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A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies

*Edited by George E. Haggerty and
Molly McGarry*

Deviant Teaching

David M. Halperin

In a famous passage of *The Divine Comedy*, Dante represents himself as encountering, in the course of his journey through Hell, the soul of Brunetto Latini, a recently deceased philosopher, poet, and rhetorician who had been the secretary or notary – in effect, the State Humanist – of Florence. Dante the pilgrim, the dramatic character and first-person narrator of the poem, converses intimately with Brunetto: in one of the tenderest speeches he ever makes to a damned soul in the *Inferno*, he more or less explicitly identifies himself as having been, earlier in his life, the object of Brunetto's painstaking and persistent instruction. "In the world, hour after hour, you taught me how man makes himself eternal" ("nel mondo ad ora ad ora / m'insegnavate come l'uom s'eterna"),¹ which need not be taken to indicate that Dante studied with Brunetto in any formal sense. Despite this considerable show of affection by Dante the pilgrim, however, the authorial verdict of Dante the poet on Brunetto Latini – on his life, his work, and his influence (or, to adopt the preferred phraseology of academic committees on promotion and tenure, his service, his scholarship, and his teaching) – is clear and unequivocal: after all, Brunetto is in Hell, and it is Dante the poet, no less than Dante's God, who has put him there. As Dante himself formulates it, in ostensibly lachrymose tones, Brunetto is irrevocably "banished from human nature" ("de l'umana natura posto in bando")² and is condemned to eternal torment without reprieve – even though Dante prayed fervently, or so at least he tells Brunetto, for a different and happier outcome.³ For all its cozy interpersonal tone, for all Dante's extravagant displays of filial piety and gratitude to his former teacher, Canto 15 of the *Inferno* represents the first and most literally damning student evaluation in European history.

So what did Brunetto Latini do wrong? His sin is tellingly not named in Canto 15, but other passages in the *Inferno* remove any doubts about its identity. Brunetto is damned for sodomy. (What exactly Dante understood by "sodomy" is far from apparent, and it has been extensively discussed by commentators since the fourteenth century, but deviant teaching, no less than deviant sex, features among the signifiers that Dante uses to figure it.) In this, it turns out, Dante was an innovator: no one before him had accused Brunetto Latini of committing sodomy. As John Freccero has observed, twentieth-century Dante scholars "have strained, without success, to find a shred of evidence from contemporary [mediaeval] sources of Brunetto's vice."⁴ The

sort of reputation that Brunetto Latini continued to enjoy among many Florentines in the years after his death can be gauged from the following comment by a fourteenth-century Italian chronicler, who – in contrast to Dante – characterizes Brunetto as "an excellent teacher":

In this same year, 1294, there died in Florence a most worthy citizen whose name was Ser Brunetto Latini. He was a great philosopher and an excellent teacher of rhetoric, a man who both spoke and wrote very well. . . . He was secretary of our commune [i.e., the city of Florence], and a very worldly man. We have mentioned him because it was he who was the initiator and the master in refining the Florentines, in making them aware of good speech, and in knowing how to guide and maintain our republic according to the art of politics.⁵

The lack of any previous scandal surrounding Brunetto, as Freccero points out, is precisely what motivates in the poem's dramatic register the astonishment that Dante the pilgrim manifests at finding Brunetto in the particular region of Hell where Dante the poet has put him. "Sieti voi qui, ser Brunetto?" ("Master Brunetto, what are *you* doing here?"),⁶ famously asks Dante the pilgrim, in the classic form of utterance – combining exaggerated incredulity with vindictive smugness ("Just as I always suspected!") – that generations of students have used upon spotting their favorite closeted professor in the local gay bar, or tripping over his photograph in the local internet chat room. That is also, of course, the typical response we have all been encouraged to make to the now-routine, mass-mediated spectacles of sexual shaming, from Bill Clinton to Andrew Sullivan to Michael Jackson, by means of which our disciplinary society polices the lives of its celebrities and "role models" and, in this way, regulates our own lives as well.

To be sure, the more sentimental of modern commentators on Dante humanely detect in his horrified and triumphant exclamation a feeling of mingled shock, pity, and grief. But we should not be deceived: even as Dante the poet uses Dante the pilgrim's rhetorical question to stage the latter's supposed surprise and heartbreak on learning Brunetto's terrible fate, he is in fact accomplishing it, for in the very act of performing that gesture of disbelief and chagrin he brings about the very thing that he pretends to lament – namely, the destruction of Brunetto's reputation, the defilement of his memory and his name (as Freccero says) – by identifying Brunetto as a sodomite and by publishing his infamy to the world. Moreover, Dante "adds to the outrage," Freccero goes on to point out, "by implying that the devastating portrait is repayment of a debt of gratitude toward his teacher: 'Quant' io l'abbia in grado . . . / convien che ne la mia lingua si scerna' ['How much I hold it in gratitude it behooves me, while I live, to declare in my speech']";⁷ "[S]uch perfidy," Freccero concludes, "requires explanation even from so uncompromising a moralist as Dante."⁸

Well, I'm not in the business of providing justifications for the sort of student who proclaims how much he's learned from me, how much I've meant to him, how grateful he is to me for everything I've done for him, and who then gleefully passes along to the Dean some of my more flamboyant or incautious displays of classroom wit, or who simply grows up and votes Republican. I'm already far too implicated in Dante's portrait of Brunetto Latini not to take it personally – by which I mean, of course, professionally. And that's not only because, as an English professor who teaches queer

theory, I am obviously, like Brunetto Latini, both in the teaching business and in (some version of) the sodomy business. But also because, like Brunetto, I'm in the literary studies business as well. One of the many things that intrigues me about Dante's verdict on Brunetto Latini is the emphasis Dante places on the contribution that the profession of literature makes to Brunetto's moral and intellectual failure. When in the *Inferno* Dante asks Brunetto "who are the most noted and most eminent" of his companions among the Sodomites,⁹ Brunetto replies, "In brief, know that all were clerks [*cherici* or "clerics"] and great men of letters and of great fame ["*litterati grandi e di gran fama*"], in the world defiled by one [and the] same sin."¹⁰ Brunetto goes on to name two of them and to allude to a third; of these, the only one that modern readers are likely to recognize without help from expert commentators is Priscian, the late antique grammarian. Sodomy, whatever else it may be in Dante's eyes, is evidently a sin to which literary scholars, critics, and writers (such as Dante himself) are peculiarly prone. It is a distinctively and characteristically literary vice. Brunetto Latini is the earliest example known to me of that perennially popular literary stereotype, which I first encountered in the course of my adolescent reading in J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* (similar to Dante in its attitude of ostensible sympathy and casual condemnation), and which I have since come willy-nilly to embody myself: namely, the gay male English teacher, the professional corrupter of youth.

Dante's earliest readers understood perfectly what he was up to. Boccaccio, for example, though surprised to find Priscian mentioned among those sodomitical companions of Brunetto whom Dante has Brunetto identify by name, did not fail to make the properly phobic connections among sodomy, teaching, and literary studies. In his commentary on *The Divine Comedy* Boccaccio reasoned as follows:

I have never read or heard that [Priscian] was guilty of such a sin. Rather, I judge Dante put him here to represent those who teach his doctrine [i.e., who teach grammar, rhetoric, and literary interpretation], since the majority of them are believed to be tainted with that evil. For most of their students are young, are timorous, and obey both the proper and the improper demands of their teachers. [Not true, in my experience at least, but isn't that what everyone outside the university, starting with the American Family Association, always imagines?] And because the students are so accessible, it is believed that the teachers often fall into this sin.¹¹

Why else, Boccaccio seems to imply, would anyone go into the profession? Similarly, Cristoforo Landino, in his commentary on Dante, associates sodomy with *grammatici*, teachers of reading, writing, and rhetoric, since they surround themselves (he says) with "copia di giovanetti," "quantities of youths."¹² Although I don't think Dante's condemnation of Brunetto for sodomy turns on such a naively literal association of literary instruction with sexual harassment, it does accomplish a conflation of teaching, sodomy, and literary culture (or its degenerate offspring, "secular humanism") so powerful and so toxic that the political fallout from it continues, seven centuries later, to pollute the professional lives of English professors who happen to be gay men and of queer theorists who work in the field of literary studies. And of course the greatest harm is done to academics who belong to *both* categories, which is to say those of us who have made entire careers for ourselves in higher education out of being gay, those of us for whom being gay has literally become a profession.

II

Nowadays, of course, it is impossible to speak of homosexuality without invoking the phantom of child molestation, just as it is impossible to speak about teaching in the same breath as sex without conjuring up the figure of the homosexual predator, the despoiler of youth. Nor does the connection between homosexual seduction and teaching customarily remain unvoiced. It was actually written into law as recently as 1995 by the government of the Australian state of Victoria (of which Melbourne is the capital). A new sexual anti-discrimination statute enacted there, and designed to protect gay people, explicitly exempts from its provisions those who work in professions that bring them into contact with children. The anti-discrimination law thereby in effect *created* a new right to discriminate, and it did so on the basis of both sexual identity and professional identity, the identity of being a homosexual and the identity of being a teacher.

The sense of moral panic surrounding the imagined homosexual seducer of the young and the innocent is one of the enduring legacies of the Cold War era. According to a 1950 US Government report, entitled *The Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government* (the poisonous fruit of an intensive Congressional investigation by the US Senate Appropriations Committee), "One homosexual can pollute a Government office," because – as the best available legal and medical evidence conclusively demonstrated – homosexuals "will frequently attempt to entice normal individuals to engage in perverted practices. This is particularly true in the case of young and impressionable people who might come under the influence of a pervert."¹³ As *Life* magazine summed things up, rather darkly, a decade later, in a pioneering 1963 photo-essay on "Homosexuality in America," "for every obvious homosexual, there are probably nine nearly impossible to detect . . . and parents especially are concerned."¹⁴ Although these sorts of pronouncements may seem to have a quaint, outdated, or archaic ring to them, the preoccupations they express continue to flourish in the straight mind, as was memorably demonstrated by the outpouring of imaginary shower-room seduction scenes and assorted other fantasy-scenarios of gay male predation during the 1993 US Congressional hearings on "gays in the military."

In short, no one who reads the newspapers or watches TV will have failed to register the high charge of anxiety that electrifies any and all connections between male homosexuality and teaching. It may still come as a shock to realize quite how ancient is the association between teaching and sodomy, between paedagogy and pederasty. The tendency to identify each of them with the other goes back at least to the time of ancient Greece. It is reflected in the laws of classical Athens, which prevented slaves from courting free boys, protected students and athletes from abuse by their teachers and trainers, and regulated access to schoolrooms and gymnasias. Plato's undecidedly ambiguous portrait of Socrates – who, after all, was tried, sentenced to death, and executed on charges of "corrupting the youth" – foregrounds the complex, fatal interplay between instruction and seduction. Indeed, the abolition of any clear or firm distinction between the relation of teacher and student and the relation of lover and beloved is one of the most notorious consequences of Plato's metaphysical theory of erotic desire.

The theme was not unique to Plato. It was taken up by a number of other writers from the same time period. For example, in a Socratic dialogue attributed to Plato but probably written by one of his contemporaries, called *Theages*, Socrates himself quotes one of his male interlocutors as telling him that “my intellectual progress was far the greatest and most marked whenever I sat right beside you, holding you and touching you.”¹⁵ Throughout antiquity, in fact, the branch of specialized knowledge or learning typically associated with paederasty was philosophy – Platonism, in particular. By late antiquity the stock figure of the outwardly austere and high-minded intellectual who finds in philosophy an ideological pretext and cover for his sexual pursuit of boys had become a staple of the erotic literature of both Greece and Rome: the paradigmatic example is Eumolpus, a character in Petronius’ *Satyricon*, whose famously witty tale of the Pergameme Boy relates how by a hypocritical show of moral purity he managed to become the tutor and seducer of his host’s good-looking son, never suspecting that the boy’s own sluttishness would soon reverse the roles of predator and victim. Other portraits of the philosopher as paederast reappear in the writings of late Greek authors such as Plutarch, Lucian, Alciphron, and Athenaeus.

The specter of sodomy continued to haunt European traditions of humanism throughout the mediaeval and early modern periods, or so Leonard Barkan and Elizabeth Pittenger have argued.¹⁶ But by that time the identity of the suspect discipline had changed – or, at least, expanded. Maybe philosophy was no longer a sufficiently common subject of youthful instruction to sustain singlehandedly its phobic role as a means of incriminating male instructors of boys; or maybe as it fell from its classical position of intellectual eminence, it rose in respectability and prestige. In any case, the field of knowledge that supplanted, or supplemented, philosophy as a signifier of sodomy was grammar and rhetoric. Dante’s text not only bears witness to that development; it contributes powerfully to the consolidation of the connection between sodomy and the teaching of literature.

In short, Canto 15 of the *Inferno* represents a significant stage in the history of the forging of what is by now an overdetermined, inevitable, and damning association in our culture among teaching, sodomy, and secular literary study. Rather than protest against that triple conjunction, or deny its grounding in truth (what good would that do, since any such denial would merely reinscribe the very thing that it seeks to refute?), my inclination is to work with it and to inquire into its historicity, its conditions of emergence, its ideological contingencies, the complex discursive and social processes by which those three orders of meaning have become irretrievably crossed, and the possible reuses of such a crossing for and by a scholarship, a pedagogy, and a politics friendly to queers, to queers who are teachers, to teachers who are professionally queer, to professional humanists, to English professors, and to teachers of lesbian and gay literary studies. A full reading of the passage in Dante, which I can only gesture toward here, would foreground, accordingly, not only the historical construction of sodomy or the sexual demonology of the classroom but also the inescapable perversity of the academic profession, the sodomitical operations of teaching, and the unnatural act of literary criticism itself.

III

In the absence of such a full and ambitious argument, the most I can do here is to suggest that “deviant teaching,” the rubric I have chosen for these remarks, may be something of a redundancy. Teaching has always been the queerest profession. Teaching has an extended history of association with deviance and has long figured as a deviant practice. That is truest of all in the case of the male teaching of boys.

The reasons for this are not far to seek. They begin with the social construction of separate spheres for women and for men, and the consequent gendering both of social space and of education. In traditional European (which is to say Mediterranean) cultures, women ideally occupy the domestic space of the household, and circulate outside it only under special circumstances. Men (including boys past the age of early childhood) are entitled, indeed required, to move in the extra-domestic world of civil society and civic space. At least since the time of ancient Greece, European cultures do not seem to have strenuously objected to the practice of educating girls and women within the household; they have not considered it catastrophic if girls end up being raised entirely within the family. Because feminine identity has traditionally been a domestic identity – even today love is still to an astonishing degree women’s work – the initiation of girls into femininity can be practiced in the home, or within a network of female kin. But the possibility of boys being educated at home conjures up visions of disaster. Boys who are raised entirely within the family cannot grow up to be men. In order for the reproduction of masculinity to be successful, in order for male identity to be transmitted from one generation of men to the next, the reproductive process cannot be confined to the home. The renewal of manhood has to take place, in significant part, outside the family.

After boys have been born, physically, and reared by women, they must be born a second time, culturally, and introduced into the symbolic order of masculinity by men. The male relatives of each boy, belonging as they do to the boy’s immediate family, cannot embody the symbolic order of masculinity, not in its totality at least: they are tied too closely to the boy by blood and domesticity, by physical and social proximity, and so they cannot fully incarnate the more abstract, cultural ideal of masculine identity that is represented by the larger male world. This means that men other than the boy’s male relatives and family members have to play a role in his upbringing. *Every proper boy has to have at least two daddies*. Males outside the family are required to intervene – and to *initiate* the boy into the secrets of male authority. This practice of initiation constitutes, even today, an important part of what we call “education.”

We tend nowadays to play down, at least officially, the initiatory dimension of education. In fact, for reasons I will specify in a moment, it makes us nervous. We therefore consign it to the lower levels of schooling. “Higher education” is defined by contrast as training in a discipline, not as initiation into a practice – except for the practice of being an academic, the practice of the profession, as we call it. Even so, initiation into an academic identity is usually not undertaken in the classroom: it is left to the informal process of “mentoring,” the occasional workshop or departmental seminar, ungraded oral presentations at academic dinner parties, and other largely non-institutional forms of apprenticeship. (And despite their comparative

marginality, all those initiatory procedures still represent something of an embarrassment to the formal definition of academic training, which is why they are coming to be ever more strictly routinized and policed.) “Higher education” distinguishes knowledge from skill, privileging “knowing what” over “knowing how,” and cheerfully skips over those practical arts, however highly developed in their own right, such as cooking or singing, that represent mere technical skills, and as such can be safely relegated to vocational schools or conservatories. What pointedly distinguishes those lowly practical arts from knowledge is that they are taught by means of initiation, by master classes in technique, in which “masters” of the art initiate novices into a direct experiential understanding of the qualities necessary for successful performance. Brunetto Latini was one such master: it was not for nothing that our fourteenth-century Florentine chronicler called Brunetto “the initiator [*cominciatore*] and the master in refining the Florentines, in making them aware of good speech, and in knowing how to guide and maintain our republic according to the art of politics.” Similarly, a proper master of an art is one who leads his students to experience in their own bodies the sensations required for a full and conscious understanding of how to practice the art itself.

In a discipline or science, by contrast, expertise is defined primarily by knowledge of an object, and only secondarily by a skill in relation to it. Close reading is an important talent for a literary critic to possess, but it takes more than that to earn a doctorate from an English department. The same logic applies to what for good reason are often called, within the context of any particular science, “the ancillary disciplines.” These subsidiary skills (e.g., epigraphy, palaeography) assist in the acquisition of a knowledge that is not reducible to their practice. Sometimes, in fact, the ability to practice a skill actually undermines the initiate’s claims to knowledge. For example, an expert on sexual perversions (according to our notions) is someone who knows the varieties, the causes, and the cures of sexual perversions – not someone who knows how to practice all the sexual perversions, who can demonstrate them in performance, who can invent new perversions, or who can teach us how to be better perverts ourselves. In fact, the more personal familiarity with the sexual perversions a person has, the less likely we are to regard that person as a possible expert, since we define expertise in part by the researcher’s personal distance from the topic of study, by the intellectual mastery of a remote body of knowledge, by the degree of disinterested scientific objectivity brought to bear on a topic by someone who is personally disengaged from it. As the posthumous reversals of Alfred Kinsey’s professional fortunes illustrate, personal distance on the part of the professional “expert” is all the more imperative when the field of study comprises such potentially discreditable topics as sexual perversion and homosexuality.

The scandal of both feminist studies and lesbian/gay studies, in this context, derives in no small measure from the prominent role they accord to initiation in their paedagogic practices. The production and transmission of knowledge in these fields has a more pronounced initiatory character than it does in the standard academic disciplines.

In feminist studies and queer studies, expertise is not proportional to personal distance from the material. No strict or formal disciplinary division is made between the subjects of knowledge (the authorities) and the objects of knowledge (whom social

scientists sometimes call the “subjects,” but *not* because these “subjects” qualify as knowing subjects in their own right: rather, as objects, they are *subjected* to the authority of experts). Indeed, lesbian and gay studies is the result of a strenuous effort to reverse the subject- and object-positions of expert discourse, whose original distribution is well attested by the title of a work published in the United States in 1954: *The Homosexuals: As Seen by Themselves and Thirty Authorities*.¹⁷ It has been one of the principal aims of lesbian and gay politics to dismantle the disciplinary division manifested by that title, along with the noxious real-world effects that follow from it.

Both feminist studies and LGBTQ studies promote forms of knowledge that are not limited to the application of a disembodied understanding to a detached body of material but that include the researcher within the field of research. They also value situated knowledges, which is to say knowledges acquired experientially and existentially through being in the world. As George Haggerty has written, “Experience *must* count in the gay studies classroom.”¹⁸ Emerging feminist and queer knowledge-practices have disclosed new possibilities for forging a different sort of relation between knowledge and subjective positioning, between truth and desire – a different distribution and articulation of subject position, site of enunciation, mode of authorization, and access to truth.

In fact, it is a positive advantage for a practitioner of feminist studies to be a woman and a feminist, although that alone is no guarantee of success in the field, just as it is an advantage for a practitioner of lesbian and gay studies to be a lesbian or a gay man, although one of the principal founders of lesbian and gay studies, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, happened to be neither. The practice of the discipline itself involves a critical reflection on personal experience, the elaboration of a situated knowledge, a gradual heightening of awareness of one’s own personal, social, political, and discursive positioning. This is a process in which “knowledge” is acquired through personal engagement, or initiation, and requires to be confirmed through personal recognition. A lack of recognition on the part of the researcher or the student, should it occur, produces an impasse in the learning experience, which can be removed only by adjusting the discipline or by transforming the learner’s relation to her own experience. A successful outcome consists not merely in an improved grasp of theory, method, and application, but in an altered self-understanding, an enhanced sense of possibility, and a transformed relation to one’s social, political, discursive, and personal situation. Other, more traditional disciplines have now altered their paedagogical and scholarly practices in similar ways, partly as a result of the influential example provided by work in feminist and queer studies – with the consequence that literary studies and academic research in general are coming more fully and complicitly into the dubious inheritance that Dante’s Brunetto Latini has bequeathed to them.

Still, it is significant that even in the field of queer studies I don’t have to persuade my students that I’m a great lover, that I have vast and various amounts of sexual experience, in order to get them to accept my authority in the classroom or my qualifications to teach courses in the history of sexuality or queer theory. (They may well speculate about it in private, alone or among themselves, but such doubts as they may understandably entertain never rise to the level of a professional challenge.) In some learned traditions of erotic knowledge, of course, such a demonstration of technique would be essential. Unless I could display my erotic expertise through practice or

practical instruction, I would be a charlatan – equivalent to a chemist who understands theoretically the physics of sauces but doesn't know how to make even the simplest *béchamel* – and no amount of publications, university degrees, or invitations to scholarly conferences would make up for so much evident incompetence. But queer studies still resembles a science more than it does an erotic art. And so no one will be surprised to learn that when I was interviewed for my present job at the University of Michigan, where it was expected that I would contribute to the curriculum in queer studies, the topic of how good a lover I was never came up. It would have been a crime to ask me such a question.

IV

As Boccaccio's commentary on Dante makes clear, the younger the student, the greater the danger of his being abused by his teachers. More to the point, I would add, the younger the student, the less formal the method of education, and the more significant the role played by initiation in the educational process. In any case, the sort of education of boys that takes the form of initiation into manhood and that requires the intervention of male outsiders (the education of women, as we have seen, has traditionally been able to dispense with both female and male assistance from outside the household) has represented a long-standing problem for male cultures. The initiation of boys into manhood by men is a traditional source of anxiety because the male outsiders who perform it are both necessary to the family and independent of it, crucial to the boy's development but not motivated to assist it. They are not bound to the boy by relations of unmediated benevolence, and they require a supplementary personal or professional reason to get involved – one that does not necessarily coincide with the needs, desires, and goals of the boy himself or his family. It is in this context that the possibility of corruption whether moral or sexual – the possibility of "sodomy," in other words – comes to represent a perennial threat, and a perennial flash-point of anxiety.

I want to argue that it is not the possibility of sex at the scene of instruction that is necessarily anxiogenic in and of itself. Nor would I want to reduce the baroque terrors of "sodomy" to the comparatively banal nuisances of homosexuality. In certain traditions, after all, the attraction of the male teacher to the male student has been considered a potential advantage as well as a potential danger. "According to the Persian philosopher Mullā Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 1640), the divine purpose behind the existence of refined pederastic attraction," the historian Khaled El-Rouayheb informs us, "was precisely to induce men to frequent and care for boys, thereby ensuring that the arts and sciences of civilization would be transmitted from generation to generation."¹⁹ If, then, sex turns out to be a perennial focus of anxiety in the pedagogic *imaginaire*, that is because it serves to materialize, to condense, and to express the larger, generalized, free-floating anxieties about deviant teaching that in many traditional cultures cluster around the male education of boys and that reflect the structural tension between the family's or the in-group's proprietary claims on each boy and the rival claims on him by men belonging to an out-group whose intervention in his upbringing is required for the successful reproduction and transmission of mascu-

linity across the generations. I'll go on to speculate that such anxieties about deviant teaching come to single out the issue of sex and to focus obsessively on it in particular when the initiation of boys into manhood takes place within a specifically heterosexual and heteronormative society.

Among a number of tribal peoples in Melanesia and elsewhere, by contrast, male initiation actually requires sexual contact between boys and men. Far from treating sex as corrupting, as constituting an abuse of the educational process or an alien intrusion upon it, the transmission of masculine identity from one generation to the next is effected by means of sex. Sex accordingly plays a significant role in male initiation rites. Among the Sambia, which is the protective pseudonym given by cultural anthropologist Gilbert Herdt to a small warrior society in a remote, mountainous region of Papua New Guinea, boys begin the long process of initiation into manhood when they are carried off into the forest by their male elders at the age of eight or nine and are forced to perform oral sex on adolescent boys.²⁰

Underlying this practice is the notion, which is common to a number of different tribal cultures in the highlands of New Guinea, that men are not born but made, that boys will not become men through a natural process of unassisted growth but must be transformed into men by other means, including elaborate ritual machinations designed to transfer physical prowess and gender identity from one generation of males to the next. As is often the case in male initiation rites, the processes by which one generation of men gives birth to the succeeding one are explicitly figured by analogy with female reproductive functions. Among the Sambia, for example, boys are taught to regard cock-sucking as a kind of breast-feeding, by which they can ingest a life-giving substance necessary for their growth. Unlike actual breast-feeding, this phallic version is an entirely masculine form of nurture, inasmuch as semen is thought to have masculinizing properties and to transform the feminine boys who have been raised by their mothers, and who are at risk of being emasculated by maternal influence, into real men who will be strong warriors.

So this practice of initiation is one in which men give birth to the next generation of men without the mediation of women, in which men transmit masculine identity and masculine power from one generation of males to the next, through the social institutions of male culture. This process presents itself as a form of male fertility, which figuratively claims for itself the prestige of female procreancy (in this instance by its metaphorical appropriation of the paradigm model of breast-feeding), and thereby comes to represent a second-order form of reproduction, a kind of male parthenogenesis, a practice by which men can give birth culturally to men without the participation of women.

After the Sambia boys return from the forest, they continue to ingest the semen of older boys and young men on a more or less daily basis until they are about 15, whereupon they switch roles and spend another five to seven years orally inseminating younger boys. Then they get married to women. (I should point out that I've radically simplified the long process of male initiation in Sambia culture: actually, there are six specific stages of initiation that all boys have to pass through in order to become men. But the details of the whole initiatory curriculum don't matter for the purposes of my argument here.) The social reproduction of manhood among the Sambia, as among European males, takes place entirely outside the family: a boy may obtain semen from

any willing male donor, except for members of his family – who include his father, brothers, cousins, and age-mates – or his ritual sponsor. The preferred donor is the boy's older sister's husband, who doesn't count as kin, but in any case boys are encouraged to obtain semen from as many older males as possible and are discouraged from pairing off with one partner in particular. (It's always a good idea to take classes from as many different instructors as possible, isn't it, and not do all your work with just one teacher?)

Clearly, the particular way that Sambia men set about reproducing themselves socially, transmitting masculine identity to each rising generation of males and introducing them into the symbolic order of masculinity, presumes a total absence of heterosexuality and heteronormativity, at least in the case of men. The example of the Sambia teaches us how male initiation can proceed in a world without heterosexuality. Now, when I say that, I do not of course mean to imply that Sambia males are all necessarily homosexuals. After all, once they have completed the six stages of male initiation and have become fully entitled men, all normal Sambia men get married to women and have children of their own. Furthermore, the boys who engage in sexual contacts with other males do not do so initially out of erotic desire: on the contrary, they are terrorized into performing oral sex, and they are given no choice. We would describe their initial experiences of same-sex sexual contact as oral rape. As time goes on, however, and the boys become convinced that they need to ingest the semen of their elders in order to grow up to be men, and to be strong warriors, they become willing and enthusiastic participants in the elaborate initiation rituals, eager sexual partners, and some of them even form life-long affectionate bonds with the older males with whom they have had habitual sexual contact. The imagery of Sambia ritual represents the younger initiates as "married" to the bachelors whom they fellate. As Herdt himself has emphasized, male initiation among the Sambia is powered by sexual excitement and desire.

So Sambia males may not be homosexuals, but they aren't exactly heterosexuals either. In fact, exclusive heterosexuality among Sambia males is entirely unknown. All males who grow up to become recognized men in Sambia culture undergo, without exception, the required six stages of male initiation, involving some 15 years' worth of daily blow jobs, given and received – an erotic career that isn't exactly calculated to qualify you for promotion to a tenured position among the ranks of male heterosexuals, at least not in the sexual institutions that I'm used to working in.

As may be evident by now, I'm interested in the various ways that human cultures represent to themselves *symbolically* the means by which they reproduce themselves *socially*. In particular, and most relevant to the present discussion, I'm intrigued by how they figure that magic moment in which adults are imagined to transmit to the next generation the keys to cultural identity – and, specifically, the keys to gender and sexual identity. It is this moment of initiation that I earlier called "the scene of instruction." It is also the scene that we find portrayed, in demonic form, in Canto 15 of Dante's *Inferno*, which is very much concerned with individual and collective initiation, with the trials and tribulations of male regeneration, and the processes whereby cultural identity is reproduced and transmitted from one generation of men to the next. A similar preoccupation with the transmission of masculine identity also crops up in the plots of countless American myths, novels, and movies, which share with

Dante and the Sambia a common cultural problem, the problem of how to represent symbolically the process whereby men reproduce themselves socially, along with the problem of how to identify and guard against the various perils that cling to that very process. A proper study of the symbolics, politics, and erotics of instruction – both its practice and its representation – in different human cultures would be as monumental an accomplishment as it would be a desirable one. I will have to confine myself for the present to one brief (though classic) example, simply to indicate the specific difference that heterosexuality makes to the sexual demonology of instruction.

V

George Stevens' 1953 movie *Shane*, like the 1949 Jack Schaefer novel on which it is based, is told from the perspective of a 9-year-old boy, named Joey in the film. It is the story of "The cowboy who made me a man." The cowboy in question is the title character, and Joey's relation to Shane is the focus of the film. Joey witnesses the events, gets caught up in them, plays a crucial role in their resolution, and is changed forever by the experience. The other themes running through the story are typical of the Western genre: the conflict between cattlemen and farmers, between lawlessness and law-and-order, between a violent male world without (decent) women and a civilized society based on marriage, as well as other social forms and civil institutions. The movie invites us to see these conflicts as symptomatic of the friction between succeeding stages in the historical growth of the United States. The slow but sure triumph of farmers, law-and-order, and civilized society over their opposite pairs, at once their predecessors and their antagonists, is the story of "How the West was won." All that is entirely standard stuff. What makes *Shane* stand out from the general run of Westerns, and makes it interesting for my purposes, is that its particular version of this mythological/historical scenario focuses on the problem of social reproduction, specifically the reproduction of masculinity, the transmission of masculine identity from man to boy. The movie argues that the West had to be won anew with each succeeding male generation (a theme highly apposite to the era of the Korean War, when the film was made, which dramatized the perpetual need for the periodic reconquest of masculinity, the need for each new crop of boys to experience at first hand the manly ordeal of combat if it was to claim the same masculine credentials as the men who went before it). In the first instance, *Shane* presents the reproduction of manhood literally, as an initiatory process in which each generation of males – Joey, in this case – has to learn from the previous one how to use guns, how to shoot them, how to fight, and how to stand up for its own independence. That version of male initiation may not be the most suggestive one that the movie has to offer but because it is the most literal I will begin with it.

Here is the background. It is the summer of 1889. Joey is growing up in a decent, self-respecting pioneer family trying to establish a farm in a remote Wyoming valley on the border between nature and civilization. His family is part of a larger, nascent community of farmers who have settled the land that had been won from the Indians by an earlier generation of cattlemen. The farmers know how to use guns, but not as well as professional gunfighters, and anyway they don't need to use them, because

they are good neighbors, and they settle their differences by getting together and talking them out. Joey is too young to have a real gun, and Joe, his father, can't spare time from his farm work in order to teach him how to shoot. Meanwhile, the farmers are menaced by the violent cattlemen and their hired gunfighters, who contest the farmers' claims to occupy the land and to fence it off to cattle. The farmers resist bravely, but they are ultimately no match for the bad guys, and they are outgunned. In these circumstances, it is only the providential appearance of a mysterious stranger, a glamorous if aging gunfighter by the name of Shane (played by Alan Ladd), that saves the farmers, saves the community, and saves the family. Shane is a loner who appears out of nowhere; he is taken in by Joey's father as a hired hand (and implicitly, though everyone except Joey denies this, as a hired gun). Shane wants to retire from gunfighting, and he is strongly drawn to Joey's family as well as to its settled way of life. He is touched by its humble efforts at worldmaking, by the embryonic civil society constituted by the local community of farming families, and by its family values, of which his own existence seems to have been conspicuously deprived. And there is an instant mutual attraction between him and Marian, Joey's mother, which intensifies his commitment to the miniature civilization of the valley even as it dramatizes the impossibility of his own integration into it. Precisely because he loves this little germ of America, Shane has to leave it. Most literally, he has to resume his identity as a gunfighter, and a killer – to revert to being the sort of person who doesn't belong in the civilization he prizes. But before he leaves it, he saves it, and he also gives Joey his first lesson in gunfighting, teaching him how to shoot – and by extension how to be a man, the sort of man who can continue the manly work of winning the West.

The moral is clear: the family can give birth to Joey and raise him physically, but in order to grow up to be a real man, he requires Shane to give birth to him culturally, in the sense of initiating him into the secrets of male authority, introducing him into the symbolic order of masculinity, and transmitting to him the essence of masculine wisdom and masculine identity (by teaching him the use of guns, the knowledge of when to use them, and by offering him a model both of masculine violence and of masculine self-restraint). In this sense, Shane performs the same masculinizing function as do the male elders in the Sambian initiation rituals. And his role is every bit as necessary: the movie consistently and repeatedly dramatizes the incapacity of the family to reproduce itself without outside help, without some magical male intervention from beyond itself. Shane assumes a second-order paternity here, becoming a kind of spiritual father to Joey, sponsoring Joey's temporary entry into the inveterate, archaic, immemorial world of male violence, and thereby performing the necessary (if dirty) work of male parthenogenesis. In the reproductive economy of the movie's mythic world, Joey has two daddies.

This is no more than the widely scattered traditions of paedagogy we have examined seem to require. The paternal function is regularly multiplied in the case of boys, and that multiplication is at once normative and necessary – something of a family value in its own right. *Heather Has Two Mommies* may have caused a scandal when it was proposed as a vehicle of primary education in the United States, but *Shane*, which could perfectly well be subtitled “Joey Has Two Daddies,” is routinely taught in middle schools throughout the US without arousing any panic or provoking the slightest expression of corresponding outrage.

Shane is no simple progress narrative. Like the Westerns of John Ford, it makes progress conditional on regression, and it makes civilization dependent on renewal through periodic descents into barbarism (that is why *Shane* serves, rather unfairly, as a symbol for everything that is wrong with the frontier myth in the bestselling post-9/11 manifesto, *Why Do People Hate America?*).²¹ For all his essential goodness, Shane is a morally ambiguous figure – though in Stevens' movie he is initially much less sinister and frightening than he is in Schaefer's novel. Uncivilized and hyper-civilized at once, he speaks a more refined English than anyone else in the film and even compliments Marian on her “elegant” meal (she had in fact set out her fancy plates and cutlery), as if it had evoked in him memories of dining at the Ritz; at the same time, he arrives in the valley dressed entirely in buckskin, and he has to purchase a cotton shirt and jeans at the local community store.²² However necessary his appearance may be for the survival of civilization, and of the family, he is irretrievably tainted by the outdated, discredited, pre-civilized social order from which he emanates, and once his use-value is depleted, the survival of civilization, no less than the survival of the family, requires that he be ejected from them.

Conversely, the civilization that Shane saves is itself a rather peculiar, truncated affair. In fact, you can tell that *Shane* is concerned specifically with male initiation because father and son in the movie have the same name (in the novel the Joey character is ineptly named Bob) and, more significantly, because the American family who incarnates its ideal of civilization contains no sisters or daughters. That last peculiarity makes Joey's family different from the other (less heroic) families pictured in the film. And this unrepresentative but somehow exemplary American family, whose values the movie advances by pre-dating them to the 1880s, installing them retroactively at the origin of everything that is great about America, turns out to be different as well from the now-canonical version of the American nuclear family, the one that we know from, say, *The Simpsons* – the family with 2.3 kids, which features at least one representative of each sex in each generation, and throws in a female toddler (the 0.3 of the statistic) for good measure. Instead, the model family at the center of *Shane* is the holy family of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, consisting this time around of Marian, Joe, and Joey – plus Shane as the Holy Ghost. It is only when Shane's potent shadow falls across the holy American family that the family succeeds in revitalizing itself and reproducing masculinity within itself, guaranteeing the transmission of paternal identity from father to son, and insuring its own futurity. Shane's mysterious visitation is brief and was always destined to be so. Like its sacred model, it doesn't amount to even so much as a one-night stand. Shane, following in the footsteps of the Holy Ghost, knows better than to stick around for breakfast: as he says to Joey on his way out, immediately after the last night-time battle, “There's no living with a killer.” But that's the point. Like all teachers, Shane is a social deviant. You might be tempted to invite him to move in with you, as Joey does at the beginning of the film, but you don't have to live with him in order to get what you need from him. One night, one semester will do the job.

Shane's instruction of Joey is a highly limited, temporally circumscribed affair. It does not ultimately displace the family, because it carefully restricts itself to a single (though powerful and transformative) intervention, after which Shane clears out and Joey graduates and life returns to normal. “You go home to your mother and your

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father,” Shane tells Joey in the final scene, “and grow up to be strong and straight.” With the conferral of that diploma, the movie ends, as Joey first calls out, famously, “Shane, come back!” and then, when Shane does not come back, resigns himself to Shane’s eternal absence. Indeed, he will have to devote the rest of his life to filling it himself. In the meantime, a decisive alteration has taken place. Shane has given birth to the man in Joey with his gun.

VI

Let’s avoid cheap Freudianism here. No one would ever claim that Shane’s gun is just a gun, but at least it’s not a penis. This is America, after all, not New Guinea. But let’s also not exaggerate the differences. Consider, for example, the following scene, late in the movie, which might be called “Cowboy Confessions”:

“Shane?”

“Hmm?”

“You want me to tell you somethin’?”

“If you want to.” [*Dr Shane, the non-directive therapist.*]

“I saw your gun in there one day. [*Pause.*] I took a look at it.”

“Oh.”

“Are you mad?”

“No, I guess not. If I were you, Joey, I’d . . . I’d leave a thing like this alone.”

“I wrapped it up careful in the blanket again.”

“Well, that’s a good boy.”

“Could I see it again?”

Joey’s request triggers Shane’s cataclysmic shooting lesson, which is interrupted by Joey’s mother wearing her wedding dress. Shane may not initiate Joey into the symbolic order of masculinity by means of sexual contact but, like the Sambia bachelors, he masculinizes Joey by enrolling him in a central institution of male culture, in this case the school of hard knocks. Gunfighting in *Shane* is like cock-sucking among the Sambia: both are cultural practices connected with initiation into the symbolic order of masculinity and heavily laden with phallic meaning. Furthermore, although the relationship between Shane and Joey is not sexual, it is not exactly unerotic. After all, the entire movie is taken up with Joey’s crush on Shane. Without that crush, and without communicating its intensity to the male spectator, the movie could not endow Shane’s example with the charismatic power necessary to enable those enamored of him (Joey, the male viewer) to accede to manhood by means of identification, emulation, and endless, unfulfilled desire for him. *Shane* is a classic male love story: “the unforgettable novel of a boy’s love,” as the cover of my Bantam paperback edition of the book artlessly puts it.²³ Shane’s instruction is as highly charged as Socrates’.

Like Socrates, Shane is hardly innocent of the desire he evokes in others. If Joey

develops a crush on Shane, that is at least in part because Shane has methodically set about seducing him. Shane’s seduction of Joey begins with the first thing he says to Joey at the very start of the movie: “Hello, boy. You were watchin’ me down the trail quite a spell, weren’t you? [Joey: “Yes . . . Yes, I was.”] You know, I . . . I like a man who watches things goin’ around. Means he’ll make his mark some day.”

How could any boy resist? (The narrator of the novel candidly registers the seductive force of the remark: “this Shane knew what would please a boy. The glow of it held me . . .”²⁴) By interpellating Joey first as a boy (“Hello, boy”) and then, more flatteringly, as a man (“I like a man who watches things goin’ around”), thereby demonstrating that he can either reduce Joey to the status of a boy or elevate him to the status of the man whom Shane claims to “like” and who Joey himself already desperately wants to be, Shane displays a head-turning ability to project to Joey a vision of Joey that is exactly in line with Joey’s own aspirations for himself. Uniquely among all the characters in the movie (with the touching and sinister exception of Ryker, the leader of the cattlemen), Shane offers Joey the illusion of being taken seriously as a grown man, and in that way he encourages Joey’s own tendency to identify proleptically with the man he will one day become. Shane even calls him on occasion “Little Joe” instead of “Joey.” In effect, Shane re-routes Joey’s identificatory desire for himself as a man, for his own future manhood, through Shane’s eyes. And in so doing, Shane makes himself both necessary and desirable to Joey as the ground of Joey’s own masculine identification. Moreover, by pretending that his “liking” for Joey is conditional on Joey’s fulfillment of that very ideal of watchfulness that Joey in fact already abundantly fulfills – by motivating Joey to model himself after Shane’s own projected object-ideal while constituting that object-ideal in such a way that Joey can flatter himself as having already lived up to it – Shane both pressures and entices Joey into depending for his own sense of masculine identity on Shane himself and on Shane’s “liking” for him.

If the delicate kind of emotional blackmail constituted by Shane’s subtle combination of flattery and bullying is supposed to be training in manhood, it certainly works well enough: by the end of the movie, Joey is sufficiently advanced on the path to manhood that Shane can entrust Joe and Marian, Joey’s own parents, to Joey’s care. Flattering to the last, Shane tells him, “Joey, take care of them – both of them.” But Shane’s manhood-building curriculum doesn’t work too badly as seduction, either. Less than 15 minutes into the film, Joey – already infatuated – begs Shane to move in with him: “I . . . I wish you’d stay here.” Half an hour and one barroom brawl later, things have started to get pretty serious:

“Want to know something, Mother?”

[Marian: “What is it? What is it, Joey?”]

Mother, I just love Shane.

[“Do you?”]

I love him almost as much as I love Pa. That’s all right, isn’t it?”

Let us defer answering, for the moment, Joey’s unanswerable question.

There is more going on here than mere seduction, of course. Shane’s prediction

that Joey will make his mark one day anticipates the movie's own penultimate scene, the climactic night-time shootout in which Joey, having spent some time watching things going around, alerts Shane to the presence of a concealed gunman and thereby saves his life (Shane is merely wounded). As Joey later exclaims, in a vain attempt to salvage Shane's honor and to repair the damage that his rescue of Shane has done to his heroic image of him (and, he fears, to Shane's own image of himself), "He'd never have been able to shoot you if you'd 'a' seen him first."²⁵ Thus, Shane's opening remark to Joey sounds a theme that will recur throughout the film: it establishes the importance of watching – in the senses both of *vigilance* and of *spectatorship*.

Instead of orally consuming Shane's semen, Sambia-style, like any decent 9-year-old in that part of New Guinea, Joey becomes a man by ocularly consuming the visual spectacle of Shane's masculinity, specifically his shooting and killing of the bad guys, thereby strengthening his own masculine identity by identification with and participation in Shane's act of violence. The social reproduction of the holy American family apparently depends on the production and consumption of eroticized spectacles of male violence. That is why the family needs Shane. One of the main purposes of Shane's strange visitation is to introduce the riveting spectacle of gunfighting into the visual economy of Joey's world, and then to remove guns and gunfighting from it, once Joey has absorbed his necessary dose.

In the world of the movie, Joey absorbs this necessary dose not through his mouth but through his eyes – through watching, through the practice of spectatorship. No fight ever takes place unless Joey is lurking somewhere, ready to watch it from a safe hiding-place, such as his favorite haunt outside the barroom door. It is violence, not sex, that constitutes the primal scene in *Shane* – that constitutes, in other words, the object of the greatest voyeuristic fascination, the visual spectacle of the greatest transformative power. That's what makes *Shane* suitable entertainment for the whole family. Moreover, Shane's erotic relationship with Joey is mediated by Marian, Joey's mother, through her own unconsummated romance with Shane. That's what makes *Shane* an initiation into heterosexuality and heteronormativity.

And that's also what makes *Shane's* eroticism particularly creepy. One of the primary strategies that the movie uses in order to deny the homoeroticism it systematically deploys is to double Joey's point of view with Marian's. This it does most obviously in the opening scene (when Shane makes his initial appearance) through insistent cross-cutting between reaction-shots of Joey and Marian, but it has a large battery of other techniques at its disposal for fusing the two characters' perspectives on Shane, thereby justifying its glamorizing and eroticizing of the man who incarnates an already ambiguous and contradictory set of masculine gender norms. The effect is to position the male spectator simultaneously as hero-worshipping boy and as sexually-aroused woman. To say that such a position is awkward for a male spectator to occupy under a regime of compulsory heterosexuality, or that it can be occupied only on the condition of being disavowed, is barely to begin to describe the notoriously traumatizing power of the movie or to specify the pressures that it brings to bear on the younger or the more immature males of whatever age in its audience. The movie perversely insists on treating Shane as a masculine role model even as it surrounds him, Hollywood-style, with a glamorous, star-quality aura of erotic irresistibility. The result for the male spectator is to make the supposedly identity-affirming, gender-

consolidating experience of masculine identification coincide, as if nothing could be more normal, with the urgent and inescapable solicitation of homoerotic desire.

VII

Heterosexual and heteronormative as the world of *Shane* is, then, the movie's recipe for successful initiation into masculinity is perilously close to the standard scenario for its subversion in the developmental psychology of Cold War America – the scenario for the destruction of normative masculinity and even for its transformation into homosexuality. *Shane* argues that in order for a boy to "grow up to be strong and straight," he first has to be seduced and abandoned by an older man. We are not as far from the basic postulates of Sambia culture as might at first be supposed. In this light, the remaining differences between the two cultures may come to seem increasingly trivial. Among the Sambia, to be sure, where there is no homosexuality or heterosexuality, there is also no need for guns at the scene of instruction, but sacred flutes play an analogous role and function as ritual symbols of the penis. It might seem that among the Sambia the penis is allowed to appear more nakedly in its own right, but even in the Sambia rituals it remains clothed in its symbolism as both breast and phallus, as the conduit of masculine essences. The transfer of masculinity from one generation to the next in a traditional heterosexual culture cannot be effected by sexual contact, obviously enough, but in America no less than in New Guinea it is effected by various social and symbolic practices mediated and ritually maintained by the fundamental institutions of male culture.²⁶ In the American context, such practices take the form of engaging in competitive sports, enrolling in schools and universities (which until recently used to be all-male institutions), and going to the movies to watch spectacles of male combat such as *Shane*. Masculinity may not be reproduced by means of sex, in the American case, but the means by which it is reproduced are not exactly unerotic.

Shane, the movie itself, is thus an instance of what it depicts. American boys are turned into men not by taking part in semen transactions but by watching eroticized spectacles of male violence, including both the spectacles in *Shane* and the spectacle of *Shane* itself. Sitting in the dark with his candy and soda pop, watching Shane and munching away, like Joey outside the barroom door, the immature male spectator of the movie is alternately seduced and bullied into manhood. In order for this procedure to work properly, to produce the ostensibly intended normative outcome, the optimal proportions of seduction and bullying, and the balance between viewing Shane from Joey's or from Marian's perspective, have to be got exactly right. Otherwise, instead of doing what it is supposed to do – instead of turning you into a heterosexual family man with a violent streak – *Shane* is liable to misfire and turn you into a gay Republican. (This has in fact been known to happen.) So here's the first reason that Joey's question – whether it's all right to love Shane – is so difficult to answer.

In America, as in New Guinea, the social reproduction of masculinity takes place outside the family – on the playing fields, in schools, in movie houses and other cultural institutions. And although the American cultural institutions responsible for male initiation do not sponsor sexual activities, the activities they do sponsor (football, cinematic spectatorship, high school) are no more innocent of all desire than are

the secret male rituals performed among the Sambia. No wonder so many anxieties in American culture today attach to the male figures outside the family who initiate boys into those activities: boy scout leaders, ministers, football coaches, actors, teachers, and professors. As in the case of Sambia culture, or Dante's culture, the American family needs such figures, but such figures aren't part of the family, can't be controlled by it, and have both personal and professional motives of their own. Moreover, the activities over which they preside are characterized by an irreducible and undeniable erotic volatility. That is a particular problem for a society that employs an erotically charged form of male initiation in a strictly heteronormative context and for exclusively heteronormative ends.

(I emphasize that the phenomenon I am describing pertains to heteronormative culture and to the social construction of male heterosexuality. Gay men don't worship their male teachers, for the most part, much less do they desire them. Gay men have no daddies – let alone two or more of them – and no heroes. Which, by the way, is what makes gay politics such a notoriously thankless task for its leaders and representatives.)

The anxieties attaching to the male figures responsible for initiating boys into masculinity outside the family become most intense in a heterosexual/heteronormative society when those figures explicitly represent themselves as sexual subjects. What makes the imagined or actual possibility of sex, especially homosexual sex, at the scene of instruction in masculinity so frightening, and so obscene, is not just its potential for harm or abuse, and not just its breach of heterosexual decorum; rather, it directly violates the larger social strategies that heterosexual culture uses to implement the process of male initiation and to calm the anxieties clustering about it. According to those strategies, boys are initiated into male identity not by sexual contact with men but – and here the analogy with the Sambia holds once again – by social practices, symbolic representations, and ideological apparatuses attached to cultural institutions whose function is both to mobilize and to mediate boys' desire for masculinity – and for men.

Shane itself is a perfect example of this simultaneous mobilization and re-routing of male homoerotic desire. After all, it is Joey's love for Shane that fuels his initiation into masculine identity and helps turn him into a man. And indeed *some* kind of motivational stimulus is going to be necessary in many cultures if boys are to pursue masculinity strenuously enough to withstand the various ordeals that their societies have devised for those who are enjoined to attain it. Here is where the eroticization of masculinity, and of men, comes in. It provides the requisite drive without which boys would not be willing to subject themselves to the prolonged and painful process that initiation into manhood demands. The problem of male initiation in heterosexual and heteronormative culture is getting boys to desire masculinity without also desiring men²⁷ – or without desiring men too much, too long, in the wrong way, or for the wrong reasons. In a world where education is inseparable from desire, and where erotic bonds between males are both compulsory and prohibited, the negotiation of such intense same-sex sentiments among men is bound to be a risky business – a delicate and dangerous and anxiogenic matter. It is the second reason that Joey's question about whether it's all right to love Shane must go unanswered.

There should be little cause for surprise, then, if it is those male figures who perform

initiatory functions in American culture whose heterosexuality is most consistently policed – and who cause the greatest anxiety when they fail to represent themselves as heterosexual: boy scout leaders, ministers, football coaches, actors, teachers, and professors. Hence the various kinds of social pressure brought to bear on those of us who are both gay men and teachers, to say nothing of English teachers.

VIII

Of course, there are safer ways to deal with those anxieties than by teaching a course in a Department of English, as I have been doing for some time now at the University of Michigan, called "How to be Gay: Male Homosexuality and Initiation." It matters little, in the light of the observations I have been making here, that my course is not at all about sex, that it studies neither the role that eroticism plays in education and cultural reproduction nor the role that sex plays in gay men's initiation into gay male identity. Rather, in line with *Shane* in this respect, the course looks at the *social processes* whereby gay men initiate other gay men into gay male identity. Those social processes feature, ironically, non-sexual methods of instruction: for example, the introduction of the gay novice to non-standard ways of seeing, to distinctive ethical and aesthetic modes of relating to the surrounding culture, to a unique set of sensibilities, and to dissident ways of reading cultural objects (movies, opera, Broadway musicals, emblems of fashion and style, embodiments of masculinity). That sort of gay initiation would seem to qualify as a stellar example of what I have been calling deviant teaching. And so, too, would the class in which such gay initiation is studied. For a course that surveys and examines some of the materials that gay men have used to create an identity for themselves (both individually and as a group) will necessarily be a course that itself performs the work of gay initiation, insofar as gay initiation consists precisely in sharing, circulating, and examining such materials. Students, whether gay or straight, whether female or male, who haven't previously encountered those particular materials are, in the very process of studying them, *initiated* into an aspect of gay male culture. Consequently, my own teaching about gay men's teaching could easily qualify as deviant teaching itself.

After everything I have had to say about the anxieties produced in heterosexual societies about even non-gay-identified male functionaries whose job it is to initiate boys into masculine authority by inducting them into the social and symbolic rituals of various erotico-cultural institutions, it will hardly come as a surprise to learn that my course on "How to be Gay" attracted a certain amount of hostile attention from outside the University of Michigan, or that it was widely interpreted to consist in my initiation of my male students into gay sex (no one seemed to care very much about what happened to the female students enrolled in it, who typically make up half of the class). The American Family Association of Michigan, for example, lobbied extensively for the cancellation of the course, claiming that "the proposed course, which openly admits its purpose is to recruit and 'initiate' teenagers into the homosexual lifestyle, . . . [promotes] a lifestyle of high-risk behavior that is not only illegal but many believe immoral, behavior that further increases the burden on taxpayers to pay for its public health consequences." (I suppose it is possible that repeated watching of

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All About Eve might ruin your health, but there is no law against it, even in Michigan, and the university never seriously considered cancelling my class.)

Furthermore, eight Republican representatives in the Michigan state legislature sponsored a proposal to set aside 10 percent of the University of Michigan's budget, and distribute it to other state universities, if the university were to hold a class "promoting or facilitating the participation in a sexual lifestyle or practices other than heterosexual monogamy." (A majority of the legislators voted for the measure, but its passage required more than a simple majority, and the votes in its favor fell short of the requisite number by four.) And, as I write, a bill has been introduced into both houses of the Michigan legislature to amend the state constitution in order to bring the curriculum of the University of Michigan under the more direct control of local politicians. (It, too, seems to have little chance of passing.) I didn't intend to ask for trouble by teaching this course, but I was not astonished to find myself in hot water as a result. The risks of attempting such an intellectual experiment at a public university in the United States can never be underestimated.

But unless we are willing to confront and work through the anxieties that surround teaching, the anxieties that impede the progress of lesbian and gay studies, and the anxieties that make life difficult for those of us in this society who are gay men and who play a role that our society associates with the initiation of the young, we won't have the slightest chance of defusing them. So, rather than engage in strategies of avoidance or denial, my own experiment in deviant teaching is designed to confront head-on the fears about gay men who initiate young men into adult male identity – the fears that we will recruit, seduce, proselytize, sodomize, corrupt. We can only defuse those fears if we are willing to analyze them, to understand them, to figure out where they come from, what their institutional basis is, and – perhaps most important of all – how they are connected systematically to the social and discursive structures that organize our culture.

Notes

- 1 Dante, *Inferno*, 15.84–5.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 15.81.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 15.79–81.
- 4 John Freccero, "The Eternal Image of the Father," in *The Poetry of Allusion: Virgil and Ovid in Dante's Commedia*, eds. Rachel Jacoff and Jeffrey T. Schnapp (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991): 62–76, at p. 65.
- 5 Giovanni Villani, 8.10 (cited by Singleton *ad Dante, Inf.* 15.32).
- 6 Dante, *Inferno*, 15.30.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 15.86–7.
- 8 Freccero, "The Eternal Image of the Father," 66.
- 9 Dante, *Inferno*, 15.101–2.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 15.106–8.
- 11 Cited by Singleton *ad Dante, Inferno*, 109.
- 12 Quoted by Freccero, "The Eternal Image of the Father," 67.
- 13 See David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004): 101–18; also, Robert J. Corber, *In the Name of National Security: Hitchcock, Homophobia, and*

the Political Construction of Gender in Postwar America (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993): 61–9.

- 14 Paul Welch and Ernest Havemann, "Homosexuality in America," *Life* magazine, 56:26 (June 26, 1964): 66–80, with commentary by Lee Edelman; "Tearooms and Sympathy; or, The Epistemology of the Water Closet," in *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994): 148–70.
- 15 130E.
- 16 Leonard Barkan, *Transuming Passion: Ganymede and the Erotics of Humanism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991); Elizabeth Pittenger, "'To Serve the Queere': Nicholas Udall, Master of Revels," in *Queering the Renaissance*, ed. Jonathan Goldberg (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994): 162–89.
- 17 A. M. Krich, ed., *The Homosexuals: As Seen by Themselves and Thirty Authorities*, 6th paperback edition (New York: The Citadel Press, 1968; first published 1954).
- 18 George E. Haggerty, "'Promoting Homosexuality' in the Classroom," in *Professions of Desire: Lesbian and Gay Studies in Literature*, eds. George E. Haggerty and Bonnie Zimmerman (New York: The Modern Language Association, 1995): 11–18, at p. 15.
- 19 Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500–1800* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005): 35.
- 20 Gilbert Herdt, *The Sambia: Ritual and Gender in New Guinea* (New York: Holt Rinehart, 1987); generally, Herdt, ed., *Ritualized Homosexuality in Melanesia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).
- 21 Ziauddin Sardar and Merry Wyn Davies, *Why Do People Hate America?* (New York: Dis-information, 2002): 171–91.
- 22 In the movie, at least, Shane's buckskin is blond, like Alan Ladd himself. In the book, just for starters, Shane shows up wearing black from head to toe, including even a black silk scarf. That outfit gets transferred in the movie, interestingly enough, to the baddest of the bad guys: Wilson, the hired gunslinger, played by Jack Palance in a memorable performance that earned him an Oscar nomination.
- 23 Jack Schaefer, *Shane* (New York: Bantam, 1975 [1949]).
- 24 *Ibid.*, 6.
- 25 This represents one of the very many improvements that A. B. Guthrie Jr's Oscar-nominated screenplay makes to Jack Schaefer's sub-literary novel.
- 26 Michael Davidson speaks, accordingly, of "compulsory homosociality" among men in Cold War America: see Davidson, *Guys Like Us: Citing Masculinity in Cold War Poetics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
- 27 I owe this pointed observation to Alex Potts.