Queer Texts and the Cold War: How Nationalism and Domesticity Shaped U.S. Lesbian and Gay Writing, 1945-1960

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements i

Introduction: Meanings of Homosexuality in a Moment of Flux 1

Chapter One: "A Completely Ordinary Boy" 24
Nationalism and Masculinity in Gore Vidal's The City and the Pillar

Chapter Two: Complicating Categories 67
Locating James Baldwin's Giovanni's Room in History and Canon

Chapter Three: Divided Loyalties 107
Conflict, Reciprocity, and Ideological Formation in Ann Bannon's Women in the Shadows

Chapter Four: A Forgotten Radical 151
Valerie Taylor's Unhomely Domesticity

Chapter Five: From ONE to Many 181
Homophile Responses to Cold War Nationalism and Domestic Ideologies

Chapter Six: The Ladder to Security 217
Lesbians, Containment, Domesticity, and U.S. Nationalism in the 1950s

Works Cited 255

Introduction: Meanings of Homosexuality in a Moment of Flux

The sudden radiance of you…
Taught my heart to sing once more
Gay melodies of happy youth
Too soon lost to clod-like conformity.
– Rick, ONE, Dec. 1957

Protective as police and P.T.A. meetings and
The Good Humor man, champion of the Goodies of Life…
You are safe (if you are smart)
behind the picket fence of yeses.
– Gabrielle Ganelle, ONE, Apr. 1955

The quotations above are excerpted from poems that appeared in ONE Magazine, an early publication of the "homophile" movement of the 1950s. Most historians and gay rights activists view the Stonewall Inn riots of 1969 as the decisive turning point which ushered in the modern era of queer political activism, if not the birth of queer activism itself. Much historical scholarship on the years "Before Stonewall" has viewed earlier queer community and activism as laying the groundwork, as it were, for this explosion of radicalism and activity. After the 1960s, it would seem, gay men and lesbians were suddenly able to piece together the material of gay history, add lessons learned from the Civil Rights and Women's Liberation movements, and create a national political movement of their own.

Few scholars have seen anything in pre-'60s gay culture that constitutes a progressive political inheritance, although several significant texts have explored LGBT cultural history in the middle of the twentieth century. In his landmark work Gay New

York, George Chauncey (1994) discusses the rich gay male community that existed in New York City before World War II in cultural and social terms. John D'Emilio's groundbreaking (and still relevant) work in Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities (1983) locates the homophile movement of the 1950s and early 1960s as a precursor to the gay liberation movement, in which important ideas about gay rights and gay worth were fleshed out, but nonetheless a prelude to the real action of the Gay Liberation movement. Lillian Faderman (1991) and Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis (1993) similarly approach twentieth century lesbian history as a narrative of progress, with pre-'60s lesbian culture providing a social foundation for later activists to build on. Robert Corber, in his 1997 study of gay male writers in the early Cold War era, identifies Tennessee Williams, Gore Vidal, and James Baldwin as "anticipating the gay liberation movement of the 1960s" (4) because the progressive narrative of gay history which informs his scholarship leaves no space for their "anticipatory" brand of oppositional consciousness to exist in the 1950s as an independent phenomenon. In spite of Corber's claim, however, even unpaid and unremembered homophile writers such as the amateur poets quoted above were giving voice to a queer critique of American society and its "clod-like conformity" years before gay and lesbian rioters took to the streets of Greenwich Village to protest the police raid on Stonewall Inn.

In "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940), Walter Benjamin warns scholars of the dangers inherent in such a progressive view of history. In these meditations, composed while the author was attempting to flee Hitler's Germany, he points out that the progressive historical narrative arises from the underlying assumption that "history," or the simple passage of time, leads inevitably, irresistibly, and in an unwavering straight

line toward the "infinite perfectibility of mankind" (260). In Benjamin's view, this assumption leads to the unhelpful "current amazement that the things [i.e., forms of oppression] we are experiencing are 'still' possible in the twentieth century" (257). The progressive historical narrative carries with it the threat of diminishing the significance of revolutionary moments in the past as well as an oppressed people's ability to creatively face the challenges of the present. As a safeguard against a misleading progressive narrative Benjamin suggests "blast[ing] a specific era out of the homogenous course of history" (263) in order to understand how specific individuals in specific circumstances took advantage of their "revolutionary chance" (263). The purpose of this dissertation, therefore, is not primarily to argue that the role of lesbian and gay writers in driving forward the timeline of the gay rights movement has been under-recognized. Rather, it seeks to examine a set of publications by lesbian and gay writers as varying responses to a specific historical context: the early years of the Cold War, the McCarthyist antihomosexual panic, and the domestic consensus ideology that accompanied this dramatic shift in American and global power structures. The ways that the writers I discuss interacted with these political forces depended to a great degree on their positioning in relation to axes of privilege and oppression based on race, class, and gender, as well as sexuality.

On February 28, 1950, Undersecretary of State John Peurifoy testified before a Senate appropriations committee that most, if not all, of 91 State Department employees allowed to resign after coming under investigation had been homosexuals (Dean 76). The statement was picked up by Republicans "eager to discredit the Truman administration" on the issue of national security (D'Emilio 41), and thus began the so-

called Lavender Scare, the association of homosexuals with Communists and the purges and brutalities which followed. The homosexual, according to popular reasoning, was particularly susceptible to blackmail by Soviet agents because of his or her shameful secret life, and so homosexuals were prohibited from working for the federal government.

Gays and lesbians, in the early Cold War years, were likened to subversives in other ways as well. Like Communists, they were an invisible threat, with no outwardly identifying characteristics, and so had to be rooted out of government offices. Homosexuals were thought to have the same slavish loyalty to their sexual drives as Communists were thought to have to their foreign ideology. The corrupt and morally weak Communist was considered to be "feminized," while the effeminate homosexual was considered morally corrupt and weak (D'Emilio 48-49).

The FBI collected information on suspected homosexuals from vice squads and postal inspectors and delivered it to the "suspect's" employer, virtually guaranteeing a firing (47). Newspapers were splashed with sensationalist headlines about the homosexual menace, the force which was undermining America's strength in the face of the international threat of Communism.[1] Indeed, as David K. Johnson writes in his 2004 study of the purges of homosexuals from jobs in the U.S. government, The Lavender Scare, "The constant pairing of 'Communists and queers' led many to see them as indistinguishable threats. Evidence that one group had infiltrated the government was seen as confirmation of charges that the other had as well" (31).

[1] Gerald Sullivan's 1999 article "Political Opportunism and the Harassment of Homosexuals in Florida, 1952-1965" cites numerous such news stories from the Miami Herald and the Miami News in which "Homosexuals were represented as anti-social monsters, child molesters and criminal ... psychologically unstable and a threat to society, and this viewpoint was presented as being factual" (72-73).

Domestic Consensus Ideology and the Homosexual

In her book Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era, Elaine Tyler May explores the ways in which the U.S. Cold War political and military rhetoric of containment was internalized by the individuals who idealized the suburban nuclear family, based on a legal heterosexual marriage, as a bastion of security against chaos. May documents how trends of marrying early, having many children, and avoiding divorce crossed the borders of race and class in the years immediately following World War II, resulting in America's "baby boom." In a culture that exalted the nuclear family, homosexuals were the archetypal outsiders. Gay men and lesbians so disturbed the domestic ideal that they were considered by civilians and by the government to be every bit as dangerous to the nation as actual Communists.

If homosexuals in the 1950s were a threat to national security in the military sense, their separation from traditional domestic gender roles made them a threat to the stability of the family as well. In the infamous "Kitchen Debate" of 1959, when Vice President Richard Nixon took on Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in a "model kitchen" display at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, Nixon told Khrushchev that unlike the Soviets, Americans valued women's traditional homemaking role and sought to make life easier for their housewives through technological innovation. The Soviet Premier countered that "Your capitalistic attitude toward women does not occur under Communism" (Kitchen Debate). For many Americans, however, Soviet women who worked outside the home stood not for liberation but for the collapse of the family caused by the loosening of gender roles. If, as Nixon asserted, the healthy family (the first line of

defense in the Cold War) depended upon a gendered division of spheres, homosexuals – whose very partnerships deconstructed these gender roles – threatened the nation's moral strength at its most basic unit.

In an international atmosphere of instability and fears of atomic bombs, politicians, the media, and civilians themselves seemed to agree, May (1999) argues, that the secret to a strong nation in a time of cold war was the strong family. Gender role instability threatened the family. To that end according to May, men needed to be breadwinners, providers of economic security for their families, and authority figures within their homes. A submissive, dependent wife and family would provide men with the sense of dignity, responsibility, and autonomy that was stripped from them in the dehumanizing corporate jobs that many saw as destroying the American male. As head of the family, men had the agency to provide a safe home environment for their loved ones, a respite from the unstable, frightening world. Meanwhile, women would channel their talents and creativity into raising children and managing the day-to-day activity of the household, a job that was seen as quasi-professional in itself.

Young couples expected marriage and childrearing to be the source of absolute personal fulfillment. They were prepared to do the job right, and sought expert advice to teach them how (May). After the Kinsey reports on male and female sexual behavior were published (in 1948 and 1953), and the scandalous information they revealed about America's widespread lack of chastity had been thoroughly objected to in the press, it became much more socially acceptable to print – and read – materials dealing with sexuality (D'Emilio 37). One aspect of this change was a new public attention to the

erotic in marriage. A sexually dissatisfied partner (or couple) would, so the experts said, wreak havoc on their children's developing psyches (May, 1999, p. 84).

The Emergence of Lesbian and Gay Voices

The lesbian and gay writers I discuss in this dissertation were all working within what Marianne Cutler concisely terms "a society hostile to the open expression of homosexuality" (238), the United States during the 15-20 years after World War II, the early Cold War era. Ironically, although the decade and a half following World War II were some of the most oppressive for lesbians and gay men in the United States, especially in terms of negative attention received from national and local government and press, these years also witnessed the emergence of new forms of gay and lesbian identities. A remarkable flowering of writing by lesbians and gay men about what the experience of being homosexual in America was like, and what it meant (for the individual and for the society), contested dominant discourses' attempts to define homosexuals and homosexuality as sick, deviant, dangerous, and wrong. Martin Meeker has called "the first half of the 1950s" the moment when lesbian and gay "politics of representation emerged as a distinct and articulate political discourse," referring to the new interventions made by the first gay and lesbian civil rights organizations and new forms of writing by and about queer people (e.g., pulp novels, homophile magazines, etc.) (Meeker 166).[2]

[2] Meeker also argues that the forms of representational politics established by lesbian and gay activists and writers during the 1950s have "not changed drastically" since that time, i.e., "the presumption that the introduction of balanced and objective representations of homosexuality held the power to change public opinion and thus legitimate homosexual claims to equality" (165) has continued to be one of the fundamental assumptions of the lesbian and gay rights movement.

At the same historical moment that John Peurifoy was causing panic on Capitol Hill with his frightening statistics, Harry Hay was in California talking with his friends about the possibility of starting an organization to fight for gay emancipation. Conditions seemed to be right. In the years after World War II, the "gay community" was larger and more unified than it had ever been before. Bars that catered to a gay clientele emerged in cities large and small and "fostered an identity that was both public and collective" (D'Emilio, 1983, p. 32). Wartime migration had also helped gays and lesbians find others like themselves: women and men, both during and after the war, often relocated to cities in pursuit of job opportunities. Lesbians and gay men in the sex-segregated armed services formed social circles that kept in contact during peacetime. Then, in 1948, Alfred Kinsey published Sexual Behavior in the Human Male, documenting (among other things) that homosexuality was much more common than had been supposed – and the book became a best-seller.

Gay community, as extant in the first half of the 20th century, mostly centered around bars and circles of gay and lesbian friends who gave parties in their private homes. Allen Bérubé has documented the ways in which the upheavals of World War II "propelled gay men and lesbians into the mainstream of American life" (255). It was in this war, Bérubé explains, that the military instituted the practice of categorizing the homosexual *individual* as psychologically unfit for military service, rather than seeing the homosexual *act* as a crime to be prosecuted under military law. The wartime experiences of gay men and lesbians were in many respects contradictory. Procedures surrounding the discharge of those identified as homosexual often resulted in crippling social stigmatization in the post-war years when employers required that discharge papers

(which named the reason for dismissal) be made available. Veterans discharged for homosexuality were denied coverage under the G.I. Bill of Rights (as the 1944 Servicemen's Readjustment Act was popularly known). On the other hand, "the draft, together with lax recruitment policies that allowed lesbians to enter the military, placed a whole generation of gay men and women in gender-segregated bases where they could find each other, form cliques, and discover the gay life in the cities" (Bérubé 256). Bérubé observes that such post-war developments as "the proliferation of gay bars, the broadening of public discussion of homosexuality, [and] the formulation of the idea that homosexuals constituted a minority" were seen by gay men and lesbians as "a sign of hope" – but the government and the press interpreted these events as "a dangerous threat" (256-257). The official position of the government and the armed services, and the view most often promoted in the mainstream media, was that homosexuals were a weak link in any organization in which they were found – from schools, to factories, to the military, to the nation itself. Homosexuals' "perverse" sexual choices were taken as evidence of their total lack of morals; their gender deviance (especially in men) was seen as a marker of cowardice under attack; and their shameful lifestyles, it was believed, made homosexuals easy targets for enemy blackmailers seeking access to state secrets.

As the Cold War opened and the anti-homosexual panic of the Lavender Scare got under way the two perceptions would continue to be in conflict. The legacy of World War II, however, contributed to the ripening of the moment for homophile organizing. Bar culture was still scattered, available only in urban areas, and isolated, but there were more gay bars than ever. Many veterans, too, had built up a circle of gay connections

that stretched across the nation. No longer was the idea of a gay rights movement that was national in scope simply unthinkable.

Benedict Anderson describes a community as "imagined" when its members "will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6). Discussing the ways the introduction of print media made possible the development of new kinds of "imagined communities," including the modern concept of the nation, Anderson describes the imaginary identification with a wider group that can be triggered by the act of reading newspapers. "It is performed in silent privacy," he writes, "[y]et each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion" (35).

This formulation of the power of printed texts to foster a feeling of group identification in readers, and, thus, the power of writers of that material to communicate with fellow group members through the medium of the printed word, is useful for understanding how U.S. lesbian and gay writers in the early Cold War years supported the development of lesbian and gay group identities and "community" feeling. It also illuminates the ways in which both writers and readers might feel themselves to be participating in a conversation with one another, exchanging ideas about the possible definitions and implications of homosexuality, at a social and political moment in which those meanings were in flux as new forms of self and community identification came into existence in the years after World War II. But in the case of the lesbian and gay writers discussed here, not only were they in conversation with one another and with similarly-

identified readers, they were also in conversation with dominant discourses about the meanings of homosexuality, aspects of which the gay authors alternately accepted, revised, and rejected.

A National Conversation

Before proceeding, the concept of a national conversation about the meanings of homosexuality needs some unpacking. First, the public debate about homosexuality in the 1950s was national not only in the sense that broad segments of the public were weighing in; its outcomes were also of concern to the state itself. Both those who argued that homosexuality was "natural" and should be tolerated and those who took the opposite position invoked the authority and the interests of the state in making their case. Secondly, it was a "conversation" in that the novels, memoirs, magazine articles, and scholarly essays dealing with homosexuality published in the early Cold War era were few enough in number to be speaking to one another, constantly referencing one another (especially Kinsey[3]) – in short, interacting with each other as participants in a conversation in which thoughts are exchanged and opinions formed. Third, the debate was over meanings: what did it *mean* to be a homosexual in America in that era? Did it mean that one had a particular identity as a result of being sexually attracted to persons of the same sex? Did it mean that one was a threat to national security? Did it mean that one could not change his or her desires or behavior? The contested meanings that

[3] In his afterword to his novel The City and the Pillar, discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation, Gore Vidal writes that upon the novel's original publication he "received a nice note from the good Doctor [Kinsey] complimenting me on 'your work in the field'" (209).

adhered to homosexuality within this debate had repercussions for the society as a whole, and the meanings that gained dominance shaped national policy.

What I call a "conversational" approach to textual analysis considers dominant discourses about the meanings of homosexuality and other nonheteronormative behaviors and identities to be continually challenged by and mutually constitutive with alternative meanings of homosexuality constructed in the oppositional literature of writers who understood themselves as homosexual, lesbian or gay, or queer.[4] In developing the "conversational" approach to situating the textual productions of a minority group in relation to dominant, state-sponsored discourses that were oppressive to that group, I have been strongly influenced by Timothy Powell's 2002 monograph Ruthless Democracy: A Multicultural Interpretation of the American Renaissance. Powell's model of "historical multiculturalism" brings the techniques of New Historicism together with an anti-racist, politically engaged critique.[5] Powell grounds his analysis in "Bakhtin's notion of 'heteroglossia,' a paradigm that engages 'a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less

[4] By "oppositional" literature, I mean writing that self-consciously engages with and challenges the oppressive discourses of sexuality, such as the identification of homosexuals with communists or criminals, that are upheld by the state or other institutions of social authority – "voices from the gaps" in institutionalized discourses of sexuality. Such writing may seek to expose the flaws in the internal logic of these oppressive discourses, envision a utopian society in which sexual minorities are seen as moral leaders, or simply offer alternative, positive ways of understanding the lives and experiences of sexual minorities.

[5] New Historicism, as a critical approach to literature originally conceived as a direct response to "American New Criticism," is influenced by Walter Benjamin's historical materialist mandate to "brush history against the grain," to "blast a specific era out of the homogenous course of history" and trace out all the complexities of the moment. For New Historicists, cultural productions such as literature and art are not the manifestations of "transhistorical truth … but the key to particular historically embedded social and psychological formations." The questions to ask when approaching a work are, for them, "When? Where? Under what circumstances? From what sources should [would] a people do this?" (7). "The task of understanding," prominent New Historicist critics Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher argue, "depends not on the extraction of an abstract set of principles, and still less on the application of a theoretical model, but rather on an encounter with the singular, the specific, and the individual" (6).

dialogized)'" (Powell 18). Situating his analysis within the American Studies tradition of interest in the literary moment 1850-1855, Powell places major works of the American Renaissance in a dialogic (or conversational) relationship with John Rollin Ridge's Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta (the first novel published in the U.S. by a Native American author) and William Wells Brown's Clotel; or, The President's Daughter (the first African American novel), both also published during this five-year span; with the popular genres of "sentimental" (women's) fiction and true-crime magazines; and with archival government records. Dialogizing texts in this way helps Powell to find discursive traces of "the crisis of national identity brought about by an ever-increasing diversity of cultures" (11). Powell describes three "fundamental hermeneutical principles" of a historical multiculturalist model: first, "that 'America' has always been a multicultural nation"; second, "that the historical multicultural context inextricably shapes the literary text (often in ways the author never intended)"; and third, "that a theoretically nuanced understanding of [a] period requires taking into consideration a multiplicity of contesting cultural voices that are each allowed to articulate the imagined community of the nation on their own terms" (10).

My work uses a version of Powell's model to conceptualize diverse texts as being in a dialogic relationship around the node of sexuality. I agree with Powell that this juxtaposition can reveal the gaps between competing discourses of oppression as well as the points of struggle between dominant and resistant ideologies. His deconstruction of the racial tensions that underwrote conceptions of American national identity in the decade immediately preceding the Civil War as they were engaged in the literature of the period, provides a helpful model for approaching the equally complex and tension-ridden

conversations about sexual identity in America in the late 1940s and 1950s, and the struggle among competing discourses for control over the meanings of homosexuality.

Much of the work that focuses on the experiences of sexual minorities during this period has emphasized the role of the powerful in defining, controlling, punishing, and excluding them, and the relative powerlessness and ineffectuality of homosexuals and other sexual minorities in challenging oppressive discourses.[6] John D'Emilio, in Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities goes the furthest toward identifying gay men's and lesbians' resistance to oppression in his pioneering discussion of the homophile movement and the new sources for the publication of oppositional queer voices that it spawned. D'Emilio, however, considers this time a largely assimilationist prelude to the "real" (post-1969) action of the gay liberation movement.

Gay/lesbian and queer literary criticism has also failed to attend to the voices of gay men and lesbians who contested the official views of homosexuality, focusing – when they focus on this period at all – on the ways in which canonical writers' works are shaped by oppression, rather than on how gay and lesbian writers have "talked back" to authority or used their positions as outsiders to challenge the discourses of national power that were bound up intimately with the national politics of sexuality.[7] Further, academic

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[6] Allen Bérubé (1991), Robert Dean (2001), David K. Johnson (2004), John D'Emilio (1983, 1992), Lillian Faderman (1991), and Justin David Suran (2001) have all contributed to our knowledge of the ways the United States government mobilized normative discourses of sexuality and gender roles and an ideology of domestic consensus, in the name of national defense, in response to the international instability of the early years of the Cold War. Charles Kaiser's The Gay Metropolis (1997) departs from this trend in its emphasis on the new forms of social organization that became open to gay men in New York City in the second half of the twentieth century. However, only a small portion of this book is devoted to the decade following World War II.

[7] See, for example, Bonnie Zimmerman, "What Has Never Been: An Overview of Lesbian Feminist Literary Criticism," and Barbara Smith, "The Truth That Never Hurts: Black Lesbians in Fiction in the 1980s," both in Robyn R Warhol and Diane Price Herndl, eds. Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism, rev. ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1997); Adrienne Rich, On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978 (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 1979); Eve Kosofsky

attention to the gay and lesbian writing of the period has had a disproportionate focus on a few major authors (mostly, though not exclusively, white and male). Robert Corber, for example, in one of the only book-length studies of this period in gay writing, analyzes the works of canonical authors Tennessee Williams, James Baldwin, and Gore Vidal, and argues that these gay male writers, in their defense of masculinity against the effeminizing forces of work in large corporations and the suburban domestic ideal. I argue that an expanded view of the national conversation about the meanings of homosexuality, which considers a variety of kinds of texts as "talking to one another," can potentially expand our understanding of the groups of people involved in this conversation, beyond the white middle-class gay men (and, to a lesser extent, white middle-class gay women) whose perspectives have been taken as representative of the era. By attending to these writers' different positions in relationship to interlocking systems of domination based on gender, race, and class as well as sexuality, I identify a number of alternative creative responses to heterosexist oppression that were in circulation at the time.

Cultural Meanings of Sexuality: Theoretical Influences of This Dissertation

I agree with the contention of Natasha Tinsley that the literature of marginalized groups can often be seen as a site of theorizing about the group's conditions of existence, and a place where the possibilities of resistance to domination can be imagined. My project also draws on Homi Bhabha's theorization of the role of cultural productions,

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Sedgwick, The Epistemology of the Closet (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); and Jonathan Dollimore, Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

including literature, art, and various forms of popular culture, in furthering creative responses to oppressive discourses. Bhabha points out that "[f]orms of popular rebellion and mobilization are most often subversive and transgressive when they are created through oppositional *cultural* practices," and that the politics of cultural production "gives depth to the language of social criticism and extends the domain of 'politics' that will not be entirely dominated by the forces of economic or social control" (29). In this dissertation, I consider literary and extra-literary texts to contain the traces – the discursive residues – of the ongoing process of the negotiation of meanings around sexuality (and particularly homosexuality) as they related to the politics of nationalism in the early years of the Cold War. I see the writings of lesbians and gay men in this period as speaking from a productively unstable interstitial space, where dominant and subordinated or resistant ideologies interact and where identities and politics are negotiated. As Bhabha explains,

> Each objective is constructed on the trace of that perspective that it puts under erasure; each political object is determined in relation to the other, and displaced in that critical act. … [S]uch contradictions and conflicts, which often thwart political intentions and make the question of commitment complex and difficult, are rooted in the process of translation and displacement in which the object of politics is described. (39)

Building on this formulation, my dissertation mines the layers of multiple identifications and perspectives within each work that I examine. In the process of replacing these texts in their discursive and political context, and highlighting their relationship to that context, the ways they are shaped by the pressures of dominant discourses and the ways they respond to and reject those pressures, this dissertation reveals the complexities of these writers' commitments and contributes to a greater and more nuanced understanding of the importance of their contributions to a broad national conversation.

The ways we approach the history and culture of people who were erotically and emotionally attracted to people of the same sex, who fell in love with people of the same sex, who understood themselves to be "different" from the sexual norms imposed by the state and other ideological institutions (such as the church, the field of science, the marketplace, or the nuclear family), and who lived in eras and geographical locations other than our own, have been irrevocably altered by the publication of Michel Foucault's The History of Sexuality, Vol. I: An Introduction in English in 1978. My dissertation engages with and furthers Foucault's insights about the relationship between state power, nationalism, and the regulation of sexuality. In his genealogy of the development of "homosexuality" as a category of identity, Foucault identified a cluster of medical articles appearing around 1870 and marking the "birth" of homosexuality into discourse (43). His genealogy describes the process by which hegemonic Western institutions – first the church, later the medical/psychiatric establishment, and finally the state – came to claim the homosexual tendencies and practices of individuals as things they should know about and regulate. In the midst of this proliferation of points of power over the discourse of sexuality – the power to make sex speak – the homosexual was practically a byproduct; homosexuality became one of many categories of perversion, and the homosexual became a "species" (24, 33).

I argue that the international political concerns associated with the Cold War, and the particular ways in which large swaths of American society responded to these threats, functioned together to create a similar moment in which the culturally-accepted "meanings" attributed to homosexuality and same-sex desire, and the role of the state in monitoring and policing these phenomena, was once again in flux. The particular

conditions of this social and political moment that called into being new ways of understanding homosexuality in the United States between 1945 and 1960 included the increasingly coherent gay identities and communities (that is, face-to-face communities) that emerged from the World War II years[8], as well as the national paranoia of the Red and Lavender Scares, which resulted in the conflation of deviant sexuality and disloyalty or Communism and heightened the distrust and scrutiny under which Americans lived. The domestic consensus ideology, as a response of the dominant culture to widely-shared feelings of insecurity and anxiety, both set lesbians and gay men apart from the norm in important (and visible) ways and also forced non-heterosexuals to account for themselves and explain why they refused to conform to the idealized suburban nuclear family model.

Foucault's formulations of the operations of discursive power insist, in ways that echo Althusser's discussion of the processes by which dominant and exploitative ideologies become institutionalized, that due to its very discursive nature, power is never a unidirectional operation. What The History of Sexuality does not do is examine the ways alternative discourses about the meanings of sexuality, originating from less-privileged quarters, have continually contested the efforts of institutional authorities to define and regulate sexuality. Siobhan Somerville's Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture expands Foucault's genealogy by describing the mutually constitutive relationship between discourses of sexual and racial regulation at the turn of the twentieth century. In its insistence on understanding a diverse array of types of texts that reflected, reproduced, and contested the interlocking discourses of sexuality and race that together had the effect of consolidating institutional

[8] See Ricardo J. Brown's memoir, The Evening Crowd at Kirmser's: A Gay Life in the 1940s (2001), for an account of how one such community came into being in St. Paul, MN.

authority over the sexuality of racialized subjects as speaking to one another in a broad transatlantic conversation about the meanings of sex and race, Somerville's methodology resembles the approach I use in my analysis of another moment of intensifying consolidation of meanings around sexuality in relationship to gendered and racialized national politics, the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Literature and Its Borderlands

Joanna Russ describes the fears of the privileged that motivate their defense of the closed doors of the literary canon: "What is frightening about black art or women's art or Chicano art – and so on – is that it calls into question the very idea of objectivity and absolute standards: This is a good novel. Good *for what?* Good *for whom?*" (112). She postulates that the reason the cultural and artistic productions of minority group members cannot be allowed to be seen is that these works reveal the guilt of the dominant class' involvement in oppression:

> The other side of the nightmare is not that what is found in the 'other' art will be incomprehensible, but that it will be all too familiar. That is:
> Women's lives are the buried truth about men's lives.
> The lives of people of color are the buried truth about white lives.
> The buried truth about the rich is who they take their money from and how.
> The buried truth about 'normal' sexuality is how one kind of sexual expression has been made privileged, and what kinds of unearned virtue and terrors about identity this distinction serves. (112)

In the chapters that follow, I explore writing by lesbians and gay men both inside and outside of the canon, and I ask, what are the needs that privileged as well as oppressed groups are trying to fill when they select a body of texts as their literary inheritance and maintain a boundary of exclusion around the chosen works? I contend that the factors

that allow certain "literary" novels with homosexual themes to be included in a canon which, as a general rule, considers such themes as grounds for rejection, reveal much about the dominant ideology as well as the complicated and contradictory social positionings of their authors. The same applies to my analysis of non-canonical genres of writing, i.e., lesbian pulp novels and homophile magazines – the conditions of their exclusion from the category of "literature" are closely related to the conditions of their authors' lives and their ideological relationships with dominant discourses and newly-emerging oppositional identities.

The six chapters of my dissertation are organized into three pairs. In Chapters One and Two, I examine the gay-themed novels of two authors universally acknowledged to be "canonical," Gore Vidal's The City and the Pillar (1948) and James Baldwin's Giovanni's Room (1956). I discuss responses to these two books by mainstream-press reviewers, academic literary critics, and scholars in the field of gay and lesbian studies. I argue that both of these novels upheld and reinforced different aspects of the dominant national ideologies of the early Cold War period as they related to nationalism, gender, race, class, or sexual identity, and that this alignment allowed the novels to be recognized by critics as belonging to the dominant culture, even as each novel also critiqued other aspects of the dominant ideology. The complexity of the authors' social and ideological positionings, their multiple affiliations, commitments, and passions, I argue, has been ignored by most readings of this period, which tend to oversimplify the authors' positions and perspectives.

In Chapters Three and Four, I bring the literary novels into conversation with another genre of fiction, usually considered to be quite separate: lesbian paperback

("pulp") novel. I consider the ways in which the pulp genre, and particular authors within it, have been reclaimed by contemporary scholars, and I extend this scholarship by examining the ways the lesbian novels of Ann Bannon and Valerie Taylor (specifically, Women in the Shadows and The Girls in 3-B) contribute to the national conversation about the meanings of homosexuality. I consider the interactive relationship of the authors to their readers and to the emerging sphere of lesbian community, culture, and activism, and discuss the ways these two authors responded to the Cold War domestic consensus ideology, particularly as concerned the pressure on women (and also men) to get married and have babies in an idealized nuclear family.

Chapters Five and Six expand the conversation to include the people writing in two of the magazines published by the lesbian and gay rights (or "homophile") organizations in the 1950s, ONE Magazine and The Ladder. The magazines hold a unique space in the national conversation about the meanings of homosexuality: edited by skilled and politically dedicated amateurs, published and circulated nationally, and containing pieces by everyone from widely-recognized professional authors to anonymous reader-contributors, they blur the boundaries between "writer" and "consumer of text" even further. Re-reading the homophile magazines reveals a much wider variety of responses to dominant discourses about homosexuality than that with which they have previously been credited. These chapters show how gay and lesbian contributors to the magazines critiqued numerous aspects of the dominant ideology, including the United States' image of itself as defender of democracy and the exclusion of homosexuals from the domestic consensus, and questioned the validity of cultural institutions such as marriage and the suburban nuclear family. I also revisit those features of the magazines

that have earned them their reputation as conservative self-help publications and suggest that positions that today seem problematic, such as The Ladder's condemnation of masculine dress for lesbians, can be more clearly understood by situating them within the social, political, and economic conditions of their era.

Describing the process of reclaiming a Chicana/o historical and artistic inheritance after more than a century of silencing and exclusion, Sonia Saldívar-Hull writes, "As a consequence [of the exclusion and erasure of Chicanas' stories from traditional, academically privileged, mainstream histories], we have to look in nontraditional places for our theories: in the prefaces to anthologies, in the interstices of autobiographies, in our cultural artifacts (the *cuentos*), and, if we are fortunate to have access to a good library, in the essays published in marginalized journals not widely distributed by the dominant institutions" (qtd. in Arredondo and Hurtado 46).

For a full understanding of the ways lesbian and gay writers in the late 1940s and 1950s participated in creating new meanings of homosexuality under social and political conditions of harsh repression, it is necessary also to look in nontraditional places for the theories that nourished emerging communities and undergirded emerging gay and lesbian identities. But because there was no single gay/lesbian identity or perspective or subjectivity during this period (as there never has been), and because the writers who participated in the national conversation about the meanings of homosexuality came from very different positions of privilege, it is necessary to acknowledge as well the ways lesbian and gay writers in the 1940s and 1950s aligned themselves with dominant national discourses, in ways that reflected their own contradictory relationships to power. By reconceptualizing voices that have traditionally been considered marginal and

powerless, my dissertation will, I hope, allow for a new understanding of the significance of the early Cold War period in the development of gay and lesbian resistance to oppression in America.

Chapter 1: "A Completely Ordinary Boy"

Nationalism and Masculinity in Gore Vidal's The City and the Pillar

Gore Vidal wrote his first novel, Williwaw, when he was nineteen years old, while he waited for discharge from the army after the end of World War II. It was based on his experience serving on a military ship in the Aleutian Islands during war, and English fiction writer and literary critic Anthony Burgess named it as one of those major American novels to "make the big statements about war's mess and futility" (150), on par with the likes of Norman Mailer's The Naked and the Dead, despite the author's youth. As Vidal recalls in a preface to a 2003 edition of Williwaw, the book "pleased middle-brow reviewers (like the New York Times) as well as the occasional literary critic like Mark Schorer in the Kenyon Review" (7).

Vidal entered the American literary scene in 1946, at a moment when the recent victories, combined with a rapidly increasing anxiety about the threat posed by the Soviet Union and international communism, contributed to the lionization, in the cultural realm, of the heroic masculine figure, the protector of nation and family (the twin meanings of the "domestic" front) from foreign aggression. As historian Ellen Schrecker observes, "by the beginning of 1946, confrontation rather than negotiation had come to characterize American foreign policy" (157), and ideological aspects of this policy, which soon came to be called "containment," demanded that the nation produce strong, virile citizen-soldiers capable of defending the U.S. and democracy against a crafty, determined, and potentially brutal foe.

Vidal's early novels portrayed this form of masculinity in a sympathetic light, helping to bolster the ideal; this contributed to his popularity with critics and readers, who placed Vidal within an American literary tradition going back to the mid-nineteenth-century that sought to understand the workings of the masculine American soul.[9] Williwaw also established Vidal, in ways that would remain true throughout his long career, as a writer who cannily gauged the prevailing mood of the American mainstream and worked within that mood in ways that both bolstered the status quo, tending to maintain existing hierarchies of privilege, while also pushing the boundaries of the mainstream, challenging the public – for Vidal was a very public intellectual, and later in his career did innovative work in writing for television, aiming always for the broad audience – to broaden their thinking on issues of personal ethics and morality. Vidal's third novel, The City and the Pillar, attempted to expand mainstream notions of acceptability to include homosexuality, by presenting as "normal" a young gay man who represents the American masculine ideal in every way but one.

In this chapter, I discuss The City and the Pillar and the forms of homosexual behavior and desires that it promotes as "natural" or "normal." I trace the roots of this "normative" version of homosexuality to the dominant ideology of masculinity in American Cold War culture, and show how, in this novel, "normality" for homosexuals relies on the violent rejection of women and of gender deviance, specifically in effeminate gay men. I explore the ways the particular expressions of masculinity that the novel draws upon rely on interlocking axes of class and racial privilege for their power to appear natural and inevitable and to exclude those who don't express masculinity in the

[9] Jon Robert Adams discusses the tradition of "heroic masculinity" in American literature and Vidal's use of that tradition to lend moral authority to his writing (120-123).

same ways from membership in the category of "normal" homosexuality. I also place the novel within a national conversation about the meanings of homosexuality by examining works by some of Vidal's contemporaries who dissented from his views about what constituted "normality" as it concerned homosexuality, and by reviewing the criticism about the novel from the time of its publication to the present day.

I argue that Vidal positions himself within the mainstream literary canon by upholding the core values of what has been called a "masculinist" tradition in American literature, and that in The City and the Pillar, Vidal gives a strenuous defense of the dominant ideology of masculinity that allowed reviewers and mainstream literary critics to respond sympathetically toward his book, despite the centrality and explicitness of its homosexual themes. The invocation of a privileged form of masculinity as proof of homosexuals' normality allowed academics to claim this novel as part of the American literary canon (and to insist that the book is not really "about" homosexuality). Many queer critics, however, have not been satisfied with Vidal's version of normal homosexuality, and in the final part of the chapter I consider some of the ways queer criticism intervened in the national conversation about the meanings of homosexuality in the years after the publication of The City and the Pillar by taking a number of different positions on the book which challenged its definitions of "normal" and the routes by which it arrived at those definitions.

The main character of The City and the Pillar is Jim Willard. The story follows Jim's life from his first homosexual experience with Bob, his high school best friend and fellow tennis player, through his exploration of many facets of the gay world. While Jim has many male lovers and participates in many gay social scenes, he retains his devotion

to Bob as his ideal lover, continually questing to find him again and resume the sexual relationship that was cut off after their high school graduation. Jim's inner experience is the focus of the novel, with his observations of gay life and his interpretations of what homosexuality means for himself and others (like and unlike him) forming the bulk of the narrative.

Jim teaches tennis to the rich and famous in Hollywood, snagging a closeted movie star boyfriend, whom he leaves for a cynical intellectual who takes him to exotic locales such as New Orleans and Mexico. At the outbreak of World War II, Jim enlists in the Army, survives an unrequited crush on a fellow soldier, and spends most of his time working out in the base's gymnasium. After his discharge, he goes to New York, where he frequents both gay bars catering to working-class clientele and gay parties in the private homes of elite homosexuals. Throughout all these explorations, he keeps himself somewhat aloof from the "gay community" as such, believing himself to be different from the majority of male homosexuals, in that he is athletic, masculine, and not identifiable as gay to the outside world – in a word, "normal." Finally he is reunited with Bob, who, now married, rejects Jim's adult sexual advances. In his disappointment and rage, Jim fights his former beloved, overpowers him, and chokes him to death.

Vidal published a revised version of The City and the Pillar in 1965. Critics since then have taken the revised edition as the definitive version, and have referred to the 1948 edition only in passing. In this chapter, I examine the novel in its original form, and focus on the contribution it makes to the national conversation about the meanings of homosexuality taking place in America at the time of its publication. However, a word about the differences between the two versions is in order.

There are both stylistic and thematic differences between the 1948 and 1965 editions of The City and the Pillar. Critics, as well as the author, have almost unanimously addressed only the stylistic alterations, identifying the tightening up of the prose and the elimination of the murder from the novel's conclusion (in the revised version, Jim rapes his old lover, but does not kill him). Both of these changes, but especially the latter, are taken by critics as efforts to lessen the tone of "melodrama" to which, according to Vidal, many readers objected -- in other words, the changes are thought simply to make the novel more readable. Post-1965 critics, in referring almost exclusively to the second edition, have assumed that in every important regard, the second is identical to the first. They have taken Vidal at his word (specifically, his "Afterword" to the 1965 edition) when he says that he has "not changed the point of view or the essential relationships" (211). This statement is, however, not precisely true, although it may help to explain why critics have failed to address The City and the Pillar in its function as a contribution to the national conversation on the meanings of homosexuality in early Cold War America. The Jim Willard who rapes Bob and then contemptuously leaves him in his hotel room is not exactly the same Jim Willard who had murdered Bob in his rage at being called "queer" in 1948.

What is erased from the 1965 edition, along with most of the longer descriptive passages, is the thread of violence that runs continually through the original novel. Also erased is the way the theme of violence, drawing its power from gender, class, and race-based hatreds, ultimately proves to be the defining characteristic of Jim's "normal" homosexuality. "Normality," for Jim Willard, is shorthand for a particular kind of masculinity with a highly privileged standing within the American culture of the early

Cold War years. This privileged status arose not only from its conformity to widely-shared beliefs about what qualities men should have as men (given that the defense of the nation against international Communism rested, in the popular imagination, on the virility and aggressiveness of American men), but also from the sometimes hidden ways in which class and race privilege lent cultural authority to Jim's (and Vidal's) power to define what is "normal" masculinity.

In the rest of this chapter, I will analyze the ways these multiple forms of privilege accrue to the character of Jim Willard and the statement he makes about what it means to be homosexual. By looking at this novel in conversation with several kinds of responses to it, from mainstream press reviewers to "establishment" literary critics to queer readers in search of a gay literary tradition, I illustrate some of the processes by which the national conversation about the meanings of homosexuality operated, and the different motivations and unequal positions of power from which contributors spoke.

Gender Ideology and Class Privilege in <u>The City and the Pillar</u>

In the late forties, Vidal writes in the "Afterword" to the revised, 1965 edition of <u>The City and the Pillar</u>, "it was a part of American folklore that homosexuality was a form of mental disease, confined for the most part to interior decorators and ballet dancers. Knowing this to be untrue, I set out to shatter the stereotype by taking as my protagonist a completely ordinary boy of the middle class and through his eyes observing the various strata of the underworld" (208). In this passage, "normality" has many valences. Normality is linked to sanity; Vidal argues against its being defined as a mental

illness.[10] Normality is linked to normative gender roles; men who have "feminine" careers (like interior designers -- or artists) are not normal. If homosexuals are to be categorized as normal, in this sense, then they must not deviate from the social norms of masculinity and femininity. Normality is also linked to socio-economic status: the middle class is "normal," to the exclusion of the poor and the working class as well as the very wealthy (although, as we shall see, Vidal's concept of "normal" masculinity appears to derive in part from the mores of his own upper-class background). And, finally, the "normality" presented in The City and the Pillar is also racially contingent -- white is, by implication, "normal," while nonwhite people represent abnormality or sickness.

The postwar, post-Rosie the Riveter years witnessed a crackdown on the division of gender roles within American families driven by motivations that were not just economical (women should stay in the home so that returning veterans could be assured of finding jobs first) but also militaristic; manly young men were needed if the nation was to stand firm against the Soviet threat. Popular parenting magazines of the late 1940s and 1950s repeatedly drove home the point that the "necessary masculine traits" were "confidence, courage, self-esteem, and aggression" (Gomes par. 20). These magazines warned the parents of the baby boomers that it was up to them to prevent the United States from becoming a nation of sissies. Childrearing experts explained that "'the true sissy' was easily recognized by a shortage of the aggression associated with initiative, enterprise, and a healthy competitiveness, all of which prepared boys to solve problems and overcome obstacles" (par. 20). A boy who got into fist-fights and played "rugged

[10] In Palimpsest, Vidal recalls a friendly acquaintanceship with Dr. Kinsey: "He has just interviewed me for a proposed study of the homo/hetero sexual balance in the arts. Even in 1948 there was a suspicion that far too many creative people were inclined to same-sexuality, which meant, of course, serious mental illness of the sort that makes truly great and universal art impossible" (103).

sports" was considered to be a well-adjusted boy; one who avoided these things was a "cowardly little boy" (par. 20) and a liability to the nation. Parenting advice columns urged the parents of "sissy" boys to intervene in a vicious cycle where "the child's feelings of inferiority and inadequacy about being male would lead him 'to pursue feminine interests' and 'at best, [make] him an indecisive and ineffectual person, and at worst may even lead to homosexuality or impotence" (par. 20).[11]

It is no coincidence, then, that aggression should be the defining characteristic of "normal" masculinity, as espoused by Vidal through the character of Jim Willard, since aggression was what America was demanding of its young men. This novel insists that a homosexual needn't be a threat to society, because it was possible to be a homosexual while still fulfilling the criterion of aggressiveness demanded by the Cold War nation. Jim, in fact, displays an aggressiveness so strong that it can only partially be channeled harmlessly into sports. It is most consistently revealed in his attitudes, words, and actions towards women and effeminate gay men, but it also characterizes his sexual encounters with men, and, of course, reaches its fullest expression in the murder at the novel's climax. It is by ardently insisting on the "normality" of Jim's masculinity and over-emphasizing his aggressiveness that Vidal makes his case for the "normality" of homosexuality.

In its construction of "normal" homosexuality, The City and the Pillar also relies heavily on ideas about what masculinity should be that stem directly from the shared experiences and ideology of the upper-class men who were personally involved in determining the nation's response to international military threats. This was Vidal's

[11] Gomes quotes Maryland Newcomb, "Civilizing the Small Boy," Good Housekeeping, Feb. 1948.

milieu; as Adam Haslett notes, he was "raised by his senator grandfather to be a senator himself and perhaps one day the President" (26). His own sexual identity took shape in a parallel direction to the aggressive heterosexuality of peers such as the young John F. Kennedy. Robert Dean's study of dominant ideologies of masculinity during the early Cold War, Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy, provides a useful illustration of the ways in which a particular class consciousness determined "normal" masculinity for a national culture of containment and heteronormativity in the years between World War II and Vietnam.

Dean's attempt to understand U.S. Cold War military interventionism led him to an analysis of the link between class and gender identities and their role in shaping "decision making among the elite men who made policy" in the 1950s and '60s (1). He argues that the impulses that provoked the Lavender Scare (the purge of homosexuals from government offices) and the U.S.'s involvement in the Vietnam War were rooted in the same anxieties. Both efforts stemmed from the need to project a particular form of masculinity as characteristic of both America as a nation and American statesmen as individuals, and were rooted in the formative experiences shared by a generation of upper-class men (including Gore Vidal, as well as the politicians whose personal histories Dean catalogues). Dean sees in this elite version of masculinity "an obsession with 'toughness'" and "a sexualized language of competition and dominance among men who contended for power within the American electoral system" (3), and he believes this

masculinity developed from an "elite narrative of vigor, physical and mental courage, service, and sacrifice" (14).[12]

One of the most important and formative of such "overlapping exclusive male-only institutions" which "provided such men with a set of credentials demonstrating that they met the criteria of masculine success required for inclusion" in this brotherhood were the private boarding schools of the sort that young Gore Vidal attended (Palimpsest 23). Boarding schools, as Dean demonstrates, taught the upper-class youth who came of age during World War II an ideology of "manly character" (18).[13] Vidal, born into an elite political family (his grandfather was a senator from Oklahoma; his distant cousin, Al Gore, became Vice President), believed himself destined for such an office. In fact, while Dean's study centers on the way John F. Kennedy's experiences in these institutions shaped him as a president, the introductory chapter of Vidal's memoir, Palimpsest, contextualizes the experiences that shaped his life as a writer by showing how they parallel those of John F. Kennedy. The memoir's opening scene recalls Vidal and Kennedy as groomsmen together in Vidal's half sister's high-society wedding.

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[12] Masculinity has been a part of romanticized images of both the American nation and its representative citizens since the nation's inception, and feminist historians have contributed to the field of American Studies numerous analyses of the ways these idealized masculine images have been used to justify colonial expansion and the oppression of internal minorities. See David Noble (1, 287-293) for a discussion of some of the foundational interventions in this area. As Joan Scott wrote in 1986,

> "Power relations among nations and the status of colonial subjects have been made comprehensible (and thus legitimate) in terms of relations between male and female. The legitimizing of war – of expending young lives to protect the state – has variously taken the forms of explicit appeals to manhood (to the need to defend otherwise vulnerable women and children), of implicit reliance on belief in the duty of sons to serve their leaders or their (father the) king, and of associations between masculinity and national strength." (qtd. in Streeby 81)

[13] "The term 'ideology of masculinity' refers to the cultural system of prescription and proscription that organizes the 'performance' of an individual's role in society, that draws boundaries around the social category of manhood, and that can be used to legitimate power and privilege. Because the roles men play in society and the powers they wield are linked to social class, ideologies are inseparable from class experience. An ideology of masculinity in its *prescriptive* aspect provides the raw material needed to imagine and construct a narrative identity -- the internal story that lends coherence to the self. In its *proscriptive* aspect, it rules out certain ways of imagining and acting in the world." (Dean 5)

Interestingly, Vidal also repeatedly situates his own sex life as parallel to Kennedy's, as in: "I was setting world records [in the years after the war] for encounters with anonymous youths, nicely matching Jack Kennedy's girl-a-day routine" (102). This comes immediately after he recalls a conversation with Kinsey, who was "intrigued by my lack of sexual guilt. I told him that it was probably a matter of class. As far as I can tell, none of my family ever suffered from that sort of guilt, a middle-class disorder from which power people seem exempt. We did whatever we wanted to do and thought nothing of it" (102).

Vidal's tone when he mentions Kennedy, as when he discusses the class for which Kennedy serves as metonym, is one of nonjudgmental recognition of the morality of an elite class in which Vidal includes himself and his family. It also reflects a sense of entitlement which is tied to membership in a privileged and powerful caste, even within the economic upper class. In the moral order described by Vidal, the code by which he professed to have lived, one viewed all other people and things as objects to be used for one's own enjoyment or advancement; or, if they interfered with one's desires, ignored or removed. The confession "We did whatever we wanted to do and thought nothing of it" (i.e., thought nothing of the potential impact on others) perfectly encapsulates the experience of privilege. Vidal's use of that statement in the sexual context shows how interconnected sexuality is with power, and suggests that many acts of aggression, fueled by entitlement, can be traced to the mores of a privileged class.

The social meanings of the obsessively masculine expression of homosexuality that Vidal promotes as "normal" in The City and the Pillar become clearer still when the novel is read in light of Dean's analysis of the class values and gender ideologies that

informed Vidal's youth. Jim Willard, the protagonist (or "hero," as many critics have chosen to call him) of The City and the Pillar, is not an autobiographical stand-in for Gore Vidal, and the details of their lives are not the same; nonetheless, Jim's story is the vehicle through which Vidal promotes his view on the "naturalness" of homosexuality. Intentionally or not, the novel makes the argument that society should not persecute homosexuals because they conform, in all other aspects of their thought and behavior, to the gender norms of the dominant class. As Dean shows us is the case with Kennedy's militaristic approach to Cold War politics ("He campaigned for office promising to halt America's decline into a flabbiness and impotence that had left the country vulnerable to the threat of a 'ruthless' and expanding Soviet empire" (Dean 170)), the violence which constantly lurks beneath the surface of Jim's sexuality bolsters a class-based, privileged ideology of masculinity. At the same time, because the novel connects homosexuals with a form of masculinity widely thought to be good for the nation, it works to counter charges that because homosexuals don't conform to the gender norms of the dominant class, they are therefore justly persecuted.

As Dean demonstrates, the virtue of athleticism was strongly supported, by the elite private schools of the sort that Vidal and Kennedy attended (sometimes together), as proof of masculinity, or, at least, of conformity to the upper-class ideology of masculinity. Dean writes, "the boarding schools offered a particularly focused and intense indoctrination in the moral and physical purpose inherent in athletic competition" (29). That violence was a part of the sporting life was expected by parents who "were privately disgusted with the bringing up of well-to-do American boys of that period. They thought them spoiled ladies' men tied to women's apron strings, and heartily

welcomed the chance to send their sons to a place where the boys had to stand on their own feet and play rough-and-tumble games" (Frank Ashburn, qtd. in Dean 30). Dean concludes that for upper-class men, "[c]ontact sports represented the moral equivalent of war" (31). Athleticism and violence, the two ends of a continuum of privileged masculine behaviors, are as central to Jim Willard's identity narrative as to the Kennedys'.

In the novel, Jim and Bob are both star athletes; Jim is "the best [tennis] player in the county and many people say ... in the state" (23), as well as the stronger, more muscular of the two. Playing tennis together forms the basis of the boys' friendship, and, in the eyes of the dominant class, this is an ideal basis for a friendship between men. A wrestling match in the swimming hole foreshadows the later wrestling match that will lead to sex. In the first match, the "oddly sensual" feeling that being naked with another boy gives Jim (39) is closely linked to violence. Vidal writes, "Somehow violence released Jim from certain emotions and he wrestled furiously with Bob, made free, for the time, by violence" (40). This violence, along with Jim's athletic dominance over Bob, reinforces Jim's conformity with the dominant ideology of masculinity and makes possible the erotic outcome of the second match, in which Jim becomes sexually aggressive. Wordlessly persuading Bob to submit to sex, Jim's "movements" become "natural and familiar," while Bob becomes "the object" of sexual aggression (48). Afterward, Bob expresses shame, but Jim feels more virile than ever. "He had great courage now," Vidal writes, and later adds, "Jim, controlled by his new courage, put his arm around Bob" (49). Although Bob says that what they've done is "not natural," Jim's newfound courage and aggressiveness demonstrate that a man can be sexually attracted to other men and still uphold a privileged masculine gender identity.

From this point onward, Vidal's descriptions of Jim's sexual desires for men, and his lack of sexual desire for women, will frequently invoke the idea of violence. Jim ends his relationship with Hollywood star Ronald Shaw because he wants to "possess" another man instead of being possessed (123). Then the man he comes to "possess," in a move attributed to a masochistic compulsion to undermine his own happiness, sets Jim up with the one woman he thinks could turn Jim straight and give him a chance at escaping the gay life (149). Jim, too, thinks he might desire her, but when she refers euphemistically to his "being different," he reacts strongly and physically. Blood rushes to his head and he panics because he thinks she has "started to unmask him ... *It seemed to be a castrating thing*; he was incomplete and Maria Verlaine ... had remarked on his incompleteness. He wanted to hurt her. He wanted to throw her on a bed and take her against her will, violently. He wanted to convince himself and her and everyone else that he was not like the others" (156, emphasis added). Here, as elsewhere, it is Jim's masculinity that he feels he needs to defend, his ability to take on a strong, virile, aggressive gender role, more than his homosexuality. When his "normality" in this sense is threatened, Jim responds with violence to prove that his masculine gender and his ability to be aggressive are not negated by his sexual desire for men.

Women are again and again portrayed as frightening, unnatural creatures who are dangerous to (homosexual) men's masculinity. The first time this happens, a female passenger on the ship where Jim is working as a cabin boy tries to seduce him. The woman is relentlessly marked as a grotesque figure. She is, for one thing, older than Jim's mother. The narrative voice refers to her repeatedly as "the heavy woman" and describes her as "poorly preserved" (53). A shipmate asks Jim how he and "that hog" are

getting along and suggests that Jim could make some cash by having sex with her (55). Jim is "disgusted" by the thought (55). She makes him come to her cabin to fix a loose window and waits for him wearing "a pink silk dressing gown that made her look dingy and somewhat heavier than she actually was" (57-58). When she brings up her widowhood -- establishing that she is available and interested -- Jim reacts by feeling "suddenly as if he were being pushed to the edge of a cliff ... He was homesick now and lost. He wanted to hide" (60). This woman's aggressive sexual interest in Jim makes him feel powerless, unmanned – like a little boy, or, worse, like the feminized object of her more masculine assertiveness.

Soon after this episode, Jim and his shipmate Collins -- the same one who suggested he sell his favors to "the heavy woman" -- land in Seattle and Jim reluctantly joins Collins on a quest for girls (and sex), hoping to prove to his peers, and to himself, that he is capable of getting excited about women. The narrative highlights the flaws in the women they end up meeting. Both are much older than the men, but they lie about their ages. One has features that are "large and not pretty" although "the effect she gave was sexual" (70), and she makes Jim uncomfortable with her "direct stare" (71). When they all go back to the two women's apartment for more drinks and, eventually, sex, Jim is "frightened" when they arrive (77), for "There were so many things to be proven [that] evening" (76). Jim's flirting is mechanical and heavily thought out, not at all "natural," in contrast to his liberated behavior with Bob. He is frightened by the look in his dance partner's eyes, "a personal and devouring look. ... [that] meant capture" (80), and frightened by a glimpse of Collins and the other woman having sex in the next room (81). When his own date takes her clothes off and calls to Jim, her voice is "unpleasant and

artificial" (81). It is this artificiality, ultimately, that makes Jim "hate her passionately," despite his desperate wish to be aroused and to "prove" himself:

> "I got to go," he said. He walked into the sitting room. He no longer had any sense of direction; he wanted only to get away. She followed him and he found himself staring at her again and now he found himself comparing her with Bob. He thought of Bob; for the first time in months he thought of the cabin and the river and he knew it was not like this; it was not unnatural like this. ... He hated this woman and her body. (81)

Women's power to emasculate Jim (and other men) is ever-present in this novel. Ron Shaw, Jim's first "boyfriend" and an unsympathetic character, is squashed under the thumb of his controlling mother (94-95). At a party, several "intellectuals" discuss, in a passage that could have been taken directly from Philip Wylie's 1946 rant Generation of Vipers, the undeserved "superior" rank enjoyed by women in America. The diatribe begins,

> "You mean Mother?" asked the bald man, smiling.
> "Yes, I mean Mother and women in America generally. Never in any country of the world, except possibly Rome before the collapse, have women been put in such an insanely unbalanced position. That, to me, is the great American perversion: the worship of the mother, the superiority of women, the whole absurd business that began to flourish a hundred-odd years ago." (237)

It continues in this vein for almost five full pages (237-241). The "intellectuals" are cast in a positive light next to the effeminate men at the party, and this discussion causes Jim to reconsider his feelings toward his own mother, and the freedom she seems to feel at the death of his tyrannical father, when he next sees her. Even Maria Verlaine, the one woman everyone thought could have turned him straight, becomes "the Death Goddess" when Jim kisses her (165).

To "prove" that male homosexuality is natural, Vidal relies on the *un*naturalness, not of heterosexuality, exactly, but of women and the feminine. The novel relentlessly

attaches the meaning of "artificiality" to women and to effeminate men, but what is artificial about them both seems to be the fact that they unite sexual aggressiveness with a feminine gender. It is "normal" and "natural" for a man to be sexually aggressive, with a woman or with a man, but for a woman, or a feminine man, to actively pursue desire is unnatural, frightening, and potentially emasculating. In this, Vidal's novel unquestioningly repeats the generalized misogyny of patriarchal culture, which relegates women to subordinate positions in relation to men, and views women's sexuality as a destructive force needing to be contained and managed by men. Jim's anxiety about women and other feminized people overtly displaying their sexuality and initiating sexual conversations or activities is an individualized example of a cultural trend that swept the nation in the years after World War II – a paranoia about the dangers of women's uncontrolled sexuality that, according to Elaine Tyler May, ran parallel to Cold War-era fears about uncontained nuclear power (May 81).

Jim's first encounter with the gay community provokes just such a response. He is unaware that some men form friendships based on their shared homosexual experience until he meets a circle of gay bellhops at the hotel where he works as a tennis instructor. Vidal's categorization of the bellhops is revealing of the novel's underlying theme of conformity to a dominant ideology of masculinity: "The bellhops were not all abnormal; the ones who were not were very interested in girls and the ones who were abnormal seldom bothered Jim" (91). What stands out in this sentence is that *normality refers to masculinity, not heterosexuality*. Vidal's phrasing implies that some normal, non-effeminate men might be interested in men, although these happen to be "very interested in girls." All the effeminate men, however, are assumed to be interested in men. Vidal

describes the effeminate gay bellhops as "all alike: their voices had a curious, almost feminine, note in them. Even the ones with deep voices had that insistent voluptuous tone." Their friends were "usually wealthy older women" or "older men with neat gray hair and pink skin, with bodies plump and well cared for, with rather high voices and ... beautifully manicured hands that seemed to belong, unpleasantly enough, to women" (90). Vidal insists on the artificiality of these men's femininity, continuing, "They walked in a tight, mincing and completely self-conscious manner. Their voices had a curious quality, a feminine intonation, and their eyes were searching but wary, continually defending, asking" (91).

The characteristics of the effeminate gay men that incite Jim's disgust are the same characteristics that he finds repulsive about women. Women and effeminate gay men who seek out sexual partners disturb him, although his own confidence in his sexual aggression is what makes him feel that his homosexuality is "normal." The juxtaposition of behavior that is properly feminine, according to the dominant gender ideology, with the "continual asking" of the sexual aggressor causes Jim's disgust. When propositioned by one of the gay bellhops, Jim's response is a desperate defense of the boundaries of masculinity. Jim is "severe and masculine and quite unnerved. ... He refused the young man and was violent in his refusal. He said furious things that he had never said to anyone before. He felt assaulted and in danger of being destroyed" (91).

Vidal's is not an isolated expression of this sentiment. It characterizes one side of a debate within the homophile movement about how gay men and women ought to behave in public. Many of the homophile writers believed that behaving in a "normal" manner, i.e., suppressing any gender-deviant inclinations, would show the straight public

and the American government that homosexuals, as a class, were generally upright citizens who were being oppressed based on a single, unchangeable, and relatively unimportant aspect of their being. This approach, often identified with the homophile movement of the 1950s and its main organizations, the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis[14], has been called "adaptationist" because of its emphasis on "fitting in" or "adapting" to the dominant social norms.[15] A passage from Donald Webster Cory's The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach hints at the currency The City and the Pillar's hostility toward gender-deviant, effeminate men had within the gay community:

> At one end of the bar, having beers, are three young queens; their eyebrows are plucked, their hair quite obviously bleached, and of course very wavy. Seldom seen in these bars, their presence is discouraged not only by the proprietors, but by the gay clientele. They gesticulate with graceful movements that are not so much feminine as caricatures and exaggerations of the feminine. They talk quickly, and their lips move in a manner not quite like the movements of either men or women. They can more aptly be compared to actors, seeking to imitate, yet not at all believing that they are play-acting. (123)

Cory's "subjective" analysis reveals a number of things about the social context of Jim Willard's violent rejection of femininity in gay men. First, femininity in gay men must be false. It could be neither a natural aspect of one's personality nor a necessary byproduct of homosexuality, because the adaptationist homosexuals of the early Cold War era believed they needed to be seen as appropriately, normally, masculine. Second, gay men

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[14] These organizations and the multiple perspectives actually found within them are discussed in detail in Chapters Five and Six.

[15] See John D'Emilio, Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities, Chapter 5: "Retreat to Respectability" for a thorough discussion of the social and political ramifications of this philosophy within the homophile movement. As Elaine Tyler May points out, "adaptation" was also part of the experience of many heterosexual American men and women in the same period who felt uncomfortable with the roles they were pressured to full within the suburban nuclear family; the experts they looked to for help with their discomfort, including psychiatrists and sociologists, "advocated adaptation rather than resistance as a means of feeling 'at home'" (22).

who exhibited feminine characteristics, therefore, were delusional -- acting, "yet not at all believing" that they were playing a role. Third, the *fake*ness, the artificiality, of gay men's femininity establishes the boundaries of the "true" version of homosexual experience, and speaks to a belief among many gay writers that if the *truth* about homosexuals' "normality" could be made known to heterosexuals, the oppression of homosexuals would end. Finally, Cory defines effeminate gay men as pathological by making the claim that among "normal" gay men, gender deviant behavior is not acceptable.[16]

Jim is never so anxious about his "normality" as when confronted with effeminate gay men. He never gets over his surprisingly powerful hatred and fear of gender-deviant men, although he cultivates a sense of superiority which allows him to react with contempt rather than physical abuse. Toward the end of the novel, Jim ends up in New York and his old lover, the movie star Ronald Shaw, introduces him to "the well-organized homosexual world" of the city (245). Jim observes the gay community, but considers himself separate from it, identifying instead with the "thousands of seemingly normal men with families who would never step into this society but who, in small towns and villages, practiced secretly with one another" (246). Jim reflects that the "homosexuals [who] had come to New York as to a center, a new Sodom" where they

[16] This is a false assertion. Historians of mid-century gay communities have shown that while this disapproval was common in many middle class and white circles, butch-femme "roles" were the prevalent form of gender expression in others, particularly in black and white working class gay communities, as well as among very wealthy homosexuals.[16] More has been made of this phenomenon among lesbians, but drag and other types of feminine gender performance were certainly important aspects of the gay life for many men as well. See, for example, D'Emilio, Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities, Lillian Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers, Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold, and George Chauncey, Gay New York. Of course, every story and essay that argues against gender deviance relies on the constant presence of gender deviant gay men. Queens exist in these narratives as that which cannot be erased, despite the apparent desire of many to erase them.

could blend into the multitude were "either the strong and brave or else the effeminate and marked, people who had nothing to lose by being free and reasonably open in their behavior" (246). Despite this reference to the "strong and brave," Jim clearly believes that only those homosexuals who pass unnoticed by society, who, especially, do not make themselves known to society, are "normal." While this passage implies that effeminate homosexuals have "nothing to lose" by being "open" because their effeminacy is a permanent part of their being, Vidal's stance on effeminacy is far from neutral. Jim's next reflections reveal that he finds effeminate gay men threateningly unnatural. Wanting to learn about the gay world, he "forced himself to move in this society":

> He disliked it. He did not like men who acted like women. He was repelled by the queens and the willowy long-haired young men with sensitive girlish faces. ... Everyone deliberately tried to destroy the last vestiges of the masculinity within himself, and this Jim found to be the worst perversion of all, the only perversion; because very often these people allowed the tyranny of their own society to geld them completely. (247)

Disgusted and terrified by effeminate gay men, and continually compelled to reinforce his own sense of conformity to normative masculinity, Jim begins going to gay bars, where he picks up a vast number of masculine men for anonymous sex. In this milieu, Jim can once again be a sexual aggressor. "Sometimes I'm surprised how easy it is and how many I've had," he tells another former lover. "I usually have four or five a week and none of it means anything, but afterwards I feel so peaceful and clean. ... Why, sometimes I never know their names. Sometimes we never say more than a few words. It's so much more natural that way" (253).

For contemporary readers, it is jarring to see anonymous sex with multiple partners described as "peaceful and clean." It is not surprising, however, that Jim sees

this form of sexual expression as "much more natural." It appears natural to Jim because it is a type of behavior supported by the dominant ideology of masculinity that informs his understanding of the "naturalness" of homosexuality. According to this ideology, masculine men *should* be sexually aggressive in this way; Jim's statement echoes again what Vidal called "Jack Kennedy's girl-a-day routine" (Palimpsest 102). It is a characteristic of dominant ideologies that the attitudes and behaviors they promote are not seen as ideological, but rather as natural or normal.[17] That is why he can say that "none of it means anything" when, in fact, it means a great deal in terms of Jim's investment in a privileged form of masculinity to prove his "normality."

The "final catastrophe" (Starkey 512) of the novel makes it plain how easily sexual aggression slips into violence when Jim's sense of his normative masculinity faces its greatest assault. After waiting years for the opportunity, Jim gets Bob -- now married -- to visit him in New York, where he plans to seduce him. He gets Bob drunk and into bed, but when Jim makes his advance, Bob is shocked: "'You're a queer,' he said, 'you're nothing but a damned queer!'" (306). Four paragraphs later, the action of the novel is over; Jim has strangled Bob and is "calmly" getting dressed (307). Throughout the novel, Jim has based his ideal of "normal" homosexual love on his enduring love for his masculine first lover, constantly working toward the time when his sexual aggression might again bring Bob to him. But Bob does not simply reject him; he challenges Jim's masculinity and normality by calling him a "queer," a term that means, to Jim, unequivocal abnormality. His need to continue to see himself as "normal" overrides the love he has borne all this time for Bob. He kills Bob, in a macabre reprise of their

[17] See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses."

wrestling matches at the cabin, by wrestling him down and strangling him; thus, through violence, he re-establishes beyond question not his heterosexuality (what had been challenged by Bob), but his "normal" masculinity.

Criticism, Canonicity, and Conversation: What work is this novel doing (and for whom)?

The emphasis on the "normality" of a certain kind of masculinity in this novel does not occur by chance. Gore Vidal entered the conversation with a specific point to make. In his new "Afterword" to the revised 1965 edition of The City and the Pillar, Vidal makes it clear that he had ideological intentions in writing this book; he wanted to make a statement to society about the meaning of homosexuality. "I decided," he says, looking back after seventeen years, "to examine the homosexual underworld[18] ... and in the process show the 'naturalness' of homosexual relations" (Vidal "Afterword" 207). The "point of this novel," Vidal writes later in the essay, is to show that "sex of any sort is neither right nor wrong. It is" (211).

If this is so, a second, equally important point of the novel – and one on which the first relies – is that while sex "just is," gender performances, on the other hand, do fall into categories of right and wrong, normal and abnormal. In this section, I will examine the ways Vidal's ideological agenda interacted with dominant discourses about masculinity and gender roles that both shaped and exceeded the anti-homosexual rhetoric of the Lavender Scare years. Taking the novel itself as a starting place but broadening the lens to show Vidal and his novel in conversation with the many people who

[18] The term "underworld," during this period, was not necessarily understood to be pejorative; often it was taken as synonymous with "subculture."

responded to it can help to illustrate the interactive process by which the social meanings attached to homosexuality in this period took shape. The culturally-privileged positions of (white, male) academic literary critics gave greater weight to their opinions about the literary merit of Vidal's novel and the validity or usefulness to society of the ideological arguments contained therein. Those same positions of privilege, and the vested interest in maintaining the status quo that upholds them, I argue, contributed to the critics' recognition of Vidal as a class and gender peer, and their admission into the canon of a work that is gay-themed but also defends a normative form of masculinity that they identify as essentially American. The City and the Pillar reproduces, in fictional form, the dominant ideology of masculinity that informed Gore Vidal's understanding of the circumstances under which homosexuality could be considered "normal."

Although Vidal claims in the preface to a 2001 Triangle Classics edition of The City and the Pillar that, on its original publication, "The New York Times would not advertise it and no major American newspaper or magazine would review it or any other book of mine for the next six years" (xvi), Robert J. Stanton's comprehensive bibliography of writings on Vidal through 1974 catalogues four "favorable," five "unfavorable," and four "mixed" reviews of the novel between 1948 and 1949. A survey of the mainstream-press reviews of The City and the Pillar at the time of its publication reveals an interesting facet of the workings of the conversational relationship among all kinds of texts about homosexuality in this period. Many reviewers treated the literary novel that dealt with homosexuality as a reliable a source of "data" on the subject, as

useful to the search for its meaning as a scientific treatise.[19] The consensus among most reviewers is that the prose style of this novel is akin to "unadorned tabloid writing," the characters are one-dimensional, and the "final catastrophe" is unconvincing (Strong 588, New Yorker 81). Most, however, of the favorable and mixed reviews praise the novel for its "honesty," its "sincerity," its "seriousness," and its "documentary" value as a source of information about a significant American subculture.

One of the lengthier reviews, published by J.S. Shirke in the highly respectable Hudson Review in 1948, discusses Sexual Behavior in the Human Male by Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin along with The City and the Pillar and Truman Capote's Other Voices, Other Rooms. Shirke begins his essay with Kinsey, noting that while the Sexual Behavior study is surely sound "scientifically," Kinsey's publisher's comment that the book would be of value to "society as a whole" because of "its demonstration that the State is unjust when it legally punishes" homosexual activities is unfounded. The State, Shirke argues, "to survive, must encourage the reproduction of its citizens. Historically, when the *terrena civitas* tolerates sexual activities which do not have procreation as an object, its worldly power begins to decline" (136). This secular objection to "nonreproductive" sex on the grounds of national extinction was a common one within the public debate about homosexuality that surged after the publication of Kinsey's research. Shirke, however, does not have much to say about the book itself. In an

[19] For an example of a work by a medical "expert" that draws on literature to support scientific and social-scientific claims, see Hervey Cleckley, M.D., The Caricature of Love: A Discussion of Social, Psychiatric, and Literary Manifestations of Pathologic Sexuality. Cleckley, a psychiatrist, draws direct comparisons between novels such as The City and the Pillar and his patients' case histories. "I am hopeful," he writes, "that my treatment of homosexuality in the works so often regarded as good modern literature will stimulate spirited discussion among teachers of literature. I am sure that what I have to say concerning the aspects of sexuality which are prominent today in psychology and psychiatry should be of interest to my fellow psychiatrists, to clinical psychologists, to doctors of medicine, social workers, probation officers, and perhaps also to lawyers and judges" (vii).

unusual move for a reviewer of literary fiction, he uses the Kinsey study's "objective" view of homosexuality to ground his review of Vidal's and Capote's novels. The two works, he says, "support to a remarkable degree [the] findings of Messrs. Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin" (137). Shirke mentions such "data" from Vidal's novel as the beginnings of its "hero"'s homosexuality in adolescence and the "detailed accounts of organized group activities of homosexuals in Beverly Hills and Manhattan," data which "corroborat[e] the findings of the researchers for large urban areas" (137).

Vidal's book, writes Shirke, "is honestly concerned with the social problem; his book is primarily a tract" (137). Though otherwise "undistinguished," the book is valuable for its "sociological demonstration" (138). The New Yorker's reviewer second this opinion, claiming that "Sociologically, the book amounts to an amazingly thorough compendium of the kind of dreary information that accumulates on a metropolitan police blotter" (81). Not all reviewers saw the "reporting" aspect of the book as negative, and some praised it for its sociological contribution while dismissing its literary value. The reviewer for the New Statesman thought its "documentary interest" was its main redeeming quality (488), and Julia Starkey noted in the New Statesman and Nation that although "Mr. Vidal's writing is not at all up my street," nonetheless "from this story one learns interesting things, and I think we ought to give both author and publisher our respectful gratitude for breaching literary territory against which there is still such a mistaken prejudice" (512).

On the other hand, since the early fifties, academic literary critics have given the literary value of The City and The Pillar a surprisingly warm reception. The chorus of critics who place the novel within an American "masculinist" tradition (beginning in the

American Renaissance with Hawthorne and Melville and continuing through Hemingway, Faulkner, and the WWII novelists) endorses the worthiness of the novel for inclusion in the American literary canon. They debate the degree to which The City and the Pillar reinforces, revises, or disappoints classic ideas about the American character, but essays supporting the claim that Vidal's novel participates in this very canonical literary tradition comprise a significant portion of the criticism of this novel from shortly after its publication (Leslie Fiedler's "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!" in the June 1948 Partisan Review, John W. Aldridge's 1951 After the Lost Generation), through the 1960s and '70s (including Bernard F. Dick's 1974 book The Apostate Angel: A Critical Study of Gore Vidal and Ihab Hassan's Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary Novel, which considers The City and The Pillar as one of a spate of postwar novels concerned with the fate of the "American Adam" (63)), to the present day (Jon Robert Adams, "The Great General was a Has-Been," published in 2004 in Harrington Gay Men's Fiction Quarterly; Nikolai Endres, "The Pillaged Pillar," also published in 2004 in Classical and Modern Literature: A Quarterly).

For academic critics with a stake in preserving the status quo of white masculine privilege, Vidal's strenuous defense of the dominant masculine ideology allowed them to consider the novel's discussion of homosexuality to be of secondary importance to the work the novel does to buttress a strong American masculinity in opposition to the emasculating effects of early Cold War culture (perceived by some as successful, by others as less so, but by nearly all as belonging to a long line of American male writers who wrestled with the question of what makes a man). That these qualities continue to be noted and approved in current criticism demonstrates the resilience of preoccupation

with the defense of American manhood within the academy. An examination of the approaches to this novel, over time, by those trying to establish a gay or queer literary tradition reveals a complexity of responses to Vidal's version of "normal" masculinity, where some see the novel as too invested in repressive social structures to be of any use to the actual gay man, and others claim it as radically redefining the possibilities of strong gay masculinity.

Paul Lauter describes the literary canon as "the works from the past that we continue to read, teach, and write about" (129). He posits that "*canon* – that is, selection" does not precede criticism, but is "related to, indeed a *function of*, critical technique" (130). The choice, by those with the cultural authority within the academy to determine what is and is not a major work deserving of sustained academic interest[20], of *which* works from the past to study in the present is not a neutral process. Rather, those choices reflect the values of those who make them, and are intended to perpetuate those values across generations. For example, in the years immediately following World War II, the academic study of American literature was highly influenced by the "myth and symbol" school[21], first introduced by F. O. Matthiessen. This understanding of the canon was based on the idea that American writing had achieved its highest expression in the works

[20] This formulation is drawn from Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, Practicing New Historicism, "Introduction".

[21] In 1945, F.O. Matthiessen's American Renaissance helped to usher in a new critical approach to literature within American Studies, known as the "myth and symbol" or "image-myth-symbol" school, itself influenced by larger movements such as New Criticism and the Southern Agrarian school of literary study. (See also George Lipsitz, American Studies in a Moment of Danger, chapter three, "Dancing in the Dark," for a discussion of the "sectarian battles" that accompanied the rise of this school, as well as the intellectual challenges that eventually undermined it.) Matthiessen argued that the works produced by the New England writers between 1830 and 1860 held special value for the story of American identity, because they tried to preserve the spirit of a fleeting and sacred moment when "a chosen people achieved harmony with the sacred" (Noble 133). For Matthiessen and his followers, "[s]ymbols could evoke and sustain a sense of unity as capitalism fragmented the culture. And myth expressed a level of experience that transcended time" (143).

of the "American Renaissance" writers of the mid-19th century, and that by preserving and teaching the works of Emerson, Hawthorne, Melville, and their cohorts, the "sacred spirit" of democracy and the trust in the national potential for freedom and greatness that these white, male, New England-based authors celebrated could be fostered in the turbulent, frightened climate of the early Cold War years.[22] As Lauter summarizes, "[T]he central issue is not which is 'better,' but what we mean by 'better.' And I am sure it is clear by now that I believe such standards of judgment, which shape the canon, to be rooted in assumptions derived from class and caste about the techniques, qualities, and especially the functions of art" (135-6).

Among some literary canon-makers of the early Cold War years, The City and the Pillar, despite being what Adam Haslett would describe, on the occasion of a 2003 reissue, as "at the time [of its first appearance] arguably the most explicit and uncompromising novel about homosexuality ever to be published in the English-speaking world" (26), could still be recognized as a participant in the century-old project of defining and defending American masculinity. Leslie Fiedler, in his widely-read 1948 essay "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!",[23] saw the source of this unity, this canonical coherence, in the novel's use of the archetype of innocent, noble masculine love (particularly between Jim and Bob as teenagers). Fiedler sees The City and the Pillar as exploring, just as did Melville, Twain, and Hawthorne (though perhaps with less genius

[22] See David Noble, Death of a Nation: American Culture and the End of Exceptionalism. 127.
[23] Sam Tanenhaus said of Fiedler's "first great essay" that it "opened with a sentence that announced itself as a scandal" (par. 4); David Tomlinson noted that "Leslie Fiedler's 'Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!' is well known to students of Twain. It has been around since 1948. Students have always read it" (par. 10); as George C. Carrington described the essay's notoriety, "In the well-known article 'Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey,' Leslie Fiedler bases on this usage much of his influential claim that Huck and Jim are consciously or unconsciously homosexuals and thus illustrative of a far-reaching tendency in American literature" (27).

than the literary forefathers), "a national myth of masculine love" and "an essential aspect of American sentimental life" (143), "a chaste male love as the ultimate emotional experience" (144). He points out that Jim Willard "indulges in the reverie of running off to sea with his dearest friend," just like Ishmael and Queequeg in Moby Dick. Despite this chaste love's breakdown over the course of the novel into explicit homosexuality, Fiedler includes it with the classics of the American Renaissance as sharing in the work of constructing a strong national masculine identity.

Ihab Hassan, writing in 1961, saw the book in a more negative relation to the great writers of the masculinist tradition in the American canon, but still preoccupied with the same concerns about manhood as those of the past writers. He laments that "[a] feeling of some intensity, an awareness of urgency and even power" which characterized the way those who served in World War II experienced and wrote about their masculinity, "dissipated itself" when the "age of so-called comfort and conformity" began a few years later (62). In the era of the Organization Man, what are according to Hassan the "basic needs" of aggressive individualism, "the go-getter virtues embodied in the American Dream," have gone "underground" (64-65). Writers like Vidal (one of the WWII generation whose vitality has "dissipated" with TCTP) oppose the deadly indifference of suburban heterosexual domesticity with the values of the "rebel-victim." "The urge to disengage love from domestic commitments and envision human relations under the aspect of a transcendant ideal," Hassan writes (love being "the last resource of revolt against organization" (68)), "the urge, that is, to resist the socialization of love, is an American urge subject to corruption" (76). Though he cites "the roots of homoeroticism, if not precisely homosexuality," as a trope for the primacy of "the

relation between man and man," going "back to the classic American novels of the nineteenth century" (76), in his view, Vidal's novel does not live up to this legacy in terms of its power to revitalize American manhood. Because Jim ultimately must destroy the object of the only true love he has ever known, "the pillar of salt is [the] most lasting monument" for "the modern Sodom" the book portrays (77). Nonetheless, although Hassan judges its hero as a failure in his attempt to secure masculinity from the social forces of organization and feminism which destabilize it, he acknowledges the novel and its author as being of the same lineage as those nineteenth century writers who established the values of aggressive, individualist masculinity to which Jim Willard adheres.

The City and the Pillar was destined to succeed or fail in its bid for canonicity based on whether or not its central concerns with the delineation of a "normal" homosexuality, which relied on a concept of masculinity rooted in racial, class, and gender privilege, were recognizable to literary critics as the extension of a long and honored tradition of writers constructing a strong American masculine identity; and, for the most part, its bid has been successful on these terms. Its reception among gay readers who were intent on claiming a gay or queer literary tradition within American writing, however, rested on very different criteria. These criteria were concerned less with the book's resemblance to classic literary themes or myths of American national identity, and more with the book's ability to improve the homosexual reader's relationship either to himself (in terms of his own self-esteem) or to the society. While inclusion in the high canon depended on the idea of a presumed shared national identity (which was, in practice, the identity of economically privileged white men), the nascent gay literary

tradition emerged from the rise of other identity categories, the homosexual identity of the individual and the identification of the individual homosexual with a wider gay community.

In 1948, when The City and the Pillar was first published, few (if any) outlets were available for the publication of responses to the novel by members of the gay community itself. By the fifties and sixties, however, opportunities would open in mainstream liberal publications as well as the emerging gay press itself for writers who identified themselves with the gay community to describe the impact of Vidal's novel on their lives. A review of the responses to The City and the Pillar from this group of critics, as compared to those coming from the academic literary establishment, can help to illuminate the way in which the national discourse on homosexuality operated as a conversation among unequally-privileged, as well as differently-motivated, voices and perspectives.

During the "homophile" years of the 1950s and the early years of the 1960s' gay liberation movement, queer readers such as Donald Webster Cory, John Murphy, and Hilton Kramer established an alternative system for determining the value of literary works about homosexuality. Cory was one of the first to argue (in 1951) that "gay" books should be useful and helpful to "gay" readers, and to argue for the development of a gay literary tradition, an academic, literary-critical project, that would entail the designation of certain works as sharing some common view of the worthiness of homosexuality across time.[24] Under this new system of value, The City and the Pillar, though trumpeted by mainstream reviewers for its bold content and accepted by literary

[24] The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach

critics as part of a distinguished tradition, as often as not fails to measure up to the standards of inclusion.

To understand the intervention that queer reviewers who reject The City and the Pillar are undertaking in the conversation about the meanings of homosexuality, it is necessary to delineate the similarities and differences between the project of defining a canon and that of building a queer literary tradition. Both projects are concerned with inclusion and exclusion, with the drawing of boundaries around "truth." A literary canon, by definition, includes and excludes on the basis of aesthetic merit. It is also understood by its critics[25] to include and exclude on the basis of adherence to certain values or ideologies, those that maintain the status quo and the privilege of the already privileged, tending to uphold the class, race, sex, and gender biases of the dominant group. This form of exclusion is oppressive because canonicity functions as a certification of value, and non-canonicity as a reflection of the "fact" that a work has no lasting value. Canonization is a ranking of truths with consequences for the dissemination and availability of viewpoints that challenge the oppressive aspects of the status quo.

Canonization is also concerned with preservation of "great works" of the past, both as models of what "great art" can and should be, and for the purpose of building group (and sometimes national) cohesion. The critics of the myth-and-symbol school attempted to rally the idealistic visions of past writers to strengthen faith in the nation in their present. Similarly, those concerned with a gay literary tradition have often used

[25] For example, Lillian S. Robinson: "For more than a decade now, feminist scholars have been protesting the apparently systematic neglect of women's experience in the literary canon, neglect that takes the form of distorting and misreading the few recognized female writers and excluding others. Moreover, the argument runs, the predominantly male authors in the canon show us the female character and relations between the sexes in a way that both reflects and contributes to sexist ideology" ("Treason Our Text" 116).

"tradition" to mean the preservation of, not the most representative, but rather the most *progressive* ideas of the past -- those agreed with, even demanded, by the new age itself. As the task was understood within the homophile and gay liberation movements of the 1950s-1970s, it involved picking and choosing those works for inclusion in the tradition which reflected the values of the movement at its current stage. But the reasons for constructing such a tradition are different from the reasons for constructing a canon (to recognize or provide examples of the highest achievements of literary art). A tradition is needed, according to its advocates, for several reasons. First, a queer literary tradition is needed to redress the wrongs inflicted on a minority group by the dominant group through the silencing (keeping out of the discussion; making unavailable; refusing to acknowledge, or acknowledge as art) of the minority group's literary voices; this is seen as a form of discrimination against the minority group. Second, a queer literary tradition is necessary to make sure that these literary voices and works are available to members of the minority group searching for a literary reflection of their lives, as members of the minority group, to help them reach a greater understanding of themselves (greater self-knowledge), their group (stronger group identification), and their group's position vis-à-vis society and the dominant group (better ability to function amid and/or resist oppression). The existence of a queer literary tradition is believed to provide gay people with these benefits. The criteria for inclusion in this tradition, therefore, reflect these goals. Works considered "valuable" to the tradition include those that teach the gay person something useful about him or her self, his or her experience as a gay person, and/or the meanings attached to gayness in society.

The process of tradition-building within minority groups might be described as "democratizing, in that it refuses to limit creativity to the spectacular achievements of a group of trained specialists" (Gallagher and Greenblatt 11) and in its fundamental purpose of helping a marginalized community to empower itself, rather than maintain the privileged status of an elite class. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to assume that the politics of inclusion and exclusion are absent from the process of building a queer literary tradition. In early discussions about what works might be usefully included in such a tradition, a great deal of animosity toward those works that did *not* appear to aid the kind of self-knowledge described above can be seen.

Thus, The City and the Pillar may be for the same reasons included in the high canon and excluded from the early formulations of the gay literary tradition. Its heavy investment in many aspects of the status quo, particularly with regard to existing hierarchies of gender, class, and race, works in its favor in the academic mainstream, but has had mixed effects on its standing in the field of "gay literature." Queer critics since the 1950s have been divided over the relevance of this novel to the gay or queer literary tradition. A look at essays by Hilton Kramer, John Murphy, Claude Summers, and Robert Corber can serve to illustrate the range of perspectives within this debate and help us to see how those critics who engaged in the work of defining a queer literary tradition sought to use the literary works of the past to foster a cohesive community identity in their present.

The publication of the revised The City and the Pillar in 1965 provided the occasion for Hilton Kramer, writing in The New Leader, to reflect that the novel was the kind of gay book that represented "the bad old days, when such novels were thought to be

'daring' and an author was more or less obliged to do his hero in, morally if not physically, as the price of luxuriating in his sexual waywardness" (16). For Kramer, this type of book "provided the public with a glamorous, though circumspect, *tour d'horizon* of the queer half-world" (16); its appeal, in other words, was to the straight reading public, to whom its subject matter might be stimulating. For the gay reader, it offered nothing more than "the sado-masochistic school of homosexual brutalism, itself a product of guilt shaking loose of its own disguises" (16). For Kramer, this book did not help the homosexual to have a better understanding of himself or a better relationship with society, and thus it was better relegated to the past than preserved, in the gay literary tradition, for the present and future.

John Murphy, in his 1971 essay "Queer Books," reviews the gay-themed works that had entered his life since his childhood and evaluates them based on their usefulness to his psychological development as a gay man. "Until recently," he writes, literature has been "the only platform for public statements by self-acknowledged homosexuals" (72). While he notes that the "antihomosexuality in these books is a prime example of what has made the gay liberation movement necessary and inevitable" (72), the primary problem he experienced as a young man, in relation to the literature of homosexuality, was that he was denied access to it. Although heterosexual youths encountered a flood of information about their desires, "[i]f a boy wants to learn anything about himself in relation to other males, he encounters a special set of problems" (73). In Murphy's analysis, literary works are valuable inasmuch as they help the reader to gain self-knowledge. He sees as the work before him and other gay critics the assembly of "a long-needed body of works about homosexuality, which will become the focus for

homosexual studies, past and present" (74). It was only when he discovered, after much effort, books that dealt sympathetically with homosexuality that he realized "that one could learn something concrete from literature, that books could actually change your life, just like the signs in the library said" (74).

Murphy approaches his analysis of each of the many books he considers by asking whether the work could give him useful insights into his own experience as a gay man. With this as his critical starting point, he classifies The City and the Pillar, along with James Baldwin's Giovanni's Room, as exemplary specimens of "the 'serious' novels that dealt with homosexuality in the fifties and sixties" (76). Again, Murphy's concern with the usefulness *to the homosexual* of the meanings of homosexuality being advocated in works of literature is clear. When one of these "serious" novelists "wrote well," according to Murphy, "there was no reason for me, an inexperienced reader, to think that this was other than a realistic portrayal of what I could expect if I ended up as a queer. I began thinking that I had to be careful, much more careful than the 'normal' people around me appeared" (76). Perhaps the venom with which Murphy rips into The City and the Pillar can be attributed to his resentment of the sense of living constantly under attack that novels of this type inculcated in him. The version of homosexuality Vidal presents as "natural," the version that seems to have held great appeal for straight audiences, gave Murphy "a familiar sense of unease" (77). He notes the "uncomfortable parallel between homosexuality and death" that "frightened" him. The "serious" novels, he says, "were my only source of information outside of my own abortive experiments, and they held very little promise for any kind of future" (76). For Murphy, novels that supported dominant ideologies of gender that linked homosexuality with violence gave

the gay reader little or no useful information about how to lead a fulfilling life. Picking up on Vidal's defense of the status quo in matters of race, class, and gender privilege, he finally judges Vidal to be "much more terrified of the breakdown of sex roles than most of his readers" and dismisses The City and the Pillar as a work that should be allowed to "lie in peace" (77).

More recent gay responses to Vidal's novel have tended to recuperate it as more radical than it appears on its surface, arguing that Vidal's yoking of Jim Willard's homosexual desires with "normal" masculinity destabilized the category of masculinity itself, and that in its time period, the portrait of a homosexual hero who was not a flaming queen was actually a radical intervention in the national conversation about the meanings of homosexuality – just as its author and earliest defenders claimed it to be. They therefore rewrite the boundaries of the gay literary tradition, this time with The City and the Pillar included as useful to the individual gay man developing his identity and public personality, and to the gay community, whose borders of possible, acceptable forms of self-expression it broadens to include the "normal" masculine identity. I argue that this group of critics, the contemporary guardians of the gay literary tradition, in much the same way as the mainstream critics of the 1950s and '60s, recognize without recognizing the "normality" of gender, class, and racial privilege. The unacknowledged basis by which they embrace Jim Willard as a radically positive portrayal of a gay man is his ability to resist negative gay stereotypes and retain those qualities of aggressive masculinity, celebrated by the dominant heterosexual culture, which rely for their privileged status within the society on class privilege and the violent rejection of women and nonwhite men.

Claude Summers, a noted literary historian and critic of queer literature, gives a different estimation of the value of the novel in his essay "The City and the Pillar as Gay Fiction," included in Jay Parini's anthology of critical essays on Gore Vidal. As the title of the essay suggests, Summers claims a place for the novel within a gay literary tradition. (Summers is also the author of Gay Fictions: Wilde to Stonewall, 1990, and editor of The Gay and Lesbian Literary Heritage: A Reader's Companion to the Writers and their Works, from Antiquity to the Present, 1995.) Like Murphy, Summers sees as the primary value of a gay literary tradition its emphasis on literature that is useful to the homosexual reader. Summers, however, places The City and the Pillar on the side of social usefulness. He considers it one of a small number of books published in the early Cold War years that "[take] homosexuality seriously as a contemporary social issue and that [seek] to interpret homosexuality in ways other than stereotypically" (56). In this case, the critic agrees with the version of homosexuality Vidal defends as "normal," and applauds the way Vidal "trac[es] the coming out process of a young man as ordinary and American as apple pie" (57). The novel's message, for Summers, is useful for gay readers, and it "succeeds primarily as a bildungsroman tracing its protagonist's gradual acceptance of a homosexual identity [which] pivots on the inflexibility of sexual orientation" (57).

Summers clearly accepts as "natural" and "normal" the version of male homosexuality that Vidal presents as such. "Central points of the novel," writes Summers, "are that repression distorts the expression of homosexuality and creates a subculture that itself contributes to that distortion." The "distorted" elements of the subculture, the homosexuals whose behavior is not natural, are "the stereotyped gay men

and lesbians ('people so hunted that they have, at last, become totally perverse as a defense')" (58). Note that, in this analysis, it is not Vidal who "stereotypes" gay men and lesbians; the "stereotypes" are seen as reflective of a class of people who actually existed in the gay world. Although Summers makes the point more subtly than Vidal, he too considers gender deviance a "distortion" of the "normal" expression of homosexuality. Thus Summers can claim that the novel belongs within the gay literary tradition because it captures, in "mythic" form, "the experience of millions of other American homosexuals of [Vidal's] era," particularly the "coming out" process as it was understood at that time (66).[26] By accepting uncritically Vidal's characterization of "normal" homosexuality, Summers allows the dominant ideology of masculinity and its attendant violence against gender-deviant homosexuals to remain an unchallenged element in the gay literary tradition. In fact, he sees this form of masculinity as a forerunner to a similar rejection of effeminacy stemming from "the pride inspired by the contemporary gay liberation movement" (67). For Summers, this interpretation of the meanings of homosexuality does provide homosexual readers with a useful framework for understanding their experience.

In his 1994 essay "Gore Vidal and the Erotics of Masculinity," Robert Corber dispenses with ambivalence and openly celebrates The City and the Pillar's rejection of effeminacy among gay men as an important component, itself, of the ideology of the gay liberation movement. Corber contrasts The City and the Pillar with Donald Webster Cory's (Corber misspells Cory's name as "Corey" throughout the article) stance on gay

[26] "Coming out" in mid-century gay slang meant the process of having one's first same-sex sexual experiences and finding one's place in the "gay world," in contrast to the contemporary understanding of "coming out" as a process of informing one's family, friends, co-workers, and eventually the world at large of one's homosexual identity.

literature in The Homosexual in America. Cory located The City and the Pillar within, in Corber's words, "a tradition of fictionalized gay autobiography that ended tragically," and "claimed that its representation of gay male experience was not realistic but the product of internalized homophobia" (30). According to Corber, Cory and others who consider the novel unhelpful for gay readers "seriously distorted Vidal's project" (31). Corber attributes misreadings of The City and the Pillar to "the degree to which [the novel] contested the conventions that governed the representation of gay male experience in literary as well as scientific discourse" (32):

> Vidal attributes to the protagonist of his novel a form of subjectivity that cannot be reduced to the binary oppositions that regulate the production of gender; in so doing, he challenges the set of narratives available for understanding gay male experience. Because Jim does not appear to be a woman trapped in a man's body but resembles an "ordinary" middle-class boy his homosexuality exceeds gender's binary logic and cannot be understood as a form of gender inversion. In deviating from the conventions that governed the representation of gay male experience, Vidal's novel also called into question the self-understanding of the gay male subculture. ... Jim's desire for other men is rooted in a disidentification with masculinity that does not revert to or manifest itself in an identification with femininity; consequently, he continues to occupy a masculine subject position. (32)

Corber's analysis validates the way in which The City and the Pillar, as a contribution to the national conversation about the meanings of homosexuality, attempts to show the "naturalness" of homosexuality by denying that homosexual men "ident[ify] with femininity." The claim, however, depends on the erasure of gay men who *do* identify with femininity. Corber does not address the way in which the effort to reclaim masculine privilege by showing that the homosexual is able to conform to the dominant ideology of masculinity necessitates the violent rejection of gay men who do not conform. Corber takes at face value Jim's statement that "his desire for other men 'was

not the result of negation, of hatred or fear of women; it came, rather, from a most affirmative love' (271)" (45), but in fact, the fear of women's bodies characterizes Jim's interaction, in various degrees, with every female character in the novel. From his first appalling glimpse of his mother's naked body, Jim shows an almost paranoid rejection of women, both as inherently inferior (but unjustly privileged) sexual rivals, and as repellant and frightening would-be seducers. Far from exploding binary constructions of gender, The City and the Pillar's hatred of gender-deviant homosexuals and effeminacy reifies these boundaries. Because it fails to address the dependence of Vidal's "natural" homosexuality on a privileged ideology of masculinity, Corber's analysis reinforces Vidal's thesis that men whose gender performance includes feminine aspects are deluded and dangerous people.

As this chapter has shown, two of the ways that novels, particularly those that are accepted by critics as "literary," can participate in a national discourse are by responding to (reflecting, defending, or critiquing) the values of a culture, and by sparking discussion in scholarly and critical circles about the meanings and repercussions of concepts circulating within the culture – in this case, the concept of homosexuality and the mainstream national culture of the United States in the early Cold War. During this period of heightened anti-homosexual sentiment, any work that treated gay men in a positive light, that encouraged the acceptance of homosexuality by society and by the homosexual himself, was innovative and courageous. These books and their authors did the work of claiming a space within the national imagination for gay people to exist as citizens, rather than criminals or mental patients. Gore Vidal, publicity hound that he

may have grown into, risked his established reputation as a "serious writer" when he published a gay-themed novel. It turned out to be a sound bet, as Vidal's literary credentials combined with his privileged social status and his commitment to maintaining the status quo of gender and class hierarchies allowed his challenge to the exclusion of gender-normative, white gay men from the benefits of full citizenship to slide by without offending his target audience of critical gatekeepers. If his argument for gay inclusion on the basis of "normality" was not taken very seriously by many critics, it also did not damage his literary reputation over the long term.

Like Vidal, the author who is the focus of the next chapter, James Baldwin, also staked a strong early publication record on a novel that defended gay love as a legitimate form of sexual and emotional expression. Despite striking similarities between Baldwin's and Vidal's novels, however, the two men's biographies could hardly have been more different. Having grown up in poverty in a racially segregated ghetto, having been persecuted for not properly embodying masculinity, Baldwin's perspective on the status quo was, not surprisingly, also dramatically different from Vidal's. His novel Giovanni's Room, discussed in the next chapter, contributes much more to the national conversation about the meanings of homosexuality, of value to heterosexual readers as well as to gay readers seeking self-understanding. Instead of positioning "normal" masculine gay love within the scope of mainstream values, Baldwin offers a new paradigm for human relations, one based on love and compassion .

Chapter 2: Complicating Categories

Locating James Baldwin's Giovanni's Room in History and Canon

Like The City and the Pillar, James Baldwin's 1956 novel Giovanni's Room opens with its protagonist getting drunk alone (in someplace other than his home) and reflecting on the consequences of his actions. In both novels, the protagonist's choices have led to the death of a man who had been his lover. Two men who are disgusted with what they have become – rapidly aging queers – take us "back to the beginning," each describing his childhood, his family of origin, his first homosexual experience with a boyhood friend, and the most recent chain of events that has culminated in the present disaster. While in Vidal's novel, Jim Willard confesses that he raped and murdered his first love in a rage at having his masculinity questioned, in Baldwin's novel, protagonist David, an expatriate white American man living in Paris, struggles with his repressed homosexuality while his girlfriend travels in Spain. During her absence, he loves and leaves Giovanni, an impoverished Italian immigrant in France, tends bar works in a gay establishment and fends off the advances of older gay men who would buy or bully his favors. Despite Giovanni's desperate love for him, and in contradiction of his own sexual desire, David leaves Giovanni without saying good-bye when Hella returns from Spain. Giovanni, devastated by David's departure, is pushed into committing a crime for which he is sentenced to death.

It is striking that two of the most critically acclaimed gay-themed American novels of the early Cold War period share such major plot similarities, especially when the plot is so macabre. Their authors' career trajectories shared some similarities as well;

Baldwin, like Vidal, was a prominent essayist and public figure as well as a writer of fiction; both have been preoccupied throughout their careers with the question of what it means to be an American. But while Vidal came from a privileged class and upheld its mores and its hierarchies, Baldwin was born into poverty, grew up in a ghetto with eight younger siblings, and remained deeply committed to the struggles of the people there. And instead of reifying fixed gender categories and sexual identities, as Vidal does in The City and the Pillar, Baldwin undermines them. In fact, for Baldwin, it is one of the unique characteristics of the United States that "American writers do not have a fixed society to describe. The only society they know is one in which nothing is fixed and in which the individual must fight for his identity."

Like Gore Vidal, Baldwin contributed much to the national conversation about the meanings of homosexuality taking place in the late 1940s and 1950s, and like Vidal, the content and philosophy of his contribution was significantly shaped by Baldwin's location on axes of racial and economic privilege relative to the dominant class. Unlike Vidal, whose writing in the 1950s was invested in the status quo of gender, race, and economic privilege, Baldwin saw this lack of fixity as "a rich confusion" that "creates for the American writer unprecedented opportunities" (Nobody 22). Against the status quo and the severe oppression that sustained it (oppression which Baldwin both experienced and witnessed), Baldwin advocated "real change" which would "impl[y] the breakup of the world as one has always known it, the loss of all that gave one an identity, the end of safety" (100). In the undoing of long-standing systems of privilege based on a hierarchy of identity categories, Baldwin saw the only real hope for America. His insistence on the need to let go of the status quo – "it is only when a man is able, without bitterness or self-

pity, to surrender a dream he has long cherished or a privilege he has long possessed that he is set free—he has set himself free—for higher dreams, for greater privileges" (100) – is addressed to both whites and blacks, heterosexuals and those whose desires and relationships fall within the spectrum labeled "queer."

I begin this chapter by discussing the various cultural projects to which Giovanni's Room has been recruited, and the ways its critical reception has differed based upon the critic's social positioning and the racial, sexual, or national identities the critic is using literary criticism to define. Then, moving away from the critical responses, I situate Giovanni's Room within its national and international historical context in order to read the novel as one of Baldwin's most explicit and intentional contributions to the national conversation about the meanings of homosexuality taking place in the early Cold War era. Baldwin's own nonfiction writings provide a particularly good reference point for this contextualization because they offer a window, not just to the political events and conditions that influenced Baldwin's thought during this period, but to the ways these events impacted Baldwin's heart and psyche. I pay particular attention to the confluence of the time Baldwin spent living in Greenwich Village in the late 1940s and openly exploring his queer identity with specific experiences of racial oppression, violence, and destruction which Baldwin witnessed or experienced during the same period. I argue that a close reading of this novel that also attends to the novel's historical context draws attention to a major gap in the academic criticism of this novel, namely, that most criticism has been overly focused on the experience of the narrator, David, and thus missed the ways that Giovanni as a character speaks to the particular kinds of black queer male suffering that so pained and frightened Baldwin in New York that he had to leave

the country. Re-orienting the critical view on Giovanni as a "self" that can speak (and must be listened to) reveals much about the kind of loving compassion that Baldwin believed could be channeled into a transformative politics for the American society of the 1950s. In the final part of the chapter, I examine the novel as an extension of Baldwin's critique of 1940s and 1950s gay male subcultures and argue that this novel opened a space in the national conversation about the meanings of homosexuality for a form of gay identity that was both politically committed and yet "unfixed," shifting, able to be different things at different times and in different contexts. I also discuss how, in order to arrive at this identity formation, Baldwin had to reject both the gender norms and domestic ideology of the Cold War United States as well as the false sense of security they were intended to buttress.

Confused Canonicity

Critics have had a hard time determining the status of Giovanni's Room in the academy, in the American literary canon, and within Baldwin's oeuvre. In 1986 Stephen Adams claimed that "[o]f all Baldwin's novels, least attention is paid to Giovanni's Room" (133). As late as 2007, Aliyyah Abur-Rahman called the book "this most neglected second novel by Baldwin" and asserted that it "has not received the critical acclaim it merits" (485). Yet both authors cite several critical works that address this novel specifically. This suggests that there is something about the novel and its critical history which does not sit easily with literary critics. That there is such hesitance to firmly claim this novel's status as "in" the canon, despite the obviously respectful engagement it has received from dozens of scholars (whether they ultimately regard it as

a "success" or a "failure"[27]), may be due in part to the extremes of emotion with which apparently distinct cultural groups have reacted to the book since its publication. Giovanni's Room has crossed the radar of multiple canon-building projects, attracting the notice of those interested in constructing an African American literary canon (especially in the 1960s and 1970s, during the zenith of the Black Arts movement) and those seeking a gay male cultural inheritance, from the 1980s on.

On one hand, the rejection of Giovanni's Room (along with any of Baldwin's writing that dealt with themes of same-sex desire) by promoters of the Black Power and Black Arts movements in the three decades immediately following its publication is now legendary.[28] The most frequently cited of these rejections is Eldridge Cleaver's discussion of Baldwin in Soul on Ice, in which he caricatures Baldwin as effeminate (Spurlin 12) and postulates that "many Negro homosexuals...are outraged and frustrated because in their sickness they are unable to have a baby by a white man" (Cleaver qtd. in Tóibín 208). As Shin and Judson point out, Cleaver's was simply the most famous attack in a "general condemnation of Baldwin's sexual politics" by "the most important figures of the Black Arts Movement" (par. 11). Both William Spurlin and Aliyyah Abur-Rahman have given useful critiques of the "policing of representations of racial blackness" that shaped "black canon formation throughout much of the twentieth century" (Abur-Rahman 478-479), whereby black gay male writers, perceived as "emasculated" (and the effects of their writing, potentially "emasculating" of black men

[27] Michael Anderson is one critic who, while admiring Baldwin's overall contribution to American letters, believes that Baldwin "never achieved a wholly satisfactory work of fiction. Yet, seriously flawed as they all are, Baldwin's first three novels," including Giovanni's Room, which he regards as the best of all, "now seem much more interesting than his essays, even if the great promise he showed was never fulfilled" (13).
[28] Yasmin Y. DeGout (1992), Shin and Judson (1998), William J. Spurlin (1999), Abur-Rahman (2007) and others discuss the backlash against Baldwin by participants in the Black Power movement.

in the national imaginary) (Spurlin 112), were denied the intellectual validity of inclusion in the developing African American literary canon. The expectation, particularly heavy during the middle decades of the century, that African American writing (including fiction) do "manifestly political work" either to protest external conditions of racist oppression or to "refigure blackness as (hetero)normative so that black Americans could enter the cultural mainstream and enjoy the full benefits of unqualified citizenship" (Abur-Rahman 478), evolved over the course of the 1960s into a demand that African American writers represent black men as virile, extremely masculine, and rejecting all forms of the "white man's decadence and disease," as homosexuality was seen to be (Spurlin 113). Andrew Shin and Barbara Judson call this "the straightjacket of black virility that [Baldwin] struggled to liberate himself from throughout his career" (par. 4).

On the other hand, since the field of gay and lesbian studies (which has been critiqued for having a bias toward the culture and issues of white gay men) gained prominence in the 1980s, Giovanni's Room has enjoyed a celebrated status as "a triumph of gay culture" (Whitaker 169). Marlon Ross writes that as "one of the earliest affirmative American novels on an overtly homosexual topic" and a "great risk" for Baldwin personally (commercially and critically), the novel "has become a foundational text for gay culture and for gay and lesbian studies" (14) – although later in his essay, Ross clarifies that the book "has gained a central place in (white) gay culture and is often a focus in (white) gay studies" (16). Routinely referred to as a "classic" in the critical context of gay studies, Giovanni's Room was named second in a list of "the 100 best gay books" chosen by a panel of 14 lesbian and gay writers in 1999 (Plunket 119). William Spurlin commented that "[i]t is difficult to find a syllabus for a queer studies course in

lesbian and gay literature today that does not include Giovanni's Room or Another Country; an anthology of gay literature that does not contain excerpts from these and other novels, such as Just Above My Head; or critical work in academic queer theory which does not analyze Baldwin's work" (118). Stephen Adams' 1986 essay, "The Homosexual as Hero," is typical of the scholarship that engaged seriously with the work of finding and claiming a gay (male) literary inheritance. In this piece, Adams counters earlier critical arguments that "homosexual talent" can "develop in only one direction, and it can never take the place of the whole range of human experience" (John Aldridge, 1951, qtd. in Adams 131). For Adams, this novel presents "the living example" that "homosexuality is not dirty" (136), and Baldwin presents "the more complex reality of such a relationship" (137) in contrast to homophobic oversimplifications.

Historically, then, there has been a drastic difference in the acceptance and importance accorded to the novel Giovanni's Room, depending on which culturally-specific group was using it to define their value (or define themselves against), to build a literary canon in opposition to the white-, male-, heterosexual-dominated canon of the academy, or to define a canon's limits. The irony is that, although identity categories such as "black" and "gay" figured in prominently in Baldwin's writing, throughout his career (indeed, from his earliest published essays, such as "Everybody's Protest Novel") Baldwin critiqued the idea of "fixed" identity categories and expressed his skepticism about the power of a category to define the entirety of an individual's soul. From his writing, we can discern that Baldwin regarded categories such as these as socially meaningful constructs, and presented individuals wrestling with both the limits of identity categories as defined externally, as well as the transformative possibilities of personal

acceptance offered by the concept of identification with a group, with another person, or even with a feeling.

This is not a new observation; it has been made about Baldwin's work at nearly every stage of his career. Leslie Fiedler's review of Giovanni's Room, published in the New Leader in 1956, although condescending at times ("I have had the sense that here for once was a young Negro writer, capable of outgrowing at the same moment both qualifications and becoming simply a writer," Fiedler says (146), as if unaware that it is largely the power of the critics to imprison a writer within a category), nonetheless registers the work Baldwin does to destabilize identity. Though Fiedler sees it as a tragic theme, "the loss of the last American innocence, the last moral certainty—that the mirror does not lie, that little boys are boys, little girls girls" (149), he also credits Baldwin with using both race and sexuality as tropes for exploring "identity and outsidedness [sic]" (147). More recently, several of the essays in the anthology James Baldwin Now (1999) take on the topic of Baldwin's approach to racial, sexual, and gender identity categories. In "The Parvenu Baldwin and the Other Side of Redemption," Roderick Ferguson analyzes Baldwin's 1949 essays "Everybody's Protest Novel" and "Preservation of Innocence," arguing that Baldwin signified on the demand of avant-garde modernist aesthetics for "representational complexity" by revealing "the ambiguity of gender and sexual identity" in a way that "critique[d] the heterosexual nature of the American national narrative" (242). As Ferguson illustrates, Baldwin extended this insistence on complexity into his analysis of the protest novel genre, which he believed invested in and reinforced "essentialist discourses about the African American male" (246). Ferguson concludes, "We may say that Baldwin signifies on the aesthetic of the American avant-

garde, because he calls for complex representations of African Americans and gays while assailing the liberal citizen-subject and the national narrative that has sustained it" (254). In the same volume, Marlon Ross writes that by deploying identities in unexpected ways (e.g., using a white protagonist in Giovanni's Room), Baldwin was "attempting to uncover this scandal of 'identity'" wherein "when it comes to identity, only one, master characteristic is possible; all others search for a place to settle within the framework of that master characteristic" (24). William Spurlin extends this point beyond the politics of literary representation and into the realm of social justice activism, asserting that "Baldwin questioned models of political solidarity and resistance based on one's membership in a particular community (thought of as homogeneous) and looked at the ways in which a variety of oppressions intersected with one another" (110).

In light of all of these competing interpretations, how are we to understand Baldwin's literary and historical significance? I do not question Baldwin's significance as a deeply committed voice of the African American civil rights movement, or as a major literary ancestor for gay writers and readers. Rather, in the remainder of this chapter, I attempt to weave together these strands of criticism to illuminate the particular work that Giovanni's Room does within the context of the struggle to define the meanings of homosexuality taking place in the United States in the 1940s and 1950s, a conversation into which Baldwin had already entered more than once.[29]

To this conversation, he brought an original perspective, uniquely Baldwin's. This perspective was rooted in his experiences of racial oppression and economic

[29] "Preservation of Innocence," which dealt explicitly with dominant views of homosexuality, was one such contribution, but works like the novel Go Tell It On the Mountain, where homosexual themes are hinted at but not allowed to be fully represented in the story, can also be understood as subtle interventions in this national conversation.

inequality as much as the suffering he endured for the nonconformity of his gender presentation and sexual orientation. It was also profoundly influenced by a spirituality that was born in the Harlem storefront churches where he was a child preacher but grew up to be a belief in God "as a means of liberation and not as a means to control others" (Nobody 113), a belief that "[i]f the concept of God has any validity or any use, it can only be to make us larger, freer, and more loving" (Fire 67); and an insistence on the relevance of "speaking of political freedom in spiritual terms" because "the political institutions of any nation are always menaced and are ultimately controlled by the spiritual state of the nation" (Fire 120).

The Other as the Missing Self

In the first decades after its publication, Giovanni's Room, like The City and the Pillar, was read by gay men searching for guidance and information on their journeys of sexual self-discovery and self-acceptance; John Murphy writes that it "assumed the status of a minor classic among homosexuals in the 1950s, according to people who read it when it originally appeared" (76). But though it may have been widely read, it was not wholeheartedly embraced by gay readers at that time. Murphy cites it (with Vidal's book) as representative of a type of "serious" novel "that dealt with homosexuality in the fifties and sixties" which tended to draw "an uncomfortable parallel between homosexuality and death" (76). As a story of how the "hero" of the novel, David, "begins to learn to live with his dreadful curse" of homosexuality, the book "frightened" Murphy (76).

In both popular and academic essays on the novel, including those written from a gay perspective[30], that David is the character with whom readers are intended to identify seems to be a near-universal assumption. Indeed, the use of the term "hero" (as opposed to, for example, main character) to describe David denotes, according to NTC's Dictionary of Literary Terms, "one who commands the most interest and sympathy of the reader or audience" (Morner and Rausch 97). One of the main ways in which this identification is promoted is through interpretations of the novel that privilege David's quest to find, and accept, himself – a quest which takes the white, middle-class American man abroad to Paris, and a quest at which, most critics agree, he ultimately fails.[31]

In virtually all the criticism on this novel, David is the only character taken seriously as a "self," while all other characters fall into support roles as victims, accomplices, or symbolic figures representing abstract perspectives and constructions. This position is supported, of course, by the fact that little space in the novel is dedicated to the internal landscape of any character other than David. I contend, however, that there is much to be gained in terms of understanding Baldwin's larger project, and the philosophy that he developed throughout his lifetime, in his essays as well as his novels, by pulling the focus back from David and zooming in on other characters. Specifically, I argue that a full understanding of the work of this novel requires taking Giovanni seriously as self. In the novel, Giovanni represents not just the mouthpiece of a

[30] By this phrase ("gay perspective") I mean to signal both the academic, often canon-building projects of gay and lesbian studies, and non-academic literary and mass-press writing by gay (particularly, in this case, male) writers about topics of special interest to "the gay community." In both cases the concept of a "gay perspective" reflects both the presence of dominant paradigms within these fields and also the tendency of many scholars and writers to imagine a unitary gay audience or gay experience which they describe or address.

[31] Brett Beemyn is an exception to this rule, finding in David's "self-revelation about his love for Giovanni" in the book's last pages some possibility of hope that he "can divest himself of false innocence and break out of his isolation" (64).

politically unconscious, innocent "love," nor even merely the character through which Baldwin articulates his own passionate beliefs about the transforming power and social necessity of radical, fearless love (which I believe he is as well), but also a very human character. This character possesses personality elements drawn from Baldwin's own autobiography and the tragic stories of people he knew, qualities which root the tragedy of Giovanni's story in Baldwin's real-world experiences of racism, homophobia, poverty, grief, and exile.

Baldwin's choice to devote so much space to the viewpoint and inner process of David gives him the freedom to delve deeply into an analysis of the American psyche – that is, the collective psyche of the economically privileged white Americans who control the majority of the nation's mainstream culture and politics, those who direct the course of the nation and are responsible for its international image, for better or for worse. Baldwin uses the character of David to critique those qualities he sees as most dangerous in white Americans, and at the same time most common, such as the widespread lack of compassion for the suffering of others, and the lack of self-awareness about one's own motives and the consequences of one's actions. Yet it is also the case that Baldwin himself strongly identified with certain aspects of "American-ness," such as a sense of newness, mobility, and possibility for change that he felt had died out in Europe. The characters of this novel (as in any good novel) cannot be neatly and perfectly translated into their separate, identifiable real-world counterparts. In at least some aspects, David represented a group – Americans – to which Baldwin also belonged, but Giovanni did not.

At the same time, there is hardly a character in the novel that does not mirror at least a small portion of the author's philosophy or personality. What has been overlooked by critics in relation to this novel, I argue, is the degree to which the character of Giovanni verbalizes the Baldwin's own response to the violence, exploitation, and self-denial he has experienced from white America and white Americans – the acts whose motivations he explores in depth through the character of David.

Giovanni should not be read as "the real protagonist," but another self operating independently in the novel, a refined consciousness whose dialogue extends and personalizes Baldwin's critique of white American values. I believe that it is a subtle but insidious bias which marginalizes or erases entirely the complex and multi-layered experience of the character marked as ethnically "other" in even the most sympathetic and nuanced readings of this novel. When this other self is overlooked, we do not enjoy a full appreciation of the richness of Baldwin's artistic creation, nor can we have full understanding of the specificities his urgent message to Americans, his call for change. We also fail to appreciate the scope of the novel itself, limiting our perspective to one main character's interpretations of events, instead of viewing, as Baldwin did, the panorama of perspectives, of actions by the dominant classes and responses by the oppressed, that make up the big picture.

Cyraina Johnson-Roullier, drawing a connection between Baldwin's admiration of Henry James and his interest in modernist writers, argues that David's efforts to squelch the reality of his homosexual inclinations in favor the socially prescribed (pre-scripted) path of heterosexual marriage mirror the quintessentially modernist dilemma of how to "say 'yes to life'" (947). David's challenge is to "stop running," to "[stand] still and

[watch] his reflection in a darkening window," in other words, to cease the self-defeating attempts to deny the reality of desire and instead to allow "that painful process of increasing self-awareness from which self-acceptance may eventually develop" (940). The emphasis on David's "self" as the location in which the main conflicts of the novel are played out suggest that David is presumed to be the character with whom readers are intended or expected to identify. Later in her essay Johsnon-Roullier universalizes David's dilemma of self-knowledge, stating that the "crucial" questions it raises – "is reality something that is determined by one's surroundings, or is it something one carries in one's head, in terms of beliefs? Is actual reality always the same, regardless of what one believes?" are "essentially the same difficulties with which mainstream modern artists are confronted" (945).

This focus on David's "self" as the expected point of identification with the novel is repeated in numerous forms in a variety of critical approaches to the novel. Michael Anderson, in a piece on Baldwin for the New York Times Review of Books, calls Giovanni's Room "a monologue by its protagonist" who "forces himself to confront the cowardice and hypocrisy" that make his life and lifestyle empty and destructive, rather than fulfilling and loving. Yasmin DeGout concurs that Baldwin's representation of homosexuality is at best ambivalent. Her contention that Baldwin, along with portraying the transformative potential of love between any two individuals, "also depicts homoerotic love as deviant behavior that proceeds from both psychological and socioeconomic depravity within the microcosmic home environment and within the larger society" (par. 5) relies on a close reading of the passages in the novel that describe David's childhood, the attitudes and behaviors of his father and aunt, and the absence of

his mother. David's story, with his psychological development centralized in this way, is presumed in this reading to be the one in which gay readers would see themselves, and thus, in DeGout's opinion, Giovanni's Room had potentially harmful effects on the self-acceptance of those readers.[32] The stickiness of this issue, and the question of whether Baldwin himself was suffering from queer self-hatred that he imbibed from the American culture in which he grew up, can only be transcended, in DeGout's essay, by the proposition that "perhaps Giovanni's Room is not, after all, about homosexuality" (par. 31) – perhaps the only conclusion that can be drawn from the analysis of a gay man who is so patently un-Baldwin-like.

Giovanni's Room is about more than homosexuality, and it is also about homosexuality. Despite being set in France, this novel speaks directly to (and about) the U.S. urban gay (male) culture of the late 1940s and 1950s, and also speaks about same-sex desire and queer identities to the dominant white heterosexual culture. It critiques modes of "being gay" that Baldwin encountered in Greenwich Village and Paris and at the same time offers alternative ways of being and relating, which are proposed to both the gay community and the American nation as potentially liberating and transformative. But in order to be able to grasp the fullness of Baldwin's message, and the utter urgency with which he sent it forth, it is necessary to break away from identification with David, to allow other "selves" within the novel to speak. And, because, as Ferguson has pointed out, race, class, gender, and sexuality are not separate and parallel issues but rather are

[32] Colm Tóibín, reflecting on the ways his own reading of gay books and gay authors had impacted his development and self-acceptance, suggests (with compassion for antecedents living in the proverbial less enlightened time), "To place a murder, however, at the center of his gay plot was to do to homosexuals what [Baldwin] had attacked Wright [in "Everybody's Protest Novel"] for doing to black people – adding impetus to the popular notion that they were alarming. Needless to say, there was no one to point this out at the time" (200).

intersectional and mutually constitutive in Baldwin's work, in order to read what this novel says about homosexuality, we must consider how race, class, and gender impact the needs and desires these characters seek to fulfill through the expression of their sexuality.

Giovanni's Room has seldom been discussed without at least some mention being made of the fact that, unusually among Baldwin's novels, there are no black characters of any nationality; rather, all the characters are either white Americans or Europeans. Perhaps because Baldwin, as a writer and public figure, has been so strongly identified with mid-twentieth-century African American movements for social justice (in spite of his and his early reviewers' explicit efforts to escape easy categorization as a "Negro writer"), critics have seemed to feel that Baldwin's choice to write about white characters is a puzzle that demands figuring out. In critical responses to this puzzle, two main currents of interpretation stand out: on the one hand, those who ask what Baldwin intended to say by his choice to use white characters (or what circumstances motivated him to do so), and, on the other hand, those who reject the proposition that some or all of these characters are "really" white, and endeavor to find the hidden blackness in the novel.

In the first category, John T. Shawcross offers this straightforward explanation (which he calls "obvious"): that Baldwin simply felt "greatly angered—as he should have been—at being labeled a Negro novelist, not a novelist," and that his writing Giovanni's Room from the perspective of white characters was an effort to counter the implication that an African American writer could "write only of a Negro world, from a Negro point of view, in a Negro idiom" (102). Other critics, such as Andrew Shin and Barbara Judson, see the choice as interconnected with the homosexual themes of the

novel, and propose that "Baldwin ventriloquizes his story through a white protagonist" for personal reasons, in order to "distance himself from the autobiographical elements of the novel" (par. 18). Johnson-Roullier reads whiteness in Giovanni's Room as an aspect of the novel's modernist experimentation. Arguing that in making his characters white, Baldwin is specifically choosing *not* to write about race or racial issues, Johnson-Roullier asserts that

> the white American protagonist serves as the means by which the novel's problem is kept pure, free of sociological interference—at least in terms of the conventional assumptions about race which might be applied to the work of a black author. Because David is a white American, the problem of homosexuality cannot be obfuscated by the problem of race, nor can its cultural significance... [Homosexuality is] not a motive for protest, but rather a metaphor for society, in the form of social injunction, of what one is not, at all costs, to be. (940)

In the other camp are those critics who do not accept the assumption that these characters are truly, unproblematically, white at all, and so invest their energy and interest in the search for the "hidden blackness" in Giovanni's Room and especially in the main character, David. Some, like Robert Bone, suggest that although Baldwin may "attempt" to write about "an all-white cast of characters," he fails to do more than "transpose the moral topography of Harlem to the streets of Paris" (qtd. in Shin and Judson par. 18). Brett Beemyn finds David's inner blackness in the dark window in which he watches his reflection, in his youthful sexual explorations with a boy who is described as "dark," and in the "black opening of a cavern" that grows in David's mind when he contemplates his own homosexual desires (62). Aliyyah Abur-Rahman, building on comments by Mae Henderson and Sharon Patricia Holland that "basically, these are black characters in whiteface" (qtd. in Abur-Rahman 480), refers to the cast of Giovanni's Room as "putatively white" (478), and asserts that Baldwin uses this method

to critique whiteness as well as to illuminate "the *racializing* effects of queerness" (480, emphasis in original).

Like Beemyn, Abur-Rahman reads David's adolescent explorations with his friend Joey as a an interracial episode based on the line from the novel, "Joey's body was brown, was sweaty, was the most beautiful creation I had seen until then" (qtd. in Abur-Rahman 481). She argues that David "register[s] Joey's racial difference before he notices their anatomical sameness" (481), and that white anxiety over the identity-disrupting potential of interracial sexual involvement always precedes and informs David's (also extremely anxious) experiences of homoerotic desire. She also notes the numerous factors that encode Giovanni as "both the figure of the black and the figure of the homosexual" (482):

> In the text, Giovanni, David's darker, poorer, abused and finally executed Italian lover, undergoes the classic experiences of the degraded figure of both the African American and the homosexual. In terms of race, Giovanni's dislocation in Paris, his failure to belong, and the extreme poverty he faces emblematize the alienation that African Americans experience wherever they are on the globe, including the country of their birth and citizenship... Giovanni is the dark figure in the novel who serves as a repository for the longings and the anxieties of the white characters. (480)

Ultimately, in Abur-Rahman's reading, neither race nor homosexuality are "fixed" in this novel as a basis of protest or polemic, because the novel is not "about" race or homosexuality. Rather, they are examples, parables perhaps, whereby Baldwin "indicts social systems that grant protection and prestige to wealthy, powerful men in society without regard for the detriment they cause to those who exist on society's fringes, and without regard for the conditions within which the severely impoverished and politically disenfranchised are forced to live" (484).

I agree with Abur-Rahman that Baldwin was writing a critique of the social order (implicitly in the United States, but also in the Euro-West in general) that transcended "protest" over singular issues such as racial oppression or anti-homosexual attitudes. This interpretation is in line with Baldwin's many statements over the years to the effect that neither race nor sexual orientation can be seen as fixed identities.[33] But while Abur-Rahman's analysis succeeds in "unfixing" the message of the novel from any one particular social issue, she, like most readers, allows that "something resolutely *indefinable*, *unpredictable*" (Baldwin qtd. in Ferguson 244), that human complexity, in Giovanni (the putatively black character) to slip away from sight. As in other readings which presume David to be the intended point of reader identification, and analyze Giovanni mainly as a tragic "figure" for blackness or homosexuality, this has the effect of erasing a specific black queer consciousness which is written into the story. Abur-Rahman's elucidation of the ways in which Giovanni is objectified as other (white) characters act out their racial and sexual anxieties on and around his body, and finally destroy him, is very astute and useful. This is, indeed, one of the roles Giovanni performs in this novel, but an analysis of Giovanni's significance that ends here is incomplete; for to neglect to read Giovanni as a consciousness, a "self" which can speak, is to replicate the marginalization of the voice of the oppressed which this novel so sharply illustrates.

By privileging the voice of the white American man who is consumed with anxiety about his failure to conform to middle-class American values and the powerful

[33] Ferguson collects many of these statements; for example, in "Everybody's Protest Novel," Baldwin wrote of "this web of ambiguity, paradox, this hunger, danger, darkness" in which "we can find at once ourselves and the power that will free us from ourselves" (qtd. in Ferguson 244).

promises of heterosexual domesticity, Baldwin makes it difficult for readers to hear other voices within the novel. As Stephen Adams writes, "The first-person confessional style naturally encourages the view of David as Baldwin's surrogate" (133). But recuperating Giovanni as a character, who in some ways represents blackness in the novel but also exceeds that symbolic value, by examining Giovanni's positioning in relation to David and in relation to the society in which he lives, allows us to see more clearly the ways Baldwin inserted this book into and in response to a specific cultural context and specific conditions of oppression.

The Character In Context

Peggy Peterman quotes Baldwin as having said at the time of the novel's publication that "Giovanni's Room grew out of things that tormented and frightened me in terms of my own sexuality. Also, now there were no secrets. No one could blackmail me. You didn't tell me, I told you" (par. 14). A least two things are made clear from this quotation: first, that Baldwin published this novel with a sense of self-revelation[34], and second, that he put a good bit of his own "shadow self" into it, those aspects of himself which caused him discomfort or suffering. While Marlon Ross persuasively argues that "the whiteness of Baldwin's characters splits the author's identity from the author's projected desire" (25), Ross' reminder that the novel's "story of tortured same-sex desire" is dependent upon "the ethnic difference between Giovanni, the impulsive Italian, and

[34] Although I argue that Baldwin's self-revelatory impulse is significant to understanding the larger social message he conveys in the novel, I think it is overly simplistic to say, as some later gay critics have, that "merely by publishing the book, [Baldwin] came out" (Richard Goldstein qtd. by David Ehrenstein 61). Calling the book Baldwin's "coming out" declaration ties Baldwin's public and literary use of his own homosexuality, as material for art and commentary, to a contemporary type of fixed gay identity which I believe Baldwin wrote *against* as it was first being articulated in the 1950s.

David, the methodical Teuton" (25) opens a space through which the author's own subjectivity can enter back in. As strongly as Baldwin identified with being an American[35], it seems certain that the character of David embodied certain peculiarities of the American character with which Baldwin himself identified. Nonetheless, given both Giovanni's ethnic-other positioning in relation to the white American male and his Baldwin-style speeches, especially near the end of the book, denouncing the failure of white middle-class Americans to truly open their hearts and love in a fearless way, it seems clear that Giovanni, not David (and not Jacques, as Brett Beemyn suggests) serves "as the most direct voice of Baldwin in the novel" (Beemyn 63).

The events and emotional processes Baldwin lived through in the period immediately before he moved to France for the first time have been connected to plots and themes of later novels, including Another Country[36], but as biographer David Leeming points out, Baldwin was wrestling with them throughout the period of the late 1940s and 1950s when he wrote his first two novels, Go Tell It on the Mountain and Giovanni's Room (53-57). Baldwin's experiences living in Greenwich Village after leaving Harlem in the wake of his stepfather's death and "the famous Harlem riot of 1943" (he said of his decision to leave his widowed mother and eight younger siblings, "I had to jump then, or I would have died" (qtd. in Leeming 43)) bear numerous parallels to the circumstances of Giovanni's arrival and tenure in Paris, where Giovanni flees to

[35] When moving among black people from many different nations at the Conference of Negro-African Writers and Artists that took place in 1956 in Paris, Baldwin realized that "what, at bottom, distinguished the Americans from the Negroes who surrounded us ... was the banal and abruptly quite overwhelming fact that we had been born in a society, which, in a way quit inconceivable for Africans, and no longer real for Europeans, was open, and, in a sense which has nothing to do with justice or injustice, was free. It was a society, in short, in which nothing was fixed and we had therefore been born to a greater number of possibilities, wretched as these possibilities seemed at the instant of our birth" (Nobody 29).

[36] See Leeming 42, Ryan 117.

escape the devastating pain of the stillbirth of his son. Tóibín writes that "the general air of sexual ambivalence and dishonesty in Greenwich Village" as much as in Paris inspired the gay milieu Baldwin describes in the novel (197).

Even more revealing of the degree of his own passion that Baldwin poured into the character of Giovanni are the character quirks of Giovanni's could be Baldwin's own. While Giovanni is a bartender in a gay bar, Baldwin waited tables in a bohemian casino in the Village. Both are dependent on the kindness of patrons for their physical survival in the new place to which they have fled. More significantly, Giovanni shares the young Baldwin's seemingly unstoppable impulse to lecture to captive audiences of white liberal friends and acquaintances. It is, as Leeming observes, part of Baldwin's social role as prophet, "simply that, as a man with a mission to bear truthful witness, he could not conceive of an evening out with those who, by benefit of their color, possessed power over his people, without reminding them of the real nature of the situation in which they lived" (Leeming 48). Giovanni, the first night he meets David in the bar where he works, repays David for the drink he buys him with a harangue about American hypocrisy and arrogance, at times "grim" (Giovanni's Room 48) and at times "grinning" (GR 50). "Insolent and dark and leonine" in his stance (GR 39), Giovanni, at the same time an object of adoration and a piece of fresh meat to the predatory white gay male customers of the bar, suffering the constant stress of living on the edge of starvation yet desperately believing in love and, simultaneously, giving an articulate (and scathing) critique of American manners, values, and integrity, Giovanni, as the moral mouthpiece of the novel, is an alter ego of Baldwin the passionate prophet, stylized into an impoverished Italian immigrant in France.

Yet there is at least one major biographical detail in which Baldwin's and Giovanni's stories diverge, and that is that while Baldwin escapes the beguiling but treacherous bohemian subculture of Greenwich Village, Giovanni perishes. I think that in writing of the destruction of Giovanni, Baldwin was also working through another very important event of his Greenwich Village years: the suicide of Eugene Worth, a heterosexual friend with whom Baldwin was in love (Leeming 46). Baldwin himself, as well as numerous critics, have discussed this incident in relation to his 1962 novel, Another Country, which prominently features a queer black male character who, like Worth, commits suicide by jumping off the Washington Avenue Bridge (Tóibín 193, Ryan 108-114). But, as Tóibín notes, Eugene Worth and his fate "haunted" Baldwin throughout the decade and a half that intervened between his death and the publication of Another Country. Baldwin seemed to feel that his life and Worth's were bound together in some way, that what happened to Worth could easily have happened to him while he was living in New York. He fled to Paris in part because, he later wrote, "I knew what was going to happen to me in New York. If I had stayed there, I would have gone under, like my friend on the George Washington Bridge" (qtd. in Tóibín 194); elsewhere he said, "I was absolutely certain, from the moment I learned of his death, that I, too, if I stayed here, would come to a similar end" (qtd. in Ryan 117). The question of how Worth could have been saved preoccupied him greatly, and he wondered if "he might have saved [Worth] from his self-destruction had they become lovers as well," if Worth had been "pleading" with him for love in ways that were too subtle for Baldwin to pick up on (Leeming 46). Eventually, by 1961, he came to understand that Worth "would not have died in such a way and certainly not so soon, if he had not been black" (194).

Katy Ryan, in her analysis of the use of suicide in three novels (including Another Country), borrows Antonin Artaud's phrase "suicided by society" to describe the trajectory of Rufus, the character associated with Eugene Worth. She paraphrases the words of the minister at Rufus' funeral, who "calls on the mourners to witness the connection between Rufus' suffering and a lethal social climate," and perceptively notes that actively "destroying the physical body is not the only form of self-destruction" (Ryan 113). For Ryan, "suicide in these novels signals a revolutionary call to remember and restore the dead," and "to dismiss the suicidal moments in these texts as counterproductive articulations of victim ideology means that we ignore, or misread, literal corpses buried in this country and the political function of death in literature" (114). This injunction can equally be applied to other literary moments in which a character's self-destructive behaviors, developed in response to systemically desperate circumstances, lead to the character's death, as is the case in Giovanni's Room. Indeed, I suggest that as Baldwin struggled to process the emotional and political implications of Worth's death over the course of the 1950s, writing Giovanni's Room gave him a chance to sort through what might have saved Worth from the destruction wrought upon him by postwar American society. Along with being the author's closest analogue among the novel's characters, and the one who most clearly speaks Baldwin's own moral philosophy, Giovanni also contains, and briefly restores, the ghost of Eugene Worth, giving this one of "the corpses buried in this country" the chance to speak once more, and more clearly. Through Giovanni's death, white Americans are shown the cost of their failure to hear and heed Baldwin's "prophesying," the function of which, according to Leeming, is to "remind his nation – all of his nation – of its falling away from truth" (52).

Reading suicide this way – as something an individual and society might do together – also retrieves death, as a trope in Giovanni's Room, from the critical wastebasket where it has been dismissed as an unfortunate symptom of writing a gay novel in a homophobic social climate. Then we begin to see that there are many corpses in this book that represent the one floating through the American subconscious as the nation's repressed guilt. Thus the person whom David meets in the bar right after meeting Giovanni, described as bizarre in outfit and makeup and giving the impression of "a mummy or a zombie" moving "its" hips with "a dead, horrifying lasciviousness" (54), both obviously foreshadows Giovanni's destruction and functions as a truth-telling corpse in its own right. Although he is extremely disturbed by this person, David says, "It seemed impossible to hit him; it seemed impossible to get angry. It did not seem real, he did not seem real" (55). What does not seem real for David is the truth of his own future, the consequences of his own actions, actions he has only just begun to contemplate in corners of his mind hidden from himself (though visible to other patrons of the bar). The strange queen reflects David's curse back to him: "Oh, no...I go not to hell...But you, my dear friend—I fear that you shall burn in a very hot fire" (55-56).

David reflects on the power of Giovanni, after his death, to keep "ris[ing] up out of the ground like Macbeth's witches" (59), and how "in the glare of the grey morning" Giovanni will be there like a ghost, and David "will see Giovanni again, as he was that night, so vivid, so winning, all the light of that gloomy tunnel trapped around his head" (59). Even before his specific events occur that begin the countdown to his execution, as involvement with David fails to develop into the actual (radical, fearless) love Giovanni needs to pull him up from the inexorable stream of is own disintegration, Giovanni

begins to look to David like a death's head. As the promise of their first days fades, as David's inability to face himself and his own shame prevent him from fearlessly loving Giovanni's human soul, the "light in [Giovanni's] eyes became a glitter; the wide and beautiful brow began to suggest the skull beneath" (99). This is not just foreshadowing, although Giovanni's death is certain by this point in the story. Regardless of the manner and time of his death in the novel, Giovanni is already a corpse to which Baldwin would like to draw the nation's attention, for its blood is on America's hands. Giovanni begins to look like death at the point when he reminds David too much of the desires he cannot bear to own, and his own guilt at the harm caused by his refusal to face the truth about himself. Giovanni's face "became a stranger's face – or it made me [David] so guilty to look on him that I wished it were a stranger's face" (100).

So if privileging Giovanni's voice (instead of David's) can reveal some of Baldwin's message to America about how the nation and the members of its dominant class destroy the lives of young black men, and also allows those who have died (and will yet die) to speak directly to the nation's conscience, what do we know about him from the novel? As an Italian, Giovanni is contrasted to both the French and the Americans in temperament: the French, he says, are cold, while "[i]n Italy we are friendly, we dance and sing and make love" (GR 50). There is "something in him of the coquette," and also something "rather boyish and shy" (GR 50). He takes the lead in making friends with David, asking "Don't you know when you have made a friend?" (52), and also is the first to flirt with him. So we know that Giovanni is open to connection, and thinks from his heart. We soon learn just how much Giovanni is in *need* of love. Making a connection with another human, finding a spark between himself and David, prompts Giovanni to

say the morning after they meet, "I have only just found out that I want to live" (67). Having been headed down a path of despair, one that seemed likely to lead to his self-destructive end, Giovanni's case seems to suggest that, for the desperate person, love can be the last-ditch radical remedy that transforms doom into life. Nor is this transformative love apolitical, as Sharon Patricia Holland asserts.[37] It is directly connected in the novel to the soul-crushing, emotional impact of continued existence under conditions of severe prejudice and oppression.

Giovanni describes to David the experience of being falsely accused by his employer Guillaume – of being presumed guilty in the eyes of all the bar patrons – "For a long while," he says, "I could not get angry and I could feel tears, like fire, coming up... And, oh, the faces in that bar, you should have seen them. They were so wise and tragic and they knew that *now* they knew everything, that they had always known it, and they were so glad that they had never had anything to do with me" (144). Against the unbearable hurt of this willful not-knowing of Giovanni's personhood, to be seen as a human and not simply an impoverished ethnic "other", to be seen by someone who actually loves him, is what Baldwin proposes could save Giovanni from desperation. "Maybe everything bad that happens to you makes you weaker...and so you can stand less and less," Giovanni speculates, then pleads with David, "You are not going to leave me, are you?... I do not know what I would do if you left me... I have been alone so long—I do not think I would be able to live if I had to be alone again" (145).

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[37] Although not entirely unsympathetic in her tone, Holland calls "Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka['s] remarks that in Baldwin's work there is 'this near-evangelical commitment to the principle that rules all being – love sought, denied, waiting in the wings or hovering on the wing, a veritable dues ex machine, lacking only a landing permit from a blinkered humanity that hesitates at the door of salvation" (273) a "sophomoric conceptualization" of "the prominence and problematic of sexuality" in Baldwin's works.

One of Giovanni's repeated critiques of David, a quality which he attributes to David's Americanness, is the slowness of the process by which David makes decisions about what he feels. "*Chez toi*," Giovanni says, "everything sounds extremely feverish and complicated, like one of those English murder mysteries. To find out, to find out, you keep saying, as though we were accomplices in a crime" (107). Giovanni's sense of time, his frustration at the slowness of David's commitment, comes from his position of desperation, waiting on the powerful (white liberal middle class) to "decide" to truly open his heart, to live and act from a place of love, which will motivate him to make right Giovanni's oppression and restore him from suffering. The urgency of the timetable that Giovanni senses echoes the sentiment, common in the 1950s, that now was not the time for deliberation over civil rights; that whites needed to wake up *now*. Baldwin's belief about the particular form that waking up needed to take was that first, white Americans needed to look at themselves honestly and fearlessly and own their own shadows so they would no longer need to project them onto blacks, and second, white Americans needed to begin living from their hearts and acting with love toward oppressed groups within the nation, including both African Americans and homosexuals. Without white self-examination and honesty, no change would be possible; with it, no further work would be necessary. As Baldwin writes in The Fire Next Time, "White people in this country will have quite enough to do in learning how to accept and love themselves and each other, and when they have achieved this—which will not be tomorrow and may very well be never—the Negro problem will no longer exist, for it will no longer be needed" (35).

The expression of the impatience of the disenfranchised and terrorized with the slow pace of political and social change was a very common one both in American and

abroad during the 1950s. When, for example, in 1958, a district court acted to insert a "breathing spell" into the process of integrating Little Rock public schools after *Brown v. Board of Education*, another expatriate living in France, Maurice Goodenough, wrote to the judge responsible, "You must be very ignorant of where America is in relationship to time and space; if not, you must be willfully seeking the loss of America's prestige and position, with its ultimately disastrous consequences" (qtd. in Dudziak 139). The U.S. government's response of "Eventually, but not yet" (Borstelmann 71) to the demands of oppressed, segregated, and disenfranchised peoples at home and abroad infuriated civil rights activists, pushed them to the end of their ability to endure, but for Giovanni, as for Worth and for every black man murdered, "suicided," or executed under a racist social order, there was simply no more time to wait.

Baldwin wrote in the introduction to the volume of essays Nobody Knows My Name, "One can only face in others what one can face in oneself. On this confrontation depends the measure of our wisdom and compassion" (13). For Baldwin, compassion allows love, and love awakens the sense of "personal responsibility" (Fire 110), which is why, he writes, "love is so desperately sought and so cunningly avoided" (128). He continues, "I use the word 'love' here not merely in the personal sense but as a state of being, or being in grace—not in the infantile American sense of being made happy but in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth" (128). This courageous facing of the self, and this spiritual growth, is what Baldwin demands of the nation, and specifically of white Americans. "It can be objected," he writes in The Fire Next Time,

> that I am speaking of political freedom in spiritual terms, but the political institutions of any nation are always menaced and are ultimately controlled by the spiritual state of the nation. We are controlled here by our confusion, far more

> than we know, and the American dream has therefore become something much more closely resembling a nightmare, on the private, domestic, and international levels. (120)

Others have noted that the term "love," in Baldwin's work, has social and political meanings as well as romantic ones. One aspect of Baldwin's politics of love is what Dorothy H. Lee calls "the bridge of suffering"; she argues that throughout his fiction, the ways characters handle suffering, and their capacity to assume the suffering of others, creates a means by which the distance of "otherness" can be bridged (92, 96). Extending this point, Emmanuel S. Nelson writes that "David in Giovanni's Room...fails to...span the chasm of otherness mostly because of two major flaws: first, he fails to forge a human identity through an acceptance of his sexuality and the suffering it entails; second, he lacks the capacity for communion with and commitment to another individual, which, according to Baldwin, is the core element of genuine love" (28). But while David's failed challenge of self-examination and self-acceptance has been noted many times[38], surprisingly little critical attention has been given to that suffering and need which David sees in Giovanni but cannot allow to touch him, because in his refusal to face the realities of his own self, he is incapable of compassion or love. The full significance and urgency of Baldwin's message is missed as Giovanni's voice and the desperate black queer self he represents slip beneath the surface of American consciousness again.

[38] Two major themes can be differentiated within the criticism of the novel that deals with David's "finding himself" or failure to do so. One finds in the "innocence to experience" plot the legacy of Baldwin's admiration of Henry James; since James and his preoccupation with the American character was a common point of reference for American literary critics of the 1950s, this was a convenient point of entry for numerous essays on Baldwin's work (for examples, see Adams and Johnson-Roullier). More recently, critics with an orientation toward the field of gay and lesbian studies have taken up David's crisis of self-knowledge as the sad story of a gay man who can't accept himself, and the novel has been dismissed or promoted on the basis of the social value such a plot was determined by the critic to have for gay readers.

When David first wakes up in Giovanni's room, he is disturbed because he sees in its messiness "not a matter of habit or circumstance or temperament" but rather "a matter of punishment or grief" (GR 115). Sensing that Giovanni has been on a trajectory toward self-destruction for some time, David believes that Giovanni brought him home "to destroy this room and give to Giovanni a new and better life," and that this new life "could only be my own, which, in order to transform Giovanni's, must first become part of Giovanni's room" (116). But perhaps David too misunderstands the desire of Giovanni's heart. As Baldwin writes in The Fire Next Time, "White Americans find it as difficult as white people elsewhere do to divest themselves of the notion that they are in possession of some intrinsic value that black people need, or want" (127). This artificially boosts "the white man's sense of his own value" (127), but Baldwin's retort to that assumption ("Alas, this value can scarcely be corroborated in any other way; there is certainly little enough in the white man's public or private life that one should desire to imitate" (127-128)) could easily have been voiced by Giovanni about David's presumptuousness.

Giovanni's longest and most revealing speech comes near the end of the novel, when David visits Giovanni after leaving him for Hella. This is where Giovanni tells David about his former life, in Italy, with a wife and a son who died. It is also where he calls David to account for the way he has treated him, and exposes the consequences of David's inability to connect with another person from his heart. It is the emotional climax of the book. Now that all is lost, and David is definitely gone for good, and Giovanni is out of hope, he can say exactly what he thinks without worrying about consequences. "I have never reached you," said Giovanni to David; "you looked at me

with such eyes, as though you did not see me" (GR 181). Giovanni's final indictment of David is that he refuses to see and refuses to love, and that the combination makes him monstrous. "And do you think I did not know when you made love to me, you were making love to no one? *No one!*" Giovanni accuses David (182), and cries out, "You do not love anyone! You never have loved anyone, I am sure you never will! You love your purity, you love your mirror—you are just like a little virgin...You will never give it to anybody, you will never let anybody *touch* it—man or woman. You want to be *clean*" (187). But Giovanni's voice also accuses the America that David represents. "The Americans," he says, "have no sense of doom, none whatever. They do not recognize doom when they see it" (190). But because our main view of these events is David's, we know that he does recognize doom – and although he is emotionally moved, he is not motivated to do anything to save his former lover's life. This is because, as Giovanni knows, David is "always hiding" his true self (182), believing he can somehow keep it "clean" by not allowing it to connect with people whose suffering is so overwhelming. He believes he has a choice about whether or not to get involved, but Baldwin's message is that he, David, the white liberal American, is already involved. As long as he resists taking the "correct" action – admitting his implication in Giovanni's oppression, his own inherent guilt, and acting to redress it – he will be tormented in his conscience, haunted by Giovanni's ghost.

Fearless Love v. American Denial: Baldwin's Response to Hegemonic Forms of Relating

Giovanni's Room is not a long novel, it does not have a complicated plot or many characters, but it is many-layered in meaning. The story of David's affair with Giovanni, the circumstances in which it is carried out and the reasons why it ends, operates on many levels at once – as a parable of American race relations, as a critique of American whiteness, and as a defense of fearless love as a radical political act and moral imperative. But it is also "about" homosexuality, and in more than an abstract sense. With this novel, Baldwin was directly engaging the contest over the meanings of homosexuality that was taking place in the United States in the 1950s. But instead of challenging the state-sponsored anti-homosexual discourse associated with the Lavender Scare and the specter of communism, this novel attacks the dominant white middle-class culture of the gay male social scene of Greenwich Village and Paris; and, as David continually compares his possibilities in that world with those he would enjoy if he married Hella and participated in the domestic consensus, we become aware that for Baldwin, white liberal America's fearful refusal to know itself poisons the hegemonic modes of relating in the straight as well as gay worlds. Abur-Rahman is correct when she suggests that homosexuality is not explicitly a basis for protest in this novel; while it is implied that people of differing sexual orientations should be accepted, Baldwin leaves this to the conscience of the reader. Yet, although he unfixes identity categories and rakes gay culture over the coals, he also inserts into the national conversation an idea for a different way of being for gay men, a vision of a love rooted in self-acceptance and honesty that can transform both lovers and beloveds.

Baldwin, although an habitué of the gay scene in Greenwich Village and in Paris, did not find the subculture as liberated (or liberating) an environment as did the lesbian writers discussed in the next two chapters. Instead, he found it a loveless and alienating environment populated by mostly white men[39] who "can no longer love women" and so "also cease to love or respect or trust each other, which makes their isolation complete" (Nobody 132). In his estimation,

> The really horrible thing about the phenomenon of present-day homosexuality...is that today's unlucky deviate can only save himself by the most tremendous exertion of all his forces from falling into an underworld in which he never meets either men or women, where it is impossible to have either a lover or a friend, where the possibility of genuine human involvement has altogether ceased. When this possibility has ceased, so has the possibility of growth. (131).

It is clear from these statements that while Baldwin may have imagined love between men as potentially liberatory, even revolutionary, the type of homosexual love that held this potential did not come from "gay culture" as it was being elaborated in the bar-and-private-party scene in the 1950s, and, in fact, that scene was deadly to this kind of lover. The reason for this is that the type of gay man Baldwin associated with this scene was implicated in the same growth-inhibiting cycle of denial that he saw in white liberals in general, and in America as a nation. The worst effects of this denial are illustrated in the character of Guillaume, where the condition of constant self-deceit (and the damage this does to one's soul) leads naturally to the abuse of others less powerful than himself. He entraps Giovanni through deception not once, but at least three times: first he pretends that Giovanni has taken his scarf, initiating contact when they meet at a movie theater; he finds an excuse to fire Giovanni, when he proves to be not as titillating as Guillaume had

[39] David Leeming writes that as "one of a very small number of African-Americans who actually lived" in the Village, Baldwin "stood out" from the beginning (45).

imagined, by falsely accusing Giovanni of stealing from him; and, in the end, he deceives Giovanni into having sex with him by implying that he could have his old job back. But such is the order of things in a gay subculture which is, to Baldwin's eye, mostly loveless and cynical. Guillaume is the proprietor of a typical bar, full of "the usual paunchy, bespectacled gentlemen with avid, sometimes despairing eyes, the usual, knife-blade lean, tight-trousered boys" (GR 38), where the former, lustful and anxious to reinforce their sense of their own untouchability, are out for prey, and the latter, poor, disempowered, and in need of money and food, are for sale.

Baldwin's characterization of the gay bar scene as heartless and vicious nonetheless reveals its dominant class as longing for a sense of security, a feeling that eludes them as long as they refuse to face their own guilt, but in search of which they continue to sacrifice their young lovers as well as their own souls. But by positioning David between the gay scene and the domestic consensus, showing him shuttling back and forth between two lifestyles or roles that must have seemed, in their dominant status within their cultures, "fixed", Baldwin makes the point that white American denial transcended sexual orientation and could be found in all hegemonic social structures, whether their hegemony was within a gay subculture or part of the national mainstream culture and backed by the ideological authority of the state.

For David to confess that he is choosing the security of domesticity ("I can have a life with her" (188)) over a love that would save Giovanni's life sounds feeble and heartless, but it helps to clarify the specific qualities of the love that David could have had with Giovanni that could have transformed both men, and could still transform their society. Giovanni and gayness are contrasted not with heterosexuality per se, but with

the heterosexual expectations of the domestic consensus ideology. While David can barely force himself to have sex with a woman, he still longs "to be inside again," that is, a member of the dominant group – white heterosexual Americans who form nuclear families in the suburbs – with all the privileges attendant on that status. David, like the majority of Americans in the 1950s, equates "security" with a stable home life founded on a heterosexual marriage. "I wanted a woman to be for me a steady ground, like the earth itself," David reflects; he wants to be in "the light and safety" of the home, "with my manhood unquestioned, watching my woman put my children to bed" (137).

To grasp after the domestic ideal is the ostensible reason why David leaves Giovanni, supposedly to marry Hella (although he is no more able to summon the true heterosexual desire necessary to achieve domesticity without Giovanni than with him). The domestic consensus ideology thus functions in this novel both as an external pressure brought to bear by those who guard the doorway to privilege (personified by David's father, who won't give him any money unless he marries a woman) and as a distraction, an excuse for people already in positions of privilege to avoid self-examination and the self-acceptance that would allow compassion. Homosexuality, therefore, is a force which potentially interrupts the controlling ideology of domesticity, intervenes in the set of ready-made identities that prevent men like David from ever having to look at themselves, and opens a space in which the personal transformation that Baldwin believes precedes political transformation (on the individual and national scales) becomes possible. Although these transformations do not move beyond the potential in this novel, homosexuality is presented as a type of connection in which, if a man is able to fully commit himself to loving another man, the facing of his own shadows of shame and fear

that this requires (especially in a time of anti-homosexual repression) has the ability to remake him as a human able to see others' humanity, a person capable of acting for justice. As Lee puts it, "in the context of [Baldwin's] entire work," "The discovery of love is liberating... And it is, in Baldwin's vision, supremely so between gay lovers" (96).

Various critics have pointed out that in several of his books, Baldwin attributes transformative, even revolutionary potential to love between two men. Douglas Field notes that "Baldwin's insistence on a sexualized spirituality remains radical today" (36). Rick Whitaker, expressing surprise that so little critical attention has focused on "the sexual activity alluded to" in Giovanni's Room, writes that he believes "Baldwin did intend to arouse his readers, partly as a political act: leading readers along a garden path toward gay sex was one way to subvert the dominant (straight) sexual ethos of the 1950s" (166). In "Beneath the Black Aesthetic: James Baldwin's Primer of Black American Masculinity," Andrew Shin and Barbara Judson posit that Baldwin "attempt[ed] to articulate a gay ethic well before 'gay' entered common parlance" (par. 2). They argue,

> Baldwin resisted an uncritical embrace of black nationalism, developing instead a vision of the homosexual as the chief instrument of cultural renovation. Indeed, bodily pleasure between men functions as a paradigm for the body politic--two men lying together spoon-fashion becomes an image of the just society. The black man as fetishized phallus gives way to an image of wholeness, of reintegrated bodies and of community. (par. 5)

I believe that in Giovanni's Room, as in other early writings, Baldwin *was* developing a new ethic of love, and that his choice to explore this ethic through gay or homoerotic characters and contexts made it, in the historical context of the 1950s, both a validation of gay love and an argument for the social and political acceptance of homosexuality. But this ethic of love is not just for gay people, it is meant to save the

nation. Developing as it did out of a particular experience of intersectionality, Baldwin's ethic of love cannot be fully understood by examining it in its "gay" context alone. Mae Henderson has argued that Giovanni's continual efforts at remodeling his room represent "efforts to destroy the confining walls of compulsory heterosexuality" and to "create a space in the universe, 'a privileged space,' for homosexuality" (320). Accepting the argument that part of the work the character of Giovanni performs in the novel is to carve out a space for a kind of homosexuality other than that which dominates the bar culture, we might ask, what does Giovanni do in that space, what does he model for gay readers? The answer is, he models fearless love.

It might seem, as it has seemed to many, that Giovanni's love is wasted on David, and that therein lies the useless tragedy of the novel, but the importance of Giovanni's insistence on loving David in spite of his many flaws – in spite of the ways he continually fails to be loving or generous or kind to Giovanni – can be illuminated by a short essay included in The Fire Next Time, entitled "My Dungeon Shook: Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation," in which Baldwin fleshes out more explicitly and clearly his vision for transformative and healing love. In this essay, he calls upon African Americans to find love in their hearts for white Americans.

"The really terrible thing, old buddy," Baldwin writes to his nephew, "is that *you* must accept *them*. And I mean that very seriously. You must accept them and accept them with love" (Fire 19). He encourages the younger James to see whites as "your brothers—your lost, younger brothers," and tells him, "if the word *integration* means anything, this is what it means: that we, with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it" (21).

Baldwin gives this job of loving the oppressor to black people, as he gives it to Giovanni, because they, by virtue of their position, do not have the luxury of denying any aspect of the reality of racial and economic oppression. Although "[t]he details and symbols of your life have been deliberately constructed to make you believe what white people say about you" (19), he urges his nephew to refuse to believe those things – to "trust your own experience" (18) and to work to help (or force) white Americans to wake up to the reality of the "devastation" they have created. This is a hard thing to ask of someone, to love and help his oppressor, and to take responsibility for bringing about change in the dominant class through acts of love, but it is, in Baldwin's philosophy, the highest moral path.

In Nobody Knows My Name, Baldwin writes,

> What it comes to, finally, is that the nation has spent a large part of its time and energy looking away from one of the principal facts of its life. This failure to look reality in the face diminishes a nation as it diminishes a person.... If we can liken life, for a moment, to a furnace, then freedom is the fire which burns away illusion. Any honest examination of the national life proves how far we are from the standard of human freedom with which we began. The recover of this standard demands of everyone who loves this country a hard look at himself, for the greatest achievements must begin somewhere, and they always begin with the person. If we are not capable of this examination, we may yet become one of the most distinguished and monumental failures in the history of nations. (99)

This, in short, is the message of Giovanni's Room that is repeated at the levels of the couple, the subculture, the mainstream culture, and the nation. Enduring conditions of oppression result when a privileged individual or class refuse to allow themselves to become aware of the suffering they cause to less privileged individuals or groups, but love (often tough love) can support or encourage or force a person to face his own guilt. This willingness to know oneself is what allows compassion to develop, and the will to

right the wrongs that have been done. As a relationship model, the affair between David and Giovanni is a "monumental failure." But Baldwin's choice to use a gay male couple to teach Americans how to love in ways that he believed could transform both the lovers and the society, combined with his cultural authority as an already critically acclaimed writer, succeeded in opening a space within the American consciousness for a gay man to prophesy to mainstream, heterosexual, white, middle class Americans, as well as to other groups, about the political necessity of love.

Chapter 3: Divided Loyalties

Conflict, Reciprocity, and Ideological Formation in Ann Bannon's Women in the Shadows

Stephanie Foote, investigating "how pulps in particular have helped to create a lesbian print culture" (170), argues that they "have been understood as signs of a secret history of readers, and they have been valued because they have been read" (178). She argues that the process by which the lesbian-themed, mass-produced paperback romance novels of the 1950s and 1960s (commonly known today as "lesbian pulps") have attained the status, fifty years later, of significant lesbian *texts*, "is intimately tied to a reverse process in which abstract readers become special, or historical, kinds of readers. They become lesbian readers, able to recognize and historicize 'lesbian texts' and 'lesbian authors' and able to participate in a historical lesbian community in the very act of buying a book and reading a text 'as' lesbian" (171).

Unlike the canonical novels discussed in the previous chapters, whose worthiness of being preserved through the decades is sought by critics first and foremost in their aesthetic qualities, lesbian pulp novels have been preserved for different reasons: "The more they are read, Foote writes, "the more they are valued, and the more they are read, the closer the relationship between the very act of circulation and the construction of a lesbian community becomes" (Foote 178). Part of the impetus for the republication and analysis of this type of lesbian writing, in other words, comes from a sense of shared creation between an author and a reading community, a sense that the real creative

success of the pulps – the work they did to open a new space for talking about lesbian lives in a mainstream medium – was something pulp authors and readers did together.

In this and subsequent chapters, I move away from those books universally recognized as "literary" to examine other ways gay and lesbian writers participated in the scramble to define and claim the meanings of homosexuality as they circulated in early-Cold War U.S. culture. I also look at other ways the gay/lesbian reading community has had of responding to these attempts to carve out a space for homosexuality and homosexuals within the culture besides canonization. As Suzanna Danuta Walters writes, pulp novels have often been considered by academics under the rubric of popular culture, an entirely different animal than literary novels such as those produced by recognized authors like Gore Vidal and James Baldwin, requiring a different set of tools for reading and explicating them (83). While recent decades have seen a reclaiming of pop culture in fields like feminist studies and American studies, in which "pop" culture is held to be no "better" or "worse" than "high" culture, there remains a tendency to keep them separate. In the following chapters, I consider two types of writing that are not generally considered "literary," pulp novels (chapters three and four) and amateur magazines (chapters five and six), as participating in the same conversation as The City and the Pillar and Giovanni's Room, a conversation taking place nationwide about the meanings of homosexuality in a climate of anxiety and instability. Though I do not argue that they are the "same kind" of writing, I do contend that with significant areas of overlap – including at least some shared readers, and a shared engagement with issues such as Cold War-era gender roles, the domestic consensus ideology, and the desire to create a space in which homosexual practices and identities could be accepted – it makes

sense to read these different types of writing as different voices with different degrees of privilege speaking to one another, and to mainstream discourses that defined homosexuality as a threat and a disease, in one messy and vibrant conversation.

In this chapter, I summarize recent scholarship on the history of the lesbian pulp genre and the significance lesbian and feminist critics have found in its material, as "survival literature" in the '50s and as literary-historical legacy for later generations of lesbian readers and writers. I discuss the ways in which some pulps have been made into "classics" in a process that in some ways parallels, but also subverts, the traditional process of academic literary canonization. I then narrow my focus to one particular writer of pulps – Ann Bannon – to explore in detail the operation of the creative process that emerges when two conflicting ideologies collide in one person – specifically, when a woman who believes in and works to uphold the heterosexual domestic consensus ideology also finds herself drawn to public lesbian spaces and driven by the desire to expand the imaginative space that lesbians inhabit in the national mainstream print culture. Drawing on Althusser's theorization of the functioning of ideology and ideological state apparatuses, I argue that Bannon's writing simultaneously re-inscribed dominant ideologies about domesticity and appropriate gender roles for the U.S. Cold War nation, and promoted an alternative ideology, in opposition to the dominant one, that urged, if not full outright acceptance, at least a laissez-faire attitude toward lesbians and gay men and the relationships and subcultures they were creating. In a close reading of Bannon's third novel, Women in the Shadows (1959), I trace the twinned development of these two subject positions in Bannon's fiction.

Pulp Fiction: Writing and Reading as Collaboration

The type of books that today are commonly known as "pulps" or "pulp novels" (a reference to the cheap form of paper on which they were printed) are also known as "paperback originals" or "PBOs", meaning that their first publication was in paperback form, they were not reprints of hardcover books.[40] The latest in a long line of forms cheap, mass-produced, sensationalist printed material, the "paperback revolution" that flourished during the 1950s and 1960s began in 1939 with the launch of the Pocket Books label (Stryker 6-7). The paperback as a medium was recruited to serve the needs of the state early in its history: during World War II, historian Susan Stryker notes, "[t]he military supplied soldiers with slender, lightweight armed services editions of popular literary titles to help relieve the tedium of camp life" (7). Throughout the 1940s, "hard-boiled" crime and detective novels and salacious heterosexual fantasies shared the paperback racks with reprints of classic literary works, but the now-famous "lesbian pulp" did not emerge until 1950, when Frenchwoman Tereska Torres' World War II memoir, Women's Barracks, was published in paperback format. It sold over a million copies in its first year of publication (51). Marijane Meaker, who both worked for Fawcett Gold Medal (publisher of Women's Barracks) and wrote popular paperbacks under several pseudonyms,[41] recalls that the publishers "were amazed, *floored*, by the mail that poured in" about Torres' book. "That was the first time anyone was aware of the gay audience out there" (qtd. in Keller 390). Yvonne Keller sees this quote as an

[40] Martin Meeker considers "paperback original" to be "the more precise, historically accurate term" for the type of books generally meant by "lesbian pulp" ("Queer" 183).
[41] Many of the authors discussed in this chapter had at least one pseudonym; some had several. My practice has been to refer to each by the name most appropriate to the role or text being discussed in each instance.

indication that the lesbian paperbacks themselves were creating an entirely new reading audience of self-identified lesbians (390). Certainly, besides alerting lesbians on the publishing inside that there were lesbian readers out there, the success of Women's Barracks alerted publishers to the fact that lesbian paperbacks were a lucrative business. Thus began what Barbara Grier is credited with naming the "Golden Age" of lesbian paperbacks (388).

Meaker, in her dual role as both lesbian pulp author and publisher's assistant, was in a unique position to witness the ways publishers made editorial decisions based on the constraints of obscenity law at the national level (Stryker 22). "The only restriction [the editor] gave me was that it couldn't have a happy ending," she remembers (qtd. in Stryker 57). Elsewhere, Meaker goes into a bit more detail about editor Dick Carroll's counsel. She recalls him telling her, "Make sure that these girls turn away from homosexuality because it is immoral, don't just have them talk about it being a hard life. We have to pass postal inspection" (Meeker "Pulp" 9). In Heavenly Love: Lesbian Images in Twentieth-Century Women's Writing, Gabriele Griffin links this kind of editorial micromanagement with the anti-homosexual politics that grew out of Cold War fears. Discussing the pulp plot device where a "real lesbian" seduces a married woman and wreaks havoc with her life, Griffin writes that such cautionary tales reflect "the postwar desire to reinforce the family as the basic unit of the dominant social order" (41). Given this requirement, it is still possible to differentiate "a sort of industry within an industry: lesbian pulps written by women within a thriving lesbian pulp industry dominated largely by male authors, and written for a voyeuristic male audience" (Walters 84). Yvonne Keller calls this the "pro-lesbian" subcategory within the broader category of lesbian

pulp.[42] Though still subject to the "unhappy ending" requirements and other forms of editorial manipulation that could lead to less-flattering representations of lesbians, this relatively "positive" variety "are women-centered, often told from a woman's point of view, dominated by a love story, without obviously extraneous sex scenes, and with well-developed characters compared to what would soon become the plentiful norm: the male-reader-oriented pulp, which I call virile adventures" (390).

Several critics and cultural historians have credited the pulps with being one of the kinds of texts, emerging in the late 1940s and 1950s, which, because lesbians and gay men (in the absence of gay community institutions or free access to non-prejudiced information) approached them with a desire to find out what kinds of lives were possible for queer people, had the effect of teaching them how to think of themselves, how to "be homosexual." Yvonne Keller's investigation of the lesbian pulp *book* as material artifact suggests that it was the pulps' "truly impressive quantities" distributed that "helped create the largest generation of self-defined lesbians up to that point" (387). Produced so as to be available for consumption by working class and middle class readers alike (Stryker 5), the pulps were a form of "survival literature," fulfilling the long-starved need of lesbians to see representations of themselves somewhere in the culture (Keller 385-386). In this way they were part of the array of texts that began during this time period encouraging people to think of homosexuality as an identity, and themselves as lesbians or gay men.

At the same time, pulp novels, with their recurrent theme of "gay life" (presented for the voyeuristic pleasure of straight readers), introduced gay readers in remote or rural

[42] Keller defines "lesbian pulps" through the following criteria: "First, they are published between 1950 and 1965; second, they have some lesbian content; third, they must be mass-market paperbacks; and fourth, they are classifiable as potentially lesbian by their cover art or copy" (396).

parts of the country to the idea that places existed where gay people came together and formed social institutions of their own, marginalized though those institutions may have been. Roberta Ysuba recalls this important aspect of the pulps' educational role, writing for Off Our Backs, "The pulps also reached isolated, small-town lesbians who could read them and see that they were not the only lesbians in the world" (qtd. in Nealon 148). In other words, they fulfilled an "educational" role in at least two senses: alerting readers to the presence of a gay subculture, and teaching them how to behave as members of that subculture. As Suzanne Walters puts it, "One could even see these books as a sort of 'how-to' of lesbian lust... travel guides to the seamy side of Village life... From these books, one could learn the terminology, dress codes, and etiquette necessary to negotiate the lesbian subculture. And one could even pick up a good line or two in the process" (90).

And therein lies the peculiar essence of the lesbian pulp's role in the national conversation about the meanings of homosexuality, and in particular, the processes of gay and lesbian identity formation taking place in the U.S. at the time. For it is clear from both memoirs and oral histories of the era as well as pieces published during that time that the pulp novels held an educational role closer to the hearts of lesbian women – despite their significant weaknesses as "affirming" texts – than any of the canonized literary novels written by gay men. There was a circular relationship between the novels and the "gay worlds" they described. Writers put together descriptions of lesbian subcultures that were a mix of personal experience, observation, imagination, and plot device, and lesbian women who participated in these subcultures brought to their interactions "information" gained from (among other sources) reading the novels, a code

of language and behavior familiar to other women who had read them. The books had a creative impact on the very communities they described, shaping their forms even as they chronicled them. The enterprise was not, however, operated by and for lesbian women, and its creative authority was always compromised by its dependent relationship both to commercial concerns and to ideological defense of the dominant narrative. Thus it is necessary to complicate my reading of the pulps as mutually creative with grassroots lesbian cultural formation and ask how, through the medium of the pulps, concerns were inserted into this culture which had nothing to do with promoting lesbians' well-being and happiness as lesbians, and in fact were more consciously intended to sabotage it. In this chapter, though looking at the work of one lesbian pulp writer in particular, I examine this dynamic interplay between lesbian culture creation and the repression of homosexuality, often within the same book.

Top among the pulp authors was Ann Bannon. By far the most famous of pulp authors, Bannon's fame (and influence) can be measured along two axes: the success of the novels at the time of their first publication and their role in the lives of lesbian readers in the 1950s, and the longevity of her works, their republishing history and the critical attention they have received. Anecdotal evidence suggests that during the years when they were first in print, Bannon's books were very popular among lesbians, and that lesbian readers considered Bannon to be one of the top writers of lesbian paperbacks. Stephanie Foote notes that "Bannon did not mean to continue [her] series" after the first novel, but "because of all the fan mail she received, she did" (180).[43] It is interesting to

[43] This type of interaction between pulp author and pulp readers, as well as the influence it reveals readers to have had over authors, demonstrates that for the reading community made up of self-identified lesbians

note that there is no evidence that implies Bannon had a stand-out role above other "pro-lesbian" pulp writers. Publishing statistics place Bannon's sales per book at a level about on par with books like Vin Packer's Spring Fire (Keller 390) and Valerie Taylor's The Girls in 3-B (Stryker 58). Writing in 1966 and looking back at the "Golden Era" of lesbian pulps (which she declared had ended in '65), Barbara Grier, speculating on the differences in "audience loyalty" that accrued to various pulp authors, places Bannon as one among several writers who achieved popularity and a large fan base, neither at the top nor at the bottom of the list of "some names" which she hopes "will remain bright for years to come: Valerie Taylor, Ann Bannon, Paula Christian, and one or two others" (qtd. in Nealon 151). The recollections of Roberta Ysuba, "a long-time collector of lesbian fiction" writing a piece for On Our Backs in 1985, bear this up: "[P]erhaps 40 or 50 lesbian novels were written by women, and were also good enough to become underground classics. Dog-eared copies of books by Ann Bannon, Valerie Taylor, Artemis Smith and Paula Christian were passed among friends in lesbian communities" (147-148).

Yet within five years, Bannon's status among readers would shoot up to superstar level. By 1970, Barbara Grier had changed her tune, now putting Bannon in a class by herself. Writing in The Ladder, she called the Beebo Brinker series "almost classic" and the books themselves "hard-to-find 'collector's items'" (qtd. in Barale 535). Lesbian historian Joan Nestle commented in the 1970s that "buying an Ann Bannon book in the '50s was tantamount to coming out to yourself" (qtd. in Uszkurat 30). By 1983, Maida Tilchen could write,

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who read lesbian pulp novels in the 1950s, "reader" was not a passive role; rather, the readers themselves were social actors with the power to at least partially shape the texts that were published.

> Of all the lesbian novels published, few are held quite so dear as six novels by Ann Bannon which came out as "pulp" paperback originals from 1957 to 1962. At a time when thousands of "trash" lesbian novels were being churned out by both major and obscure publishing houses, Bannon's stood out as exemplary. Even women who were children in the '50s and who have only just discovered this genre inevitably choose Bannon as the most outstanding of the pulp authors. (par. 1)

There is something distinctly un-pulp-like about the longevity that Bannon's books, along with a few others of the genre, have enjoyed. As Marijane Meaker put it (about her own pulp writing), "I thought the books were important, but these were paperbacks and so I didn't think they would last any longer than the paper they were printed on" (Meeker "Pulp" 10). Stephanie Foote contends that republication itself – especially when it is as extensive and multi-layered as it has been for Bannon's books – can alter the genre of a book, and that when Arno Press put the Beebo Brinker series "in a hardcover library edition with somber clothbound covers," in some sense the series ceased to be fixed in the category "pulp" (180). In republication, she writes, the books can be "reconsecrated by other presses" at a different status level (178). Though a few pulp authors have been reprinted (most recently by the Feminist Press in its series Femmes Fatales: Women Write Pulp, which has printed examples from a variety of pulp genres, not just lesbian novels), no lesbian pulp has a republication history like the Beebo Brinker books. Tracing the various publishers who have kept the series in print, Foote writes, "After its publication by Gold Medal, one of the most successful publishing houses in any genre, the Beebo series appeared in the Arno Press series on homosexuality, then in the now-venerable Naiad Press list, and then in the Cleis publisher's catalog, and the series was recently featured as a selection of the Quality

Paperback Bookclub (QPB)," an imprint that publishes editions of lesbian and gay classics (179).

Commenting that the greater part of the scholarly work that has been done on lesbian pulps has discussed Ann Bannon's books, Foote says "this is doubtless because Bannon's work has had a long life" (178), meaning, presumably, that the books are more accessible and easily found than other pulps (for the criticism itself is part of what distinguishes the books' "long life").[44] However, Foote does not venture a guess as to why this series of books more than any other pulp has showed such persistence at staying in print. As to why Arno Press selected the books for its educational series on homosexuality "rather than the work of other pulp writers," Foote says it is a question she "cannot answer here" (180). That the Beebo Brinker books have "have gone from being pulps to being examples of pulps" (178), representing the entire lesbian pulp genre, is demonstrated, but the question of why *these* books have enjoyed such a singularly "canonical" role and been lifted above the "generation of lesbian writers who worked within the formulaic constraints of the lesbian paperback genre" (Stryker 58) is not addressed.

The 1994 reference book Gay and Lesbian Literature includes a couple of paragraphs by Ann Bannon, discussing the history (and the historical significance) of her own work. She tells a very romantic version of the story of her books' republication by

[44] Critics disagree about how to characterize the amount of scholarship that has been done on the lesbian pulp novels, and Bannon's in particular. Foote describes lesbian pulps as "now undergoing something of a revival," and being "the source of a great deal of fascinating literary and cultural criticism" (177), while in the foreword included with all volumes of the Feminist Press' Femmes Fatales series (written in 2005), editors Livia Tenzer and Jean Casella state that "[r]elatively little scholarship has been done on pulp fiction; less still on women writers of pulp" (xiv).

Naiad, describing it as a labor of love by feminist heroes and attributing profound social importance to the novels:

> It took the farsightedness, the drive to save the wisdom and love of the past that characterize the publishers of Naiad Press, to rescues the books from neglect... I will always be grateful to Barbara Grier and Donna McBride, founders of Naiad, for the care they lavished on the new editions of the 1980s. Their effort gave voice to the women of an earlier era and recaptured a part of our shared history. I am proud to have been a part of it. (qtd. in Bigelow 26)

But not all lesbians, and not all feminists, were excited to see the return of Ann Bannon's books to print. Not only a stand-in for all lesbian pulp romances in the current "revival," the Beebo series is also a lightning-rod for people's negative associations with the pulps. This phenomenon can be seen at the level of scholarship and literary criticism as well as grassroots reader response.

Carol Ann Uszkurat provides a good review of what she calls the "anti-romance lesbian feminist reception" of Bannon's and other lesbian pulp romances at the hands of lesbian feminist literary critics of the 1970s and 1980s who were concerned with writing the history of lesbian literature. She points out several reasons why the pulps did not receive positive attention during this time. One has to do with the ways that women's and gay liberation movements "involved a scotching of 'bad old days' in favor of 'enlightened new' ones," such that "[t]he texts under consideration, lesbian romances of the 1950s, were produced at a time that was seen as deserving little or no respect" (Uszkurat 31). Another factor in the dismissal of the pulp romances that Uszkurat addresses is the drive to create a lesbian canon, and the particular restrictions of such an endeavor. As "Black, Black lesbian and lesbian critics added their voices to a clamour that called for an end to the silences specific to their groups," she elaborates, "the interest was in literally

canonizing those women whose writing could be re-categorized as some kind of feminist 'classic' belonging to a tradition of great women's writing," and it is to their detriment that they "rarely stopped to question the concept of 'great' writing itself" (32). Popular heterosexual romances did not receive serious critical attention until Janice Radway's work was published in 1987, but "lesbian feminism did not enter the critical arena created by feminist readings of heterosexual romance" in part "because of the negative way in which radical/lesbian feminism viewed popular culture as an insidious bogey man out to brainwash women" (and not without reason) (34-35).

The two main sources of unease with the recent lesbian past, for the generation of feminists who came of age just after the pulps went out of fashion, were the butch-femme roles which seemed to replicate oppressive social norms of the patriarchy, and the "shame" and "self-hatred" (Faderman qtd. in Uszkurat 32) with which the characters were required to live. Lillian Faderman's landmark study of lesbian life in the 20th century United States, for example, dismisses the pulps as extremely peripheral to the experience of lesbians in the 1950s. After a page and a half of discussion that focuses only on the negative content of the pulps, Faderman concludes that the message of pulp novelists was that "lesbians during the 1950s inevitably paid for their nonconformity through misery," and since this was "not true, of course," there remains no use for the books to contemporary lesbians (Faderman 148). Andrea Loewenstein is another reader who found it painful to re-read Bannon's books from the perspective of 1980. "[W]hen Ann Bannon's butch tells her lover-to-be, 'You'll never find Love with a capital L if you're gay,'" Loewenstein comments, "Bannon is not trying to show us how society has caused self-hatred in gays. She is directly reflecting her (and her culture's) ideas" (par. 2). Yet

however painful, Loewenstein still thought contemporary lesbians should read Bannon's books: "To call her books camp and stop there is not to own this concept as part of our heritage however unwanted and ugly," she argued; and, later, "Our past, however unpleasant, must be seen before it can be left behind... Invisible scars, like internal injuries, are often more dangerous than those we can see" (pars. 6, 9).

Dominant Ideology and Lesbian Subjectivity

To help us understand what work Bannon's books do within the national conversation about the meanings of homosexuality, it is helpful to revisit Althusser's concepts of ideology and the ways ideologies are reproduced in material ways within the practices and products of culture(s). Ideology, according to Althusser, is "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (241); it is what they believe to be true about the world, and particularly (in Althusser's formulation) about their place in the power dynamic of their society.

In terms of the class struggle, Althusser identifies ideological state apparatuses as those social and cultural institutions (e.g., church, school, literary canon) which promote the values of the dominant class and teach individuals to identify with and agree to their proper role in the society (e.g., worker). In other words, "ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals...or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects...by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing" (245). Agreeing to the ruling ideology, accepting its propositions as "obvious" and "true" (as though they were not ideological, that is, imaginary, but simply a description of "what

is"), properly interpellated subjects do not challenge the hegemony of the dominant group.

Thus when a text, such as a work of fiction, teaches or encourages individual readers to identify themselves with a certain set of beliefs or values, it is doing the work of interpellation, the work of calling subjects (and subjectivities) into being. The ideological text (and all texts are ideological) also hails its reader as a subject, assumes the reader to have a certain set of values, a proposition with which the reader agrees when she or he, consciously or unconsciously, responds to the hailing. But, as Althusser also points out, the installation as dominant of any ideology "is the stake in a very bitter and continuous class struggle: first against the former ruling classes...then against the exploited class" (250). What that means for our purposes here is that ideological domination and the subjection of oppressed groups is never "complete," never "finished," but always must be continually enacted and re-enacted, continually reproduced and sustained through continual interpellation of subjects. This implies that in any moment, interpellation by the dominant ideology may fail, or be incomplete; in any instance, and for a variety of reasons, a potential subject of the ruling ideology may fail to properly respond when hailed. This may be because the individual has been interpellated by a competing ideology, one that the dominant class wishes to suppress.

In Methodology of the Oppressed, Chela Sandoval points to a gap in Althusser's theory of ideology, in that he claims that "'means and occasions' do become generated whereby individuals and groups in opposition are able to effectively challenge and transform oppressive aspects of identity and social order, but he does not specify how or on what terms such challenges might be mounted" (43). In identifying several types of

"politically effective" oppositional consciousness (44), she holds up examples of ideological resistance to oppression (or resistance to ideological oppression) that are more "persistent," "self-conscious," and "political" (43) than "the forms of consciousness encouraged within subordinated classes that are resistant (but not self-consciously in *political* opposition to the dominant order)" (193, n 8), or, as she puts it elsewhere, "resistant yet appropriated" (43). While it is perhaps too far of a stretch to call Bannon's novels self-consciously political, thus gaining them the status of "oppositional" ideological texts in Sandoval's use of the term, I do not think it is quite accurate either to dismiss them as precursors of oppositional consciousness. Rather, Ann Bannon is an excellent example of a woman writing at a historical moment in which ideologies are in flux, as the meanings of homosexuality were in flux in the U.S. in the fifties. In her work we can see a model of the complexity of processes of ideological change, where an individual cannot be pinned down to one, pure subject position, but may be multiply interpellated, subject at the same time to two ideologies that are in conflict with one another. This state of being, I propose, is not rare at all, but a common condition experienced during times of major ideological flux – any time, that is, when dominant/oppressive ideologies are actively being challenged; when new possibilities, hitherto unimagined, are opening up; when social change is happening.

Thus when Loewenstein comments that Bannon is "directly reflecting her (and her culture's) ideas" about the guilt and self-loathing that should rightfully accrue to those who abandon heteronormative values and take up a lesbian lifestyle, she is drawing attention to the ways that Bannon's book, as an ideological text, reproduces the dominant ideology. But when Joan Nestle made her oft-quoted remark that picking out one of

these books and taking it to the counter to purchase it was a "political act" that was "tantamount to a coming out declaration" (qtd. in Walters 84), she was picking up on the contradictory but equally valid truth that Bannon's book supported an ideology in opposition to the ruling one, an ideology that was pro-gay, and that the text interpellated at least some of its readers as lesbian subjects. In Bannon's books, and especially in Women in the Shadows, we can identify a productive tension that occurs when an author's divided loyalties, her multiple (shifting) subjectivities, result in her reproduction and promotion of two or more competing ideologies – in this case, one dominant and one oppositional. The continual conflict between these two ideologies, the way Bannon ropes them together and demands that they drive the story forward, is like a nuclear reactor at the heart of the novel which gives this book – in other respects a seemingly run-of-the-mill, cheap piece of pulp fiction – its emotional power over the women who read it at its publication, and, perhaps, its supreme staying power in the "canon" of lesbian pulp.

I propose that one reason for the continued interest in Ann Bannon's books – indeed, the continued love-hate relationship which many lesbians seem to have with the series – is that Bannon's books, like Bannon herself, simultaneously occupy and argue for at least two distinct and conflicting ideological subjectivities. The conflicting ideologies to which I refer are the domestic consensus that dominated mainstream American culture in the early Cold War years (described in detail in earlier chapters), and the view, emerging in the U.S. at the same time, that homosexuals (gay men and lesbians) constituted a people unto themselves, a new community with possibilities and lifestyles and moral imperatives of its own. Ann Bannon's novels were part of the set of "homosexualizing" texts which, by publicizing "new categories and interpretations of

social knowledge about gay life, as well as new categories of self-interpretation and presentation of an individual's identity," helped to foster the development of a new kind of subjectivity among homosexuals (Escoffier 81). With her portraits of gay enclaves within larger cities, all-gay societies that seemed to be self-contained and self-sufficient socially if not economically, Bannon's books supported the idea of a gay "peoplehood" that emerged during the postwar and early Cold War years, following the model already established for the delineation of ethnic minority "communities" in the United States (Nealon 2).

During talks leading up to Naiad Press' republishing of the books, Barbara Grier told Bannon, "These books are not great literature, but they are emotionally, socially, and historically a part of lesbian development in this country and in this century" (Lootens par. 27). Grier's use of the term "development" (rather than, say, "history") suggests that Grier saw the books as contributing in an important way to the formation of lesbian subjectivity. Bannon herself believed this, or at least came to believe it later in her life; she commented in 1994, "I doubt that I knew much more about lesbian history and culture when I began writing than did my ingenuous readers; to think that as I learned and grew, in a small way I may have helped shape their lives and perceptions of themselves, touches me deeply" (qtd. in Bigelow 26). But at the same time that Bannon was promoting – and co-creating – the new forms of gay/lesbian group identity (and living out her own fantasies through her writing), she was also strongly committed to the domestic consensus ideology, in ways that shaped both her life and her books. Thus, in her writing, while the new gay subjectivity is both expressed and strongly defended (in ways that contributed to the interpellation of lesbians as "subjects" in this period), it is never

expressed in a "pure" ideological form. Instead, it competes for space and loyalty (from the author perhaps even more than her readers) with dominant narratives about marriage and the idealized nuclear family. Both positions are expressed with a great deal of sincerity, in ways that go beyond the "unhappy ending" dictates of publishers – and in ways that may account for some of the emotional power that so many readers have attributed to the novels.

There is no doubt that when Ann Bannon wrote about lesbian lives and relationships, she was writing her heart out. The unabashed gushiness with which she recalls, in her first interviews in the early '80s (after emerging from hiding), what being able to connect with lesbian community meant to her in those days shows that not only did she strongly support pro-lesbian and pro-gay attitudes, but identification with a wider world of lesbians who she believed shared a common essence was very important to her. In other words, the portrait of the younger Bannon that emerges from these interviews is of a young woman with a lesbian subjectivity – a relatively new creature in the 1950s. Being able to visit the lesbian areas of Greenwich Village, to "walk around those streets and know that most of the women you looked at were lesbians -- or to go into a bar and know they all were," for Bannon, was "wonderful" (qtd. in Lootens par. 30), like "being Dorothy in Oz" (par. 29). But like her readers, she also found the books themselves to be a "survival literature." She says many times in the interviews that the characters are "real" to her in important ways, and that the writing (along with the fantasy life that supported it) was necessary for her emotional survival during the years when she felt herself to be "locked into" an "inappropriate union": "A lot of rage and sorrow came out in that book," she says of Women in the Shadows (qtd. in Lootens par. 62). "I did take

them deeply seriously in that they mattered greatly to me," she says elsewhere (par. 20). Similarly, her efforts to connect with all of the women who wrote to her while she was publishing the Beebo Brinker books – she says in several places that she answered every single letter she received – not only reveal how important it was for her to feel a part of a larger lesbian community (to not feel alone), but are also a good example of how Bannon herself helped to create that feeling of connectedness, of not being alone, for other women, over and above the effect produced by reading the books.

But for all her clear investment in a pro-lesbian ideology, Bannon tells in her early interviews of a young married woman who also held a seemingly contradictory commitment, not just to her own marriage, but to the idea of marriage. At the same time as she was writing pro-lesbian romance novels and escaping to the gay nightlife whenever she could, Bannon the pulp author was also deeply invested in the domestic consensus ideology of the early Cold War years. This woman believed in the power of the domestic ideal, and, like many heterosexual women of the time, sacrificed things that were important to her in order to maintain her marriage. Though she confesses she knew at a young age that she was attracted to women, she married anyway, very young – like the majority of her age peers, as Elaine Tyler May documents. According to May, statistically, "Those who came of age during and after World War II were the most marrying generation on record: 96.4 percent of the women and 94.1 percent of the men.... Americans behaved in striking conformity to each other during these years. In other words, not only did the average age at marriage drop, almost everyone was married by his or her mid-twenties" (14). Bannon describes her attitude toward marriage as "idealistic": "I was going to make the best of a bad thing, and I was going to make it a

good thing" (qtd. in Lootens par. 1). This willingness to adapt to a less than satisfactory marriage situation is another major characteristic, according to May, of the domestic consensus ideology. Because "defying the consensus could lead to a loss of economic security, social reputation, or community support," for those who felt themselves ill-suited to marriage and its accompanying gender roles, "[c]ompromise, accommodation, and lowered expectations were solutions for many disappointed people who still clung to the ideal of domestic containment" (164).

Economic security was definitely a concern for Bannon, as she mentions it several times in these two interviews. "I was not supporting myself so I had an economic dependency," she tells Maida Tilchen (par. 14). To Tricia Lootens, she explains that the work issue was a double-edged sword for lesbians: "Most [gay] people were doing jobs where they had to button up -- or they would lose them. When that happened, and it did, it really thrust a lot of lesbian women into marriages they did not welcome, because they needed the economic support" (par. 53). But Bannon's comments show that for her, the question of how she would be supported was one strand of a web of personal commitments binding her to the institution of marriage as well as to her particular husband. Several times she mentions that it was simply how she was brought up – she did not question the ideology into which she had been socialized since girlhood. "In the beginning," she tells Tilchen, "I thought, I'm going to make this work, I'm going to live my life the way I was brought up to. I tried very hard. That was the commitment" (par. 14).

What commitment to marriage meant for Bannon was upholding the gender roles that went along with it in the mainstream imagination, including outside work for the

husband and professionalized homemaking for the wife. Although she entered into marriage with emotional ambivalence, she says, "I have two daughters, and when they were young, there was a determination to put that [meaning lesbianism] down" (qtd. in Tilchen par. 28). She wrote all of her books while caring for her children at home, and stopped writing when they got old enough to wonder "what Mommy was doing at the typewriter all those hours" (qtd. in Lootens par. 21). (She remained protective of her daughters' "innocence" with regards to both their mother's publishing history and her lesbianism until well into the girls' adulthood (Tilchen par. 46).) Following the authority and leadership of her husband was another of the characteristics of 1950s-style marriage that Bannon took for granted. Her husband's "forbearance" allowed her to continue writing as long as she (or the family name) were "never publicly associated with the books," but as the books' popularity grew he began "to get very nervous," which seems to have been part of the reason why she stopped writing and disappeared (qtd. in Lootens 21).[45] And yet, with all of these compromises, the young wife Bannon describes sincerely believed in the social value of marriage – over lesbianism. These commitments, for Bannon, came with significant pain. When she could no longer visit

[45] It is interesting to note that Bannon attributes her embrace of such strictly-defined butch-femme roles in her writing to the attitudes of the time about what made a marriage work:

> "I think one of the things that can be said against the book fairly is that there is that tendency to stereotype and to cast people in the butch and femme roles. I don't want to sound defensive about it because that's kind of pointless. I'm not going to apologize for them. Back in the '50s women really did feel they had to form a relationship based on whether they believed themselves to be kind of aggressive, strong, self-assertive, self-assured people, in which case they would fall into the butch category, or whether they were more traditionally feminine, and kind of quiet and yielding in terms of their personalities, and then they would be in the femme category. It was really modeled on the traditional heterosexual notion of what made a marriage work, that only one person would be the leader and one the follower. I didn't see how else it could work either, partly because of my experience and also because everybody else seemed to take it for granted. Now I look back, and say 'God! I put these people in boxes and it wasn't fair. Beebo could be tender and yielding and Laura could be pretty damn tough when she had to.'" (qtd. in Tilchen 49)

the lesbian bars of Greenwich Village and suffered the pain of the absence of gay community, she "almost literally thought, 'I have never deserved it anyway, and the pain I feel at losing it is my just desserts for having dared to enter that world'" (qtd. in Lootens par. 65). But sticking with the marriage seemed like the "honorable" thing to do (par. 31), "trying so hard to soldier on, one foot in front of the other, and do all the things that society told me to do---fulfill all the role expectations" (par. 64). Ultimately, she says, "it didn't work anyway. My marriage failed. I exited from it, and, I think, did terrible hurt to my husband, a good man who meant well. We both meant well" (par. 31).

In the 1950s, May writes, "Contained within the home, these liberating but potentially dangerous trends [i.e., "consumerism, women's emancipation, and technological advances"] might be tamed, where they could contribute to happiness" for the nuclear family founded on heterosexual marriage. "In private life as well as foreign policy, containment seemed to offer the key to security" (May 187). Bannon and her husband, though they (or, at least, she) "tried so hard" to adapt to the formula, they found the limits of marriage's ability to contain the unstable elements of a woman's unruly desires for artistic and sexual independence, and they found the place where the promise of security broke down. Meanwhile, in her writing, she was contributing to an ongoing project of constructing new forms of lesbian subjectivity that were emerging for the first time in the 1950s.

Bannon's positionality within the national conversation about the meanings of homosexuality was different from that of recognized literary authors like Baldwin or Vidal, whose cultural authority came from their status as reporters and spokesmen for their groups. She and her books functioned more as a node of interaction between

culture, author, and readers, where ideas were exchanged and became transformed through contact with one another – dominant ideas about homosexuality as a threat to national security, the lived experiences of lesbians who read Bannon's books and educated her with their responses, and Bannon's own blend of ethnography and wish-fulfillment fantasy.

All of Bannon's depictions of the Greenwich Village gay scene were based on a few days stolen here and there when Bannon was able to go to New York City "on one pretext or another" during a one-year period when she lived in Philadelphia with her husband (Bannon qtd. in Tilchen par. 15). In an interview, she describes the "research" she conducted while there:

> Maida: Was it pretty much that you went to the bars and you watched?
>
> Ann: Yes, I did a lot of that, kind of anonymously ... I went down on my own every chance I got. I'd poke around, and see what I could see, and would walk up one side and down the other of all the streets in the Village until I learned my way around pretty well. ... I was participating in a way. I didn't have time enough to participate over the long haul, not when I was making these short trips to NY, but I wasn't only a spectator. In the bleachers, watching the game. To the degree that I could, I wanted to touch people, I wanted to make sure that this was real, and I had so much to learn. I kind of clung to people who knew more than I did, most of whom were very kind, affectionate, good-natured, patient with me, and also loving. That was essential. I had to test that out. (qtd. in Tilchen pars. 16-20).

But Bannon also had the awareness, at least in retrospect, of "flying on [her] fantasies" qtd. in Lootens par. 12). She "hadn't had a sustained relationship with a woman" (par. 12). Later in the same interview she says, "I was so young, and I did not treat the books much more -- much more formally than I would have my own fantasies, because that's what they were" (par. 67). The characters themselves were based on who Bannon wished she could be, and who she wished she could be with: Laura, Bannon

says, she "developed...as I would have wished the girl she was based on might have developed." Beth is "sort of a mix of myself and the roommate I had as a freshman." Beebo is "far more a fantasy love object to me in a lot of ways than she is a real person" (par. 68). [46]

Though in person Bannon seems to have been more "observer" than "participant," through her books Bannon was co-creating this social milieu and the new form of lesbian identity that the women who went there embraced – and she herself was conscious of this role, taking it on with a high degree of seriousness (which can be seen in her "purple" prose, the intensity of which she also connects to the "rush" of "self-knowledge," the "freedom and delight" of "accepting an identity you never went looking for and didn't expect" (Bannon qtd. in Lootens par. 43-44)). At the time of her books' republishing by Naiad Press, Bannon commented that she thought her books, along with other lesbian-written pulps, "served as a sort of socializing force in a era when there were far too few institutions hospitable to woman-identified women and almost no sense of cohesion, of community" (Bannon "Re:Inking" par. 7). Against the isolation of a world where lesbian-centered social institutions did not yet exist, lesbians, according to Bannon, had only "the books and the bars." Amongst the hundreds of straight-male-authored lesbian-themed pulps, Bannon wrote, "a few, I think, came from the heart and helped and nourished women. I hope that, for many women, mine were among the few" (par. 8).

Bannon's books (as well as her correspondence with readers) helped lesbians of the 1950s and early 1960s to, in essence, socialize themselves into lesbian identities,

[46] Even as a fantasy, Beebo is extremely real to the author. In one interview she says that Beebo is Bannon herself, "idealized" (qtd. in Tilchen par. 35). And discussing the hard times she put Beebo through, she says, "I realize I'm talking about her as if she were a real person, but I have to deal with her that way" (Lootens par. 62).

developing both group affiliation and the subjectivity of an oppressed minority. She literally gave women instructions on how to move from being isolated individuals cast out and deemed sick by mainstream society to being people with a shared group identity and a dawning sense of entitlement to, at least, a subculture of their own. Readers wrote Bannon "hundreds of letters" during the years when the books were originally in print, asking everything from where to go to find gay nightlife to "'How will I cope with this?' 'Now what will I do?'" (Bannon qtd. in Lootens par. 11). Bannon recalls that "[t]hey asked for advice, because it struck them that I, who was a published author on the subject, must surely know the answers to their questions" ("Re:Inking" par. 4). And she did, in fact, answer every letter with some words of consolation and advice, not having "the heart to reveal [her] own naïveté" (par. 4). Yet while she was instructing young women in how to be lesbians (as an identity), Bannon herself was being instructed; her readers were not taking a passive role but were also shaping what was said. The women's "pages of intimate revelations" (par. 4) educated Bannon about the lives of other lesbians, and also confirmed for her that "women all around the country" had a great deal in common with one another; were not, in fact, "the only one in the world who felt this way" (par. 3). Ultimately, in Bannon's view, the main message she communicated in response to the women who wrote to her was "you're not alone" (qtd. in Lootens par. 13). And it is this message that made Bannon one of the 1950s' most important promoters of lesbian group consciousness.

Marriage and the Lesbian – Making It Work

In "Sad Stories," Andrea Loewenstein gives a reading of Bannon's first novel, Odd Girl Out, which she considers to be the "least depressing" of the series (par. 10). Her reading focuses on the ways Bannon continually intervenes in the happiness of the main couple, Laura and Beth, by breaking up the college romance, attributing lesbianism to emotional immaturity, and showing that both girls unquestioningly accept that Beth's trajectory – towards marriage to a man – is to be encouraged. Loewenstein holds this to be Bannon's belief as well. "So convinced is Bannon," she writes, "that she cannot even allow Laura herself to question this truth" (par. 23). Lowenstein sums up Bannon's conundrum succinctly: "It is as difficult in this book for Bannon to show lesbian sexuality as unpleasant as it is for her to show heterosexuality as pleasant. No amount of self-censorship can make her description of the courtship of Beth and Laura anything but passionate, tender, and highly erotic" (par. 29); yet the "moral" of the book, based on its ending, would seem to be that lesbianism is no path to happiness. Lowenstein's reading seems to attribute the "sadness" of the story to false consciousness on Bannon's part (and on the part of other lesbians of that generation, who share the "sad story" of the hurts they endured in the past). A more nuanced reading of Bannon's work, I believe, reveals the text as the material artifact of the process of redefining the meanings of homosexuality which was ongoing in the American culture of the 1950s. Bannon's novels, barely-edited outpourings of emotion that they were, portray the workings of an ideological struggle as it was happening. It is not simply that Bannon is applying a heavy-handed authorial morality (in her own name or in that of the censor) to squash the happiness of lesbian characters because she believed it the right thing to do, however much she may have

wished otherwise. Rather, she reveals in her writing the complicated and messy interaction of competing ideologies within an individual consciousness, within a text, and within the society at large.

Of all Bannon's novels, Women in the Shadows gives the clearest picture of the messiness at the place where conflicting ideologies come into contact with one another. It is a lesbian romance novel with a heterosexual marriage plot at its center; it is also the story of the dramatic and violent disintegration of not one, but two lesbian relationships; and all three of these relationships involve Laura, the same Laura who realized her lesbian identity in Bannon's first book. Other characters also return from Bannon's previous novels. Beebo (dearest to Bannon's heart) represents the lesbian subjectivity, the commitment to gay culture and a lesbian identity. Jack, the gay male friend who begs Laura to marry him, stands for the domestic consensus ideology. The central drama of the book is the question, which of these ideologies (even more than the characters) will win Laura's heart?

The marriage between Laura and Jack has been noted by several critics and reviewers, but, interestingly, has not been the subject of much analysis, despite sometimes disproportionate amounts of space devoted to summarizing it. For example, in her critical entry on Ann Bannon in the reference book Gay and Lesbian Literature, published in 1994, Pamela Bigelow devotes about a third of the one paragraph plot summary of the entire Beebo Brinker series to the marriage. "Two of Bannon's ongoing characters," she writes, "Laura Landon and Jack Mann, marry – not for love or sex, but for security. ... Mann and Landon run away from the gay community and, more importantly, from themselves in an effort to become 'happy and normal' as a straight

couple in suburbia" (26). Coming after a paragraph extolling the value of Bannon's writing as a document preserving the realities of 1950s gay life with its tribulations, a read which inflates the verisimilitude as well as the authorial consciousness behind the books, attributing to them a more progressive vision than was likely the case, Bigelow's comments about the marriage "for security" are nonetheless among the most savvy responses to this novel in all the criticism on Bannon.

Another such skim of the Jack-and-Laura-marriage-plot is Suzanne Danuta Walters' two paragraphs on the topic, embedded at the end of her extensive analysis of the ways lesbian desire functions in Bannon's novels as a liberatory force. Like Bigelow, she raises interesting points that she does not pursue – even more interestingly, her points are almost the opposite of Bigelow's (and, I would argue, equally valid). "The two do have a baby," Walters summarizes, "but it is a strange parody of a nuclear family: a faggot and a dyke and a baby produced by artificial insemination. Anyway you look at it, this is no happy 50's nuclear family resolution" (98). While Bigelow's more positive terms imply that she sees the marriage as "successful" insofar as it provides the escape to normality that the characters seek, Walters calls it a "strange parody," suggesting that such security is never really available to "two committed homosexuals marrying each other" (98), regardless of the socially-validated forms that they enact.

The marriage plot is the central drama that drives Women in the Shadows. More even than the story of Laura's dying romance with Beebo or her troubled affair with Tris (i.e., the storylines about lesbian relationships), this novel is fueled by a central conflict between the gay subject and the social institution of marriage. It plays out in the negotiations between Laura and Jack, and it also emerges when Laura's lover Tris's secret

marriage is revealed. In this novel Bannon wrestles with her complicated relationship to the domestic consensus ideology. It is as though the two sides of her subjectivity, her competing allegiances to the lesbian community and the nuclear family, are duking it out in a no-holds-barred fight to the death (perhaps accounting for the unusually violent scenes in the novel, which, years later, disturbed even Bannon herself (Lootens par. 60)[47]). Yet these critics' cursory comments also reveal that there was no clear victor in Bannon's struggle: does the final nod of legitimacy go to marriage and the nuclear family, or to the courageously defiant gay life? I believe that a reading which both embraces the marriage plot's ambiguous loyalties and unpacks the conflicting ideologies that drive the marriage plot can reveal much about how the process of lesbian identity formation worked for the 1950s readers who, like Bannon, found alternative identities and values compelling at the same time as they were interpellated (with varying degrees of completeness and stability) as subjects of the domestic consensus ideology.

On the second page of the novel, Laura tells in a diary entry, "*Jack asked me to marry him again...but I could never marry a man, not even him. Never*" (418). Jack is Jack Mann, her best friend in New York City, a gay man in his forties.[48] Jack is by far the most convinced, among Bannon's characters, of the preferability of the heterosexually married state over homosexuality, especially over the dissolute and unstable "gay life" of Greenwich Village. After the last in a long line of nasty breakups, Jack swears off both

[47] Bannon attributes the violence of the scenes where Beebo beats herself up and kills her dog, Nix, to the fact that she (Bannon) was "so emotionally stressed" while writing the book, particularly over her growing realization that, as a lesbian, she could never be happy in the marriage she had "locked [her]self" into (Lootens par. 61-62).

[48] Michele Aina Barale says of this character, who recurs in almost all of Bannon's novels, "As his first name implies, Jack is a most average fellow... But the ordinariness of his life is redeemed by his surname and elevated to the position of the universal. He may be 'every man Jack,' but he is also Man, *der Mann*, representative of not only the entire category male but, as male, representative of the category human" (536-537).

liquor and men[49]: "[H]e was the last one," he insists, "The end. I want a woman now. I want you, Laura" (448). But it isn't a simple case of "boys are hell so I'll give girls a try." Jack is choosing, not women per se, but the domestic consensus ideology, signing on with the mainstream view that the benefits of marriage are indispensable bulwarks against the sea of misery that is the perpetually lonely and drifting life of the urban single person in the middle of the twentieth century. One main aspect of Jack's vision is the domestic bliss of the home that includes a male breadwinner and a professionalized female homemaker. In his imagination, the benefits such a match would bring him are many, and they require nothing more than the union of a man and a woman to actualize them. The fact that both he and Laura are gay does not factor into his calculation of the benefits that would accrue to him if they were married:

> "You'd be my wife. And you'd come home at night and tuck me in and you'd be there in the morning to see me off." He sounded so peculiarly gentle and yearning that she was convinced that he meant it...
>
> "You'd be my wife, Laura, my honest-to-God lawful legal wife. You'd give me a home. You don't know what that would mean to me. I've been living in rented rooms since I was out of diapers. You'd give me a place to rest in and be proud of, and a purpose in life. What the hell good am I to myself? What use is an aging fag with a letch for hopelessly bored, hopelessly handsome boys? Christ, I give myself the creeps. I give the boys the creeps. And you know something? They're beginning to give *me* the creeps. I'm so low I can't go any place but up. If you'll say yes." (449-450)

This passage (an excerpt from an even longer speech of Jack's), expressing the yearning for a safe (and *comfortable*) port in the storm which Elaine May argues is at the heart of the mass adoption of the domestic consensus ideology during the late 1940s and

[49] Since it is a major part of Jack's character in the other books in which he appears that he is an alcoholic, constantly drinking, much attention is given in this novel to his sobriety and how unusual it is; the implication is that without alcohol, he is finally able to see things more clearly, and what he sees is the wisdom of marrying a woman.

1950s[50], reveals the power of a dominant ideology to interpellate as subjects even those whom it specifically excludes from the full privileges of membership in the dominant group. Jack knows himself to be among those rejected, and he even has the appropriate emotional response toward deviance that a good subject of the dominant ideology should have: he "gives himself the creeps" and men (or boys) like him, the ones he used to love, now "give him the creeps" as well. It is as though he has seen the light and been converted. He names the standard promises of domestic bliss as though they were equally accessible to him and to Laura – instead of a "rented room" (unappealing because untouched by a woman's homemaking skill – clearly the stereotype of the gay male interior designer has not yet come into circulation), he would have a *home*. This home would be run by its proper authority – a female homemaker. She would bring softness and caring as well as material comfort to the home; as breadwinner, masculine supporter of wife and home, Jack would have "something to be proud of, and a purpose in life."

Jack is not alone in the belief that becoming the head of a household through heterosexual marriage would provide inner fulfillment; May notes that it was one of the main tenets of the dominant domestic consensus ideology that "the home represented a source of meaning and stability in a world run amok" (18), especially for 1950s men, for whom a loss of autonomy in the workplace (as more men found their jobs in large, "impersonal" corporations) threatened to develop into a widespread crisis of male self-worth (14). All this is a powerful appeal, but it is not all that Jack hopes to gain from marriage. Following the domestic consensus ideology still further, Jack joins with the

[50] May's study finds that suburban home life based on the nuclear family (the domestic ideal of the 1950s) carried associations of safety, security, and comfort for the majority of Americans, balancing out the fears and anxieties associated with the social disruptions that came with World War II and the terrors of the nuclear age which followed it (17).

national majority in the idea that having children provides the ultimate satisfaction, the ultimate personal fulfillment and sense of purpose. In May's phrase, "a home filled with children would create a feeling of warmth and security against the cold forces of disruption and alienation" (17). Well hailed by the dominant ideology, identifying with the dreams of the national majority, Jack admits that underlying all his other arguments, the "real reason" why he wants to marry Laura is because he very badly wants a child, "the lovely child of his dreams" who "hide[s] in the secret places of his heart" (431).

As Bannon writes in the introduction to the Cleis Press edition of Women in the Shadows, "It seemed logical that a lesbian and a gay man, both of whom wanted children, should get together and, based on respect and deep affection, possibly even marry. After all, they were 'nice' people" (par. 8). And it happened in real life, too. Several of the oral histories and personal essays included in Marcy Adelman's Long Time Passing: Lives of Older Lesbians (1986), recollections from lesbian women who came of age during the 1940s and '50s, include discussions of the appeal of marriage; a few even talk about having married gay male friends, thinking, "what we ought to do is hang together since we don't have what we need in life" (174).[51] Ann Aldrich's[52] 1955 nonfiction pulp exposé, We Walk Alone, included a chapter (called "Here Comes the Bride") about lesbians who tried to escape "the life" by marrying men. One of Aldrich's case studies, Elsa, describes the draw of heterosexual marriage in this way: "I'm sick and tired of not having anyone or anything that's permanent – that's mine – that I can count on!' she said.

[51] This phrase is echoed in Elaine May's discussion of the ways heterosexual women and men scaled back their expectations in response to the disappointments of marriage – her chapter is titled, "Hanging Together: For Better or for Worse" (May 163).
[52] Ann Aldrich was a pseudonym used by Marijane Meaker for this particular type of exposé pulp writing.

'I want roots! I don't care if I ever make love to another woman, if only I can find an anchor in this life'" (134).

Even Beebo is not immune from the compelling hail of the dominant domestic consensus ideology. "I know how it feels. To want one [a child]," she tells Jack. "You just have to make do with what you've got" (433). But Beebo, unlike Jack, is fully committed to the gay life, a lesbian identity, and the work of constructing a subcultural community in which lesbians can live in ways that are true to themselves. In Bannon's book, that means no possibility of children, or even a stable relationship – in the Village, "two whole years...is a pretty good record" (418). Gay life is portrayed as both unstable and violent, with Beebo and Laura getting into frequent physical fights, and Beebo even beating herself up and killing her own dog in an attempt to manipulate Laura into staying with her. Amidst this turmoil, Beebo would like to offer her lover a safe, warm, comfortable alternative, but in this novel's moral universe, marriage is between a man and a woman, and "gay marriage" means a marriage between a lesbian and a gay man. At one point Beebo laments, "I'd sell my soul to be an honest-to-god male. I could marry Laura! I could marry her. Give her my name. Give her kids ... oh, wouldn't that be lovely? So lovely..." (440). It is as though Bannon puts these words in Beebo's mouth to show that even though Beebo is a lesbian, she is still sensible enough to know that anything outside of legal, heterosexual marriage is dangerous territory. But, Beebo concludes, "She wouldn't have me. My baby is gay, like me. She wants a woman." And, "She'd never take a man for a mate" (440).

Unfortunately for Beebo, she is wrong about Laura's potential for marriage, but the phrase "gay, like me" resonates. Beebo is the only character in the novel who

maintains a strong commitment to a lesbian identity distinct from, and in opposition to, the dominant ideology. The clothes she wears are one form of her defiance; while Laura says Beebo looks "like a freak," Beebo retorts that the clothes she wears match the gendered aspects of her butch lesbian sexual identity, "no man" but "sure as hell no woman, either" (424). Her life is organized around her gayness; she chooses a low-paying, low-status job running an elevator "so she can wear pants all day" (447). She stays in the Village, within the small gay community, where her "strange clothes and her gruff voice" and her habit of flirting with female shop clerks (441) are more likely to pass unpunished. Jack, trying to persuade Laura to marry him, ridicules the lesbian subculture of the Village, "the pitiful old women in their men's oxfords and chopped-off hair... Or living together, two of them, ugly and fat and wrinkled" (499), but this is a lesbian community to which Beebo, like Bannon herself and many of the women who fled there because of the freedom and love it promised, is fully dedicated. Even so, her identification with a lesbian subjectivity is so strong that she knowingly risks her physical safety, even her life, to be open and honest about her rejection of the dominant ideology. "It's an old story," she says of the threat of attack; "Nearly every butch I know gets it one way or another. Sooner or later they catch up with you...The goddamn sonofabitch toughs who think it's smart to pick fights with Lesbians. They ask you who the hell you think you are... And they jump you for laughs" (465). Later she says that this kind of violence is just "part of the crazy life I live. A sort of occupational hazard, you might say" (467).

But ultimately, the "proof" of Beebo's lesbian subjectivity is in the way she looks to love between women as the cure for all the hurts inflicted by the world. "I don't want

to be handsome," she says; "I just want Laura" (427). Suzanne Walters has argued that Bannon's portrayal of desire and of sex itself between women is her major contribution to the development of lesbian consciousness. "For Bannon," Walters contends, "the lesbian *is* sex, her difference as manifested in desire is what makes her a lesbian; indeed, what makes her a person" (88).[53] Indeed, Beebo seems to live through loving women. She "made wonderful love," Bannon writes; "She knew how, she did it naturally, as other people eat or walk" (436). When Laura allows her to express her sensuality with her, it is the only time we see Beebo happy in this book. "Oh, if it could only be like this. Laura, Laura, love me. Love me!" she begs (436). She claims that Laura holds her (Beebo's) life in her hands (440). But, in fact, when Laura finally leaves Beebo, Beebo manages to carry on. She makes love to other women. Although devastated by the breakup, she never considers, as Jack does, abandoning her gay identity. And ultimately, because for Beebo loving women (not heterosexual marriage) is the path to happiness and fulfillment, passing through the fires of grief at the end of an important relationship makes Beebo not bitter, but "kind" and "patient" (575), "gentle" (576), "good and tender" (578).

A one point in the story, Laura has left Beebo, who is furious with her for having an affair with another woman, and run to Jack's apartment. Jack, sensing that at this

[53] Gabriele Griffin also sees the primary value of the Beebo Brinker books in Bannon's "positive" portrayal of lesbian sexuality, arguing that "by comparison" with other writing about lesbians in circulation at the time, either "high culture" literary writing by lesbians or voyeuristic lesbian pulps written by men, Bannon's books are, "significantly, much more celebratory of lesbian sex. What the novels offer is an affirmation of lesbian sexual desire and an explicitness concerning sexual encounters between women, absent from much of lesbian writing until then and even in that period ... Similarly, the joy and sexual release women find in having sex with each other is repeatedly emphasized" (48). A third critic who has focused on the gay sexuality of Bannon's books is Michele Aina Barale, who argues that the books "blur the distinctions between something called heterosexuality and some other thing called homosexuality" in the ways they draw supposedly male heterosexual readers (always the presumed main audience for the books) into the story, enticing them into identifying with the character of Jack Mann (in stories where he is central) and sharing his perspective – and thus participating in his gay male gaze. This is a process Barale summarizes as "alternately titillating, threatening, and comforting" the heterosexual male reader and "ultimately implicating [him] in gay desires" (534).

moment Laura might now be just miserable enough to give in, pulls out all the stops in his final attempt to persuade her to marry him. He even defames Beebo's character in ways that he knows are not true. As Bannon puts it, "Jack was fighting for Laura now" (497). This struggle for Laura's soul must have been similar to how Bannon felt the pressure of the domestic consensus, the pressure to conform to the dominant ideology. The words came from a trusted friend, with overpowering force, and yet they ran counter to what she knew to be true about herself and her own needs. But the difference between Laura's marriage to Jack (for she does give in) and Bannon's own marriage is that Laura and Jack enter into it believing they have found a way to beat the system. I suggest that in this novel, Bannon is exploring the possibility that there might be other choices for lesbians and gay men in the 1950s besides adaptation to heterosexuality or a life of misery wasting every ounce of energy resisting the dominant ideology. Although the model of "gay marriage" she posits here is untenable in many ways, it is clear that Bannon imagined it had the potential, at least, to alleviate the pressures on lesbians and gay men to conform and to provide them with a way to access the vaunted benefits of domesticity while allowing them to remain true to their sense of themselves as having a fundamental identity based on their erotic attraction to members of the same sex. The marriage between Jack and Laura is not a solution to gay people's problems. Rather, this story is an artifact or trace of a conversational moment in American history, when, against an oppressive, homophobic mainstream discourse, some lesbians and gay men were attempting to rethink what "being gay" could mean, and to carve out a space for the fomenting of new and previously unimagined possibilities.

The problems Laura and Jack have with the existing choices of ways to enact gayness are also the problems that come with being outside the domestic consensus. Laura fears the insecurity and potential violence that she associates with the lesbian subculture; Jack feels incomplete without a child and a proper home. Both fear the loneliness and isolation of being outside the mainstream without a partner. Since American culture touted marriage in myriad ways as the solution to exactly these problems, it is not surprising that two gay people might decide to take a crack at it. Indeed, Jack professes that they will actually be improving upon the institution by tweaking it to meet their needs: "Ours could be damn near perfect, Laura, if we work at it a little. You know that? We won't have to face the usual pitfalls. Ours will be different...better" (514). It should be kept in mind that the type of relationship Bannon is feeling out in this book is not a simple imitation of heterosexuality. Rather, it is (at least in attempt) a mixture of the perceived benefits of the domestic ideal with the most positive qualities of the gay identity. After they stand before the justice of the peace, Laura says, "You'd think we were a couple of normal people." Jack counters, "They have no monopoly on happiness, Mother. We have a right to our share... We can make something beautiful of it together" (516). Problematic as this "solution" is, it must be read not as a paean to conformity, but as one effort among many going on simultaneously to make something new and more positive out of the materials at hand.

In all things domestic the marriage is a success, fulfilling everything Jack had hoped. Laura takes well to the housekeeper role, being "naturally mild and yielding" (517), and "[goes] to pains to please him...working to make things right as she had promised him" (519). And Jack seems to have been born to the role of breadwinner,

enjoying himself as "a man who was taking care of his woman" (518), coming home "for the first time in his life to a warm kitchen and a charming young wife" (519). They begin seeing a doctor for artificial insemination. For both, the marriage means a chance for security and fulfillment. With a home to organize their lives around, a family to give their lives meaning, "[t]hey felt as if they knew where they were going now and life was much better" (521).

In keeping with what has been said about Bannon's location of lesbianism in sexuality itself, one of the ways in which Jack and Laura keep their marriage "gay" is by not having sex with one another. Both of them repeatedly avow that they are not attracted to one another, in fact, could *never* be attracted to one another, because they are gay:

> "Jack, darling, I love you, but I don't love you with my body. I love you with my heart and soul but I could never let you make love to me."
> "I could never do it, either," he said quietly. "You're no gayer than I am, Laura. If we married it would never be a physical union, you know that." (449)

Although Bannon describes many forms of physical affection between the two, including "friendly pecks," hugs, and hand-holding, and even notes that Laura feels pleasure at "his nearness and the fact that he was male and strong and full of affection for her" (497), one of the ways in which she makes the point that Laura and Jack are both still gay, despite being heterosexually married, is by reiterating that "[t]here was no sex between them" and that "[n]either of them wanted it, and that was the way they planned it" (518). This is written as one of the benefits of "gay" marriage, what makes it even better than "straight" marriage. As Laura reflects, "Perhaps it was because she knew he would never demand of her what a normal man would...she felt so safe with him and so able to trust him"

(497). This suggests that a certain sexual equality existed between them that was absent from many heterosexual marriages (and the dominant culture itself) in that Laura enjoyed a sense of authority over sexual access to her own body – a situation that made her feel "safe."

But if, for Bannon, lesbianism is enacted through sex, and there is no sex within this marriage, how is Laura still a lesbian? The marriage includes arrangements for this. Although Jack has sworn off men, he claims he does not expect the same of Laura. "If you want affairs, have them," he tells her (499); elsewhere, "There'll be women in your life, I'm prepared for that, honey" (518). He creates space for her to have women lovers, but insists on the integrity of the marriage nonetheless. Emotionally, they take their marriage quite seriously. "I can't love you with my body," he tells her; "You wouldn't want it even if I could. But I don't think I've ever loved anyone as much as you" (560). He asks her to have lovers but be discreet with them, and he asks that she not live with any female lovers but always come home to him at night, be there in the morning. Laura believes that although she "missed women...desperately sometimes," (521) by waiting until the marriage was solidified as a secure foundation, she would eventually be able to introduce lesbian affairs into her life and "not let them touch our marriage" (518). If she stuck to this plan, "she was sure now, deep within herself, that the time would come when she and Jack would be secure with each other for the rest of their lives; when they would be able to trust each other without reservation and trust the strength of their union. When they reached that point, it would be safe to satisfy her desires" (521).

On Bannon's part, this is an optimistic idea, but it neglects to take into account what the "true" heterosexuals had been hearing from marriage experts for a decade: one

of the main components of the marriage that holds together the idealized nuclear family is good, plentiful sex. As May observes, "If there was a sexual awakening taking place" in early Cold War America, "it was focused on the promise of an eroticized marriage. Sex was expected to strengthen the marriage, enhance the home, and contribute to each partner's sense of happiness and well being. Healthy families were built upon the bedrock of good sex" (119). And, "Sexual satisfaction would presumably safeguard marriage against unhealthy developments that would weaken the family from within" (102). As a tool for promoting feelings of stability on the national home front as well as preventing morally compromising situations that could weaken the nation's ability to withstand foreign threats, May writes, "Marriage was considered to be the appropriate container for the unwieldy American libido" (88). Because Laura's active and necessary (for her gay identity) lesbian sexuality is not adequately contained by the structure of her marriage, she does not have the will power to control it herself, and it leads her to abandon Jack not once but twice to have extended affairs with both Tris (her affair partner) and Beebo. When Laura is away from the home, it loses the stability and security as a fortress against the unstable world which marriage has lent it. Jack is returned to his previous unmoored state, and becomes prey for the same exploitative ex-lover whose past abuses had sent him looking for marriage in the first place. Both of Laura's lesbian flings end in disaster and heartbreak, although they temporarily satisfy the "huge, breathtaking need for a woman that absolutely tortured her at night" (548).

In its final chapter, though, the novel recuperates the heterosexual marriage and nuclear family as the site of security and stability as Laura, having sprouted "the first gray hairs" during her foray back into the Village lesbian scene, returns to the apartment

she still shares with Jack. When she gets there, she finds a letter from her doctor informing her that insemination has been successful and she is pregnant. It is the presence of an actual baby (or at least an embryo) that seems to settle Laura down, in the intended way, by awakening her "natural" mothering instincts: where before she had screamed at Jack, "Don't call me Mother!" (563), upon finding out this news, she reflects to herself, "I'm going to be a woman. I have eight months to get ready and I've got to *be* ready when it comes. I've got to love it and take care of it" (584). That Laura immediately feels an upswell of maternal instinct the instant she learns she is pregnant, even before she can actually detect any signs of this from within, repeats the dominant view that encouraged women to have many children during the 1950s, what was later termed the "baby boom." As May writes, "So prevalent was the assumption that women were naturally fulfilled in motherhood that anxiety or ambivalence surrounding pregnancy was actually considered a pathological condition" (132).[54]

May also notes that men as well as women could be "tamed" by a baby (126), and Jack's response bears this up. He tells Laura that since she left, he has moved in with bad boy Terry, but comes to the apartment every day to see if Laura has returned, telling his boyfriend, "If I don't make it back some night you'll know she came home. Don't wait for me" (587). When Laura tells him, "Darling, we're going to have a baby!", he bursts into tears of joy (587). The two spend the rest of the evening lying in each other's arms, talking about the baby and making plans. There is even the suggestion that now that a

[54] May cites a 1953 report to the American Academy of Obstetrics and Gynecology that "repeated miscarriages may be caused by emotional factors and that a miscarriage might be the result of 'an unconscious rejection on the mother's part of repeated pregnancies and of motherhood ... psychiatric treatment will do more to help these women achieve happy motherhood than such prescriptions as vitamin E, sex hormones, or complete bed rest'" (132).

child in the equation, binding them together, as it were, a degree of eroticism is present between them that was never there before. Bannon writes, "And he kissed her mouth then. It had never happened before but it was right and wonderful" (587); and later, "He leaned down and kissed her again and, silent and amazed at herself, she returned his kiss with warmth" (588). In the last line of the novel, Laura and Jack "[fall] asleep together with the sigh of relief and hope that only the lost, who have found themselves, can feel" (588).

May writes that "in the 1940s and 1950s, nearly everyone believed that family togetherness, focused on children, was the mark of a successful and wholesome personal life. One study of 900 wives in the 1950s found that the desire for children was second only to companionship in stated marriage goals" (121). While May's research focused on self-identified heterosexual men and women, particularly those who were married, Bannon's novel Women in the Shadows reveals the ways that some lesbians adopted the dominant culture's beliefs about marriage, companionship, and child-rearing in the 1950s. Reading Bannon's work also shows us that the ideals of the domestic consensus ideology were not an easy match for lesbians, and that at least some lesbians during this time thought they could keep the spirit of the heterosexual-marriage dictate by introducing some key modifications, such as expanding the arena in which sexuality could be explored to include sex partners outside of the marriage.

We can see that the domestic consensus ideology, backed by many mainstream cultural productions and connected to national security concerns, was compelling for at least some lesbians, and we also see that while some self-identified lesbians were interpellated to a certain extend by this dominant ideology, gaps remained where their

lesbian subjectivity, not completely stifled, sought ways to change the dominant ideology from within to make it more compatible with their emotional and sexual needs. While Women in the Shadows understandably oversimplifies these ideological issues, reading it as a product of its author's need to sort out her complex relationship to multiple conflicting ideologies, and her experience of being caught between the intense pressure to conform and the intense excitement of coming out, illuminates an important aspect of the national conversation about the meanings of homosexuality. It shows us some of the messy, often incomplete, seldom black-and-white process by which individuals sort through possibilities and adopt ideological positions as new forms of subjectivity emerge and established ones begin to be transformed.

Chapter 4: A Forgotten Radical

Valerie Taylor's Unhomely Domesticity

Ann Bannon displayed a very ambivalent response to the fame thrust upon her by the success of her books among women who were developing a consciousness of themselves as lesbians. Giving no interviews (even after her divorce), keeping her "true" identity a secret, and refusing to have any contact or interaction with any lesbian organization, she remained a mysterious figure for decades before being tracked down by feminist reporters in the 1980s. Maida Tilchen, one of these reporters and a lover of lesbian pulp, recalled that "The only gossip was that Ann had married, and was living quietly in Northern California, raising children, her past behind her[;] it was said that she denied that she had ever set foot in a lesbian bar, and that she claimed that everything in the books was written purely from her imagination" (par. 9). For all intents and purposes, the author known as Ann Bannon completely vanished after the last Beebo Brinker book was published in 1962. Yet today, curiously, Bannon's name is seen everywhere, associated with everything having to do with republished and revisited lesbian pulp novels. The woman who most distanced herself from what she had created and its cultural power has become the final authority on the value of pulp novels – her own and others.

During the heyday of pulp, Bannon appears to have been about as famous and well-loved as a small cadre of writers, including Ann Aldrich/Vin Packer, Valerie Taylor, and Paula Christian. Today her blurbs on the covers of republished pulp novels give the stamp of authenticity to these works. For example, in a full-page blurb on Ann Aldrich's

We Walk Alone (republished by the Feminist Press in 2006), Bannon describes the isolated 1950s lesbian of the 1950s discovering the "miracle" of pulp fiction. Then, she writes, "another genre appeared: factual reports about lesbian life in the big city, penned by someone who lived there and knew. Her name was Ann Aldrich... The effect on women was electric" (Bannon n.p.). Ann Aldrich was a far more public figure than Bannon during the time they were publishing, having herself written what is considered to be the "first original lesbian pulp produced in the United States" (Spring Fire, 1952) to significant success (Foote "Afterword" 163). But here, Bannon's comments lend authority to Aldrich's work for the "republishing" generation. Although Martin Meeker has written about the importance of Aldrich's contributions to the pulp phenomenon and the debates about lesbian identity it sparked, she remains much less known and studied for her pulp work than Bannon, and her name has definitely not acquired the authoritative status of Bannon's to approve other women's texts.

Another author who shared Bannon's high status among lesbian readers in the 1950s but whose name has virtually disappeared from academic literary criticism of the pulp genre is Valerie Taylor. Like Aldrich's book, Taylor's The Girls in 3-B carries an approving blurb by Bannon. The work the blurb performs is twofold. First, it offers a promise to the reader, that this book "will give you a sense of the dangers and delights of passion between women in another era." Second, when Bannon comments that "Valerie Taylor's much-loved story has a achieved well-deserved classic status in the lesbian pulp canon," she uses the status of her own name to validate Taylor's importance as an author. (Bannon appears not to need this approval; the covers of her own books do not carry blurbs by another pulp writer. In the Cleis Press editions, the flyleaf blurb is written by

Bannon herself!) Although more literary-minded reviewers during the "Golden Age of Pulp" called Taylor the better of the two writers (e.g., Barbara Grier qtd. in Nealon 151), and although, as Meredith Miller has documented, *Taylor's* name together with Bannon's are "mentioned more than any others in autobiographical accounts of the period" (50), it is the weight and status of Bannon's name that signals to contemporary readers the value we should place on this book. And despite the fact that several of Taylor's lesbian pulp novels have been republished (by Naiad Press in the 1980s, the Feminist Press in 2003, and Arsenal Press in 2006[55]), and are often referenced in histories of the era, they are virtually unknown in literary criticism today. Why?

In this chapter, I contribute to the critical recovery of Valerie Taylor's pulp fiction with an analysis of her 1959 novel The Girls in 3-B. My reading focuses on the ways this novel engages with and responds to the dominant domestic consensus ideology and the ways it works to expand the conditions of possibility for lesbian participation in the domestic ideal. I argue that along with creating a space for lesbian relationships within the framework of domesticity, Taylor also deploys the rhetoric of the domestic ideal in ways that critique the failure of patriarchal mainstream U.S. society to ensure the safety of women. I suggest that this and other literary strategies Taylor uses in this book mirror discursive choices made by leftist-ideological activist organizations with which Taylor was associated during the same time period. Finally, I discuss the critical neglect of Taylor's work, and the significance of the recovery of this writer to our understanding of the scope and complexity of lesbian and gay participation in the national conversation about the meanings of homosexuality taking place throughout the late 1940s and 1950s.

[55] Arsenal Press republished Whisper Their Love as part of its Little Sister's Classics series, dedicated to preserving classic lesbian and gay titles.

Leftist Women's Organizations and the Uses of Domesticity

Almost twenty years Bannon's senior, Taylor (born Velma Young in 1913) married Jerry Tate in 1939 and had three sons before divorcing her husband, whom she later called "an alcoholic no good bum" (qtd. in D'Emilio 9) in 1953. Her first pulp novel, The Hired Girl (not a lesbian pulp), was published by Universal later that same year ("Guide" par. 6). In 1957, she published her first of numerous lesbian romances, Whisper Their Love. While Bannon avoided the public eye and visited the lesbian world only occasionally, Taylor began her political activism in college in the 1930s. Having won a scholarship to study for a teaching certificate at Blackburn College in Carlinville, IL (near her hometown of Aurora, IL), she "not only attended classes but went to Socialist meetings and farm sales, and joined local picket lines" (Gallo par. 9). She remained an active Leftist for her entire life. In an interview with Studs Terkel, she recalls being "out" in the underground lesbian community as early as 1931 (311). Involvement in anti-war activism and the civil rights movement from at least the 1950s on preceded her formal membership in the homophile movement. Taylor helped to establish the Mattachine Midwest in Chicago in the early '60s, wrote regularly for the Mattachine Society's newsletter, and served on the majority-male organization's national board, being "for a time...the only woman on the board" (qtd. in Terkel 311).

One left-leaning organization to which Taylor belonged for several decades, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, has been written about by Harriet Hyman Alonso in a contribution to the 1994 anthology Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960, a collection which explores the legacy of

women (including working-class, immigrant, and leftist women) who did not fall easily into the suburban domestic consensus ideology as it was analyzed by May. Alonso's chapter, which actually discusses events that affected the Chicago branch of the WILPF (Taylor's own home branch), provides an extremely useful background for contextualizing Taylor's writing. A lesbian single working mother with socialist political sympathies and a dedication to fighting for the inclusion of all marginalized peoples within American society, Taylor's commitments not only placed her outside the mainstream in multiple ways, they also marked her as a threat to the Cold War nation. Taylor and other members of the WILPF walked a delicate line, speaking out against empire and oppression but also moderating their messages enough to protect their organizations and their allies (many of whom, like Taylor herself, were in vulnerable, already marginalized social and economic positions) from governmental punishment in the era of McCarthy.

Organizations such as the WILPF came under scrutiny from HUAC as well as leaders within the organization, because, along with strong political stands against the arms race and for freedom of speech, another of the "difficulties" they faced "was that of 'working for goals which the Communists and other groups seem to be working for also', namely peace and justice issues" (WILPF memo qtd. in Alonso 132). "In [the McCarthyist] climate," Alonso writes, "peace organizations became particularly vulnerable because their members favored friendly relations with all nations, communist or not. Government representatives often portrayed pacifists as weak links and dupes, vulnerable to Communist trickery" (130). Women peace activists such as the members of the WILPF were indeed among "the few groups that continuously supported the

Communist Party's right to free speech" (Alonso 133), and they opposed "acts that attempted to restrict people's freedom of speech" on the local, state, and national levels (133). Alonso writes, "All these efforts, the women believed, would lead to a society based on 'unthinking conformity, enforced silence, and to the penalizing of courageous dissent' [which] would 'undermine the foundation of the American government'" (133). The WILPF strongly opposed censorship in all its forms, as part of its main work of agitating for "demilitarizing U.S. society physically, culturally, and psychologically" (130). But as an organization, it was not immune to the paranoia that swept the nation during the early Cold War years, and several of its chapters, including the Chicago chapter, endured divisive and damaging internal struggles over the possible presence of actual Communists among their ranks.

During the 1950s, according to Alonso, "the Chicago branch was made up of WILPF's traditional white upper-middle-class membership and by working-class women from the city's South Side" (139). In 1954, "membership was down," the organization's recruiting power "crippled by the effects of McCarthyism." Other women quit when "pressured" by husbands "afraid of losing their jobs" (139). This branch suffered a major crisis of internal division in 1954, with several members insisting that the group needed to be purged of secret Communists who had infiltrated it (Alonso 140). The national board of the WILPF took the official position of opposing "subversion" and the "confessed totalitarian philosophy" of Communism, and affirming "freedom and democracy." This was to be ensured in the group and in the nation through "free discussion, decision making by consensus, and constant open debate" (WILPF memo qtd. in Alonso 141). However, as Alonso points out, there were WILPF members, especially

among the group's African American and white working class constituents, who "not only accepted communist ideology but also embraced the principle of nonviolence" (141). And ultimately, although the national board encouraged branches to keep an eye out for Communists (and listed tips for identifying them)[56], it was mainly concerned with Communists usurping organizational offices and resources to advance non-WILPF goals. If members had "leftist tendencies," but showed loyalty to the group and an ability to work for its aims, they should be "welcomed" in the name of "diversity" (Alonso 142).

The WILPF made extensive use of the rhetoric of the family and domesticity as part of its campaign against atomic weapons. This, according to Alonso, was one way it tried to deflect negative assumptions about the supposedly anti-family values of leftists. As a rhetorical strategy, the use of domesticity was designed to appeal to a broad audience, couching a radical message in a language embraced by mainstream society. Alonso points out the ways women peace activists of the '50s connected their political and ethical stance for peace with their social roles as women under the domestic consensus ideology, as in this radio spot sponsored by the WILPF: "World peace and freedom! World peace so that you and I—and all the mothers all over the world—can go to sleep without thinking about the terrors of the Atomic Bomb or the H-Bomb... Women do not want to send their husbands and children to another war. None of us do" (qtd. in Alonso 131).

[56] For example, "members who want the branch to select from the WILPF program only those issues in which the Communist party is interested and to neglect all other parts of the program," or who "are totally uncritical of the USSR and who do not show a balanced judgment in their criticism of U.S. policies" (WILPF memo qtd. in Alonso 142). This publication of the national board was titled "Packet on Infiltration and Attack."

In some ways this organization is like Valerie Taylor's novels: their content is for the most part positive and progressive, and a significant departure from mainstream fare. They were islands in the storm of McCarthyism for pacifists and lesbians. Yet they both also contain elements which contradict the main stance; both accept, at times, some aspects of the dominant ideology, which are at odds with the happiness and freedom of at least some of their audiences. While the WILPF protected its civil safety by toeing the mainstream line regarding the dangerousness of Communists, Taylor did so in The Girls in 3-B by upholding the marriage-style partnership as the best source of security. But both also tweaked these concessions to make them more friendly to their constituents, the WILPF by providing a space for Communists to exist within their organization (even though it made other members nervous) and Taylor by creating a space for lesbian partnerships to exist within the domestic consensus.

Exploring the ways other leftist groups of the 1950s used the rhetoric of domesticity to promote oppositional agendas sheds further light on the operation of domesticity in Taylor's writing. The WILPF shared this rhetoric with other radical women's groups of the era, including actual Communists. Deborah Gerson, in an essay in the same volume, describes the "familialist" rhetoric of the Families Committee of Smith Act Victims, an organization of wives of men arrested for subversion or ordered into hiding by the Communist Party which raised money to pay for emergency expenses of the men's families and to provide for such things as summer camp tuition and birthday presents. Pamphlets and print ads sponsored by this group emphasized the ways that the persecution of CP members by the U.S. government broke apart families – the very social structures the government promoted as crucial to the nation's security and individual

Americans' well-being and happiness. Gerson writes that the Families Committee, in their choices to position "'women as women,' that is, as wives and mothers rather than workers," sought to "exemplify and concretize the social and human costs of anticommunist repression" (166). She further points out that "If the twin pillars of anticommunism and familialism were the ideological bulwarks of the public and private worlds, an assault on both these fronts would be doomed to failure. The Families Committee chose a strategy likely to win hearts and minds within the broadest stratum of American society" (171).

Strategic employment of the rhetoric of domesticity made sense for the female Communist organizer and the lesbian activist-writer for much the same reasons. Both were among those most marginalized by hegemonic Cold War discourses of national security that specially demonized Communists and homosexuals. As such, any appeal they made to the mainstream public would be met with negative bias and suspicion from the outset. But these were women who wanted to address the nation, and contest the widely-sanctioned prejudice against their groups. The argument that both Communists and lesbians could share in the national longing for domestic security and fulfillment, regardless of their politics, was an implicit argument against their persecution. But Taylor, like some of the other radical women of the 1950s, did not simply use domestic rhetoric as a cloak to sneak their subversive ideas into the mainstream consciousness. Rather, I contend that in their use of the language of domesticity they transformed it, made it their own, and put it to use to serve their own purposes. The values of the domestic consensus ideology became, in these women's hands, a common standard against which to judge the United States' progress on issues of equality, civil rights,

freedom, democracy, and human compassion – a standard against which the U.S. came up woefully short.

Domesticity and Women's Safety in The Girls in 3-B

Meredith Miller has helpfully pointed out that "heterosexual plot resolution" (that is, having at least one of the lesbian characters be romantically involved with a man at the end of the book), "as writers, filmmakers, and publishers in the 1950s knew, meant greater license in what could be represented in the middle part of the plot. It didn't mean much more than that" (46). This is a very useful intervention in the assumption that the ending is literally the author's final word on the subject; in essence, it allows us to weigh the content of the "middle" of the book independently of an ending that upholds a heterosexual ideal. In the case of The Girls in 3-B, however, marriage is not introduced in the last pages to satisfy an editorial requirement—it pervades the novel at all stages. In fact, a large proportion of the plot is taken up by heterosexual intrigues, as two of the three female protagonists are straight. Joke Hermes, in one of the few published essays that discuss Taylor's pulp novels, portrays Taylor's writing in the 1950s as conventional and conservative, upholding mainstream values by having so many of her protagonists choose heterosexual marriage (64). I argue, however, that Taylor uses the conventions of domesticity strategically in her writing to highlight the fundamental power inequalities between men and women in a society that offers few guarantees of women's safety outside of the protective borders of domesticity, as well as to provide a language in which lesbian characters could be read as sympathetic and relatable by mainstream audiences.

Valerie Taylor's The Girls in 3-B is one of the two most-mentioned novels, outside of Ann Bannon's, in any scholarly treatment of the lesbian paperback phenomenon of the 1950s, and in oral histories and memoirs that mention lesbian pulps.[57] This shows that, despite the fact that the novel's content is seldom discussed or analyzed, it was widely read by lesbians at the time of its publication, and it stands out in many women's memories as one of the best of the genre. This is somewhat unusual, because this is a novel about marriage, in which two-thirds of the protagonists are heterosexual, and at least that much page space is devoted to their heterosexual relationships. The lesbian content is characterized by subtlety and suggestion, in a manner not uncommon for pulp writing, while straight sex scenes are described in detail. But I would contend that Taylor's entertaining and well-written interwoven storylines, combined with a critique of women's social conditions in U.S. urban culture and an argument for the inclusion of lesbian modes of relationship within the national domestic consensus, made The Girls in 3-B an important book for many lesbian readers. Susan Stryker writes, "For those willing to work within the restrictive conventions of the new genre, lesbian-oriented paperback originals allowed a significant number of women a somewhat subversive opportunity to represent contemporary lesbian life with an unprecedented degree of sympathy and realism" (57). The Girls in 3-B is a perfect example of a "somewhat subversive" lesbian novel in that it not only gives a sympathetic portrayal of lesbians (in opposition to the dominant negative discourse), it cleverly uses a rhetoric of marriage and domesticity honored by broad segments of American society to point to the

[57] Vin Packer's Spring Fire, reputedly the first lesbian pulp written in the U.S., is mentioned about as often. No other single title comes close.

costs endured by women in a patriarchal, capitalist society (without damaging the reputation of the institutions of domesticity).

In the novel, three young women who just graduated from high school leave their small-town life for Chicago (where Taylor also lived) to pursue their various dreams – Annice to experience the bohemian lifestyle and become a writer; Pat to have adventures, be a modern career girl, and meet exciting men; and Barby, simply to escape the shame of her past rape and the incestuous gaze of her father. Each of the women is portrayed as "getting into trouble" in some way, being vulnerable to wicked or nefarious characters because of their gender and specifically because of their choices to live outside of the path pre-determined by the suburban domestic consensus ideology. Two of the three "girls" finally find their way out of insecurity and troubles by getting married to stable male characters. So far, this novel seems to fit right in with other moralistic "tales of the city"-type books that reinforced the drive for suburban security by showing that the free-wheeling, free-loving city life might offer its temporary titillations, but the price to pay would turn out to be severe unless one could escape in time into the arms of respectability (Stryker 8-9); although the clear sympathy with which the women characters are treated in Taylor's novel, and their ultimately quite likeable personalities, probably made them more enjoyable for the average woman to read.

The novel departs from the norm, though, by showing how the third young woman escapes the gravest anti-female danger of all through a lesbian relationship that is very much like the heterosexual marriages of the other girls in some key ways. What is particularly interesting in relation to the cultural messages of the Cold War era that promised security in committed heterosexual marriages is the way the novel breaks down

the heterosexist exclusivity of the marriage narrative by inserting the lesbian couple – with its historical specificities, such as the prohibition on legal lesbian marriage and the need for secrecy in the workplace – into a position equivalent to heterosexual marriage in its capacity to protect a (formerly) vulnerable single woman from the insecurity and instability of the male-dominated public world outside of marriage, the frightening and dangerous (to women) world of singles in the city.

In this novel Taylor both upholds the national consensus on marriage and domesticity as the source of happiness and security, a stance which probably made it easier for her books to enjoy truly mass circulation from the paperback distributors, and simultaneously, insidiously destabilizes the consensus from within by writing lesbians into the ranks of those who have access to the domestic refuge according to its own standards. This is the "unhomely moment" that gives the novel its particular power – to fascinate and make uncomfortable, to reach a wide audience, to provoke discussion, to reassure and to challenge, and to survive and be re-read by generations seeking to better understand the complexities of the cultural-historical-political moment, "what it was like" to be the lesbians who were reading those books in that moment.

Homi Bhabha uses the concept of the “unhomely” to describe the effect of reviving, or forcing an audience to look at, something which has been “forgotten,” that is, forcibly hidden or erased, in order for a dominant discourse to retain its power and ignore gaps in the logic which sustains it (13). The activity of negating the fixed, binary categories, such as male/female, public/private, or heterosexual/homosexual, on which the dominant discourse depends for its division of people into categories of greater and lesser value and privilege, is the destabilizing work of the unhomely. Taylor insists on

showing that the human qualities of love, loyalty, hope, compassion, commitment, and generosity, as well as qualities associated with class and national culture, such as domesticity, monogamy, the desire for security, and the insular family unit, belong as much to lesbians as to heterosexual Americans. This is "the intervention of the 'beyond' that establishes a boundary: a bridge, where 'presencing' begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world – the unhomeliness – that is the condition of extraterritorial and cross-cultural initiations" (Bhabha 13). The unhomely refuses the normalizing demands of oppressive authorities and reveals "an uncertainty at the heart of the generalizing subject of civil society" (13). The effect of deploying the unhomely, as Taylor does, is to create a destabilized space from which the internal contradictions of mainstream, McCarthyist, homophobic American culture can be seen and critiqued for what it is – an arbitrary hierarchy of identity categories based on gender, race, class, and sexuality designed to maintain power and influence in the hands of the few. As Bhabha elaborates,

> By making visible the forgetting of the forgetting of the 'unhomely' moment in civil society, feminism specifies the patriarchal, gendered nature of civil society and disturbs the symmetry of private and public which is now shadowed, or uncannily doubled, by the difference of genders which does not neatly map on to the private and the public, but becomes disturbingly supplementary to them. This results in redrawing the domestic space as the space of the normalizing, pastoralizing, and individuating techniques of modern power and police: the personal-*is*-the political, the world-*in*-the home. … The unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence. (15)

The unhomely refuses to allow dominant ideologies and the cultural institutions which reproduce them to retain the appearance of neutrality. In the case of Taylor's novel, it is the institution of marriage which is revealed to be, not an inherently superior model for

human relationships, but a choice made for self-protection by a social group (women) kept in a position of limited personal power by oppressive conditions of sexism and anti-female violence.

Taylor's reinforcement of marriage as a means to stability, security, and happiness for women is set up by her depiction of female single life as dangerous, with all three women protagonists taken advantage of by unscrupulous men as a result of their rural naïveté. Pat gets off the easiest, suffering no more than a broken heart and a loss of idealism before giving in to marriage's promise of stability and security. Starry-eyed at city life and the excitement of her new job as a secretary in a publishing house, Pat falls in love with her handsome and powerful boss, spending many nights unhappy because he doesn't notice her (being too busy womanizing). She realizes what a cad he is just in time to turn him down when he finally fulfills her fantasies by coming on to her. In fact, the book ends with Pat's total change of heart as she sizes up the "nice boy" who has been pursuing her with a new attitude. Kicking off her uncomfortable high-fashion pumps, "she looked down the years that stretched ahead, full of promises – love, job, marriage, children. It looked good. *Stan*, she thought. Very neatly, she drew a comma and put a roof over it. It looked, she thought, like a little house" (Taylor 177). Pat is depicted as waking up from a dream in which she mistakenly thought an exciting, power-playing executive would be a better match than a nice, predictable, stable (though still fun) Catholic boy. "*A crush*, she thought in sudden wonder, amazed at the revelation... Then it was over, like snapping your fingers" (176).

Annice, the poet who believes the Bohemian lifestyle must be superior to boring, bourgeois suburban domesticity, is carried closer to total degradation before climbing on

the life raft of marriage. She gets involved with a stereotypical misogynistic beatnik named Alan who shames her into dropping out of college and spending her tuition money to support him. Alan claims to be "completely unable to feel tenderness or compassion for anybody, even the woman [he] lay[s]" (50), and tells Annice, "Why don't you women learn that your place is in bed? All this futile struggle to create, when all you're really good for is to release some man's inhibitions" (52). It is not surprising when Alan – who insists that a woman should be both sexually liberated and "natural," i.e., not using birth control – skips town after getting Annice pregnant. Luckily, Annice also has a nice guy waiting in the wings with a ring, willing even to take her baby as his own. Pregnant, broke, depressed, and driven to lie and steal from her roommates, Annice begins to be concerned that she may "starve to death" in the "richest country in the world" (150). "If this were a love story," she thinks, "some nice fellow would come along and marry me and everything would come out all right... But that doesn't happen in real life. Or does it?" (150). That's when she remembers Jackson – the nice guy who had been pursuing her before she hooked up with Alan. Suddenly, "boring" is revealed as something else entirely – stable, secure, trustworthy.

Her shotgun marriage to Jackson does more than just make her respectable again; it turns her from tearful, unsteady, and unreliable (134) to "happy" and "dreamy" (171), in her roommates' descriptions. Like Pat, once she breaks from the single life and its lack of both the constraints and the protections of domesticity, she feels "[t]he indecisions of the last few weeks ... gone like a nightmare at daybreak" (150). In Annice's plot line, Taylor leans heavily on the dangers women incur when they venture out into the world of urban singles. She pulls no punches in depicting the ways Annice puts herself in harm's

way until, choosing marriage, she acquires protection from the devious men who think nothing of taking advantage of her. Marriage clearly represents safety and security, mirroring the dominant cultural narrative in some, but not all, key ways. As Elaine Tyler May writes,

> Nonmarital sexual behavior in all its forms became a national obsession after the war. Many high-level government officials, along with individuals in positions of power and influence in fields ranging from industry to medicine and from science to psychology, believed wholeheartedly that there was a direct connection between communism and sexual depravity. ... National strength depended upon the ability of strong, manly men to stand up against communist threats. ... According to the common wisdom of the time, "normal" heterosexual behavior culminating in marriage represented "maturity" and "responsibility;" therefore, those who were "deviant" were, by definition, irresponsible, immature, and weak. It followed that men who were slaves to their passions could easily be duped by seductive women who worked for the communists. (82)

In both Annice's and Pat's stories, men who do not respect the social institution of marriage are responsible for the women's misery. Without the stabilizing influence of a wife and home, they seem to be devoid of morals, endangering the safety of the female characters. One message of the novel to women readers, then, is that men who do not believe in marriage are trouble; even though the single life seems exciting, women should seek wholesome, reliable, kind men who want to get married. This portrayal of marriage as a container for men and men's sexual energy is related to the one May describes as commonplace in the 1950s. However, the sociologists, psychologists, and other commentators that May cites developed the premise of the "sexual depravity" that could develop in unmarried men in a different way. Instead of noting that such "irresponsible," amoral men posed a threat to women (who were often in positions of subservience to them), the "experts" took the stance that these "weak" and "immature" men, unprotected and uncontained by the institution of marriage (not women as such), were vulnerable to

attack and manipulation by, specifically, females working for the enemy. Taylor's novel is actually a switch-around of the dominant narrative of the benefits of domestic containment, in which the containment of *women's* powerful sexuality was "the focus of concern" for the "atomic-age family" (95). Although Taylor's novel is like the dominant narrative in that both offer a vision of a dangerous social world from which marriage provides an escape, it was not women's safety in a chaotic and disrupted world that the nation was mainly concerned about. Rather, the prevailing opinion was that "Outside the home (or even inside the home without a strong male authority), they [women] would become a dangerous, destructive force" (95). In this view, women are not in danger; they *are* the danger! In many cultural images and texts, it was the uncontained, unmarried woman who had the potential to become "the female bombshell" whose disruptive energy needed to be "'harnessed for peace' within the home" (98). In Taylor's novel, however, marriage is not marshaled for the defense of the nation, but rather as a source of protection for women who are at risk of being victimized by American modernity run amok.

If any character in Taylor's book would take issue with this construction of unmarried women as the source of danger to man and to the nation, it is Barby, who suffers the most violently at the hands of men uncontained, or imperfectly contained, by marriage. In her childhood, she has encounters with married men who hurt and exploit her, teaching her that even marriage is no guarantee that the potentially destructive force of male sexuality will be entirely contained. Barby's story reveals the limits of a form of sexual containment which does not consider the protection of vulnerable women and girls from sexual violence to be a main priority, or even truly a concern. While Taylor reifies

the basic premise of domestic retreat as a source of safety and stability, she also points to the ways the dominant version of the domestic narrative is weakened, morally and materially, by the effects of systemic sexism, misogyny, and male privilege.

Barby is raped at age thirteen by a married business associate of her father's. Her father, because his business depends on maintaining a good relationship with this associate, colludes with him in covering up the rape. He projects his feelings of responsibility for the attack and failure to protect his daughter onto his wife, whom he grows to hate. Then, blocked from "proper" expression in the conjugal bed, his desires begin to direct themselves in a twisted way toward Barby. As Lisa Walker expresses it in the "Afterword" to the Feminist Press edition of the novel, "what begins as protectiveness about his daughter's vulnerability turns into sexual possessiveness," and from there grows into full-blown "incestuous desire for his daughter" (188). Barby witnesses from a young age the was that marriage can fail to contain male sexual violence against women when misogyny is written into the national narrative of the domestic as defense. It is no wonder that when Miss Gordon, the woman she ends up dating (whose name is certainly a reference to Miss Stephen Gordon of The Well of Loneliness) asks her if she plans to "Perhaps get married and have a couple of nice children?" (115), Barby replies,

> "No, I'll never get married."
> "Don't you have a sweetheart?"
> "No, I hate men." (115)

By this time, Barby has also been manipulated into an ongoing, nonconsensual sexual relationship with her building superintendent, Rocco. Believing herself to be "ruined and rotten" from her first rape, "dirty so long now" that nothing she did or didn't do could make any difference (80), she gives in without a struggle to Rocco's sexual advances,

although they make her sick to her stomach, and she suffers a migraine after each encounter.

Ilene Gordon, an older woman, supervisor at the department store where Barby works, finally helps Barby to escape the terrible danger of single social life by offering her a home ans a stable, marriage-like, committed monogamous lesbian relationship. Everything about Ilene represents safety, security, and stability. Her appearance, in contrast to Barby's sexy looks (she imagines herself looking "like a fugitive from a burlesque show" (98)), bespeaks maturity, sensibility, and a strong sense of security flowing from within: "*Slim and tailored, and not so damn sexy...* She looked all of a piece. You couldn't imagine her being flustered or doing anything stupid or awkward. It seemed to Barby a good way to be, neat and integrated and without problems" (98). Ilene so personifies the security and stability that Barby craves that she begins to perceive these qualities in the world around her when she is out with Ilene – finally she can feel "relaxed" around people who "looked assured; you couldn't imagine them having any sordid problems" (98). The people who populate Ilene's world – what comes to be revealed as the world a lesbian moves in – stand in sharp contrast to "all the serious, respectable, married men she knew," at whom she can no longer look without fear and suspicion, without "wondering what fearful secret lives were hidden by their everyday faces" (117).

The second time Ilene takes Barby to lunch, it is to a "dark little cubbyhole" of a place where "couples...looked ardently at each other across the small linen-draped tables" and "some of the couples, Barby noticed, were women" (114). In this "different world from any she had seen" – not because of the presence of gay couples so much as the

softer, "more personal" feel of it – Barby again experiences a feeling of safety. She is able to talk and answer questions "without self-consciousness" (114) – a rare occurrence for a woman who feels constantly conspicuous and constantly under threat. The restaurant that is not a "gay" spot (including only some lesbian couples among the straight couples) but yet is discreet and protective of its lesbian patrons, with "deferential waiters," dim candlelight and soft violin music (114) offers Barby a taste of safety and security that she associates with Ilene – and which she comes to see that she can share, through a committed lesbian partnership with Ilene.

A book given to her by Ilene finally reveals to Barby the specifics of what Ilene is proposing: "the passionate unselfish love of another woman. Barby was fascinated. There was a relationship, then, without force or fear. Tenderness was in it, and compassion" (116). This is one of Taylor's main points of intervention into the domestic consensus ideology: she asserts here that one needn't be heterosexual to enjoy the benefits of domesticity and marriage, cracking open a space for homosexuals to join the consensus, albeit under the constraints of the homophobic policies and prejudices of the day. When Ilene and Barby go to lunch together, they leave the department store separately. When they move in together, they maintain a decoy second bedroom and take separate cabs so that "nobody can actually prove anything" (164). Well aware that being discovered to be lesbians would probably cost them their jobs, both women conform to the rules of the closet, but they do so without complaint, and they don't seem to take the prejudice personally. Indeed, for Barby, the extra layer of privacy and discretion – the "automatic caution, necessary to keep private affairs from the public" (164) – seems to be part of what she finds so reassuring about this relationship. Ironically, it is once she

voluntarily takes on a relationship that must be kept secret that for the first time she feels connected with other people. Barby, who embraced city life at first because of its anonymity, its thousands of people whose opinions and inner lives needn't mean anything to her, at last feels her heart open to strangers she meets in the store (118). The safety she feels with Ilene is extreme – when she sees Ilene at work, she is "conscious of an intense pleasure at the sight of her. That was all. No anxiety. She was sure everything would work out all right" (118).

Regardless of the legal and cultural punishments for homosexuality, Barby sees lesbianism as perfectly natural, even a relief. Equating a long-term lesbian relationship with heterosexual marriage (except better, because it doesn't require men), Barby looks to her relationship with Ilene to provide the same benefits that were promised by the heterosexual marriage and home. Reading her first lesbian novel, she discovers with a sense of wonder, "There was a love between two individuals who understood and cherished each other because they shared the same nature. They could even pledge themselves to each other – perhaps not for a lifetime, but then, how many wives could count on their husbands to be faithful after the first weeks of marriage?" (117). This shows that Barby considers the commitment piece – "pledging themselves to each other" – to be one of the essential parts of a working, stable marriage.

A home, pleasingly furnished and materially comfortable, is also, in this novel's view, one of the main components of a marriage. Although Ilene's Chicago apartment is not a single-family house in the suburbs, it does boast some of the characteristics that make the suburban home so desirable. Ilene lives in an "expensive-looking" neighborhood, where "the strips of lawn between sidewalk and apartment buildings were

manicured"; that these buildings have lawn at all shows them to offer a taste of the feeling of privacy and self-sufficiency of the suburban home. The residents have "smart" cars. The building's "aura of money and splendor" provides an additional layer of insulation (135). The living room is beautifully furnished with a sofa "wide enough for five," but, further emphasizing the domestic bliss the two are about to share, Ilene describes the kitchen as the "best room in the house" (136). She sits Barby down at the kitchen table surrounded by "copper pots hanging on the wall and a shelf of spices in decorated jars" and serves her coffee cake (136). These details of domesticity would have struck a familiar chord with readers; indeed, Barby's scenes with Ilene are the ones in which the domestic comforts and the joys of conjugal homemaking are most extolled.

According to May, the majority of heterosexually-married Americans who lived out the domestic consensus ideology through marriage and homemaking in the 1950s sought a feeling of security, stability, and safety to counter the many anxieties of the era. "Domesticity," May writes, "represent[ed] the safest haven in the face of the dangers of the atomic age" (97). Barby certainly finds that feeling of security with Ilene; it grows from their earliest conversations, until finally, after making love and sealing her commitment to share a home with the older woman, she comes to feel that "Nothing could hurt her any more. She fell asleep in the circle of Ilene's arms, safe" (137). Domestic partnership with Ilene tangibly increases Barby's safety and security. First of all, although they both have jobs, Ilene enjoys a higher position and salary and supports Barby at a higher standard of living than she is accustomed to with her roommates in 3-B. Second, Ilene watches Barby's back at work, teaching her not only how to escape detection as a homosexual but how to actually win positive notice and court promotion.

Third, once she moves into Ilene's apartment, she escapes once and for all from the building super who has been sexually exploiting her. Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, Ilene protects and defends Barby from her father's manipulation and obsession. When the three go out for lunch together – as Barby's father is scheming to take her back home with him – Ilene takes charge of the situation, deftly using a combination of feminine wiles and female street-smarts to outmaneuver and manipulate *him*. She easily makes him think it is his own idea to leave Barby alone. Barby is able to sit out the conversation in silence, trusting that "Ilene will fix everything" (168).

It would be easy to read this novel as upholding the dominant mainstream values of marriage and domesticity by pointing to the book's ending and the way that all three characters are neatly paired off in marriage-type relationships, the majority with men. It is more interesting, and, I think, more helpful to complicate that reading by combining an analysis of the elements of the novel that *critique* the mainstream culture's misogynistic values with an awareness of the author's lifelong political commitments to feminism, socialism, civil rights, gay rights, and the peace movement – a broad spectrum of social justice concerns. Taylor wrote pulps in the 1950s to support herself financially, to make some quick money, and to that end, she worked within the requirements and restrictions of the genre. But she was always a woman writer with an activist conscience, and her pulp novels stood out for lesbian readers among the hundreds of available titles because of the ways they challenged the expectations of the genre. Beyond providing mild erotic entertainment for women who loved women, Taylor used her pulps to write lesbian-positive images into the national imaginary, and also to cast light on the rough edges of American society, the places where the contradictions between sexism, patriarchy, and

homophobia belied the nation's official image as the home of freedom, equality, and safety. Taylor's use of the domestic supported a call for greater national attention to the safety of women (including lesbians) and for an end to the state of gender inequality which put women at greater risk of victimization.

Valerie Taylor's Forgotten Legacy

Although Taylor's writing has not been recognized by academic literary critics as significant or canon-worthy, she has been honored by historians for her six decades of activism on behalf of the cause of lesbian and gay rights, among many other causes, and especially for her consistently forward-thinking attention to the interlocking hierarchies of privilege and marginalization that characterize American society and complicate attempts to organize around neatly bounded identity categories. It is the ability Taylor showed throughout her life to be deeply involved with specific issues, including identity-based rights movements, in specific historical moments, and yet transcend the issues and the identities to maintain an evolving commitment to equality, justice, and peace, that the prominent gay historian John D'Emilio celebrates in his article in the Windy City Times (a Chicago gay newspaper), titled "A Woman for All Generations." He admires the ability she showed to adapt to changing times, joining the organized homophile movement in the 1960s and "jump[ing] in with both feet" to the feminist and gay liberation movements in the '70s while many lesbians and gay men of Taylor's generation "kept a distance and remained discreetly in the closet" (D'Emilio 9). In D'Emilio's view, Taylor's "message to the younger generation was powerful, visionary and sometimes unsettling" – unsettling because Taylor continued to point to the limitations of identity-

based social movements (9). He cites a speech she gave at the Lesbian Writers' Conference she helped organize in the mid-'70s, in which she told attendees, "We need not choose between the struggle for world peace and the fight for women's liberation," and "The whole world should be our subject matter" (9). Ultimately, he terms her "a woman of the moment, a woman who changed with the times" (9), referring to her enthusiastic commitment to the feminist and gay liberation movements as they developed through the 1970s and '80s, and the way she also challenged those movements to push past the limits and borders of their philosophies.

Lesbian historian Marcia Gallo also found Taylor's engagement with intersecting hierarchies and oppressions to be both her most noteworthy trait and also her legacy to future generations. She quotes Taylor's 1979 poem, "The Sweet Little Old Gray-Haired Lady in Sneakers," which explores the complexity of Taylor's lived experience of intersectionality:

> I am a woman,
> a lesbian,
> a poet,
> poor,
> handicapped,
> radical,
> Indian,
> over seventy --
> an eight-time loser.
>
> How shall I not be
> a revolutionary?
>
> How shall I not see
> my sister in every woman,
> my brother in any man,
> my child to cherish in every child?

> When they dragged Jane Kennedy into solitary
> that was my arm the cops were twisting.
> When they dropped napalm on the rice paddies
> that was my skin on fire,
> that was my blood running out hot and sticky.
>
> Goddess,
> give me eight kinds of strength to fight back. (Taylor qtd. in Gallo par. 1)

Like D'Emilio, Gallo points out that Taylor was a "counterpoint to the stereotypical lesbian activist of the 1950s and 1960s." Unlike many other women who joined the early lesbian and gay rights groups of the '50s, who "described themselves as conventional except for their sexual nonconformity and were seen as politically liberal at best," Taylor was "an out and proud radical whose lesbianism was incorporated into her passion for social justice, just as the poverty and physical disabilities of her youth shaped her worldview as an adult" (par. 10). For Gallo, Taylor's social movement work and her writing were complementary aspects of one activist life, and are best viewed together. Taylor's "radicalism," Gallo writes, "provided a delicious complement to her success as one of the first, and best, of the era's lesbian pulp fiction writers" (par. 10).

This is a fitting characterization; indeed, the work Taylor did through her lesbian pulp writing to enlarge the space lesbians could occupy in the public imaginary was one small part of her work for lesbian and gay rights, which was itself part of a larger commitment to social justice. Yet her writing should also not be completely subsumed under the heading of "activist work." Taylor was not simply one of the lesbian pulp writers who produced material during the "Golden Age of Pulp;" she helped define that era, and was "one of its best." Her novels could not have had the impact they did, or done the cultural work they did, if they were not also successful as good fiction.

But while accolades for Taylor's gay activism generally include her books as important contributions to lesbian and gay culture, literary approaches to Taylor's work have not considered her social movement commitments in their evaluations of her writing's merit. Rather, the few reviewers and critics who have engaged with her 1950s work criticize it for being conservative. For example, a review published in the homophile magazine ONE for one of Taylor's 1960s novels suggests that as the hegemony of the domestic consensus ideology began to fade, lesbian readers could no longer be content with plot lines that included heterosexual marriage. Holding up 1963's Return to Lesbos as "refreshingly different from most lesbian novels" in its blatantly lesbian-positive beginning, middle, and happy ending, reviewer Geraldine Jackson wonders if it was written "as a penance for [Taylor's] earlier work," i.e., her 1950s pulps (21-22). And although Taylor continued writing lesbian romance fiction for lesbian-feminist presses through the '80s, and also saw her pulp novels republished for a new generation, the status of her early writing within lesbian literary criticism seems never to have recovered from the rejection of liberated 1960s and '70s lesbians eager to put a lot of distance between themselves and the repressed '50s. In one of the very few critical essays that deal specifically with Taylor's work, Joke Hermes compares Taylor's 1960 Stranger on Lesbos (unfavorably) with a lesbian romance published in 1986 by a different author, arguing, "When I read Emergence of Green, I had the strong impression that Katherine Forrest was rewriting Stranger on Lesbos, this time giving the book the *right* ending" (61), i.e., allowing the heroine to end up with her girlfriend instead of married to a man.

It is unfortunate that Taylor has not been taken more seriously as a lesbian writer working in the 1950s. As a result of the critical neglect Taylor's work has suffered, contemporary seekers of an American lesbian literary heritage have been deprived of a visionary antecedent (a self-identified member of the Lesbian Grandmothers of America (D'Emilio 9)) who understood, decades before the second-wave feminist movement awakened to this truth, that the hierarchies of oppression operative in the United States are interlocking and mutually constitutive, and that human liberation would not be achieved until women AND lesbians and gay men AND the poor AND the disabled AND members of racial minorities AND the elderly AND all other marginalized peoples, including those marginalized because of their "radical" ideas, enjoyed both freedom from oppression and the support and care of their fellow citizens in their times of need. Taylor's contributions to American lesbian literary heritage are best understood as a lifetime of work on and off the page; her progressive messages are best grasped when her literary and cultural productions are viewed together, as a whole. Her seven decades of activism, her socialist ideals and her dedication to peace are an essential context for her writing, a context which helps readers to recognize the critiques of American Cold War-era society Taylor embedded in her lesbian pulp romances.

In the late 1980s, Taylor recalled that she had begun writing lesbian pulps in part for economic reasons (she had already written a number of "straight" pulp novels for the mass market, earning money to pay for, among other things, a divorce lawyer (D'Emilio 9)), but also to offer a counterpoint to the unrealistic, male-fantasy versions of lesbian life that were suddenly showing up on the racks. "I wanted to make money, of course," she said, "but I also thought we should have some stories about real people" (qtd. in Keller

392). But unlike Ann Bannon, whose need to offer representations of real lesbian lives was met through presenting images of the urban lesbian subculture, Taylor's understanding of "real" lesbians' lives included an awareness of economic marginalization and anti-female/patriarchal violence. Writing in a medium designed to generate a rapid profit and needing the income the publishing corporations promised for original books that fit pre-set genre specifications, the critiques Taylor made were of necessity subtle and cloaked with rhetorical strategies that appeared on the surface to be non-threatening to mainstream values. Taylor told Studs Terkel late in her life, "There [was] always a backlash ... It was very frightening in the '50s, during McCarthy time" (qtd. in Terkel 312).

Nonetheless, when one reads Taylor's pulps through the appropriate lens, her pointed critiques of those mainstream values emerge. When we read with an awareness of Taylor's radical political commitments to peace and social justice, we begin to see the ways she inserts the "unhomely" into the domestic, forcing the illusion of women's safety and equality under U.S. early-Cold War-era democracy to break down. This kind of close, contextualized reading is necessary for critics today, especially those interested in reclaiming a lesbian literary inheritance, to understand the nuanced ways lesbian writers like Taylor responded to oppressive, hegemonic discourses about homosexuality, and offered positive alternatives that not only asserted the dignity and humanity of lesbians but also challenged the moral authority of the nation to make any such judgments at all, given its dramatic failure to protect democracy and equality at "home."

Chapter Five: From ONE to Many

Homophile Responses to Cold War Nationalism and Domestic Ideologies

Among the many genres of writing which saw a sudden influx of queer writing in the 1950s, one of the most interesting is the homophile press.[58] For the first time in the United States, gay and lesbian civil rights organizations sponsored nonprofit, amateur magazines with national distribution. These magazines are significant evidence of grassroots participation in the national conversation about the meanings of homosexuality. In them, we also find a more explicit and direct contestation of early Cold War era national policies regarding homosexuality, as well as such things as loyalty oaths and the defense of democracy. Writings in the movement's magazines acknowledged the cultural and structural power of the domestic consensus ideology and responded in a variety of ways, including skepticism and outright rejection.

This chapter traces the homophile movement's engagement with these powerful, state-sponsored discourses from the personal and political writings of the founder of the Mattachine Society, Harry Hay, through seven years of issues of ONE Magazine, the movement's most widely-read periodical. It examines the ways in which the domestic consensus ideology of the 1950s informed the goals and values of the nascent "homophile" movement, and explores the ways in which some homophiles, perceiving

[58] The term "homophile" was used mainly by members of the civil rights/activist/self-help organizations founded by gay men and lesbians in the 1950s, and by other writers and commentators who were in sympathy with the goals of these organizations. Meaning a person who loves people of the same sex, the word "homophile" was a rejection of the negative and clinical connotations of the word "homosexual," and also carried more formality than the slang terms lesbian and gay. "Homophile" was a self-chosen identity for a minority of gay men and lesbian, and it reflects a political affiliation as well as a sexual orientation. I use the word homophile to refer to the self-identified homophile organizations and their members; many of these also used the terms lesbian, gay, bisexual, and homosexual.

themselves to be “free” from an oppressive consensus ideology (as a result of their exclusion), were able to critique both the institutions of marriage and family and the state of democracy in America in the early years of the Cold War.

Harry Hay and the Homophile Movement's Radical Roots

In November 1950, Harry Hay and four friends brought into being the Mattachine Society in Los Angeles, California for the purpose of “liberating one of our largest minorities from…social persecution” (D’Emilio 9). The name derived from a medieval French brotherhood of bachelors who wore masks to lead dances during the “Festival of Fools” on the spring equinox. These dance rituals occasionally turned riotous as the original Mattachines led “peasant protests against the aristocracy” (Miller 334).

In 1950, Hay was still a card-carrying member of the Communist party and "a respected Marxist teacher" (Roscoe 38). His Popular Front-style activism emphasized cultural work in developing class consciousness. The Party, when Hay became involved in the mid-'30s, "called on artists to foster social consciousness and mobilize the masses through their art" (38). It was part of his leftist cultural work to teach classes which emphasized the forms of peasant and worker resistance to class oppression contained in European folk music and dance traditions such as the Festival of Fools. Hay envisioned his twentieth-century Mattachine Society as a band of “masked people, unknown and anonymous, who might become engaged in morale building and helping ourselves and others” (qtd. in Miller 334). The name invokes a tradition of rebellion by men whom Hay suspected might have been homosexuals (D’Emilio 67).

A prospectus for an organization called the "International Bachelors' Fraternal Order for Peace and Social Dignity, Sometimes Referred to as Bachelors Anonymous" – in which Hay's "preliminary concepts" for the group that became the Mattachine Society were first laid out – reveals much about how Hay and other founders saw the role of "organized homosexuals" within the political context of the late 1940s and early 1950s.[59] Some scholars have debated whether the Society's original structure of secret "cells," which protected the anonymity of members, should be attributed to the founders' shared background in leftist organizations or to the model of "Mason-type lodges" (D'Emilio; Kepner 80). The prospectus clearly draws from both of these sources in its visioning – for example, Hay imagines several "degrees" of membership, each with its coded insignia pin, and suggests, "Similarly to Shrine and Masonic practice, insignia worn at an unconventional angle may be used to designate distress or need – and must be acted upon by all other members as quickly as possible" (Hay 72). From the fraternal orders, Hay took the idea that members should be bonded as brothers[60], pledged to help each other at all times, through economic means such as mutual aid funds as well as through group-based emotional support and individual counseling for "members in emotional and psychological distress" (69). Hay also notes that his concept is "similar in both membership service and community service and social objectives as the well-known and respected 'Alcoholics Anonymous'" (65), lending support to the thesis that the Mattachine

[59] The complete document is reproduced in the collection of Hay's writings, edited by Will Roscoe, entitled Radically Gay: Gay Liberation in the Words of its Founder. According to Roscoe, Hay first "drew up the prospectus for what became Mattachine" on August 10, 1948, but "no copy of this original version of the 'Call,' as Hay has always referred to it, has survived. The following text is a second, expanded version, hurriedly typed (and misdated July 7 instead of the actual date of July 9, 1950)" (61).

[60] Though, as Roscoe puts it, "the Mattachine organizers always conceived of the movement they were creating as being co-sexual" (62), that is, including both women and men, in the prospectus Hay suggests an "International Spinsters Order" as a "supplementary subsidiary of the main order" (Hay 72-73).]

society was a self-help group, that, like AA, it aimed to help its members integrate into the larger society despite their character flaws. Also in line with conventional wisdom about the homophile movement, the prospectus includes items about making first-person "data" available to "biologists, physiochemists, psychologists, and educators" about the real lives of homosexuals and inviting these professionals to address the group for members' enlightenment (66).

In its Masonic elements, the vision Hay had for the Society in its embryonic form can be linked to the role played by fraternal orders and similar organizations within many ethnic and racial minority communities in the U.S. in the first half of the twentieth century. For example, Martin Summers' study of African American freemasonry reveals many similarities between Hay's thinking and that of the freemasons. According to Summers, Grand Lodges of Prince Hall Freemasonry "administered insurance plans for their subordinate lodges," and "the mutual aid aspects of Masonry allowed these men to perceive themselves as fulfilling the role of community patriarchs" looking out for those less fortunate among them. Participating in mutual aid programs (especially as contributors) and being aligned with what was seen as an ancient tradition of brotherhood, in the case of African American freemasons, carried the benefits of enhancing self-esteem and the ways members perceived their place in society – benefits Hay thought the unorganized homosexuals of the early Cold War period needed. Furthermore, like the young homophile movement, members of African American lodges had need of special financial assistance when engaged in fighting oppression in the courts (Summers 39). Hay's prospectus provides for a fund to cover "legal services for all civil infractions, shakedowns, frame-ups, blackmail, slander, and unwarranted invasions of

personal privacy, as applicable legally to Androgynous experience" (Hay 67-68). In other words, like fraternal orders based around shared minority racial identity, Hay's "fraternity" based around shared minority sexual identity intended to defend members who were harassed by the state or by individuals on the basis of that identity. This was one of the ways in which Hay and those who shared his ideas formally established "gay identity" as a positive – or at least neutral – aspect of one's being.

Summers writes that in the practice of freemasonry, with its internal laws of representational democracy, "black Masons...were claiming a status of citizenship in an organization that transcended the boundaries and institutions of the nation-state" with its practices of segregation and racial oppression" (47). In his choice of symbols for the Order's insignia (the word Androgyne in Greek, the Hopi word for the role called "berdache" by anthropologists, and the "Egyptian Ankh, the sign of the Order of Pharaoh, the historic personification of the Androgynous Ideal" (Hay 71)), Hay also sought to connect members of his organization to what he saw as an honored social and political role which transcended history and nations. This imagery did not become part of the actual Mattachine Society. However, a more substantial form of engagement with politics on both the national and international levels did survive, and it formed the grounding for Hay's ideas both in Mattachine and beyond. This engagement can more appropriately be seen as the next development in Hay's intellectual leftism.

Section A of the prospectus, the "Statement of Aims and Purposes," provides a thorough discussion of the Order's situation in a particular national and international context, as Hay understood it. The prospectus begins by invoking the specter of the recently defeated Nazis to illustrate what Hay and his progressive friends saw as the dire

condition of freedom and "open communication" in the United States (Roscoe 60). In Section A-1 Hay positions his imagined organization against "encroaching American Fascism," which, "like unto previous impacts of International Fascism, seeks to bend unorganized and unpopular minorities into isolated fragments of social and emotional instability (Hay 63). The section continues its indictment of the repressive excesses of McCarthyist America by noting that "the full significance of the government indictment against Androgynous Civil Servants, veiled under the sentiment that they 'by the peculiar circumstances of their private lives lay themselves wide open to social blackmail by a Foreign Power,' lies in the legal establishment of a second type of GUILT BY ASSOCIATION" (63) which "made it impossible for Androgynes to secure employment" and, "equally with Guilt of Communist Sympathy BY ASSOCIATION, can be employed as a threat against any and every man and woman in our country as a whip to ensure thought control and political regimentation" (64).

This section's placement as the first item in the prospectus is indicative of the importance Hay placed on situating the homophile movement within a broad national political context. On one hand, Cold War anti-homosexual attitudes are equated with fascism and ascribed the goal of rendering "unpopular minorities" politically ineffective and invisible by keeping them "isolated" and in a state of internal "instability." The government, Hay charges, was blocking homosexuals form organizing, which they needed to do in order to avoid becoming scapegoats for the nation's rising panic (Roscoe 60-61). The early Cold War state, this prospectus charges, was also reneging on its democratic promises by imposing the policy of "guilt by association" and attempting "thought control." On the other hand, Hay also saw the state-sponsored oppression of

homosexuals as economic in nature, recognizing that as the Cold War escalated, more and more jobs in both the public and private sectors required security clearances, which known homosexuals were denied. As David Johnson notes, many "private industries, with no direct federal funding contracts adopted the policies of the federal government – the nation's largest single employer" (157). A security officer for an aircraft manufacturer said in 1955, "We feel that if a man is a security risk when he has access to classified materials, he is a security risk wherever he is in our plant" (qtd. in Johnson 157).

At the first meetings, the founders committed themselves to a systemic analysis of the oppression of homosexuals in America. They believed that gay people's experience with normative gender roles in the nuclear families in which they were raised led them to an "empty imitation of dominant social patterns" which gay men and lesbians would need to transcend if they were to develop a consciousness of homosexuals as an oppressed "class" and begin to fight on their own behalf (D'Emilio 65-66). The early Mattachine Society pledged to counteract internalized hatred by promoting positive values, an ethical homosexual culture, and pride in belonging to a community that contributed to human society in its own unique ways (p. 58). The Society grew rapidly, and the founders were soon unable to manage all of the discussion groups that sprang up across the region. But, it soon became apparent that not all the new members shared the beliefs of the founders.

In March 1953 a Los Angeles newspaper columnist suggested that if a "well-trained subversive" infiltrated the tightly organized homophile group, he would be able to "swing tremendous political power" (qtd. in D'Emilio 76). A miniature Red Scare broke out within Mattachine, some of whose members were frightened by that negative public

attention. By April, according to D'Emilio's meticulous account, the leadership had organized a two-day "democratic convention" for members to vote on a constitution, elect officers, and adopt an official position on Communism.

At the conference, two very different conceptualizations of what the Mattachine Society meant came into conflict. Founding members Hay and Chuck Rowland argued that the homosexual had a distinct identity and was an oppressed minority in the United States, while newer members countered with the position that gays and lesbians differed from heterosexual Americans only in their "deviant" sexual practices. This faction believed the Mattachine Society should not undertake to change society or its laws, but to help the homosexual adapt to his or her environment. Part of that adaptation would be to convince the mainstream to recognize the non-threatening, non-subversive nature of their organization. Hay and the others who opposed an official statement condemning Communism, the "second wave" members believed, would provoke the authorities into destroying the fledgling movement if they kept talking about classes and oppression. No anti-Communist declaration was passed by the convention (D'Emilio 77-80). Hay, Rowland, and the other original members, however, seeing that the issue was dividing the Society, decided to resign in "the hope that a unified movement would survive them" (Roscoe 140). Rowland and Dale Jennings, another of the five founders and then-editor of ONE Magazine, put their energy into the magazine while the Society distanced itself as rapidly as possible from its own radical beginnings (D'Emilio 87).

Hay thought the ideological differences between pre- and post-convention Mattachine were significant enough to constitute two distinct organizations, and in later years referred to them as Mattachine Society I and II ("Letter to The Ladder" 151). Hay's

biographer Will Roscoe describes the reconstituted society's "repudiation" of the original group's goals of "foster[ing] self-esteem and build[ing] identity" (139) and the founders' orientation toward preserving and extending freedom, peace, and human rights on the national and international levels. The original Mattachine was based on a discussion-group format where the opinions of all participants, at least in principle, received equal weight and respect, a procedure rooted in the tradition of Marxist organizations that Hay had been involved in during the 1930s and '40s, where authority was believed to reside in the group ("Untitled" 89). In the second version of the organization, discussion groups "were replaced with educational forums in which hetero sexual [sic] psychiatrists expounded their theories...while well-dressed Queers nodded in approval" (Roscoe 139). The figure of the Mattachine itself, which Hay had called "a militant and political" folk symbol of the power of "the lowly and oppressed [to] rise again from their despair and bandage by the strength of *their own faith* and *their own self-created dignity*" ("The Homosexual and History" 112-113), became, in the 1956 pamphlet Homosexuals Today: A Handbook of Organizations, "a medieval *court* jester, who 'lived and moved in circles of nobility'" (Roscoe 139). This revision is representative of the Society's shift away from class consciousness and toward elitism and upward mobility. Nonetheless, taking seriously the leftist, Popular Front ideals out of which the first homophile organization grew allows us to pay attention to the ways in which strands of thought that were non-adaptationist, in fact rebellious against the dominant national culture, remained within the writings produced by the movement, even as the Mattachine Society's leadership attempted to distance the organization's name from the kinds of representations,

perceived as "un-American" during the Red Scare years, that they feared would bring undue negative attention to the organization's homosexual members.[61]

ONE Magazine and Contention Within the Homophile Movement

ONE, the first publication of the homophile movement, published its first issue in January 1953, less than one year after Jennings, its first editor, successfully defeated a "lewd and dissolute behavior" charge after being a victim of police entrapment (D'Emilio 70). Although the idea for a homophile magazine developed out of a Mattachine Society discussion group and many of its writers began in Society leadership positions, ONE Incorporated was from its inception a separate entity (70). Especially after the convention later that year, the two entities moved in different directions, with ONE upholding more of "Mattachine I's" traditions of free communication and political theorizing and agitation, although it should not be seen as coterminous with that organization. Notably absent from the magazine's leadership was Harry Hay, who said later, "My association with ONE, Inc. over the last eight years might loosely be described as that of – more often than not – a loyal opposition. In education, for instance, the writer [Hay] has up to now agreed with many of their directions but not with many of their positions and/or postulates" ("Letter" 151). The magazine claimed to espouse no agenda

[61] Martin Meeker (2001) has argued that a closer examination of the Mattachine Society's internal documents and interviews with its members show that "the Mattachine Society's presentation of a respectable public face was a deliberate and ultimately successful strategy to deflect the antagonisms of its many detractors," and that "by wearing the Janus-faced mask of respectability, the Mattachine Society perfected the politics of irony and even the practice of camp" (81). His discussion of the Society's actions and activism, conducted behind this mask of respectability, and his argument that the later Mattachine was at least as radical, in different ways, as its earlier incarnation, is quite compelling and persuasive. Because the issues of the Mattachine Review published during this period, and thus the society's main contributions to the national conversation about the meanings of homosexuality, remained mainly in the realm of respectability, and did not contain the diversity of opinion seen in ONE during the 1950s, I do not discuss it here.

except to print any and all views on the position of the homosexual in America (and abroad). ONE guaranteed anonymity to its contributors as well as its readers. Some writers chose to use their real, full names. Others used a pseudonym, just a first name, or a single initial. Still others identified themselves by their city or even their occupation ("A Minister," Letters, ONE Oct. 1954). ONE's sales reached more than 2,000 per month within months of its first issue. By the mid-1950s its subscriptions had grown to above 5,000 (D'Emilio 109). The magazine was also sold at newsstands in a few cities, and many readers wrote in to say that they passed their copies on to gay and lesbian friends. ONE was an entirely volunteer effort. Individual issues sold for 20 cents in 1953 (this price later rose to 50 cents), and advertisers for the magazine were hard to come by; staffers put their weekend and evening hours into the project, and much of the material published was contributed by readers.

In a July 1959 editorial, associate editor William Lambert reflects on the magazine's history. ONE's stated mission, he writes, was to be "a forum for the wide range of opinion which exists in the Gay World" (4). Over the years the opinions expressed in ONE's pages had often conflicted, provoking complaints from readers; other protests arose when the magazine published articles by "those writing about homosexuality from the sidelines," ranging from "true scientists, to the man in the street, to the crack-pots" (p. 4). He notes that the convictions of the editors themselves can be discovered only in the editorials themselves, and that those convictions have remained the same over time: essentially, that sexual acts between consenting adults should not be regulated by law, and that any oppression of homosexuals or the homosexual "Way of Life" is wrong (4, 31). ONE's editors would often publish pieces they knew would be

controversial for the purpose of provoking debate – and debate, via full-length essays submitted by readers as well as letters to the editor, was lively.

The magazine maintained a gender balance on its editorial board throughout the 1950s; despite some critics' perceptions of male dominance, a woman, Ann Carll Reid (a pseudonym for Irma Wolf) served as editor in chief for over five years (Kepner 11). Although male writers predominated in its pages, the editors (and readers) made frequent appeals to women to submit to the magazine and even things out. Introducing a 1998 collection of his ONE writings, Jim Kepner recalls, "If we received fewer manuscripts by women than by men, we printed virtually every acceptable one" (11). A bevy of written responses to ONE's plea for donations of one dollar per reader to keep the magazine alive, printed in the August 1955 issue, reveals the economic diversity of its readership. Mr. B. of Montreal writes that he is sending $25, which he considers only a "token" toward discharging the debt he feels he owes ONE for its very existence. Mr. L., of Delaware, writes that he has been out of work for months and has had to sell his car and his television set to pay the bills, but is sending in his dollar and begs the editors "Please don't think me lying about my inability to send more." Miss D. sends ten dollars from New Hampshire, though she wishes "it could be 100 x $10," and pledges to send a dollar a week as her personal "ONE FUND" – a pledge that an editor's note informs us she kept faithfully (19-21). Despite ONE's attention to gender and economic balance, however, there is little evidence of racial diversity in the magazine's 1950s issues. Alexandra Chasin (2000), for example, draws attention to the invisibility of gays of color during the early years of the gay press.

ONE shared its audience with two other major homophile magazines, the Mattachine Review and The Ladder, publications of the Mattachine Society and the lesbian group Daughters of Bilitis, which emerged later in the '50s.[62] The three magazines advertised in each other's pages, and letters to the editor occasionally revealed some confusion as to whether or not they were, in fact, published by a single organization (see, for example, ONE, Feb. 1959, p. 27). The Review's circulation is estimated to have averaged about 2,200 copies per month, and the Ladder, about 500 (D'Emilio 110), although readership was undoubtedly higher, as, like ONE's readers, individual subscribers shared their copies with their circles of gay and lesbian friends. Chasin writes that the "Mattachine Review in particular" (that is, in comparison with ONE) "seemed to accept the characterization of homosexuals as sick and deviant, but it pleaded for acceptance nonetheless" (263). D'Emilio, in his analysis, groups all of these magazines together as mouthpieces of groups with similar adaptationist agendas. Writes D'Emilio, "Again and again, they minimized the differences between heterosexuals and homosexuals, attempted to isolate the 'deviant' members of the gay community from its 'respectable' middle-class elements, stressed the responsibility of lesbians and gay men for their second-class status, and urged self-reformation" (113). I argue that closer attention to ONE Magazine in particular (and the others, to a more limited extent) reveals a far greater variety of opinion than has been commonly acknowledged. In fact, in ONE's pages, gay and lesbian writers had an opportunity to develop positions contrary to those of the dominant culture, not only taking on the negative attitudes toward homosexuals prevalent in the mainstream media, but also challenging the naturalness and desirability

[62] The Ladder, with its specifically lesbian focus on the issues facing homosexuals during the 1950s, is the subject of the next chapter.

of the domestic consensus ideology and questioning the United States' view of itself as the best-qualified leader of the "free world."

This is not to suggest that adaptationist, assimilationist, and conformist viewpoints were absent from ONE Magazine. On the contrary, since ONE's editors encouraged – and even provoked – disagreement, arguments for and against adaptation were aired regularly. Throughout the decade, complaints about the supposed negative impact of butches and "swishes" on the good reputation of the ordinary homosexual were a regular topic of letters to the editor. In her three-page January 1958 diatribe against what she perceived to be ONE's failures, Geraldine Jackson singled out the press review column "Tangents – News and Views" by Dal McIntyre (one of several of Jim Kepner's pseudonyms (Kepner 1998)) as an example of the magazine's "negative" attitude about homosexuality. Referring to McIntyre's reports on police raids in gay bars, Jackson writes,

> Don't you think it's about time you selected the "type" of homosexual you wish to reach through your magazine? If you wish to reach and defend the type of person who is constantly being picked up in this or that tavern or beach shore or what not, then go ahead. But the self respecting homosexual is not with you. He seldom, if ever, goes to those places in the first place, and he's not too sympathetic with the kind of deviate who does go there and just asks for trouble with the law. (27)

She goes on to demand, "Cut out writing about highly masculine women and sissy men – we're sick of that too! No wonder the public thinks that's all there are in this business." In Jackson's telling turn of phrase, the magazine had deceived her high hopes by becoming "more and more anemic and limp-wristed" (ONE, Jan. 1958, pp. 27-29).

While Jackson's 1958 submission was probably the lengthiest rant about ONE's failure to appropriately chastise the gender-deviant butch or "swish" and represent the

"average" homosexual's well-adjustedness to the (heterosexual) public, it was certainly not the first. The September 1955 "Letters" section includes *three* that deal with the subject, or, at least, one half of it: the swish, a term prevalent in the 1950s for an effeminate gay man. In one of these, Mr. P. of Richmond, VA argues that a responsible homophile press should educate the homosexual about appropriate behaviors. "Let us educate our 'neurotic fringe' group to be men and women who deserve the respect of the community," he writes. "I am quite sure that so long as we have 'flits' and 'pansies' who want sympathy, we will not have tolerance and understanding." D. contends that if ONE were to fulfill its self-help obligation, its "mailing list would not only increase many fold, but would contain the names of many of our political, social, and educational leaders who are members of your 'mystic Brotherhood'" (a reference to the magazine's Coleridgean epigraph) (27). In theory, visibly gender-deviant homosexuals could be disassociated from those homosexuals who were able to pass as straight if the magazine described as "the voice of America's homosexuals" (ONE, July 1959, p. 4) identified gender deviants as not belonging to the community.

ONE did not take an editorial stand against "swish," nor did it cease to print essays and letters urging homosexuals to act more like heterosexuals. The same column that carried P.'s letter included a short note from Mr. T. of New York, NY, who writes that "I know for myself I don't find the real 'swishy' stories of much interest but looking at it from the view point of those who do like them I think that you do manage to get out an informative, interesting and thought provoking booklet" (ONE, Feb. 1955, p. 26). Considering John D'Emilio's observation that many of the arguments that were suppressed in the other homophile magazines tended to be hashed out in ONE (1983, p.

14), T.'s comment provides both a refreshing spot of middle ground between heated opinions and an indication that the magazine was having at least some success in living up to its commitment to publish the range of perspectives on gay and lesbian life.

Domestic Consensus Ideology: Recognition and Rejection

Cold war concerns were present in the magazine throughout the decade as contributors debated the wisdom of interfering in politics in the McCarthy era or requiring loyalty oaths to protect members of the ONE corporation from investigation and exposure. Many expressed a preoccupation with conforming to the mainstream and argued that homosexuals with overtly deviant looks or behaviors, the butch and the "swish" especially, should be ostracized from the homophile community. However, there was also a conspicuous and sustained strain of dissent. Over and over, one finds a recognition and rejection of the suburban nuclear family ideal. Many writers not only saw themselves as cut off from that ideal but describe it as a harmful, emotionally empty dream. Some claimed that, in fact, the homosexual was the ideal critic of the deep flaws in heterosexual society. Moreover, there was a segment of the community that presented the homosexual, who by nature was freed from the domestic ideology of the mainstream, as the true defender of democracy from the threats of conformity and repression represented by both Communism and the American government.

Most issues of ONE in the 1950s included two or three (or more) pieces of creative writing – fiction and poetry dealing with some aspect of homosexual life – sent in by readers. The writing varies greatly in quality as well as in the particulars of setting, tone, and plot, but all deal with some aspect of homosexual life (usually the quest,

successful or thwarted, for love). After a 1954 issue of the magazine was blocked from the mails under charges of obscenity (a charge that was defeated at the Supreme Court level in 1958) (D'Emilio 115), the editors made it clear that no erotic activity could occur in the stories or poems, although innuendo abounded. Plots ranged from a business trip to Bangkok with a young male prostitute for a guide, to the first awakening of a boy's desires, to a morning-after conversation between two women in bed together. A theme that recurs with surprising frequency, though, is the recognition and rejection of the suburban domestic ideal.

One of the most dramatic illustrations of this theme is frequent contributor Jody Shotwell's short story "The Ironing," appearing in the September 1955 issue under the regular column "The Feminine Viewpoint: By and About Women." The scene is a suburban neighborhood. As evening gathers, the two characters, Willa and Deb, are visiting in Willa's backyard. Their young sons are playing together while the mothers watch and chat. Across the street the neighbors are having cocktails on their patio. It seems like a scene of perfect domestic bliss, but we soon find out that both women are desperately unhappy. Deb tells Willa that she does her housework (in this instance, ironing) every night "until one, two o'clock in the morning" (24). "How can I tell you?" Deb whispers to her friend. "Willa, he's a brute. He won't let me alone. He drinks, and … God, are all men like that? Is your husband like that?" (25). Willa understands: while she waited for her husband to return from his business trips, she at first greeted him with pleasure and desire, but eventually "loneliness had built itself a shell of numbness" until finally "when he came to her now in love…she felt sickened and revolted" (25). After these confidences (and an electric touch of hands) Deb goes home to her work and Willa

makes up her mind to join the party across the street after putting her son to bed and cleaning up after his bath. When she turns to leave, however, she finds Deb has come to her door. The story ends with their embrace (25).

This story is remarkable for its emphasis on the emptiness of the suburban ideal. Deb's abusive husband drives her to seek an ironic satisfaction in housework, the only occupation open to her; she throws herself into it, but is miserable. Willa, on the other hand, does not blame her husband for her misery at all. "Whatever was wrong between them," she reflects, "wasn't his fault. He didn't even know there *was* anything wrong. He could never understand, in a million years, what was happening to her" – despite the fact that his intimate touches cause her "disgust" (25). Her husband is affectionate and a good economic provider, her son reasonably well-behaved, and her home comfortable, yet she withdraws "to live within her woman-body…chaste and inviolate" and half-heartedly "[goes] through the ritual" of caring for her son (25). There is so little in the domestic ideal to satisfy these women's needs that they reject it, dramatically, not through divorce or extramarital heterosexual affairs – which would legitimize, at least, the inevitability of male-female relations – but with the act of a homosexual coupling.

A different kind of recognition and rejection is at play in J. Lorna Strayer's "The Relative Interlude," third place winner in ONE's 1954 fiction contest and published in December of that year. The story opens with the thoughts of a middle-aged mother as she gazes out her kitchen window. She reflects with pride that her home has maintained its "neat, respectable appearance" (14) despite the family's financial difficulties. She lifts her gaze to the road running by the house and the "suburban homes" coming "closer every year," and thinks that one of her favorite things about the old house is its location:

soon it, too, will be in the heart of suburbia. She watches her son's visiting friend walking across the yard and returns to her task: "She turned and began to wipe the stove. Her hands moved gently and lovingly over the stark whiteness, lingered around the push-buttons and with painstaking care cleaned and rubbed the chrome trim until all signs of cooking vanished" (16). Only then do we realize her twenty-two-year-old son is in the kitchen with her, "helping with the dinner dishes because he had always liked to do things around the house" (17).

They get into a disagreement about the son's friend because he is a city boy, older than her son and college-educated. She doesn't trust him – but her son says "He's the first person I've ever known who understood me." His mother's eyes are described as looking like "she was in pain" (17). She tells him he should come home and look for a job in the area, adding, "With the girls all married, you're all I have left." Becoming upset, he tells her, "Forget it. I'm going down to the field." Through the window the mother watches the two men walk away together into the distance until they look "miniature and unreal" (17).

In this story, the mother's values are so prohibitive to the gay son's happiness that he becomes "unreal" to that world. The mother is concerned with respectable appearances, with taking part in the suburban dream. She cannot afford to move to suburbia – but suburbia comes to *her*, reinforcing (or buying into) the propagandized position that the American suburban home is available to families of all economic classes, just as Nixon insisted it was to Khrushchev during the Kitchen Debate. She is so intensely a part of the world of commodities, appliances, and professionalized homemaking that her attachment to the stove is described in terms of love. And she is an

extreme example of dedication to motherhood (echoing Philip Wylie's neurotic "Momism") as the source of meaning in life, wanting her son to remain at home with her although he is grown. There is no comprehension in that world for a gay lifestyle. The son rejects the values of the domestic ideal by physically walking out the door.

Homophiles and the Parenting Imperative

In "The Relative Interlude," as we saw, part of the domestic ideal's menace to the homosexual's happiness was "over-mothering," the mother's desire to keep her grown son a little boy forever. May reports that during the early Cold War years, anxiety about the nation's fitness to contain the Communist threat translated into fears that an overabundance of mothering would lead to a generation of mother-dependent sissies and "perverts," weak-willed men who would be unfit to defend democracy. This phenomenon was popularly known as "Momism," and believed to create homosexuals (May 129-130). Philip Wylie coined the term in his 1942 book Generation of Vipers, intended to acquaint America, "a Christian nation at war" (3), with its moral flaws. An entire chapter (Chapter 11: "Common Women") is devoted to the problem of the overbearing wife and mother, that is, the "Mom" who saps the virility of every male in her vicinity. By keeping her sons dependent on her care and attention, and by engineering a premature Oedipal confrontation between son and father (so that the son must "lose," and so never become a man in his own right), the Mom, according to Wylie, kept American boys from attaining emotional maturity and heterosexual fulfillment (195-196).

Far and away, however, those who approached the topic in the pages of ONE saw Momism not as the *cause* of homosexuality, but as an obstacle to the happiness of the man who was already a homosexual. Nonetheless, the magazine also contains many references to moms who fit the Momism stereotype, and that stereotype, when it comes up, is not questioned in its validity. Both male and female fiction writers present Momist-style characters, portraying them as delusional women who deserve either pity or contempt. In Strayer's story, the mother's smothering and her criticisms of her son's friend/lover are paranoid responses to an urban world she sees as taking her boy away. The gay man recognizes that this Momist mom is keeping him from adult (sexual) happiness. Though feminized (he enjoys doing housework), he is hardly weak-willed; he walks out, escapes his mother's grasp.

A third short story, "Four O'Clock Tea" by John Paul Tegner (August 1955), gives another biting indictment of Momism. The story is written as the monologue of a middle-aged, widowed mother speaking to a friend who drops by for tea. Her grown son lives at home (of course she does not realize that he is gay) and the story is a chronology of the ways in which she has systematically, if with the best intentions, thwarted his attempts to escape. George, the son, tried to go away to college, but she brought him home after just a few months, complaining of heart problems (7-8). Later he began attending meetings of a theater discussion group, which caused her to worry, and he gave them up. (Interestingly, she responds to the friend's unrecorded question, "Oh, no, that isn't what I meant at all! I never felt the meetings were subversive…Yes, I know. But what I meant was…" She is scandalized that her friend could imply a Communist taint, and rushes to defend her alert patriotism.) At the meetings, though, he met his boyfriend

Walter, and when a widower began courting his mother the two made plans to move in together – but at her insistence that George be allowed to live with them, the suitor broke off his attentions, and the trap door again closed over George. The boyfriend, hearing of these developments, came to the house to persuade George to leave, calling his mother "You old bitch!" Mother, believing the two would come to violence over the insult, physically bars the door to prevent George from going to his lover (8-9). At the end of this sad tale George enters and his mother tells him, "Throw back your shoulders, dear. You're getting so stooped…" (9). We see that George is a beaten man.

The mother guilty of Momism is quite clearly not the cause of George's homosexuality, but the constant obstacle to his fulfillment as a gay man. Homosexuality itself is presented as a potentially liberating force, one that could provide George with an escape from his domineering mother, if she did not successfully block him at every turn. However, the liberating power of homosexuality is constructed at the expense of the female character, who is the personification of all the most alarmist anti-female stereotypes of the day. In other words, the story may have a gay-positive message, but it does not have a feminist one; it reproduces the idea that the woman who attempts to contain or limit male sexual autonomy is the enemy whom all men should fear and despise.

Many of ONE's contributors saw the domestic ideal as an oppressive force which the homosexual would have to recognize and reject in order to live a fulfilling life. The non-fiction sections of ONE, however, offered at times a different perspective. In essays, columns, and letters to the editor, there appeared a vocal segment of the homophile community that believed homosexuals and the domestic ideal had nothing to do with

each other. Some thought this situation was disheartening, believing that the homosexual could never be happy because he or she could never integrate into the mainstream or live by its values. Others, like the poets cited in the epigraphs to this dissertation, found it exciting: the homosexual, released from the conformist imperative, lived a freer and more satisfying life than any married heterosexual.

The capstone of the domestic consensus ideology of the 1950s was complete faith in procreation as the ultimate satisfaction. May's research with the Kinsey Longitudinal Study survey data reveals that married couples – before and after childrearing – believed that parenting provided life's greatest fulfillment. Childless couples or individuals were seen as irresponsible, immature, materialistic, selfish, and lazy (May 120) – or as Mannes put it, lacking in humanity. Even at the height of the baby boom, the press revealed widespread, frantic fears that birth rates would go down, leading to "race suicide" for the Free World (May 121). Having many children and raising them to stand firm against Communism was an expression of national loyalty and civic virtue. May cites writer Louisa Randall Church as naming children "a 'defense – an impregnable bulwark' against the terrors of the age" (qtd. in May 120). In such an atmosphere of consensus, how could the homosexual respond?

As has been discussed in earlier chapters, countless homosexuals *did* marry and have children with members of the opposite sex.[63] As a rule, however, ONE's contributors discouraged this assimilation tactic. The February 1959 issue includes a letter from Mr. C.M. of Massachusetts, asking Dr. Baker's advice in just such a dilemma. He had decided to propose to "a country girl who is beautiful but dumb" in order to

[63] See, for example, Donald Webster Cory's autobiographical The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach (Greenberg: New York, 1951).

protect himself from the public's suspicions. Even his courtship, it seems, changed people's opinions of him: "People who formerly wouldn't speak to me," he writes, "now go out of their way to be friendly." Yet he worries whether he is "a coward" or "just wise" and asks Dr. Baker if it is "wrong for me to channel my passions and desires along the accepted lines." Interestingly, he adds that although he is "gay and…always will be," he feels that "with effort [he] can manage to perform as an acceptable husband" – that is, presumably, engage in sexual intercourse and father children (26). Baker responds by noting the conventional wisdom about what makes a good marriage (mutual affection and sexual attraction) and raises points about his seeming hostility toward women ("beautiful but dumb"). Then she writes, revealingly, that she is "sure that many readers of this column have tried the same 'escape' method and can tell you what an unsatisfactory solution this was." Her conclusion is that conformity is simply not worth it for the homophile, asking C.M., "just how many people are you going to fool and what have you really gained when you get a few more to speak to you? Wouldn't it be a lot more comfortable and agreeable to work out a partnership…with one of your own sex?" (26).

A December 1955 editorial by Robert Gregory takes the point still further. He writes in response to a book called Homosexuality by Donald J. West, which characterized ONE Magazine as "rather pathetically…begging for sympathetic understanding," and claimed that homosexuality was a form of immaturity in which one stalled on the road to full heterosexual development (21). Gregory responds with the rhetorical question, "Cannot one of these dear, studious people imagine, just for the sake of hypothesis, that possibly there is nothing whatever normal about 'relations with the opposite sex'?" He calls society "whip-lashed" by archaic religious laws and closed-

minded scientists, and compares those who proclaim the absolute rightness of heterosexual marriage to lab rats and their "blind stumblings through the mazes" (22). Gregory pulls the domestic ideal up by its root by declaring that heterosexual sexuality is neither natural nor desirable.

Gregory, in fact, claims that uncontrolled heterosexuality will lead to nothing less than catastrophic *over*population. He argues that the "unhappy practice" of heterosexuality "has mainly succeeded in populating the streets and highways with throngs of miserable entities, plagued by problems and delinquencies, unwanted by anyone – even by themselves" (22). Here, he turns on its head the rhetoric of the Lavender Scare which linked homosexuality to juvenile delinquency. Surprisingly, fears of overpopulation as an argument *for* homosexuality is a recurring theme in ONE's pages, especially in the late '50s. A March 1958 report on a conference sponsored by ONE Institute mentions it twice. In a debate over the relative merits of homosexuality and heterosexuality, the former team "cited the mass waves of excessive births now engulfing many parts of the world" (7). In a subsequent round table in which the question "Is homosexuality a social necessity?" was discussed, some participants held that "homosexuality was a brake on overpopulation" (9). In April 1959 Herman Stoessel claimed in his essay "The Decline and Fall of Marriage" that overpopulation was a great threat to the world, adding, "The family man cannot, if he is responsible, just go on reproducing" (8), while that, of course, was exactly what mainstream society was telling the family man to do. And in his August 1958 polemic "I Am Glad I Am a Homosexual," reprinted in the collection We Are Everywhere, Hollister Barnes (a pseudonym for Dorr Legg) took the point to its extreme by explicitly calling, not simply

for population control, but for eugenics. Barnes argues that "by arranging race-perpetuation a little better…we just might happen also to end up with far fewer monsters, dwarfs, cretins, morons, and all the picturesque horde" (325).

One more comment from the "social necessity" round table (ONE, March 1958) bears mentioning in relation to the homophile and the Cold War-era family. Participants were discussing the possibility that homosexuals might be inherently better suited than heterosexuals for certain jobs. The stereotypical assumption that homosexuals had special artistic talents was mentioned, and that, supposedly being naturally sensitive, they might make better counselors. Unlike men with children and wives, homosexuals were described as freer to travel for their jobs. It was then suggested that "jobs around x-rays or nuclear labs, which might endanger one's genetic structure, ought to be limited to those who aren't likely to have children" (9). This statement was made at a time when homosexuals, as security risks, were absolutely barred from working with such sensitive technologies. This anonymous contributor not only believed that as a homosexual his childless condition was socially valuable, but he offered his support for Cold War research sponsored by a government that distrusted him implicitly, even at risk to his own genetic code.

Freedom and Democracy: The American Homosexual's Civic Responsibility

Again and again, the writers of ONE Magazine employed the rhetoric of freedom. In some cases – notably in the magazine's fiction – it was freedom sought, freedom from an oppressive domestic ideology which kept the homosexual from self-fulfillment. There was also the concept of homosexuality as naturally liberating; gay men and lesbians

could be seen as free from having to conform to the empty social institutions of the suburban family which oppressed heterosexuals. As the magazine developed its identity throughout the 1950s, surviving court battles, investigations, and economic difficulties, its writers seemed to feel freer and freer. A trend emerged in which some homosexuals began to see themselves as truly the freest of Americans.

Some writers began to position the homophile movement's participants as the proper critics of the flaws in heteronormative society and as the last defenders of real democracy and civil liberty. This was not a new tactic for members of an oppressed American minority to adopt. Labor unionists and African American civil rights organizers had for decades charged the United States with failing to live up to its democratic promises. The Cold War environment in which the United States envisioned itself as the leader of the free world and role model of democracy for all nations gave black Americans in particular an opening to bring their cause before the government: with African Americans suffering brutal oppression in their own country, in front of the eyes of the whole world, how could America possibly claim to speak for "liberty and justice for all"? The argument was effective, and helped bring about important civil rights reforms during the 1950s.[64] That, however, did not make it a miracle cure for all social ills. Gerald Sullivan has argued, in fact, that as the black civil rights movement's claims on American democracy in the Cold War years came to be seen as more and more legitimate, some politicians turned to the "more defenseless," less socially respectable homosexual population as a new scapegoat and campaigning tool. Citing an investigating committee formed by the Florida state legislature that waged a particularly

[64] See Mary Dudziak, 2000, and Penny Von Eschen, 1997.

hard campaign against gays and lesbians in educational institutions between 1952 and 1965, Sullivan writes, "When [the committee] was prevented from investigating and harassing black civil rights groups … [it] began to look for a different raison d'etre" (1978). Despite this cultural fallout, some of ONE's contributors dared to argue that the homosexual, like other minorities, was in a privileged position to critique America's shortcomings in the project of democracy.

The October 1953 issue includes an anonymous letter to the editor from a Santa Monica, CA civil service employee. This person writes that there is talk in government circles of the magazine being subversive. The letter-writer begs the magazine (and also the Mattachine Society) to "require their staff and members to sign Loyalty Oaths and obtain nation wide [sic] recognition with the sanction of the United States Government in their undertakings to obtain acceptance and adjustment of this minority group into the National Society making them citizens this country can be proud to have" (10). Positions on "adjustment…into the National Society" would remain ambivalent throughout the decade. As an institution, the magazine, however, maintained its opposition to loyalty oaths of any kind. As the years progressed, writers became more and more outspoken about the national culture that demanded them.

May's survey research shows that the stable nuclear family, as the basic unit of American society, was seen in the early Cold War years as the bedrock of a stable democratic nation. By April 1959, Herman Stoessel was arguing in "The Decline & Fall of Marriage" that American society was in a state of chaos, and that this chaos was largely due to "the collapse of the family as the basic unit of loyalty" (6). Stoessel seems to partake, up to a point, of the conventional Cold War wisdom that placed the stable

family unit at the center of a healthy society. However, where other observers saw domestic bliss, Stoessel sees domestic corruption. The primary indicator of this corruption is "the spread of cheating and other 'respectable' forms of dishonesty," which he believes has given rise to social problems from "record crime rates" to the "racial crisis." The institution of loyalty oaths and the anti-Communist panic, Stoessel goes on to contend, are themselves symptomatic of a society in which "cohesion and loyalty seem less certain" as the nuclear family collapses under its own weight (6).

Marriage itself, Stoessel contends, is inimical to a healthy erotic life – essential to "an individual's ability to function normally, cooperatively and creatively" (6) – because the "'till death do us part' clause" locks people into unnatural one-to-one relationships which breed jealousy and prevent "variety and experience, two prime requisites for growth" (7). In other words, the institution of marriage has run its adherents into a collective dead end. There is hope for society, however, in the person of the homosexual. According to Stoessel, gay men and lesbians, who have never been chained to the dying institution of enforced monogamy and who have learned that unrestrained promiscuity also breeds discontent, may be able to teach the heterosexual a new way "to give order and purpose to his relationships and cohesion to his community" (7). The present social chaos brings a certain freedom to experiment, a freedom Stoessel believes homosexuals have always enjoyed, but which is now systemic. His final caution is that homosexuals should not "spend their part of that freedom on getting a crack at the old marital system" (8). Imitation of an emotionally empty heterosexual institution, for Stoessel, would be a waste of homosexuality's enormous potential to induce widespread and radical social change.

Hollister Barnes' "I Am Glad I Am A Homosexual," mentioned above, brings together the diffuse threads of rebellion found in ONE's pages and winds them into a tightly-structured attack on the perceived lack of freedom in America. The recognition and rejection of domestic ideology is combined with the defense of civil and moral liberty to present the homosexual as radically *American* in an America gasping under the weight of an oppressive and unnatural consensus. In the first two sentences Barnes places the article's theme – pride in homosexuality – in the context of the April 1953 "democratic convention" that changed the course of the Mattachine Society. An early member of the Society, Barnes (Legg) invokes the red-baiting that drove Mattachine's founding members out of the organization they themselves had created when taking a stand for political change was deemed too dangerous for a group of homosexuals in the 1950s. The article begins, "'I am proud of being a homosexual.' This powerful affirmative statement, made by a speaker at the Constitutional Convention of the Mattachine Society, in April, 1953, acted as an electrifying catalyst" (Barnes 323). Indeed, it redefined the homophile movement and ONE itself, which chose to affirm the affirmation at the risk of being designated "subversive."

Pride in homosexuality, according to Barnes, is sadly lacking in the homophile community of 1958. The majority of the homophile community he terms "asexual" because of their renunciation of gay behavior, their desperate need to conform to mainstream mores in the futile hope of acceptance (324). On the other hand, the group "comprised mainly of those claiming to be more intellectually sophisticated, and of the flaming queen," being proud and not ashamed of their nature, believes "that homosexual men and women should be in every way as free to practice their sexual preferences as are

other segments of the population; that they should enjoy the same legal and social privileges as others, no more, but also no less" (324). Barnes deserves to be quoted here at some length:

> This rugged individualism has an almost anarchistic quality that is yet as American as the "hot dog." It is in the spirit of that old Colonial flag, emblazoned with a rattlesnake and the motto, "Don't tread on me." This is the individualism of the queen, flaunting make-up and a bracelet or two the face (sic) of an amused or embarrassed public, and of the intellectual, saying, "I am proud of being a homosexual," then throwing this declaration into the very teeth of public opinion. (324)

Barnes asks, rhetorically, whether this is simply brave talk to cover deep misery, or whether the homosexual should truly be seen as the champion of democracy in its dark age. Fascinatingly, he frames his answer not in terms of the civil liberties he has just demanded, but in terms of the mainstream consensus on the domestic ideal. May writes that the overwhelming majority of married couples dedicated themselves to making their lives together work, in spite of disappointed expectations. The respondents turned to therapeutic means to help them adapt. Psychotherapy was one such means. Another was the use of tranquilizers, or the abuse of alcohol. Rather than dissolve the "stable" family unit, couples found ways of "hanging together," of compromising, and of committing themselves to making the best of things, seldom even considering divorce (May 182). But to those who would claim that "surely…in domestic life…the homosexual is at a hopeless disadvantage," Barnes says that the reverse is true. As a gay man he is "glad to be spared the deadly monotonies of marital wranglings or, worse, still, (sic) the marshmallow puffiness of marital bliss." He considers himself "fortunate in having seen through the deadly deceptions of the procreative cycle – devouring energies, talents,

ambition and individual achievement, all in the name of that great communal juggernaut, The Family, before which church and state so abjectly debase themselves" (Barnes 325).

Here we can see the most dramatic example yet of recognition and rejection of the domestic consensus; Barnes is particularly perceptive in noting the role of natural institutions in enforcing it. But Barnes does not reject the mainstream family for its mediocrity, its failure to satisfy the expectations it embodies. Even the elusive realization of the ideal – bliss itself – is only a "marshmallow puffiness." The institution of the family is seen as an unnatural limitation on individual freedom and potential – that which is "as American as the 'hot dog'." The implication is clear: the domestic consensus which has held sway throughout the 1950s has not strengthened the nation but, like Communism itself, is a legally sponsored, if widely accepted, form of forced conformity, diametrically opposed to American democracy. And the homosexual shall lead them "when at least some of us shall have purged of such ritualistic tribal vestiges," according to Barnes; "[h]ow much nearer may we find ourselves to the moral freedom which is the right of each of us" (325). In its implication that the United States is not the perfectly free nation, the leader of the "free world," that it presents itself to be, this statement of Barnes' reflects the intellectual disconnect experienced by many members of minority groups, for whom the realities of inequality did not match up to the nation's promises.

Not surprisingly, this article provoked a storm of responses from the readers of the magazine. When a piece proved especially controversial, ONE added an installment to its series "Readers On Writers," a collection of the most "lengthy and outspoken replies" received by the editors. Many of the responses to Barnes' article (which were published in October 1958) took issue with his rejection of the heterosexual family.

Helen Sanders, the Daughters of Bilitis officer quoted above, wrote in to argue that having children is not, for the lesbian, a "readjustment of her selfhood" which she is "relieved and glad" to escape (Barnes 326). "Most Lesbians," Sanders writes, "adore children. Many of them are mothers and have given up a great deal to retain their children" (ONE, October 1958, p. 25). Her real issue, however, is deeper than her personal commitment to parenthood. By denouncing heterosexual marriage and procreation homosexuals like Barnes "seek understanding from others while condemning their way of life. …We have no bone to pick with heterosexuals and their way of life. We only ask to be given an equal opportunity to pursue that which is more fitting to us." She concludes with the rejoinder, "I am glad I am a homosexual, but I'm not sure I'm glad Mr. Barnes is one" (25).

Mr. J.E.K. of Chicago, on the other hand, voices a critique based not on a defense of the domestic consensus, but on Barnes' conceptualization of democracy. Unlike Barnes, J.E.K. does not see radical individual liberty as the foundational virtue of America. "Like it or not," he writes, "we all live in a society. And society is no great and beneficent club of inherited privilege into which all men are born with free membership and entire equality" (ONE, October 1958, p. 23). In this statement J.E.K echoes the rhetoric of the Cold War state which supports the domestic ideology: individuality must be contained, because, unchecked, it will lead to chaos, sexual and political. J.E.K. adds, "Liberty without restrictions is the vain and fanciful dream of unstable and flighty minds" (23). This writer explicitly connects the destabilization of society via the breakup of the family as the basic unit of loyalty to the fall of nations. "Many of the problems in our society today (and mentioned by Mr. Barnes) have been

brought about by the failure of a man, a woman, and their offspring to maintain family status. History already bears me out (Sparta, Greece, Rome, and, most recently, the USSR)" (24). The connection of the fall of ancient civilizations to the rise of Communism is not strange in the context of containment rhetoric. For the state, just as the moral corruption and effeminization of homosexuality was popularly believed to have undermined the glory of the Roman Empire, the presence of homosexuality in America was supposed to be a weakness in its line of defense against the Soviet threat.[65]

The favorable response to Barnes consisted of one letter, the shortest of the lot, by Mr. A. of New York. With just fourteen lines of positive feedback compared to five pages of criticism, it is apparent that at the latter end of the 1950s few of ONE's readers were calling for the abandonment of the family. The merits of the domestic consensus ideology were not yet open to such radical challenges as Barnes', even from the community of those most explicitly excluded from this family-based American dream. In the next decade, domestic consensus would be challenged by heterosexuals themselves as, simultaneously, the "movement for gay liberation" would be radicalized by the influx of fresh voices with more progressive plans.[66] But Mr. A's letter, short, almost shy in its language, shows that in the late 1950s some "homophiles" were ready, with Dorr Legg, to take a more confident stand against the domestic consensus which oppressed them. "Although I've never gone around shouting that I am glad I am homosexual," begins A.,

> I feel much the same as Hollister Barnes does. And if it became possible for me to change to a heterosexual I wouldn't do it.

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[65] What *is* intriguing is that from the wording of his letter, Mr. J.E.K. seems to present himself as a *non*-homosexual, without actually saying as much (see ONE Oct. 1958, 23-24), and while supporting the adaptationist element of the homophile movement.

[66] See D'Emilio "Part 3: The 1960s: Civil Rights and the Pursuit of Equality" (127-219).

> In a way I am proud too. Because it is almost as if I have a secret. Not just a secret within myself, but a secret that I share with many others. Amongst us it becomes a bigger and better secret. It isn't the fact that I am gay and that nobody knows it because I am not one of those homosexuals that other people can't recognize. But I just feel so much wiser than straight people. I honestly feel that I can do the things that I do better **because** I am a homosexual.
>
> Perhaps what I feel is a personal superiority complex, but I prefer to think it is because I am homosexual, And if this is true, then I am glad I am homosexual and wouldn't be straight for anything in the world. (ONE, October 1958, pp. 22-23, bold type in original)

The 1950s were a decade of growth and change, of articulation of purposes and the fleshing out of ideals, for ONE Magazine and the homophile movement in general. Changes in American society were reflected in the newly energized gay and lesbian community. By the end of the decade the African American civil rights movement was showing its influence among homophiles. On the eve of the '60s Lyn Pedersen's June 1959 editorial takes American liberals to task for neglecting homosexual rights while championing those of African Americans and even communists. "Are these people simply dishonest in their professed devotion to the rights of all individuals, each in his own way, to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?" Pedersen asks. "Or is it that they are brave, but not very brave – not brave enough to run any risk of being tarred with this brush themselves?" (4). The coming decade would witness the widespread and rapid growth of movements that would shatter the ideologies of consensus and containment. Women, African Americans, peace activists and white middle-class hippies would demand that America live up to its promises of liberty. The homophile movement, too, would redefine its goals and gather its strength until, in 1969, the riots that followed the police raid of Greenwich Village's gay bar the Stonewall Tavern would usher in a new era of gay liberation.

May writes that during the years when the Cold War domestic ideology was at its most powerful, "with the exception of avant-garde intellectuals and a small number of politically active feminists, few Americans articulated viable alternatives to the suburban lifestyle" (156). While the homophile movement did not present a unified assault on the domestic consensus, the need for alternatives was being articulated by some vocal and dedicated gay and lesbian activists, and it is important to include their voices in the history of the domestic consensus and its discontents. In the most widely read homophile publication of the 1950s, some contributors urged homosexuals to modify their gender-deviant behavior and seek acceptance from heterosexuals. Some openly attempted to distance themselves – as "normal" homophiles – from the "type" of gay person who went to gay bars or dressed in the style of the opposite sex. Some professional organizers, experts, and ordinary, anonymous citizens, however, expressed a rejection of the mainstream values that identified the American dream with the suburban nuclear family. Some went so far as to decry that consensus as just as anti-American as Communism itself, and to represent the homosexual as the true defender of democracy in a world that seemed to threaten individual liberty from all sides. For these writers, the "traditional family values" that the 1950s have come to represent were an unnatural, oppressive ideology supported by a nation whose anxieties about the explosive international environment of the Cold War drove authorities and civilians alike to idealize stability in the family. As self-identified homophiles, these writers were outside the limits of the domestic consensus, and so in the perfect position to begin to critique it.

Chapter 6: The "Ladder" to Security

Lesbians, Containment, Domesticity, and U.S. Nationalism in the 1950s

A few years after ONE Magazine appeared, opening a previously nonexistent space for national-distribution magazines written by and for gay men and lesbians, the Daughters of Bilitis began publishing The Ladder in October of 1956. The Daughters of Bilitis were a lesbian organization, considered the first "lesbian rights group in America," that was founded in 1955 by a group of eight women (Soares 28). Although not an offshoot (or "women's auxiliary") of the Mattachine Society, in their first few years the Daughters depended on the Mattachine Society for organizational support, including office space, mimeograph use, and connections to businesses in the area that were friendly to their members and aims (Martin and Lyon 115). At the end of the first year, DOB membership had grown to fifteen women; by 1960 there were chapters in four cities (the original San Francisco group, as well as Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago) (116). One-year subscriptions to The Ladder cost one dollar in 1956, but the price went up to $2.50 the next year and stayed there until the end of the decade (116). The magazine had four hundred subscribers by 1958 (116); as readers shared their copies with all of their lesbian friends, and other women bought single copies without subscribing, the magazine actually "reached a far larger audience than their subscription list would initially indicate" (Soares 29). Lesbian activist Judith Schwartz, who shared her copies

with other lesbians she knew in her workplace, recalls passing the magazine to "over 30 women, and sometimes up to 50" (qtd. in Soares 29).[67]

Today, the Daughters of Bilitis and The Ladder are best known to scholars in lesbian and gay studies as conservative organizations that promoted an assimilationist agenda, most notoriously through their official policies and recommendations regarding gender-coded dress, and through their rejection of bar culture as undignified.[68] John D'Emilio, for example, has discussed at length the organization's dictum, published also in The Ladder, that attire at DOB meetings and events "should be that which society will accept" (107). As Alexandra Chasin puts it in her analysis of "The Gay and Lesbian Press and the 'Business of Liberation'," the philosophy seemed to be a "realpolitik" sensibility that "only invisible lesbians were safe lesbians" (64). D'Emilio, noting that The Ladder "carefully refrained from advocacy and editorializing," quotes magazine editor and DOB officer Helen Sanders' comment that the magazine was "never meant to be a political journal" in order to reinforce the idea that the Daughters of Bilitis "existed as a self-help effort for women, a haven where they could experience a sense of belonging, put their lives in order, and then, strengthened and regenerated, venture forth into society" (104).[69]

Some scholars have recently begun to challenge this blanket dismissal of the Daughters of Bilitis and their works. Marcia Gallo's 2006 book Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement gives a

[67] By the time it stopped publishing in 1972, The Ladder had 3,800 subscribers (Martin and Lyon 118).
[68] Martin Meeker refers to this as "the current prevailing view of the Daughters of Bilitis as an assimilationist organization that condemned gender-role nonconformity among lesbians and prized class mobility above lesbian community" (176).
[69] Kristin Gay Esterberg also expresses the opinion that the editors of The Ladder, particularly during the 1950s, showed "acceptance of [the] negative conceptions of homosexuality" held by the "professionals" they invited to address their organization and contribute to the magazine (65).

detailed account of the founding of the Daughters and their activism work, especially during the 1960s. Gallo's view is that the organizational philosophies of the Daughters were more like the later second-wave feminist movement than anything taking place in the fifties. The women-only membership organization they created, Gallo writes, "gave them the psychic and physical space to define themselves and their goals ... and debate strategies and tactics for social change from their experiences and perspectives *as women*" (17). She asserts that the very context in which they operated, one of nationwide anti-homosexual repression, made the work they were doing radical: "Educating women to question the limitations imposed by gender and sexuality in Cold War America was challenging enough; to do so openly, as an organization dealing with lesbianism in the cultural climate of the 1950s, was unheard of" (17).

A few articles have also been published that focus specifically on analysis of The Ladder. In the field of sociology, Marianne Cutler has pointed out in a 2003 article that merely by publishing The Ladder, the magazine's producers broadened the boundaries of what she terms "a public dialogue regarding the 'problem' of homosexuality" (235). She elaborates, "By entering this dialogue, the producers of The Ladder asserted two things: (1) that they possessed important knowledge regarding female homosexuality, and (2) that lesbians were legitimate participants in the discussion of this 'problem'" (235). Her essay explores the rhetorical strategies the writers employed to bolster lesbians' legitimacy as participants, with attention to the ways that "gender expectations experienced by women during the magazine's early years of publication shaped and constrained the discursive practices within The Ladder" (233).

In this chapter, I extend Cutler's observation to discuss ways that the Cold War ideology of domestic consensus and the public rhetoric of containment were reinterpreted by lesbian writers in the pages of the magazine. Reading issues of The Ladder from its first publication in 1956 until the end of the 1950s illuminates areas where the writers were able to re-work aspects of the domestic consensus ideology to fit the realities of lesbian culture and relationships, inserting lesbians into the national imaginary while maintaining the fundamental legitimacy of the dominant discourse of idealized domesticity. Conversations within the magazine about ideal relationships, lesbian parenting, and economic concerns are examples of this kind of expansion. Reading the magazine also reveals the ways the writers adopted the Cold War-era rhetoric of containment to talk about one of the most sensitive topics for DOB members, the issue of butch-femme roles and "gender-appropriate" dress. I argue that suspending the traditional scholarly judgment of The Ladder as an essentially assimilationist, conservative publication allows us to appreciate the nuanced ways its writers contributed to the national conversation about the meanings of homosexuality and broadened the scope of the conversation by creating a space for the lesbian as citizen and participant in the domestic consensus ideology.

The Daughters of Bilitis, The Ladder, and the Cold War Nation

Although they insisted that they were "not a political organization, nor…affiliated in any way with any group either of the past or present" (Oct. 1957, pg. 10), the Daughters of Bilitis and their magazine The Ladder had an internal politics and a general position from which they engaged the Cold War nation. Unlike the writers of ONE, The

Ladder's contributors never challenged the fundamental effectiveness of democracy as it was being practiced during this period. This position was articulated through a string of editorials in the first few issues of The Ladder, and it was not challenged during the rest of the 1950s. The heart of the message the editors tried to convey to readers was that the DOB was *not* a subversive organization and did not advocate subversion, either in politics or in gender roles.[70] This message was expressed as much through stories about romantic partnership and lesbian love and informational pieces on parenting and psychology as through articles about civil rights and the state-sponsored oppression of homosexuals during the Lavender Scare years. Whatever the context, the code word from above was "containment." Readers of The Ladder were repeatedly advised that if they laid low and didn't make waves, the institutions of authority within the nation would eventually recognize them as harmless.

Nonetheless, like the contributors to ONE and the novelists discussed in earlier chapters, The Ladder's writers inhabited contradictory identities during complicated times, and their writing often critiqued some aspects of the domestic consensus ideology while supporting others. In the area of finances, women's concerns were markedly different from men's, and led them to offer proposals that challenged the mainstream model of one breadwinner and one homemaker per household. The debate within The Ladder over clothing styles and gender presentation included rebellious as well as conservative viewpoints. Essays about lesbian marriage and parenting both imagined a

[70] Marianne Cutler points to the ways the magazine, after 1960, promoted the idea of the lesbian as "ideal citizen" as part of its bid for the lesbian to be seen as a legitimate participant in the national conversation about the meanings of homosexuality, encouraging civic engagement and "reinforce[ing] the image of the lesbian as a trustworthy citizen" (247). In Cutler's analysis, this is a rhetorical strategy aimed at readers belonging to the dominant culture and intended to promote acceptance of the lesbian.

society in which romantic relationships between women could be equivalent to heterosexual ones, and incorporated aspects of the status quo into that vision. Similarly, in their relationship to the Cold War nation, many of these women expressed an insistent optimism about the United States, sometimes finding fault with its policies, but grounding complaints in the values of the Bill of Rights.

In their engagement with the U.S. nation as a flawed entity but one with the potential to live up to its stated democratic ideals, and in claiming for themselves the role of legitimate critics of the nation and its values, these writers intervened in a discourse which explicitly barred them from full citizenship. The Ladder has been characterized as a self-help publication that sought to help its readers "fit in" to their society, not change it. However, positioning these essays in the context of the Eisenhower administration's declaration that "sexual perversion" disqualified one from civil service and equaled disloyalty to the nation (Johnson 123) reveals their authors as taking a more active role in redefining for their own purposes the meanings of homosexuality in relation to the nation than has been acknowledged. While the dramatic rejection of the domestic consensus ideology sometimes evident in ONE is absent, lesbian women writers for The Ladder offered "constructive criticism," salvaging some of the structures of mainstream Cold War nationalism while reinvesting them with new meanings that validated the lesbian experience.

A bulletin published in the magazine's second issue, titled "Your Name Is Safe!", expressed the fervent belief that the Constitution, as interpreted and upheld by the Supreme Court, was alive and well, and that democracy would back the lesbian who met the prejudiced public halfway. This piece was written in response to "the fear that names

on our mailing list may fall into the wrong hands" (10). The editors first affirm that DOB is an organization that "advocate[s] no illegal actions by anyone" (10), assuring readers that the organization is not one that could be considered subversive or Communist.[71] They go on to assure readers that although "deeply indebted," DOB is "an organization distinct from" both the Mattachine Society and One, Inc. (11). The implication of this separation coming in the same breath as the statement about illegality is that something about these organizations is, in the eyes of DOB, rather more radical than they condone. However, it could also imply that the distinguishing factor is the level of "outness" of each of these organizations about their relationship to homosexuality. The next paragraph insists that, in fact, subscribing to The Ladder means absolutely nothing in terms of identity or group affiliation. The "donation" of one dollar "indicates your interest in a problem which is receiving more and more nationwide attention every month—it does not 'label' you" (11) – that is, as a lesbian.

Another example of this trust in the nation to live up to its democratic ideals (when so forced by the law) can be found in the item, "San Francisco Police Raid Reveals Lack of Knowledge of Citizen's Rights," in the same issue. This knowledge gap is on the part of the citizens, not the police. The report states that of 36 women arrested in a gay bar raid, only four pleaded not guilty; the editors "feel that this was not due to actual guilt on the part of those so pleading but to an appalling lack of knowledge of the rights of a citizen in such a case" (5). In response to this and related incidents, the DOB organized a special meeting, with a male attorney invited to speak on the subject "'The Lesbian and

[71] Founding members Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin found out later, after obtaining the FBI's file on the DOB, that, in Marcia Gallo's words, "the FBI had been keeping tabs on the Daughters of Bilitis from the beginning," with reports being filed as early as 1956.

the Law,' with special emphasis on a citizen's rights in case of arrest." The piece continues, "We urge everyone to make a special effort to attend this meeting, which is an attempt to remedy the lack of knowledge which has become so evident" (5). Tagged below the news item is the rather bold statement, "'Never Plead Guilty' is more than the title of Jake Ehrlich's book; it is advice to be remembered" (5). This article acknowledges that there has been a breakdown in justice in the relationship between San Francisco lesbians and the apparatus of state authority, but places the responsibility for insisting upon justice and due process in the hands of the individual lesbian citizen. The underlying assumption is that if only the women arrested in the bar raid had been fully cognizant of their rights, they would have easily avoided police harassment and legal prosecution. In this way, the editors of The Ladder in its early issues expressed the faith that the nation was fundamentally on their side. The corollary to that belief was the position articulated above–that the Daughters of Bilitis were lesbians who were on the U.S. government's side, or at least not working against it, in the international contest of ideologies.

At least some of the founding members of D.O.B. saw the group's mission as a continuation of the women's movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. From this perspective, the organization was inherently invested in working for social change, although within a decade the "second wave" women's liberation movement would make identification with the "first wave" seem old fashioned. In the first issue of The Ladder, Del Martin writes in the "President's Message," "Women have taken a beating through the centuries. It has been only in this 20th, through the courageous crusade of the Suffragettes and the influx of women into the business world, that woman

has become an independent entity … it took women with foresight and determination to attain this heritage which is now ours" (7).

Later contributors to The Ladder would evolve that sense of their heritage as social reformers in different ways as those involved in the homophile movement wrestled with their relationship to the nation. In a letter published in April 1959, reader B.S. of San Leandro, CA says she is in search of "a 'Utopia' or a saner, happier world." She positions herself in opposition to the "New American" described by Margaret Mead as "one seeking 'to escape into one's own house and one's own garden and the small bit of life which one makes a success in, and the concentration upon it becomes a flight from larger issues'" (24). These, B.S. writes, are responsible for the "twentieth-century 'Subtopia'" (25), with "the modern citizen running away from the big problems of war, peace and social injustice!" (24). And instead of seeing the lesbian subculture as one poised to inject new vitality and courage into the nation, she accuses lesbians of being some of the most heinous perpetrators of the flight from public responsibility. "No where," she says, has there been a world more isolated, cut off from society at large" than the homosexuals' "'barroom cliques,' and the 'parlor cliques,' and the lone couples living in 'egoism a deux'. So the world goes by, unnoticed, unseen" (25). It is clear that neither the United States nor the lesbian community are living up to this writer's social ideals. The improvement she suggests is "the cause of integration … integration of peoples, and integration of ideals" (25), and the understanding, in opposition to individual Americans' self-segregation in suburban homes, that "Dwellers within ourselves that we are, there's yet a oneness of each to all mankind, and the universe" (24).

While the writers quoted above frame their calls for social justice more romantically, with appeals to the noble past and the imagined utopian future, more common are those who speak of "integration" along with cries for legal and economic equality in the present. These women frequently have quite specific ideas about what is needed for social justice for lesbians in the United States. A pair of essays by two different authors, "Me vs. Taxes" (May 1958) and "Me vs. Insurance" (June 1958), elaborate on these points. In "Me vs. Insurance," author Del Martin explains the disadvantages she and her partner encountered when trying to purchase insurance for their jointly-owned home, furniture, and car. Because they cannot be legally recognized as a single family, they are faced with a higher "two-family" rate and extra premiums for adding each other's names to the policies on their supposedly separately owned possessions. The only other option would be to "insure our possessions under one name" and risk taking "a total loss" if something happened to "the one name" under which the policy was held (13). This amounted to the economic exploitation of women, and specifically of lesbians, and was a source of real and continual feelings of anxiety and insecurity in a decade when the stability of the domestic front was supposed to compensate for the instability of international relations.

Similarly, in "Me vs. Taxes," Helen Sanders bemoans that "We live together, we own homes, we pool our resources and we work for the community, but we cannot enjoy the benefits of a household under the law" (10). Sanders makes much of lesbians' community involvement, mentioning it three times in a single-page essay, saying that "a pair of Lesbians may own a house, join the community league, contribute to all causes, keep the yard up as a credit to the area" – yet suffer from discrimination and economic

exploitation under tax law, their higher tax rates being "a great boon to Uncle Sam" (10). In an interesting conflation of community involvement, economic equality, and citizenship, Sanders writes, "Those of us who live together and own property and join in our community's interests are householders and have a right to consideration under the Constitution" (10).

The first step for homophile organizations, according to B.G. of Kansas City, "should be an effort to obtain the social and legal privileges that are automatically given to heterosexuals. Such simple and purportedly inalienable rights such as: joint income tax returns for lesbian couples, marriage ceremonies and the legal recognition of these ceremonies, and equal insurance rates for homosexual couples, etc." (22, Feb. 1959). B.G. identifies these legal and financial issues as "my just due" and "our basic freedoms" for which lesbians must fight (23). It is not surprising that for women trying to live independently of men in a culture which encouraged women's financial dependence on men in a variety of structural ways, laws allowing women to be financially dependent, or interdependent upon one another, would be seen as urgent needs. Women's financial independence was linked to their ability to participate in the nation as full citizens. B.G. explicitly connects the position of lesbians to that of African Americans in the concurrent struggle for integration. She writes, "A Negro woman friend … feels that Negroes for the most part really want absolutely equal rights … and that integration is really just a possible means of obtaining these rights. We feel that probably this is the real desire of most lesbians and most male homosexuals as well" (22-23). The two significant rhetorical moves of this letter are to position lesbians alongside African Americans as groups excluded from full belonging in the nation, and to characterize women's economic

disadvantages as the most pressing barriers to equality. These criticisms of the nation, along with the optimism, discussed earlier, about the nation's ultimate commitment to justice and the responsibility of the citizen to insist upon it, characterize the majority of The Ladder's comments on the relationship of the individual lesbian and the lesbian organization to the United States.

The Clothing Debate: Excess and Containment

In the scholarly literature on the homophile movement, the DOB is perhaps best known for its official conservatism with regard to clothing, and particularly its position against masculine dress. John D'Emilio and Alexandra Chasin, among others, cite the DOB's policy of "advocating a mode of behavior and dress acceptable to society."[72] It is not surprising that this fact about the DOB should have been noticed by scholars, since articles about clothing and style appeared with regularity in The Ladder's pages. These were not, however, the fashion pieces of the ordinary women's magazine. In these articles, a lengthy and nuanced discussion took place, one which was characterized by thoughtfulness and self-reflection as well as by a startling degree of anger and hostility. The clothing debate rhetorically marked a point where lesbian sexuality, identity, and culture came into contact with the straight world. At this point of contact, lesbians were vulnerable to physical, psychological, and economic attacks based on others' perceptions of their sexual orientation. The meaning of the clothing debate[73] goes beyond what

[72] This quotation is from Point One of "The Purpose of the Daughters of Bilitis," reprinted on the inside front cover of every issue of The Ladder during this period.

[73] I call it a "debate" because, contrary to what has been written about this issue and the DOB, this was not a one-sided proclamation handed down from above that remained uncontested. One position was held by the leadership of the organization and supported by many members, but others who wrote into The Ladder

many scholars have observed (that DOB members placed a high value on conformity to mainstream modes of dress). Instead, it should be understood as the expression of the anxiety felt by lesbians in the face of anti-homosexual oppression, and of competing ideas about the best way to ensure lesbian women's safety and security. Some thought this required the rigorous containment of lesbian sexuality and identity within the individual, the couple, and the private lesbian organization, and believed that the "spilling over" of lesbianism into the public, by means of masculine dress and other visible markers of homosexuality, disrupted social norms and created a state of instability in which acts of violence and other forms of oppression became possible, even likely. Others (the minority within DOB and The Ladder's contributors, but a presence nonetheless) argued that visibility, honesty, and the exercise of American rights of free expression were the best ways to ensure safety and stability, if not in the present, then in the future that such bold acts of self-revelation would help to create.

According to Elaine May's research, "postwar Americans fortified the boundaries within which they lived. They wanted secure jobs, secure homes, and secure marriages in a secure country….And so they adhered to an overarching principle that would guide them in their personal and political lives: containment. Containment was the key to security" (xxiv). In political terms, containment referred in this period to preventing nuclear proliferation and to stopping the spread of Communism. May argues that "[i]n the domestic version of containment, the 'sphere of influence' was the home. Within its walls, potentially dangerous social forces of the new age might be tamed, where they could contribute to the secure and fulfilling life to which postwar women and men

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ardently disagreed, forcing those who opposed masculine dress for lesbians to defend their stance in the magazine's pages.

aspired" (xxiv). Among the forces that needed to be tamed was "the unwieldy American libido," for which "[m]arriage was considered to be the appropriate container" (88). In Cold War-era sexual containment, "sexual restraint outside of marriage and traditional gender roles in marriage" (86) combined with the harnessing of female and male sexual energy to create "erotically charged marriages" that would last (89) – that is, would provide stability and security for their participants.

Many contributions to The Ladder during this period reveal a push toward containment that is similar in its energy to that driving suburban heterosexual marriages, but different in its expression. These lesbian writers seem to agree with their straight compatriots that potentially destabilizing forces and drives should be contained. Although the fears of exposure and subsequent violence or economic persecution that underlay their push for containment were different from, and perhaps even more immediate than, straight couples' anxieties about international instability, the concerns of the lesbians were also intimately interconnected with widespread Cold War concerns, since, as discussed in earlier chapters, fears about the spread of communism fueled the increased persecution of homosexuals at all levels of the society. For the lesbian writers of The Ladder, the explosive force which needed to be contained was the power of lesbian visibility.

Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline Davis have written, "The presence of the butch with her distinctive dress and mannerism, or the butch-fem couple, announced lesbianism to the public. The butch, in her willingness to affirm who she was and take the consequences, was the primary indicator of lesbianism to the heterosexual public" ("Reproduction" 244). But the women of The Ladder and the Daughters of Bilitis had a

complex relationship with visibility. It was part of their mission to make themselves available to other lesbians in need of help, and to participate in research projects as informed subjects (Soares 30), but these middle-class lesbian activists wanted to be able to exercise control over the images of lesbians that got disseminated. Butch visibility, which was outside their ability to control, provoked much anxiety for the Daughters and their magazine contributors.[74] The language in which the containment of excessive masculinity through appropriate dress was discussed is remarkably similar to that used to describe the fear of foreign spies. D.O.B. president D. Griffin, arguing that the conversion of butches to feminine attire has proceeded apace, and with positive results, quotes this testimonial "from one of our 'changelings'": "I find that because now I am wearing women's slacks and letting my hair grow long I am getting a wider variety of friends and I have neighbors instead of people next door. I no longer have the feeling that everyone is watching me" (3, Nov. 1956).

The "President's Message" column from January 1957 reveals that early in its publishing history, The Ladder received "some letters wherein the writers wonder about the type of people we have in this organization" (8). One such letter is included in the column. Its author, T.F. from Seattle, says that she and her friends are happy to see the magazine in existence, but wondered "who would participate in a movement of this type, rather, what type of kids…..anyone who had anything to risk would shy away—only the notorious would concern themselves as a means of exhibition—the 'better' kids one rarely sees as they keep to themselves and don't frequent the drinking places" (8). It is "exhibitionism", that is, taking pleasure in making themselves visible, that marks some

[74] Kennedy and Davis' interviewees describe the ways butches drew verbal and physical attacks from strangers responding to their visible displays of queerness ("Reproduction" 243-245).

lesbians as "notorious," dangerous, excessive. It is ironically *because* they are "rarely seen", that is, invisible, with their sexuality properly contained, that the "better" class of lesbians are designated as such.

In a 2007 article published in the journal Modern Psychoanalysis, Lisa Piemont characterizes "exhibitionism" as "a threatening act suggesting that the perpetrator intends a progression of ... sexually aggressive behavior and indicating a dangerous incapacity to control impulses" (79), and suggests that the exhibitionist is addicted to "being excessively known" (81). Bearing this in mind while considering the clothing debate sheds further light on the fears that underlay the condemnation of masculine dress.

Psychoanalytically, exhibitionism is associated with aggression and violence. Hoping to diffuse the association of homosexuals in the national imaginary with Communists, security risks, and threats to the nation, some of the women who wrote for The Ladder strove to portray lesbians as harmless, interested only in their private business, and certainly not violent. As the definition of "exhibitionism" quoted above suggests, some felt that women who wore masculine clothing in the butch style were forcing bystanders to view that which they did not want to look at.[75] Further, it contains the implication that the lesbian who dresses in a visibly "deviant" style cannot control her impulses. If those impulses are viewed as aggressive toward society, and if one of the conditions of lesbian existence in the 1950s was living with a stereotype of homosexuals as dangerous to society (either because of a tendency toward disloyalty or because of enslavement to sexual desires), the fear that butch women's visible signs of lesbianism would lead to lesbians in general being "excessively known" in ways that couldn't be

[75] Clearly, the phrase "out and proud" would have been lost on these lesbians.

"managed" by the DOB's public relations efforts becomes more clear, if not more sympathetic.

The writer of the "President's Message" hastens to reassure the concerned letter-writer T.F. that the DOB's members are, in fact, *none* of the "notorious", but only respectable women. "At the moment," D.G. assures, "we are all what might be termed 'white-collar' workers, but we want all kinds—those who want help and those who wish to help" (9). The position of lesbians who made this distinction was an anxious one: they were eager for friendship and a sense of community and belonging, but they were not able to make themselves visible to one another for the purposes of mutual identification. An organization like the DOB, begun in part to make these lesbians visible to one another and create community among them, and in part to champion their cause to the straight world, would necessarily be met with some distrust and trepidation. Belonging to such an organization forced members to expose sexual identities long kept in containment, if only to one another; it required of them a higher degree of visibility than felt safe. Visibility itself, and the feelings of insecurity it created, was one major reason for this fear and the resentment of lesbians who seemed able to be visible with impunity; "We are just honest, sincere people maintaining our own place in society and we want to help others do the same," D.G. asserts (9), but as this exchange reveals, many thought that more visible lesbians (the sort that would need the DOB's "help") had no place in society to maintain, that is, nothing to lose. The insecurity created by the breach of containment was in some ways independent from the instability of gender roles, and the threats inherent in that instability, that was produced by some lesbians' masculine styles of dress and behavior.

According to Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis in their classic study of the working-class lesbian community of Buffalo in the mid-twentieth-century, Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold, "butch-fem roles were the key structure for organizing against heterosexual dominance" and "were the central prepolitical form of [lesbian] resistance" in the 1950s (6). Butch lesbians, and in particular those Kennedy and Davis term "tough bar lesbians," were the lesbians who truly challenged the domestic consensus ideology and the sexual containment of the 1950s, and they challenged these forces through their visibility. "By the 1950s," Kennedy and Davis write,

> the tough bar lesbians as a group would not divide their lives in order to maintain a steady job and placate family, and they became less and less willing to do so as the decade progressed. They were in the bars every day, not just on weekends, and the butches appeared masculine as much of the time as they could, not just when they went out to the bars. The consequences of this behavior were severe. By not denying who they were and looking "queer" as much of the time as possible, or associating with those who did, tough bar lesbians drastically reduced their options for work and their chances of partaking in the American dream of upward mobility. The tough bar butches did not conform to the code of dress required for success at most jobs, particularly white-collar jobs, nor did they conform to the moral values of the middle class. (82)

These authors believe it is this refusal to conform, even at the cost of upward mobility and membership in the domestic consensus, "which gives the unmistakably working-class character to their way of life" (82). This was another way of dealing with the anxiety of instability and insecurity which prompted the DOB lesbians to pour their energy into containing their sexual identities beneath shells of social respectability and normalcy– simply to have everything out in the open, so that its revelation could not longer be a threat. This radical difference in approaches to containment is one of the factors that kept the DOB forever a mainly "white-collar" organization, and blocked understanding between working class and middle class lesbians during this time.

Although, according to the results of an internal survey conducted in 1958 and 1959, "[t]he income level and education of the group...appeared to be higher than the national average [for women], as was the percentage of professionals," and respondents reported themselves to be "living a relatively stable, responsible mode of life by certain conventional, if superficial, standards" (Soares 28), members of the DOB were aware of differences in the average economic status of lesbians and gay men. When the organization began, founding members Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon recall, the Daughters "sublet a tiny office from the Mattachine Society" (Martin and Lyon 114). The organization decided to designate some events as "open to Gay men when we realized that on average they earned considerably more money than did women" (116).

At the same time, as David Johnson notes, lesbians as well as gay men "were victims of the Lavender Scare," losing jobs in the civil service and private companies during purges of homosexuals (12-13). But although unmarried women's economic security was more precarious than that of men due to restricted access to better-paying jobs, because "security officials relied heavily on arrest records in known gay male cruising areas" (12) and "guilt by association" with those arrested (13), lesbians' relative invisibility led to their being fired in smaller numbers than gay men. Unmarried women supporting themselves (and sometimes children) in the 1950s were, financially, in a more vulnerable position than men, and lesbian women, who frequently had to do without any support from families who did not accept them, even more so. Given this context, the voices within The Ladder that urged women to "lay low" about their sexual orientation, to blend in at the workplace, may be read in a more sympathetic light as sensitive to

lesbian women's need to support themselves, and the ways that, in the political climate of the 1950s, wearing masculine clothing could seriously impair their ability to do so.

One reason for The Ladder's editors' and contributors' pleas to readers to dress in mainstream styles is that as far as employment was concerned, "guilt by association" characterized the Lavender Scare years. David Johnson notes that "[g]overnment employees who wanted to protect their jobs distanced themselves from gays and lesbians who worked in less sensitive jobs and had less reason to hide" (152). He quotes one lesbian who recalls the private parties she and her gay friends in Washington, DC held in the '50s: "The rule always was with the women I lived with, we never invited anyone who didn't have as much to lose as we did... So school teachers, military officers, etc." could come, but people in professions such as "hairdresser," who "could be as gay as [they] want to be" and not be fired, would not be allowed to attend (Joan Cassidy qtd. in Johnson 152). The Ladder's contents frequently reproduced this sort of economic practicality at the expense of promoting individual freedom of (gender) expression. An article in the March 1957 issue, titled "Job-Hunting Doesn't Need to Be a Problem," offers advice geared toward the necessities of the early Cold War-era workplace. This article summarized the major points brought up during a panel discussion on "Employment and the Homosexual," sponsored by the DOB. According to this unnamed correspondent, the "consensus of the panel" was that "[t]he only thing a homosexual has to fear when looking for a job is whether his or her ability matches the job applied for – the problem of homosexuality per se does not enter into the employment picture" (5). The panel suggested that lesbians dodge questions from co-workers about their marital status and go out of their way to be friendly and "accept others," and ended by reassuring

attendees that "homosexuals have nothing to fear in job hunting" as long as they "seek competent counsel, make a good appearance and maintain a pleasing disposition" (7).

L.H.N. (actually the award-winning playwright Lorraine Hansberry, who became very involved with the organizing efforts of the DOB in New York, according to Marcia Gallo (22)), in a May 1957 letter to the editor, explicitly compares the DOB's stated position on masculine dress to her experience with programs of racial uplift. "Rightly or wrongly," she says, "I could not help but be encouraged and relieved by" the organization's declared position (27). "As one raised in a cultural experience (I am a Negro) where those within were and are forever lecturing to their fellows about how to appear acceptable to the dominant social group," she says, she is familiar with "the shallowness of such a view as an end in itself" (27). She observes that no matter how "well" a member of her race dressed or behaved, no matter how well educated he or she was, that person "could still be insulted, denied a hotel room or meal in many parts of the country…Not to mention the possibility of being lynched on a lonely Georgia road" (27). She acknowledges that it is membership in the despised group, not behavior or dress, that prompt ill treatment. Still, she says regarding the situation of lesbians, "HOWEVER, as a matter of facility, of expediency, one has to take a critical view of revolutionary attitudes which in spite of the BASIC truth I have mentioned above, may tend to aggravate the problems of a group" (27). In other words, and with many qualifying phrases, she urges conformity to heteronormative modes of dress. Although she says she has "long since passed that period when I felt personal discomfort at the sight of an ill-dressed or illiterate Negro," she still struggles in that regard when it comes to visible lesbians. "Someday, I expect, the 'discreet' Lesbian will not turn her head on the streets at the sight

of the 'butch' strolling hand in hand with her friend in their trousers and definitive haircuts. But for the moment, it still disturbs" (27).

Reader Z.N. from San Leandro, CA (October '58), believes that "the first outward step" of the "long-range program to be undertaken" by lesbians for the improvement of their status "is that of 'advocating a mode of behavior and dress acceptable to society', which is stated as one of the purposes of DOB" (30). This reader believes that the first impressions made by members of a minority on members of the majority are vital to the latter's acceptance of the former. Although she writes "I love nothing better than slacks," she argues that "Any minority group wishing to be accepted must conform to the majority group where FIRST IMPRESSIONS are concerned," and that "Such first impressions are formed solely by outward appearance and action" (30). The amicable relationships enabled by these favorable impressions of social conformity allow homosexuals to eventually "show what lies beneath the surface" (31) – their fundamental decency and respectability. This "first impression phase" is all-important, as far as Z.N. is concerned, because "[i]f we rebel against society in the 'first impression' phase," she writes, we will never be given the opportunity to make our point and reach the common ground of understanding that results in acceptance" (31).

Z.N. makes it clear that she attributes the stability of her relationship and the social acceptance she and her partner enjoy to their discretion in the area of clothing. "It pays to make this small concession," she writes;

> The twenty happy years my loved one and I have lived together have brought us loyal friends, both homosexual and heterosexual. We have been accepted by heterosexuals and later informed by them that this acceptance, in its initial stage, was based entirely upon appearance and behavior. It gives us a measure of

> satisfaction to know that, as a couple, we have done something in this way toward establishing a better understanding of the homosexual. (30)

It seems that for Z.N., for whom the containment of urges to dress in a more masculine style apparently requires some effort, the payoff in security and acceptance is well worth the cost. A twenty-year relationship and a loyal circle of friends are signs of the stability that many Americans, mainstream heterosexuals as well as lesbians and gay men, yearned for. In this light, the hint of bitterness with which Z.N. informs readers that "no individual—homosexual or heterosexual—can act exactly as he wishes without regard for society" (31) is understandable; visible or "obvious" homosexuals, those who do not follow "a mode of behavior and dress acceptable to society," threaten the status, won at significant personal cost, of those who do. Nonetheless, Z.N.'s letter is not a simplistic sledgehammer of conformity without vision; she sees herself and her partner as working for the furthering of the cause, if in a slow and subtle way. Z.N.'s letter reflects widespread fears about the dangers of nonconformity that fueled the domestic consensus ideology subscribed to by so many straight Americans, but also reflects the liberal beliefs of many of these same Americans about the nobler potential of the nation.

Positive views toward "visible" lesbians were rare in The Ladder during the 1950s, but not absent. Barbara Stephens' trio of short stories about a group of friends from a gay bar is at least ambivalent in its treatment of butches, which is all the more surprising given her earlier (May 1957) essay, "A Plea for Integration," which attacked the homosexual minority's "exhibition of its difference in public" through stereotyped roles and "the warping of the personality in the process" (17). In March 1958's "A Night at Riley's," the main character is a prejudiced butch woman who judges everyone else in

the bar but can't see that she herself is trapped in a "straightjacket of butch-hood," as one of her drinking companions phrases it (17). Nonetheless, the rest of the bar's patrons are portrayed as a diverse but altogether okay crowd. A butch-butch couple even gets a sympathetic portrayal after the main character, Gus, proclaims, "I don't get it! Two butches going together. It ain't natural. You should be butch-and-fem, Rick" (16). Rick responds, smiling: "Nope, I'll be different. You see, I think it's better for two butches to be friends. They think alike, they act alike, they understand each other" (17). This butch character is shown as the voice of reason and one among many nice folks at the bar.

Jule Moray's July 1958 "Open Letter to Sandra Pine," another defense of lesbian visibility, is a response to that author's piece "Yes, I Am!", a typical celebration of the joys of the concealed lesbian life published in March of that year. Pine's essay includes passages like, "There is nothing 'cheap' about the deep love that we have shared. We are both very prominent women. There has never been the slightest finger of suspicion pointed at us. Our manners in public are such as not to attract any undue attention. We are both attractive, well groomed, fashionably dressed, completely feminine" (12). Moray asks Pine rhetorically, "what are you being feminine <u>for</u>? Whom are you trying to deceive?... Would you lose your job, your mother's love or your right to vote Republican if you let slip just a couple of small hairpins, took a flat with your friend, and started to make up for all the time you two have lost? Who is going to worry?" (16). As an example of a more open lifestyle, she offers herself and her partner of twenty years, saying:

> We're not at all smart or well groomed, and I don't honestly know if you'd say we are feminine or not. Probably in every place we've ever lived everyone has known we are Lesbians. We rarely think about it, and we never worry about it.

> Certainly no one has ever hinted that our relationship is at all strange. Most of our friends are married and no one has ever refused to come to our house. We, in fact, think ourselves liked, sometimes well-liked, very rarely disliked. (16-17)

Certainly there *was* plenty of evidence to suggest that the lesbians who let slip a few hairpins could lose at least their jobs and their mothers' love–and possibly even their right to vote Republican. Moray's piece could be read as naïve in its disregard for the material consequences of coming out. However, it could also be seen as an injection of much-needed idealism and optimism into The Ladder, a more full embrace of the visibility unavoidably entered into by the DOB in its project of educating the straight world, particularly professionals, about the inner workings of the lesbian.

The declaration of pride in homosexuality expressed in Sandra Pine's "Yes, I Am!" is no parallel to ONE Magazine's "I Am Glad I Am a Homosexual," and even Moray's "Open Letter" falls far short of that essay's radical embrace the potential of gay visibility for fostering widespread social change. Still, pieces such as the "Open Letter" and Barbara Stephens' stories demonstrate that not all the lesbian readers of The Ladder subscribed to the proposition that visibility spelled danger for lesbians and that visible markers of lesbian sexual identity must be contained in order to achieve stability and security in the private life, despite the pressure of the Cold War discourses of consensus and containment that saturated the national consciousness.

Lesbian Marriages, Lesbian Parenting, and the National Domestic Ideal

According to a survey conducted by the editorial board through an insert included with in the June 1958 issue (the results were published in the September 1959 issue), less than 15% of respondents reported having children (17). Twenty-seven percent had at one

time been heterosexually married; 55% of these "knew they were homosexual when they married." Reasons these women gave for marrying men included pleasing their families, social acceptance, and finding out once and for all whether or not they *could* live a "normal" life (15-16). It was not unusual to find articles in The Ladder directed toward lesbian women who were married to men, advising them to stay in the marriages if at all possible. Marion Zimmer Bradley writes, "If she and her husband take their marriage vows seriously…she must be able to put genuine truth in her statement that her interest in other women will affect her marriage no more than the heterosexual woman's healthy interest in other men." Though not "recommending marriage and motherhood as cures for Lesbianism," she asserts that "if [a lesbian] has married already, and particularly if she has or plans to have a child, these remarks may help her to accept the situation she had precipitated, and avoid marital discord, disharmony and harm to an innocent child" (15, July 1957). In an earlier issue (June 1957), Nancy Osbourne argues that the chance to participate in the outward forms of domesticity and the homemaking activities prescribed for women should be enough to override the sexual dissatisfaction of a lesbian in a marriage to a man:

> Many heterosexual marriages are based on factors other than sexual attraction. A harmonious family life may stem from mutual interest in the home. Furnishing a new home, planning the decorations, planting lawns and flower areas, sharing the household tasks as well as planning for the future can form a full, rich association which is completely satisfying for some couples, particularly if they do not have and do not plan to have children. Often a heterosexual couple of this type will share in the raising and breeding of special show animals. (6)

Osbourne presents the maintenance of the domestic sphere as a refuge from the dangerous world outside the home as the most important aspect of the domestic consensus, and encourages lesbians to continue to subscribe to this consensus, despite

obvious conflicts with its fundamental premise (that the heterosexual marriage and nuclear family are ideals to strive for). "Rather than destroy everything she has built up over the years," Osbourne asserts that "most Lesbians with successful heterosexual marriages will keep their fears within themselves, trusting to luck that the tightrope of their lives will remain intact and unthreatened" (7). The foreboding tone of this statement suggests that the lesbian can never truly feel relaxed and safe, since the source of security in this era is the home, heterosexual marriage, and nuclear family, and by the nature of her desires, she destabilizes the very structures that are meant to assure her stability.

Those who encouraged lesbians to stay in heterosexual marriages were a minority, and seemed mainly to be writing as interested observers, not as lesbians themselves. Of greater concern to the writers of The Ladder was how to have a successful lesbian relationship, and the discussions on this topic often paralleled, borrowed from, or critiqued the broader national conversations about what makes a relationship last. The women who contributed to The Ladder in the 1950s did not reject domestic consensus ideology in the same way that the writers of ONE discussed above did, but they did intervene in the mainstream understanding of domesticity in a very important way: they collectively envisioned a domestic ideal that did not include men. In an ongoing discussion carried out over several issues, writers grappled with the idea of lesbians settling down to marriage and childrearing with one another. By looking at several of these articles, we can discern several variations on the approach to lesbian marriage or long-term partnership, which was generally considered a desirable outcome. Some writers adopted the mainstream domestic ideology wholesale, changing the pronouns to make it apply to lesbian life. Others articulated the partnership goal in terms that spoke

to the particularities of women's status in 1950s America, such as the pressing concern for financial security experienced by many single women. The complex ways in which these writers interacted with the domestic consensus ideology of the period, sometimes borrowing aspects of it and sometimes altering it to suit their needs, is the subject of this section.

In her short story "The Gay Party," author Bev Berkeley's characters speak wistfully of stability and domesticity—marriage, by any other name. Jan, a career-minded woman who is "obvious to other homophiles even though she trie[s] not to be, but evidently [not] to her normal friends," is driven by loneliness to go to a party given by lesbian acquaintances. She tells a woman there that her last relationship broke up "because we didn't want the same things. She wanted laughs; I wanted a real home. I guess that's asking too much in a gay life." Her new friend responds,

> "Why is it? … I know a couple right here who own their own home and have lived together for twenty-five years." She clenched her hands around her glass. "I know it isn't easy to find someone and that it's even harder to make a gay marriage work, but it must be possible," she said intensely. "If it isn't, I have nothing left to hope for." (June '59 11)

Two paragraphs later, these two women leave the party together, apparently having finally found true compatibility.

These characters speak of "gay marriage" not in terms of a package of legal rights but as simply a long-term, stable, monogamous relationship between two women, which ideally includes "a real home" or home ownership. These are the particular elements of the heterosexual domestic ideal that many lesbian contributors to The Ladder wanted access to, and claimed as their own ideal. In this way, this group of writers aligned themselves with the domestic consensus ideology of mainstream, heterosexual America.

A report from the 1958 ONE Symposium discussion group on "The Lesbian Partnership," however, tells a somewhat different story. In this case, discussants frame the "partnership" in a way that is distinct from the heterosexual version of the domestic ideal. Its draws are specific to the needs of women. "Financially it is advantageous for women to live together, regardless of their sex life. Accordingly," the write-up states, "the Lesbian partnership helps to increase security." It goes on to note that "it was agreed that in most cases it would be better for both parties to work rather than to have an arrangement more closely approximating husband and wife," not necessarily for greater financial solvency, but for more spiritual reasons: "because each party to the Lesbian partnership is by her nature a person desiring independence and fulfillment of her own ambitions" (19). Here, the women distinguish lesbians from heterosexual women by their spirit of independence and individuality, in contrast to heterosexually married women, who are seen as either lacking these qualities or willing to compromise them for the sake of domestic happiness.

A short story entitled "The Discovery," attributed to M.L. (July 1958), expresses what may have been a dearly-held fantasy for many of the readers of The Ladder: a son's acceptance of his mother's lesbianism. The anonymity of the author of this story about coming out to one's child and being accepted adds to the story's poignancy. In this story, an incident at the boy's school in which two boys are expelled for homosexuality prompts him to look at his mother's relationship with the woman she lives with in a new light. The mother fears his inevitable questions but intends to be truthful. She wonders if she can "find the proper words to explain, to make him understand that this love, no matter what society and its mores proclaimed, was not debased and vile, but a wonderful, lovely,

precious thing, as right for Claire and me as it was for any properly married couple, tho' they be man and woman and we—two women" (13). To her surprise and delight, her son has a sympathetic view of homosexuality. At the story's conclusion, after the narrator, her son, and her partner "discussed, into the wee small hours, every fact and fancy of homosexuality and sex deviation that we had ever heard of," the narrator says, "I did have some questions of my own answered that night. I find I have a very normal, intelligent, understanding son, who has decided to learn psychiatry" in order to work with homosexuals (14).

Read alongside articles on lesbian parenting that don't mention lesbianism or homosexuality at all, let alone the particular challenges faced by the lesbian parent in the 1950s, the dream developed in this story must have seemed difficult to attain, if not impossible, for many readers. Indeed, as fiction, it can be seen as doing the work of imagining a different world for lesbians, creating a vision for the future. At the same time, the fantasy presented in this story assuages another fear close to the hearts of lesbian mothers: that their children would be harmed or corrupted by the parents' homosexuality. The son's "normalcy" is emphasized using the terms of domestic consensus ideology: "Someday I want a home with a wife and kids. I know I sure couldn't love another guy like I would a girl. The thought is somehow revolting to me. To me, that is. But if another guy feels different than that, is he wrong?" (13-14). These statements fill the narrator with joy. She reflects that some would say her son approves of this deviant way of life because he was brought up in it—unfairly disadvantaged in the morality department—"[b]ut he instinctively knows another! He is normal. And as he says, in spite of living with it, he doesn't have it in him" (14). In this idealized scenario,

the son is understanding of the homosexual lifestyle, but remains separate from it. In answer to the charges of anti-homosexual crusaders—charges which have hardly diminished with time—that gay and lesbian parents must necessarily, by their example, pass their perverted way of life on to any children they raise, M.L.'s story insists that it is possible for two lesbians to rear a healthy, straight young man with desires for a home and family stability that conform perfectly to the Cold War domestic consensus. "The Discovery" challenges the exclusion of "married" lesbian parents from the domestic ideal while also reinforcing this model of domesticity as a dream worth striving for.

This story's gentle, idealistic intervention in the exclusion of lesbian parents from Cold War domestic ideology is perhaps the strongest statement in this direction published in The Ladder in the 1950s. While the relationship of the lesbian to the concept of "marriage," heterosexual and homosexual, is discussed in some depth and a variety of viewpoints are raised, the issue of parenting is surprisingly underdeveloped. At the December, 1956 DOB discussion meeting, guest speaker psychotherapist Basil Vaerlen made the "provocative comment" that "the true biological function of the female is to have children, and that by denying themselves this function the Lesbian is unfulfilled, and is hampering her health and happiness" ("Third Discussion on Fear" 5). From Dr. Vaerlen's perspective, having children could only be accomplished through heterosexual relations. Thus he advised the meeting's attendees, "The basic problem in evaluating your personal problems…is to find out why you are shying away from sexual relations with men. In other words, the problem is not why you like women, but why you don't like men" (5).

The facing page contains a short announcement titled "Raising Children in a Deviant Relationship." This brief informs readers that the San Francisco DOB would be sponsoring "small group discussions for women interested in the problems encountered in raising children in a deviant relationship" and that these discussions would be moderated by "professional leaders in the nursery school and parent-discussion field" who could "lend assistance based on their knowledge and experience" (4). In the April 1957 issue, DOB Secretary Jean Peterson reports on the first in this series of discussions, led by Eleanor van Leeuwen, "specialist in parent education and nursery school children" (8). Her report is titled "Relationship Not So 'Deviant' If Child Has Love and Security." According to this account, van Leeuwen's talk consisted of "expert" parenting advice on a wide variety of topics, from language development to beginning school. Van Leeuwen emphasized the importance of parents in helping children develop values and emotional health. She touches on matters of sexuality only in a note about the normalcy of masturbation and in a discussion of sex education wherein "the opinion was raised that it would be better if the subject of sex education was taken out of the hands of the parents, many of whom do not feel equipped for the task, and given over to competent teachers in the school system," where information about human sexuality "could be presented in a scientific manner to meet the needs of all school ages" (10).

This account does not suggest that any attendees disagreed with any of van Leeuwen's positions, though the occasional phrase "the opinion was raised that" implies that attendees contributed points to the discussion which expanded those that had been made by the speaker. DOB members' acceptance of scientific child rearing advice puts them squarely in line with the "Postwar America…age of the expert" (May 21). Indeed,

this piece could as easily have been printed in the newsletter of any heterosexual women's club, since the only specific reference to homosexuality is: "In referring to children raised in a deviant relationship it was pointed out that anything which strays from the sincere feeling or true values can be said to be deviant, and there can very definitely be deviant heterosexuals as well as deviant homophiles." The paragraph goes on, "The emotional stability of parents will determine the background of the child. Love and security overshadow almost all other factors. If a child knows love, gives love and receives love, and knows he is wanted, chances are he will be normal and well adjusted" (9). More significant than the avoidance of the term "lesbian," the piece's emphasis on the values of good parenting, which apply to all parents universally, regardless of sexual orientation, reflects the mainstream domestic consensus ideology and reveals DOB members' agreement with, and not rejection of, that consensus. Unlike several of the writers in ONE, The Ladder's contributors sought not to refute the imagined benefits of domestic life, but rather to create a space within the national imaginary for lesbian domesticity.

Conclusion: Ordinary Women

Eleanor van Leeuwen informed her listeners that "the basic thing is to accept and understand yourself and then accept the rest of the world as it is" (9). This advice fits in perfectly with one of the larger themes of the writings in The Ladder during the 1950s: a form of individualism that plays up the uniqueness of every person in order to downplay the difference between homosexuals and heterosexuals—and ultimately to dissuade lesbians from becoming over-identified with the lesbian label, surrounding themselves

with only other lesbians, or developing overly hostile or activist attitudes toward the straight world and its heteronormative institutions. The essay "YOU" by Carol Hales (October 1957), filled with underscores and words in all capital letters, exemplifies this approach to community uplift. "You are of a sexual minority," Hales writes, "but that does not mean you are one whit less fine, courageous and capable of contributing much good to the whole of life, than is anyone belonging to the sexual majority.…You are an individual," she continues, "as is every human being. Have the courage and, if necessary acquire the skill to live successfully as the individual you are" (15). This exhortation makes it clear that although everyone is an individual, successful living is not guaranteed by simply following one's heart; some people require teaching as to how best to be themselves, and the lesbian readers of The Ladder are some of those who do. Hales seems to feel that some of these lesbians have become too militant about the plight of the homosexual in America. "Leaves, snowflakes and fingerprints have their separate distinct pattern. Don't fight and cry out complaints because you, too, are a distinct individual," she advises. "Homosexuals are like heterosexuals in some ways yet unlike them in others. So what? No two persons of either sexual group are exactly alike….YOU ARE YOU! Rejoice in that fact" (15). She goes on to beg lesbians not to "curse Nature for placing you at what you wrongfully consider a cruel disadvantage," but rather, through brave and honest facing of the facts, to see "society's stupidity and prejudice regarding your kind" as "grist for your mill of self-development" (15-16).

Elaine Tyler May describes the "therapeutic approach" espoused by many heterosexuals in dealing with their dissatisfactions in marriage and in life as "geared toward helping people feel better about their place in the world, rather than changing it.

It offered private solutions to social problems. The family was the arena in which that adaptation was expected to occur; the home was the environment in which people could feel good about themselves" (xxv). The main thrust of Hales' essay is that the lesbian should strive to live her life and be who she is "with as little conflict as possible" (17). Publicly announcing one's sexuality and complaining when one is not accepted for it is to be frowned upon. It is generally the wiser course, according to Hales, "to keep your private life private" (17). There is no need, Hales argues, "to expose that love to the glare of the spotlight of public knowledge. No need to offer yourselves up to be nailed to the cross of mass misunderstanding and condemnation. (Not unless you happen to enjoy suffering.) Only an exhibitionist must expose his private life in order to enjoy it," and so on (17). In this formulation, while homosexuality itself is reclaimed as just as normal as heterosexuality, the act of coming out becomes a form of sexual perversion, associated with such fetishes as masochism and exhibitionism. This is a form of sexual containment that developed within gay and lesbian circles in conversation with the larger discourse of sexual containment that regulated heterosexual domesticity in this period. For Hales and other writers in this therapeutic vein, homosexuality was only dangerous to the homosexual if it expressed itself publicly, outside of the individual or the couple.

A later, anonymous article, "More Alike than Different," reinforces this point and attaches this strain of individualism to an American foundation: "'The pursuit of life, liberty and happiness' is common to all of us," this author states. Other things supposedly common to all, heterosexual and homosexual alike, include "the desire for the security and fulfillment of a partnership based on love, understanding and companionship," and "the need for a 'home'—the sense of belonging and having roots" (10). The author aligns

lesbians and gay men with mainstream heterosexual Americans in "the pursuit of happiness" as expressed in the pursuit of the domestic ideal. As for heterosexuals, the marriage partnership and the home are avenues to a sense of security and personal fulfillment; they are also containers for the dangers of desire and sexuality, forces which have the potential to destabilize society as well as create stability within the family. This article encourages homosexuals to continue to seek that balance. "In the final analysis," the author concludes, "the main object of all people, regardless of their sexual preference, is to be able to live and get along with others. As long as outward forms of propriety are observed, the personal life of any individual should be his own" (11). Once again, containment—in the form of refraining from public disclosure of dangerous sexuality—is held to be paradoxically necessary for the homosexual to be able to safely be "his" authentic self.

May writes that "according to the experts" of the 1950s, the psychotherapists, sociologists, and uncredentialed advice columnists to whom adherents of the domestic consensus ideology looked for guidance, "political activism was not likely to keep the world steady. They advocated adaptation rather than resistance as a means of feeling 'at home'" (22). As this chapter's analysis of The Ladder shows, even for those lesbians involved in the first civil rights organizations for homosexuals (organizations which explicitly engaged with national- and local-level political issues), the greatest importance in the quest for personal happiness was still attributed to the individual life and the choices each woman made. Most of these women considered some form the domestic consensus ideology to be the best avenue for personal fulfillment. These women's interventions in the dominant discourse of homosexuality was their public insistence –

persistently engaged in, despite the abiding discomfort with lesbian visibility – that there must be space in the nation for the lesbian citizen *and* the lesbian family.

In a way, with The Ladder, early Cold War era lesbian and gay writing comes full circle from The City and the Pillar. Paralleling Gore Vidal's argument that a homosexual could be a "completely ordinary boy," the dominant theme of The Ladder is that lesbians can be completely ordinary "girls." That is, they can, and they should; unlike Vidal, these writers, with their rejection of lesbian "exhibitionism," portray fitting in as a moral imperative. But they also differ from Vidal in their concern for the material conditions of economic inequality and legal discrimination under which U.S. lesbian women lived in the 1950s. The Ladder must be understood as a socially and politically engaged publication which drew attention to injustices *and* provided lesbian writers, amateur and professional, with a space in which to publicly and creatively[76] imagine different, positive possibilities for lesbian life.

This was also the work of all the texts by gay and lesbian authors discussed in this dissertation. With different positionings along axes of race, class, gender, and other hierarchies, as well as different personal perspectives and political commitments, no two of the writers had exactly the same ideas about what it meant to be (a) homosexual in the early Cold War era, or what homosexuality meant (or should mean) for the nation. All of them, though, furthered the consolidation of forms of "gay identity" that have continued to hold cultural cachet for sixty years, by providing lesbians and gay men with a set of terms, ideas, and characteristics with which they might identify themselves, and by promoting a sense of transcendent "gay community" among a far-flung reading public.

[76] I use "creativity" here in Julia Cameron's dual sense of both artwork and the work of creating the world (3).

Most importantly, they provided public alternatives to the dominant, state-sponsored, negative discourses about homosexuality that flourished in a political climate of paranoia and a cultural climate of suburban domestic retreat. The complexity and multiplicity of the queer responses to these oppressive dominant ideologies, and the alternative representations of homosexuality these writers contributed, have been seriously under-recognized by scholars in the fields of literature, history, and lesbian and gay studies. It is my sincere hope that with this dissertation, I have contributed to a deepened understanding of the role and participation of lesbian and gay writers in the national conversation about the meanings of homosexuality taking place in the United States between 1945 and 1960.

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