QUEER AMERICAN EXPATRIATE WRITERS IN FRANCE
AND THE BIRTH OF THE GAY MODERNIST SUBJECT

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a comprehensive critical history of forgotten or neglected queer American writers in the international expatriate community in France who used their time in the French mainland and colonies to construct early narratives of gay identity. This project argues that French literature and art, which had already articulated discourses and paradigms of queer sexuality through writers like Proust, Gide, and Colette, and French cultural spaces in which a vibrant underground queer culture was present, were integral to the imagination of American gay identity and culture in the early to mid 20th century. This dissertation contends that through modernist French and European philosophies and literary movements such as surrealism, psychoanalysis, orientalism, and existentialism, queer American writers were able to imagine and express queer identity and desire in ways previously unspeakable in an American context. By considering unpublished manuscripts from the archives and reevaluating overlooked queer-themed works from the Lost Generation era through the 50s in France, this study uses this new history of queer writers in France to explore the wide range of queer expression in pre-Stonewall American literature before it would eventually be consolidated under the term “gay.”
Dedicated to the Memory of Dr. Lawrence Schehr
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In her short story “Miss Furr and Miss Skeene” from 1922, Gertrude Stein is widely credited as the first American author to use the word “gay” to refer to a specifically homosexual relationship. Based on a lesbian couple Stein knew in France, the woodblock artists Ethel Mars and Maud Hunt Squire, Miss Furr and Miss Skeene find happiness with one another as they cultivate their voices together in Paris (Stone 2002). That the very first American fiction to express homosexual romance as “gay” was written by an expatriate in France about artists who were able to realize homosexual desire and develop as artists in Paris speaks to how the American expatriate movement in France helped shaped the evolution of gay identity and queer literature in America over the 20th century.

In true Stein fashion, she repeats the word “gay” countless times, exploring every possible connotation of the word and the dynamics of the queer relationship it described:

They were in a way both gay there where there were many cultivating something. They were both regular in being gay there. Helen Furr was gay there, she was gayer and gayer there and really she was just gay there, she was gayer and gayer there, that is to say she found ways of being gay there that she was using in being gay there. She was gay there, not gayer and gayer, just gay there, that is to say she was not gayer by using the things she found there that were gay things, she was gay there, always she was gay there. (564)

Unlike her birthplace in Oakland, California which she famously dismissed saying, “there is no there there,” there was a “there” in France—a place where people could be “gay there”. Not only could one be gay there and “find ways of being gay there”, one could cultivate a voice there in order to speak one’s gayness and one could do “gay things” there. Published in the same year as
the expatriation of the first author profiled in my study, Robert McAlmon, Stein’s five pages on cultivating a gay voice in a space where one could be gay is an invitation to all other expatriates to come and find their own gay space, gay voice, and gay things to do in France. Stein’s repetition only subtly hints at the gays things in France with the slight variations in connotation, yet at its theoretical core, she illustrates the backbone of my dissertation argument: France provided a space where Americans could cultivate a gay voice using modernist innovations in literary form and cull inspiration from the different style of living that French culture offered.

While Gertrude Stein has made her way into the canon, and over the last few decades scholarship on other lesbian, American expatriates such as Djuna Barnes, Natalie Clifford Barney, and H.D. could fill a library, similar attention has not been paid to the gay American men of the expatriate movement in France. In this dissertation, I synthesize a critical literary history of queer American expatriate writers in France during the interwar period. This critical history explores a period of American queer writing during which the now common discourse, culture, and politics of gay identity in America had yet to exist or were in a state of becoming. Thus, a great part of this study is devoted to the question of where and how queer literary expression among American modernists found inspiration, conceptual models, archetypes, and literary conceits for imagining the kinds of queer desire and sexual identities that coalesced around the culture of “gay” in the second half of the 20th century. Queer writers of this era were particularly inventive because they had to formulate language to express facets of same-sex desire and gender non-conformity that come today nearly prefabricated with specific terminology and a canon of literature and art to which contemporary generations look to inform and navigate gay identity.
Modernism as a literary movement provided an innovative method of writing that allowed for queer writers to express desire and depict the extravagant spectacle of the gay culture in forms that illustrated the changing face of the modern world through prose and poetry that defied conventions of form, temporality, and subject matter. Modernist art and modern culture had a mutualistic relationship—new forms of expression were invented to represent new and emerging cultural identities while individuals emerging into these evolving cultures (be it the gay community, the urban migration of African Americans to the North, or the influx of immigrant populations) looked to modernist innovation to inform and define one’s self and community. In *Gay New York*, George Chauncey refers to the “fairy” of this interwar era, a gay man who combined signifiers of masculinity and femininity on his body, as a bricoleur—a skilled appropriator of clothing, behaviors, and language from a variety of cultures and classes cobbled together to formulate an identity that expressed his gender and sexual feelings. I want to think of the queer modernist writers of this era as bricoleurs (a term I myself am appropriating from the French) that appropriated conventions of narrative, archetypes, symbolism, and poetics from a variety of sources and reimagined them in ways that illuminated queer desire and sexual expression in new ways. The language of modernism did not simply describe an already existing queer phenomena, but instead by granting it semiotics and narrative, it helped to form and shape gay identity itself. I argue that this inventiveness among queer modernists not only shows us the evolution of gay identity, but that in studying their works, we discover figurations of gender, sexuality, and desire that we may be blind to today given our own strict definitions of these terms as part of lgbt identity politics.

It is no coincidence that so many queer American writers, both those well known like Paul Bowles and those obscure like Robert McAlmon, whose writing shaped how queer identity
and desire was conceptualized and expressed, expatriated to or spent many formative years abroad in France and in French colonial spaces. In examining the lives and works of these queer American expatriate modernists, I account for the myriad of ways in which French culture, politics, art, geography, philosophy, morality—in short, all things French, played a crucial role in the evolution of queer American literary expression and the emergence of American gay culture as a whole. French culture provided these writers with new philosophies for conceptualizing sexual expression and identity, new literary forms of expression for narrating desire, and a cultural space in which gay culture was in a state of flourishing. The queer American writers profiled in this study voyaged to France for many different personal reasons, but they were all united in the common bond that their time spent in France profoundly shaped the way in which they conceptualized and expressed queer desire and expression. While it would be impossible to enumerate every single reason why they chose to expatriate, there are common themes that arise repeatedly in their narratives that explain why France was such an attractive and inspiring destination for queer artists. In my analyses of queer expatriate narratives, I will pay especially close attention to the following ways in which France fostered a space for the queer literary imagination to flourish.

1. **A More Tolerant Political and Social Environment**

   France has had no sodomy law since the French Revolution. Meanwhile Germany had Paragraph 175, England had the Buggery Laws under which Oscar Wilde was convicted, and each state in the American union had their own permutations of sodomy laws ranging from the banning of same-sex coupling to certain illicit sexual acts between heterosexuals. This is, of course, not to say that gays, lesbians, and transgender people did not experience discrimination
in France. The police enforced codes about cross-dressing, public conduct, solicitation, and other laws that criminalized certain expressions of gay culture, but the act itself within the private sphere was legal. This reflected a common French cultural value about the relativity of morality that many queer expatriate writers depict in their works, lauding France as a place where personal conduct was allowed to be private while criticizing America, often characterized by its Puritanism and its obsession with policing personal morality.

2. The Presence of a Queer Canon in Arts and Literature

By the time that the American colony in Montparnasse had been populated, famous queer French writers such as Marcel Proust, André Gide, Colette, Arthur Rimbaud, and Jean Cocteau had already published well-received and popular narratives depicting same-sex love amongst their characters. These works were rapidly translated and found their way across the Atlantic where writers in their teen years such as Charles Henri Ford and Paul Bowles first read about homosexual themes in these texts. French literature already had a narrative, a set of archetypes, genres, and a language for speaking same-sex desire in its national literature that popular American literature lacked. Queer American expatriates not only consumed and appropriated ideas about same-sex desire from this literature, but by sharing the cultural space in which it was written, they also absorbed the affects of French culture and its queer dimensions that could only be put on the page through experiencing the space for their selves.

3. Greater Visibility of Queer Culture in France

The 1920s brought an unprecedented level of attention to the burgeoning gay community in Paris, both positive and negative. Outraged social commentators who saw homosexuality as
indicative of the decline of traditional culture in the modern age published warnings about the decadence of homosexuality pervading every area of French culture and its neighborhoods. Increased public scrutiny meant greater surveillance, but it also provided young queers with descriptions of the places where they could meet others and the behaviors they needed to look for in order to communicate in the gay demimonde. The gay world emerged not simply in spite of public scrutiny, but also because of it. Gay clubs, dance halls, and drag shows became increasingly popular forms of entertainment that straights and queers alike attended and marveled at the spectacle of men and women flaunting the codes of gender on stage. Gay celebrities like Jean Cocteau were renown and the bar *Le Boeuf sur le Toit* became famous for its queer crowd along with The Dome, The Select, and Bricktop’s where queers could congregate with the young and hip from the straight world. Literature depicting the gay underground and the fashionable mainstream bars with queer habitués made its way across the Atlantic, including guidebooks detailing where to find these establishments. Buttressed by the reputation of France in the American imaginary as a place of romance and sensual delights, the visibility of gay culture in the 20s expanded this romantic culture projection to illuminate queer desire as well.

4. **The Queerness of American Expatriate Life**

Queers were attracted not just by the presence of other gays and lesbians, but also by the presence of a community that lived in defiance of the traditional values and stifling social expectations of American culture. The liberal attitudes toward sex and gender within the American colony in Paris among heterosexuals had a queer resonance, developing a reputation in American periodicals and literature as a culture directly defying puritan American values of productivity, stable domesticity, and the temperance of the prohibition era. Although the lure of
sexual liberation in Montparnasse had its purely sensual qualities, sex was part of an overall critique of American values that saw sexual repression as part of a cultural apparatus that stymied individual development and produced a stagnant culture. The embracing of liberal attitudes toward sex and gender was one of several connected re-imaginings of nation, community, identity, and artistic expression that attracted queer men and women who felt themselves to be on the outside of American society as well.

5. Paris as the Epicenter of Modernism

As I argued earlier, the innovative forms and anti-traditional themes of modernist literature provided the types of narrative and discourse through which queer writers could innovate ways of expressing queer subjectivity. Many of the internationally renown writers of the modernist era expatriated to Paris in the interwar years, including the aforementioned Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Ford Maddox Ford, and Samuel Beckett among others. Young writers new to the modernist milieu often found a literary apprenticeship to established writers. All four of the writers extensively studied in this dissertation (along with Samuel Steward) were taken under the wing of Gertrude Stein early in their careers. Robert McAlmon helped to edit Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Charles Henri Ford worked on an early manuscript for Djuna Barnes’ *Nightwood*. Additionally, France was the center of several artistic and philosophical movements that offered criticisms of society and new modes of aesthetic and poetic expression that the writers of my study used to inspire their own queer expressions. The cubists, surrealists, existentialists, and Georges Gurdjieff’s Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man all captured the imaginations of the writers in this study and provided new conceptual paradigms for
theorizing and expressing the body, gender, sexuality, and human psychology that disrupted conventional wisdom and resonated with the queer imaginary.

**Recovering Queer Voices**

This dissertation is also, in part, a project of recovering lost and marginalized voices from the modernist era and reevaluating the scholarly narrative of modernism, the expatriate movement, and the Lost Generation with these queer perspectives restored in their place in history. Famous expatriate texts such as Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*, Fitzgerald’s *Tender is the Night* and Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer* all mention the presence of male homosexual characters and use them as symbols of the changing face of masculinity and a man’s role in the era of modernity, but largely leave them as peripheral figures. By reclaiming lost and marginalized texts I bring the queer male out of the margins and into central focus. Some of the texts I consider have been sitting for decades in the archives of the Yale Beinecke Library and the Getty Library, many of which have never been published. Three of the four authors that constitute my author chapters, Robert McAlmon, Charles Henri Ford, and Fritz Peters all have fully completed, unpublished manuscripts depicting queer sexuality in the modernist era in their archives that have never been considered in scholarship. I have been able to access some of these unpublished manuscripts and I factor in the great depth of unpublished queer literature into my re-reading of sexuality in the modernist era. In my Robert McAlmon chapter, for example, I devote a section to his unpublished manuscript “Hangovers of the Gay 90s,” a short story originally part of his collection *Distinguished Air: Grim Fairy Tales* from 1926. Why McAlmon chose not to publish this fascinating story about two heterosexual artists in France who wish they were homosexual so that their troubles with women would be solved along with their gay,
elderly dandy friend, remains a mystery. But, by rescuing it from the archive, I hope to not only demonstrate that psychologically rich considerations about gay desire and identity were more prevalent in the American expatriate setting that previously accounted for, but also to factor it into scholarship on the history of early LGBT literature as a whole. By finding these unpublished manuscripts and pulling lost texts from the library to write a coherent history of queer expatriation in France, this dissertation contributes to my larger project as a scholar to help re-write the history of gay identity and expression in America through reclaiming lost and forgotten authors and their texts.

Expatriation in France was also an opportunity for queer American writers to re-evaluate American culture from a distance. Luminaries of the expatriate movement such as Harold Stearns and Malcolm Cowley saw the expatriate movement in the 20s as a form of exile on the part of a new generation of American artists and writers who felt stifled by traditional American culture and its social values. Paris beckoned as a city that not only featured a rich “authentic” cultural heritage and patrimony, but it also provided an international, cosmopolitan space in which American expatriates hoped to draw inspiration to re-imagine American art and culture outside of its isolationism. Gertrude Stein perhaps most famously demonstrated this with her 900-plus-page novel *The Making of Americans* written entirely in Paris, which unfortunately bankrupted Robert McAlmon’s publishing company. While many of the queer writers of this study shared this perspective, their time spent in France also provided a perspective through which they could evaluate the status of sexual identity in America and compare it to that in France and Europe. For example, in “Miss Knight” Robert McAlmon compares the policing of homosexuality and transgender identity in America through raids on drag balls and nightclubs to the police tactics in Europe. By extension, McAlmon illustrates that the psychology of the gay
individual who fears police surveillance produces a different subjective sense of one’s queer identity to those who do not hold the same fear. In the French colonies of North Africa, Paul Bowles lamented how westernization brought with it the use of the term “homosexual” and thus the diminishing of traditional same-sex practices among the North Africans because it is now thought of as degenerate. What McAlmon, Bowles, and other writers of this dissertation demonstrate is that different cultural spaces do not only enable or liberate already existing sexual identities, but that they produce distinct identities in of themselves. Thus, in living in a different cultural environment that produced different sexual identities, American queer expatriates were able to criticize what many saw as the culture of American sexual repression and its construction of the homosexual versus what same-sex desire meant in a culture they believed to be less prey to moralism and the regulation of sexuality.

By focusing on the history of queer expatriation to France, I argue that this migration was not an isolated or freak occurrence in LGBT history, but that it was instead one particularly productive episode in the long history of queer migration. Dislocation is a common theme to queer narratives because most individuals were not born or raised in areas that had a locatable gay community. The birth of gay communities in America was largely an urban phenomenon, as the 19th century explosion of industrialization meant that working class individuals could separate from the family and live a “single” life among others united in their common pursuits of individual pleasure instead of familial obligations. Gay identity is one of the products of the great urban migration during industrialization at the turn of the century. In order to explore one’s identity, to search for community and language that supported these queer feelings, travel became imperative. This study of expatriation not only looks at the conventions of travel narratives, but it also argues that the itinerancy of the queer individual, displaced from home and
in search for queer spaces that were often impermanent and underground, constituted an important facet of gay identity itself. I use the word “queer itinerant” throughout this study to conceptualize how the constant travel of queers through different nations and cultural spaces defined a part of their identity and how the perception of queerness changed in different cultural constructs—meaning that by crossing national and cultural borders, one could become a new identity based on the cultural context. My study writes against the American-centric vision of gay identity that assumes universal constants for same-sex behavior, and instead through a study of how American writers’ own concepts of sexuality evolved based on living in a foreign environment, I encourage greater attention paid to how situatedness in certain national and cultural spaces molds sexual identity.

The four writers with dedicated chapters in this study are by no means the only queer American expatriate writers who lived in France, nor am I contending they are the most important. In my first chapter, I dedicate a section to looking at a broader history of writers who spent time in France and contributed to the making of an American gay literature. The writers I have chosen, Robert McAlmon, Charles Henri Ford, Paul Bowles, and Fritz Peters are those whose works and lives best represent the influence of French culture on their depictions on queer sexuality. Additionally McAlmon, Ford, and Peters are queer voices whose work has seen little scholarship and have left behind unpublished work worthy of rescue from the archives. Although Paul Bowles is relatively well known and his novel The Sheltering Sky has hit near-canonical status, very little has been written to consider Bowles, not only in the context of his French influences, but also as a unique voice of queer desire because he resisted identification as a “gay writer.”
The first chapter, “The Historical and Cultural Context of Interwar Queer Expatriation to France” sketches out my method for synthesizing a critical history of queer expatriation out of the many narratives and studies of the Lost Generation through World War Two. I examine the dominant models of how same-sex desire was conceptualized in both America and France and compare how gay communities and cultures developed in both nations over the turn of the century. Along with providing further context for the previously enumerated reasons why queer American writers chose to expatriate and how they found inspiration there, I also discuss how the American cultural imaginary constructed France as a sexual utopia. Americans did not just travel to or gawk at the gay demimonde in France, but instead became active participants in the culture, to the point where French civilians began to associate American expatriates with lewdness and wild behavior. By analyzing the presence of homosexuality in the narratives of Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, I argue that not only was France enabling of expressing queer subjectivity for gay writers, but that the expatriate experience in France molded how canonical authors viewed homosexuality as well, and in turn, influenced the tropes, characterizations, and symbolism of homosexuality in American literature as a whole. Finally, I catalogue a history of queer American writers who spent considerable time in France and did not receive dedicated chapters in this study, arguing that queer expatriation to France was a wide reaching phenomena in the interwar years and integral to the development of an American gay literary canon.

In my second chapter, “Robert McAlmon, a Lost Queer Voice of the Lost Generation”, I present McAlmon’s life and works as a counter history to the dominant scholarly narratives of the American expatriate movement while highlighting the often ignored presence and contributions of queers to the Lost Generation and the Montparnasse community. McAlmon
resisted romantic notions about the superiority of European culture or the “exile’s” imperative to redeem American culture from abroad, but instead stressed how he, and his cast of queer expatriate characters, chose the environment because there is “less interference with private life” in France. As a publisher, he not only had the freedom from American obscenity laws to publish his own book of stories about queer expatriate life, but those of writers like Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes, and Ken Sato as well. In contrast to the self-proclaimed “deracinated ones” who merely felt stymied by American culture, McAlmon’s stories of queer expatriates detail lives for whom deracination was essential to realizing their queer identity. Through McAlmon’s recently rediscovered *The Nightinghoul of Paris*, and unpublished work I found in the Yale Beinecke library, I argue that McAlmon’s vision of the American colony in Montparnasse constituted its own queer space insofar as its habitués used it to eschew the demands back home in America to be economically productive, create stable domestic lives, and reproduce. Conversely, the quarter offered a space of arrested development in terms of conventional American markers of maturity and manhood where one could develop individually as an artist and become a subject of one’s own desire.

Chapter 3, “Tapping the Unconscious: Charles Henri Ford’s Surreal Poetics and Queer Desires” profiles how Ford reimagined the philosophy and the aesthetics of surrealism in order to depict queer bodies and conceptualize same-sex desire. Surrealism combined Freud’s theories of psychoanalysis with the revolutionary politics of Marxism to produce an anti-normative, amoral shock to a complacent social order. Surrealism’s method represented the true experience of human thought by wrestling the unconscious from its repressed state and depicting how irrational, subjective associations lodged in the individual unconscious informs consciousness of the world around us. Yet, surrealism’s despotic founder, André Breton, also harbored a deep sense of
homophobia and dramatically censored any talk or examination of homoerotic desire, accusing homosexuals of the bourgeois decadences and abuses that surrealism’s radical politics despised. Therefore, Ford had to show that homosexuality could be part of a revolutionary project and work around surrealism’s shortcomings to supplement their lack of a theorization of queer sexuality with a bricolage of other sources. I argue that Ford found three principle sources for his creation of a queer surrealist poetics: 1. His life-long romantic partnership with painter Pavel Tchelitchew. Together, through mutual aesthetic and poetic collaboration between their work, they visualized and textualized erotic male bodies. 2. His assemblage of an alternate, queer surrealist canon. Ford’s journals reveal queer re-readings of writers the surrealists deemed precursors to their method like Arthur Rimbaud and the Marquis de Sade. Ford also cultivated the influence of gay surrealists like Rene Crevel who used surrealist philosophy to call for sexual liberation and Jean Cocteau who provided a model for addressing queer desire through the interplay of visual art, film, and poetry. 3. His re-assessment of psychoanalysis. By adding the work of Carl Jung to Freud’s psychoanalytic theories, Ford dramatically expanded the range of psychoanalytic thought that could be employed in surrealism. Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious, archetypes, and the anima and animus allowed Ford to conceptualize individuation in queer terms that explained the co-presence of masculine and feminine feelings in the gay subject.

In my fourth chapter, “The American Immoralist: Paul Bowles and the Un-Naming of Queer Desire” I argue that Bowles’ readings of French writers and philosophy allowed him to resist the detested label of “gay writer” and subvert the politics of identity, which enabled him to depict the more unsettling aspects of desire. First, I examine the influence of existentialism and the work of Jean-Paul Sartre who often used homosexual characters in his fiction and philosophy
as a way to illustrate how guilt and shame forced onto certain identities forces individuals into the bad faith of self-denial. Existentialism’s “existence before essence” provided Bowles with the philosophy that allowed him to explore the phenomenological experience of queer desire without having to label, confess, or redeem it. While Sartre’s existentialism constituted the philosophical justification for resisting the labeling of desire, it was Bowles’ admiration for André Gide that provided the literary voice through which he could express queer desire without specifically naming it. In my study of the influence of André Gide on both Bowles’ path of expatriation to France and North Africa and his depiction of queer desire in his literary works, I focus on how Gide’s own resistance toward naming his desire compelled Bowles to incorporate the themes, archetypes, and locations that kept his silence. Bowles’ shared Gide’s famous sentiment, “families, I hate you!” by identifying the patriarchy of the nuclear family as an institution repressive of desire, creativity, and individualism. He also appropriated Gide’s figure of the queer “uncle” (both biological and family friends) as a character with the potential to corrupt the child and introduce him to luxuries and desires that undermine the hermetically sealed patriarchal familial structure. Furthermore, I argue that it was Gide’s orientalism, his narratives of liberating desire within the French colonial spaces, that made the deepest impact on Bowles. Although Gide is mostly blind or indifferent to the abuses of colonialism and the power asymmetries over the people that allowed him to freely pursue desire, Bowles makes constant references to the violence and exploitation inherent to the colonies of North Africa and the Indies. Bowles recognizes his complicity in this project, but he also calls attention to how colonial exploitation is an inescapable part of how certain queer desires have been attached to an orientalist projection of the colonial “other” and how the fantasy of escaping civilization blinds the traveler to the abuses he wreaks on those he deems outside of civilization.
The final chapter of this study, “Pioneers of the Mind: Fritz Peters and The Spatialization of Desire” profiles how Peters’ time spent in France as young man (as a student of the renown mystic Georges Gurdjieff, as teenager growing up among queer modernist writers like Gertrude Stein and Margaret Anderson, and his time spent fighting in World War Two) informed his conceptualizations of queer psychology, his sensitivity to how geographical and cultural spaces produce and enable desire, and his critique of American Puritanism contrasted with the French’s lax sense of personal morality. I explore Peters’ three memoirs of his time spent at Gurdjieff’s Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man in Fontainebleau and illuminate how Gurdjieff’s teachings that criticized modern assumptions about human psychology, morality, sexuality, and gender allowed Peters to conceptualize gay subjectivity. Unlike Gide’s and Bowles’ immoralism and surrealism’s amoralism, Peters used Gurdjieff’s concept of “objective morality”, which stated that what is morally right is what is conducive to each individual’s personal development, to argue that homosexuality is not inherently immoral, but that the young gay man had the right to define his own morality. Peters explores this theme in his novel *Finistère* as a young gay American teenager struggles with the morality of his desires, trying to find a space in between American Puritanism and what he perceives to be the indifference of the French to morality at all. In this novel, Peters also shows how queer desire is spatialized. By the spatialization of queer desire, I refer to how different public and private spaces, based on their location, codes of social conduct, power structure, and who is granted access, among other considerations, are tactically appropriated by queers to pursue desire in ways impossible under full public scrutiny. These spaces do not just serve as locations for pre-formed queer erotic and social practices, but also, the space actually informs and dictates what kinds of queer interactions are possible, thus playing a role in shaping gay culture and identity. Peters maps out an eroticized
French geography, with the pastoral settings of the boarding school by the Seine in the countryside and the oceanscape of Finistère as idyllic spaces where same sex desire is innocent and private while the demimonde of Paris with its bars, flophouses, and cruising sites represent the spaces where same-sex desire is corrupted in the public.

By focusing on these four writers after sketching out a critical history of queer American expatriate writing in France, it is my aim to account for the variety of ways in which French culture has been integral in the modernist building of a gay American literary voice and identity. Not only will this study isolate the early origins of concepts, behaviors, and imagery now ubiquitous in gay culture, but I also pay close attention to those figurations of desire and identity that have long gone extinct or neglected. For example, I devote considerable study to the “fairy” as a unique figure that played with masculine and feminine signifiers of gender in a way that produced a distinct queer subjectivity and set of behaviors for which we have no exact equivalent today. That “trade”, a heterosexual male, could pursue a fairy and retain his sense of heterosexuality in both his and the fairy’s mind speaks to the ability of gender and sexual identity in that era to cross lines in ways that are today too sharply defined to overcome. My goal is not to just sketch out where today’s dominant models of gay identity and culture have come from, but to also suggest that certain forms of queer desire, identity, and its representation from the modernist era illuminated the ambiguity and malleability of sexuality and gender in ways that today’s gay/straight binary exclude. Gay identity in America, with its “born this way” mantra, has become increasingly essentialist in its definitions and ahistorical in its perception that gay men have always been born into the same innate subjectivity. Although this strict, culturally acceptable model of the gay individual has brought a greater sense of security and tolerance, it has also resulted in a certain blindness to ways in which feelings of gender, biological sex,
desire, personal expression, and intimate bonding, (among the wide range of human experience) do not neatly fit within the prescribed parameters of specifically defined identities and end up, ironically enough, repressed. Without this sense of the certainty of fixed definitions for gay desire or the assumed beliefs that come with gay as a political minority and identity politics, the gay writer and artist of the interwar era was able to discover elements of queer desire and identity that would be foreclosed by today’s identity politics. In devoting this study to the making of a modern gay American subject in expatriate France, I also want this history to inspire new ways of viewing contemporary gay identity and culture as something itself in a state of evolution. Just as gay Americans in this study imported French figurations of queer desire and helped to mold the modern sense of “gay,” our contemporary queer culture is still, constantly appropriating from foreign cultures in ways that are redefining practices of sex, gender, desire, and their expressions in forms inconceivable at present.
CHAPTER 2
HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

In this second chapter, I take an in depth look at the historical and cultural context behind the expatriation of the queer American writers profiled in this dissertation. These chapters profile only four authors, but they are not the only examples of queer American expatriates in interwar France. Rather, I argue that they indicate a broader trend of queer Americans who came to find inspiration as artists and writers within the American colony of expatriates in Montparnasse. In the final section of this chapter, I briefly detail the lives and works of other notable queer writers who spent considerable time in France in the interwar period, such as writers of the Harlem Renaissance like Claude McKay and Countée Cullen, gay mystery novelist Samuel Steward, and Franco-American writers Julien Green and Edourad Roditi, among others. This chapter synthesizes a new history of interwar queer expatriation by accounting for the widely different reasons and circumstances under which these authors decided to expatriate or travel to France and how their experiences in the community and exposure to French national and artistic culture influenced their contributions to the history of queer literary expression in America.

The expatriate experience in France and the influence of French conceptualizations of sexuality enabled new ways of expressing queer identity and desire in American literature as writers compared how sexual identity was expressed, defined, and policed in American and French cultural contexts. In the first section of this chapter, I detail a historical overview of homosexuality as an evolving concept from its first introduction as a term in America in 1892 to the myriad of ways clinicians, sexologists, and psychologists defined and conceptualized same-sex desire. Gay identity during the first half of the 20th century in America was a dialogue, sometimes contentious, sometimes mutually informing, between these experts who attempted to
taxonomize desire and categorize psychological types and those individuals embodied in queer desire who crafted innovative cultural practices, a unique language, and complex forms of personal identity in order to express these desires and find community amongst others. It is this history of innovation, artistic expression, and community building that eventually consolidated these imaginings of queer sexuality under the now ubiquitous term “gay.”

In this respect, both American and French LGBT history is remarkably similar, but the greatest difference between them was that France had no sodomy law. While French authorities sought to punish scandalous behavior in public and conservative social critics incited moral panic around the visibility and pervasiveness of homosexuality in France, the fact that the homosexual act in of itself was not illegal in private and that the French had more relaxed obscenity laws allowed for a deeper flourishing of queer culture along with a high level of visibility in the public eye. Even though the majority of public discourse in France surrounding homosexuality was negative, accusing homosexuals of corrupting minors, contributing to the low post-war birthrate, and a general lack of French patrimony, the mere state of speaking of homosexuality illuminated its existence, gave it a name,¹ and pointed toward the spaces in which it could be found. To have derogatory language to describe one’s desires provided at least a starting point from which young queers could examine and later contest these denigrations.

I contend that the assumption of a liberal, progressive France and a backward, repressive America was more the product of the American imagination than reality. French culture has long

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¹ It is important to note that while the French language used both “homosexual” and “gay” (gai), it was also common to use the term “pédéraste,” which comes from the concept of “pederasty,” intergenerational relationships between youth and older men. While in America, it has been a long held (largely unfounded) stereotype that homosexual men sought to sexually pursue and corrupt the youth, in France, this idea was explicitly inscribed in the very term commonly used to describe all homosexuals. “Pédéraste” was often used in a negative connotation, but it had a basis in truth in that turn of the century homosexual authors such as André Gide and uranian poets like Lord Alfred Douglass advocated for intergenerational homosexual relationships as a
inhabited a space in the American cultural imaginary as one of romance, art, culture, passion, and exotic fantasies. American popular culture peddled this cliché in film and musical performance, and with the growing reputation of the expatriate crowd for indulgence and decadence as journalists portrayed the rowdy American colony and expatriate novels by Fitzgerald and Hemingway become popular among the Jazz Age crowd, many Americans went abroad to France expecting a sexual utopia. Because my project charts queerness within the literary imagination, eventhough the fact that the real, material state of affairs in France did not always live up to its hype, it is just as important to understand how the American imaginary construction of French culture enabled queer expression as much as acknowledging the actual state of engaging with it in the streets. Queer literature has long been occupied with the dual task of describing the gritty, sometimes depressing reality of gay life as persecuted minorities and imagining utopian alternatives where their desires can be achieved. Life in the expatriate world provided an abundance of material for both documenting reality on the streets and borrowing innovations in French culture and philosophy for imagining and constructing alternative worlds.

As I document, not only did American expatriates and travelers participate in the burgeoning French queer culture, but they also contributed to it and gained a reputation amongst the French for their licentiousness. American travelers arrived armed with guidebooks showcasing the risqué Parisian nightlife and popular expatriate novels like The Sun Also Rises (1926) and Tropic of Cancer (1934), determined to experience for themselves what had been sold to them as the capital of decadence. Yet, outside of the bals musettes and sensual titillations, what queers found most encouraging among the American expatriate colony in Paris was a culture of non-conformity to the core tenets of American puritan morality. The expatriate crowd earned a reputation for despising the protestant work ethic and the imperative to be productive,
defying gender norms and sexual taboos, drinking freely during the US’s era of prohibition, calling for modernist innovations in art and literature against American traditional forms, and criticizing American class consciousness among many other critiques of American society. They did not just attract queers: they themselves had a queer stance, askew from normative American values. With this defiance of the American status quo as the ideal of the Lost Generation, the writers of the expatriate movement created a critical discourse that enabled queers to craft their own responses to the puritan sexual morality and to begin to create language to imagine queer desire through modernist innovation, influenced by both American expatriates and the French culture around them.

Finally, in the last two sections of this chapter, I illustrate how homosexuality and queerness became a recurring theme in expatriate literature. The more visible and open queer culture in France not only enabled queer Americans to explore these identities and desires, but it also attracted the reluctant, yet fascinated attention of some of the most famous and influential American writers of the 20th century, including Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Thomas Wolfe. In considering the homosexual themes in their expatriate works, I contend that fascination with the gay “fairy” provided an effeminate foil against which the masculinity of their ostensibly heterosexual male characters was measured. Although some narratives, especially Hemingway’s, trafficked in violent homophobia, others displayed a more thoughtful curiosity about the psyche of the “inverted” male and its origins. Yet, for Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Wolfe, the culture of the fairy signaled a certain crisis of masculinity during the modernist era—a product of the rapidly changing attitudes about gender roles and identity and a looming specter of castration and emasculation that threatened the fragile egos of heterosexual men struggling to adjust to the social politics of the era.
While the visible gay subculture signified a crisis of masculinity for the aforementioned canonical writers, in the imaginations of the queer expatriate, it provided an opportunity to re-envision gender and sexual identities and to create new narratives of queer experience. In the final section of this chapter, I allow these writers to use what they learned from their own experience in France to write in response to the dominant construction of male homosexuality in expatriate works. Samuel Steward, for example, directly addresses Hemingway’s homophobia in *A Moveable Feast* and contends that Gertrude Stein’s infamous comments about homosexuals as sick and drug-addicted were grossly misrepresented. In documenting the extensive coverage of homosexuality as a theme in expatriate literature and illuminating the participation of Americans in the queer culture of France, this chapter argues that not only was American and French modernism integral to the construction of gay identity, but that also, in turn, the emerging gay culture greatly influenced how American and French modernism depicted and viewed emerging issues about sex, gender roles, personal liberties, nationality, and human rights.

**The Birth of a Gay Nation:**

**American Queer Culture and Sexual Identity in Early 20th Century America**

To support my inquiry into the ways queer American expatriates found new forms of describing and conceptualizing gay identity and desire in French culture, I must first contextualize their position as queers within American society in that era. In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault famously traces the birth of the homosexual to 1870 and sexologist Carl Westphal’s notion of “contrary sexual feeling,” and argues that, “homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary
aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (43). For Foucault, the emergence of the “homosexual” as a paradigm within medical discourse for conceptualizing same-sex erotic behavior transformed how the public viewed such behavior. Lovers of the same sex were no longer perceived in terms of an individual who chose perverse sexual behavior, but now they were defined as a distinct category of humanity compelled to such behavior due to some biological cause.

The term “homosexual” itself did not enter America until 1892 when Charles Gilbert Chaddock translated German sexologist Richard Von Krafft-Ebing’s influential Psychopathia Sexualis from 1886 (Ackerman 5). In One Hundred Years of Homosexuality, which counts Chaddok’s translation as the birth date of homosexuality in America, David Halperin reminds us that there were other terms in medical literature available to Americans, the most influential of which was the concept of “inversion.” Yet, inversion and homosexuality were not synonymous concepts:

Inversion did not denote the same conceptual phenomenon as homosexuality. Sexual inversion referred to a broad range of deviant gender behavior, of which homosexual desire was only a logical but indistinct aspect, while homosexuality focused on the narrower issue of sexual object choice. The differentiation of homosexual desire from deviant gender behavior at the turn of the century reflects a major reconceptualization of the nature of human sexuality, its relation to gender, and its role in one’s social definition. (Halperin 15)

An explosion of language at the turn of the century was devised with the dawn of modernity to illuminate various corners and large swaths of queer subjectivity and behavior—which did not map neatly onto one another or easily reconcile as concepts or ideologies. Although
homosexuality became the dominant paradigm through which queer sexual and gender expression is most widely conceptualized, it was born out of a specific discourse of medical and scientific inquiry that sought to examine the psyche of the homosexual, but largely minimized the matters of his heart and the creative capacity of his mind. Thus, in exploring the state of discourse surrounding queer identity at the beginning of modernity, which frames my study of queer expatriate writers, I stress that the language of queerness was an often contentious, but mutually (mis)informing relationship between the scientific rhetoric of the clinic, the social panic of moralists, and the subjective experience of the queers alone and in communal settings.

Queer literature in the early part of the century is exceptionally inventive in that many of the now universal terms, concepts, and social practices that define the gay world today were still in a state of development, had yet to be developed, or embodied a different form of meaning. Just as Halperin makes a point about homosexuality’s newness as a concept by stressing its 100th birthday in 1992, I also want to point out that there is only a 31-year gap between the introduction of the term that came to invent a specific species of individual and structure the way we conceptualize same-sex desire in America and the expatriation of the first queer expatriate considered in this study, Robert McAlmon in 1921. This short period of time illustrates two important considerations about how gay identity evolved in the period covered by my dissertation: First, The rapid pace at which gay culture and identity can grow and evolve, and Second, That concepts of same-sex behavior that today seem concretely established as an a priori were still in a state of infancy and development in this era. Without the ubiquity of gay culture today and its easily locatable geographical and digital spaces in neighborhoods and the internet, gay American men of the first part of the century had to rely more heavily on their imagination
and ingenuity to create narrative structures and literary elements to describe their own desires and the burgeoning community around them.

Although homosexuality and inversion as psychological terms shaped the way same-sex sexual behavior was conceptualized at the turn of the century, it is important to consider that while these terms were “invented”, the phenomena they described had already long existed, complete with its own phrases, discourses, social practices, and behaviors. As gay cultures and communities took shape in America at the turn of the century, their formation was influenced and informed by both the prevailing psychological studies that labeled them from a clinical distance and the lingo and practices that homosexual men had organically developed amongst themselves. By the 1920s, the works of the major German sexologists and Havelock Ellis were available in America, along with philosophical tracts by gay men themselves, such as Ulrichs, John Addington Symonds, and Edward Carpenter who advocated the “uranian” model of same-sex desire, which stressed Greek ideals of male friendship and criticized the feminized model of inversion.² Carpenter and Ellis were especially influential among gay American writers of the

² The “uranian” model of homosexual identity was first advanced in 1870 by one of the first widely read and acknowledged campaigners for same-sex rights, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs. Deriving the term “Urning” to describe male same-sex attraction from Plato’s Symposium, Ulrichs delivers a call for granting the urning full civil rights in his 1870 publication “Araxes: a Call to Free the Nature of the Urning from Penal Law”:

The Urning, too, is a person. He, too, therefore, has inalienable rights. His sexual orientation is a right established by nature. Legislators have no right to veto nature; no right to persecute nature in the course of its work; no right to torture living creatures who are subject to those drives nature gave them.

The Urning is also a citizen. He, too, has civil rights; and according to these rights, the state has certain duties to fulfill as well. The state does not have the right to act on whimsy or for the sheer love of persecution. The state is not authorized, as in the past, to treat Urnings as outside the pale of the law. (604)

Ulrichs’ work was so influential in America that he is referenced in Mae West’s 1927 play “The Drag” as reference book that a doctor requests in order to treat his homosexual patients. Ulrich’s vision of the Urning was more in keeping with the concept of inversion, a belief in the feminine soul of the invert, while the uranian poets and philosophers in Britain like Symonds and
era. The editor of *The New Negro*, Alain Locke, lent out his copies of Ellis’ and Carpenter’s work to all the queer writers of the Harlem Renaissance, including Langston Hughes and Countée Cullen (Harris and Molesworth 353). Robert McAlmon printed a brief essay by Ellis on Joseph Conrad in his anthology *Contact Collection of Contemporary American Writers* in 1925 along with other queer expatriates such as himself, Marsden Hartley, Djuna Barnes, Gertrude Stein, and H.D. (Ellis 53) That the work of scientists and sexual philosophers like Ulrichs, Symonds, and Ellis circulated among the circles of young queer modernists illustrates an interest among young queers in consulting experts to put words, concepts, and definitions to explain their own abnormal sexual and gender feelings. While language on the street existed that labeled (however derogatorily) these queer feelings and practices, the terminology of sex researchers and philosophers gave young queers a sense of scientific legitimacy to their desires, even if this scientific recognition was often in terms of pathology.

While the 19th-century sexologists and the uranian writers would remain influential throughout this era, the way homosexuality along with all other forms of human sexuality would be conceived in America was radically changed with the popularity of Sigmund Freud and psychoanalysis in the 1920s. Today, basic psychoanalytic concepts are so firmly rooted in our everyday vernacular that it is easy to forget how revolutionary Freud was in helping to fuel the sexual liberation of the 1920s. Freud became an instant icon in America. Daniel Akst writes:

> During the 1924 murder trial of Leopold and Loeb, Chicago Tribune publisher Col.

> Robert McCormack cabled Freud with an offer of $25,000 or, as he put it in telegraphese,

Carpenter (uranian is the English translation of “urning”) adapted the term to refer to intergenerational relationships and passionate male friendship as they steered away from the explicitly gendered connotations of the term.
“anything he name,” to come to Chicago and psychoanalyze the killers. Later that year the movie producer Samuel Goldwyn (who called Freud “the greatest love specialist in the world”) offered him $100,000 to write for the screen or work as a consultant in Hollywood. (Akst

Pop-culture misappropriations aside, Freud changed the way that the American public conceptualized sex by placing sexual impulses as the very center of the human psyche: all desires, compulsions, and inspirations, stem from libidinal energy and can be sublimated into creative (or procreative) pursuits. Psychotic and neurotic personality disorders were thought to stem from sexual dysfunctions, the likely consequence of some form of disruption along the path of sexual maturation, which Freud believed began at infancy. The sexology of the 19th century focused almost solely on deviants: homosexuals, hysterical women, prostitutes, and all others for whom a degenerate psychology or biology was presumed to be the cause for their denigrated sexual practices. The study of sexuality had been confined to the terms of the aberrant and abnormal, and thus it was as if sexuality was possessed only by those who had non-normative sex. By placing sexual impulses at the core of the human psyche, psychoanalysis granted everyone a sexuality equally prey to disturbances and dysfunctions. Sexual health became a universal matter of concern to all, including the seemingly “normal.” As Estelle Freedman and John D’Emilio summed it up, “by the 1920s circumstances were present to encourage acceptance of the modern idea that sexual expression was of overarching importance to individual happiness” (235).

In placing sexuality as the starting point for unveiling the mysteries of an individual’s psyche, Freud’s ideas individualized sexuality. When placed under the psychoanalytic gaze,
heterosexuality became more queer as the individual’s peculiarities were illuminated. For Freud, it was not just the perverts, but all “functional” individuals who engaged in and enjoyed perversions of the imperative to reproduce. Additionally, Freud diagnosed a cause of homosexuality that departed dramatically from the sexologists. Instead of seeing homosexuality as rooted in an innate, congenital cause, Freud’s model of sexual development from infancy to adulthood argued that homosexuality was caused by a disruption in the normal process of development, becoming arrested in a state of primary narcissism. His model also asserted that homosexual impulses were a universal condition of all men and women; and that the failure to properly process these feelings, either as sublimation for heterosexuals or embracing sexual desire for the same sex among homosexuals, could lead to psychosis. Freud argued that all infants began in a state of “polymorphous perversity” in which the child began exploring sexuality not as a preprogrammed heterosexual or homosexual, but as a sensual being learning how to manipulate the body for pleasure. Heterosexuality or homosexuality develops later as the child develops attractions to external objects and is acculturated into learning what constitutes a proper or improper object. Thus, the Freudian method queers the very base of human sexuality, stipulating that we all begin as queers and that heterosexuality is not an innate or universally identical state, but a cultural construct foisted upon the child by the power relations of society. Although this model of the homosexual as the result of arrested sexual maturation led some psychoanalysts to try to “repair” the homosexual, the popularity of psychoanalysis changed the way homosexuality was viewed in America by making all people susceptible to the “perversity” that had previously been the sole domain of homosexuality and queered the line between the homosexual and heterosexual.³

³ Although Freud thought of homosexuality as the product of a disturbance in the normal sexual
Beyond the evolution of psychological and medical models of homosexuality at the turn of the century, same-sex desire was equally shaped and informed by the birth of urban gay communities. Sexuality is as much a social practice as it is a personal experience, and while the “homosexual” may have been defined by biological studies of the mind and body in isolation, the subject that would come to be known as the “gay man” was as much a product of changes in culture and technology as he was a product of psychological models. In short, sexuality has a material basis in the relations of production. In “Capitalism and Gay Identity”, John D’Emilio illustrates the role that changes in the means of production and the shift toward an industrialized, urban-based economy over the 19th century played in the development of the gay community and queer identity:

I want to argue that gay men and lesbians have not always existed. Instead, they are a product of history, and have come into existence in a specific historical era. Their emergence is associated with the relations of capitalism; it has been the historical maturation of an infant, he did not think of it as an illness and did not attempt to cure it unless homosexual feelings were the symptom of another disturbance. This is best illustrated by a letter he wrote in 1935 to the mother of a homosexual who sought his advice:

Homosexuality is assuredly no advantage, but it is nothing to be ashamed of, no vice, no degradation; it cannot be classified as an illness; we consider it to be a variation of the sexual function, produced by a certain arrest of sexual development. Many highly respectable individuals of ancient and modern times have been homosexuals, several of the greatest men among them. (Plato, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, etc). It is a great injustice to persecute homosexuality as a crime – and a cruelty, too. If you do not believe me, read the books of Havelock Ellis.

By asking me if I can help, you mean, I suppose, if I can abolish homosexuality and make normal heterosexuality take its place. The answer is, in a general way we cannot promise to achieve it. In a certain number of cases we succeed in developing the blighted germs of heterosexual tendencies, which are present in every homosexual in the majority of cases it is no more possible. It is a question of the quality and the age of the individual. The result of treatment cannot be predicted. What analysis can do for your son runs on a different line. If he is unhappy, neurotic, torn by conflicts, inhibited in his social life, analysis may bring him harmony, peace of mind, full efficiency, whether he remains a homosexual or gets changed.

(Freud as quoted by Lewes, 20)
development of capitalism—more specifically, its free-labor system—that has allowed large numbers of men and women in the late twentieth century to call themselves gay, to see themselves as part of a community of similar men and women, and to organize politically on the basis of that identity (5).

The rise of industrialization, with its basis in wage labor, afforded more individuals the ability to make a living outside of the family sphere. Thus, those with non-normative gender and sexual impulses were given an opportunity to leave the stifling familial household and pursue a living on their own. “In divesting the household of its economic independence and fostering the separation of sexuality from procreation, capitalism has created conditions that allow some men and women to organize a personal life around their erotic/emotional attraction to their own sex” (D’Emilio 7). From this change in the conditions of material existence emerged the ability of a working class person to self-support and pursue individual pleasure among like-minded “singles.” Virginia Woolf’s famous formula of money and a room of one’s own as a prerequisite for women to write fiction was the same equation necessary for the gay community to be born and flourish.

By the turn of the century, a vibrant gay culture began to take root in many major urban cities, especially New York and Chicago. In 1911, the Vice Commission of Chicago investigated “groups and ‘colonies’ of men interested in same-sex sexual activity” and sociologists from the University of Chicago sent students to the drag balls and gay bars to “study” the emerging gay culture up close (Rupp 105). These two cities served as staging grounds for all four of the featured queer expatriates in this study before they left for France. Robert McAlmon was a regular in the bohemian circles of Greenwich Village in New York before he set sail with his lesbian wife Bryher in 1921. He dramatizes his time spent among the literary circles in Chicago
and New York in his unpublished novel *School For Unrest*. Charles Henri Ford fictionalized his own move to New York as well in his experimental novel, *The Young and Evil* (1933), in which he and his co-author Parker Tyler document Ford’s arrival from Mississippi and tour through the gay bars, drag shows and tenements packed with fairies with Tyler as his guide. Fritz Peters was raised in bohemian Chicago by his flapper mother and his lesbian aunt, Margaret Anderson, as she was editing *The Little Review*. Finally, Paul Bowles was born and raised in New York and was encouraged by the composers and writers he met to take the voyage to France.

The idea of a gay identity and a gay culture did not pre-exist. Rather, it was in these urban environments that this notion was born. As George Chauncey details in *Gay New York*, a wide variety of identities, practices, and forms of expression rapidly developed in the interwar period among queer individuals: “Gay men developed a highly sophisticated system of subcultural codes—codes of dress, speech, and style—that enabled them to recognize one another on the streets, at work, and at parties and bars, and to carry on intricate conversations whose coded meaning was unintelligible to potentially hostile people around them” (4). This conversational code included the vernacular use of feminine pronouns, terms of likeminded endearment like “Mary,” and a host of specific identity categories including queer, fairy, pansy, trade, gay, and other designations that implied specific social roles. Chauncey pays particular attention to the complex linguistic and performative codes of the fairy along with the customs and signifiers of gender, sex, and class the fairy appropriated from other cultures to build his identity and advertise his predilections. The fairy combined signifiers of masculinity and femininity on his body, using “the semiotics of inversion as a cultural strategy,” although he was not a strict invert in the “woman trapped in a man’s body” model because he was not attempting to pass as a woman, but as a feminine male. In this way, Chauncey refers to the “fairy as
bricoleur.” He appropriates Claude Levi-Strauss’ anthropological theory in order to argue how the fairy created a language and a personal identity out of already existing cultural codes from various walks of life. The fairy appropriated the elegant furs and jewelry of high society, the use of coarse vernacular in order to communicate with working-class “trade” (straight men) who embodied the fairy’s object of desire, and experimented with the use of specific color codes, specifically green suits and red ties, to announce himself to a select few that could decipher him.

This fairy as bricoleur inspired Robert McAlmon’s short story collection, *Distinguished Air: Grim Fairy Tales*, which identifies the fairy as a comical, witty commentator on American culture. Ford and Tyler’s *The Young and Evil* introduces us to a cast of fairies and their trade in New York as well, borrowing stream-of-consciousness techniques from Gertrude Stein to narrate the fabulous chaos of a drag ball. Following Chauncey, I extend the concept of the bricoleur to examine queer authors of the era who cobbled together a culture, identity, and community out of signifiers from other cultures, genders, classes, and ethnic backgrounds in order to invent an intelligible and desirable sense of self and community in an era when today’s ubiquitous narratives and codified definitions of gay identity had yet to exist. For the aforementioned writers of the gay American expatriate world in France, the influence of French art, culture, and philosophy that illuminated queer desire in ways not yet examined or explained in America constitutes another ingenious bricoleur strategy. I also argue that their literary narratives themselves are an act of bricolage in that the innovative spirit of modernism inspired them to appropriate literary and aesthetic forms from across French queer culture.

Considering that interpreting the identity of the fairy relied upon a performance of the body in dress, mannerism, and speech, such a performance on the street translated easily into a performance on stage. Earl Lynde’s trailblazing *Autobiography of an Androgyne* from 1919
testifies to the fact that drag balls and similar stage performances of sexual and gender ambiguity for a specifically queer audience dated back as far as the late 19th century. However, like all stunningly innovative art forms developed in an underground community, the mainstream urban public became aware of these acts and female impersonators (who were mostly gay men like Julian Eltinge and Bert Savoy) become hugely successful performers for a mainstream audience.\(^4\) In addition, young straight people began to attend drag balls and frequent gay clubs much the way it became fashionable to go “slumming” in the Harlem Jazz Clubs. Harlem itself was one of the hotbeds for the development of a gay urban community and culture. In the burgeoning gay world, there was a considerable amount of interracial, cross-class identity mingling. Just as gay culture created gender and sexual confusion by blurring the line between female/male and homo/heterosexual, so too did they cross racial and class boundaries as well. Female impersonators and drag balls became so popular that George Chauncey calls the sudden trend in gender ambiguity in entertainment the “Pansy Craze”. A popular jazz rag from the era titled “Masculine Women, Feminine Men” poked fun at the female impersonator fad and the “new woman” who engaged in behaviors previously exclusive to men. Mae West launched to stardom on Broadway in the 1920s by writing a series of sexually provocative plays that included gay characters and female impersonators, such as “The Drag,” which contained a 20

\(^4\) Drag performances have two intersecting histories in America: as a product of gay culture and as a mainstream feature of stage entertainment that lampooned masculinity and femininity. For example, there is a long history of “Womanless Weddings” dating back to the 19th century organized by churches in the south in which local men donned women’s garments and “married” another man. During the era of the “pansy craze,” these two histories converged and many mainstream Americans attended drag performances without realizing the queer underpinnings of what they witnessed. Gay drag performers who broke into the mainstream took advantage of the mix of gay and straight audiences by writing double entendres and using gay parlances that the straight members of the audience would not have understood.
minute drag show so controversial that it was banned in New York, and West was briefly jailed for obscenity.

As evidenced by West’s obscenity trial, increased visibility of homosexuality (and all things sexual) was met with a cultural blowback and an increased policing of vice laws in the gay underground. Gays in American urban environments endured raids in their clubs, arrests on the street for transvestitism, and the black listing of known homosexuals from public employment. In 1937, J. Edgar Hoover announced his “War on the Sex Criminal,” which signaled that public perception of the homosexual shifted from shock and offense at the spectacle of his gender and sexual provocativeness to a fear of the “predatory animal preying upon society because he has been taught he can get away with it” (Hoover as quoted by Bronski 124). Fear over the homosexual hit its peak after World War Two with the Lavender Scare, a mass purge of homosexuals from government jobs over fear of collusion with communists and the launch of government propaganda like the school educational film Boys Beware that warned of predatory, pedophilic homosexuals.

At the same time, toward the middle of the century, the self-perception of homosexual men shifted as a new generation who did not feel “inverted” or feminine began to take the moniker of “gay” to distance themselves from the spectacle of the fairy, the pansy, the sissy, the queer (Chauncey 19). As a sexual term, “gay” originated in the 19th century, often attributed to prostitutes, and later to libertine men who lived a “gay life” free from the pressure of monogamy and marriage. Eventually, “gay” as a marker of sexual liberation came to mark those who departed from normal sexual and gender practices, and “gay” as an adjective extended to the kind of bright clothes and styled mannerisms characteristic of gay culture. “Gay” did not become ubiquitous as a marker of identity among homosexual men until the mid half of the century, and
it took mainstream culture until the 60s and 70s to take notice when the Gay Liberation Movement demanded the use of “gay” over “homosexual”. Over this course of time, “gay” became descriptive of all things homosexual—its identities, practices, behaviors, cultures, and extended to describing women and all people who participated in the “gay community.” This understanding of what is now a universal identity category as a concept that was in its incipient stages in the time period covered by this dissertation informs what I call in my title the “birth of the gay modernist subject”. The texts and authors covered in this study provide historical insight into the evolution of language, practices, concepts, and expressions of queer sexuality that eventually culminated in a gay community, identity, and culture. By tracing the historical trend of these early imaginers of “gay” to have lived in France and become engaged in French philosophical and artistic movements, I unearth how French concepts of sexuality influenced the birth of gay identity and culture in America. That the very term “gay” and its cognate in French “gai” co-evolved in both English and French—originating in Old French and Middle English in the middle ages, and over the 19th and 20th centuries, progressing from a term that spoke to a general sense of liberation from social pressures to a term appropriated by queer men to express their own desire for same-sex liberties—testifies to the enduring cross-cultural influence of French and English in their cultural imaginaries.

**Queer Culture and Identity in Interwar France**

While queer friendly *bals musettes* and bars flourished in the streets of Paris, spreading from one centralized queer district to a network of gay communities across the city, and artistic depictions of homosexuality in the literature of Proust, Gide, Cocteau and Colette infiltrated the mainstream of French culture, an equally expanding backlash against the widespread visibility of
homosexuality began to crack down on these cultures in public and respond in print and public opinion with condemnations of the homosexual as depraved and a threat to future of the French nation. Whether he was portrayed in the sympathetic light of literature or the sinister tone of moral panic in opinion columns, the discourse on homosexuality in the 1920s glaringly illuminated the homosexual for the public, thus becoming unprecedentedly visible and susceptible to the prejudices and social anxieties of the era. Carolyn Dean argues that this quest to make the homosexual visible and his behavior transparent in competing pathological and criminal versus tolerant and sympathetic terms defined the way in which homosexuality was conceived in France in the interwar era:

After the war, homosexuality—as it was constructed and understood by self-styled experts and writers who most shaped public opinion—no longer remained in the shadows, confined to certain milieux and types of persons. While gay men were more visible, the narratives about that visibility were simply incommensurate with their presence: those narratives, after all, told fantastic tales in which all literature was ‘infected’ by homosexuality, in which homosexual men appeared on every street corner, and in which all men were potentially homosexual...Homosexual men were everywhere, no longer hidden, and yet they eluded identification. Increased ‘light’ was necessary not only because critics perceived inverts as more difficult to recognize, paradoxically, because the more visible they were, the harder it was to see them—as if they did not reveal themselves when they were most ‘out’—in public, on street corners, and so on (Dean 151,156).

By the 1920s, the dominant model of the homosexual was undergoing a change. Experts on the subject moved away from physiological models of the 19th century, like that of Ambroise
Tardieu who was convinced one could identify a homosexual based on the physical markers of his body, such as a “club shaped penis” and a “funnel shaped anus” and certain immutable characteristics of styling the body, which presupposed feminine dress and mannerisms. 

Although elements of the classic “invert”, the individual with the soul of a woman trapped in the body of a man, continued to inform French models of homosexuality, it became increasingly apparent that the population of same-sex attracted males encompassed all gender behaviors and socio-economic markers of identity and status in French society. The more particular features of habitués of the queer world came into focus, the more French writers became aware that homosexuality had emerged from a quarantined segment of the Parisian underground to a

5 Tardieu’s 1857 text Étude médico-légale sur les attentats aux moeurs, is regarded as a pioneering, and severely flawed, early attempt to use forensic science to study the effects of sexuality on the individual’s body and to make social undesirables like the homosexual legible to law enforcement in order to punish and “correct” them. Under the section “Les Signes Genereux de la Pederastie”, Tardieu gives an account of the outward appearance of the pederast:

Le caractère des pédérastes de ceux surtout qui, par passion ou par calcul, recherchent et attirent les hommes, se peint souvent dans leur extérieur, dans leur costume, dans leurs allures et dans leurs goûts, qui reflètent en quelque sorte la perversion contre nature de leurs penchants sexuel. Si ce fait ne s’observe pas toujours, il est du moins assez fréquent pour mériter d’être signalé; il est d’ailleurs bien connus de tous ceux qui on été place de façon a voir un grand nombre de ces pédérastes auxquels s’appliquent le nom de tantes (193).

Along with a description of their social practices and how they consciously style their body with clothes and make up to reflect their sexual and gender identities, Tardieu claims that their bodies bear telltale signs of their sexual activities on their skin and organs:

Les signes caractéristiques de la pédérastie passive, que nous allons passer successivement en revue, sont le développement excessif des fesses, la déformation infundibuliforme de l’anus, le relâchement du sphincter, l’effacement des plis les crêtes et caroncules du pourtour de l’anus, la dilatation extrême de l’orifice anal, l’incontinence de matières (199).

Tardieu takes what he assumes to be their sexual practices and concludes that their bodies would experience some kind of physical violence that could be detected through scientific observation. Since these are not universal, or even common symptoms of anal intercourse, it is evident that the prejudice against these acts as violent or repugnant compels Tardieu to find evidence that justifies this prejudice on the body.
phenomenon that pervaded all areas of French society. While writers such as Gide argued that this fact supported increased tolerance for homosexuality because its wide-spread practice evidenced its naturalness and normality, social critics instead responded by inciting social panic and became determined to thoroughly scrutinize every element of homosexual behavior in the quest to find some hidden quality that would solve the mystery of homosexuality and render the homosexual thoroughly legible to the public.

Despite increased public attention to homosexuality as a vice and harbinger of moral decay that made the homosexual more susceptible to social ridicule, it also gave a name and a way to socialize same-sex attraction for many individuals who did not understand their sexual impulses. Hearing of the homosexual’s vices in opinion columns and in scandalous literature allowed queers to begin to assemble a sense of their identity and find places in which they could congregate with similar individuals. The gay world emerged not simply in spite of public scrutiny, but also because of it. According to historian Julian Jackson, the conditions of the development of a gay culture in France has led to debate amongst historians:

To what extent did the situation for French homosexuals change after the First World War? One leading French historian of sexuality recently described the 1920s as ‘a first golden age’ for French homosexuals, and another characterizes the decade as a period of ‘increased tolerance’ with ‘an explosion of the homosexual scene.’ But these descriptions need to be qualified. Just as students of women’s history have shown how this supposed era of increased sexual freedom in fact engendered acute masculine anxieties, similarly behind the chrome and bright lights of the 1920s the années folles were more ambiguous for homosexuals than they at first seem (Jackson 31).
The key term in question here is “tolerance” and its many connotations. One may argue that the expansion of gay clubs and neighborhoods along with the publication of gay-themed literature connotes tolerance simply because it was allowed to flourish. Yet, this tolerance did not extend to widespread appreciation or sympathy for gay culture, and as we will see, homosexuality was only tolerated to the minimum that could be legally justified.

Tolerance largely only extended as far as an acknowledgement that homosexuals had a right to privacy for their conduct. On the history of homosexuality in the French legal system and how it related to the question of privacy, Patrice Corriveau remarks:

At the time of the French Revolution, criminal law in France was laicized, and the private and public domains became separate spheres. Following this legal rationale, sexual behaviors, homoerotic or not, practiced in private between two consenting adults were not chargeable. This did not mean that homosexuality was tolerated but simply that the law did not pay particular, strictly defined attention to it (101).

Insofar as homosexuality was not illegal, homosexuals had the right to their existence and their choice of sexual behavior in private. However, because homosexual men depended on the existence of a gay community with bars, baths, and entertainment in order to seek out lovers and partners, homosexual identity had to become somewhat of a public identity and practice. A homosexual man had to enter a space situated liminally between the public and the private in order to pursue his desires for love, sex, and friendship. These establishments that served the queer population were privately owned, but open to the public, and thus susceptible to the regulation of local authorities. As historian Brooke Blower writes in *Becoming Americans in Paris*:

Gay culture flourished in part because in France, unlike in Germany, Great Britain,
and the United States, laws did not prohibit homosexuality or sodomy. Nevertheless, provisions against public sex acts, molestation, and cross-dressing were often employed against those of both genders engaging in same-sex activities. During these years, when access to the city’s public spaces seemed at a premium, men still risked up to two years’ incarceration for indecency if caught in flagrante delicto in a public urinal, and the publishers of homosexual material faced hefty fines and prison sentences...for this reason, the gay world in postwar Paris, like that of New York, remained clandestine even as it also sometimes appeared startlingly obvious and well integrated into public life (139).

While being a homosexual was not a crime, and anything consensual was legal in private, any manifestation of sexual identity in public could land someone in prison under obscenity and public decency laws. Given this ill-defined line between private liberties and public morality, it would be simplistic to merely argue whether or not life in France for the queer expatriates was inherently better or worse than in America. Rather, this dissertation emphasizes how French culture was productive of queer identities and culture, including the fact that political repression itself produces identity as individuals must work around or beneath the law to realize their desire for expression and community.

While homosexuality gained greater visibility in France due to scrutiny in the press and heightened law enforcement vigilance, the gay culture itself came out in the streets of Paris and could be readily detected by those who could decipher its unique signs. As Brooke Blower writes:

‘Homosexuals’ greater visibility in postwar Paris underscored the ways in which many had begun to take liberties and challenge older patterns of behavior that had yet to
completely disappear. As one Frenchman later recalled, the twenties stood out as an ‘epoch of provocation,’ a period characterized simultaneously by continuing conversational taboos about homosexuality and an emerging, demonstrative frankness about same-sex desire. Because ‘one did not speak of homosexuality, it had to be shown,’ he explained (Blower 139).

Just as the fairy in gay New York was a bricoleur of gender identity that signified inversion with his clothes and mannerisms, so too was homosexuality in Paris more about the visual display of identity. For homosexuals in Paris, there was a rapidly expanding network of places to be seen—bars, baths, restaurants, and tenements where gay men could parade openly:

Striking displays of homosexuality only compounded this sense of the breakdown of gender conventions in interwar Paris. Designated spots to search out partners for same-sex acts—like the Palais Royal—had long existed in the capital, and by the end of the nineteenth century a modern homosexual milieu had begun to take shape around a small cluster of taverns, brasseries, and baths. After the war, however, both a lesbian community and a gay male world, rich with cultural codes and well-known meeting grounds, grew rapidly in size and diversity...The spaces men sought out for same-sex encounters included certain bathhouses, the promenading galleries of a handful of cinema and music halls, as well as a plethora of sidewalk urinals—the ones with three stalls, called teapots or teacups. The world of gay men stretched into the working class district of the Bastille—to restaurants by the Gare de Lyon, known for their homosexual camaraderie, and to bals musettes on the rue de Lappe where men dance with men, rubbing shoulders with neighborhood workers, colonial soldiers, and middle-class slummers (138).
Social critics and moralists who alarmed the public with their message that homosexuals had pervaded every part of France were technically correct. Not only could homosexuals be found in every social class, as evidenced by the rich and glamorous rubbing elbows with the working class on the dance floor, but also the culture itself had spread throughout the neighborhoods in France as these bars popped up in new locations and gay men became increasingly aware of the local, public spaces in which they could seek community or cruise for sexual encounters.

The reputation of these bals musettes for putting on lavish displays penetrated into the mainstream of French culture, turning gay bars into increasingly popular places for all young people to attend, where their queer spectacles were celebrated instead of closeted. One of the most popular of these bars known for its queer entertainment and spectacle of homosexuals openly congregating was Le Boeuf Sur le Toit. The club became synonymous with its most famous patron, Jean Cocteau, who many incorrectly thought was its proprietor. As his biographer, Frederick Brown notes, the bar was “an in spot where the smart set met for drinks after dinner and stayed until the early morning and where ‘high tone’ consisted of sexual ambiguity, campy spoofing, brashness and quid pro quos...Homosexuality had become ‘chic’ and Le Boeuf its stronghold” (Brown as quoted by Sibalis 28). Le Boeuf quickly gained renown amongst both the French and American expats and tourists. Christopher Wilson depicts its racy reputation among Americans in his biography of gay socialite and Woolworth heir Jimmy Donahue: “A particularly favorite haunt was Le Boeuf Sur Le Toit, the city’s number one chic queer nightclub,” according to one who visited regularly. “At one time there was a lady fortuneteller out the back and one night Jimmy, totally in drag, sat down and consulted her. She didn’t get it that he was a man so he got up on the table, pulled up his skirts and showed his private parts” (147). The American trapeze artist Barbette, also known as Vander Clyde, thrilled
audiences at the Folies Bergere with his high wire act that blended acrobatics with a drag performance. Barbette and Cocteau (who famously wrote about him and his drag performance in “Le Numero Barbette” accompanied by the photography of American surrealist Man Ray) were some of the first queer French celebrities who made the gay bars they frequented popular with both heterosexual and homosexual crowds. Another popular queer spectacle were “the carnival drag balls held during Lent at the Magic City dance hall on the Left Bank, huge occasions attracting almost as many spectators as participants” (Jackson 32). As Julian Jackson notes, “their notoriety helped to create the flamboyant image of interwar homosexual Paris”, yet he maintains that the image of these balls, along with Le Boeuf and Barbette’s act, did not necessarily connote widely held acceptance and tolerance of homosexuality because many arrived to “jeer at the participants”, more interested at ridiculing the spectacle of freaks than appreciating an innovative form of performance and entertainment (32). Increased visibility and interest among society did not always translate into increased tolerance and appreciation or an understanding of queers as a politically persecuted people instead of crude entertainment.

**France as a Sexual Utopia in the American Imaginary**

Despite the increased public scrutiny of homosexuality on the part of the police and public opinion, the fact that Paris had gained a reputation for its ostentatious and flamboyant spectacles in the bals musettes factored heavily in the decision for queer Americans to emigrate or visit the country. Whether or not the American imagination of France had any firm comparative grounding in reality, this romantic image nonetheless dominated the way Americans
conceived of the land when they projected their fantasies onto the nation. With the increased public awareness of queer establishments filtering over to the United States in the form of travel books and literary accounts by expatriates, the image of France’s sexual licentiousness no longer merely suggested the possibility of a radiant queer culture: it was now a documented reality. The fact that gay clubs had names, celebrities, and were locatable in guidebooks was a radical departure from the almost entirely underground queer world of America. The existence of these establishments and neighborhoods was not entirely contingent on being “in the know” or an annointee into a secret cabal, but it was instead general knowledge that most queer and culturally curious Americans possessed when they decided to make the transatlantic voyage. The most firm evidence for the wide-spread knowledge of gay culture in France among prospective American travelers and expatriates is in a popular travel book, *Paris with the Lid Lifted*, by Bruce Reynolds (1929). As much a humorous parody of a travel book as it is an actual guide to the sights of Paris, Reynolds’ book not only lists where heterosexual men may find drink, dance, and the

6 For the majority of Americans, Paris and all things France have historically conjured images of the exotic, romantic, and carefree—a land that offered a culture of the artistic and the sensual unattainable in America. While examining the real conditions of life in Post-WWI France easily dispels this fantasy, it is nonetheless a durable and lucrative image in American popular culture. In the interwar period, there was an explosion of popular entertainment that capitalized on the reputation of Paris as the romantic capital of the world. George Gershwin’s 1928 composition *An American in Paris* sought to “portray the impression of an American visitor in Paris as he strolls about the city and listens to various street noises and absorbs the French atmosphere” that he himself experienced during a 1926 voyage. (Gershwin as quoted by Kotynek and Cohassey, 111) Gershwin’s music was later adapted into the 1951 MGM musical *An American in Paris*, starring Gene Kelly, which won a Best Picture Oscar. Gay songwriter Cole Porter spent a good part of the era abroad in France and had Broadway hits with his musicals “Paris” (1928) and “Fifty Million Frenchmen” (1929) which sold American audiences on Paris as a magical place where uptight Americans could free their inhibitions and pursue romance under the spell of his hit song "Let's Do It, Let's Fall in Love". Innocent on the outside, American popular culture’s romanticization of French culture could only hint at the more lurid and risqué side of France that cliché images of the Moulin Rouge, Can-Can lines, and the seemingly endless supply of beautiful women and handsome men looking to romance foreigners peddled to the American public’s imagination.
company of women of ill-repute, but it also contains information on where to find gay haunts. Among a long list of bar reviews, Reynolds describes “Le Petite Chaumiere”:

This is not a nice place, strictly speaking. The life here is a definite part of Paris and a well-known phase of humanity, but if you are circumspect and intolerant, do not visit here. This is a place where men dress as women. Men of a certain degenerate tendency who infest every large city. If, however, you do want to see these Freaks cavort around and swish their skirts and sing in Falsetto and shout, ‘Whoops, my dear,’ this is the place to see them. Nothing is said of a coarse nature and you leave quite as unsullied as when you entered. It is meant to be funny. Take it that way, rather than to bother to analyze it, or to be shocked. And funny it is. Excruciatingly funny (194).

Reynolds then lists a series of bars with addresses where one can “go and see some more fairy-nice boys (say it fast and it sounds all right)” (195). The concept of tolerance frames the initial description of the bar, stressing that one must be tolerant of inversion on parade in order to enjoy the bar and then refers to its patrons as freaks and degenerates. Yet, this language that distances Reynolds from implicit endorsement of this degeneracy conceals the fact that he understands the queer art of camp and how to appreciate its humor without “analysis.” While Reynolds explicitly describes the bar in the terms that speak to those (who like the French described earlier at the drag balls) want to gawk at freaks, it also serves as an invitation to gay American readers who came to France for the specific purpose of participating in the queer culture.

Reynolds also directly addresses the great participation of American tourists and expatriates in these bars of mixed hetero/homo patronage. On the famous Café du Dome, a favorite hang out of the Lost Generation writers, gay and straight alike, Reynolds details:
You see all the Nuts and the Freaks, plain and fancy; broke and affluent; mangy and modish, glassy-eyed and goo-goo eyed; long haired and bald-domed; Van Dyke bearded and pasty-faced; decorous and degenerate; pious and perverted; mademoiselle-ish young men and young-men-ish mademoiselles. Every sort, type, and figured male and female you ever beheld, inside or outside a side-show...Those who get themselves up the most grotesquely, are, 9 times out of 10, Americans. And the Americans do it more for a ‘Gag’ than through any artistic or Bohemian-ish temperament (204).

While young heterosexual Americans abroad flocked to the Dome to meet their idols, such as Hemingway’s Lady Brett Ashley from The Sun Also Rises, (as Robert McAlmon documents in The Nightinghous of Paris) homosexual Americans could also meet and cavort with the “degenerate” and “perverted” that freely mixed with the expatriate crowd at the Dome. “So many of these arrivals became avid participants in the city’s newly expanded homosexual subculture that one resident depicted an entire ‘American sissy world’ in Paris” (Blower 143). American participation in the queer spaces of Paris, as informed by guide books like Reynolds’ became so pervasive that the French authorities themselves complained about Americans as a corrupting influence on the French nation. For example, “the Communist weekly Samedi-Soir harped on the ‘scandalous; behavior of homosexual American tourists while the magazine Action vilified ‘the pederasts of the American intelligentsia’ on the Left Bank. One of them, Action, huffed, had made ‘undisguised propositions’ to a cavalry colonel in civilian clothes, ‘even though he was accompanied by his charming wife” (Levenstein 131). As Harvey Levenstein further remarks on the phenomenon of gay American’s treating Paris like a queer Babylon:

Sometimes gay Americans became so rowdy, and so demonstrative in their public displays of affection for each other, that offended Parisians called for police intervention.
Even though homosexuality was legal in France, the police would round them up, put them in paddy wagons, and take them to the station where officers would ask them whether they were ‘inverts,’ duly record the answer, and then release them in the usually vain hope that they henceforth would be more discreet in their behavior (125).^7

American travelers tended to allow themselves to go wild based not only on the knowledge of the licentious establishments in the city, but also based on a general misreading of France as a sexual utopia, guided by their romantic preconceptions of the land as the antithesis of America. Some were so misinformed that they “claimed that they had been assured that homosexuality and male prostitution were not only permitted but also freely practiced in Paris” (143).

This imaginary construction of interwar Paris as a sexual utopia was bolstered by the writings of Americans abroad in Paris whose literature had become widely read in America by the late 1920s as the American colony in Montparnasse began to attract a new, post-Lost Generation of artists and tourists seduced by the romanticization of expatriation. Lesbian journalist Janet Flanner who spent the majority of her career writing the “Letter from Paris” feature in *The New Yorker* under the pen name Genêt proclaimed Paris to be “the capital of hedonism of all Europe” in a famous review of Josephine Baker’s sexually provocative stage show (Pollock 122). As journalistic accounts of the American expatriate community in France like Flanner’s column made their way across the Atlantic along with the soaring popularity of

^7 Furthermore Levenstein writes:

> With the Communist press delighting in denouncing what they called ‘The Scandal of the Latin Quarter,’ and angry André Gide, the anti-Communist homosexual who won a Nobel Prize in Literature in 1947, presented a visiting American with a copy of one of his books advocating a more restrained kind of homosexuality. Waving a finger in the young man’s face, the old writer said, “Je ne suis pas tapette, Monsieur, je suis pédéraste.” (‘I am not a fag, Sir, I am a homosexual.’) Americans were also embarrassed by the gay men’s behavior. Shortly after he arrived in Paris, Saul Bellow lamented to a friend that ‘America’s chief export to Europe has been its homosexuals.’ (125)
Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and other expatriate authors, a mythology of an orgy of indulgence, relaxed morals, and bohemian leisure began to build around the residents of Montparnasse.

Demystifying the legend that has built up over the decades of scholarship and popular narrative about the Lost Generation in Paris, Paris Tribune writer Hugh Ford provides a further account about how the popular image of the expatriate crowd was situated between reality and fiction:

Most descriptions of the Left Bank dwell on the uninhibited conduct and the noisy and tedious efforts of expatriates to express themselves. The oft-repeated terrace brawls at the Dome or the Select, the boozy adventures, and the loud-voiced ‘literary’ arguments which ended in swirls of charges and recriminations, all belong to the legendary picture of Montparnasse. It is both true and apocryphal (13).

This idea that the popular narrative of the uninhibited and decadent expatriate culture is “both true and apocryphal” speaks to how the reputation of a culture can supercede the reality of its own quotidian conditions and influence the way its members perceive and express their relationship to that culture. Not every night was a drunken orgy of sensual excess, and it would be hard to envision Gertrude Stein knocking back highballs and dancing with Josephine Baker. But, the fact that the majority of fictional and non-fictional narratives of expatriate life feature these licentious sprees through the streets of Paris illustrates the kind of culture of personal freedom with which they identified, even if daily life fell drastically short of this ideal. A culture is as much a product of its mythology as it is its diurnal reality, and often it is those determined to live out that mythology of which they have heard tale that perpetuate that myth as the defining feature of the culture. While expatriate reality often (but not always) paled in comparison to its mythology, the impact of this mythology is as important as the real life conditions of the
community in considering how the expatriate movement enabled critiques of post-war American culture that armed queer writers with a discourse and a supportive culture in which to craft their own criticisms of oppressive sexual morality.

What attracted queers of the era was not merely the presence of other gay and lesbian individuals, but also a community of ostensibly heterosexual individuals who lived in defiance of the stifling norms and social expectations of their homeland. Outside of the explicit homosexuality of some of its most famous members, the liberal attitudes toward sex and gender identity within the American colony in Paris among heterosexuals had a queer resonance since it earned a reputation among those who followed their exploits in American periodicals and literature as a culture directly defying puritan American values of decency and productivity. While the appeal of sexual liberation in the expatriate community had its purely sensual dimensions, sex was rooted in an overarching critique or defiance of American cultural values, of which sexual repression was one of many, interconnected forms of policing a puritanical morality. As we have seen in the policing of queers in America and France, homosexuality was not persecuted simply because it was viewed as a disgusting sexual practice, but instead because it was feared to be a moral contagion that could corrupt individuals and create a drastically different and defiant social and political structure. Therefore, the expatriate embracing of sexual liberation and gender role defiance was one of many related re-imaginings of identity, community, and artistic expression that attracted queers who similarly found themselves on the outside of American society.

The luminaries of the Lost Generation in Paris romanticized the notion of deracination and exile from the American homeland as a way to contest and re-imagine American culture and identity from abroad. In 1922, expatriate writer Harold Stearns published the anthology
Civilization in the United States, a popularly read text among the expatriates of the late 20s and 30s, which criticized the poverty of American artistic, political, and social advances in comparison to European nations. As fellow expatriate Matthew Josephson explains:

Some literary historians have attributed the movement of Americans to Paris to the inspiration of Harold Stearns. A New Englander and Harvard graduate, Stearns at the age of thirty had won some prominence as an author and as the editor of Civilization in the United States, a symposium in which he and thirty other writers and scholars contributed essays surveying different aspects of modern American society. The consensus of opinion held that the nation’s materialism and Puritanism left it with only a poor sort of civilization. Stearns, who regarded himself as a spokesman for American intellectuals, called bravely for wine, then banned by Prohibition, and for sexual freedom (xix).

Although Josephson contends that Stearns was more of a reflection of the already held attitudes of the established expatriates rather than an inspiration, Stearns’ work is important for how it summarized the criticisms of American young intellectuals against their national culture under the rubric of 1. Intellectual and moral hypocrisy, 2. Materialism and class-consciousness as a barrier to achieving a true American national identity, and 3. The “emotional, and aesthetic starvation” of the new generation yearning for innovation while squirming under tradition and “petty regulation” (Stearns vii). For sexual freedom to be part of Stearns’ bill of grievances against American culture recognizes that sex was not a skin-deep personal pursuit of pleasure, but another underdeveloped avenue of human existence held in abeyance by an American culture refusing to progress and evolve.

Picking up on the post-war generation’s critique of American culture, expatriate journalist Alex Small enumerates in a 1930 article in the Paris Tribune, his own list of why
Americans chose expatriation as a result of disillusionment with their own national culture, which emphasizes sexual liberation and gender relations:

III. The relations of the sexes in the United States. This usually affects men. They dread gold diggers. They are in revolt against the accepted American attitude that a husband must support a wife in the style to which she would like to become accustomed. In Europe the protesting American male may not be much better off than he was at home, but at least he is not under social pressure. To be sure, many a modern American girl, especially in the big cities, has dropped the traditional attitude. She pays her share at parties and would disdain to be supported in marriage. But there are other complications—imbecile laws like the Mann Act and the general inability of the American public to take natural things naturally. We invented sex and have made far too much fuss over our invention. Passion is still considered a disease and pure comradeship and ideal. The French take no such false attitudes (56).

Integrated among other considerations such as seeking freedom from religion and the desire to find a more authentic culture rooted in national history, Small’s critique of gender relations and sexual attitudes in America paints the young expatriate as a sexual dissident that bristles under the conventions of heteronormative domestic expectations. His criticism of the Mann Act and other sexually repressive laws identifies the policing of sexuality in America as a way to cement young men and women into gender roles defined by consumption and production. He identifies this same materialism as the barrier against true friendship among Americans, “It cannot flourish amid tension and a constant conflict of ambitions. It needs disinterestedness and leisure. In America a caricature usually takes the place of the real thing. The average American thinks he is being friendly with another man when he plays golf with him of when he smiles affably as he
picks his pocket” (57). This emotionally distant form of American friendship seems indicative of the fear of the homosocial to bleed into the homoerotic, that becoming too “friendly” would mean becoming too attached, dependent, and submissive toward the will of another. They viewed the rampant materialism of American capitalist society and its class structure as the chief inhibiting factor against the type of social understanding amongst the sexes and classes that could result in more satisfying inter-personal relations and a more egalitarian society.

In an earlier article, Small identifies the defiance of the American protestant work ethic and imperative to be productive as a defining feature of the Americans of Montparnasse, “People who all their lives have been taught to virtues of industry and of punctuality, find themselves in a place where those virtues are unknown. They can at last indulge themselves in the cravings of the unregenerate man—immense laziness and immense aimlessness. Days flit by in the unending distinction of drinks and chatter, each one a perfect unpricked bubble on the sea of time” (25). Neither praising, not condemning the culture of non-production and indulgence among the expatriates, Small remarks that, “to live there requires a perverted courage”. (25) That to be in opposition to productivity would be a “perversion”, hints at how ingrained the imperative to work and produce is in the American psyche—that the non-working individual is a perversion of need to produce akin to the queer or sexually liberated heterosexual as a perversion of the need to reproduce. Fellow expatriate journalist Elliot Paul paints a similar portrait of the Montparnasse community as a radical departure from the conventions of American society:

The Montparnassians sleep in the morning and in the afternoon and spend the evening and the neo-evening, up to the rising hour for ashemen and concierges, upon the terrace of The Dome, The Rotonde, The Select, and other neighboring cafes. They have dark circles under their eyes, have read parts of Ulysses, and are likely to be self-made
Freudians. They speak most impressively when they are vague and erratically when they seek to be specific. They hate to spend money for either food or clothes.

The fact that they lay themselves open to the conventional kind of ridicule leads me to suspect there is something profound about them, and while their positive qualities escape both quantitative and qualitative analysis, their negative ones are delightful.

First of all, they make no pretense to love work and they do nothing whatever which may be termed useful by any of the known standards, either practical or aesthetic...For hours at a time they sit on the terraces of Heaven knows what or staring into space. But why should they be abused? Why should successful magazine writers and all paper designers sniff at them, when they cannot understand them? If inscrutability is a virtue in La Joconde, Buddha, and the Sphinx, why not in a Montparnassian? If they have devised a mode of life which cannot be utilized even in this most efficient of civilizations, all honor to them (21-22).

While Paul’s portrait of the slacker intellectuals of Montparnasse is somewhat tongue in cheek, and it is difficult to discern who among the Lost Generation crowd would fall into this category considering Paul himself socialized with this group, it nonetheless underscores the inherent queerness of their mode of life. The Montparnassian subverts the imperative to produce, the need to signify class identity, the culture of conspicuous consumption, and the need to be logically coherent in their ideologies and legible in their social identities. Although many expatriate authors were prolific and economically well off, this image of the expatriate as the antithesis to the structured and disciplined lifestyle of the American work ethic became the dominant image of Americans abroad in Paris. Their dissident response toward the normative expectations of American values created a space and a discourse in which sexually queer artists and individuals
could find inspiration even though it may not have been apparent to all members of the American expatriate colony.

**The Homosexual as the Specter of a Crisis of Modern Masculinity in Expatriate Narratives**

While philosophers of the Lost Generation spoke proudly of reinventing a modern American culture from abroad and wrestling American society from its puritanical roots, the question of the homosexual, now a visible actor in the American colony in Paris, posed a challenge to the limits of the sexual liberation that they preached. Because homosexual men and women mingled in the favorite cafes and bars of the American colony in Montparnasse, it was inevitable that they would appear in the literature of heterosexual writers as they communed with their queer compatriots in the literary world and described the milieu around them. For each writer, homosexuality has a purpose as a way to discuss the rapidly changing face of modern gender and sexual identity in a comparative, foreign setting. In her poem “In Defense of Homosexuality” (1925), Kay Boyle \(^8\) writes:

I speak of it as a thing with a future  
At presently badly done by amateurs neglecting  
A chance to be discriminating

It being an occupation in itself  
It should not be confused with reticence  
Or the perceptions of a shy man  
Nor should it be segregated on a question of morality (14)

To think of homosexuality as “a thing with a future” not to be “segregated on a question of morality” means that for Boyle, homosexuality was a concept and a practice in a state of

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\(^8\) Kay Boyle was also a close friend of Robert McAlmon and the driving force behind the reprinting of his memoirs *Being Geniuses Together*, updated with her own accounts spliced in between his. Boyle published at least one novel with explicit homosexual themes, 1929’s *Gentlemen I Address You Privately*. 
becoming, rife with possibilities for reassessing sexuality and gender in society. Yet, while for Boyle and the queer expatriates in my dissertation, visible queer culture in France gave inspiration to re-imagine the very nature and language of gender and sexuality, for many of their more famous literary compatriots, queer culture was regarded more as a barometer for measuring the masculinity of men in the era of modernity. In this section, I briefly investigate some of the more notable engagements with homosexuality in American expatriate literature so as to argue that not only was France a space in which queer expatriates could articulate gay identity and desire in new ways, but that it also acquainted other major American writers with the newly visible gay world whose sometimes sympathetic, sometimes castigating depiction of homosexuality influenced the way in which gay culture would be depicted and conceived in American literature as a whole. I focus on three canonical American authors, Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, whose work has been read by millions, and explore how questions of homosexuality in relation to modern era anxieties about gender roles, sexual liberation, and the opportunity to investigate them in a different culture like France known for its permissiveness, inform their characterization of masculinity in the modern era.

Arguably, no American writer has had a greater influence on the modern construction of masculinity than Ernest Hemingway. His stories of men in exotic locales (in Africa, Spain, Cuba, for example) pitting their manhood against the forces of nature (bulls, lions, sharks) and other men created a mythology of the rugged American adventurer whose masculinity had to be proven by moving outside of the comfort of his homeland. In his two most famous texts from his expatriate days in France, the autobiographical *A Moveable Feast*, and the thinly veiled fictional account of Lost Generation life in Paris, *The Sun Also Rises*, he places the newly visible figure of the homosexual, presumably effeminate male, as a counterpoint against which heterosexual men
can gauge their masculinity. Hemingway’s fascination and repulsion with homosexuality have often been explained by biographers like James Mellow as a product of a fear of his own possible homosexuality. Although no persuasive evidence has emerged to prove this claim, Hemingway nonetheless endured rumors amongst the expatriate circle, some of them fueled by Zelda Fitzgerald who at one time worried he was having and affair with her husband, F. Scott, and Robert McAlmon, who Hemingway punched for spreading this gossip (Meyers 89).

In *A Moveable Feast*, Hemingway uses a conversation with Gertrude Stein as his mouthpiece for disparaging homosexuality:

Miss Stein thought I was too uneducated about sex and I must admit that I had certain prejudices against homosexuality since I knew its more primitive aspects. I knew it was why you carried a knife and would use it if you were in the company of tramps when you were a boy in the days when wolves was not a slang term for men obsessed by the pursuit of women. I knew many unaccrochable terms and phrases from Kansas City days and the mores of different parts of that city, Chicago and the lake boats. Under

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9 James R. Mellow further writes on Hemingway’s preoccupation with constructing homosexuality as a contrast to the author’s masculine pursuits:

In the thirties, his views on writing and writers were blunt and often vulgar in print and in private, all part of his effort to stress his masculine pursuits in the literary world, particularly among the New York intelligentsia. He would pepper his published texts and letters with slurring references to homosexual writers. “Nobody but Fairies can write Masterpieces or Masterpieces conscious,” he assured Fitzgerald, to which he liked to make teasing innuendos about homosexuality in their relationship. (He sent Fitzgerald an inscribed 1931 photograph of himself, “To Scott from his old bedfellow,” signing it Richard Halliburton, the name of the then celebrated travel writer, whom they both considered homosexual.) Fitzgerald, who at times liked to play the caricature of a fairy in his letters to Hemingway, was unhappily then struggling against fears that others though he was homosexual—including Zelda, whose life had degenerated into madness and intermittent stays in mental institutions, and one of whose aberrations was the belief that her husband and Hemingway were having a homosexual affair. (Mellow 397)
questioning I tried to tell Miss Stein that when you were a boy and moved in the company of men, you had to be prepared to kill a man, know how to do it and really know you would do it in order not to be interfered with (18).

This passage is more about Hemingway adding a layer of varnish to his well-established myth as a boy adventurer through the heart of America than it is about honestly exploring his “prejudice” against homosexuality. Here, homosexuality is cast as the villain he claims to have confronted as a young man when he set off to mature into the image of rugged world traveler. Yet, as he continues the conversation about homosexuality, there is a gulf between Hemingway’s vision of homosexuality as defined by an action (here a predatory, menacing one that deserves death) and what Stein wanted to address as the homosexual as an identity category. According to Hemingway, Stein states that “those people are sick and cannot help themselves and you should pity them” and that “He’s a showman and he corrupts for the pleasure of corruption and he leads people into other vicious practices as well. Drugs for example”, which he has to take because “the act that male homosexuals commit is ugly and repugnant and afterwards they are disgusted with themselves” (20,21). Stein counters this construction of the male homosexual with the female homosexual who does “nothing that is repulsive” and can “lead happy lives” (21).

Whether or not this was indicative of Stein’s true opinion on male homosexuality, what is important to pick from this is that Stein is attempting to describe the male homosexual as a specific psychological type defined by his practices, whereas Hemingway’s construction of the predatory boxcar hobo is not a rendering of the homosexual as subject, but a warning about the looming threat of homosexuality as a practice. Phobic and prejudiced, Stein’s definition of the homosexual is nonetheless in keeping with contemporaneous clinical models of the homosexual as a congenitally “sick” case who cannot be helped and deserved pity, not criminalization. In
contrast, these boxcar hobos are likely engaging in “situational homosexuality”, in which the lack of a partner of one’s preferred sex does not deter them from engaging in sex when the need is great. He does not specify in his description whether or not the advances that the “tramps” make are sexual passes and flirtations (thus aiming for a consensual act), or violent attempts at rape, though it is apparent that any form of another man’s sexual interest in him would constitute a violation of his masculinity and warranted violent retaliation. If this is truly Hemingway’s vision of homosexuality, then his anxiety about being prey to homosexual impulses himself is explained, because here, homosexuality is an ever-present specter that can strike any man’s lust and turn another man into an object and victim.

In The Sun Also Rises, which popularized the Lost Generation moniker of his peers, homosexuality is a dual-faced menace—it can infect virile men who could then prey upon other men and it can also be the condition of weak, effeminate males against whom Hemingway measures heterosexual masculinity. In a famous early scene, protagonist Jake Barnes describes the gay men who inhabit the bal musette on the Rue de la Montaigne Sainte Genevieve with his object of desire, Lady Brett Ashley:

A crowd of young men, some in jerseys and some in their shirtsleeves got out. I could see their hands and newly washed wavy hair in the light from the door. The policeman standing by the door looked at me and smiled. They came in. As they went in, under the light I saw white hands, wavy hair, white faces, grimacing, gesturing, talking. With them was Brett. She looked very lovely and she was very much with them.

One of them saw Georgette and said: ‘I do declare. There is an actual harlot. I’m going to dance with her, Lett. You watch me.’

The tall dark one, called Lett said: ‘Don’t you be rash.’
The wavy blond one answered: ‘Don’t you worry dear.’ And with them was Brett (28).

Here, Hemingway gives an accurate description of the semiotics of homosexuality in the era, with special attention to how carefully managed “wavy hair” among other flawless physical features couple with a specific manner of speech and bodily mannerisms that signified the “fairy” of the era. Jake Barnes transfers his masculine frustrations regarding his thwarted desire for Lady Brett Ashley on to her gay companions, “I was very angry. Somehow they always made me angry. I know they are supposed to be amusing, and you should be tolerant, but I wanted to swing on one, anyone, anything to shatter that superior, simpering composure” (28). Ira Elliott argues that this scene shows that Hemingway views homosexuality as an inauthentic lifestyle, a sad send-up of the proper femininity of their companion, Lady Brett Ashley (80). For Jake Barnes, the gay men surrounding his object of affection are a reminder of his own diminished masculinity as a man. A wound from fighting in World War One has left him sexually maligned and unable to perform the kind of virile, masculine sexuality that a coveted woman like Lady Brett Ashley would command. The fairies are men with a level of intimate access to Lady Brett Ashley that Jake cannot achieve, but they choose to act as women, almost mocking Jake by not taking advantage of something he desperately wants.

Jake’s violent, homophobic impulses reveal the common core of many would-be gay bashers: the homosexual’s seemingly gleeful and willfully chosen castration making a mockery of his own sense of inadequacy as a heterosexual. While this implication is fully present in the narrative, the function of the gay men in the bal musette is not to explain the prejudice they face, but rather to render them one-dimensional symbols of the horror of emasculation that Jake Barnes must endure that can strike any man at anytime. Between the emasculated Jake Barnes and the vision of the predatory boxcar hobo seized by the temporary madness of homosexual
lust, homosexuality as a practice or as an identity in Hemingway’s expatriate narratives is a looming threat—a present villain that a man must confront and defeat to preserve and secure his masculinity.

The spectacle of fairies in the Parisian underground and the psychology of homosexuality also alarmed the male protagonists of two canonical books on American expatriation in Paris: Thomas Wolfe’s *Of Time and the River* (1935) and F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *Tender is the Night* (1934). *Of Time and the River* is an epic-length fictionalized narrative of Wolf’s (Eugene Gant in the novel) own life in the mid-twenties, spanning his time studying at Harvard, his work as a writer and professor in New York, and his travels to France with his friend, homosexual playwright Kenneth Raisbeck, named Francis Starwick in the novel. The real-life Kenneth Raisbeck’s life was cut tragically short four years before the publication of the novel, the victim of an unsolved murder in 1931 (Kennedy 5). Although Starwick’s homosexuality is established in the novel in order to create a tension between he and Eugene Gant, the original manuscript more prominently featured Starwick’s dalliances according to Richard S. Kennedy who collects these excised passages in *The Starwick Episodes*. These edited sections:

- show that during the period of companionship with Starwick in Paris, Eugene became aware of the self-indulgent corruption that Starwick slid into and of the unpleasant developments of Starwick’s homosexual tendencies. Along with the contrast between the two kinds of writers the young men show themselves to be, there also emerges the difference between the two sexual natures—Eugene’s powerfully and openly masculine; Starwick’s voyeuristic and cynical, feminine and secretive. Wolfe seems to imply that the sexual grounding of Eugene and Starwick determines their differences in artistic taste and in creative productivity (2).
Just as Hemingway introduces the homosexual as a foil against which heterosexual masculinity is measured, so too does Wolfe introduce Starwick’s homosexuality in his novel so as to provide contrast to the more conventional, and thus more masculine, Eugene Gant. Yet, because Starwick is based off Wolfe’s late friend and is established as a main character of the novel instead of a one-dimensional menace, Wolfe’s characterization of Starwick, and by extension homosexuality, is nuanced and complex, although ultimately unflattering.

In an excised portion of Of Time and the River, Wolfe describes Eugene’s introduction to Starwick who serves as the teaching assistant to one of Eugene’s writing professors:

His name—his full and complete name—was Charles Francis Starwick—but he was known only as Francis Starwick, and by his intimates as Frank. About his antecedent life, or any fact concerning his present one, he was naturally and firmly secretive, and this quality accounted in part for the dislike and suspicion some people had for him.

Americans resent and are annoyed by any mystery in the lives of their companions, or by the idea of personal privacy; they want to ‘know all about’ people, it is a familiar assertion in moments of anger that ‘they have nothing to hide,’ that ‘they have nothing to be ashamed of’ (11).

Although Starwick’s homosexuality is not explicitly spelled out in this introduction, Wolfe’s very first mention of the character was originally intended to make his homosexuality a prime feature by emphasizing his secrecy, which would later be revealed to be motivated by concealing his homosexuality. Homosexuality here is defined by its secretive nature—a lack of transparency and legibility, both in the cause of homosexuality and in the homosexual’s social behavior, that as Wolfe explains, frustrates the American public’s will to knowledge. Americans cherish their own rights to privacy, but cannot respect the privacy of others due to the pervasive fear that
whatever someone would hold private would be shameful or malicious and thus indicative of a “true” self behind a public veneer. Thus, in Starwick, Wolfe encapsulates the motive toward which American scientists, psychologists, and moral commentators of the era strained to make homosexuality visible and transparent to the public gaze: the fear of their secrecy and the belief that hidden sexuality revealed the truth of the individual.

As Wolfe foreshadows the friendship Eugene would eventually share with Starwick, the author partially defends Starwick’s right to privacy, but acknowledges how secrecy damages personal relationships because of the individual’s insatiable will to knowledge of others:

In all this Starwick was within his right, and perhaps apologists for a finer and subtler society might say he was not only within his right but that his conduct represented a higher and purer courtesy and kindliness, but even a friend was likely to feel that a secrecy so strenuously maintained over a period of years was unnatural and that the friend to whom he had revealed his own life without concealment had, on his part, yielded only occasional and guarded glimpses (12).

It is many pages later in the novel when an older Eugene meets up with Starwick in Paris that these “guarded glimpses” become a vivid panorama when Starwick takes Eugene on a tour of the Parisian demimonde. The notorious Parisian nightlife and its underground nightclubs places Starwick in a context in which his homosexuality becomes legible to Eugene. After being subject to his careless behavior, Eugene comes to resent his friend as a vapid aesthete. By dismissing his fellow playwright friend thusly, Eugene in turn valorizes his own writing ability because he is more serious, traditional, and studious in his work.

Wolfe sets the scene for the revelation of Starwick’s homosexuality by reminding us that he “had read Wilde and Moore and Baudelaire and Huysmans but he knew little of Chaucer,
Spenser, Milton, Donne, and Wordsworth.” This not only characterizing Starwick’s eventual antics in the demimonde as an attempt to live up to the aesthetes and dandies that he has read and admires, but it also denigrating the works of these queer (both gay and heterosexually non-normative) writers as lesser than the canon that Eugene admires and identifies with. Ending a serious of comparisons between George Moore’s decadent behavior in Paris in *Confessions of a Young Man* (1886) and Starwick’s own wannabe hedonism, Wolfe writes:

> For both Moore and Starwick Paris seemed to provide a kind of romantic background for their own personalities. For both of them, the real life of the place—the millions of people working, dying, getting born, being married, enduring poverty, saving, scraping, hoping, fearing, and contriving, showing happiness and sorrow, gain and loss, success or failure, in the same ways people have done and known all these things all over the world for thousands of years—all this was of no great interest either to George Moore or Francis Starwick (56).

Instead of a supposedly more noble pursuit of living amongst this “normal” world and having concern for which Eugene assumes they hold nothing but contempt, Starwick lives for immediate pleasure and the company of “amusing people.” Wolfe’s criticism walks a fine line between attacking the aestheticization of poverty and criminality amongst the decadents and those who

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10 Although disparaging of Starwick’s decadent homosexuality, Wolfe shows he does possess intimate knowledge of the kind of literature that inspired queer expatriates by citing Moore’s novel. Canadian writer John Glassco, who will be extensively featured in the next chapter on Robert McAlmon, prefaces his *Memoirs of Montparnasse* with, “I wrote the first three chapters of this book in Paris when I was eighteen, and soon after the events recorded; at that time I wanted to compose my own *Confessions of a Young Man* a la George Moore, and felt I simply could not wait, as Moore did, for the onset of middle age” (xxi). Setting the scene for a meeting with Moore in England before the young Glassco and his partner Graeme Taylor voyaged to Paris, he writes, “He was at this time still my literary god. The sweep of his memories, the magic of his style, the bland persistent assertion of himself, the dazzling effect by which in a single phrase he gives an almost physical impression of a landscape, and emotion, or a woman—these made him for me the first writer of the age” (9).
had the privilege to “slum” in these environments without living in them (which is proper to any individual of means) and merely essentializing homosexuality as an identity inherently based in the kind of depravity that would traffic and revel in crime and the exploitation of others for pleasure. After revealing here in the setting of Paris that Starwick had been associating with “a notorious homosexual” back home at college in Boston, Eugene narrates

Thus, at twenty-five, although he had never known the coarse and honest appeasements of the brothel, and the lusty commerce of the whores he was deep in the manner of dives, stews, joints, and hang-outs for lesbians, pederasts, opiumates, gangsters, thieves and murderers—a foul company of the perverse, the diseased, the criminally degenerate of all sorts. And such people and places Frank [Starwick] now called ‘amusing’” (60).

The assumed immorality of homosexuality is reinforced by its commerce among drug abuse, thievery, and violent crime, as if it were an equivalent sin or somehow connected to these crimes in a general state of degeneracy and pathology that separated the higher stratum from the dregs of society. Wolfe would be justified in attacking an attitude among the decadents that treated the underclasses of the underworld as mere objects of amusement. But, by locating homosexuality solely in the spaces of illicit trade, Wolfe’s characterization of the underground makes it appear as though homosexuality arises through the corrupt culture of that space, instead of the more likely fact that the persecution of homosexuality forces it to go into these underground spaces where all illegal activities must retreat regardless of whether or not their illegality is just.

As Eugene’s animosity toward Starwick’s lifestyle grows, Wolfe not only places Starwick as the effete foil to Eugene’s threatened masculinity in the queer haunts of Paris, but, much like Hemingway does for Jake Barnes, Wolfe also makes Starwick out to be an impediment to Eugene’s romantic intentions. Because he is a better friend with Eugene’s
beloved, Ann, even though his homosexuality prevents romantic interest, as Kennedy argues, “Starwick is made to stand for a conspiracy of forces that combine to block Eugene’s hopes and achievements in life. He is made to be symbolically ‘the enemy’, as Wolfe gives vent, with irrational intensity, to some of his own paranoia” (78). The secrecy of Starwick’s life that Eugene once understood to be the necessary condition of his homosexuality becomes a space of conspiracy in which the unspeakable and unknowable nature of the homosexual somehow explains that which is beyond Eugene’s control. Just like with Jake Barnes, Eugene sees the homosexual, somehow, against all logic, happy with his castration and able to gain access to women in ways that he cannot comprehend, possessing some sort of access to a satisfaction of desire that he cannot name, but deeply resents. Of course the trope of the rule-flaunting, flamboyant homosexual who unfairly gets to have his cake and eat it too while the heterosexual must remain studious, law-abiding, and repressed completely ignores the brutal persecution the homosexual faces for his rule breaking (often championed by those most incensed by their own repression). The mystery of his desire, psyche, and social practice turn him into a conspirator, as if the homosexual was not only a reminder of the burdens and obstacles to desire placed onto heterosexuals who want to maintain their propriety and normality, but also the actual cause of why the heterosexual male cannot achieve his desire. As long as there is a homosexual frittering away his life on decadence and frivolity, the heterosexual can be assured in his authenticity (for Eugene, this is as a writer and as a man), but the homosexual is a looming and frustrating specter, a reminder that a man can break all the rules and somehow emerge satisfied and adored.

Just as it was for Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald was also inspired by the community of queers in his expatriate neighborhood in Paris. Yet, unlike Hemingway’s crude, one-dimensional caricature of the “simpering” fairies, Fitzgerald’s exploration of queer sexuality is more
interested in cataloguing a wider breadth of forms that male effeminacy can take and investigating its psychological causes. In an early draft of *Tender is the Night* from 1926, Fitzgerald included a description of a gay bar through the eyes of the original focal character of the novel, Francis Melarky:

The place was full of fairies—we were in a world of fairies—I never saw so many or such a variety together. There were tall gangling ones and little pert ones with round thing shoulders, great broad ones with the faces of Nero and Oscar Wilde, fat ones with sly smiles that broadened into leers, nervous ones who hitched and jerked, opening their eyes very wide, handsome, passive dumb ones who turned their profiles this way and that, noble-faced ones with the countenances of senators that dissolved suddenly into girlish fatuity; pimply stodgy ones with the most delicate gestures of all; raw ones with red lips and frail curly bodies...self-conscious ones who looked with eager politeness towards every noise; satyrs whose lips curled horrible; English ones with great racial self-control, Balkans ones—a small cooing Japanese (Fitzgerald as quoted by Collins 168).

Although Fitzgerald details an impressive taxonomy of the different species of fairies, every single version embodies some form of deficient manhood. Here, Fitzgerald embodies the common wisdom of the era that saw the homosexual as invert, marked by a gender disorder. Tops, trade and aggressively masculine homosexuals are nowhere to be seen because they would have been read as heterosexual.

While the fairy bar is a diversion and a reflection on the ubiquity of the cultural phenomenon of homosexuality in this early draft, the final version of the novel with Dick Diver as the protagonist uses the homosexual, much like Hemingway, as a measurement of the protagonist’s masculine anxieties. As Angus P. Collins argues, Dick Diver’s own sense of
emascula\nsion mirrored the same sense of uneasiness that Fitzgerald himself felt as he wrote the novel:

Fitzgerald's notorious sensitivity about his masculinity, as well as the acute homosexual doubts attested to in him by observers such as Morley Callaghan may well derive not just from the fact that he was so often the self-confessed "woman" of his marriage, but from the Achilles' heel of his insecure masculinity as it related to matters of craft: Fitzgerald in these years appeared to have sus\nppected that he himself was the true homosexual in his choice of vocation. Homosexuality therefore defines the circle of his creative difficulties in that he is homosexual both in his moral and artistic commitment and in his proneness to moral collapse: homosexuality can convey to him both his own much greater emasculation (the attenuations of art) and his own capacities for self-abandonment (the perils of self-indulgence. (172)

Set in the south of France among a vacationing colony of the rich and famous, *Tender is the Night* centers on the troubled marriage between doctor and psychologist Dick Diver and his wife Nicole who had been his patient, seeking help to overcome her traumatic childhood, which included a possible incestuous relationship with her father. As Dick flounders in his love for Nicole and becomes tempted by young Hollywood starlet Rosemary Hoyt, Nicole gradually becomes more independent and divorces Dick, while he in turn gradually spirals out of control and becomes the mentally weak one. As the power dynamic in Dick and Nicole’s relationship gradually reverses, allusions to homosexuality are employed to dramatize Dick’s loss of patriarchal control over Nicole. This is most dramatically illustrated with the novel’s infamous “black lace drawers” scene at the beachside:
Nicole handed her husband the curious garment on which she had been working. He went into the dressing tent and inspired a commotion by appearing in a moment clad in transparent black lace drawers. Close inspection revealed that actually they were lined with flesh-colored cloth.

‘Well if that isn’t a pansys trick!’ exclaimed Mr. McKisco contemptuously.

By labeling it a “pansys trick” Dick’s act of transvestitism is not simply an impersonation of his wife or a poke at women, but an embodiment of a specific form of the effeminate male. While Dick intended for his “coming out” in his wife’s underwear to be a joke for their friends, this act of emasculation is a foreshadowing of his eventual role reversal with Nicole when he becomes the dependent, psychological disturbed one.

The pantomiming of the pansy could have been innocent enough if it was not for the fact that later in the book, homosexuality is specifically questioned in pathological terms when Dick is called to treat Francisco, the homosexual son of a Chilean nobleman who complains he had been “corrupted” in school. Seeking treatment for his alcohol abuse and homosexuality, Francisco claims he is “nauseated by the sight of a woman,” to which Dick responds:

   If you’re happy in this mess, then I can’t help you and I’m wasting my time.’
   ‘No, let’s talk – I despise most of the others so.’ There was some manliness in the boy, perverted now into an active resistance to his father. But he had that typically roguish look in his eyes that homosexuals assume in discussing the subject.

While Dick agrees that Francisco must control his drinking that provokes his homosexual behavior, he also identifies his homosexuality as the cause of the drinking in the first place. Drinking is his fuel toward acting out his perversion, but it is perversion that compels him to drink so as to act on it. If Dick must diagnose whether or not Francisco is happy in order to
determine if his homosexuality is a product of an innate condition that he could not treat, or if he
is truly unhappy with it, then Fitzgerald suggests he can be cured of the problem because he is
acting against his nature. In this respect, Dick’s analysis is more Freudian, postulating that a
happy homosexual does not need his therapy, while others tried to treat homosexuality itself.

As Dick further counsels Francisco, he gradually steps away from a strictly clinical
stance on homosexuality as a dysfunction to be treated and comes to identify personally with
some aspect of the patient’s suffering:

He talked automatically, having abandoned the case ten minutes before. They talked
pleasantly through another hour about the boy’s home in Chile and about his ambitions. It
was as close as Dick has ever come to comprehending such a character from any but the
pathological angle...Dick tried to dissect it into pieces small enough to store away –
realizing that the totality of life may be different in quality from its segments, and also
that life during the forties seemed capable of being observed only in segments. His love
for Nicole and Rosemary, his friendship with Abe North, with Tommy Baraban in the
broken universe of the war’s ending – in such contacts the personalities seemed to press
up so close to him that he became the personality itself – there seemed some necessity of
taking all or nothing; it was as if for the remainder of his life he was condemned to carry
with him the egos of certain people, early met and early loved and to be only as complete
as they were complete themselves.

What is so profound about this passage is how what started as a quick consultation with a
“pathological” homosexual gradually turned into such a deep identification with the young man’s
life that it caused Dick to re-evaluate his own. Dick comes close to seeing Francisco as not just
another pathological case because he realizes that in Francisco’s reckless youth, susceptible to
the temptation and influences of others, Dick is similar in his own relationships. Dick’s empathy not only humanizes what would just be another clinical case of a pervert driven to excess, but it also evidences the kind of dysfunction that Dick has descended into at this point in his own life. By now, his marriage has fallen apart and he has begun drinking heavily, and in this moment where his thoughts drift from clinical diagnosis to personal introspection, it becomes clear that Francisco’s testimony on the origins of his homosexuality illuminate Dick’s own declining mental health. Whether Fitzgerald is attempting to make the reader sympathize with Francisco and broaden the reach of mental instability to encompass heterosexuality and homosexuality alike, or if he positions Francisco as the foreshadowing of Dick’s fate—both are equally grounded interpretations of this passage. In either interpretation, Francisco’s position as homosexual is that of comparison. Sympathetic or demonized, the homosexual is imagined as a measuring stick to what heterosexual masculinity wishes to say about itself.

Reconstructing an American Queer Literary Movement in France

Although this dissertation is centered on four queer American writers in France, Robert McAlmon, Charles Henri Ford, Paul Bowles, and Fritz Peters, my specific attention to their work is not meant to imply that they were the only notable queer writers to expatriate or that their work was somehow superior to that of their peers. Rather, I have chosen these four out of a much larger population of writers because their literary output demonstrates four distinctly different ways in which the culture, environment, and artistic and philosophic movements of the French have supplied concepts, aesthetics, and spaces for imagining queer subjectivity. These four were not alone in finding inspiration for speaking and visualizing queer desire in French cultural spaces, but were instead part of a wide reaching phenomenon that extended to more writers than
is presently known by scholarship. As I continue to find more queer Americans in France in the archives, I want to emphasize that a main pillar of my thesis is that the presence of these queer writers in France was no coincidence, but part of a larger trend over the first half of the 20th century of queer Americans looking abroad for inspiration, community, and of course, sexual titillation. In keeping with this argument, I want to briefly sketch an overview of other queer American writers in France so as to illuminate the breadth of the queer expatriation phenomenon.

Several gay writers not known for their expatriation spent time writing in France during the expatriate movement. While living on a small stipend from his aunt on the Left Bank, Clarkson Crane wrote *The Western Shore*, a story of college life in Berkeley featuring a homosexual professor as a character. Charles Brackett, better known today as the closeted film producer and screenwriter of *The Lost Weekend* (of which he actually cut the homosexual themes from the original book) and *Sunset Boulevard*, wrote *American Colony* about the loose morals and raucous behavior for which Americans in Paris were notorious. Other expatriates of uncertain or disputed sexual identity made the widely visible homosexuality around them a feature of their novels. Elliott Paul, known as much for his journalism and memoirs as his novels, of which *The Last Time I Saw Paris* became his most famous when an adaptation was made into the film of the same name, wrote of a homosexual piano teacher in 1938’s *Concert Pitch*. Lucien Piot, a music critic whose apartment “reeks of fairies,” becomes obsessed with an American pupil and agrees to mentor him as a way to eventually seduce him. When the protégé rebuffs his advances, the arrangement crumbles as the student no longer trusts Piot in the close physical proximity in which a piano teacher must instruct. Paul’s novel rehashes the image of the predatory homosexual, but he also probes deeply into Piot’s conflicted, remorseful nature while also describing the judgmental and derogatory treatment he receives in the music world for his
known homosexuality. Other famed gay artists spent time as expatriates in France without composing explicitly queer writing. Painter and poet Marsden Hartley was perhaps the elder statesmen of queer expatriates. He appears in Robert McAlmon’s *Distinguished Air* as Foster, a holdover dandy from a previous era of male effétes. McAlmon published Hartley’s book of poetry through his own press in 1925. Hart Crane composed part of his ambitious epic-length poem “The Bridge” while staying in Paris and then in the south of France as a guest of expatriate poet Harry Crosby. Although no specifically queer elements from his stay appear in the work, he did take advantage of the gay culture of the city, as Crosby noted in his diary: "Hart C. back from Marseilles where he slept with his thirty sailors and he began again to drink Cutty Sark" (Crosby as quoted by Rood 83).

Although James Baldwin arrived one generation after the scope of my dissertation, he merits a brief mention because his work can be seen as the culmination of the first half of the century’s queer expatriation to France. Baldwin spent much of his early career there and set one of the most famous gay-themed novels of the 20th century, *Giovanni’s Room*, in Paris. The novel envisions France much like the narratives I will analyze from queer expatriate authors of the previous generation, in which the culture enables a more liberalized sense of human sexuality and same-sex desire can be tentatively explored among the curious and compelled. In Baldwin’s novel, the white protagonist, David, journeys to Paris in part to escape his troubles in America and the looming pressure to marry his girlfriend, Hella. While pursuing the age old cliché of the young American trying to “find himself” in Europe, he becomes acquainted with a cast of queer characters among Paris’ seedier bars, a “flaming princess”, a “fairy” discharged from the army, an unscrupulous barkeep, and his love interest, Giovanni, a working waiter with whom he falls in love and attempts to create an ill-fated domestic life.
What I wish to cull from Baldwin’s landmark novel is a list of the themes of queer expatriation in France that were established in earlier works explored in this dissertation. That Baldwin’s theme of grappling with one’s homosexuality within a foreign cultural environment had been previously engaged does not diminish the fact that his novel is arguably (and in my personal opinion) the most finely crafted and psychologically penetrative exploration of this theme. The popularity of Giovanni’s Room, both upon its initial publication and today as a classic of African American literature and queer literature is a testament to how the histories of Americans exploring their identity in France has shaped the literary expression of race and sexuality in the 20th century. Baldwin’s novel also covers other issues attached to expatriation to France: the queer cartography of “hidden” urban queer spaces, gay culture as a space in which classes mix and conflict, the association of homosexuality with criminality, and the taxonomy of different sexual and gender identities within the queer community. Not only does Baldwin’s novel benefit from the themes established by decades of previous gay American writers in Paris, but also, Baldwin’s personal experience and opportunities as a writer benefited from the long history of black American writers from the Harlem Renaissance and beyond who found greater social tolerance and appreciation in France.

The Harlem Renaissance was not only a literal rebirth of the African American as a political and social actor and commentator, but it also played a prominent role in the birth of gay culture in American urban environments. While the Harlem Renaissance provided an unprecedented opportunity for African-American writers and intellectuals to collaborate together and participate in public discourse, there was also a wide spread desire to seek out spaces in other lands where they believed racial tolerance extended throughout the land, not just in their segregated section of the American city. For many African American artists and intellectuals
over the 20th century, France became that land. By the 20s, the French had developed an interest in all African-derived art (what some scholars have dubbed “negrophilia”) Jazz had become popular, Josephine Baker was dancing in chic clubs in her banana skirt, and the cubists and other artists were appropriating African aesthetics to challenge the conventions of western visual representation. Without the history of American slavery, reconstruction, and present segregation looming in the minds of the white French population, African Americans found the sense of suspicion and intimidation that characterized engagement in white civil society in America to be largely absent, or at least differently construed. France, of course, was still in possession of African and West Indian colonies and African Americans were treated differently from black French colonial subjects. They also benefited from Anti-American sentiment among the French who saw American racism as proof of the inferiority of American culture, thereby also ignoring their own abuses of colonial and post-colonial peoples (Fabre 341). Thus, with the intersection of the many reasons why France was attractive to gay artists and with the promise of greater tolerance and appreciation of black artists, France became a destination for queer African American writers of the Harlem Renaissance and the generations it inspired.

The precedence for the Harlem Renaissance’s voyage to France was set by one of the major patrons of the movement, Alain Locke, who edited 1925’s *The New Negro*. A homosexual himself, Locke invested extra mentorship into the careers of writers who he knew were also struggling with same-sex desires, including Countée Cullen, Langston Hughes, and Richard Bruce Nugent. Although Locke, like Cullen and Hughes, only provided the most meager of hints toward their same-sex desires in their literary output, his mentorship in the ways of sexuality and his outspoken praise for French culture encouraged many associated with the Harlem Renaissance to visit the nation. Locke praised the French writers, such as Rene Maran who he
and Hughes met in France, for “developing a new colonial literature, that is pure literature,”
divested of the exoticism that he despised in other reflections on colonial spaces (37). For Locke,
the cultural space of France provided a new way of viewing colonialism and the forced diaspora
of African peoples across the colonial world. In his autobiography *The Big Sea*, Langston
Hughes reflects that his “first emotional link to France” was being able to understand the French
of Guy de Maupassant, who had inspired him to be a writer “and write stories about Negroes so
ture that people in far-away lands would read them” (Fabre 63). For both Hughes and Locke, the
canonical 19th-century Maupassant and the 20th-century colonial critic Maran spoke to them
across continents and hemispheres with a narrative and perspective unachievable in America.

Unlike Locke and Hughes who traveled mostly for inspiration, Cullen and Claude
McKay stayed for considerable lengths of time to compose full texts. Dubbed “The Greatest
Francophile” in Michel Fabre’s excellent history of African American writers in France, Cullen
completed his most ambitious and controversial work of his career, the epic-length poem of
lynching in the south, *The Black Christ*, in 1929. Although he has declined in popularity after his
death, Cullen was the most widely read of the Harlem Renaissance poets in the mid twenties, and
he became a public figure in both the Harlem community and in popular American periodicals.
He married W.E.B. DuBois’ daughter Yolande in 1928 and immediately “honeymooned” in
Paris with his best friend and possible lover, Harold Jackman, who Arna Bontemps dubbed “the
Jonathan and David of the Harlem Renaissance” (Garber). Although Yolande soon joined him,
the marriage was short lived, and they caused a scandal when they promptly divorced. While
living through marital turmoil and suppressed same-sex feelings, Cullen stayed with French-born
gay American writer Julien Green for over a year and maintained a friendship with another
French-born gay American author, the poet Edouard Roditi (Fabre 84). Once published, *The
Black Christ hinted at Cullen’s tumultuous year, containing individual poems about betrayal and coldness between lovers alluding to his marriage, the epic-length The Black Christ with veiled homoerotic subtexts, and a few poems on the French environment and culture. At the end of the poem, alongside Christ as a figure of martyrdom suffered by the lynched black youth, Cullen includes allusions to other literary archetypes for describing the youth’s death that suggest a more homoerotic bond between he and the narrator. Mourning Jim’s lynching, the narrator proclaims: “My Lycidas was dead. There swung/ In all his glory, lusty, young,/ My Jonathan, my Patrocles.” As A B Christa Schwartz notes, “All three figures mentioned were mourned by their male lovers: Edward King was mourned by Milton as ‘Lycidas,’ Johnathan was mourned by David, and Patrocles by his lover Achilles” (56). While none of these classical literary characters were explicitly homosexual by today’s definition, all three were models of homosocial friendship that informed turn of the century gay writers that traced the modern homosexual to these homosocial pairs, such as Edward Carpenter’s Iolaus: An Anthology of Friendship, which Cullen read at the recommendation of Alain Locke. Cullen includes these figures of homosociality as equally applicable paradigms for reading racial persecution as an allegory for sexual persecution.

Out of all the writers of the Harlem Renaissance, Claude McKay was the most thoroughly committed expatriate, and the only one whose literary output explicitly addresses the intersection of race and homosexuality in a comparative French and American context. As Michel Fabre writes:

Of all the Afro-American writers who resided in France between the two world wars, Claude McKay remained there the longest and mixed with all sorts of people—black and white, American and French, European and African—in both Paris and the provinces. He
also derived inspiration from his French experience, not only in *Banjo*, in which Marseilles plays more than a background role, but in a number of essays analyzing the complex race and class relations in Western Europe (92).

Although McKay is rarely mentioned in any of the famous narratives of the Lost Generation in Paris, he was a frequent visitor of the cafes and bars of Montparnasse and wrote about his own experience amongst luminaries such as Sylvia Beach and Ernest Hemingway in his own memoirs, *A Long Way from Home*. McKay has also been rumored to be sexually linked to both Robert McAlmon and John Glassco, a meeting depicted in one crazed night of drinking and carousing at Bricktop’s club in Glassco’s *Memoirs of Montparnasse* (Busby 51). In two of his novels set in France, McKay alludes to possible homoerotic relations and references “pansies” in his sexually charged novel *Banjo* (1929) and boldly depicts same-sex relations in a sympathetic tone in his unpublished novel *Romance in Marseilles* (1930). A.B. Christa Schwarz argues that while McKay dwells on the discourses of the deviant and criminal in depicting pansies in *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*, he displays a more humanizing tone in the unpublished *Romance in Marseilles*:

In ‘Romance in Marseilles,’ in contrast, the white effeminate gay man Petit Frere and his ‘manly’ companion Big Blonde are portrayed rather sympathetically. However it must be noted that the depiction of the effeminate man as somewhat ‘freakish’—he is described as ‘fascinating with his pale prettiness and challenging deep dark-ringed eyes and insolent mouth’—contrasts with the description of the butch Big Blonde as a ‘big firm-footed broad-shouldered man, splendidly built.’ (105)

For McKay, the port town of Marseilles (second largest in France) provided the setting in which he could explore queer sexuality in depth without resorting to the off-handed dismissals and
stereotypes of effeminate homosexuals in his other works. It also provided a racially integrated society since the port town was populated with a large portion of black French nationals from the colonies, creating a setting in which he could examine the relationship between race and homosexuality. In Code Name Sasha, Gary Edward Holcomb argues that McKay’s background in Marxist theory and Communist politics guides his argument for tolerance of homosexuals as an oppressed class similar to blacks in America and Europe. While the characters of Big Blonde and Petit Frere received abuse at the hands of an old white woman, Big Blonde’s black friends are tolerant of his relationship with Petit Frere, making “playful rather than abusive comments” (106). Big Blond serves as a mediator figure as a physically large, yet openly queer man between the effeminate Petit Frere and his working class, heterosexual black friends. In Marseilles, McKay found a relationship between homosexuality, race, and diasporic communities that mutually inform each other and speak to his larger concern about class relations and the possibility of Marxism and Communism as potential mediators.

For Franco-American writers Edouard Roditi and Julien Green, the narrative of expatriation is inverted since both were American citizens born and raised in France. Only later in their adulthoods did they journey to America to explore the land of their citizenship and heritage. Although Roditi was already rooted by birth in France and fluent in French as a first language, he was a fixture among the American expatriate crowd, and his career progressed in a manner similar to other queer American expatriates. Along with Paul Bowles and Charles Henri Ford, Roditi was published at a young age in Eugene Jolas’ journal Transition. When both Bowles and Ford journeyed to Paris, Roditi quickly acquainted himself with them and became life-long correspondents and collaborators from his early twenties to his elderly years (Morrow 1983). Roditi was well acquainted amongst the queer artistic scene in Europe and he was a
permanent fixture as a networker and patron of gay arts from the 20s until his death in the 80s. Like Ford, Roditi was fascinated with the work of the surrealist movement and he became acquainted with René Crevel, Ford’s future lover Pavel Tchelitchew, and André Breton despite his well publicized homophobia. Roditi collaborated with Breton on The Anthology of Black Humor despite Breton not completely grasping the concept of black humor and he translated his book of poetry Young Cherry Trees Secured Against Hares in 1946 with the backing from Charles Henri Ford’s View Press. At the break of World War Two, he was employed as a translator and writer for the Voice of America French Language Group (along with Julien Green) and later worked as a translator during the Nuremburg trials. Despite his service for his country, Roditi was swept up in Senator Joseph McCarthy’s Red Scare due to his homosexuality and suspected, but never proven, communist sympathies. He was blacklisted in America and lived the rest of his life in France.

Although Roditi’s greatest contributions to literature were his translations and his networking and patronage with the great modernist artists of his era, he also produced a series of poems about his love for a married man titled “Poems for F” (1935). Written as a series of 22 numbered, short poems, the collection reflects on the inherently secretive and unstable nature of a relationship that must be closeted not only for its homosexuality, but also for its adultery. In poem XVII, Roditi explores how spatial dislocation and exile common to many queer expatriate writers became a way to express the gulf between he and his necessarily distanced lover:

Whether in exile my home-sick eyes  
turn inward towards remembered scapes,  
or, in despair, compare, or recognize,  
in wild foreign features your friendly shapes.  
You are my fatherland: familiar hills,  
mimicked by clouds in every sky,  
your shoulders that shut my world where, folded  
in your arms and rounded by their streams, I lie. (36)
In this poem, the concepts of exile and nationality become extended metaphors for distance from a lover and being possessed by him. Because this poem addresses a closeted relationship, the idea of a gay lover being one’s fatherland also speaks to the notion of belonging as a gay man to a nation as a whole. Malcolm Cowley, Ezra Pound, and others may have played with the idea of expatriates as exiles, but for a homosexual, a certain sense of exile is all around him when his national loyalty and citizenship have been put in question as French nationalists had done during the time in which Roditi composed these poems, and as the United States would later do during the Red Scare.

Like Roditi, Julien Green\textsuperscript{11} was also an American citizen born in France. Green was raised with a strong sense of his American heritage. Named after his confederate senator grandfather Julian Hartridge, Green was brought up with a distinct American southern identity, a part of himself that he had the chance to explore independently when he voyaged to America for the first time to attend the University of Virginia. In his four volumes of memoirs from childhood to young adulthood, Green parallels his emerging homosexuality with his understanding of his American heritage, beginning with his increasing consciousness of same-sex desires stirring as he served with American troops during World War One (which also was his first time living as part of an American group) and blossoming at the University of Virginia in volume three, \textit{Love in America}.

Green’s bi-national identity parallels the internal turmoil of his emerging homosexuality. When he enters Virginia for the first time, Green writes:

\textsuperscript{11} Julien Green was christened with the American spelling of his name, “Julian”. His French publisher changed it to the French spelling in the 1920s.
This was my first sight of my mother’s country, the South, and everything she had told me about it those long years ago came flooding back into my memory. It was as if that whole world which she had loved were being offered to me in one simplified image and in some indefinable way. I recognized that image because I saw it through the eyes of my mother. Within a few seconds I understood everything: the Secession, the will to survive and not be absorbed into a nation that was too vast. Devoted as I was to France, I recognized that a part of me had no other origin than the country in which I now found myself. These feelings only lasted a few seconds. It was like some intuition, which fleeted across the mind, but it was sufficient for an entire world to establish itself with me... (18-19).

This strong, passionate identification with an unfolding sense of Southern American heritage that waxes and wanes in conflict with his French upbringing eventually mirrors his struggle with homosexuality as he comes to acquaint himself with the American boys at the University of Virginia. For example, when Green meets Mark, the boy who would become his chaste object of desire, he writes, "Suddenly, I was no longer a free man. Because of someone I had only seen for only three or four seconds, I was now enslaved.” The rhetoric of slavery, ubiquitous in his antebellum-laden descriptions of the south, comes to inform how he describes a feeling of bondage to what he was taught by religious and educational authorities to think of as sinful desires. In his Latin classes, he comes to learn of the “shame of antiquity...boylove” and the study of antiquity becomes the mediator through which he and his college friends can discuss homosexuality. Yet, he is introduced to a counter-discourse by the new generation of college students when Green’s friends lend him the aforementioned studies of ancient homosociality and
homoeroticism by John Addington Symonds and Edward Carpenter along with Havelock Ellis’ clinical studies on homosexuality.

While Green stews convulsively in his desire amongst young men who could possibly reciprocate his lust and the wide discussion of pederasty and sexology allows him and his classmates a way to discuss same sex desire, Green continues to struggle with his desires, attributing his guilt to his strong Catholic beliefs. This theme of intense inner-anguish ignited by the tension between Catholic and spiritual morality versus more carnal lusts reappears in Green’s subsequent prolific output of novels and essays, all written in France, and in French for a French audience. He personally continued to struggle with his sexuality, despite openly writing about it and publicly becoming involved with young gay novelist Eric Jourdan, 38 years his junior. Green’s work was extremely popular in France, and he became the only American ever elected to the prestigious Académie française. He also returned to the question of Southern identity, writing *Sud*, which also merged Green’s fascination with Southern heritage with homosexual identity in its plot about a southern army officer in love with another. Additionally, he also wrote *Les Étoiles du Sud*, and *Dixie* about the confederate era for a French audience. *Sud*, was later adapted into a British teledrama, credited as the first ever gay-themed drama on television.

Although more a traveler to France than an expatriate, Samuel Steward’s career as a writer also bears the influence of the queer expatriate community in France. The subject of Justin Spring’s excellent 2010 biography *Secret Historian*, Steward was a gay renaissance man: a college professor, international traveler, a sex researcher with Alfred Kinsey, famed tattoo artist, erotic fiction writer under the pseudonym Phil Andros, lgbt community ethnographer, and mystery novelist—to name a few of his incarnations. Much like the four main authors of this study, Steward had a long relationship with Gertrude Stein with whom he corresponded from
1932 until her death, and he published the letters and memoirs of her mentorship in the book *Dear Sammy*. Steward met Stein in Paris in 1937, shortly after having been fired from his position teaching at Washington State University for his portrayal of prostitution in the novel *Angels on the Bough*. Steward recounts a discussion of homosexuality with Gertrude Stein in his 1981 autobiography *Chapters from an Autobiography*:

Suddenly, while still driving, she grabbed my kneecap and squeezed it hard. ‘Sammy,’ she said. ‘do you think Alice and I are lesbians?’

I was startled. A curl of flame went up my spine. ‘It’s no one’s business one way or another.’ I said.

‘Do you care whether we are.’ she asked.

‘Not in the least.’ I said suddenly dripping wet.

‘Are you queer or gay or different or ‘of it’ as the French say or whatever they are calling it nowadays.’ she said, still driving as fast as always. She had let go my knee.

I waggled my hand. ‘I’m currently both,’ I said ‘I think,’ I added, ‘I don’t see why I should go limping on one leg through life just to satisfy a so-called norm.’...

She said that she and Alice had always been surrounded by homosexuals, that they both liked all people who produced—‘ and what they do in bed is their own business, and what we do is not theirs.’ She had denigrated male homosexuals to Hemingway to see if he would squirm because he was a secret one. And then after those shattering few moments that day she never referred to the matter again (63).

Not only does Steward set Gertrude Stein as the interlocutor for a critique of heterosexuality as the norm and a run through of the many possible sexual identities in America and France blossoming into existence in the era, but he also salvages Gertrude Stein’s reputation in the gay
community, which during the renaissance in gay cultural studies in the 70s, had taken a hit for her purported comments in *A Moveable Feast*. Steward casts Stein as a wise sage on human sexuality, and through her words, legitimates his own philosophy on homosexuality.

Along with Stein, Steward met in France an entire cavalcade of famed queer, literary celebrities including Thomas Mann, Lord Alfred Douglas, and André Gide. In a 1993 interview, Steward describes an encounter with the famed orientalist Gide, similar to what Paul Bowles would later relate from his own life in his autobiography, “Gide was quite open about his homosexuality. In fact, he once gave me his handsome and beautiful young Arab that he brought back with him from North Africa for an evening. As a note, Gide also had a satin covered circular bed which was certainly unusual in 1930s Paris” (Keehnen 1993). Although Steward only traveled to France for a few summers, his experience among the queer literary luminaries—a sharp contrast from the moral censure he had received in America—and his continued correspondence with Gertrude Stein influenced the trajectory of his writing career. This is most evident in a series of mystery novels set in Paris, including *Murder Is Murder Is Murder* and *The Caravaggio Shawl* from the late 80s staring a handsome, gay detective aided by the hidden sleuthing talents of Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, along with 1984’s *Parisian Lives*, also staring a fictionalized Stein and Toklas and their patronage of a fictitious, gay British painter Sir Arthur Lyly. Out of all the queer expatriates in my study who gained (and often lost) the friendship of Gertrude Stein, Steward is the one most determined to go one step beyond casting Stein as the widely acknowledged patron and tastemaker of modernist art and to argue for renewed interest in her understanding of human sexuality, and to cast her in bronze as a gay icon for men alongside her devoted lesbian readership.
Steward’s vision of foreign intrigue in the gay Parisian underworld had a precedent in Gordon Merrick’s 1947 novel *The Strumpet Wind*, a widely selling story of a gay American spy in France during World War Two. The novel was based on Merrick’s own experience during the war, working for the Office of Strategic Services in Cannes managing espionage programs. Merrick moved to France as a civilian after the success of his novel and continued to write explicitly gay-themed novels, that despite their subject matter, continued to chart on the American Best Seller list, including the French-set *The Demon at Noon* and *The Lord Won't Mind*. Just like Steward, Merrick’s novels varied between mainstream fiction and the lurid, though while Steward wrote explicit erotica, Merrick’s novels were more aimed at a gay equivalent of the romance novel with uncomplicated tales of impossibly beautiful men finding romance in exotic locations. Although the Parisian location of his first novel would be the first of many locales that seem exotic in the American imagination, he returned often to France both in his fiction and in his own life. While other queer expatriates’ work explored subcultures and alternative conceptualizations of queer sexuality that became extinct or forgotten, Merrick’s work perhaps most accurately predicted and reinforced the most popular gay image that would materialize in the 70s—conventionally handsome, white, masculine, well-to-do men with more of an interest in perpetuating the cult of the male body and material luxury than engagement in subversive or radical politics and art.

In this way, Merrick’s expatriate novels are perhaps the most legibly “gay” in the sense that his work bridged the gap from World War Two (at the very end of this study), to an era in which a codified gay readership could be easily located and marketed to. That Merrick could compose what would be the gay community equivalent of the mass-marketed paperback based on foreign intrigue stories in Paris and other exotic locales abroad shows not only the rapid pace
at which queer American literature evolved narrative conventions that went from modernist experiment to mass-market standardization, but also the enduring influence that visions of French culture have had on the American queer erotic imaginary. In transitioning from a broad overview of the history of queer American expatriation to France to in-depth analyses of the lives and works of specific queer American expatriate authors, I retain this analytical framework in reading how their literature details a queer pre-history of the gay subject. While I place a lot of emphasis on comparing how these concepts and descriptions of gay identity evolved, I do not contend that this evolution is somehow inherently progress toward a better, fitter concept of queer sexuality. Rather, this study’s aim is to present these narratives of interwar queer sexualities as fully formed identities specific to an era and a culture that change along with the culture, just as is the case with sexual expression at any given period in history, including today.
CHAPTER 3
ROBERT MCAŁMON

Of all the famous writers and artists of the Lost Generation, no one had been so influential and central as a figure of the American expatriate movement in France and yet rewarded with so little acknowledgement as Robert McAlmon. Aside from two biographies, (the most recent, Sanford J. Smoller’s from 1975), only recently has some scholarship been devoted to reclaim McAlmon from the margins of a literary history footnote and properly recognize his contributions to the expatriate literary movement as a writer, publisher, and pillar of the community. McAlmon moved to Paris at the very beginning of the famed expatriate movement in 1921 and grew in reputation and infamy to be one of the elder statesmen of the community by the early 30s when the magic of the era petered out, as he claimed. McAlmon was a mercurial figure, known for his sardonic wit, his loud, sometimes-amusing, sometimes-violent outbursts in bars and cafes in Paris, yet equally respected for his prodigious literary output and quiet kindness to other writers and artists through his patronage (Smoller 6). By the golden age of the era, McAlmon became the resident expert of the quarter and young expatriates sought him for making connections with other artists, publishing help, and advice on the cheapest places to drink. Through his Contact Editions publishing company, McAlmon was the first to publish works by Ernest Hemingway, William Carlos Williams, Djuna Barnes, and Gertrude Stein among other famous writers of American modernism. As a historical figure, McAlmon’s omnipresence in the Montparnasse community placed him in the background of many of the period’s significant landmarks. McAlmon accompanied Hemingway to the bullfights in Spain that he would immortalize in *The Sun Also Rises*. He typed proofs of James Joyce’s monumental novel *Ulysses*, and due to the convoluted system of notes and addendums in Joyce’s manuscript,
the voice of Molly Bloom that the first generation of readers received was McAlmon’s interpretation of Joyce’s until the original manuscript version was published many years later (McAlmon 118).

While researchers of the more famous Lost Generation writers have noted McAlmon’s presence behind their works, only recently have scholars and readers had access to McAlmon’s own texts. Today, thanks to Edward N. S. Lorusso’s publication of three of McAlmon’s early works (*Miss Knight and Others, Village, and Post-Adolescence*) in 1992 and Sanford J. Smoller’s discovery and publication of his lost novel *The Nightinghoul of Paris* in 2007, we are now presented with enough material to retrieve McAlmon from the lost and found of the Lost Generation. The rediscovery of McAlmon’s work shines a new light on the familiar narratives and mythologies of the expatriate movement in Paris. McAlmon’s centrality as a figure within the community gave him an intimate knowledge of the eccentricities and insecurities that circulated behind the iconic visages of the most lionized and beloved artists of the era. McAlmon’s stories, along with his memoir *Being Geniuses Together* (1938) provide an honest, if not sometimes caustic perspective on Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, Ford Maddox Ford, Djuna Barnes, and many other writers from the cafes of Montparnasse.

More than just a historical archive of information on expatriate Paris, McAlmon’s work deserves attention for his own distinctly modernist voice and, in particular, his early depictions of queer sexuality and gender identity. In this chapter, I position the life and works of Robert McAlmon as a key toward writing the history of gay identity and culture back into the history of the Lost Generation’s expatriation in France. First, in the beginning section, I consider McAlmon’s account of his expatriation as a counter-narrative to the dominant discourse of
expatriation in the more popular narratives of the Lost Generation. Authors like Malcolm Cowley and Harold Stearns wrote dramatically of “exile” and “deracination” and presented the project of expatriation as a dramatic step taken by artists and writers who could no longer bear the stagnation of American culture and needed to reinvent it from abroad. McAlmon resisted this romanticized vision of the artist in exile, argued against the assumed superiority of French and European culture, and instead emphasized that his expatriation in Paris endured due to the increased privacy and freedom to live as he chose. Coming from a bisexual who never declared his own sexuality in his writing, the premium placed on privacy and the freedom of lifestyle gives a microcosm of the larger history of queer Americans looking to Europe to freely pursue sexual desire among other personal liberties. McAlmon only provides a glimpse of this in his own life, but his writings detail the wide variety of queers who came to France and Europe and their personal motivations. McAlmon’s stories take the one-dimensional pansies from the periphery of Hemingway and Fitzgerald’s expatriate narratives and place them in the center of the narrative, endowing them with a voice, complex psyche, and a background that illuminates gay subcultures in a way almost unheard of in the 20s. While Malcolm Cowley and Ezra Pound played with the idea of exile as a romantic notion, McAlmon’s work describes a culture of queers facing a real form of exile and deracination from America as their pursuit of queer sexuality and gender non-conformity placed them at odds with the morality and the law back in America.

In the second part of this chapter, I take account of this deracinated queer cast of characters in McAlmon’s collection of short stories *Distinguished Air: Grim Fairy Tales*. Written in France about a period spent in 1922 in Berlin’s gay underground, each short story depicts a specific type of queer habitué: Miss Knight, an American fairy and drag performer,
Foster, an older, dandy artist based on Marsden Hartley, and Steve Rath, a lesbian described as “a man who is a woman,” based on Thelma Wood, Djuna Barnes’ lover. In these stories, McAlmon presents the gritty and often unfortunate reality of the gay subculture—a space with traffic in drugs, prostitution, and police harassment. McAlmon’s stories and his own biographical account of life in Berlin provide a rare insight into the material reality of queer existence in the 20s, specifically dwelling on how the economic depression of a war-ravaged continent allowed for a flourishing underground economy in which queers were catered to because of the spending power of the American dollar. Yet, as I argue, McAlmon’s stories do not seek to stigmatize the queer, but instead look toward queer sexuality as an inspiration for re-evaluating American culture. In the character of Miss Knight, McAlmon portrays a midwestern fairy who, despite her banishment, retains a unique sense of identification with her home, transporting her “common as dirt” persona and her nostalgia for Americana to Berlin. For McAlmon, Miss Knight is not an aberration of American culture, but an extreme example of its tradition of individualism that has taken the liberties granted on paper literally and must explore the frontier of other nations in order to find a space in which to thrive. Additionally, McAlmon’s stories provide a window into the psyche of the queer as a persecuted minority as all three characters discuss police raids in America and compare them to the relatively lax enforcement in Europe. Through Miss Knight, McAlmon shows how thoroughly ingrained the sense of surveillance and oppression has become in America and how life in expatriate Europe provided a different sense of the relationship between sexuality and the law.

The third part of this chapter examines a lost “fairy tale” I found in the Yale Beinecke archives from the original manuscript of Distinguished Air that for unknown reasons, was never published. “Hangovers of the Gay 90s”, which takes place in McAlmon’s expatriate setting in
France, depicts two American artists (Tom and Grant) who escaped unhappy, frustrated lives in America and their friend, Tut, an elderly dandy homosexual whose tastes and mannerisms are a holdover from his coming of age in the “gay nineties”. In this text, McAlmon continues his consideration of how economic class and material conditions inform queer expressions of desire by contrasting the aristocratic persona of the privileged Tut with that of the fairy. By opposing the depiction of Tut as holdover dandy (which Foster somewhat embodies as well) to Miss Knight as this new breed of fairy, I argue that McAlmon’s manuscript provided an unprecedented account in American fiction of the evolution of gay identity over the turn of the century. Tut and Miss Knight exemplify the transition from the dominant image of the homosexual as the Oscar Wilde-type aristocratic dandy with a taste for ostentatious luxury and “the love that dare not speak its name” to the fairy, a product of the burgeoning urban gay culture that allowed working class men to form a community and a lifestyle around same-sex desire.

Additionally, I contend that McAlmon’s story is also radical for its time in its depiction of two heterosexual men who view homosexuality not as a threat or with disgust, but instead consider how it could provide a preferable romantic lifestyle, if only they desired males. Tom is a divorced misogynist who chose to come to France to pursue art because of his lack of libidinal satisfaction in the US. Thus, he aligns with the classic expatriate vision of artistic freedom in France, but through this character, McAlmon takes the liberation narrative one step further and considers the depths to which a man could liberate desire. While Tom ultimately recognizes he admires male beauty in his art but does not desire men as objects, McAlmon’s story is a rare exploration of the idea that heterosexuals could look to gay sexuality for artistic inspiration and as a vision of how to re-imagine their own lifestyles.
In my final section on the newly rediscovered book *The Nightinghoul of Paris*, I consider what I refer to as Robert McAlmon’s queer paternalism, as he depicts his alter ego Kit’s guidance of two young, ambiguously gay expatriate writers (Sudge and Ross patterned after Canadian writers John Glassco and Graeme Taylor) through the American colony in Montparnasse. A thinly veiled fictionalization of his life toward what he considered the end golden age of the expatriate movement, McAlmon presents the community after it had already achieved popularity and fame and was beginning to see a new generation converge upon it. I argue that in McAlmon’s portrayal of two young writers trying to establish themselves and deal with murkyly defined feelings for another, McAlmon illustrates the inherently queer environment of Montparnasse as a space of arrested development. In this space where the heteronormative imperatives of productivity, marriage, and reproduction are not the norm or the expectation, a different kind of personal development can be achieved. For these young men, this space provided not just a culture in which their queer feelings could eventually find language to explain them, but it also taught them how to create a life around creative pursuits and personal pleasures outside of the patriarchal structure that their fathers attempt to coerce them into.

**Rooting McAlmon Among “The Deracinated Ones”**

At a young age, Robert McAlmon inherited the nomadic spirit that would compel him to move to Paris among his many migrations throughout his life. Born the youngest of ten children on March 9th, 1896 in Clifton, Kansas, McAlmon was the son of a Presbyterian minister who uprooted the family many times during his childhood and moved to several different small towns in the Midwest (Knoll 5). Despite the challenge of never being permanently situated in a community as child, McAlmon always held onto his midwestern identity, and as a writer
returned to it several times in his work. In his novel *Village* (1924), McAlmon insinuates an adolescent attraction to a young Gene Vidal in Madison, South Dakota, who would later grow up to father famous gay author, Gore Vidal (xi). The Midwest as a space of queer nostalgia and melancholy also appears in McAlmon’s short story “Miss Knight” (which will be discussed later) about a crass drag performer in Berlin who maintains a resolutely unsophisticated midwestern persona despite having been cast away from his home due to rampant homophobia. The fact that McAlmon wrote these odes to the Midwest across the Atlantic in Paris places him among other expatriates such as Glenway Wescott with *The Grandmothers* (1927) and Gertrude Stein with *The Making of Americans* (1925) whose alienation from America served to deepen their interest and sharpen their insight into American culture and politics. Although he never returned to the Midwest, McAlmon retained it as part of his identity and defended it against what he felt were unfair caricatures, specifically those of Sinclair Lewis in *Babbit* (1922) and *Mainstreet* (1920), who he accused of giving to “the fake-superior pseudo-intellectual, and to the Europeans, a picture of America which they like to believe in order to feel their superiority” (33).

Like the majority of the Lost Generation, Robert McAlmon’s young adult years were profoundly shaped by the shift in social attitudes and values during World War One. While the previous generation of Americans clung to their post-industrialization capitalism, McAlmon’s generation sought to criticize and interrogate an American culture that placed unquestioned value in the burgeoning middle-class values and did little to attend to class, race, and gender disparities in the pre-welfare state era. As mentioned in the previous chapter, McAlmon’s generation was particularly influenced by Harold Stearns’ 1921 book *America and the Young Intellectual* in which he argues that American culture is particularly antagonistic toward the social criticisms of the emerging generation of artists and intellectuals because “moral idealism is precisely what the
institutional life of America today does not want” (21).  

Stearns’ early theorization of the interwar generation’s politics provided the basis for fellow expatriate writer Malcolm Cowley’s chronicle of life among the expatriates in *Exile’s Return* (1934), which has become arguably the most influential critical investigation of the ideological component of the Lost Generation’s expatriation. Cowley’s book breaks down the expatriate movement into a standardized narrative of alienation, expatriation, and return that has come to inform many readings of the Lost Generation’s work. Yet, in spite of these master narratives that many of his compatriots clung to, McAlmon solidly maintained that his motivations, both personal and ideological, for moving to Paris were unique from the romantic vision of “exile”. Thus, in mapping McAlmon’s biography against Cowley’s dominant narrative, we find McAlmon as willing to rebel against the values of his fellow “deracinated ones” as he was against the American status quo.

Using the royal “we” to describe his experience despite not always specifying which artists from the generation are huddled under its umbrella, Cowley begins the narrative of expatriation with a social awakening in the universities:

> In college, the process of deracination went on remorselessly. We were not being prepared for citizenship in a town, a state, or a nation; we were not being trained for an industry or a profession essential to the common life; instead we were being exhorted to enter the international republic of learning whose traditions are those of Athens, Florence, Paris, Berlin, and Oxford. (28)  

Furthermore, Stearns writes: “For moral idealism, if it means anything, means fearlessness before the facts and willingness to face them, intellectual integrity, emotional honesty, the attempt to win a moral order out of the jungle of experience without bias, without any axe to grind, without native prejudice. This kind of moral idealism the younger generation has in large measure and it is just the kind of moral idealism which the younger generation finds nowhere existent in America today.” (21)
While Cowley’s narrative of expatriation presupposes college as the origin of the Lost Generation’s politics of social critique, McAlmon found his university experience to be provincial and stifling. After spending a few post-high school years bumming around South Dakota and doing manual labor, McAlmon entered the University of Minnesota in 1916 where his brother had been a football star, but found little stimulation or motivation as a student, and eventually transferred to USC when the family moved to Los Angeles after his father’s death (Smoller 17). At USC, which was, at the time still a small, religious institution, McAlmon’s intellectual curiosities and literary aspirations were met with conservative hostility. Unlike Cowley, McAlmon’s interest in modern literature and thought came in spite of the university atmosphere, not because of it.

As a second formative stage in expatriate ideology, Cowley factors the emergence of World War One and the young students’ desires to take up the cause of fighting for the romantic fervor of liberty and patriotism even before America had entered the war. In his biography on McAlmon, Sanford J. Smoller writes of McAlmon’s lack of interest in the romance of war:

Unlike Hemingway, Dos Passos, Cummings, and Cowley, who were to rendezvous with him in Montparnasse, McAlmon felt no immediate impulse to see ‘History’s Greatest War’ or even to do his bit for suffering humanity. America joined the allies on 6 April 1917, but McAlmon did not enlist until March 1918. Ironically, McAlmon, like F. Scott Fitzgerald, joined the service because he wanted to go to Europe, but he never left the states, except perhaps for off-duty excursions to Tijuana (19).

While McAlmon shared the desire to wander abroad to Europe, he maintained no high-minded ideals about how his participation emerged from political convictions as Cowley would maintain or Hemingway would document in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). In addition, missing duty on the
front spared McAlmon from directly confronting the brutality of the war that was irrefutably integral to the Lost Generation’s critique of western culture and modernity.

Once the American idealists returned to their native soil, Cowley’s narrative houses them in the bohemian comforts of Greenwich Village where they enjoyed close proximity to the hub of American publishers and liberal politics. Here, McAlmon’s narrative converges with Cowley’s. He too migrated to Greenwich Village after his own release from the army where he was integrated into the literary world with the friendship of William Carlos Williams and Marsden Hartley. As McAlmon sought to establish himself among the young modernists, according to Cowley, a growing sense of dissatisfaction with American civilization was kindled among his peers. Interpreting Harold Stearns’ argument about America’s anti-intellectualism as meaning that there was no place for them in America, the soon-to-be expatriates embraced “the idea of salvation by exile.” As Cowley sums it up, their mantra was “They do things better in Europe; let’s go there” (74).

While McAlmon shared many of the Lost Generation’s criticisms of American culture, he maintained a steadfastly unromantic vision of expatriation and an unwillingness to uncritically valorize Europe. Responding to the question “Why do you prefer to live outside America?” posed by Eugene Jolas to several expatriates in a 1928 article in *Transition* on writers abroad, McAlmon responded:

We deracinated ones, if we are deracinated, may not all have come to Europe impelled by some motive of the heart and mind. I came, intending to return, or to travel much. I felt in America that Europe was finished, decayed, war- and time-worn out. There it seemed that in Europe the sense of futility would be too enveloping, However there is the rot of ripe fruit, and there is the blight and decay of green fruit (Knoll 12).
McAlmon’s response tempers the expatriate insistence that “they do things better there”. As Smoller puts it, McAlmon, “at least had no desire to become ‘spiritualized in Europe’s crumbling temples’” (50). Despite his lack of mystified reverence for old Europe, McAlmon far outlasted Cowley, Stearns, and other theorists of deracination in Paris. Disappointed with the war-ravaged continent and the inability of many to maintain a steady living, Cowley and his exiles’ return to America came as they accepted publishing jobs and integration into a mainstream that they had previously detested. Further explaining his motivation for staying in Paris in Jolas’ survey, McAlmon responded, “I prefer Europe, if you mean France, to America because there is less interference with private life here. There is interference, but to a foreigner, there is fanciful freedom and grace of life not obtainable elsewhere” (Knoll 12). McAlmon’s preference for France had nothing to do with any fetishized taste for French or European culture, but it was instead based on the liberties he could enjoy thanks to France’s relaxed morals and more socially progressive government. As a bisexual man, McAlmon benefited from France’s lack of a sodomy law and relaxed obscenity laws that allowed him to publish queer-themed texts like *Distinguished Air*, Djuna Barnes’ *Ladies Almanack* and Ken Sato’s *Quaint Tales of the Samurai* without censorship.

In one of his many unpublished novels, *School for Unrest*, McAlmon fictionalizes his own story of adolescence and life as a young man moving across America before deciding to move to Paris. During an exchange with the gay Italian poet Emmanuel Carnevali with whom he lived in Chicago briefly in 1919, McAlmon (fictionalized as “Grant”) explains that his disaffection for American culture leaves him feeling as if he is already living abroad, “I’m deracinated now if to be American one must feel of a kind with most people about. Just because people stay where they are born does not mean that they don’t rot inside themselves or that they
have roots, or feel the impetus of this grand young country” (223). Grant’s debate with Mario Ludovici (Carnevali) inverts the expected loyalties of a debate on American culture with the expatriate Italian defending America, “You don’t know your own land’s greatness. This in the new civilization” (223). Carnevali matured as a young poet in Venice and was influenced by a futurist movement that romanticized the mechanized age of modernism with a fascination over automobiles, trains, and other technological advances (http://jacketmagazine.com/35/davies-carnevali.shtml). For a young Italian expatriate in Chicago, an industrialized metropole, America’s rapid technological innovation implied the possibilities of a cultural revolution. But for the young Grant, American culture had hit a moment of cultural stagnation characterized by the materialism of an expanding middle class that threatened to leave him insipid and complacent if he settled into their domesticity: “And I’ve grown up in the midst of it, a part of it, and want to explore. Travel won’t make anyone less racial. We have a right to reject and select as individuals, and to get about as our pioneering ancestors did. It’s the demands individuals make on life that give them roots, rather than it is race” (223). Through Grant, McAlmon channels the rationale for expatriation that he would repeat several times in his personal writings and in fiction. Expatriation should not be a disavowal or condemnation of America, but instead an exploration that advances the individualist American tradition of expanding frontiers, pioneering ideas, and importing influences from abroad.

Shortly after his visit to Chicago in the novel, Grant moves to New York where he immediately ingratiates himself into the bohemian culture of artists and writers in Greenwich Village. Yet, among these purported luminaries entrusted with the modernization of American arts, Grant finds himself frustrated with the pretentiousness and social pettiness of those around him. At a party, Grant declares, “I think I’ll take a boat to France and see what being in a country
where I don’t speak the language is like” (239). This statement piques the response of Mrs. Harper, an archetypical New Woman of the twenties who would take Grant to the clubs of Harlem and become his first mentor of liberated (hetero)sexuality:

> The poor French. Poor France.’, Grant heard muttered beside him. He turned to look at a dark, good enough looking woman beside him...Only that I grew up in France, and know that they are provincial. And I love them for that. They love food, and homes and families, but except for rare exceptions, they know and care nothing about the outside world. I’m weary of hearing Americans talk of what France is that the French never dreamed of (239).

Between Grant and Mrs. Harper, McAlmon composes his two dominant attitudes about expatriation: a feeling of optimism about vague ideas of personal development and a rebuke toward those who falsely romanticize France as culturally elite and cosmopolitan and, therefore, love only the France they invented. Despite Mrs. Harper’s warnings against expatriation Grant continually envisions the nation as an escape from the unbearable cast of characters with which he associates. McAlmon places his hesitancy to unqualifiedly valorize French culture in Mrs. Harper’s voice while he counterbalances this pessimism with Grant’s idealist vision of a life outside of elitism and pretension in America.

> Although Grant is characterized as ostensibly heterosexual, McAlmon nonetheless factors a hint of sexual dissidence into his desire to sail to France. While putting together a guest list for a party, Grant explodes into rage at the suggestion of inviting a snobbish Jewish friend named Allenson:

> Is that the guy who wanted to psychoanalyze me one night? He asked me to walk when I was drunk to see how my knees wobbled...To hell with him. He needn’t interpret me. Of
all the sexual and human variations about, that rat-toothed specimen is the prize winner. Does he think passing strangers want to confide their loves to him because he thinks he can psycholog?...I can’t go for the reeking inferior, soggy, mystical, unwashed, humanitarian, spiritually and financially persecuted, impudence of that bird. If he weren’t so blastedly heavy in his desire to interpret a sorrowing universe, his messy looks would put me off. Ask me to walk for him when I’m drunk! I’m no walking laboratory for his half-baked attempts to be Freud. Hell that’s why I want to try Europe. Maybe people there can be themselves and let other people be themselves (264).

In the original manuscript, McAlmon originally typed “Jew”, crossed it out, and wrote “guy” in pen instead. In a later quote, he refers to Allenson as a “yid”, which depending on its usage can be an anti-Semitic slur. It is possible that McAlmon originally wanted to stress a racial component to the elitism of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis has often been stereotyped as a Jewish invention and McAlmon’s likening of Allenson to a rat would be in line with the anti-Semitic renderings of Jews in the popular media of the time. In the same breath that he uses to rail against the essentialist constructions of human psychology produced by psychoanalysis, he also essentializes and degrades those who would practice it.

McAlmon maintained a disdain for pop-culture appropriations of psychoanalysis and the clinical position of power that his peers attempted to appropriate by diagnosing compulsions and complexes. He parodies the growing American fascination with psychoanalysis in his 1922 short story “The Psychoanalyzed Girl” in which he presents a woman so preoccupied by inquiry into her own psyche that she is isolated from any real world, external experiences. Beyond the undue elitism and faux-intellectualism that pop-psychoanalysis granted its devotees, McAlmon also seems to be perturbed by its interest in homosexuality as the root of so many of its diagnoses of
complexes and neuroses. For a writer that was at peace with his own bisexuality, yet unable to declare it personally in his writing despite having no compunctions about describing the homosexuality of his peers, psychoanalysis threatened to take away the power to maintain and defend his identity on his own terms. Still harping on his hatred of Allenson a few pages later, Grant declares to Mrs. Harper, “Rude? Do you think I was unconscious? He’s just another yid around telling people how they are repressed. What damned good was it confusing Harrison Lloyd with the idea that he might have homo impulses. Psychoanalyst! Allenson’s futile to himself and wants to make other people so to themselves. Maybe you’re in the same class” (264). In his next breath, Grant announces that he will leave for France in a few days with the presumption that he would be ridding himself of company that delighted in prodding his psyche and sexuality. While McAlmon’s thoughts on psychoanalysis when practiced by an expert remain unknown, he saw its popular appropriation as another mechanism of power through which society attempted to make homosexuality visible, explainable, and subject to its interests. McAlmon implies that pop-psychoanalysis does not merely identify homosexuality empirically, but that it coerces the subject into believing that they are homosexual and then they, in turn, become subjects defined by and dependent on its method and practitioner. Through Grant, he voices the hope that France’s reputation for permissiveness will allow a space for “people there to be themselves and let other people be themselves” without submitting their sexuality to scrutiny or censure.

Artistic and sexual opportunities certainly constituted McAlmon’s main drive toward expatriation, yet equally compelling was a decidedly less romantic and principled factor. McAlmon’s ability to stay in Paris well after many of the other luminaries of the Lost Generation had left was due to perhaps the least ennobling of all human motivations: economics.
McAlmon’s opportunity to go abroad came in 1921 with his sudden and capricious marriage to the lesbian writer Bryher, who was the long-term companion of the famed American imagist poet, H.D. McAlmon’s marriage to Bryher was a matter of gossip and controversy among the members of their artistic milieu—a battle still waged among scholars of the expatriate era. While many assumed McAlmon married Bryher as an opportunist interested in her wealth (going so far as to nickname him “McAlimony” after their divorce), there is considerable evidence in his correspondences that he was unaware she was Annie Winifred Ellerman, daughter of shipping magnate John Ellerman, the richest man in Great Britain (Smoller 38). Regardless of whether either McAlmon or Bryher had real interest in one another or they simply desired to manipulate the marriage for material gain, both benefited financially and artistically from the arrangement. Being married allowed Bryher greater freedom from her family’s control and to travel as she wished (usually with H.D.) while the marriage afforded McAlmon the chance to go abroad to England and to eventually settle into Paris with an allowance that permitted him to concentrate on his writing and start his publishing company.

By contrasting McAlmon’s path toward expatriation with Malcolm Cowley’s dominant narrative, what we uncover is a base anti-normative queerness that guided McAlmon’s presence in Paris. McAlmon’s exploitation of the heterosexual contract of marriage and the privileges attached to it granted him and his lesbian wife the liberty of economic inheritance that came presupposed under the system of patriarchy and legitimized their queer lifestyles. McAlmon and Bryher had sporadic contact over the course of their marriage and spent most of their time on their individual artistic pursuits and chasing their own objects of desire, paying little attention to any of the vows they may have taken or bending to any of the cliché imperatives of domesticity like settling down, reproducing, working a steady job to ensure their welfare and contributing
productive labor to the economy. As his peers such as Cowley left Paris for some or all of the aforementioned comforts of a more traditional American lifestyle, McAlmon remained in the Montparnasse colony filled with drink, dancing, sex, and indolence that catered to all immediate desires without an imperative toward the hallowed responsibility of heterosexuality.

A Trip from Gay Paris to Queer Berlin.

In 1926, Robert McAlmon wrote and published through his own press *Distinguished Air: Grim Fairy Tales*, a collection of short stories chronicling a winter he spent in Berlin in 1922, communing with the underground queer scene. For the cast of queer itinerants that accompanied him from Paris, including Djuna Barnes, Thelma Wood, Marsden Hartley, and Berenice Abbott among others, Berlin offered the chance to participate in the birth of a modern queer community thriving beneath the rubble and ruins of post-war Germany. The chaos of a nation struggling to rebuild and reinvent itself provided the distraction necessary to the mainstream public for a vibrant queer community to stake out its own space and create what Michael Warner would deem a queer “counterpublic” in the urban jungle of Berlin.¹³ In his memoir *Being Geniuses Together*, McAlmon paints Berlin as a mess of contradictions:

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¹³ In *Publics and Counterpublics*, Warner writes: “Counterpublics are, by definition, formed by their conflict with the norms and contexts of their cultural environment, and this context of domination inevitably entails distortion. Mass publics and counterpublics, in other words, are both damaged forms of publicness, just as gender and sexuality are, in this culture, damaged forms of privacy.” (63) The catastrophe of World War One, which left the mass public of Germany in ruins allowed for the rise of a queer counterpublic. The mass culture of Germany never allowed the queer community rise to full recognition or enfranchisement into the “legitimate” sectors of the public, but with the economic ruin of the formal economy and the boom of the black market, which thrived in the same networks as the queer sexual economy (prostitution, gay night clubs etc) the queer counterpublic achieved a level of power and influence uncommon to the era.
No one knew from one day to the next what the dollar would bring in marks, but everybody knew that, whatever happened, the dollar bought in Berlin as much as ten or twenty dollars would buy elsewhere. It made for wildness. In spite of the poverty-stricken situation of the people there were several smart cabarets and one futuristic dance place for tea dancing as well as for night encounters. Otherwise there were joints and dives of every order, and there was no telling whom one might encounter...even hardened Berlin night-lifers could not tell with certainty how the tone or quality of any night club might change from week to week (95-96).

McAlmon connects the wild fluxes in the German economy and society to the creation of a queer counterpublic within the Berlin nightlife of clubs and cabarets. The queer itinerant finds refuge in spaces where the very basis of society itself is unstable or in flux because addressing economic and political chaos takes precedent over policing morality. These spaces are not permanent neighborhoods that breed community and belonging, but are instead marked by their transitory nature.

In the heyday of Germany’s Weimar Republic, Berlin achieved a space in the cosmopolitan imaginary as a place of sexual utopia. In this point in history, German culture was deeply divided in matters of sexual liberty. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Germany was the birthplace of the word “homosexual” in the 1870s, and the works of Ulrichs, Kraft-Ebbing, and Hirschfeld among other sex researchers and activists who pioneered medical and social studies of homosexuality and argued for tolerance. Yet, German politics also created Europe’s most notorious anti-sodomy law, Paragraph 175, ratified in 1871. Adolf Brand published the first homosexual-themed magazine in history, *Der Eigene* in 1896, and Hirschfeld’s *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft* galvanized the first modern homosexual rights movement in the west, but
simultaneously, a conservative backlash was brewing that would eventually explode with the ascendancy of the Nazi party.\footnote{This was most dramatically demonstrated when in May of 1933, the Nazis raided Hirschfeld’s institute and destroyed upwards of 20,000 books as part of their purge of homophile organizations and gay clubs in Germany} In view of this complicated history of queer culture in the Weimar Republic, David James Prickett argues that “the German male homosexual, already marginalized by § 175, was qualified not only by his innate biological orientation, but also by those urban spaces that he visited” (134). Prickett asserts that the logic of urban space largely determined the social reality of a queer in Germany:

In the Weimar Republic, these spaces became increasingly visible due to their ambiguous position on the margin of legality. I maintain that the bourgeois fear of and fascination with these spaces that were evident in contemporary legal, clerical, and literary narratives not only further marginalized the male homosexual, but also intensified the mainstream notion that the male homosexual was a criminal. Further, although male homosexuality and homosexual identity would continue to be defined according to legal and medical discourse, I argue that both were also quantified and qualified by topography (135).

While these queer urban spaces in Berlin afforded a place of communal homosexual experience and a modicum of acceptance, their isolation from the mainstream signified a sense of secrecy to the general public, which associated it with discourses of criminality and the illicit in terms of sex and drugs. Secrecy in sexual matters always teeters between fascination and disgust in the public’s imagination, and thus the attraction to this mythology of a sexually liberal Berlin underground invited the curiosities of the expatriates and queer itinerants from abroad.
McAlmon and his compatriots were well aware of the research in sexology and the burgeoning gay rights advocacy and the effects it had on creating a distinctly German brand of queer sexuality and culture. McAlmon writes in his memoirs:

Hirschfeld was conducting his psychoanalytic school and a number of souls unsure of their sexes or of their inhibitions competed with each other in looking or acting freakishly, several Germans declared themselves authentic hermaphrodites, and one elderly variant loved to arrive at the smart cabarets each time a different type of woman; elegant or as a washwoman, or a street vendor, or as a modest mother of a family. He was very comical and his presence always made for hilarity, as did the presence of a chorus boy from New York. The chorus boy was on in years, but he fancied himself Bert Savoy and was ribaldry outright and extremely weird (96).

Although McAlmon is consistently sympathetic in his narratives about the inverts he meets, he nonetheless seems to mock or at least envision the extremes to which Hirschfeld’s model of a third sex individual can take. With the chorus boy, (perhaps an inspiration for the character of Miss Knight) McAlmon shows how far the American queer was willing to travel to live in a space where his queerness was defended by a sympathetic political and scientific discourse and placed in a social space where it could flourish. Hirschfeld’s institute and political advocacy gave the homosexual his first air of legitimacy as a subject; he was not just a psychological type, but also a social and political identity. Sexology was no longer exclusively a taxonomy of perversion and pathology now that it had a social justice-minded advocate who united research into sex with the goal of achieving social equality.

15 Bert Savoy (1888-1923) was the most famous female impersonator in America at the time. His brand of female impersonation was known for queer double entendres and he was one of the first to hint at the homosexual identity of the man hidden in the female garments.
Beyond the attraction of the cabarets and Hirschfeld’s institute, Berlin also enticed queer itinerants because its dire financial straits after World War One drastically inflated the purchasing power of the American dollar. In a recent account of Berlin’s political past and future for the Hoover institute, Victor Matus states “Americans with every fetish could come to Berlin and satisfy their urges on the cheap. Police estimated that prostitutes in the 1920s numbered over 25,000 — many were preteen girls and high school boys. There were approximately 10,000 pimps. This was Babylon on the Spree” (Matus 2001). Because gay communities have historically been forced underground due to persecution, they could often be found occupying the same spaces as other illicit trades of varying ethical levels. The inexpensiveness of the Berlin gay nightlife democratized gay culture for those of humble, lower class backgrounds and allowed queer Americans who traveled there to experience luxuries that were price prohibitive in their native land. But, being a Queen for the Day came at the expense of sharing space with drug dealing, prostitution, and a general exploitation of the poor willing to bend their moral standards for cash.

Although the looser moral regulation that came from economic necessity gave queer culture a space to thrive, the fact that more serious vices like drugs and prostitution circulated in these same spaces proved to be too much for McAlmon to take:

The innumerable beggars, paralytics, shell-shocked soldiers, and starving people of a good family became at last too violent a depressant. At nights along the Unter den Linden it was never possible to know whether it was a woman or a man in woman’s clothes who accosted one. That didn’t matter, but it was sad to know that innumerable young and normal Germans were doing anything, from dope selling to every form of prostitution, to have money for themselves and their families, their widowed mothers and
younger brothers and sisters (98).

Despite our tendency to mythologize Weimar-era Berlin with images of the cabarets and innovation in modern art painting a cosmopolitan environment, for McAlmon, the libidinal freedom that the emerging queer counterpublic offered was not worth being complicit in the more pernicious forms of vice and exploitation that it was spreading. This is of course not to say that queer culture inherently creates vice, but that because mainstream society persecuted non-normative sexuality, queers became experts at forging underground societies and networks that prostitution and drug trades also relied upon and often converged with. Given McAlmon’s depressive personal vision of the city, it is no surprise that as we meet the three queers of *Distinguished Air*, his tone is not one of celebration or romanticization for the cultural climate around him, but a rather sober calculation of the vibrant, decadent queer underground juxtaposed by the reality of material conditions in post-war Berlin.

**The American Dandy in Berlin and the Queer Logic of Non-Production**

McAlmon makes specific reference to the community’s ambivalence toward the dire economic conditions of Berlin through a discussion with Foster Graham, an American expatriate based on the poet and painter Marsden Hartley:

O yes, Foster. Tiresome boy. I’m so glad it is you I ran into. When you first spoke I was afraid it might be some of the awful rats who have come to Berlin because of the low exchange. Just too tiresome most of them are. I just feel as if I would have to give up seeing people altogether. And with this afterwar atmosphere, and poverty amongst the few really likeable Germans one knows. It’s all too tragic, I suppose, but I can’t feel any further about that sort of thing. People will starve to death; people will die;
or kill themselves, or drink themselves to death (26).

McAlmon’s depiction of Berlin recognizes that the post-war destitution and suffering of the German people were in part preconditions for a queer subculture to flourish and attract visitors. The tattered state of post-war Berlin not only allowed for economic enfranchisement for queer individuals, but it also came with odd juxtaposition of Americans enjoying luxuries while circumscribed by poverty. In his page and a half reflection on his time spent in Berlin from Being Geniuses Together, McAlmon describes Hartley as “beamingly merry these days, because for the first time in years, on account of the exchange, he could live as he liked to live” (96). McAlmon depicts the dandy foppishness that Foster was allowed to adopt in Berlin as a mode of identity that intertwines signifiers of queer sexuality with those of luxury and economic privilege. As Foster Graham in the story, McAlmon quotes Hartley describing his flamboyant dress and look, declaring “I had them pluck my eyebrows too...I wouldn’t look like this in Paris, but it goes down alright in here” (24). Plucked eyebrows were one of many ways in which effeminate homosexual men signified their inversion on their bodies for select others to pick up on. This is a testament to the liberal attitude of Berlin—that he could get away with a signifier of his inversion without fear of marking himself for danger.

For Foster/Marsden, sexual enfranchisement is predicated upon economic clout, and unlike in America and Paris where his resources could not afford tolerance, Berlin offered a sexual economy in which he was relatively affluent. Knowing that “it was only that [they] were both Americans in a foreign city that made [them] speak”, Foster goes on the defensive, accusing, “I suppose I am getting too much for any of you purposeful beings. Tut, tut, how will I stand your New England disapproval? We are so moral” (24). In response, the narrator states, “That was too much for me. After all of the yowl and yammer through America, amongst the
groping intelligentsia, about the prudishness of Puritans, my Western soul rebelled. I could not be deemed New England” (24). Foster identifies a possible disapproval of his queer indulgence in luxury and indolence with his and the narrator’s point of origin in America and the puritan ideal of constant productivity. Interestingly enough, the narrator (who we presume to be McAlmon) resents an identification with Puritanism and New England possibly because McAlmon himself grew up in the Midwest while Hartley actually was born and raised in Maine. Thus, the narrator not only disapproves of being labeled puritan, but also being the receptacle into which Foster attempts to shed his specifically regional American identity. The fact that this Puritanism is not a conceptual function of “being American”, but is specifically rooted in the geography of a particular region of the country suggests in Foster’s mind a fixity that binds morality and identity to the soil from which the individual sprung.

McAlmon connects this desire to escape the Puritanism rooted to the space of New England with a desire to evade the cultural imperative of production. Further into his conversation with the narrator, Foster states, “I know I’m a bore. But I can’t go back to America, and I knew five years back I couldn’t paint. What in Hell? This is Berlin...” (25). In Being Geniuses Together, we see that this statement reflected Hartley’s true reality:

Because of this [exchange rate] Marsden could this night cease to think about the beefsteak realities of existence, and he certainly did luxuriate in orchidean emotions for a time. Not once, but daily, several times, Marsden renounced art and the serious, boring aspects of life. He was weary of reality and intended enjoying the divine trivialities. He likes young people and there were a quantity of them about, and particularly young German boys and girls were glad to sit with him, telling of their troubles. Marsden was benign and sometimes munificent. He could give away marks,
which meaning but a few pennies to him, meant a day or more of living for the Germans.

It couldn’t last, however. Marsden eventually had to return to Paris and to America. He was still giving up art and denouncing grim reality last time I saw him, but he was still painting (97).

As much as Berlin meant dressing as he desired, easy access to sex and drugs, and somewhat of an enfranchisement into a gay community, Berlin chiefly functions as a utopic space outside of the American work ethic and the imperative of production. As an artist trying to make a living, Marsden/Foster must unite the seemingly disparate forces of artistic inspiration and emotion with the calculated, impersonal world of exchanging goods for profit in the art market. Regardless of the actual content of his output, artistic production and capitalist production become united in an all-consuming social commandment to produce something of value into the market place.

Marsden/Foster’s resistance to production manifests the ultimate deviance from society that the queer individual can present: a logic of non-production. Modern queer theorists such as Lee Edelman have identified this drive as a resistance to the cultural construction of “reproductive futurity” in which the presumption of heterosexuality as the optimal state of life in western society privileges an orientation toward the future, cherishing the idea of deferred gratification, the hope of a better tomorrow, and the promise of the child. The homosexual is identified as the enemy of reproductive futurity. He refuses to reproduce himself into the future and instead narcissistically centers upon immediate gratification of desires and lives solely in the present. Foster’s rebellion against his own art aligns with such a refusal of reproductive futurity. Instead of producing art that would immortalize him into the future, he wishes to remain completely within the present, enjoying the transient pleasures of the flesh over self-preservation and legacy.
He further avoids this imperative of production by giving away his money. Instead of preserving or investing his capital, he gives it away to poor German children, thus creating a beneficent relationship with the future generation that is not predicated upon reproducing himself into the future, but purely based on the present desire of company and the poor children’s immediate need of subsistence. His queer frivolity and defiance of reproductive futurity actually provides for the children better than the normal sources of their parents and their nation given Berlin’s destitute post-war economy. Foster’s gaze is inward, fixed entirely on immediate care of the self over identification with his friends in the expatriate community or any desire to maintain a sustainable relationship with any of the men he picks up at the bar. Yet, by focusing in on the self, Foster does not evade the trace of his “home”. Instead, he reads it in the face of any entity which seeks to judge or regulate his pursuit of pleasure, even going so far as to read it in the narrator’s disapproval of his appearance and label him “New England”, the very regulatory space he has been escaping. Although he leaves the physical geography of New England and finds a queer space in Berlin where his non-production can thrive, his “home” is a specter that constantly inhabits him and informs his sense of self and the world around him. Ultimately, as his funds wear thin, he eventually must retreat into the logic of production, albeit still questioning the purpose of production as he produces.

No Love For Women Who Were Men

In another story from *Distinguished Air: Grim Fairy Tales*, “The Lodging House”, McAlmon’s narrative perspective shifts from the other two stories as he changes from the rarely individualized “I” to a third person perspective focalized on an American expatriate named Files. The central queer of the short story is an American lesbian named Steve Rath who he meets
when she is barred entrance to the building that Files lives in after drunkenly mistaking it for the
dwelling of another. As we know from Sanford J. Smoller’s preface to McAlmon’s recently
rediscovered novel The Nightinghouls of Paris, Steve Rath is the name he gives to lesbian artist
Thelma Wood, best known as Djuna Barnes’ lover and inspiration for the character Robin Vote
in Nightwood. In The Nightinghouls of Paris and his unpublished manuscript The Politics of
Existence, McAlmon casts Barnes as Chloe Andrews, and in both novels McAlmon casts himself
as Barnes’ confidant to whom she frets over her tempestuous relationship with the promiscuous
Thelma Wood. While both of those novels are fictionalizations of true events, “The Lodging
House” casts Wood and himself as inspirations for characters in a completely fictional situation
in which Files (McAlmon) meets Steve Rath (Wood) for the first time.

McAlmon introduces Steve Rath into the story when Files overhears her getting into a
scuffle with the doorman to his apartment:

Files watched for a moment, doubtfully, and somewhat resentful of the crabbed manner
of the Prussian concierge. He was bored with the surliness that a certain type of Prussian
possesses, and utilizes, particularly on auslanders, and on such foreigners perhaps as were
allowing themselves to be charged three times the amount the law permitted for rooms.
Simply because there has been a war was no cause for an ill-mannered ruffian such as
that man to display his vile disposition to American women (60).

The economic and political relationship between Germany and America becomes gendered in an
opposite power dynamic from the one posited in the previous story where Americans are
portrayed as taking advantage of German post-war poverty. The dominant conception of the
brutish and austere German is held-over from World War One despite the fact that it is not he,
but rather, these women who by virtue of their economic capital hold ultimate power.
The Prussian explained morosely that these two women, who were schlecht, had been ringing his doorbell for the last half hour, when he had already told him that this was not their address. He also declared that he had no love for women who were men. Files, upon looking closer at the two women recognized their type. Both of them had their hair cut like boys, and the larger of them was dressed like a man in every detail with the exception of a skirt. The other was not so exaggerated a specimen (61).

These “women who were men”, stands in for a lack of a term like “lesbian” which had still not seen widespread usage in the twenties. Instead of the identity of a separate entity that “lesbian” grants, “women who were men” speaks to feeling of the doubleness of their identity, they are women and men at the same time, as the term “bisexual” originally meant. When Files discovers they are “women who were men”, this revelation does not make them seem more distantly “other”, but instead McAlmon stresses their connection based on shared American identity just as we saw between Foster Graham and the narrator. When Files explains to the heavily intoxicated Steve Rath that she was indeed trying to enter the wrong building, she is pacified and states “Good, someone who speaks American. You tell [the doorman] he gives me an ache in my fanny” (61). The idea of speaking American implies that the key point of disagreement with the doorman has nothing to do with communication in English, but instead, a clash of American and German ideology staged boldly in a confrontation of gender dissidence.

As Steve invites Files to get a drink with her and her Russian companion, she introduces herself, “Steve Rath is my name. When I was in America, it was Stephanie, and I wasn’t wise, but that isn’t it. I’m no girl, but it took Berlin to teach me what the trouble with me was. I always knew something was wrong” (61). McAlmon intentionally leaves the details of Steve’s gender and sexual identity ambiguous along with what she had specifically learned in Germany that
changed her perspective on gender. Regardless of what she learned her “trouble” was, gender and sexuality are figured as fluid and contextual with Berlin as a uniquely coded space in which the environment has the power to reveal certain truths about one’s identity unrecognizable in other places. When Steve takes Files to a queer bar, Files notices “she was the belle of the place, and that all the other habitués desired her dance favors and attention...however, she was fed up with having these German bitches try to get off with her simply because she was a foreigner, and they thought she was wealthy” (62). Although Berlin is imagined as liberal space in which sexuality can be liberated, this atmosphere of liberation is not absent of the influence of the economic and political environment in which the queer spaces are situated in Germany. Steve’s migration away from her American place of origin was premised upon finding a space in which she could actualize her gender and sexual identity, yet she cannot divorce herself from her American identity because the assumption that Americans are rich is what gained her social capital in queer Berlin. Just as the average Berliner is scrambling to get by in the wake of World War One and their economic collapse, so too was Steve struggling to survive in America given her queer identity. However, the “American” becomes an insoluble marker of identity in a foreign context that signifies economic might and social privilege even among those who experienced none of that assumed social enfranchisement in their home nation. Steve Rath is in a rare position for a queer woman of suddenly gaining privilege and having to adjust her sense of self around it. Steve’s identity has been realigned and corrected to her liking in Berlin in a manner she could not achieve in America, yet she maintains a constant antagonism toward all Berliners both gay and straight because of the distance she perceives from being an American. The queer scene in Berlin does not undo other signifiers of identity as it does for gender and
sexuality, but instead the challenging of gender and sexuality causes national identity to become even more markedly inscribed on the expatriate body.

**Miss Knight: The Unheimlich of Americana**

With the titular character of the first short story “Miss Knight”, McAlmon introduces us to a crass, drag performer from the cabarets, who like McAlmon, also grew up in the American Midwest. Miss Knight is the true “fairy” of McAlmon’s grim fairy tales. While the term “fairy” today has only the residue of ridicule for homosexual effeminacy, in McAlmon’s era, the fairy was a staple of the American gay community whose intermediate sex defied the strict binaries of masculinity and femininity and exemplified Hirschfeld’s theorization of a “third sex” to which McAlmon previously alluded. In *Gay New York*, George Chauncey spells out the specific traits of the fairy:

The determinative criterion in the identification of men as fairies was not the extent of same sex desire or activity (their ‘sexuality’) but rather the gender persona and status they assumed. It was only the men who assumed the sexual and cultural roles ascribed to women who identified themselves—and were identified by others—as fairies. The fairies’ sexual desire for men was not regarded as the singular characteristic that distinguished them from other men, as is generally the case for gay men today. That desire was seen as simply one aspect of a much more comprehensive gender role inversion (or reversal) which they were also expected to manifest through the adoption of effeminate dress and mannerisms...(47-48).

While the fairies took the feminine role in a same-sex relationship and incorporated effeminate aesthetics on their bodies, they did not identify as women like a transgender person. Rather, the
fairy took advantage of the intermediary nature of their gender identity and became experts at
gender performance, able to morph back and forth from masculine to feminine genders as the
need suited them. Accordingly, Miss Knight (it was common for fairies to refer to themselves in
the feminine) is not a transvestite or transgender (although she does drag shows) but an
intermediate third sex that combines signifiers of both genders in a complicated semiotic display
on the body that has now been rendered extinct, or at least disparaged in contemporary society
by the conviction that one is either gay or straight, male or female in gay culture.

Miss Knight’s image may appropriate images of feminine opulence, but despite her world
travels and her cosmopolitan experiences, she remains committed to the core values of her
Midwest upbringing, even though those who have taught these values to her now reject her.
She retains a plain spoken air of humility, a nostalgia for American tradition, a longing for home,
and a desire to reconnect with her family despite the fact that they have shunned her. Her
attempts to reconnect with her family and rekindle a sense of “home” in her national and mid-
western origin have proved fruitless. In recounting one such attempt from memory, Miss Knight
states:

I hadn’t seen the old woman for five years, so I sez to myself I’d drop in on her some
afternoon, because I wuz playing that summer in a show in Chicago. I’d just had my
hair hennaed and it was shinin’ goldbrick. I wuz just sittin’ myself easy in the parlor
talkin’ to my mother and sister when in comes my brother. Him and me never did like
each other. He just took one look at me and walked out and a little later as I wuz going
out he stopped me in the hall and sez, ‘For Christ’s sake, yer a disgrace to the family’.
I’m tellin’ you, Mary, I didn’t stick around home much. My brother ain’t queer. He used
to follow me when I went out cruising down State Street, and one night he wuz watching
me from the other side and saw me pick up a soldier. That night I went to visit the old lady and just as I came into the house-- bang!—he socked me just once on the jaw. I’m tellin’ you Mary, I snuck out of that house and didn’t say nothing, not at all (5-6).

For Miss Knight, “home” becomes an impossible desire, a locatable place marked by a fixed geographical point in the Midwest, but barred to her by her queer identity. While she can enter the physical location of her home and family, she cannot enter the affective bonds of belonging and acceptance that she desires from “home”. Despite her familial exile from her physical home, Miss Knight still bears the imprint of “home” as a psychological construct, a site of trauma that constantly informs her identity. Even though she was ostracized as a child and subjected to a traumatic experience upon returning to her family as an adult, Miss Knight remains determined to reappropriate a concept of home that cannot be bounded by property lines, national boundaries, or even popular sentiments that seek to demonize her. Working as a drag performer in a traveling roadshow, Miss Knight’s ability to realize her transgressive gender and sexual identity is predicated upon a constant movement from queer space to queer space. She travels city-to-city, nation-to-nation to cosmopolitan queer audiences receptive to such a performance. While she finds acceptance and appreciation as a performance artist, such acceptance is premised upon constantly traveling to it and moving on once the run of the show has finished. The instability of her physical location thus mirrors the instability of her gender and sexuality. Just as a roadshow necessitates continually crossing geographical borders, so too does queerness constantly cross in and out of borders between gender and sexual binaries with no inherently fixed destination.

In spite of her constant travel, “home” remains firmly and consciously branded into Miss Knight’s persona. Out of all the cosmopolitan characters that McAlmon encounters and
documents in his expatriate works, Miss Knight remains the most committed to retaining a uniquely American concept of being a commoner. Her “chief complex was against elegance. The one thing she could not stand was to have some stuck up bitch she’d known in the chorus get to acting elegant” (6). Throughout the story, Miss Knight crudely refers back to her middle class, middle American background, alternately branding herself “common as horseshit all [her] life” or “common as dirt” (8). This rebellion against elegance and sophistication is most evident in her colloquial speech, eschewing proper English for vulgarities and a pronounced midwesterner’s drawl. The use of colloquial phrases from the queer culture in her speech unites her humble Midwestern origin with her low economic status in the queer world as a cabaret performer. Although culturally distant from one another, both aspects of her personality are united by their common economic class status, suggesting that perhaps queers and “normal” Americans of the same lower classes have more in common than they do with the upper classes in their own immediate cultural milieu.

Even as far away as Berlin, Miss Knight has continued to house her attitude and concept of self within a distinctly American home. Here, “home” is not so much the physical location of a place as it is marked by a permanent dustiness from the ground in which she was harvested. Her constant refrain of being as common as dirt shows a feeling of relationship to the very materiality of the land itself, where identity sprouts from the soil upon which a home, society, or nation is built. Just as Foster’s image of America was specifically rooted in a vision of puritan New England, so too is Miss Knight’s American heritage specific to her Midwest up-bringing. The constant referral to dirt evidences a relationship with the agrarian image of the Midwest as America’s grower and harvester of goods. This repetition of being as common as dirt also speaks to a certain democratic American ideal of equality that she has been consistently denied due to
her gender non-conformity. While germinating from the ground is situated in a specific location, the very notion of emerging from the soil, of being a material, physical being and a product of the Earth speaks to an ideal of commonality amongst all Americans. She purposefully retains the dirtiness of her origins even though as a performer, she could easily pass as the elegant figure she parodies on stage. Miss Knight’s performance of gender is also a performance of American class relations.

Miss Knight’s humble ideal self as a harvested American product finds its most curious dramatization when she decides to prepare a Thanksgiving dinner for her friends in Berlin, driven by “nostalgia, sentimentality about a real Thanksgiving dinner, and a wish to have some real American cooking” (9). Donning a wig and a dress as both parody and identification with the traditional image of the American female homemaker, Miss Knight is the only person present at the dinner with any sense of reverence or appreciation for the ritual and unique American mythology of the Thanksgiving holiday. Here, McAlmon demonstrates a sharp understanding of camp sensibilities and aesthetics as a uniquely gay strategy of identity. While Miss Knight’s appearance is a purposeful parody of normative American femininity, its over-the-top, over identification with it actually reveals a deep reverence for it. Miss Knight does not wish to be a biological woman or mother, but she nonetheless identifies with this particular aspect of femininity and can only embody it if she makes it explicitly clear she is performing it. The semiotics of camp demands a conversant reader who can see these layers of truth disguised as artificiality and the way she takes her facetiousness seriously. But her guests ultimately fail to read this intention and Miss Knight becomes disappointed when her guests arrive intoxicated and unappreciative of the meal she cooks. In this scenario, the person most authentically American in spirit amongst the expatriates is the one who by virtue of her queer identity least fits the
traditional mold of an American citizen. Out of all the Americans present, she is the only one who has been physically barred from returning to home, yet she is also the only one who honestly shows reverence for rituals and values of her homeland. She is the unheimlich of Americana. She sports the familiar symbols of our most sentimental national traditions, but does so as a simultaneously unfamiliar, alienating, and “other” when fixed to the context of her queer body. Her queerness threatens to undermine the familiarity of American rituals, yet she is in of herself an extreme example of the individuality and pursuit of liberty that forms the foundation of American values that are supposedly expressed in these national traditions.

In the seemingly more familiar context of gay nightclubs, Miss Knight’s “presence was permitted as a relief from pretentious intellectualty, personal antagonisms, and the morbid personalities of escaped Americans who were trying to make nihilism for their ineffectuality” (9). Though departing dramatically from the Puritanism and conservativism presumed of the American mainstream, Miss Knight’s presence is injected as an antidote to the sense of stasis and despair that the expatriate crowd imported with them to Europe—the very same sense of lostness and disaffection from American culture they had vowed to transcend by finding inspiration in Europe. By depicting his fellow expatriates as unappreciative of Miss Knight’s creativity or dismissing her as a novelty, McAlmon sharply criticizes his compatriots for failing to recognize an incarnate subject of the modernism that they supposedly came to Europe to create after fleeing a supposedly repressive and antiquated America.

**Governing the Queer Body**

In all three stories, despite the relative freedoms of Weimar-era Berlin, McAlmon’s cast of queer characters are acutely aware of the constant threat of police intervention and state
persecution. Paragraph 175 had been a part of German law since 1871, and thus sodomy was still technically illegal, although the enforcement of the law was selective and sporadic during the era of the Weimar republic. While sodomy laws outlawed only an act on paper, this act is the constitutional core of homosexual subjectivity. To outlaw the act is to outlaw the person. A sodomy law makes the sodomite an illegal subjectivity. Thus, the three queer subjects of *Distinguished Air* inhabited illegal identities—their very existence a transgression of the law. For these queer itinerants who traveled across national borders, every subsequent trip to another nation changed the legal conditions of their own body. Although illegal in America, England, and Germany and enforced to different degrees, sodomy had been decriminalized in France since the French Revolution. At this time, discourses of homosexuality and criminality had been linked in numerous turn-of-the-century publications as biological degenerations, associated with other social concerns such as prostitution and female hysteria that sought to account for antisocial behavior with a physiological cause. Traveling from nations where homosexuality was regarded with varying degrees of criminality changed not just the legal status of their actions and their bodies, but also the degree to which their bodies were conceived as degenerate and abnormal. Thus, the very biological make up of the queer itinerant’s body changed from nation to nation.

Although Berlin had a reputation for its liberal and cosmopolitan attitude toward homosexuality, the presence of Paragraph 175 allowed for a convenient surveillance and monitoring of the burgeoning queer underground. Because homosexuality was linked not just socially, but biologically as well to criminal behavior, any association of homosexual men was pervaded with a sense of the illicit, and thus queers harbored a constant feeling of surveillance of their behavior. The perpetual threat of police intervention remained fixed in their minds as they associated with other queers in social spaces. Miss Knight developed a sixth sense for when a
gay club is about to be raided, “I’m tellin’ yuh, Mary, I’ve been in so many raids that I get a hunch of one a month ahead” (13). Miss Knight has so thoroughly internalized the gaze of the state regulating the queer community that the feeling that a raid may occur comes not from an observation of the environment around her, but from a deep affect, a paranoiac disposition toward the world that the persecuted develop from repeated entanglements with the law. During a coke binge at one of the clubs, Miss Knight becomes paranoid and hallucinates that she is in the middle of a raid, “Oh Mary, did I tell you about the dream I had last night? I wuz paralyzed from my nose to the top of my head with coke. Kinda blue, you maybe noticed I wuz last night, so I took more’n usual. And I thought I was in a raid and couldn’t move, and then I woke up and drank six buckets of water like I always do, and I shivered inside and out (19). The fear of a raid is firmly entrenched in her unconscious, structuring the way in which she interprets negative stimuli in her dreams. Even in a dream where there is no physical presence of authority, her unconscious comes to arrest her, and divided against herself, she is perpetually evading her own arrest. This sense of feeling the gaze of authority even when it is not manifestly present speaks to Foucault’s concept of bio-politics and the self-regulating power of the “panopticon” through which he theorizes that state subjects tend to self-policing not necessarily because they agree with the rules in principle, but instead because they have incorporated the regulating gaze of the state in their psyches and are unconsciously compliant. Part of how this self-policing works is through the dominant culture creating and regulating the kinds of identity groups and social consciousnesses that people identify with. Thus, the invention of the homosexual as “perverse” and “queer” in opposition to heterosexuality creates a form of consciousness and identity among queers that function as a form of self-policing because they behave according to the ideology imbedded in the identity that informs their sense of self.
Miss Knight’s own internalization of the state’s gaze does not compel her to abstain from illicit behavior, but instead to manipulate her expression of gender and sexual identity in the face of authority so as to disassociate herself from the types of queer bodies that raids attempt to regulate. The policing of the body is not about permanently installing self-repression in the individual, but instead it is about compelling the subject to obediently perform the part of an ideal state subject when authority stages a demonstration of its power. Later in the text, Miss Knight tells of two separate raids that she escaped in Portland and in New York as a drag performer. Before the American Gay Liberation movement of the 70s, most large towns had transvestitism laws that were used to arrest patrons of gay establishments if they were wearing a minimum amount of the opposite sex’s clothing. These functioned as a way to police the LGBT community where sodomy laws could not technically be applied because they only outlawed sexual acts. Transvestitism laws criminalized the very existence of fairies and transgender individuals.

Most local fairies knew how to manipulate the local law, but for an itinerant performer like Miss Knight, it would be impossible to conform to each new city’s law. Miss Knight recalls running afoul of the law in Portland. “I’d just come from the theatre—had shown my act there you know, and then the cops came in and pinched us and them YMCA boys was scared stiff. The let me go because one of the plain clothes guys has seen my act at the theatre and I sez to him that I didn’t know nuthin’ about what kind of party it wuz, and had come there as a paid entertainer (14). In New York, Miss Knight was arrested after walking back from a drag dance and was spotted because she had forgotten to take off her earrings:

I collected what little sense I got I ast him if they wasn’t some way we could fix it up, and he sez I’d have to call up the chief, so I did, and talked real refined and
elegant over the phone. I’m tellin’ you Mary, I can act like a real lady when I needs to, but that night I talked like rough trade—real manly tones—and I sez to the chief that I was sorry all this happened and that it wouldn’t happen again, and I has to be out of town tonight to play the next night with the show, and we wuz only stagin’ a little act and the chief talked with me for a little while and finally sez ‘All right, but the next time Mister Knight—and god Mary, you should of heard him dwell on that Mizz—‘the next time you’d better not drop your earrings around so conspicuous’ (15).

As a fairy, Miss Knight is particularly adept at manipulating her performance of gender in a given social climate. In both incidents, Miss Knight is able to avoid arrest by convincing the police that her womanly appearance is merely an act and that underneath it is a normal male who disassociates his masculine identity from the performance of femininity in drag. The appearance of femininity in a male becomes less subversive to social standards and is marked just to the good of the line between legal and illegal if it is deemed that the man underneath appears to be parodying the woman instead of inviting the woman into his soul.

Although Miss Knight dons elements of women’s attire even when she is not entertaining on stage, she keeps conscious of the performativity of her gender at all times so as to be able to alter her level of identification with her appearance at will. George Chauncey identifies this skill as a crucial part of the fairy’s use of “effeminacy as a cultural strategy” (50). The fairy was a master in manipulating the signs of their effeminacy to tactically attract those who could read their inversion on their bodies and yet remain hidden to the eyes of the public. McAlmon stresses her bodily masculinity in his description, noting that she was “built so that she could have passed as a real man; even her voice didn’t generally give her away. It was not bass, but it functioned in the lower registers” (5). It is not merely enough to claim she is just a paid performer; she must
also signify an acceptable level of masculinity through her “rough trade” voice. Therefore, her self-defense in the face of arrest amounts to a drag performance as a heterosexual man employing the same skill as her drag performances as a woman. This does not mean that either of these personas are inauthentic or impersonations obfuscating a true masculine core, but instead that all iterations of gender and sexual identity are influenced by the power dynamics of the context in which they are performed.

McAlmon provides a counterexample in Berlin to the antagonistic relationship between the police and the queer community in America. The threat of police raids comes up in “Distinguished Air”, mentioned by Foster Graham, yet the particular bar he mentions is “protected by the police” because, as he says, “the chief of police in Berlin is as queer as they make them himself” (31). Steve Rath makes a similar comment alluding to the homosexuality of the police during the drunken confrontation with the doorman when he threatens to call the police. “Goddam German. Shays he’ll call the police. What’s the use? The whole police force is queer” (61). For both Foster and Steve, there is a peculiar sense of disidentification with authority. They are aware of the laws and their transgressions, but at the same time they understand how the policing of morality in Berlin is mostly for show and thus they have little to fear. Both seasoned veterans of the community understand how the queer counterpublic’s presence in a lucrative sector of the vice economy changes how the law is levied against them. This does not make them free actors or endow them with equal rights, but their savvy knowledge of how the law is actually enforced instead of being intimidated by its writ allows them to exploit the gap between the letter of the law and its enforcement.

While the Berlin police may be “queer” and even though they are never depicted as hassling their own kind, they nonetheless still continue to target other bodies coded in sexual
deviancy. Although in all three stories, a raid specifically targeted at homosexuality never occurs, Foster, the narrator, and a few of their expatriate friends do get caught up in a raid that targeted “unregistered female prostitutes”. All the women who could not prove they were married were forced to go to the police station. These are heterosexual prostitutes, but the fact that their sexual activity falls outside of state standards encodes them as queer and outside the scope of heteronormativity. Being “unregistered” brands them as transgressive because their activity cannot be monitored and tracked by the law. These women were not arrested specifically for engaging in the act of prostitution, or for being known as a prostitute (being registered), but they were arrested because their sexual activity was insufficiently transparent to authority. Thus, all women who could not document their status to the state (married or registered) were deemed as inhabiting an illegal identity and arrested. Here then, the kind of queerness that most actively needed to be policed is defined not as being not heterosexual, but as inhabiting a space in a discourse of sexuality that is not documented and monitored by state authority. Foster and Steve Rath feel comfortable with the presence of the police even though they are technically in violation of Paragraph 175 because they maintain a certain transparency to authority. The queers in charge of the police understand their own kind and do not need to arrest bodies and identities that are compliant to the unwritten codes of conduct that the police enforce.

Despite Miss Knight’s constant fear of arrest and harassment at the hands of the police, the position of power and masculinity embodied in the policeman becomes a sexual fetish. As Miss Knight narrates:

> Discovered a beautiful blond policeman who was real rough trade, so he said, was quite convalesced. Her would sit with his right hand in the left pocket of the policeman when they were in queer cafes, and would babble ‘My god Mary, I’ve for my hand on a real
piece of meant at last, O Mary’ He was additionally happy because Kate Matthews assured him that she, would could spot a queer man a mile off, knew that the policeman was just a war-made queer one, because he had tried to hold her hand (12).

Although Miss Knight has consistent paranoid delusions about police raids, she finds herself particularly attracted to police officers, especially this one because he is only a situational queer and thus encoded as “straight”. The signifiers of strength, power, and masculinity that the police force emanates as indicative of their authority overlaps with the same signifiers of heterosexual male sexuality that attracts the desire of gay men. Miss Knight comes to sexually desire the thing she fears. The power of the state symbolized in the body of the policeman becomes incorporated into the erotic. This space of the erotic imaginary does not necessarily lessen the fear of authority or welcome it in some masochistic desire to punish the self, but instead the line between fear and desire, pain and pleasure become blurred and mutually constitutive of desire.

This logical impossibility made possible in the erotic is mapped onto the body of the policeman whose chief attractive quality is his presumed heterosexuality. Miss Knight says of the policeman, “After all, though, what they want is a woman, you know. They’re real men. They ain’t queer bitches like you and me” (13). Although today we would assume that any man who could manage to sleep with another biological male to be at least bisexual, in McAlmon’s era it was not uncommon for heterosexual men to seek out the sexual prowess of the fairy provided the fairy take the role of a woman. In fact, the ideal partner for all fairies was not another fairy or even a masculine homosexual, but “rough trade”, which Chauncey defines as an “embodiment of the aggressive masculine ideal, who was neither homosexually interested nor effeminately gendered himself but who would accept the sexual advances of a queer” (16). The fairy was attractive to some heterosexual men because they could be picked up at random for
casual sex, would perform sexual acts that a “respectable” woman would never do, and unlike a prostitute, they did not have to be paid. The fairy “behaved as no man should, but as any man might wish a woman would”, meaning that he had all the charms of a woman but with a man’s attitude and impulse toward sex (Chauncey 57). Miss Knight understands her place in the sexual schema of the queer underground and realizes that part of what makes her contact with heterosexual men possible is the ephemeral nature of these relationships. Miss Knight actively cultivates and maintains the policeman’s heterosexuality to the point where she is happy to see him show interest in women, almost fetishizing the fact that he will eventually leave her for a biological woman and start a heterosexual life. The fact that there is ultimately no room in his life for her is proof of his “authentic” masculinity, and a testament that she could touch, but ultimately not possess the ideal of domesticity that she respects, but ultimately cannot and chooses not to pursue.

During Miss Knight’s travels from nation to nation, she actively cultivates and nourishes a sense of home and American identity that she is barred from completely inhabiting under normative definitions of being a “true American”. Miss Knight shows respect and reverence for the tenets of American culture and its traditions, and while she performs them, she is acutely aware of how she cannot own them in the way heteronormative subjects are presumed to never question their identification with nation, community, and culture. Her askew stance in the queer margins allows her to appreciate and understand these facets of American culture and identity at a more complex level than those who can actually freely engage with it. With her Midwest colloquialisms and her American traditions, Miss Knight approaches the very boundary of what Americanness she can experience. Yet, with her reverence for her “home” she does not seek to
shatter or disrupt these virtues, but instead place her hands up to the glass where on the other side, authentic Americana is presumed to exist.

**Hangovers of the Gay Nineties: McAlmon’s Lost Fairy Tale**

Filed at the end of a carbon print copy of McAlmon’s original manuscript for *Distinguished Air: Grim Fairy Tales* sits a story of two frustrated heterosexual American expatriates in Grenoble and their aging, gay dandy acquaintance. Why Robert McAlmon chose not to include “Hangovers of the Gay Nineties” in the final printing of his collection of short stories remains a mystery. Sure, it was set in France and not Germany, the language is more graphic, and the characterization of women and minority races in the story is coarse and stereotypical, yet because McAlmon was his own publisher, the decision would have ultimately been an artistic decision and not a capitulation to the politics of a publishing house. Regardless of why McAlmon chose for the story to never see the light of day, “Hangovers of the Gay Nineties” is a work on par with the other three fairy tales. In the three other stories, we see the fairy, the dandy, and the lesbian, and their association with the heterosexual mainstream. In “Hangovers of the Gay Nineties”, McAlmon shifts his focus toward the dysfunction of heterosexuality and places the figure of the homosexual as a tantalizing escape from the demands of heteronormativity. Yet, in McAlmon’s story, the seemingly carefree and sexual liberated lifestyle of the homosexual is positioned outside the grasp of the heterosexual male who cannot bring himself to become “queer” and pursue it.

In the story’s opening scene, McAlmon begins his narrative in his favorite setting: a bar. Here sit Tom, a recently divorced, sexually frustrated artist, and Grant, a writer who most likely stands in for McAlmon himself. With the simultaneous introduction of Tut, an aging American
queen (the hangover from the “gay” nineties) who speaks unabashedly of his taste for young men
and Tom’s wailing against the insults he received in a letter from his ex-wife, McAlmon crosses
the two major themes of the text—heterosexuality as a hindrance to realizing desire and the
promise of homosexuality as a practice predicated on the unrestrained pursuit of desire:

Nat G. Vernon saw the two young men he knew, surrounded by younger men he was
quite ready to know. He adored you, if it was masculine. ‘You’re at it yet,’ he said
gay-gaily, as he came to their table. He carefully removed his gloves, placed his
goldenheaded cane in a rack, removed his carefully fitted overcoat, and seated himself.
Once seated he examined his fingernails that were well kept but brittle with age, and
looked about him with a dowager air of ex-beauty self-consciousness, surely noting
every young man within range of his eye though his surveillance was guarded. (1a)

McAlmon cloaks Tut in the legible semiotics of queer dandyism, similar to that of Foster
Graham in *Distinguished Air*, but with an emphasis placed on Tut’s physical decline. This is a
body that once was young and had its physical charms, but now can only access the beauty of
youth through the body of another. Yet, Tut realizes that the gay world is a cult of youth and
despite his age deeply inscribed into his weathered skin, he firmly asserts that everyone thinks he
is younger than he actually is. Tom and Grant are obviously aware of his age, yet they play along
with Tut’s narrative of self-delusion. They announce to each other that they take part in the lie
because Tut is a stitch in the same way that Miss Knight is tolerated by the Berlin expatriates
because of her outrageous, hilarious behavior. They invest in maintaining some degree of Tut’s
self-delusion—as if they themselves wish to keep the possibility of a queer existence of excess
open by denying its ravages and consequences.
Once Tut has updated Tom and Grant on his most recent overtures toward the college boys in Grenoble, Tom counters Tut’s talk of licentiousness by launching into a rant against his frustrated heterosexuality:

Letters from home, and the ex-wife, telling me not to be so cruel to other women as I was to her. But she forgives me. His voice was bitter. ‘Forgives me. Balls. Just because a man doesn’t want to be possessed in the gaddamned bourgeois female manner he’s being cruel, that’s a woman’s idea. She married me as I was and because she thought I could sculpture, but right away she wants me to settle down and lead her kind of life. A nice apartment in Florence; a game of cards with such shitty, mealy-mouthed, nice people now and then. To hell with it. She knew I drank. She knew I stayed out late nights. She agreed we wouldn’t try to interfere with each other’s way of living, but that’s women for you. They don’t play a square game. Before they say that marriage is to be a sporting proposition, and as soon as a man’s caught they begin trying to drag him into the net of their wills (3).

Tom’s heterosexual desire is incompatible with the social institutions and expectations that govern the relationship of the married couple. He identifies class identity as a regulating agent of the norms and expectations of a heterosexual relationship. The pressure to maintain a bourgeois lifestyle prevents him from engaging the artistic pursuits that would satisfy his desire to create, but come with no assurance of a steady income. He blames his ex-wife’s bourgeois tastes for the failure of their marriage, accusing her of forcing him to choose between the libidinal desire of a human relationship over the libidinal desire to create art. Here, McAlmon inducts this heterosexual subject into his oeuvre of exploring how expatriation is motivated by the desire for libidinal liberation. Just like Miss Knight, Foster Graham, and Steve Rath (a performer, a painter,
and a sculptor), Tom also comes to Europe in order to leave behind the repression of his libidinal desire by an oppressive cultural status quo. Since Tom pursues libidinal liberation by breaking from what he perceives to be the shackles of heteronormativity, he becomes a queer subject on par with McAlmon’s other fairies and queers. The balance of the story investigates the possibility for and ultimate failure of a queer sexuality for these two men, inspired by the promise of liberation that Tut as a queer subject signifies, but ultimate fails to realize himself. The homosexual as a distant figure shows these men that there is an alternative to the discontents of heterosexuality, but as they get to know him, they realize that he is fraught with his own impediments to realizing his desires and that this image of homosexuality tied to uninhibited pleasure is very much a fantasy projection of heterosexuality.

McAlmon’s first step into the possibility of a queer heterosexuality comes with an exploration of male homosociality. At the end of Tom’s page-long rant against bourgeois femininity, he states:

Christ, they don’t only get jealous of other women and all of a man’s former friends, but they get jealous of the hours he puts in on his work. She was trying to tell me that Grant was a bad influence on me. He is, God damn it; and I’m a bad influence on him, and that’s why we like [each] other. To hell with the goddamned bourgeois world with its bastardly refined ideas (3).

Tom’s decision to divorce his wife and move to France in order to pursue his creative desires came via the “bad influence” of Grant who understands Tom’s libidinal will to create and encourages him to find satisfaction for this drive. Tom’s best male friend not only understands his desires better than the women in his life, but he also knows how to help him satisfy them better than the women can.
While on the surface, this friendship could be seen as simple artistic collaboration and patronage, the language that Tom chooses to describe his expatriation reveals that his choice to expatriate was more a question of re-envisioning his lifestyle than a mere professional decision:

F--- the sonabitches that try to tell me that I’m going to hell. I am and I’ve been going there all my life, but my teeth are still clean and my hair is falling out and I don’t suffer from halitosis as much as some of the lousy bastards who went to school with me and let their papas and mammas persuade them that they should get nice positions with insurance companies and be the nice husbands of nice girls so’s to be nice papas and mammas of babies that shit their pants all over the house. The goddamned bourgeois bastard sonabitches.

Tom frames his change of lifestyle as a question of morality, or at least he recognizes that others view it to be immoral. It seems excessive that the question of going to hell should come up given his history, thus he recognizes that there is a more morally questionable motive for his lifestyle choices. He appropriates the discourse of hellfire and damnation commonly invoked against the sodomites. He may not be committing their exact crime, but the magnitude of turning his back on heterosexual conventions and pursuing pleasure places him in the company of similar intent—afterall, the slothful and lustful have their own rings of hell adjacent to the sodomites in the Inferno.

Tom further ensconces himself among the sodomites with his reflection on his fading looks and his invective against reproducing patriarchy. Tom declares that he might be going bald, but at least he still has his teeth, echoing the laughable desperation to hold onto one’s physical beauty that Tut displayed a page earlier. Tut’s queering influence has already begun. In refusing to sexually reproduce, Tom enters the same logic of non-production that characterized
Foster Graham earlier. Tom sees how modern capitalism in the age of industrialization has appropriated the self-propagating model of patriarchy for the reproduction of class relations—a vicious cycle where sexual desire becomes subservient to the interests of capitalism, which always needs another generation of laborers. Heterosexuality and capitalism oppose the modernist artist who dares to write or paint against tradition, which is far more lucrative because traditional art is purchased by those who want the art to reinforce and signify their traditional lifestyles. Regardless of the particular political or social content of a modernist work, modernism disrupts the streamlined process of patriarchy and capitalism that relies upon a continuity of values and desires from generation to generation. Straight or gay, McAlmon’s Lost Generation is a queer generation, practicing a modernism with an inherently queer stance on social production through artistic innovation and cultural defiance.

Although the homosexual is placed as a challenge to the relations of production, he is nonetheless as much a product of capitalism as his heterosexual peers. Because of the prodigious excess associated with gay culture, the homosexual occupies a space in the imaginary as somehow able skirt the imperatives of production that limit heterosexual desire. McAlmon gestures toward this notion with Tut, but ultimately shows that the homosexual’s desire is just as much informed and constrained by capitalism and materialism. Tut complains to Grant and Tom that if he had his choice, he would be in Paris where the bars are swarming with available boys, but he cannot afford to travel there:

This financial cure will kill me, Tut confided cheerfully. It’s simply frantic. If that old dodo of an uncle of mine --- he’s a supreme court judge --- would only sell those docks in New York I’d not stay long in Grenoble, I tell you. But the poor darling, he’s over eighty. He doesn’t care. He thinks they gain in value, but I’d rather have them sold and
have the less money to spend while I’m still able to enjoy it (10).

The American culture of investing capital presumes a universal heterosexual subject invested in patriarchy and inheritance. Tut challenges this assumption and reveals that the purpose of investing money is not to raise enough money for something that he wants, but that the act of investment becomes the end in of itself. Money is so fetishized that the purpose of investing money has become to see the money grow instead of using it to produce something tangible. The idea of inheritance becomes the extension of the heterosexual’s deferral of pleasure and deferral of the self onto the next generation. This image of the homosexual opposes this deferral to the future—he recognizes the ephemera of his existence and has no problem sundering money on present pleasures because he seeks no future beyond his life. But, this rendering of the carefree homosexual not worried about the future is very much an imaginary construction, more a projection of a desire to be economically, socially, and sexually free than a depiction of reality. In this way, Tut is a caricature of the effete, cultured homosexual dandy (like Oscar Wilde for example, who more publicized this image than actually lived it) who is free to pursue pleasure unburdened by heterosexual obligations to family and morality. Yet, what this caricature conceals is that this image of the homosexual is a product of class relations. It is his wealth that allows him to freely pursue his homosexual desires, and that he can live up to a lavish image and pursue younger men is a product of his class enabling a type of homosexual identity barred to the working class fairies like Miss Knight.

Beyond the mere inconvenience of having to access capital on heterosexual terms, we see through Tut that enfranchisement into a queer community mandates economic expenditure. As McAlmon illustrated with the American queer itinerants in Berlin, the poverty of the land allowed for the construction of a space where the queers of the lower classes could finally afford
a taste of prodigality. Yet, for a man like Tut who believes himself to be a “Victorian” from the upper classes, the underground cabarets were not an option.

If those damned docks of mine would sell I might have a few hot years yet. I don’t know what’s happened to my this quarter’s [sic] allowance either. I’m overdrawn so much I’m afraid to ask about it. It’s frantic. There’s a boy house in Nice, and there’s a so friend of mine in Florence who wants me to visit him. He’s over seventy, but he still goes, and his house swarms with beautiful boys, and he won’t have any but men servants in the house, and when he entertains, only men who are so, his guests just that their pick. But he’s wealthy and I can’t be around my rich friends when I’m doing a financial cure. I can’t be explaining that I’m broke, because they’ll wonder why my family in America doesn’t send me money (34-35). [italics are mine]

Tut’s predicament illuminates the complexities of class divisions amongst queers in the early years of the gay community. Although he is decidedly aristocratic, he has no access to his family wealth. He is from an affluent class, but without the ability to spend this affluence as he wishes. Tut represents the dominant construction of the homosexual of the past century—a member of the urbane elite whose economic privilege allowed for the indulgence of vice in discrete spaces to which only the wealthy had access.

McAlmon traces this sense of privilege to the conditions of Tut’s upbringing among the upper crust that estranged him from class relations outside his economic sphere. Tut states, “Would you believe that at twelve years old I asked my mother if food cost money? It seemed to me that it was just something everybody had. And when streetboys used to ask me to give them money I would tell them that I would but I didn’t have any. I had anything I wanted but no allowance” (13). Although Tut is defined by his economic class, he was raised to know little
about economics. He contrasts with the newly emerging working-class gay community of the twentieth century that John D’Emilio describes as born of capitalist means of production and that Chauncey locates as the birthplace of the fairy culture. Miss Knight is a product of this new generation of queer men for whom urbanization and industrialization created the possibility of forming a community and identity around sexual and gender identity outside of the bounds of the traditional family-based economy. Miss Knight may be poor and she may be limited to counterpublics in which crime and drugs circulate, but she has economic independence to pursue her queer desires. Tut, on the other hand, is wholly dependent upon the patriarchy of the upper classes. He does not profane himself with work, but he pays for the maintenance of his Victorian elitism by being beholden to the economic bondage of patriarchy. While on paper he is wealthy because he is entitled to the inheritance of vast capital, he has no freedom to access it and is functionally poor in a queer community that demands liquid capital and semiotic displays of elegance in order to fit in with the culture.

Tut’s realization of his queer desires and initiation as a young man into the world of gay sexuality are both enacted through his class consciousness,

I didn’t know till I was twenty six what I had felt about those streetboys, and then an older man just seduced me. I was at the opera and he --- he was married and a handsome specimen too ---- he told me that his wife was out of town and that he wanted me to stay at his house overnight with him, I went. I was ill at ease when I found I was to sleep with him, but he told me to crawl right on into bed, and then he performed. I didn’t say anything, but I thought, “well, that’s what I like. That’s what I’ve been wanting.” He passed word around, and I had dinner engagements and was popular after that. I wasn’t so bad looking myself then. New York was gay then, that was in the eighties. We weren’t
outspoken the way this generation is, but we didn’t miss much (13).

Although Tut had latent homosexual desires for the working-class males that asked him for money, he was not able to comprehend his desire until someone from his own social class made it accessible to him in an affluent setting. Tut is aware of how his entry into the world of same-sex desire is decidedly different from McAlmon’s working-class generation of the 20s. Once inducted into the world of “dinner engagements,” Tut could pursue his desire with the discretion that other men in his social class could afford to maintain. Without access to extensive, guarded spaces in the private sphere, Miss Knight’s generation had to bring their sexual and gender identities into the public and be “outspoken” insofar as they had to signify their inversion on their body. The semiotics of inversion within this newly developing queer public must deal in a profane, visual extravagance in order to be legible. This cross-class mimicry appalls the “Victorian” sentiments of the upper classes whose gaudy displays of wealth aimed to verify their aristocratic race that now seemed threatened by the fairies who appropriated these symbols of extravagance as a display of camp.

Why Not Go Gay?

Although Tut’s aristocratic homosexual indulgence is proven to have its own limitations, McAlmon continues to explore the possibility of his two heterosexual artists finding sexual liberation in the working class gay world that characters like Miss Knight inhabited. Tom not only understands that his bohemian lifestyle places him in the socially marginalized company of the queers, but he also shows that he could not care less about this perception. So, why not take the final step and become sexually queer? McAlmon presents this proposition front and center later in the text when, after a night of heavy drinking at the brothels and carousing with the
locals, Tom and Grant find themselves in awe of the feminine beauty of Marcel, a 17 year old barman who passed out at their flat. Having already placed himself structurally in the same aging situation as Tut, Tom finds himself presented with Tut’s exact object of desire. Yet, unlike Tut, whose first impulse would be to charm the ephebe, Tom wishes he had his “pencils here to make a sketch” (18). Tom’s first reaction is to sublimate any kind of sexual desire he could have to possess the male body carnally into an artistic desire to reproduce his beauty. He merges the queer gaze of a male recognizing the beauty of another male with the queerness that he already acknowledges in himself as a modernist artist. The queer stance of the modernist artist’s perception of society allows Tom to experience Marcel’s beauty insofar as he can mediate it through modernist aesthetics. He does not deny his queer attraction through art, but instead, art allows him to understand his own capacity to hold a queer attraction to another male.

As soon as Tom announces his desire to draw Marcel, Grant demonstrates his keen insight into and knowledge of Tom’s desires by proposing that he go one step further than merely drawing his attraction: “Tom’, Grant said with a teasing laugh, ‘if you think Marcel so beautiful, he’s available. The other night when you nearly smashed up Maxim’s he was impressed. He likes roughness, I take it. At any rate his Germanic soul is touched. I take it that the Italian has been educating him” (18). Although he jests, Grant understands Tom’s sexual desires and frustrations intimately, and perhaps in insinuating that a homosexual relationship could solve his problems, he also makes a gesture at how intimate they themselves have become with one another. Tom seems to take the suggestion seriously, if not as a real option, then at least as the springboard into an investigation of the root of his own sexual frustrations, “Tom looked abashed for a minute and then grinned. Jhaysus, why can’t I. He’s about the most beautiful thing I ever looked at, and I’m fed up with women, but goddamned it, I love women. I can’t help it.
They’re bitching things up for me all the time, but I love them. Why can’t I take on Marcel. I don’t disapprove, but I can’t (19). This is perhaps the first recorded (fictional) instance of a heterosexual man cursing the fact that he is not inclined toward homosexual desire.

It is also important to remember that the leap for a heterosexual man to copulate with another male was less fraught with the deeply existential crisis of homo/hetero identity that it is today. As we saw in McAlmon’s “Miss Knight” and in George Chauncey’s *Gay New York*, Tom could simply think of himself as “rough trade” and maintain his heterosexuality as long as Marcel would be limited to a feminine role. Tom does not question his identity at all, in fact, he does not worry about what the possibility of desiring a man might make him as most ostensibly heterosexual men would today. Thus, the text shows how the approach to same-sex eroticism could be handled differently in an age before the idea of a sexual orientation as concept distinct from gender identity became a ubiquitous identity category. Recognizing Marcel’s feminine beauty and having no resistance to the culture of homosexuality is not enough to turn his scopic pleasure into the desire of a carnal act. Grant suggests that this inability to leap from aestheticizing male beauty to eroticizing it may be the product of environment and learned behavior: “It’s too bad you didn’t go to Oxford or Cambridge or to sea or some sort of thing” (19). Grant cites two spaces known for its situational homosexuality. The elite, exclusively male colleges have long been associated with young hormonal males experimenting with one another, and everyone knows it gets lonely out on the sea. Grant furthermore states that it is a shame that Tom does not know how to possess beauty when he sees it because “there isn’t so much beauty about that any of it’s to be missed” (19). This suggests that sexual desire is influenced by how certain social spaces are constructed and that scarcity dictates a re-evaluation of one’s desires and innovations in the practice of satisfying them. A heterosexual male would be more inclined
to try sex with a feminine male in an all-male college or alone on a ship because feminine beauty is scarce and the drive toward sex continues to insist upon satisfaction even where there is no proper object available. At this moment, McAlmon shows that something as seemingly firmly rooted as a sexual orientation can be swayed by opportunity and environment—that queer desire can strike anyone ephemerally.

Since McAlmon sees homosexuality as contingent on a social environment and Tom already recognizes the queerness of the space of expatriate France, and he has no moral compunctions, then why can’t he pull the trigger and act? McAlmon speculates on this question through Grant’s ruminations: “Grant wondered what actually Tom was inside himself that made him turn so malely rough on women, when with men he was always gentle. Was it just the fight he had to put up within himself to keep from letting his need for women possess him completely?” (19). Grant identifies Tom’s misogyny as grounded in a question of power. He displaces his fear of a loss of self-control onto the object of desire that prompts the desire to lose control. He attempts to control women because he is afraid losing control over himself, which would, in turn, allow women to control him. Oddly enough, the idea of desiring a male seems more comforting to him because he does not desire them enough to lose himself in that desire. He does not feel a “need” for a man, so the idea of desiring something in of itself without a dependency on it appeals to him. By today’s standards one would expect the opposite, given the plethora of narratives that repeat the fear of a male losing his sense of identity and self when he discovers his latent homosexuality. This homophobia among men is often the fear of becoming the object of another man and subject to his power—essentially becoming what he believes a woman to be. Yet, in a world that does not yet have a homo/hetero binary, but instead, a binary between the genders, Tom’s identity is not in question because he is firm in his identity as a man.
so long as his desired act with another male would be roughly equivalent to what a heterosexual man would do with a woman. Thus, the only way that he could cede his identity is to submit to the power that women have over him in that they can control his access to what he wants from them. A relationship with another male does not threaten to effeminize him, but submitting to a woman threatens to take away his position of power and, by proxy effeminize him. A heterosexual act becomes more of a threat to his masculinity than a homosexual act.

By exploring Tom’s deeply contentious relation with women and his imaginary projection of the homosexual (or at least the heterosexual male copulating with a homosexual male) as unburdened by these concerns, McAlmon, like his friend Ernest Hemingway, participates in a similar inquiry into the crisis of masculinity in the modern era in an expatriate setting. Also like Hemingway, McAlmon uses the homosexual as a counterpoint to heterosexuality in order to gauge and evaluate masculinity. But, unlike Hemingway, the homosexual in McAlmon’s stories is not a harrowing reminder of the possible emasculation and castration of the heterosexual in the modern era. Rather, in McAlmon’s stories, homosexuality is symbol of the possibility of alternatives to the conventions of heterosexual masculinity.

*The Nightinghoul: Life in the Expatriate Aftermath of the Lost Generation*

In *The Nightinghoul: Life in the Expatriate Aftermath of the Lost Generation*, McAlmon considers the history and legacy of the expatriate movement in two temporal frames to record what the expatriate experience in Paris had been and to ruminate on what it continued to signify to the literary world and general public long after the passing of what he considered to be its golden age. As Sanford Smoller notes in his introduction, McAlmon wrote the novel well after his time in Paris had come to an end while he was working with family in Arizona in 1945-1947 (Smoller xxxvii). In this respect, it is more
apparent how readily McAlmon would desire to cast himself in a paternal, or at least avuncular role in the lives of Graeme Taylor and John Glassco, seeing as by this time in his life, McAlmon had advanced into middle age and had time to contemplate his personal legacy and to analyze the influence of the Lost Generation on American culture. As we know from the timeframe in which Robert McAlmon lived with Graeme Taylor and John Glassco in real life, the novel takes place roughly between 1928 and 1930. Although McAlmon would be hardly into his mid 30s by this time, in the transient environment of Paris, McAlmon’s nearly decade-long expatriation cast him as one of the elder statesmen of the quarter.

By the end of the twenties, McAlmon, as unsentimental as ever, was already pronouncing the death of Montparnasse’s golden age (Smoller 188). While the Quarter may have lost some of its key luminaries and a bit of its mystique for McAlmon and other expatriates, its importance in the American cultural imaginary was just beginning to flower. Smoller describes the scene, “Fancy American-style bars had replaced the crude but direct bistros and bal musettes of the early twenties. With the financial boom at its apex, rich American tourists had turned Paris into their private Babylon” (188). The incursion of American tourists brought with them the consumerist hunger for images of the exotic sanitized and commodified like in all other tourist traps, even though the Montparnasse neighborhood that McAlmon and other expatriates fled to had originally been considered a seedy neighborhood.16 Ironically, the American thirst for Paris can be blamed in part on the expatriates’ own success as an artistic movement. By the late 20s, Hemingway’s novels had achieved massive popularity and F. Scott Fitzgerald who had already achieved fame and celebrity before trying out the expatriate lifestyle further brought attention to

16 McAlmon writes in Being Geniuses Together that upon arrival in Paris, Sylvia Beach, the famous proprietor of Shakespeare and Company, warned him against going to Montparnasse, calling it “ghastly, a hangout for pederasts” (30).
the lives of American artists communing in the bistro of Paris. The romanticism of expatriatism and the “salvation by exile” that Cowley describes had, in less than a decade, been turned into a popular commodity for the American mainstream.

McAlmon laments the commodification of the expatriate lifestyle in the novel with his depiction of Duff Twysden (fictionalized as “Lady Mart”) who is better known as the elusive object of desire Lady Brett Ashley in Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*. Arguing that Hemingway “gave her a romantic glamour she didn’t really possess in life”, McAlmon portrays Lady Mart as desperate and dependent on her newfound celebrity when he recalls a conversation with her after Hemingway (here as Forrest Pemberton) had given her 1,000 francs in pity:

Pemberton’s thousand francs were making Mart feel momentarily secure and gay.

That was about what it should be. He had claimed to love her, and the story of his romance made thousands of American college boys’ hearts quiver. A thousand francs was a reasonable price to pay, if she didn’t get him for more. On Mart’s side, she would be pointed out to tourists and romantic young men as the heroine of his book...

Before I left La Coupole Mart was deep in conversation with three college boys from America. One was thrilled to discover that she was the original of Pemberton’s frail heroine. Mart was being gay, feeling capable of making more conquests, and what do boys come to Paris if not to have romance? (72).

At this point, Montparnasse had become a Lost Generation theme park, complete with Americanized facsimiles of the bars and cafes that used to exist and Duff Twysden happy to pose for pictures as Lady Brett Ashley like a man in a Mickey Mouse costume. Not only had the fictionalized version of expatriate Paris in Hemingway’s work covered up the more unfortunate
reality of its inhabitants, but also this glorified fiction had come to replace the reality of the community even for those who visited the actual streets.

**McAlmon Guides a Newly Lost Generation**

The work of the expatriate authors had such an impact on the pop culture of young America that Hemingway’s novel had inspired, as Malcolm Cowley claimed, “hundreds of bright young men from the Middle West” who were “trying to be Hemingway heroes, taking in tough understatements from the sides of their mouths” (225). Ushering in this new generation whose tastes and talents had been tailored around Lost Generation prescriptions, McAlmon simultaneously closes the curtains on the golden age of the expatriate movement and initiates a new, uncertain, perhaps even doomed generation with the arrival of Canadian youths Sudge and Ross. McAlmon sets the scene for their arrival in a bar in the Quarter as he is engaged in conversation with Hilaria, a noted Cuban *demimondaine* (or “*poule*” as McAlmon terms women of ill-repute in the quarter) on the prowl for young men. McAlmon as Kit O’Malley says to her, “You got going strong, didn’t you? But hell, with the summer supply of virgins and frustrated old ladies arriving, no man can afford to have his abilities exploited” (4). Establishing the bars of Montparnasse as replete with world-wise women looking to prey on younger men, McAlmon sends in the boys:

I saw them for the first time. They would touch Hilaria’s gallivanting heart which had a tincture of the maternal within it. Reticently they approached, shy boyishly eager. Hilaria took Ross’s hand to shake and her strong grip threw him off balance. She laughed with tender delight ‘Drink with Hilaria. I am the education for all leetla boys who wander lonely in Montparnasse, if they are of beauty (5).
As a potential initiator of the boys into the economy of pleasure in the Quarter, Hilaria is written as both seductress and as a maternal figure, both facets alluring and threatening. With Hilaria, McAlmon begins a discourse of cross-generational relationships that combines sexual desire with a parental drive toward mentorship. Ultimately, as the novel progresses, McAlmon crosses both of those desires to the point where they are nearly indistinguishable, suggesting even among same-age relationships, that sexual couplings are always structured by a paternalistic or maternalistic relationship of power.

Having established the elder patrons of the Quarter as capable of both benevolence and exploitation, McAlmon contrasts the world-wise inhabitants of the quarter with an innocent vision of Sudge and Ross:

They were perfect visual examples of Etonesque schoolboys, with gray trousers, pink and white reticence, and grave, palpitating courtesy. Sudge looked fifteen but claimed to be eighteen, and Ross was twenty-two. With bashful curiosity they admitted not knowing how to get acquainted with people in the quarter. I felt aged and dissipated, sure that Hilaria and I would horrify their ideas of correctness (5).

At this point, McAlmon places himself as Kit in a similar structural position to that of Hilaria in so far as he too senses both the desire to corrupt what appears to be immaculate school children. Yet, Kit is partially disabused of this assumption when Sudge explains that he is sick with a social disease. Immediately, Kit takes the place of a wise veteran of the Montparnasse sexual milieu, suggesting the name of a reputable doctor. “‘Sound’, Sudge said with polite relief. I knew then I had adopted the boys. ‘I’ve heard about you,’ Sudge said. ‘Somebody pointed you out as you passed the Dome and said you knew everybody. That’s why we came down here. Ross and I have festered all spring trying to know Paris” (5). As Kit agrees to show them around Paris and
introduce them to the remaining writers and personalities of note among Montparnasse,
McAlmon grants Kit guardianship and responsibility over both the sexual maturation of the boys as well as literary mentorship as a guide through the literary and physical space of the expatriate world. Sexual guidance becomes a prerequisite for living in the Quarter and becoming a writer, thus McAlmon’s construction of the space of expatriate Paris does not place sex and sexuality at the margin or a fringe benefit of living there, but as a force already presupposed and integrated in the natural course of artistic pursuits.

From this point, Kit takes the boys under his wing and initiates them in a whirlwind tour of the clubs in the Quarter. McAlmon summarizes his first night with his new mentees:

I got beautifully lit that night and went to Zelli’s, and from there to other places in Montmartre...I don’t know how I got home, because when I left the jazz gaiety of a Negro cabaret I forgot to remember. When I lifted my head from the pillow in the morning, I saw Ross sleeping in rosy peace beside me. He woke up as I wondered what we had done the night before. He sat up and smiled winningly. ‘Sound night we had?’ he questioned with staunch cheer (8).

McAlmon’s description of the aftermath of a night’s drunken carousing purposefully leaves it ambiguous how he ended up in bed with the young man and whether or not any sexual activity had occurred. He strategically sets up a defense of plausible deniability where a queer readership can read the erotic in between the lines while McAlmon himself could always claim lack of memory or responsibility in the haze of a drunken night he no longer could recall. Although McAlmon has no discomfort in honestly exploring the queer sexuality of his characters, he always stops short at addressing the full sexuality of his own narrative doppelganger in his
works. McAlmon later depicts in careful, sensitive detail the confused and ill-defined love and attraction between the boys, but his own sexual desire for the boys is veiled.

John Glassco’s own fictionalized memoirs of his time in Paris, *Memoirs of Montparnasse* retells his first encounter with McAlmon from an opposite perspective and orientation toward closeting. In his memoirs, which McAlmon actually depicts him writing in *The Nightinghoul of Paris*, it is McAlmon who is demonstrably homosexual while Glassco himself never alludes to his own queer feelings:

I had already noticed his small thin mouth and piercing stare, but it was clear he was far from being the kind of invert whose predilection shapes his whole personality...It soon appeared that his chosen role was to be the fatherly or avuncular, and I began to hope he was more vain of being seen with young men than actually covetous of their favors. This hope was dispelled by a burly, moonfaced man, dressed in baggy tweeds and with his necktie clewed by a gold pin, who came noisily into the bar and greeted our table with a loud ‘Well, Bob, up to your old tricks again?’ (43).

While McAlmon’s version of the meeting grants us only enough interiority into the narrator to know that he is compelled to take a fatherly position within the boys’ life in the Quarter, Glassco’s rendition gives us his full motivation for his generosity. Glassco’s early impression of McAlmon puts into question the adequacy of his masculinity and sexuality and the possible lurking motives behind whichever type of gender or sexual deviant he may be. McAlmon is judged to neither be one of the inverts from his “fairy tales” who adopted feminine attire and mannerisms, nor is he a sufficient approximation of the rugged masculine ideal that

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17 In his original publication of *Memoirs of Montparnasse*, Glassco claims that he wrote the first few chapters during this time in Paris, finished it in a sanitarium in the early thirties and forgot about it until he decided to publish it in 1970. In reality, the majority of the book was written in 1964 (Gnarowski xiii).
Hemingway’s entrance into the story embodies. While Glassco’s initial impressions of McAlmon interprets the possibility that his intentions can retain some sense of purity, the impeccable heterosexual masculinity of Hemingway comes to dispel that notion and interrogate the assumed ulterior motives of the queer “tricks” McAlmon looks to play.

Glassco insinuates by the end of his narrative of their first night out partying that McAlmon’s drinking to incapacitation may indeed have been a trick to get into bed with the young men. After having been taken to a couple of gay bars where McAlmon dances with fairies, (which McAlmon omits from his own narrative) Glassco and Taylor soon have to assume responsibility over a violent and disruptive McAlmon after they slipped a barbiturate to get him to stop singing his infamous shrieking “Chinese Opera”. In the aftermath of McAlmon’s bacchanalia, Glassco writes, “Waking uncomfortably a few hours later, however, I found he had made his way between Graeme and me and I began to wonder if he had been quite as helpless as he appeared to be in the Coupole bar” (51). Much like how McAlmon’s own narrative exploits his alcohol-erased memory as an excuse for not explaining how or why he ended up in bed with the boys, Glassco suggests that a similar manipulative spirit compelled him to feign incapacitation in order to trick the boys into sharing a bed. In both accounts, McAlmon’s sexuality is present as a series of tricks and masquerades. In his own narrative, these tricks are implicit in the silence of what he does not include as an author, while in Glassco’s tale, these tricks of his sexuality are based in his foundational queerness where he does not fit a specific paradigm of homosexuality common to the era and does not announce his attentions, preferring to remain opaque, illegibly queer.

Regardless of the real or imagined sexual desire between McAlmon and the boys, Kit’s most profoundly queer influence over the boys is the initiation into the ways of life in
Montparnasse that conflicts with the norms of patriarchy. We saw earlier in “Hangovers of the Gay Nineties” that France provided a space where an adult felt he could flee the constraints of expectations to reproduce patriarchy in his own life. With Sudge and Ross, Kit hopes to act preventatively in order to keep them from ever stepping into that domain. McAlmon’s concept of the expatriate lifestyle represents a certain period of arrested development where the artist resists growing up and into the normal, supposedly respectable lives of an average American citizen and instead develops individually as they pursue pleasure and arts without a thought toward the future. The Quarter promises a form of arrested development in which the boys, like McAlmon, can stop maturing into what patriarchal society encourages them to be, and instead can develop as artists and connoisseurs of pleasure. The balance of the boys’ time in Paris gave them an opportunity for drunken debauchery and the time and space to concentrate on writing while ignoring the imperative to “grow up” and pursue a more conventional path of conforming to their fathers’ expectations to cease their juvenile preoccupations, return to Canada, find employment, marry, and reproduce the lifestyle of their fathers. For McAlmon himself, the latter course of action was never a possibility and thus he found himself with the queer “nightinghouls” of the Quarter like Djuna Barnes and her lover Thelma Wood remaining in Paris after his compatriots one by one returned home either as failed artists reverting to tried and true American middle class lifestyles, or like Hemingway and Fitzgerald, cashing in on their fame.

While these normative standards of living did not bother the truly Lost Generation that remained in Paris, McAlmon wonders in his narrative if the new arrivals could resist “growing up” into fixity and middle class security as he had:

I had misgivings about my lost generation, which is thwartedly illusioned and in revolt to such an extent as to be incapable of detachment. Out lostness consists in knowing
ourselves lost while viewing older or younger generations and types as unaware of their lostness and mediocrity. Were the boys of the new generation free of the sentimental complexities that once bothered us? With youth still in me I didn’t want to feel a grandfather while readjustment and flexibility were possible (11).

In addition to Glassco’s suggestion of a narcissistic desire to be seen with young men, accompanying this new generation gave McAlmon a chance to take stock of what his generation had a accomplished and perhaps, with decided measure, look forward toward merging his arrested development with theirs. Yet, as the fictional Sudge and Ross struggle as writers to produce anything and experience a string of failed attempts to romance women, they become somewhat disenchanted with Kit’s expatriate style of living. McAlmon as Kit reflects:

Ross might have been declared a true product of the after-war generation, but it’s probable he was another repetition of a biologic-psychologic type which exists and recurs. In his mental attitudes he had no patience with the lost-generation, barren-leaves-on-the-wastelands apprehension of life. Somewhere in him was hardness and disdain. His attitude toward Sudge was perhaps not so much sentimental as calculating. He wanted, maybe needed Sudge, but more important, he intended to avoid coping with economic situations if he could. At times, his belief in himself as an artist was so supreme and his contempt for money as any kind of a standard so complete that, however he solved the economics of life, he was justified to himself. But now, he was merely a helpless wreck (131).

McAlmon’s narrative portrays Ross as lost in a world that offers him only the options of either the aimless indolence of the expatriates or the static materialism of his home in Canada. Compounding this unhappiness is his mostly unsatisfied desire for Sudge. Although Kit initially
thinks of the boys as one in the same “twittering like love birds” in their own youthful language and everyone they meet gets the impression that they are in love with one another, it becomes apparent over the course of the narrative that the love is decidedly one-sided. While Sudge eventually admits a certain form of love for Ross, he never demonstrably pines for Ross like Ross does for him. Because of the disequilibrium of their desires and the lack of a social discourse through which they can make sense of their feelings or put them into productive action, their relationship falls into a state of dysfunction that the fatherly Kit constantly counsels.

Without the language to directly confront their feelings, the boys end up creating what Eve Sedgwick calls an “erotic triangle”, effectively projecting their desires for each other onto a series of other people\(^\text{18}\). The first of these, is of course, Kit who encourages their arrested development toward becoming adults and mentors them in the more queer development as individually-minded artists and pleasure seekers. Kit also becomes a confessional figure and an intermediary in the boys’ relationship. Thus, they confide in him the details of their other objects of triangulation. In an early conversation with Kit, Ross confesses, “Last spring we were broke, and ran into a dirty old Englishman who wanted to see a show. We took him to our room and staged a pose for him and he gave us two hundred francs.... ’The old fool’, Ross scoffed ‘didn’t know we were only pretending. We made noises and the idiot pranced around having a great time” (25). Although at first Kit believes they saw it as a joke, it becomes apparent that such a fond memory for Ross may have been based on the fact that within the imaginary space of performance, he was able to approach some form of physical intimacy with Sudge otherwise rare

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\(^{18}\) This idea of the erotic triangle between ostensibly heterosexual men onto the body of another was first and most eloquently advanced by Eve Sedgwick in her 1985 book *Between Men*. Sedgwick argues that in 19\(^{th}\) century novels, unspoken homosocial desire between male characters is frequently projected upon a female body for which they compete. The woman’s body becomes increasingly attractive as they sense the desire that the other man invests in it.
or forbidden. Ross further explains that with part of the money, they hired a prostitute to share. “I took her first, but just played around till Sudge got excited and wanted me to hurry”. Analyzing Ross’ statement, Kit thinks to himself “It was probably always ‘just playing around’ for Ross with the girls they picked up, I suspected”. Here, according to Sedgwick’s model of the triangulation of homosocial and homoerotic desire onto the body of a woman, Ross derives pleasure from the experience not out of his own desire for the prostitute’s body, but from the desire Sudge invests in it that he can experience second-hand through her body as a conduit. Ross’s narrative also hints at a certain level of sexual attraction to himself on Sudge’s part in so far as watching Ross “play” with her can arouse him.

While the experience with the lecherous man and the prostitute speak to physical desire, Ross and Sudge’s final triangulation of desire, which they structure around a young Greenwich Village type named Sanka, is a complex interplay of romantic desire. Talking to Kit for the first time about her relationship with the boys, Sanka says “Each of them thinks he’s in love with me, and last night I told Ross it was him I loved. He’s mad at me because I flirted with Sudge all day...I feel sorta lousy horning in on them, because—I didn’t see it at first—they’re in love with each other. Ross is with Sudge, and I just mess things up” (130). While Sanka sees her presence as messing things up, despite how much she enjoys playing with their hearts, for Sudge and Ross, her presence is a decoy onto which they mutually sublimate this love for one another that even she can detect. Sanka lacks serious intentions, but she plays along with the idea of marrying Sudge which outrages Ross, who shouts in reply, “To hell with him!...He’d be festering away with that cheap family of his if it wasn’t for me. He wouldn’t know anybody if it wasn’t for me. He’d be married to some little slut like his brother is by now” (130). In Ross’ quote, we see a stark opposition between the normal life route of heterosexuality configured as an anchoring into
a fixed, patriarchal space back in Canada and the more queer life he had shared with Ross. Ross’ outrage over Sudge winning Sanka’s affections over him has nothing to do with any desire he may feign to have for the girl, but they instead are motivated by the fear that the coupling threatens to disrupt his relationship with Sudge.

The question of Sudge eventually getting married looms as a specter throughout the novel. Ross and Sudge live off a 100-dollar a month allowance from Sudge’s wealthy father, yet Sudge knows that he stands to inherit a much greater sum were he to return to Canada married. For Sudge, this proposition creates a constant existential dilemma that would force him to choose a natural desire for material security and the stability of identity that would come from cementing his place in the patriarchal structure of his family over the foreclosure of his more queer desires; his unspoken love for Ross and his literary passions. This tension comes to a violent rupture in the bar when an enraged Ross pushes Sanka off her stool and Sudge comes into to defend her, striking Ross in the process. The punch pushes a sudden realization into Sudge’s consciousness as he reacts with instant remorse seeing Ross with a cut below his eye: “Ross, precious, forgive me. You know I didn’t want to hit you. You know I don’t care for her. It’s you I love, but you don’t leave me alone, ever. I want to take care of you, but you don’t work, and you don’t let me know anybody” (133). For the first time, Sudge puts into language his feelings for his companion.

After Ross flees the scene, a disconsolate Sudge confesses to Kit, still fixed on the idea of synthesizing some form of marriage where he can somehow factor in his relationship with Ross.

‘I want to get married, but who will look after Ross if I do? Sanka wouldn’t mind if he stayed with us, but most girls would.’

‘Rot, you don’t want marriage at your age.;
‘It would look better, and people wouldn’t have rotten ideas about Ross and me’ (134). At this moment Sudge reveals that he had similarly been triangulating his desire for Ross on the body of Sanka, basing his wish to marry her on the fact that she would continue to consent to this triangulation and would tailor the parameters of their married life to include a space where his relationship with Ross remains intact, but closeted to the public. This hysterical confession on Sudge’s part speaks to the difficulty of placing into language and social expectations a kind of queer relationship that lacked visible or socially acceptable examples to emulate. In the space of a few minutes, Sudge publicly outs his love, but then immediately reveals his hidden shame, stating that he does not want people to have “rotten ideas” even if those ideas may be true. He cannot conceptualize his desire outside of the normative framework that condemns and marginalizes it; he has only negative discourse to work within order to construct some sort of paradigm for realizing his desire and expressing it to the one he loves.

After his violent scene where he takes a patriarchal stance in protecting Sanka’s body against the encroaching queerness of Ross only to immediately regret his impulse, Sudge becomes more openly hostile to the compulsory heterosexuality foisted upon him in all directions. Later in the novel, Sudge tells Kit of visiting his parents vacationing in England where an argument with his father over the direction of his life comes to blows:

When he asked me what I was going to do with my life, I asked him what he had done with his and hoped I’d avoid being such a dull fart as he is...He said how much money he had made in the last year, investing money Pinky, my sister and I inherited in trust from mother’s family. I broke loose and told him that every cent he had he’d inherited, married, or had thrown at him and that he was such a rotten lover , mother had to take on sea captains to escape him. That jolted him. He didn’t realize I knew, or that I knew
he’d kept his ugly secretary as a mistress (155).

Sudge’s criticism of his father deflates the power that he lords over his son as the patriarch by connecting his failure at normative heterosexuality to his failure to produce anything of his own. Sudge pulls back the curtain that shrouds the real sources of patriarchal power, finding that the emphasis placed on reproduction and stability forecloses on the individual’s ability to produce anything of his own. Patriarchy grants each generation the same privileged resources of capital and the inheritors are merely tasked with managing their material domination long enough for the next generation to inherit the burden. Growing up means growing out of the creative agency and individual freedom that characterizes the arrested development of the artist in exchange for security rooted in generations of inherited repression. Sudge’s eventual choice to reject this inheritance of patriarchy and instead choose to inherit the legacy of the Lost Generation turns the tables on patriarchal norms, revealing that the supposed sloth and licentiousness of Paris as a queer space is not nearly as corrupt as the shell game of patriarchy that masquerades its inertia by shuffling capital around to make it look like production and masking failed sexual desire behind the respectability of marriage.

By the end of the novel, it is actually Ross that breaks up their relationship by taking a teaching job in Canada while Sudge remains in Montparnasse still writing and looking for romance. McAlmon’s novel concludes with everyone’s lives still very much in motion, without any resolution or vision toward the future. Because this novel was an unpublished manuscript and it is possible McAlmon could have had further plans for the narrative, one can only speculate if this sudden end was purposeful or if he had simply run out of steam. In the mid 40s when he wrote *The Nightinghoul of Paris*, McAlmon was fully aware that the story of Ross and Sudge’s separation that ends the novel on a melancholic note, would soon be mended in real life. Shortly
after this initial separation left Glassco alone in Paris, he would return to Canada and resume his companionship with Taylor until Taylor’s death in 1957 (Gnarowski xii).

Why does McAlmon end the novel during their short-lived separation? Perhaps this was McAlmon’s way of ending what he considered the golden era of the expatriate movement with Ross’ decision to “grow up” and yet to simultaneously perpetuate it through Sudge’s decision to continue his arrested development. In the final chapter, Kit returns from a short trip to America to find Sudge alone in the Quarter waiting for his newest female object of desire, Katherine to arrive. Sudge tells Kit that he thought he had settled permanently in Mexico, to which Kit responds “No, I won’t be settled anywhere for many years, if ever until the old boy pops off”.

McAlmon patterns his novel’s narrative arc without a resolution according to his nomadic lifestyle that also resists a locatable destination. While the McAlmon that wrote this story in the 40s probably knew where and when his itinerant lifestyle would retire, he nonetheless retains the spirit of queer itinerancy by resisting a fixed destination for the narrative to arrive to. He leaves Sudge’s life as an author and a young man in a similar state of limbo. As Kit says to Katherine: “What’s his next phase to be? He’s skeptical about most writers, and literature in general; and a bit scornful of philosophy” (181). While the real life Glassco would eventually establish a formidable literary career for himself, the young Sudge is placed in a moment of doubt where his future remains uncertain. Sudge tells Kit that he and Katherine are planning a trip to Morocco, to which Kit replies “Good idea. Perhaps you’ve both done too long a siege of Paris without variation” (181). Kit’s last piece of fatherly wisdom blesses Sudge’s nomadism with an almost like father, like son attitude. Then with the last lines of the novel, Kit similarly sends his self off, telling a newly arrived Englishman to Paris “Let’s go on to the Quarter. There’s an Irishman, several Russians, and a Pole there, all of whom delight in talking religion, mathematics, higher
thought, and the power of evil. I’ll locate one of them for you surely, and then I must be on my way, doing my rounds” (183). McAlmon encapsulates his entire expatriate identity into that last piece of dialogue. He etches into that period one last image of himself as benevolent patron of art, a weaver of social relations, and a wanderer, off to find drink and merriment. Given that this would be one of the last works McAlmon would write, it is fitting that after a career of detailing the lost queer souls of the Lost Generation searching for identity, art, and community abroad, that he would ultimately leave himself as Kit, as his last lingering itinerant of the quarter.
Reflecting on his career as a poet, visual artist, filmmaker, and publisher that spanned eight decades, a 90 year-old Charles Henri Ford stated, “What made me a surrealist poet was because the Surrealists existed before me. They electrified my output” (Ford as quoted by Kitaori, 2000). When Ford first encountered the surrealist group in Paris as a young man in the 30s, he had just completed his first novel, a Gertrude Stein-esque stream of consciousness story of the gay underground in New York, *The Young and Evil*. In imitating the experimentalism of Stein, Djuna Barnes, and Ezra Pound while home in America, Ford had already found the freshly innovative voice of modernist prose and poetry to capture the chaotic spectacle of the drag balls and gay clubs of New York. Once he voyaged to France to have it published, Ford’s writing did indeed become electrified by surrealism as he absorbed surrealist philosophy, aesthetics, and poetics and repurposed them to expand the possibilities of expressing queer desire through surrealism’s exploration of the unconscious.

Surrealism merged Freud’s theories of psychoanalysis and its dramatic re-evaluation of the human psyche with the revolutionary theories of Marx and the intellectual left to produce an anti-normative, amoral shock to a complacent social order. Surrealism endeavored to represent the true experience of human thought by wresting the unconscious from its repressed state and depicting how irrational, subjective associations lodged in the individual unconscious informs consciousness of the world around us. In turn, they agitated for social revolution based on the belief that the morality and reason that ruled society were based on an oppressive status quo more interested in maintaining order and authority than meeting human needs and desires, which exploring the unfettered unconscious can expose. Given psychoanalysis’ then radical theories of
human sexuality, including the idea that homosexual impulses are common to all individuals, and surrealism’s stance against morality and tradition, the world of surrealism sounded like a natural fit for a gay writer invested in charting the depths of queer desire. Yet, surrealism and its chief theorist André Breton, suffered from an unexamined prejudice against homosexuality that counterintuitively placed itself in the company of the bourgeois moralists that the movement despised. In my opening section on the homophobia of surrealism, I explore the historical context of this homophobia and argue that sexism and French cultural prejudices against homosexuals caused homosexuality to be conflated with the kind of predatory bourgeois, ideology that the avant-garde criticized. Because of this, Ford had to show that homosexuality could be part of a revolutionary project and work around surrealism’s shortcomings and supplement their antagonism toward queer sexuality with a bricolage of other sources.

Ford maintained respect for and found inspiration in Breton’s literature and philosophy despite his homophobia while filling in the narrow mindedness of the surrealist movement by conceptualizing a practice of surrealist poetics and aesthetics that enabled exploration of queer desire through three principle sources. First, Ford found constant inspiration in the paintings of his long-term lover, the Russian, surrealist Pavel Tchelitchew. Through their romantic coupling, they formed a mutualistic relationship that crafted a certain esoteric formulation of surreal bodies and desires made possible through the collaboration of painting and poetry. In the young, beautiful, and sexually daring Ford, Tchelitchew found a muse that helped liberate his expression of sexuality in his works as he turned toward male nudes (sometimes with Ford as the model) and anatomical paintings in the 30s. In the older and established Tchelitchew, Ford found a mentor and aesthetic master who could put the philosophy of surrealism into visual displays that rendered the human body in amorphous, malleable, impossible positions—mirroring a queer
feeling of inhabiting and desiring bodies of abnormal sexual and gender qualities. In my readings of Ford’s poetry, I trace his visions of queer desire and surreal descriptions of the human body to Tchelitchew’s paintings, arguing that their work informed one another to the point where Ford’s poems sounded like descriptions of Tchelitchew’s canvas aesthetics and that Tchelitchew’s art visualized Ford’s written queer poetics.

Second, Ford found inspiration to re-imagine a surrealism that supported queer inquiry by re-evaluating the influential texts and writers around the movement and the avant-garde in Paris. Ford produced new readings of the authors that inspired the surrealist movement such as Arthur Rimbaud and the Marquis de Sade (both of whom Breton treats as precursors to surrealism) by emphasizing how their sexual histories and engagements with same sex themes in their work is what gained them the revolutionary visions of the human psyche that the surrealists admired. Ford also found precedents for a practice of queer surrealism through two other gay French surrealists: René Crevel, the only openly gay founding member of the movement, and Jean Cocteau, who was not a member, but a fellow traveler and practitioner of surrealist aesthetics, much like Pavel Tchelitchew. Crevel’s philosophical synthesis of psychoanalysis and Marxism analyzed how repressive sexual morality in the familial sphere of the bourgeoisie served the interests of capitalism and how sexual liberation for all, including homosexuals, could help dismantle the division between social classes. Crevel’s work proved that homosexuality was not antithetical to revolutionary politics and philosophy, but instead they constituted another oppressed class yearning for social revolution. Jean Cocteau, on the other hand, was not often politically conscious in his work, but his influence on Ford as an artist, writer, and filmmaker provided a framework for a surrealist poetics of queer desire (such as in his film The Blood of a
Poet, his novel The White Book, and his nude drawings) that synthesized multiple forms of media—all of which Ford himself would produce over his 70-year career.

Third and finally, Ford writes against the homophobia of surrealism by calling on the psychoanalytical theories of Carl Jung. Although Freud was popular with the surrealists and he placed the libido at the core of the human psyche while Jung disassociated from Freud and formulated a separate theory of the unconscious, Ford found additional inspiration in Jung’s blend of psychoanalysis and mysticism. Through Jung’s theories of the collective unconscious, the anima and animus, and the process of individuation, Ford synthesized a vision of the homosexual subject as an eternal figure of Jung’s constellation of archetypes who sought reconciliation of the gender and sexual binaries that the sexism and homophobia of the surrealist movement policed. I argue that Ford’s reading of Jung resulted in a certain queer individuation, in which Ford takes Jung’s belief that the female anima and the male animus are innate conditions of all individuals as proof that all people are born queerly with traits of all genders and that gender and sexual identity are a question of human development, not degeneracy. In Ford’s queer individuation, the homosexual male does not endeavor to defeat or fend off the anima, but instead he endeavors to identify with both and balance them.

19 In the context of Ford’s work, two key differences between Freud and Jung play an important role and help to explain how Ford’s introduction of Jung alongside Freud as an influence created a new form of surrealist innovation. First, Jung thought of Freud’s definition of the unconscious as a repository of repressed images and sensations to be too negative and added to it the theory of the collective unconscious. The collective unconscious was a shared collection of archetypes and images common to all people that informed relationships and personal identity in conscious thought. Thus, in the context of dream analysis (which was crucial to surrealist theory and practice) a Jungian would look for archetypical images and symbols, which had a certain stable meaning to all people. Second, while Freud’s theory of the unconscious was characterized by repressed sexual impulses, Jung’s theory conceived of the unconscious as a force pursuing its own individuation stocked with the archetypes and symbols that inspired human creativity and inspiration. For more on the distinction between Freud and Jung on the unconscious, see Glover, Edward. Freud or Jung. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991.
Unafraid of homoerotic desire or a cultural imperative to define and contain it, Ford’s queer surrealism not only expanded the possibilities of queer expression, but he also defied the limits of surrealism itself and in the process fulfilled its mission to excavate and unfetter the unconscious in directions that even the surrealist movement itself prohibited or ignored. Ford did not deviate from surrealist principles, but instead took them at their word and reached deeper into the unconscious than even the founders of the movement had dared.

**Ford’s Formative Years in Paris**

“Paris is the aphrodisiac of cities”, wrote a middle-aged Charles Henri Ford in his diary in 1953 upon his return to Paris two decades after his maiden voyage abroad. While the now established poet and publisher came to Paris with Eros on his mind, seducing the Parisian ephebes alongside his partner of two decades, the painter Pavel Tchelitchew, Ford’s mindset when he was one of those ephebes, trying to make a name for himself in the city of Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, and Jean Cocteau, was decidedly different. In a June 26th, 1931 letter to Parker Tyler, Ford informs his friend and literary co-conspirator that upon disembarking from the ship from New York to Paris, he noticed that his testicle had swollen to three times its original size and that he could no longer walk without a brace and considerable pain. Either back in New York or sometime on the ship over the Atlantic, Ford had contracted gonorrhea, which meant, as he wrote to Tyler “no drinking and NO women” (149). Between Ford and Tyler, with whom he had just finished co-authoring *The Young and Evil*, an experimental novel about the underground New York gay scene, the interdiction against women was an ironic jab. In a letter to his mother from the same time, who did not know of his gonorrhea diagnosis, he romantically opined that “one can see that the beauty of Paris will grow on and hold one good and tight” and
trumpeted that he had not been drinking—this being, of course, the age of prohibition in America. Yet, the commandment “no drinking and NO women” was a damper to the image of expatriate Paris that he had grown up reading about in the novels of Hemingway and Fitzgerald. Although the expatriate lifestyle would have to be placed on hold, Ford’s time in Paris eventually had the typical afternoons of writing and late nights of boozing on the streets of Montparnasse, hob-nobbings with the stars of the bohemian world, and even women.

Charles Henri Ford was born in Mississippi in 1908, though in his desire to market himself as a literary prodigy while in Paris, he claimed to be born in 1913. By the time Ford reached his late teens, the expatriate movement had already made its impact in the literary world across the Atlantic, and Ford devoured the early works of Hemingway, Pound, and Stein that found their way to America along with queer French writers like André Gide and Arthur Rimbaud. In a diary entry as a teenager, Ford wrote “I hate contemporary novels and yet I persist in reading them. They are so shallow. With the exception of Hemingway, Gide and one or two others nothing worthwhile is being written in the way of novels” (97). Just like his contemporary (and later roommate in Tangiers) Paul Bowles, Ford cites Gide’s *The Counterfeiters* as one of his favorite novels of his adolescence, with its themes of homosexual desire, youthful literary ambitions, and an underworld of petty crime as an antidote to the strict morality of his adolescence in the south. As a budding poet, Ford sent out manuscripts to *Poetry* and *The New Yorker* and worshipped the work of Ezra Pound. Upon receiving a copy of Pound’s expatriate literary journal, *The Exile*, Ford wrote:

‘The Exile’ came from Ezra Pound. What a man! In his characteristic illegible manner he wrote all over one of his cards, back and front. I could make this out on the front:

‘nil desperandum’
Beyond admiring the literature produced in Paris at the time, Ford was also becoming seduced by the romanticized notion of expatriation and exile. Later in his diary, Ford quotes the first and last stanzas of Pound’s poem “Lustra”: “O helpless few in my country,/O remnant enslaved” and “Take thought:/I have weathered the storm,/I have beaten out my exile” (Pound as quoted by Ford 97). Ford included this portion of Pound’s poem one day after writing that he had received a rejection note from The New Yorker for his poem “Minor Tragedy in a Night Club”, saying “it was ‘rather too lurid’ for them but to try them again soon, etc” (96). Although Ford had a little early success getting some of his poetry published in magazines, he became increasingly frustrated with not having the liberty to write on controversial themes and in the modernist style he desired due to the conservative tastes of American publishers. Paris, where Gide’s homosexual themes and Hemingway and Pound’s daring styles were lauded, became increasingly attractive to Ford, who understood the need to exile himself from the states in order to pursue a literary career.

In 1929, Ford ambitiously launched his first literary journal Blues, while a student in the south. Within a year, he was publishing the same expatriate authors that he admired along with their contemporaries in the US. Through his journal, Ford began a correspondence with Gertrude Stein, whose poem “Georges Hugnet” he published in an edition devoted to expatriate writing. A year later, Ford left the south for the bohemian quarters of New York and immediately began to chronicle his adventures in the gay underground along with Parker Tyler, which would be published as The Young and Evil. On this period of literary and sexual experimentation in New York, Joseph Allen Boone writes:
On one level, as Ford later reminisced, the novel owed its inception to the fact that ‘at this time many of us had been introduced to The Sun Also Rises and everyone wanted to write a novel about their life like that novel.’ Actually, the experimental text that he and Tyler produced is not only stylistically but thematically a world removed from Hemingway, for its ‘lost generation’ is composed of the queer fringe that Hemingway’s novel continually attempts to excise...(Boone 255)

Hemingway’s expatriate novel with its terse prose and rough hewn, yet psychologically fragile men popularized the Lost Generation of young heterosexual men trying to piece together meaning in a world reduced to rubble after the Great War. Ford and Tyler’s novel provided a similar illumination for a generation of queer men and women who exiled themselves to the urban, gay ghettos, chronicling in a stream-of-conscious anthropology the semiotics and cultural practices of fairies, trade, and drag queens similar to that of McAlmon in Berlin. As Sam See writes, even Ford’s poetic idol Ezra Pound weighed in on Ford and Tyler’s project:

Ezra Pound similarly thought Ford and Tyler capable of creating a new generation when he wrote to Ford in 1929 that "every generation or group must write its own literary program." In spite of this encouragement, Pound would also tell Tyler five months prior to the novel's publication that "nothing new what bloody ever has been said or thought on the subject" of what he calls "bhoogery" since "the death of Martial. And it simply can NOT be discovered 2000 years later. Responding to the exigency of this heteronormative claim, Ford and Tyler use Pound's 1929 advice to subvert his 1933 reprimand. In accord with Tyler's avowal that "literature is and was and is and was," these authors believed that they could make literary and sexual modernism new by saying something old: by infusing literature that was into literature that is, and vice versa. As
Tyler responded to Pound's unencouraging letter, ‘Antiquity doesn't hold any patents on homosexuality: there is plenty in the modern fauna and flora—so much—that doesn’t fit into the greek vase pattern—not to speak of some freshening of myth’ (See).

See’s analysis of the novel concentrates on the construction of the “mythopoetic”, Ford and Tyler’s used Greek and Roman mythology as archetypes and allegories adapted to explain the practices and ideologies of the New York gay community. Ford and Tyler’s literary fairies exemplified Chauncey’s concept of “the fairy as bricoleur”, in their reappropriation of mythological archetypes to articulate queer identity.

Yet, what Ford and Tyler’s novel lacked was a willing publisher. Due to American obscenity laws and organizations such as the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, which had successfully banned Joyce’s *Ulysses* in 1920, their novel could never find publication in America. The New York publishing industry was especially aware of the dangers of publishing homosexual-themed literature at this time. Radclyffe Hall’s seminal lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness* had just been banned in England in 1928 and it faced a similar controversy in American customs court shortly afterwards, although it was never officially banned here. Therefore, part of Ford’s motivation for sailing to Paris in 1931 was to find a publisher for his novel, knowing that similarly daring works of sexual dissidence had found a popular audience among the expatriate crowd. Ford not only found a publisher in Obelisk Press, which also

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Given the rapid evolution of gay culture and politics in America over the span of Ford’s life, the cultural reception of the novel also changed as well. Ford touches on this in a 1987 interview, “The only review we got in America was Louis Kronenberger in the *New Republic* saying the book was “both authentic and alive.” That’s the only review that we got in America. Copies were destroyed and banned here, and even Brentano’s in Paris took it out of the window. But now it’s soon going into a fourth edition. The third edition was published by the Arno Press, a *New York Times* company! The fourth edition will have Tcheticlchew’s illustrations, which he did for me in my own copy but which have never been seen. Gertrude Stein said it created a new generation as
published the equally lurid works of Henry Miller, but his novel also found famous proponents in Gertrude Stein and Djuna Barnes (both of which are referenced in the novel), two “female goddesses” who he admired with “infatuated flames” (Ford 20). Stein provided cursory edits for the novel and declared “The Young and Evil creates this generation as This Side of Paradise by Fitzgerald created his generation. It is a good thing, whatever the generation is, to be the first to create it in a book” (Abbot 394). Meanwhile, Djuna Barnes wrote, “Never, to my knowledge, has a certain type of homosexual been so ‘fixed’ on paper. No one but a genius could have written it” (Abbot 394). Both Barnes and Stein recognized the innovative quality of the novel and its importance in rendering gay identity and culture legible to a new generation. Barnes was an especially influential figure in Ford’s early years abroad. Barnes publicized Ford’s novel and Ford helped to edit and type Nightwood, although it would not be published until a few years later. Just as Ford was beginning to make a recovery from his gonorrhea, Barnes was suddenly struck by appendicitis. Ford moved in with Barnes in her Parisian flat to take care of her, and there they began a year long romance. The co-writer of what many have called “the first gay novel” and the author of the canonical lesbian novel Nightwood somehow found love together in Paris, which illustrates how careful one has to be when retroactively applying our modern terms of sexual identity on figures of the past when their lives and loves did not line up neatly with these terms’ parameters for identity.

While Ford’s romance with Djuna Barnes would be brief, his stay in Paris would eventually ignite two loves that would last a lifetime. In 1933, Ford became intimately acquainted with the Russian-born painter Pavel Tchelitchew, and through him, Ford was introduced to the world of surrealism. Enamored with the paintings and the painter, Ford was

Scott Fitzgerald had created his generation in This Side of Paradise. It had an instant prestige and an instant banning.” (Wollmer 1987)
seduced into surrealism, a move that profoundly changed his writing style when he composed odes to surrealist artists and incorporated surrealist poetics in his poetry and visual art. In turn, Ford became Tchelitchew’s muse and the artist painted several erotically charged portraits of the handsome Ford, finding inspiration in his unabashed sexuality. Ford became the catalyst for Tchelitchew’s exploration of homoerotic themes as Tchelitchew visualized the abstract philosophies of surrealism. Although Tchelitchew and Ford were not founding members of the surrealist group, they nonetheless found surrealist aesthetics and principles to illuminate the possibilities of realizing and depicting queer bodies and desires by liberating the unconscious. To fully appreciate and understand the innovative quality of Ford and Tchelitchew’s use of surrealism to speak homoerotic desire and depict queer bodies, the context of surrealism’s counter-intuitive homophobia must be factored in. Ford and Tchelitchew did not simply guide the movement toward their personal interests, but instead had to re-envision its philosophy and method in order to support their queer inquiry.

**Homophobia and the Limits of Surrealist Thought**

Surrealism was dominated by men and reflected the presupposition that the surrealist subject as artist resided in the body of a white, heterosexual male. This a priori assumption of the heterosexual male body as subject correlates to a presumption of the female body as the object of the artist’s gaze. One does not have to delve too deeply into the surrealist gallery to see the configuration of the feminine body as the eroticized surrealist object. It is evident within the most iconic images of surrealist art, such as Man Ray’s *Le Violin d’Ingres* depicting a nude woman as violin, André Breton’s story of a love affair with a mentally ill, homeless woman in *Nadja*, Magritte’s framing of a nude woman’s body with a wig to make her breasts and pubic
region resemble a face in his painting *The Rape (Le Viol)*, and the opening sequence to Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali’s *Un Chien Andalou* depicting the slicing of a woman’s eye at the hands of her lover. The gendered relationship between the male unconscious capable of surrealist acts and the female object infinitely reconfigured and imagined by the male artist often resulted in a homophobic attitude as the suggestion of a male object occupying the unconscious of the surrealist gaze underscored the instability of this gendered relationship. The surrealist method threatened to uncover truths about the queer nature of unconscious sexual desire that few artists wanted to air in public.

Surrealism’s earliest artistic projects were experiments with automatic writing, a literary exercise resembling the stream of consciousness technique in which the writer attempted to put himself in a type of trance and write purely from the liberated unconscious. In the first *Manifesto of Surrealism*, Breton defines the movement as “Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner—the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern” (Breton 26). Automatism was practiced during early group experiments with hypnosis and hypnogogic sleep, pioneered by the only openly homosexual member of the original surrealist movement, René Crevel, in which he would “sleep” and unconsciously speak his visions out loud. Breton eventually put an end to these sessions when they became wildly out of hand and dangerous. According to Ruth Brandon “Desnos chased [Paul] Eluard with a knife while in the trance state and had to be forcibly disarmed” (206). Crevel too was linked to violent behavior during these sleeping fits, although according to his biographer Michel Carassou, it took on a gendered dimension. Carassou details that “dans les constructions fantasmatiques qui s’échappent de sa bouche, Crevel s’en prend à
l'univers féminin qu’il désire saccager. Ses victimes, toujours des femmes, présentent assurément le visage de sa mère” (43).

As surrealism evolved from a literary movement over the course of the 20s and began to embrace visual arts and communist politics, automatism fell out of favor when the surrealists embraced other methods like Salvador Dali’s more aggressive technique of critical paranoia in which the artist looked for hidden patterns, images, and messages inscribed in everyday objects. Werner Haftmann termed this branch of the movement “Veristic Surrealism” in opposition to “absolute surrealism, which relied solely on automatism. Veristic surrealism was “illusionistic; it distorts or oddly juxtaposes recognizable object in order to create a kind of dream image or hallucinatory vision” (MacLeod 263). While automatism privileged an investigation of one’s unconscious that waited for the image-object to reveal itself to the conscious mind, Dali’s paranoiac critical method emphasized an active appropriation of the object as mental image, that “the paranoiac mechanism cannot but seem to us the proof of the dialectical worth of the principle of verification, by which the element itself of delirium passes practically into the tangible domain of action” (Dali 218). Instead of the passive act of leaving one’s unconscious exposed to the free entry of the object-image, the paranoiac critical method actively applies the paranoiac character of the unconscious toward the appropriation of the object. Richard Easton criticizes this turn toward critical paranoia as a masculinist response to the fear of the passive position of the unconscious practicing automatism, “these ‘automatic desires’ had to be actively repressed, in favor of a more regulated script masquerading as ‘freedom’, giving the heterosexual male license to violate femininity...the paranoiac-critical method reveals the violence of heterosexual masculine desire which was legitimated by surrealism” (Easton 1992) The disjunction between the powers of the unconscious and the object is the product of surrealism’s
homophobic defense against opening the male artist’s unconscious to the possibility of being
penetrated by the object and thus ceding possession of the determining male gaze. If automatism
represented the possibility of the production of an artistic form that truly depicted the unfiltered
unconscious, then the interdiction against the eroticized male object represents a necessary
deployment of homophobia in order to preserve the illusory notion that surrealism could
represent the true unconscious and not have to deal with the uncomfortable possibility of
repressed, queer desire.

The most widely published evidence of Surrealism’s blatant homophobia is derived from
a series of transcribed discussions between Breton and other surrealists on the subject of sex
published in their journal La Revolution Surrealiste. Early in the first dialogue, the present
members are asked of their opinion of homosexuality. While notable surrealists such as Yves
Tanguy, Raymond Queneau and Jacques Prevert voice tolerance of same sex love between men,
Breton states his virulent opposition. Breton accuses “homosexuals of confronting human
tolerance with a mental and moral deficiency which tends to turn itself into a system and
paralyze every enterprise [he] respects” (Pierre 5). Breton’s intense preoccupation with blocking
the possibility of considering a homosexual subject culminated in the second session held four
days later. In the presence of Man Ray and Louis Aragon (who would not disclose his own
homosexuality until his elderly years) who had not attended the previous session and had just
voiced their tolerance of homosexuality, Breton accused the new attendees of the “promotion of
homosexuality” and threatened to disband the discussion if further consideration of
homosexuality took place (26).

While it is not surprising that a heterosexual artist in Breton’s time could harbor
homophobic sentiments given the politics of the era, what is surprising is that a movement
dedicated to deconstructing morality and bourgeois politics would explicitly name homosexuality as immoral, thus joining the prejudice of the very social mores they sought to disrupt. Jean-Paul Sartre picks up on this hypocrisy in *Saint Genet* when he condemns members of the surrealist movement for criticizing Jean Genet’s publication in *Les Temps Modernes*:

One would think in their undertaking of demolition they have systematically spared heterosexuality and respect for plighted faith. These values can, in certain moral frameworks and, in particular, in Christian ethics, be perfectly justified, but I do not see how surrealism as such can stand up for them. In fact, the great sexual orgies in the works of the Marquis de Sade almost always include homosexual coupling, with anal intercourse and fellatio...And what about *Maldoror*, what is he doing when he lavishes tenderness on the child he means to slaughter? Furthermore in the Spanish-fly affair, it is certain that Sade was buggered by his valet. How can the surrealists reconcile their admiration for Lautréamont and Sade with the contempt they profess for Genet? (172).

Sartre identifies two main hypocrisies. First, he notes that surrealism has traced its roots to writers such as Sade, Lautréamont, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud, who all wrote on themes of same-sex desire, yet in ignoring these themes, they compromise the very core of the philosophy and social critique integral to these writers. Secondly, Sartre anticipates a basic tenet of queer theory by criticizing the surrealists’ unquestioned acceptance of heterosexuality as somehow natural and, therefore, not in itself a politicized, social construction. Sartre demonstrates how homophobia undermines the foundation of their project by pointing out that heterosexuality reproduces the codified sets of norms, which perpetuate the Christian moral discourse that the surrealists supposedly despised.
In an October 1950 diary entry, Ford weighs in on the same cast of writers whose work inspired the surrealists and identifies shamelessness as what not only made their writing successful, but also what made their work resemble surrealism:

The sense of freedom which enabled Henry Miller and Jean Genet to write their so-called obscene works. They wrote without shame, as if talking to themselves—one has shame only in the presence of others (whether they are there or not in the flesh doesn’t matter—the shame may come from imagining them there, or their reactions when reading what you’re writing). Sade achieved that sort of release—where may one be more shameless and alone (rejected by society) than in prison? Baudelaire’s ferocious anti-social feelings made him feel so apart that he said what he thought and shocked his contemporaries. The isolation of Lautréamont let him live (in his writings) uninhibited—it was only after (this word nearly became ‘father,’ symbol of authority, author of guilt feelings in his son) his Maldoror was published that reactionary qualms set in (99).

While Ford makes no mention of the explicitly queer themes of these writers’ works as Sartre does, the concept of shamelessness that binds them together encompasses their differing approaches toward depicting non-normative, amoral sexuality in their writings. Ford identifies “shame” in a similar manner as Sartre, who in Being and Nothingness identifies the homosexual’s ingrained sense of shame and guilt as the root of the bad faith that causes him to deny his identity. For both Ford and Sartre, shame is the internalized censor of society, the super-ego’s law of the father that both prevents the writer from communicating the murkier depths of the psyche and sometimes bars entrance into those waters altogether. The father figure, and by extension the authority figure, becomes the gatekeeper of the unconscious and the one true impediment to surrealism’s mission to dredge the unconscious. Breton as philosopher opened
these gates, but as the leader of a movement, he policed them. As a budding, gay surrealist, Ford thus had to confront surrealist philosophy from the askew position from which all young queers must cultivate influences—knowing that the ideas that inspired and illuminated one’s queer conceptions came from a source that would also condemn those very thoughts.

While I agree with Sartre’s criticism of surrealist hypocrisy and Ford’s analysis of shame, I also believe it is important to sketch out exactly how Breton conceptualized the homosexual as a subject so as to understand how he could maintain this apparent logical inconsistency. Breton’s earlier quote about homosexuals having a mental and moral deficiency implies that his desire to negate the theorization of homosexual desire is informed by a concept of the homosexual as inherently antithetical to the surrealist project. Breton references homosexuality as a codified social identity, one that does not challenge its own social mores, but is instead content in the unreflective pursuit of its own sexual desires. This vision of the self-obsessed narcissistic homosexual suggests an identification of the homosexual with bourgeois consciousness in so far as it is presumed to have no desire to question its own social politics. For Breton, the spread of bourgeois homosexual morality is mirrored in the act of penetrative sex, as if sodomy could be reproduced not in the biological form of a new life, but as the propagation of bourgeois ideology. Sodomy not only threatens to objectify and then violate the unquestioned mastery of the

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21 While it is impossible to discern where precisely Breton acquired this view of homosexuality, it does fit a simplistic reading of Freud’s “On Narcissism” in which he claims that homosexuality is derived from the child’s period of primary narcissism. The child is unable to graft his libidinal investment onto the mother, in what he calls an “anaclitic object choice”, but remains arrested in a state of narcissism, perpetually in search for sexual objects that are an extension of himself. Yet, Freud states that this narcissism is not exclusive to homosexuals and play a part in all people’s sexual desires. See: Freud, Sigmund, “On Narcissism”. Freud on Women: a Reader, ed. by Elisabeth Young-Bruehl. New York: W.W. Norton, 1990, 190-195.
heterosexual male body, but it also threatens to do the same to the proletarian body that surrealism’s flirtation with Marxist theory attempts to elevate from object to subject status.

Despite his aggressive close-mindedness, it would only be fair to Breton to illuminate how his prejudices were reflective of the scientific, political, and literary discourses of homosexuality of the time. In a study on research on homosexuality in interwar France, Antony Copely presents the research of Dr. Angelo Hesnard, an influential doctor turned psychoanalyst who wrote on the homosexual psyche. Attempting some form of a sociology of homosexual culture, Hesnard depicted the homosexual subject as a distinct breed of individual whose erotic practices were structured by relationships of power over their object of desire. According to these beliefs, “homosexuals experienced a split between their sensuality and their sentimental life” (151). This, in turn, fueled an eroticism of dominance in that “homosexuals sought out a young man or ephebe” and that “out of a sense of inferiority, they sought ‘individus de basse extraction’, sexual partners from a class lower to themselves and to their parents” (151).

Hesnard’s concept of the homosexual constructs class-conscious individuals who fetishize class privilege and seek to express it in their erotic lives. Taking this belief as emblematic of the discourse on the homosexual body, it is probable that Breton maintained a belief that the homosexual possessed a bourgeois sexuality unfit for surrealist contemplation. Hesnard’s early work in psychoanalysis was particularly influential on Breton because it was Hesnard’s 1914 book *La Psychanalyse* that first introduced the young Breton to the ideas of Sigmund Freud while he was an intern at the French Second Army Neuropsychiatric Center at the *Hôpital du College* in Saint-Dizier during World War One (Matthews 17). For Breton and Hesnard, the act of homosexuality through sodomy was not simply morally reprehensible in concept, but it also constituted the fetishization of bourgeois status. The bourgeois homosexual sexualizes the
proletariat male body, thus turning the male body into a feminized passive object through which masculine agency asserts itself. Thus for Breton, the real-life exploitation of class relations found its symbolism in homosexuality as an act structured by inequity that threatened not just revolutionary goals, but threatened to infiltrate the surrealist presupposition of the female body as surrealist object.\footnote{22 As we have seen earlier with fetishization of “rough trade” in McAlmon’s short stories, the erotic attraction to men of the working class did indeed exist in the gay community in America and Western Europe. However, the sexualization of the working class and the exploitation of the poor by the rich looking for sexual gratification is hardly unique to gay culture.}

Furthermore, this stereotype of the predatory, bourgeois homosexual is even featured in the works of Gide and Proust. As I argue in my chapter on Paul Bowles, Gide’s treatment of homosexuality is often presented in an asymmetrical power dynamic, whether it is Michel’s orientalist desire for Arab boys or the inter-generational desire of a libertine “Uncle” for an impressionable youth. Proust’s epic In Search of Lost Time (1927) ends with the fall from grace of the Baron de Charlus whose decent into depravity leaves him in a seedy male brothel reveling in a scene of flagellation at the hands of a supposed murderer-turned-prostitute. Gide’s Immoralist and Proust’s Charlus would confirm the caricature sketched in Hesnard’s study for a public ignorant of the complexities of the homosexual subculture of Paris.

Concerned solely with the politics of the revolution, many French communists absorbed these scientific and literary constructions of homosexuality uncritically and at best thought of sexuality as unimportant in comparison to class, or at worst, saw homosexuality as a menacing degeneration brought on by decadence. The novelist and communist newspaper editor Henri Barbusse characterized “l’homosexualité comme un vice bourgeois” and a “perversion d’un instinct naturel” (Carassou 249). By the 1930s, Breton and the surrealists had professed an allegiance with the Communist Party, yet the party itself was wary of the surrealists and
impatient with avant-garde art and abstraction that seemed to distract from their clearly defined Communist Party political goals. The surrealist movement itself skissmed over this move, as members like Louis Aragon felt that association with the surrealists hurt their standing in the party. Eventually Breton had been formally expelled from the French Communist Party when the party grew impatient with Breton’s reluctance to compromise surrealist artistic principles for the sake of party goals. As much as Breton attempted to negate an association of surrealist thought with homosexuality, the communists saw them as equally decadent and non-sensical. In his essay “Vus par un écrivain de l’URSS” (1934) Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg wrote, “they go in for Hegel and Marx and the revolution, but work is something to which they are not adapted. They are too busy studying pederasty and dreams” (371). This quote struck Breton’s two most sensitive nerves and when he encountered Ehrenburg at the 1935 Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists in Paris, Breton physically attacked him and was stripped of his speaking privileges. This turn of events devastated René Crevel. Intensely loyal to Breton despite his homophobia, Crevel had campaigned the Communist Party to invite the surrealists to take part in the conference, and when he witnessed the violent altercation over homosexuality between the two causes to which he devoted his life, he committed suicide only a few days later.

Towards a Queer Surrealism

The question that the balance of this chapter seeks to answer is why Charles Henri Ford was attracted to a movement led by an artists that could harbor contempt for homosexuality and actively discourage queer critiques of heterosexuality? Part of my approach to answering this question, is to historicize the notion of homosexuality that circulated at the time and to recover overlooked recesses of queerness. In certain surrealist works, it is possible to recover a criticism
of heterosexuality and sexual repression from a heterosexual point of view. Thus, the inherent queerness and anti-normative practices of surrealism, which feel like they should be congruent with queer sexuality, are in fact latently present in their works (for example Luis Bunuel’s silent films, Marcel Duchamps’ photos as female alter ego Rrose Selavy, and Man Ray’s distorted nude photographs) even if they did not intend it. This is ironic because with Freud’s model of the unconscious as their inspiration, the surrealists would have been conscious of the effects of repressed homosexuality and could have announced its presence without declaring a homosexual orientation. What did not occur to Breton as it does to us today is that homosexuality could be associated with a revolutionary project.

There was one founding member of the surrealist movement who recognized the mutual interests of queer desire and revolutionary politics: René Crevel. Loyal to Breton despite his homophobia, Crevel’s work demonstrated through Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxist theory how the formations of homosexual and heterosexual identities were constitutive of the bourgeoisie’s hold over society. In his most famous piece of fiction, My Body and I (1925), Crevel lambastes the “false order of today, the penchant for inversion, for example, urging homosexuals to become heterosexuals, for if, in times of apparent uniformity, everyone pretends to accept the same rule, each of them desires only to free himself from it” (130). Crevel coined the concept of a “Psycho-dialectic”, through which he analyzed how sexual repressions inculcated into children under bourgeois education, such as the prohibition of masturbation, molded them into the perfect subjects of capitalism by castrating their sense of sexual agency.

Psychoanalysis helped us to see these things clearly…but I do not believe that it would be possible to reform sexual life in the setting of the bourgeois world due to their philosophy. In creating a sexual education, one must not act as a reformist, but as a
revolutionary. We know what kind of sexual misery and destitution to which the exploiter condemns the exploited. So much that the workers of the city and the country are constrained to the promiscuity of a hovel and dreadful conditions of existence” (my translation)

For Crevel, the reproduction of the population and the reproduction of bourgeois ideology were one and the same process, thus any serious critique of capitalism must investigate the process through which infants as future capitalists were produced. Far from Breton’s vision of homosexuality as a vice of the decadent bourgeois, Crevel instead spoke and critiqued bourgeois, heterosexual reproduction from his homosexual position as an outsider.

I engage Crevel’s work for two reasons: first, to demonstrate that a connection between queer sexuality and radical politics was present in the surrealist movement, if only Breton and others had listened and not opposed up front the possibility of a revolutionary homosexuality, and second, to illustrate the queer possibilities of surrealist philosophy and literature to which Ford himself would have been exposed. Ford first met Pavel Tchelitchew and Crevel (who was himself a former lover of Tchelitchew) through Djuna Barnes at a gallery exhibit. He writes in a letter to Parker Tyler on December 3rd, 1931:

There were René Crevel, famous for his poetic books: there is a little statue on Gertrude’s table of an obscene angel with a large head and tiny feet and short-muscled arms what she told me Crevel always had said looked like him; and a well-known Russian painter who knew D. [Djuna Barnes] and asked us to his place his name I can’t spell anyway he did this portrait of Edith Sitwell in front of her Collected Poems Tchichieff or something... (180, all punctuation errors are Ford’s)
Crevel and Tchelitchew, like Ford, were all acquaintances of Gertrude Stein and reaped both the benefits of her patronage and the brutality of her scorn. In the following March, Ford writes of a dinner with Crevel, the Duchess of Clémont-Tonnère, and Stein, detailing that Stein “laid René Crevel out for having NO “historical sense” and the Duchess wanted to know who did and Gertrude said well Thomas Hardy has and “ce jeune enfant là” meaning me” (216). While this seems to me to be yet another one of Stein’s classic literary judgments without justification, what is nonetheless important to take away from Ford’s record of the moment is the precedent of Ford thinking of his work in relation to Crevel’s.

In a June 1953 diary entry, Ford looks back at Crevel’s philosophy and merges it with his own vision of the homoerotic: “René Crevel (in Le Clavacin de Diderot) reminded his generation that sadism is characteristic of the male. It is also characteristic of the male to be buggered. I would say that where sadism in the male exists, there exists likewise anal eroticism: the more sadistic, the more masochistic” (157). Ford uses Crevel’s philosophy and the surrealist method of deconstructing binaries to make a claim that would have enraged Breton’s homophobia—that an investment in sadism inherently means a parallel interest and dependency on masochism. This flies in the face of the inviolability that we would assume a true Sadist would possess—in desiring to violate, the erotics of violation are freely associating in the unconscious and thus, there is a possibly unrealized but nonetheless powerful attraction to the concept of violation itself. The aggressive, masculinist stance toward the object of art and desire that the surrealists possessed is thus, by implication, inverted and reveals that a fetishization of one’s own violence represses or denies the desire to feel it. Furthermore, this fusing of Crevel and Ford recovers the image of the Marquis de Sade as the queer figure that Sartre accused the surrealists of denying. For as much as Sade cataloged the infinite spectacle of erotic cruelty that his libertines
perpetrated, he counterbalanced this with countless scenes in which the sadean hero invited penetration and pain on their self for pleasure. Although Sade has been pigeonholed as the patron saint of erotic cruelty, he was just as much invested in and desirous of masochistic acts. In recovering Sade as a queer icon through Crevel’s work, Ford repurposes surrealist philosophy and the precursors of the movement for contemplating queer desire and queering heterosexuality. In the process, Ford (with some help from Crevel) pushes surrealism past its homophobia and toward a greater realization of its own mission: to explore the truly unfettered unconscious.

By the time Charles Henri Ford arrived in Paris in 1931 and became acquainted with members of the surrealist movement, surrealism had grown from a handful of young artistic revolutionaries to a major presence in the international art scene. Although Breton as a poet and theorist maintained an ironclad grasp on the official philosophical tenets of surrealism, the movement itself had experienced several schisms, excommunications of members, and the fellow traveling of other artists who were not members of the group but were influenced by the aesthetic of the movement. The surrealism that Charles Henri Ford immersed himself in was a mixture of the doctrinaire philosophies of Breton and the eclectic media of the surreal but not officially surrealist artists like Jean Cocteau, his eventual partner and lover Pavel Tchelitchew, and those who had been excommunicated from the group like Salvador Dali, Georges Bataille, and Louis Aragon. Unlike the first wave of surrealists who began with literature and evolved into visual arts, Ford’s entry into surrealism was a process of taking the visual work of the surrealist painters (who had at this point came to dominate the public’s perception of surrealism) and placing them into the abstraction of poetic language.

In an interview published two years before his death in 2002, Ford names Cocteau as one of his early influences due to his synthesis of visual art and literature as a surreal poetics:
I don't know if I was a multimedia artist then, but I must have felt the idea of being one. Jean's the one I think of most when I think of someone who has done work in so many mediums. He did poetry, novels, painting, plays, cinema--so I coincide in some of those media--poetry, novel, cinema. He used to say--that's when you could use the word poet without blushing--"I am a poet in everything I do. I'm a poet in the novel. I'm a poet in the theater. I'm a poet in the cinema." You name all his works and he considered himself a poet in whatever he did. That sort of sunk in, when I read that. I felt that if he could do it I could do it (Kitaori 2000).

Ford’s surrealist poetics were foremost an artistic endeavor to speak to visual medias of art and to reproduce them in verse while correspondingly reading visual art in the language of poetry and to infuse visual media with poetic sensibilities. Cocteau’s own work achieved this synthesis of the textual with the aesthetic with his works in prose and poetry combined with his iconic line drawings of portraits, figures, and erotic nudes, including the surreal memoirs of his adolescent homosexual desires in Le Livre Blanc (1928). Cocteau was not just a mentor in poetic form, but also in his content a precedent for creating a visual and poetic voice for homoerotic desire to be articulated through a surreal aesthetic. When asked in the aforementioned interview about the tension between Cocteau and Breton, Ford claims Breton was jealous “because of Cocteau's accomplishment as a figure, an artist multi-productive and his homosexuality. I guess I'm one of the few that Breton accepted” (Kitaori 2000). Catrina Neiman writes in her introduction to Ford’s View anthology that “Breton also scorned Cocteau as a publicity seeker, but particularly, Ford said, because ‘Breton felt that Cocteau was getting attention as a sexual propagandist, and Breton was always prejudiced’ (Neiman xv). As Ford himself said in a late in life interview, “Jean Cocteau was Breton’s bête noire, and that symbolized the whole sexual ambiance”
(Wolmer 1987). Breton’s two chief foci of his intolerance was homosexuality and artists who achieved fame that outgrew his own. The former led to Dali’s excommunication from the group, while both the former and the latter accounted for why Breton never accepted Cocteau.

Despite Breton’s homophobia, Ford was able to maintain a working relationship with him and continued to admire and be influenced by his theoretical corpus. Upon returning to America, Ford became a leading champion of surrealism in the states and brought Breton and his group to the American art scene. Upon starting his avant-garde magazine, View, in the 40s that blended color reproductions of surrealist art, literature, and criticism, Ford “chose Breton because [he] wanted all the Surrealists for View, and [he] couldn't publish Cocteau without antagonizing Breton” (Kitaori 2000). Ford criticizes Breton for his “stupid anti-homosexuality” and refers to him personally as “not an icon to be emulated,” yet he still retained Breton’s influence both as a poet and a leader of the avant-garde. “When I became more and more immersed in Surrealism, naturally he was the model. He also experimented in other forms. He did these little assemblage. Many people found him charismatic. He was always shameless about his anti-homosexuality, but that didn't keep him from saying about me, "This American poet, Charles Henri is le poete prototypique." (Kitaori 2000). Although Ford published translations of Breton’s work in View and his first translated book of poetry in America (which had a cover created by Marcel Duchamps featuring Breton’s face imposed over the statue of liberty, a move that Ford admits was motivated by mocking Breton’s homophobia) Breton’s “discomfort with homosexuality contributed not a little to his aloofness towards View. He was known to have been intolerant of Tchelitchew and other neo-romantics for this reason” (Neiman xv). Although he maintained a working relationship with Breton, it is apparent that Ford, with his long partnership with Pavel Tchelitchew and his friendship with Cocteau represented for Breton an American appropriation
of surrealism not fully in line with his manifestos and concentrated on the articulation of voices that Breton himself kept suppressed.

**Pavel and Charles and Paul and Arthur (and Gertrude)**

Ford’s entry into surrealism was a seduction. While he was certainly aware of the movement prior to his expatriate period in Paris, it was not until he began his relationship with Tchelitchew that he became personally acquainted with the artists and intellectuals of the movement and began to identify with their method. Ford’s immersion into the aesthetics of surrealism was inextricable from his romantic relationship with Tchelitchew, and thus his coming into being as a surrealist was guided from its first moments by his queer desire. The relationship between Ford and Tchelitchew as artists became insoluble from their relationship as one informed the other. In his published diary, *Water from a Bucket*, Ford writes in July of 1953:

> Twenty years ago tomorrow was the beginning of what resulted in a twenty year relationship, constant association with Pavlik. I wrote Parker then, “I’ve found a genius.” Summer of ’33 I visited Pavlik and his sister (Choura) and Allen Tenner at their little country place near Lagny—Guermantes, the village was called. Pavlik did, or began (probably he finished it in Paris, I don’t remember now) the Red Portrait of me—in the red shirt, with the background of wheat like a strawhat, and the poppies flying through the air. Before the summer was over, Gertrude had me at Bilignin again. The afternoon I arrived, she found out I’d been visiting the Tchelitchews, she rudely told me, “If I’d known that, I wouldn’t have invited you again (161).

This summer marked an important transition in both Ford and Tchelitchew’s lives. Tchelitchew would break up with Allen Tanner and expatriate with Ford back to America in 1934. By
forming a relationship with Tchelitchew, Ford not only entered into surrealist thought and pursued what would become his most enduring relationship, but he also symbolically broke from his early literary influences. The exact moment at which Ford knew his mentor relationship with Stein had ended came at a surrealist exhibition:

Dali invited all the snobs to his studio to see a large oil he’s done called *L’Enigme de Guillaume Tell*: a cross between Lenin, his father, and William himself, with 3 legs.

Chirico came, and André Breton...Gertrude and Alice came and Pavlik turned his back: Alice spoke as if we were all still the warmest of friends. Letter from D---- saying, ‘So G. Stein has done the turn on you? I knew she would. Why not, she has done it to everyone else’ (346).  

Before the background of Dali’s most stunning exploration of patriarchy in his own personal and political life, Ford experiences a shift in his own personal constellation of influence and patronage. In a letter to his sister dated just a month previous to his time spent with Tchelitchew, Ford writes “Miss Stein thinks I’ve changed extraordinarily in the past year—I’m another person she says, more mature and at the same time more alive. Before, I was an object, nice to look at, she says, but now I’m a subject, and companionable” (329). Ironically, Stein recognizes and praises the very quality of maturity and companionability that would lead soon to the dissolution of her mentorship in favor of Tchelitchew. Stein’s remark acknowledges Ford’s maturation as an artist as he is about to make his entry into surrealism. Ford’s evolution into the position of subject places him in the same relationship of power between object and subject that the heteronormative surrealists presuppose, yet his companionability to Tchelitchew makes him an object of desire and inspiration without becoming objectified under the surrealist lens. While

23 “D----” here refers to Djuna Barnes. It is unclear why Ford leaves her anonymous in the manuscript and not others writers.
Tchelitchew was more of a “fellow traveler” to surrealism (he called himself a neo-romantic), Tcheltichew and Ford’s relationship as poet and painter, as well as partners achieved a mutual exploration of queer desire that alternately positioned each other as the model for their art without the violation of the other through the artist’s vision and libido that Breton feared would happen if he became an object of another man’s surrealist and erotic contemplation.

In this light, Ford’s poetry, in constant dialogue with Tchelitchew’s paintings, created a poetics of surrealism through which the contemplation of the male body as an erotic object of the gaze could be rendered visible. Although Tchelitchew was a well-established artist in the Parisian avant-garde before he met the much younger Ford in 1933, Ford’s influence on Tchelitchew’s work was evident as Ford became a muse for Tchelitchew’s evolution toward painting erotic male nudes. In a collection of Tchelitchew’s male nudes, David Leddick writes:

In the 1930s the work becomes more powerful, more strongly drawn and passionate in feeling. This may have been related to the entry of Charles Henri Ford into the painter’s life, who was well aware of the importance of sex in people’s lives. Ford was also one of the first wave of artists free of Victorian guilt. His friend Djuna Barnes once said of him that ‘he was as loose as a cut jock strap’. With their move to New York, Tchelitchew was at the center of the social world of wealthy homosexuals and patrons, such as Lincoln Kirstein and his friends. This was an environment that encouraged Tchelitchew to experiment, observe, imagine and explore the world of his own sexuality and that of others (9).

Ford’s daring sexuality and cherubic looks provided a muse for Tchelitchew to explore his own queer desires through his art while Tchelitchew in turn invited Ford into an intimacy with the visual aesthetics of surrealism and neo-romanticism. The paintings were a process in which Ford
participated, both as a model for the portraits and nudes and also as an adviser, confidant, and source of sexual drive that inspired their creation.

In 1934, Ford writes of their first months living and working together in Spain before moving back to New York, “It was hot, hot, the water was cold to swim in, the nights were hot, suffocating, but we both ‘produced’: Pavlik the series of Bullfights (three big gouaches) and I continued on a series of sonnets, begun at Guermantes (later to be published as *A Pamphlet of Sonnets*, with a frontpiece by Tchelitchew)” (161). It would be easy to idealize their relationship with one another, yet in order to understand how their relationship was productive of a queer surreal erotic gaze, the volatility of their relationship must be factored in. In one of the aforementioned poems written early in their relationship Ford reflects on Tchelitchew’s oversensitivity and mercurial temper:

One moment you are stabbed with a white flag
snow-blind pissing with fury, fence-leaper
the next no flower is too frail or fair
to keep your terrible delicacy in tact.

The gap in age between the two was a constant source of anxiety for Tchelitchew, and given Ford’s “loose jock strap” reputation, his constant fear that Ford would leave him produced mood swings. In return, Ford worried about being denigrated to the status as mere object, often complaining during difficult times in the relationship that Tchelitchew had “protected him like a father” and caused him to “remain so like an adolescent” (149). This power dynamic between Ford and Tchelitchew is reminiscent of the relationship Ford’s hero Arthur Rimbaud (acknowledged by the surrealists as a precursor to their movement) had with the older, married poet Paul Verlaine as a literary prodigy in the 1870s. Rimbaud began corresponding with Verlaine and sending him poetry at the age of 16 and was eventually persuaded to leave his family for Verlaine’s patronage. Ford artificially shaved five years off of his age upon landing in
Paris and billed himself as a literary prodigy, seeking out the tutelage and affections of an older Djuna Barnes and then Tchelitchew.

Rimbaud’s tempestuous romantic/poetic mentorship under Verlaine inspired his most famous work *A Season in Hell*, in which he alludes to Verlaine as *l’époux infernal* (the infernal groom) and criticizes him for his duplicitous, manipulative nature and his cowardice for mistreating his wife (referred to as the “foolish virgin”) and despising women, yet being unable to affirmatively escape the heteronormativity he professed to hate. “His mysterious delicacies had seduced me. I forgot all my duty to society, to follow him. What a life! Real life is absent. We are not in the world. I go where he goes. I have to. And often he flies at a rage at me, me, the poor soul. The Demon! He is a demon, you know, *he is not a man*” (37). While Ford had perhaps unconsciously emulated Rimbaud’s persona and biography as a young man, once Ford reflected on Rimbaud’s influence as an older man, he shows he is very aware of the power of Rimbaud’s legend. In his unfinished, unpublished memoir *The Charles Henri Ford Experience*, Ford notes that after writing his 1952 collection of prose poems “Drawings”, Auden had advised him, “Don’t read French for two years, Don’t read Rimbaud for five years.” (34) While his contemporaries saw Rimbaud’s influence, Ford admits his influence in his adolescence:

‘Hadn’t I once a youth that was lovely, heroic, fabulous—something to write down on pages of gold?...No such luck cried Rimbaud. Vice like virtue is its own reward.

‘...the adolescent rebels...’ Before dropping out for good I was expelled twice—once in my pre-teens from St. Agnes Academy, Memphis, Tenn.—‘A rotten apple spoils the whole barrel,’ one of the nuns told my mother. ‘What was unutterable I wrote down.’ Still an ideal, cher Arthur (34).
Here, Ford uses the opening line from the second to last section of *A Season in Hell* in which Rimbaud mourns the loss of innocent childhood after his relationship with Verlaine as an inspiration for pondering his own rebellious adolescence. Yet, in striking what will become a series of comparisons with Rimbaud’s legacy, Ford seems to be ironically positioning his banal, typical teenage mischief (complete with the nun’s cliche) next to Rimbaud’s heavily mythologized life. Rimbaud loomed over the 20th century as an icon of early queer literature, preserved forever in a James Dean-like state of perpetual youth because he quit writing at a young age and died in his 30s as a world adventurer. As an elderly man, Ford realizes that his life did not match up with his adolescent, romanticized image of Rimbaud, but then again, he and all gay writers would necessarily fail when compared with a canonized poet. Rimbaud has written down what was unutterable to him, but for Ford, such an accomplishment is an ideal toward which to strive and not a declarable achievement. For Ford and other surrealists, the unconscious was the unutterable that they wrote down, but given the infinitely deep, constantly evolving unconscious, a modest poet could only claim to have scratched the surface.

Artists who have died in their youth have their beauty embalmed and their genius preserved because they never had to live up to their full potential, may inspire the young, but who does an aging gay artist identify with as his own beauty fades and potential becomes the past? For Ford, aging meant inverting the Verlaine/Rimbaud romance and identifying with Verlaine, the scoundrel and villain of his youth. “Verlaine beckoned him to Paris—as I was later to do with the fifteen year old Philip Lamantia, when he wanted to drop out of school in San Francisco and come to New York. I met him at Grand Central and took him to bed that night, gave him a job next day at the View magazine office—I was the editor and we had just printed Philip’s poems, his first time in print” (34). Ford may have unconsciously been living a Rimbaud
fantasy as a young man with Tchelitchew, but in his later years, he consciously restaged the power dynamic with himself in the role of Verlaine. By all accounts Ford’s relationship with Lamantia (which happened while he was in an open relationship with Tchelitchew) did not touch the seriousness of the Rimbaud/Verlaine relationship. Instead, by referencing Rimbaud, Ford both acknowledges the presence of the Rimbaud mythology as a trope by which gay writers like himself conceptualize their relations and at the same time, somewhat desentimentalizes it by stripping it of the over the top romantic rhetoric that has enshrined it in queer folklore. Unlike Rimbaud, all other young gay men must age. Twinks become queens and Rimbaud becomes Verlaine. Ford acknowledges that, in reality, the transition into becoming Verlaine is preferable to living the Rimbaud mythology to its fatal conclusion: “But I could not follow him (Rimbaud) into his abandonment of poetry. And I don’t mean only written poetry—but his abandonment of soi-meme...He had once thought of himself as The Poet—“Supreme Genius!” (34) Ford realizes in retrospect the state of fixed narcissism that Rimbaud as a poet would forever embrace because he quit writing poetry at the age in which young intellectuals and artists are convinced of their genius. Rimbaud departed poetry before the years of worldliness and responsibility of maturity could sound in his words, humble his declarations, and perhaps grasp the complexities of a middle-aged, homosexual psyche like Verlaine’s beyond polarized testimonies of good and evil.

With Rimbaud’s A Season in Hell firmly lodged in his unconscious, Ford writes a poem that has a precedent in the use of surreal imagery for a young, queer poet to speak back to the volatile emotions of his older lover and mentor. While Rimbaud dismisses Verlaine as irrecoverably possessed by his demons, Ford vents his frustration with Tchelitchew and then peers into his psyche with a sympathetic voice. At the end of A Pamphlet of Sonnets, Ford reiterates his allegiance to Tchelitchew, “your fame I trust, your actions I descry/nor reconcile
the bull and butterfly” (7). The trust that Ford declares in Tchelitchew’s fame fuses together a faith in their relationship and in his entry into the aesthetics and philosophy of surrealism. The challenge of reconciling the opposition between the raging bull and the delicate butterfly which characterize the two sides of Tchelitchew’s personality sounds in retrospect like a prophesy of the next two decades of Ford’s poetic endeavors and personal life. Through surrealism’s mission to subvert the Cartesian dualism of lived reality and its outward form, between the conscious and unconscious, Ford became equipped with a philosophical and aesthetic practice through which he could contemplate and reconcile the bulls and butterflies of queer desire and identity with Tchelitchew’s art as his projection screen.

Ford and Tchelitchew shared similar visions of the body as an infinitely malleable and transformative vessel invested with erotic, artistic, and political desires. While both Ford and Tchelitchew’s works show the influence of the surrealist fetishization of isolated and severed body parts and rendering the unconscious of desire legible and visible, their visual and literary poetics of the male body aimed beyond the mere shock of the disjointed and obscene and gestured toward producing bodies through which the impossibilities of queer desire could be made possible. My reading of Charles Henri Ford’s two early books of surrealist poetry The Garden of Disorder (1938) and The Overturned Lake (1941) places his poetics in conversation with Tchelitchew’s paintings and looks for how their mutual influence rendered queer desire and erotic male bodies visible and speakable as a narrative. The queer gaze of Ford and Tchelitchew renders the male body visible and transparent, yet this gaze was not so much objectifying as it was liberating for the subject itself. Their work allowed the surreality of the unconscious to unleash the repressed Eros of the gay male subject from a body marginalized in society and pathologized by science into a psychologically complex subject of his own desire.
The Garden of Disorder: Ford’s Manifesto of Surrealism

When asked in a 1987 interview to define surrealism’s mission, Ford replied “Tapping the unconscious, the irrational, the incongruous and the nonsensical” (Wollmer 1987). This definition is perhaps best illustrated in the opening poem of Ford’s first collection of poetry *The Garden of Disorder* that bears the same title as the book in which it was published. Ford begins his collection of poetry with his own manifesto on the surrealist method. Addressed to Tchelitchew, the four-part, seven-page poem is couched in the rhetoric of direct action, listing off surrealist actions that all entail an inquiry into reality and conventional human thought through the surrealist method of investigation. Ford most clearly spells out the objective of this method in the beginning of the second stanza, exhorting Tchelitchew, and by extension, the reader, “to gauge the flight of reason/ according to the fuel of unreason/ experiment with the chemicals, music, and love,/ and not leave the weather to the weather-man” (1). Here, Ford voices an allegiance to one of the most central missions of the surrealist movement, the constant critique of reason and reality using the subjective associations of one’s unconscious, irrational visions as the guide. In his first manifesto of surrealism, André Breton writes:

We are still living under the reign of logic: this, of course, is what I have been driving at. But in this day and age logical methods are applicable only to solving problems of secondary interest. The absolute rationalism that is still in vogue allows us to consider only facts relating directly to our experience. Logical ends, on the contrary, escape us. It is pointless to ask that experience itself has found itself increasingly circumscribed. It paces back and forth in a cage from which it is more and more difficult to make it emerge. It too leans for support on what is most immediately expedient, and it is protected by the sentinels of common sense (9).
Ford’s poetry testifies to the liberation of experience from the bounds of logic and reason that can only speak to the external world and the alienating process of funneling experience into pre-received categories of knowledge. Logic and reason cannot speak to the other half of experience in the unconscious that operates by subjective and affective associations. Ford’s poetry attempts to place the drives and desires of the unconscious as it appropriates and invests objects with libidinal energy into a language of surreal poetics, using a language that understands the alienating aspect of language as a producer of knowledge and reason. He attempts to liberate desire with the linguistic tools by which desire has been heretofore kept suppressed.

In this poem’s advocacy of surreal action against normality, Ford prescribes the constant questioning of a priori assumptions. Ford encourages the reader “to bisect the raindrop, quarrel with snow,/ contradict those who know”, as well as to “catalog the good postmaster/ and those hobble after/ the plough of Christianity, or vanity” while remembering “to despise, despise nothing/but the mote of shame in your eye”. Science, religion, and social customs, all of which are founded on the implicit agreement of the individual to follow a certain doctrine of rules and behaviors that promote an ideology of legitimate worldviews, are all to be critically investigated and deconstructed to their constituent elements. Yet, Ford is not proposing some alternative epistemology of thought that will repair and restore truth and reunite humanity with an already existing reality. Quite the opposite: his actions are inherently irrational. Quarreling with snow does not produce a new method of inquiry to replace science, but it instead takes the subjectivity of the unconscious that, due to some sensual association with snow, could perceive it as something with which one could quarrel. Ford then encourages this quarrel as evidence of the individually unconscious, surreal value of snow that has been repressed from being a part of the subject’s legitimate experience because it does not fit within any accepted narrative, knowledge,
or epistemology of the object. In this respect, Ford’s surreal imperative of action does not attempt to dislodge the reign of reality by the substitution of a different more true “reality”, but instead, it takes the reality that exists and calls attention to the equally important unrealities that it produces in the subject’s unconscious.

When unconscious reality is put back into dialog with objective, external reality, surreality is achieved. Ford’s *The Garden of Disorder*, which comments on all the competing ideologies of science, religion, and politics that populate reality and quarrel with one another, unites them all in a discourse of surreality. Ford does not distinguish one discourse of knowledge production from the other, but instead places surrealism as the method through which one can unearth the unrealities that their overlaps and disjunctions produce in the psyche. Thus, Ford’s surrealism is not a producer of a competing ideology, but it is instead the analysis of the repressed, ignored by-products of all ideology stored in the subject’s unconscious. While T.S. Eliot’s own epic pronouncement of humanity’s chaos in *The Waste Land* mourned the apparent death of order and universality in modernity, Ford’s characterization of this same land as a garden of disorder sees in it an opportunity for an articulation of the individual’s desires to blossom in these cracks between reason and logic. No matter what epistemologies may surface and dominate the social imaginary, they will always create subjective and affective associations below the surface where the surreal will always reside.

While the surrealist movement had embraced the communist party and the revolutionary theories of Karl Marx by the time Ford arrived on the scene, Ford nonetheless kept any endorsement of a specific political doctrine or polemics out of his work. Although we can certainly read political commentaries, Marxist inflections, and calls for racial equality in his
poetry, Ford evaded allegiance to any political platform. Catrina Neiman argues that this is evidenced in his editorial choices in *View*:

*View’s* political disposition—to the extent that the magazine can be said to have represented a group—was individualist, anarchist at most. It was in accord with Trotsky’s conviction that art must remain free of political interference but not with the theory in which this was couched; that art will serve the revolution only if it remains true to itself. *View’s* editors thought it delusional to believe that art could serve any cause other than its own. For Ford, this was a matter of natural inclination. He felt that ‘the left could take care of itself,’ and he wanted to create a magazine that would be distinctively different from the ‘boring *Partisan Review,*’ something that captured the imagination at play rather than at work (XIV).

Ford would certainly weigh in on current events and political issues in his work, but his poetry did not work in the service of clearly promoting any political ideology. He was more interested in unearthing the surreality that political ideology produced. This interest in the surreal nature of the political comes into focus in the final section of “The Garden of Disorder”: “Lenin has withdrawn to a dialectic/ paradise and counts with sociological eyes/ the biffs of the nightsticks, the devil’s police”. Ford’s invocation of Soviet Communism through Lenin presents no clear endorsement or condemnation of communism as a whole. As much as the reference alludes to the political, it is also a reflection of the personal. Tchelitchew and his family fled their home in Moscow for Kiev during the October Revolution and Tchelitchew soon left Eastern Europe for Paris and eventually for America with Ford (Soby 9). Ford pins the now dead Lenin to a paradise of dialectic, but those who were supposed to benefit, the proletariat, are bearing the brunt of brutality at the hands of the authority armed with state-endorsed ideology to beat them
into accepting their own liberation. Ford asks “But how many roofs besides my own/ leak with remorse/ at liberty’s affliction,/ be the rain fine or course?”. For Ford, this places the question of liberation in doubt regardless of the social program or ideology that advertises it. All promises of liberation mime a dialectical process of freeing the good, the victims from the tyranny of the bad, the perpetrators, at the cost of the victims now having to accept this ideology and those who control it as its master. Ford’s advocacy of the surrealist method liberates the individual from the ideology of those seeking to liberate him, arming him with self-reflective capacities and reacquainting him with his own unconscious desires and a critical method for their realization.

While Ford speaks to the world of totalizing political doctrines, he weighs in only so far as they are received in the individual’s perception. Thus, Ford’s gaze is fixed on the individual in whom a surrealist poetics acquaints the self with its own division—the divided psyche of conscious and unconscious that allows the individual to have self-conscious thoughts of his own consciousness—the self monitoring the self. In the beginning of the second section of “The Garden of Disorder”, Ford suggests “Let us try dividing the impersonal and personal,/ imagination’s cloak makes us invisible,/ and spy unseen upon the habitation/ of deities themselves unseen” (2). Ford does not say to divide the personal and impersonal from each other, but to divide each in of themselves, thus dividing down what has already been thought to have been divided to its constituent elements in a pure binary. This echoes Breton’s famous image from the first manifesto of surrealism of “a man cut in two by the window” (Breton 21). By this image that came to Breton in a moment of hypnogogic sleep, Breton suggests a vision of the human psyche where a necessary division of self, a consciousness of the unconscious, is the only way in turn to become conscious of moments of surreality where the unconscious erupts and flows into the everyday reality. The self is divided, but through the window, each half of the
division is transparent to the other. By splitting the self, the entity which most craves unity and wholeness, surrealism then introduces the subject to reading a split into all objects, ideas, and entities that are presented to them as discrete, singularly solid and thus perfectly rational in their wholeness. In splitting the subject and by proxy splitting all objects, all things can be read as divided against themselves, thus open to be reconfigured, reconceptualized, and ultimately yoked to some other object that within the bounds of logic seems irrational, but can find synthesis in the unconscious imaginary. For a movement that described beauty according to Lautréamont’s famous quote as “the chance meeting on a dissecting-table of a sewing-machine and an umbrella”, an object can be divided from itself based on that with which it is associated. (263) Ford asks his reader to conceptualize this yoking of two disparate concepts in a synthesis, questioning, “What is the language of minerals” or “When the trees ride bicycles,/ do their haunches hear how they are headed, whence going,/ or is the Brute’s breath merely blowing,/ blowing? Who can perceive/ the sound of seaweed-“ (3). These lines do not merely suggest that these disparate elements could be thought of together, but instead take their pairing as an a priori and asks the viewer to comment upon whether or not a tree on a bicycle knows where it is headed or what language a mineral speaks with certainty that this supposedly irrational question could arrive at a revelation.

This interplay of two objects can be seen in a more amorphous form in Tchelitchew’s paintings. In an essay on Tchelitchew’s work published in View, Lincoln Kirstein writes of how Tchelitchew’s vision reads images imbedded in objects that can be brought out in a painting:

By use of metamorphosis, Tchelitchew has pushed perspective one further step...His metamorphosis is linked to the realistic forms hidden in the garden arabesques of Persian carpets, to Jerome Bosch, the monster Leonardo saw in a saturated wall, whose
coruscations formed a fluid universe, she his eyes saw shifting outlines and the looming forms they enclosed (Kirstein 51).

Tchelitchew’s vision adapts the surrealist practice of frottage pioneered by Max Ernst in which artists would rub graphite on paper over the wood grain of a desk or the impressions of a concrete wall and trace out hidden images or patterns. Here, the accidental becomes purposeful. The superstitious becomes a design. Ford comments upon this method of reading the accidental or natural as a message in the section of *The Garden of Confusion*, “When the desert rearranges the sand’s abstractions,/ is one god seized with the frenzy of design/ for pattern’s range, or the madness of mutation/- to change a second god’s creation?... “Who is there, who is there to say if the sun/ fakes indifference to the flock it shines upon?” Just as the grain of a piece of wood could be read, so too can the patterns in the desert sand be decoded for meaning. Ford’s poetic image of frottage places it within his on-going project of urging the viewer to read what is presented as an integrated whole open to all the subjective, personal associations it can signify. Ford neither endorses that the sand’s patterns are chance, nor that they are one god’s purposeful design. Reading the random as if it is intentional does not claim that it is truly intentional, though what can be divined from the random can speak to experience as powerfully as an object that intentionally signifies what was interpreted. Ford echoes this absence of authority to determine truth with the sun metaphor, stating that there is nobody who can determine the purpose of nature, but at the same time nobody can legitimately read against it either. Thus, Ford calls out the superstition of reading intention in nature, but instead of condemning it repurposes it (much like Tchelitchew’s dual image nature paintings) as an artistic and intellectual exercise in reading the voices of one’s own unconscious projected upon it.
Tchelitchew appropriates the intentionality of creating hidden images and messages inscribed in another image with what Kirstein terms the dual image:

Metamorphosis in Tchelitchew’s work is a dialectic in time and space, the investigation of a structure of fact by its contradiction. There is to begin with a thesis, that is, a statement: the drawn rendering of an immediately apparent object, as for example, a wintry Connecticut landscape. Then its antithesis—a contrast or opposite, such as a tiger’s head superimposed, the tawny fur indicated as sere stubble, the ice as dripping tusks. Finally, there is a synthesis, a resolution of thesis and antithesis which provides the essential definition of the whole (Kirstein 52).

Kirstein’s reading of a Hegelian dialect in Tchelitchew’s work finds synthesis between the two images only as a completed work on canvas. The two images are both present as wholes, but constituted by the same lines and paint strokes. In the painting Kirstein describes, the alternating strokes of tan and white lines are both the patterns of snow that have fallen on the field and simultaneously the stripes of a tiger. This method borrows from Dali’s aforementioned technique of critical paranoia in which the artist looks for patterns and forms embedded in or wedded to each other by the chance meeting of other objects that have no inherent relation to these patterns other than what the artist himself can subjectively generate from the powers of his own perception. It is this same technique that Tchelitchew used for meditations on the human body in which images of the body become inscribed in the negative space of a composition or dually constituted by the same lines that make up the foreground of the image.

This technique is exemplified by what is often considered his most famous painting, *Cache Cache*. In this work, Tcheltichew depicts what is at first glance just a gnarled old tree against a background of psychedelic colors. Upon closer inspection, we see the heads and arms
of children, drawn in the negative space between the branches and that the tree is in of itself made up of body parts. What originally met the viewer’s perception as the dominant object becomes, after close observation, merely a shape between bodies and composed of bodies. Although the title is often translated into English as “Hide and Seek”, the name American children use for the same game, the double inscription of the term to “hide” is more appropriate for the piece as we first realize that images of bodies are hidden in the negative space of the tree and then realize that once the bodies are noticed, the tree becomes more and more populated with bodies until the tree becomes hidden from perception by the bodies it once itself hid. The French word, *Cache Cache* with its twice mentioning of the word “to hide” reveals the process by which at first the image of the tree hides the images of children, and then, secondly, the tree becomes hidden as we see it is composed of those images of children.

As I delve deeper into more of Ford’s poetry that deals more specifically with surreal visions of the human body, I will frequently come back to this work in greater detail and trace the aesthetic of the painting in Ford’s poetics and vice versa. Although it was painted between Ford’s two early volumes of poetry, I nonetheless see *Cache Cache* as a complimentary piece to Ford’s manifesto of surrealist poetics in *The Garden of Confusion* as both usher in a surrealist vision of objects as always inherently doubled, or perhaps multiple. For Ford and Tchelitchew an object such as a body is never whole in of itself, but it is instead constantly reshaped by the perception of the viewer and its spatial relationship with other objects. In artistic collusion, Ford and Tchelitchew blur the boundaries of bodies and objects and then expand them across a canvas or page into a queer rorschach ink blot of desire. Additionally, Ford saw works like *Cache Cache* as a visualization of the psychoanalytic theories of the unconscious that inspired his poetry. In a December 1950 diary entry, Ford writes, “I tell Pavlik: ‘So that’s what you’re painting—
Psyche’—after I quote to him Jung: ‘...everything pertaining to the psyche has a double face. The one looks forward, the other back. It is ambiguous and therefore symbolic, like all living reality’ (105). In Jung’s original quote, right before Ford’s excerpt, he writes, “To remain a child too long is childish, but it is just as childish to move away and then assume that childhood no longer exists because we do not see it. But if we return to the ‘children’s land’ we succumb to the fear of becoming childish...” (Sabini 75). The psyche’s double face is informed by the present and the past, and simultaneously, that past is mediated by the unconscious experience of those moments and our present, conscious reconstruction of them. Ford saw, in a painting like Cache Cache with the faces of children blended with the branches and leaves of a tree, a vibrant visual rendering of what had existed previously only in the form of theory.

**Jungian Psychoanalysis and Ford’s Queer Individuation**

In his diaries, passages of Jung’s work become Ford’s map for navigating his personal erotic desires and for analyzing the sexual archetypes of those around him. Ford writes that “reading Jung does not help to calm sexuality—on the contrary [it] stimulates it...” (114) Even though Freud placed the libido at the center of his subject and the sublimation of sexual desire as the source of creation while Jung thought of the unconscious as independently creative outside of sexual impulses, Ford nonetheless privileges Jung’s writing on sexuality for its more mystical vision of the erotic. Ford compares the two, “Freud illuminates a corner, Jung a universe. (Of course from that corner, Jung set out.) The basic difference: Freud is corporeal, Jung spiritual” (115). In Ford’s comparison of the two, Freud is too scientific and limited to human cognition, while Jung appeals to Ford because he illuminates the individual and their erotic desires as connected to a mystical constellation of archetypes and myths that bind together the universe.
Reading Jung’s Gnosticism is a sensual experience. He is part psychologist, part prophet. Where Ford uses Jung’s spiritual vision to supplement Freud’s empirical vision, he also uses Jung’s universal archetypes, his theory of individuation, and the collective unconscious to expand beyond the myopia of the surrealists’ investigation of their own personal unconscious.

When surrealist aesthetics and poetics violently yoked together two dissimilar objects or concepts, the objective was not merely to be shocked at their sudden wedding, but also to allow the two to cross-pollinate, blend over into one another, and then to contemplate what new understanding is produced of one now illuminated in the light of the other. Taking Freud’s famous axiom that there is “no negation in the unconscious”, Breton referred to this equilibrium achieved between supposedly opposite concepts as communicating vessels (vases communicants). MaryAnn Caws describes the concept as derived from a scientific experiment in which “vessels joined by a tube gas or a liquid passing from on to the other rises to the same level in each, whatever the form of the vessel. This passing back and forth between two modes is known to be the basis of Surrealist thought” (Caws ix). The unconscious is fluid and the rigidly discreet quality of objects and concepts, which our conscious categorization of the similar and dissimilar endows with binary categories, is suddenly dissolved in the overturned lake of the unconscious where unforeseen attachments between logically dissimilar objects begin to flourish. Reflecting back on a decade of surrealist thought in Communicating Vessels, Breton stressed the importance of maintaining the purity of this method even at the cost of political and social objectives:

If, as had been proposed, we had limited ourselves systematically to a similar activity, would that not have been to emancipate gratuitously, by reaction, the various desires of individualization that until then had been contained in poetry, in painting, and in a
general way, in the various forms of Surrealist expression?...Surrealism, as many of us had conceived of it for years, would not be considered extant except in the a priori nonspecialization of its effort. I hope it will be considered as having tried nothing better than to cast a conduction wire between the far too distant worlds of waking and sleep, exterior and interior reality, reason and madness, the assurance of knowledge and of love, of life for life and the revolution, and so on (86).

For Breton, surrealism not just united the dissimilar—it endeavored to bind them with a conducting wire that infused them with power and animated their union like the bolt of lightning that awoke Frankenstein’s monster, a singular body composed of the harvested parts of others to form a unified consciousness. Breton and the surrealists had no desire to logically resolve the paradox of individualization—that the at once highly subjective experience of the unconscious is simultaneously and impersonally pressed upon by outside forces beyond conscious control as a mechanism common to all humans. Rather, this process of individualizing the general, a process that is in of itself logically inconsistent, defines the surrealist subject.

In surrealism’s ambitious dialectical process, two crucial dualisms remained largely overlooked: male v. female and heterosexual v. homosexual. For navigating between these two dichotomies in his work, Ford turned to Jung’s psychoanalytic theories. Given the popular models of homosexuality at the time Ford was writing in the 40s and 50s, Jung’s theories of individuation, archetypes, and the idea of an anima and animus fit how Ford and others perceived sexual and gender identity. By the 50s, the concept of a sexual orientation independent from gender identity was just taking shape. Previously, the dominant model of theorizing homosexuality was the concept of inversion, driven by the assumption that sexual preference was tied to gender identity. A male who desired men was considered to harbor the soul of a woman
on the inside. While Ford’s diary entries and his fiction detail a litany of homosexual activities and queer subjects that do no fit the model of inversion, Ford is nonetheless invested in how the homosexual subject reconciles feminine and masculine characteristics within themselves. For theorizing this balance, Ford cites Jung’s theory of anima and animus. According to Jung, the anima and the animus are featured archetypes of all individuals’ collective unconscious. The anima represents the collected feminine psychological attributes latent in the male psyche while the animus comprises the masculine attributes of the female psyche. The development and ultimate integration of the anima within the psyche of the male is a key feature of what Jung refers to as “individuation”:

The process by which individual beings are being formed and differentiated; in particular, it is the development of the psychological individual as a being distinct from the general collective psychology. Individuation, therefore, is a process of differentiation, having for

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24 In “Marriage as a Psychological Relationship” Jung goes into the following detail on the origin of the anima and the animus: “Every man carries within him the eternal image of woman, not the image of this or that particular woman, but a definite feminine image. This image is fundamentally unconscious, an hereditary factor of primordial origin engraved in the living organic system of the man, an imprint or ‘archetype' of all the ancestral experiences of the female, a deposit, as it were, of all the impressions ever made by woman-in short, an inherited system of psychic adaptation. Even if no women existed, it would still be possible, at any given time, to deduce from this unconscious image exactly how a woman would have to be constituted psychically. The same is true of the woman: she too has her inborn image of man. Actually, we know from experience that it would be more accurate to describe it as an image of men, whereas in the case of the man it is rather the image of woman. Since this image is unconscious, it is always unconsciously projected upon the person of the beloved, and is one of the chief reasons for passionate attraction or aversion. I have called this image the "anima," and I find the scholastic question Habet mulier animam? Especially interesting, since in my view it is an intelligent one inasmuch as the doubt seems justified. Woman has no anima, no soul, but she has an animus. The anima has an erotic, emotional character, the animus a rationalizing one. Hence most of what men say about feminine eroticism, and particularly about the emotional life of women, is derived from their own anima projections and distorted accordingly. On the other hand, the astonishing assumptions and fantasies that women make about men come from the activity of the animus, who produces an inexhaustible supply of illogical arguments and false explanation.” (201)
its goal the development of the individual personality (Jung as quoted by Jacoby 94). Individuation entails the development of a distinct individuality in which elements of the collective unconscious are personalized and integrated into a functional whole. According to Jung, for a mature heterosexual male, a key moment of individuation occurs when the anima is stripped of its irrationality and emotion and sublimated into more mature, masculine features such as sympathy. Thus, fully individuated masculinity demands conquering the primordial, crippling femininity imbedded in all subjects in the name of logic and reason.

All of Jung’s gender stereotypes aside, Ford’s adoption of Jung’s anima and animus and the process of individuation supplied him with a model of gender development that presupposed a certain inversion of gender characteristics as a precondition of human existence. By virtue of the collective unconscious, all men are born inverters with the same potential for identification with femininity, and thus one’s gender identity is a process of individualizing this innate condition. Jung specifically cites that artists and homosexual men are “usually characterized by an identification with the anima” and, in particular, an “anima fascination with his mother” (146). Not only do the homosexual and artist identities both resonate with Ford, but also in reading his diaries, his strong attachment to his mother is evident. In his diary, Ford considers the homosexual’s options for engaging with his anima, “The ‘anima’ when it appears as the figure of a veiled woman (Jung’s anima, the feminine nature in a man) has turned into its opposite: the symbolic representation of the phallus—to which the man is attracted when dominated by this feminine being of the unconscious. A homosexual may marry his anima, thus identifying, allying, himself even closer with it (125). Here, Ford performs a straight-forward reading of Jung—that homosexuality, either practiced or latent, is tied to identification with the anima. What remains somewhat vague, and therefore intriguing, is this concept of a homosexual
“marrying his anima”. This idea may shed new light on his romance with Djuna Barnes when he first arrived in Paris in 1931. Although Barnes is famous for writing some of the most influential works of lesbian fiction such as the aforementioned Nightwood and Ladies Almanack, she never identified as a lesbian and had many relationships with men. For Ford, a romance with Barnes was a rare, but not isolated excursion into heterosexuality. The love was by all accounts genuine. Ford was never ashamed of his homosexuality. In a list of witty exchanges with Barnes written in his diary, Ford recalls Djuna saying, “People are not much good in bed when drunk. You are, though—as a matter of fact. That’s because he is shy and doesn’t really like girls.” Then I said ‘I don’t like girls in general, but I like you.’ Then Djuna asked, ‘If I were a boy, would you like me better?’ and I replied ‘No! I wouldn’t like you at all.’” (104) Considering that Ford came close to marrying Barnes, it is possible to think of her as his anima. Given her enormous influence as an older, established writer and regular of the queer New York and Paris bohemian scene, it is possible that Ford’s attraction to her was not as a conventional, heterosexual sex object, but as a projection of what he himself wished to be in this way.

Jung’s theory of the homosexual defined by his anima identification appeals to Ford because it depicts the homosexual as a subject yearning for gender synthesis—a form of dialectical reconciliation the surrealism ignored. Jung writes:

25 Barnes famously stated “I am not a lesbian; I just loved Thelma.” (Lanser 165) Thelma, here, refers to Thelma Wood, the American sculptor who provided the inspiration for Robin Vote in Nightwood and Steve Rath in McAlmon’s The Nightinghous of Paris and Distinguished Air: Grim Fairy Tales. Some scholars, such as her biographer, Andrèw Field, take this quote literally while others such as Susan Sniader Lanser allege that she had affairs with other women, including fellow American expatriate Natalie Clifford Barney. (165) Whether or not Barnes had other same-sex affairs, what is important to take from this quote is her resistance to having her sexuality essentialized by the term “lesbian”, much as Ford points toward his relationship with Barnes as proof that his sexuality is more complex than the terms used to describe it. It is perhaps their mutual recognition of each others’ aversion to this fixity of identity that allowed for their relationship to take the form that it did.

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In view of the recognized frequency of this phenomenon, its interpretation as a pathological perversion is very dubious. The psychological findings show that it is rather a matter of the incomplete detachment from the hermaphroditic archetype, coupled with a distinct resistance to identify with the role of a one-sided sexual being. Such a disposition should not be adjudged negative in all circumstance, in so far as it preserves the archetype of the Original Man, which a one-sided sexual being has, up to a point, lost (70).

In contemplating an archetypical place in the collective unconscious for the homosexual, Jung falls back on what Foucault would later identify as a common feature of homosexual discourse, “a hermaphroditism of the soul” (Foucault 43). Jung’s theory replaces the inversion model that painted the homosexual as the tragic possessor of a gender at odds with his sex, with a vision of cohabitation and cooperation between the feminine and masculine yearning for psychic completeness. The homosexual is no longer the inferior opposite of the heterosexual, but he is instead a refusal of binary constructions altogether.

Ford’s attraction to this model becomes apparent in his diary when he references Christine Jorgensen, who grabbed headlines in the 50’s as the first person to become nationally famous for receiving sex reassignment surgery:

Christine Jorgensen’s transformation from ex-GI into woman has captured the imagination of the public. She is a living dream: she corresponds to some unconscious desire in everyone: the desire of the woman to have once known what it is to be a man, the desire of the man to sleep with his own sex. With Jorgenson, that sex has become another but there’s still something of the androgyne hovering about the personality of Christine (157).
Ford’s particular interest in Jorgensen contrasts from that of the public, which largely wondered what could possibly make a man want to become a woman and if they could consider Jorgensen a “real” woman. He believes her to have been fully a man before the operation and doesn’t question her sex. Instead, he sees her as the first person to have achieved a certain psychical wholeness by having inhabited the body and desire of both sexes. Both of these assumptions conflict with what we today know—that transgender people do not change from man to woman, but instead are assigned the wrong gender at birth and then spend their lives adjusting body and mind to achieve the gender and sex expression they truly feel. Thus, in this passage, Jorgensen is used more a metaphor for what Ford wants to say about gender and sexual fluidity than as a documentation of her reality. For Ford, Jorgensen retains the “androgyne” insofar as the experience of being a man still resides in memory and affect, even if they now sit in and inform a woman. Instead of individuating by sublimating the anima, she decided to become the anima, yet she is nothing like the wild, primordial anima that Jung describes, thus she has in the process turned her memory of life as a man into an animus. Jorgensen becomes emblematic of a queer individuation, by which a man is not born with an anima to conquer, but instead he himself is the animus that he must conquer or counterbalance with his anima in order to achieve psychical wholeness.

Ford further consults Jung’s sage wisdom in regards to one of his many “trade” that he picked up and romanced while living with Tchelitchew: “In spite of all Bert says about his longing for the female, I think there must exist in his unconscious a ‘resistance’ caused by his mother-complex. As Jung puts it, ‘If there exists a resistance against the real sexuality, then the accumulated libido is most likely to cause a hyperfunction of those collaterals which are most adapted to compensate for that resistance...(114). In conjunction with Jung, Ford has produced a
psychoanalytic theory of the “trade,” the ostensibly heterosexual male who seeks out sex with an
effeminate, homosexual male. During an era before the now ubiquitous gay panic and paranoiac
fears of questioned sexuality, the gay male was a viable option through which the heterosexual
male could ventilate his pent up libido. Here, Ford does not question Bert’s orientation even
though they have had sex several times. Rather, he sees Bert’s homosexual flings as a convenient
way to achieve sexual relief without having to come to terms with a problematic relationship
with women. Ford is the collateral that willingly received the accumulated libido of a
heterosexual man afraid of his own object of desire. Ford has identified with enough anima to be
attractive to Bert, but has individuated into enough of a male form so as to put him at ease.

In the cases of Djuna Barnes, Christine Jorgensen, and Bert, Ford expands upon Jung’s
theories of the anima/animus and the collective unconscious in order to synthesize a formulation
of queer individuation. The concept of the male born with the archetype of primordial femininity
embedded in his psyche presupposed the queer beginnings of gender—that individuated
masculinity was not an innate condition, but a question of identification. Instead of conquering
the anima through sublimation as the individuated heterosexual does, Ford presents the gay male
as a figure that nourishes and cultivates his anima and is not afraid to become inverted by it. Far
from the associations of degeneracy, mutation, and perversion that characterized discourse on the
homosexual, Jungian psychoanalysis offered Ford the chance to co-create a mythology of
homosexuality and to place the homosexual in its rightful place among the archetypes of an
eternal collective unconscious. Instead of being an invention of modernity and a biological
curiosity defined by medical discourse, the Jungian homosexual, according to Ford, was both an
enduring presence with a history that informed his individuation.
Queer Desires/Surreal Bodies

With Ford’s synthesized dialectic of the surrealist and the Jungian theories in place, I now turn toward an analysis of how Ford and Tchelitchew mutually constructed queer bodies and desires from these aesthetic and philosophical mindsets. In the poem “Pastoral for Pavlik”, Ford directly addresses his partner and employs surreal images of bodies melded with trees that read almost as if he were providing his own commentary on Cache Cache. Pavlik was not only Ford’s nickname for Pavel Tchelitchew, but Pavlik is also traditionally what Russians would call a young child named Pavel, the equivalent in English being “little Paul”. As the poem progresses, Ford reads Tchelitchew’s childhood into images of the pastoral. Composed of two line stanzas of rhymed couplets, the poem begins with “The tree with the umbilical eyes/ voids the dress of sunrise” (62). This first line’s image beautifully puts into language the visual experience of looking deeply into Cache Cache and gradually discovering the children’s heads outlined in the negative space of the tree and finding the features of their faces constituted by the branches and leaves of the tree. The description “umbilical” suggests that the child is still in a stage of gestation in the womb and is thus connected to a life-giving source to sustain it. The eyes are not yet mature enough for perception and thus reliant upon what the umbilical cord connects it to in order to survive. The branches of Tchelitchew’s tree take on the property of an umbilical cord in that as they are painted, they constitute a double image of branch and child’s body part or contour in the same way that a fetus is moored to and constituted by what the umbilical cord channels to its body.

In the second to last stanza, Ford further describes how the bodies germinate in and from the tree. “Feet on the ground, bulbs without beds, sprout with bodies, bloom with heads”. Upon closer inspection, the roots at the bottom of Tchelitchew’s tree are not actual roots but are instead
made up of feet that descend down from the base of the trunk and hands that grasp onto it from the bottom. On the left hand side of the tree, in the child’s head inscribed in yellow negative space, there is a dandelion that extends from the ground, its stems like the veins of the child’s neck raising to where it blooms as the child’s cheek. Thus, Ford’s words of blooming with heads become literalized in Tchelitchew’s painting, or quite possibly, Tchelitchew’s painting visualizes the poetics of Ford’s words. Ford creates in his poem a poetics of the body that acknowledges that it is composed of the material of nature and although it blooms with consciousness, it never transcends its material state. For Ford, the matter of the body is repurposed as an infinitely malleable piece of clay that can be stretched into all the figures the unconscious can conceive and molded in the space between the objects with which it cohabitates in an environment.

Ford further establishes this surreal reading of the body constituted by the tree a few stanzas later, “Twigs, bones of the boy you were,/ wait for the bird with the kindling fur”. Ford stages an ambiguous relationship between the bones and twigs by not making the two similes or stating that they are the same thing, but instead by listing them as two elements that mutually constituted the skeleton of the child that Tchelitchew once was. The “bird with the kindling fur” represents a further permutation of Tchelitchew’s body since both are constituted by a tree and a tree in of itself. A bird fits perfectly into this image because birds build their home inside the tree out of the raw material, the twigs of the tree. Yet, the twigs and bones assembled by the bird are not a place of placid domesticity, but they are kindling ignited by the “fur” (oddly not feathers). Given the benefit of hindsight, this image recalls the title of what would be his next volume of poetry *Sleep in a Nest of Flames* (1949). The bird’s kindling fur thus suggests that this nest that the bird assembles out of Pavlik’s body is more of a pyre to be ignited, thus birthed into life with passion, heat and a radiant spectacle.
If “Pastoral for Pavlik” anticipates the germination of the body that would become his lover and artistic collaborator, then the poem “I Want Not to Have Missed a Moment of You” speaks to the figure his lover’s adult body would grow into in the form of a swan. Written in short-lined stanzas that visually mimic on the page the long elegant neck of the swan he describes, the poem begins, “My athletic swan/ prints the blank water,/ breeding lilies/ mawed for homicide... “Ah, what a swimming/ backbone, a watersnake/ to die of snakebite/ of!”. Given Pavel Tchelitchew’s biography, it is impossible to read this poem that envisions him as a swan without hearing an extended reference to the most famous of all Russian ballets, gay composer Tchaikovsky’s Swan Lake. Tchelitchew held a keen interest in dance throughout his life, painting dancing figures and drawing inspiration from the graceful, fluid motions of dancers for the composition of bodies, which as Kirstein described them, “are trained machines for release into space” (Kirstein 52). I include the fact that Tchelitchew had creative and emotional investment in Swan Lake as a way to ground in reality the surreality that Ford casts upon his lover’s enchantment with ballet as he envisions him in the role of the swan. As we know, the swan in Swan Lake is the princess Odette who has been transformed into a swan by an evil sorcerer’s curse. She is eventually rescued by her true love, Prince Siegfried. This history of the ballet as an

26 Tchelitchew worked as a stage designer and costumer for the Ballets Russes in Berlin in the 20s and for Der Blau Vogel cabaret theater (Koshkin-Youritzin 9). Investment in dance, which Tchelitchew said “above everything else, delighted me”, was more than just an interest; it was an existential choice for his identity early in his childhood when his orthodox father forbade him to study it. Choosing to study it in secrecy, Tchelitchew’s fascination with dance represents at an early age an individualist commitment to employ his body and envision other bodies outside of the patriarchal mandate of compulsory heterosexuality and normative masculinity. Dance thus became an act of non-compliance with normative gender and sexual identities and a commitment toward investing the body with a queer desire that through the athletic, graceful poses and contortions of the ballet dancer’s body saw the body as infinitely flexible into the shapes of the imagination. In his biography on Tchelitchew, Parker Tyler makes specific reference to Tchelitchew coming to London to see “one of his most admired ballerinas” who “is divine in Swan Lake”, despite “to Tchelitchew’s distress, huge heavy laurel wreaths were dragged on stage at the end of Swan Lake” (Tyler 350).
amalgamation of German and Russian folklore that became the most famous of all Russian ballets mirrors Tchelitchew’s own biography as a Russian who went to Germany to pursue his passion for the ballet. The fact that in Ford’s poem, Tchelitchew inhabits the princess’ role as the swan further echoes the choice of gender and sexual non-conformity that Tchelitchew made when he chose to pursue his passion for ballet. Yet, Ford’s vision of Tchelitchew as a swan is anything but the weak, feminine victim of evil who needs rescuing. Instead, the swan is athletic and presented in an almost predatory language. On three occasions, the swan is couched in the discourse of the fatal, he “prints the blank water, breeding lilies mawed for homicide”, his neck is merged with the form of a snake capable of a deadly bite. Then in the antepenultimate and penultimate stanzas, Ford writes “Athletic swan,/ watersnake-necked/ muscled as a fish,/ scorpion-eyed,/...who hurls though/ the lake’s blue look,/ like a bullet to the brain/ or grow again”. Despite the potential of fatal violence that the swan threatens, Ford invites this swan to come to him, “Longing bursts as tenderly/ as a cloud would burst/ underneath the sea”. This invitation of the violent is not a wish for a death, but a wish for the violence that erotic desire wreaks on the individual and the disorder it casts on the external world.

This, poem, like many of Ford’s works, merges discourses of violence and death with erotic desire and pleasure in a poetics of eroticism similar to the work of the surrealist writer and anthropologist Georges Bataille. In his most famous work Erotism, Bataille argues that the erotic imaginary comes from the human desire to transgress all social imperatives of a civilization that guarantees safety through the orderly world of work. Mankind fears death and thus evades it by consistently laboring, consistently producing, and constantly working toward his self-preservation and his ultimate transcendence of death through reproducing the next generation. Erotic desire is the latent drive toward escaping this order and stepping into the indulgent
darkness of disorder and death. The embrace of a non-reproductive sexuality means a stance against production as a whole and a valuation of desire and pleasure without redemption, without needing to inject it with a reified value beyond transient pleasure. This mirrors the reality of all homosexual desire as it is intrinsically opposed to the supposedly natural purpose of sexual conduct as a means of procreation.

By couching his homosexual desire for the swan in terms of homicide, a snakebite, and a bullet to the brain, Ford fetishes the inherent disorder of homosexuality, with its non-reproduction and its stance of pleasure over production. In this respect, the swan that darts through the lake like a bullet to the brain could be read as mimicking the rush of adrenaline that accompanies sexual desire through the brain when it pushes erotic images through the recesses of Ford’s sexual imaginary. Pavlik’s body as a swan swims through the lake of Ford’s consciousness and displaces the water in ripples that stir his imagination and desire. The body of his lover is permanently ingrained in his psyche like the voice of the father in the super-ego. Yet, because water is perpetually fluid in its motion and the swan swims in this motion alternatively gracefully or violently like a bullet, Ford makes the form and content of his resource of erotic imagination ambiguous, constantly in motion, and susceptible to taking the shape of that which contains it and to envelop that which resides in it. Thus, erotic desire takes on its own properties of a body—a body of water. The body of desire is disturbed and shaped by the bodies that swim and circulate in it and at the same time the body of desire is an ecosystem (much like the tree of Cache Cache) that feeds and sustains the bodies like the swan and the water snakes that it desires.

Ford returns to this convention of envisioning a lake as a literal body of water in the final stanza of his poem “The Overturned Lake”. In a 1951 diary entry, Ford reveals that the title is
cribbed from some quotes from Jung’s *The Integration of the Personality*, “the waters of the psyche...’ (Jung)...the overturned lake: the psyche revealed, the unconscious discovered. ‘...our unconscious conceals natural spirit, which is to say, spirit turned to water...the treasure lies in the depths of the water.” (125) With this excerpt, Ford takes Jung’s assertion that, “water is the commonest symbol for the unconscious” and blends Jungian symbolism with surrealist poetics to speak the desire of the unconscious like a diver plunging into a perfectly clear lake.

Noiseless as memory, blind as fear,  
lake, I shall make you into a poem,  
for I would have you unpredictable as the human body:  
I shall equip you with the strength of a dream,  
rout you from your blue unconscious bed,  
overturn your concern,  
as the mind is overturned by memory, the heart by dread.

Ford extends the fluid, unpredictable capacity of the body of desire and voices his endeavor to make it into a poem. He comments on the process of writing bodies of desire into the language of poetry and acknowledges that poetics informs and creates the forms that this body of desire can take. Poetry does not merely describe poetic desire—it creates and invents erotic desire in a mutualistic relationship in which desire in turn makes poetry speakable. Erotic desire is a poetics of the body. He fortifies the depths of a poetics of desire by pinning them to the unleashed unconscious forms of dreams. This inverts our normal disposition toward dreams—that in the psychoanalytic reading of dreams (of which the surrealists were hugely inspired) the conscious structure of narrative and relationships of power are imported on the dream as its images and actions are packaged into these parameters in order to distill meaning from them. Instead, Ford equips his conscious desires with “the strength of the dream”, allowing that which the psychoanalytic method says cannot stand on its own to be the anchor to moor his conscious thoughts. For Ford, the unconscious desire of dreams does not need to be legitimized by the logic
of consciousness. Instead, conscious desire needs to be liberated by being fastened to the unfettered agency of the infinite unconscious mechanics of desire and image transmutations in dreams so as to “overturn the mind”. In both the classic Freudian and Jungian diagrams of the mind, it is the unconscious that resides below and beneath the level of the conscious. Therefore, if this model of the mind were to be overturned, the unconscious would reside on top and be rendered visible and knowable. This quest to make the unconscious legible is the core of surrealist philosophy and art, and in Ford’s poetry, it is describing the queering capacity of the erotic that overturns the conscious mind.

In both “I Want Not to Miss a Moment of You” and “The Overturned Lake”, Ford weaves an extended metaphor of the body out of mapping the body’s circulatory system. In the sixth stanza of the former poem, Ford writes “Network of bloodvessels,/ the cape to gather you/ unravels around you:/ abbreviates death, to/ repeat the excavation”. The circulatory system is treated as another structure of the body that can be reconfigured under the poetic gaze, both in its form and in its metaphoric possibilities. Ford’s poetic gaze unravels the body through its circulatory system like a sweater in what he terms an act of excavation—a penetration of the body that does not seem to get to some essential core, but instead relishes the act of taking the body apart and putting it back together again. Ford’s meditation of the poetic possibilities of the circulatory system coincided with Pavel Tchelitchew’s anatomical paintings of the circulatory and nervous system of the body. In these works, Tchelitchew paints male bodies stripped of their skin, yet held together as a figure by the tightly wound network of arteries, veins, and nerves.

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27 This concept has traditionally been explained by the “iceberg model” in which a drawing of an iceberg is labeled with parts of the ego and superego at the tip of the iceberg visible above the water while the unconscious part is completely underwater. Jung’s model is similar, but the unconscious is divided into a personal and collective unconscious as mentioned earlier. In psychoanalysis, consciousness via the ego and superego is just the tip of the iceberg and the analyst must dive beneath the surface to access the unconscious.
While the meat of the body is rendered in gloomy or dark hues, the circulatory and nervous systems are electric in neon oranges, reds, and yellows. In this form, Tchelitchew re-conceptualizes the basic composition of the human body. Instead of a machine built on cogs and belts of organs and bones, Tchelitchew’s bodies contain miles of tightly coiled glowing wires transmitting thought, perception, sensation, and emotion like electricity throughout its circuitry. In his biography on Tchelitchew, Parker Tyler details the mutual influence Ford and Tchelitchew had on each other in envisioning the circulatory and nervous system of the body:

Truthfully, he had been terribly bored with studying what he decided was essential to his new style, the exact relative position of nerves, muscles, veins, and arteries, so as to visualize them simultaneously in depth. Since they overlap in a most involuted way, the problem of transparency quickly became acutely technical. When he first mentions his exasperated impatience to Ford, the poet earns his gratitude with the suggestion that he not try to put them all in at once. No! Art is selective. But more than that, it is transcendental. This means he will have to find a way of representing anatomic totality without being literal (465).

The idea of not literally representing the body’s anatomy functions both in the sense of not sketching it perfectly realistically and in the sense of not explaining it in a way that would correspond to the face value of the words to describe it (to mean literally). Ford’s depiction and description of the body in poetry are inherently not literal; one obviously cannot unravel blood vessels. Thus, Ford’s suggestion asks Tchelitchew to paint the anatomy with the vision of poetics and not the scientific gaze that, as Foucault reminds us, renders the body legible to a medical discourse whose gaze is antithetical to the poetic gaze.
In a September 1948 diary entry, Ford extends Tcheltichew’s aesthetic theory of bodily composition to encompass the psychology of the subject and, in the occasions when the model is Ford himself, their relationship:

His theory is that the human being—in art as well as in life—has been broken to pieces. To put the pieces together, reconstitute l’être humain, not merely the surface must be painted, but the entire man, transparent. And if all the parts painted transparently are painted flatly enough, the figure will seem to ‘turn’ i.e. sometimes it is looking one way, then the opposite way. To ‘put together’—Pavlik says he’s always done that, says he did that to me, and holds me together too—that I would fly off in a thousand directions if it weren’t for him (7).

While Tchelitchew was interested in wiring and winding the body, Ford’s poetry sought to unwind and deconstruct Tchelitchew’s network. Ford asserts the infinite ability to reconfigure the body from the last two lines of the penultimate stanza “like a bullet to the brain/ oh grow again” to his last stanza’s conclusion of rebirth and metamorphosis “from pod to drake,/ from frog to feather,/ as from sperm to boy, so to now from never”. Here, the bullet to the brain does not kill. The indulgence of desire and breaking of the erotic taboo does not bring death, and the unraveling of the circulatory system and excavation of the body does not murder the body. Like Sade’s libertines that can infinitely brutalize or murder the same victim only to have their body reconstitute itself pristine and virginal, Ford’s erotic imaginary understands that desire will always reconstitute itself after jouissance and the object of desire will rise again.

Similar usages of the circulatory system are prevalent in the poems of his first two books. In “The Bad Habit (for Poe)” Ford writes:

Drug of the incomprehensible
engender the freaks of desire.
The bleeding statue, the violin’s hair,  
the river of fire:  

the blood grows, the hair flows, the river groans  
from the veins, from the skin, by the home of the child  
pulled and repelled by Bloody Bones;  
renewal of the swoon. (22)

Once again, the circulatory system becomes a system of canals that channel desire through the body. Fetishized objects with a libidinal investment such as the statue, the violin, and the hair take on liquid properties and circulate throughout the body. In this case however, the circulation of desire becomes a circulation of torment as the flow of blood is likened to the river Styx in hell. That which inspires torment, torture, and sin flows scaldingly through the same channels that the more peaceful, metaphysical objects of desire in other poems also flow.

In “Winter Solstice”, Ford repurposes the image of veins for an extended metaphor struck between a tree leaf and its veins for the body, “The leaf scraped of energy is veined/ to formulate a branch. The seismograph/ turned to waves modeled like a long sigh” (29). Here, the dried leaf provides the image for what happens when desire, energy, or any source of a psychic drive throughout a system dries up. The leaf’s pattern of veins, now more pronounced as they are desiccated, is like a metonymy for the life of the tree and the directions it grew—and as a microcosm for the tree, the leaf stands in for the directions of energy flows of greater macrocosms, as if the leaf were the paper upon which a seismograph charted the tectonic rumblings of the Earth itself. That the seismic activity of the Earth models the cadences of a human sigh speaks to a series of microcosms in which the body of plant, the body of man, and the body of earth all flow through the same waves of energy whose aftermath can be mapped out in the veins of the leaf. This reading of the veins of a leaf like the afterlife of the body recalls Tchelitchew’s *Cache Cache* in which we see the roots and branches of the tree form into the
outline and veins of the arms that appear to be cradling the children’s heads. In Tchelitchew’s painting, we see the birth and implied growth of this overlap of tree veins and the human circulatory system; in Ford, we see its death and afterlife, or at least its period of dormancy in a winter of exhaustion.

In “The Overturned Lake”, Ford revisits the vision of the circulatory system: “I should like to pick you up, as if you were a woman of water,/ hold you against the light and see your veins flow/ with fishes; reveal the animal-flowers that rise/ nightlike beneath your eyes” (64). Here, Ford takes the fluid body of desire represented in the lake and personifies its currents and ripples as a circulatory system that channels fish. While the fish do not stand in for any specific object, the fish nonetheless creates the image of distinct, living objects rushing through the veins, thus opening up the possibility of anything being able to flow through the veins. The circulatory system becomes a metaphorical channel for what circulates in the body—for the ideas, images, and their corresponding objects that flow in and out of consciousness and produce an emotional affect throughout the body. Ford previously explored the similarity of fish swimming in patterns and the circulatory system in the poem “Sea-Catch” in The Garden of Disorder. The poem begins, “The nerves are fishes caught in the mind’s net,/ the net of the mind that is stronger/ than the teeth of the sea-devil” (71). Instead of a network of blood flow, Ford concentrates on a network of sensation. Yet, by figuring the nerves as fishes caught in a net, Ford’s nerves are not a stable anatomical map, but free moving vessels capable of detachment and an independent will to pleasure. But, what keeps these nerves in a relatively stable formation is that they are caught, thus kept in order and kept in abeyance by the rationalizing order of the mind. These nerves do not seem to be content in their place, but instead struggle against the net to be liberated and thus express to the body their pure, unreasoned, unmitigated sensation.
Ford further populates the sea with a bestiary of aquatic and non-aquatic animals situated in their relationship inside or outside of the net. Ford writes, “The batfish the catfish the sea-urchins and/ ravens/ cross paths and stretch the net but the net/ holds Pegasus/ and chimeras, fish of the sea who bump their/ heads against the windowpanes of water”. Animals both real and mythological, strain and pull at the net, but regardless of size, dimensions of the body, or any supernatural power the Pegasus and chimeras may have, they are held at bay and intermingle. In this respect, the mind’s net mirrors the function of the super ego, which in Freud’s theory and illustrations, monitors the subject’s psyche and keeps their ego and id in check according to the law of the father; the social order. The net, which I see fully enveloping the brain, keeps the products of the mind, some practical, some fantastical, from slipping out unrestrainedly and wreaking havoc on the external world: “If the/ minnows of/ desire escape they are not missed they are so/ numerous: they will perish before time’s/ watery mouth/ cuts with its teeth of salt keener than the/ talons of the sea-devil/ the mind’s mesh, infrangible as the rainbow/ and as frail”. These minnows of desire that are unmissed and fated to perish in the external world runs counter to the project of the emancipation of unconscious desire through the body that the rest of Ford’s poems espouse. Perhaps, Ford is speaking on behalf of the untapped potential of the unconscious and its creative desires—all that manages to escape from the constraints of the super-ego and the restrictions of the social order are but harmless minnows compared to the monstrous, fantastical forms that struggle in the net. Ford’s minnows of desire are transient articulations of pleasure. Once escaped and articulated in the form of an act, their desire is brief. It does not spawn, does not multiply, but almost delights in their ephemeral nature.

Ford continues this metaphoric attachment of desire to the bodies of marine life in the poem “Undersea Disturbance on Times Square”. Although ostensibly a tale coded in
heterosexuality and the realization during puberty of sexual attraction between teenage boys and girls, Ford’s surreal vision of whales washing up on the streets of Times Square nonetheless places the logic of heterosexuality under the microscope. In a December 1956 diary entry, Ford identifies adolescent sexuality as one of the few avenues of shock value still available to the surrealists. “Characteristic of our age (Henry James’s The Turn of the Screw a forerunner): more and more interest in the perversity of children. To shock now, the child must be involved—we are no longer capable of being moved-to-shock by a perverse adult. Example in painting: Balthus, more shocking than Dali. Most shocking movie: Bunuel and his Mexican boys (Los Olvidados). The child is all” (224). Interest in childhood sexuality was also, arguably, the most shocking and controversial element of Freud’s psychoanalytic method. By looking for disruptions in the subject’s psychosexual development during childhood as the primary locus of repressed traumas that erupt into personality disorders, Freud’s method disturbed notions of Victorian propriety (much like James did as Ford notes) as he revealed that children start from a position of perversity and are socialized into their sexualities instead of being pure and innocent vessels corrupted by the perversity of society. Ford recognizes this same mechanism of social repression in the poem—that normative sexuality is what is impressed upon already existing childhood sexuality. The shock is that the child possesses sexuality, and thus, individual agency.

Beginning the poem, Ford writes, “The Whales of longing flung themselves ashore/ on the jagged rocks of the five-and ten-cent store;/ schoolboys fishing in the street of the undefined/ heard the great jets spouting among the valentines” (72). Here, the whales function like the proverbial elephant in the room. For the schoolboys, this elephant that can no longer be ignored is the well of sexual desire newly springing in their bodies and erupting like water through the blowholes of the whales. Still, Ford allows for a space to consider the polymorphous perversity
of the boys before they hit puberty and become acquainted with their objects of desire. They fish “in the streets of the undefined”, entailing that they have a libidinal desire cast out toward another object (and are thus past the narcissistic stage), but they are still unfamiliar with what body should accompany this desire. Yet, these whales that are eventually reeled in are not of an abstract sense of desire, but are specifically encoded by the heterosexual imperative in the forms that desire may legitimately take, “whales as susceptible as little girls/wallowed on the counter strewn with false pearls;/schoolboys fishing in the furtive air of reason/ reported the occurrence all in due season”. Here, the whales are coded as feminine and that this visual, public manifestation of these schoolboy’s desire is matching the forms that the heterosexual imperative society foists on them and are this in “due season”. For these boys, the mating season of the whales is progressing as designed and slowly interpolating them through their desire into the social roles they must occupy as adults in normative society. However, in Ford’s fable, not every boy comes out alive as a heterosexual subject, “but one of them had dared put desire on his hook,/ he cast his line with a pitiful look./ Scientists who studied the mass suicide/ dislodged one youngster from a whale’s inside”. That the boy baits the hook with his own desire and has a look that distinguishes him from the rest in pity, places him under an abjecting and queering gaze. He seems to appropriate his own desire as opposed to the others who seem not to have an individual desire and thus vanishes in the process, implicitly the one swallowed whole by the whale. Whether or not this boy stands allegorically for a gay male subject and that without a socially acceptable object of desire, the ravages of desire swallow him whole; in this fable, the attempt to become a subject of one’s own desire in opposition to society leads to a pitiable fate.

Although my study of Charles Henri Ford’s work ends with what I would term his “surrealist phase” in the 40s, Ford continued to evolve artistically as a multimedia artist over the
next 50 years of his life and remained, as he took Jean Cocteau’s words to heart, “a poet in
everything [he did]”. Ford’s work branched out in media and discipline from the modernist to
post modernist era over the course of the 20th century, with his underground gay film *Johnny
Minotaur*, photography, his early work in the Pop Art movement, his collage poems, and his
expatriation in Nepal late in his life. Yet, the aesthetics and methodology of surrealism informs
every one of Ford’s evolutions. As he said in 1987 on the use of collage in his poster poems and
pop art, “most collage is surreal because it’s taking two elements which are usually disparate and
making them one” (Wolmer 1987). No comprehensive biography or study of the breadth of
Ford’s work currently exists in scholarship. It is my intent, that in theorizing Ford’s early
expatriate experiences and his foundation in surrealist philosophy and poetics, my study has set
some of the groundwork for a more a critical study of Ford’s neglected contributions to
American queer literature over the course of his eight decade career.
CHAPTER 5
PAUL BOWLES

For Paul Bowles, expatriation in Paris and the French colonies of North Africa and the corpus of French literature from which he drew inspiration taught him not only how to speak queer desire, but also how to do so without naming it and submitting to the power of others who controlled its definition. Themes of queer sexuality abound in his work, but he never labels the sexuality of his characters or their acts, and in the process, his meticulous description of desire and its practice speaks to how desire “others” the individual, compelling him in directions and actions that would otherwise seem irrational, strange, and against his nature. Desire is in of itself a queer experience. Bowles’s fiction was not afraid of engaging sexuality in its most disturbing and shocking forms; sexualized violence, incest, rape, and the sexual exploitation of colonized people are freely depicted and presented as unsettling facts of human existence. Bowles does not sensationalize this reality, but he does not moralize it either. Thus, Bowles’ resistance toward naming desire was not rooted in prudishness or shame, but instead his work recognizes that even in a society where homosexuality was feared and demonized, the very word homosexual itself contains and restrains the pervasive power of desire. In this chapter, I focus on two principle sources that guided Bowles’ charting of un-named queer desire: the influence of existentialism’s anti-essentialist philosophy, and the orientalism of André Gide who saw in North Africa a space where queer desire could be realized through a colonized and exoticized culture that kept his silence.

In the first section of this chapter, I trace the influence of Jean-Paul Sartre’s existentialism on Paul Bowles’ rebirth as a writer in the 1940s. Bowles’ underwent an existentialist apprenticeship as he translated Sartre’s 1944 play, No Exit for an American
audience, which included the homosexual character Inez, whose unabashed lesbianism provides the voice of merciless critique against self-deception and bad faith of others. Sartre’s frequent use of homosexual characters in his fiction and exploration of homosexual identity in his philosophy provided a case study through which he developed his key existentialist ideas of bad faith and the contradiction between being in itself and being for itself. According to Sartre, the homosexual, who is forced by social prejudice into internalizing shame and guilt by unconsciously assuming this is the essence of the homosexual’s being, is forced into bad faith by denying who he is and becoming complicit in the stereotyping and persecution of other homosexuals. Even though Bowles’ work is frequently described as existentialist, little work has been done in reading Bowles as an existentialist or how Sartre’s own philosophical and literary texts that use homosexuality to exemplify key tenets of existentialist thought have influenced Bowles’ own anti-essentialist construction of queer subjectivity. I argue that this understanding of homosexuality proved critical to Bowles’ discussion of queer themes in his writing and his own resistance toward being labeled as a “gay writer.” Bowles seized upon the existentialist belief in “existence before essence” in order to resist fixed assumptions about homosexual identity and to evade the social imperative to adhere to the strict labeling, and thus containment, of desire.

While Sartre’s existentialism provided the philosophical framework through which Bowles justified evading the shackles of identifying with the discriminatory social paradigm of homosexuality, it was his life-long admiration of André Gide that provided the literary voice and themes through which he could express queer desire without specifically naming it. Although Gide explicitly defined and defended a specific paradigm of homosexual identity in his philosophical tract, Corydon, his fiction and his autobiography resist labeling any type of queer
desire or grappling with adhering to a prepackaged sexual identity. In my sections on the influence of André Gide on both Paul Bowles’ personal path of expatriation to France and the French colonies of North Africa and Bowles’ depiction of queer desire in his literary works, I focus on how Gide’s own resistance toward naming his desire led the American to incorporate the themes, archetypes, and locations that kept his silence. This section considers how André Gide’s pointed critique of the family as an oppressive institution that represses individual liberties, creativity, and the pursuit of desire inspired Bowles’ own critique of the strict control that his father appropriated over his body. Gide provides the figure of the uncle, both the biological uncle (and also those family friends who earn it as an honorary title), as a queering influence on the child within the otherwise hermetically sealed patriarchal familial sphere. Bowles stresses the role of the uncle in his autobiography as well as in his fiction inspired by his childhood as the figure through which he was granted his first image of queer subjectivity and given a model of independence to defy patriarchy and pursue his own desire.

The balance of this section maps Gide’s location of queer desire within an orientalist fantasy of the French North African colonies onto the life and fiction of Paul Bowles. In Gide’s own autobiography and in his most famous novel, *The Immoralist*, Gide envisions the colonial space as a place of sensual rebirth where queer desires can be awakened and pursued via the different cultural values of the North African peoples and his belief in their more primitive nature. Not only did Bowles expatriate to the colonial (and eventually post-colonial) spaces of North Africa to pursue his literary and sexual desires, but Bowles also incorporated Gide’s queer, orientalist gaze onto the people and the culture around him. Yet, whereas Gide as a mere tourist ignored the colonial abuses and economic exploitation of the people around him that facilitated his desire, Bowles’ permanent residency granted him insight into the culture and his fiction is
acutely aware of the violence of colonialism. In North Africa, Bowles found a space in which the fixed assumptions of homosexuality did not apply in the same essentialist manner in Western society, yet he is also aware that his economic privilege as an outsider gains him access to sensual experiences. His fiction is both conscious of the violence and exploitation of colonialism, and his own complicity as he depicts how the colonial legacy of orientalism and power asymmetries stokes the desire of the western traveler.

A Queer Existentialism and the Re-Birth of Bowles as a Writer

In 1945, Paul Bowles read a review of a London production of Jean-Paul Sartre’s latest play *Huis Clos*. Drawing on his connections to the New York theater scene as a composer, Bowles immediately contacted producer Oliver Hudson Smith to acquire the American rights to the play. Because Sartre was himself touring America on behalf of the government, Bowles and Hudson were able to meet with Sartre in Washington. Bowles improvised his own English translation of the work on the spot as he read through it with Sartre, which had impressed Sartre enough to grant permission for the American production on the condition that Bowles would write the translation. Later that year, when Sartre’s tour took him to New York, Bowles met again with him. Although their very first minute in each other’s company began with his wife Jane making an unintentionally gauche comment about his legendary bizarre appearance, the “exceedingly unlaughing” Sartre seemed oblivious to the slight and immediately launched into his indefatigable lecturing. Bowles details the body of their conversation: "After lunch while I reclined on the couch in the studio, he strode up and down for hours telling me about Jean Genet. At times he trembled with the intensity of his emotion. My admiration for Sartre was already full-blown, because I had read *Le Mur* and *La Nausée*” (260). Sartre’s praise compelled Bowles
to seek out Genet’s work, which initially struck him as mere obscenity. Yet, as he explains, Genet’s work “would not let itself be dismissed in this fashion”, after rereading *Our Lady of the Flowers* three years later, “the pornographic glow had faded, the tragedy became apparent” (261). This three-year span, from 1945 to 1948 marked Bowles’ rebirth as a writer. Bowles had, until this point in his life, abandoned his adolescent literary ambitions and focused on his composing for theater, save writing music criticism for newspapers and Charles Henri Ford’s surrealist journal *View*. Translating Sartre’s play would be the first substantial literary writing he would produce since the surrealist poetry he published in his teens and early twenties. It was not until Jane Bowles had completed her first novel, *Two Serious Ladies*, that the urge to write returned to him and he decided in 1947 to move to Tangier and devote his time to prose.

Before his turn toward fiction, Bowles’ rebirth as a writer started with an act of existentialist apprenticeship by taking Sartre’s French *Huis Clos* (1944) and rearticulating it in his own language as *No Exit* (1946). This transfusion of existentialism through translation also included translating Sartre’s vision of homosexuality within the existentialist project. *No Exit*’s cast of three sinners doomed to spend an eternity locked in a room in hell together includes the lesbian character Inez whose unapologetic homosexuality plays foil to the self-deluded coward journalist, Cradeau (called Garcin in other translations), and the coquettishly manipulative Estelle. While Estelle and Garcin deny their sins, Inez wears hers on her sleeve and shamelessly pursues Estelle who tries to flee her advances through an insincere relationship with Cradeau. But, Cradeau only wants Estelle if she can assure him that he is not a coward for having collaborated with the Nazis. She is willing to say this insincerely in order to gain his help, but Cradeau is desperate to get her to believe it because he himself cannot accept the truth of his cowardice, and by the end of the play, he refuses to leave the room and leave hell because he is
so desperate for her to believe it. Despite the disagreement that Bowles and Sartre had over a script change that made Cradeau’s sin part of a collaboration with the Nazis instead of a more general betrayal of integrity through cowardice, Bowles’ translation nonetheless perfectly replicated Sartre’s casting of the unrepentant homosexual as a figure that can call truth to power. Inez is no hero in this play; she is sent to hell for adultery and she attempts to prey on the weak and frightened Estelle, but it is she who calls out the falsity of her two roommates attempting to form a heterosexual relationship based on mere necessity and mutual deception.

The character of Inez is but one of several homosexual subjects, both living and fictive, that Sartre had used over the course of his literary oeuvre to explore existentialist ideas. At this point in his career, Sartre had just published *The Age of Reason* (1945) featuring a homosexual protagonist and even though Bowles would not know it at the time, Sartre’s discussion about Genet most likely contained the rudimentary mental notes that would eventually take the form of Sartre’s 1952 biography, *Saint Genet*. The two works of fiction that Bowles cites as having built his esteem for Sartre, *Nausea*, and the short story “Childhood of a Leader” from *The Wall*, also use homosexual characters as a way to discuss hidden or repressed elements of human existence. In *Nausea*, for example, Sartre explores the theme of homosexuality through a character known as the “Autodidact”, a self-educated man who lives solely for the pursuit of knowledge, spending days on end researching humanistic texts in the library. At the end of the story, the Autodictat makes an ill-advised pass at a young man and is prohibited from ever returning to the library. Thus, the pursuit of knowledge that had defined and given existential meaning to his life is taken away from him because an unsavory truth about his life is revealed, and in a homophobic society, the noble pursuit of humanism and knowledge is rendered incompatible with same-sex desire. According to Lawrence Schehr, “Homosexuality is depicted not just as sexual behavior
between two individuals of the same sex; it is also, if not to say, fundamentally and existentially, and this is despite the Sartrean idea of freedom, a guilty behavior” (45). For Sartre, homosexuality provided a way to explore how society could make individuals feel guilty about who they are and how inhabiting a guilty conscious in turn alienates people from their own existence. Furthermore, Sartre identifies how society assumes homosexuality to be proof of guilt in general—that if one hides his homosexuality, he may be hiding other things as well that would invalidate all other aspects of his character because he is presumed “inauthentic.”

Sartre articulates what homosexuality can reveal about the nature of human identity and inauthenticity in his landmark work of philosophy, *Being and Nothingness* (1943). Here, Sartre lays out his theory of “bad faith”, in which the individual builds a false consciousness of his existence by mistaking the socially constructed elements of his identity for the essence of his existence. This is the product of the incongruity between “being in of itself”, our unconscious, unmediated state of bare material existence, and “being for itself”, our conscious process of creating knowledge of ourselves through identification with how society defines us. In this relationship, “being for itself” is a negative process, carving meaning out of “being in of itself” the way a sculptor makes meaning by chiseling it out of a rock (Detmer 65). In order to illustrate his theory of bad faith, one of Sartre’s key examples is an extended scenario featuring a homosexual refusing to admit to his own homosexual feelings. On the bad faith of the self-denying homosexual, Sartre writes:

A homosexual frequently has an intolerable feeling of guilt, and his whole existence is determined in relation to this feeling. One will readily foresee that he is in bad faith. In fact it frequently happens that this man, which recognizing his homosexual inclination, while avowing each and every particular misdeed which he has committed, refuses with
all his strength to consider himself a ‘paederast’. His case is always ‘different,’ peculiar; there enters into it something of a game, of chance, of bad luck; the mistakes are all in the past; they are explained by a certain conception of the beautiful which woman cannot satisfy; we should see them in the results of a restless search, rather than the manifestation of a deeply rooted tendency (63).

Sartre’s example of the guilt-ridden homosexual is not the exclusive or essential characteristic that defines homosexuality. Sartre chooses to focus only on homosexuals who have internalized the guilt of a society that deems their desire shameful and have been fooled into the bad faith that it is the essential truth of their being instead of a social construct.

Sartre’s vision of the homosexual entrapped by bad faith bares resemblance to the paradigm of the closet that would come to dominate the American concept of gay identity. Yet, Sartre takes a detour against the now ubiquitous notion that the solution to suffering this sense of guilt and shame is to simply “come out of the closet” and to embrace the pop-psychology of learning to love one’s self. Rather, Sartre grounds the process of confessing one’s homosexuality as yet another structure of power fraught with bad faith as he introduces the homosexual’s friend, “the champion of sincerity” (63). The champion of sincerity insists that his homosexual friend admit to being a homosexual for better or for worse, because he must admit what he truly is. Yet, he himself enforces bad faith insofar as he believes that by forcing his friend to admit to his homosexuality and uncritically identify with how society defines the homosexual, he has now realized the essence of his existence.

What Sartre reveals here is that the homosexual, regardless of feeling guilt, denies his homosexuality out of a desire to evade certain traits thought to be essential to homosexuality, which he either does not hold or wishes not to hold. “The homosexual recognizes his fault, but
he struggles with all his strength against the crushing view that his mistakes constitute for him a destiny. He does not want to be considered a thing. He has an obscure but strong feeling that a homosexual is not a homosexual as this table is a table or as this red-haired man is red-haired (64). He has been taught all his life that the homosexual is a wretched, depraved creature, but once he realizes his homosexual desire, he does not feel like he embodies these traits, so he must not truly be a homosexual. Thus, he denies his homosexuality not because he is troubled by same-sex attraction, but because he wishes to avoid the negative connotation of homosexuality that he does not want to apply to him. Sartre identifies a similar trap of denial among homosexuals as he explores the role of shame in homosexual identity in *Saint Genet*: “But the homosexual never thinks of himself when someone is branded in his presence with the name homosexual. It is not one quality among others; it is a destiny, a particular flaw of his being. Elsewhere there is a category of comic, shady people whom he jokes about with ‘straights,’ namely the queers” (41). Sartre recognizes that not only does the homosexual deny his homosexuality because he does not want to be essentialized by its bad reputation in society, but that he also actually believes in this essentialism of homosexuals, agreeing with the majority about those stereotypes and sharing their hostile view because he has so internalized society’s values. He is forced to help perpetuate the stereotypes and prejudice that he himself defies in order to identify against stereotyped homosexuals so as to prove his normalcy. As Sartre says, the homosexual denies his homosexuality in order to state that “I am not what I am” (64). Seemingly paradoxical, this statement is grounded in the core existentialist principle of “existence before essence”, meaning that the process of identity formation of the individual is not a process of realizing what you were predestined by some innate identity to become, but that
the subject is led to believe that they are whatever identity they are interpolated into becoming based on the cultural conventions of their environment.

In his refusal to name his own homosexuality in his work, Bowles seeks to elude a bad faith construction of his identity that would essentialize him as a “gay author” and then limit his work’s meaning. Speaking in an interview with Philip Ramey, in response to his opinion on his story *Pages From Cold Point* being included in gay anthologies of fiction, Bowles remarks “It’s absurd, as though that is why it was written” (http://www.paulbowles.org/talk.html).

Furthermore, on the question of being typecast as a gay author based on that one story, Bowles agrees that not only is that description irrelevant to most of his work, but that “it is not even relevant to most of [his] life”. Not only would the contemporary expectations of the label “gay author” be an anachronistic revision of an era for which such a label did not exist, but Bowles also sees in the phrase a ploy to reduce the scope of his work, and by extension, reduce the range of meaning that his depiction of human desire can illuminate. If his writing of desire were labeled as gay, then it is assumed not to apply to 95% of the population, and thus his greater exploration about how the queer experience of desire leads all people into irrational, dangerous, and strange behavior would be missed. Bowles’ rebellion against the label is not grounded in the bad faith of denying that he is in fact an author with homosexual desires, but it is instead against the bad faith of a society that believes it can so conveniently summarize the essence of his work and identity through the label.

Although Bowles remained closeted to the wide public, his relationships with other men were widely known amongst the literary circles and were permitted by his wife who was in turn allowed to have lesbian lovers. Bowles was certainly not ashamed of his queer desires nor did he care that his peers knew of them. Speaking from the point of view of memoirist David Herbert
who also expatriated to Tangier, Michelle Green writes that “Paul had a writer’s appreciation of gossip, he abhorred frank discussions about homosexuality, and one could never enlist him in the sort of bitchy gabfests that David loved” (72). For Bowles, sexuality belonged in the space of the private, an attitude too often confused for closeting or insincerity in our contemporary era of identity politics. In later interviews, he explains the lack of information on his sex life in *Without Stopping* on wanting the book to have “a relationship with facts, nothing more”, citing a distaste for his peers’ memoirs that sought to air other writers’ dirty laundry on sex and drugs and confess to their own (Alameda 224). The literary confessional had no place in Bowles’ imaginary: he not only already unabashedly expressed his sentiments in his fiction, but he also saw intimate details as something that did not merit the implied redemption of confession, as would be mandated by the bad faith of society’s champions of sincerity. By strategically leaving homosexual desire un-named yet alluded to, Bowles evades the bad faith of the sexual taxonomy of the first half of the 20th century that attempted to contain homosexual behavior by strictly labeling certain characteristics and social practices as inherent aspects of homosexual identity.

Were Jean-Paul Sartre to have met Paul Bowles at a different time in his life, he may have been persuaded to write “Saint Bowles” as a sequel to *Saint Genet*. While Bowles’ middle-class up-bringing in New York contrasts dramatically with Genet’s childhood as an orphan and thief, Sartre nonetheless would have found a similar narrative of the existentialist hero rejecting the bourgeois world that had rejected him. According to Sartre, Genet’s homosexuality was part in parcel with his decision to embrace the other abject identities of thief, prostitute, and prisoner after society had rejected him. He was not just someone who stole; rather he viewed all aspects of life through thievery because the world gave him no other opportunities. Bowles’ adolescence is the other side of the existentialist coin. Unlike Genet who was interpolated into abjection and
decided to revel in it instead of deny it with shame, the young Bowles approximates the other archetypical existentialist hero who is conscious of the inherent meaninglessness of existence and labors toward constructing some sense of meaning out of a void. Given the influence of Sartre’s own stories of coming of age through existential ambiguity, Bowles’ narrative of his adolescence retroactively assigns meaning to key existential moments of self-construction and self-dissolution. Before he had the vocabulary of existentialist philosophy as an adult, poetry was the medium through which the teenage Bowles first put his existence and identity into question:

I had thought of myself as a registering consciousness and no more. My nonexistence was a *sine qua non* for the validity of the invented cosmos. Now with the poetic definitions it was very much the same psychic mechanism at work. I received and recorded them; others were people and had ‘lives’. Perhaps two years later I found an even more satisfactory way of not existing as myself and thus being able to go on functioning; this was a fantasy in which the entire unrolling of events as I experienced them was the invention of a vast telekinetic sending station. Whatever I saw or heard was simultaneous being experienced by millions of enthralled viewers. They did not see me or know that I existed, but they saw through my eyes. This method allowed me to view rather than participate in my own existence (53).

Bowles’ complex teenage fantasy endeavors to erase and depersonalize his existence, and at the same time, he retains a certain narcissistic drive in that his nonexistence would somehow enthral millions. By becoming a participant in life instead of its embodiment, the teenage Bowles creates a psychic split between the sensory existence of the body and the higher faculties of its psychological existence. This Cartesian mind/body split served both a guarding mechanism to
shield himself from the pains of everyday existence and also a system of exercising ultimate control over his person by believing he could guide his from a distance like an automaton.

The teenage Bowles’ denial of his own existence parallels the coming of age story in Sartre’s short story “The Childhood of a Leader” from the collection, *The Wall*, mentioned earlier as one of his early influences. In “The Childhood of a Leader”, Sartre chronicles the psychology of a boy growing up in a respectable, bourgeois household from infancy to young adulthood. Lucien’s adolescence of estrangement from his own existence begins at his infancy. As a beautiful young boy, Lucien’s mother smothers him with constant coddling and affection. She dresses him in outfits befitting young girls and after becoming used to person after person who “had kissed him and called him mademoiselle”, he began to wonder whether or not he really was a girl. Although Lucien seemingly corrects his gender confusion, this experience launches him into a general psychic state of estrangement from the identities imposed upon him by his parents and the world around him. The unmanageable level of demand for love and affection from his mother causes him to believe “there must be a real Lucien who talked, walked, and really loved his parents at night, only when morning came, he forgot everything and began to pretend to be Lucien” (170). The suffocating investment into his childhood creates an idealized image of Lucien that the actual child cannot live up to, so in resentment, he splits himself off from this ideal and impersonates the ideal from a distance.

As Lucien matures, this psychic estrangement compels him to search for some sort of authentic existence through scholarship and art. He studies Freud and uses the psychoanalytic method to convince himself that the roots of his existential malaise is an Oedipal Complex, but that diagnosis only serves to phrase his problem into comprehensible terms and not actually solve it. As an older teenager, Lucien turns to avant-garde art and becomes romantically involved.
in a pederastic relationship with a surrealist, but after the thrill of the avant-garde wears off, he finds himself disgusted with having allowed himself to be used sexually. At the same age when the fictional Lucien seeks the mentorship of a surrealist in his quest for identity, Bowles also turned to surrealism in the form of creating his own automatic writing. These poems he wrote at the age of 17 were published in Eugene Jolas’ magazine *Transition* (1927-1938), a Parisian journal that showcased American expatriate writing and the French avant-garde. As we saw previously for the young Charles Henri Ford, surrealism offered an alluring promise of being able to liberate them from the conscious thought (“being for itself” as Sartre would call it) that plunged both Lucien and Paul into existential malaise and reconnect themselves with pure, unconscious drives that required no moralism or principles. Yet, surrealism falls short of this supposed revolution for Lucien because, if anything, his disgust for submitting to his queer desire reacquaints him with a certain transcendent experience of reality. Such disgust must prove that he alive. His disgust and intolerance for others becomes the tools against which he finds identity for himself. Lucien develops anti-Semitic sentiments and as his friends begin to rearrange their social lives and beliefs to accommodate his politics. Lucien is thrilled with his new defining identity as a budding fascist.

Through Lucien’s path toward fascism, Sartre uses the bad faith labels of gender and sexual identity as an introduction for the adolescent into a lifetime of interpellation into ill-fitting identities and impersonal social roles. This misrecognition originates in the parent/child relationship in which the parents invest preordained visions of the child’s life and identity and begin to mold him into these forms no matter how ill-fitting they feel to the child who attempts to define himself on his own terms. Bowles’ own account of his childhood dramatizes his resentment over a similar experience living within his parents’ own strict disciplinarian regiment.
Bowles’ father, a dentist, took to heart the turn-of-the-century puritanical treatises on child development that preached the strict regulation of the child’s daily routine directed on hygiene and physical development. This included an allegiance to “Fletcherism”, a health trend that posited that people should chew each mouthful of food hundreds of times until it lost all flavor and could be smoothly digested (Caponi 13). This process made eating no longer a source of pleasure, but a carefully coordinated hygienic exercise. As a consequence, the young Bowles was denied some of the most basic of our bodily pleasures under the directive that the body was but base mater to be controlled and disciplined by higher mental faculties and not to be experienced sensually. Just like Lucien, Bowles squirmed under the imposition of expectations that he could not fully comprehend and responded by psychically splitting himself from his body as a form of retaining control over his self. Bowles writes after suffering a beating from his father because he locked his bedroom door, “It began a new stage in the development of hostilities between us. I vowed to devote my life to his destruction, even though it meant my own—an infantile conceit, but one that continued to preoccupy me for many years” (45). Bowles figuratively annihilates his father’s authority by attempting to discontinue his own existence under his father’s terms.

This desire to eliminate his father came to a violent episode when Bowles, at nineteen, returned from his first trip to Paris and flung a knife at his father during a dispute. His father objected to his new itinerant lifestyle and insinuated that he was involved sexually with his new mentor, composer Aaron Copland (Carr 64). Although a sexual relationship with Copland would not begin until later in his life, the sexual tension between mentor and mentee was surely present and detectable. Bowles presents the violent outburst in terms of unconscious action, “I was astonished one night to discover that I had just thrown a meat knife at my father...totally dissatisfied with my own behavior because it had been a result of weakness. And the throwing of
the knife, which was now an act rather than a fantasy, worried me with its further implications of
danger” (104-105). The same psychic mechanism of estrangement from his own consciousness
that he employed as a teenager to evade the micromanagement of his body and defy his father
returned from the repressed, and in one impulsive act, Bowles nearly achieved his unconscious
objective to destroy his father. The effects of Bowles’ emerging queer identity as a
crystallization of his psychic split reveals itself in full force as his father’s naming of Bowles’
unspeakable desire for his new mentor and father-figure replacement triggered his compulsion to
destroy his biological father. Just as Sartre does with Lucien, Bowles presents the child/parent
relationship as the christening of the child into a lifetime of bad faith. His parents unintentionally
taught him to divorce himself from his own bodily existence by denying himself pleasure, which
he in turn repurposes as an existential exercise in trying to divorce himself from all the essences
drilled into his consciousness and instead seek bare experiential existence.

**André Gide’s Early Influence on Paul Bowles**

In this section, I sketch out André Gide’s enduring influence on Paul Bowles from a
teenager in America seduced by his the daring young Lafcadio living life on pure impulse in *The
Vatican Swindle*, to how Gide’s orientalist vision of queer desire in the French colonies inspired
Bowles to seek his own desires there. Along the way, I isolate the ways in which Bowles life and
works mimicked those of Gide and how Gide’s specific constructions of queer subjectivity,
including the sexualization of the colonial subject, the queering influence of the “uncle” as way
to dismantle the oppression of patriarchy, and the resistance toward specifically naming or
labeling queer desire guided Bowles in his own navigation of desire and depiction of gay
subjectivity. In 1931, a 21-year-old Paul Bowles returned to Paris from his first of what would be
a lifetime of trips between North Africa and the European and American mainland. Along with Bowles came a young Arab named Abdelkader who was hired by his friend Harry Dunham as their valet and houseboy. In his 1972 autobiography, Paul Bowles recalls with delight Abdelkader’s misadventures in Paris as he attempted to make sense of Western culture and in particular, the different articulations of gender and sexual identity. Upon meeting Gertrude Stein in her famed 27 Rue de Fleurus salon, Abdelkader remarks “c’est elle?...Mais c’est un homme ca” (140). One could hardly blame the boy for mistaking Stein, who Hemingway once described as a roman senator with her commanding presence and short-cropped hair, for a man. Through the tongue of the colonial subject, the truth of Stein’s inversion is spoken plainly in her presence, an inadvertent act of bravado that few others had dared.

Abdelkader’s second brush with the confusing semiotics of the western queer came on the streets of Paris when he met an older gentleman who invited him to his house for tea. Bowles remarks, “It was not surprising, considering he had gone wandering off fully dressed in Moroccan regalia. The old gentleman, who spoke Arabic, Abdelkader said, had pressed 50 francs in his hand when he left and insisted that he accept a djellaba which was hanging on a coat rack.” Later, describing his experience at a gallery exhibition with Abdelkader, Bowles writes:

Suddenly I heard his excited voice shouting above the several hundred voices, saying ‘Monsieur Paul! Monsieur Paul! Viens Vite!’ I hurried toward the sound and met him rushing toward me, still crying: ‘Viens! Regarde! There’s the nice old man who gave me the fifty francs! Look!’ Occupying a place of honor at the end of the hall was a huge photograph of André Gide, wearing a beret. It became the joke of the month around Paris. (144)
For the who’s who of the Parisian literary scene who witnessed or later heard the anecdote, this was not so much of a joke as it was a confirmation that Gide truly lived up to the persona he created in *The Immoralist* and *If It Die* of the pederast with a taste for the exotic, even in his elder years. Furthermore, this treatment of using the colonial subject as the sounding board against which conventions of western sexuality resonate is the beginning of a theme Bowles will develop further in this autobiography and in his corpus of fiction. It provides for Bowles the comparative context in which he can comment upon sexual identity in the west without explicitly wading into the politics of homosexual identity.

In this moment, Gide’s influence as a writer on the young Paul Bowles ended up paying a real life dividend for him in the form of having one of his prized young Arab boys imported to him (if only for one day for “tea”) from Africa by a writer whose own desire to visit the continent and seek the company of such young Arabs was informed by Gide’s own narratives from three decades prior. Bowles did not just replicate Gide’s style as a writer, but he also put Gide’s queer aesthetics and tastes into practice and came back to the master with irrefutable proof that he had taken them to heart. Gide’s novels were one of Bowles’ first and longest-lasting influences as a young writer. As a teenager back home in New York, Bowles picked up Gide’s *Lafcadio’s Adventures* (then titled *The Vatican Swindle*) and, as he writes, “like my fifteen-year-old counterparts all over the world, I was seduced by Lafcadio’s *acte gratuit*” (67). The young Bowles developed through his teen years to resemble Gide’s 19-year-old protagonist. An impudent con-man and bastard child of an Italian aristocrat, Gide’s Lafcadio journeys freely across Europe from swindle to swindle, culminating in the infamous “*acte gratuit*” when, completely unmotivated by any personal interest or reason, he throws a man from a moving train. For the young Bowles, Lafcadio became emblematic of the liberty to live a life free of the
patriarchal control and bourgeois morality under which he squirmed at home in New York and departed at the age of 18 during his first cross-Europe adventure. Yet, the nomadic Lafcadio would not be the only Gidean protagonist that Bowles’ life would parallel. Rather, Bowles’ own life and later literary output would remarkably mirror the life and works of Gide himself.

In 1893, a young André Gide spent an extended vacation in the French colonies of North Africa during which he came to realize his latent homosexual desire via the exotic charms of the local Arab boys. In If It Die (1920), an autobiography of his youth, Gide struggles to discard the moralism of his Republican era upbringing when he becomes seduced by the oriental mystery of the land that unearthed and welcomed the repressed queer desires for which mainland Europe provided no outlet. Under the tutelage of Oscar Wilde and his companion Lord Alfred Douglass, both of whom he encountered in Algiers in 1895, Gide is guided through the harems and tea rooms of North Africa. His well-acquainted mentors teach him not only how to search for and satisfy his desire, but also provide for him an archetype for living these desires as an identity complete with semiotic codes for expressing them. Just like Bowles did with Abdelkader, Gide also contemplated importing his own Arabic servant, Athman with him to Paris, though he eventually decided against it due to his mother’s fervent objections. A few years later, Gide called upon these experiences to write his 1902 novel The Immoralist, in which Michel, a repressed young academic (much like himself), has a sensual and erotic awakening in the same colonial environment among the same population of Arab boys. Yet, unlike his more explicit depictions of his sexual encounters in his autobiography, Michel’s homosexual desire only goes so far as to paint his attraction to the youthful bodies of the Arab boys as the turning point in his life when he dedicates himself to live against bourgeois morality and repression of bodily desire. Unlike the later Gide of Corydon who not only names his desire but also specifies the exact
morality of pederasty and the psychology of the pederast, Michel’s desire and identity looms ambiguously undefined over the text, eluding the specifications of a sexual taxonomy.

Bowles’ own personal history and bibliography of fiction replicated a similar pattern to both Gide’s habit of reproducing personal experience as fiction and then later rewriting himself back into the experience as autobiography. Although Bowles spent the majority of his youth from the 1930s to the 1950s traveling between France, New York, and North Africa as a composer, he did not begin to write seriously until the late 1940s with the publication of some short stories such and his landmark 1949 novel, *The Sheltering Sky*. Bowles’ debut novel restages his earlier voyages through the Saharan desert in the 30s and 40s by transplanting his tenuous marriage to the lesbian novelist Jane into the travel narrative as the fictional Port and Kit Moresby. While the story was considered largely autobiographical, and Bertolucci’s 1990 film adaptation features an elderly Paul Bowles narrating the events in the film as if they were his own, Bowles did not produce a definitive autobiography until the 1972 publication of *Without Stopping*. Just like Gide, personal experience had to be filtered through fiction before it could be narrated as fact. However, unlike Gide’s *If It Die*, which depicts but does not name the homosexual acts that were merely alluded to in *The Immoralist*, Bowles firmly kept closeted his own queer desires and relationships while in North Africa. Bowles’ personal narrative includes a number of brushes with queer sexuality from his youth and his thoroughly unsentimental depiction of his first gay experience at the age of 20 in Paris, yet his autobiography fails to mention any of his adult gay romances, including his long relationship in Tangiers with the Moroccan painter Ahmed Yacoubi. Upon its publication, fellow American expatriate in Tangiers William Burroughs remarked that is should have been titled *Without Telling* due to its failure to disclose much information about his same-sex loves. It was not until Bowles reached old age in
the 80s and 90s that he publicly acknowledged and spoke of his sexuality publicly through various interviews and to Virginia Spencer Carr for her 1994 biography.

It is not until we are aware of the details of Bowles’ own sexual life that it becomes apparent that his characterization of Abdelkader as the naive, transplanted subaltern serves as a scapegoat for the dysfunction and chaos that his own sexuality had caused. In *Without Stopping*, Bowles further places Abdelkader in conflict with the social mores of western society by describing his contentious relationship with Amelia Dunham, Harry’s sister who shared the Paris flat with him and Bowles. Amelia had little tolerance for Abdelkader’s lack of bourgeois refinement; “she campaigned ruthlessly to implement her convictions”, including locking Abdelkader in the kitchen for days. Amelia’s hostility extended toward Bowles, adding that she vowed to get [him] into a hospital yet and attempted to convince Bowles to get a spinal tap to check for syphilis (Sawyer-Lauçanno 127). From Bowles’ narrative alone Amelia is reduced to the stereotypical, uptight bourgeois moralist blind to the monstrosity of her own unfounded intolerance. When Bowles divulged information about the omitted sexual tension underlying in the shared household for Carr’s 1994 biography, Amelia’s actions became, in retrospect, less paranoid. Not only did Bowles actually have syphilis, but it was also suspected that he had either contracted it from or given it to Harry Dunham (Carr 81). It is likely that Amelia’s perception of an uncouth and uncivilized Bowles and Abdelkader was informed by the suspicion that not only were they both complicit in her brother’s sexual corruption, but also that they had literally infected him with this disease. By leaving the homosexual relationship between he and Dunham (and possibly Abdelkader) silent, Bowles’ narrative gives us only a symptom of his queer desire symbolized in the animosity between Amelia and Abdelkader. He omits any evidence about how his own pursuit of desire ultimately set up and precipitated this clash. Instead of describing the
complexities of his homosexual relationship with Dunham and implicating his own responsibility, Bowles polarizes this tension and displaces them onto fairly stereotypical constructions of the hysterical woman and the perverse native. The oriental/occidental collision between the two becomes the substitute for the erotic violence between him and Harry Dunham that he deemed unspeakable.

The orientalized body of Abdelkader stands in for the disordered discourses of disease and queer desire, which threaten, but ultimately are defeated by the rigid bourgeois morality personified in Amelia. Although Bowles only offers a short passage, the Abdelkader affair presents a moment in Bowles’ life and writing where the most influential elements of his concept of queer subjectivity collude under a policy of the unspoken. Several consistent themes throughout his work converge onto Abdelkader. First, as mentioned before, we see Bowles’ nearly mimetic real life enactment of the fiction and biography of André Gide. Gide’s discourse is so persuasive in its seductive orientalism that Bowles literally brings back to him one of his much pined after Arab boys. Second, we see the use of the colonial subject whose surface simplicity and supposedly impenetrable, unreasonable psychology becomes the embodiment of the elusive and estranging erotic impulse of one’s own sexual and violent desire. If the subaltern cannot speak, as Spivak tells us, then he is the perfect vault in which to lock one’s own unspeakable desire. Third, through Bowles’ omission, we see the unspeakable nature of his desire not as a response to an internalized shame, but as a ploy to control the power to narrate his own self according to his own wishes. Bowles sacrifices Abdelkader in order to tell the story of Amelia’s rage without risking the possibility of his identity being tainted by preconceived notions about the homosexual. In the later portion of this section on Gide’s influence, I will return to this question of queer desire and orientalism in Bowles’ later fiction and how his
experience living in the colonial spaces in which Gide was a mere traveler made him more aware and vocal about how colonial abuses of power and racist constructions of North African culture enabled the queer desire of the colonizer to flourish. But, in order for that critique of abuses of the erotic in colonized space to be understood, it is first necessary to establish how Gide’s critique of stifling, bourgeois patriarchy led Bowles to envision the orient as a queer utopia by contrast.

**Gide’s Avuncular Corruption: How Bowles Kills the Father Through the Uncle’s Desire**

Although Bowles and Gide found the bourgeois morality of the family unit in direct hostility toward the individualism they pursued, both nonetheless understood that the familial structure informed their early erotic desires. The adolescent process of cultivating the body’s sensual capacities, developing desires for others, and evolving erotic fantasies happens while the child is most influenced by his family and thus the dynamics of his familial structure shape his sexual identity. In both Bowles’ and Gide’s fiction, queer desire becomes attached to a certain, ambivalent incestuous desire. Yet, both authors remain resolute in their hostility toward a family structure that informs and inflames these desires only to forbid and pathologize them by rendering them unspeakable and unattainable. By retaining these incestuous desires and rendering them legible, while at the same time keeping the subject undefined (as in not labeling them homosexual, pederast, etc) they turn the sexualized desire for family relationships into a power to dismantle the family itself. As Gide once famously wrote through the mouth of his dandy character Menalque based on Oscar Wilde in *Les Nourritures Terrestres* (1897), “Families, I hate you! Shut-in homes, closed doors, jealous possessions of happiness.” For Gide, the family repressed individuality, demonized as immoral anyone who pursued happiness outside
the family, and purposefully cloistered their children from outside influence, keeping them ignorant and underdeveloped. Thus, for the young Bowles, who experienced the same stifling of his development, sexually and artistically, it made sense to escape the family in both the nayion of Gide in France, and in the land where Gide himself escaped the family and could pursue sexual desire in the North African colonies.

For both Gide and Bowles, the figure of the “uncle” is posed as a threat to the consolidated power of the hermetically sealed parent/child relationship that exposes the child to the desires and values of a world outside of the parents’ control. This “uncle” figure includes both biological uncles or uncles via marriage and family friends who enter the familial sphere by a relationship to the parents are given the honorary title of “uncle”. In Lafcadio’s Adventures, Gide uses the relationship with a succession of five honorary uncles in lieu of the father the teenager never knew as the influences that made Lafcadio into the free-spirited, morally ambiguous hero of the novel. Lafcadio tells his life story in detail and describes his relationships with the uncles upon meeting his estranged, aristocrat half-brother who has come to find him upon orders of his father, the Count de Baraglioul, Lafcadio’s biological father. In this scene, Gide challenges the assumptions of the inherent sophistication of blue-blood aristocracy by contrasting the repressed, mediocre author Julius, who was raised as a legitimate heir to the Count title, and Lafcadio, whose “uncles” encouraged him to pursue pleasure over respectability. At one point in the encounter, Julius reacts with scandalized horror to a photograph of Lafcadio nude on the beach near his “uncle”. Lafcadio explains that his mother’s lover at the time “Uncle Faby”, had “under the pretense of wanting me to get bronzed, kept all my wardrobe under lock and key—even my linen” (94). Lafcadio further details that Uncle Faby had taken him to Algeria, and with the bronzing episode in mind, Gide recycles with Uncle Faby the same process
through which Michel from *The Immoralist* becomes obsessed with the sensuality of his body (even the sun tanning) and the birth of his queer desire. While Gide leaves unspoken a possible pederastic relationship between this “uncle” and Lafcadio, what is certain is that he is grooming the child per Gide’s own formula to become an immoralist himself. The unspoken queerness of the uncles clearly was legible to Gide’s contemporaries when Proust wrote in a letter to Gide that “these ‘Uncles’ were ‘Aunties’ (tantes: the French equivalent of Queens)” (Pollard 366).

In addition, Gide dramatizes the homosexual desire of a biological uncle for his nephews in his novel *The Counterfeiters* (1925). Written partially in the form of the diary entries of the famous novelist, Edouard as he takes notes for a new experimental novel, *The Counterfeiters* details Edouard’s desire for his teenage nephew Olivier who is also a budding writer. From Edouard’s confessional journal, Gide’s depiction of his attraction to his nephew blurs the line between his desire to be a mentor and his attraction to Olivier’s body. Olivier himself is also encoded as a potential homosexual. He develops a deep bond with his friend Bernard who, born a bastard like Lafcadio, leaves his adopted family and seeks his own fortune independently. Having abandoned his family, Bernard spends his first night as a liberated individual sharing a bed with Olivier. As they occupy this intimate space (eventually waking up in an embrace), Bernard details the necessity of becoming his own person, declining any help from his friend. Thus in this scene, Gide marks the liberation from the bourgeois morality and individual constraint of the family structure with a scene of same-sex eroticism. He goes to bed as a subject of patriarchal control, and through the magic bond of freely chosen same-sex intimacy, he awakes a free subject. Olivier is equally attracted to his Uncle, but his reverence for his greatness as an author inhibits him from expressing any personal feelings. Edouard’s misreading of the
boy’s reticence as disinterest keeps their relationship from fruition and he takes Bernard on as his protégé even though he wanted his nephew in that role.

The pervading drama of the narrative relies upon the difficulty in distilling queer sentiments from the vast array of other emotions and considerations that characterize a relationship without the aid of a codified queer vocabulary to confront and speak a desire that has been rendered silent. Although Gide includes several eroticizing description of Olivier’s body from Edouard’s perspective and a scene in which he loving caresses the boy as he nurses him to health after a suicide attempt, his desire is never specified as pederastic, incestuous, or even homosexual; an identification with these labels is not at issue. Rather, Gide’s novel borrows his protagonist’s own goal to write a novel about “the manner in which the world of appearances imposes itself upon us, and the manner in which we try to impose on the outside world our own interpretation” (205). As it concerns queer subjects, this relationship means the process of distilling the truth of the other’s desire without making the mistake of impressing one’s libido onto the other and merely reading one’s own projection. Even though Edouard is a writer, he cannot name his desire aloud, but instead he must attempt to read vague signs that it is acknowledged and reciprocated by others without being deluded into believing one’s own wishful projections onto someone else.

For the pederast, misreading the intentions of the object of desire can mean disaster, which nearly befalls Edouard when he unknowingly makes a pass at his own younger nephew Georges in the only scene of explicitly homosexual desire. Edouard encounters a boy of roughly 13 attempting to steal a guidebook to Algeria in a bookstore. He seizes upon this opportunity to enter into a relationship with the young man, first, intimidating him by declaring that he witnessed the theft and then by revealing himself to be beneficent by offering to pay for the
books himself. As his interaction with the boy develops, the young Georges wizens to the man’s intents. Edouard touches a ribbon on the boy’s jacket and inquires about its significance, which is later revealed to be a mark of membership in a club of young petty criminals. Blocking this attempt at deciphering his identity through the codes on his body, Georges turns the tables and puts into speech Edourad’s intents, “I say...do you often go about picking up schoolboys” (88). Edouard, knocked speechless, then sees the name on Georges’ notebook and realized he had been flirting with his own nephew, causing him to drop his advances and to never speak them. Later in the novel, Georges and Olivier’s mother ask him to take an active mentoring presence in his nephews’ lives, at which he both delights and finds ridiculous. In order to straighten Georges’ moral path and Olivier’s development as a writer, she has invited into their lives the pederast who aims to lead them further astray from bourgeois respectability. Blinded by the bad faith of her brother’s image as a prominent author, she essentializes his fame as a virtue and is unable to read in his novels or on his body the signification of perverse desire and anti-moralism.

Bowles similarly develops the figure of the uncle into a vessel through which values and desires from outside the bourgeois family sphere can be introduced to the potentially queer child for the first time. In *Without Stopping*, the only two specific references to homosexuality in his life come from his uncles. Bowles’ first glimpse into a gay identity comes via Uncle Guy, “a novelty, [who] wore Japanese silk kimonos and spent a good deal of time keeping incense burning in a variety of bronze dragons” and lived in a separate apartment in the same building with his wife (40). Uncle Guy is presented not only as his first exposure to queerness, but also an important step in conceptually uniting queer desire with oriental luxuries as an antidote to heteronormativity and middle-class consumerism. With Uncle Guy, Bowles was encouraged in his pursuit of creative desires and freedom of expression: “He treated me in a very special way
which made me feel he was ‘on my side,’ and he did not try to control my activities. I had never before known such freedom” (40). Bowles stages the revelation of Uncle Guy’s homosexuality in a Freudian primal scene when the young Paul sneaks into one of Uncle Guy’s parties: “It was crowded with pretty young men dancing together. At that second a rough hand clutched at my shoulder, spun me around, and propelled me through the doorway. I saw Uncle Guy’s face transfigured by rage...’I told you not to come, and you disobeyed.’ he said between his teeth. ‘Now I’m going to lock you in” (41). Bowles represents this as a traumatic moment in his childhood. Once the exotic mystery of his Uncle’s behavior is uncloseted by little Paul as same-sex desire, Uncle Guy suddenly shuts Paul out of this world, forcing the boy into his own closet. Paul responds with destructive rage, not so much at the revelation of his Uncle’s queerness, but from his Uncle suddenly acting like his restrictive father and barring him from participating in it. Bowles would not have a chance to experience this queer world first hand until he traveled to Paris as a young man and ran into his “Uncle” Hubert. Unlike Uncle Guy who was a member of the family, “Uncle” Hubert was not technically his uncle. His grandparents had taken Hubert in as a boy from a family in Alabama undergoing hardships as a playmate for Paul’s father. Bowles introduces Uncle Hubert as a dandy much like Uncle Guy: “He was one of the first American couturiers; he established his salon (and sweatshop) on Fifty-seventh street... I remember his occasional visits during my childhood. He wore silk shirts with sapphire, ruby, emerald, or amethyst cuff links depending on the color of the silk. And he always had on spats” (92). Bowles depicts Uncle Hubert’s body from his childhood memory as exuding the same effeminate luxury as Uncle Guy with the core of his sexual identity inaccessible to a child of Paul’s age. As a young adult, Bowles moved in with Uncle Herbert in the Hotel Danou in Paris, and in a short, unromantic sentence writes that he, “received a further sexual initiation, equally
cold blooded and ridiculous” as the one he experienced a couple weeks earlier with a woman on an anthill (93). Beyond initiating his “nephew” into homosexual sex (however unsatisfying it may have been), Uncle Hubert introduces Bowles into the semiotics of homosexuality when they go shopping for clothes. Hubert buys Bowles a flashy suit and designer shoes, clothing his body with the signs of dandyism that made his own homosexuality and class identity legible to others.

The “uncle” as a mentor in signifying one’s sexual and class identities on the body makes an appearance in Gide’s work as well. Bowles’ relationship with Uncle Hubert mirrors another one of Lafcadio’s ambiguous “uncle” relationships:

The Marquis de Gesvres took a positively frenzied pleasure in spending money; it was a perpetual need—a craving; it seemed as though he were grateful to me for helping him to satisfy it—for increasing his appetite by the addition of my own. It was he who taught me (the contrary of Faby) to like dress. I think I wore my clothes well; he was a good master; his elegance was perfectly natural—like a second sincerity…We spent whole mornings together at the shirtmaker’s, the shoemaker’s, the tailor’s; he said that you could tell a man as certainly by his shoes as by the rest of his dress and by his features (96).

Just like Uncle Hubert, the Marquis introduces Lafcadio into the semiotic practice of signifying dandyism on the body and, in turn, reading it on others through shoes, dress, and “features”. The Marquis unites this with the semiotics of class consciousness, demonstrating that the ability to signify sexuality discreetly on the body is the privilege of the wealthy, and that incorporating signifiers of class privilege in turn became a way to signify homosexuality. While Lafcadio delights in his apprenticeship to luxury and indulgence, Bowles despises his uncle’s prodigality when he chastises his “uncle” for wasting money in a casino. Although Bowles registered initial resistance to physical intimacy or his “uncle’s” prodigious behavior, the episode nonetheless
taught Bowles how to decipher and signify the corporeal codes of homosexuality—a process he refined under the tutelage of Uncle Guy, Uncle Hubert, and Uncle André.

What Bowles learned about the decoding of dandyism shows up in a later short story called “The Frozen Fields” (1957), a fictionalization of Bowles’ own childhood tension with his strict father during a Christmas vacation to his Grandparents’ home. Bowles uses the regalia of dandyism to insinuate the homosexuality of Mr. Gordon, a bachelor “friend” of his Uncle Ivor who shows up to Christmas wearing “two big diamond rings on one hand and an even bigger sapphire on the other” (267). The precious jewels as the shibboleth of homosexuality are borrowed from Uncle Hubert and foreshadow how the privilege of wealth permits the rich homosexual the power to control the semiotic exchange between himself and others through expensive material objects. Being the possible lover of Donald’s uncle, Mr. Gordon occupies the position of the lavish, queering threat to his father’s strict control over his son. Before his arrival, Donald overhears his family members complaining about why it would be necessary for him to attend. His disgusted mother states that “it seems sort of unnecessary”, adding that “Christmas is a family day”, to which Uncle Willis replies, with “a crooked smile...Well he’s part of the family now” (264). The eventual presence of Mr. Gordon is shrouded in mystery for Donald and makes him more interested in what kind of a man could provoke this reaction. Instead of shielding Donald from the unspeakable queerness of this “uncle”, the family’s euphemisms and innuendo pique the child’s desire to investigate the queer uncle’s forbidden allure.

The wealthy Mr. Gordon gives every member of the family expensive gifts, especially the young Donald whom he spoils, causing his father to reproach him: “It’s bad business for one child to get too much” (268). As Donald’s father forces him to clean up and move his toys to his room after opening them, Mr. Gordon remarks that he has never seen such a well-behaved child:
“Discipline begins in the cradle,’ said his father shortly. “It’s sinister,” murmured Mr. Gordon to himself. Donald glanced up and saw his father looking at Mr. Gordon with hatred” (270).
Donald’s father uses the aura of Mr. Gordon’s elaborate gifts and their air of luxury and indulgence to demonize the queering presence of Mr. Gordon’s homosexuality, which remains only insinuated amongst family members and baffles the young Donald. For the staunchly Puritan middle class, wealth is inherently queer. It is a threat that, like homosexuality, also dismantles the power of the patriarch as provider and moral compass. Later in the text, Donald asks his mother why Mr. Gordon lives with Uncle Ivor, and she explains that Uncle Ivor is like a nurse that cares for Mr. Gordon. When the innocently inquisitive Donald asks if he is sick, his mother responds, “Yes he is,” she said lowering her voice to little more than a whisper. “He’s a very sick man, but we don’t talk about it” (270). The mother keeps with the family’s inability to speak of his homosexuality and instead of naming it, she pathologizes it, letting the discourse of disease speak toward its threat to infect their family. Instead of scaring Donald away by labeling him “sick”, he becomes more interested in understanding the nature of his sickness, yet his mother ignores his further questions.

Simultaneous with this fascination with his queer “uncle”, Donald’s animosity toward his borderline sadistic father emerges when he begins to imagine a scenario in which a pack of wolves carry his father off in the snow. Here, it appears that Bowles restages his own adolescent desire to destroy his father, which was counterbalanced with the taste for indulgence and sensuality he acquired from his own queer uncle. The decision to break from his father’s tyranny and pursue the ambiguous path of Mr. Gordon comes toward the end of the story after a violent episode with his father. While walking together in the snow, Donald’s father commands him to correct his posture, prodding him in the back and shouting, “Keep your head up. Chest Out!
D’you want to get round-shouldered? Before you know it you’ll have curvature of the spine” (274). Donald’s father attempts to erect and fortify his son’s posture in response to the softening, effeminate entry of queerness into the family. The performance of masculinity becomes not just adopting its posture, but retaining it in a state of pain against the tough terrain of the snow and the derision of his father. Donald’s trials to prove his masculinity continue as his father throws a snowball at a tree and encourages his young son to follow suit. But, Donald openly defies his father for the first time, refusing because “a wolf could be waiting here, somewhere back in the still gloom of the woods...If his father wanted to take a chance and throw snowballs into the woods, he could, but Donald would not. Then perhaps the wolf would understand that he, at least, was his friend” (274). Here, Donald’s imaginary vision of a wolf serves as a catalyst toward his own first steps toward defying his father and pursuing his own individuality. Donald’s father becomes enraged, rubs a snowball in his son’s face, and begins to shove snow into his shirt. Donald “was certain his father was trying to kill him” and as he escapes and falls face first in the snow, “an unfamiliar feeling had come to him; he was not sorry for himself being wet or cold, or even resentful at having been mistreated. He felt detached; it was an agreeable, almost voluptuous sensation which he accepted without understanding or questioning it” (274). Donald goes through an existential moment of self-splitting between the conscious subject of his father’s power and the sensual experience of a voluptuousness that he could not put into words or define. He becomes aware at that moment that his existence, his being for itself, had been nothing up until then but a being for his father. In this moment of defiance, he touches on an experience of authentic individuality tied to independence that he can begin to articulate and move away from the law of the father. He defied the father and received punishment, but because the punishment
verified how deeply and successfully he defied his father and asserted his independent judgment, he revels in the feeling of what would otherwise be brutality.

In the next scene, Bowles implicitly ties this self-awakening through the symbolism of the wolf to the enabling presence of Mr. Gordon. As Mr. Gordon leaves the household and declares his goodbye to Donald in front of the family, he remarks, “he reminds me a little of myself, you know, when I was his age. I was a sort of shy and quiet lad too” (275). Mr. Gordon freely announces the unspoken horror that motivated the father’s sadism; the fear of raising a queer child. Donald is fated by these words to become the man that stands before them, effeminate and free-willed in his luxury. Bowles further builds Mr. Gordon into the magical dandy uncle who swoops in to save Donald from his father’s patriarchy by describing the “thick beaver collar of Mr. Gordon’s overcoat” turned up over his ears and his “enormous fox gloves” (275). Not only does Mr. Gordon depart by revealing another article of his opulent, dandyism, but also, by detailing how Mr. Gordon becomes covered in animal fur, he becomes reminiscent of the father-destroying wolves of Donald’s imagination. Mr. Gordon’s queerness is the wolf that will destroy the power of the father. The wolf’s viciousness is a threat to the supposedly safe and secure bonds of the civilized, patriarchal household. Yet, with such a sadistic father, Donald’s place in civilization is just as rough and brutal as a life in the wilderness. Thus, that which is outside of the family, the wildness of the wolf and the luxury of the queer uncle become preferable to life within patriarchy.

This feeling of intimacy with the queer uncle in wolf’s clothing is foreshadowed at the very beginning of the text. When Donald first arrives in the countryside, he meets two of his uncles at the train station:

Uncle Willis wore a black bear skin coat that almost touched the ground. He put his
hands under Donald’s arms and lifted him up so that his head was at a level with his own, and kissed him hard on the mouth. Then he swung him over into Uncle Greg’s arms, and Uncle Greg did the same thing. ‘How’s the man, hey?’ cried Uncle Greg, as he set him down. ‘Fine’, said Donald, conscious of a feeling of triumph, because his father did not like to see boys kissed. ‘Men shake hands,’ he had told him. ‘They don’t kiss each other (261).

Donald’s uncles provide the physical affection that his father denies him. Although Bowles does not encode these uncles as queer in the rest of the story, they still inject a certain level of queer threat into the familial sphere in that they allow for a physical, same-sex intimacy that Donald’s father strictly prohibits. While this passage seems innocent enough at the beginning of the text, when Bowles places Mr. Gordon in the same suit of fur at the end of the story, he transfers a desire for same-sex familial intimacy onto the body of an outsider. The fur coat is a fetish object that connects and transforms Donald’s desire for affection from his father into a desire for other forms of affection from men that may blossom in the future.

In the final paragraph of the story, Donald continues to build his fantasy of the wolf as a savior from his unhappy family life:

The wolf was out there in the night, running along the paths that no one had seen, down the hill and across the meadow, stopping to drink at a deep place in the brook where the ice had not formed. The still hairs of his coat had caught the snow; he shook himself and climbed up the bank to where Donald was waiting for him. Then he lay down beside him, putting his heavy head in Donald’s lap. Donald leaned over and buried his face in the shaggy fur of his scruff. After a while they both got up and began to run together, faster and faster, across the fields (276).
The wolf that he once feared during the snowball incident has now become his friend and his guide toward an existence and identity outside of his father’s domination. Donald creates a physically affectionate relationship with the wolf, suggesting that he is not merely his leader toward this new existence, but also something that he in of himself finds attractive and wants to be intimate with. Insofar as the wolf is both complicit with and a part of Mr. Gordon’s all-encompassing queer influence, Donald does not merely want the luxury of this alternative lifestyle; he has a physical, proto-gay attraction to it as well. Yet, like in so many of his works, Bowles never once defines this sexuality, labels it, nor speaks its name. Rather, the fact that the concept remains ambiguous mirrors Donald’s own young vision of an exception to his parents’ heteronormativity. He has no idea what same-sex attraction is, and by leaving as a mysterious possible destination to these “paths that no one had seen”, it becomes all the more powerful and enticing for him to run with the wolf to wherever it may lead him away from home.

**Desiring the Colonized Body: Gide’s Immoralism and Bowles’ Critique of Orientalism**

Although the imprint of Gide’s romantic vision of queer desire in the orient is firmly ingrained into Bowles’ depiction of space and desires of North Africa, Bowles’ stories are aware of how the power asymmetry between the colonizer and the colonized has made the pursuit of his desire possible. This is in part a product of the gap in history between Gide’s travels in the 1890s and Bowles’ expatriation to Tangiers in the 50s, a span of time that saw the process of decolonization and the fervent struggle of colonized peoples to achieve independence. Yet, Gide would not have been ignorant of the exploitation and abuse of colonized people because there was already a strong criticism of imperialism amongst the European intelligentsia. Rather, Gide’s brand of modernism was complicit in the construction of an orientalist view of the colonies that,
while praising of their “simple” and “exotic” way of life, reinforced the assumption of many colonial powers that the colonized people possessed a lesser culture and that the continued possession of these lands was justified in order to spread civilization.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said explores Gide’s presence in the development of western modernism in literature and arts and its dependence upon 19th and 20th century discourses about colonialism and the construction of a non-western other that both inspired and provided a contrastive point for its aesthetic and ideological development:

When supposedly otherwise neutral departments of culture like literature and critical theory converge on the weaker or subordinate culture and interpret it with ideas of unchanging non-European and European essences, narratives about geographical possession, and images of legitimacy and redemption, the striking consequence has been to disguise the power of the situation and to conceal how much the experience of the stronger party overlaps with and, strangely, depends on the weaker (192).

Said uses this overview of the imperialist complicity in the development of modernism to launch into a short exposition of Gide’s *The Immoralist*. In the novel, Gide gives the first person narrative of a now middle-aged scholar, Michel, who tells of his sensual metamorphosis from a weak, repressed student to a libidinally driven seeker of sensual pleasure. Michel cites his honeymoon in Algeria as the moment of transformation, when, near death from tuberculosis, he becomes reacquainted with the physical and sensual needs of his infirmed body. Inspired by the nubile youth of the Arab boys among him, he devotes himself to the pursuit of the physical over the mental. Said dwells in particular on the power relations between protagonist Michel and his libertine mentor Menalque (the same character from *Les Nourritures Terrestres*, patterned after
Oscar Wilde) and with the young Arab boys. Citing the text’s most famous scene in which he watches Moktir steal his wife’s scissors and finds pleasure in the theft, Said argues:

The homosexual complicity among the three is an unmistakable hierarchical relationship: Moktir, the African boy, gives a surreptitious thrill to Michel, his employer, which in turn is a step along the way to his self-knowledge, in which Menalque’s superior insights guide him. What Moktir thinks or feels (which seems congenitally, if not also racially mischievous) is far less important than what Michel and Menalque make of the experience (192).

While Said’s analysis of the power hierarchy is apt in locating the privilege of the western narrator in determining the limited scope in which the colonial subject may act, he nonetheless assigns the dynamic with the unqualified designation of “homosexual” without historicizing what homosexuality would have meant at the time of the book’s publication in 1902. Gide’s Michel and Menalque never specify their sexual identity or even engage any form of a same-sex sexual act. The desire for the Arab boys is rendered purely aesthetic, or at least the scope of what Michel as the narrator wants to tell us leaves it as a purely scopic relationship.

Where Said’s analysis is limited, modern queer French scholars have picked up on how orientalism’s allure of lands replete with sensual delights and imperialism’s reassurance of a secure power hierarchy came to inform the formulation of a queer, western literary subject. Lawrence Schehr calls attention to the mutual desire for liberation in the relationship between the subordination of the homosexual in Europe and the subordination of the colonial subject:

At the heart of this liberation is a Eurocentric argument that is a simulacrum of the dominance of white male heterosexuality. Gide structures his liberation of homosexuality according to heterosexual oppression. Gide’s freedom then comes not only at the
expense of the Maghrebin male, but also at the expense of the gay European male himself, forced to mime the very power dynamic that made him secondary in the first place (119).

The liberation of homosexual desire that Gide would later agitate for in his more philosophical text *Corydon* by justifying the benefit of pederastic relationships relies upon an inherent inequality between subjects. When this pederastic model of same-sex desire is exported to North Africa, the power dynamic adds the further disequilibrium of the racial and cultural dominance of the European man over the indigenous youth. While Gide labels a specific model of same-sex desire in *Corydon* as pederasty, the term is absent in the ostensibly pederastic attention Michel gives to the Arab boys. Emily Apter refers to Gide’s almost teasing tone of non-classification as “the etiology of the unspoken”. Apter stresses a reading of Gide’s work that looks “not only at what Gide’s narrators seem to be withholding from their confessions, but also at specific moments in the recit where what is said by these fictional narrators is belied by what the text, as a narrative system ‘accidentally’ suggests” (106). By leaving any formal identification of homosexuality to the mere suggestion of the narration, Gide’s exploration of homosexual desire evades the clinical or social imperatives to explain it and, in the process, de-eroticize it. Gide’s suggestions of homosexuality makes same-sex desire suggestive again, a practice of insinuations and ambiguities that retains its subversion and multiplies its possibilities.

For Both Gide and Bowles, colonial North Africa provides a space that promises a reprieve from western civilization and the exactitude of representation. Gide’s colonial space is a refuge for the Western homosexual to evade the occidental will to knowledge that renders him a specimen in a jar. While the western homosexual sees the colonial space as a place where he can discard that clinical gaze by reveling in what he supposes to be a culture outside of these
practices, he nonetheless refuses to cede the power of the gaze as a mode of sexual power.

Through the voice of Michel, Gide praises the landscape and people of Tunisia:

> This land of pleasure satisfies without calming desire; indeed every satisfaction merely exalts it...A land liberated from works of art. I despise those who can acknowledge beauty only when it’s already transcribed, interpreted. One thing admirable about the Arabs: they live their art, they sing and scatter it from day to day; they don’t cling to it, they don’t embalm it in works (158).

According to Gide, the pleasure and sensuality usually only accessible by viewing works of art that depict it in the occident are lived experiences of the oriental body on a daily basis. The Tunisian people are able to pursue and satisfy their desires because they do not bother to represent them in a mode that makes them intelligible to western logics of naming. For a homosexual trying to articulate his desire outside of this very system, this vision of the Tunisian people becomes attractive. Gide reproduces the orientalist discourse of authenticity in which it is presumed that these indigenous people, presumed be not yet spoiled or corrupted by Western civilization, are more in touch with the pure experience of the human body in nature. They are constructed as endless fountains of uninhibited pleasure, evading the base unhappiness of the civilized man who represses his carnal instincts under the social contract and sublimates these drives into works of art.

> Without an art to “embalm” desire, desire is no longer abstract and illusory, but a continual experience of authentic pleasure. Greg Mullins defines this persistent discourse as colonial nostalgia, “Westerners demonstrate a yearning for an authentically ‘traditional’ non-West, that is to say, for authentic difference against which the West can know itself” (24). This claim echoes in part Jean-Paul Sartre’s own concept of authenticity, which simply put, is the
opposite of bad faith. To place the orientalized view of the colonized subject in Sartre’s terms; the colonized subject is presumed to be in a perpetual state of “being in of itself” without the estrangement of a “being for itself” which demands self-knowledge and alignment with prefabricated social identities. The colonized subject is thus presupposed to have no self-awareness and no desire to produce knowledge about the self. He does not have to navigate his libidinal instincts around the ego-ideals of his state of being for itself.

For the queer westerner, this space of the orient has particular allure because the homosexual himself shares a certain part of the same exoticising and abjecting discourse. Much like the colonial subject, who is assumed to have access to pleasures prohibited to the average person, homosexual desire also threatens to destabilize the order of civilization with its lack of a moral structure. Yet, as Lawrence Schehr reminds us, this opportunity between the marginalized queer and the subjugated colonial subject to align against the repression of imperialism is squandered in Gide’s work. Gide’s ideal of the Arab who lives his desire instead of aestheticizing it ultimately results in the aestheticization and instrumentalization of the Arab body for the western homosexual’s desire. Reflecting the very attitudes cast as fiction in the mouth of Michel, Gide writes about his own attraction to Arab youths in *If It Die*: “It was not with any one of them in particular that I fell in love, but with their youth indiscriminately. The sight of their health sustained me and I had no wish for society but theirs. Perhaps I found in their simple ways and childish talk a mute counsel to trust more confidently to life” (271). Gide’s attraction to the Arab youths depersonalizes their bodies to the point where they are no longer individuals who attract him, but merely a fantastical amalgam of Gide’s subjective construction of oriental eroticism. He is in love with an impression of them, not their selves. His desire is safely secured in a body that cannot speak. In his quest to discover a land where queer desire can
be experienced authentically without the abstraction of speaking it or representing it, he confuses the imposed muteness of the Arab boy who cannot speak out against the repressive forces of colonialism for a virtue that subverts the west’s will to knowledge.

While Paul Bowles inherits this colonial discourse from Gide in the form of nostalgia for a land where representation is overridden by pursuits of desire, Bowles is more skeptical about this possibility. In the opening pages of *The Sheltering Sky*, in which he fictionalizes several of his journeys through the Sahara with his wife, Bowles casts North Africa as the hope for a space uncontaminated by western culture bent on destroying itself during World War II:

> At this point, they had crossed the Atlantic for the first time since 1939, with a great deal of luggage and the intention of keeping as far away from the places which have been touched by the war. For, as he claimed, another important difference between tourist and traveler is that the former accepts his own civilization without question; not so the traveler, who compares it with others, and rejects those elements he finds not to his liking. And the war was one facet of the mechanized age he wanted to forget (6).

Bowles paints North Africa with the implied colonial rhetoric of the virgin land, unspoiled by civilization and brimming with the possibility of escaping the base unhappiness of civilized existence, evidenced vividly by the senseless World War Two. It is also worth noting how the distinction Bowles places between tourist and traveler fits into the logic of his own queer itinerant life. Earlier, Bowles details another distinction between the two, “whereas the tourist generally hurries back home at the end of a few weeks or months, the traveler, belonging no more to one place than the next, moves slowly over periods of years, from one part of the Earth to another” (6). Unlike Gide, the tourist who hurries back to his native France, Bowles the traveler retains an identification with his American civilization as his own, but refuses to belong
to it. This identification in turn liberates him to accept the possibilities of the alternate lifestyles of other civilizations and integrate them within his own conception of home. No matter where he is, the traveler does not belong to the place, but he is inflected with the cultural values and desires of the place he visited.

In belonging to nowhere, the traveler is not beholden to a single regime of cultural morality that would make him ashamed of feel guilty for pursuing his desire. The traveler who freely chases pleasure is the antithesis of Sartre’s homosexual who is beholden to his social context and internalizes shame and guilt that contains his desire and anchors him. In a 1933 letter to his musical mentor Aaron Copland, a young Paul Bowles makes this connection between his geographical wanderlust and his sexual desire while lamenting his dissatisfaction with western art and literature as he voices his dissatisfaction with living in America:

I never do mean to generalize, mon cher, but certainly it seems permissible in regard to America. You exaggerate when you claim sex is here, for instance. Where in this country can I have 35 of 40 different people a week, and never risk seeing them again? Yet, in Algeria, it actually was the mean rate. Or do you think that really is not what I want? I think it’s what I want, so it must be.... Art in America we also let go, because I don’t know the first thing about art and amn’t interested in it at all. I hate America because I feel attached to it, and I don’t want to feel that way. In Africa for instance, I can sit and feel unlocated; I can look at the landscape and turn the page and look at another, and it means nothing. But here I look at the landscape and it looks back at me, and I am frightened of it, and want to get out as fast as possible (117).

Bowles unites the geographical fixity of America with its lack of a satisfactory offering of sexual opportunities. By contrast, the French colony of Algeria offers enough obliging partners who
remain anonymous and Bowles feels “unlocated”. The land liberates itself to his penetrating gaze and does not return any form of judgment he would care about. The anonymous Algerians are part of this colonial landscape that does not look back at him. Just like Gide who rails against the embalming of pleasure in art, the young Bowles also contrasts a disinterest in the static nature of art and civilization in America with the lived experience of dynamic colonial Africa as part of its sensual attraction. Yet, while both Bowles and Gide praise the North African lifestyle, they are both guilty of aestheticizing these colonial subjects in their own literature.

As Bowles lived in North Africa for decades and learned more about the culture, his praise for the North African people evolved away from Gide’s aestheticization of the people and land and became more politically conscious of how westernization threatened to erode the culture that suited his artistic and sexual desires. Flash forward 50 years into the future, the elderly Paul Bowles laments the effects of globalization on the North African culture he so admired. With the increasing westernization of the Moroccan people after independence, those landscapes that never looked back at him and those sexual partners that evaporated into anonymity began to develop the capacity to gaze back and view sexuality as an essential part of one’s identity. In a 1988 interview, Bowles responds to the observation that he seems more interested in illiterate Moroccans than in educated ones: “They’re free to remember, to invent—as they would put it, to lie. They’re much better at lying because they remember their lies...The literate are less interesting. They have generally absorbed French ideas from their professors. The illiterates are much better” (216). For Bowles, literacy signifies the incursion of western civilization and, in turn, the influence of western thought and values that suddenly turn the
colonized body into a vague approximation of the colonizer.\(^{28}\) Thus, part of Bowles’ attraction to
the culture and inhabitants of North Africa was their illiteracy; their inability to read the
significations of western culture. This illiteracy made the landscape unable to look back at him
and rendered the Arab sexual partners anonymous. The land and people had no ability to read his
acts, desires, and body for the homosexuality that the west was ready to detect and essentialize.

In a 1974 interview, when asked to describe the presence of homosexuality in Morocco,
Bowles responded, “There never was such a concept before, but as it’s become more urbanized,
there has come up a younger generation which could be called homosexual, I suppose. They’re
all bisexual, but there are also now those who are very obviously homosexual, more than bi. But
that’s conditioning—15 years ago, it was taken for granted all over Morocco that anybody slept
with anybody. No holds barred” (70). Bowles argues that homosexuality as a way of
conceptualizing same-sex activity is an importation of the west that had only gained cultural
cache in the post-colonial era of Morocco. Previously, what would now be termed homosexual
behavior was more common because the act did not reflect something specific about one’s
essential identity, their cultural background, or their politics like homosexuality does in the west.
In a later interview, Bowles remarks, “Nobody thought about it. Nobody talked about it. Now
they want to do what Europeans do, naturally. If all European films and television programs, and

\(^{28}\) It is important to consider that in praising illiteracy, Bowles is not necessarily praising
ignorance. Bowles spent a great portion of his life in North Africa recording and promoting the
music of Arab musicians and he personally worked with illiterate storytellers to preserve their
tales. This endeavor led to a long collaboration with the storyteller and painter (and Bowles
occasional lover) Mohammed Mrabet who was illiterate in standard modern written arabic.
Bowles translated his stories into novels such as Love With a Few Hairs (1967), and The Lemon
(1969), (among others), both of which revolve around homosexual themes between westerners
and North Africans. Among the illiterate, Bowles found some of the remaining adherents to
traditional North Africans cultures whose futures were imperiled by globalization. Thus, in
praising the illiterate, Bowles is acknowledging the traditional cultural genius of the land, and
not the ignorant.
so on, stressed homosexuality, they wouldn’t have changed at all. They would have said: Oh yes, of course that’s the way life is! But then they saw life wasn’t that way (232). The desire to emulate European culture meant their adoption of their attitudes on homosexuality.

Bowles blames the move toward westernization on the part of the then newly independent Morocco as the reason why the concept of viewing same-sex sexuality through the paradigm of homosexuality became dominant. Bowles claims that because the concept of homosexuality carried with it such negative connotations, regular same-sex encounters decreased in the land as the westernized generation came to blame its cause on a psychological or moral deficiency.

For a writer who had no wish to disclose his own same-sex desire, the Moroccan sexual imaginary appealed to him because they did not conceive of it in terms of identity, or at least not until western popular culture taught them to. “Tangier had a reputation as a magnet for homosexual activity, and several of Tangiers' expatriate residents readily admitted that the attractions of the city were its inexpensive life and the homosexuality. Moroccans regarded homosexuality with indifference, except in the case of boys who prostituted themselves or grown men who practiced passive sodomy” (Caponi 163). Other prominent gay American writers from the 50s such as Gore Vidal, Truman Capote, Tennessee Williams, and William Burroughs all visited Bowles and sampled the sensual delights of the region. Unlike other writers for whom Morocco provided a space to freely express their sexual orientation, Bowles found liberation in the fact that he was freed from orientation itself. This is perhaps why Bowles omitted any mention of his sexual relationship with young men in Tangiers, most notably his decade-long relationship with the painter Ahmed Yacoubi who he met when he was 16. In one of his later interviews, Bowles explains that his decision not to disclose that part of their relationship was
based on the fact that it was not a “love” relationship and thus the only part excluded was the sexual, which he says would be like “telling them what sort of toothpaste you use” (230).  

It is difficult to tell with Bowles’ reactions whether this is a defensive maneuver against disclosure or if he had so internalized his belief in the lack of sexual labels in Morocco that a sexual relationship in that environment would not shed any real insight into his life. While it would be easy to romanticize this edenic proposition of a libido without identity constraints with a certain idealism, Paul Bowles speaks of his sexual life in Morocco in decidedly unsentimental terms. Speaking of his relationship with Yacoubi as an example of all his sexual interactions with the Moroccans in general, Bowles states:

I always took it for granted, always had the most cynical approach to them, thinking all their interest is for whatever they can get in the way of objects, of money from anybody, I know that’s not true but it made it easier to deal with them, no?...All relationships I ever had from the beginning had to do with paying. I never had sexual relationships without pay, even when I was much younger (226-227).

29 In recent article on Paul and Jane Bowles’ relationship, Jeffrey Meyers provides further insight on the relationship between Paul Bowles and Yacoubi’s relationship: “At the same time Paul became obsessed with a sixteen-year-old boy called Ahmed Yacoubi, the first of several handsome young Moroccans who sold themselves to him. But unlike Jane, who flaunted her destructive connection to Cherifa, Paul hid his feelings. He wanted to maintain his respectable married façade, didn’t want to be considered (even in free-wheeling Tangier) a homosexual, and, when the nationalists took control after independence, was afraid of being expelled from Morocco. Yacoubi was also rather savage, and Paul wrote, “his reactions were those of a primitive” rather than of a cultured and sophisticated man. In contrast to his cool attitude toward Jane, Paul confessed, “I loved Yacoubi with an intense passion heretofore unknown to me. With Yacoubi, it was never ‘just sex.’” Paul was intrigued by Yacoubi’s predatory, egoistic, touchy, suspicious, immoral, and irrational personality: “Few people alive could have less sense of reality. I never tried to guess what Yacoubi might do next.” Though he was far more passionate than Yacoubi and they were intimate for many years in Tangier, Fez, Ceylon, and points east, he concluded that they were never in love. Yacoubi was absolutely rotten, even to Paul, who nevertheless idealized him as a symbol of youth, beauty, and the best in Arab culture.”
Bowles uncovers in unequivocal terms the underlying foundation of economic privilege and exchange that both unites and distances the homosexual traveler and the colonized subject in a relationship of power. Bowles is fully aware of Gide’s dynamic of homosexual liberation through unequal power relations between the westerner and the colonized subject. The sexual liberation afforded by the attention of Arabs like Yacoubi came only from a meeting of material needs with sexual desire. Bowles was fully aware that “you could get anything you wanted if you paid for it. Do anything, too, for that matter;—there were no incorruptibles. It was only a question of price” (Carr 204). Bowles paints these young Moroccan boys in unflattering terms as opportunists whose culture encouraged these relationships for the material benefits they could reap. Bowles was aware of the economic power that enabled his desire, but he also believed that these relationships with Arab sexual partners were not purely relationships of dominance and submission because he maintained they were craftily exploiting him for cash in return. While Bowles is complicit in the sexualization of Arabs, he also does not view them as mute bodies blending into the scenery as he had as a young man. Rather, his life in North Africa led him to invest agency in these people, interested in the gritty reality of their everyday lives as actors even as he took advantage of them. Gide’s own sexual experiences in Algeria come to mind in that he too mediated these relationships through money. In *If It Die*, Gide’s two explicitly sexual experiences with Arab boys come from an episode with a young valet and then later with a young musician and presumed prostitute arranged by Oscar Wilde. Neither episode depicts the explicit payment of money for sexual services. Instead, both the valet and the musician’s available sexual services are treated as if they are included within the general scope of the exotic vacation that he pays for.
For Gide, these Arab boys are mute provocateurs prepositioned for the penetration of colonial desires. While for Bowles, they are cunning opportunists who understood quite well this psychological complex of the privileged westerner with orientalist fantasies and knew how to take advantage of it. Bowles saw the Moroccans who fed off the patronage of westerners as adept at exploiting travelers for profit. This attitude recalls Gide’s depiction of the theft of the scissors in *The Immoralist*, in that for both Bowles and Gide, the image of the colonized subject that thieves and deceives the westerner makes the subject even more attractive insofar as their sly transgressions against the colonizer represents the subversion of western morality that they themselves are desperate to skirt as well. Bowles in particular does not castigate or hold this generalization as proof of their inferiority, but he instead presents it as a slice of his authentic experience. Bowles depicts the colonized subject in all gradations between heroic and criminal without any explicit political interest in redeeming or condemning them. Yet, no matter where this subject fell on the scale, Bowles maintained an irreducible difference between the westerner and the Arab subject. They may collude sexually and economically. They may clash violently. They will, however, never converge as the same due to the inherent asymmetry between the colonizer and the colonized. Bowles presents these collusions and clashes as productive and destructive of queer desire. The Saharan desert in its particular void becomes a space where these mutations of gender, body, and sexuality meet violently in his stories. Predator becomes prey, man becomes woman, and woman becomes man, yet in all three, Bowles’ narration evades a moral that could somehow redeem them.

In “A Distant Episode” from 1945, Bowles depicts a violent clash between the westerner and the Arab through the story of a French linguist who is brutalized and abducted by the local people. The linguist, known only as “Professor”, travels deep into the heart of the Sahara
searching for variations of Moghrebi to study while also searching for a cafe owner with whom he had begun a friendship a decade earlier. After learning that the cafe owner had been dead for sometime upon arriving, the professor realizes his complete isolation in the foreign town and becomes unnerved, encompassed by the colonial other. While hiking alone in a quarry, the professor is ambushed and abducted by the Reguibat, a semi-nomadic tribe that traces its origins to the 16th century and is characterized in Bowles’ stories as the equivalent of land pirates. Outside of Bowles’ fiction, the Reguibat is known for their violent resistance to French and Spanish attempts to colonize the Sahara through the 19th and 20th century. The Reguibat members themselves share in the subversion of colonialism through itinerancy. Their nomadism made it difficult for colonial powers to subjugate them within a fixed space. Through their conscious evasion of colonial power through itinerancy, Bowles casts the Reguibat as the professor’s torturers in a tale of retribution for the abuses of imperialism. Shortly after the abduction, the Reguibat cut the professor’s tongue off and force him to perform for them. Eventually, they adapt this into a kind of freak show to amuse the villagers and parade the now muted professor like a puppet on a string. The professor, representing the West’s will to knowledge about colonial subjects in now turned into an object at the mercy and amusement of the people who were previously thought of as the object of his own curiosity.

A linguist loses his tongue during an expedition into Africa to study the tongues of others. With this simple irony, Bowles speaks to a sense of futility that the colonial enterprise could ever create a common language or even a way to understand the speech and culture of others that does not do violence to the others. Even the most noble of westerners with an academic interest in the other is guilty of producing knowledge of the other destined to be subsumed into the colonial regime of power. The silenced disequilibrium of power through
which Gide’s westerners realized their liberation is inverted in Bowles’ prose. The violence of colonialism is vividly realized as it acts against the previously inviolable body of the colonizer. After escaping the Reguibat, the now tongueless Professor lapses into insanity. Bowles ends the story with the professor running down the street, screaming unintelligibly and arousing the attention of a French soldier who confuses him for a “holy maniac” and takes one, half-hearted shot at him with his gun (48). In Bowles’ formula, a linguist without a tongue becomes a castrated man and castration in turn causes insanity. The professor becomes indistinguishable from the colonial other in the eyes of the colonial authority personified in the body of the soldier—his insanity is as inscrutable as the culture of the natives. Through the tongue castration, Bowles presents the horrors of colonial violence as literally unspeakable and unites this violence with the violence of the erotic, also rendered unspoken.

Bowles further explores the symbolism of castration as the unspoken erotic in the colonial imaginary in his short story “The Delicate Prey” (1948). Bowles found inspiration for the story in the form of an anecdote from a French soldier (Green 53). In this tale, Bowles depicts intra-Arab violence as three Filala merchants are attacked by a Moungari with whom they bonded on a trip into the Sahara for trading. Obsessively vigilant over the possibility of being attacked by the Reguibat, the three Filala men are blind to the murderous ambitions of the Moungari and are killed in horrific fashion. What stands out about this tale is the homoerotic terms in which Bowles describes the murder of the youngest member of the party, Driss.

The man moved and surveyed the young body lying on the stones. He ran his finger along the razor’s blades; a pleasant excitement took possession over him. He stepped over, looked down, and saw the sex that sprouted from the base of the belly. Not entirely conscious of what he was doing, he took it in one hand and brought his arm down
with the motion of a reaper wielding a sickle. It was swiftly severed. A round dark
hole was left, flush with the skin; he stared a moment, blankly. Driss was screaming. The
muscles all over his body stood out, moved (170).

Bowles scripts the erotic touching of the youth’s body parallel with the stroking of the knife
blade until they violently intersect in a swift act of castration. The repressed violence of erotic
desire is brought to the surface when Bowles’ sexual terms and violent terms become
indistinguishable from each other, mutually colluding in erotic violence.

As erotically charged as this act of castration may be, it is merely the precondition of
further sexual violence. Bowles goes into further detail: “Slowly the Moungari smiled, showing
his teeth. He put his hand on the hard belly and smoothed his skin. Then he made a small vertical
incision there, and using both hands, studiously stuffed the loose organ in until it disappeared”
(170). Driss’ emasculation is not complete through mere castration. Rather, the Moungari creates
a makeshift vagina in the boy’s abdomen as he penetrates him with his knife and then rapes the
boy with his own penis. The act performs an allegory of sexual inversion; the act of emasculation
literally inverts his genitals up inside him, preparing him for his submission to the Moungari:

Ashamed of his nervousness, feeling that Driss was watching and mocking him
(although the youth’s eyes were unseeing with pain) he kicked him over onto his
stomach where he lay making small spasmodic movements. And as the Moungari
followed these with his eyes, a new idea came to him. It would be pleasant to inflict an
ultimate indignity upon the young Filali. He threw himself down; this time he was
vociferous and leisurely in his enjoyment. Eventually he slept (170).

Castrated and beaten within an inch of his life, the victim still has the power to render judgment
and threaten the perpetrator with his emasculating gaze. Thus, he reacts by continuing to assert
his male agency by inserting his penis into the victim. The violence done to the body and the reaction to the pain makes Driss’ body erotically arousing. The physical emasculation of Driss’ body is not enough to complete his degradation, he must submit sexually to another man in order to experience the full shame of his castration. Bowles describes the Moungari’s enjoyment as vociferous, suggesting that he could put his pleasure in some kind of audible sound as he violated the boy. Violence gives the same-sex act both a writable narrative via Bowles’ narration of the castration and a vocal expression of the pleasure without specific language. The Moungari sleeps through the night with Driss, but when he awakes to see him moaning (another term of pain and pleasure) he swiftly slits his throat. While the sleeping may have betrayed a feeling of affect between predator and prey that the rape obfuscates, upon reaching the consciousness of wakefulness, the Moungari erases all traces of the act by killing its only witness. Throughout the rape and murder, not a single word is exchanged between predator and prey. Even Bowles’ explicit narration eschews any specific naming of the act or desire on either party’s behalf. Rather, Bowles picks the most horrific image of homosexual sex he can imagine, an unspeakable crime that performs an unspeakable desire.

The same colonial desert landscape that produced the unspeakable crime of “The Delicate Prey” provides the setting for erotic violence and gender transformation in The Sheltering Sky. In the final section of the novel, Port dies of meningitis and Kit escapes his quarantine and wanders in the desert. Port’s violent death stretches over the span of weeks accompanied with high fever, hallucinations, and bouts of unconsciousness. Unlike Gide and his alter ego Michel, whose illnesses in North Africa lead to a spiritual and sensual rebirth, Port’s illness is the logical conclusion of months of wandering the desert in a failed search for meaning and inability to rekindle his relationship with Kit. Once he has found nothing in the void of the desert, he
becomes nothing himself. Gide’s realization of his latent homosexuality in North Africa confuses the orientalist discourse of authenticity as the gateway to homosexual authenticity, while Bowles’ death sentence for Port clearly marks the fact that he has read too much Sartre to believe in the supposedly transformative mysticism of the orient as authentic. While Gide’s immoralist learns a life lesson that he can use to pursue a happier existence, Bowles’ Port does learn something about life, but it is never put into words and he must die in order to learn it.

Bowles does allow for the possibility of transformation in the orient—not by some knowledge of authentic, sensual living like Gide proposes, but instead transformation happens when the westerner is overtaken by the colonial other. Just as the linguist is transformed into an insane, mutilated “other”, so too does Kit transform into a barely recognizable shell of herself when she too is abducted by the natives of the land. Once Port dies, Kit becomes detached from the life she once knew and is plunged into an existential loss of identity without her husband to counterbalance her. Wandering in the desert while avoiding the French soldiers who would return her to quarantine, Kit encounters an Arab caravan where she is taken in by the handsome Belqassim. She becomes integrated into his harem of women and submits to his sexual prowess on a daily basis, approaching a carnality of lust never experienced with her marriage to Port. As Kit reconnects herself with her sexual needs, she gradually loosens touch with her identity,

She went to the camels and opened her bag for the first time, looked into the mirror on the inside of the lid, and discovered that with the heavy tan she had acquired during the past weeks she looked astonishingly like an Arab boy. The idea amused her. While she was still trying to see the ensemble effect in the small glass, Belqassim came up, bore her off bodily to the blanket where he showered kisses and caresses upon her for a long time, calling her ‘Ali’ amid peals of delighted laughter (272).
Without Port’s presence, Kit morphs into a male herself, an Arab boy. Outside of western civilization, the Saharan environment brands itself on her body and transforms her into both the gender and racial other. For Bowles, this transformation seems a little more likely given that Kit is based on his lesbian wife Jane who wore her hair short and had decidedly unfeminine mannerisms due to her congenital limp. At the time when Bowles was writing *The Sheltering Sky* in Tangiers, Bowles described himself as “obsessed” with his current lover, 16 year-old Ahmed Yacoubi. In turning Kit into “Ali”, Bowles turned his wife Jane into his lover, Ahmed. Somewhere in vast unconscious of the desiring desert, a formula emerged for merging the love and respect he had for his wife with the sexual desire he had for Ahmed, if for a just an ephemeral moment in fiction.

Kit does not wholly transform into a young male, but instead retains the ability alternate between occidental femininity and oriental masculinity, suggesting that these two categories are more similar than what would be expected. While in the novel, Belqassim is fully aware and desirous of Kit’s white female identity, which makes her the most privileged of his harem, he nonetheless finds an erotic thrill in her boyishness as well. She becomes an object of pederastic desire without actual homosexuality. Belqassim takes advantage of Kit’s ability to masquerade as an Arab youth as a way to hide her white racial identity as they travel through the desert, “When a man addressed himself to Kit, holding up a pair of sandals (she was barefoot), Belqassim pushed forward and answered for her, indicating with accompanying gestures that the young man with him was not in his right mind and must not be bothered to be spoken to” (273). Ironically, this fabricated tale of insanity had some basis in reality as her captivity in Belqassim’s harem led to her slow decent into madness. Yet, this insanity does not become fully apparent until she flees the harem, is found by the French embassy, and is delivered to an asylum. She
refuses to speak and eat, rendering herself illegible to the colonial authorities who seek to transition her back into civilization. The queer experience of racial and gender otherness that enflamed her passions in the desert and made her, temporarily, the impossibly perfect object of Bowles’ own desire are unspeakable inside French civilization. Kit comes as close as anyone in Bowles’ work to understanding the colonial other, but the understanding comes at the price of being unable to articulate it back through western speech and reason.

Although The Sheltering Sky is not explicitly about same sex desire, it coalesces at the end of the narrative the predominant features of his visions of queer desire. These elements include but are not limited to colonial spaces as enabling of queer desire through cultural exploitation, the commodification of the colonized body, the elusive goal of fleeing civilization, patriarchy as an inhibitor of desire and individual expression, the ability to pursue desire by not naming it, the erotic nature of violence and violation, and the sublime experience of terror when experiencing a social transgression beyond language. All of these themes are traceable to Gide’s orientalism and Sartre’s existentialism as influences, yet while these textual genealogies can be charted on paper, it has been equally important to map out Bowles’ own experiences on land. If Sartre’s existentialism privileged “existence before essence” and Gide’s orientalism emphasized the affective, sensual experience of the orient, then Bowles’ vision of queer desire was not simply an appropriation of ideas about its experience, but about putting them into the practice of experience. For Bowles, the act of expatriation was that experience, and in that experience, he took the existential search for meaning into the void of the desert and the orientalist search for pleasure into the heart of its violence—illustrating not only the experience of queer desire, but also how the experience of desire is queer, leading the desiring Bowles far from home and its security and into foreign spaces where desire is threatening in its allure.
CHAPTER 6
FRITZ PETERS

Unlike the writers of the previous three chapters, Fritz Peters’ time spent in France was not the volition of the young dreaming artist like his contemporaries, but instead, Peters spent his adolescence in the literary French expatriate world. Adopted by his aunt Margaret Anderson and her partner Jane Heap, who were founding editors of *The Little Review*, Fritz Peters and his brother Tom were relocated to France in 1924 and enrolled in Georges Gurdjieff’s Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man in Fontainebleau. Peters spent the next five years of his life working as a personal assistant and studying under the internationally renowned mystic. By the 1920s, Gurdjieff’s celebrity as a spiritual guru had spread among the modernists in Paris and America and several Gurdjieff Groups had been formed devoted to his teachings, including Anderson and Heap’s own lesbian clique known as “The Ladies of the Rope”. In the first section of this chapter, I briefly sketch out Peters’ adolescence and adulthood, paying close attention to how his upbringing in the modernist, expatriate world influenced his own, post-war literature.

Along with Gurdjieff, Peters’ other principle mentor of the era was Gertrude Stein, who opened the teenage Peters to the cosmopolitan culture of Paris. Peters’ fond memories of times spent exploring Paris with Stein influenced Peters’ later fiction, which also used traveling through spaces of French culture as a form of coming of age for young, queer adolescents.

This chapter examines Peters’ memoirs and two gay-themed novels in the light of Gurdjieff’s philosophy and Peters’ enduring admiration for this controversial mystic. Although Peters’ writing keeps an objective distance from the messianic level of devotion that some of Gurdjieff’s followers maintained, his time spent at the institute and his life-long relationship with Gurdjieff left a permanent impression on Peters’ psyche and profoundly shaped the
psychological and philosophical themes of his depiction of gay sexuality. Peters produced three memoirs devoted to his relationship with Gurdjieff: *Boyhood with Gurdjieff* (1964), which spans his five years at Prieuré; *Gurdjieff Remembered* (1965), which chronicles his visits with Gurdjieff in America and the therapy Gurdjieff provided for him after his service in World War Two; and *Balanced Man* (1978), a brief reflection on Gurdjieff’s philosophy published a year before Peters’ death in 1979. In the two sections devoted to these memoirs, I analyze how Gurdjieff’s philosophy criticized modern constructions of sexuality, gender, morality, and the human psyche in ways that allowed for Peters to construct a space for conceptualizing gay identity. Gurdjieff’s core belief that modern society put man into a form of waking sleep that alienated him from his potential development as an individual inspired Peters’ critique of the socially pervasive “sleep” that informed the unquestioned puritan morality of American culture.

I further contend that Gurdjieff’s “Fourth Way” to human development provided the language and critical perspective from which Peters questions normative assumptions about the human psyche through the vantage point of the trauma of war and the trauma of being a sexual minority. Gurdjieff’s theory of objective morality stressed that morality was not universal in its proscriptions and that what was morally good or bad was subjective to the balanced development of the individual. The theme of the queer individual struggling to define and defend one’s own morality, situated between the Puritanism of his home society and the perceived amorality of gay culture informed the identity of both Peters himself and his literary alter egos. Much like Freud’s model of the ego, id, and super ego that splits the human psyche into distinct, and sometimes non-cooperative parts of the individual, Gurdjieff’s model of the mind, body, and emotional core of the individual who “has no individual I” developing in disequilibrium also disrupts the Enlightenment era assumption of rationality and reason proceeding from a unified self. From
Gurdjieff’s teachings, including this model of the individual who seeks balance between unstable sectors of his personality, Peters presents the trauma of war and the masquerade of queer sexuality as subjects that contest the normative assumption of a stable, uniform self upon which all social norms and popular moralities are based. Although Gurdjieff wrote nothing explicit about homosexuality in his tomes, much like how Charles Henri Ford found inspiration in the surrealism that excluded homosexuality, Peters recognized that the implications of Gurdjieff’s philosophy implicitly knocked down the prohibitions and faulty logic that stigmatized homosexuality and provided a vision of human subjectivity and personal development that could harbor same sex desire and morally justify a gay identity.

In addition to his memoirs, Peters published a handful of novels in the late 40s through the early 60s, including two works that explicitly discuss homosexual themes: *The World Next Door* (1949) and *Finistère* (1951). Although both novels are works of fiction, they draw heavily from Peters’ two life-defining periods spent abroad. In *The World Next Door*, Peters fictionalizes his time spent in an American mental health facility after returning from duty in World War Two. Peters left for America suffering from what we would now diagnose as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. I situate *The World Next Door* and Peters’ memoirs of serving in the war within the historical context of how WWII, despite its horror and brutality, actually provided young LGBT Americans with their first exposure to specific terms and cultural practices to express their desire and find community with other queers in the service. Additionally, I explore how Peters connects the experience of war trauma and its treatment in the 50s, to the treatment of homosexuality as a psychiatric disorder. Through experimental prose, as the unreliable narrator of the novel stumbles through his hallucinations and psychotic panics, it is possible to excavate clues to Peters’ own troubled psyche, including his life lived in France and morally ambivalent references
to past homosexual experiences. Much like how the surrealists saw visions of madness as a enab
ling certain perspectives on society that a sane mind would overlook, Peters redeems the embattled psyche of the traumatized along with that of the queer as vantage points that enable a critique of post-war America, branding these individuals as “pioneers of the mind.” As the doctors try to treat the protagonist’s war trauma, not by revisiting the battlefield, but by addressing his perceived homosexuality, Peters reveals how society’s denigration of the mentally ill conceals how it is society itself that produces these illnesses. Peters’ critique of the asylum and modern psychiatry illuminates how the social prejudices that motivated practitioners of the era to deem non-normative identities like homosexuality as mental illness tend to actually produce the madness they claim to treat.

Peters’ personal struggle with homosexuality and his childhood spent in France informs his second novel, *Finistère*, about an American teenager transplanted to Paris and his attempts to conceal his love affair with an older schoolteacher. While the protagonist Matthew’s traditional boarding school experience contrasts with Peters’ own education under Gurdjieff and holidays spent at 27 Rue de Fleurus with Gertrude Stein, *Finistère* nonetheless responds to the clash of social and moral values regarding sexuality between the puritanical Americans and the comparatively liberated French that influenced both Peters’ and his literary alter ego’s sexual maturations. *Finistère*, which translates to “the end of the earth”, refers to the rocky Pont Saint-Mathieu in Brittany where Matthew ultimately commits suicide after his love affair is discovered and his mother rejects him. With the title, Peters begins his conceit of charting the geography of France to spatialize queer desire. By the spatialization of queer desire, I refer to how certain kinds of spaces, public and private, based on their location, codes of social conduct, and who is granted access, among other considerations, create opportunities for queers to tactically
appropriate the space to pursue desire in ways impossible under full public scrutiny. These spaces do not just serve as locations for pre-formed queer erotic and social practices, but also, the space actually informs and dictates what kinds of queer interactions are possible, thus playing a role in shaping the culture itself. Matthew is initiated into homosexual desire in the boarding school space, baptized in the Seine, and taken reluctantly through a tour of the gay underground of Paris where the moral purity Matthew seeks in his love is contrasted by the seedy spaces and the licentious demimonde in which gay sex can be sought in the interwar era. The physical geography of France is infused with desire and constructed as a space where queer desire is achievable, but ultimately irreconcilable with deeply ingrained Puritan American morality. In Peters’ novel, the enlightened morality of the French can read the semiotics of homosexuality on bodies and in spaces where the Americans are blinded by their Puritanism.

Peters’ novels were written in a new climate of widespread social awareness of homosexuality in post-World War Two America. Even though the 50s and the 60s of the Pre-Stonewall era in America was considered the Dark Ages of the gay community, it was also a period of unprecedented public awareness of homosexuality, often demonized as an imminent threat to social values and the nation. From Cold War purges of homosexuals in government positions to the Kinsey Report that shocked the nation with its claims of widespread homosexual conduct among ostensibly straight men, homosexuality became a moral panic that threatened the post-war prosperity of the nation. In this context, Peters’ treatment of American homophobia and his literary escape to a French culture in which homosexuality could speak its own name freely (although not without its own culturally specific moral dilemmas) aims directly at America’s Puritanism. The American public is sexually repressed in comparison to other Western cultures, yet, just as Foucault informs us in *The History of Sexuality*, the American public retained a
fascination with sex as the core explanation of the human subject. Sexuality is forbidden as a discourse of pleasure, yet ubiquitous as a clinical discourse that supposedly unlocked the inner essence of the human subject. While Peters retains Gurdjieff’s belief that sex is at the core of all human energy and it empowers our endeavors, he writes against the growing belief in policing and medicalizing sexuality as the key to the health of the individual and the nation. Although Peters struggled his entire life with his own sexuality, his fiction is empowered by Gurdjieff’s philosophy and his immersion in French culture to locate and condemn the logic of repression and the pathologizing of queerness in America in the 50s.

**Queer Orphan in the Modernist Milieu**

Fritz Peters was born Arthur Anderson Peters in 1913. Early in his life, his mother, Lois uprooted Fritz and his brother Tom and moved to the burgeoning bohemian scene in Chicago to help her sister, Margaret Anderson, with her new, avant-garde literary magazine, *The Little Review*. While Lois reveled in the freedom afforded to women in the modernist milieu of Chicago, she also suffered from mental illness and spent much of her life in and out of hospitals. After one particularly catastrophic nervous breakdown in 1923, Margaret Anderson and her co-editor and lover, Jane Heap, agreed to raise Fritz and Tom. Fritz immediately conflicted with

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30 In his study of the women devoted to Gurdjieff, *The Ladies of the Rope*, William Patrick Paterson writes on the background of the adoption:

No one knew when Lois’ state would be improved enough for her to return home. With the stepfather, a Chicago attorney, either unable or unwilling to care for his stepsons. Fritz and Tom, Margaret agreed to take them in, the oddness in those days of two lesbians raising two young boys, the extreme differences in temperament and age, and all the attendant tensions involving the boys’ mother—it was not a situation conducive to harmony. (Years later Fritz wrote: ‘To this day, I am not at all sure why Margaret and Jane took on this responsibility. It was a strange form of ‘planned parenthood’ for two women neither of whom, it seemed to me, would have wished to have children of their own, and a mixed blessing from any point of view (34).
Jane Heap’s strong will. Further compounding the problem was the fact that not only did Anderson have little interest in children or a domestic life, but also her attraction to Jane had been waning as well. Thus, it fell on Jane Heap’s shoulders to raise the disobedient nephew of a lover who had lost interest in her. Nonetheless, Heap maintained firm, decisive control over the boys. She formally adopted them in 1924 against the wishes of their biological father who had emerged after a ten year absence in the boys’ lives, and she forbade them from contact with their still recovering mother, going so far as to shut the door on her when she came to see her sons during one of their Christmas vacations back to America.

As Fritz and Jane continued to butt heads over the next few years of his adolescence, Jane wrote frequently about her frustrations with Fritz in her letters, describing him as “so cagey and narcissistic” (Badgett 91) and “awful—just imitation and shallowness showing off” (118). In another letter, Heap expresses her distress over Fritz’s behavior, stating that he has “no emotional reaction”, and she compares Fritz to “Loeb”, one half of the infamous Leopold and Loeb duo who were then dominating the headlines with their sensational trial for murdering (and allegedly sexually assaulting) a young boy in Chicago. The trial grasped the attention of the nation with its shocking story of two bright, possibly homosexual University of Chicago students who had premeditated “the perfect murder” under the supposed influence of Nietzschean philosophy. The popularization of Freudian psychoanalysis in America at the time made the trial particularly compelling as the new idea of “unconscious drives” motivating psychotic behavior was floated as an explanation and defense of the killers. In a later letter, this comparison becomes even more telling of Jane’s treatment of the adolescent Fritz Peters when she claims to have (what will later be proven untrue in the trial) inside information on the case:
I got a lot of very inside dope on that murder myself—Loeb is the criminal—they have killed and castrated, burned houses, robbed, etc. for a long time. Loeb is not a homo but the other one is not a criminal. Their families want them put away—scared to death of them—if they could not make a sicker with the state they’d pay to have them put up for life or in asylums—all the best psychiasts (sp?) in the country are being hired—Loeb had a nurse who is supposed to have raped him before he was 14—and made him what he is (95).

The association of Peters with Loeb coupled with the aforementioned assessments of his psyche show that not only did Heap think of the young Peters as possibly disturbed, but that a certain psycho-sexual dysfunction may have been at the root. One may have thought having adopted lesbian aunts as parents would have eased a latently gay child into his sexual maturity, but for Fritz Peters, any advantage growing up with a lesbian couple as “normal” was countered by the contentious relationship he had with his adopted guardians.

With this instability in his young life, Peters’ relationship with Gurdjieff at the institute became the closest thing he had to a benevolent parental figure: In *Boyhood with Gurdjieff*, Peters writes:

> My relationship with Jane, as I felt and experienced it, was highly volatile and explosive. There was, at times, a great deal of emotion, of love, between us, but the very emotionality of the relationship frightened me. More and more I tended to shut out everything that was outside of myself. People, for me, were something I had to exist with, had to bear. As much as possible, I lived alone, day-dreaming in my own world, longing for the time when I could escape from the complex, and often totally incomprehensible, world around me. I wanted to grow up and be alone -- away from all
of them. Because of this, I was almost always in trouble. I was lazy about my work at home, I resented any demands that were made on me, and any duties that I was supposed to perform, any contribution I was expected to make. Obstinate and independent because of my feeling of aloneness, I was usually in trouble, frequently punished...More and more, I retreated into a dream world of my own making.

In this world of my own, there were two people who were not enemies, who stood out with the brilliance of lighthouses, and yet there was no way that I could communicate with them. They were my mother and, of course, Gurdjieff. Why "of course"? The simple reality of Gurdjieff as a human being—the, to me, uncomplicated relationship which I had had with him during those few months in the previous summer -- became like a raft to a drowning man (22).

For the young Fritz Peters, this “world of his own” that existed in an imaginary space in his adolescent mind began to overlap with the physical geography of France and Gurdjieff’s institute in Fontainebleau. Because physical labor on the land itself was integral to psychological development in the individual, and Gurdjieff as a father figure represented the guidance Peters craved while his institute provided escape from familial drama in the US, the space of the land at Prieuré became indivisible from the kind of personhood that it fostered in Peters. The 12-year-old Peters went so far as to oppose the possibility of his father reassuming guardianship because he feared he would never get to see Gurdjieff again. Although Jane Heap had imposed Gurdjieff and the institute at Prieuré on him, Fritz nonetheless chose Gurdjieff as his unconventional father figure and the terrain of Fontainebleau as his space of individual freedom and development.

Gurdjieff was not Fritz’s only mentor in Paris. Much like in the cases of Bowles, Ford, and McAlmon, Gertrude Stein played a prominent role as a benevolent aunt and guide through
the cultural milieu of Paris. While Gurdjieff was away in America during the winter of 1925-1926, Fritz and his brother spent their time split between Prieuré and the Montparnasse quarters of expatriate Paris:

Jane had somehow persuaded Gertrude and Alice to, as it were, watch over us during her absence. On our occasional visits to Paris, we had met many controversial and distinguished people: James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, Constantin Brancusi, Jacques Lipschitz, Tristan Tzara, and others—most of whom had been contributors at one time or another to The Little Review. Man Ray had photographed both of us; Paul Tchelitchev had attempted portraits of us both. I remember when Tchelitchev, after two or three consecutive days of work on a pastel portrait of me, threw me out of his studio, telling me that I was unpaintable. "You look like everyone," he had said, "and your face is never quiet (48).

Unlike the other queer expatriates covered in this dissertation that read the works of these luminaries of modernism and voyaged to Paris to ingratiate themselves in the culture and forge an identity among Left Bank bohemia, Fritz Peters was born and raised within modernism. His childhood was recorded and reproduced by modernist aesthetics: photographed and painted by surrealists, and his dream about a pheasant inspired the opening line to Gertrude Stein’s poem portrait of Jacques Lipschitz: “He had a dream he dreamed he heard a pheasant calling and most likely a pheasant was calling” (Dydo 491). The office of The Little Review in Chicago had been his nursery and the expatriate community of surrealists, cubists, and avant-garde writers was where he came of age.

Among all of the characters of expatriate Paris, it was Gertrude Stein who truly understood the psyche and individual development of a young boy:
But it was Gertrude Stein who made the greatest impact on me. Jane had given me something of hers to read—I do not know what it was—and I had found it totally meaningless; for that reason I was vaguely alarmed at the prospect of meeting her. I liked her immediately. She seemed uncomplicated, direct, and enormously friendly. She told us—she, too, had a "no-nonsense" quality about her that appealed to me as a child—that we were to visit her every other Thursday' during the coming winter, and that our first visit would be on Thanksgiving Day. Although I was worried about Gurdjieff's absence—I felt that the Prieuré could not possibly be the same without him—my immediate liking of Gertrude and the knowledge that we would be seeing her regularly was considerable consolation (49).

One might be tempted to say that along with Gurdjieff as his chosen father figure, Stein would be his chosen mother figure, but given the weight of the authority Peters places in her and his consideration of the marked gender roles between Stein and Toklas, it may be more accurate to think of her as a second father figure—a queer father figure that understood the needs of a young American boy, but without the entrenched patriarchy of Gurdjieff’s institute.

Stein took an immediate interest in Fritz and Tom’s education and psychological maturation upon their first meeting during a traditional Thanksgiving Day celebration, “She was suspicious of both Jane and Gurdjieff as "foster parents" or "guardians" of any children, and told us forcefully that she was going to take a hand in our upbringing and education, beginning with our next visit. She added that life with "mystics" and "artists" might be all very well, but that it amounted to nonsense as a steady diet for two young American boys” (53). Despite her reputation as the most inscrutable of modernist experimentalists and her life as an expatriate, Gertrude Stein was in many respects a traditionalist with a strong American identity that came
with its national values. The patron saint of unstable prose was a figure of stability and balance that Peters desired. In the same way that Gurdjieff’s philosophy appealed to Peters because it defied conventional western values, yet retained a sense of personal morality that preached psychical balance, so too did he respect the way Stein challenged artistic and social conventions while retaining a strong core of traditional values and beliefs that she deemed useful and positive. Both Stein and Gurdjieff were strong figures that defied conventional wisdom and the oppressive status quo without falling into the moral relativism or “anything goes” assumption about personal liberation common to the Jazz Age. The idea that one could challenge social mores and yet retain their status as a moral and ethical actor was crucial to Peters who struggled to retain these values in a world that pronounced his sexuality depraved and would relegate the homosexual to hopeless immorality, and thus inhumanity.

Peters attributes his fascination with the cultural geography of Paris to the tutelage of Gertrude Stein. Squeezed in between his brother, Alice and Gertrude Stein as she drove her famous Model T Ford, Stein became Fritz’s guide to Paris:

Gertrude's plan, as she outlined it to us on our next visit, was an exciting one. She said that I was doing enough studying and reading and that while there might be some vague rewards for us in meeting intellectuals and artists, she felt very strongly that we had one opportunity that we must not neglect; the chance to get to know, intimately, the City of Paris. She made it clear that she thought this was important for many reasons, among them that exploring and getting to know a city was a comprehensible activity for children of our age, and something that would leave its mark on us forever, also that it had been neglected shamefully.
Stein was much more than a tour guide or a babysitter: she was a teacher who used the cultural geography of Paris as her classroom. The physical space of the city with its diverse communities, cultural monuments, and history became legible to the young Peters under Stein’s tutelage in a way that he would later duplicate for the naive Matthew in *Finistère*:

> From these excursions I have retained a feeling about, and a flavour of, Paris that I would never have experienced otherwise. Gertrude would lecture us about each place we visited, giving us the highlights of its history, bringing to life the famous people of the past who had created, or lived in, the places we visited. Her lectures were never over-long, never boring; she had a particular talent for re-creating the feeling of a place as she talked—she could bring buildings to life. She taught me to look for history as I lived, and urged me to explore Fontainebleau on my free days from the Prieuré.

Stein stresses the importance of learning culture by experience the space in which it lives and thrives and that exploration and travel, even on the scale of small Fontainebleau, would be essential to Fritz’s maturation. Under Stein, Peters learned that culture does not happen in a book, but in a space. While his time spent exploring Paris with Gertrude Stein left an indelible impression on the young Fritz Peters, the relationship was ultimately short lived due to rifts between her and Jane Heap. Unlike many lesbian writers in Paris at the time, Stein had no interest in the teachings of Gurdjieff and let it be known that she objected to the idea of Heap dumping her children off in his institute in lieu of a traditional American education. Stein’s criticism would prove partially correct, while Peters absorbed a philosophy that he would carry with him and defend his entire life, his lack of a formal education made transitioning back into life in America difficult.
Peters would spend the next three years living intermittently between the Institute and in Paris with Jane Heap until he received a letter from his mother entreating him to come home. The now 16-year-old Peters longed to be reunited with his mother after an absence of five years and be welcomed into her now stable domestic life. Yet, because Jane Heap was still his legal guardian and he was a minor, he would first have to gain her permission. Heap outright refused at first, but eventually allowed Gurdjieff himself to settle the situation, individually arguing their cases before him at his “writing cafe” in Paris. Peters’ sense of being an American and belonging to that land is renewed when the possibility of a more or less traditional family is brought to him. Fontainebleau and Paris had been places of escape from familial turmoil and spaces of enlightenment where he learned to balance the challenging of convention with the retention of a moral core, but now that the semblance of normality was offered to the latently gay teenage Peters in America, he seized the opportunity.

However, this idealized, aspiration to normality was quickly sabotaged. As a precondition to allowing Peters to return to his mother, Jane Heap mandated that the adoption be annulled, which was achieved via a document that pronounced Peters had been expelled for being “morally unfit”. Jane Heap had warned him that the language was just a formality, “it was very difficult to break the adoption without some reason that would be legally valid”, and the young Peters took “meagre comfort from Jane’s explanation” and assumed that the “document had to be worded that was for ‘legal’ reasons’, which were beyond [his] capacity to understand at that age” (Peters 10). Yet, Heap’s reassurance that the term was a formality was deceptive. Upon returning to Chicago and meeting his stepfather, Peters was confronted by a second letter that Heap wrote with a further explanation of his moral unfitness:
I sat in a kind of frozen horror as he read excerpts from the letter, which, according to him, had been the cause of my mother’s hospitalization a few days before, because of a complete nervous collapse. According to the letter, there was very little question but that I was some sort of sexually depraved delinquent given, principally, to the practice of corrupting other, smaller children (12).

This characterization of the young Peters recalls Heap’s earlier comparisons of Fritz to Loeb, in which sexual deviancy is purported to be the source of anti-social behavior. Peters was sent back to America officially labeled as the kind of sexually disturbed young man that Americans had come to fear after the Leopold and Loeb trial. It is also possible that elements of Fritz’s latent homosexuality were apparent to Heap and that the assumed moral deviancy of a homosexual male was enough evidence to convict him of all forms of depravity. The letter devastated Peters’ mother and stepfather, and he was eventually not allowed him to live with them for fear of what this alleged sexual predator might do to his seven-year-old daughter. Shortly after arriving in America, Peters was on his own at the age of sixteen. While Peters had been unjustly cast out for a most likely false allegation of sexual deviancy, because he was presently struggling with his own homosexual feelings, he felt the shame of banishment for his sexual identity.

As we know from *Gurdjieff Remembered*, Peters later found work escorting the mystic through America on his visits and that at the break of World War Two, he was drafted into the army. While battling Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Peters turned to writing and made an attempt at heterosexual happiness when he married Mary Louise Aswell, a literary editor for *Harper’s Bazaar*, who had helped to launch Peters’ career as well as other homosexual writers such as Truman Capote and Tennessee Williams. Since Aswell would obviously not have been naive to homosexuality, it is unclear as to whether this was a marriage of love, friendship, or
convenience. It did not last long, however. From the 50s on to his death in 1979, there is scant biographical information on Peters, but what is known is that he vacillated in his acceptance of his homosexuality and made some attempts to live within the community of gay American artists. In his biography of fellow gay American expatriate, Samuel Steward, and friend of Gertrude Stein. Justin Spring records a brief encounter between the two:

Right after *Finistère* was published I was at the height of my ‘passive aggressive’ stage, so what I wanted was to give Fritz Peters a blowjob, and I sought him out in Chicago since he was living in Rogers Park (as I remember) only a few blocks north of me, and [I] succeeded...even though he was terribly evasive at first—and reluctant when I finally did get him in bed because his underwear wasn’t the cleanest—but I managed to have my way with him—and that was the end of that...He was so difficult to know, so withdrawn and afraid (was it?) of being near or around someone gay or being thought gay himself that I just couldn’t spend the time with him that I should have...[Peters] burst into tears about five minutes after he shot his wad, and began to drink even more [and to] rant about how he really wasn’t gay...(162)

Spring further contextualizes the event, “At age thirty-eight, Peters had just emerged from a nervous breakdown and was still quite fragile—in part because he was deeply alcoholic, and in part because his psychoanalyst had ordered him to abandon his homosexuality and live as a heterosexual” (163). Although just a brief moment from his life in the early 50s, Steward’s memory provides insight into Peters’ psychological state around the time that he wrote *Finistère*. The initially bold and confident, albeit naive Matthew in the novel contrasts deeply with the psychologically fragile and deeply conflicted Peters, until Matthew becomes aware of the social castigation that homosexuals face and witnesses the seedier spaces in which queer sexuality must
be contained, and then he resembles Peters in his despondency. It seems that Peters believed that homosexuality in of itself could maintain the kind of moral purity and happiness he desired, but when placed it within the cultural politics of the era and the state of the gay community as an underground, illicit society, Peters’ vision of happiness was all but impossible or untenable. However pathetic Peters appeared in the 50s to Steward, he did eventually manage to live some part of his later years in a reasonably functional gay relationship. As Edward Field explains:

“The painter Paul Cadmus told me that in 1963, Fritz was living in New York with Lloyd Lonzes Goff, one of Cadmus’s models from the thirties and a painter by then in his own right.” (198)

According to Cadmus’ diaries, this relationship lasted until at least 1967, and it was with Goff that Peters wrote *Boyhood With Gurdjieff* and he dedicated his unpublished novel *The General*, to him. Yet, this relationship too faded due to Peters’ instability and he took a series of odd jobs while sporadically publishing until his death in 1979.

**Gurdjieff’s Philosophy by Way of Peters’ Apprenticeship to The Fourth Way**

In order to understand Gurdjieff’s influence on Fritz Peters’ construction of queer subjects and his own personally tormented sexual identity, it is first necessary to briefly sketch out Gurdjieff’s basic teachings. All of Gurdjieff’s teachings on the intellectual, emotional, and physical development of man proceed from the base belief that the average modern man lives his entire life in a hypnotized form of waking sleep. Gurdjieff’s most prominent pupil, P.D. Ouspensky quotes Gurdjieff in his book *In Search of the Miraculous*:

> A modern man lives in sleep, in sleep he is born and in sleep he dies. About sleep, its significance and its role in life, we will speak later, but at present just think of one thing, what knowledge can a sleeping man have? And if you think about it and at the same time
remember that sleep is the chief feature of our being, it will at once become clear to you that if a man really wants knowledge, he must first of all think about how to wake, that is, how to change his being (66).

This “sleep” is a lack of consciousness of the self, which Gurdjieff identifies as a symptom of modernity. The increasing mechanization of modern life creates a life of repetition and predictability that produces a type of hypnotic trance. As Colin Wilson writes on Gurdjieff’s concept of mechanical man:

Everyday consciousness is limited by ‘mechanicalness’, ‘the robot’. We become so accustomed to the repetitive routine of everyday life that we end by being bound hand and foot by habit like a fly wrapped in a spider-web. Yet, no one, even the laziest, is really happy with this state of affairs, for we recognize that it robs us of a certain intensity, a feeling of being fully alive. We need security; but it tends to conflict with that desire to be wide awake. This is more often associated with insecurity. Sartre, for example, remarked that he had never felt so alive as when he was in the French Resistance and was likely to be arrested at any moment (77).  

31 By placing Gurdjieff and Sartre in conversation, Wilson uncovers a striking parallel between Sartre’s concept of inauthenticity and Gurdjieff’s theory of sleep. Just as Gurdjieff’s concept of sleep asserts that modern man exhibits little self awareness or consciousness of the world around him and thus if he is to develop, he must be awoken, so too does Sartrean inauthenticity argue that man lives in a pervasive state of bad faith. In Sartre’s philosophy, man is only awoken occasionally throughout his life with moments of authenticity in which his core beliefs line up with his actions and intentions to produce transcendent moments of realization. These are not necessarily positive moments, but they awaken him from the perpetual sleep of bad faith and produce consciousness of his true, chosen self and his projects. While Sartre’s concept of authenticity argues that man will ultimately lapse back into his state of bad faith, Gurdjieff presents this moment of wakefulness as having the potential to emerge permanently from sleep and develop self-consciousness.
Gurdjieff’s concept of the modern, sleeping mechanical man also parallels the ideas of two of the most influential thinkers of the modern era: Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx. While as a mystic, one would associate Gurdjieff’s ideas with a pre-modern era, his ideas about the individual alienated from himself bear resemblance to those of influential modernist thinkers because his brand of mysticism was a response to the specific state of human consciousness during modernity. Although Gurdjieff and his followers were largely anti-Freudian, it is impossible to think of a project aimed at stimulating unconscious thought without envisioning Freud’s own theory of the unconscious. For both men, personal development of the individual can be achieved by increasing awareness of the elements of human experience that one normally leaves unexamined within the mind. Yet, what separates Gurdjieff from Freud is that Freud’s concept of unconscious thought is centered in a specific, unchanging part of the human mind whereas Gurdjieff’s concept of unconscious thought is more the by-product of an undeveloped human state which can be transcended through increased awareness of the self. Gurdjieff’s belief in the mechanization of human existence also recalls Marx’s concept of alienated labor in which the proletarian’s work is increasingly routinized and he simply repeats tasks on an assembly line without mastery or satisfaction. When Gurdjieff insinuates that “One would think that there are forces for whom it is useful and profitable to keep man in a hypnotic state and prevent him from seeing the truth and understanding his position,” he sounds as though he were a Frankfurt School Marxist analyzing the false consciousness peddled by the culture industry to the proletariat in exchange for their alienated, hypnotized labor.

The mechanical existence of modern man produces an asymmetry in his development as a human subject. Ouspensky records Gurdjieff saying:

Taken in itself, a man’s being has many different sides. The most characteristic feature
of a modern man is the absence of unity in him and, further, the absence in him of even traces of those properties which he most likes to ascribe to himself, that is ‘lucid consciousness,’ ‘free will’ a ‘permanent ego or I,’ and the ‘ability to do’. It may surprise you if I say that the chief feature of a modern man’s being which explains everything else that is lacking in him is sleep (66).

According to Gurdjieff, the fundamental dissymmetry of the human subject is the product of a disequilibrium between the development of man’s mind, body, and emotions. Gurdjieff taught that traditional paths to spiritual knowledge: the yogi, the fakir, and the monk, all privileged one of these three centers over the others. Alternatively, in what he termed the “Fourth Way”, Gurdjieff emphasized the importance of all three of the human centers developing together in pursuit of achieving balanced subjectivity. In Boyhood With Gurdjieff, Peters reflects on how Gurdjieff instructed him in harmonious, self-development:

He pointed out that, in any attempt or effort to get to know oneself, it was always necessary to start with the physical body for the simple reason that it was the most highly developed of man's three centres; it was for this reason that "self-observation" always started by the observation of the body alone. While the body grew automatically and mechanically, practically without supervision, nevertheless it was a more properly developed centre than either the emotional or mental "brains" (or centres) because it did, even if only automatically, perform its proper functions. Most bodily functions were not only more or less compulsive, they were also reasonably comprehensible and therefore not too difficult to satisfy (177).

Among the three centers, the body develops out of proportion to emotion or intellectual growth because the body automatically grows or changes as an organism regardless of human
intervention. Due to the increasingly mechanized state of human labor and life in modernity, the mental and emotional faculties of the individual are neglected in favor of a robot-like discipline of the body to make it efficient. The average man lives in a world that is constantly making more use of his body’s mechanical properties than his mind or emotions and consequently, his body is disciplined into new forms without a parallel shift in his intellectual or emotional state.

This concentration on harmonizing the material state of the body and its labor with the individual’s mental state was the chief objective behind Gurdjieff’s institute. During his stay, the young Peters engaged in a number of exercises alongside adult students aimed at reconfiguring physical labor as an act that can bring the physical, emotional, and intellectual sides of man into congruence for a balanced inner development. In addition to his role as Gurdjieff’s assistant, Peters was put to work in a variety of tasks at the Prieuré chateau—cutting the grass, tending to the garden, and repairing the roof. Gurdjieff referred to these tasks as part of what he termed “the work” or “the work on one’s self”, which aimed at raising consciousness of self in a process of “self-observation” and “self-remembering” through collaborative physical labor. In Boyhood With Gurdjieff, Peters explains:

He spoke again about the exercise of "self-observation" and said that since man was a three-centred or three-brained being, it was necessary to do exercises and perform tasks that were valuable for all three centres, not just the physical or "motor" centre; that "self-observation" as I knew it was a purely physical exercise in that it consisted in the observation of one's physical body and its movements, gestures and manifestations.

He said that there were various important exercises having to do with "self-remembering" which was a very important aspect of his work. One of them was to conscientiously and with all one's concentration, try to remember, as on a movie film, everything that one had
done during each entire day. This was to be done every night before going to sleep. The most important thing in the exercise was not to let the attention wander—by association.

(175)

For Gurdjieff, manual labor provided an opportunity to work on the self by focusing deep intellectual concentration on the physicality of the labor and building consciousness of the motions and movements of the body and its effects on the mind so as not to allow one’s self to become hypnotized by repetition. Recalling one of Gurdjieff’s lessons from his childhood in Gurdjieff’s fractured English, Peters quotes:

In west—your world—is belief that man have soul, given by God. Not so. Nothing given by God, only Nature give. And nature only give possibility for soul, not give soul. Must acquire soul through work...possibility to acquire conscience is already in man when born; this possibility given—free—by nature. But is only possibility. Real conscience can only be acquired by work, by learning to understand self first. Even your religion—western religion—have this phrase 'Know' thyself'. This phrase most important in all religions. When begin know self already begin have possibility become genuine man. So first thing must learn is know self by this exercise, self-observation. If not do this, then will be like acorn that not become tree—fertilizer. Fertilizer which go back in ground and become possibility for future man (47).

According to Gurdjieff, a soul is not an innate feature of humanity, but it is instead something one must earn and develop through work, which at the institute was first demonstrated through physical labor in the garden. It is the individual’s responsibility to develop one’s own soul. The essentialist construction of the soul as an eternal and universal precondition of humanity is now given a material history and a physical presence determined by the actions of the individual. This
disrupts the very core of Judeo-Christian personhood, whose pan-human assumption of the soul guarantees every individual’s basic humanity and thus equality. Gurdjieff is not interested in the Enlightenment era gloss that all men are created equally. Rather, he believed that each man has the potential to create himself and thus develop a soul. Those who do not develop themselves become fertilizer that nurtures the development of those in a state of personal growth.

Queering Gurdjieff: How Peters Individualized The Fourth Way

Just as Charles Henri Ford had to reconcile the overt homophobia of the surrealist movement’s founder André Breton with the queer potentialities of surrealist theory and practice, so too did Fritz Peters have to work around Gurdjieff’s bias against homosexuality. In Balanced Man, Peters writes that Gurdjieff “was puritanical, even a fanatic about homosexuality, and condemned it vigorously. I am still surprised when I remembered that attitude. It didn’t seem appropriate for him, but my own conclusion is that he felt that homosexuality—as a career—was a dead end street” (43). In his memoir of his adult years with Gurdjieff, Peters lists homosexuality among afflictions like alcoholism and dope addiction for which people sought out treatment and were offered “cures” from Gurdjieff (44). Peters makes no more mention in any of his memoirs about what constituted Gurdjieff’s “cures” for homosexuality, or if he ever even admitted his homosexual tendencies to Gurdjieff. Both Edward Field in his brief sketch on Peters in his memoir The Man Who Would Marry Susan Sontag and Michael Bronski in his introduction to the 2009 reprint of Finistère speculate that Gurdjieff would have likely had no problem with Peters’ homosexuality. Field foregrounds the state of homosexuality within Gurdjieff’s group in his chapter on his brief friendship with an elderly Fritz Peters:

After Gurdjieff’s death in 1949, the movement purporting to teach his ‘system,’ like most
spiritual groups, developed a decidedly antihomosexual bias. Paradoxically, memoirs of Gurdjieff have been written by a number of his often-prominent lesbian disciples, demonstrating that there was no conflict in Gurdjieff, at least, over their sexual orientation. One can only infer that homosexuality, though not be proclaimed, as no bar to participation in ‘The Work,’ at least for women. Gurdjieff, himself from a middle-eastern culture that wasn’t hypocritical about or bothered by such things, gave top marks to young Fritz Peters’ boyishly rosy behind in the community bathhouse, where the Master of European Mysticism liked to line up all his naked male disciples in order to compare, with ribald comments, their bodies and particularly their sexual parts. On this last point, Gurdjieff, at least, had no such reason to be shy, since he was said to have the biggest schwantz of all (186).

Field takes this scene directly from *Boyhood with Gurdjieff* as evidence, not of homosexual tolerance, but of indifference to the kind of male homosociality that would be confused for homoeroticism in an American context. Furthermore, he contends that the homophobic rhetoric of Fourth Way teachings did not take hold among the Gurdjieff groups until after his passing when his disciple P.D. Ouspensky, who considered homosexuality to be a “wrong use of energy,” dominated the movement (Field 196). On the other hand, Justin Spring contends in his biography of Samuel Steward that, “Gurdjieff (who was essentially Peters’ adoptive father) despised male homosexuality, and his profound disapproval of Peters’ sexual orientation caused Peters lifelong unhappiness.” (162).  

The purpose of Gurdjieff’s teachings was not consciously

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32 Although Spring, Field, and Bronski hold different opinions on Gurdjieff’s possible attitudes toward homosexuality and their impact on Peters, they are similar in that they are mostly based on the scant couples of sentences that Peters wrote on the subject. There has been no academic study, journalistic inquiry, or first-hand account on the treatment of homosexuality in Gurdjieff’s group at the institute.
aimed at liberating homosexuality, but by challenging the basic assumptions upon which heterosexuality stakes its claim to power, Gurdjieff’s ideas provided the tools Peters needed to create a conceptual space for queer subjects to exist. By focusing on how Peters narrates and explains Gurdjieff’s teachings on these subjects, I ultimately seek to explore how Peters repurposes Gurdjieff’s models on psychology, sexuality, and morality as a critique of repressive and phobic American attitudes on sexuality and mental illness in his fiction.

Although Gurdjieff accepted money from men and women struggling with their sexuality in exchange for counseling, he made no attempt to “cure” the homosexuality of his devoted gay and lesbian students and followers, including Peters’ adopted parents Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap. In her introduction to a collection of Jane Heap’s letters, Holly Baggett questions why Heap, Anderson, and their lesbian literary expatriate clique would be attracted to Gurdjieff’s teachings despite his homophobia and sexism:

Particularly interesting was the coalescence of a group of lesbians (“the rope”) surrounding Gurdjieff and his teaching. Interesting and in fact problematic--given some of his views on women and homosexuality. Gurdjieff taught gender and sexuality were divided into male and female as a reflection of nature’s symmetry. It was one example of cosmological balance that could be seen in every level of the universe. In Gurdjieff’s scheme of human creation, the male is active and positive, the female is negative and passive, and homosexuality an aberration in the natural order of the universe (17).

In speculating why Heap and Anderson would embrace Gurdjieff’s philosophy, Baggett situates Heap and Anderson within a ubiquitous practice of the time for gays and lesbians who had to cobble together their worldview and sense of self from a variety of imperfect sources: “I think we can find a similar explanation to the way Heap and her contemporaries handled the views of
the sexologists—perhaps they were by nature congenitally different, meaning they were blameless for who they were...As she did with the works of Krafft-Ebbing, Heap embraced aspects of Gurdjieff’s philosophy she found personally empowering and ignored the rest” (18).  

This is exactly what Fritz Peters himself attempted to do with Gurdjieff’s teachings. Peters’ recognizes that they allow for a critique of normative morality and grant a space for the queer individual to develop harmoniously.

What is certain about these “cures” is that Gurdjieff’s treatment for addictions, traumas, and dysfunctional personality traits were not about adhering to a singular model of what a balanced self constitutes for each individual. For example, Gurdjieff treated patients for alcoholism, but he also prescribed drinking liquor as part of Peters’ recuperation period while he was on leave from the army. Thus, drinking was not an inherently positive or negative human activity. Instead, the impact of drinking depended on whether or not it inhibited or helped the work toward a balanced self. The subjective quality of these prescriptions reflects the distinction between what Gurdjieff termed “subjective morality” and “objective morality”:

When Gurdjieff would speak of "objective" morality and "subjective" morality, I was not left entirely in the dark. In the simplest sense it seemed to mean that custom governed subjective morality, whereas what Gurdjieff called "objective morality" was a matter of natural instinct and individual conscience. In discussing morality, he recommended living

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33 I agree with Baggett in that in order to understand the personal philosophies of gays and lesbian figures of the pre-Stonewall era, we must factor in the absence of homosexuality as an identity category with its own presumed politics. Without the sense of gay or lesbian identity tied to a specific political platform and widely recognized social interests, one’s sexuality did not dominate the political or philosophical platforms that one chose in the way that we assume they do today for current members of the LGBT community. Without a preconstituted political identity or philosophical worldview attached to sexual identity, gays and lesbians of the modernist era had to appropriate elements from a variety of sources, and (like George Chauncey’s bricoleur fairies did with signifiers of femininity) suture together an identity and politics out of what was available.
in accordance with the particular moral customs and habits of the society in which one lived—he was very fond of the phrase "When you live in Rome, live as the Romans do"—but he stressed the necessity of an individual, objective, personal "morality", based on conscience, rather than tradition, custom, or law. Marriage was a good example of a subjective moral custom; objectively, neither nature nor individual morality required such a sacrament (Peters 130).

Gurdjieff recognizes the importance of functioning socially according to the mores of one’s community, but he also maintains the importance of harboring an independent, objective morality that guides personal development. This is the balancing act that all queer subjects face: the necessity of functioning within the boundaries of public morality for the sake of meeting one’s needs and living as a member of civil society while protecting a distinct sense of personal values that may be at odds with the prejudices one faces in society without internalizing its vitriol. Peters further explains in *Gurdjieff Remembered* that objective morality is:

> based in individual conscience and not on any social definitions of good and evil. In this sense, evil could be considered a term for whatever was improper to man as a function of a manifestation...As a man learns and grows, his general potential, and his power increases. It seems natural, therefore, that if one subscribes to moral concepts defined by the works ‘good and evil’, man’s potentiality to act in either sense is automatically increased (65).

Good and evil are not naturally existing phenomena. They are social constructions. However, Gurdjieff recognizes the power of social construction, and that when a belief is widely held such as the binary between good and evil, those concepts become real. In a move that recalls Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*, Gurdjieff’s philosophy claims that in one’s objective
morality, good is subjective to whatever is conducive to personal growth and evil is what hinders it. Just as Nietzsche claimed in the *Genealogy of Morals* that morality was the product of human weakness valorizing itself as a virtue, so too does Gurdjieff’s vision of morality realize that what is recognized as a universal moral in society may in fact be an “evil” if it hinders or diminishes the self. Subjective morality may actually be what is producing man’s sleep.

This challenging of universal morality and categories of good and evil equips Peters, and likely his aunts Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap with the language needed as queers to contest the social assumption of homosexuality as an amoral practice. Upon this basis of subjective and objective morality, Gurdjieff’s teachings on sex grants Peters a discourse for analyzing and writing against America’s repressive attitudes toward sex. Describing what he learned from Gurdjieff at Prieuré about sex as humanity’s central impulse of creation, Peters writes:

> In the primary sense, the purpose of sex was reproduction, which was actually only a synonym for creation. Love, therefore, in any sense—whether physical or not—had to be creative. He also said that there was a proper form of what might be called "sublimation" of sexual energy; that sex was the source of all energy and when not used reproductively could still be used in an equally creative sense when sublimated and used as energy for other types of creativity (178).

Here, Gurdjieff echoes Freudian psychoanalysis, which argues that it is the sublimation of the libido that fuels our life drive (Kalos) to create and produce. Yet, in contradiction to Freud, Gurdjieff’s teachings caution against this obsession with sex as the shibboleth to the self:

> One of the misuses of sex that had arisen through bad training, the wrong type of education, and improper habits, was that it had become almost the only vital form of human communication. It was possible for people to 'join actively" in other ways than
physically; to, as he put it, "touch each other's essences," but human beings had lost this faculty many, many years—many centuries—ago. If one was observant, however, it was possible to realize that this "touching of essences" still occasionally took place between two individual human beings, but only by accident, and that it was then almost immediately misunderstood and misinterpreted and descended into a purely physical form which became valueless once it had been expended (178).

Although Gurdjieff believed that sex was the "highest expression of the physical body", he argued that sexual liberation through mere promiscuity and licentious behavior did not lead to personal growth. The cordonning off of sex as a taboo space led to a general ignorance of how sex does not produce intimacy and fulfillment through the mere physical act and orgasm, but instead as a form of conscious connection between individuals. Here, Gurdjieff echoes Foucault’s critique of the repressive hypothesis from The History of Sexuality in which he argues against the idea that by merely talking about or engaging in more sex, man can become sexually liberated and, in turn, become liberated as an individual.

In Gurdjieff Remembered, Peters criticizes the assumption among members of the American Gurdjieff groups (which were mostly, self-started devoted reading groups with little to no affiliation with Gurdjieff’s Institute) that his teachings revolved around sexual liberation: “Since the writing was obviously critical of ordinary values, standards, and social morality, the group members usually interpreted these criticisms as meaning that any values which ran counter to the prevailing morality were worthwhile. With this view of life, such things as free love, adultery, or any radical social behavior became almost automatically justified” (17). For Peters, there was a fundamental misunderstanding among casual adherents to Gurdjieff’s teachings that questioning morality constituted its obsolescence and thus, Gurdjieff’s teachings became a
license to indulge in whatever behavior they repressed. Peters argues that this stems from an American approach to morality that places sexual prohibitions at its center:

The strictly ‘American’ nature of the group impressed upon me through the question of morality. Europeans—at least the Europeans I had known in France and at the Prieuré—appeared to think of ‘morality’ as a code of behavior covering general human activity including, among a great many other things, sexual activity. To these Americans—or for that matter most other Americans with whom I had any contact—‘morality’ was confined to sexual codes, and extended perhaps as far as table manners. Having had, up to that point in my life, no sexual experience, I was both surprised by, and unprepared for, this kind of morality. It came as a distinct surprise to me, therefore, to learn that a good deal of the interest in Gurdjieff seemed to be based on the assumption that life at the Prieuré must have been indiscriminately ‘free’, meaning ‘licentious’ (18).

The myth of France as an erotic utopia in the America popular imagination plays a role in how American devotees to Gurdjieff interpreted his teachings and envisioned his institute. Peters strikes a distinction between American and French codes of morality that will appear in Finistère since its protagonist Matthew struggles between puritanical American attitudes and liberal, indifferent French attitudes toward homosexuality. According to Peters, French morality is a complex system of social behavior in which sex constitutes a single consideration connected to all other issues. In America, on the other hand, morality proceeds from the prohibitions against certain sexual conduct and all other considerations are put into alignment with it. American sexual morality is inflexibly defined because it is not equally weighted with other social concerns that may alter the context of sexuality. In a culture in which sexuality is not at the center of morality, homosexuality is a matter of relative indifference if it causes little harm to others. In
America, homosexuality is immoral in and of itself—not because it interferes with the moral considerations of others, but because sexual prohibitions are the a priori condition of morality.

What makes Gurdjieff’s criticism of sexual morality valuable to Peters is that it does not obliterate morality altogether, but it instead rescues sexual morality from the American, Christian sense as a list of prohibitions. Peters reclaims it as a subjective experience in which what is right and what is wrong is dependent on what produces or inhibits personal growth. For Peters, who struggled with his own sexual identity, it was crucial for homosexuality to be rescued from the strict prohibition of American morality and yet still subject to the complex human reasoning of morality. This project of redefining the terms of sexual morality is evident in Gurdjieff’s recuperation of the concept of perversion. Peters writes:

When people questioned him, as they often did, about specific sexual ‘perversion’, he waved away their questions as hair-splitting. Perversion was perversion, no matter what particular form it might take—there was no question of ‘good perversions’ or ‘bad perversions’—sex, generally, was perverted when it served to perform anything other than the basic intentions of nature: to produce children and to produce energy which was to be used for higher aims, certainly, than mere physical or emotional gratification.

When improperly used such energy was always harmful (57-58).

Gurdjieff redefines perversion as a question of productive or destructive behavior instead of a question of normal or abnormal behavior. He argued that in America, sex had “become for most people nothing more than the most titillating diversions of the many forms of amusement known to modern man” (57). When sex becomes a diversion instead of a wellspring of inspiration and an act of interpersonal connection for individual development, it becomes a perversion. Yet, as Peters notes, “While he did not specifically condemn this activity any more than he condemned
other ordinary, civilized habits, he criticized it from the point of view that any waste is improper to man.” (57) In this model, perversion has nothing to do with the assumed degenerate biology or weak morals of the “pervert”, such as the homosexual. If all individuals are subject to a perversion of their sexual potential, then perversion no longer entails a category of essential human difference and thus, there are no perverts and no perverted psyches for homosexuals to be condemned for inhabiting.

The only time Peters records an engagement with Gurdjieff on the topic of homosexuality came during one of Gurdjieff’s visits to the United States during Peters’ teen years. As Peters mentions in Boyhood With Gurdjieff, Gurdjieff’s visits to America were mostly to “shear the sheep,” meaning that he found Americans much more willing to donate money to his school and studies. In order to capitalize on the American preoccupation with sex, Gurdjieff had Peters teach him a variety of vulgar American sexual terms so that during his dinner parties, he could engage them in conversations on sex. As Peters writes “people—especially Americans—were never motivated by intelligence or good feelings, but only by the needs—usually dirty—of their genital organs using, of course (as he talked) only the four letter words he had practiced with me earlier” (33). Gurdjieff’s plan was to engross the group in a vulgar conversation about their sexual practices, provoke them to the near point of orgy, and then denounce their behavior as confirming “his observations of the decadence of Americans” while making them partly conscious of how thought of sex only in the limited terms of entertainment and titillation instead of the pursuit of growth. While Gurdjieff raked in thousands in donations from the crowd, the message was mostly lost, with one patron telling Peters, “that Gurdjieff posing as a philosopher, has the best ideas about sex, and the safest ‘cover’ for his orgies, of anyone he had ever known” (36). In the midst of the erotic fever at the dinner party, a female guest remarked to Peters that it
was shameful Gurdjieff used this language in the presence of a teenager, but when Peters
announced that he had taught Gurdjieff those four letter words, she made a sexual pass at him.
Peters writes, “I backed away and told her that, unfortunately, I had to do the dishes. Rebuffed,
she glared at me, called me various dirty names and said that the only reason I had turned her
down was because I was ‘that dirty old man’s little faggot’, and only wanted him to ‘screw’ me”
(35). In all three of his memoirs, this is the only association Peters ever makes between himself
and the topic of homosexuality. Upon relating the incident back to Gurdjieff, he responds:

   Is fine feeling you have—this disgust,’ he said. ‘But now is necessary ask yourself one
question. With who you disgusted?... ‘Such lady have in self many homosexual
tendencies, one reason she pick on you—young-looking boy, seem almost like girl to her.
Not worry about this thing she say to you. Gossip about sex only give reputation for
sexiness in your country, so not important, maybe even feather in hat (36).

The question of disgust implicitly forces Peters to consider the idea of homosexuality more
deeply. That is not to say for sure that Gurdjieff recognizes this impulse in Peters and wants him
to dwell upon it, but it is possible that Peters includes this moment as a wink towards his own
conflicted sexuality as a young man.

   Much like what Jung’s theory of the anima and animus provided for Charles Henri Ford
in reconsidering the balance of gender feelings within the queer individual, so too did Gurdjieff’s
philosophy supply a reconsideration of sex and gender distinctions. In Boyhood with Gurdjieff,
Peters relates Gurdjieff’s own explanation of the distinction between the sexes:

   You remember," he said then, "how I tell about good and evil in man -- like right hand,
left hand ? In other sense, this also true of man and woman. Man is active, positive, good
in Nature. Woman is passive, negative, evil. Not evil in your American sense like
'wrong', but very necessary evil; evil that make man good. Is like electric light -- one wire passive or negative; other wire active, positive. Without such two elements not have light (122).

The idea of negativity and positivity are stripped of their cultural connotations of good and evil and are instead thought of as complimentary forces that balance each other out. Just as in any binary relationship, male and female, like negativity and positivity, not only rely on each other for balance, but they also depend on the other’s existence to define their own proper existence. Maleness cannot be defined without femaleness and vice versa. What Peters ultimately says about sex complimentarity is that the sexes achieve equality through balance, not sameness.

True man and true woman not just one sex -- not just male or female. True human is combination of these things: active and passive, male and female. Even you," he made a sweeping gesture covering all of us, "sometimes understand this because sometimes you surprised when you see man who feel thing like woman, or woman who act like man; or even when in self feel feelings proper to opposite sex (125).

Gurdjieff makes it clear that there is a difference between the concept of man and woman as they are currently conceived in present culture and the “true” man and woman that Gurdjieff’s work aims to make out of them. The “true man” and the “true woman” are not exclusively male or female in character, but are instead balanced within by characteristics that we generally consider masculine or feminine. In this way, Gurdjieff’s model of the “true man” and the “true woman” is a queer subject in comparison to normative concepts of man and woman in society. A “true man” and a “true woman” can be multiple sexes. This idea approaches the second wave feminist concept of the sex/gender distinction, which argues that since gender is a social construction, its characteristics are not the sole province of a single sex. In Gurdjieff’s system, a man and woman
still exist as biological sexes, but in the process of developing into a “true man” and a “true woman”, they develop the culturally repressed characteristics of the opposite sex within them. The “man who feel thing like woman” or “woman who act like man” that would be conventionally labeled queer in society become Gurdjieff’s examples of the type of subject that is advancing toward self-development.

In sketching out how Gurdjieff’s model of the human subject and his plan for the development of a “true man” diverge from typical western assumptions of human subjectivity, I have laid out a model for interpreting human psychology, well-understood and practiced by Fritz Peters, as a more foundationally queer model. The heterosexual delineated in Gurdjieff’s philosophy more closely resembles the qualities commonly attributed to the homosexual, thus allowing for homosexuality to be considered more like a legitimate subject and less like a bizarre outsider. While Gurdjieff did not supply Peters with a specifically homosexual model, the model of humanity that he did illustrate queered the space of psychology and the assumptions of human morality in a way that eliminated or mitigated some of the distinctions between heterosexuality and homosexuality that privilege one and marginalize the other. What Peters reports in his memoirs from Gurdjieff’s teachings is that western culture and its heteronormativity are logically inconsistent and often engage in the practices and values they consider “other” and immoral without realizing it. Homosexuality has not become equal to or removed of its stigma in this system, but heterosexuality has been revealed to harbor the same queer characteristics that it supposedly repudiates. As I explore Peters’ fiction and personal life, it is clear that while this philosophy never allowed him to embrace his homosexuality without some moral qualms, it nonetheless provided him the ammunition he needed to criticize American values—namely its repressive morality and its unexamined assumptions about the human psyche.
In 1949, Fritz Peters published his debut novel, *The World Next Door*, to a mass readership through the Farrar Strauss label. Despite its disturbing content—a shell-shocked WWII veteran detailing his hallucinations in a mental hospital where he is submitted to brutal treatments, an attempted rape, and interrogated about his alleged homosexuality, the novel received wide attention, and a positive review from Eudora Welty in the *New York Post* who called it “an astonishing example of what must be almost total recall” (92). Given that Welty was good friends with Peters’ wife at the time, the *Harper’s Bazaar* editor Mary Lou Aswell, Welty’s assumption that the narrative is “total recall” gives credence to its autobiographical basis. Like the novel’s protagonist David Mitchell, Fritz Peters also served in World War Two and arrived home deeply psychologically disturbed. Peters sprinkles vague allusions to a David’s French background—he can speak French, has involuntary flashbacks and hallucinations in set in France, and at one point states that he used to live there. There is one further similarity between author and character that Peters would not have admitted to—David is submitted to an interrogation of his sexuality as part of his treatment and he is forced to admit that he doubted his heterosexuality at one time, that he submitted to the advances of commanding generals during the war, and during his states of mental imbalance at the asylum, he begins to believe he is in love with his fellow male patients. It is impossible to determine how many of the plot details of David Mitchell’s experience in the army and the asylum are culled directly from Peters’ real life, but it is clear that David’s narrative is a dramatization of the real psychological trauma that Peters experienced both as a casualty of what was then termed “combat stress reaction” and as man grappling with his sexual identity. In this section, I contend that Peters connects the experience of war trauma and its treatment in the 50s, to the treatment of homosexuality as a
psychiatric disorder. In the process, Peters recovers mental illness as position from which one can analyze and critique dominant constructions of human psychology, which in turn justifies homosexuality, then stigmatized as a mental illness, as a legitimate and productive perspective as well.

Although the post-war period through the 1950s has often been considered to be a dark age for LGBT people—the McCarthy era HUAC hearings, often targeting queer writers and entertainers, the Lavender Scare in Washington that led to the firing of hundreds of gays and lesbians employed in the government, and the increased frequency of vice squad raids in gay bars and clubs in an effort to “clean up the streets,”—this era was also crucial to the congealing of homosexuality as a distinct identity with a sense of its own political and cultural practices. While the increased government repression caused more homosexuals to go underground and remain closeted, this focus on increased policing made the homosexual visible to the average American, although rarely in a positive light, since now talk of the homosexual as a distinct, pathological species of humanity appeared in the media. As Jeffrey Escoffier argues, in this era, homosexuality was illuminated for the public and redefined as a “social problem” inhabiting a “social world” as opposed to the image of the singular pervert living isolated in shame (249).

Although the homosexual was presented as an elusive menace to the moral order of society in a series of education films and hastily published studies, this increased interest of the American state and society to render the homosexual legible wrested him from the shadows as a despised, but visible actor in civil society, though few men wanted to publicly claim this new spotlight.

In Coming Out Under Fire, Gay historian Alan Bérubé argues that this new public interest in the homosexual and the attendant preoccupation of the state and the medical world to
define, diagnose, and police the homosexual is in part a product of the screening of soldiers for WWII and the experience of gay soldiers during the war:

As psychiatrists increased their authority in the armed forces, they developed new screening procedures to discover and disqualify homosexual men, introducing into military policies and procedures the concept of the homosexual as a personality type unfit for military service and combat—a concept that was to determine military policy for decades after the war. Their success in shifting the military’s attention away from the sexual act to the individual had far reaching consequences. It forced military officials to develop and expand administrative apparatus for managing homosexual personnel that relied on diagnosis, hospitalization, surveillance, interrogation discharge, administrative appeal, and mass indoctrination (2).

One of the main reasons for the premium placed on psychological screening of prospective soldiers was the legacy of shell shock during World War I, then called Combat Stress Reaction. Many researchers believed that susceptibility to Combat Stress Reaction was partially a product of mentally deficient personalities serving in the army. Thus, if those inhabiting unfit psyches, such as the homosexual were weeded out, battle fatigue could be kept at a minimum. This notion, of course, ignored what we know now, that Combat Stress Reaction and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is the mental illness itself, and not the symptom of an already mentally ill person subjected to a strain that the normal, healthy male could handle. Because the military is such an influential arm of the American government, the discourse, techniques, and ideological justifications for screening and policing homosexuality quickly bled over to the civilian sector.

Although the increased military screening of homosexuals led to imprisonment, discharges, and public humiliation, it also played a role in bringing gays and lesbians together in
a way that had never been done before under a universally acknowledged (but flawed) and
enforced definition. For many, serving in the army was the first time these soldiers had ever met
another man with same-sex desires, and the first time they had heard these clinical terms to
describe their desires. Bérubé quotes one veteran explaining why he denied being a homosexual
when questioned by the army screeners: “I said no. Because I truly did not know what
‘homosexual’ meant. We didn’t call it that. We called it more or less being ‘queer’ or ‘fruit.’ And
it wasn’t even till [sic] later that I knew it pertained to women also” (20). While most remained
closeted during interrogation, in training camp and during deployment, men and women with
same sex desires found each other, and while stationed in foreign lands, they found the same
clubs and hidden queer cultures abroad that attracted the American expatriate writers. The old
adage about the soldier not wanting to return to the farm once he’s seen the lights of "Gay Par-
ee" doubly applied to gays and lesbians in the armed services after World War Two. Popular
novels like Gordon Merrick’s The Strumpet Wind and John Horne Burns’ The Gallery described
soldiers in Post World War Two Europe discovering the gay bars and a queer underground in
France and Italy. After having found an identity and an unforeseen gay community in the armed
services, these previously atomized “queers” and “fruits” sought to retain their newfound identity
and community in the metropolitan areas of the country, and thus the seeds of what would
germinate into the Gay Rights Movement in the sixties were sown during World War Two and
the Cold War repression of the 50s.

Fritz Peters recognizes how World War Two not only exposed homosexuality as
psychological issue, but also how the trauma of having served in the war sheds light on the
trauma experienced by those who repressed their sexuality. In Gurdjieff Remembered, Peters
narrates his own traumatic experiences during the war and how he turned to an elderly Gurdjieff
for treatment while stationed in France. What he does not include is that Gurdjieff’s treatment was far from a cure and that he spent time in an asylum in America like his literary alter ego David Mitchell. Peters writes, “Once overseas, and quite without any awareness of my own, I began to be unconsciously filled with horror at the effects of war. My American upbringing—in spite of several years in France as a child—had certainly been no preparation for mass bombings and other such horrors” (76). Although Peters spent most of his time during the war at a desk job, the massive violence of World War Two did not stay contained at the front line. Peters survived two near death experiences: his office is bombed while he had just left to use the outdoor latrine and an air raid in a park in England during which his “friend was cut in two by the bullets, which missed [him] by inches” (78). These near fatal, traumatic episodes plummeted Peters into survivor’s guilt:

I watched so many of my fellow-men die during that period that I began to wish that I could die in their stead. The enormity of war—the very fact of it—was more than I could comprehend, and as it continued to proceed senselessly and endlessly, life itself seemed to me to lose whatever meaning it had had...There were no feelings of righteousness, patriotism or loyalty that could conceivably justify wholesale murder and I had very grave doubts about the meaning of human existence. (78)

Raised in the literary community of the Lost Generation, Peters came to experience first hand a perfect repeat of the spectacle of mass killing and destruction that had inspired the critique of modern civilization and values that fueled the artistic movement. For the psychically shell-shocked and existentially despondent Fritz Peters, the only answer was to return to Paris: “I came very close to the edge of a complete nervous collapse. When I was faced with hospitalization, I somehow managed, in my high nervous state, to convince my commanding office, a general, to
give me a pass to go to Paris where I would be able, I hoped, to see Mr. Gurdjieff” (79). Merely entering the physical geography of Paris had therapeutic powers for Peters, “Paris itself—which I had leaned to love as a child—was a kind of tonic and gave me a spurt of energy” (79). The promise of meeting Gurdjieff and immersing himself in the neighborhoods of Paris revisits Peters’ childhood connection to France as a space of refuge from chaos and a place where he can pursue psychic wholeness and connect existentially to a philosophy and worldview that permitted his individual existence.

After tracking down Gurdjieff in Paris, Peters spent three days under his care. On the final day, Gurdjieff addressed Peters’ “condition” and prescribed him a secret set of exercises “that could be harmful if revealed to, and used by, others” in order to deal with his nervousness, along with strict orders to drink a certain amount of liquor every day and to take some un-named pills (98). While the prescription was half way between esoteric knowledge and quackery, what truly helped Peters was the language through which Gurdjieff illuminated his nervous condition:

Although such states might be natural enough to me they would be considered unnatural by the general run of people and might also be considered as illnesses, although such states were actually a form of what he called ‘nervous over-exposure’—when I was very tired (he said this was true of many people) my ‘skin’ became very thin. I lost that protective coating or ‘shell’ which all human beings acquire naturally in the course of the growing years. He said that it could be a very good thing to be able to ‘shed one’s shell’ or ‘protective coating’ at will, but that it was necessary to learn when and how to do this and not be at the mercy of having it happen under stress (98).

What Gurdjieff refers to as Peters’ “nervous over-exposure” bears a strong resemblance to how Freud described the psychic origins and effect of trauma:
We describe as ‘traumatic’ any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield. It seems to me that the concept of trauma necessarily implies a connection of this kind with a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli. Such an event as an external trauma is bound to provoke a disturbance on a large scale in the function of the organism’s energy and to set in motion every defensive measure. At the same time, the pleasure principle is for the moment put out of action. There is no longer any possibility of preventing the mental apparatus from being flooded with large amounts of stimulus and another problem arises instead—the problem of mastering the amounts of stimulus which have broken in and of binding them, in the psychical sense, so then can be disposed of (24).

Freud’s corporeal metaphor for the process of trauma in which the ego skin of the conscious is punctured by excessive, untenable stimuli is nearly identical to what Gurdjieff refers to as the “protective coating or shell” and Peters’ “thin skin”. Although Gurdjieff was no Freudian, he nonetheless grants Peters a way of conceptualizing his trauma in a way congruent with the cutting edge of trauma studies at the time.

In *The World Next Door*, David Mitchell’s tortured narrative of delusion, hallucination, and paranoia exhibit several of the symptoms of what Freud believed to cause war neuroses:

Whatever I had forgotten, there was a deeper fear of what I had never known, a fear of what had brought me here. It could have been blood...bullets...air raids...terror. Was it the death that I had seen around me, shaming me into wanting it for myself? Or was it, more simply, the soldier’s necessary preparation for death, the obligation to die, that had caused me to seek it here? Would I ever know? (271)
David struggles to locate the moment or phenomena that caused his trauma. He considers two options: that it was the product of exposure to violent stimuli (the raids, bullets, blood) or the product of his soldier’s mentality—being prepared to die as a precondition of being able to fight as a soldier. Both of these are elements of Freud’s neuroses—the traumatic exposure to excess stimuli that pierces the protective shield of the ego and the presence of a “war-ego” as a separate ego that accepts the probability of death on the battlefield which takes over for the peacetime ego that seeks pleasure and self-perpetuation.

While confined in the asylum, David’s paranoiac panic is brought on when it is announced that his mother wanted him to file for a disability pension. Although he had been making steady progress, he fights against taking the pension because that would officially legitimize his insanity in the eyes of the government, and when his mother pushes him to do so, he comes to believe that she does so as a ploy to keep him detained while she seizes the money. Plunged into paranoia, David narrates:

The questions seemed to take a physical shape, spinning around in my brain...but the whirlpool in which they were contained was a separate and special compartment not my mind...not the mind or heart which had been mine before I had ever come here. Now I had a second self, intruding upon whatever it was that had been me, contained in the terrible, chilling shadow of this illness—for it was that which ate into everything, corroding and rotting (184).

David conceptualizes the paranoia as the presence of a second self, much like how Freud theorizes that the war neurotic involuntarily creates a second war-ego, a parasitic double that threatens to kill the peace-ego. The paranoiac is always a sufferer of excess signification—he tries to make meaning and find answers in signs that cannot tell him everything he wants to
know. In a way, this mirrors the excess stimuli of the battlefield that becomes overwhelming and traumatic; no matter how much the soldier strains to find clarity in the fog of war, he will be at a loss to find his way through the battlefield. The paranoid voice, the second self, is this war ego forged in the chaos of the battlefield to survive at all costs in a polarized, fight or flight, good versus bad environment which takes over David’s peace-ego instincts that would normally never consider an ulterior motive to his mother’s suggestion.

By tying in the question of homosexuality in its various forms to David’s stay in the sanitarium, Peters’ drama of war trauma is also an examination of the study and treatment of homosexuality in the era. This experience of the homosexual under medical containment parallels David’s experience in the sanitarium, where his war trauma is treated with an equally wide range of therapies, including electroshock treatments, confinement, and coercive, pseudo-psychoanalytic therapy. While David is not a homosexual, (at least he does not fit his own definition of homosexuality) even though the doctors attempt to make him believe such, he is nonetheless treated similarly to a homosexual. Thus, Peters places the suffering of war trauma as a model through which the suffering of the homosexual can be comprehended. David is clearly experiencing a mental illness, and while Peters does not include homosexuality as a mental illness, he grants us insight into the way the clinic views homosexuality as it tries to make it an

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34 In the 1940s and 1950s, the American Medical Association saw homosexuality as disorder suitable for psychiatric treatment, while the American Psychological Association had homosexuality listed as a mental disorder until 1973. There was thus a wide consensus of medical and psychological professionals who agreed on homosexuality as a disorder, but found no agreement on what could be used to treat it. Psychoanalysts prescribed standard clinical therapy, believing homosexuality to be caused by disruptions in the normal psychological development and traumatic experiences during childhood, while psychiatrists and doctors of the sanitariums proposed hormone replacement, electroshock therapy, aversion therapy in which homosexuals were forced to regurgitate or given painful shocks when presented with images of nude men, and even lobotomies. (Haggerty 805) What can be understood from this wide range of possible, yet completely ineffective treatments, is that the homosexual was subjected to a barrage of different, usually counterproductive, and often traumatizing treatments without a cure.
excuse for David’s trauma. Furthermore, David’s principled stand against this vision of homosexuality and his later, queerly inflected vision of intimate male relationships within the sanitarium as a space of situational homosexuality expose the inconsistencies and prejudices of the clinical definition and treatment of homosexuality.

While David contemplates the phenomenological conditions of the battlefield and the psyche of the soldier that transforms the life-drive of a civilian into the death drive of a subordinate soldier, the doctors at the asylum want to examine David’s sexual history as a cause:

‘Have you ever had any homosexual experience, what I mean is...’
‘I know what you mean. Yes.’
‘Do you...’ he hesitated again. ‘Would you say that you are a homosexual?’
‘No I wouldn’t.’
‘But you have had...’
‘I interrupted him. ‘Did you ever take a drink?’
‘Yes. I...’
‘Does that make you an alcoholic?’
‘No.’
‘All right.’ (176)

Without announcing why he enters this sphere of inquiry, the doctor’s intention is clear: if he can diagnose David as a homosexual, then perhaps that explains his mental illness. For the first time in the novel, David is not only cooperative with the doctor (which he is praised for), but he is one step ahead of him. The doctor’s implicit suggestion that homosexuality is what caused war to be traumatic for David is a clear reflection of what Bérubé argues about the kind of thinking that
medical practitioners shared on homosexuality as a deficient personality type making one unsuitable for war.

Yet, the doctor also possesses a view of human sexuality without nuance and sophistication, clearly uneasy in breaching the subject of sex and conflating a homosexual experience with a homosexual orientation. David anticipates this move, and in his most lucid reasoning of the novel resists this blanket diagnosis and offers his own concept of sexuality by placing pressure on how the doctor defines homosexuality:

‘Don’t be embarrassed. Tell me what a homosexual is first. What is the difference between a homosexual and someone who isn’t homosexual?’

He continued to be embarrassed. ‘Well, perhaps we could say that a homosexual is a person who prefers to have sexual relations with his own sex...other men.’

‘All right then, I am not one.’

‘But you have had...’

‘Yes I’ve had an experience. I slept with another man.’

‘Well do you know why?’

I shrugged my shoulders. ‘I was in love with him, that’s all.’

‘What happened?’

‘I don’t know. It just wasn’t any good. It’s very simple really, even it’s hard to explain. I didn’t even want to go to bed with him at first and then when I did, I simply thought what the hell, maybe that’s the way I am. So what? So I went to bed with him. It was all right for a while, but it didn’t last. It wasn’t any good. I don’t know why...it just wasn’t. It just wasn’t right, somehow. So that was the end of it.’ (177)
David and the doctor completely reverse their relationship of power. All elements of this exchange would presuppose the doctor in control: he has the medical credential, he is operating in a medical space that had incarcerated his patient, and his patient has been barely coherent up to this point, complete with the insanity cliché of believing he was the messiah. The doctor’s prudishness embarrasses him because his language is hesitant and he most likely only knows little about homosexuality beyond what his manuals tell him. He knows nothing of homosexuality as a lived experience—just as another disease. But unlike a physical malady where seeing rashes, swelling, and discoloration is confirmation of the virus inside, a homosexual act in the flesh that can be witnessed is not necessarily evidence of the homosexuality within. The doctor’s medical gaze is reversed, and the abject pervert not only takes control of the conversation, but also challenges the taxonomy and discourse through which knowledge of sexuality is produced. He claims the power to define sexual experience for himself against a medical expert. Thus, David’s experience enveloped in, yet contesting of the army’s power to define, diagnose, and treat/punish homosexuality is a microcosm of what Bérubé earlier described as the experience of thousands of homosexuals recruited into WWII whose sexuality was a tension between the state’s power to define and the soldiers’ own subjective experience.

While David contests the essentialist notion that a homosexual act constitutes a homosexual orientation, the doctor presses on, referencing an incident recorded in David’s file about a sexual pass made by a general, “Oh, that! You don’t have to worry about that! There was a general who...it wasn’t an experience. Nothing happened. He tried to get funny, that’s all [...] Quite a lot happened, but not what you’re thinking. I was locked up for a few days and the doctor wouldn’t send me to a hospital because he was afraid I’d tell somebody about it and
mention the general’s name if I got a chance’ (178). David reveals that the origin of his mistrust of medical authority was also established during the war. A doctor on the battlefield colluded in an attempt to stifle David’s possible report of sexual misconduct by imprisoning him. Medical authority is revealed to not be on the side of treating an individual, but instead to be a mechanism of power to enforce a social order. David’s, and by extension Peters’ vision of the psychiatric study of homosexuality, implicates it as a reinforcement of social prejudice and yet another controlling arm of power despite the scientific community’s perception of itself as pursuing truth outside of social interests. It is probable that the official report contains nothing that would suggest wrongdoing on the general’s part, but instead implicates David as a homosexual. Thus, David’s credibility would be forever in doubt because he would always be viewed as mentally ill. At no point is the cause of homosexuality or its actual effects ever discussed. It is synonymous with illness and bound up with the imperative of social control. The incident reveals, in truth, the exact opposite of what the doctor hoped to find. It is not his possible perverse sexuality that either causes his mental illness or constitutes a weak psyche that would be susceptible to shell shock, but that it is instead the way that sexuality is used as a weapon against him that is traumatic. David’s completely calm and rational manner in dealing with his own sexual history and his logical explanation for his one time dalliance is proof that homosexuality, in and of itself, is not the part of him that is troubled.

Homosexuality is granted no subjectivity in the clinical setting—one either is or is not a homosexual, and homosexuality is inherently degenerate. Thus, the doctor is under strain to prove that David is a homosexual, not necessarily to cure him, but to control him. He is more in the business of garnering a confession than in therapy:
'Well,' he said hesitating again. 'There was a report in your file about that experience in the Army and then the other one you mentioned and then there was that...business in the packroom.'

'What exactly are you trying to find out? Are you trying to find out one way or the other that I am homosexual?'

'Yes.'

'Well, I told you. The answer is no.'

'He hesitated again. 'Well...'

'Look,' I said,' Maybe I’m supposed to be nuts, but all you’ve got is a lot of information that doesn’t prove anything. I know this much, that I know what has happened to me and that you don’t. I told you honestly about one experience that I don’t quite understand myself. I’ve asked myself all these questions. It is true that at that time, in the beginning, I was willing to be a fairy, or whatever you want to call it, if that’s the way it was. But it wasn’t any good.' (178)

The “packroom” incident that the doctor cites refers to the beginning of David’s commitment in the asylum. After a nasty psychotic episode, David is strapped down and an orderly attempts to get David to perform oral sex on him. Although this was unequivocally sexual assault, the authority of the institution is so desperate not to compromise itself that it somehow construes this as a consensual act, or even an act of aggression on David’s part. Thus, the doctor’s insistence on getting a confession is an effort to redeem and validate the institutional reputation of the asylum.

The asylums are state spaces that are supposed to constrain and contain homosexuality, yet the power they have allows them to perpetrate it. As we see in Finistere as well, Peters points out how the very spaces built to contain vice and homosexuality actually provide the perfect location
for breeding homosexuality in those which it may not have otherwise occurred. On a wider scale, what Peters reveals about the practice of medicine on the “abnormal” is that every patient is a test of its method to maintain its coherence, and that when the patient cannot respond as promised to the method, it is the patient who is faulted and must be contorted to fit the method. A patient that speaks back to the method is dangerous to the method and must be silenced by it.

While David resists the fixed assumptions about homosexuality that the asylum perpetrates, he advances no specific model or cause of his own, but instead he looks at it contextually as a conditional behavior or impulse. This recalls André Breton’s famous quote about sanitariums and their power to define and create insanity, “Unless you have been inside a sanitarium you do not know that madmen are made there, just as criminals are made in our reformatories” (139). According to David’s narrative, this is true in both of Breton’s meanings of making madmen: the sanitarium defines certain behaviors and attitudes as symptoms of homosexuality, like the aforementioned doctor attempted to do, and as David shows in detailing the behavior of fellow patients, it is possible for the space of the sanitarium to create homosexuality out of desperation for love and sex. This is what is often termed “situational homosexuality”, when ostensibly heterosexual men turn to same-sex acts and relationships in a space or situation where women are never present. Desire here is spatialized in that the space in which the individual is situated not only controls the kinds of desire that can be pursued, but the space can also create a desire for these possibilities in those who would otherwise not have

35 The word “made” has two meanings here. First, the sanitarium makes madmen in that it has the cultural authority to define insanity and then treat it according to its own standards for psychological health, thus they can deem any kind of anti-social behavior, such as homosexuality in the 50s, and make the homosexual into a madmen. Second, the sanitarium can make a madman by subjecting him to treatments and conditions in a restrictive space that will convince him of his insanity. If he was not a madman before, the sanitarium will make sure to convince him of such. If the sanitarium can make a madman, and homosexuality was defined in this era as a mental illness, then it follows that the sanitarium makes homosexuals.
possessed such a desire. Peters gave us a taste of this kind of situational homosexuality as a product of the exploitation of the power over the incarcerated with the orderly’s attempted oral rape of David. Yet by looking at the situational homosexuality of incarcerated spaces only in the forms of rape, exploitation, and dominance, we overlook how these spaces have the potential to queer the nature of how men intimately and emotionally relate to one another. Peters then considers the possibility of more romantic forms or indeterminate bonds situated liminally between the erotic and platonic may form in these environments.

Peters briefly explores how spaces of incarceration queer the relations among men in a brief scene in a group shower. David is mentored in the complexities of social life amongst the fellow patients by his African-American friend, Dave as they notice a young man gazing lustfully at David:

‘You may not know it,’ he said, ‘but you were seeing the beginning of something. I’ve seen it lots of times here. It’s like being witness to a birth.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Didn’t you see the look in his eyes, the way he was staring at us?’

‘Yes of course I did.’

‘Sex,’ he said. ‘Pure sex, plain and simple. That’s what happens to them after a while in here. A man doesn’t stop wanting sex just because he’s locked up...anybody knows that...but that’s not the bad part of it. The bad part is when you see it happening to a kid like that. A perfectly normal guy (244).

Coming after the doctor tries to convince David that his disputed homosexuality is the cause of his mental illness, Peters points with irony to the fact that the sanitarium causes the very homosexuality that it claims it treats. The young man is a “normal” kid, but nonetheless, he is
prey to homosexual behavior by the circumstances of his incarceration. It is not clear whether or not this makes him “a homosexual” as David earlier contests the idea that a sexual act inherently implies a sexual orientation on the part of the actor, but he is being “born” into something queer, whether or not that is homosexual identity itself. When David asks, “You mean you think he’s going to end up homo?,” Dave further explains:

‘Kids like that take it hard...They don’t know how to fight it. With some of these other guys, it doesn’t matter what they do. They run it off at night, or if they get a chance, they’ll go after one of the other patients, but that’s not the same thing...it’s just gratification with them. Nothing more. But with him it’s the works. He didn’t want just any old thing, you could see that in his eyes. He wanted one of us, you or me, personally and specifically. It was happening to him inside. You could see it.’ (244).

Peters draws a dividing line between a homosexual act and homosexual subjectivity. The sexual drive is a common condition for all men in the sanitarium, and given their isolation from women, sexual acts amongst the fellow patients is given a pardon. These men are not considered homosexual by the implicit standards of the society of patients because they desire only the act of sexual release, the “sexual aim,” as Freud terms it in his famous *Three Essays on Sexuality*, and not the “sexual object” that provides the release. To desire the man himself as a sexualized object and not just as a mechanical giver of pleasure occurs when the line of homosexuality is crossed. Yet, the young man is not a conventional homosexual because he is “normal” and presumed to be heterosexual upon entering the sanitarium. Thus, what he is born into is not conventional homosexuality, but rather a queering of his desire brought upon by the will of the libido and the restrictions of the sanitarium. The space itself produces aims and objects that are
by definition homosexual, but the drive behind it has transformed these aims and objects in a way they would not have in a free environment.

Although David himself feels no erotic attachment to the men around him, he does share a deep emotional intimacy that reaches beyond all established terms for male friendships, which he can only term as love. He realizes that he is “in love” with Dave, not sexually, but not dispassionately either. Rather, their shared experience, both in this space of incarceration and as subjects of mental illness, who suffer, but also realize that their “insanity” has granted them a meaningful perspective on the world around them, bonds them in a form of love that lacks a name. Dave approaches this mutual intimacy by terming them as “pioneers of the mind”:

‘That’s what we are, really. Pioneers. Pioneers of the mind and the unknown. Pioneers of the only thing left. Before they had to fight snow and rain and Indians to get to the West, now we have to fight doctors and wars and mental hospitals to get to another world....Did you ever think, Mitch, that maybe we were never nuts at all? That in some way it was a wonderful place...at least where I was for a while. I don’t know how it was with you...It was a wonderful place, Dave. And it is a kind of pioneering...but...I sometimes don’t know if I have the courage to come back all the way. I don’t want to come back.’ (332)

In trying to understand the experience of mental illness, Dave spatializes the mind, turning it into the final frontier, complete with its boundless possibilities and its dangers. Mental illness is not an inhibitor to growth, development, or perspective, nor are its subjective experiences branded inauthentic and dismissed. This is perhaps the greatest injustice and torment that the mentally ill face: their suffering is branded as illegitimate because it is not founded on logic, and treated as if it does not exist.
Conversely, Peters reclaims the mind as a vastly unexplored territory with the potential to make new discoveries and build new social understanding, much like the west was a space of discovery for natural goods and a space for the building of new, sometimes radically redefined communities. This idea bears the influence of Gurdjieff as it takes the mind as the ultimate plane of discovery and development and advocates going against conventional wisdom and criticizing social values and moralities to achieve this development. Dave further explains his indefinable sense of intimacy with David:

Out there...I found something. I don’t know what it was, maybe I’ll never know really, but I can see it in your eyes, so that I know it wasn’t just me. If I know you’ll never forget that, that you’ll always remember that you’ve been there too, then I’ll be all right. I’ll know that it was not madness...that it was finding something, and something that was...good. I’m different now that I was when I came here. I’m not all tied up inside anymore, and I don’t hate. Almost as if what I found out there was something to do with love...What I wanted to tell you...was...I love you...because...Because you know...because you make it all right having been there (352).

Love here is based on recognition, that Dave and David recognize and understand each others’ experiences and the knowledge that they gained from it, even if it is almost beyond words to describe. They share an intimate bond that is beyond the understanding of others, and because it is based on the exploration of a state of consciousness outside of the logic of the surrounding society, it does not depend on the recognition, understanding, or permission of others for it to exist. Peters responds here to all of the struggles that homosexuals experience in his day—branded mad, perverted, carriers of illegitimate love and inauthentic experience, imprisoned, coerced into accepting a master narrative of medicine and psychology that solidifies their
abjection and subjects them to psychological and physical torture as a cure. All of this David experiences due to his war trauma, and yet he emerges not crushed, or even compromised, but with a new perspective on society informed by madness instead of destroyed by madness, and having experienced a new dimension of love. The homosexual dressed in the madman’s clothes in this novel is invested with a new title to counter all of these institutional degradations: a pioneer of the mind.

Finistère: A Geography of Desire

*Finistère* begins with 13-year-old Matthew’s voyage across the Atlantic to France with his mother, Catherine. After a divorce, his mother had just won custody of Matthew until he is 16 (much like Jane Heap with Fritz) and she decides to build a new life in Paris with her son. In Paris, they reacquaint themselves with an old family friend, Scott, who Matthew admires. Scott is a long-time bachelor who feels a duty to Matthew’s father that he should look after the withdrawn and forlorn boy. Matthew’s mother decides to send him off to boarding school (another parallel between author and protagonist) and while Matthew is initially apprehensive, upon arriving at St. Croix École des Garçons, he quickly makes friends with an older boy, André. Matthew looks up to André’s seemingly worldly sophistication; he smokes cigarettes and shows Matthew nude pictures. André initiates Matthew into young manhood, and they begin what appears to be a sexual relationship, or at least a sexual apprenticeship where he learns about sex and masturbation. While Matthew grapples with his emerging sexuality, he returns to his mother for the holidays when, she announces that she has met a Frenchman, Paul, and they plan to get married. Paul and Matthew are immediately at odds with one another. Paul thinks Matthew is overly attached to his mother and spoiled while Matthew resents having to share his mother and
his home with someone so brusque and indifferent toward his stepfather role. Even worse for Matthew, Scott is now spending less time with him because he has now found his own mate, a Frenchwoman named Françoise.

When Matthew returns to the boarding school, his despair hits a new low when he discovers André has transferred to another school. Separated from the only three people he cared for, one day while swimming in the Seine with his classmates, Matthew starts to drown and indifferently makes no effort to save himself. But, a new physical education teacher, the handsome Michel, sweeps him to safety, resuscitates him, and looks over his convalescence. Matthew and Michel bond over his recovery period and begin a covert romance at the school. While deeply in love, their relationship is in a constant state of peril due Matthew’s youth. Matthew is naive, idealistic, and unashamed of his homosexuality (so long as the attraction is one of love and not mere gratification) while the more worldly Michel is less confident and more aware of the possible persecution he can face. He also worries if Matthew’s love for him is a displaced need for fatherly affection.

At the end of the school semester, Matthew cannot bear being apart from Michel, so he convinces him to accompany himself, Catherine, and Paul on vacation. Catherine’s mother is happy to bring along Matthew’s trusted mentor and even though Paul is happy to have another Frenchman with them, he suspects their relationship is more than plutonic. Françoise shares Paul’s suspicions, and she communicates this to Scott, who unlike Françoise and Paul, is deeply disturbed by the idea (and the implication that Matthew was also attracted to him) and resolves to confront Matthew. A condemning letter from Scott who feels he must in some way intervene is the first in a series of events that would spell the demise of Matthew’s relationship with Michel and result in Matthew’s ultimate suicide. Matthew’s father comes to Paris to visit with his
fiancée and Matthew marvels at what he thinks is their perfect, happy relationship. He compares his father’s heterosexual love to his homosexual relationship with Michel and becomes progressively more disgusted with the “dirtiness” of their affair. This feeling is compounded by Michel’s revelation of his life before meeting Matthew: a life of sexual hookups in the seedier areas of Paris. Michel and Matthew fight and break up. Michel cannot deal with Matthew’s insistence on “purity” and his idealistic vision that his love could be “accepted”. Two more traumatic moments culminate in Matthew’s suicide: Paul confronts him about his relationship with Michel and makes a sexual pass at him, and his mother declares “I’d rather you be dead” when Matthew confides in her after the break up and Paul’s advances. Rejected by Scott, his mother, and broken up with Michel, Matthew walks into the ocean at Pointe St. Mathieu, Finistère, and drowns himself as he once tried to do in the Seine.

With just the title of the novel, Finistère, Fritz Peters begins to chart a geography of desire in which the spaces, cities, communities, and landmarks of France are more than just a background to a love story—they enable and complicate queer desire and love based on their spatial histories and logics. These spaces are not arbitrary locations, but they are instead specifically encoded with elements of French history, culture, and moral values different from and often at odds with their American counterparts, which both enable Matthew’s queer desire, and place him in a place of psychological struggle when he attempts to reconcile American attitudes with French customs. Queer desire is for Matthew as foreign as the land on which he lives and the language he must speak to communicate with other boys. He has some knowledge of it, appreciates what he can express through it, which would otherwise be impossible in his native tongue and land, but ultimately feels estranged because he cannot translate it to the type of normative heterosexuality and American Puritanism imbedded in him as the standards for
legitimate, pure love. The space of the sex-segregated French boarding school teaches him a kind of comradery-based love, cloistered from society in the countryside. But when he attempts to speak this desire in the public spaces of Paris, he sees how this desire can only be spoken in places he finds illicit—that his youth and economic privilege afforded him a vision of “pure” homosexuality that people struggling on their own for survival in the city cannot have. In Finistère, the French land and the French people are inseparable from one another—mutually constitutive of a culture that understands and recognizes Matthew’s homosexuality, but remain as hostile and foreboding at the rocky Pointe St. Mathieu where he ultimately commits suicide.

In this section, I look at four specific spaces of desire in the novel: the boarding school, the Seine River, Paris (its sites of cultural heritage and its demimonde) and Finistère along with the four French characters who can read the signs of homosexuality where Americans cannot: André, Michel, Françoise, and Paul. For Peters, the ability to decipher homosexuality on the bodies and behaviors of others invests the French citizen with a certain “worldliness”, which contrasts with the provinciality of the Americans like Scott and Catherine who are blind to it. Thus, to be “French” in this novel is not limited to the specific culture, history, and attitudes inhabiting the French state, but it also stands in for a general cosmopolitanism, with the lights of Paris attracting citizens of world. In its multi-cultural status, Paris becomes a site of cultural and moral relativism uncommon to the isolated and culturally homogenous United States. Queerness thrives in spaces of the cosmopolitan because the inconsistencies in worldviews, ideologies, and languages between cultures creates the expectation of a variety of lifestyles and communities. The cosmopolitan speaks queerly in different languages, customs, worldviews, and cultural traditions, whereas the American speaks in one language with one homogenous cultural tradition.
“Finistère” translates in French to “the end of the earth.” It refers to a department in the Breton region of France on the extreme western point of France. The novel is named for the western most point in France, the place closest to America, separated by the vast Atlantic Ocean. At the very tip of Finistère is the cape Pointe St. Mathieu, named for L'abbaye de Saint-Mathieu de Fine-Terre, a Breton abbey that remains in ruins. It was named for St. Matthew, one of Christ’s apostles and ascribed author of the Gospel of Matthew. In the Catholic faith, St. Matthew is regarded as a martyr for Christ, and it was also believed that that the skull of St. Matthew resided in part of the abbey that had fallen off into the ocean. This rocky cape on the western coast of France becomes a symbolic space for Matthew. It is where his inner-turmoil, the inability to reconcile Matthew (the American, puritan) with Mathieu (the homosexual, the “pervert”) comes to its tragic end at the end of the Earth.

Yet, Finistère is first introduced in the novel as an idyllic space in the countryside like the boarding school, promising the backdrop of nature (which reassures him homosexuality is natural) and escape from the prying eyes of society as the preconditions under which Matthew first learned to speak his queer desire. When Matthew’s mother informs him that she and Paul are planning to vacation at Pointe St. Mathieu, he takes it as an auspicious omen that his plan to take Michel with him on vacation will succeed, “When he pointed it out to Michel on the map, he indicated, just to the south of Requin, Pointe Sainte-Mathieu. He was sure that it was prophetic, a guarantee of happiness for both of them” (172). Peters paints the trip to Finistère as a space of unparalleled happiness for the family—Catherine is happy to see Matthew confident with his “friend” and Paul has taken a liking to Matthew as well. Michel, “allows” himself to be happy. Yet, once they arrive in the area, Peters describes the point as sublime and ominous:
Le Conquet nestled against the seashore, and to the south, jutting up and out into the ocean, Pointe Saint-Mathieu. Beyond it, even from the distance, the very color of the sea seemed changed—darker, almost black, and edged with foam. The swimming there, Paul said, was impossible—the undertow was very treacherous, but it was a beautiful view of the sea. Matthew remembered the phrase in the guidebook: *Le littoral y est tres decoupe, la mer terrible.* Nowhere else on this trip did that particular description seem so apt: here the coastal formations were cut up, chopped, and the sea did seem terrible (187).

When Matthew and Michel walk out to the point for the first time to visit the abbey, an old resident of the land warns them “*Faut pas nager la bas, ‘y a des courants maudits. Allez a la plage*”, which Michel translates to Matthew, “Evil currents...We won’t go back there.” And Matthew replies, “Not to swim.” (189) Peters leaves this suggestive bit from Matthew as a foreshadowing of what is to come at the Pointe Saint-Mathieu. At this point, Matthew is still blindly optimistic about the space with what he takes to be its auspicious naming, but Peters suggests with its foreboding description and the warning of “evil currents”, that Finistère’s Pointe Saint-Mathieu is far from the utopian space of seclusion where desire can flourish in its own hidden corner as Matthew had hoped: it is instead, the margin of France, its outward limit—the furthest one can depart from the metropole of French civilization, the last cornered step backwards before falling off the cliff and off the map. While Matthew comes of age in France and learns how queer desire and culture must be practiced in the margins of society, in spaces reclaimed and repurposed beneath the nose of the mainstream, Finistère looms ominously in the narrative, not as the freedom of the frontier, but ultimately as the geographical limit of his desire. I will return to Finistère and the end of the novel later, but for now, I want to examine how Peters
spatializes queer desire across specific geographical areas and cultural institutions how they inform Matthew of his burgeoning gay identity.

The first queer space that Matthew enters is the boarding school. Historically, sex-segregated Catholic schools have often bred the kind of young male intimate relationships that Matthew finds with André, most notably depicted in Roger Peyrefitte’s novel *Les Amitiés Particulières* from 1945, set in the same time period in the 20s as *Finistère*. While many young men born homosexual find the first of a lifetime of male partners in the all-male boarding school, a good number of ostensibly straight students choose to experiment, becoming prey to situational homosexuality. What is counterintuitively queer about the Catholic boarding school is that the model of sex-segregation is designed to keep the presumed heterosexual boys away from any sort of sexual engagement or the corrupting influences of femininity, when it in fact it actually creates a space in which a perverse and even more feared form of sexuality is practiced among young men that otherwise would not engage in it. This is how a queer space emerges within a heavily regulated institution—its logically fallacies (in this case, the idea that boys inherently learn and develop better in isolation from girls) leaves it blind to how its unquestioned principles can be appropriated for purposes contrary to their own goals.

When Matthew first enters the boarding school, he is immediately intimidated by the foreignness of the environment:

And what was this place? This isolated building and all the black-aproned boys. In Paris, the school had had the glamour of a refuge, but now he saw it for what it was: a leap into the void in the company of strangers. He knew only a little French, he could not understand the cries of these boys from the playing field, recognizing them only as joy, or
anger, or encouragement, as one recognizes the sound of animals and attempts to interpret their meaning (15).

After an unhappy beginning in France, estranged from his father and cooped up in his mother’s small apartment, the space of the boarding school seemed at first like an escape, but with the uncanny sounds of French echoing in the halls, a language he can understand just enough of to realize what he doesn’t understand. He recognizes that the space demands that he transform himself to its own status quo. Matthew initially feels isolated and alienated on his first day in the school, until André, an older boy addresses him in English and invites him to his room.

“Matthew sighed to himself, envying both the boy and the room at the same time. He felt insignificant and small compared to him, but his regret was lessened but the fact that it was he, Matthew Cameron, who had been selected to come up here. A sudden doubt pierced him: perhaps it was just because André felt superior to him, or for some other reason he had not revealed” (32). For the thirteen year old, and thus newly pubescent Matthew, the room of the older boy is a space of transition from childhood to adulthood—one that he is initially reluctant to enter. André offers him a cigarette which makes Matthew ill and shows him nude photos of men and women that “attracted and repelled at the same time” and when he retreats, half-shaken and half-titillated to his room, “he lay in his bed, his eyes wide open, staring into the night at a picture that seemed to be pasted on the ceiling above his head. His body was burning.” (36) Most teenage boys have a moment like this in their lives where an older boy who engages in the clichés of teenage rebellion seems infinitely wiser and cooler and the attention he pays to the younger boy makes him desperate for the older boy’s mentorship and approval. This makes him feel special and “grown-up”. He wants to be the older boy and he wants to be wanted by the older boy. By situating this common relationship dynamic among older and young males within
Matthew’s latent homosexuality, which he can probably sense, but not make sense of yet, Peters draws attention to the queerness of this age-old initiation into adulthood. Matthew does not just want to be André and be wanted by André, but he also desires him as an object.

The relationship between Matthew and André, as it progresses from mere mentorship to sexual exploration, illuminates the intricate webs of desire in intimate young male relationships. For Matthew, André’s sexual knowledge constitutes worldliness:

André Marat was born with a worldliness, an instinctive knowledge of things and people, that he never had cause to doubt. He did not acquire knowledge as he went along, other than the facts, dates and statistics that were necessary for his school work: the knowledge he had was born with him, and he had no interest in learning. His life was devoted to the development and use of his native talents, and by the time he was fourteen he rarely made mistakes. His assets were his uncanny awareness of his own limitations and an unbounded self-confidence which took the place of charm, poise, manners of intelligence. He did not attempt to compete with anyone of equal or greater strength than himself, and he dealt with people—even at fourteen—on his level and never on theirs. Reason, right and wrong, judgment and conscience were only meaningless terms in his vocabulary. He knew by instinct how far he could go, what he could get away with, when it was necessary to stop or hold back.

The passage describing André can been seen as a glimpse into an idealized image of what he believes a sexually confident youth to embody. André is no academic, but he is a savvy and perceptive observer of human psychology and social custom. These traits are “born” in him, suggesting that these talents, which allow him to succeed in the world and thus be “worldly”, are what also grant him the sophistication and cunning to be confident enough in his sexuality to
seduce another young man. If “worldliness” is synonymous for Peters with “the ability to decipher homosexuality and possess a lax attitude toward it”, then by extension, Peters places homosexuality within the realm of the innate and the instinctual. When André suggests that Matthew move into his room with him, Matthew jumps at the chance to learn from his worldliness: “André could advise him, answer his questions, and André could tell him so much... he thought of those pictures again. He knew he’d never have the courage to ask him to let him look at them, but if he were living with him it would undoubtedly happen of itself. And there were probably many other things...” (41). By sharing André’s space, Matthew completely subjects himself to André’s every desire, which in turn allows Matthew to pursue sexual inquiry without having to announce his interest. When the schoolmaster hears of the boys’ plan to share a room, he is happy to see that Matthew has made a friend and that he could learn from an older boy. Without realizing it, the Catholic school furnishes the very space of sin they preach against.

The shared space of the dorm room allows André to gradually seduce Matthew. By sharing a room, they share each other’s intimate privacy. While it would be odd to undress in front of a friend or invite him in to witness one’s more intimate or vulnerable moments, to a dorm mate, this arrangement is already accepted. One morning, Matthew awakes to find André staring into his eyes, and sensing his rapture, André exposes himself on the bed. From that point on, a relationship of sexual tutelage begins in the dorm room. Peters is vague about the exact details of their intimacy. André gives a “demonstration” of the fact that “there was a lot more to [sex] than just having babies, and later questions Matthew unceasingly about it until he finds out that “Matthew, too, was one of the initiated, as he called them.” (70) It is unclear if this initiation is merely into masturbation, or perhaps into same-sex desire. Peters is further ambiguous when he describes Matthew’s sexual experience with André as “it”:
The first time it had been terrifying, and what was worse, painful. But even with the pain there had been some compulsion that had forced him on and on. Gradually the pain had disappeared—they physical pain, at any rate. But it has been replaced by something else, something that formed between his ribs, and hurt almost as much. It was always afterwards that he felt it, hating himself, making promises and vows for the future. But then the next time he would be beaten again, trapped by himself, unable to resist (70).

This passage is intentionally vague and could be taken to mean anything from guilt over masturbation to the physical pain of a male new to penetrative sex. Peters considers the physical, psychological, and the erotic as sometimes cooperative, sometimes irreconcilable features of a young man’s attempt to explore and understand his sexuality. Underlying this turmoil is a general “compulsion,” a drive that supersedes physical pain and the self-preserving of the ego that pushes him toward these erotic acts. Homosexuality is force beyond one’s will. If Matthew could position himself to receive physical pain, psychological guilt, and romantic anguish, then clearly the sexual compulsion is something that trumps all reason, all morality, and dispels the illusion that one could have complete mastery over the self.

When Matthew returns to school after the vacation period to discover that André has moved to another school, he becomes despondent, and during a swimming excursion in the Seine River, he surveys his sorrows:

In the two years he had been here, Matthew had come to know the Seine and the country around it very well; he knew it especially well now because he encountered it in a mist of personal gloom, and his state of mind, the inner world in which he lived, reviewed the impressions of the country, the names of the villages deeply, marking them with his melancholy. Across this countryside, the vision of which was hung in the back of his
mind like the scenery for a play, all the events of the last two years shuttled in and out of his imagination. His first coming here, his early meetings with Paul; the ups and downs in his relationship with Scott; the announcement of the divorce and his father’s marriage; his mother’s marriage and her honeymoon his first Christmas with his new stepfather, and their first summer together, just ended. Even the places they had visited did not blot out this landscape, which seemed more permanent and durable than any other single thing in his life. More than two years in France. Two years and three and a half months, actually. And in that time he had acquired a second self: a Matthew who spoke French like a native, whose parents were named Dumesnil while his own name, Cameron, still clung to him like a remnant of something he had brought with him in 1927 (109).

The Seine pools the waters of reflection for Matthew and reveals how he has imbued the land and spaces of France with his turbulent emotional experiences. The cities he has traveled to are “marked with melancholy,” and he resents the river for having transported him into this new place. Although he felt alienated in this space at first, he realizes that it has transformed him and somewhat assimilated him into becoming a French boy. Yet, at this moment, he does not relish the transformation, but feels estranged by it and divided into two people.

Although Matthew enters the Seine with this sense of resentment and alienation in his mind, he will exit the Seine reborn as Mathieu in its waters. As Matthew walks deeper into the water, replaying these bitter thoughts in his mind, he overhears the athletics teacher call out his name: “It was Monsieur Garnier, who always called him Mathieu with a special inflection in his voice. He had laughed when he had first pronounced his name, saying that he had never known anyone named Mathieu before, and that it always made him think of Saint Matthew” (112). Matthew acknowledges Garnier’s call, and he is interpolated into becoming Mathieu when they
exchange looks with an implicit erotic charge as Matthew was embarrassed, wearing “the very brief swimming trunks which all French boys wear” (113). His body is then erotically configured as a French boy’s who would not hesitate to bear the skin that an American boy would be too modest to show. Yet, when Matthew enters the waters of the Seine, he does not consciously process this moment in which he is hailed into being as his athletics teacher’s object of erotic desire. Instead, he must be baptized into realizing his new identity in the Seine. He wades out deeper into the water, possessed by the aforementioned melancholic, resentful thoughts, and as the current overtakes him, he passively accepts the drowning as a suicide. Peters then stages one of the most cliché fantasies possessed by any woman or gay man—Matthew is rescued by the French equivalent of the hunky lifeguard. When Matthew comes to, Michel is at his side and he oversees his convalescence. Matthew is thus “reborn” as Michel’s Mathieu, a form of French identity that is uniquely his own and enabling of a part of his sexuality that he desperately wanted liberated. To be baptized in the Seine is to be reborn into a French identity—one that now liberates through Michel’s love instead of one that oppresses through Paul’s intrusion into his life.

While Matthew’s relationship with André had been that of an older boy mentoring a younger in the ways of licentiousness, Matthew’s relationship with Michel is a full romantic love affair, complicated by their cross-generational status. Michel is a young adult, but Matthew is only 15, and although this would by itself create high stakes because they are teacher and pupil in a Catholic school, the gap in age complicates the relationship by placing Matthew in a state of innocence whose enthusiasm over his first love makes him careless, contrasted with Michel’s constant worry and wariness. Michel is not just anxious about what could happen if his relationship with a student is exposed, but he is also painfully aware of how the world around
him views homosexuality and the kind of subject position he must inhabit. Matthew has no
experience “being” a homosexual, bearing that mark in society, or living in the spaces and
cultures that allow him his sexuality, whereas Michel is a veteran of this lifestyle and
understands “the price one must pay for their happiness.” Michel is both scarred and enlightened
by this experience as it informs the very beginning of his relationship with Matthew in this scene
in which they first romantically embrace:

The loneliness, all the lack of love that Michel had felt with all the men and women he
had known, poured out of him, blinding his will, shattering his resolutions. Whatever
mental struggle was taking place in him, the real strength of his will was not showing
itself in its ability to outwit him, to justify the actions which it must allow. His body
overpowered him working with the skill and competence which he had learned, not
through love, but rather in the mercilessness of parks, alleys, and darkened bedrooms—
with strangers. ‘You’re a nice boy,’ he said (121).

Just like Matthew’s first experimentations with André, Peters describes Michel’s drive to
embrace Matthew as coming from an overwhelming compulsion that supersedes mind and
reason. Yet, this compulsion is conditioned and contoured around the erotic education that
Michel received in his past of having homosexual sex in the queer spaces of France that allow
for it: the parks, alleys, and bedrooms of strangers.

In contrast to the idyllic, romantic setting of the boarding school in which Matthew learns
of homosexual desire and love, Peters presents us with Michel’s history in the Parisian
underworld in which he became acquainted with his desire for men. On leave from the army five
years before his meeting with Matthew, Michel strolls the Boulevard St. Germain, sick of the
women who solicit him, wanting “something, someone, but not that” (123). A stranger in a bar
offers him a drink, and by the end of the night, Michel finds himself in the man’s apartment, drunk and amenable to the man’s sexual advances. This experience of anonymous, yet satisfying sex awakens Michel to a whole new dimension of the Parisian demimonde that he had been blind to:

Under the crust of the normal world of the city he had found a special and unique civilization, A small world with its own special cafes, restaurants, nightclubs; a world of every kind of man of every race. Here he found men from the Army, boxers, business men, movie stars, weightlifters; married men and single men, old men and boys. some of them were permanent inhabitants of this particular world and others were only transients or novices. It was a world without limits or rules, a world of share and share alike (131). The sexual experience with the anonymous man grants Michel an affective sense of how to find the spaces where same-sex desires can conflagrate. This perception goes beyond merely being able to detect the dominant image of the pansy on the street in his performative effeminacy as Peters shows that these special cafes and clubs are inhabited by men from all walks of life. A singular vision of homosexual identity based on class, race, gender identity, class, or vocation is unfit for detecting the homosexual desire that resides in the minds of ostensibly normal men.

Michel learns a semiotic code of glances, gestures, and speech acts, so intricate and subtle that it is more like an affective sense than a conscious act of detection and interpretation:

He learned the universal language of the milieu: the language of indirection, gesture and the significant glance. Honesty and dishonesty existed in such completely equal measure that it was impossible to distinguish between them. The lack of truth in most of the sharp, witty and fantastic exchanges that passed for conversation was so obvious and so enormous that it was no longer untruth. There was no way of separating fact from fiction,
nor was there any reason to do so. Under the guise of endearments or highly civilized verbal cruelties existed an elaborate, formalized and continuous chase. Everyone was hunting, hunted, searched, wanting and wanted. The aim was constant and unchanging: conquest. Not one conquest, but continuous conquest, from one victory to another, for it was the conquest alone that was important and never the prize (131).

The culture of these gay bars and cafes depends upon more than just subtly nuanced codes of communication: they also bend and twist some of the basic assumptions of the dominant culture and values. Truth is no longer based on actuality, but on social currency. Truth is no longer a guarantee of the right, the stable, the cultural consensus, the ending reference of an inquiry, but it is instead a means to end. A world that privileges the untruth is the queer world, and this is actually a logical state for a minority culture in contestation with a majority culture that wishes it be wiped out. Truth has a suspect element for the queer individual because of all the “truths” produced by the dominant culture that degrade and abuse the homosexual. Lying and dissembling became integral to queer survival, and because all the men in these cafes arrived there through similar means of masking their desires in public, “untruth” becomes the truth that they all accept. In the post-Freudian world of the “truth” of human endeavor as defined by libidinal drives, the queer spaces of Paris realize that the truth of reason, logic, and moral order are in of themselves sublimations of the true natural of sexual desire—like Lacan’s chain of signifiers without signified, desire is never satisfied, and that is the truth that queer spaces reveal.

This is the social milieu in which Michel came to understand and define his desire, yet, as Peters writes, “He did not attempt to deny his own perversion, he could do nothing about it: it existed definitely and irresistibly, but he had not come to the point where he could do business with it” (133). Even though Michel is an athletic, desirable young man with no difficulties in
finding admirers, the endless pursuit leaves a sense of emptiness, which he attempts to find with a failed attempt at monogamy with a young Englishman. Michel “escaped with him to the outer edges of the perverted world” but “as in a marriage, but for different underlying reasons, this first happiness began to fade slowly.” (133) Even though they lapsed into infidelities and moved to separate rooms, they continued to live together, “because it was important to preserve the dream.” Swinging from the queer libertine end of the spectrum to the domestic, heteronormative end, Michel finds that the promises of happiness through unbridled debauchery or secured, monogamous attachment are both illusory and untenable.

Blaming the depravity of the queer community in Paris for his unhappiness, Michel decides to move away from the city and takes a job near Rouen at Matthew’s boarding school. As he travels, “He breathed the air deeply into his lungs, tasting its freshness, and exhaling the years’ stale smoke and debauchery” (134). The common modernist trope of escaping the corruption and sickness of the city for the wholesome, therapeutic return to nature in the countryside is given a queer twist. Michel is not renouncing his homosexuality, just the urban space and customs in which it can find expression in a community. In Matthew, he hopes to have found the kind of pure, innocent homosexual love that he desires. But, as he discovers, personified in Matthew’s naivety, this desire for love outside of a social context, especially one as bigoted and menacing as it is for homosexuals, is as untenable once it steps out from the locked dorm room in the pastoral countryside as it is when it steps outside of the alleys and the shadows: “When Michel, sadistically characterized their relationship as ‘homosexual, pure and simple,’ and told Matthew he had to ‘face the facts,’ Matthew looked at him strangely, the eternal smile disappearing from his face for a moment, ‘Well, that’s a name for it, if you say so,’ was what he said finally, but he did not seem in any way alarmed or disturbed, and added: ‘I love
you. That matters.’ (140) Matthew has no moral compunction about homosexuality when it refers specifically to his love for Michel, because he has no frame of reference outside of his own personal affairs. Michel is attracted by the possibility of living in a world in which homosexuality refers only the fact of two people of the same sex and stripped of all the negative connotations that he had experienced. Matthew’s innocence and earnest optimism contrasts with the “untruths” and endless pursuit of desire that Michel encountered in the Parisian underground, so much so that even using basic vocabulary for sexuality seems obscene in Matthew’s presence:

He had never talked to Matthew about his past; he could not bring himself, easily, to use words like seduce or even sex when he talked to him. He felt suddenly that he has been living in a kind of unreal, romantic dream with Matthew—a dream that had to be forced into reality. Matthew was inexperienced, pure and happy. His lack of guilt or worry was, it seemed to Michel, only a result of his ignorance. In the effort to explain his refusal to go to Paris, he found himself confronted with his past life there and with the necessity of someday having to talk about it, explain it. He was angry with the naivety of Matthew’s suggestion. ‘Come to Paris and we can be together’ (143)

Michel dreads the idea of accompanying Matthew to Paris because he will be placed back into these queer spaces and he fears that Matthew will know about his past in this environment and lose that kind of pure idealism that provides the core of Matthew’s love. Yet, when Matthew’s father and fiancée come to Paris that summer, he must leave the idyllic vacation at Finistère and take the train east to Paris, with Michel reluctantly in tow.

Not only does Michel fear for Matthew to see him in the queer underground, but he also worries that in his father’s presence, Matthew will feel fulfilled by the love of father figure he had long missed and would realize that his desire for an older man was mere confusion of this
need. This apprehension proves to be partially true. Matthew is initially worried that his father would not recognize him or that he would be indifferent, but the reunion is actually emotionally charged, and unlike his stepfather Paul, his soon to be stepmother is kind and loving. It is the family dynamic that he had been missing ever since he and his mother departed for France. While Matthew’s reunion with his father does not change the fact that he loves Michel, it changes his perspective on it. His parents’ love presents him with a vision of heteronormative happiness that he now believes he is doomed to never achieve as a homosexual. It is the first time that he realizes the consequences of his own identity, the price he must pay for his happiness, as Michel terms it. This realization too comes from his travels within the cultural spaces of Paris with his father and soon to be stepmother. Matthew is happy to play tour guide to the city and touristy landmarks he believes he knows so well. This is the romanticized, world-famous Paris that everyone dreams of seeing, (not the underground in which Michel came of age) and the fact that Matthew himself is the guide suggests his maturity and sophistication in the eyes of his parents. Just as the short bathing suit hailed Matthew into being a French object of erotic desire for Michel, the flannel suit hails Matthew back into his American identity as the son of his apparently wealthy father. Matthew is proud of this suit and proud to be reclaimed by his father and his soon to be stepmother—a sense of complete acceptance that a queer adolescent craves.

Matthew’s picturesque tour of French heritage and patrimony is quickly contrasted later that night by a tour of the Parisian underground by a jealous and resentful Michel. When Matthew returns wearing his father’s suit, Michel is confronted with what he believes to be his looming obsolescence and, without explanation, decides to deflate Matthew’s happiness by taking him to a series of gay bars and cafes. Matthew is visibly uneasy about being in these
seedier establishments as Michel renews acquaintances with a couple of men he had not seen since his days of tramping in Paris. Michel allows them to leer at Matthew like any other young piece of meat on the scene. At the end, Michel takes Matthew to a hidden section of a bar in which there are a series of private rooms, where presumably, men can hook up with one another. Everything Matthew sees in these establishments horrifies him as he sees gay life in practice, in its own real world spaces for the first time and he realizes that this is the environment that produced Michel. In the span of one day, Matthew sees two Parises; one of cultural patrimony and world heritage that speaks to the highest and most privileged elements of western history, and the queer underground, the Paris of alleys, seedy bars, and secret rooms that have been excavated out of the core of the city of light so that the queers may find perverted pleasures in the darkness.

From his terrifying excursion through the queer underground of Paris, Matthew has a crash course in the culture and language of the gay world, and although he maintains his love for Michel, his desire for purity is forever tainted by what he had seen. He may previously have know the definition of homosexual and had been in peace with its technical meaning, but he now understands its social signification—what it meant to exist in a space and a culture and how it grates against the sense of decency inculcated in his mind.

Thrown against this projection of Edith and John, Matthew could only feel a lack in his love for Michel...However much Michel might talk about normality, abnormality, right or wrong, the essential wrong was their inability to achieve what he felt from these two people. His instincts told him that such a balance was impossible for himself and Michel. Was it essentially because of the unnaturalness? Male and female, positive and negative...is the very emotion which two positives, two males, create, something that
produces inadequate emotions? Is the projection of such a relationship bound to be sterile? In the same way that such a union cannot produce children—the natural result, as Matthew had told himself and Michel, of sex—is it also impossible for them to produce a solidarity of feeling, which is, in its own way, creative? (256)

Due to his inexperience, Matthew cannot tell if his problem is with Michel, or with the enterprise of homosexuality itself. He has only heterosexual examples of relationships to draw from, and only his one night in the queer underground to gauge the culture of homosexuality as a whole. “Matthew knew that through his feeling he had stumbled onto something that was logical. It was not important whether of not social or so-called moral considerations were observed or disregarded, it was the defiance of—more than that—the inability to produce natural results, tangible or intangible; that was the root of their abnormality (257). Matthew’s critical examination of homosexual versus heterosexual relationships nears an enlightened stance as he seems not to care much for aligning with social convention, but what he fails to realize is the core of heteronormative social convention is this “production” that he believes constitutes a relationship. It must be productive—if not of babies, then of something. This in turn reveals the very center of puritan American morality: productivity. Social customs can be challenged and tastes can vary, but it is inherently immoral not to work and be productive, even in one’s romantic endeavors.

The seeming “amoralism” of the French characters in the novel challenges this American Puritanism based on a work ethic. One of Paul’s earliest listed flaws is that “he didn’t do anything...He had an income. In France it was not like America—men didn’t have to be in offices all the time” (47). Yet, while the Americans are concerned about morality, they have a limited ability to detect a truly transgressive “immorality” like the homosexual due to their
limited sense of what is beyond their own orderly world of work. While Matthew is just as oblivious to this reality as his mother, Scott, and his father who on their own detect nothing strange about a grown man and a teenage boy spending so much time with one another, the French characters are wise to what is transpiring. We have already seen Michel and André presented as fluent in the semiotics of a sexuality the average American would be blind to, and now Peters adds that both Françoise, (Scott’s girlfriend) and Paul are also able to decipher these codes. All of the French characters in the novel can detect and possess relatively liberal attitudes toward homosexuality, while every American character is oblivious. Thus, Frenchness becomes synonymous for Peters with liberalness and keen observational powers of human desire based on their more “worldly” stature than puritanical, provincial Americans.

During a tennis match involving Scott, Matthew’s father, and Michel, Françoise is able to detect the kind of relationship Matthew has with all three of the men by simply observing his behaviors and how he relates to them. Afterwards, Scott remarks to Françoise about Matthew’s sudden sense of maturity and confidence, ascribing his change to the possibility that he has a girlfriend. When Françoise argues that Matthew is clearly in love with Michel, and that he was probably in love with Scott, this becomes too much for Scott to handle and he believes he must intercede and do something to stop the relationship because “it’s abnormal, unnatural. It’s all wrong.” (243) Françoise on the other hand, believes that such matters are none of hers or Scott’s business, knowing that Matthew’s homosexuality is not something that can be changed through threat or coercion: “When you talk like that, Scott, you make me sick. What kind of people do you know? Are they all pure and righteous? Do they all have your morals? Do you pick your friends because of who they sleep with? And Matthew! After all, he’s in love, he’s happy. Is that so terrible? He can’t help it. Has he done something so much worse that the rest of you men?
(243) Between Françoise and Scott, Peters stages a debate on what he believes to be the contrasting visions of French and American morality. Françoise views morality as subjective to the best interests of the individual. She believes Matthew to be old enough to make his own choices, and whether or not one approves of them, the most harm can be done to Matthew if he is made to feel perverted or shunned for them. Scott, as representative of American morality, believes in a polarized sense of right and wrong that applies universally to personal actions. One can act immorally toward one’s own self and others have the right to castigate and punish the individual for acts that only affect himself. Matthew’s happiness is considered invalid if it does not adhere to the moral code that is presupposed to create authentic happiness. Peters’ vision of French versus American sexual morality is obviously highly polarized in of itself and one would not have to try too hard to find Frenchmen who would meddle in the personal lives of others and Americans who believe in this subjective morality. Nonetheless, Peters here argues the same sentiment that we see in McAlmon, Ford, and Bowles: that in some way or another, the Francophone world is more apt to “let one be” than America.

After Scott decides to write Matthew a letter because he cannot let Matthew think he knows about the relationship and allows it to be, Françoise goes behind Scott’s back and meets with Matthew to apologize for having told Scott: “What I want to ask you is not to take this too seriously. Not everyone will feel as Scott does, and certainly they will not write to you—not such a letter. He is such a moraliste! I do not feel that way, for example. I do not understand this entirely, but it does not make me feel differently toward you” (252). Because she seeks out Matthew and becomes what we would term today an “ally”, her earlier moral stance of “it’s none of our business” is further developed and we see that it is not a hands-off approach in which not intervening is actually just a way to conveniently ignore an issue. Instead, “it’s none of our
business” means that we have no right to define morality and happiness for other people, but we do have the obligation to help those whose right to happiness has been taken away from them. Although *Finistère* adheres to the “tragic invert” trope in which the queer protagonist ends up suffering for his identity, his love, and his happiness, through the character of Françoise, Peters gives us a persuasive mouthpiece for the defense of the homosexual’s right to existence.

Intellectual enlightenment is not inherently ennobling and any piece of wisdom can be used for good or for evil. Peters’ casting of the French citizen as “the one who knows” homosexuality is split between the virtues that Françoise displays with her understanding and the ultimate corruption that Paul invites when he too becomes wise to his stepson’s sexuality. Just like Françoise, Paul is also able to detect the kind of relationship between Michel and Matthew while they are on vacation, but he does not involve himself because he ultimately does not care about Matthew’s moral choices. He is happy to have another Frenchman around and he sees that Matthew’s relationship with Michel makes him agreeable and pleasant in a way that he had never been around Paul. Thus, Paul’s initial mindset of “if it harms no one, it does not matter” is initially an example of how this sense of subjective morality can create a better sense of harmony. However, as Peters repeats in most of his written work, it is important to not confuse acknowledgement of morality as a subjective thing with the complete absence of morality altogether. For Peters, it is important to challenge the conventional attitudes and status quos of a society that produces needlessly oppressive moral obligations on individuals, but it is just as ineffective and dangerous to simply throw out morality altogether. This all goes back to Peters’ belief in balance and respect for Gurdjieff and Stein as individuals that defied status quos not for the sake of enabling destructive, self-serving behavior, but in order to strike a better, more ethical balance of human liberties.
What appears at first to be Paul’s liberal attitude toward homosexuality is later revealed to be self-serving and enabling of his own vice when he attempts to seduce his own stepson. When Matthew returns to his vacationing mother and stepfather after his excursion in Paris with his father, Paul confronts him on the beach about his relationship with Michel. “And then Paul leaned close to him, putting his hand under Matthew’s body, between his stomach and the sand. ‘Do you think you can fool me?’ he asked, and Matthew’s face went slowly from red to white. ‘Do you think I don’t know about you two?’ Do you think I am blind?’ Maybe you can fool your mother, but you can’t fool me’ (283). Matthew is initially shocked that Paul had been able to detect their relationship from the moment they began their care ride from Paris to Finistère, and though his fear that Paul would expose them is quickly put to rest when he states, “What would I do? It’s nothing to me. I don’t mind,” it is replaced with a new horror as he realizes Paul is using this knowledge to seduce him:

Matthew turned to face him, withdrawing his body from the touch of Paul’s hand. He did not see Paul really. What he saw was the look in Paul’s eyes, the hair on his chest, the movement in his throat. And he could smell Paul, but it was not sweat he smelled, it was not an odor particular to Paul…it was…he remembered Michel in Paris that night… ‘I want you.’ This then, was what Michel has told him about, this was the alley, the soldier…the room above the cafe (283).

As terrifying as his involuntary tour through the seedier establishments of the Parisian queer underground had been, Matthew had indeed learned something, and picked up some unconscious element of the culture. He can now detect the lust, the perversity in Paul that he had otherwise been blind to, but not as an observable gesture or an analysis of intent. It is an odor, an essence, a queer pheromone, not universal to all homosexual men, but to those engaged in what he thinks of
as depravity. These queer spaces mark themselves on the body of those who frequent them, and they can transport their essence far from the demimonde:

Paul moved suddenly, turning Matthew on his back and holding him hard against the sand. He pressed his body against Matthew and stared down into his face. ‘I was young once,’ he said, ‘I know what it’s like. I don’t blame Michel.’...’Now just take it easy, Matthew,’ Paul’s voice went on. ‘You don’t want me to tell your mother, do you?’ He smiled. ‘It’s different with me. I don’t mind. I like a little fun myself once in a while’ (284)

Matthew kicks Paul off of him before he can advance further, but the damage has already been done. Paul becomes emblematic of everything that puts Matthew in contestation with his own sexuality: the vaguely incestuous overtones, the lack of moral boundaries, the shameless application of coercion and force, the indifference to how it effects the other relationships, the way it traffics in deception and masquerade, Paul as the “non-producing Frenchman” like all the other homosexual pursuits that produce nothing—all united in one nauseating stench.

As traumatizing as this scene of abuse at the hands of his stepfather may be, its greatest damage for Matthew is the fact that it confirms for him (at least in his own mind) the sordid reality of homosexuality—and that reality resides inside himself. After he flees and seeks Michel for comfort, the scene soon implodes as he hastily blames Michel for what has happened, “You’ve destroyed me, you’ve helped me to destroy myself. You’re a man, you know about thee things but you have to have what you want, you don’t care what happens to me...You’re like all the rest of them...you should have stayed in that place in Paris...you’re perverted!” (294) In Matthew’s hysteric moment, Michel is to blame because he had seduced him into a life and a desire of depravity, led by the promise of purity and innocence only to discover the rotten reality
of homosexual existence. Michel understands that he did not create Matthew’s same-sex desire, and while he may be guilty of taking advantage of a minor, he refuses to accept blame:

_Perverted!_ He echoed savagely. ‘And what are you, you and your holy innocence? You are perfect, aren’t you? You never wanted me, did you? You can forget yourself, can’t you? You don’t remember as far back as I do, do you Matthew? You don’t remember the first time you kissed me! The things you’ve done! No, you’re unsullied, unspoiled, pure, wonderful! You and your high and mighty morals! We’re all scum, the rest of us, no one is good enough for you! Well, I will tell you something, _mon petit_; you are like everyone else, and you might as well admit it. If it had not happened with me, it would have been someone else, some other pervert...’(294)

Before his exposure to the queer spaces of Paris, learning Michel’s history, watching his father’s “authentic” heterosexual happiness, his castigating letter from Scott, and finally Paul’s abuse—Matthew had never felt moral compunction about his homosexuality. He never had to live branded by the term, defined by it in a way that he cannot control. Now that he is subject to the discrimination and abuse (both by heterossexuals and other homosexuals in the ruthless sexual hierarchy) of being homosexual, he tries to escape it. This is the reality Michel knew all along that would face Matthew, and now that he refuses to accept responsibility for who he is, even though much of this weight is unjust and cruel, Michel has little sympathy, “You are nothing more or less than a fairy...yes a fairy...so accept it” (295).

While Michel urges Matthew to accept his “perversion” and reminds him that he does not control how his sexuality will be perceived or treated by others, he falls too deep into a pessimistic, fatalist view of homosexuality. He blames Matthew for Paul’s abuse, “You asked for it, or Paul would never have done it. You expose what you are and you ask for that kind of thing,
then you begin to cry when anything happens” (295). In Michel’s mind, the price that a homosexual pays for pursuing his desire in a shadowy world below the radar of society to escape its prejudice and persecution is that he is also then operating in a world where his rights are withheld. He cannot operate in the blind spot of the law and social morality and then expect that same system of laws and morals to protect him. Michel accepts his degraded citizenship as a precondition of pursuing his desire and does nothing to challenge this injustice while Matthew refuses to accept his newly found abject minorityhood after an entire adolescence of privilege.

When Matthew flees from Michel’s condemnations, his last line of comfort is his mother, but she, like Scott, reacts terribly to Matthew’s confession of his relationship with Michel and attempts to tell her of Paul’s abuse, “Leave Paul out of this,’ she said, cutting in on him. ‘Don’t try to drag Paul into this, Matthew. I know Paul too well. But that you and Michel…it’s unthinkable, it’s horrible!’ She turned her eyes directly into his. ‘I’d rather you were dead!’ she exclaimed, her voice like a hammer striking a nail” (303). Matthew soon grants his mother her wish as Peters takes us back to the site of the end of the novel that has been looming on the cover of the book: Finistère, the end of the Earth, the end of the line, the end of Matthew’s life, the end.

On the last page, Michel searches for Matthew, who has not returned to the house after his series of crushing confrontations:

Although he ran quickly, his breathing coming hard and fast, he felt that he was running a useless race against time. The few houses of the town of Saint-Mathieu, silent and unawakened, mocked the slowness of his pace. It was only when he was past them, approaching the lighthouse and the cliff, that he slowed to a walk. The impulse that had carried him forward had died within him, replaced by a dreadful anticipation. Her forced himself forward, walking now, his hands clenched, his ears filled with the roar of the sea
battering against the point. Over the ruins of the church, the morning edge of the sun burst into the sky. At the edge of the cliff he stopped, staring into the blinding sunlight, and then his eyes blinked and looked down...down the strip of sand, the distinct footprints leading in one single trail into the black water.

THE END     (306)

Peters takes us to the end of the Earth, the end of France at the end of the novel as he re-charts the geography of Finistère that Matthew and Michel had at first so romantically and idyllically traversed, now as a path to suicide. Matthew’s suicide is a step off France, off the continent of Europe where he had learned the language of his desire, only to reject it for fear of what it could make him become. His suicide is a denial of the land, and in that water he joins, as legend tells, the remains of St. Mathieu once contained in the abbey at the end of the Earth. He has fallen short of the saintliness of this apostle whose name he shared, but shares his martyrdom.

In Finistère, Peters leaves us with a somewhat fatalistic vision of the fate awaiting gay youth. Through Matthew, Peters redeems same-sex desire as a concept, presenting it as innocent and pure when isolated in the idyllic space of the boarding school. But as a culture and a social identity, homosexuality is presented as corrupt and incapable of producing the same form of happiness that heterosexual marriage and family life promises. Peters seems to indicate that this is as much the product of the prejudice homosexuality faces in society as it is the product of a gay culture that he believes has shed the idea of morality entirely. In both this novel and The World Next Door, homosexuality is never in of itself a moral problem, but it is only when it is situated in the world, in a community, in a nation, and in a particular cultural institution when it is prey to the judgement of society that it becomes bound to questions of morality, impurity, vice, and ultimately, unhappiness. In isolation, the homosexual, branded mentally ill by society,
is a pioneer of the mind who can criticize society from his unique vantage point, but when he is situated within society, what his homosexuality means is contingent on the space he inhabits. It is this element of homosexuality as constituting an identity that one cannot control that leads to Matthew’s suicide. He can bear same-sex desire, but cannot accept what people want to make out of him through it, to bear the stigma of this new concept of gay identity. Ultimately, this is what haunted Peters as well.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

The “birth” of the gay modernist subject was not the product of a singular narrative of literary history. Not only is the gay subject of modernist literature a figure that takes several different forms in different cultural contexts, but it is also the product of competing and contested imaginations and ideological constructs of how sexuality informs the individual subject and how this subject should be integrated into the culture around it. In synthesizing a critical literary history of queer American expatriates in France, this dissertation traces one of gay subjectivity’s millions of roots. Each genealogical line of gay discourse that a scholar follows into history will lead to different constructs of sexuality depending on the long-buried voices he or she unearths in the process. It is my hope that exploring queer expatriation in France has illuminated a section of the genealogy of gay discourse in America for which we have long seen certain clues in modernist studies—Jake Barnes cursing fairies in *The Sun Also Rises*, Paul Bowles’ morally ambivalent orientalism in *The Sheltering Sky*, and Charles Henri Ford’s behind the scenes editing of *Nightwood*—but have never put together as a coherent narrative of how expatriation in France contributed to the building of the modern identity known as “gay”.

In studying the expatriate movement in France as a window into the histories of queer life before this consolidation of a gay identity and politics, a large part of my motivation has been to disrupt the contemporary assumptions about sexuality and cultural practices that have come with this identity. The ideas of a gay identity, gay politics, or gay culture are not simply phrases developed to label an already existing phenomenon, but they are instead culturally and historically specific ways of creating an identity, politics, and culture out of a particular way of interpreting and socializing sexual behavior. This has become so ingrained in contemporary
culture that we assume that certain political beliefs, cultural tastes, and ways of viewing one’s self and position in the world are inherent, universal elements of same sex desire. In looking to the era of modernism and this specific history of queer writers in France, I not only present these writers’ lives and works as inspiration to reform and expand the possibilities of queer expression in the contemporary world, but also to contest the fixed assumptions about gay identity as coming with these now presumed innate qualities. Paramount of these is the basic idea that sexual desire even constitutes an identity. Not only does gay identity evolve as a concept over the 20th century, but also sexual identity in of itself as a basis for political beliefs and cultural identification is not a historical constant, but a distinct product of modernity.

One example that shows up in the writers of this dissertation of how living in a different era produced a sense of queer identity that contrasted dramatically from today’s assumptions about gay identity politics is the issue of marriage and companionship. All four of the writers that receive individual attention in this dissertation had significant romantic relationships with women or at some point were married to women. Additionally, all four of these were literary couplings, and three of them were to lesbians. Robert McAlmon married and later divorced Bryher, a British lesbian poet who was the long-time lover of H.D. Charles Henri Ford had a brief romance with Djuna Barnes. Paul Bowles was married for decades to Jane Bowles, a lesbian writer. Fritz Peters was briefly married to Mary Aswell, who worked in the publishing industry. Our first impulse given our contemporary expectations about sexuality is to read these as “sham marriages” or marriages of convenience. While both Peters’ and McAlmon’s marriages ended in divorce, I am reluctant to think of these marriages and relationships as insincere or fraudulent. Paul Bowles remarked repeatedly that he was at his happiest when he and Jane were traveling together and they could have their separate homosexual adventures together. Jane was
certainly the love of Paul Bowles’ life, and while it may or may not have extended to a sexual coupling, Paul saw the marriage as a bonding of two individuals united in their desires for literary expression, world travel, and sexual non-conformity. Without gay marriage as a possibility that ever crossed their minds, these men and women had to rethink the purpose of marriage in of itself and redefine it to enable a queer lifestyle instead of extinguishing it. Marriage and companionship in these regards became queered, tactically redefined to go against the heteronormativity that marriage was designed to enforce. In basing their marriages or relationships with women around coupling with an individual with shared passions for literature, expatriation, and sexual exploration, marriage is unchained from the assumption of an exclusive sexual contract and redefined. Marriage gave Paul and Jane a good “cover” for their homosexual pursuits, but it also changed marriage from a sexual union to a companionate union, which suggests the idea that individuals may be happier in unions with their best companions than with those who they sexually desire. A culture in which gay marriage is not only legal, but becoming increasingly expected of LGBT people if they want to be considered respectable and normal in society, would never think of marriage in the way that Bowles had. Yet, in studying the lives of Bowles, McAlmon, Peters, and Ford in a light that views their lack of a codified gay identity as something that could produce better or happier personal identities and social arrangements instead of seeing them as toiling in the dark ages of LGBT history, we can look at how they viewed sexuality not as a relic, but as an inspiration toward the future of gay identity.

Contemporary popular histories of gay identity and culture tend be American-centric, almost assuming that the Stonewall Riots somehow signaled the beginning of a world-wide movement for gay liberation with little consideration for how sexuality functions differently in other cultures. While I do not discount the power that America wields in its ability to influence
the perception of sexuality on a global scale as a mass exporter of entertainment and a global
hegemon that can set the political agendas of nations far away, I also believe that if we are to
truly understand how sexual identity (even the idea that sexual desire constitutes an identity)
evolved historically in America and the directions toward which it is trending in the
contemporary, then we need to think on a scale larger than our national borders. Although this
study focuses nearly exclusively on the influence of France and Francophone lands, it is my hope
that it can be situated within the scope of other studies of the transnational flows of bodies,
cultures, and ideas that have historically and will into perpetuity continue to change the faces of
sexuality in America.

One of the sub-themes of this dissertation that I intend to further develop in subsequent
scholarship is the idea of re-envisioning America by conceiving of Americanness outside of its
national borders and its physical land. If America is the hegemon of globalization, then how can
we think of American literature (among its other cultural exports) as a global literature? While
the queer expatriates of this study criticized certain puritanical aspects of American culture from
across the Atlantic, in departing from American soil, they never attempted to shed their
American identity, but instead they tried to re-envision it. Even the French born, American
citizen Julien Green, the only American member of the Academie Francaise, proudly maintained
a southern American identity even though he did not step foot onto American soil until his
college years. In “Miss Knight”, McAlmon re-imagines the meaning of a simple tradition like
Thanksgiving dinner in Berlin through a drag performer both camping on the image of the
American housewife, but also performing the motherhood of the domestic space that she was
barred from entering due to her sexuality. Gertrude Stein as well provides a traditional
Thanksgiving dinner for the young Fritz Peters in Paris, convinced that a child whose education
was left to a mystic needed to be grounded in proper American traditions. In general, the writers of this study did not see American identity as irreconcilable with queer sexuality, but rather the rift was more the product of the social climate of the nation. Being an American can be incompatible with living in America. Queerness and expatriation in France provided two outsider vantage points from which they could comment on American culture, consider how an American upbringing informed their understanding of sexuality, and imagine its reformation through comparison to French and European conceptualizations of sexuality.

Gertrude Stein perhaps best reflects this identification with America from abroad in “An American and France”, stating that “America is my country and Paris is my hometown...And so I am an American and I have lived half my life in Paris, not the half that made me but the half in which I made what I made” (62). For Stein, leaving America did not mean leaving being an American. The expatriate is made in America, but it is in France where Stein, McAlmon, Ford, and all the other authors of this study are given the chance to actively “make” something. French culture supplied a space and a literary discourse through which queer American expatriate writers could begin to make new narratives and languages to depict and conceptualize queer sexuality. While the sexuality of the queer expatriate was made in America, it took voyaging to France in order to make something of it—to represent it in modernist language. Thus, this dissertation has been about how a part of American gay history, culture, and identity was “made” in France. This did not necessarily mean making gay culture French, but rather, it meant using French discourses on sexuality and culture to re-envision the relationship between America and sexuality and to create narratives and language that would eventually coalesce in the American queer community around an identity politics based on sexual orientation and the birth of the gay subject.
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