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Reconsidering the Emergence of the Gay Novel in English and
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Chapter 6

A Tough Act to Follow: Homosexuality in Fiction after Oscar Wilde

Nineteenth-century Britain witnessed many public scandals involving "attempted sodomy" or, as it became known after 1885, "gross indecency." The Oscar Wilde trials were preceded by the Boulton and Park case (1871) and the Cleveland Street Scandal (1889). Furthermore, Charles Upchurch finds that sensationalist newspaper reporting of same-sex scandals occurred throughout the century. He argues that between the 1820s and 1870s newspapers ran "hundreds of articles pertaining to sex between men" attesting to the fact that this phenomenon was a regular topic of public discourse (*Before Wilde* 2). Wilde's scandal was unique, because it resulted in what Alan Sinfield describes as a crystallization of the homosexual image in the public figure of Wilde (*The Wilde Century* 125). Out of the hazy nexus of concepts, argues Sinfield, emerged a brilliantly clear image as well as a signifier for "unspeakable" acts and identities.

In February 1895 Wilde received an illegibly scrawled note on a calling card from the Marquis of Queensberry, father of his lover Lord Alfred Douglas, which either accused him of being a "posing Somdomite" or a "ponce and Somdomite" (Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* 411–12). Wilde sued for libel, which was unsuccessful owing to the fact that opposing council was able to provide sufficient evidence attesting to the fact that he had indeed engaged in sex acts with twelve men, ten of whom were named (Ellmann 417). This led to Wilde's arrest and two subsequent trials for gross indecency. The first of these trials opened on 26 April 1895, with the jury unable to reach a verdict, and by 25 May 1895 the next trial ended with a conviction (Ellmann 434–49). The high profiles of the personages involved made for a particularly appealing scandal for the reading public. "With Wilde and the Marquis of Queensberry vying for top billing among a remarkable cast of characters (including several legal luminaries and a potential parade of young working-class men), and with much of the dialogue provided by one of the West End's most popular playwrights himself," writes Ed Cohen, "the drama promised to be highly entertaining" (*Talk on the Wilde Side* 132). Despite the interest, Cohen points out that for the most part the public,

who greedily consumed the reporting, were left to read between the lines to infer what crime had actually been committed. Newspapers were compelled to broach same-sex acts delicately. "Indeed, the criminal activities themselves were never directly named in any newspaper account of the case but instead were designated by a virtually interchangeable series of euphemisms . . . that directly conveyed nothing substantive about the practices in question except perhaps that they were non-normative" (Cohen 184). The iconography of the scandal, the cartoons, drawings, and illustrations produced to accompany the courtroom accounts, are as important in communicating Wilde's crime as the thinly veiled language used to intimate "the Love that dare not speak its name." They would also exert "widespread influence on how the public came to perceive him," writes Joseph Bristow, leaving "a lasting impression on how his name has been preserved in cultural memory" (*Wilde Writings* 9–10). In these cartoons, Wilde becomes more "arrogant, bloated, and voluptuous than he ever was" in reality (Bristow 10). During the trials, the newspaper reports and cartoons made the aesthete as grotesque as possible, attributing to him the physical marks of racial degeneration popularized in Max Nordau's widely discussed *Entartung*, which had been recently translated and made available in the months before the trials (Bristow, "Homosexual Writing on Trial" 28; Bristow, "Picturing His Exact Decadence" 23; see also Nordau, *Degeneration* 317–22).

Despite the ambiguity that the veil of propriety cast over the issue at hand, the intense public discourse spawned by the three trials and ensuing media circus proved to make the name of the love that no one dared speak speakable. Sinfield argues in *The Wilde Century* that the trials brought together tenuously related cultural phenomena under Wilde's public persona. He writes that an important impact on the public imagination resulted, "produc[ing] a major shift in perceptions of the scope of same-sex passion" (3) and the solidification of a queer image as "the entire, vaguely disconcerting nexus of effeminacy, leisure, idleness, immorality, luxury, insouciance, decadence and aestheticism, which Wilde was perceived, variously, as instantiating, was transformed into a brilliantly precise image. The parts were there already, and were being combined, diversely, by various people. But, at this point, a distinctive possibility cohered, far more clearly, and for far more people, than hitherto" (118). Before this "queer moment," the tastes Wilde had cultivated and the traits he had incorporated into his public personality were associated mainly with the aristocracy and were thus a protest against bourgeois conventions. During the trials the queer image emerged when the aristocratic effeminate role, which Eve Sedgwick writes "has existed since at least the seventeenth century" (*Between Men* 93), merged with the homosexual in the figure of Wilde. "Oscar Wilde" became for decades afterward the only signifier available to many to name same-sex acts and "afforded a simple stereotype as a peg for behaviour and feelings that were otherwise incoherent and/or unspeakable" (Sinfield 125). Eventually, writes Sinfield, representations of the leisure-class, Wildean homosexual "consolidated the queer image, to the point where, unless there were really explicit signs, queers were generally assumed to be leisure-class. And conversely, leisure-class men might fall

under suspicion, regardless of their actual preferences" (137). For many early homosexual activists and writers, primarily in the English-speaking context, "Oscar Wilde" would be an image to negate.

This chapter investigates two of the English-language literary responses to Wilde's scandal, Edward Prime-Stevenson's *Imre* and E. M. Forster's *Maurice*, by exploring the ways in which the novels foreground masculine homosexuality over the effeminate Wildean stereotype. The former novel, along with the author's *The Intersexes*, is forthright in its rejection of the Wildean stereotype and attempts to wrestle interest in literature and the fine arts away from effeminacy. Although, in Forster's novel, Maurice identifies himself as "an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort" (134), this vision of homosexuality never provides him with a means for understanding, expressing, and living his sexual desire. Lesley Hall explains that Maurice "did not mean he was witty, politically radical, intellectually subversive, or a dandified aesthete: he meant he desired other men" (*Sex, Gender, and Social Change in Britain* 54). "Oscar Wilde" names homosexuality twice—both instances trigger instantaneous recognition of the signified "unspeakable" practices (131, 134). This is a lasting effect of the Wilde trials: "Oscar Wilde," writes Sinfield, became for decades after the trials "the one form in which speech might occur" (*The Wilde Century* 125). Regarding *Maurice*, he writes that "It was hard to be queer without a model" and thus "Maurice first recognizes homosexuality in Risley" (140), who was based on the writer Lytton Strachey (1880–1932), who had adopted the Wildean model for himself (141). However, Sinfield posits, "The novel is designed to show that Maurice doesn't have to be like Oscar Wilde" (140). "The Wildean stereotype is still powerful in the novel, though by negation. Maurice and Alec make off to the woods, whereas Forster himself stayed in Cambridge, with the knowing dons and adventurous, leisure-class students. Forster thereby excludes from his happy ending not only himself but also men like Strachey—the most prominent and progressive homosexuals of the time; so determined is he to pursue the repudiation of effeminacy" (142). I disagree with Sinfield in that I see the role of the Wildean image extending beyond mere negation or repudiation, something which is especially clear when *Maurice* is contrasted to *Imre* as well as Mackay's books of the nameless love. Risley is crucial to Maurice's education and serves a key function in the plot's progression. Claude Summers posits that one of "the most significant literary influences on Forster's novel is the work of Victorian England's most famous homosexual outlaw, Oscar Wilde," whose *De Profundis* in particular "informs Maurice at every turn" (*E. M. Forster* 148; *Gay Fictions* 22, 85). Risley is a "child of light," a figure that Wilde describes in *De Profundis*: "His chief war was against the Philistines. That is the war every child of light has to wage. Philistinism was the note of the age and community in which [Jesus] lived. In their heavy inaccessibility to ideas, their dull respectability, their tedious orthodoxy, their worship of vulgar success, their entire preoccupation with the gross materialistic side of life, and their ridiculous estimate of themselves and their importance, the Jews of Jerusalem in Christ's day were the exact counterpart of the British Philistine of our own" (*Collected Works* 2: 182). Summers argues

that "Maurice himself will after assume the same struggle" (*E. M. Forster* 152; *Gay Fictions* 88). If Risley is the "child of light," a burden which Maurice and Alec in the end assume, he and the Wildean model of homosexuality cannot be relegated to merely a negative image against which the novel defines its protagonists. There are three points in the novel when Risley stretches Maurice "a helping hand" (23). Before the literary analyses, though, three of the components that form the core of the nexus that is Wilde's public persona and, after the trials, homosexual image are discussed: effeminacy, dandyism, and aestheticism. Although *Imre* rejects all that Wilde had come to represent in the popular imagination, *Maurice* is more subtle in its depiction of the interaction between the more masculine and more effeminate models of homosexuality. Aspects of Wilde's legacy would be carried on, in a manner of sorts, in Forster's eponymous hero.

Aestheticism as Rebellion

In England in the final decades of the nineteenth century, a model of homosexuality took shape and gained attention concomitantly with the masculine and democratically egalitarian vision advocated in the writings of John Addington Symonds and Edward Carpenter (see chapter 3). Although Greek love and Walt Whitman were also key discourses which shaped and influenced this other homosexual model (see M. Robertson, *Worshipping Walt* 139–97), instead of back-to-nature manliness and socialist Utopianism being its defining characteristics, this alternative model is distinguished by effeminacy, dandyism, aestheticism, and was embodied in Oscar Wilde. This section considers these aspects of Wilde's public persona which, through their association with him, became so tightly bound up in the effeminate homosexual role.

From the time Wilde left Oxford in 1879, he marketed himself as a "liminal figure" in London society, writes Cohen (*Talk on the Wilde Side* 135). He became the embodiment of the Aesthetic Movement and the consummate "dandy-aesthete." Martin Green points out that although the dandy and the aesthete are distinct figures in many respects, the example of Wilde shows that they "are very closely related, and frequently the same person is both. Very often the two phases are alternative ways of embodying the same idea, the same temperamental drive" (*Children of the Sun* 32–33). Thus Green proposes the term "dandy-aesthete" to designate these "twin aspects of one identity" (33). Aestheticism is a movement which resists attempts to define it. Jonathan Freedman writes that there is no "single, unitary definition of a diverse, fractious, and ultimately disjunctive group of writers, artists, and critics" (*Professions of Taste* 4). The one unifying trait of British aestheticism, Freedman writes, "is the desire to embrace contradictions, indeed the desire to seek them out the better to play with the possibilities they afford" (6). Dennis Denisoff, who identifies the heyday of the Aesthetic Movement between 1880 to 1895, argues that "the term 'aestheticism' came to be associated with a multiplicity of high-art and popular constructs and products including literary and visual works, artistic styles, household decor, personae, and philosophical views" (*Aestheticism*

and *Sexual Parody* 6). Max Beerbohm (1872–1956) in the essay "1880" (1895) retrospectively described that year as a time when

Fired by [Wilde's] fervid words, men and women hurled their mahogany into the streets and ransacked the curio-shops for the furniture of Annish days. Dados arose upon every wall, sunflowers and the feathers of peacocks curved in every corner, tea grew quite cold while the guests were praising the Willow Pattern of its cup. A few fashionable women even dressed themselves in sinuous draperies and unheard-of greens. Into whatsoever ball-room you went, you would surely find, among the women in tiaras and the fops and the distinguished foreigners, half a score of comely ragamuffins in velveteen, murmuring sonnets, posturing, waving their hands (loc. 342).

These dandy-aesthetes, whom Beerbohm describes as "comely ragamuffins in velveteen," were "interested in fashioning themselves as art," writes Denisoff, they belonged to "an elite class that possessed refined tastes and values—a class in many ways beyond the dictates of everyday society." Such exclusiveness, suggests Denisoff, was "a factor in determining whether people with unconventional sexual desires were likely to turn to those interests when formulating their identities" (7).

One of the key figures in the Aesthetic Movement and one of the most important influences on Wilde was the Oxford don Walter Pater (1839–1894), whose *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (1873) Wilde had read during his first term at Oxford and would later call "that book which has had such a strange influence over my life" (*Collected Works* 2: 168; see Raby, *Oscar Wilde* 16; Wright, *Oscar's Books* 102–03). Pater insists that, to become truly conscious of the Greek spirit of beauty, one should live life as a series of intense moments. "To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life" (*The Renaissance* 152). The highest wisdom comes not from the intellectual or analytical faculties, but from the senses and immediate experience. "Of such wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for its own sake, has most. For art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality of your moments as they pass, and simply for these moments' sake" (Pater 153). The imperative here is to live one's life as a work of art: to cultivate rare and exotic tastes and interests, to deck oneself in and furnish one's abode with only the most exquisite, to draw on philosophies of Individualism that set one above the common man. "I put all my genius into my life," Wilde claimed to André Gide, "I put only my talent into my works" (qtd. in Raby 7).

Joseph Bristow writes that Wilde was celebrated for "his unmanly mode of self representation," his silks and velvets, and not "only did his unorthodox dress sense catch the public's attention, his powers of conversation usually managed to make their mark" ("A Complex and Multiform Creature" 201). This effeminate dandy-aesthete image that he fostered did not at this point indicate same-sex sexuality, but enabled him to critique and to challenge ideals of middle-class masculinity. During the nineteenth century, the middle-class man began in earnest to distinguish himself from the aristocrat. The characteristics which he stressed in order to accom-

plish this were above all his work ethic and moral seriousness (see Tosh, "The Old Adam and the New Man" 72–77). Aestheticism, for many children of the middle class, including Wilde, was a "strategic response," writes Freedman, which enabled them to "claim authority for themselves in that world" that was heretofore reserved for the aristocracy (*Professions of Taste* 48). The Regency dandy, who had "cultivated refinement to con the upper classes into accepting him" (Bronski, *Culture Clash* 57), offered a useful precedent. Stephen Calloway writes that the Regency dandies had made an art of their lives, and for their inheritors, the dandy-aesthetes of the fin de siècle, this was an aim to be emulated ("Wilde and the Dandyism of the Senses" 36). Wilde sought entry into the reserves of the upper classes; in particular he sought recourse to the freedoms ceded to aristocratic masculinity. And upset the social certainties he certainly did. "In contrast to the 'manly' middle-class male," writes Cohen, "Wilde would come to represent—through his writing and his trials—the 'unmanly' social climber" ("Writing Gone Wilde" 803).

This dandy-aestheticism merged with a theory of personality and Individualism in opposition to the mandates of British middle-class manliness. Josephine Guy explains that Wilde engaged with Individualism (uppercase "I"), a political platform which emerged in Britain in the 1880s and faded from view after 1910, rather than individualism (lowercase "i"), "the methodological atomism that underlay much nineteenth-century social thought, and that was often interpreted as a justification for egotism" ("A (Con) Textual History" 69–70). Wildean Individualism is communicated across his oeuvre, but is articulated straightforwardly in the essay "The Soul of Man under Socialism" (1891) where Wilde establishes a case for socialism based upon the opportunities this economic system could afford for unhampered personal development. Wilde writes that instead of the masculine imperatives to produce and to accumulate inherent in the capitalist system, in a socialist society man's individuality will grow organically, "flower-like, or as a tree grows" (*Collected Works* 4: 239). It is a paradoxically individualistic socialism, distinct from the no-less-Utopian socialism which Carpenter envisioned. Guy writes that the essay's "attempt to reconcile such diametrically opposed doctrines as Socialism and Individualism" features the wit and iconoclasm for which Wilde's writings have become famous ("A (Con) Textual History" 67). Under Wilde's Socialism the individual will be able to realize himself or herself perfectly. "'Know thyself' was written over the portal of the antique world. Over the portal of the new world, 'Be thyself' shall be written" (240). Being oneself would involve overturning normative gender mandates. Robert Smythe Hichens (1864–1950) captures (or rather parodies) "the higher philosophy," Wilde's subversion of middle-class masculinity, in *The Green Carnation* (1894): "The philosophy to be afraid of nothing, to dare to live as one wishes to live, not as the middle-classes wish one to live; to have the courage of one's desires, instead of only the cowardice of other people's" (109). To achieve this new world which Wilde envisions, dandy-aestheticism becomes a form of disobedience to gender roles and the economic system which underpin them, and it is through such disobedience that they can be overturned. "Disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history,

is man's original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and through rebellion" (235). The obstacle to Wilde's new world is Philistinism. "He is the Philistine," explains Wilde in *De Profundis*, "who upholds and aids the heavy, cumbrous, blind mechanical forces of Society, and who does not recognise the dynamic force when he meets it either in a man or a movement" (*Collected Works* 2: 188). Wilde's was "a life that had been a complete protest against [Philistinism], and from some points of view a complete annihilation of it" (*Collected Works* 2: 129). Wilde's effeminate self-styling, his dandy-aesthete persona, his philosophy of Individualism undermined Victorian morality and masculine gender codes which he equates with Philistinism and selfishness. "Selfishness is not living as one wishes to live, it is asking others to live as one wishes to live. And unselfishness is letting other people's lives alone, not interfering with them. Selfishness always aims at creating around it an absolute uniformity of type. Unselfishness recognizes infinite variety of type as a delightful thing, accepts it, acquiesces in it, enjoys it" (*Collected Works* 4: 263–64). During and after his trials for acts of gross indecency, the cultural phenomena Wilde cultivated in his public persona would come to be regarded as part and parcel of homosexuality.

In the Aftermath of Wilde

The Wilde trials brought male homosexuality into public discourse and contributed to the formation of a homosexual stereotype. Another effect was, writes Havelock Ellis in later editions of *Sexual Inversion*, that it "contributed to give definiteness and self-consciousness to the manifestations of homosexuality" and as a consequence "aroused inverts to take up a definite attitude" (*Studies in the Psychology of Sex* 352). And yet, for many contemporary homosexual activists in Britain and elsewhere, disassociating themselves and their desire from this Wildean homosexual role became one of the most pressing issues. Many of the post-Wilde writings by homosexual authors react against the effeminate model. Prominent among these are Marc-André Raffalovich's (1864–1934) "L'Affaire Oscar Wilde" (1895) and Carpenter's writings, such as his literary anthology *Ioläus: An Anthology of Friendship* and his sexological treatise *The Intermediate Sex*. This group also includes Prime-Stevenson with his novel *Imre: A Memorandum* and his study *The Intersexes: A History of Similisexuality as a Problem in Social Life*.

As the earliest of the four literary texts discussed in this study, *Imre* was written and published very much in the wake of the Wilde scandal, which accounts for the text's response to the effeminate role as the least nuanced of the four works of fiction. In comparison to the other works under discussion, Prime-Stevenson's text is the most straightforward in its rejection of the effeminacy model of same-sex subjectivity. The novel never mentions Wilde by name, but it leaves no doubt that the effeminate figures against which the protagonists build their identities represent Wilde and the stereotype of homosexuality his trials allowed the Victorian popular press to manufacture. Effeminacy in the novel is associated with and condemned in

terms of psychopathology, dissolution, and immorality. This response to Wilde is communicated even more openly in *The Intersexes*, where Wilde is cited by name and the Wildean model of homosexuality is confronted head on. The following first considers the overt rejection of Wilde in Prime-Stevenson's study and then explores how this stance is thematized in the novel, including an effort to wrestle interest in the arts away from the effeminacy model and situate them within the sphere that belongs to the masculine Uranian.

In addition to its medical justification and defense of manly Uranian same-sex desire, *The Intersexes* is an impassioned cultural-historical celebration of homosexuality, an exercise in establishing a queer cultural unity, which includes a sweeping exploration of same-sex love in world literature. This part of the study does not spare glowing praise for Walt Whitman and his verse, but this is not the case when it comes to Wilde. The study rejects Wilde's fiction and criticism and opposes the stereotype Wilde came to represent and the role he played for contemporary homosexual sub-cultures. This fervent rejection of Wilde demonstrates on the one hand just how crucial the Wildean counter-discourse had become for many within homosexual sub-cultures in the first decade after his death. "An exaggerated personal cult for Wilde," writes Prime-Stevenson, "and a corresponding exaggerated estimate of his intellectualism have become noticeable in circles of English homosexuals" (362–63). The author tries to downplay Wilde, but for a modern reader of the text, he inadvertently makes evident the profundity of Wilde's impact. The text reacts to the canonization of Oscar Wilde as a homosexual martyr figure, suggesting that Prime-Stevenson believed that this is not the type of figurehead homosexual men and women needed to assist in their struggle for liberation. *The Intersexes* attempts to discredit Wilde on two points: in terms of his standing as an artist and as a homosexual.

Chapter 9 of *The Intersexes* attempts to construct a homosexual literary legacy to which there are but few contributions by English-language writers (255–408). Prime-Stevenson writes that "The Anglo-Saxon uranian presents himself to us less frequently as a man of letters than does his Continental colleague. He dares not. Social ostracism and criminal prosecutions can easily follow" (347) which was the fate "of the gifted Irish novelist, essayist, and dramatist, Oscar Wilde" whose "literary tragedy [is] remembered by many contemporaries with grief" (362). Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which Prime-Stevenson describes as "a novel of vague homosexual suggestiveness" (362), is one of the few contributions to this legacy. What appears at first to be a sympathetic treatment of Wilde and his writings and an acknowledgement of their place in the Uranian literary canon quickly turns into derision of Wilde's art and its underlying aesthetic theories. "The brilliancy of Wilde, at its brightest, did not reach the level of genius. His originality of thought, and even of expression in his writings, his suggestiveness as an aesthetic theorist, his epigrammatic independence in conversation and print, all are highly discutible traits" (363). In other words, Prime-Stevenson intimates that Wilde was a literary and aesthetic charlatan. He was not as brilliant as his posthumous reputation makes him out to be, and his originality as a writer and critic are doubtful. *The Intersexes* is not the first

place this view was expressed by a contemporary homosexual man. Raffalovich, in "L'Affaire Oscar Wilde," which was first published in 1895 and the following year incorporated into his sexological study *Uranisme et Unisexualité: Étude sur différentes manifestations de l'instinct sexuel* (Uranism and Unisexuality: Study of Different Manifestations of Sexual Instinct, 1896) (Roden, "Marc-Andre Raffalovich" 131), writes of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that it is "an unoriginal novel (Oscar Wilde has never been original)" which "is artificial, superficial, and effeminate. Unisexuality reigns there, but without vigor: in a half-light of affectation and fear." He goes on to condemn Wilde: "Oscar Wilde, having neither common sense nor talent, can only treat sexual inversion or perversion feebly, deceitfully, languishingly" (qtd. in Roden, "Marc-Andre Raffalovich" 133). These diatribes against Wilde and his novel are undoubtedly to a large extent sour grapes by two writers whose fiction is, it could be argued, mediocre; but they are also important as two voices who resisted the Wildean stereotype in their own writings in an effort to challenge popular (mis-)conceptions and offer homosexual men a broader range of images of themselves.

Prime-Stevenson does not stop with Wilde's fiction though; he also casts aspersions at Wilde's homosexuality, which he calls "eccentric intimacies with young men of far inferior station" and "notoriously venal pederasty" (362). "Wilde's type of uranianism was in no sense classic. It was far below the level of idealism which his intellectuality would lead one to expect. His sexual instincts were concentrated on vulgar boy-prostitutes of the town" (363). This charge is leveled against Wilde by Raffalovich too. "It is clear," Raffalovich writes, "that Wilde never understood the obligations imposed by a love based on Plato, Shakespeare, Michelangelo" (qtd. in Roden 134). Despite what Wilde claimed in his speech in defense of "the Love that dare not speak its name," his chosen form of same-sex relations was far from Socratic and thus was not the ideal it posed as. Furthermore, Prime-Stevenson charges that Wilde died "reformed." "His receiving the halo of a 'martyr' to homosexuality is also the less well-bestowed, since he repudiated in his last writings though perhaps with his constitutional insincerity the morality of the homosexual instinct, and so died 'repentant.' That Wilde was a victim of British social intolerance and hypocrisy, and of the need of new and intelligent English legislation as to similisexual instincts is perfectly true: but Wilde himself was not a little a shrewd and superficial *poseur*, to the very last" (363). It can be assumed that by Wilde's "last writings" Prime-Stevenson means primarily *De Profundis* in its 1905 edition, which was, as Michael Doylen points out, regarded by many contemporary readers as "evidence of Wilde's genuine contrition for his past transgressions" ("Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis*" 547). But Prime-Stevenson also suggests that Wilde may not have been sincere in this repudiation, an opinion which, according to Doylen, *De Profundis* also engendered in its early readers. They saw it as "yet another pose struck by the incorrigible aesthete" (547). What is undeniable from this section of *The Intersexes* is that Prime-Stevenson treats Wilde only in a bid to write him out of the homosexual literary and (sub)cultural legacy. This stance toward Wilde is less directly evident in the novel and is mainly manifest in its repudiation of homosexual effeminacy and its valorization of homosexual

manliness. In striving to proffer images of homosexual masculinity, the novel seeks to counteract those in wide circulation after the trials—an aim perhaps too ambitious for a small book published privately by an out-of-the-way book press. Nevertheless, the novel challenges the discursive links between effeminacy and homosexuality, primarily through the trope of the Uranian comrades-in-arms, while at the same time it reestablishes the link between art and homosexuality. Appreciation for the arts plays a key role in the Uranian relationship portrayed in the novel, and images of homosexual artists, musicians, and thinkers are a crucial element of the means through which the protagonists build their identities and oppose the opprobrium attached to their desire by the forces of normativity. After the unequivocal link between aesthetic appreciation and the effeminate homosexual role emerged from the trials, the novel fights this association, striving to recoup aestheticism for the manly Uranian.

Whereas the other three literary texts feature characters that demonstrably identify with the effeminacy model—the two dandy characters in *Der Tod in Venedig*, various minor characters in *Puppenjunge*, and Risley in *Maurice*—in *Imre* evocations of the Wildean homosexual are few. These images are not absent from the text, though, instead they haunt the periphery—they materialize behind every use of the adjective "womanish." Despite the text's side-lining of effeminate homosexual figures in favor of images of masculinity, a glimpse of the Wildean homosexual does cohere briefly. As Oswald confesses his secret to Imre, he describes the models through and against which he formed his sexual subjectivity. He recalls positive images that inspired him such as "Socrates and Plato," "Alexander, Julius Caesar, Augustus, and Hadrian," and "Platen, Grillparzer, Hölderlin, Byron, [and] Whitman" (87). But the "Race-Homosexual" also includes "countless ignoble, trivial, loathsome, feeble-souled and feeble-bodied creatures" (86). "Those, those, terrified me, Imre! To think of them shamed me; those types of man-loving-men who, by thousands, live incapable of any noble ideals or lives. Ah, those patently depraved, noxious, flaccid, gross, womanish beings! perverted and imperfect in moral nature and in even their bodily tissues!" (86). As examples of this class of homosexual, he lists the third-century Roman Emperor Heliogabalus, also known as Elagabalus, (ca. 203–22 CE), the French nobleman and general Gilles Baron de Rais (1404–1440), Henri III of France (1551–1589), and the Marquis de Sade (1740–1814). These historical figures do not directly allude to Wilde, but merely suggest effeminacy, excess, or debauchery. Oswald then turns his rant onto more contemporary figures. "The effeminate artists, the sugary and fibreless musicians! The Lady Nancyish, rich young men of higher or lower society twaddling aesthetic sophistries; stinking of perfume like cocottes! The second-rate poets and the neurasthenic, *précieux* poetasters who rhyme forth their forged literary passports out of their mere human decadence; out of their marrowless shams of all that is a man's fancy, a man's heart, a man's love life!" (87). These are the very "rubbish of humanity" (86), discourses Oswald. He employs language which may indicate a pathological or hereditary etiology, not of the homosexuality of these types, but of their effeminacy. They are "perverted and imperfect" in "their bodily tissues." Within this class, there are "effeminate artists" who "twaddl[e] aesthetic sophistries" as well as "second-rate

poets and neurasthenic, *précieux* poetasters," or second-rate poets, whose muse is "mere human decadence." Byrne Fone writes that Oswald's catalogue of homosexual effeminacy "is staggering and it includes every homophobic cliché." The character is a voice in a campaign to argue that while the effeminate and therefore visible garner the public's attention, most homosexual men do not stand out and are outwardly "normal." "Protesting too much, perhaps, Oswald insists that weakness, effeminacy, and ineffectuality are found in only a small segment of the homosexual population" (*Homophobia* 358). This rant leaves little doubt that Oswald condemns a type of effeminate artist which Wilde came to represent (see also Gifford, *Dayneford's Library* 113). The entire essay (84–89) demonstrates that there is a positive and negative strand to the homosexual historical and literary legacy which the novel and *The Intersexes* forges. Both strands can be traced from the ancient world to the fin de siècle. The positive strand culminates in Whitman, whereas the negative one culminates in Wilde. There is a Whitman/Wilde dialectic that shapes the novel and its depiction of homosexual identities. The novel recalls not Wilde in any specific sense (as is the case in *The Intersexes*) but those images which the popular press constructed. The source of Oswald's anger is the stereotype in circulation, coined to make Wilde seem depraved and degenerate, but Oswald does not direct this rage at the perpetrators of this image, he blames the effeminate homosexuals themselves, attacking their aesthetic philosophies and the quality of their poetry.

The novel employs a strategy of depicting homosexuality which seems to throw the "bad," effeminate homosexuals (the Wilde type) under the proverbial bus in order that the "good," "normal" homosexuals (the Whitman type) can be accepted by the mainstream. Thus the text (over)stresses the masculinity of the Uranian, the man "who is too much man": "So super-male, so utterly unreceptive of what is not manly, so aloof from any feminine essences, that we cannot tolerate woman at all as a sexual factor! Are we not the extreme of the male?" (86). Uranians ought not to be condemned, but respected because they are even manlier than heterosexual men. Offered to the reader in support of Oswald's claim is the portrayal of the eponymous character who is an amalgam of manly virtues. Although he is a perfect specimen of manly beauty, he is not at all vain. "United with all this capital of a man's physical attractiveness was Imre's extraordinary modesty. He never seemed to think of his appearance for so much as two minutes together. He never glanced into a mirror when he happened to pass near that piece of furniture" (52–53). Neither is he dandyish. "He never posed; never fussed as to his toilet, nor worried concerning the ultrafitting of his clothes, nor studied with anxiety details of his person. . . . He detested all jewelry in the way of masculine adornments, and wore none: and his civilian clothing was of the plainest" (53). He is a lieutenant in the army, possessing renowned martial and athletic prowess (51–52), which is a fact that is key to the text, as the homosexual soldier is a central trope in *Imre*, whose importance is explained in *The Intersexes*. "It would seem that, being himself so robustly male, there is no place in a soldier's heart, or sexual impulse, for anything not vehemently manly. Here advances the theory of the Uranian as a super-virile, not sub-virile, sex" (*The Intersexes* 187).

Rather than reject the social value placed upon attitudes, ideas, emotions, and behaviors labeled in contemporary society as "manly," the novel appropriates this discursive formation for its own use, arguing that the homosexual man, although he might possess a feminine soul, can be, and in the case of the two characters portrayed in the novel is, super-manly. Femininity is in *Imre* radically restricted to sexual desire. The Uranian comrades-in-arms topos supports this claim.

Breaking the association between effeminacy and art—its production and its appreciation—is a secondary, but no less important, point of contention for the text. The Wilde scandal had a disastrous effect for many years not only on writers and artists, as W. H. Auden notes, but also upon the attitude of the general public towards the arts as a whole. The scandal allowed "the philistine man to identify himself with the decent man" ("An Improbable Life" 136). Literature, in the eyes of many in the decades following the trials, bore a dubious connection to Wilde, the infamous homosexual. The author makes breaking this connection a focus with the manly aesthete character Laurence Dayneford in the short story "Out of the Sun," in the collection *Her Enemy, Some Friends—and Other Personages: Stories and Studies Mostly of Human Hearts* (1913). Aschenbach battles in the name of art in *Der Tod in Venedig*, striving to transform the production of literature into a manly and heroic enterprise. In *Imre*, a similar battle is fought out no less tenaciously and with greater success for the protagonists. "We were both interested in art" (47), explains Oswald, and it is this shared interest in the arts that is the means through which the two characters initially form their friendship. It also signals to each other the possibility that they have more in common than these interests: their sexuality. Music and the plastic arts seem a safer conversational terrain to navigate, enabling them to disclose enough about their personalities without full confessions. Early on, Imre calls himself a "music-fiend" (40). His career, his commission in the Hungarian army, was chosen out of duty to his father and aristocratic, but impoverished, family rather than in fulfillment of his own wishes: "I wanted to study art, I didn't care what art: music, painting, sculpture, perhaps music more than anything" (50). Indeed, Oswald acknowledges that Imre is "a most excellent practical musician": "his musical enthusiasm, his musical insight and memory, they were all of a piece, the rich and perilous endowment of the born son of Orpheus" (56). This association with the legendary Greek musician and poet could point to homosexuality for anyone who had read Ovid. After attempting unsuccessfully to rescue Eurydice from Hades, he becomes the first pederast. "Orpheus now would have nothing to do / with the love of women . . . [and] even started the practice among the Thracian / tribes of turning for love to immature males and of plucking / the flower of a boy's brief spring before he had come to his manhood" (*Metamorphoses* 385–86). Imre's aesthetic enthusiasm does not extend to literature, though, at least not at this stage in the narrative, as this art form reveals too much about the face he conceals behind his mask. He feigns a "relative aversion to belles-lettres." "For novels, as for poetry, he cared almost nothing" (53–54), and he even detests letter writing. "As for sentiment—sentiment! in my letters to friends!—well, I simply cannot squeeze *that* out" (62). These aversions are at variance with "modest

"literary impulses" manifest in an "emotional eloquence of phrase" which Oswald observes burst forth in "fountains of innermost feeling" when he is stirred (54). Oswald accounts for this apparent contradiction with reference to Imre's nationality, his "race": "Imre was a Magyar, one of a race in which sentimental eloquence is always lurking in the blood, even to a poetic passion in verbal utterance" (55). Imre, until just before he discloses his homosexuality to Oswald, projects a manly reserve, a mask, which occludes expression of emotion. In the third part of the novel, he consciously rejects this, as demonstrated first by the expressive letters he writes to Oswald from the military camp and second by his decision to confess his sexuality.

This more explicit correlation between literature and homosexuality in the novel is likely an after effect of Wilde, but this point of anxiety disappears once Imre decides to admit to Oswald that he too is homosexual. Both characters are upper class and passionate about the arts, but not effete aesthetes. Their interests indicate homosexuality but not effeminacy; thus *Imre* recoups and reclaims the arts for a distinctly manly, Uranian identity. Art and literature, with history and classical philosophy, cultural figures from Plato and Socrates, through Shakespeare, Marlowe, Winckelmann, and Platen, to Whitman (87), play a decisive role in the formation of this masculine homosexual role: they are tools which empower the protagonists to forge their Uranian identities. It is a Whitmanian brand of aestheticism, not Wildean aestheticism. The link between the arts, especially literature, and homosexuality is re-established in the text, while effeminacy is repudiated. In *Imre*, these interests are the domain of the super-male homosexual man, whereas the effeminate artists are merely bad artists, not to mention bad homosexuals.

Reacting to the effeminacy model and adopting an approach to depicting homosexuality which foregrounds masculine models is not unique to *Imre*. Indeed, this novel anticipates a struggle between depicting "normal" and "queer" images which remains a central issue in gay literature (see Brookes, *Male Fiction since Stonewall* 3; see also Stevens, "Normality and Queerness in Gay Fiction" 81–96). Prime-Stevenson's fiction and nonfiction works grapple with the societal image which received its figurehead the decade before, responding to this stereotype by distancing the manly Uranians from the Oscar Wilde sort and by attempting to disassociate art from effeminacy. A similar effort is undertaken in Forster's *Maurice* through the ostensibly normal and masculine hero of the novel who rejects both intellectual and effeminate discourses of same-sex desire. The two texts differ on two key points: first, in *Maurice* there is no attempt to portray the arts as manly; and second, more importantly, the effeminate figure in Forster's work is not a negative image merely for Maurice to distinguish himself against, but assists in furthering his education and the construction of his identity.

Not "one of the unspeakables of the Oscar Wilde sort"

In *Maurice*, as in *Imre*, the platform which maintains that the homosexual man is as masculine and "normal" as the heterosexual man is promoted over the effeminate model, thus advocating normality over queerness, assimilation over subversion. For-

ster's novel features four homosexual characters and three visions of homosexuality. Clive represents Hellenism while Risley is aristocratic, effete bohemianism. Although key figures through whose influence and against whom Maurice builds his identity, neither vision of same-sex subjectivity fits. Maurice and Alec represent an alternative model to those of intellectualism and effeminacy. Maurice is Suburbia, middle-class Edwardian England; instead of an element which could have been easily side-lined (e.g., a scholar with a fantasy of ancient Greece, or an ineffectual, effete aristocrat), Maurice is at the very heart of English national identity, a pillar of British society. The protagonist is exceptional only in that he is utterly average, "Hall was one of them, and they would never cease to feel him so"; middle-class Edwardian society "could celebrate itself in his image" (15). This casting of the protagonist speaks against the pathologization of homosexuality with Maurice as the literary embodiment of the sexual reform efforts spearheaded by Symonds and Carpenter. Additionally, he provides an image in opposition to the Wildean stereotype, depicting Symonds's assertion, which he makes in "A Problem in Modern Ethics," that most Uranians are "athletic, masculine in habit, frank in manner" and able to pass "through society year after year without arousing a suspicion of their inner temperament" (*Symonds and Homosexuality* 135). Unlike Prime-Stevenson's novel, which salvages an appreciation of the fine arts and claims these interests and pursuits for the Uranian identity, Maurice is what Forster would regard as the very likeness of British manliness: masculine, athletic, and a Philistine. However, the key difference between *Maurice* and the other work lies in the fact that this novel does not deem it necessary to denigrate effeminate homosexuality in order to valorize the manly model. Risley, the representative of the Wildean mode of sexual identity, is not discounted outright. This character plays an important role in the narrative as a catalyst in the eponymous character's trajectory toward self-understanding and self-acceptance.

Risley is a figure radically unlike those of Maurice's suburban, middle-class milieu. "Risley was dark, tall and affected. He made an exaggerated gesture when introduced, and when he spoke, which was continually, he used strong yet unmanly superlatives" (19). Maurice "was not sure that he loathed Risley, though no doubt he ought to, and in a minute should" (19–20). The "strong yet unmanly superlatives" suggest the key function language fulfills in this homosexual role. Conversation is Risley's forte and the only thing, so he claims, he cares about. His words are packed with performative power: "Words *are* deeds" (21). And yet behind this high camp sensibility of wit and frivolity rests a seriousness that does not escape Maurice's recognition (20). Risley deploys arguably the most potent weapon in the Wildean arsenal; Michael Bronski writes that Wilde taught homosexual men to use words against their adversaries, "to use wit and imagination to diffuse and deflate the attacks of serious society" (*Culture Clash* 60). With words, Risley stirs up and in turn disarms the other men in this scene. The norms and values inculcated in Maurice by his Edwardian upbringing and education tell him that he ought to loathe Risley for his effeminate loquacity. But he does not, for he recognizes his need for a homosexual mentor and recognizes the possibility of finding it in Risley. Risley has "stirred

Maurice incomprehensibly"; he knows that he must meet "this queer fish" again (23). "He was not attracted to the man in the sense that he wanted him for a friend, but he did feel he might help him—how, he didn't formulate. It was all very obscure, for the mountains still overshadowed Maurice. Risley, surely capering on the summit, might stretch him a helping hand" (23). Maurice attempts to be "bohemian," to adopt Risley's mode of parlance, his imperative to "talk, talk," and accept for himself the Wildean model; but this proves to be hopeless (23). Sedgwick writes that despite the middle-class gentleman having attended the same schools and universities as the leisure-class man, he "seems not to have had easy access to the alternative subculture, the stylized discourse, or the sense of immunity of the aristocratic/bohemian sexual minority" (*Between Men* 172–73). Despite this, Risley does offer "a helping hand," each time furthering, although indirectly, Maurice's process of building an identity as a man-loving man.

The protagonist's initial meeting with Risley helps him to identify his vague and disconcerting feelings in relation to this character. Not only does Risley further Maurice's recognition of his sexuality, but he serves a similar purpose for Clive as well. "In [Clive's] second year he met Risley, himself 'that way.' Clive did not return the confidence which was given rather freely, nor did he like Risley and his set. But he was stimulated. He was glad to know that there were more of his sort about" (56). Clive is "stimulated" by Risley, and Maurice is "stirred" by him. Prior to meeting Risley, both characters are isolated in their sexuality. After meeting him, the two begin to be able "to speak out." Clive explains to Maurice, "When I came to know Risley and his crew it seemed imperative to speak out. You know what a point they made of that—it's really their main point" (31). Although neither joins (or perhaps is able to join) this aristocratic, bohemian coterie, they receive consolation from knowing that they are not alone and they learn that their desire is not "unmentionable."

Risley's second appearance in the narrative is crucial because it results in relieving Maurice of the guilt under which he suffers after the two doctors' consultations have impressed upon him that he suffers from a psychological disorder or an "evil hallucination" (131–35). They meet by chance at a performance of Tchaikovsky's *Symphonie Pathétique*, and Risley comments, no doubt provocatively, that the composer dedicated the symphony to his nephew with whom he had fallen in love. Maurice feigns lack of interest in this information, but it leads him to a biography of the great queer composer, in which he reads of his unhappy marriage and love for his nephew "Bob." The biography proves to be "the one literary work that had ever helped him" because it demonstrates to him that marriage, Dr. Barry's recommendation which he has been seriously contemplating (137), could only spell disaster for him and the woman he would marry. And the third and final instance of Risley's influence upon the narrative is his recommendation of the hypnotist Lasker Jones (138). This is the most decisive push this character gives the plot. Hypnotism does not cure Maurice, but stimulates him, opening him to the possibility of "sharing" with Alec (to use the novel's euphemism for intercourse). Maurice calls out into the night; Alec, who is standing below his window, responds by climbing up a ladder into his room

(165–66). He does not find "repose" at the hands of the hypnotist, as he hoped (155), but the two sessions are a contributing factor to the novel's happy ending.

Risley's part in the narrative is relatively small, but his impact upon the plot is significant. He is responsible for effecting key events and indirectly contributes greatly to Maurice's identity formation. A degree of distance is maintained between the two characters; to Maurice, Risley is shrouded in inscrutability: "he always felt Risley knew too much" (138). The two characters are certainly not friends, but it could be read that Risley, behind his high-camp pose of disengagement, takes an interest in Maurice's search for identity. His confidences, dropping of hints, and knowing smile suggest Risley's willingness to help a member of his tribe. Risley, "capering on the summit" of the mountains of self-knowledge, stretches Maurice "a helping hand." *Maurice* depicts a manly model of same-sex identity and relations, as does Prime-Stevenson's *Imre*. It is, however, unfair to read Forster's novel as a rejection of the Wildean effeminacy model; instead it offers further choice, broader depictions of man-loving men. Although the author suppressed his text, the manuscript had a small, but important, readership, including Christopher Isherwood and Stephen Spender, whose own writings would offer readers the broader range of images of homosexuality that *Maurice's* suppression denied them (see Isherwood, *Christopher and His Kind* 125–27; Zeikowitz, *Letters Between Forster and Isherwood* 3–4, 12–13, 20–21, 74–75, 149–51; Leeming *Stephen Spender* 76).

Conclusion

This chapter shows then that responding to the Wilde scandal was a central issue for early gay novels. The two English texts offer readers a more diverse range of images of homosexuality, namely images in opposition the Wildean effeminate stereotype, ones that seek to break the links between homosexuality and effeminacy that were cemented in the public's imagination after the Wilde trials. *Imre*, published a mere eleven years after the Wilde scandal, presents homo-masculinities which unambiguously reject the Wildean model of same-sex subjectivity. In *Maurice*, the Wildean character seems to be a figure against whom the protagonist defines his sense of self; but the novel's portrayal of effeminate Risley can, by no means, be called repudiation. Instead he serves as a valid option, one through which the protagonist can arrive at his own authentic identity as a manly homosexual. This insistence upon the conventional masculinity of the homosexual central characters is not without its subversiveness to mainstream stereotypes of heterosexual masculinity though. These works overturn these preconceptions by commandeering society's images of manliness. Take, for instance, the case of Maurice, who so fully epitomizes, externally at any rate, the English ideal of middle-class manliness. That he internally embodies a mode of sexual subjectivity which was cast as a countertype to normality works to undermine such normality and the naturalization of heterosexuality.