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Reconsidering the Emergence of the Gay Novel in English and
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Afterword

For much of the nineteenth century, homosexuality was the sin so terrible that it could not be mentioned and, when it was named, was designated by terms loaded with opprobrium: the Sin of Sodom, "gross indecency," and "widernatürliche Unzucht" ("unnatural sex act"). By the end of the century, there existed a plethora of rivaling sets of designations for these passions. "Greek love" was revived and reinvented, medico-scientific terms and concepts were conceived and theorized, and, as a result of his trials for gross indecency, "Oscar Wilde" became a signifier and stereotype. This study argues that, from this discursive landscape, the gay novel emerged. Despite their differences, the four works of fiction under scrutiny here were part of a movement that brought open and, above all, affirmative portrayals of same-sex passions into literary discourse. They adopt aspects of particular conceptual and taxonomical structures, oppose others, help to perpetuate and develop them, while challenging and expanding these cultural and scientific discursive formations. In the early twentieth century, this love dared to speak its name and did so openly for the first time in the novel.

There is a great deal of overlap, much exchange and interaction, between the discourses which this study scrutinizes. For starters, the religio-legal formation, the societies' default discourses, are a pervasive social force to which the formations of Greek love, sexuality and the Wildean discourse react. As well, Greek love was to direct greatly sexual discourse in the form of nomenclature owing to Ulrichs. And Oscar Wilde drew upon Greek love, but employed it to reach different ends to John Addington Symonds and Edward Carpenter. While Symonds disapproved of "the morbid and perfumed manner of treating such psychological subjects" as Wilde had done in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (qtd. in Grosskurth, *The Woeful Victorian* 267), Wilde was an admirer of Symonds. Wilde looked upon Symonds as an authority on Greek love; and, in his expanded version of "The Portrait of Mr. W. H.," Lawrence Danson points out, "Symonds actually makes an appearance" ("Oscar Wilde, W. H., and the Unspoken Name of Love" 993; see Wilde, *The Portrait of Mr W.H.* 43–44). Furthermore, there is also commonality between Wilde and the *Gemeinschaft der Eigenen* and Mackay in terms of philosophies of Individualism (Ivory, "The Trouble with Oskar" 146–47). And finally, Walt Whitman was an indispensable influence

upon Symonds and Carpenter (and thus Forster by way of the English Uranians), Wilde, Prime-Stevenson, Mann, and the many writers associated with Adolf Brand's journal *Der Eigene* (including Mackay), who took from the "love of comrades" very different visions of love between men. In summation, this epilogue considers the ways in which the three cross-cultural discourses of male same-sex love explored separately in the study are interwoven in each of the four literary texts and thereby draw some larger conclusions about these works and the rise of the gay novel.

Aspects of both sexology and Wilde's writings belong to fin-de-siècle decadence. Despite the more progressive attitude that Richard von Krafft-Ebing assumed in his research of same-sex sexualities as the nineteenth century drew to a close, his *Psychopathia Sexualis* still regarded nonnormative sexual desire as disease, resultant from the degrading effects of modern life. Wilde, along with such writers as Charles Baudelaire, Théophile Gautier (1811–1872), and others, was a central figure in literary decadence of this period. Thus there is some overlap in my readings of Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig* in chapters 4 and 7, where I explore the novella's engagement with discourses of pathology and aestheticism, respectively. Degeneration and art, disease and beauty, and death and love go hand in hand. The impact of late nineteenth-century degenerationist sexology and that of Wildean aestheticism upon the novella are analyzed in two separate chapters. This treatment better allowed for the comparison with and contrast to the other works of fiction discussed here, but it would be possible to consider them one after the other. Sexual science provides for the formation of an intermediate-sexed individual, one with "an incorrigible and natural tendency toward the abyss" (265) ("eine[r] unverbesserliche[n] und natürliche[n] Richtung zum Abgrunde"; 153), one whose intermediacy in terms of gender and sexuality grants him, though, a "brilliant endowment in art, especially music, poetry" (Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis* 223) ("glänzende Begabung für schöne Künste, besonders Musik, Dichtkunst"; Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis* 243). This figure is a Wildean dandy-aesthete, a rebel in the name of beauty, whom Aschenbach becomes in the wake of his dream of the Dionysian orgy. Aschenbach's struggle has been waged equally against disease and unmanliness, his own delicate constitution and intermediate gender and sexuality being part and parcel of one another.

In the course of *Der Tod in Venedig*, Aschenbach attempts to draw upon discourses of Hellenism to channel his desire so as to render it compatible with his life as the revered and ennobled *Dichter*. But Greek love only proves to undermine his bourgeois manly reserve. Aschenbach concludes in his final Platonic monologue "that we artists cannot tread the path of Beauty without Eros keeping company with us and appointing himself as our guide" (265) ("daß wir Dichter den Weg der Schönheit nicht gehen können, ohne daß Eros sich zugesellt und sich zum Führer aufwirft"; 153). Aschenbach succumbs to this briefly in the narrative, creating a work of "exquisite prose" (240) ("erlesener Prosa"; 119) and then feels shame for his "debauch" (240) ("Ausschweifung"; 119). Attempts to repress or refashion desire only lead directly back to that desire and to the abyss. "We try to achieve dignity by repudiating that abyss, but whichever way we turn we are subject to its allurement"

(265) ("Wir möchten ihn wohl verleugnen und Würde gewinnen, aber wie wir uns wenden mögen, er zieht uns an"; 153–54). Repudiating the abyss by way of the pursuit of Beauty is no repudiation, but leads "to intoxication and lust" ("zum Rausch und zur Begierde"): "they lead a noble mind into terrible criminal emotions, which his own fine rigour condemns as infamous; they lead, they too lead, to the abyss" (265) ("[sie] führen den Edlen vielleicht zu grauenhaftem Gefühlsfrevl, den seine eigene schöne Strenge als infam verwirft, führen zum Abgrund, zum Abgrund auch sie"; 154). Greek love is not a means for containing same-sex desire, as Aschenbach attempts to employ it in the narrative. It is not a way of rendering such desire compatible with his identity as the author of manly, civic-minded prose; rather, Greek love releases this desire.

Comrade love, rejections of homosexual effeminacy, and the third-sex theory of homosexuality are as interlinked in Prime Stevenson's *Imre* as they are in Forster's *Maurice*. Whitman's belief in comradeship "adhesiveness" which he communicates in his verse influences the same-sex partnership depicted in Prime-Stevenson's text between Oswald and Imre. Theirs is a love "between two manly souls [that] was no mere ideal; but instead, a possible crown of existence, a glory of life, a realizable unity that certain fortunate sons of men attained!" (78). Theirs is a love inspired by Whitman, "one of the prophets and priests of homosexuality" whose verse is pervaded with "neo-hellenic, platonic democracy" (*The Intersexes* 377). Carpenter and Merrill's partnership, which also took cues from Whitman, directs the relationship between Maurice and Alec. It was on Forster's "second or third visit to the shrine," to Millthorpe, that "the spark was kindled" that became *Maurice*. Forster writes in the novel's terminal note that the comrades "combined to make a profound impression on me and to touch a creative spring" (215; see also Moffat, *E. M. Forster* 113–14). In the novel, Carpenter and Merrill's love becomes Maurice's devotion to his "friend" that he dreams of as a boy and later realizes with Alec. "He could die for such a friend, he would allow such a friend to die for him; they would make any sacrifice for each other, and count the world nothing, neither death nor distance nor crossness could part them" (12). At the end of the novel, Maurice and Alec disappear into the greenwood; they, as well as Oswald and Imre, are like the comrades of Whitman's "Calamus" poem, "Long I thought that knowledge alone would suffice me": "It is to be enough for us that we are together—We never separate again" (Whitman, *The Complete Poems* 609).

Whitman also inspired, directly and indirectly, the masculine identities depicted in the novels. This influence is direct in *Imre*, and indirect, filtered through Carpenter, in *Maurice*. The health and manliness of the Uranians in the novels negate psychopathological conceptions of homosexuality (as are explored in chapter 5) as well as effeminate models (which are explored in chapter 6). The third-sex theory, which is based upon Ulrichs's hypothesis of a female psyche confined in a male body, would seem to be antithetical to the manly, Whitmanian program. Indeed, John Fletcher writes, in regard to *Maurice*, that it is ("Forster's Self-Erasure" 73–74). Yet this supposed "contradiction between Ulrichs and Whitman" (Fletcher 73) creates

no dissonance in the work of Symonds, Carpenter, Prime-Stevenson, and Forster because for Ulrichs the soul, not the body, of the third-sex individual belonged to the other sex. In "A Problem in Modern Ethics," in which Symonds discusses Ulrichs and Whitman, one after the other, as "Literature—Polemical" (*Symonds and Homosexuality* 175–94) and "Literature—Idealistic" (194–202), he writes that "Ulrichs maintains that the body of an Urning is masculine, his soul feminine, so far as sex is concerned" (180). By soul he means the Uranian's "passions, inclinations, sensibilities, emotional characteristics," but primarily his "sexual desires" (181). The souls of the main characters of *Imre* and *Maurice*, despite the value the texts place upon manliness of these figures, betray elements which at this time were marked as "feminine," not only in the "sexual desires" of the characters. While Oswald narrates from the assumption that Imre is heterosexual, the eponymous protagonist seems "a striking example of contradictions and inequations" (53): he is sensitive to aesthetic stimulation, particularly to music, but at the same time he is a military officer, renowned for his physical and martial abilities, the possessor of a "Hellenic exterior" (52). When he relinquishes his "mask" and admits to his homosexuality, he explains that he bears "the psychic trace of the woman" (125). He suffers from his belief that being a man and being "more feminine in impulse" are mutually exclusive. Oswald reproves Imre for this (125) because his gender and sexuality is a source of strength rather than something "base and vile" "to be crushed out" (119). And yet, in this novel, while affirming the importance of so-called "feminine virtues" in the protagonists, the deranged and "womanish" types of homosexuals are feared; Oswald says: "Those, *those*, terrified me, Imre!" (86). This terror, in contrast, is not present in Forster's *Maurice*. Carpenter's work on the intermediate sex is remarkably similar to Prime-Stevenson's, especially in regard to its use of Whitman and Greek love legacies and its incorporation of the third sex theory to argue the worth of intersexed Uranians. Although Maurice does not consciously conceive of himself as belonging to the third sex in the way that Oswald does, there are subtle indicators in the text which suggest the influence of Carpenter's theory of sexual intermediaries. These include Maurice's sensitive nature and his willingness to sacrifice for his "friend." The novel does not affirm the protagonist's masculinity by devaluing effeminacy in others. Unlike the "womanish beings" against which Oswald marks the boundaries of his identity, the Wildean figure, Risley, in *Maurice* is an essential point of reference for the protagonist as he gropes his way toward an authentic identity.

Mackay's nameless love writings depict same-sex love as "self-evident" and "natural": the protagonist Graff "did not trouble himself for an explanation where there was nothing to explain. What was self-evident, natural, and not in the least sick did not require an excuse through an explanation" (*Hustler* 158) ("[Graff] bemühte sich aber nicht um Erklärung, wo es Nichts zu erklären gab.—Was selbstverständlich, natürlich und nicht im Geringsten krankhaft war bedurfte nicht der Entschuldigung durch eine Erklärung"; *Puppenjunge* 184). Because it is a love like any other, the nameless love needs neither an excuse nor an explanation from Greek love (as is discussed in chapter 2) or from science (as discussed in chapter 4). Mackay argues in

the introduction to *Die Bücher der namenlosen Liebe*, "Die Geschichte eines Kampfes um die namenlose Liebe," that the two failing points of homosexual liberation, up to that point, were turning to the ancient past and science for answers and defense.

Mistakes and errors have been made that must absolutely be avoided. *Two above all*. In reaction to a persecution that had increased until it was unbearable, it has been sought to represent this love as special, as "nobler and better." It is not. This love is a love like any other love, not better, but also not worse. . . . A second mistake has been made that, in my eyes, is more disastrous than these others. This love, persecuted by judges and cursed by priests, has fled to the medical doctors as if it were a sickness that could be cured by them. But it is no sickness. Doctors have as little to look for and examine here as judges, and those who have accepted it as a sickness are mistaken if they believe they can free themselves from the clutches of power by making a pact with this power. (44–45)

(Fehler und Irrthümer sind begangen worden, die unbedingt vermieden werden müssen. Zwei vor Allen. Man hat, im Umschlag gegen eine bis zur Unerträglichkeit gesteigerte Verfolgung, versucht, diese Liebe als eine besondere hinzustellen, als eine "edlere und bessere." Das ist sie nicht. Diese Liebe ist eine Liebe, wie jede andere Liebe, nicht besser, aber auch nicht schlechter. . . . Endlich aber ist ein Irrthum begangen worden, verhängnißvoller in meinen Augen, als alle anderen. Diese Liebe, verfolgt von den Richtern und verflucht von den Priestern hat sich zu den Ärzten geflüchtet, als sei sie eine Krankheit, die von ihnen geheilt werden könne. Aber sie ist keine Krankheit. Ärzte haben hier so wenig zu suchen und zu untersuchen, wie Richter, und die sich ihrer angenommen haben wie keiner Kranken, irren sich, wenn sie glauben, sie könnten sie aus den Fängen der Gewalt befreien, indem sie mit dieser Gewalt paktieren; 62–63.)

Mackay states plainly that turning to science is "more calamitous" ("verhängnißvoller") than the other. The third-sex theory, in particular, seems threatening in Mackay's writings because of its implication of effeminacy. In this way, *Der Puppenjunge* rejects the Victorian notion that love for a man is an essentially feminine drive. This contrasts this novel to Prime-Stevenson's. For all of Oswald's affirmations that the homosexual man represents the apex of manliness, there is "one thing which keeps such a 'man' back from [the] possibility of ever becoming integrally male" (96), which is his desire for other men. Mackay rejects this most contentious aspect of the third-sex theory: its reification of gender norms by accepting society's assumption that love for a man is essentially a feminine impulse. Mackay was not alone in this rejection but, unlike many of his contemporaries in the GdE, he did not argue against sexology through a revived form of Greek love, the renaissance of *Lieblingminne*. His fiction presents not a universalizing, but a minoritizing vision of love between males. Mackay's fiction progresses further than the others in depicting

love and desire between men beyond cultural-historical and medical paradigms. The point where this writing program fails is his repudiation of other styles of same-sex sexuality, such as Wildean models that are distinguished by effeminacy, which although is less prevalent in *Der Puppenjunge* than in the earlier work *Fenny Skaller*, nevertheless directs the portrayals of homosexual identity in the nameless love writings. They, similar to *Imre* and even to some extent to *Maurice*, promote conformity to traditional gender roles by reifying, rather than challenging, the social worth of masculinity.

There was a movement underway in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that made the heretofore "unspeakable" speakable and a subject of serious discourse. The four works of fiction explored in this study—Prime-Stevenson's *Imre*, Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig*, Forster's *Maurice*, and Mackay's *Der Puppenjunge*—stand at the vanguard of the corresponding literary movement that not only demanded to speak the name of this love, but made it the focus of influential and even great art. The literary texts thematize, problematize, and react to societal, scientific, and literary discourses, creating a broader space for depicting love between men. These novels are four prominent examples of the emergence of the gay novel. They set the stage for the next generation of homosexual writings in which many of the same issues and discourses would be fictionalized. Indeed, the discourses explored in these four works of fiction continue to impact gay writings: from efforts to reconcile religion and homosexuality, especially the fight for marriage equality, to (re)connections with and (re)constructions of a gay past in historical fiction and nonfiction, to scientific endeavors to discover the "gay gene," to the radical "queer" and assimilative dialectic. As long as these discourses are a part of our culture, they will continue to influence and direct the stories we tell about ourselves.