The Manly Love of Comrades

Male Romantic Friendship and Masculinity
in "Tennessee's Partner," *The Shadow of a Dream*,
and *Home to Harlem*

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A Song

Come, I will make the continent indissoluble;
I will make the most splendid race the sun ever yet shone upon;
I will make divine magnetic lands,
With the love of comrades,
With the life-long love of comrades.

I will plant companionship thick as trees along all the rivers of America, and along the shores of the great lakes and all over the prairies;
I will make inseparable cities, with their arms about each other's necks;
By the love of comrades,
By the manly love of comrades.

For you these, from me, O Democracy, to serve you, ma femme!
For you! for you, I am trilling these songs,
In the love of comrades,
In the high-towering love of comrades.

Walt Whitman, 1860

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Introduction

1.1. An artefact of the nineteenth century

Throughout some of the most important works of Western literature, male friendship has played a part; sometimes a cameo, sometimes the leading role. In sagas, novels, short stories, plays, cartoons, and films, from pre-Babylonian to modern times, men have fought side by side, conquered the wild, escaped the civilized – and female – world, and pledged each other eternal love and loyalty. The Gilgamesh epic's eponymous hero and Enkidu, the Bible's David and Jonathan, and the *Iliad*'s Achilles and Patroclus are all early literary examples of men's intimate bonds. Male friendship may safely be called a recurrent theme in literature, both as myth and as a reflection of a real phenomenon, but it has also greatly changed in accordance with the shifting social positions of men and women.

The Victorians saw a particular flowering of male romantic friendship both in real life and in fiction, although it radically changed during the course of the nineteenth century. In fact, the general acceptance of the love "passing the love of women" ended along with the era. I will explore some examples of male friendship literature in relation to the different societies that produced it, not only in the heyday of the Victorian era, but also in its decline, and finally, after male romantic friendship in hegemonic society subsided. To this purpose, I will analyze and compare one short story and two novels that celebrate, illustrate, and at times question male friendship and its borders. Written from different temporal, cultural, racial,

geographical, and class based viewpoints, my chosen literary works are Bret Harte's short story "Tennessee's Partner" (1869), William Dean Howells's novel *The Shadow of a Dream* (1890), and Claude McKay's novel *Home to Harlem* (1928).

The same-sex friendships that America fostered in the nineteenth century developed chiefly in the white middle class, and, so far at least, *female* romantic friendships in this social class have been the most well-known type of same-sex bond.[1] Comparatively little is known of intimate male relationships, and only recently have these friendships been brought in from the historical cold to be recognized as equally ardent and perhaps equally widespread as their female counterpart. Although romantic friendships were most common within the middle class, working-class men and women who did not have a traditional family also formed such ties, according to the historians John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman (121). Along with most other modern historians, D'Emilio and Freedman believe these friendships to be asexual, owing to the scarcity of any such recordings by contemporary observers and the twentieth-century taboo attached to homosexuality (121-2). Moreover, physical attraction between two men was accepted at that point in time partly because reproduction played such a fundamental role in the understanding of sexuality. Sexual attraction was simply unimaginable between two people of the same sex; in fact, extravagant expressions of love both verbal and physical, by for example kissing and sharing the same bed, were not interpreted as sexual behaviour. If homosexuality was discussed at all, it was not as a defining characteristic of an individual as it to a large extent is today, but rather as an action (termed sodomy) that was done once or repeatedly. Sexuality was not essential to the creation of a person's identity, and *being* homosexual was not yet an imagined possibility.

E. Anthony Rotundo writes that "[r]omantic male friendship is an artefact of the nineteenth century" (qtd. in Nardi 3). One of many reasons why it (ostensibly) disappeared

[1] See Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's "The Female World of Love and Ritual" (1975) and Lillian Faderman's *Surpassing the Love of Men* (1981).

was the coming of sexuality as a defining characteristic. Previously, the main fault line was between procreative and non-procreative sex. All forms of non-procreative sexual pleasure were problematized, but increasingly men who had sex with men became the most tabooed form (Nissen, *Homo/Hetero* 23). In the 1870s this was for the first time known under the name "homosexuality." When sex was increasingly seen as a corollary of love, the phobia about *sex* between men evolved into a phobia about *love* between men. With homosexuality, homophobia was a more integral part of everyday sexual relations and contributed to make close friendships between men look suspect, whether they were sexual or not.

Moreover, the nineteenth century also witnessed important changes in the realm of friendship and love. Friendship had up to that point been a distinctive masculine endeavour, characterized in traditional male terms as bravery, loyalty, self-sacrifice, and heroism (Hammond and Jablow 241). In Victorian America, too much, or too close, physical contact with other men only established a man as more masculine, while an excessive interest in the opposite sex would rather decrease his manliness in the eyes of the perceiver, according to Steven Seidman (7). Towards the end of the century, the definition of friendship took a feminine turn when traditional feminine qualities like intimacy, trust, caring, and nurturing came to define it. Men's relationships became increasingly "side-by-side" instead of "face-to-face," in Peter M. Nardi's terms (5), implying that men would, for example, prefer to do things together rather than talk intimately. The concepts of love and marriage changed when women gained more individual and economic freedom, as Francesca M. Cancian points out (16). Love became feminized while the conception of self-development became masculinized, she argues, and thus, the new masculinity ideal emphasized the importance of being autonomous and independent (5). The modern man of America's white middle-class was not supposed to need a soul mate any longer.

Axel Nissen suggests that companionate marriages also affected the increasingly restrained way in which middle-class men were expressing their love for each other. This, as well as the tendency toward cross-sex friendship, competed with same-sex friendships' function of providing closeness and affection ("Departments" 118). As Cancian also indicates, the bond between husband and wife in the eighteenth century was not one of romance. The union was characterized by shared work, religion, discipline, and obedience to the patriarch, both by children and wife (Cancian 17). When this patriarchal model slowly disintegrated, the ideal of companionate marriages was articulated. It "identified the family with marriage, not parenthood, and emphasized emotional and sexual intimacy between husband and wife" (43). If the bourgeois Victorian man needed intimate loving support, he would now turn to his wife, not his male friend.

The changes that began in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century became manifest during the 1920s. According to D'Emilio and Freedman, "[b]y the 1920s Americans were clearly entering a new sexual era. . . . By comparison with the past, American society in the 1920s seemed to embrace the sexual" (233-4). There is little doubt that a new order had arisen, although much of the old mindset was still present. The main difference from today's America in sexual matters was still the lack of a clear homo/hetero binary, and, as the historian George Chauncey explains, the lack of the gay "closet" (23). Instead, there was a jungle of different orientations for a flowering gay subculture. While the visibility of this culture and the way it was integrated into the straight world mark the 1920s off as a turning point in sexual history, the definition of what was deemed normal and abnormal remained quite unchanged. In the 1920s, the culture of the black urban working class based some key aspects of their definition of masculinity on a negation of the hegemonic white, middle-class culture of the late nineteenth century. Still, however, gender was the most important identification category, not sexuality. Some male friendships in this culture might

still be innocent, emotionally and physically open, and in some cases as "romantic" as the friendships from the Victorian era.

Where does friendship end and romantic love begin? In the Victorian romantic friendships there was no sharp break. The intimate friendships between men were beyond ordinary friendship and beyond filial love, and at the same time somewhere in between the two. For most modern American men, friendship is something else than romantic love, and certainly something very far from a sexual relationship. For many, heterosexual male to male relationships are not, and cannot be, romantic. Intense love may not be combined with an aggressive, "macho" masculinity, which is our society's "hegemonic masculinity," as R. W. Connell has famously termed the one form of masculinity that is culturally exalted at any given moment (77).[2] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has theorized this modern rupture in the continuum between homosocial and homosexual. In *Between Men* (1985) she explains:

> "Homosocial" is a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with "homosexual," and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from 'homosexual.' . . . To draw the "homosocial" back into the orbit of "desire," of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual – a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted. (1-2)

There was in the nineteenth century a firm line that cut off the overtly sexual act from the continuum of friendship, but to a much greater degree in the nineteenth century than after, men were allowed to act on all the levels of this continuum (2). This, however, does not change the fact that male networks still play an important role in love relations as in power relations, both within and across the gender lines. The historian Michael Kimmel states that:

> In large part, it's other men who are important to American men; American men define their masculinity, not as much in relation to women, but in relation to each other. Masculinity is largely a homosocial enactment. . . . The historical record underscores this homosociality. From the early nineteenth century until the present

[2] The methodology of hegemonic masculinity has been and is a fruitful tool for men's studies. However, in a recent study by historian Martin Summers, the model is criticized for its tendency to over-emphasize power and leave marginalized masculinities invisible (10). I consider this to only be a danger when this model is used exclusively.

> day, much of men's relentless effort to prove their manhood contains this core element of homosociality. From fathers and boyhood friends to teachers, coworkers, and bosses, the evaluative eyes of other men are always upon us, watching, judging. (*Manhood in America* 7)

In other words, homosociality is still highly important for the making of masculinities, although in a different form.

Because of the strict contemporary boundaries for "male homosocial desire," to adopt Sedgwick's terminology, hegemonic masculinity hardly makes room for acts of friendship performed within the modern feminine friendship paradigm. Small wonder, then, that "studies of friendship today consistently argue that close friendship is rarely experienced by men in our culture" (Nardi 3), although their reasoning varies from the biological to the structural. The sociologist Nancy Chodorow, for example, uses the Freudian theory of gender development in her attempt to explain seemingly universal gender differences (1978). In her theory, children learn gender differences via their attachment or estrangement from the mother. Because males' disruption of the bond with the mother is much harder than for females, being a matter of *dis*identification rather than identification, they gain less sensitivity and emotional compassion than women. In other words they will, according to her theory, have less capability of expressing love.

Her theory has been greatly acclaimed, but also criticized by various scholars. Anthony Giddens, another important and more recent sociologist, recognizes some of its weaknesses but nevertheless states that "[h]er ideas teach us a good deal about the nature of femininity, and they help us to understand the origins of what has been called male inexpressiveness – the difficulty men have in revealing their feelings to others" (111). By referring to Chodorow's biological theory, Giddens here gives the impression that "male inexpressiveness" is intrinsic, ahistorical, and prediscursive, a notion that in the last decades

has been more or less defeated by feminists and gender researchers.[3] Yet "male inexpressiveness" is still often interpreted as a given, both by scholars and people in general.

The story of "male inexpressiveness" walks hand in hand with the story of male romantic friendship, because one of the greatest changes in the realm of friendship has not been its nature, but its expression. What Giddens really means with "male inexpressiveness," I suspect, is men's ostensible unwillingness or lack of ability to engage in intimate friendships with other men; towards women, their restraints are supposed to be somewhat lessened (Cohen 115). Nonetheless, there are countless examples of cultures elevating male passion. As Jeffrey Richards has pointed out, "manly love" was a central aspect of the definition of masculinity in the nineteenth century (qtd. in Nardi 2). In the rhetoric of frontier manhood, for example, "passionate manhood" was particularly encouraged and connected to the wild, primitive nature of men (Rotundo 222, 231). As a form of ideal manhood, this "primitive" nature was also sought after in the big, urban capitals (Kimmel 399 n. 25). This half-fantasy, half-reality existed somewhat parallel with the bourgeois manhood in the late nineteenth century, which was increasingly defined "through intellectual capacity [and] self-control of one's emotions and natural (but 'uncivilized') urges" (Summers 79).

In his landmark study *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1968), Leslie Fiedler points to a number of stories wherein two men rescue each other from dangers imposed on them by the civilization which they are trying to escape. The typical male protagonist of American fiction, he claims, "has been a man on the run, harried into the forest and out to the sea, down to the river or into combat – anywhere to avoid 'civilization', which is to say, the confrontation of a man and woman which leads to the fall to sex, marriage, and responsibility" (25-6). Fiedler's claim is infamous for defining American literature in

[3] See, for example, Toril Moi's "What Is a Woman? Sex, Gender and the Body in Feminist Theory."

exclusively male terms,[4] but it nevertheless points to an important condition that will make a conversation partner for me through the three works of literature, namely the binary opposition of primitivism versus civilization. In the late nineteenth-century masculinity ideal this duality is expressed in the possibilities for manhood: a man could either be a loving, caring husband, "civilized," as it were, or he could break free of the feminine civilization, "light out for the Territory" as Mark Twain's Huck Finn famously did with his best friend Jim.

The celebration of "primitivism," by which I mean conscious or unconscious celebration of something wild, natural, free, and emotionally open (qualities that in the nineteenth century often were seen as masculine) may have encouraged and enabled intimate male relationships. When the word "civilization" emerged in the eighteenth century, it originally entailed the elevation above barbarism. As an opposition to the masculine primitiveness, it gradually came to be understood as something domesticated and feminine (Rotundo 251-2). The binary may be seen as *externalized* gender, not only to the physical appearance of the male body, but to the body's surroundings. The categories embody a continuing negotiation where the definitions and limits of "proper" masculinity are shifted and pushed, and where the most serious transgressing will be punished (in Victorian literature often by a symbolic death). These concepts recur in all the three works of literature in highly different guises. Sometimes, feminization stabilizes the friendship, but at other times, it is its worst enemy. Women have most often in history been connected with nature, and men with culture.[5] This, however, is only superficially contradicting the case of American cultural myth. While women often have been seen to *be* or *do* nature, in the nineteenth-century myth

[4] See Nina Baym's "Melodramas of Beset Manhood" for a forceful statement of this point. For an account of how Fiedler's theories have been the subject of controversy, see Mark Royden Winchell, "*Too Good to Be True: The Life and Work of Leslie Fiedler*."
[5] See, for example, Sherry B. Ortner's "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?"

men were *in* nature, establishing their masculinity in the act of *civilizing* it – and leaving women to further domesticate it.

1.2. Methodologies and theories

While I have chosen to investigate romantic friendship literature in terms of verisimilitude, or how it reflects actual phenomena, Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow see the depiction of brotherly love in literature exclusively as a literary theme, working as a dubious celebration of patriarchal ideology. Like Fiedler, they see male friendship as a myth, but they conclude that it is in deep discrepancy with anthropological evidence: "That men bond to form friendships is an ideal that derives less from the work of scholars than from an overriding cultural assumption. This cultural article of faith is expressed in an elaborate stereotype of men and a related stereotype of friendship as the special proclivity and province of men. The stereotype idealizes men's capacities for loyalty, devotion, and self-sacrifice" (241). Their theory raises an important point: literature cannot be regarded as documentary depictions of society, and is in that respect closer to cultural and individual translations of reality, which of course may develop into or reflect existing myths. I agree with Hammond and Jablow in that male friendship also has the form of myth, but as opposed to them, I argue that the myths indeed are based in actual men's lives and loves. I moreover believe that, to a large extent, male friendship's borders work as reflectors of current trends in gender roles that mirror other important societal aspects (such as class and race).

David H. Richter writes in 1994 that "lately the principal division within the profession has shifted; the primary breach is no longer between theorists and anti-theorists, but between those who want to study literature for its own sake and those for whom the study of literature is primarily a way of investigating present-day social problems that surface in the study of literature of the past" (17). This work falls easily into the latter category: my

discussion is a comparison between three expressions of male friendship rather than comparing three works of literature as such.

Nevertheless, because of the nature of my chosen subject and inquiry, even within the realm of the socio-literary my methodology is rather eclectic. While it is not possible to give my methodology one specific label, it is at least partly inspired by some important directions in modern literary theory, namely reader-response theory and new historicism. Moreover, theories on gender, specifically men's studies, queer theory, and feminist theory, are ubiquitous and form the most important groundwork this thesis rests on. In its eclecticism this also represents the current trend in literary theory: rather than concentrate on the author's biography, the text, or the reader, it takes all of these factors into consideration, albeit with unequal emphasis. I will now explain in more detail how the different methodologies are employed.

Reader-response theory plays a small, but central role. I wanted not only to investigate the nature and history of male romantic friendship, but also the different ways this has been perceived through the layers of history. To emphasize the place of the reader in the historical understanding of the male romantic friendship theme, I discuss in Chapter Two the reception of "Tennessee's Partner," thus pointing out the great importance not only of the contemporary milieu of the text and the writer, but also the reader. Reader-response theory has traditionally paid little or no attention to the author, because as the advocates of this theory see it, once the text is in the public realm it is free to be interpreted by everyone in its own right. The text has no meaning without readers, who read it within particular contexts of their own culture which colour their interpretations. To this idea I adhere, but as for the complete exclusion of the authors, I leave the path of reader-response theory, understanding the context in which the text is written to be more important than the context of the reader. This consideration is

especially important as a tool to understand the background of the authors' subjective representation of the world.

Therefore, I emphasize the contextualization of both the texts and the authors in that I actively try to place the texts in a frame of the authors' contemporary understanding of class, race, and especially gender. Because none of the texts can be said to represent more than a small fragment of society, the accounts of the age they are from are limited to the specific class, race, and gender environment they were written about and/or depict. In so far as I see the texts as reflectors that can be unlocked with knowledge of the period, the methodology I use can be said to contain fragments of both old and new historicism. Louis Montrose, a representative of the school of new historicism, writes that "[t]he new orientation to history . . . may be succinctly characterized . . . by its acknowledgement of the historicity of texts. . .; and, on the other hand, by its acknowledgement of the textuality of history" (8). Thus in new historicism, as in post-structuralism, history is also seen as text, and can only be comprehended through text. I read the three main texts as subjective accounts of an historical period in a particular climate that reflects their time. It is the period-centeredness of new historicism that I strive to adopt here, a practice that is, as David Simpson puts it, "not for literature as a whole (the traditional province of theory) but for particular epochs and particular societies" (724).

Moreover, aspects here that are particularly influenced by *new* historicism rather than "old historicism," or historic-biographic theory, are the attempts to reread my chosen texts in the light of a particular discourse or topos, namely intimate friendship between men. Some practices of new historicism will remain untouched, however. For example the particular technique of comparing literary texts with texts of non-literary status will not be used here to any large extent. I aim to balance the way new historicists read literature in history

synchronically with a *diachronic* comparison. Sociologist Judith Halberstam eloquently expresses my concerns regarding methodology in *Female Masculinities*:

> It has proven quite difficult to theorize sexuality and gender deviance in historical ways, and often the field is divided between untheoretical historical surveys and ahistorical theoretical models. Debates about the history of sexuality and the history of gender deviance have also very often reproduced this split, rendering historical sexual forms either universal or completely bound by and to their historical moment. The challenge for new queer history has been, and remains, to produce methodologies sensitive to historical change but influenced by current theoretical preoccupations. (46)

By combining methodologies that may be employed to illuminate different aspects of male friendship, I strive to create a more sensitive understanding of the literary works, their contemporary culture, and especially the theme of male friendship.

In an attempt to balance a view that may seem to rest too heavily on literature as an objective historical tool, I briefly employ Gérard Genette's narrative theory in order to analyse how the texts are formally structured, and to recognize that they are, indeed, only fictional constructions. The formal aspects of the texts also help enlighten issues concerning presence, reliability, and partiality of the narrators when relating these tales of friendship.

Ostensibly, this thesis is about women only in that it is about the *exclusion* of women. However, the creation, maintenance, and character of homosocial networks have everything to do with the status of women in American society. Women in the societies and eras I investigate were all sidelined to varying degrees; in Harte's mining camps, for instance, there are hardly any women at all, while in Howells's middle-class society women are present as models of the female civilizing influence. In McKay's Harlem, women are portrayed more or less as obstacles to true male companionship.

1.3. Organization

The main question I structure my investigation around is how society's sexual mores and conceptions of masculinity influenced the way in which men could be intimate friends. In Chapter Two, "Masculinity and the Tender Harte: 'Tennessee's Partner' in the Wild West," I read Harte's "Tennessee's Partner" in terms of how Harte portrayed male friendship, and in what social, cultural, and gendered space he wrote. I have chosen this short story because it was written and set in the heyday of male romantic friendship and is a tale of exquisitely tender emotions between two men. Set in the Wild West, it portrays a typical rough masculinity idealized both then and later through fiction and films. My focus in the analysis will be how the friendship mirrored gendered conceptions of civilization and the traditionally female civilizing part of a relationship.

Howells said of Harte that Harte was "quite a unique figure in American authorship, not only that he writes of unhackneyed things, but that he looks at the life he treats in uncommon lights." Nonetheless, Howells notes in particular "the entirely masculine temper of his mind, or rather a habit of concerning himself with the things that please only men" (qtd. in Nissen, *The Romantic Friendship Reader* 52). Harte's middle-class white masculinity is reversely echoed in his desire for the wilderness, to the "core of masculinity," which he described from a bourgeois setting. In the third chapter, "In Sickness and in Health: *The Shadow of a Dream* and the Three-Cornered Household," it will be apparent how Howells did not seek the wilderness to explore the psyche of his characters. Dealing with things feminine in a more obvious manner than his friend and colleague, the masculinity he conveys in *The Shadow of a Dream* is coloured by its setting in a middle-class bourgeois milieu. While the "healthy" masculinities he depicts may be interpreted as hegemonic in the American culture, romantic friendship is made suspicious through presenting men who love men as sick in body and mind. I read this representation of what men should or should not be to a large extent in

relation to the coming of marriage as an institution of romance, an important theme in the novel as well as the era.

In the fourth chapter, "'Under Your Tough Black Hide': Friends and Fairies in *Home to Harlem*," I investigate the reactions to the restrained late-Victorian manliness and the expression of a male romantic friendship in a culture (perhaps paradoxically) similar to the ideal of frontier manliness. The depicted masculinities in the two first chapters are narrowly considered only in reaction with women, societal (sexual and other) mores, and other classes. That the issue of race is not overtly addressed in "Tennessee's Partner" nor *The Shadow of a Dream* does not imply that it is not of the highest importance, because their whiteness is in itself one of the chief contributors to their understanding of their own gender identity. This is one reason as to why the running discussion of civilization and domesticity is so inextricable from that of primitivism; white men were, by virtue of this specific property, hegemonic, "civilized," and would, consciously or not, compare themselves to black "primitive" masculinity, both positively and negatively.

Home to Harlem must not be seen exclusively as a corrective to the other two texts, neither in terms of race nor its situation in post-Victorian urban society where traditionally tales of male romantic friendship have not been looked for. This portrayal of black masculinity is just as much a story about men's own agency and reactions within their own community. My argument in the last chapter is that despite the increasing interest and focus on sexuality, the primary identification category is still gender, and the increasing homophobia or their own possible homoerotic desire does not inhibit the friends' intimate relationship. The culture's encouragement of homosociality and the low position of women further enable such a relationship to develop, leaving the main identification marker in terms of difference to be not women, but rather men of other colours and classes.

2

Masculinity and the Tender Harte: "Tennessee's Partner" in the Wild West

NEVER SUCH MEN!
NEVER SUCH WOMEN!
- In the West THAT WAS…
And *NEVER* WILL BE AGAIN![6]

2.1. Frontier fantasy

One of Bret Harte's (1836-1902) early biographers, Henry Childs Merwin, wrote some ten years after Harte's death that "[i]n Bret Harte's stories woman is subordinated to man, and love is subordinated to friendship. This is a strange reversal of modern notions, but it was the reflection of his California experience, - reinforced, possibly, by some predilection of his own" (157). Merwin, it appears, sees Harte's treatment of male friendship as limited to one location and one period in time, a trend very different from the "modern notions" of Merwin's own time. As much as romantic friendship was also a trend of the whole age, there was nonetheless something special about Californian conditions during the Gold Rush, the period in the middle of the nineteenth century which Harte so often wrote about. Women were scarce, a harsh physical reality reigned, and strong bonds between the men who experienced it together were created. As a contemporary report reads:

[6] Slogan from the trailer for Allan Dwan's film adaptation of "Tennessee's Partner" (1955).

> Two men who lived together, slept in the same cabin, ate together, took turns cooking and washing, tended on each other in sickness, and toiled day in and day out side by side, and made an equal division of their losses and gains, were regarded and generally regarded themselves as having entered into a very intimate tie, a sort of band of brotherhood, almost as sacred as that of marriage. The word 'partner,' or 'pard' as it was usually contracted, became the most intimate and confidential term that could be used." (S. C. Upham qtd. in Merwin 158)

Although descriptions like these indicate that Harte's male characters are both typical and apt, questions have been raised as to the verisimilitude of Harte's local colour literature, with its "romanticism that sentimentalized and stereotyped both settings and characters" (Gottesman, "Bret Harte" 1473). The depiction of male friendship first and foremost represents Harte's own ideals.

Harte was included in a social circle that Andrew J. Hoffman describes as "bohemian," where they "lived marginally, drank excessively, espoused effete literary aesthetics, and boasted an especially high tolerance for sexual ambiguity" (27). Harte displayed his high tolerance in stories that proved him liberal towards such controversial topics as miscegenation and prostitution; this is perhaps why it is especially in the field of gender studies that he has caught the renewed interest and imagination of contemporary literary scholars. Although Harte's stories frequently lacked female components and the men he depicted were often blatantly misogynistic, his characters' overt misogyny is mostly confined to a general scepticism towards women themselves, and seldom included all things feminine. The subject of men cast in traditional female roles, for example, is something he explored more than once. In the title story of his first significant collection of short stories *The Luck of Roaring Camp and Other Sketches* (1870), an all-male mining camp find that they are capable of bringing up a child without the aid of women, employing their intellect, compassion, and care. In his description of the men's abilities as nurturers, Harte convincingly dismantles the restrictions of what men could or could not do.[7] Even though

[7] See, for example, Nissen, "The Feminization" for a discussion of this short story.

"The Luck" was seen by a young and female proofreader to be "indecent, irreligious, and improper" (Pemberton 57), the men in "The Luck" did not contradict the masculine code. Still, it was the rough and wild part of masculinity that most often was remade through Western fantasies. As Michael Kimmel writes: "No sooner was the frontier 'closed' in reality than it was reopened through fantasies of manly confrontation with the wild and untamed" (*Manhood in America* n. pag.). The wilderness and men in Harte's short stories were things of the past by the time he wrote their story from his secure middle-class position.

In this chapter I consider the nature and acceptance of a close man-to-man friendship and its relation to the community in Harte's short story "Tennessee's Partner," a story about the love of a miner for his partner, Tennessee, in a gold mining community in California in 1854. Shortly after Tennessee's partner gets married to a waitress, Tennessee runs off with her. He returns after the waitress has eloped with someone else, and the expected duel between Tennessee and his partner is surprisingly replaced by a hearty welcome. When Tennessee's highwayman habits eventually put him in front of a judge, the partner attempts to rescue him from the scaffold by way of a bribe, but fails. He buries Tennessee after the hanging, attended by men from the mining society. Shortly after this, he dies.

First published in the *Overland Monthly* in 1869, it was included alongside "The Luck" in the 1870 collection. "Tennessee's Partner" is one of the most archetypal of Harte's male friendship tales, which constitute a substantial bulk of Harte's prolific literary production. In the chapter's first part I present an overview of this short story's reception since publication, through both harsh criticism and panegyric praise. Subsequently, I investigate how Harte portrayed a male romantic friendship while considering in what social, cultural, and gendered space he wrote, especially in relation to the contemporary discourse of domesticity.

2.2. The critical attention of "Tennessee's Partner"

There is a great leap of time and space, and especially culture and class, between Harte's miners and the immediate audience fifteen years later. Harte himself was far from the virile and emotionally free manhood of the frontier when he wrote "Tennessee's Partner." The story can thus be read as a fantasy, a way to solve the problems of masculinity in the bourgeois family life of a nineteenth-century man. That male romantic friendship was highly sensitive to the changing of time and environment is apparent also in the reactions to "Tennessee's Partner"; in due course the story is idealized, scoffed at, and, inevitably, homoeroticized. At the time of publication, however, the story was received as a typical expression of the celebration of primitive masculinity, and, on the whole, the public loved his work. The *Buffalo Express* merely represented the voice of the general American public when it stated that "[n]othing so thoroughly picturesque or so thoroughly native in subject and spirit has appeared yet in American literature, nor has a finer genius displayed itself than that to which we owe these Californian sketches" (qtd. in Nissen, *Bret Harte* 96).

At the end of Harte's lifetime, T. Edgar Pemberton, his friend and first biographer, celebrated the sentimentality in "Tennessee's Partner." Cheering on everything from the works to the man, he asked if anyone "with the soul to understand it ever [will] forget the exquisite pathos of the ending of the beautiful story" (57), and he indignantly rushes to its defence: "And yet I have heard goody-goody would-be critics speak of this beautiful prose poem as . . . 'singular.' Such people will always exist, and, most happily for humanity, Bret Harte does not appeal to them, but to the 'great heart of the nation'" (68-9).

The "goody-goody would-be critics'" general point of worry is the overt sentimentality the partner (and the story itself) so shamelessly displays, and not, as would be the case a century later, the nature of the relationship between the men. Professor Josiah Royce, a philosopher and colleague of William James and historian of the Californian gold

rush, for example, was particularly interested in the effect of the gold on the miners' morals and drew a harsh picture of California that sharply contrasted with Harte's comparatively idealized image. Royce found a negative consequence of the gold to be "brutal passion,"[8] and he is reported to have spoken of Harte's sketches as "perverse romanticism" (Merwin 53). However, Royce's attack on Harte is likely to have its roots in his own project of describing California in a manner diametrically opposed to Harte's.

Moreover, Mark Twain, notably Harte's ex-friend and at the point of writing his bitter enemy, wrote in the margins of his copy of "Tennessee's Partner": "Does the artist show a clear knowledge of human nature when he makes his hero welcome back a man who has committed against him that sin which neither the great nor the little ever forgive? - & not only welcome him back but love him with the fondling of a girl to the last, & then pine and die for the loss of him?" (qtd. in Nissen, *Romantic Friendship Reader* 52). Paradoxically, Twain's own Huckleberry Finn and his friend, the escaping slave Jim, were Leslie Fiedler's prime examples and constituted the basis for his famous hypothesis of the intrinsic homoerotic nature of American literature.[9] Twain's comment may be explained by his highly antagonistic feelings toward Harte, rather than a genuine misunderstanding of the character of the friendship between the partner and Tennessee. Typically, however, the partner's devotion is described as girlish, and it is the "fondling" that is marked feminine. This was a gender transgression that Twain was not alone in questioning, although it was not until later that this became the most common objection.

In 1912 Merwin described some of the pioneers, specifically the ones that came from the Western and Southwestern states, as "somewhat ignorant, slow and rough, but of boundless courage and industry, stoical as Indians, independent and self-reliant. Most of Bret Harte's tragic characters, such as Tennessee's Partner, Madison Wayne, and the Bell-Ringer

[8] http://www.dsloan.com/Auctions/A12/66WebA12.htm
[9] See Fiedler 270- 90.

of Angel's, were of this class" (56). Merwin describes Harte's men as epitomes of "primitive" manliness, while he at the same time describes close friendship in nostalgic terms, writing that "[i]n California, owing to the absence of women and the exigencies of mining, friendship for a brief and brilliant period, never probably to recur, became once more an heroic passion" (158). Interestingly, Merwin seems to regard Harte's men and the culture in mid-century California with the same aloof cool as he regards "classic times," and he considers the trend of male romantic friendship to be conclusively over. Even though he reads Harte's depiction as a kind of a curiosity that has no influential power because it is too far away in both time and space, and, ultimately, is not likely to recur, he perceives the men as both masculine heroes *and* having a close man-to-man friendship.

His response is typical of its kind, but Harte's story generally ceased to evoke such readings after Merwin. "Sentimentalism" is from this point onwards the most repeated criticism of Harte. David Wyatt understands Harte's fall from fame to be a direct consequence of "the repeated claims about the attenuation of emotion that we label 'sentimental'" (xi). Joanne Dobson links in "Reclaiming Sentimental Literature" sentimentalism first and foremost to women's writing in the middle of the nineteenth century, writing that "[f]or many of the critics who have approached American sentimentalism over the past fifty years (and many earlier critics as well), sentimental writing is *inherently* false in sentiment and/or unskilled in expression. It is, quite simply, not *literary*" (263). There is no wonder that Harte did not keep his place in the literary sun in a time when his style was not even perceived as literary. Incidentally, that the understanding of sentimentalism also is subject to change is apparent in this assessment of Merwin's: "[Harte] abhorred sentimentality in literature, and the few examples of it in his writings may be ascribed to the influence of Dickens" (284).

In 1943, Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, who were the most influential critics of the story for decades, wrote in *Understanding Fiction* that

> [e]arly in the story occurs an incident which ordinarily strains partnerships past the breaking point. Tennessee runs off with his partner's wife. . . . Why does Bret Harte use this incident? He obviously uses it to prepare for the scene which he considers to be the *climax* . . . of his story – the scene of the 'funeral service.' Certainly, if Tennessee's Partner can so readily forgive Tennessee for stealing his wife, he may be expected to perform the easier task of burying his friend. . . . But why does Tennessee's Partner forgive Tennessee so easily for the wife-stealing? (215)

They conclude that "Bret Harte has dodged the real psychological issue of his story" (215), and label the story 'sentimental.' Sentimentalism, reveals their own glossary, is "[e]motional response in excess of the occasion; emotional response which has not been prepared for in the story in question" (608). The wife-stealing, they argue, is the "real psychological issue;" the story is sentimental because the partner's emotions cannot fully be explained on this basis. Their argument is interesting because it embodies the general anxiety of men having what would in the twentieth century be considered feminine qualities, like tenderness, forgiveness, and the expression of emotions. Understanding the men's relationship to be built on a strictly heterosexual basis, they cannot explain why Tennessee is forgiven and suggest that the real intention of the forgiveness is to serve as a psychological basis for the service rendered in the funeral. They overlook that this service is prepared for thoroughly by the partner's love depicted throughout the entire story, and that burying his friend nowhere in the story is seen as a burden and consequently would not need to be prepared for in such an elaborate manner. Their repeated questioning of why the partner could forgive Tennessee underscores their lack of comprehension of the writer, the period in which the story was written, and first and foremost, the subject matter.

Why *did* Tennessee's Partner forgive Tennessee? A question that must have seemed so justified at the time begged an answer, and it came some twelve years later in the form of a film by Allan Dwan. That this arrived during Harte's below-zero popularity is perhaps surprising, yet the film's achievement is not to restore the story's glory as it once was celebrated, but rather to translate it to a time of strict heteronormativity. Starring John Payne

as Tennessee, the partner, here given the name Cowpoke, is played by Ronald Reagan in his pre-presidential splendour. The greatest similarities to Harte's story are the extradiegetic factors. The storyline bears only little resemblance to the short story, because its plot revolves wholly around what confused Brooks and Warren, the partner's forgiving Tennessee for stealing his wife. Here, the character corresponding to the wife in the short story, Goldie Slater (Coleen Gray), is a thief, Tennessee's cast-off, and Cowpoke's obsession. The film explains the partner's forgiveness in heterosexual terms because having believed that Tennessee eloped with Goldie, Cowpoke's faithful friend in reality thus saves Cowpoke from being swindled by Goldie. When the partner realizes this, and that Tennessee is not in love with Goldie but "The Duchess**"** (Rhonda Fleming), he immediately forgives Tennessee. Soon, Cowpoke is shot, Tennessee sighs "and I don't even know his name," and the film cuts to the final scene, the joyful wedding between Tennessee and "The Duchess." Thus, this version of the partnership is firmly established in a heterosexual and also far more civilized world, where Cowpoke's deepest sentiments are reserved for anxiety about the woman in question, not for Tennessee.

At this point in time, the repeated attacks had started to take its toll and both the story and the author were deeply unfashionable, although some scattered but notably terse critics still mentioned it. For example, Richard O'Connor in his 1966 Harte biography described the short story briefly as striking "an artful note of tragicomedy" and working parallel veins of "sentiment and humor" (116-7). Although he does not seem to consider the story important enough to include any of its characters in his five pages long list of "leading figures on the landscape of Bret Harte's imagination" (307-312), he does certainly read the story as a tale of friendship. In 1979, Patrick D. Morrow comes to its defence, writing that "'Tennessee's Partner' should not be dismissed as merely a mawkish story of implausible events and

psychologically invalid characters cohabiting in a world of melodramatic conventions. 'Tennessee's Partner' is a parable about the power of brotherly love" (18).

After this, the disbelief in the partner's sentimental-cum-manly character came to a head. The reading of "Tennessee's Partner" as a story of cynical revenge was first offered by Charles E. May in 1977, followed by William F. Connor in 1980. In 2000, Gary Scharnhorst joined them in an interpretation that read it as a story of "how an ostensible addled miner avenges his sexual humiliation by gulling an entire camp, much to the delight of the attentive reader who avoids the trap Harte sets for the unwary" (44). Read thus as a tale of emasculation and re-masculation, Scharnhorst effectively reinstates the partner's masculinity by explaining the partner's feminine character traits to be just a playact. J. David Stevens has similarly suggested that by making the partner the "architect of Tennessee's downfall" and "the active agent in a revenge plot typical of traditional frontier fiction," these critics try to restore his manhood (582).

In common with Brooks and Warren's reading, this interpretation entirely rejects the theme of brotherly love, and consequently cannot explain the fact that in the end the partner dies from grief. Such readings also ignore the story's context. It is unlikely that an author of sentimental literature whose most common and beloved theme was that of friendship would write a story that was so much out of character with the rest of his authorship. The justification of the cynics' reading is further contested because their reasoning rests on the assumption that the partner actually managed to tip the scale towards Tennessee's doom. However, the narrator states clearly and sardonically that the judge and jury of Sandy Bar were "ready to listen patiently to any defence, which they were already satisfied was insufficient," and they were "[s]ecure in the hypothesis that he ought to be hanged on general principles" (56). Tennessee was doomed even before his partner came to his rescue.

In 1980, a completely different and conspicuously modern interpretation appeared, namely a homoerotic reading. While this was clearly an important and innovative claim (not least politically), it is also highly coloured by the time in which it was written. Linda Burton, the first critic to read the story in this vein, writes that "it is difficult to determine whether or not Harte was fully conscious of the homosexual relationship that he depicts in the story. Perhaps a modern reader, in a time when homosexuality is openly analyzed and discussed, can actually ascertain more accurately than earlier readers what Harte either consciously or unconsciously was attempting to convey" (212). From Burton's angle, such close friends cannot be anything but "homosexual." Asking questions like why the partner would stay with someone "so obvious a degenerate as Tennessee," "[t]he answer," she ascertains, "certainly cannot lie simply with brotherly love; but when we note the sexual side of the partners' relationship, we can better understand the devotion of the wifely Tennessee's Partner to Tennessee" (214). That she establishes sex to be a prerequisite of having this kind of relationship is perhaps the most telling anachronism. Male romantic friendship had still not been rediscovered; even female romantic friendship was still relatively unknown (Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's landmark article "The Female World of Love and Ritual" was first published in 1975). It was not yet widely known that the nature of male romantic friendship included intense emotions and life-long loyalty. Whether it sometimes included sex or not, the friendship itself is ample reason for the partner to stay with Tennessee.

Continuing on from Burton, Stevens believes that Harte had a conscious mission to deconstruct the strict gender and sexuality roles of the (pre-)Western genre in his "sympathetic depiction of homoerotic urges and . . . blatantly enacted homosexual relationships" (572). Hoffman is another advocate of a homoerotic subtext, but he is also the only critic who has written (comparatively) at length about the story who recognizes that "[c]onceding only the likelihood that these relationships were partnerships described in

contemporary rhetoric with the terms applied to marriage, we cannot take a further step and conclude the relationships were sexual" (36).

Although I strongly agree with Hoffman, there might be indications, at least by proxy, that in a contemporary English climate Harte was in fact understood in a more homoerotic manner than by the Americans of his day. According to Sedgwick, Walt Whitman was received quite differently in England and America. Generally, Whitman's literature is more explicitly homoerotic than Harte's, but he resembles Harte in that he also deconstructs gender and sexuality roles and patterns and strongly celebrates male relationships. Harte, who moved to England in 1880, wrote home to America in that same year to testify that "Americans are very much to the fore just now" (qtd. in Nissen, *Bret Harte* 173). Harte's position in England and in continental Europe was still quite as stellar as it had been in America in the days of his initial success. In fact, at this stage, Harte's "sentimental" tales were unfashionable in the United States, while "English readers continued to receive his work favorably until his death" (Gottesman, "Bret Harte" 1474).

England hosted a homosexual subculture with a "widely recognized upper-middle-class fascination with crossing the class divide," as Jeffrey Weeks points out. Harte's friends in London were not only part of the literary circle, but also the aristocracy. Perhaps his association with the English nobility enabled him to write a far more homoerotic short story, "In the Tules" (1895), without any of the doubt that would come to trouble his friend, William Dean Howells, in *The Shadow of a Dream*, written in the same decade. Weeks points out that it was only around the close of the century that the aristocratic homosexual role, the "effeminate," became the ruling in all layers of society (in England, not America; America had less such stratification and correspondingly "no prevailing homosexual 'style'" [Crowley, "Howells, Stoddard" 67]). Before that, the "homosexual style" of the English middle-class was, according to Sedgwick, "relatively untouched by this aristocratic tradition, [and] turned

toward a homosexual role that would emphasize the virile over the effeminate, the classical over the continental" (93). In terms of gender performance, "virile" and "classical" are very accurate descriptions of Harte's own literature. Further, the English upper class equated rural "working class" with "masculine" and "closeness to nature," Weeks writes (204), which Harte to some extent also did. Harte's men fit very well with the English ideal as worded by the Englishman J. R. Ackerley: "the Ideal friend . . . should have been an animal man . . . the perfect human male body always at one's service through the devotion of a faithful and uncritical beast" (qtd. in Weeks 203). This statement, which could have been an exaggerated description of Tennessee's Partner, embodies a conglomeration of primitivism, strong physicality, faithfulness, naïveté, and devoted masculinity that will be the frame for the following discussion of the romantic friendship in the short story "Tennessee's Partner."

2.3. Lighting out and domesticating the Territory

The Wild West was a scene of male bonding, freedom, and virile masculinity. As one historian describes the pull of the West, "[t]he possibilities for men who wanted to experience autonomy, to leave home and go not only to a new place for them but a new place for anyone, were enormous in 19th century [sic] America: no check on movement horizontally and formally, and none vertically for white men, . . . and the most striking area for this motion was the West" (G. J. Barker-Benfield qtd. in Kimmel, "The Contemporary 'Crisis'" 138). Perhaps a romance between two men itself superficially filled some of the same needs as the physical elopement, at least in terms of the symbolic elopement from a feminine civilization. Nevertheless, I will in the following suggest that instead of escaping a domesticated household or civilization all together, "Tennessee's Partner" presents a possibility for a male couple to create their own domesticity, following the traditional, gendered Victorian household mores.

The urge to "light out for the Territory," as Huckleberry Finn aspired to do, must be seen in connection with the feminization of love, which, according to Francesca M. Cancian, paralleled the increase of companionate marriages (which incidentally would not be common until closer to the end of the nineteenth century). It is likely that this left Victorian men with a dilemma of having to be independent and competitive, while at the same time being a supportive, protective, and loving father and husband – without too many elaborate expressions of tenderness. The conflict, writes Cancian,

> was reflected in the existence of two contradictory male ideals: the family man and the independent adventurer. From the point of view of most mothers, ministers, and prospective brides, the ideal man was probably a dependable family man, a good provider, and devout Christian. . . . But many of the nineteenth-century heroes – the mountainmen, ship's captains, and cowboys – were undomesticated adventurers. They had abandoned the civilized world of women and the family for a life of danger and comradeship among men. (21-2)

In the light of the contemporary discourse of domesticity, it is fruitful to read "Tennessee's Partner" as a way of solving this dilemma in the combination of the two ideals in the relationship of the two coarse gold miners. Domesticity as a key issue in Victorian life may serve here as an analytical tool to understand the two main characters' friendship, both as it functions internally and as it exists in relation to the external society.

Leslie Fiedler has famously and controversially argued that the traditional American novel has a character different from the European, having an obsession with "death, incest and innocent homosexuality" (12). The typical male protagonist of American fiction, he claims, "has been a man on the run, harried into the forest and out to the sea, down to the river or into combat – anywhere to avoid 'civilization', which is to say, the confrontation of a man and woman which leads to the fall to sex, marriage, and responsibility." He further contends that:

> there is a substitute for wife or mother presumably waiting in the green heart of nature: the natural man, the good companion, pagan and unashamed – Queequeg or Chingachgook or Nigger Jim. But the figure of the natural man is ambiguous, a dream

> and a nightmare at once. . . ; finally the dark-skinned companion becomes the 'Black Man,' which is a traditional American name for the Devil himself. (26)

In the imperial discourse Fiedler evokes, civilization is as expected defined as something feminine, and its replacement, the nurturing, motherly element, is interestingly the primitive companion. The common link of the feminine with nature and the natural facilitates Fiedler's (and perhaps American authors') cognitive leap from the "natural man" to the "motherly man." It is possible that the primitiveness of the nurturing man must be a criterion for being allowed such transgressive masculinity.

Fiedler's line of argument is relevant to the degree that Tennessee's Partner, the story's protagonist, is the "good companion" and motherly element of Harte's story; he is its hero who, in good times as well as bad, looks after Tennessee. He is not, however, filling the role of the "natural man" or "pagan" to any greater extent than any other of his fellow miners. That it is he who is the nurturer is thus not because of his ethnicity or relative social status, at least. Yet he (and the rest) represents the primitive from the viewpoint of civilized society and, included therein, hegemonic masculinity. One early reader, G. K. Chesterton, recognized Harte as the discoverer of "the intense sensibility of the *primitive man*" (qtd. in Nissen, *Bret Harte* 98, my emphasis). Giving the quality of "intense sensibility" specifically to the primitive man seems to be almost oxymoronic when considering that in this culture "[a] man's aggressions were male; his conscience, female; his desire to conquer, male; his urge to nurture, female; his need for work and worldly achievement, male; his wish to stay home and enjoy quiet leisure, female" (Rotundo 7-8). Too much of a quality that was considered feminine was most often thought contemptible.[10] This again suggests that the primitive man was somehow seen as being under different gender laws than the urban man. Moreover, the spatial, temporal, and perhaps especially *cultural* remoteness of the story's subjects go a long way to explaining how the combination of rugged manliness and deeply sentimental

[10] See Kimmel, "The Contemporary 'Crisis'" 145.

tenderness may be so readily accepted by Harte's contemporary readers. That the estrangement was a case of culture is apparent in the comment by Dan de Quille, Mark Twain's friend, who, although himself a westerner, described the miners as "a new and strange race of men" (qtd. in Stoneley 190). Some of their peculiarity lay in their ease at displaying their naked bodies; "[a]ll are naked to the waist, and many from the middle of their waist to their feet," writes de Quille (qtd. in Stoneley 190).

Tennessee and his partner's relationship is characterized by love rather than anything physical, be it nudity, physical closeness, or sex, at least as far as the reader is informed. Tennessee's Partner belongs together with Tennessee to such an extent that the community sees them as inextricably intertwined. "Tennessee's Partner . . . we never knew by any other than this relative title; that he had ever existed as a separate and distinct individuality we only learned later," relates the narrator (54). First and foremost, however, their relationship is characterized by the partner's selfless love for Tennessee. Between the two, the partner is the one who protects their relationship from external and internal threats. As he has helped and protected Tennessee throughout their friendship, his love for him spurs him on to try and save his partner from being sentenced to death for highway robbery. His qualities, when gendered in Victorian fashion, would in a few, but important, aspects be called feminine. His conscience, wish and capability to nurture, and desire to stay at home – or bring Tennessee home – surface when he expresses his love and devotion for Tennessee in the eulogy:

> "When a man . . . has been running free all day, what's the natural thing for him to do? Why, to come home. And if he ain't in a condition to go home, what can his best friend do? Why, bring him home! And here's Tennessee has been running free, and we brings him home from his wanderings. . . . It ain't the first time that I've packed him on my back, as you see'd me now. It ain't the first time that I brought him to this yer cabin when he couldn't help himself; it ain't the first time that I and "Jinny" have waited for him on yon hill, and picked him up and so fetched him home, when he couldn't speak, and didn't know me." (60)

To "come home" may be a metaphor for dying as well as the more explicit action of carrying Tennessee's body home from his drunken meanderings or the "ominous tree" he was hanged

from, but its explicit sense is to take him home to take care of him – like a woman would be expected to want and be able to do. It is also a curious testimony to the way that a male-male love relationship actually arranged itself after the rules of the feminine domesticity of the Victorian era. That the "natural thing" to do is to come home from running free all day is highly in tune with the ideology of the day.

The partner apparently dies from grief after Tennessee is hanged. From the day of the funeral "his rude health and great strength seemed visibly to decline; and when the rainy season fairly set in, and the tiny grass-blades were beginning to peep from the rocky mound above Tennessee's grave, he took to his bed" (61). While giving him the faculty of tender love, Harte simultaneously establishes the partner as having the masculine physicality of both "rude health" and "great strength." Both vanish soon, however, and only sentiments are left as, on his deathbed, Tennessee is the last thing he thinks about. He "lifted his head from the pillow, saying, 'It is time to go for Tennessee; I must put Jinny in the cart; . . . Thar! I told you so! – thar he is, - coming this way, too, - all by himself, sober, and his face a-shining. Tennessee! Pardner!'" Whereupon the narrator solemnly adds, "[a]nd so they met" (61).

While ostensibly uncivilized, the partnership of the miners is surprisingly domesticated. Linda Burton points out that the partner's role is somewhat "wifely" (214-15). Although she reads the story distinctly from a modern perspective and perhaps her reasons for tagging one of them as the "wife" in what she reads as a homosexual relationship are faulty, she is right in that it is the partner who embodies certain feminine ideals. It would be wrong, however, to claim that their relationship merely imitates the model of the increasingly common companionate marriage. Doubtlessly the "Argonauts"[11] considered their partnerships as relationships in their own right, and with their own logic. Moreover, the role of the nurturer importantly does nothing, as far as one can tell, to diminish the partner's masculinity in the

[11] The miners were often referred to as "Argonauts" after Jason's crew on the Argo in Greek mythology (a culture that, not coincidentally, also idealized male friendship).

eyes of the community or Tennessee, as is certainly not the case for the gendering of many modern homosexual relationships. Even though qualities like tenderness, care, and nurture were considered feminine in Victorian America, this, apparently, was less restraining in the wilderness where the society was already devoid of any women to enact the femininity. This enabled the female civilization to be brought into the male wilderness and translated into something male, but, notably, with the traditional gender patterns as a blueprint. As miners, they were part of a society where men danced with men in the balls for lack of women; they were used to thinking untraditionally about the ordering of life's practical and most often gendered aspects.

Despite the partners being in an unruly and wild place, civilization was nonetheless present. What effect, then, did the actual civilization have on the partners? Did it actually threaten their relationship to the extent that Fiedler indicates was often the case elsewhere in American literature? In the case of the only female character, who represents feminine civilization almost unambiguously, this is certainly not the case.[12] The waitress may arguably be found wanting in the capacity for fidelity and her extramarital relationship would doubtlessly have raised Victorian eyebrows. Notwithstanding these less flattering aspects, the little we know of her is strongly linked with both civilized and feminine qualities, namely nurturing and service, as she "waited upon the table at the hotel where he took his meals" (54), and with the marriage to the partner added to that, she is the Wild West embodiment of the Victorian idea of civilization. Yet her civilizing influence is modified by several things. For one, merely a few lines of "Tennessee's Partner" are devoted to her part, and neither of the men spends much time with her; instead, they gladly embrace their waitress-less relationship when they meet after her final run-off. Moreover, even when married, Tennessee still lives together with them, a fact that is unblushingly interpolated in a particularly long

[12] Jinny the donkey is another female "character," and if the matter is forced, she does contribute to the bringing home of Tennessee.

sentence. The waitress can all the same be seen as the centrepiece that actually ties the men closer together, somewhat ironically, because she is far from being a centrepiece in the story. René Girard has suggested that "in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved: that the bonds of 'rivalry' and 'love,' differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent" (Sedgwick 21). In this case, the bond that links the rivals is ultimately much more powerful than the bond that ties any of them to her, whether it is erotic or not.

Ironically, it is masculine civilization that threatens the partnership. The judge (who is also Tennessee's captor) and the narrator stand for the law and the community respectively. The law poses a threat to the relationship because of the highly tangible effects of its civilizing efforts, that is, the punishment of Tennessee, and the rest of the community participates eagerly in the punishment of Tennessee and the criminalization of his partner. At a cursory first glance, it would seem that the excluding "we" of the narrator suggests that the mining society, "we," looks at Tennessee and his partner with aloof distance, apparently without understanding the nature of the partners' relationship. The narrator's role is not straight-forward, however. The narrator is homodiegetic in that he (it is most likely a man) is clearly a part of the diegesis, the fictional world of the story, both because he uses the personal pronoun "I" and because he represents the mining community, "we." The community collectively plays a role in the story, but personally, the narrator does not intervene in the action. He intervenes overtly in the *narrative*, however. Sometimes interpreting, sometimes directly addressing the reader, and sometimes moralising, he distances himself intellectually from the community. The traditional ironic distance between the narrator and the character creates a form of satire on the discrepancy between the latter, the elevated and at times omnipotent seer, and the former, the seemingly ignorant community.

The question of the community's understanding of Tennessee's Partner's affection for Tennessee is treated with this kind of satire. When the suspicion of Tennessee's highwayman habits is raised, the narrator states that "Tennessee's Partner was equally compromised; his continued intimacy with Tennessee after the affair above quoted [i.e. the wife-stealing] could only be accounted for on the hypothesis of a copartnership of crime" (54-5). The words "could only" indicate the narrator's ironic attitude to the community's assumption, and he is subtly patronizing when he reveals that this miscomprehension is persistent even after the community has shown their understanding of his loss by "calling on him, and proffering various uncouth, but well-meant kindnesses" (61). When the partner is found innocent of any involvement in Tennessee's thefts, "only a suspicion of [the partner's] general sanity" was left (61). While the community is portrayed as dim, but kind, the serious and sentimental style of the narration of the partner dying of grief, especially his use of metaphors like the storm and the fact that Tennessee's Partner again fancies to fetch Tennessee to bring him home, underscores the narrator's genuine understanding and empathy. For the contemporary readers, at least, the point of view thus must have contributed in the interpretation of this as a tale of brotherly love, very far from merely a "copartnership in crime," a mad passion, or a tale of cynical revenge, for that matter. The reader's sympathy is invited to be with the couple in a way that must have lessened the gap between contemporary, middle-class readers and the "primitive" partners.

Especially in the way it wins its readers over, "Tennessee's Partner" successfully combines the two main masculinity ideals of the Victorian age, conjuring a behavioural pattern that nevertheless proved harder to swallow for most twentieth-century readers and difficult for modern readers not to pigeonhole in contemporary categories. In Harte's story, the aspects of feminine masculinity, domesticated wilderness, and male romantic friendship are honoured, even celebrated. In William Dean Howells's *The Shadow of a Dream*, romantic

friendship is also connected with femininity and childishness in men, but here, these issues are taken up with grave consideration. This will be the point of departure for the next chapter.

3

In Sickness and in Health: *The Shadow of a Dream* and the Three-Cornered Household

To sing her worth as Maid and Wife;
Nor happier post than this I ask, . . .
I'll teach how noble man should be
To match with such a lovely mate.[13]

3.1. The realist's regrets

"Douglas Faulkner was of a type once commoner in the West than now," reminisces the narrator of William Dean Howells's *The Shadow of a Dream* (1890). This first sentence immediately sets the nostalgic tone of the novel.[14] To the narrator Basil March, Faulkner's taste for romantic literature at the end of the century already smells of mothballs, and, as it turns out, his friendship with the clergyman James Nevil is equally romantic. In the light of this friendship and the fact that it constitutes the novel's main theme, March's continuation of the initial observation is particularly suggestive: "many of the circumstances that tended to shape such a character, with the conditions that repressed and the conditions that evolved it, have changed so vastly that they may almost be said not to exist any longer" (1).

[13] Coventry Patmore, from "The Angel in the House" (1854-62)
[14] As *The Shadow of a Dreams*'s length is somewhere between an ordinary novel and a short story, both "novel" and "novella" are used to describe it.

Faulkner's romantic friendship with Nevil is perhaps not only as romantic as the literature of Faulkner's choice; it is also in some ways as *dated*. The novel's opening can be read as a comment and perhaps an attempted explanation – or excuse – for the perceived peculiarity of Faulkner's choice of having Nevil live with him and his wife, Hermia. The problematic nature of such a friendship in the late nineteenth century, especially when continued into a marriage, is the concern of *The Shadow of a Dream* as well as this chapter. I will investigate the potential for intimate same-sex bonds in youth and manhood in a bourgeois environment. The main focus is the changing conceptions of friendship, love, and marriage, and the oncoming homophobia. Who can love whom, and how? How were men who loved the wrong people in the wrong way perceived? The answers are pivotal in the understanding of gender categories and how men and women were supposed to behave.

In many ways, William Dean Howells's life (1837-1920) paralleled Bret Harte's. Not only were they more or less of the same age, but their reputations followed the same path; they were both on the whole held in great literary esteem by their contemporaries, and both reputations declined in the twentieth century. They also belonged to the same extended social circle, together with other famous writers of the era such as Samuel Clemens and Henry James, to name but a few, and they both depicted male romantic friendships. The way they did this differed, however. Howells, an ardent realist, said about realism that it "is nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material," and Henry James, when discussing Howells's extensive work, spoke about its "documentary value" (both qtd. in Gottesman, "American Literature" 1227). This does not mean that Howells is necessarily a more trustworthy commentator on his society, but his depiction of romantic friendship would be more realistic, and less a wishful scenario, than Harte's "Tennessee's Partner." More than for Harte, the idea of romantic friendship is in *The Shadow of a Dream* taken up for consideration, scrutinized, and found to be incompatible with late nineteenth-century life.

While Harte never problematized the *existence* of such friendships, the relationships portrayed by Howells reveal a much more troubled approach to the topic. Howells also wrote romantic friendship fiction before this, primarily in *Private Theatricals* (1875-6) and *The Undiscovered Country* (1880). In neither was male romantic friendship problematized to the extent that it was in *The Shadow of a Dream*. This is one of the greatest thematic contrasts to "Tennessee's Partner"; Harte's primitive scene of innocent romantic love between men is not a possibility in Howells's realistic, restrained, and civilized bourgeois setting.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the relationship between Nevil and Faulkner has by modern critics either been read as homoerotic, or it has been downplayed, while still being tacitly recognized as homoerotic, as a digression from the allegedly illicit feelings between Nevil and Hermia. The former interpretation was first argued in a pathbreaking article by George Spangler (1971), while John W. Crowley and Elizabeth Stevens Prioleau, for example, represent the latter, stressing in their reading the potential "heterosexual" liaison. Both these alternatives, I believe, distort the plot's balanced portrayal of the three-cornered household by (mis)placing the desire, disgust, and love in either an anachronistic and heteronormative perspective or an equally anachronistic homosexual perspective. Rather than forcing the novel into either the homosexual or the heterosexual camp, I contend that it is more fruitful to view its central dilemma, manifest in Faulkner's recurring dream of his wife and friend's marriage during his own funeral and the dream's consequences, as born out of his love (and possible desire) for both.[15]

Robert K. Martin suggests that the romance between men itself filled the same need as the Fiedlerian escape from civilization did for the gold miners and cowboys of the nineteenth century. The love between two men is as such an "expression of a flight from civilization, from the encumbrances of a social world where it can have no place" (174). *The Shadow of a*

[15] Howells's literature has often been read in light of psychoanalysis (see, for example, Prioleau's *The Circle of Eros* [1983] and Crowley's "From Psychologism to Psychic Romance" [1989]).

Dream is an illustrative proof of how certain expressions of manly love in bourgeois society in the late nineteenth century were out of place, but as I will argue in this chapter, this was in fact only a real problem when combined with marriage. Intimate friendships between bachelor characters in the novel are more or less accepted, although these characters are often perceived as both effeminate and childish. When in combination with marriage and adult responsibilities, they become far more problematic, entailing a symbolic punishment of the transgressive characters. I will at the end consider how *The Shadow of a Dream* incorporates the contemporary discourse on wilderness versus civilization in relation to masculinity and intimate male friendships.

3.2. Youth and bachelorhood

The differing attitudes towards intimate friendship apparent in "Tennessee's Partner" and *The Shadow of a Dream* do not stem from the changes in the age alone; differences in cultural and geographical settings and the individual preferences of the authors are also of key importance. For example, Bret Harte's short story "In the Tules" was written five years after *The Shadow of a Dream*, and does not come close to problematizing male romantic friendship in the way Howells does, being set, as is "Tennessee's Partner," in a woman-less Wild West. It is often hard to distinguish temporal, cultural, and individual factors from each other, however. The narrative technique of *The Shadow of a Dream* offers an opportunity to consider exclusively the changes in time and the ageing of the characters within the urban middle-class setting, because March's backward look hints at his changed feelings about his own affection for Faulkner. Published in 1890, the novel is clearly narrated from a time not too far from the time of publication. This is, for example, evident in the frequent references to contemporary literature, especially through what March considers old-fashioned and what he thinks is not. However, it is not very close in time either, which becomes clear in one of the very last scenes

where March notes that "it was still in the palmy days of lecturing" (158). The wording, at least, suggests that such "palmy days" were a while ago.[16] The narration is retrospective, and the first main part of the story describing Faulkner's death is set in a time frame some two years before the story's culmination, while the opening scene is set ten years prior to his death. It is safe to say, then, that the 1870s are the most likely time frame for the first scene.

In this scene, it is through the subtle play of point of view that Howells most clearly communicates the nascent worry about male romantic friendship and male romanticism from March's own perspective. Even though the story is chronologically told, the whole novel may in fact be seen as an analepsis where the "first narrative," in Gérard Genette's terminology, that is the temporal level of the narrative that the story is defined against (Genette 35), creates a persona of an older version of March. There are no action, no events, at the level of the "first narrative," but he is nevertheless even more overt than the narrator in "Tennessee's Partner" and is described by a critic as "more-or-less reliable" (Wayne C. Booth qtd. in Prioleau 115). If the first scene indeed is set in the 1870s, it is important to bear in mind that this decade "may well have been the last decade in which it was possible for a white, middle-class American man to have an unself-conscious and shameless, consuming passion for a member of his own sex" (Nissen, "Departments" 102). It is reasonable, then, to wonder whether March's sceptical account of his early meeting with Faulkner is a scepticism he feels in hindsight, rather than a worry he felt at the time. Throughout this scene and the whole novel, March scorns everything that is "sentimental" or "romantic" in the narrative, but at the same time, the young March *acts* both sentimental and romantic, and his sceptical narration is sometimes interrupted by a poetical language that celebrates the romantic action.

During their initial meeting, March and Faulkner talk politely, while March the narrator puts in cynical or disparaging comments. When March is about to leave, Faulkner

[16] Literary lecturing was not uncommon towards the end of the century. For example, Howells himself was encouraged "to seek his own fortune on the platform" as late as in 1896, six years after writing *The Shadow of a Dream* (Crowley, *The Dean of American Letters* 51).

walks with him for a stretch. “This was the second time we had met [but] Faulkner was already on terms of comradery with me. . . . As he spoke, he put his long arm across my shoulders, and kept it there while we walked” (7). Although his initially sceptical tone belies it, he seems to get very comfortable with Faulkner’s arm around him. Faulkner chats on about Nevil’s brilliant qualities, and it is perhaps this topic which impels him to burst out, “‘you can’t have any true conception of friendship till you have known him. Just see that moon!’” March is overwhelmed by the mood and starts to recite a poem, inadvertently, it may seem, and in a moment of perfect union, Faulkner and himself declaim the poem, voices breaking and whispering. “It was the youth in both of us, smitten to ecstasy by the beauty of the scene, and pouring itself out in the modulations of that divine stop, as if it had been the rapture of one soul” (8).[17] Here, the older March seems to be in tune with his younger self for the first time; after all, the simile is the narrator’s, not the young March’s. This concordance may be because the narrator in the same sentence reminds the reader and himself that it was “the youth in both of us” that inspired such sentiments; youth was, after all, the phase of life when such expressions were more or less accepted. March’s narrating style, half of the time sarcastic and the other half poetic, reflects his ambiguous attitude towards Faulkner and the sentimental or romantic way of expressing emotions.

Nevil and Faulkner’s friendship, which is described as “romantic,” “appeared to date back to their college days. That was now a good while ago, but they seemed to be in the habit of meeting often, and to have kept up their friendship in all its first fervour” (4). When this comment is made, neither Nevil nor Faulkner is married, and there are very few limitations on intimacy – yet. In the novel there are repeated references to things done and experienced in youth that have to be relinquished when becoming a grown, married man. Reaching manhood was a source of mixed pride and nostalgia for the male characters; some things were meant to

[17] The poem itself is William Wordsworth’s “Ode: Intimations of Immortality,” a poem whose invocation of innocent childhood is quite apt for the scene. The poem moreover foreshadows the central theme of death in the novel; its tone is in that respect far more poignant than the preceding conversation seems to encourage.

be left behind, and romantic friendship was, generally speaking, one of them. According to E. Anthony Rotundo, romantic friendships in middle-class, white America did most often not survive into grown manhood. The reasons for this were probably first and foremost a placing of a man's passions elsewhere, for example in marriage, commitment to a career, and a home and a family of his own (90). Whether these were demands primarily posed by society or his own genuine wish is not always clear, however. Nevil voices the conflicting interests of what ought to be done and what he *must* do for himself (or for Faulkner), when he tells March that he "ought to go away. I ought to be at home; I've spent the past year in Europe with the Faulkners, as – as their guest – and I have no right to a vacation this summer. There are duties, interests, claims upon me, that I'm neglecting in my proper work; and yet I can't tear myself away from him – from them" (45). That Nevil rushes to correct his pronounced devotion to *him* to include both of them, confirms the unease he is feeling regarding his close relationship with a married man. Crowley, who is trying to prove Nevil's attraction to Hermia, interprets this as Nevil's inadvertent admission of his "devotion to *both* the Faulkners" ("The Length" 122), which is rather a topsy-turvy way of looking at the correction he makes – after all, he corrects *him* to them, not *her* to them. Prioleau also argues that Nevil and Hermia betray "suspect inclinations" towards each other, which she proves by quoting the same lines (112).

Although sometimes said to be manly, March describes Nevil as "very handsome, with a regular face, and a bloom on it quite girlishly peachy" (4). His "girlishly peachy" face not only marks him as less than *masculine*, it is (using the word "girlishly" rather than "womanly") also the surface expression of his *childishness*, because he had the "most childlike ignorance of women, and especially girls" (107), according to Mrs Faulkner. Nevil's childishness and girlishness are emasculating character traits that associate him with romantic friendship. Too strong attachments between both young and adult men were increasingly

considered “tender, intimate, dependent, – in short, ‘childish’” (Rotundo 90), and romantic friends themselves often referred to their relationship and their feelings for each other as childish (87). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick indicates that middle-class Victorians experienced a “cognitive vacuum” in the homosocial continuum, that could be filled by “associate[ing] the erotic end of the homosocial spectrum, not with dissipation, not with viciousness or violence, but with childishness, as an infantile need, a mark of powerlessness, which, while it may be viewed with shame or scorn or denial, is unlikely to provoke the virulent, accusatory projection that characterized twentieth-century homophobia” (177).

Being both feminine and childish is what ultimately leads Nevil to choose Faulkner’s ghost over Hermia. As March points out to him, he needs to act more like a man: “you were most sacredly bound not to let any perverse scruple, any self-indulgent misgiving, betray her trust in you. You are a man, with a man’s larger outlook, and you should have been the perspective in which she could see the whole matter truly” (206). Shortly after, Nevil is squeezed to death between a train and the platform. Laden with phallic symbolism, the fatal accident may also be a typical moral punishment for his lack of “proper masculinity.”

Faulkner’s most noted quality, sentimentalism, was also increasingly considered feminine (Cancian 4). What is more, he “made himself [Hermia’s] nurse” (72) when she fell ill on their wedding journey. This may be seen as a self-inflicted emasculation, which significantly ruins his health. George Bard wrote in 1884 about people who were beginning to be known as homosexuals that “the sex [instinct] is perverted . . . men become women and women men, in their tastes, conduct, character, feelings, and behavior” (qtd. in Rotundo 276). Descriptions of men in feminine terms and women in masculine terms are not uncommon in the novel; Hermia, for example, is often referred to as having masculine qualities.

Faulkner, too, is several times described as childlike, both before and during his marriage to Hermia. As Nevil reminds March: “You know his romantic nature. He kept it

hidden in his public life, but in all his personal relations he gave it full play. . . . To give more love than she gave him, . . . He used to talk with me about it before they were married – you know how *boyishly simple-hearted* he always was" (72, my emphasis). Being of a romantic nature is not automatically connected to same-sex love, but rather, same-sex love required a rather romantic nature. A romantic nature was moreover connected to several of the traditional nineteenth-century feminine qualities listed by Cancian, for example being dependent, gentle, and expressing tender feelings. These are not very different from childish character traits, for that matter. Grown men were in comparison supposed to be independent, aggressive, and hide their emotions (Cancian 4). No wonder, then, that Faulkner keeps his romantic side "hidden in his public life."

That homosocial attachment ended with youth and bachelorhood must nevertheless only be seen as a general trend. David Deitcher has, for example, maintained that "there is ample documentation to prove that romantic friendships between men did indeed endure well past youth, although marriage did become an impediment" (59). Moreover, while Rotundo refers to a three-cornered household as "unusual," he mentions more than a few examples of such relationships (80, 320 n. 21), and Bret Harte lived in a similar household for over a decade.

After Faulkner's death, Nevil quickly gets engaged to a young woman, and luckily, his friendship with Faulkner has prepared him for this new state. With his "childlike ignorance of women," "Nevil, though past thirty-five, had never been in love before, and gave himself to his passion with the ardour of an untouched heart, and the strength of a manhood matured in the loftiest worship" (107). His relationship with Faulkner is here contrasted with "being in love," although his "lofty worship" of Faulkner does not seem to differ substantially from that condition. In *The Shadow of a Dream*, the view of romantic friendship as childish and dependent parallels the ideal where the friendship itself is seen as a separate, strong entity (as

long as the issue of marriage is not brought in). If their friendship differs from the state of being in love, it is in fact getting the better of the comparison. In the novel, passion, ardour, and sentimental romanticism are disliked and seen as insubstantial, while forthright attraction is celebrated. Intimate friendship is not bad in itself; it contributes to Nevil's "strength of manhood." Importantly, however, such relationships are clearly not meant to be a man's main concern. In the late days of the nineteenth century, they often constituted only potential apprenticeships to later marriage.[18] This is clear in both Nevil and Faulkner's case. For the latter, however, it is only apparent through the difficulties that arise by *not* letting the friendship be a mere apprenticeship, but rather keeping it up in its "first fervour."

Being a bachelor for too long was far from fortunate. When Nevil gets engaged, Hermia writes to March and his wife that she thinks Nevil "has missed Douglas almost as much as we [Hermia and Faulkner's mother] have. He hints in his letter that if Douglas were living, and the old place here could welcome him as of old, he could wish for no other home" (97). March asks with customary scepticism how this could be the case "if Mr. Nevil is so very ecstatic about his betrothed?" (98). While March hints at the suspected romance between Nevil and Hermia, his comment also describes the intensified demand to marry and the dangers of bachelorhood, which included a demand to let go of the close male bonds when otherwise affectionately connected.

The link of homosociality, or even "sodomy," to the state of bachelorhood, is clear in Vincent J. Bertolini's observation that the bachelor's "solitary and unmonitorable status as an autonomous unmarried adult male . . . represented the transgressive triple threat of masturbation, whoremongering, and that nameless horror – homosexual sex" (qtd. in Nissen, "Departments" 114). It is important to note that Nevil's strong urge to marry comes only *after* the break-up of the three-cornered household. Naturally, Nevil was not in an "unmonitorable"

[18] See, for example, Martin (174-75) or Rotundo (86).

state when living with the Faulkners, and the impulses of bachelorhood were somewhat reduced. The three-cornered household may thus be said to offer an alternative both to marriage and the exclusive romantic friendship in terms of keeping the potentially unruly bachelor in check.

That Howells largely chose to depict the adult male characters who love other men in terms of childishness and even ill health, as I will show in the following, may be partly because of his own troubled attitude to intimate friendships, which naturally must be seen in connection with the influence of sexuality and friendship mores in his society. For example, he displayed some discomfort surrounding intimate male friendship when combined with marriage himself. According to Crowley, Howells's friendship with the writer Charles Warren Stoddard (b. 1843) was intimate, but not exclusive. Howells's family, especially his daughter Mildred, was brought into its orbit, and a typical display of affection included their love as much as his. Crowley writes that "[i]n expressing his 'love' for Stoddard, Howells always put it in the context of a collective feeling – as if to remind Stoddard (and himself) that anything approaching a 'romantic friendship' between them was something to be shared with Howells's family" ("Howells, Stoddard" 71).

There is ample evidence, moreover, that Howells shared some of the sentiments discussed by Bertolini. According to Crowley, "Howells was repelled by the idea of same-sex genitality" ("Howells, Stoddard" 72). Nevertheless, Crowley indicates that Howells's relationship with Stoddard did carry some homoerotic overtones, albeit subtle, and a half-parody of Stoddard's own, more flamboyant style ("Howells, Stoddard" 72). Howells apparently thought that close same-sex attachment in the life of a married man must not be a threat to the family, and he viewed such attachment, possibly genital, as a necessary, but unfortunate part of being a young man. As Crowley further suggests, because Howells's feelings towards genitality were torn between desire and disgust, his feelings towards

romantic friendship seem to be similarly ambiguous, perhaps because of its increasing connection with just such genitality. Even though homosexuality was not yet an established category, sex between two men was increasingly abhorred, or at least, increasingly punished. In the 1890s the number of appeals cases mentioning "bestiality or anal intercourse" is multiplied by four from the previous decade (Katz 73). This, which previously had been a world apart from romantic love, was now brought closer to that phase of life when the man was most vulnerable to "evil impulses," bachelorhood.

3.3. "A husband shouldn't have any friend but his wife"

Notwithstanding Howells's somewhat troubled approach to the topic, several more characters in the novel other than Faulkner and Nevil are prone to connecting with members of their own sex swiftly, intimately, even romantically, without criminalization, moral blame, or sickness. To fall in love with another man or woman is something almost all of the characters do more or less explicitly, perhaps with the exception of Hermia. In turn, March, Mrs March, Nevil, the old Mrs Faulkner, and of course Faulkner himself have moments of infatuation with Hermia. One of the last times March sees her, he realizes that he "had never done justice to her as a woman that some favoured man might be in love with, *as men are with women*, and might marry" (155, my emphasis). It seems that March understands men's falling in love with women to be of a somewhat different quality; when men fall in love with women they marry them, while this is clearly not an option for men who fall in love with men or women who fall in love with women.

In the novel, the expression "being in love" is frequently used about both cross-sex and female-female relations, but a man is never said to be in love with another man. However, the way men feel for men differs little from same-sex love when this expression is used.

Male-male infatuations occur surprisingly often throughout the novel. For example, when meeting Nevil again, March plunges into a feeling described thus:

> I cannot tell how my heart went out to him with a tenderness which nothing in his behaviour toward me had ever invited. On the few occasions when we met, he had always loyally left me to Faulkner, who made all the advances and offered all the caresses, without winning any such return of affection from me as I now involuntarily felt for Nevil. (23)

Even though March is sceptical towards unwarranted intimacy from Faulkner, this unease evaporates when he meets Nevil, although he does consider his own attachment to Nevil with wonder. When much later he meets a recently broken-hearted Nevil, March is disappointed by Nevil's lack of sentimentality and "almost hurt" by his manner, because "I had met him so full of a sympathy which I could not express, and which he could not recognise. . . . I did not reflect that the intimacy had proceeded much more rapidly on my part than on his" (111-2). This notion is related with curious detachment; March tells the reader only what he told his wife, admitting to the reader that he "was rather vague" (111). Perhaps March suspects his wife's scorn, because Mrs. March's reaction is to claim that Nevil's rejection of March's affections is deserved, "a just punishment for my having liked Nevil so much" (113).

After his strong immediate affection for Nevil, March relates that: "Of course I looked at my wife to see what she thought of him. I saw that something in her being a woman, which drew her to Mrs. Faulkner, left her indifferent to Nevil" (23). Mrs March's friendship with Hermia will come to be called both "intimate friendship" (82) and "infatuation" (144). In a foreshadowing of the drama that is to come, March realizes that "[i]n fact I knew that my wife had fallen in love with [Hermia]; and when you have fallen in love with a married woman you must of course hate her husband, especially if you are another woman" (39). Hermia chooses to live with her mother-in-law after Faulkner's death. "I dare say they get on very well," says March. "The old lady is romantic, I believe, like Faulkner; and probably she's in love with her daughter-in-law" (87). He must revise this later when he actually meets her, however, stating

that: “Her relations with her daughter-in-law had nothing, certainly, of romantic insubstantiality; they were of the solidest and simplest affection” (158). While the brief same-sex infatuations are indirectly described as insubstantial and thus left appearing unreliable and fickle, a long-term, forthright, loyal, and intense *female* same-sex relationship is positively emphasized, to the same degree as Nevil and Faulkner’s friendship when it is seen in separation from marriage.

The chief negative consequence of the Faulkner’s domestic arrangement is Faulkner’s recurring nightmare where Hermia and Nevil

> were – attached, and were waiting for him to die, so that they could get married. Then he would see them getting married in church, and at the same time it would be his own funeral, and he would try to scream out that he was not dead; but Hermia would smile, and say to the people that she had known James before she knew Douglas; and the both ceremonies would go on, and he would wake. (175)

Although the doctor disagrees, both Nevil and Hermia feel sure that it is the dream that finally kills him. Faulkner’s heart problems may be of physical origin, but in the throes of pain he apparently believes the dream to be true: “his gaze seemed to grow and centre upon Nevil. He flung his wife’s hand away, and started suddenly to his feet and made a pace toward us. . . . He put his hand on her breast and pushed her away with a look of fierce rejection. Then he caught at his own heart” (77). Faulkner’s look at Nevil is significantly ambiguous. His controversial relationship with Nevil is perhaps one reason why Faulkner, too, is symbolically punished by suffering and death.

The ideal of romantic love had emerged by the end of the eighteenth century, encouraging “two people to be as finely tuned to one another as possible” (Rotundo 111). While this fine-tuning formerly had been a same-sex venture (between two men, ideally), the spiritual union was now the ideal for spouses. Rotundo argues that the ideal of companionate marriages, characterized by a “sense of supportiveness, affection, and mutual dependence,” developed largely in the eighteenth century, but were not common until the end of the

nineteenth century (163). This is explained partly by the fact men and women went from being stark opposites to being merely different towards the end of the nineteenth century. "Raised on the idea that they were completely different beings, a man and a woman started their relationship with a sense of alienation," writes Rotundo (165). When men and women still inhabited a contradictory set of worlds, soulmates were easier to find among someone coming from the same realm: someone of one's own sex. Jonathan Ned Katz's interpretation of the intimate friendship between Abraham Lincoln and Joshua Fry Speed leads him to conclude that "Lincoln and Speed's friendship continued, intermittently, into the 1860s, but without its old intensity. Marriage to women led to these men's divorce" (24). As Harte's biographer Henry Childs Merwin lamented from the perspective of 1912: "Friendship between one man and another would seem to be the most unselfish feeling of which a human being is capable. . . . In modern times the place which the friend held in classic times is taken by the wife" (157).

The clash of Faulkner's affection for Nevil with his affection for his wife is thus all but inevitable. While Hermia gets her share of the blame for the triangle's sad fate, Nevil is mostly seen as innocent of responsibility for the tragedy that unfolds: "I did not accuse [Nevil] of anything wrong in his intense feeling; in my heart I pitied him as the victim of a situation which he ought never to have witnessed" says March, and continues by securing Nevil as the chief victim. "I wanted to say to my wife that here was another instance, and perhaps the most odious we could ever know, of the evil of that disgusting three-cornered domestic arrangement which we had both always so cordially reprobated" (76). Interestingly, he who is just there, intruding on the matrimonial happiness, is seen as more or less blameless (therein lies also some infantilization), while most of the blame lies with the man who cannot chose between his male and his female love.

The Marches are wholly negative to the concept of three-cornered households, something which they repeatedly stress throughout the novel. After going over "the list of households we knew in which the husband supplemented himself with a familiar friend," they conclude that "[i]t kept the husband and wife apart, and kept them from the absolutely free exchange of tenderness at any and every moment, and forbade them the equally wholesome immediate expression of resentments, or else gave their quarrels a witness whom they could not look at without remembering that they had quarrelled in his presence" (33). The modern marriage ideal is transparent in the need for the married couple to be a loving, inseparable unit.

As for the duties and rights of the spouses, they are stated very clearly, especially by the proper, strict, and ever-astute Mrs March. After Hermia is crushed when finding out the dream's content, Mrs March says to her husband:

> 'It isn't her fault . . . It's *his* fault for having him there to dream about; and it's HIS fault for being there to be dreamt about.' I knew that my wife meant Faulkner by her less, and Nevil by her greater, vehemence of accent. 'I suppose she felt, all the time – such a woman would – that he had no right to bring his friendship into their married life that way. She must have felt hampered and molested by it; but she yielded to him because she didn't want to seem petty or jealous. That's where I blame *her*. Basil! A woman's jealousy is God-given! It's inspired, for her safety and for her husband's. She *ought* to show it.' (138)

It is his duty to rid himself of the links to the past, and it is her duty to force him if he does not do it willingly. This is stated surprisingly explicitly, again by Mrs March: "It was his folly, his silly, romantic clinging to a sentiment that he ought to have flung away the instant he was married, which did all the harm. A husband shouldn't have any friend but his wife" (139). There is ample cause for jealousy between the men, too, but because Nevil and Faulkner are so true to each other throughout their lives, little of this is to be seen in an explicit and unambiguous form. Their friendship certainly "passes the love of women." As Nevil tells March, "I saw the impression [Hermia] instantly made upon [Faulkner]: it was love at first sight. But though the love of her had possessed his whole soul, he was first faithful to his

friendship with me" (202). In return, Nevil is faithful to Faulkner. When Nevil has doubts and thinks he might have been in love with Hermia towards the end of the novel, he chooses Faulkner's memory over his living new love, Hermia.

After his marriage, Faulkner is always described in terms of physical, mental, and moral disease. While Nevil is described as "[s]piritually wholesome" (6), "Faulkner certainly did not look wholesome" (4). His complexion is pale, and "his eyes, once so beautiful, had a dull and suffering look . . . and his dress had a sort of characteristic slovenliness" (19). Prioleau has suggested that Faulkner bears the markings of one incarnating "sensual undiscipline," being "a textbook exhibit of the symptoms of masturbation and incontinence in Howells's culture" (110). When the Marches visit the Faulkners later in the novel, they find Faulkner "deeply sunken in [an] armchair . . . and fondling the crook of his stick with his thin right hand" (27). As Prioleau points out, this masturbatory imaging and his appearance fulfil "the Victorian prognosis for intemperance" (110). Faulkner is said to have been smoking cigars "nervously . . . one after another" (167). Smoking was in Victorian advice literature coupled with sexual delinquency. The Victorian Dr. Frederick Hollick wrote that "[*t*]*obacco* is an article that exerts a most decided action . . . upon the generative organs. . . . I could . . . give numerous cases, both among single and married, showing the effects of this poisonous drug, and I do not hesitate to say that I think it has more to do with many [sexual] complaints" (qtd. in Walters 60). Nevil smokes too, which is naturally disapproved of by the correct March, who "had not thought it very seemly for a clergyman to smoke and drink claret-punch" (6-7). The increasing anxiety about the feminization of late nineteenth-century civilization included a fear of a spoiled generation of men that might come forth; "flat-chested cigarette smokers with shaky nerves and doubtful vitality" (qtd. in Rotundo 252).

Moreover, Faulkner's old-fashioned taste in literature not only makes him seem sentimental and romantic in March's eyes, it is harmful in itself. To March's exasperation,

Faulkner claims that “Byron was the last that you could really call great” (29). In a letter to his younger brother, written in 1863, Howells writes: “About this time, you’ll form some friendship, I suppose, that will have more influence upon your life than you can know, at once. A young fellow must have some friend; but you’ll do better not to have any than to be taken with one who is a funny chap, and at the same time a blackguard.” In the same letter he relates his “shameful” youthful passions, among them certain “bad poems of Byron” (qtd. in Crowley, “Howells, Stoddard” 61). Crowley indicates that Howells’s insinuations may relate to potential erotic and/or homoerotic desire or attraction. Be it in literature or in real life, this is seen by Howells as one of several youthful flaws that must be corrected and regretted. If they are not, Howells warns his brother, they will spoil him. Faulkner’s physical and mental illnesses mirror his moral delinquency, which corrupts those closest to him, ultimately causing suffering and death.

Mrs March thinks Faulkner not only a sentimentalist but “one *sop* of sentiment; and as conventional! Second-rate and second-hand!” (32). With characteristic aplomb, she declares that “[i]t’s quite like such a man as Faulkner to want a three-cornered household. I think the man who can’t give up his friend after he’s married, is always a kind of weakling” (33). However, there is a certain magnificent beauty recognized in it, too. When hearing of the particularities of the Faulkners, Mrs March sighs “Ah! . . . how cruel life is! But how beautiful, how grand!” Her husband dryly replies: “A nature . . . that might impress the casual observer as a mere sop of sentiment, is often capable of that sort of devotion” (73). Mrs March excuses a romantic nature in excess when the cause and object of it is Faulkner’s wife. The same kind of behaviour because of a man, however, is condemned.

3.4. The wilderness within

The themes of decay, moral, mental, and physical, the nature of the dream and dreaming, the futility of pain, the barrenness of all the main relationships but the Marches', the death of male romantic friendship, and the sexual unease – all come together in the novel's one substantial metaphor, the image of a wild garden, that "must once have flourished in delicious luxuriance." Every spring,

> the tall weeds sprang up to the light, and withered in midsummer for want of moisture, and the Black Hamburgs and Sweetwaters set in large clusters whose berries mildewed and bursts, and mouldered away in never-riping decay. . . . but nature took up the word from art, and continued the old garden in her wilding fashion to an effect of disordered loveliness that was full of poetry sad to heart-break. (48)

This is the setting in which Faulkner and March discuss Faulkner's dream at length, albeit at a meta-level (March does not yet know the dream's content), the possibility of Faulkner's imminent madness is suggested, and it is here, after glaring at Hermia, that Faulkner clutches his heart and dies. Also symbolically, then, Faulkner's many-layered decay is linked with the problematic form of same-sex relationship, and as several critics have noted, also "sexuality gone wrong" (Spangler 114, Prioleau 111, McMurray 27). The image of the garden also evokes an agonizing *beauty*, perhaps most clearly an image of Faulkner himself; whose "immortal eyes with starlike sorrows in them. [He] seems plainer and limper than ever" (37) and resembles the garden that Faulkner describes as "a melancholy, a desolation, a crazy charm, a dead and dying beauty" (49). The form of manly love that, in this culture at least, is soon to be obsolete, is thus fittingly described both in terms of beauty and of decay.

In the garden, "nature took up word from art" (48); the wilderness has won over civilization in this place. With the earlier discussion of male affection situated in relation to the (male) wilderness as opposed to the (female) civilization in mind, it seems particularly fitting that the symbolic core of a romantic friendship at the end of the nineteenth century is a chaotic wilderness. However, the traditional naming of nature as feminine is explicit here

("*her* wilding fashion"), a traditional way of conceiving the binary nature versus culture that was somewhat old-fashioned even in Howells's day. It is in the wilderness of the garden that the most intense feelings and the anguish stemming from a dysfunctional domestic arrangement can be played out. Moreover, in a novel with more dialogue than actual events, the most important action takes place in this wild spot: Faulkner's dramatic death. This is also the only place where March allows a certain magniloquence in Faulkner's way of expressing the place's beauty without censuring him, as if the wilderness of the place itself allows for passionate exclamations and feelings.

Leslie Fiedler's assertion that the typical male protagonist of American fiction has failed "to deal with adult heterosexual love and his consequent obsession with death, incest and innocent homosexuality" (12) does not, as he repeatedly states, include Howells. "[H]is forty books, in which there are no seductions and only rare moments of violence, are too restrictedly 'realistic' to do justice to the reality of dream and nightmare, fantasy and fear" (260). It is tempting to suggest that Fiedler could not have read *The Shadow of a Dream*. Whether he had or not, however, he is not wrong in recognizing Howells's strictly civilized and cultivated style, although the novel must be said to indeed "do justice to the reality of dream and nightmare, fantasy and fear." To the extent that that the novel does this, it is perhaps partly because of the symbolism of the garden's wilderness and the conversation and action that take place there, which deepen and explore the repressed wilderness of both the characters and the plot.

A major change from the culture fostering a friendship like Harte's Tennessee and his partner's to that of Faulkner and Nevil took place in the realm of domesticity. The Victorian dilemma of two almost incommensurable ideals, the family man and the wild, virile man, must have been expressed very differently within the city than in the wilderness itself. The type of masculinity that, in the specific frame of the masculine Wild West, could balance an

aggressive masculinity with a nurturing (and by definition feminine) behaviour, was very far from being hegemonic in a bourgeois setting in the late nineteenth century. While the early nineteenth century "provided a fertile environment for an expansive American manhood," Michael Kimmel writes, "[g]eographic expansion – the taming of the West, the 'pacification' of its native population, and dramatic urban growth . . . grounded identity in a 'securely achieved manhood' until industrialization and democracy shook the established and secure manhood by mid-century" ("The Temporary Crisis" 137-8). As Cancian writes, "[a]n ideal man was not perfectly suited for family life. Trained for competitive battles and self-reliance, he might well suffocate in a cozy Victorian home" (21). Rather than being trained for something exclusively masculine, for Faulkner it is rather a case of being trained in a form of affection increasingly considered feminine, and this is the reason he is a misfit in a late-Victorian home.

Howells's domestic dramas were, predictably, not perceived as the most masculine of narratives. When his grand niece wrote to him on finding his novels devoid of virility, her definition of virility was "very strong . . . ; and mistrustful; and relentless; and makes you feel as if somebody had taken you by the throat; and shakes you up, awfully, and seems to throw you into the air, and trample you underfoot" (qtd. in Rotundo 226). She, too, had perhaps not read *The Shadow of a Dream*. Because in a moment of resentment, March describes Faulkner as "a demoniac presence, . . . implacable, immovable, ridiculous like all the rest, monstrous, illogical, and no more to be reasoned away than to be entreated" (146). Typically, the most virile, immediate, and rough masculinity is also the one which is the most romantic and ardent and the most open to intimate same-sex friendships. In the context of this novel, it is also typical that Faulkner is the one who is most severely symbolically punished for his ill-fitting masculinity.

In contrast, the masculinity embodied by March is connected with constrained and feminized domesticity by his being the assigned protector and provider for his home and family. While aggressive masculinity perhaps remained a subordinate possibility, what the late nineteenth century called "character" embodied "honesty, piety, self-control, and a commitment to the producer values of industry, thrift, punctuality, and sobriety" (Summers 1). These qualities are to a great extent personified in the adult March. In some ways, he is diametrically opposed to Tennessee's Partner, being less "natural," "rough," or passionate, and also less likely to show what was understood as *feminine* care and love. This type of masculinity would come to represent an image of repressed Victorian manhood that other men in American society later would refute, something which I will explore in the following chapter.

4

"Under Your Tough Black Hide": Friends and Fairies in *Home to Harlem*

"I suppose some of us Erotics lads, vide myself,
were placed here just to eat our hearts out with
longing for unattainable things, especially for that
friendship beyond understanding."
Countee Cullen[19]

4.1. The reaction to Victorian manhood

During the thirty years after William Dean Howells emphatically, though not without regret, kissed goodbye to romantic friendships and three-cornered households, Americans entered a new sexual era that pointed to the future rather than echoing the past. The historian Martin Summers points out that "the transition from Victorian culture to a more modern ethos . . . roughly occurred between the 1890s and the 1920s" (155). In some ways, the tendency in the white middle-class society, at least, nevertheless marked a continuation of a restricted manhood ideal. Because sexuality was beginning to be a defining characteristic of a person's identity, close friendship between men was generally looked at with increasing suspicion. Friends would need to define and separate more carefully the realm of friendship and sexual feelings, according to John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman (130). At the same time, the erotic was by the 1920s seen as more positive, young people were allowed more autonomy,

[19] Qtd. in Summers 190.

love was to be pursued, men and women interacted more in public, and the female interest in the sexual was more legitimate (233). For sexual relationships between men and women, the changes were mostly for the better, but relationships that fell outside of the lawful union experienced an increased strain. By all its participants, however, this transition was felt consciously and keenly. "This is a new age," says Ray, one of *Home to Harlem*'s protagonists, to his best buddy Jake, "with new methods of living" (206).

Published towards the end of the Harlem Renaissance, *Home to Harlem* (1928) by Jamaican-born Claude McKay (1889-1948) may be read as a reaction to the Victorian middle-class manliness. Narrated from the lower levels of society, it is also a picture of Harlem as a working-class wilderness; black migrant workers are floating around in Harlem, with sex, violence, and jazz music in ample measure. As a wilderness Harlem was, in fact, used by white tourists to get in touch with their "primitive side." This primitivism was used ambiguously by McKay; while he on one hand rejected the image of African Americans as primitive, he embraced the strong masculinity inherent in this stereotype and exploited this possibility in *Home to Harlem*.[20] Thus it is also possible to recognize a certain tendency towards reclaiming the natural, virile masculinity Victorian men used to seek at the Frontier. The previous thirty, even forty years, had been so industrialized, urbanized, and "feminized," that this was almost only a fantasy, at this stage kept barely alive in literature like Bret Harte's. Basil March's ideal manliness in Howells's *The Shadow of a Dream* embodied exactly that emotionally restrained, domesticated middle-class masculinity that *Home to Harlem*'s protagonists reject. Jake, the novel's working-class hero, is emotionally and physically free, childish, virile, "primitive," and embracing his sexuality in a new and, to the older generation of black intellectuals like W. E. B. Du Bois, disgracefully shocking way.

[20] On McKay's relationship to primitivism, see Summers 222-29 and Rosenberg 223-26.

Jake and Ray meet in the early days of the Harlem Renaissance, are immediately attracted to each other, and are thereafter almost inseparable. When Ray finally decides to leave on a ship for Europe, the only thing that keeps him from leaving is his friendship with Jake – and not his fiancée, whom he gladly leaves behind. My contention is that the friendship between Jake and Ray has the potential of being as romantic as the friendship between Tennessee and his partner. The main difference from Victorian romantic friendships lies almost exclusively in the hegemonic society's general acceptance. Even though the comparatively small crowd of Harlem's young men generally accept intimate male relationships in *Home to Harlem*, as black working-class men they hardly have the power to influence or speak for anybody but themselves. The following discussion includes an investigation of the circumstances that shape Jake and Ray's relationship. Harlem's strong gay subculture is central in understanding the restraints or possibilities inherent in a male friendship in a time that schematically could be (mis)understood as "after homosexuality emerged." The discussion will entail an investigation of how Jake and Ray's friendship was constituted in terms of class, gender identification, and the reactions to Victorian and the hegemonic white values in the special culture of the Harlem Renaissance.

The meaning of homosexuality was quite different from today, and "heterosexuality" as such had barely become a meaningful expression. George Chauncey writes in his groundbreaking work *Gay New York* (1994) that not until the 1930s and 1940s did "homosexual" and "heterosexual" slowly replace the division of "fairy" and "normal man." The new terms, however, did not carry the exact same implications as the old, because as far as the twenties were concerned, the important determinative criterion in the identification of men was in terms of imaginary gender status, not sexuality. In other words, whether a man acted in a way perceived as feminine or masculine was more important than whom he slept with. Thus the term "fairies" described effeminate men, whose preference to have sex with

other men was seen as something of a logical consequence of their effeminacy (47-8). The term "gay" "emerged as a coded homosexual term and as a widely known term for homosexuals in the context of the complex relationship between men known as 'fairies' and those known as 'queers,'" and McKay has illustrated his intimate knowledge of both. The word did not necessarily entail sexual preference, either. Because "gay" was more commonly used about something pleasurable, often something naughty, it could easily be used as a code word for the less detectable queers (as opposed to the fairies) (Chauncey 14-16).

Therefore, *Home to Harlem* does not necessarily need to be interpreted as either heterosexual or homosexual just because those categories existed to a greater degree than before. The words describing persons or actions connected with homosexuality were just starting to manifest themselves in the language and to be recorded in official and unofficial documents around the time the novel was written. Some were not quite sure whether they even referred to something real. The *Medical Review of Reviews* asked in 1921: "Does the 'fairy' or 'fag' really exist?" (Shapiro 284). Yet the "Dickties," the young intellectuals in Harlem, had no trouble recognizing the novel's verisimilitude. They perceived it as "the truest picture of black life yet published," and Langston Hughes declared "it is the finest thing 'we've' done yet" (Watson 84). Probably from a combination of the "Dickties'" assessment and its immediate notoriety, *Home to Harlem*, after only two weeks, made the American best-seller list as the very first novel by an African American author. A few later critics agreed with the initial indignation of Du Bois and his peers,[21] but critics such as Burton Rascoe (1928), Michael Stoff (1972), and James R. Giles (1976) celebrate, rather than censure, the "primitivism" of *Home to Harlem*, agreeing with Hughes that it gives a true and vivid representation of Harlem working-class life. For all the hubbub about illicit sexuality, however, sexuality and gender have very rarely been discussed as such until quite recently.

[21] Hugh M. Gloster, for example, agreed with Du Bois in 1945.

Deborah McDowell's essay investigating the homosexual subtext of Nella Larsen's *Passing* in 1988 was pathbreaking in that it encouraged a substantial rereading of both of Larsen's novels *Passing* and *Quicksand*. Yet before Suzette A. Spencer's essay "Excavating the Homoerotic Subtext in *Home to Harlem*" in 1998, the topic was distinctly *off topic* where other literature from the Harlem Renaissance was concerned. In her essay, however, Spencer argues that "what appears to be McKay's indefatigable penchant for the reckless heterosexual philandering of his male characters might just be McKay's own protective cover . . . for a homoerotic subtext" (166). Insisting that Ray is homosexual and Jake is bisexual, she evokes a conspicuously modern discourse on sexuality that fails to realize the novel's scope in depicting the love and sexual scene in the Harlem Renaissance.

The other extreme is the more common, (implicit) heterosexual reading. In 1976, for example, McKay's biographer James R. Giles could not understand the ending of Ray's section: "In *Home to Harlem*," he writes, "one is left with a feeling of uncertainty and confusion concerning Ray because the ending of Book II is probably the biggest artistic flaw in the novel. McKay arbitrarily introduces the nice, educated black girl Agatha who wants to marry Ray; but Ray refuses because he sees marriage as a trap" (82). Why would a nice and educated man like Ray reject a nice and educated woman like Agatha? Why was she introduced in the novel in the first place? The similarity of Giles's worry to that of the critics of "Tennessee's Partner" is striking in that he cannot understand the rejection, or even inclusion, of Agatha in the novel, and accordingly feels both "uncertain" and "confused," maybe because he cannot place Ray's sexuality. Again, as with *The Shadow of a Dream*, a re-reading of *Home to Harlem* might benefit from a more generous interpretation in terms of a person's love and desire for persons of both sexes and the different expressions this may take.

4.2. Intimate friends in gay Harlem

Summers bases his recent study of black masculinity, *Manliness and Its Discontents* (2004), largely on the "younger middle-class African American and African Caribbean men," and includes primarily members of the Harlem literati like McKay, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Wallace Thurman, and Jean Toomer. They formed the vanguard in Harlem in rejecting Victorian values and, as Summers writes, of these values they especially attacked "the canon of manliness." McKay's attack on middle-class respectability was not, however, an attack on black manhood itself. As Summers points out, he rejected "white middle-class manhood and what he felt to be the unnatural constraints placed on sexuality and virile masculinity by bourgeois gender conventions" (222). McKay and the young Harlemites challenged this "through the career choices that they made . . . , 'unrespectable' modes of leisure, and the intimate relationships that they formed with both women and other men" (152). Such intimate relationships would indeed challenge exactly that emotional self-restraint that (the older) Basil March adhered to, although I suspect that Summers is indicating sexually, not emotionally, intimate relationships. Nevertheless, in the hegemonic culture it was no longer an obvious choice for a man to have an intimate male friend. This was probably yet another factor to rebel against, because such friendships embodied the opposite of the restricted masculinity ideals from which the Harlemites wanted to liberate themselves.

Importantly, as Summers shows, black masculinity has to date almost exclusively been read in reaction to the white hegemony. However, to a large extent it was also shaped by reacting to their parents' generation (whose elite had, incidentally, much in common with the white hegemony) and other social classes of black men (11-13). "Black masculinity" equally contained an ongoing negotiation between black men and black women, as between different groupings of black men, for example African Americans and African Caribbeans. The latter is

also clearly illustrated in *Home to Harlem* in the relationship between the Haitian Ray and Jake, born and bred in America.[22]

In his literature, McKay "merely inverted the Victorian gendered hierarchies of technology and nature, self-control and sexuality, reason and emotion. Nature, sensuality, and emotion, qualities that were most clearly embodied in the black working-class, . . . became the markers for a modern masculinity," writes Summers (224). Summers clearly refers to the qualities of the late Victorian bourgeoisie, and not, importantly, their fantasy of the "frontier manhood." In fact, the modern black masculinity as embodied by Jake was not substantially different from Tennessee's Partner's frontier masculinity, or the late Victorian aristocratic ideal of an English working-class male lover, for that matter. In extension, the expression of male friendship that we find in *Home to Harlem* is reminiscent of the romantic one in "Tennessee's Partner." The gay subculture, albeit open, prevalent, and subject to some censure amongst Harlem's young men and women, inhibited neither Jake nor Ray, as I will show in the following. As Eric Garber points out, gay men were often mocked, but they were not shunned, something that was also apparent in blues lyrics from the era (322). However, there were also quite a few Harlemites who to a large extent accepted and embraced this culture (Summers 181-199), and it seems that Jake, Ray, and their friends belonged to the latter category.

The narrator of the story is heterodiegetic. The focalization shifts between Jake and Ray and some of the minor characters, but their thoughts and feelings are described not as though by themselves, but as a friend may have recounted them. The narrator is not distanced from the characters like in "Tennessee's Partner" and partly in *The Shadow of a Dream*. This increases the impression of an attempt at giving "a true picture of black life," which is rather emphasized by a frequent use of ellipses. They often work as filling and indicate phases of

[22] For an investigation of the relationship between Jake and Ray in terms of national differences, see John Lowney's "Haiti and Black Transnationalism: Remapping the Migrant Geography of *Home to Harlem*."

transition, but sometimes it is implied that something is omitted, something which the reader is left to figure out for her/himself. The reader's expected knowledge of what is omitted reaffirms the notion of this being based on a real scene that readers may have such knowledge about.

The plot of *Home to Harlem* revolves around Jake Brown roaming Harlem's underworld picaresque-style in search of his "tantalizing brown," Felice, a prostitute he meets on his first night back in Harlem and does not re-encounter until the end of the novel. Jake meets Ray, a young Haitian intellectual, when they are both working as waiters on the Pennsylvania Railroad. Set off by the book Ray is reading, *Sapho* by Alphonse Daudet, their first conversation may serve as an indication of the sexual climate in Harlem. Ray tells Jake the story of the real Sappho, "of her poetry, of her loves and her passion for the beautiful boy, Phaon. And her leaping into the sea from the Leucadian cliff because of her love for him" (128). Then Ray rhapsodizes:

> 'Her story gave two lovely words to modern language [. . .] Sapphic and Lesbian . . . b e a u t i f u l words.'
> 'What is that there Leshbian?'
> '. . . Lovely word, eh?'
> 'Tha's what we calls bulldyker in Harlem,' drawled Jake. 'Them's all ugly womens.'
> 'Not *all*. And that's a damned ugly name,' the waiter said. 'Harlem is too savage about some things. *Bulldyker*,' the waiter stressed with a sneer.
> Jake grinned. 'But tha's what they is, ain't it?' He began humming:
> 'And there is two things in Harlem I don't understan'
> It is a bulldyking woman and a faggoty man.' (129)[23]

Their conflicting attitudes towards what today would be termed homosexuality are quite characteristic for McKay's own highly ambiguous relationship to it. While rebelling against the middle-class manliness he often proudly exhibited his sexual desire for men, yet he also conformed to "hypermasculinity and occasional homophobia" (Summers 196). McKay's intermittent homophobia is not overt in *Home to Harlem*, but there are clear examples from his prolific letter writing (Summers 197). As Summers indicates, this might as well be an

[23] When quoting from *Home to Harlem* I will put my own ellipses in brackets, so that McKay's own frequent ellipses will stand as intended by the author.

expression of his "queer" identity; he was an example of men who "separated their sexuality from their gender" and he presumed that his sexual desire did not hinder his masculinity (197). Interestingly, Jake has at this stage in the novel already proved his openness towards gay *men*, but it seems that he is more judgmental when it comes to lesbians. This may be accounted for, however, by the fact that lesbian women's sphere was to a large extent separated from the male gay scene (Chauncey 228).

Early in the novel, a cabaret singer, who is described as a girl with a man's bass voice, sings for Jake. That this is a girl with an exceptionally deep voice is of course a possibility, but it is more than likely that she is a drag artist, a feature common in Harlem's nightlife. The singer, whom the narrator refers to as a girl, entices the pansies and dandies present in the cabaret. When she sings and dances for Jake, the "pansies stared and tightened their grip on their dandies. The dandies tightened their hold on themselves. They looked the favored Jake up and down. All those perfection struts for him. Yet he didn't seem aroused at all" (32). Jake, although attractive to both women and men, is not attracted to the pansies and dandies, nor does he care for the singer at that point. However, only moments after his reserve is stated in the novel, "Jake was going crazy. A hot fever was burning him up. . . . Where was the singing gal that had danced to him? That dancing was for him all right" (32-3). The jazz music in the cabaret and the realization that the singer was dancing for him rapidly transform Jake from a state of "not aroused at all" to a feverish state of desire.

If the singer is in fact a man, this does not necessarily make Jake bisexual, as Spencer claims, using this scene as the main reasoning for that contention. To label someone as bisexual on those frail grounds even today would be unconvincing. To label someone as bisexual in the 1920s, when that category very rarely was used as such, is anachronistic. According to Chauncey, "bisexual" did not refer to people who were attracted to both men and women. It referred to people who *were* both male and female, either physically, mentally,

or both (49).[24] One needed to display a far more extensive breech of norms than Jake ever does to be called, for example, "fairy" or "dandy." A man who responded to a fairy would not be considered as such as long as he acted in a masculine way. As long as the fairy was something of a third sex, many conventionally masculine men were allowed a greater deal of sexual relations with other men than what would be common today, without the risk of stigmatization (Chauncey 13).

This illustrates, then, Jake's secure, virile masculinity. Justin D. Edwards reads this scene as an example of where Jake's "gender and sexual identities remain static," because of his disinterestedness in the gay men of the club, although he does not investigate the scene further than the point where Jake is still disinterested (164). I am not sure that his sexual identity is so static, but if the novel hints at him (sexually) being "trade,"[25] this nevertheless stabilizes his *gender* identity in terms of an active, virile, powerful, and attractive masculinity. According to Chauncey, the presence of fairies did not threaten the masculinity of other men, but rather confirmed it, because the differences between men and women were exaggerated through them. Many gay men considered the perfect partner to be an embodiment of the "macho" masculine ideal, for example a sailor or a soldier (Chauncey 57, 78). Jake is in that respect the epitome of masculinity, a homecoming soldier returning to Harlem on board a ship. That both men and women admire him does nothing but boost his self-esteem, not least sexually. The ease with which the novel exhibits Jake in continuous juxtaposition with a variety of gay men indicates that there is little or no need for Jake to worry about the perception of his sexuality, or, rather, gender performance. Therefore, Jake's reaction to the singer and to the fairies and dandies indicates that the open gay sexuality in Harlem did not at all inhibit his feelings or actions as they are always open and straightforward. He still can be

[24] "Bisexual" in the sense "capable of loving a person of either sex" is noted first in 1914 in *American Medicine* (Shapiro 284), but it is unlikely that this was a common understanding of the term in the Harlem Renaissance.
[25] "Trade" was a common pre-war term referring to "any 'normal' man who accepted a queer's sexual advances" (Chauncey 66).

loving, sweet, and open to Ray without feeling that he needs to restrain himself lest he should be thought gay.

Billy Biasse, one of Jake's friends, is a typical example of how masculinity did not have much to do which sex one fancied, as he, as a "wolf" who "eats his own kind" (*Home to Harlem* 92),[26] is highly masculine, in fact, far rougher than Jake. He chastises Jake for only carrying a knife, when he ought, according to Billy, to carry a gun. As Summers also points out, Billy calls Jake a punk, which denoted a more effeminate, younger man (334 n. 51) – often, in fact, the lover preference for "wolves." This does not seem to bother Jake much. He is an image of a "softer" masculinity and ultimately portrayed as the healthier of the two, and the gun comes to nothing good in the end.

Enveloped within Jake's picaresque narrative, Ray is introduced as a waiter on the Pennsylvania Railroad, and as someone completely different from the men and women Jake is normally surrounded by. Detached from the lively, colourful, and violent Harlem social scene, the university-educated Ray presents Jake with a whole new world of learning and a different sense of worth for black men on the train. He knows stories of black emancipation Jake has never dreamt of; his account of Toussaint L'Ouverture makes Jake exclaim: "'A black man! A black man! Oh, I wish I'd been a soldier under sich a man!'" (132). Yet Ray himself is racked with self-contemptuous thoughts on account of his manhood. Importantly, nothing unconventional in Ray's sexual identity is the cause of this, nor does his sexuality further impair his low self-esteem, rather, in fact, the opposite.

After reaching their destination one night, their sleeping quarters are bug-ridden and filthy. Ray, tortured by the bugs, overdoses on opium in an attempt to get some sleep. Before taking the drugs from Jake's pocket, Ray is in a frenzy of worry. For Ray, masculinity is inextricably interlinked with autonomy, an autonomy he once had as a citizen of a free Haiti.

[26] A common term for masculine men who prefers to have sex with men (Chauncey 89)

Now that he is no longer free, but himself one of the "ten millions of the suppressed Yankee 'coons'" (155); he hates himself and them, and is, symbolically at least, made impotent by it. The primary identification for Ray as a *man* is not connected with sexuality, nor with gender as a category positioned in opposition to women; he sees his emasculation as a direct consequence of his race, loathing "every soul in that great barrack-room, except Jake" (153).

A sexual fantasy symbolically reinstates his manhood in this scene. The homoerotic dream emerges moments after he looks up at Jake who sleeps above him in a bunk bed, and through Ray's focalization Jake is described, "stretched at full length on his side, his cheek in his right hand, sleeping peacefully, like a tired boy after hard playing, so happy and sweet and handsome" (157). The tender description is surprisingly physical, but there is nothing in Ray's contemplation that involves sexual or gendered doubt. Their relationship has no carnal component as far as the reader is informed. Instead, the image of Jake as the epitome of innocent and pure boyhood works in this context as a foil to Ray's troubled manhood. Eventually, Ray takes the drugs, and soon he is deep in an erotic fantasy where he is "a gay humming-bird, fluttering and darting his long needle beak into the heart of a bell-flower. . . . Now he was a young shining chief; . . . slim, naked negresses dancing for his pleasure" (157-8).[27] So far the dream's imagery is quite ambiguous, but it develops quickly into a more homoerotic reverie with "courtiers reclining on cushions soft like passionate kisses; gleaming-skinned black boys bearing goblets of wine and obedient eunuchs waiting in the offing. . . . And the world was a blue paradise" (158). The images of sexuality in Ray's dream affirm his masculinity in terms of the norms of the day because he is symbolically the active performer in the dream. That the dream is provoked by his admiration of Jake's good looks does nothing to diminish the power of sexuality in terms of restoring Ray's wounded masculinity. Sexuality, in fact, emerges in the dream as something which *rectifies* "[t]aboos and terrors and

[27] It is likely that McKay knew the alternative meaning of "gay" at the time of writing because of his intimate knowledge of Harlem's gay scene.

penalties" when they are "transformed into new pagan delights, orgies of Orient-blue carnival, of rare flowers and red fruits, cherubs and seraphs and fetishes and phalli and all the most-high gods" (158).

One of the main reasons for the demise of male romantic friendship is said to be the stigmatization of homosexual men simultaneous with the "coming of homosexuals as a species" around the turn of the century (Foucault 43). However, in this particular culture, neither Ray nor Jake is inhibited by the new, overt sexuality and the homophobic labelling therein, firstly because both are to a greater and lesser extent masculine enough not to be labelled, and also, importantly, they are part of a subculture that is in opposition to a white or black bourgeois Victorian ideal. So far, Jake and Ray's relationship differs from known romantic friendships only in that homoeroticism is overt and acknowledged as something in opposition to the hegemonic manhood, as opposed to when the physical aspect conformed to the friendship ideal or, alternatively, was accepted with a shrug.

4.3. Homosocial environment

How is this friendship comparable to other romantic friendships? Apart from the actual loyalty, expressions of love and devotion, and unashamed physical admiration, a male homosocial community is the central arena. Similar to the environment in "Tennessee's Partner," it is within this that the friendship between Jake and Ray is constituted. Homosociality here, however, is not a straightforward condition for wonderful, unproblematic male bonding as in Leslie Fiedler's outline or as it to a certain extent is portrayed in "Tennessee's Partner." Much more present in McKay's novel are aspects of class and race, which function to modify the experience of a group unity based solely on belonging to a sex. The male community is still highly important, however. The railroad crew, for example, form the absolutely masculine backdrop for Ray and Jake's dyadic relationship, although Ray and

Jake's friendship is elevated above the rest of the all-male community. The narrator relates that:

> Men working on a train have something of the spirit of men working on a ship. They are, perforce, bound together in comradeship of a sort in that close atmosphere. In the stopover cities they go about in pairs or groups. But the camaraderie breaks up on the platform in New York as soon as the dining-car returns there. Every man goes his own way unknown to his comrades. Wife or sweet-heart or some other magnet of the great magic city draws each off separately. (208)

The all-male environment might have been what made them seek out the railroad in the first place, but it is not what made any of them stay. Unlike the rest, their friendship does not break up on the platform. That it is this relationship which is important and not the larger male community onboard is underscored when Ray wants to quit, and Jake answers: "'Why, ef you quit, chappie, I'll nevah go back on that there white man's sweet chariot.'" Jake's friend Billy Biasse butts in and asks incredulously: "'Kain't you git along on theah without him?" Jake explains his unwillingness to be without Ray with: "'It's a whole lot the matter you can't understand, Billy. The white folks' railroad ain't like Lenox Avenue. You can tell on theah when a pal's a real pal.'" Billy mockingly chants in reply, "'I got a pal, I got a gal'" (239) – as if the difference mattered just very little.

Chauncey advises that "historians need to recognize the desire to live in a social milieu in which [homosexual] relationships were relatively common and accepted – or to escape the pressure to marry in a more family-oriented milieu – as one of the motives that sent men on the road or to sea" (Chauncey 91). The railroads and ships did not only present a homo*sexual* scene, but also homosocial places where there were no women. Although the three main male societies presented in *Home to Harlem*, the life as a soldier, a sailor, and a worker on a train, are places for homosocialization, they are all insufficient as scenes for male empowerment and bonding because they are all dominated by the suppressive white superiors. One of the places for the young men of Harlem to find an almost exclusively black male crew was, naturally, a bar in Harlem: "A bar has a charm all of its own that makes drinking there

pleasanter. We like to lean up against it, with a foot on the rail. We will leave our women companions and choice wines at the table to snatch a moment of exclusive sex solidarity over a thimble of gin at the bar" (324).

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes that "[o]nly women have the power to make men less than men within this world" (40). Ontologically, this is of course true – for example, a man could not be seen as effeminate if women did not occupy the opposite of the binary. However, it seems to me that it is rather the other way around in *Home to Harlem*. Firstly, men themselves do a good job of disempowering other men of different races, creeds, or social standing. Secondly, men have the power to unman other men from the exact same strata as themselves as well. In *Home to Harlem*, the late nights in the buffet flats, pool rooms, clubs, and cabarets are more often than not ruptured by sudden outbursts of violence, often in the shape of seamy jealousy with women and men scratching, yelling, and slapping. Jake thinks after the last time this occurs in the novel: "These miserable cock-fights, beastly, tigerish, bloody. They had always sickened, saddened, unmanned him" (328). Here, all male fighting indeed has the power of unmanning Jake (far from covering his homosexual desire, then, as Spencer argues [172]).

This is not to say that women in *Home to Harlem* do not have the power to emasculate men. At a time of high unemployment among African Americans, women found it easier to attain paid work (mainly in domestic service), and could then be the main wage earners (Summers 152). Jake's lover Congo Rose strives to maintain gender differences despite being the breadwinner, and makes Jake slap her to feel his physical power; only then can she see him as "a *ma-an* all right" (117). The ideal masculinity must perhaps be more emphatically manifest when the woman in the relationship is "wearing the pants" all of a sudden, but Jake resents this. The importance of the conflict about what being a man entails is heightened by Jake actually leaving Rose over it; this is also a political act that celebrates Jake's positive and

non-violent masculinity that for all its virility and power is never aggressive. Interestingly, the way that Rose unmans Jake is by assigning him more rough power, and the reason he is put off is that he does not want it.

Moreover, Sedgwick's statement may also be turned upside down: it is only women who can make men *men* in the world. Women never present men with an actual alternative to male friendship in the novel; rather, as many critics have argued, they serve as obstacles in the way to black male freedom.[28] Men's identity must be created in opposition to women, but this is easier done without being in the actual presence of one. The only woman who has the potential of making Jake happy and secure is Felice. Significantly, the promised happiness of Felice and Jake is never explored, only introduced in the novel's last pages. Felice is thus almost completely excluded from the narrative. Even when Ray has gone and Jake finally recaptures his "little brown" and takes her to his room, it is Ray who steals the scene. While Jake praises him, she "smoothed out the counterpane on the bed, making a mental note that it was just right for two" (304). Seeing no room for anyone but the loving couple there, it is as if Felice shuts Ray out of their bed – and life – and thinks to herself that, like Mrs March's in Howells's *The Shadow of a Dream*, "[a] husband shouldn't have any friend but his wife" (139).

4.4. Civilization, primitivism, and class

"True friendships," the Harlem poet Countee Cullen felt, "instead of marriages, are made in Heaven. I fail to see any divine diplomacy behind most marriages; they are too easily disrupted" (qtd. in Summers 189). Marriage was seen by Harlem literati as an obstacle and a troubled sphere for both women and men, Summers writes, and they rejected the "'hierarchical and emotionally barren' relationships that characterized the typical Victorian

[28] See, for example, Kimberley Roberts (121) or Edwards (162).

marriage" (188). Ray sees marriage as a pit-fall into Victorian middle-class values, and as such, Fielder's image of the man escaping from feminized civilization bears even stronger resonance in this novel because Ray so vocally expresses the link between emasculation, civilization, and marriage. Indeed, another similarity with "Tennessee's Partner" and much of the homosocial fiction that Fiedler explores is the connection with primitivism. The notion of emotional restraint, inherent in the Victorian middle-class ideal of manliness, was negatively opposed to an excess of emotions, having a "primitive" nature (which was a two-edged sword; its negative connotations were mostly given to black men), and belonging to the lower classes. These were all feminized in that culture (Summers 227). One of the chief reactions to this in *Home to Harlem* is how these traits are masculinized by both Jake and Ray. Again, this reclaiming of certain culturally-gendered character traits resembles how the masculinity connected with primitivism in white, rural working-class America was virile and autonomous and, as in Harte's literature, could also embody a femininity traditionally connected to wifely or motherly home-making. Another reason for the possibilities of intimate same-sex friendship, then, was the connection of black working-class men with primitivism, and therefore openness and emotions.

The discussion of domesticity and primitivism takes a different and highly contradictory direction in *Home to Harlem* from "Tennessee's Partner" and *The Shadow of a Dream*. In some ways, Harlem as a city, although referred to explicitly as female, is as an urban scene the modern place to prove one's manhood after there was no more wilderness to "masculinize" in (Kimmel 399 n. 25). This may be seen as a continuation of the way that nature itself was considered female, while men tamed it. The femininity in McKay's depiction is doubtfully meant as a sign of domesticity. It is the implicit likening to a female prostitute that is imperative in its gendering, a metaphor, perhaps, for the exploitation of the city and its inhabitants. As Summers points out, conflicts between "respectability and libertinism,

'civilization' and 'the primitive,' reason and emotion, [are] resolved on the terrain of gender - specifically, . . . masculine identity" (228). Because no women in the novel, excluding Agatha, have a chance of achieving bourgeois respectability, this discourse consequently eliminates women. Masculinity is thus relationally constituted almost exclusively in opposition with other men – men of other classes, nationalities, races, and philosophies – while the great majority of women serve only as vague and almost wholly negative foils.

Agatha is an exception only by proxy. She is not challenging Ray's manhood as a woman, but, reduced to a reminder of the hated civilization that oppresses him, she is hated in its place. Fearing the conformity of a Harlem domesticity, he describes the fear of succumbing to the white ideology; "the contented animal that was a Harlem nigger strutting his stuff" (264). The fear of being domesticated entails in fact two senses, both meaning him as a "contented animal" that must submit unquestioningly to act as the white folks' puppet and forget his "wild blood," and in the more literal sense that he will not make a home with Agatha. Although civilization and domesticity are explicitly connected in Agatha, Ray does not necessarily want to escape civilization as something feminine as such; he wants to escape it as something white.

Jake embodies the "primitive" duality; he is black, working-class, and therefore, stereotypically, he is more sexual, masculine, naïve, and trusting. Ray is more educated and more conscious about his symbolic emasculation. McKay includes all these aspects and expresses both their conflicting masculinities and their intimate friendship in the poignant scene when Ray finally leaves Harlem to go to find a real, homosocial wilderness at sea. The day before Ray's ship is leaving, Jake still tries to convince him to stay home in Harlem. "Why not can the idea, chappie? The sea is hell and when you hits shore it's the same life all ovah," Jake asks. "I guess you are right [. . .] Goethe said the same thing in *Werther*" (272). Jake suddenly grips Ray's shoulder and exclaims:

> ‘Chappie, I wish I was edjucated mahself.’
> ‘Christ! What for?’ demanded Ray.
> ‘Becaz I likes you.’ Like a black Pan out of the woods Jake looked into Ray’s eyes with frank savage affection and Billy Biasse exclaimed:
> ‘Lawdy in heaben! A li’l’ foreign booze gwine turn you all soft?’
> ‘Can’t you like me just as well as you are?’ asked Ray. ‘I can’t feel any difference at all. If I was famous as Jack Johnson and rich as Madame Walker I’d prefer to have you as my friend rather than – President Wilson.’
> ‘Like bumbole you would!’ […] ‘Ef I was edjucated, I could understand things better and be proper-speaking like you is.’ (272-3)

Billy Biasse cries out in despair over Jake’s soft heart, “‘Oh, you heart-breaking, slobbering nigger! . . . That’s the stuff youse got tuck away there under your tough black hide.’ ‘Muzzle you’ mouf,’ retorted Jake. ‘Sure Ise human. I ain’t no lonesome wolf lak you is’” (273-4).

Billy the Wolf’s taunting Jake for his “softness” again parades Billy as the embodiment of a more modern, aggressive masculinity ideal. Jake, on his side, scoffs at Billy’s hardness. Neither Jake nor Ray is overly upset by Billy’s many references to Jake being effeminate; to Jake, it is far worse being animal-like and tough. Notably, Jake never shows any contempt for Billy’s preferences in having sex with men, only his aggressive masculinity, which is opposed to Jake’s own affection for Ray. The term “savage,” which today evokes a perhaps equally aggressive masculinity, in reality rather stresses the connection between black men as “primitive” and the received understanding of their emotional openness.

Again, it is not the gender or sexuality discourse that is the most important, the most explicit restraint on their friendship is the class difference between the two. While Jake feels the difference between them keenly, Ray has no conception of class as a ruining factor in their relationship. However, he is far from at ease with his education: “[M]odern education is planned to make you a sharp, snouty, rooting hog. A Negro getting it is an anachronism. . . . And civilization is rotten. We are all rotten who are touched by it,” (243) he exclaims. While Jake regrets that he cannot be educated so as to be closer to Ray intellectually, Ray hates his class because of its close associations with white, Victorian, civilized manhood mores. Ray

cannot avoid seeing his education as a mocking parody of his own powerless situation. The education that Jake envies and is somewhat alienated by confuses and alienates Ray, too, and he tells Jake that "The fact is, Jake, [. . .] I don't know what I'll do with my little education. I wonder sometimes if I could get rid of it and go and lose myself in some savage culture in the jungles of Africa. I am a misfit" (274). Interestingly, Jake's solution to the dilemma is a "three-cornered household" that is to contain Ray, Jake's sister, and Jake. A typical Victorian solution to male romantic friendships, it simultaneously overcomes the class gulf, because in Jake's fantasy "I mighta help mah li'l sister to get edjucated, too [. . .], good enough foh you to hitch up with. Then we could all settle down and make money like edjucated people do, instead a you gwine off to throw you'self away on some lousy dinghy" (273).

There are two aspects to dyadic intimacy: emotional and physical. In terms of emotional intimacy, Jake and Ray's relationship is as loving, spontaneous, and open as a romantic friendship was fifty years before, although their language, of course, lacks the vocal romanticism of Howells's Douglas Faulkner, which sickens March so. In terms of physical intimacy, Jake and Ray's friendship still does not differ substantially from such friendship that existed thirty or fifty years before. Expressions of a physical kind which extend certain boundaries have lost their innocence, but this, importantly, entails neither implications for a man's gender identity, nor a problematic relationship to homoeroticism in itself. Physical intimacy was irrefutably sexualized, but it is hard to say whether it was more so than in the Victorian age. Importantly, being "in love" (whether they use that term or not) does not necessarily include sexual feeling, and when it does, this does not inhibit the relationship in any perceivable way.

The same is the case in the novel that continues where *Home to Harlem* left off. McKay wrote *Banjo* a year after *Home to Harlem*'s publication and the Ray we meet in Marseille is explicitly the same Ray we meet in Harlem, but seven years later. At the docks of

Marseille, the homosociality is even more pronounced, and Latnah, the only woman of the group "came as a pal" (27). In this setting, Ray meets the African American Banjo. They hitch up immediately and become intimate friends. Leaving Marseille, Banjo asks Ray to leave with him. Ray falls into another of his reveries, "dreaming of what joy it would be to go vagabonding with Banjo" (277). He comments that "[i]t would have been a fine thing if we could have taken Latnah along, eh?" Banjo answers: "Don't get soft over any one women, pardner. That's your big weakness. A woman is a conjunction. Gawd fixed her different from us in more ways than one. And theah's things we can git away with all the time and she just cain't. Come on, pardner. We've got enough between us to beat it a long ways from here" (283-4).[29] The emotional intimacy between men is here closer than between the sexes.

Secondly, tales of physical closeness with other men are told and received quite naturally, as when Banjo, who is quite a womanizer, tells his group of friends a story of a young Parisian who picks him up in a bar and takes him around Paris, spending an enormous amount of money on alcohol. Banjo ends the tale with how the two "flopped together, I ain't telling you no lie, either, and imagine what you want to, but there wasn't no more than one bed, neither. And before he left the next morning he hand me a thousand franc note" (109-10). By way of responding to this story, his friends ask what words the Parisian used, "nigger" or "colored people," but they do not question that the two slept together in a single bed. From Banjo's comment "imagine what you want to," it is apparent that he knows the implicit connotations but does not care.

It needs serious reconsideration whether this type of intimate friendship necessarily has to be grouped either in the "homosexual" category or if it altogether must be read as "heterosexual." Although it would not be possible to call Jake and Ray's world for something like the male equivalent of what Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has called the "the female world of

[29] Regrettably, much of the idiomatic language is in this edition changed to Standard English.

love and ritual," there was nevertheless a general acceptance of the typical traits of black, working-class masculinities in Harlem, which enabled just such friendships.[30] This, combined with gender as the main identification category, meant that being "in love" with someone of one's own sex still was possible without necessarily including a sexual aspect.

[30] Very little has been written on black friendship. For some exceptions, see Clyde W. Franklin and George W. Roberts. Both indicate that black male friendships are more intimate than white. Franklin moreover concludes that working-class friendships are even more intimate than middle-class.

Conclusion:

"What Are You, a Faggot?"

In the introduction, I sketched the most common, received account of how intimate male friendship evolved through the last couple of centuries. The study of this theme has almost exclusively focused on white middle-class men, with some exceptions for white working-class friendships. I find it somewhat problematic that the definition of male romantic friendship has excluded anyone else but this group, and I suspect that the extreme focus on this particular group gives a wrong picture of same-sex friendship, not because it in itself is wrong to focus the research on one field or one strata of society and then draw certain conclusions from this, but rather because when other groups are so rarely investigated, there is a danger of these conclusions being thought valid for the rest of the population as well. Typically, the conclusion about white, middle-class close male friendship has most often been, in the words of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick: "By the first decade of the [twentieth] century, the gaping and unbridgeable homophobic rift in the male homosocial spectrum already looked like a permanent feature of the geography" (201). By employing a socio-literary methodology resting heavily on gender and sexuality history, I aimed to investigate my initial supposition that society's sexual mores and conceptions of masculinity influenced the way in which men could be intimate friends. Sedgwick's conclusion may have been confirmed here, if my study had not included a black, working-class friendship from the 1920s. In so far as this friendship may be read as "passing the love of women," while at the same time not being identified as

homosexual, it is apparent that the field of male romantic friendship would need an expansion both in terms of race, class, and even period.

The discussion of primitivism versus civilization as externalized gender roles sheds light on the connection between the establishing of gender identities in terms of the physical situation of the body, the expectations of a man in different localities, and the acceptance or rejection of a great variety of behaviour, depending on his physical, temporal, and cultural location. Whether or not male femininity has been the ultimate threat to the definitions of masculinity depends therefore on the contextual definition of femininity and masculinity. For example, in Bret Harte's "Tennessee's Partner," the partner's nurturing behaviour towards Tennessee, a behaviour that was and is understood as feminine in the hegemonic culture, is actually what manages to stabilize the romantic friendship between the two miners. In Howells's *The Shadow of a Dream*, a man's feminine expression of domestication and romanticism, when this form of expression was clearly outdated, criminalizes and pathologizes a romantic friendship. In *Home to Harlem*, feminization in terms of gender enactment, and not sexuality, potentially limits the communication of love, but not the enactment of friendship.

In fact, the modern understanding of what curbed intimate male friendships seems to rest too much on the coming of homosexuality as an identification category in the late 1800s. In the periods that I have studied, including the Harlem Renaissance, gender, not sexuality, was the main identification category. A man was defined by his type of masculinity, not the sex of the person he was attracted to. In terms of male friendship's boundaries, it seems that to the extent that such friendships have been hindered, the strongest encumbrance to the evolvement of passionate or intimate friendships is the fear of losing masculine status, rather than being thought "homosexual" even in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although the nascent homophobia was and is connected to the anxieties about the feminine

man, the fear of being thought homosexual is not prevalent in any of the three texts I have considered.

The understanding of an earlier homosocial continuum, in Sedgwick's terms, makes the modern dichotomization of homosexuality and heterosexuality stand out in stark relief. The Danish scholar Henning Bech writes that:

> [w]hen homosexuals from the 1920s to the 1960s so frequently used words like 'friendship' and 'friend' in the names of their organizations and journals, it was no doubt also because they could thus borrow support from a phenomenon still socially respectable. But as time went by, these words turned into purely homosexual terms, just as the reality they designated disappeared from everything but homosexuals' relations. (73)

This is a typical example of how the homosocial continuum no longer is a continuum, but a dichotomy where all male closeness that has the potential of being erotic is forced to one side. In the last decades, this dichotomization is apparent in two ways, either when a close male friendship has been interpreted as homosexual whether there are grounds for it or not, or when such a couple must continuously stress their heterosexuality. This is fairly clear in most of the modern interpretations of the texts I have studied here. In recent years, however, there are signs that indicate a reopening of the middle stretch of the continuum. I will briefly show how homosexualization, heterosexualization, and a transgressing middle may be recognized in modern tales of male romantic friendship.

Firstly, there is the strategy of homosexualization, exemplified in a strong tradition of the loyal-to-death man-to-man friendship, the cartoon superhero genre. With its typical partnership between the superhero and the faithful sidekick, it has permeated the American comics since the late 1930s. An example of this is the adventure comic *Batman*, which was created in 1939 by Bob Kane. By day Batman is a bourgeois gentleman, but by night he searches Gotham City for the killer of his parents and defends the city from criminals. By his side in the urban jungle, he keeps Robin "the boy wonder," who is Batman's live-in ward and loyal companion. Together Batman and Robin withdraw every night into a world wholly

different from ordinary life, where there are no demands from everyday civilization – a world with different laws, different demands, and hardly any women. The homosexualization lies in how Batman's relationship to Robin was severely condemned from the outside. The man who first interpreted the two as a disguised homosexual couple was Dr. Fredric Wertham in his book *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954). Dealing with cartoons' damaging effect on young Americans' minds, he parallels homosexual overtones in the cartoons with grotesque murders, rape and racism. Not only are we warned against homoeroticism in *Batman*, but the sympathy between Batman and Robin is equally appalling: "[Batman and Robin] constantly rescue each other from violent attacks by an unending number of enemies. The feeling is conveyed that we men must stick together because there are so many villainous creatures who have to be exterminated" (190). Thus, male sympathy is homosexualized in the same breath as homosexuality is criminalized.

Heterosexualization of male buddies is perhaps most often performed from the inside. For example, in 1987, a continuation of the theme of brotherly love was explored in the action adventure movie *Lethal Weapon* (directed by Richard Donner). Partners in the LA police force, the relationship between the black upper-middle class Roger Murtaugh (Danny Glover) and the white, poor, and suicidal Martin Riggs (Mel Gibson) evolves throughout the film. The characteristics of the male friendship theme are highly present. The action takes place mostly at night time when the civilized world is sleeping, and here they also repeatedly save each other's lives from baddies – and suicide. The film flirts with two potentially emasculating issues for a man of the late twentieth century: mental problems and, problematic at least for the heterosexual man, an intimate male friendship. The film became a box office hit, perhaps because it solves these anachronisms of masculinity by advocating a stance of extreme aggressive manliness and heterosexuality. Although Murtaugh is happily married and Riggs mourns the death of his wife, they still feel the need continually to perform a kind of self-

censure, asserting to themselves and the audience that they are absolutely not homosexual. Riggs's comment on the fact that two girls might have shared a bed is "disgusting!" In the next scene, Riggs's jacket catches fire when a house explodes. Murtaugh throws himself on him to extinguish it. Riggs consequently asks, only seconds after escaping death: "What are you, a faggot?" After this, it is safe for the two of them to reconfirm their friendship in the last scene when, after having beaten the main villain to a bloody pulp, Riggs collapses in Murtaugh's arms. Harking back to the cry uttered by Tennessee's partner at his death bed, "Tennessee! Pardner!" Murtaugh whispers emotionally: "I've got you. I've got you, partner."

In the same year as *Lethal Weapon* was released, Bech wrote that it was not possible to find any examples of male friendship in reality, and almost none in films or television; the only example he could find was *Miami Vice* where two men drive around endlessly in a car, shooting at criminals, hardly even talking to each other. In the 1997 revision of his book, he felt no need to change this, writing that "[i]t is tempting to view this show as an indication of the status of friendship in modern societies, both because there aren't *more* of such series with friendships, and because there isn't *more* friendship in it" (72). That Bech felt no need to change his assertion about the dearth of male heterosexual intimate friendship (or, indeed, even non-intimate) reads quite like he has overlooked the early 1990s explosion of friendship in films and television – the popular television series *Friends*, *Cheers*, *Two Guys, a Girl and a Pizza Place*, and *Seinfeld*, to name but a few. It seems too pessimistic to completely write off male friendship as an impossibility because of the ostensible all-encompassing power of homophobia. Male friendship has undoubtedly gone through a silent explosion in later years, and there are indications of a renewed softening of the binary of friendships between strictly heterosexual men and homosexual relationships. An example of this is J. R. R. Tolkien's novel *Lord of the Rings* (1954-55), which shows none of the homophobic, emotionally bound behaviour that is apparent in *Lethal Weapon*, and none of the restraint apparent in a

Hollywood epic such as *Troy*. The film version of the book (2001-3), directed by Peter Jackson, remarkably did not shield its viewers from the intimate friendships' emotional openness and even physical ease. The main friendship between the hobbits Frodo and Sam is indeed a friendship that passes the love of women, and here is a romanticism that even Harte could envy. Long, loving gazes, crying over each other's lost love or death, and even the hobbits sleeping huddled together is depicted in the film, amidst a group of adventurous elves, dwarves, hobbits, and humans – all male.

The relative acceptance of homosexuality in modern-day America also enables a new variant of romantic friendship, between the homosexual man and the lesbian woman. The 2002 film version of Michael Cunningham's novel *The Hours*, directed by Stephen Daldry, tells the tale of such a modern romantic friendship between Richard (Ed Harris) and Clarissa (Meryl Streep), who have had an affair in their youth. Middle-aged, Clarissa is in a long-term same-sex relationship and Richard is somewhat recently out of one, and still, their relationship is marked by life-long loyalty, love, and affection, even a dependence that approaches addiction. The marked categories of love, sexual desire, romance, and affection are blended and confused and what is left is simply the story of a friendship. This intricate establishing of a relationship and identities beyond the strict homo/hetero binary system, and between having a sexual love relationship and being "just friends," is certainly miles away from Riggs's shout at Murtaugh's rescue: "What are you, a faggot?"

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