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IRVINE

Return To Normalcy:

Modernist Prose and the Quantification of Sexuality

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in English

by

Scott Streitfeld

Dissertation Committee:  
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## Abstract

Literary modernism's "queer" textual forms and erotic meanings were inextricable from the construction of "normal" sexuality as a statistical, racial, and gendered category in the early-twentieth century. However, scholarship on modernist sexualities has tended not to historicize the languages and practices of normality, and have likewise passed over an archive of quantitative and statistical sex research in the period prior to Alfred Kinsey's midcentury studies of sexual behavior. On the heels of Victorian sexology's expansive taxonomies of perversion, twentieth-century sex researchers set out to construct more rigorous mathematical models for recording, organizing, and measuring social and sexual data. Equally fascinated and troubled by the formal possibilities of enumerated and aggregated desires, novelists like Henry James, Gertrude Stein, Willa Cather, Ernest Hemingway, Djuna Barnes, Charles Henri Ford, and Parker Tyler crafted experimental prose forms that explore multiple, varied, and often competing models of normal/deviant binaries. These texts diverged from scientific idealizations of both numbers and prose as neutral languages that might embody and represent sexual normality at a mass level. At the same time, these authors express an intense interest in normalizing forms, presenting challenges to queer critics: what kinds of queer language can describe the emergence of "normal" sexuality as a statistical and social construct without recourse to the very category being constructed? The period covered by this study witnessed the emergence of "normal," "straight," and "hetero" sexualities—distinct but related discursive formations written through the aesthetics and erotics of numbers. While accounts of queer modernism tend to focus either on the queerness of form, or on the history of pathologized identities, this project argues that modernist texts also worked against the consolidation of a singular, totalizing ideal of transhistorical heteronormativity.

INTRODUCTION:

QUEER MODERNISM, QUANTIFIED SEXUALITIES, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF NORMALITY, 1886-

1948

*“She always says she dislikes the abnormal, it is so obvious. She says the normal is so much more simply complicated and interesting.”*

-Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933)<sup>1</sup>

*“prose : statement of facts concerning emotions, intellectual states, data of all sorts — technical expressions, jargon, of all sorts — fictional and other —”*

-William Carlos Williams, *Spring and All* (1918)<sup>2</sup>

A Vicious Tenth

The unfinished manuscript of Jennie June’s *The Riddle of the Underworld*, what would have been the third installment in a trilogy of memoirs, opens with a number. The book’s author, a female impersonator, tells us that she has “associated intimately” with those “who [...] belonged to the so-called ‘vicious tenth,’” a short-hand for identifying various criminals and sexual abnormalities.<sup>3</sup> Numbers like these appear throughout June’s work. For instance, she concludes her first book, *Autobiography of an Androgyne* (1918), with the hope that the volume “will

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<sup>1</sup> Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 83.

<sup>2</sup> William Carlos Williams, *Spring and All* (New York: Contact Publishing, 1923), 67

<sup>3</sup> See Earl Lind, “The Riddle of the Underworld.” *OutHistory.org*. OutHistory. October 11, 2010, <https://outhistory.org/exhibits/show/earl-lind>. June had many pseudonyms, and no name can be officially identified with her identity through the texts. To avoid confusion, all citations to materials by the person I call Jennie June are cited under the names listed on the individual works (that is, Earl Lind and Ralph Werther). It is not clear where the phrase “vicious tenth” originates, nor is it likely that this phrase was a common expression, but June’s usage suggests that the number had some origin.

contribute to a correct estimate of androgynism”—a term that June uses to describe a gender and sexual identity via then-current theories of homosexuality and sexual inversion.<sup>4</sup> Whether as a corollary or alternative to this demand for better numbers than a “vicious tenth,” it is perhaps not surprising that Alfred W. Herzog, physician and editor of the *Medico-Legal Journal*, where the memoirs were first published, appended a “questionnaire on homosexuality” to the book’s conclusion. Herzog prefaces the survey by noting that while “all cultured lands take from time to time censuses of the blind, the deaf, and other defective classes,” no equivalent “census of homosexuals” exists.<sup>5</sup> Herzog is incorrect here (Magnus Hirschfeld had conducted a survey of homosexuals in Germany in 1903-1904, which he published in 1914), but even in the context of June’s writing, any such “census” must be superfluous. June’s book is already full of estimates, numbers, and data, all delivered in a characteristically enumerative style: “In a class of fifty boys in a school, there was one passive invert. In another class of forty, there were two. In a club of thirty young men, there were two. In an office staff of fourteen, there were two.”<sup>6</sup> The list does indeed go on. In June’s catalogues of sexological data, rife with citations to writers like Havelock Ellis and Albert Moll, the numbers do not add up to any coherent, singular, or categorically specific knowledge about passive inverts, homosexuals, or “ultra-androgynes,” the category with which June herself identifies—indeed, the categorical differences at times seem to be determined by the numbers themselves. The rare “ultra-androgyne,” we are told

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<sup>4</sup> See Ralph Werther, *Autobiography of an Androgyne*, ed. Scott Herring (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 196.

<sup>5</sup> Werther, *Autobiography* 207. Other sexological guess-timates also inform June’s numbers. Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, for instance, claimed that what he calls urnings (a third sex between men and women), number one man in 200 (Ulrichs is summarized in Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis: A Medico-Forensic Study*. (New York: Rebman and Co, 1894), 351-352.

<sup>6</sup> Werther, *Autobiography* 40.

several times, in all three memoirs, is a definite population: “one adult possessor of male pudenda out of every three hundred is predominantly female psychically.”<sup>7</sup> It is through these numbers—perhaps almost exclusively--that June can be said to write of identity at all.

Numerical identities also become the basis for an ethics of sexual normality. There are many ways, June argues, in which, she can be called normal. “Penis is below the average size,” she tells us, “but entirely normal. Testicles were pronounced of normal appearance by the surgeon who castrated me at the age of twenty-eight.”<sup>8</sup> Here, normality emerges from the late-Victorian biometric apparatus in which racial and sexual others are measured and ranked through the scientific ordering of bodies and minds.<sup>9</sup> June writes at one point that while the bible prohibits “relations between man and man, both of whom are normal,” these “prohibitions do not apply” to her because she is “seven eighths woman, and only one eighth man.” A footnote appended to the published text adjusts this number slightly: “psychically I am practically all woman, and physically at least one third, although the organs of generation are completely male.”<sup>10</sup> It’s not entirely clear why June changes her mind about the numbers, but what matters is that the representations are numerical, and that it is through such numbers that sexuality attaches to populations, and to the representation of certain sexual identities as “normal.” Likewise, the idiomatic ease of the “vicious tenth” suggests that at some point in the years depicted in June’s

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<sup>7</sup> *Riddle* np; this same estimate appears at least once in the other two memoirs.

<sup>8</sup> June, *Autobiography* 24-25.

<sup>9</sup> For more on sexuality in the context of scientific racism and biometric thought during and after the rise of sexology, see Siobhan Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*. (Durham: Duke UP, 2000); Valery Rohy, *Anachronism and Its Others: Sexuality, Race, Temporality* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009); and Dana Seitler, *Atavistic Tendencies: The Culture of Science in American Modernity* (Durham: Duke UP, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> June, *Autobiography* 93. Not just identities, but sexual partners and acts too: June reports having “nearly 800 intimates in my lifetime,” and to have given fellatio over a thousand times before the age of seven (38).

works, which span from the 1890s to the late 1910s, this proportion, one in ten, attains the status of a known quantity, a category of “sexual delinquents” marked by antisociality and criminality, but also by minority status.

Both June and her editor imagine that these quantities can function as scientific evidence, but disagree about what kind of writing can represent that evidence. In his introduction, Herzog admits, for example, that he initially objected not just to the book’s content but to its prose, complaining that he “neither liked the style in which [*Autobiography*] was written, nor the manner in which, to me, unimportant details were given a great deal of space, nor the manner in which vital questions were entirely overlooked.”<sup>11</sup> Rather, he describes a fantasy in which June’s text might act like a filled-out questionnaire, a ready-made form for sexological data in which “unimportant details” are determined and excluded in advance. The concept of a stylistically empty form buttresses the epistemic neutrality accorded to these numbers in the conceptual equation of quantities and objective scientific knowledge. At the same time, June’s elaborate taxonomies and gradations of sexual and gendered types, what she calls *scalae sexuales*, subdivide and fracture the sexualities of populations, even as her numerical representations crystalize certain of these categories as “normal.” Enumerative styles and statistical representations run the gamut between multiple models of the normal, defined against vice, delinquency, and sexual and gender dissidence.<sup>12</sup> In June’s writing, and through her conceptual

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<sup>11</sup> See Herzog’s introduction to the *Autobiography* (14-15).

<sup>12</sup> The scholarship on June’s memoirs has tended to focus on relationships between gender identity and desire. Joanne Meyerowitz and Aaron Shaheen have productively traced the relationship between sex, infantilism, and Victorian gender norms. While these accounts have rigorously historicized the Victorian basis of June’s gendered desires in the memoirs, they have not discussed the retroactivity of June’s sexual statistics in her narration of this period. Christopher Looby’s reading of *Autobiography* is helpful here, as he argues that June’s memoirs insist on the Kantian qualities of the aesthetic distance that marks sexuality. My account expands on Looby’s understanding of sexuality and aesthetics to include forms normally understood as scientific. Or rather, I argue that June’s aping of scientific styles is not opposed to, but coextensive with this aesthetic project. See Meyerowitz, Joanne. “Thinking Sex with an Androgyne.” *GLQ* 17, no. 1 (2010): 99-105; Shaheen, Aaron. “Strolling through the Slums of the Past:

imaginaries of populations, she adopts a characteristically modernist stance toward sexual norms. That is, her writing imagines the normal as a defined category, yet also one whose internal logic is contingent on the written forms that could represent it. This historically specific obsession with numerical form, I argue, becomes a site for experimentation with the structure and meanings of sexual identities in the twentieth century; or, in other words, modernism.

### Historicizing Normalcy

“Return to Normalcy” describes a period of literary history defined by reactions to a perceived crisis of normality, a crisis which is in fact defined by the invention of normal/deviant binaries as such. To imagine a return to normalcy is to imagine a narrative frame in which normal sexuality can be grafted onto the past as a naturalized category. Likewise, the language of going back to normal signaled a kind of normal language, a set of spoken and written styles that rewrite normal desires as invisible and transhistorical. In contrast to the desire for a transhistorical norm, this study examines “normal” sexualities and prose styles as historically particular constructions of the early-twentieth century, a period in which the formal experiments of literary modernism underwrite constructions of sexuality as regular, directed, and increasingly subject to the logic of large numbers. I trace the normalization of sexuality and language in the thematic and stylistic experiments of modernist prose texts, including works by Henry James, Willa Cather, Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes, and the collaborative work of Charles Henri Ford

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Ralph Werther's Love Affair with Victorian Womanhood in ‘Autobiography of an Androgyne.’” *PMLA* 128, no. 4, (October 2010): 923-937; and Looby, Christopher. “Sexuality’s Aesthetic Dimension: Kant and the *Autobiography of an Androgyne*.” *American Literature’s Aesthetic Dimensions*. ed. Cindy Weinstein and Christopher Looby. (New York: Columbia UP 2012), 156-177.

and Parker Tyler. Prose writing, for these authors, served as both a form and figurative language for continually rewriting the field of sexuality through quantitative and statistical visions of erotic desire. I read these works alongside social-scientific writing on statistical sexualities from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, tracing how these texts experiment with the aesthetic, epistemic, and erotic use of quantifying and normalizing forms. In these works, sexual norms often appear both fragile and newly flexible. In 1920, when then U.S. Presidential candidate Warren G. Harding gave his oft-garbled campaign speeches on postwar “readjustment,” his platform, that Americans did not want “nostrums but normalcy,” seemed to offer all at once both an apparent neologism and a pleasant rediscovery of old, reusable language. “Normalcy” was not a new word, but it was often used by, and attributed to Harding, whose awkward style drew reactions ranging from tepid acceptance to outright parody.<sup>13</sup> But perhaps more important than the pseudo-novelty of “normalcy” is the nostalgia that his style claimed to embody, in its search for a measurable normative standard of sexual meaning against which the recent history of armed conflict, mass pandemic, and economic crisis could be narrated as mere interruptions. In this period, the rhetoric and stylistics of normalcy became a whole narrative apparatus for reading history as one long, persistent (and implicitly heterosexual) norm subject to manageable abeyance.

The mapping of statistical and normative sexual ideals onto *heterosexuality* in particular was not historically given fact, but a contested ground of scientific and mass-cultural negotiation. “Heteronormativity” in this period does not signify a single, permanent, stable sexual identity.

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<sup>13</sup> In Frederick Lewis Allen’s, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1931), we are told that Harding “unwittingly added a new word to the language,” but the word had been around for much longer (36). Likewise, Allen also points out that Harding was oft-parodied for his “clogged style” and “maladroit language” (109). See also Harding’s speech, “Readjustment,” The Miller Center, May 14, 1920, Home Market Club of Boston. [millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/may-14-1920-readjustment](http://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/may-14-1920-readjustment)

However, scholarship on queer modernism has also tended to abstract these ideals from the historical contexts that have produced our contemporary norming genres. Particularly after the First World War, a kind of haphazard heteronormativity emerged out of a genealogy of quantitative research on sexuality and “average” middle-class life, continually shifting ground of sexual definition under the near-constant threat of crisis, suspension or dissolution. The binarism, now familiar in queer studies, between normal and deviant sexualities—in which certain sexual forms are understood to run athwart the heteronormativity that undergirds signifying systems—functioned less as a static opposition and more as a set of competing ideals for imagining the possibility of consistent and regulable sexual identities as such. The construction of normalcy as a state that can be suspended and returned to involved new forms of population thinking; or in other words, biopower.<sup>14</sup> Sex statistics were situated in a discursive space in which “normal” relations between bodies and desires became problems of statecraft, of the management of desire in aggregate, and through a signifying relation between “normality” (measured through frequency, sexual periodicity, body measurement, or other means) and the preservation and continuation of national life and health.

The archive of sex research considered here at times includes, but is not limited to, the fields of sexology and psychoanalysis, on which much has already been written in this period.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> According to Foucault, biopower is distinct from discipline insofar as the latter operates on the individual body, while the former operates at the level of populations. See Foucault, *“Society Must Be Defended”: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-76*, (New York: Picador, 2003), 246.

<sup>15</sup> For example, Joseph Boone, in *Libidinal Currents: Sexuality and the Shaping of Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), reads key modernist texts in relation to Freud’s theories of sexualities, and also identifies key modernist texts that, despite their distance from the contemporary meaning and politics of “queer,” nonetheless “foreshadow” the later anti-assimilationist currents of nineties queer theory (205, 207). Michael Trask’s *Cruising Modernism: Class and Sexuality in American Literature and Social Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003) engages in key readings of sexological texts through the lens of modern social thought, showing how sexual meanings metaphorized new forms of classed mobility. Most recently, Benjamin Kahan’s *The Book of Minor Perverts: Sexology, Etiology, and the Emergences of Sexuality* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2019) conducts a close study of the problem of etiology in the early-twentieth century’s sexological archive.



Rather, it aims to expand the site of modernist sexualities to include statistical sex research and quantitative social science, primarily in the U.S. context. Critical accounts of modernist literature, until recently, have typically focused on case histories, while ignoring other genres, like questionnaires, psychometric tests, and sex education materials. Of course, for the purposes of historicism, there is no reason, *a priori*, to think of psychoanalysis and statistics as purely opposed discourses that must be kept separate by “qualitative” and “quantitative” barriers. Indeed, many sex researchers borrowed psychoanalytic concepts, often in slapdash fashion, to explain their findings. However, in this study, I diverge from the archive of writing about desire as an individual, private and subjective phenomenon. Instead, I read literary objects for their attempts to write desire in aggregate, often through numerical forms that represent bodies and sexuality—most notably, heterosexuality—without an individual subject. “Desire,” in this context, gets inscribed onto, and refracted by, masses of data.<sup>16</sup>

In queer studies, particularly in the context of queer theory, the terms “normativity” and “heteronormativity,” while not exactly interchangeable, generally refer to the cohering of normal sexualities as epistemic ideals and institutional forms that can masquerade as invisible, natural, and objective.<sup>17</sup> Yet more recently, as historians of sexuality and scholars of modernism, have

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<sup>16</sup> This observation is influenced broadly by recent work in critical data studies from scholars like Lisa Gitelman, Mary Poovey, and Bonnie Ruberg. While I note Ruberg’s and Spencer Ruelos’s recent caution that “dominant standards of understanding and collecting demographic data—such as in research surveys or government censuses—are insufficient for accounting for the complexities of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ, or broadly ‘queer’) lives” (2), I also want to think about how data might also generate spaces in which queer desires operate. As Gitelman and Virginia Jackson point out, “the history of objectivity turns out to be inescapably the history of subjectivity, of the self, and something of the same thing must hold for the concept of data.” In this regard, I also follow Poovey’s claim that a critical account of sexual surveying also requires an account of the history of “knowledge” itself. See Lisa Gitelman and Virginia Jackson, “Introduction,” in *“Raw Data” Is An Oxymoron* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013); and Bonnie Ruberg and Spencer Ruelos, “Data for Queer Lives: How LGBTQ Gender and Sexuality Identities Challenge Norms of Demographics,” *Big Data & Society*, 2020, 1–12; and Poovey, “Sex in America.” *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2, (Winter 1998): 369.

<sup>17</sup> For a foundational definition of heteronormativity, see Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, “Sex In Public.” *Critical Inquiry*. 24, no. 2, Winter 1998, 547-566.

shown, this set of standardized sexual types, along with ideals of “normal” bodies and acts, was historically tied to racialization, gender, class, and ability. Work in normality studies and critical whiteness and heterosexuality studies has been crucial to this set of observations.<sup>18</sup> These scholars have generally dated the emergence of normalized heterosexuality—that is, not as a means to enforce marriage or reproduction but of regularized heterosexual acts and desires as such—at some point between the First World War and Stonewall. Prior to that, the word “heterosexuality” was a word used to describe a perversion, one marked by an excessive sexual drive toward the “opposite” sex.<sup>19</sup> The massification of heteronormative social performances was accomplished in part through the massification of numbers. Statistics had already entered into official use, by the late nineteenth century, to count, measure, and list the bodies of non-whites, immigrants, and gender and sexual nonconformists. But in the twentieth century, as sex researchers continued to turn their gaze toward “normal” sexuality (which was implicitly though not pathologically heterosexual), statistical ideals of normality increasingly came to signify white, able-bodied, non-working-class identities. In this period, the complex of discourses we now associate with heteronormativity signaled not only a totalizing stability and persistence, but also forms of necessary interruption and suspension.

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Jonathan Ned Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Mary Louise Adams, *The Trouble With Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1998); Julian B. Carter, *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1880-1940*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); and Jane Ward, *The Tragedy of Heterosexuality* (New York: New York University Press, 2020). For more on the emergence of male heterosexuality amid anxieties over masculinity and the middle-class at the turn of the century, see George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994): 111-127; For a statistical account of opposite-sex behavior in the history of sexuality in England, see also Hera Cook, “Demography,” in *Palgrave Advances in the Modern History of Sexuality* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2006), 17-40. Cook’s methods differ from my own, in that I aim to historicize, rather than practice statistical methods, but in one core respect, we both share the conclusion that statistics reveal “major shifts around the turn of the twentieth century in the discursive construction of same-and opposite-sex sexualities” (27).

<sup>19</sup> See Adams, *Trouble*, 8.

Tracing these discourses requires a recognition of a queer-critical desire for the normal to always be, and have always been normal, that is, for a certain transhistorical logic of heterosexual normalization. Instead, I attend to the construction of normality as it underwrites certain modernist prose experiments. Doing so also invites a reconsideration of literary modernism as a formal and historical category. Accounts of modernism typically define their object in two conflicting but overlapping ways: either the term denotes a specific period, often in the early-twentieth century, even more often during the interwar period, in which any number of genres, forms, and media from this window can be called “modern” or “modernist” because bound to a shared set of historical and/or geographic boundaries; or, alternatively, the term describes formal features found among texts not necessarily bound to any one period of space or time, but by canons, shared literary projects, or a certain purchase on language or art.<sup>20</sup> As feminist and queer studies of modernism have shown, these more rigid rubrics, until recently, tended to exclude “peripheral” figures, often women, people of color, and non-heterosexuals, from the modernist “center.” This work argues that authors whose writing does not fall within the discursive frame of traditional “male” modernism, both traditional period boundaries and formal designations. Yet, to the extent that modernism is a designation already preoccupied with these disturbances, one might ask, as Heather Love has, whether queer modernism is simply

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<sup>20</sup> For accounts of debates over the meaning of modernism as a concept, and formal versus period definitions, see Astradur Eysteinnsson, *The Concept of Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); and Sean Latham and Gayle Rogers, *Modernism: Evolution of an Idea* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015). For a historically expansive but formally restrictive account of modernism, see Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 1995). For an account focusing on a range of objects in a more restricted timeframe, see Michael North, *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). In the wake of the New Modernist Studies, a secondary distinction between so-called High Modernism (capital M) and other peripheral modernisms, has shaken many of the binary oppositions on which these debates rest. It is worth noting that while these thinkers do not wholly agree on the relation between form and historical periodization, the vast majority tend to localize modernism, in some way, to the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In other words, the dividedness of the history-versus-form debates, in modernist studies, may be somewhat overstated, even as these conversations highlight questions about the scale of literary periodizations as such.

“another name for modernism,” which is also to ask, at least partly, whether it reproduces the same formal and period boundaries.<sup>21</sup> In this work, the very status of formal experimentation has come to be aligned with the disruptive potentials of queer sexualities. In one introduction to the field, Celia Marshik and Allison Pease summarize this trend, noting that scholars of queer modernism “have come to align the disruptive elements of modernist literary practices with the disruptive work of queer theory.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, when we talk about certain modernist prose texts as “queer,” we often imagine sentences that deviate from some kind of norm, or which undermine standardized sexual identities and their demographic representations. By linking queerness, in a broad sense, with modernist formal aesthetics of shock and transgression, however, these accounts raise questions about what normal forms look like within various formal or period boundaries.

Collecting a number of texts with diverse aesthetic projects under the rubric of “modernism,” I periodize sexual and statistical norms as historically specific and intertwined social practices and languages that project sexual categories onto written forms. The prose texts here which are called “modernist” are in no way wholly aligned with a singular normal/deviant binary, nor indeed with one another’s aesthetic and political aims. Rather, I group them because their work engages with the erotic potentials not only of formal and sexual transgression, but also

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<sup>21</sup> See Heather K. Love, “Introduction: Modernism At Night.” *Queer Modernism*, special issue of *PMLA* 124, no. 3 (2009): 744-748. The scholarship on this subject is vast. A brief glance at some introductory surveys of modernism and sexuality highlights this trend of describing modernist queerness as necessarily deviant, transgressive, or anti-identitarian. Or, as Hugh Stevens puts it, in his Introduction to *Modernist Sexualities* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), “modernism is not involved in straightforward assertions of stable identities” but in theorizing sexuality as a broader field of inquiry (9). The linkages between the anti-normativity and anti-identitarianism of late-nineties queer theory informs many of these accounts. See also Daniela Caselli, “Sexual and Textual Experimentalism in the Interwar Years,” in *The Cambridge Companion to American Gay and Lesbian Literature*, ed. Scott Herring (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 103-121. For a critique of the emphasis of queer modernism on medical and scientific discourses, see Robert L. Caserio, “Queer Modernism,” *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms*. Ed. Peter Brooker et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> See Marshik and Pease, *Modernism, Sex, and Gender*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 80.

of defining and redefining oneself in relation to the normal. In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Sedgwick argues that the critical preoccupation with periodizing the homo/hetero binary, what she calls the “search for a great paradigm shift,” may in fact occlude the contradictions that structure sexuality in the present moment.<sup>23</sup> As that present moment appears increasingly driven the normalization of crisis itself, I want to suggest that tracing the history of quantified sexualities may illuminate, rather than obscure, contemporary conditions of sexual definition. The uneven periodization of modernism as a literary category also corresponds, in more ways than might be expected, to the uneven periodicity of the normal.

Two rough, overlapping periodizations circumscribe the emergence of this category. The history of statistics and quantitative sociology can provide a rough framing narrative, beginning with Quetelet’s “social physics” and Galton’s laws of deviation, and concluding at some point in the 1930s, when the techniques of stratified sampling and inferential statistics were more or less standardized.<sup>24</sup> The concept of “normal sexuality” itself, however, involves a kind of historical lag. Stable divisions between normal and pathological sexualities did not simply arrive, fully formed, at the advent of sexology in the 1860s. In her account of gender deviancy during the

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<sup>23</sup> See Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*. (Berkeley: University of California Press), 44.

<sup>24</sup> Ian Hacking, in *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), notes that the concept of the normal begins with pathology, insofar as “most of the law-like regularities were first perceived in connection with deviancy” (2-3). I follow the lead of other historians who have framed statistics in relation to biopower, politics, and knowledge. Other similar periodizations for these statistical forms can be found, for instance, in Theodore Porter’s internalist account, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). In other words, taxonomies buttressed the biopolitical architecture of statistical formalisms. Alain Desrosieres (*The Politics of Large Numbers: A History of Statistical Reasoning*. Trans. Camille Nash. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998)) summarizes that, after the turn of the century, the emergence of social categories depended on different, competing conceptions of how those categories related individuals to social wholes: “A singular case could be reduced either to a discrete category (that is, uniform within it, but discontinuous in relation to others, the ensemble not necessarily being ordered), or to a position on a continuous scale (or possibly several scales)” (260). The question of what spaces norms would operate in is crucial to twentieth-century conceptions of sexual identity, which was assumed to have its own internal normative logic—the point is that these logics were in no way singular.

First World War, Laura Doan observes that that the very idea of “normal” sexuality “starts to gather momentum in British and American public discourse only in about the 1930s or, at the very earliest, the late 1920s.”<sup>25</sup> While the normal took a back seat in the pathologizing gaze of mid-nineteenth-century sexology, it was eventually embroiled in statistical debates that surrounded early-twentieth-century obsessions with data-gathering. These debates would culminate in the wake of the Kinsey reports on human sexuality in 1948-1952, texts that became unlikely bestsellers.<sup>26</sup> Doan argues forcefully that “putting a slippery and elastic queer against a coherent, all-powerful normal makes it difficult for queer scholars to provide explanations for students who ask [...] what normal was called before it was invented.”<sup>27</sup> Taking Doan’s provocation seriously, I trace the way models of normality continually failed to live up to this coherentist standard, instead generating a plurality of written styles and mass representations. In other words, just as Gertrude Stein tells us, in *The Making of Americans*, that “it takes time to make queer people,” my periodization recognizes that took time to make sexuality normal.

My periodization of “quantified sexualities” in literary texts extends from the publication of Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* in German in 1886, and extends to the introduction of statistical sampling methods in the late-1930s, discourses that were central to late-modernist novels in that decade, and to the work of Kinsey and others in the following one. The Kinsey

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<sup>25</sup> See Doan, *Disturbing Practices: History, Sexuality, and Women’s Experience of Modern War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 170.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Warner (*The Trouble With Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999)) has argued, for example, that “one reason why you won’t find many eloquent quotations about the de-sire to be normal in Shakespeare, or the Bible, or other common sources of moral wisdom, is that people didn’t sweat much over being normal until the spread of statistics in the nineteenth century” (53). This is surely correct in the sense that it explains the discursive basis of a descriptive mode, but it does not account for the way the descriptive or statistical ideal of the normal became forceful much later, in the twentieth century. In other words, a taxonomic ideal of pathological sexuality might be said to have preceded the statistical construction of normal sexuality.

<sup>27</sup> Doan 190.

reports, which mark a discursive endpoint for the study, were coextensive with a midcentury model of homo/hetero difference that was not based in theories of gender inversion. But Kinsey's work was also novel for the way that the theory of sexual variations determined the very methods of the study. For Kinsey, because the aim was to deal with all "the possibilities of behavior" and "variant techniques," it followed that "a scientist studying sex should be able to accept any type of sexual behavior objectively, listen to the record without adverse reaction, and record without social or moral evaluation."<sup>28</sup> If Kinsey's language of "variations" sounds familiar, it is partly because the concept of sexual variance had already, by the 1930s, come into scientific usage to describe both normal and abnormal sexuality.<sup>29</sup> While criminologists were becoming increasingly preoccupied with the figure of the "pervert," the scientific meanings ascribed to "perversion" or "perversity" had become passé by the mid-twentieth century.

By the end of the Second World War, even Ernest Hemingway would agree. In his posthumously published, unfinished novel, *The Garden of Eden* (1986), written in the mid-1940s, the protagonist, David Bourne, tells his wife Catherine—who anally penetrates him, cuts her hair short, has an affair with another woman—that "perversion's dull and old fashioned. I didn't know people like us even kept up on it."<sup>30</sup> In the unexpurgated manuscript, as Hemingway scholar Debra Modellmog points out, the novel goes even further. Marita, the woman for whom David leaves Catherine, tells David not to see their experimentation of "perversion" but simply,

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<sup>28</sup> Kinsey, Alfred, Pomeroy, Wardel, and Martin, Clyde. *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders and Co 1948), 48

<sup>29</sup> See Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press 1999). Terry points out that, by the late 1920s, "an emphasis on statistical variation signaled a new model for thinking about difference based on empirical observations and statistical calculations rather than on a notion of fixed and mutually exclusive changes" (156). For a detailed account of Kinsey's sampling methods and later critiques of those methods, see in particular Chapter 9.

<sup>30</sup> See Hemingway, *The Garden of Eden* (New York: Scribner, 1986), 120.

“infinite variety.”<sup>31</sup> Variety normalizes, not as return but as continuation. The values associated with the straightforward and uncomplicated qualities of prose were likewise central for Hemingway. But even prior to this late stage in his career, one is driven to ask: through what historical complex of sexual meanings can Hemingway’s prose be called “straight?” The straightness of Hemingway’s prose, in the double sense of being both syntactically directed and redolent of its author’s avowed heterosexuality, became a figurative language in which linguistic styles, sexual identities, and idealizations of normative directedness come into alignment. To imagine style as capable of performing such functions is to imagine sexuality as bound to forms of regulable directedness. But by the mid-century, this turn invites another: our previous estimates are always wrong. Deviations turn out to be normal.<sup>32</sup> By the time the of the Kinsey debates, the quantification of sexuality attained the status of a coherent normative framework which could serve a number of assimilationist or liberationist ends. While anti-normative queer studies has revealed intimate connections between particular heterosexual norms and the broader concept of normativity in intellectual history, it has also tended to obscure the history of

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<sup>31</sup> See Modellmog, ““Who’s Normal, What’s Normal?”: Teaching *The Garden of Eden* Through the Lens of Normality Studies.” *The Hemingway Review* 30, no. 1 (2010): 148. In Chapter 3, I read this framework as applicable not just to *The Garden of Eden* but to a variety of texts in Hemingway’s career, including his early narratives of the First World War.

<sup>32</sup> This commonplace involves a category error, but a historically productive one. As Georges Canguilhem argues in *The Normal and the Pathological*. (New York: Zone Books, 1989), an ethical ideal is not the same as a statistical description, and “normal” as a statistical description does not always equate to “normative” in the technical vocabulary of philosophy, but rather depends on a normative construction (77). Nonetheless, I want to insist on the fungibility of these distinct meanings, insisting that discourses of normality can be slippery, shuttling between multiple discursive frames, often at once. In the version of this concept inherited by Foucault, the more important process is not the definition of the normal versus the normative but the processes of “normalization” and standardization carried out through the twinned prongs of discipline and biopower. Likewise, Michael Warner is getting at much the same distinction when he distinguishes between what he calls “statistical” and “evaluative norms” (56). But for Canguilhem, the point is that there can never be a pure descriptive norm in the absence of a normative ethical frame.



alignments, discursive and aesthetic, between descriptive statistical representations and normative prescriptive ideals.<sup>33</sup>

The example of Hemingway shows the way in which historiographic desires for historical sequence and generationality—what Doan calls “ancestral genealogy”—buttress the coherence of the “normal” as a historically contingent sexual category. In his recent account of the relationship between sexuality and the *longue durée* of capitalism and the state, Christopher Chitty suggests that this logic of normalization is bound up with the historicity of crisis. He points to our current late-capitalist crisis of norms, arguing that “the projection of the normal into an ever more nebulous and free-floating vision of ‘normativity’ and the expanded currency of the concepts of the ‘queer’ and the ‘closet’ are themselves antinomies produced by a collapsing hegemony of the normal.”<sup>34</sup> Chitty likewise rejects the Foucauldian narrative that attributes the origins of homosexual identity to sexual science in the nineteenth century, pointing out that this narrative ignores working-class sexualities. By anchoring my study to sex research, my aim is not to reproduce the totalizing narrative of the scientific construction of bourgeois sexuality. Rather, I argue, it is precisely the delayed normalization of scientific knowledge that conjures historiographic problem of normality’s historicity, a problem that confronts the queer critic with renewed force when defining what “queer” means in the moment of normalcy’s rise to

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<sup>33</sup> While, as Canguilhem points out, there can never be any pure differentiation between a descriptive taxonomy and a normative ideal, I adopt a distinction between “normal” and “normative” for convenience and precision. In this project, “normative” generally refers to either socio-ethical ideality or non-pathologized status that gets accorded to particular sexual and social forms, and is related but necessarily reducible to or even equivalent with terms like “typical,” “average,” and “normal,” which are descriptive, yet nonetheless underwritten by a normative frame. “Normativity” will usually refer to the epistemologies that align descriptive and prescriptive systems, while “normalcy” (which I use interchangeably with “normality” as used by Adams and Carter) indicates various pre-defined states aligned with regularity, statistical prevalence, and the quotidian. Finally, I use “norm” to refer to specific practices and discourses that frame sexuality as either statistically frequent or demographically (and by extension, ontologically) categorized.

<sup>34</sup> See Chitty, *Sexual Hegemony: Statecraft, Sodomy, and Capital in the Rise of the World System*. (Durham: Duke UP, 2020) 188, 176.

prominence. As Chitty points out, discussing critical accounts of the late-capitalist crisis of normalized trauma, “the demand for a return to normalcy or the preservation of the present order seem like radical strategies amid widespread structural socioeconomic fallout,” even when they are not.<sup>35</sup> But my choice to reexamine the historicity of norms does not seek to reinstall or preserve normality as a political good, but to rethink the historicity of heteronormativity’s totalizing status as an organizing framework for power. In other words, I trace the political valences of the aesthetics of norms in the work of modernist writers who are each known, in various ways, for textual and sexual queerness because, to the extent that their works can be, and has been, described as “queer,” they also engage with these crisis-bound problematics of normality far more than has generally been recognized. Their work underscores the instability and flexibility of normal/deviant binaries in this period was intimately bound up with anxieties over race, nation, and the state’s management of human masses in a post-crisis moment.

### The Normal and the Prosaic

In the context of early-twentieth century ideals of normalization, prose forms served as languages that performed virtues of epistemic and sexual neutrality. The need for language that could describe sexuality as normal, written from a normal subject-position, would turn out to be of central importance to both literature and sexual science. This dissertation argues that the statistical construction of sexual norms was not a separate phenomenon from, but rather intertwined with, a massive widening of normative meanings attributed to prose forms. For scientists and educators, standardized house styles could serve as signs for “normal” writing that

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<sup>35</sup> Chitty, *Sexual Hegemony* 178.

could represent and describe sexuality in neutral or even scientifically “objective” terms. For advertisers and journalists, the prosaic affordances of good copy could maintain economic health. Yet prose forms would also mark a space in which written forms just as often obstructed the task of standardization. June, in her memoirs, often imitates the styles of both case studies and statistical reports, rewritten through the argot of New York’s sexual underworld. She does not demand that her writing stand in for something like everyday speech or ordinary language, but instead uses numbers to create a queer authority about sexual norms. Still, the problem of “normality” as both a descriptive category and normative virtue, undergirds the very question of what forms could represent it as such. In *Writing Degree Zero*, Roland Barthes offers an image of this problem as it applies to the problem of written style:

A language and a style are data prior to all problematics of language, they are the natural product of Time and of the person as a biological entity; but the formal identity of the writer is truly established only outside the permanence of grammatical norms and stylistic constants, where the written continuum, first collected and enclosed within a perfectly innocent linguistic nature, at last becomes a total sign, the choice of a human attitude, the affirmation of a certain good.<sup>36</sup>

Style is a “constant,” a vertical line whose intercept is the “horizon” of linguistic rules and norms. These two lines, individual style and syntactical patterns of usage, circumscribe the space in which the “formal identity of the writer” emerges. Barthes suggests that this formal identity, what we might call a stylistic impressionism, is also tied to some set of norms that are equally difficult to pin down. Work on style in queer theory and sexuality studies, from scholars such as Scott St. Pierre and Kevin Ohi, has shown that these norms are often naturalized at the expense of their historicity within the field of sexuality.<sup>37</sup> The idea of a stylistic norm is bound up within

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<sup>36</sup> See Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 13-14.

<sup>37</sup> I discuss work from these scholars in detail in Chapters 1 and 3.

the history of sexuality, as it also carries its own normativity, a set of discourses that inflect standards of syntactical and lexical usage through ideals of erotic meaning.

Rather than attempt to provide an all-encompassing view of prose formalism in the twentieth century, I want to pull on certain threads of formalist discourse that align prose with normality, automaticity, and abstraction. Modernist experimentation with prose form often involved, paradoxically, a critical tightening of formal definitions and boundaries, often between prose and poetry, or prose and verse, even when the criteria of those boundaries were not entirely clear. One of T.S. Eliot's early essays, "The Borderline of Prose" (1918), polices these formal boundaries by directing critical flack at late-Victorian prose poetry. Eliot asks, "do the present signs show that poetry and prose form a medium of infinite gradations, or is it that we are searching for new ways of expression?"<sup>38</sup> The limitation of prose becomes a scale by which to measure shifting formal definitions and to regulate and stabilize boundaries. Like Eliot, Edmund Wilson writes about prose as an expanding linguistic norm tied to regulatory schemes. Verse forms, he argues in his 1934 essay, "Is Verse a Dying Technique?" changed functions in the nineteenth century, becoming a form suited only to short works, while prose, the more recent form, becomes the preferred technique for "longer" works.<sup>39</sup> Both prose and verse, for Wilson, are "simply two different techniques of literary expression," techniques that are secondary to the broader social functions performed by *kinds of language*. But he also essentially reduces these "techniques" to print formats: "verse is written in lines with a certain number of metrical feet each; prose is written in paragraphs and has what we call rhythm."<sup>40</sup> While neither of these

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<sup>38</sup> T.S. Eliot, "The Borderline of Prose." *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot*. Vol 1, 5 vols. ed. Jewel Spears Brooker and Ronald Schuchard. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 538

<sup>39</sup> Edmund Wilson, "Is Verse a Dying Technique?" *Literary Essays and Reviews of the 1930s and 1940s* (New York: Library of America, 2007), 19.

<sup>40</sup> Wilson, "Is Verse" 19.

essays define the explicit social uses of prose, they both point to a form of writing distinguished by its ease of use, lack of regularized rhythms, vernacular commonality, and adaptability to any number of standardized uses. Prose, in this context, is a catch-all term for both normality and standardized mass-cultural forms. While Wilson sees the blurring of formal boundaries as the opportunity for “new mediums,” Eliot ultimately concludes that “both verse and prose still conceal unexplored possibilities, but whatever one writes must be definitely and by inner necessity either one or the other.”

These reflections on the tendril-like growth of prose, Eliot’s objections notwithstanding, are by no means representative of some general modernist distrust of prose forms. Yet they also exemplify one prevalent discourse in which the expansion of prose came to signify the internal logic normalization itself.<sup>41</sup> For Eliot, these boundaries appear less essentialized than performative. This language mirrors what Ben Hutchinson, in his book on modernist styles, describes as an epidemiological motif in modernist writers’ discourse on prose (Virginia Woolf, for example, recorded in a 1928 diary entry, that her prose experiments seemed like a “disease” that infected her work). Prose was a form whose viral capability lay in its totalizing spread as standardized, automated language whose widespread circulation signified not just normality but a potentially pathological overgrowth of stylistic excess. To use Peter Nicholls’ language, the aesthetic emptying out of language into “pure style” threatened to lapse into “mere style,” an empty shuffling around of different pre-determined mass-cultural forms.<sup>42</sup> The normalization of

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<sup>41</sup> As I show in Chapter 5, The erotic potentialities of what Eliot called the “infinite gradations” of forms were also readily adaptable to discourses of homosexuality.

<sup>42</sup> The concept of style was, like the concept of the normal itself, both vague and flexible. Ezra Pound, for example, distinguished between the “armour” of pure style and what he called mere “verbalism,” though this latter term came in two varieties: “bad verbalism is rhetoric, or the use of cliché unconsciously, or a mere playing with phrases. But there is a good verbalism, distinct from lyricism or imagism, and in this Laforgue is a master.” Nicholls suggests that a distrust of “modernity’s aestheticization of life called for an antagonistic art which would save history from being dissolved into mere style.” See *Peter Nicholls, Modernisms* 216.

prose was thus aligned with anxieties over gender and mass culture, a version of what Andreas Huyssen has called modernism's "anxiety of contamination."

Queer modernism has inherited concepts of deviant language from a formalist tradition that constructed prose as a form bound to the logic of norms. Victor Shklovsky's theory of prose, for example, has been influential in characterizing modernist texts' turn toward the automatic and abstract characteristics of language. In Shklovsky's now well-known account, prose, as everyday language, serves the needs of efficiency and automaticity. Borrowing from Herbert Spencer, he describes an "economy of perceptual effort" that takes place, whereby "objects are represented either by one single characteristic (for example, by number), or else by a formula that never even rises to the level of consciousness."<sup>43</sup> By contrast, so-called literary language defamiliarizes phenomena by vitiating quasi-mathematical reductions of standardized prose—or, in the famous phrase, literary language "makes the stone feel stony." Formalist theories of prose after Shklovsky have tended to understand the erotics of prose forms in terms of the literary value of deviation or abnormality. Queer-modernist accounts of what Shklovsky calls defamiliarization, or estrangement, have reinforced his own somewhat Manichean divide between automated, numerical language and estranging or deviant literary language.<sup>44</sup> In her account of modernism and perversion, for example, Anna Katherina Schaffner, following

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<sup>43</sup> Shklovsky, "Art as Device." *Theory of Prose*. Trans Benjamin Sher (Elmwood Park: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), 5.

<sup>44</sup> An exemplary work is Colleen Lamos's *Deviant Modernism: Sexual and Textual Errancy in T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Marcel Proust*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). According to Lamos, The critical apparatus of T.S. Eliot, for example, tended to frame poetic "errors," such as the inversion of sense and sound, in terms that recall pathologizing constructions of sexual inversion (44). However, Lamos does not discuss the statistical implications of the relationship between error (as deviation) and sexual deviance, even though this relationship is implied in many places. Lamos is more interested in error in the evaluative sense of straying or wandering. However, my work approaches a wider playing field in which (for example) deviation might be understood as prior to the construction of normativity.

Shklovsky, stresses the analogy between perverse sexuality and “deviation from normal language.” Schaffner aptly argues that modernist formal deviation involves “turnings of sense and perversions of the ‘natural’ flow of literary images and their ‘original’ functions and meanings” that happen “not only at the level of content but also at the levels of style and structure.”<sup>45</sup> However, as I have been arguing, these discourses also insist that what marks language as abnormal might also depend on historically specific relations between normative forms and sexual meanings. Queer modernist formalisms highlight the vexed status of prose as a disorganized assemblage of non-literary, functional, and quantitative languages: what William Carlos Williams, in *Spring and All*, dismissed as “statement of facts concerning emotions, intellectual states, data of all sorts — technical expressions, jargon, of all sorts.” But it is precisely through these heterogeneous qualities that prose comes to be aligned with the formal qualities of norms. Prose might shock, transgress, and perform a virtuous antinormativity, but it also attaches sexualities to everyday languages.

Accounts like Wilson’s and Eliot’s, in narrating the historical spread of prose in terms of expanding limits and boundaries, analogize formal regularities and standardized styles with social norms. Quantitative sex research serves as another space in which “prose” signifies a specialized language for shuttling between the normative and the erotic. This is not to say that these discourses might not also be understood historically in relation to verse forms—rather, it is to emphasize the way in which prose was imagined as a language unsuited to the erotic. It wasn’t simply that all writing which could be called prose was necessarily thought of as plain or straightforward or unsuited to aberrant, vicious pleasures. Certain styles of medical writing did

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<sup>45</sup> Schaffner, *Modernism and Perversion: Sexual Deviance in Sexology and Literature*. (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2011), 27-28.

indeed typify what Carter calls “frank reticence,” a style and vocabulary used in sex education and social hygiene writing, whose purpose was to present “facts” about sexuality as simultaneously objective and invisible, that is, by couching it in language intended to be boring and unerotic, so as to inform without arousing pleasure.<sup>46</sup> But prose, as the language of the automatic, in Shklovsky’s terms, also had epistemic virtues. As a sign for automatic language, prose could divest the erotic from its attachment to gendered subject positions. The utility of this figurative association made prose suitable not just for performing norms but for representing sexuality as an object divorced from the raced and gendered meanings that entangle it, framing it instead through ideals of heterosexual romantic love, even as those ideals were increasingly defined by white, middle class subject positions. To say that prose and quantities often performed like functions is not to say that they were understood as equivalent forms, or that they were both determined by the same discourses. Rather, we might understand certain numerical representations rhetorically and aesthetically through virtuous performances of representative neutrality, that is, as signifiers for a set of writing styles that work toward an ahistorical rewriting of the normal. We might call such styles “plain” insofar as they are aligned with the forms of reduction, efficiency, and automaticity. The history of “plain style” in critical thought is much older than the period considered here, and is not the object of this study.<sup>47</sup> Rather, statistical

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<sup>46</sup> Carter, *Heart of Whiteness* 122. I discuss the concept of frank reticence further in Chapter 3.

<sup>47</sup> John Guillory has recently proposed that now-forgotten critical debates in the 1920s over the history of the plain style might tell us about the emergence of prose as medium. Guillory aims to account for “a simple, generally accepted observation: Readers of English literature know that prose changed in the latter end of the early modern period, and that by the eighteenth century the difference between modern and premodern prose was more or less established.”<sup>47</sup> Guillory’s point is not to rehash the debate over whether plain style was continuous with a stylistic tradition that passed from Ciceronianism to Senecanism or whether it was bound up instead with pressure exerted on style by the conventions crystallized by science. Rather, he historicizes a moment when “new developments in the discourse of prose style betray the recognition of prose *avant la lettre* as a *medium*.” See Guillory, John. “Mercury’s Words: The End of Rhetoric and the Beginning of Prose.” *Representations* 138 no. 1, (Spring 2017): 63.



idealizations transparency, of a plain, frank, and unobtrusive scientific style served projects aiming to make sex ordinary.

Recent accounts in the field of new formalism have also thrown these concerns into greater relief. Indeed, queer accounts of modernism have come to stress what Anna Kornbluh, following Giorgio Agamben, calls “destituent theory”—the privileging of formlessness, de-ordering, and deconstruction—in their positioning of queer sexualities against sexual and textual normativities that are at once historical and formal. Kornbluh thus traces relations between the overlapping emergence of literary and mathematical formalisms, arguing for a “political formalism” that energizes form’s constructive affordances.<sup>48</sup> Yet while Kornbluh focuses on the abstract, mathematical uses of symbols, I attend to quantitative forms aimed at valuation, counting, and measurement, focusing, more often than not, on *specific numbers* that get attached to social and sexual categories. A political formalism that affirms form’s constituent affordances offers one alternative to the destituent narratives of queer modernism. But it also intentionally sidelines the historical specificity and co-determination of the formal and the erotic, and their relation to questions about power. By contrast, this project aims for a queer historicism of normalizing forms, in which the constituent and destituent potentials of numbers, their capacity to be both normal and deviant, is also imbricated within the history of sexuality. As Kornbluh observes, Shklovsky’s concept of defamiliarization anticipates what later critics (in the Frankfurt school, for example) “would come to cement as a theoretical suspicion of mathematical abstraction, and [Shklovsky] derives his sense of the revolutionary power of art, and of literature in particular, from its countervale to this abstraction.” Rather than turn toward formal abstraction as such, I place alignments between prose forms and quantitative language within the

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<sup>48</sup> See Anna Kornbluh, *The Order of Forms: Realism, Formalism, and Social Space*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2019), 2-5.

context of twentieth-century revisions of normality, that is, within the field of power relations embedded within the negotiation of the quantitative and discursive meaning of “normal.”

To say traditional “High” Modernism (capital M) is obsessed with “abnormal” forms is a critical commonplace. Indeed, the risks of aestheticizing an abnormal, potentially pay pose toward language and art turn out to be a recurrent theme in canonical modernist writing by straight men. In *Exiles Return*, for example, Malcolm Cowley, describing the “lost generation” of writers, observes his and others’ attachment to a kind of offbeat aesthetic identity: “we had all the normal aberrations of our age and type,” he notes, adding, “we were like others, we were normal—yet we clung to the feeling that as apprentice writers we were abnormal and secretly distinguished: we lived in the special world of art.”<sup>49</sup> What Cowley calls the “religion of art,” an all but cliché attachment to shock and transgression, is also couched in homophobic anxieties about what “abnormal” signifies. Yet Cowley also famously notes, in the same volume, that he “came to believe that a general offensive was about to be made against modern art, an offensive based on the theory that all modern writers, painters, and musicians were homosexual.”<sup>50</sup> Imagining modernism as experimental in relation to sexual norms often invokes the conceptual non-specificity and fungibility of normal and deviant sexualities. The trope of normalized deviation—what Cowley calls “the normal aberrations of our age and type”—imagines normality as a space not just of stricture but also as of potentially queer pleasure—queer, that is, in the sense of performing the transgressiveness of deviant sexuality without ceding the ground of the “normal.”

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<sup>49</sup> See Malcolm Cowley, *Exile’s Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s*. (New York: Penguin 1994) 18, 22.

<sup>50</sup> Cowley, *Exile’s Return* 190.

By contrast, the texts I examine are concerned not with the contaminating effects of sexual queerness, but with the risks and possibilities enabled by normality. In many cases, these texts offer critiques of social practices and discourses that could be called “heteronormative.” But my argument is precisely that these discourses are neither equivalent, nor wholly aligned with one another, nor positioned equally with respect to power. If these texts can collectively be called queer, it is not out of resistance to a singularly normative hegemony. Rather, these texts also challenge what Heather Love has called the “heroic anti-normative” within contemporary academic queer theory. These projects turn to forms of statistical description and experimentation sometimes assumed to be normalizing, including the aesthetics of objectivity and taxonomy (James and Stein), of regularity and straightening (Cather and Hemingway), or, finally, of counting and enumeration (in Barnes, Ford, and Tyler).<sup>51</sup>

### The Erotics of Quantities

In this study, “quantified sexualities” index a set of discourses in which mathematical forms—and, to a large extent, numbers themselves—and statistical representations determine the social meanings of sexual acts and identity categories. The textual attributes of numbers are themselves expansive. Freidrich Kittler has argued that the historical separation of numbers and written

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<sup>51</sup> As Love points out, the sociological concept of deviance itself emerged in tandem with a rethinking of descriptive practice in social science. By turning to this archive, Love argues that mid-century deviance studies anticipate and challenges queer theory’s commitment to ideology critique and its wholesale rejection of sociology’s descriptive gaze. Love observes that while “the study of sexuality as an objective phenomenon is fundamental to sociology and anathema to queer theory,” this break with social-scientific objectivity has obscured discourses linking queer studies with social science in general, and with post-war studies such as those of Erving Goffman, in particular. What’s valuable about this genealogy, Love suggests, is that it “captur[es] the experience of gender and sexual minorities in a moment of rapid social transformation and in an academic context in which the social referent of queer can be elusive.” See Heather K. Love, “Doing Being Deviant: Deviance Studies, Description, and the Queer Ordinary,” *Differences* 26, no. 1 (2015): 74–95.

numerals inaugurated a shift whereby written “storage and transmission media” became “an indispensable part of mathematics,” prior to the rise of information theory and Alan Turing’s theories of computation. Written numerals become a “culturally highly advanced magic wand, which separates signifieds (a matter of reading and writing) from signifiers (a matter of hearing).”<sup>52</sup> Numbers can thus be thought of as bound up with a history of technologies for recording and marking. I widen the scope of “quantified sexualities” to include the scalar and discursive frameworks in which numbers operate. Quantitative thinking was involved in mass-cultural constructions of “abnormal” sexuality, whether as an exaggeration of the “normal” sexual instinct (as in the original, pathologizing sense of ‘heterosexual’ propounded by Krafft-Ebing and others), or as a categorically distinct phenomenon.<sup>53</sup> The forms and genres used to mark sexualities constitute part of the historical archive of statistical and sexological thought.

Three discursive transformations, in social science and more broadly, were central to these representations: an emergent homo/hetero binary, the mass-cultural spread of social measurements, and the professionalizing turn in social science toward ideals, often gendered, of “objective” knowledge. In statistical sex research, the meaning of quantities, and their aesthetic and epistemic relation to scientific objectivity, was not unitary or totalizing. After the 1930s, statistical sampling increasingly signaled what Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison have called “structural objectivity,” a form of epistemic consensus on the value and non-bias of abstract mathematical formalisms. Objectivity is an epistemic virtue, a normative value judgement and

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<sup>52</sup> Friedrich Kittler, “Number and Numeral,” *Theory, Culture, and Society* 23, no. 7-8 (2006): 53

<sup>53</sup> Canguilhem and Hacking both trace the genealogy of this debate in the history of medicine. The “physiological” account (the word is Hacking’s) of pathology as irritation or overextension follows through the positivism of Auguste Comte and physician Francois Broussais. In medical thought, later nineteenth-century physicians worked to cast doubt on theories of pathology that reduced abnormality to absolute quantitative difference. Pathology would then be an entirely different class of phenomena, with its own quantitative logic.

ethic that attaches to scientific procedures.<sup>54</sup> As discourse, quantification and numericity are not, nor were historically, equivalent to objectivity, but rather serve this end the most when numbers are “invoked to suppress some aspect of the self—for example, its judgments by means of inference statistics.”<sup>55</sup> Yet numbers can also articulate desires and aesthetics. In this sense, I follow Mary Poovey’s observation that the “(uneven) process of disciplinary aggregation” in nineteenth century social science and political economy, separated statistical figures from “figurative language and (what we call) literature.” This separation meant that quantities increasingly came to be seen as an especially ‘literal’ kind of language, even if, as Poovey recognizes, “numerical representation has always had more in common with figurative language than the champions of the former tend to admit.”<sup>56</sup> Modernist numericities and numerologies populate sign-systems of normality, languages whose potential non-literality could lead to potentially queer places.

In my focus on statistical sex research, my goal is not to pick apart the objectivity of particular truth claims or data, but to read sexual statistics as context-bound languages for producing the normal and the deviant as sexual, stylistic, and epistemic categories. In these studies, particularly as they were generated in the U.S., the tendency of norms to take the form of numbers was not determined historically by a singular consensus on quantitative objectivity, but involved local and partial invocations of numbers as standardized and “objective” language. Victorian sexologists like Ellis, Moll, and Krafft-Ebing had, by the 1890s, written elaborate lists

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<sup>54</sup> Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2009), 38-39. These authors argue that such virtues exemplify what Foucault calls technologies of the self.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 381.

<sup>56</sup> See Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 26.

of sexual pathologies that divided perversions into separate categories of identity. Quantitative guess-timates of one privileged perversion in particular, homosexuality, tend to appear in these texts, but only in later editions after the turn of the century.<sup>57</sup> By the close of the nineteenth century, statistical thought also turned on the question of whether the norm ought to signify an average whose extremes were always de-stabilizing, or whether it described some deviations as desirable, others not. Scholars of the history of statistics sometimes gloss this debate as ‘Quetelet versus Galton,’ or alternatively, ‘Durkheim versus Galton.’ As Hacking summarizes it, “there is the thought that the normal is what is right, so that the talk of the normal is a splendid way of preserving the status quo,” which he calls “Durkheim;” alternatively there is “the idea that the normal is only the average, and is something to be improved upon,” and this is “Galton.”<sup>58</sup> In other words, the “descriptive” use of norms was also vexed by different normative or “prescriptive” values—in physiology, sociology, eugenics—and thus diverging conceptions of what deviations might signify.

At the turn of the twentieth century, “normal” sexuality emerged in sex research through virtuous performances of descriptive neutrality. Around the time of the First World War, sex statistics became a regular tool of moral hygienists and social reformers amid new anxieties over prostitution, vice, and venereal disease. After the First World War, larger studies with institutional funding expanded the scope of “normal” sexuality. Surveys and public opinion polls were, by the mid-1930s, a widespread “massifying” genre, one that furnished a language

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<sup>57</sup> A 1927 edition of Havelock Ellis’s *Sexual Inversion* (3rd ed. New York: F.A. Davis, 1927. *Project Gutenberg*, [www.gutenberg.org/files/13611/13611-h/13611-h.htm](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/13611/13611-h/13611-h.htm)), for example, contains added text referencing estimates of homosexuality, including the estimate that “Taken altogether we may probably conclude that the proportion of inverts is the same as in other related and neighboring lands, that is to say, slightly over 2 per cent.” (n.p.)

<sup>58</sup> See Hacking, *Taming* 168-169. Peter Hegarty also summarizes much the same distinction, using Quetelet instead of Durkheim, and applies this problem to the psychometric construction of homosexuality in the work of Lewis Terman and Kinsey. This work features prominently in Chapter 5. See Hegarty, *Gentlemen’s Disagreement: Alfred Kinsey, Lewis Terman, and the Sexual Politics of Smart Men*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2013) 38-39.

accessible to both scientists and laypersons—what Allison Miller has called “vernacular psychology.”<sup>59</sup> Prior to the late 1930s, and the spread of probability sampling, “normal” was purposively selected for, that is, defined *a priori* in terms of the population that could represent it. Robert and Helen Lynd’s bestselling *Middletown* studies (1929, 1937), the archetype for later social research on “average” America, situated American normalcy at the seat of small-town, white, middle-class married life in Muncie, Indiana.<sup>60</sup> Studies of marital happiness and women’s sexuality from this period, like those of Catherine Bement Davis and Gilbert B. Hamilton, used mailing lists taken from universities, local clubs, and social hygiene organizations as the basis for their data. New genres of data-gathering were also well-suited to this task of constructing gender and sexual norms. The questionnaire, as several recent scholars in print culture have observed, was as much a mass-cultural genre as it was a modernist one.<sup>61</sup> The ubiquity of surveys evidently irked Gertrude Stein, who was known for giving terse, even dismissive, answers to questionnaires sent to her by magazines like *The Little Review*.<sup>62</sup> In a later interview with Robert

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<sup>59</sup> See Allison Miller, “Am I Normal? American Vernacular Psychology and the Tomboy Body,” *Representations* 122 (Spring 2013): 23–50. For a history of the sex survey as a genre and sexological project, see Erikson, *Kiss and Tell: Surveying Sex in the Twentieth Century*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). For more on the rise of surveys and polling in the U.S., see also Sarah E. Igo, *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>60</sup> As Igo points out, “what *Middletown*’s ‘normality’ really registered—that is, its omission of blacks and marginalization of ‘ethnics’—was seldom noted by either general or academic readers.” The whiteness of Muncie was also largely invented and sustained in later studies by what she calls a form of “social-scientific collusion.” See Igo, *The Averaged American* 83, 100.

<sup>61</sup> For more on the relationship between questionnaires and modernism, see Ian Afflerbach, “Surveying American Late Modernism: *Partisan Review* and the Cultural Politics of the Questionnaire.” *Modernism/Modernity Print Plus* 4, no. 1 (2019). Drawing on this archive of modernist surveying, Afflerbach argues that *The Partisan Review*’s “distinctive position within the literary field in 1939—and the questionnaire’s distinctive affordances as a genre—make this archive a uniquely sensitive instrument for capturing defining points of debate about the politics of aesthetics in the United States” in the 1930s. See also Lori Cole, *Surveying the Avant-Garde: Questions on Modernism, Art, and The Americas in Transatlantic Magazines*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2018.

<sup>62</sup> Stein, *How Writing Is Written*. ed. Robert Haas. (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1974), 52-53.

Haas, when asked why she gave such answers, she wrote “that does not interest me; it is like the Gallup Poll. After all, my only thought is a complicated simplicity.”<sup>63</sup>

But Stein’s dismissal of the project of surveying, as I show in Chapter 2, was also caught up in her own interest in developing a “simply complicated” prose forms that could accomplish what pollsters, advertisers, psychometricians, and sex researchers would increasingly gauge through imaginaries of large-scale social data. Ten years before Stein’s comments, the Gallup Poll had been the center of a statistical drama. The poll correctly predicted that Franklin Delano Roosevelt would win the 1936 U.S. Presidential election, using more sophisticated sampling methods than the *Reader’s Digest*, whose poll had overrepresented conservative support for Alf Landon, Roosevelt’s opponent. In 1948, however, in the same year as Kinsey’s report on male sexuality, the Gallup poll would famously fail to predict Harry Truman’s victory over Thomas Dewey, shaking the public’s faith in the accuracy of social measurements.<sup>64</sup> As rigorous methods like random sampling, inferential statistics, and factor analysis became the norm for statistical sex research after the forties, the normativity represented by quantities increasingly came to stand for an epistemic neutrality signaled by normal sexuality’s putative purchase on the objective. Experiments with prose from this period are marked thematically by the belated arrival of a norm and the retroactive fixing of abnormality within history. Central to this elision, in addition to surveys of normal sexuality, was a whole host of technologies dedicated to quantifying homosexuality in particular. The twentieth-century obsession with statistical estimations of male homosexuality, for example, generated quite a few numbers whose continual

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<sup>63</sup> Stein, “A Transatlantic Interview: 1946.” *A Primer For The Gradual Understanding of Gertrude Stein*. ed. Robert Haas. (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1971) 34-35.

<sup>64</sup> For more on the backlash to 1948, see Igo, *The Averaged American*, chapter 4.



repetition has tended to make them appear as natural, objective estimates, rather than as historically specific figurative languages linking numericity with identity. One such number is credited to Kinsey: the now-common figure of “10 percent” as a sign for the frequency of male homosexuality (whatever that means). The oft-quoted number was in fact a vast simplification of Kinsey’s data on homosexuality, one popularized amid the gay liberation movements of the 1970s.<sup>65</sup> What matters here is the circulation of the numbers themselves, the historically specific discursivity and aesthetic programs that attach to them. Kinsey’s ten percent echoes June’s “vicious tenth,” even as the number produces an entirely different kind of social normality, one based in “variations” rather than in vice: despite their numerical equivalence and genealogical relation, these are, historically speaking, two different numbers.

A feature unifying these oft-repeated estimates is their functionality, their ease of wielding. They exemplify what Eric Bulson, following David Kurnick, has called “numberiness,” a historicity of number’s rhetorical power, where discursive content and numerical scale collide in the statistical imaginary.<sup>66</sup> In literary studies, we are familiar with the not-so-difficult leap from computation to questions about scale and objectivity, as in the

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<sup>65</sup> The observation comes from David Spiegelhalter, *Sex by Numbers: The Statistics of Sexual Behavior* (London, Profile Books, 2015), 81-82. The sentence, from Kinsey, that “10 per cent of the males are more or less exclusively homosexual (i.e, rate 5 or 6) [on the 6-point scale]” comes amid a battery of other numbers that in fact make homosexual experiences seem comparatively *more* prevalent than this.

<sup>66</sup> The word “numberiness” originates in Kurnick’s reply to a much-discussed article by Eric Bulson in *Representations*, cited hereafter in *Ulysses By Numbers*. (New York: Columbia UP, 2020). Bulson conducts a close analysis of wordcount in Joyce’s *Ulysses* as evidence of a shift in Joyce’s concept of length. In his response, Kurnick separates wordcount from length (arguing aptly that two equally long passages might have different ‘lengths’ based on other factors that affect reading). But his broader point, and the one I borrow, is that the “charisma of quantification more generally” has obscured the significance of Joyce’s numbers in their historicity (n.p.). Quantitative representations are, in some sense, historically specific, even when two such representations are numerically equivalent. See Kurnick, “Numberiness.” *Representations Comments and Responses*, Jan 13, 2015. [www.representations.org/response-to-ulysses-by-numbers-david-kurnick/](http://www.representations.org/response-to-ulysses-by-numbers-david-kurnick/).

statistical methods sometimes collected under rubrics of distant reading.<sup>67</sup> As Bulson points out, the aesthetic and epistemic attributes often assigned to quantities have been central to both modernist numerologies and the more recent application of Computational Literary Analysis (CLA) to modernist texts. Quantified sexualities can manifest as what Bulson calls “literary numbers,” that is, numbers whose embeddedness in literary texts changes their formal and historical meanings: “it’s not that literary texts don’t count. Rather, it’s that they don’t have to count the same way and for the same ends.”<sup>68</sup> The rhetoric of trust in both numbers and prose were intertwined in the study of sexual normality. Such forms, I have been arguing, imagined the average as both factually concrete and formally abstract: quantifying styles—not, in the sense of styles that are quantified through computational reading, but of styles that quantify; or in other words, prose forms suited to constructing and aggregating descriptions of norms. While several of the texts treated here have, over the last decade, become the sites of investigations into CLA, my goal is not to proceed with a stylometric reading. Instead, I conduct close readings that trace the way these authors tend to defamiliarize the way language produces the relationships that align sexual identities, populations, and “normal” forms. While statistical and demographic representations of sexual identities therefore appear, from present vantage, as signs for neoliberal assimilation amid worsening global crisis, they might also appear, in the period considered here, as signs for the epistemic indeterminacy of the normal itself. In the twentieth century, and in the period between the two World Wars especially, quantified sexualities provide representational

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<sup>67</sup> Moretti, in *Distant Reading* (New York: Verso, 2003) hints at some of the epistemic values associated with quantities, particularly for big data, where the number of objects disallows the possibility of “the very close reading of very few texts” (“Slaughterhouse” 67). These require “other skills: sampling [and] statistics” even if “subjective” readings would be preferable. However, this is not the direction I follow. Rather, I am interested specifically the uses of quantification that move *away* from falsifiability—that is, from ideals of accuracy and objectivity, while retaining certain imaginaries of mass scale.

<sup>68</sup> See Bulson, *Ulysses By Numbers* 35.

frames for the grafting of temporal, aesthetic, and erotic values onto a normal/deviant distinction whose meaning was endlessly flexible, yet also in need of constant regulation.

### Modernism's History of the Normal

The chapters in this study are organized thematically and (roughly) historically across several problematics that emerge in quantitative research about sex, following a historical trajectory that traces the construction of normal/queer binaries at the turn of the century, in the period after the First World War, and during the 1930s. Chapter One approaches Doan's question, "what was normal called before it was invented?" by tracing competing models of normality and objectivity in two novels by Henry James. The emergence of an empirical framework for describing social norms becomes increasingly determinate alongside the transforming normalities imagined by Jamesian style. In *The Bostonians* (1886), James's narrator imagines the objectivity of norms and social categories—like the "genius" of his central character, Verena Tarrant, or the queer "morbidness" of Olive Chancellor—through dithering performances of narratorial objectivity. By the later part of his career, however, James's prose tends toward narratorial indirection signaled by the increasing vagueness of the content of "quantity" and the syntactical waywardness of his late style. In *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), I trace the unmooring of sexual knowledge from objectivity and its attachment to figures of risk. The novel's power couple, Kate Croy and Merton Densher, are characters whose calculating visions of the social are constituted by queer silences and absent quantities. James's late style diverges from the biopolitical formal logic of nineteenth-century realism, marking a shift toward a normativity in which sexual

indeterminacy was increasingly policed, even as it would form a central part of normal sexuality's internal logic.

The problem of representing sexuality at the level of the population was linked with the project of imagining data itself as a space of normative regulation. The work of Gertrude Stein showcases the convergence between populations and prose within her stylistic interests in the categorization and measurement of human character. Chapter two examines the erotics of Stein's project of cataloguing of human varieties in her long novel, *The Making of Americans* (1925), in its interest in constructing normal identities through divisions in gender, sexuality and national identity. The stylistic strategies of Stein's long novel, which include reduced lexical diversity, the nominalization of verbs, and the repetition of syntactical structures with minor variations, can be, and has been, read in relation to quantitative ideals of objectivity and taxonomic totality. By tracing the vexed position of queerness in Stein's objectivity, I show how Stein's texts register the way that queer desires get articulated through the linguistic ideals of data and information. I then turn to Stein's responses to modernist questionnaires, placing them alongside writings in which Stein looks back on this totalizing project with waning interest. In her dismissive answers to surveys, Stein redefines the taxonomic conception of sexuality that she constructs, in *Making*, through the internal variability of prose. For Stein, style might offer an alternative to the undifferentiated repetitions of polling and sampling, while also functioning as a space in which to articulate desires for, and beneath, taxonomy.

After the First World War, the linkage between heterosexuality and normality took on a conceptual specificity in which sexual normality was rewritten through anxieties over the preservation of marriage or the reproduction of populations. Chapter Three examines several of Willa Cather's fictions of the 1920s, work that was increasingly troubled by these demands for

prose language that could represent sexuality according to the demands of new discourses of erotic symmetry and normalized ideals of measurable happiness. I examine the novels *One of Ours* (1922) and *The Professor's House* (1925), works concerned with the incorporation of queer linguistic and sexual forms into heterosexual identities written through sexual hygiene, marital happiness, and whiteness. Alongside these, I read examples of statistical and stylistic constructions of heterosexuality in sexual normality studies, tracing the diverse functions performed by prosaic reticence and indirection in Cather's fiction. Cather's queerness is marked by what several critics have understood as a backward-looking turn from interwar forms of sexual definition. In *One of Ours*, the language of social hygiene and quantified marital happiness marks a normativity that can be measured with respect to its own frequencies, repetitions, and everyday rhythms. Claude Wheeler's narrative, which passes from the Great Plains, through the Influenza Pandemic, and to his eventual death on the Western Front, imagines the war as a space of exception and exclusion. By contrast, *The Professor's House* (1925), I will suggest, imagines suspensions and interruptions which also require an inevitable return of a normative frame signified by hetero-reproductive futurity.

In contrast to Cather, Ernest Hemingway's fiction suggests that the war's relation to heterosexuality was not a distinct category from peacetime norms, but rather an extension of the tenuous and fragile equilibrium metaphorized by "straight" sexuality. In Hemingway's fiction, male heterosexuality becomes straight through the textual management of measurable erotic pulsions that require regulated pressure and release. Through new biometric conceptions of manpower and morale, discourses of male straightness scripted a number of morality-plays around the direction (or potential misdirection) of soldiers' erotic feelings in and outside of the trenches. I focus on *A Farewell To Arms* (1929), a novel set during the Italian army's retreat

from Caporetto in 1917, and which is preoccupied with the prosaic management of with the standardized sexual appetites of soldiers through a problem of “numbers’ that Hemingway rewrites as a homeostatic ideal for the straightness of his prose. In this chapter, I introduce the term heteronationalism, a concept that traces interwar alignments between “straight” style and nationalistic constructions of sexual health and disease. Against a heteronationalist ahistoricism in which the war’s deviance requires straightening, Hemingway’s prose generates suspensions and equilibrations that thwart interwar alignments between heterosexuality and peacetime norms. Yet this prose also renders heterosexual identity as a flexible form which can accommodate any number of non-normative interruptions while still remaining bound to the history of post-war crisis.

The crystallization of sampling techniques in the 1930s, and the battery of normality studies that followed, created the discursive ground for mid-century re-alignments of sexual categories. Homosexuality, gender nonconformity, and sexual deviance could be categorically separated and rewritten through the language of internal variance. Yet the problem of quantities and their relation to language did not disappear. Chapter Four returns to the question of objectivity and deviance by examining queer uses of the figurative and stylistic affordances of numbers to measure homosexuality. In this chapter, I turn to debates in psychometry and quantitative sex research over the “literal” quality of numbers, and the relationship between quantification and the normative character of intellection in sexual science. Two queer. experimental novels of the 1930s, Djuna Barnes’s *Nightwood*, and Ford and Tyler’s *The Young and Evil*, are central here, as these texts dramatize scenes where quantitative representations are detached from objectivity, and repurposed as forms suited to forms of queer genius and universalism. Ford and Tyler represent sexual knowledge as the free flow of prose, sometimes

without distinction between narration, dialogue, and interiority. Their collaborative novel thus imagines a voice attributable to a population in the absence of objectivity or information. By contrast, Barnes's *Nightwood* consolidates sexological information down to a single voice, Doctor Matthew O'Connor, whose large blocks of prose constitute nearly half the novel's text. O'Connor's language of sizes and quantities becomes a means for Barnes to imagine a scale of sexual meaning that might correspond to a queer condition of non-relation within the sex-gender system. For Barnes, as for other thinkers of the period, the model discourse for thinking about the desirability of abnormal traits was eugenics. O'Connor borrows normative frameworks from eugenic discourses as the basis for valuing non-normative sexual identities. While Barnes is often read as resisting scientific knowledge about sexuality, O'Connor's universalizing strategies throw into relief the relationship between prosaic language, quantities and anti-normativity. Rather than argue for an absolute historical origin to the normal, we might understand the trope of a "return to normalcy" as a cultural fiction and a regulative form linked with the temporality of repeated crisis and inter-crisis. I conclude this chapter, and the project, by returning to the question of the way normal/deviant binaries function in an epistemic space defined by the aesthetics of routinized suspension and return. By centering the problematic of the normal in my analysis of modernism, my hope is not to effect a nostalgic return to a bygone form, but to historicize attachments to regulated sexualities in the context of a period marked by an oft-stated desire for, and distrust of, normality.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### QUANTITY'S DEVIANT STYLES IN JAMES'S *THE BOSTONIANS* AND *THE WINGS OF THE DOVE*

*“The jealous cultivation of the common mean, the common mean only, the reproduction of everything to an average of decent suitability, the gospel of precaution against the dangerous tendency latent in many things to become too good for their context, so that persons partaking of them may become too good for their company—the idealized form of all this glimmered for me, as an admonition or a betrayal, through the charming Florida radiance, constituting really the greatest of the lesson one had travelled so far to learn.”*

— Henry James, *The American Scene* (1907)<sup>1</sup>

In *The American Scene* (1907), as Henry James records the myriad impressions of his return to the U.S., a pivotal emphasis is placed on the puzzling and imposing abundance of quantities. By the turn of the century, the U.S. had perhaps accustomed itself to what Ian Hacking calls the “avalanche of printed numbers” in the nineteenth century, a profusion of statistical thought discourse that enshrined the statistical value of the “normal.”<sup>2</sup> At that time, the language quantity itself began to function as an index of mass—masses of numbers, masses of print. In James’s book, large numbers connect individuals to local and national contexts, and to James’s expansive conception of the social; not just numbers themselves, whether by thousands or millions, but the norms they represent are in flux. James records a “reconsecration of values, of representative weight,” in the U.S., where “new values arise as expansion proceeds; the marked character of which, for comparative sociology,” he adds, “is that they are not all as other values.” Instead,

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<sup>1</sup> See James, *The American Scene* (New York: Penguin) 325. For convenience, abbreviations and editions for James’s major works are as follows: AN - *The Art of the Novel* (New York: Scribner’s, 1934); AS - *The American Scene* (New York: Penguin 1994); B - *The Bostonians in Novels: 1881-1886* (New York: Library of America, 1985); PL - *Portrait of a Lady* (Penguin, 2011); WD - *Wings of the Dove* (London: Norton, 2003); LC1 - *Literary Criticism*, Vol 1. (New York: Library of America, 1984). References to the New York edition prefaces are cited in *The Art of the Novel*.

<sup>2</sup> See Hacking, *Taming 2*.



“what they ‘count’ for is the particular required American quantity; and we see again how large a quantity symbol and figure have to represent” (236). To James’s surprise, however, language does indeed “cover the ground; it covers elements that in communities employing a different scale require for their expression [...] a much greater number of terms.” Large quantities would seem to demand a more efficient language, yet the problem with this reduction in spoken style, as James would have it, is the way it comes to perform the signifying role demanded by large numbers. Such impressions, he later tells us, “lurk confused, disengaged, in the mere looming mass of the *more*, the more and more to come,” the expansive bulk of a “perpetual increase of everything, the growth of the immeasurable muchness that shall constitute the deep sea into which the seeker for conclusions must cast his nets” (AS 296). The vast scale of this American quantity may exceed both the capacity for measurement and for language to grant it ontological specificity.

Quantity, in James, is American preoccupation, a sign for its own expansiveness and that of mass culture, and a language of scale that threatens boundaries between center and margin. “Social quantities,” a term James often employs to describe the scale of “large” and influential characters, just as often threatens to slip into their opposite, “mere quantity,” a numerical expression of popular opinion slotted into standardized schemes, where numbers both signify and become mass market genres (AS 292). In the U.S., James observes, the sheer preponderance of numbered masses represented both an indeterminate number of new possibilities and the potential for the annihilation of those possibilities through a reduction to a “lowest common denominator.” For instance, in his description of Florida, quoted in the epigraph, the “common mean” paves over individuating distinctions in both the landscape and people. “The elements of difference, whatever they might latently have been, struck me as throughout forcibly simplified,”

James notes, enforcing the “prompt reducibility of a thousand figures to a common denominator.” Such a reduction also creates new forms of hybridity and typology. “Individuality and variety is attributed to ‘types,’ in America,” he claims, “and the reputation for it enjoyed on terms not more difficult; so that what I was most conscious of, from aspect to aspect, from group to group, from sex to sex, from one presented boarder to another, was the continuity of the fusion, the dimness of the distinctions” (*AS* 333). The reduction of language to suit the needs of quantities, replacing individuals with types, does not just flatten sex itself, but distinctions “from sex to sex.” Gender indeterminacy, in these descriptions, haunts the very idea of quantitative form. “Numbers” indicate, at least partially, for James, a democratic pluralism determined in part by large waves of immigration at the end of the Nineteenth-century, and with it, new forms of class contact that he associates with crowds and large cities, which threaten to level old class distinctions and dissolve traditionally gendered social spheres. The paradoxical quality of James’s descriptions of American “muchness” owes at least some of its force to the way in which these phenomena were, for James, both strikingly perverse and, as his observations continually suggest, frustratingly normal.

This set of contradictions over the normal and the numerical, in the realm of gender and sexuality, sound familiar notes in James criticism.<sup>3</sup> Where numbers themselves dissolve into an unreadable masses, James’s prose provides an ordering function, one that makes quantity an object of a queer gaze. The pluralizing possibilities of numbers enable a visual and observational mode imagined from the position of a norm, but in James, the status of that norm, and of its narratorial frame, is always vexed. This chapter argues that the emergence of sexual perversion

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<sup>3</sup> The genealogy of sexuality studies in James criticism is vast, but particularly influential texts for this chapter include Eve Sedgwick’s reflections on “The Beast and the Jungle” in *Epistemology of the Closet*; Michael Moon, *A Small Boy and Others: Imitation and Initiation in American Culture from Henry James to Andy Warhol*. (Durham: Duke UP, 1998); Hugh Stevens, *Henry James and Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998).

as an object of scientific study, as it emerged through sexology and racial science, altered the erotic meanings and stylistic affordances of large numbers. In James's fiction, "quantity" serves as a figurative language for describing relations between social norms and desiring vision. I compare two texts in James's career that have magnetized queer and sexuality studies, and which tend to fall on either side of the dividing line of James's "major phase": *The Bostonians* (1886) and *The Wings of the Dove* (1902). Between these texts, an increasing distance of James's narrators from diegetic explanation and clarification shifts away from narration that claims a privileged access to an objective norm and toward a multiplication of indeterminate meanings within the social norming of desire.

A paradox therefore haunts the idea of Jamesian style. It names, on the one hand, what Roland Barthes's calls a "secret," a personal project that presumes to be "outside the pact which binds the writer to society."<sup>4</sup> Yet it is also difficult to disentangle an authorial style, to define its syntactical norms and errancies, whether by impression or computation, apart from James's own account of that style, and of its relation to the normal. Likewise, queer-theoretical critics of James have stressed that one such "secret" of James's style is sexuality.<sup>5</sup> Scholarship on the queerness of Jamesian style has tended to emphasize what Scott St. Pierre understands as a

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<sup>4</sup> Barthes' concept of the secret of style forms the basis of D.A. Miller's *Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003), from which I draw many insights. Miller conceives of Austen's style as both an identification with an absolute narratorial impersonality, even as that identification incurs an aesthetics of shame associated with the open secret of homosexuality. He summarizes that while "[Austen's] works regulated erotic desire so well the world had judged them as sexless... they wound up giving their puerile reader, still at an age of sexual inexperience and vagueness, as much credit for an inclination to sex perversion as if they had been the wrong kind of pornography" (4). Austenian style both "incurs and inflicts" what Miller understands as a "feminizing shame" (7-8). Likewise, it appears as if James's own understanding of large quantities becomes analogous to his own queer excess.

<sup>5</sup> These accounts have problematized this relationship between queerness and style in terms of a disconnect between object and aim. Style either signifies queerness, or style enables the occlusion or revelation of a queerness that remains bound to the author. See, for example, Eric Haralson, *Henry James and Queer Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003); David Kurnick, "What Does Jamesian Style Want," *The Henry James Review* 28 (2007): 213-22; and Kevin Ohi, *Henry James and the Queerness of Style* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2011).

cultural obsession, at the turn-of-the-century, with “an assumed conceptual relationship between aesthetic production and sexuality.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, James’s contemporary critics tended to imagine his style as excessive and large, and in particular as an enlargement of James’s queer personage. One review of *The Wings of the Dove*, for example, by J. P. Mobray, draws a direct link between the excesses of James’s style and the “effeminacy” of the author, whom he accuses of an “indisposition of a mind to contemplate the more rugged aspects of humanity and content to loiter with a strange industry amid the foibles and fashions of a mere intellectual coquetry.”<sup>7</sup> As St. Pierre’s work suggests, and as Mobray’s typology of misgendered style exemplifies, the entanglement of abnormal sexual identity was also in many ways commensurate with James’s own anxieties over “mere quantity” and its flattening of sex distinctions.

In this chapter, I trace links between quantities and sexuality through shifts in Jamesian style, understanding transforming models of objectivity and neutrality in James’s narration as a site where literary texts registered the emergence of statistically “normal” sexuality and the concomitant production of sexual identity as a social fact. In sexological thought, the idea that a highly individual style might be evidence of queerness hinged on a description of individual subjects’ attributes, the enumeration of those attributes as comparable members of a single set, and the construction of categories and types to represent that set. “Style,” in James’s vocabulary, is often written in relation to the dual languages of genius and deviation. For James’s “genius” characters, like the persuasive Verena Tarrant in *The Bostonians* (1886), style is often central to

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<sup>6</sup> See St. Pierre, “A Personal Quantity: On Sexuality and Jamesian Style.” *The Henry James Review*. Vol 33 (2012), 113.

<sup>7</sup> According to Mobray, “Nothing can be more beautiful or more wondrous in the experience of literary genius than that first throb of independence” in the author’s characters, Mobray writes. But there is too much of James’s “finite omnipresence that insists upon filling the stage, and not only pouring its aides into every ear but demand[ing] that every mortal soul of them shall use his patois and adopt his idiosyncrasies. See J.P. Mobray, from “The Apotheosis of Henry James.” *Henry James: The Critical Heritage*. ed. Roger Gard (London: Routledge, 1968), 330-331, 327.

their gifts. It is also linked, in *The American Scene*, with “perversities” in American manners and morals written into the scene (such as the non-abundance of churches and the overabundance of hotels), but also with the “happy deviations” of urban architectural forms.

By the turn of the century, sexual pathologies could be thought of, at least abstractly, as statistical phenomena that might be correlated with other abnormal traits. Genius and degeneration, for example, were two terms that were rapidly becoming objects of new scientific approaches to sexuality and anthropometry. Debates over genius and style were also central to the rise of what Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison have identified as the turn toward “mechanical objectivity” in nineteenth century science. In contrast to eighteenth-century’s reliance on “genius of observation” and “truth-to-nature” modeling in atlas-making, nineteenth-century “mechanical objectivity,” while by no means a singular or purely dominant discourse, stressed the removal of subjective agency from the production of working models and references, often through automatic measurement and recording technologies.<sup>8</sup> Jamesian genius, much like the “secret of style,” becomes one site in which to imagine the work of fiction writing as enabling “objective” narratorial modes associated with mechanical procedure. But in James, this recording is limited also by what James understood as an increasingly thin barrier between public and private. James’s prose, marked, toward the end of his career, by its increasing syntactical

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<sup>8</sup> It was in the eighteenth century, according to Daston and Galison, that the terms “subjective” and “objective” in philosophy shifted from definitions in which the terms meant, broadly, the opposite what they mean in contemporary common usage. By the mid-nineteenth century, the meaning of objectivity had come to signify mechanical self-abnegation. Indeed, it is Henry James who serves as Daston and Galison’s privileged example of the Victorian shift in the word’s meaning. They cite James’s reference, in his 1909 preface to *The Awkward Age* (1898), to “objectivity” as a “special sacrifice” of artistic talent as evidence of the word’s contemporary usage. In the preface, James’s contrast between the technique of the novelist and the “guarded objectivity” of the dramatist consists in the latter’s absence of narration, and he argues that, as he applies it to his novel, “this objectivity, in turn, when achieving its ideal, came from the imposed absence of that ‘going behind’ to compass explanations and amplifications, to drag out odds and ends from the ‘mere’ storyteller’s great property-shop of aids to illusion” (AN 110-111) It is the erotics of this “going behind” that animate the following analysis. See Daston and Galison, *Objectivity* 37.

errancies, excesses—dare I say deviations? —tends to detach quantitative forms from scientific models of objectivity, rendering those forms instead spaces of desire and possibility. Critics of gay and lesbian literature have been keen to point out that *The Bostonians* dramatizes questions about the historical emergence of legible homosexual identities, while queer-theory minded critics of James's later fiction have tended to trace the effacements of identity that attend the emergence of the closet. James is thus either too early or too late for the arrival of legibility at the level of avowable identity. But this aporia might also be symptomatic of the vexed status of sex-gender normativity in the moment of sexuality's crystallization. One major shift of the late style involves the way James's prose seems to get caught in the liminal space between the interiority of his characters and the impersonal diegetic comments of the narrator, a boundary that is often anxiously maintained in his middle period.<sup>9</sup> In *The Wings of the Dove* and *The American Scene*, quantity also becomes an expansive social form, one that signals the fragmentation of norms through the erotics of large numbers. Yet even at the margins of identity, James's models a vision of social quantification that registers the epistemic concretization of sexual norms as objects of social-scientific knowledge.

### Queer Genius and Statistical Sexualities in *The Bostonians*

The law of large numbers placed risk and calculation at the center of social categorization discourses. So too, in the nineteenth century, the expansive, tendril-like growth of officialized

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<sup>9</sup> Miller illustrates the consequences of this blending via Ann Banfield's distinction between "pure narration" and "represented consciousness." Analyzing the continuation and repetition of a single sentence across a chapter break in Jane Austen's *Emma*, Miller shows how the sentence changes functions across the break. In such a continuation, "what had been the indirect and impersonal performance of Emma's consciousness has become the mere matter-of-fact notation of that thought," or, in Banfield's phrase, "a fact of the fiction" (Miller 64-65). James's sentences, particularly in the late novels, tend to dissolve this distinction.

statistics led to an expansive rethinking of numerical forms and their relation to the social. Statistical discourses have also led to recent critical debates over the extent to which Victorian statistical thought was solely preoccupied with control and stricture, or whether it may have signaled new formal possibilities of openness and multiplicity.<sup>10</sup> The aesthetic preoccupation with the random qualities of quantities in James's late fiction highlights the spread of statistical discourses that Coleby Emerson Reid has also linked with the thematic obsessions of literary naturalism. Reid usefully points out that, in James's late work, statistics are "a form of impersonality attained not merely through identity-shattering, but through a correlating attachment of the self to a social body."<sup>11</sup> If that impersonality can inaugurate social identity, rather than dissolve it, James's narration can be said to modulate the relationship of identity categories to the aleatory aspects of the social. James does indeed flirt with the deterministic and positivistic affordances of numerical forms. However, Jamesian statistics can also be very queer, particularly in ways that thwart the more deterministic varieties of naturalism in which characters behave mechanistically according to the dictates of genetics and social class.<sup>12</sup> While determinism was, at least prior to the turn of the century, central to the scientific culture I draw from, I want to trace James's vexed relationship to the positivist and naturalist discourses of

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<sup>10</sup> See Michael Tondre, *The Physics of Possibility: Victorian Fiction, Science, and Gender* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2018), 7. Tondre has explored this relationship between literature and the science of probability in terms of narrative structure, suggesting that novels took up "questions that Victorian scientists left unanswered" by examining "alternative historical possibilities." Emily Steinlight makes a similar argument with respect to the biopolitical imaginaries of literary "population," in that "rather than placing a reified and dematerialized life principle at odds with specific forms of life, splitting zoe from bios, one might thus understand life as the potential for new forms to emerge." See Steinlight, *Populating the Novel: Literary Form and the Politics of Surplus Life*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2018). See also Elaine Freedgood, *Victorian Writing about Risk: Imagining a Safe England in a Dangerous World*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000); Jesse Rosenthal, "The Large Novel and the Law of Large Numbers; Or, Why George Eliot Hates Gambling," *ELH* 77, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 777–811.

<sup>11</sup> See Reid, "The Statistical Aesthetics of Henry James, or Jamesian Naturalism." *The Henry James Review*. Vol. 30 (2009), 102-103

<sup>12</sup> For more on James's relation to naturalism, particularly in *The Bostonians*, see Jennifer Fleissner, *Women, Compulsion, Modernity: The Moment of American Naturalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

quantity, a relationship that undergoes, I argue, a shift between his early and late style. This is particularly true of the ontological status of heterosexuality *as* sexuality, that is, as a product of a legible sex-gender system signified by norms.

In James's account of statistics, a binary emerges between an obscure, private individual style and an officialized, public language of numbers. Rather than leave this binary totally intact, I want to examine the thematics of quantities, and the function of numbers in James's sentences. In *The American Scene*, James often adopts a separation characteristic of mechanical objectivity, contrasting the individual, and potentially feminizing, accents of style to the flattening, sexually indeterminate neutrality of mere quantity. But for James, prose style is not therefore more far removed, as a representational frame, from the "data" it represents. In his oft-cited essay, "The Art of Fiction" (1884), the language of data and objectivity proves a useful analogy for the fraught relationship between writer, critic, and mass market. At one point, James invites critics and authors to engage one another with the gentlemanly ethos of scientific data gatherers:

Meanwhile, I repeat, we do not judge the artist with fairness unless we say to him, "Oh, I grant you your starting point, because if I did not I should seem to prescribe to you, and heaven forbid I should take that responsibility. If I pretend to tell you what you must not take, you will call upon me to tell you then what you must take; in which case I shall be prettily caught. Moreover it isn't till I have accepted your data that I can begin to measure you. I have the standard, the pitch; I have no right to tamper with your flute and then criticise your music..." (James LC1 57)

The passage works to establish a clear division between the objects of description and prescription. The narrative "data" of premise becomes a fact to be represented rather than an act of representation through its stylistic "treatment." James's description of critical and popular



reception maps this form-content separation onto the relationship between raw data and the “standard” and “pitch” whereby the data becomes interpretable, and this makes it possible to “measure” the novelist’s skill independently of assumed givens. Social “data” then becomes a professionalizing metaphor for the performatively factual half of what Mark Seltzer marks as James’s “radical break between subject and technique.”<sup>13</sup> Such a commitment, at first blush, to a clear-cut distinction between form and content, continually blurs throughout the dialogue. The intrusion of the second metaphor, the flute, further complicates the instrumentation of this analogy. It performs as both the inviolate premise and the tool for producing it as useable content from pure noise—an instrument not for establishing objectivity but for separating the artist’s skill as its own object.

James’s social quantities, like style itself, signal possibilities for engendering perversities of form. *The Bostonians* exemplifies how this formalist rupture within the landscape of power and possibility also operates within the field of sexuality. *The Bostonians* begins with a number: “about ten minutes,” Mrs. Luna tells her cousin, Basil Ransom. This is the time it will take for Olive Chancellor to arrive, and is characteristic: “about ten; that is exactly like Olive. Neither five nor fifteen, and yet not ten exactly, but either nine or eleven” (*B* 803). The number is indicative of the character’s normal behavior. Yet throughout the novel, the relationship between average, margin, and deviation becomes increasingly contingent. Often these ideals are couched in terms of the mutually reinforcing categories of genius and morbidity. When Basil Ransom first meets Olive, the narrator remarks, via Basil, on the vexed facticity of Olive’s “morbid” demeanor, and its social representativeness:

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<sup>13</sup> Seltzer, *Henry James and the Art of Power*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984), 16. Seltzer aptly points out that James dissimulates this very distinction by the end of his own essay.

this pale girl, with her light green eyes, her pointed features and nervous manner, was visibly morbid, it was as plain as day that she was morbid. Poor Ransom announced this fact to himself as if he had made a great discovery; but in reality he had never been so ‘Boeotian’ as at that moment. It proved nothing of any importance, with regard to Miss Chancellor, to say that she was morbid; any sufficient account of her would lie very much to the rear of that. Why was she morbid, and why was her morbidness so typical? (James, B 810).<sup>14</sup>

Basil’s observation briefly masquerades as narrated truth, until James’s narrator proceeds to call him “boeotian,” signaling his own evidently greater awareness of more important questions, like “why was [Olive’s] morbidness so typical?” However dull-minded Basil’s observation is, according to the narrator, the factualness of Olive’s morbidity emerges as a “discovery” only from his own repeated grammatical construction across a comma splice (“was visibly morbid, it was plain”). Several critics have focused on the word “morbid” and the problem of identity that emerges from the word’s proximity to, or synonymy with, homosexuality. Natasha Hurley reads this passage as concretizing, through Basil’s repetitions, “the illusion of verification and statistical accumulation” that “calcifie[s]” the referent of the word as “evidence for [Olive’s] lesbianism.”<sup>15</sup> This statistical production of Olive’s morbidity as both “fact” and the evidence

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<sup>14</sup> The word has an important history in sexological discourse. The French medical doctor B.A. Morel, who coined the term “degeneration” in 1857, defined his concept as a “morbid deviation from an original type” (qtd in Seitler 61). Hugh Stevens has attended to the word’s sexological associations, observes similar associations the word “vicious” (one is reminded of the ‘vicious tenth’). Similarly, Madoka Kishi links the genealogy of morbidity in William James’s concept of the “sick soul” to Henry James’s trope of sacrifice in *The Bostonians*. Kishi argues that James denies Olive access to her “impossible longing for identification with other women,” insofar as her attachment to martyrdom, in the Swedenborgian thought of James’s father, “requires the nullification of a firmly established subject that desires an object, urging instead the passional identification with the object at the cost of subjectivity” (Kishi 109). See Hugh Stevens, *Henry James and Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 11, 92-93; and Madoka Kishi, “‘The Ecstasy of the Martyr’: Lesbianism, Sacrifice, and Morbidness in *The Bostonians*.” *The Henry James Review*, vol. 37 (2016): 100-116.

<sup>15</sup> See Natasha Hurley, *Circulating Queerness: Before the Gay and Lesbian Novel* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018): 156.

for its own “discovery” highlights the production of sexual types, as Hurley points out, but it also suggests a shift in the way gendered abnormality could become an object capable of being stripped away from the particularity of an individual case. Olive, as Hurley deftly shows, becomes an exemplar for a typology that can ultimately do away with her. Yet, to the extent that “lesbian” could be intelligible as a category of person, the “fact” of Olive’s morbidity, as a category of social deviance, is also understood as “typical” of some larger group.

The objectivity accorded, in the narrator’s qualifications to Olive’s abnormality is also rendered as a problem that requires the fixing of a normative standard of identity in the field of sexuality. Centering this question, queer scholarship on *The Bostonians* has generally been divided on the question of whether the novel arrives “on time” for the emergence of legible lesbian identity.<sup>16</sup> The novel was published in the midst of what might be called a “moment” in the methods of sexual science. In Europe, some of the first works of German, French, and Italian sexology were being published; yet many of these texts, in which these typologies of perversion were first defined, did not receive English translations until the 1890s. Critical work has thus tended to highlight the proximity of James’s response, in *The Bostonians*, to the late Victorian construction of abnormal sexuality. The character on whom much of this work has focused is Olive, who is variously read as tragic lesbian heroine, celibate feminist, and/or queer pedagogue. Peter Coviello has theorized the text’s circumlocutions around Olive as evoking modes of belonging and desire that anticipate but do not yet coincide with the moment of homosexual

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<sup>16</sup> For more on *The Bostonians* as a lesbian novel, see Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia UP, 1993): 178-179; Castle concludes that James’s novel stands “as the first and perhaps most haunting ‘lesbian tragedy’ in modern English and American literature, and Olive Chancellor (potentially) as the first lesbian tragic heroine.” For an account of the pre-history of lesbian identity, see Peter Coviello, *Tomorrow’s Parties: Sex and the Untimely in Nineteenth-Century America* (NYU Press, 2013); For an account of celibacy in the novel, see Benjamin Kahan, *Celibacies: American Modernism and Sexual Life* (Durham: Duke UP, 2013).

legibility in the final years of the century. Theorizing pre-sexological desire in terms of its illegibility and unnameability, Coviello argues that “James finds in Olive a way to anatomize the fate of a person made for love, but not heterosexuality, in the dwindling moment before new names for that queer love would achieve a definitive prominence.”<sup>17</sup> Such ambivalence takes the form of an “in-between time,” an idleness that languishes “as languages of sexual specification move nearer and nearer a broad legibility [which] has come to seem in most respects like a sharpening of the world into bad options.”<sup>18</sup>

As compelling as this reading is, I want to press on the formulation that Olive is “not made for heterosexuality”—a formulation that suggests that “heterosexuality” was already coherent as a normative framework within James’s text. While it is certainly arguable that James can be said to recognize Olive’s non-relation to men within a discourse that resembles sexual identity, it is also possible to say, without contradiction, that her non-alignment with heterosexuality takes place under the same conditions of illegibility—that what counted as sexually normative may not have aligned entirely with the sociocultural scripts that would come to be identified as *heterosexual*. Coviello is not alone in this framing. In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick likewise naturalizes the givenness of heterosexuality in her account of James’s relationship with Constance Fenimore Woolson:

James’s mistake here, in life, seems to have been moving blindly from a sense of the good, the desirability, of love and sexuality to the automatic imposition on himself of a specifically *heterosexual* compulsion. (I say “imposition on himself,” but of course he did not invent the heterosexual specificity of this compulsion; he

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<sup>17</sup> See Coviello, *Tomorrow’s Parties* 179.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.* 189.

merely failed, at this point in his life, to resist it actively.) The easy assumption (by James, the society, and the critics) that sexuality and heterosexuality are exactly translatable into one another is, obviously, homophobic.<sup>19</sup>

Sedgwick's overall point about the homophobic substitution of heterosexuality for sexuality writ large (whereby James criticism has "actively repelled any inquiry into the asymmetries of gendered desire") continues to be apt, but her claim suggests perhaps too readily that James would have recognized the norm of his identity as heterosexual at all, that is, as an option. In other words, Sedgwick assumes that the normative status of cross-gendered desire was necessarily understood *as* a sexuality, that is to say, as part of a taxonomic system of sexual identity. In other words, in accusing James of the same error as his critics, she raises the question of whether both conflation (James's error, and the error of his critics) work to support the same category of norm. Rather than read "heterosexual" (or for that matter, "homosexual") as a defined category, I read them as statistical phenomena whose legibility was not yet wholly circumscribed by a coherent quantitative frame. Heterosexuality was neither a word that indicated normal sexuality, nor were erotic relations between men and women necessarily the objects of statistical thought (at least not as a sexual identity, that is, considered separately from census data on births and marriages). In that light, James might be said to narrate the conditions under which sexual identity itself arrives as statistical fact. As Hurley observes, "James... does not just archive an early conceptualization of either lesbianism or desirous celibacy; [his] narration and description collectively archive and showcase" the circulation and construction of what she calls "interior belonging."

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<sup>19</sup> Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 196-197.

In *The Bostonians*, The narrator's dissimulation of Olive's "morbid" character should give us pause, as it founders on the problem of imagining correspondences between an individual and a pathological type. Yet Olive's morbidity is also placed in intimate relation with another category of abnormal mind—the genius of Verena Tarrant. A whole set of anthropometric schemes for measuring, ranking, and categorizing morbid and benign deviations was built into the scientific context of the late nineteenth-century professionalization of social science. The distinct but overlapping statistical visions of eugenics, body-measurement studies, and error-reduction techniques all contributed to discourses of the "average man," many of which were exemplified and modeled by the thought of Francis Galton. Victorian studies of genius set out to measure the frequency of intellectual superiority in the general population by searching for arbitrary criteria through the biographies of historically "eminent" men. Galton's *Hereditary Genius* (1868), the prototype for such studies, defined an "eminent man" as "one who has achieved a position that is attained by only 250 persons in each million of men, or by one person in each 4,000." Similar studies by American psychologist James McKeen Cattell and British sexologist Havelock Ellis also drew related conclusions.<sup>20</sup> In his pathbreaking sexological work, *Sexual Inversion*, Ellis also cites Galton in order to claim that "twenty-four, or 66 percent [of inverts]" in his sample "possess artistic aptitude in varying degree," leading him to believe that

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<sup>20</sup> A founder of American experimental psychology and a baron of scientific print culture, Cattell spearheaded the use of measurements in the study of cerebral operations, writing articles throughout the 1880s on reaction time and mental testing. In his own genius studies, he argued that "the theory of probability makes even the measurement of the eminence of great men possible," as long as the meaning of "great men" is also imagined through a narrative of patrilineal generation and an idealizing concept of normative reproductive sexuality (374). Cattell served as the editor of *Science* from 1894 until just before his death in 1944. Robin Vandome points out that "the establishment of *Science* as an authoritative periodical was partly due to the creation of networks [...] and partly a result of Cattell's fusion of his editorial conduct with a cognitive ideal of scientific inquiry itself." See James McKeen Cattell, "A Statistical Study of Eminent Men," *The Popular Science Monthly*, April 1903: 374; and Robin Vandome, "The Advancement of 'Science': James McKeen Cattell and the Networks of Prestige and Authority," *American Periodicals* 23, no. 2 (2013): 173.

the congenitally inverted may... [have] nervous characters which to some extent approximate them to persons of artistic genius.”<sup>21</sup> (195). Ellis, who tended to view sexual inversion as a congenital sexual variation, also advocated for a eugenic conception of race improvement, to which homosexuality was seen as a non-threatening dead-end. Yet the delineation of statistical categories of persons also foundered on the question of whether some deviations could be mapped onto numbers at all.

In that light, eugenic conceptions of genius inaugurated new quantifying schemes, in which sexual and intellectual abnormalities could be thought of as coextensive, both potentially desirable and pathological all at once. While Galton and Ellis stressed categorical differences between genius and pathology, theorists of degeneration like Cesare Lombroso, and his disciple, Max Nordau, understood genius itself as another manifestation of “morbid” deviations and perversions. Lombroso argued that genius was a different phenomenon from, but homologous to, forms of degenerate atavism. Often homosexuality was part of this equation.<sup>22</sup> Describing the composite construction of his criminal type, Dana Seitler observes that Lombroso’s “accumulation of images of individuals in specific environments or under particular modes of scrutiny all correspond to an emergent historical paradigm, in which the individual image was treated as indexical to the population at large.”<sup>23</sup> His studies also, in many cases, included weak

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<sup>21</sup> See Ellis and Symonds, *Sexual Inversion*, 195. For more on Ellis’s commitments to eugenics, and its relationship to theories of homosexuality, see Ellis, *A Study of British Genius*. (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1904); and Ivan Crozier, “Havelock Ellis, Eugenicist,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Medical Sciences* 39 (2008): 187–94.

<sup>22</sup> See Bellaclossi, “Cesare Lombroso and Italian Criminal Anthropology” in *Female Sexual Inversion: Same-Sex Desires in Italian and British Sexology, c. 1870-1920* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2012): 146. Lombroso’s studies of sexual inversion and prostitution, Chiara Bellaclossi notes, showed an “interest in same-sex desires and female abnormal sexuality [that] stemmed from a more general concern with deviancy,” one in which several categories of “abnormal” offenders “shared a series of characteristics” with a general criminal type.

<sup>23</sup> Seitler, *Atavistic Tendencies* 69.

statistical justifications for sweeping claims correlating this criminal type with particular environments and hereditary characteristics.<sup>24</sup> Lombroso's degenerate genius provided a means of suturing identities to both individual bodies and the social body. In degenerationist theory, homosexuality and genius are not differences in type but rather indicate a shared form of morbidity that is both an extreme and pernicious exaggeration "normal" mental states.

For James, genius also serves as a discourse of quantities, but one whose affordances might distend, even if temporarily, the boundaries between individual subjectivities and social identities. Identity then becomes a form of public address. Verena has the ability to speak well, but what she says is often elided and silenced by the narrator as he shuttles between Basil and Olive's conceptions of Verena. For these characters, genius is often spoken of in proximity with the quantifying and racializing visions of hereditary intelligence studies. Its quality as a private, individual phenomenon is rendered, in Olive's gaze, as the object of a public concern. "Verena's genius was a mystery, and it might remain a mystery," much to her chagrin (B 876). Yet Olive nonetheless finds herself musing on its hereditary origins: "It was notorious that the great beauties, great geniuses, great characters" all generate the need for "the gaping spectators to make them 'fit in' and holding from far-off ancestors, or even, perhaps, straight from the divine generosity, much more than from their ugly or stupid progenitors." Nonetheless, she dismisses these questions as "incalculable phenomena," even as her own visions of Verena, as I will aim to show, are markedly quantitative.

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<sup>24</sup> Lombroso disputed the scientific value of "pure" quantities. In a discussion of whether statistical data can explain the relationship between high intellect and climate, he defends his use of small sample sizes thus: "I imagine the objections that may be made against these conclusions; the scarcity of data, their doubtfulness, the boldness of bringing within the narrow circle of statistics those sublime phenomena of intellectual creation which seem the least susceptible of calculation. Such objections may have weight with those who believe that statistics can only deal with large numbers, perhaps more remarkable for quantity than for quality and who thrust aside a priori all reasoning on the data, as though figures were not facts, subject like all other facts to synthesis, and had not their true value as materials for the thinker" (Lombroso, *Man of Genius* 114).



The sexual and democratic ideals implicit in Olive's conception of Verena's abilities have been explored in great detail in the scholarship on nineteenth-century genius.<sup>25</sup> Gustavus Stadler has traced a version of queer genius in terms of James's writing of artistic labor and Jewishness, arguing that James, contra Lombroso and other pathologists, "places the genius characters in a therapeutic role; he or she liberates in other effective powers of self-expression, powers for which sexuality and aesthetics act as mutually constitutive media."<sup>26</sup> While Stadler reads James as imagining a therapeutic scene of privatized sexuality, Victoria Olwell has explored the ways that Jamesian genius participated in the cultural production of new public spheres for women's political discourse, attending to James's thematic complaint registering what he understood as the deterioration of privacy. For Olwell, *The Bostonians* "not only stages the collapse of the private sphere into the public but also apprehends as private—and therefore as dangerous to the public—the mode of genius that had historically served to create scenes of public life."<sup>27</sup>

For both of these critics, James's privatized psychology places gender and sexuality on the side of the personal and interior, rather than, or indeed for Olwell, at the expense of, the impersonal and the public. But when it comes to Verena, James's novel often negotiates between these two modes of representation - private scene of self-knowing and statistical political discourse—in order to distance the narrator from the norms he describes and dramatize the

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<sup>25</sup> For more on the relationship between homosexuality and genius in the context of romanticism, see Andrew Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius: The Prehistory of a Homosexual Role* (New York: Columbia UP, 1999). For more on early sexological discourses on relationships between romantic genius and nineteenth century sex magic, see Kahan's comments in *The Book of Minor Perverts*, 66-68.

<sup>26</sup> Stadler, *Troubling Minds: The Cultural Politics of Genius in the United States, 1840-1890* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006): 132.

<sup>27</sup> Olwell, *The Genius of Democracy: Fictions of Gender and Citizenship in the United States, 1860-1945* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011): 76.

narrative consequences imposed by a formal principle routed through “objective” sexual normality. Rather than take genius or morbidity as one of the novel’s many possible ciphers for a not-yet-legible lesbian identity, I argue that Jamesian style registers the formation of sexual categories as objects and social forms that incorporate individual subjects’ desires by formalizing them within the field of statistical norms. In *The Bostonians*, that related field of what would come to constitute legible sexual identity is marked by a narratorial style that subjects categorical norms to statistical laws. However, the novel also proves to be a text in which the narrator’s commitment to neutrality and objectivity in the face of social fact ultimately prove untenable.

### Positivism and Sexuality

*The Bostonians* begins with a number, one through which James’s narration conjures an authority rooted in the purported objectivity of narrated fact. Immediately, our first description of Olive, and Ransom’s first impression of her, involves a confrontation with numerical inexactitude. For Ransom, as for James’s narrator, Olive seems to invite typological thinking. We are told that Basil had “arrived at two or three” generalizations in life, including the idea that “the simplest division it is possible to make of the human race is into the people who take things hard and the people who take them easy,” and that “Miss Chancellor belonged to the former class” (B 809). The narrator adds, “this was written so intensely in her delicate face that he felt an unformulated pity for her before they had exchanged twenty words” (809-810). It is thus within the space of these twenty words that Basil first concludes that Olive is “morbid,” (even if the narrator spends more than twenty to get there). In the early chapters of the novel, prior to Verena’s entry into narrative, the specificity of numbers serve to break up social relations and

interactions into manageable units and discreet measurements. The numbers themselves are only approximate—"about ten," "less than twenty," but their numerical form also attaches to what will become a drama of the non-relation of Basil and Olive on the basis of gender and politics. The narrator in *The Bostonians* continually describes Olive and Basil's characters in free-indirect discourse, if only to distance himself through clarifying phrases and clauses that perform a "neutral" gaze, however disingenuous that neutrality may be by the narrative's end. The narrator's commitment to an objective norm is unstable. Rather than adhering to any consistent theory of norms, the narrator continually shuffles and substitutes competing models of social facticity in order to rewrite the problem of the public and the private through the language of norms and aberrance. Numbers participate in the central dilemma of the novel, one that rests in the narrator's claim of intellectual and gendered distance from the object that the novel ultimately works toward: sexuality

James's narration in *The Bostonians* is marked by positivist conceptions of sexuality, models that work to reify and naturalize heterosexual non-relation in the moment of sexual identity's emergence. To hear James tell it, in the well-known passage from his notebooks, the novel concerned itself gender in a way that James saw as peculiar to the U.S. Context:

The relation of the two girls should be a study of one of those friendships between women which are so common in New England. The whole thing is as local, as American, as possible, and as full of Boston: an attempt to show that I can write an American story... At any rate, the subject is very national, very typical. I wish to write a very American tale, a tale very characteristic of our social conditions, and I asked myself what was the most salient and peculiar point

in our social life. The answer was: the situation of women, the decline of the sentiment of sex, the agitation on their behalf.<sup>28</sup>

I quote this oft-cited passage at length in order to highlight the continually shifting levels of scale at which James's somehow simultaneously "local," "typical" and "national" novel will be written. His novel dramatizes the scientific fixing of a sex-gender system within a field of quantities, one in which the putative neutrality of sexological thought was also situated within the field of its objects. The "decline of the sentiment of sex," which James and his narrator appear at times to lament, is at times articulated via an implicit binary opposition between feminine sentiment and masculine objectivity.

The narrator, of course, is hardly neutral insofar as his performances can be historicized. No character escapes this narrator's scrutinizing gaze, and flashes of sympathy are oft-dismissed via free-indirect discourse as quickly as they appear. Cultural conservatives and feminists have made diverging claims to the novel's allegiance to Olive or Basil, often based on the narrator's tentative and uneven performance of a divided allegiance to both characters. Scholars, likewise, have centered questions about authority and reading practices framed by James's own anxieties over the dissolution of private life: what matters is not James's own (private) political stances but his narrator's refusal to admit an allegiance to any character. It is highly unlikely that James himself was neutral about his characters' politics at this point in his career. Alfred Habegger's well-known critique of the novel makes the compelling case that James's own views on feminism most likely aligned closely with Basil's.<sup>29</sup> However, scholars in queer studies have also re-opened questions about the given-ness of the novel's categories of sexual definition and their

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<sup>28</sup> See James, *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James*. ed. Leon Edel and Lyall H. Powers (Oxford: Oxford UP 1987): 19-20.

<sup>29</sup> See Habegger, *Henry James and The "Woman Business."* Cambridge UP, 2004, 190

relationship to the novel's unsettling resolution. It is worth separating the formal principle of performative neutrality from the question of James's own politics, so as to historicize the former category in the context of those politics. Narratorial objectivity, as an aesthetic and stylistic program—even if, as Habegger would have it, a failed one—reveals much about what styles and what forms of knowledge could be thought of as objective in the emergent field of scientific knowledge about sex. The question of the narrator's non-objectivity cannot be adequately answered merely by unmasking his performances as biased all along. Rather, I want to inquire into the sexological and quantitative forms that James assumes as the categorical givens, the criteria for a style that can claim to be neutral in relation to gender, yet also work to fix *hetero* desire within a sex-gender system. James's text registers the epistemic ripples created by the reorganization of queer desires into quantifiable schemes of bodies and mental phenomena. That Verena should seem to end up with Basil through the inevitable force exerted by the dictates of her gender sits uneasily with the novel's dithering over the facticity of sexuality as such. The naturalization of Verena's heterosexuality is also vitiated by the narrator's (at times convincing) performances of sympathy toward Olive.<sup>30</sup> The attachment of Olive and Basil to distinct models of empirical and statistical knowledge create an epistemic dilemma for a narrator that seems at times to raise the possibility of alternatives to heterosexuality as the statistically necessary conclusion to Verena's narrative.

Numbers, for James's narrator, tend toward the idealizations of the "data" of premise in "The Art of Fiction," working to create scales of persons and masses. The problem of proportional scale, guarantor of the realism and representativeness of James's setting, is perhaps most central to the character of Miss Birdseye, the aging new England social reformer, likely

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<sup>30</sup> For more on the narrator's sympathy toward Olive, see Coviello, *Tomorrow's Parties*, 170-171.

based on the real personage of Elizabeth Peabody. The interpretation of James's harsh descriptions and parodic treatment of the character has been central to debates over the novel's treatment of Olive, of feminism, and of lesbian sexuality, however obliquely represented. In the immediate reception of the novel, public and critical response to Miss Birdseye, as scholars often note, was harsh. William James objected to the portrayal, called "bad business," and told Henry that she too closely resembled Peabody. To his brother, Henry replied, in a now-famous letter, that upon "any chance of its being represented to [Peabody] that I have undertaken to reproduce her in a novel" he would reply "to say [to her] that I have done nothing of the kind, that an old survivor of the New England Reform period was an indispensable personage in my story, that my paucity of data and not my repletion is the faulty side of the whole picture [...] and that in short I have the vanity to claim that Miss Birdseye is a creation."<sup>31</sup> The problem of Miss Birdseye's representativeness is also a quantitative one. Early on, when Olive first takes Basil to Miss Birdseye's home, the narrator marks Basil's response to "the mansion, which had a salient front, an enormous and very high number—756—painted in gilt on the glass light above the door." The two adjectives clarify that while the number itself is quite high, what is "enormous" is not its value but the size of the gilt numerals that publicize the address. The same word, "enormous" is also repeated later in the same paragraph in the long, ungenerous description of Miss Birdseye: "she was a little old lady, with an enormous head; that was the first thing Ransom noticed" (824). Miss Birdseye's "vast, fair, protuberant, candid, ungarnished brow," is large in a way that deviates (*enormous*) from the norms of anthropometric vision. At the same time, her face becomes a statistical fiction, a blurry composite, looking as if it had been "soaked, blurred, and made vague by exposure to some slow dissolvent," with a "mere sketch of a smile, a kind of

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<sup>31</sup> Henry James to William James, Feb 14, 1885, in *Henry James: Selected Letters*, ed. Leon Edel (Cambridge: Belknap 1987), 202.

instalment [sic], or payment on account; it seemed to say that she would smile more if she had time” (824). Her address and her body are linked by two different social scales that extend into a description of her discursive and charitable excesses. As a representation of the “data” to which James appeals in his defense of the character as “creation,” Miss Birdseye can thus be read as a figure for rewriting the facticity of representations of typologies based in region and gender, even as her body overshadows any sense of scale and order.

Miss Birdseye also stands for that most Jamesian of social errors, namely, a failure to distinguish, within the social sphere, between types of people. The problem of Olive’s morbidity repeats itself here: of what, exactly, can Miss Birdseye be said to be representative, if she is not a category unto herself, a category defined by its sole exemplar? James’s depiction agonizes over the forms of abstraction required to generate data from individual cases. In his reply to William, he seems to imagine his brother as the critic tampering with observer’s instrument before measuring his findings, emphasizing that the “faulty side” of, variously, the “picture” and the “data” is not “repletion” but “paucity,” not too much information but too little. This language of insufficient examples is all the more striking given the “enormous” scale accorded to Miss Birdseye’s body and her social presence. Coviello observes that amid James’s “broadside assault on her character,” we can see how the “strange career of Miss Birdseye shows us more than the instability of James’s putative hostility toward feminism and reform,” in that she becomes “the novel’s chief figure for historical unfolding, and for the accretive movements visible only over deep time.”<sup>32</sup> If the novel registers some consciousness of the nascent crystallization of sexual meaning, James’s narrator presents this temporality via the anthropometric description of bodies as representative exemplars or composite pictures of the population he aims to represent.

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<sup>32</sup> Coviello, *Tomorrow’s Parties*, 182, 184.

The “enormous and very high number” on Miss Birdseye’s mansion is also noteworthy insofar as it functions as an address, a number that indexes social links between place and sexuality. Street addresses become a central motif in Basil’s and Olive’s contest over Verena later on in the novel. When Olive and Verena first meet, Verena asks where Olive lives, and Olive, the narrator has it, “syllabled the address” to her. During their visit to New York, the narrator explains Olive’s anxious revelation to Basil of the address where they are staying when the two women happen to run into him at Mrs. Burrage’s apartment. Unlike Miss Birdseye, the address given is not specified in the diegesis, much like Olive’s own residence on Beacon Street: ““We are in West Tenth Street,” Olive said; and she gave the number. ‘Of course you are free to come’” (B 1056). The number is given with some hesitancy. But we are told, on reflection, two chapters later, that she has only given Basil the number because she feels secure in her “prevision” of a future, designed by her, in which Basil and Verena will never meet again. Olive plans to arrange it so that Verena will instead go to dinner with Mr. Burrage, (who is also interested in Verena but more “polite”) so that they are absent when Basil calls on them. “It had been only this prevision,” the narrator explains “that sustained her when she gave Mr. Ransom their number” (1064). Until that point, she had instead been sustained by a hope that they would never see Basil, a “belief that they might easily spend four days in a city of more than a million of inhabitants without that disagreeable incident. But it had occurred.” Through the large numbers of urban populations, the narrator appears, at least at first, to envision chance without expectation. But he later reveals that, in fact, the meeting was entirely by design, as Verena and Basil have been “in correspondence” without Olive’s knowledge. Again, Olive’s immediate question is “How did you know his address?” (1067). The word “address” itself is also central to the public-facing discursivity of the novel, as *addresses* are also what Verena delivers to her



public. It is likewise women's agency of address that Basil seeks to return to the private, domestic sphere—he wants her to only address him. The delivering of addresses and the transmission of numbers thus index a time-worn Jamesian anxiety about the dissolution between public and private, and the gendered lines along which these spheres fall. But the continual exchange of addresses also signals the naturalization of Verena's desire as a category of sexual knowledge that is kept hidden from Olive through the exchange of numbers. The novel repeatedly poses the question of to whom desire is addressed, and what norms and interpellations shape the forms of that address.

The problem of address, and of the objective narrator, is thus tied to the problem of how numbers can serve as a space of normative predictability.<sup>33</sup> The address becomes a way for James's narrator to dramatize what Basil presumes and what Olive anxiously seeks: knowledge of a coherent identity to signify Verena's desire, one that could lend ontological coherence and specificity to a norm in which heterosexuality is not equivalent to sexuality. As Verena is approached by several gentlemen callers, such as Matthias Pardon and Mr. Burrage, Olive tries to “allow for such aberrations, as a phase of youth and suburban culture,” recognizing that Verena is also “not in the smallest degree a flirt” (937, 912). The problem, for the narrator is that Verena's desires are understood as categorically different from Olive's. Verena's dialogue raises, at one point, the possibility of Olive's own erotic feelings towards men, but the question creates what James sees as an aporia for a shared sexual identity based in women's presumed

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<sup>33</sup> In other words, James's quantities register questions about chance more than questions about frequency. The novel highlights a gap between the diagnostic description of the individual case and the production of deviance as a quantifiable variation on an “existing norm,” or in other words, between what Hacking has called a physiological versus a sociological conceptions of norms. In Hacking's terms, the physiological approach sees the accretion of data as a means to diagnose the individual case, whereas the sociological approach sees the individual case as data in relation to an average. This distinction he characterizes in terms of the difference between norms as conceptualized by Brüssais (in which the pathological is an extreme, localized inflammation of the normal condition) versus norms as conceptualized by Durkheim and Galton (in which deviance is an extreme variation of the norm, whether or not some forms of deviance are desirable) See Hacking, *Taming* 166-168.

heterosexual desire. Olive tells Verena “I am not the least afraid of your marrying a repulsive man; your danger would come from an attractive one,” and Verena retorts, “I’m glad to hear you admit that some *are* attractive!” (930). To a queer reader, Verena’s reply appears naive, misrecognizing Olive’s proto-Kantian disinterested aesthetics of male attractiveness as an admission of shared *desire* for men. But Olive much more accurately imagines men as social quantities whose influence needs to be managed alongside Verena’s desire for them. We are told, in free-indirect discourse, that for Olive, “the great trouble was that weak spot of Verena’s, that sole infirmity and subtle flaw, which she had expressed to her very soon after they began to live together, in saying [...] ‘I’ll tell you what is the matter with you—you don’t dislike men as a class!’” (1065). Indeed, early on in the novel, when Basil asks, if Verena “flee[s] from the individual male,” she answers, “Oh no; I like the individual!” Basil then wonders “how she came to be closeted so soon with his kinswoman, to whom, only a few hours before, she had been a complete stranger,” concluding that the situation represents “doubtless the normal proceedings of women.” (B 883). The expressions of normality, classes, and individuals attempt to represent gender and sexuality as one and the same category. In the middle parts of the novel, James’s narrator often attributes to Olive a leveling rhetoric that assigns men values through a quantifying vision that aligns with the narrator’s uneven pretense to non-partisanship. When it comes to the men Verena should see, the decision is easy for Olive, of whom, the narrator assumes, “we know that her own mind had long since been made up in regard to the quantity of esteem due to almost any member of the other sex” (937). “We,” of course, only know this insofar as the narrator renders Olive’s interiority as a social fact, part of the norm-bound “data” that constitutes its premise.

It is in this context that I want to read Basil's commitments to positivist sociology, and the way James narrates those commitments in relation to the question of Verena's desire. Basil imagines himself as a defender of a disappearing masculine type and, along with it, a form of brutal male rationality paradoxically fashioned into a neutral intellectual persona. We are told, early on, in one of James's free-indirect character portraits, that Basil "had read Comte, he had read everything—[Olive] would never understand him." (B 818). "Everything" is typically (and to my mind, aptly) read ironically—this is Basil's word, while the narrator merely has to borrow it. Once again, the narrator appears neutral. He implicitly sees through Basil's intellectual arrogance and the shallowness of his repertoire, and insults him for not knowing what he assumes we know. Comte, who coined the terms "sociology," and "positivism," becomes a sign for Basil's unearned elitism and his own dilettantish interest in political theory. At the same time, Basil, unlike Olive, does not often describe Verena using quantifying schemes, seeing them as perhaps inadequate for a totalizing sociological vision, much as Comte did.<sup>34</sup> This vaguely positivist intellectual genealogy also includes Basil's other preferred thinker, Thomas Carlyle, whom he quotes at Verena when he meets with her during her trip to New York; when she tries to "assure" Basil that "this is an age of conscience," he replies "That's part of your cant. It's an age of unspeakable shams, as Carlyle says." When Verena retorts, he calls her "perverted" (1112). Habegger has argued that James may have been influenced directly by readings from

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<sup>34</sup> Comte, though influential for later statisticians like Quetelet, did not trust numbers to provide an adequate vision of society. As Hacking summarizes: "[Comte's] own philosophy did not fare especially well, but the word [positivism] caught on. Positive science meant numerical science. Nothing better typified a positive science than a statistical one—an irony, for Comte himself despised merely statistical inquiries" (Hacking, *Taming* 5). Porter points out that "it was a central truth of positivism that each science must have its own distinctive method and that the reduction of sciences is impossible (Porter 156). In spite of this, Comte was also significant for his eventual departure from Broussais' conception of the norm as physiological regularity, and toward a conception of pathology as categorically distinct from the norm, rather than an excitation or exaggeration of the normal state.

Carlyle when constructing the novel, and likely modeled Basil at least partly on Carlyle.<sup>35</sup> Comte and Carlyle, (both of whom, coincidentally, appear as examples of degenerative genius in Lombroso's study) become a shorthand Basil's racializing vision of Victorian womanhood, filtered through the imagined neutrality of positivistic science and "theory."

James's narrator can often be found in sympathy with the gendered politics of this positivist vision of the objective. Alongside this male scientific persona is an atavism, registered in Basil's attachment to outdated social forms, and his view of norms as needing to be both conserved and morally ameliorated. When James lays out the multi-paragraph description of Basil's intellectual roots, he distances his narrator by crafting an intrusive subjectivity, a first-person identity that manifests in order to protest ignorance of Basil's mind:

I know not how these queer heresies had planted themselves, but he had a longish pedigree (it had flowered at one time with English royalists and cavalier), and he seemed at moments to be inhabited by some transmitted spirit of a robust but narrow ancestor, some broad-faced wig-wearer or sword-bearer, with a more primitive conception of manhood than our modern temperament appears to require, and a programme of human felicity much less varied (975).

Describing Basil's reactionary politics as "queer heresies" and denying knowledge of their origin perhaps protests too much. The additional clauses slip into an analogy, in which Basil's

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<sup>35</sup> According to Habegger, "[James's] planning coincided with his reading (and reviewing) of Carlyle and Emerson's correspondence, and his writing began while he was absorbed in the last two volumes of James Anthony Froude's life-in- letters of Carlyle." I want to highlight a secondary, but significant association with Carlyle: that he and his wife, Jane Welsh, had a famously quarrelsome marriage that included abusive fights (to which Lombroso devotes several passages in *The Man of Genius*). This detail is only significant insofar as it reinforces the potential antifeminist values that James might have located in images of male genius. The figure of the abusive male genius suggests a kind of guilt by association at the end of the novel, where the narrator tells us, in the novel's final sentence, "it is to be feared that with the union, so far from brilliant, into which [Verena] was about to enter, these were not the last [tears] she was destined to shed" (B 1219). See Habegger, *Henry James and the "Woman Business"* 196.

“pedigree” appears as the “spirit” of an atavistic masculinity no longer evolutionarily fit, the narrator suggests, for modern society. James’s address to a mass reader via a shared “modern temperament” is beguiling: as an address, it both estranges and naturalizes the violent policing of gendered boundaries that James attributes to Basil. The obsession with Comte and Carlyle likewise signify Basil’s performatively masculine, anti-metaphysical commitment to the empirical, one based on the dismissal of interior feeling as feminized sentimentality.<sup>36</sup> In that regard, he signifies the epistemic image of the instrument that cannot measure itself. The narrator is meant to serve as that instrument. But this position is only tenable by the grafting of Verena’s desires onto impersonal ideals of statistical identity. That this narrator should so often appear to take Basil’s side, despite these weak attempts at distancing, is hardly surprising then. For Basil, the normative is the factual. His philosophy on gender is, in reality, an extension of the narrator’s commitment to a neutrality defined against a morbid or pathological femininity.

### Verena’s Aberrance

The anxious deflections of James’s narrator in *The Bostonians* throws into greater relief the positivist turn in Victorian social thought as taxonomies of sexual perversion took shape. As discourses of mechanical objectivity revised and moved away from models of observational

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<sup>36</sup> One phallic joke from Comte’s *Cours de Philosophie Positive* was so oft-cited as to find its way into William James’s *Principles of Psychology* (1890). Arguing against the possibility of introspection, Comte observes, “it is conceivable that a man might observe himself with respect to the *passions* that animate him, for the anatomical organs of passion are distinct from those whose function is observation. Though we have all made such observations on ourselves, they can never have much scientific value, and the best mode of knowing the passions will always be that of observing them from without” (188). Comte’s philosopher is thus both anatomically and sociologically gendered, and William’s citation of this male masturbatory fantasy sheds light on the sexual imaginaries that the James’s might have attributed to Comte. While William goes on to include a rebuttal from John Stuart Mill about the functions of memory, he ultimately sides at least partly with Comte in his conclusion that “introspection is difficult and fallible; and that the difficulty is simply of all observation of whatever kind” (191). See William James, *The Principles of Psychology*. (New York: Dover, 1950), Volume 1:188-191.

genius, the concept of the singular abnormal mind policed the rapidly multiplying divisions between pathology and mere abnormality.<sup>37</sup> To the extent that critics have understood Olive's sense of what Hurley calls "interior belonging" in her desire for Verena, aptly, as queer, and aligned with what would come to be called lesbian identity, the abstentions of James's narrator can be understood as a device for refracting this desire. However, while the narrator can be said to regularly distance himself from Olive, Olive sees with a quantifying vision that offers public alternatives to Basil's positivist, anti-quantitative masculinity that preserves the privacy of the domestic and the feminine. In Olive's measure, Verena's genius for public address creates quantitative forms that promise to open perverse and even queer possibilities, if only temporarily, and even if only because they are marked as perverse by a narrator whose normality must be assured.

These possibilities are engendered through a formal language focused on the erotic body of Verena. "I should like to be able to say that you are my form—my envelope," Olive tells her, "but you are too beautiful for that!" (946). This formalism hovers around her descriptions of Verena's genius, the "divine afflatus" that seems to make anything she says agreeable. For Olive, Verena's genius is alchemical, in that it can translate statistics into style:

the happy thing in [Verena's] composition was that, after a short contact with the divine idea—Olive was always trying to flash it at her, like a jewel in an uncovered case—she kindled, flamed up, took the words from her friend's less persuasive lips, resolved herself into a magical voice, became again the pure

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<sup>37</sup> The emergence of a non-pathological form of abnormality was an important corollary of the rise of statistical normativity and its reification of Quetelet's concept of the "average person." The biometric gazing seen throughout the novel recalls the ordering and measuring of bodies in the works of Quetelet and Galton. The ideal of the average as a reflection of a biological norm was a concept with profound implications for the grafting of the social onto the sexual. Canguilhem reminds us that, in the context of body measurement, "statistical frequency expresses not only vital but also social normativity. A human trait would not be normal because frequent but frequent because normal, that is, normative in one given kind of life" (Canguilhem 160).

young sibyl. Then Olive perceived how fatally, without Verena's tender notes, her crusade would lack sweetness, what the Catholics call unction; and on the other hand, how weak Verena would be on the statistical and logical side if she herself should not bring up the rear (B 947).

In this "interview," James combines the language of the supernatural - Verena's "divine idea," "unction," and her "magical voice"—and Olive's "logical and statistical" rhetoric, so as to imagine genius as circulating between women and the mass public. The syntax of the first sentence enumerates, without a terminal conjunction, several predicates ("kindled, flamed, resolved, became"), as if any one of these equipossible sentences could provide the necessary closure to this free-indirect vision of Verena. But what matters, for this narrator, is that they are, putatively, Olive's verbs. The erotics of this description of Olive's pedagogy, with its flashes of Paterian burning, imagines Verena as the wellspring of pure style.<sup>38</sup> The quantitative arguments that pass from Olive's "less persuasive lips" to hers are anointed and refashioned as a statistical aesthetics that can be reproduced as spoken style, through the movement of the lips ("She syllabled the address"). Such indirect labial contact is perhaps where we see the novel brush up against the historical concreteness of lesbian "sexuality" (as identity, as literary category) into which Olive's and Verena's relationship has been read.

This historically particular intimacy is key to the dilemma that hovers around the narrator's stylistic performances of objectivity and neutrality. In the interview scene, Olive's "survey" of Verena becomes a way of imagining her as a vehicle for addressing the masses. Her genius promises, for Olive, to transcend class-based schemes of the "average" or "common

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<sup>38</sup> Here I am thinking also of what Miller calls "Style" (capital S), which he describes as "absolute impersonality," as opposed to the lower-case "style," which indicates "an obvious personal project" (Miller 96). Here I choose not to dwell on a distinction between the two precisely because James's narrator is also enmeshed with the negotiation of privacy along gendered lines. The narrator's impersonality works to insulate style's "personal" referent.

denominator” that would so irk James in his later writing on America. To Olive, “she was so strange, so different from the girls one usually met, seemed to belong to some queer gipsy-land or transcendental Bohemia,” a quality for Olive that “make[s] her belong to ‘the people,’ threw her into the social dusk of that mysterious democracy which Miss chancellor held that the fortunate classes know so little about, and which (in a future possibly very near) they will have to count” (James, B 873). In Olive’s racialized fantasy, the anaphora that signals free-indirect style (“it was this glance... it was with this quick survey,” “so strange...so different”) and the series of adverbs in the parenthetical comment (“a future possibly very near”) amplify James’s distinction between his narrator and Olive’s interiority. Olive’s feminism becomes the novel’s discursive link between discourses of sexual object choice her fantasy of address, of directing a message to the “queer bohemia” of young women through Verena’s stylistic gifts. For James, the relationship between normativity and typicality becomes discourse of scale bound by place and region. Hurley reminds us that James’s characters stops short of claiming an “autochthonous identity” out of their sense of “interior belonging.” Said more succinctly, as Hurley puts it, James’s “project... was never to write a lesbian novel... his goal is to prove he can write an American novel.” The novel is motivated by the task of aggregating and characterizing the “data” of a national population. His characters are, at least in theory, abstractions intended to represent composites defined through the logic of type.<sup>39</sup> But it is within the particularity of Olive’s quantifying visions that the problem of the narrator’s sympathy disrupts the novel’s commitment to the absolute impersonality of a statistical style.

This problem of stasis overdetermines the novel’s conclusion. What is so frustrating, perhaps, about James’s narrator is that he represents Olive’s feminism and Basil’s positivism as

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<sup>39</sup> Hurley, *Circulating Queerness* 164.



if they are opposing and symmetrical forms for rendering gender and sexuality as normal objects. James's language of type and "data" require something like genius of observation to write Olive as both typically morbid and typically Bostonian. However, his stylistic dismissal of any grounding for "fact" marked by the subjectivity of the characters creates, in the novel's concluding sections, an epistemic problem. As Olive waits, on "the saddest, most wounding day of her life" for Verena to return from her promised final meeting with Basil, her interiority is rendered counterfactual through a narratorial sleight of hand:

Did Verena's strange *aberration*, on this particular day, suggest to Olive that it was no use striving, that the world was all a great trap or trick, or which women were ever the punctual dupes, so that it was the worst of the curse that rested upon them that they must most humiliate those who had most their cause at heart? Did she say to herself that their weakness was not only lamentable but hideous — hideous their predestined subjection to man's larger and grosser insistence? Did she ask herself why she should give up her life to save a sex which after all, didn't wish to be saved, and which rejected the truth even after it had bathed them with its auroral light and they had pretended to be fed and fortified? These are mysteries into which I shall not attempt to enter, speculations with which I have no concern; it is sufficient for us to know that all human effort had never seemed to her so barren and thankless as on that fatal afternoon (B 1180, emphasis mine).

In these remarkable sentences, the narrator speaks with an increasing distance from the objectivity and impersonality he claims to maintain, raising the possibility of sympathy, only to foreclose it, in the end, with a denial of knowledge. James repeatedly uses the word "aberration" in the mouth of his narrator to describe Verena's desires and tendencies toward men. It is thus in

some sense through the deviant qualities that James's narrator attributes to Verena's desire that Olive can be thought of as the object of a decidedly non-disinterested sympathy. Much like the narrator's ignorance of Ransom's "queer heresies," here the irony of the passage is in the narrator's refusal to explain, affirming the speculation he raises in the act of refusing to speculate. If the pathos of the passage relies on the recognition Olive's desire for, and identification with women, it also attaches to the narrator's subjectivity, one that is capable of refusing, and therefore admitting the "concern" here denied, to Olive. The narrator's affective shift, at the end of the novel, to resignation toward Verena's choice, and Olive's "fatal" loss, works to reify Verena's desire for Basil less as an inexorable force of nature but more as a norm of *sexuality*. The novel naturalizes the consistent and directed quality of Verena's desire, while also painting that desire's constant "aberrations," in a culminating gesture of patronizing sympathy for Olive, as errant. In James's final claim that Olive's morbidity is "fatal," he subsumes the novel's speculations on the meaning of Olive's desires beneath a Jamesian essentialism that pathologizes the deviant tendencies of women's sexuality writ large.

The Janus-faced narratorial style of *The Bostonians* thus plays out an uneven and contentious discursive process of grafting sexual meanings to normal and deviant forms through a language of performative neutrality. While it may be counterintuitive to suggest that James's attribution of "queer heresies" to Basil's politics is comparable to the erotic queerness of Olive's affinity with women's genius, the novel's epistemic dilemma obtains from the way in which James's narrator can claim to think of both characters' desires as operating within the same field of the normal and the perverse, even as they pose competing models of objectivity and normality. The tenuous impersonality of that narrator, and, by extension, the facticity and autonomy of James's "subject," can only be maintained through the fiction that Olive and Basil

can make equipossible claims to initiate Verena into this normative field. The narrator is the prop that supports this fiction. He imagines Olive and Basil as two subjects with flawed or distorted visions of gendered normality, visions whose competition across genders is understood to be partly constitutive of a normative frame for reading women's desires as normal or pathological to begin with. By that logic, if Olive's hatred for men can be grafted onto a field of sexual meaning, her pathologized identity also serves to project and naturalize gendered non-relation within "normal" women's sexuality. Put simply, the historicist question of whether Olive can be read within sexological frameworks of lesbian meaning is also bound up with James's own recognition that the alternative is to read Olive's hatred of men as an extension of women's "normal" social and economic relation to a sexual category called heterosexuality. Of course, the problem is that this non-relation cannot coexist with the version of Verena's desire he represents. Basil and Verena end up together in order to uphold a "norm" in which the facticity of sexuality determines social fact. Rather than determine a singular procedure for objectifying knowledge, *The Bostonians* renders both genius and mechanical objectivity within a social reality predicated on a heterosexual gender system. Quantity becomes a container for evidence of Verena's sexuality, evidence that secures the capacity of any number of chosen objects to be enumerated and for that ordered sequence to prop up the fiction of a consistent and directed sexual aim.

#### Large Numbers, Queer Possibility, and *The Wings of The Dove*

*The Bostonians* confronts the emerging strictures of quantified heteronormativity through the narrator's fixing of a normative frame for gendered meaning. In *The Wings of the Dove*, however, the narrator's allegiance is not simply divided between two models of reified sexuality.

Rather, James's narrator follows several characters whose separate plots collide within a thick network of determinants and chance encounters. This convergence of plot lines follows the accumulative desires of terminally ill American heiress Milly Theale, who necessarily enlists, James tells us, the desires of other characters. As he explains, in his preface to the New York Edition of *Wings*, "if [Milly's] impulse to wrest from her shrinking hour still as much of the fruit of life as possible, if this longing can take effect only by the aid of others, their participation (appealed to, entangled, and coerced as they find themselves) becomes their drama too," a drama in which they "promot[e] her illusion, under her importunity, for reasons, for interests, and advantages, from motives and points of view, of their own" (WD 5). This pull-and-push involves its own laws of physics, in which Milly's influence also magnetizes the novel's form itself, its many "centres," which act as "sufficiently solid *blocks* of wrought material, squared to the sharp edge, as to have weight and mass and carrying power" (WD 9). This apportionment of masses and amounts James expands to a compositional principle, observing first the absence of several "happy features" of his original plan for the novel, features that have become "absent values, palpable voids." He goes on to offer a mechanical analogy. The novelist "places, after an earnest survey, the piers of his bridge—he has at least sounded deep enough, heaven knows, for their brave position; yet the bridge spans the stream, after the fact, in apparently complete independence of these properties" (9). Fiction writing, James suggests, involves a special kind of knowledge that is capable of seeing initial conditions, however accurately measured, as "an illusion, for their necessary hour." The initial survey becomes valuable, rather, for its inaccuracy, for its errors, its deviations from the model. "Such cases," he notes, "are of course far from abnormal" (9).

In his preface, James understands Milly as a “complication” for the other characters, a wellspring of “tragic, pathetic, [...] indeed for the most part sinister, liabilities for her living associates” (WD 7). That Kate Croy and Merton Densher are, as James would have it, pulled into the drama of death, marriage, and inheritance surrounding Milly would seem to constrict them even as new possibilities are opened up. Likewise, the syntax of *The Wings of the Dove* registers this sense of possibility. If, as Leo Bersani points out, one effect of James’s prose in this novel, is to imagine, within the sentence, “alternatives” and “potentialities” to those that close off the narrative, then style also carries some of the risk that James seems to imagine in the gap between the possible and the factual in the field of the social that he maps.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, if the language of oppressively large quantities throughout *Wings* seems to anticipate the formulations James would apply to urban masses in *The American Scene*, it is perhaps because of the incorporation, by the turn of the century, of mass quantities into a racialized framework of middle-class normality defined through risk-management and charitable respectability.<sup>41</sup> However, as Michael Trask reminds us, the novel’s anxieties over social risk is also bound up with the rise of opportunism and pragmatism, discourses in which “the question of choice at the turn of the century was affiliated with risk more than it was aligned with the certitude of a progressively more satisfying middle-class life.”<sup>42</sup> As Trask reminds us, this emphasis on contingency and risk,

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<sup>40</sup> See Leo Bersani, “The Narrator as Center in ‘The Wings of the Dove,’” *Modern Fiction Studies* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1960): 132.

<sup>41</sup> For an account of class differentiation within sexuality in the context of turn-of-the-century urban culture, see Chad Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940* (Chicago: Chicago UP 2009), particularly Chapter 1. Heap traces a genealogy of white, middle-class slumming parties, which “reflect[ed] the growing trend toward the heterosocialization of public leisure” (18). The eventual closure of red-light districts in Chicago and New York after the turn of the century were predicated on shifts in these racialized models of charity alongside anti-vice campaigns.

<sup>42</sup> See Michael Trask, *Cruising Modernism: Class and Sexuality in American Literature and Social Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2003): 50.

in American social thought, were often associated with a prevailing sense of anomie exemplified by James's imagined "risky" encounters with European immigrants. To the extent that nineteenth-century middle-class respectability also inflected the social meanings of the statistical fiction of the average person, the quantitative turn toward risk and indeterminacy in turn of the century statistical thought also provided a model for articulating the sexually destabilizing effects of these new forms of class mobility.

In *The Bostonians*, these threats tend to be imagined in terms of the breakdown of gendered Victorian spheres. By comparison with performative antifeminist neutrality of James's earlier novel, the style of James's late fiction, I argue, complicates the factual status of sexual identities by deferring the syntactic closure of subject and object. Thematically, this blurring of object status is also accomplished through the emptying out of numerical specificity. Near the end of Volume I, Milly Theale reflects on her chance meeting with Merton Densher at the National Gallery, in a description that imagines desire as circulating between private and public knowledge. Milly has gone to visit the Gallery to escape the "personal question" that has haunted her since the doctor, Sir Luke Strett, first has diagnosed her with the unnamed illness (likely consumption) (176). Here at the Gallery, the "anomaly" of meeting Merton Densher and Kate Croy, and of learning that these two know each other, emerges in sentences in which knowledge and silence are distended across subjectivities:

The flash in which he [Densher] saw this was, for Milly, fairly inspiring—to that degree in fact that she was even now, on such a plane, yearning to be supreme. It took, no doubt, a big dose of inspiration to treat as not funny—or at least as not unpleasant—the anomaly, for Kate, that she knew their gentleman, and for herself, that Kate was spending the morning with him; but everything continued

to make for this after Milly had tasted of her draught... Whatever the facts, their perfect manners, all around, saw them through (WD 180).

Here, the repeated clarifying phrases (“for Milly,” “for Kate,” “for herself”) coordinate multiple subjectivities to one another. The desire Milly feels for Densher, and the dissimulated fact of Densher's quiet engagement to Kate, signaled in some recognition of their having met before, are strung together in a lengthening of a thought that appears to belong, by the end of the sentence, to Milly. But “the facts” are ultimately tossed aside. Regrettably, for Milly, the “personal fact” of Densher is finally supplanted, moments later, by the return of that “quantity” she has come to the gallery to forget, her illness. Yet as that quantity returns, we are told that “she didn’t care now for Mr. Densher’s personal fact” (184). She withholds this quantity from Susan Stringham, knowing that that Kate, whose not-so-coincidental relational to Densher she has just witnessed, is only kept from knowing of her illness “by so thin a partition” as Susie. Likewise, the diegetic attention to the contingency of knowledge attenuates the thin partition that separates narrator from character in the recognition of deviant possibility.

Late in James’s career, the erotics of “quantity” and “personal fact” emerge through the circulation of knowledge in and around a career-long interest in privacy, a dividing line that the narrator in *The Wings of the Dove* regularly crosses. The disappearance of Lionel Croy, Kate’s father, whom Sedgwick calls the book’s “unspeakable homosexual,” becomes a narrative consequence of the novel’s commitment to occluded quantities. In her account of *Wings*, Sedgwick reads, via the “flatness” of James’s reference to his “impossible” scandal as central to the novel’s construction of Kate’s gender and sexuality.<sup>43</sup> Lionel’s ghostly presence upholds

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<sup>43</sup> For more on the construction of Kate Croy as a character “type,” and the role of Lionel’s social disgrace in that construction, see Millicent Bell, “‘Type’ in *The Wings of The Dove* and the Invention of Kate Croy,” *The Cambridge Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (March 2008): 90–97. Bell’s account of Lionel’s embarrassment as an epistemic absence is helpful, but Bell does not read this absence in terms of sexuality, whereas I, to borrow a formulation from

James's "contagious sexual aesthetic (and a related novelistic aesthetic) that places a high value on brutalizing silences."<sup>44</sup> In his preface, James describes the novel in terms of the formal problem created by the continually shifting perspectives and the seeming non-centrality of Milly, whom he claims is the novel's true subject. Sedgwick reads this formalism through the erotics of anal penetration, focusing on James's description, in his preface, of the novel's form as a two-faced medal, in which the author has the "option" of deciding whether to begin with Milly's illness, or with the other characters caught up in its wake. Sedgwick's reading of this passage turns on the dimensionality of James's figurative shift from obverse and reverse to recto and verso, and finally to rectum, that is to say, a shift from an image of the flat surfaces of the medal to one of inner and outer: "preparatively and, as it were, yearningly—given the whole ground—one began, in the event, with the outer ring, approaching the centre thus by narrowing circumvallations (AN 294). Here, for James, the concept of the "centre" governs the relationship between form and content.

However, Sedgwick does not attend to the "optional" aspect of James's medal. The hanging coin in the preface stands in contrast, thematically, to Osmond's painting of the coin in *Portrait of a Lady* (1881). There, the object is already rendered on the canvas, flattened and congealed in the gaze of the aesthete, though we are never told what side of the coin is visible (PL 568). In the preface to *Wings*, however James imagines the coin, and the temporalities of the novel's form, as suspended and unresolved, at least in the opening parts of the text. To read the anal erotics of James's metaphor as in some sense aligned with the formal problem of Lionel's homosexuality is apt, but it may also risk fixing the normative meaning of those forms.

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Hugh Stevens, would suggest that it enlivens *Wings* to read Lionel as at least "(some kind of)" sexual deviant, although I also do so with the qualification that homosexuality only emerges as an absence.

<sup>44</sup> Sedgwick, "Is the Rectum Straight?" in *Tendencies* (London: Routledge, 1994): 75.



Sedgwick reads silence as a structuring sign for the novel's "libidinal indifference" that same-sex desire inaugurates within the oedipal narrative. Rather than take *the* oedipal narrative itself as a normative frame, I want to examine the distortions that James's prose exacts on "normal" oedipal sexuality's quantitative forms. James's sentences take measure of the relations between social quantities and desires in the construction of the normal and the aberrant. For Kevin Ohi, the silences in James's prose highlight a formal problem, which he reads in the opening to the novel, when Densher wonders just "what was it, to speak plainly, that Mr. Croy had originally done." Here, Ohi observes, "the central question of that unspecified sin... is explicitly bound up with the question of narrative proximity and distance" such that "Lionel's disappearance as a legible character is paired with the vanishing, in the narration, of a determinate locus of voice."<sup>45</sup> James dramatizes not just Lionel's homosexual unspeakability, but the formal qualities of the unspeakable as a "personal fact." The style of *Wings*, as James explains it, produces a "centre" that is contingent on a unity where the "optional" quality of contingent knowledge is rendered through a stylistic "economy of composition" (AN 302). The obsession, in James's late fiction, with discontinuity and breakages in narratorial perspective registers the shifting role that objectivity plays in James's constructions of sexual aberrance.

The novel's style alters naturalist assumptions about the epistemic relationship between statistical visions of populations and the dictates of sexuality. Such deferrals of closure, both in his sentences and in the stability of the "personal fact" of Lionel Croy's homosexuality, locate narrative possibilities the flattening, indeterminacies of "mere quantity." Here, James highlights the aleatory potentialities of the social. Characters run into one another. Possibilities are imagined, tested, and discarded. Early on in the novel, the character most associated with

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<sup>45</sup> Ohi, *Henry James and the Queerness of Style*, 90-91. For Ohi, "free indirect style in *Wings of the Dove* is queer" to the extent that the open secret of homosexuality revealed in the performance of a perspectival vanishing act.

managing the various personal quantities of the characters is Maud Lowder, Kate's benefactor, who has agreed to support her financially and advance her social prospects in exchange for her renunciation of her father, and for her tacit refusal to marry Merton Densher. As Merton tells Kate after his first conversation with Aunt Maud, what troubles him is that she knows "the probability—I mean Mrs. Lowder measures probability—that I may be prevented from becoming a complication for her by some arrangement, any arrangement, through which you shall see me often and easily" (WD 70). He means that unlike Kate's father, an affordable loss, Maud has calculated that inviting Merton to social occasions is less risky than spurning him, as keeping him at a safe distance from Kate makes it all the easier to arrange Kate's marriage to Lord Mark. So too, as a measurer of probabilities, Aunt Maud is also, herself, a quantity. Her presence is repeatedly described in terms of her massive scale. Densher compares her to "the car of Juggernaut" (70). Susan Stringham describes her as "large" and likens her to "a capacious receptacle, originally perhaps loose, but now drawn as tightly as possible over its accumulated contents" (111). Densher recognizes a "truth" by comparison, "he was—on Mrs. Lowder's basis, the only one in question—a very small quantity, and he did know, damnably, what made quantities large" (66). What makes quantities large, for James is constituted by a social power relation that determines what scales will count in the first place. The description of Maud's and Densher's social masses also highlights her management of normative sexuality. Maud cultivates Milly as an alternative prize for Densher if he at least appears to stop pursuing Kate, so as to keep Kate within Maud's own social circle and effect Lionel Croy's further banishment from the narrative. It's no wonder, then, for Kate and Merton, that upon arriving in London, "the sense of quantities, separate or mixed, was really, no doubt, what most prevailed" (110).

Aunt Maud's massive social scale exerts a norming force and a transactional form on the characters' sexualities and desires, whether articulated through kinship, marriage, or public scandal. Nonetheless, each of these are quantified monetarily, though often without the numerical specificity of price. Lionel Croy's offense remains hidden in the privatized world inaugurated by the quantifying schemes of Maud Lowder and the turn toward Milly's vast wealth as the solution to escape his contaminating presence. But in the early parts of the novel, Lionel is also the subject of speculations both financial and sexual. In the novel's first chapter, he criticizes Kate for giving away, to her destitute sister, half of her share of their late mother's trust. He tells her it's "about two hundred a year for Marian, and two for me, but I give up a hundred to Marian," and Lionel "sigh[s]" in reply, "Oh you weak thing!" When Kate relays her aunt Maud's proposal—that she should cut all ties with him in exchange for financial support and marriage prospects—the conversation with Lionel becomes a negotiation. We are told, even before this, that Lionel sees Kate as a "tangible value," and that "he derived none from similar conditions, so far as they *were* similar, in his other child" (WD 25). Likewise, when he urges Kate to extract as much as possible from Maud, he tells her, "there was a day when a man like me—by which I mean a parent like me—would have been for a daughter like you quite a distinct value; what's called in the business world, I believe, an 'asset'" (29). What Kate is supposed to realize in this "value," if not Lionel's being a certain "kind of man," that is, a homosexual, does not necessarily preclude Lionel's vague financial situation. By the end of the novel, we learn that Kate has resumed relations with her father after he has turned up on their doorstep, though not in want "of food, of necessary things—not even, so far as his appearance went, of money" (395). Rather, we are told, "he looked as wonderful as ever. But he was—well, in terror," though of what, she does not know. Lionel's sudden reappearance and disappearance coincides with the

effacement of Milly's bequest, and demarcates the novel's formal "blocks" that bookend the middle sections of the text. Yet the quantitative inconsistency of his finances also threaten to undermine the narrative's compensatory translation of Lionel's original sin into the social scene surrounding Milly's desire.

At the end of the novel, Lionel becomes, like the amount of Milly's bequest, an unknown quantity, predicated on Kate's refusal to name the actual figure that Milly has left to Densher. This abyss stands out, not least because, within the artificiality of the "test" Densher has created for Kate—renounce the money or end the engagement—that number's value also becomes Kate's sole bargaining chip. Yet Kate's withholding of knowledge also returns, in the penultimate scene, to the biggest open secret of the novel, as just before Densher hands Kate the sealed letter from Milly's estate: Kate begs him: "If you love me—now—don't ask me about my father" (395). In the ensuing scene of Densher's "test," Kate questions him, and when she detects the slightest hint of his willingness "to believe the amount of money's not small," she immediately seizes on it ("Ah there you are!") but then drops it just as quickly. That Kate never reveals the sum, just as she never reveals the answer to Densher's question, "what has [Lionel] done?" operates within James's own formal framework of suspending the closure of objective knowledge. Kate's circumlocution exemplifies what James scholars will recognize as the kind of narrative abysses that he tends to open, in his late fiction, creating gaps in knowledge that throw into relief the discourses that wrap, tendril-like, around them. Densher disturbed by the possibility of Kate's being rich, with her "genius for the so-called great life," a genius still marked, for Densher, by the abysses surrounding her paternal disgrace. Unlike *The Bostonians*, in which narrative and narratorial closure concretizes the novel's deference to the norm as stabilizing evidence for sexual typologies, *The Wings of the Dove* concludes with a form of

closure in which James's epistemic absences take shape around quantified social "values" associated with the risks of public sexual disgrace. But the novel also predicates this quantitative vagueness and deferral of objective quantities on the gendered and sexual aesthetics of style.

### Deviating Style

In *The Wings of the Dove*, the narrator's prose does not tend toward a gendered objectivity written from an imagined normative frame, but rather constructs a non-objective, non-normative sociality through inexact quantities. David Kurnick has suggested that James's late style articulates certain desires, highlighting an "interest in collective forms of being" rather than individualized, privatized psychology.<sup>46</sup> He argues that the "prodigality of style in the Jamesian universe," with its "refusal to observe the limits of any particular consciousness," creates what he calls a "performative universalism." In aestheticizing Milly, James makes her, as Kurnick observes, an "emblem of style," but one in which stylistic deviation is at its most pronounced when she, like Lionel Croy, is finally absent. For Kurnick, this style works against the acquisitive frame that would assign an ethical or moral weight to the novel's conclusion.<sup>47</sup> In the social space of the novel, the prodigality of such a style might indeed risk social embarrassment of the kind suffered by Lionel Croy, without any mention of sexuality being required. Such a style also operates within a social normativity, but one determined, far more than in James's

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<sup>46</sup> See Kurnick, "What Does Jamesian Style Want?" 216.

<sup>47</sup> For more on the relationship between sexuality and ethics in *Wings*, see Phyllis Van Slyck, "Charting an Ethics of Desire in *The Wings of the Dove*," *Criticism* 47, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 301–23. Van Slyck argues that James's novel's ethical complexities cause a recognition of the epistemological void that signified by the Lacanian real, which creates the possibility for "the individual to begin (to act) from a wholly subjective orientation, in opposition to 'the reality that commands and regulates'" (van Slyck 302). If indeed the gaps in *Wings* signal the fragmentation of regulative knowledges through pure subjectivity, it is worth asking exactly what construction of "reality" James's style works against.

earlier work, by the desires of social masses. So his narrator describes it, at one particular social occasion at Matcham, where Susan, Kate, and Merton discuss and contemplate Milly's social success in London:

The great thing for him [Densher], at this, as Kate gave it, was in fact quite irresistibly that the case was a real one—the kind of thing that, when one's patience was shorter than one's curiosity, one had vaguely taken for possible in London, but in which one had never been even to this small extent concerned. The little American's sudden social adventure, her happy and, no doubt, harmless flourish, had probably been favoured by several accidents, but it had been favoured above all by the simple spring-board of the scene, by one of those common caprices of the numberless foolish flock, gregarious movements, as inscrutable as ocean-currents. The huddled herd had drifted to her blindly—it might as blindly have drifted away (WD 211).

The syntax of these sentences imbricate multiple characters' consciousnesses into the description of the capricious movements of a social mass. Here James also emphasizes the importance of chance and randomness. Milly's social success, for Densher (and for Kate, we are told, via Densher), is subject to the aleatory and hard-to-predict, "gregarious" movements of the "numberless" crowd. James's enumerations and clarifying phrases defer the closure of the description of Milly's audience-conscious sociality, in which Densher, the journalist, recognizes a way of describing "a feature of the time, of the purely expeditious and rough-and-tumble nature of the social boom... Anything was boomable enough when nothing was more so" (211-212). James understands Milly as a vehicle for his own ambulatory style at the moment where she disappears, variously, into the "scene" of social fact. But such a disappearance threatens to

collapse into a journalistic style emblematic of the masses of print and numbers that James associates with “mere quantity.”

James’s syntactical deviations, in the later fiction, do not solidify his objective distance from the characters, as in *The Bostonians*, but rather subjects object status to an aesthetic principle of wandering subjectivity. In the much-discussed scene where Milly contemplates the Bronzino portrait, she declares aloud, in the presence of Lord Mark, “I shall never be better than this,” to which Lord Mark replies by confusing (“he hadn’t understood”) the woman in the painting for the painting itself. Later, this aesthetic viscosity is routed through Densher’s gaze:

That was the story—that she was always, for her beneficent dragon, under arms; living up, every hour, but especially at festal hours, to the ‘value’ Mrs. Lowder had attached to her. High and fixed, this estimate ruled on each occasion at Lancaster Gate the social scene; so that he [Densher] now recognized in it something like the artistic idea, the plastic substance, imposed by tradition, by genius, by criticism, in respect to a given character, on a distinguished actress (WD 206).

For whom does the statement, “that was the story,” have meaning? Is it Milly or Densher who speaks of such intimacy with “her beneficent dragon”? The circumlocutions and silences of James’s prose vitiate the value that “tradition,” “genius,” and “criticism” demand by deferring the syntactical grounding of “personal fact” through style. Milly becomes a “centre” insofar as she is an object of this style’s many subjective gazes. She transforms the narrative of young women’s doomed freedom from James’s middle period into an aesthetic and formal principle of the late period.

Such moments of “aestheticized voyeurism,” as Jonathan Freedman observes, respond to and rewrite the aestheticist problematics of *Portrait of a Lady*. In contrast to James’s earlier novel, Freedman observes, “it is not just the observer figure who plays out the ambiguities of aestheticism... it is the object of her observation who willingly—even eagerly—participates in them.”<sup>48</sup> This revision of Paterian aestheticism, Freedman suggests, “brings not only the worldly engagement of a consciousness engorged with sense data but also serves as a force to be reckoned with in the world of social power,” in that Milly follows Pater’s demand, in the conclusion to *The Renaissance*, to experience a wealth of sensations, but does so in the social and monetary sphere of Aunt Maud and Kate.<sup>49</sup> The narrative dilemma that circulates around the possibility of Milly’s desire for Merton Densher and Lord Mark, is imagined as the product of a style that renders her as an aesthetic object for both men. Freedman suggests that in James’s late fiction, the aesthetic sensibility that he attempts to cleanse in his earlier work metamorphoses into formal principle. Milly takes on an object status in James’s style, but is often the site of a gaze that is multiply gendered, where desire is not divided neatly along heterosexual lines. In one moment of description, Densher shares a gaze, a “relation inconceivable” with an unnamed young man that quickly morphs into a tacit understanding. Densher sees “him hushed, passive, staying his breath, but half understanding, yet dimly conscious of something immense and holding himself painfully together not to lose it.” He feels that although the man “was too distant and too strange for the right identity [...] it was his own face Densher had known.” Just as

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<sup>48</sup> See Jonathan Freedman, *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism, and Commodity Culture*. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990): 206; for more on the relationship between vision and sexuality in the novel, see also Michael Moon, “Sexuality and Visual Terrorism in *The Wings of the Dove*.” *Criticism*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (fall, 1986), pp. 427-443. I also borrow from Moon’s a foundational theorization of sexuality as a wider field of meaning encompassing various acts, identities, and modes of self-knowledge than is typically delimited by heterosexual genitality.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.



quickly, that look transfers to Maud Lowder, for whom the impression “passed between them mutely as in the intervals of their associated gaze they exchanged looks of intelligence” (WD 373). The intimacy Densher shares with the man through an imagined recognition of shared loss is somehow registered, as if telepathically, in “the intervals” of the gaze that is shared between Densher and Maud. James’s prose reroutes the possibility of desire between men through the looming figure of Milly and her death-infected largesse. Thus, when Densher learns of this “fact” on Christmas Eve, and “for the next hours took its measure,” he is struck by the sense that “the consequences possibly implied were numerous to distraction” (378). James’s prose seems to register these numerous and distracting possibilities. Yet the aesthetics surrounding the fact of Milly’s illness and death work to open some sexual possibilities even as they close off others. Through Milly, James flirts with the possibilities of public intimacies, even if only to imagine certain desires as doomed.

Such a style deviates, but in ways that work against the pathologizing gaze of male sexual science. Milly is often the object of that male gaze, though just as often, she returns it in such a way that distorts the novel’s division between sexual and physiological norms. In Milly’s first meeting with Sir Luke, James conjures a version of the “genius of observation” in which the expertise of the observer mediates the model or composite representation of the norm:

They had been together, before, scarce ten minutes; but the relation, the one the ten minutes had so beautifully created, was there to take straight up: and this not, on his own part, from mere professional heartiness, mere bedside manner, which she would have disliked—much rather from a quiet pleasant air in him of having positively asked about her, asked here and asked there and found out. Of course he couldn’t in the least have asked, or have wanted to; there was no source of

information to his hand, and he had really needed none: he had found out simply by his genius—found out, she meant, literally everything (WD 147).

As pathologist, Sir Luke exemplifies the forms of expert judgement and observational genius whose status was hotly debated in discourses of scientific neutrality. The passage, it must be said, has more to do contextually with Milly's social performances than with direct diagnostic knowledge of her illness; but Sir Luke exemplifies an inductive logic in which knowledge emerges entirely in absence of any direct "information." He has found out "everything" not through any physiological aberrance but simply through Milly's public presence. That "everything," the object of Sir Luke's verb, extends the sentence in the same manner as James's enumerated phrases throughout the passage. The prose seems to mimic Sir Luke's probing, adding short clauses that enable the deduction of the concluding object. But by the middle of their conversation, Milly's replies, she imagines, have "showed him—showed him in spite of himself—as allowing somewhere far within, things comparatively remote, things in fact, as she would have said, outside, delicately to weigh with him" (150). Milly's interaction with Sir Luke models a relation between the author-artist and the text, imagining that the style of the prose might serve also as an instrument for both suspending and generating narrative closure through the knowledge of pathology.

The disappearing act of Lionel Croy is therefore part of a larger aesthetic and formal program that operates in James's novel, in which "queer" sexual meanings are rendered possible and illegible in one and the same gesture. To the extent that the continuous fragmentation of characters' perspectives inaugurates, as Ohi argues, a groundless epistemic silence, the style of *Wings* serves as an alternative to the public-facing forms of address represented by Densher, or the social deductions of Sir Luke. "If James could not plot his way out of his culture's

pronouncement that style and homosexuality are virtually one and the same,” St. Pierre observes, then at least “he could invent a negative style that would prevent readers from applying that logic to him.”<sup>50</sup> But is no ground truly reached in James’s representation? Even as James opens up gaps in the possibility of specific (that is to say, specifically homosexual) identities, he also quantifies the social meanings of those gaps in ways that exercise a profound impact on the events of the narrative and its social scene. Lionel Croy, like Milly’s Bequest, becomes an unknown social quantity whose presence invites endless speculation about the motives and interests that James describes in his preface. Milly serves as an aesthetic object and a formal principle founded on the privatization of sexual knowledge. That privatization never ultimately escapes the transactional world of social quantities. To the extent that *Wings*, written only a few years after the Wilde trials, can be said to arrive on the heels the homosexual’s arrival as a figure of the mass public, the novel’s occlusions also at least register the *possibility* of homosexuality as a public social fact. Exploring James’s vexed relationship to Wilde, Freedman argues that “James presents himself as the fulfillment of a Wildean position or pose, Wilde, his own negation; for James plays the true, alienated artist, the true poet insensitively abused and scorned by his materialistic, vulgar, and inartistic society, and casts Wilde as the embodiment of the corrupt animating principles of that society.”<sup>51</sup> Late style might then be read as a response to the cultural moment where discourses of sexual deviance produce not just typologies of sexual difference but a logic for policing the social for signs of the perverse. What is less James’s late fiction, however, is the positive, empirical status of social facts themselves. Rather, his late fiction suggests, sexuality is most visible when its possibilities are left uncounted.

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<sup>50</sup> St. Pierre, “A Personal Quantity,” 123.

<sup>51</sup> Freedman, *Professions* 176.

The high “American quantity” that James observes in *The American Scene* envisions the possibilities implied by the feminized social quantities. The “unexampled opportunity of the woman” in America, James records, has revised a fundamental assumption about divisions between private and public. “The woman is two-thirds of the apparent life—which means that she is absolutely all of the social” (255). These anxieties over shifts in women’s sociality come to structure James’s categories of pathologized feminine desire amid the separation of social gender from sexual identity. But the recognition of this social fact was also predicated on the arrival of sexuality’s emergence apart from gender. More than ever, after the turn of the century, the objective “facts” of public sexual knowledge seemed inescapable, yet for James, such facts inevitably betoken a cultural circumlocution around sexuality, a reticence which he describes in *The American Scene* (1907) as “the general American habit of indirectness, of positive primness, of allusion to those matters that are sometimes collectively spoken of as ‘the great facts of life.’” (AS 38). It is not coincidence that, just before turn-of-the-century that the phrase ‘the facts of life’ first acquired its idiomatic meaning as knowledge about reproductive sexuality.<sup>52</sup> Yet when James refers, early on in *Wings* to “the great serious facts of life,” which Milly Theale and her companion, Susan Stringham, have attempted to escape by traveling to Switzerland, he does so with reference to Milly’s illness, an unspoken “motive of unrest,” an “impression... of something that had a reality compared with which the nervous explanation would have been coarse” (WD 83). Seltzer’s reading of *The American Scene* reminds us to recognize, in James’s ostensible resistance to representing “the facts of life,” a problem arising from the reduction of sexuality to a “common mean.” “The facts of life” became James’s phrase for what H.G. Wells,

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<sup>52</sup> The OED lists its first print usage in George Meredith’s 1891 novel, *One of Our Conquerors*, though the phrase may have been in spoken use before that.

in his critique of James's account of America, called "the social and economic substance," that is, James's advertisement of his own complicity in the "artful evasion of the actual."<sup>53</sup>

The shift, evident in James's late style, away from the performative neutrality of his earlier narration, highlights the way in which his compositional ideals turned on the gendered attachments of scientific knowledge to nascent discourses of sexual science. *The Bostonians* dramatizes competing models of positivism, pitting feminist deployments of statistics against an empiricism modeled on the gendered separation of public and domestic spheres. The concatenation of Verena's "aberrant" flirtations with men culminate in the novel's production of her sexual identity through the narrator's dramatization of this gendered epistemic conflict. In James's late fiction, however, no ground is given to a singular vision of an objective norm, nor to a categorizing system that could enumerate desire. The desire of Milly, refracted in Lionel Croy's disappearance from the text, is figured in the novel's occlusion of the central quantity that renders Kate and Merton's love impossible, marked by the ghost of sexual deviance.

James's novels articulate a dilemma facing critics seeking to historicize his evasive and calculating representations of desire, namely, how to situate those representations in schemes of normal and irregular social behavior at the moment in which the very category of "normal" was crystalizing in statistics, sociology, and sexology. If, as Michael Warner has argued, being normal was not widely understood as a (normative) virtue "until the spread of statistics in the nineteenth century," James's fiction registers the often jerky and uneasy construction of sexual deviations as statistical forms.<sup>54</sup> After the turn of the century, newly professionalized social sciences rewrote the relationship between sexuality and knowledge by standardizing the genres of sexual evidence—case studies, sex surveys, psychometric tests—through which sexual and

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<sup>53</sup> H.G. Wells, qtd in Seltzer, *Henry James and the Art of Power*, 100-102, 104.

<sup>54</sup> See Warner, *The Trouble With Normal*, 53.

intellectual identity categories could be constructed within the social. The branching off of psychoanalysis, social psychology, and psychometry from the broader but more unspecified network of late-nineteenth century experimental psychology and philosophy of mind might be read as a symptom of anxieties over an increasing instability of biopolitical knowledge. Like James's narrators, twentieth century sex researchers needed increasingly complex instruments to measure the social relations in which they were already imbricated. By staging the concretization of sexual identity out of several competing frameworks of normalization, James's fiction foregrounds a central problem that would characterize normalizing discourses in the coming decades: the problem of form.

CHAPTER TWO:  
THE STEIN QUESTIONNAIRE

*“It is not easy to say how seriously the questionnaire should be regarded [...] Personality has its bulwarks. If they are broken down by academic pressure, they will not be available later as resistant to any other kind of pressure. Personalities violated will not be as tough as personalities splendidly inviolate.”*

-P. W. Wilson, “A Question of Questionnaires,” (1934)<sup>1</sup>

*“5. Do you find, in retrospect, that your writing reveals any allegiance to any group, class, organization, region, religion, or system of thought, or do you conceive of it as mainly the expression of yourself as an individual? [Answer:] I am not interested.”*

-Gertrude Stein, response to the *Partisan Review* (1939)<sup>2</sup>

For Gertrude Stein, queer people are an endless source of information. Perhaps this is because, to borrow her famous expression from *The Making of Americans* (1925), “it takes time to make queer people,” time required for the recording, collecting, and describing of character. The queerness of character interested Stein throughout her career—until it didn’t. In fact, the disappearance of “queer people” and their character from Stein’s prose is a repeated refrain in her narratives of stylistic and aesthetic maturation. In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), she writes, in the voice of her eponymous narrator, that, at some point between 1912 and 1914 (after the completion of *The Making of Americans* and prior to *Tender Buttons* (1914)), she abandoned a descriptive project that had arguably occupied her attention since the completion of her first literary works. She tells us that her “style gradually changed” in that “hitherto she

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<sup>1</sup> P.W. Wilson, “A Question of Questionnaires.” *The North American Review* 237, no. 4 (Apr., 1934), 326

<sup>2</sup> Gertrude Stein, “Response to the *Partisan Review*.” *How Writing Is Written*. Ed. Robert Bartlett Haas. (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1974), 54-55.

[Stein] had been interested only in the insides of people, their character and what went on inside them,” yet she felt, after that trip, “a desire to express the rhythm of the visible world.” As Stein points out, she “always was, she always is, tormented by the problem of the external and the internal” (ABT 119).<sup>3</sup> Yet in this recurrent retroactive discontinuity, it is almost always the internal part of this binary that she jettisons. At some point, for Stein, the insides of people become endlessly possible to describe, and therefore not worth describing. According to another, oft-quoted version of the story, her interest in human character had begun to wane even before she wrote *Making*. In a 1946 interview, she claims that her early work in the nineteenth aughts and afterward concerned “not solely the realism of the characters but the realism of the composition... the realism of the composition of my thoughts.”<sup>4</sup> Character, for Stein, is always past its expiration date, and the further one reads in her career, the more obsolete it becomes. By the time she published *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein narrates that she had begun to reject “pathological psychology” even before writing her long novel, when she left medical school and moved to Paris. It is on the heels of this rejection of both medicine and pathology that Stein offers the epigrammatic phrase, in Alice’s narration, that “she always says she dislikes the abnormal, it is so obvious. She says the normal is so much more simply complicated and interesting” (ABT 83).<sup>5</sup> The shift describes a prose style that is no longer interested in the erotics

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<sup>3</sup> Abbreviations to Stein’s major texts are as follows: NMA – “Normal Motor Automatism;” CMA – “Cultivated Motor Automatism;” F – “Fernhurst” in *Fernhurst, Q.E.D., And Other Early Writings* (London: Liveright, 1973); MA – *The Making of Americans* (Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1995); ABT – *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (New York: Vintage, 1990); CE – “Composition as Explanation,” in *Writings, 1936-1946* (New York: Library of America, 1998); *Lectures in America, in Writings, 1936-1946*.

<sup>4</sup> See Stein, “A Trans-Atlantic Interview — 1946” in *A Primer For the Gradual Understanding of Gertrude Stein*. Edited by Robert Bartlett Haas. (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1971), 13-35

<sup>5</sup> For more on Stein’s construction of abnormality in Stein’s juvenilia, including the Radcliffe Manuscripts, see Priscilla Perkins, “‘A Little Body with a Very Large Head’: Composition, Psychopathology, and The Making of Stein’s Normal Self.” *Modern Fiction Studies* 42, no. 3 (1996), 528-546. Following Foucault’s concept of technologies of self-knowledge, Perkins points out that while Stein may have declared abnormality passé in the 1930s, she was intensely interested in it in her early writing.



of people's insides, and is routed instead through the externalizing affordances of vision. Yet character often returns, despite Stein's assertion that she has done away with it. The uneven lurches and jolts of Stein's interest in the specificity of character and "the normal," throughout her career, imagines the slow, accretive textual process whereby queer desires pass from the referential language of the pathological case and into the enumerative possibilities of large-scale forms: queerness as data.

For Stein, the relationship between sexual and textual queerness is written within the normative field of information and data. As such, I use these terms in order to echo the increasing importance, in the twentieth century, of "information" to the study of media, statistics, and communication. In using the term, I also rope in a broad cluster of social-scientific ideals associated with the increasing allure of large samples. I mean to place Stein's career-long aesthetic interest in typologies of personality, to which her longest and most difficult novel, *The Making of Americans*, serves as her most exhaustive study, in the context of the early-twentieth century's looming mass of social data gathering tools and the growing centrality of sexuality to imaginaries of "information." By the late 1920s and early 1930s, however, statistical data was becoming increasingly important to psychologists, politicians, and advertisers. As recent scholarship has pointed out, *The Making of Americans*, performs a level of abstraction and descriptive flatness that has made it an attractive object for critics interested in big data analysis and digital reading methods.<sup>6</sup> As Natalia Cecire points out, "the relationship between not reading and the unreadable [...] [is] embedded in an early twentieth-century history of compromised

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<sup>6</sup> Tanya Clement, for example, has used digital reading methods in order to argue for Stein's commitment to a structure and form, as opposed to "postmodernist" readings that read the novel as chaotic or anti-mimetic. See Tanya Clement, "The Story of One: Narrative and Composition in Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 54, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 426–48.

reading, whether performed by machines or by women.”<sup>7</sup> It was Toklas who did all of Stein’s typing and proofreading.<sup>8</sup> For Cecire, the demand for compromised and automated reading practices highlights the role of women’s reading work, including Alice’s, in the construction of computing and data-analysis as forms of labor. Likewise, the “unreadable” has also been an important component of for feminist accounts of Stein’s work as specifically “lesbian writing,” with its resistance of male modernism’s demands for signification.<sup>9</sup> In taking up the erotics of data representation, I want to highlight the way in which queer desire can be represented in aggregate, not through a one-to-one translation between women’s work and the queerness of Stein’s style, but rather through the discursive threads that connect the idealization of norms and asymmetrically gendered taxonomies of knowledge and desire. In doing so, I show how Stein’s texts place desire at the center these gendered scenes of information-gathering and recording, and imagines forms for routing that desire through descriptions of “insides.”

Stein’s ideal of a numerical information was intimately connected with modernist elevations of the automatic, and also with anxieties over the femininized allure of mass-cultural forms.<sup>10</sup> The spread of the social-sciences themselves into mass culture created one domain in which the neutralizing force of social data became laced with gendered meaning. Historical

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<sup>7</sup> See Cecire, “Ways of Not Reading Gertrude Stein,” *ELH* 82, no. 1 (2015), 283

<sup>8</sup> For more on Toklas’s role in the production of Stein’s writing, see Janet Malcolm, *Two Lives: Gertrude and Alice* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2007), 42.

<sup>9</sup> Shari Benstock points out, for example, that “[Stein’s] writing constitutes both the expression of the social (the lesbian writer writing against dominant culture) and the negation of the social (Stein’s language denies the claims of the patriarchy by writing a different language – what Catharine R. Stimpson calls Stein’s ‘antilanguage,’ one that the patriarchy calls ‘nonsense’).” See Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986): 162; the reference to “anti-language” can be found in Stimpson, “The Somagrams of Gertrude Stein,” *Poetics Today* 6, no. 1/2 (1985): 76.

<sup>10</sup> I borrow the “anxiety of contamination” thesis from Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986). For Huyssen, these anxieties had much “do with the increasingly marginal position of literature and the arts in a society in which masculinity is identified with action, enterprise, and progress-with the realms of business, industry, science, and law” (45).

accounts of Stein's relation to information have typically focused on the relations between writing and media technology, and have emphasized the way turn-of-the-century life was bombarded not just by information but by the quotidian disruptiveness of noise. Juan A. Suarez writes, persuasively, that "noise, in the cybernetic sense of nonsignifying matter, is another name for the otherness that modernism, as an art of practice, discovered in the heart of the quotidian." Following Walter Benjamin, he describes noise as a version of the "automatism of the world," conditioned by apperceptions of "the stochastic disorder of bodies and things" via the camera (and, for Suarez, audio recording technologies).<sup>11</sup> Stein's psychological experiments and her style in *Making* form part of Suarez's catalog of modernist texts that "fashioned themselves after recording-receiving devices—radios and telephones picking up the signal, and phonographs alternately recording and playing messages back."<sup>12</sup> Likewise, Fredrich Kittler, reading Stein's prose as "automatic writing by invention," places her psychophysical experiments at the Harvard Psychological Laboratory, along with her literary work, within a set of forms he collects under his "discourse network of 1900."<sup>13</sup> In Kittler's account, psychophysics reduced signification to

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<sup>11</sup> See Juan A. Suarez, *Pop Modernism: Noise and the Reinvention of the Everyday*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 8-9.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 129. For more on Gertrude Stein's relationship to auditory media and broadcasting, see Sarah Wilson, "Gertrude Stein and the Radio," *Modernism/Modernity* 11, no. 2 (2004), 261-278. For Wilson, the version of understanding Stein articulates in her late work, emblemized by a 1937 radio interview, can be likened to "participatory radio" programs like *America's Town Meeting of the Air*, which "recouples emotional and intellectual engagement, just as Stein's writing does" (265). Stein's interest in the participatory forms of media is suggestive of interesting connections to her concepts of literature as a data-gathering tool.

<sup>13</sup> See Fredrich Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*. trans. Michael Metteer and Chris Cullins (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990), 228. Kittler's account of the way automated writing technologies "desexualized" discourse by decoupling spoken signs from women's voices has been influential for this work. But Kittler does not consider the way automatism and the imagined extricability of information from noise also participated in the constructions of erotic identities within a sexual system based on statistical norms.

meaningless noise, which vitiated previous hermeneutic models of writing by “advanc[ing], beyond all attribution of meaning and its transparent arbitrariness, to the meaningless body.”<sup>14</sup>

But the very idea of the meaninglessness of the body’s “normal” automatic movements—the question of which movements are pathological, which are normal, and what forms enforce such a distinction—was also a discursive construction, one intimately bound up with the emergence of “normal” sexuality. Mark Goble has skillfully applied these concepts of noise and static to the writing of sexuality in Stein’s modernist celebrity. For Goble, one formal analogue to noise, in both Hollywood films and in Stein’s late work (particularly the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and after), is the cameo appearance. In a text like *The Autobiography*, which is filled with brief but fleeting celebrity encounters, the distractions and static of Stein’s prose then become a site to inquire after “the means by which knowing sex is transposed into a question concerning communication itself.”<sup>15</sup> However, the noisiness that surrounds sexuality, can also appear paradoxical, in that its textual effect, Goble suggests, is silence. In quest of what those silences efface, we as critics risk abstracting the “unspoken” sexual referent from the construction of sexual identities as a new form of mass-cultural information. Rather than presume, *a priori*, that the queerness of Stein’s prose runs athwart these forms of information-gathering and transmission, I want to examine the affordances of desire that Stein’s prose enables alongside the scientific rewriting of character as an object of social and psychophysical *data*, that is, of imagined relations between textual norms and gendered rubrics of sexual categorization. Stein’s descriptions of human character, and with their masses of textual (and often sexual) description, can be traced through the social-scientific grafting of erotic meanings

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>15</sup> See Mark Goble, *Beautiful Circuits: Modernism and the Mediated Life*. (New York: Columbia UP, 2010), 128

onto newly measurable social identities, intertwined objects of a growing obsession with forms and data the social sciences. It is in this arena that I want to locate Stein's recurring narrative of the turn away from "internal" pathology and toward the "external" and the normal.

The debates in Stein criticism over labor, technology, and the allure of the automatic are instructive. In addition to Stein's scientific writing and literary prose works, I examine a less-visited site where her writing complicates the erotics of data-collection: her answers to literary questionnaires. While the uses of questionnaires for statistical purposes predates the origins of psychometry, these genres, also became mass-cultural objects with the spread of the "confession albums" as popular parlor games in the late nineteenth-century. The now-famous (or infamous) "Proust Questionnaire," later enshrined as the Celebrity Questionnaire of the mid-century, included questions such as "your favorite virtue" and "For what fault have you most toleration?"<sup>16</sup> Such objects reveal the way in which personality tests and surveys became modernist literary objects. Stein participated in a number of these surveys in the late 20s and 30s, often giving short and dismissive answers, though not to every question. In some cases, these answers would seem to undermine the very questions themselves, implicitly critiquing the form of the survey. Yet Stein's system of personality types or "bottom natures" in *The Making of Americans* is also emblematic of the twentieth-century re-invention of "personality" (as distinct from "character"), a phenomenon described in detail by historian Warren Susman and explored in Stein's portraits by the critic Ann Diebel.<sup>17</sup> The terrain of Stein's discarded characterological

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<sup>16</sup> For more on this questionnaire, and the historical context of the confession albums, see Evan Kindley, *Questionnaire* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 18.

<sup>17</sup> Susman argues that the concept of personality emerged in congruence with the professionalization of the social sciences and "the development in government and public journals of a view of the need for 'objective' and 'scientific' gathering of data and treatment of social ills" (274). Diebel's work on Stein shows the way in which Susman's culture of personality was also central to Stein's star-making status in the literary world. My own methods differentiate from Susman's in that I see personality not as a pre-discursive concept that found articulation after the fact, but that its construction as a concept marks a definitive shift in the epistemology of gender and sexuality. See

projects, and of her longest novel, has been the subject of multiple book-length studies, and is too vast for this chapter.<sup>18</sup> Rather, I pull on particular threads in her work, identifying the appearance, disappearance, and reappearance of the language of pathological character and queer personalities across her career. By the mid-1930s, a torrent of surveys, questionnaires, and public opinion polls had already formed (for advertisers, pollsters, sex researchers) a growing mass of information—but the question of what these statistics could signify was also increasingly up for debate. Of course, the surveys Stein answered in modernist magazines were not scientific: their discursive aims, and methods of aggregation and individuation, were far hazier. Indeed, Lori Cole has argued that “avant-garde questionnaires” in modernist little magazines were marked not by “a desire for statistical quantification,” but rather by a tendency to thwart “the survey’s data-driven logic [and] to parody empiricism.”<sup>19</sup> Still, we might inquire what kind of public knowledge this genre continued to generate. Stein’s responses highlight intimacies between modernist anxieties over mass-cultural forms, and its self-consciously perverse flirtations with those same forms. Stein’s iterative and eroticized descriptions of “bottom natures” and “the insides of people” might productively be read via the spread of rapidly standardizing forms for generating information about social and sexual normality. If Stein’s long novel requires a means for reading big data, that may be because its sentences *are* data.<sup>20</sup>

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Susman, “‘Personality’ And the Making of Twentieth-Century Culture” in *Culture as History* (New York: Smithsonian Books 2004), 272-285; and Anne Diebel, “Gertrude Stein’s Mutual Portraiture Society.” *The Paris Review*, May 14, 2018. <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2018/05/14/gertrude-steins-mutual-portraiture-society/>

<sup>18</sup> Leon Katz’s well-known dissertation is perhaps the foremost extended study of this text (insights from which are printed in Katz’s important article on Stein and Weininger, discussed below). Two other studies come from George B. Moore, *Gertrude Stein’s The Making of Americans: Repetition and the Emergence of Modernism*. (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999); and more recently, E. L. McCallum, *Unmaking the Making of Americans: Toward an Aesthetic Ontology*. (New York: SUNY Press, 2018).

<sup>19</sup> See Cole, *Surveying Modernism* 28.

<sup>20</sup> For more on the relation between statistics and automatism, see Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines* (New York: Routledge, 1994). Seltzer traces, for example, the use of what Galton “pictorial statistics” in the novels of Stephen

If, as Goble suggests, Steins' style is marked by a language that transposes effaced erotic relations onto literary forms that approximate the automated recording of information, that information can involve its own erotic possibilities. Stein's externalizing and flattening forms often, paradoxically, return her to the scene of looking into people's insides. The scientific aim of flattening of desire becomes the site of an epistemic gazing at bodies, often women's, engaged in the act of recording. For queer scholars, Stein's repetitions themselves create opportunities for queer relations to time and text. E.L. McCallum, for example, approaches the queerness of Stein's long novel by de-historicizing it, arguing that the novel's queerness does not consist in its representation of "gendered and sexed identities" but rather in the ecstatic "unmaking of sexed and temporalized identity" through which it refuses the demand that narrative produce heteronormative futurity.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, Elizabeth Freeman argues, though without jettisoning the historicity of identity, that Stein's early works, like "Melanctha," cleave queer experience from the aesthetics of rupture and transgression, imagining instead the possibilities of the "hopeless case" whose malicious compliance tends toward boredom and routine as spaces of resistance.<sup>22</sup> Repetition in Stein's texts, for Freeman, is not "the harbinger of an event" but "fuzz, a skip in the record or a moment of frozen pixilation on the screen," one that rejects the transgressiveness of shock. These accounts stress the way in which Stein separates repetition from normative temporal structures. Yet Freeman, like the media studies critics, also describes Stein's reiterations as another potential source of interrupting noise, even if that noise does not

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Crane, arguing that the naturalist fictions of the late nineteenth and early-twentieth century tended to produce character types as variations on "statistical persons" (Seltzer 100, 95).

<sup>21</sup> McCallum, *Unmaking* 25-26.

<sup>22</sup> See Elizabeth Freeman, Hopeless Cases: Queer Chronicities and Gertrude Stein's 'Melanctha.'" *Journal of Homosexuality* 63, no. 3, (2016), 337. Freeman also points out that "queer theory problematically privileges noncompliance" and the "transformative event" where difference irrupts into repetition (333).

ultimately stop the show from going on. These accounts may miss the way Stein's data, just as often, generates desire not just out of noise and interruption but for data itself. Stein makes the very queerness of unbroken interruptions into a kind of norm for her prose, one in which desire is imagined through masses of information.

The repeated return of Stein's project of categorizing the relation between automatism and character reiterates and rewrites a desire for written forms that can flatten the asymmetries of identity systems into a "pure" description: a fantasy of data without prescription, of normality without normative hermeneutics. The text becomes objective by way of its norming of a desire normally jettisoned from scientific experimentation. In the next section, I discuss Stein's scientific writing at the Harvard Psychological Laboratory in the context of early attempts to measure character in both psychometrics and experimental psychology. After that, I transition into a reading of selected portions of *The Making of Americans*, focusing in particular on one unexpectedly novelistic section that has come to be called the "Hodder episode," where the language of "personality" returns and then disappears. In the third and final section, I discuss Stein's responses to questionnaires in literary magazines and interviews alongside her writing and lectures of the late-1930s. Definite character implies a limit to description, a point at which characterization can end, and where some words get to count as part of the whole, while others get omitted as irrelevant or repetitive. Stein's prose flattens individual differences in sexual identity, imagining the text as an instrument for mediating between desire and identification, collapsing distinctions between the desire for interiority, and the social performance of desirable interiority within a heterosexual field of meaning. Rather, queer style becomes a stylistic norm that underwrites the labor of norming and recording sexual data. What I trace is an erotics of norms that is not reducible to a desire simply to negate queerness (I'm just like everybody else),



nor to render it as tragic (If only I were normal); rather, such an erotic attaches to the flattening, distracting affordances and de-individuating effects of information, information mediated by specialized, automatic, and standardized forms operating multiplying levels of scale. Her prose raises the possibility of an erotic connection established through the data of the text, through the formal project of observing and recording a desire in aggregate.

### Desiring Personalities

The languages of character and personality, in the early years of experimental psychology, articulated a discursive process of separating objective data from the erotic bodies of both observer and observed in the scene of information-gathering. Around the turn of the century, the meaning of “personality” changed. Having meant, at least until the nineteenth century, the ontological quality of being a person, the word was repeatedly churned through psychological research, advertising, and advice manuals, so that by the early-twentieth century, it tended to indicate a set of personal behavioral qualities tangentially related to the concept of “character” in nineteenth-century moral education.<sup>23</sup> With the vogue of personality talk, nineteenth-century constructions of character as manhood, associated with industry and the protestant work ethic, gradually gave way to described a growing vocabulary of self-knowledge voiced through the acquisitive and desiring performances of a heteronormative, middle-class consumerism.<sup>24</sup> As James B. Salazar points out, the decline of character in the latter half of the nineteenth century also redefined relationships between bodies, interiorities, and social categories insofar as “the

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<sup>23</sup> See Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 176-178

<sup>24</sup> See Susman, “Personality” 276.

promise and peril of the rhetoric of character that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century was that it provided a powerful resource for challenging the social and legal delimitations of race and gender while also articulating a newly elaborated and delimiting taxonomy of race, class, and gender ‘types.’”<sup>25</sup> By contrast, “personality,” in the first decades of the early-twentieth century, signified social performances that rendered interiors as private and potentially desirable attributes—or rather, an interior represented through technologies and genres of assessment within a heterosexual norm of aesthetic and erotic valuation. In Stein, the concept of personality (and the death of “character”) appears with similarly erotic undertones, and through a variety of origin stories. Tracing the relation between these concepts and the massive typology of “bottom natures” that appear in *The Making of Americans* reveals slippages between the limited but elaborately structured lexicon through which Stein names these interiorities—“character,” “bottom-nature,” “personality,” “queerness”—not just through the novel but through her early attempts to write the externalizing performance of character as an object of scientific observation.

Stein’s scientific writing is circumscribed by discourses for negotiating the experimental situation as a space of desire. Of course, I say this with the caution that no account of influence on Stein’s typological systems in *The Making of Americans* can be totally extricated from the texts, or from the effects of her own continuous rewriting of her biography. However, certain Stein’s interest in the mechanical determinations of character through language draws on the quantitative imaginaries of experimental psychology, particularly in her oft-discussed writings at the Harvard Psychological Laboratory, where she studied under Hugo Munsterberg and William James. In a co-authored paper called “Normal Motor Automatism,” (NMA), Stein and Leon

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<sup>25</sup> See Salazar, *Bodies of Reform: The Rhetoric of Character in Gilded Age America* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 4.

Solomons describe a series of experiments in which the two observed themselves as “normal” subjects engaged in a mechanical procedure. The essay’s conclusions were intended as an intervention in contemporary debates about hysteria, most notably the “second personality” theory, which stated that a subject who entered a hysteric state showed evidence of a secondary consciousness. Stein and Solomons disagreed, arguing instead that the observed “personality” is really a form of automatic behavior, a “disease of the attention” (NMA 512-513). Just as importantly, Stein and Solomons implicitly construct themselves as normal experimental subjects and also as mental instruments capable of recording themselves and one another. In one paragraph, about the “tendency to repetition,” (a paragraph which B.F. Skinner would later call upon to exemplify and dismiss Stein’s “secret,” accusing her of repackaging automatic writing as literature), highlights the rhythmic and regular interval of the repetition (“the unconsciousness was broken into every six or seven words by flashes of consciousness”) as an aspect of the authors’ normal subjectivity.<sup>26</sup> In this early essay, normal consciousness steps in where “personality” disappears.

Stein and Solomons’ constructions of the normal scientific character underscore the slipperiness of “character” and “personality” even as they function as centrifuges for separating the scientist’s character from the impersonality of data.<sup>27</sup> Stein’s second article, “Cultivated

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<sup>26</sup> See B.F. Skinner, “Has Gertrude Stein a Secret?” *Atlantic Monthly* 153, no. 1, (Jan 1934) <https://www.bfskinner.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Has-Gurtrude-Stein-a-secret.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Perhaps just as important as James’s theories of personality, for Stein, was the fact that that James was, himself, a personality, a large scientific character in whom Stein found an admirable model of singularity and consistency. In the Autobiography, for example, she describes how she was “delighted” and “pleased” by James’s “personality and his teaching and his way of amusing himself with himself and his students” (ABT 78). Years earlier, Stein elaborated on that personality in a theme she composed in response to a lecture James delivered on the subject “Is Life Worth Living?” To James’s question, Stein answered “Yes, a thousand times yes when the world still holds such spirits as Prof. James... He is a strong sane noble personality reacting truly on all experience that life has given him. He is a man take him for all in all.” See Stein, “Untitled Theme” in *Gertrude Stein: Form and Intelligibility: Containing the Radcliffe Themes*. Ed. Rosalind Miller. (New York: Exposition Press, 1949) 146-147

Motor Automatism” (1898) (CMA), is marked by a shift in methodology and a tightening of the discursive meanings of “character” and its relation to the automatic. But it is precisely in the description of character that discourse operates in the service of what Cecire understands as Stein’s commitments to epistemic virtues associated with Daston and Galison’s concept of mechanical objectivity. Stein’s turn toward objectivity “has the effect of further embedding” her scientific research “in historical contingency.”<sup>28</sup> Maria Farland reminds us that the experimental core of Stein’s writing on neuroanatomy and automatism in medical school was also informed by a scientific model of both mind and brain that was explicitly gendered. Stein borrowed, Farland argues, an “abstractionist” method of thinking associated with Johns Hopkins biologist W.K. Brooks’s “variability hypothesis,” a heterosexist theory of mind that claimed abstract thought was a “biologically male” cognitive process.<sup>29</sup> By contrast, brain modeling—the work of drawing, labeling, and organizing specimens—was denigrated as “‘purely mechanical work’ performed primarily by female students and assistants.” According to Stein, “the men wouldn’t waste their time on it.”<sup>30</sup> For Farland, the scientific context of Stein’s work was one in which “type and variation are antithetical descriptive approaches whose shared implicit goal is the elaboration of differences between the sexes.”<sup>31</sup>

But it is through this model of scientific work that Stein’s texts register desires articulated through images of women’s intimacy with data. Likewise, William James’s theories of character and consciousness, which repeat nineteenth-century associations between character-building and masculinity, provide a premise for Stein’s own surveying projects, while also troubling the

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<sup>28</sup> Cecire, *Experimental* 91.

<sup>29</sup> See Maria Farland “Gertrude Stein’s Brain Work.” *American Literature* 76, no. 1 (2004), 137.

<sup>30</sup> Stein, qtd in Farland, “Gertrude Stein’s Brain Work” 123

<sup>31</sup> Farland, “Gertrude Stein’s Brain Work” 128.

putative genderedness of objectivity itself. Steven Meyer tells us that James distrusted the second personality theory, but his own uses of the words “character” and “personality” are likewise complex.<sup>32</sup> Early on in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), in the chapter on Habit, James’s reproduces the liberal nineteenth-century vision of character, quoting John Stuart Mill’s ideal of a “fashioned will,” which he redefines, via a mechanistic language, into “an aggregate of the tendencies to act in a firm and prompt and definite way upon all the principle emergencies of life.”<sup>33</sup> As Salazar points out, “James’s point in citing Mill, rather, is not to reiterate the classical dilemmas of character building but rather to resolve them with a physiological account of habitual self-inscription.”<sup>34</sup> While the word “character” indicates a cultivated self, the word “personality” appears elsewhere in *Principles*, though primarily as a synonym for “consciousness.” Adapting James’s distinctions to her second article tightened its definitions. But Stein struggled with the composition, receiving comments from Solomons at one point that her language was too abstruse and that the important observations were buried under the weight of the other text.<sup>35</sup>

In the study, Stein describes the tendency toward automatic writing as a measure of the attentive capacities of character types. She rested her subjects’ arms on a planchet suspended from the ceiling and attached to a pencil, which would mark a piece of paper below. With the

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<sup>32</sup> See Steven Meyer, *Irresistible Dictation: Gertrude Stein and the Correlations of Writing and Science*. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001). He points to a particular instance where James places the term in scare quotes, claiming that “whatever mistrust he meant his inverted commas [around ‘secondary personage’] to suggest was directed at the notion of a ‘secondary personage,’ not at consciousness per se,” and adds that “other researchers may have uncritically posited unconsciousness in hysterics, but for James it only existed in quotation marks.” (244, 246).

<sup>33</sup> See William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol I, 125.

<sup>34</sup> Salazar, *Bodies of Reform* 94

<sup>35</sup> Malcolm compares Solomons’s comments on this early draft of Stein’s article to the “magisterial disorder” of *The Making of Americans*. Solomons tells Stein, “one has to hunt around too much to find the important points,—it is as bewildering as a detailed map of a large country on a small scale” (qtd in Malcolm 134-135).

subject's eyes closed, Stein then "direc[t]ed] him to keep his mind off the experiment and off his arm" while she very slowly attempted to move the arm so as to "teach" repetitive movement, allowing her to "judge also how readily he [the subject] yielded to a newly suggested movement, or if he resisted it strongly" (CMA 295-296). The subjects (all students at Harvard and Radcliffe) of the experiments are then classified into two groups, "Type I and Type II," a character-type division bound up with the students' chosen field of study and their responses to the experiment. Type I, we are told, "consists mostly of girls who are found naturally in literature courses and men who are going in for law... nervous, high-strung, very imaginative, has the capacity to be easily roused and intensely interested" (297); type II, conversely, "is more varied... the individuals, often blonde and pale, are distinctly phlegmatic. If emotional, decidedly of a weakish sentimental order... Their power of concentrated attention is very small," a series of characteristics she associates with hysterics (298). Cecire points out that this study has been generally dismissed by Stein critics interested in her more experimental writing, largely because it comes to "conclusions that seem all too embarrassingly typical of the late nineteenth-century disciplinary context in which the study was done."<sup>36</sup> In terms of the position it takes in the hysteria debate, Stein's thesis mirrors her first article with Solomons, in that hysteria consists not in a secondary personality but a disease of the attentive capacities. But in CMA, it is the space of character description and typology that serves as the central space for negotiating the objectivity of the normal and the pathological via the affects and desires that find formal articulations in her descriptions of the data.

While sometimes dismissed as just poor science, Stein's psychological writings highlight the twentieth-century U.S. obsession with forms—with the use of forms as a way of mediating

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<sup>36</sup> Cecire, *Experimental* 88.

and regulating the relation between social categories and scientific subjectivity. Prior to the spread of random sampling in the late 30s and early 40s, a bevy of questionnaires and surveys after the turn of the century articulated scientific idealizations of large samples, but also of uniform data, that is, of forms (literally, in some cases, forms to be filled out) that could render the discursive plenitude of the self.<sup>37</sup> The use of surveys and questionnaires had, by that time, become a standard genre for the growing industry of personality testing based on a wealth of psychological categories, including Allport's "ascendance and submission" and Jung's "introversion and extroversion," which were readily adaptable into pop-psychological genres for use by corporations and advertisers (including the now-ubiquitous Myers-Briggs Inventory, developed on a loose interpretation of Jung in the nineteen-teens, and popularized in the following decades).<sup>38</sup> Yet the problem of the characterological lexicon also troubled the psychophysical experiments of the 1880s and 1890s. Alongside the automated recording technologies used by psychologists like James, Munsterberg, and Cattell, anthropometric and psychometric theories of measurement also debated on the linguistic relations between data and interiors. Procedures for measuring mental characteristics routinely ran aground on the problem of developing a metalanguage for counting and enumerating the available categories of psychological classification. The task was, as Francis Galton put it in a founding essay of

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<sup>37</sup> According to Igo, "surveyors' modes of representation were ubiquitous in the twentieth century, and crucial to the making of a self-consciously mass society" (12).

<sup>38</sup> In her account of the rise of personality testing, which focuses in particular on Meyers-Briggs, Merve Emre observes that personality tests became, using Foucault's phrase, "technologies of the self" that provided knowledge in the form of statistical aesthetics, even as standards for test validity grew more rigorous, and continued to demand better and better data, even when the tests proved problematic. She also observes that, by the 1920s, psychologists generally distinguished between character and personality, in that "the former connoted a stable, unified, and interior self and the latter the mutable expression of that self across different social circumstances." See Merve Emre, *The Personality Brokers: The Strange History of Meyers-Briggs and the Birth of Personality Testing*. (New York: Doubleday, 2018), 54

psychometrics, to “apply a foot rule to [the] heights and depths” of “human nature.”<sup>39</sup> If, to use Stein’s language, nature has a bottom, Galton argued it can be reached by counting words. The psycholexical theory he proposed was that socially bound character traits preceded language, meaning that the lexicon itself could furnish data on the total number of mutually determining categories of persons. Consulting a dictionary, he noted “fully one thousand words expressive of human character” (181). In the 1920s and 1930s, on the heels of personality trait theories, several lexical studies that claimed to expand this list of words to 3,000, 4,000, 18,000.<sup>40</sup> At the turn of the century, psychophysical experiments provided one empiricist approach to the problem of measuring psychic interiors, but, as Stein’s work shows, mental measurement tended to struggle with questions of terminology and classification. Even as mechanically objective technologies were employed to record data about individual subjects’ physiological responses at unprecedented levels of scale, discourse on the proper place of the scientist’s subjective description multiplied. In a response to one of Cattell’s articles on “Mental Tests and Measurement,” Galton argues that psychologists should supplement their numbers with “with an independent estimate of the man’s powers,” or in other words, with impressionistic character bios, adding “if psychologists seriously practised the art of briefly describing characters, they

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<sup>39</sup> Francis Galton, “Measurement of Character,” *Fortnightly Review* 36 (August 1884): 179–85.

<sup>40</sup> In a 1936 monograph, Gordon Allport, inventor of the theory of personality traits, would claim to have found nearly 18,000 words in the English lexicon that described motivations, reactions, emotional states, and character traits. Allport classified these terms into four groups: “trait names” (“neutral” words that described “true” permanent character traits), “temporary states” (non-permanent feelings, including participial forms), “social evolutions” (non-neutral words, either praising or denigrating, that described personalities in terms of social roles and values) and a fourth category, “metaphorical or doubtful” (Allport and Odbert vii-viii). Close examination of Allport’s list reveals that sexual behaviors and identities are among the most fraught of his categories. Words like “perverse,” “lesbian,” “Sapphic,” “nymphomaniac” and “hysterical” appear in the trait-names category, while other terms like “fairy,” “fagot [sic],” “bisexual” and “asexual,” are “metaphorical or doubtful,” but do not likely refer to sexual identities but the sexes of species. See Gordon Allport, H.S. Odbert, *Trait Names: A Psycho-Lexical Study. Psychological Monographs* 47, no. 1, 1936.



might raise that art to a high level.”<sup>41</sup> It was in this inexact space between “character” and “personality” that both psychometry and the automatic writing experiments faced the lures of a scientific desire for meaningful descriptions of data—desires that, through these same lexical ideals, reflected back on the character of the scientist.

The constructions of objectivity and normality in both NMA and CMA form part of a scientific discourse in which the very language of description becomes a contested territory for the negotiation of desire and objectivity in quest of a neutral metalanguage of measurement. In these texts, character, when it ceases being written automatically, risks revealing the queer foundations of language itself. An example from James’s *Principles* shows the queer possibilities that get inscribed through his radical empiricist metalanguage of interiors. In a well-known account of homosexuality, James writes that, while same-sex aversion is instinctual, habit can overcome instinct in order to produce “a certain sexual appetite, of which very likely most men possess the germinal possibility.”<sup>42</sup> For James, what makes for this “germinal possibility” of homosexuality is the plasticity of character, a stochastic principle in which “the sexual instinct is particularly liable to be checked and modified by slight differences in the individual stimulus, by the inward condition of the agent himself, by habits once acquired, and by the antagonism of contrary impulses operating on the mind.”<sup>43</sup> “Liability,” a plasticity of “habit,” “tendencies to act”—these are as much features of homosexual character as of the continuous nature of thought itself. The queerness of this consciousness troubles James’s concept of empirical data. In the famous “Stream of Consciousness” chapter, for instance, James underscores the reality of such

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<sup>41</sup> James McKeen Cattell, “Mental Tests and Measurement,” *Mind* 40, no. 59 (July 1, 1890): 380.

<sup>42</sup> See James, *Principles of Psychology*, Vol. II 439.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 437

“tendencies” in thought, psychic pulsions that direct objects toward other objects in sequence. Here the “definite images” of thought appear as “pailsful, spoonsful, quartpotsful, barrelsful, and other moulded forms of water” and tendencies as “the free water that flows around it.” How else, he wonders, could it be possible for someone who is reading a sentence for the first time to “immediately emphasize all his words aright, unless from the very first he have a sense of at least the form of the sentence yet to come, which sense is fused with his consciousness of the present word, and modifies its emphasis in his mind so as to make him give it the proper accent as he utters it?”<sup>44</sup> Here, the “tendencies of the nascent images to arise, before they were actually there” depends on the presence of organizing forms and incorporates objects of (potentially queer) desire. Michael Trask has pointed out how James’s “germinal possibility” theory reproduces a sexological discourse in which sexual inversion, at one pole, was “obscure, mobile, and diffuse,” while, at the other pole, the figure of the invert himself (or herself) was understood to be paradoxically “transparent and stable.”<sup>45</sup> (Trask 33). The word “tendency” also appears throughout both of Stein’s articles, generally as a synonym for “suggestibility” toward automatic movement (CMA 305). But these early studies collapse character and personality together, revising the Jamesian distinction between consciousness and habit, and ensconcing the hysteric as a single character type among other types. Likewise, James’s “tendencies” freight sexual and textual desires with statistical echoes, conjuring, for the coherence of the mental as an object, an imagined mass of normative data represented by a central position, a median, an average.

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<sup>44</sup> See James, *Principles of Psychology*, Vol. I 254-255.

<sup>45</sup> See Trask, *Cruising Modernism* 33. These constructions of a desire offer a basis, Trask argues, to “restor[e] a sense of content to Stein’s seemingly aleatory and nonnarrative texts” in order to “look past the linguistic formalism her work has invited” (90).

James's radical empiricism is thus marked by the problem of language's slippages between the representation of data-as-text and the personal, subjective space of sexual desire.

Stein's literary works, producing lexical variations as substitutions, may act at times like statistical ranges, where normative combinations can be isolated and represented as sequential, enumerated "values" (as she would later describe them), rather than simultaneous possibilities. As Stein writes in "Composition as Explanation," the flattening and "even-ness" of her style articulates the production of "time in the composition" through "the quality of distribution and equilibration" (CE 529). Stein, of course, would later distinguish herself from the work of both Solomons and James.<sup>46</sup> Meyer observes that by the time she completed *The Making of Americans*, Stein rejected the theory of automatic writing, and with it, the idea of a purely senseless language, pointing to comments in her 1946 interview and elsewhere, where she says that she "made innumerable efforts to make words write without sense and found it impossible," adding, "any human being putting down words had to make sense out of them." For Meyer, this reader-response theory of "sense," or, alternatively, the death of the (automatic) author, is enough evidence that Stein did not view her own writing as truly automatic, and that purely "automatic writing was impossible to anyone who was not clinically hysterical."<sup>47</sup> But this does not explain the continued allure of character (and the death of character) for Stein's stylistic experiments. The gendered and erotic meanings that Stein attaches to the norming of character and personality linger throughout her work. Her scientific writings highlight that the status of gendered desire (what the genteel male scientist must protect himself from) was also at stake for experimental psychology and its project of measuring mental responses. The work of modeling,

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<sup>46</sup> For more on Stein's disagreement with Solomons, See Cecire, *Objectivity* 85.

<sup>47</sup> Meyer, *Irresistible Dictation* 231.

of describing specimens, of collecting data, of calculating, of recording—these forms of gendered labor were also intensely regulated spaces of desire and identification on the part of both experimenter and subject. But as Stein moves beyond her early intellectual contexts, these gendered asymmetries, baked into the construction of typologies and variations themselves, becomes just another object to be flattened under the weight of Stein’s forms. The intransigent refusal of “the insides of people” to submit itself to objective measurement serves as the basis for a sexual and textual experimentation with the scale of data and desire.

### What Does Description Want?

Stein’s longest novel, completed in 1911, dramatizes the problematic effects of desire on the construction and description of data. Characteristically, it does so at a scale that demands, for some critics, that the text be read through procedures that resemble data gathering, with or without the aid of machines or algorithms. Stein’s now-famous clause, “It takes time to make queer people,” occurs early in *The Making of Americans*. In this early section of the novel, the writing still kind-of-sort-of resembles a conventional nineteenth century novel. Here, revised portions of her original short draft of the book appear in bits and pieces. “Queer people,” in the sentence, are those who possess a “vital singularity,” an individuality that can be eccentric, yet still “keeps well within the limits of conventional respectability” (MA 21). But as the novel shifts toward its characteristically abstract style in the later chapters, the word “queer” undergoes a shift, and becomes a part of the text’s opaque typological system of “attacking” or “independent-dependent” being and “resisting” or “dependent-independent” being (169-170). The novel’s vocabulary of types passes through several phases through the novel’s 925 pages, beginning with

the nineteenth-century narrative conventions that Stein associated with “character,” and then shifting to the language of “queerness,” “bottom natures,” and “personality” through the middle sections of the text, before abandoning nearly all of these terms in the concluding chapter. In *The Making of Americans*, the word “character” appears much more frequently than “personality.” Throughout the first few chapters of the text, before introducing the concept of “bottom nature,” Stein takes “character” as the object of her description (e.g. “Each one of them had his own way of such changing and this will come out in the character of them as each one of them shows it in them”) (93). But by the final chapter, only rarely does the word appear, and when it does, Stein applies it to things, rather than people (“a thing has character making it a particular thing”) (MA 744). Throughout the text, the ghostly presence of obsolete language haunts Stein’s intimate, though often violent, constructions of individual interiors through the language of type and scale. Critics have debated the extent to which the completion of this novel and the abandonment of its sequels signal Stein’s abandonment of scientific determinism. However, it is precisely through the concept of character that Stein’s language of recorded desire comes to underwrite the epistemology of large-scale social data as such.<sup>48</sup>

In the long shadow cast by Leon Katz’s work, it is difficult to read Stein’s account of character without reference Otto Weininger’s widely-read anti-feminist work, *Sex and Character* (1903), which Stein read closely. Critics generally see Stein’s engagement with this text as an early-career embarrassment, though the extent to which she absorbed its ideas remains a subject of debate, particularly among scholars in queer and trans studies.<sup>49</sup> Stein encountered

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<sup>48</sup> Meyer, for example, reads this novel as an end point of Stein’s interest in the mechanistic conception of character, after which she breaks with both the deterministic understanding of character and the “realism of character.” Catharine Stimpson, meanwhile goes so far as to argue that Stein breaks with science entirely after writing this novel. See Stimpson, “The Mind, the Body, and Gertrude Stein.” *Critical Inquiry* 3, no. 3 (Spring 1977), 489-506.

<sup>49</sup> See Barbara Will, *Gertrude Stein, Modernism, and the Problem of “Genius.”* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000); and Chris Coffman, *Gertrude Stein’s Transmasculinity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2018). Will comments on the

Weininger's book in 1908, through her brother Leo, while writing *The Making of Americans*.<sup>50</sup> Weininger theorized a universal "bisexual condition," composed of ideal types of maleness and femaleness, and the proportional mixtures of these types through which individuals were constituted. (Weininger 48). What's important about Weininger's system is its mathematical formalism, its reduction of gender and even what he calls "laws of attraction" to a mathematical equation in which homosexuality involved the overabundance of gendered "protoplasms."<sup>51</sup> During these early years in Paris, Stein kept notebooks where she "began to make charts of all the people I had ever known or seen or met or remembered," diagramming the personalities and pathologies of close friends and relatives through an arcane therapeutic system that resembled Weininger's typologies (LA 273).<sup>52</sup> I see Weininger's text as just one among many intertexts in which mathematical formalisms and other signs for "objectivity" operate within Stein's formalisms.<sup>53</sup> By the time Stein introduces "bottom nature" into *The Making of Americans*, the text's style has shifted, and the word "character" disappears to coincide with the introduction of the Attacking-Resisting typology. The descriptive systems of James and Weininger, which

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Weininger connection in relation to Stein's observation in Lectures in America about the "essence of genius" consists in "one who is at the same time talking and listening" (LA 290). For Will, Stein's genius unsettles the relationship between talker and listener, or author and reader, and that Stein's texts undermine their own typologies, such that "Weininger's greatest influence on Stein lies arguably in his providing her the terms with which to understand her own 'type,' and thus, paradoxically, to move beyond her own typological project." (64-65). Coffman argues, however, that Stein quickly moved beyond Weininger's ideas and developed her own transmasculine concept of genius.

<sup>50</sup> See Leon Katz, "Weininger and The Making of Americans." *Twentieth Century Literature* 24, No. 1 (1978) pp. 8-26.

<sup>51</sup> See Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character* (New York: A. L. Burt and Co, 1906), 16-17.

<sup>52</sup> In one called "The Diagram Book," Katz notes, Stein organized her pages into zones of character labeled "top," "middle," and (at the bottom of the page) "where it comes from" (19).

<sup>53</sup> Moore points out that, throughout the early chapters, the word "singularity" serves as a "first attempt... to create a category for a group of individuals within the typological framework." He suggests, following Katz, that Stein's "vital singularity" was based on Weininger's concept of genius. But I would also add that it also requires what Stein calls a "queer feeling." See Moore, *Gertrude Stein* 44.

atomize the “insides of people,” are overdetermined by the imagined possibility that sexual types and variations might be a latent possibility in character as such. Like the theory of automatic writing and, eventually, the interest in interiority, “character” and “personality” were words that Stein’s novel aims to get beyond. The very idea of “character” has become deviant.

This is particularly true of the middle sections of the text, where flashes of narrative sometimes break through the successive enumerations of Stein’s long and digressive explanations. That other critics have tended to see the non-narrative and non-interior attributes of Stein’s prose as “noise” and “static” is somewhat appropriate if we begin to see the text as if it were a kind of stereogram, shuttling back and forth between sense and nonsense: now it’s information, now it’s randomness. One such moment occurs early on in the Julia Dehning and Alfred Hersland chapter, where Stein describes an incident with an unnamed boy and his father:

One of such of these kind of them had a little boy and this one, the little son wanted to make a collection of butterflies and beetles and it was all exciting to him and it was all arranged then and then the father said to the son you are certain this is not a cruel thing that you are wanting to be doing, killing things to make collections of them, and the son was very disturbed then and they talked about it together the two of them and more and more they talked about it then and then at last the boy was convinced it was a cruel thing and he said he would not do it and his father said the little boy was a noble boy to give up pleasure when it was a cruel one. The boy went to bed then and then the father when he got up in the early morning saw a wonderfully beautiful moth in the room and he caught him and he killed him and he pinned him and he woke up his son then and showed it to him and he said to him "see what a good father I am to have caught and killed

this one," the boy was all mixed up inside him and then he said he would go on with his collecting (MA 489-90).

Stein's vision of collecting and taxonomy is not the same as the one that would galvanize Alfred Kinsey's field research with gall wasps, which he would conduct as part of his Ph.D. thesis in the late nineteen teens and publish throughout the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>54</sup> For Stein, by contrast, to collect something as a specimen is to kill it, or, in her language, it becomes "a dead one." But it is also in the space of this task of amassing massive collections of specimens that troubles the novel's divergent aims to create enumerative taxonomic forms for recording both interiors and language. Stein later explained that this passage concerned a "very definite problem" of determining the relationship between type and specimen. "Types of people I could put down," she writes in "The Gradual Making of the Making of Americans," but a whole human being felt at one and the same time, in other words, while in the act of feeling that person was very difficult to put into words" (LA 276). She goes on to describe this "difficulty" as "putting down the complete conception that I had of an individual, the complete rhythm of personality that I had gradually acquired by listening seeing feeling and experience" (277). In her later work, by rewriting character as "what went on inside them" and personality as "rhythms," Stein makes her text an instrument for evaluating specimens registering their patterns and anomalies across a range of samples.

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<sup>54</sup> Donna J. Drucker has detailed the context and response to Kinsey's entomological research, including contemporary debates about taxonomy. For some, writes Drucker, Kinsey's "bloated taxonomies" (the phrase is Stephen Jay Gould's), based on massive populations of millions of wasps, were insufficiently rooted in the "population." Kinsey's fieldwork approach to biology was influential, but "as North American specimen collections became nearly complete through the end of the 1930s," Kinsey found a new home for these methods in social research. See Drucker, *The Classification of Sex: Alfred Kinsey and the Organization of Knowledge* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014), 56-57. For more on the public response to Kinsey's sex research, see Igo, chapter 6. For more on Kinsey's account of homosexuality, see Terry, chapter 9.



For Stein, the repetitions and variations of her prose also cultivate an erotic relation between observer and observed. In the long digression on “writing for myself and strangers” that opens the Martha Hersland chapter, the continual deferral of getting on with repetition becomes a “loving” that absorbs the narratorial and authorial voice into this system. Stein’s narrator describes how “there is then now and here the loving repetition, this is then, now and here, a description of the loving of repetition and then there will be a description of all the kinds of ways there can be seen to be kinds of men and women,” which will reveal “the complete history of every one, the fundamental character of every one, the bottom nature in them” (MA 290). These continual images of probing “insides” and “bottoms” are suggestive, not least for their associations with anal pleasure. This is perhaps most evident in the “lumps” description, midway through the first part of the Martha chapter:

There must now then be more description of the way each one is made of a substance common to their kind of them, thicker, thinner, harder, softer, all of one consistency, all of one lump, or little lumps stuck together to make a whole one cemented together sometimes by the same kind of being sometimes by other kind of being in them, some with a lump hard at the centre liquid at the surface, some with the lump vegetablisth or wooden or metallic in them (MA 345).

The series of phrases that make up most of this sentence depend, grammatically, on an incitement to discourse, on a call for “more description,” an exhortation within the syntax to generate the material bulk of social data signified by Stein’s analogy. The anal and scatological erotics of passages like these might be said to demonstrate what Lisa Ruddick calls Stein’s “anus sense” (a pun on Stein’s own playful phrase “only excrete a no since,” in *Tender Buttons*, which Ruddick skillfully reads via infantile pleasures—“excrete,” “innocence”), in which her games

with “no since”/nonsense language challenge a familiar Freudian truisms about stages of sexual development and language acquisition.<sup>55</sup> But in the rush for a psychoanalytic reading of Stein’s form, we risk reducing the sense of her prose to an empty signifier, and thus miss the problem of scale it proposes. These sentences are troubled by the massive size of the novel’s content, its stated project of probing and classifying the insides of everyone through this not-quite-nonsensical, but stylistically taxing prose. The sentence demands more description, more repetition, more data, reducing its own style to a local or micro phenomenon within a much larger textual project whose form cannot possibly keep up. We might therefore read the anal erotics of Stein’s bottom natures instead through Sedgwick’s account of the “politics of the ass,” in which the historical centrality of men’s anal eroticism to western cultural representations inscribes women’s anal erotics as an empty signifier.<sup>56</sup> The cultural absence assigned to the possibility of women’s pleasure becomes, for Stein, a means to introduce the possibility that her prose can double as both a register of queer meanings and non-signifying noise. It is precisely the status of this language as either information or nonsense that the novel’s repetitions throw into relief, and which becomes its historically particular “content” in the field of sexuality.

It is in the Martha chapter that Stein’s lexical shift from “character” to “personality” and “bottom nature” articulate the problematics of desire and data. Much of the chapter is dedicated to typing Martha through a combination of narrative episodes and extensive discourse about Stein’s taxonomy. Martha, we are told, “was of the independent dependent kind of them,” (398) (that is, an “attacking being”), which is elsewhere described in language that resembles Stein’s description of “Type II,” the hysterical character type from CMA:

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<sup>55</sup> See Ruddick, *Reading Gertrude Stein*, 145.

<sup>56</sup> See Sedgwick, “A Poem is Being Written” in *Tendencies*, 199.

This then the attacking being was first clear to me in one having it as a slow, stupid, gelatinous being that when it got moving went on repeating action, never could get going any faster, had a nervous anaemic feeling that was part of its getting moving and keeping going. The resisting medium has a different kind of action as I was explaining. Now this attacking being when it is vibrant can be nervous and poignant and quicker than chain-lightning, there can be to it a profound complete reaction having the intensity of a sensation (MA 350).

This language adapts the “nervous” hysterical character, with its tendencies toward “diseased attention” into an instrument for recording taxonomy as such. In the middle of the chapter, however, Stein suddenly shifts back into the nineteenth-century realist descriptive mode that aligns with the early sections of the text. This is the “Hodder episode,” in which Stein’s narrator describes a love triangle between Martha’s husband, Phillip Redfern and two women at the fictional Farnham college (based on Bryn Mawr), where Redfern teaches philosophy. In this curious moment about midway through the text, Stein once again revises one of her earlier works, *Fernhurst* (composed 1904-1905), from which large sections of the texts are lifted. *Fernhurst* is a first draft for a fairly traditional realist campus novel, and a semi-autobiographical treatment of the affair between two of Stein’s acquaintances, Alfred Hodder and Mabel Haynes.<sup>57</sup> It is here, in the *Fernhurst* section of the novel, that “bottom nature” disappears, only to be replaced with the word “personality,” a relic of the earlier text. In *Fernhurst*, the women at the college, the dean, Helen Thornton, and her friend Janet Bruce, are described using the same

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<sup>57</sup> See Katz’s introduction to Stein, *Fernhurst, Q.E.D. And Other Early Writings*. Edited with an Introduction by Leon Katz. (London: Liveright 1973), xxxi.

phrases, at some points verbatim, (“two very interesting personalities in the place”) as Hannah Charles and Miss Dounor, their replacements in *Making* (F 9).

Between *Fernhurst* and *The Making of Americans*, the stylistic shift reveals much about Stein’s later investment in the capacity of syntax and “composition” to draw out and distend the description of characters and their erotic investments. The revisions Stein made to this passage (her additions shown in brackets) attempt to rewrite the older style into the new:

for the first time [in his living] he with his brilliant personality [for he had that then to himself and to every one], keen intellect, ardent desires, moral aspirations and principles [that he knew he could know by analysing them were not well reasoned principles for him to have in him but were to him as his mother’s being was in him as a dear friend inside him], was to be thrown into familiar relations with young men and women (MA 431, F 23).<sup>58</sup>

Alice B. Toklas claimed that the text from *Fernhurst* “was never rewritten,” but close examination of the rewriting Stein did reveals much about the shift from personality to bottom nature, and her refashioning of desire and information.<sup>59</sup> The additions Stein makes to the sentence soften the breakage from the commas by adding more unpunctuated clauses and so drawing out the distance between the grammatical pauses in the original, as if to melt the description of Redfern into the substance of her prose. Stein kept the commas in the later text, which highlights the distinctness of the two styles. The additions rewrite the “personality” of this

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<sup>58</sup> The quote is taken from *Fernhurst*, with bracketed phrases indicating additions that Stein made to the sentence in MA.

<sup>59</sup> See Katz, introduction to *Fernhurst* xxxvi.

heterosexual encounter within the text's apparatus of data, as if to showcase the obsolescence of the prior style, and of the psycholexical vocabulary that comes with it.

In the earlier text, the words "personality" and "nature" seem interchangeable, and both words come with several modifiers, including "interesting," "brilliant," "powerful," and "wondrous." Personality generates adjectives. The ones that appear in *Fernhurst* and *Making*, during this episode, resemble the list of words that Susman associates with the invention of "personality"—"fascinating, stunning, attractive, magnetic, glowing, masterful, creative, dominant, forceful," a catalogue whose emptiness also refracts the psycholexical projects of early-twentieth century psychological theories of interior categorization.<sup>60</sup> The juxtaposition of this later method with the descriptions from *Fernhurst* presents a narrative of maturity in which Stein rejects the "realism of character" in favor of an anti-realism of description. In the antifeminist rhetorical project of *Fernhurst*, Stein understands Phillip's personality to emerge from his experience of sexual difference as a fantasy of male disempowerment. In the rewrite, the egalitarian aspirations of first-wave feminism, represented by the Dean Charles/Thornton, cause Redfern to experience "his first definite realization of the quality of women when the inherent contradiction in the claims made for that sex awoke in him much confused thought." (MA 429).<sup>61</sup> Redfern's career in psychology and philosophy culminate in the conflict between his own "brilliant personality" and the "two very interesting personalities" with whom he begins the romantic tryst shatters his and Martha's marriage. Here, the structure of the love triangle is also between the very terms that describe them, with two "interesting" and one "brilliant," until one of the interesting (Miss Dounor/Thornton) takes possession of the other "interesting"

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<sup>60</sup> See Susman, "Personality" 277.

<sup>61</sup> For more on the transposition of the characters from *Fernhurst* to *The Making of Americans*, see Stimpson, "The Mind," 502-503, as well as Katz, "Weininger," xxxiv-xli.

personality (Hannah Charles/Bruce) by hinting to Redfern's wife about the affair and re-establishing the feminine space of the college. The final lines of *Fernhurst* attempt to reduce the triangle to a single term: "Fernhurst was itself again and the two very interesting personalities in the place were the dean Miss Thornton with her friend Miss Bruce in their very same place" (Stein, *Fernhurst* 49).

The return of the adjectives, particularly "interesting" also marks a shift in Stein's grammatical strategies. As she writes in "Poetry and Grammar," "adjectives effect [sic] nouns and as nouns are not really interesting the thing that effects a not too interesting thing is of necessity not interesting" (LA 314). Interesting itself is perhaps exception, an adjective that fits in with the participial and gerundive forms of Stein's prose in *Making*, and with it, the signifying emptiness of personality through which Stein articulates the possibility of desire within the supposedly neutral language of description. But even here, the collapsing of the women into "the two very interesting personalities," and the twinning of their "place," conflicts with *Fernhurst's* individuating model of character. Why would a "realism of character" dismiss the character as merely "interesting" (that most Steinian of adjectives) when the text has dedicated so much prose to saying more than this? The reduction of the two characters to "interesting personalities" flattens the triangulation (what Katz has called Stein's geometric method) of desire that the novel explores.

By drawing attention to the palimpsest of *Fernhurst* and its rewriting, Stein imagines her own text as a source of data for her larger descriptive project, even as the conventions of her earlier prose stress the limits of that project's standardizing forms. The disavowed desire normally abnegated in the scientific scene of observation returns with a vengeance in *Making*:

Categories that once to some one had real meaning can later to that same one be all empty. It is queer that words that meant something in our thinking and our feeling can later come to have in them in us not at all any meaning

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This is very true then, this is very true then of the feeling and the thinking that makes the meaning of the words one is using, this is very true then that to many of them having in them strongly a sense of realising the meaning of the words they are using that some words they once were using, later have not any meaning and some then have a little shame in them when they are copying an old piece of writing where they were using words that sometime had real meaning for them and now have not any real meaning in them to the feeling and the thinking and the imagining of such a one (MA 440-441).

By the middle of Stein's long novel, the now-absent meaning of Stein's typology has become "queer" through the process of continually rewriting it. The psycholexical dream of a neutral metalanguage of character has shattered. By now, the narrator's "I" from the first half of the chapter has also shifted to a more generalized "one" in the second half. In this description of the emptying out of "categories" and "words" in the copying of *Fernhurst*, Stein rewrites the gendered division between the writing of description and data. "Personality" is one of the empty signifiers that this passage highlights. While it may have meant something in *Fernhurst*, the word has become all but useless in *The Making of Americans*' broader aesthetic and intellectual project of imagining the text as a totalizing statistical record of people's insides (until it isn't anymore). Stein's narrator understands this rewriting as necessary to the eroticization of the Hodder affair as data, even if the traces of narrative cannot quite be scrubbed from it. At times,

the “I” that Stein tries to kill from *Fernhurst* is exhumed, and it is at that point that Philip Redfern becomes “a queer one.”

What the rewriting of *Fernhurst* reveals is that, unlike the narratives of personality trait theory, which, by the 1920s, would abandon the Victorian vision of a cultivated self for its various social manifestations and performances, Stein instead saw both “character” and “personality” as insufficiently aligned with the flattening aesthetics of her style. The fleeting language of “Character” and “singularity” from early on in the text gets garbled in their translation into the erotics of “bottom nature,” while “personality” is simply abandoned altogether. Having a personality is not a universal condition, like bottom nature, but an individuating process that gets absorbed into the novel’s account of the desiring functions of data:

It happens often in [about] the twenty-ninth year of a life that all the forces that have been engaged all through the years of childhood, adolescence and youth in confused and ferocious [sometimes angry] combat range themselves in ordered ranks —[,] one is uncertain of one’s aims, meaning and power during these years of tumultuous growth when aspiration has no relation to fulfillment and one plunges here and there with energy and misdirection during the storm [strain] and stress of the making of a personality until at last we reach the twenty-ninth year[,] the straight and narrow gateway of maturity and life which was all uproar and confusion narrows down to form and purpose and we exchange a great dim possibility for a [big or] small hard reality (F 29, MA 436-437).

The edits to this passage are less dramatic than in other passages. Between the earlier text and the later one, Stein replaces a dash with a comma and adds another comma further on. The “making



of a personality” echoes the novel’s project of “making” both Americans and “queer people.” According to Catherine Stimpson, Stein rewrote the character of Phillip Redfern in *Making* so that he bore closer resemblance to Leon Solomons.<sup>62</sup> Reading these same lines, Katz points out that Solomons was 29 years old when he died undergoing treatment for cancer.<sup>63</sup> The rewriting of one biographical figure (Hodder) into another one (Solomons) consolidates the making of an individual personality into the mechanical and automatic reproductions of type. However, the Hodder episode also highlights the obsolescence of this theory by replacing personality with bottom nature and queerness. By the end of the chapter, bottom nature will also disappear.

Stein abandons the typology of character after the Alfred Hersland and Julia Dehning chapter, after which the penultimate chapter figures the death of David Hersland as yet another rewriting of the text’s descriptive project. Whereas, in the first three quarters of the novel, “queer” was understood to indicate an individuating self-definition that both inhabits and structures normative typologies, in the David Hersland chapter, the word undergoes yet another transformation to its lexicality. Katz reads David as the character who comes closest, in the novel, to exemplifying the Weiningerian concept of genius (with which, he argues, Stein herself identified). Of David’s death, Katz summarizes that “he was to be merely the character in the book who might have been, the only character of whom one might properly say that he should have been [a completed individual], and failed. None of the other characters have sufficient ‘being’ to be worthy of such a failure — neither their success nor their failure is on par with his.”<sup>64</sup> But it is also in the David chapter that Stein sets aside the typology that had guided her

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<sup>62</sup> See Stimpson, “The Mind” 503

<sup>63</sup> See Katz, “Weininger” 17.

<sup>64</sup> Katz, “Weininger” 16-17

descriptive project. David might be a genius, but by the end of this text, the only relic left of his character (and character in general) is “queer.”

### Surveying Stein

Stein’s texts dramatize the problem of queer desire—an erotics based in an aggregating vision in which language doubles as information and noise—in mechanistic discourses of automatism and data-gathering, and the effects of those desires on social-scientific description. I want to conclude by turning to a later point in Stein’s career, where she began to engage as a literary celebrity with the co-determining problems of personality and data. The literary surveys Stein answered in the late 1920s and 1930s point to a growing interest among modernist writers not just in the counting of opinions, but in the affordances of surveying forms, and the possibility of a public literary knowledge. For Stein, the formal qualities of questions themselves was imbricated in the problem of inscribing information. In “Poetry and Grammar,” just as she dismisses nouns and adjectives, she also distrusts question marks along with other punctuation she deems unnecessary:

The question mark is alright when it is all alone when it is used as a brand on cattle or when it could be used as a decoration but connected with writing it is completely and entirely uninteresting. It is evident that if you ask a question you ask a question but anybody who can read at all knows when a question is a question as it is written in writing. Therefore I ask you therefore wherefore should one use it the question mark (*LA* 316-317).

The very form of the questionnaire thus presupposes a kind of inscription that Stein associates with the marking and numbering tendencies of mass culture. Stein's responses to these surveys also refract the political stakes of her turn toward "the normal" through her flattening masses of description. As literary magazines like *New Masses* and *The Partisan Review* increasingly engaged in debates over literature and politics, these surveys perhaps threatened to reveal too much. In March 1933, just before her *Autobiography*'s popular success, she responded to a multi-paragraph prompt on the "crisis of man" from Eugene Jolas at *transition* (one of the main periodical venues of her work), where Jolas decried the death of the individual, and the "gregarious hypnosis [that] threatens to make a man a mere number in a collectivity." To Jolas's loaded question about individualism, Stein responded, "I don't envisage collectivism. There is no such animal, it is always individualism, sometimes the rest vote and sometimes they do not, and if they do they do and if they do not they do not."<sup>65</sup> The aggregating language Stein uses directly conflicts with the account of individualism she offers here (as does the very idea of responding to a survey about individualism). And while that individualism is, on the surface, coextensive with Stein's modernism, it also a category that remained problematic in her attempts to separate aesthetics, politics, and scientific knowledge in her writing. The questionnaire serves as both a space for Stein to articulate a vision of literary personality and celebrity, but also a form that contradicts her vision for the relationship between inscription and description, and between norms and identity.

A repeated refrain of Stein's dismissive answers to these surveys is to reject the survey itself as a technology of self-knowledge. To one survey from *The Little Review* in September 1929, for the final issue of the magazine, Stein prefaced her answers to the ten questions given

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<sup>65</sup> Stein, *How Writing is Written* 53

by Jane Heap by saying “I would much rather have written about Jane because I do appreciate Jane but since this is what you want here are my answers.”<sup>66</sup> To the ten questions, Stein gave responses that were each five words or less. To the question, “what do you look forward to?” Stein wrote, “More of the same.” When asked, “What is your attitude toward art today?” she famously wrote, “I like to look at it.” This answer has become a commonly quoted example of Stein’s aesthetics. In her lecture, “Pictures,” she rewrites her line as a defense of visuality:

Once the Little Review had a questionnaire, it was for their farewell number, and they asked everybody whose work they had printed to answer a number of questions. One of the questions was, what do you feel about modern art. I answered, I like to look at it. That was my real answer because I do, I do like to look at it, that is at the picture part of modern art. The other parts of it interest me much less (LA 224).

Rewriting her own cryptic answer to the survey for an audience, Stein highlights the way in which the response functions as non-signifying text until supplemented with additional description. At the same time, the rewriting also serves as an opportunity for self-promotion. It is not clear in the rewriting that Stein would “much rather have written about Jane” in the original response. The shift suggests that what may have been more interesting than the visuality of modern art, for Stein, was the management of public identities for literary lesbians like Heap and herself through the questionnaire form itself. Her responses to the questionnaires (and the rewriting of those answers as part of her own career narrative) often dismiss of the project of quantitative social research itself as a means of measuring interiors, turning again to the ontological priority of the external.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 52.

Unlike modern art, or the empty personalities of the figures in *Making*, these questionnaires were not, according to Stein, as “interesting.” Yet they nonetheless serve as a space in which to promote her own personality through this performance of non-interest, a non-interest that nonetheless serves an aggregating project. To a questionnaire in *Partisan Review* (quoted in the epigraph), which asked whether Stein identified herself with any particular social or political group, Stein answered, “I am not interested.” In her interview with Haas, Stein discusses these surveys, and her answers, as an extension of her “realism of composition” and her style’s claim to describe “every variety of human experience that it was possible to have, every type, every style and nuance.” She says that in *The Making of Americans*, she “was not interested in making the people real but in the essence, or as a painter would call it, value.” She then explains the stylistic principle using a democratic metaphor: “just as everybody has the vote, including women, I think children should, because as soon as a child is conscious of itself, then it has to me an existence and has a stake in what happens. Everybody who has that stake has that quality of interest, and in *The Making of Americans* that is what I tried to show.”<sup>67</sup> This patronizing political analogy between women’s suffrage and the children’s vote, threatens to escape the formal boundaries Stein sets, just as her response to Jolas’s questionnaire—“sometimes the rest vote and sometimes they do not”—turns away from the political and from survey and toward the problem of the sample. Haas then asks, later on in the interview, “why did you answer questionnaires like those in *Little Review* and *transition* cryptically, with a chip on your shoulder?” Stein’s answer is perhaps no less dismissive here, declaring, “that does not interest me; it is like the Gallup Poll,” and elaborating, “nothing can be the same thing to the

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<sup>67</sup> See Stein, “A Trans-Atlantic Interview,” 16-17.

other person. Nobody can enter into anybody else's mind; so why try?"<sup>68</sup> For Stein, the vote is not coextensive with the pollster's attempt to gather a representative sample and generate predictions. Rather, Stein reduces the possibility of massified knowledge to a stochastic principle, in which information is always subject to high degrees of loss and distortion. At the same time, the interview—whose questions were largely prepared in advance and in written form, delivered via an intermediary—also serves as the scene for Stein to once more rewrite the psychometric meanings of her characterological project of her long novel. Lest the project of *The Making of Americans* get too close to the imaginaries of the survey, she imagines her prose instead as a purely formal project of description. As she tells it in *Lectures in America*, she had intended to continue the typological project of *Making* into her next novel, *A Long Gay Book*, but then stopped, because “at last really convinced that a description of everything is possible” and so “I gradually stopped describing everything” (284).

The slippage between the equilibrated style that gives everyone a vote and the quantitative rigor of polling science emerges all the more strongly from Stein's insistence that their objects are not the same. If Stein's answers can be said to frustrate attempts of the surveyors to generate information about her social identity, she also seems to double down on the status of her own writing as a kind of information. “When I was working with William James,” Stein writes in “The Gradual Making,” “I completely learned one thing, that science is continuously busy with the complete description of something, with ultimately the complete description of anything with ultimately the complete description of everything” (LA 283). As Cecire suggests, such representations are, for Stein, objective, insofar as they are only able to be reproduced mechanically. At the same time, Stein imagines that her prose cannot be abstracted into

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 34.

quantitative data through polling procedures because its form is already an ordered system of description. Rather, Stein's data requires automatic technologies to reproduce it, to record each specimen individually, such that the form of each sentence becomes the horizon of data and its abstraction.

But this formulation was also compensatory, supplying an empty formalism as a replacement for politics. Stein herself was a political conservative, challenging to critics who have attempted to draw affirmative or politically desirable values from her prose. Around 2012, for instance, debates swirled around Stein's relationship with Bernard Faÿ, and her undertaking of a project of translating Philippe Pétain's speeches while she and Toklas lived under the Vichy government.<sup>69</sup> These debates have now largely settled on the neutral turf of nuance. "It is a case of epistemic virtue (objectivity)," Cecire argues, "appearing to adequately proxy for political virtue even as [...] it actually produces the condescending, racist, and reactionary elements of her writing."<sup>70</sup> The responses to modernist questionnaires do more than reveal (for example) Stein's entrenchment in U.S. nationalism. They highlight the mixed political virtues that Stein continually re-inscribes onto her own surveying project, even as she dismisses political polling as bogus and claims that her own project is a purely formal attempt at creating linguistic *neutrality*. Stein's dismissive responses to the surveys also perform a version of the personality that Stein jettisons from her project in *The Making of Americans*, rejecting the epistemic aims of the questionnaires and substituting her textual form as data. If Stein imagines queer style as a norm

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<sup>69</sup> Claims to the possibility of Stein's collaboration with the Vichy government were first articulated in Malcolm's *Two Lives*. Barbara Will's *Unlikely Collaboration: Gertrude Stein, Bernard Faÿ, and the Vichy Dilemma* (New York: Columbia UP 2011). For an account of the response to the controversy and of Stein's unfinished translations of Pétain's speeches, see Rachel Galvin, "Gertrude Stein, Pétain, and the Politics of Translation." *ELH* 83, no. 1, Spring 2016, 259-292. For Galvin, Stein's translations involve a translation of the original speeches in her own prose style, marking the text as "one of the literary artifacts of modernist reactionism" (286).

<sup>70</sup> Cecire, *Experimental* 115.

embodied in the data of her text, she also marks that norm by its capacity to flatten the social asymmetries that undergird the relationship between writing and politics.

I have been arguing that Stein's textual representations of information and character serve as a space in which queer style becomes a norm of her prose, one that places desire at the center of scientific gazing. The disappearance of character from Stein's writing thus registers the vexed and uneven negotiation of desire in the scientific construction of sexual identity categories. To the extent that Stein can be said to subsume, under the auspices of her own taxonomic system, the specificity of any identity (heterosexual, lesbian, trans, or otherwise), her questionnaire responses also register the impasses and interruptions created by desire within the imaginaries of social data. While Stein emphasized the obsolescence of "personality" in *The Making of Americans*, the word reappears in her later work. As Kirk Curnutt suggests, this had much to do with her sudden celebrity after the success of *The Autobiography*. In her lectures—and, we might add, in these surveys—Stein cultivated an authentic, "unwilling" persona that suggests, for Curnutt, that "she entertains the idea of a lecture tour only because the personality that she will inevitably commodify constitutes the essence of her writing."<sup>71</sup> The paradox of Stein's impersonal typology of personality is its construction of Stein as a personality. But this was also vexing for Stein's celebrity status. Curnutt points to her comments in a 1935 essay in *Vanity Fair* called "And Now," where Stein describes how, after the initial success of *The Autobiography*, she couldn't write: "I lost my personality. It has always been completely included in myself my personality as any personality naturally is, and here all of a sudden, I was not just I because so many people did know me." A page later, however, she notes that "I have come back to write

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<sup>71</sup> See Kirk Curnutt, "Inside and outside: Gertrude Stein on Identity, Celebrity, and Authenticity." *Journal of Modern Literature* 23, no. 2 (Winter 1999-2000), 303.



the way I used to write and this is because now everything that is happening is once more happening inside, there is no use in the outside, if you see the outside you see just what you look at and that is no longer interesting, everybody says so or at least everybody acts so and they are right because now there is no use in looking at anything.”<sup>72</sup> Here Stein rebukes her comments on the rhythm of the visual world from *The Autobiography* by dismissing the exterior and the visual as passé. The external has gone the way of nouns, adjectives, commas, surveys, and Gallup polls. The internal has returned. So too, as her longest novel suggests, even when mediated by automated language and the normalizing impersonality of data, desire can remain queer.

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<sup>72</sup> See Stein, “And Now” in *How Writing is Written*, 66.

## CHAPTER THREE:

### CATHERIAN UNHAPPINESS AND THE PROSE OF INTERWAR NORMALITY

*“Although this form of imaginative prose in its short history presents such a rich variety of subject matter, until very lately the American novelist has been confined, or has confined himself, to two themes; how the young man got his girl, whether by matrimony or otherwise, and how he succeeded in business [...] We won't face the fact that it's the formula itself which is pernicious, the frame-up.”*

-Willa Cather, NBC radio broadcast (1933)<sup>1</sup>

*“Sex education should seek to normalize, not repress, social relationships between the sexes”*

-Max Exner, *Problems and Principles of Sex Education: A Study of 948 College Men* (1915)<sup>2</sup>

Critics have observed, for the last three decades, that there something queer about the conventionality of Willa Cather's prose. Her fiction, with its thematic interests in non-heteronormative relationships and the unspoken recognitions that constitute them, tends to avoid the narrative closure of “the marriage plot,” and does so through a prose style whose minimalism is also marked by silence and refusal.<sup>3</sup> A source of this critical energy is encapsulated in a much-

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<sup>1</sup> Cather, Willa. “Transcript of Willa Cather's Speech.” Transcript of speech delivered at Plaza Hotel, New York, May 4, 1933. [https://cather.unl.edu/multimedia/audio/cather\\_transcription](https://cather.unl.edu/multimedia/audio/cather_transcription)

<sup>2</sup> Max Exner, *Problems and Principles of Sex Education: A Study of 948 College Men*. (New York: Association Press, 1915), 37.

<sup>3</sup> The term “marriage plot” has a vast field of scholarship behind it in twentieth-century literary criticism; Later rejections of this trope in queer theory are largely influenced by Marxist and feminist ideology critiques of romantic love as the basis for fictional form. Tony Tanner, for example, has argued that “marriage is the central subject for the bourgeois novel; not marriage as a paradigm for the resolution of problems of bringing unity out of difference, harmony out of opposition, identity out of separation, [...] but just marriage in all its social and domestic ramifications in a demythologized society.” Likewise, Boone identifies a centralizing tradition of “marriage fiction” driven by the “love plot,” but also identifies a “counter tradition” which stages “the persistent ‘undoing of the dominant tradition by the contradictions concealed within the specific forms that its representations of life and life and love have assumed.” See Tanner, *Adultery in The Novel: Contract and Transgression* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1979), 15; and Boone, *Tradition Counter Tradition: Love and The Form of Fiction* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), 2.

cited comment from her 1922 essay, “The Novel D meubl ,” where she argues that “it is the inexplicable presence of the thing not named, the overtone divined by the ear but not heard by it, the verbal mood, the emotional aura of the fact or the thing or the deed, that gives high quality to the novel or to the drama, as well as to poetry itself” (NF 837).<sup>4</sup> Ever since Sharon O’Brien first identified Cather’s silences with “the love that dare not speak its name,” queer critics have waged battles over the question of Cather’s lesbianism, the meanings of her silences, and the thematics of same-sex attraction in her novels.<sup>5</sup> Yet, just as Heather Love points out, “identifying Cather as queer does not, however, solve the difficulty of how to situate her in a queer literary genealogy.”<sup>6</sup> Still, if there is any critical consensus on Cather’s prose, it seems to consist with an alignment between her de-nominating strategies and the critical energies of queer theory.

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<sup>4</sup> Citations to Cather’s fiction are, unless otherwise noted, from the *Library of America* editions of her collected works. Abbreviations to particular works are as follows: SL: *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather* (ed. Andrew Jewell and Janis Stout, Vintage Books, 2014); OO: *One of Ours (Early Novels and Stories)*, ed. Sharon O’Brien, Library of America, 1987); PH: *The Professor’s House (Later Novels)*, ed. Sharon O’Brien, Library of America 1990); NF *Not Under Forty (Stories, Poems, and Other Writing)*, ed. Sharon O’Brien, Library of America, 1992); and SE: *Selected Reviews and Essays (Stories, Poems, and Other Writing)*. Citations to “The Novel D meubl ” reference the text of *Not Under Forty*. References to letters are, unless otherwise noted, to the *Selected Letters* (other notes point to the *Complete Letters*, hosted on the Willa Cather Archive).

<sup>5</sup> See O’Brien, “The Thing Not Named: Willa Cather as a Lesbian Writer.” *Signs* 9, no. 4 (Summer 1984): 576-599; Butler, “Dangerous Crossing: Willa Cather’s Masculine Names” in *Bodies that Matter* (London: Routledge 1994); Eve Sedgwick, “Willa Cather and Others” in *Tendencies*. (London: Routledge, 1994); John P. Anders, *Willa Cather’s Sexual Aesthetics and the Male Homosexual Literary Tradition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Joan Acocella, “Cather and the Academy,” *The New Yorker*, November 27, 1995; and Nealon, *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion Before Stonewall* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), chapter 2. O’Brien’s argument has had longstanding implications for queer Cather studies. Judith Butler, building on O’Brien’s reference to Wilde’s “love that dare not speak its name,” marks the Wilde trial as the moment “that homosexuality became associated with the unspoken and unspeakable name” (Butler 108). Eve Sedgwick has also written about the problematics of unspeakability in Cather’s fiction in relation to Wilde, while John P. Anders builds on accounts of lesbian desire to discuss Cather’s affinity with the homosexual literary tradition (Anders 3). Reacting against these readings in 1995, critic Joan Acocella argued that the “lesbian argument was not airtight” and that, to her mind “Cather was lesbian in her feelings, and celibate in her actions” (Acocella 66-67). More recently, critics like Christopher Nealon have turned to the question of what it means that Cather critics are variously attached, or performatively unattached, to the historical problem of Cather’s lesbianism.

<sup>6</sup> See Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 74.

I highlight the queerness of Cather's silences in order to raise a more heretical possibility, one whose implications extend directly from the queer articulations of her prose: namely, that Catherian reticence is, at least to some extent, about heterosexuality; or, to put this another way, her work is concerned with the tragic and damaging effects that heterosexuality exacts on narrative forms by incorporating forms of managed unspeakability. This is not to suggest that Cather, or her texts, are not "queer," but that the silences and interruptions of her prose are highly vexed. I read these silences not simply as queer deformations but as contested spaces within new regulatory frameworks of heterosexual narratives. This chapter argues that Cather's novels of the early 1920s are *formed* around the managed interruption of new prescriptive heterosexual norms, norms which are revealed, in Catherian style, to be both historically contingent and formally incoherent. This argument works according to, and not against, the genealogy of criticism that begins with the (to my mind, now affirmatively settled) question of Cather's lesbian erotics, and the queer affinities of her prose. Likewise, I do not posit that "the thing not named" must nominate heterosexuality *at the expense of* queerness, but rather that its purposeful vagueness highlights the new role of interruption and regulation in the discursive field in which "opposite" (that is, hetero) sexualities get attached to cultures of gendered non-relation (which includes discourses of "sexual inversion") and to the norms that enforce this culture. Cather's novels are often queer insofar as they avoid being reduced or closed off by the norms of white, middle-class, heterosexual marriages. But such marriages also become a problematic object in her fiction, where tactics of interruption, delay, and suspension serve less to challenge than to postpone, or even at times to reinforce, the hegemony of white, middle-class marital heteronormativity and the attendant myth of a return to normalcy.

The genres I examine here were prescriptive, and represent a selection of scientific, pedagogical, and advice literature within the twined Progressive-era rhetorics of sex hygiene and marital happiness, programs that attached erotic meanings to the representation strategies of “wholesome” prose. I focus on two of Cather’s postwar novels, *One of Ours* and *The Professor’s House*, works in which her characters deliberately refuse the forms of happiness and satisfaction that straight sex and marriage are supposed to provide—indeed, the protagonists of these novels seem, at times, to prefer death to heterosexual life. Yet her novels also register the constitution of sexuality as a field of non-relation between “different” sexes. In suggesting that Cather’s prose indexes the regulatory scripts of “hetero” norms in the nineteen twenties, I am purposefully identifying heterosexuality as a category whose meaning was still very much under construction in this period.<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, I am defining heterosexuality as a set of practices and discourses in which sexual difference (more pointedly, genres of normalized non-relation, dislike, and mutual repulsion) serve as the basis for the patriarchal and biopolitical regulation and management of American white, middle-class life—life, that is, as extendable through living-together. Heterosexuality in this sense is not reducible only to marriage or reproductivity, but refers instead to historically specific ideals of mutually pleasurable, routinized, boring sex in coupled form. The idea is not to suggest that heterosexuality under patriarchy is symmetrical (it isn’t), but to trace the historical emergence of eroticized symmetry as its *ideal*, an ideal that was somehow normal but also required work and regulation, usually by

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<sup>7</sup> The timing of the periodization of heterosexuality varies between scholars, but many place its contemporary origins at some point in the twentieth century. Adams, in *The Trouble with Normal*, proposes the midcentury as the period in which a recognizable heterosexual culture emerges. Katz argues, meanwhile that “heterosexuality began this century defensively, as the publicly unsanctioned private practice of the respectable middle-class,” but goes on to argue that “by the end of the 1920s, heterosexuality had triumphed as the dominant, sanctified culture” See Katz, *Invention* 83.

women. For Cather, the problem with this culture is its capacity to incorporate queer silences and interruptions as part of its functioning, rendering them inert and ahistorical.

Cather's fiction offers a critique of heterosexuality from a queer desiring position, one that registers its myths of symmetry, its collateral damages, and its subsumptions of sexual particularities within a totalizing homo/hetero dyad. Here, I am taking a cue from Jane Ward's recent book, *The Tragedy of Heterosexuality*, which has proposed that heterosexuality itself (as opposed solely to its oppressive manifestations for queer people) might furnish a ready object of queer critique. "The tragedy of heterosexuality," she argues, "is about men's control of women, but it is also about straight women's and men's shared romantic and erotic attachment to an *unequal gender binary*, or to the heteroerotic fantasy of binary, biologically determined, and naturally hierarchal gender oppositeness."<sup>8</sup> Ward challenges queer critics to recognize queer experiences as sources of possible happiness. But given recent cultural dismissals of queer suffering in the U.S. (what Heather Love calls "compulsory happiness") predicated on the tenuous political victories of marriage equality and workplace protections, it can be tempting to respond to such a provocation with skepticism.<sup>9</sup> But closer examination of the construction of heterosexuality in the nineteen-twenties also reveals the extent to which "happiness" was, as Ward shows, reified as a quantifiable value measured through the regulation of heterosexual

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<sup>8</sup> See Jane Ward, *The Tragedy of Heterosexuality*, (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 22, emphasis in original. While Ward purposefully de-centralizes narratives of queer suffering in order to highlight the suffering of heterosexuality, I diverge from the quantitative language of her claim that heterosexuality, because of its attachments to violence, necessarily involves "more unrelenting" forms of "gendered and sexualized and racist forms of violence" toward straight women than toward queers (6, my emphasis). In what sense more? In that it affects more people? Or happens more often? Heterosexual life is difficult to represent as "more" difficult, or less happy, for straight or queer people, not least without recourse to utilitarian statistical logics for measuring happiness and satisfaction, metrics that, as Ward admits privilege, even as they undercut, the heteronormative ideal that straight life *should* be happy.

<sup>9</sup> See Love, "Compulsory Happiness and Queer Experience." *New Formations* 63 (2007): 52-63. For an account of feminist history as the basis for a critique of the demand for women's happiness, see also Sara Ahmed, "Killing Joy: Feminism and the History of Happiness," *Signs* 35, no. 3 (Spring 2010): 571-94.

practices. As queer “happiness,” whatever that means, can only be poorly gauged by these metrics, my aim is not to imagine Cather as a happy or tragic queer, but to further historicize the problem of heterosexual unhappiness in her fiction.

The very idea of marital satisfaction emerged in the culture of social hygiene and sex research in the early-twentieth century. Marriage advice literature and sex education materials became mass-cultural genres in this decade, and appear in her fiction as deeply unhappy objects. I do not, in other words, equate institutionalized oppressions and privileges with genres and representations of heterosexual suffering. Rather, I want to historicize how the idea of heterosexual unhappiness became a central problematic in the revision of sexual norms during and after the First World War. Central to Cather’s separation of norms from heterosexuality are temporalities of the everyday, that is, of routine and regimentation. Novels like *One of Ours* and *The Professor’s House* are particularly interested in what Michel de Certeau has called the “innumerable practices by means of which users reappropriate the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production.”<sup>10</sup> For De Certeau, procedures of use and consumption create opportunities for articulating identities that undercut master discourses. In both her prose and her representations of everyday life, Cather, I argue, turns the routines of quotidian normalcy against new techniques for regulating and naturalizing heterosexuality, including the rebranding of women’s domestic labor under American ideals of “hooverizing” during the War. In Cather’s fiction, the space in which these everyday sexual norms are negotiated is mediated by prose—that is, the negotiation, through silence and candor, of the referentiality of heterosexual practices. De Certeau’s model for these practices is the linguistic distinction between individual speech

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<sup>10</sup> See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans, Stephen Randall, University of California Press, 1984, xiv.

acts and linguistic knowledge, or in his own words: “‘performance’ and ‘competence’ are different: the act of speaking (with all the enunciative strategies that implies) is not reducible to a knowledge of the language” (xiii). In the period in which Cather was writing, this question of usage turns out to be the site of intense negotiation over the mass-cultural roles of speech and silence in new regimes of sexuality. The mass-market popularity of novelists like Elinor Glynn—who popularized the word “it” as a modern appliance for talking about sex—highlights the rising role of what Michael North calls “negative indirection” in writing about heterosexuality during this period.<sup>11</sup> Rather than position the shock of innuendo-laden silences against heterosexual norms, Cather marks the linguistic space of usage and silence as the site where her prose rewrites the terms of sexual norms themselves.

Here I also run the risk of suggesting that Cather was reticent about gay and lesbian identities because she found them too close to heterosexual norms, and therefore not queer enough. Such a reading would indeed be generous. However, I remain cautious about idealizing silence in this way, as it runs the risk of overburdening the referential work of queerness to the point where it operates as a formal or linguistic principle rather than through its historically particular discursive and political formations. In that sense, my focus is not simply on the refusal to speak but on moments where the uses of silence and candor can be detached from progressive-era obsessions with the prosaic. Both of the novels in this chapter focus on the lives of young men of whom it might be said that their relationships with other men are more intense than their relationships with their wives. Claude Wheeler, a reticent and sexually frustrated soldier, and Godfrey St. Peter, a university professor preoccupied with the death of a former student, are protagonists for whom the norms of heterosexual marriage seem unbearable. However, the

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<sup>11</sup> North, *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern*. Oxford University Press, 1999, 197-198.



solutions that Cather offers to these problems are ultimately inadequate. They are the products of a tactical repurposing of the gaps between normal states, rather than the establishment of a permanent strategic space for queer politics.<sup>12</sup> While Ward is aptly concerned with the deleterious effect of heterosexuality on straight women, the anti-heterosexual impulse I locate in *One of Ours* and *The Professor's House* is thematically focused on men; in particular, on (at least ostensibly) heterosexual, married men whose encounters with war, disease, and death both open and tragically close off queer possibility. In these novels, Cather's focus on the dissatisfactions of male-attracted married men repulsed by their wives may seem trite, or at worst, politically backwards. But they also stage scenes of interruption in which the norms of heterosexuality are rendered, however briefly, as contingent on the fantasy of a transhistorical norm. Queer critics like Scott Herring and Heather Love have called on Cather readers to critically regard the non-affirmative aspects of Cather's politics within the political frame of queer history by recognizing their particularity and non-assimilability to contemporary political aims.<sup>13</sup> We might understand this sense of absolute particularity itself as a queer form grounded in the context of an emergent but totalizing heterosexual norm.

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<sup>12</sup> Here I make use of de Certeau's distinction between tactics, which are aligned with timing and opportunism, and strategies, which create a base of operations for the management of space (xvii-xix).

<sup>13</sup> See for example Scott Herring, "Catherian Friendship; or, How Not to do The History of Homosexuality." *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* 52, No. 1 (Spring 2006): 66-91; Catherian friendship, Herring suggests, "fail[s] to materialize into urban homosexual subcultures, and, in so doing, resist[s] the historical march from the former to the latter." (67). Love, however, points out that "argues that Cather valued qualities in friendship from which modern queers tend to turn away, like loneliness (*Feeling Backward* 85).

## Frank Reticence and Catherian Style

Early-twentieth century heterosexuality, with its ideals of frictionless sexual compatibility and monogamy, required a certain kind of prose, one capable of both describing and prescribing a norm for managing a supposedly mutual (though remediable) repulsion between the sexes. Sex Hygiene literature was a discourse of correction and return. In that sense, Cather's silences might therefore be read as responses to growing mass-cultural obsessions with the idea of frankness—that is, of the growing number of discourses built for neutralizing the shock of naming the functions of heterosexual relations (whether reproductive, marital, or otherwise) in order to construct an ideal of healthy marital sexuality. Sex educators and researchers of the period regularly adopted a set of compositional principles that historian Julian B. Carter has called “frank reticence,” an expression meant to highlight the social-hygienists' insistence that “normal frankness and simplicity in sexual expression was not the same thing as the abandonment of self-control” but rather functioned as “a performance of a very carefully calibrated capacity for appropriate expression.”<sup>14</sup> For Carter, the shift toward regulatory public expressions of sexual health participated in a broad “reconfiguration of racial meanings” in the twentieth century, and became “central to the discursive construction of the homogenous, indicatively white sexuality called ‘normality’” (123). Frank reticence created a set of stock expressions, styles, and metaphors that regulated the boundaries of sexual pedagogy by generating a mass-cultural language of normal heterosexuality.

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<sup>14</sup> See Julian B. Carter, *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1880-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 122.

In tandem with social and cultural obsessions with describing sex in overt but non-erotic terms, dividing lines between “dirty” and “clean” writing became all the more stark. In an 1899 review essay of Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, for example, Cather wonders how it is that Chopin can apply “so exquisite and sensitive, well-governed a style to so trite and sordid a theme.”<sup>15</sup> While she dismisses the idea that a woman might be so dissatisfied with her marriage as to choose death, as Chopin’s Edna Pontellier does, this same “sordid theme” will turn out, arguably, to have just as strong a resonance for the male protagonists in *One of Ours* and *The Professor’s House*. The word “sordid” appears more than once in these early writings as a signifier for both the commonplace and the sexual. In a later essay on Defoe’s *Roxana*, for example, Cather calls the novel “one of the meanest and most sordid books ever written.”<sup>16</sup> Chopin’s style, by contrast is “genuinely literary” (910). Yet her protagonist, we are told is of the “‘Bovary’ type”, a character who fails to contain sexuality, and “expect[s] the passion of love to fill and gratify every need of life, whereas nature only intended that it should meet one of many demands” (911-912). Edna “expect[s] an individual and self-limited passion to yield infinite variety, pleasure and distraction, to contribute to [the Bovary types’] lives what the arts and the pleasurable exercise of the intellect gives to less limited and less intense idealists” (912). The problem, Cather tells us, perhaps anticipating Leo Bersani, is not so much that Chopin’s character might find non-marital heterosexuality satisfying, but that she would *expect* any sexual relation to satisfy.

Yet while contemporary writers like Frederick Lewis Allen heralded the shortening of women’s skirts and hair as signs of new sexual freedom, later historians of sexuality have

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<sup>15</sup> Cather, “Kate Chopin” (SE 910).

<sup>16</sup> Cather, “Defoe’s ‘The Unfortunate Mistress’” (SE 949).

generally been skeptical of this version of what Foucault calls the repressive hypothesis, in which sexual history as a narrative of the gradual loosening of repressive norms.<sup>17</sup> The redefinition of the role of silence through normalizing technologies like sex education and statistical marriage studies created new ideals of normalcy that flattened heterosexuality into a totalizing ideal of sexual health. As Jeffrey P. Moran points out in his history of sex education in America, “the ‘revolution in manners and morals’ was as much a product of perception as of actual behavioral change, for the media in the 1920s not only recorded the ‘revolution’ but also helped create it.”<sup>18</sup> This prosaic vision of sexuality in the 1920s emerged partly out of the social hygiene movements that arose prior to and extended through the First World War. Social researchers, reformers and sex education advocates revised familiar assumptions about the relationship between reticence and candor in relation to the problem of heterosexual normalcy.<sup>19</sup> Early on, sex education advocates and social hygienists like Max Exner, secretary of the Young Men’s Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.), complained of a “policy of silence and evasion on the part of parents and teachers.”<sup>20</sup> The statistical construction of white, middle-class American heterosexuality, as a technology for representing norms under the mantel of scientific objectivity,

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<sup>17</sup> An avalanche of sex talk in this period constituted one arm of what Allen, in 1931, called the “revolution in manners and morals” of the 1920s; for more on the “manners and morals” thesis, see John Burnham, “The Progressive Era Revolution in American Attitudes Toward Sex.” *Journal of American History* 59, no. 4 (March 1973), 885-908. For an example of the “anti-progressive” view of sexual history in the U.S., see John D’Emilio and Estelle Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> See Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century*. Harvard University Press, 2000, 78

<sup>19</sup> In doing so, these thinkers highlight Foucault’s important claim that “there is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case” More specifically, these accounts break apart and negotiate the politics of reticence and candor, in their many styles, in public discourse on sex. See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage 1990), 27.

<sup>20</sup> Exner, *Problems and Principles*, 15

provided a scheme for the articulation of frank reticence and hygienic normativity. Researcher and social hygienist Katharine Bement Davis encapsulated this idea in the early 1920s when she declared the need for “more adequate data as to both the physical and mental facts of the sex life of the normal individual.”<sup>21</sup> Like other social researchers in this decade, Davis’s “normal individual” was defined arbitrarily and purposively selected for, yet represented through statistical aggregation. By 1920, with the founding of the Committee for Research in Problems of Sex (CRPS), of which Exner and Davis were board members, the study of normal sexuality had begun to popularized the idea of a regulated “sex life,” a biopolitical framework for stabilizing both reproductive and non-reproductive ideals of normal, heterosexual behavior.

The cultivation of a prescriptive heteronormativity through frank reticence and statistical language renovated ideals of marital satisfaction as an expression of political and sexual symmetry, ideals that Cather often dismisses, in her early criticism and fiction, as emblematic of an overly-cluttered descriptive realism. In her essay on Henry James, for example, she expresses a wish that the writer she so admires “would write about modern society, about ‘degeneracy’ and the new woman and all the rest of it” not because James would “throw any light on it,” but because “he would say such awfully clever things.”<sup>22</sup> Cather extols that James “never lets his phrases run away with him.” In other words, he maintains an appropriate distance between himself and his prose, so as to ward off the temptation to elope. Unlike Chopin then, James exhibits the kind of continence that makes him able to represent, without being pulled into, the themes of “degeneracy” that might normally be too sordid for other writers. Here, as in the essay

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<sup>21</sup> The sentence originally appeared in Davis’s article on contraceptives in *Social Hygiene* 8., no. 2, (1922), and is reprinted in *Factors in The Sex Life of Twenty-Two Hundred Women* (1929), ix.

<sup>22</sup> Cather, “Henry James,” (SE 905).

on Chopin, the crossing between Victorian concepts of self-control and avoidance of sexual candor draws on the force of social hygiene while refusing to “throw any light” on sexuality itself. Silence, in this essay, obtains through the emptiness of usage, of saying “such clever things” in order to avoid speaking frankly about sex.

The erotics of reticence and candor were central to the statistical construction of metrics for regulating and promoting ideals of marital happiness. On the one hand, a “normal” and “healthy” sex life became a discourse for defining ideals of white American marital happiness against perceived social ills such as prostitution, venereal disease, and rising divorce rates.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, the statistical sex studies like those of Exner and Davis also repeatedly revealed a normativity that failed to live up to these standards, thus proving the effectiveness of, and continued need for, sanitary and moral prescription. In her study of the sex lives of married and unmarried women, Davis found, in response to a survey question about why marital relations were distasteful, that the most popular answers by far indicated either a lack of desire or “physical repulsion—vulgar, disgusting, nasty, revolting, horrid, brutish.”<sup>24</sup> Importantly, however, when it came to the question of happiness, “no significant differences were found between” the married populations and unmarried “overt homosexuals” when it came to “answers to questions as to happiness and success.”<sup>25</sup> According to these thinkers, revulsion between the sexes, while normal, can be remedied, and heterosexuality can, with a little work, be a happier alternative than lesbianism. “Sexologists and physicians” of the period, Ward points out, “were

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<sup>23</sup> Statistics on divorces in the U.S. can be found in Eby, *Until Choice Do Us Part: Marriage Reform in the Progressive Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 26-27. For Eby, the mutual pleasure described by Davis might exemplify what she calls the “progressive-era marital ideal” based in a critique of economically motivated marriage, one that emphasized “mutually satisfying sex” (38).

<sup>24</sup> Davis, *Factors* 180

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 278

very busy teaching women and men how to make their bodies, and heterosexual sex itself, less repellant.”<sup>26</sup> The idea, promulgated by a wave of sex advice literature, that men and women are repulsed by one another, and that this disgust is natural and normal, but can nevertheless be

TABLE XI  
HAPPINESS OF MARRIAGE

Very, perfectly, or entirely, happy.....	58
Happy.....	814
Fairly, more or less, not altogether, "yes and no," "mixed".....	70
Unhappy.....	46
Unanswered.....	12
Total.....	1000

COMPARISON AS TO HAPPINESS IN FIRST AND SUBSEQUENT MARRIAGES

	First marriage	Second marriage	Third marriage
Happy.....	6	6	
Unhappy.....	1	1	
Unhappy.....	7	7	
Unhappy.....	1	1	Happy..... 1
Unanswered.....	1	1	
Unanswered.....	2	2	

CORRELATION TABLE 5

HOMOSEXUAL EXPERIENCES AND HAPPINESS—"DO YOU CONSIDER YOUR LIFE AS A WHOLE AS HAPPY?"

	H. I.		H. II.		Others		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Happy.....	221	79.2	227	77.2	439	78.5	887	78.3
Fairly happy.....	32	11.5	28	9.5	58	10.4	118	10.4
Neutral.....	7	2.5	19	6.5	20	3.6	46	4.1
Unhappy.....	19	6.8	20	6.8	42	7.3	81	7.2
Total answered.....	279	100.0	294	100.0	559	99.8	1132	100.0
Unanswered.....	14	.....	18	.....	36	.....	68	.....
Total.....	293	.....	312	.....	595	.....	1200	.....

Fig. 1: Tables comparing women’s reported marital happiness to the reported happiness of unmarried homosexual college graduates. H. I. and H. II. Refer to two different groups which Davis classifies as homosexual, with I representing women who felt strong emotional attachments to other women, and II representing women who had these attachments, and engaged in specific intimate acts (such as mutual masturbation). From Davis, *Factors In the Sex Life of Twenty-Two Hundred Women*, 11, 262

corrected, provided one of the period’s fundamental bulwarks for eugenics and white supremacy by reimagining heterosexual marital practices between whites as a sexual ideal of normality.

Nonetheless, a pedagogical problem lay at the core of “frank” sexual talk in this period. In a 1915 survey of 948 college men, Exner found, in response to a question about sources of sexual knowledge, that “91.5 per cent” of those who answered “received their first permanent impressions about sex from unwholesome sources,” and that further more “in an overwhelming proportion of cases the source of the earliest information and impression about sex has been the other boy, usually an older boy.”<sup>27</sup> When it came to the meaning of “unwholesome,” however,

<sup>26</sup> Ward, *Tragedy* 41.

<sup>27</sup> Exner, *Problems and Principles* 6.

Exner's methods become hazier. Listing these "bad" sources arbitrarily, he includes "boy associates," "girl associates," "hired men" and "stories and talk" (5); by contrast, "good sources" include "parents and relatives," "brothers," "teacher," and, of course, the "Y.M.C.A." (6). Hygienic normativity signals a space of discursive negotiation over speech and silence in the creation of a "clean" and "wholesome" language through which white, middle-class sexual values could be disseminated. For social hygienists like Exner and Davis, numbers, like prose, were tools for shifting sexological discourse from abnormal sexualities to ideals of mutually pleasurable, monogamous and "happy" heterosexuality as the truly normal state (Fig. 1). In Exner's sex attitude survey, even respondents who got their information from "wholesome" sources reported that the "information was not enough nor in plain enough language."<sup>28</sup> Sex education therefore promised to "maintain a normal sex consciousness from earliest childhood up to maturity" through the adoption of a kind of plain style.<sup>29</sup> Through this plain prose, sex education could be, in Exner's words, "scientific in spirit" by avoiding "exaggerated statements and extravagant estimates" (34). For sex educators and researchers, procedures of quantification performed the functions of this efficient and factual prose fitted to the hygienic transfer of sexual knowledge.

The thematic flexibility of prose mirrored that of sexual norms. In her bestselling advice manual, *Married Love* (1918), arguably the most influential and widely-read book on marriage before to World War II, British scientist and social reformer Marie Stopes freighted prose with the risks of *not* outperforming this sexual dullness. "Each coming together of man and wife,"

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<sup>28</sup> Exner, *Problems and Principles* 11-13

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 15



Stopes writes, “should be a fresh adventure; each winning should necessitate a fresh wooing” but the problem is that “what a man often finds so hard is to come to that wooing with full ardour [...] if the woman he is to woo has been in a too uninterrupted and prosaic relation with him in the meantime.”<sup>30</sup> Work was required, often by women, to maintain heterosexuality and spice things up by introducing controlled interruptions and deviations into the usual, everyday repetitions presumed to characterize married life: sexual experiments were imagined as forms of labor to reproduce the norm. For sex researchers, the prosaic was therefore aligned with the norm, but also haunted by anxieties over non-reproductivity and vice. Certain styles of prose thus came to stand for prosaic language writ large, that is, for a language whose normative ideal and virtue lay in its performative disinterest in the erotic, a disinterest aimed at *producing* heterosexual eroticism as the norm.

For Cather, by contrast, “clean” prose had to distance itself from calculating logic of the mass public and the enforcement of heterosexual norms through gendered habits of consumption.<sup>31</sup> In essays like “The Novel D meubl ,” Cather conceptualizes her own prose style as distinct from, and in many ways defined against, a contemporaneous sexual hygiene achieved through market-generated routines of frankness. Cather’s later fiction explicitly engages with and rewrites emergent concepts of sexual normativity and satisfaction through suspensions that link

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<sup>30</sup> Stopes, *Married Love: A New Contribution to the Solution of Sex Difficulties*. (London: A. C. Fifield, 1918), 93.

<sup>31</sup> For more on Cather’s relationship to mass market prose forms, see David Humphries, *Different Dispatches: Journalism in American Modernist Prose* (London: Routledge, 2006); and Donal Harris, *On Company Time: American Modernism in the Big Magazines*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016). For Cather, certain kinds of clean copy, while desirable, are only all-too conventional. So too, Cather often distances herself, in like language, from the journalistic prose that was her own stock and trade until her first major novelistic successes. Cather critics have likened Cather’s dismissal of reportage and journalistic prose to the larger modernist anxieties over the rise of mass-market writing in both newspapers and big magazines. Donal Harris, for example, has argued that one referent of Cather’s famous “thing not named,” with its queer and promiscuous leanings, might be “the magazine work that was just as much an open secret in her literary life” as was her sexuality (36). If magazine work and journalism share some of the embarrassment of sexual queerness, it may be because both involve forms of openness that Cather sees as too emblematic of the new “straight talk” about sex.

queer suffering to the quotidian arrangements of married life. As America's political course in world affairs increasingly brought them into collision with the War in Europe, the groundswell of demographic numbers on venereal disease and the sexual habits of young men drew even greater interest. Normal sexuality increasingly came to represent discursive ideals of masculinity and national health amid escalating military action, first at the U.S.-Mexico border, and later in Europe.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, anxieties over sexual vice took on a marked utilitarian cast. Writers previously concerned with promoting abstinence until marriage quickly shifted their strategies when it came to the sexual habits of soldiers. Sexual and moral prophylaxis became more about encouraging soldiers who had seen prostitutes to seek treatment right away, so as to curb the spread of venereal disease, rather than stopping prostitution altogether. Amid the vast destructiveness of the Great War, and the devastating influenza pandemic that followed, Cather's concepts of prosaic cleanliness and sexual reticence shifted in relation to new quantifying descriptions of venereal disease and mass death. By turning to these descriptions, Cather displaces quantified representations of heterosexual happiness, if only temporarily.

### New/Normal

Cather wrote *One of Ours* partly to memorialize the life and death of her cousin, Grosvenor P. Cather, who died at the Battle of Cantigny in 1918.<sup>33</sup> Yet the story of Claude Wheeler also becomes a narrative of diverted heterosexual desire, in which the trenches become a means of

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<sup>32</sup> Carter, *Heart of Whiteness* 128.

<sup>33</sup> See Harris, "Historical Essay" in *One of Ours: A Scholarly Edition*, n.p. *The Willa Cather Archive*. <https://cather.unl.edu/writings/books/0019>

suspending the biopolitics of heterosexual everyday life. The First World War and the influenza pandemic which followed on its heels created new reasons for quantifying biological health and death on a mass scale. For Cather, statistical visions of male death signify forms of gendered labor. Taking a short break from writing “Claude” (the working title of *One of Ours*), in 1919, Cather published a short piece for *The Red Cross Magazine*, where she commemorated American soldiers, including those who died at Cantigny. In Cather’s characterization, Cantigny was the site where Americans “had still to prove whether we were a fighting nation or not.” But “when the casualty lists began to appear in the New York papers,” she continues “morning after morning I saw the names of little towns I knew in Nebraska, Kansas, Wyoming, Colorado... It was like a long roll call, and all the little prairie towns were answering that they were there.”<sup>34</sup> The enumerative logic of the roll call as death list signals a conception of American masculinity tied to the regional specificity of the Midwest. But the article also extols the “hooverizing” labor of the women in these midwestern towns. “The whole routine of housekeeping was different from what it used to be,” requiring a new economy built for the reproduction of the soldiers (28). In Cather’s description, the role of domestic routines, marks an ongoing temporality of making-do, a continuation of domestic labor in light of the war’s interruption. Cather’s protagonist, Claude, comes to emblemize a version of the vast “roll call” of known and unknown dead. At the same time, even as Claude registers masculine heroic ideals that Cather associates with heterosexuality, he also becomes a figure through whom Cather articulates desires that run outside of marriage, particularly in ways that resist what Claude sees as the feminizing norms of sexual and social hygiene.

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<sup>34</sup> Cather, “Roll Call on the Prairies.” *The Red Cross Magazine* 14, July 1919, 27.

If the “health” of *One of Ours* was to be judged by sales, it fared well. Critically, its reception was mixed, as scholars have pointed out. Cather’s novel won the Pulitzer Prize in 1922, yet its cool reception by prominent male modernists like Edmund Wilson and Ernest Hemingway have become central to the novel’s discussion. In an oft-quoted letter to Wilson, Hemingway levied a misogynistic critique of Cather’s novel, calling the battle scenes “Catherized,” declaring, “poor woman, she had to get her war experience somewhere.”<sup>35</sup> If critics, including Hemingway himself, preferred the non-redemptive depictions of the war in novels like his own *A Farewell to Arms* and Dos Passos’s *Three Soldiers*, it may be, at least in part, because Cather’s novel does not insist on a clear severing of wartime heterosexuality from the domestic drama that comprises the novel’s first half. Furthermore, as Michael North has persuasively argued, “it may be that the massive condescension of the younger male writers to their older female colleague masks another reaction, that distinction is insisted on, as it so often is, precisely because the resemblance is too close.”<sup>36</sup>

If, for Hemingway, the femininities of Cather’s character perhaps hit too close to home, the Pulitzer was no less a register of the negotiation of sexual and textual reticence. Allen notes that “the Pulitzer Prize juries had a hard time meeting the requirement that the prize-winning novel should ‘present the wholesome atmosphere of American life and the highest standard of American manners and manhood,’ and finally had to alter the terms of the award, substituting ‘whole’ for ‘wholesome’ and omitting reference to ‘highest standards.’”<sup>37</sup> Although Cather’s novel repeatedly registers the contradictions in this ideal of clean, wholesome, and normal

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<sup>35</sup> Hemingway, Qtd in North, *Reading* 179

<sup>36</sup> North, *Reading*, 179.

<sup>37</sup> Allen, *Only Yesterday*, 103. See also Harris’s historical essay in the scholarly edition of *One of Ours*, which confirms that the earlier language was applied to Cather’s novel.

depictions of American male identity desired by the Pulitzer committee, the novel has tended to be either ignored, or dismissed as a trite and heroizing depiction of the war. Importantly, the critical debates in the 1920s over “conventional” and “feminine” depictions of the war, North argues, also centered gender in contemporary obsessions with linguistic novelty. Contemporary male critics seemed to share the view of linguist Otto Jespersen that women “embody linguistic convention,” (unlike men, who innovate). By contrast, North argues, Cather responds by “putting convention, in language and behavior, in some sort of critical resonance until it yields up the freedom inherent within it” (*Reading* 174, 177). Cather’s ideals of convention, whether prosaic or sexual, required a new kind of reticence in which the “freedom” encapsulated in revised sexual norms is also situated within spaces where the “highest standards” of masculinity and hygiene become impossible to maintain.

The spectacle of great numbers of enumerated war dead inaugurates the novel’s revision of heterosexual ideals. However, war casualties were not the sole cause, nor the sole image, of mass death during this period. According to historian David Stevenson, “it has often been pointed out that the Great War was the first major conflict (apart from the Russo-Japanese War) in which [military] deaths from wounds exceeded those from illness.” At the same time, war deaths (which numbered around ten million) were themselves outnumbered by deaths caused by the Influenza pandemic of 1918-19 (around thirty million).<sup>38</sup> As Elizabeth Outka has recently observed, military deaths in the Great War have tended to be memorialized through the erasure of pandemic deaths; deaths from influenza, in contrast to the heroism of pitched battles, have been characterized as more senseless, wasteful, and feminized. “Even before the fighting started,” Outka aptly observes, “Cather was primed, as her culture was, to see the war as manly

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<sup>38</sup> See Stevenson, *1914-1918: The History of the First World War* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 207, xix

and the pandemic as emasculating” (46). At the same time, the portrayal of the pandemic (which, historically speaking, arrives too early in the novel’s timeline, by several months)<sup>39</sup> signals the irruption of domestic temporalities of care and gendered labor into the space of the war. It is only when Claude reaches Europe that the norms of his previous life are wholly suspended. The gendered divisions that emerge in *One of Ours* distinguish between ideals of masculinity, normalcy, and heterosexuality in ways that do not create neat alignments between, on the one hand, heterosexual ideals of normalcy, and on the other, the routinized management of male death. In Cather’s body of post-war work, the gendered meanings of death are skewed by Claude’s own troubled relationship to heterosexual models of gendered labor.<sup>40</sup> Both the war and the pandemic placed renewed emphasis on sexual health as a register of national health. The environment of the military camps created new demands for regulating the spread of venereal disease. As the social reformers who had spearheaded the shutting down of red-light districts in the previous decade now advocated for widespread sex education in the military, the concept of sexual hygiene took on a renewed importance. While the war highlighted the need for a regulatory framework for managing heterosexual reproduction, the pandemic altered relationships between intimacies and gendered labor in the space of managed health.

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<sup>39</sup> According to Outka, “Cather deliberately change[d] the timeline of the pandemic so it happens earlier in the war, allowing the war to continue after the pandemic episode—and deepening the impression that the war subsumed the pandemic” (51).

<sup>40</sup> “Just now I am really going away from your firm for Claude’s health,” wrote Cather to her erstwhile editor, Ferris Greenslet, in 1921, in what is now a well-known career decision to publish *One of Ours* with Knopf instead of with Houghton-Mifflin. Claude, Cather felt, “need[ed] ‘presentation’, a certain kind of publicity work.” Cather’s relationship with both Greenslet and her new editor, Alfred Knopf, is characterized by an evasiveness around matters she perhaps saw as inappropriately meretricious. As Marilee Lindemann’s well-known account has shown, this relationship (between herself, her agent, and her editor) gets repeatedly framed, in her letters, as a kind of heterosexual “erotic triangle” in which Cather “found herself guilty of both baby-selling and prostitution.) See Cather, “To Ferris Greenslet, Jan 12, 1921,” *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather*, ed. Andrew Jewell and Janis P. Stout, (New York: Vintage, 2014), 297; and Lindemann, *Willa Cather, Queering America*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 90.

The novel is generally seen as divided into two rough halves along the axis created by America's entry into the war in Europe, though the story ultimately lingers in its midwestern opening setting for more than half of the book's length.<sup>41</sup> But it is in these early chapters that Cather dramatizes the erotics of usage and reticence and their relationship to the biopolitics of marital happiness. The three sections which comprise this first half of the narrative takes the form of a bildungsroman, following Claude's farm life in Frankfort, Nebraska, his education at Temple University, and his unhappy marriage to Enid Royce. In these chapters, the repeated thematic notes of Claude's life are drudgery, disillusion, and apathy, at least until the war breaks out. So too, his family life is characterized by a kind of toxic inarticulateness. Having dinner with the family of a boy he meets at university, Claude reflects on the "poisonous reticence he had always associated with family gatherings [...] the awkwardness of people sitting with their hands in their lap, facing each other, each one guarding his secret or his suspicion, while he hunted for safe subjects to talk about" (975). Unlike Claude's family, "all the people he met at the Erlichs talked," a norm which affects him too. "He caught himself using words that had never crossed his lips before, that in his mind were associated only with the printed page," words he sometimes mispronounces, at which point he "would blush and stammer and let someone finish his sentence for him" (977). Cather's sentences here imagine Claude's anacoluthon as a kind of textual redaction enacted through an interruption of the norm of his family's silences.

But the question of usage also provides one of the novel's central thematic shifts. One motif in which these concepts of speech and silence are embedded is in the pronunciation of Claude's name. Early on in the novel, Claude is visited by Mr. Weldon, who, we are told,

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<sup>41</sup> A notable exception to this trend is Outka, who highlights the importance of the novel's third section, "The Voyage of the Anchises" and the long narrative arc that swings around the Influenza pandemic. Yet Outka also argues aptly that, for Cather, the pandemic ultimately remains subordinate to the war narrative.

“always pronounced Claude's name exactly like the word ‘Clod,’ which annoyed him” (1043). In a literal sense, Clod means dirt, which lends to the character both a kind of autochthonous identity and a link to classed conceptions of contamination. Dirt, as anthropologist Mary Douglas argues, “is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements.”<sup>42</sup> If dirt, in this well-known formulation, implies the mixture of unordered matter in an ordered system, Claude’s frustration over his name speaks to a sense of misplacement. Of course, it is not only Brother Weldon who messes up the pronunciation. Enid, the woman whom he eventually marries, “pronounced his name in the same way, but either Claude did not notice this, or did not mind it from her” (OO 1043-1044). The separation of articulation from usage becomes a signifier for the inarticulateness of Claude’s marriage. As North points out, “it is not until he actually goes to France that he finally escapes cloddishness by acquiring his right and proper name in a land that can properly pronounce it” (*Reading* 180). Elevating the character from an earthen “clod” to the height of a “cloud” would seem to wash away Claude’s uncomfortable relationship to both earth and sordidness. Yet, as I hope to show, dirt also channels Claude’s masochistic attachments to heteronormative masculinity, attachments that Cather suggests are ill-suited to the demands of domestic (that is, of the home, and within the nation’s borders) heterosexuality.

Claude’s anxiety over cleanliness and masculinity throughout middle-west life is bound up with his political quietism and dismissals of social advocacy and reform, including social hygiene movements. Early on, Claude casts his aspersions on a fellow student, Chapin, “a man of twenty-six, with an old, wasted face,” whose “natural stupidity must have been something

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<sup>42</sup> Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2002), 44.



quite out of the ordinary.” We are told that Chapin “‘supplied’ the pulpit when a minister was ill, did secretarial work for the college and the Young Men’s Christian Association” (OO 967). Here, Cather’s enumeration of the cloddish social work in which Chapin is involved foreshadows the novel’s broader aversion to public discourses of reform and purity. After marrying Claude, Enid picks up Chapin’s mantle. If Chapin and Brother Weldon represent versions of the small-town intellectual mediocrity that annoys Claude, Enid comes to figure Claude’s own unsatisfied sexual appetites in her turn away from marital domesticity and toward public advocacy. Claude’s dissatisfactions with Enid mirror those detailed the genres of marital unhappiness highlighted by contemporary studies of sexual norms.<sup>43</sup> So too, Claude idealizes femininity in ways that reinforce the oppositions indexed by the normalization of heterosexual practices and pleasures. “Women ought to be religious,” Claude finds himself thinking early in the text, and goes on to imagine that “faith was the natural fragrance of their minds.” Such fantasies, steeped in erotic sensations he associates with gendered divisions in thought (and with his mother reading him *Paradise Lost*), lead Claude to conclude that “a woman who didn’t have holy thoughts about mysterious things far away would be prosaic and commonplace, like a man” (OO 1041).

Enid, understandably, cannot live up to these ideals, yet while Claude recognizes this, he rationalizes them by turning to marriage as a heterosexual fix: “Everything would be alright when they were married, Claude told himself.” For Claude, the “transforming power of marriage... reduced all women to a common denominator; changed a cool, self-satisfied girl into

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<sup>43</sup> It is worth noting that many of these studies focused, in particular, on women’s sexual dissatisfaction with their husbands. Contemporary thinkers tended to solve this through the routinization of women’s sexual life, timed to the menstrual cycle. As Carter points out, “the difference between the sexes was specifically an erotic difference,” one whose “essence,” for contemporaries, “lay in sexual timing.” See Carter, *Heart of Whiteness* 91.

a loving and generous one” (OO 1078).<sup>44</sup> In Cather’s free-indirect prose, Claude’s understanding of marriage is really a kind of inevitable disaster, but one neither Claude nor Enid are prepared to avert. The novel, at times, even seems sympathetic to Claude’s general disregard (or, at times, disdain) for his wife’s interests and needs. This is especially true of the discourses of social reform and sexual hygiene that Claude eschews. Enid, we are told, avoids her husband, and spends her time distributing social reform leaflets with Claude’s brother Bayliss instead:

Claude consistently refused to take any part in the activities of the Anti-Saloon League, or to distribute what Bayliss and Enid called ‘our literature.’

In the farming towns the term ‘literature’ was applied only to a special kind of printed matter; there was Prohibition literature, Sex-Hygiene literature, and, during a scourge of cattle disease, there was Hoof-and-Mouth literature. The special application of the word did not bother Claude, but his mother, being and old-fashioned schoolteacher, complained about it (OO 1103-1104).

In reducing marriage to a “common denominator,” Claude reiterates the quantifying logic of marital happiness studies, while also dismissing sex hygiene discourse as insufficiently literary. In the first half of the novel, Cather’s prose works to create distinctions between kinds of writing and their relation to sex. While hygienists like Davis and Exner describe marital unhappiness primarily through the asymmetry between women’s and men’s relationship to time and routine, here Cather suggests that Claude’s own attachments to marriage are also too prosaic. As a matter of narrative record, Claude and Enid’s marriage is never consummated. Their cold relationship exemplifies a stereotype of twentieth-century “normal” non-relation between husband and wife,

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<sup>44</sup> The language of the common denominator recalls Cather’s memory of Stephen Crane, and his warnings about the error of reducing literature to a “common divisor.” See Cather, Willa Cather, “When I Knew Stephen Crane,” in *Stories, Poems, and Other Writing*, ed. Sharon O’Brien (New York: Library of America, 1992), 932–38.

whereby Claude's expectations of satisfaction within heterosexuality obtain from mathematical ideals of reduction to an average. Enjoying routine heterosexual sex for purposes beyond reproduction, scientists increasingly argued, was not only normal but healthy for individuals and for society as a whole. Claude and Enid's heterosexual identities are both routed through a quantitative language that position them within a system of sexual hygiene and normalized marital routine.

Claude's marriage, prior to the war, dramatizes the novel's cluster of thematic and figurative relations between cleanliness, domestic labor, and masculinity. If there is one quality that characterizes Claude's sexuality in the first half of the novel, it is a kind of ascetic masochism that takes the form of masculine 'toughening.' We are told early on that "one year he went to school all winter in his jacket, to make himself tough... as soon as he got out of sight of the house, he pulled off his coat, rolled it under his arm, and scudded along the edge of the frozen fields, arriving at the frame schoolhouse panting and shivering, but very well pleased with himself" (OO 965). Elsewhere, Cather's narrator has Claude assuring himself, through ritual self-humiliation, that "the lowest state of mind was the truest, and that the less a man thought of himself, the more likely he was to be correct in his estimate" (979). As the novel continues, however, it becomes clear that Claude derives a certain pleasure not just from the idea of toughness, but from a gendered and masochistic enjoyment of contact with dirt. When Claude realizes that Enid does not intend to sleep with him on the train ride to his honeymoon in Colorado Springs, he requests to be allowed to smoke in the day coach, "a very dirty car where the floor was littered with newspapers and cigar stumps, and the leather cushions were gray with dust" (1093). In the smoker coach, Claude experiences a "long, dirty, uncomfortable ride" that becomes a "storm of anger, disappointment, and humiliation," one that eventually smolders as

Claude returns to Enid's sleeper the next morning, unfulfilled. Enid scolds him for smelling smoky, but Claude stops her physically when she attempts to brush the dust off his clothes, saying, "sharply," that "the porter can do that for me" (OO 1094). Claude's reaction to his wife's cleaning suggests a veneration of, and a desire for, humiliations which he associates with his own sensual and sexual dissatisfaction.

Claude's lack of marital fulfilment early on in the novel serves as a narrative device through which Cather frames the shift to the trenches in the latter half of the novel. It is heavily implied that Claude volunteers for his role in the army to escape the domesticity and routine he associates with marriage. At the same time, the cluster of "feminine" political movements Claude disdains, exemplified by sexual hygiene, the Y.M.C.A., and the anti-saloon league, had increasingly entered into the lives of military men in camp life. As the war movement ramped up, organizations like the Y.M.C.A. and the American Social Hygiene Association (A.S.H.A.) became increasingly involved in sex education programming for the troops. As Carter describes, agitation by sexual hygiene reformers spurred the Secretary of War to create the Commission on Training Camp Activities "less than two weeks after the United States declared war on Germany in April 1917," and implemented "mandatory sex education" for the soldiers.<sup>45</sup> The Y.M.C.A.'s sex education programs, spearheaded by Exner, incorporated a great variety of the kind of "literature" Claude so disdains, including pamphlets, films, medical literature, and other materials intended to educate soldiers on the risks of prostitution and the importance of wholesome talk in the camps (Fig. 2). "No man more than the soldier must do straight thinking

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<sup>45</sup> Carter, *The Heart of Whiteness*, 128.

and form a manly purpose as to the ideals that shall govern his sex instinct,” declared one anti-prostitution pamphlet titled “Friend Or Enemy?” which educated soldiers about the dangers of venereal disease.<sup>46</sup> A.S.H.A. and other organizations developed materials intended to speak to “these big, husky soldier children,” in Exner’s words, through the “inherent manly idealism which runs strong in the lives of all normal men.”<sup>47</sup> In these pamphlets, hygienic normativity cuts across both idealizations of marital happiness and anxieties over venereal disease. The forms



Fig. 2: Sexual hygiene materials from the Y.M.C.A.’s program for sex education in the Army, in Exner, “Social Hygiene and the War,” between 285-286, and between 288-289

of moral purity inscribed in these objects link both Christian and scientific ideals of

<sup>46</sup> The text of this pamphlet is taken from Exner, “Friend or Enemy? To the Men and Women of the Navy.” *Social Hygiene* 2, no. 4 (October 1916), 481-99.

<sup>47</sup> Exner, “Social Hygiene and the War.” *Social Hygiene* 5 (1919), 283.

wholesomeness and masculinity through a variety of genres and modes. Claude embodies several of these ideals even as he refuses to participate in their dissemination.

In the early sections of the novel, Claude's dissatisfaction with domestic norms of heterosexuality direct him toward new ideals of non-domestic American masculinity and non-hetero desire. As Claude transitions from married life to the homosocial environment of the Army camps, rhetorics of sexual hygiene furnish discourses in his training and education. En route by train to his home town, before the first drafts are called, Claude peruses a French phrase book, "made up of sentences chosen for their usefulness to soldiers,—such as: 'Non, jamais je ne regarde les femmes'" (1131). Insisting 'I never look at women' mimes the hygienic reticence employed by sex educators, while also winking at the normative 'boys-will-be-boys' expectation that Claude, and other men, do indeed look, even if not always at women. Yet the sentence is also accurate. Going forward, Claude's gaze is primarily directed at men, though often in ways that mime the homoerotic ideals of male virtue displayed in the Army's sex education programs. On his first visit home, Claude is "still burning with the first ardour of the enlisted man," fantasizing that "he was going abroad with an expeditionary force that would make war without rage, with uncompromising generosity and chivalry" (1134). Just as the war would eventually dispel such ideals of virtuous chastity, so too, Cather argues, would it unmask the masculine sexual "rage" at the heart of warfare. At the same time, this heterosexual chivalry is directed through homosocial bonds. "Claude loved the men he trained with," we are told, on several occasions (1134). Claude's erotic bonds to other soldiers are circuited through his attachment to an ideal of fundamental non-relation between men and women. As Claude readies himself for war, desires that fall outside of marital heterosexuality become a discourse for Cather to allow

certain kinds of non-normative sexualities into values of masculine military strength, even as the men come to represent American ideals of white heterosexuality on the world stage.

### Outnumbered

In the second half of the novel, two polarized images of mass death—from war and illness—fundamentally alter the lines Cather draws between “literary” prose and the sterilized language of marital happiness. When war is first declared in Europe, the conversation is largely speculative, and focused on mass images of an anonymous German threat to the French army. “The Germans outnumber them five to three in men and nobody knows how much in artillery,” Claude tells his mother and father (OO 1075). Later that night, Claude imagines his own body anonymized and melded with the human masses of the French armed forces:

He knew he was not the only farmer boy who wished himself tonight beside the Marne. The fact that the river had a pronounceable name, with a hard Western ‘r’ standing like a keystone in the middle of it, somehow gave one’s imagination a firmer hold on the situation. Lying still and thinking fast, Claude felt that even he could clear the bar of French ‘politeness’—so much more terrifying than German bullets—and slip unnoticed into that outnumbered army (1075).

Claude’s fixation on “French politeness” and the hard “r” in the middle of the river offers Claude one vision of a possible future where his own name is “pronounceable.” Thus, the problems of usage and annunciation surrounding Claude’s name the novel’s first half enable his transition to the European theaters of mass death in the second. The fantasy of a French name allows Claude, in his vision, to overcome a linguistic barrier and thus “slip unnoticed” into the impersonal mass

of the military in Europe. In the second half of the novel, the earthen gravity of midwestern farm life is reimaged through the repeated opening of mass graves within the trenches.

However, the narrative logic that sends Claude from reticent strictures of heterosexual hygiene into the homosocial space of the military is diverted, if only temporarily, by the irruption of the pandemic. The penultimate section of the novel, “The Voyage of the Anchises,” reroutes the narrative arc that pulls Claude into the vortex of Europe, even as it brings him into contact with the pandemic’s repetitive enumerations and iterations of hygiene, care, and death. The influenza episode inaugurates a yet another new set of routines for Claude, rewriting Cather’s distinction between the prosaic and the everyday. Indeed, “the 1918 strain” Outka tells us, was, despite its remarkably more lethal quality, still “called influenza,” and thus signified “a common, everyday illness.”<sup>48</sup> As the epidemic mounts, so too do the vast roll calls of the dead. The “common denominator” in this half of the novel is no longer marriage, but mass death. We are told that “the death list was steadily growing; and the worst of it was that patients died who were not very sick.” The disease, Cather tells us, affects “vigorous, clean-blooded young fellows of nineteen and twenty,” who, we are told, “turned over and died because they had lost their courage” (1180).<sup>49</sup> Here, aboard the Anchises, cleanliness takes on multiple racialized and erotic meanings. “Clean blood” and other internal bodily channels cannot stop the spread of an invisible agent. At the same time, the sentimentalizing “courage” that the virus drains signals another version of the masculinity that Outka has described, one driven by a culture where influenza deaths get construed as wasteful, feminizing, and meaningless. Like the “ardour” and

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<sup>48</sup> Outka, *Viral Modernism* 22.

<sup>49</sup> As Outka observes, the influenza pandemic of 1918-1919 affected young and healthy people the most: “fatalities were also high among healthy men and women between twenty and forty years of age and especially among those between twenty-one and thirty” a phenomenon that some scientists now believe may be due to strong autoimmune response (10).



“chivalry” that characterize Claude’s ideal of military masculinity, here Cather depicts the pandemic as a force that interrupts, but does not ultimately thwart, the larger war narrative. But in doing so, she also rewrites the terms of the relationship between prose and gendered labor.

As mass death becomes part of Claude’s routine, the pandemic serves a kind of preparatory function, requiring him to perform a version of the hygienic labor Cather marks as feminine (and which, to this point in the novel, has primarily been associated with Enid, and with the aging women in Claude’s family). The ship’s physician, Doctor Trueman, enlists Claude’s help in the nursing duties, showing him “how to give his patient an alcohol bath,” along with regimens of orange juice and castor oil. Yet hygienic management cannot keep up. The ship’s fetid hold is “damp and musty as an old cellar, so steeped in smells and leakage of innumerable dirty cargoes that it could not be made or kept clean” (1170). Cather’s descriptive emphasis on the filth, the lack of ventilation, the clutter—all of these get close to violating Cather’s own stated principle that authors should “present their scene by suggestion rather than by enumeration” (NF 836).<sup>50</sup> “A novel crowded with physical sensations,” Cather writes in “The Novel Demeublé,” “is no less a catalogue than one crowded with furniture” (NF 837). The build-up of sensation and dirt therefore serves a function here, one that literalizes a principle that Outka has identified as the long afterlife of miasma theory in twentieth-century depictions of illness. But in adapting these epidemiological frameworks to the rewriting of Claude’s relationship to gendered labor, Cather also paradoxically imagines the space of the trenches as an alternative to normative heterosexuality. Cather’s muddying of her own stylistic principles in the

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<sup>50</sup> Richard C. Harris has done detailed work on the sources from which Cather constructed *One of Ours*, and provides some insight here. According to Harris, many of the visual descriptions of the contents of the ship’s rooms, were basically “cribbed” from two sources: Dr. Frederick Sweeny’s World War I diaries, and Joseph Husband’s, *A Year in the Navy*. This passage is not one for which Husband provides a parallel, but the tracing of Cather’s borrowings from Husband suggests that there was something about the environment of the troop ship that provides an exception to Cather’s normal mode of writing. See Richard C. Harris, “Getting Claude ‘Over There’: Sources for Book Four of Cather’s *One of Ours*.” *Journal of Narrative Theory* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2005), 248-256.

second half of *One of Ours* turns on the “miasma trope: the all-male space of the American troop ship becomes a means for Cather to imagine normalized pathology as the basis for a turn away from the heterosexual normality of domestic marriage fictions.

These attachments are not “queer” in the sense of resisting heteronormativity in favor of marginalized sexualities. Rather, they signal an interruption in the normative rhythms demanded of progressive-era heterosexuality, with its routinizations of desire, work and care. Cather’s prose in these sections trouble easy alignments between the biopolitical work of life-extension and the maintenance of heterosexuality. After Claude arrives in France, the problem of sexual hygiene returns as a language for articulating, tacitly, recognitions about the management of health and vice among soldiers who are on leave or who haven’t yet reached the front. One relationship that Cather frames in this way is the camaraderie between Claude and Canadian flying ace Victor Morse. While aboard the *Anchises*, Claude and Victor discuss “French girls,” and Victor mentions the “weekend wives” he and his fellow soldiers slept with while training in England. He then launches into “a tale of amorous adventure, a little different from any Claude had ever heard,” one to which a fellow shipmate, Tod Fanning, reacts “with disgust” (OO 1165). Much later, after the company arrives in Paris, Victor tells Claude, on the night he is set to ship out for the front, that he plans to go “nutting” in the red-light district. He asks Victor whether his girlfriend, Maisie, objects to “these—diversions,” to which Victor replies that “women don’t require that sort of fidelity of the air service” because “our engagements are too uncertain” (1196). In Claude’s dash, the interruption and quick substitution of an unspoken word (affairs?) with the more pleasant euphemism (“diversions”) exemplifies the way “the thing not named” is not always a site of queer resistance, but may in fact operate within contemporary frameworks of “clean” language and sexual regulation. Rather than nominate the nature of Victor’s desires,

Cather supplies another word: “Verdun... the very sound of the name was grim, like the hollow roll of drums.” Such silences do not condone Victor’s desires, but accept their unspokenness as compensation for the performance of good soldiery in the face of mass death. Later that night, after Victor goes out “in quest of amorous adventure” in the red-light district, Claude wanders the streets, where he eventually comes across a young French “country girl” and her paramour, a soldier with an amputated arm (1196). Substituting the anonymous soldier for Victor, in this scene, Claude’s voyeuristic gaze projects desires onto male soldiers’ bodies as sites of both purity and desire. Through his relation to Victor and the soldier at the church, Claude enacts, in different modes, relations that Eve Sedgwick has described, in *Between Men*, as “the triangular “system by which homosocial masquerades as heterosexual.”<sup>51</sup> In Sedgwick’s famous argument, women as circulate as objects of desire, positioned between male rivals, so as to ward off the slippage of desire for and identification with other men.

While Sedgwick sees heterosexuality as a conduit for rewriting potentially homoerotic desire as competition, I want to think about the ways that Cather imagines these triangles through the fractures of heterosexuality itself. When, in the final chapters, Claude finally reaches the Western front, the densely populated underground spaces of the trench lines allow Claude to eroticize, even as he manages, the health and cleanliness of fellow soldiers’ bodies. One scene has Claude disavowing the very possibility of homosexual desire itself, when he sees a dead soldier with a locket containing a “painting—not, as Bert romantically as Bert romantically hoped when he opened it, of a beautiful woman, but of a young man, pale as snow, with blurred forget-me-not eyes” (OO 1276). While Claude naively mistakes the non-“romantic” figure for “a

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<sup>51</sup> Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 60.

kid brother,” Gerhardt, looking “at it with a disdainful expression,” redirects the conversation elsewhere. Focusing on Claude’s relationship to Gerhardt, North argues that “if Claude is so utterly unaware of the possibility of male sexual attraction, he may easily feel it without knowing it, but it seems safer to assume that Claude’s feelings for David are much like his feelings for Enid, that what he wants is not a sexual partner but an aesthetic proxy.”<sup>52</sup> While it’s not necessarily clear why assuming the absence of desire is “safer” than assuming its presence (at least not without assuming that what is safe for Claude is safe for the critic), I want to explore the possibility that Claude is most interested not in intimate bodily relations with individual men but in the management and sublimation of non-heterosexual desire. If Claude’s desires fall short of homosexuality, these homoerotic affinities, however inarticulate, participate in the broader elevation of situational and exceptional suspensions of biopolitical norms of heterosexual coupledness.

Central to Claude’s narrative, then, is the development of his command over his company through the management of men’s desires. When he eventually learns of Victor’s death at Verdun, he experiences a fantasy that Victor’s girlfriend, Masie, has been unfaithful, imagining “the flat in Chelsea; whether the heavy-eyed beauty had been very sorry, or whether she was playing ‘Roses of Picardy’ for other young officers” (1230). While the comment reads on the one hand as misogynistic and retributive answer to Victor’s “diversion” in Paris, it comes across on the other as a kind of fantasy that, should Victor have lived, Claude might have him all to himself. “He had really liked Victor,” we are told, with the addition that Claude sees him as “a sort of debauched baby, he was, who went seeking his enemy in the clouds” (1230). The image of Victor attacking his enemies in the clouds (or in the Claudes) spurs a momentary recognition

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<sup>52</sup> North, *Reading* 188.

of same-sex eroticism under the banner of armed conflict. But just as quickly, the problem of frank reticence returns. Shortly after this reverie, they encounter a British soldier, whose looks are described as “adolescent” and “almost girlish”--“you’d be afraid of using bad words before him, he’s so pretty!” says Hicks (1231-1233). The soldier’s apparent innocence is juxtaposed with the slaughter he witnesses at the Battle of the Somme, which he describes for the two men. “We went over a thousand,” he tells them, “and we came back seventeen” (1232). Claude revises the image by filtered through the masculine toughness of understatement: “There was something very unpleasant about the idea of a thousand fresh-faced schoolboys being sent out against the guns” (1232). In passages like these, the novel juxtaposes images of quantified death with the aesthetics of clean language. The gendered and erotic meanings that the novel attaches to Claude’s language in the second half of the novel suspend the ideals of clean, neutral prose associated with sex hygiene literature in the novel’s first half. Claude’s death in the penultimate chapter becomes the culmination of these discourses of self-regulation, masculinity, and managed desire in the context of non-heterosexual norms. As Claude stands behind a sandbag parapet of the “Boar’s Head” following a German mine explosion, he directs his men, urging them to keep “steady, steady!” as they attempt to shoot down the German soldiers:

It was not only that from here he could correct the range and direct the fire; the men behind him had become like a rock. That line of faces below, Hicks, Jones, Fuller, Anderson, Oscar.... Their eyes never left him. With these men he could do anything. He had learned the mastery of men... The blood dripped down his coat, but he felt no weakness. He felt only one thing; that he commanded wonderful men (1292).

In the final instance, Claude's direction of his men is one where the directed norms of desire ("steady, steady") is not wholly aligned with the biopolitical demands of marital heterosexuality and its narrative forms. Cather's war novel imagines the suspension of the norms of heterosexual marriage in the service of a nationalist political program. After the war, however, the revision of sexual norms represented in part by social hygiene discourse and propelled by postwar capitalism, would deepen the contradictions in heterosexuality that Cather articulates through figures like Claude. If critics would eventually fault Cather for depicting the Great War as a heroic enterprise for Claude, these criticisms also highlight what is perhaps the novel's thornier, and more difficult-to-parse assertion: namely that heterosexuality of any kind is, for Claude, simply not a preferable alternative.

### Regular Heterosexuality

If *One of Ours* can be said to negotiate the re-orientation of non-marital sexualities in the service of nationalist military aims amid the interruptions of war and mass death, *The Professor's House* poses competing ideals of interwar normalcy articulated through cultures of white, middle-class American heterosexuality. Yet in doing so, it also dramatizes how the reversion to the normal or average state, following an interval of queer desire, can never be wholly, and in fact is seldom, repetitious. In this light, narrative form itself becomes an uncertain space. Where, if heterosexuality is so radically contingent, must its narrative begin and end? In this novel, the problems of usage and reticence seen in *One of Ours* take on new importance in the parceling out of what kinds of matter will be accepted into everyday heterosexual life. Prose serves as the space in which the uses of silence are negotiated, whether they serve as a means to signal queer

affiliations, or whether they serve the needs of a totalizing discourse of clean prose. Staging this question, the novel opens on two nested images of cleanliness whose effects are not neatly aligned. Professor Godfrey St. Peter has packed up the contents of his old house, and now stands in its “empty, echoing rooms,” reflecting: “It was almost as ugly as it was possible for a house to be” (103). In practically condemning the old property, he and his family, including his wife Lillian and his two daughters, are agreed. He thinks about the “needless inconveniences he had to put up with for so long,” as if to speak for the family as a whole. Yet while he “sympathize[es] with his daughters’ dissatisfaction,” the professor simply cannot abide the smaller space of hygiene within the house, the bathroom:

he could never quiet agree with them that the bath should be the most attractive room in the house. He had spent the happiest years of his youth in a house at Versailles where it distinctly was not, and he had known many charming people who had no bath at all. However, as his wife said: ‘If your country has contributed one thing, at least, to civilization, why not have it?’ (103-104).

Unwilling to accept his wife’s veneration of the American water closet, St. Peter demurs moving into his new home, with its conveniences and modern fixtures, partly out of his attachment to old habits. Along with the unattractive bathroom, St. Peter refuses to give up the attic room he uses as his study. The Professor’s attachment to his room becomes the focal point of a narrative that disaligns the links between reticence and heterosexuality, if only to eventually accept, by the end of the novel, the possibility of a futurity based in routinized heterosexual non-relation.

With its extreme reluctance to get on with being heterosexual, *The Professor’s House* has been read as a kind of queer melancholic novel, particularly with respect to the erotic relations between the professor and his former student, Tom Outland, who begins the novel as a corpse,

returns during a long flashback in “Tom Outland’s Story,” and then retreats back into the past in the novel’s short final section.<sup>53</sup> The novel concludes with resignation at the prospect of a return to married life, but one delayed by this tripartite structure, where Outland’s brief return serves as both a queer interruption and corrective fix. According to Cather, the novel was the result of two formal “experiments:” “that of inserting the *Nouvelle* into the *Roman*,” and a second scenic imagery borrowed from “Dutch paintings,” where “in most of the interiors, whether drawing room or kitchen, there was a square window, open, through which one saw the masts of ships or a stretch of gray sea” (SE 974). Early on, as the professor walks through the garden where he and Outland used to talk, he recognizes he “could not evade the unpleasant effects of change by tarrying among his autumn flowers.” Instead, he thinks, “he must plunge in like a man, and get used to the feeling that under his work-room there was a dead, empty house” (106). Apparently neither dead nor empty yet, the old room houses the remains of St. Peter’s and Outland’s intimacies, and embodies anxieties about making a “plunge” into married life that feels, if anything, belated. St. Peter has already been married for decades, and raised two daughters. With these “experiments” in the representation of domestic interiors, Cather dramatizes the biopolitics involved in the construction of an American heterosexual normalcy defined through white, middle-class concepts of marital satisfaction. By the end of the novel, after the Professor is rescued from an accidental gas leak (which some have read as a suicide attempt), he feels ready, at the novel’s conclusion, “to face with fortitude the *Berengaria* and the future” as the aforementioned ship bearing his wife and daughters makes its way to him to unite the family in their new house (PH 271).

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<sup>53</sup> The critics most interested in the novel’s treatment of melancholy, loss, and repair, include Madoka Kishi, Christopher Nealon, and Heather Love.



The introduction of several temporally distended relationships between men pauses this narrative of St. Peter's marital future. The novella, "Tom Outland's Story," a brief but significant deviation within a larger temporality of repetition with a difference, organizes St. Peter's acceptance of a shifting but recognizable heterosexual norm. In his critical account of Cather's novel, Walter Benn Michaels has pointed out the extent to which St. Peter's queer filiations serve as alternatives to the possibility of the contamination of his white American identity by "foreign" elements, or in other words, "the homosexual family and the incestuous family thus emerge as parallel technologies in the effort to prevent half-breeds."<sup>54</sup> The figure in whom these anxieties are most magnetized is Louis Marsellus, a Jewish immigrant who has married St. Peter's daughter, Rosamond. Outland, who was Rosamond's late husband, has bequeathed her the patents to his Outland vacuum, from which Marsellus has profited. St. Peter takes umbrage with Marsellus's expenditure of the patent's profits on a new home built in a style that St. Peter detests, and which he and his daughter have named, to his great chagrin, "Outland." While Michaels has aptly critiqued Cather's nativism, I want to argue that St. Peter is repeatedly troubled not simply by reproductive futurity but, somewhat more prosaically, by the managed extension of his own daily life under postwar heterosexual routines, or, to put it another way, by life without Tom. It is not just the contamination of whiteness by non-white others, but the norms of WASP heterosexuality as such, that troubles the professor. This is not so much to exonerate St. Peter of racism so much as highlight that homosexuality does not, in fact, prevent

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<sup>54</sup> See Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 48-49. The year before *The Professor's House* was published, the passage of the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act (1924) restricted immigration based on national origin, while, around the same time, the Indian Citizenship Act (1924) granted American citizenship to all American Indians born in the U.S. Michaels argues that Tom Outland's identification of the Anasazi Indians on the Blue Mesa as his "ancestors," renovates nativism, since "in claiming descent from Indians, Tom is committing himself to the conception of American identity embodied in the Johnson Act" (32).

reproductive futurity at all in the novel. Rather, it interrupts, stalls, and delays the arrival of a temporality defined by standardized regimens of reproductive health and marital satisfaction.

In revising the terms of heterosexual marital happiness that *One of Ours* rejects, *The Professor's House* also rewrites the transactional logic that connects Outland to the financial future of his family. These economies depend on the corrective re-routing of desires that extend beyond the confines of “normal” heterosexual familial structures. One narrative thread that is repeatedly picked up in the two bookending sections of the novel is the prestige and money that St. Peter earns from the Oxford Prize (5,000£), and the new house it purchases for his family. Cather repeatedly compares St. Peter's money to the money earned and spent in “Tom Outland's Story,” going so far as to link this sum with the profits generated by Outland's invention. While St. Peter claims to be untroubled by being left out of Outland's bequest, he still refuses Rosamond's financial offers, claiming that his “friendship with Outland is the one thing he refuses to “have translated into the vulgar tongue” (PH 133). For St. Peter, discussion of money may lead the mouth to unclean places, even as the novel repeatedly “translates” his relationship to Outland, into quantities. We are told that the summer St. Peter spends alone with Tom's sees the production of both Outland's patent and the most productive works of St. Peter's multi-volume opus, *Spanish Adventurers in America*. Later on, the story repeatedly marks both St. Peter's and Outland's studies as sources of ill-gotten financial gain. Through St. Peter's phantasmatic conversion of same-sex intimacies into “dirty” money, Outland's patent comes into contact with the Oxford Prize, and by extension, the new home, with its modern fixtures and clean bathrooms. The queerness of St. Peter's attachments to Outland become a presence that must be exorcised in order to produce the ordinariness of heterosexual domestic bliss.

If St. Peter's marriage to Lillian resembles, more closely than Cather's prior novels, the loveless marriages catalogued in modernist fictions and marital advice books of the twenties, it also highlights that St. Peter is, himself, a man of routine. Early on, we are told that "once at his desk, he didn't dare quit it," assured that he can "train the mind to be active at a fixed time, just as the stomach is trained to be hungry at certain hours of the day" (113). The Professor does not so much object to routine as such but of the scrubbing of Tom from his daily life, insofar as he has rooted his memories of Tom in the old house. In the novel's final section, during the summer he spends in the attic of the old house as he awaits his family's return, he turns to the diary that Tom Outland leaves behind on the Blue Mesa. As a record of the time Tom spends with Rodney (Roddy) Blake cataloguing artifacts left by the Anasazi Indians, the diary becomes a source of St. Peter's fantasy and despair. He spends his time trying, "in a desultory way, to annotate the diary that Tom had kept on the mesa, in which he had noted down the details of each day's work among the ruins, along with the weather and anything unusual in the routine of their life" as he prepares the text for publication (258). Searching for tiny, tactical interruptions in the routines of Outland's own daily "life" offers the Professor a substitute for the increasingly regulated procedures that characterize the hetero-quotidian aspects of his own. The emphasis on periodicity and regularity in the management of bodily functions and sexual satisfaction would seem to elide, in Cather's formulation, heterosexuality with the managed repetitions of straight, middle-class life under the standardizing force of consumer culture.

As regards the Professor's habits, the overcluttered house, again emblematic of Cather's injunction against forms of enumeration and cataloguing in fictional prose, is also a space where women's domestic labor becomes central to the construction of hetero-difference through the management of male desire and revulsion. The character who most embodies this labor, and

whose agency is central to the novel's pivotal plot point, is Augusta, a German sewing-woman, "a reliable, methodical spinster" who shares the Professor's study with him for six weeks each year, periodically, in the fall and spring. When the novel opens, Augusta has arrived "a week before [her] regular time" in order to craft "curtains and hem linen for Mrs. St. Peter" (109). The arrival of Augusta spurs some short banter on a set of dress forms to which St. Peter has become attached, which he calls his "ladies" (109). Keeping the room exactly as he likes it wards off a shift in the habitus that defines his work. St. Peter then confides in Augusta that he is spending time apart from Lillian but does not want to be talked about as having "how do they put it, parted, separated," a word that Augusta assures him is characteristic for men of his class (108). Like Claude, St. Peter's dialogue stages the absent referent of frank reticence about heterosexual non-relationality. Whatever St. Peter wishes the word were, he preserves the room, for most of the novel's length, just so. In this way, he relives his summer with Tom, at least until a letter arrives from Lillian in the final section. The letter informs St. Peter that she and his daughters are returning from France, and announcing her arrival on the ship *Berengaria*. Importantly, she tells St. Peter that Augusta is "the best person to open the house and arrange to have the cleaning done" (265). The letter triggers a fit of what St. Peter calls "low spirits," a depression that nearly ends in death when St. falls asleep as the draft blows out his gas lamp. It is Augusta who discovers the Professor and the lamp, and quickly shuts off the gas and pulls him to safety, saving his life. In the novel's final pages, we are told that St. Peter "had no more thought of suicide than he had thought of embezzling," and that he considers it "a grave social misdemeanour." Yet when "confronted by accidental extinction, he had felt no will to resist" (271). Augusta's repeated early arrivals repeatedly interrupt the Professor's noncompliance with the task of caring for and extending his own life.

The relationship between regularity, heterosexuality, and life is figured in this novel not through the logic of inevitable reproductivity but instead through the managed maintenance of marital norms. While St. Peter assures the wife of a colleague that “Tom willed his estate and royalties in a perfectly regular way,” Tom himself is repeatedly characterized through the language of irregularity (PH 179). We are told, upon first meeting St. Peter, that “the boy spoke with gravity, as if he had reflected deeply upon irregular behaviour.” (167). Tom’s irregularities, unlike those of Rosamond’s second wife, become a repeated source of trouble for St Peter’s wife:

She could never forgive poor Tom Outland for the angle at which he sometimes held a cigar in his mouth, or for the fact that he never learned to eat salad with ease. At the dinner-table, if Tom, forgetting himself in talk, sometimes dropped back into railroad lunch-counter ways and pushed his plate away from him when he had finished a course, Lillian's face would become positively cruel in its contempt. Irregularities of that sort put her all on edge. But Louie could hurry audibly through his soup, or kiss her resoundingly on the cheek at a faculty reception, and she seemed to like it (144).

It is within the space of habitual uses of the oral/orifice—in which pronouncing takes on mannered functions akin to eating and kissing--that Tom’s irregularities impinge upon the language of St. Peter’s relationship with Lillian. Cather returns to the temporality of routine at the moments where the irregularity and interruption of the past is also at its most strongly felt. After learning of the *Berengaria*’s arrival, St. Peter goes to the doctor, claiming that he “simply feel[s] tired all the time.” The doctor confirms that he professor sleeps and eats well, commenting, “always a *gourmet*, and never anything wrong with your digestive tract!” (262).

Just as he regulates the activity of his mind and his gut, so St. Peter leaves the Dr. Dudley “well satisfied,” having not “mention[ed] to [him] the real reason for his asking for a medical exam. One doesn’t mention such things” (262). Here, just as Claude sanitizes the reference to Victor Morse’s affair in *One of Ours*, Cather redacts the precise referent of St. Peter’s ailment—Melancholy? Homosexuality? Both? Outland becomes a kind of psychic and narrative anacoluthon, a blockage that disrupts the regularity of the conventions and rhythms of the formulaic family narrative. But in so doing, his presence transposes progressive-era heterosexuality’s rewriting of silence and interruption onto the form of the novel itself.

Cather places the possibility of a queer quotidian temporality within temporary interruptions within standardized progressions. When “Tom Outland’s Story” does finally arrive within the novel’s structure, Cather writes, across multiple points in time, the relationship between queer reticence and the rhythms of heteronormativity. The discovery of the Anasazi relics on the Blue Mesa marks the site of an everyday temporality that structures both the absent indigenous life, the flashback of Tom and Roddy’s everyday activities, and the Professor’s annotation of their activities. The mesa enfolds past time into memory in ways that challenge heteronormative alliances between repetition and futurity through reproduction:

By the first of July our money was nearly gone, but we had our road made, and our cabin built on top of the mesa. We brought old Henry up by the new horse-trail and began housekeeping. We were now ready for what we called excavating. We built wide shelves all around our sleeping-room, and there we put the smaller articles we found in the Cliff City. We numbered each specimen, and in my day-book I wrote down just where and in what condition we had found it, and what we thought it had been used for (227).

Amid the nested historicist enterprise of collecting and counting artifacts, or of annotating Tom's diary, the cabin that the two men share becomes a domestic space in which to perform both daily housekeeping and the repetition of a daily life narrative through fantasies of an indigenous past. In "Tom Outland's Story," the archaeology of everyday life among the indigenous Anasazi becomes a domestic space where Tom and Roddy form a kind of queer friendship, for the space of the novella. Routine, for Tom and Roddy, encompasses the cataloguing of the tools, the cookware, and the human remains with which they share their time. Likewise, fantasies of male intimacy as indigeneity underwrite the Professor's own nativist leanings. Cather's novel can thus be said to recognize the new linguistic strictures of interwar heteronormativity, but stops short of recognizing the way those fantasies were articulated through racializing frameworks.<sup>55</sup>

Yet there is still one distinction for Cather. The conflation of normal sexuality with whiteness nonetheless sees the former category as contingent on pecuniary considerations. Just as St. Peter resents the translation of his relationship with Tom into the "vulgar tongue," money, so too does Tom snap over Roddy's sale of the Anasazi relics to Fechtig, a German dealer, for a sum of \$4,000. Tom and Roddy initially fantasize initially about getting funding from the Smithsonian to support further research. But when Tom tries to go to Washington to acquire sponsorship, he is thwarted by bureaucracy and funding shortages, and returns to find the artifacts gone. Roddy explains his decision, framing the sale through a calculus of norms and indeterminacy:

It was a chance in a million, boy. There wasn't any time to consult you. There's only one man in thousands that wants to buy relics and pay real money for them. I

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<sup>55</sup> As Ward points out, following Hortense Spillers's account of Black women's exclusion from heterosexual norms, "the American construction of modern heterosexuality was inseparable from white-supremacist gender norms." See Ward, *Tragedy* 46.

could see how your Washington campaign was coming out. I know you'd thought about big figures, so had I. But that was all a pipe dream. Four Thousand's not so bad, you don't pick it up every day...I took the best chance going, for both of us, Tom (246).

Through several numerical descriptions, Roddy closes the gap between chance events and the quotidian expectations of domesticity. The explanation falls apart as the "chance in a million" becomes "one man in thousands," and finally slips into a more average kind of quotidian irregularity, "you don't pick it up every day." The set of compromises required to produce value from the queer domesticity atop the mesa is written as a betrayal.<sup>56</sup> At the conclusion of Tom Outland's Story, Cather substitutes queer happiness for what St. Peter understands as the "vulgar tongue" of satisfactory heterosexuality.

The novel's final section creates a formal analogue for interwar idealizations of a return to heterosexuality, one that is marked, historically, by queer non-repetition and suspension. The narrative of Tom and Roddy culminates in the revelation that Tom has left his diary in the Eagle's nest, back at the Blue Mesa, knowledge that serves as St. Peter's sole bequest. At the culmination of St. Peter's near-death experience, as he is in the process of preparing an introduction for a publication of Tom's diaries, the return to Tom and Roddy's daily life suspends his own attachments to routine. As he is passing out from the gas of the kerosene lamp, St. Peter experiences the culmination of a "long-anticipated coincidence" that recedes into the

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<sup>56</sup> See Sarah Wilson, "'Fragmentary and Inconclusive' Violence: National History and Literary Form in The Professor's House." *American Literature* 75, no 3 (September 2003), 571-599. An oft-commented on scene has Tom accusing Rodney of selling American secrets to the Germans, and comparing him to Dreyfus. As Sarah Wilson points out, Cather would have known that Tom's comparison represented "bad history" (Wilson 574). Whereas Michaels characterizes Cather's return to the past as nostalgic, Wilson argues instead that Cather engages in a historicist critique of the causal explanations her characters create (578).



language of biopolitics: “How far was a man *required* to exert himself against accident? ... He hadn’t lifted his hand against himself—was he *required* to lift it for himself?” (267, my emphasis). When Augusta does finally save his life, he characterizes her as a prophylactic and purifying presence:

Augusta, he reflected, had always been a corrective, a remedial influence... She wasn't at all afraid to say things that were heavily, drearily true, and though he used to wince under them, he hurried off with the feeling that they were good for him, that he didn't have to hear such sayings half often enough. Augusta was like the taste of bitter herbs; she was the bloomless side of life that he had always run away from,—yet when he had to face it, he found that it wasn't altogether repugnant (269-270).

In this markedly gynophobic description, the unpleasant future St Peter has to face, on the “bloomless side of life,” though “bitter” and sensed with a vulgar tongue, is not wholly unbearable. Perhaps it is even less unpleasant than Claude’s image of “fresh-faced schoolboys” being gunned down by the thousands. Such images form the “corrective” to the temporal aberration in which St. Peter has cultivated a queer domesticity through Outland. His distaste for women, while all-but-nominated as a genre of homosexual feeling, is also, I have been emphasizing, a function—not a bug, but in fact a salient feature—of early-twentieth-century heterosexual ideals. Interwar heteronormativity’s turn toward frank reticence and the statistical management of marital satisfaction does not deny heterosexual non-relation but encourages its management and regulation through normalized domestic work. In her “remedial influence,” then, Augusta turns St. Peter toward this version heterosexuality through a kind of regression to the mean. Unlike Claude, or Tom Outland, St. Peter substitutes the management of sexual life

and health for the forms of intimacy signaled by the shocking irruption of the Great War and the great pandemic into white, heteropatriarchal fantasies of domestic bliss.

Rather than refuse normativity outright, Cather aligns temporary suspensions of normal routine against heteronormative connotations of normalcy, happiness, and marital life. In these two novels, these everyday procedures, objects Cather associates with textual practices of reticence and frankness within her prose, do not themselves become a site of refusal, but rather serve as the basis for interruptions in which heterosexuality can be fractured, even if only to be repaired and refortified. Ideals about the cleanliness of prose encode the contradictions inherent in postwar fantasies of normalcy as it was increasingly defined through the conventions of cisgendered sexual oppositions. At the same time, Cather's refusals of these conventions also renovate nativist conceptions of American whiteness, even when they allow for the possibility of desire that extends beyond marriage. To the extent that Cather has been read as an author generally disinterested in heterosexuality, I have been arguing that it is worth reading that disinterest not just negatively but historically. Put plainly, the queer disinterest of Cather's men in their wives was the central object of a linguistic program based on the expansion of progressive-era regulatory frameworks, which emphasized mutual pleasure in exchange for ever more strict conditions on the kinds of pleasure that could be enjoyed. This devil's bargain was involved fantasies of a heteronormative, middle-class life built on a discourse of naturalized gender non-relation, one that, historically, has been used to dismiss and flatten the politics of gender and sexuality into narratives of private domestic strife. Erotic non-relation was presumed to be both normal and correctable, requiring a frank lexicon built on a hygienic plain style. In repurposing that plain style, Cather challenges the status of regulated marital heterosexuality as the default referent of the everyday practices and domestic labor marshalled in the service of

maintaining straightness. While *One of Ours* figures the war as a space for the redirection of men's desires away from heterosexuality, *The Professor's House* articulates the idea of a corrective episode in the aftermath of the war's devastation. If, in more than one sense, the "quality" of clean prose, for Cather, is signaled by the unspoken interruptions of queer desires into normal rhythms, her novels offer a version of sexual history as anti-progressive, continually subject to redefinition, transformation, and reversion. As heteronormativity became increasingly bound to representations of white, middle-class life, Cather's postwar fiction suspends the demands of marital and domestic non-relation, even if such suspensions, she argues, can only be temporary. Yet as interwar fiction increasingly grappled with the expansion of totalizing norms, the problem of suspension and interruption would also become, more than ever, a quantitative problem.

## CHAPTER FOUR:

### HETERONATIONALISM AND THE DESIRE FOR STRAIGHT FORM IN HEMINGWAY'S WORLD WAR I

#### FICTION

*"Here in the United States we feel the reflex, rather than the hurting wound itself, but we still think straight; and we mean to act straight."*

-Warren G. Harding, "Readjustment," 1920.<sup>1</sup>

*"[...] and if [Hemingway] has sometimes, under the menace of the general panic, seemed on the point of going to pieces as an artist, he has always pulled himself together the next moment. The principle of the Bourdon gauge, which is used to measure the pressure of liquids, is that a tube which has been curved into a coil will tend to straighten out in proportion as the liquid inside it is subjected to an increasing pressure."*

-Edmund Wilson, "Hemingway, Gauge of Morale," 1941.<sup>2</sup>

*"Write the best story that you can and write it as straight as you can"*

-Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*, 1966.<sup>3</sup>

For Ernest Hemingway, the first serialized installments of Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* in 1933 became a source of growing concern about his literary reputation. In a letter to Janet Flanner that same year, Hemingway speculated and complained about what Stein's memoir might say about his sexuality, telling Flanner that when the two last spoke, Stein told him "she had heard an incident, some fag story, which proved me conclusively to be very queer indeed."<sup>4</sup> While Hemingway's most recent biographer, Mary Dearborn, doubts that Stein ever made these comments, Hemingway's response is still noteworthy for the way it adopts, alongside

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<sup>1</sup> Warren G. Harding, "Readjustment." Miller Center, May 14, 1920, Home Market Club of Boston. [millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/may-14-1920-readjustment](http://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/may-14-1920-readjustment)

<sup>2</sup> Edmund Wilson, "Hemingway, Gauge of Morale," in *Literary Reviews and Essays of the 1930s and 1940s* (New York: Library of America, 2007), 436.

<sup>3</sup> Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast: The Restored Edition* ed. Sean Hemingway (New York: Scribner, 2009), 157.

<sup>4</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Janet Flanner, Apr 8, 1933 in *Selected Letters, 1917-1961*, ed. Carlos Baker (New York: Scribner, 1981), 387-388.

a familiar brand of misogyny and homophobia, an anti-identitarian posture.<sup>5</sup> He tells Flanner that he “never cared a damn about what [Stein] did in or out of bed and I liked her very damned much and she liked me,” but that “when the menopause hit her she got awfully damned patriotic about sex.” As a metaphor for a separatist lesbian identity, the accusation of “patriotism” projects national and political identifications onto Stein’s affiliation with the lesbian communities on Paris’s left bank. The letter offers a familiar homophobic script, in which Hemingway’s supposed indifference to Stein’s sexual practices somehow protects him from any kind of sexual affiliation himself.

Hemingway readers would not be faulted here for recalling, if somewhat perversely, the famous passage from *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), where, just prior to the retreat from Caporetto, Lieutenant Frederic Henry, an American ambulance driver on the Italian Front, reflects on the “obscene” language used by his patriotic fellow driver, Gino:

There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. Certain numbers were the same way and certain dates and these with the names of the places were all you could say and have them mean anything. Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates. Gino was a patriot, so he said things that separated us sometimes, but he was also a fine boy and I understood his being a patriot. He was born one (*FTA* 161).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Dearborn observes that “it is difficult to imagine Stein making these remarks; they do not sound in character, and the last time she and Ernest saw each other was an occasion in 1929 at which Pauline, Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald, Alan Tate and Caroline Gordon, and John and Margaret Bishop had been present—hardly a likely occasion or an appropriate audience.” See Mary V. Dearborn, *Ernest Hemingway: A Biography*, (New York: 2017), 323.

<sup>6</sup> Abbreviations for Hemingway’s works, and editions used, are as follows: *FTA*, *A Farewell to Arms: The Hemingway Library Edition* (Scribner, 2012); *DIA*, *Death in the Afternoon* (Scribner, 1932); *TSS*, *The Short*

We might take Frederic's monologue as a description of straight style. "Dignity" is also the same word Hemingway would use, two years later, in *Death In the Afternoon* (1931), to identify the so-called principle of omission: "The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water," meaning that "if a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader [...] will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer has stated them" (DIA 192). This principle, whether taken as doctrine or dismissed as a critical mysticism, has become a keystone in twentieth-century Hemingway studies. But in *Death*, the quantitative, fractional expression of this formal principle is both numerically specific and quantitatively vague. One eighth isn't really one eighth. Who's measuring? What matters is that the numbers themselves are "concrete," that is, that their numberiness might signify the stylistic principle of reduction as such. Likewise, a prose made of nothing but place names and numbers can, Frederic imagines, produce history without the "obscene" language of propagandistic abstractions he associates with Gino's variant of Italian protofascist nationalism.<sup>7</sup> The dream of a purely anti-patriotic language of sexual individualism proposes a formal vocabulary in which bodies and pleasures are not marked solely by their relation to normal or deviant acts but by the imagined erotic orientation of a literary style. For Hemingway, the martial capacities of an anti-patriotic style lies in a historiographic refusal to pathologize war itself. In *Green Hills of Africa* (1935), for instance, he reflects that an "experience of war" can be a "great advantage" to a writer, and that "those writers who had not

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*Stories: The First Forty-Nine Stories With a Brief Preface By the Author* (Scribner, 2003); GHOA, *Green Hills of Africa: The Hemingway Library Edition* (Scribner 2015); TSAR, *The Sun Also Rises*, (Scribner 1926); AMF, *A Moveable Feast: The Restored Edition* (Scribner, 2009); GOE, *The Garden of Eden* (Scribner, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> Frederic and the others have been ordered to hold the Bainsizza Plateau (in Present-day Slovenia), a space in which the shifting borders of the Italian state serve nationalist ideals. Gino imagines some places in Italy as being more worth fighting for than others, telling Frederic "I am a patriot [...] But I cannot love Brindisi or Taranto" (160).

seen it were always very jealous and tried to make it seem unimportant, or abnormal, or a disease as a subject, while, really, it was just something quite irreplaceable that they had missed” (*GHOA* 49). The defensiveness of this remark is telling: Why would it matter that war itself, or for that matter, a particular experience of war, be seen as normal? Hemingway’s experience was perhaps not typical—his month-long stint in a non-combatant volunteer role in the Italian army and his wounding at the Fossalta di Piave, as Michael Reynolds reminds us, was not the sole historical basis of Frederic Henry’s experience in *Farewell*, despite the prominence of the “wound theory.”<sup>8</sup> Ernest arrived in Italy well after the retreat from the Isonzo, and constructed the battle through his own research.<sup>9</sup> But in rejecting the characterization of armed conflict as “abnormal,” Hemingway also revises a “patriotic” historical fiction of interwar normalization, in which the First World War signifies both a wellspring of perversity and a great, arcing historical deviation from normal social arrangements.

The idea of a deviant war was central to the construction of a straight interwar. In the 1920s, the ideal and promise of going “back to normal,” popularized in the campaign speeches of Warren G. Harding, was repeatedly couched in the language of straightness, a spatial and formal metaphor that promised provide figurative correctives to a culture still dwelling in the lingering shadow of global war and mass pandemic. But if the war could be thought of as deviant, it was only one capable of being written that way in retrospect. As I argued in previous chapters, the

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<sup>8</sup> Philip Young’s *Ernest Hemingway, A Reconsideration* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1966) is the foundational work on this subject, arguing that Hemingway’s heroes are wounded “not only physically but [...] psychically as well” (41). However, Young’s account of the wound is also troubled by pathologizing associations with homosexuality, which sees Hemingway’s depictions of sexual abnormalities as coextensive with the implied relationship between trauma and its referent, that is, the “violence” and “evil” on which it is predicated (see, for example, his account of “The Battler,” which leads into his discussion of Nick’s injured spine) (39).

<sup>9</sup> The classic study of Hemingway’s sources for this novel is Reynolds, *Hemingway’s First War: The Making of A Farewell to Arms* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1976).

broad and gradual discursive alignment between heterosexual desire and various “normalcies”—temporal, statistical, as well as classed and racialized categories-- emerges, in this period, with renewed durability and flexibility in the language of plain style and “straight talk.” The epigraphs to this chapter offer three very different metaphors of this ideal: straightness as internal normalcy, as pressurized uncoiling, as stylistic directedness.

Straightness: a sexuality that is also a style.<sup>10</sup> If the critical record is any evidence, Hemingway’s prose is itself perhaps the most well-known example of a modernist style that performs, or is expected to perform, a certain kind of sexual norm; that norm is usually revealed as contingent and fragile, yet somehow also stronger for its fragility. To what extent has the literary history of Hemingway’s omissions been policed by the demand to act straight? I do not ask this question facetiously, but rather to suggest that the question of the “straightness” of Hemingway’s prose creates an aporia for the history of sexuality. If the First World War exercised a profoundly transformative effect on twentieth-century sexual norms, as I and other literary critics and historians continue to assert, they are in some sense inseparable from the accreted re-readings of the war as a mass experience of abnormality. The idea of a deviant war was, at least in part, a retroactive construction of the interwar period, one that relies on a myth of the war’s violation of historiographic coherence and a normal/deviant binary linking heterosexuality and statecraft. As Hemingway tells it, both war and prose embody a shared fiction in which temporary aberrances render identities *more*, and not less, stable. Wartime sexualities become privileged signifiers for deviant directionalities that could threaten national

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<sup>10</sup> “Straight” sexualities are an interwar neologism. The *OED* lists the first printed example of “straight” to mean “heterosexual” in George Henry’s 1941 study, *Sex Variants*. The term appears in a glossary of sexual slang appended to the two-volume edition of the book. Since slang usually sees spoken usage well before it is printed, and because Henry conducted his studies throughout the 1930s, it seems probable that “straight” had been around for some time in the interwar period.



strength and health, while also propping up normative frame in which the tropes of correction and readjustment could shore up national and racial distinctions. Normal sexuality, no longer tied to reproduction as such, was increasingly thought of as a set of spoken and written styles, languages that stood in for the imagined directedness of men's sexual aims. Quantified erotic bodies shifted such that heterosexual relations could be represented via a normativity not wholly determined by the statistical tracking of births and marriages, but by the norm-bound constructions of identity.

At the same time, the sexual behaviors of Hemingway's men, as critics have pointed out, seldom read as sexually or psychologically "normal," no matter how we define that word.<sup>11</sup> Feminist and psychoanalytic approaches in the 1980s and 1990s renewed the importance of gender and sexual experimentation in Hemingway's work, and over the last two decades, a queer-ish Hemingway has become a recognizable figure in both criticism and biography.<sup>12</sup> Scott St. Pierre, for instance, has challenged the myth of Hemingway's "straight style," arguing that his prose "only pretends to be straight in order to cover up the embarrassing fact of being bent."<sup>13</sup> St. Pierre praises the work of critics who have undermined the culturally overdetermined image

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<sup>11</sup> . For early studies of "androgyny" and gender nonconformity in Hemingway, see Spilka, *Hemingway's Quarrel with Androgyny*, (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1990); and Kennedy, "Hemingway's Gender Trouble." *American Literature* 63, no. 2 (Jun. 1991): 187-207.

<sup>12</sup> The posthumous publication of the Scribner's edition of *The Garden of Eden* in 1986 is an imperfect but useful origin point for LGBTQ Hemingway studies. Kenneth Lynn's now well-known biography, published the following year, (*Hemingway*, Simon and Schuster 1987), established the oft-cited thesis that Hemingway was traumatized as a child when his mother "twinned" him with his sister. Eby's account in *Hemingway's Fetishism: Psychoanalysis and the Mirror of Manhood* (State University of New York Press, 1999) is useful for its recognition of the fetishistic basis of Hemingway's sexual forms—which I would argue is central to straightness—but his account pathologizes fetishism in ways that obscure the historicity of non-normative desire, particularly with respect to the question of which acts get constructed as deviant or transgressive in the first place. (Eby 27). Comely and Scholes (*Hemingway's Genders: Rereading the Hemingway Text*, Harvard UP 1994) have provided much-needed feminist insights about the gendered meanings of Hemingway's characters and languages. Likewise, Moddelmog's foundational book, *Reading Desire: In Pursuit of Ernest Hemingway* (Cornell UP, 1999), has made productive use of queer theory, and has exploded the myth that Hemingway was ignorant of the scientific discourses that structured emergent concepts of homo/hetero and queer/deviant categorization in the interwar period.

<sup>13</sup> See Scott St. Pierre, "Bent Hemingway," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16, no. 10 (2010): 371

of Hemingway's heterosexual manhood, but criticizes the impulse to do so while keeping the straightness of his prose intact. Hemingway's ideal of heterosexual linguistic efficiency "establishes [...] a sexual hierarchy determined by the use of language" whereby that language is differentiated from chatty gay-male amplitude and its pleonastic excess; yet that impulse to "signify sexuality by taking note of styles of expression" ultimately and inevitably breaks down, St. Pierre argues, "because the desire represented exceeds the technique used to express it." Indeed, according to the iceberg formulation, if and when sexually queer content gets "omitted," it is absent because it is known in advance; its signifiers are transfigured into a stylometric abstraction—"shorter" prose<sup>14</sup>— while adding sexual meanings in excess of the text's normative surface.

But in dismissing straight style offhand, St. Pierre also leaves open the question of what discourses produce the figurative qualities and virtues attributed to so-called "straight" form in this period. Indeed, Hemingway's prose—freighted with the heft of nearly a century of literary-critical interpretation—sits at the crux of an interwar ahistoricism: the anomalous qualities of the war can be corrected and readjusted through prose that can claim to tell it straight. Of course, recent historical work on sexuality and the First World War from scholars like Laura Doan, Jason Crouthamel, and Deborah Cohler has largely debunked the idea that the historicity of

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<sup>14</sup> It's worth pausing on "length," a flexible concept that can often refer to textual metrics, such as word or page count, or, in a completely different register, to categories of reader response, such as time spent reading, or, alternatively, a subjective "sense" of how long something is (some narratives "drag"). We can easily form a list of modernist "long novels" —Joyce's *Ulysses*, Stein's *The Making of Americans*, Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, perhaps some of Henry James's late works—but the definition of what makes a modernist work "short" raises its own distinct questions. These insights might be tempered with an impressionistic comment that will hopefully be uncontroversial: Hemingway's fictions, with important exceptions (such as *For Whom the Bell Tolls*), are fairly short. Arguably, the literary form on which Hemingway has had the greatest impact is the short story. So too, if his stylistic principle holds, his sentences are also short. Stylometric and computational readings of Hemingway's lexical density and sentence lengths have recently been of interest for scholars in the digital humanities, as in the recent collection, *Hemingway in the Digital Age* (edited by Laura Godfrey, Kent State UP, 2019) and the panel of the same title at the MLA 2021.

sexuality and war is reducible to the experiences of heterosexual men in the trenches, nor to stark gendered divides that reinforce heterosexual divisions of desire and labor along the lines of domestic and battlefield experiences.<sup>15</sup> Hemingway's resistance to both "patriotic" language and the pathologization of war index shifts in interwar heterosexuality toward a biopolitics of form. I will therefore identify three features of interwar "straight forms," three conceptual and discursive tropes for metaphorizing the stabilized directedness of styles and identities. First: the rewriting of the war itself as deviant. Interwar straightness was constructed at least in part against the First World War's recurrent historiographic figuration as a norm-annihilating force for which one privileged metaphor was male sexual perversity—even when that perversity serves not to undermine, but to buttress, the conceptual flexibility of "straight." I do not suggest that Hemingway's work "queers" armed conflict, nor even that queering is a desirable outcome of queer reading practices. Rather, I am suggesting that his imagination of a politically neutral language of straightness is partly determined by the revision of "normal" male sexuality after the war. For Hemingway, identities only arrive through repeated homeostatic equilibrations under the constant anticipation of policing and violence. Likewise, straight prose might omit or represent any number of sexual acts that we today might categorize as conceptually adjacent to, but importantly distinct from "queer." These acts, scripts, and fantasies—such as, to name a couple oft-cited Hemingway experiments, the elaborate scenarios he builds around male anal bottoming and hair fetishism—can be said to expand the boundaries of acceptable pleasures and styles of intimacy between men and women within a normative frame defined by planned

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<sup>15</sup> See Laura Doan, *Disturbing Practices: History, Sexuality, and Women's Experience of Modern War*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013); Jason Crouthamel, *An Intimate History of the Front: Masculinity, Sexuality, and German Soldiers in the First World War*. (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2014); Ana Carden-Coyne and Laura Doan, "Gender and Sexuality," in *Gender and the Great War*, edited by Susan R. Grayzel and Tammy M. Proctor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 91-114; Deborah Cohler, *Citizen, Invert, Queer: Lesbianism and War in Early-Twentieth Century Britain*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

suspension and interruption. The straight forms articulated through the stylistic sign of “Hemingway” are not simply performances of heterosexual identities, but complex and durable formal languages for rewriting the historicity of sexuality and the war outside of a determinist frame.

Second: Straight forms align sexual and national identities, such that normal heterosexual forms are understood to be translatable into biopolitical metrics of state health. These forms are not tied solely to fascist Europe but also to the interwar U.S. context.<sup>16</sup> The alignment of non-reproductive heterosexual norms with straight forms in the early-twentieth century depended on rhetorical tropes that anticipate later alliances between white, normative gay identities and postwar U.S. Imperialism, a phenomenon that Jasbir Puar has termed homonationalism. The emergence of a nationalist homosexuality coextensive with empire “operates as a regulatory script not only of normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality, but also of the racial and national norms that reinforce these sexual subjects.”<sup>17</sup> Homonationalism thus involves normalization. While Puar is interested in the twenty-first century nation-state under the auspices

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<sup>16</sup> See Erin G. Carlston, *Thinking Fascism: Sapphic Modernism and Fascist Modernity*. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998); and Laura Frost, *Sex Drives: Fantasies of Fascism in Literary Modernism*. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2002) The scholarship on modernism, sexuality, and fascism is an enormous field that provides one basis for inquiry, but these accounts have typically focused on questions about fascism’s deviant qualities, and on the erotics of homosexuality and sadomasochism. Two conclusions can be drawn from these recent studies. First, there is no single taxonomic erotic paradigm (based in homosexuality, male beauty, fetishism, or sadomasochism, for example) encompassing of European fascism. Second, it is difficult to disentangle the historical realities of fascist sexual fantasies from literary and cultural constructions of sexualized fascism, i.e., from the cultural eroticization of fascism from outside. Frost shows how this “libidinal phenomenon” was a powerful cultural fiction, one in which “political and national identities are constructed around and shored up by particular sexual identities” (3). More importantly, she argues that the eroticization of fascism involves “a response to specific discussions about the enemy that can be traced back to World War I” (6). In other words, the figure of deviant fascism, like that of the deviant war, involves both erotic and phobic constructions of political enemies—often Germans and Italians in the U.S. context—that are then projected onto history as racial and sexual types for shoring up democratic national identities.

<sup>17</sup> See Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), 2. In my attempt to historicize the relationship between heteronormativity and nationalism, I take seriously her caution that “as with all narratives of telos and periodization, such as those embedded in and endemic to modernity, to heterosexuality, to adulthood, temporal qualifications work to determine the intelligible sphere of scholarly legitimacy” (xix).

of the U.S.'s war on terrorism, we might productively view homonationalism as an earlier outgrowth of the heteronormative nation-state and its efforts to quantify the martial and sexual capacities of male bodies through the rubrics of manpower and morale. What I will call heteronationalism (a term I co-opt from Puar, who uses but does not define this term in detail), involved a massive widening of the referents of both “heterosexual” and “normal” sexual acts—principally acts between men, often outside of heterosexual marriage—and the cultivation and management of that desire during the war. In Puar’s account of the relation between the hetero- and the national, “heteronormativity is, as it always has been, indispensable to the promotion of an aggressive militarist, masculinist, race- and class-specific nationalism.”<sup>18</sup> My aim is to historicize the “always” of this formulation, and I will argue that the construction of white, able-bodied, straight male national identities becomes a central problematic of the interwar period, one often signified by the ubiquitous cultural diffusion of Hemingway’s prose style as a sign for the heteronormative “always” that has become a staple of queer Hemingway studies and queer studies more broadly.

Third: interwar straightness is characterized by an intense concern with figurative languages and formal ideals of regulation, homeostasis, and readjustment. Heteronationalism imagines that national identities are *more secure* and *less permeable* when the potential non-normativity of straight men’s desires is actively recognized and regulated by the state. During and after the war, the rise of military psychology, influenced by sexology, racial science, and Taylorist scientific management, developed techniques for managing soldiers’ sexual health through the systematized regulation of affects, appetites, and exhaustions. A new set of ‘massifying’ regulatory and biopolitical schemes, couched in the military-historical vocabularies

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 40.

of “numbers” and morale, were devoted to measuring and managing these appetites, so that numbered bodies could be capable of greater martial flexibility. If Hemingway’s prose has been summoned to reinforce this norm, it has also, more recently, become a space for contesting it. I will argue that Hemingway’s narrators generate a straight prose that is expatriated, one which Hemingway imagines can cross borders, nationalities, and bodily boundaries, and even partake in “queer” pleasures without giving up the figurative language of measurable, regulable straightness as its rigid and unwavering formal ideal.

But why hetero-nationalism? If institutions that can be called “hetero” are already part of the foundation of the nation-state, as Puar and others have shown, isn’t hetero-nationalism just another name for nationalism? My goal is not to rewrite heterosexual nationalism as the inverse of, and antecedent to, a homosexual nationalism, or to create any kind of neat historical teleology or parallelism. Indeed, history shows that neither the elision of martial virility with national strength, nor the association of martial culture with the secret pleasures of guilt-free sex between men, are new phenomena in the twentieth century. The discursive alignment of “normal” sexuality and bourgeois respectability with the nation-state extends well back into the nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup> What may be different (or abnormal), then, about the period between the outbreak of the First World War and the rise of European fascisms, is a concern with the optics of male desire, in which stable heterosexualities serve as gauges of national health and military strength. Heteronationalism articulates the arrival of a homeostatic norm within identity-based constructions of both country and enemy. My goal is not to reinstall masculinity or heterosexuality as the unquestioned meaning of Hemingway’s prose. This reading of desire is not

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<sup>19</sup> In his study, *Nationalism and Sexuality* (U of Wisconsin P, 1985), George L. Mosse argues that nationalist regulations of sexuality tended to reinforce binaries between deviance and middle-class respectability. After the advent of German- and English-language sexology in the late-nineteenth century, Mosse Argues, “the concept of homosexuality had become absolute, the antithesis of respectability” (37).

a biographical attribution of queer feelings, nor even of straight ones, to Hemingway the author, though his many biographers have certainly raised both as very real and likely possibilities. Rather, I aim to historicize an interwar *desire* for straight forms, and to read that desire queerly, that is, without taking its normality as historically given. Of course, as Hemingway readers can predict, desire will inevitably be thwarted. There will be tension and pressure, but never relief. In the next section, I examine new interwar models for imagining male heterosexuality through norming and regulatory languages of quantifiable desire and pressurized straightness. In the following two sections, I proceed with a close study of these biopolitical forms and martial sexual cultures in two of Hemingway's World War I narratives: the very short story, "A Simple Enquiry," and *Farewell to Arms*, narratives thematically obsessed with the standardized sexual behaviors of soldiers. These war fictions imagine the concreteness of numbers and prose by way of a stylistic principle in which the meaning of the normal is both straight and endlessly flexible.

### Straight Under Pressure

In the U.S., interwar scientific thought about male heterosexuality preoccupied itself not just with the problem of classifying desires as normal or abnormal, but also with the problem what otherwise "normal" men are supposed to *do* with desire, particularly its sights extended beyond the boundaries of marriage and reproduction. As we saw from the statistical marriage studies examined in Chapter 2, interwar sex research construed "normal" marital heterosexuality as something that had to be worked at and maintained, usually through women's domestic and hygienic labor, because male sexual drives were understood to be temporally and intensively out of sync with their wives' sexual periodicities. But the straightness of normal male desire was also

crafted through figurative languages of affective regulation. The oft-repeated language of internal pressure and tension, along with recurrent metaphors of biometric and atmospheric gauges—barometers, thermometers, and others—repeatedly imagined the normativity of men’s sexuality as both literally and figuratively marked through, and as, vital signs for social and national health. Psychiatrist Edward J. Kempf’s *Psychopathology* (1920), a work that popularized the term “homosexual panic” through its case studies of war veterans’ neuroses, repeatedly uses the language of pressure to describe the relations between sexual desire and what Kempf calls “affective cravings.” In one example, Kempf describes a case of a “a large, vigorous, well-developed army officer” who sought “relief from high blood-pressure (180-200).” Through psychoanalysis, Kempf diagnoses the officer with a fear of heterosexuality, claiming “that he had repressed his, sexual cravings from acquiring a heterosexual object” and that, in response, “his persistent fear of becoming homosexual (subconscious) had aroused the compensatory autonomic striving and explained the cause of his increased blood-pressure.” However, once the officer “acquired insight’ about his condition, “he made a quite comfortable readjustment, and his blood-pressure soon subsided to about 160.”<sup>20</sup> The goal of my example with Kempf’s account is not to suggest in any simplistic way that Hemingway’s writing is affected by homosexual panic—in fact, I will argue something closer to the opposite, that his prose is intensely interested in what it means to imagine straightness as a kind of regulated norm that can incorporate certain kinds of “queer” desires and even certain receptive sex acts without requiring any kind of readjustment.

Importantly, that readjustment, for Kempf, is a pleasurable form of relief. In his chapter on “virility, goodness, and happiness,” Kempf’s hypertensive language also asserts the need for

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<sup>20</sup> See Kempf, *Psychopathology*. C. V. Mosby Co, 1920, 51-52.



institutionalized instruction in sexual continence, as “prostitution and perverseness, alcoholism and drugs, are largely barometers of our social system's aborting influence upon human nature.”<sup>21</sup> In this framework, which combines both Freudian jargon and behaviorist doctrines, the language of pressure becomes the basis for both autonomic affective responses and psychic mechanisms of *repression*. This recognizable model of male heterosexuality—sometimes called the “hydraulic” or “drive-reduction” model in sexuality studies—was at least partly derived from Freud’s theory of the polymorphous perversity of infantile sexuality. In this theory the libido’s capacity to “fill up collateral channels which may hitherto have been empty,” can result, for Freud, from *both* psychic *and* situational blockages. “Sexual repression,” he writes in the *Three Essays*, is placed, “as an internal factor alongside such external factors as limitation of freedom, inaccessibility of a normal sexual object, the dangers of the normal sexual act, etc., which bring about perversions in persons who might perhaps otherwise have remained normal.”<sup>22</sup> While modernist studies has typically focused on what Freud says about internal psychic mechanisms, it has seldom attended to the possibilities he signals in these “external factors,” situations that were increasingly objects of biopolitical regulation during and after the war. The quantitative problem of personnel management was intimately linked with the parallel problem of whether desire was being directed “externally” or driven through a consistent “internal” mechanism, a problem articulated through the psychophysical languages of pressure and relief.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 157

<sup>22</sup> See Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on The Theory of Sexuality*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 36. For an account of Freud’s use of fluids and water, and the significance of drive-reduction models to women’s sexuality, see Boone, *Libidinal Currents*, 69. As Frost points out, Freud also offered like models in essays like “Psychoanalysis and War Neuroses,” and while his theory “of the mechanism of repression is far more nuanced than this crude hydraulic model,” the simplifications of this model were also central to the construction of sexual types in the interwar period, including, most notably “as paradigms for what was happening in Germany,” that is, as discourses for delineating country, enemy, and deviance (Frost 18).

This language abounds in interwar writing on the psychology of soldiers, particularly as militaries grappled with the unprecedented scale of the war's casualties. The word "manpower," which acquired a new quantitative meaning during the First World War, was often juxtaposed

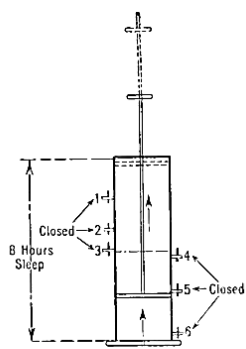


Figure 7. 8-Hour Sleep Period.

As the piston is drawn upwards, the cylinder fills with air. This process is comparable to the sleep period of the soldier during which he stores up energy. It will be noted that in this diagram all cocks, both military and other, are closed.

Cocks

Military

1. Exercise of initiative
  2. Opportunity for advancement
  3. Physical exertion
- Personal
4. Domestic
  5. Civic
  6. Pleasure

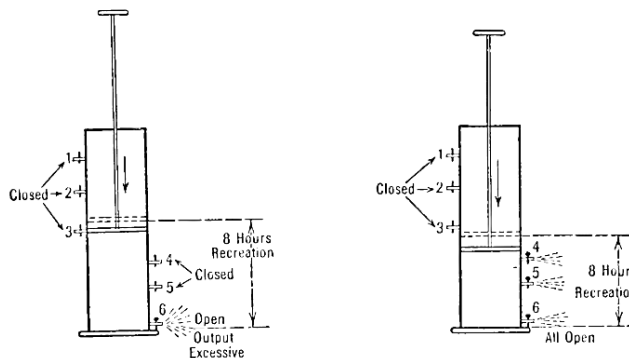


Figure 9. 8-Hour Personal Period.

*As it often is*

A. With more than half of the day's store of energy at the soldier's disposal and cocks 4 and 5 as well as military outlets, closed. The result is a heavy flow through No. 6.

*As it should be*

B. The position of the piston at the beginning of the period shows most of the day's energy already expended. Cocks 4, 5 and 6 are all partially open and there is some flow through each. Education has enlarged the soldier's field of interests so that this period is not confined to pleasure alone.

Fig. 3. Munson's diagrams for the soldier's day, imagined as a pressurized "air-pump." From Munson, *Management*, 134, 136.

with the problem of morale, and thus to the measurement of pressures, both internal and external, at a mass level.<sup>23</sup> For Edward L. Munson, chief of the U.S. Military's morale branch during and

<sup>23</sup> According to the *OED*, the first example of "man-power" (hyphenated) as "the number of people available for employment, military service, etc., considered collectively; human labour in general, esp. viewed as a quantifiable resource," is attributed to a comment by Winston Churchill in 1917. Stevenson, following Keith Grieves, dates the emergence of "manpower" slightly earlier, at around 1916, when the "manpower problem" described by Churchill reared itself as army reserves approached exhaustion, and the debate over conscription reached its apex in Britain. See Stevenson, *1914-1918*, 204.

after the war, morale, like manpower, was also a “numbers” problem.<sup>24</sup> In his book, *The Management of Men* (1921), a long handbook on military psychology and personnel management based partly on the morale program he spearheaded near the end of the war, Munson uses the language of air and other fluid pressures (Fig. 3) as a privileged metaphor for the problem of managing men’s appetites and pleasures at a mass level. “Morale work acts like a barometer,” Munson writes, “to warn of a threatening emotional storm and the acts which may result from it.”<sup>25</sup> Regulations on emotions provide a damper on “the impulses which they arouse and the acts which flow from them,” and can, Munson claims, “be accomplished with mathematical certainty if the appropriate stimuli are brought into appropriate operation.”<sup>26</sup> He provides diagrams in which “the soldier’s day of twenty-four hours may be compared to the operation of a hand air-pump, with two sets of cocks, one set to represent the outlet for energy in military activities or drill; the other to represent the flow of energy in personal activities or recreation.” Through the strategic opening and closing of these valves (the choice of “cocks” is doubly interesting), military personnel can be managed so that on and off-duty periods “are utilized in such a way as to bring the satisfaction required without resort[ing] to anti-social measures for gratification.”<sup>27</sup> The meaning of “anti-social” behavior is vague but all-too-easy to guess, as suggested by the data Munson includes in the later chapters, detailing lists of infractions, including thirteen kinds of sexual offenses.<sup>28</sup> Through these metaphors for

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<sup>24</sup> For more on Munson’s role in the morale program in the U.S. military, see Camfield, Thomas. “‘Will to Win’—The U.S. Army Troop Morale Program of World War I.” *Military Affairs*. vol. 41, no. 3, Oct 1977, 125-128.

<sup>25</sup> See Edward L. Munson, *The Management of Men: A Handbook on the Systematic Development of Morale and the Control of Human Behavior*, (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1921), 21.

<sup>26</sup> Munson, *Management* 68-69.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 133-134.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 683.

controlling the pressurized release of soldiers' energies and appetites into appropriate or desirable channels, Munson rewrites the problem of "numbers" and "manpower" as a quantitative discourse about relations between men; for "while seventy-five men in perfect morale will accomplish as much as a hundred men in three-quarters morale," he points out that in the opposite scenario, "there are twenty-five drones who [...] threaten the integrity and efficiency of the others."<sup>29</sup> Thus, with morale, less can become more.

Restated as an editorial principle, the idea that less is more is a familiar idea for Hemingway readers, yet as I have already hinted at, his characters are seldom sources of well-regulated morale or sexual purity. Eroticized languages of pressure and regulated norms are common in Hemingway, often freighted with anxieties about masculinity. One might note, for instance, the "barometric accuracy" of the unnamed grain broker in the extended yacht club scene in *To Have and Have Not*, who is described along with his "useless and disproportionately large equipment" (THHN 235-236). In *A Farewell To Arms*, scenes of biometric reading often serve as spaces of eroticized normality. Catherine Barkley is one of five nurses whom Frederic Henry meets while he convalesces from his knee surgery in Milan, and it is in these scenes that his desires are straightened through the homeostatic routines of military medicine. The day after he arrives, one of the nurses, Miss Gage (whose name sounds like "gauge"), takes his temperature orally. Frederic protests that "the Italians put [the thermometer] under the arm," but Miss Gage dismisses him and says he is "almost normal" (FTA 74). Later, after Catherine and Frederic have begun to have sex in the hospital, she takes his temperature again, telling him, "your temperature's always normal. You have a lovely temperature" (86). The dialogue here also anticipates a later remark by Catherine, when she is in the later stages of her pregnancy. She tells

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 39.

Frederic, “I have a wonderful blood pressure, darling,” though this condition will not ultimately last (253). Body temperature and blood pressure index the homeostatic norms in Frederic and Catherine’s relationship. Yet this relationship, as the oral temperature reading suggests, is troubled by images of bodily receptivity that are discursively tied to nationality. The difference Frederic observes between how “the Italians” and the English nurses take temperature readings eroticizes the orality involved in the gauging of biometric normality.

Hydraulic models of pressurized sexuality, and their attendant languages of regulation, represent a discursive nexus of postwar responses to shifts in sexual norms brought about by the war. Hemingway’s writing, I am arguing, is a central term, and an exemplary object, within this nexus. As Modellmog reminds us, the history of sexuality has also depended on “the cultural construction of Hemingway as an exemplar of white American heteromascularity,” one which “has simultaneously derived from and contributed to the maintenance of dominant notions of selfhood and sexuality.”<sup>30</sup> By contrast, the historicity of Hemingway’s sexological knowledge, with few exceptions, has been mostly papered over. Modellmog has shown that Hemingway was a fairly avid reader of sexology: he began reading Havelock Ellis’s *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* beginning as early as 1921, and urged his first wife, Hadley Richardson, to read it too. Later in life, he kept, among other sex studies, a copy of Kinsey’s *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* on his shelf.<sup>31</sup> My goal is not to craft a biographical theory of influence through sexological texts. But to put it simply, knowing that Hemingway read sexology means we need not be naive, in the name of historicism, about the identitarian possibilities that his narratives appear to reductively simplify. For example, one book in Hemingway’s sexology collection, Anton

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>31</sup> See Modellmog, *Reading Desire* 52, and Dearborn 103.

Nyström's *The Natural Laws of Sexual Life* (1908), contains a chapter on male sexuality, in which the privileged metaphor for sexual directedness is a thermometer. "The sexual life," he tells us, can be thought of as having "a centigrade scale with temperaments of different degrees, from the freezing to the boiling point."<sup>32</sup> (110). Like other social hygienists and marital advice writers, Nyström was an advocate of normalized sexual expression within marriage. "The sexual desire serves as a 'thermometer of health,'" he argues, and goes on to say that "moderate performance of coition keeps the sexual organs in a healthy state and preserves the general well-being."<sup>33</sup> The affective predicates of this thermometer were often described *literally* as genital tension or pressure, which for Nyström, was caused by the build-up of fluids in the seminal vesicles. While Nyström was writing prior to the war, he also anticipates the way thermometers became an overdetermined metaphorical gauge for normalcy in a culture whose straightness was defined against the disturbances of the deadly Influenza pandemic, and defined by the anxiety, to quote Harding again, that "fever has rendered men irrational."<sup>34</sup>

The regulation of straightness indexed an entire historiographic revision of the war and its relationship to heteromascularity. The militaristic qualities Hemingway's style, with long, paratactic sequences of actions strung together so as to resemble discipline and drilling (what Young calls the "one-two-three-four" of his prose), is well-known.<sup>35</sup> Symptomatically, although they could not be further apart ideologically, both Munson's and Hemingway's accounts of

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<sup>32</sup> Anton Nyström, *The Natural Laws of Sexual Life: medical-sociological researches*. (Kansas City: Burton Co., 1908), 110. According to Brasch and Sigman's exhaustive and helpful catalogue of the contents of Hemingway's libraries, the book can be found at Finca Vigia, meaning he likely owned the book around or after 1938; but no receipt establishes whether he might have owned the book before then. See *Hemingway's Library: A Composite Record*. John F. Kennedy Library Digital Edition, 2000, [jfklibrary.libguides.com/ld.php?content\\_id=38785340](http://jfklibrary.libguides.com/ld.php?content_id=38785340) 271

<sup>33</sup> Nyström 112, 123-124

<sup>34</sup> Harding, "Readjustment" n.p.

<sup>35</sup> See Young, *Ernest Hemingway*, 45. Young calls this "pulsing monotony" the "Hemingway style at its most extreme," yet it is only, he points out, when Nick catches a trout that "the pressure is off the man" (46).

morale and patriotism center on one theater in particular: the retreat from Caporetto in 1917. “Just as [the Germans] contaminated sources of water supply,” observes Munson, “so they deliberately set about to *poison* the wells of thought of their antagonists and to *pervert* the channels through which ideas were transmitted [...] The success of their efforts was demonstrated in Russia and at Caporetto” (my emphasis). The sexual implications of Munson’s language are hardly subtextual. Regulation of emotions, he avers, requires that antagonistic relations toward the enemy be maintained, but “modern war prevents this and it is not easy to keep an impersonal anger at high pressure,” and which leads to “fraternizing,” which he claims, the Germans used to gain tactical advantage over the exhausted Italians at the Isonzo.<sup>36</sup> The setting of Hemingway’s novel was, by the time of its composition, already a kind of morality narrative for rewriting relations between men during the war through the idea of internal psychological pressure and the dangers of perverse thoughts and behaviors, which threaten to lead men toward non-aggressive relationships with enemy combatants. High pressure, even with its attendant risk that desire may explode into an “emotional storm,” must therefore still be maintained. It makes sense, then, that in Hemingway’s career, the metaphor of pressure is perhaps most famously encapsulated in an oft-repeated quote, popularized by Dorothy Parker, that courage is “grace under pressure.”<sup>37</sup>

My focus is less on the use of particular figurative gauges—barometers and thermometers--than on the diagrammatic images of measurable sexual directedness, envisioned through the twinned vocabularies of straightness and pressure. Such images become a repeated

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 127

<sup>37</sup> The comment was first spoken, so the story goes, by Hemingway to Gerald Murphy, and later clarified in a letter to F. Scott Fitzgerald (Dearborn 213). The comments were then elaborated in an article by Parker in *The New Yorker* in 1929.

ideal projected onto Hemingway's prose. Indeed, contemporary critics were at times eager to measure his prose in biometric metaphors, where the straightness or kinkiness of his writing follows a regulatory script. Edmund Wilson's oft-cited comparison of Hemingway's "barometric accuracy" to a "bourdon gauge" of "morale," quoted in the chapter epigraph, reinforces a double-bind that Hemingway's writing seems to create, in which his prose renders sexual norms both sturdy and fragile. As Wilson would have it, some norms stabilize only when their fixity is brought into question. The straightness of the "bourdon gauge" can therefore signify not a comfortable return to the normal state but a norm defined by continuous and regular disturbances. For Virginia Woolf, this theatrical masculinity likewise calls up images of screwing and contortion where Hemingway's heterosexual posturing seems to falter. In "An Essay on Criticism," her long-form review of several Hemingway works, Woolf pauses at one point to consider an image from *The Sun Also Rises*, in which the matador, Pedro Romero, becomes a model for what Hemingway thinks of as good bullfighting and good prose. Pedro, Hemingway writes, and Woolf quotes, "never made contortions," and so is able to keep a "straight and pure and natural" posture, while other bullfighters, we are told "twisted themselves like corkscrews, their elbows raised and leaned against the flanks of the bull after his horns had passed, to give a faked look of danger." For Woolf, "Mr. Hemingway's writing [...] gives us now and then a real emotion, because he keeps absolute purity of line in his movements and lets the horns (which are truth, fact, reality) pass him close each time," and yet, she adds, "there is something faked, too" in this positioning.<sup>38</sup> While Woolf is careful to borrow the language of contortion from Hemingway's prose, she makes a point of holding that prose to a standard of

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<sup>38</sup> The quote comes from *TSAR* 172, and is quoted in Woolf, "An Essay in Criticism." *Granite and Rainbow*. (New York: Hartcourt Brace, 1958), 88 The essay was originally printed in 1927 in the *New York Herald Tribune*.



straightness that is both formal and gendered. The review enraged Hemingway, as he told Max Eastman in a letter, partly because Woolf had also directed criticisms at a blurb on the dust jacket of *Men Without Women*, copy that Hemingway did not write or approve. Offering another image of contortion, he accused her of “deliberately twisting” the blurb, and went on to declare, as if confirming his hetero-ness to Eastman, that he “would have enjoyed taking the clothes off Virginia Woolf this noon, permitting her to walk down the Avenue de l’Opera.”<sup>39</sup>

Doubtless, the homophobia cuts both ways here, insofar as Hemingway’s reactions to Woolf and other critics (he also physically attacked Eastman for accusing him of wearing “fake hair on his chest”), violent and sexist as they are, cannot but rebuke accusations whose content, like Stein’s “fag story,” is essentially empty.<sup>40</sup> However, even in Hemingway’s relatively homophobic reflections on sexual identity, he generally does not share this reductive understanding of his own aesthetic categories. In *Death In The Afternoon*, the relation between bodily contortions, style, and sexuality becomes a principle of sexual particularity. In the glossary to the book, under the entry for *maricón*—a Spanish-language insult he defines as “a sodomite, nance, queen, fairy, fag, etc.”—Hemingway claims to “only know of two of them among the forty-some matadors de toros.” One of them, he tells us, “is almost pathologically miserly, is lacking in valor but is very skillful and delicate with the cape, a sort of exterior decorator of bullfighting,” while the other “has a reputation for great valor and awkwardness and has been unable to save a peseta” (*DIA* 417-418). In their important feminist study of gender in Hemingway, Nancy Comley and Robert Scholes point out that while Hemingway might have been trying to “distance himself,” from these fighters in *Death In the Afternoon*, it is significant

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<sup>39</sup> See Dearborn 245.

<sup>40</sup> See Dearborn 325-326. Eastman’s review, cleverly titled “Bull In the Afternoon,” appeared in *The New Republic* in June 1933.

that he should spend so much attention merely to “count the number of gay blades” in the sport.<sup>41</sup> One of these two homosexuals can lay claim to a masculinity and straightness that is more closely emblemized by Romero’s “pure line,” though both ultimately fall short of the prosaic deftness that critics expect from him, and which he expects from the matadors. As Comely and Scholes point out, “the Hemingway Text does not always speak of this pure vision of masculinity or in a single macho voice,” meaning, ultimately, that “even the phallic (or, perhaps better, cojonic) text of *Death in the Afternoon* has a way of sliding into the maricónic” (110-111). The formal qualities of straightness, for both Hemingway and his critics, are inflected by alignments between metaphors of prosaic directedness and pressurized masculinity. Critics like Wilson and Woolf (and to a lesser extent, later critics like Philip Young), to the extent that they imagine the author’s straightness as something whose authenticity requires testing and scrutiny, also perform the logic that I have been arguing is central to interwar norms: heterosexuality becomes ontologically fixed insofar as it appears to emerge all the more triumphant from the continual suspensions and abeyances of its supposed transhistorical normativity.

The discourse of manpower was thus a deployment of biopower, particularly as these languages of sexual regulation rose to prominence in the context of the looming economic impacts of standardization.<sup>42</sup> As Foucault reminds us, biopower does not operate at the level of individual bodies, as disciplinary techniques do, but rather at the level of populations, in order to establish “regulatory mechanisms” that produce “an equilibrium, maintain an average, establish a sort of homeostasis, and compensate for variations within this general population and its aleatory

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<sup>41</sup> See Comley and Scholes, *Hemingway’s Genders* 107.

<sup>42</sup> For more on sexual regulation in the context of Fordism, see Kahan, *The Book of Minor Perverts*, chapter 4. For Kahan, the social research undertaken by the Ford Motor Company’s sociology department exemplifies the impacts of this regulation (87).

field.”<sup>43</sup> Thus while Hemingway’s prose certainly borrows from military disciplinary techniques, such as drills, marches, and other forms of bodily control, they also manage sexuality demographically, through a detailed record-keeping of men’s potentially perverse behaviors. Straight forms serve as one interwar discursive node for mediating between bodies and the state, that is, between the disciplinary and the biopolitical. In this heteronationalist paradigm, the supposed deviancy of the war itself figures as the impetus for a stylistic impressionism that sees the directedness of male heterosexual aims as one, long, hard-fought victory over any number of historical vicissitudes, political enemies, and sexual experiments. Thus, non-reproductive heterosexuality in particular could signal national vitality, even if not linked directly with the management of national populations. But rather than aligning male military desires with a postwar heterosexual norm, Hemingway enacts a different dehistoricizing strategy, one in which straight forms might uncouple the omitted meanings of erotic acts and desires from national and sexual identities altogether.

#### Omitted Identities, “Irregular Lengths”

Hemingway’s interest in quantifying homosexuality was not limited to the task of counting gay matadors. The relationship between demographics, morale policing, and the normalizing discourses of pressure and relief are central to a little commented on story, “A Simple Enquiry,” published in *Men Without Women*. On its face, the story appears to contain “omitted” meanings that are simplistically homosexual. The story, critics observe, is based on D.H. Lawrence’s story, “The Prussian Officer,” but changes both the setting and the narrative outcome of the desire

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<sup>43</sup> See Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*” 246.

between officers and enlisted men. However, I will argue that while the imagery of sex acts between men supply what I consider necessary meanings for the story's absences, its primary epistemic problem concerns the instability of an interwar straight/deviant binary in which the normativity of heterosexual identity is somehow both persistent and unchanging, yet also in need of continual testing, constant regulation, and timed, directed release. In Hemingway's story, the actual same-sex referents in the prose are really only barely concealed. It takes serious effort to interpret the story without them. More troubling, by contrast, is the abeyance of any "simple" or defined norm that could regulate the waywardness of desire between men. The story follows an unnamed major in the Italian army who interrogates a soldier named Pinin. We open inside of a hut, where the narrator tells us, "outside, the snow was higher than the window." What follows is a description of the optics created by the snow and the effects of the weather on the men inside the hut: "A trench had been cut along the open side of the hut, and each clear day the sun, shining on the wall, reflected heat against the snow and widened the trench" (*TSS* 327). The major, introduced in the second paragraph, peers out of "two white circles where his snow-glasses had protected his face from the sun on the snow," while the rest of his skin is "burned and tanned and then burned through the tan" (*ibid.*). The story's two most prominent thematic motifs—temperature and height—are established early on as languages of both bodies and desires. In the second paragraph, there is an extended image in which the major applies oil to his sunburned nose and then "stroke[s]" it "gently" up and down, before interacting briefly with the adjutant and retreating into another room. Once Pinin, the orderly, arrives to tend the stove, the major orders the adjutant, Tonani, to send Pinin into his room. The orderly is asked to close the door, and the interrogation commences (328).

During the interrogation, the major's first question is about Pinin's age—"you are nineteen?"—after which he asks a series of questions to determine whether the soldier is attracted to women, and, furthermore, whether he is "in love" with a particular woman: he asks if the orderly has ever been "in love—with a girl?" and Pinin replies "I have been with girls," but this is not satisfactory, as the major continues to press the soldier about "this girl." Pinin has not written her any letters, a pretext for the major's suspicions that he may not love girls at all (*TSS* 328). The major then pauses to determine if the adjutant, Tonani, can hear him through the walls, and then Pinin whether he is sure "that you are not corrupt." Pinin balks, telling him "I don't know what you mean, corrupt," and the Major, seemingly satisfied, says "All right... you needn't be superior." The word "superior" inverts both status and rank, since it is really the higher-up, the officer, accusing the enlisted man. Superiorities are manifold, as the story's descriptions are almost entirely concerned with rank and height. Among these "vertical" representations, there are two "horizontal" exceptions: one is the major lying on the bed, the other is of the orderly carrying "some pine branches, chopped into irregular lengths," for the stove. The metonymy between these two images of receptivity—the felled tree and the supine male body—culminates in the brief image of the sticks in the stove, a burning faggot. While these images appear to simplify this very short story's account of homo/hetero difference, the problem of "irregular lengths" is also one that refracts the story's reductions. So too, in attributing impudence and prudery to Pinin's "superiority," the Major's dialogue imagines both the possibility of desire and a tantalizing image about the two men's sexual positions—with the orderly on top and the major on the bottom—in one and the same suggestion.

The directed quality of Hemingway's narration is constituted by indirection about the desires of the character being interrogated. While the major's possible queerness is subsumed

under the optics of the closet, the question of straightness centers on Pinin, the one character whose thoughts are not reported by the narrator. Hemingway's narrative seems to invite us, as critics, into the role of the major, interrogating the text for signs of homosexual meanings. Unlike the major, we are not granted a relief from the epistemic problem of the scene:

“And you don't really want—” the major paused. Pinin looked at the floor. “That your great desire isn't really—” Pinin looked at the floor. The major leaned his head back on the rucksack and smiled. He was really relieved: life in the army was too complicated. “You're a good boy,” he said. “You're a good boy, Pinin. But don't be superior and be careful some one else doesn't come along and take you.” (329).

What is actually being omitted here? The dashes signal the most visibly absent sign, and it takes little imagination to supply one—a proposition for sex—even if this is not the only possible reading. Indeed, the dashes supply these signs only through negation. What matters is what Pinin *doesn't* want, what his desire *isn't*. The straightness and horizontal imagery of the dash also cuts off the sentence before any object choice can be fixed. One chases a receding ground of meaning through each of the repetitions. Yet finally we are told that the major “was really relieved,” eased by the tacit acknowledgement that if Pinin does *not* want the major, he must therefore want the unnamed “girl.” All is suddenly well. The discomfort caused by a “complicated” army life promises to return to normal.

Or not. The adjutant, seeing Pinin exit the major's quarters, notices that he walks “awkwardly.” We are told that his face is “flushed” and that he “moved differently than he had

moved when he brought in the wood for the fire” (329).<sup>44</sup> That he “move[s] differently” invites comparison to an earlier description; but in fact, we are told very little about how exactly it was that Pinin “moved” in the first place.<sup>45</sup> Thus the story’s call-back to this description actually removes the foundation from any original state of normative coherence from which Pinin’s present movements can be said to deviate. For the major too, relief is only temporary. In the story’s final line, the major considers whether the orderly, whom he calls a “devil,” has “lied” to him (330).<sup>46</sup> We lack access to several texts: not just Pinin’s consciousness but also his letters, which the Major has read, and which he claims contain no reference to the girl. Thus, it is certainly the case, as Gerry Brenner has pointed out, that “the major has inferred his concept of Pinin on the basis of some missing signs.” In Brenner’s semiotic reading, these signs are omissions, and so “the major’s interrogation—whether exploitative or tendentious or considerate—replicates readers’ attempts to convey through an exchange of signs with an audience the meaning and significance they have extrapolated from signs.”<sup>47</sup> Compelling as this is, the epistemic problem that Brenner reads within language is also compounded by a historically specific problem within heterosexuality. With the two characters’ sexual identities never fully realized, the story does not commit to any stable ground for defining a sexual norm,

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<sup>44</sup> Charles J. Nolan Jr. offers a few potential interpretations, arguing that Pinin’s “reactions come either because he has been under pressure or because he is embarrassed at being thought homosexual or because he is upset at being propositioned, or because he has been discovered” (221). All of these possibilities seem equally valid (and I am particularly compelled by the use of “pressure”). Furthermore, the multiplicity of possible meanings should be noted, as it highlights the story’s central epistemic aporia. See Nolan Jr., “Hemingway’s Complicated ‘Enquiry’ in *Men Without Women*.” *Studies in Short Fiction* 32, (1995): 217-222.

<sup>45</sup> The narrator tells us that he “came in and put some branches [...] into the stove,” after which Tonani tells him to “be soft” to not wake the major, suggesting, if only indirectly, that Pinin made some noise while doing so. After that, he puts the wood in “carefully.” These are the only descriptions of the manner of Pinin’s *movements* prior to the scene with the major.

<sup>46</sup> “Devil” is also a word that appears repeatedly in *The Garden of Eden*, with reference primarily to Catharine Bourne, who experiments with masculine identities, cuts her hair short, and anally penetrates her husband.

<sup>47</sup> See Brenner, “A Semiotic Inquiry into Hemingway’s ‘A Simple Enquiry.’” *Hemingway’s Neglected Short Fiction*. edited by Susan F. Beegle, (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989), 205.

imagining the environment of the trench, the hut, and the major's quarters as spaces of exception and exclusion. Hemingway's "little story about the war in Italy," and its concern with "irregular lengths," truncates desires and texts in a manner that fractures coherent interwar narratives of sexual norms constituted by the tropes of relief and return.

As an account of military anxieties over homosexuality during the war, this formalism is also an etiology: desire becomes impossible to direct. Anybody could be capable of becoming "corrupt." Hemingway reverses what we as critics might expect would be a hierarchy between a straight text and an "omitted" queer meaning. Instead, the story imagines the bodies of men as sites for a non-differentiated desire that could fall on any number of objects. Thus, while Modellmog suggests offhand that this story might reflect a viable model of identity to "a gay reader who relates to desire foundationally," (that is, someone who experiences their homosexual identity as essential rather than constructed), I would argue that the story just as easily dislodges desire, so that it appears fluid, subject to shifting causes.<sup>48</sup> The sentences are so bare that any number of explanations for homosexuality can be supplied, some of which could run athwart stable identities: the few setting details, the piled up snow "outside," the sunburn, and the fireplace, along with the ambiguity of Pinin's "flushed" face—all of these suggest that sexual feeling and intimate desire between men may be indistinguishable from a desire for warmth. Most critics have assumed that the story's details—the major's delicacy, Tonani's ostensible disrespect, and the inquiry itself—add up to some kind of stable identity for the major, if not for Pinin. But none of these explanations, as Brenner points out, are determined by the text. The regulation of homosexuality is, by contrast, overdetermined by its omission.

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<sup>48</sup> Modellmog, *Reading Desire* 6.



If the story insists on the ahistorical status of non-identitarian desires between men, it also imagines forms that are straightened by both disciplined refusal and official military-record keeping, even as the “omitted” referents of the dashes serve as their ground. The major’s admonition to the orderly not to be “superior” anticipates a recurrent theme in Hemingway, one that can be seen in a much later novel, *The Garden of Eden*. In this later text, the protagonist, novelist David Bourne, at one point goes to a restaurant and orders a beer; but the waiter tells him “this isn’t a beer place.” David tells the waiter, “up yours,” but then realizes that the waiter “wasn’t being insolent” but “was just being literal” (*GOE* 58). As Valerie Rohy points out, the “literal” quality of the waiter’s language, and the novel’s prose, is predicated on a reductive logic of the sex-gender binary: gender becomes a figurative term subordinated to the “literal” of sex, with sex itself becoming the “literal” of the genitals. She points out that “whereas a nonliteral statement would have been insolent by hiding its barb under the cloak of mere information, the waiter’s literalism exonerates” the waiter, such that “the literal” becomes is “an impossible ideal” that is simultaneously “the vanishing point of a system whose highest reward is the invisibility of the norm.” Literalism’s “politics” are aligned with “its mechanism of naturalized facticity defends the norm” by producing it uncritically as a textual surface.<sup>49</sup> Rohy’s reading of “literal” in *The Garden of Eden* might be applied to “superior” in Hemingway’s earlier short story: the major’s interpretation of the orderly’s reaction resembles David’s, in that it interprets the negation of gendered and sexual meaning as if it were the only meaning. However, the orderly’s denial is not aligned with a clear norm by end of the narrative. The major tells the orderly, “you can return to your platoon if you like,” but urges him to “stay on” as his “servant,” because he

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<sup>49</sup> See Rohy, “Hemingway, Literalism, and Transgender Reading.” *Twentieth-Century Literature* 57, no. 2, (Summer 2011): 163.

has “less chance of being killed” (*TSS* 329). The decision is never resolved. In this biopolitical calculus, deviance compensates for risk when the only possible return is to the front. Perhaps this might explain something of the major’s relief to learn that his subordinate does not desire him, even if it means his longings cannot be fulfilled. A return to normalcy, within the drive-reduction model of male sexuality, is often relieving. The story’s prose enables the major to enjoy the pleasurable deflation of desire by eroticizing the denied possibility of its fulfilment.

By denying access to any norm for regulating identity, the story conjures a specter within what Benjamin Kahan has described as the long afterlife of discourses of situational homosexuality in the twentieth century. Borrowing Regina Kunzel’s definition of situational homosexuality as same-sex acts which are interpreted to lack “a somatic or psychic origin,” Kahan argues that such acts were “not written under the sign of *psychopathia sexualis* —the psychologization of sexual aberrations,” but rather understood within the contours of normality. For Kahan, the invention of these models “brings the very situatedness of all sexualities (not just situational homosexuality) into view.”<sup>50</sup> At the same time, even temporary aberrations had meaning in an identitarian psychological paradigm, meaning that situational homosexuality can also participate in the essentialization of identity. As Jane Ward has shown, the discourse of temporary or situational homosexuality can be double-edged. More often than not, it has us think that momentary aberrations do not so much undermine straight norms as fortify them, often by insisting that these temporary blips in identity need not alter its norms. The history of flexible male heterosexuality itself informs Ward’s provocation that the discursive construction of certain homosexual acts between straight white men in fact forms a central part of heterosexual culture,

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<sup>50</sup> See Kahan, *Minor Perverts* 26, 33. For more on this definition in the context of mid-twentieth century prison culture, see also Kunzel, “Situating Sex: Prison Sexual Culture in the Mid-Twentieth-Century United States.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 8, no. 3 (2002): 253.

not simply as a cover for closeted gay existences, but as part of straight ones: in other words, not all, but many of these acts were, and continue to be “best understood as straight.”<sup>51</sup> In suggesting that “A Simple Enquiry” charts desire that runs athwart identity, I also recognize that the term “situational homosexuality” is at best an anachronism, since the phrase did not see common usage until the 1940s, as Jeffrey Escoffier points out.<sup>52</sup> Rather, I use the term with the understanding that the very situationality of these sexual acts was a historically specific discursive construction, one that could paradoxically feed into the ahistoricism of straight identity’s “always.” What I am calling situational homosexuality dogs the story in ways that unsettle not just gay identities but “straight” ones as well, particularly as the story’s final lines reveal the major’s doubts concerning Pinin. In raising the possibility that Pinin might have “lied” to the major, the story leaves intact the possibility that Pinin may have an identity, but one that is not on record. That some kernel of a norm-based identity remains at the end of the story suggests that the indeterminacy of “situational” aids the discursive crystallization of straightness. In other words, the idea of homosexual acts unbound to identity can also serve to buttress the fantasy of an unchanging heterosexuality, since its situationality can be marshalled to explain what is normally oriented elsewhere: I was just curious, it was just that one time, it did nothing for me. The interwar period’s ideals of straightness as parallel with, but not entirely reducible to, the hetero-as-not-gay, highlights the way that heterosexuality in the 1920s and afterward involved a biopolitical regulatory logic in which straightness and deviation could be grafted onto national health.

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<sup>51</sup> See Ward, *Not Gay: Sex Between Straight White Men*. (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 42. According to Chauncey, “many doctors writing in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries regarded the fairy as an ‘intermediate sex’ between men and women, but they also believed that many men engaged in homosexual activity without being inverts.” See *Gay New York* 122

<sup>52</sup> See Escoffier, “Gay-for-Pay: Straight Men and the Making of Gay Pornography.” *Qualitative Sociology* 26, no. 4, (Winter 2003): 531-555.

The historical shifts in military strategies for regulating homosexual acts exemplifies this logic. In the U.S. Military, for example, there was a gradual change in the procedures used to police sexual misconduct in the name of morale and sexual health during and after the First World War. Of course, I must pause and note that the important feature of Hemingway's military environments, here and in *Farewell*, is that they are in the Italian, and not the U.S. Military, which matters to the history of homosexual policing. But I will show that both military contexts—the Italian and the U.S.—adopted diverse regulatory strategies that imagined male sexual desire as increasingly mobile, and therefore regulable, given that virility should serve the state's aims, but might also spill over into queerness. As Margot Canaday points out, the regulation of military homosexuality in the U.S. was somewhat harum-scarum during this period. Screening procedures were adapted, early on, from psychometric and sexological approaches to try and detect “perverts.” However, as the war drew to a close, and as the U.S. Military was itself rocked by public sex scandals, courts “directed military policing away from effeminacy and toward sex.” It was not until World War II that anti-homosexuality campaigns in the U.S. would resume their focus on identity categories. Yet in cracking down on sodomy as an act during the First World War, military courts also self-consciously challenged many soldiers' prevailing beliefs that certain kinds of sex between men might not make one queer. For example, Canaday describes one soldier whose view was not atypical. When questioned by a judge as to whether “anyone who takes part or gives their permission in the act of sodomy is as guilty as the other,” the soldier only tentatively replied “I guess they are.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 81

In the Italian context in which both “A Simple Enquiry” and *A Farewell to Arms* take place, the regulation of sexuality serves as a historical anchor for Hemingway’s characters and their sexualities. I note that Hemingway’s stories on the Italian front are set during a period between Italian unification and the rise of fascism, during which sodomy was decriminalized in Italy (this in contrast to Germany, where the criminal code known as Paragraph 175 still criminalized homosexuality). Yet in the Italian military, sodomy was still viewed as a potentially draining force that needed to be stemmed through managed heterosexuality. Laws in Italy imposed punishments for homosexual relations between officers and soldiers.<sup>54</sup> Prostitution, by contrast, was tolerated and regulated. The *case di tolleranza*, the “bawdy houses” described in the opening of *A Farewell to Arms*, became a highly regulated architecture intended to direct and regularize men’s sexual urges. In *Farewell*, at Gorizia, we are told there are “two bawdy houses, one for troops and one for officers,” a division that reinforces, through its bifurcated architecture, the regulatory scheme intended to police relations across lines of rank such as those represented in “A Simple Enquiry.” Indeed, the brothels were, as military historian John Gooch summarizes, intended to reduce the potential consequences of “too long a period of enforced abstinence,” including sexual assault and “homosexuality.”<sup>55</sup> In both the U.S. and in Italy, morale was linked with the managed availability of heterosexual acts, availability through which the War’s actors managed the optics of soldiers’ sexual behaviors, even as the regulationist doctrine might be in

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<sup>54</sup> According to Dagmar Herzog, “consenting adult same-sex acts in private were legal (though by no means socially acceptable, nonetheless not prosecuted)” in Italy and France at this time. However, there were nonetheless “provisions” that forbid certain kinds of relationships, including those involving “officer–soldier” relationships, which were considered among the same class as non-consensual relationships, or indeed any relationship “which cast doubt on the ability to give consent.” Both Crouthamel and Herzog discuss Germany’s Paragraph 175, which had been in place since the 1870s. This code was a central object of protest for Germany’s homosexual rights movement since prior to the turn of the century, but attention was renewed with the Eulenberg Affair, a series of homosexual scandals that rocked Kaiser Wilhelm’s government in 1907. See Herzog, *Sexuality in Europe: A Twentieth Century History*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2011, 38; and Crouthamel 17.

<sup>55</sup> See Gooch, *The Italian Army and the First World War*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 166.

tension with “official” government stances that appeared to frown on prostitution. The use of military brothels was, of course, hardly unique to the Italian army. But the Italian context also illuminates the extent to which assumptions about the periodicity of men’s sexualities was built into the management of martial bodies as gendered ideals of the state itself.

Hemingway adapts the European theaters of the First World War into spaces where identities can loosen, often in ways that are imagined against newly crystalized sexual norms in the interwar period. The problem of straightness in “A Simple Enquiry” intertwines national and sexual identities, such that the forms of policing enacted by the major are understood to be in some sense specific to Italian nationalist anxieties over male weakness. Such anxieties aid in understanding how the sign of “Caporetto,” in Munson’s morale manuals, became a kind of morality tale—or, if you like, a “morale” tale—one whose reliance on fictions about sexuality, manpower, and national strength was in affinity with broader nationalist anxieties over martial and economic power whose privileged sign was male effeminacy and weakness. In *A Farewell To Arms*, this weakness, often couched in homophobic language, extends and complicates the relationships Hemingway imagines between sexuality and nationality.

### Manpower and Biopower

In “A Simple Enquiry,” Hemingway destabilizes the normative basis of straight identities through truncated forms. In that story, the “irregular” horizontality of the relations created by not-gay sex is signaled syntactically by the use of dashes to create dialogic interruptions. Quite a few dashes can also be found in *A Farewell to Arms*—but in this novel, their relation to sexuality has, partly by way of greater critical and scholarly attention, more definite book-historical

contours. Readers familiar with the novel will likely recognize that the original manuscript of *Farewell* contained quite a few more four-letter words than the published novel; when the finished edition was printed, most of these were replaced with dashes. One reason for this was censorship. Hemingway's editor at Scribner's, Max Perkins—who so the myth goes, never touched a word of Hemingway's prose—in fact demanded that some *inaccreditable* words be removed from the text after the novel was banned during its serial publication.<sup>56</sup> Still, the changes were more cosmetic than formal. “Fuck” and “shit” were turned into dashes. “Balls” was changed to “scrotum” in the exchange with Miss Van Campen. And another word, “cocksucker” was also struck from the manuscript, written as a dash instead.<sup>57</sup>

I want to examine two passages in which the word “cocksucker” was struck. Like “A Simple Enquiry,” both passages use dashes to draw attention to an omitted homosexual referent, and both do so in relation to the problem of policing authentic Italian identity amid the paranoid conditions of morale policing:

[Aymo] died while I was stopping up the two holes. Piani laid his head down, wiped his face, with a piece of the emergency dressing, then let it alone.

“The —— [cocksuckers],” he said.

“They weren't Germans,” I said. “There can't be any Germans over there.”

“Italians,” Piani said, using the word as an epithet, “Italiani!” (185).

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<sup>56</sup> Three words were problematic, Dearborn tells us: “Ernest thought they were ‘balls,’ ‘cocksucker,’ and ‘shit,’ while actually it was ‘fuck’ rather than ‘shit’ that was deemed unpublishable.” She goes on to say that “in the end Scribner’s published the novel with long dashes in place of the offending words” (282). For a helpful guide to these and other publication contexts, see also Lewis and Roos, *Reading A Farewell To Arms: Glossary and Commentary*. (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2019), 226, 233

<sup>57</sup> See Dearborn 282-283.

“Take him back there with the others,” the first officer said. “You see. He speaks Italian with an accent.”

“So do you, you —— [cocksucker],” I said” (192).

In the first passage, Frederic Henry, escaping on foot with his company after his ambulance gets stuck in the mud, witnesses Italian infantrymen casually gun down one of his men. The friendly fire occurs amid the chaos of the retreat from the Isonzo and the attendant paranoia over German and Austro-Hungarian infiltration, embodied by the Italian battle police, who arrest Frederic after he arrives at the main retreat without his company. In the first passage, the conceptual relationship between Italian citizenship and homosexuality is blurred by the use of “epithet” to relate the two languages. Piani utters “Italians” in the same tone he utters “cocksucker.” By taxonomizing national and sexual identities—that is, by imagining the figure, the personage, of a patriotic Italian “cocksucker”—Hemingway inverts the terms of the nationalistic obsession with determining who is, and is not, a proper soldier, a proper Italian, or a proper man. In these dashes, Hemingway replaces this question with another: who is, and is not, perverse in their alignments with national identity. The implication of both of these dashes is clear: this figure will shoot every man in the lineup regardless of how they answer his questions. Thus the problem, for Frederic, is that the effeminate, submissive military officer is *not* really interested in upholding morale, but in exercising an authority whose nationalism is couched in perversity and impotence.

The problem with Frederic’s and Piani’s formulation will be obvious to those familiar with the novel: the protagonist himself, as if to anticipate the scene with the battle police, has already shot a man dead for desertion. His reasons for doing so would ostensibly echo those of the *carabinieri*: it is his duty to fire on those men to maintain morale and discipline in his unit. Thus, what is often understood as one of the novel’s many ironic reversals also creates a



paradox: through what distinctions and modes of differentiation does Frederic escape the boundaries of prescribed identity without becoming a cocksucker himself? My point, to avoid being roundabout, is that the editorial replacement of the epithets with dashes, while traditionally thought of not as “omission” but as censorship, can still be thought alongside novel’s interest in detaching Frederic’s heterosexuality from any kind of national or political affiliation. As we have seen, the quantification of male sexual appetites and behaviors through morale work involves biopolitical technologies that retroactively produce the war’s meaning within a regulative discourse. The retreat from Caporetto, as “morale narrative,” serves as a privileged site for imagining the problem of men’s relations to other men through the language of policed identity. In the context of the novel, however, morale has other gendered meanings. Early on in the novel, Frederic and several of the ambulance corps mechanics are discussing an impending attack while holed up in a dugout. Much like “A Simple Inquiry,” as the mechanics and ambulance drivers joke about the sizes of the men in the Italian infantry, physical stature becomes a way of talking about relations between nation and enemy. Passini, one of the more vocal mechanics, declares that “bersaglieri are fools,” referring to the class of soldier who are said to be conducting the assault at the Isonzo Front, where morale has plummeted following a recent mutiny, adding “they are big enough through the chest by measurement, and healthy. But they are still fools” (*FTA* 42). Manera, another driver, then comments that “the gratanieri are tall,” and everyone else but Frederic laughs. The joke is in reference to the mutiny. “When they wouldn’t attack,” he is told, the military police decimated the unit, or, “shot every tenth man.”<sup>58</sup> The dialogue toys with the prospect of being quantified, either as healthy martial bodies or as corpses produced by the battle police. Here in the dugout where Frederic will be wounded by a

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<sup>58</sup> For more on the decline in morale at the Isonzo, see Stevenson, *1914-1918*, 329-330

mortar shell a few pages later, the dialogue raises the specter of an endless war that could continue with the bodies, if not with the consent, of the men involved.<sup>59</sup> Frederic's interaction with the mechanics enacts the gaze of military science, a metric visual frame which imagines martial bodies as readable and regulable by the state, where the qualities of numbered masses, and lines between psychic interiors and "external" pressures appear fungible. The anxiety over endless war also speaks to the temporalities that Paul K. St. Amour has excavated in interwar literature's traumatic anticipations of total war, that is, continued armed conflict without any distinctions between civilian and combatant targets. This discourse also imagines a totality whose "portrait of national life completely subordinated to a war effort misses the persistence of the everyday during even the most restrained conflicts."<sup>60</sup> Thus, the totalizing frame of "interwar"—a suspended norm between wars—temporality can be said to rewrite a normal/deviant binary along the lines of a temporality structured by armed conflict. For Hemingway, this partiality articulates a normative frame in which straight forms do not buttress heteronationalist imaginaries of interwar heteronormativity but rather invert the alignments between sexuality and the management of identity through interruption, and return. *A Farewell To Arms* invites suspicion about Frederic's heterosexuality partly in order to undermine the biopolitical equation of straightness with normative regulation, imagining it instead as a flexible

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<sup>59</sup> The debate between Passini and Frederic concerns whether it would be preferable to be coerced into soldiery by the state, or by an occupying force. "Defeat is worse," Frederic argues, "They hang you. They come and make you be a soldier again. Not in the auto-ambulance, in the infantry" (43). But Manera maintains that "an outside nation can't make you a soldier," and simply claims he would desert.

<sup>60</sup> See St. Amour, *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedic Form*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 58. Of course, as St. Amour illustrates, total war, as discourse, is inevitably partial, its distinctions undergirded by the definitions imposed by settler colonial states on indigenous populations.

and mobile form for navigating a condition of modernity that St. Amour calls “perpetual interwar,” the uneven extension of anticipatory temporalities of postwar peace.<sup>61</sup>

As Frederic himself begins to migrate across national borders, the narrative increasingly divides sexualities along the lines of normativity and perversion, even as Frederic and British V.A.D. Nurse Catherine Barkley attempt to establish “a separate peace” in the provisional norms of heterosexuality. The boundaries of the male body, and the question of what that body can be made to do when pressured from “outside,” is a central thematic concern of Hemingway’s novel. Readings of the novel have typically focused on Frederic’s transformation through his wounding, his eventual desertion, and his relationship with Catherine. Whether read redemptively or as a narrative of total disillusionment, the significance of Frederic’s relation to both national identity and war is often abstracted ahistorically from the novel’s treatment of sexuality. As Thomas Strychacz points out, the reading of Frederic as a representative literary figure typifying a male experience of modern war “depends in part on the early proclivity of literary historians to characterize the historical and cultural temper of ‘lost generation’ modernism in terms of the First World War and its aftermath—and thus to read constructions of gender in the context of a sociopolitical event that by definition seemed to belong to a male order of experience.”<sup>62</sup> Indeed, for Strychacz, the novel itself works against this ideal of a representative male vision of war by self-consciously refusing to perform the masculine roles demanded by military “theater.”

As I have been suggesting, perhaps another way to undercut the teleology implicit in this totalizing “male order of experience” is to historicize its implicit straightness. As my readings

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<sup>61</sup> St. Amour explains that while “the expression appears to contradict itself because an interval between two discrete historical events would seem nonperpetual by definition,” but that this contradiction only holds “if we apply the term *interwar* exclusively in retrospect, after the event of a second war has notarized the foregoing period’s in-betweenness” (305). This postwar rewriting describes different kind of retroactivity that operates in parallel to the idea of an interwar norm, but one that nonetheless buttresses the fiction of war as shock, deviation, and disturbance.

<sup>62</sup> See Strychacz, *Hemingway’s Theaters of Masculinity*, (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2003), 96.

have suggested thus far, Frederic's straightness, along with the supposedly "direct" quality of his narration, ought not to be taken for granted. Rather, the question of what the narrator wants is one of the novel's central problems, one tied to the formal project of "omission." As Modellmog points out, "there are hardly any normal sexual relationships and very little normal sex" in the book; that is, if such terms are measured against prevailing attitudes about sexual norms in which sex ought to be "heterosexual missionary-position sex within the context of religious-or state-approved marriage."<sup>63</sup> While this definition of "normal sex" is somewhat ahistorical in scope, it is also in some ways accurate to the period in question, specifically in that it includes certain prescribed *styles* of hetero-relationality that are not conceptually tied to reproduction. What Modellmog does not account for, however, is the flexibility of this norm in the interwar moment. Thus we might understand the problematic of *heterosexuality*—the thematic concern in Frederic's and Catherine's relationship with both mirroring and symmetry—as distinct from, but increasingly aligned with, the problematic of "straight" norms—formalizations of rigid and directed movements assigned (usually) to male sexual appetites, desires, and acts.

What interests me about this straight-hetero relationship is the way it discursively shuttles between deviance and normalcy, particularly as it is defined, in the later sections of the novel, against the perversities of war. In scenes where Frederic's erotic fantasies about women are mediated by the labor of medical care, his prose becomes increasingly tuned to the metric periodicities of bodily norms. In the incident with Miss Gage, the penetration of the thermometer is reported in the narration ("she put the thermometer in my mouth"). Later, however, when Catherine performs the same task, the detail is not narrated but implied through Catherine's

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<sup>63</sup> See Modellmog, "We Live in a Country Where Nothing Makes Any Difference": A Queer Sensibility in *A Farewell to Arms*. *The Hemingway Review* 28, no. 2 Spring 2009): 8.

dialogue (“that’s fine for the chart”). Later, Catherine gives Frederic an enema, which is also only suggested at first by the dialogue (“not much, but quite unpleasant”) and later clarified obliquely in the narration (“I was clean inside and outside and waiting for the doctor”) (92). In both of these instances, the mode of indirection used is comparable to the earlier omission of sex between Frederic and Catherine in the hospital bed: “‘Come on. Don’t talk. Please come on.’ / Catherine sat in a chair by the bed. [...] The wildness was gone and I felt finer than I had ever felt.”) (81). In these scenes, the shift from dialogue to narration, signifying the passage of time and procedure in the diegesis, covers over any interiorization of these scenes of bodily penetration. Rather, what Frederic’s narration registers, throughout the novel, are his body’s affective and somatic returns to equilibrium. In the early sections of the novel, the nurses, including Miss Gage, Miss Van Campen, and Catherine, serve partly to assure Frederic that he is still normal even under abnormal conditions, operating within the parameters of military medicine by maintaining the reproductive capacities and vital energies of combatants. Yet they are also voices that echo the tropes of relief and return, even when, at this point in the novel, as with “A Simple Enquiry,” the only return is back to the front.

If there is any marked shift in Frederic’s relationship to Catherine after the retreat from Caporetto, it registers primarily in his prose, as Catherine increasingly occupies Frederic’s narrated thoughts and desires as a more fulfilling and durable possibility than his liaisons with prostitutes, which have left him unsatisfied and infected with gonorrhoea. A commonly asked question is whether the shift in Frederic’s relationship to Catherine involves a genuine change in Frederic’s feelings for Catherine, or whether it showcases his tendency to simply rewrite his past experiences to suit his own ends.<sup>64</sup> This debate assumes implicitly that a sexually normative

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<sup>64</sup> Reynolds, for example, argues that Frederic might well be a “changed man,” but he also raises the question: change from what? Strychacz summarizes critical debates over Frederic’s character in more detail, and remarks that

relationship to Catherine, defined by marriage and family life, would constitute a renunciation of something else that, by definition, is less desirable, or more perverse. I read this relationship less heroically. Frederic's love for Catherine, even if genuine, is not as an escape from, but an extension of the biopolitical aims of state regulatory schemes, particularly in the novel's conclusion. So too, Frederic's attachment to Catherine often dissolves, as several critics have observed, into recurrent fantasies of erotic symmetry and gender indeterminacy. The hair-cutting fantasy, for example, in which Catherine fantasizes that by making her hair "short," they could "both be alike," is also a fantasy of heterosexual sameness and mirrored symmetry. She tells Frederic "I want you so much I want to be you too" (*FTA* 257). Critics like Eby and Modellmog have pointed out the resemblances between this scene and other episodes of kinky hair play in (for example) *The Garden of Eden* and the "Secret Pleasures" episode of the recent restored edition of *A Moveable Feast*. Likewise, these critics have had much to say about the gendered and sexual meanings Hemingway associated with hair. My goal is not to reiterate those accounts here, but to point to the hair fantasy role in the novel's gendered divide between Catherine as an object of Frederic's straight desire and role of the male bodies on the front as objects within that fantasy. In this scene, Catherine asks him if he would "like to go on a trip" alone so he can "be with men and ski," which he doesn't. She presses him, asking if he feels "restless," and he tells her, "No. Sometimes I wonder about the front and about people I know but I don't worry. I don't think about anything much [...] About Rinaldi and the priest and lots of people I know. But I don't think about them much. I don't want to think about the war. I'm through with it." (256). The sentence "I don't want to think about the war" usually feels like a kind of master code for

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the literary-critical impulse to read of Frederic's narrative as a moral education has "given rise to a particularly powerful construction of American masculinity" (94). See Reynolds, "A Farewell to Arms: Doctors in the House of Love." *The Cambridge Companion to Ernest Hemingway*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 119.

the myth of the authorial “experience” of the war as the “real” referent of the omitted text. But here, the syntax is revealing, in that it separates both Rinaldi and the priest from the war, suggesting that while the war itself is not worth thinking about, the two men are. Instead, when Catherine presses him as to what he is thinking about, he answers, “I was wondering whether Rinaldi had the syphilis.” Rinaldi, a physician and close companion, is repeatedly marked in Frederic’s narration by venereal disease, an association strengthened by Catherine, who chides Frederic for having had gonorrhea. When she changes the subject, and introduces her fantasy of merging with Frederic, she invites him to “play” in bed, but not before having a game of chess. Suddenly, after three pages of dialogue, there is narration: “I got out the chess board and arranged the pieces.” (258). The battle lines on the chessboard would seem to deflate Frederic’s fantasy of authentic straightness by re-introducing the martial bodies she has been urging him to forget. But insofar as the game with Catherine’s hair also interrupts Frederic’s speech about Rinaldi and the priest, she assures Frederic that their relationship can accommodate certain other pleasures, partaking, through various fetishy scenarios and scripts, of erotic fantasies involving other men and gender-crossings that would traditionally undermine the myth of symmetrical hetero-difference.<sup>65</sup>

If the novel can be said to cast suspicion on the normalcy of Catherine’s and Frederic’s relationship, it also fails to entirely separate the pleasures of that relationship from the supposed perversity of martial homosociality. When Frederic extols the “dignity” of “certain names” and “the numbers of regiments,” he describes a prose in which quantities signal a historicity irreducible to the propagandistic language of interwar nationalism. However, these regimental

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<sup>65</sup> According to the *OED*, the sense of “kink” as a sexual abnormality only saw print usage after World War II, but a broader meaning—kink as an “odd notion”—goes back to the turn of the nineteenth century.

numbers also serve another function. Early on in the novel, Rinaldi teases Frederic about his closeness with the priest, whom the other officers bully. Frederic admits he “like[s] him,” and Rinaldi tells him “I knew it. Sometimes I think you and he are a little like that way. You know,” adding perhaps unnecessarily that he means “a little that way like the number on the first regiment of the Brigata Ancona” (*FTA* 57). Hemingway later clarified to a translator that the number of this regiment is sixty-nine.<sup>66</sup> Rinaldi’s joke therefore indulges in the same homophobic discourse as Frederic in the later parts of the novel, suggesting, by way of “concrete” regimental numbers, that Frederic might be a cocksucker after all. Despite the homophobia of the joke, Rinaldi is also invested in nationalist heterosexualities that might include same-sex pleasures. After Frederic returns to the front, Rinaldi inspects the lieutenant’s knee, calling him “baby” and urging him to “take off [his] pants,” joking that “we’re all friends here” (146). They drink cognac. Rinaldi jokes about Frederic kissing him, and then tells Frederic “I will get you drunk and take out your liver and put you in a good Italian liver and make you a man again” (*FTA* 148). While Rinaldi performs homosocial affections as an excuse to joke about Frederic’s sexuality, his repeated images of men trading organs reproduces the ideal of male bodily efficiency in a fantasy of assimilation into both sexuality and nation. Rinaldi, who has syphilis, appears death-infected, as if acting out a morality tale in which martial gay desires are “killed” as part of the maintenance of straightness. However, in Hemingway’s version of this fantasy, neither normal heterosexuality nor reproduction offers a way out of this environment. The “concrete” language whose prose consists of regiments, names, and numbers also operates

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<sup>66</sup> According to Lewis and Roos’ glossary to the novel, ““The Brigata Ancona was [...] composed of two regiments, the Sixty-ninth and the Seventieth. Therefore, the number of the first regiment of the brigade was sixty-nine, a fact Hemingway confirmed later in a letter to his French translator, Maurice Coindreau” (107).



in the service of a regulatory biopolitics for managing the directedness of identity through homosexual pleasures.

The novel dramatizes the discursive flexibility of sexuality in the retroactive construction of “morale” to explain the problem of “numbers” in the Great War’s massive scale of casualties. These numbers are repeated throughout the novel. Even the novel’s opening chapter tells us that “only seven thousand died” of cholera in the summer of 1916. But Hemingway’s commitments to a reductive style and “concrete” numericity, as we have seen, are also predicated on fictions of manageable and measurable martial power. During Frederic’s stay at the hospital, a British officer offers a version of the morale narrative that would come to signify the deviance of Caporetto:

He said they had lost forty thousand on the Carso besides. [...] We were all cooked. The thing was not to recognize it. The last country to realize they were cooked would win the war. [...] His boots were smoothly polished dull leather. They were beautiful boots. He said it was all balls. They thought only in divisions and man-power. They all squabbled about divisions and only killed them when they got them. They were all cooked. The Germans won the victories. By god they were soldiers. The old Hun was a soldier (116-117).

The British officer’s assessment of national martial strengths operates within a flexible framework for attributing gendered weakness according to the calculus of numbers and morale. The officer does not fall in line with Gino’s patriotic abstractions that demand soldiers not die “in vain,” yet he also produces an alternative morale discourse, one juxtaposed, in the narrator’s distant and indirect reporting of the dialogue, to a biopolitics of “divisions and manpower.” He goes on, adding that ‘the Italians were cooked [...] The old Hun would come down through

Trentino and cut the railway at Vicenza,” but then concludes that “they would probably wouldn’t do that. It was too simple They’d try something complicated and get royally cooked” (117). The expression “royally cooked” sounds a lot like “royally fucked”—and indeed, according to one glossary for the novel, Hemingway apparently toyed with changing the word “cooked” to “fucked” in a later scene, when Frederic is first ordered to hold the Bainsizza. My point is not to substitute a non-textual referent for the published text (very likely it would have met the same dashed fate as the other fucks in the novel). My point is rather to connect the repetitive action of being cooked to the larger conceptual framework in which male sexual receptivity informs the biopolitics of manpower. The officer’s pessimism echoes a retroactive imagination of the war as a *fait accompli* in which men can speak proleptically of a post-sexual trauma. Much like Eliot’s Tiresias in *The Waste Land*, the officer imagines having already “foresuffered all / Enacted on this same divan or bed.”<sup>67</sup> However, Frederic reinstalls the possibility of an endless war—of endless, aggressive fucking—into a narrative temporality in which male death cannot be represented numerically. In doing so, he would seem to substitute one ahistoricism, in which the war is written proleptically as a doomed enterprise that interrupts historical progress, with another, in which the “interwar” interrupts—becomes a pause, a dash, a normalized, totalized war whose endlessly flexible numerical logic can be extended indefinitely. For Frederic, numerical representations of death—marked as male, nationally-affiliated, and erotically passive—signal not the finalization of war but the biopolitics of its continuation. The Great War does not appear retroactively as a deviant suspension of an interwar period, but as a norm whose persistence underwrites a heterosexual norm by serving as the staging ground for binaries of

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<sup>67</sup> See Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Norton Critical Edition*. Edited by Michael North, (New York: Norton, 2001), 13

internal directedness and external pressure, of equilibrium and extremity, of the normal state and the exceptional situation.

In the middle sections of the novel, when Frederic is nearly executed by the battle police, this heteronationalist framework polices identities across national lines. So too, Frederic's provisional Italian identity becomes a problem, though he recognizes that for the *carabinieri*, his accent is not so much a criteria for being shot as an excuse: "I was obviously a German in Italian uniform" (194). The reality that he is an American in an Italian uniform both ironizes the statement and renders Frederic's flight from national affiliations as a movement away from regulable identity norms. While desertion and delinquency could be understood as evidence certain kinds of "antisocial" behavior, as Munson claims, Hemingway also rewrites this antisociality as a biopolitical alternative to Gino's nationalistic desire for nationality and Rinaldi's intimacy with death. In this novel, one homophobic script, in which male effeminacy and improper intimacies sap martial strength, is deflected through a second morality narrative, in which straight forms are constituted through the flexibility imparted by the perpetual extension of suspended identities; as we have seen, this form of normalization was one that was instilled *through* managed deviation. Desertion, for Frederic, appears less like a queer act of rejection and more as a desire for straight forms that could retain the chronological directionalities of war and straightness while abdicating the nationalistic narrativization of the war's deviance.

Male sexuality, in *A Farewell to Arms*, involves a calculus in which desire is regulated through a language of numbers and regiments, that is, of manpower. The novel's prose normalizes omission as a principle for fortifying heterosexual identity against attachments to male loss. It is significant, then, that not even heterosexual relationships survive the novel. The

“they kill you” monologue in the final scene, which occurs after Frederic learns his child is stillborn, enacts this principle:

That was what you did. You died. You did not know what it was about. You never had time to learn. They threw you in and told you the rules and the first time they caught you off base they killed you. Or they killed you gratuitously like Aymo. Or gave you the syphilis like Rinaldi. But they killed you in the end. You could count on that. Stay around and they would kill you (279-280).

The description of being “off base” threatens fatal consequences for any kind of deviation from military discipline, but it also imagines the biopolitics of war as marked by a finality hitherto unrecognized in the novel. The passage lays bare the prosaic straightness whose quantitative limit is the representation of male death—limited because such representations restore the temporality of historical distance, of the postwar, or at least, the post-*that*-war. His list of the dead specifically nominates the two men who are thematically marked, as we have seen, by their proximity to death and to images of homosexual pleasures. But it also juxtaposes these men to the “they” who do the killing, a group who must necessarily include the dashed epithets who kill Aymo “gratuitously.” By imagining straightness as capable of a flexibility that can temporarily suspend sexual and national identities, Hemingway enacts a desire for an endless suspension that could thwart the arrival of a normativity underwritten by nationalist narratives of the war. Instead, he proposes a model of sexuality in which the possibility of the war’s continuation interrupts and fractures any norm-bound identitarian affiliation. One effect of this strategy is to recast narratives of the retreat at Caporetto outside of nationalist anxieties about manpower and racial degeneration, narratives that propelled the interwar rise of European fascisms by perpetuating fears of sexual deviance and male weakness as signs for degraded national vitality.

This anxiety was increasingly present in the discourse of “morale” in both interwar American military psychology and European fascist imaginaries. In a broader way, too, Frederic’s narration of the retreat and his eventual desertion revises the ahistorical normativity of interwar constructions of male desire in the service of the state.

For Hemingway, the sexual specificity of The Great War does not involve simply a quantitative exaggeration of everyday mortality, nor an entirely, that is, ontologically separate state of morbidity, but also a sign for a historical disturbance whose difference from the norm serves to buttress the invisibility and facticity of a heterosexual identity itself. But rather than read this hydraulic normativity as simply traumatically belated, I understand its temporality to be more closely bound up with the problems of presence and continuation, that is, of a form of biopower whose representations were founded on the formal languages of straightness and deviance. In contrast to the interwar obsession with preserving a progressive historical directedness that staves off the conclusion of an interwar norm, the regularities of Hemingway’s wartime sexualities dramatize the possibility of endless armed conflict, one that would render heterosexual norms temporary and provisional at best. Such a fantasy, even as an anxious daydream, requires pause. Its view of history as a continually interrupted war might be read not as an endorsement of perpetual warfare, but a critique of a heteronationalist historiography, in which the postwar is always straight.

CHAPTER FIVE:

QUANTIFIED HOMOSEXUALITY AND ENUMERATIVE AESTHETICS IN *NIGHTWOOD* AND *THE YOUNG AND EVIL*

*“It is indispensable that our thought embraces all aspects of reality. Instead of discarding the residues of scientific abstractions we will utilize those residues as fully as the abstractions. We will not accept the tyranny of the quantitative, the superiority of mechanics, physics, or chemistry.”*

-Alexis Carrel, *Man, The Unknown* (1935)<sup>1</sup>

*“The truth is we do not yet have and may possibly never have psychological measuring units which are straightforward and unambiguous”*

-Lewis Terman, “The Measurement of Personality” (1934)<sup>2</sup>

In the history of twentieth-century sexual cultures, much ink has been spilled over the numerical estimation of the frequency and prevalence of homosexuality on a mass scale. Overtaking most percentile representations of this concept by far, one particular figure, appearing in Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler’s 1933 novel, *The Young and Evil*, hints at the aesthetic fascination these numbers hold. In one of the novel’s later chapters, we encounter a series of sentence fragments, snippets from a great many conversations circulating through a late-night Harlem drag ball. Near the middle of the chapter, as the party picks up speed, one voice comments that “ninety-five percent of the world is just naturally queer and are really according to the degree of / Resistance,” (159). Indeterminism rules here, as the percentage itself depends on a secondary

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<sup>1</sup> Alexis Carrel, *Man, The Unknown*. (Rampart Row: Wilco Publishing House, 1959), 205-206. No translator is listed for this edition.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis Terman, “The Measurement of Personality,” *Science* 80, no. 2087 (Dec 28, 1934): 606

metric, a “degree of resistance” that is constantly in flux. As Joseph Boone has observed, this “arch comment” stages the collision of what Eve Sedgwick has described as a split between minoritizing and universalizing “models of homosexuality.”<sup>3</sup> The fragment elevates, in Boone’s words, “the superiority of the misunderstood artist—and, by extension, the persecuted homosexual” as a defined category; on the other hand, as the passage lays bare, desire also becomes “notoriously fluid.”<sup>4</sup> By locating queer possibility within a majority figure, “ninety-five percent” also inverts the usual relationship between norm and outlier. The point is not whether the figure is accurate (it might or might not be) but rather that its numerical specificity might also queer its demographic meaning. The numbers might lie, but they also aestheticize.

This chapter discusses quantitative figurations of bodies, acts, and identities marked as ‘queer’ in two experimental novels of the 1930s.<sup>5</sup> These two texts are central to studies of queer modernism, and as such, their productive connections to sexology and psychoanalysis have been well-mapped. Still, as I have suggested all along, the potential influence of statistical and psychometric thinking on these objects remains under-explored. This is all the more striking given the thematic prevalence of statistics on homosexuality in novels of this decade. A less experimental text, like Blair Niles’s *Strange Brother* (1931), for example, has a scientist declare at one point that “in Germany what you call abnormals make up at least two to three per cent of

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<sup>3</sup> These minoritizing-universalizing and separatist-integrationist axes can be found in Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 88.

<sup>4</sup> See Boone, *Libidinal Currents* 252-253

<sup>5</sup> I use several terms here, including “homosexual,” “inversion,” and “queer,” in specific ways. The two former terms identify what David Halperin understands as historically specific “discourses of homosexuality,” including the idea of sexual inversion (elaborated by Terry and others). These discourses map relations between sexuality, sameness, and gender (45). “Queer,” by contrast, is meant in the sense of both a broad umbrella for categorizing non-normative sexual identities, as well as two more specific definitions drawn from different strands of queer theory: queer as anti-normative, and queer as resistant to particular identity categories.

the population,” or, via some quick math “over three million abnormal in the United States.”<sup>6</sup>

Other novels of the period would later be marketed as pulp paperbacks that advertised the aesthetics of quantified homosexualities. A glance at the back cover of a late-fifties reprint of Andre Tellier’s 1931 gay pulp novel, *Twilight Men* (Fig. 1), shows me five cartoon faces, one of which is colored red, the rest blue. A blurb tells me, in bold, all-caps, red print, that “At least one man in every five... has tasted the forbidden fruits of homosexuality – according to the

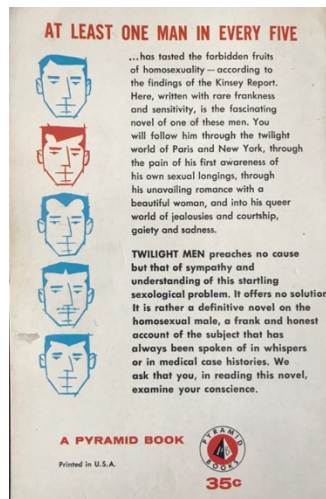


Fig. 4: Back cover of Andre Tellier, *Twilight Men* (1931), Pyramid Books Reprint (1957)

findings of the Kinsey report.”<sup>7</sup> In Niles’ novel, the point is precisely that this is supposed to be a trustworthy figure, insofar as it aspires to truth-value and comes from an extant scientific source (likely Hirschfeld).<sup>8</sup> By contrast, in Ford and Tyler’s frenetic scene, the prose can (to quote another voice at the party) “hardly get two articulate sentences out on the subject of homosexuality” before the conversation moves on (158). The “ninety-five percent” and the

<sup>6</sup> See Blair Niles, *Strange Brother* (London: Gay Men’s Press, 1991), 178.

<sup>7</sup> Andre Tellier, *Twilight Men*. (New York: Pyramid Books, 1957).

<sup>8</sup> Hirschfeld’s oft-quoted survey of homosexuality (1914, cited in Kinsey), offers a kind of ur-text for demographic estimates in this period. Indeed, after this study, other major sexological texts included new material on the statistics of sexuality, often citing Hirschfeld. The original 1897 edition of Ellis’s *Sexual Inversion*, for example, did not include any statistics on homosexuality, while later editions added a welter of statistical estimates, citing Hirschfeld among others. All subsequent citations of *Sexual Inversion* reference Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds, *Sexual Inversion: A Critical Edition*, ed. Ivan Crozier (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2008).



concomitant “degree of resistance” by which it is measured are never fully elaborated. Rather, the percentages flow through the novel’s scenes as sexual fictions and erotic figures. These two novels articulate the queer possibilities of numbers when numerals are detached from the statistical framework of norms.

There is a flippancy to Ford and Tyler’s estimate, a quality whose epistemic consequences may partly explain the tepid reaction of Djuna Barnes to their novel. In a blurb that emblazoned their dust jacket, Barnes proclaimed that “never, to my knowledge, has a certain type of homosexual been so ‘fixed’ on paper,” a type defined by an “utter lack of emotional values – so entire that it is frightening,” and a “loss of all Victorian victories: manners, custom, remorse, taste, dignity.” She concludes by declaring that “No one but a genius, or Mr. Ford and Mr. Tyler, could have written it.”<sup>9</sup> The blurb juxtaposes homosexuality and genius in terms that frame aesthetic value as an extension of sexual and intellectual types. In this context, Ford and Tyler’s novel is all the more interesting if read alongside Barnes’s contemporaneous experimental work, *Nightwood* (1936), a text that also flirts with quantified representations of bodies, acts, and identities. A line of dialogue from Barnes’s novel (deleted in editing from the 1936 edition but restored in the unexpurgated edition) signals a thematic echo of Ford and Tyler’s statistical vision. At this point in the novel, Barnes’s queer medical practitioner, Doctor Matthew O’Connor, is expounding to an unnamed ex-priest to about his partly fabricated life history, when he suddenly proclaims, “you can lay a hundred bricks and never be called a

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<sup>9</sup> See Phillip Herring, *Djuna: The Life and Works of Djuna Barnes* (New York: Viking, 1995), 175, 183. Ford and Barnes were close friends and romantic partners. In the early 30s, Ford stayed with Barnes in Morocco and typed early drafts of *Nightwood* and worked in his spare time on his and Tyler’s novel. Barnes’s blurb appeared on the dust jacket of the original publication of *The Young and Evil*, and is also reproduced on the Gay Men’s Press edition (cited hereafter).

bricklayer, but lay one boy and you are a bugger!” (132).<sup>10</sup> His complaint troubles definitions, highlighting inconsistencies in criteria used to define social categories through analogous categories of acts. The disconnect between the numerical and the factual also implies that there is something questionable, for O’Connor, if not for Barnes, about suturing identities and acts to numbers at all.

In the late 1930s and after, statistical sex research became a contested ground for hashing out debates among scientists and laypeople about data-gathering methods and the value of sampling procedures. It was also here where the theory of sexual inversion—the theory that homosexuals had mental or physical traits marked by the “opposite” gender—was both constructed through, and later undercut by the quantitative imaginaries of sex research. To the extent that quantities are often taken, normatively, as signs for epistemic qualities, such as objectivity and accuracy, *Nightwood* and *The Young and Evil* employ them toward different ends. In the next section, the example of statistical and psychometric sex research serves as a historical anchor for exemplifying the kinds of rhetoric that attach these ideals to statistical representations of sexuality. Quantitative rigor buttressed the measurement of mental phenomena by separating both sexual inversion and scientific objectivity from nineteenth-century concepts of queer genius, and consolidating epistemic authority in the gentlemanly figure of the male

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<sup>10</sup> The line is restored in the Dalkey Archive press edition (1995). Cheryl Plumb’s introduction gives context for several restorations. All citations of *Nightwood* are of the Dalkey Archive edition. Citations of T.S. Eliot’s introduction will refer to the New Directions edition. On this line, Leigh Gilmore points out that while editing the novel, Eliot created interpretive challenges by striking this line (and other references to homosexual argot), yet argues that these edits had much to do with the legal context of obscenity in America (619-620). For Dianne Chisholm, however, the historicist emphasis on legal discourse misunderstands the “queer antidiscourse” of *Nightwood*’s surrealism. Whereas Gilmore’s reads *Nightwood* within obscenity discourse, Chisholm understands the novel to resist discourse entirely. See Leigh Gilmore, “Obscenity, Modernity, Identity: Legalizing ‘The Well of Loneliness’ and ‘Nightwood,’” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 4, No. 4 (Apr. 1994): 617, and Dianne Chisholm, “Obscene Modernism: Eros Noir and the Profane Illumination of Djuna Barnes,” *American Literature*, 69, No. 1 (Mar 1997): 186.

scientist. By contrast, as I show in the following sections, *Nightwood* and *The Young and Evil* tend to burn bridges between numbers and facts, a formal strategy that undermines scientific values often associated, even if tendentiously, with quantitative procedure. Rather than elide quantifying visions of sex with empirical data about queerness, Ford and Tyler's *The Young and Evil* separates enumerative forms from heteronormative ideals of observational vision, reimagining them from the position of a desiring queer subject. Likewise, in *Nightwood*, Dr. O'Connor's quantifying monologues obfuscate the part-whole relationships imagined in statistical sex research. However, O'Connor's biometric imaginaries, as well as Barnes's flirtations with pop-scientific eugenics discourse, also foreground historical proximities between modernist sexualities, quantitative technologies, and racial science. These texts develop quantitative aesthetics that sever numerical links between bodies, masses, and scientific values, generating modernist visions of sexual identity that are internally fractured.

### Homosexuality and The Virtues of Accurate Numbers

In the study of homosexuality, quantitative methods only gradually became a sign for the heteronormative persona of the newly professionalized field sex research. What I call "quantified homosexualities" in this chapter refer to a range of discourses that collapse distinct acts, desires, and identities across the sex-gender system into a singular sexual identity whose sign was a number. In the introduction to this study, I noted that quantifying visions of homosexuality appeared in print beginning around the First World War. But in the 1930s, sexual surveying had begun to adopt statistical procedures that challenged the "literal" status of numbers that Mary Poovey has described. Quantitative forms, as I have been arguing, skirt the lines of objectivity

and literality, as well as those of mysticism and figurative meaning. In the history of sexual science, debates over the accuracy and validity of numbers—two concepts closely related to the idea of objectivity—negotiated the place of desire in the formation of sexual knowledge. The problem of identifying and representing norms and deviations within data itself was increasingly central to questions about scientific objectivity, particularly as statistics came to dominate twentieth-century sex research. Psychometric sex studies offer a privileged site for examining these shifts, as they rewrote sexology’s “genius of observation,” to borrow Daston and Galison’s formulation, by isolating non-normative intellects from sexological concepts of effeminacy and inverted genius. As I showed in Chapter One, “genius” is a historically over-freighted term, one that, by the end of the nineteenth century, had come to be discursively aligned with sexual deviance and, for sexologists like Havelock Ellis, with male homosexuality in particular. In later psychometric research, by contrast, queer sexualities tend to appear as signs for the possible non-neutrality of the intellect. In his major work, *The Measurement of Intelligence* (1917), Stanford psychologist Lewis Terman defined IQ, as a ratio of mental age to chronological age, and categorized “genius” as the set of individuals possessing an IQ of 140 or above.<sup>11</sup> Terman’s genetic genius studies, as well as his later studies of personality and sexual inversion, articulated psychometric vision of sexual identity and a model of desirable intellectual abnormality (that is, abnormality that was normative according to the value of IQ as a socially trusted metric). These constructions would later serve as a battleground for the erotic and potentially queer meanings of numbers themselves.

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<sup>11</sup> See Lewis Terman, *The Measurement of Intelligence: An Explanation of and Complete Guide for the Use of the Stanford Revision and Extension of The Binet-Simon Intelligence Scale* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1916), 79

Critiques of intelligence testing in relation to race and gender are now familiar territory, but attention to the spectral presence of sexuality in psychological measurement also highlights the way modern epistemic ideals were determined by early-twentieth-century constructions of heteronormative scientific vision.<sup>12</sup> psychometric and statistical sex research ordered human minds in ways that echoed the “ranking and ordering [of] bodies according to stages of evolutionary progress,” modes that Siobhan Somerville has described in the mutually reinforcing fields of nineteenth century racial and sexual science.<sup>13</sup> In the twentieth century, quantitative procedures projected these evolutionary ideals not simply onto a normal-deviant binary but onto multiple competing ideals of measurable deviance. The distinction between “intelligence” and “talent,” for example, was central to idealizations of a male heterosexual intellect in intelligence studies. In his early work, for example, Terman argues that intelligence testing “does not pretend to bring to light the idiosyncrasies of special talent, but only to measure the general level of intelligence.”<sup>14</sup> Far from a simple issue of semantics, this distinction separated the artistic and linguistic aptitudes that Ellis and others associated with the “genius” of homosexuality from the broader category of “general intelligence” as an apparently pure measure of mental ability writ large. As Peter Hegarty points out, Terman’s genetic genius studies showed a “consistent concern to associate sexual morality with high intelligence,” particularly in his studies of gifted children.<sup>15</sup> Gould likewise observes that Terman’s studies showed an “animus against the

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<sup>12</sup> For a general critique of IQ testing, see Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co, 1995). For an account of the relationship of intelligence testing to gender in modernist “highbrow” cultures, see McGurl, *The Novel Art: Elevations of American Fiction after Henry James* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001), particularly chapter 4.

<sup>13</sup> Somerville, *Queering the Color Line* 24.

<sup>14</sup> Terman, *The Measurement of Intelligence* 48-49.

<sup>15</sup> Hegarty, *Gentlemen’s Disagreement* 39.

performing arts,” and that certain students tended to be “downgraded for their rebelliousness in school.”<sup>16</sup> The vision of intelligence as gender-neutral was thus developed through the negotiation of normally gendered epistemic categories. Heteronormativity signaled neutrality, even as it imagined some abnormal minds as normatively desirable. As Hegarty summarizes, this research “obscured the possibility that giftedness could signal sexual alterity,” and, in one and the same motion, consolidated that sexual normality in the gaze of the scientist.<sup>17</sup>

After the advent of modern intelligence testing, genius, as a quantified mental phenomenon, became a kind of figurative ideal whose measurement reflected the disinterested intellect of the scientist, insofar as it came to represent not subjective bias but “objective” self-negation. In other words, one function of quantification, for modern psychometry, was to construct sex research as a non-desiring scientific enterprise. In J.P. Guilford’s mathematically dense textbook, *Psychometric Methods* (1936), for example, the very first page is devoted to theorizing how psychological measurements can be objective and accurate. Guilford recognizes that objectivity amounts to “interpersonal agreement... [as to] observations and conclusions,” such that “descriptions of nature are more likely to be free from the biases of particular individuals.”<sup>18</sup> Numbers are only “isomorphically” related to objectivity insofar as they are more likely to generate this kind of agreement. Yet, as Terman recognized, that agreement depends on certain shared fictions. He points out, in a 1934 essay on personality, that psychometrists are “so accustomed to use numbers to express the results of our investigations that we end by taking them too literally.”<sup>19</sup> Taking numbers less literally, and, in Poovey’s terms, more figuratively,

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<sup>16</sup> Gould, *Mismeasure* 217.

<sup>17</sup> Hegarty, *Gentlemen’s Disagreement* 42.

<sup>18</sup> See J.P. Guilford. *Psychometric Methods*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1936), 1

<sup>19</sup> Terman, “The Measurement of Personality” 606.

involved a commitment not just to the aesthetics of statistical forms, but to erotic meanings involved in the translation of numerals into discourse. The return of the persona of the sex researcher in the spaces where quantities defy signification also marks the return of the rhetorical and aesthetic “genius” that was abnegated in sexual statistics, particularly as that persona could operate in literary registers. The sliding between the numerical “figure” and the “figurative” in these texts suggests that the idea of genius, as a quantitative abstraction, constantly shuttles between sexual and intellectual difference in imagining “queer” as a (potentially desirable) kind of physical and mental abnormality.

The point is not to claim that the “special talents” and “interests” Terman isolates from intelligence ought to be *a priori* signs for queerness, but that, in Terman’s body of work and more broadly, these attributes were historically aligned with statistical constructions of homosexuality. This is particularly true of Terman’s foray into sexuality studies in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In a series of studies conducted with fellow sex researcher Catherine Cox Miles, Terman actively promoted theories of sexual inversion through the development of an “M-F Test,” a battery of questionnaires asking test-takers about their various “attitudes” and “interests” and then measuring these responses for “sex-predictiveness.”<sup>20</sup> Terman and Miles’s coauthored report, *Sex and Personality* (1936), also included a study of male homosexuals, in which the authors proposed an “inversion scale” represented by what they called an “I-Score.” These I-scores were skewed by the arbitrary weighting of certain responses in terms of their correlation

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<sup>20</sup> See Terry, *An American Obsession*, particularly chapters 4 and 5. For more on the M-F tests in general, see Miriam Lewin, *In the Shadow of the Past: Psychology Portrays the Sexes* (New York: Columbia UP, 1984). The tests, as Terry summarizes, asked “what books [subjects] preferred to read, what kind of people they admired, what historical events they found significant, and what hobbies they cultivated,” among others (169). Lewin points out that the Terman-Miles questionnaire also “set the style” for whole host of similar M-F tests that emerged in this decade and the next. (158).

with or against the normative responses of the “opposite” sex. I-scores of “passive male homosexuals,” they claimed, were measured as positive integers according to the strength of their tests’ correlation with the (negative) “F” part of their M-F scale.<sup>21</sup> This mathematical inversion of positive and negative “literalizes” a figurative difference of degree, but this is hardly surprising when the concept of sexual inversion was already baked into the metric from the start. The study’s populations of homosexuals were pre-divided into “active” and “passive” roles (the “passive male homosexual...plays the role of female”) and so were already grouped according to the perceived qualities their tests purported to measure by other means.

In Barnes’s *Nightwood*, inversion theory’s gendered associations between feminine identity and homosexual acts are regularly subjected to a prose style that distorts the erotic and scalar meanings of quantities. The cultural context of the M-F studies may help explain some of the echoes of queer genius that circulate through Barnes’s novel, particularly with respect to the status of its prose. In the cautious preface appended to the American edition of the novel, T.S. Eliot claims that Barnes’s prose will “appeal primarily to readers of poetry,” a comment, he clarifies, that does “not mean that Miss Barnes’s style is ‘poetic prose’” but rather that “most novels are not really ‘written.’”<sup>22</sup> This written-ness occasions, for Eliot, is a wholesale rewriting of sexual norms. After comparing the various abnormalities of the characters, many, but not all of which involve gender and sexual nonconformity, Eliot insists that the book “is not psychopathic study,” as it moves beyond mere abnormality. “The miseries people suffer through their particular abnormalities of temperament are visible on the surface,” he writes, but “the

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<sup>21</sup> See Lewis Terman and Catherine Cox Miles, *Sex and Personality* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1936), 241-242.

<sup>22</sup> See T.S. Eliot, introduction to *Nightwood* (New York: New Directions, 1937), xi.



deeper design is that of the human misery and bondage which is universal.”<sup>23</sup> For Eliot, the deviance of Barnes’s style and characters does not revise formal boundaries so much as it sweeps them away in favor of a sexual and cultural universalism. But Barnes’s novel, which Jane Marcus has famously called a “prose poem of abjection,” also marks its difference from scientific writing on sexual deviance with a style that estranges the norming languages of populations and numbered bodies, as well as between poetic and prosaic form.<sup>24</sup>

<b>M-F test items</b>	<b>Like</b>	<b>Dislike</b>	<b>Neither</b>
<b>3. Movie love scenes.....</b>	<b>+13</b>	<b>-10</b>	<b>- 6</b>
<b>4. Poetry.....</b>	<b>+ 5</b>	<b>- 7</b>	<b>+ 1</b>
<b>7. Adventure stories.....</b>	<b>-10</b>	<b>+ 5</b>	<b>+11</b>
<b>9. Radio magazines.....</b>	<b>-14</b>	<b>+ 9</b>	<b>+ 3</b>
<b>10. Chemistry.....</b>	<b>- 4</b>	<b>+ 8</b>	<b>- 4</b>
<b>11. Dramatics.....</b>	<b>+13</b>	<b>-11</b>	<b>- 6</b>

Fig. 5: Table of results of M-F Test in Terman and Miles’s inversion study in the category “Reading and Movie Preferences.” The positive and negative numbers indicate the strength of the correlation of male homosexual responses of “like” and “dislike” for the specified genres. From Terman and Miles, *Sex and Personality*, pp. 278.

Psychometric and other numerical constructions of sexual identity are threaded through Barnes, Ford, and Tyler’s novels, constructions that underwrite the experiments of their prose. In different terms, Terman’s M-F studies also grafted numerical specificity to longstanding cultural associations of homosexuality with literature and the arts, and with poetry in particular. When it came to occupational preferences, Terman and Miles found that their invert subjects expressed a higher interest in occupations like “singer,” “dressmaker,” “cook/chef,” “novelist,” “artist” and “librarian,” and a lower interest in “forest ranger,” “building contractor,” “soldier,” and “auto

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, xv.

<sup>24</sup> The comment comes from Marcus, “Laughing at Leviticus: ‘Nightwood’ as Woman’s Circus Epic.” *Cultural Critique* 13 (1989), 161.

racer,” from which they concluded that their results were “in line with what is known about the occupational preferences of male inverts.”<sup>25</sup> But the question at stake is precisely what “is known” and how this knowledge is reproduced across forms. Here, the presumed relationship between homosexuality and “artistic” occupations also becomes knowable through preferences for different genres of writing. Based on a list of responses to “reading and movie preferences,” which included terms like “movie love scenes,” “chemistry,” and “dramatics,” the researchers concluded, based on a positive correlation, that inverts “are probably more interested in poetry, or at least poetry of a certain kind.” But what “kind,” in particular, they do not say.<sup>26</sup> For sexual scientists, the heteronormative affordances of prose aid in the construction of data about the relation between queerness and poetic form. But in Barnes’s novel, the construction of knowledge about homosexuals is routed through the deforming effects of prose, which has the capacity to distort the numbers themselves.

Following Terman and Miles, other M-F tests, such as those developed by the Guilfords, set out to describe sexual difference in statistical representations. This M-F paradigm perhaps also ossified a “type of homosexual” that Barnes implicitly separates from the “type” represented in Ford and Tyler’s novel. This “kind” appears in one particular M-F study, by Leslie Barnette, which urges greater “attention” to the “well-adjusted and cultured homosexual,” or, as Barnette

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<sup>25</sup> Terman and Miles, *Sex and Personality*, 277

<sup>26</sup> This is important because, in a different section of the test, in which participants were asked to respond with “like or dislike” to a list of specific literary works, the only work of poetry listed among those included (at least on Form A) was Longfellow’s *Evangeline*, which was nowhere near the top of the list of “invert” preferences for specific works. This was the only form given to a large portion of the study’s “invert” participants, in quotes here to distinguish between two different sexual types, “invert” and “sodomite,” which were classified differently in this period. Terman and Miles report that Form A was given to what they called the P.M.H (passive male homosexual) group, whereas form B was used for the “Alcatraz group,” the latter of whom, they point out, “in practically every case...were supposed to have played the active part [in sodomy].” (241). In other words, Form A was given to femmes and bottoms, while Form B to the “sodomite” prisoners, who were understood to be normatively masculine. No results, however, are listed for the Alcatraz group in the appendix to their book. Whatever poetry the passive homosexuals/inverts did prefer, it certainly wasn’t Longfellow.

has it, “the kind of homosexual who does not generate problems for society.”<sup>27</sup> But in the early 1940s, the M-F studies also reflected a broader scientific and cultural preoccupation with the scaling and scoring of homosexuality through ordinal systems. Debates over these scales would serve, in the next decade, as an unstable territory for rewriting the epistemic virtues of statistical samples themselves. Alfred Kinsey rejected the basic assumptions of Terman and Miles’s inversion model, but did so primarily on statistical grounds. In his 1948 *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, he would criticize Terman for his reliance on hearsay and questionnaires.<sup>28</sup> But it was nearly a decade prior, in 1940, that Kinsey would begin developing his own 6-point scale of homosexuality, a numerical system that Drucker suggests “may also have been Kinsey’s rebuttal to the Terman-Miles” system.<sup>29</sup> In 1941 article, Kinsey also leveled a characteristic quantitative critique of an article on recently-developed hormonal theories of homosexuality, in which the authors found differing estrogen levels in urine samples from two populations of “normal” and “homosexual” men. Kinsey rejected the findings on the basis that “The samples are small, there is great variation in the samples from different individuals, and in the successive samples from the same individuals.”<sup>30</sup> Anticipating the homosexual scales of the later reports, Kinsey concludes the article by challenging typologies based on sexual inversion, arguing “although there are some 'homosexuals' which show what are popularly considered to be 'effeminate' characteristics, there are others that are physically as robust and as athletically active as the most

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<sup>27</sup> See Leslie Barnette, “Study of an Adult Male Homosexual and Terman-Miles M-F Scores.” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 12 (1942): 346, 351.

<sup>28</sup> Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* 618-619.

<sup>29</sup> Drucker, *The Classification of Sex* 136.

<sup>30</sup> See Kinsey, “Criteria for a Hormonal Explanation of the Homosexual.” *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology* 1, no. 5 (1941): 424.

'masculine' of men,” meaning that “there are, in short, intergradations between all of these types, whatever the items by which they are classified.”<sup>31</sup> So much for inversion.

These figures magnify the historical process of identity-consolidation that Benjamin Kahan has recently called homosexual “speciation,” that is, the subsumption of previously distinct sexual particularities under the umbrella of homo/hetero difference.<sup>32</sup> Central to this process, I argue, quantified sexualities generated metrics that reflected imaginaries of the scientific intellect as disinterested, self-controlled, and non-desiring. Responding to these theories, the two novels in this study place problems of quantity and scale at a distance from these ideals in a decade where debates about statistical sampling took on new prominence. In 1934, for example, Jerzy Neyman, in a paper delivered at the Royal Statistical Society, generated new insights on inferential statistics and officialized the procedures of stratified sampling.<sup>33</sup> Barnes’s *Nightwood* was published in the same year as both Guilford’s *Psychometric Methods* and the Terman-Miles M-F studies, as well as the meteoric rise of the Gallup poll. The debates that raged in the following decades over the value of sampling procedures in the measurement of homosexuality would also, by the time of the Kinsey reports, spell the end for the statistical idealization of inversion theory. If numbers could serve as the basis of a scientific identity whose neutral character was defined against the excessive subjectivity of “inverted” sexuality, they would also serve as the basis for that identity’s undoing. The quantitative studies of the 1930s aimed to package both desire and intellect as objects of an objective procedure, rather than as the

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 427.

<sup>32</sup> Kahan, *The Book of Minor Perverts* 4.

<sup>33</sup> For a historical perspective on debates over purposive selection and probability sampling, see Desrosieres, particularly chapter 7. Stratified sampling would be important for Kinsey’s intervention, though Kinsey also famously did not use probability samples in his groupings.

product of analytic or observational expertise. Though banished from good science, the specter of queer genius haunted the turn toward quantification in sex research.

*“Ninety Percent Lies”*

Quantitative descriptions of sexual and intellectual distinctions circulate through Ford and Tyler’s novel. Once a largely unknown text on the fringes of modernism, Ford and Tyler’s novel has become a central object in queer modernist studies over the last two decades.<sup>34</sup> Set in the queer literary milieu of Bohemian New York, the main action of *The Young and Evil* transpires among a core group of four characters, focusing on two queer protagonists, the poets Karel and Julian, (based on Tyler and Ford respectively) and their two anarchist acquaintances, Gabriel and Louis. As the characters traverse the various apartments, restaurants, and jazz clubs of Greenwich Village, other fifth wheels enter, leave, and return to the group at various moments, but the novel most often resolves into pairs of relationships—dyads that dissolve as quickly as they form. In its attention to characters’ movements through the urban built environment, the novel also imagines them as navigators of a social world defined by aesthetics and intellectualism. In several places, the novel’s thematic registers oscillate between the erotic and the intellectual. Imagining his relationship to Karel, Julian reflects at one point that he “had never known physical and mental love towards a single person” but that “it had always been

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<sup>34</sup> The novel’s own publication history puts this centralizing tendency into greater relief. Initially published by Jack Kahan’s Obelisk Press in 1933, the book was declared obscene and seized by U.S. customs (Austen 59). Kahane was, in Rachel Potter’s words, “the most notorious publisher of legally obscene modernist writing.” (71). Out of print for nearly thirty years, it was published again in 1960 by the Olympia press, run by Kahane’s son, and again in 1975 by the Arno Press as part of their series on homosexuality, under the editorship of Jonathan Ned Katz. The novel re-emerged in the context of a new interest in gay literary studies, likely spurred by liberation. Roger Austen praised the book in 1978, claiming the novel “towers over everything else written in the thirties.” (62). See Potter, *Obscene Modernism: Literary Censorship and Experiment 1900-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Roger Austen, *Playing the Game: The Homosexual Novel in America* (New York: Bobbs-Merril, 1977).

completely one or the other” (72). We are told that he feels “mental” love for Karel, who at this point has fallen for Louis (for whom he feels “neither”). The splitting of desire is a repeated theme of the text, but not along the lines of philo/eros, or platonic/amatory so much as between two overlapping ways of relating queerly to bodies. Like intelligence theory, then, the novel presumes the separateness of desire and intellect. Yet it also imagines that desire can participate in and function through the categorization of intellects.

Critics have rightly observed this obscuring of characters’ interiorities, an inattention that exemplifies what Daniella Caselli calls the novel’s “anti-mimetic allegiance” (105). The novel’s rejection of psychological “depth” often de-centers objective knowledge, as suggested in an oft-quoted 1933 letter from Tyler to Ezra Pound, where Tyler claims the novel was interested not in “homo information” but in “homorendition.” He goes on to clarify that the novel’s thesis concerns “NOT whether there are any new ‘scientific’ conclusions but whether there are any new phenomena.”<sup>35</sup> The distinction between “information” and “rendition,” as well as between “conclusions” and “phenomena” dissociates representation from knowledge, but suggests also that ostensibly scientific phenomena might be viewed otherwise. In the novel, the central objects of this anti-objective gaze are Gabriel and Louis. Just before their introduction into the novel, Karel tells Julian “not to adopt” them, because “they are always acting and not very scientific” (32). In one chapter, told from Gabriel’s perspective, the narrator pauses on the “impress of derision” in Gabriel’s smile” imagined from the position of a fictive “stranger,” at which point the narrator pauses to explain that this visuality mirrors Gabriel’s own compromised objectivity. He tells us that “if it was [Gabriel’s] will to treat the lives of people objectively, hence without

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<sup>35</sup> Tyler, qtd in Sam See, “Making Modernism New: Queer Mythology in the Young and Evil,” in *Queer Natures, Queer Mythologies*, ed. Christopher Looby and Michael North (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), 206.

involving his own feelings, hence selfishly, it was his fate to be treated so by others” (79). Seeing “objectively” elides with seeing “selfishly” because, according to the narrator, the aspiration to eliminate subjective bias still requires a desiring subject.

Objectivity can be selfish. But this exchange also performs what critics have characterized as the novel’s tendency to neutralize questions of truth value by rewriting modernist experimental modes (259). As Cecire reminds us, “experimental writing does not do experiments (follow a method) but rather performs epistemic virtues.” To that extent, Ford and Tyler might be said to trouble the separation of desire from heteronormative ideals of ‘good’ knowledge.<sup>36</sup> Epistemic virtues—among which we might include psychometric virtues of accuracy, objectivity, and validity—signal the quality of statistical knowledge through an imagined consensus on the value of particular procedures and methods of sampling and data-gathering. In this text, however, as a title like *The Young and Evil* might suggest, some knowledge can be desirable without being virtuous. For Tyler, as he describes it in a later mock interview, the novel “is also still ‘evil’ because, in its rightness (not righteousness!) it is quite unconscious of piety or purity,” and furthermore “rejects labels and methods and systems, even nominal rights and privileges, in order uncompromisingly create its own individual good.”<sup>37</sup> Scientific conceptions of homosexuality may perhaps be too righteous to be part of that good. Likewise, according to Sam See, the novel rewrites modernist themes and tropes, including its obsessions with myth and folklore. By challenging elisions between myth and falsehood, the

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<sup>36</sup> See Cecire, *Experimental* 23. Ford and Tyler can be read within the tradition Cecire summarizes, as they also published writers associated with this group. For instance, a 1934 anthology edited by Tyler, called *Modern Things*, contains poems by himself, Ford, Stein and Zukofsky, and is introduced by Tyler as a collection of poets “experimentally concerned with literary idiom.” See Parker Tyler, “Introduction,” in *Modern Things*, ed. Parker Tyler (New York: Galleon Press, 1934), 5.

<sup>37</sup> The words are Tyler’s, and can be found in Stephen Watson’s introduction to the Gay Men’s Press edition of *The Young and Evil* (viii).

novel also challenges modernism's tendency to "universalize lived experience through positivist forms and heteronormative themes."<sup>38</sup> The novel's introductory lines dramatize the epistemic value of myth. "Well said the wolf to little Red Riding Hood," the opening paragraph tells us, "no sooner was Karel seated in the Round Table than the impossible happened. There before him stood a fairy prince and one of those mythological creatures known as lesbians" (11). As other critics, including See, have noted, "wolf" and "fairy" signify both myths and sexual types: the wolf being what sexologists called (using Terman's language) an "active male homosexual," ostensibly masculine, passing for (and in some cases thought of as genuinely) heterosexual. The fairy, the "passive" homosexual, is gender-inverted, non-passing, and marked as effeminate.<sup>39</sup> In offering up these types immediately as myths, the novel dismisses their significance as facts, a strategy that disentangles sexual knowledge from the performance of objectifying procedures by a normative observer.

However, these challenges to positivism and universalism, also, paradoxically, incorporate social-scientific modes of expression. Near the middle of the novel, a sequence of scenes conceptualizes an ideal of intellectual disinterestedness in which the mind of the queer artist becomes valuable for its refusal to "treat the lives of people objectively." The centerpiece of these chapters is Karel's speech on "political liberty and the artist," delivered to a crowd of queer radicals at The Round Table restaurant. In the speech, Karel divorces political struggles from the modern artist's quest to satisfy "spiritual" needs, claiming that the search for the "conceptual realization of [man's] material welfare" is secondary to the "his spiritual welfare," as superior intellects, he reasons, must want more than satisfied needs. He argues that "the artist, whose

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<sup>38</sup> See, "Making Modernism New" 198.

<sup>39</sup> This "encoding" is discussed at length by Boone (256).



mental activity goes at a greater rate of speed than the mental activity of anyone else, finds absent meals, bedless nights, and overcoatless cold are merely incidental” to thought (121). Karel’s psychophysical abstraction (the “rate of speed”) also invites quasi-statistical classifications. For the “ordinary person,” he claims, “political freedom may mean in pretty accurate substance an economic serenity.” However, this will not be enough for the “slightly above average person,” for whom “the means for the satisfaction of his desires are more complicated” (122). Abounding in the language of “accurate substance” and “average person[s],” Karel’s distinctions would seem to articulate rhetoric that betrays what Joseph Boone aptly calls “the transcendent vision of the individual artist who brings order out of chaos,” or in other words, “canonical modernism.” Karel’s speech, with its statistical image of queer artistic superiority, implies the abandonment of “queerness as a communal affiliation that cuts across and unites multiple categories of oppression,” and retreats instead into the mind of the artist.<sup>40</sup>

While, for Boone, this modernist elitism shares uncomfortably close quarters with the novel’s queer aesthetic project, I suggest that Karel’s myth of the “above average person” is also undercut by the internal non-coherence of populations in the novel. This fragmentation is foregrounded in the numerical descriptions that emerge in the characters’ many arguments over literary and poetic “value.” Following the speech, one such argument ensues. Louis claims that poetry “may have no scale of recognizable value,” an idea that, for Karel, strips “images in poetry... of their validity” (125, 126). The conversation eventually dissolves into gossip, only to re-emerge later in the chapter in an exchange between Julian and Gabriel. Julian defends “literature, the baggage now,” claiming that “a lot of fairly good work is being done presently,” while Gabriel dismisses “modern poetry,” declaring, “the point is everyone must have jobs and

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<sup>40</sup> Boone, *Libidinal Currents* 265

there are 99 competent milliners to one creative artist” (135). The numbers in this passage deserve attention. While it is common to spell out small integers and enumerate larger ones, no such consistency in numerical format obtains whatsoever in this novel (in the later drag ball chapter, “ninety-five percent” is spelled out).<sup>41</sup> A sentence from earlier on in the chapter reinforces the format inconsistency. At the party, Frederick makes a crude comment to a pair of college girls, and Karel snidely suggests he should telephone next time before coming over. In a familiar gesture, the narrator pauses here to explain that “if Frederick was 100% positive he was desirable in a room as a guest only 50% of the time he was in the room as a guest” (127). With the percentage signs, the prose short-hands interiority, rendering, as data, the ironies of the character’s misrecognitions of the social world. Gabriel’s ratio of “99 competent milliners” to “one creative artist” creates further complexities. The use of a centile scale suggests a hierarchical logic of rank, yet the ratio expresses no clear ordinal relationship, no “scale of value” between the terms.<sup>42</sup> Rather than forming consistent scales of value, these percentages tend to dissolve them.

Continually reducing poetic and literary value to dubious statistical elitisms, the characters imagine a queer enumerative aesthetic from which quantitative and modernist formalisms are detached from virtues associated with a non-desiring scientific vision. What might be called a queer genius of observation, in which quantities become signs for a desiring

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<sup>41</sup> These inconsistencies may have editorial explanations. For example, the novel has several misspelled words, which may have been typographical errors, but may also have been transcribed from letters Tyler sent to Ford, and reflect intentional format choices. Alexander Howard discusses the authors’ collaborative relationship, and points out that while “the original idea for the novel came from Ford,” “epistolary exchange” was central to the book’s composition. See Howard, *Charles Henri Ford: Between Modernism and Postmodernism*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 74

<sup>42</sup> As Guilford notes, a ranked series does not imply consistent distances between ranks; secondarily, ratios do not scale in the same manner as an ordinal set (12-17). For scaling ordinal rankings, “any transformation that will preserve order rank will leave the scale inviolate.” By contrast, “for ratio-scale measurements, there is only one kind of transformation...multiplication by a constant” (17).

intellection, emerges out of the characters' trained aesthetic sensibilities and erotic interests. Karel's on-again-off-again relationship with Louis complicates the role of erotic vision in the construction of inversion. Early on, seeing Louis convince Karel to sleep in his bed, Julian considers that "for a sexual conquest that turns out to be mutual it is not required that flattery be used by the aggressor [sic]; all that is necessary is that the object feel inferior, not in intellectual qualities but in sexual attractiveness" (68). Karel fantasizes about Louis "turning queer so beautifully gradually," but their romance dwindles as Louis fails to reciprocate his desire (124). He eventually tells Karel he isn't a "homo," mocks his femininity, and accuses him of keeping his "eyes fixed on the male symbol" (143). Here, the insults cross pathways between heteronormative intellectual ideals and theories of gender inversion. Karel, Louis claims, is "deceiving himself" for refusing to acknowledge that by chasing a (self-identified) heterosexual man, he is "approximating something," that is, womanhood (145). Accused of "destroying an illusion" of queer possibility, Louis claps back: "Destroying an illusion? Yes I am. But you ought to be above that. You're not like these other homos—you're intelligent." Louis's attacks place Karel in a double bind, since to acknowledge this intelligence would mean ceding to the facticity of his own inversion in Louis's supposedly non-desiring gaze. Not unlike the logic of the M-F studies, here gender inversion becomes a socially-embedded language for making distinctions based on arbitrarily gendered cultural virtues. Karel's distinction from other homos is measured intellectually, apart from his desires, even as that metric also nominates a specific kind of desire as a precondition for objectively describing itself. Karel can only be singled out in relation to "other homos" on from the position of a heterosexual intellect who claims to not desire him, and which he can only claim by ceding his own desire.

In these exchanges, the novel does not articulate a clear epistemic program but rather signals a queer-modernist revision of the concepts of both the intellect and the idea of the mass. In this sense, parts of the climactic scene at the drag ball might be usefully read within the context of debates over statistical sampling in sex research that began in the 1930s and which persisted well into the mid-century and beyond. Beginning in this decade, as already noted above, probability sampling gained popularity over purposive selection (that is, nonrandom sampling) because it enabled inference and generalizability. The comment that “95 percent of the world is just naturally queer” suggests something inferential about the regional and community specificity of the population. The “world” looks different when its cross section is the gay male world, the Casino Palace, or Greenwich Village. Of the latter possibility, the novel has already supplied an answer a few pages earlier in another block of fragmented prose:

picked me up on Eighth Street and did me for a Trade on Christopher Street  
some  
books aren't even read things  
about the Village because they are bound to be ninety percent  
lies there a new place called Belle's Jeans... (157)

The words “read” and “lies” are each positioned between two incomplete clauses on either side, and each supplies crucial grammatical details for both. “Read” is both a past participle (aren't even read) and an imperative verb (read things about the Village); “lies” is a plural noun that completes the imperative (ninety percent lies) and a present tense verb (lies there). That there is a missing negation (“[don't] read things about the Village”) enjoins one not to avoid lies about the Village but in fact to read them in spite of, or perhaps even because they are inaccurate. By

extension, these lines attenuate the force of “ninety five percent,” yet suggest also that the value of these numbers might lie elsewhere than accuracy.

The characters’ percentile jabs pre-empt the obsession in sexual science with measurement as a site for erotic vision linked with images of amassed bodies. One is reminded of Alfred Kinsey, who, out of a stated commitment to observe all kinds of “sexual variations,” cultivated a close circle of gay male friends, and collected many of their erotic drawings (a collection that by 1947 included several nudes by Pavel Tchelitchew, Ford’s partner from 1931 until his death).<sup>43</sup> Even in scenes of data-gathering, measurement and erotic response are not entirely separate phenomena, even when measuring is supposed to be the unsexy screen between the observer and the data. As Kinsey and Terman later traded barbs over the former’s lack of probability sampling and the latter’s test validity and his reliance on questionnaires, the rhetoric of statistical rigor increasingly placed desire at the center of negotiations of sexual knowledge. To phrase the question as Hegarty does, “how can knowledge be made to appear independent of the character of the scientist who produces it?” The two scientists probably never met in person, as Hegarty observes. Still, Terman “could not imagine,” in Hegarty’s words, “how [Kinsey’s] patterns might emerge faithfully from the sexual histories without the undue influence of the interviewers.”<sup>44</sup> Kinsey championed interviews precisely because he thought they could get more honest responses, with researchers asking questions like “yes, I know you have never done that, but how old were you the first time that you did it?”<sup>45</sup> Likewise, he objects to Terman’s use of

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<sup>43</sup> A brief account of this archive, and a selection of works by Tchelitchew and others, including George Platt Lynes and Paul Cadmus, can be found in the recent (and aptly titled) art book, *The Young and Evil: Queer Modernism In New York*, ed. Jarret Earnest (New York: David Zwirner Books, 2019), 36-46. The curations were based on a 2019 exhibition of the same name.

<sup>44</sup> Hegarty, *Gentlemen’s Disagreement* 91, 97.

<sup>45</sup> Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* 55

questionnaires, and scrutinizes some of Terman and Miles' estimates, which were based on hearsay.<sup>46</sup> Statistical debates on sexuality often imagine a desiring subject (intellectually compromised and potentially queer) as a kind of evil twin of the normal and objective scientific intellect. In the novel, the selfishness accorded to objectivity is also signaled by the characters' attachments to lies. In one of the novel's most surreal exchanges, following Karel's break-up with Louis, Julian comforts Karel by dismissing ideals of happiness as mass delusion. Karel claims that happiness is "being not knowing," but Julian dismisses him, calling it "impossible." He then tells Karel, in a cryptic comment, "the amount of stupidity is never equaled by the amount of elimination by the individual intellect" (174). The formulaic proportioning of "amounts" renders this delusion too large for "elimination"--but elimination of what? Desire? Happiness? As the exchange goes on, this form of inadequate self-divestiture also attaches to rubrics of homo/hetero difference. Karel tells Julian he does not love him, but rather claims to love Julian's unrequited feelings, which he calls a "minor pathology" (175). He calls Julian "selfish," in an echo of the narrator's harsh words to Gabriel—objectivity is selfish—but he also amends his idea of love to accommodate, somewhat uncomfortably, forms of sameness. "I do love you," he tells Julian, "but only because you do not disturb me, you face the way I do and you are moving in that direction" (175). While this appears at first like a repetition of Louis's inversion discourse, the vectors of attraction and repulsion are also uneven. If the two imagine a minority discourse, here it is one defined through sameness, rather than cross-gender identification. Julian finds this explanation "too sterile," a complaint Karel likens to his own feeling of artistic alienation, of existing in "a great coarse essentially foreign world in which only the *objets d'art* seem friendly, seem able to walk and talk with me." Julian replies with a

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 618

fragment: “When you think of the *number* of superfluous but exact people”—but does not finish the sentence, leaving this mass image floating free, like the sentence fragments at the drag ball (176, emphasis added). Desire and intellection are never disentangled, but rather articulated through the characters’ imagined relationships to a queer, dubiously numbered mass.

In this and other exchanges, Ford and Tyler provide one rejoinder to statistical expressions of inversion theory. In the Terman-Miles studies and the other M-F studies that followed in their wake, homosexual types were categorized and measured through by correlating sexual acts and identities with social interests and cultural preferences. By contrast, for Ford and Tyler, this kind of “homo-information” might be “ninety percent / lies.” Yet lies, as I have argued, also signal aesthetics and desire. Karel initially breaks up with Louis because he has been spreading lies that Karel has been “whoring” for him. But the attachment to illusion, as I have shown, also animates an attraction to Louis’s heterosexuality. The erotics of deception and truth ultimately drive the characters toward each other once more in the novel’s final chapter. In a cryptic scene in Gabriel’s bedroom, “an ordinary bedroom, for two,” Karel admits he still loves Louis (211). But Louis “think[s] that’s a lie” because Karel refuses to give him money and shelter. He then forces Karel to strip, then kisses and bites him, presumably as a prelude to sex. The bite the resulting scream could return us the novel’s first sentence, framing Louis as the nominally heterosexual “wolf,” and Karel as Little Red Riding Hood. But here Louis’s desire also reverses the gendered ideals of the mythical figures—he desires Karel, but his desires are channeled through Karel’s clothing, encapsulated in Louis’s repeated utterance, “I think I want that suit” (215). Desire for men’s clothes and identification through men’s clothes supplies one final image of “Louis turning queer,” suggesting that desire’s fluidity creates many vectors that point outside the confines of opposite-sex identifications. Yet the novel also returns to the

numerical specificity of dyadic relationships, of paired identities in which the “number of superfluous but exact people” overdetermines the construction of identity categories. The lack of narrative closure marks the end of inversion theory as a kind of unfinished business, highlighting the ongoing role of the numerical in the revision of homo/hetero difference that would obtain the following decades. As Djuna Barnes’s novel shows, the problem of inversion is the problem of the quantified body as such.

“*We All Love In Sizes*”

Barnes’s response to Ford and Tyler’s novel— “nobody but a genius, or Mr. Ford and Mr. Tyler, could have written it”—imagines that sexual differences might signify, by analogy, differences in literary or aesthetic value. The accusation that their characters destroy “emotional values,” highlights Ford and Tyler’s refusal, in their book, to recognize any “scale of value” that might stabilize categorical distinctions. In *Nightwood*, however, a similar problem of scale haunts the text’s thematic registers. The narrative revolves around the relationship of two women, Nora and Robin, who become lovers, separate, and then meet again. In the second half of the novel, three long chapters bring this narrative to a sudden halt through the extended diatribes of Matthew O’Connor, as he comforts the two characters, Felix and Nora, whom Robin has jilted. I want to focus in particular on O’Connor’s monologues, reading their thematic preoccupation with size and scale as yet another register in which desire and intellection serve a queer enumerative aesthetic. Far from invoking Eliot’s rejection of abnormality, O’Connor invokes the language of numerical classification in order to distend the relation between desire and categorization.<sup>47</sup> On

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<sup>47</sup> For more on O’Connor’s poetics and its relation to Eliot, see Ed Madden, *Tiresian Poetics: Modernism, Sexuality, Voice, 1881-2001* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2008). Madden argues that O’Connor’s appeals to universality



first being introduced to Felix Volkbein in the opening chapter, O'Connor describes his time in Austria via a biometric image of schoolchildren, telling Felix, "youth is cause, effect is age; so with the thickening of the neck we get data" (16). Felix responds by touting Austria's "military superiority, its great names," setting the pattern of missed significances in the two characters' interactions, which center on historical and bodily concepts of scale. Images of tallness, thickness, and size become, for both characters, a language through which to imagine queer masses as fundamentally divided along numerical lines between bodies, acts, and identities.

Yet these metaphors, as O'Connor lays bare, also highlight the racializing process whereby quantified sexualities came to signal the virtues of eugenic thought. As for Felix, O'Connor later comments to a mutual acquaintance, Frau Mann, that when he sees Felix next, he will tell him a story about King Ludwig II of Bavaria, a historical figure who indexes both his and Felix's desires, though in different ways. O'Connor's suggests as much when he narrates his inquiry about the size of the king's genitals:

"Up there in the palace there's an attendant wandering the great empty rooms...He said the king was so tall that he himself, six foot three, had to stand on the tips of his shoes to get at his tie. So suddenly I myself rose up on tip-toes, right in the middle of that great fine room, and whispered, 'Was he large?' and it went echoing and bellowing through all those rooms like a great bull getting madder and madder the harder he ran... I stood there all dumbfounded, my eyes

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echo and repurpose appeals from Eliot in the introduction to Barnes's novel to his poetics of "impersonality," as he articulates in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." For Madden, Dr. O'Connor becomes an "Eliotic poet, sensitive to those around him, but transforming their particular pain (and his own) into something more 'profound' and 'universal'," meaning, Madden concludes, that Barnes "thought of O'Connor in Tiresian — and also Eliotic — terms" (13, 191).

getting frightened, and he said, ‘Oh very!’ but did he know what I meant or was he thinking of character?” (25).

The innuendo, amid both numeral and qualitative descriptions of size, indexes multiple logics of scale. This episode also recalls and extends the doctor’s ekphrastic description of “Nikka the nigger” from earlier on in the same chapter, who, O’Connor notes, “couldn’t have done a thing (and I know what I am talking about, in spite of all that has been said about the black boys) if you had stood him in a gig mill for a week, though (it’s said) at a stretch it spelled Desdemona” (14). These body-measurements explicitly draw on nineteenth-century racial science, in which myths about genital size were applied, as Somerville shows, to both men’s and women’s bodies. Just as blackface minstrelsy popularized the stereotypes O’Connor invokes, racialized descriptions of black women’s genitals “literalized the racial and sexual ideologies of the nineteenth-century ‘Cult of true Womanhood,’ which explicitly privileged women’s sexual purity’ while implicitly suggesting African American women’s sexual accessibility.”<sup>48</sup> O’Connor’s macroscopy, oscillating between engorgement and shrinkage, might be said to parody, even as it reproduces, pseudoscientific taxonomies and anthropometric myths about racial and sexual categories. In the description of Ludwig, sharing sexual secrets undercuts Felix’s patriarchal concept of “great” and “large” men and his “obsession for what he termed ‘Old Europe’: Aristocracy, nobility, royalty” (9). Images of scale are thus hinted at, at in some cases specified, but never fully concretized. Several of these figures appear as he tries to persuade Nora to move on from Robin in the middle chapters. “Suppose your heart were five feet across,” he tells her in “Go Down, Matthew,” and asks, “Would you hurl yourself into any body of water, in the size you now are, for a woman you had to look for with a magnifying glass?” —

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<sup>48</sup> Somerville, *Queering the Color Line* 28.

only to answer his own question, as he often does: “No, we all love in sizes, yet we all cry out in tiny voices to the great booming God, the older we get.”

These scalar descriptions form and dissolve categories of persons on the basis of figurative (as opposed to numerical fantasies of “literal”) size distinctions. For O’Connor, these figurative qualities of numbers can also aggregate bodies. In the first of the three O’Connor chapters, Nora comes to O’Connor’s apartment and asks him to tell her “everything [he] know[s] about the night” (69). Mid excursus, the doctor offers a striking image to describe his experiences with anonymous sex at Paris’s public toilets:

“And do you think that those circular cottages of delight have not brought me to great argument? Have you ever glanced at one when the night was well down, and seen it and what it looked like and what it resembled most, with its one coping and a hundred legs? A centipede. And you look down and choose your feet, and, ten to one, you find that you have picked a bird with a light wing, or an old duck with a wooden knee, or something that has been mournful for years” (78).

This image recalls the later (deleted) line about the bricklayer and the bugger, if only for the repeated decimal scale: a hundred legs, a hundred bricks. That many legs might imply fifty men. But one need only think of old statistical jokes that play on cis-normative bodies, (such as “the average human has one testicle”) to recognize the way O’Connor’s image cuts across relationships between parts and wholes. His probabilistic language (“ten to one”) of the bird and the wooden knee moreover implies that legs and feet need not indicate anything at all about relations between quantified bodies and mass images. The centipede obscures the possibility of seeing beyond the legs, yet also consolidates all of the bodies into a singular metaphor for

desiring mass. In doing so, it manages to both aggregate and obfuscate the content of what it describes.

As these quantified bodies signify O'Connor's claims to expertise, they often obscure epistemic particularity. In his consoling conversation with Nora in the chapter, "Watchman, What of the Night?" the descriptions of crowds intensify the role of pleasure in the sharing of information about bodies. Among the anonymous throngs that populate O'Connor's night world, these numbers also furnish evidence for a demographic description of Paris on the basis of racial type, region, and genital size. He describes a scene of demographic debate over this question, "about the particular merits of one district over another for such things, of one cottage over another for such things," claiming the best tearooms are to be found at the *Place de la Bastille*, where "they come as handsome as *mortadellas* slung on the table" (78, 80). But the idea gets him "torn into parts by a hundred voices,—each of them pitched in a different *arrondissement*, until I began clapping like the good woman in the shoe, and screaming for silence." He then asks the anonymous crowd "Do any of you know anything about atmosphere and sea level?... Sea level and atmospheric pressure and topography make all the difference in the world!" (78-79). The "hundred voices" quickly become an audience for his own voice, which "crack[s] on the word 'difference,' soaring up divinely" (79). O'Connor professes to know the "difference" through a variety of climatological metrics that end up mystifying what that difference might mean beyond signaling that he knows the difference, and his listeners do not. "Your *gourmet*," he goes on, "knows for instance from what water his fish was snatched" and can distinguish "one truffle from another and whether it be Brittany root or if it came down from the north" (80). In his descriptions of crowds, and bodies, both scalar modifiers and numbers themselves perform these on-the-fly productions of racial and sexual distinction, a version of what Sedgwick has called

“nonce taxonomies.” Yet in these exchanges, O’Connor’s own desires also create models of sexual generalization that separate racial and sexual categories from the individual bodies they mark.

The doctor’s preoccupation with genital size also emerges in self-descriptions that are often diminutive, as in “Matthew-mighty-grain-of-salt-Dante-O’Connor” and “a little child with my eyes wide open” (70, 81); this applies, perhaps most importantly, to his own penis, whom he names “Tiny O’Toole” (111). These descriptions highlight the totalizing force of genitality in sexual inversion discourse, one version of which took the form of body measurement studies, which inherited their methodologies from the context of scientific racism described by Somerville and others. Sexual anthropometry itself goes back well into the nineteenth century, but the quantitative turn in sexology also sparked a number of these studies (including portions of the Terman-Miles study) in the 1920s and 30s. Sexologists debated whether slight differences in body measurements across samples of “homosexual” and “normal” populations were statistically significant, and whether they might signify forms of what psychiatrist Joseph Wortis called “intersexual traits” (1125).<sup>49</sup> The application of quantitative procedures to inversion theory complicated narratives of homosexuality as *anima muliebris in corpore virilis inclusa* (a woman’s mind in a man’s body) insofar as minds and bodies now furnished multiple co-imblicated metrics whose meanings were constantly in flux. Yet these metrics also produced sexual meanings in which deviance was marked upon, and by, non-white bodies. In *Nightwood*, by contrast, numbers tend to separate racialized bodies into parts. In “Go Down, Matthew,” for

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<sup>49</sup> Wortis disagreed with the conclusions of Medical doctors Hugh Galbraith and George Henry (1934), who claimed that “many of the homosexual males [in the sample] have a feminine carrying angle of the arm, large muscles, deficient hair on the face, chest, and back, a high-pitched voice, small penis and testicles and the presence of a scrotal fold” (1255). Their procedures involved very little actual measurement, relying mostly on researchers’ *impressions* of size (“large” or “small”). By contrast, Wortis (1937) argued “the actual evidence for any constant or typical intersexual traits among male homosexuals is still wanting” (1125).

example, O'Connor describes a memory from his experience serving in the First World War, where he encounters "a dead horse that had been lying long against the ground," such that "time and the birds, and its own last concentration had removed the body a great way from the head" (107-108). The body becomes, for O'Connor, a "missing quantity," one that makes the head "heavier," with a "memory of its weight" (108).

This splitting imagines subjectivity as both bifurcated and distended, and suggests, as Emma Heaney puts it, that "the self is internally divided in Barnesian writing, and so no identity of a coherent 'particular' is possible to prove a representation of the 'general' division that constitutes them in their morphology" (147).<sup>50</sup> Thus O'Connor's quantifying descriptions could be said to consistently perform the splitting of measurable parts from categorical wholes, freezing them in a suspended state of non-relation. This condition of non-correspondence between bodily particularities and big-tent concepts of identity might be thought of historically in relation to the problem of the "missing quantity." For Heaney, the splitting signals Barnes's universalizing account of feminine pain signaled through O'Connor's trans-femininity. My own account focuses on homosexuality rather than trans identity, but insofar as early-twentieth century discourses of sexual inversion, more often than not, failed to disentangle sex and sexuality from one another (as sets of acts or identifications), I am arguing that O'Connor's "missing quantity" could productively signal both discourses. It is through these distorting effects that O'Connor's numbers also fracture the surveying gaze of inversion discourses, which collapse gender and sexuality together. Rather, O'Connor suggests, numbers signify what

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<sup>50</sup> See Emma Heaney, *The New Woman: Literary Modernism, Queer Theory, and the Trans Feminine Allegory* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017). Examining this body-mind split as part of what she terms the trans feminine allegory, Heaney uses she/her pronouns throughout her study, arguing that O'Connor (whom Barnes based on her trans feminine friend Dan Mahoney) exemplifies a material history of trans identity renovated under modernism. While I find Heaney's account deeply compelling, I have opted to preserve, for the sake of readerly convenience, the pronouns as written in the text.

O'Connor envisions as the contingency of taxonomies as languages for categorizing and measuring the erotic.

Signaling both totalization and division, “the night,” with its anonymous masses, is seductive to O'Connor not just for its universalizing potential but for its creation of non-assimilable particularities. He tells Nora, “even the greatest generality has a little particular; have you thought of that? A high price is demanded of any value, for a value is in itself a detachment” (76). In imagining the night as an erotic zone of identity-stripping and detachment, O'Connor's numbers line these uncountable particulars with a protective anonymity that enables both desire and identification.<sup>51</sup> In equal measure, however, this denuding of quantities is also coextensive with his claims to have “known everyone” and everything (136). It is often when his monologues are most inflated that O'Connor performs his own smallness and insignificance. In negotiating between these two positions—I know everything, I am nothing—O'Connor brings into focus the stereogram effect created by statistical sexualities in their oscillations between information and noise. The force of this kind of selfish visibility is to elevate the moments where aggregated pluralities no longer correspond to the individuals, or to the divided bodies, that comprise them.

For Barnes, O'Connor's measurements figures become the stress points of identities themselves, but often in ways that reconjure the pathologizing vision of sexological discourse. As Barnes scholars may recognize, certain of O'Connor's scalar visions are also hinted at in the writing of surgeon Alexis Carrel, whose bestselling eugenics tract, *Man, The Unknown* (1935),

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<sup>51</sup> One might read these desires selfishly, as enabling forms of negativity and masochistic self-shattering often associated with the “antisocial thesis” in queer studies. Reading accounts of *Nightwood* against more redemptive narratives, Brian Glavey helpfully suggests that the novel “offers a vocabulary for talking about queerness, modernism, and the aesthetic that is less Manichean, and consequently more useful, terms” than negativity versus affirmation. See Glavey, “Dazzling Estrangement: Modernism, Queer Ekphrasis, and the Spatial Form of ‘Nightwood.’” *PMLA* 124, no. 3, (2009): 751. Likewise, O'Connor's numbers, unmoored from the compensatory and redemptive values of good data, might be turned, perversely, into an instrument of pleasure, even as they also gesture at forms of universalism and collective possibility.

Barnes read, according to biographer Phillip Herring, “with great pleasure and excitement” while editing *Nightwood* at Hayford Hall (219).<sup>52</sup> Carrel’s book is now known mostly for its advocacy of eugenic social policies and scientific fascism. My aim is to highlight the way problems of scale animate both texts, not as evidence for a narrative of influence leading directly from Carrel to Barnes (as the timeline wouldn’t really make sense), but as two contemporaneous reactions to biometric discourse in the mid 1930s. Marked at times by an outsized emphasis on anti-quantitative rhetoric, several passages in Carrel’s book digress on what he calls “the tyranny of the quantitative,” the scientific veneration of measurement in physics and chemistry at the expense of qualitative methods, which ascribes to biology and anthropology. Against this, he claims that “in man, the things which are not measurable are more important than those which are measurable.”<sup>53</sup> (205). At the same time, ground is ceded to metrics when necessary. “Intelligence,” he tells us, “measurable by appropriate techniques,” but those techniques reveal only the “conventional aspect of the mind” and “do not give an accurate idea of intellectual value” (97-98). These values are also rigidly gendered and homophobic. “Sexes again have to be clearly defined,” he claims in the book’s final pages, meaning “each individual should be either male or female, and never manifest the sexual tendencies, mental characteristics, and ambitions of the opposite sex” (230). By contrast, *Nightwood* disrupts the concept of inversion, as Carrel

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<sup>52</sup> According to Mary Lynn Broe, Barnes’s admiration might have been misplaced, resting on a misinterpretation of Carrel’s “integrated ‘science of man’ [as] a female superiority and the revolution of all women artists through their bodies.” See Mary Lynn Broe, “My Art Belongs to Daddy: Incest as Exile, The Textual Economics of Hayford Hall,” in *Women’s Writing In Exile*, ed. Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 65. Altman provides another important response to this context, suggesting that while the novel “does not give an alternative to the eugenic discourse. . . the explanations it provides are incomplete.” See Meryl Altman, “A Book of Repulsive Jews? Rereading *Nightwood*,” *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 13, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 166.

<sup>53</sup> Alexis Carrel, *Man, The Unknown*: 205



articulates it, while still situating sexual queerness within discourses of racial decline.<sup>54</sup>As Dana Seitler incisively summarizes, “*Nightwood* willfully reimagines the terms of sexual inversion at the same time that...it redeploys them in yet another degeneration narrative” (116).<sup>55</sup> In other words, degeneration, along with eugenics, supplies the logic whereby the novel undercuts sexological knowledge. Insofar as quantities, in *Nightwood*, often dissolve categorical wholes, the novel responds to the same cultural imaginaries as Carrel, juxtaposing anxieties over racial degeneration with the pluralizing force of statistical procedures.

The chapter “Where the Tree Falls” foregrounds these linguistic linkages between O’Connor’s concepts of scale and Felix’s longing for the past, as well as to the discursive regimes of twentieth-century psychometry. Much of this section focuses on Felix’s and Robin’s son, Guido, whom the narrator tells us is “mentally deficient, and emotionally excessive, an addict to death; at ten, barely as tall as a child of six, wearing spectacles, stumbling when he tried to run” (90-91). Again, stature emerges to fill in information about character. For Felix, this link to Robin is also a problem of scale. He tells O’Connor, “the more we learn of a person, the less we know,” and compares this condition to learning about buildings in places one has never been. Using the example of a cathedral in Chartres, he admits an inability to compare “the relative heights of the cathedral and the lives of its population in proportion” because when he tries to think of it, “the deed will measure as high as the building; just as children who have little

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<sup>54</sup> Jane Marcus has argued that *Nightwood* articulates “the political unconscious of the rise of fascism” by forming a literary coalition of “lesbians, blacks, circus people, Jews, and transvestites—outsiders all” (161). For more on the relationship between *Nightwood* and fascism, see Erin G. Carlston. *Thinking Fascism: Sapphic Modernism and Fascist Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998). The novel can also be read, as Carlston has demonstrated, as an ambivalent “flirtation” with fascist aesthetics; but he concludes that “*Nightwood*’s relationship to fascism is unstable,” insofar as it, like fascism, “pos[es] a fascination, seductive, and perilous challenge to those of us who approach it again and again, armed with every critical weapon at our disposal” (34).

<sup>55</sup> As Somerville likewise points out, “the denaturalization of one identity category is often achieved through a renaturalization of another category” (175).

knowledge of life will draw a man and a barn on the same scale.” O’Connor replies, in another parody of the language of historical scale, that Felix’s “devotion to the past... is perhaps like a child’s drawing” (94). Yet in the passage as a whole, Guido’s mind also becomes O’Connor’s answer to the disjuncture between different models of scale—architectural, chronological psychometric, historical. By his own measure, Felix describes his son’s “deficiency” as a kind of precocity, noting “he is not cruel or savage... a child who is mature, in the sense that the heart is mature, is always, I have observed, called deficient” (98). Rather than normalize Guido, O’Connor suggests that Felix is “in the presence of the ‘maladjusted,’” he explains, and clarifies that he is “not using that word in the derogatory sense at all, in fact my great virtue is that I never use the derogatory in the usual sense” (99). The unusual sense, we gather, is that Guido has a potentiality whose content remains cloaked in obscurity: “a mind like his may be more apt than yours or mine.” Conjuring specters of the gifted child as queer genius, he argues that “an unknown room and a known room is always smaller than an unknown” (102). In this manner, non-typical minds furnish a rhetorical space of illegibility replete, for O’Connor, with queer possibility.

As Kathryn Bond Stockton points out, Guido is “a boy whose innocence, as a sickly holiness, makes him fully strange—and estranged from adults” in that he is rendered queer in relation to his mother’s own inversion and his father’s heterosexuality.<sup>56</sup> “Where The Tree Falls” accomplishes this estrangement by disaggregating statistical representations of queerness and eugenic conceptions of sexual development and ability. There is much in O’Connor’s remark to Felix that “in the average person is the peculiar that has been scuttled, and in the peculiar the ordinary that has been sunk” (102). This description pits two models of normativity against one

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<sup>56</sup> See Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child: Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 93.

another. As I argued in my introduction, descriptive challenges emerged from the capacities of quantities to both prescribe the norm as the ideal, or to describe it as something to be improved. This distinction was also central, as Hegarty points out, to Terman's scheme of intellectual norms, insofar "the Galtonian scheme of normativity also allows for positive descriptions of atypical people who embody ideals," including those minds that appeared to reflect the non-desiring intellect of the scientist (38-39). Against this, O'Connor borrows from eugenic logic in order to idealize Guido's mind as a space of indeterminism. He insists to Felix that his son "is what you have always been looking for—Aristocracy," a comment that might forge hereditary links between Guido's "holy decay" and Robin's inversion (102). Yet the logic is also double-edged. When he re-tells the episode to the ex-priest in "Go Down, Matthew," O'Connor changes the narrative's meaning: "Felix said to me, 'Is the child infirm?' I said, 'Was the Mad King of Bavaria infirm?'" (133). Here the joke about Guido representing "aristocracy" elevates the very same qualities that mark his decline. O'Connor anticipates this when he declares in his very first line of dialogue, "we"—by which we might read any number of identifications across schemes of race and sexuality—"may all be nature's noblemen" (13). The dialectical description of norms shuttles Guido's mind into a space of probabilistic uncertainty—he urges Felix to treat "that boy's mind like a bowl picked up in the dark; you do not know what's in it" (102). What tracks across the temporal gap between king Ludwig and Guido is a metaphor of scale—the measurable as index of both history and sexuality.

In these scalar descriptions, identity gets fractured along the fault lines that separate the measurable from the objective. In the abysses created through empty numbers, O'Connor's monologues locate queer potentialities whose meanings emerge at the limits of numerical coherence, even as connections between measurement and queerness remain severed.

Quantification, for Barnes, becomes a formal principle of splitting and disaggregation. Even the doctor, who admits he has “given [his] destiny away by garrulity, like ninety per cent of everybody else,” is eventually taken apart by such expenditures (78). As he is led, in the penultimate chapter, from the bar where he has gotten “drunk as a fiddler’s bitch,” he shouts that he has “told [his life] for nothing,” a word he repeats in the chapter’s final lines. “Now,” he said, “the end—mark my words—now *nothing but wrath and weeping!*” (136, emphasis in original). The grammar suggests not total absence but remainder. What gets left over is perhaps the “missing quantity,” a queer version of Carrel’s scientific “residues” that cannot be assimilated into quantitative generalization. After three chapters of agglomerating, sweeping visions of the night, the doctor himself becomes an exemplar of ungeneralizable particularity.

Like other novels in this study, these two texts turn to style as a means of frustrating narrative closure. These dormancies and temporary discontinuations do not reproduce normality as return or extension. Rather, they signal an ongoing negotiation of the boundaries of a historical present imagined through the atomized stability of quantity. While *The Young and Evil* finds in percentile representations a vantage for aestheticizing the intellect of a non-objective and erotically invested artist, *Nightwood* generates moments where the non-correspondence of bodies and masses can estrange ideals of sexual knowledge and scale. These novels suggest, however, that quantification need not always lead to clarity, accuracy, or objectivity, but may in fact signal aesthetic and sexual values normally ejected from scientific procedure. Reading quantitative representations in this way allows us to frame them historically as both epistemic commitments and formalist aspirations. Divorced from their obligation to be factual, numbers might signal modernist annihilations of both norms and identities, but not in ways that resemble contemporary

approaches to anti-normativity. In a recent essay on mid-century deviance studies, Heather Love has argued that sociological methods of description may inform queer studies in ways that have been obscured by anti-normative queer theory. Her turn to this archive invites a closer examination of disciplinary procedures in the construction of queerness. What she calls the “queer ordinary,” a recognition of the disciplinary normality of anti-normativity queer studies, articulates a position from which to critique “the heroic antinormative” as a position of absolute refusal.<sup>57</sup> I have been arguing something similar, though from an earlier, and historically distinct vantage, seeking not a genealogical connection between sociology and queer studies, but a historicism of presumed alliances between statistics, heterosexuality and normativity in the U.S. during the period prior to Kinsey. In this chapter, I have argued that, while many queer modernists turned to quantities in order to rewrite the meanings of sexual normality, others saw quantities as a means of deforming the epistemic basis of normality as such. Quantitative forms themselves need not signal the normalizing energies against which queer studies is typically defined. Rather, by pulling our attention to the role of desire in the construction of social categories, these forms may in fact point to the historicity of relations between the literary, the sexual, and the numerical.

More to the point, these works’ distortions of statistical epistemologies do not serve a computational function but rather an aesthetic one. They form part of a historically specific response to the demographic rewriting of inversion theory through psychometric, biometric and eugenic thought. To an extent, these discourses also marked the beginning of the end for the disciplinary vogue of inversion theory, as it was at least partially on statistical grounds that Kinsey’s tendentious model of widespread same-sex attraction won out in the shift toward mid-

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<sup>57</sup> See Love, “Doing Being Deviant” 91

century assimilationist discourse and object-based models of homo/hetero identity. These two novels anticipate these shifts by dramatizing the undermining of quantitative rhetoric on inversion. But just as importantly, they are also marked by modernist endorsements of an absolute elevation of form above content. Telling lies with statistics, as these texts do, highlights the circulation of sexual knowledge and desire in both scientific and literary history.

The queer ordinary also signals the recent affective and critical energies surrounding a (by no means unitary or coherent) set of anti-normative frames that have emerged to historicize non-normative sexuality under capitalist modernity. The texts considered in this project recall the affective genres that Lauren Berlant has described via her distinction between modernist, urban everyday life and the “stretched out present” that thickens a temporality she calls “crisis ordinariness.”<sup>58</sup> Formalist accounts of queerness linked with defamiliarization tend to reproduce what Berlant understands as the former category: an aesthetics of shock and interruption linked with urban anomie. However, I have instead read the quantitative imaginaries in these texts, their dwelling in suspended states of ordinary queerness, in relation to the temporalities and historicities that emerged in tandem with modernist normalities. It is worth placing the discursive avalanche of data on sexuality within an inter-crisis temporality, one based in both anticipation and a desire for a history of the normal that could serve as a genre of its extension. The emergence of a model of homo/hetero difference based in object choice rather than inversion emerged unevenly from this context of quantitative sex research, but it also required the discursive fortification of a heterosexual identity commensurate with a perceived crisis in the U.S. nation state, particularly after the First World War. I have argued that the construction of statistical sexualities in this period generated forms through which literary texts negotiated

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<sup>58</sup> See Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 8-10.

modes of sexual definition. A stable ground for object-choice models of sexuality was not a categorical given but a contested space in which identities were regulated through biopower. In this context, numerical representations of sexuality may in fact reside closer than we have imagined to the literary archives of queer modernism.

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