In the concluding chapter of *Sexual Inversion*, Havelock Ellis turns with considerable circumspection to the vexing problem of the correction and consolation of the "sexual invert." In the especially vexed case of the presumptively incorrigible "congenital invert"—in the case, that is, of a person who is the "victim of abnormal [homosexual] impulses" that spring ineluctably from "the central core of organic personality"—consolation through sublimation constitutes the only available palliation because the invert's "inborn constitutional abnormality" remains, by definition, nonductile and fundamentally resistant to "psychotherapeutical [and] surgical treatment." Nonetheless, the impossibility of effective medical remediation did not legitimate an active homosexual genitality. Instead, and for reasons less medical than political and practical, Ellis prescribed the difficult consolation of a more than Penelopean patience: "it is the ideal of chastity, rather than normal sexuality, which the congenital invert should hold before his eyes." Yet if the rigors of so sustained a specular meditation upon "the ideal of chastity" were likely to produce an intense ocular strain, then perhaps this difficulty could be mitigated by a practical program of displacement and surrogate satisfaction: a regimen of sublimation—a course of psychosexual exercises, or, as Ellis cheerfully called it, a "method of self-restraint and self-culture, without self-repression." A civilization, it would seem, without the burden of much discontent.

What does Ellis offer as his primary example of this "method of self-treatment," of "how by psychic methods to refine and spiritualize the inverted impulse"? It is nothing less, and nothing other, than a list of books to read and imitate: a prophylactic mimesis. Such remedial homosexual reading, at once consolatory and disciplinary, would serve a double or ambivalent function: the verbal substitution would express the desire it also nonetheless worked to contain, and the text would be at once the home of desire and the site of its exile. (The *Memoirs of John Addington Symonds* narrate a personal history of this agonistic Victorian belief in
efficient homosexual sublimation. Early in his literary career, Symonds had hoped
that "literary and imaginative palliatives" would double as both "the vehicle and
the safety valve for [the] tormenting preoccupations" that beset the victims of
"this inexorable and incurable disease."* Later he would regard such belief as pure—and self-destructive—fantasia.) First among the exemplary texts enlisted
by Ellis in his program of literary surrogation are, predictably enough, the
dialogues of Plato, which "have frequently been found a source of great help and
consolation by inverted." Indeed, the reading of Plato, especially the Phaedrus and
the Symposium, had for nineteenth-century gay males the force of a revelation.
Symonds' case history in Sexual Inversion, transcribed by Ellis into the third per-
son, is representative: "It was in his eighteenth year that an event occurred which
he regards as decisive in his development. He read Plato. A new world opened,
and he felt that his own nature had been revealed."* This topos of self-recognition
via Platonic texts is of course a staple in the cultural construction of nineteenth-
century male homosexual subjectivity. Second in order of emphasis in Ellis' itin-
erary of inverted reading is, again predictably, Whitman's Leaves of Grass, with "its
wholesome and robust ideal" of "manly love," although Whitman's exuberant sen-
nuality and aboriginal stance rendered his poetry "of more doubtful value for
general use." Again, Symonds on Whitman has representative value: Leaves of Grass
"became for me a kind of Bible. Inspired by 'Calamus' I adopted another method
of palliative treatment, and tried to invigorate the emotion I could not shake off by
absorbing Whitman's conception of comradeship. . . . The immediate result of
this study of Walt Whitman was the determination to write the history of pederastia
in Greece [i.e., Symonds' A Problem in Greek Ethics] and to attempt a theoretical
demonstration of the chivalrous enthusiasm which seemed to me implicit in com-
radeship."* Here, in the translation of desire into sexual discourse, and of sexual
discourse into more sexual discourse, we may see a paradigmatic example of
Ellis' program of disciplinary reading and writing, itself a striking confirmation of
Foucault's assertion that the nineteenth century worked assiduously to put sex
into discourse.*

But if Ellis felt the rhetorical need to demur at Whitman's anatomical insistence,
his barely veiled genital reference, Ellis had the advantage of an absolutely ca-
nonical counter-example, a Victorian text whose passionate discursivity and sex-
ual obliquity everywhere marked its submission to the Victorian imperative "to re-
fine and spiritualize" this problematic desire. He turned with confidence to In
Memoriam: "Various modern poets of high ability have given expression to emo-
tions of exalted or passionate friendship towards individuals of the same sex,
whether or not such friendship can properly be termed homosexual. It is scarcely
necessary to refer to In Memoriam, in which Tennyson enshrined his affection for
his early friend, Arthur Hallam, and developed a picture of the universe on the
basis of that affection."* Ellis' sentences here pivot on an ambivalence that we
should recognize as our own: it may be "scarcely necessary" to adduce In Me-
moriam in this homosexual context, so famous is it as a site of exalted friendship
and erotic displacement, yet Ellis equivocates, as indeed he must, as to "whether
or not such friendship can properly be termed homosexual." Ellis' verbal equi-
poise here—his dichotomous need to affirm the homosociality of Tennyson's poem while refusing to specify the homosexuality of Tennysonian desire—responds faithfully both to Ellis' own delicate discursive situation as a writer of suspect texts and to a certain strategic equivocation within In Memoriam itself, an equivocation accurately identified by Edward Carpenter when he described In Memoriam as being "reserved" and "dignified" "in [its] sustained meditation and tender sentiment" but as also "half revealing here and there a more passionate feeling."* Exactly this strategic equivocation defines the critical and taxonomic problem of whether In Memoriam "can properly be termed homosexual."

This is not to deny but rather to assume and affirm that desire in In Memoriam pivots and circulates around Hallam as around "the centre of a world's desire."** Or, rather more accurately, around Hallam's absconded presence, for he is, as Carol Christ writes, "the absent center around which the poem moves."*** But if Hallam is Tennyson's "central warmth diffusing bliss," the elegy negotiates its problematic desire less by a centering of its warmth than by the dispersion of its bliss, less by acts of specific definition than by strategies of deferral, truncation, and displacement: strategies that everywhere work to "refine and spiritualize" what otherwise would be "the wish too strong for words to name" (p. 93). But In Memoriam is more than a machine for the sublimation, management, or erasure of male homosexual desire. It is, rather, the site of a continuing problematization: a problematization not merely of desire between men but also of the desire, very urgent in the elegy, to speak it.

A certain anxiety attends the reading of In Memoriam, and always has. The first reviews were, of course, largely laudatory, but a palpable dis-ease haunts particular early responses. An anonymous review in the Times (November 28, 1851), now usually attributed to Manley Hopkins, father of the Victorian poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, specifically complained of the elegy's erotic metaphors, its "strange manner of address to a man, even though he be dead."**** A "defect," this reviewer noted, "which has painfully come out as often as we take up the volume, is the tone of—may we say so!—amatory tenderness." "Very sweet and plaintive these verses are," Hopkins the elder continued, "but who would not give them a feminine application? Shakespeare may be considered the founder of this style in English." Here the reviewer's palpable gender anxiety, his fear of the unhinged gender within Tennyson's poetic voice, reflects the bewildering ease with which Tennyson employs heterosexual desire and marriage as a trope to represent his passion for lost Hallam: a tropological indiscretion, the reviewer assumes, derived from "floating remembrances of Shakespeare's sonnets," which "present the startling peculiarity of transferring every epithet of womanly endearment to a masculine friend—his master-mistress, as he calls him by a compound epithet, harsh, as it is disagreeable." This homoerotic linkage of In Memoriam to Shakespeare's sonnets is not anomalous. In another anonymous review, Charles Kingsley found in In Memoriam a descendent of "the old tales of David and Jonathan, Damon and Pythias, Socrates and Alcibiades, Shakespeare and his nameless friend, of 'love passing the love of woman,'" although recently Christopher Ricks has
charged Kingsley with “recklessness” and has balked at the allusion to 2 Samuel, calling it “that perilous phrase.” By the 1890s, when Tennyson’s son Hallam wrote his biography-cum-hagiography Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir (1897), the perils of what Ricks calls the “homosexual misconstruction” incited Hallam to a prudential pruning of any material that might conduce to equivocal interpretation. For example, as Ricks’ biography of Tennyson informs us, when Hallam quoted Benjamin Jowett regarding “the great sorrow of [Tennyson’s] mind,” he carefully elided anything suggesting what Jowett called, with discreet indirection, “a sort of sympathy with Hellenism.” Jowett’s comment on Tennyson’s grief, that “it would not have been manly or natural to have lived in it always,” succumbed to Hallam’s editorial prudence and was cut from the Memoir.

Very much the same critical propensity to keep Tennyson “manly and natural” has governed more recent criticism of In Memoriam, although modern evasions of the poem’s disturbing sexuality have generally demonstrated more cunning than Hallam Tennyson’s. Perhaps the simplest of contemporary critical circumventions of In Memoriam’s homoerotic discourse are those, like Jerome Buckley’s Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet (1960), that don’t find sexuality pertinent at all to the elegy’s recuperative desiring. A more intriguing strategy for negotiating the problematics of same gender desire can be found in Harold Bloom’s early essay “Tennyson, Hallam, and Romantic Tradition” (1966), in which Bloom declares, with a falsifying assurance, that it “need disturb no one any longer . . . that Tennyson’s Muse was (and always remained) Hallam.” Bloom’s poetic/sexual centering of Hallam is of course substantially correct, but his cosmopolitan poise would be more convincing did he not directly exculpate himself from further musing on homoerotic muses by saying, first, that “the sexual longings of a poet qua poet appear to have little relation to mere experience anyway” and by saying, second, that “the analytical sophistication in aesthetic realms that would allow a responsible sexual history of English poetry is not available to us.” There is therefore very little to say. We may see in Bloom’s passing acknowledgment of the homosexual subject an ambivalence characteristic of our tradition’s reading of this poem. On the one hand he acknowledges the inescapable homoerotics of In Memoriam’s elegiac desire, while on the other he precludes a sustained and detailed analysis of that desire by foreclosing critical access to either “mere experience” (which in the case of Tennyson and Hallam is unrevealing anyway) or to the “analytical sophistication” that would render such criticism “responsible.”

Furthermore, Bloom’s blithe assurance that Hallam’s erotic centrality in In Memoriam “need disturb no one any longer” seems not to have had its pacifying effects; seems indeed to have gone unheeded, for in 1972 (six years after Bloom’s essay) Christopher Ricks in his astute critical biography Tennyson paused for some ten pages to worry over precisely this issue. “But do we too,” Ricks asks, “need to speak bluntly? Is Tennyson’s love for Hallam a homosexual one?” Ricks’ answer—I doubt that I am betraying any suspense here—is no, although a number of equivocations beset this denial. His discussion of this anxiogenic question opens with a gesture that recalls Bloom’s deferral of adequate discus-
sion to that millennial day when analytic sophistication in aesthetic realms will enable intelligent discourse; but whereas Bloom's displacement is temporal, Ricks' is spatial. Disclaiming the authority of literary criticism altogether, Ricks invokes another professional discipline, and a predictable one: "the crucial acts of definition will have to be left to the psychologists and psychiatrists, though it should be said that literary historians usually vitiate their arguments by conveniently jumbling the old severely differentiating view with the newer 'something of it in everybody' one." Such recourse to psychiatry and psychology does double duty; in submitting poetry to pathology the literary critic escapes ultimate responsibility for what must remain a literary decision about the representational function of desire in the text, while simultaneously and inescapably situating that decision within an ideological economy of disease, dysfunction, and presumptively desirable remediation. Implicit in this gesture is the normativizing hope that Tennyson was not "bluntly" "homosexual" or, in Ricks' other locution, "abnormally abnormal." More importantly still, the deferral of literary decision to medical authority quite simply misses the point. The question at issue is not the history of Tennyson's genitalia (which Tennyson's most recent biographer suggests would yield a rather brief and tedious narrative) nor the potentially psychopathic trajectories of an obviously tortured psyche. Rather, as we shall see, the issue that matters here is the function of represented sexual desire within the verbal economy we call In Memoriam and within the larger tradition of representation from which the poem arises and to which it continues to direct its strange manner of address.

Ricks' extended "defense (so to speak) of Tennyson" against imputations of homosexuality remains sympathetic to certain Tennysonian notions of an orderly and conventional androgyne, of an androgyne that perhaps mitigates but never subverts the disciplinary bifurcation of gender characteristics, as when Tennyson admonishes that "men should be androgynous and women gynandrous, but men should not be gynandrous nor women androgynous." "* A transparent ambivalence informs Tennyson's sentence: on the one hand a desire to escape the containments of gender, on the other a desire to contain the escape. Tennyson's precise marshalling of prefixes and suffixes, of fronts and backs, of (to borrow one of Ricks' metaphors) "heads" and "tails," bespeaks an anxiety of gender inversion strong enough to require careful regulation at the level of the signifier. If signifiers can be compelled into remaining "jubilantly straight" (Ricks again), perhaps signifieds will follow suit. The disciplinary punctilio of gender enacted by Tennyson's sentence suggests one reason for the obliquity of sexual representation in In Memoriam, and it certainly anticipates the dis-ease circulating throughout Ricks' defense of Tennyson's (hetero)sexuality.

The foregoing reading of our tradition's reading of In Memoriam, brief and partial as it is, is intended to suggest the conceptual and imagistic burden suffered by our culture's discourse on same gender eroticism. In Memoriam remains a pivotal case in this regard precisely because the problematic of the poem's erotic representations are indistinguishable from readerly problems of interpretation and feeling. To mouth the Tennysonian "I," as the reader of this poem must repeatedly and
obsessively do, is to bespeak (for the duration of reading at least) an anxiogenic identification with the poet's fierce reparational desire, a longing that regularly presses to a transgressive homosexual verge. But In Memoriam approaches this verge only when compelled by an incommensurate grief. Why, we must now ask, does In Memoriam disclose homosexual desire as indissociable from death? As itself a mode of mourning? Why this constitutive linking of desire and death?

In In Memoriam death discovers desire, the latter arriving in and as the wake of the former. The linkage between desire and death is not a causal metaphorical articulation; it is rather a causal narrative one. For in the very personal erotic myth that In Memoriam so extensively develops, the death of Hallam, when "God's finger touch'd him, and he slept" (P. 85), initiates in the poet both a recuperational homosexual desire—a desire to restore to its preschismatic unity the "divided hal[ves] of such / A friendship as had master'd Time"—and, what is worse, a desperate need to speak this potentially philosophic "desire and pursuit of the whole" under the aegis of a transgressive erotics.28 "Descend, and touch, and enter," Tennyson dangerously pleads, and "hear / The wish too strong for words to name" (P. 93). The extremity of such expression, its desperate mode of erotic address, derives from the poet's belated recognition that no other human love will ever be "as pure and whole / As when he loved me here in Time" and from the correlative fear that "love for him [may] have drain'd / My capabilities of love" (PP. 43, 85). Thus desire's duration, the temporal and spatial extensions of this very distended text's poetic wooing (cf. P. 85, "I woo your love"), commences not with Arthur's desirable presence (for when Arthur is present desire and language are redundant media), but rather with its opposite, with the poet's recognition that his "dear friend" has become in death's difference "my lost Arthur's loved remains" (PP. 129, 9). The language of active desiring therefore finds its origin in a death or terminus that retrospectively figures the gap or aporia intervening between the now disjunct members of an ontologically prior wholeness or sameness whose unitary gender remains emphatically, inescapably male. In what we may now correctly call the hom(m)osexual economy of In Memoriam, death and not gender is the differential out of which desire is so painfully born.29

This structure of desire entrains certain disciplinary relations which are coextensive with, indistinguishable from, the desire itself. The elegiac mode disciplines the desire it also enables: on the one hand the sundering of death instigates an insistent reparational longing, on the other it claustrates the object of this desire on the far side of a divide that interdicts touch even as it incites the desire for touching. An infinite desire is infinitely deferred, subject always to postponement, displacement, diffusion. Death thus inscribes a prophylactic distance, as Tennyson himself suggested in a related context. Commenting on the initial line of poem 122 ("Oh, wast thou with me, dearest, then"), the poet said: "If anybody thinks I ever called him 'dearest' in his life they are much mistaken, for I never even called him 'dear.'" Ricks finds this statement "naïve perhaps, but not tonally suggestive of homosexuality."30 I would say, rather, that such "naïvety" marks Tennyson's perfectly Victorian strategy of linguistic displacement, precisely be-
cause it embeds "homosexuality" within an idealizing elegiac register. This is to repeat the elegy's own insistence that the interfiguration of desire and death derives from a tropological necessity: "Let Love clasp Grief lest both be drown'd" (P. 1). What is "saved" in this embrace is a poetic logic that instantiates homosexual desire as already its own distantiating. "My prime passion [is] in the grave," and "so hold I commerce with the dead" (P. 85).

Of course, as Victorian and modern readers have been quick to notice, the formal solution to this problem is Christ. In a way that is so straightforward as to be transparent, Tennyson would master his unconventional desire for Hallam by figuring it as a subspecies of a very conventional desire for "the Strong Son of God" (Prologue). A perfectly conventional trope of typological interpretation enables Tennyson to represent Hallam as a "noble type / Appearing ere the times were ripe" (Epilogue)—as, that is, a medial character whose death repeated the ontologically prior sacrifice of the other "He that died" (P. 84) and whose earthly presence had pointed to the superior consummation of a second coming. Yet simply to identify Hallam and Christ as interpenetrated figures of erotic and religious devotion is to repeat what the criticism has already noticed. "In Memoriam," Gerhard Joseph writes, "describes the transformation of Hallam into an analogue of Christ; to render this Hallam-Christ accessible Tennyson eroticizes him, giving him female attributes." 23 Joseph's sentence is of course summarily correct (correct, that is, as a summary), but the pages to follow will argue that a more capable understanding of Tennyson's fluent erotics demands that we pause at length to consider how In Memoriam articulates the analogy between Hallam and Christ, and how that analogy works to relieve the speaker's desperate erotic distress, a distress that is indistinguishable from his grief. To rush to the Christological or phallogocentric solution—to chant complacently with Tennyson, "Love is and was my lord and king" (P. 126)—is to risk another terminological reduction, one that, in its leap to the available comforts of a conventional faith, fails to register the anxious and fluctuant interfusion of sexual desire and religious faith in a poem justly more famous for the quality of its oscillations than for the force of its closural affirmation. In Memoriam, Eliot was right to say, "is not religious because of the quality of its faith, but because of the quality of its doubt." 24 If, making explicit what Eliot in his essay leaves implicit, we recognize doubt as a figure of desire, as a mode of suspension poised between the loss of Hallam and the promise of his restoration in a Christological embrace, then we will have begun to trace the homoerotic basis of the elegy's extensive yearning.

In its most orthodox articulation, Tennyson's typological strategy figures Hallam as a quotidian declension, a beautiful but fallen simulacrum of the absolutely perfect and ontologically prior archetype of Christ himself. The disciplinary and transferential trajectory of such a figural strategy is clear: a desire that would seem to begin in Hallam is discovered to begin and end in Christ, whose forgiving body safely absorbs, relays, and completes a fierce homoerotic cathexis. The elegy's sustained appeal to the "conclusive bliss" (P. 85) of its Christological closure identifies apocalyptic death as the site of a deferred but certain erotic restoration. In the closural ecstasy of the "one far-off divine event / To which the whole cre-
ation moves," a similitifying Christ will "take" the lovers' riven halves and restore them to a "single soul" (P. 84). In Memoriam thus solves the problem of desire's divisiveness by fantasizing a dissolving incorporation:

Dear friend, far oft, my lost desire
So far, so near in woe and weal;
O loved the most, when most I feel
There is a lower and a higher;
Known and unknown; human, divine;
Sweet human hand and lips and eye;
Dear heavenly friend that canst not die,
Mine, mine, for ever, ever mine. (P. 129)

As is perhaps obvious, the intermediate qualities identified in these quatrains refer equally or indistinguishably to Hallam and to Christ. The blended might of erotic and religious devotion at once mediates and idealizes the poet's indefatigable longing for "that dear friend of mine who lives in God" (Epilogue); in this transfiguration the conventional topoi of a reparational theology subsume and discipline the transgressive force of Tennyson's elegiac desire.

As is consistent with its consolatory structure, In Memoriam both begins and ends with an orthodox stress upon this Christological figuration. Begins and ends, that is, with promises of a condition that transcends the unappeasable homosexual longing that drives the poem's extended middle. For as In Memoriam opens, the problematics of elegiac desire — of, that is, desire for the dead and desire for death as recuperated sameness — have already found their solution in Christ; or so at least the pietistic voice of the Prologue suggests:

Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
Who art, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove;

Thine are those orbs of light and shade;
Thou madest Life in man and brute;
Thou madest Death; and lo, thy foot
Is on the skull which thou hast made.

Thou wilt not leave us in the dust:
Thou madest man, he knows not why,
He thinks he was not made to die;
And thou hast made him: thou art just.

That the Prologue, which was written last and therefore postdates the composition of the earliest lyrics by some seventeen years, should offer the image of a Christocentric "embrace" as the elegy's apparently originary gesture very well figures the evasive dislocations, both temporal and spatial, required to manage the anxieties generated by Tennyson's "lost desire."\(^\text{25}\) Indeed, part of the disciplinary work of the Prologue specifically, as of the Christological figuration generally, is thus belatedly to install a fantasized terminus (the promise of Christ's restorative embrace) in the place of the origin (the rift opened by Hallam's death) in order thereby to mask the apostasy intrinsic to a personal love that is, to borrow Bloom's apt phrase, "about as restrained and societal as Heathcliff's passion."\(^\text{26}\)
Within the figural economy of *In Memoriam*, the Christocentric impulse works its consolatory changes largely through the extended trope by which Christ’s hand comes to substitute for Hallam’s own; the oft-repeated images of “clasp,” “touch,” and “embrace” are all local variations on this trope. Indeed, as the criticism has already noticed, *In Memoriam* is almost obsessive in its concern for the human hand and in its desire for a restored male touch. Noting correctly that “Tennyson’s love for Hallam is the overriding subject of *In Memoriam*,” John D. Rosenberg continues: “Indeed, Tennyson’s unending speculation on immortality is rooted in his inexhaustible impulse to visualize and to touch Hallam. Hence the ubiquitous image of the hand.” Ubiquitous indeed, Hallam’s “sweet human hand” (P. 129) is at once this text’s primary synecdoche for presence (“hands so often clasp’d in mine”; P. 10); for absence (“A hand that can be clasp’d no more”; P. 7); and for the medial condition between these two (that crepuscular state of “dreamy touch,” during which the poet is left “waiting for a hand”; PP. 44, 7). Certainly the elegy’s explicit recommendation that “Love clasp Grief lest both be drown’d” cathect the hand with a semantic charge that oscillates obscurely between the homosocial and the homosexual. At times the poet’s desire that Hallam “should strike a sudden hand in mine” (P. 14) takes on a startling sexual configuration:

Tears of a widower, when he sees
A late-lost form that sleep reveals,
And moves his doubtful arms, and feels
Her place is empty, fall like these;

Which weep a loss for ever new
A void where heart on heart reposèd;
And, where warm hands have prest and closed,
Silence, till I be silent too. (P. 13)

Tennyson’s specification of the squeeze of the hand as a multivalent site of male homosocial communion is anything but anomalous in Victorian literature, although the extraordinary repetitiveness in his use of this figure may well be so. The utility of the hand as at once an overdetermined and unstable signifier is, I take it, manifest and obvious: on the one hand, the “manly” handshake and the “fraternal” embrace are respectable, disciplined, and sexually innocent gestures of Victorian male homosociality (imagine, for instance, counting the handshakes in Dickens); on the other hand, such gestures, given a slightly altered social context, only too readily take on the heat and the pressure of the sexual. A mobile figure, the hand ranges dexterously across the entire male homosocial spectrum. Consider what happens when fingers wander:

I stripped him naked, and fed sight, touch and mouth on these things. Will my lips ever forget their place upon his breast, or on the tender satin of his flank, or on the snowy whiteness of his belly? Will they lose the nectar of his mouth—those opened lips like flower petals, expanding neath their touch and fluttering? Will my arms forget the strain of his small fragile waist, my thighs the pressure of his yielding thighs, my ears the murmur of his drowsy voice, my brain the scent of his sweet flesh and breathing mouth? Shall I ever cease to hear the metallic throb of his mysterious heart—calm and true—ringing little bells beneath my ear?

I do not know whether, after all, the mere touch of his fingers as they met and clasped and put aside my hand, was not of all the best. For there is the soul in the fingers. They speak. The body is but silent, a dumb eloquent animated work of art made by the divine artificer. 26
The ambivalent gesture that dominates this passage from the *Memoirs of John Addington Symonds* very well figures the cloven subjectivity Symonds associates with sexual inversion while it also tellingly exercises the ambivalence at hand here. "For [if] there is a soul in the fingers" and if "they speak," then what they bespeak is a riveness so integral to soul that soul must celebrate its own alienation. The touch that repels touch touches fulfillment; to have one's hand "put aside" is indeed "all the best." As a self-nominated invert who understood himself to be "a compound of antagonistic impulses" and whose sexual praxis included mutual masturbation, Symonds repeatedly inclined toward the hand as a figure, and a mode, of self-expression: "I knew that my right hand was useless—firmly clenched in the grip of an unconquerable love, the love of comrades. But they [i.e., those who criticized 'the languor of my temperament'] stung me into using my left hand for work, in order to contradict their prognostications [of failure]."]29

When one hand is busy at pleasure, the other apparently may be stung by criticism into the compensation of good work. Clearly enough, the heterosexalizing semiotics of Victorian masculinity inscribe a developmental trajectory by which the boy's hand of pleasure must pass into the mature hand of work (a trajectory, obviously, that Symonds never quite mastered). What is understood to happen between boys in the dormitories of Harrow ("onanism, mutual masturbation, the sport of naked boys in bed together")30 must not happen, as Wilde was to discover, between men in the private dining rooms of, say, the Savoy Hotel. Hence the maturing boy's growing hand must be lifted from the specific genitality of an institutionalized homosexual pedagogy and carefully steered forth into the businesslike and sterilizing grip of a radically homophobic male homosociality. Handsome is indeed as handsome does; fingers must not wander.31

If, as I have suggested, these passages from Symonds' *Memoirs* present genitally specific analogues to *In Memoriam's* fetishizing of the hand, then it is also clear that large differences of tact and tactility distinguish the two discourses. Part of *In Memoriam's* rhetorical finesse is to articulate a desire whose intensities are sexual but whose modalities have already superseded the genital placement that Symonds' narrative works toward. Indeed, the elegy's typological figuration works against the "deviations" that Symonds breathlessly charts, especially so since *In Memoriam* chastens the longing of its hands by transfiguring Hallam's hands into Christ's own "shining hand." *In Memoriam* devises a trajectory by which a desire to touch Hallam is satisfied elsewhere, as when late in the poem "out of darkness came the hands / That reach thro' nature moulding men" (P. 124).32 And in turn these consoling hands point to the closural embrace in which Christ's outstretched apocalyptic hand will redeem—or, more literally, re-member (i.e., restore the hand to)—the interrupted secular embrace between the poet and Hallam. In that good moment the poet and his beloved will

Arrive at last the blessed goal,
And He that died in Holy Land
Would reach us out the shining hand,
And take us as a single soul. (P. 84)

The singular virtue of Christ's apocalyptic hand is that its finishing touch finishes everything and not the least of what it finishes—completes and erases—is the
constitutive ambivalence about intermasculine union that the metonymy of hands, as we have seen, so ambidexterously conveys. In the rapture which comes at his second coming, the handy interchangeability of Hallam and Christ insures a taking so complete that it leaves nothing—no one—to be desired.

But now we must clarify the heterodoxy which Tennyson's orthodox typology works to occlude. The consoling pieties of a conventional typological reading cannot quite obscure the elegy's strong impression that Christ is at best a belated lover who functions as the devotional succedaneum of which Hallam is the great original. Christ's otherwise redundant presence is fathered by Hallam's absence, since it is the loss of Hallam's hand and Hallam's embrace that alone motivates the re/pair/ational touch of Christ, whose hand must "shine" in order to obscure its transparent second-handedness. T. S. Eliot, who understood the anamorphic optics of Christological displacement well enough not to be blinded by the light, caught Tennyson at his sleight of hand. In what remains the best essay ever written on In Memoriam, Eliot handles this subject with characteristic and knowing finesse:

[Tennyson] was desperately anxious to hold to the faith of the believer, without being very clear about what he wanted to believe: he was capable of illumination which he was incapable of understanding. "The Strong Son of God, immortal Love," with an invocation of whom the poem opens, has only a hazy connection with the Logos, or Incarnate God. Tennyson is distressed by the idea of a mechanical universe; he is naturally, in lamenting his friend, teased by the hope of immortality and reunion beyond death. Yet the renewal craved for seems at best but a continuance, or a substitute for the joys of friendship upon earth. His desire for immortality never is quite the desire for eternal life; his concern is for the loss of man rather than the gain of God.  

We may say of Eliot here that the ease with which he manipulates clairvoyance into circumspection itself constitutes a brilliant critical response to the failure of tact in Tennyson's account of Christological tactility. In gently reproving Tennyson for dubious or eccentric theology, Eliot very clearly recognizes that the elegy's desire for Christ is "at best but a continuance, or a substitute for the joys of friendship upon earth." A stylistic chastisement is also implicit here. Consider, for instance, the revisionary subtlety with which Eliot redeployes Tennyson's language of desperate and anxious "holding," of "teasing," of "craving," and finally of "desiring." It is as if Eliot, performing a kind of post mortem refinement upon In Memoriam's language of desire, were chastening the precursor poet for the startling clarity of his longing to fill the "void where heart on heart [had once] reposed; / And, where warm hands have prest and closed" (P. 13). Eliot's tact inherits and then reproves Tennyson's passionate failure of it.

In the opening pages of "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud explicates the libidinal work that mourning performs:

In what, now, does the work which mourning performs consist? I do not think there is anything far-fetched in presenting it in the following way. Reality-testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to the object. This demand arouses understandable opposition—it is a matter of general observation that people never willingly abandon a libidinal position, not even, indeed, when a substitute is already beckoning to them. This opposition can be so intense that
a turning away from reality takes place and a clinging to the object through the medium of hallucinatory wishful psychosis. Normally, respect for reality gains the day. Nevertheless its orders cannot be obeyed at once. They are carried out bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathexic energy, and in the meantime the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged. Each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hypercathexed, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it. Why this compromise by which the command of reality is carried out piecemeal should be so extraordinarily painful is not at all easy to explain in terms of economics. It is remarkable that this painful unpleasure is taken as a matter of course by us. The fact is, however, that when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again.∗

In this compact synopsis of a libidinal dilemma that recalls Tennyson’s own, Freud delineates the process of “normal” mourning: an excruciating, fluctuant, and piecemeal process through which the mourner is compelled by the reality of loss to abandon one object cathexis in order that another object (“a substitute is already beckoning”) may in time be cathexed anew. A process, then, of abandonment and substitution. Intrinsic to this cruel process is a sometimes intractable resistance, a libidinal conservatism, a refusal willingly to abandon one’s attachment to the beloved object. In response to the irreconcilable demands of reality and desire, an ambivalent memorialization ensues. “Each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hypercathexed.” As Freud carefully stresses, this work of remembering performs a double or ambivalent function, a binding and an unbinding. On the one hand, the beloved object is revived and made present, even by “hallucinatory wish,” to consciousness; in this way “the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged.” On the other hand, and by way of an operation whose workings Freud leaves obscure, the same work of remembering accomplishes “detachment of the libido” in respect to the lost beloved; it unbinds or decathexes desiring subject and desired object. Every act of vivifying memory, Freud seems to imply, entrains a corresponding death, a fatal or terminal forgetting, if only because the desiring subject cannot, short of psychosis, sustain the phantasmic presence of the beloved. The lost object thus suffers a thousand posthumous deaths at the now murderous hands of the mourner. This, then, is the duplicitous work of mourning: to “prolong” in order to “detach,” to give birth in order to kill. Once this “work of mourning is completed” (once detachment overmasters prolongation), “the ego becomes free and uninhibited again”; free, that is, to become bound to a substitute object.

It is unnecessary, I think, to belabor the reader with an extended catalog of the striking (indeed obvious) symmetries between Freud’s account of mourning and Tennyson’s elegy. Instead, I would like to exploit Freud’s intuition regarding the ambivalence of memorialization in order to suggest the divided work of In Memoriam’s homosexual figuration; in order to suggest, that is, the ways in which In Memoriam resists its own ideology of recuperative substitution, Christological or otherwise, and the ways in which this resistance ensures the intractable circulation of male homosexual desire. For In Memoriam works to postpone the conclusive bliss it also wants to complete; thus at odds with its own desire to end.
desiring, the elegy wards off, even as it employs, an (eroto)logic of efficient sur-
rogation. Until that far off and divine event enfolds the poet and his beloved in its
closural embrace, the poet must instead endure the empty and passive space of
grief, the same space in which “the existence of the lost object is psychically pro-
longed.” It is finally this medial space of unclosed longing that In Memoriam me-
morializes. But there is compensation here too. Because disseminated Hallam in-
seminates everything, Tennyson as desiring subject partakes of an equivocal
expansion that helps him endure his subjection to desire:

Thy voice is on the rolling air;
I hear thee where the waters run;
Thou standest in the rising sun,
And in the setting thou art fair.

What art thou then? I cannot guess;
But tho’ I seem in star and flower
To feel thee some diffusive power,
I do not therefore love thee less:

My love involves the love before;
My love is vaster passion now;
Thou’st mix’d with God and Nature thou,
I seem to love thee more and more. (P. 130)

Not the least beauty of In Memoriam, nor its least cultural utility, can be traced in
these lines, which very well enact the ambivalent process of substitution that
Freud anatomizes in the passage above. Hallam is prolonged even as he is dis-
persed into simulacra whose “more and more,” Tennyson says, involve and ex-
tend “the love before.” This ambivalent procedure subjects male homosexual de-
sire to an almost sanitizing mediation. An intense desire for another male submits
itself, or is taught by privation to submit, to a mediating force, or “diffusive power,”
which generates the difference of a “vaster passion” whose very differences will in turn recondense (if Tennyson’s promise of the good moment holds) into the
closural bliss of an absolutely androcentric embrace. From sameness to same-
ness, then, but only through difference. If this is a disciplinary trajectory (and of
course it is), its particular strength resides in the quality of its ambivalence: on the
one hand, a startling and sometimes abrupt acknowledgment of intermasculine
desire and its right to bliss; and on the other hand, a formula for the mediation of
this desire by substitutes that bespeak a more conventional erotics of difference.

Of course the most obvious instance of such differentiating substitution is what
Ricks aptly calls “the reiterated metaphor of man and wife,” which both sexual-
izes and heterosexualizes the perduring grief whose extreme painfulness seems
to have forestalled whatever disciplinary anxiety would itself otherwise have fore-
stalled the use of an even heterosexually figured homosexual desire. Perhaps the
sheer straightforwardness of the requisite gender inversion is this figure’s most
disarming quality:

Two partners of a married life—
I look’d on these and thought of thee
In vastness and in mystery
And of my spirit as of a wife. (P. 97)
In Memoriam repeats, as Ricks says, this swerve toward heterosexual (only sometimes marital) figuration, and sometimes the gender assignments within the figure vary. In lyric 13, "Tears of a widower," which specifically recalls Milton's sonnet on the seeming return of his dead wife, Tennyson identifies himself as a male, though a weeping one; but it is of course more characteristic, given both the passivity of his grief and the feminization of passivity within Victorian gender codes, that Tennyson should feminize his waiting for Hallam as a "perpetual maidenhood" that expects "no second friend" (P. 6). Like Marianna, who fixedly grieves for the arrival of a male lover who "cometh not," Tennyson, as the speaker of In Memoriam, yearns in his (or her) stasis for a lover who will descend and touch and enter.

Yet the metaphor of heterosexual embrace remains—at least for Tennyson and Hallam—a figure of separation, interdiction, distance. "Woman exists only as an occasion for mediation, transaction, transition, transference, between man and his fellow man, indeed between man and himself." The very presence of woman signifies the rift or gap in sameness that the hetero, by definition, cannot heal. In Memoriam most characteristically sees the heterosexual embrace as always already interrupted, and as therefore a sign or structure whose primary service is painfully to repeat loss without ever recuperating loss into gain. Of course this is to deny the closural or restorative value of the thumpingly symbolic heterosexual marriage that so famously and unconvincingly closes—or almost closes—the elegy. As Tennyson himself said, "the poem concludes with the marriage of my youngest sister [to Edward Lushington]. It was meant to be a kind of Divina Commedia, ending with happiness." If Tennyson's argument for this particular variety of terminal bliss seems a little forced (more formal than felt), it is perhaps because this marriage quite obviously leaves the elegy's two central lovers still halved by desire, still unwed, the distastened participants (Hallam's spirit, Tennyson conjectures, is present as a silent "stiller guest") at a wedding whose symbolic reparations ignore the poem's primary erotic schism. Tennyson himself seems unconvinced by this account of heterosexual closure; as Rosenberg notes, his "posture in the closing epithalamium is mannered and false." When the poem quite correctly dismisses the newlyweds ("But they must go . . . and they are gone"); Epilogue and Tennyson "retire[s]" to his enduring loss, he must then dream (or dream up) the adequate recompense of this poem's other dream of closure: its prolepsis of the "one far-off divine event" whose phallogocentric erotics we have already examined. In a very linear way, therefore, the Epilogue represents, and indeed repeats, the elegy's desire to end desire happily first by superceding its own account of the closural satisfactions of heterosexual marriage and then by requiring its speaker once again to fantasize about the conclusive bliss that is offered only by—and only in the deferral of—that half-divine embrace with the compound "Christ that is to be" (P. 106). A promise, then, of homosexual closure rather than the thing itself; or rather a promise indistinguishable from its own deferral.

The sheer extensiveness of Tennyson's discourse of homosexual desire (no one ever wished the poem longer) derives, I think, from the inextricability of these two
countervailing desires: a terminal desire to close with Christ, and a medial desire
to forestall such bliss. Indeed, the very medium of Tennyson's spoken desire to
(re)embrace Hallam-in-Christ-and-Christ-in-Hallam depends upon the same en-
abling rupture or separation that this desire also wants rapturously to terminate.
The very desire to speak the end leaves one stranded in the desiring middle,
where "a use in measured language lies" (P. 5). This is a paradoxical condition
that can be readily measured into orthodox uses: a potentially transgressive de-
sire is obsessively evoked in order that it may be just as obsessively repeated in
words that "half reveal / And half conceal the soul within" (P. 5). The desiring sub-
ject is thus held back, by language as by death, from his proper place, but in
some sense he loves that displacement:

O days and hours, your work is this
To hold me from my proper place,
A little while from his embrace,
For fuller gain of after bliss:

That out of distance might ensue
Desire of nearness doubly sweet;
And unto meeting when we meet,
Delight a hundredfold accrue,

For every grain of sand that runs,
And every span of shade that steals,
And every kiss of toothed wheels,
And all the courses of the suns. (P. 117)

Here, in a totalizing eroticism that would be difficult to exceed, Tennyson submits
all things to desire in order thereby to achieve the submission of desire itself. If
Hallam had once been "the centre of a world's desire," its "central warmth dif-
fusing bliss" (p. 84), then in these lines he becomes diffuseness itself, as Tennyson
dutifully deploys the whole of creation—every grain, every span, all suns—in
order thus to facilitate the good Victorian work of interdicting the homoerotic em-
brace that is nonetheless acknowledged to be "my proper place." It may have
been death alone that set Tennyson to his specifically reparational wooing, but
these lines suggest the poet's own complicity with the duty of differentiation; for
just as it is the "work" of the world both to separate and remember lovers by incarn-
aturing difference, so it is the work of the poet's word to distribute his desire as
meaning—indeed, as the most over-determined of meanings—through the differ-
entiae of the otherwise blank natural world. The diffusive power of imagination
thus perfectly fetishizes the world. Where Hallam emphatically is not, Hallam
therefore everywhere is.

In a strategically double way, therefore, Tennyson retains the ontological pri-
macy of his desire for Hallam while he simultaneously disperses the perils of gen-
der sameness into the prophylactic difference of an absolute heterocosm, with
the inescapable residuum that "every kiss" of this therefore secondary hetero is
itself the disfigured memorial of a banished originary homo. The erotics of such a
substitutive structure are irreducibly ambivalent: since the homo is lost or ban-
ished only to be rediscovered in and as the hetero (which is itself thus constituted as a memorial of a former undifferentiated sameness), all longing remains longing for the homo even as it submits to the mediation of the hetero. Difference itself thus bespeaks a desire for sameness—speaks, like the poet, *in memoriam*.

It was, I think, to this strategic ambivalence that Ellis alluded when he recommended *In Memoriam* as a primary literary exemplar of how "by psychic methods to refine and spiritualize the inverted impulse." For Tennyson in the extremity of his grief had authored a virtual copy-text for the recognition and articulation of a homosexual desire whose subjective effects were almost palpable in their intensity but whose distantiated object had always already been exiled to a realm beyond touch if not beyond the desire for touching. In figuring Hallam's death as the terminus in which desire discovers its origin, Tennyson's discourse of homosexual longing instructs the desiring subject in the affined Victorian virtues of heroic patience and active surrogation, virtues which alone make it possible to endure a desire otherwise impossible of fulfillment. (They also serve who only stand and wait.) And in his figuration of the hetero as the diffused or encoded expression of the homo, as in his subsumption of erotic privation within an economy of symbolic compensations, Tennyson was in effect devising a translation machine for the conversion of the desire otherwise too strong to name; by 1850 he had provided a personal and exacting version of what Ellis, more than fifty years later, was still struggling to devise: "a method of self-restraint and self-culture, without self-repression." Revaluing the too easy optimism of Ellis' last prepositional phrase, we may begin to conclude by saying that Tennyson transvalued his passionate grief into a semiosis of homosexual desire in which the painful but presumably liberative work of recognition and accommodation blends indistinguishably into the work of discipline and containment. As Foucault would have said, incitement and repression are complicit here.

But to have said even this much is already to have overvalued the disciplinary register at the expense of its revisionary or oppositional complement; and it would be wrong to leave *In Memoriam* with so compliant an acceptance of its normativizing significations, important as it is for criticism to register these. For I would hope that Tennyson's elegy retains some of the transgressive force that so unsettled some of its first readers. Whatever bliss or agony the poem owns, it owes to its interminable desire for Hallam; nor can the dispersions of that "vaster passion" displace Hallam as the affective center of *In Memoriam*’s world of desire. In this sense, *In Memoriam* refuses to complete its work of mourning; refuses, that is, the work of normal (and normalizing) substitution. Thus, in the sheer ferocity of its personal loss, as in the extreme extensiveness of its reparational hungering, Tennyson's elegy manages to counterspeak its own submission to its culture's heterosexualizing conventions. In this view, our departing view, *In Memoriam* remains at its end what it had been at its beginning—a desiring machine whose first motive is the reproduction of lost Hallam—and as such it continues to do what it has always done best. It keeps its desire by keeping its desire desiring.39
NOTES

2. Ibid., p. 341.
3. Ibid.
9. Edward Carpenter, *Iolaus: An Anthology of Friendship* (New York, 1917; Pagan Press reprint, 1982), p. 181. My use of the notion of “homosociality” is derived from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York, 1985). Like Sedgwick I understand “male homosociality” to denote an entire spectrum of male bonds, only some of which are sexual; and I understand this spectrum or continuum to be historically marked by a phobic disruption that would severely disjoin the homosocial from the directly homosexual. It might be said of the intensity of *In Memoriam*’s elegiac desire that it problematically overrides or elides the disjunction that conventionally intervenes, so phobically, between what is social and what is sexual.
16. Since 1966, of course, Bloom has been writing a brilliant and responsible “sexual history of English poetry”: a history, not incidentally, in which a belated poet’s creative potency—his power of speech as self-production or self-fathering—is tested not in a heterosexual embrace with a female muse but rather in a distinctly oedipal tussle between men, during which the muscular ephbe, if indeed he be muscular enough, may wrest from his father/precurser the right and power of seminal speech. It is precisely this gladiatorial wrestling—during which the ephbe, now giving what he had been forced to take, reverses the temporal hydraulics of influence—that enables his subsequently productive intercourse with the text-to-be, whose essentially “feminine” receptivity has been, until that moment, effectively forfended by the father’s covering presence, by the oedipal force of his prior inscriptions. In Bloom’s agonistic reading, a text functions as an already inscribed mediatr, as an intervening distance or difference, between two competing familial male potencies whose displaced intercourse is poetry itself. The applicability of all this to *In Memoriam* is, to say the least, enticing, but as yet we have had from Bloom no revised misprision of Tennyson’s elegy.
18. Tennyson quoted in ibid., p. 218.
19. Partial indeed. These pages were written before the publication of Alan Sinfield’s excellent *Alfred Tennyson* (Basil Blackwood, 1986), which offers a “materialist” reading of same-sex desire in *In Memoriam*, see especially pp. 127–53. I admire Sinfield’s analysis and recommend it to anyone interested either in Tennyson or the historical construction of Victorian sexualities, unfortunately I discovered this book too late to employ its insights here.
20. I take the phrase “the desire and pursuit of the whole” from Benjamin Jowett’s translation of Plato’s 79
Symposium, where it is employed by Aristophanes to explicate a (problematically sexual) desire whose recuperative energy seeks to restore a lost ontological wholeness. David M. Halperin ("One Hundred Years of Homosexuality," Diacritics 16, no. 2 [1986]: 34–45) explains:

According to Aristophanes, human beings were originally round, eight-limbed creatures, with two faces and two sets of genitals—both front and back—and three sexes (male, female, and androgynous). These ancestors of ours were powerful and ambitious; to put them in their place, Zeus had them cut in two, their skin stretched over the exposed flesh and tied at the navel and their heads rotated so as to keep that physical reminder of their daring and its consequences constantly before their eyes. The severed halves of each former individual, once reunited, clung to one another so desperately and concerned themselves so little with their survival as separate entities that they began to perish for lack of sustenance; those who outlived their mates sought out persons belonging to the same gender as their lost complements and repeated their embraces in a foredoomed attempt to recover their original unity. Zeus at length took pity on them, moved their genitals to the side their bodies now faced, and invented sex, so that the bereaved creatures might at least put a terminus to their longing and devote their attention to other, more important matters.

From this narrative Aristophanes extracts, as Halperin says, "a genetic explanation of the observable differences among human beings with respect to sexual object-choice," an explanation that clearly establishes a formal isomorphism between female-female, male-male, and male-female desire. As Aristophanes says, "the reason is that human nature was originally one and we were whole, and the desire and pursuit of the whole is called love" (Benjamin Jowett, The Dialogues of Plato [Oxford, 1875], vol. 2, pp. 43–44).

21. I have taken the cross-lingual pun "hom(m)osexual" from Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, 1985), where it is used to designate the androcentric assumptions grounding Western notions of same-sex desire. See especially "Commodities among Themselves," pp. 192–98.

22. Ricks, Tennyson, p. 218.


25. Although the first lyrics in memory of Hallam were composed as early as 1833, the Prologue was not composed until 1849, as Tennyson arranged and assembled the individual elegies into the long poem we know as In Memoriam.


30. Ibid., p. 94.

31. For more on developmental homophobia, see Sedgwick, Between Men, pp. 176–77, where she proposes a "slow, distinctive two-stage progression from schoolboy desire to adult homophobia." Thinking of Dickens, she writes:

David Copperfield, among other books, makes the same point. David's infatuation with his friend Steerforth, who calls him "Daisy" and treats him like a girl, is simply part of David's education—though another, later part is the painful learning of how to triangulate from Steerforth onto women, and finally, although incompletely, to hate Steerforth and grow at the expense of his death. In short, a gentleman will associate the erotic end of the homosocial spectrum, not with dissipation, not with viciousness or violence, but with childishness, as an infantile need, a mark of powerlessness, which, while it may be viewed with shame or scorn or denial, is unlikely to provoke the virulent, accusatory projection that characterizes twentieth-century homophobia.
32. Rosenberg, who also quotes these lines, provides the apposite gloss: "Yet these hands, which Tennyson has sought throughout the poem, are not Hallam's but those of the immortal Love of the Prologue." Rosenberg in In Memoriam, p. 214.
33. Eliot in Hunt, Casebook, p. 133.
35. Ricks, Tennyson, p. 216.
39. The present essay is a shortened version of a dissertation chapter that has benefitted from a number of readings; for these I want especially to thank Carol Christ, Catherine Gallagher, D. A. Miller, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Alex Zwerdling.
Representation and Homophobia in The Picture of Dorian Gray

Richard Dellamora

Although homosexuality in the nineteenth century was often perceived as a disturbance in gender-relations, twentieth-century writers have often regarded it sui generis. In her recent book, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Eve Sedgwick proposes a persuasive case for viewing desire between men as part of the normal structure of gender-relations. According to Sedgwick, especially in the nineteenth century masculine privilege was sustained by male friendship within institutions like the public schools, the older universities, clubs, and the professions. Because, however, the continuing dominance of bourgeois males also required that they marry and produce offspring, the intensity and sufficiency of male bonding needed to be strictly regulated. Sedgwick locates the regulating mechanism in homophobia, a term whose current prominence in literary discussions she is responsible for. Homophobia (or what she refers to as “male homosexual panic”) regulates the limits of male friendship; the fear of ordinary males that they might be (or might be accused of being) homosexual compels them to direct their energies into marriage. “Because the paths of male entitement, especially in the nineteenth century, required certain intense male bonds that were not readily distinguishable from the most repressed bonds, an endemic and ineradicable state of...male homosexual panic became the normal condition of the male heterosexual entitement” (“The Beast in the Closet” (151)). The resulting situation is a double bind in which “the most intimate male bonding” is prescribed at the same time that “the remarkably cognate” homophobia is proscribed (152).

The opening of Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* provides an instance of this contradictory situation. One of the novel’s three male protagonists, the painter Basil Hallward, begins by confessing his passion—“I call it ‘idolatry’” (11)—for his young model, Dorian Gray. In a passage that Walter Pater quoted with approval in his 1891 review, Basil codifies his infatuation in terms of the synthesizing cultural ideal prominent in the writing of Matthew Arnold and Pater.

“Sometimes think, Harry, that there are only two eras of any importance in the world’s history. The first is the appearance of a new medium for art, and the second is the appearance of a new personality for art also. What the invention of oil-painting was to the Venetians, the face of Antinous was to late Greek sculpture, and the face of Dorian Gray will some day be to me. ... His personality has suggested to me an entirely new manner in art, an entirely new mode of style. I see things differently, I think of them differently. I can now recreate life in a way that was hidden from me before. ... Unconsciously, I mean for me the lines of a fresh school, a school that is to have as its all the passion of the romantic spirit, all the perfection of the spirit that is Greek. The harmony of soul and body—how much that is! We in our madness have separated the two, and have invented a realism that is vulgar, an ideality that is void. If you only knew what Dorian Gray is to me.” (9-10)

Hallward’s portrait of Dorian prophesies a Renaissance that is both cause and effect of a new way of life capable of integrating responsibility with an open attitude towards experience. This ideal is based in turn on delight in the male body and on a celebration of masculine desire.

Although the ideal brings to mind the early writing of Pater, especially the essay on Winckelmann (see Dellamora), there is a crucial difference between the homosexual contexts in which Pater affirms the ideal of cultural renewal in *The Renaissance and Marius the Epicurean* and the context that Wilde establishes. Wilde chooses what Sedgwick would call a male homosocial context in which to frame Basil’s version of Pater’s ideal: Basil confesses his “secret” (5) not to Dorian but to an old Oxford friend, Lord Henry Wotton. By definition this context is heterosexual. Wotton is married and pursues actresses. Basil himself is a graduate of Oxford, a well-established artist, and respectable to a fault. Later, he repeatedly enjoins Dorian to conformity. Both older men live in a network of male friendships that ramify through the novel.

Accordingly, even though Sedgwick remarks that “the triangular relationship of Basil, Dorian, and Lord Henry makes sense only in homosexual terms” (Between Men 176), one might more accurately say that homosexuality exists here within a heterosexual framework which demands that desire between men be negated. The demand is doubly ironic since the portrait in which Basil has revealed his secret is prominent both at the start and at the end of the novel. The painting suggests how the masculine desire that propels the action may be both acknowledged and objectified in ways that permit it to circulate and yet to be ever evaded in the form of genital contact between men. As a substitute for the desire that motivates it in the first place, the picture functions as a sign of economic, social, and gendered privilege: “the gracious and comely form” (1), a description redolent of the stylish portraiture of Wilde’s friend, John Singer Sargent, contrasts to the plebeian awkwardness of the brother of Dorian’s fiancé later: “He was thick-set of figure, and his hands and face were large, and somewhat clumsy in movement. He was not so finely bred as his sister” (61). The form, face, and color that attract Sibyl Vane signify the wealth, status, and power of Dorian and other men of his class. Her brother responds instinctively with a self-protective hatred of the “gentleman” (66) while just as spontaneously Basil, Sir Henry, and Dorian worship the representation.

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1. For nineteenth-century views see Weeks ch. 6.
2. Albert Boime makes detailed comparisons between Sargent and Basil Hallward in an essay included in the catalogue of the current exhibition of the works of John Singer Sargent.