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Theorizing the Queer Modernist Short Story: From Failures of Socialty to Negative Affects

Bart Eeckhout

- 1 The following essay seeks to contribute to the development of methodological tools for analyzing non-normative sexualities in cultural products from recent history, applied here to a sample of modernist short stories. I come to this topic from the angle of a literary scholar who is currently collaborating with colleagues outside of literature departments in an attempt to recalibrate the notion of sexual scripts that was first developed by the social scientists John Gagnon and William Simon in the early seventies. The concept of sexual scripts launched in *Sexual Conduct: The Social Sources of Human Sexuality* seems to us worth reactivating because it involves a distinction among three levels: the cultural, the interpersonal, and the intrapsychic. To study human sexuality in cultural products, this division seems to us a good point of departure: it does not limit the analysis to either a close reading of individual symptoms or a sociological analysis of interactions, but combines the two with an emphasis on cultural structures, which allows us to be attentive also to regimes of patriarchal and heteronormative discourse.
- 2 While this larger project is meant to serve the analysis of a variety of cultural data, it has obvious relevance for literary studies. To bring the concept of sexual scripts up to date, however, we should take on board additional tools of more recent vintage and with a more specific disciplinary focus. These are to be found most prominently, I would argue, in writings inspired by what is called the affective turn in queer theory—a critical development associated with figures such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (in her later work), Ann Cvetkovich, José Esteban Muñoz, and Sara Ahmed, in publications from the late 1990s and early 2000s. One of the more recent contributions to this field—one that is firmly focused on the study of literary modernism that concerns us here—is a study by Heather Love entitled *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Love makes a case for revisiting literary texts about sexually non-normative characters and themes from before

the age of sexual emancipation—the period we tend to sum up as “pre-Stonewall.” This is how she opens her introduction:

A central paradox of any transformative criticism is that its dreams for the future are founded on a history of suffering, stigma, and violence. Oppositional criticism opposes not only existing structures of power but also the very history that gives it meaning. Insofar as the losses of the past motivate us and give meaning to our current experience, we are bound to memorialize them (“We will never forget”). But we are equally bound to overcome the past, to escape its legacy (“We will never go back”). (1)

- 3 Noting that “[t]he history of Western representation is littered with the corpses of gender and sexual deviants,” Love deplors how these characters more often than not seem to have died in vain. “Many contemporary critics,” she claims, “dismiss negative or dark representations entirely, arguing that the depiction of same-sex love as impossible, tragic, and doomed to failure is purely ideological” (1). This may be something of a straw target when it comes to academic literary criticism with an interest in historical representations of non-normative sexualities (Love provides no examples of the dismissive critics). But it does arguably reflect the responses of a good many ordinary LGBT readers and book reviewers, as well as students in classrooms, who are inclined to reject the association between well-integrated LGBTs today and pre-emancipatory images of a depressing—and depressingly consistent—negativity. And the objections formulated by Love may also account for the relative paucity of queer-theoretical work about such negative images from modernist literature.

- 4 As Love goes on to argue,

The emphasis on damage in queer studies exists in a state of tension with a related and contrary tendency—the need to resist damage and to affirm queer existence. This tension is evident in discussions of the “progress” of gays and lesbians across the twentieth century. Although many queer critics take exception to the idea of a linear, triumphalist view of history, we are in practice deeply committed to the notion of progress [...]. Critics find themselves in an odd position: we are not sure if we should explore the link between homosexuality and loss, or set about proving that it does not exist. (3)

- 5 Undeterred by this quandary, Love returns to the negativity of early twentieth-century queer representations, even as she concedes that “[i]t is not clear how such dark representations from the past will lead toward a brighter future for queers” (4). She is interested, nevertheless, in investigating what she calls, in a term borrowed from Cvetkovich, “a crucial ‘archive of feeling,’ an account of the corporeal and psychic costs of homophobia.” This forces her to “pay particular attention to feelings such as nostalgia, regret, shame, despair, *ressentiment*, passivity, escapism, self-hatred, withdrawal, bitterness, defeatism, and loneliness.” By focusing on such feelings, she argues, we gain insight into “what it is like to bear a ‘disqualified’ identity” (4). This in turn contributes to our understanding both of modernity and modernism, for it helps us grasp

the reliance of the concept of modernity on excluded, denigrated, or superseded others [...]. If modernization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century aimed to move humanity forward, it did so in part by perfecting techniques for mapping and disciplining subjects considered to be lagging behind [...]. Aesthetic modernism is marked by a similar temporal splitting. While the commitment to novelty is undoubtedly a dominant feature of modernism, no account of the movement is complete without attention to the place of the nonmodern in the movement—whether in primitivism, in the concern with tradition, in widely

circulating rhetorics of decadence and decline, or in the melancholia that suffuses so many modernist artworks. (5-6)

6 Presenting her work as part of the affective turn in queer theory, Love defines this critical development as an investment in “the relation between emotion and politics” that shows theorists trying to “bring together traditionally polarized terms such as the psychic and the social, subject and structure, politics and loss, affect and law, and love and history” (10). A crucial source of inspiration in this regard is Raymond Williams’ concept of “structures of feeling,” which, according to Love, “might have special relevance to literature in that literature accounts for experience at the juncture of the psychic and the social” (12).

7 As Love draws actively on the philosophical reflections of Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, it may be useful to establish a theoretical link here between her critical enterprise and a recent essay by Benjamin Kohlmann in *PMLA*, entitled “Awkward Moments: Melodrama, Modernism, and the Politics of Affect.” Kohlmann opens his discussion in a way that, even as it speaks to all students of modernism, is particularly provocative for those who study sexuality under the regime of modernity. He returns to Adorno’s writings on Hegel as follows:

Just because we have the “dubious good fortune to live later,” Adorno notes, we are not entitled “sovereignty” to “assign the dead person his place” or to “elevat[e]” ourselves “above him.” Much will be gained, he argues, if the question of appreciation is reversed. Instead of posing the “loathsome question” whether past modes of thinking and feeling have “any meaning for the present,” we should ask “what the present means in the face of [the past]” [...]. This dialectical inversion would enable us to think of history not as a teleological progression from a closed-off past to a present that can freely choose from the knowledge of earlier generations but as a process whereby the present is reconfigured in terms that may seem anachronistic and alien to it. (337)

8 It is of considerable critical value, from this perspective, to allow cultural manifestations from the past to set up diverse forms of resistance to hegemonic thinking in the present, thereby forcing us to grapple with both past and present. This is the case also when we confront the dogged negativity of the “bad” feelings Love puts center-stage in her book. “As queer readers,” Love writes, “we tend to see ourselves as reaching back toward isolated figures in the queer past in order to rescue or save them. It is hard to know what to do with texts that resist our advances. Texts or figures that refuse to be redeemed disrupt not only the progress narrative of queer history but also our sense of queer identity in the present” (8).

9 These few introductory remarks have to suffice as a preamble to the corpus of case studies I have compiled for the occasion and that I now wish to test against Love’s critical argument. For reasons that are both obvious and significant, I was unable to focus on an individually authored short story collection that revolves entirely around LGBT and queer themes, since to my knowledge no such book has emerged from Anglophone modernist fiction (unless it were the symptomatically posthumous collection by E. M. Forster, *The Life to Come*). I had to settle, rather, for individual stories by different writers. Fortunately, the resulting heterogeneity may be turned into an advantage when we wish to detect recurrent patterns that apply across a sufficiently diverse range of literary scripts. In

accordance with the editors' request that contributors focus their investigations on the period 1900-1940, I decided to aim at a balanced selection by picking three stories from *The Penguin Book of Lesbian Short Stories* and three from *The Penguin Book of Gay Short Stories*, two anthologies published in the early nineties. My respective materials are "Leves Amores" by Katherine Mansfield (1907), "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene" by Gertrude Stein (1922), "Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself" by Radclyffe Hall (1926), "A Poem of Friendship" by D. H. Lawrence (1911), "Arthur Snatchfold" by E. M. Forster (1928), and the opening story of Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, "Hands" (1916).

- 10 Importantly, none of these stories are the object of analysis in Heather Love's book, and they were selected before I had been able to acquaint myself with that book's contents. Thus, my primary interest in studying them has been to assess to what extent and how precisely failures of sociality and negative affects prove to be just as central to them as they are to the case studies gathered by Love. This implies that my working methodology has been geared toward the analysis of selective textual moments and compositional features that allow for the identification of recurrent patterns. It is good to remind ourselves from the start, though, that such patterns have but limited validity in terms of their representativeness and should not be allowed to culminate in the establishment of a monolithic historical scenario that may be supposed to apply across the board to all queer literary representations from Anglophone modernism. My hope is, rather, that detecting a number of patterns will heighten our awareness of the cultural power of certain hegemonic social discourses during the early half of the twentieth century, and that this will deepen our analytical understanding whenever we grapple with queer literary representations from roughly a century ago.
- 11 So I find it remarkable and of critical importance that, without the six stories having been selected so as to support Love's argument (this in obvious contrast to her own sample of texts), the kind of failures of sociality and negative affects she unfolds appear to be abundantly on display in five of the six stories—with Stein's language experiment as a fascinating exception I am keeping for the end. To begin with, in all three "gay" stories (and I will need to keep up the scare quotes around "gay" not only to avoid historical back-formations of identities that are anachronistic, but for additional reasons that will become clear toward the end), we encounter scenarios that contain a conspicuous displacement of homoerotic desire outside of community life and into a realm of public invisibility. This adds evidence to the central argument in one of the foundational works of queer theory, Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*, which investigates the crisis of secrecy attending the emergence of the homo/hetero binary both in the modern thinking on sexuality at large and in its concrete enactments in literature.
- 12 Lawrence's "A Poem of Friendship" evokes a brief spell between two teenage boys in the English countryside (the local village is called Nethermere, perhaps distantly echoing the melancholic "Nevermore" of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven"). The failure of sociality is registered here by the way the first-person narrator is able to be intimate with another farming boy, George, only when the two are away from the public realm (and public acknowledgment) of the village, while working the land or taking a swim in the pond. And even then the intimacy is of a heavily interior, psychological kind that must face multiple obstacles. Among other things, the boys' closeness is sometimes experienced across a physical gap that keeps the two apart: "we worked, with a wide field between us, yet very near in the sense of intimacy" (2). Sometimes erotic desire is acted out indirectly, by proxy: at the pond, once again physically separated from the object of his desire, the

narrator enjoys the spectacle of George's dog pleasuring his undressed master "with little caressing licks" and George reciprocating by "play[ing] with the dog" (5). Immediately after this scene, social awareness forces the two boys to discipline the frolicking on which they have finally started when they are interrupted by a girl. Having just become "sensible of nothing but the vigorous poetry of action" and put his hand on George's shoulder, the narrator freezes because of "a laughter from the bank. It was Emily" (5).

- 13 In "Hands," the participant-observer around whom Anderson's cycle of stories is organized, George Willard, derives momentary and partial insight into the tragedy of a local man's homoerotic desires and the subsequent punishment of ostracism meted out to him by befriending a nervous character called Wing Biddlebaum. In a series of obvious spatial metaphors that introduce the story, this character is to be found "[u]pon the half-decayed veranda of a small frame house that stood near the edge of a ravine near the town of Winesburg, Ohio" (160). Striking his precarious balance there on the edge of complete social rejection and even extinction, "Biddlebaum, forever frightened and beset by a ghostly band of doubts, did not think of himself as in any way a part of the life of the town where he had lived for twenty years. Among all the people of Winesburg but one had come close to him. With George Willard [...] he had formed something like a friendship" (160).
- 14 Forster's "Arthur Snatchfold," too, presents a case of problematical sociality, though it is more complex. Here the story centers on the single sexual encounter between the elderly upper-class protagonist Sir Richard Conway and the young working-class milkman who lends his name to the title—an encounter that occurs away from the public realm again, this time in the bushes of a generically depicted country estate visited by Conway. In this case, contrary to the previous two, we get an instance of sexual consummation and apparent satisfaction. Yet, private and invisible as it might have seemed at the time, the encounter returns like a boomerang after Conway finds out, much later, that Snatchfold got arrested mere seconds after their sexual dallying and was condemned to a six-month prison sentence as a result. In Forster's story, the social counterforces are made explicit: the local community's moral crusaders have made it their mission to crack down on all attempts at homosexual bonding. As Conway's countryside host, Trevor Donaldson, reports without realizing that his guest was the other half of the sexual encounter, "oh, you remember our Chairman, Ernest Dray, you met him at my little place. He's determined to stamp this sort of thing out, once and for all" (21). Forster gives a bittersweet twist to the ending when he turns Snatchfold into an unsung hero who has been remarkably loyal to his one-time sexual partner: although the milkman was given the chance to escape imprisonment on condition that he identify his older partner (who was obviously of higher standing), Donaldson reports how the young man obstinately forwent the opportunity. A kind of enduring sociality is thus created between Conway and Snatchfold, but it is a retroactive, politically sterile, publicly invisible, and paradoxical one for which the less powerful partner has been severely punished. And it is further complicated by the fact that Forster wrote this sexual fantasy for private delectation only. As in the case of his better-known novel *Maurice*, he did not feel he could publish such a story of surreptitious same-sex bonding during his lifetime.
- 15 Here it is worth returning to another observation made by Love—one that plays a key role in the resistance many queer modernist representations set up to LGBT readers' desire to place non-normative predecessors on an axis of inevitable social progress. Love notes that "[w]hile contemporary gay, lesbian, and queer critics tend to see queer subjects

during [the early twentieth century] as isolated and longing for a future community,” the narratives in her corpus actually “turn their backs on the future: they choose isolation, turn toward the past, or choose to live in a present disconnected from any larger historical continuum” (8). Her analysis reveals a whole set of characters and images that do not look forward to a more promising future, but unhelpfully and self-destructively back with regret, shame, or despair. Like Walter Benjamin’s famous figure of the “angel of history” (in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History”), they serve as “emblem[s] of resistance to the forward march of progress” (Love 147). Once again, this turns out to be a striking staple of all three “gay” stories I have selected.

- 16 Looking through the lens offered by Love, we notice more easily how Lawrence’s text, for example, is not focused simply on the present of its narrated story, but is explicitly set up from a distant future in which time has mercilessly eroded the ephemeral teenage romance. As a shrewd early-modernist writer, Lawrence shows himself alert to the formal possibilities this temporal gap offers. On one very brief and fleeting occasion that is yet of importance in underwriting the genre designation in the title (“A Poem”), he allows his narrator to register the force of his backward feelings within his very grammar. In a telling recollection, the narrator shifts from the past to the present tense to describe George’s handling of the horse-driven plow: “he flung himself against the plough and, leaning well in, brought it round with a sweep: a click, and they are off uphill again. There is a great rustle as the birds sweep round after him and follow up the new-turned furrow” (3). This image of the object of same-sex desire turning his back on the desiring protagonist and moving away—a typical image of loss as investigated by Love—is apparently etched in the narrator’s mind in a perennial here and now to which he returns in a gesture that queer theorists such as Judith Butler have sought to define by engaging with the Freudian notion of melancholia (Butler 73-84).
- 17 A similar narrative organization may be found in Anderson’s story, which is set up to culminate in an extended look backwards at Biddlebaum’s traumatic past. As a twenty-year-old schoolmaster living in another town (somewhere in Pennsylvania) and under his birth name (Adolph Myers), Biddlebaum was betrayed by his involuntary habit of caressing the boys under his charge. The habit led to his being falsely accused of sexual harassment by a “half-witted boy” who “became enamored of the young master” and reported his nocturnal sexual fantasies back to the townsmen as facts (164). Ever since that traumatic episode, in which the young schoolmaster barely escaped getting lynched, Biddlebaum has suffered from a radically “disqualified” or “spoiled” identity, living as a self-chosen outcast in Ohio under a new name, preternaturally aging (although “but forty” he “looked sixty-five” [164]), and continuously haunted by his fluttering hands, which forever threaten to give away what the rest of his body and mind work so hard to repress.
- 18 Forster’s Conway presents a third variation on the experience of feeling backward rather than forward. In his case, the feeling is reflected metaphorically when at the end of the story he catches his own mirror image and suddenly realizes the extent to which he, too, has radically aged: “They had reached the top of the club staircase. Conway saw the reflection of his face once more in a mirror, and it was the face of an old man. He pushed Trevor Donaldson off abruptly, and went back to sit down by his liqueur-glass. He was safe, safe, he could go forward with his career as planned. But waves of shame came over him” (22). Conway is overcome by shame both at the young milkman’s sacrifice for him and at his own cowardice that keeps him from standing up for the prisoner. He is undone

by the unproductiveness of his own lucky escape, the impossibility to grieve publicly despite the waves of feeling washing over him, and the certain promise of continuing guilt.

- 19 Considering the huge differences in plot, setting, and character among the three “gay” stories in my corpus, it is all the more remarkable, finally, that we can identify yet another thread of unproductive negativity binding my sample together. Love notes that many of the queer figures she analyzes “are characterized by damaged or refused agency” (147), and she includes passivity and withdrawal in her list of negative affects. This pattern, too, returns in multiple guises in all three narratives. On several occasions, for instance, the intimacy between the narrator and George in Lawrence’s story is characterized by speechlessness and a lack of interaction. In addition, we must read the narrator’s wistfully remembered desire through a number of heavily affective projections onto nature in a kind of metonymical chain that Jacques Lacan has made central to our understanding of the workings of desire:

I ran with my heavy clogs and my heart heavy with vague longing, down to the mill, while the wind blanched the sycamores, and pushed the sullen pines rudely, for the pines were sulking because their million creamy sprites could not fly wet-winged. The horse-chestnuts bravely kept their white candles erect in the socket of every bough, though no sun came to light them. Drearily a cold swan swept up the water, trailing its black feet, clacking its great hollow wings, rocking the frightened water hens, and insulting the staid black-necked geese. *What did I want that I turned thus from one thing to another?* (4, my emphasis)

- 20 In this passage (another obvious attempt at poeticizing the story), a whole libidinal psychodrama is compressed into the chain of images that runs from rude pushing to sulking, the inability to fly, candles that are being kept erect, the sun failing to arrive, the sense of dreariness, the clacking of hollow wings, and frightened feelings. When later in the story George does wind up taking the narrator in a firm grip, moreover, the latter surrenders to him in a heavily gendered manner that puts him resolutely in a position of passivity: “He saw I had forgotten to continue my rubbing, and laughing he took hold of me and began to rub me briskly, as if I were a child, or rather, a woman he loved and did not fear. I left myself quite limply in his hands” (6).
- 21 Anderson’s story ends with the image of a socially withdrawn Biddlebaum, all by himself inside his kitchen and self-absorbed, engaging in an involuntary ritual that may in turn be interpreted as a hypertrophied symptom of damaged agency. From the externally focalized position in which we are invited to watch the ritual, it seems like a form of private erotic prayer:
- Lighting a lamp, Wing Biddlebaum washed the few dishes soiled by his simple meal and, setting up a folding cot by the screen door that led to the porch, prepared to undress for the night. A few stray white bread crumbs lay on the cleanly washed floor by the table; putting the lamp upon a low stool he began to pick up the crumbs, carrying them to his mouth one by one with unbelievable rapidity. In the dense blotch of light beneath the table, the kneeling figure looked like a priest engaged in some service of his church. The nervous expressive fingers, flashing in and out of the light, might well have been mistaken for the fingers of the devotee going swiftly through decade after decade of his rosary. (165)
- 22 Conway in Forster’s story appears to be even worse off than Biddlebaum, for he is simply unable to find a correlative for prayer: “Oh for prayer!—but whom had he to pray to, and what about? He saw that little things can turn into great ones, and he did not want greatness. He was not up to it” (22). The only action Conway is able to undertake, in the

story's concluding lines, is to write down "the name of his lover, yes, his lover who was going to prison to save him, in order that he might not forget it. Arthur Snatchfold. He had only heard the name once, and he would never hear it again" (23).

- 23 Turning to the "lesbian" stories in my corpus, we cannot be surprised to notice how several of the patterns already described seem to exert a recurrent appeal. Both Katherine Mansfield's and Radclyffe Hall's stories add grist to Love's analytical mill. Mansfield does so perhaps most ambiguously and in a decidedly more experimental form. Her extremely brief, less-than-two-page story contrasts two images of the female protagonist—who, as with Lawrence, is an unnamed first-person narrator recollecting a memory of great erotic and affective significance ("I can never forget [...] [24])—and another, equally anonymous woman in a hotel room. The first image is all about the darker affects stereotypically associated with feeling backward: here the heavily metonymical description revolves around "the dreary room" with a single "filthy window" giving out onto "the choked, dust-grimed window of a wash-house opposite" (24). This description builds up a sense of the hotel room as a space of abjection by adding how "revolting" the curtains seemed to the narrator, that the wardrobe contained a "cracked mirror" and "the wallpaper hurt [the narrator] physically" (24-25). The descriptions issue in a deep psychological conviction: "I felt within me a certainty that nothing beautiful could ever happen in that room, and for her I felt contempt, a little tolerance, a very little pity" (25). The whole scene also "accentuate[s] the thin tawdriness of her clothes, the squalor of her life," and makes the woman look "dull and grey and tired." All this comes to underwrite the narrator's loss of passion as a result of aging: "I sat on the bed, and thought: 'Come, this Old Age. I have forgotten passion, I have been left behind in the beautiful golden procession of Youth. Now I am seeing life in the dressing-room of the theatre'" (25).
- 24 The second image sets against this depressing prelude an even shorter, lyrically blossoming evocation of one brief sexual encounter between the two women that fleetingly restores passion to the narrator. It reads more like a masturbatory fantasy, however, than a believable adventure:
- She told me as we walked along the corridor to her room that she was glad the night had come. I did not ask why. I was glad, too. It seemed a secret between us. So I went with her into her room to undo those troublesome hooks. She lit a little candle on an enamel bracket. The light filled the room with darkness. Like a sleepy child she slipped out of her frock and then, suddenly, turned to me and flung her arms around my neck. Every bird upon the bulging frieze broke into song. Every rose upon the tattered paper budded and formed into blossom. Yes, even the green vine upon the bed curtains wreathed itself into strange chaplets and garlands, twined round us in a leafy embrace, held us with a thousand clinging tendrils. And Youth was not dead. (25)
- 25 Here again, despite the apparent ecstasy, we do not find any sustained sociality: the intimacy takes place in the privacy of the hotel room (with the lit candle paradoxically increasing the darkness), and the two images pitted against each other in the story do not build a plot: they fail to contain the temporal, spatial, and social conditions needed for flowering into a real narrative. Youth may be declared reborn in the final line, but the sense of delivery at the end of the story arrives in a social bubble; it is not earned through

any act of moral daring or public agency, and has no way to convince us of its sustainability into a social future.

- 26 Hall's much longer and more conventionally plotted story about Miss Ogilvy "find[ing] herself" (as the title has it) is perhaps the most archetypal part of my corpus—as we might expect from a narrative written shortly before the author made up her mind to write *The Well of Loneliness*, a central case study in Love's *Feeling Backward*. Here the failed sociality, sense of loss and regret, choosing of isolation, looking to the past, damaged agency, and passivity from previous examples all return with a vengeance. In less than twenty pages, we come across every one of these negative affects and conditions during the bird's-eye view we get of Miss Ogilvy's sadly unfulfilled life.
- 27 The telescoped biography starts, typically again, in a backward manner and under the aegis of loss. We find Miss Ogilvy at the outset of the story standing "on the quay at Calais," where she "survey[s] the disbanding of her Unit, the Unit that together with the coming of war had completely altered the complexion of her life, at all events for three years" (84). Her physiognomy betrays that she is an emblem of the masculine kind of woman whose condition Hall conceived of as "congenital sexual inversion" (84): Miss Ogilvy is described as having a "tall, awkward body" with a "queer look of strength," a "broad, flat bosom and thick legs and ankles" (85). More important than these outward features, though, is the woman's inner turmoil: "She was standing firm under fire at that moment, the fire of a desperate regret." The cause of this violent affect is to see the war ended, with Miss Ogilvy being forced to surrender life at the front—the kind of life that had allowed her to rise to a figure of heroic stature, "possessed of so dauntless a courage and of so insistent a vitality that it vitalized the whole Unit" (85).
- 28 Backward feelings and the sense of loss multiply when we encounter Miss Ogilvy in the next scene on the train from Dover to London, full of "frustration" and convinced that her future is as "small" as the English landscape passing her by (86). She starts to recollect her life, beginning with the "queer little girl" that showed all the markers of someone we would now call a tomboy but who in her own day and age was compelled to grow up with mounting "bitterness" at the fact that "the world has no wish to understand those who cannot conform to its stereotyped pattern" (86-87). Much later, after the death of her parents and with two equally unmarried sisters on her hands who "looked upon her as a brother" (88), Miss Ogilvy purchased a little estate in Surrey and concluded that "at fifty-five she had grown rather dour, as is often the way with shy, lonely people" (89). The outbreak of the First World War transformed her overnight and gave her an opportunity to experience a three-year spell of psychological liberation while working as a nurse on the battlefields, a period during which she could convince herself that continued acknowledgment of her "courage and hardship and high endeavor" was possible, and that she could afford to "forg[e]t the bad joke that Nature seemed to have played on her" (90).
- 29 From these recollections we fast-forward through the remaining years of Miss Ogilvy's life—years of "growing irritation" during which she is occasionally overcome by a sense of "complete desolation" (92). Her disaffection is only augmented by her antipathy for growing old, which "she resented most bitterly, so that she became the prey of self-pity, and of other undesirable states in which the body will torment the mind, and the mind, in its turn, the body" (93). As a result, and on an impulse, Miss Ogilvy eventually decides to pack and leave everything behind. We are half-way through the story and find Hall suddenly switching genres in accordance with her "forenote" announcing "a brief

excursion into the realms of the fantastic" (84). "Near the south coast of Devon," the narrator tells us, "there exists a small island that is still very little known to the world, but which, nevertheless, can boast an hotel; the only building upon it" (93). To this fantasticated space Miss Ogilvy retreats "with a sense of adventure" (93).

- 30 Apparently wishing to anchor her protagonist's "congenital" gender identity and/or sexuality far back in human history, Hall allows Miss Ogilvy to recall suddenly how on the south-west side of the island that she has never visited before "there was once a cave—a very large cave" (94). When her hostess at the hotel shows her some local archeological findings being kept in her scullery, including a man's skull and thighbone, Miss Ogilvy is filled with "outrage" because "she knew how such men had been buried [...]. They had buried such men in deep, well-dug pits surmounted by four stout stones at their corners—four stout stones there had been and a covering stone. And all this Miss Ogilvy knew as by instinct, having no concrete knowledge on which to draw" (96). The violent feeling segues into another dark affect when she is swept by "a terrible unassuageable grief, without hope, without respite, without palliation, so that with something akin to despair she touched the long gash in the skull. Then her eyes, that had never wept since her childhood, filled slowly with large, hot, difficult tears" (96).
- 31 Exhausted and back in her room, Miss Ogilvy undergoes a remarkable transformation: she forgets all about who she is and starts to relive a scene she considers to be "very familiar," in which all her actions feel "perfectly natural" (97). She imagines herself walking outside on the island, in the sunset, as an antediluvian hypermasculine warrior with a young girl by his side. An extended fantasy of loving interaction and *faux*-primitive dialogue unfolds between the two, culminating in a retreat to the local cave, where the warrior deflowers his trembling companion. The morning after this entranced fantasy/recollection, the elderly Miss Ogilvy is found "sitting at the mouth of the cave. She was dead, with her hands thrust deep into her pockets" (103). Once again, then, we have been reading a story that has been looking backward for most of the time while the arrow of time inexorably moved forward, until the failed sociality, lack of future, and damaged agency of Miss Ogilvy's life seemed to necessitate the construction of a primeval pipedream. In this pipedream, the many negative affects that had dominated the woman's life as a result of the mismatch between her gender/ sexuality and the sexism/heteronormativity of her surroundings could be shed at long last and replaced by an imaginary world in which Miss Ogilvy was finally able to surrender to her deepest desires—and depart from this world.
- 32 Hall's story is hardly subtle, and although it engages in a mild form of genre-mixing by switching from realism to fantasy, it is also hardly modernist. Yet the thematic materials are resolutely modern, so that the story offers an early example of the literary experimentation with sexual scripts that would come to enable the figuration of lesbian and transgender identities under the regime of modernity. The hopeless and fateful backwardness of this script sits uneasily with the would-be forwardness of modernist art-making, which is why Hall's story does not welcome a twenty-first-century revisit the same way as my final story does. Gertrude Stein's tricky and ambiguous evocation of the life of Miss Furr and Miss Skeene (the title immediately sets up a couple instead of the single Miss Ogilvy) is the one story in my corpus that arguably fits comfortably on queer reading lists today. Instead of forcing readers to engage with discouraging scripts of feeling backward, Stein's story posits different, more positive pedagogical challenges—the challenge, for instance, of becoming sensitive to the precise history of modern sexuality

(what are we to make of women who are so insistently labeled “gay” in the 1920s?); the challenge of avoiding an understanding of sexualities as solidified into clear-cut categories and identities (there seem to be so many ways in which the two women manage to be gay, and so many remain unspecified); but also the challenge of retroactively applying Butler’s notion of gender performativity (the women’s social identity seems to be the effect of an endless repetition of discourses that are explicitly marked as regulatory) as well as David Halperin’s more recent reflections in his book on *How to Be Gay* (in particular his insistence on understanding homosexuality as a cultural practice that requires the establishment of distinctions from mainstream society). This is not the place to untie that complex analytical knot in any detail; instead, an excerpt will suffice to illustrate the queer-friendly close-reading problems posed by Helen Furr and Georgine Skeene being “gay”:

They did then learn many ways to be gay and they were then being gay quite regular in being gay, being gay and they were learning little things, little things in ways of being gay, they were very regular then, they were learning very many little things in ways of being gay, they were being gay and using these little things they were learning to have to be gay with regularly gay with then and they were gay the same amount they had been gay. They were quite gay, they were quite regular, they were learning little things, gay little things, they were gay inside them and the same amount they had been gay, they were gay the same length of time they had been gay every day. (38)

- 33 Stein’s witty spin on language allows me to bring my reading of queer short stories round to one of the central points Heather Love wishes to make. To her, Williams’ thinking “offers a crucial link between cognition and affect and, in doing so, advances an argument against [...] the ‘expressive hypothesis’—the idea that feeling flows naturally from the subject and expresses the truth of that subject” (11). Writers of fiction are more than usually aware of the treacherousness of expressive truth-claims, suggesting that we instead consider the complexity of indirect scripts that are able to dramatize and perform for us how cognition and affect mutually shape each other in dynamic discourses. In Williams’ terms, such indissolubly cognitive-affective stories serve to present “not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought [...]. We are then defining these elements as a ‘structure’: as a set, with specific internal relations, [...] a social experience which is still in process, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private” (11). A reconsideration of queer sexual scripts from the modernist era is still of value in helping us understand the nature and workings of these “structures of feeling,” even as they strenuously resist recuperation and put question marks behind our most positive political projects. If this also means that as readers we are constantly on the verge of losing touch with strangely backward-feeling stories, we might ponder for a moment the possibility offered by Love—that “the art of losing” is “a particularly queer art” (24).

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ABSTRACTS

Cet article se propose d'analyser l'expression des sexualités non normatives dans une sélection de nouvelles modernistes anglophones. L'étude part du concept de « scénarios » sexuels (*sexual scripts*), emprunté aux sciences sociales, qui est adapté par le biais d'instruments théoriques récents centrés sur les axes littéraires et critiques. On trouve un apport intéressant dans les écrits inspirés par le récent « tournant affectif » (*affective turn*) des études LGBT, en particulier dans *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* d'Heather Love, qui propose une relecture de textes littéraires publiés avant l'ère de l'émancipation sexuelle. Love examine ce qu'elle appelle, avec un terme emprunté à Anne Cvetkovich, « des 'archives de l'affect' cruciales, un récit des dommages corporels et psychiques de l'homophobie ». Cet article a pour objet de confirmer les arguments de Love sur un plan culturel plus large, en étudiant trois nouvelles tirées du *Penguin Book of Lesbian Short Stories* et trois tirées du *Penguin Book of Gay Short Stories* : "Leves Amores" de Katherine Mansfield (1907), "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene" de Gertrude Stein (1922), "Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself" de Radclyffe Hall (1926), "A Poem of Friendship" de D. H. Lawrence (1911), "Arthur Snatchfold" de E. M. Forster (1928), et la nouvelle qui ouvre *Winesburg, Ohio*, de Sherwood Anderson, "Hands" (1916). Une micro-lecture de certains passages montre que

les échecs sociaux et les affects négatifs occupent une position aussi centrale dans cinq des nouvelles que dans les cas étudiés par Love. La seule exception est l'expérimentation linguistique de Stein, qui pourrait presque figurer sur une liste de lecture "queer" d'aujourd'hui.

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