Sexual Sameness

Textual differences in lesbian and gay writing

Edited by
Joseph Bristow

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1 *Introduction*

Joseph Bristow

Sexual Sameness brings together eleven representative essays by lesbian and gay literary critics working on both sides of the Atlantic. The focus is mainly on English and American literature, and the range of texts analysed here is reasonably wide – from the provocative fiction of Oscar Wilde to the controversial erotica of Joan Nestle. Practically all of these writings fall within a period of roughly one hundred years. Some of the authors under examination have been absorbed by the academy (Wilde, E.M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, James Baldwin), some are at present marginal to the canon (H.D., Sylvia Townsend Warner, Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde), and others are in the process of being recovered (Michael Field, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen). Their poems, plays, and novels shift to some extent across national and ethnic borders (Irish, English, white American, African-American). The collection maintains a more or less even balance between men and women writers. And the same may be said for the distribution of female and male contributors.

I wish to make the parameters of this volume of essays perfectly clear at the outset for a number of reasons. Although it is fairly obvious that each and every academic publication operates within particular institutional boundaries, and that the institutions in which we teach, read, and write about literary representation remain extremely powerful sites of cultural legitimation, these issues are especially pressing for those of us involved in researching lesbian and gay writing, since our field, in all its diversity, is only just coming into existence. The objects of our enquiry – literary works which disclose, articulate, even polemicize same-sex desires – have a peculiar standing within a discipline that has for many years placed an extraordinary emphasis on questions of value and discrimination, and therefore on marking out points of distinction between what is and is not worthy of serious analysis.

Over the past decade there have been several investigations into how and why English literary studies in Britain had at its inception to secure its place as a respectable field of study.[1] When it was established in the late nineteenth century, debates about the hazards of working-class literacy were particularly fraught, and proponents of English literature

in higher education laboured under considerable obligations to defend their work from charges of irresponsibility. As the educated classes looked despairingly at the ever-increasing sales of penny papers and other kinds of disreputable publication, there was certainly great pressure on advocates of English to make literary studies into a field of knowledge that had a clear moral purpose and a definite aesthetic value. Rather than pursue this point at length, all I need to add is that the aesthetic-moral axis around which the institutionalization of literature turned still has remarkable influence. To this day teachers frequently express concern about whether popular fiction, community drama, feminist writings, the narratives of soap operas – indeed, anything of dubious standing – ought to be allowed on the syllabus.

Yet considerable changes have indeed taken place in general academic awareness of what does and does not constitute 'literature'. Just as pedagogic methods for the transmission of skills in literary interpretation have shifted the centre of their authority away from the tutor more towards the student, so too have there been alterations in the scope of the texts we discuss in class, and the way we discuss them. Taught either by period or by genre (these are the prevailing models of text grouping on degree curricula), the works we consider in our seminars and lectures now include many more by women writers and Black writers. In this respect, publishing houses have both responded to and encouraged the redesigning of our literature programmes. And so it is fairly clear to see how canons of 'minority' writings – if we choose to call them that, and such labelling has its dangers – have been gradually forming since the 1970s and 1980s. These days we enjoy Virago Classics along with Penguin English Classics; and there is, to take a further example, the rich resource of the Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black American Women Writers, published by a company no less distinguished than Oxford University Press. But where do these disciplinary transformations leave lesbian and gay writing? And where, amid the residual moral-aestheticism of English studies, and the counter-cultural challenges of feminist and Black studies, might we locate lesbian and gay criticism?

Before proceeding to these important questions, let me first of all point out that lesbian and gay criticism does not comprise a coherent field. That, as I will argue, is its strength. Because of the alliance it endorses (the potentially controversial 'and' at its centre), it does not stand as one thing alone with fixed demarcations and singular methodological concerns. Indeed, it is vital to probe the co-ordinating conjunction – the 'and' – that yokes together the contributors, the academic practices, and the subject-matter involved in this book. By making connections between *sameness* and *difference* (and both terms have their complications), the title of this collection signals the overlapping concerns of discrete subcultures. *Lesbian* and *gay* designate entirely different

desires, physical pleasures, oppressions, and visibilities. The mark of gender, given the cultural violence and the inequalities of power it sets in motion, is perhaps the most important distinction placed between lesbians and gay men. But both subordinated groups share parallel histories within a sexually prohibitive dominant culture, and these have inevitably brought us into the 'and' that both links and separates our sexual-political interests. Homosexuality is the word we are still too often made to share, even though it is clearly one one we have jointly learned to subvert and resist. This unhelpful and misleading sexual, legal, medical, and ultimately moral classification has for decades compounded our differences, and in its exceptionally inflexible implementation it has served to mask a great many confusions about sex, gender, and sexuality that saturate western culture. Its history, and the impact of that history on our own, need to be briefly examined here.

Emerging from late Victorian obsessions with sexual taxonomy (the precise origins of the term still remain open to debate: some say it came from developments in the fertilization of flowers, others from the work of a Hungarian sexual emancipationist), the category of the homosexual became a clinical definition that recognized for the first time, as Michel Foucault put it, a *type* of person, rather than a *sexual activity*, such as buggery.[2] The point I am making, however, is a simple one. No matter how we situate the modernity of this concept, homosexuality *denies the gendered difference* between men and women who desire their own sex. It produces sameness where there is not necessarily any at all. Only when modified by a sexual definition – male homosexuality or female homosexuality – can the distinction between lesbians and gay men be understood, and even then only within the severe limitations of an opposition between the sexes. This is an opposition that has served us very badly.

For a century at least, since Havelock Ellis theorized 'sexual inversion', the regulatory apparatuses of medicine, education, and the law have almost always seen us as two sides of the same coin. Images of lesbians and gay men frequently circulate in the popular imaginary as reflections of one another. Images of virile women and effeminate men preoccupy the popular press, if not more educated minds, and these keep reappearing on television, in the courts, and in books of literary criticism (to name just a few sites where this logic is in action) as versions of our apparently authentic selves. But, of course, the reality of our lives, not to say the literary representation of them, often speaks otherwise. None of us, either within our own gender or sexuality, conforms to one psychic, physiological, or political type – even if the idea of homosexuality would suggest that is the case. Desiring the same sex, we are not desiring the same things. Whatever our differences, then, we have historically been regarded, as it were, as twins. And since the law still insists on banishing our desires in almost the same breath – from public spaces, from school classrooms, from involvement in child custody, fostering and adoption,

and so on – it is not so surprising that many of us have been led to make alliances with each other. Lesbian *and* gay criticism is one such outcome of the violence that has been done to us. And we are now seizing for the first time on the opportunity to consider openly how and why the dominant culture has silenced, excluded, and, sometimes in spite of itself, actually made spaces for, even produced, literary representations of same-sex desires by lesbian and gay writers. But in demonstrating that lesbian and gay male critics are prepared to appear between the covers of the same book, the structure of this collection should not be seen as a replication of how the dominant and heterosexually organized culture mistakes all the varying things we are. Nor should it be taken that the procedures adopted by these essays, juxtaposing a great range of desires, literary traditions and forms, and, importantly, concepts of sexuality are entirely compatible with one another.

If lesbian and gay studies is not a unified field (it refers outwards to two genders, and thus to two differing subcultures), it is none the less true that in the particular institutional history of literary studies lesbian and gay criticism has largely been enabled by more than twenty years of concerted feminist enquiry. Feminism has been its greatest intellectual resource. Yet the consequences of feminism in all its plurality have differing effects for lesbians and for gay men. Since lesbians have always played a prominent role within feminist campaigning since the 1960s, they have been instrumental in developing methods for investigating the cultural work of gender, the normative presuppositions of psychoanalysis, and the masculist biases of historiography, to name but a few of these achievements. There has, undeniably, been a strong presence of lesbian theory during what now adds up to more than two decades of feminist criticism. By comparison, gay men have worked from a much less advanced base of theory, and have had to learn a great many lessons from varieties of feminist scholarship.

This is an issue addressed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her introduction to *Epistemology of the Closet*, where the operative terms of sexual definition within lesbian and gay studies are treated with the utmost care and caution. Sedgwick frames her analysis of male–male sexual relations in this way:

> *Epistemology of the Closet* is a feminist book mainly in the sense that its analyses were produced by someone whose thought has been macro- and microscopically infused with feminism over a long period. At the many intersections where a distinctively feminist (i.e. gender-centred) and a distinctively antihomophobic (i.e. sexuality-centred) inquiry have seemed to diverge, however, this book has tried consistently to press on in the latter direction. I have made this choice largely because I see feminist analysis being considerably more developed than gay male or antihomophobic analysis at present – theoretically, politically, and institutionally.[3]

It is difficult to preface a collection of essays such as *Sexual Sameness* without mentioning Sedgwick's extraordinary work, since her investigations into male homosociality, or bonding between men, could be said at least to have established a theoretical framework, if not a disciplinary foundation, for gay male criticism. Sedgwick's highly innovative project is to explore how 'many of the major nodes of thought in twentieth-century western culture as a whole are structured . . . by a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition, indicatively male' (p.1), and, as the earlier passage from her book makes clear, she is acutely aware of the critical location of her writing. Her feminism, itself proceeding from an institutionally marginalized if not historically maligned position, has taken its increasingly sophisticated knowledge of gender to interrogate the precarious break between 'homo' and 'hetero' that dominant culture strives to keep as distinct as possible.

But in her powerful analyses of the manifold and crisis-inducing disruptions in social and sexual relations between men, Sedgwick has left some lesbian theorists wondering where their histories, their desires, and their representations remain within her feminist-orientated gay male criticism. Terry Castle's essay raises this question at some length (see pp. 128–47). Similarly, Sedgwick has been accused by one gay writer of misrepresenting gay male lives, on the ground, it would seem, of feminist intrusion.[4] These significant debates cannot be unpicked here. But what can be said is that Sedgwick's risk-taking work has both given the impetus to an intellectually vital arena of cultural debate, and has, by virtue of that, opened up a great many concerns about how feminists and gay men may or may not align their interests, how heterosexual feminists may or may not work together with lesbian critics, and how feminism is separate from but inevitably implicated in a field entitled lesbian and gay studies. Surrounding the co-ordinating 'and' between lesbians and gay men that has taken up much of my discussion so far are all sorts of anxieties about who has the right to speak for whom, about who is entitled to read and write about another's work, and about how we can, if we choose to do so, together create an area of knowledge about same-sex desires. At no point can we forget that lesbian and gay subcultures contain within them many discrete sexual-political groupings. Both have their separatist constituencies, just as they simultaneously include men and women who work from an understanding that we have more in common with each other than not.

There have been other responses to the emergence of lesbian and gay studies. One is a feminist-identified anxiety, very different in political direction from Sedgwick's. In *Feminist Literary Criticism: A Defence*, Janet Todd wonders whether, with the burgeoning of gay male criticism, 'feminism [will be thought to have] had its place in the liberal sun and should move over to leave the victim's space for a greater (male) victim, the homosexual'.[5] Todd would seem to be suggesting that there is at

present an implicit competition between feminists and gay men about who possesses – or should possess – the most radical sexual politics, and who is therefore most deserving of serious attention. It strikes me that such a consideration will certainly prove a block to any progressive sexual politics that aims to bring an end to victimization within what remains a brutal gender/sexuality hierarchy. All types of feminist criticism need defending from neutralization within the academy but they do not require this kind of territorial defence, implying that there is only one exclusive space for a sexual victim – if that is how gay men and feminists are to see themselves.

Todd's troubled remark should, I feel, be viewed within the larger scope of current arguments about the increasing prominence of 'men's studies', with its primary emphasis on heterosexual masculinity. In literary criticism there is now a visible 'male feminism', and several studies and collections of essays explore its place in relation to, and difference from, the feminism it is trying variously to imitate, modify, and, some might argue, obliterate.[6] That feminism is now, if very slowly, being appropriated by radical men to discuss masculinity certainly prompts questions very similar to those active within lesbian and gay studies about who has the right to speak on another's behalf. Some will observe that male feminism is a contradiction in terms. (Does not the irreducibility of gender exclude men from feminism?) Others might say that heterosexual men may only be able to reconstruct their lives through feminist understanding. (What other discourses are currently available to change such men?) Given the proliferation of politically gendered positions in cultural theory, it is becoming more and more difficult to map out exactly how male feminists, straight-identified feminists, and lesbian and gay critics are currently relating to one another. Interwoven with each of these sexual-political types of criticism are voices that speak of connected forms of class and racial subordination. Perhaps by learning to respect and accept the meetings and partings of our concerns, those of us who inhabit counter-cultural spaces can develop our work along similar but not competing lines.

There have, of course, been other, much more familiar and altogether hostile responses to the appearance of lesbian and gay studies. In 1991 the University of Sussex launched an MA course in 'Sexual Dissidence and Cultural Change', enabling for the first time in Britain the formalized study of same-sex cultural practices. Organized, among others, by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (both contributors to the present collection), this master's degree met with the consternation of the press, a parliamentarian, and other dignitaries when publicity for applications was circulated. Both writers have been subject to attacks (as well as much praise) from the critical establishment for some time. Given the year-long cross-fire of opinions in the correspondence columns of the *London Review of Books* about Dollimore and Sinfield's work in 'cultural materialism' (April 1990–May 1991; the exchange of letters stems from continuing debates concerning their highly successful collection of essays *Political Shakespeare* (1985)), it is more than likely that their involvement in this postgraduate degree programme will result in even more assaults from so-called defenders of orthodox literary studies.

The traditional study of English and American literature finds itself in a paradoxical position if and when it denounces lesbian and gay criticism, since so many of the literary works within the canon have homosexuality, if not as their central, then as their displaced theme. Any reasonably conventional course in twentieth-century English writing might comprise a novel by Forster, one by Woolf, a volume of poems by W.H. Auden, and some of Joe Orton's dramas. But, given the constraints on most lesbians and gay men in being open about their sexualities even in the liberal academy, it was for many years nearly impossible to develop the critical vocabulary that would make sense of the relations between the emergence of a modern concept of homosexuality, and thereafter of lesbianism and gay maleness, and their articulation in literary forms. Literature in its purest and most high-flown sense has proved, for a century at least, to be one of the few cultural spaces in which same-sex love could find some expression – often obliquely (through, for example, the use of classical myth), sometimes explicitly (as in Forster's *Maurice*, although this novel was published posthumously, fifty-seven years after its completion). The work of lesbian and gay criticism, however, is not simply to reread canonical writings, and thereby come to an understanding of the historical, aesthetic, and political pressures under which homosexual representation has had to exist. It is equally, if not more so, engaged in the investigation of how and why modern sexualities have followed particular patterns, and how literary works – so frequently responsive to cultural transitions – mediate the making and breaking of these sexual behaviours. It is perhaps in its refusal to be complicit with the naturalizing tendencies of heterosexual analyses of gender and sexuality that lesbian and gay criticism has its greatest purchase. It speaks oppositionally from the sexually dissident margin to comprehend the heterosexually dominant centre, and in so doing aims to change it.

With such political transformations in mind, I want, finally, to go back to the title of this collection. Currently, discussions of gender and sexuality often revolve around the often loosely defined concept of difference – particularly sexual difference. As a term, sexual difference came into play in the 1970s when, as Mandy Merck has said, cultural theorists sought to 'semioticise subjectivity . . . to think its differences as the work of representation rather than some pre-existing social or biological reality'.[7] In the light of recent deconstructive and Lacanian thinking, one may well be led to believe that such a notion of difference involves the endless sliding of the desiring signifier, forever trying to

reconstitute itself, forever at the mercy of deferral and delay. But, as Merck adds, despite this emphasis on the semiotic instability of meaning, desire, and representation, there is frequently a sense of dualism, if not heterosexism, in theories of sexual difference. By emphasizing *sameness*, lesbian and gay criticism works from an understanding that the notion of difference is not an infinitely elastic term. Its emphasis on sameness seeks to redress – if not reverse – such a notion of difference, drawing attention back to the particular interests – the same-sex desires – that theorizations of difference may occlude or disperse. There again, once the particularity of our concerns with sameness is accepted as a material fact – women with women; men with men – then the specific differences that inhabit the 'and' that brings us politically and critically together can be comprehended. All of the contributors to this collection examine the process of trying to write sexual sameness into literary form, of attempting to understand what it means to love someone of one's own sex, and of gaining knowledge about how and why the culture around us – so brutally in this era of AIDS – often seeks to forbid our existence.

2 *The cultural politics of perversion: Augustine, Shakespeare, Freud, Foucault*

Jonathan Dollimore

This chapter argues that perversion is not only a culturally central phenomenon, but, thereby, also a crucial category for cultural analysis.[1]

In Freud's theory of the sexual perversions the human infant begins life with a sexual disposition which is polymorphously perverse and innately bisexual. It is a precondition for the successful socialization and gendering of the individual – that is, the positioning of the subject within hetero/sexual difference – that the perversions be renounced, typically through repression and/or sublimation. In this way, not only is the appropriate human subject produced but so also is civilization reproduced. But the perversions do not thereby go away: repressed or sublimated, they help to constitute and maintain the very social order; this is one reason why that order requires their repression and sublimation. As such they remain intrinsic to normality and might be said to constitute the cement of culture, helping 'to constitute the social instincts' (11: 437–8)[2] and providing 'the energy for a great number of our cultural achievements' (8: 84). Sublimated perversions place 'extraordinarily large amounts of force at the disposal of civilized activity' because they are able to exchange their original aims (sexual) for other ones (social) without their intensity being diminished (8: 84; 12: 39, 41).

So one does not become a pervert but remains one (8: 84); it is sexual perversion, not sexual 'normality', which is the given in human nature. Indeed, sexual normality is precariously achieved and precariously maintained: the process whereby the perversions are sublimated can never be guaranteed to work; it has to be re-enacted in the case of each individual subject, and it is an arduous and conflictual process of psychosexual development from the polymorphous perverse to normality which is less a process of growth than one of restriction (7: 5). Sometimes it doesn't work; sometimes it appears to, only to fail at a later date. Civilization, says Freud, remains precarious and 'unstable' (1: 48), as a result.

The clear implication is that civilization actually depends upon that which is usually thought to be incompatible with it, a proposition which has been resisted inside psychoanalysis, and, even more, outside it. At its

4 *Wilde,* Dorian Gray, *and gross indecency*

Joseph Bristow

I

'Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful places are corrupt without being charming. This is a fault', wrote Oscar Wilde in his series of provocative aphorisms prefacing *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891).[1] This chapter investigates how Wilde's only novel risked opening up a metaphorical space in which male same-sex desire could be articulated as a potentially beautiful thing that the law rendered ugly by granting such desire a grotesque and incriminatory definition – namely, gross indecency. Taking its bearings from well-known aspects of Walter Pater's controversial aesthetics and their much-maligned interests in 'testing opinions and courting new impressions, never acquiescing in a facile orthodoxy',[2] the analysis that follows reads *Dorian Gray* as a dramatization of key preoccupations about the preservation of youth at the centre of late Victorian legislation on sexual relations. In these respects, the secret degeneration afflicting the hero's picture turns him into a hideous figure whose image bears witness – not to his innate immorality – but to the cultural representation of 'corruption'. Dorian Gray's tragically divided public beauty and private shame work as a double identity that places the fine values of art in opposition to the increasing power of the state – a state that was for the first time making condign judgments about what constituted a homosexual danger to the perceived moral well-being of the nation. The aesthetic and desiring energies invested in Dorian's equivocating 'picture' suggest a morality based on an ethics very different from that which in the statute books worded homosexuality in such punishingly negative terms. The novel, then, raises questions – rather than makes assertions – about how and why such an aesthetically ennobled image as Dorian's is, at one and the same time, 'gross' in its 'indecency'. In Dorian, Wilde was transgressing the dichotomy of public and private worlds in a manner very much of his era – as might be witnessed in a novel such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). But Wilde was practically alone in going so publicly into print to develop, even advertise, available cultural models of homosexuality. His purpose was to expose the implicitly 'criminal' effects which led beautiful beings such as Dorian into the most fatal of crimes.

It has to be said, from the outset, that such an approach to *Dorian Gray* is in itself somewhat unorthodox. None the less, the reading presented here belongs to a gathering body of what may be labelled anti-homophobic or uncloseted criticism. Since the publication in 1985 of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's innovative theorization of the precarious divide between male homosocial and male homosexual desires, it has been possible to use a new vocabulary to address the homoerotic interests of Wilde's best-known works.[3] Sedgwick's pathbreaking study owes much to the work of lesbian and gay theorists, notably Gayle Rubin, whose rethinking of Claude Lévi-Strauss's anthropological inquiries into gift-exchange, taken together with René Girard's structural analysis of erotic triangulations in western narratives, forms the basis of an ambitious literary understanding of how male bonds are cemented by two prevalent and interdependent types of sexual loathing: homophobia and misogyny. Sedgwick examines the shifting boundaries of these formations of sexual hatred from the Renaissance (Shakespeare's sonnets) to the late nineteenth century (Henry James and Wilde). But given the meagre historical apparatus that Sedgwick sets in place to comprehend some three hundred years of increasingly prohibitive relations between men, it is, to say the least, difficult to see precisely how and why the late nineteenth century placed a strategic ban on male–male sexual contact. Similarly, Sedgwick supplies only a limited amount of information to indicate the structures of self-perception in which those subjects involved in homosexual practices were positioned. For a start – as Michel Foucault and Jeffrey Weeks remind us – the homosexual was only a 'homosexual' by the last decade of the nineteenth century.[4] Sedgwick, therefore, has offered literary historians a general – but none the less crucial – thesis into which a more particularized knowledge of homosexuality and homosociality may be inscribed.

Detailed work of this kind has already begun to emerge, and with important consequences for criticism of Wilde. One example of research probing the cultural models of homosexual desire available to late Victorians is Linda Dowling's outstanding essay on two related literary codes (the 'Dorian' and *poikilos*). These codes can be traced in the writings of Pater, John Ruskin, and Gerard Manley Hopkins (all Oxford men), indicating the degree of visibility potentially outrageous aspects of classical learning might in fact enjoy in a university ethos saturated with images of Ancient Greece. There is no need to rehearse Dowling's complex argument here but it is instructive to draw attention to her tentative conclusion about the ways in which 'Dorian' (namely, the hyper-Hellenic) and *poikilos* (meaning dappled, or 'pied', as in Hopkins's 'Pied Beauty') might be considered in potentially 'homosexual' contexts. Having illustrated Hopkins's disturbance with Walt Whitman's 'Cala-

mus' poems – poems which attracted Hopkins as much as they repelled him – Dowling states:

> This is not at all to say that there is no such thing as a 'homosexual' code in later Victorian writing. But it is to suggest that whatever that code consists in (and even its outlines are not yet clear to us), it does not operate as a simple inversion of the dominant discourse. Instead, as Ruskin's persistent presence as a source and influence will remind us, the late Victorian 'homosexual' code . . . assumes a discontinuous and constantly shifting relationship to the discourse of the dominant group . . . What future studies of Victorian sexuality must strive to do, then, is to plot the varying adhesions and resistances that punctuate the relation between 'homosexual' and dominant discourses. Yet even to speak of 'the dominant discourse' is a perilous oversimplification. For what may appear from a point of view at the margin to be the fluent speech of power may seem from a point near the centre to be a subversive dialect of opposition. Hence, for example, the unstable institutional role of Greek studies at the ancient universities: J.A. Symonds found in Greek studies a haven, while opponents of 'Germanism' and university reform saw in them a hell, and it is precisely the continuing implication of 'homosexuality' in university politics that at times impels and at times impedes its emergence as a discourse.[5]

Dowling is indubitably correct to state that a homosexual coding is not necessarily an 'inversion' of a dominant discourse; it is more likely to be of the order of a Foucauldian 'reverse-discourse', whereby conventional terms are subverted from within. *Dorian Gray* is, to all appearances, an extension of the late nineteenth-century Gothic. And, indeed, that is how this novel has frequently (and not altogether misguidedly) been interpreted. But the Gothic – a variable term of classification in itself, with its strongly marked capacity for monstrous imaginings – provides a generic space in which many kinds of sexual otherness can take shape. Dorian Gray's Gothic spectre haunts the troubled conscience of the degenerating *fin de siècle*. And the novel adumbrates its hero's perverse desires by appropriating not only the conventions of the horror story but also a multiplicity of motifs from classical learning (Wilde, after all, was a first-rate scholar in the field).

Dowling's article does not touch on the work of Wilde. Yet, in an obvious sense, the implications for his links with Pater's homoerotic teachings are many, and the Oxonian connection with Pater forms a key component of Wilde criticism. The trouble is, moves have just as recently been made to dissociate Wilde from Pater's works. In fact, in what must amount to one of the most substantial items of Wilde scholarship to date – the edition of his Oxford Notebooks – astonishing pains are taken to unhitch Wilde from Pater's 'materialism'. That is, in this new account of

Wilde's Oxford education, he is no longer the Paterian spectator of life but one who is using criticism as a creative act to breathe energy – or soul – into art. In their exceptionally well-documented introduction to the Notebooks, Philip E. Smith and Michael S. Helfand return the whole of Wilde's art criticism (in which they include *Dorian Gray*) to his Oxford days: a brief period of intensive study when Hegel's writings on history made their greatest impact in Britain. (Oxford University was, of course, the main conduit for the transmission of Hegel in the nineteenth century.) Focusing on Wilde's many debts to Ruskin (namely, the spiritual influence of art), his response to Hegel (dialectical thinking), and the concomitant influences of theories of race health (taken from a variety of sources, but both Charles Darwin's *Descent of Man* (1871) and W.K. Clifford's theories of the 'tribal self' figure largely here), Smith and Helfand present an image of Wilde's intellectual development as one of progressive (but not unilinear) evolutionism, which is also proto-eugenic. Indeed, so constant and unwavering is this account of Wilde's dialectical thinking that no other influences can find their way into the apparently consistent logic of a body of 'art criticism' that has – to even a casual observer – a 'homosexual' content.

With such points (or prejudices) in mind, it is perfectly possible for these editors to claim that the transactions that occur between the protagonists in Wilde's essay on Shakespeare's sonnets ('The Portrait of Mr W.H.' (1889)) involve 'a transference of spirit', 'a dialectical process in which an unrealized aspect of the collective soul is brought to awareness by an outside agent: an individual, or some other form of artistic or cultural expression', and, finally, 'the psychology of transmission', with no reference to same-sex desire whatsoever.[6] Each of the actors in this essay on the forgery and/or authenticity of the love represented in the sonnets is shown to be an instrument of Wilde's complexly Hegelianized Ruskinism. That the essay on the sonnets forms part of a wider attempt on the part of homosexual writers to find a history for their prohibited pleasures does not enter their argument. (Roden Noel, Havelock Ellis, and John Addington Symonds, for example, were writing about Christopher Marlowe's and Thomas Otway's dramas to uncover the homosexual past.) *Dorian Gray*, which for Smith and Helfand marks the culmination of Wilde's 'art criticism', is similarly confined to an exclusively anti-Paterian allegory, displaying the necessity of dialectical thinking, the renunciation of the ego in favour of the transaction of spiritual influences – from art to life, and back again. The controversy that surrounded the publication of Wilde's novel, and led to the withdrawal of copies from bookshops, is mentioned nowhere at all. The homosexual allusions – especially those echoing many sections of Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) – are marginalized. Even Wilde's multiple uses of 'hedonism' – which, as John Stokes reminds us, was at this time one of several code-words for 'homosexuality' ('morbidity' would be another) – passes without notice.[7]

Yet the narrowing of the critical lens in this manner actually yields surprising results, picking up on features of Wilde's novel that earlier commentators have neglected. One significant aspect Smith and Helfand focus on is the emphatic reference to 'race' or 'race-instinct' that recurs in the narrative. The novel is populated with distinctly modern scientific allusions to a degenerate 'germ' (p. 112) that seems to consume Dorian's soul. Yet rather than view this violent instinct as a product of a society that outlaws certain desires, Smith and Helfand attribute the blame for Dorian's fate upon Pater's 'materialism', alias the hedonistic and 'wild struggle for existence' (p. 25) vouched for by Lord Henry Wotton – Dorian's mentor and corruptor. (Wotton, the arch-culprit, supposedly figures in Smith and Helfand's thesis as a Paterian demon.) All in all, the conclusion they draw is summed up in one sentence: 'Dorian's role in the story is to be an object lesson, to represent what hedonistic materialism might do to Western civilization.'[8] The novel has become an allegory of a contest between, on the one hand, Pater, and on the other, Ruskin mediated by Hegel.

Since Smith and Helfand's meticulous but highly selective account has more than an element of truth in it, the next advisable step would seem to be to act on Dowling's counsel and try to plot the 'varying adhesions and resistances' that lie between Wilde's homosexual textuality and the dominant, or acceptably authoritative, aesthetic debates to be found in *Dorian Gray*. The central metaphor on which the novel turns – that of a man and his portrait whose mortality and immortality swap roles – can be understood not solely in relation to Pater, Ruskin, and Hegel (or any of the other authorities cited by Smith and Helfand) but also with reference to the Criminal Law Amendment Act, and its final clause which outlawed acts of 'gross indecency'. Like Dorian's portrait, this law sought to preserve the face of British youth. To its critics (and victims), this law created the corruption it was designed to eradicate. In the context of *Dorian Gray*, it is important to remember that Henry Labouchère's amendment, which legislated against 'gross indecency', was commonly known as 'the blackmailer's charter'.

II

How Victorian Britain came to understand 'gross indecency' follows a rather circuitous path joining together hotly debated legislative issues concerning prostitution, consent, and birth control. Each part of this sexual history needs to be briefly mentioned in turn if we are to comprehend why so many 'ugly meanings' lurk in the shadows of Wilde's portrait of a wealthy, beautiful, and yet – for some reason – 'corrupt' young man.

In the 1890s, when the infamous 'Love that dare not speak its name' was alluded to in the Wilde trials, the idea of 'homosexuality' – as a specific type or person – was still restricted to medical textbooks. Before

that time, sexual intercourse between men was called sodomy or buggery, a crime punishable by death in England and Wales as late as 1836. In the 1870s and 1880s, groups of men who engaged in (or were suspected of) this form of sex were becoming more and more visible – most notably in the figures of Ernest Boulton and Frederick William Park, who were tried (unsuccessfully) in 1871 on the vague charge that they, 'being men and dressed in female attire', intended to 'commit a felony'. Found in the foyers of London theatres, these lavishly dressed figures were thought by some to be prostitutes. Both of these female impersonators were anally examined when under arrest. They crossed identifications of gender for reasons that their prosecution could not comprehend.[9] Later, in 1885, the law was used – almost, it would seem, in the manner of an afterthought – to criminalize sexual contact between men in the context of extensive legislation concentrating on female prostitution (particularly the corruption of young working-class women by well-off men): this was the Criminal Law Amendment Act. The Labouchère amendment, outlawing 'gross indecency' between males (even in private), is frequently cited as the crucial moment in characterizing, and establishing, the concept of the male homosexual in British culture.

The Labouchère amendment largely arose in response to the numerous homosexual scandals of the early 1880s. Its aim, however, when situated within the complete scope of the 1885 Act, was not so much to prohibit same-sex relations between adult males but more to deter the corruption of youth – both young men and young women. John Marshall claims that 'if we examine the motives behind the anti-homosexual amendment, we will see that the law was consistent with the general drive against decadence and did not presuppose the existence of a special type of person.'[10] The notion of 'gross indecency' was, in part, an outgrowth from the concept of 'obscenity' – the 'filthy' and 'corrupt' nature of which was written into the statute books in 1857 (the Obscene Publications Act), and famously invoked against Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh in their birth control campaign some twenty years later. Again, the law sought to obscure sexuality – of any kind – from public view. If seen, it would supposedly destroy the moral order, an order maintained by hierarchies of class and gender, along with a universal insistence on a division between private and public domains. The intensified legal surveillance of sex – on the one hand, monitoring women's interference with the passage of semen, and, on the other, scrutinizing the penetration of the anus – obviously demonstrates how at this time sexual desire was beginning to be perceived as a separate formation from naturalized categories of gender.

The 1885 Act was significant – not least for *Dorian Gray* – because it raised the age of consent for women from 13 to 16, creating entirely new boundaries for heterosexual relations, and greatly extending, and

He went on to add: 'It is intellectual.'[14] Wilde protested that no work of art put forward views: 'Views belong to people who are not artists' – lawyers, for example. He rejected outright that 'flattering a young man, making love to him in fact, would be likely to corrupt him'.[15] But, as *Dorian Gray* implies, it is not flattery that makes young men into homosexuals. Instead, it is the law that persistently returns to the question creating the object it seeks to prohibit. The trials demonstrate that male homosexuality is thought to be an undoubted possibility (more natural than unnatural) when an older man 'influences' a male youth. The courtroom, of course, is not involved in a theoretical exercise to examine why an all too possible desire is, in another sense, undesirable. The legal desire to preserve youth is clearly agitated by the idea of an older man's interest in a young person of his own sex. If youth is to be kept innocent – for as long as possible – then it must, in one way or another, be desirable. To put it bluntly: preservation is here the public face of corruption. This is a paradox – a double standard – inherent in the actions of the law, and it is a contradiction that *Dorian Gray* turns into an alarmingly suggestive figuration for its time.

Even if 'homosexuality' was not named by Wilde's prosecutors – nor by Wilde in his novel – it had a new status and significance in the cultural consciousness, not only with regard to young people but also to questions of class. From the moment it was first published, *Dorian Gray* caused considerable concern in the press. In its original periodical form (in the American *Lippincott's Magazine*), it promptly received a hostile response from Charles Whibley in the Tory *Scots Observer*. (As a consequence, copies of *Lippincott's* were quickly withdrawn from sale by the largest retail outlet, W.H. Smith.) Whibley picked up on the homosexual content instantly: 'if he [Wilde] can write for none but outlawed noblemen and perverted telegraph-boys, the sooner he takes to tailoring (or some other decent trade) the better for his own reputation and public morals.'[16] These vituperative remarks refer to the Cleveland Street affair, which involved a number of wealthy men in a homosexual brothel off Tottenham Court Road where post office boys worked to supplement their incomes. In the Wilde trials, working-class young men were paraded in court to give evidence against him. *Dorian Gray*, the Wilde trials, and the Cleveland Street affair shared the same shocking elements: leading the young into vice; homosexual relations; and, in many respects most egregious of all, cross-class liaisons. What needs to be borne in mind here is that the corruption of youth is part of a larger formula – the upper-class contamination of working-class boys – each aspect of which makes the other look even more offensive to the Victorian bourgeois mind. (At the time when Dorian's crimes are considerably on the increase, he remarks: 'The middle classes air their moral prejudices over their gross dinner-tables, and whisper about what they call the profligacies of their betters in order to try and pretend that they are in smart society, and on intimate terms with the people they slander' (p. 118).) Whibley implies that the wealthy older men and the working-class youths share a sexual identity that threatens class relations and, more specifically, the middle-class ideology of self-help characterized by the 'decent' tailor working for the good of 'public morals'. Tellingly, after the first day of the third trial, Wilde (outrageously) declared: 'The working classes are with me . . . to a boy.'[17]

Dorian Gray stands at the beginning of a self-consciously homosexual literary tradition opposing the social undesirability of cross-class sexual relationships and the decadent uncleanliness associated with them. As Weeks states, a good deal of homosexual fiction developed 'a pattern of what could be called "sexual colonialism", which saw working-class youth as a source of "trade" '.[18] For example, on one of Dorian's 'mysterious and prolonged absences' (p. 102) he is rumoured to have been 'brawling with sailors' (p. 112). Dorian's secret relations with 'foreign sailors' cross national and class barriers to disclose (but, importantly, not name) homosexuality. One transgression, therefore, implies another. The fact that Dorian mixes with these men suggests that he keeps their company for something other than 'brawling'. Wilde is strategically silent about Dorian's barely glimpsed life along the shadowy docks. Defining the nature of this life, of course, would certainly have risked prosecution. The 'homosexual' code had to be read through such obliquities.

Replying to Whibley, Wilde made three aphoristic statements that refused to name – to lend a positive term to – the offensively implied sexual interests of the novel: 'each man sees his own sin in *Dorian Gray*. What Dorian Gray's sins are no one knows. He who finds them has brought them.'[19] The 'sin' is produced, not discovered. It is a 'sin' only when it is named – and thus essentialized – as such. (It is important to remember that Wilde only took action against Queensberry when he was abusively categorized, in a celebrated misspelling, as a 'somdomite' by the Marquess.) As the preface to the novel declares: 'There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book' (p. 17). Such a statement, refusing to comply with the conventional opposition of vice and virtue, may appear to be fired by a Romantic impulse to set apart aesthetics from politics (to transcend, in other words, material conditions). But, in fact, Wilde's novel illustrates the problematic links between art and the ethical decisions underpinning such a narrowly defined morality. It was Pater who recognized the complex moral structure of *Dorian Gray*: '[Dorian's] story is a vivid, though carefully considered, exposure of a soul, with a very plain moral pushed home, to the effect that vice and crime make people coarse and ugly.'[20] But what makes a vice vicious and a crime criminal to begin with? Virtuous public morals and the law, it seems. The 'moral' of this story, of course, cannot be spoken about in the same register as those 'public morals' that deem such writing 'indecent'. Instead, its desire-stricken 'picture' discloses how the aspirations of art

have been woefully incriminated by the invidious prurience of bourgeois morality.

Seeing something of his own teachings within the novel, Pater remarked that 'Dorian himself, though certainly quite unsuccessful in Epicureanism, in life as a fine art, is . . . a beautiful creation.'[21] These words suggest that *Dorian Gray* is, to some extent, a rewriting of Pater's erudite fictional narrative of aesthetic development, *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), which follows a young Roman's maturation from paganism to a suspected conversion to Christianity. It was a rite of passage that appeared controversial because it presented Christian belief as an aesthetic attraction – a sensuous form of art – rather than a divinely imparted dogma. To Pater, Dorian is beautiful in so far as he is desirable as a youth who is perfect enough to be a work of art. It is in Wilde's aphorisms that a Paterian commitment to aesthetics – art for its own sake – may be seen to subvert proverbial moral wisdom. However, the aphorism is not modelled on Pater's elegant prose. Instead, it is here that an undoubtedly Hegelian turn of mind is at work. Aphorisms contain a dangerous knowledge for Dorian: they make other meanings, often lethal ones, available to him.

Dorian is surely seduced by aphorisms. He comes under the verbal spell of Lord Henry Wotton, the older man who provides Dorian with the pleasure-seeking philosophy that, to all appearances, is the cause of the young man's downfall. Wotton's enchanting aphorisms open up the shape and structure of Dorian's sexual exploits. They invert given values and make other meanings possible. This strategic 'inversion' is, as Jonathan Dollimore has pointed out, part of a politically oppositional reverse-discourse.[22] Many of these maxims explicitly parody proverbs unthinkingly dictated to the young. But the Wildean apothegm, as Dollimore implies, is more than simply parodic. Lord Henry's eloquence overturns commonly held assumptions to reveal the unethical bases of values all too readily deemed fit for young minds. For example, in one of his most characteristic overturnings of common sense, Lord Henry argues: 'It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible' (p. 32). This may well mean he is a Paterian materialist. But this aesthetics of the surface solicits other interpretations. It is the form as well as the highly critical content of these aphorisms that has a broader bearing on late Victorian culture.

Taking as her cue a remark made by Lord Henry about the virtues of a new and highly fashionable commodity, the cigarette – which forever promises, but never can fulfil, pleasure – Rachel Bowlby observes that Lord Henry's aphorisms absorb other aspects of the culture of consumerism undermining the authenticity of Dorian's portrait. Bowlby's analysis treats *Dorian Gray* within the context of the 'conspicuous consumption' that Thorstein Veblen remarked on in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), and which permeates the upper-class society that prevails in Wilde's novel. Noting how bourgeois culture at this time witnessed the convergence of art and advertising – focused by a familiar example, Millais's commercial ideal of youth, 'Bubbles', used to promote Pears's soap – Bowlby indicates that Wilde's aphorisms are suffused in an atmosphere where the relations between art and commerce have been destabilized: 'the aphorism repeats the effects of pleasure of non-satisfaction attributed to its subject, securing a renewed quest for more satisfaction'.[23] Since they read like promotional slogans, these aphorisms mockingly place art criticism and advertising on more or less the same plane. It could also be said that since Wilde transposes his aphorisms from one text to another with such frequency in his whole canon of work, they float free from any pure source of authority. They mimic – only to criticize – the mass-produced phrases of the marketplace.

For Lord Henry, aesthetics concerns the elegance and persuasiveness of expression itself as much as anything else. He is endlessly enchanted by superficial qualities – by how an object looks and by the desires that object arouses, rather than by its deepest and most serious implications. The apparent assault on Pater may seem to hold good. However, throughout the novel, the point seems to be that whatever may be desired in the name of beauty cannot be seen for what it is. 'Bubbles' may advertise a bar of soap but Dorian Gray cannot promote sexual relations between men. To reiterate: the representation of homosexuality stands against, even if it draws on, the interests of consumer capital. Likewise, it displays the dangerous influence of Paterian hedonism in a world where the consequences of such a doctrine cannot freely exist. In a world where – to take the interwined issues at stake here – commerce, art, and sexuality have been radically reconfigured, it is still not possible to portray some of the desires shaped and encouraged by the increasingly rapid exchange of goods.

In *Dorian Gray*, pleasure remains in continual conflict with property, as well as proper behaviour. Dorian's first encounter with the painter Basil Hallward points this out. Dorian's beauty captivates Hallward so much that the painter falls in love with him: 'I knew that I had come face to face with some one whose mere personality was so fascinating that, if I allowed it to do so, it would absorb my whole nature, my whole soul, my very art itself' (p. 21). 'Personality' – a word repeatedly turned to by Wilde throughout the trials – both eludes and yet signals the object of homosexual attraction. Hallward captures Dorian's remarkable looks in paint to the extent that there is barely any distinction to be made between Dorian and his picture. The portrait marks the zenith of the painter's career. Lord Henry is impressed by the finished work. There follows a short but highly significant dialogue about who owns the picture – Dorian, Hallward, or its purchaser:

'Of course he [Dorian] likes it,' said Lord Henry. 'Who wouldn't

like it? It is one of the greatest things in modern art. I will give you anything you like to ask for it. I must have it.'

'It is not my property, Harry.'

'Whose property is it?'

'Dorian's, of course,' answered the painter.

'He is a very lucky fellow.'

'How sad it is!' murmured Dorian Gray, with his eyes still fixed upon his own portrait. 'How sad it is! I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will always remain young. It will never be older than this particular day of June . . . If only it were the other way! If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that – for that – I would give everything! Yes, there is nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for that!'

'You would hardly care for such an arrangement, Basil,' cried Lord Henry, laughing. 'It would be rather hard lines on your work.'

'I should object very strongly,' said Hallward.

Dorian Gray turned and looked at him. 'I believe you would, Basil. You like your art better than your friends. I am no more to you than a green bronze figure. Hardly as much, I dare say . . . How long will you like me? Till I have my first wrinkle, I suppose. I know, now, that when one loses one's good looks, whatever they may be, one loses everything. Your picture has taught me that. Lord Henry Wotton is perfectly right. Youth is the only thing worth having. When I find that I am growing old, I shall kill myself.' (pp. 34–5)

Dorian's image provides the focus for the different, inquiring looks of all three men. Each is in competition with the other. In Dorian's picture, Lord Henry and Hallward see what they desire. This desire, however, can only exist as a representation, as art. The artwork itself has such a high price on it that the desire to possess it – and implicitly kill it – begins to intensify. In response to what appears to be an alienating commercial transaction (that is, putting the picture into the realm of property) Dorian fears he has lost control over his identity, since it seems that he is only desirable as a valuable artwork and nothing else. He strives to reappropriate his image – to become what he has been made to look like: an aesthetic object. But as soon as he enjoys the hedonistic lifestyle he has been led towards, the picture turns grotesque, and consequently has to be put into hiding. Thereafter Dorian can never be anything other than a picture, a falsifying image, to the world – of heterosexual norms, of conspicuous consumption, and of widening gaps between rich and poor – in which both his desire and his desirability are situated. Ed Cohen argues that this narrative displaces the erotic on to the aesthetic,

making homosexuality problematically unrepresentable. That is, the picture has the function of an 'absent presence' which 'interrupts the novel's overt representational limits by introducing a visual, extraverbal component of male same-sex desire'.[24] Cohen means that homosexuality cannot be seen for whatever it may be. Only through an oblique reading of the painting can the homosexual 'moral' of Dorian's life be comprehended.

Having sat for his portrait, Dorian is able to see how he solicits the gaze of other men. But his position within this relay of looks is not the *raison d'être* for his sexual preference. The novel explores various structures and theories of deviant desire to witness the formation of Dorian's 'Greek' sensibility. Wilde's narrative moves from the same-sexual interests of narcissism implicit in the painting, to Lord Henry's misogyny, and finally to Dorian's outlandish experiments in cross-dressing (see pp. 107–9) to examine how homosexual desire might be articulated. He also introduces a proto-eugenic account of Dorian's hereditary sexual nature. Passing meditatively through the rooms of his family home, Dorian muses on the portraits of his scandalous ancestors gracing the walls:

> He felt that he had known them all, those strange terrible figures that had passed across the stage of the world and made sin so marvellous, and evil so full of subtlety. It seemed to him that in some mysterious way their lives had been his own. (p. 113)

Ancestry and heredity are controlling (because predestinarian) forces in Dorian's double life. But these, by turns, sensual, evil, and fantastic people from the past do not wholly account for the perverse vicissitudes of his desire. Slightly earlier, the narrator has pointed out that to Dorian 'man was a being with myriad lives and myriad sensations, a complex multiform creature that bore within itself strange legacies of thought and passion, and whose very flesh was tainted with the monstrous maladies of the dead' (p. 112). Such thoughts allow both heredity and many other causes, in all their multiformity, to give birth to the monstrosity that is Dorian's partially obscured sexual identity. This story explores different types of sexual daring and sexual loathing to suggest Dorian's dangerous homoeroticism.

First of all, misogyny figures as a defining feature of homosexuality. Dorian's initial crime involves the harsh rejection of a woman, the actress, Sybil Vane. (Her name puns on several things. She is, to begin with, a 'sybil' – a prophet – who is 'vain': both narcissistic and empty-headed. Moreover, as the narrative shows, she can only be loved 'in vain', a feature which extends to practically every one of the marginal women characters mentioned in the story.) This crime occurs early in the novel, by which time Dorian is almost wholly under the influence of Lord Henry. A working-class girl playing to a middle-class audience, Sybil is a

hack actress who untiringly performs Shakespearean drama to pay the rent. She is exploited by her Jewish agent, Mr Isaacs, and Dorian's anti-Semitic jibes underline the depravity of her life. In his insatiable pursuit of transgressive desires, Dorian visits her downmarket theatre to watch her in a variety of comic roles. She plays parts involving cross-dressing, ones which in themselves disrupt conceptions of gender. Dorian muses: 'One evening she is Rosalind, and the next evening she is Imogen . . . I have watched her wandering through the forest of Arden, disguised as a pretty boy in hose and doublet and dainty cap' (p. 51). Neither boy nor girl in these costumes, Sybil exists in a world of factitious images that flout sex, class, and even the Bard. But the moment Sybil is disabused of the artificiality of the theatre – by discovering her 'real' love for Dorian – she can no longer succeed on the stage. Dorian instantly loses interest in her. She tells him: 'The painted scenes were my world. I knew nothing but shadows, and I thought them real. You came – oh, my beautiful love! – and you freed my soul from prison. You taught me what reality really is' (p. 74). Yet he finds her desirable only when she is associated with a despised Jew, a mother whose life thrives on sensation novels, and a theatre that vulgarizes Shakespeare.

Furthermore, it is later revealed that her brother, James, is a bastard. Sybil's love for the fairy-tale 'Prince Charming' – as Dorian is known in the dockland underworld of prostitution and social decay – clearly perturbs her brother. A cross-class love affair is sensed as a fatal attraction – and so it is. Towards the end of the novel, James Vane haunts the East End to avenge his sister's death. He will also die, if not at Dorian's hands, then by association with him. (Vane accidentally receives a fatal wound from a shooting party of which Dorian is a member.) Basil Hallward – whom Dorian murders for gaining access to the hidden painting – implores the by now lethal hero: 'Why is your friendship so fatal to young men?' (p. 117). Dorian's homosexuality symbolically spreads like an incurable, chancre-ridden disease. Elaine Showalter observes how his recriminatory picture appears to be pathologically eaten away by syphilis, noting the 'warped lips' and 'coarse bloated hands', the 'misshapen body and failing limbs' (p. 103): 'The sudden and uncontrollable frenzy in which "the mad passions of a hunted animal" (p. 122) seize Dorian . . . suggest the psychology of general paralysis.'[25] So sexuality can only maim, madden, and finally kill, annihilating both men and women, and all kinds of art. Bastardy; degeneracy; prostitution; homosexuality – all bear witness to the criminality of desire. Yet the more Dorian stares, nervously, at his portrait, the more it may seem that he is inevitably and wrongly caught up in a duplicitous world which legislates against his pleasures. And so his story goes from bad to worse.

After hearing of Sybil's death, Dorian expresses no guilt whatsoever. Lord Henry delivers the following detached account of her sad life: 'I am afraid that women appreciate cruelty, downright cruelty, more than anything else . . . They love being dominated. I am sure you were splendid' (p. 86). This misogynistic tirade fully satisfies Dorian. Women are 'charmingly artificial, but they have no sense of art' (p. 85). When, much later, Dorian challenges another character, the Duchess, to define women, he is told, in one of Wilde's oft-repeated phrases, that they are 'Sphynxes without secrets' (p. 150) – without sexuality, the ultimate secret, it might be inferred. Even woman's 'mystery' or 'otherness' is rendered factitious. Artificial, not art; subservient, not dominant – women are the official objects of sexual interest, to be condemned in the process of being loved. In *Dorian Gray*, female sexuality is continually displayed as a theatrical spectacle. Lord Henry again: 'A woman will flirt with anybody in the world as long as other people are looking on' (p. 154). And, close to the start, Lord Henry claims that his own marriage enables him and his wife to live 'a life of deception' (p. 20). By exposing what he considers to be the shallow qualities of women, Lord Henry persuades Dorian to entertain other desires, other objects, ones kept out of view, outside the marriage market. Dorian 'felt the time had really come for making a choice. Or had his choice already been made? Yes, life had decided that for him – life, and his own infinite curiosity about life. Eternal youth, infinite passion, pleasures subtle and secret, wild joys and wilder sins' (p. 87). By now Dorian has turned away from women, whatever their class or reputation. Lord Henry opens up Dorian's mind: 'I represent to you all the sins you have never had courage to commit' (p. 70). These sins are serious, not shallow, and concern pleasure, not wedded union. Lord Henry has already pronounced that 'Men marry because they are tired; women, because they are curious; both are disappointed' (p. 48).

To become homosexual, Dorian has made a number of moves. He has, first of all, separated out property from art, locating desire as a force directed against convention (property relations) and towards the aesthetic beauty of other bodies, regardless of class or gender. Dorian, after all, says of his affair with Sybil: 'I did not treat it as a business transaction' (p. 68) – which is how officially respected sexual relations in marriage may be thought of. Second, his desire is driven towards those who manipulate roles and masks. Sybil, at the start, delights him because she is a common actress pretending to be something else – a boy, for instance. Lastly, Lord Henry denies that women possess the finest qualities of art. Misogyny here forms part of a struggling understanding of what motivates male homosexuality. Such cruel woman-hating attends the generally deleterious consequences that stem from the moral constraints placed on all sexual desire. Dorian soon learns that only in the underworld, among unnameable sexual acts, can 'art' discover its erotic potential. This shadowy, private world is the best – because most improper – place for it. It is also where it is most imperilled.

That Dorian has turned to homosexuality emerges in the description of his friendship with Lord Henry. Their love

> was really love – had nothing in it that was not noble and intellectual. It was not that mere physical admiration of beauty that is born of the senses, and that dies when the senses tire. It was such love as Michael Angelo had known, and Montaigne, and Winckelmann, and Shakespeare himself. (p. 97)

Listing these famous artists, Wilde is exposing the 'grossly indecent' subtext to be found in the successive chapters of Pater's *The Renaissance*, the Conclusion to which was thought by some to endanger its young male readers. There, Pater infamously encouraged 'the desire of beauty, the love of art for its own sake'.[26] Pater's advocacy of such unrestrained fervour for art disturbed his conservative contemporary, Sidney Colvin, who remonstrated: 'by all means refine the pleasures of as many people as possible; but do not tell everybody that refined pleasure is the one end of life. By refined, they will understand the most refined they know, and the most refined they know are gross.'[27] Gross indecency? The line between what was considered to be refined and what was indecent was so precarious that Pater seemingly was moved to withdraw the Conclusion from subsequent editions. (There may, admittedly, be other reasons for this retraction. The Conclusion reappeared in the fourth edition in 1893.) Colvin's comments indicate a prevalent attitude: if something is beautiful it is probably immoral, especially if the working classes start liking it.

Dorian wears a fine aristocratic face but possesses what may be referred to as a working-class (debased, gross, indecent) body, as he moves across and between different echelons of society. He is to be found either in a 'delicately-scented chamber, or in the sordid little room of the little ill-famed tavern near the Docks . . . under an assumed name, and in disguise' (p. 103). He frequents places at the heart of the late Victorian social conscience. In one episode, a politician states: 'The East End is a very important problem' (p. 44). Set against this serious issue are Lord Henry's flippant remarks: 'I don't desire to change anything in England except the weather' (ibid.). This brief exchange belongs to the after-dinner repartee of the upper classes where no one can accept the vicious activities attributed to Dorian Gray – 'those who heard the most evil things against him . . . could not believe anything to his dishonour when they saw him' (p. 102). It is at points such as this that the full sweep of Smith and Helfand's belief in the anti-Paterian representation of Lord Henry comes into its own. Hedonism of Lord Henry's kind here may reveal his complete contempt for improving social relations.

But, there again (to keep the Wildean dialectic in motion), Lord Henry will not tarry with the witless pieties of political rhetoric. That said, other writings by Wilde can be brought to bear on this piece of dialogue; take this, for example, from 'The Soul of Man under Socialism':

> when scientific men are no longer called upon to go down to a depressing East End and distribute bad cocoa and worse blankets to starving people, they [the poor] will have delightful leisure in which to devise wonderful and marvellous things for their own joy and the joy of everyone else. (p. 1089)

Yet in a class-divided and gender-riven world where 'public morals' dictate standards of behaviour, there can only be the most formidable kinds of 'corruption', like that brought about by Labouchère's amendment. Late in the novel, Dorian threatens to expose the young scientist, Alan Campbell, for untold crimes if Campbell refuses to get rid of Hallward's murdered body. 'You have gone from corruption to corruption, and now you have culminated in crime' (p. 132), says the scientist. At this point, the picture begins to bleed. A site of beauty has become one of sin. Who or what is to blame? Pater or the law? Or even homosexual desire itself?

Let me offer a not entirely satisfactory answer to the 'multiform' possibilities opened up by the implicit 'moral' of this story. If Lord Henry embodies the worst of Pater's materialism – a self-seeking hedonism – it may follow that his evil influence on Dorian, introducing him to the yellow-wrappered book (J.-K. Huysman's *A Rebours* (1884), itself containing a homosexual incident), would seem to be an outright condemnation of Greek ethics. Dorian certainly leads his life to its fullest and most sensational ends, and the price he has to pay is his own mortality. Yet, in the course of his hedonistic indulgences, Dorian learns that what he takes pleasure in is not permitted in public; his delights are consigned to secrecy. His unspoken wish for sexual relations with men; his impossible liaisons with the lower-class Sybil and, later, the village girl, Hetty Merton – all of these things signal Dorian's displacement from conventional heterosexuality. His desires subsist on blackmail and the ruination of other people's lives. This fact alone, however, does not necessarily suggest that such desires should not be expressed or that hedonism itself is evil.

Dorian's fatal punishment, lying dead, a wrinkled husk of a man, having stabbed his monstrous bleeding picture (now the last will and testament of all his sins), anticipates Wilde's own in Reading Gaol. There, Wilde witnessed the appalling cruelty exercised towards children incarcerated for petty crimes. Two well-known pieces of correspondence on this theme describe the circumstances in which a friendly and caring warder lost his job because he had provided, out of his own pocket, sweet biscuits to a hungry child prisoner (see 'The Case of Warder Martin: Some Cruelties of Prison Life': pp. 958–69). The young person to be protected in these interlinked arenas – the courts and the prison – was, on the one hand, to be saved from the clutches of the homosexual, and on the other, to be imprisoned for minor thefts arising out of poverty. With this double standard in mind, it looks as if the law is its own criminal. But is it?

This chapter has attempted to argue that in *Dorian Gray* Wilde turns his hero into a figure whose life story implicitly interrogates the iniquitous effects of legislation on sex in the 1880s. Surely, in the light of all that has been said, child prostitutes required protection? They did – from the law, which persistently marked out women's bodies as sites of vice, instead of challenging the patriarchal governance of those bodies, and which, simultaneously, drove homosexual men into hiding. The Wilde trials, of course, shocked those who backed movements campaigning against the Contagious Diseases Acts. W.T. Stead's famous 'Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon' published in the July and August 1885 issues of the *Pall Mall Gazette* is important here. This bestselling piece of investigative journalism into the 'white slave traffic' of young British girls to European brothels both landed Stead in prison and precipitated the passing of the Criminal Law Amendment Act. He wrote after judgment had been passed on Wilde:

> [T]he trial and the sentence bring into very clear relief the ridiculous disparity there is between punishment meted out to those who corrupt girls and those who corrupt boys. If Oscar Wilde, instead of indulging in dirty tricks of indecent familiarity with boys and men, had ruined the lives of half a dozen simpletons of girls, or had broken up the home of his friend's wife, no one could have laid a finger on him. The male is sacrosanct; the female is fair game.[28]

Stead would seem to be suggesting that the incrimination of homosexuals was serving as an excuse for the ongoing corruption of young women by men of Wilde's class. It is certainly the case that men involved in practices of 'gross indecency' in Britain have often received sentences that seem harsh by comparison with those delivered against men who have raped women. (But that is not to argue that the punishment for the one crime should or should not exceed the other. It is, instead, the fact that a juridically reviled male homosexuality grants a certain permission to the apparently 'understandable' impulses motivating heterosexual male rape.)

By the time of the Wilde trials, it was clear that the Labouchère amendment had diverted attention from the prime objectives of protecting girls to focus instead on the private world of male sexuality – a sexuality which, if at one time seen as natural in its lustfulness, was now particularly intriguing because of its (potential) wrong choice of object. In 1885 what was most familiar about men and sex (they were bestial) had become, ten years later, most strange (they were perverse). This turnabout in the legal comprehension of – or, indeed, puzzlement about – male sexuality can be connected, once more, to Wilde's principal textual strategy, the aphorism – that which playfully resembles received wisdom only to invert it, thereby exposing the mistaken complacency of its origins. At one point Sybil Vane, at her most wise, declares: 'Our proverbs want re-writing' (p. 62). For homosexual politics, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* marks the beginning of such a project: to rewrite and rethink how and why it is 'strange to live in a land where the worship of beauty and the passion of love are considered infamous'.[29]

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990; Hemel Hempstead: Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1991).
Sinfield, Alan, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Post-War Britain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).
Summers, Claude J., *Gay Fictions: Wilde to Stonewall: Studies in a Male Homosexual Tradition* (New York: Continuum, 1990).
Woods, Gregory, *Articulate Flesh: Male Homo-Eroticism and Modern Poetry* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987).
Yingling, Thomas, *Hart Crane and the Homosexual Text: New Thresholds, New Anatomies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
Yorke, Liz, *Impertinent Voices: Subversive Strategies in Contemporary Women's Poetry* (London: Routledge, 1991).
Zimmerman, Bonnie, *The Safe Sea of Women: Lesbian Fiction 1969–1988* (Boston: Beacon, 1990; London: Onlywomen Press, 1991).

Notes

1 Introduction

1 See, for example, Chris Baldick, *The Social Mission of English Criticism 1848–1932* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 45–6.
2 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 43.
3 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press; Hemel Hempstead: Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 15–16.
4 David Van Leer, 'The Beast of the Closet: Homosociality and the Pathology of Manhood', *Critical Inquiry*, 15:3 (1989), pp. 587–605.
5 Janet Todd, *Feminist Literary Criticism: A Defence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), p. 118.
6 'Male feminism' makes its appearance in two important collections: Alice Jardine and Paul Smith (eds), *Men in Feminism* (New York: Methuen, 1987), and Joseph A. Boone and Michael Cadden (eds), *Engendering Men: The Question of Male Feminist Criticism* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
7 Mandy Merck, 'Difference and its Discontents', *Screen* 28:1 (1987), p. 2.

2 The cultural politics of perversion: Augustine, Shakespeare, Freud, Foucault

1 The issues and arguments outlined in this chapter are explored more fully in Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
2 All quotations from Freud's writings are taken from the Pelican Freud Library. Volume and page numbers are included in the text.
3 Kenneth Lewes, *The Psychoanalytical Theory of Male Homosexuality* (London: Quartet, 1989). Those analysts Lewes cites include Edmund Bergler ('the most important analytic theorist of homosexuality in the 1950s', p. 15), who wrote: 'I have no bias against homosexuality . . . [but] homosexuals are essentially disagreeable people . . . displaying a mixture of superciliousness, false aggression, and whimpering . . . subservient when confronted with a stronger person, merciless when in power, unscrupulous about trampling on a weaker person' (cited by Lewes, p. 15).
4 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1978). See especially part 2, ch. 2.
5 Foucault, 'Introduction' to George Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological* (New York: Zone Books, 1989), p. 22.
6 Francis Bacon, 'Advertisement Touching an Holy Warre', in *Works*, ed. J. Spedding and R.L. Ellis (1857–61; Stuttgart: Fromann, 1961–3), vol. 7, pp. 33–4.

20 Mary Sturgeon, *Michael Field* (London: Harrap, 1922), p. 47.
21 British Library, Add. MS 46803, fo. 100[v].
[illegible]on, op. cit., p. 47.
[illegible]nan, op. cit., p. 210.
[illegible]d Carpenter, *Homogenic Love, and Its Place in a Free Society* (Manchester: Manchester Labour Society, 1894).
25 Elizabeth Mavor, *The Ladies of Llangollen: A Study in Romantic Friendship* (1971; London: Penguin Books, 1973), p. xvii.
26 Case histories of female sexual inverts contained in H. Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, vol. 1, *Sexual Inversion* (1897) included Edith Ellis and Renée Vivien.
27 Sonja Ruehl, 'Sexual Theory and Practice: Another Double Standard', in Sue Cartledge and Joanna Ryan (eds), *Sex and Love: New Thoughts on Old Contradictions* (London: The Women's Press, 1983), p. 219.
28 Gayle Rubin, 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality', in Carole S. Vance (ed.), *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 301.
29 *Works and Days*, p. 63.
30 British Library MS, 46798 fo. 25[v].
31 See E. Ann Kaplan, 'Is the Gaze Male?', in Ann Snitow *et al.* (eds), *Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (London: Virago, 1984), pp. 321–38.
32 British Library MS, 46798, fo. 20[v].
33 Wayne Koestenbaum, *Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 173: he is citing Sturgeon, op. cit., p. 23.
34 British Library MS, 46797, fo. 52[v].
35 ibid., fo. 77.
36 British Library MS, 46777, fo. 87.
37 Michael Field, *The Wattlefold: Unpublished Poems by Michael Field*, collected by Emily C. Fortey (Oxford: 1930), p. 191.
38 *Works and Days*, p. 326.
39 See, with reservation and suspicion, since he suppresses or refutes any suggestions of homosexuality, Brocard Sewell, *Footnote to the Nineties: A Memoir of John Gray and André Raffalovich* (London: C. & A. Woolf, 1968) and Brocard Sewell, *In the Dorian Mode: A Life of John Gray 1866–1934* (Padstow: Tabb House, 1983).
40 Sturgeon, op. cit., p. 47.
41 *Works and Days*, p. xix.

4 Wilde, Dorian Gray, *and gross indecency*

Thanks to Jonathan Dollimore and D.A. Miller for responses.

1 *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. J.B. Foreman (London: Collins, 1966). All references to this unreliable but widely available edition are contained in the text. Wilde's textual revisions to the version of *Dorian Gray* that appeared in *Lippincott's* in 1890 do not form part of the present discussion; for further details of the salient changes to the 1890 text, see Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987), pp. 292–306. Wilde's collected writings are now being prepared for an edition to be published by Oxford University Press.
2 Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed. Donald L. Hill ([1873 and subsequent editions] Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 190.
3 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), and 'The Beast in the Closet: James and the Writing of Homosexual Panic', in Ruth Bernard Yeazell (ed.), *Sex, Politics, and Science in the Nineteenth Century Novel*, Selected Papers from the English Institute 1983–84, NS 10 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 147–86. One reading of *Dorian Gray* which has emerged from Sedgwick's investigation of homosocial and homosexual bonds is Richard Dellamora, 'Representation and Homophobia in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*', *Victorian Newsletter*, 73 (1988), pp. 28–31. Sedgwick considers the 'sentimental relations of the male body' in the writings of Wilde and Friedrich Nietzsche in *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990; Hemel Hempstead: Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 31–81. Further significant gay readings of Wilde's works include Kevin Kopelson, 'Wilde, Barthes, and the Orgasmics of Truth', *Genders*, 7 (1990), pp. 22–31; Wayne Koestenbaum, 'Wilde's Hard Labour and the Birth of Gay Reading', in Joseph A. Boone and Michael Cadden (eds), *Engendering Men: The Question of Male Feminist Criticism* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 176–89; and Christopher Craft, 'Alias Bunbury: Desire and Transgression in *The Importance of Being Earnest*', *Representations*, 31 (1990), pp. 19–46.
4 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 43; Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics, and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800*, 2nd edn (London: Longman, 1988), pp. 99–100. A fresh analysis of the emergence of 'homosexuality' is provided by Ed Cohen, 'Legislating the Norm: From Sodomy to Gross Indecency', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 88:1 (1989), pp. 181–217.
5 Linda Dowling, 'Ruskin's Pied Beauty and the Constitution of a "Homosexual" Code', *Victorian Newsletter*, 75 (1989), p. 7. For a related account of emerging nineteenth-century homosexual codings, see Michael Lynch, '"Here Is Adhesiveness": From Friendship to Homosexuality', *Victorian Studies*, 28 (1985–6), pp. 67–96.
6 Philip E. Smith II and Michael S. Helfand (eds), *Oscar Wilde's Oxford Notebooks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 91. A briefer but nevertheless useful account of Wilde's philosophical affiliations with progressive late Victorian thought – Tylor, Spencer, and Buckle, among others – can be found in Bruce Haley, 'Wilde's "Decadence" and the Positivist Tradition', *Victorian Studies*, 28 (1985–6), pp. 215–29.
7 John Stokes, *In the Nineties* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester-Wheatsheaf; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 22. Stokes's study explores the nineties' fascination with Max Nordau's polemic on 'degeneration'. The publication of the English translation of *Degeneration* roughly coincided with two events that year: first, the Wilde trials, and second, a heated debate in the periodicals about fiction and sexuality (especially in relation to 'New Woman' fiction): see, among other examples, James Ashcroft Noble, 'The Fiction of Sexuality', *The Contemporary Review*, 67 (1895), pp. 490–8; and Janet E. Hogarth, 'Literary Degenerates', *The Fortnightly Review*, NS 57 (1895), pp. 586–92. (My thanks to Kate Flint for pointing out these references to me.)
8 Smith and Helfand, op. cit., p. 101.
9 Neil Bartlett, *Who Was That Man? A Present for Mr Oscar Wilde* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1988), pp. 128–43. On Bartlett's gay historiography, see Joseph Bristow, 'Being Gay: Politics, Identity, Pleasure', *New Formations*, 9 (1989), pp. 61–81.
10 John Marshall, 'Pansies, Perverts and Macho Men: Changing Conceptions of Male Homosexuality', in Kenneth Plummer (ed.), *The Making of the Modern Homosexual* (London: Hutchinson, 1981), p. 139. Marshall adds: 'Judging from the written records (Parliamentary Debates 1885), Henry Labouchère, who introduced the amendment, was concerned essentially with indecent assaults involving males, which at that time had to be committed on persons

under 13 years of age to be punishable. His clause was designed to make any assault of this kind punishable whatever the age of the assailant. However, the actual amendment referred rather vaguely to "acts of gross indecency", and it was this undefined offence that was to be so widely interpreted in the years that followed. Apparently Labouchère did not intend his clause to penalize "grossly indecent" acts which involved the consent of both parties' (p. 139). Questions arising from the eleventh-hour appearance of this amendment to the 1885 Act are covered in F.B. Smith, 'Labouchère's Amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Bill', *Historical Studies* [Melbourne], 67 (1976), pp. 165–75.

11 Wilde made this remark in his petition to the Home Secretary for some reading materials to alleviate the boredom of solitary confinement: 'To the Home Secretary', 2 July 1896, in *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962), p. 402.

12 Judith Walkowitz, 'Male Vice and Female Virtue: Feminism and the Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain', in Ann Snitow *et al.*, (eds), *Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (London: Virago Press, 1984), p. 49.

13 H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* (London: William Hodge, 1948), p. 124.

14 ibid., p. 236.

15 Hesketh Pearson, *Oscar Wilde* (1946; Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1982), p. 157. Pearson's commentary here on this phase of the trials is especially valuable.

16 Hyde, *Oscar Wilde: A Biography* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1976), p. 118. The extract is taken from the *Scots Observer*, 5 July 1890.

17 Pearson, op. cit., p. 286.

18 Weeks, 'Discourse, Desire and Sexual Deviance: Some Problems in a History of Homosexuality', in Plummer, op. cit., p. 102.

19 Hyde, *Oscar Wilde: A Biography*, p. 118.

20 Walter Pater, 'A Novel by Mr Oscar Wilde', in Richard Ellmann (ed.), *Oscar Wilde: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 37. Pater's review originally appeared in *The Bookman*, November 1891.

21 ibid.

22 Jonathan Dollimore, 'Different Desires: Subjectivity and Transgression in Wilde and Gide', *Textual Practice*, 1:1 (1987), pp. 48–67.

23 Rachel Bowlby, 'Promoting Dorian Gray', *Oxford Literary Review*, 9:1–2 (1987), p. 148. For a further analysis of how sexual desire is connected with the seductions of advertising and the organization of the consumerist gaze, see Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 18–34. A parallel analysis of this culture of 'self-advertisement' to be found both in the text of, and the critical responses to, *Dorian Gray* is provided by Regenia Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Scolar Press, 1987), pp. 51–66. Gagnier's study balances the homosexual interests of the novel against the 'real story behind the novel and the nature of British decadence' (p. 52), namely the longstanding nineteenth-century controversies surrounding the figure of the dandy from Beau Brummell onwards. Gagnier usefully points out that both Wilde and his critics 'were situated in the context of public images and self-advertisement: the journalists posing as the gentlemen guardians of public morality, Wilde advertising himself as the subtle dandy-artist of higher morality' (p. 57).

24 Ed Cohen, 'Writing Gone Wilde: Homoerotic Desire in the Closet of Representation', *PMLA*, 102 (1987), p. 806.

25 Elaine Showalter, 'Syphilis, Sexuality, and the Fiction of the Fin de Siècle', in Yeazell, op. cit., p. 103.

26 Pater, *The Renaissance*, p. 190.

27 ibid., p. 445. Colvin's remarks were first published in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1 March 1873, p. 12.

28 Hyde, *Trials of Oscar Wilde*, p. 359. Stead's article, 'The Progress of the World', appeared in *The Review of Reviews* in 1895.

29 'To Lord Alfred Douglas', *c.* 9 November 1894, *Letters*, ed. Hart-Davis, p. 377. Wilde adds that he 'hate[s] England'. It must be borne in mind that Wilde was in many respects an outsider to the elite and fashionable world in which he thrived, not least because he was an Irishman.

5 Forster's self-erasure: Maurice *and the scene of masculine love*

1 E.M. Forster, *Maurice* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 207. All further references are included in the text.

2 Robert K. Martin, 'Edward Carpenter and the Double Structure of *Maurice*', in Stuart Kellogg (ed.), *Essays on Gay Literature* (New York: Harington Park Press, 1985), pp. 35–46.

3 Cynthia Ozick, 'Forster as Homosexual', *Commentary*, 52 (1971), pp. 81–5; Jeffrey Meyers, *Homosexuality and Literature 1890–1930* (London: Athlone Press, 1977).

4 Claude J. Summers, *Gay Fictions: Wilde to Stonewall: Studies in a Male Homosexual Literary Tradition* (New York: Continuum, 1990), pp. 78, 111.

5 Martin op. cit., pp. 37, 45, n.8.

6 John Addington Symonds, 'A Problem in Greek Ethics', in Symonds, *Sexual Inversion: A Classic Study of Homosexuality* (New York: Bell, 1984), pp. 9–97.

7 The broad outline of Symonds's description of Greek *paiderastia* as an institution has been confirmed by recent scholarship: K.J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (London: Duckworth, 1978); and especially David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990), writing in a Foucauldian constructionist framework very different from Symonds. Symonds nowhere discusses pederastic sexual practices in any detail, confining himself to embarrassed generalities about 'sensuality', 'indulgences', and 'carnal appetite', but it is clear that what he calls 'Greek love' includes sexual expression. Symonds also makes a useful distinction between Socratic and Platonic conceptions of love. The figure of Socrates in Plato's dialogues presents an idealized version of *paiderastia* as a transmitter not only of martial values but of a philosophical idea of the noble life and a metaphysics of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful, to be found in a number of Plato's dialogues, particularly *Phaedrus* and *The Symposium*. Plato's late dialogue *The Laws*, where the figure of Socrates is absent, declares sexual acts and pleasure between men to be against nature and fit to be criminalized. Here Plato assigns sexual activity to procreation and relations with women. Same-sex love (*philia* or friendship) is to be chastely directed towards the beloved's soul not his body. It is to this late Platonic but non-Socratic conception that Clive Durham's ideal of homosexual love in *Maurice* conforms. To confuse matters, however, the particular Platonic dialogues that Forster associates with Clive, i.e. *Phaedrus* and *The Symposium*, are the very ones that present the Socratic celebration of an ennobling *paiderastia*, beginning with sexual desire for male bodily beauty and ending in a sublimated love of Beauty as a philosophical vision. Consequently there can be no simple equation of the Platonic texts as a whole (with their different concep-