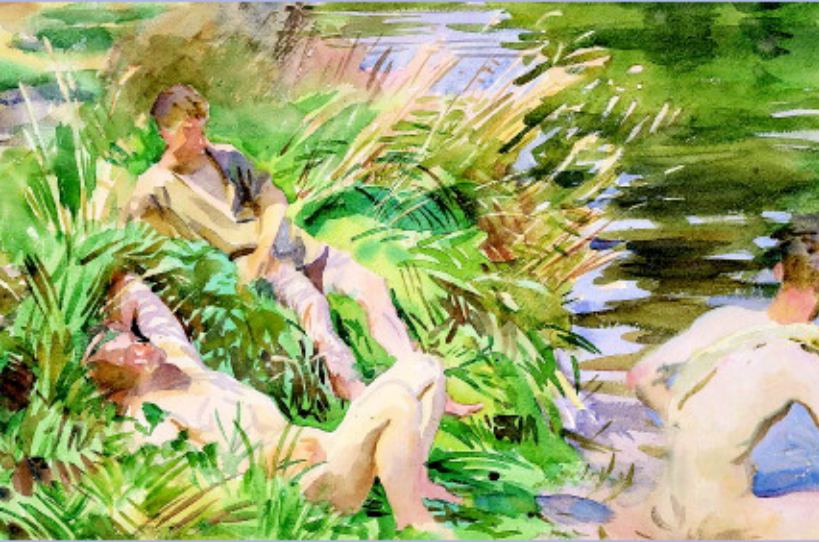


Eric Haralson

Henry James and Queer Modernity



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HENRY JAMES AND QUEER MODERNITY

In *Henry James and Queer Modernity*, Eric Haralson examines far-reaching changes in gender politics and the emergence of modern male homosexuality as depicted in the writings of Henry James and three authors who were greatly influenced by him: Willa Cather, Gertrude Stein, and Ernest Hemingway. Haralson places emphasis on American masculinity as portrayed in fiction between 1875 and 1935, but the book also treats events in England, such as the Oscar Wilde trials, that had a major effect on American literature. He traces James's engagement with sexual politics from his first novels of the 1870s to his "major phase" at the turn of the century. The second section of this study measures James's extraordinary impact on Cather's representation of "queer" characters, Stein's theories of writing and authorship as a mode of resistance to modern sexual regulation, and Hemingway's very self-constitution as a manly American author.

ERIC HARALSON is Associate Professor of English at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. He has published articles in such journals as *American Literature* and *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, and has contributed to *The Cambridge Companion to Henry James* (1998). He is also the editor of the two-volume *Encyclopedia of American Poetry* (1998, 2001).

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HENRY JAMES AND QUEER MODERNITY

ERIC HARALSON



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From a love letter written by James Strachey, the famous translator of Sigmund Freud, to Rupert Brooke, the modern “Apollo” and doomed poet of World War One

January 7th, 1909, Hampstead, London

[Like you,] I also read Henry James. But it's fairly gloomy living here with a lot of people who don't in the least know what I'm thinking about, & who [would] hate me if they did... It [would] be some relief if I could talk to you about... things that I really care about. Shall I ever?... Somehow when I'm with you, there's always a damned awkwardness. I, at least, so often don't say what I mean... [T]hen I have ghastly moments sometimes, when it all seems to be explained by your... wishing most of the time that I weren't there... I'm sure it's all my fault; but I don't see how. Can't you help?

I [had] no notion all this was coming when I said that I also read Henry James. Shall I burn it?

Friends and Apostles: The Correspondence of Rupert Brooke and James Strachey, 1905–1914, ed. Keith Hale (1998)

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Acknowledgments

This book considers how five American authors, and a few of their British counterparts, contended with new models of categorizing identity, especially gender and sexual identity, in the crucial period of cultural history that extends from the mid-1870s to the mid-1930s. I have been particularly interested in studying the strategies of resistance to such categorization found in their works – the often subtle ways in which they sought to combat evolving patterns of discrimination towards “deviance” or to turn new regimes of “difference” to the advantage of *their* differences, writing also on behalf of others marked out as “queer” or self-identifying against prevailing norms. Here it is my pleasant task to identify and categorize the many debts I have accrued during the course of this project, to distinguish among the persons, of various complex and engaging identities, without whose help and comradeship this book would not have been possible.

Although Columbia graduate school is now distant enough for nostalgia to have set in, very present to my mind is the invaluable guidance of my dissertation director, Jonathan Arac, the epitome of professionalism, intellectual endeavor, and warm collegiality. I was also fortunate to have as dissertation readers Robert A. Ferguson and Andrew Delbanco, whose prestige as scholars and teachers of American literature does not need my further testimonial, but I am glad to give it anyway. I am also happy to remember the steadfast support of Karl Kroeber, who was a constant source of mental agitation and buoyant humor. My memory of these fine mentors is aided by the circumstance that they continue to take an interest in my career and to nurture my development.

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widely curious, like the author we study), I want to thank a few more of them. In cases where I have committed an unwitting theft of their ideas, they themselves are to blame for having such seductive insights in the first place. I refer to, and express my gratitude to, Wendy Graham, Christopher Lane, Jonathan Levin, and David McWhirter (a special thanks to him for strategizing with me during the trials of seeking a publisher).

For providing me with opportunities to try out portions of the book's argument in the agora, my thanks (again) to Lee Person (Midwest Modern Language Association) and David McWhirter (Chicago MLA); to yet further outstanding Jamesians, Michael Anesko (Chicago MLA) and Sheila Teahan (Twentieth-Century Literature Conference, Louisville); and to Joseph Bristow (UCLA Center for Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Studies and the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library). For helping in various ways to get my scholarship into print, I am grateful to Sara Blair, Wai Chee Dimock, Susan M. Griffin (editor of the excellent "new" *Henry James Review*), Joseph Litvak, Peggy McCormack, Gary Scharnhorst, and Tom Wortham. Under the heading of general moral support and refreshing dialogue, I am happy to thank Rick Bozorth, Gert Buelens (yet another exemplar of the species "Jamesian"), Jerry Rosco, Melissa Solomon, and Jonathan Veitch. A very special thanks to my dear friend Jennifer Fleischer, for setting me the example of superior scholarly productivity, as well as for many hours of pretenure coaching and counseling.

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generation in our profession – for teaching me so much about my research topics and compelling me to test, refine, and often revise my thinking.

This brings me to the most challenging category of all – that of my exceptional mentors – because each person listed here deserves separate praise. To begin with Martha Banta, I can only hope to be as prolific and as consistently interesting (sacred Jamesian word) on Henry James and so much else in American literature as she has been in her distinguished career. Thinking of our many conferences together, and our purely social “larks” in New York and Los Angeles, I cannot imagine a better friend or a more thought-provoking dinner companion. Richard Dellamora and I struck up our friendship in convention-land as well, the “alternative” Whitman gathering at Penn almost a decade ago: I thank him for his sponsorship of my work, for the inspiring example of his own, and for many enlarging conversations on James, Wilde, and their milieux. My debt of gratitude to Jonathan Freedman is especially large, encompassing his generous support as editor of the *Cambridge Companion to Henry James*, his careful help with the manuscript of this book, his own stellar scholarly contributions, and his bountiful sense of “fun” (Jamesians tend to put this word in quotation marks). In all things Jamesian, Hawthornean, and Forsterian, Robert K. Martin has been an intellectual *provocateur par excellence*; we, too, have cultivated the habit of conference socializing, to the point where the MLA is not the MLA without his good company and witty, thoughtful commentary. Last in this category, but only alphabetically so, is John Carlos Rowe, who embodies many of my own professional aspirations, being an unsurpassed Jamesian, a wide-ranging Americanist who is helping to redefine and broaden what “Americanist” means, a politically committed teacher and scholar, and a democratic spirit who distinctively blends and balances the modes of dialogue, critique, and camaraderie.

For Cambridge University Press, the editor of the series in which this book appears, Ross Posnock, does not require me to burnish *his* Jamesian credentials, but I am pleased to testify to his additional virtues of patient kindness and unfailing guidance and support. Ray Ryan has been especially thoughtful and instructive, and I have appreciated the prompt expertness and pleasant reassurances of Rachel DeWachter, Nikki Burton, Jayne Aldhouse and Karl Howe. Kevin Broccoli helped me immensely with indexing, and Hilary Hammond supplied both meticulous copyediting and good cheer. My gratitude to the press designer for making such a handsome book, and a special thanks to Dr. H. Barbara Weinstein, Curator of the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, for permitting me to use Sargent’s superb watercolor, *Tommies Bathing*, for the jacket design.

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Abbreviations

- A* *The Ambassadors* (1903), ed. S. P. Rosenbaum, New York: W. W. Norton, 1964.
- AB* "The Author of 'Beltraffio'" (1884/5), in Leon Edel (ed.), *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, vol. v, Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1962–5. (Text is taken from *Stories Revived*, London 1885, and thus substantially follows the original form in *English Illustrated Magazine*, June–July 1884.)
- ABT* *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, in *Writings 1903–1932*, ed. Catherine R. Stimpson and Harriet Chessman, New York: Library of America, 1998.
- AM* *The American* (1877), ed. James W. Tuttleton, New York: W. W. Norton, 1978.
- AS* *The American Scene* (1907), ed. W. H. Auden, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946.
- AU* *Autobiography* (1913/14), ed. Frederick W. Dupee, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- CH* Roger Gard (ed.), *Henry James: The Critical Heritage*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968.
- CR* Kevin J. Hayes (ed.), *Henry James: The Contemporary Reviews*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- CS* *Collected Stories*, New York: Vintage Classics, 1992. (Contains "Flavia and her Artists" and "Paul's Case," both 1905.)
- DG* *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985. (Text is taken from the revised and expanded book version published by Ward, Lock & Co., 1891.)

- DS *Dear Sammy: Letters from Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas*, ed. Samuel M. Steward, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977.
- EA *Everybody's Autobiography*, Cambridge, MA: Exact Change, 1994.
- EN *Willa Cather: Early Novels and Stories*, ed. Sharon O'Brien, New York: Library of America, 1987. (Contains *O Pioneers!*, *The Song of the Lark*, *My Ántonia*, and *One of Ours*.)
- EU *The Europeans* (1878), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985. (Text based on the original edition published by Macmillan, 1878.)
- FA *Four in America*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947. (Contains the essay "Henry James.")
- GHA *Green Hills of Africa*, New York: Scribner's, 1935.
- GL Byrne R. S. Fone (ed.), *The Columbia Anthology of Gay Literature: Readings from Western Antiquity to the Present Day*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.
- L I, II, III, IV *Henry James: Letters*, volume I, 1843–1875, ed. Leon Edel, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974; volume II, 1875–1883, 1975; volume III, 1883–1895, 1980; volume IV, 1895–1916, 1984.
- LC 1 *Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers*, ed. Leon Edel, New York: Library of America, 1984.
- LC 2 *Literary Criticism: French Writers, other European Writers, the Prefaces to the New York Edition*, ed. Leon Edel, New York: Library of America, 1984.
- LL *Henry James: A Life in Letters*, ed. Philip Horne, Harmondsworth: Viking/Penguin, 1999.
- MF *A Moveable Feast*, New York: Scribner's, 1964.
- MOA *The Making of Americans: Being a History of a Family's Progress*, Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1995.
- N *The Notebooks of Henry James*, ed. F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, New York: George Braziller, 1955.
- PC *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986 (text is taken from the first edition, published by Macmillan & Co., 1886).

- PH* *The Professor's House*, New York: Vintage Classics, 1990.
- RH* *Roderick Hudson* (1875), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981. (Text is taken from the first revised text, published by Macmillan & Co., 1879.)
- SA* *Letters of Sherwood Anderson*, ed. Howard Mumford Jones and Walter B. Rideout, Boston: Little, Brown, 1953.
- SAM* *Sherwood Anderson's Memoirs: A Critical Edition*, ed. Ray Lewis White, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1969.
- SAR* *The Sun Also Rises*, New York: Scribner's, 1926/1954.
- SL* *Ernest Hemingway, Selected Letters, 1917–1961*, ed. Carlos Baker, New York: Scribner's, 1981.
- SP* *Willa Cather: Stories, Poems, and Other Writings*, ed. Sharon O'Brien, New York: Library of America, 1992.
- T* *The Torrents of Spring: A Romantic Novel in Honor of the Passing of a Great Race*, New York: Scribner/Simon & Schuster, 1998.
- THJ* *Tales of Henry James*, ed. Christof Wegelin, New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1984.
- TL* *Three Lives: Stories of the Good Anna, Melanctha and the Gentle Lena*, New York: Dover, 1994.
- TM* *The Tragic Muse* (1890), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978 (text follows the first edition of 1890).
- TS* *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), in *The Turn of the Screw and Other Short Novels*, New York: New American Library, 1962 (text follows first American appearance in book form in *The Two Magics*, Macmillan, 1898).
- WO* *Winesburg, Ohio*, New York: Viking, 1969.
- WP* 1, 2 William M. Curtin (ed.), *The World and the Parish*, volume I, *Willa Cather's Articles and Reviews, 1893–1902*; volume II, *Willa Cather's Articles and Reviews, 1893–1902*, Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1970.

Introduction

So much of life is queer, if we but dare feel its queerness.
(Sherwood Anderson, *Memoirs*)

As the most politically charged term in my title, with respect to both literary criticism and the *realpolitik* of contemporary culture, “queer” deserves primary attention among my definitional tasks, before I can begin to examine the questions that underlie this study. Although it is hard to generalize about a field as diverse and proliferating as queer studies, especially one that programmatically prides itself on constant self-querying and self-renovation, the current mood in this subdiscipline seems introspective, even uneasy, after a long decade of evolution. Originally, the conceptual terminology of “queerness” (or “queer”) drew its analytical and political force from the very quality that made it so appealing, as well, to Victorian and modernist authors and readers: a fluency or an indeterminacy of signification that was felt to be at once powerful and elusive. In *Saint Foucault*, for instance, David Halperin suggests that both the intellectual value and the subversive potential of *queer* depended on its being defined as indefinite, its referentiality mobile and contingent rather than fixed: “Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers*. It is an identity without an essence . . . describing a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance.”¹ One impetus of this challenging anti-definition (challenging in every sense) was clearly the desire to push against the damaging epistemological operations whereby the modern sex/gender system conflated identities with essences and fastened down referentiality in order to categorize, weed out, and punish those who were “at odds.” The work of Judith Butler has put perhaps the strongest stamp on contemporary theorizings of sexual discourse, discussing the attempted reclamation (or “discursive resignification”) of *queer* from its history of abuse and the strategic exploitation of its contingency

to turn a vicious stigma into a “term of affiliation” for purposes of lesbian advocacy or antihomophobic critique.² Butler, like Halperin, conceives of the discursive transience of *queer* in the most radical possible fashion, suggesting that the politically necessary fictions of stable identity that the word names or inspires will have to adapt as oncoming generations of speakers and writers trope *queerness* into new shapes or possibly even out of existence.

Yet the democratic ebullience and liberating effects of such thinking – already conditional in Halperin’s formulations³ – have recently been qualified by warning sounds from some of the ablest practitioners of queer reading. Marilee Lindemann, whose work on Willa Cather informs my chapter on Cather’s formative triangular relationship with her precursors Henry James and Oscar Wilde, observes that in academic literary criticism, “the assault on heteronormativity . . . has come to seem not revolutionary but routine,” to the point where embracing the term *queer* for its subversive flexibility has become “not merely generous or pragmatic but evasive and risky.”⁴ Marjorie Garber concedes the need for a word to describe “transgressive self-invention,” but wonders (*pace* Butler’s more hopeful view) whether the lessons exemplified in Wilde’s rhetorical strategies might not be forgotten, causing *queer* to reify as “yet another essentialized identity or political faction.”⁵ Leo Bersani moves in a different direction entirely, suggesting that no matter who is performing the queer reading, or how it is performed, the practical effect on the established order may be puny at best.⁶

I want to advance as a fundamental principle in approaching the conceptual task, and then in undertaking queer readings of my five main authors – James, Cather, Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, and Sherwood Anderson – that the critical posture recommended by the latter author, as expressed in the epigraph above, will be not merely useful but methodologically vital. Feeling or reading the “queerness” in life, in literature, in the very diction of *queer* – where *queer* itself is not limited to but manifestly includes matters of sexuality – is substantially a factor of *daring* to feel or see or read queerness. What differentiates the work of these American authors from most of their predecessors is their alert receptivity to this queerness, to the strange combinations that modern life casts up: a receptivity – sometimes despite powerful internal resistance, and sometimes even through the screen of homophobic prejudice – to modernity itself. “Queer” is so interwoven with the modern, and the modern with the queer (though neither is simply reducible to or synonymous with the other), that one’s reading practice must be equally receptive.

This is not to say that one should succumb to what Rita Felski describes – and well resists – as “an over-arching meta-theory of modernity”

that grants interpretative superiority to present-day perspectives. Rather, the critical project must be to track “the mobile and shifting meanings of the modern as a category of cultural consciousness” by seeking to recover, as much as possible, the representations of modernity sanctioned by the historical objects being surveyed. This effort seems especially acute in addressing the span of years under consideration here – from 1875, when James published *Roderick Hudson* and began writing *The American*, to the mid-1930s, the period of Stein’s *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *Four in America*, with its important chapter on James. This sixty-year swath of cultural history witnessed a heightened preoccupation with “narratives of innovation and decline,” as well as the self-conscious mobilization of “the modern” as a master trope by which Anglo-American society sought to understand itself. In Felski’s helpful summation, “‘modernity’ thus refers not simply to a substantive range of sociohistorical phenomena – capitalism, bureaucracy, technological development, and so on – but above all to particular (though often contradictory) experiences of temporality and historical consciousness.”⁷

For Henry James, the struggle to articulate a modern manhood – apart from the normative script of a fixed national identity, a vulgarizing, homogenizing career in business and commerce, a middle-class philistinism and puritanical asceticism in the reception of beauty, and crucially, a mature life of heterosexual performance as suitor, spouse, physical partner, and paterfamilias – resulted in his valorizing the character of the disaffiliated aesthete. To what degree this modern aesthete’s difference from other men may be attributed to “queerness” in the emergent sense of “homosexuality” shall be discussed later. What is striking and symptomatic about the work of all the authors I will examine, starting with James, is that while they simultaneously fostered the association between “queer” and “homosexual,” they also sought to contain, constrain, and rhetorically manage the implications of that linkage: in effect, to mean only so much, or to mean it only so distinctly, in the way of sexual meanings. The “queerness” of their texts always opens on to a larger field of difference(s). Lindemann, for example, has noted that the recurrent word *queer* in Cather is a marker not only of “sexual ambiguity” but also of ethnic difference or corporeal distortion;⁸ sometimes just the vague community impression that a young man “don’t seem to fit in right,” as in the case of Claude Wheeler in *One of Ours*, is enough to brand him *queer*, though the sexual implications of his difference must be patiently extracted from context (*EN* 1050).

James himself dramatizes the broader spirit of Anderson’s above-quoted remark in the so-called Lambinet scene of *The Ambassadors*, which

culminates in Lambert Strether's acceptance of the novel's sexual intrigue; the unfolding, quasimystical events of his fateful day of discovery strike this well-read man as being "as queer as fiction" (*A* 308). This reflexive gesture of James's text makes for meaningful fun, suggesting that a realist fictional practice inevitably blurs the line that only seems to set the novelistic genre apart *as* fiction. Whatever is "queer" in literature seeps into the queerness of modern social reality, just as whatever is "queer" in reality may turn up in literature. In pointing to this coincidence or interpermeability of zones of queernesses, James instructs his readers that they, too, should be prepared for startling recognitions such as Strether's: for the exposure of a potent secret or "a *lie* in the charming affair" that constitutes the public surface of social life, and more particularly, for the revelation of a "deep truth of . . . intimacy" precisely where they (like Strether) have labored not to notice or acknowledge it – in other words, where they have not dared to feel it (*A* 311, 313).

Oh, *prefer?* oh yes – queer word. I never use it myself. (Herman Melville, *Bartleby, the Scrivener*, 1853)

Despite this contiguity, in *The Ambassadors*, between the word *queer* and a form of intimacy (technically, adultery) in violation of community norms, especially the norms of American post-Puritanism, it is not immediately apparent how phenomena "as queer as fiction," or phenomena queer *in* fiction of the Victorian and modern periods, can be related to the discourse of sexuality, or homosexuality, as such. Indeed, Strether's mental phrasing seems almost to lead *away* from eroticized resonances by recalling the sheer abundance and diversity of "queer" things in Anglo-American literature from the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, most of which have no evident connection to sexuality. Even a highly selective catalog suggests the term's extraordinary range of application and, partly as a result, its diffuse referentiality. For instance, Anglo-American prose as well as verse of this vintage regularly featured dwellings or places of business that were "queer" in atmosphere, furnishing, or architectural condition: queer shops, lodgings, castles, gables, looking glasses, smelling bottles, and so forth. Characters in fiction notoriously succumbed to "queer" states of affect or imagination – queer moods, fancies, ideas, or reminiscences – or fell into "queer" habits and forms of self-expression: queer grins, laughs, looks, noises; queer little dances, tunes, ditties; queer "ways of putting it." If manners or bodies or faces became "queer" *enough*, the persons exhibiting them were set down as queer fellows, chaps, or creatures, or sometimes evoked more colloquially as queer birds or queer fish. Extreme manifestations

aroused suspicion that a person might be “queer in the head” or possibly residing in “Queer Street,” that populous thoroughfare, running through the pages of especially English literature from Charles Dickens to Robert Louis Stevenson to Evelyn Waugh, where residents suffered from unspecified but unseemly “difficulties”; some of these unfortunates were probably “on the queer,” as well, or living by forgery and theft, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* clarifies.⁹

In works by other prominent authors the reader learns even more about the proliferation of “queer” possibilities. Sailors could be dangerously, even fatally “queer” toward one another (Herman Melville, *Billy Budd*, 1886–91); “single gentlemen lodgers” were “a queer lot” (Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, 1906/7); men apparently had to worry about women “turning ‘queer’” with age (Edith Wharton, *Ethan Frome*, 1911); genius, too, could be a “queer thing” (James Joyce, *Ulysses*, 1922); horses might think it “queer” to stop without a farmhouse near (Robert Frost, “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,” 1923); and female poets were *also* “a queer lot” (Amy Lowell, “The Sisters,” 1925).¹⁰ As these and other literary examples suggest, “queerness,” whether in persons or in things, often referred to an *internal* heterogeneity – perhaps a character who was a “queer mixture” of contraries (as in James’s own “Daisy Miller,” 1878) or a dry goods store that contained a “queer jumble” of wares (Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio*, 1919) – that simultaneously perplexed, attracted, alienated, and possibly mirrored the putatively normal outside observer (*THJ* 22; *WO* 196). At a minimum, it is safe to say that queer “happenings,” objects, and types abounded in Victorian and modern fiction, so that James’s Strether, whose adventures in alterity while abroad in Europe render him “changed and queer,” was far from alone in his impressions and sensations (*A* 317).

But again, what might this rampant queerness in literature written between the mid-1870s and the mid-1930s have to do with sexuality? Is it necessary that an author *intend* for a text to be queer in order for it to be read queerly? One premise of this book is that each of these instances, and others that will be drawn from the work of my five main authors, participates to some degree in the broad, complex cultural process – a process uneven, shadowy, and multiply sited – by which “queer” came to include “homosexual” among its meanings, first in urban subcultures in New York, Paris, London, and elsewhere, and increasingly in popular parlance and mainstream media. To adapt Butler’s theoretical terms, these textual instances constitute a formative (if inchoate) chapter in the strategic resignification of *queer* that would cohere as a political force in the 1980s. Clearly, some of these early examples can be more readily related than others (such as

Frost's pensive little pony) to the troping of *queer* into the vocabulary of sexual difference – the initially underground but ultimately very public discourse tradition in which *queer* (as well as *gay*) came to be “used . . . tactically” by men (and only somewhat less by women) to “position themselves and negotiate their relations with other men, gay and straight alike.”¹¹

As in the case of *The Ambassadors*, one often discerns this process in suggestive juxtapositions and contexts of usage, especially since the sexual shading of *queer* was bound to be muted and nuanced instead of self-advertising during this period. The claim is not that diction definitively establishes a character's homosexuality, nor that the examples in question necessarily signal the circulation of same-sex desire among the professional classes of London (near Stevenson's “Queer Street” in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*),¹² the sailors of the merchant marine (in Melville's *Billy Budd*), or among the denizens of men's boardinghouses (in Conrad's *Secret Agent*), but rather that the recurrent recourse to *queer* to evoke an uncanny emotion or a densely homosocial environment indicates the term's adaptability or inclination to its evolving sexual meaning. By the same token, although it is uncertain whether the idea of lesbianism, as such, underwrites Amy Lowell's reference to women poets as a “queer lot” (“The Sisters”), her inclusion of Sappho and Emily Dickinson in this deviant sorority marks her poem as a shaping force in itself in the emergence of the homosexual signifier. Even such unlikely seeming instances as Edith Wharton's may forecast the modern meaning of *queer* in a generally progressive spirit. When her character Ethan Frome, embodying a hapless masculinity, worries that women “turn queer” after menopause, the phrase does not mean “become lesbian,” and yet as can be seen in considering Hemingway's relations with Stein, Wharton does engage a cultural logic that would increasingly understand a woman's “change of life” as a potentially ominous virilization that might well reinforce lesbian tendencies (*SL* 736). To extrapolate from these diverse examples, then, it might be said that the quality of diffuseness or indeterminacy – of widely dispersed differences – that distinguished *queer* is precisely what recommended the term to writers or narratives preoccupied with the murky dynamics of modern sexualities.

Even to make these moderate claims, as they strike me, is already to invite skepticism from certain quarters. The politically motivated resignifying of *queer* has predictably (and profitably) agitated the academy, notwithstanding Bersani's argument that Butlerian exercises in reverse discourse are not only *not* revolutionary (“spectacles of politically impotent disrespect”) but are also easily reversed themselves (such “hyperbolic miming,” being “too closely imbricated” with the very norms it mimes, falls subject to

re-appropriation by the dominant culture).¹³ Prestigious Jamesian scholars such as Alfred Habegger have hardly been reassured by this deflationary view. In fact, to Habegger's mind, the queer studies meaning of *queer* has so "overwhelm[ed]" the conventional Victorian sense of *queerness* – in his gloss, "an oddness . . . not felt to be desirable and . . . surpass[ing] harmless eccentricity" – that this older usage seems "obsolescent and . . . definitely unsmart," prompting a "defiant self-consciousness" in the speaker (particularly in the US) who wishes to employ it. As part of his own verbal recovery effort – a reading of James's *What Maisie Knew* as a *bildungsroman* of "the artist as queer moralist" – Habegger leans on the authority of the *OED* to argue that James could not have been thinking of "homosexual" when he wrote "queer": "James used the language of his time, not ours," and the earliest use of the word in its latter-day sense, according to the *OED*, occurred in 1922, or "six years after James's death."¹⁴

There are several problems with this resort to the dictionary, particularly in the case of such a loaded term, with such a complicated history, as *queer*. First, Habegger's formulation seems too complacent about "the language of [the] time," as if usage were governed by a unitary standard and no allowances needed to be made for variations owing to national setting (American versus British), the relative privacy or publicity of the text or utterance in question, or the lively, disparate, and often subcultural processes by which diction mutates and gathers new inflections. It is worth noting, for instance, that the *OED*'s 1922 source for *queer* as "homosexual" is a report on juvenile delinquency issued by the US Department of Labor, from which it can be inferred that the usage was already well established on the street. Indeed, the document seems to acknowledge this slang currency by placing *queer* in quotation marks: "a young man . . . 'queer' in sex tendency."¹⁵ A more useful approach to the challenge of dating usage is advanced by George Chauncey, who studies "the broad contours of lexical evolution," rather than "reconstructing a lineage of static meanings," and who finds that the use of *queer* as "essentially synonymous with 'homosexual'" (though not with "effeminate") was already common in New York "by the 1910s and 1920s."¹⁶ This usage had made it to the opposite coast of the United States by that time as well. In Sharon R. Ullman's *Sex Seen: The Emergence of Modern Sexuality in America*, one learns from court testimony in the Long Beach, California, homosexuality scandal of 1914 about the fancy "wardrobes among the 'queer' people" (which I will have reason to inventory shortly).¹⁷

The quasi-documentary gay rights novel *Strange Brother* (1931), by Blair Niles, pushes the dating of this specialized usage back even farther,

suggesting that *queer* as a term of opprobrium had found its way into American small-town vernacular even *before* 1910.¹⁸ But most remarkably, Hugh Stevens borrows from Douglass Shand-Tucci's work to show that *queer* had acquired "a more assertive shade of pink" as early as 1895, when a Boston professional man, by the Jamesian name of Wentworth, warned his gay friends to be cautious inasmuch as "queer things are looked at askance since Oscar's exposé" (referring to the contemporaneous Wilde trials).¹⁹ Thus, although the *OED* is probably correct in noting that this pink tincture to the word originated in the US, one cannot rely on its methods or sources for careful knowledge about the early, subterranean life of *queer*.

If approached as scripture in matters of linguistic history, the *OED* can be equally misleading on the use of *queer* as a noun substantive (as opposed to its adjectival form) to mean "a homosexual." W. H. Auden is credited with the first such usage, in a piece of writing from 1932, and yet a short story collection by the American writer Robert McAlmon makes it clear that this meaning was abroad in New York and in the expatriate circles of European capitals by the early 1920s. The postwar Berlin and Paris evoked in McAlmon's *Distinguished Air* (*Grim Fairy Tales*), published in 1925 but based on the author's experiences of 1922–3, clearly belong to the vertiginous cabaret scene associated with Auden and Christopher Isherwood ("To Christopher, Berlin meant boys")²⁰ and later with Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1944/5), in which, for instance, "lubricious anecdotes of Paris and Berlin" are the stock-in-trade of the novel's gay aesthete.²¹ McAlmon's personal reminiscence of Berlin, in particular, chimes as well with the city of transexual fantasia made familiar in Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* (1936): "along the Unter den Linden it was never possible to know whether it was a woman or a man in woman's clothes who accosted one."²² Seeking to capture the argot of this modern urban netherworld, *Distinguished Air* uses *queer* extensively to mean a sexual "invert" (or an "androgynous"), as when both "war-made queer[s]" and congenital ones, like the drag queen "Miss Knight," congregate in "queer cafés" (*GL* 634, 632).

If McAlmon had discovered that "a queer" meant "a homosexual," then so had many other migratory artists of the time. To speak only of American, English, or Irish figures, those in the know would have included Ezra Pound, James Joyce, and William Carlos Williams, all of whom praised McAlmon's *Distinguished Air*; the author's social friends, many of them "elaborately double-lived person[s]" themselves (*GL* 634), such as Djuna Barnes, Ronald Firbank, Mina Loy, Marsden Hartley, Man Ray, and H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), the lover of McAlmon's former wife, Bryher (Winifred Ellerman); and writers whose works were published by McAlmon's

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