

with discussion, research, preparation, and/or insightful reading of this manuscript. Finally thanks to Thomas B. Byers, Andrea K. Newlyn, Patrick O'Donnell, Dianne Sadoff, Robyn Wiegman, and Lynda Zwinger, whose friendship and intellectual stimulus made me want to finish this project.

INTRODUCTION

COMING TO

I have never begun a novel with such misgiving. If I call it a novel it is only because I don't know what else to call it. I have a little story to tell and I end neither with a death nor a marriage. Death ends all things and so is the comprehensive conclusion of a story, but marriage finishes it very properly too and the sophisticated are ill-advised to sneer at what is by convention termed a happy ending. It is a sound instinct of the common people which persuades them that with this all that needs to be said is said. When male and female, after whatever vicissitudes you like, are at last brought together they have fulfilled their biological function and interest passes to the generation that is to come.

—W. Somerset Maugham, *The Razor's Edge*, p. 1

I have never begun a book with such misgiving. If I call it a book it is only because I don't know what else to call it. I have a little theory to propose and I end neither with an answer nor a proposal. The answer ends all things and so is the comprehensive conclusion to a theory, but

a proposal finishes it very properly too and the sophisticated are ill-advised to sneer at what is by convention termed a satisfying ending. It is a sound instinct of the common people which persuades them that with this all that needs to be said is said. When question and answer, after whatever vicissitudes you like, are at last brought together they have fulfilled their philosophical function and interest passes to the issues that are to come.

This book's question is how ideas of narrative and sexuality inform one another. How do twentieth-century Western cultural understandings of narrative infect, mold, determine, and/or reproduce understandings of sexuality and how do understandings of sexuality influence, define, configure, and/or reproduce narrative? Since I surmise from the start that narrative and sexuality somehow jointly engender and reproduce a heterosexual ideology, I have already brought them together to fulfill their figuratively "biological" or in any case (re)productive function. But my interest does not pass to the "generation" to come, it sticks obsessively to how I might undo the story I have concocted.

As I trace the stubborn pairing of narrative and sexuality through the lengthy vicissitudes of psychoanalysis and structuralist theories of narrative, through analyses of short stories, novels, films, and television shows, and finally through a critique of the politics of identity and identification, I cannot disengage them. My failure does not leave the thankfully surviving couple together for a conventionally satisfying ending; there seems to be no chance for a happier, less oppressive confederation between the two nor can I find a way to finagle their opportune divorce. Like Maugham's indeterminate novel, this book terminates uncertainly with the question of how to break narrative and sexuality apart, entwined as they are (and we with them) like tragically doomed lovers whirling around Dante's third circle.

If Maugham's novel recipe begets a good story, then this book may not be a good story. But perhaps Maugham is not quite right; perhaps the end is always in the beginning and a story's satisfaction consists in going on anyway. In any case, we cannot escape narrative, even imperfect narratives, since narrative is the inevitable register through which we define, reason, analyze, criticize, and comprehend the protagonists—narrative and sexuality—in this story. Let me therefore introduce the players so they can fulfill whatever function scholarly inquiry decrees.

THE NARRATIVE OF NARRATIVE

"To raise the question of the nature of narrative," Hayden White observes, "is to invite reflection on the very nature of culture and, possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself."¹ Linking narrative to culture and humanity, White sketches narrative's pivotal operation not as the mere proliferation of stories but rather as a complete and definitive engagement with our concepts of culture. Declaring narrative's total omnipresence, Roland Barthes asserts that "narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself."² Of course, narrative is not "simply there"; its shapes, assumptions, and operations manifest a complex, naturalized process of organization, relation, and connection. Narrative is so subtly and ubiquitously operative that I cannot even define it except through narrative—a narrative of narrative where parts come together to make a sensible whole. And you would not be able to comprehend my observations about narrative unless I cast them in a narrative form.³

Narrative constantly reproduces the phantom of a whole, articulated system, where even the concept of a system is a product of narrative, where the idea that there are such things as parts and wholes is already an effect of a narrative organizing. As a pervasive sense of the necessary shape of events and their perception and as the process by which characters, causes, and effects combine into patterns recognized as sensical, narrative is the informing logic by which individuality, identity, and ideology merge into a cooperative and apparently unified vision of the truths of existence. As a set of ordering presumptions by which we make sense of perceptions, events, cause/effect relations (and even the idea that sense can be produced by a notion of cause/effect), and life, narrative permeates and orders any representation we make to ourselves or to others. As a cultural, psychological, ideological dynamic, narrative aligns disparate forces and elements into productive configurations of difference and opposition. These configurations produce the perpetual opportunity for synthesis, for totalizing, cathartic gestures linked to insight, knowledge, reproduction, and temporary stability.

Narrative's pervasiveness makes it difficult to locate. One discourse among many, narrative appears to organize our understandings of discourse and its divisions. Its omnipresence, ranging from the local and idiosyncratic to the cultural and philosophical, makes narrative seem both artifact and organizing principle, text and the embodiment of ide-

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ology itself. This sense of narrative ubiquity is further bolstered by the fact that narrative does not exist or operate separately from other modes—identity, ideology, subjectivity, and sexuality—by which we organize existence and experience. The significant categories of life are already narrative both in our apprehension of them as significant and in our understanding of that significance. While narrative's organizing function seems to situate it as a powerful ur-force, its ubiquity is probably more an effect of its representational capabilities. Narrative's intersection of language, psychology, and ideology makes it an appropriate and compelling construct for the negotiation and containment of the contradictions and anxieties that inevitably attend the focal and delusively stable organizations of existence.

Its myriad loci suggest that narrative both operates like ideology and is shaped by ideology. Generally speaking, "ideology is the system of ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man [sic] or a social group."⁴ While this is Louis Althusser's reading of Marx's concept of ideology in a context quite different from any analysis of narrative, it has the virtue of proposing ideology as a system that operates in some relation to representations. For Althusser, ideology operates as a part of dominant apparatus, representing "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (153). The material conditions of production comprise the context for this rendering of ideology; ideology is one way the relations of production are reproduced. While narrative undoubtedly participates in constructing, managing, and reproducing this "imaginary relationship," narrative's far-reaching and diverse operation suggests that a less focused framework might better capture narrative's aegis.

Roland Barthes' rendering of ideology is probably more descriptive of an ideology coextensive with narrative's broad context. In his examination of the cultural operation of myth, Barthes sees bourgeois ideology as a particular confusion of nature and history, where the historical is rendered natural.⁵ While this confusion explains specific ways the bourgeoisie has rendered its interests universal, the model of an ideology that works through "signs which pass themselves off as natural which offer themselves as the only conceivable way of viewing the world," which "convert culture into nature," which "'naturalize' social reality" and "make it seem as innocent and unchangeable as Nature itself," resonates with both narrative's ubiquity and its seemingly mimetic logic.⁶

Narrative appears, thus, to reproduce natural experience, but the logic of its representation recalls Althusser's concern about how the relations of production are reproduced. While the "natural" events that seem to account for narrative's shape—the events Maugham so nicely summarizes—appear to be natural, they are in fact not only reproductions of the quintessentially naturalized "biological function" of human reproduction, they are also metaphors of capitalist relations of production. The connection between reproduction and production occurs in their common appeal to a productive joiner. Where in human reproduction male and female come together to produce offspring, in capitalist production capital and labor come together to generate products. Reterritorializing a similar dynamic—the same dynamic Maugham identifies as the model of a good novel—reproduction, production, and the ways that we understand and represent them are the very processes and institutions naturalized in and by ideology. The connection between human heterosexual reproduction and capitalist production provides an irresistible merger of family and state, life and livelihood, heterosexual order and profit whose formative presence and naturalized retentions govern the conceptions, forms, logic, and operation of narrative. As ideology, this pattern of joiner to product also accounts for the countless analogies to child/product—knowledge, mastery, victory, another narrative, identity, and even death—that occupy the satisfying end of the story.

Narrative's apparent rendition of life experience, then, is already an ideological version of (re)production produced by the figurative cooperation of a naturalized capitalism and heterosexuality. Narrative's dynamic enacts ideology and narrative's constant production proliferates that ideology continually and naturally, as if it were simply a fact of life and sense itself.

Like trying to define narrative without narrative, how can we determine narrative's ideologies without somehow reiterating them? Looking for ideology as a defining characteristic means already acquiescing to an understanding of narrative that assumes that narrative has an ideology, that such an ideology might be discerned through reading narratives or theories of narrative, and that discovering such an ideology, like discovering an origin, would account for narrative's complex dynamic. But even the search for narrative's origin—for some primitive narrative that provides the pattern for all narratives—assumes narrative's conventional logic and assumptions. Refinding these assumptions in

the place of an originary but fictive protonarrative means defining narrative and its ideology through narrative and its ideology. In other words, if positing an originary narrative risks an unwilling tautology—defining the conclusion by projecting it into the premises—such tautology is inevitable. The only way to combat it is to be aware of it, as long as that awareness is not itself already a narrative convention.

Since dedicating an ideology cannot be accomplished except through ideology, perhaps I should look to those places where narrative asserts its own ideology "with a vengeance," as Teresa de Lauretis might characterize such excess, in those narratives openly about narrative.⁷ At least these cases offer the illusion that narrative speaks openly about itself. Privileging self-conscious narrative, however, still reflects the operation of an ideology (that consciousness and recognition of one's ideology exempts one from its operations), though self-reflexivity implies a more conscious, hence supposedly less self-interested site of analysis. The tendency to tautology is further deferred when several apparently self-reflective processes intersect; where, for example, self-conscious processes of narrative coalesce with the self-reflective analysis of human development as sometimes happens in Sigmund Freud's writings. Here the circular paradox of narrative ideology becomes visible at least on one level, since the coexistence and comparison of narrative's narrative and narratives of development bring their premises and interrelation into starker relief. This is not, however, to recommend a genre such as autobiography as an ideal specimen text, since what is crucial is not the self-reflexivity of the process of narrating "self" but rather the sense that there is no subject, no "self" to narrate, that self-like narration cannot exist except through narrative. And even this connection does not escape the furtive cast of some preexistent narrative of narrative, some notion of the story ending and how we get there.

THE NARRATIVE OF SEXUALITY

In the concluding "Summary" to his 1905 "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," Sigmund Freud simultaneously narrates a brief history of human sexual development and his theory of it. It is not surprising that history and theory are entangled, since Freud's theory of sexuality in 1905 is already narrative, performing a politic of sexualities in narrative terms and a narrative dynamic in sexual terms. Freud's pervasive liquid

metaphors of sexuality simultaneously serve as the fluid figures of narrative progress. Characterizing libido as a current of water whose physical demand is simply to flow freely to its destined end, Freud envisions both story and sexuality as a single strong stream gushing gleefully into the wide sea of human generation. This oceanic finale exalts both healthy heterosexuality and the satisfying story. Any impediments to an unobstructed flow force the current away from its appointed end into tiny, doomed side streams, their deviance spawning a degenerate or perverted story in place of the felicitous convergence of river and sea.

Freud begins his exposition of sexuality with an essay on the "Sexual Aberrations." He begins this way not only because such aberrations contrast with the mechanisms of normative sexuality but also because the sheer ubiquity of aberrations represents an all-important rebuttal to what Freud summarizes as the existing mainstream, but incorrect narrative of sexuality:

Popular opinion has quite definite ideas about the nature and characteristics of this sexual instinct. It is generally understood to be absent in childhood, to set in at the time of puberty in connection to the process of coming to maturity and to be revealed in the manifestations of an irresistible attraction exercised by one sex upon the other; while its aim is presumed to be sexual union, or at all events actions leading in that direction. (1)

Outlining a linear chronological trajectory from absence to presence, Freud characterizes this narrative as a "false picture" containing "a number of errors, inaccuracies and hasty conclusions" (1). One hasty conclusion is the narrative's conclusion, hasty because there have not been enough impediments in the way of its realization. One inaccuracy is infantile sexuality's absence from the beginning. But the real problem with the story is that it is a completely unsatisfying narrative, going from nothing to something without threat, risk, conflict, impediment, or motive. Without the possibility that something might go wrong, the saving force of heterosexual attraction means nothing.

Freud's own narrative of sexuality begins with the aberrations that provide the damning stuff against which the hero of normative heterosexuality must struggle. It is as if Freud takes the narrative of sexuality apart, initially enacting aberrations' deviance to prove that they are necessary to the story, highlighting their presence to underline his

understanding of the sexual narrative as complex, ambivalent, and suspenseful. Tracing aberrations in the first essay and infantile sexuality in the second, Freud connects the two in the third as necessary parts of the sexuality's narrative:

We were thus led to regard any established aberration from normal sexuality as an instance of developmental inhibition and infantilism. Though it was necessary to place in the foreground the importance of the variations in the original disposition, a cooperative and not an opposing relation was to be assumed as existing between them and the influences of actual life. It appeared, on the other hand, that since the original disposition is necessarily a complex one, the sexual instinct itself must be something put together from various factors, and that in the perversions it falls apart, as it were, into its components. The perversions were thus seen to be on the one hand inhibitions, and on the other hand dissociations, of normal development. Both these aspects were brought together in the supposition that the sexual instinct of adults arises from a combination of a number of impulses of childhood into a unity, an impulsion with a single aim. (97-98)

Detailing a chronological narrative that proceeds from risky multiplicity to productive singularity, Freud's story features a struggle and victory instead of the erroneous account's inevitable and unmotivated line of least resistance. In his narrative, Freud situates the perversions as the spot where the story falls apart, a spot that is also a part of the story, serving its function as inhibition or dissociation only in relation to the narrative's ultimate end, "the discharge of the sexual substances" (76). While "the final outcome of sexual development lies in what is known as the normal sexual life of the adult, in which the pursuit of pleasure comes under the sway of the reproductive function and in which the component instincts, under the primacy of a single erotogenic zone, form a firm organization directed towards a sexual aim attached to some extraneous sexual object" (63), perversions, chronologically and analogically linked to infancy and foreplay, threaten to substitute themselves for this normal end pleasure. "The motive for proceeding further with the sexual process then disappears, for the whole path is cut short, and the preparatory act in question takes the place of the normal sexual aim" (77).

Supplanting the proper conclusion, perversions cut the story short, in a sense preventing a story at all by tarrying in its preparations. But this premature abridgment only has significance in relation to the "normal"; we only know the story is cut short because we know what length the story is supposed to be. Perversion, then, acquires its meaning as perversion precisely from its threat to truncate the story; it distorts the narrative, preventing the desirable confluence of sexual aim and object and male and female, precluding the discharge of sexual substances, and hindering reproduction. And yet the aberrations are the foreplay necessary to ever getting to the end at all. Comprised of perversions, foreplay leads to the proper play of confluence and discharge; without perverse foreplay, no discharge would occur. An integral threat, the perversions are absolutely indispensable to the story; their possibility and presence complicate the narrative of sexuality, making Freud's story the right story—right because it is a narrative instead of the simplistic developmental trajectory commonly held to be the truth of sex, right because his narrative of sexuality reenacts sexuality's narrative configuration.⁸

Freud, however, may be far more right about the story and its ideological imperatives than he is about the nature of sexuality. In his account the final leap from perversion to normalcy is accomplished without motive as the effect of an inherent, automatic, naturalized heterosexual desire. "No doubt the strongest force working against a permanent inversion of the sexual object is the attraction which the opposing sexual characters exercise upon one another," he speculates (95). And even if homosexuality, at least between men, might also result in the good end Freud assigns to the story—the desirable discharge of sexual substances—the underlying, satisfying requisite for the real story is not just discharge but discharge in the correct venue, naturally derived from the inevitable attraction between the sexes and leading to reproduction, the only function that can disqualify all but heterosexuality from the main stream.

In Freud's story, the naturalized primacy of heterosexuality constitutes a "normal" that appears without motive, one that is so ideological as to be completely natural. The reproductive demand of the end of the story produces this normalcy rather than reproduction being the logical end to an inevitable—and irresistible—heterosexuality. Reproduction produces heterosexuality instead of heterosexuality necessarily leading to reproduction. This governing reproductive ideology is not any literal

command to go forth and multiply; rather, it is the expression of an ideology of value and meaning that resides in the pattern of joiner to product where products parallel such other metaphorically reproductive yields as children, knowledge, and victory. The reproductive imperatives of the story produce heterosexuality as the magical, motiveless mechanism that turns everything right, while homosexuality and other perversions—also necessary elements—make all fail to cohere, exposing the story's parts in a meaningless, short-circuited, truncated, narrative gratification that heterosexuality seals up again. The sexual players have their metaphorical parts and the narrative has its reproductive engine.

THE SEXUALITY OF NARRATIVE

Two women (instead of a woman and a man) overcoming parental opposition, surviving the wilderness, enjoying domestic bliss together, achieving orgasm with a finger instead of a penis is only Romeo and Juliet again with two differences: happy endings—of both kinds.

—Bertha Harris, "What We Mean to Say," p. 6

While Freud complicates and to some extent reverses the polarities of the commonly held account of sexual development, his understanding of sexuality is already heavily influenced by narrative, not as the specific shape of a specific story but as a way of organizing cause/effect relations. His narrative is already governed by a heterosexual ideology, or heteroideology, reflected both in the story of the development of literal heterosexuality and in the ways narrative functions to distribute sexualities in metaphorical positions in a narrative dynamic that proceeds from parts to a whole, from little tributaries to the big stream that was there all along. Narrative's sexuality is, thus, not so much the literal heterosexual content of a story as D. A. Miller claims: "the couple is in full and open possession of a story, a story, moreover, that one hardly exaggerates in our culture to call *the* story. Outside the heterosexual themes of marriage and oedipalized family (the former linked to the latter as its means of transmission), the plots of bourgeois life . . . would all be pretty much unthinkable."⁹ Rather, our very understanding of narrative as a primary means to sense and satisfaction depends upon a metaphorically heterosexual dynamic within a reproductive aegis.

Its reproductive impetus and metaphorically sexualized positions of hetero versus homo do not, however, entirely define the sexuality of narrative. While for the most part Freud's story of sexuality explains rather than captures or expresses the sexualities it describes, when it brings diverse positions together in a coherent and meaningful whole coincident with the appearance of heterosexuality, it enacts heterosexuality through narrative's dynamic. In like fashion, the perverse, as in Freud's theory of sexuality, plays within and against structure. This perverse, as Roland Barthes elaborates it in *The Pleasure of the Text*, performs through the text of pleasure and the text of bliss, both fugitives from narrative, the former produced as the comfort yielded by going with "the text that comes from culture and does not break with it," and the latter generated by the narrative's edges, seductive appearances, in the "seam" between "culture and its destruction."¹⁰

For Barthes, a text's eroticism is only indirectly linked to a sexuality he locates as an appurtenance of the father. Defining sexuality as an "Oedipal pleasure (to denude, to know, to learn the origin and the end)" (10), the oedipal pattern Barthes delineates is the same as the narrative dynamic I have just described as enacted by Freud's own narrative assumptions. Narrative and sexuality join at the oedipal; therefore neither Barthes's text of pleasure nor bliss has a sexuality insofar as each exists apart from or in playful relation to that oedipal. Instead they are erotic, gaining a sexual cast only when either the bliss of reading or the blissful text directly engages the oedipal that imports the heterosexual, familial, masterful tropes of knowledge, identity, gender, and sexuality. Pleasure comes when the "body pursues its own ideas" (17), protected from oedipal sexuality "by perversion which shields bliss from the finality of reproduction" (24). Eroticism comes from a dynamic produced by a concatenation of edges, gaps, loss, and desire, but is structurally unfixed except as it coexists with and is produced and enjoyed despite cultural imperative.

Structurally, the counterproductive perverse seems to occupy the space between sexuality and eroticism, between narrative and the body, between structure and an almost unimaginable lack of structure—that site structurally fixed at death or origins as the two loci where structure provides the illusion of the perverse's disappearance. While Freud categorizes homosexualities as perverse, as examples of something gone wrong at the beginning or end of the sexual story, the perverse in turn jeopardizes the sexual system itself, threatening no structure and no

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HETEROSEXUALITY

narrative in a system dependent upon both. It is tempting to locate Barthes's perverse bliss as a gay text, but to do so is to reinscribe bliss as a discrete category within a still governing narrative heteroideology. Defining the perverse as homosexual threatens to import the entire narrative heterodynamic, arresting textual play in favor of a fixed narrative impetus labeled homosexual

Thus, one can only enjoy bliss without a structural fix. Its dynamic, vaguely parasitic on the memory of narrative, is textual rather than narrative, that is, is produced by properties of the text as text (language, image, rhetoric) as they play through and around narrative. To have sexuality is to have narrative; to have narrative is to have sexuality. As circular as this relation might seem, what is important is the distinction it suggests between structure as represented both by the desires of narrative and of sexuality and by a different desire, produced by the dynamic intersection of text and reading, narrative and not, and both at the same time.

How then can there be a perverse narrative? Insofar as perversity belongs to narrative as the instance of its potential dissolution, the perverse narrative, like *The Pleasure of the Text* or Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*, would be a narrative about narrative dissolution, a narrative that continually short-circuits, that both frustrates and winks at the looming demagogue of reproduction. Insofar as lesbian or gay is linked to perversity, the lesbian or gay narrative might be the perverse narrative. But the perverse narrative's perversity is not in its subject matter, for that is squarely planted in the realm of narrative, but in the way any such narrative enacts a perverse relation to narrative itself. *The Pleasure of the Text* flirts, evades, reveals, and conceals its narrative of reading, suggesting, cajoling, and teasing with suggestions of something narrative and not, the quality of an interchange, and a process of profaning the oedipal sanctity of structure and control.

Nightwood aligns the narrative of the Volkbein's misfired generation, a parodic version of the narrative of productive procreation, against the narrative of the somnambulist Robin Vote whose complete anathesia makes her both an object of desire (for Felix, Nora, and Jenny) and the character who cannot be a character because narrative has no meaning for her. Tracing Robin's perverse lack of narrative cooperation, *Nightwood* reveals how much the other characters are bound into narratives of coupling and reproduction. Guided by the transvestite commentator, Dr. Matthew O'Connor, whose narrative of self-knowl-

edge sustains the perverse narrative to its bestial end, *Nightwood* is the paradoxical narrative of the perverse narrative. Conscious of the perversity it narrates, it is also conscious of that perversity's relation to the reproductive narrative that it installs at the novel's opening birth scene and maintains in the multiple failed couplings of characters who always believe in their fantasy narrative of the other.

Nightwood's narrative perversity is not produced by the presence or activities of transvestite or lesbian characters but rather in the narrative's actual perversion of the reproductive narrative. This occurs not because *Nightwood's* narrative actively thwarts or frustrates reproduction but because reproduction, brought to the fore as an insistent and visible ideology, is no longer the alibi of the story. Instead *Nightwood* narrates the failure of a reproductive ideology as it traces the weakening of Felix's generation from his strong Teutonic mother to his feeble son, Guido. And while heteroideology still governs in stories where reproduction is prevented, frustrated, or disappointed, in *Nightwood* reproduction is self-consciously reduced to just another pathetic narrative that languishes rather than dies, affording an obviously false structure and motive superseded by the lesbian characters' retreat to the new world (and to their past).

Nightwood is still narrative, still furnishing a beginning and end and sets of cause/effect relationships located in character psychology. But it sustains itself as a narrative by its indirect appeals to narrative—by Dr. Matthew O'Connor's self-conscious reference to the narrative context of his own telling. The middleman between the reproductive and something else, O'Connor's wouldbe wise narrative of a human nature broken loose from its reproductive, oedipal moorings sustains and short-circuits at the same time, producing the reproductive story while putting it in its place.

At the same time, *Nightwood* tells another story, the story narrated by the novel's third-person omniscient narrator, who organizes Dr. O'Connor's perverse excursions as well as the other characters' coupling failures. While those failures might be understood as an effect of their "perversion"—Nora's, Robin's, and Jenny's lesbian attachments; Felix's misguided narrative of Robin's archetype—in most cases the nature of the failure as specifically a failure of the couple prevents any approach to the literally reproductive. Instead *Nightwood* reproduces knowledge—the knowledge of character, of the night, and of the nature of the pathetic reproductive story itself in the literal terms of its

vestment. The net result is a narrative that enacts the relation between reproduction and perversity but is not a narrative with a sexuality except in so far as the perversion of the reproductive mainstream is accomplished by mainly homosexual characters. And if the homosexual characters contribute to the perversion of narrative's reproductive aegis, their role demonstrates even more than ever that the sexuality of narrative is straight.

While the sexuality of narrative may be metaphorically heterosexual, perversions, as a structural part of narrative, are not exactly aligned with either lesbian or gay male. Rather, lesbian and gay male characters are synecdoches of the perverse: the slippage between the larger category of the perverse and the specific example of the lesbian and/or gay male points to the operation of a distinctly heterosexual oedipal structure that fixes and defines as opposed to the shifting operations of Barthes' textual erotic. The tendency to locate and name perversity as a necessary part of heterosexual structure contains perversity within a still-Oedipal, still-reproductive domain even as the perverse might, as in *The Pleasure of the Text* and *Nightwood*, illustrate the reproductive's possible lack of hegemony or fool us by offering itself as the whole story.

RECOMMENCING

I began this project with a long list of nagging questions. Why is the story always the same? Why, no matter how sympathetic, clever, radical, or well-meaning the author, the circumstance, the occasion, is the story of the lesbian always really the same old story and her fate the same old, vaguely oppressed fate whether she is the protagonist or a minor character? Why am I rarely happy with any narrative that represents or suggests the presence of lesbian sexuality? There always seems to be something slightly alienating if not definitively wrong about it (assuming there could, possibly, be a "right" story). If culture is defined by or defines the story—if narrative is a means of cultural evaluation and oppression—must we change the story and the role the lesbian plays in it to alter the lesbian's place in culture? If lesbian sexuality is entirely a construction of the discursive fields that define it, is it possible to represent the lesbian differently and still have either a recognizable lesbian or a discernible narrative? Finally, if narrative is epistemologically pervasive, how do I understand narrative without narrative? How do I

consider these questions without reiterating the very structures I try to discern and critique?

In this book I focus on narrative and sexuality as organizing epistemes and as expressions of a figuratively heterosexual reproductive ideology in twentieth-century Western culture. Interwound with one another, narrative and sexuality operate within the reproductive and/or productive, metaphorically heterosexual ideology that also underwrites the naturalized understanding of the shape and meaning of life. Narrative and sexuality's intimacy goes beyond the identity of terms they share (*climax*, for example); they are interwoven with one another as interdependent, mutually reflective, reciprocal organizations. The imbrication of narrative and sexuality is a symptom of their common progenesis in a specific, already heterosexual ideology that presents a critical difficulty in even thinking about them outside of that same set of ideologies.

The reciprocal relation between narrative and sexuality produces stories where homosexualities can only occupy certain positions or play certain roles metonymically linked to negative values within a reproductive aegis. This marriage of sexuality and narrative has several consequences: 1) the production of sexual categories whose existence and constitution depend upon a specific reproductive narrative heteroideology; 2) the preservation of literal and metaphorical heterosexuality as (re)productive (and hence valuable); and 3) the constitution of narrative that includes both heterosexuality and homosexuality as categories necessary to its dynamic.

My hypothesis about narrative's heteroideology builds on the insights of three different theorists. Teresa de Lauretis's understandings of the ideological relation of gender and narrative point to a problem Judith Butler also identifies: the tendency of Western cultural discourse to replicate its own, oppressive, founding terms. "The problem," as de Lauretis describes it, is "that most of the available theories of reading, writing, sexuality, ideology, or any other cultural production are built on male narratives of gender, whether oedipal or anti-oedipal, bound by the heterosexual contract; narratives which persistently tend to reproduce themselves in feminist theories."¹¹ De Lauretis's suggestion that theories and ideologies are narratives and that those narratives are somehow defined by the "heterosexual contract" invites further investigation into this relation as a primary mode of cultural production as well as a site of discursive and ideological operations and limits.

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+ "symptoms" not as binary

never end, it's a process unless
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we are all there is

Monique Wittig's observation of the founding alibi of heterosexuality and its relation to representation—"These discourses of heterosexuality oppress us in the sense that they prevent us from speaking unless we speak in their terms"—raises the question of how this policing occurs.¹² Judith Butler, while recognizing the heterosexist tendency of "the matrix of power and discursive relations that effectively produce and regulate the intelligibility of those concepts ['person,' 'sex,' or 'sexuality']," asks, "what constitutes the possibility of effective inversion, subversion, or displacement within the terms of a constructed identity?"¹³ This book takes up de Lauretis's narrative suggestion as a way both to define redundant discursive limitations and to forge a strategy to disrupt the insistent system by which identities are conceived and constructed.¹⁴

My argument about the interrelation of narrative and sexuality depends upon presumptions about the historical venue of this phenomenon, a particular definition of sexuality, narrative's preeminently structuralist nature and its cultural efficacy as well as the deliberate but reasoned omission of some of the impossibly large number of terms and discourses that might participate in the relation of narrative and sexuality. I concentrate more on discerning narrative/sexuality's heteroideology than on interpreting representations of literal sexualities in specific narratives, except where stories serve as examples. I also stress the metaphorical quality of narrative heteroideology, because it is through the metaphorical rather than the literal that sexuality infects all that seems not immediately sexual. Metaphor accounts for how it is that narrative can convey and situate a sexual ideology while not appearing to represent sexuality at all. Thus, what is important is not so much literal representations of specific sexualities but rather a more pervasive, structured interrelation among sets of terms and values associated with positions and functions within narrative.

I locate the beginnings of this particular manifestation of narrative and sexuality's interrelation in accord with Michel Foucault's understanding of the emergence of the category of sexuality in the nineteenth century in volume 1 of the *History of Sexuality*.¹⁵ If, however, I am to be suspicious of narrative, history is one narrative to be wary of, especially as it appears to offer a means to an origin that provides both answer and explanation. While the question of the origin of contemporary conceptions of sexuality and homosexuality has rightly compelled many theorists, I am more interested in tracing how the imbrication of narrative and sexuality pervades contemporary culture, working to sustain and (re)produce a particular understanding and relative valuation of a sexuality that consists of the binary categories heterosexual and homosexual.

For the purposes of this book, the term *sexuality* refers to naturalized, historically located cultural assumptions about identifiable sexual categories based primarily on the gender of object choice and delimited to the heterosexual and the homosexual (both male and female)—though the homosexual is a synecdoche of the larger field of "perverse" object and aim choices that currently comprise our ideas of sexual desire and behavior. The reduction of a larger field of sexuality to two categories is partly an effect of narrative's binary operation within a reproductive logic; in this sense there are really only two sexualities: reproductive sexuality, which is associated with difference and becomes metaphorically heterosexual, and nonreproductive sexuality associated with sameness, which becomes metaphorically homosexual.

Its relation to narrative is only one out of a number of possible ways sexuality intersects with, informs, and organizes discourses and knowledge and is, in turn, informed and organized by them. While there are other ways sexuality is deployed across the cultural field—and while the contemporary critical tendency is to enable the interplay of multiple possibilities—I want to map the connection between narrative and sexuality as a way of at least partly understanding how sexual ideologies tend to remain consistent in the face of social change, how they are disseminated and remain in circulation, and how vastly divergent terms (such as *Nazi* and *lesbian*) are repeatedly associated. This is not to claim that narrative is necessarily the only or even the most important of many possible discursive relations, but it is to suggest that as an organizing structure, narrative plays a large part in the stubborn return of a particularly heterosexual normativity.

Because I focus primarily on the connections between narrative and sexuality and because of the self-circling nature of those connections, it may appear as if I am constructing a closed circuit, an impossible labyrinth whose claustrophobic interreferentiality permits no hope for escape or change. In the sense that humans tend to employ narrative to cover over or rearticulate contradictions, gaps, or inconsistencies, narrative is a kind of closed circuit, especially about narrative itself. Insofar as perceiving the reach and kind of narrative's influence might actually alert us to narrative's heteroideological uses, this is not a hopeless story

at all but one way to begin to try to dislocate or alter the uses of narrative and its insistent presumptions.

In focusing on the relation between narrative and sexuality, I inevitably underplay other terms—*class*, *race*, *nationality*—whose connection to these two would also be informing. It is undoubtedly artificial to focus on two terms when focusing on twenty would still not suffice to account for any complex cultural phenomenon. While my purpose is to understand something about the nature of narrative and the disposition of sexuality in modern Western culture, my focus on these categories and not others is also determined by the incredible complexity of their interrelation. This is not to suggest that their complexity is isolated to narrative and sexuality alone but to acknowledge that these two terms are all this book will consider.

And even those two terms are too much. I often reduce the term *sexuality*, though itself a large dynamic system, to its lesbian example, not because there is an identity between the category of sexuality and the lesbian but because the configurations of the lesbian tend to mark failures of the system.¹⁶ I assume that the category *lesbian* represents both a construction participating in this larger sexual ideology and a name applied to the practices, identities, definitions, or self-definitions of real women. The complex relation among these terms—ideology, representation, and actual women—is a complicated articulation. There is no lesbian who is not affected by ideology nor any ideology that is not in some way infected by women's lives, but this also means that there is no pure *ab quo* unmediated lesbian experience—no "authentic" lesbian—and no comprehension of the term *lesbian* outside of a larger ideological system.

For reasons I shall argue, the lesbian position is often indicative of how the sexual ideology in narrative operates and is itself a sufficiently complex example of the interrelation of narrative and sexuality. I am most interested in what the lesbian position can reveal both about narrative and about how *lesbian* gets to be what it is. It is also the case that the categories, including the lesbian, that occupy the metaphorically homosexual position in narrative perform differently in that position; there is a difference, for example, between the narrative disposition of the lesbian and the male homosexual. Suggestions about the ideological positioning of analogous categories, except insofar as they bear directly upon the lesbian example, I leave to others to question, refute, develop, or refine.

While the notion of narrative and sexuality as reciprocal systems suggests a structuralist approach, narrative itself is a structuralist category, its operation depending upon a knowledge of structure. Despite the insights of poststructuralism (or perhaps because of them), narrative is entirely structuralist even when it is postmodern, fragmented, or presumed missing. Even if narrative structure is an illusion that compensates for lack or provides a false mastery of what can never be mastered, these defenses exist because narrative is a structural defense against a chaotic world. And narrative's structuralism, intimately linked to still prevalent structuralist ways of understanding it, may well be necessary to its ideological operation, to its incorporation and replication of the pretentiously "complete" and "true" structures of capitalism, religion, and the nuclear family.¹⁷ If this book seems anachronistically structuralist or perversely interested in structures, then, it is because I have taken as my object of inquiry those structures that persist despite a postmodern failure of what Jean-François Lyotard calls "legitimizing meta-narratives," and because both narrative and sexuality *as structures*—as finished complete, unified (if delusively so) products—fit readily into commodity culture's systems of exchange and logic of simulation. In this sense, contemporary culture has incited the production of even more narrative—a specifically structuralist understanding of narrative—packaged, produced, and disseminated as life.¹⁸

My focus on structure also creates the illusion of a totalized or closed system that includes and can account for everything. This sense of systemic totality is a feature of the narrative ideology I try to locate as well as an attribute of cultural understandings of just what narrative, in its largest sense, is. There are other understandings of how ideas, events, and language might be organized, but those organizations—including repetition and/or simple alternation—are not culturally intelligible as narrative. Our failure to credit such other organizations with meaning is due to our sense that a narrative must produce something and/or go somewhere in an analogue to time or space.

Given these suppositions about narrative, it is not sufficient to account for the often negative narrative disposition of lesbian characters by understanding stories as direct expressions of conscious or unconscious homophobia and misogyny. Although there is some relation between the narrative disposition of characters and homophobia, that relation extends beyond personal anxiety. Cultural homophobia does not account for either the reiteration of the same narrative struc-

bp: the grounded? Besides, 'what is the appeal of the story'?

ture in sympathetic stories by or about lesbians or for the consistency of their representation; it is a product of the same ideology that organizes narrative. Something in the way we understand what a story is in the first place or something in the way narrative itself operates produces narrative's "heterosexually friendly" shape. If this is the case, then simply changing people's minds through good public relations would not change the story all that much.

Finally, given its realm of apparent influence, I assume that there is some political agency to narrative—that where narrative underwrites cultural ideology, it might also be used to challenge and change it. My optimistic and perhaps overly idealistic hope is that if we know enough about the mechanisms of culture and their interrelationships we might be able to wield them, or at least influence their shape. This dream of mastery, however, requires that I submit myself to narrative—to the narrative that defines the very dream of knowledge that engenders this project. If even my analysis of narrative complies with ideologies of narrative, am I not sustaining those ideologies even as I try to expose them?

What I hope to demonstrate is both a narrative tendency connected to sexualized ideologies and specific examples of how the ideologies of narrative and sexuality work. Rather than tracking specific contents, or patterns to discern a majority occurrence or its cultural currency, my analysis attempts to discern narrative's dynamic, its impetus to negotiate disparate elements through the sexualized terms by which production and reproduction are conceived in Western culture. It is likely that this dynamic is neither completely static nor entirely structural (though it might appear to be so) but is, rather, flexional and inflective, moving the choice and linear ordering of elements through complex, self-contradictory compromise formations whose provisional effect is the representation of a sense of cause and effect in history and the production of an illusion of meaning and order.

COMING TO

As a narrative, this book can not help but be narrative, but as a critique it might be self-conscious of the ways narrative works to efface its own assumptions. Because I am treating large epistemic categories and because as much as possible I must try to avoid falling into the narra-

tive ideologies I critique, this book proceeds with a structural consciousness of its own narrative. I begin therefore with the end as that moment of illusory completion that, as I have pointed out in Freud's narrative of sexuality, defines the story in the first place. Deliberately keeping the end in mind rather than assuming it makes visible, at least momentarily, our investment in the whole narrative process.

Beginning, therefore, at the end in chapter 1, "The End Is Coming," I examine ideas about narrative's end in narratives, narrative theory, and psychoanalysis. Tracing narrative's metaphorically reproductive impetus through the larger historical and cultural relation between ideologies of narrative and of sexuality, I examine assumptions about narrative shape and organization and their contemporary currency. Through narratives of orgasm, Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Peter Brooks's "Freud's Masterplot," and Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, I track this end fixation as it derives from our very sense of narrative itself and as it appears insidiously to determine narrative's dynamic and our understanding of it.

But the critical tendency to look for a narrative origin suggests equally that narrative's end always looks for another beginning, the founding moment or essence of narrative itself. In chapter 2, "Come Together," I examine understandings of what makes narrative narrative. Reading through the narratives of structuralist theories of narrative, I try to determine how theories both understand and depict the quality or process by which narrative becomes narrative and not something else. In other words, for a moment I give in to the impetus to discern a narrative origin and actively look for it. Since narrative is still preeminently structural, structuralist accounts of narrative seem the best arena in which to examine the ways narrative structure reproduces and reinforces itself.

While these theories offer descriptions of narrative and narrative process, they are more symptomatic of the same reproductive ideologies I discuss in chapter 1 than they are successful at offering any truth or essence of narrative. I read the narrative theories of Ivetan Todorov, Roland Barthes, Algirdas Greimas, and others against Colette's short story, "The Secret Woman," not only to emphasize the narrative nature of structuralist theory but also to reveal narrative's (and its theories') dependence upon ideologies of gender and sexuality. "The Secret Woman's" narrative consciousness, its play on the characters' and readers' narrative assumptions, and its commentary on the nature of narrative's investment in mastery illustrates on the level of the story narra-

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tive's management of disorder, its imbrication with sexuality, and its ironical failure. "The Secret Woman" exposes what is missing in narrative theories.

Structuralist accounts, as I show in chapter 2, discern narrative origin in yet another performance of a trajectory from parts to a joined synthetic whole, reproducing narrative's heteroideology. And again, the nature of narrative depends upon an unwitting estimation of narrative's proper (re)productive end, not as a specific outcome but as a shaping presumption. It is clear from this theoretical dependence on this end that the narrative middle, as in Freud's narrative of sexuality, provides the scene for doubt, risk, and uncertainty. The middle, as Freud suggests, is the locus of homosexual suggestion, the place where such a possibility is made visible on the way to a reproductive end.

In chapter 3, "Coming Apart," the middle of this book, I focus on the nature of this middle, the realm where the perverse and the normal intermingle and where the lesbian becomes visible, attempting in analytical fashion to wrench sexuality and narrative apart at the point where they seem to come together. Using cross-gender narratives such as *Victor/Victoria*, *All of Me*, and *Switch*, and the more celestial *Star Trek: The Next Generation* where the middle terms are particularly manifest, I examine how the metaphorically perverse both threatens to short-circuit and leads toward a satisfying, very heterosexual closure. In other words, I look to where the coming together might fail, and I find the lesbian.

As part of this middle, the lesbian constitutes some threat to the story but also provides the pretext for the heteronarrative's spectacular return. This pattern accounts for many mainstream representations of the lesbian as temporary, immature, and titillating. But its suggestion of a possible opening in heteronormative hegemony also provides a rationale that underwrites overtly lesbian tactics for employing, negotiating, and/or exploding the heteronarrative. If the lesbian is visible and viable in the narrative middle, why not exploit that visibility as a way of devising a lesbian story? At the penultimate fourth chapter, where narrative typically reorganizes its perversities into a heterosexual mainstream, I analyze whether and how it is possible to divert that mainstream into a lesbian narrative without having that narrative simply reinscribe the heteronarrative with lesbian players.

Chapter 4, "The Second Coming," examines mainstream narratives; various lesbian narratives, including coming out stories, narratives of les-

bian sex, lesbian detective novels, and the experimental narratives of Monique Wittig and Nicole Brossard; and such "perverse" fictions as *Nightwood* to see how playing on the middle's perverse works to avoid heteronormative recontainment. Mainstream narratives such as *Roseanne* that deliberately include lesbian characters try to exploit the virtues of visibility ostensibly for politically laudatory reasons, but at the same time they tend to reproduce sexual ideology all the more insidiously. While they appear to be open and supportive to diversity, they recontain the lesbian resoundingly, publicly, indubitably within the spectacularly heteronormative family.

Some of the forms written for a lesbian audience—the coming out story in particular—also reiterate a version of the heteronarrative by making the recognition of identity the victorious product of a struggle with self, locating the lesbian again within the overweening heteronarrative. Other forms such as the lesbian detective story try to alter the narrative's valence by simply replacing most characters with lesbians; this may produce a better story for lesbians, but it also inscribes heteronarrative for dykes, since the story itself doesn't change. Lesbian experimental writing tries to shift narrative practice and expectations with perhaps better, but more limited success and certainly with a smaller audience. What these deliberately lesbian stories reveal is how difficult it is to surmount narrative's reproductive ideology as long as the writer aims only at form and content.

The final chapter, "Come As You Are," the place where narrative should end in its satisfying product, extends this understanding of the relation of narrative and sexuality into the realm of social action, reading political strategies as already motivated by the same narrative heteroideology they try to combat. Examining the rhetoric of visibility, the strategies of outing and role models, and their reliance on identification and identity reveals their dependence on a particular coming out story narrative of victory. Since the coming out story in fact serves to locate homosexual characters within the larger heteronarrative, it also unwittingly returns bids for homosexual rights to the system that denies them in the first place.

The purpose of this final chapter is not to denigrate political efforts but rather to analyze why those efforts have not worked as well as they might and to suggest a different way of thinking about praxis. If narrative and sexual ideology are interwound, then perhaps finding ways of shifting the very understanding of story would effect small changes in

ideology. The end, thus, has no answer, only questions about how to disimbricate sexuality from narrative as a strategy for potentially altering oppressive social conceptions. If narrative is the representational ideology that glues discursive fields into insurmountable fortresses, then perhaps via narrative it will also be possible to take them apart.

COME As You Are