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Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment

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Preface

I WAS working towards a book on theatre and homosexuality; it seemed obvious that it should begin with Oscar Wilde. After all, he is the most notorious/celebrated queer/playwright. Yet the place of homosexuality in his plays is by no means plain. Many commentators assume that queerness, like murder, *will out*, so there must be a gay scenario lurking somewhere in the depths of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. But it doesn't really work. It might be nice to think of Algernon and Jack as a gay couple, but most of their dialogue is bickering about property and women; or of Bunburying as cruising for rough trade, but it is an upper-class young heiress that we see Algernon visiting, and they want to marry. Lady Bracknell has been played as a man in drag – well, why not? And why not Lady Macbeth? – except that one would not want to fall into the notion that any effective woman must really be some kind of man. As David Savran remarks, trying to 'translate' texts by writers whom we now regard as sexually dissident, back into a supposed lesbian or gay original, produces 'an unintelligible clutter whose only coherence becomes the ill-concealed homosexuality of its author'.[1] And that is not very interesting.

All that said, Wilde's principal male characters do look and sound like the mid-twentieth-century stereotype of the queer man (I am using 'queer' to evoke this historical figure). They are effete, camp, leisured or aspiring to be, aesthetic, amoral, witty, insouciant, charming, spiteful, dandified. If these characters are not offered as homosexual (and generally they are pursuing women characters), the whole ambiance reeks, none the less, of queerness. Or, rather, it does for us. And so does Wilde himself. Wow! what a fabulous camp queen! – we would say if he came into the room today. For fifteen years, though – until the trials provoked by the strange recklessness of Lord Alfred Douglas and the strange vindictiveness of Lord Queensberry – Wilde was regarded by society, the

press and the public as rather wicked, but by no means as a pariah. And well-informed people were surprised, I will show, when his queer practices came to light.

The question, then, is: how did he get away with it? – going around looking and talking the way he did, and putting such characters on the stage. And the answer must be: they didn't see queerness in the way we have come to see it. Our interpretation is retroactive; in fact, Wilde and his writings look queer because our stereotypical notion of male homosexuality derives from Wilde, and our ideas about him.

The key to the matter, I argue, is 'effeminacy' (a misogynist but powerful term): Wilde was perceived as effeminate, to be sure; but not, thereby, as queer. In the mid twentieth century, effeminacy and queerness became virtually synonymous, along with the rest of the Wildean manner. But how was effeminacy regarded before the trials? I knew that in Shakespeare and Marlowe it meant giving too much attention to women, so I went back to that, and then worked forward, exploring the scope of effeminacy, same-sex passion (a term used to avoid anachronism), and relations between the two. The dominant modern idea of the male homosexual unravelled before me as I advanced: each time he seemed to be emerging, more complex evidence disturbed the picture.

So this book begins with an elaboration of the problem, and the theoretical issues it engages. Then it jumps back to early-modern times, and proceeds briskly forward through rakes and fops, molly-houses, the eighteenth-century cult of sensibility, the Victorian cult of manliness (heterosexual and homosexual), dandies, aesthetes, decadents, sexologists. Chapter 5 shows, first, how same-sex passion was being represented, in Wilde's time, as quintessentially masculine; then how the trials reoriented it. Chapter 6 explores how an effeminate, Wildean model of the queer man became established in the twentieth century, and the various consequences for gay men. In the course of these chapters, I discuss writings by Wilde and a good many others that offer to shed symptomatic light on the issue.

The villain of the piece is the masculine/feminine binary structure as it circulates in our cultures, by which I mean the supposition that masculinity and femininity are the essential, normative properties of men and women respectively. This is scarcely valid in respect of heterosexuals – they don't in fact fall tidily into mascu-

line and feminine attributes, all the time or in every respect; so it is perverse that lesbians and gay men should be interpreted as some kind of contorted variation upon it. Chapter 7, therefore, is a demonstration of how that binary is transmitted through its most influential modern conduit, Sigmund Freud. Finally I review some of the pressing issues in the current situations of lesbians and gay men, reassessing them in the light of my inquiry. As is generally the case, my project of historical reconstruction has substantial implications for how we handle ourselves today. Our present selves are formed out of continuity and difference: because Wilde and others were as they were, we are as we are.

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Note

1. David Savran, *Communists, Cowboys, and Queers* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1992), p. 115.

Chapter one

Queer Thinking

OSCAR WILDE appeared in three trials in 1895. In the first, he sued Lord Queensberry for libel, but dropped the case when Queensberry was discovered to have embarrassing evidence about Wilde's activities. In the second, Wilde was prosecuted by the state for gross indecency, but this proved inconclusive. At the third trial he was found guilty of gross indecency with another male person. In the middle of the second trial, Frank Harris, editor of the *Fortnightly Review* and man-about-town, was talking with Wilde about strategy. Wilde exclaimed: 'You talk with passion and conviction, as if I were innocent.' 'But you are innocent,' cried Harris in amazement, 'aren't you?' 'No,' said Wilde. 'I thought you knew that all along.' 'No,' Harris replied. 'I did not know. I did not believe the accusation. I did not believe it for a moment.'[1] This was despite the fact that young men were testifying, with circumstantial detail, that they had had sexual relations with Wilde – Harris thought they had been paid to perjure themselves. Even Queensberry, Harris deduces (p. 231), did not initially believe the same-sex allegations: he was surprised by the evidence that was offered to him.

Now, Harris is not altogether reliable, and the conversation perhaps didn't go quite the way he says in retrospect. Nevertheless, there is no reason to suppose he would wish to appear naive or ill-informed, and his story would be pointless if it were not adequately plausible; it is accepted by H. Montgomery Hyde and Richard Ellmann.[2] What it shows is that homosexuality was *not* manifest from Wilde's style. To be sure, Wilde's 'effeminate', dandy manner and interests had excited comment and hostility, but they had not led either his friends or strangers to regard him as obviously, even

probably, queer. His appearance on first meeting, according to Harris, was not prepossessing: 'fleshly indulgence and laziness, I said to myself, were written all over him. ... He shook hands in a limp way I disliked; his hands were flabby, greasy; his skin looked bilious and dirty' (pp. 91–2; fortunately, all this was entirely outweighed by his pleasant personality). But Wilde's manner did not strike Harris as queer.

Wilde had adopted the manners and appearance of an effeminate aesthete in 1877; since 1882 he had presented himself as an effeminate dandy. Yet it was in late 1894, only a few months before the trials, according to Holbrook Jackson, that 'serious rumours about [Wilde's] private life and habits became more persistent in both London and Paris'. And still not everyone believed them. W. B. Yeats, who knew Wilde well, thought he was unjustly accused when the trials began.[3]

Popular opinion seems to have been no more knowing. In the second trial the jury could not reach a verdict on any of the principal charges. A sheet ballad printed at the time is titled and has as its refrain: 'Oh! Oscar Wilde, we never thought that you was built that way'.[4] The whole point is surprise at what is being revealed:

> Now wonders they will never cease, and as each day we read,
> The papers, why we of't say, well, 'I am surprised' indeed,
> For people who we think are 18 carat turn out brass,
> And what we thought a Lion's roar's the braying of an ass.

The surprise could be sarcastic, but there are no pointers towards that; on the contrary, the verse depends on the reader having thought, hitherto, that Wilde was 18-carat. There is here a wariness about notables in general (they often turn out to be wrong 'uns) but nothing specific to Wilde; no suggestion, at all, on grounds that we might expect today – dandyism, effeminacy and aestheticism – that we should have guessed all along. It is not my case that no one would have credited that Wilde was homosexual; but that those features of his manner which would signal it to us, then did not.

For us, it is hard to regard Wilde as other than the apogee of gay experience and expression, because that is the position we have accorded him in our cultures. For us, he is always-already queer –

as that stereotype has prevailed in the twentieth century (for the sake of clarity, I write 'queer' for that historical phase – not contradicting, thereby, its recent revival among activists – and 'gay' for post-Stonewall kinds of consciousness). But Wilde's typicality is after-the-effect – after, I believe, the trials helped to produce a major shift in perceptions of the scope of same-sex passion. At that point, the entire, vaguely disconcerting nexus of effeminacy, leisure, idleness, immorality, luxury, insouciance, decadence and aestheticism, which Wilde was perceived, variously, as instantiating, was transformed into a brilliantly precise image. The effect was comparable to that produced for lesbianism by Radclyffe Hall's *Well of Loneliness* (1928). The parts were there already, and were being combined, diversely, by various people. But, at this point, a distinctive possibility cohered, far more clearly, and for far more people, than hitherto. The principal twentieth-century stereotype entered our cultures: not just the homosexual, as the lawyers and medics would have it, but the queer.

Many commentators have attributed this kind of significance to Wilde.[5] Recently Ed Cohen has shown how newspaper reports of the trials avoided specifying Wilde's alleged crimes – they were regarded as too horrible to be named. The *Evening Standard* reported that Queensberry had written '"Oscar Wilde posing as _____"': the last word, 'somdomite' (Queensberry's mistake for 'sodomite'), was replaced by a blank. 'Oscar Wilde posing' stood for the whole idea. In other newspapers the entire phrasing of the libel was eliminated, leaving Wilde's person as the offence.[6] Not only did this love not dare to speak its name, it hardly *had* a name. 'The love he bore to Dan,' Sir Henry Hall Caine wrote, 'was a brotherly passion for which language has yet no name.'[7] At that very moment, of course, several names were being coined, but 'an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort', as E. M. Forster's Maurice presents himself, became the commonest name. Thus could the unspeakable find voice. Cohen shows how this usage occurred between the wars; I remember it at school in the 1950s – along with 'Monty', which derived from the latest incarnation of the scandalous Wilde figure, Lord Montagu of Beaulieu.[8]

Wilde and his dandy characters were perceived as 'effeminate' – that was widely said – but not as queer. They *passed*, we might now say, not by playing down what we call camp behaviour, but by manifesting it exuberantly. When T. W. Higginson reviewed

the *Poems* (1882) he called his article 'Unmanly manhood', but his objection was not that Wilde's writing presented the same 'offences' as Walt Whitman's homoerotic poetry. Rather, it appealed excessively to women. Ambrose Bierce made a similar complaint: Wilde's *Poems* are making him suspiciously attractive to women: by 'emitting meaningless murmurs in the blaze of women's eyes' he has become a 'dunghill he-hen'.[9] Such remarks led me to explore the historical relations between homosexuality and 'effeminacy' – the quote marks indicate that I regard this as a cultural construct, not an essential property, either of gay men or in its reference to a supposed femininity of women. In all the current preoccupation with concepts of manliness and masculinity, effeminacy is rarely addressed head-on; yet it defines, crucially, the generally acceptable limits of gender and sexual expression.

Until the Wilde trials, effeminacy and homosexuality did not correlate in the way they have done subsequently; unravelling this takes me back through the centuries before Wilde, forward into twentieth-century queer and gay culture, and on beyond that, into the potential for our sexualities in the future. In subsequent chapters I consider further complexities in Wilde's writing and career. In this chapter I try to show how we may understand and make use of references to same-sex passion in earlier times, even while recognizing their elusiveness. I review the debate about whether homosexuality is better regarded as an essential property of lesbian and gay individuals, or as a social construct, looking both at the historical moment when 'homosexual' was coined and at the political implications of constructionism. Finally I return to Wilde, finding in 'The portrait of Mr W. H.' an echo of these arguments.

Reading silences

When a part of our worldview threatens disruption by manifestly failing to cohere with the rest, then we reorganize and retell its story, trying to get it into shape – back into the old shape if we are conservative-minded, or into a new shape if we are more adventurous. That is how cultures elaborate themselves. The stories that address the unresolved issues, the ones where the conditions of plausibility are in dispute, require most assiduous and continuous

reworking; I call them faultline stories.[10] This is spectacularly true of Wilde's person and writings; he is a cultural token around which contest and change occurred, and still occur.

In our cultures, the discourses through which sexuality circulates are of course among the most fraught and conflicted, and often the most obliquely apprehended. Silences, Michel Foucault has taught us, are significant:

> Silence itself – the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers – is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies.[11]

It might seem that this point has been well taken among commentators on Wilde, for any silence is likely now to be read as a deafening roar about homosexuality. But that is too simple. Foucault continues:

> There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorised, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.

The danger is that, instead of unravelling the intricate silences, we assimilate them too rapidly to the model that prevails in our own cultures.

Richard Ellmann accepts that Wilde's first same-sex encounter was, as Wilde said, initiated by Robbie Ross in 1886; Montgomery Hyde, Richard Gilman and Peter Ackroyd are of the same opinion; Frank Harris points out that all the offences alleged in the trials derive from 1892 or thereabouts – after the first meeting with Douglas.[12] Despite his explicit acknowledgement, Ellmann implies, throughout his biography, that Wilde's male relationships

were always, from the start, somehow already homosexual. Again, on the basis of certain close relationships and some loose associations, Brian Reade concludes that Wilde was 'seriously initiated in homosexual practices' while a student at Oxford in 1875–7, ten years before the episode with Ross.[13] But, bearing in mind the mobility of sexualities in our cultures and the pressures against same-sex practices, it is a mistake to read anyone as 'really homosexual' from the start. There is no reason to suppose that Wilde's discovery of same-sex passion was less problematic than for very many people today. Consider, again, the wide acceptance of a supposed photograph of Wilde, bewigged and bejewelled, in costume as Salomé. John Stokes points out that this is almost certainly not Wilde, and when you look again it is not very much like him.[14] It is part of the modern stereotype of the gay man that he should want to dress as a woman, especially a fatally gorgeous one. Our cultures observe the Wilde they expect and want to see.

The trial in 1871 of Stella and Fanny, also known as Ernest Boulton and Frederick Park, gained immense press attention. The two lads, it emerged, had from childhood liked to play female parts in semi-professional theatricals, and now were inclined to go about in female attire. They were arrested coming from the Strand Theatre, and appeared – still cross-dressed though perhaps somewhat dishevelled after a night in the cells – at Bow Street court. As a result of letters from admirers found at their lodgings, they and six associates were charged with conspiracy to commit a felony. One of the accused was Lord Arthur Clinton MP, but he died before the trial. The defence case was that it had all been mere frivolity. The drag was for theatricals and was worn publicly for a joke; the boys' admirers were just silly. Defence Counsel said he 'was not going to attempt to justify the execrable taste, the indelicacy of penning such letters, but he asked them [the jury] to view them in the light of notes addressed to an effeminate lad; a dainty and pleasing boy'. This (to us) surprisingly naive, and yet strangely provocative, version of events proved persuasive. The Lord Chief Justice evidently did not have the horrible crime of sodomy in his sights when, in his summing up, he said there was no evidence of felony or conspiracy; the letters might be 'no more than the romantic expression of personal admiration and affection. No doubt such feelings and attachments had existed and might exist without any evil'.[15] The jury acquitted after just fifty-three minutes; *The Times*

declared that the prosecution should never have been brought.

Why were Fanny and Stella and their friends not demonized, victimized, punished? That is what we have been used to. Two explanations have been advanced. Jeffrey Weeks attributes it to 'concepts of homosexuality', as late as 1871, being 'extremely undeveloped'. 'Neither the police nor the court were familiar with the patterns of male homosexuality. The opening remarks of the Attorney General hinted that it was their transvestism, their soliciting men as *women* which was the core of their crime.' The police doctors had not encountered cases of sodomy, and were unaware of recent French work; indeed, the Attorney General thought it fortunate that there was 'very little learning or knowledge upon this subject in this country'.[16] It is not clear, even, how some of Stella and Fanny's associates perceived the liaison, for sometimes the lads passed successfully as women, and took up with men who apparently believed them to be women.

Neil Bartlett agrees that the trial focuses a single question: 'Were Fanny and Stella visible?'[17] Unlike Weeks, Bartlett believes that they were – all too visible. He makes two points: first, that they made 'determined efforts to use their frocks to create public space for themselves in London, in the separate but overlapping worlds of the actress, the prostitute and the demi-mondaine. ... They were well aware that they were playing precise games with their appearance, and that an exact understanding of the rules was a prerequisite of survival' (pp. 138–9). So concepts of homosexuality were well enough developed in certain quarters. This is surely right. However, it does not follow that the court was able to recognize this behaviour. Indeed, the strategic skills of Fanny and Stella were designed, partly, to prevent that – to enable them to make the contacts they wished without attracting unhelpful attention. The condition for their subculture may have been that it was, in many quarters, unrecognizable.

Bartlett's second argument is that the court was wilfully blind; it needed to disbelieve in the existence of such a milieu: 'Only by silencing, not punishing, the sodomites, could the court breathe a sigh of relief. When Boulton and Park were dismissed, declared improbable if not impossible, the existence of a homosexual culture in London was effectively denied' (p. 142). The opinion of *The Times* lends support to the idea that a guilty verdict would have been embarrassing; it 'would have been felt at home, and received

abroad, as a reflection on our national morals'.[18] But for this strategy of disbelief to work, there has to be a genuine indeterminacy – same-sex passion has to be implausible in some degree, whatever the thinking that produced the acquittal.

The interpretations of Weeks and Bartlett could both be correct. Some people involved in bringing the prosecution may have been aware of a same-sex subculture and reluctant to press the case strongly, whilst members of the jury might have been unaware and uncomprehending. Bartlett's question remains: who understood the letters that were presented in evidence; and how, and why, and on what terms (p. 139)? The answer, probably, is that some people heard same-sex passion loud and clear, whereas others could not conceive of it. It is through that indeterminacy that indirections and evasions – those of the court, and of Fanny and Stella – could flourish.

The interpretative challenge is to recover the moment of indeterminacy. For it is not that our idea of 'the homosexual' was hiding beneath other phrases, or lurking unspecified in the silence, like a statue under a sheet, fully formed but waiting to be unveiled; it was in the process of becoming constituted. The concept was *emerging* around and through instances like Fanny and Stella, and Wilde. To presume the eventual outcome in the blind or hesitant approximations out of which it was partly fashioned is to miss, precisely, the points of most interest.

The half-heard character of homosexuality in discreet discourse has been theorized, in terms afforded by D. A. Miller, as an *open secret*. 'In some sense,' Miller observes, the secret is always open: its function 'is not to conceal knowledge, so much as to conceal the knowledge of the knowledge'.[19] It helps to constitute the public/private boundary – the binary structure that seems to demarcate our subjectivities from a public realm, while actually producing those subjectivities – and thus facilitates the policing of that boundary. The idea of a private space might seem to free an autonomous zone for self-expression, but the effect, rather, is a specific policing of the border between the two. As David Evans puts it, 'by concentrating on public manifestations of sexual deviance in the buffer zone between moral and immoral communities, this policing has effectively penetrated all "private" territories with immanent self-regulating material forms of power/knowledge'.[20]

The secret keeps a topic like homosexuality in the private sphere, but under surveillance, allowing it to hover on the edge of public visibility. If it gets fully into the open, it attains public status; yet it must not disappear altogether, for then it would be beyond control and would no longer effect a general surveillance of aberrant desire. For, as Jonathan Dollimore has argued, 'the negation of homosexuality has been in direct proportion to its actual centrality, its cultural marginality in direct proportion to its cultural significance'.[21] The open secret constitutes homosexuality as the 'unthinkable' alternative – so awful that it can be envisaged only as private, yet always obscurely present as a public penalty for deviance.

The potential for disturbance on the public/private boundary is apparent in the wording of the 1885 Labouchère amendment which criminalized male homosexual acts in Britain: it is titled 'Outrages on public decency', but begins: 'Any male person who, in public *or private*, commits ...'.[22] Such a muddle collapses, repeatedly through the twentieth century, from both sides: the state pursues homosexuals into their privacy, and homosexuals achieve reluctant or determined public visibility. The Wolfenden Report was commissioned in 1954 to re-handle and re-secure the private/public boundary; this was the effect also of the British law reform of 1967. The UK Thatcherite Section 28 legislation of 1988, forbidding municipalities to spend public money in ways that may 'promote homosexuality', is one more attempt to control public visibility in the face of the adjustments to the private/public boundary that gay activists have forced.

Such instability affects crucially the kinds of textual and cultural analysis that can usefully be undertaken. It will not be sufficient to anticipate a single, coherent interpretation; we must expect texts to reveal faultlines, and must consider the disparate reading conditions in which diverse decodings will be possible. As Pierre Macherey proposes, the point at which the text falls silent is the point at which its ideological project may be disclosed. What may there be discerned is both necessary and necessarily absent; it manifests breaking points of the text, moments at which its ideological project is under special strain.[23] Such gaps in ideological coherence are in principle bound to occur. No text, literary or otherwise, can contain within its ideological project all of the potential significance that it must release in pursuance of that

project. The complexity of the social formation combines with the multi-accentuality of language to produce an inevitable excess of meaning, as implications that arise coherently enough at one point cannot altogether be accommodated at another.

The whole tendency of ideology is to efface contradiction. But it is a condition of representation that any such project will incorporate the ground of its own ultimate failure. The customary notions of sexualities in our cultures are contradictory and indeterminate. When such a key concept is structurally unstable, it produces endless textual work. The awkward issue has continually to be revisited, reworked, rediscovered, reaffirmed. And because closure is tantalizingly elusive, texts are often to be found pushing representation to a breaking point where contradiction comes to the surface. Some commentators will then seek to help the text into coherence – in literary analysis, supplying for characters feasible thoughts and motives to smooth over the difficulty. This has been the virtual *raison d'être* of traditional literary criticism. Other commentators may take the opportunity to address the ideological scope of the text – how its closures provoke collusion or questioning.

Within this mode of analysis, it is relatively unimportant to decide how far a text presents positive images of lesbians and gay men – how far it manifests a good political tendency. Textual potentiality is far more fluid than that. Even a text which aspires to contain a subordinate perspective must first bring it into visibility; even to misrepresent, one must present. And once that has happened, there can be no guarantee that the subordinate will stay safely in its prescribed place. Readers do not have to respect closures – we do not have, for instance, to accept that the independent women characters in Shakespearean comedies find their proper destinies in the marriage deals at the ends of those plays. We can insist on our sense that the middle of such a text arouses expectations that exceed the closure. Lesbians and gay men have been necessarily adroit at reading against the grain, building their culture in the margins of the dominant. Representation is always involved in contest. When, in any instance, sexual dissidence gains ground, or loses ground, that is not in the nature of things; it is because of their relative strengths in that situation. And this means that, politically, there is a great deal to play for.

Constructionism

My argument about the emergence of a queer identity around Wilde is constructionist: it holds that sexualities (heterosexual and homosexual) are not essential, but constructed within an array of prevailing social possibilities. For this reason, I try to avoid using present-day concepts anachronistically. 'Same-sex passion' is the best term I have been able to find for the period up to 1900 ('passion' is intended to include both an emotional and a physical charge, while avoiding the fraught term 'desire').

Sexual identity depends not on a deep-set self-hood (though it may feel otherwise), but on one's particular situation within the framework of understanding that makes certain, diverse, possibilities available; which makes some ideas plausible and others not. This is the ideological network that we use to explain our worlds. Ideology makes sense for us – of us – because it is already proceeding when we arrive in the world; we come to consciousness in its terms. As the world shapes itself around and through us, certain interpretations of experience strike us as plausible: they fit with what we have experienced already, and are confirmed by others around us. So we complete what Colin Sumner calls a 'circle of social reality': 'understanding produces its own social reality at the same time as social reality produces its own understanding'.[24] This is apparent when we observe how people in other cultures than our own make good sense of the world in ways that seem strange to us: their outlook is supported by their social context. For them, those frameworks of perception, maps of meaning, work.

There will also be new breaks, when the combination of circumstances enables or forces people to develop new structures. Characteristically, this will be done through a process we may call *bricolage* – Lévi-Strauss's term for the way ideological systems are 'extended and amplified to deal with new situations by "putting together", often in an illogical or incoherent way, what were, previously, the fragments of more ordered or stable meaning-systems'.[25] New constructs are 'improvised' or 'made-up' as *ad hoc* responses; we catch that process at work when the *Evening Standard* invites the reader to fill in the blank in the sentence '"Oscar Wilde posing as ____"'. The dominant twentieth-century queer

identity, I will argue, has been constructed in this kind of process – mainly out of elements that came together at the Wilde trials: effeminacy, leisure, idleness, immorality, luxury, insouciance, decadence and aestheticism.

The constructionist argument is generally indebted to the work of Michel Foucault, who argues that the big shift in homosexual identity occurs when the person who engages in same-sex activity gets perceived as a personality type. So far from repressing sex, Foucault brilliantly observes, the Victorians went on about it all the time; it became a principal mode of social regulation. In the process of this discursive proliferation, the 'homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. ... The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species'.[26] The difference is like that between nicking things from Woolworths, which any child might do, and being labelled 'a thief': with the latter, thievishness seems to pervade the whole personality. Previously, for instance in Shakespeare's time, same-sex passion was not specialized as the kind of thing only a certain kind of person might do; it was something anyone might fall into – since we are all 'fallen'. Hostility to same-sex practices, Alan Bray shows, derived hardly from a concept of homosexuality as such; rather, from 'a more general notion: debauchery; and debauchery was a temptation to which all, in principle at least, were subject'.[27]

Hence the answer to the question that seems suddenly to have hit the agenda: 'Was Shakespeare gay?' He couldn't have been, because lesbian and gay identities are modern developments: the early-modern organization of sex and gender boundaries, simply, was different from ours. However, by the same token, he couldn't have been straight either, so present-day heterosexism has no stronger claim upon him than homosexuality. In practice, his plays are pervaded with erotic interactions that strike chords for lesbians and gays today. Friendships are conducted with a passion that would now be considered suspicious; language of sexual flirtation is used in circumstances where we would find it embarrassing; and all the women's parts may, legitimately, be played by young men. It is not that Shakespeare was a sexual radical, marvellously anticipating progressive modern ideas; the ordinary currency of his theatre and society is sexy for us. And this potential may be

exploited in gender-bending productions, as it was in Cheek by Jowl's *As You Like It* in 1991.

There are problems with the historical provenance of Foucault's argument, and they affect its political implications. It is understandable that he should wish to correct a naive 1960s exuberance about the liberatory consequences of everyone doing their own thing, but he falls into a somewhat paranoid slant, whereby the development of homosexuality may appear as a device through which the state gained greater control over subjectivities. There are also problems of method. Foucault finds history falling into epochs, characterized by distinct modes of thought; change occurs through a sequence of large-scale epistemological shifts. This makes his case vulnerable to almost any scrap of empirical evidence showing ideas occurring at the 'wrong' time. While accepting his broad thesis about the development of homosexual identity, as a shift from incidental behaviour to a personality type, I believe the change to have been gradual and highly uneven – as such changes generally are. A same-sex coterie may well have flourished at the court of Queen Elizabeth, around the Earl of Southampton, and may have involved a same-sex identity recognizably continuous with that experienced by some men today. At the same moment, people in other circumstances in Western Europe may have had no concept of same-sex passion. There were subcultures in Victorian times for the sexologists to observe, George Chauncey, Jr has pointed out: 'they were investigating a subculture rather than creating one'; male homosexuality was not, as Simon Shepherd puts it, a 'virgin birth'.[28]

Also, Foucault places too much emphasis on medical and legal discourses, and on their supposed collusion in consolidating state power. It would be better to regard those discourses as two among many, and as responding to and channelling social change rather than determining it. Frank Mort has shown that, in England at least, nineteenth-century changes in the regulation of sexuality derived from diverse interventions in civil society. In large part, the impetus came from outrage at the oppression of poor women through prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation.[29] Same-sex practices came into focus as a by-product of broadly progressive campaigns, and doctors and lawyers were relatively ignorant of and uninterested in them. The Labouchère amendment, criminalizing homosexual acts in private, was tacked on to the

Criminal Law Amendment Act (1885), which was aimed ostensibly at procurers of prostitution; and the penalty of flogging on second conviction for soliciting men was introduced through the Vagrancy Law Amendment Act (1898), which mainly targeted men who accosted women.

This mode of interpretation perceives homosexuality within a complex elaboration of socio-sexual discourses, finding homosexual men caught up in the problems of heterosexuality (as they so often are), rather than as a primary focus of inexplicably sudden hostile attention. The crunch issue in Victorian England, Judith Walkowitz has argued, was not homosexuality but widespread sexual oppression by middle-class men, in the main of working-class women. This was shifted away from its logical focus and (in a manner familiar to lesbians and gay men) on to the victims. So, despite the initial reformist goals, the legislation that eventuated gave police far greater summary jurisdiction over poor working women and children. New penalizing of homosexual men occurred, opportunistically – almost casually – within this wider pattern. Such displacement of responsibility onto sexual dissidents consolidated the pattern: social ills could be attributed to a scarcely specified category of shadowy deviants, whose victims were characteristically perceived as young people. As Jacqueline Rose has observed, 'The child prostitute became the emblem for a social conscience which saw in the repairing of her moral and sexual innocence a corrective to fundamental problems of social inequality'.[30]

We need to envisage the stigmatization of homosexuality as occurring within a field of diverse interacting discourses. In many of these, it is a relatively incidental factor; in others, it may even be represented positively. There was a positive contribution from homosexual men. As Frederic Silverstolpe has pointed out, the term 'homosexual' was coined not by a doctor but by the Hungarian writer Karoly Maria Benkert. The appeal to medical knowledge was generated among activists such as Magnus Hirschfeld, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs and John Addington Symonds as a strategic move, designed to justify claims for homosexual rights.[31] Manifest, diverse and purposeful political activity appeared within several same-sex circles in Victorian England. Some of this was courageous and innovative; some was equivocal and half-submerged (for instance, members of the literary establishment published editions

and studies of Greek and other suitable precursors; Wilde's tutor in Dublin hesitantly defended ancient Greek homosexuality in print – but removed the passage from a second edition).[32] To be sure, much of the publishing was in expensive, limited editions; as I have said, we have to consider who knows about a concept. Nevertheless, much of this writing (some of which I consider later on) still seems bold; as with feminism, the late nineteenth century made advances that we have had painfully to recover in recent times. In a flurry of writing and networking, more various than at any time until the 1970s, 'homosexual' identity was being explored.

With this kind of sophistication, I believe the constructionist argument stands up historically. Homosexual and heterosexual identities were in the making, crucially, in the nineteenth century; in later chapters I say more about how same-sex passion was regarded previously. The broader problem with constructionism is that it may appear to destroy the scope for political intervention. The key question is: if we come to consciousness within a language that is continuous with the power structures that sustain the social order, how can we conceive, let alone organize, resistance? If deviant identities are produced by the dominant ideology in ways that police sexualities, containing dissidence, how is a radical lesbian or gay identity to arise?

Foucault has often been taken as the theorist who has maintained that the outcome of dissidence will be the exploitation and incorporation of the subordinate. This is because he writes: 'Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power'.[33] So dissidence may seem always fatally implicated with that which it aspires to oppose. Even attempts to challenge the system help to maintain it; in fact, those attempts are distinctively complicit, in so far as they help the dominant to assert and police the boundaries of the deviant and the permissible. It begins to seem that any move we make has been anticipated by the power system – you only dig yourself in deeper. Dissidence plays into the hands of containment.

D. A. Miller draws upon this sense of Foucault. *The Novel and the Police*, the title of Miller's book, suggests straightforward state intervention, but he finds that social order is achieved mainly through ideological self-policing – through 'various technologies of the self and its sexuality, which administer the subject's own contri-

bution to the intensive and continuous "pastoral" care that liberal society proposes to take of each and every one of its charges'. Policing, Miller says, moves 'out of the streets, as it were, into the closet – I mean, into the private and domestic sphere on which the very identity of the liberal subject depends'.[34] Identifying privacy and self-policing with the gay closet is richly suggestive – as in Eve Sedgwick's deployment of the idea in *Epistemology of the Closet*. However, in so far as such self-policing is being identified as the principal mode through which surveillance is exercised in societies like ours – as a general effect inherent in the whole modern concept of subjectivity, registering 'the subject's accommodation to a totalizing system that has obliterated the difference he would make';[35] in so far as the open secret is doing all that, merging it with homosexual oppression may obscure distinctions in the historical opportunities for lesbians and gay men.

To be sure, there is good reason for students of sexualities to dwell upon self-policing and entrapment: a great difficulty in lesbian and gay subcultures is self-oppression – how we get to internalize demeaning images of ourselves. None the less, we must seek to track the open secret to specific subcultural formations in determinate historical conditions. Homosexuality is not an open secret at all times, nor is it open and secret in the same ways to different groups at any one time. To suppose otherwise would be to see lesbians and gay men as trapped eternally by their sexuality as such (this might be a psychoanalytic perspective), and that must discourage political action. In the rallying cry, Silence = Death, we assert that secrecy about the concerns of gay men makes their early and painful deaths more likely; openness makes a difference.

This approach is not in fact at odds with Foucault's. Though there is not, in his view, much scope for a grand revolutionary gesture, there is, he says, 'a plurality of resistances ... spread over time and space at varying densities, at times mobilizing groups or individuals in a definitive way'. He *denies* that these must be 'only a reaction or rebound, forming with respect to the basic domination an underside that is in the end always passive, doomed to perpetual defeat'.[36] In fact, a dissident text may derive its leverage, its purchase, precisely from its partial implication with the dominant; it may embarrass the dominant by appropriating its concepts and imagery. Foucault takes the emergence of the concept of homosexuality as an instance of what he terms 'a "reverse" discourse'. Legal,

medical and sexological discourses on homosexuality made possible new forms of control, he says, but, at the same time, they also allowed a voice to sexual dissidents. 'Homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or "naturality" be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified' (p. 101). Deviancy returns from abjection by deploying just those terms which relegated it in the first place.

Cultural materialism has been particularly concerned to theorize the scope for dissident perceptions and action. Foucault's argument about the inter-involvement of power and resistance is not complacent, in my view, because it understands that conflict and contradiction stem from the very strategies through which the social order attempts to sustain itself. As Raymond Williams has observed, ideology has to be seen as a process, and one that is always precarious: 'social orders and cultural orders must be seen as being actively made: actively and continuously, or they may quite quickly break down'.[37] Despite their power, dominant ideological formations are always, in practice, under pressure, as they strive to substantiate their claim to superior plausibility in the face of diverse disturbances. The maps of meaning are always proving inadequate, failing to contain both inherent instabilities and the pressures and strains that arise from new historical conditions. The social order *cannot but produce* faultlines through which its own criteria of plausibility fall into contest and disarray.

Looking for Mr W. H.

Constructionism means that it is hard to be gay until you have some kind of slot, however ambiguously defined, in the current framework of ideas. This may be observed in *Teleny* (1893), to the writing of which Wilde may have contributed. The novel exhibits a same-sex subculture around the dandy aristocrat Briancourt, and an outdoor cruising ground, but the middle-class Des Grieux has initially no idea of such things. He is taken by surprise when he falls in love. 'I afterwards came to the conclusion that I had felt the first faint stimulus of love already long before, but as it had always been with my own sex, I was unconscious that this was love'; so little was same-sex passion anticipated.[38] Des Grieux

argues for the naturalness of his passion: 'I know that I was born a sodomite, the fault is my constitution's, not mine own,' he declares (p. 70); the 'fault' is in his 'nature', his 'blood' (p. 130). Despite this conviction, he does not see himself as a queer in the twentieth-century sense. He is able passionately to desire the maid (despite initial indifference), and says he 'would even have gone so far as to marry her, rather than become a sodomite' (pp. 87, 89). The phrasing there is significant: though he says it is his nature, he has still to *become* a sodomite by indulging his preference. Same-sex passion is natural to Des Grieux, but not essential; it is what you do that counts, not what you are. Indeed, although the novel breaks ground in its handling of same-sex love and eroticism, it anticipates a reader interested equally in cross-sex activity, and the dénouement is the discovery of Teleny's infidelity – with Des Grieux's mother! Same-sex passion is situated, in *Teleny*, partly in an emerging – though far from available – queer subculture, partly as one component in a general dissoluteness.

As *Teleny* and the story of Fanny and Stella suggest, there was a queer subculture, and Wilde, because of his class position (I will argue), was better placed to discover it than many men. We will observe the same pattern in E. M. Forster's *Maurice*. But there is no reason to suppose that Wilde either envisaged, or would have wanted, a distinctively queer identity. Dorian Gray, his narrator says,

> used to wonder at the shallow psychology of those who conceive the Ego in man as a thing simple, permanent, reliable, and of one essence. To him, man was a being with myriad lives and myriad sensations, a complex multiform creature that bore within itself strange legacies of thought and passion, and whose very flesh was tainted with the monstrous maladies of the dead.[39]

This sense of fluidity and constructedness informs 'The portrait of Mr W. H.' In this novella, Wilde's narrator is shown by his friend Erskine a portrait purporting to represent Willie Hughes, a boy actor in Shakespeare's theatre and the supposed addressee of the Sonnets. He was 'about seventeen years of age, and was of quite extraordinary personal beauty, though evidently somewhat effeminate. Indeed, had it not been for the dress and the closely cropped hair, one would have said that the face, with its dreamy wistful eyes

and its delicate scarlet lips, was the face of a girl'.[40] The portrait had been shown to Erskine by his friend Cyril Graham, to whom it had appealed, evidently, as a precursor of Graham himself. For he too was marvellous at performing Shakespearian girl parts, and was 'wonderfully handsome', though some saw 'mere prettiness'; he was 'effeminate, I suppose, in some things, though he was a capital rider and a capital fencer' (pp. 1152–3). However, the portrait of Willie Hughes is a forgery – Graham has concocted him. The characters strive to establish the existence of Willie Hughes, but it cannot be done. The idea of a queer identity is ill-founded, the story seems to say.

'Mr W. H.' aroused suspicions about Wilde's sexuality in some quarters.[41] Nevertheless, Wilde was not being dishonest in this court exchange: 'I believe you have written an article to show that Shakespeare's sonnets were suggestive of unnatural vice? – On the contrary, I have written an article to show that they are not.'[42] What 'Mr W. H.' suggests is Wilde's interest in discovering a homosexual identity, but also his scepticism about how that might be achieved. The story depends upon the fact that the existence of Willie Hughes cannot be demonstrated. Indeed, the quest proves fatal: disappointed by his failure to persuade his friend of his theory, Graham commits suicide. The idea is sufficient, however, to get the narrator obsessed with the Hughes thesis. But when he has worked it up to the point where it becomes persuasive (though the existence of Hughes still cannot be proved), the narrator loses interest: 'Willie Hughes suddenly became to me a mere myth, an idle dream, the boyish fancy of a young man who, like most ardent spirits, was more anxious to convince others than to be himself convinced' (p. 1196). 'Mr W. H.' enacts not the discreet presentation of an existing queer identity, but the elusiveness of the quest for such an identity.

This elusiveness has two facets. Not only is the boy actor not there; the very project of using him to establish a historical fix on sexuality is ill-judged. There is 'no permanence in personality,' 'Mr W. H.' asserts, and we are 'at the mercy of such impressions as Art or Life chose to give us' (pp. 1196–7). There is something of importance to gay men in Shakespeare, Wilde suggests, but it is not to be claimed at the expense of the fluidity of sexuality, in both personal and cultural terms.

'Mr W. H.' was published in 1889, but Wilde enlarged it in

1893, approximately doubling its length.[43] The additions are mainly the narrator discovering further incidental evidence for the Hughes thesis – more quotations from the sonnets, historical investigations into boy actors, an 'explanation' of the Dark Lady. All this tends to make the thesis seem more persuasive; also, Renaissance Neo-Platonism and friendship are invoked, and Michelangelo's 'worship of intellectual beauty' (p. 1175); and 'I am that I am' is quoted from the Sonnets, implying Shakespeare's 'noble scorn' in matters of sexual orthodoxy (p. 1169). Wilde is shifting the story towards a justification of same-sex passion. Between 1888 and 1893 he became increasingly fascinated with homosexual subculture, and perhaps more inclined to think, with his narrator, that he might be 'deciphering the story of a life that had once been mine, unrolling the record of a romance that, without my knowing it, had coloured the very texture of my nature, had dyed it with strange and subtle dyes' (p. 1194). If the Victorian male same-sex lover could discover himself through a study of Shakespeare, he might lay claim to the further nobility of deriving from 'something within us that knew nothing of sequence or extension, and yet, like the philosopher of the Ideal City, was the spectator of all time and of all existence' (p. 1195). Nevertheless, the text still insists, there is no evidence that Willie Hughes ever existed. And Wilde was still affirming – in the elaboration of the collapse of the narrator's faith – that there is 'no permanence in personality' and we are 'at the mercy of such impressions as Art or Life chose to give us' (pp. 1196–7). He was still more engaged with the idea that we invest history with our own fantasies: 'No man dies for what he knows to be true,' he concludes in the enlarged version; 'Men die for what they want to be true, for what some terror in their hearts tells them is not true' (p. 1201).

Lawrence Danson rejects the thought that 'Mr W. H.' may be teasing or evasive; he believes Wilde was trying 'not to be trapped in another man's system' – not to confine his sexuality within the boundaries that seemed available in his culture. So 'the deferral of meaning was a necessary act of resistance'.[44] This might be a strategy for our time; it might involve claiming same-sex eroticism without accepting the terms and conditions, social and psychological, of being 'gay'. But Wilde, whatever his wishes, could not simply discover a queer precursor in Willie Hughes because 'Mr W. H.', the plays, the trials, and the whole package that we call

'Oscar Wilde', were key sites upon which a modern queer identity has been constituted. They did not produce male homosexuality, but they helped to produce it in a particular cultural mode. Wilde could not foresee this, but he may still help us to understand it. As Neil Bartlett puts it, in *Who Was That Man?*, Wilde 'proposed that our present is continually being written by our history; that the individual voice can hardly be separated from the historic text which it repeats and adapts'.[45] 'Mr W. H.' shows that we construct, in culture, the identities that we want – though not in conditions of our own choosing.

Notes

1. Frank Harris, *Oscar Wilde* (New York: Frank Harris, 1918), p. 286.
2. Montgomery Hyde, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* (London: William Hodge, 1948), p. 81 (in a note, Hyde gives reasons for crediting this story); Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987), p. 440.
3. Jackson is quoted in Karl Beckson, ed., *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1970), p. 331; W. B. Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1961), p. 285. Yeats added: 'I was certain that, guilty or not guilty, he would prove himself a man.'
4. Hyde, *Trials*, pp. 265–6; see H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Other Love* (London: Mayflower, 1972), p. 31. The ballad is printed by John Stokes, *In the Nineties* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1989), p. 4.
5. See Ellen Moers, *The Dandy* (London: Secker, 1960), p. 304; Brian Reade, *Sexual Heretics* (London: Routledge, 1970), pp. 53–4; Martin Green, *Children of the Sun* (London: Constable, 1977), pp. 23–40; Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out* (London: Quartet Books, 1977), p. 21; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 94, 216–17; Regenia Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1987), p. 139; Claude J. Summers, *Gay Fictions* (New York: Continuum, 1990), p. 60 and ch. 3; J. E. Rivers, *Proust and the Art of Love* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp. 112–41; Michael Hurley, 'Homosexualities: fiction, reading and moral training', in Terry Threadgold and Anne Cranny-Francis, eds, *Feminine, Masculine and Representation* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990), p. 164.
6. Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 145–8.
7. Sir Henry Hall Caine, *The Deemster* (1887), quoted in Reade, *Sexual Heretics*, p. 208.

8. E. M. Forster, *Maurice* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 136; Cohen, *Talk*, p. 100. On the Montagu trial, see Peter Wildeblood, *Against the Law* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1955).
9. Beckson, ed., *Oscar Wilde*, pp. 50–4. I discuss Higginson's article further in chapter 4.
10. See Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Berkeley: California University Press and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
11. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), p. 27.
12. Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 261; Hyde, *Trials*, pp. 368–71; Richard Gilman, *Decadence* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1979), p. 135; Peter Ackroyd, *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* (London: Sphere, 1988), pp. 68, 101–3; Harris, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 152.
13. Reade, *Sexual Heretics*, pp. 24–5.
14. John Stokes, letter in *London Review of Books*, 27 February 1992, p. 4; the photo has often been printed, e.g. in Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, facing p. 371.
15. William Roughead, *Bad Companions* (Edinburgh: W. Green & Son, 1930), pp. 178, 180–2. See also Hyde, *The Other Love*, pp. 112–15.
16. Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, 2nd edn (London: Longman, 1989), p. 101.
17. Neil Bartlett, *Who Was That Man?* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1988), p. 135.
18. Roughead, *Bad Companions*, p. 183.
19. David A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1988), pp. 205–6. See Alan Sinfield, *Cultural Politics – Queer Reading* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press and London: Routledge, 1994), ch. 2.
20. David T. Evans, *Sexual Citizenship* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 64.
21. Jonathan Dollimore, 'Homophobia and sexual difference', in *Sexual Difference*, ed. Robert Young (special issue of *Oxford Literary Review*, 8 (1–2), 1986), 5–12, p. 5; see also Jonathan Dollimore, 'Masculinity and homophobia', in Helen Taylor, ed., *Literature Teaching Politics 1985* (Bristol: Bristol Polytechnic and Helen Taylor, 1985), pp. 58–63. And see Suzanne Pharr, *Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism* (Inverness, CA: Chardon Press, 1988), pp. 13–23. Guy Hocquenghem observes: 'Every effort to isolate, explain, reduce the contaminated homosexual simply helps to place him at the centre of waking dreams'; Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, trans. Daniella Dangoor (London: Allison & Busby, 1978), p. 38.
22. Hyde, *The Other Love*, pp. 153–5 (my italics). For parallel observations in respect of US law, see Robert C. Caserio, 'Supreme Court discourse vs. homosexual fiction', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 88 (1989), 267–99.

23. See Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (London: Routledge, 1978).
24. Colin Sumner, *Reading Ideologies* (London, New York and San Francisco: Academic Press, 1979), p. 288.
25. Stuart Hall, 'Deviance, politics, and the media', in Paul Rock and Mary McIntosh, eds, *Deviance and Social Control* (London: Tavistock, 1974), p. 293. See John Clarke, 'Style', in Stuart Hall, John Clarke, Tony Jefferson and Brian Roberts, eds, *Resistance through Rituals* (London: Hutchinson, 1976), pp. 177–8; Terry Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics* (London: Methuen, 1977), pp. 51–2.
26. Foucault, *History*, vol. 1, p. 43. Sociological contributions to the debate are collected in Edward Stein, *Forms of Desire: Sexual Orientation and the Social Constructionist Controversy* (New York: Garland, 1990).
27. Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (London: Gay Men's Press, 1982), p. 16. See Bruce R. Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England* (Chicago University Press, 1991); Jonathan Goldberg, *Sodometries* (Stanford University Press, 1992).
28. George Chauncey, Jr, 'From sexual inversion to homosexuality: medicine and the changing conceptualization of female deviance', *Salmagundi*, 58–9 (1982–3), 114–46, pp. 142–3; Simon Shepherd, 'What's so funny about ladies' tailors? A survey of some male (homo)sexual types in the Renaissance', *Textual Practice*, 6 (1992), 17–30, p. 18.
29. See Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1987); Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society* (Cambridge University Press, 1980); Edward Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1977); John Marshall, 'Pansies, perverts and macho men: changing conceptions of male homosexuality', in Kenneth Plummer, ed., *The Making of the Modern Homosexual* (London: Hutchinson, 1981), pp. 139–40.
30. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, pp. 246–51; Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 99.
31. Frederic Silverstolpe, 'Benkert was not a doctor: on the non-medical origins of the homosexual category in the nineteenth century', in *Homosexuality, Which Homosexuality?*, Conference Papers: International Scientific Conference on Lesbian and Gay Studies, Free University of Amsterdam, December 1987 (Amsterdam: Free University and Schorer Foundation, 1987).
32. Alison Hennegan, 'Personalities and principles: aspects of literature and life in *fin-de-siècle* England', in Mikuláš Teich and Roy Porter, eds, *Fin de Siècle and Its Legacy* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 206–7; Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, pp. 27–8. See Reade, *Sexual Heretics*, pp. 40–6 and Introduction; Timothy d'Arch Smith, *Love in Earnest* (London: Routledge, 1970); Bartlett, *Who Was That Man?*, ch. 5.

33. Foucault, *History*, vol. 1, pp. 95–6.
34. Miller, *The Novel and the Police*, pp. viii–ix. See Sinfield, *Cultural Politics – Queer Reading*, chs 2, 3.
35. Miller, *The Novel and the Police*, p. 207; see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 67–75.
36. Foucault, *History*, vol. 1, pp. 95–6. See Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, 'Culture and textuality: debating cultural materialism', *Textual Practice*, 4(1) (spring, 1990), 91–100, p. 95; and Jonathan Dollimore, 'Sexuality, subjectivity and transgression: the Jacobean connection', *Renaissance Drama*, new series, 17 (1986), 53–82.
37. Raymond Williams, *Culture* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1981), p. 201.
38. Oscar Wilde and others, *Teleny*, ed. John McRae (London: Gay Men's Press, 1986), p. 57.
39. Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. Isobel Murray (Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 143.
40. *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, intr. Vyvyan Holland (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1966), pp. 1150–1.
41. See Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 282; Gagnier, *Idylls*, p. 20; Hyde, *Other Love*, p. 163; William A. Cohen, 'Willie and Wilde: reading *The Portrait of Mr W. H.*', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 88 (1989), 219–45, pp. 233–4; Lawrence Danson, 'Oscar Wilde, W. H., and the unspoken name of love', *English Literary History*, 58 (1991), 979–1000.
42. Hyde, *Trials*, p. 130. Wilde added: 'I objected to such a perversion being put upon Shakespeare'. On 'Mr W. H.' as a critique of over-rapid assimilation of Shakespeare and others to a nineteenth-century idea of same-sex passion, see Simon Shepherd, 'Shakespeare's private drawer: Shakespeare and homosexuality', in Graham Holderness, ed., *The Shakespeare Myth* (Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 106–7; Chris White, 'The organization of pleasure: British homosexual and lesbian discourse 1869–1914', unpub. dissertation (University of Nottingham, 1992), pp. 114–17.
43. The enlarged, 1893, version of 'Mr W. H.' was first published in 1958; it is printed in Holland, ed., *Complete Works* (from which I have been citing); the 1889 edition is reprinted in *The Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. G. F. Maine (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1948).
44. Danson, 'Oscar Wilde', p. 997.
45. Bartlett, *Who Was That Man?*, p. 209.

Chapter two

Uses of Effeminacy

A POEM in Norman Gale's collection *More Cricket Songs* (1905) is titled: 'The female boy':

> What in the world is the use of a creature
> All flabbily bent on avoiding the Pitch,
> Who wanders about, with a sob in each feature
> Devising a headache, inventing a stitch?
> There surely would be a quick end to my joy
> If possessed of that monster – a feminine boy.[1]

It seems obvious to us, today, that the misogyny in this hearty little verse does not betoken an effortless heterosexuality. In fact, the opposite: looking at the writer's language, we might suspect that his joy – not flabby or bent – might indeed reach a 'quick end' if he dared, monstrously perhaps, to 'possess' such a boy. These innuendoes, surely, were inaudible to the writer; otherwise he would have suppressed them, for fear of what they might disclose about his own anxieties. From this I deduce that the 'feminine boy' was not understood, here, as related to same-sex passion. He is despicable simply because he is girlish. In this chapter I assess some instances and theories of effeminacy in the centuries before Wilde.

Ganymedes and warriors

Much of the unease with Wilde's appearance and behaviour, before the trials, centred upon 'effeminacy'.[2] As I said in the previous chapter, I regard 'masculinity', 'femininity' and 'effeminacy'