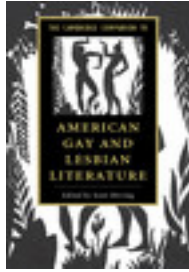


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6 - Nineteenth-Century Queer Literature pp. 89-102

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6

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Nineteenth-Century Queer Literature

Because, really, what isn't queer about nineteenth-century American literature?

Take, for example, "The Man Who Thought Himself a Woman" (1857), an anonymously published short story whose protagonist spends seven years secretly "making ... a perfect suit of garments appropriate for [her] sex" and then hangs herself, leaving behind a suicide note regretting that she has "passed so long, falsely, for a man."¹ Or Anna Seward's "Elegy" (1796), which dwells sensually on the beauty of her beloved Honora Sneyd. Or Julia Ward Howe's *The Hermaphrodite* (ca. 1846), whose ambiguously gendered protagonist challenges the very foundations of patriarchal sexual norms, attracting the desires of women and men alike. Or perhaps the stories of Sui Sin Far, such as "The Smuggling of Tie Co" (1900) and "A Chinese Boy-Girl" (1904), which frequently use cross-dressing as a trope to destabilize any seemingly self-evident terms purporting to categorize gender, desire, race, and citizenship. And that does not even include the canon, where we find Charles Brockden Brown locking *Ormond's* (1799) narrator, Sophia Westwyn, in a struggle with Ormond for the affections of Constantia Dudley; Emily Dickinson refiguring female eroticism through the behavior of flowers, birds, and bees; Herman Melville marrying off *Moby-Dick's* (1851) narrator, Ishmael, to the heroic Queequeg; Walt Whitman celebrating the virtues of urban cruising; Louisa May Alcott crafting her beloved Jo as a male-identifying woman whose "heterosexual" desires arise out of shared masculinity; and Sarah Orne Jewett highlighting the remarkable lives of spinsters who fashion lives outside the confines of marriage or, indeed, coupledness of any sort.² None of this even gets us to Henry James, the novelist with by far the highest number of hits (fifty-seven and counting) when you perform a keyword search for "queer" in the Modern Language Association's International Bibliography of secondary criticism.

In short, where nineteenth-century American literature is concerned, there is plenty of queerness to go around. This remains true if we take the term

“queer” at its most narrow to denote same-sex desire and deviance from those gender roles prescribed by compulsory heterosexuality; and it becomes even more so if we instead follow broader scholarly (and nineteenth-century) uses of the term to indicate that which undermines taken-for-granted social structures and misalignment with the normal (as in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s description of *The House of the Seven Gables*’s [1851] Holgrave as “queer and questionable”).³ The challenge, then, lies not in locating queer texts written during the nineteenth century but instead in knowing how to interpret or understand those texts. As Jordan Alexander Stein describes the problem: “It’s becoming easier (in part because so many more people are looking) to find apparent evidence for queer sex and homoerotic relationships in pre-twentieth-century texts. But it is no easier to determine what exactly this evidence is evidence of.”⁴

Consider a famous case of delightfully suggestive queer intermingling: the ninety-fourth chapter of *Moby-Dick*, “A Squeeze of the Hand,” which describes a group of sailors re-liquefying cooled spermaceti:

Squeeze! squeeze! squeeze! all the morning long; I squeezed that sperm till I myself almost melted into it; I squeezed that sperm till a strange sort of insanity came over me; and I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-laborers’ hands in it, mistaking their hands for the gentle globules. Such an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling did this avocation beget; that at last I was continually squeezing their hands, and looking up into their eyes sentimentally; as much as to say, – Oh! my dear fellow beings, why should we longer cherish any social acerbities, or know the slightest ill-humor or envy! Come; let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness.⁵

The critic and novelist Caleb Crain describes first encountering this passage at age twenty and experiencing a pronounced identification with its author. Seeing the chapter as a thinly veiled expression of Melville’s homosexual desire, Crain summarizes his initial impression thus: “To me, in my youthful misery, these sentences seemed to convey a secret meaning. They said that people like Melville and me had to accept that we were not going to be happy; we were going to have to settle. The closest we were ever going to come to what we really wanted was a metaphor.”⁶ Crain’s Melville is, if not gay himself, then at least closeted, and the scene’s erotic pleasures cover thwarted realities and offer, at best, a literary inheritance that retroactively fashions the paradox of shared isolation. Other critics interpret the scene in ways that leave virtually no breathing room for such a cross-century identification or, indeed, for one another. In their hands, the scene represents not tragedy but “a comically anarchic sensuality”; not gay yearning but “a vision of sexual pleasure ... without sex,” which “cannot be said, strictly

speaking, to be homosexual or modern in any way”; and not sexual but instead merely social, “a moment of fraternal community.”⁷ These competing interpretations, selected from dozens, underscore the trickiness that contemporary readers face when attempting to apprehend queer representations from more than a hundred years ago. Yet they simultaneously underscore precisely what is queer about *Moby-Dick*, pointing us toward queerness as an object of study and analysis that resists being pinned down or wedged into any one framework or conclusion.

All of this foregrounds what this chapter will not do, what it cannot do: adjudicate between interpretations, stifle the present’s myriad and ever-shifting investments in the past, or distill the vast corpus of pre-1900 queer American literature into a neatly chronological survey. Instead, I provide some tools for the reader’s own interpretive work by suggesting two historical axes – sexology and race – along which queer representations might be positioned. I begin with sexological knowledge, which, for the most part, succeeded in coalescing the dispersed erotic life of the nineteenth century into the identities, such as gay and straight, that many now take for granted. I then shift to the related axis of race, examining how literary representations of queerness take shape, implicitly and explicitly, in tandem with the histories of racialization, racism, imperialism, settler colonialism, and white supremacy.

Sexological Knowledge

It has become a familiar story: as the nineteenth century unfolded, the very nature of sex shifted. Sex was enthusiastically taken up as an object of study and entered the realm of science, where psychologists, psychiatrists, and doctors promised to decode entire populations according to whom or what they desired. Michel Foucault’s now famous term, *scientia sexualis*, emerged, tasking itself with the bold discovery of new perversions and the rigorous categorization of new sexual types, in the process launching what we now know as sexual modernity and what we now recognize as specific sexual subjects.⁸ No longer a set of desires and acts – some sanctioned, many labeled sinful – sex became a key marker of being and a core component of self-definition.

We cannot pinpoint exactly when or how this transition began or even if it ever entirely ended (certainly, previous models have yet to be completely supplanted), but we can identify certain moments during the late nineteenth century when its pace quickened.⁹ One such moment occurred with the popularity of Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis, with Especial Reference to Contrary Sexual Instinct: A Medico-Legal Study*,

first published in German in 1886 and then translated into English in 1892. In his study, which was quickly followed by others in a similar vein, Krafft-Ebing coupled sexual acts with deeply ingrained identity categories – for instance, linking sex between men to sexual inversion, which he defined as an all-encompassing mismatch between the sex of one’s body and the sex of one’s very soul. Another moment occurred in 1892, after a middle-class white woman slashed the throat of her female lover in downtown Memphis, Tennessee, staging an exceptional public event that became the international focus of not merely journalists but also medical and scientific professionals. And another occurred just three years later with the transatlantic sensation of the Oscar Wilde trials, which presented Wilde less as a transgressing individual than as a very specific type of person, complete with a deeply seated thing that we now call sexuality explaining nearly all of his behavior.¹⁰ Taken together, these events and others propelled a medical-psychological model of homosexuality into transatlantic consciousness, providing queer writers with ample material to work with – and, of course, against.

By the end of the nineteenth century, therefore, it is difficult to imagine many writers who did not have some consciousness of emergent sexual types. Sarah Orne Jewett, for instance, seems to resist the rise of this new configuration of sex when she presents the heroine of her 1884 Bildungsroman, *A Country Doctor*, against sexological notions of the self. As the novel’s narrator puts it, Nan Prince belongs to a “class of women who are a result of natural progression and variation,” formed as much by exposure to her surroundings as she is by intrinsic (or, to use a term favored by Krafft-Ebing, “congenital”) forces.¹¹ Hence, once Nan has grown to adulthood, she finds herself “more than ever before surprised to see the connection of one thing with another, and how some slight acts had been the planting of seeds which had grown and flourished long afterward” – suggesting a multitude of possible outcomes arising from an impossible-to-predict complexity of “slight acts” (232). In this sense, the narrator’s “class of women” does not correspond to a static, transhistorical identity type but instead emerges within an evolutionary logic in which difference produces variation rather than reproducing itself.

Alternately, in his *Autobiography of an Androgyne*, which was begun during the late nineteenth century but not published until 1919, Ralph Werther wholeheartedly embraces sexological vocabulary and invokes a sexological explanation for his homosexuality, even to the point where he presents his own story as a case study in which one specific individual becomes the basis for an entire group’s characteristics. He writes, for instance, “I have been doomed to be a girl who must pass her earthly existence in a male body,” thereby embracing the notion of homosexuality as gender inversion, and he

provides section titles, such as “Typical Temptation of Inverts,” that seem to have been pulled from a scientific text rather than an autobiography.¹² Whereas Jewett places her heroine in a model of subject formation that refuses to collapse differences into identities, Werther values a model that articulates affinities and deep identifications between himself and his fellow inverts.

Literary representations under the sway of sexology or even modern lesbian and gay identity categories sometimes seem to contract knowingly on the specificity of their characters, labeling them as just this or that sort of person, but presexological representations frequently dilate under even the slightest critical pressure, expanding to create room for an ever-increasing range of possibilities and lending themselves to what we might call a refreshing unknowingness.¹³ This is what Peter Coviello stresses when he reminds us “that the appearance of what we might want to call queer identity, or modern homosexual identity, was not a fate fixed in the stars, and was not the target toward which all emergences were speeding, arrow-like, across the century” – and that, in fact, “presexology writers ... might in fact know things we do not, or that we have over the course of time lost the ability to see clearly.”¹⁴ Thus, although presexological representations can suggest appealing and valuable back stories for modern-day queerness, they also invite us to dispense as best we can with our assumptions about what any given representation might mean or imply – to entertain alternate ways of being sexual and alternate ways of organizing sexual difference.

To explore these interpretive problems, I consider, at some length, the competing ways in which we might position a single text vis-à-vis the emergence of modern sexual categories: Rose Terry Cooke’s remarkable and surprisingly underread ghost story, “My Visitation,” published in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* in July 1858. The story follows an unnamed first-person narrator who is orphaned at age fifteen and sent to live with her guardian. After a year, Eleanor Wyse, the guardian’s beautifully statuesque cousin, comes to live in the home, and within a month of Eleanor’s arrival, the narrator has fallen “passionately in love.” “I speak advisedly in the use of that term,” she hastens. “[N]o other phrase expresses the blind, irrational, all-enduring devotion I gave to her; no less vivid word belongs to that madness.”¹⁵ A relationship between the two girls soon transpires, although it is always on Eleanor’s terms and is thus fraught with unequal distributions of emotion and expression. At the very least, we learn, Eleanor finds in the narrator’s blind adoration and “constant yearnings” a “receptivity that suited her” (30, 28). This state of affairs continues, with brief interruptions because of distance, for roughly eight years before coming to no fewer than three separate ends: first, when Eleanor confesses to an unnamed

yet apparently cruel deception (more on this narrative gap in the next section); second, when Eleanor marries and moves west; and third, when she dies. In the months after her death, “*It*” – that is, Eleanor’s ghost – begins visiting the narrator: “*It* was there beside me! – unseen, unheard, but felt in the secretest recesses of life and consciousness” (37). This haunting, which most frequently occurs at night and accompanies a series of distinctly erotic touches, continues until Christmas morning, when the ghost identifies herself and asks forgiveness. Ultimately, these visits enable the narrator to reconcile her love for her new male suitor and fiancé, Herman, and her still intense feelings for her deceased lover: “Herman and Eleanor both loved me – I had forgiven; I was forgiven” (42).

We have ample evidence to read this story as a lesbian narrative, one that anticipates the twentieth century’s translation of sexology, with its clinical approach, into the pathological representation of lesbianism as either an immature girl’s rehearsal for heterosexual adulthood or an object lover’s tragic desire, doomed to unrequited heartbreak. Hence, Kristin Comment argues that the story fictionalizes warnings against female masturbation and the female attachments found in mid-century guidebooks, ultimately “foreshadowing ... the clinical pathologization of lesbianism.”¹⁶ In this sense, the ghost stands in for a durable social order that perseveres stubbornly into the present. Take the narrator’s description of one visitation, the closest the story comes to describing an erotic encounter between the two girls or, at least, between the narrator and Eleanor’s ghost:

At first I felt only a sense of alien life in a room otherwise solitary; then a breath of air, air from some other sphere than this, penetrative, dark, chilling; then a sound, not of voice, or pulse, but of motion in some inanimate thing, the motion of contact; then came a touch, the gentlest, faintest approach of lips and fingers, I knew not which, to my brow; and last, a growing, gathering, flickering into sight.

(38)

The narrator’s hesitation here, in which the faint “sense of alien life” builds gradually into the indeterminate “approach of lips and fingers,” bespeaks a desire that fears itself; she is timid or even terrified to embrace the “penetrative, dark, chilling” force for which she so desperately longs. In this sense, the description suggests a scene of masturbation in which a fantasy of sex with Eleanor gathers and flickers just at the edge of consciousness as a doomed possibility the narrator can only barely allow herself to entertain. Such a reading invites us to group the two girls in “My Visitation” within what Heather Love terms the “wicked sisterhood” of “perverse school-girls, vampires, and poetesses” that looms in the “genealogy of the modern

lesbian,” who typically meet with tragic ends and whose presence, like that of a ghost, continues to make itself felt in contemporary representations of lesbian desire, such as David Lynch’s *Mulholland Drive* (2001).¹⁷

Alternately, in a related reading, we might focus on the genre of the ghost story as a remarkably prescient choice on Cooke’s part, the perfect vehicle for identifying a pattern in which, to cite Judith Roof’s influential paradigm, lesbianism appears time and again as a “representational impossibility” – which is to say that even after lesbianism was created as a meaningful sexual category, it nevertheless lacked the terms through which to appear in ways that do not flicker in and out of sight.¹⁸ “Why is it so difficult to see the lesbian – even when she is there, quite plainly in front of us?,” Terry Castle asks before then answering, “In part because she has been ‘ghosted’ – or made to seem invisible – by culture itself.”¹⁹ Perhaps, we can reasonably speculate, Cooke is making a similar point. In this case, the ghostliness of pleasure-inducing lips and fingers stems not from failed masturbatory fantasy but from thwarted potential, or interruption by a social order that at best defers the narrator’s desire until another time and place. Hence, Ralph Poole’s argument that the ghost here prophesizes “future fulfillment.”²⁰ Both of these readings depend on a method that begins with the present and works backward to the terms of Cooke’s story – one that, put differently, reads sexual modernity into its just barely pre-modern past. The value of the readings, to return to Heather Love’s term, lies in the construction of a genealogy that can make visible the ways in which past remnants continue to impact how we conceive of homosexuality and how we represent contemporary lesbian and gay experience.

However, we might instead take as our starting point not the modern lesbian but the precise terms Cooke uses when representing her heroine’s experience, thereby following the inductive method “for interpreting sexuality before ‘homosexuality’” suggested by Jordan Alexander Stein in which we begin with the evidence on the page and then move outward to our categories of analysis.²¹ In this vein, I return to the passage cited earlier in this section and its scene of ghostly visitation. At its most literal, Cooke uses this passage to describe the sensory (and sensual) aspects of her narrator’s encounter with an otherworldly and ephemeral presence, “a sense of alien life in a room otherwise solitary.” Yet in so doing, she also seems to be working against a model of sexuality based solely on the object of one’s core desires. The narrator finds herself immersed in an eroticism that externalizes desire, in which stimulation arises from the frictions and vibrations caused by contact between herself, an ephemeral “breath of air” from another realm, and the seemingly paradoxical liveliness of the material world (“motion in some inanimate thing”). Take, as one small example of the scene’s charge,

the striking repetition of “air,” separated by only a comma (“air, air”), as though, given the right conditions, even air has the ability to rub against itself, initiating vibrations that impact the narrator’s pleasure and fright. At its broadest, then, the scene imagines a sexuality that is more likely to define settings than people, particularly settings that enable the rubbing together of things and realms – human and inhuman, animate and inanimate, material and immaterial, secular and spiritual. It is true that we later learn “*It*” is also Eleanor, so the scene’s eroticism includes something like homosexuality, the desire of one female for another; yet homosexuality alone cannot begin to account for the full range of the scene’s desires and experiences.

Indeed, one of the striking things about these pre-sexological representations is how inadequate something like *sexuality* becomes in any reckoning with the vocabularies and grammars that are used when describing erotic experience. In Cooke’s case, for instance, we may require a religious account as well – specifically one that turns to Spiritualism, a movement involving communication and contact with spirits of the dead that was popular in the United States from the 1840s to the 1920s. Such an association becomes particularly apt if we note that the story itself seems to invoke Spiritualist channeling when it directs its final two sentences not to the reader but to “thee, Eleanor” (42). Whereas our modern, post-sexological categories of sexual definition tend to privatize eroticism and desire as a kind of property belonging to individual subjects, Spiritualism had a very different impulse. As Molly McGarry argues, “crossing the boundary of life itself worked to unsettle a whole series of earthly boundaries,” particularly those between “religion, politics, sexuality, gender, and less easily named modes of existence.”²² In this sense, we might see “My Visitation” less as a lesbian narrative anticipating medicalized demarcations of sexual desire than as a narrative striving to align spiritual embodiment with sexual experience in a way that renders both roomier and better primed to accommodate multiple forms of deviance.

Sex and Race

If sexology constitutes an obvious axis along and against which to place nineteenth-century queer texts, a second axis, racialization, remains still too frequently ignored – an omission that becomes particularly vexing when we consider the degree to which the epistemologies of race and sex interacted in nineteenth-century America. Racialization, which refers to the historical production of racial identities and to the ways that certain characteristics become attached to racially marked bodies, presaged the categorization of sexual behaviors, even as queerness became a potent stigma for reifying

racial hierarchies. Yet these interconnections do not mean we can rest on any easy analogies between racial and sexual histories; nor, as we shall see, do they mean that white queerness always misaligns with white supremacy. Here then, I trace a series of uneven, sometimes contradictory, processes through which race and sex interacted in queer texts.

In *Queering the Color Line*, Siobhan Somerville tracks a history in which mid-nineteenth-century scientific racism, with its insistence on documenting and specifying racially distinct kinds of people, helped clear a path for *scientia sexualis*, with its insistence on documenting and specifying sexually distinct kinds of people. Moreover, scientific racism's obsession with the mixed-race figure and the "unnaturalness" of interracial sex became a useful analogy for the later interest in the invert and the pathology of homosexual sex.²³ As Somerville argues, this conflation between the mulatto, to use the era's common terminology, and the invert emerges perhaps most clearly in the fiction of Pauline Hopkins, particularly in *Contending Forces* (1900) and *Winona* (1902–1903).²⁴ For instance, when the mulatta heroine, Winona, cross-dresses as Allen Pinks and becomes "the prettiest specimen of boyhood," Hopkins registers the conflation of anxieties surrounding both male and female homosexuality as well as mixed-race identity.²⁵ Indeed, we might return to "My Visitation," where one possibility for the content of Eleanor's discovered deception is that she initially hid her own mixed-race identity. Although the evidence for this is inconclusive, it is also far from absent. The text describes Eleanor with tropes that are conventionally used for the tragic mulatta, noting her "long, melancholy eye, with curved, inky lashes," the contrast between her "scarlet lips" and "tiny pearl-grains of teeth," and her "soft, oval cheeks, colorless but not pale, opaque and smooth, betraying Southern blood" (26). We also know that racial passing constituted a keen interest for Rose Terry Cooke, who explores it more explicitly in her short story "A Hard Lesson." When read as a story about homosexual and interracial desire, "My Visitation" reveals the mixed or ambiguously raced person as not only an object of cultural anxiety but also an object of intense erotic interest and fascination.

For at least some queer white men, indigenous peoples, both inside and outside the U.S. territorial border, constituted just such an ambiguously racialized source of erotic fascination that was at once a lurking source of homosexual possibility and a threat to be contained. James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* (1823–1841), for instance, frequently register Natty Bumppo's attraction toward the body and manners of Chingachgook, whom the texts represent as being at once immensely appealing and barbaric. In a somewhat different vein, Melville's South Sea novels *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847) both, as Caleb Crain argues, figure

cannibalism as a stand-in for same-sex desire, which perhaps explains why they seem likely to have been read in late-century homosexual underworlds and found readership among British sexologists, including Havelock Ellis, whom historians credit with the first use of the word “homosexual” in English.²⁶ Likewise, Gregory Tomso argues that Charles Warren Stoddard’s Pacific travel narrative *The Lepers of Molokai* (1885) turns to indigeneity as a site of homosexual potential by figuring native Hawaiians, with their perceived racial difference, as uniquely susceptible to homosexuality and leprosy. In the narrative, Tomso writes, Stoddard “presents leprosy as a spectacle of the flesh that is at once horrifying and erotic, at once forbidding in its evocation of fears of national and racial pollution and alluring in its suggestion of intimate contact with supposedly hypervirile Hawaiian natives.”²⁷ The narrative, that is, renders disease and homosexuality as twinned contagions that, regardless of their Orientalist appeals for Stoddard, threatened the sanctity of national whiteness.²⁸

As the century unfolded, this whiteness – or, more precisely, the family-making white couple through which whiteness reproduced itself – increasingly came to occupy an unquestioned norm against which racial and sexual others were measured. Hence, for instance, the turn to heterosexuality in the wake of the Civil War, when writers sought to reconcile the white North with the white South through romance reunion narratives and the marriages and intersectional progeny they featured.²⁹ Such a tightening around both race and sex of just what counts as normal corresponded to an expansion of what counts as deviant, and this requires us to consider the possibility that we might find queerness in the places we are least likely to go looking, including ostensibly heterosexual relationships that somehow stand apart from privatized, nuclear arrangements. As Cathy J. Cohen writes, “a simple dichotomy between those deemed queer and those deemed heterosexual” lacks the critical subtlety to analyze nonnormative experience.³⁰ Breaking from this “simple dichotomy” allows us to begin seeing the ambivalence toward queerness that marks so many nineteenth-century queer texts, which vacillate between imagining alternatives to hetero-familial paths, on the one hand, and at least partially embracing those paths, on the other hand. For Mark Rifkin, the essays and short stories of the Dakota writer Zitkala-Ša manifest exactly this tension. Zitkala-Ša’s writings clearly resist governmental efforts to use Indian education to position “real and stable love, home, and family” at the center of Indian life, “instead connecting romance to the maintenance of indigenous collective identity and forms of self-determination”; yet they simultaneously disavow “social identities and practices that might be taken by white readers as sexually *nonnormative*.”³¹ For Rifkin, this knotty complexity suggests that we need to consider

the “layered quality” of nonnormative representations, perhaps particularly those by writers of color, as well as the different ways in which writers, readers, and characters experience their distance from the family-making white couple.³²

Such a “layered quality” emerges as well in texts where homosexuality allies itself with white supremacy. A rather blunt example occurs in Leonora Sansay’s 1808 epistolary novel *Secret History; Or, The Horrors of St. Domingo*, which takes the form of letters primarily written by Mary, a white American woman who witnesses firsthand what would come to be known as the Haitian Revolution. At one point, Mary wishes that “the negroes” could again be “reduced to order,” so that she might “be fanned to sleep by the silent slaves, or have [her] feet tickled into extacy [sic] by the soft hand of a female attendant.”³³ Sansay represents what Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman terms “the linkage of sexual abuse, homoeroticism, and racial dominance” under slavery, a linkage that Harriet Jacobs also explores in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), which represents the continued sexual exploitation of a slave, Luke, by his master.³⁴ Frederic Loring’s Civil War novel *Two College Friends* (1871) represents a related connection between homoeroticism and racial dominance by aligning white homosexual romance with racially exclusive nationalism. Although the romantic ties between Ned and the breathtakingly beautiful Tom are cut short with Ned’s honorable death, the novel circulates its accumulated passions of homosexuality as a way of compensating for the potential flatness of more large-scale affective attachments, such as those between citizens. The novel’s penultimate sentence underscores the point, beginning with “These friends, these brothers,” a phrase in which the second half corrects the first by redirecting the intimacy of “friends” toward the fraternity of “brothers.”³⁵ In this way, the novel participated in a larger culture of nationalist sentiment, including the romance reunion narratives that were popular through the end of Reconstruction and the rise of Jim Crow segregation.³⁶ In his analysis of white supremacist literature, Mason Stokes provides one plausible explanation for why white supremacy, even as it idealized and incorporated the heterosexual couple, may have needed a homosocial, even homoerotic collaborator; he argues that heterosexuality in a racially diverse society always comes with the threat of miscegenation. In a system where the biological reproduction of whiteness “risk[s] contamination,” homosexuality might comprise “the only structure of desire that can keep whiteness white.”³⁷

Taken together, these patterns of race and sex underscore the difficulty of disentangling racialization from the history of sexuality or of predetermining the nature of their relationship. Moreover, similar arguments could be made that this conclusion characterizes not only sex and race but also sex

and religion, sex and region, sex and nation, sex and freedom, sex and terror, sex and sovereignty, sex and democracy, and sex and reform – a list that only barely gets us started. Knowing this, our readings into the queer past become an open engagement with a broad, unexpected world, leaving us, to return to Sarah Orne Jewett’s apt phrase, “more than ever before surprised.”

NOTES

- 1 “The Man Who Thought Himself a Woman,” *The Knickerbocker* (Dec. 1857): 609.
- 2 For good places to begin research on these canonical depictions of queerness, see, respectively, H. Jordan Landry, “Animal/Insectual/Lesbian Sex: Dickinson’s Queer Version of the Birds and the Bees,” *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 9, no. 2 (2000): 42–54; Leo Bersani, “Incomparable America,” in *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 136–154; Kathryn R. Kent, *Making Girls into Women: American Women’s Writing and the Rise of Lesbian Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 43–104; and Heather Love, “Gyn/Apology: Sarah Orne Jewett’s Spinster Aesthetics” *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 55, no. 3–4 (2009): 305–334.
- 3 Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables* (New York: Penguin, 1986), 154. When citing these two versions of queerness, scholars frequently claim that the latter, more general definition at least includes the former, which pertains more specifically to homosexuality. One thing the nineteenth century has to teach us, however, is that it is also possible to identify moments of clear separation when homosexuality aligns itself comfortably with everyday normalcy.
- 4 Jordan Alexander Stein, “*The Blithedale Romance’s* Queer Style,” *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 55, no. 3–4 (2009): 214.
- 5 Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; Or, The Whale*, in *The Writings of Herman Melville*, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 6:416.
- 6 Caleb Crain, “Melville’s Secrets,” *Leviathan* 14, no. 3 (2012): 6.
- 7 Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 145; Cesare Casarino, *Modernity at Sea: Melville, Marx, Conrad in Crisis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 175; Elizabeth Barnes, *Love’s Whipping Boy: Violence and Sentimentality in the American Imagination* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 78.
- 8 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 53–73.
- 9 Here I refer to events that popularized and propagated sexual categorization schemes. Historians of sexuality also point to previous significant events in the history of sexology, including Heinrich Kaan’s publication of an earlier *Psychopathia Sexualis* in 1844; Karl Heinrich Ulrichs’s use of *Urning*, a term roughly synonymous with “invert,” in 1862; and Karl Maria Kertbeny’s use of the term “homosexual” in 1868.
- 10 Useful places to begin research on key sexological texts, the Wilde trials, and the “girl lovers” murder trial include, respectively, Lucy Bland and Laura Doan, eds., *Sexology in Culture: Labeling Bodies and Desires* (Chicago: University of

- Chicago Press, 1999); Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side* (New York: Routledge, 1992); and Lisa Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).
- 11 Sarah Orne Jewett, *A Country Doctor* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 223. See also Josephine Donovan, "Nan Prince and the Golden Apples," *Colby Library Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (1986): 17–27.
 - 12 Ralph Werther, *Autobiography of an Androgyne* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 45, 55. For sexology's influence on Werther, see Scott Herring's introduction, especially xviii–xxiv.
 - 13 I have in mind here Scott Herring's useful phrase "sexual unknowing" in *Queering the Underworld: Slumming, Literature, and the Undoing of Lesbian and Gay History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 60.
 - 14 Peter Coviello, *Tomorrow's Parties: Sex and the Untimely in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 16, 42.
 - 15 Rose Terry Cooke, "My Visitation," in *Two Friends and other Nineteenth-Century Lesbian Stories by American Women Writers*, ed. Susan Koppelman (New York: Meridian, 1994), 26; hereafter cited in text.
 - 16 Kristin M. Comment, "'When It Ceases to Be Silly It Becomes Actually Wrong': The Cultural Contexts of Female Homoerotic Desire in Rose Terry Cooke's 'My Visitation,'" *Legacy* 26, no. 1 (2009): 26–47. In a similar vein, Elizabeth Ammons reads the story as a journey wherein the narrator's fulfilled same-sex desire is repressed, forcing her to become monstrous to herself and ultimately leading her into madness. Elizabeth Ammons, introduction to "*How Celie Changed Her Mind*" and *Selected Stories*, by Rose Terry Cooke (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986), ix–xxxviii.
 - 17 Heather Love, "Spectacular Failure: The Figure of the Lesbian in *Mulholland Drive*," *New Literary History* 35, no. 1 (2004): 121.
 - 18 Judith Roof, "The Match in the Crocus: Representations of Lesbian Sexuality," in *Discontented Discourses: Feminism, Textual Intervention, and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Marleen S. Barr and Richard Feldstein (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 103.
 - 19 Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 4.
 - 20 Ralph J. Poole, "Body Rituals: The (Homo)Erotics of Death in Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Rose Terry Cooke, and Edgar Allan Poe," in *Soft Canons: American Women Writers and Masculine Tradition*, ed. Karen L. Kilcup (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999), 257.
 - 21 Stein, "The Blithedale Romance's Queer Style," 214. In a related argument, Dana Luciano suggests that historians of sexuality ought to "understand the category of 'sex' as speculative rather than given." Dana Luciano, *Arranging Grief: Sacred Time and the Body in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 11.
 - 22 Molly McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 159–160.
 - 23 Siobhan B. Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 15–38.

- 24 Ibid., 77–110.
- 25 Pauline Hopkins, *Winona: A Tale of Negro Life in the South and Southwest*, in *The Magazine Novels of Pauline Hopkins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 388.
- 26 See Caleb Crain, “Lovers of Human Flesh: Homosexuality and Cannibalism in Melville’s Novels,” *American Literature* 66, no. 1 (1994): 25–53; George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 284; and Jordan Alexander Stein, “American Literary History and Queer Temporalities,” *American Literary History* 25, no. 5 (2013): 862–863.
- 27 Gregory Tomso, “The Queer History of Leprosy and Same-Sex Love,” *American Literary History* 14, no. 4 (2002): 747.
- 28 For a related account of the interaction between heterosexuality and colonialism, see Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).
- 29 See Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).
- 30 Cathy J. Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3, no. 4 (1997): 440.
- 31 Mark Rifkin, “Romancing Kinship: A Queer Reading of Indian Education and Zitkala-Ša’s *American Indian Stories*,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12, no. 1 (2006): 29–30.
- 32 Ibid., 48.
- 33 Leonora Sansay, *Secret History; Or, The Horrors of St. Domingo and Laura* (New York: Broadview Press, 2007), 73.
- 34 Aliyyah I. Abdur-Rahman, “‘The Strangest Freaks of Despotism’: Queer Sexuality in Antebellum African American Slave Narratives,” *African American Review* 40, no. 2 (2006): 231.
- 35 Frederick Loring, *Two College Friends* (Boston: Loring, 1871), 161.
- 36 See Travis M. Foster, “Campus Novels and the Nation of Peers,” *American Literary History* 26, no. 3 (2014): 462–483.
- 37 Mason Stokes, *The Color of Sex: Whiteness, Heterosexuality, and the Fictions of White Supremacy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 18.