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Matthiessen's Public Privates:
Homosexual Expression and the
Aesthetics of Sexual Inversion

Even before . . . [Mr. Fields's] death Sarah Jewett had begun to be a more frequent visitor in Charles Street, and now impalpably—Mrs. Fields was fifteen years older than Sarah—the two women were absorbed into a union that endured as long as their lives.—F. O. Matthiessen, *Sarah Orne Jewett*

In 1949, less than a year before his suicide, the prolific and now renowned literary critic F. O. Matthiessen reviewed *A Bibliography of the Published Writings of Sarah Orne Jewett*. His review praises the bibliography's handsome printing, flatters the erudition and painstaking scholarship of its compilers, and notes with no small degree of joy the increased critical and biographical attention paid to Jewett, who twenty years earlier had been the unlikely subject of Matthiessen's first book.¹ The kernel of his review traces Jewett's "increasing appeal to readers everywhere" and singles out in particular the popular film star Barry Fitzgerald, "who spoke lovingly of her 'good, slow-natured prose,'" as if to celebrate Jewett's popular circulation and continued relevance, even in an age of film and mechanical reproduction.²

Matthiessen's admiration of this bibliography and the pleasure he expresses at Jewett's increasing readership bring into relief a still germinating field of inquiry: What are the traces, consequences, and effects of Matthiessen's homosexuality on and for his scholarship? How might those effects in turn have wound their way into a genealogy of modern literary criticism and American studies? Thus far,

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much of the work done to answer these questions provides historical, social, and, above all, biographical context to the texts that either directly address or are otherwise structured by Matthiessen's homosexuality. In so doing, this work opens up an archival field rich in its suggestiveness and possibility, one that demands dramatically new accounts of Matthiessen's criticism; his various roles as teacher, socialist, and scholar; and his place as a figurehead in American studies.³ Other recent accounts deploy this archive in order to reexamine Matthiessen's best-known, canon-forming text, *American Renaissance* (1941). By exploring the discordance between Matthiessen's homosexuality and the heteronormative, even homophobic discourses that enter into *American Renaissance*, critics such as Jay Grossman and, to a lesser extent, Donald Pease flesh out discursive practices and structures heretofore elided.⁴ By directly countering any notions of sexuality as a paradigm to be skipped past in pursuit of greater or more universal analytic playgrounds, these recent reexaminations of *American Renaissance* foreground sexualities as sites of generation, multiplicity, and contradiction—exactly those qualities most evident from even a quick look at (homo)sexualities in the Matthiessen archive.

My essay asks what is enabled by such critical inquiries into homosexual lives and the texts such lives leave behind. It does so precisely by looking at Matthiessen's own investigation into the life one lesbian author led a generation before him. Unlike the vast bulk of *American Renaissance*, Matthiessen's critical biography, *Sarah Orne Jewett* (1929), contains content that is explicitly homosexual. While recent criticism into an erotic or sexual dynamic in *American Renaissance* largely focuses on those moments when the discourses of sexuality are embedded within series of connotations, my essay asks what enables—and is in turn enabled by—denoted vocabularies of homosexuality in a public, published text of literary criticism.⁵ Such an examination invites us to read Matthiessen's first book as a protohistory of what we now call lesbian and gay studies, an exploration into the workings of homosexual identities, homosexual representations, and same-sex desire that Matthiessen finds in both the biographic details of Jewett's life and in the worlds created by her fiction.

By focusing predominantly on Matthiessen's reading of Jewett's homosexuality, I do not mean to suggest that he did not value Jewett's work for its aesthetic and literary qualities. Indeed, although she does not enjoy sustained treatment in his later scholarship and even finds

herself categorized as a “minor talent,” Jewett enters repeatedly into Matthiessen’s published writings as an insightful figure of qualitative authority.⁶ My argument, then, rests in that blurry intersection between evaluated and evaluator: the value of Jewett’s work for Matthiessen lies precisely in its creation of an aesthetics from which “homosexuals” can both speak and be recognized. It is thus impossible for Matthiessen to distinguish between the aesthetic value he finds within Jewett’s regionalist fiction and the success of that fiction to publicly enunciate a homosexual presence, identity, and desire. As previous critics have found, tensions between the explicit and the inexplicit, the public and the private, the enunciable and the inchoate profoundly structured Matthiessen’s worldview.⁷ My essay will argue that *Sarah Orne Jewett* opens the critical and epistemological space within which such frameworks lose at least some of their oppositional tension; in this text, Matthiessen articulates, quite openly and seemingly contradictorily, the speech prohibitions placed upon sexual others.

For this reason, to examine the Matthiessen-Jewett relationship is to situate it within the series of discourses, vocabularies, acts, and histories that made it possible for Matthiessen to speak both as a homosexual and about homosexuality. Precisely, we must place Matthiessen in relation to those turn-of-the-century sexological texts that articulate homosexuality as inversion or intermediacy—texts that understand the homosexual as a person whose soul is trapped in the body of the “other” sex, an intermediate or sometimes third sex, neither fully male nor female. These models form for Matthiessen the substance of his ideas—both personal and critical—surrounding homosexuality and are thus for him the conceptual framework by which he theorizes his own same-sex relations and those of others. Inversion texts allow him, in short, to conduct an “invert” reading and evaluation of Jewett’s life and work. To place my analysis of Matthiessen in the context of this invert framework, I approach *Sarah Orne Jewett* circuitously, beginning with Matthiessen’s private theories of inversion as expressed in letters to his lifelong partner, the painter Russell Cheney, then discussing the tension between Matthiessen’s notions of a necessarily private inversion and the more public notions found in *The Intermediate Sex*, an inversion text out of which he forms his theories. My final section emerges from these first two by suggesting that *Sarah Orne Jewett* operates as an explicit and palpable

violation of Matthiessen's insistence that he fence inversion from the public realm.

"Creation Is Never Easy"

In a letter to Russell Cheney on 5 November 1924, Matthiessen describes the moment that he came "face to face with the fact that I could probably never marry" and realized that "I might very likely be altogether homosexual."⁸ The letter couches this realization as an interaction with Havelock Ellis's prominent text, *Sexual Inversion* (1897), which, Matthiessen tells Cheney, convinces him that "I was what I was by *nature*" (*RD*, 47, 1924). Matthiessen's letter is not, however, merely biographical; its foremost purpose is persuasion. Matthiessen intends to convince his lover that he too should recognize his desires, his sexual history, and his romantic affection for another man inside of the theories put forward by inversion texts; he aims for Cheney to identify himself as an invert. To this end, Matthiessen includes with the letter a copy of Edward Carpenter's *The Intermediate Sex* (1908), which he had bought and read only the day before, and further attempts to aid Cheney's process of self-identification by heavily annotating the book's final chapter, "The Uranian in Society." In a terrific show of confidence, Matthiessen describes Carpenter's text such that Cheney's consent to its ideas has already occurred: "It doesn't tell us anything we don't know already, but presents the position of the Uranian in society in an appealing fashion" (*RD*, 47).⁹

Matthiessen was certainly not alone in his enthusiasm. Inversion texts flourished from their first appearance in Germany during the 1870s and, as George Chauncey notes, by the mid-1910s several United States journals devoted regular columns to sexology, producing ever more specified accounts of inverted men and women.¹⁰ As readers of Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* are aware, the rapid spread of inversion as a concept emerges along with an explosion of nineteenth-century scientifico-taxonomic discourses aimed, on one hand, at classifying and ordering by rank the "races" of people that Europe's imperialist projects located across the globe and, on the other, at finding increasingly specialized systems for ordering domestic populations.¹¹ Sexologists engaged in studying inversion ranged broadly from conservatives to homophile reformers—Ellis came to the subject after his wife began having affairs with women, while Carpenter was among

Britain's first publicly self-proclaimed inverts—and the types of inversion thus emerged as multivocal and contradictory.¹² Ellis and Carpenter, the two invert specialists Matthiessen discusses in his letters to Cheney, provide inversion's most expansive definitions: they discuss both male and female inversions (though both emphasize the male, despite Ellis's personal interest in his wife's inversion), and both allow for a wide range of inverts, from the gender nonconforming to those, among whom Matthiessen counts himself and Cheney, whose sexual intermediacy manifests itself almost exclusively in the sex of their object choices.¹³

We can, of course, never know the exact extent to which invert models contributed to the emergence of the fully defined category homosexual. From Matthiessen's letters to Cheney, however, we have ample evidence that *Sexual Inversion* and *The Intermediate Sex* provided for Matthiessen both foundational and revelatory models for self-identification, allowing him a new identity so seemingly natural and axiomatic that the texts merely restated his already held, though perhaps inchoate, understandings of himself: "It doesn't tell us anything we don't know already." The statement neatly captures Matthiessen's wholehearted belief that homosexuality's root or cause rests on a firm and essentialist foundation. But it more fruitfully speaks to the subtle yet increasingly pervasive influence of the inversion model in the transatlantic 1920s and to the surreptitious means by which inversion inserted itself into entrenched notions of biologically determined sex characteristics, so that even as a relatively new model, inversion could emerge in the realm of common sense and intuition. Matthiessen's statement therefore follows from the dominant function of inversion texts, which is the creation of a taxonomy that inscribes homosexuality into the already existing social and biological category of sex, so it is not surprising when Matthiessen claims that his knowledge of inversion models predates his encounter with inversion texts. What might remain surprising is that, given their lack of informational value, inversion texts have any use for him at all. Yet without them, of course, inversion would remain undeveloped, inexpressible, and private. The value of inversion texts is thus discursive: by writing same-sex desire into a discourse of sex difference and, hence, making homosexuality newly familiar, Ellis and Carpenter provide Matthiessen with a language, a vocabulary, a means by which to enter into dialogue with Cheney about their shared desire for men.¹⁴

Such texts create, in other words, the systems and rules that frame the conditions through which homosexuality can find expression, bringing it into what Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* calls the “enunciative field.”¹⁵ Inversion discourse for Matthiessen therefore has the potential to become profoundly subversive, providing nothing less than the ability to enunciate himself in opposition to a system that, based upon the prevailing norm of heterosexuality, profoundly misrecognizes him. Inversion, in short, creates the possibility for homosexuality to become public.

Although (or likely because) inversion texts make homosexuality newly expressible, Matthiessen’s letters introduce inversion in the same breath that they insist it remain tightly sealed from any public sphere. Now public and published in the collection *Rat and the Devil*, Matthiessen’s private letters to Cheney express inversion as a form of life doubling back on itself: one moment possibility, the next foreclosure, an incessant cycling between moments of happiness and, more commonly, bleak isolation, anguish, and loneliness (“CC,” 804). In 1930, for example, Matthiessen rhetorically asks: “Have I any right in a community that would so utterly disapprove of me if it knew the facts?” One sentence later, he defers an answer to his own question, relocating his idea of community from the large, disapproving, and general public to the immediate and private site of his relationship with Cheney: “I ask myself that, and then I laugh; for I know I would never ask it at all if isolation from you didn’t make me search into myself. I need you, feller; for together we can confront whatever there is” (*RD*, 200, 1930). The lesson learned from what amounts to a series of wonderfully intimate love letters is, for Cheney and Matthiessen, both simple and confounding: they can rely on nothing—not publicly recognizable categories, customs, or traditions, not even many of those among their most intimate circle of friends.¹⁶ Early in their relationship, Matthiessen puts it this way: “[T]hose gates of society are of iron. And when you’re outside, you’ve got to live in yourself alone, unless—o beatissimus—you are privileged to find another wanderer in the waste land” (*RD*, 30, 1924).

These comments stand in brutal contrast to the first-person plural evocation of community, communal identity, and nation that we find in Matthiessen’s published works, especially *American Renaissance*. His stated goal in that text’s preface is to place his nineteenth-century subjects both in their own age “and in ours,” and he later refers to

American letters as “our literature” (*AR*, viii, ix). Describing the criteria by which he hopes his work will be judged, Matthiessen quotes the architect Louis Sullivan, turning to the principles of U.S. democracy expressed in his writings: “In a democracy there can be but one fundamental test of citizenship, namely: Are you using such gifts as you possess for or against the people?” In his own words, Matthiessen adds: “These standards are the inevitable and right extension of Emerson’s demands in *The American Scholar*” (*AR*, xv–xvi). Matthiessen’s expressed purpose in *American Renaissance*, then, is to promote that from which he finds himself excluded: an American identity. He aims to do so by describing American literature in a way that is beneficial to the American “people,” a category with which he expresses deep and profound identification. Indeed, for a man who spent much of his life marking, as it were, the value of interpellation, processed through a national literature, national exceptionalism, and the communion of citizenship, it reads as both tragedy and farce that Matthiessen’s own place inside of such groupings can become feasible only after a series of profound misrecognitions.¹⁷

Even with the history of inversion theories for him to read, and presumably even with the knowledge of fellow homosexuals in his academic and other circles, Matthiessen feels (or, perhaps the same thing: knows) that his relationship with Cheney must exist outside the pre-set national and sexual identity categories with which subjects identify themselves and through which they are in turn identified. Yet paradoxically, Matthiessen repositions this notion of the external in terms of U.S. myth, describing his life with Cheney as though the two were pioneers on the western front:

Of course this life of ours is entirely new—neither of us know [*sic*] of a parallel case. We stand in the middle of an unchartered, uninhabited country. That there have been other unions like ours is obvious, but we are unable to draw on their experience. We must create everything for ourselves. And creation is never easy. (*RD*, 71, 1925)

The relationship with Cheney becomes Matthiessen’s organic community, one that exists in paradox vis-à-vis the national traditions put forward in *American Renaissance*. By defining his possibilities for a life with Cheney spatially and by seeking to open up unchartered land within a thoroughly chartered nation, Matthiessen positions himself and his lover both outside of the prerequisite conditions that must be

met before one can partake in “American” possibility and, according to the mythic dimensions of trailblazers on the western front, as quintessentially American, perhaps even more American than those whose sexual lives and relationships follow the predetermined and teleological paths prescribed for heterosexuality. In emotional terms, Matthiessen’s organic community is thus a realm of hope and possibility in addition to hardship and despair. Self-creation, while “never easy,” will open up the strange frontiers of inversion and intermediacy, yielding intimacy and the potential for new groupings, new communities, and new fellowships, even if these consist of mere communities of two. Indeed, as inverts, self-creation is their only choice, which is to say that Matthiessen and Cheney do not choose to become pioneers—the pioneering path chooses them.

As I have already suggested, one of these spaces of experimentation for Matthiessen and Cheney exists in that private space of letters exchanged to and fro over the course of their twenty-year relationship. In one of these letters, Matthiessen specifically locates an additional space of productive possibility in another site of exchange—his and Cheney’s physical and sexual intimacy. When Cheney, racked with guilt, suggests that he and Matthiessen abstain from sex, Matthiessen rebuts in part by paraphrasing Whitman’s “Body Electric”:

You say that our love is not based on the physical, but on our mutual understanding, and sympathy, and tenderness. And of course that is right. But we both have bodies: “if the body is not the soul, what then is the soul?” . . . Perhaps just living as [intimate friends] each random thought could be shared just as freely as it has been during our life together so far. Perhaps, on the other hand, it would mean that there would no longer be the same abundant joyous lack of restraint, and that the dim corners of our hearts where physical desires lurked would no longer be wholly open to each other. (*RD*, 86–87, 1925)

In sex and physical intimacy, Matthiessen thus locates a space free from both restraint and—in a direct response to Cheney’s guilt—heteronormativity, one that he argues is equally necessary to a written or spoken intercourse for their ability to know one another and to communicate. Matthiessen continues the letter by again urging Cheney to see himself as “sexually inverted”: “[S]ex is not mathematical and clear-cut, something to be separated definitely into male and

female," adding: "[T]here are women who appear to be feminine but have a male sex element, and men, like us, who appear to be masculine but have a female sex element" (*RD*, 87, 1925).¹⁸ Cheney is an invert, and his inversion manifests itself in his desire for men. To deny what for Matthiessen amount to self-defining desires is to refuse self-enactment. The choice is not whether to be an invert, and inversion is not something to be overcome. Rather, Cheney must choose whether or not he will exist in complete isolation or in a world that allows for invert possibility, one that he and Matthiessen will necessarily construct themselves and one that fundamentally includes generative homosexual sex. For the invert, to choose community is to enter a productive frontier of self-creation and experimentation and there to find, in Matthiessen's words, "a new fullness and balance to life" (*RD*, 88, 1925).

This self-creating path that Matthiessen suggests for inverts verges on what Foucault calls "a critical ontology of ourselves," which conceives "as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time an historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them."¹⁹ Foucault describes his "ontology of ourselves" as aesthetic, specifically as an "aesthetics of existence": "From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art."²⁰ Matthiessen's language similarly represents this philosophical, intellectual, and sexual life as an aesthetic act that one performs upon oneself. He argues (more or less successfully) to Cheney that the "fundamental secret" of combining a lonely status of inversion with possibilities to live "the most beautiful experiences of life" is to "blend together the mind, body, and soul so that they are joined in a mighty symphony" (*RD*, 88, 1925). Moreover, as we have seen in the dense literary allusions and citations in Matthiessen's letters to Cheney, "self-creation" is a literary and discursive act for Matthiessen as well as a sexual one. Just as inversion texts provide Matthiessen with the ability to express his homosexuality, so literary texts (Whitman's especially) open up explorative fields that suggest imaginative possibilities by which Matthiessen and Cheney can construct their existence as an invert couple.

I suggest that for Matthiessen these possibilities form an aesthetics of inversion, by which I mean an exacting—often anguished, yet poten-

tially joyous—site of intellectual and bodily self-creation that often operates in a necessarily paradoxical space, outside of the community from within. By using the term *aesthetics* I do not mean to imply that Matthiessen occupies an unproblematic position within a genealogy tracing more visible forms of queer performance and self-enactment.²¹ What I'm calling Matthiessen's *aesthetics of inversion* differs markedly from these other expressive possibilities. His is seemingly private and largely out of sight, the product of searching out new possibilities through imagination and private sex; he neither hints at nor forthrightly avows the desire to transform his various public spheres. Yet implicit to the aesthetics we find described in both Matthiessen and Foucault (whose theorization pointedly does not make any public-private distinction) is the utter impossibility of a hermetic private sphere. Foucault's aesthetics and Matthiessen's symphony, then, are both broader and vaguer than any notion of aesthetics dependent on public perception. They instead emphasize the ontological notions of what exactly constitutes art so that art includes self-fashioning and the quest for new forms of life. Art, in other words (and for Matthiessen, literature holds a privileged position in this category), becomes both the work or text being experienced and the experience itself, extending itself transhistorically and beyond the immediate bounds of frame or cover.

Matthiessen's symphony metaphor—with its emphasis on the famously uncontainable phenomenology of sound—usefully speaks to the unpredictable nature of the project his letter details. If he and Cheney “blend together the mind, body, and soul so that they are joined in a mighty symphony,” then how can it be known in advance how that symphony might resonate or how many unknown, unexpected hearings that symphony might enjoy? Similarly, how is it possible to trace in retrospect a complete record of all the effects and marks this symphony leaves behind? Although it is clear that throughout his life Matthiessen firmly held to a belief that he must isolate his homosexuality from other, more public, encounters, it is also clear that the realization of his desire to share with Cheney “the most beautiful experiences of life” could not be manifestly contained. Matthiessen's letters to Cheney, therefore, through their specification and interpretation of public, literary texts (an act that comes strikingly close to Matthiessen's public profession as a literary critic) and through their

evocation of emblematic national pioneer narratives, create what we might call a publicly inflected private sphere, one that flirts with its own publicity, its own public relevance. It is perhaps for this reason that the invert text Matthiessen ships to Cheney is not Ellis's *Sexual Inversion* but, rather, Carpenter's *The Intermediate Sex*, a text that makes no attempt to contain inversion and instead advocates a forceful opposite: homosexuality should and must insert itself into the very center of public life.

"Tell It? Well, That's Difficult"

For Edward Carpenter, the invert's value within culture is as a mediator and interpreter between men and women, and the space of sexual inversion is therefore at the very center of a sexually bifurcated culture, making heterosexuality itself possible and even intelligible. Inversion, for Carpenter, must be publicly enunciated, and the invert must insert herself or (and) himself into the public sphere as an invert; the very value of inversion remains entirely contingent upon this act of publicity. The inversion we find in Matthiessen's letters is thus more closely allied not with Carpenter but with Carpenter's fellow scholar of inversion, Havelock Ellis, whose text is wary of bringing discussion of sexual inversion even into the semidiscrete public space of a scientific text. Unlike the valuable invert of Carpenter's *The Intermediate Sex*, Ellis's invert is pathological, a regrettable abnormality who, because his or her inversion is rooted in biological causes, deserves the kind of public sympathy bestowed on the ill, the disabled, and the deformed. Where Carpenter's text attempts to depart from the sexological tradition, Ellis's sits squarely within a scientifico-psychological discourse that uses empiricism to create distance between itself and its subject.

Even within his text, *Sexual Inversion*, Ellis occasionally attempts to banish his own ostensible subject in favor of what is a more properly universal discussion. This occurs most clearly during a section on Walt Whitman, in which Ellis protests against "the tendency, now marked in many quarters, to treat him [Whitman] merely as an 'invert,'" and then argues: "However important inversion may be as a psychological key to Whitman's personality, it plays but a small part in Whitman's work, and for many who care for that work a negligible

part.”²² Ellis thus separates Whitman into two necessarily discrete figures: the private, personal, and psychological invert and the public, published poet.

Matthiessen, of course, similarly fences his spaces of self-creation within a private world, and his resultant fear of disclosure creates its own substantial series of restraints. Grossman eloquently describes Matthiessen’s invert self-knowledge as a “more than nascent awareness of the closet” (“CC,” 815). In an early letter to Cheney, for example, Matthiessen proclaims with yet another allusion to Whitman: “Tell it? Well, that’s difficult. For it is an anomaly the world as a whole does not understand, and if you proclaim it from the house tops you will receive a great deal of uncomprehending opprobrium, and will do no good” (*RD*, 87, 1925). For the public and published Matthiessen, then, inversion must follow Ellis’s prescriptions and play a “negligible part.” Indeed, Matthiessen’s desire to parcel his inversion from his professional and public lives led him to avoid even the homosexual and homosexual-friendly circles common during his time as a professor at Harvard. Joseph Summers and U. T. Miller Summers write in their entry on Matthiessen in the *Dictionary of American Biography*: “For most of his students and younger colleagues Matthiessen’s homosexuality was suggested, if at all, only by the fact that his circle was more predominantly heterosexual than was usual in Harvard literary groups at the time and he was usually hostile to homosexual colleagues who mixed their academic and sexual relations.”²³

A contradiction emerges, then, when we note that Matthiessen gives Cheney a copy of *The Intermediate Sex*, not *Sexual Inversion*, and moreover that the chapter he annotates for Cheney is precisely—astonishingly—“The Uranian *in Society*” (my emphasis). Carpenter’s radicalism (he was an outspoken feminist and, like Matthiessen, a socialist) therefore provides an alternate means to view Matthiessen’s notions of both an aesthetics of inversion and the invert’s place within a culture. For if we take Matthiessen at his word that Carpenter “presents the position of the Uranian in society in an appealing fashion” (*RD*, 47, 1924), then we see in Matthiessen the at least latent hope that his aesthetics of inversion might contain radical potential, with abilities not only to alter the immediate conditions for himself and Cheney but also to open up new possibilities for “society.” Such is the claim that Carpenter, contra Ellis, makes for Whitman, who, as *The Intermediate Sex* presents him, is publicly inverted and even what we might

anachronistically call a gay activist. Responding to the Ellis-like critic Dr. E. Bertz, who objects to Whitman's "Comradeship" as an "abnormality" that cannot assume to have anything close to universal application, Carpenter writes:

But this is rather a case of assuming the point which has to be proved. Whitman constantly maintains that his own disposition at any rate is normal, and that he represents the average man. And it *may* be true, even as far as his Uranian temperament is concerned, that while this was specially developed in him the germs of it *are* almost, if not quite, universal. If so, then the Comradeship on which Whitman founds a large portion of his message may in course of time become a general enthusiasm, and the nobler Uranians of today may be destined, as suggested, to be its pioneers and advance guard.²⁴

The passage invokes the language of trailblazing also found in Matthiessen's letters in order to envision not, as the letters seem to suggest, the creation of new spaces in which the invert can thrive in separate communities of his or her own creation but the re-creation of already existing spaces in which the sexual, interpersonal, and affective freedoms specified through the term *Comradeship* can universally thrive. Inversion in Carpenter's text is therefore not external to community; it defines the ideal community into which the nobler Uranians will usher their non-invert comrades.

For Carpenter, such radical possibilities are enabled by the expression of inversion found in Whitman's poetry. *The Intermediate Sex* presents Whitman and his work as a public and tremendously potent aesthetics of inversion, the gateway into new forms of life, part and parcel of an embodied politic, and inextricably interwoven throughout both English and U.S. culture. For Carpenter, that is, Whitman is a pioneer in the literal, world-changing sense, opening up sexual categories for his entire community, his entire nation, his entire readership. In this way, Carpenter's invert and the public Whitman—as invert par excellence—emerge as the model for future subjects outside a system of sexual difference (*IS*, 75).²⁵ Hence, in Carpenter's analysis of early-twentieth-century European and U.S. politics, women's liberation movements were fundamentally "accompanied by a marked development of the homogenic passion among the female sex" (*IS*, 77–78). Hence, the Intermediates form "a moving force in

the body politic" (*IS*, 77). And hence, "Eros is a great leveler" for the creation of a true democracy (*IS*, 114).²⁶ Inverts, then, and Whitman in particular, are for Carpenter what the literary subjects of *American Renaissance* are for Matthiessen, who sees in the "blatantly, even dangerously expansive" literature of Emerson, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Whitman, and Melville possibilities for realizing the "potentialities freed by the [American] Revolution" (*AR*, xv). In this sense we might read the preface to *American Renaissance* against the heteronormativity of the *American Renaissance* text. With its vision of national categories inclusive even of inverts such as Matthiessen, the preface emerges as prefatory not merely to the text but to a world in which the radical potential of the text's subjects has already been realized. Like Carpenter's Whitman, Matthiessen's renaissance subjects will do nothing less than transform the world.

Although Matthiessen and Carpenter thus give similar treatments to their literary subjects and even avow similar political aims in their literary criticism, the invert seemingly has no role in Matthiessen's project (*American Renaissance* criticizes Whitman's "passivity" as "vaguely pathological and homosexual" [*AR*, 535]), while Carpenter gives the invert top billing. How, then, can we understand Matthiessen's attraction to Carpenter's radical theories of an inversion that ought to "proclaim itself from the house tops"? How can we explain his note to Cheney, claiming that *The Intermediate Sex* "presents the position of the Uranian in society in an appealing fashion"? And what do we make of Matthiessen's further comment that Carpenter's book does not "tell us anything we don't already know," given that Matthiessen concretely knows "public opprobrium" will follow any scene of public disclosure? In my final section I hope to begin answering these questions by suggesting that we look to *Sarah Orne Jewett* as an attempt, early in Matthiessen's career, to integrate inversion into his published literary criticism, to use literature in the way we find it used in his letters, as an aesthetic and eloquent expression of homosexuality and homosexual desire.

"Those Unwritable Things"

Like the preface to *American Renaissance*, *Sarah Orne Jewett* places great hope in the potential for literature to play a nontrivial and transformational role in the worlds it seeks to represent. While no doubt

a multiple and largely unknowable set of factors collided in order for Matthiessen to violate the silence to which he relegated inversion throughout his public life, we can, I think, at least make some reasonable speculations. For one, Matthiessen's first published text was also the first one he wrote outside of an academic and institutional setting. *Sarah Orne Jewett* is a compact and sometimes breezy book, directed seemingly at a largely nonspecialized audience, written after Matthiessen finished his dissertation at Harvard and before he began his professorship there. Moreover, the project was profoundly tied to Matthiessen's relationship with Cheney, such that the writing scene itself became one of same-sex intimacy. Cheney both gave Matthiessen the initial idea for the text and provided the finished product with its several illustrations.²⁷ We might therefore consider *Sarah Orne Jewett* to constitute their sole public collaboration.

The example of Jewett's life also likely inspired—directly or not—some degree of freedom in Matthiessen's writing process. Jewett maintained with Annie Fields a reasonably open and intimate relationship and, like Matthiessen, left behind a series of letters frank in their depictions of physical and emotional desire for a same-sex lover. As Matthiessen puts it, they were “hardly letters, but jotted notes of love, plans of what they would do when they met, things they wanted to talk about, books they would read together” (*SOJ*, 73). At least one critic makes the obvious connection and suggests that “the Jewett-Fields relationship perhaps provided a model for Matthiessen and Cheney.”²⁸ Likely, Jewett's sex also allowed Matthiessen to be more explicit in treating homosexuality than he would be in his later criticism of Whitman. By using Jewett as the subject for an overt discussion of homosexuality, Matthiessen ironically (given his belief in sexual intermediacy) could rely upon sexual bifurcation to block the mapping of invert identity from subject onto critic. In *Sarah Orne Jewett* Matthiessen was thus able to avoid the kind of scrutiny he might have faced had he addressed Whitman's homosexuality in a similarly overt manner.

Perhaps also we may attribute the text's indiscretions to region or regionalist possibility. Matthiessen researched and wrote the biography during a summer he and Cheney spent together in Maine, not far from where Jewett herself lived and wrote. From that summer forward, Maine played a pivotal role in the Matthiessen-Cheney relationship. The two bought a house in Kittery Point where Cheney lived full time and where Matthiessen made his home whenever freed from

teaching duties in Cambridge. As a result, Maine became the hub of their relationship, the place to which they came together time and again and, ultimately, the place in which they spent most of their time as a couple. Their friend C. L. Barber describes the Kittery Point home as a site freed from national expectations: “[Matthiessen’s] concern with the region . . . was rather like that of an American who has settled abroad in some richly provincial locality. There were, indeed, many things about the way the household was conducted which recalled such life abroad, rather than American customs.”²⁹ Maine thus emerges out of the Matthiessen-Cheney relationship as a sort of middle ground between the national and the foreign, a physically manifested frontier that allowed them to carve out a space free (or at least free enough) from heteronormative imperatives.

In a similar vein, we can also speculate about literary critical factors that allowed for Matthiessen’s temporary indiscretion. In *Sarah Orne Jewett*, Matthiessen comments on so-called local color or regionalist fiction, a genre that, as Wai Chee Dimock and others have argued, adamantly disdains its characters’ attempts to exist within discrete spaces and consequently refutes the notion that discreetness can ever be more than a partially successful endeavor. “[T]he fictive world here,” Dimock writes, “is relational in quite a stifling sense: it is a web, a history of entanglement, a space-time continuum alternately registered as friction and kinship, endearment and encroachment.”³⁰ In *Sarah Orne Jewett*, Matthiessen notes a similar observation, remarking that Jewett emphasizes the atmospheric intermingling of bodies over the singularity of individual characters: “You do not remember her characters as you do the atmosphere that seems to detach from their rusty corduroys and the folds of their gingham dresses” (*SOJ*, 149). By underscoring the atmospheric connections that, voluntarily or not, connect individuals into grids of association, regionalist fiction thus cautions against the very feasibility of any attempt to maintain private-public discreetness. Perhaps, then, by representing as fruitless any attempts to maintain hermetically discreet spheres, the generic qualities of regionalist fiction also contributed to the factors that allowed Matthiessen’s text to itself refuse strict cautiousness. For indeed, in *Sarah Orne Jewett* we find a text that enters explicitly into and even reproduces regionalism’s conflicted commingling of public and private spaces. As such, the text reveals to us a Matthiessen we find rarely, if ever, outside of his private letters—noticeably indiscreet and will-

ing to express, however delicately or subtly, a public, Carpenterian inversion.

The Jewett we thus find in Matthiessen's biography is identifiably inverted, mixing both masculine and feminine traits, foregoing traditional married life with a husband in favor of a long-term partnership with a "wife." As Jewett grows older and makes acquaintances outside of her immediate South Berwick circle, Matthiessen notes with a suggestive lack of specificity: "A flood of new problems presented themselves, and she was forever getting tangled up in her emotions, and then bursting out of the house, and riding too fast for good manners, and then having to try all over again not to let her boyishness make her rude and unladylike" (*SOJ*, 39). And later, in an anecdote for which subsequent Jewett biographers have been unable to find a source, Matthiessen tells us: "One day Mr. Whittier asked her: 'Sarah, was thee ever in love?' She answered, with a rush of color, 'No! What ever made you think that?' And Mr. Whittier said, 'No, I thought not'; and again she laughingly explained she had more need of a wife than a husband" (*SOJ*, 72). He explains Jewett's comment (and perhaps also his own curious qualification of the comment, *again*) with recourse to her novel *A Country Doctor*, which, as Josephine Donovan persuasively argues, is a text implicitly aware of the medicalized inversion models of homosexuality commonly found in late-nineteenth-century medical textbooks.³¹ In the now near-famous passage Matthiessen cites, Dr. Leslie remarks of his adopted daughter, Nan Prince (the name itself an androgynous shortening or inversion of her mother's name, Anna Prince):

You may think that it is too early to decide, but I see plainly that Nan is not the sort of girl who will be likely to marry. Nan's feeling toward her boy-playmates is exactly the same as toward the girls she knows. You have only to look at the rest of the children together to see the difference; and if I make sure by and by, the law of her nature is that she must live alone and work alone, I shall help her to keep it instead of break it, by providing something else than the business of housekeeping and what is called a woman's natural work, for her activity and capacity to spend itself upon.³²

Although *Sarah Orne Jewett* includes many long passages from letters both to and from Jewett, this passage is the only one in which Matthiessen cites extensively from Jewett's published fiction. *Sarah*

Orne Jewett thus silences itself during these two moments of homosexuality, allowing Jewett's texts to speak for themselves. Or put differently, homosexuality finds expressive potential only in the site of Jewett's fiction and in the possibly fictional anecdote from her biography. It is noteworthy that in both passages Jewett's inversion and the inversion of what Matthiessen sees as her literary alter ego, Nan Prince, are placed into public circulation without facing the "uncomprehending opprobrium" Matthiessen fears will result from his own disclosure. His text thus presents us with a Jewett whose own possibilities to publicize inversion and homosexuality exceed his own. He presents us, that is, with a past that is more expansive than his own present. Yet the text also examines Jewett's own praise for earlier generations and the incorporation into her work of anachronistic possibilities. In so doing, Matthiessen provides a model, through Jewett, for making the past, including Jewett herself, newly resonant.

From its first sentence, Matthiessen's text invokes an image of Jewett's grandmother's garden, "bounded by the white paling fences around her house" (*SOJ*, 1). This garden, for both Jewett and Matthiessen, becomes a private, though not entirely discrete, space in which to cultivate the self. Writing in 1950, shortly after Matthiessen's suicide, the critic Bernard Bowron, a friend of Matthiessen, argues: "In context, it is clear that Matthiessen's mind, at this stage of his career, chimed with Miss Jewett's. Sensibility was a heritage of the past that could not survive the smoke and social leveling of factory society. The remedy was to withdraw, to build fences, to cultivate one's own private garden."³³ Under this formulation, the garden is for Jewett an anachronism, a retreat from increasingly industrialist turn-of-the-century New England. *Sarah Orne Jewett* itself encourages such a claim, emphasizing an old-fashioned quality in Jewett's world, her work, and her emotion, citing letters to show that Jewett felt connected more to an earlier generation than the one into which she was born (*SOJ*, 30).

Matthiessen's analysis of Jewett's anachronistic worlds extends from her life into her work. Not only does she belong to a prior generation, but she belongs inside her fictional portrayal of that generation. Matthiessen, for instance, places Jewett into the setting of *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and places Almiry Todd, the setting's de facto spokeswoman, back into Jewett: "As long as she [Jewett] stayed within the limits of the Dunnett Township she flourished abundantly. And if the trailing arbutus is the symbol of her form, Almiry Todd stands

stalwartly as the essence of its content" (*SOJ*, 135). The claim operates on a double level, placing spatial limitations on Jewett's abilities as an artist and a writer, but more important, placing Jewett into a self-created world (and locating that world in the subject of a self-created Jewett), one that, as representation, exists both inside and outside her "real" landscape. For Matthiessen, then, Jewett's creation of the Dunnett Township and its many characters constitutes an aesthetics of inversion, the fictional world in which she can flourish, a world that lies outside the prevailing expectations of heterosexuality and marriage. In short, Jewett's "private garden" mentioned in the text's opening sentence consists of the various settings found in her regionalist fiction. Jewett's anachronistic worlds thus collapse both temporal and spatial axes, allowing her an identity and a temporal present that are, like the world Matthiessen aims to trail blaze for himself and Cheney, at first seemingly characterized by paradox because they cannot be assimilated into either actual community or contemporaneity.

While Jewett's self-creation is much like Matthiessen's, it differs markedly on one point: it is not in fact private at all. Hers, like that of Carpenter's Whitman, is circulated, public, and published. Matthiessen points us toward an explanation for the difference between his and Jewett's self-creative possibilities when he, like Jewett, expresses with nostalgia the praise of an earlier generation. Describing the national histories that made Jewett's world—"Miss Jewett . . . found her niche virtually carved for her"—Matthiessen writes:

America seemed with the expansion of its lands to be suddenly aware of its sectional differences, and eager to taste the distinctive flavor of each. The protecting fences might be all broken down by the onrushing crowd, but before their feet had trampled every region to the level of standardization a few writers caught the essence of the old provincial charm. (*SOJ*, 62)

The passage historicizes possibilities for self-creation. During a previous time, fences carved out the space for a private self-creating aesthetics, and "taste" made such private, "distinctive" spaces appealing so that they could coexist publicly on a national level. In 1929, when Matthiessen published *Sarah Orne Jewett*, however, Jewett's readership had dwindled and her work was receiving no critical attention save from her life-long admirer Willa Cather. Under the rubric of "standardization," Matthiessen traces an increasing distaste and per-

haps intolerance for the distinctiveness of Jewett's work. In so doing, he suggests that his own self-creative possibilities, and those for all 1920s U.S. inverts, were far more limited than those for Jewett and her contemporaries.

Yet in making public a visible inversion in both Jewett and her work, Matthiessen also defies his own set of limitations, pushing at the boundaries of standardization, and hence of normative expectations for gender, sex, and literature. "Sectional differences" in this context become sexual differences, and when Matthiessen revives Jewett, he brings into his own time an aesthetics of inversion to resonate with a new generation of readers. Like Carpenter's Whitman, Matthiessen's Jewett carries the radical potential of publicly disseminated inversion. Such a move transforms Matthiessen's expressed nostalgia for Jewett's time into the prefatory hope he expresses in *American Renaissance*; *Sarah Orne Jewett* thus stands as an early and exemplary case of Matthiessen's career-long belief in the transformational potentialities of literature. Put in temporal terms, he finds (and publicizes) anachronistic possibilities for new futures in both Jewett and the age that made her.

Thus, though he does not see Jewett's work as entirely without faults, Matthiessen returns to the value of Jewett's texts again and again, arguing at last that her work is "impressive in its quietness, and . . . has gained the end suggested to its author by Flaubert—it has made us dream" (*SOJ*, 152). Matthiessen's text therefore encourages new readers to enter into, temporarily inhabit, and potentially become transformed by Jewett's various worlds. When they do, those readers—inverted and not—enter a decidedly queer world in which men and women may still define the poles, but such single-sex characters are vilified; the vast majority exist somewhere in between. In the often anthologized "A White Heron," for example, the traditional marriage plot is turned on its head when the hero, hunting both the heron and the story's heroine, Sylvia, is abruptly thwarted after Sylvia decides she has no interest in being prey for a man—any man—now or ever. She instead returns to her "home" world, in which most "didn't hitch" and women and men perform the work of both sexes (*NS*, 673). In another example, "An Autumn Holiday," we are guided by narrative exploration into a community's tender yet sometimes troubled reaction to the cross-dressing habits of one of its inhabitants (*NS*, 571–84). And finally, there is of course Matthiessen's favorite, *The Country*

of the *Pointed Firs*. As Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse note, the book is in part pedagogical: Almiry Todd—praised by Matthiessen, in an unmarked quotation of Jewett's narrator, as “mateless and appealing” (*SOJ*, 135)—steps in time and again to instruct Jewett's narrator how to adopt her approach to difference, especially sexual difference, and thus how to exist socially in a world devoid of stabilizing sexual and gender norms (*NS*, 371–492).³⁴

Matthiessen, moreover, encourages his readers to find value in Jewett's texts precisely for their representation of inversion and of inverts' lives. Near the text's conclusion, we learn that Jewett's strength and the reason Matthiessen argues that she will and should find enduring readerships, lies in her style:

She has withstood the onslaught of time, and is secure within her limits, because she achieved a style. *Style means that the author has fused his [sic] material and his technique with the distinctive quality of his personality.* No art lasts without its fusion. . . . Without style, Sarah Jewett's material would be too slight to attract a second glance. . . .

Style has not been such a common phenomenon in America that its possessor can ever be ignored. Sarah Jewett realized its full importance, though she naturally expressed it in somewhat different terms. She said once to Mrs [Sara] Whitman: “You bring something to the reading of a story that the story would go very lame without; *but it is those unwritable things that the story holds in its heart, if it has any, that make the true soul of it, and these must be understood.*” (*SOJ*, 145–46, 148, my emphasis)

In these passages, Matthiessen provides us two telling definitions of style: infusion of the author's distinctive personality and unwritable things. For Matthiessen, Jewett's personality was best captured in her relationship with her longtime lover, and “wife,” Annie Fields. Of their correspondence, he says: “One probably comes closest to her personality in the hasty notes to Annie Fields” (*SOJ*, 78), notes that, as I mention earlier, express Jewett's desire for Fields in terms both affectionate and erotic. Moreover (though as the field of lesbian and gay studies reaches a sort of maturity it feels almost heavy-handed to point this out), Jewett's description of “unwritable things” at the heart of a story, as well as Matthiessen's redeployment of the term as a definition for style, recalls not only Cather's “The Novel D meubl e”

(1922), in which she encourages her readers to attend to “the inexplicable presence of the thing not named,” but, of course, it also recalls Oscar Wilde’s wildly famous pronunciation that homosexuality is “the love that dare not speak its name.”³⁵ In Matthiessen’s two-pronged definition, style thus constitutes a mode of transmission across time for inversion and for the representation of same-sex desire. Its success comes from a combination of unspeakable *and* speakable enunciations, that is, from form, the grammar of the unspeakable (“those unwritable things”), and from content, the expression of the supposedly inexpressible—of inversion, homosexuality, and homosexual desire (“the distinctive quality of . . . personality”).

By invoking style as a central term through which to read and evaluate Jewett’s fiction, Matthiessen does not, therefore, merely name *avant la lettre* what will become a central methodology in queer theory and lesbian-gay studies, namely, locating homosexual content in moments of textual periphrasis and preterition.³⁶ For as Matthiessen’s text makes abundantly clear, invert and homosexual content in Jewett’s fiction exists in vocabularies and structures that are both spoken and unspoken. Jewett herself emerges from Matthiessen’s text as recognizably, visibly homosexual. His deployment and denotation of style thus literally inverts the private aesthetics of inversion that his letters so poignantly inflect with public possibility. In *Sarah Orne Jewett*, that is, we find a public aesthetics of inversion inflected by a private sphere, an enunciation of homosexuality that airs its own injunction to silence, its own formal unspeakability. Style, then, allows Matthiessen to make connections between what throughout his career remain ostensibly isolated realms; through style, he theorizes the personal with the professional, the private with the public. Such doubling enables a parallel doubling of the separate uses to which Matthiessen puts both literature and aesthetics. *Sarah Orne Jewett*’s definition of style blends the private use of literature we find in Matthiessen’s letters to Cheney—giving to inversion and invert experiences an eloquence and articulation—and the public relationship he maintained with literature as a literary critic. Moreover, style combines Matthiessen’s two aesthetic projects: the formalist project of his profession with the self-creating project that enabled the distinctive quality of his and Cheney’s invert worlds. These combinations firmly align Matthiessen with Carpenter while opposing him to Ellis; far from negli-

gible, Jewett's inversion emerges from Matthiessen's aesthetic criteria as utterly indispensable, constituting the core of his argument on exactly why Jewett ought to be read, both "now" and in the future. And thus, although style does not resolve the private-public tension immanent in Matthiessen's invert identity, it bestows to that tension a critical voice and an epistemology that admits the seemingly impossible: public comprehensibility.

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Notes

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- 1 Although Matthiessen published *Sarah Orne Jewett* (1929) over a year before *Translation, An Elizabethan Art* (1931), his Harvard PhD dissertation, a draft of the dissertation was written first. See also Clara Carter Weber and Carl J. Weber, comp., *A Bibliography of the Published Writings of Sarah Orne Jewett* (Waterville, Maine: Colby College Press, 1949).
- 2 F. O. Matthiessen, review of *A Bibliography of the Published Writings of Sarah Orne Jewett*, comp. Clara Carter Weber and Carl J. Weber, *Colby Library Quarterly* 2 (November 1949): 200.
- 3 Henry Abelove provides a biographical outline of Matthiessen's life and homosexuality as well as a critical genealogy of various methods by which several critics have managed to deny *American Renaissance* any of its erotic content; see *Deep Gossip* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2003), 56–69. For more on Matthiessen and homosexuality, see David Bergman, "F. O. Matthiessen: The Critic as Homosexual," *Raritan* 9 (spring 1990): 62–82. For biographical context as well as a reexamination of the Whitman found in *American Renaissance*, see Robert K. Martin, "A Dream Still Invincible? The Matthiessen Tradition," in *Whitman East and West: New Contexts for Reading Walt Whitman*, ed. Ed Folsom (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 2002), 97–104.
- 4 See Jay Grossman, "The Canon in the Closet: Matthiessen's Whitman, Whitman's Matthiessen," *American Literature* 70 (December 1998): 799–832; further references will be cited parenthetically as "CC." See also Donald Pease, "Negative Interpellations: From Oklahoma City to the Trilling-Matthiessen Transmission," *boundary* 2 23 (spring 1996): 1–33; and Michael Cadden, "Engendering F. O. M.: The Private Life of Ameri-

- can Renaissance,” in *Engendering Men: The Question of Male Feminist Criticism*, ed. Joseph A. Boone and Michael Cadden (New York: Routledge, 1990), 26–35. Eric Cheyfitz contributes to a reexamination of the traces of homosexuality in *American Renaissance*, although Grossman makes a good case for the reductive character of Cheyfitz’s treatment of Matthiessen’s sexuality; see “Matthiessen’s *American Renaissance*: Circumscribing the Revolution,” *American Quarterly* 41 (June 1989): 341–61. For an early account of the interrelation between nationalism, national identity, and homosexual exclusion in *American Renaissance*, see Jonathan Arac, “Authorizing an American Renaissance,” in *The American Renaissance Reconsidered*, ed. Walter Benn Michaels and Donald E. Pease (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1985), 90–113.
- 5 Grossman, for example, writes: “[D]iscourses of sexuality structure *American Renaissance*—particularly in its treatment of Thoreau and Whitman—even or especially at those moments when sexuality does not seem to be initially, or explicitly, present” (“CC,” 800). For an influential discussion on the importance of connotation to queer studies’ methodologies, see D. A. Miller, “Anal Rope,” in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), 119–41.
- 6 If we look at just a few of *American Renaissance*’s seven references to Jewett, we find her marginalia adding authority to a claim for the richness of a particular Emerson sentence, her “sketches” offering the successful instance of a form in which Hawthorne flounders, and her insight into antebellum American literature providing the pitch-perfect phrase—“we confuse our scaffolding with our buildings”—by which Matthiessen can encapsulate a chapter of aesthetic theories (F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* [London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1941], 26, 210 n, 584). For the reference to Jewett as a “minor talent,” see 229 n. Further references to *American Renaissance* will be cited parenthetically in the text as *AR*.
- 7 See Grossman, “CC,” 808–17; and Pease, “Negative Interpellations,” 13–14.
- 8 *Rat and the Devil: Journal Letters of F. O. Matthiessen and Russell Cheney*, ed. Louis Hyde (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1988), 47. Further references to the collected letters are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as *RD*, followed by both the page number and the year the letter was sent. Matthiessen’s nickname was “Devil,” Cheney’s was “Rat.”
- 9 *Urning* and *uranian*, adapted from Plato’s *Symposium*, were frequently used in place of *invert*.
- 10 See George Chauncey, “From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: Medicine and the Changing Conceptualization of Female Desire,” *Salmagundi* 58–59 (1982–83): 114–46. See also George Chauncey, “Christian Brotherhood or Sexual Perversion? Homosexual Identities and the Construction

- of Sexual Boundaries in the World War One Era," *Journal of Social History* 19 (winter 1985): 189–211.
- 11 See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, vol. 1 of *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990). See also Lisa Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2000), 156–79; Lucy Bland and Laura Doan, eds., *Sexology in Culture: Labeling Bodies and Desires* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998); Vernon Rosario, ed., *Science and Homosexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1997); and Siobhan B. Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2000).
 - 12 For an attempt to account for more recent inversion models, see Alan Sinfield, "Lesbian and Gay Taxonomies," *Critical Inquiry* 29 (fall 2002): 120–38.
 - 13 The Carpenter and Ellis texts thus present a model for inversion that is far more expansive than that found in recent scholarly accounts. David Halperin, for instance, defines male inverts as those who "actively desire to submit their bodies 'passively' to sexual penetration by men, and in that sense they are seen as having a woman's desire, subjectivity, and gender identity" (*How to Do the History of Homosexuality* [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2002], 122). Such a definition comes nowhere near the multiple, conflicted, and open-ended way that inversion is deployed by Ellis and, especially, Carpenter.
 - 14 By removing himself and his lover from heteronormative systems and placing both within the language of sexual inversion texts, Matthiessen reinserts homosexuality and his homosexual relationship into what is for him a "natural," and therefore comprehensible, order: "I was what I was by *nature*." By naming himself an invert—classifying his desire for other men as a sexual and biological trait—Matthiessen affirms the "naturalness" and "essentialness" of his own homosexuality. And in so doing, he places blame for the incommensurability of the homosexual in public life squarely on the "public's" lack of knowledge. Inversion in this sense invents what we now call homophobia and imagines homophobia's root cause to be ignorance of the homosexual's natural origin. The invert model thus operates as what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick names an essentializing and "minoritizing" view of homosexuality, one that lays bare its theoretical naïveté by describing homosexuality as a distinct, small, and fixed category (*Epistemology of the Closet* [Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1990], 83–85). As such, this view is of course vulnerable to several claims of faulty logic, foremost of which is perhaps that it affirms nature as unchangeable—and, thus, perfectly knowable—and opposes it to a changeable culture. My method here, however, follows Sedgwick's model; I mean not to delegitimize the felt and reported experience of inversion and invert self-identification (as if identity ever

- amounts to anything more or less than its perseverance through lived and performed experience), but to ask how inversion works within Matthiessen's writings, what it enables, and what relations it creates.
- 15 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 130.
 - 16 Robert K. Martin provides an anecdote that strikingly underscores this point. He describes asking May Sarton, a lesbian friend of Matthiessen's who wrote the novel *Faithful Are the Wounds* about his life, why the novel left out any reference either to Matthiessen's homosexuality or his relationship with Cheney. Even though Sarton lived quite close to Matthiessen and Cheney in southern Maine, she responded that she had no idea about his homosexuality ("Matthiessen Tradition," 99).
 - 17 On "negative interpellations" and "misrecognition," see Pease, "Negative Interpellations," especially 11–14.
 - 18 Grossman notes that Cheney and Matthiessen form an example of Sedgwick's idea of "unrationalized coexistence of different models of homosexuality." Matthiessen understands himself in the quasi-identitarian form of the invert, while Cheney's understanding of his own homosexuality is not at all identitarian; he instead sees his homosexuality as a behavior that requires management ("CC," 816). On the coexistence of different models for a (self-)understanding of homosexuality, see Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 47. For theories of homosexual representation that juxtapose an inversion model with some different model of homosexual (self-)representation, see Kathryn R. Kent, who argues that turn-of-the-century lesbian representations are a hybrid of sexualogical inversion and "white, middle-class 'women's culture,' distinguished in part by its central focus on the mother" (*Making Girls into Women: American Women's Writing and the Rise of Lesbian Identity* [Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2003], 1); and Christopher Nealon, *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion before Stonewall* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2001), especially 1–23. Nealon traces in a "foundling imaginary . . . a determined struggle to escape the medical-psychological 'inversion' model . . . and a drive toward 'peoplehood' that previews the contemporary 'ethnic' notion of U.S. gay and lesbian collectivity" (2).
 - 19 Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" trans. Catherine Porter, in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 50.
 - 20 Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 350–51; further references to this essay will be cited parenthetically as "GE." In a series of interviews Foucault gave with the gay press in the early 1980s, he argues that a later formulation of homosexuality, that of a "gay" identity, also demands the creation of new ways of life; see the interviews "Friendship as a Way of Life," "Sexual Choice,

- Sexual Act," "The Social Triumph of the Sexual Will," and "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity," in *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954–1984*, vol. 1 of *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1994), 135–73.
- 21 For two recent genealogies of such public self-enactment, see Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1998); and Shelton Waldrep, *The Aesthetics of Self-Invention: Oscar Wilde to David Bowie* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2004).
 - 22 Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds, *Sexual Inversion* (London: Wilson and MacMillan, 1897), 19 n. 2. The contributions of Symonds, who died midway through the book's authorship, are relatively minor and separate from the passages in the book I discuss. For this reason, my text refers only to Ellis.
 - 23 Joseph Summers and U. T. Miller Summers, "F. O. Matthiessen," in *Dictionary of American Biography, Supplement Four: 1946–50*, ed. John A. Garraty and Edward T. James (New York: Scribner's, 1974), 560; cited in Cadden, "Engendering F. O. M.," 32.
 - 24 Edward Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1908), 117. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text as *IS*.
 - 25 For a similar take on the centrality of homoeroticism to Whitman's theories of democracy, see Betsy Erkkila, "Public Love: Whitman and Political Theory," in *Whitman East and West: New Contexts for Reading Walt Whitman*, ed. Ed Folsom (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 2002), 115–144. Matthiessen himself endorses Carpenter's theories about inverts and, perhaps, about Whitman when he writes to Cheney: "[W]hat we have is one of the divine gifts; that such as you and I are the advance guard of any hope for a spirit of brotherhood" (*RD*, 47, 1924).
 - 26 For more on Carpenter, see Beverly Thicle, "Coming-of-Age: Edward Carpenter on Sex and Reproduction," in *Edward Carpenter and Late Victorian Radicalism*, ed. Tony Brown (London: Frank Cass, 1990), 102–13; and Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks, *Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis* (London: Pluto Press, 1977).
 - 27 See F. O. Matthiessen, *Sarah Orne Jewett* (Glouster, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1965), 155; and F. O. Matthiessen, *Russell Cheney (1881–1945): A Record of His Work* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1947), 63; cited in *RD*, 144 n. Further references to *Sarah Orne Jewett* will be cited parenthetically in the text as *SOJ*.
 - 28 Bergman, "Critic as Homosexual," 73.
 - 29 C. L. Barber, "Statements by Friends and Associates," in *F. O. Matthiessen (1902–1950), A Collective Portrait*, ed. Leo Huberman and Paul M. Sweezy (New York: Henry Schuman, 1950), 102; cited in *RD*, 225.
 - 30 Wai Chee Dimock, "Rethinking Space, Rethinking Rights: Literature,

- Law, and Science,” in *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, ed. Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2002), 259. See also Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse, *Writing Out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture* (Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2003).
- 31 See Josephine Donovan, “Nan Prince and the Golden Apples,” *Colby Library Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (1986): 23–27.
- 32 Sarah Orne Jewett, *A Country Doctor*, in *Novels and Stories* (Washington, D. C.: Library of America, 1994), 234; cited in Matthiessen, *Sarah Orne Jewett*, 72. Further references to Jewett’s fiction are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as *NS*.
- 33 Bernard Bowron, “The Making of an American Scholar,” in *Matthiessen: A Collective Portrait*, ed. Huberman and Sweezy, 49. For additional critical commentary on *Sarah Orne Jewett*, see Giles B. Gunn, *F. O. Matthiessen: The Critical Achievement* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1975); Frederick C. Stern, *F. O. Matthiessen: Christian Socialist as Critic* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1981); and William E. Cain, *F. O. Matthiessen and the Politics of Criticism* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1988).
- 34 Fetterley and Pryse, *Writing Out of Place*, 327. See also Michael Davitt Bell, “Gender and American Realism in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*,” in *New Essays on “The Country of the Pointed Firs,”* ed. June Howard (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994), 61–80; Marjorie Pryse, “Archives of Female Friendship and the ‘Way’ Jewett Wrote,” *New England Quarterly* 66 (March 1993): 47–66; and Laurie Shannon, “‘The Country of Our Friendship’: Jewett’s Intimist Art,” *American Literature* 71 (June 1999): 227–62.
- 35 Willa Cather, “The Novel Demeublé,” in *Stories, Poems, and Other Writings* (Washington, D.C.: Library of America, 1992), 837.
- 36 See Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 201–12.