen Jay Gould, *Ontogeny and Phylogeny* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977). On its application to education in Cather’s time, see, for example, Edward L. Thorndike, *Educational Psychology* (New York: Lemcke and Buechner, 1903).

⁵⁰ Hall, *Adolescence*, 1: 340.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 407.

⁵² Kidd, *Making American Boys*, 16.

Paul as a “motherless lad,” the Cumberland minister and the Sabbath school justify their interference. In the face of juvenile delinquency, the discourse of recapitulatory boyology permeates the educational, familial, legal, and religious apparatus. In concert, they believe that Paul is being a criminal and will outgrow the phase through such correctional facilities as Sabbath-school and Young People’s Meeting. Turning the adult’s retrospective look at adolescence into a progressive evolution from savage boyhood to sage manhood, recapitulatory boyology renounces adolescents’ unwanted behavior as temporary digression, ultimately constructing adolescence as troublesome by nature.

But Paul undoes the discourse of temporary deviation and eventual maturity by refusing to be a straight/gay man in the making. Suspended from the timeline of (re)production, Paul loses himself in art not as an artist *manqué*, but as a tourist away from the regularity of Cordelia Street. If boyology redeems wayward adolescence by the discourse of belated, eventual maturity, Paul never grows up into another exemplary clerk, iron king, or procreative adult. And he never quite turns into a gay man. Translating Paul’s problem with his family and his excursion with the Yale student into an open secret of homosexuality, gay-affirmative critics like Sedgwick wish Paul to bide his time in anticipation of a fabulous gay adulthood. But gay teleology could be as demanding as the arc of (re)productive adulthood. It configures Paul’s trip to New York as an initial stage of coming out prior to a full membership in the gay underworld.

Given Paul’s chronological and historical ages, the differences among suspension, transition, and transience are crucial. In *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler argues that Paul’s brief encounter with the Yale student suggests “a certain sign of transient homosexuality.” From the perspective of gay historicism, Butler concedes Paul’s failure—as well as Cather’s—to claim a more visible homosexuality. It is “transient homosexuality” because it hints at homosexuality

without confirming it, because it lasts only for one night without blossoming into a relationship. Taking his cue from Butler, Herring instead studies Paul as a transient artist and tramp boy. According to Herring, Paul counters the consolidation of gay identity by slumming incognito: “Wandering adolescent males fit in nowhere yet manage to be everywhere, and such a transient state leads to a mobile indeterminacy. Tramp boys like Paul wander themselves out of a social existence and, to an extent, out of a social identity.”⁵³ Correlating Paul’s peregrination with his sexuality, Herring concludes, “The artist’s creative mobility—based on the mind’s capacity to wander into foreign locales—replaced the bourgeois citizen’s social mobility in a strategic combination of decadent modernity and low lifestyle.”⁵⁴ For Herring, transience befits Paul’s rambling adolescence and elusive homosexuality: Paul cruises the gay world, but he is not affiliated with it.

The concept of transience has its charm and harm. Even though Herring objects to Butler’s connotative reading, his reading misses three points. First, the idea of transience frames homosexuality as a stage, as if Paul could walk in and out of it. Although Butler and Herring both acknowledge the social pressure on explicit portrayals of gay characters, there are huge differences between reading Paul as experimenting with same-sex relationships for the purpose of future (dis)identification (transitional homosexuality), reading him as limiting his same-sex expression to a tourist site (closeted homosexuality), and reading him as giving up homosexuality once and for all (renouncing homosexuality). In Herring’s reading, Paul becomes a boy engaged in sex between men without identifying himself as gay. But it is never clear whether Paul has any homosexual encounters to begin with. Second, it is problematic to read Paul as a tramp. Staying in a swanky hotel, Paul travels in style and visits New York for only a

⁵³ Herring, *Queering the Underworld*, 78-79.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

few days. He is better described as a (sex) tourist. In contrast to wandering tramps, Paul is characterized by his dyed-in-the-wool materialism. While he and tramps may both spurn bourgeois respectability and conformity, Paul does not rise above class difference and the philosophy of getting by. Third, Paul's escapist view of art clashes with bohemian aesthetics. Loafing, Paul does not flee from Pittsburgh to embrace music and drama; he is a boy at odds with (re)productive adulthood. Tapping into the occasional same-sex encounters among tramps and bohemian artists, Herring hovers over the disparity between gay sex and gay identity. But slumming may have nothing to do with gay sex.

While Herring reads Paul as a boy who "loses" himself in the gay underworld, I read him as a "lost" boy who suspends himself from the teleology of adulthood. However deviant his behavior, boyologists expect to see the worst from Paul *and* wait for the best to come of him. Even if Paul is a gay teenager, the discourse of wayward adolescence could still dismiss his homosexuality as a transitional stage prior to eventful conformity. While sexology rounds up inverts' gender deviance and sexual perversity, constructing protogay childhood *after* the fact of gay adulthood, boyology believes that a deviant boy like Paul still has the chance to outgrow his "misdemeanors." With the tricky temporality of adolescence in view, the point is not when Paul can be gay for sure or what he should do to prove otherwise, but how the redemptive discourse of maturity would not leave him alone.

Sidestepping the sexologist polarity between immature gays and mature straights, the boyologist disparity between immature adolescents and mature adults, and the temporal division between closeted gay boys and "out" gay men, Cather uses Paul's suspended adolescence to disrupt the homo/hetero teleology. Refusing to let Paul's effeminacy crystallize into homosexuality or let an adult Paul dismiss his adolescent same-sex encounters (if any) as

temporary aberration, Cather suspends Paul's timeline to bar the retrospective construct of inversion in sexology, the arc of eventual maturity in boyology, and the epistemology of the closet in gay hermeneutics. Under the ban of boyish suspension, Paul is "lost" not because he does not know what to do with his sexuality, but because he thwarts the trajectory of homo/hetero maturity.

Renouncing Maturity

I have studied Paul in terms of suspended adolescence and recapitulatory boyology, teasing out the concepts of boyhood effeminacy and protogay boyhood. In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the resistance to transitional readings of boyhood. In "Suspended Beginnings: Of Childhood and Nostalgia," Elspeth Probyn suggests treating childhood not as an origin, but as an event: "far from treating childhood as an originary moment from which we might emerge as proud grownup queers, we need to remake childhood into evidence of the necessary absence of any primary ground in queer politics."⁵⁵ For Probyn, the urge to create a seamless life story from protogay childhood to gay adulthood may do a disservice to queer politics: the reconstruction of protogay childhood is less a faithful record of the past than a tool to validate current gay identity. When such a back-formation becomes a guidance for assessing effeminate boys, it not only foresees the birth of future gay men but also gives rise to the anxiety about GID among children and translates sissy boys into protogay boys.

In "Paul's Case," Paul's suicide intercepts the progressivist and redemptive views of adolescence. Boyologists construct boys as temporary savages evolving into civilized men, or as

⁵⁵ Elspeth Probyn, "Suspended Beginnings: Of Childhood and Nostalgia," in *Outside Belongings* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 97.

adolescents falling into deviant, transient homosexuality; Paul, however, loathes the narrative of eventual maturity exemplified by his clerk neighbor. When he finally hit the locomotive, “the folly of his haste occurred to him with merciless clearness, the vastness of what he had left undone” (136). Paul does not mourn for a beautiful family, lucrative career, or gay adulthood. Rather, he wishes he were on vacation like one of the steel magnates: “There flashed through his brain, clearer than ever before, the blue of Adriatic water, the yellow of Algerian sands” (136). With two billion dollars invested in iron and steel manufactures in 1905, Pittsburgh is a “smoke-palled city, enamoured of figures and grimy toil” (126).⁵⁶ Busy with work, one of the iron kings “arrang[es] his office hours on his [Mediterranean] yacht just as though he were at home, and ‘knock[s] off work enough to keep two stenographers busy’” (124). In contrast, Paul wants nothing but sightseeing. Unapologetically suspended, the dying boy does not repent his deviation from the institution of the family. Envisioning the Adriatic Sea and the Sahara Desert, Paul does not long for nature and seclusion; he feels entitled to the luxury of cruising. Instead of making good his past, acknowledging his ruined life, or figuring out an alternative to marital heterosexuality, Paul wants to be a boy, floating “blue league by blue league, away from everything.”

⁵⁶ Sarah Hutchins Killikelly, *The History of Pittsburgh: Its Rise and Progress* (Pittsburgh, PA: B.C. & Gordon Montgomery, 1906), xvi.

Chapter Two

“A Little Short of That”: The Indefinitely Delayed Marriage in Henry Blake Fuller’s *Bertram Cope’s Year*

Between Men, Between Women

In *Between Women*, Sharon Marcus argues that relationships between women in Victorian England cannot be reduced to a euphemism for lesbianism or a nonsexual bond between girls before marriage.¹ According to Marcus, female friendships in Victorian novels are often interdependent with marriage plots: “In the terms of classical narrative theory, the rapprochement between the two women is related to the heterosexual plot both syntagmatically

¹ Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 29. According to Marcus, “The concept of a lesbian continuum, once a powerful means of drawing attention to overlooked bonds between women, has ironically obscured everything that female friendship and lesbianism did not share and hidden the important differences between female friends and female lovers. . . . [A]lthough the lesbian continuum posits female friends and lesbian lovers as united in their opposition to patriarchal marriage, many nineteenth-century lesbian relationships resembled marriages more than friendships—and as a result shared with friendship a high degree of acceptance by respectable society.” On female romantic friendships and the continuum discourse of lesbianism, see Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: Morrow, 1981); Julia Markus, *Across an Untried Sea: Discovering Lives Hidden in the Shadow of Convention and Time* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000); Lisa Merrill, *When Romeo Was a Woman: Charlotte Cushman and Her Circle of Female Spectators* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Signs* 1, no. 1 (1975): 1-29; and Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778-1928* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

(one event clinches the other) and paradigmatically (the two events share sufficient features to come under the same category).² Although this does not change the teleology of heterosexual marriage, Marcus recognizes Victorian marriage plots as a communal project rather than as an individual's pursuit of happiness: "Marriage plots unite not only a man and a woman but two social institutions, friendship and marriage, which begin as separate but are finally united in a kind of Moebius strip or feedback loop."³ In particular, Marcus teases out three major functions of female friendship: replacing parental authority for a less abrasive influence in matters of marriage, promoting companionate egalitarianism between husband and wife by modeling marriage after female amity, and generating an indispensable, stable narrative matrix in contrast to courtship's vagaries, conflicts, obstructions, and resolutions.⁴

Marcus makes several important interventions in gender and sexuality studies, as well as literary criticism. First, instead of arguing that heterosexual plots repress homosexuality and female friendship, she embarks on what she calls *just reading*, "which attends to what texts make manifest on their surface, in this case the crucial role female friendship plays in courtship narratives."⁵ For Marcus, "female friendship was neither a static auxiliary to the marriage plot nor a symptomatic mechanism that kept narrative energies on track."⁶ Second, Marcus counters Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's study of male desire. While Sedgwick teases out the eroticized alliances and rivalries between men in heterosexual marriages, Marcus does not define women as subordinated to, opposite to, or objectified by men.⁷ For Marcus, women's desire sometimes has nothing to do with men, and women may objectify one another through fashion magazines and

² Marcus, *Between Women*, 78.

³ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 85, 79.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

dolls. Third, Marcus argues that female relationships can affect men. In her reading of Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1860-1861), Marcus claims that Miss Havisham and Estella's contempt for the working-class protagonist Pip leads the boy "to reject his male body by using fashion to become feminine—that is, to become a woman's object of desire."⁸ Although Marcus's treatment of Pip's masculinity and her interpretation of the triangle among Miss Havisham, Estella, and Pip have their own blind spots, she is right about women's traffic in boys.⁹

Marcus challenges the heterosexual paradigm of marriage, the deviance paradigm of homosexuality, and the continuum theory of lesbianism by integrating female desire and friendship into marriage plots. But the primacy of friendship and the teleology of marriage become problematic when the narrative indefinitely delays the male protagonist's marriage, when the narrator and other characters come close to revealing and yet obscure the protagonist's sexuality, and when the novel is set in the 1910s Midwestern United States instead of Victorian

⁸ Marcus, *Between Women*, 3.

⁹ According to Marcus, "Pip's desire to have Estella is inseparable from his desire to be Miss Havisham, but it is also intimately related to a wish to occupy Estella's place as a fashionable doll, set off by jewels and lovely clothes, attracting the admiration of a wealthy woman of leisure." This triangulation of male and female desire overlooks several issues. First, the desire between Miss Havisham and Estella is not original, primary, and autonomous. Had Compeyson not abandoned Miss Havisham at the altar, she probably would have not been so vindictive. Although Miss Havisham desires Estella and uses her to toy with Pip's feelings, this female dyad cannot be alienated from a male influence (Compeyson) and male spectator (Pip). Miss Havisham displays his affection for Estella in order to make Pip desire Estella and feel left out. It is not a spontaneous female desire that happens to affect a gullible boy. Second, the triangle among Miss Havisham, Estella, and Pip creates a limited circulation and interpretation of Pip's desire. Why does Pip's desire for Estella entail his wish to be Miss Havisham? To occupy the *subject position* of Miss Havisham—so that he can have Estella—does not mean that Pip has to *be* Miss Havisham. To occupy the *subject position* of Estella—so that he can be loved by Miss Havisham—does not mean that Pip has to *be* Estella. Third, Pip's desire to doll himself up evinces a strategic feminization. If Pip's ultimate wish is to occupy Estella's place, his feminization is performative rather than ontological. And finally, though Pip's feminization undoes his boyhood, it also contributes to the making of a gentleman. To see Pip's change over the course of the novel as what Marcus calls the rise "from debased masculinity to elite femininity" is simplistic. While Pip's brother-in-law Joe Gargery and his secret benefactor Abel Magwitch fail to live up the middle-class ideal of gentleman (Joe is a blacksmith; Magwitch is a convict), Pip forgoes such undesirable masculine models in order to become a gentleman. It is not a categorical renunciation of masculinity. Since the idea of gentleman in *Great Expectations* involves the intersection of gender, class, fashion, and finance, masculinity and femininity cannot be reduced to male and female influences or embodiments. See Marcus, *Between Women*, 168, 184.

England. In Henry Blake Fuller's *Bertram Cope's Year* (completed in 1918, published in 1919), the marriage plot is of another order: not only does the male friendship between the twenty-four-year-old Bertram Cope and the twenty-seven-year-old Arthur Lemoyne stand in the way of Cope's marriage, but this premarital romantic friendship also does not develop into or declare itself a homosexual relationship.¹⁰ While the epistemology of the closet may "bring out" the "coded" intimacy between these two boys, it reduces Fuller's intricate design of Cope to gay hermeneutics and loses sight of his sly reconfiguration of the marriage plot. At the same time, though the paradigm of romantic friendship may explain Cope's attachment to Lemoyne, male friendship does not simply function as a stable, neutral narrative matrix in this novel; it becomes a contending force against the still privileged yet indefinitely delayed marriage. In *Bertram Cope's Year*, men and women do not merely help one another navigate the treacherous road to marriage: even though they uphold social decorum and are cordial to one another, they often vie for Cope or intervene in his love affairs through friendship, companionship, mentorship, patronage, and other social relations. As a result, it is not always clear whether they are sexually

¹⁰ On the conventions or practices of male friendship in the Victorian age and, more broadly, the early modern period, see Henning Bech, *When Men Meet: Homosexuality and Modernity*, trans. Teresa Mesquit and Tim Davies (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997); William Benemann, *Male-Male Intimacy in Early America: Beyond Romantic Friendships* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2006); Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Caleb Crain, *American Sympathy: Men, Friendship, and Literature in the New Nation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Edward Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1908 [1921]); John W. Crowley, "Howells, Stoddard, and Male Homosocial Attachment in Victorian America," in *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies*, ed. Harry Brod (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 301-324; John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); David Deitcher, *Dear Friends: American Photographs of Men Together, 1840-1918* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001); Karen V. Hansen, "'Our Eyes Behold Each Other': Masculinity and Intimate Friendship in Antebellum New England," in *Men's Friendships*, ed. Peter M. Nardi (Newsbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992), 35-58; Jonathan Ned Katz, *Love Stories: Sex between Men before Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Robert K. Martin, "Knights-Errant and Gothic Seducers: The Representation of Male Friendship in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America," in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. Martin B. Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey (New York: New American Library, 1989), 169-182; Axel Nissen, *Manly Love: Romantic Friendship in American Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Nissen, ed., *The Romantic Friendship Reader: Love Stories between Men in Victorian America* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 2003); and E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

interested in Cope themselves or simply helping Cope avoid a calamitous marriage. While Cope's friendships with other characters are constantly charged with the aspiration to marriage or relationship, none comes to fruition.

It is the difficulty of telling friendship from relationship and the correlation between them in a marriage plot that I would like to study in *Bertram Cope's Year* as a boyish narrative. In my previous chapter, I argued that Cather intercepts the teleology of maturity by suspending Paul's adolescence and having him commit suicide in "Paul's Case": as a result, Paul's boyhood femininity does not entail protogay boyhood. In this chapter, I argue that Fuller undercuts the progress narratives of marriage plots and coming-out stories by representing Cope as a boy indifferent to women and attached to his best male friend. (By "coming out," I mean that characters identify themselves as gay and explicitly express their sexual interest in same-sex partners.) Although Cope and Lemoyne may be a gay couple, such a reading is premised on the ideas of compulsory maturation and compulsory historicism: at age twenty-four, Cope is supposed to have a sexual partner; in the age of homo/heterosexuality, he is supposed to be gay or straight. Instead, I argue that Fuller constructs Cope as sexually inscrutable in order to suspend the transition from male friendship to heterosexual marriage and the crystallization of male homosexuality. Since the novel ends with two seniors speculating about Cope's future relationships—not with Cope's own choices between male and female friends—Fuller's narrative eludes the arcs of sexual subjectivity and maturation in conventional marriage plots and coming-out stories. In other words, the question is not whom Cope loves, what he likes, or who he is, but how Fuller bypasses the discourse of life forms and sexual identity in his representation of a youth in the early twentieth century.

Beginning this chapter with Marcus's study of relationships between women—rather than a more “direct” engagement with the history and representation of male romantic friendship or male homosexuality at the turn of the twentieth century—I do not mean to be circumlocutory. While I will address issues of male romantic friendship and homosexuality later in this chapter, I want to foreground the stakes of using friendship or homosexuality as the primary tool for studying characters in a marriage plot like Fuller's. In *Bertram Cope's Year*, friendships do not herald marriages. While two minor characters do marry, they do not trace the origin of their relationship to some precious male or female amity. Although Sedgwick and Marcus have shown the intricate relationships between same-sex friends, the use of homosexuality, homosociality, and friendship as the master discourses for understanding male and female desire has made it difficult to see Cope's deliberately ambiguous subjectivity—especially because the ambiguity is not his own doing, but a construct of the narrative. Besides, the discourse of male romantic friendship may eclipse women's agency, as if they could only be desired, despised, or deserted by men. In *Bertram Cope's Year*, Cope actually becomes a surface for women to display their sympathy and desire for the boy, as well as their competition with one another.

The primacy of coeval friendship, with its potential development into a homosexual relationship or its sequential (syntagmatic and paradigmatic) relation to marriage, also tends to displace intergenerational relationships by desexualizing them as patronage, mentorship, or maternal and avuncular concern. Egalitarian and welcoming as the idea of companionate friendship and marriage is, it sometimes renders invisible or unthinkable other love interests, subjects, or configurations (more on this in my next chapter on Tennessee Williams's “The Mysteries of the Joy Rio” [1941]). In *Bertram Cope's Year*, senior characters like the forty-five-year-old widow Medora Phillips and the fifty-year-old bachelor Basil Randolph do not simply

preside over Cope's troubled love life. To limit the story to the intimacy between Cope and Lemoyne or between Cope and Medora's female boarders (Amy Leffingwell, Hortense Dunton, and Carolyn Thorpe) fundamentally translates these two senior characters' love interest in Cope into chaste avuncular or maternal care. To address such obscured intimacy, I use the word *boyish* to allude to the age-stratified forms of love in intergenerational relationships.

“The Art of Making It Flat”

Before I look at specific passages in *Bertram Cope's Year* to see how Fuller revamps romantic friendship and the marriage plot, I would like to review the reception of this novel among critics in order to redirect identity-inflected or teleological literary criticism to aestheticism. Between the 1930s and the 1970s, most reviewers had criticized Fuller's novel for failing to deliver the reward of teaching (Cope is an uninspiring instructor), the bliss of matrimony (Cope's friendships with women are uneventful), or the plight of homosexuality (Cope's intimacy with Lemoyne is unresolved). But such critiques were actually premised on normative literary conventions (the campus novel, the Bildungsroman, or the marriage plot) or sexological monographs (the undoing of sexual inverts or homosexuals): they read the novel with a specific plotline, characterization, and life form in mind. In contrast, Edward Wilson argues that *Bertram Cope's Year* is about “the art of making it flat.”¹¹ How does the turn from emplotment to aesthetics help us see Fuller's novel as a “boyish narrative”?

I also want to comb through the literary reviews of *Bertram Cope's Year* to show what reading Cope as a gay character leaves out. As contemporary critics recover Fuller and his novel

¹¹ Edmund Wilson, “Two Neglected American Novelists: I—Henry Blake Fuller: The Art of Making It Flat.” *New Yorker*, May 23, 1970.

from obscurity in light of Chicago modernism and the gay literary tradition, it ironically becomes difficult to see how this novel engages ideas of marriage, friendship, desire, subjectivity, and agency without reducing Cope to a gay character.¹² To approach characters in such symptomatic or revisionist fashions often renders literature a version of sexology, psychiatry, and other identity-inflected discourses of life forms. This ignores Fuller's narrative design and his representation of life.

In 1919, Fuller published *Bertram Cope's Year*, a novel about a graduate student and instructor's one-year stay in Churchton, a college town reminiscent of Evanston, Illinois. Although Cope meets different girls and at one point lives with his best friend, the novel disappointed lots of reviewers. Describing it as a "dull" novel with a "duller" protagonist and an "indecisive" plot, a story with "uneventful" action and a "slight" theme on ingrate youth, or a bold book of homosexuality "compromise[d]" by its ambiguous ending, most reviewers obscured or inveighed against *Bertram Cope's Year* for its treatment of homosexuality.¹³ One critic even criticized Fuller for "his failure to deal adequately with the impact of sexual abnormality upon

¹² On Fuller as Chicago-based author, see David Weir, *Decadent Culture in the United States: Art and Literature against the American Grain, 1890-1926* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 86-119, 169-175; Frederik Byrn Køhlert, *The Chicago Literary Experience: Writing the City, 1893-1953* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2011); Randolph H. Hudson and Jan Pinkerton, *Encyclopedia of the Chicago Literary Renaissance* (New York: Facts On File, 2004), 128-129; Marie J. Kuda, "Man about Town: Henry Blake Fuller," in *Out and Proud in Chicago: An Overview of the City's Gay Community*, ed. Tracy Baim (Chicago: Surrey Books, 2008), 24-25; and Clarence A. Andrews, *Chicago in Story: A Literary History* (Iowa City: Midwest Heritage, 1982). On *Bertram Cope's Year* as a gay novel, see Roger Austen, "Back in the Closet," in *Playing the Game: The Homosexual Novel in America* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1977), 27-30; Anthony Slide, *Lost Gay Novels: A Reference Guide to Fifty Works from the First Half of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2003), 94-97; and Christopher Looby, "The Gay Novel in the United States 1900-1950," in *A Companion to the Modern American Novel 1900-1950*, ed. John T. Matthews (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 414-436. On Fuller's literary biographies, see Constance M. Griffin, *Henry Blake Fuller, A Critical Biography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1939); Kenneth Scambray, *A Varied Harvest: The Life and Works of Henry Blake Fuller* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987); Bernard R. Bowron, Jr., *Henry B. Fuller of Chicago: The Ordeal of a Genteel Realist in Ungenteel America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1974); and John Pilkington, *Henry Blake Fuller* (New York: Twayne, 1970).

¹³ Griffin, *Henry Blake Fuller*, 67; Bowron, *Henry B. Fuller of Chicago*, 226; and Scambray, *A Varied Harvest*, 152.

the lives of his characters.”¹⁴ Another critic, who was less appalled than bemused by Fuller’s gay theme, found the relationship between Cope and Lemoyne a “scrupulously packed [dynamite]” that “fell as harmless as a dud.”¹⁵

Among the few positive reviews, Carl Van Vechten praised Fuller for tactfully addressing the taboo subject of male intimacy: “The story, apparently slow moving, really thrusts forward its emphatic moments on almost every page, but it would probably prove unreadable to one who had no key to its meaning. Once its intention is grasped, however, it becomes one of the most brilliant and glowingly successful of this author’s brief series of works.”¹⁶ Yet, the brilliance of *Bertram Cope’s Year* lies not only in Fuller’s tango with gay codes but also in his creation of a flat yet charismatic protagonist. According to Wilson,

Fuller’s rather difficult problem here has been to make Bertram intrinsically uninteresting and even rather comic, but at the same time to dramatize convincingly the spell of enchantment he is supposed to cast. This is seen in his effect on the other characters, but the reader is not made to feel it: Bertram is represented as behaving in an agreeable enough way, but, in his self-centeredness, he never does anything that is made to seem really attractive. And the result . . . is a kind of deliberate flatness.¹⁷

In other words, *Bertram Cope’s Year* is about people’s misplaced worship and incomplete knowledge of Cope: the Churchton circle gravitates to Cope’s boyish charm, readily adoring him and expecting grand things of him. The readers of the novel know better than to dote on Cope, but they are still not sure whether Cope will end up with anyone. Cope himself is boring, but that is not the problem. The novel is more about the audience’s futile investment in Cope.

¹⁴ Pilkington, *Henry Blake Fuller*, 151.

¹⁵ John Chipman Farrar, “The Literary Spotlight XXVII: Henry Blake Fuller, with a Caricature by William Cropper II,” *The Bookman: A Review of Books and Life (1895-1933)* 58, no. 6 (February 1924): 649.

¹⁶ Carl Van Vechten, *Excavations: A Book of Advocacies* (New York: Knopf, 1926), 140.

¹⁷ Wilson, “The Art of Making It Flat,” 134.

With Fuller's aestheticism in view, Cope's subjectivity is not so much a matter of gay representation as a matter of stylistic ambiguity. Although Cope may not be gay, the idea of gay representation already assumes his sexuality to begin with. To read Cope in terms of style, I do not mean to see how Cope fashions himself (through clothes, intonations, gender mannerisms, or cultural practices) as a gay man or how Fuller discloses Cope's sexuality through gay signs (male intimacy, theatergoing, and his erotic indifference to women). Instead, I mean to see how the narrator, the ending, the various scenes or phrases in the novel, and the temporal manipulations of Cope's age and his brief sojourn in Churchton all render it impossible to pinpoint Cope's sexual subjectivity. In *Bertram Cope's Year*, Cope is sexually passive: not that he claims to be a bottom in sex with men or desires to be desired, but that he resists women's sexual advances instead of pursuing his love object. And the omnipresent, analytic, yet reserved voice of the narrator reveals Cope's inner thoughts and his point of view without telling readers who he is. In *Henry James and the Queerness of Style*, Kevin Ohi argues, "The queerness of Henry James's writing resides less in its representation of marginal sexualities—however startlingly explicit those may be—than in its elusive and multivalent effects of syntax, figure, voice, and tone, in its systematic challenging of the presumption that desire can be, or ought to be, represented."¹⁸ This assessment applies to Fuller's style as well. While readers may realize how lackluster Cope is, the joke is on Cope for failing to meet people's expectations and on the audience—in and of the novel—for projecting their romantic feelings and narrative arcs (the marriage plot or the coming-out story) on the boy.

Thanks to Cope's "deliberate flatness," the novel creates four dimensions of boyishness. First, Cope is fairly young. Although he has not done anything spectacular, most characters in

¹⁸ Kevin Ohi, *Henry James and the Queerness of Style* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 2-3.

the novel see him as a man in the making. The disparity between expectation and reality renders Cope always not quite the man he is to become. The point, however, is not when Cope will fulfill people's great expectations; it is how Fuller thwarts the telos of maturity. Second, Cope is characterized by his boyish detachment. In the novel, women tend to translate Cope's polite engagement into something romantic: they color his every move, gesture, and even reluctance with their own love interest. But Cope fends off their sexual advances without vigorously pursuing anyone. As a result, Cope may be not ready to forgo his friendship with Lemoyne, he may be too focused on career to consider marriage, or he may be gay. The boy may marry, but the marriage is indefinitely delayed in the novel. Third, the novel ends with a cliffhanger: Medora and Randolph wonder whether Cope will marry Carolyn or reunite with Lemoyne. While such a choice implies two distinct sexual trajectories—straight marriage and same-sex friendship/domesticity—Cope himself has no say here. Such projections are the two seniors', not Cope's own. Ending the novel this way, Fuller courts and foils the arc of homo/hetero maturation with the boy's noncomplicit silence.

Finally, Cope evades the progress narrative of gay history, for he is not necessarily too "repressed" or too "immature" to come out. Fuller and his character Randolph had lived through the heyday of romantic friendship, which, according to Axel Nissen, emphasizes spirituality rather than carnality between male pals in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁹ But there is no telling whether Cope abides by the new regime of homo/heterosexuality. It would be prim, if not anachronistic and homophobic, to see Cope and Lemoyne as chaste friends who honor the conventions of romantic friendship. But it would also be historically determinist and dismissive of Fuller's style to read them as a gay couple. Aware of Fuller's subtlety, some contemporary

¹⁹ Nissen, *Manly Love*, 8.

critics describe Cope as “readily identifiable as gay, although never specifically labeled.”²⁰ But such interpretative prudence is false: there are gaps between who Cope is, what he knows, what he does, what he passes as (not necessarily what Cope pretends to be, but what impressions people have of him), what people know about him, and what people want from him—all carefully manipulated by Fuller’s narrative. To determine the nature of Cope’s relationship with Lemoyne in terms of history of homosexuality is not always accurate or helpful.

“Who Else Is There?”

With the four dimensions of boyishness in view, I want to address the ambiguous ending of *Bertram Cope’s Year* to see how Fuller eludes the marriage plot and the coming-out story. After Cope rejects Amy and Hortense, the Churchton circle realizes that Cope has been consorting with Lemoyne, a chum he met in a cathedral choir in Winnebago, Wisconsin, and later shares a room with in Churchton. Yet, the novel does not culminate in two boys’ triumph of love or their passionate death. Aghast at Lemoyne’s drag performance on stage and his improper advances to a fellow male actor on the back stage while he is still in drag (the latter leading to Lemoyne’s expulsion from college), Cope takes a hard look at their friendship. With Cope moving to the East Coast for a stable teaching position, the novel ends on a cliffhanger: will Cope marry Carolyn—the only young female boarder and potential love interest left in Medora’s house—or reunite with Lemoyne?

At first glance, the ending levels the playing field: after seeing everyone’s true colors, Cope would choose between his old friend and new favorite. While Medora interprets Cope’s

²⁰ Hudson and Pinkerton, *Encyclopedia of the Chicago Literary Renaissance*, 129.

“fateful letter” to Carolyn as a prelude to marriage, her bachelor friend Randolph bets on Cope’s rekindled friendship with Lemoyne:²¹

“Who else is there?” Medora continued to demand sturdily. “In October they will be married—”

“Heaven forbid!” ejaculated Randolph.

“You have something better to suggest?”

“Nothing better. Something different. Listen, as you yourself say. Next October I shall call on you, put my hand in my inside pocket, bring out a letter and read it to you. It will run like this: ‘My dear Mr. Randolph,—You will be pleased, I am sure, to hear that I now have a good position at the university in this pleasant town. Arthur Lemoyne, whom you recall, is studying psychology here, and we are keeping house together. He wishes to be remembered. I thank you for your many kindnesses,’—that is put in as a mere possibility,—‘and also send best regards to Mrs. Phillips and the members of her household. Sincerely yours, Bertram L. Cope.’”

“I won’t accept that!” cried Medora. “He will marry Carolyn, and I shall do as much for her as I did for Amy, and as much as I expect to do for Hortense.” (220-221)

Regarding Cope’s letter as his penultimate step on the way to realizing his “real” sexuality, Medora and Randolph come up with two possible endings: opposite-sex marriage or same-sex partnership.

While such might be the case, these two readings reflect more the two seniors’ amatory assumptions and preferences than Cope’s. Thwarted by Cope’s uneventful relationships on campus, Medora and Randolph envision that Cope will finally look for a partner and settle down. When Medora asks, “Who else is there?,” she is pronouncing Carolyn the winner of Cope’s affection. With Amy, Hortense, and Medora herself out of the picture, Carolyn is the last woman standing. Randolph, however, offers an alternative: Cope’s rapprochement with Lemoyne. A dandyish bachelor, Randolph is attuned to male friendship and probably homosexuality. Having

²¹ Henry Blake Fuller, *Bertram Cope’s Year*, ed. Joseph A. Dimuro (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2010), 220. Hereafter references to this edition will be incorporated parenthetically in the text. Unless otherwise noted, all italics that appear in quoted extracts from this book are Fuller’s own.

wanted to live with Cope himself, he counters Medora's projection with Cope's keeping house with Lemoyne. Both speakers accommodate Cope's delays, rejections, and even red herrings, but feel that Cope must be interested in someone, and that it must be someone they already know. It is only a matter of time before the boy makes up his mind and takes action.

Medora and Randolph map out two life trajectories on Cope's behalf. But what if Cope meets someone else? What if he stays single? What if he chooses Lemoyne or Carolyn first and then turns to the other? What if Lemoyne and Carolyn marry or settle down with someone else? What if Cope changes his mind about Medora or/and Randolph and goes back to Churchton? What if he dies before he finds anyone? According to Medora's and Randolph's trajectories, Cope has to grow from a sexually ambiguous boy to a straight or "gay" man.²² And since they both dislike Lemoyne's "epicene" effeminacy (208), they might discredit Cope's relationship with Lemoyne as adolescent, transient, or dead wrong—even if they acknowledge Cope's same-sex desire.²³

²² For a critique of the linear construct of sexuality from a bisexual perspective, see, for example, Elisabeth D. Däumer, "Queer Ethics; Or, the Challenge of Bisexuality to Lesbian Ethics," *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 7, no. 4 (Fall 1992): 91-105; Ruth Gibian, "Refusing Certainty: Toward a Bisexuality of Wholeness," in *Closer to Home: Bisexuality & Feminism*, ed. Elizabeth Reba Weise (Seattle, WA: The Seal Press, 1992), 3-16; Clare Hemmings, "Bisexual Theoretical Perspectives: Emergent and Contingent Relationships," in *The Bisexual Imaginary: Representation, Identity and Desire*, ed. Phoebe Davidson et al. (London: Cassell, 1997), 14-37, and *Bisexual Spaces: A Geography of Sexuality and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Chung-Hao Ku, "The Kid Is All the Rage: (Bi)Sexuality, Temporality and Triangular Desire in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*," *Journal of Bisexuality* 10, no. 3 (2010): 309-349; and Maria Pramaggiore, "BI-ntroduction I: Epistemologies of the Fence," in *RePresenting Bisexualities: Subjects and Cultures of Fluid Desire*, ed. Donald E. Hall and Maria Pramaggiore (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 1-7.

²³ Lemoyne denotes a boyish subjectivity distinct from Cope's. Although his effeminacy taps into the medical discourse of inversion and homosexuality at the turn of the twentieth century, it evokes Renaissance boy actors. Outrageously feminine, Lemoyne exasperates his audience with his drag in the musical comedy, "The Antics of Annabella": "Most amateur drama is based, perhaps, on the attempted 'escape': one likes to bolt from his own day, his own usual costume, his own range of ideas, and even from his own sex. Endeavors toward this last are most enjoyable—or least offensive—when they show frank and patent inadequacy. It was Arthur Lemoyne's fortune—or misfortune—to do this work all too well" (208). In addition to Lemoyne's gift for female impersonation, the drama club is aptly called "The Grayfriars," a smart allusion to the legendary boy company in Renaissance England: the Children of the Chapel. Originally performing at the Blackfriars Theater in 1600, the boy company was renamed the Children of the Queen's Revels in 1604, the Children of Blackfriars in 1608, the Children of Whitefriars in 1609 when moved to the eponymous playhouse, and back to the Children of the Queen's Revels in 1610. By the time it arrived, the Whitefriars playhouse was already a private theater notorious for its proximity to brothels, its bawdy

Since the novel ends with two senior characters' predictions of Cope's future relationships—not Cope's own account of his feelings for Carolyn and/or Lemoyne—the ending is far from final, objective, and authoritative. Yet, the issue is not *when* Cope will become a readable sexual subject, as if he eventually has to be in a sexual relationship with someone. Instead, it is *how* Fuller evades Cope's sexuality by mapping out two distinct trajectories without obligating Cope to fulfill either. Whereas Medora and Randolph foresee domesticity in Cope's future, the narrative deftly lets Cope be who he is without forcing him to choose between Carolyn and Lemoyne or be in a relationship with anyone. Even though Medora and Randolph present a choice between a man and a woman, such a choice has no direct bearing on Cope's sexuality.

Evasive, the narrative raises the issue of homo/hetero teleology. In *Bertram Cope's Year*, Medora's and Randolph's projections represent a condensed version of homo/hetero teleology: seeing sexuality as a trajectory, such a teleology tolerates delay, deviance, and even stages of ambiguity or experimentation, but it regards homo/hetero identity as the final destination. In fact, such teleology is riddled with assumptions. First, this discourse often assumes everyone to be heterosexual by default. One does not have to marry the opposite sex to prove one's heterosexuality. Second, even when homosexuality enters the picture, heterosexuality is still privileged. Homosexuality only becomes a plausible subjectivity when one fails to be straight.

plays, and the alleged prostitution of boy actors offstage. Naming themselves "Grayfriars," Lemoyne and the rest of boy actors evoke the religious brotherhood of a friary, the musical performance of choir singing, and the theatrical craft of impersonation on the early modern stage. But there are also connotations of effeminacy, homoerotics, and male prostitution. On the history of the Children of the Chapel, see Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearian Playing Companies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Mary Bly, *Queer Virgins and Virgin Queens on the Early Modern Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Lucy Munro, *Children of the Queen's Revels: A Jacobean Theatre Repertory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). On boy actors, see Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Bruce R. Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England: A Cultural Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991 [1994]); Mario DiGangi, *The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and Gina Bloom, *Voice in Motion: Staging Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

Third, once homosexuality becomes a legitimate sexuality, it generates its own arc of development (from denial to acceptance, from oppression to liberation), grids of normativity (the urban gay subculture), and ways of reading (gay sensibility and the epistemology of the closet). Under the rubric of homo/hetero teleology, individuals like Cope are often seen as transitional. It is as if he could or should have done more (marrying Carolyn or keeping house with Lemoyne) to be an “authentic” straight or gay character. Such teleology obscures issues other than the gender of the partner: age, finance, temperamental compatibility, family and cultural background, etc.

Proleptic, homo/hetero teleology renders Cope a boy in distress. Endowing Cope’s friendly companionship and his courteous kiss with amatory meaning, Amy envisions an engagement. Picturing Cope as a bridegroom in the making, Amy overlooks Cope’s preoccupation with his career and his friendship with Lemoyne. The fact that Cope does not, and cannot afford to, imagine nuptial beatitude is foreign to her:

“Happiness”—that conventional bliss toward which she [Amy] was turning her mind as they strolled together on these late November afternoons—was for him [Cope] a long way ahead. How furnish a house, how clothe and feed a wife?—at least until his thesis should be written and a place, with a real salary, found in the academic world. How, even, buy an engagement ring—that costly superfluity? How even contrive to pay for all the small gifts and attentions which an engagement involved? Yet why ask himself such questions? For he was conscious of a fundamental repugnance to any such scheme of life and was acutely aware that—for awhile, at least, and perhaps for always—he wanted to live in quite a different mode. (150)

Amy’s marital teleology reads everything Cope does with her as some stage in the progress narrative of the marriage plot: when marriage becomes the one and only life goal, Cope’s bachelorhood is translated into a premarital phase. As Amy marks him as her potential husband, Cope feels more compelled than inadequate.

From Amy's perspective, Cope is always already the man she wants to marry. But Cope's attitude toward marriage takes the form of a deceitfully transparent indirect discourse: sometimes the narrator reports what Cope is thinking or feeling ("for him a long way ahead"), and sometimes he blurs the distinction between his voice and thoughts and Cope's.²⁴ Although the narrator frames Cope's trouble with marriage as a battery of how-tos, the indirect discourse registers Cope's subjectivity and anxiety without giving away his sexuality: "Yet why ask himself such questions? For he was conscious of a fundamental repugnance to any such scheme of life and was acutely aware that—for awhile, at least, and perhaps for always—he wanted to live in quite a different mode." Putting work before any relationship, Cope cannot afford to marry. But this does not necessarily mean that he will plan to marry someday, that he is a straight man who wishes to save enough money before marrying a wife. Though Cope dislikes the idea of engagement, he does not avow confirmed bachelorhood or confess his homosexuality. The indefinite delay of marriage—"for awhile, at least, and perhaps for always"—relegates marriage to the unknown future. Even though the narrator tries to get to the bottom of Cope's marital trouble, he can only register Cope's own uncertainty.

Although Cope does not specify what he means by "a different mode," the life forms available in the early twentieth century encompass at least homosexuality, celibacy, libertinism, bachelorhood, and romantic friendship—all of which, with the possible exception of the last,

²⁴ Free indirect discourse sometimes allows the narrator to enter the head of the character ironically by withdrawing his/her presence. In such cases, the narrator seems to identify with the character; the narrative authority becomes at once omniscient and nonexistent. But sometimes the narrator imitates a character's speech while he/she imitates yet another character's subjectivity. When this happens, the narrator does not necessarily identify with two characters or the first character with the second. According to Daniel Gunn, "This is *narratorial* subjectivity, engaging in a kind of verbal play, which includes the imitation of others' speech." See Daniel P. Gunn, "Free Indirect Discourse and Narrative Authority in *Emma*," *Narrative* 12, no. 1 (January 2004): 38 (emphasis in original). Also see Dorrit Cohn's definition of "narrated monologue," which "maintains the third-person reference and the tense of narration, but . . . reproduces verbatim the character's own mental language." It is basically "a character's mental discourse in the guise of the narrator's discourse." Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 14.

conflict with heterosexual marriage but have distinct implications. Given Cope's fleeting stay in Churchton, his unfavorable yet inconclusive attitude toward marriage, and his suggestive yet vague relationship with Lemoyne, Cope's sexual status remains uncertain. Carefully framed by the narrative—to the extent of Cope's own train of thoughts—Cope displays a boyish phase, status, or subjectivity correlated with, but not congruent with, the discourse of homo/heterosexuality: he may delay his marriage temporarily or permanently; he may amend or renounce his friendship with Lemoyne; he may grow distant from or keep in touch with the Churchton circle. He may turn straight/gay eventually, but he may also discard the whole teleology. While Medora's and Randolph's speculations suggest two competitive life trajectories, the effect is not to map out two exclusive alternatives but to provide possible dénouements that cancel each other out. The projected ending itself indexes the intricate correlation between sexuality and temporality, as well as the ideology of couplehood. A bachelor marked by his uncertain relation to marriage and friendship, Cope inhabits a penumbra between boyhood and adulthood, between arrested development and belated maturity. While his boyishness may mark a phase prior to homo/hetero identification, it also implies a moratorium on all relationships, a subjectivity of bachelorhood, and above all a check on homo/hetero teleology.

“A Little Short of That”

Having addressed the homo/hetero teleology in Medora's and Randolph's projections of Cope's future relationships, I would like to turn to the tricky epistemology of boyishness in *Bertram Cope's Year* by highlighting three matters: the narrator's contrast between Cope and George du Maurier's fictional character Peter Ibbetson (Pierre Pasquier or Gogo) at the

beginning of the novel, the ubiquitous appearance and multivalent uses of the word *boy* in the novel, and the contrast between Cope and a minor, younger character in the novel, George F. Pearson, who later marries Amy. Although there is a general consensus about the arc of maturity in the novel, the idea of normative life stages soon breaks down into individual cases: Peter's "best age" at twenty-eight (43), Pearson's early marriage, and Cope's proleptic development. Such individualization, however, does not entirely embrace personal freedom (you can do whatever you want with your life) or personalized life trajectories (every man will achieve his goal—it is just a matter of time). Instead, all the visions and contrasts make Cope always "a little short of" accomplished manhood but not totally off (43): he is acting and not acting his age.

Bertram Cope's Year begins with an epistemology of boyishness by contrasting Cope with du Maurier's protagonist in *Peter Ibbetson* (1891):

What is a man's best age? Peter Ibbetson, entering dreamland with complete freedom to choose, chose twenty-eight, and kept there. But twenty-eight, for our present purpose, has a drawback: a man of that age, if endowed with ordinary gifts and responsive to ordinary opportunities, is undeniably—a man; whereas what we require here is something just a little short of that. Wanted, in fact, a young male who shall seem fully adult to those who are younger still, and who may even appear the accomplished flower of virility to an idealizing maid or so, yet who shall elicit from the middle-aged the kindly indulgence due a boy. Perhaps you will say that even a man of twenty-eight may seem only a boy to a man of seventy. However, no septuagenarian is to figure in these pages. Our elders will be but in the middle forties and the earlier fifties; and we must find for them an age which may evoke their friendly interest, and yet be likely to call forth, besides that, their sympathy and their longing admiration, and later their tolerance, their patience, and even their forgiveness.

I think, then, that Bertram Cope, when he began to intrigue the little group which dwelt among the quadruple avenues of elms that led to the campus in Churchton, was but about twenty-four,—certainly not a day more than twenty-five. If twenty-eight is the ideal age, the best is all the better for being just a little ahead. (43)

Unpretentious, the beginning lays out the theme and narrative arc of the novel: people's varied and generally positive opinions of a young male. But the elegant prose is packed with

conventions of maturity (accomplished manhood and virility) and elders' indulgence of a youth. Although the omnipresent narrator seems to celebrate youth, he is anything but omniscient: with the use of reportorial inquiry ("What is a man's best age?"), qualified statement ("But twenty-eight, for our present purpose, has a drawback"), superimposed negation ("whereas what we require here is something just a little short of that"; "yet who shall elicit from the middle-aged the kindly indulgence due a boy"), and envisioned audience ("Perhaps you will say . . ."), the narrator invites discussion. While he establishes and defends his authority, he also reduces himself to an opinion ("I think . . .").

Contrasting Peter with Cope, the narrative also takes the double form of realistic fiction and literary criticism. To be sure, the character Cope comes to life when he becomes the subject of various opinions: he is idealized by maids, indulged by seniors, and celebrated by the narrator himself. But Cope himself, as in the ending I discussed earlier, has no say here. Also, Cope is contrasted to another literary character, du Maurier's romantic character, Peter. When these two characters stand side by side, the narrative adopts the argumentative tone of literary analysis: this essayistic novel addresses a boyish character, Cope, who is not yet a man but full of great expectations. This contrast between Peter and Cope, however, dissolves when we know the specific condition of Peter's age: Peter regards twenty-eight as "a man's best age" not because he is at the peak of his career, productivity, or physical strength, but because he starts living in an ageless dreamland with his childhood sweetheart, Mary Seraskier (Mimsey). Reunited with his lover in dreams, Peter is oblivious to his life imprisonment in reality.²⁵ Still, the narrator uses

²⁵ In *Peter Ibbetson*, Peter lives with Mary by "dreaming true." Imprisoned for life for killing his uncle and guardian by accident, Peter builds an alternative life with Mary—the Duchess of Towers separated from her husband—in dreams. At their first oneiric rendezvous, the jailed Peter exclaims, "Nothing can ever equal this moment—nothing on earth or in heaven. And if I were free to-morrow, life would not be worth having without *you*. I would not take it as a gift." Ecstatic, Peter would rather stay twenty-eight in dreamland than be absolved in reality. For the next twenty-five years, these two star-crossed lovers do not age, bear children, or have misgivings about

twenty-eight as a working benchmark of manhood. While Peter has met the dictum of manhood, the twenty-four-year-old Cope falls short. Pegging Cope as a “boy” on his way to manhood, the narrative then turns to the impressions a young male may make on different people: he may appear fully adult to younger individuals, virile to unmarried maids, and an object of “sympathy,” “longing admiration,” “tolerance,” “patience,” and “forgiveness” to middle-aged patrons. To complicate this picture, a twenty-eight-year old “man” may look like a “boy” to septuagenarians. While the four-year gap has previously made all the difference between man and boy, it now means nothing.

All these twists and turns problematize the arc of maturity. Although Peter produces a romantic reconfiguration of time, his perpetual twenty-eight compensates for his life incarceration: whereas the imprisoned Peter has no future, the oneiric Peter is free from linear temporality. More important, Peter’s relationship with Mary is so fated that it becomes a backhanded prototype of marital teleology. Throughout du Maurier’s story, Peter never falls in love with anyone other than Mary. His lifelong commitment extends the puppy love in childhood: it never becomes sexual and procreative. Although Mary is already married to the Duke of Towers when she reunites with Peter, these two do not elope or commit adultery. Instead, they suspend their real lives in abstinent incarceration and saintly charity, remaining a carefree young couple in dreams. Until nearly the very end, the dreamland takes the form of an

social morals in dreamland. But it all ceases when Mary dies. Now a middle-aged man in his dream as well, Peter feels dejected. It is not until Mary consoles Peter from beyond the grave that he lives the rest of his life in peace. See George du Maurier, *Peter Ibbetson, with an Introduction by His Cousin, Lady ***** (Madge Plunket)* (New York: The Modern Library, 1891 [1932]), 288, 278 (emphasis in original). Although a Broadway adaptation of *Peter Ibbetson* came out in 1917, it did not specify the age twenty-eight. Therefore, my discussion of Peter and Mary refers to the original novel. For the Broadway script, see John Nathan Raphael, *Peter Ibbetson, A Play in Four Acts* (New York: Samuel French, 1915 [1934]). For the operatic and cinematic adaptations, see Constance Collier and Deems Taylor, *Peter Ibbetson: Lyrical Drama in Three Acts (Nine Scenes) from the Novel by George du Maurier: Opus 20* (New York: J. Fischer, 1930); and *Peter Ibbetson* (dir. Henry Hathaway, US, 1935). Although “dreaming true” is prevalent in all these versions, they put different emphases on Peter’s paternity, his family background, his accidental homicide (whom Peter kills and why), Mary’s marriage, and the causes of their deaths.

ever-pleasant, everlasting present. In a similarly fateful vein, Amy envisions Cope as her future husband at first sight in *Bertram Cope's Year*. And it is precisely Cope's susceptibility and resistance to the marriage plot that renders his life in Churchton miserable. While Peter remains Mary's boyish companion in their shared dreamland, Cope has to fend off people's romantic interest and investment in turning him into a married man in real life.

With Cope's dilemma unfolded, let us see how Fuller captures the elusive yet overloaded meaning of boyishness before I contrast Cope with Pearson. In *Bertram Cope's Year*, the term *boy* is multivalent. It not only designates age (below twenty-eight), gender, bachelorhood, kinship ("The mother . . . did not want her boy to be unhappy" [159]), and adolescence ("Those years of happy boyhood . . . !" [156]). It also functions as an epithet of endearment ("Arthur, my dear boy" [76], "My poor, dear boy!" [111], "Oh, I was just hoping the poor boy was back on his pins all right again" [119]), innocence/ignorance ("a small-town boy" [80], "college boys" [45], "Oh, my poor boy, you have everything to learn [about the flora]" [95], "fresh, innocent, ingenuous boys" [161]), independence ("one of the cool boys, and one of the self-sufficing" [64]), mischievousness ("You're a wicked, unappreciative boy" [45]), tutelage ("We don't do half enough for these poor boys" [83]), and clumsiness ("That boy fallen maladroitly in love? thought Randolph" [152]). But above all, Cope cannot be pegged. At the shocking news of Cope's engagement with Amy, Randolph thinks aloud:

What *was* the boy, then? he asked himself. He recalled their talk as they had walked past the sand-hills on that October Sunday. Cope had disclaimed all inclination for matrimony. He had confessed a certain inability to safeguard himself. Was he a victim, after all? A victim to his own ineptitude? A victim to his own highmindedness? Well, whatever the alternative, a field for the work of salvage-corps had opened. (160)

Confused, Randolph does not know whether Cope is a liar or a victim. Earlier he had tried to read Cope by his handwriting in vain. Although Cope's penmanship is "open and easy," the hand is "rather boyish": "Was it formed or unformed? 'I am no expert,' confessed Randolph" (63). Indeterminate, Cope is an enigma.

Ingeniously orchestrated, the Fullerian "boy" is by no means universal. Except for the friendship between unmarried peers, the term often denotes a man-boy or adult-youth hierarchy. In the novel, hierarchy dictates the relationships among patrons, senior faculty, graduate instructors, and undergraduate students. A former performer in the college choir, Cope had slipped under Medora's radar. In a college town, undergraduates are "a species upon which many of the Churchtonians languidly refused to bestow their regard" (43). Now that the instructor Cope is likely to secure a permanent position and take root in Churchton, Medora takes a shine to him. If undergraduate boys are too big and transient a crowd to deserve attention, graduate boys are apt candidates for marriage and connections. Given the homoerotic undertones, the mentorship between Randolph and Cope is also conducive to a pederastic reading. As Randolph gives Cope academic advice, saves him from his dreadful engagement, and expresses his interest in living with the boy, the fine line between pedagogy, patronage, parenting, and intergenerational relationship makes it difficult to define this man-boy relationship.²⁶

²⁶ I am aware of the cultural and historical particularity of Greek pederasty: a pedagogical/sexual relationship between a man/lover in his twenties and a boy/beloved in his teens. But Greek love is repeatedly evoked at the turn of the twentieth century to advocate male same-sex intimacy. The point is how proponents strategically deploy pederasty to validate love between men, not how they faithfully replicate pederasty. On classical pederasty, see, for example, Kenneth James Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (London: Duckworth, 1978); David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990); John J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (New York: Routledge, 1990); William Armstrong Percy, *Pederasty and Pedagogy in Archaic Greece* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996); and James Davidson, *The Greeks and Greek Love: A Radical Reappraisal of Homosexuality in Ancient Greece* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007).

At the faculty reception, Cope encounters his first trouble as a “boy” with Medora.

Although he resents being slighted as a “boy,” Cope also understands that he is not financially independent and “socially confident” enough to be on a par with Medora:

“Boy” indeed she had actually called him: well, perhaps his present position made all this possible. He was not yet out in the world on his own. In the background of “down state” [southern Illinois] was a father with a purse in his pocket and a hand to open the purse. Though the purse was small and the hand reluctant, he must partly depend on both for another year. If he were only in business—if he were only a broker or even a salesman—he should not find himself treated with such blunt informality and condescension as a youth. If, within the University itself, he were but a real member of the faculty, with an assured position and an assured salary, he should not have to lie open to the unceremonious hectorings of the socially confident, the “placed.” (45)

On top of Medora’s blunt and condescending patronage is her heterosexual teleology. Although Cope has not established himself, Medora and other women cannot wait to see him wed. A fair-looking fellow with a “slender” figure (46), “slightly bony” knees (46), and “lithe” limbs (89), Cope did not stand out the first time Medora saw him in the university choir. Now a graduate student, he exudes magnetism. As Wilson puts it, Fuller has a flair for making Cope flat. To the extent that people make a hero out of a zero, the joke is on Medora and her entourage for their romantic scripts, and on Cope himself for his mediocrity.

While Medora infantilizes Cope with her patronage, Randolph tries to figure the boy out. A curio-collector and connoisseur, Randolph represents decadent aestheticism, Wildean tutelage, and, by association, sexual nonconformity: “His principal concern was to please himself, to indulge his nature and tastes, and to get, in a quiet way, ‘a good deal out of life.’ . . . His collection represented his own preferences, perseverance and individual predilections” (61-62). A member of a brokerage firm, Randolph supports his expensive taste by stock investment. A

confirmed bachelor and mentor of Cope, he reads like a Wildean character.²⁷ In contrast, Cope—as represented by his handwriting—is probably already “formed” and yet “unformed” (63). Through the novel, Randolph gradually formulates his assessment of Cope. Although Cope may be a younger version of Randolph and a homosexual, the senior bachelor is at best a reader of Cope, not his spokesman. Predicting Cope’s reunion with Lemoyne, Randolph counters Medora’s marriage plot with Cope’s domesticity with Lemoyne. Believing in male friendship, same-sex desire, and probably even homosexuality, Randolph nevertheless dismisses Cope’s relationship with Lemoyne as “a passing *amitié*” (210).

Attracting attention, the naïf Cope passes for a gem. Although Cope’s Freeford family signals provincialism, Randolph and Medora call him an “ebullient Puritan” with “[s]mall-town morals,” an “[e]xuberant,” “cold,” yet “charming” boy (64, 83, 63). Enchanted, these two seniors speculate about Cope’s British origin: despite his prosy parents, the name “Cope” rings “[a] nomenclature not without distinction” (64). Later at Medora’s parties, Cope impresses local luminaries and her French guests not with his wits, but with his fainting and artlessness: “‘You know,’ said Medora Phillips to Randolph, . . . ‘those sophisticated, world-worn people so appreciate our fresh, innocent, ingenuous boys. M. Pelouse told me, on leaving, that Roddy quite met his ideal of the young American. So open-faced, so inexperienced, so out of the great world . . .’” (161). Just as Roddy’s negligence of the dress code strikes M. Pelouse as “ingenuous,” so

²⁷ Randolph reads like a character in the decadent novel. According to Ellis Hanson, “The decadent novel is more likely to resemble a volume of art criticism or a book of sketches, since it usually eschews anything like a plot, wandering off into aesthetic meditations or clever conversations. The typical decadent hero is . . . an upper-class, overly educated, impeccably dressed aesthete, a man whose masculinity is confounded by his tendency to androgyny, homosexuality, masochism, mysticism, or neurosis.” If Randolph were the protagonist in *Bertram Cope Year*, it would probably be a totally different novel. Randolph’s relationship with Cope is charged with homoerotic feelings, but he does not make it verbally or sexually explicit. See Ellis Hanson, *Decadence and Catholicism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 3.

too does Cope's gaucheness strike him as charmingly boyish: "no close and eager attendance; cool, cool" (165). Jaded, the worldly M. Pelouse finds the green Cope refreshing.

Socially awkward and yet agreeable, Cope cannot stop women from thrusting their marriage plot on him: "If there was any offense at all, on anybody's part, it lay in making too much of too little" (49). Aware of romantic conventions, Randolph thinks that Cope's "rescue" of Amy in the sailing accident would "[lead] straight to matrimony—in the story-books, anyhow" (141). To this Cope responds with disrelish: "I don't feel any more inclination to wedded life than ever, nor any likelihood"—here he spoke with effort, as if conscious of a possible danger on some remote horizon—"of entering it" (141). Still, Cope gets tangled. At the news of Cope's engagement, Randolph is nonplused: "What *was* the boy, then? he asked himself." But he defends Cope in front of Medora's disabled brother-in-law Joe Foster:

"I wouldn't go so far as to assert that a young man married is a man that's marred—"
"That *is* stiff doctrine," Foster acknowledged.
"But somehow he [Cope] does seem done for. He is placed; he is cut off from wide ranges of interesting possibilities; he offers himself less invitingly to the roving imagination . . ." (152)

Trapped by Amy's marital plot, Cope can only rely on Randolph and Lemoyne's intervention. But male friends can only postpone marriage; they cannot disarm it once and for all. With Amy married to Pearson, Hortense, Carolyn, and Medora are still on the prowl.

In contrast to Cope's mediocrity, Pearson is already an accomplished man as an undergraduate. Recalling Amy and Cope's sailing accident, he pokes fun at the heroic script embellished by Amy:

If Amy had but been rescued by him, George F. Pearson, instead of by this Bertram Cope, and if she had been snatched from a disorderly set of breakers at the foot of those disheveled sandhills instead of from the prim, prosy, domestic edge of Churchton—well, wouldn't the affair have been better set and better carried off? In such case it might have been picturesque and heroic, instead of slightly silly. (142)

To satisfy her craving for male chivalry, Amy crowns the almost drowning Cope her savior. In contrast, Pearson calls the whole incident “silly,” wishing that he himself had been the hero in a riskier, more “picturesque” scenario. Although Pearson is jealous, he is not wrong about Cope's flatness. When Amy finally marries Pearson, there is nothing romantic about their married life. Enterprising and competitive, Pearson embodies U.S. efficiency, patriarchy, and capitalism. He would like Amy to quit her job and become a housewife. He also decides to complete the wedding in mid-April so as to have a rapid ten-day honeymoon trip, “followed by a prompt, business-like occupancy of the new apartment on the first of May exactly” (194). Pragmatic, Pearson sees Amy as the missing piece of his domestic kingdom. He attests to the velocity of the marriage plot: a boy may become a man overnight.

A brash Chicagoan, Pearson already has fortune, family, and fame before he graduates from college. He knows exactly what he wants: “He was a clever, companionable chap, but he declared himself all too soon, even in this remote Arcadia [Duneland], as utterly true to type” (95). In the midst of Duneland, a summer retreat by Lake Michigan, Medora ignores the looming penitentiary and pictures Cope as “[a] highly civilized faun for her highly sylvan setting” (94). In contrast to such romanticism, Pearson intimidates Cope with his imposing norm: “the young man in business constituted, ipso facto, a kind of norm by which other young men in other fields of endeavor were to be gauged: the farther they deviated from the standard he automatically set up, the more lamentable their deficiencies” (95). While Pearson moves “all too soon,” Cope “has

been slow” (60). If Cope feels the pressure of becoming a man by age twenty-eight, Pearson already has it all at a much younger age.

In *Bertram Cope's Year*, senior characters like Medora, Randolph, and M. Pelouse have treated Cope as a “boy.” But once he leaves Churchton, he is beyond the reach of those seniors, the narrator, and even the novel itself. Even though Randolph has the potential to turn Cope into a Wildean character, the novel is not about the warped time of perpetual youth, homosexuality, or intergenerational relationship. It is about the deliberate delay of marriage and the suspension of a confirmed gay identity. Stuck in Churchton, “[Cope] wished he were back home [in Winnebago], smoking a quiet cigarette with Arthur Lemoyne” (182). Although passages like this may denote a coded, implicit homosexuality, Fuller creates a boy who readily confesses his friendship with Lemoyne but remains “a little short of” an unmistakable gay identity.

Boyish Passivity

I have shown that Cope attests to one of the paradoxes of boyish narratives: the more we say about boyish characters, the less we are sure about them. But this does not relieve him of the marriage plot. In fact, Cope's subjectivity takes the particular form of boyish passivity, a passivity that shows little about his sexuality except his indifference to women. In the face of the scrappy Medora, Cope has been assuming “an easy passivity” (49). Later when Hortense invites him to finish his portrait in her studio, Cope again “drop[s] into complete physical and mental passivity—the *kef* of the Arabs” (190). In *Bertram Cope's Year*, women like Medora, Amy, and Hortense are so assertive that they seem to switch gender roles with Cope. But the discourse of female domination translates Cope's measured engagement with, and distance from, women into

emasculatation. Although he rejects several women's advances, Cope ascribes his rejections to his young age, financial instability, and preference for friendship, not to an unfulfilled sexual interest or object. While the discourse of sexual reversal empowers women and counters the myth of male supremacy, it also castrates men when they fail to control or pursue women.²⁸

To understand Cope's boyish passivity without translating it into castration (and homosexuality), I would like to highlight a scene in the novel: the worship of Adonis. The day after Cope fainted at Medora's party, Foster compares the boy to the young, beautiful, dead Adonis worshipped by women in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. While this comparison seems to be a casual poetic reference, it shows how women desire Cope-as-Adonis and mock his prowess through mourning, how they approach the swooned boy through female piety, and how Foster disguises his interest in Cope from the perspective of an indignant onlooker.

When Randolph visits Foster the day after Cope's fainting, the almost blind Foster feels like reading "about Adonis, or Thammuz, whose mishap 'in Lebanon' set the Syrian females a-going" (116). According to legend, a bull in Lebanon killed the Syrian shepherd Thammuz (Sumerian Dumuzi), whose blood then dyed purple the river Adonis. To commemorate the boy, women hosted an annual funeral to honor Thammuz as a god of food and vegetation.²⁹ Referring to the mourning of Thammuz in *Paradise Lost*, Foster hints at Medora and other women's

²⁸ My idea of Cope's boyish passivity is inspired by Richard Rambus's reading of William Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*. According to Rambus, "active" and "passive" are not univocally gendered as masculine and feminine. Although Venus pursues Adonis and is rejected by the boy, Adonis is not necessarily narcissistic, misogynist, effeminate, or sexually passive. Instead, the boy, Rambus claims, asserts "erotic apathy." See Richard Rambus, "What It Feels Like for a Boy: Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*," in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works, Vol. IV: The Poems, Problem Comedies, Late Plays*, ed. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 244.

²⁹ Foster refers to the passages from *Paradise Lost*: "Thammuz came next behind, / Whose annual wound in Lebanon allur'd / The Syrian Damsels to lament his fate / In amorous ditties all a Summers day, / While smooth Adonis from his native Rock / Ran purple to the Sea, suppos'd with blood / Of Thammuz yearly wounded." See John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Barbara K. Lewalski (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), Book 1, 446-452. According to the editor, "Here, 'Adonis' is a Lebanese river, so named because each July it turned blood red from iron-rich clay" (27).

maudlin sympathy for Cope. And he responds to their worship with ambivalence: “I could stand a lot more of that,—or perhaps I couldn’t!” (116). To be sure, Foster may be jealous of Cope: while the boy gathers all the attention, he is slighted. Riled, Foster sees Cope’s swoon as an insult to his masculinity: “Well, the young fellow began by roaring through the house like a bull of Bashan, and he ended by toppling over like a little wobbly calf” (117). But there is something more necrophilic in Foster’s attitude. Pressed by Randolph, Foster recalls a religious festival he saw twenty years ago in Florence: “There was a kind of grotto in the church, under the high altar; and in the grotto was a full-sized figure of a dead man, carved and painted—and covered with wounds; and round that figure half the women and girls of the town were collected, stroking, kissing . . . Adonis all over again!” (117). Foster sees Adonis as a prototype for women’s mourning of a beautiful, passive (dead or fainted) boy.

But what is the nature of those Syrian women’s mourning? Did they treat Thammuz as their beloved son, their star-crossed lover, or simply a beautiful boy who died young? To answer these questions, let us look at the rite of Adonia, a funeral-cum-festival where Greek women mourned for the premature death of Adonis. According to Matthew Dillon, women in ancient Greece carried pots of sprouted seeds—the “Gardens of Adonis” (*kepoi Adonidos*)—up onto the rooftops of their houses to bewail Adonis’ death in groups, just as Aphrodite laid Adonis in a bed of lettuce while he lay dying. They danced and celebrated all night on the rooftop. As the rite approached the end, these women laid out small images (*eidola*) of Adonis as corpses in their plant beds and carried them in funeral processions through the streets before throwing the images into a spring or the sea.³⁰ An amalgamation of mourning and merrymaking, the Adonia did not just liven up a solemn funeral with gaiety. According to John Winkler, Greek women mock

³⁰ Matthew Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion* (London: Routledge, 2002), 162-169, particularly 166-167.

men's short staying power: "the narrative brings the lover quickly to a dormant state which can be read not only as a genital but also as a social allegory, a statement that women and goddesses have primary control of the processes of production and reproduction, that women enjoy relative independence from male performance in the basic life processes."³¹ In other words, the women worship Adonis, only to bewail his impotence. They hail him back every year for a short eight-day sprout-and-fizzle and send him away for the rest of the year. Assuming the role of lachrymose widows, the women take advantage of a beautiful dead boy. They render the whole rite a mock sympathy on display.

Sympathetic, Medora smothers the passive Cope. Upon visiting his quarters, Medora is disappointed to see Cope recovering from his swoon: "Well, he was on his feet, then. No chance to feel anxiously the brow of a poor boy in bed, or to ask if the window was right or if he wouldn't like a sip of water. Life's little disappointments . . . !" (125). Despite her senior age, Medora treats the accompanying Amy as her chaperon, rather than the other way around: "For heaven's sake, Amy, don't look so concerned, and mournful, and sympathetic! Anybody might think that, instead of your being my chaperon, I was yours!" (126). Scolding Amy for her overt display of concern and naming her chaperon, Medora makes herself the ward and claims modesty. Later at the news of Cope's capsized sloop, Medora again hogs the spotlight: "She was inclined to make the most of the occasion, and she did so. With Helga [her head maid] she quickly superseded the pair of sympathetic and ready maids, whom she allowed to fade into the background with too scant recognition of their services" (134-135). Seeing such outrageous female sympathy, Randolph earlier pictures Cope as a "young knight [escaping] from some 'Belle Dame sans Merci'" (108). Women like Medora and Amy are "sans merci [without

³¹ Winkler, *Constraints of Desire*, 206.

mercy]” not because they overtake Cope by force, but because they kill him with kindness. Grabbing every opportunity to play caretakers, they are relentless. Obligated, Cope can only meet such ordeals “with the smiling, polite, half-weary patience which a man sometimes employs to inform a woman that she doesn’t quite know what she is talking about” (130). A boy in distress, he can only let sympathetic women have their way with his body.

Although Medora’s sympathy may be attributed to maternal instinct or tutelary responsibility, sexual undertones abound. At the reception, Medora already gets fresh with the fresh meat on campus: “Mrs. Phillips spoke out loudly and boldly, and held his [Cope’s] hand as long as she liked. No, not as long as she liked, but longer than most women would have felt at liberty to do. And besides speaking loudly and boldly, she looked loudly and boldly; and she employed a determined smile which seemed to say, ‘I’m old enough to do as I please’” (44). Audacious, Medora checks out Cope’s body as if she were gazing at the slopes of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon “terrace by terrace” (44). On the pretext of tutelary interest, she lavishes adoration on Cope and gets away with the sexual overtones. Later when a midnight intruder breaks into her cottage in Duneland, Medora does not thank her butler for grappling with the burglar. Instead, she gives Cope—who merely wakes up with a shriek—the credit. A chaperone in appearance, Medora is a cougar at heart.

An affluent, childless widow, Medora introduces Cope to the high society of Churchton, meddles in his relationships, and chases the boy herself. Although she never verbally expresses her sexual interest in Cope, Medora exploits their age difference (about twenty years apart) to pamper Cope as a protégé, son, and suitor in her “little court” (74). Constantly inviting Cope to her house, Medora likes to “show him off, sure that her choicest circle could not but find him as charming as she herself did” (109). When all her tactics crumble, Medora finally resigns: “The

young, at best, only tolerate us [Medora and Randolph]. We are but the platform they dance on,—the ladder they climb by” (221). As long as Cope does not take the bait, his “easy passivity” both encourages and withstands Medora’s amatory and tutelary advances.

Mocking women’s effusive sympathy, Foster is no wiser. Caught among desire, jealousy, and cynicism, he disguises his interest in Cope with complaints. Although Foster has been calling Cope an “ingrate” (171), his feelings for the boy are no less complicated than Medora’s. Irked by Foster’s hostility to Cope, Randolph ejaculates:

“Why does anybody care? And for what? For the thing that is just out of reach. He’s [Cope’s] cool; he’s selfish, he’s indifferent. Yet, somehow, frost and fire join end to end and make the circle complete.” He [Randolph] fell into reflection. “It’s all like children straining upward for an icicle, and presently slipping, with cracked pates, on the ice below.”

“Well, *my* pate isn’t cracked.”

“Unless, it’s the worst cracked of all.”

Foster tore off his shade and threw it on the floor. “Mine?” he cried, “Look to your own!” (188)

Comparing Cope to an icicle, Randolph acknowledges his childlike interest in the boy and interprets Foster’s onlooker stance as sour grapes: “the worst cracked of all.” If relentless sympathy enables Medora to manhandle Cope, sheer cynicism alienates Foster from the Churchton circle. Scolding Cope does not make Foster superior; instead, it expresses his desire for the unattainable boy or/and his rivalry for the boy with Randolph. The two bachelors have been good friends, but now Cope is in the way.

In contrast to Foster’s bitchiness, Randolph approaches Cope with great care. Throughout the novel, Randolph has been putting Cope down: he thinks that Cope is “[d]ecent enough, but commonplace” (61), that he belongs to “the regular set” (118), that he “ha[s] not learned much” (140), that he would “accept about everything that comes his way, and . . . accept it as a matter of

course” (152), and that he is not “[w]orth the to-do” (221). But he cannot resist Cope’s boyish charm. In fact, Randolph has been Medora’s biggest competitor for Cope before Lemoyne arrives. He offers Cope academic advice, proposes an outing to help him recover from his illness, invites him to his new apartment, helps him get rid of Amy, and secures a job for Lemoyne at his behest. Cope’s wish is Randolph’s command.

But all these amount to little. Discussing women with Cope by Lake Michigan, Randolph comes up with four chief qualities: desire, determination, dexterity, and devotion. Although the conversation is all about women, it is highly homoerotic and yet restrained:

“You’ve run the gauntlet,” said Cope. “You seem to have come through all right.”

“Well,” Randolph returned deprecatingly, “I can’t really claim ever to have enlisted any woman’s best endeavors.”

“I hope I shall have the same good luck. Of your four *d*’s, it’s the dexterity that gives me the most dread.”

“Yes, the appeal (not always honest) to chivalry,—though devotion is sometimes a close second. You’re manoeuvred into a position where you’re made to think you ‘must.’ I’ve known chaps to marry on that basis. . . . It’s weary waiting until Madame dies and Madonna steps into her place.” (92)

According to David Weir, “Both men are careful to avoid any direct reference to their own homosexual feelings as they express their mutual wish to avoid female intimacy, settling instead on a kind of genial bachelor solidarity.”³² But such “bachelor solidarity” does not have to be homosexual—at least, it may not be equally homosexual on both sides of the conversation. Recalling his night out with Cope in downtown Chicago, Randolph reports to Medora: “I innocently suggested cocktails; but, no. He declined—in a deft but straightforward way. Country principles. Small-town morals. He made me feel like a—well, like a corrupter of youth” (83). In the regime of homo/heterosexuality, every gesture of male intimacy is tinged with gay

³² Weir, *Decadent Culture in the United States*, 170.

implications. But the discourses of friendship, patronage, and innocence/ignorance complicate the picture. Through the year, Randolph does everything he can to help Cope, but Cope does not desire Randolph. Upon visiting Randolph's new apartment, Cope is impressed by its luxury: "Randolph . . . had dealt as a bachelor with a problem which he himself as a bachelor must soon take up, on however different a scale and plane. For everything here was rich and handsome; he should not know how to select such things—still less how to pay for them" (139). Seeing Randolph as a prospective self, Cope welcomes his "friendly interest" and avuncular tutelage. But this relationship is hinged on Cope's material—rather than amatory—identification. Cope wants to be another Randolph mainly because he has everything the boy wants, not necessarily because both are homosexual.

In the end, Randolph has to withdraw his affection: "He had exerted himself to show a friendliness for Cope, had expected to enjoy him while he stayed on for his months in town, and had hoped to help push his fortunes in whatever other field he might enter" (152). Despite his fondness, Randolph is realistic about Cope's sojourn. While Foster lambastes ungrateful youth, Randolph sees it as a pardonable phase: "I was beyond the middle twenties before I quite launched out for myself, and any kindness received was taken without much question and without much thanks" (152). If Medora is so romantic toward Cope that she showers the boy with sympathy, Randolph is at first skeptical about Cope, then becomes attentive to his needs, and finally resigns himself to the boy's disinterest and his departure.

To be sure, Cope's indefinite delay of marriage eludes women's marital trajectory and his own sexuality. But Fuller represents Cope's sexuality and subjectivity in ways hazier and more intricate than not deciding whether he is straight or gay. In *Bertram Cope's Year*, the marriage plot, the coming-out story, the practices of romantic friendship and companionate friendship, the

discourse of female sympathy and boyish passivity, patronage, mentorship, and male homosociality/homosexuality all complicate Cope's sexuality. On the one hand, Medora and Amy exploit the discourse of patronage, friendship, and female piety to get close to Cope. On the other hand, that Foster compares the Churchton women's worship of Cope to the mourning of Adonis or a dead man in Florence demands a discourse more complicated than gender reversal. In a conventional marriage plot, he and Randolph cannot play any role but guests or hosts. Now that these two men discuss the dynamics between Cope and the Churchton women, they insert their male desire into an otherwise heterosexual scenario.

Passive, Cope nevertheless is not a *tabula rasa*. He knows what he wants but does not show it. As a result, his passivity says more about what the Churchton circle and readers want to see in him than about his own desire. And the whole inquiry into Cope resembles what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes as gravestone-rubbing: "The dense back-and-forth touch of the crayon leaves a positive map not of excrescences but of lines of absent or excised matter. And the pressure of insistence that marks a continuous legibility called sexual knowledge . . . is, most powerfully, *the reader's* energy of need, fear, repudiation, projection."³³ Cope does not tell any characters or readers what type of women he likes; the only "sexual knowledge" we have about him comes from his avoidance of Amy, Hortense, and Medora, as well as his indefinite delay of marriage. Intimate with Lemoyne and friendly with Randolph, Cope may know what homosexuality is and may be a homosexual. But Fuller's representation renders Cope's sexuality inscrutable: while readers are supposed to notice that Cope's bachelorhood, male friendship, and delay of marriage may be indirect signs of the boy's homosexuality, it is the readers themselves who may translate such gay signs into "truth" about Cope.

³³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Privilege of Unknowing: Diderot's *The Nun*," in *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 46 (emphasis in original).

(In)significant Friendship

I have addressed Fuller's various manipulations of Cope's boyishness. In conclusion, I would like to explicate Cope's (in)significant friendship with Lemoyne.³⁴ I call this friendship paradoxically significant and insignificant because it may be an (in)significant phase prior to either boy's marriage (or other forms of relationship) or an (in)significant end in itself. A married man may treasure one of his premarital male friendships as the most important relationship in his life or outgrow it. A gay man may value his friendships with other men, but he does not necessarily expect them to develop into sexual relationships. Since Cope's sexuality is represented as an enigma—an enigma marked by Cope's young age and his indefinite delay of marriage—it is more accurate to use the term *(in)significant friendship* and bring out the implications of this friendship than to translate it into a premarital romantic friendship or a connotatively gay couplehood.

To read Cope as a boyish character in an (in)significant friendship with Lemoyne is to turn the question of his sexuality into one of style. How does Fuller's novel defer to and differ from the conventions of romantic friendship? How can reading Cope as a boyish character shed light on what we otherwise may miss in terms of romantic friendship and homo/heterosexuality? And how does Fuller's representation speak to the periodization of sexual paradigms? Having discussed issues like the narrator's indirect discourse of Cope's thoughts on marriage, the spurious contrast between du Maurier's Peter as a man and Fuller's Cope as a boy, and Medora's

³⁴ My idea of (in)significant friendship is inspired by Valerie Traub, "The (In)Significance of 'Lesbian' Desire in Early Modern England," in *Queering the Renaissance*, ed. Jonathan Goldberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 62-83.

and Randolph's projections of Cope's future relationships with Carolyn and Lemoyne, I would like to end this chapter with the implications of (in)significant friendship.

According to Nissen, romantic friendships in the nineteenth-century American literature often refer to “noninstitutionalized, socially sanctioned, (often) temporally limited and premarital, (ostensibly) platonic, nonexclusive yet primary emotional relationships, (usually) between young, coeval, coequal white men of the middle and upper classes.”³⁵ Historian E. Anthony Rotundo even observes three forms of male friendship, each with its own implications. The first one refers to a phase wherein adolescent boys or college buddies share their hopes and fears about their future. It tends to give way to marriage. The second one refers to grown men's homosocial intimacy, such as bed sharing and nocturnal embraces, even if one is engaged. And the third one takes on a homoerotic tinge, though the males at issue may express similar passion for women. Acknowledging the nuances and connections among these three modes, Rotundo concludes, “A wide spectrum of possible meanings—from casual accident to passion—could be felt in the touch of a bedmate. In the absence of a deep cultural anxiety about homosexuality, men did not have to worry about the meaning of those moments of contact.”³⁶ Sharing the same rhetoric of couplehood with marriage, romantic friendship may be an adolescent stage, an extended kinship, or a protogay relationship. Although romantic friendship is marked by the absence of sex, the absence may be rhetorical. As Nissen argues, it is likely that “sex had a smaller role to play in romantic relations and representations of them” or that “our current preoccupation with genital desire has blinded us to the valences and nuances of love between men in prehomosexual cultures.”³⁷

³⁵ Nissen, *The Romantic Friendship Reader*, 4.

³⁶ Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 85.

³⁷ Nissen, *Manly Love*, 6.

In *Bertram Cope's Year*, the friendship between a bookkeeper's son-cum-college instructor and a wholesale-hardware man-cum-artist is too uneven and too modern to meet with Nissen's and Rotundo's definitions. Although intergenerational romantic friendships and the coexistence of romantic friendship and marriage do occur in history and literature, Cope and Lemoyne are not in the Victorian age.³⁸ Still, romantic friendship could be a viable paradigm in Fuller's novel for three reasons. First, the medical discourse of homosexuality had not prevailed in the 1910s. As George Chauncey claims, such discourse became popular in the mid-twentieth century.³⁹ The Wilde trials also did not just change expression and meaning of male intimacy overnight. Second, Cope and Lemoyne are in their mid twenties. They are not too old for romantic friendship. Their intimacy may be seen as commonplace, immature, or boyish, but not necessarily homosexual, pathological, and criminal. Third, senior characters like Randolph, Medora, and Foster could embody or still entertain values in the Gilded Age. Since Randolph presents himself as an aesthete, bachelor, and mentor who eagerly yet cautiously befriends Cope, it is simplistic to situate this novel solely in the homo/hetero regime.

Cope's biggest problem, however, is not how liberally or anachronistically he clings to a predominantly Victorian paradigm. The point is not how romantic friendship persists in the age of homo/heterosexuality or how Cope uses romantic friendship to bypass the medical and criminal discourse of homosexuality. Such readings suggest that Cope is unaware of the homo/hetero regime (he only knows the "archaic" practice of romantic friendship), that he is gay

³⁸ Ibid., 19-20, 43. Historical figures like novelists Bayard Taylor and Bret Harte, as well as stories like Elizabeth Stoddard's *Temple House* (1867) yield a more complicated picture of romantic friendship. According to Nissen, Taylor consorted with the German merchant August Bubleb, a married man nearly twenty-five his senior, and the friendship lasted for more than two decades. Harte left his wife and children in 1879, choosing instead to live in London with a Belgian diplomat and his cosmopolitan wife. In *Temple House*, the middle-aged Argus Gates rescues a young Spaniard, Sebastian Ford, from drowning in a shipwreck, and they became devoted to each other.

³⁹ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay World: 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 125.

but does not admit it (he insists that he and Lemoyne are friends, not lovers), that he only admits his homosexuality by implication (he uses friendship as a code for homosexuality), or that he is not the kind of gay represented in pathological discourses (he is not an effeminate gay). Instead, Fuller emphasizes Cope's youth and his indefinite delay of marriage, rendering his friendship with Lemoyne a legitimate contender against marriage without giving away his sexuality.

At the end of the novel, Cope's friendship with Lemoyne appears to be expiring. Now that Cope starts his career, he is expected to marry. Yet a number of factors suspend this marriage plot. First, it is unclear whether Cope is in love with Carolyn, Lemoyne, or anyone else. Second, it is unknown whether Cope would like to marry. Third, the projections of marriage and same-sex domesticity are Medora's and Randolph's, not Cope's own. Fourth, the novel only records Cope's one single year, not his complete life. Fifth, there is a fine yet crucial line between reading Cope and Lemoyne as premarital best friends and reading them as a gay couple. And sixth, the narrator does not specify Cope's relationship with Lemoyne. Instead, many characters voice their opinions. At the sight of Cope and Lemoyne in company, Foster compares them to "a young married couple" who "had made their partiality [so] public . . . that they brought the manners of the bed-chamber into the drawing-room" (168). In contrast, Hortense dismisses their friendship as "preposterous": "You [Cope] will tire of him [Lemoyne]; or more likely he will tire of you. Something different, something better will be needed,—and you will live to learn so" (194). Even though Medora at first sees these two boys as a perfect duet, she later abhors Lemoyne's flamboyant effeminacy. And Randolph finally projects Cope's domesticity with Lemoyne to cancel out Medora's marriage plot. Since Cope and Lemoyne are already best friends at the beginning of the novel, the question is not how Fuller fulfills the conventions and motifs of romantic friendship (though he does emphasize the temperamental and

physical contrasts between Cope and Lemoyne) or how male romantic friendship resembles, differs from, and interferes female friendship (though it does), but how Fuller arrests the maturing trajectory of marriage plots and coming-out stories by making Cope boyish.

Suggestive of gayness and yet irreducible to it, Cope's boyishness demands a more ambiguous reading. Having known Lemoyne for less than two years in Wisconsin, Cope keeps up a correspondence with him while he is in Churchton. Calling Lemoyne his "regular [duet] accompanist" and his "chum" (78, 127), Cope also keeps pictures of Lemoyne, invites him home for the Christmas holidays, turns down Randolph's invitation in order to appease him, and curries favor with Randolph on his behalf. Upon hearing the news of Cope's engagement with Amy, Lemoyne even accuses Cope of violating "an *entente* of long standing" (158). He wants Cope to end the engagement: "Nip it. Nip it now. Don't think that our intimacy is to end in any such fashion as this, for it isn't—especially at this particular time" (154). Indignant, Lemoyne declares, "I had never expected to double up with an engaged man" (158). To be sure, Lemoyne may be in love with Cope. By not expecting to "double up with an engaged man," he may mean not sleeping with a married man (because Cope should have outgrown their romantic friendship and be with Amy now) or not sleeping with a straight man (because Cope should not renounce his homosexuality and turn straight). But Lemoyne may also protect his best friend from marrying a woman who is more in love with the idea of marriage than with Cope himself. Lemoyne may justify his intervention without putting his sexuality on the line.

Although Lemoyne later moves in with Cope, their life together in Churchton is disastrous. Expelled from school for making a pass at another actor while he is still in drag, Lemoyne turns out to be a nuisance: "Beyond an accustomed and desired companionship, Lemoyne contributed nothing—was a drag, in truth" (211). After Lemoyne leaves Churchton in

disgrace, Cope thinks twice of their friendship. Although he gets back in touch with Lemoyne at the end of the novel, it is uncertain what this friendship will turn out to be. In the face of marital teleology, male friendship can be sublimated (as something loftier than marriage), pathologized (as homosexuality), abominated (as an obstacle to marriage), and/or infantilized (as a “childish game”).⁴⁰ It does not work like female amity in the marriage plots of Victorian novels. Cope and Lemoyne’s relationship is so intermittent that it undoes the linear logic of marriage plots and coming-out stories. Reunited, Cope may have in mind a prolonged premarital friendship, a friendship that is not incongruous with marriage, or a full-fledged gay relationship. There is no telling when Cope’s friendship with Lemoyne will end or whether it will evolve into a lasting relationship.⁴¹

Gingerly, Fuller defuses allusions to Cope’s homosexuality. While words and phrases like “intimacy,” “chum,” “an *entente* of long standing,” and “especially at this particular time” are purposefully vague, the reference to Urania is deliberately suggestive. With Cope’s

⁴⁰ I borrow the term *childish game* from William Maxwell, *The Folded Leaf* (New York: Vintage, 1945 [1996]), 289. Maxwell represents two male adolescents’ tender friendship as a phase, for it stands in the way of their heterosexual relationships and careers. Yet, the novel also represents adulthood as an arid desert. Aside from occasional tutelage, it is full of bereavement, poverty, alcoholism, and avarice.

⁴¹ Cope’s indefinitely delayed marriage distinguishes *Bertram Cope’s Year* from Fuller’s earlier representations of male friendship. In his debut novel *The Chevalier of Pensieri-Vani* (1890), Fuller presents a bride who drives a wedge between two best friends. Upon hearing the Seigneur of Hors-Concours’s engagement, “the dismayed Cavaliere, pierced to the heart, gave him a reproachful glance, murmured the brief yet historical phrase of the great Roman, and muffling himself in the toga of single blessedness, sank deserted at the feet of statued Celibacy.” While Hors-Concours feels that he has “betrayed a cause,” the Cavaliere regards the bride as a “presumptuous interloper.” According to David Weir, the Cavaliere’s evocation of celibacy has a twofold meaning: “Does Fuller mean that [the Cavaliere] has lost a partner in celibacy that resistance to matrimony entails, or does he mean that one man has simply lost his partner and, as a result, must now be celibate?” Later in “At Saint Judas’s” (1896), Fuller again plays up the tension between marriage and friendship. In this symbolist one-act drama, the best man does everything he can—including spreading slanders—to stop his friend’s marriage. At the revelation, the bridegroom is not shocked by the best man’s confession of love. Instead, he is so enraged at the best man’s scheme that he demands he kill himself for redemption. In the end, the groom joins his bride at the altar, with the best man lying on the floor of the sacristy “in a pool of blood.” Although Cope might consistently regards marriage as the end of male friendships in these three stories, he postpones Cope’s marriage—and thus his sexuality—indefinitely. See Henry Blake Fuller, *The Chevalier of Pensieri-Vani* (New York: The Century Co., 1890 [1899]), 183; Weir, *Decadent Culture in the United States*, 89; and Henry Blake Fuller, “At Saint Judas’s,” in *Bertram Cope’s Year*, ed. by Joseph A. Dimuro (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2010), 266.

engagement with Amy annulled, the narrator describes Cope and Lemoyne as a household under the auspices of Urania: “They spent ten minutes in the clear winter air. As Cope, on their return, stooped to put his latch-key to use, Lemoyne impulsively threw an arm around his shoulder, ‘Everything is all right, now,’ he said, in a tone of high gratification; and Urania, through the whole width of her starry firmament, looked down kindly upon a happier household” (174-175). The term *Urania* was in circulation from the 1860s and had been used in a number of different contexts, some of them blatantly homosexual.⁴² But neither Cope nor Lemoyne identifies himself as a Uranian. Here, Urania refers to a star, not to a type of homosexuality or subjectivity. In other words, the sign of homosexuality might “[look] down kindly” upon Cope and Lemoyne, but these two boys do not necessarily claim to be Uranians. In *Bertram Cope’s Year*, Cope, Lemoyne, Randolph, and Cope’s father all frown on Cope’s engagement with Amy. While Cope’s sexuality may be one of the reasons, the most explicit ones are Cope’s financial status and his young age. It is too early for the twenty-four-year-old graduate student to marry a wife and support a family. Having Cope delay his marriage indefinitely, Fuller may portray Cope as Lemoyne’s romantic friend or as a boy consorting with a gay character. In both cases, Lemoyne may deter Cope from marriage, arguing that Cope is too young or too gay to marry.

In the wake of Amy comes Hortense, but Cope has learned to insist on nonmarital friendships: “I [Cope] like you [Hortense] as well as another; no more, no less. I am in no position to think of love and marriage, and I have no inclination that way. I am willing to be friends with everybody, and nothing more with anybody” (193). A “boy” who indefinitely delays

⁴² While Karl-Heinrich Ulrichs borrows the term *Uranian* from Plato’s *Symposium* to designate “a female psyche confined in a male body,” Edward Carpenter uses the term to refer to same-sex attachments. This turn has two advantages. First, it eludes the clinical connotations in Ulrichs. Second, it refers to affective attachments, not necessarily to sexual acts: Uranians “are often purely emotional in their character; and to confuse Uranians (as is so often done) with libertines having no law but curiosity in self-indulgence is to do them a great wrong.” Still, by the time “Uranian” poets like Lord Alfred Douglas employed the term, it was not as innocent or platonic as romantic friendship. See Carpenter, *The Indeterminate Sex*, 26.

his marriage and yet is up for companionate friendships, Cope forestalls Hortense's marriage plot. If Fuller represents Cope's friendship with Lemoyne as "failing" to lead to anything definite (despite Randolph's projection of same-sex domesticity), he represents women like Amy, Hortense, and Medora as too aggressive to be perfect candidates for relationships. These three women traffic in the boyish Cope through patronage, female piety, and friendship.

Reading *Bertram Cope's Year* as a gay novel, Christopher Looby also highlights the paradigms of romantic friendship and homo/heterosexuality. But he reads Fuller's novel as a rivalry between Randolph (who embodies the paradigm of romantic friendship) and Lemoyne (who embodies the paradigm of homo/heterosexuality) for Cope. According to Looby,

Basil and Arthur belong to different gay worlds, we might say; their rivalry over Bertram is waged from positions in those different worlds. Basil would like Bertram to join him in a life of decorous bachelor leisure and social respectability, on a residual model that would have been normative in the nineteenth century. Arthur seems to be itching to have Bertram join him in an emerging world of newly licensed sexual and gender deviation. Bertram does not appear to know what he wants, except, perhaps, that he is not interested in signing on for either of these options—at least not yet. *Bertram Cope's Year* stages the historical transition from one economy of sexual subjectivity to another, and poises Bertram on the cusp of change.⁴³

Looby's reading has several premises. First, Randolph might want to be more than Cope's cohabiting mentor. While in the novel he only expresses his wish to live with Cope, it is simplistic to name his interest in Cope chaste friendship. It is as if intergenerational relationships could be nothing but spiritual, as if homosexual desire were absolutely foreign to Randolph. Second, to what extent is romantic friendship "normative"? Is it "normative" as a premarital phase or "normative" as an alternative to marriage? Although marriage and romantic friendship are not always mutually exclusive, those who have enduring romantic friendships are often

⁴³ Looby, "The Gay Novel," 424.

married to women already. If Cope lives with Randolph, they may be respectable for their social status. But the idea of two bachelors living together is not “normative.” Third, Lemoyne is likely to be gay, but this is only because we read his effeminacy, his intimacy with Cope, and his pass at a fellow actor (when he is in drag) as gay signs. As I have discussed earlier, Cope and Lemoyne may also be romantic friends. Even if they are both gay, Cope’s choice is not necessarily one between romantic friendship with Randolph and homosexuality with Lemoyne. He and Lemoyne may also be two gay men who do not get along. And finally, Looby reads Cope as a character who does not know what he wants, “at least not yet.” But such a “not yet” status is constructed by the progress narrative of sexual identity (particularly the marriage plot and the coming-out story). In the novel, Cope does not necessarily forgo his sexual agency or experience a transitional phase. Rather, Fuller turns Cope’s sexuality into a stylistic question: the narrative is constructed in ways that any reading that presumes Cope knows or does not know his sexuality is a speculation.

Without defining the nature of Cope’s relationship with Lemoyne, Fuller exploits the mundane and scandalous nature of (in)significant friendship. A drag (nuisance) in drag (cross-dressing), Lemoyne does not successfully convert his ambiguous friendship with Cope into an explicit homosexual relationship. Rather, he becomes part of the enigma of Cope’s sexuality. According to Sedgwick, male homosexual panic at the turn of the twentieth century is so powerful that it converts same-sex experience into “a *developmental* stage—toward the more repressive, self-ignorant, and apparently consolidated status of the mature bourgeois paterfamilias.”⁴⁴ In other words, as long as the man in question eventually marries a wife and “turns straight,” he can dismiss his same-sex experience as an error or past that has no bearing on

⁴⁴ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990 [2008]), 193 (emphasis in original).

the future. In *Bertram Cope's Year*, however, Fuller represents Cope as at once susceptible to and independent of the marriage plot. Due to his studies, financial straits, and boyish passivity, Cope prefers companionate friendship to marriage. When Amy's engagement with Cope falls through, Medora, Hortense, and Randolph continue to position him as a "boy" on his way to homo/hetero adulthood. Since the narrative defines the age twenty-eight as the threshold of adulthood, the post-Churchton Cope may still cha-cha with homo/hetero teleology for a few more years, taking a few steps forward and another few back with relationships. Yet, the threshold of adulthood is arbitrary: even if Cope reaches twenty-eight, he may remain a bachelor like Randolph. And this does not necessarily make him gay. In Fuller's boyish narrative, Cope keeps rejecting unsuitable women in favor of male friendship and indefinitely delays his marriage. There is no telling what will happen in years to come.

Chapter Three

“Indifferent to Time”: Homosexual Reproduction in Tennessee Williams’s “The Mysteries of the Joy Rio”

Intergenerational Relationship

In a 1981 interview with *Le Gai Pied*, then the most popular gay magazine in France, Michel Foucault pinpointed two major issues in the post-Stonewall era: the idea of gay movement as a youth movement, and the psychological construct of homosexuality.¹ According to Foucault, the image of young gay men cruising and having sex has become such a predominant representation of homosexuality that it obscures intergenerational gay relationships. Though gay-positive, *Gai Pied* is so geared toward a young readership that it largely bypasses older gay men: it is as if older gay men did not have desire, as if they were attracted to young

¹ Michel Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, vol. 1 of *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley et al. (New York: New Press, 1997), 135-136. *Gai Pied*, literally meaning “Gay Foot,” is an elaborate pun of Foucault’s invention. As sociologists Jan Willem Duyvendak and Mattias Duyves point out, “The French word ‘guepier,’ pronounced roughly the same way, means a ‘hornets’ nest.’ The French slang expression ‘prendre son pied,’ means to have an orgasm. Put these expressions together, we produce the image of a swarm of gay people all having orgasms. But the title may also be interpreted as ‘on a gay footing’ or ‘on the way with gays.’” See Jan Willem Duyvendak and Mattias Duyves, “*Gai Pied* After Ten Years: A Commercial Success, A Moral Bankruptcy?” *Journal of Homosexuality* 25, no. 1-2 (November 1993): 206. For a brief history of Foucault’s relation to the magazine, see David M. Halperin, “Michel Foucault, Jean Le Bitoux, and the Gay Science Lost and Found: An Introduction,” *Critical Inquiry* 37, no. 3 (Spring 2011): 372.

men only, as if their concerns were not worth the platform, as if they could not afford to be gay.² Foucault also rejects the medical and psychological framework of homosexuality in favor of an ethical deployment of homosexuality: “The problem is not to discover in oneself the truth of one’s sex, but, rather, to use one’s sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships.”³ As homosexuality become polarized into casual cruising (as opposed to heterosexual marriage) and serious monogamy (akin to heterosexual marriage) in the post-Stonewall era, Foucault champions noninstitutionalized friendships.

The interview is now famous for Foucault’s ethical view of homosexuality. But gay intergenerational relationships now take on meaning at the intersection of social variables (race, age, class, nationality, citizenship, etc.).⁴ Although scholars have recognized and accommodated intergenerational relationships between consenting adults, they often interpret such relationships in terms of sexual commerce, sexual kinks, sexual racism, or sex tourism.⁵ An older gay man

² According to Duyvendak and Duyves, “*Gai Pied* also lacks any initiative in the field of gay studies. The heading ‘Gai Savoir’ (Gay Knowledge) in the back holds at best an easy-to-swallow summary of French books. The magazine doesn’t burn its fingers on literary surveys.” See Duyvendak and Duyves, “*Gai Pied*,” 210.

³ Foucault, “Friendship,” 135.

⁴ I focus on intergenerational relationships between consenting adults. In contrast, North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA) promotes the benefits of relationships between consenting adults and minors. On NAMBLA and the issues it generates, see, for example, Stephen T. Holmes and Ronald M. Holmes, *Sex Crimes: Patterns and Behavior* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), 109; and Daniel Tsang, ed., *The Age Taboo: Gay Male Sexuality, Power, and Consent* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1981).

⁵ In the context of sex tourism, usually a rich, old, white gay man from affluent regions in Western Europe, Scandinavia, North America, and Australasia looks for poor, young, nonwhite “rent boys” in Southeast Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. But this picture has been complicated. Sometimes the clients may save money in their home countries to procure sex and love in less affluent countries; they are not always rich. The clients are also not always white: a gay man of Asian descent from the United States or a rich nonwhite client from Mexico, Argentina, China, or India may have sex with a man in Thailand, Amsterdam, New Orleans, or Las Vegas. Some sex workers do not identify themselves as gay despite their sex with men: they may have wives or girlfriends or call themselves bisexual. Also, the same-sex relationship is often nonmonogamous: both the client and the sex worker are often in an open, polyamorous, or polyexclusive relationship. Finally, due to Asian regionalism, some middle-class gay men in Thailand and Asian Americans avoid white men in favor of gay men from other more affluent Asian countries like Japan, Taiwan, and Singapore or Asians in the West. Since white-Asian relationships have been associated with prostitution and imperialism, they prefer a partner of Asian descent. On sociological, ethnographical, and anthropological research on intergenerational relationships, see Barry D. Adam, “Age Preferences among Gay and Bisexual Men,” *GLQ* 6, no. 3 (2000): 413-433; Dredge Byung’chu Käng, “Queer Media Loci in Bangkok: Paradise Lost and Found in Translation,” *GLQ* 17, no. 1 (2011): 169-191; Mark Padilla, *Caribbean Pleasure Industry: Tourism, Sexuality, and AIDS in the Dominican Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007),

may be neutral about age difference, but his relationship with a much younger man is often translated into aspiring to youth, seeking domination, and ageism. A gay boy may prefer an older partner, but his proclivity is often dismissed as ignorance, curiosity, or a kinky enactment of the incest taboo: having sex with a man of your father's age may be fun, but the relationship is often considered fleeting. In contrast to normative or banalized young gay couples, those in intergenerational relationships are at best marginalized, and at worst discredited as pedophilic, perverse, transient, and/or monetary. Although a gay man may sleep with any consenting adult, he had better settle down with someone of his age range.

The understanding of gay intergenerational relationships from the perspective of social science (particularly anthropology, sociology, and psychology) tells particular stories of sexual subjectivity: a young gay man may look for a father figure or a sugar daddy for emotional ballast and financial support; an older gay man may begrudgingly be identified as a chicken hawk or eagerly pursue boys. But gay intergenerational relationships may also rewrite normative ideas of time, reproduction, and relationship. Instead of striving for acceptance, assimilation, or even institutionalization (by means of marriage, domestic partnership, and other equality policies), the man-boy relationship in Tennessee Williams's "The Mysteries of the Joy Rio" (1941; hereafter "Mysteries) engenders temporal and relational reconfigurations. Even though one can still approach the German American watch repairman Emiel Kroger and his Mexican protégé Pablo Gonzales in terms of what they want, who they are, and what social differences undergird their relationship, I argue that this short story presents a boyish narrative where the middle-aged Pablo

and "'Western Union Daddies' and Their Quest for Authenticity: An Ethnographic Study of the Dominican Gay Sex Tourism Industry," *Journal of Homosexuality* 53, no. 1-2 (2007): 241-275; and Brian Simpson and Cheryl Simpson, *From Heritage to Terrorism: Regulating Tourism in an Age of Uncertainty* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 145. On autobiographies and fictions related to sexual racism and/or sex tourism, see Daniel Gawthrop, *The Rice Queen Diaries* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2005); Rafaelito V. Sy, *Potato Queen* (Richmond, VA: Palari, 2005); and Lawrence Chua, *Gold by the Inch* (New York: Grove Press, 1998).

sees in the mirror not a grown man but “the boy that was loved by the man [Emiel] whom he loved,” where his body is folded in with Emiel’s against the passage of time, and where they elude the progress narrative of gay relationship.⁶ In other words, the point is not that gay intergenerational relationships are just as normal and deserving of respect as most relationships or that they are so distinct from most relationships that they require an account of their own, but that Emiel and Pablo reconfigure normative ideas of time and relationship because of their connection. While the post-Stonewall gay scene, as Foucault points out, emphasizes gay men’s search for and understanding of their self, “Mysteries” dwells on Pablo’s particular passivity: not that he submits to Emiel or takes pleasure in masochism, but that he goes along with Emiel’s apprenticeship and copies Emiel’s being. In this particular man-boy relationship, pedagogy, inheritance, and repetition—rather than domination, equality, and maturation—are the key.⁷

In my previous chapters, I distinguished Paul’s boyhood effeminacy from the idea of protogay boyhood and addressed Cope’s indefinitely delayed marriage. In “Paul’s Case,” Paul renounces maturity by suspending his adolescence and committing suicide. In *Bertram Cope’s Year*, Cope eludes the progress narratives of marriage plots and coming-out stories, and his boyish passivity becomes the stage for the spectacle of female piety. In this chapter, the focus shifts to Pablo’s temporal folding. If Paul and Cope do not grow up because they kill themselves or do not marry by the end of the story, Pablo—while aging chronologically—does not always

⁶ Tennessee Williams, “The Mysteries of the Joy Rio,” in *Collected Stories* (New York: New Directions, 1985), 106. Hereafter references to this edition will be incorporated parenthetically in the text. Unless otherwise noted, all italics that appear in quoted extracts from this story are Williams’s own.

⁷ On male apprenticeship and its implications of homosexuality, see William Benemann, *Male-Male Intimacy in Early America: Beyond Romantic Friendships* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2006); and Axel Nissen, “Compulsory Domesticity: Roderick Hudson, Love, and Friendship in the Gilded Age,” in *Manly Love: Romantic Friendship in American Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 89-111. On age-structured homosexualities, see Stephen O. Murray, *Homosexualities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). “Homosexualities” here is a historiographic term that sometimes designates male intimacy predating the medical discourse of homosexuality in the nineteenth century.

look his age. This, however, has nothing to do with his ability to remain young. Instead, Pablo becomes dramatically aged when Emiel passes away, regains his youthful look when he contracts the same illness as his patron-lover, and always stays as Emiel's boy. This man-boy relationship creates its own temporality, folding time as Pablo and Emiel take in each other's bodies.

Reading "Mysteries" as a boyish narrative, I have three points to make about the correlation between temporality and sexuality. First, Emiel and Pablo form what I call *homosexual reproduction*. While most age-stratified regimes (for example, Greek pederasty) focus on the senior partner's desire, Pablo repeats Emiel's way of being and ultimately recreates Emiel. Second, this man-boy relationship allows Pablo to be indifferent to time. Instead of becoming a mature gay man under Emiel's aegis, Pablo always sees himself as Emiel's boy. Third, Pablo's cruising is more an inheritance of Emiel's prudence and being than a result of his own promiscuity. Instead of criticizing the middle-aged Pablo for failing to outgrow cruising as a life stage, I study his cruising as a way of recreating his lover's being. Taken together, Pablo is not inherently boyish, lazy, passive, or immature. Rather, his relationship with Emiel defies the telos of mature adulthood and their correlated ideas of relationship, sexuality, career, and uses of time.

Homosexual Reproduction

In "Mysteries," Emiel picked up the then nineteen-year-old illegal immigrant Pablo during a watchmakers' convention in 1920s Dallas, and in the next three years he taught the boy everything he knew about clocks and cruising the Joy Rio—a local rundown cinema where men looked for anonymous sex in the dark—before he died of "a chronic disease of the bowels"

(100). One August afternoon, the now forty-year-old Pablo cruised the Joy Rio, accidentally interrupting the usher George's tryst with his girlfriend Gladys in the ladies' room. As Pablo stood outside the room to catch his breath, George mistook Pablo's rest for an ambush. Peeved, he confronted Pablo, calling him "morphodite" (108). Frightened, Pablo climbed up to the roped-off balconies and saw Emiel's ghost. Soothed by the late man's lecture about prudence—"You must always be able to go home alone without it"—Pablo finally "drifted away from everything but the wise old voice in his ear, even at last from that, but not till he was entirely comforted by it" (109). Between George's profanity and Emiel's incantation, Pablo died in the theater.

To be sure, "Mysteries" reads like a sad story about Pablo as a "morphodite": a derogatory term that refers to Pablo's sex with men and probably his racialized effeminacy.⁸ But

⁸ An abbreviation for "hermaphrodite," the word *morphodite* often refers to anatomical intersexuality (human beings who have male *and* female reproductive organs) or other biological "abnormalities" (for example, enlarged clitorides). In "Mysteries," however, George uses this term to refer to Pablo's deviant gender mannerisms and sexuality. As the narrator describes Pablo as having "a lustrous dark grace which had completely bewitched Mr. Kroger" (99), Pablo's androgyny is racialized. Even though term *morphodite* is not directly related to my discussion of boyishness, it is still important to tell its nuances and inflections in different contexts. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the term derives from the corporeal fusion of the fifteen-year-old boy Hermaphroditus and the naiad Salmacis. But Hermaphroditus is originally the son of Hermes and Aphrodite. In this context, hermaphroditism does not specify inborn intersexuality. Instead, it indexes the supernatural fusion of male and female bodies, aggressive female sexuality, and boyish passivity. Later scholarship, however, finds the union to be marital. In contrast to etiological myth, an inscription dated to the second century B.C.E. and found at the very site of the spring Salmacis in Halicarnassus generates a different narrative. According to Allen J. Romano, "In the inscription, Hermaphroditus invents the institution of marriage and 'binds the marriage bed in law.' The spring of Salmacis, on the other hand, does not make men less manly or manufacture hermaphrodites; instead it 'tames savage minds.' A far cry from Ovid's chaste boy and lustful girl, in the Salmacis inscription, we find Salmacis the nurturing nymph and Hermaphroditus the lawgiver."

In sexology, the term *hermaphroditism* becomes a placeholder for deviant sex, gender, and sexuality. According to Richard von Krafft-Ebing, male hermaphroditism asserts "direct transitions" from psychical hermaphroditism ("pronounced sexual instinct and desire for the same sex"), homosexuality ("sexual desires and inclinations for persons of the same sex exclusively"), and effemination ("males [who] are females in feeling"). In his case study 152, Krafft-Ebing yokes the bisexual male Mr. v. H. to effeminacy, loafing, and homosexuality, pronouncing the thirty-year-old patient an outgrown child and liar for his feminine mannerisms, his interest in feminine aesthetics (painting, poetry, embroidery, and fashion), his lackluster sexual experience with women, his blushing at a scandal with young boys, and his imprudent use of money. Similarly, Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds argue that most psychosexual hermaphrodites "prefer their own sex. It is curiously rare to find a person, whether man or woman, who by choice exercises relationships with both sexes and prefers the opposite sex." In contrast, psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud regards anatomical hermaphrodites as embodying an earlier stage of the human species. Although Freud does not infantilize hermaphrodites, his discourse of evolution operates on a similar logic of maturity: "it appears that a certain degree of anatomical hermaphroditism occurs normally. In every normal male or female individual, traces are found of the apparatus of the opposite sex. These either persist without function as

I would like to study Pablo's subjectivity in light of his relationship with Emiel. By this, I do not mean that their relationship proves that Pablo is gay or that they use apprenticeship to cover their gay relationship. Instead, I mean that Pablo inherits Emiel's profession, real estate, cruising habits, and even bowel disease, and that this man-boy relationship reconfigures the otherwise chronological, heteronormative uses of time. Instead of defining Pablo's subjectivity by how deviant he is from normative sexuality or how intimate he is with men, I study Pablo's recreation of Emiel's being. I call this *homosexual reproduction*.

In "Mysteries," the homosexual reproduction occurs under serendipitous and scandalous circumstances: not only does Emiel pick up Pablo by chance, but their union suggests a German-Mexican alliance in a time of racism and xenophobia in the United States. In January 1917, in the midst of World War I, the British intercepted a telegram from Arthur Zimmermann, State

rudimentary organs or become modified and take on other functions." Employing the concepts of ontogeny and phylogeny, Freud complicates the pathological reading of hermaphroditism in sexology. But he still values procreation as the ultimate aim of sexuality. In Freud's schema, hermaphroditism only becomes an issue when it deviates from procreation; otherwise, it is an incident of atavism.

In Southern literature, hermaphroditism is not necessarily correlated with immaturity, rudimentary conditions, and/or nonproductivity but with androgyny, hybridity, or a comic yet violent sense of monstrosity. In Truman Capote's novella *The Grass Harp* (1951), Eugene Fenwick calls Verena Talbo a "morphodite" because of some financial dispute. A baneful quip, there is nevertheless a grain of truth in Eugene's vituperation. An affluent and shrewd spinster, Verena not only asserts patriarchy in a household made up of two unmarried sisters, a Native American-identified black woman, and Eugene's orphaned boy Collin. But she also looks androgynous and attuned to female friendship (or even lesbianism). Watching her former female friend's souvenir snapshots, Verena would sometimes "pace around the room with the lights turned off, and presently there would come a hurt rusty crying sound as though she'd tripped and fallen in the dark." In Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), Miss Maudie Atkinson calls the snowman that Jeremy "Jem" Finch and Jean Louise "Scout" Finch build in a rare snow day "an absolute morphodite." Here, the "morphodite" snowman suggests a male neighbor who cross-dresses as Miss Maudie or vice versa. Jem and Scout accidentally create a botched monster and present themselves as brats who inadvertently insult their neighbors. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. David Raeburn (London: Penguin, 2004); Allen J. Romano, "The Invention of Marriage: Hermaphroditus and Salmacis at Halicarnassus and in Ovid," *The Classical Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (2009): 544; Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis: With Especial Reference to the Antipathic Sexual Instinct: A Medico-Forensic Study*, trans. Franklin S. Klaf (New York: Arcade, 1886 [1998]), 258, 231, 240, 253, 259-260; Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds, *Sexual Inversion* (London: Wilson and MacMillan, 1897), 115; Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1905 [1962]), 7; Truman Capote, *The Grass Harp*, in *A Capote Reader* (New York: Penguin, 1987), 156, 158; Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (New York: HarperCollins, 1960 [2010]), 111. On female hermaphroditism—that is, women who had enlarged clitorides and desired penetrating other women in premodern eras—see Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 55.

Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the German Empire. In the telegram, Germany proposed an alliance with Mexico against the United States. Irked, President Woodrow Wilson declared war in April, thus stirring up anti-German/Mexican sentiment on U.S. soil. On top of this, old Mexican descendants in the Southwest and new Mexican immigrants had been facing identity predicaments: some Mexican American citizens were confused with illegal immigrants, many Mexican nationals suffered deportation, and both had to negotiate the black-white politics under the Jim Crow regime. At the same time, German Americans encountered cultural effacement: while the Prohibition devastated German breweries, the Ake Law in 1919 even forbade the German language in public, private, and parochial schools in Ohio below the eighth grade.⁹ Taken together, Pablo's "foreign," "illegal" status results from the vicissitudes of wars: the Mexican-American War (1846-1848), World War I (1914-1918), and the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). Emiel's married sister in Toledo might have offspring subject to the Ake Law. And Emiel himself is described as "a very strange and fat man of German descent" (99). The apprenticeship and inheritance is nothing short of a miracle.

To illustrate the contingency and fatefulness of their relationship, the narrator emphasizes Emiel and Pablo's initial contrasts. When they first meet, the man and boy cannot be more different: Emiel is a fat, old, established watch repairman of German descent, whereas Pablo is a slim, young Mexican tramp. Adding to these disparities is Emiel's work efficiency: "Emiel Kroger, being a romantically practical Teuton, had taken time, the commodity he worked with, with intense seriousness. In practically all his behavior he had imitated a perfectly adjusted fat silver watch" (99). In contrast, Pablo is loafing. But Emiel is "subject to the kind of bewitchment

⁹ See Gregory Rodriguez, *Mongrels, Bastards, Orphans, and Vagabonds: Mexican Immigration and the Future of Race in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 143, 174; and Don Heinrich Tolzmann, *The German-American Experience* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2000), 294, 300.

that the graceful young Pablo could cast” (99). Enchanted, Emiel takes Pablo home as his apprentice: “Mr. Gonzales, who was then young enough to be known as Pablo, had been his only sustained flirtation with the confusing, quicksilver world that exists outside of regularities” (99). The rhetoric of masculine contrasts and instant connections evokes the conventions of romantic friendship and the trope of “love at first sight”: Emiel and Pablo are meant for each other.¹⁰ And the spell is so powerful that Emiel leaves Pablo with everything—his shop-residence, clocks, government bonds, profession, cruising habits, and even disease—all “except a few pieces of dining-room silver . . . to a married sister in Toledo” (100). Valuing apprenticeship more than sibling kinship, Emiel makes Pablo his principal heir.

Despite their differences, Pablo’s body becomes similar to Emiel’s: the boy grows fat and becomes a second Emiel after his man’s death. As the narrator reports, “He [Pablo] never became anywhere nearly so gross as Emiel Kroger had been, but his delicate frame disappeared sadly from view among the irrelevant curves of a sallow plumpness (102). To be sure, the homogenization between man and boy attests to the operation of avuncular tutelage. According to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick,

“Uncle” . . . was a common term for a male protector in a sexual relation involving economic sponsorship and, typically, class and age transitivity. “Uncle” has been common, as well, in gradations from the literal, is a metonym for the whole range of older men who might form a relation to a younger man (as patron, friend, literal uncle, godfather, adoptive father, sugar daddy) offering a degree of initiation into gay cultures and identities.¹¹

¹⁰ On the conventions of romantic friendship, see Nissen, *Manly Love*, 14-23.

¹¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Queer Tutelage in *The Importance of Being Earnest*,” in *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 59. On queer tutelage, also see David M. Halperin, “Deviant Teaching,” in *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*, 146-167; and Ellis Hanson, “Teaching Shame,” in *Gay Shame*, ed. David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 132-164.

But the homosexual reproduction in “Mysteries” is more than physical imitation and cultural initiation. Endowed with Emiel’s fortune, cruising, and even disease, Pablo not only becomes another watch repairman and learns to look for anonymous sex in the Joy Rio. He also takes in his man through embrace, listening, and other ways of physical intimacy, preserving the posthumous Emiel in his body.¹²

To the extent that Pablo grows to resemble Emiel in looks and deeds, their homosexual reproduction is distinct from gay adoption, gay parenting through surrogates or from previous heterosexual marriages, or the birth of a gay son. The boy reproduces his man’s way of being, even though they are not biologically related. Here, Emiel and Pablo do not model their relationship after heterosexual marriage and paternity. They do not aim at gay assimilation. On the contrary, they undo heteronormative concepts of family and heritage, disrupting the ideological division between procreative heterosexuals and nonprocreative homosexuals.

To be sure, not all straight couples have or want children, not all gay couples are childless, and not all relationships can be reduced to homo/hetero couplehood. But people seldom associate reproduction with two gay men alone. They often understand homosexual relationships in terms of recruitment, contagion, or vampirism: a self-identified gay man or lesbian seduces innocent teenagers and college students in order to convert them to

¹² Not all intergenerational relationships are characterized by the senior partner’s teaching of the junior partner; a junior yet more seasoned “chicken” may manipulate a senior closeted gay man. In Williams’s “The Killer Chicken and the Closet Queen” (1977), a closeted gay man falls for a conniving boy. If “Mysteries” portrays a benign intergenerational relationship, “Killer Chicken” presents two harmful intergenerational relationships: Nathaniel Webster, a fifty-nine-year-old partner of a Wall Street law firm, marries his nephew’s widow Maude, an adolescent girl from the Arkansas Ozarks. Possessive, Webster asks Maude’s sixteen-year-old brother Clove to stay at a local YMCA, where “wolves [are] out for chickens.” At Maude’s plea, the thirty-seven-year-old bachelor and Webster’s colleague, Stephen Ashe, accommodates Clove, who then pretends to be Ashe’s secret son in order to please his mother from Florida. Drugged and bewitched by Clove’s body, Ashe eventually yields to the boy’s murdering scheme. At the end of the story, they are on a train to visit Ashe’s rich mother, who Clove claims is at “the last stage of her tragic asthma condition.” See Williams, “The Killer Chicken and the Closet Queen,” in *Collected Stories*, 555, 569.

homosexuality.¹³ In “Mysteries,” however, Emiel and Pablo do not traffic in women to ensure the transmission of lineages. Their homosexual reproduction is hinged on the contingent inheritance from one partner to the other.

Although this homosexual reproduction may look like an alternative family arrangement, it is not based on queer egalitarianism or gay assimilation to straight families. Evoking the homophobic myth of gay recruitment, Emiel and Pablo nevertheless reconfigure the ethos and uses of time upheld by heterosexual reproduction. If heterosexual reproduction envisions children as the mirror images of their parents, they fold each other in physically and temporally. Soon after Emiel’s death, Pablo gains weight and ages drastically:

He never became anywhere nearly so gross as Emiel Kroger had been, but his delicate frame disappeared sadly from view among the irrelevant curves of a sallow plumpness. One by one the perfections which he had owned were folded away as Pablo put on fat as a widow puts on black garments. For a year beauty lingered about him, ghostly, continually fading, and then it went out altogether, and at twenty-five he was already the nondescriptly plump and moonfaced little man that he now was at forty. (102)

With his bloated body and drained youth, the slim, young Pablo seems to die with Emiel and revive as his man at the same time. Living posthumously, Emiel takes the form of Pablo, who in turn has a brief “ghostly” existence until he is completely Emielized.

The temporality of Emiel and Pablo’s homosexual reproduction is marked by comebacks. While Pablo has taken in Emiel to “revive” the dead man in a corporeal fashion, the *revenant* of Emiel’s disease also “rejuvenates” Pablo. Afflicted with the same bowel disease, the middle-aged Pablo regains his former figure: “Now rather startlingly, after all this time, the graceful

¹³ See Robert N. Rowe, “Are We Educators Who Are Homosexual Recruiting Youth?” *Education* 113, no. 3 (1993): 508-510; Mark D. Jordan, *Recruiting Young Love: How Christians Talk about Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); and Richard Dyer, “It’s in His Kiss! Vampirism as Homosexuality, Homosexuality as Vampirism,” in *The Culture of Queers* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 70-89.

approximation of Pablo's delicate structure has come back out of the irrelevant contours which had engulfed it after the long-ago death of Emiel Kroger" (106). Again, the "irrelevant contours" signify no simple fat; they represent Emiel's matter embalming the youthful Pablo. At this point, it is pointless to tell who is outside and who is inside: though people recognize the middle-aged body as Pablo Gonzales, he looks like Emiel Kroger. Since the "irrelevant contours" are related to Emiel, the man seems to have encased his boy. Now that the middle-aged Pablo has the same disease as Emiel contracted decades ago, it curiously brings out the young Pablo. Looking in the mirror, the slimmed Pablo does not see himself as the middle-aged Mr. Gonzales. Instead, he sees "the boy that was loved by the man whom he loved." When he finally sees Emiel's ghost in the Joy Rio, Pablo passes away.¹⁴

In "Mysteries," the corporeal and temporal folding of homosexual reproduction cannot be translated into linear generationality (a boy/son growing into a man/father). If Oedipal temporality is marked by generational relay, paternal identification, and sexual reproduction, the homosexual reproduction between Emiel and Pablo is almost Oedipal, but not quite. In this boyish narrative, the boy does not grow up into a man or look his age; he becomes prematurely old when his man passes away, repeats his man's way of being in almost every aspect he can, and slims down to his former figure when he catches the same illness as his man. While most young straight couples are busy with their career and family, Pablo treats his work more as a pious succession to Emiel's life than as a lucrative livelihood. Reproducing Emiel's economic role but not actively pursuing wealth or looking for an heir, Pablo does not act like an

¹⁴ Reading "Mysteries" punitively, Edward A. Sklepowich argues that homosexuals are so self-indulgent that they all look and die alike. Interpreting Pablo's rejuvenation as a wish for perpetual youth, Sklepowich renders Pablo a Mexican Dorian Gray who deserves death. But such a reading is so geared toward heterosexual reproduction that it loses sight of Pablo's inheritance of Emiel's being. See Edward A. Sklepowich, "In Pursuit of the Lyric Quarry: The Image of the Homosexual in Tennessee Williams' Prose Fiction," in *Tennessee Williams: A Tribute*, ed. Jac Tharpe (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977), 532.

enterprising young adult. Instead, he plays the role of a boy inheritor. While the ethos of heterosexual reproduction dismisses homosexuality as transient and fruitless, Pablo reproduces a senior gay man's otherwise irreproducible being.

Inheriting Emiel's being, Pablo takes after Emiel. But it is more accurate to say that they are within each other. When the lean Pablo loses Emiel, he incorporates his man and gains weight. At the same time, his youthful self seems to be preserved inside a forty-year-old Mr. Gonzales, indifferent to time's wear and tear. Now that the fat Pablo has Emiel's disease, he ironically slims down to his former figure. Not necessarily aging abnormally fast, slowly, or backward, Pablo's body warps time. Defined by his relationship with Emiel, Pablo has always been "the boy that was loved by the man whom he loved." Beyond mortality, reciprocity, and linear repetition, this Möbius strip of homosexual reproduction renders it impossible to tell Emiel from Pablo, inside from outside, subject from object, past from present. While Pablo might represent a Mexican immigrant who realizes his American Dream, a junior gay man in an intergenerational relationship, or a Southern "morphodite," the story is not about social mobility, a psychological, age-based understanding of homosexuality, or gay witch hunt. It is about the folding temporality of homosexual reproduction, a boyish narrative in which Pablo lives in, on, with, and without Emiel.

Even before Emiel's demise, these two men have been taking each other in. Embracing Pablo, Emiel rises above his disease: "The long-ago Mr. Kroger had paid little attention to his illness, even when it entered the stage of acute pain, so intense was his absorption in what he thought was the tricky business of holding Pablo close to him" (100-101). As Emiel translates his bowel pain into the absorption of embracing Pablo, a tender bond brightens up his medical condition and remaps their bodies. At the bedside, Emiel and Pablo embark on a queer Eucharist.

At once repentant, pedagogical, and sensual, Emiel's confession was characterized by imageries of feeding and absorbing:

It was his [Emiel's] theory, the theory of most immoralists, that the soul becomes intolerably burdened with lies that have to be told to the world in order to be permitted to live in the world, and that unless this burden is relieved by entire honesty with *some one* person, who is trusted and adored, the soul will finally collapse beneath its weight of falsity. Much of the final months of the life of Emiel Kroger, increasingly dimmed by morphia, were devoted to these whispered confessions to his adored apprentice, and it was as if he had breathed the guilty soul of his past into the ears and brain and blood of the youth who listened, and not long after the death of Mr. Kroger, Pablo, who had stayed slim until then, had begun to accumulate fat. (102)

Williams or the narrator may mock the church by appropriating religious rituals. But this tableau of communion suggests something more ambivalent than an acerbic pastiche. As Pablo's absorption of Emiel's soul and past is compared to the Eucharist, the comparison at once elevates Emiel to the status of divinity and passes the "full gift of his shame" on to Pablo (102). Whereas the Holy Communion refers to the consumption of bread and wine to symbolize Jesus' body and blood, as well as Jesus' instruction at the Last Supper, the communion in "Mysteries" is about the passing of Emiel's cruising, guilt, and shame to Pablo. One feeds his disciples with food that symbolizes his being; the other feeds his boy with confessions to relieve himself of the burden of falsity and enlighten his beloved.¹⁵

¹⁵ Williams's relation to religion is too complicated to be adequately addressed here. If the church can be righteous, cannibalistic, or corrupt in plays like *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), *Suddenly Last Summer* (1958), and *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959), it can also underwrite love between man and boy in "Mysteries." An Episcopal clergyman's grandson, Williams associates religion with his grandfather, not necessarily with God: "I was born in the Episcopal rectory and I grew up in the shadow of the Episcopal church. I can't say that I've continued to go to it, but my grandfather was devoted to the church and certainly his sincerity and depth as a person made it impossible for me to ever be against formal religion per se." Just as Williams identifies more with his grandfather's piety than with his worship of God, so too do Emiel and Pablo have faith in "Mysteries"—even though they do not go to church. See Tennessee Williams, "Tennessee Williams," in *Conversations with Tennessee Williams*, ed. Albert J. Devlin (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1986), 58.

A religious confession turned into the endowment of carnal knowledge, Emiel's queer Eucharist leads Pablo to the Joy Rio. In a sense, Emiel's confession backfires: Pablo should have abstained from cruising; he should have learned from Emiel's mistake. But under the banner of homosexual reproduction, the boy learns the man's life before he dies and recreates the man's being in a gay haunt. Pablo learns to be as prudent as Emiel during his sexual adventures. The lesson is not to deny homosexual desire, but to seek pleasure without risking his life.

With such temporal and corporeal folding in view, "Mysteries" challenges the polarity of heterosexual reproduction and homosexual nonproduction. According to Guy Hocquenghem, "Homosexual desire is the ungenerating-ungenerated terror of the family, because it produces itself without reproducing. Every homosexual must thus see himself as the end of the species, the termination of a process for which he is not responsible and which must stop at himself."¹⁶ In the context of Oedipal reproduction, Hocquenghem critiques how homosexuals are translated into degenerates: "The only acceptable form of homosexual temporality is that which is directed toward the past, to the Greeks or Sodom. . . . Since homosexual desire is ignorant of the law of succession . . . and is thus unable to ascend to genitility, it must therefore be regression, a counter-current to the necessary historical evolution, like an eddy on the surface of a river."¹⁷ As the Oedipal timeline sees life as a series of progressive stages like marriage and childbearing, Hocquenghem argues that gay men are represented as nostalgic, regressive, and unproductive.

Critiquing Oedipal heterosexuality and temporality, Hocquenghem nevertheless limits his discussion of reproduction to biology. In fact, gay men are capable of reproduction through the inheritance from one partner to the other. Emiel and Pablo are the ends of their individual family

¹⁶ Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, trans. Daniella Dangoor (Durham: Duke University Press, 1978 [1993]), 107. For more critique of the Oedipal family structure, see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 107-108.

lineages, but they counter Oedipal sexuality and temporality by folding each other in. Although the reproduction in “Mysteries” is precarious—Emiel found Pablo, but Pablo does not find another Pablo—homosexuality is not as serendipitous as heterosexuality is inevitable. Conflating heterosexuality with procreation, Oedipal paternity takes on the “dogged, defensive narrative stiffness of a paranoid temporality.”¹⁸ Staking all hopes and fears on newborns and even unborn children, Oedipal temporality anticipates, justifies, and boils everything down to heterosexual paternity and its assimilated doubles. In “Mysteries,” Emiel allows Pablo to inherit his property and being without subjugating him to lifelong commitment or the telos of prosperity. If an Oedipal boy has to become a man and raise his own boy in sequence, Pablo remains boyish through his bonding with Emiel. Translating male relations into a father-son continuum, Oedipal temporality evades unmarried bachelors and spinsters, childless straight couples, and intergenerational gay men like Emiel and Pablo. But Pablo recreates Emiel through homosexual reproduction.

Emiel and Pablo demonstrate only one kind of homosexual reproduction, however. While heterosexual reproduction passes from father to son, homosexual reproduction does not depend on intergenerational relationships. As Emiel and Pablo fold each other in through listening, disease, weight gain, and shared habits, it is one partner’s inheritance from the other partner—not generationality or the age difference itself—that matters. In other words, junior partners can pass their habits or ways of being to their senior partners; two partners of similar ages can also embark on homosexual reproduction. If there is anything essential about homosexual reproduction, it is the (dis)avowal of one partner’s mortality through the other partner’s

¹⁸ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You,” in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 147.

inheritance of his or her way of being. Such reproduction is not guaranteed to pass from one partner or generation to another endlessly. Even though Pablo picks up boys in the Joy Rio and has sex with them, he does not bring one home to become his protégé and heir.

Under the rubric of homosexual reproduction, the two partners become one in a way distinct from the Platonic fusion of lovers. As Foucault argues, two men of noticeably different ages “have to invent, from A to Z, a relationship that is still formless, which is friendship.”¹⁹ In “Mysteries,” Emiel and Pablo bear out Foucault’s idea. Spurning the telos of (re)production, the dictum of lifelong companionship, and the ideal of Platonic love, Pablo preserves Emiel’s posthumous being and asserts a fluid sense of time: “if in his waking hours somebody to whom he would have to give a true answer had enquired of him, Pablo Gonzales, how much do you think about the dead Mr. Kroger, he probably would have shrugged and said, *Not much now. It’s such a long time ago*. But if the question were asked him while he slept, the guileless heart of the sleeper would have responded, *Always, always!*” (102). Professing oblivion, Pablo acknowledges Emiel’s mortality in public. But he takes such a temporal order at face value, for in private he never lets go of Emiel. He and Emiel fold each other in—always, always.

In the upper galleries of the Joy Rio, Pablo finally sees Emiel’s ghost. As Pablo’s sexual excursion ends up in flight from George’s chase, Emiel calms his boy down with his magic words: “The lecture continued softly, reassuringly, familiar and repetitive as the tick of a bedroom clock in [Pablo’s] ear, and if his ancient protector and instructor, Emiel Kroger, had not kept all the while soothing him with the moist, hot touch of his tremulous fingers, the gradual, the very gradual dimming out of things, his fading out of existence, would have terrified Pablo” (109). A rosary of words, the lecture repeats itself like “a penitent counting prayer beads” (109).

¹⁹ Foucault, “Friendship,” 136.

Not a final countdown of Pablo's life, it asserts the "[soft], [reassuring], familiar and repetitive . . . tick of a bedroom clock," thus transporting Pablo from the public, life-threatening Joy Rio to his private, secure bedroom with Emiel. Climbing the stairs to meet his man's revenant, the boy gives himself to Emiel once again. While they seem to reunite after two decades' separation, Emiel and Pablo have never been apart.

Temporal Indifference

Having discussed the corporeal and temporal folding of homosexual reproduction, I want to address Pablo's temporal indifference. To be sure, Pablo is not free from work and other temporal binds: he ages and dies, after all. But Pablo's relationship with Emiel enables him to develop a unique relation with time, one that exempts him from the normative progress of schooling, career, marriage, procreation, and mortality. Instead of seeing Pablo's relation with work as an issue of work-leisure balance, a violation of Emiel's mechanic efficiency, or a testimony to his inborn immaturity, I read it as a demonstration of Pablo's boyish subjectivity. Here, the subjectivity does not denote a particular sexual practice or preference (attraction to older gay men). Rather, it shows that Emiel's endowment allows his boy to deploy time differently. In other words, there is nothing inherently lazy, inferior, childish, or deficient about Pablo; he uses time in a way at odds with normative adulthood and teleological maturity. While the capitalist logic may peg Pablo as a profligate heir, a slothful Mexican, or a gay man who wastes his life in cruising (and praise Emiel for his dedication to work), I critique the capitalist discourse of (re)production.

In describing Pablo's relationship with Emiel, the narrator evades their daily life together (for example, how Emiel teaches Pablo to fix clocks or what happens in the bedroom) and underscores Pablo's life after Emiel passes away instead:

Some of these facts are of dubious pertinence to the little history which is to be unfolded. The important one is the fact that Mr. Gonzales had managed to drift enviably apart from the regularities that rule most other lives. Some days he would not open his shop at all and some days he would open it only for an hour or two in the morning, or in the late evening when other shops had closed, and in spite of these caprices he managed to continue to get along fairly well, due to the excellence of his work, when he did it, the fact that he was so well established in his own quiet way, the advantage of his location in a neighborhood where nearly everybody had an old alarm clock which had to be kept in condition to order their lives (this community being one inhabited mostly by people with small-paying jobs), but it was also due in measurable part to the fact that the thrifty Mr. Kroger, when he finally succumbed to a chronic disease of the bowels, had left a tidy sum in government bonds, and this capital, bringing in about a hundred and seventy dollars a month, would have kept Mr. Gonzales going along in a commonplace but comfortable fashion even if he had declined to do anything whatsoever. (100)

The relationship mainly takes the form of Emiel's absence. Dismissing the details of Pablo's life with the living Emiel as "of dubious pertinence," the narrator highlights the aftermaths of Emiel's death: Pablo keeps irregular work hours and depends on Emiel's endowment. In place of Emiel's body are his shop, his craft, and his money, which provide Pablo with a decent livelihood. All set, Pablo is able to live the life he wants, "drift[ing] enviably apart from the regularities that rule most other lives." He opens his shop not necessarily to make money, to show his craftsmanship, or to serve the community (though he does), but to meet his "caprices."

Pablo is lucky to live off Emiel's money and reside in a neighborhood in need of a skillful watch repairman. But I would like to focus on Pablo's posthumous relationship with Emiel and his relation with time. In the very beginning of the story, Pablo has been depicted as a watch repairman "indifferent to time":

Perhaps because he was a watch repairman, Mr. Gonzales had grown to be rather indifferent to time. A single watch or clock can be a powerful influence on a man, but when a man lives among as many watches and clocks as crowded the tiny, dim shop of Mr. Gonzales, some lagging behind, some skipping ahead, but all ticking monotonously on in their witless fashion, the multitude of them may be likely to deprive them of importance, as a gem loses its value when there are too many just like it which are too easily or cheaply obtainable. At any rate, Mr. Gonzales kept very irregular hours, if he could be said to keep any hours at all, and if he had not been where he was for such a long time, his trade would have suffered badly. (99)

Instead of adjusting his timepieces, Pablo leaves them in disarray. While such a conduct throws into relief Emiel's dedication to work (that is, the boy fails to be as diligent as his man), it also allows each timepiece to assert its individual autonomy, countering the tyranny of standard time. With the enactment of standard time, people are able to take public transportation, meet clients, and finish classes on time. But the compulsory synchronization between human beings and timepieces also causes complaints. Take Frederick Taylor's scientific management for instance. His war on wasted time, labor, and energy eventually led to workers' strikes and protests.²⁰ To yield the utmost productivity, entrepreneurs and investors often force their workers to catch up with machines. But human beings cannot be as consistent in productivity as a well-oiled machine; they cannot always be in sync with a well-adjusted clock. In "Mysteries," Pablo liberates his timepieces from the regime of standard time. Now that the clocks are no longer timekeepers, they become a graveyard of time: not that things become timeless or dead in Pablo's shop, but that unadjusted timepieces cannot force people to meet appointments and schedules.

²⁰ On Taylorism, see Frederick Winslow Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (New York: Norton, 1911 [1967]); Samuel Haber, *Efficiency and Uplift: Scientific Management in the Progressive Era, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964); Daniel Nelson, *Frederick W. Taylor and the Rise of Scientific Management* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980); Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); and Michael O'Malley, *Keeping Watch: A History of American Time* (New York: Viking, 1990), 170.

Owing to his temporal indifference, Pablo transforms substantial clocks—and insubstantial time—into worthless gems. Slighting the industrial value of clocks in regulating, predicting, and boosting productivity, Pablo also cares little about their property value. Whereas shop owners like Emiel convert labor and service into an income, Pablo sees the clocks in his store as gems devalued by their sheer profusion. Whereas businesspeople like Taylor try to generate as much wealth with as little time as possible, Pablo has so much time—and so many timepieces—at his disposal that he splurges without misgivings. If Emiel and Taylor use time and timepieces to make as many profits as possible, Pablo simply gets by.

Drifting, Pablo is nevertheless something more than a freeloader. Loafing yet not stopping work altogether, he realizes what Paul Lafargue calls *the right to be lazy*. According to Lafargue, capitalism has been promoting the delusional “love of work” in order to enslave the working classes: “Instead of opposing this mental aberration, the priests, the economists and the moralists have cast a sacred halo over work.”²¹ Comparing factories to “houses of correction in which the toiling masses are . . . condemned to compulsory work for twelve or fourteen hours,” Lafargue advocates moderate work hours to save workers from wage slavery.²² In “Mysteries,” Pablo lives primarily on Emiel’s government bonds and works irregularly. As Lafargue protests against overtaxed proletariat and abusive capitalists, Pablo also refrains from overwork and overproduction.

But Pablo does not aim at striking a work-leisure balance. Whereas Lafargue dramatizes the dichotomy between capitalists and workers, Pablo’s “right to be lazy” is based on Emiel’s endowment, not on his compassion for the abused proletariat. Working irregularly instead of

²¹ Paul Lafargue, *The Right to Be Lazy, and Other Studies*, trans. Charles H. Kerr (Chicago: C. H. Kerr & Co., 1907), 9.

²² *Ibid.*, 15.

moderately, Pablo breaks down normative rhythms, schedules, and deployments of time.

Whereas Lafargue's concern with wage laborers' welfare encourages him to pay attention to work hours, Pablo's temporal indifference challenges the institution of time in employment and other aspects of life. According to Dana Luciano, religion, state government, reproduction, and other temporal rhythms together constitute *chronobiopolitics*, a biopolitics of time:

The human body, in this light, cannot be temporalized in relation to (its) death alone; rather, it becomes implicated in a proliferation of temporalities dominated by, but not limited to, the linear, accumulative time of development, the cyclical time of domestic life, the sacred timelessness of the ordinary bond and of the eternal reward toward which the faithful subject progressed; or, beyond these norms, the wayward time of perversity, the nonprogressive time of pure sensation, et cetera. These were ordered, on the national level, through a dual appeal to stability and progress, though the nationally conceived mapping of time could also give way to a selectively transnational sense of modernity, a sense of synchronicity across borders, as manifested in appeals to refined Euro-American sensibilities or certain articulations of "Christian" (against, say, the heathen or primitive).²³

In *Boyish Narratives*, the characters at issue are often out of sync with chronobiopolitics. In "Paul's Case," Paul renounces the progress from boyhood to adulthood. In *Bertram Cope's Year*, Cope tangoes with marital teleology. In "Mysteries," Pablo works irregularly and cruises the Joy Rio. Drifting in the river (Spanish: *rio*) of pleasure, Pablo does not sail forward. While most people go to the Joy Rio to watch movies and take time out from work, he is less interested in what is on the screen than who is in the audience. As Pablo visits the Joy Rio religiously, the cinema becomes not only a space for his sexual adventures but also a motif of his being: just as the movies combine temporal fragments, shots, and sequences and replay themselves on a loop,

²³ Dana Luciano, *Arranging Grief: Sacred Time and the Body in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 10-11.

so too does Pablo relive Emiel's life in the theater. Not necessarily a shadow, the boy defines his life in relation to his man.

Taking her cue from Luciano, Elizabeth Freeman coins the term *chrononormativity*: “a mode of implantation, a technique” by which institutions regulate schooling, marriage, childbearing, and other uses of time “to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity” and naturalize schedules, calendars, time zones, and even wristwatches as if they were “somatic facts.”²⁴ In “Mysteries,” Pablo eludes various naturalized temporal regimes: moralized punctuality, industrial efficiency, gradual maturity, heterosexual procreation, and maximum productivity. Although he seems to fritter away his time and inheritance, Pablo idles against chrononormativity. While most people—particularly those in white, middle-class families—schedule their career, relationships, and even entertainment for the purpose of social climbing, financial affluence, work-leisure balance, and familial prosperity, Pablo undoes the notions of maturity, adulthood, and productivity embedded in such normative uses of time.

To be sure, Pablo's immigrant status and homosexuality might demand a timeline distinct from that of white, bourgeois families. But I do not argue for different temporalities to meet different identities. The point is not to individualize chrononormativity: if a man does not start working until he is thirty, he should be able to postpone his marriage and childbearing; if a woman drops out of school to marry, she should be able to make up for her education; if a gay Mexican immigrant does not have any offspring, he should be able to adopt a baby. Instead of striving for equality, I acknowledge some white, bourgeois families' own struggle with chrononormativity and stress the implications of Pablo's temporal indifference. In “Mysteries,” Pablo's irregular work hours do not result from his lascivious cruising, his Mexican origin, or his

²⁴ Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 3.

irresponsible youth. Rather, they attest to Pablo's particular boyish subjectivity: the boy's reproduction of his man's profession, cruising, and being gives rise to such a temporal existence, one that does not aim at compulsory progress, maturation, or prosperity. Such a subjectivity is not a textbook example for any junior partner in a man-boy relationship; it derives from the particularities of Pablo's relationship with Emiel.

Undermining chrononormative (re)productivity, Pablo thwarts the transitional concept of life stages. Although "Pablo" and "Mr. Gonzales" refer to the same Mexican immigrant, the narrator meticulously tells them apart—not only to show how much the tramp Pablo has grown into the proprietor Mr. Gonzales, but also to see them as two individuals. Early in the story, the narrator emphasizes the age difference between these two names: "Mr. Gonzales, who was then young enough to be known as Pablo, had been [Emiel's] only sustained flirtation with the confusing, quicksilver world that exists outside of regularities." Yet the distinction becomes most bizarre when the narrator compares Mr. Gonzales to Mr. Kroger in search of his Pablo:

Mr. Kroger's life had been much the same until he had come across Pablo at the watchmakers' convention in Dallas. But so far in Mr. Gonzales' life there had been no Pablo. In his life there had been only Mr. Kroger and the sort of things that Mr. Kroger had looked for and sometimes found but most times continued patiently to look for in the great expanse of arid country which his lifetime had been before the discovery of Pablo. (105)

Understanding life not in terms of sociological milestones (such as marriage, career, and offspring), the narrator compares Mr. Gonzales to Mr. Kroger in terms of the man-boy dyad. In this light, "Pablo" not merely refers to the specific boy whom Emiel brought home; it also stands for the protégé, the junior beloved in an intergenerational relationship or apprenticeship. Similarly, "Mr. Kroger" is not just the particular watch repairman; it also stands for the man, the

senior lover to his apprentice boy. When Pablo becomes Mr. Gonzales, he is literally a different person: that is, more a double of Mr. Kroger than a grown Pablo. While Mr. Kroger is lucky to find Pablo, there is no guarantee that the middle-aged Mr. Gonzales will find his boy Pablo.

In “Mysteries,” the relationship between Emiel and Pablo controls the hourglass. An idle watch repairman, Pablo is above the timeline of procreation and career. No sooner did Emiel die than Pablo aged prematurely. And the dramatic aging was reversed when Pablo developed the same disease as Emiel did over seventeen years before. Shrinking to his former size, the middle-aged Mr. Gonzales sees in the mirror “the boy that was loved by the man whom he loved. It is almost Pablo. Pablo has almost returned from Mr. Gonzales” (106). Due to this particular man-boy relationship, the slim Pablo has little to do with the plump Mr. Gonzales. Rather, Pablo and Emiel take each other in; they fold each other in physically and temporarily. Never a grown man, Pablo always remains boyish despite the passage of time.

Cruising Temporalities

I have studied Pablo’s homosexual reproduction and his temporal indifference. In conclusion, I would like to study Pablo’s inherited cruising from Emiel to show another intricacy of this boyish narrative. In “Mysteries,” Pablo’s cruising parallels George’s tryst with his girlfriend: both are illicit sex. Yet these two kinds of sex are not on an equal footing: while teenage sex has the potential for marriage and reproduction, gay cruising is often considered sinful or inconsequential. As Foucault argues, gay cruising among young homosexuals may generate little unease for two reasons: “it responds to a reassuring canon of beauty, and it cancels everything that can be troubling in affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity, camaraderie, and

companionship, things that our rather sanitized society can't allow a place for without fearing the formation of new alliances and the tying together of unforeseen lines of force."²⁵ On the other side of accusing gay men of nonproductivity (no children, no future) is dismissing them for their uneventful relationships (no strings attached, no future).²⁶

In addition to Foucault, Leo Bersani and Tim Dean also focus on the ethical aspect of cruising. According to Bersani, cruising is about the praxis of ascesis, a self-shattering that elicits "a happiness inherent in not being entirely ourselves, in being 'reduced' to an impersonal rhythm."²⁷ To the extent that cruising can be "a training in impersonal intimacy," Bersani argues that such self-shattering ultimately leads to "an ecological ethics, one in which the subject, having willed its lessness, can live less invasively in the world."²⁸ In a similar vein, Dean explores cruising from the perspective of communion. According to Dean, "cruising exemplifies a distinctive ethic of openness to alterity": "There is pleasure and satisfaction in risking the self by opening it to alterity—pleasure and satisfaction quite distinct from those to be found in securing the self around its familiar coordinates."²⁹ Treasuring certain practices of cruising for "their aimlessness, their encouraging a centrifugal openness to the other without the necessity of having a particular object of seduction in mind," Dean regards such cruising as the avenue to interclass democracy.³⁰ In line with Samuel R. Delany's distinction between open-minded

²⁵ Foucault, "Friendship," 136.

²⁶ Also see Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

²⁷ Leo Bersani, "Sociability and Cruising," in *Is the Rectum a Grave? and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 47. On ascesis, also see Foucault, "Friendship," 137; and Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?," in *Is the Rectum a Grave?*, 24-25, 30. According to Foucault, ascesis refers to "the work that one performs on oneself in order to transform oneself or make the self appear which, happily, one never attains."

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 60, 62. This is a more optimistic, democratic interpretation of cruising, for cruising may also be aggressive, competitive, judgmental, desperate, and materialist. It may hurt one's pride when one is rejected (for being not muscular enough, not young enough, not rich enough, not big enough, etc.) in the gay meat market.

²⁹ Tim Dean, "Cruising as a Way of Life," in *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 176, 210.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 210.

contact and narrow-minded networking, Dean, on the other hand, critiques online cruising for “insulat[ing] the self from alterity by centripetally narrowing the attention, often to crotch level.”³¹

To be sure, cruising offers one the chance for inconsequential hookups, impersonal sociability, or casual yet meaningful friendships. But Pablo’s cruising extends his relationship with Emiel: the boy forms an enduring yet formless and nonteleological relationship with his man, one that even outlives the man’s life. Here, cruising encompasses more than a gay man’s search for quick, anonymous sex in such public spaces as movie houses, parks, or tearooms. Since Pablo learns to cruise the Joy Rio from Emiel, cruising stamps and prolongs their three-year relationship. “Evolving” from a fortuitous pick-up to unofficial apprenticeship to the reproduction of cruising, Emiel and Pablo do not promise each other lifelong partnership—at least, not on the part of Pablo. Complicating the polarization of transient cruising and teleological monogamy, their relationship is contingent and yet steadfast. Emiel and Pablo neither look for a fling to begin with nor grieve or aspire to a gay counterpart of heterosexual marriage. Absolving cruising of the stigma of loose morality and frivolity, they stay with each other because they do, not because they want to live up to the standard of monogamy.

After a brief introduction to Emiel’s (posthumous) relationship with Pablo, the narrator unfolds the secret of the Joy Rio as a cruising spot:

I have already suggested that there was something a bit special and obscure about Mr. Gonzales’ habitual attendance at the Joy Rio, and that was my intention. For Mr. Gonzales had inherited more than the material possessions of his dead benefactor: he had

³¹ Ibid., 211. On the gay subculture of cruising, also see Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Dianne Chisholm, *Queer Constellations: Subcultural Space in the Wake of the City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Mark W. Turner, *Backward Glances: Cruising the Queer Streets of New York and London* (London: Reaktion, 2003); and Samuel R. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

also come into custody of his old protector's fleeting and furtive practices in dark places, the practices which Emiel Kroger had given up only when Pablo had come into his fading existence. (101-102)

In "Mysteries," cruising signifies not only an illicit sexual activity but also a legacy that passes from one partner to the other. Bequeathing the "full gift of his shame" to Pablo, Emiel transforms cruising into an intimate endowment from man to boy. At once a rite of initiation and an item of inheritance, cruising attests to a gay life and constitutes part of the homosexual reproduction between Emiel and Pablo.

While Emiel was alive, he and Pablo seemed to simulate gay couplehood; the narrator even compares the bereft Pablo to "a widow [that] puts on black garments." But their relationship is actually contingent. Picking up the tramp Pablo in Dallas, Emiel thought that the boy would soon outgrow his apprenticeship: "Mr. Kroger had taken the animated allure of his young protégé, the flickering lights in his eyes and his quick, nervous movements, his very grace and slimness, as meaning something difficult to keep hold of" (100). Although Pablo had been Emiel's "only sustained flirtation with the confusing, quicksilver world," and although "[Emiel] couldn't have guessed how perfectly everything suited Pablo Gonzales" (100), the couplehood states a fact in retrospect—not a goal in anticipation. Exceeding Emiel's prediction of a short-term relationship, Pablo turns out not to be "[a bird] of sudden passage but rather the kind that prefers to keep a faithful commitment to a single place, the nest-building kind, and not only that, but the very-rare-indeed-kind that gives love back as generously as he takes it" (100). If Emiel had been alive, he would have called himself lucky to keep Pablo. But he did not know it: "It was a pity that the late, or rather long-ago, Mr. Kroger, had not understood what a fundamentally peaceable sort of young man he had taken under his wing" (100). To the extent that both parties did not sign up for life partnership, Emiel and Pablo are better described as protracting an

otherwise fleeting temporality of cruising (and apprenticeship) than as exponents of gay monogamy. Although they prefer monogamy, they do not ask each other for such commitment.

Informing Pablo of his former cruising, the dying Emiel turns his bedside confession into a life lesson. Instilling “a practical wisdom [to] live by safely and quietly and still find pleasure” in Pablo (105), Emiel renders cruising less about promiscuity than about prudence. To cruise without getting into trouble with the law or with the men he is cruising, Emiel emphasizes patience:

Mr. Gonzales did not take many chances. This was a respect in which he paid due homage to the wise old spirit of the late Emiel Kroger, that romantically practical Teuton who used to murmur to Pablo, between sleeping and waking, a sort of incantation that went like this: Sometimes you will find it and other times you won't find it and the times you don't find it are the times when you have got to be careful. Those are the times when you have got to remember that other times you *will* find it, not *this* time but the *next* time, or the time *after* that, and then you've got to be able to go home without it, yes, those times are the times when you have got to be able to go home without it, go home *alone* without it . . . (104)

Precarious, cruising is not about switching partners every night; it is about treasuring the rare successful occasions. More a way to get by than a way to get laid, cruising in “Mysteries” is a series of disappointments seasoned with optimism. And on top of that, cruising connects Emiel and Pablo. A belief in deferred gratification and a vital prudence based on the knowledge of a certain permanent availability of trade, Emiel's “incantation” palliates Pablo's thwarted visits. The happy moment may come, but Pablo should be able to go home—and live—without it.

As Emiel passes away, cruising becomes the hub of Pablo's life. Yet this does not mean that Pablo is over Emiel. On the contrary, Pablo cruises the Joy Rio with Emiel's axiom and spirit. Despite his irregular work hours, Pablo always takes to the street in the afternoons: “He did not go far and he always went in the same direction, across town toward the river where there

was an old opera house, now converted into a third-rate cinema, which specialized in the showing of cowboy pictures and other films of the sort that have a special appeal to children and male adolescents” (101). Shuttling between his shop and the cinema, Pablo perverts industrial punctuality for the fortuitous payoff of cruising. When most married adults juggle career with family, visiting the Joy Rio for zippy interludes, Pablo cruises the cinema to inherit Emiel’s being.

In the cinema, Pablo visits the same places frequented by Emiel, and the man-boy bonding is so strong that they seem to do “the sad, lonely things” together:

The old man had left Mr. Gonzales the full gift of his shame, and now Mr. Gonzales did the sad, lonely things that Mr. Kroger had done for such a long time before his one lasting love came to him. Mr. Kroger had even practiced those things in the same place in which they were practiced now by Mr. Gonzales, in the many mysterious recesses of the Joy Rio, and Mr. Gonzales knew about this. (102)

If Mr. Gonzales and Pablo are so different in body and age that they may as well be two persons, Mr. Gonzales and Mr. Kroger are so alike that the only way to distinguish them is by the past and past perfect tenses. And the distinction is disrupted by the continuum between man and boy. Visiting the Joy Rio, Pablo recreates Emiel’s being. While Pablo’s irregular work hours attest to his indifference to chrononormativity, his regular visits to the Joy Rio corroborate the enterprise of homosexual reproduction. While both practices show Emiel’s endowment on Pablo, Pablo is no puppet. The boy’s subjectivity is ethical (in relation to Emiel), not individual (in relation to the self alone).

Ultimately, the narrator incorporates Emiel and Pablo into the Joy Rio, rendering cruising part of its history. Formerly an opera house and now a cinema, the Joy Rio “had opened and shut like a nervous lady’s fan” (103). Now everything is deteriorating: “the dark glory of the upper

galleries was a legend in such memories as that of the late Emiel Kroger and the present Pablo Gonzales, and one by one, of course, those memories died out and the legend died out with them. Places like the Joy Rio and the legends about them make one more than usually aware of the short bloom and the long fading out of things” (103). Instead of writing a chronicle of the watch shop, glorifying gay domesticity and the happy life of an odd couple, “Mysteries” encases Emiel and Pablo in the legend of a rundown theater, recounting a boyish narrative of Pablo’s homosexual reproduction, his temporal indifference, and his inheritance of cruising from Emiel. To be sure, Pablo’s inheritance fights a losing battle against the progress of time. There is no new Pablo to comfort or replace the old one. Even the revamped Joy Rio cannot stay erect forever. But the story is never about immortality, the triumph of (re)production, or gay couples’ assimilation to the institution of family. It is a story that survives its protagonists and refuses to bury them in the receding past. Even though the “fading out of things” is inevitable, Emiel manages to assert a posthumous being in Pablo—not to possess him, but to reproduce himself in his boy and to protect him with a love from beyond the grave. Even though Pablo acknowledges the death of Emiel in public, in private the boy folds his man in and preserves him against the passing of time. In this boyish narrative, Emiel and Pablo reconfigure various temporal notions: nonproductive homosexuality, inevitable maturity and mortality, as well as transient cruising. If the story makes cruising worth telling, Pablo’s inheritance makes Emiel’s being worth living.

Chapter Four

“Riding Backward”: The Creolized Genealogy in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*

The Black Atlantic

In *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy challenges the national or ethnocentric paradigms of black cultural studies in favor of a transnational framework of the black Atlantic: “The history of the black Atlantic . . . , continually crisscrossed by the movements of black people—not only as commodities but engaged in various struggles toward emancipation, autonomy, and citizenship—provides a means to reexamine the problems of nationality, location, identity, and historical memory.”¹ Using black music as one of his main media to capture the restlessness of blacks, Gilroy argues that such vernacular expression not only transforms the curses of homelessness and enforced exile into “the basis of a privileged standpoint” but also produces “a syncopated temporality—a different rhythm of living and being” from the progress narrative of nation-states and Western modernity.²

¹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 16.

² *Ibid.*, 111, 202.

Gilroy also teases out the convoluted memory of slavery. According to Gilroy, black subjectivity and historicity are hinged on whether one remembers slavery and how one remembers it:

Blacks are urged, if not to forget the slave experience which appears as an aberration from the story of greatness told in African history, then to replace it at the centre of our thinking with a mythical and ruthlessly positive notion of Africa that is indifferent to intraracial variation and is frozen at the point where blacks boarded the ships that would carry them into the woes and horrors of the middle passage.³

The multivalent operation of remembering and forgetting slavery shows how memory and subjectivity are at stake. Some blacks identify slavery as a site of victimhood: future-oriented, they leave the harrowing memory of slavery behind in order to fulfill the progress narrative of emancipation, citizenship, and autonomy. Others remember slavery, but their relations to the past may be redemptive, instrumental, or mystical. Some focus on how they have overcome the ordeal of slavery. Such remembering is tinged with startling triumph, not staggering trauma. Others translate the history into a moral or political lesson for present and future generations: such catastrophes should not repeat themselves. And still others highlight the anteriority of African civilization to western civilization, appealing for a grandiose premodern African tradition. For Gilroy, such enthusiasm for Afrocentric tradition expresses “not so much the ambivalence of blacks towards modernity, but the fallout from modernity’s protracted ambivalence towards the blacks who haunt its dreams of ordered civilisation.”⁴ Aspiring to the fulfillment of modernity, blacks are also disenchanted with and sometimes disfranchised from it.

³ Ibid., 189.

⁴ Ibid., 191.

Gilroy's work belongs to a growing assemblage of diaspora studies, transnational studies, migration studies, memory studies, media studies, and museum studies.⁵ Beginning this chapter with his mediations on the "syncopated temporality" of black people and the uneven memory of slavery, I want to make a transnational and past-oriented turn in *Boyish Narratives* by studying Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* (1977). At first glance, Morrison's novel embeds the belated maturity of an African American man in black history: chronicling the life of Milkman Dead (a.k.a., Macon Dead III) from the early 1930s to the early 1960s in Michigan, the novel touches on such monumental events as the Great Migration, the Emmett Till murder in 1955, and the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama, on September 15, 1963—all of which lead to the eve of Civil Rights Act of 1964. But such a contextualization is limited. Under closer scrutiny, Morrison's novel demands a transnational and transhistorical frame in order to address the aftermaths of slavery, the circulation of black cultures across the Atlantic, the

⁵ See, for example, Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Hirsch and Nancy K. Miller, eds. *Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); and Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, eds., *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005). On recent studies of the black diaspora or the remapping of black histories and experiences from a transatlantic, diasporic, or/and creolized perspective, see George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America, 1800-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Christine Chivallon, *The Black Diaspora of the Americas: Experiences and Theories out of the Caribbean*, trans. Antoinette Tidjani Alou (Kingston and Miami: Ian Randle Publishers, 2011); Barnor Hesse, "Black to Front and Black Again: Racialization through Contested Times and Spaces," in *Place and the Politics of Identity*, ed. Michael Keith and Steve Pile (London: Routledge, 1993), 162-182, and "Symptomatically Black: A Creolization of the Political," in *The Creolization of Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 37-61; Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000); Patrick Manning, *The African Diaspora: A History through Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Ronald Segal, *The Black Diaspora* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995); and Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

decolonization of Africa, and the various characters' displacements, travels, relocations, and homecomings in and outside the United States. Positioning the novel in the niche of ethnic studies—that is, reading it merely as an African American text—misconstrues the North as *the* end point of black diaspora.

At the same time, the Solomon-Jake-Macon-Milkman lineage streamlines the complexity of time and genealogy in Morrison's novel. Although this male lineage can be divided into different periods to foreground the distinct challenges of modernity for each generation of black men in the United States, such divisions subscribe to the linear logic of progressive historicism and generational difference: it is as if the past only led to the present and the present had little to do with the past, as if the New World were the final destination in contrast to Africa as the roots and the Middle Passage as the routes, as if African Americans and Africans were not only thousands of miles away but also decades apart. While Milkman seems to be only a step away from achieving financial independence and becoming "a whole man," he is no bellwether of liberty for blacks in the United States and other nation-states.⁶ Taking issue with American, African American, and individual exceptionalisms, I do not set Milkman and other African Americans apart from the rest of blacks in African diaspora or define maturity in terms of independence.

With the black Atlantic in view, I use the word *boyish* to describe Morrison's novel and Milkman for three reasons. First, the novel is more about the stakes of progressivism than about Milkman's belated maturity as a black man. In my previous chapters, I focused on several authors' stylistic and temporal manipulations to evade normative arcs of maturity: Paul's

⁶ Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (New York: Plume, 1977 [1987]), 77. Hereafter references to this edition will be incorporated parenthetically in the text. Unless otherwise noted, all italics that appear in quoted extracts from this book are Morrison's own.

boyhood effeminacy does not entail protogay boyhood; Cope's friendships with Carolyn and Lemoyne do not necessarily designate a transitional phase prior to heterosexual marriage or same-sex domesticity (or homosexuality); and Pablo's cruising attests to a boy-beloved's reproduction of his man-lover's being rather than his own juvenile promiscuity. In this chapter, Morrison evokes a transnational, past-oriented frame that undoes the progress narrative of emancipation, citizenship, and autonomy in African American cultural politics. Although Milkman wants to obtain autonomy by seeking the gold buried in the South—although he falls short of normative masculinity for delaying his weaning, remaining single, abusing women, and fighting with other black men—the novel is by no means about his (failed) attempt to be assimilated to white, middle-class adulthood or acquire black manhood. In the postslavery era, Milkman's connection to the past histories and relations—rather than his financial status or future prospects—is the key to his subjectivity. And such subjectivity relies not on Milkman's knowing himself in a psychological or ethnic fashion, but on his getting over himself in a genealogical and transnational fashion.⁷

⁷ A lot of critics have read *Song of Solomon* as Milkman's quest for manhood. While I acknowledge the merits of such an approach in critiquing the issues of race, gender, and masculinity in this novel, this approach often upholds the inevitability of maturity and tends to embrace a simplistic "different but equal" version of black manhood in contrast to its white counterpart. When the polarity between immature adolescence and mature adulthood prescribes a set arc of development, it renders all male characters in *Song of Solomon* adolescent-like: Milkman should have respected women and paid attention to black histories, his father Macon should have been less materialist, and his friend Guitar Bains should have been less radical. "Adolescence" here does not refer to a specific age group; instead, it becomes synonymous with immaturity and associated with black men. See, for example, Michael Awkward, "'Unruly and Let Loose': Myth, Ideology, and Gender in *Song of Solomon*," in *Negotiating Difference: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Positionality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 137-153; Jeffrey B. Leak, *Racial Myths and Masculinity in African American Literature* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005); Dorothy H. Lee, "Song of Solomon: To Ride the Air," *Black American Literature Forum* 16, no. 2 (1982): 64-70; Susan Neal Mayberry, *Can't I Love What I Criticize? The Masculine and Morrison* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007); and Philip M. Royster, "Milkman's Flying: The Scapegoat Transcended in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*," *Collage Language Association Journal* 24, no. 4 (June 1981): 419-440. On African American masculinities, also see Elijah Anderson, *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999); Marcellus Blount and George P. Cunningham, eds., *Representing Black Men* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Rudolph P. Byrd and Beverly Guy-Sheftall, eds., *Traps: African American Men on Gender and Sexuality* (Bloomington, IN: Indian University Press, 2001); Phillip Brian Harper, *Are We Not Men?: Masculine Anxiety and the Problem of African-American Identity* (New York: Oxford University

Second, I call Milkman *boyish* to emphasize his humbling connections to people and pasts beyond the Solomon-Jake-Macon-Milkman lineage, not to reinforce a hierarchy between him and the patriarchs in his family history. In *Song of Solomon*, Milkman does not represent an alternative masculinity—a masculinity that may be dismissed as boyish or childish according to hegemonic masculinity. Rather, he is boyish because he originally relinquishes his family and history. Feeling entitled to his rights as a free black man in early 1960s Michigan, Milkman does not care much about his great-grandfather’s slavery or his grandfather’s murder. He is too elitist to entertain the thought of living in the segregated South or sympathize with decolonizing blacks in Africa. It is not until later in the novel that he learns to situate himself in a transhistorical and transatlantic network beyond his personal interests and biological heritage.

Third, Morrison’s narrative is boyish because it undermines teleological temporality. Throughout the text, the narrator or characters use songs, urban legends, fairy tales, barbershop gossip, news vignettes, myths, and unofficial names to create a heteroglossic text.⁸ But such techniques also break the linear flow of time and narrative. At several points, the narrator even shifts the focus from Milkman to female characters, such as Pilate, Ruth, Magdalene called Lena, First Corinthians, Circe, Singing Bird, Hagar, and Ryna. As a result, to read the novel as Milkman’s quest for recovering his family history is simplistic. Not only is Milkman’s quest unfinished, but he is actually open to a creolized genealogy across gender, race, generation, and

Press, 1996); Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson, *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America* (New York: Lexington Books, 1992); Richard Majors and Jacob U. Gordon, eds., *The American Black Male: His Present Status and His Future* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1994); Robert Reid-Pharr, *Black Gay Man: Essays* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Robert Staples, *Black Masculinity: The Black Male’s Role in American Society* (San Francisco, CA: Black Scholar Press, 1982); and Maurice O. Wallace, *Constructing the Black Masculine: Identity and Ideality in African American Men’s Literature and Culture, 1775-1995* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

⁸ On the oral tradition in *Song of Solomon*, see Joyce Irene Middleton, “Orality, Literacy, and Memory in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*,” *College English* 55, no. 1 (1993): 64-75. On Morrison’s use of folklore, see Jacqueline de Weever, “Toni Morrison’s Use of Fairy Tale, Folk Tale and Myth in *The Song of Solomon*,” *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 44 (1980): 131-144.

national borders. As the novel ends with Milkman's suspended deathmatch with his best friend Guitar Bains, it does not culminate in the crisis of black futurity, but signifies a turn to a past-oriented genealogy that connects Milkman to people beyond his male lineage and immediate family. Milkman is a dot in a constellation of connections, not the end of the Dead family.

Emphasizing Milkman's connections to the past, I do not mean that the future is not at stake. In *Song of Solomon*, Robert Smith's insurance policy and Macon's material accumulation aim at a better future. In a perverse way, even the Seven Days vigilantes murder whites in order to even the casualties between blacks and whites and ensure the existence of future black generations. Since such concerns or acts are energized by ideas of racial justice, communal sustainability, and altruistic love (however twisted), they righteously codify particular forms of biopolitics: one must think of future generations when one works, pays premiums, invests in real estate, and even kills innocent people. While I focus on Milkman's changing relations to the past in this chapter, I will also tackle such future-oriented practices because they often implicate particular relations to the past as well.

Creolized Genealogy

In *Song of Solomon*, Milkman's boyishness designates his growing susceptibility to the past and his connection to previously disavowed relations (of or not of his own doing) rather than his social subordination, chronological age, or intrinsic immaturity. An ethical attachment, such boyishness honors the creolized genealogy in Morrison's novel, which in turn reconfigures the hierarchal or patriarchal relation exemplified by the Solomon-Jake-Macon-Milkman lineage. At the same time, since the roots narrative takes the double form of Milkman's quest for gold and

ancestry, the serendipitous discovery of Solomon's identity forms a queer rendition of William Wordsworth's "The Child is father of the Man." Here, Milkman does not teach Solomon natural piety. Instead, Solomon would remain unknown were it not for Milkman. Although Solomon was born earlier than Milkman, the boy takes narrative priority.

Although *Song of Solomon* seems to build up to Milkman's discovery of his biological great-grandfather Solomon, another genealogy—the creolized one—revolves around an old white man's remains. Fleeing Danville, Pennsylvania, to escape their father's murderers, Milkman's father Macon and his aunt Pilate came across a stranger in a cave. Paranoid, Macon stabbed the white man and, believing that the man was dead, decided to possess his bags of gold. After Pilate deterred him with a knife, Macon left the cave, convinced that his sister had pocketed the gold. Over half a century later Milkman finds out that Pilate saves the white man's bones and calls them her "inheritance" (97). Craving the gold left in the cave to grant him freedom from his pressing family, Milkman goes South, only to realize that the bones belong to Jake. When Pilate and Milkman finally return to Shalimar, Virginia, to bury Jake's bones in his birthplace, Guitar kills Pilate to punish Milkman for "stealing" the nonexistent gold. The novel ends with Milkman leaping toward Guitar at the very spot where Solomon had taken flight back to Africa.

In most diasporic contexts, creolization entails the colonial and postcolonial mixture between people of indigenous, European, Asian, and African decent in the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean. In such oceanic archipelagos, creolization often designates ethnologic pluralism, supersyncretic languages (lingua francas or pidgins), and the interaction between, fusion of, or

bricolage across different cultures or value systems.⁹ In *Song of Solomon*, however, the creolization happens in the United States, engenders two intertwined genealogies, and takes a retro and sometimes nonbiological turn. Here, Milkman's creolized genealogy includes not only his Native American grandmother Singing Bird but also the white man killed by Macon, the Shalimar children, the numerous people who bear the same name as his great-grandfather Solomon, and a host of other people who open up the biological, patriarchal logic of kinship to assemblages of relations across time and space. In this roots narrative, it is not the twigs (younger generations) but the roots (older generations) that branch out. And Milkman is not Solomon's reincarnation (though both desert women and take flight). Because the creolized genealogy is past-oriented and roots-developing, Milkman does not grow into a man during his quest. On the contrary, he realizes how boyish he is when he faces the disavowed dead and elders related to the Dead family tree.

To be sure, the white man is no biological father of anyone in the Dead family. But an inclusive creolized genealogy suggests new poetics of relation, historicity, and maturity. Between the white man's gold and bone, maturity in *Song of Solomon* is not hinged on material accumulation (exemplified by Macon, who teaches Milkman to "[o]wn things. And let the things you own own other things. Then you'll own yourself and other people" [55]), but on

⁹ On creolization, see Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, trans. James Maraniss (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992); Elizabeth DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007); Okwui Enwezor et al., eds., *Créolité and Creolization* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2003); Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), and *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); Stuart Hall, "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities," in *Culture, Globalization, and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, ed. Anthony D. King (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 41-68; Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon, eds., *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992); Wendy Knepper, "Colonization, Creolization, and Globalization: The Art and Ruses of *Bricolage*," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 10, no. 3 (October 2006): 70-86; Françoise Lionnet, "Continents and Archipelagoes: From *E Pluribus Unum* to Creolized Solidarities," *PMLA* 123, no. 5 (October 2008): 1503-1515; Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, eds., *The Creolization of Theory*; and Stephan Palmié, "Creolization and Its Discontents," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 35, no. 1 (2006): 433-456.

genealogical excavation and reconfiguration (exemplified by Pilate's inheritance of the white man and Milkman's retracing of his roots). Even though Milkman seems to retrieve the Solomon-Jake-Macon-Milkman lineage, the novel does not culminate in a wistful gaze at the African continent, a mythological construct of "some ancestor, some lithe young man with onyx skin and legs as straight as cane stalks, who had a name that was real" (17), as Macon envisions at the beginning of the novel. Rather, it bursts into an orgy of relations: not only does Milkman's quest lead him to his African American folks and Native American relatives in the South, but he also learns to relate to dead people like Singing Bird, Dr. Foster (Milkman's maternal grandfather), the Butlers (Jake's white murderers), and the white man in the cave. As the Shalimar children, Solomon's twenty other sons besides Jake, and Milkman himself open up the Solomon-Jake-Macon-Milkman lineage, maturity does not depend on becoming a free, rich black man in Solomon's antebellum Virginia, Jake's Pennsylvania at the turn of the twentieth century, or Milkman's 1963 Michigan, but on opening oneself to nonkin, collective relations. Since generational transmissions in *Song of Solomon* are often alienated—that is, ruptured by events such as paternal desertion, maternal death, and obscured ancestry—the individuals who construct the genealogy are not necessarily biologically or maritally related to their "forebears" or "relatives." Instead, their genealogy becomes an intricate web of relations to the people they meet and know, as well as the distant connections extended from their acquaintances. In urban, modern Michigan, Ruth's prolonged lactation, Pilate's voodoo doll, Freddie's ghost story, and the folklore about the fetus' caul spin connections to the South, the Caribbean, and Africa (14, 132, 109-110, 10).¹⁰ Even though the North asserts political and geographical integrity as a

¹⁰ Morrison does not use the term *voodoo* or *conjure* to describe Pilate's deployment of the doll, but the image is evocative: to deter Macon from aborting Ruth's fetus, Pilate produces a "male doll with a small painted chicken bone struck between its legs and a round red circle painted on its belly" (132).

nonsegregated domain, it is not culturally, historically, or genealogically independent. As he retrieves lost connections and solders new ones in the South, Milkman's original plan to obtain the white man's gold turns out to be a genealogical explosion. Although the novel ends with Milkman revisiting Solomon's "origin" in Virginia, it actually opens him to a galaxy of relations, where people migrate and connect like expanding constellations. The open ending is also an open origin.

In explaining the unique forms of roots narratives, Jarrod Hayes deploys Jacques Derrida's concept of the trace. The idea of tracing may generate the chronological progress of history or the backward-and-forward unfolding of literature, and the latter often produces a narrative paradox. According to Hayes,

roots narratives narrate a "return" to a prior "origin" that is actually *not* prior since it is an *effect* of the narration, not its cause and this not actually an origin. The narrative itself can therefore only be considered a return if the notion of return is complicated, along with the notions of priorness, origins, and roots. Queer roots, in other words, are origins that are not original; queer diasporas exist through 'returns' to these origins-that-are-not-origins. This defining aporia at the heart of roots narratives can also be likened to the deconstruction of origins most succinctly articulated by Jacques Derrida in *Of Grammatology*: "The trace is not only the disappearance of origin . . . it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a nonorigin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin."¹¹

Hayes uses the word *queer* to refer to the complication of the chronological order, not to the critique of sexual normativity. Similarly in *Song of Solomon*, tracing the roots of Milkman's family is anything but reversing the chronological order. The white man's bones—the traces of a creolized genealogy—do not hark back to his family tree. Rather, they introduce Milkman to

¹¹ Jarrod Hayes, "Queering Roots, Queering Diaspora," in *Rites of Return: Diaspora and the Politics of Memory*, ed. Marianne Hirsch and Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 79-80 (emphasis in original).

Macon and Pilate's childhood friends, the servant of his grandfather's murderers, and Singing Bird's Native American offspring who pass as whites. Transformative and generation-churning, such a genealogy reconfigures biological kinship and disrupts the concept of Solomon as *the* root of the Dead lineage.

According to Afrocentrism, Africa is the homeland—the one and only root—for black people displaced around the world. When such an ideology applies to black geo- and bio-politics, slavery, miscegenation, migration, passing, plantation colonialism, and black people's different degrees of cultural agency are understood in the logic of origin, dispersal, and return. In *Song of Solomon*, Pilate's relation to the white man and Milkman's connection to the folks in the South showcase a nonbiological genealogy obscured by Afrocentrism. Expanding genealogy from the sole dimension of heredity or miscegenation to posthumous and communal contact, Pilate and Milkman create a creolized genealogy based on reparation, not on intermarriage.

Reparative, Milkman gestures not toward one single male lineage passed on from one father to one son, but toward multiple roots and origins. According to Susan Willis, "The end point of Milkman's journey is the starting point of his race's history in this country: slavery. The confrontation with the reality of slavery . . . is liberational because slavery is not portrayed as the origin of history and culture. Instead, the novel opens out to Africa, the source, and takes flight on the wings of Milkman's great-grandfather, the original Solomon."¹² Although Willis does not ask Milkman to forget the past and move on, her rhetoric of liberation implies Afrocentrism and progressivism: Solomon's flight and Milkman's quest must eventually transcend slavery, Solomon's uprooting in the United States is only temporary, slavery is seen more as a deviation from black history than as a defining moment, and the black Atlantic is

¹² Susan Willis, "Eruptions of Funk: Historicizing Toni Morrison," in *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Methuen, 1984), 271-272.

divided into different nation-states and geopolitical sectors. But Solomon's flight does not free Jake from slavery. Nor will financial autonomy grant a black man ultimate freedom. As Guitar's grandmother comments on Macon's ruthless capitalism, "A nigger in business is a terrible thing to see" (22). A free black man, Macon wants to own things and own people. He repeats the same logic of slavery. When the achievement of emancipation, citizenship, and autonomy has to rely on individual exceptionalism and transcending the past, it is progressivist. In *Song of Solomon*, the biological "origin" that flies away is actually a narrative and genealogical end, not the beginning. After all, someone must have fathered Solomon. And Solomon's life before and after his uprooting in the United States remains a mystery. A story about dissemination rather than insemination, *Song of Solomon* does not show Solomon completing his homecoming: he leaves the United States and his family behind. When Milkman and Pilate take Jake's bones back to Virginia, they embark on a vicarious yet displaced homecoming on Jake's behalf.¹³ To say that the beginning and the end finally come full circle overlooks the multiple homes and origins in the novel, as well as the creolized relations beyond the Solomon-Jake-Macon-Milkman lineage.

Instead of leading to a linear, singular beginning or end, Milkman's quest evokes five different senses of "ends."¹⁴ First, the "ends" refer to the irresolvable dénouement—the loose ends—of the narrative. Instead of building everything up to the resolution of a crisis—*Will*

¹³ Also see Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 304. Derrida understands writing as dissemination: "There is no first insemination. The semen is already swarming. The 'primal' insemination is dissemination. A trace, a graft whose traces have been lost. Whether in the case of what is called 'language' (discourse, text, etc.) or in the case of some 'real' seed-sowing, each term is indeed a germ, and each germ a term. The term, the atomic element, engenders by division, grafting, proliferation."

¹⁴ My reading of the "ends" in *Song of Solomon* is inspired by Jodi Kim's study of the protracted afterlife of the Cold War. According to Kim, there are four senses of "ends" when it comes to the Cold War's historical life: "First, we can think of 'ends' as these *temporal* terminations or multiple endings of the Cold War as a historical era. Second, 'ends' also delineate the *spatial* contours, as in extremity or furthestmost points or places, where the global Cold War was waged. Third, 'ends' signify as well the *functional*, meaning the aims, objectives, purposes, and effects of the Cold War. Lastly, 'ends' point to fragments and remnants, whether the physical remains and ruins of Cold War violence . . . , the human ruin or death produced by such violence, or the necessarily fragmentary attempts to grasp, remember, and narrate Cold War history." See Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 4 (emphasis in original).

Milkman and Guitar kill each other? Who will survive? Will the Deads and blacks in general die out?—the novel undoes the future-oriented view of genealogy by its past-oriented temporality. Second, the “ends” signify genealogical fragments. Who were Solomon’s parents? Was Solomon the only son? What happened to his twenty other sons than Jake? Who are the people on the maternal side of Solomon’s family? And what happened to those who claim kinship to Solomon even though they are not biologically related? To the extent that Solomon left his sons behind, Milkman’s genealogical retrieval is never complete; it is a thread cut on both ends. Third, the “ends” delineate Milkman’s unfixed movement. At the end of the novel, Milkman does not stand at the edge of a valley rock, as if he had reached the end of a landscape or arrived at some destination. Instead, he jumps into the air and floats like a “lodestar” (337), ready to embrace Guitar and open to astral connections. Fourth, the “ends” signify the endless possibilities of Milkman’s connections. In the South, Milkman comes across unexpected people and builds unthought-of connections. Now a “lodestar,” he does not complete a set genealogy. Rather, the genealogy expands its scope and changes patterns when different people-as-stars migrate, relating more people to Solomon and his creolized genealogy. And finally, the “ends” point to bodily remnants, ghostly matters, and cultural memories. In addition to Pilate’s inheritance of the white man’s bones, Ruth, Milkman, and the Seven Days vigilantes also (learn to) live with the past by remembering, recreating, or even revenging the dead. People do not die without leaving a trace, and the genealogy in *Song of Solomon* can take posthumous forms.

In *Song of Solomon*, Macon teaches Milkman to own things. He also tries to win his son over by charging that his mother had committed incest with her father: “You want to be a whole man, you have to deal with the whole truth . . . That [your] mama screwed her daddy” (77). Instead of defining maturity by the Oedipal script of female debasement, paternal identification,

and financial independence, the idea of creolized genealogy opens Milkman to a reconfigured community and temporality. Growing to acknowledge his attachment to the dead and the past, instead of asserting a break from his humble ancestors and traumatic slavery, Milkman turns the progressivist paradigm of emancipation, citizenship, and autonomy into a web of contact and indebtedness. The boy does not grow up by moving forward; he grows boyish by becoming more susceptible to the past.

“Three Deads Alive”

Having studied Milkman’s boyishness in terms of his susceptibility to the past rather than his transcendence of it, I want to compare and contrast the temporal enterprise of the three Macon Deads (Jake, Macon, and Milkman) with the temporal reconfiguration initiated by Ruth’s and Pilate’s tutelage of Milkman. These two systems position Milkman differently: one expects the boy to make progress in a lockstep marked by paternal emulation and the pursuit of emancipation, citizenship, and autonomy in African American cultural politics; the other opens the boy to a transatlantic genealogy marked by care, reparation, and engagement with the past. To be sure, Jake, Macon, and the Milkman in the male lineage develop relations with the past. But their relations are often instrumental, transcendental, or mystical, if not dismissive, traumatic, or apathetic. Future-oriented, they often see the past as a burden to be rid of, as an obstacle to be overcome, or as an antithesis of modernity. In contrast, Ruth, Pilate, and the Milkman in the female tutelage and creolized genealogy live with the past. Past-oriented, they nevertheless do not define tradition as a lost past to be rescued or as a grandiose image of Africa to be “contrasted with the corrosive, aphasic power of the post-slave history of the Americas and

the extended Caribbean.”¹⁵ While I will elaborate on the female tutelage in my next section, let us tease out the temporality codified by the three Macons in this section.

When Milkman first visits Pilate’s house in his childhood, the boy is ashamed and mesmerized: “She was the one who was ugly, dirty, poor, and drunk. The queer aunt whom his sixth-grade schoolmates teased him about and whom he hated because he felt personally responsible for her ugliness, her poverty, her dirt, and her wine” (37-38). Pilate proves to be dignified, and when Guitar has a hard time relating the unkempt Pilate to the respectable Macon, she confirms their siblinghood: “The only one [sister] he got. Ain’t but three Deads alive” (38). Pilate’s speech makes Milkman indignant on the spot: “I’m a Dead! My mother’s a Dead! My sisters. You and him ain’t the only ones!” (38). Milkman hates his name, but when Pilate seems to usurp the name, he feels “defensive” and “possessive” (38).

Pilate does not explain what she means by “three Deads alive.” But I would like to take the liberty of using this quirky oxymoron to explicate the three Macons’ relations to the past, the temporality they build up, and see how all these position Milkman as a boy in a progress narrative of African American manhood. Jake, deserted by Solomon, pronounces his last name “Dead,” with a stroke of error at the Freedmen’s Bureau. Macon, influenced by Jake’s devotion to his farm and his murder, becomes a materialist landlord. And Milkman, when confronted with Macon’s accusation of Ruth’s incest with Dr. Foster, wants to get rid of such pasts as dead weight: “all he knew in the world about the world was what other people had told him. He felt like a garbage pail for the actions and hatreds of other people. He himself did nothing” (120). It is not until Milkman travels to the South that the male lockstep opens up to a creolized genealogy.

¹⁵ Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 198-199.

Endowed with wealth and freedom in early 1960s Michigan, Milkman is indifferent to his family history, Hagar's pangs, Till's death, the cotton plantation in the South, tea-leaf pickers' suffering in India, and other blacks' struggle in the recently independent Republic of the Congo. When Guitar compares Indian coolies to black slaves in Southern cotton fields and uses brown eggs as a metaphor for miscegenation in the postcolonial Congo, Milkman voices his naïve liberalism: "Well, I got a right to be what I want to be, and I want to be a[n] egg" (116). An egotistic womanizer and simplistic liberal, Milkman sees his future as a guaranteed continuum of his father's present in the postslavery North. He believes in the progress narrative of emancipation and adulthood. Regarding his father as the last wall between him and total freedom, Milkman would have nothing to do with the dead or the past except to take them at face value.

While Milkman's family has come a long way, the progress narrative of emancipation proves detrimental: Milkman resents Jake's illiteracy and the stipulated identification between him and Macon. According to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, compulsory paternal emulation forms a paranoid temporality:

The dogged, defensive narrative stiffness of a paranoid temporality, after all, in which yesterday can't be allowed to have differed from today and tomorrow must be even more so, takes its shape from a generational narrative that's characterized by a distinctly Oedipal regularity and repetitiveness: it happened to my father's father, it happened to my father, it is happening to me, it will happen to my son, and it will happen to my son's son.¹⁶

¹⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 147.

With his future engraved in stone, Milkman is confined in his father's posh Packard. Although Macon intends to parade his family and success, the townspeople dub the showy yet sluggish vehicle "Macon Dead's hearse" (33). While Guitar comes from the working class in Florida, develops transnational sympathy for people in India, cultivates diasporic camaraderie for the Congolese, joins the Seven Days, and skewers Milkman's simplistic North-South divide, Milkman feels jaded about his heritage and impatient with his independence.

If Milkman's ride in Macon's Packard suggests a deadening legacy of materialism, the repeated name "Macon Dead" suggests an ambivalent legacy of emancipation. In contrast to Macon's high hopes for prosperity, the name indexes an alcohol-induced "origin." At the Freedmen's Bureau in 1869, a drunk Yankee "asked Papa [Jake] where he was born. Papa said Macon. Then he asked him who his father was. Papa said, 'He's dead.' Asked him who owned him, Papa said, 'I'm free.' Well, the Yankee wrote it all down, but in the wrong spaces. [I]n the space for his name the fool wrote, 'Dead' comma 'Macon'" (53). A comedy of errors, there is nevertheless a grain of truth to this "origin." Abandoned, Jake does not answer the official with a shrug. Instead, he owns the lost Solomon by calling him "dead." Now belonging to no master and father, Jake is "free" by renouncing both origins. Seen in this light, the name that represents his freedom does not foreshadow extinction. As Singing Bird puts it, it asserts a clean slate: "Mama liked it. Liked the name. Said it was new and would wipe out the past. Wipe it all out" (54). It is ironic how Jake's decision to own himself—to be a free man, to be a Dead—depends on disowning his past. Owing his new last name "Dead" entails disowning Solomon.

Imposing a break from Solomon, "Macon Dead" nevertheless becomes a vapid name when it passes from generation to generation. Although Macon and Milkman faithfully carry the name, they hate it. Pining for "some ancestor, some lithe young man with onyx skin and legs as

straight as cane stalks, who had a name that was real,” Macon (dis)owns the humble Jake by envisioning a regal yet forever unknown African forefather and fatherland. Evoking a mystical African anteriority apart from the shameful history of African American slavery, Macon nevertheless has no desire to go back to Africa. Since contemporary Africa is still in the throes of imperialism and decolonization, he establishes himself as a property owner on a par with his white counterparts in Michigan. Similarly, Milkman complains about his last name: the past means nothing to him except for an embarrassing origin and his current entitlement.

In response to Milkman’s resentment, Guitar puts the twists and turns of African American history in perspective: “Niggers get their names the way they get everything else—the best way they can. The best way they can” (88). Since African American names often originate from white masters’ names on the plantation, owning a name in the postslavery era is a constant reminder of slavery. Even though the black man has risen from the status of property to that of personhood, he inherits his white master’s name and history. In *Song of Solomon*, the name “Macon Dead” designates a more complicated heritage. Although Jake seems to have a name of his own, the name “Dead” is still related to his absent father Solomon and the drunk Yankee official. The desire for freedom is always an unfinished business; it always generates loose ends.¹⁷

Given such an “origin,” the three Macons prop up historical periodization: Jake is a self-sufficient farmer, Macon is a propertied landowner, and Milkman is a dependent freeloader. The three of them attest to different stages of emancipation, citizenship, and autonomy. Each son

¹⁷ On the aftermath and postmemory of slavery, see, for example, Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*; Christina Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Hortense J. Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); and Patricia Yaeger, *Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women’s Writing, 1930-1990* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

establishes his power by symbolically killing his father, rendering him a nominal “dead” predecessor. But the onomastic repetition also evokes a transgenerational beat or refrain. Addressing the repetitive nature of black music, James A. Snead defines the recursive “cut” as “the desire to rely upon ‘the thing that is there to pick up’”: instead of moving forward once and for all, “[t]he ‘cut’ overtly insists on the repetitive nature of the music, by abruptly skipping it back to another beginning which we have already heard.”¹⁸ In *Song of Solomon*, the name “Macon Dead” has a similar effect: accumulating meaning over generations, it does not just have the son add a new layer of meaning to his father’s name or fuse time spans by “creating strange phantasmagoric resemblances and resonances” across generations.¹⁹ Rather, it returns to the genealogical “cut” whenever a Macon Dead is born. As a result, the three Macons circulate a history that bleeds and breeds across time. Not only is the first Macon never quite dead, but the three Macons give meaning—predetermined, posthumous, chronological, and retrojective—to one another. Susceptible to a transhistorical loop, the name “operates as both quotation and invention.”²⁰ Even though Jake instates the name, he is not its sole owner. When Macon and Milkman repeat the name, they give meaning to it not only in terms of their own generations but also in terms of an intergenerational lineage.

Taken together, the phrase “three Deads alive” reinforces and undermines individual autonomy: fathers are best when they are dead. To be sure, Macon feels honored to work abreast with Jake, who establishes a farm in postslavery Pennsylvania. Even though Macon’s

¹⁸ James A. Snead, “Repetition as a Figure of Black Culture,” in *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, 68, 69.

¹⁹ Deborah Guth, “A Blessing and a Burden: The Relation to the Past in *Sula*, *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved*,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 39, no. 3-4 (Fall/Winter 1993): 589.

²⁰ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 33.

materialism is abrasive, it in part results from the traumatic history of slavery.²¹ Milkman himself also has helped Macon with his booming business. But the idea of paternal emulation often makes the son speak of his father in tones of mixed respect and distaste. Striving to fulfill the modernity of emancipation, citizenship, and autonomy, the three Macons are respectable African American men. Yet the discourse of fulfillment also sullies their relationships. Acknowledging dead ancestors and earlier generations, they often aim to break from tradition or improve on the past as an inferior state. Treating male homosociality as the only means to maturity, the paternal paradigm ultimately pathologizes or infantilizes father-daughter and mother-son relationships.²²

Although Milkman learns to challenge Macon, such maturity is fictitious. In honor of the patrilineal, Eurocentric discourse of development, critics have compared Milkman to Odysseus: just as Odysseus' homecoming establishes "a prototype of the bourgeois individual" who "loses himself in order to find himself," Milkman's quest takes the form of a belated initiation into manhood.²³ But such a reading projects a trajectory of enlightenment on Milkman: it reads transcendence into Milkman's suspension at the end of the novel, translating Jake's and

²¹ Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber approaches Jake and Macon's relationship in terms of historical trauma. According to Schreiber, "Macon's business dealings have been influenced by the knowledge that his father worked for sixteen years only to be tricked out of the fruits of his labor." In other words, Macon is not materialistic by nature; he "inherits his father's traumatic history in white culture, which produces a legacy of ownership." See Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber, "Inherited and Generational Trauma: Coming of Age in *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, and *Song of Solomon*" in *Race, Trauma, and Home in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 99.

²² A case in point is the Moynihan Report. Emphasizing the detrimental effects of absent fathers on black families, this report translates caring black matriarchs into emasculating figures. For critiques of the Moynihan Report, see, for example, James Berger, "Ghosts of Liberalism: Morrison's *Beloved* and the Moynihan Report," *PMLA* 111, no. 3 (May 1996): 408-420; bell hooks, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 51; and Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 123.

²³ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1972 [1995]), 43, 48. On the parallel between Milkman and Odysseus, see Kimberly W. Benston, "Re-Weaving the 'Ulysses Scene': Enchantment, Post-Oedipal Identity, and the Buried Text of Blackness in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*," in *Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex, and Nationality in the Modern Text*, ed. Hortense J. Spillers (New York: Routledge, 1991), 87-109; Judith Fletcher, "Signifying Circe in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*," *Classical World* 99, no. 4 (2006): 405-418; and A. Leslie Harris, "Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*," *MELUS* 7, No. 3 (1980): 69-76.

Solomon's problematic homecoming into Milkman and Pilate's own. While Milkman's vicarious homecoming is exhilarating, it does not undo the historical desertion or amnesia of his forefathers: Solomon seeks his freedom by leaving his offspring behind; Jake owns his freedom by forgetting his father. Imposing a chronological progression on Milkman's male lineage, the arc of enlightenment translates the communal creolized genealogy into the making or undoing of a man. When the desire to overcome the past becomes the operative tenet in historicity, the three Macons' relations to the past must serve the present and the future. And such triumphalism comes at the dear cost of symbolic patricide. Odysseus' killing of Penelope's suitors is only a literal execution of a man's restoration of his place in history. Under the rubric of enlightenment, Solomon, Jake, and Macon not only guide Milkman to manhood; they are in his way to autonomy and self-realization.

A free African American in the North, Milkman has shunned his family history and cared little about other blacks in the South and Africa. But he finally learns to inherit Hagar's hair in the same manner Pilate inherits the white man's bones. Such ownership of the dead, however, is not the same as Odysseus' reclaiming of his property, family, and throne. It is also different from Jake's acquisition of his new name or Macon's repetition of Jake's name. Milkman is not taking back what used to belong to him, nor does he assert a break from his forefathers. Instead, he learns to connect to the past and the dead in an ethical, communal manner. If the progressivist ethos renders the dead either an irrelevant past divorced from the present or a divining tool to enlighten the current traveler (as in Odysseus' necromancy [*nekylia*] in the underworld), Milkman finally upends such teleology.²⁴ He owns the dead because he is indebted to them, not because he

²⁴ On the attitudes toward death in ancient Greece, see Emily Vermeule, *Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); Ian Morris, "Attitudes toward Death in Archaic

is entitled to possess or dispose of them. While the three Deads in the male lineage are alive because each Macon is haunted by the past and trying to get rid of his predecessor(s), the three Deads in the creolized genealogy are alive because Milkman learns to live with the past as part—rather than the end point—of a transatlantic community.²⁵

Female Tutelage

While the repetition of the name “Macon Dead” ironically suggests symbolic patricide, Ruth’s and Pilate’s tutelage of Milkman reorients Milkman toward maternal care. Highlighting gender, I do not mean that women are better teachers. Nor do I mean to reduce Ruth and Pilate to maternal figures, defining them only in terms of their relations to Milkman. Instead, I stress Milkman’s relationships to his mother and aunt in order to tease out temporalities and ethics at odds with those codified by the nation-state, male homosociality, and the discourse of emancipation, citizenship, and autonomy. Ruth’s prolonged breastfeeding of Milkman and Pilate’s communication with Jake’s ghost are scandalously anachronistic practices in modern, urban Michigan, but to dismiss them as backward subscribes to the logic of Western modernity.

Milkman’s nickname derives from Ruth’s prolonged lactation. At the sight of Ruth suckling the four-year-old Milkman, the flunky Freddie exclaimed: “I be damn, Miss Rufie. When the last time I seen that? I don’t even know the last time I seen that. I mean, ain’t nothing wrong with it. I mean, old folks swear by it. It’s just, you know, you don’t see it up here much. . . .” (14). Shocked, Freddie continues, “Used to be a lot of womenfolk nurse they kids a long time

Greece,” *Classical Antiquity* 8, no. 2 (October 1989): 296-320; and Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

²⁵ I am indebted to David Caron for the idea of living with the past. See David Caron, *My Father and I: The Marais and the Queerness of Community* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 205.

down South. Lot of 'em. But you don't see it much no more. I knew a family—the mother wasn't too quick, though—nursed hers till the boy, I reckon, was near 'bout thirteen. But that's a bit much, ain't it?" (14). Dismissing prolonged lactation as an anachronism in 1930s Michigan, Freddie implies that Ruth is too slow to wean her son off her milk. Derisively, he starts calling Ruth's son Milkman. When Macon hears about the nickname, he does not care about its origin; he simply feels that the name is "dirty, intimate, and hot" (15), as well as "coated with disgust" (16).

Portraying Ruth as overly intimate with her son, Macon also accuses Ruth of committing incest with her father. According to Macon, Ruth not only had Dr. Foster deliver her daughters, with "her legs wide open," but she also lay "[n]aked as a yard dog" next to his dead body, "sucking his fingers" (71, 73, 74). Upon hearing Macon's accusation, Milkman starts developing two consecutive images: first, Macon and Dr. Foster lying in bed with Ruth, each nibbling on a breast; then, he himself sucking Ruth's breasts (77). Even though Milkman tries to dispel the images of incest by Macon's grudge against Ruth (for not persuading Dr. Foster to lend Macon money) and Ruth's maternal instinct, he cannot help seeing his mother as a loose woman who clings to her father and her son.

But to read Ruth as an incestuous daughter/mother pathologizes female attachment and infantilizes Milkman. According to Edith Frampton, Ruth's extended breastfeeding forges a link with the ancestral epistemologies in the South, resists the discourses of middle-class womanhood, and creates an intersubjective relation between mother and son.²⁶ Instead of abiding by the normative timeline of weaning in the modern North, Ruth evokes a suckling genealogy

²⁶ Edith Frampton, "'You just can't fly on off and leave a body': The Intercorporeal Breastfeeding Subject of Toni Morrison's Fiction," *Women: A Cultural Review* 16, no. 2 (July 2005): 148, 151. On Ruth's maternity and sexuality, also see Leak, *Racial Myths*, 103; Eleanor Branch, "Through the Maze of the Oedipal: Milkman's Search for Self in *Song of Solomon*," *Literature and Psychology* 41, no. 1-2 (1995): 63; and Philip M. Weinstein, *What Else But Love?: The Ordeal of Race in Faulkner and Morrison* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 30.

stemming from the Caribbean and West African societies. Such a genealogy foils the tenets of progress and efficiency in the industrial North. According to Kenneth Morgan, African slave women extend lactation to moderate an otherwise hectic production line of paternity and slavery on Jamaican sugar plantations:

African women in the British Caribbean appear to have nursed their children for two years, sometimes up to three or four years, whereas North American slave women breastfed their infants no longer than a year. Longer lactation, it is argued, would have served as a natural means of contraception, either through the physiological suppression of fertility in the mother by producing breast milk or through the social impact of constant nurturing of infants and consequently unavailability to men. Lactation periods of two, three, or four years have been interpreted as carryovers from traditions in West African societies.²⁷

To be sure, it has become commonplace to see black women as big mammies, to translate prolonged lactation into the baby's belated maturity, and to subscribe to an ethnographic division between premodern blacks and modern whites. But Morgan paints a much more complicated picture of prolonged lactation: malnutrition, overwork, flogging, self-abortion, infanticide, bad medical conditions, physical separation from husbands, and taboos against postpartum intercourse all may contribute to the low fertility among Jamaican slave women. Between the end of the slave trade in 1807 and emancipation in 1834, lengthy lactation not only reduced nursing women's workload on the plantation. The milk was also one of the few sources of food to feed babies. Even though the myth of the big black mammy persists in the 1930s United

²⁷ Kenneth Morgan, "Slave Women and Reproduction in Jamaica, ca. 1776-1834," in *The Modern Atlantic*, vol. 2 of *Women and Slavery: The Americas*, ed. Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph Calder Miller (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2008), 37-38. Also see Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838* (Kingston: Heinemann Publishers, 1990), 126.

States, it is not always the case that black women have so much milk that they can suckle more children than their own and postpone weaning.²⁸

Tracing Ruth's breastfeeding to plantation practices, Valérie Loichot argues that Ruth institutes a milk genealogy.²⁹ Positioned in the black Atlantic, Ruth's milk streams across geo- and bio-political confines. Just as transoceanic imaginaries evoke "histories [as] bodies of water [that] stream into one another," so too does Ruth's milk defy the notion of a linear origin.³⁰ At the same time, Ruth's milk genealogy reconfigures patriarchy. Undoing relations like father and daughter, husband and wife, father and son, father-in-law and son-in-law, as well as grandfather and grandson, the nursing ensemble of Ruth, Dr. Foster, Macon, and Milkman crumples patriarchal generationality. Breastfeeding three men, Ruth does not necessarily render Dr. Foster, Macon, and Milkman her sons. But she definitely counters the three-Macon enterprise, which only recognizes father-son relationships in the Dead family tree. Connecting to Foster, Macon,

²⁸ The myth of the big black mammy has a strong bearing on black cultures. Asked to explain a vignette of four women—girls and women—suckling each other from her installation *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven* (1995), Kara Walker answers, "History. My constant need or, in general, a constant need to suckle from history, as though history could be seen as a seemingly endless supply of mother's milk represented by the big black mammy of old. For myself, I have this constant battle—this fear of weaning. It's really a battle that I apply to the black community as well, because all of our progress is predicated on having a very tactile link to a brutal past." Kara Walker, Interview by Liz Armstrong, *No Place (Like Home): Zarina Bhimji, Nick Deocampo, Willie Doherty, Kay Hassan, Kcho, Gary Simmons, Meyer Vaisman, Kara Walker* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1997), 113. On Walker's art, also see Joan Copjec, "Moses, the Egyptian and the Big Black Mammy of the Antebellum South: Freud (with Kara Walker) on Race and History," *"Identities": Journal for Politics, Gender and Culture* 1, no. 2 (Winter 2002): 67-90; Annette Dixon, ed., *Kara Walker: Pictures from Another Time* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Museum of Art, 2002); Darby English, "This Is Not about the Past: Silhouettes in the Work of Kara Walker," in *Kara Walker: Narratives of a Negress*, ed. Ian Berry et al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 140-167; Arlene R. Keizer, "Gone Astray in the Flesh: Kara Walker, Black Women Writers, and African American Postmemory," *PMLA* 123, no. 5 (October 2008): 1649-1672; Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies*, 153-187; Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, *Seeing the Unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Amy Tang, "Postmodern Repetitions: Parody, Trauma, and the Case of Kara Walker," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (2010): 142-172; and Patricia Yaeger, "Circum-Atlantic Superabundance: Milk as World-Making in Alice Randall and Kara Walker," *American Literature* 78, no. 4 (December 2006): 769-798.

²⁹ Valérie Loichot, *Orphan Narratives: The Postplantation Literature of Faulkner, Glissant, Morrison, and Saint-John Perse* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 171.

³⁰ DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots*, 54. DeLoughrey coins the term *tidalectics* to reconceptualize diaspora historiography. According to DeLoughrey, "tidalectics foreground a cyclical model of history and resist the teleology of a Hegelian dialectical synthesis" (51).

Milkman, and the nursing mothers in the Caribbean and West Africa, Ruth's milk floods the consequential and hierarchical logic of generationality, as well as the historicism and modernity shored up by the nation-state. Although her milk genealogy is not necessarily cyclical or oceanic in a planetary sense, it is anything but teleological. Churning, commingling, and circulating bloodlines, Ruth's transatlantic milk inundates Macon's ink and his patriarchal traffic in women.³¹ Superabundant with milk, Ruth transforms the germinative, arborescent structure of paternal kinship into a streaming ensemble of nursing.³²

Just as Ruth's milk genealogy rewrites the incest taboo, questions normative weaning, and purges Milkman of the stigma of arrested development, so too does Pilate's earring recast kinship relations. Placing the name picked by Jake in her mother's brass box, the twelve-year-old Pilate had the midwife Circe and a local blacksmith solder and create the family heirloom with gold wire from the Butlers to make an earring. Putting on the earring, Pilate not only reclaimed her parentage in place of her absent navel. She also incorporated her father's murderers, the midwife who delivered everyone in her hometown, and the whole black community who knew that Pilate and Macon were alive by witnessing or hearing about her name in the brass box. Just as the "golden thread" of Ruth's milk forms a transatlantic network (14), so too does the Butlers' gold wire connect Pilate's body to her parents' remains. Without this thread, the earring—and creolized genealogy—will fall apart.

Born without her mother, bereft of her father, estranged from her brother, and giving birth to Reba without marrying the island man, Pilate has been deprived of family, friendship,

³¹ On the analogy between male ink and female milk, see Hélène Cixous [trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen], "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs* 1, no. 4 (Summer 1976): 881.

³² One might immediately think of the arborescent pseudo-multiplicities and rhizomatic multiplicities in *A Thousand Plateaus*, but I highlight Ruth's lactating agency and her connection to black histories. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 8.

and even religion. Isolated, she nevertheless “acquired a deep concern for and about human relationships” (149). When Pilate first introduces Milkman to his cousin Hagar, she calls him Hagar’s “brother” (43). As Reba corrects her, Pilate retorts, “I mean what’s the difference in the way you act toward ’em? Don’t you have to act the same way to both?” (44). Later when the jilted Hagar hates her own hair, Pilate soothes her: “How can he [Milkman] not love your hair? It’s the same hair that grows out of his own armpits. . . . It’s his hair too. He got to love it” (315). If Ruth would not choose her husband over her father, Pilate would not favor certain people just because they are closer in kinship. Loving strangers and even enemies, Pilate values the white man in the cave and the Butlers as parts of her creolized genealogy.

Under such female tutelage, Milkman starts to appreciate Ruth’s visits to Dr. Foster’s grave and Pilate’s communication with Jake’s ghost. After giving birth to Reba, Pilate heard from Jake’s ghost: “You just can’t fly on off and leave a body” (208). Interpreting Jake’s words as instructions for collecting the white man’s bones, Pilate reasoned: “You can’t take a life and walk off and leave it. Life is life. Precious. And the dead you kill is yours. They stay with you anyway, in your mind. So it’s a better thing, a more better thing to have the bones right there with you wherever you go. That way, it frees up your mind” (208). Defining freedom not in terms of autonomy but in terms of obligation and inheritance, Pilate’s past-oriented ethics defies the progressivist discourse of African American and individual exceptionalisms. While Macon feels tethered to the history of slavery, Pilate feels liberated by carrying the white man’s bones with her.

Pilate’s communication with Jake’s ghost also contradicts modern treatments of the dead. As Michel Foucault and others point out, modernity ushers in the medical association of death with disease and old age, the enterprise of healthcare and insurance, the separation of hospitals,

morgues, and cemeteries from daily life, and the technologically mediated death scenes in affluent countries. As religion and superstition give way to science and democracy, secularization generates a new way of governmentality: biopolitics.³³ But Pilate stretches her relationship with Jake beyond mortality. While modern commemoration of public figures may take the form of sensational spectacle (when it comes to the death of celebrities, presidents, or terrorist victims) or somber formality (when it comes to the death of wartime heroes or casualties reported on TV), Pilate's communication with her dead father registers a father-daughter bonding at variance with the paranoid temporality of father-son emulation and symbolic patricide.³⁴

And such past-oriented temporality becomes particularly meaningful in a novel laden with the dead. Beginning with the suicidal flight of the insurance agent Robert Smith, the novel is jammed with Guitar's sawed father, Emmett Till's murder, Dr. Foster's ashen corpse, Jake's ghost, Singing Bird's maternal death, Hagar's demise of unrequited love, the four colored girls blown out of a church (referring to the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing), the Seven Days vigilantes' killing of white people, Pilate's inheritance of the white man's bones, her death at the near end of the novel, the urban legend of the white lunatic Winnie Ruth, the hunting of wildlife, and the possible deaths of Milkman and Guitar at the end of the novel. Even Milkman's last name is "Dead." The sheer abundance of the dead/Deads suggests that characters are constantly risking their own lives, killing lives, or/and reeking of others' deaths: "Perhaps that's what all human relationships boiled down to: Would you save my life? or would you take it?" (331). But

³³ See Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 22-27; and Margaret Gibson, "Real-Life Death: Between Public and Private, Interior and Exterior, the Real and the Fictional," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 110, no. 4 (Fall 2011): 917-932.

³⁴ Sociologist Stjepan G. Meštrović coins the term *postemotionalism* to describe the compassion fatigue in mass, industrial societies. See Stjepan G. Meštrović, *Postemotional Society* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997).

the body count amounts to something more than racial trauma, political strife, and amatory lament; it also suggests the poverty of progressivist discourses in ideas like adulthood, freedom, and reproduction. Human beings do not just grow up, become independent, sire offspring, and perish; their lives are punctuated by threats of their own death, other people's deaths, and the afterlives of the dead. All these disturb the linear notions of maturity and mortality.

As Ruth's and Pilate's female tutelage indicates, engaging with the dead is as important as surviving others' deaths and moving forward. In light of Ruth's milk genealogy, marriage, mortality, and even the incest taboo do not eclipse, overtake, or terminate Ruth's attachment to Dr. Foster and Milkman. The deceased father, the possessive husband, the suckling son, and the unknown lactating women in the Atlantic world are all parts of the nursing network. Thanks to Pilate, Milkman also sorties out of the pitfall of black paternity and male homosociality. Under the banner of creolized genealogy, Milkman is not the end of the Dead family. Rather, he is a star in a baroque constellation of his disowned kin (Dr. Foster, Pilate, Reba, and Hagar), removed townspeople (the black folks in Danville), reclaimed relatives (Jake, Singing Bird, Solomon, Ryna, and Singing Bird's Native American relative Susan Byrd), fortuitous friends (the Southerners with whom Milkman fights and goes hunting), and wronged victims (the white man in the cave), as well as new and old enemies (Guitar and the Butlers).

Dwelling on Ruth's and Pilate's female tutelage, I do not argue that only women can cross familial and racial borders. Earlier in the novel, Milkman prefers Franklin Delano Roosevelt to his own father—not because of FDR's exceptional presidency, but because of Milkman's shared limpness. To distinguish himself from Macon, Milkman crosses the color line. Instead of constructing a female creolized genealogy, I argue that Ruth and Pilate open Milkman to people other than his conjugal relatives. Thanks to Ruth's milk genealogy and Pilate's earring

network, Milkman does not outgrow the epithet “mama’s boy” by debasing women. A “Milkman,” he has maternal attachment written in his name and learns to live with the aftermaths of the slave trade across the Atlantic.

Although Macon seems to represent a white assimilationist as opposed to Pilate as a black mammy, they together contribute to Milkman’s changing relation to the past. Believing in material accumulation and paternal identification, Macon has estranged Milkman from his mother, his family, and even black history. He drives forward to escape the Butlers, abandon the white man, renounce Pilate, surpass his father, and pursue wealth. When he looks back on his family history, he envisions a mystical African forefather in place of the embarrassing Jake. Such historicity is more about denying slavery than a wish to go back to his roots. In contrast, Pilate teaches Milkman to turn backward—not to get something from the past (though he does) and move forward, but to surrender himself to the constellation of relations beyond the Dead family. She helps create a creolized genealogy by carrying with her the white man’s bones and the *bricolage* earring. Owning the dead ethically instead of nominally or proprietarily, Pilate teaches Milkman to “fly on off [without leaving] a body,” to fly “[w]ithout ever leaving the ground” (208, 336). Taken together, Milkman receives more than “a dual inheritance, masculine and feminine, a different duality which supports, supplements, and multiplies the fractured and ultimately debilitating [father-son] duality of the paternal.”³⁵ His heritage is creolized by Pilate’s ethical ownership and his own travel down South. He matures by orienting himself toward the past.

“Riding Backward”

³⁵ Marianne Hirsch, “Knowing Their Names: Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*,” in *New Essays on Song of Solomon*, ed. Valerie Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 89.

I have defined Milkman's boyishness as his growing susceptibility to the past: instead of moving past his family history and fulfilling his autonomy, Milkman starts to acknowledge the recursive genealogical "cuts" and numerous connections in a creolized genealogy. I also have defined the narrative as boyish for its past-oriented temporality: instead of defining maturity in terms of mother-son separation and father-son identification, the narrative focuses on Ruth's and Pilate's connections to their dead fathers and complicates the paternal relationships in the three-Macon enterprise. In conclusion, I want to juxtapose Milkman's earlier ride on Macon's Packard with his final leap in the novel. In a narrative where characters travel around the country (Pilate and Reba), leave their hometowns voluntarily or involuntarily (Solomon, Jake, Singing Bird, Macon, Guitar, and Freddie, among others), feel displaced even at their own home (Milkman, Ruth, and her two daughters), fly across borders (Solomon, Robert Smith, and Milkman), practice various sorts of homecoming (Solomon, Jake, Pilate, and Milkman), and participate in cultural practices across the Atlantic (Ruth and Pilate), it is crucial to see how Milkman's "riding backward" engages with the restlessness of the black Atlantic and evades the progress narrative of self-autonomy (32).

After Milkman learns about Solomon's flight and buries Jake's bones with Pilate in the South, the novel ends with Milkman's suspended leap toward Guitar: "As fleet and bright as a lodestar he wheeled toward Guitar and it did not matter which one of them would give up his ghost in the killing arm of his brother. For now he knew what Shalimar [Solomon] knew: If you surrendered to the air, you could *ride* it" (337). Critics often interpret Milkman's leap as a willful suicide, a headlong engagement with despair, nihilism, and sterility, a healing sacrifice of love for Guitar, a call-and-response embrace of the past, a symbolic communication with the

ancestors, or/and a freedom defined as complex connectedness.³⁶ While such readings are plausible, they often derive from the anxiety about black futurity, about the continuum between the present and the past, or about the teleology of liberation: since Milkman and Guitar remain wifeless and childless, any death will be regrettable. But if Milkman has been freed from his Northern liberalism, he does not die in vain. Dwelling on transcendence, one critic even argues, “Whether or not Milkman Dead dies in the end is less important, finally, than what the reader does with him after the novel ends, as our interpretative processes continue. He is our dead now, our textual ancestor to carry with us, to stimulate our imaginations.”³⁷ It seems that Milkman is at his most useful when he passes the torch to enlighten the living and the reader.

Against the discourse of enlightenment, I argue that Milkman’s aerial suspension underwrites a backward riding: not one that forces Milkman to face the receding past with the same unease he had when he looked out the back window in his father’s Packard or one that compels him to fly back to Africa like Solomon, but one that connects him to a skein of relations beyond the Solomon-Jake-Macon-Milkman lineage through the past’s shards (bones, songs, names, ghosts, milk, earrings, and particular cultural practices). Such a backward riding defies the discourse of fulfillment (the search for gold, freedom, or enlightenment). The cinematic “cut” of Milkman’s leap is also congruous with the various sorts of cuts in the novel: the genealogical “cuts” of the three Macons, the musical “cuts” in the songs of Solomon and Hagar (303, 317-

³⁶ See J. Brooks Bouson, *Quiet As It’s Kept: Shame, Trauma, and Race in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 76; Harris, “Myth as Structure,” 75; Catherine Carr Lee, “The South in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*: Initiation, Healing, and Home,” in *Toni Morrison’s Song of Solomon: A Casebook*, ed. Jan Furman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 59; Middleton, “Orality,” 74; Ashraf H. A. Rushdy, *Remembering Generations: Race and Family in Contemporary African American Fiction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 77; Genevieve Fabre, “Genealogical Archaeology or the Quest for Legacy in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*,” in *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison*, ed. Nellie Y. McKay (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1988), 113; and Guth, “A Blessing and a Burden,” 584.

³⁷ Linda Krumholz, “Dead Teachers: Rituals of Manhood and Rituals of Reading in *Song of Solomon*,” in *Toni Morrison’s Song of Solomon: A Casebook*, 223.

318), the narrative “cuts” of dialogue, mythology, radio news, urban legends, and chapters (Morrison begins several chapters *in medias res*), and the migratory “cuts” of many characters. Taken together, these “cuts” undo linear progressivism. Instead of reading Milkman’s journey as an accumulative arc of reclaiming the past and self-searching, I see his final surrender to the air as an act of getting over himself. The point is not how Milkman has grown over the course of the quest; it is how he gets over flight as escape or/and freedom in favor of flight as connection.³⁸

Beginning the novel with the flights of a daring adventurer, an unsung hero, an obscured ancestor, and a disappointed boy, *Song of Solomon* is about the memories and aftermaths of the past, not about making progress over generations. In 1927, the aviator Charles Lindbergh made the first solo transatlantic flight. He became a national hero, leading to a boom in air travel and aviation.³⁹ In contrast, the black “[Robert] Smith didn’t draw as big a crowd as Lindbergh” (3). On February 18, 1931, the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance agent and secret Seven Days vigilante decided to fly from Mercy Hospital in Michigan to the other side of Lake Superior with his wide silk blue wings. While Smith’s exploit crashed, the date also heralded the upcoming birth of the first black baby inside Mercy Hospital, Milkman.⁴⁰ Before Milkman was born the next day, Pilate, with “her eyes fixed on Mr. Robert Smith,” sang about a “Sugarman cut across the sky” and “gone home” (6). This mysterious Sugarman turns out to be Pilate’s grandfather Solomon, who left his family behind in Virginia and flew back to Africa.⁴¹ With these flights

³⁸ On the flight motif, also see Peter Brück, “Returning to One’s Roots: The Motif of Searching and Flying in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*,” in *The Afro-American Novel since 1960*, ed. Peter Brück and Wolfgang Karrer (Amsterdam: Grüner, 1982), 289-305; Lee, “To Ride the Air”; and Royster, “Milkman’s Flying.”

³⁹ See Charles A. Lindbergh, *The Spirit of St. Louis* (New York: Scribner, 1953).

⁴⁰ Morrison was born on the exact date—February 18, 1931—that Smith committed suicide. Perhaps she sees herself as a carrier of Smith’s legacy, bearing his death as Pilate does with the white man’s bones. She might also see herself as another woman who sings and writes Milkman into being.

⁴¹ Solomon’s homecoming flight has a folklore streak. Legend has it that a witch doctor’s son on a South Carolina plantation pronounced a secret word and led his fellow slaves back to Africa. See Julius Lester, “People Who Could Fly,” in *Black Folktales* (New York: Grove Press, 1969), 99-103.

evoking a gamut of emotions and meanings—heroic exploit and slave trade, freedom and abandonment, transcendence and suicide—Milkman feels ambivalent about such a genealogy: “Mr. Smith’s blue silk wings must have left their mark, because when the little boy discovered, at four, the same thing Mr. Smith had learned earlier—that only birds and airplanes could fly—he lost all interest in himself” (9). Against the official, glorious flight of Lindbergh, Solomon’s and Smith’s flights send a mixed message: the triumph of flying solo is often accompanied by the sadness of someone left behind. Although the “someone” may also take flight some day, the heritage is mixed with envy and accusation.

If Solomon’s and Smith’s flights denote a mix of freedom and desertion, Macon’s equation of wealth with freedom subscribes to a simplistic discourse of social mobility: “Money is freedom, Macon [Milkman]. The only real freedom there is,” says Macon to his son (163). Fleeing Pennsylvania to escape Jake’s murderers, Macon has made a fortune in Michigan. Yet, his mobility is encapsulated in the hearse-like Packard. During his Sunday rides, the five-year-old Milkman was forced to sit between his parents in the front, facing backward:

So it was only by kneeling on the dove gray seat and looking out the back window that he could see anything other than the laps, feet, and hands of his parents, the dashboard, or the silver winged woman poised at the tip of the Packard. But riding backward made him uneasy. It was like flying blind, and not knowing where he was going—just where he had been—troubled him. (32)

The Packard sports a splendid emblem, the Goddess of Speed holding a car wheel. In contrast, both Macon and Milkman fall short: Macon wants to make another Macon out of his son, but such paternal emulation is deadening. Milkman abhors what he sees in the past, but he does not know where he is heading. Milkman’s blindfolded vision of the future attests to a ruthless

teleology, which is all about renouncing past experiences or relations. Believing that financial independence will grant him total freedom, Milkman is “flying blind.”

Serendipitously, Milkman’s trip to the South rewards him with the grand scale of a creolized genealogy. But not until Hagar and Pilate die does he get over the transcendental, escapist concept of flight. After Pilate buries her earring along with Jake’s bones at Solomon’s Leap, Guitar shoots her. Before she passes away, Pilate sighs, “I wish I’d a knowed more people. I would of loved ’em all. If I’d a knowed more, I would a loved more” (336). A daughter who had talked to her father’s ghost, a wanderer who had carried the white man’s bones with her, and a shaman who had brought Milkman into being, Pilate combines genealogy with ethics, love, and knowledge: knowing more people increases not only the size of her community but also her capability of love. In contrast to most men in her family, Pilate does not leave people behind. Just as the homophone of her name “pilot” designates an aircraft or ship commander, so too does Pilate preside over a creolized network across time, space, and race. At her death scene, Milkman finally sings for Pilate, replacing the “Solomon” in the Shalimar children’s song with “Sugargirl” (336). If Pilate had sung him into existence, Milkman now sings his aunt into cultural memory. Chanting, Milkman attracts two birds: “One dived into the new grave and scooped something shiny in its beak before it flew away” (336). As the bird takes off with Pilate’s communal earring, it stretches the golden thread of relations skyward. Amazed, Milkman now knows why he loves Pilate so: “Without ever leaving the ground, she could fly” (336). If Solomon, Macon, and Milkman had abandoned their wives, sisters, or cousins for their pursuit of freedom, Pilate gives herself away.⁴²

⁴² Bev Hogue studies the bone-burying scene as “a monument to the transience of monuments in a world where the search for authenticity results at best in a meaning that will eventually take flight.” See Bev Hogue, “Naming the Bones: Bodies of Knowledge in Contemporary Fiction,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 52, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 127.

According to Michael Awkward, *Song of Solomon* is “a record both of transcendent (male) flight and of the immeasurable pain that results for the female who, because she has no access to knowledge, cannot participate in this flight.”⁴³ But the very two phrases “transcendent flight” and “access to knowledge” are polemic in two respects. First, even though Milkman finds out the “origins” of the white man’s bones and his own ancestry, he does not rise from bondage to liberation. In fact, the past-oriented temporality of the novel is suspicious of the discourse of enlightenment and progressivism. Second, the gendered reading of fugitive males and forsaken females applies to Hagar and Ryna only. As Ruth’s transoceanic lactation and Pilate’s communal earring indicate, women access and create genealogical knowledge through their bodies. Embodying creolized genealogies, Ruth and Pilate fly without leaving their beloveds behind; they fly not to dodge enemies or seek freedom, but to suture connections.

Past-oriented, Ruth and Pilate counter the future-oriented paternal emulation. And their connections to deceased fathers, unrelated strangers, and even paternal murderers deliver Milkman from the progressivism of self-realization.⁴⁴ If Milkman’s and Guitar’s bachelorhood suggests a crisis of black futurity, women are in no less danger of extinction: Hagar, Circe, Lena, Elizabeth Butler (the last of the Butlers), Susan Byrd, and Grace Long (Byrd’s garrulous friend) all stay or die single by the end of the novel. Even though Milkman’s second sister, First Corinthians, elopes with a Seven Days ex-member, they are unlikely to bear children in their

⁴³ Awkward, “Unruly and Let Loose,” 152. On *Song of Solomon* as a story about Milkman’s transcendence, also see Royster, “Milkman’s Flying,” 440. Royster says Milkman’s gained knowledge of Solomon “produces a spiritual rebirth or transcendence . . . that is suggested symbolically when he returns again to Sweet’s and takes her swimming in a river nearby.”

⁴⁴ Morrison herself critiques contemporary progressivism. According to Morrison, some secular, psychoanalytic, feminist, or other “progressive” forms of thought base their arguments on independence or departure from the past: “So what’s left? There’s nothing left to love, except the children and the member of the opposite sex. . . . It’s not the comradeship of past generations, it’s romantic—love—eternal. . . . Kill your ancestors, you kill all. There’s no future, there’s no past, there’s just an intolerable present. And it is intolerable under the circumstances, it’s not even life.” See Toni Morrison, “The One Out of Sequence,” in *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danille Taylor-Guthrie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 73.

middle age.⁴⁵ But the point is not how fragile the lineage is or how crucial procreation is. It is how malleable the genealogy can be. Even though Milkman and Guitar are childless at the end of the novel, they are not dead. More important, the Shalimar children open up the genealogical avenue. Singing about Solomon, they pass on the encrypted genealogy to Milkman, who in turn decodes the “Sugarman” in Pilate’s song.⁴⁶ In *Song of Solomon*, genealogy does not just pass from father to son. It also travels backward, sideways, posthumously, and anachronistically. Though much younger and not necessarily hereditarily related, the Shalimar children can be Milkman’s forefathers and heirs at the same time.

Seen in this light, Milkman’s final leap is not sacrificial, revengeful, or transcendental. He is not copying Solomon or Smith. Reaching backward, Milkman does not aim to reclaim the male lineage. Instead, he surrenders himself to the creolized genealogy of gold, milk, bone, and song, opens himself to the black Atlantic, and gives himself up to ghosts like Smith, Solomon, Ryna, Jake, Singing Bird, Hagar, Pilate, Dr. Foster, the Butlers, and the white man in the cave. Instead of seeing his family as the dead weight to be disposed of, he learns to carry it like Pilate’s inheritance of the white man’s bones. Flying toward Guitar, Milkman is not the blindfolded boy in his father’s “hearse.” It is deadly only if we dismiss Milkman’s aerial suspension and his past-oriented, creolized genealogy.

⁴⁵ Jane S. Bakerman argues that First Corinthians, Hagar, and Pilate present failed cases of female initiation: “Each of the three defines herself only according to the standards and desires of a beloved man: Pilate lives her entire life under her misapprehension of her father’s messages; Hagar dies because she cannot be the kind of woman Milkman desires; and Corinthians abandons the self-image she has cherished for a lifetime to find menial work in a white-controlled world and to find sexual release with a man who demands that she submit completely.” While I agree with her reading of Hagar, Bakerman largely defines successful womanhood as independence from men. Despite her misinterpretation, Pilate champions egalitarian ethics and embraces father-daughter attachment. Though not a white-collar career woman, Corinthians asserts her sexual freedom from Macon. See Jane S. Bakerman, “Failures of Love: Female Initiation in the Novels of Toni Morrison,” *American Literature* 52, no. 4 (January 1981): 563.

⁴⁶ Kathleen O’Shaughnessy calls the Shalimar children “a chorus and transmitter of genealogy.” See Kathleen O’Shaughnessy, “‘Life life life life’: The Community as Chorus in *Song of Solomon*,” in *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison*, 130.

Wheeling out of teleology, Milkman matures by “riding backward.” According to Morrison, Milkman’s final ride is a “sexual act”: “the actual penetration of a woman and having an orgasm”; it is at once “dominating the woman” and “surrendering to her.”⁴⁷ With due reservations for the heterosexual imagery, this celestial intercourse evokes the exploding images of pollination and constellation. Like a pollen grain blown in the air, Milkman fertilizes history—not only by recovering lost ancestors, but also by connecting negated or unthought-of relations. Akin to Ruth’s milk genealogy and Pilate’s earring network, Milkman’s backward riding connects people. And his connection does not aim to form a grand self, but to get over himself. With the hills resounding with his cry—echoing “*Life life life life*” (337)—Milkman finally evokes a multitude of lives that extends to the Bird and Foster lineages, Solomon’s African tribe, Jake’s other twenty brothers, Ryna and her ancestors, the assorted Solomons who claim “kin to him [Solomon]” but have no relation to one another (322), and the Shalimar children who sing about Solomon. Like a “lodestar,” Milkman leaps into the “killing arms of his brother” Guitar, into the intricacies of male homosociality, into the “rough but maternal hands” of his cradling ancestors (279), into the cosmic rays of the galaxy. Just as Pilate includes the Butlers in her earring network, so too does Milkman embrace the murderous Guitar. Instead of boiling everything down to the conflict between two African American men (as if the future depends on Milkman and Guitar), the boyish narrative has Milkman surrender himself to the aftermaths of slavery, the golden threads of creolized genealogy, and the Milky Way of relations.

⁴⁷ Morrison, “The One Out of Sequence,” 76.

Chapter Five

“God, How Retro”: Spatiotemporal Displacements in David Wong Louie’s “Pangs of Love”

Spatiotemporal (Dis)placements

In *Global Divas*, Martin F. Manalansan addresses the issue of topographical division: *HX* (or *Homo Xtra*), a gay nightlife magazine in New York City, privileges particular Manhattan neighborhoods by marginalizing nearby areas in the “Out There” category. According to Manalansan, “Most of Manhattan below Harlem is popularly seen as the modern gay ‘white’ metropolis with Chelsea, the East Village, and more recently Hell’s Kitchen as the prime gay neighborhoods. In contrast, the other boroughs are more often than not seen as peripheral, decrepit immigrant enclaves as well as premodern and anachronous queer sites.”¹ The spatial arrangements reflect not only urban planning (such as financial, residential, and commercial districts) but also class, racial, and ethnic zoning. Although New York City as a whole exudes a vibrant, multicultural air, its diversity has a special logic of spatial placement. People seldom associate New York’s Chinatown with terms like *modern*, *sophisticated*, and *white-(collar)*. In

¹ Martin F. Manalansan, “‘Out There’: The Topography of Race and Desire in the Global City,” in *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 63.

contrast to the chic Chelsea and the suburban, middle-class Long Island, Chinatown is translated into a “premodern” ethnic enclave. These areas seem not only blocks away but also years apart.

To be sure, the idea of topographical division downplays the flows of people: Wall Street is not exclusive to high-power brokers and lawyers, and Chinatown is not exclusive to Chinese immigrants. But the designation of different functions and meanings to different locations has hefty implications. Not only does it dictate property values, but it also rationalizes the polarization of Western modernity/modernization: Chinatown is a “premodern” space not because you literally go back to the sixteenth century there, but because you are not in a “trendy” area anymore. Even though Chinatown itself goes through modernization and gentrification, imposed or self-proclaimed exoticism makes this space foreign and primitive. Such exoticism is good for tourism, but it comes with a price: if only you had a pair of ruby slippers to bring you back to modernity!

Dwelling on Chinatown’s spatiotemporal (dis)placement, this final chapter of *Boyish Narratives* makes another transnational turn, with the focus shifted from the black Atlantic to the Asian Pacific. In my previous chapter, I read Morrison’s *Song of Solomon* from the perspective of the black diaspora. While the geopolitical division between the nonsegregated North and the segregated South has massive currency, I argued that the restlessness of black people and the past-oriented temporality in Morrison’s novel undo the progress narrative of emancipation, citizenship, and autonomy in the early 1960s United States. In the transatlantic context, Milkman is boyish not because he fails to mature into an African American man and reach enlightenment, but because he becomes susceptible to the memory, aftermath, and creolized genealogy of slavery across the Atlantic. In this chapter, I will read David Wong Louie’s “Pangs of Love” (1991) from the perspective of the Asian Pacific. While the topographical divisions among

“trendy” New York neighborhoods, suburban Long Island, and “traditional” Chinatown are in operation, I argue that the idea of Chinese diaspora, the particular modernity of Hong Kong, and the memory of Japanese imperialism among post-WWII Chinese Americans in Louie’s short story complicate the discourse of Asian Americans as the model minority. At the same time, the practice of a predominantly pre-Stonewall diva worship in the late 1980s counters the discourse of gay visibility, masculinity, and maturity in the coming-out narrative. In the transpacific context, the two Chinese American bachelors—the narrator Ah-Vee-ah and his younger brother Bagel (Billy)—are boyish not necessarily because they fail to marry or come out, but because they challenge Asian American- and gay-inflected arcs of maturity in the United States. Such identity-inflected arcs of maturity often come from a good place of social integration and equality, but the underpinning logics of nation-state, cultural difference, and maturity may do a disservice to Chinese immigrants and their American-born offspring by overlooking the aftermaths of Asian history, ascribing Asian Americans’ uneven identification with Western modernity to their essential difference or backwardness, or simply dismissing them as displaced in the United States. In Morrison’s roots narrative, Milkman matures by reorienting himself toward the past; in Louie’s resettlement narrative, the Pang brothers face the constant negotiation and contradiction of different arcs of maturity, and their boyishness registers such a dynamic standoff.

Highlighting the issue of spatiotemporal (dis)placements, I do not marshal Chinese Americans into white assimilation, Western modernity, gay visibility, and Asian American coalition. Nor I do claim that they are not mature enough to be on a par with their racial or ethnic

counterparts in the United States.² Instead, I study four spatiotemporal (dis)placements in Louie's story—Ah-Vee-ah's memory of Japanese imperialism, Bagel's pre-Stonewall diva worship, their immigrant mother's idea of Chinese diaspora, and the representation of New York's Chinatown as a "premodern" space—in order to tease out the Pangs' ambivalence toward the bio- and geo-politics in the late 1980s United States and see how their alternative spatiotemporal orientations ruffle the fabric of the nation-state. In this boyish narrative, the Pangs are not in transition to full citizenship, autonomy, or maturity. They are not condemned to bide their time (though they may appear so). Instead, no integrated, revisionist arcs of maturation emerge as the principle to dictate their lives.

Ah-Vee-ah and Bagel are correlated with and yet distinct from other boyish characters in *Boyish Narratives*. Like Cope in Fuller's *Bertram Cope's Year*, they are implicated in the marriage plot. But these three "boys" index different issues. In Fuller's novel, Randolph's projection of same-sex domesticity cancels out Medora's marriage plot, but Cope himself insists on friendships with Lemoyne and Carolyn. In "Pangs of Love," Ah-Vee-ah has problems dating or marrying white women, whereas Bagel does not come out to his family. White-Asian miscegenation and homosexuality change the texture of the marriage plot. Although Bagel is not

² On critique of, or subjects at odds with, Western modernity from various disciplines, see, for example, Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000 [2008]); David L. Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); and José Quiroga, *Cuban Palimpsests* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), and *Tropics of Desire: Interventions from Queer Latino America* (New York: New York University Press, 2000). On issues of displacement in a transnational or diasporic context, also see Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996); Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, "Global Identities: Theorizing Transnational Studies of Sexuality," *GLQ* 7, no. 4 (2001): 663-679; and Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

an “out” and proud gay man, he raises the question: what can the unfavorably “closeted,” effeminate, and archaic practice of diva worship do in a climate of gay visibility, masculinity, and maturity? In parallel with Bagel’s issue with gay teleology, Paul in Cather’s “Paul’s Case” renounces maturity: his boyhood effeminacy does not entail protogay boyhood. Finally, though Ah-Vee-ah is also susceptible to the past, he is different from Pablo in Williams’s “Mysteries” and Milkman in Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*: Pablo’s relationship with Emiel makes him repeat his man-lover’s being; Milkman outgrows the discourse of self-autonomy by reorienting himself toward the communal heritage of slavery; and Ah-Vee-ah carries memory of Japanese imperialism even though he does not experience Japan’s invasion of China like his mother. These boyish conditions, status, or subjectivities do not always generate alternative trajectories of maturity (such as gay marriage). Instead, they suspend normative temporalities in matters of relationship, career, racial, ethnic, and sexual identity, as well as marriage and reproduction.

Evoking Paul Gilroy’s book title *The Black Atlantic*, I do not see the Asian Pacific as its double or a completely separate entity. The bodies of water evoke transnational trade and traffic; they do not prescribe discrete realms of activity. The history of black slaves and the history of Chinese immigrants are intertwined, but each is also unique, heterogeneous, and polemical in its own ways.³ To be sure, both blacks and Asians share the experiences of displacement and

³ The racialized relationships between blacks and Asians are varied: they may be in concert, in conflict, or mediated by a third party (whites, for example). They need to be studied case by case and often put in a multiethnic, transnational context. See, for example, Frank Chin and Jeffrey Paul Chan, “Racist Love,” in *Seeing through Shuck*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), 65-79; Claire Jean Kim, “The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans,” *Politics & Society* 27, no. 1 (1999): 105-138; Daniel Y. Kim, *Writing Manhood in Black and Yellow: Ralph Ellison, Frank Chin, and the Literary Politics of Identity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Elaine H. Kim, “Asian Americans: Decorative Gatekeepers?,” in *MultiAmerica: Essays on Cultural Wars and Cultural Peace*, ed. Ishmael Reed (New York: Viking, 1997), 205-212; David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Rhacel S. Parreñas and Lok C.D. Siu, eds., *Asian Diasporas: New Formations, New Conceptions* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Min Hyoung Song, *Strange Future: Pessimism and the 1992 Los Angeles Riots* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); K. Scott Wong, “Chinatown: Conflicting Images, Contested Terrain,” *MELUS* 20, no.

resettlement; both African Americans and Asian Americans resort to cultural nationalism. But these two transnational terms also have distinct concerns and expressions: Afrocentrism and African American exceptionalism represent two ends of a political spectrum in black cultural politics. In contrast, Sinocentrism is more often an ideology of Chinese hegemony than a rallying cry for solidarity among Asians. If we consider the various wars and colonial histories in Asia and their repercussions in the United States, Chinese Americans do not have the same experience as other immigrants from Asia. And the global differences among people of Chinese descent make it even harder to pin down Chineseness.⁴ To put Chinese Americans together with other Asians under the rubric of Asian Americans hence eclipses their historical imbroglios in Asia. And to place all people of Chinese descent in the same category of Chinese diaspora is also misleading.⁵

In *Transnational America*, Inderpal Grewal argues that studies of diasporas in the United States “must engage with historical studies of the relation between diasporas and the regions to which diasporas are connected.”⁶ Taking my cues from Gilroy and Grewal, among other scholars on transnational studies, I am wary of the lure of modernity, citizenship, and nation-state.

1 (1995): 3-15; and Sau-ling Wong, “The Yellow and the Black: The African American Presence in Sinophone Chinese American Literature,” *Chung Wai Literary Monthly* 34, no. 4 (2005): 15-54.

⁴ On the multiplicity, heterogeneity, and hybridity among Asian Americans, see, for example, Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); and King-Kok Cheung, ed., *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). On the concept of Chineseness in a global context, see, for example, Ien Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Rey Chow, “Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem,” *boundary 2* 25, no. 3 (1998): 1-24; Allen Chun, “Fuck Chineseness: On the Ambiguities of Ethnicity as Culture as Identity,” *boundary 2* 23, no. 2 (1996): 111-138; Gungwu Wang, “Chineseness: The Dilemmas of Place and Practice,” in *Cosmopolitan Capitalists: Hong Kong and the Chinese Diaspora at the End of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Gary Hamilton (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), 118-134.

⁵ The emergence of such terms as *Anglophone Chinese literature*, *Sinophone Chinese literature*, and *global Chinese literature* register the tensions and transformations in the transnational Chinese community. See, for example, Shu-mei Shih, “The Concept of the Sinophone,” *PMLA* 126, no. 3 (2011): 709-718, and *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); and Jing Tsu and David Der-wei Wang, eds., *Global Chinese Literature: Critical Essays* (Boston: Brill, 2010).

⁶ Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America: Feminism, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 3.

Although I highlight the discourse of Chinese diaspora and the history of Japanese imperialism in Louie's story, I do not mean to portray the Pangs as too haunted by Asia to be modern Americans or to disregard the impact of white assimilation on them. In fact, a transnational matrix of the whites in the United States, people of Japanese descent in United States and in Japan, and people of Chinese descent in the United States, China, and Hong Kong provincializes the notions of white supremacy and Asian Americans as the model minority. Louie's title designates not only the dilemmas of mother-son and white-Asian relationships but also the tenacity of transnational attachments in a nation-state, the taut tension among various arcs of maturity, and the unresolved tangle of different forms of modernity. It is the temporal and historical flux in a transpacific context—not the psychological or transitional condition of the characters—that makes Louie's story a boyish narrative.

A Diasporic War Bride

The most blatant spatiotemporal (dis)placements in Louie's "Pangs of Love" are Mrs. Pang and New York's Chinatown. Born in China in 1914, Mrs. Pang fled to Hong Kong to escape the Japanese raids in 1939, entered the United States in 1949, gave birth to Ah-Vee-ah in 1954, and now lives in New York's Chinatown in 1989. At age seventy-five, all she cares about is her single sons' marriages, the next meal on the table, and saving money. Although she has been uprooted from China, resettled in the United States, and traveled between Hong Kong and the United States to visit her friends and look for ideal wives for her bachelor sons, Mrs. Pang is not considered cosmopolitan and worldly. Instead, she is often seen as parochial, childlike, crass, ignorant, or anachronistic. Calling her "a sweet, blockish woman whom people generally like,"

Ah-Vee-ah frowns on Mrs. Pang's simplemindedness: "with my mother repetition is a necessity, as it is when teaching a child to speak."⁷ Bagel feels ashamed that his mother watches "something as low as wrestling" (97). And Deborah, Ah-Vee-ah's current white girlfriend, dismisses Mrs. Pang as a "linguistic dead-end street" because she does not speak English (84). On their way to Bagel's house on Long Island, Ah-Vee-ah depicts his septuagenarian mother as displaced: "She seems out of place in a car, near machines, a woman from another culture, of another time, at ease with needle and thread, around pigs and horses" (86). Compared to "a monkey strapped into the Mercury capsule, all wires and restraints and electricity, shot screaming into outer space" (86), Mrs. Pang is not so much a heroic frontierswoman as a clueless primate. An immigrant from China, she is an alien in the United States.

To call Mrs. Pang displaced upholds two interweaving discourses: Western modernity and Chinatown essentialism. According to Jeffrey F. L. Partridge, the impression of Chinatown as an exotic space derives from a Euro-American outlook, which "tend[s] to see America as an extension or development of European civilization, with various immigrant groups from around the world living within it (a view that could be held by a monoculturalist who defines 'America' as white-European or by a multiculturalist who defines 'America' as originally white-European but now culturally diverse)."⁸ Although the multicultural perspective accommodates Chinese immigrants and Chinese culture, it may still privilege Euro-Americans as the mainstream, translating Chinatown into a "mysterious and dangerous" or "foreign and strange" place at odds with Western modernity.⁹ The other side of respecting cultural difference is denying significant

⁷ David Wong Louie, "Pangs of Love," in *Pangs of Love* (New York: Plume, 1991 [1992]), 76, 79. Hereafter references to this short story will be incorporated parenthetically in the text. Unless otherwise noted, all italics that appear in quoted extracts from this story are Louie's own.

⁸ Jeffrey F. L. Partridge, "Literary Chinatown: Dynamics of Race and Reading," in *Beyond Literary Chinatown* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 25.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

commonalities. When Ah-Vee-ah's siblings decide to have him relocated from Los Angeles to accompany the widowed Mrs. Pang in New York's Chinatown, it is not just for her convenience: "They moved her things from Long Island, carpeted her floors, bought prints for the walls, imported me for company, then returned to their lives" (75). Mrs. Pang does not belong to the racially integrated, middle-class Long Island. She is too Chinese even for her own family.

But Mrs. Pang was "modern" once; she is not always an anachronism. Thanks to the War Brides Act of 1945, which breaks loose earlier restrictions on the entry of Chinese women and interracial marriage, Mrs. Pang migrates from Hong Kong and brings in a new generation of Chinese Americans in a former bachelor society full of overseas husbands, single men, and "paper sons" who forge identity papers and claimed kinship with veteran immigrants.¹⁰ A woman who rises above the ravages of World War II, gives birth to Ah-Vee-ah at the age of forty, and contributes to a new stage of Asian American history, Mrs. Pang has every reason to boast about her "talented womb" (85).

¹⁰ The word *bachelor* needs parsing here. The "bachelors" in early bachelor societies were not always wifeless, childless, or heterosexual. Some married and had children before they entered the United States. Others consorted with the few Chinese women in Chinatown. (The sex ratio in bachelor societies was so skewed that Chinese prostitutes found themselves in demand as potential wives. Even though the wartime amity between China and the United States lifted the exclusion acts in 1943, it allowed a yearly quota of a mere 105 Chinese immigrants.) Still others circumvented the laws, marrying in states that did not outlaw their relationships, settling for cohabitation, or marrying on board a ship at sea or in the extraterritorial spaces outside the nation-state. The deprivation of marriage, however, did not necessarily imply frustrated heterosexuals. As George Chauncey points out, "While slender oral history evidence hints at homosexual activity among some of the bachelors [in New York's Chinatown at the turn of the twentieth century], there is not a single gay-related reference (and virtually no reference of any kind) to Chinese men in the records of the Committee of Fourteen and Committee of Fifteen I have examined. The single sodomy case I have found concerns an unmarried twenty-four-year-old Chinese laundryman, who allegedly forced sex on two Jewish boys he enticed into the premises of a laundry on East Broadway one evening in 1898." Although the said laundryman might use the Jewish boys as substitutes for women and/or choose boys outside of his ethnic enclave in order to avoid scandal, it is also possible that sex between Chinese immigrants was an "open secret" or that the laundryman was attracted to both women and boys. George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay World: 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 392n. On the "bachelors" in early Chinese American and Asian American history, see Madeline Y. Hsu, "Unwrapping Orientalist Constraints: Restoring Homosocial Normativity to Chinese American History," *Amerasia Journal* 29, no. 2 (2003): 230-253; Jennifer Ting, "Bachelor Society: Deviant Heterosexuality and Asian American Historiography," in *Privileging Positions*, 271-279; Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Women and Men: Labor, Laws and Love* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), 22-23; Koshy, *Sexual Naturalization*: Stanford University Press, 2004); and Estelle T. Lau, *Paper Families: Identity, Immigration Administration, and Chinese Exclusion* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

Between her marginalization by her American-born children and her glorification in Asian American history, Mrs. Pang witnesses the technology of the nation-state and ethnic politics in the post-WWII United States. Two decades after the War Brides Act, the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (the Hart-Celler Act) ushers in affluent, professional immigrants from Mediterranean Europe, Asia, and Latin America, thereby “sprucing up” the impression of Asian immigrants as coolies, cooks, laundrymen, and domestic servants.¹¹ In the late 1980s, bachelorhood carries valences much more complicated than potential ethnic extermination.¹² In this context, Mrs. Pang’s anxiety about her sons’ marriage and procreation seem too traditional, if not completely archaic and misplaced. The operation of bio- and geopolitics in the United States not only affects immigration policy but also leads to Mrs. Pang’s displacement.

¹¹ Southeast Asian refugees, however, do not always fit in the niche of Asian professional newcomers. On early immigration acts, see Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretative History* (Boston: Twayne, 1991), and *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991); David L. Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Espiritu, *Asian American Women and Men*; Koshy, *Sexual Naturalization*; Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*; Eithne Luibhéid, *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); and Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, rev. ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998). On the impact of the Hart-Celler Act, see David Leiwei Li, *Imagining the Nation: Asian American Literature and Cultural Consent* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Eithne Luibhéid, “The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act: An ‘End’ to Exclusion?,” *positions* 5, no. 2 (Fall 1997): 501-522; and Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999). On Southeast Asian refugees, see Monique T. D. Tru’o’ng, “Vietnamese American Literature,” in *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature*, 219-246; Katsuyo K. Howard, comps., *Passages: An Anthology of the Southeast Asian Refugee Experience* (Fresno: Southeast Asian Student Services, California State University, 1990); and Karen Tei Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1997). In Yamashita’s novel, Bobby Ngu—a Chinese from Singapore—pretends to be a Vietnam refugee in order to escape the economic plight in his home country.

¹² On the representations of bachelorhood in the twentieth-century United States, especially in the post-WWII era—see Howard P. Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Elizabeth Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Lynne Luciano, *Looking Good: Male Body Image in Modern America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); Bill Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise: Masculinity, Youth and Leisure-Style in Modern America* (Oxford: Berg, 2001); and Harry Waters, “Games Singles Play,” *Newsweek*, July 16, 1973, 52.

At home and not at home in Chinatown, Mrs. Pang calls for a transpacific framework: her attachment to Hong Kong and her idea of Chinese diaspora counter the representation of Chinatown and its residents as “premodern.” In “Pangs of Love,” Mrs. Pang would like her sons to marry Chinese girls from Hong Kong because they will pass on the Chinese legacy, speak Cantonese with her, and be “modern” enough to speak English with Ah-Vee-ah and Bagel (88). Due to Hong Kong’s unique position in the transnational matrix of British colonialism and Chinese diaspora, Mrs. Pang embraces a particular version of Chinese modernity—one that is not congruent with U.S.-based Asian American cultural nationalism, China-based Sinocentrism, or the British Empire. Hong Kong is “modern,” but it is not completely Western. Instead of craving her roots in China, Mrs. Pang prefers transplanting daughters-in-law from Hong Kong to the United States. While Hong Kong has been a broker between the East and the West, it now functions as a nexus among people in Chinese diaspora. When Bagel refuses to marry, Mrs. Pang calls him “juk-sing” (88). Literally meaning “bamboo” in Cantonese, this derogatory term refers to the diasporic Chinese who lose their Chinese immanence.¹³ Even though Bagel has U.S. citizenship, Mrs. Pang’s friends from Hong Kong see him as a member in a global Chinese community by calling him “an overseas bandit” (87).

A Chinese American with connections to Hong Kong, Mrs. Pang develops plastic affinity for the United States. Watching American TV programs without really understanding the contents, Mrs. Pang laughs along with the studio audience, “as if invisible wires run between her and the set” (75). Able to be part of and apart from the American audience, she develops an evolutionary advantage: “dumb to the prattle that fills the airwaves, maybe her brain will wither proportionately less than the average American’s” (75). Although Mrs. Pang seems

¹³ Julie D. Soo, “Strained Relations: Why Chinatown’s Venerable Associations Are Ending Up in Court,” *AsianWeek*, January 14, 1999, 15.

unassimilable, she prefers Ah-Vee-ah's ex-girlfriend Mandy Millstein to his current girlfriend Deborah. Although Mandy is not Chinese, she is a Vassar graduate, speaks Mandarin Chinese and Cantonese, observes Chinese festivals and holidays, cooks Chinese food, and appeals to Mrs. Pang's idea of American womanhood: "skirt, nylons, high-heel shoes" (80). In contrast, Deborah is "dressed in a most unladylike fashion: penny loafers or running shoes, chinos, and shirts bought in a boys' department" (83).

Embracing Hong Kong modernity without rejecting Western modernity, Mrs. Pang believes in the American Dream. But the dream becomes a nightmare when the Japanese prevail. Seeing his mother flipping through channels to locate the wrestling program in Bagel's bedroom, Ah-Vee-ah recalls a fresh-off-the-boat Italian sailor who miraculously won over a vicious blond wrestling champion in his boyhood: "It was myth in action. The American Dream in all its muscle-bound splendor played out before our faithful eyes" (94). But now the winner becomes the detested "Samurai Warrior," the new "Yellow Peril" (94).¹⁴ Although Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans both belong to the Asian American community, Mrs. Pang's memory of the Second Sino-Japanese War sparks her anti-Japanese sentiment and pushes her to support the "All-American" opponent, the "doe-faced" Bubby Arnold (94). Calling the Samurai Warrior "the little Jap boy" (94), Mrs. Pang roots for a white wrestler not because she is a self-hating Asian American, but because she abhors Japan imperialism and its post-WWII incarnation. In a transpacific triangle among whites, people of Japanese descent, and people of Chinese descent,

¹⁴ The term *yellow peril* may loosely refer to the threat of Oriental hordes threatening the West. Originating in the late nineteenth century with the immigration of Chinese coolies and laborers to the West, the term is later associated with Japan's military expansion in the mid twentieth century. On the construct and myth of the Chinese as the "yellow peril," see James Martin Miller, *China, the Yellow Peril at War with the World: A History of the Chinese Empire from the Dawn of Civilization to the Present Time* (Chicago: Monarch, 1900); Jiwu Wang, *"His Dominion" and the "Yellow Peril": Protestant Missions to Chinese Immigrants in Canada, 1859-1967* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006); Jenny Clegg, *Fu Manchu and the Yellow Peril: The Making of a Racist Myth* (Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham, 1994); and William F. Wu, *The Yellow Peril: Chinese Americans in American Fiction, 1850-1940* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1982).

the two Asians do not join forces against white supremacy. Instead, Mrs. Pang will side with anyone to knock the Japanese down.

Mrs. Pang's spatiotemporal displacement eludes the logics of nation-states, Asian American coalitions, and indiscriminate Chinese diasporas. Although she is not boyish, her evasion of many progress narratives marks a boyish narrative. Place-oriented but not place-bound, Mrs. Pang does not identify with a particular place or aspire to live somewhere else. She does not see herself as moving from one place to another, either. Though she thinks highly of Hong Kong's modernity, Mrs. Pang does not intend to resettle there. Preserving Chinese tradition, she is not returning to China. She develops an affinity for Hong Kong as a "modern" space for importing Chinese daughters-in-law into the United States. Between her attachment to Hong Kong and her anti-Japanese sentiment, Mrs. Pang unevenly identifies with Western modernity, white assimilation, and Asian Americans as the model minority in the United States. Believing in the American Dream and inheriting the anxiety about procreation as a war bride, she nevertheless speaks little English. Whereas most American citizens move out of ethnic enclaves, become cosmopolitan, and acknowledge Japan's superpower status in the late 1980s, Mrs. Pang lives in Chinatown, clings to her Chinese culture, and holds onto her memory of the Second Sino-Japanese War. Transnational, she is nevertheless "traditional" and "parochial." But to dismiss her as displaced misses the intricate palimpsest of the Asian Pacific.

Postmemory of Japanese Imperialism

Dismissing his mother as "out of place," Ah-Vee-ah himself is also displaced. While Mrs. Pang's connections to Hong Kong, her memory of the Second Sino-Japanese War, and her living

in Chinatown contradict her status as a war bride in the post-WWII United States and the discourse of Asian American coalition, Ah-Vee-ah's transpacific memory of Japanese imperialism also undermines the progress of Asian Americans as the model minority. In the late 1980s, Japan's superpower status boosts the image of Asian Americans as overachievers in the United States, but the prevalence of Japanese and Japanese Americans across the Pacific also overshadows a Chinese American like Ah-Vee-ah. Working in a Japanese chemical company and losing his ex-girlfriend to a Japanese American, Ah-Vee-ah projects Mandy's current Japanese partner Ito and his boss Kyoto onto the ruthless Samurai Warrior, sees the sushi chefs at the local Japanese restaurant as reincarnations of Japanese colonialism, and imagines creating a spray as mighty as the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. While he dates white women and has generation gaps with his mother, the problem does not lie in the discourses of white supremacy and white assimilation, but in the history between Japan and China, as well as the disparity between Japanese Americans and Chinese Americans.

In the very beginning of the story, the thirty-five-year-old Ah-Vee-ah represents Asian Americans as the model minority: "I work for a midsize corporation that manufactures synthetic flavors and fragrances. We are the soul of hundreds of household products . . . Our mission is to make the chemical world, an otherwise noxious, foul-tasting, polysyllabic ocean of consumer dread, a cozier place for the deserving noses and tastebuds of America" (75-76). Ah-Vee-ah sees himself and his corporate job as integral to American society. Instead of pursuing wealth alone, the company is unctuously altruistic. In addition, Ah-Vee-ah claims to be "a responsible citizen of the planet" (76). While Mrs. Pang laughs at the antics on TV, he pays attention to world news. As an American citizen, Ah-Vee-ah takes pride in his compassion and cosmopolitanism without borders.

Such a glossy façade crumbles when it comes to Ah-Vee-ah’s sexual relationships with white women. His former Jewish girlfriend Mandy needs the potent musk tincture from his company to initiate their lovemaking. His current girlfriend Deborah calls him a “mama’s boy” for living with his mother (85). When Mrs. Pang catches him having sex with Deborah, Ah-Vee-ah does not stand up against his mother. Instead, he meekly asks, “What do you see?” (84). It is as if Ah-Vee-ah wants his mother to make sense of his relationship with Deborah, “the rebound among rebounds” (84). As Crystal Parikh argues, “Pang seems to ask of both his mother and the reader: what is going on and who is on top in this confusion of gendered positions when the Asian-American man, the rice boy, is introduced into the heterosexual romance of white love?”¹⁵ Ironically, the son who pegs his mother as “out of place” needs her to help him orient himself.

Although Ah-Vee-ah’s relationships with white women often threaten his manhood, it is his homosocial relationship with Japanese American men that stands up in this boyish narrative. While Ito wins Mandy over at around the same time Sony purchases Columbia Pictures, Ah-Vee-ah’s boss Kyoto is also intimidating: “Every time we meet he sizes me up, eyes crawling across my body, and lots of sidelong glances. *Who is this guy?* It’s the same going-over I get when I enter a sushi joint, when the chefs with their long knives and blood-red headbands stop work and take my measure, colonizers amused by the native’s hunger for their superior culture” (79). Japan’s superpower status in the late 1980s, coupled with the history of Japanese imperialism, becomes as invincible as the Samurai Warrior in the wrestling ring. As the white boy Bubby Arnold collapses under the Samurai Warrior’s assault, so does Ah-Vee-ah lose his “tenuous hold on Mandy” (94). Ah-Vee-ah identifies with Bubby not because he wholeheartedly

¹⁵ Crystal Parikh, “‘The Most Outrageous Masquerade’: Queering Asian-American Masculinity,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 48, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 866.

embraces white assimilation, but because they have a common enemy, the Samurai Warrior and his embodiments in Kyoto and Ito.

According to King-Kok Cheung, “Although Mandy simply leaves one Asian man for another, Japanese men, with their imperial past and superior economic presence (not to mention their samurai icon), have often been perceived as more dominating and more sexy (and sexist) than Chinese and Chinese American men.”¹⁶ Likewise, Parikh argues, “The emasculation of the heterosexual Chinese-American men . . . seems to come not at the hands of . . . a dominant white culture, but rather in the figure of Japanese-American men, who stand in also for the history of Japanese colonial conquest and occupation of China.”¹⁷ As Japan Americans become the superlative model minority, they outshine both whites and Chinese Americans.

But there is something more to Ah-Vee-ah’s memory of Japanese imperialism: it takes the particular form of postmemory. According to Marianne Hirsch,

[Some] descendants of victim survivors as well as perpetrators and of bystanders who witnessed massive traumatic events connect so deeply to the previous generation’s remembrances of the past that they identify that connection as a form of *memory*, and that, in certain extreme circumstances, memory *can be* transferred to those who were not actually there to live an event. At the same time, these members . . . also acknowledge that their received memory is distinct from the recall of contemporary witnesses and participants. Hence the insistence on “post” or “after” and the many qualifying adjectives and alternative formulations that try to define both a specifically inter- and transgenerational act of transfer, and the resonant aftereffects of trauma.¹⁸

A transmission of earlier generations’ memory, postmemory becomes a collective heritage, and such memory becomes particularly potent and problematic in a transnational context. In “Pangs

¹⁶ King-Kok Cheung, “Of Men and Men: Reconstructing Chinese American Masculinity,” in *Other Sisterhoods: Literary Theory and U.S. Women of Color*, ed. Sandra Kumamoto Stanley (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 187.

¹⁷ Parikh, ““The Most Outrageous Masquerade,”” 866-867.

¹⁸ Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 3-4 (emphasis in original).

of Love,” Ah-Vee-ah associates the sushi chefs with Japanese colonialism; such an association not only registers the neocolonialism of Japanese culture and cuisine in the 1980s but also displaces the chefs “as colonizers amused by the native’s hunger for their superior culture.” Here, Ah-Vee-ah is not an American customer who demands cultural diversity to enrich his life experience. His postmemory simultaneously transports him to the pre-WWII era and turns the United States into Japan’s neo-colony. The notions of periodization and nation-state lose their bearings.

Such spatiotemporal undoing is characteristic of a boyish narrative. The point is not that Ah-Vee-ah gets mired down in the past or feels castrated in front of Japanese American men and white women.¹⁹ It is that the Asian Pacific reconfigures the time and space of the United States as a nation-state. In “Pangs of Love,” the progress narrative of Asian American politics is mapped onto the generation gaps between Ah-Vee-ah and Mrs. Pang: the naturalized citizen mother is not as assimilated as her natural-born son. But the transpacific discourse of Hong Kong modernity and the (post)memory of Japanese imperialism erode such a mapping. To be sure, Ah-Vee-ah belittles his war bride mother: “Her mind isn’t cluttered with worries that extend beyond food and family. When she talks about the Japanese raids on her village back home, for instance, it’s a personal matter; the larger geopolitical landscape escapes her” (77). But it does not occur to him that Mrs. Pang becomes a hoarder because of the Second Sino-Japanese War and her exile. Ah-Vee-ah trivializes his mother’s issues of food and family for not being political enough, dismissing her hoarding as a Chinese trait or as an elder’s habit.²⁰ And the biggest irony erupts when he sees himself displaced as a “native” craving a colonizer’s food at a sushi joint. Such a

¹⁹ On the infantilization or symbolic castration of Chinese Americans, see Elaine H. Kim, “‘Such Opposite Creatures’: Men and Women in Asian American Literature,” *Michigan Quarterly Review* 29, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 74; and Eng, *Racial Castration*, 1.

²⁰ On hoarding at the intersection of immigration and racial history, see Scott Herring, “Collyer Curiosa: A Brief History of Hoarding,” *Criticism* 53, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 159-188.

“native” is a native speaker of English, but the United States is transformed into a Japanese colony.

The superimposition of Asian history on the U.S. territory becomes most disorientating when Ah-Vee-ah imagines spraying his mother with “something on the order of canned Hiroshima” to punish her for being oblivious to current world affairs (77). Such an enlightening device repeats the logic of self-justification when the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945, but here it effaces Mrs. Pang’s experience of the Japanese raids in China and Ah-Vee-ah’s working at a Japanese American corporation. After all, it must be extremely cruel—or campy—for an anti-Japanese immigrant to suffer the bombing in Hiroshima herself, for a Japanese American company to design, produce, and market fragrances of a historical tragedy, and for a Chinese American son to teach his immigrant mother lessons of geopolitics by spraying artificial smells. Putting on the teaching persona of Western modernity, Ah-Vee-ah cannot be exempt from the stink of filial impiety or miss the irony of his smug cosmopolitanism.

At the end, Deborah sneers at Ah-Vee-ah and Mrs. Pang’s viewing of wrestling on TV: “‘God, how retro,’ she says” (98). But wrestling represents more than a cheap entertainment or an allegory of immigrants’ American Dream. It also constitutes a matrix of identification and disidentification where Chinese Americans are unfairly forced to choose the lesser of two evils: white assimilation (embodied by Bubby Arnold and Deborah) and Japanese supremacy (embodied by the Samurai Warrior, Kyoto, and Ito). The love triangle among Ito, Mandy, and Ah-Vee-ah is a geopolitical triangle, and to contextualize it in terms of the Asian Pacific evokes the memory of Japanese imperialism. Frustrated, Ah-Vee-ah hurls the phrase “Forget it” at Mrs. Pang (82). But they both cling to the history of Japanese imperialism. The war bride is fortunate

enough to migrate from China to Hong Kong to the United States, and the American-born son wants to end the torment of diaspora. But now they are displaced by the memory of Asia.

Ah-Vee-ah nevertheless does not suffer from racial melancholia. Employing Sigmund Freud's formulation of melancholia, Anne Anlin Cheng argues that "racial melancholia tracks a dynamic of rejection and internalization that may help us comprehend two particular aspects of American racial culture: first, dominant, white culture's rejection of yet attachment to the racial other and, second, the ramifications that such paradox holds for the racial other, who has been placed in a suspended position."²¹ Chang acknowledges dominant and marginal subjects' haunted relations of identification and loss, but such a dualistic structure does not take into account Japan's superpower status and the postmemory of Japanese imperialism in the late 1980s. In "Pangs of Love," Ah-Vee-ah's displacement at the sushi joint and Mrs. Pang's displacement in the United States have a lot more in common than Ah-Vee-ah cares to spell out. To be haunted by—and susceptible to—histories and relations outside the borders of the United States is painful, but to see what is "out there" does not compel Ah-Vee-ah to synthesize the discourses of Chinese diaspora, Japanese imperialism, and white assimilation like chemical flavors and fragrances. There is no coherent, integrated arc of historicity and maturity.

Coming Out through Diva Worship

Having addressed the displacements of Chinatown, Mrs. Pang, and Ah-Vee-ah, I want to end this chapter with Bagel's displacement. Calling Bagel "a bad candidate for procreation" or conceding that "even heterosexuality does not guarantee patrilineage," critics recognize the

²¹ Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), xi.

issues of white-Asian relationships and homosexuality in Louie's story.²² But there is something "anachronistic" about Bagel's expression as a gay man: instead of coming out to his family, he claims to be married to his cat Judy and adores the dead actress Bette Davis. Evoking a predominantly pre-Stonewall gay sensibility—that is, expressing his homosexuality through diva worship instead of through participating in a gay parade or other explicitly homosexual activities—Bagel becomes displaced in a gay scene marked by visibility, masculinity, and maturity.

To be sure, a gay man may practice diva worship in the post-Stonewall era. But there are differences between an "out" gay man who honors and inherits a gay sensibility that is often associated with the pre-Stonewall era and a "closeted" gay man who adores divas and makes his sexuality an "open secret."²³ In "Pangs of Love," Bagel's discussion of Bette with his bachelor friends may mean different things to different people. Clueless about the gay subculture of diva worship, Mrs. Pang may see Bagel simply as a movie buff. Bagel might even take pleasure in Mrs. Pang's ignorance. Probably aware of the gay connection of diva worship, Ah-Vee-ah may see Bagel as "coming out" to him. In the know about Bagel's homosexuality, Bagel's white bachelor friends express gay conviviality with him. Louie may or may not have Bagel employ diva worship to reveal his sexuality. He also may not construct diva worship as an "outdated" gay culture in the late 1980s. But issues of displacement emerge when we accept this premise:

²² Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, "Chinese/Asian American Men in the 1990s: Displacement, Impersonation, Paternity, and Extinction in David Wong Louie's *Pangs of Love*," in *Privileging Positions: The Sites of Asian American Studies*, ed. Gary Y. Okihiro et al. (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1995), 186; and Cheung, "Of Men and Men," 186.

²³ According to D. A. Miller, secrecy does not always denote crime or shame. Instead, it resists the penetration of social discourses: "Secrecy would thus be the subjective practice in which the oppositions of private/public, inside/outside, subject/object are established, and the sanctity of their first term kept inviolate. And the phenomenon of the 'open secret' does not, as one might think, bring about the collapse of these binarisms and their ideological effects, but rather attests to their fantasmatic recovery." See D. A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 207. Also see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990 [2008]), 67-90.

what if Bagel “comes out” through diva worship? Given that gay men used to worship divas to fantasize about the male leads and evade homophobia in the pre-Stonewall era, Bagel may be an offbeat anachronism at odds with the outspoken gay liberationists.²⁴ But he and his friends may also complicate the progress narrative of gay visibility and normativity in the coming-out discourse. In other words, the question is not how childish or archaic Bagel is to cling to a pre-Stonewall expression. It is what such a “retro” expression can do to gay progressivism and gay teleology.

At Bagel’s house, Ah-Vee-ah joins Bagel and his three bachelor friends’ discussion of Bette. Upon Deborah’s snarky comment on Bette’s “old bug eyes” (89), one of Bagel’s friends snaps: “Nino makes a hissing sound. We all look at Deborah. ‘Oh, hell,’ Nino finally says, ‘what does she know?’” (90). Proclaiming himself a better connoisseur of actresses, the jewelry designer dismisses Deborah as ignorant. But Nino’s rejoinder may also be a sincere question: what does Deborah know about Bette in the gay subculture? In contrast to Deborah’s sheer diatribe, Nino worships Bette by trashing her:

“I wanted so badly for Bette to be beautiful, but she looked like leftovers that even the cat won’t touch. I swear I cried, she was such a mess.”

“He did,” says Mack. “Poor Nino, it was tragic. He cried the biggest tears ever. But you have to admit, she still had those fabulous eyes.”

“Sure, eyes. The rest of her had been run over by Hurricane Hugo.”

“I saw the show,” Jamie says. “Her mind was still there. She was very sharp.”

²⁴ On diva worship as a hermeneutical sign of homosexuality, see Brett Farmer, *Spectacular Passions: Cinema, Fantasy, Gay Male Spectatorships* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 2. On gay sensibility, also see David M. Halperin, *How To Be Gay* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012); Michael Bronski, *Culture Clash: The Making of Gay Sensibility* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984); David Caron, “Shame on Me, or The Naked Truth about Me and Marlene Dietrich,” in *Gay Shame*, ed. David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009), 117-131; Brett Farmer, “The Fabulous Sublimity of Gay Diva Worship,” *Camera Obscura* 20, no. 2 (2005): 165-194; Richard Dyer, *The Culture of Queers* (London: Routledge, 2002), and *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986); Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen’s Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1993); Alexander Doty, ed., *Camera Obscura* 65, no. 2 (2007) and 67, no. 1 (2008); and Michael Montlack, ed., *My Diva: 65 Gay Men on the Women Who Inspire Them* (Madison: Terrace Books, 2009).

“Oh sure,” says Nino, “so’s broken glass.” (90)

Comparing Bette to leftovers, a mess, and a hurricane wreck, Nino criticizes Bette with affection. Whereas Deborah calls Bette a flawed actress, Nino loves her so much that he has to laugh the bereavement off. Witnessing Nino’s tears, Mack teases him for his excessive feeling. Together, they (presumably partners) put on a sassy, intimate show.

Worshipping an aged, bitchy actress, Bagel and his bachelor friends “reveal” their sexuality through gay sensibility. When they each name a film to toast Bette’s career, they recite such roles as the strong-willed Southern belle Julie Marsden in *Jezebel*, the blasé Broadway actress Margo Channing in *All About Eve*, and the over-the-hill vaudevillian Baby Jane Hudson in *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* In contrast, Ah-Vee-ah brings up the prizefighter film *Kid Galahad*, evincing his anxiety about masculinity. A vixen, Bette and her characters possess what Wayne Koestenbaum calls *divaspeak*: “a way of asserting power, preeminence, and invulnerability through language alone, of speaking strong though one is really weak.”²⁵ Such an assertion becomes especially caustic when Bette plays aging actresses, commanding the audience not by her beauty, but by her performance. Marked by her ballsy personality, Bette is popular among drag queens and gay men. She is not for straight men.

Channeling Bette, Nino is the loudest campy queen in the room: he outfoxes Deborah and Bette herself. As Esther Newton puts it, “The campy queen who can ‘read’ (put down) all challengers and cut everyone down to size is admired.”²⁶ Such channeling does not necessarily make Nino misogynist or effeminate, though. According to Brett Farmer, “Gay camp readings of female stars do not represent . . . an illegitimate colonization of femininity by a group that has no

²⁵ Koestenbaum, *The Queen’s Throat*, 132.

²⁶ Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972 [1979]), 111.

claim whatsoever to that category but an exploration by gay men of their own important psycho-cultural relations to the feminine.”²⁷ Deploying the female grotesque in terms of performativity, Nino sees everything in drag.

More important, practicing diva worship in the late 1980s counters masculinist gay normativity and maturity: gay men do not have to outgrow their diva worship in favor of the boosterism of gay clones, disco kings, and bodybuilders. As butch gay clones, athletic disco acrobats, and militant gay activists champion gay masculinity in the post-Stonewall era, it seems retrograde, shameful, and effeminate to worship divas.²⁸ Although gay liberationists successfully revamp sexuality as an issue of civil rights and social minorities, they also make coming out inevitable and sometimes shame closeted gay men into membership. According to John D’Emilio, “Those [gay activists] who remained in the closet had a shadow cast over their moral character. . . . Meanwhile, those who had come out possessed a compelling need to have others join them.”²⁹ With gay visibility yoked to respectability and progress, the closet is equated to oppression, shame, and backwardness. Glorifying coming out as the turning point for gay men to get rid of gay shame once and for all, radical gay activists venerate “out” gay men as martyrs to

²⁷ Farmer, *Spectacular Passions*, 129.

²⁸ On gay masculinity, see Martin P. Levine, *Gay Macho: The Life and Death of the Homosexual Clone*, ed. Michael S. Kimmel (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Alice Echols, *Hot Stuff: Disco and the Remaking of American Culture* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010); and Mark Simpson, “Big Tits! Masochism and Transformation in Bodybuilding,” in *Male Impersonators: Men Performing Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 21-44. On the post-Stonewall assault on Broadway musicals and flamboyant gay men, see Michael Joseph Gross, “The Queen Is Dead,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, August 2000, 62-70; David M. Halperin, “Homosexuality’s Closet,” *Michigan Quarterly Review* 41, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 21-54; Daniel Harris, *The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture* (New York: Hyperion, 1997); and D. A. Miller, *Place for Us: Essay on the Broadway Musical* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

²⁹ John D’Emilio, “Cycles of Change, Questions of Strategy: The Gay and Lesbian Movement After 50 Years,” in *The World Turned*, 95. Also see John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 322; and Karla Jay and Allen Young, eds., *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation* (New York: New York University Press, 1972 [1992]).

or survivors of homophobia, thereby infantilizing closeted gay men and reinforcing homo/hetero definition.³⁰

But diva worship in the post-Stonewall era is not necessarily retro in a pathetic or nostalgic sense. On the contrary, Bagel and his chums put history and gender in scare quotes. The pre-Stonewall diva worship might have suggested a lie with a grain of truth: a closeted gay man tries to “conceal—or rather, by concealing badly, to disclose—a radically pathetic subject, who by letting us see that he is trying to hide his sufferings, becomes additionally so.”³¹ In contrast, the participants in post-Stonewall diva worship air their sexuality through cultural practice, instead of guarding it with angst, shame, and paranoia or owning it with sacrosanct pride. Channeling Bette, diva worshippers use history as a repertoire. According to Diana Taylor, the repertoire allows for individual agency and requires presence: “people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by ‘being there,’ being a part of the transmission. As opposed to the supposedly stable objects in the archive, the actions that are the repertoire do not remain the same. The repertoire both keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning.”³² Outrageously loud and deliberately anachronistic, diva worship in the post-Stonewall era turns the angst-ridden narrative of coming out into a zesty craft of putting on/down. Although Bagel’s

³⁰ On the myth of coming out as a “once and for all” narrative, see Didier Eribon, *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self*, trans. Michael Lucey (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 49; John D’Emilio, “My Changing Sex Life,” in *The World Turned: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 199-209; and Samuel Allen Chambers, “Telepistemology of the Closet,” in *The Queer Politics of Television* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009), 31-62. On the untimely feeling of shame in the post-Stonewall era, see Halperin and Traub, *Gay Shame*; and Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 20. On the narrative possibilities and limitations of homosexuality, see D. A. Miller, *Bringing Out Roland Barthes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Dennis W. Allen, “Homosexuality and Narrative,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 41, no. 3-4 (Fall/Winter 1995): 609-634; Paul Morrison, “End Pleasure,” in *The Explanation for Everything: Essays on Sexual Subjectivity* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 54-81; and Nicholas de Villiers, *Opacity and the Closet: Queer Tactics in Foucault, Barthes, and Warhol* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

³¹ Miller, *Place for Us*, 8.

³² Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University, 2003), 20.

diva worship is not a transpacific attachment or memory, it undermines Western progressivism from within. Countering—or better yet, complementing—the normative interpellation of gay activism, diva worship allows gay men to come out by raving about a “bad” love object (Bette) and rouses the crowd through the catfight between the diva’s aficionados (Nino) and detractors (Deborah).³³

Although Bagel may use diva worship to “out” himself, being “out” to his mother is not his goal. As Fabio Cleto argues, there is a contradiction between the “flaunting it” attitude of camp and the effacing logic of the closet: “by taking camp not as a synonym of ‘homosexuality,’ but rather of the community-building survivalist dealing with the *signs* of a stigmatised (homosexual) identity, gay camp can be construed as precisely that contradiction, *flaunting the closet*.”³⁴ Instead of wallowing in self-pity, Bagel and his bachelor friends engage in witty repartees and sassy catfights. Instead of agonizing over coming out to Mrs. Pang, Bagel idolizes a dead bitch. Eluding the teleology of gay maturity—that is, becoming an “out,” masculine homosexual—Bagel does not see coming out as the last wall between him and freedom. Even though diva worship perpetuates the gay stereotypes of camp aesthetics and urbane sophistication, it also forms friendship across race.³⁵ Even though the absence of gay sex might strike critics like Leo Bersani as de-gayng, gay specificity is not so limited.³⁶ Claiming sexuality through an “anachronistic” practice, diva worship in the late 1980s resists the heroic, teleological discourse of gay liberation. A spatial displacement, it unmoors periodization.

³³ I am indebted to Elizabeth Freeman for the idea of countering the progress of history. See Elizabeth Freeman, “Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations,” *New Literary History* 31, no. 4 (Autumn 2000): 727-744.

³⁴ Fabio Cleto, “Introduction [to Flaunting the Closet],” in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 90 (emphasis in original).

³⁵ In “Pangs of Love,” the friendship is still limited to white and Asian middle-class gay men. On a black counterpart in the form of voguing, see William G. Hawkeswood, *One of the Children: Gay Black Men in Harlem*, ed. Alex W. Costley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

³⁶ Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 7.

In concert with Bagel's gay theatricality, Ah-Vee-ah plays along. At the end of the party, he produces some magic tablets to play tricks on everyone's sensation:

I say nothing. I pull from my pocket gold-foil packets the size and shape of condoms. Inside each is a tablet developed at the lab. You dissolve it in your mouth, and it will disguise the sourness of whatever you drink or eat. I pass them to everyone at the table.

They won't know what has happened. They will laugh, delighted by the tricks of their tongues. But soon the old bitterness in our mouths will be forgotten, and from this moment on, our words will come out sweet. (98)

To be sure, the condomlike tablet functions as a prophylactic against Mrs. Pang's marital teleology. Anxious about paternity, she sees her sons' single status as cases of delayed marriage. Now that Ah-Vee-ah uses the tablets to "disguise the sourness" of his white-Asian relationships and Bagel's homosexuality, people will remain clueless, or know better than to ask, about these two Chinese Americans' bachelorhood.

But the tablets also mediate the characters' perceptions—not necessarily to cloud them, but to transform them. Earlier, Ah-Vee-ah claims that his company aims to "make the chemical world, an otherwise noxious, foul-tasting, polysyllabic ocean of consumer dread, a cozier place for the deserving noses and tastebuds of America." To neutralize the damage of hurtful words, he produces the tablets to make people's words "come out sweet." Even though this sounds like Ah-Vee-ah's old trick—the "forget it" attitude that upsets Mrs. Pang with evasion—it does not mean to stop conversations. To "come out sweet," Mrs. Pang does not have to accuse Bagel of being a "juk-sing." To "come out sweet," Ah-Vee-ah does not have to dismiss his mother as childlike or displaced. To "come out sweet," Deborah does not have to emasculate Ah-Vee-ah. To "come out sweet," Nino does not have to be mean to Deborah. Instead of disguising people's real feelings, the capsule engenders sweet yet genuine talk.

In Louie's story, Western modernity seems to dominate the whole narrative: it pegs Mrs. Pang as too "out of place" to speak English and understand her sons. It also pegs Ah-Vee-ah as too "boyish" to leave his mother, and Bagel too "immature" to come out to his family. At Bagel's party, where Bagel makes all-American apple pies and serves white bagels for breakfast, Mrs. Pang brings dumplings and roast duck from Chinatown and spills soy sauce on the white chair. Creating an eyesore, Mrs. Pang's Chinese food requires four gay men to "converge on the stains with sponges, Palmolive dishwashing detergent, paper towels, and a pot of water. An eight-armed upholstery patrol" (89). But the story is not about how hard it is to stay white or become modern. It is not about how displaced Mrs. Pang or her Chinese food is in Bagel's white house. Instead, Japan's superpower status in the late 1980s, Mrs. Pang's connection to Hong Kong, Ah-Vee-ah's postmemory of Japanese imperialism, and Bagel's pre-Stonewall practice of diva worship all complicate the progress narrative of Western modernity and its various teleologies like white assimilation and gay liberation. They render a picture so heterogeneous that any affiliation, identification, or teleology is precarious. In the boyish narrative of four displacements, no arc of maturation has the last word.

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