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A Kink in the Plot:  
Fetish Desire, Literary Modernism, and Narratives of Social Integration

By

Kevin Matthew Stone

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Comparative Literature

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Critical Theory

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in Charge:

Professor Grace Lavery, Chair

Professor Lilla Balint

Professor Damon Young

Professor Dora Zhang

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## Abstract

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by

Kevin Matthew Stone

Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

Designated Emphasis in Critical Theory

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Grace Lavery, Chair

This dissertation traces the literary-historical development of the aesthetics of what it calls kink desire, rooted in the discourse of “sexuality” and sexual identities that emerged in nineteenth-century Victorian medicine and German sexology. It identifies this development in narrative forms that resist the closure and linear continuity of the *Bildungsroman* and the marriage plot novel. The dissertation turns to Romantic (Kleist, Emily Brontë) and modernist (Musil, Lewis) novels that adapt the structure of the marriage plot and the *Bildungsroman*, yet undermine their linear narratives of the social integration of the individual subject’s sexual desires with frame stories, false endings, and fragments. It argues that the fragmentary nature of these narrative forms emerges from the material impossibility, in the Romantic period, of creating a narrative of social integration for certain categories of sexual desire and taste. Yet from this impossibility emerge new forms of sexual sociality based not on a dialectic sublation of the individual with the family and the state, but rather on sub-communities formed from a shared pedagogy and aesthetic experience of desire. For example, the second chapter moves to the later 1800s to examine how *Venus in Furs* and the early sexology work *Psychopathia Sexualis* established two genres that conditioned the modern experience of desire: the decadent philosophical novel and the medical case study, respectively. But in both cases, the reactions of their readers exceeded the pedagogical intentions laid out in the framing material, with Sacher-Masoch’s novel inspiring an avid fan culture and Krafft-Ebing’s medical textbook inspiring confessional letters from lay readers. As the dissertation tracks the social circulation of these narrative forms, it also attends in the last chapters to their use in literary debates about avant-garde aesthetics and the status of art in the work of writers like Wyndham Lewis. In tracing the development of this aesthetics, this dissertation challenges the dichotomy in much of contemporary queer theory between a radical resistance to social structures like the family and the state and a simple liberal assimilation into those structures. In doing so, it reorients the literary history of sexuality around the ways that a continuity of narrative forms provided the infrastructure for new social groupings.

*to the ghosts and lovers,  
who rap on the walls  
when you're trying to sleep,  
to the many dads who came back  
after going out for a pack of cigarettes,  
and to a favorite otter,  
who goes,  
"mi-mi-mi-mi-mi-mi-mi"*

## Acknowledgements

I remember reading once, I think in *The New Yorker*, about a concept in ethical philosophy of a special category of decisions that cannot be reasoned about in the usual way. What distinguishes these decisions is that to choose them will so fundamentally and foreseeably, yet open-endedly, alter the set of values that motivate your actions that the “you” who looks back on the decision cannot meaningfully be said to be the same “you” who made them. The person who asks whether it is right to bring a child into a world where environmental disaster and the decay of governance are likely to bring about a future where the child’s opportunities for happiness are greatly diminished compared to those of the potential parent is not yet the parent who would almost surely never look back at her life and say that it is right to wish her child out of existence. (An old friend with a better memory whose life has taken as hyperbolized a trajectory as mine tells me I am thinking of L.A. Paul’s *Transformative Experience*.) As a queer with no prospect of parenting, I don’t think I’ll ever be faced with a decision pregnant with the gravitas of bringing a new life into the world. But spending eight years on a doctorate in the humanities is surely one of those life-altering absurdities. Whether it was a good, or even rational, idea to undertake this project is really quite beside the point. All I can do is contend with the transformations it has wrought. The “me” who never moved to California, took years of graduate seminars, formed a new set of tastes and desires, and discovered endless entries in an archipelago of friends and lovers is no longer a “me” I can recognize from this other side. For that, I am grateful.

Academic work is, of course, never done alone, even as we continue for some reason to prioritize publications with only one name in the author field. Even a dissertation begun in the horizonless anxious doldrums of the COVID-19 pandemic was not written in absolute isolation. I am grateful to my committee for listening to my cries from the wilderness. Damon Young provided patient and practical professional advice, and his dissertation workshop convinced me to do something I should do much more often: throw away a huge chunk of chapter three to write something better. Lilla Balint read my work with a generosity and interest she convinced me it could deserve. Dora Zhang suggested I read Wyndham Lewis. Grace Lavery appeared at unexpected intervals, Poppins-like, to turn my intellectual world upside down and inspire me to rethink all that the project could be. Several elder statesfolks of academia were among the most helpful, soothing, and pleasurable parts of this writing process. Judith Butler was a sea of reassurance and a source of collar advice. Chana Kronfeld, and her dissertation workshop, were my greatest official font of advice and encouragement. D.A. Miller was a vigorously soft-voiced, twinkle-eyed, sharpshooting conversational companion. The pandemic dispersed us, but for a long time, my fellow graduate students were my greatest sustenance. Thank you, at various times and in various degrees, despite whatever extent to which our paths have diverged, to Keoni, Daryl, Kyra, Caleb, Kyle, Cedar, Alex, Spencer, Eve, Camille, Emily, Howie, Matt, Pedro, Pê, the other Pedro, innumerable others, and my oldest comrade, Mary.

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Parallel but by no means subordinate in intellectual importance to the official academic world was the whole social world—sexy, sweaty, passionate, and ridiculous—in which this work was conceived. Likely a higher-than-average proportion of this dissertation was conceptualized in attempts to flirt with middle-aged men at fetish bars in California and Berlin, a *Bildung* for which I am immeasurably grateful. There are too many men to possibly thank for plunging, guiding, leading, and sustaining me in that world. Some particularly important ones have included Jay, Scott, Joe, and Eric. Tio remains my best friend and smartest interlocutor. I reserve the greatest thanks of all to the primary partner of the prime of my life, Vincent, who has forever been my biggest fan, my sanest source of stability, my great love, and my carefulest (and, sometimes, only) reader. May I someday prove worthy, and may I have the great honor of following you down whatever kinked paths you may stroll.

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In the very final moments, Dad fell horribly ill, and I'm so immensely grateful you wanted to see me graduate before it happened, even if I'm still not sure you're sure what I graduated from.

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## Introduction: A Kink in the Plot

Sexual desire is the model of and engine for human social relations. This is tautological when it comes to marriage and kinship. And in a post-Freud world, it's no longer counterintuitive to say that sexual desire, in sublimated form, is also the engine of various other social groupings: friendship, artistic rivalry, nation-state. If you're a strict Freudian you would of course say that eros sustains *all* social life whatsoever. But even popular culture and mass media know the myriad ways that friendship, competition, cooperation, and intimacy rub up against sexual desire. Given that queer studies and queer theory are interested in ways of being social—identities, subcultures, minority groupings—that emerge from sexual behaviors, you might expect that they would be interested in the relationship between sex and social life. You would be wrong, I concluded as I made my way through a survey of queer theory in preparation for my qualifying exams. Queer studies about social life—the ones that think about categories like queer kinship, queer relationality, queer aesthetics—don't seem to care very much about sex. And the queer theory that has most directly taken on the question of sex—I am thinking most of all of the work of Leo Bersani—radically insists that, despite all appearances, sex is anti-social. At the same time that I was preparing for my qualifying exams, I was also becoming acquainted with San Francisco's gay leather subcultures. As I encountered ways of forming, sustaining, and proliferating social ties through sex that were impossibly, scarily, exhilaratingly new to me, it was hard not to notice how little they had to do with what I was reading, even though I was reading it with the expectation that it might have something to say about these new ways of being together that I was suddenly encountering.

This project relates, perhaps, a little obliquely to those concerns that gave rise to it. You will, I hope, forgive me when I reveal that this was a preamble to a discussion of genre, narrative form, and the aesthetic relationship between Romanticisms and Modernisms in nineteenth and early twentieth century British and German literature and sexology. The task of this introduction is to make that obtuseness acute. Little of what follows in the chapters of this dissertation will commentate directly on what has been called “the anti-social thesis in queer theory,”<sup>1</sup> but all of it was conceived in debt to it. Consider it a response to Bersani's famous formulation, written in 1987 from the height of the AIDS crisis: “...sexuality is socially dysfunctional in that it brings people together only to plunge them into a self-shattering and solipsistic *jouissance* that drives them apart” (222).

One goal of this dissertation is to think desire and form together, but not as negativity, deconstruction, or shattering. I want instead to think about desire as it is experienced everyday by many people who would gather themselves under the banner of queer or kink: as something that, just as much as it excludes or exempts us from hegemonic life narratives, also gives form to ways of living, by which I always mean new ways of relating to each other. This sounds very abstract, but it gives coherence to the many foci of this project. Tim Dean's work is an inspiration here. In a critical overview of Bersani's work from 2010, Dean writes, “What has made Bersani hard to assimilate is less his psychoanalytic emphasis on the ineluctable masochism of sexuality (a principal reason for the aversion to sex) than his insistent conceptualization of sexuality in aesthetic terms. Although his work has never shied from the rebarbative aspects of erotic life, it is, in fact, Bersani's speculations about relationality as

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<sup>1</sup> The name of a 2005 MLA panel that brought together Robert L. Caserio, Lee Edelman, Jack Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz, and Time Dean that has proven extraordinarily influential on the direction of queer theory in the 2000s based on the names and concerns it concatenated.

irreducibly aesthetic that have proved tougher for the field of queer theory to countenance” (“Sex and the Aesthetics of Existence,” 387). Although Dean was an admiring acolyte of Bersani, his 2009 work *Unlimited Intimacy* shifts the focus away from the singular moments of aesthetic shattering of the self and its social relations that preoccupy Bersani in *Homos* and toward the ethics and aesthetics of erotic relation. Namely, *Unlimited Intimacy* analyzes the coherent set of ethical and aesthetic values binding the men who engaged in barebacking subculture in San Francisco before the arrival of PrEP derisked gay promiscuity, even though their activities seemed to so many other observers to be the very manifestation of that well-worn identification between gay male sexual practices and the death drive that tears apart all self-identity and social relation. Another inspiration would be the pornographic oeuvre of Samuel R. Delany, with its vivid evocations of the social worlds created by gay men’s sexual practices across time, space, genre, and history, whether that history is a real one (the New York City of the 1999 essays *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*) or a fictionalized one (the Roman Empire of the 2004 novella *Phallos*). What both Delany and Dean understand in their work is that, like (and in symbiotic relationship with) aesthetic experience, sexual desire is a social force that can cut across class interest or identity claims, even if it can never really nullify them and indeed is always open to being redeployed in their service. The loving pursuit of the full representation of their object even despite that inconvenient fact animates my own exploration of the kinky narrative structures that bind literary history and the history of modern sociosexual life.

At the same time, this project takes seriously from the insights of the anti-social thesis that non-normative categories of desire can explode what it means to be social. The plots that I analyze in this dissertation are narratives about failures to assimilate, to find the synthesis between individual desire and social imperative. The characters who pursue the fulfillment of their kink desire thereby exclude themselves from existing notions of narrative closure or even coherence. They are unable to come of age, to get married, to serve the interests of the nation-state. The shakiness of early liberationist utopianism left the flank of desire open for the skewering that Bersani and the later anti-social ally Lee Edelman so rightfully give it (see, for example, Guy Hocquenghem’s delightful but wild claim in the 1972 manifesto *Homosexual Desire* that cruisy anal sex enacts a communism of libido). As Bersani amusingly notes in “Is the Rectum a Grave?”,<sup>2</sup> the bathhouse, far from nullifying the congealed privileges of social and cultural capital in a brotherhood of anonymous intimacy, is in fact an economy where those privileges can be spectacularly converted into public sex, unfreighted by the frictions of social obligation. Nevertheless, to conclude from the fact that nonnormative sex fails to end the perverse social relations of capitalism or racism once and for all that nonnormative sex has *no binding social force whatsoever* is surely just as romantically dystopian as Hocquenghem’s anal communism is utopian. As so many queers and kinksters know, that’s not where the story of our desire ends. In this failure of social assimilation appear new ways of being social, new narrative forms for desire.

What I learned from San Francisco’s leather cultures was that following desire outside its prescribed ends does not have to mean Romantic dissolution, heroic isolation, the war of all against all. Desire does not show itself only in negativity and the shattering of forms; it is also

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<sup>2</sup> “Anyone who has ever spent one night in a gay bathhouse knows that it is (or was) one of the most ruthlessly ranked, hierarchized, and competitive environments imaginable. Your looks, muscles, hair distribution, size of cock, and shape of ass determined exactly how happy you were going to be during those few hours, and rejection, generally accompanied by two or three words at most, could be swift and brutal, with none of the civilizing hypocrisies with which we get rid of undesirables in the outside world” (206).

productive, like Foucault's notion of power. Those whose paths through social life are kinked by desire can yet, sometimes, find others along these curved paths. The protagonist of this dissertation is therefore not Bersani's homo, whose sexual acts relate him to the social world by revealing that the other to whom he would relate is merely another shattered ego like himself. Nor is it Edelman's sinthomosexual, that Romantically cursed antihero who reveals the impossibility at the root of all psychic relations. Rather, I am interested in those whom desire marks out as misfits, who nevertheless find some sort of way into a plot, however misshapen or inconclusive, with other misfits. Put more mundanely, I want to know what cultural, aesthetic, and narrative processes had to take place over the course of the long nineteenth century so that some individuals who could once only be cast outside society as criminals, madfolks, or degenerates can now today come together in neighborhoods, conferences, message boards, and subreddits and organize themselves as visible subcultures or even fanbases. What new forms can we descry among the shards left behind after the shattering of *jouissance*?

That concludes, then, the high-queer-theory portion of this introduction, because it turns out that the answers this question leads me to are rather more familiar to the lived lives of queers and sexual misfits than Bersani's idiosyncratic Freudian idiom or Edelman's Lacanian idiolect. The history of kink is a history that crosses familiar literary and historical movements and eras. "Kink" is a productive anachronism for me, much as "queer" has served as perhaps the most productive anachronism for generations of scholars of sexuality and cultural studies. In framing this project, however, "queer" came more and more to obscure exactly the aesthetic continuities that I want to analyze. I see "queer" as, ultimately, wrapped up in questions of identity. Whether used in its more recent colloquial sense, where it serves statisticians and activists as an umbrella term for a group of identities that have sometimes expanded or contracted but have consistently shared some level of solidarity (however internally contested) in social struggles related to sexual behavior and gender performance, or whether used in the stricter and earlier academic sense, where "queer" names a relation to identity that contests the very possibility of a fixed, consistent, self-identical identity, ultimately the term "queer" burdens us with the question of "sexual identity." While this dissertation is not entirely uninterested in the question of identity, given that identity is so frequently a pre-condition for the formation of social groupings, what I am more interested in here is tracing a relationship between desire and narrative aesthetics. "Kink" does the work for me of naming a relationship between desire, narrative aesthetics, and social reproduction that "queer" cannot. Whatever quibbles more recent scholarship has had with the precision of his dating, I follow Foucault, more or less, in considering "sexual identity" a product of the major epistemological, institutional, and biopolitical changes in Europe of the later 1800s. And Niklaus Largier's Deleuze-inflected extension, in *In Praise of the Whip*, of that Foucauldian paradigm to understand voluntary whipping as a pursuit of sensational intensity before it was captured by the discourse of sexuality to become the psychosexual identity of "sodomasochism" is a good, productive one to keep in mind. Nevertheless, deploying the anachronism "kink" will help me keep in sight the specific relationship between stigmatized sexual desires, narrative aesthetics, and social groupings that I am tracing, even as the specific content of which kinds of sexual desires fill out this category changes according to geography and time.

This dissertation traces the aesthetics of kink desire through a series of anglophone and germanophone encounters in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It explores how the pathologization of non-normative sexual desires in the nineteenth century provided eventually for the conditions under which sexual subcultures formed as an alternative to communities

structured by heterosexual nuclear families in the early twentieth century. I argue that four narrative strategies that characterize the aesthetics of kink desire—frame stories, narrative fragments, false endings, and interpolations—revised the linear narratives of self-cultivation and social integration provided in medicine, philosophy, and the marriage plot novel and the *Bildungsroman*. This category of desire emerged from the tension between a psychological model of individual aberration and a literary model of subcultures and communities with shared narratives. The aesthetics of these texts challenges the binary between liberal assimilation and radical anti-sociality that underlies much of contemporary queer theory. Against this dichotomy, I argue that these narrative forms created the infrastructure for new social groupings formed around a shared pedagogy and aesthetic experience of desire. This dissertation starts in the Romantic era, before the consolidation of discourse around “sexuality,” to chart how Romantic literary forms gave expression to new categories of desire and new social relations before their conceptualization in medical and legal discourses. These earlier works provided aesthetic continuity across a historical-conceptual rupture and supplied a formal resource to Modernist authors whose work helped articulate and consolidate these emergent categories of sexuality. What emerges from my analysis of the various phenomena I am gathering under “kink desire” is a definition that is probably frustratingly, but also usefully, vague and relational. By kink desire, perhaps all I mean to name is categories of desire that exceed the hegemonic narratives for the expression of desire in the time and place of analysis without falling into other narratives of explicit taboo (e.g., rape or sodomy). Those hegemonic narratives provide categories like “courtship,” “companionate marriage,” “romantic love,” etc., to contain and give form and expression to desire. What resists these categories, then, seems often to encompass sadomasochism, but also gear fetishism, group sex, certain categories of homosexuality, and even sometimes what we would now call sexual violence. This relational notion of “resistance” also points at a problem of analysis raised by my work: whatever resists hegemonic narratives also risks absorption into them. There is forever a push-pull between subversion and incorporation, thus the many moments in my dissertation where the narrative of marriage proves capable of absorbing sexual violence, sadomasochism, or fetish, even as they push against its boundaries. What I try to analyze, then, is categories of sexual desire that are neither unsayable nor fully assimilated into those hegemonic forms like “family,” “marriage,” and “state.”

My critical terms “kink” and “kink desire” are meant to accrue meanings and form new layers of concreteness in my use. To some degree, this may read as a certain circularity: I identify “the aesthetics of kink desire” in various contexts by pointing at a set of similar but nonidentical formal features and the relations between those features and concepts of social and sexual life, and I explain those things by shepherding them under the category of “kink.” I intend the phrase, instead, as a heuristic placeholder, something that is indeed describing different things, referring to them under the same header so that they may be put usefully into relation with one another, without necessarily suggesting that “kink desire” is some sort of explanatory historical agent. Think of the term, perhaps, as a pointer, in the sense used in computer science: a constant label whose referent can be overwritten when called upon in different contexts. To the extent that my analyses seem to suggest “kink desire” as some transcendental, unchanging historical force with explanatory power, my gambit has failed. I hope instead to open up possibilities for relating various aesthetic, social, and sexual phenomena that may not be necessarily related in a causative sense, but nevertheless form constellations of formal homology, of relational similarity. My wager, ultimately, is that the term will prove its usefulness in use, that its expansiveness will expand its heuristic power rather than doom it to

fuzzy uselessness.

To that end, the level of literalness with which I deploy these concepts in different chapters expands and contracts. In talking about *Venus in Furs* and *Psychopathia Sexualis* in the second chapter, I mean everything quite literally: the decadent novel and the medical case study provided new genres in which we can see German-speaking laypeople in the later 1800s narrating their own sexual lives back to Leopold von Sacher-Masoch and Richard von Krafft-Ebing. The relation between aesthetic experience, genre, and kink desire in this chapter is meant in all its historical concreteness, and I do intend an argument of historical causation. In the other chapters, “kink desire” is more of a figure, most necessarily in the first chapter, which describes Romantic prose written before any concrete notions of sexual identity and psychological deviance had really been articulated. My gambit, again, is that using the same terms in these varying contexts will demonstrate their productive elasticity rather than stretching them out into confused and useless deformity.

The intention of this dissertation, therefore, is not to trace some causative, linear history of desires that once dared not speak their name but now, unleashed from the boudoir, have been elevated to the dignity and status of “identity.” Rather, I want to stay strictly focused on sex and sexual desires themselves, and the way they are emplotted in literature and incorporated into social groupings and their social reproduction. One of the other aims, here, is to broaden our understanding of what kinds of sexual desires merit intensive attention to their histories. In starting this dissertation with the question of sexual violence in Romanticist reworkings of the *Bildungsroman* and the marriage plot, I am, I hope, making it abundantly clear that this is not a search for our kinky forefathers, nor a lamentation that they were too repressed by the institutional apparatuses of the nation-state to put on a harness and take a flogging at the Folsom Street Fair like us liberated queers of 2024. It is all too easy in deploying “identity” as the major category—even when identity is put radically under erasure, as in Lee Edelman’s Lacanian redefinition of the term—to find oneself giving in to the heteronormativity of a history of lineages, forefathers, and cause-and-effect relations. Even as the early queer theorists, like Eve Sedgwick, remind us consistently that “queer” is relational, not an ontologically fixed category, its constant mapping onto LGBT identities, though done provisionally, nevertheless risks obscuring the critical roles of other categories of desire at different historical moments. Whether it’s a historical accident or a deep ontological necessity that homosexual desires emerged from their place alongside the other paraphilias of Krafft-Ebing’s 1886 *Psychopathia Sexualis* into the well-organized, politically powerful communities of the present day does not change the fact that it was possible and intelligible, within the socio-conceptual German-speaking world of Krafft-Ebing’s day, to taxonomize those desires alongside one another (even as Krafft-Ebing made “Especial Reference to the Antipathetic Sexual Instinct”): an epistemic universe we risk prematurely reducing if we approach it *a priori* as a mistake or a primitive developmental stage on the way to our present-day constellation of sexual identities oriented around the gender of object choice.

This dissertation understands itself instead as an aesthetic history: it identifies a specific relation between categories of desire and narrative form and analyzes how this form was adapted in different moments of German and British literary and sexual history to narrate changing faultlines and boundaries in the social history of sex. In doing so, I intend to produce a critical history of relations between sexual desire and social integration and reproduction in different moments of anglophone and germanophone literary culture, as well as a literary history that suggests surprising aesthetic continuities between works rarely considered together. Yet at the

same time that I want to emphasize, emphatically, that I am not drawing any necessary causal relation between Romanticist sexual violence and Modernist fetishism, I also want to preserve a productively uncomfortable formal proximity or continuity between the categories of desire that I am analyzing in my different chapters. The history of kink desire is not a hagiography;<sup>3</sup> the basic operation of kink—the sexualized reduction of humans to narrative functions—inherently means the possibility of Othering and dehumanizing instances of kink desire and narrative, particularly when those narrative functions draw on intensively affectively-charged power relations, like those of class, gender, and race. Nevertheless, this dissertation argues that we can find glimmers in these narratives of kink desire of the working out of a new kind of social grouping and reproduction not modeled on heterosexual desire, the heterosexual family, and heterosexual reproduction, a grouping that may, at its best, point toward a sociality that is neither the rootless nihilism of Lee Edelman’s antisocial queer nor the constraining, fitfully successful and rewarding, sometimes coercive, occasionally dull, and, as we are told again and again in solemn tones, *necessary*, social reproduction of the heterosexual family.

The concepts of “narrative” and “genre” that I work with are simultaneously fairly specific and rather expansive. Taking my cues from work like D.A. Miller’s classic 1989 study *The Novel and the Police*, I understand novels, particularly the bourgeois and high-art novels of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as a privileged technology of cultural discipline and meaning-making. The narratives they create, cite, rework, contest, circulate, and proliferate offer an assemblage of social heuristics, intuitions, categories, and structures to their audience. As these shared narratives circulate among a readership and beyond out into the cultural imagination, their audiences may identify with, challenge, internalize, expand upon, disidentify with,<sup>4</sup> cognitively map themselves, form stereotypes, create typologies, model themselves upon the categories and structures with which narratives give order to lived experience. In the course of this historical process, I understand narratives to be critical mediators of social relations. Thus, when I refer to “the marriage plot” and “the *Bildungsroman*,” I mean both the narrow sense in which those terms have applied to literary history as well as a broader set of shared social codes, expectations, and commonsense ways of understanding life that are deeply embedded in the cultures I am analyzing. I take Lee Edelman’s insight seriously that what he calls “reproductive futurism,” by which he means the limit placed on the domains of the social and the political by the absolute and ever-present idea of a generation whose future is guaranteed

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<sup>3</sup> My thinking about this is deeply indebted to a talk given by Andrea Long Chu at Berkeley in 2018. Whatever ones makes of her sometimes trollish later career, she made a remark that has long directed my thinking on these types of anachronistic queer studies. Pointing at various examples of the field, such as Tan Hoang Nguyen’s *A View from the Bottom: Asian American Masculinity and Sexual Representation*, she suggested that there is a common structure in these sorts of critical histories in which the author identifies a phenomenon in which they have a deep affective and personal investment, identifies themselves as a committed leftist, and then does whatever analysis necessary to show that the phenomenon they have identified, whether sissification porn or the racist presumption that Asian-American gay men are femme bottoms, is in fact some sort of leftist critical praxis. In framing my argumentation for this dissertation, I want to be very clear that, while I think there is critical political value in analyzing the phenomenon of kink desire, it is also, like much of any cultural entity in the world, something that can be and has been put to bad, non-leftist, dehumanizing, oppressive uses. I do not think the Leatherification of all social relations would do much on its own to make a more livable world. I’m all for speculative hyperbole in critical thought, but also for a sense of intellectual humbleness, of dialectical inquiry, and of proportion.

<sup>4</sup> I borrow this term, of course, from José Esteban Muñoz’s highly-influential 2009 response to the “anti-social thesis,” *Cruising Utopia*.

by heterosexual reproduction, structures the cultural imagination of the West.<sup>5</sup> But rather than place that cultural imagination in the universal structures of language and the psyche, I understand it as something culturally and historically specific, constructed, contested, and proliferated by technologies and historical processes and cultural artifacts. So when I refer to “the marriage plot,” I do have in mind, say, the novels of manners and social observation that Jane Austen produced in British culture at the beginning of the nineteenth century that created a precedent where marriage offers a socially acceptable resolution to conflicts between individuals, their desires, and the cultures and social norms within which they move. Likewise, I also understand the *Bildungsroman* to be a German invention of the early nineteenth century, most famously embodied by Goethe’s 1795 *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, where the plot concerns a young person whose process of education offers him, as Franco Moretti puts it, “one of the most harmonious solutions ever offered to a dilemma coterminous with modern bourgeois civilization: the conflict between the ideal of *self-determination* and the equally imperious demands of *socialization*” (15).

But, as will become clear throughout this dissertation, I also mean to refer loosely to the legacies of these plot structures as they expanded out into the wider cultural imaginations of anglo- and germanophone cultures. Insofar as marriage is figured as closure to a set of conflicts raised by individual desire and taste, or educational processes are understood as a possible means of reconciling the individual to society, I would suggest that we can glimpse aspects of the reach of these social technologies in cultural artifacts seemingly far afield from the nineteenth-century novel, such as the medical case studies of German sexologists or the theoretical work of Freud’s developmental and social psychology. Because these narrative structures have such a wide reach in the ways that individuals come to position themselves within the preexisting categories and roles that their societies offer, as well as in the ways they contest, reinvent, and reimagine those roles, I argue that this kind of capacious narrative and genre analysis is a critical methodology for investigating how certain kinds of sexual desire came to be categorized, to gain social salience, to be given meaning, and to become the domain upon which people worked out new ways of relating socially to one another.

## Chapter Overview

The first chapter, “Desire’s Romantic Wanderings,” begins with Romantic works by Heinrich von Kleist and Emily Brontë, which were written before the creation of psychosexual categories that Foucault traces in *The History of Sexuality*. Although these works predate the invention of such categories as “the sadomasochist,” their narratives grapple with non-normative sexual desires as a figure for the individual who cannot be unproblematically assimilated into existing social relations. In attempting to tell a marriage plot about a rapist or a *Bildungsroman* about two class-boundary-crossing sadists, these authors produce lumpy, misshapen plots of familial tragedy. Their works are structured by excessive, socially inappropriate, cross-

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<sup>5</sup> In his own words, this reproductive futurity is “political insofar as the fantasy subtending the image of the Child invariably shapes the logic within which the political itself must be thought. That logic compels us, to the extent that we would register as politically responsible, to submit to the framing of political debate—and, indeed, of the political field—as defined by the terms of what this book describes as reproductive futurism: terms that impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations.” (4)

generational, untimely, sometimes incestuous desires that turn the usual linear closure of the *Bildungsroman* or the realist novel into a non-chronological story with a grotesque sense of closure and convoluted frame stories. I argue that these earlier works introduce a set of narrative tools for thinking about how to tell stories about this category of desire—tools that, rather than erase the marriage plot or *Bildungsroman* altogether, make them serve new ends. Kleist and Brontë strain to give narrative form to a category of desire that does not yet have social forms for its expression that would correspond to the sexual practices and social relations of the family. I show that Kleist and Brontë’s texts land on aesthetic experience and the pedagogical relationship, respectively, as a means of working through the question of how to give their antisocial desires a social form that can be transmitted and reproduced. The traditional marriage plot and *Bildungsroman* posit the family structure as a closed, private form for expressing individual desire socially and reproducing it stably into the next generation. The family structure corresponds in these novels to the linear plot with conventional closure. In contrast, Kleist’s work lands on sudden, singular eruptions of desire into the plot as a way of navigating the collision between individual taste and social ethics. Drawing from Kleist’s engagement with Kant, I argue that aesthetic experience in Kleist is socially pre-conditioned, yet open-ended, a social experience felt as an inexplicable individual experience. I contrast this engagement with aesthetics with the more conventional adultery novel of Goethe, *Elective Affinities*, which I read as an Enlightenment tragedy that laments the inability of human social relations and ethics to conform to the rationality and universality of chemical laws. For Brontë, the pedagogical relationship emerges as a non-private, yet potentially erotic social relation contrasted with the closed structure of the family. This pedagogical relationship possesses an open-endedness that allows for transmissions and transformations of desire that the family forecloses; desire can be passed to non-kin, or refused, or transformed entirely.

In my second chapter, “Pedagogies of the Obsessed,” I turn to the moment in German history in which it is, following Foucault, more historically proper to refer to the social emergence of kink desire. Sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s taxonomy of sexual pathologies in the 1886 *Psychopathia Sexualis* differentiated these categories of sexual desire into psychological types, among them the “masochist,” a word he coined in reference to Sacher-Masoch’s proto-decadent 1870 novel, *Venus in Furs*. Looking at the framing material of Krafft-Ebing’s forewords to the many editions of *Psychopathia Sexualis* and the frame story of *Venus in Furs*, I find two models for the narrative pedagogy of desire. In the case of Sacher-Masoch, the frame story presents sadomasochism as an individual aesthetic experience that a friend can be taught to appreciate but simultaneously disavows this reading by treating sadomasochism as a metonym from which a universal philosophical lesson about the relations between the sexes can be extracted. In the case of Krafft-Ebing, his forewords present his case histories as a form of narrative knowledge-making from which other doctors and lawyers can learn. But in both cases, the reactions of their readers exceeded the pedagogical intentions laid out in the framing material. Sacher-Masoch’s novel inspired an enthusiastic readership who, in their willingness to identify themselves in and expand upon Sacher-Masoch’s erotic universe, it might even be apt to describe with the contemporary term “fanbase.” As for Krafft-Ebing, despite his attempts to address his work to knowledge professionals like doctors and lawyers, he ended up teaching the objects he wrote about in his case studies to become narrating subjects. In later editions of the work, he had to acknowledge that he had received so many autobiographical letters from people identifying themselves in his categories of “pathology” that their stories became part of the case histories he incorporated into future editions of the text. The sociality of sexual desire, I argue, is



inextricable from the forms of these narratives; it is in the circulation of these texts' literary, medical, legal, and autobiographical narratives that we can witness kink desire *becoming* social. Throughout, I read both with and against Foucault's *History of Sexuality* and Christopher Chitty's recent attempt to place Foucault's work on institutional biopower back into a framework of class relations. In tracking the ways that these two texts provided narrative forms from which aesthetic admirers and social misfits learned to narrate their experience of desire, I argue that Foucault's model of institutional power and Chitty's model of normative sexuality as status property fail to account for the semi-autonomy of aesthetic forms. While Krafft-Ebing's work certainly did create conceptual categories that shored up the administration of populations and endowed bourgeois family structures with cultural and social capital, neither author attends to the structures of genre that Krafft-Ebing's case studies and Sacher-Masoch's decadent erotic tableaux provided for their readers to articulate their sexual subjectivity to each other, to the public, and to Krafft-Ebing and Sacher-Masoch themselves.

My third chapter, "Perversion and Its Discontents," turns to pedagogy in the works of two paradigmatic Austrian Modernists of the turn of the twentieth century, when changes in mass media, urbanization, and economic relations had made possible the formation of publicly visible sexual subcultures. The chapter discusses the narrative of child development in Freud's 1905 *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* alongside Robert Musil's impressionist 1906 *Bildungsroman*, *The Confusions of Young Törleß*, where a boy at a military school for Austria's German elite learns to take an aesthetic distance from social life after an experience with sadomasochistic bullying. Each work, I suggest, must contort its narrative shape to incorporate childhood perversion into its tale of adult integration, whether through a turn backward or a flash forward. Freud's backward-looking narrative of sexual development offers at once a universalization of kink desire and a foreclosure of its social possibilities. Starting from the observable fact of a minority of adult perverts—those whose sexual desires have led them to the psychoanalyst's couch—Freud works back to a universal originary state of polymorphous perversion. This is a stark narrative contrast to Krafft-Ebing's forward-looking case studies, which began at the earliest memories of kinked desire that his minority of "lonely souls" could recall and worked forward to the troubled adult social lives those desires caused. In the Freudian narrative of development, the cost of universalizing kink desire is placing it forever in an amnesiac past, or else a pathological present. Yet at the same time, I detect a perverse counter current in Freud's project. Insofar as there is any form of positive social relation to be drawn out from Freud's narrative of kink desire, I argue that it is perhaps to be derived from psychoanalysis as a project of knowledge making and pedagogy. I contend that the "we" that Freud invokes in the *Three Essays* figures a like-minded group of counter-educators engaged in a perverse project of reverse-narrative seduction opposed to the civilizing repression of the "educator." Meanwhile, I examine the two endings of *Törleß*: the flashforward to the adult Törleß interpolated into the middle-rear of the novel and the moment young Törleß leaves his boarding school and returns to his bourgeois family to be homeschooled at the novel's actual end. I argue that these two endings offer a narrative expression of the paradoxical equilibrium between kink desire as that which must be disavowed to ensure the reproduction of bourgeois adulthood and its accompanying social relations (family, labor, state) and that which might provide the germ of an aesthetic sensibility around which new forms of sociality can be imagined. *Törleß* leaves these two endings in uneasy tension with each other, offering both a young Törleß who has made peace with his family and his pedagogy by leaving his kinky experiences behind and an adult Törleß who disavows those experiences only by making them the aesthetic center of his relation

to his self and to others. The novel's form, then, points beyond the mere sublimation of these emergent categories of desire — homosexual, sadomasochistic, fetishistic — toward a new understanding of sexual sociality outside of family, state, and pedagogical institution, neither unrepresentable and unconceptualizable nor assimilated and sublimated into existing institutions. In my final chapter, "Sex and the City-State," I argue that by the time of high Modernism, kink desire had achieved a social salience such that it could be recruited to questions of aesthetics and avant-garde battles over the status of art just as much as utopian social struggles for the liberation of the libido. Focalizing an undercurrent in my previous chapters, I look at questions of sexual taste and avant-garde aesthetics alongside questions of regionalism and cosmopolitanism. Turning to the British provocateur Wyndham Lewis, I read his novel *Tarr* (serialized beginning in 1916, but published in its final form in 1928) as an avant-garde marriage plot that expresses Wyndham Lewis's anti-social, anti-movement, anti-ism aesthetic project. I argue that the conflicts about the status of the art object and the autonomy of the artist from prior aesthetic movements and from existing social institutions for the reproduction of artistic forms play out in *Tarr* as a satirical clash of genres. Tarr, the autonomous Modernist individualist with no need for the state or for other art institutions or social circles, finds the expression of his ideology in the manifesto, which the novel quotes at length in his homosocial conversations with men he holds in contempt. But in inserting the manifesto back into the framework of a marriage plot, through Tarr's entanglement with the drearily conventional German Romantic Bertha, the novel combats the utopian frictionless circulation and self-organizing aesthetic pedagogy of the manifesto. Its declarations are returned to a social context, to a narrative of bourgeois-bohemia where each artist has his part in the local scene. Kinky roleplay emerges as the model of artistic and sexual autonomy that denies the conventionality of the marriage plot and shows up the naiveté of Tarr's simple declaration of independence from social relations and conventional forms. But it remains a figure, unrealizable in terms of narrative or genre, a satire of existing social forms and sexual relations whose only positive program is the pleasure of satire's constant resignification.

## Desire on the Wily, Windy Moors: Kleist and Emily Brontë

This first chapter begins by analyzing the narrative strategies of two paradigmatic Romanticists from the literatures I am addressing: Heinrich von Kleist (who died in 1811) and Emily Brontë (died in 1848). This choice of authors and works surely raises immediate questions in the astute reader. What can it mean to talk of “kink desire” in the period of European history before conceptual and political infrastructure had solidified sexual acts into sexual identities? Why choose two authors who did not know each other, with different national contexts, and from different eras? My readings in this chapter will serve as a protracted answer to these questions, but before I launch into my micro-readings of these authors, let me start with the more conceptual-methodological questions.

In choosing Kleist and Emily Brontë I am making no argument for them as kink auteurs *avant la lettre*. But I am making an argument that their work uses a socially unassimilable sexual desire, specifically for what we would now call sexual violence, to work narratively through specific faultlines in the constellation of sexual desire and social groupings in their own contexts, in a way that resembles the uses to which Modernists would put paraphilias and sadomasochism. In both cases, a sustained narrative about the social development of the deviant individual proves impossible, yet the local eruption of his unassimilable desire into the narrative transforms the overall story into a parody or travesty or monstrous distortion of a plot of social integration, whether a *Bildungsroman* or a marriage plot. In Kleist’s case, the social groupings at stake tend to be the relation between the individual and the state or the individual and the bourgeois/aristocratic family that was a major theme of German idealism and the discourse of *Bildung* as well as a major subject of the legal reforms around the Napoleonic code.<sup>6</sup> As Alice

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<sup>6</sup> Katrin Pahl, while perhaps getting a little overheatedly sweeping in her Lacanian description of the social changes informing Kleist’s writing, provides a very helpful overview. Following Thomas Laqueur’s *Making Sex*, she argues that this period saw the transition from a model of sex inherited from Classical Greek medicine, where human sex differences are a result of differing levels of heat present in the body, to a modern sex-gender system, where dyadic sex is a naturalized and universal phenomenon. She traces these changes to the spread of the ideas of the French Revolution to the German States through the Napoleonic Wars:

“The decisive changes mentioned so far combine and culminate in the French Revolution, which radically restructures society based on the idea of equality and reorients politics around the ideal of freedom. The bourgeoisie establishes itself as the political force and reorganizes the public and private spheres based on its distinctive values (informed, to a large extent, by the structure of the nuclear family with its regulation of gender, emotion, and sexuality). Napoleon’s colonization of Europe disseminates some of these changes. In particular, as Rebecca Comay (2001, 137) recounts, after the decisive Prussian defeat near Jena in 1806 Napoleon ‘imposed a dramatic reorganization of the legal, fiscal, political, military, agricultural, educational, and administrative fabric of German life.’ If the German experience of the French Revolution can be described as a missed experience on the order of a traumatic event, the heteronomous imposition of autonomy, the colonizing delivery of freedom, and the imparting of reason through brute violence followed a no less self-defeating logic and broken temporality. Whether one considers his reign to have advanced or perverted the ideals of the revolution, Napoleon did, ‘by forcing an accelerated modernization upon a state long regarded as moribund and beyond resurrection,’ induce ‘a temporal shortcircuit that leaves Germany breathlessly suspended between two epochs. He confronts Germany with the specter of its own noncontemporaneity’ (ibid., 137–38). The reaction from German poets and thinkers is mixed. While the proponents of Weimar Classicism smooth over the rupture with an aestheticizing interest in the harmonious whole, and the German Romanticists, after having jumped ahead by celebrating fragmentation, turn to folk and children’s literature, Kleist, whose relatively short writing life spans the period of the Napoleonic Wars and the Napoleonic restructuring of German society, responds to and intervenes in this situation drawing creative energy from its broken temporality. His stories and plays dramatize the overlay of the two epochs. Kleist is the

A. Kuzniar writes in her introduction to *Outing Goethe & His Age*, “[L]ate-eighteenth-century German literature was preoccupied with solidifying heterosexual roles via the inventions of Romantic love, classical femininity, the marriage partnership, and an aestheticized motherhood” (30). But sexual desire serves in Kleist’s work as the hinge point between individual passions and these rational systems and institutions designed to contain and channel them. In Emily Brontë’s case, unassimilable sexual desire and the ensuing coercions and incests travesty the Victorian rigidities of class relations and the strictly constrained sexual relations they demanded.

### Desires, Romantic and Enlightening

Kleist’s stories generally share with the Romanticists the gesture of choosing a time or place far removed from his own. Where that Romantic gesture might be read as an attempt to find an outside in art to the totalizing logic of Enlightenment rationalism, Kleist’s use of these other places seems to me a bit more socially precise. He constantly chooses places or periods ruled by a culture whose logic and values are just as internally consistent as those of the aristocratic families that populate his stories, but which differ vastly in the conclusions they draw about the ideal expression of sexual desire and the social forms it can take. At its most extreme lies a play like *Penthesilea* (1808), which stages a conflict between irrational individual passion represented by amorous desire and collective duty to a social formation but chooses a society where collective duty demands homoerotic matriarchy and casual heterosexual rape over monogamous heterosexual desire. In brief, the play imagines a meeting between Achilles and Penthesilea, the queen of the Amazons. The Amazon society relies on homosocial bonds among women, with heterosexual sex occurring only when the women warriors capture men in battle and ritualistically rape them before removing them from their society. When Penthesilea encounters Achilles, she understands the passion she feels for him, within the context of her society, as a battle fury rather than sexual desire. In the play’s tragic ending, once Penthesilea has decided to abandon her duties as queen in favor of marriage to Achilles, this confusion between love and battle lust causes her to set her hunting hounds on Achilles when she mistakenly believes he has spurned her. In *Penthesilea*, then, it is precisely *monogamous, heterosexual* desire that puts the titular queen into friction with the society over which she reigns.

Kleist’s story “The Foundling” (1803) works this structure in the opposite direction: where *Penthesilea* is interested in the ways that monogamous heterosexual desire might be perverse in a matriarchal society, I read “The Foundling” as a warped *Bildungsroman* plot where the paterfamilias must murder the son to head off the all-too-easy integration of his perverse desires into a corrupt society. The short story follows a wealthy Italian merchant named Piachi in feudal Italy who travels to a town for business. The town is struck by the plague, and when Piachi leaves, he takes an orphan boy with him out of pity. Recognizing the orphan as a victim of the plague, the authorities quarantine the travelers. The boy recovers, but Piachi’s own son dies. He adopts the boy, Nicolo, who grows up to enjoy “an early inclination toward the feminine sex [*das weibliche Geschlecht*]” (729, translations from Kleist are my own) and for the company of Carmelite monks. His pious and chaste adoptive mother, Elvira, worries about this former propensity, but believes it cured by marriage. Nicolo, however, continues his affairs with

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author of noncontemporaneity.” (8)

While my own account of Kleist focuses on emerging categories of desire, rather than sex, and takes a sociological approach to narratology, rather than using psychoanalysis to analyze Kleist’s drama and performativity, my reading is very much informed by and complementary to Pahl’s.

a courtesan of the monks. He blames Elvira for revealing this and plots revenge on her. Through a series of coincidences, this revenge takes the form of imitating a man who died saving Elvira from a fire when she was a teenager. His “inclination toward the feminine sex” overcoming him when a shocked Elvira loses consciousness, Nicolo attempts to rape her and is caught in the act by Piachi. With the power of the Church on his side, Nicolo takes legal control of Piachi’s property. Elvira dead from shock and his property lost, Piachi avenges himself on his adopted son by crushing his skull and stuffing the deed to the land down his throat.

“The Foundling” has been called a failed *Bildungsroman* in other places,<sup>7</sup> but where exactly does that failure lie? In a failed *Bildungsroman* like *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, critics generally point to the failure of a rigid society’s institutions to hold space for a sensitive or idiosyncratic soul like Werther. “The Foundling,” however, reverses this structure on the level of plot. The story seems to find failure not so much in the social integration of the foundling, but in the desperate infanticide with which the upright bourgeois father heads off his adopted son’s integration into a society defined by a corrupt Catholic Church. In the world of the story, the Catholic Church functions as a direct foil to the upright bourgeois family represented by the Piachi and his chaste and pious wife Elvira. The story goes out of its way to emphasize the Church as an institution defined by homosocial bonds and the casual passing around of mistresses among its all-male ranks, as opposed to the strictly heterosexual and monogamous merchant family into which the title character finds himself adopted. Ultimately, Nicolo is *all-too-successful* in his integration into this corrupt society, and the father’s murder, which sets off a grotesquely narratively over-extended ending where the father’s execution is delayed by his demand for the right to follow his adoptive son into hell, is a desperate bid to head off this integration. The son’s perverse desire to sleep with his adoptive mother is not so much a barrier to his integration into a society defined by the Church, but rather a great success. Where Penthesilea is tragically unable to integrate her heterosexual monogamous desire into the reproductive obligations of a matriarchal society, in “The Foundling,” the bourgeois family structure asserts itself over against a social structure defined by perverse desires. Unable to integrate the son’s misdeed into its structure, even as the Italian society of the story proves all-too-willing to absorb the son, the family strikes back against the son’s desire. At that point, the short story’s linear *Bildung* structure goes akimbo, with the story continuing grotesquely, almost comically, past the son’s death, until it finds a way to return the son to the story in the form of his damned soul.

I want to resist the temptation to immediately put Kleist’s thought and art into a more contemporary and easily digested box, like a cultural relativism or even a drive toward queerness *avant la lettre*. Rather, what I think we can more readily call Kleist’s constant staging of this conflict between passionate individual desire and rationalized social forms, which always seems to be routed through *perverse desires* (even when, in the case of *Penthesilea*, those perverse desires are for heterosexual monogamy), is a radical skepticism. Kleist’s stories certainly do take sides—royalty over romantic love in *Penthesilea*, father over foundling in “The Foundling,” noble family and nun over the raging mob in “The Earthquake in Chile” (in which a mob obsessed with maintaining the distance between the non-erotic homosociality of the nunnery and

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Tim Mehigan’s reading of the story: “The initial exchange of the adoptive son for the natural son provides the experimental conditions for a proposition that is tested in the narrative: can the adoptive son take the place of the natural son, can social education compensate for natural identity, or indeed create it ex nihilo? Can, in short, a rational order inspired by the Enlightenment ideal of education stand for a natural order, or take its place?” (44).

the bourgeois family end by murdering the bourgeois family in whose name they are acting) — but they evince a radical skepticism toward the possibility of rationally and justly arranging social structures to accommodate a range of individual sexual desires (and gender expressions).

I can illustrate this more exactly with a brief analysis of one of Kleist's most famous pieces of short prose. *The Marquise von O—* (1808) tells the story of an aristocratic Italian family during the War of the Second Coalition against revolutionary France. The story opens *in medias res* by describing how the daughter of the family places a notice in the newspaper asking that the father of her child make himself known to her. It proceeds back in narrative time to a moment when the family's compound is under siege by the Russian army. A group of Russian soldiers surrounds the Marquise, seemingly on the verge of gang raping her. A Russian officer appears, drives them off, and saves the fainting Marquise, a scene that is suddenly broken off with a dash (“[H]e led her, who was speechless from all these occurrences, into the other wing of the palace that had not yet been taken by the flames, where she sank to the ground fully unconscious as well. Here—” [659]). In the wake of this, he conducts an accelerated courtship of the Marquise, whose very speed makes the family suspicious of him as a match. When the Marquise's pregnancy becomes visible, the rest of the family casts her out as a disgrace. Only at the end of the story does it become clear to the Marquise (though perhaps the reader has earlier guessed) that the Russian officer raped her himself when she was unconscious, in the space of the dash. This revelation results first in an eroticized reunion with the father, followed by marriage to the officer.

In the scene of the reunion with the father, the novella's narration shifts suddenly to the perspective of the mother. The scene of the mother peering through the peephole to see her daughter in the lap of her husband, kissing avidly “like a lover [*Verliebter*]” (683), seems to take us straight to Oedipus and Electra, but let's stop and follow the narrative logic of the story before we immediately jam it through a Freud-shaped mesh. It is in fact the officer's rape elided in the infamous dash at the beginning of the novella that determines the logic of the rest of the story. It starts *in medias res* to give the reader the most narratively perverse consequence of this narrative pivot point that determines everything that follows, including the event that precedes it in the discourse but postdates it in the plot. This dash initiates the reader as scopophile, inviting us to trace to its origins the kink in desire that inaugurates all the future events and to take a certain pleasure in that investigation, a pleasure that ultimately converges with that of the mother gazing upon her daughter in rapturous intercourse with the father, putting the reader in the place of the mother.

Upon first glance, we might read the scene as the triumph of Oedipus, the aristocratic family returned to its ordinary romance as the plot reaches its perverse conclusion. But following the chain of causality, it is in fact the transgression of the Russian officer that introduces this perversity into the family structure that so easily absorbs it. From that moment where Kleist chooses not to let the reader in on the pivotal event of the plot, the reader is led through a parodically compressed courtship plot—compressed precisely because the officer's perverse desire is out of synch with the temporality of aristocratic courtship rituals. He must compress his courtship to the biological rhythms of the pregnancy that results from the eruption of his inassimilable desire if he is to assimilate that desire into the norms of marriage and family building. Yet that solution proves unacceptable to the family, who reject his courtship not on the grounds of his class or character but on the grounds of its non-conformance to the narrative temporality of a typical courtship. This rejection only deepens the reader's scopophilic interest in discovering the perverse origins of the soldier's behavior, displaced into the depths of the

Marquise's pregnant body.

It is thus not the Oedipal structure that rules the soldier's and Marquise's desires, but rather the desire introduced from outside the family, by the soldier whose only social positioning described in the story is as the strict and chivalric head of the homosocial institution that is his platoon. Originating from this alternative social grouping, the perverse desire that animates the soldier's war crime finds its way into the structure of the family rather than the other way around. The reconciliation of the daughter and the father is re-cast as a second ultra-compressed courtship, this time a successful one, that echoes the officer's initially rejected courtship. Assured of his daughter's innocence of a premarital desire whose consummation would preclude her from the structures of an aristocratic marriage, the father now enacts a second perversely compressed courtship upon her. His amorous desire for his daughter awakens from the knowledge that his daughter was the victim of the perversity of a man from outside the family, rather than the originator of that perversity. He learns incest from outside the family.

Pointedly and rather oddly, the novella moves at this moment away from the perspective of the Marquise, whose knowledge and point of view it otherwise follows almost wholly with the exception of the opening exposition. This moment, then, perfectly couples the perverse incestuous desire of the father with a corresponding scopophilic pleasure from the mother, whose perspective suddenly corresponds to that of the reader "as soon as she was outside" (683) the room where the Marquise and her father are reconciling. The novella emphasizes the voyeurism of the mother and reader's position, describing how the mother "eavesdropped with an ear laid lightly on the door" and "noticed through the keyhole" (683). The reconciliation of the aristocratic family becomes, under the influence of the officer's violent sexual rupture of that family structure, a courtship and a seduction itself. Reconciliation following sexual violence becomes incest; the desire for that reconciliation becomes scopophilia. Rather than serving as the structure that shepherds the child through polymorphous perversity, I could rather say that the family in the novella holds itself together in the face of this perverse desire from outside only through the conversion of its members' desires for reconciliation into perverse desires.

In thinking about how this sets Kleist's work apart from the concerns of some of his contemporaries, it is instructive to take a deeper look and contrast the plotting of *The Marquise von O*— with another example of a novel from the period that powers its plot with undisciplined desires that undo aristocratic marital structures, the 1809 *Elective Affinities* of Goethe, an intrigued but sometimes baffled reader of the younger Kleist. I bring in *Elective Affinities* to sharpen by contrast our sense of how Kleist's narratives work out the contradictions of individual desires and their place in rationalized social structures. My readings suggest how socially unintelligible or inexpressible desire in Kleist's stories generates a localized narrative convolution (in the flashforward opening of the *Marquise von O*— and its belated realizations, which serve to give content to the gap of a dash that reproduces the captain's violent sexual desire) or a narrative excess (in the grotesque extension of "The Foundling" past its protagonist's death). In each of these cases, a socially unassimilable desire generates narrative contortions that necessarily interfere with the linearity of a courtship or *Bildung* plot in order to stage the difficulty of bringing that desire into conformance with the social structures it challenges. Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, as an adultery plot, is similarly concerned with sexual desires that cannot be brought into conformance with rationalized social forms, but its narrative strategy is one of strict narrative rigidity rather than excess. *Elective Affinities*, with its dry, omniscient narrator, explicitly compares its narrative structure to the laws of chemistry before it begins to unfold the events of the plot. This image at the beginning of the novel of the relation of its own

narrative structure to a scientific law of chemical attraction that one of its own characters willfully conflates with human desire will serve as an excellent jumping off point for thinking about what is particular about the way Kleist's work conceives of the relation between desire, social forms, and narrative.<sup>8</sup>

Early in *Elective Affinities*, the characters discuss a chemical formula and explicitly compare the reaction to the events in their own lives, setting up a framework for the story that is both mirrored in and challenged by the remainder of the novel's discourse. Eduard and Charlotte are recently-married, middle-aged aristocrats who were adolescent sweethearts and have recently

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<sup>8</sup> After composing this section, I discovered a 1999 article by Wolfgang Wittkowski, "*Die Marquise von O... und Der Findling: Zur Ethischen Funktion von Erotik und Sexualität im Werk Kleists.*" Extraordinarily, Wittkowski uses the exact same constellation of texts as his starting point:

"Erotik und Sexualität gewannen im Jahrhundert der Aufklärung und Naturverherrlichung öffentlich an Wertschätzung und provozierten damit die noch immer kirchlich bestimmte Gesellschaftsmoral. 1809 demonstrierten Goethes *Wahlverwandschaften* mit dem doppelten Ehebruch im Ehebett auf schockierende Weise, wie unbändig Eros und Sexus selbst wohlgesittete Menschen aus dem Geleise werfen können, und vor allem, zu welchen Problemen, Ansprüchen, Formen des ethischen Versagens, Ausweichens, aber auch Bewährens es dabei kommen mag. Kaum geringere Zumutungen boten Kleists Novellen *Der Findling* (1811) und *Die Marquise von O...* (1808)" (192).

Unfortunately for my purposes, *Elective Affinities* makes only this guest appearance in the article, and Wittkowski's interpretation of Kleist and Goethe's ethical-aesthetic commitments differs greatly from my own reading. He suggests that Goethe put the ethical outside the realm of philosophy, mathematics, and the natural sciences rather than seeing a potential unity in them and that Kleist "apparently rejected or never grasped" Kant and Fichte's project of making subjectivity a human universal: "Um 1800 wies Goethe darauf hin, daß Philosophie, Mathematik, Naturwissenschaften nur diejenigen Ausschnitte und Aspekte von Wirklichkeit in den Blick bekommen, für deren Erfassung sie konstruiert sind, nicht mehr. Lenkten Kant und Fichte davon ab, indem sie Subjectivität zur anthropologischen Konstante machten? Kleist hat diese Abstraktion anscheinend nie begriffen oder hat sie abgelehnt" (193). Proceeding from the fact that Kleist wanted to entitle the collection of his novellas "Moralische Erzählungen" (195), Wittkowski reads these two Kleist novellas as straightforward ethical tales where "Erotik und Sexualität" put individual characters' virtues to the test, passing over the categorical imperative (196) in favor of a virtue ethics rooted in the classicism of Christian Thomasius, the German Enlightenment figure.

I admire Wittkowski's taking of vulgar Freudian-Lacanian and deconstructionist critics to task for filling in what he calls "den berühmtesten Gedankenstrick der deutschen Literatur" (197) with either unconscious feminine desire or a total aporia (197-99). I think my own reading amply demonstrates how rape fills the form and content of that dash without needing to contort the text. Where I strongly disagree with Wittkowski is his contention that "Sexus und dann Eros zusammen mit der Kriegssituation setzten die Ereignisse zwar in Gang, wurden aber unverzüglich von der ethischen Relevanz der Folgen in den Hintergrund gedrängt" (204). Far from simply setting the events of the plot in motion and then retreating, the dash and the rape it contains structure the novella at every level of form and content. Indeed, while Wittkowski polemically takes newfangled "Theoretiker" to task for quoting chunks of the text without attention to the overall Gestalt of the novella, it is worth noting once again that the story starts *in medias res* and not with the rape at all, despite Wittkowski's invocation of a linear chain of consequences. That leads me to the core of my objection to Wittkowski's reading: he makes the novel into a simple tale of individual virtue where the Officer's initial misdeed leads him into further lies until he learns from the example of the Marquise's humble selflessness in putting the notice in the newspaper and mends his ways, being rightfully welcomed into the family as a now-honorable man. This story of individual virtues being put to the test by the arbitrary interest of an individual sexual passion seems to me to ignore all that is narratively odd about the story's structure, all of which, as I suggest, can be traced back to a thematization of the conflict between individual sexual drives and the social groupings that attempt to integrate them. These formal and social elements largely disappear in Wittkowski's reading, which seeks instead to show how each individual character in the story does or does not successfully practice various Enlightenment-era virtues.



reunited after their first spouses died. The novel opens with a long discussion between them about whether they should invite friends of theirs to stay on the estate that they are remodeling. After Eduard prevails in the debate, he invites his friend the Captain to help survey his land. Overhearing Eduard reading from a technical book, Charlotte asks Eduard to explain the chemical concept he is learning about:

‘I heard you reading about relations between things [*Verwandschaften*] and at once began thinking about *my* relations [*Verwandten*], of one or two of my cousins who are rather a worry to me at present. When I began listening again I realized that it was entirely inanimate things you were reading about and I looked over your shoulder to get my bearings.’

‘It was an analogy [*Gleichnisrede*] which misled and confused you,’ said Eduard. ‘All we are concerned with here is earths and minerals, but human beings are very narcissistic, they like to see themselves everywhere and be the foil for the rest of creation.’ (29, translations from the excellent Oxford text, with the bracketed German added by me to clarify my reading)

With this pun on the double meaning of the word *Verwandschaften* (affinities / relatives), the novel introduces, in the space of discourse, a model for its own narration. As Eduard explains, elective affinities (*Wahlverwandschaften*) are the natural tendencies of different chemical substances to bond with each other.<sup>9</sup> In a rather starkly gendered debate, Charlotte finds an obvious metaphor for human relationships in the concept, while Eduard and the Captain find the analogy to be a mistaken one. The introduction of this analogy in narrative discourse, in quoted conversation from characters with different perspectives, allows Goethe to introduce a distinction between rationalized-scientific and narrative knowledge even as a similarity is asserted. Charlotte, with her more metaphorical and social cast of mind, finds the concept an illuminating comparison to human relations; the Captain and Eduard insist these domains of knowledge must be kept rigorously apart. The novel thus uses discourse to depict, without taking sides, the possibility of different affective relations to universal physical laws, suggesting narrative as a way of working out human relationships with abstract laws.

Complicating the comparison between chemical knowledge and narrative knowledge even further, Charlotte finally insists that the men supply her with a narrative example of the symbolic formula they are discussing:

‘If you don’t think it will seem pedantic,’ said the Captain in reply, ‘I can doubtless summarize what I was saying by using such symbols. Imagine an A closely bound to a B and by a variety of means and even by force not able to be separated from it; imagine a C in a similar relationship with a D; now bring the two pairs into contact; A will go over to D, C to B, without our being able to say who first left the other, who first with another was united again.’

‘Well then,’ said Eduard interrupting, ‘until we have seen all this with our own eyes we shall think of these formulae as a sort of parable [*Gleichnisrede*], out of which we can abstract a lesson for our own immediate use. You are the A, Charlotte, and I am your B: for do I not depend on you and come after you as the B does the A? The C is quite

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<sup>9</sup> The theory of chemical bonds Goethe was working from is outdated, but I think the present-day chemical concept covering most of the same semantic ground would be electronegativity.

obviously the Captain, who for the time being has to some extent taken me away from you. Now it would be right and proper, to prevent you from departing into the void, to provide you with a D, and quite without question that must be the amiable young lady Otilie, and you must not now make any further objection to her joining us.'

'Very well,' said Charlotte in reply, 'even though the illustration [*Beispiel*] does not seem to me to fit our case [*Fall*] exactly.' (35)

Within the discourse of the novel, then, the Captain supplies an abstract, universal formula describing a category of chemical reactions. Eduard, who has already been established as an enemy of pathetic fallacy, offers a "parable" that turns this universal formula ironically to account on the present, individual situation, merely for the purposes of concrete explanation. Charlotte, who has affirmed a predilection for using abstract scientific laws as useful metaphors for human relations, now demurs and says that this comparison does not fit the particulars of their narrative situation. The novel therefore uses the particulars of discourse—perspectives, metaphorical language, etc.—to establish a grounds for comparison between abstract, universal scientific laws even while undercutting them with the particulars of human affairs.

The rest of the novel's plot will continue this simultaneous validation and denial of the comparison between universal chemical laws and the vicissitudes of human social affairs. Immediately after the introduction of Otilie into their coterie, the dynamics shift, and Eduard's example becomes absurd: rather than Charlotte bonding with Otilie, Eduard feels an immediate, intense attraction to her, while Charlotte gradually realizes the Captain's charms as Eduard begins spending more time with Otilie. And yet, the overall structure of the reaction holds: despite all social laws around marriage, Eduard and Otilie cannot overcome their attraction and continually hatch plans to trade over partnerships, even after the social consequences have persuaded Charlotte and the Captain to avoid pursuing their attraction. The rigidity and abstractness of the chemical formula contributes to a curious stasis in the plot, with the situations of the characters developing little over the next two hundred pages as Eduard and Otilie fail to overcome what feels to them like a natural law of attraction. And yet, ultimately, the novel uses its plot to assert the difference between abstract formulae and a narrative understanding of social life: the characters fail to swap partners, Otilie accidentally drowns Charlotte and Eduard's baby in a tragic coincidence of events, and first Otilie and then Eduard refuse nourishment until they, too, die. While the underlying structure of attraction expressed by the formula may hold, human social laws and sheer chance prevent the realization of the partner-swapping reaction in the course of the plot. As the introduction of the formula through quoted discourse suggests, there always remains a gap between universal laws and their application to particular human affairs, even as those laws seem to assert their force on individuals.

In the chemical formula as a model for the translation of desire into narrative, we have a very different, much more traditionally "Enlightenment" view of desire and social relations than Kleist's idiosyncratic skepticism. Indeed, the chemical formula introduced at the beginning of the novel that will define and be challenged by the events of the narrative, and yet fully encompass them, could be thought of as quite the reverse of *The Marquise von O*—'s insistently *in medias res* opening. In place of weird narrative convolutions that struggle to give meaning to the socially unintelligible, the Captain's formula totally contains the structure of the novel. The tragedy of the story emerges from the gap between the rationality of the formula and the conventionality of human social relations. While Charlotte and the Captain are dissuaded from pursuing their desire for one another by the social consequences, Otilie and Eduard are unable to

turn off their desire nor to fit it into the available structures of marriage and family. Tragedy, then, emerges from narrativity, from the ways that the expression of individual desires in human social forms introduces greater frictions and convolutions than the expression of chemical attractions in the purely logical form of the chemical formula  $AB + CD \rightarrow AD + BC$ . In other words, the tragedy of Goethe's novel of unassimilable sexual desires can be expressed as a rather *typische Aufklärungsansicht*: the closer that irrational or conventional human social forms can be brought to the logical clarity of natural laws, the more that individual desires will find their fulfillment. The oft-noted, almost experimental stasis of the novel's plot tends toward a suspicion of narrative altogether: if only the events of the plot *could* be reduced to the chemical formula that serves as its metonym, tragedy could be avoided. In a fully rationalized society, Goethe's novel suggests, there would be no gap between individual desire and social forms that would need narrating, for all desires would be perfectly assimilated into their social expression.

Kleist's narratives, then, although also deeply preoccupied with the conflict between individual desire and its expression in conventional social forms, do something very different from Goethe's adultery plot. Rather than will that gap away by imagining frictionless, universalizable social relations that could be expressed by a chemical formula, Kleist's works open up narrative spaces for those unassimilable desires to operate.

To express this more sharply, let me contrast the chemical formula of *Elective Affinities* by returning to a different figure that Kleist's work offers for the way that a socially unassimilable sexual desire generates narrative: that infamous dash near the beginning of *The Marquise von O*—. Both figures occur close to the start of their respective texts and serve as metatextual commentary on the narrative structure of their texts. Both belong to an order of discourse outside the usual components of narrative fiction: a punctuation mark that acts as a lacuna and a chemical formula that expresses a non-narrative universal law. But both are also incorporated into the narrative of their respective texts.

In the case of Goethe's formula, that incorporation occurs through dialogue. Charlotte and Eduard are talking about chemistry, and in the tradition of novels of ideas, each is the partisan of a viewpoint that cannot be fully attributed to the author, with the events of the plot mediating between their respective viewpoints. Charlotte is a partisan of the idea that chemical laws can serve as useful figures, parables, or metaphors of social relations, arguing that it is not difficult "to see people of one's own acquaintance in these simple forms" and declaring herself "particularly reminded of the social circles people move in" (31). Eduard, on the other hand, cautions against conflating universal laws and human relations, seeing in this conflation a "narcissistic" longing for humans "to see themselves everywhere and be the foil for the rest of creation" (29), although he also suggests the analogy between social and chemical forces: "just as these [Charlotte's 'large social groups'] may be joined by custom and the law, so in our world of chemistry there are agents which will bind together the things that are holding one another off" (31). Ultimately, the plot's tragedy lies in the way that, as Charlotte argues, "the illustration [of this abstract chemical formula] does not seem to me to fit our case exactly" (35). The novel's plot explores to what extent Eduard's analogy of "custom and the law" to chemical forces applies in the particular situation embodied by its four characters. Ultimately, it turns out that this analogy is not apt: the friction generated by the transfer of Eduard to Otilie and Charlotte to the Captain does not have a social form that can bear its heat. The desires of the characters cannot find social expression as neat and formalizable as Eduard's formula. The resolution is tragic: rather than the elegant transfer Eduard describes, he and Otilie succumb to the social impossibility of their desires. The near-stasis of the novel's plot is resolved only by killing two

of its protagonists.

Kleist's plot, on the other hand, takes a much less linear and literal path to incorporating its metatextual figure. The dash serves as a lacuna in the moment of the plot it narrates, interrupting one of those breathless sequential narrations of actions that is characteristic of Kleist's style with an odd spatialization of the gap in narrative time it introduces: "Hier —" (659). And yet, if this dash represents a moment of unrepresentability in narrative time, the space it opens for the eruption of the Officer's socially reprehensible desire nevertheless determines both the discourse and the plot of the rest of the novella. Upon first reading, the opening of the novella relates two completely unrelated events. The first paragraph begins by mentioning the notice that the Marquise von O— will put in the newspaper asking that the father of her child make himself known to her, an event that will occur much later in the plot, and follows this event by situating the Marquise and her family socially. This social situating slides over the course of the first paragraph into a sequential narration of the events of the night that Russian troops besiege the citadel of the Marquise's father. The next paragraph narrates the events of that night in breathless detail, ending with the dash. Once the plot content of that dash becomes known to the reader, however, these two paragraphs no longer read as a causally unrelated juxtaposition of the present circumstances of the Marquise von O— and an event from her past. Instead, the dash provides a full explanation for that otherwise unaccountable opening sentence: the officer's violent indulgence of his desire, in that moment, is the impetus for the notice that the Marquise will place in the newspapers later in narrative time. The opening paragraphs, once the reader is made aware of this, are not so much *in medias res* as a version of the novella's plot in miniature. The Russian Officer, following social decorum, saves the Marquise, but then succumbing to a violent sexual desire, he rapes her in her unconsciousness. In order to bring this crime of desire into accord with the aristocratic norms of marriage, family, and lineage in which she lives, the Marquise must take this "so peculiar step attracting the world's scorn" (658).

Unlike Eduard's formula, this dash emanates directly from the narrator rather than the dialogue of characters; it is not an idea about socially unacceptable desire so much as the site of its eruption into the plot. Kleist's dash is an event of desire in the plot where Eduard's formula is an abstract, external idea about desire<sup>10</sup> introduced into the novel by dialogue rather than by plotting. While Eduard's formula provides a simple model for the plot, and the tragedy of the novel occurs insofar as the social plot fails to live up to the simplicity of that model, Kleist's dash ripples through the whole plot of the novella. Critics have often noted that the linearity of Goethe's novel approaches stasis: with the formula containing the entire story in miniature, all that happens in the plot is the inevitable tragedy when social forces prove more complicated and

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<sup>10</sup> I'm thinking here of Sianne Ngai's chapter on the novel of ideas in *Theory of the Gimmick* (109-112), where she cites a large body of scholarship theorizing the incorporation of external ideas into novels. The consensus seems largely to be that, while novels as a genre are attracted in their great flexibility to the idea as it is expressed in non-plot-based genres like the essay or the treatise, the novel of ideas tends always to treat this as external material. It is often incorporated by dialogue, and characters serve as embodiments of those ideas. There is often a fundamental opposition between the idea, as the domain of the discursive genres, and the plot, as the domain of the novel. While Ngai dates the novel of ideas proper to the late nineteenth century, this particular scene of the novel certainly incorporates features of the genre that Ngai considers characteristic, including "direct speech by characters in the forms of dramatic dialogues or monologues" and "flat allegorical characters" (110). Goethe's example is particularly interesting in this case, as the formula seems to be an external idea (or analogy) *about* plots. If the transfer of human partners happened as frictionlessly as the transfer of chemical partners, Goethe's novel suggests, there would be no need for a novel at all. The novel's entire plot would be contained in that simple formula.

less rational than chemical forces. Kleist's use of this unassimilable desire, however, suggests a much more complicated relation between individual desire and social plot. The plot content of the dash, which at first might seem empty or at least external to the plot, makes sense of the otherwise unaccountable opening of the novel. It also determines everything that follows, including the semi-comically compressed courtship plot that follows, where the Officer attempts to assimilate his violent desire into social structures by marrying the Marquise before she might become aware of the potential pregnancy resulting from his rape. The courtship fails precisely because of its compression, which causes the Marquise and her family to reject the Officer as a social oddball, which then generates the conundrum of the pregnant Marquise. Unable to countenance a pregnant daughter who is unmarried, the family cast her out, leading back to the newspaper incident that opens the discourse of the novella. Ultimately, as we have seen, the novella finds a much more complicated solution to its problematic of individual desire versus social forces than Goethe's rather conventionally tragic choice to bump off half his cast of improperly desiring characters. The uneasy solution the novella finds is a conversion of the aristocratic family itself into a social grouping formed by incestuous desire. Goethe's plot suggests the total rejection of the possibility of incorporating such unacceptable sexual desires into the social structures of the family: death, as Lee Edelman would remind us, is the ultimate anti-social drive. The convolutions of the plot introduced by the dash in Kleist's novella, on the other hand, suggest the possibility that these desires can introduce a new kind of social grouping. By introducing a sort of perverse contagion into the family, and by twisting and distorting the courtship plot out of its linear form, they can incorporate themselves into it.

### **Universals and Particulars, Ethically and Aesthetically**

What ethical and aesthetic commitments lie behind these two models of plotting socially unacceptable individual sexual desires? Here I would suggest it is high time I turn to Kant. Behind Goethe's model, I would suggest there lies a version of Kant's deontological ethical project and its Enlightenment optimism about the possibility of rationalizing human social relations. The plot of *Elective Affinities* is, I would suggest, essentially a tragic narration of the categorical imperative. The characters wish to act, in their affairs, as though they could elevate their actions to the universal laws of chemistry. Realizing, however, that the social circles in which they turn will resist so dramatic an expression of individual desire as the switching of marital partners, they discover that universal laws must succumb to the individual case when it comes to social affairs. The novel laments the tragedy of that gap and suggests a means by which it could be overcome: the Enlightenment drive to demystify and rationalize social conventions.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In thinking about this strain of German Enlightenment thought, we might look at Kant's own utopian project for elevating humanity toward its rational purposes through law. In his "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View" (written in 1784, the year before the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*), Kant suggests a progressive idea of human history. He starts from the premise that humankind's free will comes from nature and must therefore be subject to natural law, even if its results on an individual level seem to be random or arbitrary. Kant suggests that on a species level, across generations, the reason that is man's natural purpose will lead ultimately to a perfectly rational harmonizing of humankind's free will with external laws in the form of a league of harmonious states with rational civic constitutions. This perfection consists in the use of reason across the whole species over the course of many generations, which Kant claims will gradually refine individual moral inclinations into a rationalized, social whole: "Thus are taken the first true steps from barbarism to culture, which consists in the social worth of man; thence gradually develop all talents, and taste is refined; through continued

Kleist's work takes us somewhere very different in its treatment of the socially unacceptable individual desire. There is no question in *The Marquise von O*— of simply rationalizing social forms so that as many individual desires can find their happy social expression as possible. Indeed, the fulfillment of desire and the seeming happiness of the characters at the end of the novella seems to constitute its tragedy in itself. In one of Kleist's characteristically unparisable endings, the Marquise, in a desirous gesture not unlike the one with which she embraces her father when he allows her back into the family, declares "as she fell about his [the Officer's] neck: he would not have appeared like a devil to her then had he not, in his first appearance, come before her like an angel" (687). This final line layers irony on irony, with the Officer's appearance as an "angel" being in truth the moment in which he raped the Marquise and his appearance as a "devil" being the one in which he at least attempted to begin amends, all of this occurring as the Marquise converts his initial rape into a conventional scene of domestic marital bliss by fondly wrapping her arms around his neck. If there is an ethics of desire to this ending, it most certainly does not consist in the rationalization of social forms to universal laws so that they may more readily incorporate individual desire.

So what exactly is Kleist's ethical commitment here? Rather than the discovery of universally applicable ethical laws, I think we must turn here to the more socially complex realm of aesthetic judgment and its relation to the ethical realm. This is not the place for me to work out the exact relationship between Kleist and Kant; exactly how Kleist as an author related to Kant's aesthetic theories is not critical to the argument. Rather, I want to use this foray into Kant to open up the question of why socially unassimilable sexual desires play such a strong role in Kleist's prose and how the form in which he engages with them differs so strongly from his

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enlightenment the beginnings are laid for a way of thought which can in time convert the coarse, natural disposition for moral discrimination into definite practical principles, and thereby change a society of men driven together by their natural feelings into a moral whole." Throughout the essay, Kant metaphorically compares this search for a "universal history" of mankind to the discovery of natural laws and repeatedly compares the dynamics of social interaction to the laws of physics and chemistry. For example, he writes in the introduction, "We wish to see if we can succeed in finding a clue to such a history; we leave it to Nature to produce the man capable of composing it. Thus Nature produced Kepler, who subjected, in an unexpected way, the eccentric paths of the planets to definite laws; and she produced Newton, who explained these laws by a universal natural cause." In addition, we can place Kant's essay in the context of my argument about individual sexual desire as a literary figure for non-rationalizable individual inclinations. Kant's *own* figure for the way that the seemingly arbitrary individual exercise of free will is in fact governed by rational natural laws is the individual choice to marry and conceive children compared to the regularity of marriage and birthrates, which he then analogizes to the natural phenomena of the weather: "Since the free will of man has obvious influence upon marriages, births, and deaths, they seem to be subject to no rule by which the number of them could be reckoned in advance. Yet the annual tables of them in the major countries prove that they occur according to laws as stable as [those of] the unstable weather, which we likewise cannot determine in advance, but which, in the large, maintain the growth of plants the flow of rivers, and other natural events in an unbroken uniform course." Relating this to the question of the social integration of individual desires, Kant suggests that it is precisely the "unsocial sociability" of "man" that will bring about this state of perfectly rationalized social and ethical relations. His Fourth Thesis declares, "*The means employed by Nature to bring about the development of all the capacities of men is their antagonism in society, so far as this is, in the end, the cause of a lawful order among men.*" Goethe's narrative, I would suggest, reflects tragically on the failure of this utopia in the present while pointing longingly toward this desired future. Kleist's narratives in contrast suggest a radical skepticism about the dialectical neatness of Kant's "unsocial sociability," pointing toward the ways that social forms can collude with and even absorb "unsocial" inclinations without elevating or refining themselves or the "unsociability."

Many thanks to Kyle Ralston, who brought my attention to this short programmatic statement of German Enlightenment moral and social ambition.

contemporaries and what implications for the literary and sexual history I am tracing here that difference might have. To give a brief historical justification of the introduction of Kantian aesthetic theory here, it is worth mentioning Kleist's so-called "*Kant-Krise*."<sup>12</sup> The received story is that a young Kleist, very interested in contributing to the project of universal knowledge promised by Enlightenment methodologies in the natural sciences, began his study. He quickly abandoned it, amid a total upheaval in his emotional life and sense of self, upon learning of the limits to epistemology proposed in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Thereafter, he reassembled his shattered sense of self by a turn toward artistic production, yet nevertheless this decisive encounter with Kant's proof of the limits of human reason dogged his remaining days (and his artistic output) with the stormy, ironic skepticism so characteristic of him. More recent scholarship has generally suggested that this neatly Romantic *Bildungsnarrativ* is indeed a little messier and more mundane than the rather Wertherian form it takes in some of the early scholarship. For one, it is unclear that Kleist ever actually engaged directly with Kant's writing; it is likely he merely heard a general summary of the conclusions Kant draws in the First Critique. For another, Kleist, like most any young student, had other sources of emotional distress and personal upheaval in his life during this period than merely *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Extrapolating so much from a single diary entry to a universal key for Kleist's subsequent work is, perhaps, merely a just-so story that is irresistible to us literary scholars for its narrative coherence and its inflation of the power of dry rigorous writing and ideas to determine an otherwise inexplicably odd and powerful artistic output.

To that end, I think what I can most clearly extract from the story of the *Kant-Krise* is that, very much unlike Goethe, Kleist early lost faith in a utopian project of rigorously uniting natural science and the arts in a grand totality of knowledge-making. He gave up natural science for art-making. In further justifying a turn toward aesthetic theory over ethics in pursuing this thought about Kleist's work, it is also worth a look at Kleist's somewhat enigmatic essayish-short-story on aesthetics, "On the Marionette Theater" (1801). The story is obsessed with questions of how to interpret the aesthetic concepts of beauty and grace when they appear in creatures or objects that do not share the human social world of desires, wills, and cultural meanings. The narrator relates an encounter with a dancer, who attends the marionette theater because he finds that there is something to be learned from the graceful movements of the puppets. When the narrator asks whether the puppeteer must have "an understanding of the aesthetic of dance" (23), the dancer responds by giving an almost hyperbolically mathematically rigorous description of the relation between the curves described by the puppeteer's hand movements and those described by the marionettes, all to support the theory that a certain level of "feeling" or "intellect" in the puppeteer is necessary to create the puppets' graceful movements (23). The dancer himself, however, declares that what he truly desires in his aesthetic pursuit of the marionette theater is an entirely mechanical puppet, with no human "affectation" or expressiveness at all (24). The narrator responds with a story about "how consciousness creates disorder in the natural harmony of man" (24). He relates a tale of a childhood friend who, beginning to become aware of his sex appeal to women, once accidentally struck an effortlessly

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<sup>12</sup> I am drawing this quick account from the first chapter of Tim Mehigan's *Heinrich von Kleist: Writing After Kant*, which is very invested in the question of just how Kleist was or was not exposed to Kant. He concedes that it's very possible Kleist never read Kant directly, though he makes an indirect case that he did. Frankly, I'm simply not that interested in the exact contours of Kleist's understanding of Kant because I'm not trying to make a direct cause-and-effect argument about philosophical influence; it's plenty to go on, to me, that Kleist lived in a milieu pervaded by the general worldview that Kant's works metonymically embody.

graceful pose resembling that of a statue he once saw. Trying to reproduce the movement, he is never again able to capture its grace, leading to what the narrator describes as a complete degradation of his character into fruitless vanity. (The final story is, of course, the infamous one about a trained bear that is very good at fencing.) This second story, which has attracted far less critical attention than the others,<sup>13</sup> is worth lingering on: we have a tale of youth who, realizing his budding sexiness, attempts to pose in the form given by a beautiful statue. This attempt to conform his body to an artistic ideal saps his sex appeal. The narrator derails the boy's development with his laughter at the ludicrously self-conscious attempt to strike the pose. Not only does he lose his "natural charm," but "one virtue after another dropped away from him" (25), a sort of failed *Bidungsnarrativ* that ends, seemingly, with the narrator cutting social ties with the boy. While the thrust of Kleist's essay is clearly in the direction of contemporary aesthetic theory about categories like "grace" and "self-consciousness" (see, for example, Pourciau 56-57), the narrative form of this treatise introduces other elements that should be familiar from my close readings: socially disapproved sexual desire ("vanity"), a derailed *Bildung* plot, disruption in social relations ("the natural harmony of man"). At stake in aesthetic judgments of taste, it seems, is nothing less than the harmony of social relations and the whole development of a young man's ethical-social life.

In this way, then, I would suggest that if we can analogize the structure of Goethe's adultery tale with the Kantian project of formalizing ethics, Kleist's stories of socially unassimilable sexual desires point instead toward the knottier question of aesthetic judgments and sociality. In Kant's "Analytic of the Beautiful," he distinguishes between three kinds of delight: the agreeable, the beautiful, and the good. In the course of his analysis, we learn that one major distinction between agreeableness and beauty (the two properly aesthetic judgments) is how they relate to the social world: "Agreeableness is a significant factor even with irrational animals; beauty has purport and significance only for human beings; i.e. for beings at once animal and rational (but not merely for them as rational—intelligent beings—but only for them as at once animal and rational); whereas the good is good for every rational being in general" (49). Famously, agreeableness is "private" (because merely related to subjective sense perception) while beauty is "public" (54), a "subjective universal" (55), finding "the rule in respect of which it looks for confirmation, not from concepts [like "the good" in Kant's schema], but from the concurrence of others" (56). Right in the heart of Kant's project, then, there lie judgments that concern humans as both irrational animals and rational humans, in both their private sensations and their public judgments. And here, I suggest, is the domain where Kleist's stories make so much use of individualistically deviant sexual desire and its place in the social order. Sexual desire serves as a potent example of the "irrational animal inclination," to use Kant's language, while nevertheless being a universal state that requires public forms and social relations for its gratification and expression. In judging the appropriateness of this taste, Kleist's works suggest, intensely felt individual inclination runs up against historically contingent but strict social forms (Amazonian society, the Catholic Church, the feudal aristocratic family), and no logical universal rule can be given to adjudicate between them.

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<sup>13</sup> A quick trip through the rather thorough literature review Sarah Pourciau offers in footnote 2 of her impressive 2015 reading of Kleist's essay, for example, reveals several essays taking the puppet dancers for their title and only one essay that takes the story of the youth looking in the mirror for its own title. Even that essay, William Ray's "Suspended in the Mirror: Language and the Self in Kleist's 'Über das Marionettentheater,'" moves very quickly from the story of the youth to the other stories, asserting that the image of the self looking at its own image in a mirror that contradicts its intentions is a microcosm of the structure of the other anecdotes in the essay (531-32).



### Regionalisms of Taste and Desire

If the social groupings in Kleist's stories deal often with faraway places and transnational conflict—the Catholic Church, the Napoleonic wars and their armies, the clash between Greek and Amazonian cultures—*Wuthering Heights* (1847) is claustrophobically regionalist in its Gothic tale of the ugly transformations of socially thwarted desire. Where Kleist's tales deal in questions of the place of individual desire in nation-building and a universal schema of ethics, *Wuthering Heights*, from its very title, is insistently focused on the attempt to integrate individual desire into a tiny region where seemingly every character has an infinite number of blood relations with every other one. Nevertheless, I would assert that it is not merely idiosyncratic to read these very different texts together. Both Kleist and Brontë's work share a similar reception history because of similar oddities of form. Kleist was widely read by the literary luminaries of his era, like Goethe, but often with bafflement. The grotesque mixtures of tone and idiosyncrasies of plot into which his fixation on socially unassimilable desires led him won him both admiration and confusion, as his works were difficult to place precisely in the literary currents of the time, whether Neoclassical or Romantic. Goethe famously responded to a letter that Kleist sent him with a fragment from his 1808 *Penthesilea*, "With Penthesilea, I cannot yet make friends. She is from such a wonderful race [*Geschlecht*] and moves in such a foreign region that I must take time to orient myself in both. Allow me also to say to you (for when one ought not be frank, it would be better for one to be silent altogether), that it always disappoints and concerns me when I see young men of spirit and talent who are waiting for a theater that is yet to come [*welches da kommen soll*]" (409, translation mine, qtd. on Griffiths 453-54). As Griffiths puts it, "Goethe's sense of the unintentionally comic aspects of *Penthesilea* is closely related to his inability—or perhaps unwillingness—to engage with the play as an exploration of gender roles, or with less harmonious representations of the classical world" (454). Or to put it more simply, Goethe's confusion with Kleist's work relates to its uncategorizable relation to genre, in both the literary and the sexual senses.

Likewise, the very extremity of passion and insistence on hinging her plot on social behaviors that critics felt made for poor literary material caused Brontë's novel to be received initially with a mixture of admiration, confusion, and even a little moral reprimand. Early critics strained to place Brontë in a literary tradition. "This is a strange book," begins the unsigned review published in *Examiner* in 1848 (cited in the Norton Critical edition, 276). They reached back to early Gothic novels<sup>14</sup> and even, tellingly, "those irregular German tales."<sup>15</sup> Part of my argument in placing these texts together, despite the differences in their concerns and contexts, then, is that it is the very formal features that I am identifying that made these works so hard to place in their original literary context.

<sup>14</sup> The Norton Critical Edition of the novel reprints an unsigned 1847 review from H.F. Chorley published in *Athenaeum*: "It was a like dreariness—a like unfortunate selection of objects—which cut short the popularity of Charlotte Smith's novels,—rich though they be in true pathos and faithful descriptions of Nature" (qtd. on 272).

<sup>15</sup> 1848 *Britannia* review cited in the Norton Critical Edition: "It is humanity in this wild state that the author of *Wuthering Heights* essays to depict. His work is strangely original. It bears a resemblance to some of those irregular German tales in which the writers, giving the reins to their fancy, represent personages as swayed and impelled to evil by supernatural influences. But they give spiritual identity to evil impulses, while Mr. Bell more naturally shows them as the natural offspring of the unregulated heart" (279). Note also how this review picks up on the question of human "nature" versus "the unregulated heart," which itself gets caught up in a reproductive metaphor with the image of "natural offspring."

As a starting point, I follow Nancy Armstrong's argument in her classic study, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*:

I am convinced there is a direct relationship between the historical importance of their fiction and the difficulty we have historicizing the Brontës; they had more to do with formulating universal forms of subjectivity than any other novelists. If today their writing seems unrelated to history, it is because they perfect tropes to distinguish fiction from historically bound writing. These tropes translated all kinds of political information into psychological terms. As they displaced the facts and figures of social history, the Brontës began producing new figures of desire that detached the desiring self from place, time, and material cause. Never mind that Heathcliff comes from the streets of Liverpool and that Brontë sets the date of his appearance in the novel around the time of the provincial hunger riots (1766). By the end of *Wuthering Heights* he has become a phantasm of unfulfilled sexual desire. (186)

While Armstrong's argument focuses on the "figures of modern desire" (191) and the desiring subject that *Wuthering Heights* produces, I am more interested in Kleist's and Brontë's *narratives* of modern desire. I suggest that these formal features emerge out of an analogous attempt to work out a proper narrative form for the integration of socially marginal sexual desires into existing social forms. In both cases, what results are texts that make use of familiar plot arcs—the *Bildungsroman* and the courtship plot—yet distort them into shapes that contemporary critics had difficulty fitting into the formal categories of their period. My later chapters will make a case for a retrospective lineage of such texts, but much like this bringing together of Brontë and Kleist, it will be a lineage of works that resist, in their very form and their concern with such inchoate categories of desire, the linearity of lineage: a lineage of un-likenesses.

Turning our attention now to *Wuthering Heights*, we have a novel just as concerned with individual desire, but rather than nation-state or Church, its plot turns on how that desire can fit into the claustrophobic world of British rural-aristocratic manners and lineages. Where Kleist's prose relies on disruptions of linear narrative time to figure the moments where the irruption of individual desire threatens the linear narrative of social integration, *Wuthering Heights* relies most thoroughly on its frame plot. The frame plot allows the novel to work through the social implications of its story of the failure of Heathcliff's socially unacceptable desires to cohere into the family structure that the novel critiques. Through the frame story, characters who exist outside the novel's hermetic family structures—namely, the narrators Mr. Lockwood, the renter; and Nelly, the servant—become implicated in the singular desires of Heathcliff that prevent his integration into marriage and family. The sociality that this frame story introduces is a strange, equivocal one: at moments, Mr. Lockwood is so intrigued by the tale that Nelly tells, he almost takes on Heathcliff's desires and comes close to becoming romantically involved with the characters of the plot, and yet this never quite happens. There is a certain *pedagogical* quality to this frame story, where Lockwood almost imitates Heathcliff's singular desires, a plot development that never quite occurs and that would unravel the whole structure of the plot, with its reliance on the closure of the two families and the impossibility of expressing Heathcliff's passionate, violent desires within them. This failed pedagogical relation, where Heathcliff's desires almost, but don't quite, teach Lockwood how to desire, expresses in the very structure of the novel's plot the strange sociality of Heathcliff's unassimilable desires: a sort of sociality in his very antisociality. In the upcoming chapters, we will see these two narrative strategies again

in the context of two novels that explicitly treat desires that comport with modern categories of kink and fetish: *Venus in Furs* (1870) likewise treats its sadomasochistic plot in an explicitly pedagogical frame story, while *The Confusions of Young Törleß* (1906) makes use of a flash-forward to describe the equivocal *Bildung* of its narrator who participates in sadistic homosexual bullying at a boys' school.

### An Awfully Perverted Discourse

*“Catherine had an awfully perverted taste to esteem him so dearly, knowing him so well. Monster!” (133)*

*Wuthering Heights* is a *Bildungsroman* as much as it is a series of unhappy marriage plots. This is not a new observation, of course<sup>16</sup>; the novel's characters are explicitly obsessed with questions of whether Heathcliff is bad by birth or by abuse and miseducation, and Heathcliff himself declares his rearing of Hareton to be an “experiment” in the effects of education on natural inclination. What I want to explore in this section of the chapter, however, is how thoroughly the questions of *Bildung* and marriage plots are integrated into not just the imagery or dialogue of the novel but also its *narrative* structure. As my epigraph for this section suggests, the training or education of *desire* is where these two aspects of the novel meet. Taste emerges in the novel as an aesthetic faculty combining both pedagogy and “breeding,” and it is a taste for certain kinds of desire whose expression leads to the novel's “perverted” plot structure. It's not a new observation, either, that the novel is obsessed with images of pleasure in inflicting and enduring suffering. As Terry Eagleton puts it in his 2004 introduction to his classic 1975 Marxist study of the Brontë's novels, “[A]lmost all human relationships in the Brontës are essentially power struggles, and ... these conflicts commonly assume a sado-masochistic form” (xvii). Indeed, even Charlotte Brontë, in her introduction to the 1850 edition of the novel republished after her sister's death, declared, “Nor is even the first heroine of the name [Catherine] destitute of a certain strange beauty in her fierceness, or of honesty in the midst of perverted passion and passionate perversity” (cited in the Norton Critical Edition, 308). Heathcliff is the greatest inflictor of suffering in the novel, but he also accuses various characters of sharing his sadistic taste, whether by miseducation (in the case of his adoptive brother's son

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<sup>16</sup> Marianne Thormählen addresses this taxonomic question at the beginning of her 2007 monograph-length study, *The Brontës and Education*, as follows:

“In view of the importance of education in the Brontë fiction, it might have seemed natural to discuss these works as *Bildungsromane*, and *Jane Eyre* has often been cited as an example of that genre. However, none of the terms offered by the relevant conceptual arsenal fits even the majority of the novels well enough to form a useful terminological implement. While *Bildung*, *Entwicklung* and *Erziehung* are highly relevant to them all, the process of maturation is not the core issue in them. Self-education projects in the works of the Brontës do not stop with well-adjusted adulthood, nor are they limited to successful socialisation in this world. The end towards which storylines tend is not an adult in harmony with society, but an adult in harmony with herself as part of the Creation, including its spiritual and imaginative-creative aspects. For a Brontë protagonist to lead a successful life, he or she must have an answer to the question posed by the apprehensive teenager Helen Lawrence on the brink of a disastrous marriage: ‘What shall I do with the serious part of myself?’ (*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall XXII.190*)” (4). As the invocation of “disastrous marriage” at the end of Thormählen's remark suggests, questions of the individual against society, education, and marriage are entangled in *Wuthering Heights* in a way that both invokes and resists any easy label of *Bildungsroman* or marriage plot.

Hareton) or by inherited nature (in the case of his own son Linton).<sup>17</sup> Likewise, the novel questions whether or not other characters might be picking up these perverse tastes, whether by nature or by contagion, as when Nelly suggests that Catherine “seemed to have made up her mind to enter into the spirit of her future family, and draw pleasure from the griefs of her enemies” (217), an odd mixture of “choice” and “family” inheritance.

What I want to draw out in this section, however, is just how thoroughly the expression of these “tastes” structures the plotting of the novel. The whole novel struggles to find a linear narrative form in which it can narrate the impossibility of Heathcliff’s consummation of his thwarted desire for Catherine. As Terry Eagleton tantalizingly writes in that same 2004 introduction to *Myths of Power* (though unfortunately the reading in the body of that chapter does not take into account the frame story at all), “At [*Wuthering Heights*’s] core lies something alien and recalcitrant, some need or passion which resists being fully articulated, and which for both good and ill plays havoc with the stability of the social order. It also plays havoc with the stability of the classical realist text, garbling its chronology, embedding one narrative within another like Chinese boxes, and refusing the reader a reassuring voice-over” (xix). Disallowed from marriage because of his unknown parentage and lack of a patronym, Heathcliff’s desire for Catherine is displaced (or, we might say, “perverted”) into a sadistic torturing of his rivals and their kin. But the forms his torture takes themselves become part of the novel’s structure of aborted, multiplied, monstrous, and grotesque marriage and *Bildung* plots. Heathcliff’s violent desire for Catherine becomes a series of miseducations into sadomasochism and marriages under force. The nephews, nieces, and cousins that result from these plots then themselves become subjects of the novel’s perverse *Bildung* and marriage plots. The novel struggles to find closure for any of these narratives within the bounds of the two aristocratic families at its center by any means other than death. While the frame story that structures the novel—the servant of the two families, Nelly, narrating these events to the novel’s ultimate narrator, the stranger and tenant Lockwood—seems to offer a conventional way out of this claustrophobic tale of family decline and unconsummated desire, the novel refuses to take it.<sup>18</sup> Instead it ends, finally, in a union that unites its concerns of pedagogy and displaced desire. In the spirit of *Wuthering Heights*’s severely convoluted plot, we will return to that point at the end of this section.

Let me begin by analyzing more closely the mechanics of the novel’s plot. The initial distortion of the plot structure outside the linearity of the marriage plot begins with the frame story. The first three chapters of the novel open with Lockwood’s narration and occur near the end of the novel’s narrated time. This frame story opens with a double misrecognition: the slightly clueless narrator, Lockwood, sees in Heathcliff a “capital fellow” who forms with him “a suitable pair to divide the desolation between us” (3), and he sees in his household something like the intact aristocratic family that results from the ending of the conventional marriage plot. In the first several pages, both of these misrecognitions are systematically revealed. Lockwood at first “bestow[s] my own attributes over-liberally on” Heathcliff (5) and seems to find a sort of asocial sociability in identifying a shared misanthropy with Heathcliff. By the second chapter,

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<sup>17</sup> Heathcliff: “... I don’t like you [Cathy] well enough to hurt him [Linton]: you shall get the full benefit of the torment, as long as it lasts. It is not I who will make him hateful to you—it is his own sweet spirit. ... I heard him draw a pleasant picture to Zillah of what he would do, if he were as strong as I. The inclination is there, and his very weakness will sharpen his wits to find a substitute for strength” (217).

<sup>18</sup> “What a realization of something more romantic than a fairy tale it would have been for Mrs. Linton Heathcliff, had she and I struck up an attachment, as her good nurse desired, and migrated together into the stirring atmosphere of the town!” (230)

however, “I no longer felt inclined to call Heathcliff a capital fellow” (10). Nevertheless, despite this immediate dis-identification from Heathcliff, at critical moments throughout the novel, as Lockwood listens to Nelly’s tale, he finds himself having to resist taking on Heathcliff’s desires. For example, after Nelly has narrated Catherine’s mental-physical crisis that results from her being forced to choose between Heathcliff and her future husband Edward, the first volume ends with Lockwood telling himself, “[L]et me beware of the fascination that lurks in Catherine Heathcliff’s brilliant eyes. I should be in a curious taking if I surrendered my heart to that young person, and the daughter turned out a second edition of the mother” (120). Likewise, it will take most of the novel to unravel just how badly Lockwood blunders in identifying Heathcliff and Cathy as the happy lord and lady of the house.<sup>19</sup> For the perverted household that Lockwood encounters in the first pages of the novel, then, a perverted narrative structure. The frame story of the novel opens right near—but not quite *at*—the end of its combined marriage-*Bildung* plot. It then looks back almost forty years when Lockwood encounters the servant Nelly and asks her the story of how the occupants of Wuthering Heights came to occupy all the perverted household roles—the lady who is a captive, the lord who is a servant, the father who is a usurper. To explain this family that, on the surface, contains all the proper roles of an aristocratic household, yet conceals beneath that surface a series of abortive courtship and *Bildung* plots that have resulted in the broken family structure that Lockwood encounters in the opening scene, the novel must unfold in a convoluted narrative structure that only reaches the narrated time of its opening in its final pages.

The frame story structure, then, seems to do two interrelated things. First, it provides a social framework for the otherwise extreme private domesticity and regionality of the novel. Second, it places the plot out of order and allows it to suggest, and then rescind, more conventional narrative closures. The two characters who tell the story are the only two substantial characters in the novel, besides some instrumental characters like the family doctor and the curious case of the other major named domestic servantm Joseph, who do not belong to the families at its center. Lockwood, in particular, stands as the only character in the novel who comes from “the town” (besides Heathcliff before his adoption into the Earnshaw family). This serves the more mundane narrative function of providing a pretext for the novel to explain some of its regionalisms to a character who stands in for an audience ignorant of the place, as when Lockwood pedantically (and portentously) records that “Wuthering” is “a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult” (4). At a deeper level, even this expository device reveals a link in the novel between regionalism and pedagogy: Lockwood is curious about Wuthering Heights because its very social isolation, and the incestuously closed family structures both resulting from and standing in for it, seem to promise to teach him something more general through their very peculiarity. Thus, although Lockwood “had determined to hold myself independent of all social intercourse” (26), he immediately enters into social relations at his new home of Thrushcross Grange by asking Nelly to teach him how the family he

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<sup>19</sup> Lockwood: “[I]t is strange how custom can mould our tastes and ideas; many could not imagine the existence of happiness in a life of such complete exile from the world as you spend, Mr. Heathcliff; yet, I’ll venture to say, that, surrounded by your family, and with your amiable lady as the presiding genius over your home and heart—” (11). Notice how Lockwood’s mistake here unites several of the themes we are concerned with. From the start, Lockwood suggests that sociality is a matter of “custom” and “tastes” but places the family structure outside the realm of custom. Immediately, Heathcliff pounces on this assumption to rebuff Lockwood’s attempt at a sociality in shared misanthropy. Heathcliff’s interjection—“My amiable lady!” he interrupted, with an almost diabolical sneer on his face”—reveals that what takes the form of an aristocratic household on its surface is in fact itself the result of his own “diabolical” tastes.

encountered at Wuthering Heights came to take on its form that so outwardly resembles the conventional one while so inwardly perverting it.

In asking this, he already unwittingly reveals a desire that imitates Heathcliff's, with a difference: "“Oh, I'll turn the talk on my landlord's family!” I thought to myself. ‘A good subject to start—and that pretty girl-widow, I should like to know her history: whether she be a native of the country, or, as is more probable, an exotic that the surly *indigenae* will not recognize for kin’” (27). Unbeknownst to Lockwood, Cathy is indeed a “native,” and moreover one who shares her name and physical features with the beloved of Heathcliff, who himself is no “surly *indigenae*,” but rather adopted kin to the Earnshaw family. The transition of narrative perspective from Lockwood to Nelly, then, occurs at a complex nexus of the local and the outsider, of desire and pedagogy, of kin and lover. What Lockwood expresses to Nelly as a desire to learn more about his landlord's family is really a fantasy of saving the “exotic” “pretty girl-widow” from the locals. Yet in attempting to disidentify himself from Heathcliff, whom he initially read as a fellow misanthrope, Lockwood unwittingly mimics the very desire of Heathcliff that ultimately results in Cathy's forced confinement to his household. As he will, eventually, learn from Nelly's long unraveling of the tale, it is in fact *Heathcliff* who entered the Earnshaw family as an outsider and came to desire Catherine. It was this very outsider status that prevented Heathcliff and Catherine from marrying in the first place. In place of consummating his desire for Catherine, Heathcliff contents himself with torturing her daughter, who happens to share her name. In an immensely convoluted way that only becomes clear near the novel's end, then, Lockwood's very request to learn more about Heathcliff's household, which he imagines will arm him with knowledge to free Cathy from it, in fact repeats Heathcliff's own desire. In asking to learn the story of Heathcliff's perverse household, Lockwood the outsider implicates himself in it.

The passing of narrative perspective from Lockwood to Nelly, therefore, marks a moment where Lockwood identifies himself with Heathcliff's desire in the very act of trying to remove himself from “social intercourse” with him. Nelly likewise has an equivocal relationship to kin and care as she takes up the narrative from Lockwood. Nelly positions herself, in the moment of taking up the story, as a moralist, someone removed enough from the events of the tale to reflect on them and extract a lesson to impart to Lockwood. As she does periodically throughout her tale, Nelly quickly abstracts a general moral lesson from Lockwood's question about Heathcliff's peculiarities: “With this intention [to “know” Cathy's “history”] I asked Mrs. Dean why Heathcliff let Thrushcross Grange, and preferred living in a situation and residence so much inferior. . . . ‘Rich, sir!’ she returned. ‘He has, nobody knows what money, and every year it increases. . . . It is strange people should be so greedy, when they are alone in the world!’” (27). And yet, although Nelly positions herself as a narrator-pedagogue, her tale soon implicates her desires, too. Although Nelly does not explicitly make the connection, much like Heathcliff, she too holds an equivocal kin position in the Earnshaw family. Her story begins, “I was almost always at Wuthering Heights, because my mother had nursed Mr. Hindley Earnshaw, that was Hareton's father, and I got used to playing with the children. I ran errands too, and helped to make hay, and hung about the farm ready for anything that anybody would set me to” (29). Much like Heathcliff, then, Nelly was non-kin who was raised as kin with the Earnshaws. What seems to set her kin/non-kin position apart from Heathcliff's is that she was expected to run “errands” and perform farm labor from the beginning of her life. Heathcliff, however, we soon learn, was exempted from domestic labor far longer than Nelly because he was Mr. Earnshaw's favorite. As revenge for taking his place in the family and his biological father's affections,

Hindley Earnshaw demotes Heathcliff to domestic servitude, as well as deprives him of his pedagogy, when he becomes the head of the household after Mr. Earnshaw's sudden death. Hindley "drove him [Heathcliff] from their company to the servants, deprived him of the instructions of the curate, and insisted that he should labour out of doors instead, compelling him to do so, as hard as any other lad on the farm. Heathcliff bore his degradation pretty well at first, because Cathy taught him what she learnt, and worked or played with him in the fields. They both promised fair to grow up as rude as savages" (37), Nelly explains. In this interval between kinship and servitude, then, Heathcliff gains both a formal education and a mutual desire for Catherine. This desire, somewhat paradoxically, seems possible precisely *because* Heathcliff is raised as kin much longer than Nelly, who works as a servant even as she remains a playmate to the Earnshaws. Furthermore, Nelly's own education comes not from quasi-kinship with aristocrats, but from the asocial pedagogy of auto-didacticism: "I have undergone sharp discipline which has taught me wisdom; and then, I have read more than you would fancy, Mr. Lockwood" (50). Nevertheless, if the difference in their positions seems to foreclose intrafamilial desire for Nelly, she still shares an odd quasi-kin position with Heathcliff.

Much later in the novel, this quasi-kinship will be reactivated precisely when Nelly's desiring investment in the story she narrates is fulfilled. It is worthwhile to quote this passage in full, as this section will end by again looking at Cathy and Hareton's union:

When this slight disagreement [between Cathy and Hareton] was over, they were thick again, and as busy as possible, in their several occupations, of pupil and teacher. I came in to sit with them, after I had done my work, and I felt so soothed and comforted to watch them, that I did not notice how time got on. You know, they both appeared, in a measure, my children: I had long been proud of one, and now, I was sure, the other would be a source of equal satisfaction. His honest, warm, and intelligent nature shook off rapidly the clouds of ignorance and degradation in which it had been bred; and Catherine's sincere commendations acted as a spur to his industry. (243)

In another paradox of the natural versus the educated, Hareton seemingly becomes Nelly's adoptive child not because she has performed so much motherly care labor on his behalf, but because he is now "a source of equal satisfaction" after Catherine's instructions (somasochistic ones, it turns out—a point to which we will return) disperse "the clouds of ignorance and degradation in which it ['his nature'] had been bred." This "breeding," which Heathcliff carries out as a form of sadistic revenge on Hareton's father for reducing Heathcliff to an uneducated servant, consists precisely in a *lack* of formal education. In this image, Catherine's education does not cultivate Hareton's natural-born state of ignorance but rather sloughs off a layer of imposed ignorance to reveal an "honest, warm, and intelligent nature." And in Nelly's telling, it is precisely this cultural process of educating Hareton into his "nature" that also makes him and Cathy appear as "my children." Through the process of education, which restores Hareton to a state of nature, the children finally become Nelly's natural kin. Thus, the story that Nelly tells Lockwood, which she seems to be able to tell as a morality tale precisely because she is one of the only characters in the story who is not implicated in its dynamics of familial desire, ultimately offers no lesson to Lockwood but rather incorporates Nelly into the family by this final image of pedagogy-leading-to-marriageability. While Nelly at first seems to serve as the story's frame narrator because she takes part in the narrative action and yet stands at a remove from the closed system of familial desires that drive it, ultimately she reveals her own

desirous and interested investment in the story.

This becomes clearer in the moments of the novel that revert from the ongoing plot to the frame story. I have already mentioned the moment that closes the first volume of the novel when Lockwood warns himself, “[L]et me beware of the fascination that lurks in Catherine Heathcliff’s brilliant eyes. I should be in a curious taking if I surrendered my heart to that young person, and the daughter turned out a second edition of the mother” (120), a moment where he seems to acknowledge that listening to this tale may implicate him in Heathcliff’s desires. Volume II makes this warning of the reproducibility of desire almost punnily overliteral, as the novel resumes by dispensing with the frame story altogether and subsuming Lockwood’s voice into Nelly’s: “I’ll continue it in her [Nelly’s] own words, only a little condensed. She is, on the whole, a very fair narrator and I don’t think I could improve her style” (121). The irony of this sentence, which becomes clear only much later when the narrated time of the novel finally catches up to the frame story, is that the pedagogical “fair”ness of Nelly’s narration of Volume II in fact conceals her desire to create a bond between Cathy and Lockwood that would be a “second edition of the mother” (and Heathcliff). While Lockwood initially asks Nelly to tell the story so he can get closer to Cathy, it turns out that Nelly’s own investment in the story is precisely to implicate Lockwood in it:

“These things happened last winter, sir,” said Mrs. Dean; “hardly more than a year ago. Last winter, I did not think, at another twelve months’ end, I should be amusing a stranger to the family with relating them! Yet who knows how long you’ll be a stranger? You’re too young to rest always contented, living by yourself; and I some way fancy no one could see Catherine Linton, and not love her. You smile; but why do you look so lively and interested, when I talk about her? and why have you asked me to hang her picture over your fireplace? and why—”

“Stop, my good friend!” I cried. “It may be very possible that I should love her; but would she love me? I doubt it too much to venture my tranquillity [sic] by running into temptation; and then my home is not here. I’m of the busy world, and to its arms I must return.” (194)

When the novel finally returns to the frame story in the second volume, then, Nelly begins to encourage the desire for Cathy that she sees in Lockwood—a desire that, as we have already seen, inadvertently repeats Heathcliff’s own position as an outsider from the family who wanted to marry Catherine. The very end of Nelly’s narration, when the events she narrates finally reach the present of Lockwood’s frame story that opens the novel, ends with an implicit appeal to Lockwood to intervene by consummating his desire for Cathy in a marriage:

At first, on hearing this account from Zillah, I determined to leave my situation, take a cottage, and get Catherine to come and live with me; but Mr. Heathcliff would as soon permit that, as he would set up Hareton in an independent house; and I can see no remedy, at present, unless she could marry again; and that scheme, it does not come within my province to arrange.

Thus ended Mrs. Dean’s story. (225)

What seemed at first, then, like a story Nelly tells from the distance of non-kin with no desiring investment in the events is revealed as a narrative pedagogy of desire. In telling the



story, Nelly hopes to encourage the desire for Cathy she sees incipient in Lockwood. This will bring about her desired outcome of removing Cathy from the closed, incestuous, cyclical, regional pattern of desires that drives the plot by introducing her to a “stranger” and bringing her into what Lockwood calls the “busy world.” But this narrative thread ultimately frays. When Lockwood finally wrests the narration back from Nelly and the frame story collides with the present of the novel’s action, Lockwood extricates himself by declaring, “What a realization of something more romantic than a fairy tale it would have been for Mrs. Linton Heathcliff, had she and I struck up an attachment, as her good nurse desired, and migrated together into the stirring atmosphere of the town!” (230). At the moment that the normally slightly clueless Lockwood has the opportunity to undo the damage of Heathcliff’s thwarted desires by consummating them, he instead describes Nelly’s implicit desire with surprising clarity. And he rejects them on the grounds that they would be narratively unsatisfying: too neat, too simplistic, too “romantic” and “fairy tale”ish. The lesson Lockwood, and we as readers, learn from Nelly’s story, then, is that a straightforward marriage by a stranger from outside the family and the region is too simplistic a solution to the problems of desire, kinship, and pedagogy that the novel raises. Only something less linear, more convoluted, and more perverse can resolve the narrative complexities raised by Heathcliff and Catherine’s thwarted mutual desire. As we have seen, it turns out that that solution is the sadomasochistic roleplay of the “occupations, of pupil and teacher” between the cousins Cathy and Hareton. This roleplay reveals Hareton’s naturally intelligent nature, transforms the enmity between the two into desire, and makes their marriage socially acceptable. But what kind of desire demands this bizarre consummation? It is time I take a closer look at the dynamics of Heathcliff and Cathy’s desires that drive Nelly’s convoluted narrative.

### **Cruel Heathcliff, My Only Master**

Tracing the origin of the novel’s perversely non-linear frame story that Nelly tells in an attempt to implicate Lockwood in the desires of the novel’s characters, it all begins with a straightforward marriage plot. Or, more accurately, the origin of Cathy’s predicament that Lockwood could solve by marriage begins precisely when Heathcliff and Catherine are unable to fit their desire for one another into a marriage plot. Once Catherine and Hindley’s father has died and Hindley has taken his revenge on the now teenaged Heathcliff by depriving him of education and kinship and setting him to working-class labor, the fulfillment of his and Catherine’s desire for one another in marriage becomes socially impossible. Nelly informs Lockwood, “In the first place, he [Heathcliff] had, by that time, lost the benefit of his early education: continual hard work, begun soon and concluded late, had extinguished any curiosity he once possessed in pursuit of knowledge, and any love for books or learning” (54). Because of this debasement of his “naturally reserved disposition” (53), conventional expressions of their desire become socially impossible: “Catherine and he were constant companions still, at his seasons of respite from labour; but he had ceased to express his fondness for her in words, and recoiled with angry suspicion from her girlish caresses, as if conscious there could be no gratification in lavishing such marks of affection on him” (54). Terry Eagleton, describing this conundrum in a Marxist idiom, writes, “Its [the love between Heathcliff and Catherine] non-sociality is on the one hand a revolutionary refusal of the given language of social roles and values; and if the relationship is to remain unabsorbed by society it must therefore appear as natural rather than social, since Nature is the ‘outside’ of society” (108). In this state of “nature” (which is at the same time an unjust deprivation of education), Heathcliff begins to resent the

time that Catherine spends with the more socially appropriate, educated, cultured, aristocratic Lintons of Thrushcross Grange. Just as they fight over this for the first time, Edgar Linton enters, and Heathcliff storms off. Catherine picks a fight with Nelly, ostensibly because she continues performing her servant labor in Edgar's presence, but really, Nelly suggests, because "she had failed to recover her equanimity since the little dispute with Heathcliff" (55).

This dispute with Heathcliff, over the social appropriateness of their spending time together, leads to the novel's first deflection of desire into violence. In a rage, Catherine pinches Nelly "very spitefully on the arm" (56). Hindley's son Hareton, who is still a toddler in this scene, begins to cry, and Catherine shakes the child in response. Edgar attempts to intervene, "and the astonished young man felt it [Catherine's hand] applied over his own ear in a way that could not be mistaken for jest" (56). Nelly declares Catherine's blow to be "a glimpse of her genuine disposition" (56). But curiously, far from severing their relationship, this unladylike violence performs for Edgar and Catherine exactly the function of the "girlish caresses" and "marks of affection" that the now-uneducated Heathcliff shrugs off. Despite Nelly's attempts to warn him off, the stricken Edgar Linton stays with Catherine. Nelly tells Lockwood, "I saw the quarrel had merely effected a closer intimacy—had broken the outworks of youthful timidity, and enabled them to forsake the disguise of friendship, and confess themselves lovers" (57). A few pages later, Catherine and Edgar are engaged. The match, Catherine tries to explain to Nelly, is a socially conventional one: she loves Edgar, "and he will be rich, and I shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighbourhood, and I shall be proud of having such a husband" (61). On the other hand, Catherine tells Nelly, she feels she is wrong to enter this conventional marriage when her desire for Heathcliff remains. But, she finally explains, "I've no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven; and if the wicked man in there [Hindley] had not brought Heathcliff so low, I shouldn't have thought of it. It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now; so he shall never know how I love him; and that, not because he's handsome, Nelly, but because he's more myself than I am" (63). With that declaration, which sets off Heathcliff's pursuit of revenge against Edgar (Heathcliff overhears "it would degrade me," but not the confession of love), the curious logic of perverse desire and marriage plots that drives the novel is set.

Catherine declares that her love for Heathcliff is really a love for herself, but in his current *déclassé* and uneducated form, that love cannot find expression in a conventional marriage. Instead, this desire is deflected: she "shouldn't have thought of" accepting Edgar's proposal, were Heathcliff not "so low." And it is precisely the chain of violence—first Nelly, then Hareton, and finally Edgar—that allows Edgar to call the desire he has for Catherine "love" rather than friendship. Caresses become unintelligible to Heathcliff as a sign of desire, and in their place, a blow to the head convinces "the soft thing" Edgar, who "possessed the power to depart, as much as a cat possesses the power to leave a mouse half killed, or a bird half eaten" (57), that the masochistic desire he feels is love. Edgar being a socially appropriate match for Catherine, the punch leads to marriage (and, eventually, the child Cathy). Desire deflected from socially appropriate expression, then, becomes something like sadomasochism *avant la lettre*, yet that sadomasochism precipitates an entirely conventional marriage.

Further perverting this marriage plot structure, the novel implies that Catherine's deflection of desire into violence is communicable. Every subsequent marriage in the novel, orchestrated by Heathcliff, is itself precipitated by escalating acts of violence, until the cycle ends in Hareton and Cathy's marriage, which synthesizes violence and pedagogy. Heathcliff is, after all, "more myself than I am," as Catherine says; his thwarted desire for Catherine leads to

not one but two marriages consummated by violence. Catherine and Heathcliff, with a passionate but straightforward heterosexual desire for one another, are unable to realize that desire in marriage while Heathcliff remains so improperly educated. Instead, Catherine must beat her more conventional match into marrying her. Learning from this, Heathcliff sets off on a series of violent revenge marriages. First, he elopes with Edgar's younger sister Isabella, who has conceived a romantic crush on him. Their elopement Heathcliff marks by hanging Isabella's terrier, an act of violent cruelty he claims substitutes for the love he lacks for her: "The first thing she saw me do, on coming out of the Grange, was to hang up her little dog; and when she pleaded for it the first words I uttered were a wish that I had the hanging of every being belonging to her, except one: possibly she took that exception for herself. But no brutality disgusted her. I suppose she has an innate admiration of it, if only her precious person were secure from injury! Now, was it not the depth of absurdity—of genuine idiocy—for that pitiful, slavish, mean-minded brach to dream that I could love her?" (118-19). Secondly, he kidnaps and beats Cathy until she agrees to marry his own dying son Linton in a plot to steal the property and the child that Edgar's marriage to Catherine deprived him of. *Wuthering Heights'* strangely convoluted narrative structure, therefore, is an attempt to tell a marriage plot story about a desire that cannot be fit into a marriage plot. Even the frame story structure ultimately leads back to this moment where Catherine turns her caresses of Heathcliff into her blow against Edgar. As I sketched above, Heathcliff's kidnapping of Cathy is the situation into which Nelly tries to insinuate Lockwood by telling him her tale, for if she can nurture Lockwood's desire for Cathy, their marriage could remove Cathy from this cycle of violently incestuous marriages.

But the novel rejects this ending, which would transform it back into the very straightforward aristocratic marriage plot that it refuses. Lockwood's function in the frame story, we finally see, is to stand in for this possibility and allow the novel the gesture of explicitly refusing it. At the very moment he re-enters the novel as a desiring character in its main plot, rather than the voyeur listening to Nelly's tale for hints on how he might seduce Cathy, Lockwood refuses this possibility. Nelly's tale over, the novel's story having caught up to its discourse, and Lockwood having thoroughly convinced himself that there is no place for him in the closed system of incestuous desire diverted into sadomasochistic marriages that Nelly describes, he departs Thrushcross Grange.

At this moment, which precedes the yearlong break in story time before the novel's actual ending, Lockwood explicitly connects his function in the novel to genre. The very last paragraph before the break in time, narrated by Lockwood, runs:

"How dreary life gets over in that house!" I reflected, while riding down the road. "What a realization of something more romantic than a fairy tale it would have been for Mrs. Linton Heathcliff, had she and I struck up an attachment, as her good nurse desired, and migrated together into the stirring atmosphere of the town!" (230)

Lockwood's fulfillment of his desire for Cathy, we learn at this moment, which was Nelly's investment in narrating her story to him, would be an aesthetically and perhaps morally unsatisfying ending. It would transform this long, sprawling tale of desire that cannot be expressed in marriage into "something more romantic than a fairy tale." In other words, the problem of Lockwood's desire in this story is a problem of genre: were he to marry Cathy, he would simply consummate the very desire whose deflection drives the novel. The stranger from outside the family gets to marry the headstrong girl and whisk her away from this peculiar region

to the cosmopolitan city. This, Lockwood declares (and, though the novel often seems to lightly ironize his observations, here it's difficult not to read his perspective as aligning with that of the implied author), is a bad ending. Too tidy, too romantic, too conventional, too much closure.

What kind of closure, then, does the novel propose in place of the fairy tale ending? What is the appropriate ending to this story of a desire that is inexpressible in conventional marriage and so becomes a series of sadomasochistic marriages that substitute for without fulfilling the initial desire? Lockwood returns a year later to Thrushcross Grange, which remains under his lease, and learns that Nelly has moved back to Wuthering Heights. An extraordinary scene of voyeurism, sadomasochism, and pedagogy ensues as he comes upon the house:

I could both see them and hear them talk before I entered, and looked and listened in consequence, being moved thereto by a mingled sense of curiosity and envy that grew as I lingered.

“*Con-trary!*” said a voice, as sweet as a silver bell—“That for the third time, you dunce! I’m not going to tell you, again—Recollect, or I pull your hair!”

“Contrary, then,” answered another, in deep, but softened tones. “And now, kiss me, for minding so well.”

“No, read it over first correctly, without a single mistake.”

The male speaker began to read. He was a young man, respectably dressed, and seated at a table, having a book before him. His handsome features glowed with pleasure, and his eyes kept impatiently wandering from the page to a small white hand over his shoulder, which recalled him by a smart slap on the check, whenever its owner detected such signs of inattention.

Its owner stood behind; her light shining ringlets blending, at intervals, with his brown locks, as she bent to superintend his studies; and her face—it was lucky he could not see her face, or he would never have been so steady. I could, and I bit my lip, in spite, at having thrown away the chance I might have had of doing something besides staring at its smiling beauty.

The task was done, not free from further blunders, but the pupil claimed a reward, and received at least five kisses, which, however, he generously returned. Then, they came to the door, and from their conversation, I judged they were about to issue out and have a walk on the moors. I supposed I should be condemned in Hareton Earnshaw’s heart, if not by his mouth, to the lowest pit in the infernal regions if I showed my unfortunate person in his neighborhood then, and feeling very mean and malignant, I skulked round to seek refuge in the kitchen. (232-33)

In this scene, the novel proposes to finally find narrative closure for the problems it raises when Catherine and Heathcliff’s marriage proves impossible due to his lack of education and both must instead find fulfillment in sadism. Where Catherine’s caresses of Heathcliff earlier proved unintelligible because of his lack of refinement and so she had to resort instead to slapping Edgar, here kisses and slaps become interchangeable. Or, perhaps more precisely, they build an integrated system of desire that solves all the novel’s concerns: by slapping Hareton, Cathy expresses her desire to educate him; in receiving her slaps and educating himself, Hareton becomes eligible for the kisses he desires from Cathy. The three-person system that led to the rupture between Catherine and Heathcliff’s desire and its social expression in marriage is here made whole. Heathcliff could not understand Cathy’s caresses as desire because the education

Hindley deprived him of made him unmarriageable; unable to marry Heathcliff, Catherine instead beat the marriageable Edgar, who recognized that beating as desire. Heathcliff, in turn, deflected his own desire for Catherine into marriages precipitated by his own acts of violence. In this scene, however, Cathy's beatings educate Hareton into marriageability. The beatings, willingly received, make him eligible for the more conventional caresses and, finally, the aristocratic marriage they lead to. Where sadomasochism was unable to compensate for the impossible marriage between Catherine and Heathcliff, here it becomes the instrument of a conventional marriage between Cathy and Hareton. If Heathcliff's primary desire was deflected into a series of sadomasochistic substitutions that failed fully to compensate for his original desire, the novel's solution is to make the sadomasochistic desire into the instrument of its final conventional marriage. Much as the plot convolutions of Kleist's *Marquise von O*—find a way, ultimately, for sexual violence to be integrated into a conventional marriage, *Wuthering Heights* solves the narrative problems it sets itself by ending in a conventional marriage made possible by sadomasochism. If the novel is a marriage plot, it is one whose narrative closure comes about by synthesizing sadomasochism with caresses. If the novel is a *Bildungsroman*, it is about an education of and by desire. Because Heathcliff lacks the education for his marriage to Catherine to be socially appropriate, he must instead satisfy himself by acts of violence, including depriving Hareton of his aristocratically-appropriate education. Because Hareton wants to marry Cathy, he must submit to the sadistic treatment she learned when Heathcliff forced her to marry his son; this masochistic education makes him eligible for her caresses and their marriage.

This returns us, at last, to the question of genre and the novel's frame story. This contorted marriage-plot-*Bildungsroman* ending is, both Lockwood and Nelly tell us, a more suitable ending than the romantic fairytale of Nelly inspiring Lockwood to marry Catherine. That fairytale—which seems, more or less, to align with a more traditional marriage plot—falls away at this moment where Lockwood reenters the novel as a desiring agent rather than the student extracting secondhand lessons from Nelly's tale. If this scene is a re-enactment of the scene between Heathcliff, Catherine, and Edgar, Lockwood here must be cast in the role of Edgar. But because Cathy, the “second edition” of Catherine, learns to apply both her slaps and her caresses to Hareton, Lockwood receives no slap that would reveal Cathy's desire for him. Instead, he drops out of the plot altogether; no longer a possible actor in the scene, he is reduced to a desirous, envious voyeurism. For the first time, he longs explicitly for Catherine, but her “ringlets” already “blending” with Hareton's “locks” in a perfect synthesis of desire and education, he can take his pleasure only in the agony of observing a consummation in which he has no part. Despite Nelly's attempts to insinuate Lockwood into the system of desire that she narrates, ultimately the fairytale is left to envy the strange synthesis that this sprawling series of marriage plots and *Bildung* stories achieves. The monstrous genre hybrid formed by Cathy and Hareton's intertwined locks cucks<sup>20</sup> the fairytale ending embodied by Lockwood.

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<sup>20</sup> In choosing this intentionally provocative anachronism, it would be remiss of me not to address the word's racialized connotations and the substantial literature on Heathcliff's ambiguous racialization in the novel. Susan Meyer's 1996 book *Imperialism at Home: Race and Victorian Women's Fiction* offers a helpful footnote on pp. 101-102 gathering various readings of Heathcliff as a Black revolutionary pushed too far by the racial regime to attempt to tie his depiction to contemporary stereotypes of Irish migrants. Meyer's own reading identifies Heathcliff with the various so-called “dark races” of Britain's colonial subjects. She helpfully collects the moments in the novel where racialized and colonial metaphors concentrate, though I am not entirely convinced by her larger argument that the novel's “passionate sense of identity that Catherine feels with Heathcliff” (102-103) links Catherine's disciplining into gender norms with Heathcliff's disciplining by whiteness. My disagreement brings me to my point

Nelly, for her part, finally moves in this gesture from desiring narrator to active agent in the plot, as we saw earlier. Witnessing Lockwood's disappointment in his failure to act on the lessons Nelly taught him about seducing Cathy, Nelly declares, "Earnshaw was not to be civilized with a wish; and my young lady was no philosopher, and no paragon of patience; but both their minds tending to the same point—one loving and desiring to esteem, and the other loving and desiring to be esteemed—they contrived in the end to reach it. You see, Mr. Lockwood, it was easy enough to win Mrs. Heathcliff's heart; but now, I'm glad you did not try. The crown of all my wishes will be the union of those two; I shall envy no one on their wedding-day—there won't be a happier woman than myself in England!" (239). Where Lockwood, in moving from student-listener to narrator finally falls out of the plot, Nelly finally has her desires fulfilled within the system of the plot itself rather than the frame story surrounding it. Hareton and Cathy's union in sadomasochistic education finally incorporates Nelly herself into the plot. Their marriage becomes her marriage, and we already saw the scene in which she is incorporated into this family as adoptive mother. The novel's solution to its closed system of insular, regional, incestuous desire is to make that system even more peculiarly hermetic. Nelly, one of the few characters in the plot not belonging fully to the families and their system of desire, the sister-servant, the character-narrator, is finally incorporated fully into the plot, her desires fulfilled by this sadomasochistic union. She, too, is metaphorically married off in this scene and made an adoptive member of the family. To achieve this, Lockwood and the cosmopolitan urban world, the conventional marriage plot ending, and the straightforward desire he represents must be expelled finally from the plot. Although the novel flirts with having Lockwood take over Heathcliff's desires, in the end, he serves no function in the plot except as a figure of the more conventional desires that the novel rejects. Nelly, the novel's other quasi-outsider narrator, declares this ending that rejects Lockwood and what he represents to be a far more satisfying solution to the problems of desire and its social expression that the novel raises.

Having found a solution to the impossibility of Heathcliff and Catherine's desire for one another finding socially acceptable expression in marriage by making a sadomasochistic *Bildung* the condition of possibility of a conventional aristocratic marriage, the novel at last disposes of Heathcliff. After he witnesses Cathy and Hareton's union, Lockwood is stunned to learn that Heathcliff has died in the year since he last visited Wuthering Heights. This invites the novel's final foray into retrospective narration. Lockwood asks Nelly what happened, and she catches him up on the last year's events: "He [Heathcliff] had a 'queer' end, as she [Nelly] expressed it" (234). Heathcliff's "'queer' end" consists in his acceptance of the impossibility of sustaining forever his sadistic substitutions for his desire for Catherine. His sadistic tastes revert back into desire for Catherine once Cathy has found a way to incorporate his sadism into her love for

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here about Lockwood's "cucking," which is that far too much criticism seems to ignore the novel's rather tortuous narrative structure and the identifications that it produces. While Catherine may say in reported dialogue, "I am Heathcliff," I hope I have demonstrated here the ways that the novel's narrative structure multiplies the possible identifications and disidentifications among characters. In this scene in particular, Lockwood seems to occupy a similar role as when Heathcliff overhears Cathy's choice of Edward over him. Unlike the racialized Heathcliff, however, who responds to his replacement in Cathy's desires by a pale effete man with a novel-spanning, narrative-generating campaign of sadistic revenge, including by eloping with Edward's own sister, Lockwood slinks away quietly from his own Catherine and her interloper. The underlying tangle of racial and masculine dynamics in this scene suggests a further humiliation of Lockwood and the fairytale he represents in comparison to Heathcliff's violent, chaotic, driven response to his own substitution, a response that generates the very narrative structure of the novel. I will return to the question of race in these formations of desire and sociality in the chapter on *Venus in Furs*.

Hareton. As Nelly tells Lockwood, once Heathcliff learns about Cathy and Hareton's newfound desire for each other, he declares, "My old enemies have not beaten me; now would be the precise time to revenge myself on their representatives: I could do it; and none could hinder me. But where is the use? I don't care for striking, I can't take the trouble to raise my hand! That sounds as if I had been labouring the whole time, only to exhibit a fine trait of magnanimity. It is far from being the case—I have lost the faculty of enjoying their destruction, and I am too idle to destroy for nothing" (244). Now that Heathcliff's antisocial sadism—the forced marriages, the kidnappings, the beatings—has been incorporated into a socially acceptable match that mirrors his failed match with Catherine, he loses his taste for the sadistic. Instead, his desire for Catherine that was perverted into the sadistic substitutions reawakens. Catherine now dead, this desire of course remains unfulfillable. The only remaining plot option is for the unrealizability of this desire to kill Heathcliff, and so it does. The novel's initial marriage plot, between Heathcliff and Catherine, is diverted into a series of sadistic substitutions when Heathcliff's lack of education makes the expression of their desire for one another in marriage socially impossible. Cathy becomes the victim of one of these sadistic substitutions when Heathcliff beats and confines her until she agrees to marry his son. Yet rather than merely imitate this sadistic impulse, Cathy finally integrates it into an acceptable marriage: she turns sadism into the motor of Hareton's *Bildung*, and so their marriage becomes possible. This reversal accomplished, Heathcliff and his antisocial desires die out of the plot. Cathy and Hareton's marriage—incestuous, sadomasochistic, still confined to the regional peculiarities of Wuthering Heights instead of the wider social world that Lockwood represents, yet socially acceptable in its form—finally finds an uneasy synthesis between Heathcliff's antisocial desires and the social form of marriage.

### Narrative Aesthetics, Narrative Pedagogy

In reading the works of these two authors together, I wish to set up a point that I will be tracking as I move in the later chapters from Romanticist literatures to literary modernisms proper. What I hope to have demonstrated here is the way that Kleist and Emily Brontë, two canonically difficult-to-canonize authors, develop conventional marriage and *Bildung* plots around socially inassimilable sexual desires (what we would now understand as sexual violence and sadomasochism). Although the narrative techniques of each author tend in somewhat opposite directions—Kleist's prose preoccupies itself with the concentrated moment where a problematic individual desire runs up against the rationalized, universalized ethics of larger social groupings like the State or the Church, while *Wuthering Heights* sprawls and doubles back in search of a narratively satisfying ending to the problems it raises—each arises from a structurally similar problem. How can conventionally linear plots about education, self-formation, and courtship be told about unconventional desires? Without larger social narratives or conceptual categories for thinking about the kinds of desire they represent, Kleist and Brontë's plots lapse into the unrepresentable—the dash of the *Marquise von O*—or the grotesquely convoluted, as in *Wuthering Heights*'s rejection of the linear "fairytale" ending in favor of a sadomasochistic union. Crucially, these narrative strategies chart a path between a totally antisocial unintelligibility and a genre conventionality. Kleist's lapse into the unrepresentable is merely a moment, though one that structures the entire plot. *Wuthering Heights* draws from more conventional marriage plot novels. It is precisely in attempting to incorporate these inassimilable desires into their plot structures that each author's work must contort their received

narrative structures. Appropriately, both authors in their own time received both admiration and bafflement, sometimes in equal measure—Kleist and Brontë were neither total literary outsiders nor ever quite fully accepted into the canons of their eras.

As I move forward in time, many of the themes that I have pulled out here will re-emerge. Fetishistic sexual desires will still act as a site for authors to work out questions of the individual in society: questions of taste, of regionalism, of self-formation. The narrative aesthetics of desire that I find in Kleist will emerge again in Robert Musil's experimental *Bildungsromane*. The narrative pedagogy of desire that I find in Brontë will form the basis of *Venus in Furs*'s frame story blending pornography and philosophy. (Indeed, *Venus in Furs* inspired Krafft-Ebing's word "masochism" when he learned to see its narrative in the stories that some of his patients and correspondents sent him.) In these later works, it will be more appropriate for me to refer directly to kink and fetish desire. In the period intervening between these Romantic works and literary modernism, these categories of desire were transformed by social, economic, and epistemological shifts from vague, untheorized things to psychologized categories and nascent communities. These earlier works introduced a set of narrative tools for thinking about how to tell stories about this category of desire—tools that, rather than erase the marriage plot or *Bildungsroman* altogether, reconfigure them, make them serve new ends. Kleist and Brontë strain to give narrative form to a category of desire that does not yet have a fully built out narrative form because it does not yet have corresponding social forms for its expression. I suggest that these novels land on aesthetic experience and the pedagogical relation as a means of working through the question of how to give their antisocial desires a social form that can be transmitted and reproduced. The traditional marriage plot and *Bildungsroman* posit the family structure as a closed, private form for expressing individual desire socially and reproducing it stably into the next generation. The family structure corresponds in these novels to the linear plot with conventional closure. Kleist and Brontë, I suggest, begin to experiment with narrative forms that work through the problematic of giving social form to antisocial desires. Kleist's work lands on sudden, singular eruptions of desire into the plot as a way of navigating the collision between individual taste and social ethics. Aesthetic experience is socially pre-conditioned, yet open-ended, a social experience felt as an inexplicable individual experience. For Brontë, the pedagogical relationship emerges as a non-private, yet potentially erotic social relation compared to the closed structure of the family. This pedagogical relationship possesses an open-endedness that allows for transmissions and transformations of desire that the family forecloses; desire can be passed to non-kin, or refused, or transformed entirely. These open-ended social relations resist the linearity and closure of the family.

As we will see in the following chapters, the modernist novel that I will be working with has the benefit of a greater social infrastructure for thinking through this category of desire: psychology began to provide the taxonomical and narrative blueprints for it, and urban densification even provided the possibility of expressing these desires in a social form that would be unimaginable on Heathcliff's moors. The open-endedness and unintelligibility of these categories of desire begins to cohere into larger narratives. But just like Kleist and Brontë's work, the novels I examine in the coming chapters re-work rather than explode the narrative genres they draw from. In the process, kink desire serves both as a basis for modernist formal experimentation as well as a site to work out newly relevant themes about cosmopolitanism and regionalism; about the place of the individual in the forms of the family and society; and about questions of the imbrication taste, identity, and aesthetic experience.



## Pedagogies of the Obsessed: Sacher-Masoch, Krafft-Ebing, and the Masochists

When we left off our history (if I may call it that) in the last chapter, the narrativization of kink desire found itself at an impasse. In the case of Heinrich von Kleist, the brief sublime eruption of desire into the text ultimately found its way back into the family form, reabsorbed, if not seamlessly or unincestuously, by the structure of the family. In the case of Emily Brontë, protosadomasochistic desires, though routed this way and that by the novel's circuitous frame plots, were ultimately able to find fulfillment in the marriage plot, if only in an eccentric, hyperlocalized way that the novel explicitly contrasts with the forms of socialization characteristic of the metropole. Our next chapter finds kink desire at the beginnings of its more explicit narrativization, no longer confined solely to moments of eruption or paratextual framing, if not yet ready to support fully a larger narrative of the integration of desire into society. Once again, we find ourselves among texts with a strange relation to genre and the canon, fitting a little uneasily into the history of thought and form.

In this chapter, I will turn my attention to two simultaneously canonical yet underread authors in the history of German-speaking perversion. I will follow the narrative machinations of kink desire into the Galician-Austrian writer Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's novel *Venus in Furs* and the early German psychiatrist-sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*. *Venus in Furs* was first published in 1870, the same year that Foucault famously (though also cheekily) identified as the year emerging German, English, and French sexology invented homosexuality (*History of Sexuality* 41). The novel is, of course, most famous for inspiring Krafft-Ebing's use of the word *Masochismus* to describe a fetishism characterized by a desire for domination, humiliation, and the passive reception of pain.<sup>21</sup> But as Deleuze notes in his own less canonical 1967 book on Sacher-Masoch, "he was ... disturbed when Krafft-Ebing used his name to designate a perversion. Masoch was a famous and honored writer; in 1886 he made a triumphant journey to Paris where he was decorated and entertained by the *Figaro* and the *Revue des Deux Mondes*" (10). Although Sacher-Masoch's literary output consistently incorporated erotic fantasy, he apparently experienced a shock of misidentification in seeing his name used in the emerging psychiatric taxonomy of "sexual psychopathies." Indeed, he was known rather in his day as a writer of localist genre novels about the Slavic customs in Galicia, even being described "as the Turgenev of Little Russia" (Deleuze 10). His style mixes realist detail and, as Deleuze describes it, "all the forces of German Romanticism" (12). Like Kleist and Emily Brontë, the effect is difficult to place in clear period or genre demarcations. The heavy stagings of emotion, the interest in exotic locales and local details, and the mixture of essayistic philosophizing into the narrative clearly draw from the German Romantic tradition decades later, while the turn toward symbolic tableaux loosened from the strictures of plot and fixated on the opacities of sexual desire clearly presages the decadent Viennese modernism of

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<sup>21</sup> It's worth nothing, in this little history of inspiration and circulation, that, while Krafft-Ebing was definitely a popularizer of the term "masochism," he likely wasn't the first person to use it. Renate Hauser notes in the chapter "Krafft-Ebing's Psychological Understanding," "The label 'masochism' had been suggested to [Krafft-Ebing] by an anonymous man in Berlin, who wrote him a long autobiographical letter and subsequently became his main informant on this condition. This man had found consolation in reading Rousseau and Sacher-Masoch" (213). Many thanks to Gayle Rubin for pointing this out to me in personal correspondence. The "anonymous man in Berlin"'s use of the word suggests that it may have been circulating already among an emergent group of practitioners. And the letter further reinforces this chapter's point about the circulation of narratives among different genres and domains of discourse in this period: from fiction, to personal correspondence, to medical textbook, and back again.

early twentieth century literary figures like Arthur Schnitzler. As I suggested in the case of Kleist and Brontë, I will argue here that much of this uneasy relation to aesthetic-historical canonicity can be traced to Sacher-Masoch's attempt to narrativize kink desire. In attempting to emplot a category of desire only beginning to emerge in the discourses of law, medicine, and science, Sacher-Masoch draws on eclectic narrative and prose techniques. Specifically in this chapter, I will be focusing on the uneasy marriage of the narrative techniques of the philosophical novel, in *Venus in Furs*'s frame story, and the pornographic novel in its descriptive tableaux. At the end of the last chapter, I introduced the concept of a "narrative pedagogy of desire" to describe how the protosadomasochistic desires of *Wuthering Heights* are both thematized and narrativized. I will be expanding that concept greatly in this chapter to describe how the philosophical frame and the pornographic descriptions of *Venus in Furs* make kink desire social, both within the events of the novel as well as among Sacher-Masoch's enthusiastic readership (whom, in their willingness to identify themselves in and expand upon Sacher-Masoch's erotic universe, it might even be apt to describe with the contemporary term "fanbase").

Krafft-Ebing's medical textbook, too, sits somewhat uneasily in the history of psychological thought about sexuality.<sup>22</sup> It plays a not insignificant role in Foucault's account of the emergence of the subject with an interiority defined by psychosexual categories. Yet it also has often been passed over as a mere steppingstone on the way to Freud's fuller account of psychosexual life. Foucault includes Krafft-Ebing among his examples of nineteenth century scientific figures whose work "entailed an *incorporation* of perversions and a new *specification of individuals*" (42-43). He writes about Krafft-Ebing and his contemporaries, "The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. So too were all those minor perverts whom nineteenth-century psychiatrists entomologized by giving them strange baptismal names: there were Krafft-Ebing's zoophiles and zooerasts, Rohleder's auto-monosexualists; and later, mixoscopophiles, gynecomasts, presbyophiles, sexoesthetic inverters, and dyspareunist women. These fine names for heresies referred to a nature that was overlooked

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<sup>22</sup> For more on the historical reception of *Psychopathia Sexualis*, see p. 7-10 of Harry Oosterhuis's *Stepchildren of Nature*. Oosterhuis provides a very helpful reception history among historians of psychiatry and sexuality that is fair to the Foucaultian paradigm of productive power while rightfully restoring complexity to Krafft-Ebing's contributions to sexology. As he writes, "Clearly, Krafft-Ebing's work has evoked powerful emotions and value judgments, but to this day it has barely been done justice by historians. He hardly appears in the well-known cultural-historical works on fin de siècle Vienne, such as Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin's *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (1973), Carl Schorske's *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* (1980), and Jacques Le Rider's *Modernité viennoise et crises de l'identité* (1990). Although his name shows up in many historical studies of sexuality and in some histories of psychiatry and while his *Psychopathia sexualis* is often discussed, Renate Hauser's unpublished dissertation "Sexuality, Neurasthenia and the Law: Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840 - 1902)" (1992) is the only intellectual biography available to date. Historians of psychiatry and sexuality gave generally given a limited and one-sided view of Krafft-Ebing. I cannot escape the impression that many of them base their knowledge of his work on what others have written about it and only a cursory reading of *Psychopathia sexualis* and perhaps two of his other psychiatric textbooks" (8-9). Oosterhuis's book emerges from access to an archive of Krafft-Ebing's papers and private correspondence and served me as an invaluable guide to this part of my argument. I am more focused on questions of genre, narrative, and rhetoric in Krafft-Ebing's work than Oosterhuis's intellectual historian perspective, but in general I share his approach to Krafft-Ebing: "The psychiatric theories on sexuality that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century only became established as facts about sexuality because they were directly linked to specific social groups and the larger cultural setting from the beginning. Not only was the relationship between doctors and patients reciprocal; there were also close connections between individual experiences involving sexuality and changes in society. Both patients and doctors were agents of culture at large" (12).

by the law, but not so neglectful of itself that it did not go on producing more species, even where there was no order to fit them into” (43). Foucault’s language here is highly suggestive of the relationship between kink desire and sociality that I want to trace: these “fine names for heresies” are not reproductive of themselves, for they name a sexuality that is not reproductive, but they do “produce” new species (“*continuer à produire encore des espèces*” 60), even though the inability of these desires to reproduce places them outside the social “order.” But the aspect of Krafft-Ebing’s text that I want to draw out further is Foucault’s slippage from the “new *specification of individuals*” to the “producing” of “more species.” From Foucault’s brief reference to Krafft-Ebing’s work, one might expect that *Psychopathia Sexualis* was a work of pure taxonomy, an encyclopedia of perversions with individual case studies attached to them to serve as evidence for analytical distinctions. While this does describe much of Krafft-Ebing’s text, it also has narrative elements. Krafft-Ebing himself was concerned with narratives of development just as much as a formal schema of perversions; the first section of the work, “Fragments of a Psychology of Sexual Life,” outlines both the biological development of the sex drive in the individual as well as a theory of the ways that different cultures have historically developed social structures to incorporate the sex drives of individuals.

Foucault’s language of speciation seems to suggest a strong contrast between Krafft-Ebing’s work and Freud’s—a work of psycho-biological taxonomy on the one hand and a narrative theory of psychological development on the other—but Krafft-Ebing’s text incorporates both. Revisiting the text for its narrative features reveals its own form of the narrative pedagogy of desire. As Foucault’s comparison of the medical discourses from which works like *Psychopathia Sexualis* emerged to Christian practices of confession suggests, Krafft-Ebing’s work not only taxonomized kink desire but also provided a narrative model for it. Krafft-Ebing claims in the original foreword to the text that he writes it strictly for a juridical and medical audience who would “make the psychopathology of sexual life into the object [*Gegenstand*] of a scientific [*wissenschaftlichen*] treatise,” and he suggests that he writes “wherever possible in terminis technicis” so that the text will not “serve as reading material for the non-professional [*Unberufene*, literally the ‘uncalled’—with its echoes of religious calling]” (v, all translations of Krafft-Ebing are mine unless otherwise noted). However, the very process of producing the text’s ever-expanding editions belied this pedagogical intention. Those meant to be the object of his study quickly learned from Krafft-Ebing’s work how to become narrating subjects of their desire. By the publication of the ninth edition, Krafft-Ebing had to include a new foreword acknowledging that many of his readers had found “elucidation and solace [*Aufklärung und Trost*] in the book” and had even taken it upon themselves to send letters sharing their own stories with him, which he sometimes incorporated as additional case studies in new editions. While Foucault’s model of the “*specification of individuals*” and the taxonomy of “species” suggests that this was a purely individualizing process, a one-on-one relation of doctor-confessor to patient-confessee, I argue that there are the contours of an emergent sexual sociality to be traced in this narrative pedagogy.

Indeed, although his reading of the sexologists’ texts is somewhat flatter, Foucault is careful in other places to note the bidirectionality of power and pleasure, the ways that the exercise of power always creates its own resistance and the ways that that resistance can produce pleasure for both the confessor and the confessee. My reading of *Psychopathia Sexualis* will strive to restore this bidirectionality and sociality to the text. In doing so, I am greatly aided by Harry Oosterhuis’s 2000 book, *Stepchildren of Nature*, which pushes back against a vulgar Foucauldianism that would view sexual identities as the mere symptom of increasing biopower

and a medical will-to-know embodied in texts like *Psychopathia Sexualis*. As Oosterhuis writes, “Belief in psychiatric knowledge among Krafft-Ebing’s bourgeois clientele was sustained not simply by its possibility to give a satisfactory explanation of abnormal sexual feelings and experiences, but also by its persuasiveness in negotiating social relations between a representative of established science and those who felt and were considered as outsiders, but who, at the same time, wished to be acknowledged” (16). Where Oosterhuis achieves this revision of Krafft-Ebing by turning his historian’s eye to the archive of Krafft-Ebing’s correspondence and tracing its place in the larger “mentality and cultural climate in which Krafft-Ebing worked” (16), I will be more concerned with the literary, rhetorical, and narratological features of Krafft-Ebing’s text itself. This chapter will look at the erotic-pedagogical dynamics of a community of individuals learning to write shared narratives of individual desire to a medical researcher. And I will place that in conversation with the philosophical-pornographic pedagogy of Sacher-Masoch’s *Venus in Furs*, whose own work inspired a correspondence with, a marriage to, and finally a confessional memoir from a fan (Deleuze 11). And lastly we will consider how Sacher-Masoch’s literary narrative taught Krafft-Ebing, whose theory of masochism makes explicit reference to *Venus in Furs*, to narrate desire scientifically.

As I track this development of the narrative aesthetics of kink desire into this period, I want also to hold in view the broader historical changes that were the conditions of possibility for Sacher-Masoch to write an entire novel about a man’s sexual slavery and for Krafft-Ebing to contribute to a growing medical and scientific discourse on sexual development and “pathology.” While I am arguing for an aesthetic continuity between the works of Kleist and Brontë and those of Sacher-Masoch, there is a clear historical discontinuity in European notions of sexual desire and development. Where *Wuthering Heights*’s tale of sexual desire consummated in cruelty and violence baffled British reviewers in 1847 and ultimately could find narrative resolution only in a more conventional marriage, Krafft-Ebing was a celebrated author across Europe in the 1880s even though *Venus in Furs* sustains an entire plot on the desire of its protagonist to be sexually dominated, with only the frame story at the beginning and the end to make a socially intelligible lesson out of its kinky fantasy. The Foucault paradigm explains this change with the discursive operations of biopower. Foucault looks to state interest in managing and optimizing the sexual forces of populations as industrialization proceeded. The *History of Sexuality Vol. 1* traces how this optimization began at the end of the eighteenth century and accelerated throughout the nineteenth through the scientific works of the early sexologists like Krafft-Ebing, whose ideas then operated on European populations through the apparatuses of public health and the disciplinary institutions of schools, prisons, and the law.

Christopher Chitty contends that Foucault’s idiom of institutional power unnecessarily divides the history of sexual dissidence from the history of class struggle. His dissertation, published posthumously as the 2020 book *Sexual Hegemony: Statecraft, Sodomy, and Capital in the Rise of the World System*, recasts queerness as a failure to hold the status of sexual normalcy. In a formulation that is helpful not just for accounting for the historical shifts I am tracking here, but also for understanding my category of “kink desire” and putting it into relation with Chitty’s own categories of “homosexuality” and “sodomy” under the larger banner of “queerness,” Chitty writes:

The normal will not be understood [in this book] as “normativity”—some free-floating, regulative idea, perhaps taking shape in particular institutions, according to which human

activities are monitored and judged. I will instead conceive of the normal as a status, one which—given certain concrete socioeconomic conditions—accrues material advantages to those who achieve it or happen to be born into it. ...

The “queer” can then be recast as a narrower descriptive category, signifying the lack of such status property: it captures the way in which norms of gender and sexuality get weakened, damaged, and reasserted under conditions of local and generalized social, political, and economic crisis. The queer would then imply a contradictory process in which such norms are simultaneously denatured and renaturalized. Rather than marking some utopian opening up of these logics for self-transformative play, the queer would describe forms of love and intimacy with a precarious social status outside the institutions of family, property, and couple form. (26)

Chitty takes to task the queer theorists of the 1990s for following Foucault into “bourgeois categories” by focusing on literary works describing the “subjective interiority” of “the closet,” works that he claims necessarily narrate the “experience of a privileged class of homosexuals who are overrepresented in the literary archive” (33). He argues that what Foucault sees as an epistemic break in the history of perversion appears as a continuity when the fixation on medical, institutional, and literary sources is put aside and we attempt to reintegrate the experiences of proletarian queers into sexual history (33-35). Chitty’s formulation offers a powerful explanatory model for why, in the later nineteenth century, the ongoing struggle over normative sexuality as class status took the particular form of the psychopathologization of certain categories of sexual desire. In his account, “Outside the privileged classes, capitalism supported these peculiar customs [“middle-class nuclear family norms”] for a brief period beginning with the sexual chaos initially unleashed by industrialization, reaching its peak in the mid-nineteenth century, and continuing until the social upheavals of the 1960s and collapse of the USSR—little more than a century” (22). In Chitty’s account, industrialization extended the possibility of “status property” in the normal of reproductive nuclear family sexuality to the rising bourgeoisie starting with industrialization. Extending his argument, I would claim that my category of “kink desire” emerges as a pathology in the medical discourse of this period as a means of shoring up the “status property” of this particular form of reproductive heterosexual desire by creating new categories for the kinds of desire that fail to adhere to it. “The normal” gains its status through a more finely delineated definition of “the queer.” As scientific discourse and medicine gain in status in this period as a means of managing and optimizing the productivity of populations mobilized by industrialization, medical discourse becomes a particularly salient tool for the “contradictory process in which such norms are simultaneously denatured and renaturalized.”

I don’t disagree with Chitty’s account of the larger historical forces that were the condition of possibility of Sacher-Masoch’s work. However, in tracing my aesthetic continuity here, I do wish to push back on his scorn for the elevation of literary sources. This chapter attempts to demonstrate the semi-autonomy of form in the history of sexuality. As I argue in this chapter, the narrative forms of desire whose history I began to trace in the previous chapter circulated and were taken up and transformed by both the subjects and objects of those forms. Neither Foucault nor Chitty, I think, gives quite enough attention to the massive influence that particular narrative forms exercised on not just individual subjects but emerging social formations who learned to locate their desires in those forms and, in turn, produce new narratives of their desire that became the material of further narrativization. This process, I suggest, became

the basis for new forms of the sociality of sexual desires outside the family form. While Chitty is right, I think, to note that larger historical continuities can be glimpsed when sexuality is viewed as a site of class struggle and status property rather than solely as a principle of subject formation and psychological identity that emerged only in the nineteenth century, his own focus on class struggle can obscure some of the ways in which sexual desire is shaped by and reciprocally shapes narrative forms and aesthetic experience. While it is certainly too strong an argument to claim (and I think it is somewhat of an unnuanced reading of Foucault to attribute this argument to him) that medical discourses *invented* these categories, this chapter will analyze a clear circulation of narrative forms—from romantic literature to medical text to letters and correspondences and memoirs—in the midst of their elaboration of new social categories and narratives of sexual desire. The sociality of sexual desire, I argue, is inextricable from the forms of these narratives; it is in the circulation of these texts’ literary, medical, legal, and autobiographical narratives that we can witness kink desire *becoming* social. In 1908, Wanda von Sacher-Masoch, Leopold’s ex-wife whom he met through a fan letter and who took on the name of his fictional dominatrix, explains in a section entitled “Masochism and Masochists: Afterword to My Life’s Confessions” that she wrote her memoirs to disentangle her life story from Leopold’s. She continues, “When I go somewhat further today, it is in the interest of the truth ... For when a man influenced his time so powerfully and unfavorably, as Sacher-Masoch did, setting a precedent, so to speak, with his pathological fantasies, there’s no room for *de mortuis nil nisi bene*.” (410). This chapter tracks the textual, narrative, and aesthetic preconditions that allowed Wanda von Sacher-Masoch to write autobiographically of “masochists and masochism,” of “pathological fantasies,” and of having “set a precedent” (literally “made a school”) of how to tell a story about a category of desire.

### **Pedagogical Frames, Medical and Aesthetic, Part I**

The ever-expanding forewords of *Psychopathia Sexualis*, which Krafft-Ebing added to as the book went through at least a dozen editions, and the dreamy frame story of *Venus in Furs* serve similar ends. Each of them explicitly delimits the pedagogical purposes of the body of the text that follows. Each text positions its author and its intended audience within and lays out a theory of medical-judicial or aesthetic education in this framing material. The body of each text is both contained by and overflows the frame, as I suggested in the introduction. Where Krafft-Ebing staked out the position of a scientist writing about a curious object for the sake of other knowledge professionals in law and medicine in his first foreword, by the ninth edition he was forced to acknowledge that the objects of his text’s theorization had learned from his work how to put narratives to their own experiences of kink desire. Likewise, while Severin strives in the frame story of *Venus in Furs* to give the unnamed narrator of the novel a clear ethical-philosophical lesson, the story’s pornographic delight in its descriptions offers a different “education of desire” from the one Severin would give to the narrator. Much like my reading of *Wuthering Heights*, I turn to the undertheorized framing material of these works to specify how they give form to the narratives of desire they offer their characters and readers.

Crucially, of course, kink desire is no longer confined in this framing material or unable to find full narrative expression in the body of these texts. Where *Wuthering Heights* generated its marriage plots out of the impossibility of fitting Heathcliff and Catherine’s cruel desires into a marriage plot, here kink desire finds a place within the main bodies of these works, if still a

fragmentary one. As the historical changes I outlined above made more possible the social and narrative expression of kink desire, these works elaborate their narratives far beyond the diffuse substitutions or momentary irruptions of Kleist and Brontë. In so doing, I will suggest, they both draw on the potency of this desire as a figure for what is absolutely socially unassimilable as well as begin to lay the narrative conditions of possibility for a socially integrated kink desire. Nevertheless, in each case, this sociality remains an ambivalent, not-yet-fully-formed one. We can glimpse this even in the forms of the works themselves. Although *Venus in Furs* is an elaborate marriage plot and *Bildungsroman*, it is a failed one. Severin and Wanda's arrangement works only as long as they maintain strict control over its exposure to the outside world. Unlike Catherine and Heathcliff's desire, there is a certain amount of social content that feeds their kink desires. Yet once the relationship is put to the test of full contact with the larger social world, it collapses immediately. Likewise, as a *Bildungsroman*, Severin's integration into larger society is an equivocal one: he becomes an eccentric and a dilettante after his experiences, a man with a certain well-demarked place in society, yet one defined precisely by its inability to assimilate fully and maintained by his wealth and aristocracy. Furthermore, he carves out this space only by disavowing his experience of kink desire and confining it to the realm of aesthetic and philosophical material. Similarly, Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* is more than an analytical taxonomy of sexual perversions. The psychopathologies he taxonomizes have a critical place in his theory of sexual development for both individuals and civilizations. He has not yet achieved the reversal of Freud, for whom polymorphous perversion is an originary state from which a well-adjusted adult sexuality only sometimes develops after much difficult repression, but he does find an equivocal place for fetishism as both an error of erotic attachment as well as its "germ": "Regarding the development of physiological love, it is probable that its germ [*Keim*] is always to be sought and found in an individual fetishistic enchantment [*Fetischzauber*] that the person of one sex exerts upon one of the other sex"(18). At the same time that he outlines a grand theory of individual and civilizational sexual development that incorporates "psychopathology," however, Krafft-Ebing's theory must take that most ambivalently narrative of Romantic and modernist forms: "Fragments of a Psychology of Sexual Life," the title of this first section of *Psychopathia Sexualis*.<sup>23</sup>

I take the phrase "education of desire" (62) from an excellent 2015 article by Joseph Metz. Picking up many strands of criticism of the novel starting from Deleuze's description of Sacher-Masoch and Severin as "a victim in search of a torturer ... who needs to educate, persuade, and conclude an alliance with the torturer in order to realize the strangest of schemes" (20), Metz reads the novel as a "'Jewish' Bildungsroman" that "disrupts the Germano-Prussian inflection of *Bildung* as a gendered nationalist practice" (69). But Metz's interest in the novel's rewriting of the *Bildungsroman* tradition leads him quickly away from desire, as he instead treats masochism as one of several practices in the novel (including the novel's interest in aesthetic "acts of mirroring or imitation" like the paintings, sculptures, and copies that appear constantly) that allows Sacher-Masoch to deploy stereotypes of Germanic and Jewish masculinity while campily undermining them. My own reading is going to stay with the question of masochism itself as a practice for educating and narrativizing desire. To that end, I treat the frame story as critical to the structure of desire in the novel, where the unnamed narrator first dreams of a cruel Venus who offers to dominate him to teach him of pagan love, only for the narrator to discover that the dream was inspired by a painting in his acquaintance Severin's home. Severin,

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<sup>23</sup> Many thanks to Chana Kronfeld for pointing out to me the resonance of this title with the Romantic and modernist predilection for the "fragment."

recognizing that this aestheticized representation of his own desire has educated his companion's erotic dreams in a particular direction, quickly offers him a manuscript of his own journals from his own tale of sexual slavery. Although he offers the journal as a warning to the narrator, drawn from his reading of Hegel and Goethe, that all relations between men and women must ultimately take the form of master or slave, the pornographic excess of the manuscript's descriptions offer an alternative education of desire. At the same time, my reading of the novel will also attempt to complement Metz's insights into the racialized and ethnicized eroticism of the novel, whose ideas of desire are inextricable from its ideas about the ethnic hierarchies within and beyond the borders of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Prior readings of the novel, starting from Deleuze and all the way up to Metz's reading, have picked up on the aspect of education *within* Severin's manuscript. However, my focus on desire and social formations leads me to give equal critical weight to the pedagogical relationship of Severin and the unnamed narrator of the frame story. In this frame story, I suggest, we see Sacher-Masoch striving to write two separate accounts of his character's masochistic desires that would give them intelligible social meaning: one as the material for artistic representation, which unfolds onto shared aesthetic-erotic experience; the other as a metonym for a philosophical dialectic, in which the tale of Severin's relationship with Wanda stands as an extreme example of the power relations between men and women in a pre-feminist society in general, a master-slave dialectic that Severin suggests, in a return to the frame story at the end of the novel, can be sublated only by a revolution in the rights of women. Yet the body of the novel itself offers two more registers in which kink desire is educated into sociality: on the one hand, Severin's desire to submit absolutely to a woman for the experience of sexualized pain serves as the grounds of a narrative that draws from both the marriage plot and the *Bildungsroman*. And on the other, the descriptions within this novel serve to educate the reader's own eroticism: beyond any capture by narrative, aesthetic experience, or philosophical theorization, the novel's erotic tableaux educate the unnamed narrator, who stands in for the reader, into a desire that finds fulfillment in ritualistically repeated descriptions of fetish objects (furs, whips, boots) and scenes of submission and pain.

Let me turn now to the frame stories themselves to see how they position desire and pedagogy in each text. *Venus in Furs* opens *in medias res* with an unmarked dream scene, a surreal allegory that would not be out of place in the allegorical symbolist plays of an Austrian high-modernist like Hugo von Hofmannsthal if it weren't for its comic register. Venus herself meets the unnamed narrator to argue with him about the nature of love:

I had a charming guest.

Opposite me, by the massive Renaissance fireplace, sat Venus: not, mind you, some demimondaine who, like Mademoiselle Cleopatra, had taken the pseudonym of Venus in her war against the enemy sex. No: my visitor was the veritable [*wahrhafte*] Goddess of Love [translation modified here].

She sat in an easy chair after fanning up a crackling fire, and the reflections of red flames licked her pale face with its white eyes and, from time to time, her feet when she tried to warm them.

Her head was wonderful despite the dead stone eyes, but that was all I saw of her. The sublime being had wrapped her marble body in a huge fur and, shivering, had curled up



like a cat. (3)<sup>24</sup>

The conversation between the two plays out as a starkly binarized set of somewhat clichéd regional stereotypes: Venus accuses “you northerners” of being “unable to love” due to “Germanic female virtue and German philosophy” (3), while she herself represents the “sensuality and cheerful love” (4) of the pagan south. On the one side of the allegorical dream lies Northern Europe, coldness, Germanic philosophy (by which we soon learn is meant Hegelian philosophy), monogamy, Christianity, intellectualism and idealism; on the other side lies Southern Europe, warmth, sensuality, free love, paganism, the ancient world. The allegory might pitch over into the hackish if it weren’t for the comedy and emphatic artificiality undermining its grave seriousness. The word “veritable” (*wahrhaft*) rings with a bit of comedic irony as we realize this is not the goddess descended from Mount Olympus, but rather a statue with “stone eyes” and a “marble body” that has come to life. Cheekily literalizing this conceit and taking it out of the realm of purely conceptual allegory by emphasizing its materiality, the narrator describes the divine Venus as curling up rather undivinely before the fire “like a cat”; in the next paragraph, the allegorical figure even “sneezed two divine sneezes” (3). This comedic materiality takes the allegory out of its intellectual seriousness and instead emphasizes its artificial and aesthetic dimensions: Venus the partisan of pagan love, who declares that “nature has put man at woman’s mercy through his passion, and woman is misguided if she fails to make him her subject, her slave” (6), is not Venus the goddess, but rather an artistic representation of her, a statue come to life.

And indeed, once the novella leaves this *in medias res* dream scene, we learn that the origins of the narrator’s desire that drives him to declare to Venus, “I cannot deny that nothing excites a man more than the sight of a beautiful, voluptuous, and cruel female despot who capriciously changes her favorites” (6), lie not in his psychology but in his philosophical and aesthetic pedagogy. The dream is not a Freudian expression of unconscious desires but rather a dialogical working out of philosophical concepts and aesthetic representations that have been training the narrator’s desire. As the dream ends, the “marble hand” of Venus becomes the real hand “brown as Bronze” of “my Cossack,” who chastises the narrator for falling asleep while reading “a book by Hegel” (7). Perhaps the narrator was reading Hegel’s *Lectures on Aesthetics*, with their attempt to tie different artistic forms to the spirit of different civilizations, but I’m rather inclined to agree with Neugroschel’s footnote to the translation, which declares, “We can’t really fault the narrator for dozing off while reading Hegel—even though the passage was probably from ‘Master and Servant’ in *The Phenomenology of Mind*” (125). The dream, then, could be understood as an erotic recasting of Hegel’s decidedly unsexy account of the reliance of

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<sup>24</sup> Unless noted, all translations of the novel are from Joachim Neugroschel’s excellent translation for the Penguin Classics edition of the novel. For such an infamous text, it is paradoxically rather difficult to find good editions of the novel, perhaps due to its very notoriety. It is frequently out of print in both German and English, and many of the presses keeping it in circulation are pornographic vanity presses or those Amazon-driven publishers that reprint texts in the free domain. I have yet to find a definitive German-language edition of the text and will be relying on the Project Gutenberg text when I need to modify Neugroschel’s translation for my readings. As an indicative anecdote of the text’s reception history, I was excited finally to pick up a seemingly promising library order of the German text that required its digging up out of the back catalogues entitled *Venus im Pelz und andere Novellen: Ausgewählt, Kommentiert und Herausgegeben von Reinhard Federmann* from Stiasny Verlag. Upon opening to the novella, however, I discovered that the editor had chosen to leave out the frame story altogether and start straight from Severin’s manuscript. The insertion of some erotic prints between the pages of the novella suggests that the intention was to get straight to the sexy bits and leave out extraneously unsexy complications of the novella’s frame story.

self-consciousness on the subjugation of the Other in the form of a dialogue, with a cold Idealist German finding an erotic thrill in the possibility of becoming the slave of the hot, sensuous Venus: philosophy as the origin of a kinky wetdream.

But whither the *eroticization* of Hegel's Lord-Vassal dialectic? If the philosophy seems to provide the form of this dream, with its back-and-forth dialogue between two allegorical embodiments of diametrically opposed concepts, what turns that dialogue into one of sexual desire? Once the narrator's Cossack servant has woken him up, he goes to tea and recounts his dream to his friend Severin, an "eccentric" and "a Galician nobleman and landowner" who "lived according to a minutely implemented, half-philosophical, half-practical system, virtually by the clock, and not only that, but also by the thermometer, barometer, aerometer, hydrometer, by Hippocrates, Hufeland, Plato, Kant, Knigge, and Lord Chesterfield" (7). As this comedic pile-up of names associated with philosophical systems for self-conduct suggests, Severin is a philosophical and aesthetic dilettante given to teaching his friend ways of living. And, it turns out, a visual representation of Severin's experience is what taught the narrator to find a model of *desire* in Hegel's philosophical system. After he tells Severin about his dream, the narrator suddenly finds its origin in aesthetic representation:

My eyes then happened to linger on a painting that I had seen often enough; yet today, in the red glow of the fire, it had an indescribable impact [*unbeschreiblichen Eindruck*] on me.

It was a large oil painting in the intense colors and robust manner of the Belgian school; its subject was odd enough. A beautiful woman, with a sunny smile on her fine face, with rich, classically knotted hair covered with white powder like a soft frost: naked in a dark fur, she reclined on a sofa, leaning on her left arm, her right hand playing with a whip, her bare foot casually propped on the man, who lay before her like a slave, like a dog. And this man, who revealed salient but well-shaped features infused with brooding melancholy and devoted passion, this man, who peered up at her with the burning, enraptured eyes of a martyr, this man, who served as a footstool for her feet—this man was Severin, but beardless and apparently ten years younger.

"*Venus in Furs!*" I cried, pointing to the picture. "That was how I saw her in my dreams."

"So did I," said Severin, "except that I dreamed my dream with open eyes."

"How?"

"Oh! It's a foolish story."

"The painting obviously inspired my dream," I went on. "Do please tell me, however, in what way it played a role in your life and, as I can imagine, perhaps a very crucial role. I look forward to the details."

"Just view its counterpart," my bizarre friend retorted without heeding my words.

The counterpart was an excellent copy of Titian's renowned *Venus with Mirror* in the Dresden Gallery. (7-8)

Following the chain of representations back to its beginning, the narrator finds the kink in his dream in this painting. If the dialogue form of the dream was inspired by his reading of Hegel, the moment where he sublates his German intellectualism and the Venus statue's Southern sensuousness by confessing his desire to become her slave is inspired by this painting. His passive consumption of this visual representation inspires the kinky desire that his dream

expresses. The narrator attempts to go one step further in tracking down the origin of this desire by asking Severin “in what way it played a role in your life,” moving from aesthetic representation to the personal experience represented. But Severin immediately moves the origin of this kinky desire back to aesthetic representation: although the painting represents Severin’s own visual experience, which he saw “with open eyes,” the composition of the painting was itself inspired by a different painting. When Severin answers the narrator’s question about the place of this experience of sexual subjugation in his life by pointing at a different painting that does not represent his own experience, he insists that there is no final distinction between his own experience and its aesthetic representation in inspiring the narrator’s dream. Ultimately, Severin suggests, the transmission of his kinky desire to the narrator lies just as much in its aesthetic mediation as it does in Severin’s own experience. Pushing this chain of representations to the point of comic absurdity, the painting that inspired Severin’s *Venus in Furs* is, of course, a copy.

At this moment, however, Severin moves the discussion back to the realm of philosophical system-making. Having declared that the transmission of his desire to the narrator was a matter of shared aesthetic consumption, he then attempts to extract a universal philosophical idea from the experience he is discussing to teach to the narrator. If the narrator models a form of depth reading when he says, “The painting obviously inspired my dream,” by tracing the form of his dream and the desire that it expresses to another aesthetic source, Severin’s reading of the dream pulls away from individual aesthetic experiences and sexual desires. Instead, he uses the dream as support for a universalizing theory of “the relationship between man and woman”:

“Nowhere is Goethe’s dictum, ‘You must be hammer or anvil,’ more relevant than in the relationship between man and woman. And Madam Venus even admitted that to you in your dream. Woman’s power lies in Man’s passion, and she knows how to make use of it if man isn’t careful. His only choice is to be woman’s tyrant or slave. The instant he gives in, he already has his head in a yoke and he will feel the whip.”

“Strange maxims [*Maximen*]!”

“No maxims, just experience [*Erfahrungen*],” he retorted with a nod. “*I was seriously whipped*, I’m cured. Would you like to read about it?” (9-10)

Severin’s exegesis of the narrator’s dream leads back away from searches for individual origins and toward evidence for universal theories—away, that is, from desire as expressed in narrative form. Severin’s use of the word “*Erfahrungen*” for “experience,” rather than “*Erlebnis*,” brings us to the realm of “experience” as a form of meaningful, knowledge-producing, and therefore generalizable experience, rather than raw sensory experience. For Severin to achieve the kind of uneasy social integration—the eccentric dilettante—that he has achieved by the time of the frame story, that experience and the desire that gave rise to it must be placed firmly in the past: “*I was seriously whipped*, I’m cured.” The framing of Severin’s desire to be whipped as an illness that could be cured, and therefore placed in the past, is the price of his social integration. The cured illness can be detached from Severin’s individual experience of desire and made the material of universal maxims about the general “relationship between man and woman.” In this formulation, the narrator’s dream about Venus becomes evidence of the universal philosophical lesson that Severin derives from his own experiences.

But the narrator’s model of reading exceeds the interpretation Severin offers of his own

experience. The narrator rightly identifies the painting that Severin commissioned as the origin of his dream, and then asks Severin about the individual experiences that inspired that painting. Even if Severin has decided to confine his experience of kink desire to the past and to the realm of philosophical speculation so as to make it socially intelligible, that experience has left behind aesthetic objects that exceed social intelligibility. The impression the painting leaves on the narrator after his dream is, he says, “indescribable.” And precisely what seems to be indescribable about it is the desire for “a beautiful, voluptuous, and cruel female despot” (6) that the narrator expresses in his dream, a desire that Venus calls “your predilection” (“*Ihre Vorliebe*”) (6). On the one hand, then, we have Severin’s reading of the dream, which, like his own experience of kink desire, is simply an expression of “Goethe’s dictum, ‘You must be hammer or anvil’”—a particular experience whose meaning is the confirmation of a universal concept. In Severin’s formulation, kink desire can be given a socially intelligible lesson. On the other hand, we have the narrator’s reading, where the dream, like the painting, are expressions of an individual “predilection” and an aesthetic experience that is “indescribable,” that is, that cannot be communicated because it cannot be translated into the social concepts that underly language. Severin makes social sense out of his experience by extracting a philosophical lesson from it; the narrator suggests instead that that experience is individual, aesthetic, and incommunicable by language.

Severin proposes settling this interpretative impasse by introducing a new genre: narrative prose. That is, he hands the narrator (and, of course, the reader) his memoirs, which then comprise nearly all of the rest of the novel until it reverts to the frame story on the very last page, where the narrator asks for “the moral of the story” (“*die Moral der Geschichte*”) (119). The narrator seems in this final passage to have accepted Severin’s framing of the memoirs as the material for a general social-ethical lesson. Severin declares that the moral of the story is that “she [‘Woman’] will be able to become his [‘Man’s] companion only when she has the same rights as he, when she is his equal in education and work” (119). This sudden reversion to (for the time) radical feminism completes the philosophical theory that Severin lays out: man and woman are unequal, therefore one of them must inevitably dominate the other, until this relationship of dominator and dominated is sublated by a new equality. However, the narrator’s emphasis on individual aesthetic experience in the opening of the novel forces the question: if the only purpose of Severin’s experience is to prove this general lesson, why does the illustration of this lesson take the particular form of a kinky marriage plot?

I propose, then, that the frame story should be read as a complex attempt to frame two different ways that kink desire can create social relations. The frame story is not merely a cover for the pornographic content of Severin’s manuscript by giving it a digestible “moral” for the squeamish. Rather, it frames two ways of understanding how Severin’s desire to be whipped can be integrated into social relations, however uneasily. One is as a philosophical lesson about the universal relations “between man and woman.” The other is as a form of shared aesthetic experience.<sup>25</sup> And explicitly, the mediation between these two possibilities is framed as an act of shared exegesis: Severin reads the narrator’s dream, and in return he offers the narrator, who seems obviously to stand in for the reader, a narrative text to interpret. In this act of shared

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<sup>25</sup> My two descriptions of how *Venus in Furs* positions kink desire—as a universal, philosophical metonym and as an aesthetic taste connecting and setting apart certain select individuals—may recall Eve Sedgwick’s famous characterization of homosexuality’s “universalizing” and “minoritizing” modes in *Epistemology of the Closet*. The rhyme is intentional. And, just as Eve Sedgwick argues about homosexuality, there is no need to choose between these seemingly mutually exclusive positions, as I will show at the end of the chapter.

aesthetic experience, and the exegesis of that experience, I see a model for a kind of shared sexual pedagogy that *doesn't involve sex*. Severin's painting trains the narrator's desire, which produces his dream; Severin also attempts to give a philosophical reading of that dream and his own experience. In this we have a model for the novel itself: Severin stands over the narrator as he reads about Severin's attempt to make a sadomasochistic relationship work. This shared reading of erotic material, which the frame story casts as a philosophical exegesis, could also be understood as the creation of a kind of community of desire defined by media consumption and analysis. The reader is cast in the role of the narrator, both to be philosophized to and also to consume the pornographic descriptions that seem to exceed that philosophical exegesis in their training of the reader's desire. If Severin extracts from his experience a lesson about the necessity to restructure society by offering state rights to women, the stylistic features of his manuscript train the narrator and the reader's desire in a different direction. The constant descriptions of Wanda's fetish gear and the tableaux of domination that Severin's manuscript contains teach the reader to desire like Severin, to notice the same details and attach an eroticism to them, just as Severin's painting inspires the narrator's dream. The traditional method of description in the realist novel famously appeals to the shared social context of reader and author.<sup>26</sup> We understand the social type and social positioning of a Balzac character by matching the description of the things that surround him, that he owns and wears, that he encounters, to our own shared understanding of Balzac's social world. And our reading of Balzac teaches us to be attentive to these socially telling details. In the same way, the descriptions in Severin's manuscript create a shared erotic context between Severin and the narrator, between Sacher-Masoch and the reader. Wanda's furs, her whip, her leather boots are held up as aesthetic details that *can* be eroticized. In holding up these details for erotic attachment, Severin creates a relationship between himself and the narrator that exceeds the philosophical lesson he draws from his manuscript. The narrator is asked to desire with and like Severin, a very different relationship to Severin's kink desire than his explicit demand that the narrator *think* about Severin's experience of desire the same way that he does and extract the same philosophical lesson from it.

My reading of the body of the text in the next sections therefore takes into account not just the Master/slave relationship between Wanda and Severin that most readings of the novel focus on, but also the parasocial relationships of desire that surround it.<sup>27</sup> My reading of the body of the novel emphasizes the moments where Wanda and Severin's play bumps up against the larger social world, whether it is the black maidservants that Wanda occasionally summons to the site of their sexual play to bind Severin or ending of the novel where Wanda encounters a

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<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Dora Zhang's characterization of Balzac's mode of description: "In the case of the Balzacian description, the specificities of Goriot's dress and manner all serve to locate him in a sociocultural-moral matrix evincing a familiar realist descriptive mode that Balzac himself did so much to establish and for which he served as the exemplar to many" (2).

<sup>27</sup> Suzanne R. Stewart's reading of the novel in *Sublime Surrender: Male Masochism at the Fin-de-Siècle* is an intriguing exception, except she immediately ignores the relation between Severin and the narrator to suggest instead that, "The reading of [Severin's] 'Confessions' is to be understood as a mediation between these two paintings" (mentioned in the introduction) (70), oddly eliding the relation between Severin and the narrator that is mediated by these aesthetic objects to focus instead on the aesthetic objects themselves. We will revisit this in my reading of the scene where Wanda has a German painter paint her domination of Severin, but Stewart's reading is characteristic of psychoanalytic approaches to the novel, which fixate inevitably on the relation between Severin and Wanda and their formation as psychic subjects, to the detriment of the other social relations found in the novel.

new man in town who offers her the possibility of a conventional marriage and aristocratic life. Ultimately the body of the novel becomes a question of how sustainable Wanda and Severin's play is, and whether it can ultimately sustain a conventional marriage. Their play pulls in a certain amount of the social world to create its tableaux of power, yet their relationship finally evaporates when they attempt to integrate it into the larger social world beyond the small circle of those they have initiated into their form of desire. The ending of the novel thus implicitly stages a battle between these two ways of making Severin's kink desire social: must it be relegated to the past, to a universal philosophical lesson, for Severin to find his stable social role as an eccentric aristocratic dilettante? Or is there some larger possibility in the small community of those Severin and Wanda initiate into their form of desire and aesthetic experience, even if that group proves unsustainable and nearly every character Severin and Wanda initiate into their inner circle meets disaster in the course of the plot?

### Pedagogical Frames, Medical and Aesthetic, Part II

Before we turn to Severin's manuscript, it is time for a closer look at the framing material of *Psychopathia Sexualis*. My contention is that the conflict between a pedagogy of desire and an attempt to make desire an object of systematic, generalizable knowledge characterizes *Psychopathia Sexualis* just as much as the frame story of *Venus in Furs*. Just as *Venus in Furs* works through different models for giving social intelligibility to kink desire in its frame story, so too does Krafft-Ebing spend the preface to the first edition of his medical work sixteen years after the publication of *Venus in Furs* arguing that the discourse of science is the most socially useful in making sense of this emerging category of desire. The very first sentence of the preface reads, "The least of men is fully aware of the enormous influence that sexual life gains over feeling, thought, and behavior in individual [*individuellen*] and social [*gesellschaftlichen*] existence. Schiller in his poem 'Die Weltweisen' acknowledges this fact with the following words: 'In the interim before philosophy holds together the structure of the world, it obtains its bustle through hunger and through love.' Strikingly, sexual life has experienced only a highly subordinate appraisal from the philosophers." (iii). From the very first lines of his work, Krafft-Ebing introduces poetry and philosophy as competing discourses of knowledge-making about desire, while also citing Schiller's poetic language as evidence for his own argument for the primacy of scientific discourse in making sense of the place of sexual desire in both "individual and social existence."

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given his use of *Venus in Furs* as a basis for his theory of masochism, Krafft-Ebing seems most anxious to establish the superiority of science to poetry in matters of sex. He dispatches of philosophy's treatment of sexual life in just another couple sentences, declaring Plato, Rousseau, and Kant's attempts on the subject "meager" (*dürstig*) and Schopenhauer and E. V. Hartmann's pessimistic takes "so erroneous and in their consequences so tasteless...that both the empirical psychology as well as the metaphysics of the sexual side of human existence are an almost virgin scientific ground [*jungfräulicher wissenschaftlicher Boden*]" (iii). But if the psychology of sexual desire is virgin ground for science, Krafft-Ebing must concede that poetry's flirtations with sexual life have been rather more mature:

For the time being, the poets may be better psychologists than the professional psychologists and philosophers, but they are men of feeling, not reason, and are at least one-sided in their examination of the object. However, they do not see the deep shadows

over the light and the sunny warmth of the material from which they draw nourishment. Granted that the works of all the poetic art of all times and peoples offer inexhaustible material to the monograph of a “Psychology of Love,” nevertheless the great task can be solved only under the assistance of natural science [*der Naturwissenschaft*] and especially of medicine [*der Medicin*], which investigates the psychological material all the way to its anatomical-physiological source and is fair to it in all its aspects [*allseitig*, compared to the *Einseitigkeit* of poetry]. (iii-iv)

What is striking about Krafft-Ebing’s argument for the primacy of science in addressing the question of sexual desire in the life of individuals and societies is how steeped it is not so much in scientific language but rather in the language of narrative and poetic imagery. He sketches a developmental narrative where philosophical treatments of the subject have been “meager,” while the territory remains as yet unexplored for science, a “virgin ground,” with all the invocations of colonial exploration and development and sexual violence that image conjures. In back-handedly complimenting the more mature work of poets, he lapses into surprisingly poetic imagery, conjuring “deep shadows” and “sunny warmth.” This language reads to me as a concession and a one-upmanship at once: he may have learned something on the topic from Schiller, and he may even need to make his argument in the same language as poetry, but scientific discourse can encompass poetic imagery just as much as sober detached prose, giving it that *Allseitigkeit* that poetry’s *Einseitigkeit* lacks.

At the same time, the excess of meaning summoned up in this poetic imagery threatens to undermine the very authority that Krafft-Ebing claims for scientific discourse in using it. The image of “virgin scientific ground” positions his scientific analysis as a sort of deflowering of sexual life itself. If poets are “men of feeling, not reason” who are too close to the subject of love to give it a fully rational treatment, it would seem that scientists like Krafft-Ebing are the men of reason who can “investigate the psychological material all the way to its anatomical-physiological source.” Yet this poetic imagery of the “virgin scientific ground” positions this investigation not so much as a disinterested revelation of facts that will leave both the investigator and his object unchanged, but rather a desirous seduction. Seemingly inadvertently, Krafft-Ebing’s own wielding of the tools of poetry—the construction of images whose play of possible meanings exceeds their referent—to demonstrate the superior objectivity and reason of science reveal his own scientific practice as a form of self-interested desire. Poetry’s self-interested *Schwärmerei* on the topic of love remains a sort of courtly or platonic love, leaving the virginity of its object intact. But Krafft-Ebing’s medical investigation of the subject will, presumably, take its virginity. Even as Krafft-Ebing praises the objective distance that scientific discourse can take from its object, he also positions his investigation as a deflowering of perversity itself. We will revisit this paradoxical dynamic—an objective distance from the object of study that is also a seduction—in a moment when we take a look at the forewords that Krafft-Ebing added to later editions.

After introducing the object of his study — “the psychopathological manifestations of sexual life and the attempt of their recuperation under lawful conditions [*Zurückführung auf gesetzmässige Bedingungen*]” (iv) — Krafft-Ebing’s original foreword returns to one more poetic image to make his case for the superiority of scientific discourse in treating his topic. The image is complex enough to linger on for a time:

He who makes the psychopathology of sexual life into the object of a scientific treatise

[*Gegenstand einer wissenschaftlichen Abhandlung*] sees himself confronted by a night-side [*Nachtseite*] of human life and misery, in whose shadows the gleaming idol [literally “image of god”, *Götterbild*] of the poet becomes a hideous grimace and morality and aesthetics threaten to despair of the “image and likeness of God” [*an dem ‘Ebenbild Gottes’ irre werden möchten*]. (v)

Krafft-Ebing’s imagery weaves a complex semiotic web of associations in this passage. Scientific discourse, it seems, gains its authority partly from being able to descry its object even in darkness, while that darkness distorts the divine representations that poetic, moral, and aesthetic discourses worship. Recalling the frame story of *Venus in Furs*, Krafft-Ebing assigns pagan worship of artistic representations to the poet (the “idol”) and Christian worship to morality and aesthetics (the “image and likeness of God,” which is in quotation marks in the original text, as well, emphasizing the connection to the Genesis story of creation and the Fall). The poet, devoted, it seems, to a naive, pagan idea of sensual love that he has created with his own mimetic tools, would see this representation made “hideous” and no longer worthy of worship were he to treat sexual life in its full plenitude of manifestations. Krafft-Ebing suggests, contrary to the dream in the frame story of *Venus in Furs* that associates sadomasochism with pagan aestheticism, that a poetry of perversity would produce a representation of human sexual life that would be unfit for aesthetic appreciation, precisely because it would become “hideous” rather than beautiful. Morality and aesthetics are no better equipped to address the subject of perversity because doing so would undermine their own investment in humanity as a representation of God. In each case, Krafft-Ebing’s metaphor suggests that each discourse has a self-interested relationship to representation. In poetry, an aspect of human life is made into a representation of a god—a fetish item. Poetry, in this metaphor, must exclude from representation objects that are not beautiful. Morality and aesthetics, it seems, are invested in an idealized representation of humanity as a whole and, likewise, shrink away from investigating those aspects of human “nature” that would deviate from this image. Only scientific discourse has a gaze that “must constantly look upon the reverse side of life, upon human weakness and meanness” (v). The representational power of scientific discourse is that it has no attachment to humanity as a representation of divinity. It simply sees, apparently, humanity-in-itself.

And yet Krafft-Ebing’s metaphor once again exceeds its immediate context. If this is meant to be an argument for science as a mode of secular discourse that sees things as they really are, rather than as representations of the divine, the metaphor of “darkness” brings us inevitably back into the mediation of representation. Krafft-Ebing’s language positions light as the medium in which objects appear; in darkness, the beautiful “idols” of poetry instead appear “hideous.” Rather than a purely objective, unmediated gaze, the scientist seems rather to have a sort of night-vision that allows him to produce accurate representations of objects that are cast in darkness. In the next paragraph, Krafft-Ebing writes:

Perhaps it [“medicine, and especially psychiatry”] takes some solace in its difficult vocation and compensates the ethicist and the aesthetician by being capable, in many cases, of attributing to pathological [*krankhafte*] conditions that which offends the ethical and the aesthetic sense. In doing so, it takes on the salvation of the honor [*Ehrenrettung*] of mankind in the forum of morals and of the individual before his judges and fellow men. The duty and the right of medical science to these studies accrues to it from the high purpose of all human research into truth. (v)



While Krafft-Ebing evokes again in this last sentence an ideal of scientific discourse as a disinterested representation of universal truths, the previous sentences reveal other audiences and goals as well. The compensation Krafft-Ebing suggests to the ethicist and the aesthetician seems to be not so much to bring this “night-side of human life” into the light, but rather to keep it carefully confined to a darkness into which the ethicist and the aesthetician cannot see. Insofar as “pathological conditions” are a terrain upon which the ethicist and the aesthetician cannot or do not want to gaze, Krafft-Ebing suggests he does their field a service by keeping “the psychopathology of sexual life” confined there. Unlike Severin’s attempt to draw a universal lesson from his desire to be whipped, of which he was “cured,” Krafft-Ebing’s argument suggests that, in attributing these desires to “pathological conditions,” he removes them from the realm of universal human nature, allowing the ethicist and the aesthetician to go on untroubled with their contemplation of humanity as the “image and likeness of God.” Once it has been confined to the category of pathology, morality does not need to contend with perversity as something that would spoil the honor of “mankind” in general, and the perverse individual no longer needs to defend his honor in front of the law or his “fellow men.” Although Krafft-Ebing explicitly attributes the “right” of science to study these phenomena to the general human quest for “truth,” there’s also a sense in which science seems to collude with the darkness here. Representing the perverse “individual” in the category of “pathological conditions” removes him from the universalizing gaze of morals, aesthetics, law, and fellow man. Seen by the gaze of medical science and represented in its discourse, Krafft-Ebing suggests, the perverse man is an object of concern only to medical science. His perversity need not be integrated into or justified before his “fellow men.” The only social relation it need produce is that between him and his doctor—a relation that can, apparently, be understood as the deflowering of a virgin ground.

This implied version of aesthetics, which names experiences of the beautiful and the divine as the only properly aesthetic experiences, requires the confinement of narratives about “perverse” sexual desires to medical discourse. Krafft-Ebing in fact made this literary taste explicit in his judgment of Sacher-Masoch’s work. Both Joachim Neugroschel and Suzanne Stewart bring attention to a passage in the body of *Psychopathia Sexualis* where Krafft-Ebing applies this aesthetic theory to Sacher-Masoch’s literary output:

As a man Sacher-Masoch can not lose anything in the estimation of his cultured fellow beings simply because he was afflicted with an anomaly of his sexual feelings. As an author he suffered severe injury so far as the influence and intrinsic merit of his work is concerned, for so long and whenever he eliminated his perversion from his literary efforts, he was a gifted writer, and as such would have achieved real greatness had he been actuated by normally sexual feelings. (translation cited in Neugroschel xix)

This fascinating passage makes clear how central not just epistemological but also aesthetic claims are to Krafft-Ebing’s theory of perversions. Krafft-Ebing’s objection to Sacher-Masoch’s perversion is not that it is morally wrong, but rather that it is not proper material for a literary narrative. Instead, Krafft-Ebing argues, it belongs properly to the genres of psychological theory and medical case studies. Reading this passage in light of the introduction, it is clear that Krafft-Ebing considers the good and the beautiful to be the proper material of literature. While he is reaching “virgin scientific ground” by making perversion the object of medical study, Sacher-Masoch produces bad literature when he makes the same material the

object of literary narrative. While Krafft-Ebing understands this innovative material as a virtue for scientific writing, for literary writing it is a vice. Implicit in this argument, however, is an idea rather similar to my own reading: in Krafft-Ebing's argument, the problem with Sacher-Masoch's writing is not so much that it is untalented or poorly constructed, but rather that kink desire is not suitable material for already existing literary forms. Judged by a traditional aesthetics of the good and the beautiful, Sacher-Masoch's work comes up short. In putting literary form to ugly material, Krafft-Ebing implies that Sacher-Masoch departs from the realm of the properly literary to a field that is, Sacher-Masoch believes, best suited to the distanced prose and narrative forms of medicine. Krafft-Ebing's aesthetic argument is less that Sacher-Masoch is a poetaster and more that he is a modernist.

In this first foreword, then, Krafft-Ebing employs the tools of poetic language to make an argument that the perversities he describes are best limited to the realm of law and medicine. But despite his rhetorical and logical pleas for confining perversity to the realm of distanced medical and juridical study, the narrative forms his text provided reached far beyond his initial intentions. The case studies that comprise the main body of his text circulated far beyond the body of the "*Berufene*" that the first foreword addresses. In the ninth edition, published in 1894, Sacher-Masoch wrote a brief but fascinating additional foreword that attempts delicately to address this circulation, which I quote in full:

The ninth edition that follows is one that has been carefully revised, partly improved and expanded. The reception that the book has so far received in juridical circles—favorable, without exception—is evidence to the author that it will have no small influence on the practice of law and legislation and that it will have a hand in the elimination of centuries-long errors and orthodoxies [*Härten*].

This book's unexpectedly great success at bookstores is probably the best evidence that there are countless unfortunate people [*Unglückliche*] who are seeking and finding within it elucidation and solace with regards to enigmatic manifestations of their *Vita sexualis*. Innumerable letters from such stepchildren of Nature directed to the author from all lands are evidence that this supposition is justified. The reading of these letters, the majority of whose writers are intellectually and socially upstanding [*geistig und social hochstehende*] and often very sensitive people, awakens the deepest pity. After all, it is spiritual suffering that is revealed within these letters, against which everything else that fate ordains fades to nothing.

May the book also continue to offer such unfortunate people solace and moral rehabilitation!

In order to hinder and spoil [*zu erschweren und zu verleiden*] the reading of this book by possible non-professionals [*Unberufene*], still more use was made of terminis technicis and Latin language than in earlier editions. New observations—that is, ones not contained in the eighth edition—are case numbers 44, 66, 69, 92, 93, 99, 117, 119, 123, 125, 188, 189 of the present edition.

Hopefully this edition, too, will be granted the friendly reception that the previous ones enjoyed. May the book prove useful in service of science, of law, and of humanity!  
Vienna, March 1894 — The Author.

Krafft-Ebing performs a complex rhetorical maneuver in this new foreword. No longer worried that his scientific work may have to compete with poetry or philosophy, he begins by

invoking the “favorable reception” in “juridical circles.” This positive reception, and the attendant liberalization of law in its treatment of the “sick” individuals who encounter it, confirms his wishes for the first edition. Then, however, he must acknowledge that the book is entering its ninth edition not so much because of its favorable intellectual reception in a limited community of elite knowledge professionals, but rather because of its “great success at bookstores.” That is, the stories it contains have economic value for a wider, curious public.

This, of course, puts the Krafft-Ebing who insisted on empirical scientific truth, no matter how much it may make the aesthete and the moralist “despair of the image and likeness of God,” in an awkward position. For the book’s great success suggests not so much that its subject is a dark one from which non-scientists would like to avert their unprofessional and modest gaze, but rather one with a certain lurid popular appeal. With great rhetorical alacrity, Krafft-Ebing moves to forestall any suspicion that his book’s success may lie in the kinship of its case studies with popular pornography. Instead, he conjures up a possible audience absent from the original foreword, sympathetic, intelligent, and well-differentiated from the masses who might read the book for a cheap thrill: the community of people defined by the same psychopathological categories that his case studies narrate.<sup>28</sup> These “unfortunate people,” who are, Krafft-Ebing is anxious to assure the presumably legal audience of this foreword, upstanding citizens except for their pathologies, have turned to his book for “elucidation and solace” of their own lives.

Embedded in this rhetorical movement is an admission that Krafft-Ebing’s case studies have provided not just evidence for legal rulings, but also a new narrative genre for his audience to identify with, elaborate, and narrate themselves within. The objects of his study have written back and become narrating subjects of their own lives. In Krafft-Ebing’s case studies, they have found a way to tell their own stories and a term for their own “spiritual suffering.” However, Krafft-Ebing assures his juridical audience (which is, it is now clear, much smaller than the audience writing “innumerable letters”), these people remain passive objects of study, merely looking into his book to discover the “solace,” “elucidation,” and “moral rehabilitation” contained within. They are, in fact, to be pitied by the implied audience of this foreword, rather than acknowledged as a substantial audience themselves. To facilitate this return from narrating subject to studied object, Krafft-Ebing emphasizes that he has made the book even harder to read for people without technical educations. And yet, despite this anxious self-defense, Krafft-Ebing acknowledges that his deflowering of “virgin scientific ground” has produced fruit—the speciation of new perversities that Foucault describes *The History of Sexuality*.

Drawn by his work to write letters or become his patient, various “unfortunate people” have served as new case studies that this updated edition inserts. Turning to case 44 (98), the first of the new cases in the ninth edition, we see how Krafft-Ebing has taught his readers to identify

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<sup>28</sup> For an overview of historical documents related to the reception of *Psychopathia Sexualis* by a professional and a lay audience, see Oosterhuis’s chapter, “The Comfort of Togetherness,” pp. 185-194. Oosterhuis notes that there’s no documentation suggesting that Krafft-Ebing was particularly distressed by the book’s popular success in his private life. As he notes, “There is no indication that he ever instructed his publisher to have the sale of *Psychopathia sexualis* restricted to a professional audience. On the contrary, he proposed that the publisher increase the number of copies printed and was perfectly aware that his work was popular with a lay audience” (188). Oosterhuis cites an 1894 letter to Ferdinand Enke as evidence for this, as well as this preface. While Oosterhuis reads the sentence “Its unexpected commercial success is the best proof that large numbers of unfortunate people look for and find in the book enlightenment and comfort with respect to enigmatic manifestations of their *vita sexualis*” as straightforward evidence of Krafft-Ebing’s glee in the book’s popular success, my own reading notes how much this glee is still couched as a justification to his main, professional audience and a plea to keep the object of the text’s study restricted to that audience.

and narrate themselves in his categories and genre. The “Mister X.” who is the subject of this case, a 26-year-old technician, is quoted at length describing his masochistic fantasies (98). Krafft-Ebing supplies a life history, with early childhood manifestations, a further development around puberty, and an uneasy adulthood. At the end of the case, Krafft-Ebing sums up Mister X.’s diagnosis in what is presumably a paraphrase of his own words (the passage is written in Subjunctive I, a mood used in German to paraphrase someone else’s words while distancing the speaker from them):

Patient is an intellectually high-standing, sensitive, somewhat neurasthenic personality. He complains that in company [*Gesellschaft*] he largely has the feeling of standing out, of being observed, to the point of putting him a state of anxiety although he is aware that he is only imagining these things. For this reason, he loves solitude, above all because he has to fear that someone will come to notice his sexual abnormality.

His impotence is not embarrassing to him, for his libido is practically zero, nevertheless he would consider the recovery of his *Vita sexualis* the best fortune, for so much in social life [*im socialen Leben*] depends on it, and he would then surely move more securely and more masculinely in society [*Gesellschaft*].

His current existence is torture for him, and such a life, a burden. (100)

What strikes me most about this about this case is both the richness of description that Krafft-Ebing’s language provides for this man to describe his sexual desire—the description of his masochistic fantasy runs for two paragraphs and sketches a tableau of submission that could be straight out of *Venus in Furs*—as well as the narrative finality of the ending. If Krafft-Ebing’s narrative for kink desire—an object of scientific and legal interest, an enduring diagnosis with an attendant case history, a natural but unfortunate variation to be pitied—provided some level of solace to his readers and protected them from cruel misunderstandings by the legal system, it also insisted on isolating them socially. Mister X. insists that his impotence outside of masochistic fantasies is not even particularly embarrassing for him but suffers from constant anxiety about the social consequences of being found out to have such a socially unassimilable psychosexuality. Although Krafft-Ebing’s book encouraged an outpouring of letters narrating situations like Mister X.’s own, his new foreword insists on treating them as unfortunate souls suffering in lonely isolation. The narrative of the case study connects patient and doctor, with the doctor in strict control of the meaning and circulation of the patient’s story. Mister X. can take solace knowing that there are other lonely sufferers of the same affliction in the doctor’s care—a community of fellow sufferers. The main body of *Venus in Furs* also imagines a community of social outcasts. But rather than relating as objects of medical discourse, they come to their co-suffering as subjects of an aesthetic sensibility.

### A Matrimonial Education

It is time I look more closely at the sociality of desire in Severin’s manuscript in the body of *Venus in Furs*. I have already alluded to readings from Deleuze and Joseph Metz that emphasize the aspect of education and *Bildung* in the plot of the novel. Indeed, when, very early in their strange courtship, Wanda asks Severin whether, by his childhood, “all these singular tendencies had already crystallized in you?” (30), education figures strongly in the life narrative that Severin recounts. The case study he offers Wanda of his “singular tendencies” is just as

much an account of how he came to be an aesthetic dilettante:

“My Catonian severity, my timidity with women, were simply nothing but the most sublime sense of beauty; sensuality now became a sort of culture in my imagination, and I swore not to squander its holy sensations on an ordinary creature but to save them for an ideal woman—if possible, the Goddess of Love herself. I was very young when I began studying at the university in the capital, where my aunt resided. ... I studied everything higgledy-piggledy, unsystematically, promiscuously: chemistry, alchemy, literature, astronomy, philosophy, law, anatomy, and history. I read Homer, Virgil, Ossian, Schiller, Goethe, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Voltaire, Moliere, the Koran, the Cosmos, Casanova’s memoirs. I grew more and more confused, eccentric, and suprasensual every day. In my mind I always pictured a beautiful female ideal; and now and then, amid my skeletons and my leather-bound tomes, she would appear like a vision, reclining on roses, surrounded by cupids.” (33).

The unconventionality of Severin’s desires, in his account, seems both to express and reinforce itself in the unconventionality of his education. The story of how he developed the “singular tendencies” that set him apart from the rest of the aristocratic society he was born into seems to be just as much the story of how he became the socially marginal figure of the aesthetic dilettante.

But the novel’s adaptation of the marriage plot to unconventional narrative ends has been less noted. Just as Severin responds to Wanda’s question about whether the origin of his aesthetic-sexual “tendencies” could be traced back to his childhood with a story about his education and his punishment by a beautiful but cruel aunt, when Severin asks Wanda how she came to “develop” her unconventional “notions” (20), she, too, responds with a story of how an unusual education gave rise to a socially out-of-place and out-of-time view of marriage:

“Very simple. My father was a rationalist. Starting in the cradle, I was surrounded by plaster casts of ancient statues. At ten, I read *Gil Blas*, at twelve *La Pucelle*. Just as other children were friends with Tom Thumb, Bluebeard, and Cinderella, I counted Venus and Apollo, Heracles and Laocoön as my friends. My husband had a cheerful, sunny disposition; not even the incurable ailment that overcame him shortly after our wedding could ever darken his brow for long. The very night before his death he took me into his bed, and during the many months he sat dying in his wheelchair, he would often joke with me: ‘Well, do you already have an admirer?’ I turned crimson. ‘Don’t cheat on me,’ he once added. ‘I would find that ugly. Just get yourself a handsome man or rather several. You’re a good wife, but you’re still half a child, you need toys.’ I probably don’t have to tell you that I had no admirer during his lifetime. Enough though. He groomed me to become what I am: a Greek.” (20-21)

In both cases, even as their views of sexuality are framed as “tendencies,” as matters of taste and aesthetics whose origins could be traced back to their earliest memories, Wanda and Severin also account for their desires as a product of education, a process of *Bildung*. The novel never very coherently works out the question it frequently ponders of whether their desires are inborn or a matter of experience; at various points, Wanda accuses Severin of “corrupting” (38) her but also of bringing out something “latent” (55), while Severin’s case-study-like account of

his tastes seems to frame them as both a matter of his “suprasensual nature” as well as his unusual education and experiences of punishment. Whether or not the quasi-philosophical dialogues of the characters establish the ontology of sexual desire as a natural biological drive or as an interaction of experience with those drives is not really as interesting for my purposes here as the genres the novel reworks as it imagines a narrative for the cultivation and expression of those desires. As much as it is a failed *Bildungsroman*, where the subject of the narrative ends up a mere eccentric dilettante rather than a well-integrated member of society (though it also gestures at this integration at its very end—more on that later), *Venus in Furs* is also a marriage plot in reverse.

In emplotting masochistic desire, the novel begins with marriage and follows with scenes from an extended, eccentric courtship. And rather than the more linear marriage plot, with its overcoming of obstacles leading to the consummation of marriage, the novel starts with the possibility of marriage and offers each of the scenes of courtship that follow as themselves consummations of Severin’s “singular tendencies.” After Severin meets Wanda during a stay at a “small Carpathian resort” (11) that seems cut off from the rest of their social lives, they quickly share the origin stories of Severin’s unconventional sexual desires and Wanda’s unconventional scorn for the social institutions available in Christian society that limit the expression of women’s sexual pleasure. Severin immediately declares his love for Wanda and suggests they marry. Wanda, true to her skepticism of marriage, puts the plot in motion by suggesting they live “as if in a marriage”: “I’ll give you a year to win me over, to convince me that we are suited to each other, that we can live together. If you succeed, I’ll be your wife, Severin—a wife who will perform her duties rigorously and conscientiously. During this year we will live as if in a marriage. ... We will live together ... share all our habits, in order to see whether we can find ourselves in one another. *I grant you all the rights of a husband, an admirer, a friend!* Are you satisfied with that?” (26). If the traditional marriage plot, as Joseph Allen Boone suggests in *Tradition Counter Tradition*, almost never imagines married life, instead figuring matrimony as the resolution of all conflict between individual and society,<sup>29</sup> Severin’s kinky desires and Wanda’s skepticism of contemporary social forms demands a reversed structure. Wanda suggests living as if in marriage so that they might see whether Severin’s unconventional desires can be accommodated in that form before she commits to it. This is a more developed plot than the absolute unimaginability of Heathcliff and Catherine’s cross-class marriage that leads to a string of sadomasochistic outbursts before ending in a wedding, but the scenes that follow are more isolated descriptions of Severin’s submission than a true cause-and-effect narrative, and the plot still relies heavily on a withdrawal of the characters from larger social institutions. If the narrative of *Wuthering Heights* demanded the absolute isolation of remote aristocratic estates in a rural region, *Venus in Furs* gives its characters slightly more freedom of motion through

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<sup>29</sup> Boone’s reading of the marriage plot tradition in the Anglophone novel notes “the tradition’s appearance of an overarching unity and authority, nowhere so evident as in the codification of its narrative plots into recognizable, repeating, and contained structures ... whether or not marriage is actually attained, these patterns almost uniformly uphold the concept of romantic wedlock as their symbolic center and ideal end” (9). For Boone, the deeper unity in the nineteenth century marriage plot, whether it ends tragically or comically, narrates a course of courtship or a course of seduction, is the way it prescribes a specific desire for a specific type of closed ending into the novel’s form. Boone identifies the ideal of wedlock with the very concept of narrative closure, writing “the knot binding narrative closure and wedlock is ‘fatal’ in more senses than one, protecting the text’s ideal vision of unchanging love from interrogation by strangling the possibility of more narrative at that very juncture where the novelist—so comments Dickens—would fain ‘weave, for a little longer space, the thread of these adventures’” (17).

societies. But the scenario still demands a certain halfway withdrawal from social forms: both the characters are wealthy aristocrats, with Wanda having enough money from her dead father and husband to fund seemingly any whim; the plot begins at a resort and never moves to any place where Severin or Wanda have any social demands on them by relatives, friends, or economic partners; the regionalism is not so tightly constrained as *Wuthering Heights*, but the novella is still part of Sacher-Masoch's regionalist evocations of life in Galicia, a multiethnic, largely Slavic, region of the Austro-Hungarian Empire far from the metropole of Vienna.

At the same time that the novel's plot maintains a certain distance from actual social life and obligations, the form of Severin's kinky desires nevertheless requires some level of content from the larger society surrounding them. This paradox—that Severin's fantasies of submission to a dominating woman must, necessarily, pull in some of the context of broader power structures, even as their enactment requires a suspension of Severin and Wanda's usual social relations—works itself out in a decision that Wanda makes near the beginning of the story. Wanda draws up a contract for Severin “binding me by my oath and word of honor to be her slave as long as she desired it” (51). The genre of the contract again points to the way the novel's plot adopts social forms while emptying them of their larger social relations: a contract is enforceable only in the context of a legal system, a state, a hierarchy of power relations between the parties involved, yet it becomes here the fodder of a private sexual fantasy. Following this logic, Wanda decides, unilaterally, to turn down Severin's fantasy of going “to a country where it [slavery] still exists, to the Orient, to Turkey”:

“Should I sign the contract?” I asked.

“Not yet,” said Wanda. “I want to add your conditions. Besides, you're going to sign it in the right place.”

“Constantinople?”

“No. I've thought it over. What good is having a slave where everyone has slaves? I want to be alone in having a slave in our educated, sober, Philistine world—a slave with no will of his own, a slave who is put into my hands not by the law, not by my privilege or brutal violence, but solely by the power of my beauty and my being. I find that piquant. At any rate, we're going to a country where nobody knows us, so that you can appear as my servant before the entire world without any ceremony. Perhaps Italy, perhaps Rome or Naples.” (52)

The frisson of the slavery fantasy, for Wanda, is precisely that it remains private *fantasy*. None of the social structures required to maintain actual slavery must exist, merely the private sexual relation between Wanda and Severin. Yet at the same time, to maintain the fantasy, they must suspend their embeddedness in the obligations and relations that define their everyday life and go “to a country where nobody knows us.” A totally isolated fantasy roleplay, confined only to private spaces and carried on at the resort or among their usual social world, would be too idiosyncratic and fantastic to be fun; Wanda wants Severin to be treated as though he really were her servant “before the entire world.” But an actual, socially, culturally, and legally recognized slavery for Severin would remove the sexual frisson by merging too closely with actually existing social relations. It would have no fantasy element at all, but merely integrate Severin and Wanda's relation into an actually existing social system in a way that disavows its sexual element.

This unstable equilibrium—that the expression of their sexual desires needs *just enough*

integration into already existing social categories, like that of the servant, without becoming so thoroughly integrated into them that it loses its sexual element by becoming another power relation altogether—defines the rest of the novel. Wanda and Severin indeed embark on their trip to Italy, and the relation between them remains largely stable as long as they successfully maintain the fiction that Severin is Wanda's servant without either letting others in on the fiction or reducing Severin to an actual servant. For example, Wanda rents a villa on the outskirts of town where they are not so thoroughly embedded in the town's social life, saying, "I've given up on the idea of renting an apartment in town. . . . It's hard to find an entire floor where one can be secluded and do as one likes. In such a strange and fantastic relationship as ours, everything has to harmonize" (70). On this estate that is literally on the margins of the town's social life, Wanda assigns Severin to work for a month with the gardener under the fiction that he is her servant. He very nearly decides that this idea was "stupid," as he realizes that the state of *actual* servitude is not the constant climaxes of his voluntary whippings at Wanda's playfully cruel hands, but rather one of "humdrum regularity" (77). But the arbitrary time limit Wanda puts on Severin's servitude restores their relation to the level of sexual fantasy; when at last Wanda drops the temporary fiction of servitude by asking, "Can you still love me?", Severin responds with an embrace, a storm of kisses, and, "That's my misery—that I keep loving you more and more intensely, more and more insanely the worse you treat me, the more often you betray me!" (82). Severin, of course, is not quite right about the dynamics of his desire: he gets off not on the "humdrum regularity" of being a forgotten gardener for a cruel aristocrat, but rather by the interruption of that power relation, the sudden shift from master-servant to lover-lover.

To analyze how the fulfillment of Wanda and Severin's kink desire for each other relies on bringing their sexual relationship close-but-not-too-close to existing social relationships, we can look more closely at the three people they let in on their fiction. First, there are Wanda's black maidservants, who appear sometimes as a chorus and sometimes as a single figure named Haydée. Second, there is a German painter. And lastly, there is a Greek aristocrat whose capacity for cruelty matches and even exceeds Wanda's. Each of these characters illuminates just how the expression of Wanda and Severin's kink desire changes when exposed to broader social relations. In the case of the black maidservants, who help Wanda in administering bondage and impact sessions on Severin, we see how their sadomasochistic relation requires the emptying out of real-world oppressions and power relations into a mere formal figure or symbol around which their sexual fantasy can concentrate. In the case of the cruel and racist Greek, who gladly impinges upon Wanda and Severin's scene to woo and ultimately marry her, we see how there is some truth to the philosophical-ethical reading that the older Severin offers to the narrator in the frame story. That the Greek ultimately enters a conventional marriage with Wanda (with a conventional end to their narrative) after helping her torture Severin makes an argument for the ways in which conventional heterosexual marriage can be understood to exist on a continuum with Wanda's Domme/sub relationship with Severin. The German painter, however, provides the most intriguing figure for my purposes. After Severin catches an image of himself in submission to Wanda in a mirror, he convinces her to commission the painter to immortalize her "extraordinary beauty" (91). But it is not just Wanda's beauty that the painter captures, but rather the entire aesthetic expression of desire contained in the tableau of Severin in submission to Wanda.

Let me contrast the appearance of the "African women" with the German painter more closely. On a formal level, the African women belong to the novel's description and the German painter to the plot. The women's introduction is sudden, with no narrative justification, and



serves as ornament in one of the novel's many descriptive, pornographic tableaux. They appear once Wanda at last consummates her relationship of domination with Severin in the Italian villa they rent together by having him sign the contract. That narrative climax over, and Severin's passport and money handed over to Wanda, the novel moves from courtship narrative to pornographic description: "Suddenly she [Wanda] kicked me away, leaped up, and rang the bell. Three young, slender African women came in—carved out of ebony, as it were, and clad entirely in red satin. Each woman was clutching a rope" (75). A long description of bondage and a whipping follows. Up to this moment, the narrative has never mentioned the African women, even though their presence is a bit mystifying from the perspective of the plot (did Wanda somehow travel on the train to Italy with them? Did she hire them in town?). Amber Jamilla Musser, in *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism*, reads this as a form of invisibility, arguing that "these women" are "technicians of domination," a phrase that emphasizes "the labor involved, its invisibility, and the opacity of their affect" (84). However, what she characterizes as "the invisibility of their labor" I am much more inclined to describe as a lack of embeddedness in the novel's plot and social relations. The women are not so much invisible as *hypervisible*. They fit entirely within the descriptive logic of the novel's style. Adjectives pile up around them, just as they do when Sacher-Masoch stops to describe the fetish object that is Wanda's endless succession of fur jackets. They are "young, slender"; they wear "red satin"; they clutch ropes, just as Wanda, a few sentences later, slips on "the ermine-trimmed kazabaika" with "white fur" and Severin is tied to the columns of "the canopy of the wide Italian bed" (75). This hyper-specification of origin, color, and spatial description ornamentizes the African women; that Wanda commands one of them by her proper name, "Haydée,"<sup>30</sup> establishes her less as a character in the plot than as an overdetermined fetish object little different from the "ermine-trimmed kazabaika." Indeed, Severin's narration explicitly compares the women to an art or even fetish (in the anthropological sense contemporary to the period) object: each of the women is "carved out of ebony, as it were."

On the other hand, the women do not participate only as objects; they mirror and multiply Wanda's actions. Soon after this scene, "the Africans tied me to a post and amused themselves by needling me with their gold hairpins" (84), evidently taking a similar pleasure to Wanda's in torturing Severin. The scene ends with the women, at Wanda's command, "bind[ing] my arms on my back, put[ting] a yoke around my neck, and harness[ing] me to the plow" (84). Then, "One guided the plow, the second led me with a rope, the third drove me along with the whip. And Venus in Furs stood on the side and watched" (84). The racist reduction of the women to exotic, ornamental fetish objects in the novel's description is obvious, but it is worth lingering a little on the odd sociality of this scene. While the novel gives the women space to mirror Wanda's sadistic desires by "amusing themselves" in the torture, there is very little of the pedagogy of desire that we see in other parts of the novel. The women are not given space to learn masochistic desire from a painting, like the narrator, or by watching Wanda whip Severin, as the German painter does (they simply appear and follow Wanda's orders before doing any observation). The women have no social relations outside of what is needed to fulfill Severin's fantasies of torture. While Musser writes that "the black servant girls are read as reserved without the associated aesthetic dimension" (85), I would argue that it is more precise to read

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<sup>30</sup> The name itself seems less to specify a concrete background for the character than to establish her as an artificial fantasy. It originates from Greek, or perhaps from the character in *The Count of Monte Cristo* who is sold into slavery in Constantinople, which recalls Wanda's desire to avoid taking Severin to a place "where everyone has slaves."

them as nothing *but* an aesthetic function. The comparisons to *objets d'art* reduce them to descriptive ornament, not so much invisible as part of an overstuffed decadent backdrop. When no longer needed to fill out the novel's pornographic tableaux, they even "suddenly vanished as if the earth had swallowed them up" (75).

Yet they are not entirely emptied of all social or historical content; Severin's description repeatedly goes out of its way to emphasize their blackness, and the scene where they tie Severin to the yoke to work the field can't possibly fail to resonate, even as the novel strictly emphasizes their "African"ness and places them far, far away from the system of American slavery which had been abolished less than a decade before its publication. Yet even as the novel evokes this larger historical context, it disavows it. The only references to real historical systems of slavery in the novel refer to the Ottoman Empire and to Russian serfdom. And not only does the novel avoid the American context by fixating on their Africanness, it even removes them one step further from real-world ethno-racial relations in its description: "I now first observed her [Haydée's] noble, almost European features, her splendid, statuesque bust virtually sculpted in black marble" (84). In Severin's description, Haydée is a character with a proper name, but also a bust or a carving; she is emphatically black, yet also European; she shares Wanda's sadistic desires, yet also becomes an object of Severin's lustful gaze. Her participation in Wanda and Severin's sexual play emphasizes the ways that, although the expression of their kink desire requires a certain distance from existing social forms, it nevertheless requires a certain amount of social-historical content to be articulated. There is no sexual desire for domination without really existing systems of domination. Yet, for that desire to remain sexual, it needs to function one step removed from those really existing systems: Haydée functions not as an independent character with her own social relations or function in the plot, but rather as an evocation of the existence of the structures of colonialism and slavery. Through Haydée, those structures are pulled in to the context of Severin and Wanda's desire and the fantasies that express it, but their desire does not have to contend with the actual material social relations of real-world masters and slaves. Needless to say, though important to emphasize, insofar as the novel provides a narrative for sexual relations outside the bounds of marriage, family, and state, this sociality is not free or "outside" of other oppressive social relations.

In contrast to the "African women," the German painter is part of the novel's plot, rather than its description. And rather than functioning as an aesthetic object himself, he produces them. If the African women mirrored Wanda's actions, but functioned really as a symbolic context for Severin's fantasies, the German painter learns to experience desire the same way that Severin does. This learning happens through shared aesthetic experience, and its artifact is an aesthetic object capable of further circulating this aestheticized experience of desire. Not only that, but ultimately (and subtly), the German's participation in the plot, and the painting that results from it, functions as the origin of the whole novel's narrative. His Germanness and his work as a painter, in contrast to the African handmaidens, put him in the category of people the novel envisions as capable of sharing in Severin's aestheticized mode of desire. In that way, he seems aligned with the narrator of the frame story who is reading the manuscript, who himself stands in for Sacher-Masoch's implied reading audience. (Indeed, as I will revisit in the conclusion, some of those educated, German-speaking men who went on to produce written accounts of the origins of their desire that are collected in *Psychopathia Sexualis* cite *Venus in Furs* as a major factor in their erotic imaginations.)

Not long after Wanda has her maidservants tie Severin to the plow, the German painter is introduced as one of Wanda's "admirers" that she tells Severin she must retain "so I won't lose

you” (86). Unlike with the African women, the painter is well-integrated into the novel’s plot; when Wanda and Severin first discuss the possibility of a relationship, Wanda suggests repeatedly that she may need to retain another man’s affections to be sufficiently cruel to Severin. She follows through with her rendezvous with the German painter, who appears in a long progression of causally-connected scenes, as opposed to the disconnected pornographic tableaux in which Haydée appears. At first, Wanda’s rendezvous inflames Severin with jealousy, until Severin realizes he is in the same position as himself: “Venus in Furs had trapped his soul in the red snares of her hair. He would paint her and lose his mind” (87). Two parallel scenes have Severin, in his role as Wanda’s servant, watching the German watch Wanda, “folding his hands as if in prayer” (87) and then, a short time after, drawing a bath for Wanda and gazing at her naked body, whose beauty affects him so strongly “that I knelt before her as I had knelt before the Goddess” Venus (90). In his obeisance, Severin “happened to glance at the massive mirror on the opposite wall and I cried out, for I saw us in its gold frame as if in a painting; and this painting was so marvelously beautiful, so singular, so fantastic, that I was grief-stricken to think that its lines, its colors would dissolve as in a fog” (91). This glance convinces Wanda to have the German paint her.

The series of scenes places Severin and the German in a chiasmic relation to each other: the German gazes at Wanda as though she is a painted image of a goddess, and his adulation of that beauty “trapped his soul” with desire for her; Severin views his own submissive desire for Wanda in a mirror and experiences the image “as if in a painting,” leading Wanda to have the German express his desire for her by copying a painting of her “that I myself painted” (92) after she rejects his painting of her as a Madonna (91). Severin’s desire for Wanda is expressed in service, and he experiences the image of that service like the beauty of a painting; Wanda commands the German painter to express his desire for her by subordinating his own aesthetic sense to her self-portrait, which he experiences as a kind of service. The expressions of their desire for Wanda—in service and in aesthetic labor—merge. As he sketches Wanda, the painter asks her to make “the expression I need for my painting,” which she achieves by whipping Severin (93). But watching this aestheticized expression of Severin and Wanda’s kinky desire destroys the painter’s ability to create an aesthetic image; he complains “now I can’t do anything” (93) after he watches Wanda whip Severin. Wanda’s solution is to have the painter take Severin’s place; she offers to tie him up and whip him, and he begs her to do so. Severin then takes the place of the painter: he watches as Wanda whips the painter, and he writes, “For me the scene had a ghastly charm that I cannot depict. ... [S]he tore away at him until his poignant blue eyes seemed to beg for mercy—it was indescribable” (94).

This chiasmic progression of desire and its expression, of gazing and mimetically representing, of service labor and aesthetic labor, completes a circuit of kinky desire. Suzanne Stewart, in a dazzling reading of the scene, emphasizes the mirroring of desire, but her psychoanalytic vocabulary leads her to focus only on Severin and the painter as doubles, two versions of the same masochistic subject gazing at Wanda: “The doubling is also expressed in the problematic fact that this scene requires a third subject-position, namely that of the witness, expressed here in the doubling between Severin and the painter. The former witnesses the latter’s whipping, an event that transforms Severin into the painter of the scene, and the German can in turn only paint the scene by witnessing Severin’s whipping. In both cases, the witness cannot be the recipient of Wanda’s gaze. Within the completed picture, her gaze is always at some indeterminable point outside the representation, which can only ever represent, then, Wanda’s absent gaze” (85). Stewart’s reading ultimately emphasizes *absence*, a failure of desire,

a disruption to the circuit, because she considers only each man's relation to Wanda's gaze. Missing from her psychoanalytic vocabulary is the relation created between the men themselves as they desire together. Mediated by representation in word and paint, Severin and the painter share the same desire without ever serving as the object of one another's desire. They are put in a sexual relation with each other not by sex, but rather by shared aesthetic experience. Severin experiences his own whipping as beauty; the painter attempts to capture this beauty in paint, but he needs to be whipped himself in order to paint, a scene that Severin himself experiences as a beauty he cannot express in words. From watching Wanda whip Severin for his painting, the painter learns to experience his desire for her *as a desire to be bound and whipped*. The context of this pedagogy of desire is an attempt to represent beauty.

Although the painter suddenly disappears from the plot after completing his painting, this series of scenes proves crucial to the novel's narrative. After he completes his portrait of Wanda, which the painter describes as "both a portrait and a narrative [*ein Porträt und eine Historie*]" (92) and Severin describes as "an incomparable likeness" but "also ... an ideal" (95), the painter paints Severin. Alone with their shared desire, and the painter's attempt to represent it in an aesthetic object, they are able to confess their shared love of Wanda to each other (95). They achieve a unique sociality: alone together in their love for a woman that cannot be expressed by conventional social or aesthetic forms. Rather than rivalry for Wanda's hand in marriage, or some such conventional ending, the painter's role in the story ends when he completes the painting:

The painting was completed. She wanted to pay him for it, the way queens pay.

"Oh, you've already paid me!" he said, begging off with a painful smile.

Before leaving he secretly opened his portfolio to let me peer inside. I was dumbfounded. Her face stared at me, virtually alive, as if from a mirror.

"I'm taking this along," he said. "It's mine. She can't snatch this, I worked hard enough for it." (95)

The relation between Severin and the painter ends with the painter taking an aesthetic object out of economic circulation and into his private possession. He shares this aesthetic object only with Severin, from whom he has learned to desire masochistically through a shared aesthetic experience. He has learned from Severin how to desire in this way, and he takes off with him an aesthetic object that could teach others the same form of desire.

Although the painter disappears from the novel's plot at this point without further mention, his shared aesthetic experience with Severin is ultimately revealed as the very origin of the novel's scenario. The last character to be introduced to Wanda and Severin's strange scene is a Greek prince who appears suddenly in town and whose beauty and capacity for cruelty immediately draw in Wanda. They pursue each other more conventionally, and Wanda finally tricks Severin into allowing her to whip him one more time. Once he is bound, she reveals that the Greek has been hiding behind her bed curtains. She invites the Greek to join her in whipping Severin. The Greek, however, does not share Wanda's form of desire, but merely a "bloodthirsty expression [*jenen blutgierigen Ausdruck*]" (116). Rather than the Greek learning a new form of desire in this decidedly un-aesthetic scene, he causes Severin to un-learn his desire. "Now observe me training him," the Greek shouts to Wanda as he begins whipping Severin (116), but Severin does not experience this as beauty. Rather, he writes, "There is no describing the feeling of being mistreated by a successful rival in front of the woman you worship. ... I initially felt a

kind of fantastic, suprasensual fascination—but Apollo lashed the poetry out of me, stroke by stroke” (117). The Greek does not experience his whipping of Severin the way the painter experiences *watching* Wanda whip Severin; he does not share in Wanda and Severin’s kinky desire, but rather brings the whipping back to the conventional desire of “a successful rival” for a woman’s affection. Where the painter left the plot by sharing a beautiful likeness of their shared form of desire with Severin, the Greek takes the plot back to the conventional form of male relation in a marriage plot: one rival subduing the other for the hand of a beloved woman.

Once the Greek intervenes to bring whipping away from a kinky, aestheticized expression of desire and back into the realm of male violence, the novel’s plot resolves into conventional endings for its coming-of-age and love stories. Wanda has a conventional relationship with the Greek prince who is her social and temperamental match, integrating her desires into her aristocratic position. And Severin leaves and comes of age properly, learning to integrate into the position expected of him now that he has unlearned his unconventional form of desire: “So I quietly returned home and for two years I helped him [Severin’s father] endure his troubles and run the estate; and I learned something that I hadn’t previously known and that now revived me like a drink of fresh water: *to work and to fulfill obligations*. Then my father died, and I became the landowner” (117-118). (However, as I noted at the beginning of the chapter, this *Bildung* is an equivocal one: though Severin represents himself in his manuscript as a suddenly responsible aristocrat stepping into his father’s role, by the time of the frame story at the beginning of the novel, he seems to have backslid into dilettanteish eccentricity and is all-too-eager to teach the narrator about his desires, even as he pulls a proper “moral” from them.)

The painting, however, re-emerges in the final scene to undermine these conventional endings of integration into society. Not only does the painter’s copy of the painting escape from the plot, but in the final scene, Wanda’s copy returns to Severin, and with it the aestheticized desire Severin used to experience. Three years later, Wanda sends Severin a letter. Proclaiming herself on the side of the marriage plot, Wanda writes, “I must again confess to you that I loved you very deeply.” But, she continues, there was no social form that could correspond to that love: “[Y]ou yourself smothered my feelings with your fantastic surrender, with your insane passion. The moment you became my slave, I felt that you could never be my husband” (118). Instead, of course, Wanda chose the conventional marriage plot ending: “I found the strong man whom I needed and with whom I was as happy as one can be on this comical ball of clay.” The only interruption to this living-together-happily-ever-after ending is another novelistic convention: death by male rivalry. “But,” Wanda adds, “like all human happiness, mine was very brief. Roughly a year ago he was killed in a duel” (118). (Only some pages before this, Severin recites to Wanda Lermontov’s poetry, whose Romantic hero Pechorin infamously kills a fellow officer in a duel started by a romantic rivalry in his 1840 collection, *A Hero of Our Time*.) The letter, however, ends with a counterexample to its own supposed lesson. Wanda ends by writing, “I hope that you were healed under my whip; the therapy was cruel but radical” (118). She has, she claimed, whipped Severin back into shape by “curing” him of his kinky desire and preparing him to be a proper, hard-working landowner. But the letter ends by bringing a representation of that desire back: “To remind you of that time and the woman who passionately loved you, I am sending you the portrait painted by the poor German” (118).

As much as the novel seemingly tips itself toward coming-of-age and courtship endings that remove the barriers its characters’ kinky desire presents to their integration into society, it is belied by this final moment. Although the painting is, seemingly, incidental to Wanda’s “therapy,” which Severin declares to be the “moral of the story” in the frame story, it is the final

origin of the entire novel. In the frame story, Severin presents his journal manuscript to the narrator as a lesson he can learn from. However, the narrator's strange desire and the dream expressing it are the ultimate instigation of the story. Severin shares his manuscript only because the narrator tells him his dream. Despite Severin's own interpretation of the manuscript, at a plot level, the manuscript is actually the origin story of the painting whose viewing awoke the narrator's strange desire that occasioned the entire plot. The narrator who reads and learns from Severin's descriptions of his desire is a mirror of the painter within the manuscript who represents those desires in paint and learns from them. While Severin understands his manuscript as a record of a strange and failed time in his love life, and he interprets it for the narrator as a philosophical lesson about the relations between men and women, the novel as a whole could be understood as the story and an example of the creation of aesthetic objects that teach another mode of desiring and create strange new relations between the men among whom they circulate.

### The New Domme, Same as the Old Dom

In looking at the narrative analysis I've performed here, which offered a universalizing narrative for sadomasochistic desire (it is an illustrative example of the relations between genders in general), a medical model (it is a psychopathology with an associated case history), and an aesthetic model (it is an aestheticized mode and narrative of desire that can be learned from a shared experience of certain stylized aesthetic objects), it'd be all-too-easy to praise the aesthetic model and disparage the others. I don't need to revisit the political struggles of medicalized sexual minorities in the twentieth century to make that point. But, as the cases in *Psychopathia Sexualis* make clear, even though I've split these different models for the sake of analysis, they weren't necessarily experienced as separate. Neugroschel's introduction to his translation of *Venus in Furs* catalogues just some of the examples of case histories in *Psychopathia Sexualis* that show "a sort of cult appeal" that Sacher-Masoch "exercised ... upon people who recognized their own sexual inclinations in his literary work" (vii). Case 80, Neugroschel notes, even describes a man "with a special interest in licking women's feet" (vii) who himself corresponded with Sacher-Masoch for advice before talking to Krafft-Ebing.

Looking beyond the text of *Psychopathia Sexualis* itself, Oosterhuis's book on Krafft-Ebing makes vast use of the unpublished letters of Krafft-Ebing's archive, which allows him to helpfully catalogue the ways that his correspondents worked with and against the narrative and conceptual models that Krafft-Ebing provided them. His findings make clear that, however much Krafft-Ebing himself may have tried to distinguish his writing from literature and philosophy, his readers and patients did not experience his writing as passive objects of study, nor divorced from their experience of other media and genres. Oosterhuis, for example, brings attention to a passage in *Psychopathia Sexualis* where Krafft-Ebing quotes an 1895 classified ad in the *Hannover'schen Tageblatt*: "Sacher-Masoch. 109404. Ladies interested in and thrilled with the work of this author, and who embody its female characters, are requested to send their address. ... Strictest discretion" (191). By that time, Sacher-Masoch had already become a shibboleth, a condensation of a certain category of sexual taste or "interest," and a shorthand for a certain narrative about how to act out those sexual interests by "embodying its female characters" and bringing those fictional plots into reality. This newspaper ad allows us to witness the social function of the circulation of *Venus in Furs* as an aesthetic and narrative object. Even as sadomasochistic desire remained a taste that required the "strictest discretion,"

Sacher-Masoch's work provided an aesthetic nexus around which its admirers could gather and begin to form an alternative to the sexual socialities found in institutions like the state and the family. As Oosterhuis rightfully surmises from his material, "A need for group identification can be discerned among Krafft-Ebing's masochists ..." (191). He cites a correspondent of Krafft-Ebing's "who recognized himself in Sacher-Masoch's work" and who, Krafft-Ebing wrote, "in a letter to another masochist ... proposed to look for like-minded men and sadistic women in order to establish a private society" (191). This notion of establishing a "private society" where not only sadistic women could serve as potential sexual partners, but also fellow masochistic men would share their experiences, seems rooted just as much in the shared diagnosis of "masochism" that Krafft-Ebing offered as it is in the shared aesthetic experience of Severin and the German painter in *Venus in Furs*. One correspondent even wrote to Krafft-Ebing that he "would consider it as the ultimate bliss to get to know other masochists ... to hear their life history, to learn about their condition, and, if necessary, to advise and help them as much as I can" (191). In these terms we can hear the echo of both the medical and the aesthetic narratives: the medical-juridical will to collect "life histories" and "learn about their condition," as well as the pedagogical desire to "advise and help them" in the aesthetic and social expression of their desires. This sociality, according to the correspondent, would be "the ultimate bliss"—not the sexual relation between him and a sadistic woman, but rather the pedagogical relation of finding men with the same tastes, bidding them to narrate about their lives, and educating their expression of their desires.

And even if the reader were now to object that, although the medical and the aesthetic narratives were experienced together, we can have a utopian longing for the possibilities of the purely aesthetic, untainted by medical pathologization, we need only look at the narrative of *Venus in Furs* or Sacher-Masoch's real-life attempt to live out its fantasies to see that there is no such thing as a pure aesthetic experience of desire shorn from social structures. The reduction of Wanda's African maidservants to symbols, the transformation of the colonialist and racist structures that they embody to mere ornament, little different from the other fetish objects that adorn the villa where Severin and Wanda act out their fantasies, is of course an artifact of an unreflective nineteenth century racism. But it also reveals something critical in the structure of this aestheticized form of desire that I am tracking: insofar as that desire requires real, material power relations to give it content, it can approach those power relations only at a certain aesthetic distance. Whatever critical challenge Krafft-Ebing's "stepchildren of nature" or Sacher-Masoch's "masochists" might have presented to the contemporary social forms through which individual sexual desire could be expressed, their "private societies" and S/M contracts were not some utopian escape from the everyday power relations of Austrian and German culture. My argument for this desire and its new forms of sociality is rather more modest and narrow. Rather than some utopian outside to the power relations that define the family and the state, we can see in it simply a novel approach to those power relations. Where the family was defined by a sexual ethics, these relations center a sexual aesthetics. And where a traditional marriage plot imagines the heterosexual relations between men as rivalry for a desired woman—the relation between Severin and the Greek—the marriage plot of kink desire allows for shared aesthetic experience and pedagogy between desiring men—the relation between Severin, the narrator, and the German painter. If, however, we're tempted to see this as the solution to the contradictions of the marriage plot, we need only look at the memoirs of "Wanda von Sacher-Masoch" (née Angelika Aurora Rümelin). Where the marriage plot generated the adultery plot as its tragic underside, *Venus in Furs* generated Wanda's sexual autobiography as its own

narrative critique. Writing against the cult appeal that Sacher-Masoch's literary output aroused, Wanda reveals in her own narrative that the desire to be dominated by a woman in an unconventional marriage could burden women just as much as the desire to dominate them in the family structure. She writes of the burdens of childcare and Sacher-Masoch's kinky demands, of the drudgery and endless disruptions to their home life, of the difficulty of separating her own story from that of her ex-husband's: "In the delusion of serving art, I sacrificed myself to the artist—until I realized too late the perversity [*das Widernatürliche*], the absurdity, and above all, the *uselessness* of my sacrifice" (346). In opening up new possibilities for narrative and new possibilities for social relations, the aesthetics of desire also open up new forms for the same old oppressions.



### Perversion and Its Discontents: Musil and Freud

Echoing the pairing of Sacher-Masoch's late-Romanticist, early-decadent novel with the early sexology of Krafft-Ebing, in this chapter I turn to two paradigmatic Austrian modernists, Robert Musil and Sigmund Freud. Musil, with his training in engineering and competing theories of Gestalt psychology, was a lifelong skeptic of Freud, but his prose experiments in capturing obscure associations of thought and ambivalent desires sometimes brought him closer to the project of psychoanalysis than he might have wished. Indeed, the two experienced a near-simultaneous intellectual and artistic breakthrough. In 1905, Freud published the first edition of his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, which traces adult "sexual aberrations" back to a universal infantile state of "polymorphous perversion."<sup>31</sup> In 1906, Musil began to turn toward a literary career with the publication of his debut *Bildungsroman*, *The Confusions of Young Törleß*. The novel follows the psychosexual experiences of Törleß at a remote boarding school for the sons of the Austro-Hungarian Empire's elite. After several false starts, Törleß finds himself drawn into a sadomasochistic bullying scheme directed by two older, crueler boys against an effeminate classmate. The novel ends with Törleß's denunciation of the meaning and value he had attempted to extract from the experience, yet in a brief flashforward to his future as an adult that occurs near the end of the novel, we also learn that this experience served later as a decisive moment in his life that caused him to develop a unique aesthetic sensibility and a certain interior distance from the outward moral norms of bourgeois society. Though a gulf in genre, intellectual framework, and aesthetic aspirations divides these two works, they are united in presenting the narrative elaboration of kink desire as a narrative of the integration of the individual into existing social institutions.

I would go so far as to suggest that these two works re-imagine the central conflict of the modernist *Bildungsroman* as a story of the integration of kink desire into social relations. Franco Moretti claims, "[T]he concept of the *Bildungsroman* has become ever more approximate," yet "it is still clear that we seek to indicate with it one of the most harmonious solutions ever offered to a dilemma coterminous with modern bourgeois civilization: the conflict between the ideal of *self-determination* and the equally imperious demands of *socialization*" (15, emphasis in original). If I may stretch that approximation even further without entirely deforming the idea, Freud's work can be described as a psychosexual *Bildungsroman*. Indeed, Freud's entire theory of psychosexual development is a theory of the conflict between "self-determination" and the "demands of socialization" as a narrative of sexual development. In Freud's account, the process of integrating the developing child into society is exactly the process of diverting libido away from "perversions" toward the socially normal sites for the expression of sexuality. As he writes in the *Three Essays*, "What is it that goes to the making of these constructions which are so important for the growth of a civilized and normal individual? They probably emerge at the cost of the infantile sexual impulses themselves" (44). In fact, in his late work of social psychology,

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<sup>31</sup> Freud revised the text repeatedly until 1925, producing what Steven Marcus calls "something of a palimpsest" (xxx). I will be working in this chapter largely from James Strachey's translation, as published by Basic Books in 2000. The edition notes where additions and deletions were made from the 1905 edition but follows the text of the 1925 edition. Because it is the most coherent and developed, I rely on the 1925 text, but Marcus's description of the text as a "palimpsest" is of course not impertinent to the theme of the *Three Essays* as an experiment in modernist narrative aesthetics—a totalizing theory expressed in constant revision and fragmentation. I try to avoid recourse to the German text as long as the English is not substantively changed since, for better or worse, the English translations of Freud's vocabulary have become canonical and more literal translations are likely to confuse more than clarify.

*Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), which I will have recourse to as well later in this chapter, Freud extends this process of individual development to his theory of the development of civilization in general: “At this point we cannot fail to be struck by the similarity between the process of civilization and the libidinal development of the individual. . . . it is impossible to overlook the extent to which civilization is built up upon a renunciation of instinct, how much it presupposes precisely the non-satisfaction (by suppression, repression or some other means?) of powerful instincts. This ‘cultural frustration’ dominates the large field of social relationships between human beings” (44). In other words, while *Young Törleß*, despite its emphasis on gay sadomasochism as the essential conflict, follows more or less the shape of the classic *Bildungsroman* plot as it traces how a boy at an educational institution learns to reconcile his individual inclinations with the demands of bourgeois society, Freud’s own scientific work is just as much a narrative of the integration of kink desires into existing social relations. Freud’s theory of sexual development posits that the process of developing into adulthood is, for everyone, a kinky *Bildungsroman*.

At this moment, I should probably acknowledge that I haven’t been proceeding entirely innocently in the previous chapters in using categories like “desire” and “integration” to analyze the works I have been concerned with without having mentioned psychoanalysis. In suggesting that “kink desire” serves as a figure for narratives about what is “unassimilable” into “social relations,” am I not simply rediscovering Freud’s own assertion that the “perversions” are channels for the “libido” that resist “civilization”? While acknowledging the debts I (unconsciously, reluctantly) owe psychoanalysis, I also want to be clear that I am analyzing not so much the biosocial reality of libido itself, but rather the history of narrative technologies for the management and expression of desire. Freud’s own works cast a particularly impenetrable shadow—or blinding light—over the history I am tracing, but I am interested in historicizing them among other narratives of desire. “Desire” has had to stand as a flexible enough category for me to deploy across historical paradigms of sexuality and across literary movements, but I don’t mean to make arguments about the ontological nature of libido. The history I am tracing is a history of narratives and narrative techniques, not of desire itself. We will be concerned, then, not so much with the theoretical content of Freud’s work itself, but rather with the narrative features of his theories, as well as with his theories *as* a theory of narrative. Part of Freud’s innovation over a figure like Krafft-Ebing is, in fact, his insistence that *narrative* is the proper category from which to understand perversions.

In the last chapter, we revisited Foucault’s characterization in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I* of the early sexologists as taxonomists, natural scientists creating a new phylogeny of perverse types. My analysis in that chapter suggested that that characterization was perhaps a little too schematic in assigning a pure schematicism to Krafft-Ebing. While a quick glance over the table of contents of Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* and Freud’s *Three Essays* surely demonstrates that *something* has happened to the forms in which psychologists were able to organize this knowledge—compare, for example, Krafft-Ebing’s “General Neuro- and Psychopathology of Sexual Life,” with its headings like “Sadism,” “Masochism,” and “Fetishism” to Freud’s “Infantile Sexuality” and its subheadings like “The Period of Sexual Latency” and “The Phases of Development of the Sexual Organization”—nevertheless I suggested that a closer look at Krafft-Ebing’s text reveals literary and narrative features one might not expect of a mere taxonomist. Indeed, we might even glimpse the modernist predilection for the narrative fragment in his first section, “Fragments of a Psychology of Sexual

Life.”<sup>32</sup>

But if we can't simply call Krafft-Ebing a schematicist and Freud a narrativist, how might we characterize the differences in their relationship to narrative more closely? I suggested in the last chapter that the narrative form that is most characteristic of Krafft-Ebing's writing is the case study. For Krafft-Ebing, the case study was intended to provide evidence for his taxonomy, but we saw how the stories he told of the personal and social histories of sexual pathologies in his patients were such an arresting feature of the text that they inspired non-specialists to write in to him with autobiographical case studies, born from the narrative coherence that Krafft-Ebing's case studies offered to a set of experiences that had previously lain outside the categories of the narratable. In insisting that the medical case study was the proper form and epistemology with which to apprehend these categories of desire that were now to be understood as “psychopathologies,” Krafft-Ebing felt the necessity of distinguishing his medical approach from philosophical investigation on the one hand and poetry on the other. His introductions to the text insist that the medical case study can compete narratively with literature (as well as the proceedings of the legal system).

By the time of Freud's *Three Essays*, there was no need for anxious rhetoric justifying perversions as a proper object of psychological narrative and theorization. In fact, Freud's *Three Essays* achieve rather a reversal of Krafft-Ebing's predicament: so confident is Freud in the primacy of psychological narratives for explaining perversion that, from the first of the *Three Essays*, “The Sexual Aberrations,” he unspools a general theory of “Infantile Sexuality” and “The Transformation of Puberty” that explains not just perversion, but “normal” sexual life in general, not to mention the repressions of moral education, the sublimations of aesthetic practice, and, in later social psychology works like *Civilization and Its Discontents*, a comprehensive story of the development of human civilization itself. Where Krafft-Ebing cautiously collated case studies to provide evidence for his taxonomical categories, Freud drew from his psychoanalytic cases to create a grand narrative of individual and civilizational development. If *Venus in Furs* and *Psychopathia Sexualis* offered competing narratives that made an emerging category of desire socially intelligible, Freud's *Three Essays* offer a totalizing narrative within which competition seems impossible. In the *Three Essays*, perversion and a socially integrated sexuality alike are the result of a kinky *Bildungsroman*, one failed and one successful. Within Freud's total theory of psycho-socio-sexual development, literary narratives themselves become a category of case study.

What narrative forms, then, can the modernist *Bildungsroman* offer that resist or exceed Freud's own theory of the role of the perversions in individual development and the integration of sexuality into society? While many figures of Viennese modernism, like Arthur Schnitzler, had a warm relationship with Freud and considered themselves fellow travelers in their artistic explorations of sexuality, other authors of the Austro-Hungarian Empire equally interested in exploring sexual neuroses, like Musil and Kafka, were hostile skeptics.<sup>33</sup> Where might we look

<sup>32</sup> As noted in the last chapter, this most interesting association was first pointed out to me by Chana Kronfeld.

<sup>33</sup> Though a little rigidly biographical in its readings of Musil's work, Hannah Hickman's *Robert Musil & The Culture of Vienna* is an indispensable source for confirming Musil's literary and intellectual influences and milieu. The book painstakingly maps Musil's entire oeuvre to his contemporaneous journals and letters. As she notes, “Since Musil's novel [*Törleß*] appeared in 1906, it has been argued that he must have known both *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *Sex and Character*. The notebooks of the time do not support this view, whereas other writers who interested him are freely quoted; nonetheless he might very well have seen reviews of these works. Musil's later references to Freud show considerable reservations, interpreted by some critics as evidence of a defensive attitude. Certain

in the form of a novel about the role of an adolescent's dalliance with gay sadomasochism in his development that distinguishes it from Freud's own narrative of infantile polymorphous perversion? Or perhaps flipping that question, to what extent is Freud's own account of kink desire in the development of adult sexuality itself a narrative with modernist literary aesthetics? Much attention, of course, has been given to the kinship between the narrative techniques of modernist novels and Freud's case studies, like the "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria" also published in 1905, or "The Wolfman" case first published in 1918. Peter Brooks, for example, writing in 1978 from the beginning of "French Theory"'s reception in the United States, suggests that "The Wolfman" is paradigmatic of the deconstructive conflict between narrative and authority he finds in modernist aesthetics: "The case-history of the Wolfman's story, itself imbedded in modern history, suggests a paradigm of the status of modern explanation, which must on the one hand see itself as narrative, concerned with a set of histories and the mediations among them, and on the other hand recognizes that the traditional tenets and the very authority of narrative have been subverted, that the bases of explanation have been radically problematized" (74). Part of my contention in this chapter, however, is that the *Three Essays*, just as much as the case histories, can also be read productively for their narrative structures.<sup>34</sup>

To begin answering these questions, it is necessary to take a closer look at the narrative shape of *Young Törleß* and the *Three Essays*. Unlike previous chapters, kink desire is no longer confined to framing material or momentary eruptions from the surface of the text. Though it does not have the stability and reproducibility of the marriage form and the family, underwritten by the blessings of the state, nor is it entirely unrepresentable within the terms of the social relations that the texts represent. Neither fully formalized and institutionalized, nor entirely unconceptualized and glimpsable only in absence or in the relations between text and reader or text and paratext, kink desire allows these texts to explore the categories of sexuality, experience, and social relation that trouble the institutions of social integration at their center: the boarding school and the bourgeois family. Corresponding to this semi-institutionalization, this chapter is less concerned with framing material and more with the shape of the texts' narratives. Though modernist literatures in general and the works of Musil in particular are often associated with a de-emphasis on plot in favor of description, or of causality in favor of juxtaposition,<sup>35</sup> genre and

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aspects of the early novel do have an affinity with the writings of Freud, but the same may be said of several other works of the period. In Austria before the First World War there was widespread uncertainty about all aspects of life; in a study of Schnitzler, Martin Swales comments: "... it is almost irrelevant whether writers of the time were directly influenced by Freud or not; his thinking is recognisably part of the spirit of the time" (30).

<sup>34</sup> One notable exception to this is Leo Bersani's work. In his classic essay "Sexuality and Aesthetics" from 1984, Bersani reads *The Three Essays* in two competing manners: a teleological narrative capturing the excesses of sexuality and a competing theory of sexuality as an atemporal masochistic force that eludes narrative representation. As he puts it, "Rather, Freud's work is a special kind of aesthetic text: it seeks to stabilize the perturbations of sexuality in a theory about the subversive, destabilizing effects of human sexuality on the human impulse to form. Consequently, there is no 'moment' at which its formal replications of the sexual are not already a movement which reflects (on) the collapse of formal relations, the precariousness of representational discourse itself" (40). Bersani's opposition of a masochistic sexuality comparable to aesthetic experience with a narrative of sexual development that seeks to contain it resonates in some ways with my own terms of desire "kinking" the narrative shape of the theory. However, where Bersani is most interested in the "nonnarrative" sexuality he finds in Freud, I of course am focused on where kink desire distorts, involutes, or diverts narrative, rather than escaping it altogether.

<sup>35</sup> For literary criticism in this tradition stretching all the way back to the early twentieth century's critical theory,

plot are central to this chapter. The kinky marriage plot or the sadomasochistic coming-of-age narrative appear formless relative to the neat closure of the British marriage plot or Moretti's "harmonious solution" to the conflict between "self-determination" and "socialization," but that is merely because the closure is not quite so closed or harmonious, the social forms for expressing this category of desire not so reproducible and stable as a marriage or a sublation of the self into the state. Both *Törleß* and the *Three Essays* offer models for fitting traditional plots to these categories of desire. *Törleß*'s fellow students sublimate their homosexual sadomasochism into military and political leadership, which has led to canonical and convincing readings of the novel as an exploration of proto-fascist drives and institutions in Austria, a reading of the work that Musil himself later embraced.<sup>36</sup> And the *Three Essays*, though they trouble the concept of the "normal" by tracing its emergence from the perverse, constantly hold up the figure of the "final, normal shape" of "sexual life" (73) as a telos toward which all this tarrying in perversity may lead.

But each text also perverts its shape when it comes to narrating kink desires that refuse to be sublimated into existing institutions. *Törleß* offers two endings that undermine one another, while the *Three Essays* start from the end of adult perversion before returning to infantile sexuality and tracing its development into puberty: one *Bildungsroman* that undermines its closure with two endings, another that undermines its developmental story by telling it backwards. *The Confusions of Young Törleß*, despite its occasionally wild experiments in prose as it traces the obscure sensations and associations playing across Törleß's confused adolescent mind, largely follows the contours of a traditional *Bildungsroman*. The plot consists of a series of thematically related episodes illustrating Törleß's difficulties in feeling his way through the educational institution preparing him for his role in elite Austrian society. *Törleß* ends with Törleß giving a long, rambling, but confident speech to his instructors, standing in for various disciplines for organizing experience and producing knowledge, in which he declares that his mistake was to try to consider his sadomasochistic experiences as commensurable with his more mundane institutional and family life. He declares he will never do so again, and everyone agrees that he should be returned to his family and educated at home, *Bildung* achieved and *Verwirrungen* straightened. But shortly before the end, without obvious logical connection to the plot, *Törleß* offers a vision of an adult Törleß for whom his experience at boarding school has served as the very foundation of his inner, private life, turning him into an aesthete who "thought it inevitable that someone with a rich and active inner life would have certain moments about which other people could know nothing, and memories that he kept in secret doors," whose only responsibility to these private experiences of the amoral and unconceptualizable is that "he should know how to make refined use of those moments later in life" (127). Steven Marcus's excellent introduction to the *Three Essays*, meanwhile, describes the paradox of its backwards discursive form as follows: "A further pertinence of this device of working backward begins to

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see, for example, György Lukács, "Narrate or Describe?" (1936), which is taken up in recent work like Frederic Jameson's *Antinomies of Realism* (2013) and Dora Zhang's *Strange Likeness: Description and the Modernist Novel* (2020).

<sup>36</sup> Reviewing critical interpretations and Musil's own writings, Hickman notes, "Some interpretations of *Young Törleß* emphasize the sociological aspects, seeing the novel as a critique of the prevailing system of education and, by extension, of the society maintaining that system. They point to oppression, cruelty and lack of regard for the individual in the outer action, particularly as shown by the two bullies, whom the author himself saw later as young precursors of the Nazi criminals" (31). Indeed, later Musil seemed to perceive in his own novel not just a portrait of the artist as a young man, but also a *Bildungs*-plot for fascists: "Looking back at his first novel, writing in the 1930s, Musil refers to these two characters [Reiting and Beineberg] as 'today's dictators *in nucleo*.'"

be revealed when we see Freud regarding these adult manifestations of sexual behavior as being on one level integrated forms of sexual activity and at the same time on another level failures of integration, developmental outcomes in which the various component drives of the sexual instinct have not been put together in a fully integrated way” (xxxiv). If we are to glimpse narrative, social, and aesthetic possibilities for kink desire beyond a pathological failure of integration, the refusal of closure in *Törleß* and the refusal of linearity in describing developmental processes in Freud seem the best sites for investigation.

Freud’s backward-looking narrative of sexual development offers at once a universalization of kink desire and a foreclosure of its social possibilities. Starting from the observable fact of a minority of adult perverts—those whose sexual desires have led them to the psychoanalyst’s chair—Freud works back to a universal originary state of polymorphous perversion. Krafft-Ebing’s forward-looking case studies began at the earliest memories of kinked desire that his minority of “lonely souls” could recall and worked forward to the troubled adult social lives those desires caused; Freud transforms the particularities of those adult pathologies into a theoretical meta-narrative that applies to everyone by starting with the numerous categories of “Sexual Aberrations” and tracing them back to a unitary “Infantile Sexuality.” Late in the first essay, describing the sexual lives of neurotics, he provides a curious image for this developmental process: “In both these cases the libido behaves like a stream whose main bed has become blocked. It proceeds to fill up collateral channels which may hitherto have been empty” (36)—the “hydraulic” theory of the libido. To justify his backward-looking narrative, Freud suggests a single stream of libido, with a source and a forward motion. The neuroses are the pre-set channels into which this stream is diverted, the perversions the failure of the libido to re-integrate those channels into the single heterosexual, genital desire of adulthood. In the Freudian narrative of development, the cost of universalizing kink desire is placing it forever in an amnesiac past, or else a pathological present; the “collateral channels” are available to anyone, yet from the same origin they must flow and toward the same reunion they must tend, lest the adult risk anti-social perversion or sickly neuroticism.

In tracing the sexual development of an adolescent into his ethical and aesthetic development, Musil, despite his protestations, seems quite the Freudian. As Coetzee succinctly describes in his introduction to the Penguin translation of the novel, “Because of the concentration in his work, from *Young Törless* onwards, on the obscurer workings of sexual desire, Musil is often thought of as a Freudian. But he himself acknowledged no such debt. He disliked the cultishness of psychoanalysis, disapproved of its sweeping claims and its unscientific standards of proof. He preferred a psychology of what he ironically called the ‘shallow’—that is, experimental—variety” (x). This experimentalism would become an explicit feature of Musil’s later fiction, as in his theorization of “essayism” as a mode of exploring life with a series of experiments in *The Man Without Qualities*. Perhaps, then, we can see in *Young Törleß* a novel less interested in exploring the set channels down which desire must run than in finding something beyond them. As this chapter will argue, Musil’s *Törleß* is a *Bildungsroman* obsessed with the capture and disciplining of desire by institutions. What sets *Törleß* into his confusions is his refusal to place the sadomasochistic bullying he participates in into any narrative of personal development. The novel is preoccupied with the compromises of the self that accompany the segmentation of knowledge into disciplines and the process of educating youth toward social usefulness. *Törleß*’s confusions hold on to the possibility of kink desire as a figure for precisely what remains outside of processes of institutionalization or personal development. Indeed, as we will see, the refusal to suppress or deny it becomes the foundation

for an aesthetic sensibility and a correspondingly distanced approach to social life, rather than the neuroses and psychopathologies that accompany the repression of desire in psychoanalysis.

At the same time, I do not intend to draw these contrasts too sharply. Musil's preoccupation with "essayism" as a model of both a *Lebensweise* and the structure of an experimental novel suggests another affinity with Freud, whose *Three Essays* offer their totalizing theory of psychosexual development in the fragmented, discursively mixed form of, well, three essays. The problem of uniting irrational sexual desires with epistemic questions that so preoccupies the mind of Törleß and the form of *Törleß* appears across Musil's whole oeuvre, with the mixed chapters of narrative and essay in the never-finished and probably unfinishable *The Man Without Qualities* providing only a provisional formal solution. The narrative form that Freud gives to the development of sexual desire in the *Three Essays*, meanwhile, meant that questions of aesthetics and narrative form would preoccupy his scientific work as well. This, at least, seems to be the only way to understand the inverted order of the *Three Essays*, Freud's constant recourse to metatheoretical images like the blocked stream that I quoted above, or the first chapter of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, which is ostensibly a work explaining the process of the development of civilizations but opens, oddly, with a lamentation of Freud's inability "to represent this phenomenon [the persistence of earlier mental stages alongside later ones] in pictorial terms" (18). More on this oddity later, but the point is that what distinguishes the two writers is less the dispositif within which they operate, with its assumption that the process of development and integration into society is necessarily a question of the development and discipline of normal and abnormal sexual desires, and more the formal solutions they offer to the narration of the intertwined categories they investigate.

In any case, the two endings of *Törleß* offer a narrative expression of this uneasy, even paradoxical, equilibrium between kink desire as that which must be disavowed to ensure the reproduction of bourgeois adulthood and its accompanying social relations (family, labor, state) and that which might provide the germ of an aesthetic sensibility around which new forms of sociality can be imagined. *Törleß* leaves these two endings in uneasy tension with each other, offering both a young Törleß who has made peace with his family and his pedagogy by leaving his kinky experiences behind and an adult Törleß who disavows those experiences only by making them the aesthetic center of his relation to his self and to others. The novel's form, then, points beyond the mere sublimation of these emergent categories of desire—homosexual, sadomasochistic, fetishistic—toward a new understanding of sexual sociality outside of family, state, and pedagogical institution, neither unrepresentable and unconceptualizable nor assimilated and sublimated into existing institutions. These two endings offer a *Bildungsroman* that resolves the conflict between "self-determination" and "socialization" by reimagining sociality: the adult Törleß makes social sense of his sexual experiences by refusing to make sense of them, instead making them the basis of a mode of relating to self and others by acknowledging the shared experience of aesthetic experiences that are unshareable. If *Venus in Furs* offered a sadomasochistic marriage plot that simultaneously affirmed sadomasochism as unable to coexist with existing social institutions, yet also imagined a society of aesthetes educated into the same sexual tastes, *Törleß* offers a more equivocal vision of inassimilable sexual desires as precisely what can be left unconceptualized, unshared, untaught, and undisciplined, and therefore the basis, in an alienated modernism, of relating socially and aesthetically to others who are similarly alienated.

### **Irrungen, Verwirrungen**

Squinting from a distance, *The Confusions of Young Törleß* might be grouped with other modernist novels more interested in the rich description of sensations and interior states than traditional plot structures. Achille Varzi captures a strain of Musil criticism when he writes, in an article more focused on giving a rigorous philosophical reading of the novel, “The plot itself is rather meager, the focus being entirely on the inner responses of young Törless (we are never told his first name and exact age) to a collage of more or less distressing events” (Varzi 31). The slim novel follows Törleß, a boy for whom “the first signs of sexual maturity were beginning, slowly and darkly, to well up within him” (9). He falls in with two older boys in his grade, Reiting and Beineberg, “the worst of his year, talented and, obviously, of good family, but sometimes wild and unruly to the point of brutality” (9), contrasted with Törleß’s more intellectual and detached sensitivity. Reiting is a Machiavellian schemer, despised by the class but begrudgingly respected for his knack of setting the other boys against each other and maintaining his social advantages. At one point, he declares, “I like mass movements as a rule” (130). Beineberg is the slightly more intellectual of the two, the son of a general who served under the English in India who “had not only, like other Europeans, brought back carvings, weavings and little manufactured idols” but “had also sensed and retained something of the bizarre and mysterious half-sleep of esoteric Buddhism. Whatever he had learned there and later added to by reading he had passed on to his son, from his childhood onwards” (17). Like his father, Beineberg views reading and learning as themselves a sort of colonial practice of domination, devouring esoteric texts from India in search of knowledge that will allow him to dominate others. Accordingly, when Reiting learns that the cause of the disappearance of some sums of money from the boys’ lockers is, in fact, Basini, a rich, weak, dull, effeminate boy, he draws Törleß and Beineberg into a scheme to dominate Basini rather than turn him over to the school’s faculty. The scheme quickly turns sexual and sadistic, but Törleß can’t break himself free from it, feeling that Basini’s internal state is somehow the key to his vague sense that there is an adult world of manners and social norms and, underneath it, an incommensurable yet necessary and parallel world of irrational passions. Finally, the situation reaches crisis when Reiting and Beineberg out Basini to the class for further tortures, and Törleß tells Basini he must turn himself in, before fleeing the school. Found a town over, Törleß is brought back to explain himself to the headmaster, the chaplain, and his mathematics teacher, and he gives a long rambling speech about the two incommensurable worlds he perceives. Everyone agrees it is in his best interest to be educated at home.

While the conflict with Basini is, of course, the central episode of the plot, and generally what has received the most scholarly attention, examining the plot more closely reveals a structure of episodes arranged to probe by juxtaposition the novel’s questions of the place of sexual desire in the institutions, official and quasi-official, that usher youth into their adult social positions. The episodes are not necessarily connected in the cause-and-effect form of a realist plot, but the novel tells several stories of sex and *Bildung*, differentiated along lines of class, gender, and ethnicity. The sometimes self-conscious narrative voice makes this metonymic structure of episodes-standing-for-a-whole explicit near the beginning: “One episode [*Episode*] from this time was characteristic of what was being prepared within Törleß, to develop further at a later stage” (7). The narrator then recounts Törleß’s brief but intense homosocial relationship with a young aristocrat, a prince from “one of the most influential, oldest and most conservative aristocratic families in the Empire,” whose mannerisms the other boys “mocked as effeminate [*weibisch*]” (7). Törleß, coming from a “free-thinking bourgeois family,” finds “keeping



company with the prince ... a source of refined psychological pleasure” (8). An air of sublimated desire surrounds the narrator’s description of Törleß’s pleasure in his intense attachment to the highly religious boy, as Törleß learns from this relationship “to know and appreciate another person by the fall of his voice, the way he picks something up, even the timbre of his silence and the expression of the physical posture with which he occupies a space” (8). After a falling out over religion, however, the boy leaves the institute, where he was unhappy—prefiguring and resonating with Törleß’s own departure from the institute at the end of the novel, but from the perspective of a spiritual aristocrat unable to cope with the more material preoccupations of the school’s social environment, engaging his desires only in a highly sublimated, spiritual form. Likewise, we have already seen how the novel briefly recounts Beineberg’s familial social positioning and the idiosyncratic approach to learning that his father instills in him. The brief account of Beineberg’s upbringing sets him up as a foil to Törleß whose same sadistic impulses, unlike Törleß’s, find a place within the educational and social environment of the school, preparing him for military or political leadership.

But the most important episode worth examining more closely to understand the novel’s approach to narrating the role of deviant sexual desire in socialization occurs immediately after the prince and concerns a Slavic sex worker named Božena. Božena is a peasant woman who works out of a village inn in the vicinity of Törleß’s elite institute. The novel takes a surprising care in narrating in miniature the course of her life and the intersection of her sexual explorations with the various economic relations, domestic spaces, and institutions that define the bourgeois milieu of Törleß’s upbringing. Indeed, it provides a more comprehensive account of Božena than the prince, Reiting, or Beineberg. The episode where Törleß and Beineberg talk to her at the inn also marks an inflection point in the novel’s balance between the detached, lightly ironic tone of social realism that we have seen above and the more experimental, impressionistic treatment of Törleß’s interiority that characterizes most of the rest of the novel.

The episode occurs near the beginning of the novel, shortly after the narrator has dispatched with the backstory about Törleß’s parents’ reasons for sending him to the “seminary in W” and Törleß’s early flirtations with the prince and his religiosity. After these details, the novel returns to the present-day of its action, where Törleß’s parents are returning from the rural location of the school “back to the capital” (12) (the novel consistently draws a contrast between “the eastern part of the Empire, in the midst of dry and sparsely populated farmland,” and the center of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the state the boys are being trained to manage, rule, or protect when they “go on to university after they left the institute, or...join the army or the civil service” (4). Törleß’s father explicitly passes off the parental duty of care and *Bildung* to Törleß’s companions, parting with, “Isn’t that right my dear Beineberg? You will look out for my boy for me?” (12). The framing of the scene provides an enlarged social context for the *Bildung* provided at the isolated “institute”: Törleß’s parents ride back to the capital, where the boys will presumably return once they have achieved the intellectual and social maturity provided by the institute, which is located on the margins of the empire “probably to protect the growing adolescents from the corrupting influences of a big city” (4). Törleß is handed off from the care of his parents to his classmates, who offer “social contact in the circles of respectable society” (4), Beineberg being a “young baron” (12) and Reiting sporting an aristocratic “von” (16) that the narrator usually drops. The novel immediately ironizes the tone of social snobbery (“respectable society”) and family sentimentality (“Frau von Törleß pressed her veil tighter to her face to hide her tears”) (13) by having the boys set off from the respectable scene at the train station out to the mostly-Slavic village surrounding the school, with Reiting and Beineberg

harassing the peasant women they pass with brushes on the breasts and “a slap on the thigh” (15). This, too, the novel suggests by juxtaposition, is part of the education into society that Törleß is receiving *in loco parentis*. The village seems just as much part of the educational milieu as the institute itself, as is the sexual entitlement over lower class, ethnicized women that Törleß’s peer-caretakers practice. Törleß and Beineberg continue on alone to a café, where Törleß tries his best to express to Beineberg a vague unease he suddenly feels, which the novel narrates in its more impressionistic, less realist mode (e.g., “Between events and himself, indeed, between his own emotions and some innermost self which craved that they be understood, there always remained a dividing line which retreated like a horizon from his yearning the closer he came to it” [25]—a far cry from the striving bourgeois social world of “respectable society” and “particular advantage” and “best families” that the narrator quoted from twenty pages earlier). Finally, Törleß and Beineberg leave the café and continue their pedagogical journey from the parental pieties at the train station to “a disreputable inn” (27).

There, they meet up with Božena, a Slavic sex worker who made the opposite journey the boys have just made, from country peasant to the capital and back to the country. (In case the parallels and continuities between these journeys are not entirely clear, Törleß even pays for Božena’s schnapps with “one of the silver coins he had received from his mother that afternoon” (32) a few pages later, in a complex gesture of sexual, familial, and economic substitution.) When the boys arrive at the inn, they witness from afar an argument between Božena and a John. Quite abruptly, the novel interrupts the action to give in miniature the tale of Božena’s own sexual *Bildung*, one that also brings her in contact with the social circles of the élite, though with vastly different results. In an article pushing back against readings of the novel as uncritically reflecting notions of German ethnic superiority in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Robert Lemon writes, “Far from offering proto-Nazi sentiments, the novel in fact undermines pretensions to cultural superiority by delving into the psychosexual mechanisms of fantasy and repression behind Törleß’s response to Czech alterity” (3) and even claims, “In fact, one could argue that the trajectory of the whole novel subtly reinforces Božena’s cynical view of the Austro-German elite” (9). I agree entirely that such readings ignore the tone and narrative context of the scene with Božena. To that end, it is worth quoting this remarkable passage, with its unexpectedly empathetic, unironic social observation, in full:

The first-floor landing was in total darkness. Neither Törleß nor Beineberg dared take a step forward, worried that they might knock something over and make a noise. In their excitement, their fingers fumbled hastily for the doorknob.

Božena had come as a peasant girl to the capital, where she went into service and later became a lady’s maid.

Everything had gone quite well for her at first. Her peasant manner, which she had not lost, any more than she had lost her broad, solid walk, assured her of the trust of her mistresses, who liked her cow-byre smell for its simplicity, and the amorous attentions of her masters, who liked it for its perfume. Perhaps out of caprice, or perhaps out of discontent and a vague longing for passion, she relinquished that comfortable life. She became a waitress, was taken sick, found lodging in an elegant house of ill repute and, as time passed and her dissolute life [*Lotterleben*] wore her down, found herself washed further and further out into the provinces.

Here, finally, where she had now lived for several years, not far from her home village, she helped in the inn by day and in the evening she read cheap novels, smoked

cigarettes and received occasional visits from men.

She had not yet become ugly, exactly, but her face was strikingly free of charm, and she clearly made a special effort to stress this even more with her manner. She liked to show that she was very familiar with the elegance and manners of polite society, but was now beyond all that. She liked to say that she cared not a whit for it, as she cared nothing for herself, or for anything at all. For that reason, in spite of her degeneracy [*Verwahrlosung*], she enjoyed a certain respect among the peasant boys of the area. Certainly, they spat when they spoke of her, and felt obliged to be coarse in their treatment of her, even more so than they were with other girls, but at root they were also very proud of that ‘damned whore’ [*verfluchte Mensch*] who had emerged from their midst and seen so clearly through the world’s veneer. They came to see her—one by one, and on the sly, but time and again. This fact brought Božena a residue of pride and justification in her life. She took perhaps even greater satisfaction, though, in her visits from the young gentlemen from the institute. It was for them that she deliberately displayed her crudest and most ugly qualities, because—as she liked to put it—they would come crawling to her anyway. (28-29)

The passage interpolates into Törleß’s journey of sexual and social *Bildung*, away from his parents, into the company of his peers, past his school, and into the inn of ill repute where he is learning from his social peers how to express class-appropriate sexual desire, an anti-parallel journey. Božena, we learn, moves as an economic migrant from the Slavic village to the German capital, where she quickly achieves a preordained, and relatively optimized, economic and sexual role for her background: a maidservant and an object of her masters’ excess lust. The two roles are seemingly mutually reinforcing, with her same peasant manners assuring her mistresses of their superiority and her masters of her desirability, proving her value to both. She functions to prop up the aristocratic and bourgeois households and marriages that she serves just as much by providing a socially-acceptable outlet for her masters’ extramarital desires as through her domestic labor. Yet she feels discontent with this circumscribed social role, with the narrator hinting most strongly at errant, unfulfilled sexual desires (“a vague longing for passion”) as the reason. Where Törleß’s vague, uncategorizable longings that do not fit neatly into the social role for which he is being prepared will be the engine for the rest of the novel’s strange, meandering plot, Božena’s own “longing for passion” is neatly dispensed with in an orderly, abbreviated narrative of a single sentence. Unable to express this longing in her role as handmaiden, she switches from domestic labor to service labor among her own class. Quickly this service labor becomes sex work, and Božena’s “vague longing for passion” has found the only social form and economic relation available for its expression. The parallels between their stories make starkly visible the differences between the social forms available to the German son of “a free-thinking bourgeois family” and to a Slavic “peasant girl.” Though Božena, in her role as the village “whore” hamming it up for the “young gentlemen from the institute” becomes seamlessly integrated into Törleß’s own narrative of sexual *Bildung*, the novel’s abrupt pause to narrate her own story makes those seams briefly visible. Crucially, the gulf in class, gender, and ethnicity between Törleß and Božena is expressed here as a difference in narrative genre. Törleß’s own modernist story, with its complex abstractions, its “innermost self,” its “dividing line which retreated like a like a horizon from his yearning,” is counterposed with Božena’s straightforward realist narrative: she was a handmaiden and an object of her masters’ lust, longed for something else, and thus became a waitress, then a “whore.” Same “vague longing for passion,” different

positionality, and vastly different narrative form.

Not only does the novel make the differences in the narratives available to Törleß and Božena visible to the reader through this abrupt interpolation, but Božena turns her circumscribed role as a paid adjunct to Törleß's sexual *Bildung* into a scene of kinky class humiliation. The gap in their two narratives that she makes Törleß so excruciatingly, pleurably aware of becomes the basis of Törleß's confusions that drive the rest of his impressionistic, modernist *Bildung* plot. As Törleß walks into the room, Božena turns his desirous gaze back on him, taking pleasure in playing up their class differences and denying Törleß the pleasure he seeks, teaching him instead to take pleasure in that very humiliation:

Törleß, still standing in the doorway, greedily devoured the image of her with his eyes.

'My goodness, what dear little boys [*süße Buben*] have we here?' she cried mockingly as they came in, studying them with some contempt. 'Eh, Baron? What'll Mama have to say about this?' The welcome was typical of her. [...]

Visits to this woman had recently become his sole, secret pleasure. (30)

Törleß, we learn, is unable to consummate the economic-sexual relationship he pays Božena for, instead diverting his pleasure into the humiliating recognition that his own desire has drawn him away from relations among his class and into Božena's social world:

Božena appeared to him as a creature of incredible degradation, and his relationship with her, the sensations that he had to undergo, seemed like a cruel cult of self-sacrifice. It thrilled him to have to leave behind everything that normally enclosed him, his privileged position, the thoughts and feelings inculcated in him, everything that gave him nothing and oppressed him. It thrilled him to flee, naked, stripped of everything, racing madly to that woman.

This was much the same as it is with young people in general. If Božena had been pure and beautiful, and if he had been capable of love in those days, he might have bitten her, heightening both her lust and his own to the point of pain. [...]

The only reason that things were different for Törleß was that he was alone. (31)

As the narrator wanders away from the straightforward realist narrative of Božena's own sexual life into a description of the complex interiority that it awakens in Törleß, we learn that Törleß imagines the sexual relation between him and Božena as inevitably a sadomasochistic one, where either a "degraded" Božena humiliates him by playing up her social unsuitability for his desire, or a "pure" Božena provides him with an object to dominate and subject to pain. The narrator suggests that this dichotomy characterizes youthful desire generally, yet something about how Törleß senses and cognizes this experience sets him apart from "young people in general" and onto a path where is "alone."

Törleß's attempt to make some philosophical or social sense of this sudden, painful-pleasurable awareness of the way that his sexual desires have caused him to form kinky relations that betray his class and gender position drives the remaining episodes of the plot, including and especially his fascination with Reiting and Beineberg's sadomasochistic treatment of Basini. What makes Törleß "alone" among "young people in general" is precisely his refusal, unlike Beineberg, to consider Božena a simple object in the story of his sexual coming-of-age, the prostitute that serves the sexual needs of the upper-bourgeois adolescent before he matures into a

proper marriage. Törleß instead experiences a masochistic thrill in the realization that what separates his social world from Božena's is not their sexuality but the manners and proprieties available to their social classes for expressing it. As Božena describes working as a maid in Beineberg's aunt's house, perhaps truthfully, perhaps to get a rise out of him, Törleß has a complex sensuous experience he can't fully conceptualize, as the prose twists and strains to capture his confusions:

[Törleß] could see what [Božena] was describing vividly before him. Beineberg's mother became his own. He remembered the bright rooms of his parents' apartment. The well-groomed, clean, unapproachable faces that had often instilled a certain awe in him during dinner parties at home. The elegant, cool hands, which never seemed to lose any of their dignity, even at dinner. Many such details came into his mind, and he was ashamed to be here in a foul-smelling little room, trembling as he replied to the humiliating words of a whore. The memory of the perfect manners of that society, which never failed to observe the proprieties, had a more powerful effect on him than any moral considerations. His dark, nagging passions struck him as ludicrous. With visionary vividness he saw a cool, dismissive gesture, a shocked smile, like that with which one would shoo away a small and unclean animal. None the less he remained in his seat as though unable to move. (33)

Sexual pleasure and conceptual cacophony accompany Törleß's attempt to hold Božena's sexual role and her "foul-smelling room" in the same space as the "dinner parties at home." The recognition that bourgeois "dignity," "manners," and "propriety" are all that separate his sexual desires from Božena's becomes a suspicion "that there was something in the background that was being kept from him" (36), a yearning for "something quite out of the ordinary," a "mysterious, terrible joy ... in which one can drown oneself along with all one's fear of the monotony of the days" (37). The sexual thrill that Törleß experiences from Božena's class humiliations, and his suspicion that there is some extraordinary meaning to it that he cannot quite conceptualize, becomes the source of Törleß's fascination with Basini in the next episode of the plot. The novel narrates Božena's "vague longing for passion" as the story of her economic migration from peasant to maid to waitress to sex worker. For Törleß, the same vague longing becomes the material of experimental descriptions of his interiority and a scattered *Bildungsroman* plot governed more by conceptual associations between different episodes than the cause-and-effect logic of Božena's narrative. Törleß's desire to extract some sort of deeper knowledge or meaning from his encounter with Božena drives the rest of the plot by setting him apart from Reiting and Beineberg. To emphasize this point, the section with Božena ends with a sudden jump cut from Törleß's sense of being alone, to the next episode of the plot, where Reiting catches Basini stealing from their classmates' lockers:

With a petrified smile, [Törleß] stared into the ravaged face [Božena's] above his own, into those vacant eyes, then the outside world began to grow smaller...to move further and further away...For a moment the image of that peasant lad who had picked up the stone came into his mind and seemed to scoff at him...then he was quite alone.

"Hey, I've got him," whispered Reiting.

"Who?"

"The locker thief."

Törleß had just come back with Beineberg. (38)

Reiting then takes Beineberg and Törleß to the secret attic space they have set up for their plotting to discuss Basini's fate further. The novel takes the moment to draw a distinction between Reiting and Beineberg's use of the school, their intrigues, and the secret room, and Törleß's interest. Reiting, we learn, uses the secret room to fill "secret diaries" with "deranged plans for the future, and with precise notes about the cause, staging, and development of the many intrigues that he instigated among his classmates" (42). Reiting calls these plans "just an exercise," because he "dreamed of high politics and *coups d'état*, and consequently wanted to become an officer" (42). His extracurricular activities, including the sadomasochistic scheme he evolves against Basini, are, in other words, oriented toward the same thing that the more formal aspects of his education are preparing him for: a future where he has found his place in society by dominating it, by becoming the officer his *Bildung* has groomed him to be. Törleß, in contrast, "remained indifferent to these things. Consequently he was not skilled in them. None the less, he had been included in this world, and each day he could plainly see what it meant to have the most important role in such a state—for in such an institute each class is a little state in itself" (43). While Törleß can well observe that the school is preparation for elite service to the state—indeed, that the social relations of his grade function themselves as a practice mini-state—he has no interest himself in the concrete workings of these social maneuverings. Rather, as Reiting and Beineberg discuss how to use Basini's theft to further their schemes, Törleß zones out and abstracts from the situation at hand, allowing his mind to return to the *frisson* of pleasure-pain he felt when Božena forced him to compare the story of her sexuality to his own: "And again that was somehow linked with Božena. His thoughts had blasphemed. He had been confused by a rotten, sweet smell rising from them. And that profound humiliation, that self-abandonment, that state of being covered by the pale, heavy, poisonous leaves of shame that had passed through his dreams like a disembodied, distanced reflection, had suddenly become reality for Basini" (49).

From these associations, between shame and pleasure, between transgression and the possibility of organizing the narrative of one's life differently, Törleß forms the abstract questions that will drive him to continue participating in Reiting and Beineberg's scheme with Basini to its bitter end:

In that case Reiting and Beineberg were possible. This little room was possible... Then it was also possible that a portal led from the bright, daytime world which had hitherto been the only one he knew, and into another world that was gloomy, surging, passionate, naked, annihilating. That between those whose lives move in an orderly manner from office to family and back, as though in a solid and transparent building of glass and iron, and the others, those who have been cast down, the blood-stained, the debauched and filthy, who wander a confusion of passageways echoing with roaring voices, there is not a bridge, but it is rather that their boundaries abut, secret and close, and ready to be crossed at any moment...

And one question alone remains: how is it possible? (50)

In this scene, then, the novel draws a distinction between Reiting and Beineberg's interest in sadomasochism and Törleß's. Reiting views his treatment of Basini as an alternative form of education, an "exercise" that will prepare him for his future as an officer, just as his formal

education at the institute is intended to do. For him, pursuing his sadistic desires will not derail his future integration into society but enhance it; if his official education prepares him for a stable life as an officer and a family man, this informal exercise in sadism will prepare him for an unstable state of “high politics and *coups d'état*” (and it is perhaps worth noting that the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed thirteen years after the novel’s publication, when a real-world Reiting would have just been ascending to a role as an officer). Törleß, in contrast, sees the pursuit of sadomasochism—he is interested in Basini’s experience of masochism as much as his own experience of sadism—explicitly as a means of crossing over to a society organized differently. Where Reiting views his exploration of sadism as a supplement to his linear path to an official role, Törleß imagines it as something that might twist the “orderly” movement “from office to family and back” into the debaucher’s non-linear wandering along “a confusion of passageways.” This conflict between what Törleß hopes to extract from the intrigue and what Reiting and Beineberg seek from it forms the final episode of the novel. And just as we saw in the scene with Božena, it is worth again noting how the novel narrates Reiting’s plans with a straightforward accretion of realist details, while Törleß’s musings about a society organized otherwise lead the narrator away from plot and towards the metaphorical description of interior states, kinking the novel’s narrative progression. In the last section, we will return to the novel to see how Törleß’s attempt to extract something else from his experience undermines the narrative’s closure, and we will visit the adult Törleß to see how his youthful flirtation with gay sadomasochism culminates not in an officership, but rather a unique aesthetic sensibility and approach to social life. For now, however, we visit Freud.

### Perversions of Future Past

Krafft-Ebing’s 1886 *Psychopathia Sexualis* names its intention to taxonomize perversions as mental pathologies, but the first chapter then offers, tentatively, “Fragments of a Psychology of Sexual Life.” In those fragments, Krafft-Ebing generally describes pathologies as unfortunate deviations from normal development, only to occasionally contemplate the possibility that fetishism may be the very “germ” of all sexual desire. Just twenty years later, Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* achieve a neat inversion. The title announces an intention to formulate *the* (note the “zur” subtly edging out Krafft-Ebing’s more tentative “einer”) comprehensive theory of sexuality in three fragments. The first chapter, however, turns away from the general psychology of sexuality to its abnormal pathologies: “The Sexual Aberrations.” Where Krafft-Ebing’s work naming the perversions and claiming them for psychology required a brief detour into grand theorizing, both to give the perversions a greater context and to adumbrate the possible contributions to a general theory that they might offer, Freud’s work of grand general theory begins with an essay on the perversions.

Steven Marcus helpfully calls this a “device of working backwards” (xxxiv) and he suggests that “his strategy in this context is not difficult to understand” (xxxiii). Marcus gives two general suggestions as to why Freud starts with the aberrations: first, theoretically, Freud is taking adult behaviors that are fully “aggregated” and arranging them so that they are analytically “disaggregated” and “decomposed”; second, rhetorically, Freud starts with adult behaviors that would be familiar to his audience to get them on his side before turning to the unfamiliar and potentially shocking material of infant sexuality (xxxiv). These suggestions are reasonable enough, but narratively, the structure remains puzzling. The sexual theory that Freud ultimately lays out in the three essays is that psychosexuality forms through a developmental

process that can be narrated linearly; there are no grand ruptures between childhood and puberty or puberty and adulthood, only an unbroken chain of events leading back to infancy. Those events may deviate in some way or another from the expected path, but nevertheless they remain linear, one event leading to another. In this sense, the decision to start with the ending of this narrative—a set of possible bad endings, at that—still remains a problem. What about kink desire requires its narrative placement at the beginning of the process of which it is, plotwise, the end?

Examining the structure of the first essay itself reveals even more narrative perplexity. Freud begins by rehearsing “popular opinion”’s “quite definite ideas about the nature and characteristics of this sexual instinct” (1). He then introduces “two technical terms” (1), “sexual aim” and “sexual object” (2), that he insists will help demystify some of the ideas of “popular opinion.” Starting with sexual object, he dives into the problem of “inversion,” where a person’s sexual object matches their own sex, rather than that of the opposite sex. Then, as if this developmental aberration entails a narrative aberration, he loses the initial goal a little bit; inversion, which he summoned up as a counterexample to the popular idea that one sex exercises a natural attraction on the other, suddenly moves from illustrative example to theoretical object. An excursion of fourteen pages reflecting on everything from the nature of inversion, to the general manliness of its practitioners, to the ways that inverts choose to get off, takes over the main focus of the text, until Freud suddenly leaves off with the observation “that we are not in a position to base a satisfactory explanation of the origin of inversion upon the material at present before us” (12). Although the example seems to have gotten away from him, Freud suddenly returns to the larger theoretical question, declaring that inversion, despite the long excursion, was not really the point after all: “Nevertheless, our investigation has put us in possession of a piece of knowledge which may turn out to be of greater importance to us than the solution of that problem. It has been brought to our notice that we have been in the habit of regarding the connection between the sexual instinct and the sexual object as more intimate than it in fact is” (12-14). It is as if this knowledge, that the sexual instinct and object that usually appear together can in fact wander from one another, required the wandering of Freud’s own discourse to uncover.

Indeed, a few pages later, we learn that perversions are, themselves, literal spatial or temporal deviations from the narrative of a normal sexual encounter: “Here, then, are factors which provide a point of contact between the perversions and normal sexual life and which can also serve as a basis for their classification. Perversions are sexual activities which either (a) extend, in an anatomical sense, beyond the regions of the body that are designed for sexual union, or (b) linger over the intermediate relations to the sexual object which should normally be traversed rapidly on the path towards the final sexual aim” (16). In other words, the structure of Freud’s discursive examination of the perversions mirrors the conclusion he reaches about them: perversions are spatial extensions or temporal lingerings, sexual aims that either go too far or take too long, just as Freud’s discourse lingered with inversion far past the straightforward utility of its use as a counterexample to the popular idea that sexual attraction is exercised naturally by the object upon the attracted person. Perversion is literally a narrative deviation. But this narrative deviation is, we will soon learn, precisely what is necessary to produce the appearance of a linear developmental process.

Shortly after this, Freud’s description of fetishism requires him, once again, to make a meta-discursive comment about the order in which he is detailing all of these categories. Introducing the category of fetishes, he writes, “From the point of view of classification, we



should no doubt have done better to have mentioned this highly interesting group of aberrations of the sexual instinct among the deviations in respect of the sexual object. But we have postponed their mention till we could become acquainted with the factor of sexual overvaluation, on which these phenomena, being connected with an abandonment of the sexual aim, are dependent” (19). Once again, it is as though the theoretical or classificatory deviation of “fetishism” requires a corresponding discursive deviation. The perversion is always out of place, spatially or temporally. Freud evokes the possibility of a systematic and logical enumeration of “deviations in respect of the sexual object” only to declare that the nature of fetishism requires that it appear out of its proper time in his discourse, “postponed” from its proper position because a full understanding of fetishism requires an understanding of “sexual overvaluation,” which he could not neatly place within the group of deviations relating to the sexual object.

Notably, the invocation of fetishism leads to the first of Freud’s citations from literature in the main body of the text. A page before, Freud declares that fetishism is the most interesting “variation of the sexual instinct that borders on the pathological” because of “the peculiarity of the phenomena to which it gives rise” (19). But the literary appears just when he reverses that statement: it turns out that what is so interesting about the fetishistic is not merely that it gives rise to the most peculiar phenomena, but also that it is the closest variation of the sexual instinct to “normal love”:

A certain degree of fetishism is thus habitually present in normal love, especially in those stages of it in which the normal sexual aim seems unattainable or its fulfilment prevented:

Schaff’ mir ein Halstuch von ihrer Brust,  
Ein Strumpfband meiner Liebeslust! [“Fetch me a neckerchief  
from her breast, a garter for my love’s desire!”]

The situation only becomes pathological when the longing for the fetish passes beyond the point of being merely a necessary condition attached to the sexual object and actually takes the place of the normal aim, and, further, when the fetish becomes detached from a particular individual and becomes the sole sexual object. These are, indeed, the general conditions under which mere variations of the sexual instinct pass over into pathological aberrations. (20)

In this moment where the literary (a line from Goethe’s *Faust*) is first pressed into evidence as an example of “normal love” lies, perhaps, the clearest answer to why Freud begins his linear theory of psychosexual development with the endpoint of failed, aberrational development. It turns out that the sexual desires that are most peculiar, that most deviate from the shape of the normal, are also the ones that are most present in the normal. What makes them an aberration is not the kind of sexual aim or object, but rather their place in the narrative. As Leo Bersani puts it in an intriguing line from his classic essay, “Sexuality and Aesthetics,” “Heterosexual genitality is the hierarchical stabilization of sexuality’s component instincts. And the perversions of adults therefore become intelligible as the sickness of *uncompleted narratives*” (30). Bersani unfortunately does not expand on this characterization, occupied as he is in that essay with a non-narrative thread in Freud, but the terms I have laid out here let us expand on his comment a little more precisely. Perversions are to be “traversed rapidly on the path to the final sexual aim”; it is only when they become the aim itself—the climax to the sexual act rather than its rising action—that they are perverted. Perversions are components of “normal” sexual desire,

but sometimes they threaten to “take the place” of it. Thus it is not only that perversions offer a premature ending or lack closure, as Bersani’s phrase “uncompleted narratives” implies. What makes perversions perverted is their very insistence on appearing out of place in the narrative: too soon, too late, at a place where they are not to be expected.

Although the punctuation implies that the reference to *Faust* is meant as evidence for the place of fetishism in the “stages” of “normal love,” the sudden decontextualized quotation from the literary text introduces the interpretive possibility that the quote is as an example of Freud’s description of perversion, as well. Although the first line of the couplet describes an object attached to “a particular individual”—it is a neckerchief from *her* breast, not *a* breast that Faust demands—the second line already slips away from “her.” “A garter for my love’s desire” describes a direct relationship between the narrator’s desire and the fetish as its object, with no mediation of a body part like “her breast” required. The distinction that Freud tries to draw between the normal and the pathological seems to slip away as soon as he summons an example from a literary text. (It is instructive to note the subtle but anxious attempt to disambiguate the situation in the James Strachey translation. Strachey’s footnote cites a translation of *Faust* by Bayard Taylor that reintroduces the lover’s body back into the second half of the couplet: “Get me a kerchief from her breast / A garter that her knee has pressed” [20]. The phantasmatic knee that the translation summons up in place of the lover’s desire would solve the problem, but alas, there’s not a knee to be found in the original couplet.) There is a sense, then, in which the distinction between a “stage of normal love” and a “pathology” is a narrative or discursive one. It is not the object of the desire that makes it pathological, but rather where and when it appears in the plot. And there’s a peculiar way in which even a single couplet cited as a familiar and illustrative example nevertheless seems to exceed the space to which it is allotted. The question of narrative, and the ambiguity of literary language, is inevitably imbricated with Freud’s theoretical description of pathological perversity.

Freud’s decision to narrate the perversions first, then, is exactly what makes them perverted. Although he will refer in the next chapter to the “polymorphous perversion” of infantile sexuality, the perversity is mere metaphor, derived from the perversity of adult desires compared to a “normal” of genital sex taken to full consummation. In an infant, in fact, the same desires are not perverse at all because infancy is their proper place in the story of sexual development. It is only by starting from the perspective of adult perversity that Freud can call infantile sexuality “polymorphously perverse.” This category of desire, Freud suggests, is always threatening to appear in the wrong place and time, sometimes “taking the place” of the “normal aim,” just as it threatens to show up in the wrong places in Freud’s own discourse.

What begins as an “aberration,” then, Freud soon reveals to be part of the universal story of sexual development. Having finished the analytical overview of Section 1 of the First Essay, “Deviations in Respect of the Sexual Object,” and of Section 2, “Deviations in Respect of the Sexual Aim,” Freud now moves from these particular accounts of pathological individuals to Section 3, “The Perversions in General.” It turns out immediately that all of this tarrying in the details of aberrant individuals was in fact a prelude to the assertion that the perversions are, when put in their proper time and place, not aberrant or individualizing at all: “No healthy person, it appears, can fail to make some addition that might be called perverse to the normal sexual aim; and the universality of this finding is in itself enough to show how inappropriate it is to use the word perversion as a term of reproach” (26). In other words, Freud needed to start his narrative theory of general psychosexual development with the “bad ending” of the pervert to reveal that normal, linear sexual development requires a passage through kink desire. Freud’s narrative

deviation—his beginning with the ending, and tarrying with it overlong—is precisely what is necessary to produce the appearance of a linear developmental process.

This discursive technique—the telling of the *Bildung* story in reverse—accomplishes two theoretical ends. First, as has long been noted about Freud, perversity becomes universal. Or, to state it more precisely, kink desire becomes a universal beginning for the story of desire in general. Unlike Krafft-Ebing's case studies and fragments of a theory, kink desire is not confined to a well-defined population of aberrant individuals with particularizing life stories, and the idea that fetishism might, possibly, be a “germ” of desire transforms from tossed-off speculation to a central tenet of the general theory.

The cost of this universalization, however, and the second theoretical end, is a strict fixing of the place of kink desire in the plot of the development of the individual's desires. As Henri Zukier puts it in a helpful comparison of psychoanalysis to later “developmental stage” psychology:

Clearly, the premise of structural variability and initial indeterminacy required a developmental theory to outline the transformations of structures from the initial polymorphism to the final integrated forms of sexuality and personality. This developmental imperative has often been construed as a quintessential feature of psychoanalysis. Yet a brief examination of the developmental parameters of psychoanalysis points to the absence of any theory of change or concepts of development in Freudian theory and therapy. Although, at first, it might have appeared that psychoanalysis had successfully snatched many phenomena (e.g., sexuality) from the naturalistic tradition, and from their shallow fixation in the present, all were ‘lost again’ in a rigidly predetermined model. (8)

To put this in more narratological terms, placed at the beginning of Freud's *Three Essays*, the “bad ending” of the adult pervert can be passed over in the general narrative of psychosexual development. The “aberration” of kink desire torqued Freud's discourse out of chronological order, but now that this ending has been dealt with in its properly improper place, the remainder of the *Three Essays* proceeds in proper chronological order, from “Infantile Sexuality” to “The Transformations of Puberty.” Though Krafft-Ebing's taxonomization of the “psychopathologies” set apart the subject of kink desire as an individual “lonely soul” crying out for the solace of the psychiatric gaze, his case histories also provided a means for the people he minoritized to give a collective narrative coherence to their experiences. Freud's modernist story of reverse-*Bildung* makes perversion a universal origin of desire. But it also leaves the figure of the actual adult pervert behind: the out-of-place ending that must be passed over at the start so that the linear story of individual desire's integration into social relations can at last be narrated in chronological order. The last sentences of the first essay end by invoking the telos of “normal sexual life” that passing over perversion has made possible: “A formula begins to take shape which lays it down that the sexuality of neurotics has remained in, or been brought back to, an infantile state. Thus our interest turns to the sexual life of children, and we will now proceed to trace the play of influences which govern the evolution of infantile sexuality till its outcome in perversion, neurosis or normal sexual life” (38). Perversion, and neurosis, thus become precisely the appearance of kink desire at the wrong time in the plot: a “remain[ing] in” or a being “brought back to an infantile state.” Kink desire becomes the origin of all desire, but it has no future.

### “A Child Ineducable”

Before contrasting the relationship of *Törleß*'s two endings to (fore)closure with the “bad ending” of Freud's first essay on sexuality, I would like to make my own instructive excursion. The *Three Essays* are remembered, of course, for the place of the parents, particularly the mother, in infantile sexuality. The mother becomes the (lost) origin of all sexuality and love relations in the third essay, where Freud delivers the much-quoted line, “There are thus good reasons why a child sucking at his mother's breast has become the prototype of every relation of love. The finding of an object is in fact a refinding of it” (88). And this formulation can't help but resonate, despite Musil's protestations, with the final lines of *Young Törleß*, where Törleß, released from the institute to be educated at home, refinds his mother:

Törleß remembered how unimaginable his parents' life had been. And he stole a glance at his mother.

“What is it, my son?”

“Nothing, Mama, I was just thinking about something.”

And he breathed in the faintly perfumed fragrance rising from his mother's waist.  
(160)

But before contemplating the implications of Musil's choice to figure the reconciliation of Törleß's exploration of kink desire with his education as the sniffing of his mother's waist, I would like to turn to the role of a less explored figure in the shaping of the child's desire in the *Three Essays*: the educator (and the educator's evil twin, the seducer). It is through the figure of the educator that I can perhaps best substantiate my argument that the *Three Essays* offer a *Bildungsroman* theory of sexual development, one in which the process of education and the process of integrating an individual's sexual desires with social relations are posited as one and the same.

The educator, in fact, appears in the body of the *Three Essays* before the mother. Indeed, it is the figure of the educator who leads Freud to the famous section on auto-erotism, where he declares that the child's first experience of sexual pleasure occurs when sucking the mother's breast (47). Motivating the theories of this section, Freud writes:

In so far as educators pay any attention at all to infantile sexuality, they behave exactly as though they shared our views as to the construction of the moral defensive forces at the cost of sexuality, and as though they knew that sexual activity makes a child ineducable: for they stigmatize every sexual manifestation by children as a ‘vice’, without being able to do much against it. We, on the other hand, have every reason for turning our attention to these phenomena which are so much dreaded by education, for we may expect them to help us to discover the original configuration of the sexual instincts. (45)

Freud's educator is a figure less of cultural instruction than of moral finger-wagging. The educator is always haplessly pointing out vices that they are powerless fully to suppress. A few pages later, Freud invokes educators again with those lightly-mocking scare quotes: “Educators are once more right when they describe children who keep the process back [ie, the withheld bowel movements of the anal stage of infantile sexuality] as ‘naughty’” (52). The

educator emerges as, in some ways, the opposite of the mother. If the mother “familiarized” (47) the child with the pleasure of mucous-membrane-on-nipple contact, thus awakening sexuality in general, the educator works to put the sexual drive back to sleep with their moralizing. Freud’s scare quotes emphasize that the educator is allied with his intellectual project insofar as both search out all the manifestations of sexuality in children. To the extent that Freud distances himself from the educator, it is because the educator seeks to suppress those impulses with morals, calling them ‘vice’ and ‘naughty.’ Freud, on the other hand, seeks to remove these perversions from the realm of ethics.

On the other hand, if Freud gently mocks the educator for making a big moral deal out of normal childhood experiences, he also ultimately aligns himself with their goals. Whether or not childhood perversions *ought* to be suppressed as immoral, Freud nevertheless agrees with the educator that this ethical process is necessary for further education. Indeed, the channeling of child sexuality away from perversions turns out to be nothing less than the condition of possibility for the development of “civilization” and “culture” in general: “In consequence of the inverse relation holding between civilization and the free development of sexuality, of which the consequences can be followed far into the structure of our existences, the course taken by the sexual life of a child is just as unimportant for later life where the cultural or social level is relatively low as it is important where that level is relatively high” (108). In one of his uncomfortable confluences of pre-industrial non-Western societies with childhood, the conversion of childhood perversions to the properly restricted adult sexuality turns out to be the very task that makes more complex social relations and cultural production possible. If the educator comes off as a bit of a moralistic fuddy-duddy in their suppression of manifestations of childhood sexuality, nevertheless, they are *precisely* correct that this is the proper task of education. For Freud, the redirection of childhood sexual impulses is the necessary precondition of other forms of education, first ethical, and then aesthetic and “cultural.” As he writes in the summary of the essays at the end of the book, “On this view, the forces destined to retain the sexual instinct upon certain lines are built up in childhood chiefly at the cost of perverse sexual impulses and with the assistance of education” (98). *Bildung*, then, consists in redirecting sexuality away from the perversions that the mother first aroused.

An odd corollary to this description of education is the role of the seducer. Not long after introducing the mother as the origin of infantile sexuality, Freud reflects on a figure who can reverse the linear development of the child’s progressive damming of the various sites for sexuality:

It is an instructive fact that under the influence of seduction children can become polymorphously perverse, and can be led into all possible kinds of sexual irregularities. This shows that an aptitude for them is innately present in their disposition. There is consequently little resistance towards carrying them out, since the mental dams against sexual excesses—shame, disgust and morality—have either not yet been constructed at all or are only in course of construction, according to the age of the child. In this respect children behave in the same kind of way as an average uncultivated woman in whom the same polymorphously perverse disposition persists. (57)

In this passage, seduction emerges as the exact opposite of *Bildung*. Where the educator instills morality to redirect a child’s sexual impulses away from perversity so that the child may be educated, the seducer undoes this education to lead the child (or “uncultivated woman”) back

to their infantile state. There is a sort of counter-pedagogy in this, as the seducer is able to “[lead the child] into all possible kinds of sexual irregularities.” Freud describes this counter-*Bildung* as specifically a reverse process, a turning backward from a present state toward an originary one, as well as a turning away from the narrow but useful potential of educability toward the infinite possibilities of “polymorphous perversion.”

What concerns me here is not so much the question of actual child seduction (the reality and horrors of child rape go without saying), but rather Freud’s positioning of it as a direct counternarrative to the linear developmental processes of education. The most remarkable part of Freud’s positioning of the seducer as the evil mirror image of the educator is that he aligns his own investigations and the form of the *Three Essays* not with the educator *but with the seducer*. At the beginning of this section, Freud claimed that “in so far as educators pay attention at all to infantile sexuality, they behave exactly as though they shared our views as to the construction of the moral defensive forces at the cost of sexuality...for they stigmatize every sexual manifestation by children as a ‘vice’” (45). Though Freud and the educators share this theoretical understanding of the relationship between child sexuality and education, the educators align themselves with the linear developmental process. They “stigmatize every sexual manifestation by children” so as to begin building up the moral dams that make a child educable. Freud, however, goes on to say that “we”—the royal “we”? he and the readers he is educating? the imagined community of psychoanalysts? ...seducers?—“on the other hand, have every reason for turning our attention to these phenomena which are so much dreaded by education, for we may expect them to help us to discover the original configuration of the sexual instincts” (45). Indeed, though he shares the educators’ views, where educators “stigmatize,” Freud’s project is explicitly to normalize: “No healthy person, it appears, can fail to make some addition that might be called perverse to the normal sexual aim; and the universality of this finding is in itself enough to show how inappropriate it is to use the word perversion as a term of reproach” (26). Educators reproach perversion; Freud universalizes it.

This offers one last answer to the question of why Freud begins with the ending of the adult pervert in the first essay, only to turn to the beginning of infant sexuality in the second: the narrative trajectory of the *Three Essays* follows not education but *seduction*. Freud, of course, distinguishes himself from the child seducer by declaring that the goal of turning his exposition back toward the originary state of polymorphous perversion is “to discover,” not to lead the subject “into all kinds of sexual irregularities.” But the point is that the narrative structure of the *Three Essays* has the same backward chronology as seduction. Freud must work back from the sexuality-stigmatizing education of the educators to seduce the reader into accepting his discovery of the universal originary state of polymorphous perversion. The narrative project of the *Three Essays*, then, is aligned with the backwards-looking, perverse counter-education of seduction, against traditional education’s linear process of progressively channeling sexuality toward socially acceptable expressions. The “we” who turn “our attention toward these phenomena which are so much dreaded by education,” then, share a process of seduction and de-education. Unlike the actual criminal seducer, the goal of this process is knowledge; it leaves polymorphous perversion in the past where it belongs. While Freud does not go so far as to imagine a society of practicing perverts, he does position psychoanalysis itself as a communal project of perverse knowledge production, a counter-educational narrative of group seduction.

Turning now to the place of education and educators in *Törleß*, we find once again some striking similarities to Freud’s work in the novels’ positioning of child sexuality and formal education. As I suggested in the first section on *Törleß*, the novel has a somewhat more

expansive concept of education, with peer group formation and the brothel serving just as much as sites of bourgeois *Bildung* as the institute itself. But insofar as the novel does represent formal education, it appears as a process of discipline, both in the sense of Freud's "mental dams" instilled by punishment and stigma and in the sense of carving up the continuous meadows of knowledge into non-overlapping fields. While Törleß himself struggles with the necessity of setting different realms of experience apart from one another—manners from formal education, sexual impulses from aesthetic experiences, mathematics from epistemology—his teachers appear as rigid disciplinarians attached to specific disciplines of knowledge. The novel expresses this most succinctly in a remarkable passage where Törleß attempts to read a copy of what seems to be Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* given to him by his math teacher while staring lustfully at Basini as they work in an empty classroom.<sup>37</sup>

To give that image a little more context, there is one more "episode" in *The Confusions of Young Törleß* that co-occurs with the Basini conspiracy, and it concerns formal education. Beset by the confusions of his kinky encounter with the Slavic sex worker Božena, Törleß brings these perplexities not just to the extracurricular incidents with Basini, but also to the classroom. In the novel's usual episodic manner, the episode occurs abruptly, juxtaposing Törleß's informal education by the boys who run the mini-"state" of his class with the formal education of the classroom. Beineberg and Reiting have commanded that Basini and Törleß accompany them to the hidden storage room that they use as a hideout. For the first time, their humiliations turn violent: they strip Basini down and whip him with a switch. As Basini moans in the dark from his beating, "Törleß felt pleasantly touched by those moaning sounds. A shudder ran up and down his back, as though on the feet of spiders, then it settled between his shoulder-blades and, with delicate claws, drew his scalp backwards. To his disgust Törleß realized that he was in a state of sexual arousal. [...] It made him ashamed; but it had filled his head like a surging wave of blood" (78). Much like his encounter with Božena, Törleß suddenly finds himself aroused by a strange knot of repulsive empathy, shame, and, this time, a sensuous pleasure in seeing and hearing an act of violence. As he attempts to untangle this knot of sensations, he realizes that, despite the group dynamics of this torture scene, the most distinguishing feature of his arousal is that it is for him alone, that the sexual thrill of it consists precisely in the feeling that he is alone within the group: "He already knew very clearly that something had been saved up for him, something that admonished him again and again, at ever shorter intervals; a sensation that was incomprehensible to the others, but was clearly very important for his life. He didn't know what his burst of sensuality had to do with it, but he remembered that it had always been present when events had begun to seem strange to him alone, and tormented him because he knew of no reason

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<sup>37</sup> The novel never names the volume, though given that the math teacher is seemingly giving Törleß a lesson on the grounds for what is knowable, the First Critique seems like the right corollary. In fact, the identification seems so obvious that it is a mildly diverting game to track which critics write as though the First Critique is named in the novel. Hickman, for example, summarizes the scene, reasonably, "Not surprisingly, the boy's attempt to unravel the *Critique of Pure Reason* founders on the footnotes" (31). I noted also Achille Varzi (35) and Tim Mehigan (85) as examples. Philip Kitcher (15) is a rare example that identifies a different work of Kant's; he suggests "apparently" the second critique (22), or in a footnote, speculates that it could be *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* or the *Metaphysics of Morals* before declaring that "it is clearly on practical philosophy" (29). Kitcher's rigorous attempt to read *Törleß* as a commentary on Hume's description of the self as a succession of psychological states with no causal connection is highly interesting. But it is also highly symptomatic of a strain of commentary on Musil that insists, scoffingly, and somewhat bafflingly, given how thoroughly it permeates his entire oeuvre as well as the intellectual life of *fin-de-siècle* Austria generally, that sexuality is too frivolous a topic to be the *real* subject of Musil's weighty experimentations in form (see Kitcher 14).

why that should be” (79). This voyeuristic-sadistic arousal seems to require the group scene, yet arises exactly because Törleß feels himself set apart from the group.

Abruptly, the novel cuts from the torture scene to Törleß’s formal education: “But Törleß had already leaned back in the dark again. He was repelled by the scene, and ashamed that he had let the others have his idea. [\*\*\*] During maths class Törleß had suddenly had an idea. Over the past few days he had been following his lessons with special interest, thinking, ‘If this is really a preparation for life, as they say it is, then it must contain a trace of whatever it is that I’m searching for’” (80-81). As with most everything else in the novel, whether Basini, Božena, or math, Törleß experiences an anguished conceptual perplexity that his peers do not share. The connection Törleß (and the novel’s abrupt cut from one scene to another) attempts to draw between the situation with Basini and mathematics fixates on imaginary numbers. Though he does not quite have the vocabulary for it, Törleß is perplexed by their ontology. He cannot understand how the multiplication of two quantities that do not exist can produce a real number that can describe concrete objects. When he attempts to explain this to Beineberg, he immediately dismisses Törleß’s confusion before placing it within his mysticist belief system. Still perplexed, Törleß relies for the one and only time in the novel on his teachers to demystify his confusion. He decides to ask the math teacher to explain his ontological conundrum: how can two imaginary quantities produce something real?

Törleß’s inquiry appears to him just as much a question about ontology as a question of how to be a well-integrated adult member of society. As he goes to his teacher’s office hours, he simultaneously feels a kind of envy for his teacher, “who must surely be familiar with all those relationships, and who carried his knowledge of them around with him wherever he went,” as well as a curiosity “to learn how the life of another, knowledgeable and yet settled person might look, at least as far as one could tell from his outward surroundings” since “he had never been in the room of an adult young man” (83). But Törleß’s expansive concept of *Bildung*—the connection he makes between possession of certain categories of knowledge and being “settled” in a specific social milieu—immediately runs up against the mathematics teacher’s own dedication to disciplinarity. Where Törleß intuits a connection between his inexplicable attraction to Basini and his perplexity around imaginary numbers, and between his teacher’s specialized knowledge and his “outward surroundings,” his teacher immediately insists on education as the mastery of discrete disciplines of knowledge. He tells Törleß, “Now I don’t know how you feel about this; the supersensory, everything that lies beyond the strict laws of reason, is something that follows its own rules. I’m not really equipped to talk about it, it isn’t part of my subject; you can think about it in one way or another, and I would prefer to avoid being controversial...But where mathematics is concerned, it is quite certain that even here there exists only a natural, purely mathematical context” (85). His teacher ends the conversation by showing Törleß “an elegant and expensive volume of Kant” and declaring, “You see this book, this is philosophy, it contains the defining aspects of our actions. And if you could feel your way to the bottom of it, you would encounter only such logical necessities, which define everything despite the fact that they themselves cannot be understood” (86). He ends by telling Törleß that he “it would be too difficult for you” to read the Kant “for the time being” (87). Were Törleß to pursue the narrative of education that his math teacher lays out for him, rather than illuminating the strange connections he makes between different categories of experience and thought, he would eventually come to understand the analytic limits of knowledge that Kant parses in *The Critique of Pure Reason*.

I set this scene next to Freud’s invocation of the educator in the *Three Essays* to suggest



that both works challenge, both in their content and their formal structure, a traditional, linear narrative of education. For Törleß's math teacher, education is the mastery of increasingly specialized bodies of knowledge over time. He declares to Törleß, "My dear friend, you must simply believe; if you can do ten times as much mathematics as you do at the moment, you will understand, but for the time being: believe!" (86). Freud's educators, in their case, view child sexuality as something that must be suppressed so that "real" education can happen. For Freud, however, the analytical separation of sexual ethics from cultural education is a fallacy; *both* are a necessary part of the educational process. Perverse sexuality is not simply an unrelated "vice" that distracts a child from education, but rather the condition of education's possibility. The educator's imposition of ethics on the child's polymorphous perversion frees up that store of energy for further education. Similarly, Törleß refuses the traditional model of education that his mathematics teacher offers. Törleß intuits that his question about the ontological status of imaginary numbers might somehow resolve his intuition about how the dark sadomasochistic rituals Beineberg and Reiting practice on Basini hold out the possibility of a society organized differently.<sup>38</sup>

The response of the mathematics teacher is to assure Törleß that these different realms of experience and knowledge are distinct and have no bearing on one another; the young student must take on faith what the adult who has undergone years of specialized training will eventually come to understand. Törleß, however, refuses this temporality; he demands to understand now and refuses to hold his interest in the ethics, social dynamics, and aesthetic experience of Basini's torture separate from his interest in mathematics. The next day, he goes out to buy "the cheap edition of the volume he had seen in his teacher's room" (89). The narrator intervenes to describe this process as a "diversion" from Törleß's "development." After his encounter with his teacher, Törleß spends the day "in an agitated state" (87); he "had only ever heard the name of Kant uttered occasionally and then with a curious expression, as though it was the name of some sinister holy man. And Törleß could only imagine that Kant had solved the problems of philosophy once and for all, and that since that time those problems had been merely a pointless occupation, just as he believed that there was no point in writing poetry after Schiller and Goethe" (87). The narrator in fact suggests that it is precisely this approach to knowledge and study that has "diverted" Törleß into sadomasochism in the first place: "That skewed relationship towards philosophy and literature would later have an unfortunate influence on Törleß's further development, and one which would bring him many unhappy hours. It was because it diverted his ambition from its proper objects, and, robbed of his goal, he sought a new one, that he came

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<sup>38</sup> Törleß uses metaphors about "bridges" and "boundaries" to relate these topics semantically in a way that escapes him conceptually. Recall from my analysis in the section "Irrungen, Verwirrungen" the passage describing Törleß's fascination with the scenes in the secret room early in the novel: "That between those whose lives move in an orderly manner from office to family and back, as though in a solid and transparent building of glass and iron, and the others, those who have been cast down, the blood-stained, the debauched and filthy, who wander a confusion of passageways echoing with roaring voices, there is not a bridge, but it is rather that their boundaries abut, secret and close, and ready to be crossed at any moment" (50). Likewise, when Törleß attempts to describe his fascination with imaginary numbers to Beineberg, he invokes an impossible bridge between two realms: "Just think about it for a moment: in that kind of calculation you have very solid figures at the beginning, which can represent metres or weights or something similarly tangible, and which are at least real numbers. And then there are real numbers at the end of the calculation as well. But they're connected to one another by something that doesn't exist. Isn't that like a bridge consisting only of the first and last pillars, and yet you walk over it as securely as though it was all there? For me there's something dizzying about a calculation like that; as if it goes off God knows where for part of the way." (82)

under the defining and brutal influence of his companions” (88). This “diversion” in Törleß’s development narratively resembles something like Freud’s description of seduction: Törleß is unable to apply his energy to its “proper objects” because it has been channeled into the perversion of Reiting and Beineberg’s sadomasochistic scheme. Reiting and Beineberg, however, see their bullying as a mere extension of their formal education, preparation for their adult roles in the military and the state. Törleß, perversely, seeks something different from their sadomasochism, the “proper objects” he should have found in philosophy and literature. Freud needed to turn back from the educator’s progressive imposition of sexual ethics to discover the originary state of “polymorphous perversion”; Törleß, in his own epistemological journey, is diverted from the linear mastery of fields of knowledge into the aesthetic contemplation of perversion. Intimately bound up in both Freud’s and Musil’s conceptions of education, then, is the kinking of a linear narrative of *Bildung* into the diversions of perversion. In the last section, then, I turn to the resolution of Törleß’s perverse *Bildung*. If sadomasochism is a nonlinear diversion from the “proper objects” of education, then what sort of *Bildung* does it produce?

### **This *Bildung* Which is Not One**

I have already explored how *Young Törleß* adapts the traditional narrative structure of the *Bildungsroman* to a modernist aesthetics. The novel’s plot proceeds less by narrating the logical results of choices proceeding from its character’s traits, social positioning, and the contingencies of life than by juxtaposing thematically resonant episodes. The most remarkable result of this juxtaposition is what I have been calling the novel’s two endings: one that occurs latest in narrated time and one that occurs latest in narrative time. The ending that actually ends the novel, in the sense that it is narrated on the last pages of the novel, corresponds more closely to the traditional closure of the *Bildungsroman*, that “harmonious solution” to “the conflict between the ideal of *self-determination* and the equally imperious demands of *socialization*,” as Moretti memorably puts it. However, the second ending, occurring before this ending in the novel’s discourse, is an equivocal look into Törleß’s adult life that destabilizes the closure offered by the more traditional ending.

The two endings are a major point of contention in the novel’s criticism. Raleigh Whiting, in a 1989 article, offers a helpful and expansive overview of two camps of criticism up to that point, writing, “[S]ome reviewers follow Alfred Kerr’s view of Törleß as an indictment of the irresponsible aesthete, and others accept the young author’s defense of his hero against moral attack” (29). Whiting’s article valiantly steers between these two camps, venturing in the conclusion that “rather than one of the novel’s few inconsistencies, this shift in tone and time frame seems instead to be part of a pattern meant not so much to diminish young Törleß’ growth nor even to render the mature Törleß a complete moral cripple but rather to prevent the reader from embracing his line of development as an absolute model. Thus the complexities of narrative technique impart to this symmetrically closed story an element of thought-provoking open-endedness” (30). There’s a certain retro-appeal in the article’s falling back on Musil’s notebooks to descry the true meaning of the novel’s place in the phases of his literary development (Whiting even labors to show that the second ending is not a “flaw” but part of the novel’s “intention,” a line of literary criticism wildly foreign to those of us raised in the post-Theory Zeitgeist!), but I don’t think we need to be overly attached to that historical positivism to agree with this assessment of what the novel implies through its narratological juxtapositions. (For a more recent review, from 2002, of interpretations of the “double ending,”

see Clinton Shaffer, pp. 42-44, and the accompanying footnotes. For his part, Shaffer also endorses the endings as provocatively failing to offer a “‘stable’ Törleß,” which he reads as “point[ing] up startling gaps in the rational-liberal cultural consensus that had lent the Austro-Hungarian Empire its last shreds of coherence,” as well as “exempl[ifying] the Modernist realization that consciousness, experience, and development can no longer be recounted without recourse to innovative, conflicting, and occasionally unsettling narrative structures” [44].) But just what does this unstableness and open-endedness, or perhaps multi-endedness, afford beyond thought-provocation and innovative narrative structures?

Beginning with the later ending, the closure it offers corresponds to the linear narrative of education that Törleß’s math teacher offers him, as well as, notably, the version of sexual development away from the perversions and toward the Oedipus complex that Freud offers. Leading into the ending, Reiting and Beineberg finally make their private sexual torture of Basini into a public spectacle for the miniature “state” that is their class. As Reiting and Beineberg recruit the rest of the class into their scheme, “hot, dark and filled with dark desires, an oppressive silence descended upon the classroom” (148). A scene of ritual homosocial-homosexual bonding occurs to fulfill those “dark desires,” as Beineberg and Reiting begin by humiliating Basini with a public reading of letters Basini’s mother has sent him, which quickly devolves into a group beating in the empty classroom when “suddenly someone gives Basini a shove” (148). Törleß, alone in this crowd, learns nothing from this lesson in group psychosexual dynamics, taking place in a classroom on “a free afternoon” (148). The location of this scene in a classroom aligns it, perversely yet in accordance with the logic the novel has developed, with the formal education the boys receive at the institute. Beineberg and Reiting’s exploration of sadomasochistic desire finds its well-integrated social form in homosocial group bonding that will prepare the boys for their adult roles in the state just as well as the lessons on divinity and math that take place in the classroom.

Törleß rejects this vision of sadomasochistic bullying as professional preparation. He secretly urges Basini to turn himself in to end the tortures before he flees the institute and its version of education entirely. However, in the last scene, he also rejects his own attempts to extract something more meaningful, an alternate vision of social relations and group ethics, from the incident with Basini. He spends the night before he flees trying to bring some narrative coherence to his experiences:

Now Törleß began to flick through the notes he had made. The sentences in which he had helplessly recorded events—that multifarious astonishment, that sense of being affected by life—came alive again, began to stir and become coherent. They lay before him like a bright path bearing the imprints of his tentative footsteps. But still they seemed to be missing something; not a new thought, it wasn’t that; but they did not yet come fully alive for him.

[...] And now he grew anxious about standing before his teachers tomorrow and having to justify himself. How? (150)

In a self-reflexive moment, Törleß is unable to bring a narrative closure to his own experiences that mirrors the novel’s own uneasy sense of closure.

The next day, he is apprehended in the next town over and brought before a tribunal of school officials to bring the narrative closure to the incident with Basini that they demand. The scene plays out as a semi-comic attempt to fit Törleß’s incoherent merging of the sexual and the

mathematical, the socially transformative and the private aesthetic experience, into the disciplinary boundaries<sup>39</sup> represented by each of the school officials present at the interview: “Also present, apart from the headmaster, were the form master, the divinity teacher, and the mathematics master who had, as the youngest staff member, been assigned the duty of taking the minutes” (152). Each utterance in Törleß’s attempt to give coherence to his experiences and motivations, which resembles in its fragmentariness and striking metaphors the narrator’s own modernist poetics, is met by an attempt from one of the adults to simplify it into the terms of his own field of knowledge. Törleß begins by saying “I...I thought about Basini’s soul,” and “the divinity teacher beamed, the mathematician cleaned his pince-nez” (153). But, disappointing the divinity teacher, he continues by describing his kinked sexual attraction to the scene:

“I couldn’t imagine the moment when such humiliation had descended upon Basini, and for that reason I felt drawn to his presence time and again...”

“I see—you are probably trying to say that you felt a natural revulsion for your classmate’s errors, and that the sight of vice enthralled you, as the gaze of snakes is said to do to their victims.”

With lively gestures, the form master and the mathematician hurried to demonstrate their agreement with this simile [notably, in contrast to Törleß’s use of language, one with a clear referent].

But Törleß said, “No, it wasn’t actually revulsion. [...] it seemed so strange to me that I couldn’t think in terms of punishment, and I found myself confronting him from a quite different angle; every time I thought of him something within me cracked...” (153)

As the conversation continues, the mathematician intervenes to reduce Törleß’s confusions to a matter of technical training: “I must add, if we are to have a better understanding of these obscure statements, that young Törleß once visited me to ask me to explain certain fundamental mathematical concepts—including the imaginary—which might in fact present difficulties for the untrained intellect” (154). The divinity teacher, for his part, hopes to claim Törleß’s testimony for spirituality and morality, attempting to summarize his explanations with “So, you feel drawn away from science towards religious points of view?” (154). But to his teachers’ frustration, Törleß rejects all these attempts to discipline his experience into discrete fields of knowledge and training. Climactically, suddenly sure of himself, he begins, “Perhaps I have not yet learned enough to express myself properly, but I will describe it” (156).

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<sup>39</sup> I am not the first to make this observation. For example, Todd Kontje writes, “[T]he final interrogation of Törleß by the committee of teachers is depicted as a grotesquely comic struggle for power, in which representatives of various disciplines battle to subsume his confusions in the language of their respective fields” (251, qtd. in Schaffer 47). (Remarkably, I wrote the phrase “semi-comic attempt” before reading his more evocative “grotesquely comic struggle for power.”) And the relation between Musil’s work and the increased disciplinarity of modernity, as noted by contemporary critical theorists like Simmel, Weber, and Durkheim, is given a thorough and fascinating treatment in David Wellberry’s “The General Enters the Library: A Note on Disciplines and Complexity,” which argues that Musil’s later opus *The Man Without Qualities* is “a novel that takes disciplinary proliferation and the Babel of misunderstanding that flows from it as a cardinal feature of modernity” (983). I think, however, that these readings reveal a characteristic split in the literature on Musil: the readings of sexuality in his work often don’t take his reflections on epistemology as entirely serious, while the attempts to give philosophical coherence to his work often read sexuality as some lurid screen for a deeper philosophical seriousness. I think I may be one of the few to connect the discipline of sexual desire with the disciplinarity of knowledge in the novel, as much as that seems like an obvious Foucauldian leap.

The speech continues with Törleß's declaration that, in his experiences with Basini, he sensed something unconceptualizable, unrepresentable within the terms of language:

“Just as I feel that an idea comes to life inside me, I feel also that there is something alive inside me when I look at things, when thoughts fall silent. There is something dark in me, something among all my thoughts, something that I cannot measure with thoughts, a life that can't be expressed in words and which is none the less my life....

[...]

Now that is past. I know that I was indeed mistaken. I'm not afraid of anything any more. I know: things are things and will remain so for ever; and no doubt I will see them now one way, now another. Now with the eyes of reason, now with those other eyes...And I will no longer try to compare the two..." (157)

With this disavowal of his attempt to extract something from the experience with Basini that would transform everyday social relations, and his relegation of it to his private past, Törleß leaves. This strange speech, though it refuses the categories into which Törleß's teachers would discipline it, also satisfies the adults in their roles as bureaucrat, theologian, and mathematician. The headmaster declares that the institution cannot provide the “intellectual nourishment” that Törleß needs; instead, “Törleß should be educated privately” (148), transferred from the education into public service/ domination that the institute provides to the privacy of his family. A harmonious resolution is found.

Significantly for my purposes, this private resolution is figured in the last lines of the novel as a transformation from the perverse sexual attraction to public class humiliation that Törleß felt at the beginning of the novel when he and Beineberg visited Božena to the private family drama that Freud describes as the stage in sexual development where polymorphous perversion is channeled into the proper sexual aims and objects of adulthood. In the final lines of the novel, Törleß's mother picks him up from the school and reverses the journey that the boys made from the train station to Božena's inn:

When they set off for the station, the little wood with Božena's house lay on their right. It looked so insignificant and harmless, a dusty thicket of willow and alder.

Törleß remembered how unimaginable his parents' life had been. And he stole a glance at his mother.

“What is it, my son?”

“Nothing, Mama, I was just thinking about something.”

And he breathed in the faintly perfumed fragrance rising from his mother's waist. (160)

This ending neatly (almost *impossibly* neatly) follows Freud's own narrative of sexual development and social integration. So striking is the comparison that one of the earliest works of criticism on the novel in English, Harry Goldgar's 1965 article, “The Square Root of Minus One: Freud and Robert Musil's *Törleß*,” declares that “this short, sensitive, graceful novel ... may in fact be the earliest novel of any sort in any language to show specific Freudian influences” (118). The article goes on to offer a completely orthodox reading of the novel's plot according to the developmental stages of Freud's *Three Essays*. The open-ended possibilities of polymorphous perversion are left in the past, having served their purpose, and are now

disciplined into the private family form that is the Oedipus complex. Božena's home, which Törleß once experienced as a thrillingly *déclassé* and public perversion of the bourgeois domestic space in which he was raised, no longer holds any meaning for him. And I would add, corresponding to this discipline, Törleß at last becomes educable, no longer trying to bring his perverse desires to bear on his understanding of the everyday social world. Sodomasochistic desire no longer opens onto the possibility of a society organized differently; it is left behind as a necessary step in Törleß's development so that he may continue his education and find objects of desire expressible in existing social forms.

But this orthodox Freudian reading leaves out something critical (besides the notable but perhaps less important fact that Musil shows no evidence in his journals at the time of the novel's composition of having read Freud). The other ending—the one that comes first—makes this sense of neat closure impossible. Having already encountered the adult Törleß earlier in the novel, no reader can possibly take quite straight Törleß's vow that “things are things, and will remain so forever...And I will no longer try to compare the two...” The second ending perverts this closure and reopens the possibility of things being otherwise that this ending (and Freud's narrative of perversion as a developmental step left in the past) shuts down. It is introduced suddenly, with merely a section break and a time marker, and following the narrative progression of most of the rest of the novel, it is another episode with no obvious connection to the narrative around it. But unlike the other episodes, it occupies a strange temporality—a sketch of an ongoing future that gives some new meaning to the discrete events the novel narrates in its present. Narratively, it is a fragment, a deviation or a supplement thrown into the novel's discourse that, despite its tangential relation to the episode with Basini, entirely recasts its meaning. I will quote this “second ending” from the beginning, excerpting the images relevant to my reading:

Later, once he had overcome the events of his youth, Törleß became a young man with a very fine and sensitive mind. He became one of those aesthetic and intellectual characters upon whom respect for the law and, to some extent, for public morals, has a calming effect, relieving them of the need to think about anything coarse and remote from the finer things of the soul; but who, when asked to declare a more personal interest in the objects of morality and the law, bring to their grandiose outward show of correctness, with its hint of irony, a certain bored insensitivity. [...]

So, even later in life, Törleß never felt any remorse for what had happened in those days. His needs had become so keenly and one-sidedly aesthetic that, had he been told a very similar tale of a lecher's debaucheries, it would never have occurred to him to voice his outrage at such behavior. Such a person would have warranted his contempt not for being a lecher, but for being nothing better than that. [...]

He liked to think that the capacity for enjoyment, artistic talents, the highly refined spiritual life, was a piece of jewelry upon which one could easily injure oneself. He thought it inevitable that someone with a rich and active inner life would have certain moments about which other people could know nothing, and memories that he kept in secret drawers. And of such a person he asked only that he should know how to make refined use of those moments later in life.

And so, when someone to whom he had told the story of his youth asked him whether he was not sometimes ashamed of that memory, he gave the following reply with a smile: “Of course I can't deny that it was degrading. Why would I? The degradation passed.

But something of it lingered for ever: that tiny quantity of poison that is needed to rid the soul of its overly calm, complacent health, and instead to give it a kind of health that is more refined, acute and understanding.

“And would you wish to count the hours of degradation that are branded on the soul after any great passion? Just think of the hours of deliberate humiliation in love! Those enraptured hours that lovers spend [...] Just to feel themselves trembling! Just to fear being alone above those dark, fiery depths! Just suddenly—out of fear of their own loneliness with those dark forces—to seek refuge within one another!

Just look into the eyes of young couples. ‘Do you really think...?’ they say. ‘But you have no idea how low we can sink!’—Those eyes contain a tranquil mockery of those who know nothing of so much, and the tender pride of those who have gone together through all kinds of hell.

“And just as these lovers go through these things together, in those days I went through them on my own.” (126-128)

The dialogic framing of this scene mirrors in its indecisiveness the uneasy relation between the individual subject of kink desire and society. The passage starts with an omniscient third-person narration that places the adult Törleß socially, as one of “those aesthetic-intellectual sorts.” It proceeds to describe how the adult Törleß himself makes aesthetic-ethical judgments about other social types, the debauchers (“*Wüstling*”) who resemble him in the sexual acts they devote themselves to but with whom he feels no social kinship because they do not make the same aesthetic use of those sexual experiences. Finally, the passage proceeds to a dialogue about how the adult Törleß judges the place of his own youthful sexual deviance in the narrative of his formation as an adult. Törleß addresses an interlocutor who is a single “somebody” who talked to him “once,” yet the address is a microcosm of his approach to the social world and social types. The narrator describes the interlocutor as though they speak discrete words to Törleß on a single occasion, yet the narrator does not quote the words of that “somebody” directly. The dialogue between Törleß and this nameless stand-in for social norms collapses immediately into a monologue indistinguishable from the style that the narrator uses everywhere else in the novel to approach Törleß’s thoughts to himself by free indirect discourse.

Even more strangely, the metaphor that Törleß uses invokes the sexual relationship of a heterosexual married couple, yet only to explain the relationship the incident with Basini caused him to form with himself. Törleß describes the marital sex act as an action by which each of the couple feels afraid of their aloneness together, as a way, “out of fear of their own loneliness” to “seek refuge within one another,” and then insists that this is the relationship with himself into which his individual attempt to extract meaning from his group sadomasochism plunged him. All of this bizarre extended metaphor that ostensibly gives an intelligible social meaning to Törleß’s seemingly unclassifiable debauchery compares his own sex acts to the more familiar, respectable acts of a married couple. Yet he insists to his interlocutor that it is precisely the knowledge that the meaning of those acts can be fully known only to the couple that gives them social meaning outside of that couple. Marital sex, in this metaphor, is a known unknown—the shared knowledge that every couple shares something that cannot be known, socially, outside that couple. To make his own childhood indulgence of kink desire intelligible to his interlocutor, Törleß compares it to the familiar unfamiliarity of marital desire.

Gathering these disparate narrative and formal threads, we can sketch some of the parameters of the alternative sociality of kink desire that this ending offers. The experience of

sadomasochistic group sex in his childhood does not define Törleß as a social type, a fetishist; he does not maintain his desire for this kind of sexual experience into his adulthood and explicitly rejects a community with other debauchers who seek out similar sex acts. Just as the young Törleß was repulsed by Beineberg and Reiting's insistence on making educational use of their experience with Basini, the adult Törleß recoils from debauchers who find value in the sex act itself rather than turning it toward a socially useless aesthetic end. We are not in the presence of Sacher-Masoch's aesthetic cult of masochists or his novel's relationship between Severin and the painter who lets Wanda whip him. Yet at the same time, the experience is completely determinative of Törleß's development into "one of those intellectual-aesthetic sorts." It is the "little bit of poison" that causes him to follow social and moral laws in their external forms, yet with a certain internal "ironic" or aesthetic detachment. Mirroring this ironic detachment narratively, the passage provides a second ending to the novel's linear *Bildungsroman* plot that ironizes and destabilizes the return to heterosexual domesticity in the actual ending of the novel without fully supplanting it. It is precisely the impossibility of ascribing a clear social meaning or categorization to Törleß's adolescent experience of sadomasochistic sex that gives that sex a social meaning. It becomes instead for the adult Törleß a cipher for the parts of individual experience "about which other people could know nothing," and what distinguishes it from heterosexual marital sex is that it is shared with no one, not even the boy Törleß beat nor the boys who helped him do the beating. The adult Törleß speaks freely of this experience with others, yet only by metaphorically mapping it onto more familiar sexual experiences. The novel offers no hints as to whether the adult Törleß joins the social order of marriage and family, but we know he definitively rejects a community of debauchers and appears, at least externally, as "a young man with a very fine and sensitive spirit." Nevertheless, we also know that this childhood experience of kink desire shadows forever with a slight irony his "grandiose outward show of correctness." The social unintelligibility of the experience neither isolates Törleß nor introduces him to an alternative community of fellow fetishists; rather it shades his every social interaction with a slight aesthetic difference, just as this flashforward fragment of the novel shades the seemingly successful *Bildung* of the ending. Insofar as the adult Törleß's aestheticism implies a sociality, it is in his demand that other people "know how to make refined use of those moments later in life."

Returning briefly to the volume of Kant that Törleß's mathematics teacher shows him, it seems that the adult Törleß, rather than expressing his sadomasochistic desire in the homosocial form of the group hazing ritual, has transformed it into a private aesthetic sensibility. The adult Törleß rejects the universal, deontological ethics of sex that the divinity teacher suggests in the other ending; he has no ethical judgment for the lecher, but rather an aesthetic disgust. He accepts a subjective limit to knowledge, but he makes an aesthetic use of this limit. Sexual experience stands for him as a figure of what is unknowable to others; it becomes a kind of private property with a universal form, the "secret drawers" that define a private inner life.

In a way, this aesthetics is a reversal of Kant's. (And though I am not making an argument here that this scene displays some rigorous engagement with the specificities of Kant's aesthetics, it is worth noting that Musil read *The Critique of Judgment* a few years before the novel, as well as Schiller's writing on aesthetics [Luserke-Jaqui 155-56].) Whereas Kant describes the judgment of beauty as a "subjective universal," a subjective feeling whose universal validity is mistaken for an objective property of the beautiful object, Törleß prizes his experience with Basini as a purely subjective one. No one, not even Basini himself, nor Reiting and Beineberg, can share the private meaning that Törleß gives to his experience of kink desire.



It is a wholly subjective experience that Törleß entirely delaminates from Basini, the object of his desire. The social demand he makes, however, is not that others share his judgment. In Kant's aesthetics, the subject insists that others find the object beautiful, too, but even the young Törleß does not expect others to share his morbid attraction to Basini. Rather, the adult Törleß demands that others *also* attach aesthetic significance to private, subjective experiences that are socially unintelligible. The debaucher finds community with other debauchers by pursuing a kinky category of sexual experience as a shared end in itself. The adult Törleß instead identifies himself with others who have had a private experience of the unintelligible. His aesthetic sensibility relies on the form of a universal experience of something private and individual. Given that the content of that experience is, for the adult Törleß, gay sadomasochism, we might say this sociality is a sexual one. Although Törleß does not teach others to experience their desire the same way, what he shares with Severin and the painter in *Venus in Furs* is a sexual relation *without sex*. This sensibility seems like an alienated one; the adult Törleß has a yawning gulf between his private aesthetic experiences and his "grandiose outward display of correctness." But it escapes the miniature "state" that is Reiting and Beineberg turning Basini over to the class, and it escapes the family romance that ends the novel. It finds a sociality in a shared private experience of what is absolutely asocial, an aesthetics that has no need for objective categories and a sociality that has no need for social forms like the family and the state. Törleß finds a way simultaneously to leave behind kink desire and rejoin the family while also making use of his experience to put a slight aesthetic distance between himself and all social forms. The two endings allow for the social integration of Törleß's experience and his alienation from sociality at once, in an unstable and paradoxical equilibrium of form.

### **The Transkinkification of All Values**

At this point, I can return to Freud, who also found an aesthetic use for perverse desire. For Freud, the most successful outcome of the development from infantile polymorphous perversion to adult sexuality is the sublimation of perverse desires rather than their repression or preservation. Sublimation of the libido that attaches to socially unacceptable aims or objects is the basis of artistic and intellectual achievement. Perverse sexual desire thus becomes the basis of aesthetic experience for Freud, too. However, sublimation requires the transformation of the original desire; its original object is lost to conscious experience. What differentiates the adult Törleß from this model is his preservation of adolescent experience in his "secret drawers," his conscious use of it as the "tiny quantity of poison" that makes his aesthetic sensibility possible. For Freud, except in the case of the adult pervert, infantile polymorphous perversion is lost to consciousness through the mechanism of "infantile amnesia" (see pp. 40 of the *Three Essays*). Freud is theoretically concerned in the *Three Essays* with creating a continuity of sexual experience from earliest infancy to adulthood. One of his most fundamental theoretical arguments is that human sexual development should not be understood on the model of a radical rupture that occurs at puberty, but rather as one continuous stream of experience traceable to an individual's earliest existence. To smooth out this model of an incommensurable narrative lacuna at puberty—a model of discontinuous narrative that we might more readily associate with modernist aesthetics—he must trace perverse desires back to a stage before conscious memory. Infantile perversion becomes the necessary element that makes a linear story of sexual development possible.

Freud's narrative of sexual integration thus makes use of perversion only to leave it

behind. It is not necessarily that perversion leads always to a failure of integration. Freud notes, crucially, “In my experience anyone who is in any way, whether socially or ethically, abnormal mentally is invariably abnormal also in his sexual life. But many people are abnormal in their sexual life who in every other respect approximate to the average, and have, along with the rest, passed through the process of human cultural development, in which sexuality remains the weak spot” (15). Rather, it is that the survival of perverse desires past their proper place in infancy either disrupts *too much* or *nothing at all*. All failures of social or ethical integration are always traceable to the living on of perversity past its proper narrative stages. Or, alternatively, kink desire becomes entirely a matter of private taste, a quirk of people “who in every other respect approximate to the average.” The desire can either be all-too-public, making social integration impossible, or all-too-private, a matter of a purely private sexual life with no bearing on the social or the ethical. The difference in *Törleß*, then, is that Törleß rejects this dichotomy. His memory of a socially unintelligible private experience becomes the very basis of his interaction with social forms, “the objects of morality and the law,” transforming his public display of conformity to these norms into a private aesthetic practice. But, as I just suggested, this private aesthetic practice is not merely taste or quirk, but rather a demand that Törleß makes on his relation to anyone “with a rich and active inner life.”

Insofar as there is any form of positive social relation to be drawn out from Freud’s narrative of kink desire, perhaps it is to be derived from psychoanalysis as a project of knowledge making and pedagogy. The “we” that Freud invokes in the *Three Essays*, who share the educator’s interest in infantile sexuality, but to pursue it for knowledge’s sake rather than to repress it for education’s sake, figures a like-minded group of counter-educators engaged in a perverse project of reverse-narrative seduction. This community is not related by a shared category of sexual desire, but rather by a shared interest in the theoretical narratives that become possible when perverse desire is pursued back to its origins. In this community, perhaps I could suggest another example of people bound by a sexual relation without sex. And this community of knowledge seekers even offers a stable social institution of psychoanalytic practitioners, outside the family and the state, yet reproducing itself through this shared will-to-knowledge.

As much as a knowledge-making process, Freud’s pursuit of kink desires to their narrative origins remains as well an aesthetic problem throughout his work. His late 1930 work of social psychology, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, asks why individuals remain unhappy when the social cooperation of civilization has enabled so many means by which humans can meet their needs and prolong the conditions of their happiness. Freud suggests, ultimately, that there is an irresolvable contradiction between individual drives and the renunciation of them that civilization demands, including especially the death instinct and the sexual drive. Freud even goes so far as to declare the relegation of all sexual activity outside an opposite-sex object choice and a genital aim one of the grave social injustices of Western European society: “As regards the sexually mature individual, the choice of an object is restricted to the opposite sex, and most extra-genital satisfactions are forbidden as perversions. The requirement, demonstrated in these prohibitions, that there shall be a single kind of sexual life for everyone, disregards the dissimilarities, whether innate or acquired, in the sexual constitution of human beings; it cuts off a fair number of them from sexual enjoyment, and so becomes the source of serious injustice” (51).

But despite these weighty questions, about just how much of sexual life must be forbidden or coercive ethics imposed to allow for the benefits of complex social relations without individual misery, the book still starts curiously with a question of form and aesthetics. Just as

describing adult perversions alongside infantile sexuality was a narrative problem for the *Three Essays, Civilization and Its Discontents* begins with “the more general problem of preservation in the sphere of the mind. The subject has hardly been studied as of yet; but it is so attractive and important that we may be allowed to turn our attention to it for a little, even though our excuse is insufficient” (16). Freud begins the book with the particular question of whether there is an infantile feeling of ego-unboundedness that lives on in the adult psyche, but the “general problem” applies just as much to his theorization of the preservation of infantile sexuality in the *Three Essays*. This excursion that both begins the book and diverts it from its main aim seems like another example of the necessary out-of-placeness of perverse desire. Freud goes on for a surprising five pages in his attempt to find an image for how earlier stages of development, like ego-unboundedness or perversion, might live on in the psyche, in a section that is not referenced again in the book. Ultimately, he declares, “The fact remains that only in the mind is such a preservation of all the earlier stages alongside of the final form possible, and that we are not in a position to represent this phenomenon in pictorial terms” (18). The narration and imaging of the structure that describes infantile perversion remained a problem throughout his theoretical project, emerging at places and times where it was not expected, yet still remaining aesthetically generative for him, standing as a figure for what cannot be fully represented in image or words. The narration and imaging of the psychic structure of perversion, in other words, form the base layer of Freud’s lifelong aesthetic project of inventing new ways to narrate psychic development.

Meanwhile, Musil would maintain an interest in kink desire as a site that brings into unstable equilibrium the rational and the irrational, the aesthetic and the epistemological, the artistic and the natural scientific, throughout the rest of his own work. The figure of the *Lustmörder*, the sex murderer, which became a cultural phenomenon in German-language media and art of the early twentieth century, remained a narratively and poetically generative one for him throughout his career. His remarkably experimental 1911 adultery novella, *The Perfecting of a Love*, with its hundreds of obscure metaphors, opens with the married couple’s discussion of how a story they just read together about a sex murderer relates to the opacities of desire they feel in their own conventional marriage. And in *The Man Without Qualities*, Ulrich and his sister Agathe briefly fixate on the sex murderer Moosbrugger as a possible resolution to their search for a mystic union between scientific rationality and aesthetic irrationalism (not to mention their eventual turn late in the novel toward a romance with each other).

The point, then, is that the sociality of kink desire by the time of high modernism this chapter visits had expanded outward from the communities of shared aestheticized fetish or shared psychopathology that we saw with Sacher-Masoch and Krafft-Ebing. Certainly, those projects also continued in this period. Historically, the infrastructure for new forms of sexual sociality developed greatly between the time of Sacher-Masoch and the *fin-de-siècle*. Adolf Brand’s modernist literary journal, *Der Eigene*,<sup>40</sup> for example, began appearing in Berlin in 1896. In the first issue’s dedication, Brand articulates a theory of sexual practices as the basis for an aesthetic sensibility that would create a community out of individual, “self-possessed” men. Homosexual desires and relations were for him explicitly the basis for a community of self-chosen, Nietzschean free thinkers whose sensibilities would be expressed in new poetic and literary forms.<sup>41</sup> In the early 1900s, he would explicitly break with the emerging sexual science and advocacy of Magnus Hirschfeld, which began to articulate non-normative sexual practices—

<sup>40</sup> A direct translation of the title into English is a little challenging. Something like “The Self-Possessed Man” or “His Own Man” gets the gist.

<sup>41</sup> Many thanks to Peter Rehberg of the Schwules Museum in Berlin for introducing me to this archival material.

homosexual ones foremost, but fetishistic ones as well—as minoritarian identities. Instead, Brand and likeminded artists, advocates, and theorists argued for male-male sexual practices as a distinct aesthetic sensibility, associated with a strain of modernist literary practices, and argued for the revival of Greco-Roman pederasty as a model for modernist social and aesthetic practices. The circulation of these ideas in magazines and affinity groups began to create visible urban social networks formed around shared sexual practices. While developments like these are often treated, not wrongly, as part of the history of the emergence of gay (male) identity in German-speaking cultures, my point in recounting it here is to argue that, shifting the emphasis a little, they can also be understood as inheritors of the project of Sacher-Masoch and his masochists. If we de-emphasize the question of same-sex object choice and instead focus on non-normative sexual practices as shared, teachable aesthetic sensibilities that their practitioners understood to generate new aesthetic forms and modes of sexual relation, periodicals like *Der Eigene* and movements like the *Wandervögel* can perhaps be productively understood in the history of “kink desire” that I have been tracing. Wanda von Sacher-Masoch’s 1908 memoirs, with their references to Sacher-Masoch’s “followers” as “masochists,” and Brand’s attempts to form a society dedicated to the aesthetic and literary possibilities of pederasty, I am suggesting, belong to this same strain of modernist interest in kinky sexual desire as the basis of a renewal or transformation in aesthetic and social forms.

But Musil’s project points even beyond this, toward kink desire as a resource for thinking through a new modernist narrative aesthetics and a new form of social relation abstracted entirely from sexual relations themselves. Kink desire is no longer a figure for what is socially inexpressible and unnarratable. Indeed, as Brand and Hirschfeld show, the urban infrastructure had begun to support the explicit, semi-public formation of sexual subcultures around it. But the adult Törleß distinguishes himself from the “debauchers,” the people who organize their relations and affinities around the shared pursuit of kinky sex as an end in itself. Rather, it becomes for Musil a site for rethinking social relations in the face of the opacity of the other, as well as the failures of traditional social institutions for reproductive labor, namely, the family form and formal education. It has already, in just a couple decades, escaped the narrative of medical pathology to become a central resource to Freud’s project of narrative knowledge-making and Musil’s attempts to create new narrative forms for social relations in the face of the crises of authority, language, and the subject that so preoccupied German-language modernists.

### **This Country Makes It Hard to Fuck; Or, Sex and the City-State: Wyndham Lewis**

At the end of the last chapter, I suggested that *Young Törleß* demonstrates how, over the course of a few decades, kink desire was partially freed from debates about psychopathology and subcultural communities to become a figure in some of the big themes that preoccupied Germanophone modernists. Törleß's childhood experiences of gay sadomasochism, I argued, offer a figure upon which Musil articulates a modernist aesthetics of inner ironic distance from the forms of outward institutions of social reproduction, like the military school, the family, and the state. This chapter returns to the British context to show how this figure was recruited to some of the aesthetic squabbles of the avant-garde. It also focalizes a theme that has been thronging at the periphery of the previous chapters but has not yet been treated in proper detail. Throughout this project, I have adumbrated the ways that my questions of deviant sexual taste intersect with questions of place: regionalism, center and periphery, cosmopolitanism. We glimpsed this dynamic in Kleist's Romantic choice of far-off times and places for his stories, in the intense closed-system regionalism in *Wuthering Heights*, in the questions of Austrian Empire, of Germanness and Slaviness in *Venus in Furs* and *Young Törleß* (not to mention Blackness, in the first case). In this chapter, I come full circle to the British context, examining a curious outlier of British modernism: Wyndham Lewis's cosmopolitanism in *Tarr*. In *Tarr*, I even end neatly on a novel that imagines the sexual conflicts of a cosmopolitan "bourgeois bohemianism," to borrow the novel's term for the social scene it describes, as a marriage plot of kinky competition between a British and a German artist.

It has become a commonplace of queer-theory-inflected literary criticism that nonnormative sexual desires are generative of experimental aesthetic forms. But this formulation has struggled to contend with how figures of sexual deviance have also been generative aesthetic resources for avant-garde formations with reactionary sexual politics. Our current reactionary retrenchment invites us to revisit habits of thought that would all-too-easily equate progressive sexual practices with formal innovation and reactionary sexual politics with formal traditionalism. As the various right-wing European modernisms of the early twentieth century demonstrate, artistic reaction against experimentation in gender and sexual arrangements does not necessarily take the form of repression and return to tradition.

Wyndham Lewis and his half-serious Vorticism make for a particularly complex case study because of his proximity to and reaction against the modernisms of his milieu that encompassed both progressive (the Bloomsbury Group) and reactionary (the Italian Futurists) sexual politics. Prior scholarship on his early novel *Tarr* (first serialized in 1916, then published in revised form in 1928)<sup>42</sup> has tended either to dismiss the sexual elements as simply reducible to

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<sup>42</sup> Lewis began work on the project around 1907 after dropping out of the Slade School in London and moving to Paris to pursue a more radical art practice, as most any ambitious painter was doing at the time, including the characters populating *Tarr* (Klein x). Lewis set the work down for a time, continuing his painting practice and returning to London, where he nurtured an endless grudge against the Bloomsbury Group, from whom he felt excluded, and also witnessed the first visit of the Italian Futurist Filippo Marinetti to the United Kingdom, which set off a media sensation (Puchner 111-12). In response to the Bloomsbury Group, he set up his own, slightly pathetic (in both senses) "Rebel Art Centre," and in response to Marinetti's visit, he co-edited two volumes of his own "Vorticist" journal *BLAST* in 1914-15. The journal was filled with half-serious, all-caps manifestos both inhabiting and mocking the blaring chauvinistic stylings of the Italian Futurists. The first issue was advertised in *The Egoist* (Puchner 115), a feminist-review-turned-literary-magazine run by the suffragist Harriet Shaw Weaver. Once Lewis

Lewis's nasty chauvinism or to attempt recuperation for a feminist sexual politics that the surface of the text explicitly agitates against. My reading instead follows the dynamics of sexual desire in the narrative form of the novel both to show how they serve its reactionary sexual politics, but also to trace the formal digressions into which kink desire leads that allow the novel's most reactionary formulations to be re-read against themselves.

Lewis probably seems, at first blush, like a willfully contrarian choice of a willful contrarian. In a discussion of the co-development of anglophone modernist narrative aesthetics and new sexual socialities, one might look first toward the polymorphous swinging of the Bloomsbury Group, or the butch/femme dynamics of the Gertrude Stein household, or the chaotic free love of Djuna Barnes and her abject queer characters. Lewis, in contrast, was a sexual reactionary.<sup>43</sup> His misogyny was thoroughgoing, with the writings of his 1914-1915 literary journal *BLAST* taking particularly condescending aim at suffragists.<sup>44</sup> His contempt for gay men and women was, likewise, vicious, most especially when directed at his literary competitors.<sup>45</sup> In *Tarr* itself, as well as his non-fictional writings, Lewis espoused a hard, coldly formalist art untouched by sex. Tarr, the titular character, whom we of course cannot read as an exact stand-in for Lewis, but who nevertheless often speaks in the same voice that Lewis adopted when writing as himself outside his fiction, declares in the first pages of *Tarr*, "Sex is a monstrosity" (13), and, "The artist is he in whom this emotionality normally absorbed by sex is

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returned to *Tarr* and completed it in 1915, *The Egoist* serialized the novel between 1916 and 1917 (Peppis 229), then published an edited book version in 1918 (Klein 286). Ten years later, in 1928, Lewis rewrote the novel for the Phoenix Press, writing in a new preface that "in turning back to it I have always felt that as regards form simply it should not appear again as it stood, for it was written with extreme haste, during the first year of the War, during a period of illness and restless convalescence. Accordingly for the present edition I have throughout finished what was rough and given the narrative everywhere a greater precision" (3). I will be working from the 2010 Oxford World's Classics text, which is based on the 1928 edition, because it contains more material, but for a detailed stylistic and historical analysis of the differences between the editions, see "Rewriting Tarr Ten Years Later" in Lise Jaillant's *Cheap Modernism*.

<sup>43</sup> Charles Ferrall, in "The *New Age* and the Rise of Reactionary Modernism Before the Great War," traces reactionary beliefs circulating among writers for the *New Age*, an important pre-war journal whose contributors included the artistic allies T.E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, and Wyndham Lewis. Ferrall writes, "We find, therefore, that one of the distinguishing characteristics of classical or post-Impressionist art is its asceticism. In fact, one of the most reliable indicators of a writer's political affiliations during this period is his attitude toward 'sex.' Writers such as Wells, according to Orage ('Readers & Writers'), are obsessed with 'sex-love' (28 Aug. 1913: 513), whereas classicists treat the lower and degraded pleasures of the body with a suitable disdain" (662). He quotes from Tarr and argues, "The asceticism which derives from such grotesque misogyny, as for all the *New Age* critics, tends to be more an anxious defence against the world of the flesh than a transcendence of it" (663). Ella Zohar Ophir notes in "Toward a Pitiless Fiction: Abstraction, Comedy, and Modernist Antihumanism" that Lewis's *The Wild Body*, a collection of short stories from 1917-1922, opens with the narrator declaring, "there is no sex interest at all. ... I boldly pit my major interests against the sex-appeal, which will restrict me to a masculine audience" (qtd. on 98). Ophir connects this rejection of sex in art to Lewis's "ideals of rationalist art," his misogyny, and his Nietzschean "offensive moves against 'the masses'" (97-98). Despite (or perhaps because of) Lewis's anxious disdain, however, I argue that, far from being purged from its pages, sex and desire thoroughly and everywhere structure the narrative of *Tarr* and prove critical to the way that Lewis satirizes his own theories of an art abstracted from the social forces of everyday life.

<sup>44</sup> In a 1978 article, "Women and Wyndham Lewis," Judith Mitchell helpfully collates the many examples of woman-hating portrayals in his fiction, in a spirited attempt at the tepid defense that he did not hate all women, just feminine ones, and also feminists.

<sup>45</sup> A footnote in Michael Wutz's "The Energetics of *Tarr*" collects various examples, with a soupçon of antisemitism admixed in the case of his attacks on Stein and Proust (867).

so strong that it claims a newer and more exclusive field of deployment” (16).

These very attitudes, however, are what make *Tarr* such a fascinating case study. Despite Lewis’s personal hostility to sex and the exploration of new social arrangements and formal experiments around it, desire is the engine of every plot and subplot ensnaring *Tarr*’s four main characters. The novel illustrates that, by the time of the ferment of the Great War and high Modernism, kink desire had quickly become so socially salient and so intertwined in the public narratives circulating around the metropolises of European culture, it could be delaminated from the discourses of psychiatry or the social realities of urban sexual subcultures and put to use in seemingly distant debates about artistic form, the status of the art object, and the nature of the institutions for (re)producing and circulating artistic ideas. Genre and sexual sociality held a central place in Lewis’s project of an avant-garde modernist aesthetics that would resist not just the traditional institutions of social reproduction like the nation state and the family, but also the burgeoning avant-garde institutions of the artistic coterie, the manifesto, and the movement. John Xiros Cooper offers an illuminating materialist reading of these connections, arguing that the increasing integration of market values into British culture led at the turn of the century to “the fragmentation of the public world into noetic enclaves of private individuals brought together by shared interests and chosen attachments” (225). For Lewis’s main artistic enemies, the Bloomsbury Group, this opened a space where they could explore “a commitment to the open reciprocities of the pure relationship,” including the intimacy of sharing “taboo subjects like sexuality and the body” (246). In Lewis’s case, however, “what stood in the way of the genuine artist ... was the very intimacy of the bohemian enclave itself. For Lewis, relations of intimacy inevitably ran on towards sex” (227). Thus, Cooper suggests, sex and the socialities it enables and constrains lay at the very center of Lewis’s aesthetic project. Cooper reads *Tarr* purely as a corrosive satirical takedown of these bohemian sexual intimacies, which it certainly is, but what positive socio-sexual program might also be wrested from the complexities of the novel’s plotting and character system?

My contention is that the genres with which *Tarr* toys without quite being able to free itself from them are narrative technologies of the kind of institutional and social reproduction that Lewis struggled against, in both his aesthetic projects and his personal life. In agitating for an anti-movement movement and rebelling against both the traditional and the modernist institutions for (re)producing artistic forms, the plot of *Tarr* takes up two genres concerned with aesthetic pedagogy and social reproduction. That is to say—as any minimally attentive reader of mine should by now guess—*Tarr* is an intertwined *Bildungsroman* and marriage plot. To these realist genres whose narratives manage the individual’s social expression of his sexual taste, *Tarr* adds a third, distinctly modernist genre: the artistic manifesto. Where the famed synthesis of the individual and society achieved by the *Bildung* narrative often explicitly involves the social integration of the individual’s sexual taste, and the marriage plot finds narrative closure in the integration of individual desire into the social form of marriage, the manifesto’s theoretical program offers group cohesion and social reproduction without the sex.<sup>46</sup> Martin Puchner

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<sup>46</sup> Recall from the previous chapter Franco Moretti’s statement that, although “the concept of the *Bildungsroman* has become ever more approximate, ... it is still clear that we seek to indicate with it one of the most harmonious solutions ever offered to a dilemma coterminous with modern bourgeois civilization: the conflict between the ideal of *self-determination* and the equally imperious demands of *socialization*” (15). Michel Foucault’s claims in *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1* that “sexuality” increasingly became throughout Europe’s nineteenth century a privileged site of the individual’s subjectivation and the state’s management of populations are familiar. It should

helpfully describes the pedagogical, reproductive, and social-scene-forming aspects of the manifesto as a genre by placing Lewis in his Great War-era context: “The other feature that was missing in England [at the time] was the formation of self-declared artistic groups, whose programs then would lend themselves to being presented in something resembling a manifesto” (110). Puchner suggests that Lewis’s journal *BLAST* was an attempt both to parody and to claim the self-organizing social power of this genre.

Lewis was deeply anxious about the institutional reproduction of art, both in terms of the art establishment (the Slade School) and the institutional anti-establishment (Bloomsbury).<sup>47</sup> He wanted to found an avant-garde -ism, with a magazine and manifestos and a hardline house style, as well as the coterie of likeminded practitioners and acolytes that implied, but he was also deeply skeptical of any and all herds, social groupings, and institutions. Puchner helpfully terms this attitude a “rearguard action,” writing, “Marked by belatedness in relation to the Continental avant-gardes, London’s international modernists sought to catch up with the extreme modernism of the semiperiphery but also to redirect its impulse. Without wanting to go back and without wanting to embrace some utopian future, the only attitude that was left for them was that of a defensive battle on all fronts, a reactive form of avant-garde, even a reaction *to and against* the various avant-gardes, what I will call a rearguard action against every major force and movement of the time” (107). This chapter’s contention is that it is therefore no surprise that Lewis’s concerns with the social institutions for reproducing artistic forms became intertwined with his hostility to new forms of sexual sociality, particularly with the Bloomsbury crowd, whose alternative sexual arrangements he lampooned just as viciously as the brand of modernist aesthetics he thought to be inextricable from them.<sup>48</sup>

I argue that the conflicts about the status of the art object and the autonomy of the artist from prior aesthetic movements and from existing social institutions for the reproduction of artistic forms play out in *Tarr* as a satirical clash of genres. This satirical clash of genres is expressed narratively as a love quadrangle between Tarr, the theoretical, self-serious, and

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come as no surprise, then, that the modernist *Bildungsroman* often explicitly narrativizes the conflict between “self-determination” and “socialization” as a problem of integrating an individual’s sexual desires into the social order. James Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as Young Man* (1916) and D.H. Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers* (1913) are obvious examples in Wyndham Lewis’s anglophone milieu, while my previous chapter on Robert Musil’s *The Confusions of Young Törleß* offers an extensive reading of this phenomenon in the German-speaking world.

For a brilliant and remarkably thorough treatment of the nineteenth century marriage plot novel and the way that its narrative form identifies the desire for wedlock with the desire for narrative closure, see Joseph Allen Boone’s *Tradition Counter Tradition: Love and the Form of Fiction*.

<sup>47</sup> For a careful and detailed historical account of the prewar aesthetic debates in London between Lewis and his allies and the Bloomsbury Group, in the context of which Lewis began his work on *Tarr* and published the literary journal *BLAST*, see Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy’s article, “*The Good Soldier* and the War for British Modernism,” especially pp. 308-18. McCarthy writes, “The disagreement between the Rebels/Vorticists and Bloomsbury is central to the major developments in the prewar English art scene: the schism in Roger Fry’s Omega Workshop in fall 1913; the formation of a number of competing schools of modernist painting; the publication of Bell’s *Art* in March 1914; the publication of Lewis’s *BLAST* in June 1914; and, I will argue, the publication of Ford’s *The Good Soldier* in 1915” (309). In McCarthy’s reading, the primary debate was between an abstraction engaged with and intervening in the experience of modern life (attributed to the Vorticists) and an abstraction that transcended that experience by turning away from it (attributed to the Bloomsbury Group). These categories seem to me a little too simple—as we will see in *Tarr*, Lewis often propounded abstraction as a way of turning away from human experience, while Roger Fry’s post-Impressionism was representational and based on the artist’s sensory perceptions—but the reconstruction of the history is still quite helpful.

<sup>48</sup> See Lewis’s malicious and interminable 1930 novel *The Apes of God* to observe this at great length.

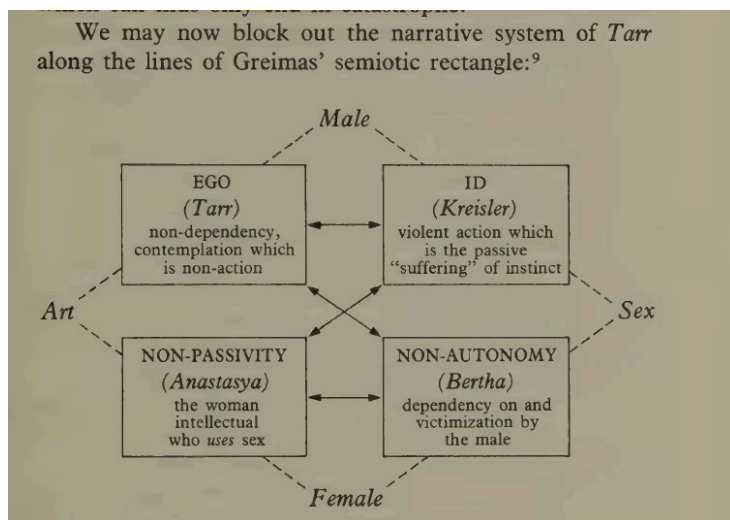


withdrawn British painter; his sometimes-fiancée, the German Romantic Bertha; the German painter Kreisler, who serves as Tarr's passionate foil; and Anastasya, an art dealer and multi-ethnic German-Russian "New Woman" who was raised in the United States. Tarr, the autonomous modernist individualist with no need for the state or for other art institutions or coteries, finds the expression of his ideology in the manifesto, which the novel quotes at length in his homosocial conversations with artistic rivals. But in inserting the manifesto back into the framework of a marriage plot, through Tarr's entanglement with Bertha, the novel combats the utopian frictionless circulation and self-organizing aesthetic pedagogy of the manifesto. The betrothal forces Tarr to sully his theory with narrative, his art practice with sexual desire. The manifesto's declarations are returned to a social context, to a narrative of "bourgeois-bohemia" (Tarr and the novel's favorite term for the pre-war, cosmopolitan ex-pat artistic scene in Paris), where each artist has his part in the local scene. In returning it there, Tarr's utopia of artistic autonomy is made ridiculous in light of his drearily conventional sexual relations with Bertha. Tarr becomes just another one of the artists concerned with his sex life, as the novel, seemingly in his voice but really in what is on closer inspection a satirical narrative omniscience, says in its very first lines ("It is not across its Thébaidé that the unscrupulous heroes chase each other's shadows: they are largely ignorant of all but their restless personal lives" [7]). Meanwhile, Kreisler's leaning into Romantic passions leads to an absurd parody of a *Sturm und Drang* death as he accidentally kills a man he has mistaken for a rival for Anastasya's affection in a duel. Like *Young Werther*, his wild desire proves impossible to integrate into his social scene, leaving only suicide as an option for narrative closure in place of a harmonious artistic *Bildung*.<sup>49</sup>

Only Anastasya and her "swagger sex" (as the novel refers to her approach to sex and her use of femininity) evade capture within a pre-existing narrative genre or social form. Her narrative closure occurs only in the negative, in the refusal of pre-given narrative terms ("Tarr and Anastasya did not marry. They did not have children," writes the narrator in the terse final page [284]). Her pursuit of desire alone resists cohering into an existing social form, like marriage (Bertha), or sexual violence and the honor duel (Kreisler), or the maintenance of an extra-marital lover (Tarr). My reading, then, centers Anastasya and the version of kink desire, narrative, and sociality that she brings into the novel in a way that previous readings have not. Fredric Jameson, for example, in his influential 1979 study *Fables of Aggression*, maps all the characters as balanced forces in a semiotic rectangle whose axes are "Male and Female," "Art and Sex," and "Ego and Id":

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<sup>49</sup> Much prior research has placed *Tarr* in conversation with other modernist *Bildungsromane*. Most helpfully, Paul Peppis analyzes the novel's original serialization in *The Egoist* in 1916-1917. Peppis notes that the journal was dedicated to the Idealist libertarian philosopher, Max Stirner, whose radical arguments for liberating the self from all fixed external ideas inspired the journal's advocacy for feminism and against static notions of national identity (229-30). Peppis argues that D.H. Lawrence's 1913 *Sons and Lovers* (237) and James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which was serialized in the journal in 1914-15, "can usefully be termed the Individualist Bildungsroman," with plots that chart a hero's self-formation as an independent artist who liberates himself from "the constricting influences of personal history" (227-28). In contrast, Peppis suggests, *Tarr* satirizes these individualist orthodoxies by depicting two heroes who believe themselves either entirely independent of their nationality, in the case of Tarr, or entirely a Romantic product of it, in the case of Kreisler, failing to achieve independence in the face of various conventions and social forces that shape their worlds and narratives.



Jameson suggests that the novel's ending demonstrates "the incapacity of this system to resolve itself in its own terms" (101). However, reading Anastasya as the narrative's prime engine of desire shifts my emphasis away from lack of narrative resolution as a formal failure and toward her refusal of closure as a positive strategy. Anastasya functions as a sexy supplement, in the Derridean sense, to Jameson's totalizing semiotic rectangle: although her actions are seemingly supplemental to the novel's narrative system, where Tarr and Bertha marry and Kreisler dies, her play with these terms threatens to overthrow the whole thing.

Anastasya emerges as an unrealizable utopian figure of sexual and artistic autonomy. But her autonomy is not Tarr's fantasy of the artist unencumbered by the social relations that sex draws him into. Rather, it emerges from Anastasya's constant play with genre and social form, recasting them toward new ends. She leads both Tarr and Kreisler into plots that show them the impossibility of their positions and genres, the inadequacy of their attempts at sex and art. Her kinky play draws Tarr into a swinging marriage; her romantic attractions lead Kreisler to his death. Her sexual desires inhabit and satirically rework the existing social forms and genres for expressing them. Although she emerges relatively unscathed, she does so only by escaping from any of the terms that the characters in the novel are seeking. Her love affair with Tarr produces no children or marriage, and she leaves the plot altogether; she is associated with no particular genre of art or narrative. Instead, her sexual and artistic autonomy satirize the others'; her narrative form is the digression, and the form her sexual relations take is roleplay—both second-order forms that make pleasurable use of pre-existing genres with an ironic distance. She is Tarr's "perfect woman," a multiethnic and multinational and pansexual figure, unrealizable within the terms of any of the novel's social scene setting or artistic discourse or sexual plot-building. Anastasya functions as an impossible synthesis of what vexed Lewis, pursuing her kink desire without getting bogged down in the new conventionality of a "bourgeois-bohemianism," dealing in art without cohering into genre or institution. Where Tarr rejects the state by propounding an abstract individualism, Anastasya is a cosmopolitan, playing up her multiple ethnic identities and national citizenships. Her sexuality serves neither the state nor the artist's coterie from which she keeps a polite distance, but only herself. In pursuing it, she offers a model of artistic and sexual autonomy that denies the conventionality of the marriage plot and shows up the naiveté of Tarr's simple declaration of independence from social relations and conventional forms. But she remains a figure, unrealizable in terms of narrative or genre, a satire of existing social forms and sexual relations whose only positive program is the pleasure of

satire's constant resignification.

### The Other Bohemians

Allow me to characterize these narrative dynamics more closely by following the movements of the first section of the novel, entitled "Bertha." Doing so reveals that the frequently repeated characterizations of the Tarr sections of the novel as inert, abstract, and narrative-less and the Kreisler sections as dynamic, concrete, and plotful understate the complexity of the novel's narrative structure.<sup>50</sup> The framing sections of the novel with Tarr are unmistakably a marriage plot, however modernist it may be in its prose pyrotechnics and its relative lack of events. Tarr's musings about art and sex occur dialogically, spoken as dialogue between Tarr and several characters with their own motivations and roles within the social milieu that the novel sketches. Michael Levenson, in a fascinating reading of the conflict between individual "psychological excess" and formal narrative structure in the novel, acknowledges this by arguing that the novel's "situation might have furnished the kernel of a Jamesian novella" whose plot articulates "the rigorous geometry of emotions, in particular the symmetric reversal of the original couplings" (121). Having written at length about Robert Musil in the previous chapter, I note that the interplay between Tarr and Kreisler as protagonists bears some resemblance to Robert Musil's own masterwork of modernist experimentation that he began writing in 1921, *The Man Without Qualities*, where Ulrich, a man of contemplation, theory, social withdrawal, and inaction comes up against Arnheim, a dynamic industrialist and Romantic hero whose sections move the plot forward. But unlike *The Man Without Qualities*, *Tarr* contains no essays emanating from nowhere and pausing the plot entirely. The sections about Tarr are not only theoretical conversations; they are embedded in their own narrative context. Indeed, both Kreisler and Tarr's sections end with the traditional closures of the nineteenth century novel: Kreisler's death by suicide and Tarr's marriage to Bertha (followed by his divorce, followed by another marriage). Whatever Tarr's pretensions to an artistic distance from the social scene in which he finds himself, ultimately he marries into it, and the reader is given no further information about his artistic formation nor any resolution to the theories he spins.

This long section—the novel is split into seven sections, but the first one comprises more than a fifth of its length—follows Tarr on a single day in Paris where he holds three conversations with characters from different parts of his cosmopolitan "bourgeois-bohemian" milieu. The first two are Englishmen of Tarr's acquaintance, the last is Bertha, his German fiancée. In the first conversation, Tarr runs by coincidence into Alan Hobson, the son of a rich merchant, who has just returned from a trip to Cambridge. Tarr holds Hobson in contempt for his "art-touch, the Bloomsbury technique" (9).<sup>51</sup> Hobson represents for Tarr the idle children of the international wealthy playing at art in Paris as a bohemian lifestyle that fails to produce anything sufficiently creative or new. Tarr castigates Hobson in an abstract rant, while Hobson

<sup>50</sup> For a typical, if perhaps particularly extreme, statement of this trend in the scholarship, consider this argument from Michael Wutz: "The figure of Otto Kreisler, the novel's protagonist and the major character is conceived as a machine, and it is through him that Lewis signifies the momentum and the form of the narrative. ... By discharging the energy of his force field into the novelistic space and by drawing other characters into his orbit, Kreisler produces activity in the novel, and thus energizes the textual event. This event comes to a standstill the moment Kreisler, the rotating vortex-machine, can no longer charge himself, and he begins to run down" (846).

<sup>51</sup> Klein's explanatory note in the Oxford World Classics edition suggests that Hobson is a parody of the Bloomsbury painter Roger Fry, who helped popularize French Post-Impressionism in London and who initially supported Lewis's painting before Lewis turned on him (293).

attempts to bring him back to the goings-on of their social scene by teasing Tarr about his new engagement to Bertha. In the next conversation, Tarr runs into a friend he prefers to Hobson, Guy Butcher, who went into the automobile business at Tarr's urging rather than indulging his artistic inclinations. Tarr talks to Butcher about his engagement to Bertha, again in abstract theoretical terms that touch more on his theories of the relations between art, sex, and nationality than on the matter of gossip at hand. Lastly, he goes to Bertha's dusty apartment, filled with the bricolage of German Romantic sentimentality like a bust of Beethoven, where they continue an ongoing, quasi-ritualistic battle they have had over whether to marry or to separate. The battle ends with neither a commitment to marriage nor a separation; each combatant-lover takes up dramatic positions they have no intention of carrying out, with Bertha offering to sacrifice herself so Tarr can continue sowing his wild oats and Tarr nearly offering to marry her on the spot. The conversation ends when Tarr decides to leave without the narrative closure of a real decision; instead, he extends the seething stasis of their relationship by promising to come back the next day or the one after that.

To frame the role of Tarr's manifesto-like declarations in this section, the novel opens with a paragraph narrated omnisciently, evoking the social scene-setting of a realist novel. "Paris hints of sacrifice," intones the first sentence with the voice of a Dickens narrator. It continues, "But here we deal with that large dusty facet known to indulgent and congruous kind: it is in its capacity of delicious inn and majestic Baedeker, where western Venuses twang its responsive streets and hush to soft growl before its statues, that it is seen. It is not across its Thébaidé that the unscrupulous heroes chase each other's shadows: they are largely ignorant of all but their restless personal lives" (7). Though the prose may be more oblique, we have all the trappings of an omniscient narrator setting a social scene and casting judgment on it: there are the sweeping wide lens view of the city, the puncturing of hypocrisies, the ironic distance and moral judgment ("unscrupulous"), the "we" that seems to be inviting the reader to join the narrator in casting judgment upon the inferior tastes and preoccupations of the "indulgent and congruous kind." The next several paragraphs of scene-setting continue in this way, offering local precision by introducing "the Vitelotte Quarter" (presumably a pseudonym for the cosmopolitan artist neighborhood of Montparnasse) while continuing to recruit the reader into judgment against the supposed hypocrisies of artists who attend more to their style and social lives than their creative genius: "Art is being studied.—But 'art' is not anything serious or exclusive: it is the smell of oil paint, Henri Murger's *Vie de Bohème*, corduroy trousers, the operatic Italian model" (7). Lastly, this introduction introduces a final obsession of the novel, besides the conflict between art and conformity to a social scene ostensibly incubating creativity, by describing the quarter as a set of ethno-national enclaves: "The Vitelotte Quarter is given up to Art: letters and other things are round the corner. Its rent is half paid by America. Germany occupies a sensible apartment on the second floor. ... Italian models festoon it in symmetrical human groups; it is also their club" (7).

After this page-long zoomed-out tableau limning the general contours of the international artists' social scene, the novel's narration switches to the particular and locks into a third-person limited mode, with its free indirect discourse clearly favoring Tarr's perspective. As the narrative proper begins, "Hobson and Tarr met in the boulevard du Paradis" (8). Their meeting immediately gives particularity to the general conflicts outlined in the introduction; the novel seems to align Tarr immediately with the narrator and the reader who were casting judgment on those who were studying art, but not seriously. We receive a half-page outlining why "for Hobson's outfit Tarr had the most elaborate contempt" (9), with the narrator mercilessly

cataloguing the pretentious bohemian shabbiness of this son of “a wealthy merchant somewhere in Egypt” (9).

When at last Tarr speaks, it is to call out the offenses of Hobson’s style against the seriousness of art: “Tarr turned to Hobson and seized him, conversationally, by the hair. ‘Well Walt Whitman, when are you going to get your hair cut?’” (9). This combative opener introduces the narrative conflict this conversation mediates; although Tarr keeps trying to unfurl a general theory of the autonomous avant-garde artist as a self-creating genius, Hobson keeps trying to drag Tarr and his theories back into the everyday social and sexual relations that define the social scene in which they find themselves. The result is that Tarr’s theories, as much as they may seem to align with the narrator, or even with the language that the real-world Lewis deployed in his *BLAST* manifestos, is also given a function in the novel’s narrative. Tarr tries to skewer Hobson’s lack of artistic seriousness by browbeating him with theory; Hobson retorts by bringing up Tarr’s own social ties; Tarr ripostes by attempting to theorize those ties as part of his art practice.

Crucially for my purposes, the thematic territory upon which this conversational combat is fought is the sex drive and its expression in the social forms of marriage and nationality on the one hand and its sublimation into art and form on the other. Hobson responds to Tarr’s assault on his style by returning to the affairs of their social set: “It seems to me, Tarr, that you know far more Germans than I do: but *you’re ashamed of it*. Hence your attack. I met a Fräulein Unger the other day, a German, who claimed to know you—I’m *always* meeting Germans who know you! She also referred to you as the ‘official fiancé’ of Fräulein Lunken.—Are you an ‘official fiancé’—and if so what is that may I ask?” (11). Hobson’s way of dragging Tarr’s theory back down to the everyday of social intercourse in their shared scene is to invoke a proper noun, Fräulein Lunken, to fill out Tarr’s abstract pontificating about “Germans,” and then to suggest that Tarr has promiscuous social relations that seem even to have culminated in the conventional form of a betrothal. Tarr, not to be bested so easily, first declares himself entirely aloof from such conventionalities, claiming, “I never know at any given time whether I’m engaged or not, I leave all that sort of thing entirely in her hands” (11). Mounting a counterattack, Tarr transforms his social and sexual ties with Bertha into the material of a manifesto’s abstract declarative sentences, declaring grandly, “Sex is nationalized, more than any other essential of life, Hobson, it’s just the opposite of art there: in german sex there is all the german cuisine, the beer-cellar, and all the plum-pudding mysticism of german thought. But then if it is the *sex* you are after, that does not say you want to identify your being with your appetite: quite the opposite. The condition of continued enjoyment is to resist assimilation” (12). Tarr argues that sex is sullied with the particularities of the social, as manifested in the stuff of national culture, with which he contrasts art. When Hobson attempts to return this grand theorizing to the question of “your intentions ... as regards the fair Fräulein” (15), Tarr refines the contrast further, placing marriage on the same side as representative art and the narrative anecdote. Hobson asks, “What exactly is your discourse intended to prove?” and Tarr responds, “*Not* the desirability of the marriage tie, if that’s what you mean, any more than a propaganda for representation and anecdote in art: but *if* a man marries or a great painter represents (and the claims and seductions of life are very urgent) he will not be governed in his choice by the same laws that regulate the life of an efficient citizen or the standards of a eugenicist” (15). Tarr’s coup de grâce in the argument, then, is that when the sex drive takes the form of marriage, it is a concession to the conventional social relations of the “efficient citizen,” just as the non-avant-garde artist’s attachment to the particularities and the social content of “representation” and “anecdote” is a concession to the conventions of genre.

He grants that it is possible for a “great painter” to be seduced by the “claims” of representation or by a conventional marriage, but he insists that, to remain great, the man or the painter must still avoid the laws and regulation that govern these categories.

Sexual desire, and the social forms for its expression, therefore, bear not merely a metaphorical but a *necessary* relationship to the avant-garde aesthetics of the autonomous artist that Tarr attempts to articulate in this section. Tarr’s theory of the artist is quasi-Freudian; in the climax of this rant, he pronounces, “The artist is he in whom this emotionality normally absorbed by sex is so strong that it claims a newer and more exclusive field of deployment. Its first creation is *the Artist* himself. That is a new sort of person, the creative man” (16). Like Freud, Tarr’s avant-garde artist is freeing psychic energy from the objects of his sexual desire and the project of social reproduction so that he may instead apply it to a sort of aesthetic parthenogenesis. His creative artist must ideally make no concessions to conventional social forms like marriage or aesthetic forms like representation. And yet, the embedding of that aesthetics in a novel that proceeds, after all, with anecdote and social scene-setting, can’t help but make Tarr’s declarations ring differently than they would from the pages of a manifesto. Tarr attempts, somewhat lamely, to account for this by adding an additional wrinkle to his theory, claiming that “very often with an artist whose work is very sensuous or human, his sex instinct, if it is active, will be more discriminating than with a man more fastidious and discriminating than he in his work. To sum up this part of my disclosure: no one could have a coarser, more foolish, slovenly taste than I have in women” (16). Tarr claims that his conventional tastes in sex are a sign that the refinement of his artistic taste has made such thorough use of his libido or “emotionality” that he has little left to devote to refining his sex. Against the hapless Hobson, it’s easy to side with Tarr. But the placement of this conversation in the larger narrative design of the novel makes it impossible to take Tarr’s theories quite straight.

Seen from this perspective, Tarr’s theoretical proclamations can be understood as an attempt to convert his participation as an actor in a network of narrative events back into the objective grist for his abstract theorizing. His manifesto-esque declarations are an attempt to create distance between himself and the particularities of his social scene, a way of converting his sexual and social entanglements into the object of a universal aesthetic theory. His next encounter with Butcher, the automotive entrepreneur, gives him the opportunity to reconceptualize his conflict with Hobson. Tarr tells Butcher, Hobson “happened to drop on me when I was thinking about my girl. He began congratulating me on my engagement. So I gave him my views on marriage and then wound up with a little improvisation about himself” (24). Note how Tarr attempts to contain the narrative action of “my engagement” within the non-narrative theorizing of his “thinking” and his general “views on marriage.” Where Hobson attempted to drag Tarr into the narrative world of gossip and social maneuvering that the event of his engagement suggests, Tarr attempts to reclaim his aesthetic autonomy by using his engagement as the material of a general theory of the relation between sex and aesthetics. Butcher is happy to help Tarr along in this, allowing Tarr to unspool a rant that transforms his engagement to Bertha into a treatise on types, classes, and tropes of femininity. Asked whether he is in fact engaged, Tarr begins a discourse that ends by declaring, grandly, “All individuals who have class marked upon them strongly resemble each other don’t you agree—a typical duchess is much more like a typical nurserymaid than she is like anybody not standardized to the same extent as the nurserymaid and herself. So is Bertha, a bourgeoisie or rather bourgeois-bohemian, reminiscent of the popular maiden: she is the popular maiden, at one remove.—I am

not in love with the popular maiden” (26). Seen this way, Tarr’s theoretical proclamations are not only the articulation of a general aesthetic theory, a typology, and an argument about the general relationship between the sexes, but also, in their narrative context, a self-conscious attempt by this character to remove himself from the narrative. If Hobson’s claim is that Tarr is an aesthetic hypocrite because he is just as much a participant in the social goings on of the artistic scene as the people he holds in contempt because they are concerned more with “their restless personal lives” than the creation of new, autonomous art forms, Tarr’s riposte is that he participates in these social relations only to better refine his aesthetic theories.

The sequence of events in the novel’s narrative, however, soon revenges itself on Tarr’s pose of aesthetic autonomy. He next encounters Bertha, and his desire for her pulls him back from theory and into the thicket of social relations. As he enters Bertha’s apartment, “he found Bertha’s eye fixed upon him. . . . On finding himself in the presence of the object of his erudite discussion, he felt he had got the focus wrong after all: this familiar life, with its ironical eye, mocked at him, too. It was aware of the subject of his late conversation. Some kind of twin of the shrewd feeling embodied in the observation ‘one can never escape from oneself’ appeared” (38). Although the narrator’s perspective often seems aligned with Tarr’s, here a gap between them can be glimpsed: the phrase “erudite discussion,” illuminated by Bertha and “familiar life’s” “ironical eye,” seems to mock Tarr just as much as it might be quoting his internal monologue in free indirect discourse. Are we to understand “erudite” as Tarr’s word or the narrator’s ironic teasing of Tarr’s pretensions? It is hard not to read this passage as a rebuke of Tarr’s pose of cool, formal distance from the “restless personal lives” of his social scene. The “object of his erudite discussion” suddenly turns her eye back at Tarr and becomes a subject that can guess at “the subject of his late conversation.” Tarr’s general theory is pulled back into a particular narrative and social context, as Bertha realizes that Tarr has been discussing whether to marry her with members of their shared social world. Having reasoned himself into believing that Bertha is an instantiation of the “bourgeois-bohemian,” a type with which he cannot possibly be in love, Tarr must suddenly contend with the object of his theories embodied as a subject, with an ironical eye turned upon him. The desire this body arouses in him entangles him once again in the marriage plot from which he has tried to exempt himself with his ideas of artistic autonomy and sexual sublimation. Having come to Bertha’s to tell her that he will not take part in her marriage plot, desire entraps him again in the stuff of narrative conflict: he puts his hand on Bertha’s hip and “remarked that she was underneath in her favorite state of nakedness. He frowned as he reflected that this might subsequently cause a hitch” (39).

This hitch plays out as a ritual battle between Bertha and Tarr over the social form that their sexual entanglement will take. Having arrived to tell Bertha that he will not marry her, ending the narrative of their social and sexual relationship, desire instead prolongs Tarr’s narrative engagement with Bertha. The object of Tarr’s abstract homosocial theorizing with Butcher about sex has become a speaking subject; the concept (“popular maiden”) becomes a proper-noun character (Bertha), with all her social particularities. The narrator carves out more space between himself and Tarr by figuring the conflict between Bertha and Tarr as a narrative fiction, a play: “In this impasse of arrested life he stood sick and useless: they progressed from stage to stage of their weary farce. The confusion grew every moment. It resembled a combat between two wrestlers of approximately equal strength: neither could really win. One or other of them was usually wallowing warily or lifelessly upon his stomach while the other tugged at him, examining and prodding his carcass” (48). If the battle between Tarr and Bertha is partly a struggle over narrative—is Tarr’s desire for Bertha the stuff of an abstract aesthetic theory to be

declaimed to a man that Tarr respects, as Tarr asserts, or is it the foundation of a social entanglement to be lived out in a marriage plot, as Bertha desires?—the narrator’s metaphor clearly comes down on the side of narrative. Far from Tarr’s avant-garde theories of the popular maiden and the sublimation of sex into form, the narrator describes his sexual entanglement with Bertha as the “stage[s]” of a “weary farce.” The image of male wrestlers in combat—the conversation between the two is filled with metaphors of war, combat, and violent struggle, metaphors that break into the novel on the level of narrative when Kreisler’s doomed attraction to Anastasya ends in a duel near the end of the novel—introduces a sadomasochistic element to Bertha’s attempt to contain Tarr’s desire for her in a narrative. But Bertha’s conception of the marriage proves flexible enough to contain this kink; Tarr’s “joining battle again,” in “the first skirmish of his comic Armageddon” (50), happens not by theoretical argument, but on Bertha’s terms, by Tarr informing Bertha, dramatically, in all italics, that he encountered “*a feeling of complete indifference as regards yourself*” (52) when he entered her apartment. Bertha responds, equally dramatically and tactically, by assuming an exaggerated state of submission and declaring, “If you’ve made up your mind to go—do so Sorbert—I release you!” (53). This homoerotic wrestle, these exaggerated gestures of domination and submission, prove to be internal to Bertha’s idea of marriage, part of their “routine of wrangle” (53). Some pages later, the narrator, inhabiting Tarr’s thoughts, states, “that passive pose of Bertha’s was not encouraging. ... There was something almost pugnacious in so much resignation” (60).

Bertha’s bourgeois taste for marriage, and her bohemian flexibility in how it comes about (she offers repeatedly to have a friendly talk about any other lovers Tarr might be seeing), prove more powerful than Tarr’s attempts to sublimate desire into theory and remove himself from narrative. In his attempt to break up with Bertha, Tarr claims to have rationalized himself out of marriage plots, saying, “I had always till I met you regarded marriage as a thing beyond all argument *not* for me, I was unusually isolated from that idea; anyway, I had never even reflected what marriage was at all. ... It was you who introduced me to marriage!” (54). He even attempts to regionalize marriage, comparing Bertha’s taste for it with a local dialect: “I have accepted from you a queer sentimental dialect of life. ... I should have insisted on your expressing yourself in a more metropolitan speech. Let us drop it. ... you are not a girl who wants an intrigue, but to marry” (53-54). Tarr’s theories of sexual sublimation for the sake of art are mapped to “a more metropolitan speech” compared to the “queer sentimental dialect of life” in which he and Bertha communicate their desires for one another.

But though Tarr believes himself to be speaking “in a more metropolitan speech,” he has already ceded the ground of the conversation to Bertha’s marriage plot. Bertha’s conception of marriage proves able to subsume the “routine of wrangle,” the wrestling and combat, as well as Tarr’s attempts at grand theory. Once Tarr is no longer theorizing to his male friend, but rather talking directly to Bertha, all of his attempts to argue his way out of his social obligations to her become merely a lover’s quarrel, a hitch in the marriage plot, rather than a manifesto on the relations between Sex and Art. When the conversation ends, Tarr has made no progress in removing himself from the plot: “Let them immediately call a halt, pitch tents preliminary to turning back: a pause was essential before beginning the return journey. Next day they would be jogging on again in the same disputed direction. Tarr now saw at once what had happened: his good words had been completely thrown away, all except his confession to a weakness for the matronly blandishments of Matrimony” (56). Their combat, and Tarr’s attempts at turning their relationship into theory, and even the possibility that Tarr might take another lover, become merely one event on the way to marriage for Bertha. Tarr’s abstractions about sex and marriage



prove naive when he is face to face with the object of his desire; no matter his attempt to theorize the autonomy of the artist from existing social relations, to transform his desire for Bertha into a homosocial relation between thinking men, Tarr finds himself entangled in a marriage plot. Although the section ends in a narrative impasse, with Tarr deciding to leave Bertha's apartment with an indecisive promise to "come and see you to-morrow or the day after" (62), it still ends on narrative terms. Tarr realizes that the only way out of the entanglements into which his desire has led him is a narrative one, a closure: "In some way, for both their sakes, the foundations of an ending must be laid at once" (56). That ending, is, ultimately, a marriage to Bertha. But before we get there, we have a narrative digression into the kinky mystery of Anastasya and "swagger sex."

### Swagger Theory

Five sections that center Kreisler intervene between the two sections where Tarr is the main character. Each of those sections where Tarr is the primary narrative perspective is, itself, named after the woman toward whom Tarr's desire is directed: Section I, where Bertha manages to contain Tarr's attempts at art theory in the confines of a marriage plot, is entitled "Bertha." Section VII, the primary subject of this half of the chapter, is called "Swagger Sex." The novel uses this somewhat opaque phrase a few times to describe Anastasya's modern sexual practices, or perhaps her practice of femininity, in the other sense of the word "sex," or most plausibly, a mixture of both, as Anastasya, in diametric opposition to Bertha's nineteenth-century Romanticism, seems to be an avatar of the "New Woman" figure that circulated in the anglophone world in the early twentieth century, whose sexual autonomy was part of what made her a new kind of woman.

Despite these titles for the sections, I have found few examples of analyses that center Bertha and Anastasya as agents in the plot who capture and maneuver Tarr's contradictory desires.<sup>52</sup> Most prior literature understandably focuses on Kreisler, as his sections of the novel contain the most novelistic action and also seem to demand the most interpretation. Where Tarr expresses his thoughts and motivations in the didactic declamations of the manifesto, Kreisler has the roiling, opaque passions of a *Sturm und Drang* or Dostoyevsky protagonist. His sections are plotty because, in contrast to Tarr's pose of cool detachment from social life, Kreisler is constantly deflecting his desires and motivations from one domain of action into another: a need for money becomes a passionate sexual fixation, that sexual fixation becomes a masculine competitiveness, the duel that results almost ends in a homosexual kiss before instead ending in murder and suicide. In contrast to Tarr's sections, which are so stuffed with abstract dialogue that they've been referred to as borderline plotless, Kreisler's sections are so full of events they are difficult to summarize succinctly. In the spirit of perversity within which this dissertation has

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<sup>52</sup> A rare counterexample is Richard W. Sheppard's "Wyndham Lewis's *Tarr*: An (Anti-)Vorticist Novel?", where he writes, "Anastasya is the agent of a hidden power that is never named or brought into clear focus in the novel, that synthesizes Apollonian and Dionysiac qualities, and whose nature is to cause crisis, compel truth, and impel growth. Consequently, Anastasya both exemplifies and transcends Lewis's theoretical demands for synthesis, indicating that by the time Lewis completed *Tarr* he had, whether he was aware of it or not, gone beyond the stark, polar categories of early Vorticism" (526). At the end of the article, he argues that Lewis's later work "refus[ed] to investigate the metahumanist possibilities implicit in the figure of Anastasya" (530). My own reading of Anastasya takes up this structural role she plays. However, that hidden power does have a name: "swagger sex." My reading of Anastasya focalizes her relation to sex and desire as categories productive of narrative form and aesthetic experience.

operated—focusing on frame stories over main plots, on stray flashbacks and -forwards over the main event—I am going to bracket Kreisler’s sections to focus on the understudied Tarr sections that frame them. Kreisler’s rape of Bertha and the homosocial violence he commits would certainly yield more insights on this topic if analyzed more closely, but for the sake of space and balance, I am going to zoom forward to the end of Section VI where Tarr once again takes over as the main focal point of the narration.

One salutary effect of this perverse refocalizing is that it brings Anastasya into the center of the frame. This brings a symmetry into view that has largely been left unnoticed when Kreisler’s mad dance is allowed to take center stage. Where Tarr spends the first section of the novel trying to turn his sexual relations with Bertha into the stuff of an aesthetic theory shared between men only to have Bertha drag him into a marriage plot, in Section VII, he attempts to spin a theory of art and sex out of Kreisler’s fate that Anastasya manages to transmute into the material of a kinky seduction. Once again, Tarr’s attempts at theory founder on the implacability of his desire and its redirection at the hands of the novel’s women.

Kreisler’s suicide at the end of Section VI, “Holocausts,” is a burnt offering that kindles Tarr and Anastasya’s further acquaintanceship. In the last two pages of the section, they have dinner to discuss the death, and it ends with Anastasya’s strategic reference to “your fiancée,” which Tarr quickly corrects, as he and Bertha have been broken up since Bertha started spending time with Kreisler (254). As Part VII, “Swagger Sex,” begins, Tarr is alternating dutiful visitations with Bertha, which he conceptualizes as a homeopathic “cure” to wean himself off their relationship (255), with passionate meetings with Anastasya. This scene set as an ongoing state of affairs, the novel spends fully half of the final section on Tarr’s tenth meeting with Anastasya. Stylistically, the date resembles Tarr’s conversations with the two Englishmen in the first section of the novel, with a chaotic energy added to the dialogue by the characters’ drinking. Tarr pontificates abstractly on art while Anastasya attempts to pull him back to the social occasion at hand. This time, however, that social occasion is not a homosocial debate or trade of gossip, but a seduction. If “swagger sex” has any specific reference, it seems to be this very act of seduction, this transformation of abstract theorizing into kinky roleplay, the way that Anastasya disproves Tarr’s theories of the autonomy of art from social relations and even from the human individual by recontextualizing his theory as foreplay. Over the course of these two chapters Anastasya transforms Tarr’s attempts at aesthetic manifestos into a sexual roleplay that jars Tarr out of the marriage plot into which Bertha’s “queer sentimental dialect of life” had inducted him and into the new flexible sexual relations that Anastasya practices.

Throughout the debate, Anastasya playfully inhabits Tarr’s abstract, intellectual manner of speech only to draw his attention away from weighty matters of art theory and toward her body and his desires. She shows up to dinner in something like fetish gear, adopting a “belted smock and skirt, like a working girl” and “open-work stockings on underneath, such as the genuine girl would have worn on her night-out” (257). She tells Tarr, “I put these on for you” (257), allowing the gear to contrast with “her aristocratic woman’s sense” (252), and demonstrating her sexual sophistication against the dutifully straightforward bohemian dress that appeals to Bertha’s taste. This classed roleplay gives Anastasya the opportunity to mock, seductively, the way that Tarr’s taste for pure aesthetic form over desire for the human body is more class-bound than he pretends. Putting a hand on one of her breasts, she adopts Tarr’s intellectual idiom and demands, “[A]s a stark high-brow I ask you, can you respect such objects upon a person, right on top of a person?” (258). Tarr attempts to demure by responding mundanely, “I don’t mind them. I think they are nice,” but Anastasya mocks him back in his

high-brow language, responding, “Not as a high-brow, it’s imposs; they class me, I am one of the Bertha-birds” (258). Later in the conversation, Anastasya offers up sex as a counterargument to the kind of theory-talk that Tarr prefers, declaring, “We intellectuals talk far too much about things that simply will not bear talking of and looking into—a high-brow girl such as me must be sexually (oh that’s very very american) an abomination” (260-61). Tarr’s response, characteristically, comes in the language of philosophical aesthetics, moving from the case to the general theorem. Comparing Anastasya’s body to the pork they are eating, he declares, “In the case of the sucking-pig it is the tongue. The thing seen is merely disgusting to the eye, but it is delightful to the tongue: therefore the eye passes beneath the spell of the palate, and it is not an image but a taste—much more abstract, in consequence—that it sees—if one can say that it sees. The body of the sucking-pig is blotted out” (261). Anastasya categorically refuses this attempt to make her body the stuff of “much more abstract” theory, firing back, “I think you forget that it is my breast from which we started this rambling argument. Also I would take leave to observe that it is not so easy to blot out a food-unit as you appear to think” (261). Whenever Tarr tries to appeal to matters of abstract taste, Anastasya brings him back, with words and body, to the rootedness of taste in the social realities of class and the physical concreteness of desire.

All this tugging between theory and desire culminates in an astonishing scene where Tarr offers a Vorticist theory of impersonal art, Anastasya pleasures herself with Tarr’s theories, and the two stage a confrontation between Tarr’s theorization and Anastasya’s insistence on the embeddedness of such theories in desiring bodies and social relations by debating psychosexual interpretations of Kreisler’s suicide. The debate kicks off with Anastasya again demanding that Tarr respond in his own theoretical terms: “But let us have a definition here and there. What is art?” (264). Taking the bait, Tarr offers an aphorism: “Life with all the humbug of living taken out of it” (264). Art is, for him, congruent with his genre of theory-speak: an attempt to take the particular stuff of life, the bodies and social relations, and abstract them into universal form. Perhaps this is why the novel never actually describes a Tarr painting or Tarr in the act of painting; his primary activity in the novel, besides his sexual relations with Bertha and Anastasya, of turning his life into theory through conversation is, perhaps, the very art practice that he theorizes. Prompted further, Tarr elaborates that bodies, and the relation between the sexes, “are the worst art of all”: “Anything living, quick and changing is bad art always; naked men and women are the worst art of all, because there are fewer semi-dead things about them” (265). Prompted one last time by Anastasya’s gentle mockery, Tarr unfolds a fuller theory, declaring, with the short numbered declarative sentences of the manifesto, “Deadness is the first condition for art: the second is absence of soul, in the human and sentimental sense. With the statue its lines and masses are its soul, no restless inflammable ego is imagined for its interior: it has *no inside*: good art must have no inside: that is capital” (265). Although this theory more or less resembles Lewis’s own ideas for Vorticism as a movement, with the focus on forms, exteriority, static geometry, and the rest, it can’t help but ring discordantly when embedded in a novel that, for all its experimentalism, nevertheless describes events in the lives of characters with a certain level of social and psychological realism.

And indeed, Anastasya deals a coup de grâce to Tarr’s attempt to theorize an art autonomous from the body and the desires and social life in which it finds itself, an art that can live only in the axiomatic *de novo* language in which Tarr describes it, by returning his theory to the social situation at hand. That is, she takes Tarr’s theory and fucks herself with it: “Anastasya now stretched herself, clasping her hands in her lap. She smiled at Tarr. She had been driving hard inscrutable Art deeper and deeper into herself: she now drew it out and showed it to Tarr.

‘Art is all you say—have it your way. ... I wish intensely to hear about life.’ Tarr was staring, suspended, with a defunct smile, cut in half, at the still life” (265). In making a dildo of Tarr’s theory of “hard inscrutable Art,” plunging its exteriority “deeper and deeper into herself,” Anastasya reminds Tarr that all his abstraction is, ultimately, the conversation made on a date where they are deciding whether to bed one another. Despite his theories of art as deadness and form opposing liveness and the body, Tarr perceives this gesture as itself art, a “still life”—Anatasya wins the theoretical argument with a flirtatious movement. Tarr and Anastasya, then, use language to perform opposite operations. Tarr takes in the events of his social and sex life and transmutes them into the abstract language of the aesthetic manifesto. Anastasya adopts Tarr’s abstracted way of speaking so as to reveal that it is not nearly so dead and purified as he thinks; with this gesture, she reminds Tarr that all his talk about “deadness” and “absence of soul” is not merely art for art’s sake, but rather serves a human social function as part of their ongoing mutual seduction, with their intellectual one upmanship becoming a power game of dominance and submission.

These two modes of intellectualizing—Tarr’s attempt to sublimate his sexual desires in intellectual theory and Anastasya’s recognition that intellectual theorizing is a form of foreplay—culminate, self-reflexively, in the two offering each other competing interpretations of the novel’s central plot event, Kreisler’s suicide. Anastasya having put a pin in their theoretical conversation, she steers the conversation to gossip about their social milieu and the novel’s plot: “What did you make of Kreisler’s proceedings? He was a queer fish” (266). In a rare show of interest in the cast of characters he is surrounded by, Tarr asks Anastasya, “What were Kreisler’s relations with you by the way?” (266). The two then have a back-and-forth where they oppose two theories interpreting Kreisler’s failed *Bildungsroman* plot:

‘My relations with Kreisler consisted in a half-hour’s conversation with him in a restaurant, no more: I spoke to him several times after that but only for a few minutes. He was very excited the last time we met. I have a theory that his duel was due to unrequited passion for me. Your Bertha, on the other hand, has a theory that it was due to unrequited passion for her. I merely wondered if you had any information that might confirm her case or mine.’

‘No, I know nothing about it. I hold, myself, a quite different theory.’

‘What is that? That he was in love with *you*?’

‘My theory has not the charming simplicity of your theory or Bertha’s. I don’t believe that he was in love with anybody, I think that it was however a sex-tumult of sorts—.’

‘What is that?’

‘This is my theory. I believe that all the fuss he made was an attempt to get out of Art back into Life again. ... *Back into sex* I think would describe where he wanted to get to: he was doing his best to get back into sex again out of a little puddle of art where he felt he was gradually expiring. He was an art-student without any talent you see. ... The sex-instinct of the average sensual man had become perverted into a false channel. Put it the other way round and say his art-instinct had been rooted out of sex, where it was useful, and naturally flourished, and had been exalted into a department by itself, where it bungled. The nearest the general run get to art is *Action*: sex is their form of art: the battle for existence is their pleasure.” (266-67)

Note the movement of the two “theories” that Anastasya and Tarr offer. For Anastasya, the theory is a narrative one, rooted in the dynamics of their social scene: although he never told her so, Kreisler had a passion for her that was unrequited and therefore could not be consummated in any of the narrative closures available to passion, of marriage or even seduction. Anastasya shrewdly perceives the burst of homosocial/homoerotic violence—before he accidentally killed his dueling partner, Kreisler tried to end the duel with a kiss—that ends Kreisler’s turn in the plot as a narrative deflection of his desire for her. Tarr counters this plotty, socially-grounded interpretation of Kreisler’s desire with a Freudian case study by-way-of Nietzsche. His explanation, laden with the stylistic tics of Grand Theory—the italics, the Germanically capitalized common nouns—offers a symptomatic reading of Kreisler’s life that abstracts away from his desire’s embeddedness in a social scene. There was no simple *object* to Kreisler’s desire, claims Tarr—he did not love Anastasya, or Bertha, or himself—but rather a failure of sublimation. Kreisler thought himself the sort who could sublimate his sex drives into great art, but being in fact a mediocre member of the herd rather than the self-willing creative Nietzschean individual that Tarr fancies himself, his attempt at sublimation, which Tarr calls “perverted,” erupted into self-destructive neurosis. Tarr self-congratulatorily opposes the abstractness and complexity of this reading to the “charming simplicity” of Anastasya’s social explanation. Cleverly, his theory elevates Kreisler’s “sex-tumult” to a universal statement of the relation between individual and type, between art and sex. It has, however, the great disadvantage of being wrong. We the readers, having spent several sections of the novel in a third-person perspective limited to Kreisler’s thoughts, are well aware that Kreisler *did* nurse an unrequited passion for Anastasya. That passion, along with his deteriorating financial situation, drove the whole mad plotty mess leading to the duel and the suicide. Despite Tarr’s grasp of grand language, the “charming simplicity” of Anastasya’s social theory is proved by the novel’s own plot to be apter than Tarr’s aesthetic abstractions.

Anastasya’s mastery of genres of language and narrative interpretation lead at last at the end of this long chapter to a triumph of her “swagger sex.” In their debate over Kreisler’s motives, Anastasya and Tarr demonstrate certain parallels in how they wield language. I observed that, earlier in the novel, Tarr compares Bertha’s attempts to lead him into marriage with “a queer sentimental dialect of life,” as opposed to his worldly and intellectual manner of speech. For Tarr, this “queer dialect” was a limited ability to interpret events outside of a narrow notion of genre: Bertha could not understand Tarr’s desire for her beyond the conventions of anything but a marriage plot. Tarr, for his part, wields language and genre to recast his desire as Theory; in his conversations with Hobson and Butcher, in the first section, he suggests that what seems like a poor taste in mates is in fact proof of his theory of the creative genius as an individual who can sublimate his sex drives into pure form. Anastasya proves herself in this section of the novel to have an equal facility with language; far from Bertha’s “queer dialect” of marriage plots and Romanticism, the cosmopolitan Anastasya can speak both Tarr’s high theoretical language as well as the “charming simplicity” of narrative interpretation. At the end of this section, she puts this facility with different registers and genres of speech to use and bests Tarr’s pretensions by recasting the genre of this whole intellectual conversation with Tarr into another: kinky roleplay.

As this long chapter describing Tarr and Anastasya’s tenth date ends, Anastasya plays a genre trick in the next two-page microchapter that recasts the narrative closure of their dinner debate in a different register. Their dinner and their debate over, a thoroughly drunk Tarr goes a little too far in his playful needling and calls Anastasya, in a nasty fit of Lewisian chauvinism,

“you great he-man of a german art-tart” (270). He tries to get Anastasya to stay with a fake offer of “twenty-five francs,” and Anastasya storms off with one last jab at Tarr’s pretensions: “Twenty-five francs to be your audience while you drivel about art? Keep your money and buy Bertha an—*efficient chimpanzee*—she will need it poor bitch if she marries you!” (271). Tarr, realizing his boorishness, decides that this ending casts the whole date in a certain genre: “It’s like a moral tale told on behalf of Bertha” (271). The chapter ends. As the next chapter begins, Tarr finds his door ajar, a fully nude Anastasya has been waiting in the moonlight of his apartment, and she’s apologetically horny: “‘Forgive me, Tarr, my words belied me, the acidulated demi-mondaine was a trick. It occupied your mind—you didn’t notice me take your key!’ Tarr’s vanity was soothed: the key, which could only have been taken in the Café, justified the harsh dialogue” (272). With her nudity and her apology, Anastasya has translated this “moral tale told on behalf of Bertha” and her marriage plot into a porno scenario. The insulted intellectual woman was just pretending offense at misogyny to make herself all the more available to the dashing artist. What looked like a theoretical debate was really foreplay; what looked like anger and rejection was really a shift in the power dynamics between man and woman. In a final jab at Tarr’s art theory, the nude Anastasya asks, “Will you engage me as your model sir?”, to which Tarr, faithful to his theory of a dead art of forms, declares, “I never use nude models for my pictures” (272). Playing the brat, Anastasya says, “Well I must dress again, I suppose,” and Tarr finally submits, no longer playing at the great artist who has retreated from sex and life: “I accept, I accept!” he shouts (272), retreating from art into sex. In bed the next morning, Anastasya reveals that the goal of this roleplay was to drag Tarr’s sex drives away from marriage plots: “You’ll never hear the horrid word *marriage* from me! I want to rescue you from your Bertha habits” (272).

With this declaration and seduction, Anastasya bests Tarr’s theories not by a more sophisticated theory, but by recasting them into another genre altogether. If Tarr tries to sublimate his sex drives by making them the raw material of theory, Anastasya drags Tarr’s theories back to sex and social life by making them the stuff of roleplay. With this microchapter, the long narration of their date is given a different plot role—Anastasya inhabited Tarr’s cosmopolitan intellectual dialect not to prove herself his intellectual equal, but to subjugate intellectualization to sex. Tarr believes that his intellectual maneuvers transform the bourgeois marriage plot into which his desire for Bertha leads him into the stuff of grand aesthetic theory. Anastasya shows him that the language of grand aesthetic theory can be made into the stuff of roleplay. In the tiny space of this digressive chapter, she introduces a kink into the narrative that requires that all Tarr’s bloviating in the previous chapters be understood differently. And within this little digression, Anastasya offers a new possibility for sex, outside of the marriage plot and Bertha’s “queer sentimental dialect” or Tarr’s intellectual jargon. She tells Tarr he’ll never hear of marriage from her. The chapter ends with Anastasya offering to Tarr some as-yet untheorized role for their sexual relationship. “You are my efficient chimpanzee then for keeps?” Tarr asks (273). “No I’m the new animal; we haven’t thought up a name for him yet—the thing that will succeed the Superman,” responds Anastasya, and the chapter ends (273).<sup>53</sup> Whatever exactly

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<sup>53</sup> For a brief account of Lewis and Ezra Pound’s relation to Nietzsche, see Charles Ferrall’s “The *New Age* and the Emergence of Reactionary Modernism Before the Great War,” pp. 656-59. Ferrall notes that Tarr, along with his allies Ezra Pound and T.E. Hulme, often made disparaging references to the reactionary Nietzscheans with whom they shared the pages of the *New Age*. But Ferrall points out that Lewis later acknowledged his enormous debt to Nietzschean thinking about the self-creating artist. Interestingly, he also quotes on pp. 658 from the first edition of the novel, where it is Tarr, not Anastasya, who invokes the animal that will “succeed the Superman.”

“swagger sex” is, it seems to consist in this ability to use desire toward new ends, toward a thing that does not yet have a name, toward a future that can’t yet be conceptualized, something beyond even Tarr’s heroic Nietzschean artist of the future. This perverted channel of a microchapter offers an outlet for the narrative, a place desire could go that would not be the bourgeois closures of marriage or the dry sublimations of theory. Alas, this narrative possibility exists only as a kink in the novel’s plot. Soon, Anastasya will leave the scene for unknown territory. And Tarr will find himself married.

**“Tarr and Anastasya did not marry. They had no children.”**

The novel, of course, does not end with a sex act that would give birth to the not-yet-named creature that would succeed the *Übermensch*. Anastasya’s ecstatic resignification occupies only this tiny digression. The demands of reproduction, social integration, and narrative closure at last catch up with Tarr the supposed self-creating artist: he finally marries Bertha. The marriage is bourgeois: it legitimates Bertha’s pregnancy. It is also bohemian: the child’s father was Kreisler, and Bertha allows Tarr to continue his meetings with Anastasya. But the example of Anastasya’s “swagger sex” makes clear that the dash in the phrase Tarr and the narrator are so fond of, “bourgeois-bohemian,” is to be understood not as the synthesis that overcomes an antinomy, but rather as an intensification: *so* bourgeois because *so* tolerantly bohemian. Returning now to the ending of the novel, which Jameson calls “a stray but terminal wrong note” (102), we’re left to ask ourselves: what exactly is the function of this digression before the novel’s (parody of) traditional closure?<sup>54</sup> Why bother telling us Anastasya’s fate (“Tarr and Anastasya did not marry. They had no children”) in the negative? What, frankly, is the novel up to with this figure who upsets both its narrative structure and the aesthetic theories its author seems committed to?

Anastasya emerges as the only character in the novel who evades the trappings of genre, narrative closure, and nationality that so overdetermine the other characters’ narrative fates. Kreisler, the Prussian throwback, dies by Romantic suicide after the narrative deflections of his desire lead him to murder; Bertha, the bourgeois German, gets her bohemian sexual misadventure and her bourgeois marriage; Tarr, the self-creating English artist who never seems to create any art but clever theories, finally finds himself pulled between competing demands of desire and social ties, marrying, divorcing, taking up with a new mistress, then marrying conventionally, seemingly toggling back and forth endlessly. Anastasya, however, exits the narrative by negation: she does not integrate her desire into marriage, she does not carry on the project of social reproduction with a child. So what *does* swagger sex do in the aesthetic and narrative terms the novel lays out?

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<sup>54</sup> The novel ends emphatically on a compressed parody of the closure of the traditional marriage plot, offering instead of matrimonial bliss a series of vacillations between bourgeois marriage and bohemian “swagger sex,” with the last several paragraphs narrating the future marriages and lineages of the principal characters in simple, rapid-fire declarative sentences that suddenly introduce several new characters with proper names:

“Two years after the birth of the child, Mrs. Tarr divorced him: she then married an eye-doctor and lived with a brooding severity in his company and that of her only child.

Tarr and Anastasya did not marry. They had no children.

Tarr, however, had three children by a lady of the name of Rose Fawcett, who consoled him eventually for the splendours of his ‘perfect woman.’ But yet beyond the dim though solid figure of Rose Fawcett, another rises. This one represents the swing back of the pendulum once more to the swagger side. The cheerless and stodgy absurdity of Rose Fawcett required as compensation the painted, fine and enquiring face of Prism Dirkes.” (284)

Both Jameson and Puchner recognize *Tarr* as a pivot point in Lewis's literary output. They refer to Lewis's articulation of an aesthetic program of "satire" in his 1934 work, *Men Without Art* (Puchner 129 and Jameson 52). For both, "satire" is the apotheosis of Lewis's aesthetic program as a pure negativity with regards to all existing aesthetic forms and social movements. For Puchner, "his satire is a general name for rearguard art as such. . . . Satire articulates, against the progressive, millennial-modernist paradigm, an antiaction art that reacts point for point to the formation of modernity, manifesto, and revolution" (129). Puchner is interested in this project insofar as it adds to "'good' or 'high' modernism and 'bad' or manifesto modernism . . . a third term . . . that of a rearguard modernism, which wants to present itself as an 'and/or' and, at the same time, as a 'beyond' or 'neither'" (130). While Puchner finds this position an interesting third possibility for modernism, he also notes that the turn toward absolute satire after *BLAST* and *Tarr* "may appear not so much a solution to the question of good and bad as something altogether worse and beyond the pale, full of grotesque distortions, offensive clichés, racist portraits, patronizing characterizations, sexist obsessions, and tiresome repetitions" (130-31). For Jameson, Tarr's speeches to Anastasya about "deadness" and "exteriority" in art are "virtually the letter of what will later become Lewis' own aesthetic program—called *satire*—[which] is here still the mere opinion of one of his characters: the coincidence of authorial value with Tarr's structural position as a character within the novel marks him as the first and last fully positive figure in Lewis' work, at the same time that it virtually excludes him from the narrative itself" (98). After *Tarr*, Jameson suggests, there is a "break" (122) where a character and narrative system become impossible for Lewis because he is less concerned with national allegory and individual psychology and more with the transnational ideological forces of communism and fascism. Within this new system, "satire generalizes Tarr's view of art" and "thus absolutized, satire recovers something of its primitive power and its most archaic vocation: it is no longer a choice or stylistic option within the world, but the latter's overriding law and inner dynamic" (136). While Jameson is fascinated by the universal alienation from the social and the self that this narrative form expresses, he also acknowledges that the project is an entirely negative one, where even "the satirist becomes self-conscious about his own activity. With the problematization of his own place as a judging and observing subject, he begins to reckon himself into the universal condemnation which only awaited his own presence to be complete" (138). In both of their perceptive readings of Lewis, *Tarr* leaves open the possibility of a positive program that will, in Lewis's later work, degrade into something purely negative, essentially reactionary, an eternal "no" to all social and aesthetic movements.

Anastasya, whom Jameson calls "an anomalous figure" with "no place" in Lewis's "mature narrative system" (146), and her "swagger sex," may then serve as the last place in Lewis's aesthetic program where negativity toward social and aesthetic forms offers positive possibilities. Where Jameson sees Tarr as Lewis's first and last "positive figure," I would suggest that Anastasya is the actual figure of some quasi-utopian quasi-synthesis of Lewis's contradictory aesthetic impulses. As Levenson points out, Tarr, "who had claimed to find in painting what others find in women, leaves the novel as an accomplished sexual athlete" (141). It is in fact Anastasya, and not Tarr, who manages to leave "narrative itself" at the end of the novel: Tarr marries, divorces, marries, and trysts again, but "Tarr and Anastasya did not marry. They had no children." Lewis wanted, with *BLAST* and Vorticism, to create a distinctly British avant-garde movement even as he made fun of the continental avant-gardes and disdained British artistic coteries. His work points toward an anti-movement movement, a society of the anti-social. Where Tarr tries to exempt himself from life only to end up married, Anastasya



acknowledges her embeddedness in social forms while still giving them the slip. Levenson argues that “by the end of the novel the initial distinction between art and sexuality has dissolved and has been replaced by a coy distinction within sexuality itself: Bertha’s ‘bourgeois-bohemianism’ and Anastasya’s ‘swagger sex’” (141). But this analysis fails to see how “swagger sex” is not *only* sex, shorn from art; it is also a particular orientation toward narrative and social forms.

The key to Anastasya’s narrative power is her kinky play with language and genre, her ability not merely to negate, like Tarr, but to transmute: she can speak both in Bertha’s “queer sentimental dialect” and in Tarr’s cosmopolitan intellectualism, without confining herself to the narrative and social ideologies underlying them. Bertha’s dialect and nationality trap her; she lives out her preordained role as a mother “with a brooding severity” (284), the gloomy narrative closure that she craves. Tarr finds himself just as trapped by his own jargon. We never once get a description of a canvas that Tarr paints, for all his theorization. His attempts to negate his social ties by making them the object of abstract theory, the basis of a dead art, prove a trap as well: theory alone cannot abstract drives and social ties away while the theorizer still participates in a social scene. Instead, he wavers between bourgeois and bohemian sexual ties endlessly, never settling on a positive mode of life or program of aesthetics. However, Anastasya’s negativity—her method of ironically inhabiting genres of speech and narrative—has an immediate positive result in its embrace of “life,” which we could perhaps also call pleasure. Intellectual debate becomes roleplay; angry disagreement is foreplay; a debate about the lifelessness of art becomes the immediacy of a sexual attachment with no as-yet socially recognized name. Rather than narrative closure, Anastasya’s restless play with language and genre offers the tiny digression that recasts the rest of the narrative in a different register. In place of the negativity of abstraction, her “swagger sex” offers the constant dynamic transmutation of existing genres and social relations into pleasure.

The pleasures of restless resignification are the positive program, then, that I would counterpose to the angry reaction and rearguard defensiveness with which Puchner and Jameson identify Lewis’s later work. This restless resignification is constitutionally unstable and perhaps unsustainable. It has none of the stability and definitiveness of the manifesto, the nation-state, or the marriage plot. In place of narrative closure, it offers digression. In place of genre, it offers roleplay, subject at any moment to being recast in another register. In place of the nation-state and the artistic movement, it offers momentary sexual relation. Its program is not the universality of form but the present of pleasure. In this digression, then, there might be the glimmers of something that would transcend rearguard reaction. But in the subjugation of all institutions for social reproduction to roleplay and pleasure, this aesthetic program appears impossible to reproduce. This small digression into pleasure would later be subjected to satire itself and harden into a systematic negation of all aesthetic and social forms. One wonders, pointlessly but piquedly, where in the world Anastasya followed her kink desire and her artistic inclinations after she did not marry and had no children.

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