MODERNISM, MALE FRIENDSHIP, AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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Victorian dreams, modern realities: Forster's classical imagination

> He was thinking of the irony of friendship – so strong it is, and so fragile. We fly together, like straws in an eddy, to part in the open stream. Nature has no use for us: she has cut her stuff differently. Dutiful sons, loving husbands, responsible fathers – these are what she wants, and if we are friends it must be in our spare time. Abram and Sarai were sorrowful, yet their seed became as sand of the sea, and distracts the politics of Europe at this moment. But a few verses of poetry is all that survives of David and Jonathan.[1]
>
> E. M. Forster, *The Longest Journey*

Forster is often remembered as a modernist who believed in "personal relationships." An acute social critic with a persistent ironic vision, he nevertheless retained a core belief in the enduring power of intimate ties to mitigate against an increasingly authoritarian and mechanized world.[2] At the same time, passages like this one from *The Longest Journey*, which express a sense of pathos about the potential for male love to be articulated and realized, blend Forster's faith in small-scale humanity with his most private desire. If the erotics are shepherded in quietly, they effectively transform the passage from an example of youthful sentiment into a depiction of more empathetic, adult desire. Such saturated language about friendship would seem to proceed directly out of Forster's personal fantasies, to function in part as a sexualization of his humanist ideal. Moreover, when Forster imagines male bonds as a tempting alternative to the confines of the family and its cultural and political authority, he taps into a broader current of turn-of-the-century thought, preoccupied with the rituals that sustain and delimit male relations. To elevate the institutions and traditions of heroic male friendship, while negotiating a space for real intimacy (including, but not limited to, sexual intimacy) – this two-tiered rhetorical strategy had become the hallmark of a certain strain of late nineteenth-century writing, and Forster might be taken as one of its most ardent, if somewhat belated, exponents.

Here, then, is a relatively clean narrative of classics-and-comradeship; but what I want to argue is rather the reverse, that Forster's place in this story is one of disturbance and his language functions as a note of uncomfortable critique. Far from nurturing a decadent fantasy of ascendant friendship, Forster would eventually shatter that gilded image. Although Forster's elegiac tone may seem to suggest that his aim is primarily to protect and elevate homoerotic bonds, his texts in fact expose the futility and tragic inadequacy of such an enterprise. No harmonious movement from personal desire to social practice will be possible in novels such as *The Longest Journey* (1908) and *Maurice* (composed 1913–1914), as troubling elements reside beneath a thinly idealized surface. Even in *A Passage to India* (1924), where balance and artfulness seem triumphant, not to mention a steadfast commitment to male friendship, the text ultimately refuses to champion its own apparent causes, undoing the very edifice of friendship it so elaborately constructs. Thus, where it might be tempting to assert a smooth transition in these texts from desire to its theorization, in effect to see Forster as a celebrator of "gay" (as distinct from "queer") love, I shall argue that the novels posit disruption.[3] Forster's ultimate emphasis on forms of ambiguity, unease, and isolation surrounding his male protagonists, and his substitution of loss for community, follow directly from the disenfranchisement of friendship.

To focus on Forster's disjunctive function is to unsettle several critical commonplaces. The first involves his status as a modernist – or, better, as a theorist of modernity. With his Austenian tone, settings, and plots, and his generally conventional narrative style, Forster is often figured as something of a latter-day Victorian, and the paradigm-shattering developments of high modernism seem far distant. Though Forster might address problems of modern existence with exceptional grace and insight, literary history in general has not found his texts to "force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning," as Eliot, for one, famously demanded of any work that can be considered "really new."[4] More recently, queer theoretical critics have tended to place Forster, whose texts often instantiate a nostalgic *élan* about the passing of a lost era, as a footnote or coda to the historical, literary, and cultural practices of nineteenth-century aestheticism. If Forster garners sympathy and interest, his inability to see beyond the literary and legal constraints of the *fin de siècle* has limited his appeal and status as an important theorist of sexual difference.[5] In sum, though Forster is widely read both as a part of the broad modernist canon and as a (hesitant) voice for homosexual liberation, he is rarely credited with creating a crux within either of these major literary and cultural movements.[6]

This chapter begins to redress Forster's status as a transitional figure, and hence as a marginal voice in both modernism and twentieth-century homosexual discourse, by focusing on the ramifications of his very transitionality. Ultimately, I will suggest that Forster derived his own complex aesthetic out of the failure of decadent erotics, that his place on the threshold between centuries and world-views creates some of his most interesting and overlooked fictional effects. My analysis begins in the 1880s and 1890s, with a discussion of two topics in late-Victorian cultural politics: the role of the public schools and universities as crucial sites of male community and identity; and the ways in which aesthetic critics worked to hallow masculine bonds and the male body through an idealization of friendship. Although the aestheticist ethos contains its own divisions and contradictions, as I shall stress, it nevertheless presented a relatively coherent and institutionally authorized model for understanding erotic male community, a model that Forster seriously and thoroughly considered. However, Forster's faith in nineteenth-century strategies for representing homoerotic desire eventually gave way, and in lieu of an integrated friendship system, he was left with a form of rootless individualism that looks very much at home in the landscape of modernism. At the personal level, Forster had everything to gain from espousing a nineteenth-century paradigm of friendship that he recognized as his inheritance, yet he became a spokesman for its failure, generating a field of isolated figures and an atmosphere of dis-ease, declining the comforts of classicism in favor of ambiguity, ambivalence, and uncertainty. Ultimately, what perpetuates Forster's rejection of Hellenism, a value system that might have offered a rich ground to sanction and celebrate homosexuality, is his refusal to concede that the physical body can be controlled within a transformative or idealizing narrative. In a thoroughly surprising and ironic development, the body comes to thwart decadence itself, and this move yields an image of the individual as caught between historical modes, in a kind of psychic and cultural limbo.

HELLENISM AND THE BEAUTIFUL BODY: CARPENTER, PATER, SYMONDS

The background for Forster's rich masculine cosmos is a nineteenth century of dynamic, complex, and competing male environments. The late Victorians imagined and constructed multiple sites of flourishing male community, locations and languages dedicated to creating a sphere for intimate male ties, which worked in part as "counter-discourses" to the leviathan of bourgeois respectability and to the sovereignty of a domestic ideal.[7] Certainly,

private and public became central ordering tropes in nineteenth-century Britain, helping to configure the world according to a basic gendered division; indeed, the division between the sexes at times seemed to reach a psychotic apex in the high Victorian years. Yet, just as certainly, these were not monolithic spheres (male/female, public/private, world/home), nor was power located in an uncomplicated and totalizing way in one arena or the other. Moreover, within the ordinary constructs of gendered existence, intimate male relations occupied a complex position, for their all-male character might easily point in the direction of a vexed homo-erotics, at the same time that the very bastions of economic, political, and social power tended to be sites of exclusive masculinity and vaunted bonding. The nineteenth century, that is, constructed venues and institutions that functioned simultaneously as strongholds of patriarchal, middle-class power, and as forms of resistance against the dominance of domestic ideology. These include, for instance, the imperial adventure tradition (to which I shall return in the next chapter), the rise of bachelorhood as a convention, and the world of urban male "clubland," which enjoyed a kind of flowering in the latter quarter of the nineteenth century.[8]

The historical construct that will concern me most directly here, however, is what I shall call "Hellenism."[9] Most broadly, the term refers to the nineteenth-century rediscovery of ancient Greek art and culture, with the acquisition and display of the Elgin Marbles in the expanded British Museum standing as perhaps the signal aesthetic/cultural event.[10] It may seem surprising, today, to recognize how strongly Hellenism impressed many Victorian intellectuals as a viable idea to help combat a sense of cultural deterioration and to compete with dominant values surrounding Christianity, capitalism, and the middle-class family. Without abandoning the framework of the Judeo-Christian tradition, many thinkers across the political spectrum turned to Greece as an avenue for intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual inspiration. In the face of what many felt to be the dizzying pace of social, technological, and moral change, looking back to Greece seemed to provide a template for a fully realized, highly cultivated, self-confident society, a model and example for the contemporary world. As one scholar explains it, "[w]riting about Greece was in part a way for the Victorians to write about themselves" (*Greek Heritage*, 8). Because the Greeks held tremendous cultural authority, which only increased as the century progressed, at the same time that Greek civilization appeared – literally and figuratively – in fragments, the ancient Hellenes could be infinitely useful as a kind of *tabula rasa* on which to write whatever one wanted.

The mid-Victorian elevation of the Greeks is epitomized by Matthew Arnold's argument in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) that what British culture required was a shift from "Hebraism" to "Hellenism," from dogma and obedience to "sweetness and light."[11] For Arnold, Hellenism represents above all a habit of mind: "To get rid of one's ignorance, to see things as they are, and by seeing them as they are to see them in their beauty, is the simple and attractive ideal which Hellenism holds out before human nature" (*CA*, 134). Arnold pits what he views as the active consciousness of Hellenism against a Hebraic (i.e., Judeo-Christian) adherence to stasis and submission, stressing not only the need for social regeneration, but also the pleasure of the vigorous mental life. Arnold's emphasis on the value and delight in the mobile mind and his hailing of classical culture, at the expense of middle-class "philistinism," establish him in some ways as the precursor to later Hellenists like Walter Pater and John Addington Symonds. Arnold, of course, wanted classical Greece to become an ordering and stabilizing force, a bulwark against the anarchy he perceived in the masses, and, like his later, more flamboyant followers, he found in the Greeks something persistently relevant to the modern world of industrializing Britain. Overall, Hellenism, as I am using the term, will involve at least three interconnected themes, on top of its generally humanist orientation: a desire to escape the allegedly feminized world created and disseminated by domestic ideology; a cult of male friendship; and a tendency to idealize the youthful male body as object of desire, pathos, and, at times, national sentiment. Reverence for male bonds tended to follow quickly from the infatuation with Greek culture, and usually involved elaborate references to the heroic, canonical friendships of such figures as Achilles and Patroclus, as well as a valorization of the Platonic ideal of male love, as presented in such works as *Symposium*. In turn, this history was often transferred into a glassy-eyed notion of present-day male worlds, understood as both vigorous and intellectual.

Most striking for his conjoining of key Hellenist elements into a coherent political and spiritual ideal is the late-Victorian socialist Edward Carpenter. Reformer, social critic, poet, and open homosexual, Carpenter championed a vision of male intimacy that welcomed homoerotic desire, patterned the idealized relations of national identity on a friendship model, and seamlessly united individual sexuality with broader institutional affiliations. In the 1880s and 1890s, and indeed all the way until the war, Carpenter was widely known for several things: a large production of essays on such topics as vegetarianism, marital reform, socialist principles, and especially sex and gender; the lengthy *Towards Democracy* (1883), a series of mystical lyrics

written under the spell of Walt Whitman; and his unconventional life (turning his back on his privileged Cambridge credentials, he established a communal farm with his working-class partner George Merrill, where they entertained and educated a stream of admiring pilgrims). Carpenter's personal and professional accomplishments attracted the notice of a large cohort of the era's literary figures and social radicals. As Forster described the effect:

Carpenter had a prestige which cannot be understood today [1960]. He was a rebel appropriate to his age. He was sentimental and a little sacramental, for he had begun life as a clergyman. He was a socialist who ignored industrialism and a simple-lifer with an independent income and a Whitmannic poet whose nobility exceeded his strength and, finally, he was a believer in the Love of Comrades, whom he sometimes called Uranians. It was this last aspect of him that attracted me in my loneliness. For a short time he seemed to hold the key to every trouble. I approached him . . . as one approaches a saviour.[12]

In Carpenter's soaringly optimistic model of comradeship, which borrows liberally from Whitman's "Calamus" poems, the anxieties one might expect to accrue to problems of desire, sexuality, and class politics are wiped away in an ecstasy of loving male community. Indeed, Carpenter's utopian view of friendship's possibilities forms an essential part of his appeal.

For Carpenter, male friendship offers a double possibility, providing an escape from what he views as the sterile and hypocritical impasse of Victorian family values, and opening up a vista for personal, social, and political fulfillment that aims at class equality, national solidarity, and individual freedom. The essence of *Towards Democracy*, for example, involves the claim that political and national organization is, or ought to be, entirely interconnected with personal desire. At the center of the poem's erotic economy is the figure of the working-class man, a locus of fierce eroticism, and, in Carpenter's imaginary, something of a mascot for a revitalized English identity. At the formal level, the text moves back and forth between ruminations on democracy (in a general cultural sense, rather than as a matter of political institutions and practices) and sexualized images of human love, with a particular focus on male comrades, whose virile, working-class beauty dominates the text. Thematically, too, Carpenter repeatedly asserts that the personal spirit of comradeship takes political form in the notion of democracy, and that a sexualized democratic ideal provides the best hope for England's future. Such a national agenda is important to Carpenter, who envisions an England modeled on Whitman's muscular, rugged America, equally with Plato's Greece. Images of soldiers fighting for the national

cause abound in the poem, and their powerful devotion to one another acquires institutional shape in the military, as they form a new and heroic Theban Band. In addition to combining the personal with the martial, the homoerotic with the institutional, Carpenter's often maudlin language borrows quite liberally from the rhetoric of Christianity. Though Carpenter's mystical vision shares little with conventional religious discourse, he consistently presents his goal in terms of its potential to transform Britain's sterile and immoral institutions into fertile and sacred bonds, and he repeatedly suggests that the ascendancy of the beloved working-class youth marks a kind of second coming, a new spiritual birth for a decrepit and exhausted civilization. Far from embodying the emasculation and degeneration of England, as many of Carpenter's worried contemporaries suggested, the working-class male promises to re-energize the nation. What these lyrics repeatedly produce and reproduce is an image of men whose mutual love and high social purpose merge in the form of specific structures and rituals, a resounding articulation of the organization of intimacy.

Carpenter's essays continue *Toward Democracy*'s project of making same-sex love a pivotal cultural asset. Brimming with scientific and anthropological language, essays such as "The Intermediate Sex" and "The Homogenic Attachment" analyze the nature and social function of what many contemporaries believed to be a new sexual type. Through their freedom from sexual conventionality, Carpenter's "Urnings," masculine women and feminine men who exist precisely on the threshold between the genders, have the power to lead England towards a bright new future. If the Urning resembles the artist, as conventionally conceived in the late nineteenth century – sensitive, intelligent, misunderstood by his contemporaries – he is differentiated by his ability to channel his comradely sentiment into the work of social reform.[13] What distinguishes Carpenter's sexology from many of his contemporaries', then, is that Carpenter wants to locate the crux of his observations less in the personal consequences of sexual difference than in the cultural promise offered by these new and impressive figures of modernity.[14]

Carpenter will always organize his intimacies, often under the rubric of Greek tradition: "Greek custom, at least in the early days of Hellas, not only recognized friendships between elder and younger youths as a national institution of great importance, but laid down very distinct laws or rules concerning the conduct of them…In Crete, for instance, the friendship was entered into in quite a formal and public way."[15] Carpenter bases his system on the smooth conjunction between intimate bonds and larger cultural structures, organized as friendship and oriented towards the reform of both individuals and the body politic. Yet despite Carpenter's spirited defense of

the "homogenic attachment," and his bold claims about the leadership position he feels Urnings merit, he repeatedly suggests that the bonds of friendship remain chaste. Using such words as "clean" and "pure" throughout his prose, and regularly citing the imperative for definitive rules and rituals to contain sexual behavior (as in the above description of Greek friendship), Carpenter insists that comradeship be distinguished from homosexuality, even as he proclaims a special social value in homosexuality and an elevated, almost prophetic role for homosexuals in the national arena.

Perhaps more than any other attribute, what makes comradeship so appealing to Carpenter is his belief that the bonds of friendship open the way for bridging class differences. "Eros is a great leveler," he proclaims, arguing that an eroticized ideal of friendship will draw men from different class backgrounds together through mutual affection and, eventually, structured bonds (*IS*, 114). For Carpenter, homoerotic desire offers the best hope for overcoming class antagonism, as the ideal of democratic fraternity replaces a class-stratified society, and men understand themselves both as individual friends and as brothers in a nation: "It is hardly needful in these days when social questions loom so large upon us to emphasize the importance of a bond which by the most passionate and lasting compulsion may draw members of the different classes together" (*IS*, 77). At the same time, Carpenter never entirely rejects organization by class, for he continues to rely upon class difference to create an erotic charge. While Carpenter's ultimate aim is the obliteration of class privilege, that is, the politics of eros call for the continued presence of the class-marked body.

Carpenter's interest in friendship is exemplary for its political and personal sweep, but his work can also be situated within the context of a group of writers and artists who shared his "Uranian" ideals, employed similar tropes, and invoked a shared cultural imaginary. This group, often dubbed "the Uranians," worked in painting and photography, as well as literature, developed a recognized artistic subculture with a coded language of its own (what Wayne Koestenbaum calls a mode of "double talk"), and published their work in specific journals, such as the *Artist*.[16] In lavish prose and verse, they celebrated the beauty of the youthful male body (like Carpenter), often by way of disparaging contrast with women (here marking a difference from Carpenter's feminist politics), and enthusiastically envisioned an Edenic space that would nurture and protect their fantasies. The visual image of the lovely lad was critical to the project, as was an idealized setting, often pastoral. In general, Uranian rhetoric brings together a host of associations about innocence, freshness, and perfection, with an embodied figure of desire, defined by contradictory features – a youth on

the threshold of adult manhood, both sexual and unsexual, vigorous yet vulnerable, handsome yet unselfconscious.

When Oscar Wilde at the end of his trials famously characterized the love between men as intellectual and pure, an emblem of perfection, he invoked this same tendency to see purity not in opposition to male desire, but as one of its attributes. With heavy emphasis on Plato's ideal of love refined beyond the mere body, Wilde followed the Uranian mode of simultaneously delighting in male beauty and turning the eyes further afield, towards the abstractions of Beauty, Purity, and so on. Yet, the example of Wilde reminds us that such rhetorical idealism is often at odds with the exceptionally harsh and destructive atmosphere of Britain in the period after the notorious Labouchère Amendment (1885), which criminalized homosexual acts in private as well as public. Even earlier in the century, as Timothy d'Arch Smith chronicles in his thorough study of the Uranians, the group's writerly utopianism, with its ideal of perfect boy worship, often met extreme resistance in the real world. If Carpenter had established friendship as a zone free of conflict and full of potential for social regeneration, the historical realities surrounding Uranian discourse were often punitive and unrelenting.

In the Uranian landscape, it is men who dominate – their bodies and activities, their forms of beauty – often hailed at the direct expense of women. Thus, in a poem by Edwin Emmanuel Bradford, which we may treat as representative, the poet heaps up imagery of desired masculinity, construed as an alternative to an artificial and vulgar femininity:

> Eros is up and away, away!
> Eros is up and away!
> The son of Urania born of the sea,
> The lover of lads and liberty.
> Strong, self-controlled, erect and free,
> He is marching along to-day.
>
> He is calling aloud to the men, the men!
> He is calling aloud to the men –
> "Turn away from the wench, with her powder and paint,
> And follow the Boy, who is fair as a saint":
> And the heart of the lover, long fevered and faint
> Beats bravely and boldly again.[17]

Or, in an 1894 essay published in the *Artist*, Charles Kains-Jackson, a former master at Eton, hailed the shift from "the Old Chivalry, or the exaltation of the youthful feminine ideal," to "the New Chivalry, or the exaltation of the youthful masculine ideal" which he believed could flourish at a time

when the imperative to reproduce was waning.[18] Using a vague sociology to lend scientific credence to his point, Kains-Jackson argues that the aesthetic moment for appreciating the beauty of the young male has come into its own. As both of these texts indicate, the presentation of masculinity in Uranian writing does not conform readily to simple gender categories: it is difficult, for instance, to reconcile the emphasis on naturalized, soldierly masculinity with the notion of boy-worship, which one would expect to be tainted by the ubiquitous Victorian fear of effeminacy. As Alan Sinfield has shown, however, in an analysis of the signs surrounding such interrelated terms as effeminacy, homosexuality, decadence, and virility, to assimilate the rugged masculinity of classical athleticism with the scopic economy of the lovely youth was a standard strategy among late-Victorian homoerotic writers.[19]

For Sinfield, it is only after 1895 that the complex and contradictory associations surrounding the image of the effeminate man took definite shape as the homosexual:

The sexologists and the boy-love advocates made the masculine/feminine binary structure even more central and necessary while, at the same time, doing little to clarify its confusions. The Wilde trials exploded in the midst of all of this urgent ideological work. As a consequence, the entire, vaguely disconcerting nexus of effeminacy, leisured idleness, immorality, luxury, insouciance, decadence and aestheticism, which Wilde was perceived as instantiating, was transformed into a brilliantly precise image. (*The Wilde Century*, 118)

According to Sinfield, then, the queer moment arrives as a kind of stunning unveiling, with the spectacle of Wilde permanently altering the valence attached to the image of the boy-lover, as to the dandy. Thus, while Uranian discourse is characterized by a kind of excess that clearly conflicted with dominant middle-class morality, the construct of the beloved young male body was more adaptable in the period before Wilde's trials than would be feasible in later decades. Yet, as Sinfield concedes, even after the spectacle of Wilde's sentencing, the conjoining of athlete and aesthete, of normative and dissident tropes of masculinity, would maintain a fitful existence, though never again carrying the earlier sense of potential completeness, ease, and blitheness.

A final point to note about Uranian rhetoric involves the rendering of history. Carpenter understood the flourishing of the Urning to be a purely contemporaneous development, and so, too, did the Uranians present their project of replacing the female body with the youthful male, and feminine domesticity with the masculine circle, as symptomatic of their historical

time, a fruitful coalescing of style, technology, and political progress. Elaine Showalter, among others, has noted the "sexual anarchy" that accompanied the end of the century: such parallel social constructs as the New Woman and the adventure romancer, with their complex sexual and gender meanings, contributed to a sense of possibility in the last decades of the century, a flux which many hoped (and many feared) would herald an irrevocable dismantling of high-Victorian domestic ideology.[20] At the same time, writers like the Uranians invoke the textual authority of classical precedent, supplemented by a select tradition of post-classical works (the Bible, Shakespeare, Montaigne) and in that sense point to a trans-historical phenomenon, a continuous history of male love from Homer to Hopkins. This combination – historicity in tandem with an ideal of historically extensive male community – takes us straight to the organizations which in many ways governed normative ideas of masculinity during the nineteenth century: the public schools and the universities. In the schools and universities, we find highly developed versions of both parts of this conjunction – an elaborate ancestry of masculine fraternity, to be studied and emulated; a specific contemporaneity, or form for expressing, understanding, and promoting male community. During the long span of years between mid-century and the First World War, male intimacy was almost inevitably understood in one or another institutional context, and it was in many ways the conflict over how to institutionalize male bonds that came to crystallize debates about masculinity, male desire, and the mechanics of social power.

The key point to underscore about the public schools and the universities in the nineteenth century is that both types of institution underwent terrific growth and substantive reform, with the public schools showing an especially marked leap in influence and power.[21] In the fifty years that spanned mid-century, the public schools experienced a stunning reconstitution, as the school tie went from an essentially marginal matter to a crucial badge of access for a host of professional and social privileges, a necessary credential for entry into Britain's developing leadership class. The schools expanded internally, with individual schools consistently increasing their enrollments over the course of the nineteenth century, and in numbers, from nine in 1841 to seventy-one in 1873.[22] Inextricably connected with the numerical expansion was a spirit of reform that was nothing short of transformational. It was largely the influence of Thomas Arnold at Rugby that set the tone for change, as the principles of asceticism and athletics that he inaugurated took on a life of their own.

The cultural and political hegemony of the British public schools during the Victorian and Edwardian years can hardly be overstated. The schools,

which increasingly in the nineteenth century became purveyors of an ideological vision that centered on the perpetuation of England's imperial mission, provided the core training for Britain's ruling elite, creating a set of norms about how to live and what to believe that touched nearly all sectors of British life, at home and in the expanding empire. As Forster has it: "Just as the heart of England is the middle classes, so the heart of the middle classes is the public school system . . . With its boarding-houses, its compulsory games, its system of prefects and fagging, its insistence on good form and on *esprit de corps*, it produces a type whose weight is out of all proportion to its numbers."[23] Public-school ideology influenced the English and their imperial subjects through several circuits: directly, as men were trained in the schools and steeped in their reigning philosophy; indirectly, as the values and perspectives of this powerful group were transmitted into large-scale educational, political, and cultural practices; and through specifically organized and targeted programs, such as the Boys' Brigade and the Boy Scouts, aimed at diffusing public-school morality into the working classes.

   As Forster's description suggests, the public schools prided themselves on creating character in their boys, an intangible quality that was widely viewed as the most important element in education. An aristocratic leadership ideal, now available to a broader spectrum of men, was at the core of their training.[24] In brief, the public-school spirit of the late nineteenth century consisted primarily in an adherence to two things: "manliness and loyalty."[25] The belief that there is a smooth succession along the loyalty spectrum from team, to house, to school, to nation is a staple of public-school thinking, with especially strong connotations for the twin pursuits of war (the culmination of masculine courage and loyalty) and the management of empire (a profession that the schools insisted was an equally important element of patriotic duty). The full force of this ideal was gradually solidified over the course of the nineteenth century in the living conditions at the schools, with the cult of loyalty, realized primarily through athletic games and house rituals, reaching an almost psychotic apex. Whereas, in the early nineteenth century, unstructured intimacy between boys was accepted, and individual pursuits like walking, collecting, and naturalism were approved – a sensibility embodied in the character of Martin in Thomas Hughes' fabulously popular *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857) – by the end of the century the emphasis had shifted entirely in the direction of supervision, group games, and, more generally, rigid organization at nearly every moment of the day. The increased discipline, extensive archipelago of prefects and punishment, emphasis on organized athletics, and morally ascetic tone of the

schools came to define their character. Moreover, as I shall discuss further
in relation to the Great War, the transference of the schools' loyalty ethos
into military ideology played an important role in setting the rhetorical and
emotional tone of the war years. That young soldiers would kick a football
as they headed over the top at the outset of the battle of the Somme, or
compose poems in which it was deemed an honor to die in the name of
one's school, can only be understood if we recognize the psychic power
wielded by the public-school axiom of an interdependence linking school,
sport, masculinity, and patriotism.

The construct of "muscular Christianity" is often used to describe the
blend of obsession with athleticism and adherence to conventional piety
that characterized at least the official ideology of the public schools. Asso-
ciated most directly with the mid-century novelist and social critic Charles
Kingsley,[26] the muscular Christian is the paradigmatic English citizen,
whose body and spirit have been hardened, through games and other rites
of passage, and whose will is indomitable. At the same time, he is expected
to maintain a Christian spirit of compassion for those whom it is his duty
to govern. As the phrase so well suggests, the muscular Christian conve-
niently conjoins in his person conventional morality with masculinism,
reassuring pieties with something closer to an ethos of bullying. If muscu-
lar Christianity was meant to provide the overarching moral force at the
schools, however, the role accorded to serious religious observance defini-
tively shrank as the century progressed. As Thomas Arnold's specific legacy
waned, a suspicion of excessive piety, rather than its practice, became the
norm (by all accounts, Arnold was a genuinely pious person whose vision
for Rugby involved religious study). As Forster beautifully captures it in
A Passage to India: "Ronny's religion was of the sterilized Public School
brand, which never goes bad, even in the tropics. Wherever he entered,
mosque, cave, or temple, he retained the spiritual outlook of the Fifth
Form, and condemned as 'weakening' any attempt to understand them."[27]
Critics have further suggested that in the actual life of the public schools,
where hardship and repression were typically the rule, Social Darwinism
rather than any kind of Christian spirit, with or without muscles, provided
the ideological force dictating the competitive and often brutal atmosphere
into which the boys were thrown.[28]

The figure of the old boy, whose fortitude, loyalty to country, and re-
spectability are ensured by his lengthy stay in the school system, even as he
retains a marked quality of infinite adolescence, emerges through a variety
of texts and conventions. Following *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, public-school
novels enjoyed a huge boom that lasted all the way into the 1930s; the official

language of headmasters and school commissioners wended its way across the political landscape; and even today the memoirs of men who attended the schools as boys continue to engage a reading public. George Orwell's "Such, Such Were the Joys . . .," John Addington Symonds' memoirs, Robert Graves' autobiography, Virginia Woolf's biography of Roger Fry, Forster's fictional depictions of public-school life, to name just a few prominent accounts from the early twentieth century, present a world in which intellectual gifts and non-physical pursuits of any variety were crushed under the heels of suspicious masters and their organizations of student prefects. Most critics point to a deeply anti-intellectual spirit permeating all aspects of public-school life, a suspicion of "weedy" intellectuals who were the obverse of the revered athletic "bloods." Descriptions of the public schools by intellectuals educated there tend to read like catalogues of insensitivity and philistinism, illuminated only by the occasional companionship of like-minded students or masters.

Finally, though intellectual life at the public schools might have been discouraged, classical literature remained the core of the curriculum, and, more to the point, the schools quite effectively appropriated ideals of classical masculinity for their own uses, primarily in the form of athleticism. Though the schools were harsh and punitive in their treatment of boys, and physical existence was deliberately harrowing, they also emphasized the glory and beauty of the physical body in its prime, and this contrast underscores the complexity of the schools' management of the body. In a circular logic, the schools combined a draconian system of rules and surveillance with a reverence for the male body, which they then needed continually to supervise.[29] Commentators tend to stress the omnipresence of homosexuality as a standard element in the public-school experience, even as a tone of intolerance dominated official rhetoric and infused the boys' anxious psychic development. In his moving autobiographical memoir, for instance, Symonds describes a system of "bitching" and "fagging," constructed on a model of hierarchy, brutality, and exploitation, rather than tenderness or tolerance, which terrorized the young and confused homosexual. Of equal importance to the complex enabling and policing of homosexual acts was the proliferation of intimate, romantic friendships between boys. As with the regulation of the body, the schools' attitude towards intimacy is contradictory: on one hand, the creation of networks and alliances, life-long old-boy bonds, and the cult of sport-based friendship were central to the schools' self-concept and mission; on the other hand, many former students maintain that their closest friendships with other boys actually collided with the inevitable cult of *esprit de corps*. Robert Graves, for instance, describes

his beloved school friendships as a form of resistance against orthodoxy. "At Charterhouse," he writes, "no friendship was permitted between boys of different houses or of different years beyond a formal acquaintance at work or organized games like cricket and football," and hence Graves' most cherished relationships worked as a rebuttal of school form.[30]

In a similar vein, Virginia Woolf characterizes Roger Fry's school friendships as the only light in a dark world, and his matriculation as a movement out of spiritual and intellectual morbidity:

it meant an end – an end to Sunninghill and its shrivelled pines and dirty heather and Monday morning floggings, and an end to Clifton and its good form, its Christian patriotism, and its servility to established institutions. From his private school he had learnt a horror of all violence, and from his public school a lifelong antagonism to all public schools and their ideals. He seldom spoke of those years, but when he did he spoke of them as the dullest, and save for one friendship, as the most completely wasted of his life.[31]

Woolf depicts the schools as sites of dearth ("shrivelled pines and dirty heather," "wasted…life"), and suggests that the spirit of real friendship works in its small way against such life-depleting forces. School comradeship is allied with the institutions' hated "ideals," while individual intimacy provides a small haven for the young men who resist school spirit. Indeed, the problem of the schools, even in Woolf's account, is not only that they exclude intellectual growth (not to mention women), but that their official doctrine of male community distorts and destroys real friendship, whose power and desirability remain as forms of underground resistance to dominant orthodoxy. Thus male intimacy, as distinct from authorized male bonds, becomes an antidote to public-school oppressiveness. We should notice, moreover, that Woolf represents the lifelessness of the schools in language that mocks the schools' pretensions of virility: the "shrivelled pines" are an image of failed masculinity at the very institution that promises to create it. The schools might attempt to make men, but in fact real masculinity abides precisely in the relationships that thwart official school policy.

Yet Woolf's withered phalluses also suggest a strange web of ambivalence around the idea of male friendship. Woolf seems unwilling to abandon a certain nostalgic vision of a masculine world, and she turns to the university as an alternative locale for a more positive male community. That is, the desire to rebel against the hegemony of the public schools without entirely surrendering the goal of organizing intimacy leads to a hallowing of collegiate life, even in the work of such an exemplary feminist as

Woolf. We see glimmers of such community in *The Waves*, for instance, surrounding the person of Percival, and especially in *Jacob's Room*, where the masculine is understood as an almost aesthetic quality, a kind of harmony or beauty that grows out of intimacy and intellectual exchange among men:

Jacob remained standing. But intimacy – the room was full of it, still, deep, like a pool. Without need of movement or speech it rose softly and washed over everything, mollifying, kindling, and coating the mind with the lustre of pearl, so that if you talk of a light, of Cambridge burning, it's not languages only. It's Julian the Apostate.[32]

For those excluded from the light of Cambridge, there is something painfully attractive about this gorgeous male world, an enclosed circle attached to intellectual pursuits. Woolf muses, here, about a form of masculinity that centers on the intimacy developed among men with shared intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic values. Though this is an intimacy based on personal choice, it nevertheless belongs to an institution with powerful defining traditions and an imposing history of its own, a tradition and history whose exclusivity Woolf condemns in *A Room of One's Own*. Still, Woolf gazes in the window of the college room: her extraordinary empathy towards the pleasure of collegiate friendship is in part a function of her close relations with men who had prospered in such circles, but it also represents a characteristically Woolfian ability to grasp a contemporary phenomenon with both compassion and irony. What Woolf captures here is the way the intellectual and social organization of the university had recast the schools' brutal and confusing male community into a kind of hallowed domestic circle.

It was in the highly erudite world of the university, then – with its residential colleges and its reading societies dedicated to "the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake"[33] – and particularly at Oxford, that an alternative view of male relations oriented around classicism took shape in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, henceforth becoming a fixed element at both major universities. Like the public schools, the universities underwent fundamental and lasting reforms during this period, involving, for instance, the abolition of religious tests for undergraduates at Oxford (1854), and, later, removal of the celibacy requirement for fellows (1877/1884). The gradual shift at the universities to a secular framework from an ostensibly Christian one, a shift that involved both the subject of study and the population of the university, was intimately connected with the increasing curricular importance of classical, and particularly Greek studies. Moreover, a

heightened emphasis on the tutorial relationship functioned in various ways to foster this spirit of change, as the close bonds between fellows and students offered a modern-day analogue for the Greek culture at the center of the curriculum. In her study of homosexuality and Victorian Oxford, Linda Dowling describes the reform period at mid-century as "the unique moment of Oxford masculine comradeship, a window or halcyon interval of particularly intense male homosociality which flourished between the first two waves of university reform."[34] Even the Oxford Movement, an apparent challenge to secularist tendencies, grew out of and depended upon the new dispensation. With the tutorial relationship and the intimate circle at its core, the Oxford Movement was a natural outgrowth of the general shift in university culture towards intimacy, fraternity, and a degree of individual preference in constructing the curriculum.

Dowling argues that the kinds of appropriation of the male body that I will be describing in the texts of Pater, Symonds, and ultimately Forster have their origins in the shifting uses made of Greek history by the intelligentsia of the Victorian period:

As regards Victorian Oxford, my argument is that (1) such leading university reformers as Benjamin Jowett were seeking to establish in Hellenism, the systematic study of Greek history and literature and philosophy, a ground of transcendent value alternative to Christian theology – the metaphysical underpinning of Oxford from the Middle Ages through the Tractarian movement. But (2) once they had done so, Pater and Wilde and the Uranian poets could not be denied the means of developing out of this same Hellenism a homosexual counterdiscourse able to justify male love in ideal or transcendental terms: the "spiritual procreancy" associated specifically with Plato's *Symposium* and more generally with ancient Greece itself. (*Hellerism and Homosexuality*, xiii)

At Oxford, the debates about institutional organization and curriculum were interconnected with a wide reconsideration of intellectual and moral values, and at the center of the new ideal was the intimate male relationship, understood as a revival of Plato's Greece. Yet the late-Victorian university did not uniformly and without resistance accept the views of writers like Pater and Symonds, both of whom were affiliated with Oxford for many years. On the contrary, Pater was in constant conflict with members of the university elite because of his shocking views – expressed most notoriously in the "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance* – and both he and Symonds were passed over for the prestigious position of Professor of Poetry at Oxford for reasons that probably had at least something to do with the politics of their sexual lives.[35] The central point is that Pater and Symonds, like others concerned with masculinity and Hellenism during the period, developed

their visions of masculine community in a complex relation of reciprocity and competition with the powerful institutions that surrounded them. As we turn to their texts, we can trace a contest over the male body, in which the different models of male fellowship embedded in the public schools and universities competed against one another, creating tension and ambiguity alongside a seemingly harmonious vision of male love.[36]

Walter Pater, the great champion among the late Victorians of aesthetics, classical studies, and male friendship, invites an immediate reckoning with both the abundance and the limitations of organized intimacy. Pater seems, at first glance, to offer a ringing endorsement of male friendship as both ideal and practice, and to admire without restraint the preeminent historical personae associated with masculine love (Plato, Michelangelo, Winckelmann). And it is certainly true that, like Carpenter, Pater offers a complete vision of friendship as a social and aesthetic structure whose merit and power go unchallenged. Yet, an analysis of Pater's approach to friendship yields some surprising results. For Pater, male friendship will never quite be able to reconcile all the contrasts it seems, at some level, to harmonize and fuse; it unsettles as much as it consolidates. At the center of Pater's concept of friendship, as developed in *The Renaissance* (1877), is conflict – the conflict between intimacy and institutions, which might also be understood as a juxtaposition of male love against stabilizing cultural traditions, the couple versus the group. These contrasts underpin the story of Amis and Amile, which inaugurates *The Renaissance* (in its revised and expanded second edition), and which I will use as an exemplary case of Pater's uneven treatment of male friendship in relation to history.[37] It is a tale of richly physical male friendship, but it also indicates that absorbing such an extreme masculine relation into the broader culture will never quite be possible.

Pater portrays the intimacy of Amis and Amile as powerful precisely because it is connected with important institutions, such as the church, the monarchy, and the military. The two protagonists are leaders in their society, governors and symbols of major institutions, images of absolute loyalty not only to one another, but also to the king. As in Woolf's hallowing of university space, Pater attaches the intimacy of Amis and Amile to solid and powerful organizations, stressing the social structure (primarily military) at the basis of their fierce love for one another. The story thus represents for Pater a rare moment "in which the harmony of human interests is still entire," since there appears to be no conflict between personal desire and state or religious duty.[38] Yet this sense of compatibility between male love and institutional sanction is, in fact, illusory, and cannot be sustained by the

wider currents of convention detailed in the story. Despite the "harmony of human interests" that the story proclaims, the continuing cycle of the men's friendship contributes to a severe conflict with social norms. Such conflict is most spectacularly illustrated in the (temporary) destruction – violent and shocking – of Amile's family. Out of loyalty to his twin and friend, Amile kills his own children, and, despite his wretched emotional state, the murder is undertaken with gruesome efficiency. Rather than adopt the public-school platitude of a spectrum of loyalties, Pater's story demonstrates that in the face of an intensely valued male friendship, in which identity itself becomes fluid, traditional institutions such as family risk destruction. If Amis and Amile initially look like models of an integrated system of intimacy within culture, the story in fact takes aim at the very idea of organizing friendship, situating its protagonists in the shifting positions of heroes and heretics.

There is a reason why Amis and Amile cannot unambiguously assimilate into culture, for what characterizes such figures across history is a "spirit of rebellion and revolt against the moral and religious ideas of the time" (*Ren*, 16). Pater presents this revolt explicitly as part of a contest over the body and its place in social discourse: "In their search after the pleasures of the senses and the imagination, in their care for beauty, in their worship of the body, people were impelled beyond the bounds of the Christian ideal; and their love became sometimes a strange idolatry, a strange rival religion" (*Ren*, 16). Crucial to Pater's admiration for figures such as Amis and Amile is that their story situates the body as the ground for spiritual and aesthetic value. To locate the human body at the place where important institutions do their work is to propel the worshipper into conflict with those institutions, to create subcultures, subversions, and dissonance. Thus, it is only at rare moments that the personal and the political are harmoniously united; more typically, the devotion to intimacy and the worship of the body sit uncomfortably alongside such daunting structures as Christianity. The Amis and Amile tale constructs a vision of identity that clashes not only with arbitrary institutional loyalty, but with individualism itself, as the histories and bodies of the two men intermingle right up to their deaths, when their decaying bodies refuse to separate into distinct entities for burial and commemoration. For Amis and Amile, identity is a matter of mimesis, and their interiority, like their exterior persons, is an indistinguishable amalgamation: "that curious interest of the *Doppelgänger*, which begins among the stars with the Dioscuri, [is] entwined in and out through all the incidents of the story like an outward token of the inward similitude of their souls" (*Ren*, 6). A sign of doubleness and mimesis, masculinity here

refutes both competition and the ascendancy of the self; such an image of the masculine fits only uneasily into its cultural setting.

In *The Renaissance*, Pater unites the disparate values that orient male intimacy and the male body under a common rubric of Hellenism. Rather than juxtapose Christianity with paganism, Pater establishes his own grid, asserting the subterranean existence of a trans-historical "Greek spirit." According to Pater, this Greek spirit has always had its Christian adherents, especially among those early Christians who accentuated male fellowship and the physicality of religious worship. This widely defined (and, one might add, somewhat self-serving) Greek ideal provides Pater with an asset in his long-standing effort to amalgamate and organize divergent texts and historical periods into a unified polemic. In *The Renaissance*'s conclusory essay on the eighteenth-century art critic Winckelmann, as oddly placed in a study of the Italian Renaissance as is its initial story, Pater explicitly connects the friendship ethos of Amis and Amile with his concept of the Greek spirit, and insists that those who study, admire, and understand the Greek image of "supreme beauty," which is "male rather than female," share a special trans-historical sensibility (*Ren*, 123). These men, who live by a creed of friendship and place a male aesthetic at the apex of the critical hierarchy, are the natural inheritors of the Greek mantle.

Pater's extreme valorization of friendship and his lauding of the male body as a centerpiece for a civilized culture reach a pitch when he describes the Greeks themselves, primarily in the lectures and essays that became *Plato and Platonism* (1893) and *Greek Studies* (1895). In *Plato and Platonism*, a broad and poetical (if idiosyncratic) study of Plato's thought, Pater turns his imagination to Sparta, which he presents as a monastic land of brotherhood and male communion. Pater stresses three things about the Spartans: their asceticism; the organization of their lives around the rites of young men; and their reverence for male beauty. These three attributes continually mingle together in institutions and rituals that center around the physical and mental discipline of young men. The image, for instance, of Spartan youths singing together, which Pater imagines to have epitomized all Spartan values, provides a perfect picture of masculine beauty, control, and ceremony, "one of the things in Old Greece one would have liked best to see and hear – youthful beauty and strength in perfect service – a manifestation of the true and genuine Hellenism."[39] This charged fantasy is characteristic of Pater's discussion of the Spartans, whose physical presence gleams throughout the text. The young Spartans are ascetic, restrained, obedient; yet such discipline is not understood as passivity, much less weakness, but as strength in reserve, an aestheticizing of masculinity