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Momma's Boy: Queer Masculinity and Cross-Gender Identitfication in U.S. Modernism

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ABSTRACT

Momma's Boy: Queer Masculinity and Cross-Gender Identification in U.S. Modernism traces a particular strand of non-normative masculinity in three major works of early 20th century American fiction: Willa Cather's *One of Ours* (1922), Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), and Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923). Putting a twist on the traditional, Oedipal paradigm of male artistic growth, Cather, Anderson, and Toomer imagine the writer as growing, in the spirit of emotional communion, to resemble his own mother. Drawing on psychoanalytic feminists and queer theorists who explore the roots of normative masculinity and the wellsprings of possible alternatives, I argue that these authors value a form of male subjectivity that feels across the gender divide and that displays attributes conventionally associated with women, particularly emotional vulnerability. They represent this subjectivity as enabled by recognizing and identifying with women as creative, autonomous subjects. In their accounts, the capacity to be open to women in this way begins with the mother, specifically in the male artist's connection to her capacity for creative self-realization as well as the suffering she has endured under a binary gender system. By seeing this form of male subjectivity as viable, these authors show themselves to be emblematic of a modernist sub-tradition that overcomes the despair about unconventional forms of male desire to which many modernists surrendered. In this way, *Momma's Boys* expands our understanding of the gender politics of American modernism. It shows us, in short, that the depiction of non-normative masculinity as destined for extinction, the fatalistic version of the story of modern

manhood made popular by writers like F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway, was only one impulse within a contested literary movement.

INTRODUCTION

This is a dissertation about the avenues and obstacles to queer masculinity in early twentieth-century America. It is an exploration of men who want to be alive to the longings and wounds in others and themselves, who seek out love with women and other men based on mutual dependence and reciprocity, and who acknowledge these capacities as central to their ability to lead free and fulfilling lives. It is also investigation into the historical and psychological dynamics that train men to reject these capacities as weak and "unmanly" and to enshrine and embrace toxic forms of masculinity rooted in inflated notions of toughness, virility, and dominance, and in a phobic repudiation of traits and comportments the dominant culture defines as "feminine" or "gay." The dissertation contends that some literature enables us to see the catastrophic impact of these dynamics on the lives of men and women and to conceive of ways of resisting these dynamics. It argues that the power of this literature lies not only in its critique of toxic and phobic masculinity, but in its insistence that there are men who can refuse the imposition of such masculinity even in cultural periods that enforce misogynistic and homophobic male gender norms.

The dissertation focuses on a set of authors—Willa Cather, Sherwood Anderson, and Jean Toomer—who produced this kind of literature. These authors participated in an early 20th century literary movement we now call modernism, a movement that emerged in the U.S. in the wake of changes in the sex-gender system and, in particular, in normative conceptions of male gender identity. As historians of masculinity have argued, in the late 18th and early 19th century, most Americans extolled women (mothers and teachers) as the repository of virtues such as carnal self-restraint, empathy, and

compassion. They saw these traits as integral to manhood, as a civilizing counter to natural male aggression and as crucial in tempering and channeling the unbridled passions associated with boyhood into socially constructive adult male behavior. American men lived in a culture of separate spheres in which their exclusive access to the public domain and autonomy outside the home encouraged them to believe they could assimilate these "feminine" traits without undermining their essential manliness. But by the middle of the 19th century they began to feel that their privilege was under assault from an array of social and economic transformations, including rising immigration, the bureaucratization of male labor, an increasing emphasis on leisure and comfort, and, especially, the growing social presence and power of women, who were beginning to demand equal rights, to enter into the wage-earning workforce, and to breach the traditionally male domains of politics and cultural production. These transformations spurred a crisis in male gender identity, as growing numbers of men experienced deep anxieties about gender difference and started to see the influence of women as an unmanning restraint to male virility rather than a valued means of self-control. As a result, men sought to secure their manliness by enforcing a more rigidly binary division between male and female gender traits. In place of the older notion of "manhood," which integrated traits associated with women in order to reign in the wild passions of boyhood, men started to adopt an emergent conception of "masculinity" that required them to denigrate and repudiate the "feminine" qualities previously thought to be crucial in men, and to embrace exaggerated notions of primality, aggression, and dominance as the core features of normative male selfhood.[1]

During the same period, American men also defined themselves increasingly in

opposition to homosexual men. Early in the 20th century, visible gay male subcultures began to surface in major cities in the U.S. At this time, the dominant public image of gay male life was that of the "fairy": men who adopted femininity as a style and public marker of homosexuality. The stigmatized image of the fairy expressed men's fears about feminization. The fairy was an especially threatening figure because he openly embraced and eroticized the femininity most men were anxiously trying to disavow. He also appeared--under discourses of sexual inversion that conceptualized male homosexuals as fundamentally female, as men with women's souls-- to embody men's potential to be invaded by essentially feminine characteristics. Men who strived to be normatively masculine thus felt the urge to contain the threat of inversion, and they did so by phobically rejecting intimate friendships with other men and various forms of male same-sex interaction (especially those involving physical and emotional tenderness) that opened them to the charge of homosexuality and feminization.

I argue, here, that the modernist writers Cather, Anderson, and Toomer are crucial to a historical and psychoanalytic understanding of the emergent male gender norms. These authors were born into the rapidly changing sex/gender regime at the turn of the century. They came into their own as artists as the older model of manhood that incorporated "feminine" traits was fading and the more starkly binarized masculinity took hold in U.S. culture. They offer us several key insights about the impact of this period of transition. Foremost, they show us that men's adoption of a standard of masculinity that was strictly opposed to comportments associated with women and homosexuals was not only a conscious response to threatening social changes but a tendency anchored in deep psychological fears about women and non-normative male desire. In their novels and

stories, men formed these fears starting in their earliest experiences of love and identification, through culturally shaped processes of subject formation that installed a terror of sexual difference—and, especially, of the vulnerability, abjection, and impotence associated with women--at the deepest level of psyche. These authors saw the process that Freud and subsequent psychoanalytic thinkers have called Oedipalization as the central, familial mechanism that installs this terror in boys by perpetuating the perception of women as a potentially annihilating threat to male individuality against which they must defend themselves. The need for that defense compels men to repudiate women as possible objects of identification and to embrace patriarchal masculinity as a way to consolidate their hold on the agency and power denied to women. Cather, Anderson, and Toomer offer us stories in which they acknowledge the devastating toll of Oedipalized masculinity on the lives of men and women. They represent this masculinity as brutalizing and suppressing women as well as libidinally non-normative men. They also show us how men who embody this masculinity foreclose their own capacity to see and love women as full subjects, to love other men, and to be emotionally attuned to the pain and longing of others as well as themselves.

But, importantly, Cather, Anderson, and Toomer offer us stories in which men are also able to refuse Oedipalization--to sustain their identifications with women and to reject dominatory manhood. Their fictions demonstrate that those who refuse Oedipal fantasies about women are able to remain open and alive those subjective capacities foreclosed in patriarchal gender formation: to live out the forms of heterosexual and same-sex love denied by Oedipalized masculinity; to be emotionally receptive to the vulnerability of others and themselves; and to carry out the dream of being a an artist who

can affirm the freedom and pleasure of this form of male subjectivity. As I show in the chapters that follow, one of the main ways these authors explore this form of male subjectivity and its obstacles is through representations of the mother-son relationship. Because of their particular positions in the social order, and because of their particular relationships to their own mothers, these authors created narratives of male subjects—what I call the "momma's boy"—who value relationships to their mothers or to fantasized maternal figures with whom they experience (or yearn to experience) modes of inter-subjectivity and emotional reciprocity. These writers insist that such relations are central to the life of emotionally and libidinally full male subjects. They depict male characters who are receptive to the dreams and desires of mothers and other women, as well as the distinctive wounds they endure in a patriarchal society.

By examining the social and psychic contours of normative masculinity and its possible alternatives, Cather, Anderson, and Toomer contribute to an evolving understanding of male subjectivity that recent historians and theorists of gender have also worked to advance. In the dissertation, I draw on these historians and theorists as a way to illuminate these authors' representations of masculinity, but also to highlight how these authors prefigured and contribute to contemporary feminist conceptions of masculinity? . I engage specifically with recent historical scholarship about modern American masculinity and with gender theorists, including anti-essentialist critiques of normative manhood offered by psychoanalytic feminists such as Jessica Benjamin, Judith Butler, Kaja Silverman, and Hortense Spillers, and by queer theorists such as Leo Bersani, Adam Phillips, and Guy Hocquenghem.

The feminist theorists I engage help us to see how the Oedipal process functions at the level of the male psyche and how it might be refused. Benjamin shows Oedipalization to be the process that installs binary notions of gender subjectivity in men and drives them to embrace forms of masculinity rooted in the repudiation and domination of women. Spillers show us how this account varies for black male subjects. She argues that, in societies defined by racial slavery, the Oedipal process is a foreclosed avenue of development for black men (because of chattel slavery's systematic subversion of the black nuclear family), but that this prohibition also creates an opportunity for African American men (and women) to forge alternate forms of gender subjectivity. Silverman and Butler similarly posit the centrality of male identification with women in opening men up to alternate possibilities of pleasure and fullers ways of being in the world. They see the deforming process of Oedipalization as difficult to overcome but also explore cultural and psychological conditions in which men can refuse it and sustain modes of identification with women that allow them to live out more flexible libidinal orientations and subject-positions that exceed the rigid boundaries of conventional manhood and the binaries (man/woman, heterosexual/homosexual) that enable it.

The queer theorists whom I address share the notion that Oedipalized manhood is toxic and violent. But they also focus (as does Silverman) specifically on male same-sex love as a sexual and emotional practice that has the potential to rupture Oedipalized masculinity. Both Bersani and Hocquenghem concentrate on forms of male same-sex love that unleash the subversive pleasure of anal sex against phallic-oriented hegemonic manhood. They see such love as enabling economies of male same-sex relations based in mutual pleasure rather than hetero-normative competition over women and as dissolving

the ego boundaries through which normative masculinity secures itself against the threat of alterity. Phillips shows us how the experience of dissolution can occur in heterosexual as well as homosexual relations, through forms of "impersonal intimacy."

By arguing that Cather, Anderson, and Toomer engaged in powerful critiques of male gender norms, my dissertation also intervenes in a developing account of modernism and masculinity. Early critics of modernism enshrined writers who seemed to endorse early 20th-century notions of masculinity as representatives of the literary movement. They celebrated and canonized authors whose conceptions of creativity seemed to endorse manly virility and emotional hardness--those who, in their view, promoted aesthetic principles of emotional control, objectivity, impenetrability, and detachment resonant with what Ezra Pound called "hardness of edge" (51) and T.S. Eliot dubbed "impersonality" (44).[2]

The perception that modernism was a fundamentally masculinist literary movement lasted for decades, until a generation of feminist literary scholars in the 1970s and 1980s rightly challenged it. These feminist critics demonstrated that the modernist canon as it was initially conceived was constructed on the basis of excluding women writers as well as gay and African American authors. They offered a more diverse and inclusive picture of modernism that celebrated those previously obscured figures. Moreover, they exposed and criticized the masculinist ethos that early critics celebrated. They showed that the hardened, dominatory masculinity these critics embraced as the hallmark of the true modernist was, in fact, toxic, and based on phobic misogyny. These early feminist critics, however, left largely intact the perception that the modernist movement was predominantly masculinist. This view has dominated our understanding

of modernism for some time. But we are now at an exciting juncture in our understanding of modernism and masculinity. The latest generation of feminist and queer critics has advanced a more complex portrait of the gender politics of canonical modernism. These critics have shown us how even the most firmly canonized modernists in Europe and the U.S.--James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Marcel Proust, Ernest Hemingway, Willa Cather, William Faulkner, and F. Scott Fitzgerald--valued traits associated with women and struggled ambivalently with the changing organization of gender and the imposition of normative masculinity.[3] Yet many of these scholars have emphasized the unresolved nature or pessimistic resolution of this ambivalence. Colleen Lamos, for instance, has argued that Joyce, Eliot, and Proust explored conceptions of creativity that they associated with women and with "feminine" forms of masculinity, but, at the same time, retreated into matricidal fantasies about overcoming the deadly imposition of the mother as a strategy for managing anxieties about female identification. Similarly Greg Forter has shown that canonical U.S. modernists such as Hemingway, Fitzgerald and Faulkner yearned, at one level, to return to a Victorian style of manhood that incorporated ways of being associated with women, but that, in their work, this longing was overcome by a more dominant tendency to devalue non-normative forms of manhood, which they surrendered melancholically, in "manly" valorizations of despair, to the social pressures of modernity they conceived of as irresistible.[4]

My dissertation builds on the account of modernist masculinity produced by this generation of critics. The authors I discuss struggled with the emergent male gender norms in a manner to similar to the writers explored by Lamos, Forter, and others. But they also differ in some key ways. Most importantly, they did not seek to resolve their

struggles with the changing norms by vilifying and disavowing the forms of male subjectivity they also valued.[5] That is, Cather, Anderson, Toomer refused the authorial aggression toward non-normative masculinity displayed by some of their contemporaries. They also resisted the related tendency to naturalize the complex historical and psychological processes that prohibit the formation of less Oedipalized male subjects by reducing those processes to the notion of fate and representing their destructive consequences as tragic misfortune. Without this aggression and naturalizing tendency, these authors were able more successfully to name and record the processes that disrupt the possibility of non-normative male gender formation. And most remarkably, Cather, Anderson, and Toomer were able to celebrate alternate masculinities for their emotional receptiveness to others and openness to a love of women and other men. They saw the cultivation of such masculinity as crucial to the freedom of both men and women.

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In what follows, I argue that Anderson, Cather, and Toomer helped to launch the critique of hetero-normative manhood extended by these later theorists. They, too, represent men's capacity to identify with women and love other men as being central to their freedom and pleasure. But they also acknowledge as an obstacle to this freedom the profound fear of femininity and same-sex desire that men absorb early in their lives. In an effort to explore the entanglement of misogyny and homophobia, these authors represent male characters whose life on the margins of conventional manhood (because of their racial identity or libidinal orientation) puts them in a position to acknowledge, witness, and experience the violence that women typically endure in a culture that valorizes male domination. These characters feel terror in the face of this violence and sometimes

succumb to the urge to consolidate their alignment with conventional manhood as a defense against it. But these authors also explore the precarious flourishing of other ways of being. In various ways, Anderson, Cather, and Toomer seek to affirm the subversive significance of men whose yearning to carry out full lives and to honor women's desires to do the same enable them to remain psychologically open to same-sex love and to women and to remain alive to those who suffer.

The body of the dissertation consists of three chapters. The first focuses on Willa Cather's *One of Ours*, a story about the psychogenesis of the momma's boy and a powerful critique of Oedipalization as the process that works to rupture that structure of male subjectivity. Her protagonist, Claude, idealizes a younger version of himself associated with the pleasures of a relation to his mother rooted in reciprocity, shared vulnerability, and mutual dependence. In her representation of Claude, Cather also reveals how the process of Oedipalization works to install in young men a fear of inter-subjectivity and the compulsion to abandon that early psychic orientation. She depicts as the driving force of this process Claude's father, who violates the mother-son relationship in an effort to impose on Claude his intolerance for vulnerability, mutual dependence, and a relation to women characterized by those capacities. But she emphasizes that the young male subject's encounter with Oedipalization need not resolve itself in a normative outcome for male development. Rather than developing into the hard kind of adult male his father intends to impose on him, Claude continues to seek (at an unconscious level) the love he has experienced as a boy. In one of the most fascinating insights of the novel, Cather shows how the desire for the mode of subjectivity associated with boyhood--the desire to be a son in an inter-subjective relationship to one's mother and to the world--can

lead to homosexual attraction. She represents Claude's intimacy with other men who resemble him in his boyhood relation to his mother. He loves in other men the boy he has been and the love with the mother he has experienced.

In *Winesburg, Ohio* and other stories Sherwood Anderson also reveals the psychic life of early 20th-century male subjects. In *Winesburg* he, too, offers us a genesis story and critique of Oedipalization in which he emphasizes the devastating impact of that process on men and (perhaps even more profoundly than Cather) on women. Anderson adds several insights to the conception of the momma's boy. First, he emphasizes that this form of subjectivity is the creative wellspring of the 20th-century male writer, whose main task is, in his view, to reveal the challenges of Oedipalization and to visualize ways for men to hold onto the vulnerability and inter-subjective connection to others that Oedipalized masculinity repudiates. In the main protagonist of the collection, George Willard, he imagines the writer as having been an adolescent boy who wants to become an artist but who struggles with the norms his father attempts to impose on him. Anderson imagines George as drawing the strength to refuse those norms by recognizing that his mother has also aspired to become an artist and struggled with the denial of that dream. By remaining alive to the dreams and struggles of his mother, George is able to cultivate the kind of emotionally receptive, mutually vulnerable relationship to women that Oedipalization seeks to prohibit and to begin to develop into an artist who avows this capacity.

Furthermore, Anderson offers us an account of the momma's boy that explicitly engages with the anxieties about male feminization that began to gain traction at the turn of the century. As I show, Anderson was acutely aware that the kind of male subjectivity

he valued was widely perceived as "feminine" in a culture that rigidly defined conventional manhood as hetero-normative, emotionally hardened, and dominatory. This perception was a central part of his account of unconventional forms of male subjectivity and creativity. In stories like "Hands" and "The Man Who Became a Woman," Anderson explored how men who love other men internalize the perception that they are "feminine" in a hetero-normative society, and how those men experience the shame and violence that women are also subjected to in such a culture?. Anderson shows how this terrifying experience drives men to close themselves to same-sex desire, to turn away from the brutality of a homophobic and misogynistic society, and to adopt the posture of conventional manhood. But in other stories in *Winesburg* he also suggests that men can live out the desires and comportments prohibited in normative conceptions masculinity, and that their capacity to do so rests on their ability to remain alive to the desires of women to live outside the boundaries of normative femininity. He shows us this most vividly in "The Book of the Grotesque," in the image of a writer whose ability to sustain an internal life irreducible to gender binaries relies on his ability to honor the desire of women to do the same.

In the final chapter, I argue that, in *Cane* (1923), Jean Toomer also offers a critique of conventional manhood and emphasizes the importance of forging alternative narratives for male development. As I show, Toomer ultimately cares less about the genesis of male subjectivity than with it racial contours--with the conscious and unconscious impact of racism on black men's capacity to live out freer and more pleasurable forms of subjectivity. Toomer reveals the way in which some black men feel the deep existential anxieties of living on the peripheries of white patriarchal manhood

and the compulsion to adopt the dominatory posture of white men as a guard against those anxieties. In "Avey," he explores how these anxieties play out in relation to women, exposing the male fantasy of sexually possessing and dominating women as a reaction to the terror of mutual dependence: to the unmanning experience of recognizing the authority of women and to the child-like vulnerability some men feel in acknowledging their power. Through the eponymous protagonist of "Kabnis," Toomer shows how some black men feel these anxieties with a special intensity shaped by the experience of racial disempowerment and by the loss of the possibility of mutually dependent, nurturing relationships with black women to white exploitation and violence. He represents such men as oscillating between two competing inclinations. On the one hand, they desire to hold onto the aspects of subjectivity denied in conventional manhood: an openness to companionship with women (as well as other men) rooted in reciprocity and mutual dependence, and to the dream of becoming an artist who is able to acknowledge and work through the pain, loneliness, and fragility of black life in a white supremacist social order. But on the other, they yield to the compulsion to embrace hegemonic manhood and conventional male traits (toughness, aggression, emotional hardness) as a guard against the horrors of subjugation. Toomer depicts the acquisition of hegemonic manhood as having profound costs for both African American women and men. He represents men who seek to acquire hegemonic manhood as suppressing the voices, feelings, and desires of African American women as well as their own capacity for emotional openness, creative self-expression, and intimacy with women other men.

CHAPTER 1

Out of the Mother and into the Male Lover
Homosexual Momma's Boys in Willa Cather's *One of Ours*

In her 1922 novel, *One of Ours*, Willa Cather imagines the son's love for the mother as a relationship that precedes gender difference. A brief episode in the middle of the novel encapsulates his reading. Returning by train to his hometown of Frankfort, Nebraska while on leave from training as a U.S. Marine for what will soon be his journey to the French front of World War I, Claude Wheeler happens upon a dismaying scene. Entering the restaurant at which he dines when travelling to college, he learns that its owner, Mrs. Voigt, the old German immigrant woman he has taken to over the years, has become the victim of harassment. A gang of local boys have come to perceive and to treat her as the enemy. Their behavior stems from the mounting anxiety concerning the allegiance of German-Americans after America's entry into the Great War—a sensibility that Claude has seen surface in his hometown. Claude reacts with indignation. Mrs. Voigt has always attended to him, as she does for all traveling men who pass through her restaurant, with the kindness of a mother, as though he were the son she never had. In defense of his proxy mother, Claude confronts the boys. He declares to them "You're not our kind" and vows to take action if they continue to bother the German woman.[1] The scene ends with Claude leaving for home, so upset about the mistreatment of Mrs. Voigt that he cannot return in the joyful spirit he had expected. He is unable to acknowledge the familiar farms of his hometown "with the pleasure he anticipated, because he was so angry about the indignities Mrs. Voigt had suffered. He was still burning with the first ardour of the enlisted man" (*OO* 202).

Claude's defense of Mrs. Voigt marks his first act as a U.S. soldier. Significantly, it is an act that does not follow from his sense of patriotism, from his loyal observation of national differences or to the forms of violence that can be mobilized in the name of American nationalism. Rather, it is a gesture of affection, one born out of Claude's love for the immigrant woman who has treated him like a son. In this sense, Claude's "first ardour" echoes his first love (202). It is a passion for the maternal—a mode of feeling that repudiates the perceived boundary between *us* and *them*. Claude's emotional connection to Mrs. Voigt, the bond between son and mother, rejects the division of national identity that the boys police. His love enacts a distinction based in emotion rather than nation. It is an affection that distinguishes between "our kind"—men, like himself, whose actions proceed from the continued affection for the mother and an appreciation of her emotional generosity—and the other kind, the violent type of man epitomized by the band of boys who reject and abuse the mother in the name of national identity (202). For Claude, it is the shared love of the mother, not the shared love of country, that is the most important allegiance, and it is the structure of feeling that creates real unity between men. To be one of ours is not simply to be an American. Nor is it to be just any kind of man. It is to be a faithfully loving son, a momma's boy.

Willa Cather's commitment in *One of Ours* lies, like Claude's, with the mother. In this chapter, I argue that Cather is invested in exploring a filial attachment to the maternal as the foundation of a particular form of relationality, one that negotiates violence by challenging the constructions of difference that enable it—both identity-difference (German/American) and, as I show, ontological difference (self/other). In particular, I argue that Cather sees the mother-son relation as the basis of a non-violent kind of

masculinity and, concomitantly, as the root of a form of same-sex male bonding that flows from the fundamental equity of a shared love for the maternal.

Queer Psychoanalysis and Impersonal Maternal Love

My analysis of masculinity, male same-sex relations, and maternal love in *One of Ours* traces a resonance between Cather's representation of the affective male subject and recent developments within queer psychoanalysis discourse that teach us about the pleasure of selflessness and about the permeable boundaries of the sexual and the emotional subject. I draw inspiration from the small group of psychoanalytic-minded critics who have contributed to the study of Cather's fiction over the years. Most directly, I am indebted to Sharon O'Brien's groundbreaking psychobiography *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice*, specifically her argument about the function of maternity in Cather's life and work. But my reading stems additionally from two other sources that also engage with Cather and psychoanalysis: Merrill Maguire Skaggs's claim, in *After the World Broke in Two*, that Cather uses Freud to conceptualize Claude, specifically the scene of familial violence through which she accounts for his personality; and, more generally, Jonathan Swift's persistent effort to bring a Freudian vocabulary to Cather's fiction. Significantly, Skaggs stakes her claim about Cather's novel and Freud even after she acknowledges the now familiar truism that Cather rejected Freudianism outright—a popular belief that takes its cue from Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant's reflection, in her 1953 memoir, that Cather denounced psychoanalysis as a contemporary vogue, from her own increasingly culturally backward vantage point (Skaggs 34). It is not good critical practice, Skaggs suggests, to take Cather's word on her intellectual resources at face value. Skaggs was among the founding scholars of contemporary Cather studies and a

biographically oriented critic who was one of the first to gesture toward the Freudian dimension of Cather's work. It is curious, then, that critics who are still largely influenced by the biographical tendency of earlier critics such as Skaggs appear to respond so tepidly to psychoanalytic readings of Cather's fiction. But many critics today assume that Cather's biography and her correspondence provide the definitive rubrics by which to evaluate the meaning of her fiction. Swift rightfully observes that an inquiry into the psychoanalytic dimensions of Cather's fiction must proceed with care, given the lack of evidence to demonstrate Cather's personal investment in American Freudianism. But unlike Skaggs before him, Swift seems to be more sensitive to the biographical precariousness of his argument. In "Cather, Freudianism, and Freud," the impact of the biographical prejudice in Cather criticism on his critical method is evident in his apologetic tone.

I take under advisement the cautiousness of Swift and of others who have walked down this interpretive path. But I also embrace the confident celerity with which Skaggs hurdled over the "problem" of Cather's public repudiation of psychoanalysis. An author's biography does not define the limits of her work. It is important to remember that fiction need not be understood as corresponding with the creative intention of its author or, in this case, with an intellectual orientation that she purportedly disclaimed. This principle should especially hold true when one writes about Cather, a novelist who famously declared herself fond of leaving things unnamed. In this light, my particular interest in *One of Ours* pursues, to some degree, the larger question of how to interpret Cather, and specifically, what to make of her investment in backwardness—the element of Cather's personality that Elizabeth Sergeant labeled as conservative, but the feature of her fiction

that Christopher Nealon and Heather Love have understood as Cather's backward feeling. Like Nealon and Love, I cotend that Cather was not simply culturally retrograde, but also, affectively backward. And it is my specific claim that the tools for conceptualizing affect offered to us by recent queer psychoanalytic writing makes for an accurate and compelling way to understand what I consider to be one of Cather's most psychically complex novels.

My interpretation of *One of Ours* draws in particular on Adam Phillips's reading of the pre-Oedipal relation between mother and child as the origin of a specific kind of impersonal love. Phillips lays out his interpretation of the pre-Oedipal dynamic in an essay titled "On a More Impersonal Note," his contribution to *intimacies*, a collection of essays co-written with queer theorist Leo Bersani. Phillips expands on the investigation into Freudian narcissism that Bersani develops in a series of essays in this volume. Specifically, Phillips broadens Bersani's understanding of narcissistic self-love as the basis of non-violent forms of relationality, offering as a model of the dynamic between self-love and relational love the pre-Oedipal relation between mother and child.

I will provide, here, a brief genealogy of Bersani's thought before moving on to the particularities of Phillips's addition to it. Bersani's conception of narcissistic forms of relationality in *intimacies* builds on his critique of identity politics in his seminal essay, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" (1987) and from his expansion of those insights in his book *Homos* (1995). In "Is the Rectum a Grave?" Bersani advances an understanding of power not as that which operates through sexual identities and that can be resisted simply through their deconstruction (in his estimate, the kind of anti-identitarian strategies produced by queer theorists like Judith Butler, Michael Warner, and Monique Wittig),

but rather, as a matter of internalized conditioning, as an effect of one's training in notions of sameness and difference, one that must be challenged from within the psychology of the desiring subject. For Bersani, power is specifically a function of ego, the product of the fragile fiction of selfhood and the subject's need to defend itself. He writes, "The self is a practical convenience; promoted to the status of an ethical ideal, it is a sanction for violence" (*Rectum* 222). In Bersani's account, hegemony and violence manifest in the subject's need to protect the borders that separate him from alterity. It is his violent response to that which is perceived to be ontologically outside of himself, different from him, threateningly beyond his control. Thus, it is in the dissolution of the ego and the imperative of self-protection that Bersani locates his strategy for challenging the hegemony produced by difference. Working from Freud's understanding of pleasure as affect beyond psychic organization and, therefore, as inimical to selfhood, he contends that sex (mainly exemplified, for him, in gay male sexual practices) possesses the capacity for "self-shattering," for an explosion of ego boundaries that provides the means for exposing and disrupting the violent fictions of self and difference on which all power relations are founded. "If sexuality is socially dysfunctional in that it brings people together only to plunge them into a self-shattering and solipsistic jouissance that drives them apart, it could," he concludes, "also be thought of as our primary hygienic practice of non-violence" (*Rectum* 222).

In *Homos,* Bersani develops the concept of self-shattering sex into the notion of "homo-ness," a term that registers his transition from embracing certain sexual practices as a means of challenging ego to exploring certain forms of relationality as a way of undermining power. Put simply, homo-ness entails a relation of sameness rooted in

affectionate self-identification: the self-same connection that manifests when one loves the "self" that one finds echoed in the "other." This formulation of love foregrounds Bersani's more recent addition to the concept of egoless relationality in *intimacies.* Here, Bersani shifts from conceptualizing narcissistic desire and its dissolution of identity as a potential specific to gay erotic experience (homosexual "homo-ness") to his understanding of narcissism as a possibility of various relational modes. Thus, in *intimacies,* impersonal love and impersonal intimacy, rather than self-shattering sex or erotic homo-ness, become operative terms. Bersani's principal intuition in the collection is his radical description of love not as a relation between a subject and object that invites the violence endemic to the differentiation between self and other, but rather, as a fundamentally narcissistic relationship in which the ontological distinction between subject and object is overcome by the subject's recognition of himself in the other. Bersani's notion of impersonal love builds on Freud's insight, in his 1914 essay "On Narcissism: an Introduction," that love is never purely objective because the object that the subject pursues always contains traces of the self-idealization of his primary narcissism: the infantile state in which ego-libido (love of self) and object-libido (love of otherness) are indistinguishable. Because, as Freud points out, the subject's original investment is in himself and in "objects" that are perceived to be extensions of himself (e.g. the woman or man who is his caretaker), the objects onto which he transfers his love in later development (after he has lost his sense of his own perfection) is always a throwback to his original idealizations: himself and the co-extensive mother (or father). For Bersani, Freud's notion, that what the subject desires in another in relations of love is actually the "self" in the "other" (more of the same), provides a version of intimacy that

is unburdened by ego and the violent demand for self-protection. Love and intimacy are, in this sense, impersonal narcissisms. Narcissism and impersonality shed the pejorative connotations customarily attributed to them as putative enemies of intimate relations and become the very means through which non-violent modes of being and being with are possible.

Bersani's formulation of impersonal love significantly differs from the lay use of the term impersonal to mean a non-relational or emotionally disconnected individual. Likewise, the understanding of narcissistic love from which his concept of impersonality stems fundamentally differs from its colloquial connotation. The lay meaning of narcissism, in my estimate, most closely follows what Freud calls *secondary* narcissism, which describes a solipsistic, non-relational form of self-idealization that is intensely personal and that obliterates any sense of the other. In secondary narcissism, the subject libidinally disconnects from the world. He affectively withdraws from others and into himself. Bersani's notion of narcissistic love develops, instead, from the concept of *primary* narcissism, which describes a psychic state, usually occurring in infancy, in which the subject idealizes himself so profoundly that he does not distinguish between his private "self" and "others" outside of himself, nor between his "self" and the organic external world. In this mode, the subject experiences himself as limitless. He feels himself to be ubiquitous and omnipotent.

Bersani seizes on the extreme self-idealization involved in primary narcissism to make his case for his counter-intuitive conception of such love as relational and impersonal. As he understands it, the intense self-love that provides the subject with a sense of omnipresence and limitless power is paradoxically self-defeating. In primary

narcissism, the inability of the subject to distinguish between self and not-self suggests that in that state he inflates his ego to the point of exploding any distinctiveness. He loves himself so much that he cannot sustain a meaningful distinction between self and other, self and world. Thus, primary narcissism is incompatible with the psychic tendency toward self-differentiation and self-containment on which the ego later comes to rest. The impersonal self-love of narcissism proves to be relational rather than insular. It is a way of feeling and being in which the difference between "self" and "other" are overcome. It is a love that is also reciprocal. In impersonal love, the subject's "self" is porously open to (penetrating and penetrated by) others and, more generally, to the external world, which is not perceived to be truly outside the self. This kind of narcissism entails a form of mutual "self"-idealization, a love in which both individuals are attracted to the respective "self" that they see mirrored in the each "other." In this sense, impersonal love describes an affective continuum between ego and object investments (rather than an attachment solely to a private self or distinct other) that undermines ontological separation. To love self as other and to love other as self is to challenge the psychic barriers that obstruct relational unity.

In *intimacies,* Bersani explores narcissistic relational models ranging from dialogue to Socratic love and the gay subcultural practice of barebacking. But for my purposes, the most compelling model comes from Phillips, who offers an account of the impersonal as rooted in the primary narcissistic love between mother and infant. In "On a More Impersonal Note," Phillips interprets the subject's infantile relation with the mother and the effects of the Oedipal scenario on that dynamic in light of Bersani's understanding of narcissism. Like Bersani, Phillips formulates a model of relationality

that is genderless at a conceptual level. His version of impersonal love undermines gender difference as it rests on the undifferentiated love between mother and child. But, also like Bersani, Phillips is particularly interested in the implications of impersonality for our notions of masculinity, in what it would mean to imagine masculinity as an impersonal formation rooted in selfless love rather than as a virile individual subject—the sanctified figure of power to which we are accustomed. Phillips's focus on masculinity provides us with a framework for understanding Cather's conception of masculinity and male same-sex relations. By drawing on Phillips, I do not mean to claim that Cather herself conceptualizes impersonality as a uniquely male mode of loving. To be sure, Cather does not limit her account of impersonal love to men. In fact, in other works, such as *O'Pioneers!*, *My Antonia*, and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, she explores impersonal love centrally through women. But in *One of Ours*, she focuses chiefly on the implications of the impersonal for men and for the male-male emotional dynamics that she visualizes as a source both of great pleasure and, as I show, tremendous destructiveness. Thus, even though I gesture toward Cather's exploration of impersonal femininity and female-female relations as impersonal in the conclusion of this chapter, I am mainly concerned with Cather's conception of impersonality as it relates to men in the novel.

What is distinctive about Phillips's model and what makes it central to my reading of Cather is the emphasis that it places on the genderless quality of impersonal love. Whereas Bersani, in *intimacies* and in his work on self-shattering affect more generally, tends to demonstrate the capacity of impersonal love to undermine difference mostly through examples of male same-sex relations, Phillips more fully illuminates the

capacity of the impersonal to challenge gender difference by figuring it through the example of a non gender-specific arrangement. In his essay, Phillips offers a model of impersonal love as open to and inclusive of women. Working from Bersani, he imagines such love as the continuous extension of a primal intimacy with the mother. He writes:

> What is interesting about Bersani's description of impersonal narcissism is how it links with a language that is at once germane though rarely explicitly alluded to in Bersani's work: the language of early development, of mothers and fathers and babies. What, after all, is more central to post-Freudian accounts of early mothering than the notion of what Bersani calls 'reciprocal self-recognition in which the very opposition between sameness and difference becomes irrelevant as a structuring category of being'? The impersonality of mother, one might say, is the precursor, the precondition of an impersonal narcissism. (Phillips 104)

According to Phillips, the impersonal narcissism that Bersani locates in particular homosexual formations originates in the family, specifically in the narcissistic intimacy between the pre-Oedipal son and mother. For Phillips, the pre-Oedipal dynamic is the primary bond, the initial intimacy, and it is characterized by a feeling of emotional unity with the mother, a figure that the infant does not acknowledge as a defined individual but that he experiences an undefined extension of his own being. The child's feeling of oneness with the impersonal maternal body is a sensation that precedes any sense of ontological separation from others and any feeling of separate individuality. "The first intimacy," Phillips proclaims, "is an intimacy with process of becoming, not with a person" (114). In this state, the son's connection to the mother follows from his experience of himself as an unbounded being. He reflects what Bersani calls, in an earlier essay, "virtual being," a potential for becoming who does not feel himself to be a fixed subject, but rather, a transformative and continuous extension of the mother and of the world: the "objects" from which he feels himself to be undifferentiated (86). The son's love for the mother is, in Phillips's formulation, not a love for perceived otherness.

Rather, it is a narcissistic intimacy, a love of the "other" who is experienced as "self," as more of the same. It is a narcissistic arrangement that is also reciprocal. While the son perceives the mother to be indistinct from himself, the mother experiences the son as an extension of her being. She relates to him not as a predefined individual (for he has not yet developed into one), but instead, as a reflection of the unlimited possibilities for becoming that she projects onto him. Imagining the myriad persons that her child might one day become, the mother's love for the son, Phillips claims, is a love for her own ascribed self-idealizations—an intimate relation with the unknown and unknowable potential for being that she assigns to him.

For Phillips, the fate of the developmentally normal male subject who goes on to the Oedipal scenario is the termination of the state of impersonal narcissism—both the end of the son's own sense of limitless being and of the limitless potential for becoming that the mother assigns to him. "But if mothering could be described, however counterintuitively, as a profoundly impersonal intimacy," he writes, "it is fathering, the developmental myth will tell us, that personalizes things. It is triangulation, contemporary psychoanalytic theory insists, that is the forcing house of self-conscious singularity" (104). Understood in these terms, the narcissistic mutuality that constitutes the son's primary state succumbs to the Oedipal father's injunction for him to grow up. Forced by the presence of the father, the third party, to recognize the mother as a separate object who is desired by, and can desire, another person, the son is pulled into the domain of differentiated object relations. The disrupted sensation of affective unity with the mother forces the son to recognize his bounded individuality and that of the mother. The trauma of the Oedipal, Phillips suggests, thus concerns the father's production of the son as a

distinct person marked by the lost experience of himself as a coextensive being. Ejected from the time of selflessness, the normative male subject is left to deal with the world as an alienated individual who is haunted by the futile longing to return to the moment before the painful onset of his individuality. He becomes defined by a desperate and impossible search for the old impersonality of maternal love in new objects of desire. He lives forward but desires backward to a selfless past.

In this chapter, I draw on Phillips's account of male subjectivity as an originally impersonal formation that precedes identity and feelings of difference as a framework for understanding Willa Cather's account of masculinity in *One of Ours*. Cather visualizes an alternative to the trauma of lost narcissism and the affectively normal male that Oedipalization produces. Through Claude, she imagines a male subject for whom the narcissistic relation with the mother is not a permanently lost dynamic but a retrievable way of feeling and being in the world, one that can be reclaimed through forms of same-sex male love that are affectively continuous with the impersonality of the mother. In so doing, Cather figures her protagonist as a "momma's boy," a backwardly driven, emotionally non-normative subject who pursues and recuperates the impersonal intimacy associated initially with the mother

Impersonal Cather and Her Critics

Critics of *One of Ours* have accurately identified Claude's problem as one of self, observing in the text the self-loathing with which he regards his body and his identity. But they have nonetheless taken the novel quite personally, understanding the protagonist as a direct figuration of Cather's own war-affirmative or anti-war politics.[2] As others have pointed out, criticism on the novel resembles a stalemate between two basic camps:

those who have lambasted the novel as war romance, a maudlin and thus inaccurate depiction of the American soldier in World War I, and those who have sought to redeem it as a surreptitiously ironic work that exposes and subverts the drive to become a hero on the battlefield. The first position is associated mainly with Cather contemporaries and includes scathing reviews of the novel by H.L. Mencken, Edmund Wilson, Sinclair Lewis, and Ernest Hemingway. The second viewpoint, originating with David Stouck's 1975 essay "Willa Cather's Imagination," is associated with more recent Cather scholars, such as James Woodress, Susan J. Rosowski, and Merrill Maguire Skaggs.[3]

But whether they have celebrated or condemned the novel, critics have so far left intact the assumption that *One of Ours* centers on a normative male protagonist whose masculinity is consolidated in battle and affirmed in heroic death. If early critiques by Wilson, Lewis, and Hemingway reduced the novel to a romance of male self-discovery that distorted the true, alienating experience of war, the ironic reclamations by Woodress, Rosowski, and Skaggs only replicate the assumption that Claude goes to war to find himself—arguing that Cather stands at a greater authorial distance from her protagonist.[4] It is a supposition that persists even in the most recent examinations of the novel.[5] Even Steven Trout's characterization of *One of Ours* as ambiguously caught between the mythifications of commemorative war culture and unapologetic exposition of its gruesome realities, we find still the notion that Claude's narrative is one of transformation in which he develops from a "miserable Nebraskan to an exuberant *American*."[6]

As I see it, the identification of Claude as a normative male subject has helped to produce the terrain on which both positions rest. It has led to the paralyzing assumption

that the only way to read the politics of the novel is in terms of Cather's identification with or disidentification from her fictional subject. In essence, what critics seem to have been arguing about all along is how to reconcile an ostensible difference: between Claude, a character whose patriotic war impulse makes him a personification of a militaristic ethos, and the good liberal Cather that most critics now desire. In this light, critics on both sides of the debate presume Claude to be a masculine fictional subject that must be pried apart from Cather, a female authorial subject. The violence at stake in such identity politics is reflected most clearly in the early critiques of *One of Ours*, which place damaging emphasis on Cather's position as a woman writing in a genre dominated by men. The two most notable examples of this accentuation come in Edmund Wilson's chauvinistic references to "Miss Cather" in his unfavorable 1922 *Vanity Fair* review of the novel and in Hemingway's infamous declaration that *One of Ours* had "Catherized" the Great War. The tone of these evaluations indicate that the indignation of early critics who shared the misogyny of Wilson and Hemingway lay not merely in their objection to the assumed derivativeness of Cather's aesthetic, but in the femininity that she allowed to seep into the American soldier and the masculine scene of war. Critics from this generation generally rejected Cather and her boy Claude from the literary men's club of American World War I fiction. But in doing so, they were not simply excluding a female author from their rank. They were also, in a sense, policing the boundaries between a purportedly normal masculine subject, a soldier, and a female writer. For these critics, it seems that there was too much Cather in Claude and, we might say, too much Claude in Cather. Unnerved by the merging of female self and male other that Cather enacted in her

production of Claude, they were compelled to pry them apart by disqualifying her novel as a fundamentally feminine and thus invalid attempt to depict the Great War.

As they merely reversed the assumptions produced by opponents of *One of Ours*, subsequent well-intentioned advocates of the novel replicated the gender essentialism of earlier critics. If Wilson, Hemingway, and Lewis were anxious about Cather transgressing the boundary that distinguishes mawkish women writers from virile male ones, those who wanted to reclaim *One of Ours* were no less concerned about the borderline separating Cather from Claude. Emphasizing Cather's ironic distance from her fictional subject, these scholars labored to prevent Claude from polluting Cather's valued female identity. Maintaining that Claude substantially differs from Cather, they insisted that Cather did not share the perspective of her soldier, but rather, offered him as a commentary on the naivety of war-idealizing dough boys.

To my mind, queer scholarship provides the most provocative approaches to Cather's work precisely because it recognized Claude as less (or more) than a masculine ideal and Cather as less (or more) than a fixed female self.[7] Early readings of sexuality in Cather imposed stable gender identity. This imposition is exemplified in the works of Sharon O'Brien, Timothy R. Cramer, and John P. Anders, all of whom work to bring Cather into a gay literary tradition. Queer criticism has moved us, however, beyond reductive notions of gender and sexuality in Cather's fiction.[8] The anti-identitarian readings produced by Judith Butler and, more recently, Scott Herring and Marilee Lindemann in recent years comprise the chief way in which Cather has been queered. These critics, whose work ranges in focus from Cather's early novels, such as *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia*, to her last published novel, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*,

conceptualize Cather's aesthetic as a sort of literary Trojan Horse that deploys representational uncertainty, instability of character, multivalence of meaning, and genre-defying formal strategies as tactics to resist stable definitions of identity.[9]

But, for my own purposes, the most insightful queer reading comes from Christopher Nealon, who offers a different, character-driven reading of Cather's queerness. In "Affect-Genealogy," Nealon argues that Cather conceptualizes homosexuality as an "affect genealogy," an alternate kinship formation that, as it is forged in emotion rather than biology or identity, surpasses familial and national boundaries.[10] According to Nealon, Cather's affect genealogies are nostalgic, existing in the bonds between emotionally and erotically atavistic figures linked through their common degeneracy. He contends that such a connection demonstrates Cather's conception of the homosexual male not as a community bounded minority subject defined by a stable sexual identity, but rather, as a more universal subject, one who is emotionally regressive and who is connected to a variety of other socially unproductive subjects who share his backwardness. Nealon reads Claude in this context, adducing Cather's association of him with the local estranged dreamers and marginalized failures that are described by Gladys Farmer during a particular scene from *One of Ours*: Miss Livingstone, the compulsive liar, Mr. Smith, the bibliophile lawyer obsessed with Dryden and Shakespeare rather than success, and Bobbie Jones, the effeminate "drug clerk" preoccupied with poetry and screenwriting (129).

Nealon's reading of Claude as emotionally backward illuminates Cather's exploration of her male figures as affective rather than gendered subjects whose relations are rooted in emotion rather than in identity. In her recent book, *Feeling Backward*,

Heather Love expands on Nealon's account. She agrees that Cather's male kinship formations are fundamentally backward. But she sees these relational forms as shadowed by negativity. They are informed by a sense of loss, failure, and impossibility that refuses the emphasis on affirmative feeling that dominates modern gay activism in its willful progression away from queer historical trauma. Thus, Nealon and Love invite us to reevaluate not only the use of gender as a way to conceptualize Cather's fiction, but also the use of a gendered difference to understand the relation between Cather and her fictional subjects.

I propose to build on Nealon's and Love's work. By reading Claude's backward homosexuality (and backwardness in Cather more generally) in terms of the maternal association that Cather assigns to it and in terms of her imagining of the mother-son bond as narcissistic relation 'a la Bersani and Phillips. Through Claude's friendships with the Bohemian boy Ernest Havel in Nebraska and, later, with the violinist David Gerhardt in France, Cather explores male same-sex love as an impersonal connection: a same-sex formation that she perceives not as an exclusive love between men that is closed off to women entirely, but as an open dynamic that remains continuous with the attachment to the mother as well as with the organic world. In this way, Cather affirms Adam Phillips's suggestion that the impersonal love of the son, threatened by Oedipalization, might find its survival in male same-sex affection that are beyond the Oedipal home.[11] Figured as intimacies between filial men who share the love for the mother rather than competing for possession of her, Claude's male same-sex bonds represent throwbacks to the narcissistic intimacy with the mother. Through them Cather challenges the mandate for men to take love personally and the antagonistic relations between men that emerge from

Oedipalization. Atavisms that constitute the possibility of a backward future, Cather's same-sex pairs in *One of Ours* enact the lived continuation of impersonal intimacy.

Pre-Oedipal Disunion

For Cather, the world broke in two in 1922—as she famously summarized the dramatic social shifts that influenced her imagination and that of so many of her literary contemporaries in "The Novel Démeublé." In *One of Ours*, it is Claude Wheeler's world that has broken in two. At the base of the protagonist's sense of alienation—his acutely felt, but vaguely understood sense of displacement—lies a childhood trauma that stems from his emotional history with his father and mother. Early in the novel, Claude reveals a memory that captures this history. Reflecting on the tension that persists between him and his father, Mr. Wheeler, a jocular and easy-going man about town, Claude contemplates why he feels "afraid of his father's humour" despite his popularity with various members of town, who find his humor to be charming (*OO* 24). At first, Cather appears to be unsympathetic to Claude's trepidation. She explains that Claude might have appreciated his father's humor "had they been of any other authorship. But he unreasonably wanted his father to be the most dignified, as he was certainly the handsomest and most intelligent, man in the community" (24). Claude cannot enjoy his father's humor, according to this reasoning, because of his unfair wish for Mr. Wheeler to be a man of respectable manners whose reputation in the town stems from his civility rather than his affable jocularity. But there is a deeper history behind Claude's apprehension. Claude's fear of his father is an effect of his emotional sensitivity, his inability to "bear ridicule," to absorb without complaint his father's physical punishment. In the past, Mr. Wheeler has taken Claude's vulnerability as an invitation to abuse him

(24). Young Claude "squirmed before he was hit; saw it coming, invited it" (24). Mr. Wheeler has taken his son's sensitivity personally, seeing the "trait" as an act of defiance against his emotional authority. He "called it false pride, and often purposely outraged his feelings to harden him," in order to condition Claude to be an emotionally "strong" individual, distant enough from his emotions to withstand quietly his father's cruelty. Significantly, Cather sees the hardening to which Claude has been subjected as mirroring the abuse his mother has also experienced at the hands of his father. Mr. Wheeler has hardened Claude just as "he had hardened Claude's mother, who was afraid of everything but schoolbooks and prayer-meetings when he first married her" (24). Like Claude, Mrs. Wheeler has feared her husband's malicious exploitation of vulnerability. But unlike her son, she has overcome her fear of Mr. Wheeler, forgiving his cruel behavior as part of his "rugged masculinity," a characteristic of which she has, in fact, grown quite "proud" (24). Cather implies, here, that Claude's continuing fear of his father stems from his refusal to embrace the toughness that his father wants to impose on him, the affective indifference and brutality that his mother accepts as part of Mr. Wheeler's identity as a hard-boiled man. She writes, "Claude had never quite forgiven his father for some of his practical jokes" (24).

Claude and his mother's past experience s with Mr. Wheeler's brutality figures them as emotional doubles who share an affective orientation (both are sensitive and vulnerable) and history of abuse. Cather explains the similarity as deriving from a deeper sense of relational unity that Claude and Mrs. Wheeler have felt with each other. She depicts this unity early through Claude's recollection of a particular joke played that his father played on him and his mother when he was a child. Early in the novel, Claude

remembers having been a "boisterous little boy of five, playing in and out of the house" (25). In the memory, he hears his mother ask Mr. Wheeler to go the orchard to pick cherries from a tree "loaded" with the fruit (25). She asks because the task is too physically demanding. The cherries are "too high for her to reach," and "even if she had a ladder it would hurt her back" (25). Mr. Wheeler, who "was always annoyed if his wife referred to any physical weakness," goes out and returns with the guarantee that the cherries will be accessible. Relying on her husband's promise, Mrs. Wheeler "trustfully put[s] on her sunbonnet" and brings Claude with her "down the pasture hill to the orchard" (25). With his mother, Claude is a blissful child who runs "happily along in one of the furrows" (25). But his happiness is short lived, for when he and his mother arrive in the orchard, he discovers "a sight he could never forget. The beautiful, round-topped cherry tree, full of green leaves and red fruit—his father had sawed it through! It lay on the ground beside its bleeding stump" (25).

Like Phillips, Cather imagines her male subject as starting from an initial state of non-alienated love, an impersonal mode of connectedness in which the boy feels himself to be continuous with the mother and with the natural world more broadly. Claude has enjoyed a past utopia, a childhood characterized principally by a free and intimate experience of the world. While he has been forced to recognize his home and the land that surrounds it as his father's property, as a young boy Claude does not observe those demarcations. He is able to enjoy play both "in and out of the house," to enjoy a pleasure that has not been limited by his father's privatization (25). This unbounded enjoyment of space is a freedom of pleasure that extends to Claude's companionship with his mother. With Mrs. Wheeler, Claude can frolic freely in "the furrows" (25). More importantly, as

the central figure of the memory, Claude's journey to the orchard along with Mr. Wheeler represents an idealized form intimacy. The image conceptualizes the relation between a prior self (Claude's childhood) and mother (Mrs. Wheeler) as one that extends to the natural world. The relation between mother and son is also a relation between self and world. Claude and Mrs. Wheeler represent an affective unity one that is characterized by, as it is receptive to, the abundant sweetness of the cherries that they plan to share with each other.

For Cather, the love between mother and son is the ultimate expression of libidinal wholeness, preceding separation and the transformation of the son into a private individual who must experience the world as something separate from himself. As Cather visualizes Claude's original sense of himself as a utopian experience of selflessness associated with the maternal, she imagines it as abruptly disrupted by his forced disunion from the mother, by his imposed individuation. Like Phillips, who reads the Oedipal father as effecting the individuation of the male subject, Cather figures Claude's father as violating his son's experience of unity. But whereas, in Phillips, the father interrupts the son's narcissistic arrangement with the mother by his mere presence (which triangulates the dyadic relationship and forces the son to encounter his mother as a separate being who can be desired by another person) Cather imagines the father playing a more active role in the disunion of mother and son. Mr. Wheeler functions as a violent force of possessive objectification. In an act of libidinal monopolization that tarnishes Claude's pleasure with this mother and that ushers in the hateful and angry feelings that suddenly replace his innocent joy, Mr. Wheeler fells the "bleeding" cherry tree (25). The severed tree marks the father's prerogative of relational exclusivity. Mr. Wheeler's disruption of

the anticipated pleasure of cherry picking signals his forceful separation of Claude and Mrs. Wheeler through the destructive possession of the mother. Like her acceptance of her husband's malevolence as a feature of his masculinity, Mrs. Wheeler's encounter with the fallen tree forces her to observe and submissively justify her own objectification. Subsequently, she explains to Claude, "it's your father's tree. He has a perfect right to cut it down if he wants to" (25). For Claude's mother, the fallen cherry tree signifies the father's entitlement to privatization, his "right" to mark and even kill what he owns. But for Claude, who rejects the notion of libidinal exclusivity ("'Taint so!" he yells in response to the idea of his father's "right"), the sight of the cherry tree forces him to realize the aggression of other men who objectify the maternal and to take such violence personally. The self-destructive indignation that Mr. Wheeler's action induces in Claude dramatizes the onset of his individuation. After he observes the fallen tree, Claude quickly fills with a "rage and hate" that he enacts on himself and on the natural world in which he had just been running "happily" (25). He "kick[s] the loose earth with his copper-toed shoes until his mother [becomes] much more concerned for him than for the tree" (25). Cather thus imagines Claude as transformed into an object of self-abuse. The surrounding world changes for him into a punishable object that is also subjected to his misdirected fury.

In this way, Cather's conception of masculinity and its formation goes beyond the psychological narrative offered by Phillips. By connecting the monopoly that Mr. Wheeler exercises over Claude's mother with the concept of private property—the "right" of ownership to which Claude's father feels entitled—Cather suggests that the Oedipal father and the competitive relations between men that he aims to perpetuate in

his relationship to his son is not merely a natural, trans-historical formation, but rather, a historically shaped phenomenon that is linked to the emergence of an economically competitive social order (25). In other words, Cather intuits the link between libidinal and socioeconomic structures, between the competition for relational exclusivity to which Claude is subjected and the particular social order that confers Mr. Wheeler's entitlement to own land.

The interplay between libidinal and economic competition that Cather suggests through the connection between the Oedipal family and the modern social order echoes Guy Hocquenghem's account of Oedipalization as the heteronormative substructure of western capitalism. In *Homosexual Desire,* Hocquenghem contends that the rivalry between men for capital rests on the heterosexual competition instituted in and operative through the Oedipal family. Modern competitive society, he claims, sustains itself through the rivalry bred into men by the family and it survives by shaping men into monogamous heterosexual opponents who struggle with each other for exclusive access to a female love object. For Hocquenghem, the normative function of the Oedipal is the preclusion of men from realizing their potential for non-exclusive homosexual love and the non-competitive social order that it might yield.[12] In a related spirit, Cather imagines Mr. Wheeler to be a historically specific version of the Oedipal father, one whose malicious practice of libidinal privatization is structurally related to the emergent practice of proprietorship and a system of economic privatization.

Mama's Boys and Filial Same-Sex Love

The severed cherry tree stands as one of Cather's most evocative symbols of modernization. It is a metaphor for the fracturing of an original state of psychic

wholeness inflicted by a system of monogamous privatization that Cather associates with the patriarch—the breaking in two, as it were, of a world of libidinal completion, caused by the father and his assertion of a monopoly over the mother, whom he has marked as a private object for his own pleasure. It is also, as I have suggested, a figure for an emergent system of economic privatization predicated on that very libidinal formation. Cather offers the felled cherry tree as a symbol of lost harmony and as the icon of an imminent modernity. But significantly, the figure functions also as the figurative root of her emancipatory aspirations. As I will show, it is metaphor for the continuity of impersonal love and for the perseverance of the masculine subject who remembers and wants to retrieve the selfless way of feeling and being associated with the mother. Cather gestures toward this alternate connotation at the end of Claude's memory. She states that even after he is made to witness the tree that has been destroyed by his father, Claude continues for a time to return to the site of loss. "For days afterwards," she explains, "Claude went down to the orchard and watched the tree grow sicker, wilt and wither away. God would surely punish a man who could do that, he thought" (25). Claude's return to the tree is, in one sense, a melancholic internalization of his injury, a circling of the wound that results in his internalization of his father's hardening violence and his perpetuation of the malice he has suffered.[13] As Cather further tells us, after the incident Claude develops, a "violent temper and physical restlessness" that comes to dominate his behavior as a child, transforming into a tendency to prove his physical toughness through self-destructive behavior.

But Claude's return need not be understood as figuring his ineluctable transformation into the aggressive and unfeeling male subject into which his father wants

to shape him. Indeed, his preoccupation with the chopped cherry tree also represents the very affective principle that allows him ultimately to refuse his father's demand for his individuation. His return to the tree signifies his return to the vestige of his affective union with Mrs. Wheeler, to the selfless feeling with the mother that preceded his father's intervention. It is a gesture through which Cather signals her rejection of Oedipalization as an irresistible narrative of male development. Far from conceiving the patriarch's intention to harden his son as a trauma to which all boys are fated, Cather sees the transformation of the son into an objectifying heterosexual as a process that is prone to failure. Through Claude's experience of the disruption of his impersonal connection to his mother, Cather advances two crucial intuitions about masculinity and about the interplay between the libidinal and socioeconomic structures that she sees as fundamental to modernity: that a historically particular organization of male subjectivity and an emergent modern socioeconomic order characterized by individual proprietorship are intimately related formations, but that neither the production of normative heterosexual masculinity nor the economic organization enabled by it are unavoidable. If Cather imagines Claude as having once been subjected to Oedipalization, she envisions him, in the present of the novel, as compelled by the desire for impersonal relations and as still able to engage the world impersonally. Claude represents, we might say, Cather's expression of a developmentally arrested masculinity, a backward figure in whom she preserves the capacity for impersonal love and in whom she imagines a non-Oedipalized version of masculinity.

The primary way that Cather depicts Claude's continuation of the impersonal love of the mother is through the dynamics of his same-sex intimacies. As Christopher Nealon

has argued, Cather represents male same-sex pairs as atavisms, as emotionally primal romances suffused with an eroticism that transgresses geographical and cultural boundaries. But Cather's male-male couples can be understood more accurately as psychosexual atavisms that extend the pre-Oedipal mother-son bond. For Cather, male same-sex love is a backward present. It is a lived manifestation of impersonal desire, the recuperation of a form of intimacy whose pleasure defies the limitations and violence of normative object relations.

Cather's exploration of Claude's male same-sex relations surfaces centrally in two episodes: in the frustrated prairie romance that Claude pursues with the Bohemian boy Ernest Havel and, later and more fully, in Claude's companionship with the musician-soldier David Gerhardt. Claude's friendship with Ernest Havel in the first half of the novel provides the model for all of Claude's subsequent male-male relationships. Cather imagines Claude's relationship with Ernest as an intimacy that provides the mutuality of impersonal love. Early in the novel, Claude walks into town after having prevented from taking a joy ride in the family car he has washed all morning by his father, who forces him, in another one of his cruel jokes, to haul into the market some rotting hides he has been meaning to sell. But as he soon as he arrives, Claude, rather than carrying out his father's task, searches for Ernest. He finds his friend lying by the stream at Lovely Creek and joins him in a pastoral scene:

> The horses stood with their heads over the wagon-box, munching their oats. The stream trickled by under the willow roots with a cool, persuasive sound. Claude and Ernest lay in the shade, their coats under their heads, talking very little. Occasionally a motor dashed along the road toward town, and a cloud of dust and a smell of gasoline blew in over the creek bottom; but for the most part the silence of the warm, lazy summer noon was undisturbed. (12)

Here, Cather envisions the bond between Claude and Ernest as occupying a natural space outside of modernity and the competitive father-son relation that defines it. Abandoning the festering hides with which his father has burdened him in favor of joining the Bohemian boy, Claude throws aside the imperative of money-making and the exploitative ideology of individual proprietorship. With Ernest, he reclaims an ideal relation characterized by a natural abundance that restores him from the emotional pain caused by his father's practical joke, an injury whose lingering refuse, like the "cloud of dust" and "smell of gasoline" that occasionally "blew in over the creek bottom," is resisted by Claude and Ernest's fertile relationship (12).

In this light, Claude and Ernest's intimacy takes the form of a pre-Oedipal idealization. Like the undefined potential that, in Phillips's account, the pre-Oedipal son and mother invest in each other, Ernest is characterized by a relatively unconflicted potential for being that explains his capacity to recuperate Claude from his emotional injuries. As Cather further tell us, "Claude could usually forget his own vexations and chagrins when he was with Ernest," because Ernest "had a number of impersonal preoccupations," an unfixed range of intellectual modes that afford him a "mental liberty" to which Claude aspires (12). Cather figures the bond between the men is an extension of the impersonality that Claude values in Ernest. Like the love between Claude and his mother, Claude and Ernest's relationship is a union that extends to the natural world. Intimacy with the Bohemian boy means intimacy with the world itself. Lying on the banks of Lovely Creek, Claude and Ernest are continuous with the nourishing plenitude of nature, with horses that eat from the "wagon-box, munching their oats" and "the stream [that] trickled by under the willow roots with a cool, persuasive

sound" (12). While the image lacks a sexual explicitness whose absence can be taken as an indication of the sexual conservatism of which Cather is sometimes accused, we can more accurately understand the depiction here as a visualization of pleasure as unrestricted to physical expression. Like the bond that Bersani envisions between Michel and the Arab boys in his reading of André Gide's *The Immoralist*, Claude's enjoyment of Ernest is physically unlocatable, suggesting that the relation is irreducible to an inter-subjective bond. The pleasure between Claude and Ernest is irreducible to their immediate relation to each other.[14] It is of a piece with the salubriousness of feeding horses and the roots that drink from the waters of the creek.

Cather imagines the bond between Claude and Ernest as a form of male same-sex love that affectively continues the pre-Oedipal relation between mother and son. The kind of intimacy that Claude and Ernest enjoy with each other at Lovely Creek is the expression of a friendship that has been formed in a shared love for Mrs. Wheeler and the impersonal quality of that affection. The dynamic between male same-sex love and mother-son love surfaces in the background story that explains Claude and Ernest's friendship as necessarily connected to Mrs. Wheeler, who feels "almost as fond of Ernest" as Claude himself. In the story, Claude and Ernest's bond includes Mrs. Wheeler, who, in sharing her son's affection for the Bohemian boy, nurtures the relationship (12). When Claude and Ernest study together in the Wheeler home while in high school, Mrs. Wheeler often joins the boys, bringing her own work ("brought her darning and sat near them") and helping the boys with "their Latin and algebra" (12). Together, Claude, Ernest, and Mrs. Wheeler form a circle further joined by Mahailey, the domestic servant who has cared for Claude with maternal affection since he was a boy and for whom the

"words of wisdom" that pass between the boys and Mrs. Wheeler provide a rare opportunity for intellectual enlightenment (12).

Cather imagines the mother-son union between Mrs. Wheeler, Claude, and Ernest (and even Mahailey) as originating from Mrs. Wheeler's love for Ernest as one of her own sons and from the bond between Claude and Ernest that formed from that maternal affection. Later in the scene, Mrs. Wheeler recalls as the basis of her involvement with Ernest and Claude the story of her initial encounter with Ernest when he comes to town for the first time. In the memory, Ernest arrives in Frankfort by train and is picked up by his older brother Joe, who "was to stop on the way home and leave some groceries for the Wheelers. The train from the east was late; it was ten o'clock that night when Mrs. Wheeler, waiting in the kitchen, heard Havel's wagon rumble across the little bridge over Lovely Creek. Mrs. Wheeler, who had been waiting up for him, Joe came in with a bucket of salt fish in one hand and a sack of flour on his shoulder" (12). Cather describes Ernest's arrival in Frankfort as the occasion for an act of filial affection that is natural and nourishing. Like a caring son, Ernest's brother, Joe, brings to Mrs. Wheeler "salt fish" and "a sack of flour" (12). His benevolence sparks the bond between Ernest and Mrs. Wheeler, who find each other because of his kindness:

> While [Joe] took the fish down to the cellar for [Mrs. Wheeler], another figure appeared in the doorway; a young boy, short, stopped, with a flat cap on his head and a great oilcloth valise, such as pedlars carry, strapped to his back. He had fallen asleep in the wagon, and on waking and finding his brother gone, he had supposed they were at home and scrambled for his pack. He stood in the doorway, blinking his eyes at the light, looking astonished but eager to do whatever was required of him. (13)

Finding Ernest, Mrs. Wheeler discovers a "young boy" who wants, like his brother, to please the mother. Ernest is "astonished" to have awoken in a strange home, but he is

immediately ready to earn his place in it ("eager to do whatever was required of him"). However, Mrs. Wheeler requests nothing of him. Feeling love and sympathy for the travel weary boy, in whom she sees "one of her own boys," she quickly embraces Ernest: "She went up to him and put her arm around him, laughing a little and saying in her quiet voice, just as if he could understand her, "Why, you're only a little boy after all, aren't you? (13) As Ernest would later remember, Mrs. Wheeler's touch provides him with his "first welcome to this country" (13). It marks his initial experience of affection in the United States, one that recuperates him from the trauma of geographical displacement (Ernest has lost the Bohemian motherland from which he has been forced to emigrate) and from the hostility he has suffered (he has been "pushed and hauled and shouted at for so many days, he had lost count of them") upon his arrival in America. (12-13).

In this way, Cather depicts Ernest as an echo of Claude's emotional backwardness. He is characterized by an attachment to maternal plenitude and marked by a desire to reclaim the love of a mother (his Bohemian homeland) from which he has been estranged. As Cather further suggests, the bond between Claude and Ernest is an extension of their emotional similarity. On the night of Ernest's arrival, "[Ernest] and Claude only shook hands and looked at each other suspiciously, but ever since they had been good friends (13). Claude and Ernest are originally wary because they see in each other a potential competitor for Mrs. Wheeler. But the suspicion never deepens, and the possible competition is never realized. As the intellectual circle that the boys later share with Mrs. Wheeler suggests, the potential for rivalry that momentarily surfaces between Claude and Ernest is quickly overcome by their capacity to share the love of Mrs. Wheeler with each other and to be shared by the mother. Even though Ernest's readiness

to love Mrs. Wheeler initially provokes the "suspicio[n]" of a wary Claude—who has, until that point, experienced male relations only as an abusive competition between father and son for the exclusive love of the mother—Claude and Ernest quickly become "close friends" (13). In contrast to the Oedipal rivalry that characterizes Claude's relation to his father and the affective monopoly Mr. Wheeler exercises in the name of erotic privatization, Claude and Ernest represent a male-male that is emotionally inclusive. Their love for Mrs. Wheeler brings Claude and Ernest to love each other and to reclaim through that affection a non-competitive male-male intimacy that extends to the mother. In addition to Claude's friendship with Ernest, Cather figures impersonal male same-sex intimacy through Claude's friendship with the Erlich boys and their single mother, Augusta. The episode continues Cather's pattern of linking intimacy between filial men with the mother. Claude's friendship with the Erlich boys develops in a way similar to his friendship with Ernest. It begins with a potential for competition that quickly eases into a friendship whose pleasure is associated with the mother. Claude meets Julius Erlich after a football game that takes place between Temple, the religious college that Claude's family forces him to attend, and State, the university that actually appeals to Claude's broad intellectual interests and where he desires to enroll as a full-time student. Claude leads the Temple team and loses the game. But the competition is friendly. It does not end with Claude feeling bitter about his defeat or with State emphasizing their athletic superiority. Instead, Claude impresses the State football players with his athleticism, and after the game Julius, the quarterback for State who is won over by Claude's performance, warmly congratulates him and invites him to meet his mother and to visit his home, where, he declares, they are "all boys" and where Claude need not feel

ashamed about wearing his football uniform to dinner, a feeling he had "been trained to observe" (34). Julius's gesture of asking Claude to dinner with him, his brothers, and his mother enables them to become "good friends, all in a few minutes" (34). Before the invitation, Claude feels distant from Julius. He has sat next to him in a class he takes at State and spoken with him on several occasions. But he "couldn't make Erlich out" (34). Cather implies, here, that Claude's initial sense of distance from Julius is informed by the same kind of suspicion that Claude has felt toward Ernest before they became friends. Claude did not know if Julius were a man he could trust emotionally, but by welcoming Claude into his fatherless household he proves himself to be, like Ernest, a son willing to share openly the love of the mother (34).

Through the sequences that describe Claude's experience with the Erlich family, Cather represents Claude's connection with Julius and his brothers and with their mother, Augusta, as a non-Oedipalized home that represents the familial possibility of impersonal intimacy. Among the Erlich boys, Claude becomes a son who can pursue the love of another mother without the impediment of the father. His brief romance with Augusta Erlich—whose affectionate note of thanks he carries around in his breast pocket after sending her a "box of the reddest roses he could find" (40)—temporarily offers the fulfillment of the filial wish to be with the mother. Cather explicitly points toward the pre-Oedipal mother-son quality of the relation through Augusta's Cousin Madame Shroeder-Shatz, who declares to Augusta, after one of Claude's visits, that she herself might have married Claude "if you were but a few years younger, it might not yet be too late. Oh, don't be a fool, Augusta! Such things have happened, and will happen again" (52). While Cather envisions Claude's later marriage to Enid to be alienating, his

hypothetical marriage to Augusta Erlich points to the romantic nature of their intimacy. Here, Cather queers marriage by envisioning it as potentially a non-patriarchal arrangement that does not involve the brutal and possessive husband. The non-normative wedding of mother and son suggests the possibility of an institutionalized and culturally sanctioned form of a relationship that cannot bloom in the Oedipal home.

One of Ours could have been a story in which Claude proceeds in his friendship with Ernest or the Erlich boys and more fully loses himself in the pleasure of their company. But as much as Cather commits to imagining the possibility of non-alienated male-male love, she envisions that form of intimacy as succumbing to the demands of erotic privatization. Claude and Ernest's romance does not survive the abeyance into which it is forced by Claude's marriage to Enid, the wife who embodies institutionalized monogamous heterosexuality and the erotically deadening emotional privacy that it requires. In psychoanalytic terms, heterosexual marriage is the telos of Oedipalization. The son relinquishes the mother in return for the promise of a wife. But Claude never fully abandons the mother. The estrangement that he experiences with Enid and the ultimate failure of their relationship demonstrates his continued longing for a mode of fulfillment that marriage is fundamentally unable to provide, as it would force him to abandon the inclusive love of the mother, identify with the father, and pursue, as part of the mandates of that identification, the exclusive love of another woman. Claude's marriage to Enid exacerbates the alienation that he feels early on as the result of his father's malice. Claude's loneliness results, in part, from his own misrecognition of marriage, as an institution that marks one's social and erotic normalcy, as a unifying

process. Ironically, Claude initially hopes marriage will make "him right with the world and make fit into the life about him" (122).[15]

At the same time, however, Cather sees the isolating effect of marriage as a problem with Enid herself, as a function of her unaffectionate individualism as a wife. With Enid, Claude succumbs to the demands of a self-contained individual who polices the boundaries between herself and the world. In her sanctimonious prohibitionism, her vegetarianism, and in her aversion to the principal of intellectual freedom that Ernest relishes as a Bohemian and that Claude admires in his friend, Enid represents a cauterized body whose sanitary self-discipline and repression sharply differs from Ernest and the unbounded pleasure that Claude enjoys in him. In contrast to the affective union that characterizes Ernest and Claude's relation, Enid epitomizes emotional and erotic disconnection. Early in his relationship with her, Claude ironically admires the very quality in Enid that comes to be the source of his discontent, observing that "She moved quickly and gracefully, just brushing things rather than touching them, so that there was a suggestion of flight about her slim figure, of gliding away from her surroundings (103-4). Removed from her surroundings, Enid represents detached, self-contained individuality—an anti-relational way of being that produces in Claude a sharp sense of disconnection and unquenched yearning for physical and emotional contact. Shut off from Ernest because of Enid's aversion to his indulgent Bohemianism and unable to connect with a wife who finds even mere "embrace" to be repugnant, Claude discovers marriage to be a relational dead zone (172)—just the "final sort of thing" that Enid's father Mr. Royce tries to warn him about when he asks for permission to marry his daughter (123).

In the section that follows Claude's marital failure, Cather dissolves the relation between Claude and Ernest because it is found to be indelibly tarnished by the intrusion of the marriage. We are told that even though Ernest came to see Claude after the dissolution of his marriage:

> They both felt it would be indelicate to renew their former intimacy. Ernest still felt aggrieved about his beer, as if Enid had snatched the tankard from his lips with her own corrective hand. Like Leonard, he believed that Claude had made a bad bargain in matrimony; but instead of feeling sorry for him, Ernest wanted to see him convinced and punished. When he married Enid, Claude had been false to liberal principles, and it was only right that he should pay for his apostasy. (186)

Cather describes the discontinuation of Ernest and Claude's bond as the consequence of betrayed "liberal principles" (186). Understood in this way, she, like Ernest, punishes Claude for betraying the emancipation he enjoyed formerly with the Bohemian boy. But even as Cather's conclusion of Claude and Ernest's friendship may be understood as a tragic foreclosure, it nonetheless constitutes a thematically meaningful gesture. The end of Claude and Ernest's bond allows Cather to explore the full meaning of the erotic inclusiveness that she assigns to the relation. It is a plot device that permits her to conceptualize same-sex bonds as expressing an impersonal love feeling that persists beyond any particular dissolution.

Just as Cather imagines the Oedipally fractured harmony between Claude and his mother as recuperated, to a degree, in his relationship with Ernest, so too does she see the intimacy between Claude and Ernest as finding an alternate expression. Where one same-sex male love ends, another begins. Through Claude's journey to war in France, Cather explores his connection with the violinist-soldier David Gerhardt as a continuation, and fuller reclamation, of undifferentiated love. The intimacy between these men is anticipated by the pleasures of male-male friendship that Claude enjoys even before

arriving in France. The companionship that Claude enjoys with the U.S. Marines on the Anchises during his voyage to the Great War conceptualizes homosexual bonding as an impersonal fraternity that is enabled by a mutual and reciprocal love for the mother. The scene in which Claude learns about the origins of Albert Usher, the orphan soldier from Wyoming, reveals Cather's vision of the marines as a surrogate family that is beyond the Oedipal dynamic:

> When questioned, the Marine went on to say that though he had no home of his own, he had always happened to fall on his feet, among kind people. He could go back to any house in Pinedale or Du Bois and be welcome like a son.
> "I suppose there are kind women everywhere," he said, "but in that respect Wyoming's got the rest of the world beat. I never felt the lack of a home. Now the U.S. Marines are my family. Wherever they are, I'm at home." (228-9)

Likening the U.S. Marines to the homes that he, as an orphan, always found among the "kind women" of Wyoming, Albert Usher characterizes the marines as a loving family in which men, who were once estranged sons, retrieve the lost affection of the mother through their bonds with one another. Fittingly, the friendship that forms between Claude and Usher through their conversation is itself a manifestation of the maternally infused homosexual bond implied in Usher's background story. Claude idealizes Usher, who resembles "what a soldier ought to look like," and becomes fascinated with him, unable to remove his gaze from his fellow marine: "His eye followed the Marine about all day" (228-9). The scenario in which Claude speaks with Usher reveals that his attraction to the marine follows from his yearning for home, specifically for his mother. Before talking to Usher, Claude reflects, "It was the hour when the farmers at home drive their teams in after the day's work. Claude was thinking how his mother would be standing at the west window every evening now, watching the sun go down and following him in her mind. When the young marine came up and joined him, he confessed to a pang of

homesickness" (228-9). Claude's bond with Usher is a manifestation of his longing for the maternal. It is a relation in which Claude realizes the potential of finding the love of the mother through intimacy with another marine, another son in whom Claude finds mirrored his love for the mother.

The affectionate bond that Claude experiences with David Gerhardt shortly after he arrives in France serves as a continuation and fuller reclamation of impersonal love. Like his friendship with Ernest, Claude's connection with David is a union rooted in emotional recognition, one in which Claude finds his love for the mother mirrored in a male counterpart. But Cather imagines the union between the soldiers as more ambivalently vacillating between rivalry and affection. On the one hand, the bond enacts the latent violence in love between men who affectively echo each other. Claude encounters David for the first time when he joins B Company. Meeting David, he feels that "something like jealousy flamed up in him. He felt in a flash that he suffered by comparison with the new officer; that he must be on his guard and must not let himself be patronized" (*OO* 279). Initially, David provokes insecurity in Claude, giving rise to a sense of "jealousy" and a fear of inferiority ("that he suffered by comparison to the new officer") against which he must "guard" himself (279). Cather imagines these feelings of vulnerability as a feature of Claude's friendship with David that periodically resurface to create a tension between the soldiers. Early on, when Claude and David are assigned to build the "new barracks and extend the sanitation" for B company, a physical "rivalry" springs between the soldiers in which Claude, as a response to his insecurity, "seize[s] the opportunity to be patronizing," feeling himself superior in his knowledge of carpentry,

"when Gerhardt betrayed that he was utterly unable to select lumber by given measurements" (284).

Claude's relationship with David more fully enacts the rivalry with which his bond with Ernest only momentarily flirts—before the suspicion between the boys gives way to an affectionate and lasting friendship. The sense of rivalry that Claude initially feels with David shows him to be susceptible to the Oedipal competitiveness embodied by his father. Suitably, Claude's fear of inferiority develops into a possessive envy that emerges in his jealousy of David's European sophistication, his mastery of French language and culture, and, more importantly, his creative talent, his ability to play the violin. Cather illustrates the envious strand of Claude's connection with David in one of the episodes in which the two soldiers stay in the village home of the Jouberts, the French family with which Claude and David periodically take respite from duty. In the scene, Claude, waking up from a nightmare in which he has never left his father's farm in Nebraska, evaluates his fortune of being in France with David, with whom he has realized his dream of discovering "some one whom he could admire without reservations; some one he could envy, emulate, wish to be" (332). Here, Claude's relationship with David resembles an emotional hierarchy. Cather imagines Claude's envy as a desire for emulation, what she understands as the longing to possess the personality of another. For Claude, David represents, in part, an opportunity for imitation, the fruition of his perennial longing to be exposed to and to absorb the worldliness and sophistication embodied by David. Claude further considers that such a privilege could happen only "in war times," when a diversity of men are unified for a common purpose that he and David

"would have been likely to cross; or that they would have had anything to do together…any of the common interests that make men friends. (332).

But while emulation represents, from Claude's perspective, a romantic fulfillment of a once futile aspiration, for Cather the "wish to be" another is not an innocuous desire. Rather, it is a dangerously selfish one, a desperate and ultimately corrosive need for self-affirmation that is an extension of the fear of emasculation and the rivalry that Claude initially feels with David (332). Claude could have been with David only in war, which provides him not only with the chance to bond with a man like David but with the emotional freedom to nurture that bond. In France, Claude is beyond his father's home, his violence, and the mandate for emotional privatization that misguides him into marriage with Enid. But at the same time, he is still prone to a fear of inferiority that provokes his competiveness and his possessive desire for emulation. Thus, in one way, Claude's relationship with David reflects what Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen calls mimetic rivalry.[16] It is a relationship between two men who emotionally mirror each other but in which the affective replication is realized as a competition.

Yet, Claude's bond with David is also a reciprocal love based in affective similarity. Cather imagines Claude's desire for emulation as counterbalanced, over the course of the friendship, with feelings of affection that challenge the potential for competition between the soldiers. As much as Cather acknowledges that male-male relations can be envious and destructive, she envisions them simultaneously as intimacies that resist violence. Claude's wish to be David, his desire to take on the personality of his counterpart, is offset by his wish to be *with* David, his participation in an equitable and less personal same-sex bond. For Cather, the Oedipal friction between men can be

dissolved through a love that retrieves the pre-Oedipal intimacy of the mother. If mimesis is a potentially destructive bond, it can also slip, Cather imagines, into an impersonal union, one in which the recognition of the self in the other translates not into the violent desire to displace the object with the oneself (or oneself with the object), but rather, into a mutual relation rooted in what Bersani describes as narcissistic self-recognition: the love of self as other and the love of other as self.[17]

Like his intimacy with Ernest, Claude's connection with David escapes normative male relations. To begin, Cather envisions the bond as connected with a shared love for the mother. David and Claude are linked by their mutual affection for Madame Joubert, the French mother who offers her home as a refuge to the soldiers and with whom they find reprieve from battle and relief from the injuries of war. When they first meet, David brings Claude to stay with him in the home of the Jouberts, the "nice old couple" with whom he stays during down time. Despite his initial distrust of David, Claude follows him to the home, which resides in "a village, which lay on the edge of a wood,--a wood so large one could not see the end of it; it met the horizon with a ridge of pines. The village was but a single street. On either side ran clay-coloured walls, with painted wooden doors here and there, and green shutters. Claude's guide opened one of these gates, and they walked into a little sanded garden; the house was built round it on three sides (280). Entering the garden, Claude's first sight is of Madame Joubert, the French mother with whom the home is centrally associated: "Under a cherry tree sat a woman in a black dress, sewing, a work table beside her" (280). Through this image, Cather suggests that Claude retrieves the unity of his childhood with David. Guiding him to the Jouberts, David leads Claude back to the maternal wholeness from which he has been

estranged. Madame Joubert occasions the return of the cherry tree he anticipates enjoying with his mother in youth. Here, the cherries, the once violently protected possession of the patriarch, are an abundant pleasure enjoyed by all. On the dinner table that Claude later shares with David and the French mother, the cherry tree rains down "bright drops" of its ripened fruit (287). Like the bond with Ernest that extends to Mrs. Wheeler, the mother-son dynamic here is also a reciprocal relationship. Madame Joubert enables Claude and David to be sons again, and Claude and David, in turn, allow Madame Joubert, who, we later discover, has lost both her sons in the war, to be a mother once more.

The intimacy between Claude and David follows from their love for Madame Joubert. Suitably, the limitless wood ("one could not see the end of it") associated with the French mother is the space in which Claude and David escape the Oedipal dynamics that are potential in their relationship. The episode in which Claude and David compete with each other during the construction of the barracks also describes the relationship between the men as refusing that element of rivalry. The next day, when rain suspends the contest between the soldiers, Claude absconds from his company. Skipping out on a "boxing match" to which a fellow officer intends to invite him and David, Claude makes his way to "the big wood that had tempted him ever since his arrival" (284). For Claude, the temptation of the wood is the temptation of David himself. Expecting solitude, he, instead, finds David, who has also left the company for the allure of the wood, sitting alone in a clearing (284). Echoing his time with Ernest at Lovely Creek, Claude's experience David in the woods is a pastoral romance that shows the bond to be an intimacy in which men escape male same-sex aggression. In the wood, Claude and David

abandon the rivalry that has manifested between them, a competitiveness further symbolized in the boxing match that the soldiers also avoid. Claude and David are the expression of an impersonal love whose resistance to violent male-male relations stems from the unbounded quality of their bond. Just as Cather depicts Claude and Ernest's relationship as coextensive with landscape at Lovely Creek, she imagines Claude and David as continuous with the natural world that surrounds them. When Claude discovers David, he finds him in a

> grassy glade, among the piles of flint boulders, [where] little white birches shook out their shining leaves in the lightly moving air. All about the rocks were patches of purple heath; it ran up into the crevices between them like fire. On one of these bald rocks sat Lieutenant Gerhardt, hatless, in an attitude of fatigue or of deep dejection, his hands clasped about his knees, his bronze hair ruddy in the sun. After watching him for a few minutes, Claude descended the slope, swishing the tall ferns. (285)

David has sought reprieve in the wood specifically because, as we learn later, he feels burdened and depressed by the labor and turmoil of being a soldier. But when Claude joins David's private refuge in the "glade" after briefly admiring him from afar, he gains and provides a restorative experience of companionship (285). Claude's presence brings to David all the splendor and natural vivacity of the wood itself. Like the purple heath that courses "like fire" through the rocks on which David sits, the connection that blossoms with Claude's arrival bursts through the emotional ossification that burdens his companion. It is a relation so naturally vivacious and powerful that it can develop even in the most unlikely place (285).

But Claude's relationship with David never completely overcomes the destructive possibility of its competitive undercurrent. Even as Claude enjoys the pleasure of being with David, such feeling alternates with his desire to possessive the qualities he envies in

David. The sequence in which Claude and David stay briefly at the home of David's friends Madame Claire captures the persistence of Claude's envy. In this scene, Claude listens to David play the violin for the first time. He acknowledges that "The music was part of his own confused emotions" and that in listening to it he was "torn between generous admiration, and bitter, bitter envy" (338). "What would it mean," he thinks, "to be able to do anything as well as that, to have a hand capable of delicacy and precision and power?" (338).

Cather explicitly responds to Claude's question about the implications of his wish for the "precision and power" of David's hand by visualizing the delicate power for which Claude yearns as translating into the destructive precision of militarism and weaponry. Late in the novel, Claude is sent to protect an embattled trench on the front line. When he and his company arrive at the trench, he sends David and his best officer, Sergeant Hicks, on a mission to retrieve a lost support battalion. Claude leads his company in a counterattack against advancing Germans. A mine explodes beneath the trench, killing the "Georgia gun teams" that are a part of the counterattack (365). Realizing that the riflemen are the last defense, Claude takes action. He directs the rifles, which have become "spongy and uncertain," and he transforms them into a "withering fire" that checks the German advancement:

> He sprang to the fire-step and then out on the parapet. Something instantaneous happened; he had his men in hand.
> "Steady, steady!" He called the range to the rifle teams behind him, and he could see the fire take effect. All along the Hun lines men were stumbling and falling. They swerved a little to the left; he called the rifles to follow, directing them with his voice and with his hands. It was not only that from here he could correct the range and direct the fire; the men behind him had become like rock. That line of faces below, Hicks, Jones, Fuller, Anderson, Oscar….Their eyes never left him. With these men he could do anything. (366)

In this passage, Cather exposes the violent extension of Claude's longing to emulate David. His wish to be David assumes a destructive mode of empowerment, as the pleasure he derives from instrumental music transforms into the pleasure of instrumental killing. Directing the line of rifles with his "voice and hands," Claude becomes a wielder not of the violin, but of the weapons of war. Conducting an orchestra of men whose fixed gaze ("Their eyes never left him") recalls Claude's own envious fascination with David's violin playing, Claude enables, here, a male same-sex formation that is not about unbounded pleasure, but rather, unlimited destruction. "With these men," he realizes, "he could do anything," and that "anything," now, means death (366).

The scene is Claude's last. It ends with him dying from bullet wounds in the arms of Sergeant Hicks, who returns alone from his and David's mission before the start of the battle. Thus, Cather concludes Claude's life on a fearful note. His death serves as a warning against the oedipal emotional possibility between men, against the possessive potential in even the most loving form of emotional reciprocity. At the same time, however, Claude's end indicates that the destructive potential between men figured by the violent homosociality of militarism is not the fate of all male same-sex love, but rather, one disastrous conclusion that Cather entertains and simultaneously repudiates. Importantly, Claude's death also foregrounds the selfless, non-violent potential of male same-sex bonds. Cather offers this final gesture as the denouement through Sergeant Hicks, to whom, significantly, she gives the final say about Claude and David's relationship. After Claude fades away, Hicks expresses his relief that he did not tell Claude that David had been "blown to pieces" before his heroic orchestration of his company: "Thank God I never told him," he said. "Thank God for that!" (367). Here,

Cather implies that David's death would have struck Claude with a sense of loss so shattering that it would have undermined his ability to perform his duty as a soldier. In this light, Claude and David's bond is figured as a having the potential to challenge the violence of battle. Even as Cather depicts the love between Claude and David as impossible, as destroyed by war and the destructive potential of rivalrous identification that enables it, she sees that love as characterized by an emotional depth that would have thwarted Claude's ability to continue to fight. Claude's feelings for David are strong, so much so that they could have frozen his orchestration of the rifles and could have paralyzed, in effect, the aggressive energies on which the bond also drew.

Cather does not imagine viable future for male same-sex love. She imagines it as vulnerable to the possessive, self-destructive desire for emulation that animates men as they conduct the orchestra of war. Claude and David are an historical impossibility that cannot survive the allure of battlefield heroism. *One of Ours* represents, on this account, Cather's own war against a modern future. Like the normative Freudian male, who rages self-destructively against new objects of desire through which he can never reclaim his impersonal experience of the world, Cather's fiction expresses her struggle against an emerging emotional-social order that cannot offer her the non-alienated plenitude of the past.

But the novel does not end with Claude's death. In the final paragraphs of *One of Ours*, Cather brings us back to Mrs. Wheeler and her relationship with Claude. First, the concluding depiction of Mrs. Wheeler further develops Cather's conception of the dynamics of male-male emulation as disastrous. Mulling over the letters Claude has written to her after receiving word that he has been killed in action, Mrs. Wheeler

contemplates his death. She considers that her son has died for the misguided investment in the glory of battle—that his enthusiasm about fighting is a sign of his delusional romantic perspective. Claude had been tricked by the nationalist propaganda and the romance of Europe by which young men had been drawn to the war, she reflects, just as he had been deceived, in the past, by his father's malevolent humor. He, "who was so afraid of being fooled! He had died believing his own country better than it is, and France better than any country can ever be" (370). Mrs. Wheeler characterizes Claude's death as arbitrary, preferable insofar as it saves him from the disillusionment suffered by so many of World War I survivors, "heroes" who survived battle only to become "slayers of themselves" upon returning home (370).

Mrs. Wheeler's evaluation of Claude's death articulates Cather's criticism of militarism. But the critical distance that representation posits between Mrs. Wheeler and her son is not the note on which *One of Ours* concludes. As her final gesture, Cather brings us back, once more, to the impersonal intimacy between mother and son—what she imagines as an emotional formation in which the lost love object is preserved through a love that transcends death. The last image describes Claude, after his death, as surviving in the bond between his two mothers, Mrs. Wheeler and the maternal domestic servant, Mahailey:

> Mahailey, when they are alone, sometimes addresses Mrs. Wheeler as "Mudder"; "Now, Mudder, you go upstairs an' lay down an' rest yourself." Mrs. Wheeler knows that then she is thinking of Claude, is speaking for Claude. As they are working at the table or bending over the oven, something reminds them of him, and they think of him together, like one person: Mahailey will pat her back and say, "Never you mind, Mudder; you'll see your boy up yonder." Mrs. Wheeler always feels that God is near,—but Mahailey is not troubled by any knowledge of interstellar spaces, and for her He is nearer still,—directly overhead, not so very far above the kitchen stove. (371)

Cather imagines female same-sex love as the expression of an impersonal love whose presence reclaims historical trauma. The loss of Claude becomes, here, an occasion for unity between Mrs. Wheeler and Mahailey, an affectionate bond between women in which the son is not displaced, but rather, fantasmatically reincarnated. Claude is the emotional trace that binds Mrs. Wheeler and Mahailey, who assumes the son's love for the mother. In her concern for the comfort and well-being of the mother, Mahailey embodies Claude's affection. When the two women are alone, Mahailey sometimes refers to Mrs. Wheeler as "Mudder" (371). In doing so, she "think[s]of Claude, speak[s] for Claude" (371). United by their love for the lost son, the female same-sex exceeds affective individuation. When "they are working at the table or bending over the oven, something reminds them of [Claude], and they think of him together, like one person" (371).

Cather understands Mahailey's union with Claude as enabled by the emotional similarity between the domestic servant and the lost son. Like Ernest and David, Mahailey echoes Claude's desire for the mother and the experience of alienation that animates the yearning to return to maternal plentitude. Early in the novel, Cather figures Mahailey as a momma's girl whose membership in the Wheeler family comes from her continued love for and desire to be with the mother. Mahailey's background story explains that she has had a "hard life" (20). When she was young, she, like Claude and Mrs. Wheeler, was the victim of male brutality. She had been "married to a savage mountaineer who often abused her and never provided for her" and who often came home with nothing "but a jug of whiskey and a pair of brutal fists" (20). Cather implies that she has found salvation from her abusive husband in the company of the mother of a

travelling family. She moves West with "a shiftless Virginia family" that eventually shatters under the pressures of "pioneer farm-life" (20). "When the mother of the family died," the story continues, "there was no place for Mahailey to go, and then Mrs. Wheeler took her in. Mahailey had no one to take care of her, and Mrs. Wheeler had no one to help her with the work; it had turned out very well" (20). Like Claude's, Mahailey's attachment to Mrs. Wheeler survives the physical and emotional injuries she has suffered at the hands of a patriarchal male and estrangement from an original maternal love. Mrs. Wheeler provides for Mahailey the maternal love that had been earlier offered to her, Cather suggests, by the mother of the "shiftless Virginia family" (20). The love between the two women is equitable, forged through their mutual need for each other. Mahailey needs someone "take care of her" just as Mrs. Wheeler needs someone "to help her with the work" around the house (20).

Through the depiction of female same-sex affection, Cather suggests that the impersonal love of the mother is not a gender-specific structure of feeling limited to men. Though men take center stage in the novel, the figure intimates Cather's equal investment in the selfless potential of female same-sex relations. Just as she sees the love between filial men as including the mother, Cather envisions the love between maternal women as including the son. Sharing the pleasure of Claude's memory and his feeling as they share domestic labor, Mahailey and Mrs. Wheeler overcome the division between self and other and are brought together "like one person" (371). Here, Cather emphasizes the genderless character of the kind of impersonal love that she pursues centrally through male same-sex relations in the novel. This love is not founded in gender difference. Rather, it is an inclusive emotional union between men or between women that

undermines through affective unity the boundaries and categories that separate individuals.

By figuring Claude as a pleasure shared by Mahailey and Mrs. Wheeler, Cather reclaims the mother-son bond. She returns Claude to the maternal plentitude that Mr. Wheeler tried to force him to relinquish when he was a child. Claude is preserved in a relation that persists beyond his death, in a way of feeling and being that is presently enacted by Mahailey, who acts more like him, loves more like him. It is a mode of emotional continuity that Mrs. Wheeler mistakes for a personal God that exists outside of the self, but which Mahailey, to whom Cather gives the final word in *One of Ours*, more accurately understands as a cohesive form of desire—something "nearer still," not beyond but coextensive with the impersonal intimacy of mother and son—"directly overhead, not so very far above the kitchen stove" (371).[18]

Conclusion

Cather's touching ending, her depiction of Claude as having loved and been loved so much by Mrs. Wheeler and Mahailey that he persists in the affection between them, returns us to the question of the author's relationship to her fictional male subject. As I have suggested, most criticism about *One of Ours* (with the exception of queer criticism) has been too personal. It has been influenced largely by the biographically biased assumption that Cather is an essentially female author, a woman writer, who differs fundamentally from Claude, a figure that she rigidly defines as normatively masculine. The stakes of such criticism are large for our understanding of the novel, for our interpretation of male and female subjectivity in Cather's work more generally, and for our conception of Cather's relationship to femininity and masculinity in her own life. Its

implications are nowhere more apparent than in Sharon O'Brien's influential reading of *One of Ours*. In "Willa Cather's 'Manly Battle Yarn,'" O'Brien provides an analysis of Cather's fictional representation of men and women and its connection to her personal relation to male and female identification—intuitions that she goes on to explore more fully in her groundbreaking biography *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice* (1987). In the essay, O'Brien argues that Cather offers in *One of Ours* an ultimately female-centered story that signals her transition away from her identification with males. O'Brien finds this psychic tendency exemplified in Cather's adolescent cross-dressing; in her usage of the masculine name William rather than Willa; and in the author's identification with male relatives: most notably her maternal uncle, William Boak, the Civil War soldier who died in combat and who Cather claimed, in her 1907 story as her "Namesake," and her nephew G.P. Cather, the World War I soldier who, killed in combat, was the inspiration for *One of Ours*. As O'Brien sees it, *One of Ours* is one of the novels that registers the emergence of Cather's feminine aesthetic, her evolution into a woman writer who increasingly identified with the women in her life, especially—as she would later claim in her biography—with her mother. For O'Brien, the biographical element in the novel, Cather's separation from male identity and her pursuit of female identity, manifests itself in Cather's representation of the male narrative, Claude's story, as giving way to the female story of his mother and Mahailey's relationship. For her, the conclusion demonstrates that the novel is a "mother-son story in which women gain the power men relinquish" (O'Brien 193). When Cather kills off Claude and imagines him, in the final scene, as entombed within the relationship between Mahailey and Mrs. Wheeler, she enacts a reversal of male dominance. Through Claude's death, she rescinds

the agency that she initially attributes to her male protagonist and reassigns it to the community of women that supplants Claude and his male same-sex bonds. To make her case for the biographical element in the story, O'Brien maps the relationship between Mrs. Wheeler and Claude onto Cather's relationship with Claude. She reasons that that the death of Claude and his displacement in the narrative by Mrs. Wheeler and Mahailey dramatizes Cather's increasingly oppositional relation to male identity. Like the mother and the maternal house servant, who both survive Claude's death and come to feel and to speak for him in their relationship, Cather establishes her voice as a woman writer and secures her membership in a female literary tradition. She buries the dead son, and along with him, her identification with men.

It is understandable that O'Brien argues for Cather's position within a female literary tradition and that she uses *One of Ours* to argue for her evolution as a woman writer. She does so to help establish Cather as important early twentieth-century writer and to foreground the author's investment in love between women. But her reading imposes a strict developmental narrative onto Cather's life and work that assumes her progress toward female identification at the expense of her interest in men. O'Brien's interpretation of masculinity and femininity in *One of Ours* as oppositional formations suggests the violence risked in reading Cather, in her life and in her work, as exclusively feminine. The central assumption of her reading is that female agency relies on the death of men and that Cather's identity as a woman rests on her killing off male identifications that were important to her self-conception, to her imaginative life, and to her creation of fictional selves. Moreover, O'Brien's gender-essential genealogy of Cather's growth as an artist seems to contrast with her own observations about the intensity of Cather's

feelings toward the men in her life with whom she identified, particular the sense of connection she felt with G.P. Cather, her dead nephew who was the main inspiration for Claude. Contrary to her notion that Cather shed her personal and aesthetic investment in masculinity, O'Brien's account of Cather's relationship to G.P. suggests that the author did not simply rid herself of male identification. Indeed, Cather's sense of kinship with her nephew did not res on differentiation. Her feelings for G.P ran so deep that she considered them to disturb the borders between herself and him, between her life and his death. As O'Brien describes it, Cather was so invested in the memory of G.P. that she came to understand him as her "other self" (186).[19] Indeed, as Cather later confessed to friend and fellow writer Dorothy Canfield Fisher, she sensed that "Some of her was buried with [G.P.] in France [and] some of him was living in her" (187).[20] Cather felt a profound sense of unification with her dead nephew, a bond that took them beyond their differences as man and woman, as living and dead.

The sense of unity that Cather continued to feel with her nephew beyond the grave suggests that her understanding of her creative identity—both her conception of herself as an author and her understanding of her relationship to Claude, the fictional male subject that was inspired by G.P.—was less organized by the opposition between man and woman than O'Brien assumes. Cather's bond with one of the most central male figures in her personal and imaginative life seems to have been, on the contrary, an impersonal intimacy. She did not simply bury her nephew and her identification with men along with him. She felt that part of herself was G.P, entombed within him. She felt also that part of G.P. was in herself, still living, continuing inside her. The relationship echoes that between Claude and his mothers in the conclusion of *One of Ours.* Cather does not

merely kill off Claude and bury the love between him and his mothers. As an effect of their continuing affective unity, part of Claude persists in Mrs. Wheeler and Mahailey, just as part of his mothers, as we can imagine, continue on in Claude. And in this way, Cather's creation of Claude and her venture into the genre of war fiction constitutes less an invasion of male artistic terrain (as O'Brien would have it) than it does her understanding of affect as able to overcome the division between female and male, between a mother and her son.

CHAPTER 2

Momma's Boy
Maternal Masculinity in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* and "The Man Who Became a Woman'"

Sherwood Anderson has been regarded in recent years as a minor figure in U.S. modernism and his work has inspired little criticism since the 50s. But it wasn't always thus. In the early stages of his career, Anderson enjoyed a brief but significant period of celebrity. His best work, *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), earned him widespread admiration. Rebecca West celebrated Anderson as the American "we have most reason to envy" (Townsend 184). Her praise echoed among contemporary writers and critics including Gertrude Stein, Theodore Dreiser, James Joyce, and Edmund Wilson. Anderson's work appeared frequently in prestigious journals such as the *Nation*, the *New Republic*, and the *Dial*. Indeed, he won the *Dial*'s first literary prize in 1921, an honor that later went to T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and William Carlos Williams. He also exercised significant influence on the changing literary scene and was recognized as one of the founders of the literary movement we now call U.S. modernism. In 1919, H.L. Mencken declared that *Winesburg* was a landmark work that helped to establish a "new order" in writing (Mencken 39). Anderson played a crucial role in the development of this formation. Through *Winesburg* he influenced a group of younger artists who are now seen as canonical modernists. He inspired writers like Thomas Wolfe, Hart Crane, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Jean Toomer, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway. Anderson was especially important for Hemingway and Faulkner. He mentored these authors and launched their careers by helping them to publish their first works (Hemingway's *In Our Time* in 1925 and Faulkner's *Soldier's Pay* in 1926).[1] Anderson possessed a cultural authority so great that

Hemingway, at the time a relatively a minor figure trying to escape his mentor's shadow, was forced to mock him as the "Master" of American letters.[2] Faulkner, in a more affirmative vein, also acknowledged Anderson's mastery. Years after his death, he fondly remembered his mentor as "the father of my generation of American writers and the tradition of American writing which our successors will carry on." [3]

But in the mid-20s, especially after the publication of his best-selling novel, *Dark Laughter* (1925), Anderson's reputation and career deteriorated rapidly. [4] This deterioration was, in part, the result of a growing trend among Anderson's contemporaries to associate him with a sentimentalism against which they defined modernism, to see in his work an emphasis on personal feeling they rejected as effeminate, anachronistic, and juvenile.[5] This trend began with Anderson's closest protégés, Hemingway and Faulkner, who criticized him for failing to embody a "male" style of writing that was--as characterized by two of the leading spokesman for modernism, T.S. Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot--hard-edged, tough, and impersonal (Casey 4). In 1926, Hemingway published *Torrents of Spring*, a damaging parody of *Dark Laughter* in which he declared the end of Anderson's standing as a leading American writer. In the same year, Faulkner wrote his own satire, *Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles*, a work that irreparably strained his relationship with Anderson.[6] Faulkner lightly struck at Anderson for his juvenile, self-reflexive emotionalism. He criticized him for lacking--as he later said about Anderson's autobiographical memoir, *A Story Teller's Story* (1924)--the mature "ego" of a good writer (Townsend 221). But Hemingway did not pull his punches. He attacked Anderson for the maudlin qualities of his fiction, which he perceived as an extension of the author's effeminate demeanor. In *Torrents*, he depicted Anderson, through the

character Scripps O'Neill, as a failed romantic whose desperate hunger for compassionate love aligned him with the gay "fairy" (*Torrents* 20). Hemingway's misogynistic and homophobic attitude toward Anderson intensified in later years. After Anderson's death, he took shots at his former mentor that exposed the severity of his hostility. He declared, for instance, in a letter to the art critic Bernard Berenson that the hype surrounding Anderson during his heyday in the 20s had been undeserved because he was "wet and sort of mushy" (*Letters* 802). Hemingway repeated these sentiments in a letter to his book reviewer, Harvey Breit, in which he declared that Anderson "was like a jolly but tortured bowl of pus turning into a woman in front of your eyes" (*Letters* 862).

Literary critics quickly fell on board with Hemingway and Faulkner. They repudiated Anderson as a passé sentimentalist beyond which U.S. literature had grown. In a 1927 review for the *New Republic*, Lawrence S. Morris rebuked Anderson as an emotional degenerate "stuck" in the sensitive "adolescence" he celebrated in *Winesburg*. That same year, Cleveland B. Chase, in his critical biography, *Sherwood Anderson* (one of the first book-length studies of the author), claimed that Anderson "feels great writing, but lacks the inner hardness and determination necessary to express it," and that his "softness" prevented him from becoming a "great writer" (5, 14). This misogynistic attitude continued into 40s. In 1941, Lionel Trilling belittled Anderson for possessing an immature "innocence" that emerged in the "adolescence" of his fiction (214). He declared that while Anderson had been influential for his contemporaries in the early stages of modernism, they had grown beyond their youthful fascination with his work. On a similar note, Oscar Cargill lambasted Anderson for being emotionally backward, which he associated with Anderson's feminized understanding of creativity (328-9). One year later,

Alfred Kazin similarly claimed that Anderson was "clumsy and sentimental," that he wrote "at times as if he were finger-painting" (211). Anderson's reputation as a womanish sentimentalist continued into the early 50s, in the criticism of Irving Howe, who despite his passion for the author, consolidated the "critical commonplace that while he attracts sensitive adolescents he cannot satisfy the mature mind" (208-9).

Howe and the others phobically rejected Anderson for failing to live up to the objective and masculine. But they were, in a sense, right. The author was, in fact, deeply invested in emotion and in a feminized conception of himself as a writer, even before he fell in the eyes of his contemporaries. This investment grew, in part, from Anderson's sympathetic identification with his mother, Emma Jane Smith, "whose keen observations on the life about her," he wrote in the dedication to *Winesburg*, "first awoke in me the hunger to see beneath the surface of lives."[7] Anderson conceived of his creativity as based in a feminine capacity for empathy. It embodied a vulnerable receptivity and compassionate responsiveness to the internal "lives" of others (their desires, feelings, and pain), an emotional insightfulness that sprang from the perceptual gifts of the mother. Anderson's investment in femininity as the wellspring of male creativity reflected his continued attachment to what Anthony Rotundo has called Victorian manhood: a relative fluid conception of male selfhood as imprinted with "feminine" elements of personality, the compassion and tenderness conventionally associated with women, specifically the mothers and teachers who were responsible, as per the culture of separate spheres, for raising and educating young men.[8] Born in 1876, Anderson inherited this model of masculinity, and, despite its decline in the twentieth century, he valued male femininity as a repository of cultural value. Feminine manhood was central to his understanding of

modernism as a contradictory, non-binarized form of creative self-expression. Anderson offered this view in “The New Note,” one of his early attempts to conceptualize the movement. He declared, here, that the new writer was, in fact, "as old as the world itself." The “voice of the new man” spoke from “the body and the soul of youth rather than from the bodies and souls of the master craftsmen who are gone.” The modern writer spoke through himself. He articulated an internal vitality ("the body and soul of youth"). In doing so, he broke away from the external influence of male literary tradition ("the bodies and souls of the master craftsmen who are gone") and became part of a creative genealogy rooted in personal feeling. This genealogy was feminine. The "new man" was a modern artisan, part of a new order of “craftsmen.” But in sounding “The New Note,” he channeled a feminine past, an origin comprised of both the “youth and the maiden."[9] In "The New Note," Anderson thus offered a non-binarized account of artistic creation that integrated the “new,” “male” writer with an “old,” “female” capacity for non-alienated self-expression. In this chapter, I argue that this androgynous conception of creativity--the combination of the old and the new, the male and the female--is at the core of Anderson's fiction.[10] It is the central concept of *Winesburg, Ohio*. As I will argue, while his contemporaries celebrated the sequence of short stories as a landmark of the new, impersonal style of literature, it, in fact, represents Anderson's profound conception of modernism as the continuation of an "old" form of creativity as an embodied and emotional craft that conveys the writer's "feminine" qualities. I will claim that this notion is also the key concept in “The Man Who Became a Woman" (1922), a short story that Anderson produced toward the end of his career. The short story shows Anderson's continued investment in a complexly gendered version of manhood as a model for

creative and emotional freedom. In doing so, it challenges the assumption that Anderson's work after *Winesburg* is relatively unsophisticated and that it does not deserve to be studied carefully.

In *Winesburg* and in “The Man Who Became a Woman,” Anderson offers as a model of the new writer an internally and expressively female man who connects empathetically with other "lives" (*Winesburg*). Importantly, he also explores, as an expression of the libidinal freedom enabled by this empathy, love between men. While it is a largely overlooked element in his fiction, Anderson understands compassionate male-male relations as a significant component of androgynous masculinity. It is a form of libidinal freedom that grows from the emotional receptivity he associates with male femininity. It is a desire for emotional and physical contact with other men that springs from his "feminine" qualities. A letter Anderson wrote to his friend Roger Sergel in 1935 illustrates his understanding of male same-sex love as linked to the “hunger" for empathetic relations he felt he had inherited from his mother.[1] Reflecting on his visit with Sergel earlier that year as an instance in which he had been driven by the need for such companionship (a need mirrored by Sergel, who, in an earlier exchange, shamefully confessed to writing long, passionate letters to male acquaintances), Anderson claims that men are “hungry” for one another, and that “companionship, even love, as between man and man, is a thing most of all wanted now” (*Letters* 322). He calls for male “tenderness” as a way to ease this hunger, and he offered a personal confession to stress the importance of love between men. Referring to his friendship with Maurice Long, a laundromat owner he had met during a trip to Washington D.C. six years earlier, Anderson claims that he himself “came near getting it a few years ago after I came down

here, with an Irishman who lived in Washington, a man met quite accidentally, a man [who] came here as often as I went to him" (322).

My argument offers, in this way, a relatively complex picture of Anderson's gender politics. One of the greatest paradoxes of Anderson's career is that he, an author once too feminine for critics, has become, in a sense, too masculine. Since the 80s, the largest, most recent contribution to Anderson scholarship has come from feminist critics. With a few exceptions, these critics view Anderson as a sexist who is insensitive toward women and perpetuates a polarized view of masculinity and femininity.[11] Marilyn Judith Atlas claims that for all of his apparent sympathy toward women in *Winesburg*, Anderson refuses "to create a female character who wants, and is able to, form her own life" (264). This kind of critique is common among this generation of critics. Judith Fetterley similarly declares that "what happens to women is of no importance of all" in Anderson (21). William V. Miller sees Anderson's women as "peculiarly circumscribed in their development" in comparison to the men who are the true agents in his stories (196). And Clare Colquitt states that in Anderson men's relationships with women are just matters of "exploitation" (91). These evaluations persist. They echo in Mark Whalan, who argues, in the most current study of gender in Anderson, *Race, Manhood, and Modernism in America* (2002), that the author views masculinity as essentially different from femininity in service of "consolidating a patriarchal masculinity" (46).

I sympathize with these commentators to a degree. They are right to point out that Anderson invests unevenly in men as cultural producers and is lopsidedly pessimistic about the fate of modern women who pursue emotional and intellectual fulfillment. But they underestimate the progressive quality of Anderson's gender politics, especially his

conception of feminine masculinity. In recent years scholars have reevaluated the assumption that modernist writers invest in a normative conception of masculinity that they define against the feminine. They have revealed the ways in which some of these writers--Jean Toomer, Willa Cather, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Faulkner--offer a relatively complexly gendered model of masculinity.[12] Anderson is part of this progressive vein of modernism. He explores, in the way that I have suggested, an ambiguously gendered version of the modern writer. As I will show, while this figure relies on a traditional association of women with emotional responsiveness, ultimately it does not serve sexist ends. It is not an essentializing combination of the masculine and feminine as fundamentally separate components of selfhood but, rather, an ambiguous mixture that obscures the distinction between the genders. The writer is internally feminine, but his internal femininity is also masculine. This androgynous formation springs, importantly, from an empathetic connection to women. Anderson understands that to embrace the feminine elements of male selfhood that enable creative and libidinal freedom is to recognize and to relate to women as desirous, vibrant subjects who aspire for intellectual and emotional liberation. It is also to be vulnerable to the social phenomena that inhibit feminine self-expression. Anderson imagines non-normative masculinity as imperiled by an emerging patriarchal social order that rigidly polarizes the masculine against the feminine. This system disavows "feminine" elements of male selfhood. It voids men of the compassion that enables their creative and libidinal freedom. In doing so, it produces the conditions of female oppression. A system that devalues empathy in men precludes their ability to identify women as subjects. It is to

foster the binarized gender scheme that naturalizes male privilege and the suppression of women.

Anderson has a special investment in men's freedom from this misogynistic social order. This commitment is problematic in the ways that critics have noted. It suggests that Anderson attributes to men a degree of agency he does not afford women. But it also speaks, significantly, to the impressive optimism with which he represents non-normative manhood. As I will show, Anderson imagines female masculinity *and* the love between men that it enables as socially viable. Male femininity resists the bifurcated gender order that works to erase it. It continues in the modern writer, as an internal component of male selfhood that emerges in the art and lived relations of the new man. This hopeful depiction is exceptional. In depicting male femininity as a livable possibility (rather than conceiving it as tragically annihilated by the social order that imperils it) Anderson refuses the pessimism that Greg Forter has shown to be characteristic of mainstream modernism. In *Gender, Race, and Mourning in American Modernism*, Forter argues that canonical U.S. modernism "came to yearn for a masculinity less rigidly polarized against the feminine" (4). He demonstrates that authors F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and Willa Cather embraced as a metaphor for their creativity a non-alienated version of manhood founded in a "'feminine' capacity for sympathetic identification and abrogation of the self's borders," (4). These writers valued feminine manhood as a way to refute the "increasing subordination of creativity to instrumental reason with bourgeois modernity, and the increasing denigration of non-commodifiable, non-instrumentalizable desires as feminine (4). But they were unable, ultimately, to cherish this kind of masculinity. Their celebration of it was short-circuited by their

"ambivalence toward the feminine," a conflict of feeling shaped by the disparagement of femininity they had internalized from the dominant culture. This ambivalence manifested itself in the tendency of these writers to represent feminine masculinity as vibrant, precious, but tragically evanescent.

Anderson presents his optimistic version of feminine manhood in “The Book of the Grotesque,” the prologue to *Winesburg*. It opens with a nameless “writer, an old man with a white mustache [who] had some difficulty getting into bed” because it is too tall (Anderson 3). The writer has elevated his bed to access the tall windows of his bedroom so that he might “look at the trees when he awoke in the morning” (3). Through the “old man,” Anderson provides an image of creativity that echoes the non-binarized conception of modernism he provides in “The New Note.” To begin, he represents the writer as integrating spatial contradictions. The old man wants to feel connected to something outside the self. He wants to view the world beyond the internal space of his bedroom. His desire has the potential to lift the border that separates these spaces. (The writer can open the window.) It is also, importantly, revitalizing. The writer longs to see “trees,” to join in the vivacity of the natural world.

The desire for vitality beyond the self represents the “hunger” to connect with other “lives," the drive for empathetic connection that Anderson saw as the basis of his creativity (*Winesburg*). The writer can achieve the vivacity for which he yearns only in relation with someone else. He wants to see the trees, but he cannot reach the tall windows on his own. He requires help. Realizing his need for assistance, the old man calls on a carpenter to help him “fix the bed so that it would be on a level with the window” (3). But when the carpenter arrives, the discussion of the initial project gives

way to a more important conversation. The carpenter, who “had been a soldier in the Civil War,” eventually “got on the subject of the war. The writer, in fact, led him to that subject” (3). The carpenter reveals that he had “once been a prisoner in Andersonville prison and had lost a brother. The brother had died of starvation, and whenever the carpenter got upon that subject he cried” (4). Anderson depicts male same-sex affection as the principal expression of the modern writer's capacity for empathy. The image of the writer and carpenter illustrates the love between men that Anderson also described to Sergel. It represents this love as tender and therapeutic. The old man forms with the carpenter a emotionally intimate bond based in grieving. He enables the carpenter to be vulnerable, to express his personally lived and privately suffered historical wounds, to share and to cry over his imprisonment and the death of his brother in the Civil War. Anderson depicts the relation, in this way, as an uninhibited version of the male same-sex relations that he also imagines in stories such as "Hands" and "The Untold Lie" but represents as tragically repressed.

Through the writer and carpenter, Anderson represents male same-sex love as a libidinal freedom that is socially viable. He visualizes this love as continuing in the writer, who is receptive to the feelings and pain of another man. He also describes this empathy as central to modernism. To love another man openly is to engage an emotionally expressive form of male-male relations. Anderson sees this direct expression of personal emotion as the basis of creative freedom. Importantly, the old man and carpenter represent a union of artisanal and artistic production that illustrates Anderson's conception of the new writer was a modern “craftsmen" who writes from "the body and soul of youth"(“The New Note”).[13] This craftsman is not a normative man. Rather, he is a

complexly gendered cultural producer. Anderson further explains that the old writer “was a hard smoker” whose “heart fluttered” and who, lying in bed at night, contemplates that “he would some time die unexpectedly” (4). The thought of death does not “alarm” the writer. Rather, it revitalizes him. His fluttering heart “made him more alive, for while his “body was old and not of much use any more” there was “something inside him [that] was altogether young. He was like a pregnant woman, only that the thing inside him was not a baby but a youth. No, it wasn’t a youth, it was a woman, young, and wearing a coat of mail like a knight” (4). Consistent with his vision of the "new man" as rooted in an "old" feminine vitality, Anderson imagines the writer, here, as a female man ("The New Note"). The old man is an incarnation of Anderson's identification with the feminine as the wellspring of his creativity. He is expressively and internally feminine. He is a mother whose maternal character derives from a vibrant feminine interior, a young “woman” who rejuvenates and enables him to feel enlivened rather than frightened at the prospect of death. He is, in this way, a non-binarized subject who integrates and obscures temporal, spatial, and gendered oppositions. On the outside, the writer is an old man. But inside, he is a young “woman" who is also male, who "wear[s] mail like a knight” (4).

Through the female-male writer, Anderson represents modernism as ambiguously gendered form of creativity. To be a male artist is to be an androgynous man. It is to embrace a version of male selfhood that is contradictory, that incorporates "feminine" qualities that are also masculine. It is also to value these qualities for enabling in men the vulnerability to others that is the root of creativity. The old writer's intimacy with the carpenter represents a kind of receptivity he has also experienced with others. The old man has “known people, many people, known them in a peculiarly intimate way that was

different from the way in which you and I know people" (5). His "peculiarly intimate way" of knowing others represents an empathic knowledge of others who have suffered historical trauma. This empathy stems from his feminine interiority, the basis of his craft. Lying in bed, the old man imagines the "young woman" inside him mobilizing his intimate knowledge of "people":

> the young indescribable thing within himself was driving a long procession of figures before his eyes… All of the men and women the writer had ever known had become grotesques. The grotesques were not all horrible. Some were amusing, some almost beautiful, and one, a woman all drawn out of shape, hurt the old man by her grotesqueness. When she passed he made a noise like a small dog whimpering. For an hour the procession of grotesques passed before the eyes of the old man, and then, although it was a painful thing to do, he crept out of bed and began to write. (5)

In this passage, Anderson offers an account of a modernist sensibility that rejects impersonal "masculine" objectivity as the defining feature of the new literature. He depicts art as an intimate and personal mode of creativity through which the writer enacts his affection for others he has known. In a meditation on the form of *Winesburg*, Anderson imagines the old writer, here, as haunted by a horde of "grotesques" (5). These deformed figures represent the traumatized subjects on whom the individual episodes in the short-story cycle focus.[14] In the stories, Anderson explores these grotesques as particular subjects with distinct backgrounds. But he also depicts them as part of a collective history of suffering. The grotesques share as a common reason for their deformity. As I will argue, they are victims of a gender order that disavows in men the vibrant "feminine" qualities and, in doing so, produces men who are unreceptive to femininity and to the aspirations of women. Like Wing Biddlebaum in "Hands" and Elizabeth Willard in "Mother," these grotesques are ghosts of a past deformed by the bifurcated form of masculinity.

Anderson imagines that the work of the writer is to acknowledge this past. As with the carpenter, who represents the "nearest thing to what is understandable and lovable of all the grotesques in the writer's book," the old man is receptive to the pain of the deformed individuals who appear before him. As a way to grieve for these grotesques (to exorcise the ghosts of the past), he produces a work of fiction that enables him to honor them both as particular subjects and as historically wounded grotesques whose pain stems from a shared social phenomenon. The old writer imagines the grotesques as a "long procession of figures" (5). He transforms the "procession" into a sequence of vignettes, which he names the "Book of the Grotesques." In the book, he provides a unifying mythology in which he expresses his intimate knowledge of the deformed individuals and their suffering. He writes "That in the beginning when the world was young there were a great many thoughts but no such thing as truth. Man made the truths himself and each truth was a composite of many vague thoughts. All about in the world were the truths and they were all beautiful" (6). The writer's myth expresses the aesthetic principle he embodies. It imagines "truth" as an artistic creation that represents a contradictory form of selfhood. Like the ambiguously gendered writer, who is both feminine and masculine,, "truth" emerges from a meaningful and aesthetically pleasurable integration of diffuse ideas ("many vague thoughts"). Indeed, truth is itself pluralistic, a harmonious collection of "truths" that derive from the variety and paradoxes of experience: "The old man had listed hundreds of the truths in his book…There was the truth of virginity and the truth of passion, the truth of wealth and of poverty, of thrift and of profligacy, of carelessness and abandon. Hundreds and hundreds were the truths and they were all beautiful" (6). Anderson visualizes true and "beautiful" forms of self-

expression as complementary rather than oppositional. He defines grotesqueness, by contrast, as a kind of binarized expressive isolation. It emerges when one adopts a single category as the absolute meaning of the self: “It was his notion that the moment one of the people took one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live his life by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced became a falsehood” (6). Truth retains its meaning insofar as it is part of a contradictory whole. Isolated and individually possessed, it transforms into a false fragment, and the person who “lives his life by it,” an alienated subject whose fractured deformity reflects the incomplete “falsehood” he has lived (6).

While Anderson visualizes the grotesques, here, as agents of their deformity who have seized on isolated articulations of "truth," he develops elsewhere in *Winesburg* a fuller analysis of them as tragic victims of a binarized, misogynistic social order that denigrates male femininity and that promotes a form of masculinity void of empathy. This social order is, in effect, the phenomenon that sutures individuals to the "falsehood[s]" that deform them. It voids men of "feminine" qualities and disables their capacity to see women as subjects. While the work of the writer is to recognize this past, it is also, importantly, to resist it. Significantly, Anderson figures the writer as an incarnation of the creative freedom the grotesques have been denied. He is a female man, an embodiment of non-binarized self-expression. This complex quality enables the writer empathize with the specters of historical suffering that haunt him, to acknowledge them as vestiges of historical suppression and to feel the specificity of their wounds. But it also frees him to move beyond their suffering. The old writer is “hurt” when he looks at the grotesques, and his effort to express them is “painful” (6). However, he is not distorted by

his sympathy. The past threatens to perpetuate itself in the writer, who risks "becoming a grotesque" in his intimacy with the ghosts of history. However, the writer overcomes this threat. As an internally feminine man, he embodies the historical possibility of androgynous masculinity, one that rescues him from repeating the deformation of modern manhood: "It was the young thing inside him that saved the old man" (60).

The "Feminine" Touch and Modern Homophobia

So far I have argued that Anderson visualizes modernism as an art rooted in the "feminine" impulses of the writer, who produces a work of fiction that compassionately mourns wounded figures from the past. Through the succeeding stories of *Winesburg*, Anderson offers a bildungsroman in which he explores this version of modernism as emerging from a sustained identification with the "feminine" elements of youth. He represents this dynamic through the cycle's protagonist, George Willard, a young aspiring artist who, as the defining pattern of his adolescence, empathically witnesses the grotesques who are the inhabitants of his hometown: Winesburg. George mirrors the old writer from "The Book of the Grotesque." As the recurring character who appears in most of the episodes in *Winesburg*, he serves to integrate into a narrative the individual grotesques whose stories intersect with his own. But, as I show, he, too, resists becoming a grotesque because of his interior femininity. As a final act, he departs from Winesburg to pursue his aspiration to become a writer, to realize the creative freedom that has been denied to the people of his town.

George's growth as an artist most centrally revolves around his association with two grotesques in particular: Wing Biddlebaum, the effeminate recluse from "Hands," and Elizabeth Willard, his desiccated mother in "Mother" and "Death." In "Hands,"

Anderson explores how a social order that devalues male femininity inhibits the form of male-male love he represents between the writer and carpenter. The story opens with Wing Biddlebaum, a frantic old man who "forever frightened and beset by a ghostly band of doubts did not think of himself as in any way a part of the life of the town where he had lived for twenty years" (9). In contrast to the old man from "The Book of the Grotesques," Anderson describes Wing as alienated from the vibrant connection to others. He lives on the margins of town because his "doubts" disconnect him from the "life" of Winesburg. These doubts also alienate him from himself. Wing incessantly feels anxious, and this anxiety manifests itself in the uncontrollably nervous movement of his hands. The only exception to Wing's estrangement is his friendship with George Willard, the only person in Winesburg who has "come close to him" (9). With the young boy, Wing has "formed something like a friendship" (9). Wing longs for George's companionship, but he feels conflicted about it. Anderson foregrounds this ambivalence from the outset. One particular evening, Wing waits for George to visit. He excitedly paces on his porch and checks the road to town for signs of the boy's arrival. But he also retreats from his desire. Though he ventures beyond his house in hope of discovering George, with "fear overcoming him, [Wing] ran back to walk again upon the porch on his own house" (9).

Wing desires George, one the one hand, because his companionship returns him to an earlier vitality. It releases the old man from his "timidity," freeing his "shadowy personality" from the "sea of doubts" that usually encumber him (9). George restores Wing's natural expressivity, his capacity for passionate intellectual and emotional communication. In the presence of the boy, "like a fish returned to the brook by the

fisherman, Wing Biddlebaum the silent began to talk, striving to put into words the ideas that had been accumulated by his mind during long years of silence" (9). Importantly, George's affect on Wing is also physical. He liberates Wing's hands: "The slender expressive fingers, forever active, forever striving to conceal themselves in his pockets or behind his back, came forth and became the piston rods of his machinery of expression" (10). Wing's body is fundamental to his capacity for communication. His "expressive fingers" drive his entire "machinery of expression," and they are animated by the presence of the boy (15).

Wing's hands are the most outstanding aspect of his grotesqueness. They are alive with George, but typically they are inhibited. Wing represses them with a persistence that has come to define him. In Winesburg, they are known simply for their "restless activity," which, "like unto the beating of the wings of an imprisoned bird, had given [Wing] his name" (10). Anderson explains Wing's inhibition as rooted in his own trepidation about the implications of his expressivity. Wing's hands "alarmed their owner" (10). In public, he wants to "keep them hidden away" because he fears that their distinctive energy signifies a non-normative quality that distinguishes them from "the quiet inexpressive hands of other men who worked beside him in the fields, or passed, driving sleepy teams on country roads" (10). George's companionship intensifies Wing's apprehension about his difference from other men. So, with the boy, he enacts more severe measures to restrain his urge for physical expression: "When he talked to George Willard, Wing Biddlebaum closed his fists and beat with them upon a table or on the walls of his house. The action made him more comfortable. If the desire to talk came to him when the two were walking in the fields, he sought out a stump or he top board of a

fence and with his hands pounding busily talked with renewed ease" (10). Here, Anderson suggests that homophobic repression leads to self-abuse. Wing "beat[s]" his hands to restrain his natural impulse to touch George.

Wing's self-constraint deprives the world of a gorgeous but vaguely known form of male physical expression. His hands are worthy of artistic focus. They deserve "a book in itself. Sympathetically set forth it would it would tap many strange, beautiful qualities in obscure men (10). Wing's desire for sensual male-male relations is a longing shared by other, "obscure men" who also possess "many strange, beautiful qualities" (10). The project of literature is to "[s]ympathetically" depict these qualities, to "tap" into the inhibited qualities of men like Wing. But it is also to acknowledge the social phenomena that suppress these qualities in men. Anderson conceptualizes these phenomena, first, through the sensibility about manhood that the town of Winesburg has imposed on Wing:

> In Winesburg the hands had attracted attention merely because of their activity. With them Wing Biddlebaum had picked as high as a hundred and forty quarts of strawberries in a day. They became his distinguishing feature, the source of his fame. Also they made more grotesque and already grotesque and elusive individuality. Winesburg was proud of the hands of Wing Biddlebaum in the same spirit in which it was proud of Banker White's new stone house and Wesley Moyer's bay stallion, Tony Tip, that had won the two-fifteen trot at the fall races in Cleveland. (10)

Wing is the victim of a social order that values the male body only as an instrument of normative male expression. Winesburg has helped to distort his capacity for sensual communication with boys like Goerge. The town has valued Wing's hands merely for their extraordinary productivity, celebrating them as tools of material success ("Banker White's new stone house") and spectacles of athletic power ("Wesley Moyer's bay stallion") (10). The emphasis on male instrumentality warps Wing's capacity for sensual male-male communication. It also inhibits him from sharing the freedom of this relation

with other men. On one of their evenings together, Wing advises George against "his tendency to be too much influenced by the people about him. 'You are destroying yourself,' he cried. 'You have the inclination to be alone and to dream and you are afraid of dreams. You want to be like others in town here. You here them talk and you try to imitate them" (11). In urging George to embrace "dreams" that do not conform to "others in town," Wing advises him to value his particularity and his individual freedom. In doing so, he encourages him to embrace himself as an expressive male subject and to aspire to an uninhibited form of male-male contact that will enable his freedom. Wing shares this aspiration with George in the dream he describes to him: "In the picture men lived again in a kind of pastoral golden age. Across a green open country came clean-limbed young men, some afoot, some mounted upon horses. In crowds the young men came to gather about the feet of an old man who sat beneath a tree in a tiny garden and who talked to them" (11). The dream represents an idealized version of Wing's passionate mentorship of George. It is a historical fantasy that imagines passionate male-male contact as a socially lived possibility, as part of a "pastoral golden age" in which "clean-limbed young men" are free to pursue the companionship and wisdom of an old man. The sensuous image captures the emotionally and physically uninhibited nature of expressive male-male contact, and it animates Wing's repressed yearning for physical contact with men. Describing the utopia to George, he "forgot the hands. Slowly they stole forth and lay upon George Willard's shoulders. Something new and bold came into the voice that talked. 'You must try to forget all you have learned,' said the old man. 'You must begin to dream. From this time on you must shut your ears to the roaring of the voices'" (11-12). Here, Anderson expands his intuition about the affirmative quality

of physically expressive male relations. Wing's touch represents an enabling form of affectionate proximity through which he articulates and transmits the dream of non-normative, expressive male subjectivity. At this point, Wing momentarily escapes his inhibitions and embraces the kind of self-expression he hopes to inspire in George. However, the fears and doubts that force him to repudiate his touch quickly resurface. Caressing George, Wing is overcome suddenly with a sense of "horror" that forces "his hands deep into his trouser pockets" and scares him away from talking with the boy (12).

Anderson conceptualizes Wing's inhibition as stemming from a past experience in which his proclivity for physical closeness with younger men is violently punished. A background story reveals that Wing has "been a school teacher in a town in Pennsylvania" (12). At the time, he was not merely known for his restrained, tireless hands, but rather, as a beloved mentor of young men. Instead of the name Wing, he "went by the less euphonic name of Adolph Myers. As Adolph he was much loved by the boys of his school" (12). In contrast to the distortive reputation he earns as a field laborer, "Adolph Myers was meant by nature to be a teacher of youth" (12). His capacity to be an affectionate, nurturing mentor made him uniquely suited for the profession: "He was one of those rare, little understood men who rule by a power so gentle that it passes as a lovable weakness. In their feeling for the boys under their charge such men are not unlike the finer sort of women in their love of men" (12). Like the old writer from "The Book of the Grotesque," Adolph is complexly gendered. He is a man who is emotionally and expressively "feminine." His feelings for his boys are a love like that felt by "the finer sort of women" for men (12). He enacts this affection through physical tenderness: "Here and there went his hands, caressing the shoulders of the boys, playing about the tousled

heads. As he talked his voice became soft and musical. There was a caress in that also" (13). Adolph touches his students as he touches George Willard. His hands are part of his "effort to carry a dream into the young minds" (13). The "dream" represents the aspiration to be a non-normative man. It embodies the joy of emotionally and physically uninhibited male-male relations: the libidinal freedom of men who are like women in their feelings for other men. Through his touch, Adolph imparts this femininity as a decentralized form of libidinal expression: "He was one of those men in whom the force that creates life is diffused, not centralized," and with his caressing touch, he liberates boys to realize their own diffuseness, freeing them from the "doubt and disbelief" that encumber their aspirations "to dream" (13).

But Adolph's relationship with his students ends tragically. At some point:

> A half-witted boy of the school became enamored of the young master. In his bed at night he imagined unspeakable things and in the morning went forth to tell his dreams as facts. Strange, hideous accusations fell from his loose-hung lips. Through the Pennsylvania town went a shiver. Hidden, shadowy doubts that had been in men's minds concerning Adolph Myers were galvanized into beliefs. (13)

Here, Anderson depicts the tragedy behind Adolph's hands as emerging not simply from one boy's misrecognition of his teacher's amorous touch as explicitly sexual and, therefore, abusive, but from a larger, homophobic assumption about the pernicious character of effeminate, sensual male expression. The boy's "hideous accusations" do not directly alarm the town. Rather, they "[galvanize] into beliefs" the fearful suspicion men already have formed about Adolph's feminine qualities: his non-normative desire for affectionate physical contact with young boys. Anderson conceptualizes homophobic panic as a toxic, self-confirming paranoia that "uncovers" the abusive quality it already presumes in men like Adolph and that produces the very violence it purports to resolve.

In the town, the rumor about Adolph spurs the fathers elicit through intimidation evidence of his abuse: “The tragedy did not linger. Trembling lads were jerked out of bed and questioned. ‘He put his arms about me,’ said one. ‘His fingers were always playing in my hair,’ said another” (13). Mistaken as confirmation of Adolph’s abusiveness, the boys’ confessions spur the fathers to violence:

> One afternoon a man of the town, Henry Bradford, who kept a saloon, came to the schoolhouse door. Calling Adolph Myers into the school yard he began to beat him with his fists. As his hard knuckles beat down into the frightened face of the schoolmaster, his wrath became more and more terrible. Screaming with dismay, the children ran here and there like disturbed insects. “I’ll teach you to put your hands on my boy, you beast,” roared the saloon keeper, who, tired of beating the master, had begun to kick him about the yard. (14)

Patriarchal masculinity violently forecloses non-normative contact between men. Assuming Adolph’s touch to be sexually abusive, Henry Bradford, the father of one of the boys, confronts the school teacher and beats him “with his fists” (14). Anderson captures the regulatory function of homophobia in this sequence. Here, fear twists the hands of men into punitive instruments that “teach” Adolph to restrain his hands (14). Such violence also serves to teach young boys to feel threatened by the touch of older men. Bradford’s brutality instills precisely the fear and doubt about affectionate relations between men that Adolph has hoped to liberate in his students. It emotionally polices the aspiration to realize the implicitly feminine “dream” of unrestricted, gender-fluid male self-expression.

Fear of Adolph spreads and intensifies among the men in town, who eventually try “to hang the schoolmaster” (14). One night, a mob of a “dozen men” approach Adolph with a noose. However, Adolph’s touching vulnerability elicits compassion from the men, who decide against hanging the school master, because “something in his figure,

so small, white, and pitiful, touched their hearts and they let him escape" (14). The men, however, quickly resume their violence. Regretting initial hesitation as "weakness," they run Adolph out of town, "throwing sticks and great balls of soft mud at the figure that screamed and ran faster and faster into the darkness" (14).

Adolph's brutal ejection from his former life explains his grotesqueness as the distorting consequence of the homophobic violence directed at non-normative men succumb in a social order that validates male brutality as a "protective" measure against male effeminacy and the tenderness between young and old men. Such violence inhibits this form of masculinity and male same-sex love by alienating men like Adolph from their bodies. Adolph is unable to grasp "what had happened" to ostracize him from the town (14). He cannot understand the systemic reasons behind his injury, the homophobic panic that drives the violence he has endured. As a result, he internalizes the fearful repudiation of his touch. He feels that his "hands must be to blame. Again and again the fathers of the boys had talked of the hands. 'Keep your hands to yourself,' the salon keeper had roared, dancing with fury in the schoolhouse yard'" (14).

In the final scene, Anderson emphasizes how profoundly homophobia wounds non-normative men. After he retreats from George, Wing Biddlebaum continues to feel "[hunger] for the presence of the boy, who was the medium through which he expressed his love of man" (15). He craves the emotional sustenance of communicative male-male relations, but his fear of his own hands deprives him of such nourishment. Without George, Biddlebaum's hunger "became again a part of his loneliness and waiting" (15). He remains, in his isolation, with only scraps for fulfillment. Picking up from the floor the "crumbs" of an earlier meal, Biddlebaum consumes them "with unbelievable

rapidity" (15). His ravenous hunger for male-male contact is a spiritual deprivation. Kneeling to eat the crumbs, Biddlebaum "looked like a priest engaged in some service of his church. The nervous expressive fingers, flashing in and out of the light, might well have been mistaken for the fingers of the devotee going swiftly through decade after decade of his rosary" (15). Biddlebaum's desire for contact is as central to his spiritual well-being, and it is a passion as benign as religious devotion. But his repression of this desire divorces him deprives him of this fulfillment. Like a "devotee" who hungrily thumbs through his religious text in search of God, Biddlebaum remains alienated from George and from the fulfillment of expressive male-male relations.

Anderson conceptualizes the brutal suppression of male femininity as a social phenomenon that is destructive for women as well as men. In "Mother," he explores through George's mother Elizabeth how a homophobic social order that prevents men from loving one another precludes them from embracing women as subjects who aspire to be libidinally and creatively free. Like Wing, Elizabeth is a grotesque whose individuality has been truncated by normative men. She suffers, at the relatively young age of "forty-five," from "some obscure disease [that] had taken the fire out of her figure" (21). The "disease" that extinguishes Elizabeth's vivacity proves to be a physical symptom of the labor she is forced to perform as the caretaker of the Winesburg hotel. Though she has inherited the hotel from her father after his death, Elizabeth has become merely a servant to it, as she is a servant to the will of her husband, Tom Willard, who has appropriated the property. Like the hotel's "faded wall-paper" and "ragged carpets," Elizabeth has become a worn accommodation, a damaged instrument of her husband's will. Her body and spirit have deteriorated in the service she provides to Tom's

customers. In the hotel, Elizabeth works as a "chambermaid among beds soiled by the slumbers of fat traveling men," transient guests known to her only by the waste they leave behind for her to clean (21).

Anderson conceptualizes Elizabeth's damaging and isolating labor as an effect of her husband's material ambitions. Like other women in *Winesburg*—Kate Swift ("The Teacher"), Alice Hindman ("Adventure"), and Louise Bentley ("Godliness")—Elizabeth is a victim of male exploitation. Tom Willard represents the toxic commerciality and self-regulation that Anderson sees as normative. His disciplined body, his "quick military step, and a black mustache trained to turn sharply up at the ends," express his stringent self-restraint and the control he has expected to exercise over his financial ambitions and his wife, whom he has used as an extension of those ambitions. But this form of self-willed male individualism is illusory. Tom has failed to maintain control. Despite his efforts, his hotel withers unprofitably. His wife, a "tall ghostly figure, moving slowly through the halls," also decays. Her body is a personal "reproach" to Tom, who takes it as a sign of his failed attempt at fortune and of his failed masculinity: "As he went spruce and business-like through the streets of Winesburg, he sometimes stopped and turned quickly about as though fearing that the spirit of the hotel and of the woman would follow him even into the streets. 'Damn such a life, damn it!' he sputtered aimlessly" (22). Like the decrepit hotel, Tom sees Elizabeth as sign of loss, an imminently threatening specter of emasculation that he cannot escape.

Just as Wing's experience of violence prevents him from having an inhibited relationship with George, Elizabeth's destructive marriage inhibits her capacity to love her son openly. She has with him:

> a deep unexpressed bond of sympathy, based on a girlhood dream that had long ago died. In the son's presence she was timid and reserved, but sometimes while he hurried about town intent upon his duties as a reporter, she went into his room and closing the door knelt by a little desk, made of a kitchen table, that sat near a window. In the room by the desk she went through a ceremony that was half a prayer, half a demand, addressed to the skies. In the boyish figure she yearned to see something half forgotten that had once been a part of herself re-created. (22)

Elizabeth silently feels for George. She sees in him the potential to realize a "girlhood dream" she has lost, a past aspiration that "long ago died" (22). She wants, like Wing, to pass this dream onto George, to see in him "a part of herself re-created" (22). However, she is tragically incapable of communicating it. Elizabeth can only privately pray to "keep defeat" from her son, indirectly wish that he realize the part of her that has been diminished (22). She "demand[s]" that God protect George, and she vows, further, to return from the dead to avenge him if were to become the "meaningless drab figure" into which she herself has deteriorated (23).

Elizabeth wants to retrieve through George a part of herself that she has lost. But unlike her husband, she is not manipulative. She does not want to control George. She believes that the restoration of her dream will liberate her and her son. It will express "something for us both" (24). The unspecified "something" is a form of creative and libidinal liberation that Elizabeth defines against commercial success. As part of her prayers, she hopes that George will not become "smart and successful" like her husband, an achievement that would squelch his creativity.

Elizabeth's inability to articulate her sympathy for George severely constrains their relationship. George routinely joins his mother in front of the window in her room, where the two of them sit together and look out at the town. But Elizabeth cannot enjoy her son's companionship. For her, the window that she and her son share looks out only

onto the history of the violence she has suffered, which she finds "rehearsed" in the persistent "contest" she and George observe between a local baker and a grey cat he abuses. Elizabeth's wound—as does Wing's—squelches the communication between her and George. The moments they spend together are dominated by a "silence that made them both feel awkward" (24). The reticence of their relation is something that disturbs both mother and son. But while Elizabeth understands the silence, George cannot grasp it. A stranger to the secret sympathy that she feels for him and to the history of abuse that has muted her expression of that emotion, George knows only to be disturbed by his mother. He continually retreats from her decaying, "listless" body, withdrawing from her room with an eagerness so overwhelming that on his way out he sometimes "fumbled for the doorknob" or "knocked against a chair" (25). Elizabeth does not blame her son. She affectionately excuses his departure, helping him to "relieve the embarrassment" of his withdrawal by routinely justifying it for him, suggesting that he "had better be out among the boys. You are too much indoors" (24).

Elizabeth believes that underneath her silent relationship with George lies true emotional kinship, and so she has accepted his brief visits and quick withdrawals as part of the external formality of their bond. Yet she grows anxious that the secret sympathy she imagines between her and her son may be her delusion, that the muteness of their relation is more than just an appearance. One night, when she realizes George's recent absence, Elizabeth grows anxious. She worries that she has been "foolish" to believe she enjoys some unspoken affinity with George, who, she assumes, must already be well on his way to normative manhood. He has neglected her, she imagines, because he has become preoccupied with typical male-adolescent concerns, "with boyish affairs," and

perhaps has already "begun to walk about in the evening with girls" (25). Elizabeth's concern suggests, again, not a selfish desire to monopolize her son, but rather her desire for him to be free from a standard narrative of male development, from the distracting and restraining hallmarks of normative male growth ("boyish affairs"). Accordingly, the mother's anxiety temporarily wanes when, alarmed by George's disappearance, she goes to look for her son and discovers that he is in his own room. Elizabeth cannot, of course, openly speak to him. However, she can listen, and when she kneels at the closed door of his bedroom and hears him "moving about and talking in low tones a smile came to her lips" (25). She is pleased because she assumes that the "low tones" emanating from George's room mean that he is talking to himself, a "habit" that has always given "his mother a peculiar pleasure" because "she felt, [it] strengthened the secret bond that existed between them" (25). For Elizabeth, George's talking affirms the deep, underlying sympathy between mother and son that exists despite its outward silence. It suggests that George has not become estranged from her, caught up in the patriarchal masculinity embodied by his father, and that he continues in the mode of undefined self-expression, the unrestricted potential for undetermined self-realization that has been defeated in her: "A thousand times she had whispered to herself of the matter. 'He is groping about, trying to find himself,' she thought. 'He is not a dull clod, all words and smartness. Within him there is a secret something that is striving to grow. It is the thing I let be killed in myself'" (25).

But as soon as Elizabeth is assured that the lost part of herself will continue in George, she realizes that her husband Tom is a threat to the possibility of that transmission. Before she leaves, the door to George's room opens, and Elizabeth

observes her husband step into the hallway. Elizabeth suddenly realizes that the noises she has been hearing from her son's room are not the usual murmurs of George talking to himself. Rather, they are the sounds of a conversation her son has been having with his father, who, "ambitious for his son," has been trying to persuade George to embrace the model of material success and social status he has failed to realize for himself. In this sequence, Anderson depicts Tom Willard as possessing the voice that he has silenced in his wife, and thus, the privilege of attempting to communicate to George his aspiration to become "one of the chief men in town" (26). He has "secured for the boy" a job as a journalist on the "*Winesburg Eagle*," a position that does not fulfill George's desire to be a creative writer (26). Tom tries, in this way, to suppress his son as he has suppressed his wife. He is unreceptive to George's individual aspirations, berating him for ignoring the instructions of Will Henderson, his boss at the *Eagle*:

> "[Will Henderson] says you go along for hours not hearing when you are spoken to and acting like a gawky girl. What ails you?" Tom Willard laughed good-naturedly. "Well, I guess you'll get over it," he said. "I told Will that. You're not a fool and you're not a woman. You're Tom Willard's son and you'll wake up. I'm not afraid. What you say clears things up. If being a newspaper man had put the notion of becoming a writer into your mind that's all right. Only I guess you'll have to wake up to do that too, eh?" (26)

Tom rejects George's mental freedom as immature and womanish, unproductive and undisciplined behavior characteristic of a "gawky girl" (26). Though he endorses George's "notion of becoming a writer," he does so strictly because he sees writing as a potentially lucrative and, thus, masculine career, one that still requires George to "wake up" from his dreams.

Anderson represents the father as a force of intervention that tries to disrupt the intellectual and emotional kinship between mother and son, the bond from which the

aspiration to be a creative writer (as opposed to a journalist) is born. When Elizabeth overhears Tom instructing George to "wake up," she understands the full meaning of the mandate and becomes "maddened" at Tom's attempt to influence her son. Fulfilling her zealous devotion to preserving George's ability to live out the writer's implicitly feminine dreams of uninhibited self-expression, Elizabeth plans to murder her husband:

> Although for years she had hated her husband, her hatred had always before been a quite impersonal thing. He had been merely a part of something else that she hated. Now, and by the few words at the door, he had become the thing personified. In the darkness of her own room she clenched her fists and glared about. Going to a cloth bag that hung on a nail by the wall she took out a long pair of sewing scissors and held them in her hand like a dagger. "I will stab him," she said aloud. (27)

Here, the threat of the father's intervention transforms into a lethal desire the mother's wish to preserve the trace of herself in her son. Elizabeth wants to kill her husband with a "long pair of sewing scissors," to turn the tools of her domestic servitude against him. In her view, Tom has transformed from being merely one expression of the broader structure of suppression that she has suffered ("part of something else that she hated") to the very embodiment of that structure ("the thing personified"). He has become a living personification of the system that destroys women's dreams.

Anderson conceptualizes Elizabeth's murderous impulse as a violent response to the misogyny she has experienced throughout her life. A brief background portrait depicts Elizabeth as a vibrant young woman who wants to be free to love and to pursue her creative aspirations: "In her girlhood and before her marriage to Tom Willard, Elizabeth had borne a somewhat shaky reputation in Winesburg" (28). Elizabeth has

earned a “shaky reputation” for her relationships with various older men, behavior that the town degrades as sexually promiscuous. She has “paraded through the streets with traveling men guests at her father’s hotel, wearing loud clothes and urging them to tell her of life in the cities out of which they had come” (28). Elizabeth has not always been the servant of men who stay at the hotel. As a young girl, she is fascinated with “traveling men” (28). She enjoys with them vibrant intellectual bonds that connect her to a broader sense of vitality, to the “life in the cities out of which they had come” (28). Elizabeth’s relationships with the traveling men represent a fulfilling bond that contrasts with her deadening marriage and her inhibited relationship with her son. Her capacity for open intellectual and emotional relations with men is, importantly, an androgynous mode of self-expression. Just as Wing’s love for young men feminizes him, Elizabeth’s connection with the traveling men masculinizes her. She has earned her “shaky reputation,” in part, because she has publically cross-dressed. She has “startled the town by putting on men’s clothes and riding a bicycle down Main Street” (28). Elizabeth’s intellectual and libidinal emancipation is a non-binarized form of gender. It is neither essentially feminine nor masculine. Here, Anderson suggests that to be a woman who can love others openly is to be free of gender categories. It is to love others as a “man” or “woman.”

But Elizabeth’s lively independence succumbs tragically to the misogyny her husband has come to personify. Her relationships the traveling men inspire in her a “restlessness” that “expressed itself in two ways” (28). First, she “turned her mind to the stage. She dreamed of joining some company and wandering over the world, seeing always new faces and giving something out of herself to all people” (28). Like the old

writer in "The Book of the Grotesque," Elizabeth's aspiration to become a traveling actress represents the desire to produce art that connects the artist empathically to others. Elizabeth wants to "[give] something out of herself to all people" (28). However, Elizabeth's aspirations go unnurtured, for when she tries to convey her ambitions to "the members of the theatrical companies that came to Winesburg and stopped at her father's hotel, she got nowhere. They did not seem to know what she meant, or if she did get something of her passion expressed, they only laughed" (28). Like Tom Willard, these male performers are normative men who are unreceptive to her dream of living creatively. They refuse to cultivate her desire to leave Winesburg, ridiculing her aspirations and pessimistically declining them as socially unlivable.

As an alternative to her aspiration to become a traveling performer, Elizabeth tries to find expressive fullness in relationships with men. In her physical intimacy with the traveling men and, later, with her husband in the early stages of their relationship, Elizabeth experiences the makings of an empathic bond: "On the side of the streets of the village, in the darkness under the trees, they took hold of her hand and she thought that something unexpressed in herself came forth and became a part of an unexpressed something in them" (29). Elizabeth believes that sexual intimacy with men can provide the form of expressive unity she hoped to realize as a performer. But this intimacy dissatisfies her: "It was always the same, beginning with kisses and ending, after strange wild emotions, with peace and then sobbing repentance. When she sobbed she put her hand upon the face of the man and had always the same thought. Even though he were large and bearded she thought he had become suddenly a little boy. She wondered why he did not sob also" (29). Elizabeth's sexual experiences with men prove to be non-

communicative acts that repeatedly disappoint her expectations for an exchange of shared vulnerability. Even though the men with whom she enjoys passionate physical intimacy reflect her own infantilizing sense of sexual inexperience, brought on by the "strange wild emotions" and guilt displayed in the "sobbing repentance" that reduce each one of them in her eyes to a "little boy," they are incapable of expressing such feelings because they imply an emasculating sexual vulnerability.

In this light, Anderson depicts Elizabeth as having suffered a form of alienation that stems from the contradictory emotional logic inherent in a patriarchal culture, a system of value that forecloses the emancipatory hope of female self-expression only to redirect that aspiration toward men, who fail to fulfill it because they themselves have been made to relinquish affective self-expression as a threateningly feminine trait. Elizabeth's history thus explains her urgent desire to protect George from her husband's mandate to succeed. She wishes to free him from the emotional exploitation she has personally suffered. Fearing her husband, the embodiment of the pessimistic masculinity that has defeated her dreams of intimate, expressive communication, Elizabeth plans to kill Tom to prevent him from persuading George to relinquish his feminizing aspiration to become a creative writer.

But Elizabeth is ineffectual. Patriarchy has twisted her aspirations for self-expression into a life of physical and emotional servitude and disconnection. She has become a prisoner of her husband's desire, of the hotel that serves his ambition, in which she has become divorced from the emotional world outside herself and the physical world outside her window. Thus, when George enters his mother's room, in the final scene, to inform her that he plans to "get out of here," to leave Winesburg, Elizabeth initially

assumes that his departure means that he has embraced his father's mandate to succeed, to abandon emotionally the mother and forfeit the desire for creative liberation she has hoped to transmit to him. Attacking what she fears are her son's conventional reasons for leaving, Elizabeth rhetorically mocks George: "'I suppose you better wake up,' she said. 'You think that? You will go to the city and make money, eh? It will be better for you, you think, to be a business man, to be brisk and smart and alive?' " (30). But Elizabeth quickly learns that his departure does not mean that George has internalized his father's mandate to "wake up" but rather that he has decided to pursue his dream of becoming of a writer and, thus, the kind of creative freedom she has wished for him.

Because of their silenced relationship, George presumes that he "can't make [his mother] understand" the particular reasons behind his desire to leave town, even though he desperately would like to ("but oh, I wish I could, he said earnestly"). Although he does not even bother to "try" to explain himself to his unreceptive father, to whom his dreams are fundamentally incommunicable, George attempts to explain himself to his mother. He tells her, "I don't know what I shall do. I just want to go away and look at people and think" (30). Like his mother before him, George wants to experience life beyond Winesburg, to realize a liberating feeling of connection with others. His aspiration requires him to relinquish his father, whose directive to wake up from his feminizing dreams he feels he must escape. He confesses, "Something father said makes it sure that I shall have to go away" (30).

George's vow to leave Winesburg one day brings great pleasure to Elizabeth, who "wants to cry out with joy because of the words that had come from the lips of her son" (30). The son's expression of his hopes to his mother is a manifestation of the same

communicative intimacy that Elizabeth has attempted with other men. But even though George's words nearly stir his mother to a moment of shared emotional expression, Elizabeth cannot cry, for the "expression of joy had become impossible for her" (30). Elizabeth remains muted. However, through her final words to George, she indirectly affirms her empathy for him. Suggesting to her son, as she always has, that he "better go out among the boys" because he is "too much indoors," Elizabeth once again excuses George from the awkward silence of her room. But here the mother's words resemble a self-sacrificial gesture that affirms her love for her son. They are colored by her confidence that she will continue in George, whose anticipated departure from Winesburg promises to express something for both mother and son. Telling George to "go out among the boys," the mother permits the son to leave her behind so that he can move past their muted connection, beyond the room to which she has expected him to always return and the window that remains closed to her.

In leaving his mother, George begins to relinquish the wounds that Elizabeth shares with Wing Biddlebaum. In the final two episodes of *Winesburg*, "Sophistication" and "Departure," Anderson depicts George's growth into the artist as a realization of the feminine vitality prohibited in Wing Biddlebaum and Elizabeth Willard. This development allows him to leave Winesburg and avoid the fate of these grotesques. "Sophistication" begins with George forlornly wading through crowds of people who have gathered in Winesburg for the county fair. He is at crucial stage in his life, a time when the "village boy" grows into "manhood" (220). George feels lost in the crowd at the fair, alienated from the townspeople of Winesburg among whom he has lived. His sense of isolation reflects a new state of emotional consciousness inspired by the loss of his

mother. In the previous story, "Death," George realizes what the ending of "Mother" anticipates. He embraces the hunger for creative and compassionate expression that Elizabeth has been unable to communicate. Elizabeth's death prevents George from adopting the corrosive patriarchy represented by his father and some of the other men he has encountered in Winesburg. It transforms him from approaching women as sexual objects to appreciating them as fully emotional, desirous subjects. Specifically, the memorial service disrupts George's plan to see Helen White, the daughter of the Winesburg banker and the girl about whom he fantasizes sexually. Standing before his mother's body, George, who imagines that the "young red lips of Helen White touched his own" is overcome by a sense of "shame for his thoughts" (216). The "shame" he feels for sexually objectifying Helen incites in George a "new notion," an emergent sensibility that signals George's transition into acknowledging and adopting the "feminine" vitality and desire for expressive contact associated with his mother. Standing before Elizabeth's body, George feels as if his mother has returned to her former vitality, that she has become an "unspeakably lovely" woman who embodies the vibrancy she possessed in youth (216).

In "Sophistication," George realizes the kind of expressive love that his mother has been denied. He seeks "someone to understand the feeling that had taken possession of him after his mother's death" (219). As part of his hunger for communication, he departs from the normative model of manhood his father attempts to impose on him. This departure begins when he recognizes that men are fragile subjects who, like his father, lack the control they desire. He imagines:

> the countless figures of men who before his time have come out of nothingness into the world, lived their lives and again disappeared into nothingness. The

> sadness of sophistication has come to the boy. He knows that in spite of all the stout talk of his fellows he must live and die in uncertainty, a thing blown by the winds, a thing destined like corn to wilt in the sun. (220)

Here, Anderson imagines that mature male emotional "sophistication" develops when one recognizes that the toughness and autonomy associated with normative masculinity are illusory. George realizes that men are, in fact, ephemeral (eventually they "disappeared into nothingness"), and that, despite "the stout talk of his fellows," men are susceptible to natural forces that are greater than them.

In recognizing male fragility, George embraces a sense of vulnerability that reinforces his desire for intimacy. His need for contact is a mature desire shared by other young men:

> With all his heart he wants to come close to some other human, touch someone with his hands, be touched by the hand of another. If he prefers that the other be a woman, that is because he believes that a woman will be gentle, that she will understand. He wants, most of all, understanding. (220)

Here, Anderson suggests that the yearning for connection young men experience as part of their maturation is not necessarily heterosexual. George hungers for compassionate contact, for physical and emotional proximity to "another" (220). But the gender of this "other" is, importantly, a function of choice. She is a woman only "if" the boy "prefers" her to be. But as in the case of Wing Biddlebaum and the old writer in "The Book of the Grotesque," he might express his need for affection through same-sex contact, to "touch" and be "touched by" a man. Thus, gender is incidental to the kind of sympathetic love the boy desires. If he wants to be with a woman, it is because of the emotional qualities he associates with womanhood. He expects her to be "gentle" and "understanding" (220). But Anderson implies that he could find this compassion and sensitivity also in men who exhibit these "feminine" traits.

As it happens, Anderson imagines George realizing his bisexual hunger for sympathetic connection in a relationship with a woman. George wants to be with Helen White. Inspired by his transformed perception of women, he desires a form of companionship with the banker's daughter that is not sexually objectifying and that departs from the patriarchal impulses he has attempted to enact with her. In the past, George has been aggressively macho with Helen. He has "given way to an impulse to boast, to make himself appear big and significant in [Helen's] eye" (220). He has vowed "to be a big man, the biggest that ever lived here in Winesburg" and has demanded that she reflect his grandness by becoming a "beautiful woman" (222). But George's new desire for sympathetic relations enables him to repudiate his former masculinism. Anderson offers a brief episode to signify this shift. At the fair, George wanders into Wesley Moyer's barn in the hope of resolving his loneliness through the companionship of other men. At the barn, he overhears

> a group of men who talked of a race Wesley's stallion, Tony Tip, had won at the Fair during the afternoon. A crowd had gathered in front of the barn and before the crowd walked Wesley, prancing up and down boasting. He held a whip in his hand and kept tapping the ground. Little puffs of dust arose in the lamplight. "Hell, quit your talking," Wesley exclaimed. "I wasn't afraid, I knew I had 'em beat all the time. I wasn't afraid." (223)

Wesley Moyer's bravado, the posture of fearless competitiveness that he dons for the crowd of men, represents a form of normative masculinity that George adopts in some other episodes in *Winesburg*. In "Nobody Knows," for instance, George feels "wholly male, bold and aggressive" in pursuing Louise Trunnion. He also feels "drunk with a sense of masculine power" in his pursuit of Belle Carpenter in "An Awakening" (171). But, here, George has moved beyond his commitment to these forms of manhood. He rejects normative expressions of masculinity as empty bravado that mask the doubt and

insecurity he feels in himself and recognizes in other men. Thus, while George normally "would have been intensely interested in the boasting of [Wesley] Moyer, the horseman. Now it made him angry. He turned and hurried away along the street. 'Old windbag,' he sputtered. 'Why does he want to be bragging? Why don't he shut up?'" (223).

George's repudiation of normative masculinity enables him to pursue an inter-subjective relation with Helen. Having initially attempted to act manly with Helen, George wants "to see her for another purpose. He want[s] to tell her of the new impulses that had come to him" (222). George's new desire for Helen develops from the feminine "impulses" inspired in him by his mother. He wants a compassionate relationship in which to share his new feeling. The desire is mutual. Helen, too, yearns for this kind of compassionate bond. Like George, she has grown to embrace a less restrictive definition of womanhood. She has pursued a superficial relationship with a local college instructor, a young man whose prestige will "create an impression" in "the eyes of her former schoolmates" and who takes interest in Helen only because he feels he "should marry a woman with money" (221). But Helen refuses to become, like Elizabeth Willard, the lifeless prisoner of male materialism. She has realized a sense of agency and a freedom of experience that represents the kind of emancipated self-expression and broad connectedness denied to other women in *Winesburg*. She has spent "months" in "the city" "going to theaters" and "seeing great crowds wandering in lighted thoroughfares (222). Such experiences have "changed [Helen] profoundly," and she yearns to share this change with George, for him "to feel and be conscious of the change in her nature" (221).

In the second part of the story, George and Helen realize their desire for sympathetic connection. Leaving behind the college instructor, who insists that no one in

Winesburg is “fit to associate with a girl of Helen’s breeding,” Helen finds George, who has been searching for her. Helen frees in George a feeling of connectedness that releases him from his isolation:

> The presence of Helen renewed and refreshed him. It was as though her woman’s hand was assisting him to make some minute readjustment to the machinery of his life. He began to think of the people in the town where he had always lived with something like reverence. He had reverence for Helen. He wanted to love and be loved by her, but he did not want at the moment to be confused by her womanhood. (226)

Helping him to “make some minute readjustment to the machinery of his life,” Helen enables in George the form of uninhibited communication Anderson attributes to Wing Biddeblaum. Like Wing, Helen’s “hand” offers emotional freedom, the “feminine” aspiration for a kind of expansive, unrestricted contact. Her touch inspires in George “something like reverence” for the townspeople of Winesburg, admiration for the individuals from whom he has felt isolated and from the crowd from which he feels alienated in the opening. George feels this “reverence” for Helen, he wants “to love and be loved by her” (226).

Anderson visualizes the pleasure of adult male-female relations as respectful, inter-subjective love. He imagines this formation as an ideal that is continuous with the playful spirit of adolescence and a primal, natural plenitude. Together, Helen and George return to the “the animalism of youth”: “They laughed and began to pull and haul at each other. In some way chastened and purified by the mood they had been in, they became, not man and woman, not boy and girl, but excited little animals (227). Here, Anderson imagines the sophistication of the modern adult as a throwback to more basic elements of pleasure. This kind of love, which combines mutuality, respect, and affectionate

playfulness, makes for viable and affirmative male-female relations. It "makes the mature life of men and women in the modern world possible" (228).

In the closing story, "Departure," George represents the "mature" possibility of feminine masculinity. Several years after his evening with Helen White, he fulfills his promise to his mother. He leaves Winesburg to pursue his aspiration to become a writer. In departing, George relinquishes the grotesques whose suffering he has witnessed. To realize the libidinal and creative freedom that has been denied to them as a socially viable way of feeling and being, he must say goodbye.[15] At the train station, George's father advises him, again, to "Be a sharp one," to "Keep your eyes on your money. Be awake" (231). But George refuses this order. Instead, he continues to daydream in the way that he has while working on the Winesburg Eagle. His mind drifts to "little things":

> Turk Smollet wheeling boards through the main street of his town in the morning, a tall woman, beautifully gowned, who had once stayed overnight at his father's hotel, Butch Wheeler the lamp lighter of Winesburg hurrying through the streets on a summer evening and holding a torch in his hand, Helen White standing by a window in the Winesburg post office and putting a stamp on an envelope. (232)

George sympathetically acknowledges the individuals from his past. His thoughts represent his continued compassion for the people of Winesburg. But they also suggest that he, like the old writer in "The Book of the Grotesque," is free from this past. They symbolize "his growing passion for dreams," his hunger for the creative and libidinal liberation that Elizabeth and Wing have been denied. (232). To become a creative writer, to embrace in himself the "feminine" capacity for expression, George moves, as he does with his mother, beyond the tragedies that have befallen the town's grotesques. On the train he watches as Winesburg vanishes before his eyes. But in its absence, he embraces

the town as “a background on which to paint the dreams of his manhood,” as a canvas on which to realize a form of male creativity rooted in his mother’s desire.

The Feminization of Male Same-Sex Love

In *Winesburg* Anderson imagines that the writer grows from a sympathetic identification with women. He depicts this identification as the core of creative and libidinal emancipation. It enables in men a "feminine" capacity that enables them to recognize women as desiring subjects and to embrace the possibility of loving and being loved by another man. In a late short story called “The Man Who Became a Woman," an obscure piece of fiction he wrote in 1923 for the collection *Horses and Men*, Anderson expands his intuitions about feminine manhood in two ways. He emphasizes the connection between male same-sex love and male femininity, depicting receptive relationships between men as the principal expression of their libidinal freedom. He figures this receptivity as an erotic feeling of penetration that dissolves the boundaries between the writer and figures from his past: not just the man he has loved but also the horse that he has cherished. Anderson also offers a more radical depiction of the empathic connection with women enabled by this receptivity. He imagines that to be penetrated by the love for another man is to identify with women so profoundly that it is, in a sense, to be a woman. It is also, significantly, to be vulnerable to the extreme forms of misogyny that women experience in a binarized gender system that disavows male femininity while promoting aggressive masculinity. In one of his darkest portraits, Anderson depicts feminine men in a misogynistic social order as prone to sexual violence.

Anderson represents tenderness between men as the primary expression of male creativity. He presents this notion through Herman Dudley, a writer who reflects on the love he has felt for another man. Consistent with the conception of feminine masculinity as resisting the materialism of the patriarchal family, Herman rejects his father's capitalist model of success. He inherits his father's business as a "retail druggist" but quickly rejects it as a "lonely life" (148). His repudiation frees him to enjoy vibrant relations with men that resist the commercialism of the father. Herman begins a life working as a groomsman for racehorses after he abandons the family business. Here, he establishes the most significant bond of his youth: his relationship with Tom Means, "a young fellow about my own age who has since become a writer of some prominence" (149). Tom echoes Herman's refusal of the normative manhood symbolized by the father. He is "unmarried" and also "free" of the restrictions of family (149). In rejecting normative masculinity, Herman and Tom repudiate the material competitiveness and class hierarchy that characterizes male-male relations within the dominant culture. At the racetrack, they associate with "touts, drivers, niggers and gamblers," spendthrifts for whom money is "dirt" to be wasted, and who refuse "kowtowing to people, they thought must be grander or richer or more powerful than themselves" (149).

When men reject the will to dominate, they realize the love they feel for each other. Herman realizes these feelings with Tom:

> To tell the truth I suppose I got to love Tom Means, who was five years older than me, although I wouldn't have dared say so, then. Americans are shy and timid about saying things like that and a man here don't dare own up he loves another man, I've found out, and they are afraid to admit such feelings to themselves even. I guess they're afraid it may be taken to mean something it don't need to at all. (151)

Consistent with his conception of male-male intimacy in “Hands,” Anderson figures “love” between men as a structure of feeling buried beneath the homophobia of American patriarchy. In the U.S., men feel the love to which Herman confesses, but they “don’t dare own up” to it because they fear its homosexual implications: the “something” it “don’t need to at all” (151). The passage may be understood as a moment of homophobic panic in which Anderson anxiously distinguishes between his non-sexual version of male-male love and the emasculating homosexuality most American men fear. But the distinction is, importantly, ambiguous. Anderson does not describe Herman and Tom's bond as a fundamentally non-homosexual. Herman does not say that his love for Tom *does not* mean “something,” that it is not or cannot be homosexual (151). Rather, he claims that it is not *necessarily* homosexual, that it “don’t need to” mean “something” (151). Thus, Anderson describes the love between men as a complexly desirous feeling that does not have predefined limits and that cannot be easily categorized. It is not quite homosexual. Nor is it non-homosexual.

Anderson presents Herman's feelings for Tom as the emotional root of his creativity. Herman's memory of Tom enables him "to write this story myself,” to produce a narrative of the past that echoes the romantic sensibilities he has learned from his friend. The story derives from the passion for horses, racing, and writing that Herman has learned from Tom, who loves horses as “though they were human beings” and who sees racing as a form of art, a mode of creativity that expresses the same kind of non-commercial, non-competitive masculinity associated with writing (151-2). Tom hopes to be a writer and to produce a book on the famous jockey Pop Geers, “one American who never went nutty about getting rich or owning a big factory or being any other kind of a

hell of a fellow" (155). Geer repudiates materialism and competitive male-male relations for the greater fulfillment of art. His racing is not a spectacle of male athleticism but an intense act of passionate, vulnerable expression that abrogates the borders between him and the sensations he experiences during the race, where he surrenders "all of himself to the thing right in front of him" (155). Geer's self-release epitomizes the kind of emotional expressivity that characterizes the relationship between Tom and Herman. Tom "blubber[s]" at the thought of Pop Geers (155). He feels very passionate about the jockey, and his emotions touch Herman, who "blubber[s] too" (155). The men connect to each other through their shared love of sport not as an expression of male virility but as a form of male creativity that embodies the tenderness they experience with each other.

Anderson represents the emotional connection between Herman and Tom as deeply empathic:

> Always out of Tom's talk I got something that stayed in my mind, after I was off by myself, curled up in my blanket. I suppose he had a way of making pictures as he talked and the pictures stayed by me as Burt was always saying pork chops did by him…He started something inside you that went on and on, and your mind played with it like walking about in a strange town and seeing the sights, and you slipped off to sleep and had splendid dreams and woke up in the morning feeling fine. (16)

In this passage, Anderson intensifies the erotic implications of the kind of sensual male-male love he explores through Wing Biddlebaum in "Hands." Tom's passion penetrates Herman. Like Burt's "pork chops," his "talk" is an internal physical pleasure. He forms with his words "pictures" that get inside Herman. The experience is ambiguous. Echoing the sexual potential of male-male love, "something" that most American men fear to be underneath their love for one another, Tom produces in Herman an unnamable sensation: "something" he cannot name directly but that stimulates him endlessly, with the

excitement of an unfamiliar landscape of thought and feeling (“your mind played with it like walking about in a strange town and seeing the sights”) (159). Importantly, Anderson conceptualizes this form of love as resisting the sexual objectification of women. Tom inspires in Herman "splendid dreams” that relieve him of nightmares about "women's bodies and women's lips and things" (159).

Anderson represents the kind of love he represents in the bond between Herman and Tom as a broad form of empathy that enables men to love the natural world. He figures this link through Herman's bond with Pick-it-boy, a young male horse he grooms:

> It's something in us that wants to be big and grand and important maybe and won't let us just be, like a horse or a dog or a bird can. Let's say Pick-it-boy had won his race that day. He did that pretty often that summer. Well, he was neither proud, like I would have been in his place, or mean in one part of the inside of him either. He was just himself, doing something with a kind of simplicity. That's what Pick-it-boy was like and I got to feeling it in him as I walked with him slowly in the gathering darkness. I got inside him in some way I can't explain and he got inside me. (161-2)

Like Tom, Pick-it-boy penetrates Herman, who "got inside" him in the same way that "he got inside me" (161-2). The sensation resonates with the erotic undertones of male same-sex love. Like the nameless "something" Tom excites in him, Herman's experience with Pick-it-boy is unnamable. He "can't explain" the phenomenon. His love dissolves the borders between him and the horse. The experience also resists a sexually objectifying relation to women. It saves Herman from the same "kind of dreams" from which Tom relieves him. Anderson imagines the kind of libidinal freedom embodied in male-male love also as a primal compassion. Like Pick-it-boy, male-male love is a natural form of affection. It lacks the egotism ("something in us that wants to be big and grand") that prevents normative men from being vulnerable to each other and to the natural world

more broadly--from experiencing the kind of penetration Herman enjoys with Tom and Pick-it-boy.

Male same-sex love resists reducing women to objects of sexual fantasy because it stems from a sympathetic relation to women. For a man to love another man is to express a “feminine” capacity to be emotionally responsive. It is to identify with women so deeply that is to become a woman. Echoing his androgynous conception of manhood in *Winesburg*, Anderson feminizes Herman's receptiveness to Tom and Pick-it-Boy. When Tom leaves to work on another racetrack his absence overwhelms Herman with a sense of isolation and a longing for connection that enable him to sympathize with women, who “generally are lonesomer than men" (168). Seeking companionship, Herman ventures into a mining saloon, where he, looking into a mirror, realizes that his loneliness has changed him. His face has become "the face of a woman. It was a girl’s face, that’s what I mean. That’s what it was. It was a girl’s face, and a lonesome and scared girl too. She was just a kid at that” (168). Here, Anderson imagines alienation that Herman shares with women man as a transformative feeling of empathy. It allows him not just to acknowledge the fear to which women are prone but to experience that vulnerability as a “scared girl” (168).

Anderson employs this non-realistic device to emphasize the connection between men and women who yearn for romantic fulfillment in a social order that promotes sexual difference and disavows male femininity. Herman experiences what it means to be a woman in a world dominated by men who are incapable of identifying with women and expressing their “feminine” qualities. His transformation shows the isolation he feels to a condition produced by normative men, who are closed to the kind of penetrating love he

has felt. These men are products of a binarized gender order promotes misogynistic violence by inhibiting men's capacity to be "feminine," to be tender and vulnerable with each other. Herman experiences this violence in two ways. At the saloon, he witnesses a scene that illustrates how the repudiation of femininity in men warps them into destructive brutes. Shortly after Herman's transformation, a huge red-haired coalminer enters the saloon. The miner embodies a working-class version of normative manhood. Like the commercial masculinity figured in Herman's father, Anderson imagines the miner as incapable of the libidinal and creative freedom Herman experiences with Tom. But he is more sympathetic toward the miner. He sees him as a victim of industrial capitalism. Working in the coalmines has "cracked" the red-haired man. It has deformed in him the capacity to love, the ability to connect to others in the way Herman has connected to Tom and Pick-it-boy. The miner possesses qualities "you get maybe from a horse," but "his eyes weren't like a horse's eyes," but, rather, those of rat, a timid "little animal, gleaming out at you from a dead wall darkness" (170). He has lost his natural vitality--the egoless primal quality associated with Pick-it-boy. He is also void of compassion and tenderness toward other men, which extraordinary hostility. Herman watches the miner respond with swift brutality to a man who has been taunting him for his deformity:

> With just a sweep of his arm, he brought me up against his big body. Then he shoved me over with my breast jammed against the bar and looking right into his kid's face and he said, "Now you watch him, and if you let him fall I'll kill you"...I closed my eyes for a moment and was sick all through me an then, when I opened my eyes, the big man's fist was just coming down in the other man's face. The one blow knocked him cold and he fell down like a beast hit with an axe. And then the most terrible thing of all happened. The big man had on heavy boots, and he raised one of them and brought it down on the other man's shoulder, as he lay white and groaning on the floor. I could hear the bones crunch and it made me so

> sock I could hardly stand up, but I had to stand up and hold on to that kid or I knew it would be my turn next. (173)

To be a "feminine" man is to acknowledge the extraordinary violence to which women are exposed when men cannot love one another (173). Seeing Herman as a woman, the miner "shove[s]" threatens to "kill" him if he does not watch his child. Herman is forced to witness the brutality of the miner, who beats and stomps the man who has been ridiculing him (173). The brutal scene shocks and frightens Herman, who knows he will be "next" if he does not perform the maternal duty the miner has imposed on him (173).

Anderson depicts sexual violence as another manifestation of toxic masculinity. After the saloon, Herman falls asleep naked in a barn loft. He wakens suddenly to find two drunken swipes entering the barn after a night on the town. The swipes are black men who are frustrated by the discrimination that prevents them from pursuing white women—a problem that "white swipes, who had some money in their pockets, wouldn't have been up against" (177). They stumble accidentally upon Herman, whose "pretty white and slender" body appears to be that of young girl sleeping after a night spent with some white swipe. The men want to "snatch" Herman away from the white man (177). They try to rape him: "'Jes you lie still honey. We ain't gwine hurt you none,' one of them said, with a little chuckling laugh that had something in it besides a laugh, too. It was the kind of laugh that gives you the shivers (179). At the risk of depicting black men as vindictive rapists, Anderson attempts, here, to explore racism as an institution that fosters sexual violence. Like the miner, the black swipes are sympathetic grotesques. They are men who have lost their compassion and who treat women brutally because of this loss. Their misogyny stems from the discrimination they have endured. They have been barred from having relationships with white women--sexual, romantic, or otherwise--and they

attempt to rape Herman as a way to react against white supremacy--to "hurt" him in order to injure the white swipe to whom they assume he belongs. Anderson imagines sexual violence, in this way, as a product of a racist social order, which produces hostile relations between men who enact that hostility through women.

Anderson imagines that the sexual violence that men risk in identifying with women tragically forecloses the possibility of male femininity. Herman's vulnerability shocks him out of his transformation. He escapes the swipes but returns to being a man. The threat of rape severs his capacity to be a woman. It also deeply humiliates him. In the final sequence, Herman returns "stark naked" to the loft from which he was chased and realizes his fear that other men will laugh at him:

> I knew someone would be up and would raise a shout and every swipe and every driver would stick his head out and would whoop with laughter. And there would be a thousand questions asked, and I would be too mad and too ashamed to answer, and would perhaps begin to blubber, and that would make me more ashamed than ever. It all turned out just as I expected…(185)

Here, Anderson acknowledges that the shame of sexual vulnerability contributes to men's incapacity to love one another Herman has been threatened with rape, but he cannot share his experience with other men, who ridicule him for being exposed in a "feminine" way. He cannot speak to them about what has happened to him because he is "too ashamed" to admit his susceptibility and fears that he might "blubber," a sign of weakness that would only make him feel "more ashamed" (185). This emasculation scares Herman away from the libidinal freedom he has felt with Tom and Pick-it-boy, chasing him from the "race-hose and tramp life for the rest of my days" (186).

CHAPTER 3

A Son on the Horizon
Glimpsing Maternal Masculinity in Jean Toomer's *Cane*

In the previous two chapters, I have argued that Sherwood Anderson and Willa Cather represent a sub-tradition of U.S. modernism that promoted an affirmative vision of non-normative masculinity and artistic practices that encourage gender fluidity. They promoted this vision of masculinity and art at a moment of pervasive changes in the sex/gender system, changes that gave rise to a new model of normative manhood that was predicated on the domination of women as well as the psychological repudiation of traits codified as feminine. As I have shown through readings of *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) and *One of Ours* (1922), Anderson and Cather worked to reveal the social and psychological dynamics that cultivated this kind of manhood. They also embraced an alternate style of male subjectivity they imagined to be open to interdependent relations with women and to the creative and emotional capacities (including a longing for same-sex intimacy) that were increasingly viewed as feminine. They conceived of the male writer as one who embraced his vulnerability and expressed his feelings, and whose ability to do so was rooted in a sense of emotional communion with women that began with maternal attachment. In this way, Anderson and Cather refused the mandates of a culture that taught men to close themselves off to the pleasures of compassionate, vulnerable relationships with women, to cross-gender identification, and to the joys of male same-sex love. In doing so, they also resisted the gender politics of modernists who were ambivalent about changing male gender norms but resolved this ambivalence through phobic repudiations of women and non-normative masculinity.

In this chapter, I argue that, in *Cane* (1923), Jean Toomer also explores a form of male subjectivity that yearns to adopt conventionally feminine traits and to enjoy a mutually dependent relationship to women. While Toomer does not explicitly represent maternal identification as the wellspring of this subjectivity, he does depict male characters (at least one) that fantasize about loving and being loved by a maternal figure. In this way, he shares with Anderson and Cather an investment in what I have been calling the momma's boy, one that enables him to expose the dynamics that foster normative manhood and to gesture toward the importance of embracing alternatives. But unlike Anderson or Cather, Toomer explores in black men a category of people who have been systematically barred from the norms, privilege, and power of patriarchal white masculinity. In *Cane*, he represents this exclusion as an effect of racial disempowerment that amplifies the terrors of white violence and gives rise to two competing inclinations. Toomer shows that some men yearned, on the one hand, to embrace a way of being that their exclusion from normative masculinity made possible: to be open about their suffering and longings--to share with others the pain and loneliness they endured under racism--and to have relationships with women (as well as other men) rooted in reciprocity and mutual dependence. But at the same time, these men also sought to access the kind of hegemonic manhood from which they were excluded. In doing so, they disavowed the subjective and libidinal possibilities that hegemonic manhood repudiated. Toomer understands there is no neat resolution to this conflict. On one level, he imagines that black men's exclusion from gender norms opens space for them to cultivate alternative forms of male subjectivity. In this sense, his conception of black masculinity resonates with that of late 20th-century black feminist Hortense Spillers. In "Mama's

Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," Spillers, in a rebuttal of the Moynihan report, debunks the myth of the matriarchal black family and the female-dominated black man. She argues that the myth (which obscured and distracted attention from the history of racism in the United States and its lingering economic and social effects on African Americans) inaccurately imposes a normative gender schema onto the black family. She claims that, in fact, slavery systematically subverted the production of the traditional black family, interfering with the ability of black men and women to produce stable families, to have sustained relations with their children and, thus, to embody conventional motherhood and fatherhood. Spiller sees this historical tragedy as nevertheless offering an opportunity for African Americans to cultivate alternative forms of kinship and gender subjectivity. She focuses specifically on what this opportunity entails for black women, claiming that their exclusion from "the traditional symbolics of female gender" has enabled them to explore unconventional modes of "female empowerment" (80). But Spillers also suggests that black men have experienced a similar exclusion that provides them, likewise, with an opportunity to explore unconventional ways of being. Slavery enacted this exclusion, she suggests, by prohibiting fathers from being a symbolic presence and avenue of identification in the psychosocial development of black boys--by removing fathers "from mimetic view as a partner in the prevailing social fiction of the Father's name, the Father's law" (Spillers 80). The absence of the father–and normative Oedipal dynamic--provides African American men with the occasion to see the strength of black women. The black male subject is able to "learn who the female is within itself, the infant child who bears the life against the could-be fateful gamble, against the odds of pulverization and murder, including her own. It is the

heritage of the mother that the African-American male must regain as an aspect of his own personhood--the power of "yes" to the "female" within" (Spillers 80). Black men have an opportunity that they must seize: the opportunity to perceive black women as individuals who have endured the vulnerable experience ("infant child") of bearing children in a social order in which the fate of black life is uncertain--in which black mothers and their children risk being subjected to white violence--to "pulverization and murder" (80). It is this "heritage"--the history of black women's capacity to endure the vulnerability of creating life in a world in which they risk the brutalization and destruction of that life and their own--that Spillers calls on black men to acknowledge and reclaim as a psychological foundation for their own empowerment.

Toomer anticipates Spillers's focus on the non-normative gender possibilities for African Americans but places an even greater emphasis on its challenges for black men. He acknowledges that black men's exclusion from white patriarchal masculinity enables them to see that conventional male traits (toughness, aggression, emotional hardness) are not natural characteristics but, rather, a set of behaviors, sensibilities, and comportments that white men claim for themselves and deny to others. But he also highlights the anxiety produced by exclusion from the power, privilege, and norms of white masculinity, and the constraint that this anxiety places on the desire and capacity of black men to seek alternative forms of subjectivity. In *Cane*, Toomer represents this exclusion as an emotionally painful and terrifying experience that drives some black men to mimic the dominatory posture of white masculinity as a defense against their powerlessness. He depicts this tendency as having profound costs for both African American women and men. The drive to acquire hegemonic manhood requires men to suppress a range of

capacities that they value and yearn to enact (emotional vulnerability, creativity, and intimacy with other men) but that they ultimately reject, in a world that defines these capacities, as feminine and weak. It also leads men to perpetuate the wounds of domination and gendered exclusion onto African American women, whose agency and capacity for self-expression they deny and whom they attempt to possess exclusively. Toomer represents black men's reactionary absorption of normative masculinity as, in this way, especially toxic for women, who are reduced to muted sexual objects. But he also sees this phenomenon as toxic for men themselves, who, in disavowing non-normative traits and suppressing women, deform themselves and cut themselves off from the women on whom they might rely for nurture, comfort, and protection.

By emphasizing the psychological conflict the male characters in *Cane* experience, I want to suggest that Toomer's account of gender subjectivity and the dynamics of male-female relationship are more complex than some critics have assumed. Critics have long been divided about the gender politics of *Cane*. Some, like Patricia Chase, Rafael Cancel, William J. Goede, and most recently, Laura Doyle have represented *Cane* as a work characterized mainly by gender essentialism and the objectification of women. Chase argues, for instance, that while Toomer is sensitive to the experiences of southern black women, his female characters are flat and merely "archetypal" (259). Doyle similarly claims that Toomer "desire[s] to build an art on behalf of black women, especially mothers," but this tendency succumbs to a more powerful "desire to own, in many senses, black women in homosocial competition with other black men" (109). Other critics such as Alice Walker and, later, Nellie Y. McKay and Siobhan Somerville have seen things quite differently. They have framed *Cane* as an

early example of black male feminism that reveals the toxic effects of racism, misogyny, and homophobia on black men and women, and that strives to imagine ways of being free from these structures of oppression. In "Searching for our Mother's Gardens," Walker claims, for example, that Toomer recognizes the "springs of creativity" that lay dormant in black women in the racist-patriarchal social order of the Post-Reconstruction era (45). She argues that in stories like "Fern," "Karintha," "Avey," and "Carma," he deeply identifies with the creative capacities and vulnerability of African American women--placing him within a tradition of literary black feminists that ranges from Phillis Wheatley to Zora Neale Hurston. For Somerville, Toomer's representation of gender and sexual desire in *Cane* offers something even more radical. In *Queering the Color Line*, she argues that his representation of male same-sex desire scrambles the "boundary logics of race and gender," revealing the way in which early 20th-century conceptions of sexual and racial identity overlapped (139-40).

Building on the work of Somerville and, especially, Walker, I argue that Toomer seeks to explore as a defining feature of early 20th-century black masculinity the conflict between a desire to embrace mutual dependence with women and an impulse to adopt dominatory manhood. For Toomer, men who struggled with this conflict were present not only in the south, where the legacy of slavery was closest, but also in the northern cities to which African Americans were traveling during the Great Migration. These kinds of men thus appear in both part one of *Cane*, which depicts life in rural Georgia, and in part two, which focuses on northern urban life. They surface in stories like "Fern," "Karintha," "Carma," and, in part two, "Theater" and "Box Seat." But I focus, here, on two stories: "Avey," which is set in the north, and the final story in the collection, "Kabnis," which

returns to the Jim Crow south. In these stories, Toomer offers his most in-depth exploration of the conflict at the center of black male subjectivity. "Avey" explores the male fantasy of sexually possessing and dominating women as a reaction to the terror of mutual dependence: to the unmanning experience of recognizing the authority of women and to the child-like vulnerability some men feel in acknowledging their power. The story suspends the question of racism and racial violence. But Toomer then shows us in "Kabnis" how the context of white racial violence dramatically intensifies the terror of mutual dependence--as well as the fear of embodying non-normative traits. More specifically, he reveals how some black men yearn for an inter-subjective relationship to women that they associate with an idealized image of mother-son relations, but how, faced with white men's exploitation and murder of black mothers, they anxiously and angrily disavow the possibility of such a relationship.

Fear and Misogyny in "Avey"

In "Avey," Toomer explores normative black masculinity as rooted in the disavowal of male vulnerability and in the rejection of emotionally open relationships to women. The story appears in the second cluster of stories/vignettes, which transition us from the setting of the rural south and questions of southern racism in the first section to Washington D.C. and the problem of northern urban racism. The story follows an unnamed male narrator who, over the course of his adolescence, pursues Avey, a young black woman from his neighborhood in Washington D.C. Avey has been seeing an older man, a college boy, and the allegedly sexual nature of the relationship has become the subject of neighborhood rumor. Excited by her alleged promiscuity, the narrator (like the other boys with whom he competes for her attention) fantasizes about having a sexual

relationship with Avey. He longs to possess her in the way he imagines her college boyfriend has possessed her. But this fantasy quickly unravels. One evening, the narrator takes Avey out for a romantic boat ride, during which he fantasizes about embracing her romantically:

> I should have taken her in my arms the minute we were stowed in that old lifeboat. I dallied, dreaming. She took me in hers. And I could feel by the touch of it that it wasnt a man-to-woman love. It made me restless. I felt chagrined. I didnt know what it was, but I did know that I couldnt handle it. She ran her fingers through my hair and kissed my forehead. I itched to break through her tenderness to passion. I wanted her to take me in her arms as I knew she had that college feller. I wanted her to love me passionately as she did him. I gave her one burning kiss. Then she laid me in her lap as if I were a child.
>
> Helpless. I got sore when she started to hum a lullaby. She wouldnt let me go. I talked. I knew damned well that I could beat her at that. Her eyes were soft and misty, the curves of her lips were wistful, and her smile seemed indulgent of the irrelevance of my remarks. I gave up at last and let her love me, silently, in her own way. The moon was brilliant. The air was sweet like clover, and every now and then, a salt tang, a stale drift of sea-weed... (Toomer 46).

In this passage, Toomer represents a man who perceives women as sexual objects he must dominate, and who maintains this perception as a way of rejecting women's agency and closing himself off to the vulnerability he feels in the presence of their authority. Avey displays, here, a self-possession that thwarts the narrator's desire to dominate her. The narrator dreams about taking Avey. But, instead, she takes him. She holds the narrator with an affection that resists the conventionally sexual "man-to-woman love" he expects to experience with her. She embraces him as he imagines a mother would hold a defenseless child. However, the narrator cannot "handle" the child-like vulnerability he experiences in Avey's arms. Rather than allowing himself to submit to the pleasures of being loved by a woman on whom he depends, he finds the experience to be agitating, frighteningly strange, and disempowering. Toomer thus captures here a male anxiety about powerlessness and a corresponding inability to be open to a relationship to

women that involves a loss of control. He imagines the narrator as attempting to exercise control in two ways. He attempts, first, to "break through [Avey's] tenderness to passion," to penetrate her affection with a "burning kiss" through which he tries to redirect her affection into a sexual encounter that would affirm his dominance and enable him to evade the vulnerable, "Helpless" feeling of being in the arms of a woman (46). Here, Toomer (like Anderson) suggests that male sexual desire tends to slip into an act of domination that precludes true emotional connection. This tendency combines with the narrator's subsequent attempt to exercise control by being verbally dominant. When his kiss fails, the narrator tries to overcome Avey's affection through "talk[]," to "beat" her with words in an attempt to assert the authority of his voice (46). But this, too, fails. Avey affectionately dismisses the narrator's observations. Like a mother listening fondly to the gibberish of an infant, she is "indulgent of the irrelevance of [the narrator's] remarks" (46).

Toomer imagines that the narrator is able, briefly, to relinquish his impulse to control women. He momentarily surrenders to Avey's affection and to the child-like vulnerability he experiences in her arms. "I gave up at last and let her love me," he admits (46). In giving in to Avey, the narrator frees her to love him "in her own way"--to own her feelings and express them in the way she desires. When men open themselves to women in this way, Toomer suggests, they open themselves to the beauty and vitality of the world itself. In Avey's arms, the narrator comes alive to the "brilliant" light of the moon and to the "sweet" aroma of the "air" (46). But such moments are fleeting. In Toomer's view, even as the narrator allows himself to be vulnerable, he follows a stronger impulse to suppress that vulnerability and control women. Despite giving into

her way of loving, the narrator continues to withdraw from Avey and to try to dominate her through sex and talk. When it becomes clear that Avey wants only to "hold[] hands" with him, the narrator attempts to "talk" his way out of such tenderness, to "explain what I meant to her" (46). He attempts to impose a sexual meaning on his interaction with Avey, and when she does not respond, he fantasizes that he "could do with her what I pleased. Like one can strip a tree. I did kiss her. I even let my hands cup her breasts. When I was through, she'd seek my hand and hold it till my pulse cooled down. Evening after evening we sat there. I tried to get her to talk about that college feller. She never would (46). Here, the narrator's "talk" enacts another attempt at control. He silences and dehumanizes Avey, enabling him to fantasize about her as an idle object, a "tree," whose protective exterior he can tear ("strip" away) and render vulnerable to his sexual advances.

Toomer shows us, further, that men who deny women's subjectivity also wound themselves. The objectification of women erases their feelings and desires, and, thus, reduces them to deadened objects who cannot love men. Avey's continuous "indifference" hurts, angers, and confuses the narrator, leading him to dismiss the young woman as cold and idle. He sees Avey's unresponsiveness as part of her "downright laziness. Sloppy indolence…She was no better than a cow. I was certain that she was a cow (47). The narrator fails to see Avey's indifference to him, and the loneliness he feels in the face of it, as a condition he himself has produced. He misrecognizes Avey as innately emotionally and sexually apathetic, and he attacks her unresponsiveness as the root cause of his isolation. Toomer suggests that men perpetuate their own estrangement in refusing to acknowledge how they personally contribute to the suppression of women.

The end of "Avey" emphasizes that men's fearful repudiation of women is a deeply rooted psychological impulse that cannot be easily overcome. In the final scene, the narrator repeats his pattern of dominating Avey through talk. Returning to Washington after years studying at a college in Wisconsin, he finds Avey and reveals his new understanding of her:

> I traced my development from the early days up to the present time, the phase in which I could understand her. I described her own nature and temperament. Told how they needed a larger life for their expression. How incapable Washington was of understanding that need. How it could not meet it. I pointed out that in lieu of proper channels, her emotions had overflowed into paths that dissipated them. I talked, beautifully I thought, about an art that would be born, an art that would open the way for women the likes of her. I asked her to hope, and build up an inner life against the coming of that day. I recited some of my own things to her. I sang, with a strange quiver in my voice, a promise-song. (48)

The narrator believes he understands Avey. He rightly imagines that she has been denied the ability to realize her capacity for self-expression because of women's limited opportunities for self-realization in Washington. He intuits that Avey possesses the capacity to be expressive, and that what she needs is a "larger life," the opportunity to experience the world more broadly, in order to express herself adequately. He also looks forward hopefully to the emergence of an "art" that will honor women's capacity for self-expression and open the doors of the world to them, and he asks Avey to share and find strength in this "hope" (48).

But the irony, here, is that the narrator talks over Avey and, in doing so, thwarts the very capacity for self-expression he sees in her. His speech is a narcissistic monologue that demonstrates his continuing need to exercise verbal control. He presumes to possess knowledge about Avey's "nature" and "temperament" and the lack of "proper channels" for her self-expression. But rather than allowing her to channel her need for

self-expression, he exercises his own ability to talk “beautifully” about the meaning of Avey's silence. In doing so, the narrator misses the point that her silence has been shaped by his inability to be receptive to her--and that she has been similarly muted by other men. His speech misrecognizes the cause of Avey's silence and his isolation and merely repeats the pattern of male domination. At the end of his speech, the narrator discovers that Avey has fallen asleep. His narcissistic projections have exhausted the young woman, who retreats into unconsciousness as a means of blocking him out. The narrator responds, once again, by becoming angry at what he perceives to be Avey's indifference to him. Her unconsciousness reignites his “old-time feeling about her laziness” and his "passion"--his desire to exploit her sexually (48).

In this final scene, Toomer thus stresses the price that both men and women pay when men surrender to their fear of women and their need to control them. Avey is unconscious. She is dead to the world. The narrator is alone, lost to the woman whose voice he has ignored. But in this way, Toomer also implies what is to be gained when men don't capitulate to their anxieties. By learning not to fear women and to embrace the child-like vulnerability of being open to them, men might avoid the alienation produced by their misogyny, and also gain the pleasure of being vulnerable to women: the pleasure of feeling loved by a woman who is strong, nurturing, and protective--a woman with whom one could feel, as the narrator feels briefly with Avey, awakened to the world.

Male Vulnerability and Racial Violence in "Kabnis"

In "Kabnis," Toomer furthers his exploration of normative black masculinity as a formation rooted in the disavowal of male vulnerability and the repudiation of women. The story returns us to the rural south and, in doing so, explores how the climate of

southern racism shapes the dynamics of repudiation and domination that Toomer explores in the urban setting of "Avey." Here, Toomer imagines that in the white supremacist social order of the south, the threat of racial domination impels some black men to disavow their desire to be emotionally vulnerable with others and to express themselves creatively. The story begins with a dramatic representation of this desire and the feeling of terror that suppresses it. It opens with Ralph Kabnis, a black northerner and aspiring artist who has taken a job teaching in Sempter, Georgia so that he may experience living in the rural south and draw creative inspiration from it:

> Kabnis: Near me. Now. Whoever you are, my warm glowing sweetheart, do not think that the face that rests beside you is the real Kabnis. Ralph Kabnis is a dream. And dreams are faces with large eyes and weak chins and broad brows that get smashed by the fists of square faces. The body of the world is bull-necked. A dream is a soft face that fits uncertainly upon it... God, if I could develop that in words. Give what I know a bull-neck and a heaving body, all would go well with me, wouldnt it, sweetheart? If I could feel that I came to the South to face it. If I, the dream (not what is weak and afraid in me) could become the face of the South. How my lips would sing for it, my songs being the lips of its soul. (84)

Kabnis longs to show his true "face" and to realize his most profound "dream" (83). He has been hiding the loneliness he has felt in the south but he wants to admit his suffering and desire for companionship. He dreams of sharing this suppressed aspect of himself with others. With Whitmanesque sentiment, Kabnis expresses a longing to be with "Whoever" will respond to his affection, anyone, regardless of race or gender, who will be his "warm glowing sweetheart" (83). In this way, he embodies the child-like vulnerability that the narrator in "Avey" momentarily displays. He acknowledges in himself the fragility and dependence on others that most men in *Cane* repudiate and, importantly, he sees these traits as his most sincere qualities. Kabnis's true face is a "soft

face" (83). His most genuine self, the person he dreams of showing to the world, is a man who feels isolated and seeks the affirmation of others.

Toomer recognizes, however, that Kabnis's desire to reveal his soft qualities competes with his urge to diminish and suppress those qualities. This urge arises from a terrified awareness of the violence that threatens black men in the racist social order of early 20th-century America Toomer explores the psychological impact of this fear through Kabnis. He imagines that the terror of racial violence produces a kind of melancholic rage in the black male artist--a structure of feeling reflects what Seth Moglen describes in *Mourning Modernity* as a tendency among artists who experience shocking forms of social injuries and who, blind with despair and unable to name the historical conditions that are at the root of their injuries, turn inward to blame their wounds on their own inherent susceptibility to loss. Kabnis internalizes the hostility he sees in the world. Thus, while he values his "soft face," he turns against this aspect of himself. He dismisses his face as one of those "with large eyes and weak chins and broad brows that get smashed by the fists of square faces. The body of the world is bull-necked. A dream is a soft face that fits uncertainly upon it" (83). Kabnis fears what will happen to him if he shows his softness in a world in which soft-faced men are prone to being "smashed" by the "fists" wielded by men with hard, "square faces," in a world dominated by men who are hardened against male vulnerability and who punish signs of it in other men (83). The image of square-faced men that terrorizes Kabnis represents normative masculinity and the violence through which it polices those who deviate from the norm of emotional toughness and impenetrability. Toomer imagines, here, that such masculinity perpetuates itself in men who capitulate to their fears about being victimized. Kabnis rejects his

softness as fragile and "weak" in favor of embracing the "bull-neck" and "heaving-chest" that accompany hard-edged masculinity. He becomes an agent of the aggression he fears. Furthering his exploration of this melancholia, Toomer imagines that black men who turn against their own inner softness also turn outward against the subjects who have been, historically, most susceptible to the forms of racial domination that they fear: namely African American women.

In "Avey," Toomer examines the way in which back men who suppress their vulnerability feel threatened by the power of African American women to express themselves and to love in their own way. He suggests, through the dynamic between the narrator and Avey, that some men objectify women in order to disavow their individuality and, thus, defend themselves against the child-like vulnerability they feel in the presence of that individuality. Building on these intuitions, Toomer imagines, here, that black men reject women not just because of their power, but also, because of the powerlessness they associate with them. He envisions that under the terror of racial domination black men reject women as they reject the most vulnerable aspects of themselves. In a white supremacist social order black men repudiate women as particularly frightening embodiments of racial subordination and the violence to which subordination makes one prone. Toomer explores this phenomenon in two instances. In the first, he represents Kabnis as indirectly attacking women for their subservience to whites. At the end of his opening soliloquy, Kabnis momentarily holds on to the idea that "the dream (not what is weak and afraid in me) could become the face of the South. How my lips would sing for it, my songs being the lips of its soul" (84). He embraces the possibility of sharing his vulnerability with others through art. He wants to express

through song the longing for intimacy he hides in himself--what he imagines to be the true "face" of the "South" rather than the violence that makes individuals like him feel too "weak" and "afraid" to reach out to one another (84). But the sudden intrusion of a hen into his cabin disrupts the dream that Kabnis wants to hold onto:

> A hen, perched on a shelf in the adjoining room begins to tread. Her nails scrape the soft wood. Her feathers ruffle. 'Get out of that you egg-laying bitch.' Kabnis hurls a slipper against the wall. The hen flies from her perch and cackles as if a skunk were after her. 'Now cut out that racket or I'll wring your neck for you.' Answering cackles arise in the chicken yard. 'Why in Christ's hell cant you leave me alone? Dam it, I wish your cackle would choke you. Choke every mother's son of them in this God-forsaken hole. Go away. By God I'll wring your neck for you if you dont. Hell of a mess I've got in: even the poultry is hostile. Go way. Go way. By God, I'll... Kabnis jumps from his bed. His eyes are wild. He makes for the door. Bursts through it. The hen, driving blindly at the window-pane, screams. Then flies and flops around trying to elude him. Kabnis catches her. 'Got you now, you she-bitch.' (84)

In this passage, Toomer dramatizes the misogynistic outcome of suppressed male vulnerability. He suggests that black men who vilify their own softness as "weak" project that weakness onto women and attack aspects of the outside world that remind them of it (84). Kabnis sees the hen as a symbolic reminder of women's weaknesses. She is an "egg-laying bitch" whose fecundity and voice (the "cackle" that gets underneath his skin) are "hostile" to him (84). But the hen is more than a threatening abstraction. By attacking her, Kabnis acts out his aggression toward the real target of his rage: the black mother.

Kabnis's association of the hen with the black mother reveals itself at the peak of his rage:

> With his fingers about [the hen's] neck, he thrusts open the outside door and steps out into the serene loveliness of Georgian autumn moonlight. Some distance off, down in the valley, a band of pine-smoke, silvered gauze, drifts steadily. The half-moon is a white child that sleeps upon the tree tops of the forest. White winds croon its sleep-song:
>
> rock a-by baby. .
> Black mother sways, holding a white child on her bosom.

when the bough bends. .
Her breath hums through the pine-cones.
cradle will fall. .
Teat moon-children at your breasts,
down will come baby. .
Black mother.

Kabnis whirls the chicken by its neck, and throws the head away. Picks up the hopping body, warm, sticky, and hides it in a clump of bushes. He wipes blood from his hands onto he coarse scant grass. (84)

In this image, Toomer suggests that Kabnis's anger derives not only from his need to disavow the susceptibility to racial dominance he assigns to women. It also stems from being deprived of the maternal capacities of black women in an era in which those capacities are exploited by white people in power. Kabnis sees the natural world as infused with this loss. He cannot embrace "the serene loveliness" of the Georgia autumn moonlight against the dark night sky, or the melodious "sleep-song" of the nighttime wind because their beauty is inseparable from the image of exploitation he associates with them. They resemble a "Black mother" who has been made to serve white families and whose capacity to nurture black children like Kabnis has been usurped by white children. The mother holds "a white child on her bosom," a child whom she nurses at her "breasts" and comforts with a lullaby (84). Here, Toomer depicts Kabnis as fantasizing about a black mother on whom he can depend for protection and comfort as well as physical and creative nourishment--a mother in whose arms he can also embody the child-like vulnerability he compulsively renounces. He shows us the way in which Kabnis's knowledge of black women's exploitation disrupts his fantasy of having a mother, and the way in which Kabnis directs his anger over this disruption towards women. Kabnis attacks the hen as a symbolic substitute for the mother he feels he has lost. His aggression is, one the hand, a misogynistic dislocation of his rage toward white

exploitation. But it is also an act of displacement through which he redirects his rage away from real women. By attacking a symbolic substitute, Kabnis shows that on some level he understands that African American women are victims of white exploitation, and are not blame for the lost

In a second instance, Toomer deepens his exploration of the loss of the black mother as a deep wound that the black male artist endures. At one point, Kabnis sits down with two friends: the preacher, Layman, and the town wheelwright, Fred Halsey, who tell him stories that speak to Sempter's history of racial violence. Specifically Kabnis learns about Mame Lamkins, a pregnant woman who attempted to hide her husband from an angry white mob. Layman explains:

> She was in th family-way, Mame Lamkins was. They killed her in th street, an some white man seein th risin in her stomach as she lay there soppy in her blood like any cow, took an ripped her belly open, an th kid fell out. It was living; but a nigger baby aint supposed t live. So he jabbed his knife in it an stuck it to a tree. An then they all went away. (92)

The story of Mame Lamkins allegorizes the way in which white violence severs the cord between black men and the women on whom they rely for care and protection. It emphasizes that whites are able to openly murder black women and those who are most vulnerable and dependent on them: the unborn child impaled and pinned to a "tree" for others to view (92). Toomer suggests that the destruction of black mother and child, and the stories inspired by the public and spectacular nature of that destruction, serve to prevent black men like Kabnis from embracing an original dependence on black women. The story of Mame Lamkins intensifies Kabnis's fear that to rely on the black mother--like the unborn baby who lives inside of her, umbilically dependent on her for its very life--is to risk her destruction and to share her fate. Kabnis cannot bear to acknowledge

this destruction. As he listens to the story, he overhears a choir of women singing at a nearby church: "Singing from the church becomes audible. Above it, rising and falling in a plaintive moan, a woman's voice swells to shouting. Kabnis hears it. His face gives way to an expression of mingled fear, contempt, and pity" (92). The "high-pitched and hysterical" voice "is almost perfectly attuned to the nervous key of Kabnis" (92). Kabnis fears and angrily closes himself off to the mournful song of the "plaintive" church woman because her expression of grief echoes a loss he cannot face: the loss of the mother and the child-like vulnerability of black men to white violence. At the height of the woman's song, Kabnis panics. He believes he has become the target of such violence. A stone crashes through a nearby window. It contains a threat Kabnis assumes is addressed to him: a note that warns the "northern nigger" "t leave" (92).

Importantly, Toomer imagines that Kabnis confronts not only the loss of black women on whom men can depend for maternal nurturance and protection, but also the loss of men on whom they can rely for those same capacities. He explores this notion through the link between Kabnis and his double, Lewis, another northerner who has journeyed to Sempter to see the south:

> Lewis enters. He is the queer fellow who has been referred to. A tall wiry copper-colored man, thirty perhaps. His mouth and eyes suggest purpose guided by an adequate intelligence. He is what a stronger Kabnis might have been, and in an odd faint way resembles him. As he steps towards the others, he seems to be issuing sharply from a vivid dream. Lewis shakes hands with Halsey. Nods perfunctorily to Hanby, who has stiffened to meet him. Smiles rapidly at Layman, and settles with real interest on Kabnis. (97)

Lewis represents a return of the repressed. He embodies the "dream" that Kabnis shuts himself off to in the face of racial domination--the dream of sharing the most vulnerable aspects of himself with others through art (96). Lewis is, in this sense, a "stronger"

version of Kabnis, a man who embraces the dream of open emotional connection that Kabnis cannot realize.

The description of Lewis as a "queer fellow" may suggest the homoerotic nature of the attraction between him and Kabnis, as Shiobhan Sommerville has argued regarding Toomer's use of the term "*queer*" more generally. However, the connection is also queer, I want to argue, in the sense that it is emotionally non-normative. It is based in a shared longing to be emotionally open and vulnerable with another man in a social order that forces men to repress such feelings. Lewis and Kabnis recognize this desire in each other:

> There is a swift intuitive interchange of consciousness. Kabnis has a sudden need to rush into the arms of this man. His eyes call, "Brother." And then a savage, cynical twist- about within him mocks his impulse and strengthens him to repulse Lewis. His lips curl cruelly. His eyes laugh. They are glittering needles, stitching. With a throbbing ache they draw Lewis to. (98)

Toomer describes Kabnis and Lewis, here, as engaged in an empathic union, a "swift intuitive interchange of consciousness" in which each sees himself in the other. Kabnis recognizes Lewis as a man who echoes his desire to be vulnerable with others--to be compassionate and affectionate. He, thus, yearns to be in the "arms" of Lewis (98). This desire echoes his hidden longing for the affection of women. He longs to be held by another man in the same way he desires to be held by the black mother he imagines nursing white children. Kabnis wants to seize Lewis as a "Brother" who can offer him love and compassion. But just as he yields his desire to be embraced by the black mother to his fear of the susceptibility to domination he associates with women, so too does Kabnis relinquish his yearning to be held by another man. His longing for Lewis succumbs to a "savage, cynical twist-about within him" that "mocks his impulse" (98). In the same way that he turns inward against his desire to share his vulnerability with others,

Kabnis suppresses his longing for same-sex love--the "throbbing ache" he cannot satisfy (98).

By representing Kabnis as turning against his desire to be held by another man just as he repudiates his desire to be held by a black mother, Toomer suggests that the suppression of male same-sex intimacy and the prohibition of heterosexual love are linked. He suggests that both forms of love are prohibited by a fear of being vulnerable that has been intensified by the terror of racial violence. Toomer deepens his exploration of this link by depicting Lewis as suddenly drawn to Fred Halsey's sister, Carrie Kate, in the same way he feels attracted to Kabnis:

> [Lewis and Carrie Kate's] meeting is a swift sun-burst. Lewis impulsively moves toward her. His mind flashes images of her life in the southern town. He sees the nascent woman, her flesh already stiffening to cartilage, drying to bone. Her spirit-bloom, even now touched sullen, bitter. Her rich beauty fading..He wants to--He stretches forth his hands to hers. He takes them. They feel like warm cheeks against his palms. The sun-burst from her eyes floods up and haloes him. Christ-eyes, his eyes look to her. Fearlessly she loves into them. And then something happens. Her face blanches. Awkwardly she draws away. The sin-bogies of respectable southern colored folks clamor at her: "Look out! Be a *good* girl. A *good* girl. Look out!'" (103)

Lewis's link to Carrie Kate echoes the empathic union he experiences with Kabnis. Here, Lewis embodies Kabnis's "dream" in the sense that he displays the vulnerability to women that Kabnis refuses. Lewis compassionately recognizes and understands the suffering that African American women in the Jim Crow south endure. He opens himself to Carrie Kate, with whom he ignites a "sun-burst" of passionate recognition in which he sees the "life" she has lived in Sempter, a life that has depleted her "rich" physical and spiritual "beauty" (103). Lewis's openness to Carrie Kate momentarily revives her beauty. Carrie Kate reciprocates Lewis's vulnerability. She "loves" him "Fearlessly" (103).

In the interaction between Lewis and Carrie Kate, Toomer depicts a moment of genuine emotional responsiveness between man and woman that reclaims the beautiful spiritual life that the social order of the south entombs in African American women. However, he sees this kind of relationship as ultimately prohibited in a culture in which women learn to close themselves to men as a means of protecting themselves against the threat of sexual violence. Carrie Kate suddenly withdraws from Lewis because she has learned to distrust men. She has internalized the voices of others who have warned her to "Look out" for men, who want to use her sexually. These voices encourage her to protect herself by conforming to the "respectable" ideal of chaste womanhood (103).[1]

In a subsequent passage, Toomer further explores the fear of male sexual violence that prevents women like Carrie Kate from being open to men. He suggests that the root cause of women's fear is not simply learned distrust, but, more deeply, the cycle of racial and sexual domination that has distorted relations between black men and women. He explores the impact of this cycle through the character of Father John, the old speechless man who lives in the cellar of Fred Halsey's shop. At one point, Kabnis joins Lewis, Halsey, and two women, Cora and Stella, for drinks in the cellar. In this scene, Stella sees Father John as a figure who resembles her own father. She explains,

> That old man there--maybe its him--is like m father used to look. He used t sing. An when he could sing no mo, they'd allus come f him an carry him to church an there he'd sit, befo th pulpit, aswayin an aleadin every song. A white man took m mother an it broke the old man's heart. He died; an then I didnt care what become of me, an I dont now. I dont care now. Dont get it in y head I'm some sentimental Susie askin for yo sop. Nassur. Theres somethin t yo th others aint got. Boars, an kids an fools--But thats all I've known. Boars when their fever's up. When their fever's up they come t me. Halsey asks me over when he's off th job. Kabnis--it ud be a sin t play with him. He takes it out in talk. (109)

Father John reminds Stella of her own father, whose songs were silenced by the loss of his wife to a "white man" (109). Through the story of Stella's father, Toomer allegorically represents black men's loss of creative voice in a world in which white men are able to deprive them of the women they love and in which they are overwhelmed with grief ("broke the old man's heart") over the victimization and loss of black women to hegemonic white manhood. Toomer suggests that this injury produces, as a reaction formation, a form of black masculinity that adopts the sexually dominatory posture of white manhood and that, in doing so, perpetuates the objectification of women. Stella declares that after her father lost his voice and died she "didn't care what become of me, an I dont now" (109). She has surrendered herself to a world in which she has been subjected to men who know only how to approach women like "Boars, an kids an fools"--to puerile, sexually animalistic and violent men like Halsey, who, in this moment, threatens to "hurt" Stella when she resists his advances (109).

At the end of "Kabnis," Toomer shows us the cost of misogyny and sexual violence. He explores this through the final exchange between Kabnis and Carrie Kate. In the morning after the gathering in the cellar of Halsey's workshop, Kabnis wakes up on the floor, where Carrie Kate finds him:

> She turns him to her and takes his hot cheeks in her firm cool hands. Her palms draw the fever out. With its passing, Kabnis crumples. He sinks to his knees before her, ashamed, exhausted. His eyes squeeze tight. Carrie presses his face tenderly against her. The suffocation of her fresh starched dress feels good to him. Carrie is about to lift her hands in prayer, when Halsey, at the head of the stairs, calls down...Turning, [Kabnis] tumbles over the bucket of dead coals. He savagely jerks it from the floor. And then, seeing Carrie's eyes upon him, he swings the pail carelessly and with eyes downcast and swollen, trudges upstairs to the work-shop. (117)

Here, Kabnis allows himself to be vulnerable to a woman. He opens himself to the affection of Carrie Kate, whose touch releases him from the "fever" of rage he has previously directed at himself for being vulnerable and at black women for eliciting his vulnerability (117). Kabnis shows Carrie Kate the soft face he has longed to share with others--his longing to be close to and depend on others. This is an important image. By depicting Kabnis as open to Carrie Kate, Toomer suggests that the capacity to be vulnerable and to forge a mutually dependent, nurturing relationship to black women that echoes Kabnis's fantasy of mother-son relations persists in some black men despite the fear of white violence and they anger at the usurpation of black women with which they struggle. Yet, at the same time, Toomer imagines that such fear and anger prevent this capacity from truly flourishing. Kabnis warms to the touch of Carrie Kate, but he ultimately withdraws from her. In doing so, he retreats from being a man who reaches out to women and resumes instead the conventional craft masculinity embodied by Halsey, who has offered him a job working as a blacksmith--a job that promises to harden him against the threat of domination--to "make a man of him" so that “nobody can take advantage of” him (96).

Toomer suggests that men who capitulate to a fear of domination surrender the pleasure of shared vulnerability--the pleasure of reaching out and finding comfort in others that Kabnis experiences momentarily with Lewis and with Carrie Kate. But this is not his final gesture. After Kabnis returns to Halsey’s shop:

> Light streaks through the iron-barred cellar window. Within its soft circle, the figures of Carrie and Father John. Outside, the sun arises from its cradle in the tree-tops of the forest. Shadows of pines are dreams the sun shakes from its eyes. The sun arises. Gold- glowing child, it steps into the sky and sends a birth-song slanting down gray dust streets and sleepy windows of the southern town. (117)

Toomer leaves us with an image that visualizes the kind of love to be gained when men do not repudiate the companionship of women and other men. The image looks forward to a day in which black men can open themselves to the pleasure of shared vulnerability. Carrie Kate and Father John represent this possibility. The "*soft* circle" that encompasses them reclaims the vulnerability that Kabnis repudiates. It revives the "*soft* face" that he has repressed. The accompanying image of the rising sun--the "Gold-glowing child" awakening from "dreams" that are its "birth-song"--similarly promises the dawn of a new masculinity--a black son capable of expressing and realizing the desire for compassionate heterosexual love. (117). In the end, the dream of being vulnerable that Kabnis cannot realize is one that Toomer insists the reader can glimpse. The dream remains on the horizon--a luminous promise that he or she can see.

CONCLUSION

I try not to cry. This has been true for as long as I can remember, and recently I was reminded of it. In the morning a text-message from my mother woke me up. It was my father's cat. He found her in the backyard at 5am. She was hiding in the bushes, unable to breathe. She collapsed. He attempted CPR for 20 minutes. She died in his arms.

I was afraid. Outside of his wife or children, the death of his cat was the most painful loss my father could experience. She had been his companion. She was his beloved friend, the child he nurtured, protected, and pampered with the attentiveness of a doting mother. Earlier in the year the family dog had died. But that was different. The dog was hard to love, easy to hate, and my father's frustration with him developed into proud detestation long before he died. But he felt no ambivalence about the cat. There was no way to reject her, no way to shut himself off from the pain of her absence. I imagined him at the bottom of a very dark hole.

I have a soldier-like response to loss. After reading the text, I rose from the bed stoically, showered, pulled on clothes, completed my morning routine of coffee-drinking and dog-feeding with swift mechanical efficiency, climbed into my SUV, and began to drive to my parent's house. I wasn't sure of my motivation. I think I was driving home to help my father absorb the shock. Was I rushing to his need --or mine? I do know that during the drive I thought a lot about my father's love for the cat. I felt like sobbing. But I wouldn't. I was worried someone in another car would see me. At one point a single tear escaped from behind my sunglasses. But that was all. I exercised restraint and control, like a plumber opening the valves slowly to ensure the water doesn't burst the pipes.

I didn't know what to expect when I got home, or what I wanted. I didn't want to see my father at all. I was afraid to witness his grief, to be embarrassed by it. But then again, perhaps I wanted to find him crying. I half-hoped, half-believed that I would find him sobbing and that, on seeing him, I would begin crying too. We would hold and comfort each other, and maybe even smile through our tears--two men accepting each other's emotionalism. But my father was upstairs sleeping when I arrived, and I was relieved. I felt he had done me a favor by hiding from me and allowing me to hide from him. Stepping into the house, I found only my mother in the living room. She was waiting for me like an ambassador for her husband's grief. She showed me where they had buried the cat beneath the tall tree in the back yard just off the patio. I made myself stare at the dirt mound to force a confrontation with the loss until I realized my father was watching me from his bedroom window. He came downstairs to greet me but also, I think, to show that he was fine. I approached him cautiously, making sure he was composed. We said hello, hugged lightly. I wanted to tell him I was sorry but wouldn't. I was scared the sentiment would break us. The thought alone made me tear up, so I turned away. I felt heavy, like I was going to sob, so I hurried to the front porch to be alone, swatting away a box of tissues my mother extended to me. This was hard. I needed to collect myself. I needed to distance myself from the moment, to fold my feelings back into myself, to straighten my face. She was just a stupid cat after all. I choked down whatever tried to escape and returned to the backyard.

My father looked like he had done the same. I noticed his eyes were bloodshot. He hadn't been sleeping, I imagined, only pretending so that he could cry in private. I tried not to meet his eyes to avoid embarrassment, both mine and his. We talked for some

time. The conversation was like many others we had had before. It was like conversation in a dream: aimless, indirect, carried out in a dialogue that seemed to float just above substantive meaning. We talked around what we felt, about topics that seemed only obliquely related to our emotions: my recent cancellation of my wedding plans; a friend of a friend who had just died in a motorcycle accident; my mother nearly fainting last week from the heat; how to bleed brakes properly; how tall the tree above the cat's grave had grown. Occasionally this pattern was interrupted by sporadic assertions of grief--*I want my cat back. We were planning to grow old together, but it wasn't meant to be. Wouldn't it be nice if this was just a nightmare?* But these sentiments were quickly swallowed up in the uncomfortable silences that passed between us. Neither of us elaborated. Neither of us cried. My mother waited nearby with a look of concern we ignored, with a fist full of tissues we pretended were for her.

After some time passed and I felt like I had fulfilled my filial duties, I got up to leave. In a firm voice, I managed to tell my father that I was sorry for his loss. I heard him choke up then stop himself. "Such is life," he responded mechanically. We hugged briefly. I left for home. He left for Home Depot, to buy mortar for the concrete he planned to finish pouring that day.

* * *

What happened yesterday is a familiar scenario. I usually shut myself off to pain when it arises. At one level, I want to acknowledge that pain and to have a relationship with my father in which we share our vulnerability and are unafraid to comfort each other through grief. But at another, I am disgusted by this thought. It feels alien and gross. I

grow anxious when I think about allowing others, especially my father, to see me cry, to witness my weakness, my neediness. I don't want others to see me as dependent on them.

I imagine that many other men feel similarly conflicted. Many men want to cry but fight the urge to do so. Like me, they have grown intolerant of vulnerability in themselves and in other men. They don't know the origin of this impulse, but it is real and familiar. Their inability to tolerate pain is such an integral part of their identities that for them to cry would be to feel torn away from themselves. They would be ashamed. Like me, such men turn away from their wounds in order to keep themselves intact. They stop themselves from crying because they are afraid that doing so would dissolve their manly toughness and self-control. And like me, they are comforted by a culture that reinforces this tendency. They are put at ease when they see men being valued for toughing it out, for being receptive to pain only insofar as it does not compromise their hardened persona. They accept the tears of men only when they are not excessive and when they can be justified. They nod in sympathy when they see men shed tears over competitive losses, but shake their heads in revulsion if they begin to weep--to turn into crybabies or sissies.

I have written this dissertation, in part, to explore why so many American men find it difficult to accept their pain and fragility. The writers I have focused on show us that the conventional male rejection of vulnerability and emotionally open relations with other men is not a natural phenomenon. This tendency is, in fact, a socially and psychologically shaped impulse structured by historically particular gender norms and by the dynamics and processes that install those norms at the deepest levels of male subjectivity. Willa Cather, Sherwood Anderson, and Jean Toomer show us that men's intolerance to vulnerability was shaped by shifts in the sex-gender system in the late 19th

and early 20th century. At this time, men increasingly abandoned an earlier model of manhood that encouraged compassion and emotional receptiveness in favor of a masculinity that emphasized hard-boiled toughness. Men adopted the new masculinity to consolidate notions of sexual difference against an invasive femininity they saw as embodied (among others) in progressive women and feminine gay men. This was an era in which men frequently sought venues--including organizations such as the Boy Scouts and professional sports like boxing, football, and body building--that would enable them to display toughness, virility, and immunity to pain.

Cather and Anderson name Oedipalization within the nuclear family as the process that installs these norms at the deepest levels of male subjectivity. They depict male protagonists who, like Claude Wheeler and George Willard, confront fathers who try to impose on them a perception of physical and emotional vulnerability as innately feminine weaknesses against which they must defend themselves by adopting the tough, hard-edged, and dominatory posture of normative masculinity. They also urge us to see that the drive to adopt hard masculinity perpetuates a fear of male same-sex love. As Anderson poignantly demonstrates in "Hands" and "The Man Who Became a Woman," men learn to reject same-sex love as vulnerable and weak in a culture in which men see male same-sex intimacy as a sign of feminization and police that intimacy through violence. Toomer particularly reveals that the formation of this misogynistic and homophobic masculinity cannot be thought apart from the dynamics of white racism in our society. In "Kabnis, he demonstrates how the terror of white violence and the experience of African American vulnerability has driven many black men to disavow their artistic aspirations and longing for companionship as soft and unbearably fragile

qualities that must be relinquished in order to acquire the toughness to defend themselves. Like Anderson, Toomer emphasizes the way in which particularly anti-black violence works to police feminization in black men. Such violence forces men to turn away from their soft traits, but it also drives them to turn away from--as reminders of their own potential to be exploited and brutalized--the distinctive ways that African American women suffer in a white male-dominated society.

Cather, Anderson, and Toomer illustrate the price we all pay in a racist, misogynistic, and homophobic social order that compels men to embrace forms of masculinity rooted in the repudiation of vulnerability. Such a society often produces men who are abusive and dominatory, even murderous. Men learn to oppress, brutalize, and dominate women and libidinally non-normative men as a way to police the boundaries between male toughness and "feminine" weakness. For this reason, it is important that we study authors who explicitly focus on the problem of toxic masculinity. Reclaiming modernist authors focused on this problem has a special importance, as these writers were responding to a cultural formation that was being newly consolidated in their generation. These authors helps us to expose and critique the historical and psychological processes through which American men came to adopt the tough and virile masculinity that endures in our culture even as its violence continues to shock us. Moreover, these writers help us to see that the destructive forms of male subjectivity that plague our society are not irresistible or immutable. They represent men who refuse the dynamics that produce the intolerance to vulnerability, men who can turn toward rather than away from pain and vulnerability in themselves and others. Anderson launched his most influential work, *Winesburg, Ohio,* with a representation of such men in "The Book of the Grotesque." In

the image of the writer and the carpenter, he depicts a man who listens to and comforts another man who weeps as he tells the story of his own imprisonment and the death of his brother during the Civil War. He depicts here a relation that I and others like me strive one day to realize. He shows men who do not silently endure their wounds, who are unafraid to acknowledge the pain of loss, and who, in doing so, live freely outside the prison of conventional male toughness. These are men who can love other men and who can find solace and companionship with them. In an important contribution to feminist thought, Anderson also emphasizes, here, the importance of vulnerable male-male love in enabling men to recognize and honor the ways in which others, especially women, dream and suffer. He suggests that only when men remain alive to their emotional vulnerability and love one another can they begin to learn to love women. The writer's connection with the carpenter allows him to see and feel the wounds of people he has known throughout his life, people he imagines appearing before him in a procession of grotesque figures, including a deformed woman who stands out above the rest. The writer is frightened by the woman's suffering. He fears that the grief will overwhelm him. But he refuses to surrender to this fear, to turn away from the pain he sees in the woman. In his love for another man, he has found the strength to be vulnerable.

NOTES

Introduction

[1]For historical studies of this masculinity, see Bederman, Kimmel, Rotundo, Pettegrew, and Chauncey.

[2]Pound uses “hardness of edge” when referring to the inadequacies of Edgar Lee Masters (51). See letter 62 to H.L Mencken in D.D. Paige, *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941*. For Eliot’s conception of “impersonality” see "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in Frank Kermode, *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot* (44). My claim, here, is Pound and Eliot's formulations were perceived as masculinist, not that they were so inherently. More recent critics have, of course, complicated this perception. See Note 4 for examples of this criticism. For discussions of modernism’s gender binary, see Kerr, Casey, Forter, Boone, and Lamos. On the connection between the rise of anti-feminine "masculinity" and modernism, see Forter.

[3]For examples of these revisionary critics, see Koestenbaum, Kerr, Casey, Boone, Lamos, Suzanne Clark, Somerville, Laity and Gish, and Izenberg.

[4]To clarify, Lamos and Forter see value in gender ambivalence because it complicates the standard image of canonical modernists as decidedly misogynist and because it queers canonical modernists, showing them to engage with gender as part of a complex and incomplete process of artistic self-understanding. I am deeply indebted to their explorations of this ambivalence. I underline their emphasis on the violent and melancholic quality of this ambivalence only as a point of departure for my own emphasis.

[5] Greg Forter also discusses Willa Cather in his work on modernism and masculinity. In his reading of *The Professor's House*, he argues that Godfrey St. Peter embodies Cather's longing to return to a Victorian model of "feminine" manhood that she, at once, appreciates and devalues. He claims that Cather ultimately resolves this ambivalence by repudiating feminine manhood as weak and unsustainable in the modern world--a gesture manifest in Godfrey's attempted suicide at the end novel. While I agree with Forter that Cather tends to visualize her non-normative male protagonists as destined to die, I insist that she does not enact the kind of authorial aggression that Forter assumes in *One of Ours*. I want to suggest, moreover, that Cather's ability to name the Oedipal as the psychosocial obstacle to the kind of male subjectivity she values distinguishes her from the melancholic modernists that Forter discusses--modernists whose ambivalence, he claims, prevents them from naming and successfully recording the historical and psychic processes that work to shut down "feminine" manhood and make it seem unlivable.

Chapter 1

[1] Willa Cather, *One of Ours* 1922, Vintage Classics Edition (New York: Random House, 1991) 202. Subsequent references to *One of Ours* will be cited parenthetically as *OO*.

[2]For the evidence typically cited by critics, see Cather’s description of Claude as “exactly the sort of looking boy he didn’t want to be,” especially his “block-head,” and as experiencing his name as “another source of humiliation” (*OO* 16).

[3] James Woodress, *Willa Cather: A Literary Life* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 1987) 325; Merrill Maguire Skaggs, *After the World Broke in Two: The Later Novels of Willa Cather* (Charlottesville: U P of Virginia, 1990).

[4] For an efficient synopsis of the critical history on *One of* Ours, see the introduction to Steven Trout’s *Memorial Fictions: Willa Cather and the First World War* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2002) 3-7. For an extended engagement with the critical history on Willa Cather’s work, see Deborah Carlin’s introductory chapter in *Cather, Canon, and the Politics of Reading* (Massachusetts: U of Massachusetts P, 1992) 13-14; and Sharon O’Brien’s “Becoming Noncanonical: The Case Against Willa Cather,” *American Quarterly* 40.1 (March 1988): 110-126.

[5] In the most recent assessment of the novel, Daryl W. Palmer, reading the text in light of Bergsonian notions of authenticity, has gone as far as to proclaim it a "selfish book" that captures an "intimacy between author and protagonist" through which we are offered the keys to Cather's authentic self. Daryl W. Palmer, "Ripening Claude: Willa Cather's *One of Ours* and the Philosophy of Henri Bergson," *American Literary Realism* 41.2 (Winter 2009): 112-132.

[6]See Steven Trout, *Memorial Fictions: Willa Cather and the First World War* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2002). As Steven Trout claims, the debate on whether to situate the novel as ironic or sympathetic persists in contemporary examinations of the novel. It is a critical purgatory that I perceive as stemming from the personalization of Claude and the politics of the novel. My hope is that a reevaluation of Claude in terms of impersonality will lead us away from the identitarian logic that dominates not only our consideration of Cather's war novel but also Cather Studies more generally.

[7] For an extended discussion of Hermione Lee and other critics who still frame Cather in identitarian terms, see Marilee Lindemann, *Willa Cather: Queering America* (New York: Columbia UP, 1999).

[8]Timothy Cramer, "Claude's Case: A Study of the Homosexual Temperament in Willa Cather's *One of Ours*," *South Dakota Review* 31.3 (1993): 147-173; John P. Anders, *Willa Cather's Sexual Aesthetics and the Male Homosexual Literary Tradition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999).

[9] Judith Butler, "'Dangerous Crossing': Willa Cather's Masculine Names." *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Marilee Lindemann, *Willa Cather: Queering America* (New York: Columbia UP, 1999); Scott Herring, "Willa Cather's Experiment in Luxury" *Queering the Underworld: Slumming, Literature, and the Undoing of Lesbian and Gay History* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2007).

[10]Christopher Nealon, "Affect-Genealogy: Feeling and Affiliation in Willa Cather," *American Literature* 69.1 (March 1997): 5-37. The essay that I cite also later appears in chapter form in Nealon's *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion Before Stonewall* (Durham: Duke UP, 2001). For a thorough discussion of Nealon, see Jonathan Goldberg, "War Requiems," *Willa Cather and Others* (Durham: Duke UP, 2001). For other readings of Cather as exploring alternate kinship formations through homosexual friendship, see Scott Herring, "Catherian Friendship; or, How Not To Do the History of Homosexuality," *Modern Fiction Studies* 52.1 (Spring 2006): 66-91.

[11] See Adam Phillips, "On a More Impersonal Note," *intimacies* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2008) 106. In light of the extra-familal models of impersonal intimacy taken up by Bersani in his discussion of the practice of barebacking and the notion of Socratic love, Phillips questions whether impersonal intimacy, the origin of which he locates in the primary narcissism of the subject, requires the "after-education of a lover outside the family to be realized, and does the love relation need to be the same sex for such reciprocal self-recognitions to occur?" While Cather, elsewhere, does not dismiss the possibility of reclaiming impersonality through heterosexual intimacies outside of the family , she centrally explores it through same-sex dynamics in *One of Ours*. In the novel, Gladys Farmer represents the possibility of a fulfilling heterosexual intimacy for Claude, but it remains a love that never blooms.

[12] Guy Hocquenghem, "Capitalism, the Family, and the Anus," *Homosexual Desire*, trans. Daniella Dangoor (Durham: Duke UP, 1993) 93-112. In *Homosexual Desire*, Hocquenghem offers a specifically sexual method for negotiating competition between men. He calls specifically for the reclamation of the anus (which he believes has been sublimated in the Oedipal drive for the phallus) as a possible pleasure for males that would decentralize the phallus and challenge the Oedipalized relations between men.

[13] For a reading that assumes that Claude enacts a melancholic relation to his injury and then proceeds to identify with his father as a result of his obsession with the destroyed tree, see Merrill Maguire Skaggs, "One of Ours," *After the World Broke in Two: The Later Novels of Willa Cather* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1990) 34.

[14] For the relevant discussion of *The Immoralist*, see Leo Bersani, "The Gay Outlaw," *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995).

[15] Claude's pursuit of Enid despite her insistence that she desires not to marry, but to go to China and join her sister in Christian missionary work, suggests that Cather, to an extent, indicts him and his stubborn investment in the standard notion of marital bliss. However, Cather's relatively elaborate treatment of Enid's lack of affection and Claude's unsatisfied yearning for connection with Enid implies that she also assigns the failure of the marriage to Enid. For an in-depth treatment of Cather's ambivalence toward Enid and the misogynistic implications of her portrayal, see Pearl James, "The Enid Problem: Dangerous Modernity in *One of Ours*," *Cather Studies* 6 (2006): 92-128.

[16] See Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, "The Primal Band," *The Freudian Subject* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1988) 127-239. In "The Primal Band," Borch-Jacobsen provides an extensive treatment of Freud's variegated and sometimes contradictory notion of identification. In the section "Double Band or Triangle?" he works through Freud's paradoxical conception of peaceful identificatory bonds, which he envisions to be the basis of non-violent sociality. As Borch-Jacobsen sees it, the notion of peaceful identification appears contradictory, because it is defined, in one sense, as a necessarily rivalrous Oedipal formation.

[17] While the homosexual resolution to rivalrous same-sex identifications that Freud proposes, in "Some Neurotic Mechanisms in Jealousy, Paranoia and Homosexuality" (1922), does not precisely fit with the resolution that Cather imagines here (because Freud deploys same-sex object-love as the progressive resolution to identificatory rivalry), it is worth noting that both Freud and Cather similarly understand forms of same-sex love as negotiating the potential violence of homosexual relations. See the relevant section on Freud's essay in Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, "The Primal Band," *The Freudian Subject* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1988). 201-202.

[18] Sharon O'Brien, "Willa Cather's '*Manly Battle Yarn.*'" *Arms and the Woman: War, Gender, and Literary Representation* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1989).

[19] O'Brien cites as her reference: Willa Cather to Dorothy Canfield [Fisher], April 7, 1922.

[20] O'Brien cites as her reference: Cather to Canfield, March 8, 1922, Dorothy Canfield Fisher Papers.

Chapter 2

[1] For Anderson's tutelage of Hemingway and Faulkner, see Townsend 202-232.

[2] See Baker 178. Hemingway refers to Anderson as the "Master" in a letter to Archibald MacLeish. His full sentiment reads: "My mother always sends me everything that shows up Sherwood or when he gets a divorce or anything because she has read that I am much the same thing only not so good and she naturally wants me to know how the Master is getting along."

[3] See Faulkner. Also qtd.in David D. Anderson, "Sherwood Anderson's Grotesques and Modern American Fiction," 55.

[4] Faulkner's acknowledgement suggests this shift. Even while he professed Anderson to be the "father" of American modernism, he also declared, in the same recollection, that the author had "never received his proper evaluation." His regret that Anderson died before he received his due praise suggests that by the time Faulkner's words were published in 1956 his late mentor had fallen so dramatically from his initial repute that even he, his closest protégé, forgot that he had once been more than a minor writer.

[5] Suzanne Clark has named this phenomenon modernism's "antisementimental" posture: new writers and critics' repudiation of affectivity and the value of emotion in literature. See the intro and first chapter in *Sentimental Modernism*.

[6] Critics have blamed Anderson's fall on his irrelevance to the proletarian literature of the 30s; on critics who rejected him as a chiefly rural writer who did not belong in a progressively urbanized literary mainstream; and on critics who sutured him to the myth of his emergence as an artist. See Crowley on the point about Anderson's reputation in the 30s. See Welford Dunaway Taylor 61-74 about Anderson and the geo-cultural critical prejudice. Taylor claims that Anderson's reputation inflated between the publication of *Winesburg, Ohio* in 1919 and *Dark Laughter* in 1925 but plummeted shortly after his death because he was personally and fictionally non-urban. Taylor assigns the cause of the decline to Lionel Trilling and to Irving Howe, who both defined New York as the center of American literary establishment and pushed Anderson, a non-Eastern intellectual, outside of it. Also see David D. Anderson's "Sherwood Anderson and the Critics."To my mind, David D. Anderson offers the most compelling theory. He argues that the critics of the 20s and the 40s who tarnished Anderson's reputation operated under a misunderstanding of his oeuvre that developed from their misreading of *Winesburg, Ohio*. These critics took at face value the widespread myth of Anderson's rise to literary stardom, to the legend perpetuated by the author himself in *A Story Teller's Story* and *Memoirs* (1942) that one day he simply threw aside his materialistic small-town life and abandoned the factory he managed and the family he had started with his first wife, Cornelia Lane, for the independent writer's life. For these critics, Anderson's later fiction did not live up to this story, which he realized in *Winesburg* through George Willard, the protagonist who leaves home to pursue his aspirations as writer.

[7] On the relationship between Anderson and his mother, see Townsend, 12-14. While it is beyond the scope of this paper, it might be fruitful to explore as a psycho-familial explanation for Anderson's capacity to embrace femininity as a model of creativity the deep sympathy he had for his mother, especially as it relates to the absence of his father, Irwin McClain. As Townsend and others have noted, Anderson struggled throughout his life to come to terms with his father, whom he blamed for the hardship's his mother endured as the family's sole caretaker.

[8] Concerning the Victorian notion of feminine masculinity, see Rotundo, Kimmel, and Bederman. On the erasure of female masculinity in the twentieth century, also see Pettegrew. Anderson was part of a generation of white middle-class American men who faced a changing standard of masculinity in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Men from this period had been raised under the doctrine of separate spheres, an institution that assigned women to private space while freeing men to pursue an autonomous public identity. As such, they inherited as a model of identity the Victorian notion of individual, "self-made" manhood. Consistent the division of the sexes, this formation was understood as s balance of the aggressive and competitive qualities thought to be natural to men and necessary for their socioeconomic autonomy, and the civilizing virtues of compassion, tenderness, and selflessness that were associated with domestic womanhood. The "femininity" from which Victorian manhood drew its morality was imprinted on men in youth by the women who raised and educated them. Its purpose was to bridle the appetitive passions of boys in order to shape them into productive rather than socially destructive or wasteful men. While some men in the mid to late nineteenth century were not heavily influenced by their feminine upbringing, many were deeply impressed by it and maintained a meaningful connection with their feminine origins into adulthood. These men felt the values with which they had been imprinted to be a lasting and integral part of themselves. But by 1890, the ideal of feminine masculinity had fallen dramatically. Changes in the socioeconomic order, most significantly the bureaucratization of male labor and the progressive entry of women into traditionally male public spheres, threatened a once relatively stable male-female divide and white middle-class male identity. In the wake of these "emasculating" shifts, men began to perceive the feminine virtues they received in youth as degenerate, anti-social, and unmanly, and to repudiate the femininity they had internalized from their mothers and (female) teachers as an interior threat that metonymically reflected the broader "feminization" of U.S culture. Against the Victorian discourse of "manhood," they adopted "masculinity," a term that denoted an essential maleness divorced from femaleness (Bederman 16-20). No longer valued as an internal component, male femininity became a socially unviable formation. In its place emerged a new, "modern" standard of manhood that repudiated femininity in men and that naturalized aggressive masculinity as ineluctable brutality rooted in psychological instinct (Pettegrew 1-20).

[9] See Townsend and Klein for the importance of female self-identity in Anderson's life and fiction. Other examples of Anderson associating his art with femininity appear throughout his self-reflections. For instance, in his autobiographical fiction, *The Story Teller's Story*, he conceptualizes the sensual intimacy he sensed in producing *Winesburg* in terms of motherhood, fantasizing that in the process of writing he had become a "woman who has just become impregnated. Something was growing inside me. At night when I lay in my bed I could feel the heels of the tale kicking against the walls of my body" (STS 122). For other examples, see *Letters*, specifically letters 122, 217 (where Anderson compares himself to a hen), and 263.

[10] In using the term *androgyny* to frame the contradictory way in which Anderson understands gender I am indebted to Martin Bidney's reading of *Winesburg* as organized around an androgynous model of the psyche.

[11] For exceptions to this trend, see Bunge and Rigsbee. To my mind, Rigsbee offers the best feminist reading of Anderson. She sees him as sympathetic to women's subjugation to their social roles, which, in devaluing tenderness and vulnerability, render communication impossible for them (and for others). She recognizes that Anderson idealizes, above all else, a form of reciprocal relationality that he associates primarily with the feminine.

[12] For examples of critics who explore a relatively sophisticated account of twentieth-century manhood, see Kerr, Boone, Casey, Somerville, and Forter. See Izenberg for a discussion of masculinity in European modernism. These critics challenge traditional scholarship on manhood, which has understood the shift from Victorian to modern standards of masculinity to be absolute. Historians of modern masculinity emphasize the erasure of feminine manhood in early twentieth century U.S. culture. Feminist critics of modern*ist* masculinity also have maintained this position. They have argued that canonical literary modernism is gender-normative and that it constructs women as its "other." On their account, modern (male) writers define the aesthetic movement as exclusively masculine, either by associating women with an inauthentic commercialism distinct from true, individual, "male" art; by reducing the feminine to pre-modern plenitude; or through more direct expressions of misogyny. On the point about historians, see for example Rotundo, Kimmel, Bederman, and especially John Pettegrew. For a classic discussion of modernist misogyny, see Gubar and Gilbert. On the commercial association of womanhood, see Huyssen and Douglas. While Ann Douglas does not make direct claims about the function of nineteenth-century sentimental culture for modernists, I take as an implicit part of her argument its role in fostering modernism's nostalgic attachment (what she would undoubtedly consider a politically ineffectual attachment) to "feminine" virtues—elements for which modernists longed but which they conceded as irretrievably lost in a progressively masculine culture.

[13] Anderson reinforces his depiction of writing as craft by representing the old man as a physical double of the carpenter, whose age shows in his white mustache, which "bob[s] up and down" when he cries. (4).

[14] For a discussion of *Winesburg*'s form in relation to the grotesques, see Ciancio.

[15] While it's not central to my argument, it is important that George misses saying goodbye to Helen White, who, "hoping to have a parting word with him," arrives after his train departs. Helen's absence from the closing sequence is significant. But not because it indicates Anderson's indifference to her future and to the fate of women in the modern world, as some critics have assumed. We learn in "Sophistication," Helen has defied the mandates for conventional womanhood. She has experienced life beyond Winesburg and felt the kind of expansive self-expression denied to other women. Rather, Helen's absence serves to emphasize George's pursuit of the broad love she has helped to incite in him. In doing so, it also underscores the "bi-sexual" potential of George's affections. As Anderson suggests, in "Sophistication," George's love for Helen is a matter of preference. The feeling, as figured by the affection between the old writer and the carpenter in "The Book of the Grotesque," can manifest between men. Even though Anderson initially figures George's desire to be with another as heterosexual, Helen's absence disrupts that meaning.

Chapter 3

[1]It is important to note that Lewis's perception of Carrie Kate continues the motif of mother-son love. Lewis "wonders what Kabnis could do for [Carrie Kate]. What she could do for him. Mother him" (104). Lewis recognizes that the fear to which Kabnis and Carrie Kate succumb prevents them from depending on each other. They "could do" something for each other (104). They could offer each other love unencumbered by a fear of being vulnerable to white domination (Kabnis) or sexual exploitation (Carrie Kate). Kabnis could be a son to Carrie Kate. He could offer her compassion and understanding--the recognition of her pain and the comfort that Lewis attempts to offer her. Reciprocally, Carrie Kate could be the "Mother" Kabnis has rejected-- one with whom he can display the vulnerable need for others he has been forced to suppress.

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EDUCATION

Ph.D., English, Lehigh University, 2015
Dissertation Title: "Momma's Boy: Queer Masculinity and Cross-Gender Identification in U.S. Modernism"

M.A., English, Villanova University, 2008

B.A., English, Drew University, Magna Cum Laude, Honors in English, 2006

HONORS & AWARDS

Teaching Assistant of the Year, Nomination/Honorable Mention, Lehigh University, 2015

Dale S. Strohl Graduate Dissertation Fellowship, College of Arts and Sciences, Lehigh University, 2014-2015

Dissertation Fellowship, English Department, Lehigh University, 2011

Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination, Passed with Distinction, Lehigh University, 2010

Tuition Scholarship, Villanova University, 2006-2008

Distinguished Graduate Paper Prize, Elizabeth Cady Stanton Conference, Villanova University, 2007

Highest Distinction for undergraduate Senior Thesis, "Walt Whitman and the Woman Question," English Department, Drew University, 2006

PUBLICATIONS

"Momma's Boy: Maternal Masculinity in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*," under review at *Studies in the Novel*

"[T]he very worst…the oldest, deepest fear": Masculine Anxiety and Male Responses to Emasculatory Threats in Martha Gellhorn's *Point of No Return*." *Atenea*. 28.1 (2008): 133-146.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

"Momma's Boy: Maternal Masculinity in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*," delivered at "Marginal Masculinities: Queer, Black, Wayward" panel (co-organizer), *Modernism Studies Association Conference*, Pittsburgh, 2014

"Gender Transformation in Sherwood Anderson's 'The Man Who Became a Woman,'" delivered at "New Directions in Sherwood Anderson" panel (organizer), *American Literature Association*, Washington D.C., 2014

"Puerile Modernism in Sherwood Anderson's "Loneliness," delivered at "Remembering and Recreating the Self in 19th- and 20th-Century Fiction" panel (co-organized), *North East Modern Language Association Convention*, Boston, 2013

"The Gender of Modernism in the Fiction of Sherwood Anderson," discussant at Major/Minor Modernism Seminar at *Modernism Studies Association International Conference*, Las Vegas, 2012

"Homosexual Momma's Boys in Willa Cather's *One of Ours*," *Willa Cather Conference*, Smith College, 2011

"Martha Gellhorn's Ernest Hemingway," *Elizabeth Cady Stanton Conference*, Villanova University, 2007

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Lehigh University

Literature Courses

"American Literature Since 1865" (survey course), Instructor of Record, Spring 2014

"Modernism and Masculinity" (100-level), Instructor of Record, Fall 2012

Composition Courses

"American Controversies" (Eng 2), Instructor of Record, Spring 2014

"Gender Trouble" (Eng 1), Instructor of Record, Fall 2013

"Terrorism in America" (Eng 1), Instructor of Record, Fall 2013

"Loss and Love" (Eng 2), Instructor of Record, Spring 2013

"College Cultures" (Eng 2), Instructor of Record, Spring 2013

"Current Debates" (Eng 1), Instructor of Record, Fall 2012

"Contacts across Social Divides" (Eng 2), Instructor of Record, Spring 2012

"Labor and Alienation" (Eng 2), Instructor of Record, Spring 2011

"American Modernism" (Eng 1), Instructor of Record, Fall 2010

"The End of Innocence" (Eng 2), Instructor of Record, Spring 2010

"High and Popular Fiction (Eng 1), " Instructor of Record, Fall 2009

"Fictions of Maturation" (Eng 2), Instructor of Record, Spring 2009

"Too Cool for School" (Eng 1), Instructor of Record, Fall 2008

ADDITIONAL ACADEMIC WORK EXPERIENCE

Assigned Grader, Professor Kristine Seasholtz, Business Ethics, 2013

Research Assistant, Dr. Seth Moglen, 2010-2011

Research Assistant, Dr. Lauren Shohet, 2006-2008

Tutor, Villanova University Writing Center, 2006-2007

SERVICE EXPERIENCE

Organized Events Related to Visiting Scholars Greg Forter (Fall 2013), Tim Dean (2011), and Heather Love (2010), at Lehigh University, English Department

Coordinator, Graduate Queer Theory Reading Group, Lehigh University, English Department, 2010-2015

Founder, LGBTQIA Graduate Group, Lehigh University, 2010-2011

Volunteer Leader, LGBTQIA Services, Lehigh University, 2008-2011

Guest Speaker, Equality Pennsylvania, *Gun Hill Road*, Arts Quests LGBT Film Series, Steel Stacks Cinema, Bethlehem, Spring 2011

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