

..... *introduction*

THE INVERT,
THE FOUNDLING,
AND THE “MEMBER
OF THE TRIBE”

It takes time to make queer people.—Gertrude Stein

This book gathers together some texts produced by gay men and lesbians in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century—poems by Hart Crane, novels by Willa Cather, gay male physique magazines, and lesbian pulp fiction—to argue that, during this period, queer writers and artists were groping their way toward a notion of homosexuality defined by a particular relationship to the idea of history. This relationship, which I call “foundling,” entails imagining, on one hand, an exile from sanctioned experience, most often rendered as the experience of participation in family life and the life of communities and, on the other, a reunion with some “people” or sodality who redeem this exile and surpass the painful limita-

tions of the original “home.” The figures for what unites these new sodalities vary, of course, among the texts I have chosen: Crane imagines a secret, surpassing vitality that links American men in a Whitmanian brotherhood of hope for the future, while Cather dreams of a diaspora of lonely, artisanal sensitives; the editors of the physique magazines trumpet a “movement” of physical culture that will make America the latter-day fulfillment of Greek bodily and political ideals, while pulp authors such as Ann Bannon write about a network of Greenwich Village lesbians whose erotic entanglements and struggles against prejudice mark the beginnings of recognizably contemporary urban queer culture. Across differences of sex, genre, and two generations, however, the manifestations of this founding imaginary share two characteristics: a determined struggle to escape the medical-psychological “inversion” model of homosexuality that was dominant in the United States in the first half of the century and a drive toward “peoplehood” that previews the contemporary “ethnic” notion of U.S. gay and lesbian collectivity. Before describing how I read these founding texts, I offer a brief historical sketch of the other two models of American homosexuality between which they move.

We may think of the inversion model of homosexuality—the idea that homosexuals are people whose souls are trapped in the body of the “other” sex—and of the ethnic model—the idea that gay men and lesbians, either separately or jointly, constitute a people with a distinct culture—as two poles between which the history of U.S. lesbian and gay sexuality was shaped in the twentieth century. Roughly speaking, the inversion model enjoyed dominance in the first half of the century, while the ethnic model rose to prominence in the second. The two notions have always been deeply bound up with each other, however, and each of my four chapters takes up the ways that paying attention to their shared articulation can illuminate lesbian and gay texts for us; in the following paragraphs I offer a formal separation between them for the sake of preliminary clarity.

The understanding of gay men and lesbians as “inverts” emerges in nineteenth-century German sexology, with the writings of Karl Ulrichs, whose Urnings (male homosexuals) and Urningin (female homosexuals) owe their names to a passage in Plato’s *Symposium* that describes two Aphrodites, a “heavenly” and a “common”: the tributary pull of the two versions of the

goddess of love inspires, respectively, love of men and of women (Mondimore 29). Ulrichs's choice of mythological nomenclature already suggests a tension between advocacy on behalf of homosexuals as a kind of "people" (since they are ancient) and clinical categorization of them as a "type" (since they seem to fit a psychological pattern). In fact, Ulrichs's writing on inversion is taken in each of these two directions in the 1880s and 1890s, as Richard von Krafft-Ebing damningly encapsulates it as an example of degenerate *per*-version in his influential *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), while John Addington Symonds, in "A Problem in Modern Ethics" (1896), makes a plea for the unpunishing dignity of Greek attitudes toward it—attitudes promisingly revived, he finds, in the fraternal poetry of Walt Whitman (Cory 86). Later, just after the turn of the century, Edward Carpenter tries with great invention to work the inversion model into a notion of "the intermediate sex" who have a historical status that exceeds the merely clinical. Suggesting their special sensitivity in matters of the heart, Carpenter argues for a historical mandate to value homosexuals of both sexes, since members of "the intermediate sex" will serve as mediators in the twentieth-century war of the heterosexual sexes (Cory 142).

As it turns out, the Victorian inversion model did not disappear in the twentieth century, despite competition from psychoanalysis and social-psychological sexology. Indeed, as both Thomas Laqueur and Judith Butler have shown, the idea of inversion lingers on in the psychoanalytic understanding of homosexuality, which depends not only on a notion of the two sexes as "opposites" (as opposed to, say, neighbors) but also on a notion of "primary bisexuality" or the coexistence of masculine and feminine impulses in all persons, so that homosexuality becomes a kind of psychological inversion: it is the man "within" a lesbian that motivates her to love a woman, and the woman in the man that presses him to love a man (Laqueur 149–53, 233–34; Butler, *Gender Trouble* 60–61). Outside the psychoanalytic idiom, meanwhile, both lesbian and gay vocabularies of self-definition, and, later, the "expert" medical-psychological writing on homosexuality, also continued to depend on Victorian notions of the homosexual as invert. Two examples are Radclyffe Hall's portrayal of lesbian subjectivity in *The Well of Loneliness* (1929)—in which, for clarification, the hero, Stephen Gordon, reads Krafft-Ebing, not Freud—and the work of the psychologist George Henry, whose 1948 *Sex Variants* encodes homosexuality as a secondary sign

of a root disorder in gender identity, essentially an inversion (Terry). Even Alfred Kinsey's dispassionate study of homosexuality in the 1948 and 1953 *Sexual Behavior* volumes, based as it was on statistics about frequency of sexual contact, and not on the subjective experiences of its interviewees, was consumed by lesbians and gay men alongside, and not instead of, earlier models (partly, no doubt, because Kinsey offered no descriptive vocabulary for the lived experience of homosexuality). Kinsey's research decisively shifted the focus of sexology from pathology to statistical analysis and from Europe to America; even so, American lesbians and gay men were still consuming both old and new sexology. The Victorians and the social scientists appeared side by side, for instance, in the well-known 1956 volume edited by gay activist Daniel Webster Cory, *Homosexuality: A Cross-Cultural Approach*.

One reason for the collocation of such different sexological methods in a single volume is that, whatever their differences concerning the degree or kind of pathology at work in the homosexual, the languages of psychoanalysis, Victorian sexology, and social-scientific sex research are all primarily focused on describing the genesis of homosexual individuals (or, in Kinsey's case, the prevalence of certain types of individual experience within a population). By World War II, however, these languages would begin to prove inadequate to historical change rung by the emergence of large, urban lesbian and gay communities.¹ Another vocabulary, generated by lesbians and gay men themselves, and more attuned to collective experience than to individual identity, begins to be visible around World War I and picks up momentum after World War II: a vocabulary for what I call the "ethnicity" model of American homosexuality.

The anthropologist Gayle Rubin succinctly describes the historical and cultural changes that encouraged the development of the ethnicity model in the United States and Western Europe. In this passage from her 1984 essay "Thinking Sex," Rubin distinguishes modern, "ethnic" homosexuality from the homosexual behavior of other cultures and epochs.

The New Guinea bachelor and the sodomite nobleman are only tangentially related to a modern gay man, who may migrate from rural Colorado to San Francisco in order to live in a gay neighborhood, work in a gay business, and participate in an elaborate experience

that includes a self-conscious identity, group solidarity, a literature, a press, and a high level of political activity. In modern, Western industrial societies, homosexuality has acquired much of the institutional structure of an ethnic group.

The relocation of homoeroticism into these small, quasi-ethnic, nucleated, sexually constituted communities is to some extent a consequence of the transfers of population brought about by industrialization. As laborers migrated to work in cities, there were increased opportunities for voluntary communities to form. Homosexually inclined women and men, who would have been vulnerable and isolated in most pre-industrial villages, began to congregate in small corners of big cities. [17]

Although Rubin's rendition of the historical background of this "quasi-ethnic" homosexuality is extremely general, more detailed work in lesbian and gay history locates the wave of urbanization she mentions at the turn of the twentieth century. And all of this scholarship overwhelmingly supports Rubin's basic claim to the link between industrial modernity and contemporary homosexual community, further specifying World War II as a turning point in its consolidation, since the war segregated men and women from each other in the armed forces, made possible a brief experiment in integrating women into the work force while men were fighting, and also led, at peacetime, to a massive settlement of GIs in coastal urban centers like San Francisco and New York. Each of these demographic shifts has been shown to have facilitated the development of lesbian and gay communities.²

Rubin's description of the emergence of an "ethnic" lesbian and gay community implies a wide variety of cultural practices that grew up alongside it. The bare bones of the ethnicity model, for instance, are to be found in the simple but enduring lesbian and gay practice of listing famous homosexuals from history—a gesture of genealogical claiming for which literary historian Rictor Norton finds evidence as far back as the sixteenth century but which he suggests picks up a great deal of momentum in Anglophone settings after the 1897 publication of an English translation of Havelock Ellis's *Sexual Inversion* with its list of famous "inverts." Norton points to the use of such lists as a gesture of political defiance—most famously by Oscar Wilde in his rehearsal, at his 1895 trial, of all the illustrious historical adher-

ents to “the love that dare not speak its name”—and to their recurrence in U.S. queer novels of the 1930s such as Blair Niles’s *Strange Brother* (1931) and Richard Meeker’s *Better Angel* (1933), as well as in late-century work such as Larry Kramer’s 1985 AIDS-activist play *The Normal Heart* (Norton 218–24). Indeed, the practice of producing queer lists survives and flourishes in contemporary mass culture, in the form of books such as Leigh Rutledge’s 1987 *The Gay Book of Lists* and Dell Richards’s 1990 *Lesbian Lists*, as well as in a wide variety of literary anthologies such as Steve Hogan and Lee Hudson’s 1998 *Completely Queer: The Gay and Lesbian Encyclopedia*. Such compendia, designed to combat a homophobic belief in the lonely singularity of gay men and lesbians, expend their self-justifying energy in the assembly of illustrious literary and artistic queer names—Sappho, Shakespeare, Michelangelo, Dickinson, Whitman—and in the collation of evidence for the social dignity of homosexual roles from cultures both geographically and historically far-flung—most frequently, in U.S. contexts, evidence of the normal status of male-male pederasty among the classical Greeks, and of the high value, in many Native American tribes, placed on the spiritual services of *berdache* or “two-spirit” figures.³

These modest, defiant lists of homosexuals, once gay men and lesbians’ prime and lonely strategy for describing queer historical presence, now form part of a much wider array of lesbian and gay projects of historical and cultural reclamation that aim to uncover a sense of what Norton calls the “cultural unity” of homosexual experience in history. To be sure, feminist lesbian writers and queer writers of color in the United States have tried to make clear to their reading publics that contemporary gay men and lesbians are as much divided by differences in sex, race, and class as they are “united.” Audre Lorde’s *Zami*, Joan Nestle’s *A Restricted Country*, and Samuel Delany’s *The Motion of Light on Water* are among the best examples. Following on the critical assessments of queer cultural unity in these texts, lesbian and gay scholars in the U.S. academic left have pointed out the political problems with the primarily white, middle-class practice of claiming non-white or otherwise historically distant “ancestors.” Scott Bravmann’s *Queer Fictions of the Past* is the first full-length academic study of the problems queer historians face as they try to weigh the tension between middle-class desires for a unified queer “heritage” and the actual vicissitudes of political difference in forming their narratives. But the debate

about whether “we” can ever really claim “ancestors” across multiple historical divides is a grass-roots one as well, conducted in queer newspapers and in conversations among friends (98).

Even in light of these strong political cautions, however, the lure of the ethnicity model remained strong at the end of the century, not least because it continued to be widely encouraged in queer consumer culture, especially its national print culture—which for half a century has been one of the most powerful links among lesbians and gay men in the United States. There are no lesbian and gay radio stations or television stations and, until the advent of the Internet—now a major avenue for socializing and for circulating information among queer people—city and regional newspapers, and the books available in liberal or queer bookstores, have been the very glue of the “imagined community” of U.S. lesbian and gay culture. Indeed, the conceptual force of Benedict Anderson’s phrase is plainly evident in the myriad ways contemporary U.S. gay men and lesbians signal their sense of collective agency to each other across abstracting distances by consuming certain images and metaphors—not least the rainbow flag attached to cars and homes and clothing and countless product logos (for cruises, for magazines, for CDs); and the figure of “the tribe,” represented by books with titles like *Joining the Tribe* (Linnea Due’s collection of interviews with and stories about young men and women “growing up gay and lesbian in the ’90’s”), *Reviving the Tribe* (Eric Rofes’s guide to gay male mental and sexual health in the second decade of the AIDS epidemic), and *Members of the Tribe* (a collection of cartoon caricatures by Michael Willhoite, modeled on the format of the “gay list,” in which the uniform style of the cartoonist encourages the reader to experience Anne Frank, Sergei Eisenstein, Gore Vidal, and Senator Joe McCarthy as ethnically similar). The ethnic model of American homosexuality, whose first armature was the simple list of worthy forerunners, has been elaborated in contemporary mass culture into an ambient notion of the “peopleness” of lesbians and gay men.⁴

Such are the large historical changes—the dissemination of sexological theories, the mass migration of military and labor forces, the formation of urban queer subcultures, and their integration into a mass market—that Jonathan Dollimore summarizes as a movement “from pathology to politics” (169–230). The questions that animate this book, however, are meant

to challenge that formulation. What did such changes feel like? Was there really a movement from inversion to ethnicity, from isolation to peoplehood, that women and men living through it could experience as such? What is the subjective experience of the birth of a new social movement, or even a new ethnicity?

The texts I have gathered in the four chapters that follow suggest that before Stonewall, literary and mass-cultural writing in the United States reflects neither an immersion in “pathology” nor an inevitable movement in the direction of what we now call “lesbian and gay culture”: neither inversion nor ethnicity, that is, in any pure form. What such texts do illuminate is the tension between them, which manifests itself in an overwhelming desire to *feel historical*, to convert the harrowing privacy of the inversion model into some more encompassing narrative of collective life. This is why I think of my materials as “foundling”: the word allegorizes a movement between solitary exile and collective experience—one that is surely still a part of contemporary queer culture but that is foregrounded in the two generations that connect Hart Crane and Willa Cather to muscle magazines such as *Physique Pictorial* and lesbian pulp novels such as *Odd Girl Out*.

I should pause here to emphasize that while I want to be respectful of the differences among early-, middle-, and late-twentieth-century lesbian and gay cultures, I am nonetheless tracking a dilemma or tension between individual and communal identities that animates texts across those differences. We find this dilemma—which foundling texts suffer as the untenability of the inversion model, on one hand, and the inaccessibility of an ethnic model, on the other—rephrased in contemporary queer culture, where it operates in political debates about how important sex is to lesbian and gay identity or how innate it is; and in academic arguments about whether homosexuality is an “identity” in the first place. Before I return to the last of these questions, I want merely to suggest that their persistence across the century prevents us from looking to the present for greater or more reflexive knowledge about the historical significance of homosexuality than what the past holds.

If I reject a purely progressive or liberationist narrative of the development of U.S. queer politics and culture in the twentieth century, though, it is not because I think the past one hundred years reflect no change at all. I am simply persuaded by a different narrative, one that traces a movement from

isolated, urban queer subcultures to a subculture networked across urban centers, then to a “national” queer culture linked by lesbian and gay print media and by shared habits of commodity consumption, and then—most recently—to a globalized queer culture facilitated by tourism, migration, and Internet communication. This other narrative does not imply progress toward liberation in the sense that a “pathology to politics” story does; a wide variety of commentators have been careful to point out that with each new stage of queer integration into urban, national, or international systems new problems of representation, cultural integrity, and political danger emerge to replace or reshape old ones.⁵ What our retrospect from the vantage of a global queer culture does allow is a way of reading early- and mid-century identity struggles, like those in founding texts, as signals of the deeply unfinished business between desire and history whose terminus, if it has one, may not lie within the realm of “queer culture” at all. As I hope to make clear, then, I am most attracted to the exemplarity rather than the uniqueness of my source materials.⁶

So founding texts do not tell stories of inversion. In this regard they are to be distinguished from the major texts of the emerging canon of lesbian and gay literature in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, which thus far has been drawn primarily from cosmopolitan literatures of England and Europe, most of them in a modernist vein: the work of Oscar Wilde, Thomas Mann, Marcel Proust, André Gide, Virginia Woolf, or Djuna Barnes. Next to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Death in Venice*, *Remembrance of Things Past*, *The Immoralist*, *Orlando*, and *Nightwood*, founding texts look adolescent, hapless, literal-minded. We can see this in choices of genre: Crane, Cather, the muscle editors, and the pulp novelists all make use of coming-of-age narratives to link their solitary heroes to a larger community, whereas Gide’s Michel and Barnes’s Nora Flood and Robin Vote are wandering cosmopolites, expatriates who traffic, like Wilde’s Lord Henry, in the language (and the narrative arc) of degeneracy. None of these decadent texts reaches toward anything like a “community” that outpaces the hostile language of inversion. Indeed, the texts of the Anglo-European canon seem allergic to anything like the contemporary model of community: even Proust’s famous “freemasonry” of inverts is constituted by a deep ambivalence among its members about each other’s perversion (Bersani 129). It is as though the inversion model, first formulated in the centers of Euro-

pean culture, is diffused in its transmission to America shores, where it becomes a background against which writers struggle but never a narrative destination.

On the other hand, foundling literature is not what we could call an “ethnic” literature, either: we must reserve that designation for the vast (and exuberantly multi-ethnic) body of U.S. queer literature that has been published since Stonewall, by which time a national lesbian and gay culture provides a pool of character types (the queen, the ingenue, the bartender) and narrative tropes (coming out, first love, breaking up, homophobic violence) to draw on. The post-Stonewall literature of queer ethnicity—whether in the short stories of Achy Obejas or Norman Wong, the performance art of Holly Hughes, the later novels of Edmund White, or the plays of Tony Kushner—depends on a complicity with queer audiences that foundling texts never assume. When Hughes recalls in one monologue that her WASP parents used to worry that the expressive flamboyance of her childhood made her seem “ethnic,” the joke the audience shares is the pun between her failure to be “straight” and her failure to be “white” (3). And when Obejas titles her first short story collection *We Came All the Way from Cuba So You Could Dress Like This?* the joke with her lesbian readers is that her characters’ first ethnicity, their Cuban-ness, will be complicated by another “ethnicity” of butch lesbianism whose sign—masculine dress—is both absorbed and misunderstood in the parental address of the title. Both texts are secure in the assumption that readers have split identifications between their “family of origin” and their “chosen family,” to use the current parlance. But foundling texts make no such leap. Their ideas of sodality (if not readerly complicity) are based on hopeful analogies to other historical forms: Whitemanian brotherhood, Native American extended family, Greek pederasty. Only the lesbian pulps do not make this analogical move; but even among Ann Bannon’s Greenwich Village lesbians, whose relative freedom from the closet brings them closest to a contemporary queer literature, the social and erotic network that links them in a flush of self-discovery is always in danger of disruption by avenging husbands and over-eager male suitors.⁷

The historical analogies that populate foundling texts, I should point out, make my choice of the word *foundling* a metaphorical one: the texts I have gathered are not orphan narratives after the fashion of *Great Expectations* or *Anne of Green Gables*. It is true that most of the women in Bannon’s

fiction, for instance, are very conveniently orphaned and Cather's protagonists are most often separated from their families by ambition or a deep sense of difference from them, but the orphanhood in the texts is never at the center of a plot's arc. Similarly, in Crane's poems, the lyric value placed on brotherhood far exceeds that placed on parental figures, much as the gestures toward family in the muscle magazines (captions noting the family situations of physique models, for instance) always feel secondary, an afterthought. But I have not written a narrative history of the figure of the foundling in lesbian and gay culture. Recent literary-critical work on the figure of the orphan or the foundling, focused on English Romantic poets and early American texts, has examined the orphan as a trope for experiences of artistic alienation and economic disenfranchisement, or for forms of scapegoating and cultural marginalization during tumultuous historical change, reinvesting the figure of the orphan with broad historical and cultural meaning.⁸ I share that last gesture, although my notion of what counts as orphanhood is more metaphorical at the outset, and it is also the starting point for a notion of potentially shared identity, based on queer writers' historical analogies rather than on figures of orphans.

The analogies that animate foundling texts, especially those analogies that equate an inarticulate homosexuality with a distant racial, ethnic, tribal, or national form, have led me in all the chapters that follow to turn my attention to the racial politics of foundling imagination. All of the primary texts in this book are by white writers and artists; most of them trade in primitivist or at least anachronistic fantasies that earlier cultural modes are less punishing of secret desires than their own. It is not true, however, that foundling writing must be produced by white people: James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and John Rechy's *City of Night* are both good examples of texts that easily fit the coming-of-age and neither-invert-nor-queer-ethnic model of foundling writing I have laid out here. It is true that foundling texts by white people tend to participate in an unpolitical and sometimes racist set of beliefs about the simplicity of racial analogies; I have tried to balance the obvious political limitations of such analogies with the benefits of historicizing them. These benefits may be considerable, if we begin to see the twining of race with sexual fantasy as a story about different but simultaneous modes of writing history. I have, of course, learned a great deal about this relationship of modes by reading the work of U.S. queer

writers of color (among them contemporary writers such as Delany, Lorde, Wong, and Obejas, but also early-century writers we now claim as illuminating queer desire, such as Nella Larsen and Jean Toomer). I have also been provoked in this regard by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who write in *Anti-Oedipus* about the historical promiscuity of sexual fantasy:

In delirium the libido is continually re-creating History, continents, kingdoms, races, and cultures. Not that it is advisable to put historical representations in the place of the familial representations of the Freudian unconscious, or even the archetypes of a collective unconscious. It is merely a question of ascertaining that our choices in matters of love are at the crossroads of “vibrations,” which is to say that they express connections, disjunctions, and conjunctions of flows that cross through a society, entering and leaving it, linking it up with other societies, ancient or contemporary, remote or vanished, dead or yet to be born. Africas and Orients, always following the underground thread of the libido. . . . A love is not reactionary or revolutionary, but it is the index of the reactionary or revolutionary character of the social investments of the libido. (352)

Deleuze and Guattari are not suggesting, in this passage, that racial identities are “merely” fantasy material; on the contrary, they are proposing that fantasy is never merely private. They are also helpful in pointing the way to an antiracist reading practice that historicizes rather than punishes the racialized sexual fantasies of modern subjects, white and non-white alike. And, further, they are helpful in suggesting that “the libido” and race may be names for different historical temporalities—one of them, sexuality, cycling and recycling pieces of the other, race—whose large movements (migrations, displacements) individual lives cannot themselves encompass. Sexuality in this reading is an “individual” phenomenon only insofar as it is historical; and it is “fantasy” only insofar as the material for fantasy depends on the “investments” of the social body. It is always strung between different speeds of time and different registers of experience, between the private and the public. Or, as Deleuze and Guattari put it, desire itself is foundling: “the unconscious is an orphan” (49).

If the texts I have chosen here suffer a political naïveté about race that demands historicizing, they are also in danger of being assimilated into a

queer reading practice that assumes the movement “from pathology to politics,” so that they come to represent, for better or for worse, what “we” presume ourselves to have transcended: the closet, isolation, dubious and literal-minded analogies to other cultures. And it is true that all the materials I have gathered here do traffic in something like queer mythology, if by “mythology” we mean Fredric Jameson’s notion that myths are what writers who dream of describing history collapse into when they cannot gain access to objective historical knowledge (“Figural Relativism” 164). In each of the chapters in this book, however, I try to suggest that it is exactly the “mythological” features of the texts—their hopefulness, their naïveté—that historically illuminate them for us. Through the lens of a foundling imagination, in other words, we can see homosexuality in twentieth-century U.S. literature and culture, not as an early stage in the formation of an autonomous sexual-political “identity” that has “liberated” itself over the past seventy years, but as a historiographical struggle: specifically, a struggle to find terms for historical narration that strike a balance between the unspeakability of desire, especially punishable desire, and group life. “History is what hurts,” Jameson writes, meaning by “history” the name we give to the impossibility of reconciling personal life with the movements of a total system (*Political Unconscious* 102). If that is true—and I believe it is—then the pain and the painful delight in these foundling texts are among the most richly “historical” of any a lesbian and gay movement might choose to claim, since they extend our idea of “the historical” to include the desire for its conditions.

I begin to specify what such a desire can look like in chapter 1. Surveying seventy years of Crane criticism, I point out that both his detractors and his champions resolve their difficulty with Crane’s notoriously “ecstatic,” dense lyrics by subliming him out of literary history: he seems to his critics not a modernist or a metaphysical or a romantic poet but somehow all of these, ransacking “the history of styles” and floating lost beyond it. This subliming of Crane out of literary history is always linked, I suggest, to a notion that he fails to write history; this notion is linked, in turn, to his homosexuality. Hostile critics, that is, have suggested that Crane failed to digest the stern imperative of Anglophone literary modernism to write history as a story of decline and argue that the basis of this failure is a promiscuous male homosexual dispersal of energy, which appears in the poems as an adolescent overexcitement about new technologies such as airplanes

and radios. Crane's defenders, meanwhile, have tended to write him as an Icarian overreacher, whose sheer commitment to the means of poetry is traceable to the ahistorical *jouissance* of gay desire. Against these claims, I argue that Crane is in fact an acute theorist of history and that his poems, so often read as the product of uninterpretable private fantasies, actually offer a supple and legible vocabulary for the unnoticed sensory experiences out of which historical narration emerges. In readings of short lyrics from Crane's first book, *White Buildings*, as well as sections from Crane's long poem *The Bridge* and a posthumously published fragment addressed to his critics, I show that Crane's homosexuality prompts him to shape a poetic language of shared but occluded historical experience. Gay critics such as Thomas Yingling have shown Crane's inventiveness in reworking the tropes of the inversion model of homosexuality in his love poems; but this tropological "queering" is only half the story. Crane's desire to communicate historical experience in a lyric address to what Allen Grossman calls his "hermeneutic friends" and to imagine them as the basis of an American fraternity marks his poems as founding texts.

In chapter 2 I show what a search for "hermeneutic friends" looks like in sustained narrative form. Reading four of Willa Cather's novels—*The Song of the Lark*, *One of Ours*, *The Professor's House*, and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*—I show that Cather's entire career can be understood as a sustained and creative effort to imagine kinship relations among characters without making recourse to the heterosexual marriage plot of the realist novel. I argue that Cather achieves this aim by creating "affect-genealogies," coming-of-age stories that establish for her young heroes a lineage of invisible kin, who always share three things: their unfitness for family life, their identifications with European high culture and against American mass culture, and their faintly inverted gender identities. Cather liked her male protagonists to be ever so slightly feminine, and her female heroes to be boyish. And she is fiercely proud of these inversions: she believes they make her men less brutish and her women less frivolous. They also are the bodily ground for what Cather will argue throughout her career really connects people: not relations of family or nation but the quiet dignity, sometimes terribly lonely, of people who live the life of the imagination. That Cather insists on the bodily visibility of this seemingly intangible difference is both a confir-

mation of its allegorical relation to homosexuality, I argue, and the source of its interest as a theory of history. In short, Cather's characters, strung between their gender inversions and some ineffable peoplehood of dreamers, give evidence on their bodies of what one character calls "the open secret" of "passion": a struggle to give form to desire that is invisible only to people who believe that material progress is what gives meaning to life. I conclude the chapter with a survey of how this matrix of concerns about feeling and affiliation still silently controls the terms by which contemporary readers of Cather are trying to understand the relationship of her sexuality to her art.

The musclebound images in physique magazines of the 1950s and early 1960s might seem a long way from Cather's early-century struggle with the marriage plot. But in chapter 3 I show that, at mid-century, the magazines are hashing out answers to many of the same questions about homosexuality and history that Cather faced. Like Cather, the muscle magazine editors believed that adolescence encodes an "open secret" in the social body, the secret of beauty—and, like Cather, they believed this secret could operate as a social bond, and a source of historical narration. In a brief introduction, I show how Bob Mizer, the editor of *Physique Pictorial*, insisted on linking images of the taut, muscular bodies of their adolescent male models to written text that poses homosexuality, not as a problem of individual desire, but as an appealing condition in the social body, a kind of contagious "courtesy" that should be the basis for a worldwide fitness movement. The rest of the chapter traces the role of the physique magazines in a mid-century struggle over how to read the relationship between individual gay male bodies, on one hand, and an invisible gay public that might or might not turn out to be the source of some historical change, on the other. Alongside readings of the relationship between word and image in the muscle publications themselves, then, I look at how physique culture was interpreted from outside—by *Sports Illustrated* (which abhorred it as evidence of homosexuality in American sport), the U.S. Supreme Court (which judged it, in 1962, not to be obscene), and by social-psychiatric sexologists (who equated excessive bodily athleticism with a gender identity disorder). In a conclusion devoted to contemporary gay male celebrations of 1950s muscle culture, I show how the way that culture is represented as a "simpler, more innocent" male homosexuality actually masks the unfinished struggle of the

magazines to de-individualize homosexuality by placing it in history—to escape the loneliness of the model of individual gender pathology and to confirm the wholesome masculinity of a vast “secret public” of musclemen.

This unfinished struggle between the explanatory powers of isolation and collectivity, between ideas of inversion and a dream of peoplehood, is nowhere more sharply etched than in the production and consumption of the lesbian pulp novels of the 1950s and 1960s. In chapter 4 I focus on how the ambivalent heroines of lesbian pulp novels have shaped the criticism of the genre. The protagonists of the most famous novels of the era, Ann Bannon’s Beebo Brinker series, are torn between hating themselves for being inverters and celebrating the erotic networks their sexuality forms. The pressure Bannon places on her characters to come to terms with themselves as “trapped in the wrong body” is so intense, I show, that the plots of Bannon’s novels are essentially determined by the tension between butch and femme bodily styles: femme lesbians, who can “pass” as straight, flee their butch lovers, who cannot disguise their masculinity, only to return when the affections of men prove hollow; or, in another arrangement of this plot, a woman who has married a man finally abandons him in order to hunt down her femme lover from college, only to end up playing femme herself to the same butch—Beebo Brinker—from whom the first femme had fled. I argue that subsequent criticism of Bannon’s novels, which has focused primarily on their highly mobile femmes, cannot choose between labeling them realist and labeling them melodramatic: are the novels to be remembered primarily as “self-hating,” because of the violent instability of the relationships they depict, or are they to be canonized as camp melodrama, whose erotic *rondelé* reflects the proud sexual autonomy of women? My own answer to this question is that focusing on Bannon’s butch, Beebo, allows us to read the novels so as to accommodate the histories of both celebration and shame they describe: in Beebo’s “masculine” physique, which over the course of five novels ages from adolescence to menopause, Bannon finds a way to make the inversion model feel historical. Beebo accrues the experience of being unable to pass, that is; and this experience becomes a source of sexual dignity. Age, however, more than a particular butch or femme identity, affords this historicization—or, age in combination with a romance involving both terms of the butch-femme pair. I close this chap-

ter with a reading of a 1992 Canadian film about lesbian pulp, *Forbidden Love*, whose delightful toggling between interviews with older lesbians and a fictional, pulp-style butch-femme romance suggests ways of reading both inversion and an “ethnic” peoplehood into the queer past.

Before turning to my four chapters, I would like to offer a brief description of how I think this book fits into the ongoing work of queer studies. One of my primary aims in writing *Foundlings* was to try to resolve a tension in the United States between lesbian and gay studies, on one hand, and queer theory, on the other. The difference between these two designations has been succinctly phrased by Michael Warner in terms of method, as a difference between historical and psychoanalytic models of interpretation (“Introduction” xi); and by Lisa Duggan, in terms of the institutional placement of queer scholars, as a difference between historians and literary critics (“The Discipline Problem”). In both understandings of this tension, what is at stake is the problem of how to relate the uncovering of a lost or submerged U.S. lesbian and gay history to the project of formulating a nonpunishing but specific account of the origins of homosexuality.

The debate that has most often emerged from the collision of these two projects goes something like this: queer theorists, determined to write a story of the origins of homosexuality, assign themselves to understanding the (logically, if not temporally) “presocial” intersection of matter and language in the figure of sexuality and therefore tend to produce “radical” understandings of homosexuality—that is, theories that locate homosexuality at the very margins or origins of culture itself. This approach is true of all the major American theorizations of the last decade: Leo Bersani’s *Homos*, Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, Teresa De-Laurentis’s *The Practice of Love*, Lee Edelman’s *Homographesis*, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet*. Historians of U.S. lesbian and gay sexuality, meanwhile, engaged in the project of capturing lost information about past queer lives, place the objects of their study firmly within the realm of the cultural, as articulate—if contingent—historical forms. This means that the understanding of homosexuality in the historical work is less “radical” and more “political”—less about the untapped possibilities at the root of culture and more about the accumulated example of past attempts at

survival. This political emphasis can be found in broad, summary histories of the twentieth century, such as Lillian Faderman's *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, as well as histories of particular places and shorter periods, such as George Chauncey's *Gay New York*, which covers the turn of the century, or Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis's *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*, which is focused on lesbians in Buffalo, New York, from the 1930s to the 1950s. What emerges from the differences between queer theory and lesbian and gay history, then, is something like a debate about ideology and historical self-consciousness: is homosexuality most potent as a force for social change when it is inarticulate, unconscious, and acting as a threat to representation? or when it clothes itself in specific historical and political forms, which pose challenges to particular arrangements of power and authority? Does homosexuality have to be the conscious possession of a person or a group of people—an identity—for it to shape history?⁹

My own solution to this problem partakes of something that James Chandler recently called “the return to history” in literary criticism, under whose rubric we can include the new historicism. Chandler's *England in 1819* offers a genealogy of new historicism, with its interest in particular locales and specific scenes, that links it back to debates about “uneven development” in Marxist historiography—debates about why some dates, 1789 or 1939 or 1819, say, seem supersaturated with “history” (108–9, 131). This genealogy moves Chandler to ruminate on what exactly the “history” is that saturates certain dates (and, since he is a Romanticist, certain poetic figures), and he concludes that it is something like a Lukácsian historical “consciousness,” a historical “phantasm” irreducible to mind or body, the material world, or the world of the imagination. What gives this historical phantasm a Marxist genealogy for Chandler is its illumination, for the historical (or protohistorical) subject, of her membership in a collectivity imagined as “revolutionary” (554).

I am especially sympathetic to such formulations, which arrive at a sympathetic, unpunishing description of the relationship between historical fantasy and historical “experience.” What attracted me to Hart Crane, Willa Cather, physique magazines, and lesbian pulp novels, and what made me want to collect them and give them a common name, was my sense of the vulnerability of all of the texts to history. In the very articulation of their desire to “feel historical,” that is, each of my foundling texts resorted to

means so delicate, so unapproved, that in retrospect they seem utterly in danger of being swept aside on the grounds of their naïveté. Crane's enthusiasm for the fraternal possibilities implied in the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge or Cather's belief that a return to some "Native American" artisanal culture was a way to resist modernization and the pressures of heterosexual marriage: these seem too counterfactual to hold up as "lesbian and gay history." The same could be said of the muscle magazines' insistence on the moral purity of their Greek ideals of beauty or on the lesbian pulps' constant recourse to melodramatic, transporting sex as a solution to homophobia. These strategies, in other words, are all mythological rather than historical. But the very subjectivity, the very "mythology," of all of these strategies told me a story that seemed historical: the story of discarded attempt—of unfulfilled desire and the incomplete historical project of connecting personhood and peoplehood it cathects.

In one sense, then, I am participating in a new historicist project that Catherine Gallagher and Steven Greenblatt summarize as an insistence on the historical worth of the fragmentary, islanded, or anecdotal utterance. In an essay called "Counterhistory and the Anecdote," which was written as a kind of retrospective on the past thirty years of literary historicism, Gallagher and Greenblatt offer a clarifying linkage between a resistance to the traditional, narrative history of "great men" and the lure of the anecdote. Surveying the heady intellectual changes of the 1960s and 1970s, they write:

Along this counter-historical continuum—from poststructuralist negativity, through the recovery of the *longue durée* and the history of the losers, to the envisioning of counterfactuals and provisional historical worlds—our sense of delayed and alternative chronologies, of resistances to change, its unevenness, and the unexpectedness of its sources, grew more complete and assured. . . . At certain points along this range of counter-historical endeavors, anecdotes became prime carriers and expressions of various counter-historical desires: to foster scepticism about the depth or thoroughness of historical explanation; to counteract narratives of development or progress; and to imagine a more complete array of the options at a given moment in the past, instead of selecting only those realized as "historically significant." (53–54)

In its “counter-historical desires,” the new historicist anecdote seems to offer queer critics a possibility of adequating between the place of homosexuality as logically prehistorical, as in the major texts of queer theory, and legitimately historical and simply waiting to be recovered, as in most lesbian and gay history. To be fair, many lesbian and gay historians, in specifying the modernity of the homosexuality we think of as ours, have themselves come up against criticism as “social constructionists” who do not believe in any pre-given homosexual identity; and queer theorists have shown a strong commitment to using theories of the presocial mobility of homosexuality to re-inflect properly social and historical forms. There is no absolute line, in other words, between post-structuralist theorists and traditional historians. But no U.S. scholars I know of have tried to write either a history or a historiography of what is proto-historical in homosexuality, desire. That I might try to do so, at least in a “micro-historical” way, is exactly what appealed to me in my materials. And the anecdote, described by Gallagher and Greenblatt, begins to sound like a name for the traffic in and out of history that desire performs.

Indeed, in the writing to which the new historicists are perhaps most indebted, the scholarly encounter with the anecdote takes on the excitement of desire itself. Michel Foucault, in a 1977 essay called “The Life of Infamous Men,” recounts his discovery in the Bibliothèque Nationale of a whole archive of eighteenth-century documents that spoke to him like “strange poems,” such as hospital internment registers, in which entire lives seemed summarized in a flash of clumsy prose. He becomes aroused:

I would find it difficult to say exactly what I felt when I read these fragments and many others which were similar to them. Doubtless one of those impressions which one says are “physical” as if it would be possible to have others. And I confess that these “*nouvelles*,” suddenly rising up through two and a half centuries of silence, stirred more fibres in me than what one usually calls literature. (77)¹⁰

Foucault is, of course, the scholar best known for having tried to write a counter-history and historiography of the un- or prehistorical, of sexuality in the protean variety of its productions, and who thereby subjugated “history” as theory’s master code to some other term, usually *power*. But this subjugation has taken on the character of a historical master code

itself, as his famous assignation of an 1870 birthdate to homosexuality is absorbed into lesbian and gay scholarship (*History of Sexuality* 43). This declaration hinges, first, on an idea that power always breeds its own resistance, which, with deviant sexuality, leads to another famous formulation, where homosexuality, pressed into being by medical and juridical discourse in the nineteenth century, “began to speak in its own behalf”; and second, on a periodization (and, implicitly, an ethnography) that differentiates between societies that regulate themselves primarily through “the deployment of alliance,” that is, through kinship systems, and those that have superimposed on this system of alliance another system, “the deployment of sexuality” (106–7). While both this theory of power and this periodization have been immensely congenial to lesbian and gay literary scholars, it has also resulted in exactly the sort of *grand récit* that Gallagher and Greenblatt describe themselves and Foucault as struggling to dismantle. Not only is homosexuality, in this account, a product of modernity, but it veritably represents modernity: it is the example, par excellence, of new forms of power and of new periodizations.

This theoretical privilege gave rise to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s 1990 *Epistemology of the Closet*, which, in a dazzling elaboration of Foucault’s work, argues that the late-nineteenth-century transformation of homosexuality from a juridical and medical category into a fully ontologized identity (“a species,” in Foucault’s terms) underwrites a new *episteme* in which cultural distinctions as basic as those between ignorance and knowledge, or culture and nature, owed their coherence to an unacknowledged “open secret” about the existence of homosexuals (11). It is interesting to note, though, that in the midst of this major formulation Sedgwick feels obliged to sketch its own counter-history. Although she places herself squarely in the “constructivist” camp of scholars for whom there is no essential homosexual identity across time, she acknowledges in the introduction to *Epistemology of the Closet* that “essentialist” queer history, rooted in the list-making defiance I describe above, may capture a local, affective dimension of lesbian and gay lives slighted in such global arguments as her own:

It seems plausible that a lot of the emotional energy behind essentialist historical work has to do not even in the first place with reclaiming the place and eros of Homeric heroes, Renaissance painters, and

medieval gay monks, so much as with the far less permissible, vastly more necessary project of recognizing and validating the creativity and heroism of the effeminate boy or tommyish girl of the fifties (or sixties or seventies or eighties) whose sense of constituting precisely a *gap* in the discursive fabric of the given has not been done justice, so far, by constructivist work. (42–43)

The counter-historical resistance to major narratives returns here in Sedgwick's link between "emotional energy" and "historical work," specifically in the form of her description of some lesbian and gay historians' unconscious desire for the unsung, for the study of details undignified by contact with History. Here, interestingly, Sedgwick locates this unconscious desire close to the ground of the inversion model, at the intersection of gender identity and object choice, in the figures of the "effeminate boy" and the "tommyish girl" whom "essentialist" historians are not aware of wanting to write about and whom "constructivist" scholars have not yet acknowledged. The explanatory power of the tomboy and the sissy for Sedgwick, in this dream of her own counter-practice, is no less than that of a Jamesonian "political unconscious," a double figure for how particular texts—say, essentialist queer histories focused on luminaries rather than children—repress what they do not have the historical resources to master or organize (*Tendencies* 48–49).

This acute vulnerability of queer texts to what comes after them, their excitation in the matrix of claiming, is why Sedgwick is interested in the possibilities of furnishing the tomboy and the sissy with a historical heroism. It is also, I suggest, why Foucault is moved by the stylistically awkward "infamy" of his archival subjects, and why I have found these foundling texts so compelling. In fact, it is the reason I chose the metaphor of "the foundling" to describe them: the sense of unfinished historical business that close reading can bring, especially the close reading of texts that seem too catachrestic, too counterfactual, too literal-minded or unsophisticated to merit full-scale integration into the story of how we come up with historical periods or theories of history. Here I argue that close readings of Crane, or Cather or muscle magazines or pulp fiction, are of great value because they help us reread U.S. lesbian and gay history against a progressive or liberationist grain, and along the fault lines, instead, of a still-incomplete struggle

to adequate inversion and ethnicity, solitude and community, singularity and universality.¹¹

When, in her 1903 story “The Making of Americans,” Gertrude Stein writes, “It takes time to make queer people” (152), she is trying to describe the development of interesting identities that are neither “bourgeois,” that is, undistinguished by any eccentricity, nor “crazy, faddist, or low class,” that is, marred by what she sees as an overinvestment in being different from the “normal” world. She is suggesting, I think, that “queer people,” the luckily strange people in America, require a particular type of time in order to exist: neither the slow time of conformity to nineteenth-century bourgeois ideals, nor the over-rapid time of adherence to twentieth-century fads, or of abject suffering, caught up in every passing change. The elitist class politics of her distinction, if unhappy for most of us, should nonetheless illuminate what we can gain from reading foundling texts. Because they do not properly belong either to the inert, terminal narratives of inversion or to the triumphant, progressive narrative of achieving ethnic coherence, they suggest another time, a time of expectation, in which their key stylistic gestures, choices of genre, and ideological frames all point to an inaccessible future, in which the inarticulate desires that mobilize them will find some “hermeneutic friend” beyond the historical horizon of their unintelligibility to themselves. The sense that I might be such a “friend” is not only what I consider to be the historical and interpretive bridge between Stein’s use of the word *queer* and my own; it is also the main reason I have been so happy to write about these materials. I hope, introducing them to my readers, the feeling will transmit.