SHIFTING BORDERS AND CHANGING BOUNDARIES: A CONTINUUM:

HOMOSEXUALITY AND HOMOEROTIC DESIRE IN NINETEENTH -

CENTURY AMERICAN AND BRITISH LITERATURE

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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In mid to late nineteenth-century American and British literature there is a continuum of the representation of homosexuality and homosexual desire. This continuum begins with authors using overly guarded language to communicate that particular characters were homosexual. This continuum continues with language becoming less guarded and ends at the end of the nineteenth-century with more open representations of homosexuality and homosexual desire. The continuum created in this thesis is grounded in the following works: Herman Melville's *Typee*, Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*, and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

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century literature. Similar to Melville's *Typee*, but at times less covert at creating a queer[1] reading is Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). In this novel there is a movement from the male kinship and homoerotic desire found in Melville's *Typee* to homosexuality. The language used by James to reference homosexuality is less guarded, and James describes many of his male characters in ways that were associated with homosexual men during the time, for example by stressing their appreciation of the decorative arts. Related to James's *The Portrait of a Lady* is Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). In Wilde's only novel the language surrounding homosexuality is more difficult for the reader to ignore. Wilde uses covert language to describe characters who are homosexual. He is less subtle than both Melville and James in his development of homosexuality in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Homosexuality in nineteenth-century literature, of course, was not limited to the works of Melville, James, and Wilde; however, their novels are in some ways representative of how homosexuality was approached by their contemporaries.

As mentioned, homosexuality in nineteenth-century literature is not limited to the writings of Melville, James and Wilde. Part of the reason for choosing these three authors is twofold. First, the queer theory surrounding these authors by such theorists as James Creech, Eve Sedgwick, Robert Martin and Joseph Bristow provides the window through which a queer reading of these authors is established. These theorists also provide the foundation on which this thesis rests, even though at times their arguments are applied to different texts; for example, in her book *Tendencies*, Sedgwick constructs a

[1] Queer, homosexuality, and homoerotic desire are of course complex terms, which will be addressed in more detail in the thesis. Part of the complexity lies in what different terms signify based on whether and how they were defined in the nineteenth-century. For now, these terms simply mean any sexual desire between male characters.

queer reading of James's *The Wings of the Dove*; in this thesis the argument she creates is applied to James's *The Portrait of a Lady*. Second, it is by building on these theorists' ideas that the examining of a continuum of homosexuality in nineteenth-century literature is allowed. Other types of continuums have been examined, such as the one by Sedgwick in her book *Between Men*; as she states, "'Male homosocial desire' is the name this book will give to the entire continuum;" in *Between Men* Sedgwick discusses homosocial desire and its relationship to patriarchy and the oppression of women (Sedgwick, *Between Men* 2). However, the inquiry into a continuum that traces how homosexuality changes in nineteenth-century literature has not occurred. Finally, the reason for choosing these authors and texts is similar to what Sedgwick claims are the reasons for the texts she chose in *Between Men*: "I have simply chosen texts at pleasure from within or alongside the [American and] English canon that represented particularly interesting interpretive problems, or particularly symptomatic historical and ideological nodes" (17). Her reasons are very similar to my own.

In these three novels, *Typee*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, there are similar ways in which homosexuality is characterized. For example, in each novel, the issue of homosexuality is exiled away from society. When Melville broaches homosexuality in his novel he does so in an environment away from American society: the South Sea Islands. James, whose novel is concerned with American expatriates, similarly allows the discussion of homosexuality regarding his American characters to be centered around England and Italy. With Wilde's protagonist, Dorian, the reader is led into the opium dens and seedy parts of London where homosexuality is out of view by heterosexual and middle-class Londoners. The significance of the

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Three nineteenth-century authors, Herman Melville, Henry James, and Oscar Wilde, stand out as writers identified with the literature of their countries. Herman Melville is recognized as one of America's greatest writers, Henry James, an American expatriate, is claimed by both America and England, and Oscar Wilde, in England, carries a similar reputation to that of Melville and James in America. These three authors form a time line or continuum from roughly 1850 to 1900 during which the undercurrent of same-sex desire and homoeroticism becomes more open and less obscure in their writings, and in American and British literature at large, as a homosexual identity-if it did not become more accepted-was at least becoming recognized as an issue that needed to be addressed. American authors such as Herman Melville made covert references to male kinship and male-male desire in masked language that allowed him to address this issue in his literature. This masked language allowed readers who did not want to confront the issue the option of overlooking or ignoring it. The development of male kinship and same-sex desire became more prevalent as Melville's career continued. Focusing on *Typee* (1846) and to a lesser extent on both *Moby-Dick* (1851) and *Billy Budd, Sailor* (1924), published posthumously, allows readers to see the beginning of a discussion concerning some of the issues surrounding homosexuality in nineteenth-

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location where homosexuality is discussed allows readers, particularly American readers and American and English society, to distance themselves from homoerotic undertones in the novels. Not only is homosexuality exiled, it is also coupled with horror, sickness, and evil. As will be discussed, Melville couples homosexuality with cannibalism. The cannibalism of the Typees is similar to male-male desire in that Melville creates both attraction and repulsion to both. In James's novel one of the characters described in homosexual terms is stricken with disease while others are villainous in their actions. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* there is again repulsion and attraction. Dorian's remarkable beauty creates an attraction to him on the part of other characters and the reader; however, the loathsome painting that bears the scars of Dorian's sins is repulsive to both Dorian and readers.

As mentioned, complexity in both time and meaning surrounds the idea of homosexuality in relation to the three novels. During the time that Melville wrote *Typee* words like homosexual, queer, and gay were not fully defined. This does not, however, mean that *Typee* cannot be discussed in relation to these terms. For Melville, there was more of a sensibility towards relationships between men, whether on the basis of sex or desire. Certainly Melville would have been familiar with the idea of sodomy, therefore indicating that there was a concept of the ability for sexual acts to occur between men. Years later, when James was writing, the idea of a homosexual identity was still difficult to grasp, and the term was more associated with psychology and psychiatry. "The later part of the nineteenth century, however, saw the clear emergence of new conceptualisations of homosexuality although the elements of the new definitions and practices can be traced to earlier periods" (Weeks 102). It was not until 1892, one year

after Wilde's novel, that the word homosexual was used in writing. As Weeks claims there was a "public image for the 'homosexual', a term now coming into use, and a terrifying moral tale of the dangers that trailed closely behind deviant behavior" (103). In Wilde's time it was more often referred to as gross indecency. These changes from Melville to James and to Wilde in the way homosexuality was approached is, in many ways, related to society and locations.

Herman Melville is one of the most recognized names in American literature, particularly nineteenth-century American literature. He searched for ways to develop "an American novel" and to be recognized as the American novelist similar to the way Shakespeare is associated with British drama. In his first published novel, *Typee*, Melville begins his quest for this identity. As suggested by the full title of the novel, *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life,* readers are provided a peep at Polynesian life, not a full disclosure. In his article on cannibalism and postcolonial studies, "Cannibals at the Core," Brian Greenspan comments on Ian Wedde's description of Melville as someone who, "stood for a new class of writer-adventurer, as one who ingested stories like a rare and radical delicacy" (Greenspan 153). He also describes Melville as "one of the 'new people'" (153). While this is true, Melville goes beyond this and his American contemporaries. Melville uses his writing to look at questions about human nature and social customs, whether it is to question them, to attract attention to them, or to use them in conjunction with or against each other in a way that calls attention to issues that are both fascinating, and at the same time, socially unacceptable. In *Typee*, Melville develops a relationship between homosexuality and cannibalism, and he uses that relationship to interest readers in two socially unacceptable issues.

Typee, as a travel narrative, portrays for readers a representation of a life that is not constrained by nineteenth-century American society and values. *Typee* provides "American readers with voyeuristic 'peeps' into foreign lands unrestricted by American social and sexual codes" (Edwards 63). Because he is not constrained by American mores, Melville not only describes the Polynesian women in erotic terms, but he also "paints erotic pictures of his male Polynesian characters" (65). Melville provides an erotically charged description of Marnoo by stating, "His unclad limbs were beautifully formed; whilst the elegant outline of his figure, together with his beardless cheeks, might have entitled him to the distinction of standing for the statue of the Polynesian Apollo" (Melville 135). Edwards notes that Melville is not the first American author to include homoerotic desire in a travel narrative about the South Seas. Among others, Edwards notes that William Ellis discusses "male kinship" and "asserts that foreign visitors to Polynesian islands are immediately presented with male companions" (Edwards 67).

However, Melville does not end his sensual descriptions of males with the Typees. He breaks from this norm within the genre of the travel narrative and takes it to another level. The relationship between Tommo and Toby appears as more that one maintained by "pals" or "buddies." Tommo states, "There was much even in the appearance of Toby calculated to draw me towards him" (Melville 32). Tommo goes on to say, "Toby was endowed with a remarkably prepossessing exterior…he was as smart a looking sailor as ever stepped upon a deck" (32). Tommo's attraction to Toby is marked with homoerotic desire. The relationship between the two men deepens when they ratify their "engagement with an affectionate wedding of the palms" (33).

This idea of matrimony between men, for Melville, is not exclusive to *Typee*. In

Moby-Dick, Melville goes into detail explaining the intimacy between Queequeg the cannibal and Ishmael the American. The relationship between Queequeg and Ishmael at the Spouter-Inn is described in terms of a marriage: "You had almost thought I had been his wife" and Queequeg hugs Ishmael in "that matrimonial sort of style" (Melville 25, 27).

Tommo's homoerotic desire towards Toby is marked, just as the cannibalism of the Typees is marked. Tommo's desire for Toby is marked by his inflamed leg. According to Leslie Fiedler, marriages (or homosexual desire) between men almost always "are in the past, the wilderness, or at sea" (Fiedler 351). In this particular instance, Tommo and Toby are deep within the wilderness of the island. Tommo describes the scene by stating, "I lay on my back completely shrouded with verdure, the leafy branches drooping over me, and my limbs buried in grass" (Melville 48). In this scene, Tommo is completely immersed in nature. It is also important that nature shrouds him. Nature helps conceal the desire Tommo has for Toby. Ultimately though, Tommo is unable to hide his desire for Toby. While Tommo is shrouded by nature, he states that one of his "legs was swelled to such a degree, and pained me so acutely, that I half suspected I had been bitten by some venomous reptile" (48). It is possible that Tommo's swollen leg represents a swollen penis, which would be inappropriate to state outright at the time Melville wrote *Typee*. Tommo's swelling is painful because he is unable to satisfy himself through sex with Toby. Tommo's swollen leg also serves as a mark or symbol for his homoerotic desire for Toby.

Just as the travel narrative allows for authors to free themselves from the fetters that constrain American sexual issues, the travel narrative allows for a discussion of

social issues and ideas. While it can be argued that today's American society is more accepting of homosexuality, during the nineteenth-century, the idea of same-sex relationships was just as disturbing as cannibalism. In reference to Tommo's fear of cannibalism, Edwards makes the following claim: "His anxiety about losing his identity and being consumed—culturally and physically—by the Typees constitutes yet another discursive model that originates within the nineteenth-century system of connotations and assumptions of the traditional travel narrative" (Edwards 70). Because the setting for *Typee* is a south sea island, and in addition, while on the island, the action takes place in the woods or in the wilderness, Melville is allowed to comment on cannibalism. From the time that Tommo comes in contact with the Typees until his eventual escape, Tommo fears being eaten. One night soon after their contact with the Typees, Tommo and Toby are sleeping, and Tommo awakes to discover that a fire is blazing in the distance. Immediately, Tommo is convinced that he and Toby "will be eaten this blessed night, and there is the fire we shall be roasted by" (Melville 94). The reader knows that, in the end, Tommo will escape the Typees; otherwise, he would not live to tell his adventure. But what of Toby? It is not until after the story concludes that the reader is assured that Toby escaped. As soon as Tommo has resigned himself to accept that Toby is not returning, he tries to rationalize what happened to Toby. Along with the other possibilities is the plausibility that Toby, "more dreadfully still, might have met with the fate at which my very soul shuddered" (109). Even though Melville does not explicitly state so, the reader knows that the fate mentioned here is cannibalism. Unfortunately, despite Melville's use of his novel to address homosexuality, he does so in a way that equates homosexuality to cannibalism.

With homosexuality and cannibalism, in Melville's work, there is a sense of both attraction and repulsion. In regard to *Billy Budd, Sailor*, almost all of the sailors aboard the *Bellipotent* are attracted either homosocially or homoerotically towards Billy. Aboard the *Bellipotent*, Billy was "not at all disliked for his unpretentious good looks and a sort of genial happy-go-lucky air" (Melville 49). Despite this attraction, Monika Mueller argues that *Billy Budd* "is also about homophobia and homosexual self-loathing" (Mueller 194-95). Claggart is an example of a homosexual who is unable to control his desire for Billy. Claggart sees in Billy the things he wants to be; therefore, he wants to either have sex with Billy (to possess Billy) or be Billy. Billy is roused from his sleep one night and propositioned to participate in what can be interpreted as either mutiny or sex. Claggart arranges the proposition and is becoming obsessed with Billy. The reader is told:

> As to Claggart, the monomania in the man—if that indeed it were—as involuntarily disclosed by starts in the manifestations detailed, yet in general covered over by his self-contained and rational demeanor; this, like a subterranean fire, was eating its way deeper and deeper in him. Something decisive must come of it. (90)

Even though, for the most part, Claggart is able to disguise his desire for Billy, the desire that he has for Billy begins to overtake Claggart in the same way a disease overtakes a person.

Returning now to Edwards' essay, even though he refers to *Benito Cereno*, Edwards mentions that the narrator is "simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by the thought of 'going native'" (Edwards 61). In this same sense in *Typee*, Melville shows, in regard to cannibalism, "feeling a kind of morbid curiosity" (Melville 237). Tommo

returns early from a "Ti" one afternoon and his arrival causes a stir among the inhabitants of the house. Tommo discovers that they are handling the contents of the three "mysterious packages" that always hang out of Tommo's reach. Tommo experiences an "uncontrollable desire to penetrate the secret so jealously guarded" (232). Tommo discovers that the contents of the mysterious packages are three human heads, two Typee "but the third, to my horror, was that of a white man" (233). Another instance where both attraction and repulsion towards cannibalism is apparent is when there is a war-like encounter with the neighboring Happars. At this point, some of the enemies are captured by the Typees and brought to the village as a symbol of victory. As the chapter unfolds, it becomes clear that the Typees responsible for killing the enemies are going to eat them. After several attempts to stop Tommo from discovering the truth about their cannibalistic activities, Tommo discovers what appears to be an overturned canoe. When "prompted by a curiosity I could not repress" Tommo peeps under the canoe and discovers "the disordered members of a human skeleton, the bones still fresh with moisture and with particles of flesh clinging to them here and there" (238). To show his repulsion, Tommo states, "The last horrid revelation had now been made" (238). Tommo is attracted, almost beyond his control, to discover the truth about whether the Typees are cannibals. At the same time, the horror that he associates with these activities repulses Tommo, almost serving as a catalyst to make Tommo start to consider ways to get himself away from the Typees, off the island, and back to Western civilization.

Related to the repulsion and attraction to cannibalism and homosexuality, there is a "panic" that seizes a character. According to Caleb Crain, "Panic is a knot of conflicting emotions. It binds attraction and revulsion tightly together" (Crain 34).

Expanding on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's description of "homosexual panic," Crain refers to "instances in Melville of "cannibalistic panic" (33). When Tommo is making his successful escape from the Typees, he is in the water and Mow-Mow is approaching Tommo with the intent to either kill him or take him back to the village. Tommo states: "Even at the moment I felt horror at the act I was about to commit; but it was no time for pity or compunction, and with a true aim, and exerting all my strength, I dashed the boat-hook at him. It struck him just below the throat, and forced him downwards" (Melville 252). Tommo has a sudden moment of enlightenment when he realizes that, if captured, he will likely be consumed by the Typees. It is at this point that he becomes an enemy, and therefore available to be eaten. It is also significant that Tommo kills Mow-Mow by striking him with the boat-hook below the throat. By killing Mow-Mow with an injury below the throat, Tommo reaffirms his determination to not be consumed by the Typees.

Another relationship between homosexuality and cannibalism is the exclusiveness of men. Just as some novels allow men in nineteenth-century American literature to form a bond that is considered to be more pure than the relationship between a man and a woman, acts of cannibalism do not include women. In *Typee*, the women are excluded in the celebration that precedes the cannibalism of the enemy tribesmen. In his book *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Leslie Fiedler discusses the "love of comrades" and "the holy marriage of males" (Fiedler 348, 350-51). According to Fiedler, this marriage of males transcends the normal marriage between a man and a woman because "the relations of males seemed therefore healthy by definition" and excludes "'evil women'" (350). This healthiness of male and association of women as evil can also be applied to cannibalism. The healthy male flesh can sustain life and is acceptable for eating;

however, to eat the flesh of a woman is not healthy, it is in fact evil, and not acceptable; in *Typee*, it would be considered a "taboo." After the capture of a few of the Typee's enemies, a feast takes place. The reader is led to believe that at the feast some of the Typees are going to cannibalize their captured enemies. Tommo is unable to go to where the feast takes place and he asks:

> several of the people why they were not at the 'Hoolah Hoolah' (the feast) , they uniformly answered the question in a manner which implied that it was not intended for them, but for Mehevi, Narmoee, Mow Mow, Kolor, Womonoo, Kalow-running over, in their desire to make me comprehend their meaning, the names of all the principal chiefs. (237)

In other words, the cannibalistic feast is meant only for men, not women. In addition, the feast is for the leaders of the Typees, the elite of the men.

Melville's reader never encounters an eye-witness account of cannibalism. Also, Melville does not provide an obvious description of homosexual activity between Tommo and Toby. In nineteenth-century terms and conditions, it would be almost impossible for Melville to provide a detailed account of sexual contact between women, but even more so between men. This reasoning therefore requires that male-male desire be masked in terms that make it possible for a reader "in the know" to comprehend these issues. James Creech, in his book *Closet Writing/Gay Reading,* describes an exchange between a writer and the reader, where the author might ask, "'What if some of the people who read this are gay...What if the text addresses itself particularly to these other, gay people?'" At the same time, the reader might ask, "'What if whoever made this was gay too?'" (Creech 75). Whether Melville was a closeted homosexual is something that

will never be known, but his adventures at sea for long periods of time make it possible for him to understand and possibly to have experimented in homosexual activity, and further than that, homosexual desire; however, it is important to clarify that homosexual activity does not automatically also mean homosexual desire, or sexual attraction to one man by another. Creech continues and proposes the following claim:

> The capacity to experience and acknowledge a sexual communion through literature would have required that all involved be able to at least imagine, even if semiconsciously, that there were indeed other homosexuals who, by virtue of being homosexuals, wrote in a certain way, that homosexual readers would respond homosexually to the erotic sensibilities of novels such as *Typee*. (75-76)

Even though the term homosexual was not in use at the time Melville was writing, there was certainly a sensibility to homoerotic desire and homosexuality. These hints at homosexuality and disguising homosexuality in other elements of the text allowed a way to get these issues on the page, and for observant readers to pick up on the issues. According to Creech, Melville's hints at homosexuality account, in part, for the rediscovery of Melville by British activists and literary scholars [2]who, for the most part, were either gay or bisexual. Creech makes the following claim:

> After his [Melville's] eclipse in the 1860s and 1870s, a Melville revival began, rather modestly at first, in the last decades of the nineteenth-century, and fully blossomed after 1920 with the Oxford edition of *Moby-Dick*...There is evidence to suggest that, in the first decades especially, Melville was in substantial part rediscovered by British literati who were themselves predominantly homosexual

[2] Creech provides Edward Carpenter, and early gay rights activist, and F. O. Matthiessen as examples of people involved in this movement.

or bisexual. (76)

This adds support to Creech's claim that literature with a homosexual undercurrent is appreciated and uncovered by homosexual readers.

Building upon the idea that Melville was able to mask homosexual desire with other issues, it becomes clear that Melville had many possible masks in his use of the travel narrative-at sea and in the South Sea Islands. In *Billy Budd, Sailor*, Melville is able to use the possibility of mutiny as a way of disguising homosexuality. The reader discovers that Claggart is attempting to set up Billy by having someone confront Billy about the possibility of participating in a mutiny. The confronting sailor asks Billy to become part of a gang of soldiers. Billy seems unclear of what is being asked of him, so the sailor goes on to say, "'Couldn't you–help–at a pinch?...Hist, hist!' the hurried whisper now going husky. 'See here,' and the man held up two small objects faintly twinkling in the night-light; 'see, they are yours Billy, if you'll only–'" (Melville 82). While the sailor approaching Billy could be talking about mutiny, the ambiguity in the tone, and the fact that the sailor is actually cut off from saying what it is he wants from Billy, Melville sets the scene up so that the reader can also see this scene as an attempt of a sailor to persuade Billy to have, and even possibly pay Billy, for sex. Billy's outraged response, "'D-d-damme, I don't know what you are d-d-driving at, or what you mean, but you had better g-g-go where you belong!'" can be seen as an instance of homosexual panic (82). In a similar vein, Eve Sedgwick suggests that, "the expressive constraints on mutiny make it analogous to the excess of male-male desire" (Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* 93).

Just as the claim is made that Melville masks homosexuality in other issues, such

as mutiny, Greenspan claims that in regard to cannibalism, "Melville perpetuates this conspiracy of silence. Writing in his public role of Tommo, the Man who Lived among Cannibals, Melville introduces the topic in *Typee* by alluding to 'vague accounts of such things [that] reach our firesides'" (Greenspan 156). Greenspan suggests that writers, including Melville, allude to cannibalism, but do not actually expose it. Greenspan is accurate in his statement that Melville alludes to cannibalism; however, he is incorrect when he states that Melville only alludes to cannibalism. Melville, in some places in *Typee,* only alludes, but at other scenes, it is quite clear that Melville is discussing cannibalism.

A relationship between homosexual desire and cannibalism that needs addressing is the power relationship at play. In homosexual desire, just as in any other erotically charged relationship, there are multiple power dynamics at work. The male who is attractive to another male has a power over the other male. He can use that power to either satisfy the desire of the other male, or can choose not to. Additionally, in the essay "Robinson Crusoe Inc(orporates)," Minaz Jooma discusses Foucault's argument surrounding domination in sex between men:

> He suggests that because male power constituted through heterosexual relations is always polarized, polarities such as active command and passive compliance, dominator and dominated, penetrator and penetrated mark one role as intrinsically honorable and the other its converse. When this model is transferred to two male partners, a conflict develops between an ethos which associates men with both the active and passive poles and the conception of all sexual intercourse in terms of male domination. (Jooma 65)

In *Typee*, the more visible relationship is the one in which Toby has power of Tommo because Tommo is unable to satisfy his desire for Toby. It is easier to see Foucault's theory regarding sexual domination between men when looking at the interactions between Tommo and Marnoo. Tommo is enchanted by Marnoo's physical beauty, and is eager to gain his attention. When Marnoo overlooks Tommo at their first encounter, Tommo feels slighted and states, "Had the belle of the season, in the pride of her beauty and power, been cut in a place of public resort by some supercilious exquisite, she could not have felt greater indignation than I did at this unexpected slight" (Melville 136). Tommo goes on to express his concern that he, "greatly feared lest having, from some cause or another, unfriendly feelings toward me, he might exert his powerful influence to do me mischief" (138). At first, Marnoo has a great amount of power over Tommo, and Tommo is obviously aware of this power; however, Marnoo eventually sits down with Tommo and Tommo comes to life as soon as their "palms met" (139). Through Marnoo's attempt at English, he and Tommo equally share the power they have as a couple. None of the Typees speak English, so they are unable to understand the conversation that the two are having. The conversation they have works for Tommo as almost a sexual exchange because he is so enraptured by Marnoo, and they are able to meet as one through a common language. The Typees, feeling threatened by the conversation between Tommo and Marnoo, quickly force them to end their interaction.

Melville marks his characters with homosexual or homoerotic desire, and also marks cannibalism; this marking creates a relationship between the two. These marks, on the flesh or as part of the body on his characters, place an identity on the character. Characters are attracted and repulsed at the same time, and their attraction and repulsion

are beyond the individual's control. Not only does Melville explore issues that are considered taboo, such as sexual desire between two men and cannibalism, but he pushes these issues as far as he can, and by doing so, allows future authors to continue using literature as a way to connect with human nature and to expand the boundaries of ideas and sensibilities. Even though Melville allows for a homosexual reading of *Typee*, it is problematized because Melville attempts to associate it with cannibalism, thereby associating homosexuality with the taboo. Even in *Billy Budd, Sailor*, where the homosexual undertones are more obvious, there are problems surrounding homosexuality caused by the execution of Billy. Just as there are problems with Melville's characterization of homosexuality the same is true in Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*.

Melville and James are both very distinct writers grappling with different issues, particularly in regard to social class; however, there are similarities in how they discuss homosexuality. Melville uses the sea and the South Sea Islands as a place where he can question normative social and sexual roles. America itself is not a place where these issues can be addressed, and James employs a similar technique. James, an expatriate American living in Europe, uses Europe, specifically England and Italy, as a place where American characters' unacceptable characteristics can surface. This is even more detectable when compared to how James describes his American characters who live in Europe without a desire to return to America. In *The Portrait of a Lady*, James creates characters who, in multiple ways, are not representative of societal expectations based on gender. More specifically, it is the Americans in the novel who, though living in England or Europe and are in the majority, fail to perform their gender in ways that fall in line

with societal constructions. Through the characterization of men in feminine ways or by completely emasculating men, it becomes possible to uncover the homosexual and homoerotic subtext prevalent in the novel.

Before diving into the novel, worth discussing is James's personal life and the image that many, including literary scholars, have of him. Many people within literary studies prefer to think of James as a person devoted to a life of the mind and of literature. Part of this idea is grounded in portraying James as a person without sexual thoughts, homosexual or otherwise; however, this is changing. As Leland Monk notes, "Outing Henry James is all the rage these days, though it is a practice about which James himself would have expressed considerable outrage" (Monk 247). A more recent study into James's letters indicates that not only was James a sexual person, and whether or not he practiced homosexuality, he did think of other men in rather blatantly sexual ways. Sheldon M. Novick, in his introduction to *Henry James and Homo-Erotic Desire*, discusses the homosexual tendencies in some of James's letters. Novick claims that "there is a dimension of feeling in James's letters to young men that is lacking in his letters to young women" (5-6). Novick describes James in the following way:

> James was evidently a lover, rather than a beloved. He greatly admired beauty, and tended occasionally to confuse it with good character. He was manly and gentle, fond and generous; his hand fluttered on a young man's shoulder like a dove. His affections were highly particular and well under control. He formed friendships with slender, handsome, manly, passive young men who greatly resembled the male protagonists of his stories and novels...When the context suggests an erotic undertone of masculine affection, his jokes and puns are about

mouths and hands. (9)

This description of James shows him as a lover of beauty and of beautiful men. Moreover, this attraction he has appears to have been devoted only to men, and not to women. One letter which Novick references appears in a collection of James's letters edited by Leon Edel. The letter, addressed to Hendrik Anderson, is dated 9 February 1902 and begins with "My dear, dear, dearest Hendrik" (Edel 225). In the middle of the letter, James tells Anderson, "I wish I could go to Rome and put my hands on you (oh, how lovingly I should lay them!)...so that I might take consoling, soothing, infinitely close and tender and affectionately-healing *possession* of you...to put my arm around you and *make* you lean on me as on a brother and a lover" (226). Hendrick was a young artist and one of James's close friends (Novick 3). Henry James sent this letter to Anderson after the death of Anderson's brother. The language used by James is unquestionably homoerotic with clear references to homosexual acts through "possession." The open and obvious homosexual and homoerotic ideas conveyed in James's letter to Anderson are similar to the more guarded and carefully chosen words used to reference homosexuality and homoerotic desire in his novels. A discussion of James as a person who understood and expressed sexual desire allows a closer examination of how homosexuality and homoerotic desire are conveyed in *The Portrait of a Lady*.

In *The Portrait* Ralph Touchett's character is one that is compromised by his illness: consumption. The narrator tells the reader, "One of his lungs began to heal, the other promised to follow its example, and he was assured he might outweather a dozen winters if he would betake himself to those climates in which consumptives chiefly congregate" (93-94). Tuberculosis and references to Ralph's lungs continue at several

points in the novel. Ralph's unhealthy or possibly even collapsed lung is symbolic of his flaccid penis or impotence, particularly in regard to women. Ultimately, Ralph "in particular embodies a flaccid and feminized masculinity and thus offers James something of a 'cover' for his other portraits of male alternatives to [Casper] Goodwood and other Masculine Achievers" (Person 89).

Gilbert Osmond's character is not one that is necessarily complex, but his gender is. He is, in many ways, calculating and controlling, especially in regard to Isabel, and even more so in regard to Pansy, but what is significant about Osmond is what he is not. As Leland Person points out, Madame Merle refers to Osmond "as a man with 'no career; no name, no position, no fortune, no past, no future, no anything'" (James 94). Each of these items that Madame Merle lists are all things that are historically masculine. Osmond has no job; therefore, "he does not work". He has neither title nor family with wealth to possibly excuse him from having a career, and he has made no name for himself through his past actions. Later in the novel, he is able to more fully become what he truly is, which is someone who is devoted to beautiful objects and surroundings, but he is only able to do this through Isabel and her money. Like many of the other male characters in the novel, Osmond's only interest is "in aesthetic appreciation or observation" (95). In this regard, Isabel serves more than one purpose; she is a wife who provides him with something beautiful to look at, and her money affords him a life surrounded by beautiful objects. Both Ralph Touchett and Gilbert Osmond are American expatriates; Touchett lives in England and Osmond lives in Italy. Their characterizations stand in sharp contrast to Casper Goodwood, the American who has come to England to find Isabel in hopes of a definite answer regarding their intended marriage.

Even Casper Goodwood is aware of the differences between American men and Englishmen. When Isabel tells Casper that she and Lord Warburton, a British nobleman, are companions, Mr. Goodwood retorts "'Oh, those people [the British]. They're not of *my* humanity, and I don't care what becomes of them'" (212). Through Isabel and Henrietta, a friend of Isabel's from America who is working in Europe, the reader learns information about Goodwood. Casper Goodwood is described as a man "of high, bold action. Whatever happens to him he'll always do something, and whatever he does will always be right" (152). Also, when referring to Casper, Isabel states "'When a man's of that infallible mold what does it matter to him what one feels'" (152). That infallible mold Isabel refers to is that of a powerful and masculine man. Casper Goodwood is a man of action who does not let others make decisions for him. Casper's masculinity is attributed to his large, square jaw, which Isabel happens to find unattractive. Isabel states, "His jaw was too square and set, and his figure too straight and stiff" (170). This description of Casper ties the largeness and squareness of his jaw to his "straight and stiff figure." The stiffness referred to here can be seen as Casper's ability to penetrate Isabel. It is also no coincidence that Casper's last name is Goodwood; "Casper is characterized in strikingly phallic and aggressive terms, culminating with his name" (Snyder 89). This implies that his "wood" or "stiff" penis is good. How it is good remains another question. Is it referring to pleasure or the ability to spawn healthy young Americans? When readers meet Casper for the first time, a sense of his hyper-masculinity is revealed: "Casper Goodwood raised his eyes to her own again; they seemed to shine through the vizard of a helmet. He had a strong sense of justice and was ready any day in the year—over and above this—to argue the question of his rights" (James 207). Casper's

sense of justice and his ability to fight for what he believes is right and what he is entitled to is reflective of more conventional masculinity. When we meet Casper the second time, the same type of language is used to describe him. Casper is described as "Straight, strong, and hard...His jaw showed the same voluntary cast as in earlier days" (377). Finally, the narrator states "there was a manly staying in his hand that made her heart beat faster" (382). Even though Casper is unsuccessful in his attempts to convince Isabel to marry him, his masculinity is never questioned. In some ways we see that his masculinity even causes a sort of electric current for Isabel, but she is able to avoid its lure. After a confrontation between Goodwood and Isabel rather early in the novel the reader finds Isabel left in the following state: "she was trembling–trembling all over. Vibration was easy to her" (217). Unlike the Americans living in Europe, and even the Englishman Lord Warburton, Casper, the American, is both masculine and potent.

James rather openly characterizes many of the people in the novel in opposition to their traditionally prescribed gender roles. The gender that these characters perform is related to the cultural changes surrounding them, particularly from an American perspective. Through these characters, James is also making references to homosexuality and homoerotic desire. The men in the novel, particularly Ralph Touchett, Gilbert Osmond, and to an extent Lord Warburton are characterized in homosexual terms. In her book *Tendencies* Eve Sedgwick provides illuminating criticism on the homosexual and homoerotic undercurrent in James's *The Wings of the Dove*. Her comments concerning this novel can also be applied to *The Portrait of a Lady*.

Sedgwick's criticism concerning *The Wings of the Dove* has been quite controversial. As usual with Sedgwick, her argument is dense, but in all of its specificity,

the center of her argument lies couched in her reference to Kaja Silverman's claim that "a discussion of Jamesian anal eroticism begins with a discussion of his much-proclaimed penchant for...'going behind' his characters, for routing the authorial point of view austerely through the eyes of characters as they in turn view other characters" (Sedgwick, *Tendencies* 97). Sedgwick takes this claim and adds to its complexity by stating, "As it happens James's own, extremely dense, and highly charged associations concerning the anus did not cluster around images of the phallus. They clustered around images of the hand" (99). In an effort to de-compact Sedgwick's argument, essentially she claims that James's references to hands are also references to anal penetration; in addition, characters positions, not side-by-side but rather one-behind-the-other, are also references to anal penetration. An instance of an example of this occurs early in *The Portrait* and is between Ralph Touchett and Lord Warburton.

One thing of particular interest about Lord Warburton is that even though he is feminized in the novel, it is complicated by the many ways in which he is seen in masculine terms. Readers first meet Lord Warburton in the opening chapter. He has traveled to Gardencourt, the Touchett family's estate, to visit Ralph and his father Daniel. In this scene, Lord Warburton is described in the following manner: "He was booted and spurred, as if he had dismounted from a long ride; he wore a white hat, which looked too large for him; he held his two hands behind him, and in one of them – a large, white, well-shaped fist – was crumpled a pair of soiled dog-skin gloves" (61-62). In order to understand this description, the reader might need to take the time to reread it. But even beyond a possible second reading James has created a more subversive meaning. The description of Lord Warburton as wearing boots and spurs after a long ride can also be

viewed as a sexual ride, with Lord Warburton bearing some exciting accoutrements. In addition, in one of his fists he carries a pair of soiled gloves. The gloves are described as being dog-skin, which is the same term used to describe leather gloves made from sheep-skin. Before latex, sheep-skin was used to make condoms. In her book *Rereading Sex*, Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz refers to the purchase and ordering of condoms during and before the mid-nineteenth-century (277). In a more detailed account of condoms, she refers to Robert Dale Owen[3], in which it is described as "'a covering made of very fine, smooth, and delicately prepared skin,' used by the man. He stated that it had been used for at least a century, primarily by elite men as a guard against syphilis" (61). In this passage, Lord Warburton, an elite man, can be seen as holding in his fist, a pair of soiled condoms. While there is the question of whether condoms would have been used between two men during the nineteenth-century to protect against syphilis, the reference to condoms and sex in this passage seems evident. This reference to condoms begs the question of for whom were the condoms meant? Certainly Ralph is a possible candidate. His affection for Lord Warburton is long standing and endures through the novel. But there is also the possibility of Daniel Touchett. Despite Daniel's age, James, with his double meanings and use of puns, says of Daniel Touchett that "he had certainly had a great experience of men" (61). It is therefore possible that not only is Ralph a possible homosexual partner for Lord Warburton, but Daniel could be one as well.

One other scene involving Lord Warburton occurs later in the novel. He calls on Isabel and Osmond in Rome and discovers that they are attending an opera performance.

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[3] Horowitz notes that Owen was an advocate of liberal thinking, and in 1831 he wrote *Moral Physiology, or, a Brief and Plain Treatise on the Population Question*, which was the first US published book that discussed contraception.

He goes to the opera and visits Osmond in their box, "the box was large, and there was room for him [Lord Warburton] to remain if he would sit a little behind and in the dark. He did so for half an hour, while Mr. Osmond remained in the front, leaning forward, his elbows on his knees" (350). In this scene, Lord Warburton is clothed in darkness, and in front of him, Osmond is leaning forward, providing access for Lord Warburton. The secretiveness of the darkness provides and environment where Lord Warburton and Osmond can participate in homosexual acts while being surrounded by an aristocratic society attending the opera.

In many places in the novel the narrator calls attention to the placement and size of people's hands. At the very beginning of the novel the narrator tells the reader that Ralph "carried his hands in his pockets" (62). This continues until later in the novel where the narrator, in reference to Ralph, states that he had "his hands where they usually were" (350). These references to Ralph's hands in his pockets are used to characterize him as homosexual. Ralph's hands in his pockets are symbolic of Ralph as a person who participates in anal penetration. His pockets are a place of warmth and enclosure that he can penetrate or open with his hands. Despite the significance of the location of his hands, there are other ways in which Ralph is characterized in a homosexual manner. Ralph, like many other men in the novel, is a collector. He, like Osmond, has an appreciation for beautiful surroundings, which were more typically associated with women than with men. Robert K. Martin claims that "Ralph's homosexuality should be considered a possibility. He is of the character and physical type that constituted the male homosexual as he was constructed in the years surrounding this novel" (88). Part of this construction might best be described in more modern terms as a sort of gay

aestheticism. Ralph and Osmond have an appreciation for, and desire to possess and own, beautiful objects. For Ralph, Gardencourt itself represents a beautiful environment. Even though in the end it is the place where he dies, it is also the place where we see him the most comfortable and lively. The interior of Gardencourt is also described in ways that make it obvious to the reader that it is a beautiful place. Additionally, Ralph has a collection of art on display in a gallery-like space. These paintings provide a certain comfort for Ralph, which is proved by the meticulous attention he pays to the details of who receives what painting after his death. It could also be argued that Ralph's sexuality is possibly linked to his disease, tuberculosis. Susan Sontag, in her book *Illness as Metaphor*, claims, "Nobody conceives of cancer the way TB was thought of–as a decorative, often lyrical death" (20). She also claims that it is a disease characteristic of those who repress their true sexual nature (20). She continues to discuss the relationship between tuberculosis and class and aestheticism: "TB was on the index of being genteel, delicate, and sensitive...Both clothes (the outer garment of the body) and illness (a kind of interior décor of the body) became tropes for new attitudes of the self" (28). Tuberculosis was associated with the wealthy, with aestheticism, and with femininity, all of which are characteristics of Ralph.

One other place in the novel, outside of Sedgwick's theory concerning homosexuality in James's writing, where Lord Warburton and Ralph can be viewed as, if not lovers, at least sexual partners, occurs when they encounter each other in Rome before Isabel's marriage to Osmond. I will come back to this, but first, something that happens immediately before that needs addressing. Ralph, along with Isabel, who he is escorting through Rome, comes across a place where an archeological dig is taking place.

At this dig, a proposal is given to Ralph in the following passage:

> One of the humble archaeologists who hover about the place had put himself at the disposal of the two, and repeated his lesson with a fluency which the decline of the season had done nothing to impair. A process of digging was on view in a remote corner of the Forum, and he presently remarked that if it should please the *signori* to go and watch it a little they might see something of interest. The proposal commended itself more to Ralph than to Isabel…she admonished her companion to satisfy his curiosity. (337)

Several details about this scene are suspect. First, that narrator makes it clear that the tourist season is over, which means that there are not a lot of people around. Additionally, the cicerone wants to take Ralph to a remote location, which suggests that no one will be around. The proposal is addressed specifically to Ralph, and the narrator purposely uses Isabel as a way to refer to this as a thing of curiosity for Ralph. This passage suggests going to a "dig" or remote place where the archeologist and Ralph might have the opportunity to have a sexual encounter. Immediately after Ralph leaves, Lord Warburton emerges. Isabel does not know that Warburton is in Rome. When he approached her, "she looked up and saw a gentleman - a gentleman who was not Ralph come to say that the excavations were a bore" (337-338). After realizing who the other is, they greet each other. Isabel tells Lord Warburton where Ralph has gone to, and he responds, "'Ah yes: I see.' And Lord Warburton's eyes wandered vaguely in the direction she had indicated" (338). As Lord Warburton acknowledges Isabel's remark, it appears as if Lord Warburton has just come from the same place.

At the end of the same chapter which includes Ralph's descent into the dig, Ralph

and Lord Warburton are off from the others discussing Isabel's relationship with Osmond. Just as the chapter ends:

> "Ralph took him [Lord Warburton] by the arm to turn him: they had to rejoin the others. "She wants nothing that *we* can give her."
>
> "Ah, well, if she won't have You - !" said his lordship handsomely as they went. (346)

Lord Warburton is possibly indicating to Ralph that since Isabel will not have him, he will. This image of Ralph and Lord Warburton walking off together arm-in-arm at the end of the chapter, and at the end of Volume I of the novel, portrays the two as, at the very least, sexual partners, though not necessarily exclusive. James uses plays on language and a pivotal point in the novel to draw attention to the two. It is through these scenes and other characterization in the novel that cause Ralph and even Lord Warburton to appear as homosexual and as having homoerotic desire for one another and others.

One of the most, if not the most, vile characters in the novel is Gilbert Osmond. His calculating and manipulative moves are repeatedly used to describe him. Additionally, Osmond, like Ralph, enjoys beautiful surroundings. Near the beginning of Osmond's arrival in the novel, the reader is given a hint that Osmond is a homosexual. After Madame Merle describes Isabel to Osmond, Madame Merle tells Osmond that Isabel "'fills all your requirements'" (291). Osmond responds: "'More or less, of course'" (291). The requirement that Isabel is unable to fulfill is that she does not have a penis. Osmond, though poor, has a sense of entitlement and resentment towards the world. The narrator provides the reader with a reason for Osmond's resentment, "He had never forgiven his star for not appointing him to an English dukedom" (354). Osmond

has an almost obsessive love for tapestry and beautiful objects. Osmond is described as "a gentleman who studied style" (280). He is overly concerned with his appearance and also with his wit. In this regard, Osmond seems very much in line with others who were contributing to an aesthetic movement at the time. James was also aware of this movement and he associated it "with a decadent homoeroticism he found very disturbing" (Monk 247). But through the narrator, James also points out that there may be some flaw in his appreciation, for Osmond only cares for new things, not old things. Also, one way that Osmond is frequently described is "he has his perversities" (295). In *The History of Sexuality* Foucault discusses how, in the nineteenth-century, "the homosexual" was forming an identity. Psychiatrists grouped homosexuals with "minor perverts" for whom labels were being created (Foucault 43). Following this idea, Dennis Allen states, "it is during this period [the nineteenth-century] that 'perversion' is implanted in the individual" (113). Allen continues by claiming that as "possessor of the phallus, the homosexual is seen as perverse because he nonetheless desires the phallus" (115). These perversities can be many things, including sexual perversities, but it can also reference his coldness to others. The narrator also indicates that one reason Osmond enjoys the Thursday nights of entertainment is that he can reflect on the people who are not invited. His treatment of others, including Isabel, is often cruel and unreasonable.

One person to whom Osmond develops an attraction is Casper Goodwood. Goodwood travels to Rome in hopes of discovering that Isabel is unhappy. After he and Isabel met, she invites him to join others in their Thursday night entertaining. The narrator indicates that Isabel does this so as to not keep her meeting with Goodwood from Osmond. It may also be that Isabel wonders if her husband will be able to resist the

manly and hyper-masculine Casper Goodwood. Osmond develops a quick appreciation for Goodwood. The narrator goes on to say:

> He declared he liked to talk to the great Goodwood; it wasn't easy at first, you had to climb up an interminable steep staircase, up to the top of the tower; but when you got there you had a big view and felt a little fresh breeze. Osmond, as we know, had delightful qualities, and he gave Casper Goodwood the benefit of them all...Gilbert asked him repeatedly to dinner, and Mr. Goodwood smoked a cigar with him afterwards and even desired to be shown his collections. He was strong and...had plenty of the straps and buckles which would never wear out. (542)

It is clear from this passage that Osmond develops a strong liking toward Goodwood, and in some ways it is reciprocated. The complexities of their relationship are heightened because of Goodwood's masculine and sexual appeal. It is also worth pointing out that at this point Goodwood has been in Europe for an extended period of time; perhaps he, like the other American men living in Europe, is starting to develop a homosexual attraction, which in his case is directed at Osmond. But Goodwood, being the ultimate masculine man that he is, quickly finds his grounding. At the same time, he becomes aware of Osmond's attraction and "his humor was not, like Osmond's, of the best; there was an element of dull rage in his consciousness of things. Up to this time he had not disliked Osmond personally" (553). The significance of this is that Goodwood becomes aware of Osmond's attraction to him; additionally, Goodwood becomes aware of his attraction to Osmond. The rage that he feels is one akin to homosexual panic, a panic in which Goodwood must escape in order to preserve his masculinity and heterosexuality.

The American expatriates in *The Portrait of a Lady* are complicated characters who often exhibit feminine and homosexual characteristics, particularly when compared to an American character like Casper Goodwood. As with Melville, however, there are issues that need to be addressed when considering how James represents his characters. Neither Ralph nor Osmond are what one might call examples of great men. While Ralph is not an evil character, he is in some ways responsible for Isabel's downfall by convincing his father to provide a substantial inheritance for his niece. Also, Ralph, who is stricken by disease, is in some ways weak as a person and weak physically. Osmond is not a weak character; however, he is an evil person. His character is one who manipulates and uses people for his own needs, and he treats Isabel with cold indifference.

James's *The Portrait of a Lady* is much more similar to Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* than is Melville's *Typee*. Among other things, both James and Wilde are concerned with wealthy aristocrats while Melville is concerned with the more average or less affluent average man and cannibals. A man of Dorian's or Ralph's wealth is in sharp contrast with that of Tommo's. But in other ways they are similar, particularly in their representation of homosexuality and homoerotic desire. Like James's and Melville's novels Wilde's only novel contains a homosexual theme; however, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* the theme is more visible and less difficult to decipher; the novel was even used against Wilde during his trail for committing "gross indecency."

When compared to Melville's *Typee* and even James's *The Portrait of a Lady* Wilde's novel is less covert in its depiction of homosexuality. In his book *Gay Fictions: Wilde to Stonewall* Claude Summers discusses the way homosexuality is understood in

Wilde's novel. In an essay about *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and "The Portrait of Mr. W.H." Summers states that they both have a "homosexual ambiance and tone" (43). Summers goes on to say that both "pivot on portraits of androgynous young men, who are extraordinarily beautiful and adored by somewhat older men" (43). Moreover, "Homosexuality is an important aspect of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and the novel deserves credit as a pioneering depiction of homosexual relationships in serious English fiction" (45). In much the same way that James Creech discusses the way gay readers might perceive *Typee*, Summers states about *Dorian Gray*: "Homosexual readers would certainly have responded to the book's undercurrent of gay feeling, and may have found the very name 'Dorian' suggestive of Greek homosexuality, since it was Dorian tribesmen who allegedly introduced homosexuality into Greece as part of their military regimen" (45). Many critics agree that homosexuality exists in the novel; reviews of *The Picture* immediately following publication found the book to be "for none but outlawed noblemen and perverted telegraph boys" and that the story "constantly hints, not obscurely, at disgusting sins and abominable crimes" (43).

Just as Henry James uses aestheticism to draw attention to the homosexual undertones in his novel so does Wilde. Lord Henry and Dorian, in particular, enjoy beautiful surroundings. In his essay "The Disappearance of the Homosexual in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*" Jeffrey Nunokawa states, "All the usual suspects make an appearance:...the extremities of aestheticism [and] a passion for interior decorating" (183). Wilde wants his reader to understand that Dorian is a homosexual. Wilde is not faced with some of the same difficulties as earlier writers; however, the topic must still be handled carefully in late Victorian society. Wilde does, through careful use of language,

allow the reader to see if he wants, or to ignore if he needs. As mentioned earlier, in his discussion of Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*, Robert K. Martin describes the way homosexuals were characterized as having an appreciation for aesthetics in nineteenth-century England, and his descriptions can also be applied to Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. An example of this appreciation for beautiful objects occurs early in the novel when Dorian is paying a visit to Lord Henry at his Mayfair home:

> It was, in its way, a very charming room [the library], with its high panelled wainscoting of olive stained oak, its cream-colored frieze and ceiling of raised plasterwork, and its bickdust felt carpet strewn with silk long-fringed Persian rugs. On a tiny satinwood table stood a statuette by Clodion, and beside it lay a copy of 'Les Cent Nouvelles', bound for Margaret of Valois by Clovis Eve...(45)

At various intervals in the novel Wilde provides for his reader a glimpse into either Dorian's or Lord Henry's surroundings. They are always overly-luxurious and aesthetically pleasing. After Dorian's confrontation with Sibyl Vane and he learns that the painting takes on the scars of his sins the narrator provides the reader with a view into Dorian's bedroom: "Victor [Dorian's valet] came in softly with a cup of tea, and a pile of letters, in a small tray of Sèvres china, and drew back the olive-satin curtains, with their shimmering blue lining, that hung in front of the three tall windows" and a few lines later "he got up, and, throwing on an elaborate dressing-gown of silk-embroidered cashmere wool, passed into the onyx-paved bathroom" (91-92). These descriptions of Lord Henry's and Dorian's personal surroundings call attention to their homosexuality. Late Victorian society would have recognized these appreciations as typically associated with women and with feminine men, which for Wilde, is a mark of the homosexual.

The importance of aestheticism is related to the way different characters are portrayed as feminine. Related to this is the feminine description of British aristocracy; as Alan Sinfield states, "Aestheticism, it appears, derives from aristocratic decadence" (Sinfield 94). Part of the characterization of homosexuality is that characters who are homosexual are feminized. This feminization stems from characters who enjoy or participate in activities typically associated with women. The relationship that this develops with the aristocracy is that the women these activities were associated with, such as interior decoration and posh luxurious surroundings, were typically associated with wealthy women: those who could afford to be concerned with such matters. Since aestheticism was associated with wealthy women, the men associated with it were also wealthy, therefore connecting effeminacy and aestheticism with aristocratic men who had the time and the means necessary to invest in it. Another way in which Wilde suggests homosexuality is through the use of Basil confronting Dorian about what people are saying about Dorian.

Wilde uses carefully chosen language to continue the homosexual undercurrent surrounding the novel. At the beginning of the novel the reader encounters Basil Hallward. Basil, a discreet and respected man of London, confronts Dorian about what people in society are saying about him. The reader receives this information from a trusted source, and it is also coming from people who are part of the inner circle of aristocratic society, to which both Basil and Dorian belong, so there is a sense that there may be some truth to what is being said. During this confrontation Basil asks Dorian, "Why is your friendship so fatal to young men? There was that wretched boy in the Guards who committed suicide...There was Sir Henry Ashton, who had to leave

England, with a tarnished name...What about Adrain Singleton...What about Lord Kent's only son...What about the young Duke of Perth" (144). Basil is listing only men with whom Dorian has had some sort of relationship. All of these men are now fallen in some way, and through this is the possibility that their homosexual relationships with Dorian Gray caused their troubles. Wilde uses this as his opportunity to reinforce the possibility that Dorian Gray is gay.

Adding to the significance of Basil's claim is that the men Basil names are men of Victorian aristocratic society. They are part of the class of which Dorian, Basil, and Lord Henry are members. It is within this class that homosexuality must remain discreet. Just as Melville uses the South Sea Islands as a place to discuss male-male relationships and James uses England and Rome as a place where he can discuss the homosexuality and homoerotic desire of American characters, it is on the margins of society, in the opium dens and bars of the lower classes where Dorian must indulge in homosexual acts. One of the men who Basil mentions when he confronts Dorian is Adrian Singleton. After the confrontation the reader meets Adrian when he encounters Dorian in an opium den. Close to midnight Dorian decides to venture out. He hails a cab and after offering the driver two sovereigns, "and after his [the driver's] fare had got in he turned the horse round, and drove rapidly toward the river (175). After an hour long ride Dorian gets out and walks hurriedly towards the opium dens. When he finds the one he wants, Dorian goes in:

> At the end of the room there was a little staircase, leading to a darkened chamber. As Dorian hurried up its three rickety steps, the heavy odor of opium met him. He heaved a deep breath, and his nostrils quivered with pleasure. When

he entered, a young man with smooth yellow hair, who was bending over a lamp lighting a long thin pipe, looked up at him, and nodded in a hesitating manner.

'You here, Adrian?' Muttered Dorian.

'Where else should I be?' he answered, listlessly. 'None of the chaps will speak to me now.' (179)

Adrian, being a friend of Dorian's and a possible former lover is outcast, just as Dorian has become. When the narrator describes the room, the reader sees the kind of place Dorian and Adrian are in, "Dorian winced, and looked round at the grotesque things that lay in such fantastic postures on the ragged mattresses. The twisted limbs, the gaping mouths, the staring lustreless eyes, fascinated him" (179). Even though Dorian is in an opium den, the mattresses and twisted limbs also hint at a place for anonymous sex. It is in these opium dens where Dorian must not be recognized. The dens represent a lower class of people, and Dorian becomes tainted by his associations with people outside of his own class.

It is because homosexuality is not allowed in society that Dorian is able to blackmail one of his former lovers. After Dorian murders Basil he needs to find a way to dispose of the body. He contacts Alan Campbell who is "scientific" (161). Dorian tells Alan "You know about chemistry and things of that kind. You have made experiments. What you have got to do is to destroy the thing that is upstairs–to destroy it so that not a vestige of it will be left" (161). What Dorian is asking Campbell to destroy is Basil's murdered body. After Dorian makes his plea, Campbell not only refuses, but also rebuffs Dorian: "I will have absolutely nothing to do with it. I don't care what shame comes on you. You deserve it all. I should not be sorry to see you disgraced, publicly disgraced"

(161). Dorian, use to getting what he wants, is at first taken aback by Campbell's words, and Dorian begins to beg Campbell for his help. When Dorian realizes that Campbell is not going to help him, Dorian decides that blackmail will force Campbell to change his mind. Dorian tells Campbell:

> ...you leave me no alternative. I have a letter written already. Here it is. You see the address. If you don't help me, I must send it. If you don't help me, I will send it. You know what the result will be. But you are going to help me. It is impossible for you to refuse now. I tired to spare you. You will do me the justice to admit that. You were stern, harsh, offensive. You treated me as no man has ever dared to treat me—no living man at any rate. I bore it all. Now it is time for me to dictate the terms. (163)

Campbell realizes that he is cornered and has no choice but to help Dorian. This passage contains short deliberate sentences spoken by Dorian. They suggest a coldness and directness that has not been seen by him before. The quick short sentences are like quick stabs, like the stabs that killed Basil at Dorian's hand. The reader is never told what is in the letter, but Campbell's reaction convinces the reader that the contents are grave. Perhaps the letter contains a confession of a homosexual relationship between Dorian and Campbell. Dorian's reputation is already tarnished; Dorian does not have as much at stake or as much to lose as Campbell. Campbell does dispose of Basil's body for Dorian, but later in the novel the reader also learns that Campbell soon afterward commits suicide.

Just as the places away from society and middle class values are locations where homosexuality can take place, it is with people who are not part of middle-class society

where homosexuality is less disturbing. Before the part of the novel where Dorian goes to the opium den, the narrator tells the reader of another incident involving Dorian: "Curious stories became current about him [Dorian] after he passed his twenty-fifth year. It was rumored that he had been seen brawling with foreign sailors in a low den in the distant parts of Whitechapel" (136). As Joseph Bristow points out "Dorian's secret relations with 'foreign sailors' cross national and class boundaries to disclose (but, importantly, not name) homosexuality" (53). The incident with the sailors could be very damaging to Dorian because it takes place away from the upper class neighborhoods and involves sailors who are possibly from other countries. This mixing of classes and possibly races could be perceived as threatening to the strict class lines that partly defined Britishness. Additionally, the use of sailors by Wilde suggests men at sea for long periods of time without women onboard. "The fact that Dorian mixes with these men suggests that he keeps their company for something other than 'brawling'. Wilde is strategically silent about Dorian's barely glimpsed life along the shadowy docks...The 'homosexual' code had to be read through such obliquities" (53). These homosexual activities on the seedy side of London are not as threatening to middle-class Londoners. They are seen as places that no nobleman like Dorian would ever venture into. As long as the activities are veiled to the middle class and the reading public they do not exist. It is within the middle class that values were controlled. Acts of sexual deviance were associated with the poor and with a renegade portion of the upper-class; even so, intermingling between these classes was not acceptable. Just as homosexuality is relegated to the margins of society in his novel, the same was true of his life. Wilde was known to have had a sexual relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas, the son of the

Marquis de Queensberry, but he was also believed to have had homosexual encounters with prostitutes; it was these encounters with prostitutes and lower-class people that, after trial, resulted in Wilde's imprisonment with a sentence including hard labor.

The way homosexuality is viewed in society and literature during the late nineteenth-century is very different from how it was approached by writers during the time Melville was a young author. Partly due to language, the idea of homosexuality itself or a homosexual identity was not as focused during the 1850s; however, it is evident that Melville, being a progressive writer, was possibly struggling with the issue in his writings. In *Typee* readers encounter Tommo, whose relationship with Toby is described in possibly sexual and matrimonial ways. Melville's novel takes place away from American soil; therefore offering him the freedom, though still covertly, to develop a homoerotic undercurrent in his novel. The relationship between Tommo and Toby, though at times is erotically charged, is described more as a male or same-sex kinship. When comparing Melville's *Typee* to James's *The Portrait of a Lady* the idea of male kinship becomes more overtly sexualized, though still guarded. James creates characters who are unable to perform their gender in constructed and acceptable ways. James creates these problems in the first chapter of his novel. Moreover, James's less guarded homosexual theme is in some ways more erotically described. Like Melville, James displaces homosexuality. His American characters are in Europe, specifically England and Italy, where they are not confined by a morally strict American society. What caused this need for Melville and James to move their American characters off of American soil in order to develop socially unacceptable ideas? Many possible answers could be considered; for example, one possibility could be America's Puritan heritage. One thing

that ties James's novel to Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is the idea of a developing homosexual identity. Part of this identity is grounded in an appreciation for beauty and beautiful possessions by homosexual men. This identity is reflected in James's male characters and becomes a more central theme in Wilde's novel. Again, homosexuality is displaced. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* homosexuality is relegated to the less respectable neighborhoods of London; however, it is also seen in the elite aristocratic community, where power and influence is beginning to erode as the twentieth-century comes closer.

In this continuum that is created between Melville, James, and Wilde the idea of homosexuality is also coupled with repulsion, disease, and horror. Melville creates a relationship between homosexuality and cannibalism that links the two. Despite Melville's progressiveness he creates a relationship that equates the repulsion to cannibalism similar to a repulsion to homosexuality or same-sex desire; however, within the repulsion there is curiosity and awkward attraction. James creates characters like Ralph Touchett who are weak and stricken with disease but who also exhibit homosexual tendencies or a homosexual identity. Also, Gilbert Osmond is a controlling manipulative man whose self-centeredness is related to his homosexuality. With Wilde the issue of homosexuality and identity becomes more difficult to understand. The sin and scars of homosexuality are taken on by the painting of Dorian. The painting is loathsome and becomes monstrous. Its hideousness is observed by Dorian and described to readers. But what is Dorian's true identity? Is he the loathsome person looking back at him from the painting or is it the beautiful Dorian that others see when looking at him? Oliver Buckton quotes Wilde as saying about *Dorian Gray*, "'It contains much of me in it. Basil

Hallward is what I think I am: Lord Henry what the world thinks of me: Dorian what I would like to be–in other ages, perhaps'" (112). Perhaps Wilde, unlike Melville and James, is commenting on how people perceive others based on their actions regardless of who they really are. Might is also be possible that Dorian represents Henry James? He is a respected man of upper-class society who has a dark and hidden side viewed only by himself until after his death. Wilde certainly knew of James, and Leland Monk states "He [James] seems to have been repulsed by Wilde not simply on moral grounds (whatever that might be), but because the aesthete's public and flagrant suggestion of a homosexual life and style threatened to call attention to James's more private and discreet passion for members of his own sex" (247). Ultimately, this continuum of the development of homosexuality and homoerotic desire in nineteenth-century literature traces how, over time and through the genius of these authors, the development of homosexuality and homosexual identity are important aspects of the American and British canon.

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