the long-term demographic depredations of the disease will fall, to the contrary, on groups, many themselves direly endangered, that are reproduced by direct heterosexual transmission.

Unlike genocide directed against Jews, Native Americans, Africans, or other groups, then, gay genocide, the once-and-for-all eradication of gay populations, however potent and sustained as a project or fantasy of modern Western culture, is not possible short of the eradication of the whole human species. The impulse of the species toward its own eradication must not either, however, be underestimated. Neither must the profundity with which that omnicidal impulse is entangled with the modern problematic of the homosexual: the double bind of definition between the homosexual, say, as a distinct risk group, and the homosexual as a potential of representation within the universal.27 As gay community and the solidarity and visibility of gays as a minority population are being consolidated and tempered in the forge of this specularized terror and suffering, how can it fail to be all the more necessary that the avenues of recognition, desire, and thought between minority potentials and universalizing ones be opened and opened and opened?

27. Richard Mohr, in “Policy, Ritual, Purity: Gays and Mandatory AIDS Testing,” *Law, Medicine, and Health Care* (forthcoming), makes a related linkage, with a more settled hypothesis about the directionality of causation:

AIDS social coercion has become a body accelerated under the gravitational pull of our anxieties over nuclear destruction. Doing anything significant to alleviate the prospects of the joint death of everything that can die is effectively out of the reach of any ordinary individual and indeed of any political group now in existence. So individuals transfer the focus of their anxieties from nuclear omnicide to AIDS, by which they feel equally and similarly threatened, but about which they think they can do something— at least through government. AIDS coercion is doing double duty as a source of sacred values and as a vent for universal anxieties over universal destruction.

For readers fond of the male body, the year 1891 makes an epoch. Chapter 1 of *Billy Budd* opens, as we have noted, with a discussion of the Handsome Sailor — “a superb figure, tossed up as by the horns of Taurus against the thunderous sky” (1354). As Chapter 1 of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* opens, “in the centre of the room, clamped to an upright easel, stood the full-length portrait of a young man of extraordinary personal beauty”.

Like many Atget photographs, these two inaugural presentations of male beauty frame the human image high up in the field of vision, a singular apparition whose power to reorganize the visibility of more conventionally grounded figures is arresting and enigmatic.

For readers who hate the male body, the year 1891 is also an important one. At the end of *Dorian Gray* a dead, old, “loathsome” man lying on the floor is the moralizing gloss on the other thing the servants find in Dorian Gray's attic: “hanging upon the wall, a splendid portrait of their master as they had last seen him, in all the wonder of his exquisite youth and beauty” (248). The end of *Billy Budd* is similarly presided over by the undisfigured pendant: Billy noosed to the mainyard gallows “ascended, and, ascending, took the full rose of the dawn” (80). The exquisite portrait, the magnetic corpse swaying aloft: iconic as they are of a certain sexual visibility, their awful eminence also signals that the line between any male beauty that's articulated as such and any steaming offal strung up for purchase at the butcher's shop is, in the modern dispensation so much marked by this pair of texts, a brutally thin one.

In this chapter I am undertaking to consider some more of the modern relations over which this male body presides in formative texts of the late...
nineteenth century. Through a broader application of the same deconstructive binaries, I move here from the last chapter's treatment of one 1891 text, *Billy Budd*, to treating a group of other texts dating from the 1880s and early 1890s, including the contemporaneous *Picture of Dorian Gray*. This chapter moves outward in two other principal ways, as well: from the sentimental/antisentimental relations around the displayed male figure toward, on the one hand, the modernist crisis of individual identity and figuration itself; toward, on the other, the intersections of sexual definition with relatively new problematics of kitsch, of camp, and of nationalist and imperialist definition.

The two, roughly contemporaneous figures whom I will treat as representing and overarching this process are Wilde and Nietzsche, perhaps an odd yoking of the most obvious with the least likely suspect. Wilde is the obvious one because he seems the very embodiment of, at the same time, (1) a new turn-of-the-century homosexual identity and fate, (2) a modernist antisentimentality, and (3) a late-Victorian sentimentality. Interestingly, the invocation of Nietzsche's name has become a minor commonplace in Wilde criticism, though certainly not vice versa. It has served as a way, essentially, of legitimating Wilde's seriousness as a philosopher of the modern—in the face of his philosophically embarrassing, because narratively so compelling, biographical entanglements with the body; it's at least arguable, though not necessary for my present argument, that almost all of them were. Given that, and especially given all the thought recently devoted to the position of women in Nietzsche's writing, it is striking how difficult it seems to have been to focus on the often far more cathedged position of men there. There are reasons for this even beyond the academic prudishness, homophobia, and heterosexual obfusceness that always seem to obtain: Nietzsche offers writing of an open, Whitmanlike seductiveness, some of the loveliest there is, about the joining of men with men, but he does so in the stubborn, perhaps even atrophied or puny beings] of his philosophical embarrassing, because narratively so compelling, biographical entanglements with the most mangling as well as the most influential of the modern machineries of male sexual definition. Needless to say, however, the opposite project interests me as much here: the project of looking at Nietzsche through a Wildean optic. That, too, however, to the very degree that it does seem to promise access to the truths of twenty-first-century culture, involves the built-in danger of a spurious sense of familiarity, given what the received figure "Nietzsche" has in common with certain received topoi of homosexuality and of sentimentality or kitsch: namely, that all three are famous for occasioning unresolved but highly popular and exciting "questions"—insinuations—about the underpinnings of twentieth-century fascism. To avoid the scapegoating momentum that appears to be built into the structure of sentimental attribution and of homosexual attribution in the culture of our century will require care.

This project involves, among other things, a binocular displacement of time and space between Germany of the 1880s (for my focus will be on Nietzsche's last several texts) and England of the 1890s. It also embodies the distance between a new, openly problematical German national identity and an "immemorial," very naturalized English one, though, as we shall see, one none the less under definitional stress for that. German unification under Prussian leadership, culminating with the proclamation of the Second Reich in 1871, led newly to the criminalization of homosexual offenses for the entire Reich—a process that coincided, as James Steakley points out, with "the escalating estimates of the actual number of homosexuals" in Germany, from .002 percent of the population in 1864, to 1.4 percent in 1869, to 2.2 percent in 1903. "These estimates," Steakley says, "appear astonishingly low in light of modern studies, but they nonetheless document the end of homosexual invisibility." The same period encompassed the first formation—in Germany—of organized homosexual emancipation movements. It seems patent that many of Nietzsche's most effective intensities of both life and writing were directed toward other men and toward the male body; it's at least arguable, though not necessary for my present argument, that almost all of them were. Given that, and especially given all the thought recently devoted to the position of women in Nietzsche's writing, it is striking how difficult it seems to have been to focus on the often far more cathedged position of men there. There are reasons for this even beyond the academic prudishness, homophobia, and heterosexual obfusceness that always seem to obtain: Nietzsche offers writing of an open, Whitmanlike seductiveness, some of the loveliest there is, about the joining of men with men, but he does so in the stubborn, perhaps even studied absence of any explicit generalizations, celebrations, analyses, reifications of these bonds as specifically same-sex ones. Accordingly, he has been important for a male-erotic-centered anarchist tradition, extending from Adolf Brand and Benedict Friedländer through Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, that has a principled resistance to any minimalizing model of homosexual identity. (Friedländer, for instance, ridiculed those with an exclusively hetero- or homosexual orientation as *Kümmerlinge* [atrophied or puny beings].) But the harder fact to deal with is that Nietzsche's writing is full and overfull of what were just in the process of becoming, for people like Wilde, for their enemies, and for the institutions that regulated and defined them, the most pointed and contested signifiers of precisely a minoritized, taxonomic male homosexual identity.
At the same time it is also full and overfull of the signifiers that had long marked the nominally superseded but effectually unvacated prohibitions against sodomitic acts.

A phrase index to Nietzsche could easily be confused with a concordance to, shall we say, Proust’s *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, featuring as it would "inversion," "contrary instincts," the contra naturam, the effeminate, the "hard," the sick, the hyper-virile, the "décadent," the neuter, the "intermediate type"—and I won’t even mention the "gay." Nietzsche’s writing never makes these very differently valued, often contradictory signifiers coextensive with any totality of male-male desire; in many usages they seem to have nothing to do with it at all. This is because, to repeat, he never posits same-sex desire or sexuality as one subject. Instead, these signifiers—old markers for, among other things, same-sex acts and relations; incipient markers for, among other things, same-sex-loving identities—cut in Nietzsche’s writing across and across particular instances or evocations of it. But they do so repetitiously, so suggestively as to contribute, and precisely in their contradictoriness, to the weaving of a fatefully impacted definitional fabric already under way.

Just one example of the newly emerging problematics of male homosexuality across which Nietzsche’s desire flung its stinging shuttle. The question of how same-sex desire could be interpreted in terms of gender was bitterly embattled almost from the beginnings of male homosexual taxonomy: already by 1902, the new German gay rights movement, the first in the world, was to split over whether a man who desired men should be considered feminized (as in the proto-modern English “molly-house” culture and the emerging inversion model) or, to the contrary, virilized (as in the Greek pederastic or initiation model) by his choice of object. The energy Nietzsche devotes to detecting and excoriating male effeminacy, and in terms that had been stereotypical for at least a century in antisodomitic usage, suggests that this issue is a crucial one for him; any reader of Nietzsche who inherits, as most Euro-American readers must, the by now endemic linkage of effeminacy with this path of desire will find their store of homophobic energies refreshed and indeed electrified by reading him. But far from explicitly making male same-sex desire coextensive with that effeminacy, Nietzsche instead associates instance after instance of homoerotic desire, though never named as such, with the precious virility of Dionysiac initiates or of ancient warrior classes. Thus, his rhetoric charges with new spikes of power some of the most conventional lines of prohibition, even while preserving another space of careful de-definition in which certain objects of this prohibition may arbitrarily be invited to shelter.

An even more elegant example is the insistence with which he bases his defense of sexuality on its connection with “the actual road to life, procreation.” “Where is innocence? Where there is a will to procreate.” He execrates antisexuality as a resistance to procreation, “resentment against life in its foundations,” which “threw filth on the beginning, on the prerequisite of our life” (*Twilight*, 110). In the definitional stress he places on this defense of sexuality and in the venom he reserves for non-procreative acts and impulses, if anywhere, one might imagine oneself, according to discourses ranging from the biblical to the nineteenth-century medical, to be close to the essence of an almost transhistorical prohibition of a homosexuality itself thereby rendered almost transhistorical. But, oddly, what Nietzsche, with the secret reserves of elasticity that always characterized his relation to the biological metaphor, framed most persistently within the halo of this imperative to procreate was scenes of impregnation of men (including himself: “The term of eighteen months might suggest, at least to Buddhists, that I am really a female elephant”) or of abstractions that could be figured as male. The space

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There are two kinds of genius: the kind which above all begets and wants to beget, and the kind which likes to be fructified and to give birth. And likewise there are, to ask it in all modesty, the Germans?—peoples tormented and enraptured by unknown fevers and irresistibly driven outside themselves, enamoured of and lusting after foreign races (after those which “want to be fructified”) and at the same time hungry for dominion.

To ask who is *self* and who is *other* in these dramas of pregnancy is as vain as anywhere else in Nietzsche. The relation to Zarathustra may be taken as emblematic:

That I may one day be ready and ripe in the great noon: as ready and ripe as
cleared by this move for a sexy thematics of ripeness, fructification, mess, ecstatic rupture, penetration, between men was bought dearly, however, in the sense of being excruciatingly vulnerable to any increased definitional pressure from the angry impulsions that Nietzsche's own celebrations fed: the virulence, only a couple of decades later, of a D. H. Lawrence against a realm of desire that was by then precisely circumscribed as coextensive with "the homosexual," even with all the self-contradictions of that definition intact, borrowed wholesale from Nietzsche the rhetorical energies for anathematizing the desire that was Nietzsche's own, not to say Lawrence's own.

**Greek/Christian**

For Nietzsche as for Wilde, a conceptual and historical interface between Classical and Christian cultures became a surface suffused with meanings about the male body. In both German and English culture, the Romantic rediscovery of ancient Greece cleared out—as much as recreated—for the nineteenth century a prestigious, historically underfurnished imaginative space in which relations to and among human bodies might be newly a subject of utopian speculation. Synecdochically represented as it tended to be by statues of nude young men, the Victorian cult of Greece gently, unpointedly, and unexclusively positioned male flesh and muscle as the indicative instances of the "body, of a body whose surfaces, features, and abilities might be the subject or object of unphobic enjoyment. The Christian tradition, by contrast, had tended both to condense the flesh (insofar as it represented or incorporated pleasure) as the female body and to surround its attractiveness with an aura of maximum anxiety and prohibition. Thus two significant differences from Christianity were conflated or confutable in thought and rhetoric about "the Greeks": an imagined dissolving of the bar of prohibition against the enjoyed body, and its new gendering as indicatively male.

Dorian Gray, appearing in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* first as artist's model, seems to make the proffer of this liberatory vision—at least he evokes formulations of its ideology from his two admirers. The artist Basil Hallward says of him, "Unconsciously he defines for me the lines of a fresh school, a school that is to have in it all the passion of the romantic spirit, all the perfection of the spirit that is Greek. The harmony of soul and body—how much that is! We in our madness have separated the two, and have invented a realism that is vulgar, an ideality that is void" (16–17). And Lord Henry Wotton addresses the immobilized sitter with a Paterian invocation:

"The aim of life is self-development. To realize one's nature perfectly—that's what each of us is here for. People are afraid of themselves nowadays. . . . And yet. . . I believe that if one man were to live out his life fully and completely, were to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream—I believe that the world would gain such a fresh impulse of joy that we would forget all the maladies of mediocrism, and return to the Hellenic ideal—to something finer, richer, than the Hellenic ideal, it may be. But the bravest man among us is afraid of himself. The mutilation of the savage has a tragic survival in the self-denial that mars our lives. We are punished for our refusals." (25)

The context of each of these formulations, however, immediately makes clear that the conceptual divisions and ethical bars instituted by, or attributed to, Christianity are easier to condemn than to undo, or perhaps even wish to undo. The painter's manifesto for Dorian's ability to reinstitute a modern "harmony of soul and body," for instance, is part of his extorted confession—and confession is the appropriate word—to Lord Henry concerning "this curious artistic idolatry, of which, of course, I have never cared to speak to [Dorian]. He knows nothing about it. He shall never know anything about it. But the world might guess it; and I will not bare my soul to their shallow prying eyes" (17). To delineate and dramatize a space of the secret also emerges as the project of Lord Henry's manifesto, an address whose performative aim is after all less persuasion than seduction. Like Basil, Lord Henry constructs the secret in terms that depend on (unnameable) prohibitions attached specifically to the beautiful male body; and like Basil's, Lord Henry's manifesto for the Hellenic unity of soul and body derives its seductive rhetorical force from a culminating that depends on their irreparable divorce through shame and prohibition.

"We are punished for our refusals. . . . The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing. . . . "

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"glowing bronze, clouds pregnant with lightning, and swelling milk udders—ready for myself and my most hidden will; a bow lusting for its arrow, an arrow lusting for its star—a star ready and ripe in its noon, glowing, pierced, enraptured by annihilating sun arrows—a sun itself and an inexorable solar will, ready to annihilate in victory! (Zarathustra, 214–15)"
The crystallization of desire as "temptation," of the young body as the works, demands, and evocations that it becomes not only inextricable "Hellenic ideal," insofar as its reintegrative power is supposed to involve from but even a propellant of the cognitive and ethical compartmentalizations of homophobic prohibition. That it is necessarily has that panic so deeply at the heart of its occasions, frames the healing of the culturewide ruptures involved in male homosexual panic, ever deplored, makes the enabling condition for rhetorical force.

In *The Victorians and Ancient Greece*, Richard Jenkyns points out that precisely a visible incipience or necessity of this phobic fall was read back into Greek selves and Greek culture as the charm of their wholeness, a charm defined by the eschatological narrative it appeared to defy or defer. And this seems a good characterization of Nietzsche's classicism, as well, with its insistent pushing-backward of the always-already date of the charm of their wholeness, necessitates has that panic so deeply at the heart of its occasions, frameworks, demands, and evocations that it becomes not only inextricable from but even a propellant of the cognitive and ethical compartmentalizations of homophobic prohibition. That it is these in turn that become exemplary propellants of homosexual desire seems an inevitable consequence.

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche frames the proto-Christian fall into metaphysics as an incident of classroom sexual harassment among the ancients. The seduction at which his own language aims, however, and which seems to mirror the first one at the same time as repudiate it by "worldly" trivialization, is the seduction of the reader. His tactics are those of the narrator of *Dorian Gray* as an exemplary propellant. Nietzsche makes almost explicit—what no character in *Dorian Gray* does more than demonstrate—that the philosophic and erotic potential lodged in this modern pedagogic-pedantic speech situation comes not from some untainted mine of "Hellenic" potency that could be directly tapped but, rather, from the shocking magnetism exerted by such a fantasy across (i.e., because of) the not-to-be-undone bar of Christian prohibitive categorization. Modern homosexual panic represents, it seems, not a temporally imprisoning obstacle to philosophy and culture but, rather, the latent energy that can hurtle them far beyond their own present place of knowledge.

With his characteristically Socratic flirtatiousness ("as a physician"!), Nietzsche frames the proto-Christian fall into metaphysics as an incident of classroom sexual harassment among the ancients. The seduction at which his own language aims, however, and which seems to mirror the first one at the same time as repudiate it by "worldly" trivialization, is the seduction of the reader. His tactics are those of the narrator of *Dorian Gray* as an exemplary propellant. Nietzsche makes almost explicit—what no character in *Dorian Gray* does more than demonstrate—that the philosophic and erotic potential lodged in this modern pedagogic-pedantic speech situation comes not from some untainted mine of "Hellenic" potency that could be directly tapped but, rather, from the shocking magnetism exerted by such a fantasy across (i.e., because of) the not-to-be-undone bar of Christian prohibitive categorization. Modern homosexual panic represents, it seems, not a temporally imprisoning obstacle to philosophy and culture but, rather, the latent energy that can hurtle them far beyond their own present place of knowledge.

9. To evidence the mix of eroticism and prohibition that characterizes this bent bow, I quote from "Epeode" (*Beyond*, 203-4)—a prothalamion in the garden with Zarathustra:

> A wicked huntsman is what I have become! See how bent my bow! He who drew that bow, surely he was the mightiest of men--; but the arrow, alas—ah, no arrow is dangerous as that arrow is dangerous—away! be gone! For your own preservation!... What once united us, the bond of one hope—who still can read the signs love once inscribed therein, now faint and faded? It is like a parchment—discoloured, scorched—from which the hand shrinks back.

And, supposing the "wide-spanned rhythm" to refer to the same bent-bow sensation:

> The concept of revelation, in the sense that something suddenly, with unspeakable certainty and subtlety, becomes visible, audible, somethings that shakes and overtops one to the depths, simply describes the fact. One hears, one does not seek; one takes, one does not ask who gives; a thought flashes up like lightning, with necessity, unalteringly formed—"I have never had any choice. An ecstasy whose tremendous tension sometimes discharges itself in a flood of tears, while one's steps

The assumption I have been making so far, that the main impact of Christianity on men's desire for the male body—and the main stimulus it offers to that desire—is prohibitive, is an influential assumption far beyond Wilde and Nietzsche. It is also an assumption that even (or especially) those who hold and wield it, including both Wilde (who was never far from the threshold of Rome) and Nietzsche (who, at the last, subscribed himself as "The Crucified"), know is not true. Christianity may be near-ubiquitous in modern European culture as a figure of phobic prohibition, but it makes a strange figure for that indeed. Catholicism in particular is famous for giving countless gay and proto-gay children the shock of the possibility of adults who don't marry, of men in dresses, of passionate theatre, of introspective investment, of lives filled with what could, ideally without diminution, be called the work of the fetish. Even for the many whose own achieved gay identity may at last include none of these features or may be defined as against them, the encounter with them is likely to have a more or other than prohibitive impact. And presiding over all are the images of Jesus. These have, indeed, a unique position in modern culture as images of the unclothed or unclotlibale male body, often in extremis and/or in ecstasy, prescriptively meant to be gazed at and adored. The scandal of such a figure within a homophobic economy of the male gaze doesn't seem to abate: efforts to disemboby this body, for instance by attenuating, Europeanizing, or feminizing it, only entangle it the more compromisingly among various modern figurations of the homosexual.

The nominal terms of the Greek/Christian contrast, as if between permission and prohibition or unity and dichotomy, questionable as (we have seen) they may be in themselves, have even less purchase on this aspect of Christianity by which, nonetheless, they are inevitably inflected. Both in Nietzsche and in Wilde—and, partly through them, across twentieth-century culture—this image is, I believe, one of the places where the extremely difficult and important problematic of sentimentality is centered. Let me take a little time to explore why it is so difficult to get hold of analytically and so telling for the twentieth century, on the way back to a discussion of its pivotal place in the homo/heterosexual definitional struggles of Wilde and Nietzsche.

Sentimental/Antisentimental

One night in Ithaca in the mid-seventies, I happened to tune into a country music station in the middle of a song I had never heard before. An incredibly pretty male voice that I half recognized as Willie Nelson's was singing:

And he walks with me, and he talks with me,
And he tells me I am his own.
And the joy we share, as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.
He speaks; and the sound of his voice
Is so sweet the birds hush their singing.
And the melody that he gave to me
Within my heart is ringing.
And he walks with me, and he talks with me,
And he tells me I am his own.
And the joy we share, as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.
I'd stay in the garden with him
Though the night around me be falling,
But he bids me go through the voice of woe,
His voice to me is calling...

This blew me away. I had already listened to a lot of Willie Nelson's songs about Waylon Jennings, which I always interpreted as love songs, but I never thought I was meant to; and nothing had prepared me for a song in which the love and sensuality between two men could be expressed with such a pellucid candor, on AM shit-kicker radio or maybe anywhere.

A decade later, I noted an article by J. M. Cameron in the New York Review about religious kitsch, which, he says, "presents us with a serious theological problem and stands, far beyond the formal bounds of theology, for something amiss in our culture":

Kitsch must include more than the golden-haired Madonnas, the epicene statues of Jesus, the twee pictures of the infant Jesus. . . . It must also include music, and the words of the liturgy, and hymns as well. . . . [An] example is:

I come to the garden alone,
While the dew is still on the roses.
And the voice I hear,
Falling on my ear,
The Son of God discloses.
And He walks with me and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am his own.
And the joys we share, as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.

Cameron considers it important not only to describe. . . . this as sentimental. . . . but. . . . discuss it as what it surely is, a terrible degradation of religion not simply as a purveyor of the false and the unworthy but as a kind of nastily flavored religious jello, a fouling of the sources of religious feeling. It is as though the image of Jesus is caught in a cracked, discolored distorting mirror in a fun house.12

Let me remark on two possible sources for Cameron's ostentatious disgust here, one topical, regarding the subject of sentimentality, and the other grammatical, regarding its relations. Topically, I have to wonder if a certain erotic foregrounding of the male body, what made the song so exciting to me, may not be tied to the stigmatization of these verses as sentimental and kitsch. I have mentioned the difficult kind of cynosure that proliferating images of Jesus, what Cameron refers to as the "epicene statues," create within a homophobic economy of the male gaze. This scandal might account for the discomfort of a J. M. Cameron with the hymn, but it does leave us with questions about the local specifications of the sentimental, and in particular about its gender: if the sentimental, as we have been taught, coincides topically with the feminine, with the place of women, then why should the foregrounded male physique be in an indicative relation to it?

If indeed, however, as I want to hypothesize, the embodied male figure is a distinctive, thematic marker for the potent and devalued categories of kitsch and the sentimental in this century, then it is only the equivocal use of the first person ("And he tells me I am his own")—the first person that could be your grandmother but could be Willie Nelson, too, or even a distinguished professor of religion at the University of Toronto—that lends such a nasty flavor to the gender-slippage of this morsel of religious "jello" down the befouled and violated gullet of Mr. J. M. Cameron. The gender-equivocal first person, or the impossible first person—such as the first person of someone dead or in process of dying—are common and, at least to me, peculiarly potent sentimental markers: my goose bumps, at any rate, are always poised for erection at "She walks these hills in a long black veil, / Visits my grave when the night winds wail," and my waterworks are always primed for "Rocky, I've never had to die before," or letters to Dear Abby purporting to be from seventeen-year-olds who were too young to die in that after-school car crash. Arguably, indeed, the locus classicus of this tonally and generically unsettling, ingenuous-disingenuous first-person mode, other versions of which can be found in any high school literary magazine, is the ballad that ends Billy Budd:

No pipe to those halyards. —But aren't it all sham? A burr in my eyes; it is dreaming that I am. A hatchet to my hawser? All adrift to go? The drum roll to grog, and Billy never know? But Donald he has promised to stand by the plank; So I'll shake a friendly hand ere I sink.
But—no! It is dead then I'll be, come to think. I remember Taff the Welshman when he sank. And his cheek it was like the budding pink. But me they'll lash in hammock, drop me deep. Fathoms down, fathoms down, how I'll dream fast asleep. I feel it stealing now. Sentry, are you there? Just ease these darbies at the wrist, And roll me over fair! I am sleepy, and the oozy weeds about me twist.

These knowing activations of the ambiguities always latent in grammatical person as such, at any rate, point to the range of meanings of sentimentality that identify it, not as a thematic or a particular subject matter, but as a structure of relation, typically one involving the author-audience-relations of spectacle; most often, where the epithet "sentimental" itself is brought onto the scene, a discreditable or devalued one—the sentimental as the insincere, the manipulative, the vicarious, the morbid, the knowing, the kitschy, the arch.

To begin with the question of thematic content. In recent feminist criticism, particularly that involving nineteenth-century American women's fiction, a conscious rehabilitation of the category of "the sentimental" has taken place, insofar as "the sentimental" is seen as a derogatory code name for female bodies and the female domestic and "reproductive" preoccupations of birth, socialization, illness, and death. The devaluation of "the sentimental," it is argued, has been of a piece with the devaluation of many aspects of women's characteristic experience and culture: in this view "the sentimental," like the very lives of many women, is typically located in the private or domestic realm, has only a tacit or indirect connection with the economic facts of industrial marketplace production, is most visibly tied instead to the "reproductive" preoccupations of birth, socialization, illness, and death, and is intensively occupied with relational and emotional labor and expression. Since one influential project of recent popular feminist thought has been to reverse the negative valuation attached to these experiences, emphases, and skills by both high culture and marketplace ideology, an attempted reversal of the negative charge attached to "the sentimental" has been a natural corollary.

It would make sense to see a somewhat similar rehabilitation of "the sentimental" as an important gay male project as well—indeed, one that has been in progress for close to a century under different names, including that of "camp." This gay male rehabilitation of the sentimental obviously occurs on rather different grounds from the feminist one, springing as it does from different experiences. The kid in Ohio who recognizes in "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" the national anthem of a native country, his own, whose name he's never heard spoken is constructing a new family romance on new terms; and for the adult he becomes, the sense of value attaching to a "private" realm, or indeed to expressive and relational skills, is likely to have to do with a specific history of secrecy, threat, and escape as well as with domesticity. A very specific association of gay male sexuality with tragic early death is recent, but the structure of its articulation is densely grounded in centuries of homoerotic and homophobic intertextuality; the underpinnings here have long been in place for both a gay male sentimentality and, even more, a sentimental appropriation by the larger culture of male homosexuality as spectacle.

I have been arguing that constructions of modern Western gay male identity tend to be, not in the first place "essentially gay," but instead (or at least also) in a very intimately responsive and expressive, though always oblique, relation to incoherences implicit in modern male heterosexuality. Much might be said, then, following this clue, about the production and deployment, especially in contemporary U.S. society, of an extraordinarily high level of self-pity in nongay men. Its effects on our national politics, and international ideology and intervention, have been pervasive. (Snapshot, here, of the tear-welling eyes of Oliver North.) In more intimate manifestations this straight male self-pity is often currently referred to (though it appears to exceed) the cultural effects of feminism, and is associated with, or appealed to in justification of, acts of violence, especially against women. For instance, the astonishing proportion of male violence done on separated wives, ex-wives, and ex-girlfriends, women just at the threshold of establishing a separate personal space, seems sanctioned and guided as much as reflected by the flood of books and movies in which such violence seems an expression not of the macho personality but of the maudlin. (One reason women get nervous when straight men claim to have received from feminism the gift of "permission to cry.") Although compulsively illustrated for public consumption (see, on this, the New York Times's "About Men," passim, or for that matter any newspaper's sports pages, or western novels, male country music, the dying-father-and-his-son stories in The New Yorker, or any other form of genre writing aimed at men), this vast national wash of masculine self-pity is essentially never named or discussed as a cultural and political fact; machismo and competitiveness, or a putative gentleness, take its place as subjects of nomination and analysis. Poised between shame and shamelessness, this regime of heterosexual male self-pity has the productive potency of an open secret. It would scarcely be surprising if gay men, like all women, were a main target of its scapegoating projections—viciously sentimental attributions of a vitiated sentimentality.

The sacred tears of the heterosexual man: rare and precious liquor

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14. One might look, for instance, to Achilles and Patroclus, to Virgilian shepherds, to David and Jonathan, to the iconography of St. Sebastian, to elegiac poetry by Milton, Tennyson, Whitman, and Housman, as well as to the Necrology of Vito Russo's Celluloid Closet...
whose properties, we are led to believe, are rivaled only by the lacrime
Christi whose secretion is such a specialty of religious kitsch. What
charm, compared to this chrysm of the gratuitous, can reside in the all too
predictable tears of women, of gay men, of people with something to cry
about? Nietzsche asks scornfully: "Of what account is the pity of those
who suffer!" But, he explains, "a man who can do something, carry out a
decision, remain true to an idea, hold on to a woman, punish and put
down insolence... in short a man who is by nature a master—when such
a man has pity, well! that pity has value!" (Beyond, 198). Both the mass
and the high culture of our century ratify this judgment, by no means
stopping short at such a man's pity for himself. Cry-yin'-lonely tear-
drops, teardrops cryin' in the rain, blue velvet through the tracks of my
tears, the tears of a clown, maybe Cathy's clown, the Red Skelton clown
by whose tears every show of lowbrow art must be baptized, the Norman
Mailer or Harold Bloom buffoon by whose tears...

If these modern images borrow some of their lasting power from the
mid-nineteenth-century association of sentimentality with the place of
women, what their persistence and proliferation dramatize is something
new: a change of gears, occupying the period from the 1880s through the
First World War, by which the exemplary instance of the sentimental
cases to be a woman per se, but instead becomes the body of a man who,
like Captain Vere, physically dramatizes, embodies for an audience that
both desires and cathartically identifies with him, a struggle of masculine
identity with emotions or physical stigmata stereotyped as feminine.
Nietzsche says, "With hard men, intimacy is a thing of shame and" (by
implication: therefore) "something precious" (Beyond, 87). This male
body is not itself named as the place or topos of sentimentality, the way the
home, the female body, and female reproductive labor had been in the
nineteenth century. Rather, the relations of figuration and perception
that circulate around it, including antisentimentality, might instead be
said to enact sentimentality as a trope.

How, then, through the issue of sentimentality can we bring to
Nietzsche questions that Wilde and the reading of Wilde may teach us to
ask? Gore Vidal begins a recent essay on Wilde: "Must one have a heart of
stone to read The Ballad of Reading Gaol without laughing?"16 The
opening points in only too many directions. Between it and the same
remark made by Wilde himself, a century earlier, about the death of Little
Nell, where to look for the wit-enabling relation? One story to tell is the
historical/thematic one just sketched: that whereas in the nineteenth
century it was images of women in relation to domestic suffering and
death that occupied the most potent, symptomatic, and, perhaps, friable
or volatile place in the sentimental imaginaire of middle-class culture, for
the succeeding century—the century inaugurated by Wilde among others—it has been images of agonistic male self-constitution. Thus the
careful composition of The Ballad of Reading Gaol, where Wilde frames
his own image between, or even as, those of a woman-murdering man and
the Crucified, sets in motion every conceivable mechanism by which most
readers know how to enter into the circuit of the sentimental:

Alas! it is a fearful thing
To feel another's guilt!
For, right, within, the Sword of Sin
Pierced to its poisoned hilt,
And as molten lead were the tears we shed
For the blood we had not spilt.

And as one sees most fearful things
In the crystal of a dream,
We saw the greasy hempen rope
Hooked to the blackened beam,
And heard the prayer the hangman's snare
Strangled into a scream.

And all the woe that moved him so
That he gave that bitter cry,
And the wild regrets, and the bloody sweats,
None knew so well as I:
For he who lives more lives than one
More deaths than one must die.17

Think of the cognate, ravishing lines of Cowper—

We perished, each alone,
But I beneath a rougher sea
And whelmed in deeper gulfs than he.18

16. Gore Vidal, "A Good Man and a Perfect Play" (review of Richard Ellmann, Oscar
Wilde), Times Literary Supplement (October 2–8, 1987): 1063.

17. The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde (Twickenham, Middlesex: Hamlyn, 1963),
p. 732, 735. Further quotations from this edition will cite it as Complete in the text.

18. William Cowper, "The Castaway," lines 64–66, in the Complete Poetical Works of
— and the cognate sentimental markers (the vicariousness, the uncanny shifting first person of after death, the heroic self-pity) that give them their awful appropriateness, their appropriability, to the narrow, imperious, incessant self-reconstitution of, say, Virginia Woolf’s paterfamilias Mr. Ramsay. Yet the author of Reading Gaol is also the creator of “Ernest in town and Jack in the country” and of Mr. Bunbury, of men whose penchant for living more lives than one, and even dying more deaths, not to speak of having more christenings, seems on the contrary to give them a fine insouciance about such identity issues as the name of the father—which his sons, who have forgotten it, have to look up in the Army Lists. “Lady Bracknell, I hate to seem inquisitive, but would you kindly inform me who I am?” (Earnest, in Complete, 181). At the same time, the precise grammatical matrix of even the most anarchic Wildean wit still tends toward the male first-person singular in the mode of descriptive self-definition. “None of us are perfect. I myself am peculiarly susceptible to draughts.” “I can resist anything except temptation.” “I have nothing to declare except my genius.” The project of constructing the male figure is not made any the less central by being rendered as nonsense; in fact, one might say that it’s the candor with which Wilde is often capable of centering this male project in the field of vision that enables him to operate so explosively on it.

The squeam-inducing power of texts like De Profundis and Reading Gaol—and I don’t mean to suggest that they are a bit the less powerful for often making the flesh crawl—may be said to coincide with a thematic choice made in each of them—namely, the framing and display of the male body be placed in the explicit context of the displayed body of Jesus. One way of reading The Picture of Dorian Gray tells the same story, since the fall of that novel from sublime free play into sentimental potency comes with the framing and hanging of the beautiful male body as a visual index of vicarious expiation.

That the circumference of sentimental danger in Wilde’s writing should have at its center the image of a crucified man would have been no surprise to Nietzsche. Nietzsche oriented, after all, his own narrative of the world-historical vitiation of the species around the fulcrum point of the same displayed male body: appropriately his meditations concerned, not the inherent meaning of the crucifixion or the qualities of the man crucified, but instead the seemingly irreversible relations of pity, desire, vicariousness, and mendacity instituted in the mass response to that image.

Evidently Nietzsche’s ability to describe the relations around the cross from a new perspective depends on an Odyssean trick: blindfolding himself against a visual fixation on the focal figure aloft, deaf to the aural penetration of his distant appeal, Nietzsche (like the jello-phobic J. M. Cameron) gives himself over, in his discussions of Christianity, to the other three senses—taste, touch, smell, those that least accommodate distance, the ones that French designates by the verb sentir—and in the first place to the nose. “I was the first to sense—smell—the lie as a lie... My genius is in my nostrils” (Ecce, 126). Possessing “a perfectly uncanny sensitivity of the instinct for cleanliness, so that I perceive physiologically—smell—the proximity or—what am I saying?—the innermost parts, the ‘entrails,’ of every soul” (Ecce, 48–49), Nietzsche is alive to “the complete lack of psychological cleanliness in the priest” (Anti, 169), is able to “to smell what dirty fellows had [with Christianity] come out on top” (Anti, 183). He gags most on the proximity into which this spectacle of suffering draws the men who respond to it: “pity instantly smells of mob” (Ecce, 44). And in this phenomenon he finds the origin of virtually every feature of the world he inhabits. “One who smells not only with his nose but also with his eyes and ears will notice everywhere these days an air as of a lunatic asylum or sanatorium... so paltry, so stealthy, so dishonest, so sickly-sweet! Here... the air stinks of secretiveness and pent-up emotion.”

Nietzsche, then, is the psychologist who put the scent back into sentimentality. And he did it by the same gesture with which he put the rank and the rancid back into rancor. The most durably productive of Nietzsche’s psychological judgments was to place the invidious, mendacious mechanism rather mysteriously called resentment—re-smelling, one might say as much as “resentment,” or re-tonguing, re-palpating—at the center of his account of such ordinary anno Domini virtues as love, goodwill, justice, fellow-feeling, egalitarianism, modesty, compassion. Resentment was for Nietzsche the essence of Christianity and hence of all modern psychology (“there never was but one psychology, that of the priest”); and the genius of his nostrils repeatedly reveals these appar-


ently simple and transparent impulses as complex, unstable laminates of self-aggrandizement and delection with self-contempt and abnegation, fermented to a sort of compost under the pressure of time, of internal contradiction, and of deconstructive work like Nietzsche's own. The prefix of *ressentiment* marks a space of degeneration and vicariousness: the nonsingularity of these laminates as redoublings of one's own motives, and their nonoriginality as reflexes of the impulses of others. Thus the sentimental misnaming, in the aftermath of the crucifixion, of its observers' sensuality and will-to-power as *pity* becomes the model for the whole class of emotions and bonds of which Nietzsche was the privileged analyst:

At first sight, this problem of pity and the ethics of pity (I am strongly opposed to our modern sentimentality in these matters) may seem very special, a marginal issue. But whoever sticks with it and learns how to ask questions will have the same experience that I had: a vast new panorama will open up before him; strange and vertiginous possibilities will invade him; every variety of suspicion, distrust, fear will come to the surface; his belief in ethics of any kind will begin to be shaken. (*Genealogy, 154*)

Sentimentality, insofar as it overlaps with *ressentiment* in a structure we would not be the first to call *ressentimentality*, represents modern emotion itself in Nietzsche's thought: modern emotion as vicariousness and misrepresentation, but also as sensation brought to the quick with an insulting closeness.

*Direct/Vicarious; Art/Kitsch*

It would be hard to overestimate the importance of vicariousness in defining the sentimental. The strange career of "sentimentality," from the later eighteenth century when it was a term of high ethical and aesthetic praise, to the twentieth when it can be used to connote, beyond pathetic subject matter, the sacralizing contagion of tears was the much reenacted primal scene of the sentimental in the eighteenth century. If its early celebrants found it relatively (only relatively) easy to take for granted the disinterestedness and beneficence of the process by which a viewer "sympathized" with the sufferings of a person viewed, however, every psychological and philosophic project of the same period gave new facilities for questioning or even discrediting that increasingly unsimplifying bond.21 Most obviously, the position of sentimental spectatorship seemed to offer *coveture* for differences in material wealth (the bourgeois weeping over the spectacle of poverty) or sexual entitlement (the man swooning over the spectacle of female virtue under siege)—material or sexual exploitations that might even be perpetuated or accelerated by the nonaccountable viewer satisfactions that made the point of their rehearsal. The tacitness and consequent nonaccountability of the identification between sufferer and sentimental spectator, at any rate, seems to be the fulcrum point between the most honorific and the most damning senses of "sentimental." For a spectator to misrepresent the quality or locus of her or his implicit participation in a scene—to misrepresent, for example, desire as pity, *Schadenfreude* as sympathy, envy as disapproval—would be to enact defining instances of the worst meaning of the epithet; the defining instances, increasingly, of the epithet itself. The prurient; the morbid; the wishful; the snobbish;22 the knowing; the arch: these denote subcategories of the sentimental, to the extent that each involves a covert reason for, or extent or direction of, identification through a spectatorial route. As Nietzsche says of Renan (with whom he has so much in common), "I can think of nothing as nauseating as such an 'objective' armchair, such a perfumed epicure of history, half priest, half satyr. . . ." Such 'spectators' embitter me against the spectacle more than the spectacle itself" (*Genealogy, 294*).

It follows from this that the description of scenes, or even texts, as intrinsically "sentimental" (or prurient, morbid, etc.) is extremely prob-

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22. I mean "snobbish," of course, not in the sense of a mere preference for social altitude, but in the fuller sense explicated by Girard, the one whose foundational principle is Groucho Marx's "I wouldn't belong to any club that would have me as a member": it is the tacit evacuation of the position of self that makes snob relations such a useful model for understanding sentimental relations. See René Girard, *Desire, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), esp. pp. 53–82, 216–28.
lemmatical, not least because such descriptions tend to carry an unappealing authority: the epithet "sentimental" is always stamped in indelible ink. "Sentimental" with its quiverful of subcategories: don't they work less as static grids of analysis against which texts can be flatly mapped than as projectiles whose bearing depends utterly on the angle and impetus of their discharge? In the last chapter, we discussed "worldliness" as an attribution whose force depended, not on its being attached firmly to a particular person or text, but on its ability to delineate a chain of attributive angles of increasing privilege and tacitness; a "worldly" person, for instance, is one whose cognitive privilege over a world is being attested, but the person who can attest it implicitly claims an even broader angle of cognitive privilege out of which the "worldly" angle can be carved, while a silent proffer to the reader or auditor of a broader angle yet can form, as we discussed, the basis for powerful interpellations. "The sentimental" and its damning subcategories work in an analogous way. Themselves descriptions of relations of vicariousness, the attributive career of each of these adjectives is again a vicariating one. For instance, it is well known that in Proust the snobbish characters are easy to recognize because they are the only ones who are able to recognize snobism in others—hence, the only ones who really disapprove of it. Snobbism, as René Girard points out, can be discussed and attributed only by snobs, who are always right about it except in their own disclaimers of it.23 The same is true of the phenomenon of "the sentimental" as a whole and of its other manifestations such as prurience and morbidity. Homo solet qui mal y pense is both the watchword and the structural principle of sentimentality-attribution. What chain of attribution is being extended, under pretense of being cut short, when Nietzsche exclaims, "O you sentimental hypocrites, you lechers! You lack innocence in your desire and therefore you slander all desire" (Zarathustra, 122-23)? What tacit relations of prurient complicity are compounded under the prurience-attribution of Nietzsche's discussion of the Law-Book of Manu?

One sees immediately that it has a real philosophy behind it, in it...—it gives even the most fastidious psychologist something to bite on...All the things upon which Christianity vents its abysmal vulgarity, procreation for example, women, marriage, are here treated seriously, with reverence, with love and trust. How can one actually put into the hands of women and children a book containing the low-minded saying: "To avoid fornication let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband...for it is better to marry than burn? And is it allowable to be a Christian as long as the origin of man is Christianized, that is to say dirtied, with the concept of the immaculata conception?...I know of no book in which so many tender and kind remarks are addressed to women as in the Law-Book of Manu; these old graybeards and saints have a way of being polite to women which has perhaps never been surpassed. "A woman's mouth"—it says in one place—"a girl's breast, a child's prayer, the smoke of a sacrifice are always pure." Another passage: "There is nothing purer than the light of the sun, the shadow of a cow, air, water, fire and a girl's breath." A final passage—perhaps also a holy lie—:

"All the openings of the body above the navel are pure, all below impure. Only in the case of a girl is the whole body pure." (Antí, 176)

Vidal's score off Wilde, "Must one have a heart of stone...?", seems to depend on the same structure. If the joke were that the Wilde who took advantage of the enormous rhetorical charge to be gained from hurling at Dickens the aspersion of sentimentality also at another time, perhaps later in his life when the hideous engines of state punishment had done their work of destroying the truth and gaiety of his sensibility, developed a proneness to the same awful failing, that would be one thing. Perhaps, though, the point is that there isn't a differentiation to be made between sentimentality and its denunciation. But then we are dealing with a joke that can only be on Gore Vidal himself, whose hypervigilance for lapses in the tough-mindedness of others can then only suggest that he in turn must be, as they say, insecure about his own. It may be only those who are themselves prone to these vicariating impulses who are equipped to detect them in the writing or being of others; but it is also they who for several reasons tend therefore to be perturbed in their presence.

By "they" here I definitively mean "we." In order to dispense with the further abysmal structuring of this bit of argument through an infinity of insinuating readings of "other" writers, let me try to break with the tradition of personal disclaimer and touch ground myself with a rapid but none the less genuine guilty plea to possessing the attributes, in a high degree, of at the very least sentimentality, prurience, and morbidity. (On the infinitesimally small chance that any skepticism could greet this confession, I can offer as evidence of liability—or, one might say, of expert qualification—the pathos injected into the paraphrase of Esther, in Chapter 1, which I loved composing but which is rendered both creepy and, perhaps, rhetorically efficacious by a certain obliquity in my own trail of identifications. As a friend who disliked those paragraphs put it acidly, it's

not me risking the coming out, but it's all too visibly me having the salvational fantasies.)

Clearly, this understanding of "sentimentality" makes problems for a project, whether feminist- or gay-centered, of rehabilitating the sentimental. The problem is not just that the range of discrediting names available for these forms of attention and expression is too subtle, searching, descriptively useful, and rhetorically powerful to be simply jettisoned, though that is true enough. A worse problem is that since antisentimentality itself becomes, in this structure, the very engine and expression of modern sentimental relations, to enter into the discourse of sentimentality at any point or with any purpose is almost inevitably to be caught up in a momentum of essentially scapegoating attribution.

The attempt to construct versions of the present argument has offered, I might as well say, startlingly clear evidence of the force of this momentum. Given a desire to raise the questions I'm raising here, it's all too easy to visualize the path of least resistance of such an argument. The ballistic force of the attribution of "sentimentality" is so intense today that I've found it amazingly difficult to think about any analytic or revaluative project involving it that wouldn't culminate its rehabilitative readings with some yet more damning unmasking of the "true," and far more dangerous, sentimentality of an author not previously associated with the term. This would be congruent with a certain difficult-to-avoid trajectory of universalizing understandings of homo/heterosexual definition—Irigaray's writing about the "hom(m)osexual" is the locus classicus of this trajectory, although feminist thought has no monopoly on it—according to which authoritarian regimes or homophobic masculinist culture may be damned on the grounds of being even more homosexual than gay male culture. And each of these trajectories of argument leads straight to terrible commonplaces about fascism. In the case of Nietzsche and Wilde, the most readily available—the almost irresistibly available—path of argument would have been to use the manifestly gay Wilde as a figure for the necessity and truth of a "good" version of sentimentality, then to prove that the ostensibly heterosexual and antisentimental Nietzsche was, like Wilde, maybe even more actively than Wilde because unacknowledgedly, and in ways that could be shown to have implications for his writing and thought, "really" homosexual, and at the same time "really" sentimental.

Why should it be so hard to think about these issues without following an argumentative path that must lead to the exposure of a supposed fascist precursor as the true homosexual, or especially as the true sentimental? I have tried to avoid that path of exposure, for four reasons. First, of course, Nietzsche, like Whitman, is a cunning and elusive writer on whose self-ignorance one never does well to bet the mortgage money. Second, though, such a trajectory of argument presupposes that one has somewhere in reserve a stable and intelligible definition for both what is "really homosexual" and what is "really sentimental," while our historical argument is exactly the opposite: that those definitions are neither historically stable in this period nor internally coherent. Third, obviously, that argument necessarily depends for its rhetorical if not its analytic force on the extreme modern cultural devaluations of both categories, the homosexual and the sentimental—a dependence that had better provoke discomfort, however much Nietzsche's own writing may sometimes be complicit in those fatal devaluations. And finally, the most productive questions we can ask about these definitional issues must be, I think, not "What is the true meaning, the accurate assignment of these labels?" but, rather, "What are the relations instituted by the giving of these labels?" In that case, any enabling analytic distance we might have would be vitiated to the degree that our argument was so aimed as to climax with this act of naming.

The categories "kitsch" and "camp" suggest, perhaps, something about how the formation of modern gay identities has intervened to reimagine these potent audience relations. Kitsch is a classification that redoubles the aggressive power of the epithet "sentimental" by, on the one hand, claiming to exempt the speaker of the epithet from the contagion of the kitsch object, and, on the other, positing the existence of a true kitsch consumer or, in Hermann Broch's influential phrase, "kitsch-man." Kitsch-man is never the person who uses the word "kitsch"; kitsch-man's ability to be manipulated by the kitsch object and the kitsch creator is imagined to be seamless and completely uncritical. Kitsch-man is seen


either as the exact double of the equally unenlightened producer of kitsch
or as the unresistant dupe of his cynical manipulation: that is to say, the
imagined kitsch-producer is either at the abjectly low consciousness level
of kitsch-man or at the transcendent, and potentially abusive, high con-
sciousness level of the man who can recognize kitsch when he sees it. In the
highly contestative world of kitsch and kitsch-recognition there is no
mediating level of consciousness; so it is necessarily true that the structure
of contangion whereby it takes one to know one, and whereby any object
about which the question “Is it kitsch?” can be asked immediately be-
comes kitsch, remains, under the system of kitsch-attribute, a major
scandal, one that can induce self-exemption or cynicism but nothing
much more interesting than that.

Camp, on the other hand, seems to involve a gayer and more spacious
angle of view. I think it may be true that, as Robert Dawidoff suggests,
the typifying gesture of camp is really something amazingly simple: the
moment at which a consumer of culture makes the wild surmise, “What if
whoever made this was gay too?”26 Unlike kitsch-attribution, then, camp-
recognition doesn’t ask, “What kind of debased creature could possibly be
the right audience for this spectacle?” Instead, it says what if: What if the
right audience for this were exactly me? What if, for instance, the re-
sistant, oblique, tangential investments of attention and attraction that I
am able to bring to this spectacle are actually uncannily responsive to the
resistant, oblique, tangential investments of the person, or of some of the
people, who created it? And what if, furthermore, others whom I don’t
know or recognize can see it from the same “pervasive” angle? Unlike
kitsch-attribution, the sensibility of camp-recognition always sees that it is
dealing in reader relations and in projective fantasy (projective though not
infrequently true) about the spaces and practices of cultural production.
Generous because it acknowledges (unlike kitsch) that its perceptions are
necessarily also creations,27 it’s little wonder that camp can encompass
effects of great delicacy and power in our highly sentimental-attributive

culture.

26. Personal communication, 1986. Of course, discussions of camp have proliferated
since Susan Sontag’s “Notes on ‘Camp,’” in Against Interpretation and Other Essays
(New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966). One of the discussions that resonates most with this
book’s emphasis on the open secret is Philip Core, Camp: The Lie That Tells the Truth
27. “CAMP depends on where you pitch it . . . CAMP is in the eyes of the beholder,
especially if the beholder is camp.” Core, “CAMP RULES,” Camp, p. 7.
ual inversion, the term used most commonly in the nineteenth century, did not denote the same conceptual phenomenon as homosexuality. 'Sexual inversion' referred to an inversion in a broad range of deviant gender behavior—the phenomenon of female masculinity or male femininity, condensed in formulations such as Karl Heinrich Ulrichs’ famous self-description as anima muliebris virili corpore inclusa, a woman’s soul trapped in a man’s body—‘while ‘homosexuality’ focused on the narrower issue of sexual object choice.’28 According to David Halperin, “That sexual object-choice might be wholly independent of such ‘secondary’ characteristics as masculinity or femininity never seems to have entered anyone’s head until Havelock Ellis waged a campaign to isolate object-choice from role-playing and Freud . . . clearly distinguished in the case of the libido between the sexual ‘object’ and the sexual ‘aim.’”29

Halperin describes some consequences of this shift:

The conceptual isolation of sexuality per se from questions of masculinity and femininity made possible a new taxonomy of sexual behaviors and psychologies based entirely on the anatomical sex of the persons engaged in a sexual act (same sex vs. different sex); it thereby obliterated a number of distinctions that had traditionally operated within earlier discourses pertaining to same-sex sexual contacts and that had radically differentiated active from passive sexual partners, normal from abnormal (or conventional from unconventional) sexual roles, masculine from feminine styes, and pederasty from lesbianism: all such behaviors were now to be classed alike and placed under the same heading. Sexual identity was thus polarized around a central opposition rigidly defined by the binary play of sameness and difference in the sexes of the sexual partners; people belonged henceforward to one or the other of two exclusive categories. . . . Founded on positive, ascertainable, and objective behavioral phenomena—on the facts of who had sex with whom—the new sexual taxonomy could lay claim to a descriptive, trans-historical validity. And so it crossed the “threshold of scientificity” and was enshrined as a working concept in the social and physical sciences.30

It is startling to realize that the aspect of “homosexuality” that now seems in many ways most immutably to fix it—its dependence on a defining sameness between partners—is of so recent crystallization.31 That process is also, one might add, still radically incomplete.32 The potential for defamiliarization implicit in this historical perception is only beginning to be apparent.

The homo- in the emerging concept of the homosexual seems to have the potential to perform a definitive de-differentiation—setting up a permanent avenue of potential slippage—between two sets of relations that had previously been seen as relatively distinct: identification and desire.33 It is with homo-style homosexuality, and not with inversion, pederasty, or sodomy (least of all, of course, with cross-gender sexuality) that an erotic language, an erotic discourse comes into existence that makes available a continuing possibility for symbolizing slippages between identification and desire. It concomitantly makes available new possibilities for the camouflage and concealment, or the very selective or pointed display, of proscribed or resisted erotic relation and avowal through chains of vicariation—through the mechanisms that, I argue, cluster under the stigmatizing name “sentimentality.”

Let me make it clear what I am and am not saying here. I do not, myself, believe same-sex relationships are much more likely to be based on similarity than are cross-sex relationships. That is, I do not believe that identification and desire are necessarily more closely linked in same-sex than in cross-sex relationships, or in gay than in nongay persons. I assume them to be closely linked in many or most relationships and persons, in fact. I certainly do not believe that any given man must be assumed to have more in common with any other given man than he can possibly have in common with any given woman. Yet these are the assumptions that underlie, and are in turn underwritten by, the definitional invention of “homosexuality.”34

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29. Halperin, One Hundred Years of Homosexuality, p. 16.
30. Halperin, One Hundred Years of Homosexuality, p. 16.
31. Indeed, though the two etymological roots of the coinage “homo-sexuality” may originally have been meant to refer to relations (of an unspecified kind) between persons of the same sex, I believe the word is now almost universally heard as referring to relations of sexuality between persons who are, because of their sex, more tightly and globally categorized as the same.
32. For instance, many Mediterranean and Latin American cultures distinguish sharply between insertive and receptive sexual roles, in assessing the masculinity/femininity of men involved in male-male sex; the concept of homosexual identity per se tends not to make sense readily in these cultural contexts, or tends to make sense only when evaluated against binary absolutes like puros or pasivos but not machos or activos. And these are, along with the Anglo-European and others, among the cultures that are also U.S. cultures. See, for instance, Ana Maria Alonso and Maria Teresa Koreck, “Silences: ‘Hispanics,’ AIDS, and Sexual Practices,” Differences 1 (Winter 1989): 101–24.
33. On this, see Chapter 1 of Between Men.
34. At the same time, the fact that “homosexuality,” being—unlike its predecessor terms—posed on definitional similarity, was the first modern piece of sexual definition that simply took as nary a the distinction between relations of identification and relations of desire, meant that it posed a radical question to cross-gender relations and, in
How does a man’s love of other men become a love of the same? The process is graphic in *Dorian Gray*, in the way the plot of the novel facialates the translation back and forth between “men’s desire for men” and something that looks a lot like what a tradition will soon call “narcissism.” The novel takes a plot that is distinctively one of male-male desire, the competition between Basil Hallward and Lord Henry Wotton for Dorian Gray’s love, and condenses it into the plot of the mysterious bond of figural likeness and figural expiation between Dorian Gray and his own portrait. The suppression of the original defining *differences between* Dorian and his male admirers — differences of age and initiated-ness, in the first place — in favor of the problematic of Dorian’s *similarity to* the painted male image that is and isn’t himself does several things. To begin with, the similarity trope does not, I believe, constitute itself strongly here as against an “inversion” model, in which Wilde seldom seemed particularly interested and whose rhetoric is virtually absent from *Dorian Gray*. Rather, this plot of the novel seems to replicate the discursive eclipse in this period of the Classically based, *pederastic* assumption that male-male bonds of any duration must be structured around some di­rectical difference — old/young, for example, or active/passive — whose binarizing cultural power would be at least comparable to that of gender. Initiating, along with the stigma of narcissism, the utopic modern vision of a strictly egalitarian bond guaranteed by the exclusion of any consequ­ential difference, the new calculus of homo/hetero, embodied in the portrait plot, owes its sleekly utilitarian feel to the linguistically unap­pealable classification of anyone who shares one’s gender as being “the same” as oneself, and anyone who does not share one’s gender as being one’s Other.

It served, however, an additional purpose. For Wilde, in 1891 a young man with a very great deal to lose who was trying to embody his own talents and desires in a self-contradictory male-homosocial terrain where too much was not enough but, at the same time, anything at all might always be too much, the collapse of homo/hetero with self/other must also have been attractive for the protective/expressive camouflage it offered to distinctively gay content. Not everyone has a lover of their own sex, but everyone, after all, has a self of their own sex. 35 (This camouflage, by the way, continues to be effective in institutions that connive with it: in a class I taught at Amherst College, fully half the students said they had studied *Dorian Gray* in previous classes, but not one had ever dis­cussed the book in terms of any homosexual content: all of them knew it could be explained in terms of either the Theme of the Double—“The Divided Self”—or else the Problem of Mimesis—“Life and Art.”)

For Wilde, the progression from *homo* to same to self resulted at least briefly, as we shall see, in a newly articulated modernist “self”—reflect­iveness and antiﬁgurality, antirepresentationism, iconophobia that strug­gles in the antisentimental entanglements of *Dorian Gray* and collapses in the sentimental mobilizations of *Reading Gaol*. 36 Nietzsche’s use of the nascent accommodations of the new concept are oddly simpler, for all that you would have to describe him as the man who tried to put the hetero back into *Ecce Homo*. Freud in his discussion of Dr. Schreber gives the following list of the possible eroto-grammatical transformations that can be generated in contradiction of the sentence, unspeakable under a homo­phobic regime of utterance, “I (a man) love him (a man).” First, “I do not love him— I hate him”; second, “I do not love him, I love her”; third, “I do not love him; she loves him”; and finally, “I do not love him; I do not love any one.” 37 None of these translations is exactly foreign to Nietzsche; in fact, one could imagine a Nietzsche life-and-works whose table of contents simply rotated the four sentences in continual reprise. But his

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35. If, at any rate, under this new definitional possibility, that which I am and that which I desire may no longer be assumed to be distinct, then each one of those terms can be subjected to the operations of slippage. We have seen how both Wilde and Nietzsche camouflaged what seem to be the male objects of male desire as, “ultimately,” mere reflections of a divided “self.” But it can work in the other direction: the homo-construction also makes a language in which a man who desires may claim to take on some of the lovable attributes of the man desired. In Nietzsche, for example, the unimaginable distance between the valetudinarian philosopher who desires, and the bounding “masters of the earth” whom he desires, is dissolved so resolutely by the force of his rhetoric that it is startling to be reminded that “Homer would not have created Achilles, nor Goethe Faust, if Homer had been an Achilles, or Goethe a Faust” (*Genealogy*, 235). And, as we shall see, Wilde presents a similar double profile.

36. For Nietzsche, whose literary impulses aren’t in that sense modernist, the desired male figure never ceases to be visible as a male figure, except, as we’ve noted, in those instances where the sense of sight is willfully suppressed.

own most characteristic and invested grammar for this prohibited sentence is a different one, one that underlies Freud's project so intimately that it does not occur to Freud to make it explicit, and far closer to the bone of the emergent "homo-" reading of what it means for man to desire man: "I do not love him, I am him.

I do not desire, let us say, Wagner; I am Wagner. In the loving panegyric of Wagner in Bayreuth, "I am the only person referred to—one may ruthlessly insert my name... wherever the text gives the word Wagner" (Ecce, 82). (Or: "Supposing I had baptized my Zarathustra with another name, for example with the name of Richard Wagner, the perspicuity of two millennia would not have sufficed to divine that the author of 'Human, All Too Human' is the visionary of Zarathustra" [Ecce, 59].) It was not "one of my friends, the excellent Dr. Paul Ree, whom [in Human, All Too Human] I bathed in world-historic glory"; that was merely how, "with my instinctive cunning, I here too avoided the little word 'I'" (Ecce, 94). I do not desire Zarathustra, though "we celebrate the feast of feasts; friend Zarathustra has come, the guest of guests! Now the world is laughing, the dread curtain is rent, the wedding day has come for light and darkness" (Beyond, 204)—rather, at the moments of definitional stress, I am Zarathustra. I do not desire Dionysus, for all the gorgeous eroticism surrounding that great hidden one, the tempter god... whose voice knows how to descend into the underworld of every soul, who says no word and gives no glance in which there lies no touch of enticement... the genius of the heart... who divines the hidden and forgotten treasure, the drop of bone of the emergent "homo-" reading of what it means for man to

—no, in the last analysis, I am Dionysus. (The dedicatory phrases, for instance, that begin the "Dionysus" section of The Will to Power, "To him that has turned out well, who does my heart good, carved from wood that is hard, gentle, and fragrant—in whom even the nose takes pleasure," turn up almost verbatim in the "Why I am so Wise" section of Ecce Homo,

with the notation, "I have just described myself."). Indeed, "What is disagreeable and offends my modesty is that at bottom I am every name in history." And, as with Dr. Schreber, the whole elaborated syntax of the contraries of these propositions emerges in turn: Nietzsche as the contra Wagner ("we are antipodes");40 "Dionysus against the Crucified" (the last words of Ecce Homo); Nietzsche, in perhaps the most central turn, as the Anti-Christ.

Abstraction/Figuration

To point to the paranoid structure of these male investments is not, in the framework I hope I have created, to pathologize or marginalize them but, rather, to redeploy their admitted centrality. "Madness is something rare in individuals—but in groups, parties, peoples, ages it is the rule" (Beyond, 85). To the degree that Nietzsche is here engaged in a projective heroics of embodiment already characteristic of post-Romantic projects, he provides an exemplar for the Gothic-marked view of the nineteenth century as the Age of Frankenstein, an age philosophically and tropologically marked by the wildly dichotomous play around solipsism and intersubjectivity of a male paranoid plot—one that always ends in the tableau of two men chasing one another across a landscape evacuated of alternative life or interest, toward a climax that tends to condense the amorous with the murderous in a representation of male rape.41 What is anomalous about Nietzsche in this context is scarcely the hold this plot has on him, but indeed the flexuous sweetness with which sometimes he uniquely invests it:

You who with your spear of fire
Melt the river of my soul,
So that, freed from ice, it rushes

40. On this, see Between Men, Chapters 5, 6, 9, and 10.
seen, from a worldly one of complex intersubjective rivalries to a hermetic one of the Double defined could be at once circulated, channeled, extended, and occluded. Chapter 4, on the historical creation and manipulation of male homosexual panic per se, will discuss these mechanisms more fully. What makes Dorian Gray degree to which it partakes of the paranoid-associated homophobic alibi “I do not love him; I am him.” It is a different though intimately related alibi that the modernism of Dorian Gray performs: the alibi of abstraction. Across the turn of the century, as we know, through a process that became most visible in, but antedated and extended far beyond, the trials of Oscar Wilde, the discourse related to male homosexuality itself became for the first time extremely public and highly ramified through medical, psychiatric, penal, literary, and other social institutions. With a new public discourse concerning male homosexuality that was at the same time increasingly discriminant, increasingly punitive, and increasingly trivializing or marginalizing, the recuperative rhetoric that emerged had an oddly oblique shape. I would describe it as the occluded intersection between a minority rhetoric of the “open secret” or glass closet and a subsumptive public rhetoric of the “empty secret.”

The term “open secret” designates here a very particular secret, a homosexual secret. As I explain in Chapter 1, I use it as a condensed way of describing the phenomenon of the “glass closet,” the swirls of totalizing knowledge-power that circulate so violently around any but the most openly acknowledged gay male identity. The lavender button I bought the other day at the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookstore, that laconically says, “I know you know,” represents a playful and seductive version of the overtly Gothic Dorian Gray, insofar as its plot devolves, as we’ve seen, from a worldly one of complex intersubjective rivalries to a hermetic one of the Double tout court, drinks as deeply and much more conventionally of this nineteenth-century current by which the energies of a male-male desire by now completely prohibited but still rather inchoately defined could be at once circulated, channeled, extended, and occluded.

The public rhetoric of the “empty secret,” on the other hand, the cluster of aperçus and intuitions that seems distinctively to signify “modernism” (at least, male high modernism), delineates a space bounded by looseness, a self-reference that refers back to—though it differs from—nineteenth-century paranoid solipsism, and a split between content or on the one hand and structure on the other that is stressed in favor of structure and at the expense of themes. I will argue in the next chapter that this rhetoric of male modernism serves a purpose of universalizing, naturalizing, and thus substantively voiding—depriving of content—elements of a specifically and historically male homosexual rhetoric. But just as the gay male rhetoric is itself already marked and structured and indeed necessitated and propelled by the historical shapes of homophobia, for instance by the contingencies and geographies of the highly permeable closet, so it is also true that homophobic male modernism bears the structuring fossil-marks of and in fact spreads and reproduces the specificity of desire that it exists to deny.

The Picture of Dorian Gray occupies an especially symptomatic place in this process. Published four years before Wilde’s “exposure” as a sodomite, it is in a sense a perfect rhetorical distillation of the open secret, the glass closet, shaped by the conjunction of an extravagance of deniability and an extravagance of flamboyant display. It perfectly represents the glass closet, too, because it is in so many ways out of the purposeful control of its author. Reading Dorian Gray from our twentieth-century vantage point where the name Oscar Wilde virtually means “homosexual,” it is worth reemphasizing how thoroughly the elements of even this novel can be read doubly or equivocally, can be read either as having a
thematical empty "modernist" meaning or as having a thematically full "homosexual" meaning. And from the empty "modernist" point of view, this full meaning—any full meaning, but, in some exemplary representative relation to that, this very particular full meaning—this insistence on narrative content, which means the insistence on this narrative content, comes to look like kitsch.

Basil Hallward perfectly captures the immobilizing panic that underlies this imperfect transformation of the open secret into the empty secret. He had been able, in decent comfort, to treat artistically of his infatuation with Dorian so long as he had framed it anachronistically, Classically—even while knowing that "in such mad worships there is peril" (128)—but

Then came a new development. I had drawn you as Paris in dainty armour, and as Adonis with huntsman's cloak and polished boar-spear... And it had all been what art should be—unconscious, ideal, and remote. One day, a fatal day I sometimes think, I determined to paint a wonderful portrait of you as you actually are, not in the costume of dead ages, but in your own dress and your own time. Whether it was the Realism of the method, or the mere wonder of your own personality, thus directly presented to me without mist or veil, I cannot tell. But I know that as I worked at it, every flake and film of colour seemed to me to reveal my secret. I grew afraid that others would know of my idolatry. I felt, Dorian, that I had put too much of myself into it... Well, after a few days the thing left my studio, and as soon as I had got rid of the intolerable fascination of its presence it seemed to me that I had been foolish in imagining that I had seen anything in it, more than that I was extremely good-looking, and that I grew afraid that others would know of my idolatry.

I had had too much, that I had put too much of myself into it... Well, after a few days the thing left my studio, and as soon as I had got rid of the intolerable fascination of its presence it seemed to me that I had been foolish in imagining that I had seen anything in it, more than that I was extremely good-looking, and that I could paint. Even now I cannot help feeling that it is a mistake to think that the passion one feels in creation is ever really shown in the work one creates. Art is always more abstract than we fancy. Form and colour tell us of form and colour—that is all. (128-29)

Or, as Basil has put it earlier, interrupting his own confession of love and desire for Dorian: "He is never more present in my work than when no image of him is there. He is a suggestion, as I have said, of a new manner. I find him in the curves of certain lines, in the loveliness and subtleties of certain colours. That is all." (17)

Passages like these, as well as some of the important antinarrative projects that seem to shape the early parts of Dorian Gray, suggest the prefiguring manifesto of a modernist aesthetic according to which sentimentality inheres less in the object figured than in a prurient vulgarity associated with figuration itself. Postmodernism, in this view, the strenuous rematch between the reigning champ, modernist abstraction, and the deposed challenger, figuration, would thus necessarily have kitsch and sentimentality as its main spaces of contestation. But insofar as there is a case to be made that the modernist impulse toward abstraction in the first place owes an incalculable part of its energy precisely to turn-of-the-century male homo/heterosexual definitional panic—and such a case is certainly there for the making, in at any rate literary history from Wilde to Hopkins to James to Proust to Conrad to Pound to Joyce to Hemingway to Faulkner to Stevens—to that extent the "figuration" that had to be abjected from modernist self-reflexive abstraction was not the figuration of just any body, the figuration of figurality itself, but, rather, that represented in a very particular body, the desired male body. So as kitsch or sentimentality came to mean representation itself, what represented "representation itself" came at the same time signally to be a very particular, masculine object and subject of erotic desire.

Invention/Recognition; Wholeness/Decadence

An antifiguralist modernism per se never seems to have formed any part of Nietzsche's program. It seems, however, that after the revulsion against his love for Wagner, opera functioned for Nietzsche rather as figuration itself did for Wilde; it stood, that is, for a fascinating, near-irresistible impulse barely transcended if transcended at all, but against which a scouring polemic might none the less productively and revealingly be mounted. Thematically and rhetorically, as well, Nietzsche's treatment of opera is similar to Wilde's treatment of mimesis—writing in 1886 about his major Wagnerian work of fifteen years before:

To say it once more: today I find [The Birth of Tragedy] an impossible book: I consider it badly written, ponderous, embarrassing, image-mad and image-confused, sentimental, in places saccharine to the point of effeminacy, uneven in tempo, without the will to logical cleanliness... a book for initiates, "music" for those dedicated to music, those who are closely related to begin with on the basis of common and rare aesthetic experiences, "music" meant as a sign of recognition for close relatives in artibus... Still, the effect of the book proved and proves that it had a knack for seeking out fellow-rhapsodizers and for luring them on to new secret paths and dancing places. What found expression here was anyway—this was admitted with as much curiosity as antipathy—a strange voice, the disciple of a still "unknown God."... Here was a spirit with strange, still nameless needs. 43

43. From "Attempt at Self-Criticism," 1886 introduction to a reissue of The Birth of Tragedy, in Basic, pp. 19-20.
Nietzsche calls the “image-mad” relations around Wagner “sentimental” in the specific sense that they involved his “confounding of myself with what I was not” (Ecce, 93); as for “the Wagnerian” more generally, “I have experienced” three generations of them, from the late Brendel, who confused Wagner with Hegel, to the ‘idealists’ of the Bayreuther Blätter, who confuse Wagner with themselves” (Ecce, 90). The promiscuously vicariating impulse triggered by Wagner, while entailing all the “uncleanliness” attributed to its Christian original (“I put on gloves when I read the score of Tristan” [Will, 555]), also performs, however, another function that Nietzsche finds more difficult to repudiate: a function of community-building through the mechanism of mutual recognition enabled by this slippage, among “initiates,” between desire and identification. The very stress on the “secret,” “curious,” “strange,” “unknown,” and “nameless,” terms that flamboyantly condense the open secret with the empty one, dares such recognitions.

One of the most Wildean functions that the opera serves in Nietzsche is to anchor a rhetoric of decadence. Wagner was a perfect foil for Nietzsche’s erotic grammars here: himself certifiable as heterosexually active, if not hyperactive, he nonetheless, like Nietzsche, crystallized a hypersaturated solution of what were and were about to become homosexual signifiers. Set up under the notorious aegis of Ludwig II, the Wagnerian opera represented a cultural lodestar for what Max Nordau, in Degeneration, refers to as “the abnormals”; the tireless taxonomist Krafft-Ebing quotes a homosexual patient who is “an enthusiastic partisan of Richard Wagner, for whom I have remarked a predilection in most their own.”

In the late twenty-century retrospect there is, as we have mentioned, almost only one out of the panoply of nineteenth-century sexualities that represents the pathological (just as the phrase “sexual orientation” now refers quite exclusively to gender of object-choice); the reading of Nietzsche through these tendentiously filtered lenses certainly represents a violence to his meaning, but a violence in which he is anything but unimplicated.

The thematics as well as argumentation of decadence in Nietzsche are close to those of ressentiment: loosening of the laminated integument, as in the “over-ripe, manifold and much-indulged conscience” of Christianity (Beyond, 57), a palpable gaps, crawling, or fermentation where firmness ought to be, like the Overture to Meistersinger, which has “the loose yellow skin of fruits which ripen too late” (Beyond, 151). Although the negative valuation attached to ressentiment per se — ressentiment under its own name—is one of the most consistent of Nietzsche’s ethical judgments, it’s nonetheless clear that his acuity as a psychologist of ressentiment requires that he as well undergo subjection to its processes. It is an easy task for anyone instructed by Nietzsche to demonstrate the infusion of his most powerful thought with ressentiment, given both the absence in Nietzsche of any comparably psychologized alternative account of human emotion, and the implication in the very terminology of ressentiment that the supposed activity of emotion and the supposed passivity of perception are indistinguishable from one another, the degradation of re-already implicit in every sense of sentiment. But Nietzsche makes explicit about décadence what he leaves to be inferred about ressentiment — how absolutely its recognition, whether to celebrate or deprecate it, is implicated in the interminable logic of, among other things, homosexual attribution whereby it takes one to know one:

If one is to be fair to [The Wagner Case] one has to suffer from the destiny of music as from an open wound. — What is it I suffer from when I suffer from the destiny of music? From this . . . that it is décadence music and no longer the flute of Dionysos . . . Supposing, however, that one in this way feels the cause of music to be one’s own cause, to be the history of one’s own suffering, one will find this writing full of consideration and mild beyond measure . . . . — I have loved Wagner. — Ultimately this is an attack on a subtle “unknown” who could not easily be detected by another, in the sense and direction of my task. (Ecce, 119)

His aptitude for perceiving decadence is traced directly to his affinity with it; correspondingly, the ability of others to suspect it in him is traced to their own.

I have a subtler sense for signs of ascent and decline than any man has ever had, I am the teacher par excellence in this matter—I know both, I am

both. — My father died at the age of 36: he was delicate, lovable and morbid. . . . A doctor who treated me for some time as a nervous case said at last: "No! there is nothing wrong with your nerves, it is only I who am nervous." . . . — Convalescence means with me a long, all too long succession of years—it also unfortunately means relapse, deterioration, periods of decadence. Do I need to say that in questions of decadence I am experienced? I have spelled it out forwards and backwards. (Ecce, 38–39)

What is strangest is this: after [the ordeal of a long sickness] one has a different taste—a second taste. Out of such abysses, also out of the abyss of great suspicion, one returns newborn, having shed one’s skin, more ticklish and sarcastic, with a more delicate taste for joy, with a more tender tongue for all good things . . . more childlike and yet a hundred times more subtle than one has ever been before. (Contra, 681)

The relatively relaxed openness with which this epistemological structure is acknowledged means that decadence, unlike the resentment to which it otherwise seems so closely to correspond, can often be discussed in Nietzsche without mobilizing the fierce, accusatory machinery of projective denial:

We Europeans of the day after tomorrow, we first-born of the twentieth century—with all our dangerous curiosity, our multiplicity and art of disguise, our mellow and as it were sugared cruelty in spirit and senses—if we are to have virtues we shall presumably have only such virtues as have learned to get along with our most secret and heartfelt inclinations, with our most fervent needs: very well, let us look for them within our labyrinths! (Beyond, 128)

Perhaps, indeed, the most exquisite erotic meditation of the nineteenth century lies spread out in this subcutaneous fermentation of the decadent, the “multitude of subtle shudders and trickles down to one’s toes” (Ecce, 102–3) radiating around the point of a penetration whose object is both oneself and not. Where, for instance, to locate the boundary between self and other in Nietzsche’s encounter with his own book *Daybreak*?

Even now, when I chance to light on this book every sentence becomes for me a spike with which I again draw something incomparable out of the depths: its entire skin trembles with tender shudders of recollection. (Ecce, 95)

As Nietzsche says of his own ideal, “It is impossible for the Dionysian man not to understand any suggestion of whatever kind, he ignores no signal from the emotions. . . . He enters into every skin” (Twilight, 73).
developments that both paralleled and entangled the new developments in homo/heterosexual definition. So Nietzsche says of the "total aberration of the instinct" that can attract young German men to Wagner's art, "one piece of anti-nature downright compels a second" (Ecce, 91–92). In The Picture of Dorian Gray as in, for instance, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, drug addiction is both a camouflage and an expression for the dynamics of same-sex desire and its prohibition: both books begin by looking like stories of erotic tensions between men, and end up as cautionary tales of solitary substance abusers. The two new taxonomies of the addict and the homosexual condense many of the same issues for late nineteenth-century culture: the old antisodomic opposition between something called nature and that which is contra naturam blends with a treacherous apparent seamlessness into a new opposition between substances that are natural (e.g., "food") and those that are artificial (e.g., "drugs"); and hence into the characteristic twentieth-century way of problematizing almost every issue of will, dividing desires themselves between the natural, called "needs," and the artificial, called "addictions." It seems as though the reifying classification of certain particular, palpable substances as unnatural in their (artificially stimulating) relation to "natural" desire must necessarily throw into question the naturalness of any desire (Wilde: "Anything becomes a pleasure if one does it too often"), so that Nietzsche's hypostatization of Will "itself," for example, would necessarily be part of the same historical process as the nineteenth-century isolation of addiction "itself." Inexorably, from this grid of overlapping classifications — a purported taxonomic system that in fact does no more than chisel a historically specific point of stress into the unresolved issue of voluntarity — almost no individual practice in our culture by now remains exempt. The development of recent thought related to food is a good example: the concept of addiction to food led necessarily to that of addiction to dieting and in turn to that of addiction to exercise: each assertion of will made voluntarity itself appear problematical in a new area, with the consequence that that assertion of will itself came to appear addictive. (In fact, there has recently been a spate of journalism asserting that antiaddiction programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous and others modeled on it are addictive.) Some of the current self-help literature is explicit by now in saying that every extant form of behavior, desire, relationship, and consumption in our culture can accurately be described as addictive. Such a formulation does not, however, seem to lead these analysts to the perception that "addiction" names a counter-structure always internal to the ethicizing hypostatization of "voluntarity"; instead, it drives ever more blindly their compulsion to isolate some new space of the purely voluntary.

The "decadence" of drug addiction, in these late nineteenth-century texts, intersects with two kinds of bodily definition, each itself suffused with the homo/heterosexual problematic. The first of these is the national economic body; the second is the medical body. From the Opium Wars of the mid-nineteenth century up to the current details of U.S. relations with Turkey, Colombia, Panama, Peru, and the Nicaraguan Contras, the drama of "foreign substances" and the drama of the new imperialisms and the new nationalisms have been quite inextricable. The integrity of (new and contested) national borders, the reifications of national will and vitality, were readily organized around these narratives of introjection. From as far back as Mandeville, moreover, the opium product — the highly condensed, portable, expensive, commerce-intensive substance seen as having a unique ability to pry the trajectory of demand conclusively and increasingly apart from the homeostasis of biological need — was spectacularly available to serve as a representation for emerging intuitions about commodity fetishism. The commodity-based orientalism of Dorian Gray, for instance, radiates outward from "a green paste, waxy in lustre, the odour curiously heavy and persistent" that represents an ultimate recourse for Dorian — outward through its repository, "a small Chinese box of black and gold-dust lacquer, elaborately wrought, the sides patterned with curved waves, and the silken cords hung with round crystals and tasseled inplaited metal threads" — outward through the "Florentine cabinet, made out of ebony, and inlaid with ivory and blue lapis," from whose triangular secret drawer his fingers move "instinctively" to extract the box (201–2). Like Wagnerian opera, Dorian Gray accomplished for its period the performative work of enabling a European community of gay mutual recognition and self-constitution at least partly by popularizing a consumerism that already derived an economic model from the traffic in drugs.

47. Dorian Gray, p. 236.
Take an example from the prodigally extravagant guide to lifestyle, interior decoration, and textiles offered in Dorian Gray's aptly titled Chapter 11. A whole set of epistemological compactions around desire, identification, and the responsive, all but paranoid mutuality attributed to gay recognition are condensed in the almost compulsive evocation there, even more than elsewhere in the novel, of the drug-tinged adjectives "curious" and "subtle," two of the Paterian epithets that trace in Dorian Gray the homosexual-homophobic path of simultaneous epistemological heightening and ontological evacuation. Unlike the cognate labels attached so nearly inalienably to Claggart in Billy Budd, these adjectives float freely through the text: "some curious dream" (8), "this curious artistic idolatry" (17), "throbhing to curious pulses" (26), "a subtle magic" (26), "his subtle smile" (27), "a curious charm" (28), "a subtle fluid or a strange perfume" (44), "so curious a chance" (44), "women . . . are curious" (55), "a mad curiosity" (57), "a curious influence" (61), "some curious romance" (63), "a subtle sense of pleasure" (64), "poisons so subtle" (66), "the curious hard logic of passion" (66), "some curious race-instinct" (77), "curious Renaissance tapestries" (102), "pleasures subtle and secret" (119), "the curious secret of his life" (136), "curious unpictured sins whose very mystery lent them their subtlety and their charm" (137), "metaphors as monstrous as orchids, and as subtle in colour" (140), "subtle symphonic arrangements of exotic flowers" (144), "that curious indifference that is not incompatible with a real ardour of temperament" (147), "their subtle fascination" (148), "a curious pleasure" (148), "a curious delight" (150), and so on apparently endlessly. Besides being almost violently piquant and uninformative, "curious" shares with "subtle" a built-in epistemological indecision or doubling. Each of them can describe, as the OED puts it, "an object of interest": among the meanings for this sense of "curious" are "made with care or art, delicate, recherché, elaborate, unduly minute, abstruse, subtle, exquisite, exciting curiosity . . . queer. (The ordinary current objective sense)." At the same time, however, each adjective also describes, and in almost the same terms, the quality of the perception brought by the attentive subject to such an object: for "curious" "as a subjective quality of persons," the OED lists, e.g., "careful, attentive, anxious, cautious, inquisitive, prying, subtle." The thing known is a reflection of the impulse toward knowing it, then, and each describable only as the excess, "wrought" intensiveness of that knowledge-situation.

In their usage in the fetish-wrought Chapter 11, the epithets record, on the one hand, the hungrily inventive raptness of the curious or subtle perceiving eye or brain; and, on the other, the more than answering intricacy of the curious or subtle objects perceived—imported or plundered artifacts, in these typifying cases, whose astonishing density of jewels and "wrought" work such as embroidery testify, more than to taste, to the overt atrocities they sometimes depict, and most of all to the "monstrous," "strange," "terrible" (I use the Wildean terms) exactions of booty in precious minerals, tedious labor, and sheer wastage of (typically female) eyesight, levied on the Orient by the nations of Europe. "Yet, after some time, he feared of them, and would sit in his box at the Opera, either alone or with Lord Henry, listening in rapt pleasure to 'Tannhauser'" (150).

Still, it would be reductive to confine the national question embodied in the sexuality of Dorian Gray to an exercise in orientalism. Indeed, the very patency of Wilde's gay-affirming and gay-occluding orientalism renders it difficult to turn back and see the outlines of the sexual body and the national body sketched by his occidentalism. With orientalism so readily-to-hand a rubric for the relation to the Other, it is difficult (Wilde seems to want to make it difficult) to resist seeing the desired English body as simply the domestic Same. Yet the sameness of this Same—or put another way, the homo- nature of this sexuality—is no less open to question than the self-identicalness of the national borders of the domestic. After all, the question of the national in Wilde's own life only secondarily—though profoundly—involved the question of overseas empire in relation to European patria. To the contrary: Wilde, as an ambitious Irish man, and the son, intimate, and protégé of a celebrated Irish nationalist poet, can only have had as a fundamental element of his own sense of self an exquisitely exacerbated sensitivity to how by turns porous, brittle, elastic, chafing, embracing, exclusive, murderous, in every way contestable and contested were the membranes of "domestic" national definition signified by the ductile and elusive terms England, Britain, Ireland. Indeed, the consciousness of foundational and/or incipient national difference already internal to national definition must have been part of what Wilde literally embodied, in the expressive, specularized, and symptomatic relation in which he avowedly stood to his age. As a magus in the worship of the "slim rose-gilt soul"—the individual or generic figure of the "slim thing, gold-haired like an angel" that stood at the same time for a sexuality, a sensibility, a class, and a narrowly English national type—Wilde, whose own physical make was of an opposite sort and (in that context) an
infinitely less appetizing, desirable, and placeable one, showed his usual uncanny courage ("his usual uncanny courage,"
*anglice* chutzpah) in foregrounding his own body so insistently as an index to such erotic and political meanings. Wilde's alienizing physical heritage of unboundable bulk from his Irish nationalist mother, of a louche swarthiness from his Celticizing father, underlined with every self-foregrounding gesture of his person and *persona* the fragility, unlikelihood, and strangeness—at the same time, the transformative reperceptualizing power—of the new "homo-" homosexual imagining of male-male desire. By the same pressure, it dramatized the uncouth nonequivalence of an English national body with a British with an Irish, as domestic grounds from which to launch a stable understanding of national/imperial relations.

For Nietzsche, more explicitly antinationalist than Wilde, virulently anti-German, and by the later 1880s virulently anti-anti-Semitic (which is hardly to say he was not anti-Semitic), the conjunction of the drug topic with the national also evokes a dangerous rhetoric of the double-edged. He writes retrospectively, for instance:

> If one wants to get free from an unendurable pressure one needs hashish. Very well, I needed Wagner. Wagner is the counter-poison to everything German *par excellence*—still poison, I do not dispute it. . . . To become healthier—that is *retrogression* in the case of a nature such as Wagner. . . . The world is poor for him who has never been sick enough for this "voluptuousness of hell." . . . I think I know better than anyone what tremendous things Wagner was capable of, the fifty worlds of strange delights to which no one but he had wings; and as I am strong enough to turn even the most questionable and perilous things to my own advantage and thus to become stronger, I call Wagner the great benefactor of my life. (Ecce, 61)49

A characteristic gesture in Nietzsche is to summon up the spectre of an addiction, but at the same time to make an assertion of transcendent or instrumental will that might be paraphrased as "but as for me, I can take it or leave it." The ability to *use* a potentially addictive stimulus without surrendering to it is attributed to a laudable strength. Thus, for instance, "Grand passion uses and uses up convictions, it does not submit to them—it knows itself sovereign" (*Anti*, 172). *Zarathustra* says that sex is "only for the wilted, a sweet poison; for the lion-willed, however, the great invigoration of the heart and the reverently reserved wine of wines" (*Zarathustra*, 188).50 The equivocal way Nietzsche describes the relation of Judaism to decadence has the same structure as the way he describes his own relation to the potentially addictive:

Considered psychologically, the Jewish nation is a nation of the toughest vital energy which, placed in impossible circumstances, voluntarily, from the profoundest shrewdness in self-preservation, took the side of all *décadence* instincts—not as being dominated by them but because it divined in them a power by means of which one can prevail *against* "the world." The Jews are the counterparts of *décadents*: they have been compelled to *act as* *décadents* to the point of illusion. . . . For the kind of man who desires to attain power through Judaism and Christianity, the priestly kind, *décadence* is only a means. (*Anti*, 135)

And any danger posed by nineteenth-century Jews to nineteenth-century Europe occurs because "that which is called a 'nation' in Europe today and is actually more of a *res facta* than *nata* (indeed sometimes positively resembles a *res facta* et *picta*--) is in any case something growing, young, easily disruptable, not yet a race, let alone such an *aere perennius* as the Jewish" (*Beyond*, 163).

As always in Nietzsche, his implacable resistance to giving stable figuration to even the possibility of a minoritizing homosexual identity makes one hesitate to read into these passages what one might look for in, say, Proust. But nor is the figuration so very stable in Proust. For Proust, whose plots of Dreyfusism and of gay recognition are the organizing principles for one another as they are for the volumes through which they ramify, the numinous identification of male homosexuality with a *pre*-national, premodern dynastic cosmopolitanism, through the figure of Charlus as much as through the Jews, is no more than haunted by the spectre of a sort of gay Zionism or pan-Germanism, a normalizing politics on the nominally ethnic model that would bring homosexual identity itself under the sway of what Nietzsche called "that *néurose nationale* with which Europe is sick" (*Ecce*, 121). Each of these writers, at any rate, seems to use an erotics of decadence to denaturalize the body of

49. Or of the English, "To finer nostrils even this English Christianity possesses a true English by-scent of the spleen and alcoholic excess against which it is with good reason employed as an antidote—the subtler poison against the coarser: and indeed a subtle poisoning is in the case of coarse peoples already a certain progress" (*Beyond*, 165).

50. More: a section of *The Genealogy of Morals* juxtaposes, without confronting, the "drugged tranquillity" of the "impotent and oppressed" with the healthy "power of oblivion" of "strong, rich temperaments" (*Genealogy*, 172–73).
the national per se. But, as Nietzsche’s pseudo-psychiatric diagnostic stance in this memorable formulation may already suggest, the standpoint from which that denaturalization proceeds may itself present new problems.

Health/Illness

The most fateful aspect of Nietzsche’s understanding of decadence is his philosophical reliance on a medical model of the human body. As we have seen, the thematics of decadence does not, of itself, entail for him any necessarily phobic ethical valuation — and this is true even as that thematics is crossed and recrossed by what had been and what were becoming the main signifiers of male-male-loving acts and identities. Indeed, Nietzsche’s writing is rich in what amount to — in some cases, what explicitly present themselves as — avowals of identification with and desire for the signifieds of decadence. Such avowals barely loosen, however, the horrifyingly potent knot of accusatory decadence-attribution, so long as the authority over that process is vested, as the anthropomorphizing logic of the metaphor historically required that it be, in an embattled and expansive expert science of health and hygiene.

It can be argued, after all, that Nietzsche made only one disastrously mistaken wager with his culture: the wager that the progress he had painfully made in wresting the explicit bases of his thought inch by inch away from the gravely magnetic axis of good / evil could be most durably guaranteed by battening them to the apparently alternative, scientifically guaranteed axis of health / illness or vitality / morbidity. (“Whoever does not agree with me on this point I consider infected” [Ecce, 97].) The genocidal potential in his thought seems to have been reactivated only through a cultural development that, however predictable it might have seemed to others, completely blindsided him. That is the indefatigably sinister hide-and-seek that ethicizing impulses have played in this century behind the mask of the human and life sciences. The hide-and-seek has depended, in turn, on the invisible elasticity by which, in the developments toward eugenic thought around and about the turn of the century, reifications such as “the strong,” “the weak,” “the nation,” “civilization,” particular classes, “the race,” and even “life” itself have assumed the vitalized anthropomorphic outlines of the individual male body and object of medical expertise. For instance:

To refrain from mutual injury, mutual violence, mutual exploitation, to equate one’s own will with that of another: this may in a certain rough sense become good manners between individuals if the conditions for it are present (namely if their strength and value standards are in fact similar and they both belong to one body). As soon as there is a desire to take this principle further, however, and if possible even as the fundamental principle of society, it at once reveals itself for what it is: as the will to the denial of life, as the principle of dissolution and decay. One has to think this matter thoroughly through to the bottom and resist all sentimental weakness: life itself is essentially appropriation, injury, overpowering of the strange and weaker, suppression, severity, imposition of one’s own forms, incorporation and, at the least and mildest, exploitation — but why should one always have to employ precisely those words which have from of old been stamped with a slanderous intention? Even that body within which, as was previously assumed, individuals treat one another as equals — this happens in every healthy aristocracy — must, if it is a living and not a decaying body, itself do all that to other bodies which the individuals within it refrain from doing to one another: it will have to be the will to power incarnate, it will want to grow, expand, draw to itself, gain ascendency — not out of any morality or immorality, but because it lives, and because life is will to power. On no point, however, is the common European consciousness more reluctant to learn than it is here; everywhere one enthuses, even under scientific disguises, about coming states of society in which there will be “no more exploitation” — that sounds to my ears like promising a life in which there will be no organic functions. “Exploitation” does not pertain to a corrupt or imperfect or primitive society: it pertains to the essence of the living thing as a fundamental organic function, it is a consequence of the intrinsic will to power which is precisely the will of life. (Beyond, 174–75)

From the body of the “individual” to the body of the “healthy aristocracy” to “the will of life” itself: these invocations are no unproblematical metonymies, but anthropomorphic pseudo-equivalencies whose slippery scientism conceals the very violence it purports to celebrate.

Thus when Nietzsche comes, in a late book, to offer a description of the actual body of Christ, the terms he chooses are both tellingly congruent with his own decadent self-descriptions and at the same time tellingly distanced through the figuration and narrative implicit in the medical model in its most dangerously elastic incarnations.

To make a hero of Jesus! — And what a worse misunderstanding is the word “genius”? To speak with the precision of the physiologist a quite different word would rather be in place here: the word idiot. We recognize a condition of morbid susceptibility of the sense of touch which makes it
shrink back in horror from every contact, every grasping of a firm object. Translate such a physiological habitus into its ultimate logic—an instinctive hatred of every reality. . . .

I call it a sublime further evolution of hedonism on a thoroughly morbid basis. (Anti, 141–42)

The word "idiot" here points in the direction of the blank male cynosure of erotic flux and surplus: "One has to regret that no Dostoyevsky lived in the neighbourhood of this most interesting décadent; I mean someone who could feel the thrilling fascination of such a combination of the sublime, the sick and the childish" (Anti, 143). Nothing in Nietzsche has licensed one to read this as merely a sneer; indeed, nothing has quite licensed one to read it as not about Nietzsche himself. The word "idiot" points as well, however, by the same gesture toward the taxonomic and ultimately eugenic sciences of the "morbid"—the sciences that move imperceptibly back and forth from delineating the outlines and describing the prognosis of the individual body to enforcing an ethics of collective hygiene, on an infinitely elastic scale, in response to a chimera of demographic degeneration and a fatally tacit swarm of phylogenetic fantasies. It points to the genocidal space of slippage, in a single page of Beyond Good and Evil, among the individual man, the "corruption of the European race," and "the will to make of man a sublime abortion" (Beyond, 70–71; emphasis added).

It may be, then, that much of the heritage that today sets "sentimentality" and its ever more elusive, indeed, ever more impossible Other at the defining center of so many judgments, political as well as aesthetic, impinging so today on every issue of national identity, postcolonial populism, religious fundamentalism, high versus mass culture, relations among races, to children, to other species, and to the earth, as well as most obviously between and within genders and sexualities—it may be that the structuring of so much cultural work and apperception around this impossible criterion represents a kind of residue or remainder of erotic relations to the male body, relations excluded from but sucked into supplementarity to the tacitly ethicized medical anthropomorphizations that have wielded so much power over our century.

That antisentimentality can never be an adequate Other for "the sentimental," but only a propellant for its contagious scissions and figurations, means that the sources of courage or comfort for our homophobically galvanized century will remain peculiarly vulnerable to the impossibility of the male first person, the unexpected bathos of the anthropomorphic—for those who wish, in the words W. H. Auden wrote in 1933,

That later we, though parted then,
May still recall these evenings when
Fear gave his watch no look;
The lion griefs loped from the shade
And on our knees their muzzles laid
And death put down his book.

51. From "Out on the lawn I lie in bed" (1933), pp. 29–32, W. H. Auden: Selected Poems, ed. Edward Mendelson (New York: Random House/Vintage, 1979); lines quoted are from p. 30. I encountered these lines, not reading Auden, but in the obituary listings in the New York Times, July 23, 1988, where someone had purchased space to reproduce them as an unsigned memorial to a man, who had died the previous day, named Nick Knowlden.

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