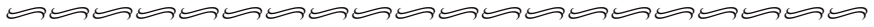


# INTRODUCTION FROM *BETWEEN MEN*

(1985)



## I. HOMOSOCIAL DESIRE

The subject of this book is a relatively short, recent, and accessible passage of English culture, chiefly as embodied in the mid-eighteenth- to mid-nineteenth-century novel. The attraction of the period to theorists of many disciplines is obvious: condensed, self-reflective, and widely influential change in economic, ideological, and gender arrangements. I will be arguing that concomitant changes in the structure of the continuum of male “homosocial desire” were tightly, often causally bound up with the other more visible changes; that the emerging pattern of male friendship, mentorship, entitlement, rivalry, and hetero- and homosexuality was in an intimate and shifting relation to class; and that no element of that pattern can be understood outside of its relation to women and the gender system as a whole.

“Male homosocial desire”: the phrase in the title of this study is intended to mark both discriminations and paradoxes. “Homosocial desire,” to begin with, is a kind of oxymoron. “Homosocial” is a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with “homosexual,” and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from “homosexual.” In fact, it is applied to such activities as “male bonding,” which may, as in our society, be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality.<sup>1</sup> To draw the “homosocial” back into the orbit of “desire,” of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual—a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted. It will become clear, in the course of my argument, that my hypothesis of the unbrokenness of this continuum is not a *genetic* one—I do not mean to discuss genital homosexual desire as “at the root of” other forms of male homosociality—but rather a strategy for making generalizations about, and marking historical differences in, the *structure* of men’s relations with other men. “Male homosocial desire” is the name this book will give to the entire continuum.

I have chosen the word “desire” rather than “love” to mark the erotic emphasis because, in literary critical and related discourse, “love” is more easily used



to name a particular emotion, and “desire” to name a structure; in this study, a series of arguments about the structural permutations of social impulses fuels the critical dialectic. For the most part, I will be using “desire” in a way analogous to the psychoanalytic use of “libido”—not for a particular affective state or emotion, but for the affective or social force, the glue, even when its manifestation is hostility or hatred or something less emotively charged, that shapes an important relationship. How far this force is properly sexual (what, historically, it means for something to be “sexual”) will be an active question.

The title is specific about *male* homosocial desire partly in order to acknowledge from the beginning (and stress the seriousness of) a limitation of my subject; but there is a more positive and substantial reason, as well. It is one of the main projects of this study to explore the ways in which the shapes of sexuality, and what *counts* as sexuality, both depend on and affect historical power relationships.<sup>2</sup> A corollary is that in a society where men and women differ in their access to power, there will be important gender differences, as well, in the structure and constitution of sexuality.

For instance, the diacritical opposition between the “homosocial” and the “homosexual” seems to be much less thorough and dichotomous for women, in our society, than for men. At this particular historical moment, an intelligible continuum of aims, emotions, and valuations links lesbianism with the other forms of women’s attention to women: the bond of mother and daughter, for instance, the bond of sister and sister, women’s friendship, “networking,” and the active struggles of feminism.<sup>3</sup> The continuum is crisscrossed with deep discontinuities—with much homophobia, with conflicts of race and class—but its intelligibility seems now a matter of simple common sense. However agonistic the politics, however conflicted the feelings, it seems at this moment to make an obvious kind of sense to say that women in our society who love women, women who teach, study, nurture, suckle, write about, march for, vote for, give jobs to, or otherwise promote the interests of other women, are pursuing congruent and closely related activities. Thus the adjective “homosocial” as applied to women’s bonds (by, for example, historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg)<sup>4</sup> need not be pointedly dichotomized as against “homosexual”; it can intelligibly denominate the entire continuum.

The apparent simplicity—the unity—of the continuum between “women loving women” and “women promoting the interests of women,” extending over the erotic, social, familial, economic, and political realms, would not be so striking if it were not in strong contrast to the arrangement among males. When Ronald Reagan and Jesse Helms get down to serious logrolling on “family policy,” they are men promoting men’s interests. (In fact, they embody Heidi Hartmann’s definition of patriarchy: “relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women.”)<sup>5</sup> Is their bond in any way congruent with the bond of a loving gay male couple? Reagan and Helms would say no—disgustedly. Most gay couples would say no—disgustedly. But why not? Doesn’t the continuum between “men-loving-men” and “men-promoting-the-interests-of-men” have the same intuitive force that it has for women?

Quite the contrary: much of the most useful recent writing about patriarchal structures suggests that “obligatory heterosexuality” is built into male-dominated

kinship systems, or that homophobia is a *necessary* consequence of such patriarchal institutions as heterosexual marriage.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, however convenient it might be to group together all the bonds that link males to males, and by which males enhance the status of males—usefully symmetrical as it would be, that grouping meets with a prohibitive structural obstacle. From the vantage point of our own society, at any rate, it has apparently been impossible to imagine a form of patriarchy that was not homophobic. Gayle Rubin writes, for instance, “The suppression of the homosexual component of human sexuality, and by corollary, the oppression of homosexuals, is . . . a product of the same system whose rules and relations oppress women.”<sup>7</sup>

The historical manifestations of this patriarchal oppression of homosexuals have been savage and nearly endless. Louis Crompton makes a detailed case for describing the history as genocidal.<sup>8</sup> Our own society is brutally homophobic; and the homophobia directed against both males and females is not arbitrary or gratuitous, but tightly knit into the texture of family, gender, age, class, and race relations. Our society could not cease to be homophobic and have its economic and political structures remain unchanged.

Nevertheless, it has yet to be demonstrated that, because most patriarchies structurally include homophobia, therefore patriarchy structurally *requires* homophobia. K. J. Dover’s recent study, *Greek Homosexuality*, seems to give a strong counter-example in classical Greece. Male homosexuality, according to Dover’s evidence, was a widespread, licit, and very influential part of the culture. Highly structured along lines of class, and within the citizen class along lines of age, the pursuit of the adolescent boy by the older man was described by stereotypes that we associate with romantic heterosexual love (conquest, surrender, the “cruel fair,” the absence of desire in the love object), with the passive part going to the boy. At the same time, however, because the boy was destined in turn to grow into manhood, the assignment of roles was not permanent.<sup>9</sup> Thus the love relationship, while temporarily oppressive to the object, had a strongly educational function; Dover quotes Pausanias in Plato’s *Symposium* as saying “that it would be right for him [the boy] to perform any service for one who improves him in mind and character.”<sup>10</sup> Along with its erotic component, then, this was a bond of mentorship; the boys were apprentices in the ways and virtues of Athenian citizenship, whose privileges they inherited. These privileges included the power to command the labor of slaves of both sexes, and of women of any class including their own. “Women and slaves belonged and lived together,” Hannah Arendt writes. The system of sharp class and gender subordination was a necessary part of what the male culture valued most in itself: “Contempt for laboring originally [arose] out of a passionate striving for freedom from necessity and a no less passionate impatience with every effort that left no trace, no monument, no great work worthy to remembrance”;<sup>11</sup> so the contemptible labor was left to women and slaves.

The example of the Greeks demonstrates, I think, that while heterosexuality is necessary for the maintenance of any patriarchy, homophobia, against males at any rate, is not. In fact, for the Greeks, the continuum between “men loving men” and “men promoting the interests of men” appears to have been quite seamless. It is as if, in our terms, there were no perceived discontinuity between the male bonds at the Continental Baths and the male bonds at the Bohemian Grove<sup>12</sup> or in the boardroom or Senate cloakroom.



It is clear, then, that there is an asymmetry in our present society between, on the one hand, the relatively continuous relation of female homosocial and homosexual bonds, and, on the other hand, the radically discontinuous relation of male homosocial and homosexual bonds. The example of the Greeks (and of other, tribal cultures, such as the New Guinea “Sambia” studies by G. H. Herdt) shows, in addition, that the structure of homosocial continuums is culturally contingent, not an innate feature of either “maleness” or “femaleness.” Indeed, closely tied though it obviously is to questions of male vs. female power, the explanation will require a more exact mode of historical categorization than “patriarchy,” as well, since patriarchal power structures (in Hartmann’s sense) characterize both Athenian and American societies. Nevertheless, we may take as an explicit axiom that the historically differential shapes of male and female homosociality—much as they themselves may vary over time—will always be articulations and mechanisms of the enduring inequality of power between women and men.

Why should the different shapes of the homosocial continuum be an interesting question? Why should it be a *literary* question? Its importance for the practical politics of the gay movement as a minority rights movement is already obvious from the recent history of strategic and philosophical differences between lesbians and gay men. In addition, it is theoretically interesting partly as a way of approaching a larger question of “sexual politics”: What does it mean—what difference does it make—when a social or political relationship is sexualized? If the relation of homosocial to homosexual bonds is so shifty, then what theoretical framework do we have for drawing any links between sexual and power relationships?

## II. SEXUAL POLITICS AND SEXUAL MEANING

This question, in a variety of forms, is being posed importantly by and for the different gender-politics movements right now. Feminist along with gay male theorists, for instance, are disagreeing actively about how direct the relation is between power domination and sexual sadomasochism. Start with two arresting images: the naked, beefy motorcyclist on the front cover, or the shockingly battered nude male corpse on the back cover, of the recent so-called “Polysexuality” issue of *Semiotext(e)* (4, no. 1 [1981])—which, for all the women in it, ought to have been called the semisexuality issue of *Polytext*. It seemed to be a purpose of that issue to insist, and possibly not only for reasons of radical-chic titillation, that the violence imaged in sadomasochism is not mainly theatrical, but is fully continuous with violence in the real world. Women Against Pornography and the framers of the 1980 NOW Resolution on Lesbian and Gay Rights share the same view, but without the celebratory glamor: to them too it seems intuitively clear that to sexualize violence or an image of violence is simply to extend, unchanged, its reach and force.<sup>13</sup> But, as other feminist writers have reminded us another view is possible. For example: is a woman’s masochistic sexual fantasy really only an internalization and endorsement, if not a cause, of her more general powerlessness and sense of worthlessness? Or may not the sexual drama stand in some more oblique, or even oppositional, relation to her political experience of oppression?<sup>14</sup>



The debate in the gay male community and elsewhere over “man-boy love” asks a cognate question: can an adult’s sexual relationship with a child be simply a continuous part of a more general relationship of education and nurturance? Or must the inclusion of sex qualitatively alter the relationship, for instance in the direction of exploitiveness? In this case, the same NOW communiqué that had assumed an unbroken continuity between sexualized violence and real, social violence, came to the opposite conclusion on pedophilia: that the injection of the sexual charge *would* alter (would corrupt) the very substance of the relationship. Thus, in moving from the question of sadomasochism to the question of pedophilia, the “permissive” argument and the “puritanical” argument have essentially exchanged their assumptions about how the sexual relates to the social.

So the answer to the question “what difference does the inclusion of sex make” to a social or political relationship, is—it varies: just as, for different groups in different political circumstances, homosexual activity can be either supportive of or oppositional to homosocial bonding. From this and the other examples I have mentioned, it is clear that there is not some ahistorical *Stoff* of sexuality, some sexual charge that can be simply added to a social relationship to “sexualize” it in a constant and predictable direction, or that splits off from it unchanged. Nor does it make sense to *assume* that the sexualized form epitomizes or simply condenses a broader relationship. (As, for instance, Kathleen Barry, in *Female Sexual Slavery*, places the Marquis de Sade at the very center of all forms of female oppression, including traditional genital mutilation, incest, and the economic as well as the sexual exploitation of prostitutes.)

Instead, an examination of the relation of sexual desire to political power must move along two axes. First, of course, it needs to make use of whatever forms of analysis are most potent for describing historically variable power asymmetries, such as those of class and race, as well as gender. But in conjunction with that, an analysis of representation itself is necessary. Only the model of representation will let us do justice to the (broad but not infinite or random) range of ways in which sexuality functions as a signifier for power relations. The importance of the rhetorical model in this case is not to make the problems of sexuality or of violence or oppression sound less immediate and urgent; it is to help us analyze and use the really very disparate intuitions of political immediacy that come to us from the sexual realm.

For instance, a dazzling recent article by Catharine MacKinnon, attempting to go carefully over and clear out the grounds of disagreement between different streams of feminist thought, arrives at the following summary of the centrality of sexuality per se for every issue of gender:

Each element of the female *gender* stereotype is revealed as, in fact, *sexual*. Vulnerability means the appearance/reality of easy sexual access; passivity means receptivity and disabled resistance . . . ; softness means pregnability by something hard. . . . Woman’s infantilization evokes pedophilia; fixation on dismembered body parts . . . evokes fetishism; idolization of vapidness, necrophilia. Narcissism insures that woman identifies with that image of herself that man holds up. . . . Masochism means that pleasure in violation becomes her sensuality.

And MacKinnon sums up this part of her argument: “Socially, femaleness

means femininity, which means attractiveness to men, which means sexual attractiveness, which means sexual availability on male terms.”<sup>15</sup>

There’s a whole lot of “mean”-ing going on. MacKinnon manages to make every manifestation of sexuality mean the same thing, by making every instance of “meaning” mean something different. A trait can “mean” as an element in a semiotic system such as fashion (“softness means pregnability”); or anacritically, it can “mean” its complementary opposite (“Woman’s infantilization evokes pedophilia”); or across time, it can “mean” the consequence that it enforces (“Narcissism insures that woman identifies. . . . Masochism means that pleasure in violation becomes her sensuality”). MacKinnon concludes, “What defines woman as such is what turns men on.” But what defines “defines”? That every node of sexual experience is in *some* signifying relation to the whole fabric of gender oppression, and vice versa, is true and important, but insufficiently exact to be of analytic use on specific political issues. The danger lies, of course, in the illusion that we do know from such a totalistic analysis where to look for our sexuality and how to protect it from appropriation when we find it.

On the other hand, one value of MacKinnon’s piece was as a contribution to the increasing deftness with which, over the last twenty years, the question has been posed, “Who or what is the subject of the sexuality we (as women) enact?” It has been posed in terms more or less antic or frontal, phallic or gyno-, angry or frantic—in short, perhaps, Anglic or Franco-. But in different terms it is this same question that has animated the complaint of the American “sex object” of the 1960s, the claim since the 70s for “women’s control of our own bodies,” and the recently imported “critique of the subject” as it was used by French feminists.

Let me take an example from the great ideological blockbuster of white bourgeois feminism, its apotheosis, the fictional work that has most resonantly thematized for successive generations of American women the constraints of the “feminine” role, the obstacles to and the ravenous urgency of female ambition, the importance of the economic motive, the compulsiveness and destructiveness of romantic love, and (what MacKinnon would underline) the centrality and the total alienation of female sexuality. Of course, I am referring to *Gone With the Wind*. As MacKinnon’s paradigm would predict, in the life of Scarlett O’Hara, it is expressly clear that to be born female is to be defined entirely in relation to the role of “lady,” a role that does take its shape and meaning from a sexuality of which she is not the subject but the object. For Scarlett, to survive as a woman does mean learning to see sexuality, male power domination, and her traditional gender role as all meaning the same dangerous thing. To absent herself silently from each of them alike, and learn to manipulate them from behind this screen as objects or pure signifiers, as men do, is the numbing but effective lesson of her life.

However, it is *only* a white bourgeois feminism that this view apotheosizes. As in one of those trick rooms where water appears to run uphill and little children look taller than their parents, it is only when viewed from one fixed vantage in any society that sexuality, gender roles, and power domination can seem to line up in this perfect chain of echoic meaning. From an even slightly more ec-centric or disempowered perspective, the *displacements* and *discontinuities* of the signifying chain come to seem increasingly definitive. For instance, if it is true in this novel that all the women characters exist in some meaning-ful relation to the role



of “lady,” the signifying relation grows more tortuous—though at the same time, in the novel’s white bourgeois view, more totally determining—as the women’s social and racial distance from that role grows. Melanie is a woman as she is a lady; Scarlett is a woman as she is required to be and pretends to be a lady; but Belle Watling, the Atlanta prostitute, is a woman not in relation to her own role of “lady,” which is exiguous, but only negatively, in a compensatory and at the same time parodic relation to Melanie’s and Scarlett’s. And as for Mammy, her mind and life, in this view, are *totally* in thrall to the ideal of the “lady,” but in a relation that excludes herself entirely: she is the template, the support, the enforcement, of Scarlett’s “lady” role, to the degree that her personal femaleness loses any meaning whatever that is not in relation to Scarlett’s role. Whose mother is Mammy?

At the precise intersection of domination and sexuality is the issue of rape. *Gone With the Wind*—both book and movie—leaves in the memory a most graphic image of rape:

As the negro came running to the buggy, his black face twisted in a leering grin, she fired point-blank at him. . . . The negro was beside her, so close that she could smell the rank odor of him as he tried to drag her over the buggy side. With her own free hand she fought madly, clawing at his face, and then she felt his big hand at her throat and, with a ripping noise, her basque was torn open from breast to waist. Then the black hand fumbled between her breasts, and terror and revulsion such as she had never known came over her and she screamed like an insane woman.<sup>16</sup>

In the wake of this attack, the entire machinery by which “rape” is signified in this culture rolls into action. Scarlett’s menfolk and their friends in the Ku Klux Klan set out after dark to kill the assailants and “wipe out that whole Shantytown settlement,” with the predictable carnage on both sides. The question of how much Scarlett is to blame for the deaths of the white men is widely mooted, with Belle Watling speaking for the “lady” role—“She caused it all, prancin’ bout Atlanta by herself, enticin’ niggers and trash”—and Rhett Butler, as so often, speaking from the central vision of the novel’s bourgeois feminism, assuring her that her desperate sense of guilt is purely superstitious (chs. 46, 47). In preparation for this central incident, the novel had even raised the issue of the legal treatment of rape victims (ch. 42). And the effect of that earlier case, the classic effect of rape, had already been to abridge Scarlett’s own mobility and, hence, personal and economic power: it was to expedite her business that she had needed to ride by Shantytown in the first place.

The attack on Scarlett, in short, fully means rape, both *to her* and to all the forces in her culture that produce and circulate powerful meanings. It makes no difference at all that one constituent element of rape is missing; but the missing constituent is simply sex. The attack on Scarlett had been for money; the black hands had fumbled between the white breasts because the man had been told that was where she kept her money; Scarlett knew that; there is no mention of any other motive; but it does not matter in the least, the absent sexuality leaves no gap in the character’s, the novel’s, or the society’s discourse of rape.

Nevertheless, *Gone With the Wind* is not a novel that omits enforced sexuality.



We are shown one actual rape in fairly graphic detail; but when it is white hands that scabble on white skin, its ideological name is “blissful marriage.” “[Rhett] had humbled her, used her brutally through a wild mad night and she had gloried in it” (ch. 54). The sexual predations of white men on Black women are also a presence in the novel, but the issue of force vs. content is never raised there; the white male alienation of a Black woman’s sexuality is shaped differently from the alienation of the white woman’s, to the degree that rape ceases to be a meaningful term at all. And if forcible sex ever did occur between a Black male and female character in this world, the sexual event itself would have no signifying power, since Black sexuality “means” here only as a grammatic transformation of a sentence whose true implicit subject and object are white.

We have in this protofeminist novel, then, in this ideological microcosm, a symbolic economy in which both the meaning of rape and rape itself are insistently circulated. Because of the racial fracture of the society, however, *rape and its meaning circulate in precisely opposite directions*. It is an extreme case; the racial fracture is, in America, more sharply dichotomized than others except perhaps for gender. Still, other symbolic fractures such as class (and by fractures I mean the lines along which the quantitative differentials of power may in a given society be read as qualitative differentials with some other name) are abundant and actively disruptive in every social constitution. The signifying relation of sex to power, of sexual alienation to political oppression, is not the most stable, but precisely the most volatile of social nodes, under this pressure.

Thus, it is of serious political importance that our tools for examining the signifying relation be subtle and discriminate ones, and that our literary knowledge of the most crabbed or oblique paths of meaning not be oversimplified in the face of panic-inducing images of real violence, especially the violence of, around, and to sexuality. To assume that sex signifies power in a flat, unvarying relation of metaphor or synecdoche will always entail a blindness, not to the rhetorical and pyrotechnic, but to such historical categories as class and race. Before we can fully achieve and use our intuitive grasp of the leverage that sexual relations seem to offer on the relations of oppression, we need more—more different, more complicated, more diachronically apt, more off-centered—more daring and prehensile applications of our present understanding of what it may mean for one thing to signify another.

### III. SEX OR HISTORY?

It will be clear by this point that the centrality of sexual questions in this study is important to its methodological ambitions, as well. I am going to be recurring to the subject of sex as an especially charged leverage-point, or point for the exchange of meanings, *between* gender and class (and in many societies, race), the sets of categories by which we ordinarily try to describe the divisions of human labor. And methodologically, I want to situate these readings as a contribution to a dialectic within feminist theory between more and less historicizing views of the oppression of women.

In a rough way, we can label the extremes on this theoretical spectrum “Marxist feminism” for the most historicizing analysis, “radical feminism” for the least.





Of course, “radical feminism” is so called not because it occupies the farthest “left” space on a conventional political map, but because it takes gender itself, gender alone, to be the most radical division of human experience, and a relatively unchanging one.

For the purposes of the present argument, in addition, and for reasons that I will explain more fully later, I am going to be assimilating “French” feminism—deconstructive and/or Lacanian-oriented feminism—to the radical-feminist end of this spectrum. “French” and “radical” feminism differ on very many very important issues, such as how much respect they give to the brute fact that everyone gets categorized as either female or male; but they are alike in seeing all human culture, language, and life as structured in the first place—structured radically, transhistorically, and essentially *similarly*, however coarsely or finely—by a drama of gender difference. (Chapter 1 discusses more fully the particular terms by which this structuralist motive will be represented in the present study.) French-feminist and radical-feminist prose tend to share the same vatic, and perhaps imperialistic, uses of the present tense. In a sense, the polemical energy behind my arguments will be a desire, through the rhetorically volatile subject of sex, to recruit the representational finesse of deconstructive feminism in the service of a more historically discriminate mode of analysis.

The choice of sexuality as a thematic emphasis of this study makes salient and problematical a division of thematic emphasis between Marxist-feminist and radical-feminist theory as they are now practiced. Specifically, Marxist feminism, the study of the deep interconnections between on the one hand historical and economic change, and on the other hand the vicissitudes of gender division, has typically proceeded in the absence of a theory of sexuality and without much interest in the meaning or experience of sexuality. Or more accurately, it has held implicitly to a view of female sexuality as something that is essentially of a piece with reproduction, and hence appropriately studied with the tools of demography; or else essentially of a piece with a simple, prescriptive hegemonic ideology, and hence appropriately studied through intellectual or legal history. Where important advances have been made by Marxist-feminist-oriented research into sexuality, it has been in areas that were already explicitly distinguished as deviant by the society’s legal discourse: signally, homosexuality for men and prostitution for women. Marxist feminism has been of little help in unpacking the historical meanings of women’s experience of heterosexuality, or even, until it becomes legally and medically visible in this century, of lesbianism.<sup>17</sup>

Radical feminism, on the other hand, in the many different forms I am classing under that head, has been relatively successful in placing sexuality in a prominent and interrogative position, one that often allows scope for the decentered and the contradictory. Kathleen Barry’s *Female Sexual Slavery*, Susan Griffin’s *Pornography and Silence*, Gilbert and Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Jane Gallop’s *The Daughter’s Seduction*, and Andrea Dworkin’s *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* make up an exceedingly heterogeneous group of texts in many respects—in style, in urgency, in explicit feminist identification, in French or American affiliation, in “brow”-elevation level. They have in common, however, a view that sexuality is centrally problematical in the formation of women’s experience. And in more or less sophisticated formulations, the subject as well as the ultimate object of female heterosexuality within what is called patriarchal culture are seen as male.



Whether in literal interpersonal terms or in internalized psychological and linguistic terms, this approach privileges sexuality and often sees it within the context of the structure that Lévi-Strauss analyzes as “the male traffic in women.”

This family of approaches has, however, shared with other forms of structuralism a difficulty in dealing with the diachronic. It is the essence of structures viewed as such to reproduce themselves; and historical change from this point of view appears as something outside of structure and threatening—or worse, *not* threatening—to it, rather than in a formative and dialectical relation with it. History tends thus to be either invisible or viewed in an impoverishingly glaring and contrastive light.<sup>18</sup> Implicitly or explicitly, radical feminism tends to deny that the meaning of gender or sexuality has ever significantly changed; and more damagingly, it can make future change appear impossible, or necessarily apocalyptic, even though desirable. Alternatively, it can radically oversimplify the prerequisites for significant change. In addition, history even in the residual, synchronic form of class or racial difference and conflict becomes invisible or excessively coarsened and dichotomized in the universalizing structuralist view.

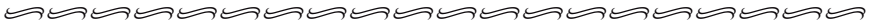
As feminist readers, then, we seem poised for the moment between reading sex and reading history, at a choice that appears (though, it must be, wrongly) to be between the synchronic and the diachronic. We know that it must be wrongly viewed in this way, not only because in the abstract the synchronic and the diachronic must ultimately be considered in relation to one another, but because specifically in the disciplines we are considering they are so mutually inscribed: the narrative of Marxist history is so graphic, and the schematics of structuralist sexuality so narrative.

I will be trying in this study to activate and use some of the potential congruences of the two approaches. Part of the underpinning of this attempt will be a continuing meditation of ways in which the category *ideology* can be used as part of an analysis of *sexuality*. The two categories seem comparable in several important ways: each mediates between the material and the representational, for instance; ideology, like sexuality as we have discussed it, *both* epitomizes *and* itself influences broader social relations of power; and each, I shall be arguing, mediates similarly between diachronic, narrative structures of social experience and synchronic, graphic ones. If common sense suggests that we can roughly group historicizing, “Marxist” feminism with the diachronic and the narrative, and “radical,” structuralist, deconstructive, and “French” feminisms with the synchronic and the graphic, then the methodological promise of these two mediating categories will be understandable.

In *The German Ideology*, Marx suggests that the function of ideology is to conceal contradictions in the status quo by, for instance, recasting them into a diachronic narrative of origins. Corresponding to that function, one important structure of ideology is an idealizing appeal to the outdated values of an earlier system, in defense of a later system that in practice undermines the material basis of those values.<sup>19</sup>

For instance, Juliet Mitchell analyzes the importance of the family in ideologically justifying the shift to capitalism, in these terms:

The peasant masses of feudal society had individual private property; their ideal was simply more of it. Capitalist society seemed to offer more because



it stressed the *idea* of individual private property in a new context (or in a context of new ideas). Thus it offered individualism (an old value) plus the apparently new means for its greater realization—freedom and equality (values that are conspicuously absent from feudalism). However, the only place where this ideal could be given an apparently concrete base was in the maintenance of an old institution: the family. Thus the family changed from being the economic basis of individual private property under feudalism to being the focal point of the *idea* of individual private property under a system that banished such an economic form from its central mode of production—capitalism. . . . The working class work socially in production for the private property of a few capitalists *in the hope of* individual private property for themselves and their families.<sup>20</sup>

The phrase “A man’s home is his castle” offers a nicely condensed example of ideological construction in this sense. It reaches *back* to an emptied-out image of mastery and integration under feudalism in order to propel the male wageworker *forward* to further feats of alienated labor, in the service of a now atomized and embattled, but all the more intensively idealized home. The man who has this home is a different person from the lord who has a castle; and the forms of property implied in the two possessives (his [mortgaged] home/his [inherited] castle) are not only different but, as Mitchell points out, mutually contradictory. The contradiction is assuaged and filled in by transferring the lord’s political and economic control over the *environs* of his castle to an image of the father’s personal control over the *inmates* of his house. The ideological formulation thus permits a criss-crossing of agency, temporality, and space. It is important that ideology in this sense, even when its form is flatly declarative (“A man’s home is his castle”), is always at least implicitly narrative, and that, in order for the reweaving of ideology to be truly invisible, the narrative is necessarily chiasmic in structure: that is, that the subject of the beginning of the narrative is different from the subject at the end, and that the two subjects cross each other in a rhetorical figure that conceals their discontinuity.

It is also important that the sutures of contradiction in these ideological narratives become most visible under the disassembling eye of an alternative narrative, ideological as that narrative may itself be. In addition, the diachronic opening-out of contradictions within the status quo, even when the project of that diachronic recasting is to conceal those very contradictions, can have just the opposite effect of making them newly visible, offering a new leverage for critique. For these reasons, distinguishing between the construction and the critique of ideological narrative is not always even a theoretical possibility, even with relatively flat texts; with the fat rich texts that we are taking for examples in this project, no such attempt will be made.

Sexuality, like ideology, depends on the mutual redefinition and occlusion of synchronic and diachronic formulations. The developmental fact that, as Freud among others has shown, even the naming of sexuality as such is always retroactive in relation to most of the sensations and emotions that constitute it,<sup>21</sup> is *historically* important. What *counts* as the sexual is, as we shall see, variable and itself political. The exact, contingent space of indeterminacy—the place of shifting over time—of the mutual boundaries between the political and the sexual is, in fact, the most fertile space of ideological formation. This is true because



ideological formation, like sexuality, depends on retroactive change in the naming or labelling of the subject.<sup>22</sup>

The two sides, the political and the erotic, necessarily obscure and misrepresent each other—but in ways that offer important and shifting affordances to all parties in historical gender and class struggle.

## IV. WHAT THIS BOOK DOES

The difficult but potentially productive tension between historical and structuralist forms of feminism, in the theoretical grounding of this book, is echoed by a tension in the book between historical and more properly literary organization, methodologies, and emphases. Necessarily because of my particular aptitudes and training, if for no better reason, the historical argument almost throughout is embodied in and guided by the readings of the literary texts. For better and for worse, the large historical narrative has an off-centering effect on the discrete readings, as the introversive techniques of literary analysis have in turn on the historical argument. The resulting structure represents a continuing negotiation between the book's historicizing and dehistoricizing motives. The two ways in which I have described to myself the purpose of this book express a similar tension: first, to make it easier for readers to focus intelligently on male homosocial bonds throughout the heterosexual European erotic ethos; but secondly, to use the subject of sexuality to show the usefulness of certain Marxist-feminist historical categories for literary criticism, where they have so far had relatively little impact.

Chapter 1 of the book, "Gender Asymmetry and Erotic 'Triangles,'" locates the book's focus on male homosocial desire within the structural context of triangular, heterosexual desire. René Girard, Freud, and Lévi-Strauss, especially as he is interpreted by Gayle Rubin, offer the basic paradigm of "male traffic in women" that will underlie the entire book. In the next three chapters a historically deracinated reading of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, a partially historical reading of Wycherley's *The Country Wife*, and a reading of Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* in relation to the inextricable gender, class, and national anxieties of mid-eighteenth-century English men both establish some persistent paradigms for discussion, and begin to locate them specifically in the terms of modern England.

Chapters 5 and 6, on homophobia and the Romantic Gothic, discuss the paranoid Gothic tradition in the novel as an exploration of the changing meaning and importance of homophobia in England during and after the eighteenth century. A reading of James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* treats homophobia not most immediately as an oppression of homosexual men, but as a tool for manipulating the entire spectrum of male bonds, and hence the gender system as a whole.

Chapters 7 and 8 focus on more "mainstream," public Victorian ideological fictions, and on the fate of the women who are caught up in male homosocial exchange. This section treats three Victorian texts, historical or mock-historical, that claim to offer accounts of changes in women's relation to male bonds: Tennyson's *The Princess*, Thackeray's *Henry Esmond*, and Eliot's *Adam Bede*; it approaches most explicitly the different explanatory claims of structuralist and historical approaches to sex and gender.



Chapters 9 and 10, on Dickens' Victorian Gothic, show how Dickens's last two novels delineate the interactions of homophobia with nineteenth-century class and racial as well as gender division.

Finally, a Coda, "Toward the Twentieth Century: English Readers of Whitman," uses an account of some influential English (mis-)understandings of Whitman's poetry, to sketch in the links between mid-Victorian English sexual politics and the familiar modern Anglo-American landscape of male homosexuality, heterosexuality, and homophobia as (we think) we know them.

The choices I have made of texts through which to embody the argument of the book are specifically *not* meant to begin to delineate a separate male-homosexual literary canon. In fact, it will be essential to my argument to claim that the European canon as it exists is already such a canon, and most so when it is most heterosexual. In this sense, it would perhaps be easiest to describe this book (as will be done more explicitly in chapter 1) as a recasting of, and a refocusing on, René Girard's triangular schematization of the existing European canon in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*. In fact, I have simply chosen texts at pleasure from within or alongside the English canon that represented particularly interesting interpretive problems, or particularly symptomatic historical and ideological nodes, for understanding the politics of male homosociality.

I hope it is obvious by this point that I mean to situate this book in a dialectically usable, rather than an authoritative, relation to the rapidly developing discourse of feminist theory. Of course, the readings and interpretations are as careful in their own terms as I have known how to make them; but at the same time I am aware of having privileged certain arresting (and hence achronic) or potentially generalizable formulations, in the hope of making interpretations like these dialectically available to readers of other texts, as well. The formal models I have had in mind for this book are two very different books, Girard's *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* and Dorothy Dinnerstein's *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*: not in this instance because of an agreement with the substance of their arguments, but because each in a relatively short study with an apparently idiosyncratic focus nevertheless conveys a complex of ideas forcefully enough—even, repetitiously enough—to make it a usable part of any reader's repertoire of approaches to her or his personal experience and future reading. *From* that position in the repertoire each can be—must be—criticized and changed. To take such a position has been my ambition for this book. Among the directions of critique and alteration that seem to me most called for, but which I have been unable so far to incorporate properly in the argument itself, are the following:

First, the violence done by my historicizing narrative to the literary readings proper shows perhaps most glaringly in the overriding of distinctions and structural considerations of genre. And in general, the number and the *differentness* of the many different mechanisms of mediation between history and text—mechanisms with names like, for instance, "literary convention," "literary history"—need to be reasserted in newly applicable formulations.

At the same time, the violences done to a historical argument by embodying it in a series of readings of works of literature are probably even more numerous and damaging. Aside from issues of ideological condensation and displacement that will be discussed in chapters 7 and 8, the form of violence most obvious to me is simply the limitation of my argument to the "book-writing classes"—a group that



is distinctive in more than merely socioeconomic terms, but importantly in those terms as well.

Next, the isolation, not to mention the absolute subordination, of women, in the structural paradigm on which this study is based (see chapter 1 for more on this) is a distortion that necessarily fails to do justice to women's own powers, bonds, and struggles.<sup>23</sup> The absence of lesbianism from the book was an early and, I think, necessary decision, since my argument is structured around the distinctive relation of the male homosocial spectrum to the transmission of unequally distributed power. Nevertheless, the exclusively heterosexual perspective of the book's attention to women is seriously impoverishing in itself, and also an index of the larger distortion. The reading of *Henry Esmond* is the only one that explicitly considers the bond of woman with woman in the context of male homosocial exchange, but much better analyses are needed of the relations between female-homosocial and male-homosocial structures.

The book's almost exclusive focus on male authors is, I think, similarly justified for this early stage of this particular inquiry; but it has a similar effect of impoverishing our sense of women's own cultural resources of resistance, adaptation, revision, and survival. My reluctance to distinguish between "ideologizing" and "de-ideologizing" narratives may have had, paradoxically, a similar effect of presenting the "canonical" cultural discourse in an excessively protean and inescapable (*because* internally contradictory) form. In addition, the relation between the traffic-in-women paradigm used here and hypotheses, such as Dinnerstein's, Chodorow's, and Kristeva's in *Powers of Horror*, of a primary fear in men and women of the maternal power of women, is yet to be analyzed.

Again, the lack of entirely usable paradigms, at this early moment in feminist theory, for the complicated relations among violence, sexual violence, and the sadomasochistic sexualization of violence,<sup>24</sup> has led me in this book to a perhaps inappropriately gentle emphasis on modes of gender oppression that could be (more or less metaphorically) described in economic terms.

At the same time, the erotic and individualistic bias of literature itself, and the relative ease—not to mention the genuine pleasure—of using feminist theoretical paradigms to write about eros and sex, have led to a relative deemphasis of the many, crucially important male homosocial bonds that are less glamorous to talk about—such as the institutional, bureaucratic, and military.

Finally, and I think most importantly, the focus of this study on specifically English social structures, combined with the hegemonic claim for "universality" that has historically been implicit in the entire discourse of European social and psychological analysis, leave the relation of my discussion to non-European cultures and people entirely unspecified, and at present, perhaps, to some extent unspecifiable. A running subtext of comparisons between English sexual ideology and some ideologies of American racism is not a token attempt to conceal that gap in the book's coverage, but an attempt to make clear to other American readers some of the points of reference in white America that I have used in thinking about English ideology. Perhaps what one can most appropriately ask of readers who find this book's formulations useful is simply to remember that, important as it is that they be criticized at every step of even European applications, any attempt to treat them as cross-cultural or (far more) as universal ought to involve the most searching and particular analysis.



As a woman and a feminist writing (in part) about male homosexuality, I feel I must be especially explicit about the political groundings, assumptions, and ambitions of this study in that regard, as well. My intention throughout has been to conduct an antihomophobic as well as feminist inquiry. However, most of the (little) published analysis up to now of the relation between women and male homosexuality has been at a lower level of sophistication and care than either feminist or gay male analysis separately. In the absence of workable formulations about the male homosocial spectrum, this literature has, with only a few recent exceptions,<sup>25</sup> subscribed to one of two assumptions: either that gay men and all women share a “natural,” transhistorical alliance and an essential identity of interests (e.g., in breaking down gender stereotypes);<sup>26</sup> or else that male homosexuality is an epitome, a personification, an effect, or perhaps a primary cause of woman-hating.<sup>27</sup> I do not believe either of these assumptions to be true. Especially because this study discusses a continuum, a potential structural congruence, and a (shifting) relation of meaning between male homosexual relationships and the male patriarchal relations by which women are oppressed, it is important to emphasize that I am not assuming or arguing either that patriarchal power is primarily or necessarily homosexual (as distinct from homosocial), or that male homosexual desire has a primary or necessary relationship to misogyny. Either of those arguments would be homophobic and, I believe, inaccurate. I will, however, be arguing that homophobia directed by men against men is misogynistic, and perhaps transhistorically so. (By “misogynistic” I mean not only that it is oppressive of the so-called feminine in men, but that it is oppressive of women.) The greatest potential for misinterpretation lies here. Because “homosexuality” and “homophobia” are, in any of their avatars, historical constructions, because they are likely to concern themselves intensely with each other and to assume interlocking or mirroring shapes, because the theater of their struggle is likely to be intrapsychic or intra-institutional as well as public, it is not always easy (sometimes barely possible) to distinguish them from each other. Thus, for instance, Freud’s study of Dr. Schreber shows clearly that *the repression of homosexual desire* in a man who by any commonsense standard was heterosexual, occasioned paranoid psychosis; the psychoanalytic use that has been made of this perception, however, has been, not against *homophobia* and its schizogenic force, but against *homosexuality*—against homosexuals—on account of an association between “homosexuality” and mental illness.<sup>28</sup> Similar confusions have marked discussions of the relation between “homosexuality” and fascism. As the historically constructed nature of “homosexuality” as an institution becomes more fully understood, it should become possible to understand these distinctions in a more exact and less prejudicious theoretical context.

Thus, profound and intuitable as the bonds between feminism and antihomophobia often are in our society, the two forces are not the same. As the alliance between them is not automatic or transhistorical, it will be most fruitful if it is analytic and unpresuming. To shed light on the grounds and implications of that alliance, as well as, through these issues, on formative literary texts, is an aim of the readings that follow.



## NOTES

1. The notion of “homophobia” is itself fraught with difficulties. To begin with, the word is etymologically nonsensical. A more serious problem is that the linking of fear and hatred in the “-phobia” suffix, and in the word’s usage, does tend to prejudge the question of the cause of homosexual oppression: it is attributed to fear, as opposed to (for example) a desire for power, privilege, or material goods. An alternative term that is more suggestive of collective, structurally inscribed, perhaps materially based oppression is “heterosexism.” This study will, however, continue to use “homophobia,” for three reasons. First, it will be an important concern here to question, rather than to reinforce, the presumptively symmetrical opposition between homo- and heterosexuality, which seems to be implicit in the term “heterosexism.” Second, the etiology of individual people’s attitudes toward male homosexuality will not be a focus of discussion. And third, the ideological and thematic treatments of male homosexuality to be discussed from the late eighteenth century onward do combine fear and hatred in a way that is appropriately called phobic. For a good summary of social science research on the concept of homophobia, see Morin and Garfinkle, “Male Homophobia.”

2. For a good survey of the background to this assertion, see Weeks, *Sex*, pp. 1–18.

3. Adrienne Rich describes these bonds as forming a “lesbian continuum,” in her essay, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” in Stimpson and Person, *Women*, pp. 62–91, especially pp. 79–82.

4. “The Female World of Love and Ritual,” in Cott and Pleck, *Heritage*, pp. 311–42; usage appears on, e.g., pp. 316, 317.

5. “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union,” in Sargent, *Women and Revolution*, pp. 1–41; quotation is from p. 14.

6. See, for example, Rubin, “Traffic,” pp. 182–83.

7. Rubin, “Traffic,” p. 180.

8. Crompton, “Gay Genocide”; but see chapter 5 for a discussion of the limitations of “genocide” as an understanding of the fate of homosexual men.

9. On this, see Miller, *New Psychology*, ch. 1.

10. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, p. 91.

11. Arendt, *Human Condition*, p. 83, quoted in Rich, *On Lies*, p. 206.

12. On the Bohemian Grove, an all-male summer camp for American ruling-class men, see Domhoff, *Bohemian Grove*; and a more vivid, although homophobic, account, van der Zee, *Men’s Party*.

13. The NOW resolution, for instance, explicitly defines sadomasochism, pornography, and “pederasty” (meaning pedophilia) as issues of “exploitation and violence,” *as opposed to* “affectional/sexual preference/orientation.” Quoted in *Heresies 12*, vol. 3, no 4 (1981), p. 92.

14. For explorations of these viewpoints, see *Heresies, ibid.*; Snitow et al., *Powers*; and Samois, *Coming*.

15. MacKinnon, “Feminism,” pp. 530–31.

16. Mitchell, *Gone*, p. 780. Further citations will be incorporated within the text and designated by chapter number.

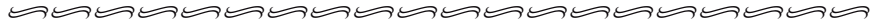
17. For a discussion of these limitations, see Vicinus, “Sexuality.” The variety of useful work that is possible within these boundaries is exemplified by the essays in Newton et al., *Sex and Class*.

18. On this, see McKeon, “Marxism.”

19. Juliet Mitchell discusses this aspect of *The German Ideology* in *Woman’s Estate*, pp. 152–58.

20. Mitchell, *Woman’s Estate*, p. 154.





21. The best and clearest discussion of this aspect of Freud is Laplanche, *Life and Death*, especially pp. 25–47.

22. On this, see ch. 8 of *Between Men*.

23. For an especially useful discussion of the absence of women from the work of Girard, see Moi, “Missing Mother.”

24. On this see (in addition to Snitow et al., *Powers*) Breines and Gordon, “Family Violence.”

25. The following books are, to a greater or lesser extent, among the exceptions: Fernbach, *Spiral Path*; Mieli, *Homosexuality*; Rowbotham and Weeks, *Socialism*; Dworkin, *Pornography*.

26. The most influential recent statement of this position is Heilbrun, *Androgyny*.

27. See Irigaray, “Goods”; and Frye, *Politics*, pp. 128–51. Jane Marcus’s work on Virginia Woolf makes use of Maria-Antonietta Macciocchi’s homophobic formulation, “the Nazi community is made by homosexual brothers who exclude the woman and valorize the mother.” Marcus says, “The Cambridge Apostles’ notions of fraternity surely appeared to Woolf analogous to certain fascist notions of fraternity.” Macciocchi’s formulation is quoted in Jane Caplan, “Introduction to Female Sexuality in Fascist Ideology,” *Feminist Review* 1 (1979), p. 62. Marcus’s essay is “Liberty, Sorority, Misogyny,” in Heilbrun and Higonnet, *Representation*, pp. 60–97; quotation is from p. 67.

28. On this see Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, pp. 42–67.

# GENDER ASYMMETRY AND EROTIC TRIANGLES

(1985)



The graphic schema on which I am going to be drawing most heavily in the readings that follow is the triangle. The triangle is useful as a figure by which the “commonsense” of our intellectual tradition schematizes erotic relations, and because it allows us to condense into a juxtaposition with that folk-perception several somewhat different streams of recent thought.

René Girard’s early book, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, was itself something of a schematization of the folk-wisdom of erotic triangles. Through readings of major European fictions, Girard traced a calculus of power that was structured by the relation of rivalry between the two active members of an erotic triangle. What is most interesting for our purposes in his study is its insistence that, in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved: that the bonds of “rivalry” and “love,” differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent. For instance, Girard finds many examples in which the choice of the beloved is determined in the first place, not by the qualities of the beloved, but by the beloved’s already being the choice of the person who has been chosen as a rival. In fact, Girard seems to see the bond between rivals in an erotic triangle as being even stronger, more heavily determinant of actions and choices, than anything in the bond between either of the lovers and the beloved. And within the male-centered novelistic tradition of European high culture, the triangles Girard traces are most often those in which two males are rivals for a female; it is the bond between males that he most assiduously uncovers.

The index to Girard’s book gives only two citations for “homosexuality” per se, and it is one of the strengths of his formulation not to depend on how homosexuality as an entity was perceived or experienced—indeed, on what was or was not considered sexual—at any given historical moment. As a matter of fact, the symmetry of his formulation always depends on *suppressing* the subjective, historically determined account of which feelings are or are not part of the body of “sexuality.” The transhistorical clarity gained by this organizing move naturally has a cost, however. Psychoanalysis, the recent work of Foucault, and feminist historical scholarship all suggest that the place of drawing the boundary between the sexual and the not-sexual, like the place of drawing the boundary between the

realms of the two genders, is variable, but is *not* arbitrary. That is (as the example of *Gone With the Wind* suggests), the placement of the boundaries in a particular society affects not merely the definitions of those terms themselves—sexual/non-sexual, masculine/feminine—but also the apportionment of forms of power that are not obviously sexual. These include control over the means of production and reproduction of goods, persons, and meanings. So that Girard's account, which thinks it is describing a dialectic of power abstracted from either the male/female or the sexual/nonsexual dichotomies, is leaving out of consideration categories that in fact preside over the distribution of power in every known society. And because the distribution of power according to these dichotomies is not and possibly cannot be symmetrical, the hidden symmetries that Girard's triangle helps us discover will always in turn discover hidden obliquities. At the same time, even to bear in mind the lurking possibility of the Girardian symmetry is to be possessed of a graphic tool for historical measure. It will make it easier for us to perceive and discuss the mutual inscription in these texts of male homosocial and heterosocial desire, and the resistances to them.

Girard's argument is of course heavily dependent, not only on a brilliant intuition for taking seriously the received wisdom of sexual folklore, but also on a schematization from Freud: the Oedipal triangle, the situation of the young child that is attempting to situate itself with respect to a powerful father and a beloved mother. Freud's discussions of the etiology of "homosexuality" (which current research seems to be rendering questionable as a set of generalizations about personal histories of "homosexuals")<sup>1</sup> suggest homo- and heterosexual outcomes in adults to be the result of a complicated play of desire for and identification with the parent of each gender: the child routes its desire/identification through the mother to arrive at a role like the father's, or vice versa. Richard Klein summarizes this argument as follows:

In the normal development of the little boy's progress towards heterosexuality, he must pass, as Freud says with increasing insistence in late essays like "Terminable and Interminable Analysis," through the stage of the "positive" Oedipus, a homoerotic identification with his father, a position of effeminized subordination to the father, as a condition of finding a model for his own heterosexual role. Conversely, in this theory, the development of the male homosexual requires the postulation of the father's absence or distance and an abnormally strong identification by the child with the mother, in which the child takes the place of the father. There results from this scheme a surprising neutralization of polarities: heterosexuality in the male . . . presupposes a homosexual neutralization phase as the condition of its normal possibility: homosexuality, obversely, requires that the child experience a powerful heterosexual identification.<sup>2</sup>

I have mentioned that Girard's reading presents itself as one whose symmetry is undisturbed by such differences as gender; although the triangles that most shape his view tend, in the European tradition, to involve bonds of "rivalry" between males "over" a woman, in his view *any* relation of rivalry is structured by the same play of emulation and identification, whether the entities occupying the corners of the triangle be heroes, heroines, gods, books, or whatever. In describing the Oedipal drama, Freud notoriously tended to place a male in the generic

position of “child” and treat the case of the female as being more or less the same, “mutatis mutandis”; at any rate, as Freud is interpreted by conventional American psychoanalysis, the enormous difference in the degree and kind of female and male power enters psychoanalytic view, when at all, as a result rather than as an active determinant of familial and intrapsychic structures of development. Thus, both Girard and Freud (or at least the Freud of this interpretive tradition) treat the erotic triangle as symmetrical—in the sense that its structure would be relatively unaffected by the power difference that would be introduced by a change in the gender of one of the participants.

In addition, the asymmetry I spoke of in section 1 of the Introduction—the radically disrupted continuum, in our society, between sexual and nonsexual male bonds, as against the relatively smooth and palpable continuum of female homosocial desire—might be expected to alter the structure of erotic triangles in ways that depended on gender, and for which neither Freud nor Girard would offer an account. Both Freud and Girard, in other words, treat erotic triangles under the Platonic light that perceives no discontinuity in the homosocial continuum—none, at any rate, that makes much difference—even in modern Western society. There is a kind of bravery about the proceeding of each in this respect, but a historical blindness, as well.

Recent readings and reinterpretations of Freud have gone much farther in taking into account the asymmetries of gender. In France, recent psychoanalytic discourse impelled by Jacques Lacan identifies power, language, and the Law itself with the phallus and the “name of the father.” It goes without saying that such a discourse has the potential for setting in motion both feminist and virulently misogynistic analyses; it does, at any rate, offer tools, though not (so far) historically sensitive ones, for describing the mechanisms of patriarchal power in terms that are at once intrapsychic (Oedipal conflict) and public (language and the Law). Moreover, by distinguishing (however incompletely) the phallus, the locus of power, from the actual anatomical penis,<sup>3</sup> Lacan’s account creates a space in which anatomic sex and cultural gender may be distinguished from one another and in which the different paths of *men’s* relations to male power might be explored (e.g. in terms of class). In addition, it suggests ways of talking about the relation between the individual male and the cultural institutions of masculine domination that fall usefully under the rubric of representation.

A further contribution of Lacanian psychoanalysis that will be important for our investigation is the subtlety with which it articulates the slippery relation—already adumbrated in Freud—between desire and identification. The schematic elegance with which Richard Klein, in the passage I have quoted, is able to summarize the feminizing potential of desire for a woman and the masculine potential of subordination to a man, owes at least something to a Lacanian grinding of the lenses through which Freud is being viewed. In Lacan and those who have learned from him, an elaborate meditation on introjection and incorporation forms the link between the apparently dissimilar processes of desire and identification.

Recent American feminist work by Dorothy Dinnerstein and Nancy Chodorow also revises Freud in the direction of greater attention to gender/power difference. Coppélia Kahn summarizes the common theme of their argument (which she applies to Shakespeare) as follows:



Most children, male or female, in Shakespeare's time, Freud's, or ours, are not only borne but raised by women. And thus arises a crucial difference between the girl's developing sense of identity and the boy's. For though she follows the same sequence of symbiotic union, separation and individuation, identification, and object love as the boy, her femininity arises in relation to a person of the *same* sex, while his masculinity arises in relation to a person of the *opposite* sex. Her femininity is reinforced by her original symbiotic union with her mother and by the identification with her that must precede identity, while his masculinity is threatened by the same union and the same identification. While the boy's sense of *self* begins in union with the feminine, his sense of *masculinity* arises against it.<sup>4</sup>

It should be clear, then, from what has gone before, on the one hand that there are many and thorough asymmetries between the sexual continuums of women and men, between female and male sexuality and homosociality, and most pointedly between homosocial and heterosocial object choices for males; and on the other hand that the status of women and the whole question of arrangements between genders, is deeply and inescapably inscribed in the structure even of relationships that seem to exclude women—even in male homosocial/homosexual relationships. Heidi Hartmann's definition of patriarchy in terms of "relationships between men" (see introduction 1), in making the power relationships between men and women appear to be dependent on the power relationships between men and men, suggests that large-scale social structures are congruent with the male-male-female erotic triangles described most forcefully by Girard and articulated most thoughtfully by others. We can go further than that, to say that in any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (*including* homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power: a relationship founded on an inherent and potentially active structural congruence. For historical reasons, this special relationship may take the form of ideological homophobia, ideological homosexuality, or some highly conflicted but intensively structured combination of the two. (Lesbianism also must always be in a special relation to patriarchy, but on different [sometimes opposite] grounds and working through different mechanisms.)

Perhaps the most powerful recent argument through (and against) a traditional discipline that bears on these issues has occurred within anthropology. Based on readings and critiques of Lévi-Strauss and Engels, in addition to Freud and Lacan, Gayle Rubin has argued in an influential essay that patriarchal heterosexuality can best be discussed in terms of one or another form of the traffic in women: it is the use of women as exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men. For example, Lévi-Strauss writes, "The total relationship of exchange which constitutes marriage is not established between a man and a woman, but between two groups of men, and the woman figures only as one of the objects in the exchange, not as one of the partners."<sup>5</sup> Thus, like Freud's "heterosexual" in Richard Klein's account, Lévi-Strauss's normative man uses a woman as a "conduit of a relationship" in which the true *partner* is a man.<sup>6</sup> Rejecting Lévi-Strauss's celebratory treatment of this relegation of women, Rubin offers, instead, an array of tools for specifying and analyzing it.



Luce Irigaray has used the Lévi-Straussian description of the traffic in women to make a resounding though expensive leap of register in her discussion of the relation of heterosexual to male homosocial bonds. In the reflections translated into English as “When the Goods Get Together,” she concludes: “[Male] homosexuality is the law that regulates the sociocultural order. Heterosexuality amounts to the assignment of roles in the economy.”<sup>7</sup> To begin to describe this relation as having the asymmetry of (to put it roughly) *parole to langue* is wonderfully pregnant; if her use of it here is not a historically responsive one, still it has potential for increasing our ability to register historical difference.

The expensiveness of Irigaray’s vision of male homosexuality is, oddly, in a sacrifice of sex itself: the male “homosexuality” discussed here turns out to represent anything but actual sex between men, which—although it is also, importantly, called “homosexuality”—has something like the same invariable, tabooed status for her larger, “real” “homosexuality” that incest has in principle for Lévi-Straussian kinship in general. Even Irigaray’s supple machinery of meaning has the effect of transfixing, then sublimating, the quicksilver of sex itself.

The loss of the diachronic in a formulation like Irigaray’s is, again, most significant, as well. Recent anthropology, as well as historical work by Foucault, Sheila Rowbotham, Jeffrey Weeks, Alan Bray, K. J. Dover, John Boswell, David Fernbach, and others, suggests that among the things that have changed radically in Western culture over the centuries, and vary across cultures, about men’s genital activity with men are its frequency, its exclusivity, its class associations, its relation to the dominant culture, its ethical status, the degree to which it is seen as defining nongenital aspects of the lives of those who practice it, and, perhaps most radically, its association with femininity or masculinity in societies where gender is a profound determinant of power. The virility of the homosexual orientation of male desire seemed as self-evident to the ancient Spartans, and perhaps to Whitman, as its effeminacy seems in contemporary popular culture. The importance of women (not merely of “the feminine,” but of actual women as well) in the etiology and the continuing experience of male homosexuality seems to be historically volatile (across time, across class) to a similar degree. Its changes are inextricable from the changing shapes of the institutions by which gender and class inequality are structured.

Thus, Lacan, Chodorow and Dinnerstein, Rubin, Irigaray, and others, making critiques from within their multiple traditions, offer analytical tools for treating the erotic triangle not as an ahistorical, Platonic form, a deadly symmetry from which the historical accidents of gender, language, class, and power detract, but as a sensitive register precisely for delineating relationships of power and meaning, and for making graphically intelligible the play of desire and identification by which individuals negotiate with their societies for empowerment.

## NOTES

1. On this, see Bell et al., *Sexual Preferences*.
2. Review of *Homosexualities*, p. 1077.
3. On this see Gallop, *Daughter’s Seduction*, pp. 15–32.
4. Kahn, *Man’s Estate*, pp. 9–10.

5. *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Boston: Beacon, 1969), p. 115; quoted in Rubin, "Traffic," p. 174.

6. Rubin, *ibid.*


7. Irigaray, "Goods," pp. 107–10.

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