

Resistant Utopias:

Gender Difference and Radical Queer Subjectivity in Post-Gay American Drama

by

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Resistant Utopias: Gender Difference and Radical Queer Subjectivity in Post-Gay American Drama

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This dissertation investigates American contemporary plays wherein the interaction of male and female characters generates queer states that break away from the conventions of previous gay drama. This study attends to three major contemporary topics that have received insufficient attention in theatrical scholarship: post-gay drama, queer subjectivity, and the role of female characters in queer plays. Post-gay drama emerged in the 1990s as a category related to and yet distinct from both Gay Pride and AIDS drama. In these plays, depictions of non-normative sexuality move beyond same-sex eroticism. This study seeks to address several key questions regarding the vitality and importance of theatre scholarship to contemporary criticism: how do women and gay men, two historically marginalized “Others,” interact in post-gay drama to generate radical queer subjectivities? What particular aspects of gender difference facilitate these subjectivities? How do these plays use dramatic techniques and theatrical fantasia to imagine queer life beyond identity politics and struggle? How might the innovations represented in these plays be applied to additional areas of inquiry regarding other intersecting oppressions, such as race, age, ability, and ethnicity? The hypothesis of this study is that a close examination of these plays will reveal the multivalent character of female/male relationships in post-gay drama, demonstrating that not only is queer subjectivity complicated on the contemporary stage but that men, women, and the way that they affect each other as sexual and desirous beings is equally complicated.

This dissertation is dedicated to Dr. Don LaPlant, for telling me to become a doctor; to my parents, for their patience and love; to my sister, for always being proud of me; and to Heath, for never having any doubts.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In the second part of Tony Kushner's award-winning play, *Angels in America* (1993), Prior, a gay-identified man suffering from AIDS, is helped to the hospital by Hannah, a middle-aged Mormon housewife. Prior's revelation that he has had visions of an angel lead to a religious conversation between the two, and Prior confesses to Hannah – who he has only just met – that much of what she believes is “repellant” to him. “What do I believe?” Hannah challenges him, and Prior replies:

PRIOR: I'm a homosexual. With AIDS. I can just imagine what you ...

HANNAH: No you can't. Imagine. The things in my head. You don't make assumptions about me, mister; I won't make them about you.

PRIOR (*A beat; he looks at her, then*): Fair enough. (235)

After agreeing to relinquish their assumptions associated with each other's identity markers – Mormon, female, homosexual, AIDS patient – Prior and Hannah quickly develop an unusual and strong friendship. Because of their presence in each other's lives, these two characters experience the divine, resist the will of heaven, and end the play hopeful about their futures despite the bleak circumstances under which they met. Though Kushner's play includes a vast array of characters, subplots, and ideological complexity, the essential story is about differently-marginalized characters fighting against the oppressive work of powerful systems to ultimately arrive at an enhanced existence.

In the last twenty years a category of American drama has emerged wherein queer identity—and indeed, the very notion of identity as a useful analytical schema—is not only made visible but is also complicated and challenged. In the wake of both the Stonewall Riots and the AIDS crisis in America, two historical shockwaves that pushed overt depictions of queer sex onto the American stage, new paradigms for dramatizing men, women, and queer subjectivities

emerged. This post-gay drama, which derives from and yet departs in significant ways from drama of the Gay Pride and early AIDS eras of the 1970s and '80s, not only features radical types of queer subjectivity but generates these subjectivities through the interaction of differently-gendered characters. In these plays, depictions of non-normative sexuality include but are not restricted to same-sex eroticism, and the ways that these plays represent queer characters and their experiences breaks with earlier conventions. However, as the term “post-gay” itself is still a contested notion, and as its particular resonances in dramatic literature have yet to be consistently defined, it may appear impossible to articulate these new paradigms in a cogent manner, particularly concerning gender difference.¹ However, if heteronormative² drama is characterized by compulsory and inevitable desire between male and female characters, and if male and female characters in “gay” drama³ are tied primarily by their alliance or conflict in the socio-political struggle of gay rights, then in post-gay drama characters of the opposite sex relate in ways that are not exclusively defined by either desire or struggle. What, then, are the paradigms that define male/female relationships in post-gay plays? This study investigates American contemporary plays wherein the interaction of male and female characters generates queer states that break away from the conventions of previous, “first generation” gay dramas. How do women and gay men, two historically marginalized “Others,” interact in post-gay drama

¹ The very notion of gender difference is, of course, a heteronormative binary (man/woman) that is challenged by queer theory. Though these plays may at first appear to treat gender as a discrete, knowable category, they ultimately challenge the man/woman binary, just as these plays challenge the homo/heterosexual identity binary. Characters that initially appear to neatly occupy a female identity with essential differences from males demonstrate “male” attributes and actions, and vice versa. For the purposes of this study, “gender difference” refers to the socio-political consequences that fall onto characters as a result of their being labeled “male” or “female” in these plays.

² Berlant and Warner define heteronormativity as “the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent—that is, organized as a sexuality—but also privileged. Its coherence is always provisional, and its privilege can take several (sometimes contradictory) forms: unmarked, as the basic idiom of the personal and the social; or marked as a natural state; or projected as an ideal or moral accomplishment” (548).

³ As discussed extensively in Chapter 2, female characters are scarce in American gay-male drama. Female characters who are featured in this type of drama are often peripheral to or defined by the gay male characters. This gendered exclusion can be attributed to gay-male drama’s project of giving visibility to gay men’s lives and experiences which had previously been absent from the American stage, much as feminist and lesbian drama tends to exclude or limit depictions of male characters.

to generate radical queer subjectivities? What particular aspects of gender difference facilitate these subjectivities? How do these plays use dramatic techniques and theatrical fantasia to imagine queer life beyond identity politics and struggle?

In the past twenty years, female characters (straight and queer) have come to figure more prominently and in a greater variety of ways in the dramatic depiction of queer male characters than in previous eras of gay drama, particularly the “coming-out” plays of the 1970s or the AIDS-crisis plays of the 1980s. Whereas traditional gay drama tends to either exclude female characters or, if female characters are included, define them entirely by their relationship to a gay male character, the plays in this study feature heterosexual female characters and homosexual (or queer) male characters as multi-dimensional individuals whose interactions result in both an interrogation of their own marginalization as well as new, radical paradigms of queer life. These contemporary depictions raise questions concerning how male and female character relationships may be analyzed if these relationships are not governed by the previously dominant structures determining the interaction of men and women in drama: they are not defined by sexual and/or romantic interest or by traditional, heteronormative family relations. This study uses four significant post-gay American plays to explore different manifestations of radical queer subjectivities via gender difference in order to arrive at a multifaceted discussion of how intersections of gender, desire, power, and sex in human relationships have been and continue to be depicted and interrogated on the American stage, as well as how these depictions and interrogations may speak to contemporary theorists.

This study attends to three major contemporary topics that have received insufficient attention in theatrical scholarship: post-gay drama, queer subjectivity, and the role of female characters in queer plays. Post-gay drama emerged in the 1990s as a category related to and yet distinct from both Gay Pride and AIDS drama. Because the American discourse regarding

gender, sex, desire, and identity has changed significantly in the last twenty years—as evinced by the emergence of queer theory, major developments in feminist theory, and the active relationship between these two courses of inquiry⁴—there is a significant need to examine how contemporary dramatic literature reflects and/or contributes to this changing discourse. By addressing how opposite-sexed character relationships influence the depiction of queer subjectivity-formation in drama—that is, how a character or characters come to be marked as queer, express queer desire, and/or to enact queer practice—this study seeks to meet this need. Specifically, this study examines the interaction of gay/queer male characters, one type of Othered (ie, marginalized) group, with female characters as another discrete and historically Othered group. In recent years, some scholars have noted and problematized the tendency of gay-male studies and queer theory to obfuscate multiple types of Otherness in its attention to issues of gender, desire, and sexuality. This is particularly evident in drama, not only in dramatic criticism but in the body of mainstream American plays that depict queer characters. The fact that a number of these high-profile plays that depict remarkable queer subjectivities also emphasize the interaction of male and female characters suggests a correlation between the radicalizing of queer drama and engagement with multiple kinds of difference;⁵ it is this correlation and its implications that this study explores.

This study seeks to develop a new definition of post-gay that reflects developments and innovations in contemporary American drama. The plays included in this study – some of which have had little to no scholarly attention from queer and feminist theorists—were written throughout a fifteen year period, and were not written with the intention of exploring “post-gay” notions in drama, but embody similar characteristics that break with conventional gay drama,

⁴ This point is expanded upon in Chapter 2.

⁵ As is addressed in Chapter 2, race is largely ignored or problematically depicted in the majority of gay and post-gay drama, including the plays in this study. One of the goals of this study is to engage the exegeses of gender difference in this drama in order to suggest how other types of difference—including race, ethnicity, class, and ability—might also be productively engaged rather than overlooked in queer dramatic scholarship.

resulting in radical queerness. Plays such as these, therefore, require new tools of analysis for understanding their significance to the representation of queer states of being on the American stage, with particular regard to the way that these plays look toward queer theatrical utopias. Though these plays may appear less politically-directed than Gay Pride and AIDS drama, they employ theatrical fantasia and radically unconventional interactions between male and female characters to generate a type of queer resistance that is unique to contemporary American drama. Resistance, in this case, is distinct from conventional political activism in that rather than confront heteronormativity by confronting it as its diametric opposite, the radical queer subjectivities in these plays attempt to envision new systems altogether.⁶ If post-gay indicates a movement beyond struggle and definition-by-exclusion, then it is necessary to examine how these dramas reflect this movement in order to elucidate the role of theatre and drama in contemporary discourses on queer life. The unique goal of this study is to focus on gender difference in these plays wherein the interaction is not predicated on sexual interest and struggle but rather on how women and men forge complex solidarities to move toward queer utopias.

Definition of Terms

Post-gay

While a specific definition of the term “post-gay” may be difficult to articulate given the contested nature of its meaning and usage, it has since its origination been used to refer to a self-reflexive look at Gay Pride and related issues, including interaction among individuals of opposite sexes in queer contexts. Post-gay can also indicate recognition of the exclusionary tendencies of the Gay Pride movement and an attempt to engage with issues of race, gender, ethnicity, and ability that are often elided in gay-male-focused scholarship and activism. Because

⁶ This notion of resistance versus political opposition can be attributed to Michel Foucault. Foucault scholar Barbara Biesecker explains that “resistant practices are gestures that defy translation, throw sense off track and, thus short-circuit the system through which sense is made” (357).

the epistemology of this term is somewhat convoluted, and because its usage and relationship to other “post-” frameworks (post-feminism, post-race, post-colonialism, post-modernism) are complex and in flux, “post-gay” is discussed further in Chapter 2. In his essay “Post-Gay Collective Identity Construction” (2011), Amin Ghaziani explains that “post-gay” was first used by British journalist Paul Burston in 1994 as “an observation and critique of gay politics” (99), or, in the words of *Out* magazine editor James Collard:

Post-gay isn't “un-gay.” It's about taking a critical look at gay life and no longer thinking solely in terms of struggle. It's going to a gay bar and wishing there were girls there to talk to. (qtd. in Ghaziani 99)

Collard's use of the term is somewhat problematic, and his controversial insistence on a post-gay overhaul of *Out* magazine was met with resistance. In spite of this, it is noteworthy that the term “post-gay” was initially used to indicate a move toward engagement with another Other, a move past definition-by-exclusion. Gay-male and queer theory scholars have continued to investigate the term's usage and implications, focusing more on the “critical look at gay life” that it implies. In *Gay and After*, renowned critic of gay drama Alan Sinfield offers his understanding of the transition into a post-gay moment:

For we did not *come out*, in the wake of the Stonewall Riot of 1969, in the sense of emerging, already formed, as if from behind a curtain. Rather, we have been making our history and hence ourselves—though not, of course, in conditions of our own choosing. Now, it seems, we may be growing out of “gay.” Suddenly, improbably, we are in a position to envisage a new refocusing of sexual dissidence for the next millennium. It is a point at which to reassess our situation and the cultural resources through which we comprehend it. (orig. emph. 1)

As it applies specifically to the plays in this study, post-gay drama refers to plays that do not employ coming-out narratives for the purposes of explaining the subjectivity or actions of a gay character to the audience. In these plays, same-sex sex and desire are presented as known quantities so that the character's queer subjectivity formation goes beyond familiar manifestations of homosexuality. In these plays, the practices and cultural exegeses that might be

called gay—such as two men in a romantic relationship and/or a man who is traumatized from losing his lover to AIDS—are treated as comprehensible; it is the radical queer subjectivities, which may include but are not limited to characteristics of gay practice and/or culture, which are the objects of dramatic interest.

The plays included in this study share characteristics that are post-gay, though they may not encapsulate every possible definition and implication of this still-contested term. These characteristics include a movement beyond the “coming-out” narrative as a way to indicate a character’s queerness; the gay/queer male characters in these plays are revealed as such because they openly call themselves “gay,” to other characters or the audience directly, or because they reference having male lovers. Another post-gay characteristic featured in these plays is the direct interrogation of gay identity; the gay/queer male characters in these plays all either overtly question their own status as gay/homosexual (such as Sebastian in *Raised in Captivity*), they exhibit traits that do not neatly fit into the category of “gay” (Winston in *The Credeaux Canvas*), or they self-consciously reference the implications of the term “gay” and of belonging to gay culture (such as Prior in *Angels in America*). Similarly, these plays use markers besides same-sex desire and sex to indicate queerness, such as Nick’s infatuation with a Shark in *Swimming in the Shallows*. The fact that these plays all feature significant, agentive heterosexual female characters and engage these women’s Othered status in addition to the featured queer male characters is also a post-gay characteristic. Therefore, these plays are not “post-gay” in a necessarily self-conscious or political sense but in the way that they interrogate and destabilize notions of gender, sex, identity, and resistance to heteronormativity. Using the term post-gay, broadly construed, this study examines evidence from four plays that share significant characteristics in order to arrive at a new, nuanced definition of post-gay that is applicable to contemporary American drama.

Queer and Gay

In this study, “queer” refers to non-normative sex, eroticism, and desire, if patriarchal heterosexuality is taken as normative. A distinction is also made in this study between queer desire, which may be expressed but not acted upon, and queer practice, which is physically-enacted sex or affection. For the majority of this study, the word “queer” will not be used to delineate a “type” of person or character, but rather types of desire and practice since this study conceives of queerness as a type of subjectivity rather than a type of stable, essential identity. As the distinction between “queer” and “gay” is of particular import to his essay “Other Kitchen Sinks,” Sam See offers a cogent explanation of the two terms:

“Queer” is a word appropriated by contemporary queer theorists to embrace all forms of sexual otherness, not just the gay/lesbian lives indicated by “homosexual.” It is the most apposite term to describe the polyamorous, frequently bisexual characters in these works and the unconventional communities that those characters create. After all, not all queers are gay. (34)

The term “gay,” then, describes one type of queer subjectivity, namely same-sex-directed desire and sex. Several of the principle main characters in this study’s focal plays self-identify as or exhibit exclusively gay subjectivity. Louis in *Angels in America* would be a prime example of this type of character: he calls himself gay and his sexual and erotic encounters within the play are exclusively with other men. However, because all of these plays interrogate the notion of gay identity to some degree, it is in some cases more appropriate to refer to the principle male characters as queer; Nick in *Swimming in the Shallows*, for instance, has a history of exclusive romantic and sexual interaction with men, until he falls in love with a Shark, who is played by a male actor and referred to with male pronouns, but has pronouncedly animal characteristics. Several of the supporting plays in this study—such as *A Taste of Honey*, *Entertaining Mister Sloane*, and *Design for Living*—include male characters who interact sexually with or express desire for both men and women, and so “queer” is a more appropriate term for these characters.

The definition of queer is polyvalent and can be dauntingly broad when used in contemporary theoretical writings. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who many scholars credit with first defining and activating the term, uses “queer” to mean “ ‘across’ formulations” such as “*across genders, across sexualities, across genres, across ‘perversions’*” (orig. emph. *Tendencies* xii). According to Sedgwick, the term “queer” signifies that “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or *can’t be* made) to signify monolithically” (orig. emph. *Tendencies* 8). Queer theory, therefore, interrogates the presumption that “everyone ‘has a sexuality’” that is unified and knowable in its entirety, and that this sexuality is “implicated with each person’s sense of overall identity in similar ways; that each person’s most characteristic erotic expression will be oriented toward another person and not autoerotic; that if it is alloerotic,” that is, oriented toward another person, “it will be oriented toward a single partner or kind of partner at a time; that its orientation will not change over time” (*Tendencies* 8). Thus, Sedgwick demonstrates that the term queer destabilizes various exegeses of heteronormative discourse: whereas the terms “‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ still present themselves (however delusively) as objective, empirical categories governed by empirical rules of evidence (however contested)” (*Tendencies* 9), queer fundamentally disrupts the homo/heterosexual binary. “Like the postmodern turn in feminism,” explains Sharon Marcus in her essay “Queer Theory for Everyone” (2005), “the adoption of *queer* issued a reminder that complex identifications and differences undermine identity” (orig. emph. Marcus 196). Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, in their provocatively-titled essay “Sex in Public” (1998), explain how this term and its implications function as culturally resistant:

Queer social practices like sex and theory try to unsettle the garbled but powerful norms supporting that [heterosexual] privilege—including the project of normalization that has made heterosexuality hegemonic—as well as those material practices that, though not

explicitly sexual, are implicated in the hierarchies of property and propriety that we will describe as heteronormative. (548)

Queer, then, is not only a term that describes the complexity of human desire and sex, but a method of analysis that reveals the underlying assumptions of heteronormative culture.

Subjectivity

The term “subjectivity” is distinct from the term “identity;” whereas “identity” suggests that individuals can be neatly interpolated into discrete categories defined by characteristics such as gender and sex, “subjectivities” indicates the fluidity of how individuals come to behave and respond as they do, as well as the fluidity of these behaviors and responses. The term “queer subjectivity” also indicates a practice, or a way of life, that is disentangled from an individual’s essence. For instance, Nicky Silver’s *Raised in Captivity* (1995) ends with a brother and sister (a gay man and heterosexual woman, respectively) taking on the roles of mother and father to a child; this living arrangement, which both mimics and subverts a heteronormative family unit, constitutes a queer subjectivity. A queer subjectivity might also be a relationship between a gay man and an ambiguously anthropomorphic shark, featured in Adam Bock’s *Swimming in the Shallows* (2005). Essentially, a queer subjectivity refers to a continuous sexual, erotic, and/or affective practice and/or circumstance that defies the boundaries of the hetero/homosexual binary; it cannot be delineated by or understood in terms of opposite-sex versus same-sex attraction, though it may include one of both of these types of attraction. Berlant and Warner describe the “radical aspirations of queer culture building” as “not just a safe zone for queer sex but the changed possibilities of identity, intelligibility, publics, culture, and sex that appear when the heterosexual couple is no longer the referent or the privileged example of sexual culture” (548). Though they do not use the exact word, the radical notion of “queer subjectivity” meets the criteria that Berlant and Warner set forth. The term subjectivities as opposed to identities also

acknowledges the accuracy of assertions such as the one made by Valerie Lehr in *Queer Family Values* (1999), that “social movements do not simply organize people with pre-given identities; they also play a role in constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing identities” (79). What, then, constitutes a radical queer subjectivity? In this study, the term radical denotes a practice or ideological move that directly confronts, interrogates, and destabilizes an assumption or convention. For instance, the queer family generated in *Raised in Captivity* destabilizes the heterosexual family unit as well as conventional representations of gay male experience.

Methodology

The findings of this study will be based primarily on close-readings of each of the four focal plays: Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* (1991), Nicky Silver’s *Raised in Captivity* (1995), Keith Bunin’s *The Credeaux Canvas* (2002), and Adam Bock’s *Swimming in the Shallows* (2005). This textual analysis will largely exclude considerations of the playwright’s intent, though characteristics of the playwright’s body of work may be referenced to contextualize the focal plays. Considerations of audience reaction will also be generally excluded from this study. As the performance of play texts involves interpretation by multiple artists and is influenced by a multitude of factors for which this study cannot necessarily account, performance and individual productions do not constitute conclusive evidence for this study. While the four plays listed above will be the focus of this study and structure the chapter arrangement, supporting works of dramatic literature will also be analyzed. These supporting plays—which are plays that feature a similar gendered relationship and/or similar queer subjectivity to the focal play, or which differ from the focal play in a way that creates a productive point of comparison—may be plays that premiered or were popularly revived around the premiere of the focal play. These supporting plays will not be discussed to the extent of the

focal plays, but the aspects of these supporting plays which can elucidate the distinctness of the focal plays or help to situate them within a cultural or historical context will be discussed at length. For instance, the chapter of this study focused on *Swimming in the Shallows* will also reference Peter Shaffer's *Equus* (originally premiered in 1973 and revived on Broadway in 2008) and Edward Albee's *The Goat* (2003), two plays which, like *Swimming*, feature an erotic relationship between a male character and an animal. This feature distinguishes these three plays from the majority of American contemporary mainstream theatre, but more importantly, the way that interaction between the queerly-desiring male characters and significant female characters shape and frame the presentation of the queer subjectivity in *Equus* and *The Goat* are remarkably different from the way they influence the unusual queer relationship in *Swimming*. In each chapter, the supporting plays will similarly help to explicate the features of the focal play which contribute to the overall goal of this study.

In addition to text-based analysis of each play as a work of dramatic literature as well as analysis of relevant supporting plays, pertinent scholarly criticism will also be discussed in each chapter. This criticism may include analysis of the focal and/or supporting plays (such as Robert F. Gross's essay "The Last Gay Man" which directly addresses *Raised in Captivity* or Sam See's "Other Kitchen Sinks" which discusses Joe Orton's *Entertaining Mr. Sloane*, a supporting play for *The Credeaux Canvas* in Chapter 5); however, it may also include scholarly research related to the particular type of gendered relationship and/or queer subjectivity found in the chapter's focal play. For instance, in Chapter 5, Elisabeth Sheff's study, "Exploring Polyamorous Community" (2005), provides ethnographic analysis that helps to elucidate the radical nature of the male-male-female relationship in Keith Bunin's *The Credeaux Canvas*. Though extant scholarship does not directly engage the subject of this study, enough work exists to richly contextualize the primary analytical materials of this project, which are the play-texts.

Each of the focal plays in this study is discussed separately and in chronological order. When a productive comparison can be made to (an)other play(s) included in this study, however, that will be discussed in the appropriate chapter, acknowledging the specificity of the plays' historical moments. Progression or change through time may be referenced in chapters, but this study will not manipulate the plays into a liberal-progression-through-time narrative as that risks reducing the overall findings and obfuscating important divergences. Though the focal plays are organized in chronological order, within each chapter are plays that may have premiered significantly earlier or later than the focal play. For instance, *Entertaining Mister Sloane* premiered in London in 1964 but is discussed in Chapter 5, which focuses on *The Credeaux Canvas* which premiered in New York in 2002. Within chapters, plays are not grouped because they share a historical moment but because they feature similar queer subjectivities. *The Credeaux Canvas* and *Entertaining Mister Sloane*, for example, feature similar three-person-relationships in which desire is complex and fluid, and so both are discussed in Chapter 5.

The body chapters of this study are organized chronologically by the focal play of each chapter: *Angels in America* (1992), *Raised in Captivity* (1995), *The Credeaux Canvas* (2002), and *Swimming in the Shallows* (2005). The order of these chapters does not, however, necessarily indicate progression or increase of certain characteristics over time. Beginning this analysis with *Angels* is beneficial because Kushner's epic play is considered by many scholars to mark a major turning-point in gay drama in America; furthermore, as this study will demonstrate, *Angels* features significant differences from coming-out drama and from AIDS drama, which provides a point of clarification for the post-gay characteristics of the successive plays in this study. Additionally, the queer subjectivity manifested in *Angels* is comparatively less radical than those manifested in the later plays discussed. It is not the case, however, that *Swimming in the Shallows* (2005) is somehow "more post-gay" or that it features a more radically queer

subjectivity than the earlier plays in this study. Though they are organized chronologically, each of the four focal plays of this study relate to each other in complex and varied ways, and each play will be contextualized within the entire study regarding noteworthy trends and divergences.

Review of Literature

Several major works of queer theory and gay/queer drama criticism are used throughout this study to contextualize the plays within extant scholarship. Leo Bersani's *Homos* (1995), for instance, is often referenced in critical analyses of these plays and of contemporary queer theory, and therefore provides a rich resource for considering these plays in a larger theoretical framework that stretches beyond theatre and drama. In addition, foundational works of gay male studies drama criticism such as John M. Clum's *Still Acting Gay* (2000), and Alan Sinfield's *Gay and After* (1998) and *Out Onstage* (1999) are useful to this study for the purpose of establishing the characteristics of "coming-out" and AIDS drama, as well as the dominant critical approaches to this type of drama. *Still Acting Gay* and *Out Onstage* similarly catalogue and critique plays featuring gay (and, in the case of Sinfield's book, lesbian) characters in American and British drama in the twentieth century, contextualizing them with the socio-political circumstances of homosexuality during particular historical moments. For example, both books include a chapter focusing on gay drama during the first ten years of the AIDS crisis. Because these two works, and Clum's in particular, reflect the perspective of gay male/gay and lesbian studies, more recent post-gay and queer criticism endeavors to complicate if not outright problematize Clum's and Sinfield's analyses not only of specific plays but of certain developments in queer drama. In his 2004 essay, "Other Kitchen Sinks, Other Drawing Rooms: Radical Designs for Living in Pre-1968 British Drama," for instance, queer theorist Sam See demonstrates how Clum, Sinfield, and other authors' works of drama criticism written from a traditional gay-male-studies perspective

obfuscate the queer subjectivities in plays such as Joe Orton's *Entertaining Mister Sloane* (1964), Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* (1958), and Noel Coward's *Design for Living* (1933).⁷ Because gay male drama critics focus on male/male desire and sex, See argues that they risk misreading the complexly queer relationships in these plays as closeted male/male homosexual relationships. In all three plays, a female character is a complicating factor; whereas Clum and other gay male studies critics read the presence of the female character as a cover for exclusive male/male desire, See and other queer critics read the interaction of the female and queer male characters as queer subjectivities that cannot be restricted to or fully explained by same-sex desire. Therefore, See's and similar analyses provide an indispensable theoretical nexus between traditional gay male drama criticism and drama criticism influenced by post-gay and queer theoretical trends, particularly as they concern gender difference within these plays. Sinfield's *Out Onstage*, though not as fully invested in queer theory as See's work, falls into this category since it features Sinfield's reflections on some of his previous criticisms in light of post-gay and queer evolutions in theory and drama.

To facilitate an in-depth and detailed analysis, the plays featured in this study contain very specific characteristics and therefore do not in any way represent a comprehensive view of contemporary queer American drama. There is, in fact, a multiplicity of voices that make up this drama, though many of these voices are excluded from the scope of this study. Plays such as *Little Dog Laughed* (2006) and *Next Fall* (2010), both of which have enjoyed significant mainstream success on Broadway, feature male/male couples in unusual circumstances, but both are more typical love stories than the plays in this study. Musicals featuring queer themes and characters such as *Falsettoland* (1990), *RENT* (1996), and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (1998) have also enjoyed varying degrees of mainstream and cult popularity in contemporary America.

⁷ All three of these plays are discussed in this study, *Honey* in Chapter 4 alongside *Raised in Captivity*, and *Sloane* and *Design* in Chapter 5 alongside *The Credeaux Canvas*.

In fact, *Hedwig* represents a vivid example of radical queer subjectivity via its shock-rocker main character and his/her botched sex-change which is graphically described to the audience. *RENT*, unlike much of mainstream queer drama, also prominently features a female/female couple who enjoy a happy ending, unlike the male/male couple in *RENT* who, despite the innovative reputation of this musical, fall victim to the familiar trope of one half of the couple dying from AIDS and leaving the other grieving and alone. More recently, the outrageously popular musical *Avenue Q* (2003) presented Broadway audiences with Rod, a gay-male puppet character who closely resembles *Sesame Street*'s "Burt;" unlike the unfortunate gay men of *RENT*, Rod ends up not only with a supportive, mixed-gender community of friends but also a muscular boyfriend. As this small sampling demonstrates, many divergent queer voices exist in contemporary mainstream American drama, and among these are original and varied representations of queer individuals and relationships.

One type of queer characters and relationships which is conspicuously absent from this study and under-represented in mainstream American drama are lesbians. Though the female characters featured in this study behave in queer ways, none of them identify as gay, as do many of the queer male characters in these plays, nor do the majority of these female characters engage in female/female desire or sex within these plays.⁸ Because lesbians and female/female desire are subject to particular material and political circumstances distinct from those that affect gay men and male/male desire, these types of relationships are excluded from this study in order to avoid collapsing lesbians into the same category as gay men. The consequences of being both female and queer in contemporary America are not equivalent to the consequences of being male and queer, and therefore these types of characters and relationships deserve specific treatment. In the plays analyzed in this study, the majority of female characters are marginalized by their female-

⁸ The major exception to this is Hannah in Kushner's *Angels*, discussed in Chapter 3. Hannah engages in a female/female kiss with the Angel; though the Angel's actual gender is ambiguous, she appears to the audience with the body of a female.

ness but privileged by their association with heteronormativity, just as the queer male characters are marginalized by their queerness but privileged by their gender.⁹ Lesbian characters are marginalized both by their gender and their queer affiliation, and may be further marginalized by other intersecting markers such as race and ethnicity. However, the comparative marginality of plays emphasizing lesbian characters in contemporary American drama should be noted. There does not exist, for instance, a play with mainstream success such as *Angels in America* that features lesbian women as prominently as gay men are featured in Kushner's play; analyzing radical queerness in relation to gender-difference in plays featuring lesbians would require going to the margins of American drama much more so than the drama analyzed in this study. This disparity reflects the privileging of white male characters in queer drama as well as the tendency to elide differences of race, class, age, gender, ethnicity, and ability in queer theory and activism, a tendency which is discussed at length in Chapter 2. An extension of this study, therefore, would include drama that features lesbian characters and female/female desire and sex, examining how post-gay notions are rendered in this type of drama; what are the particulars of developing queer family and imagining queer utopia in plays wherein queerness is rooted in female/female desire? Similarly, queer plays that significantly feature racial and ethnic difference, or emphasize the experience of non-white characters, exist largely in the margins of American drama. While the plays analyzed in this study are not necessarily the best-known examples of contemporary queer drama, they may certainly be considered more mainstream than, for instance, the work of Split Britches, a queer performance group composed primarily of lesbian artists who have been active since 1980. A more thorough exploration of post-gay drama and what that appellation suggests would necessarily, therefore, reach out to the margins of American drama, where radically queer types of representation and performance thrive. In sum,

⁹ This is discussed at length in Chapter 4 which features male and female siblings, the brothers gay and the sisters in heterosexual marriages.

the plays represented in this study by no means offer a comprehensive look at contemporary American queer drama, but rather constitute a starting-point for a larger analysis of a highly diverse category of drama characterized by a multiplicity of voices and types of difference.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 2

Historical and Theoretical Contexts

This chapter will explicate relevant historical trends and movements in dramatic literature and theatrical production as well as political and theoretical shifts. For instance, in order to fully appreciate the change in queer American drama marked by Kushner's *Angels in America* (1991), it is necessary to characterize gay American drama since its emergence in the late-1960s and to situate this drama within major historical epochs such as the Gay Pride movement and the AIDS Crisis. Additionally, the history of the theoretical lenses which this study engages – particularly queer and feminist theory – will be further explained in this chapter, with specific attention to how these theories interact in contemporary scholarship.

Chapter 3

Queer Community and Knowledge Across Difference in Kushner's *Angels in America*

While it may seem anachronistic at first glance, it is valid to mark post-gay American drama as beginning with *Angels* because *Angels* featured gay male characters, fore-grounded AIDS, and had an unprecedentedly broad appeal for a play with these attributes; in addition, as I demonstrate in Chapter 3, *Angels* distinctly breaks away from the typical narratives of the coming-out and AIDS drama eras. In his 2002 book, *The World Turned: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and Culture*, John D'Emilio asserts the significance of the 1990s to queer history:

Something happened in the 1990s, something dramatic and irreversible. A group of people long considered a moral menace and an issue previously deemed unmentionable in public discourse were transformed into a matter of human rights, discussed in every institution of American society [...] During the 1990s, the world seemed finally to turn and take notice of gay people in its midst. (qtd. in Ghaziani 103)

Ghaziani uses D'Emilio's assertion to contextualize his discussion of the post-gay moment, which most scholars mark as beginning in the 1990s. Indeed, Kushner's *Angels in America* reflects this shift and as such is an appropriate point to begin this study.

Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (1993) features characters who claim a variety of queer-identities and experience a variety of queer trajectories, from Prior and Louis who begin in a monogamous male/male relationship, to Hannah, a Mormon house-wife who later in the play is aroused to orgasm by a female angel. While unexpected examples of queerness are abundant in Kushner's play, so are more archetypical and straight-forward depictions of gay characters and narratives. Joe's queer trajectory, for instance, follows a familiar path of coming-out to his mother and wife, and then becoming involved in a sexual relationship with another gay man, Louis. In the ways that it engages archetypical dramatic tropes of gay drama but also extends its reach into new narratives, *Angels* represents a nexus between gay and post-gay drama. In *Angels*, coming-out is not the climax of the character's queer trajectory but a step in a more complex process, much as Prior's contracting HIV does not lead to the familiar structure of suffering, support, and loss that defined AIDS-crisis drama. Similarly, Kushner's play deals with familial relationships such as mother and wife, but does not reduce the female characters who are mother and wife to their relationship with the male character; their journeys, and the influence that they have on each other and on queer male characters besides Joe (their son/husband), extend beyond the coming-out narrative enacted in Part I of this two-part play. *Angels* is also compared to traditional AIDS drama, exemplified in this chapter by Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart* (1985), and to traditional gay drama, such as Terrance McNally's *Love! Valour! Compassion!*

(1994). *Angels* is crucial to this study not only for the transition it represents in queer drama but also because it ends with an image of community that includes male and female characters, characters who, in *Angels*, are marked and set apart by their shared experiences with the supernatural. This chapter also sets up a conversation among feminist scholars who criticize the representation of women in *Angels*, and feminist scholars who argue that the female characters in this play are fundamental to the play's progression and meaning.

Chapter 4

Trauma, Family, and Sexual Interest in Silver's *Raised In Captivity*

Like *Angels in America*, Nicky Silver's *Raised in Captivity* (1995) explores familial relationships between opposite-sexed individuals, in this case Sebastian, the male protagonist, and his sister, Bernadette. Unlike *Angels*, however, *Raised* does not contain a coming-out narrative; rather, at the beginning of the play, Sebastian reunites with his sister at their mother's funeral, over a decade after losing his long-time lover to AIDS. This play is largely about Sebastian re-configuring his queer subjectivity as a gay man without the archetypical markers of the previous decade: he does not have AIDS or an AIDS-suffering partner to support, he is long-past coming out to his family, he is not connected to a larger gay community, and he enacts high-risk behavior (such as correspondence with a murderer, Dylan). Sebastian, emotionally traumatized from his experiences, is gradually re-integrated back into a nuclear family, but one in which he and his sister act as mother and father to her child. Robert F. Gross's essay, "The Last Gay Man," in which he compares Silver's play to Richard Greenberg's *Hurrah at Last* (1998) and analyzes these plays' depictions of traumatized, isolated, and de-sexualized gay male characters, contributes significantly to the discussion of the brother/sister relationship and queer subjectivity formation in this chapter, as does Jordan Schildcrout's essay, "No Tragedy," which

also discusses familial relationships and queerness in post-AIDS American drama. Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* (1958) in which an ambiguously queer male character and ostensibly heterosexual female character form a non-normative family unit to raise her child is also discussed in this chapter as a counterpoint to the non-normative family unit in *Raised*, as is Richard Greenberg's *Hurrah At Last* (1999) which features a brother/sister relationship that interestingly compares to the relationship in Silver's play.

Chapter 5

Queer Triangles and Bunin's *The Credeaux Canvas*

Keith Bunin's *The Credeaux Canvas* (2002) is similar to *Angels* and to *Raised* in that it features a familial type of queer community, but the community in Bunin's play is an unusual and poignant love-triangle among two men and a woman. The queer triangulation of desire in this play is comparable to male-male-female relationships found in Joe Orton's *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* (1964) and Noel Coward's *Design for Living* (1933), both of which are discussed in Sam See's essay "Other Kitchen Sinks" (2004) which attempts to recuperate such plays from what See calls "homosexist" criticism that regards the female character's presence as an attempt to eclipse or negate male/male desire. See's use of the term "queer community" to describe these triangulated relationships is particularly appropriate to Bunin's play as it features not only sexual interaction among the characters but also domesticity that evokes the familial roles observable in *Angels* and *Raised*. Though both male characters (Jamie and Winston, who are roommates and best friends) engage in sex with the female character (Amelia, Jamie's girlfriend), sex and desire remain, for the most part, enigmatic in this play. Jamie expresses paternal affection for both Amelia and Winston, who both care deeply for Jamie despite their affair with each other, and Winston expresses notably intense though nonsexual affection for Jamie. Unlike in *Angels* or

Raised, male/male sex is not discretely utilized as a marker of queer subjectivity in *Credeaux*, though male/male desire and certainly male/male affection are present; rather than from male/male sex or a gay-identified male character, queerness in this play manifests most clearly in Winston's ambivalence to gender preference in desire. The fluidity of desire, love, and affection among same- and opposite-sex characters in *Credeaux* make it uniquely useful to this study, particularly as a means of looking at queer family and how gender difference works in this kind of drama.

Chapter 6

Bestial Desire and Queer Utopia in Bock's *Swimming in the Shallows*

Continuing the divergence from male/male sex as a queer marker, this chapter explores the development of a relationship between a young gay man and a handsome shark in Adam Bock's *Swimming in the Shallows* (2005). Peter Shaffer's *Equus* (1973) and Edward Albee's *The Goat, or, Who Is Sylvia?* (2002), which also feature sensuality between male characters and animals, both enjoyed successful Broadway runs in the mid-2000s, making them contemporaries to *Swimming's* off-Broadway production. Unlike *Equus* or *Goat*, however, *Swimming* does not focus on the main male character's struggle with his own or his loved one's shame and bewilderment in response to his queer desire; rather, Nick's female friends (two of whom are a monogamous couple) encourage and facilitate his relationship with the Shark. The fact that the Shark is not only played by a person but also interacts with the other characters in a human manner further distinguishes *Swimming* from Shaffer or Albee's plays while also deepening the complexity and ambiguity of this queer relationship. These plays are particularly relevant to this study, however, because in each, female characters have ultimate agency over how the male character and the audience read the queer desire of human for animal. Despite a healthy

production history, *Swimming* is still a very new play and has therefore not been the subject of significant scholarly work. However, analysis such as James Frederick Kittredge's essay on "The Formulation of American Identity" in Albee's plays, including *The Goat*, and I. Dean Ebner's essay on "Sexuality and Worship" in Shaffer's *Equus* can productively contextualize *Swimming* within American drama that uses bestiality to mark queer desire, demonstrating how Bock's play represents a significant divergence in the role of gender difference and the representation of queer subjectivity in such plays.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study will compare the findings of each previous chapter and apply this comparison to the primary research question: how, in post-gay American drama, does gender difference contribute to a generation of radical queer subjectivities? What do the commonalities and disparities among these plays suggest as far as new dramatic paradigms that govern the interaction of opposite-sex characters in queer contexts? Given that this question engages both feminist and queer theoretical pursuits, how might these findings influence the study of gender, desire, sex, and power in contemporary drama? The working hypothesis of this study is that a close examination of the four focal plays will reveal the multivalence of female/male relationships in post-gay drama, demonstrating that not only is queer subjectivity complicated on the contemporary stage but that men, women, and the way that they affect each other as sexual and desirous beings is equally complicated. This study's conclusion also collates and analyzes the different representations of queer family, theatrical fantasia, and utopian imaginings that emerge in many of these post-gay plays. By focusing on these dramatic relationships, this study incites further interrogation of how gender difference and queerness

have evolved in recent drama and how it might continue to evolve in the future, specifically regarding how divergent types of Othered subjectivities interact in drama and the possibilities implicit in this kind of cross-difference engagement.

Chapter 2

Historical and Theoretical Contexts

Before examining the queer subjectivities manifested in these post-gay plays, it is beneficial to first establish the relevant historical and theoretical contexts underlying queer subjectivities and post-gay drama. This chapter examines American gay drama in its historical contexts during the “coming-out” era of the 1970s as well as the AIDS crisis era of the 1980s so that the divergences and innovations of post-gay drama discussed in the body of this study will be legible. The points of intersection and conflict between feminist and queer theory are also explicated in this chapter, which creates a context for examining gender-difference in the plays featured in this study with particular attention to how identity-based politics is interrogated and challenged by both of these theoretical frameworks. This discussion also provides a basis for extrapolating the development and implications of the term post-gay, both as it relates to other strains of the “post-” movement and how it specifically describes the drama featured in this study. What an examination of gay drama, the relationship between feminist and queer theory, and the characteristics of post-gay drama reveals is that gender-difference is an overlooked and insufficiently attended area in drama featuring issues of queerness, and so the last section of this chapter engages major developments in contemporary feminist/queer theory to provide criteria for describing the ways that these plays attend to difference within queer contexts.

Gay Drama

Though queer characters and actions can be found in numerous American plays before the late 1960s, most scholars mark this decade as the beginning of self-consciously and overtly gay drama. *Boys in the Band* (1968), by Mart Crowley, is considered by most gay male drama

scholars to be the first American play to overtly represent gay men on the mainstream stage (Clum 2000; Helbing 1981; Sinfield 1999; de Jongh 1992). In his 1981 essay, “Gay Plays, Gay Theatre, Gay Performance,” Terry Helbing explains that *Boys in the Band* marked the first time that “[a]udiences—including gay people—were able to see gay characters portrayed openly onstage, although soon after its premiere and as a result of the Stonewall riots, many gay people would feel that they were being portrayed in too much of a stereotypical, ‘politically incorrect’ manner” (37). The Stonewall Riots which took place in New York City in June 1969 are considered a major turning-point for gay visibility in the United States, and the following decade reflected this new visibility in theatre and drama. “The rebellion resulted in an unprecedented public exposure of queer people,” explains Jordan Schildcrout in his essay “The Closet is a Deathtrap” (2011), “This declaration of a public identity was part of ‘coming out,’ one of the key principles of the gay rights movement” (43). Theatre companies and playwrights who focused on gay-male identity and experience became more widely known as well as part of a concerted gay political movement, often referred to as Gay Pride. As Schildcrout explains, theatre and drama were remarkably significant to this movement:

The theatre played an important role in opening the closet door for queer people, probably because it was often a more hospitable site for queer representation than other cultural venues during the gay liberation era. The 1970s saw the emergence of a queer theatre movement that included openly queer theatre artists such as Charles Ludlam, queer theatre companies such as Theatre Rhinoceros and the Other Side of Silence (TOSOS), and scores of queer characters ranging from the ordinary to the outrageous. (44)

While there was certainly a wide variety of gay-centered companies and artists during this era, several key characteristics linked these various manifestations of Gay Pride theatre. “The central theme of most of these plays,” Helbing explains, “is a gay relationship—sometimes it is two gay men who are lovers and are living together, sometimes two gay men who are only roommates—but gay playwrights are usually concerned with the ways gay men find to deal with each other

without resorting to conventional heterosexual role models” (38). Here, Helbing points out that gay drama began as a way for gay men to assert agency in their own representations onstage, resisting “conventional heterosexual” representations. Helbing’s description, however, also reflects the male-centric nature of most gay drama as it focuses primarily on gay men dealing with each other.¹⁰ The shift of focus from gay relationships to relationships between/among characters of different genders with complex queer subjectivities is one of the major distinctions between gay and post-gay drama.

Throughout this study, plays with characteristics that described gay drama in this era are called “coming-out” plays to signify their contribution to the visibility of gay experience in America as well as their focus on the explanation and illustration of gay men’s identities and lives. Writing in 1981, Helbing asserts that the importance of “‘Coming out’ plays” goes beyond the initial decade of Gay Pride political activism since “these plays delineate the difficulties gays encounter” in a still dominantly heteronormative society. Many “coming-out” plays, therefore, include a coming-out narrative in which one or more characters realizes or reveals their own gay identity. Thusly, homosexuality is represented in these plays as a discrete identity that is aligned with a specific culture and a specific political affiliation. These plays often also treat homosexuality and gay culture as phenomenon that must be explained to the audience or to characters in the play, which is part of the visibility-raising project of this type of drama. More radical and less mainstream gay plays, particularly during the 1970s, focused less on coming out narratives directly but definitely focused on the political and social issues of being gay in America. This focus on visibility is a major element of all traditional gay drama, whether intended for education or for protest.

¹⁰ Helbing is specifically discussing plays written by gay men, about gay men. Since the plays in this study are all also written by gay male playwrights, this comparison is appropriate.

For the purposes of this study, “gay male plays” are defined as plays wherein desire and/or sexual practice between (at least) two men is either a significant element of the play’s plot or a significant identificatory feature of the primary male character. Clum’s *Still Acting Gay*, Sinfield’s *Out Onstage*, De Jongh’s *Not In Front of the Audience*, and similar studies which focus specifically on gay male depiction in drama, contextualize these depictions in a history of gay/queer socio-political presence in the U.S. and UK and also provide a useful schema for identifying plays pertinent to this study. These critical works, in fact, generate a canon of both pre- and post-Stonewall “gay-male” plays which includes subcategories such as “closet dramas” of the pre-Stonewall era and “AIDS plays” of the 1980s/90s (Clum 2000). Though much of the terminology and methodology of traditional gay-male criticism has been problematized by contemporary queer critics, the canon developed by gay-male critics provides a useful starting point for this investigation, which is concerned with continuing to problematize this canon from a perspective of gender and queer theory.

AIDS drama

AIDS drama is a distinct category that developed during the 1980s due to the responses (or lack thereof) of the gay community and the United States government to the AIDS epidemic. Similarly to how “coming-out” drama provided a way for gay men to control their own representation on stage, AIDS drama was conceived by many as a way for gay men to speak back to the conservative, moralizing rhetoric deployed by heteronormative authorities that demonized homosexuals, using this disease. “Gay AIDS drama dismantled the misapprehensions about AIDS while affirming the Person With AIDS,” explains John M. Clum (34), who also points out how this epidemic became the overwhelming concern of gay drama: “In the mid-eighties AIDS was the focus of most gay drama, as the diverse population known as the ‘gay

community' began to be unified in its attention to an epidemic that ravaged lovers, friends, neighbors, and acquaintances" (53). Many scholars, in fact, point out the politically-unifying effect of the AIDS crisis on disparate queer communities during the 1980s. Feminist critic Suzanna Danuta Walters, in her essay, "From Here to Queer" (1996), asserts that "the AIDS crisis not only prompted a renewed and reinvigorated gay and lesbian movement but radically opened up (or re-created) new ways of doing politics" (486). While Walters acknowledges that "this was surely not the first time gay men and women had worked together," this crisis "encouraged a rethinking of gay politics" (486) resulting, Walter implies, in a more diverse gay political community. In his 1998 book, *Dry Bones Breathe*, which concerns the development of "post-AIDS identities and cultures," Eric Rofes describes how a 1997 "women's studies conference on sexuality" sponsored by the State University of New York "became the focus of intense media coverage and attacks by conservative public officials," demonstrating that "the sex-panic impulse may target lesbians and feminists as well as gay men" (177). AIDS drama, however, did not necessarily reflect this energized communication between gay men and women, queer and straight; like "coming-out" drama, much of AIDS drama tends to focus on gay men and their relationships with each other.¹¹ In addition, some critics argue that AIDS drama problematically affiliates gay men with disease and death, though in a heroic or tragic rather than demonizing manner. In his article "Minority Theatre" (1989), drama critic Richard Hornby calls AIDS plays "affliction plays" and claims that in these plays, "homosexuality" is "usually depicted as an affliction, which should draw more protest from gay liberation groups than it does" (287). While Hornby's presumption to tell "gay liberation groups" what they should and should not protest is problematic, his point regarding the potential implications of associating AIDS with gay drama is noteworthy. As is discussed further in Chapter 3, AIDS drama focuses

¹¹ Chapter 3 includes a discussion of Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart* (1985), one of the most prominent examples of AIDS drama, and its depiction of a significant female character.

on gay male characters suffering from AIDS and often their male partners and/or families struggling with and supporting them through their ordeal, which typically ends in death. Granted, death and loss characterized a tragically significant portion of gay male experiences with AIDS in the 1980s and beyond, and so this preoccupation makes sense as a way to not only give visibility to such experiences but to humanize gay men in the face of homophobic rhetoric surrounding AIDS. Post-gay plays such as *Angels in America* and *Raised in Captivity*, however, depart from these narratives of suffering, support, and loss; in *Angels*, all gay male characters afflicted with AIDS are not unequivocally doomed to die, and *Raised* deals with the trauma for survivors of the initial AIDS crisis era.

Feminist and Queer Theory

The close and often difficult relationship(s) among feminist, gay male, and queer activism as well as scholarship also lend significance to this study, particularly in contemporary discourse when the issue of “identity-based” theory and politics is being increasingly problematized and interrogated. Another indicator of change in the socio-political as well as scholarly context of gender and sex issues, the interrogative framework of queer theory, also emerged in the 1990s and has greatly influenced the study of gender, sex, desire, and power in contemporary theatre. Whereas gay and lesbian studies implies attention to either male or female individuals and groups identified as homosexual, queer theory indicates attention to non-normative desire, eroticism, sex, and gender expression without employing discrete identity categories. Queer theory responds to the same progression of identity politics as the “post-gay” notion, which is that the socio-political framework for discussing sexual desire and practice as related to identity-formation has changed since the Stonewall Riots (1969) to the point that new terminology and interrogative schema are needed to productively engage actual and imagined

life. With queer theory comes the de-emphasis of “coming out” as a marker of gay identity, and so new types of trajectories emerge: for instance, homosexual identity becomes queer subjectivity to indicate unexplored complexities, a shift which observably influences drama.

Feminist theory, which pre-exists queer theory and has also had a profound impact on the study of theatre, underwent major shifts beginning in the early 1990s which continue to affect the work of feminist scholars and activists. In her 1996 essay, “From Here to Queer,” Suzanna Danuta Walters points out that “the development of queer theory and politics (related but not identical phenomena) emerges in the context of changing definitions of feminist theory and politics” (482). The impetus for this change, Walters explains, is pressure for feminism to attend to “‘other’ differences” (482)—such as race, class, ability, and geography—pushing toward more inclusive and nimble theoretical frames. “Like the postmodern turn in feminism,” explains Sharon Marcus in her 2005 essay “Queery Theory for Everyone,” “the adoption of *queer* issued a reminder that complex identifications and differences undermine identity” (orig. emph. 196). Arguably, queer theory responds to gay-male and lesbian studies similarly to how contemporary feminism responds to first- and second-wave or “classical” feminism: as a way to make visible and examine more complex possibilities of difference and power connected to gender and sex. Marcus provides a cogent description of how queer theory developed in part through the work of feminist theorists seeking new methods of attending to gender and sex:

In the 1980s, scholars objected to the ways that feminists like Rich and Irigaray characterized male homosexuality (Sedgwick 1985, 26; Owens 1987), and in recent years many men doing queer studies give equal weight to feminist research agendas. Parallel lines can sometimes converge. Feminist theory shifted from studying women to studying gender as a set of relations, and lesbian and gay studies analogously moved from tracing historically stable identities based on object choice to defining queerness in relation to sexual norms. Those parallel shifts have created intersections between queer and feminist scholars who now share gender and sexuality as objects of analysis. (195)

These “parallel shifts” to which Marcus refers belie the important and close relationship between these two theoretical frameworks. Convergence and intersection between feminist and queer

scholarship, however, often reveal significant differences and conflicts. In the Introduction to *Feminism Meets Queer Theory* (1997), Elizabeth Weed and Naomi Schor cite “the separation of gender from sex and sexuality” as a major tenet of queer theory that “makes the meeting of feminism and queer theory a strange one” (viii). Walters similarly claims that queer theory “renders subjectivities infinitely indeterminant,” (485), undermining the importance of gender as a marker of privilege or marginalization. Such arguments imply that feminism relies on and essentially supports the theoretical and practical efficacy of identity-based politics. Indeed, Walters claims that the “critique of identity,” which she sees as central to queer theory (485), “seems to place feminist activism in a political straitjacket [sic], unable to move (because moving requires reliance on identity concepts that are themselves suspect), yet needing desperately to organize women precisely around those newly suspect categories” (487). In the context of contemporary feminism, Walter’s assertion that feminism is paralyzed without identity-based politics is problematic. “It could be argued,” admits Sharon Marcus, “that by undermining gender as a stable category, queer theory undermines feminism, which depends on the concept of women” (200). Marcus calls this argument “groundless,” however:

First, queer theory does not completely abandon the concept of gender, since homosexuality depends on assigning a gender to oneself and to the people to whom one is sexually attracted. Queer theory simply refuses the strict limits that heterosexism sets on the possible configurations of genders, bodies, and desires. Second, since feminism is by definition invested in changing women’s social and political positions, the concept of woman on which feminism rests is mobile, not static, and thus not at risk from the kinds of plasticity that queer theory ascribes to gender. (200 footnote)

It is understandable that some feminist theorists would raise concerns that because queer theory sees gender as performative it denies the material and political consequences of gender. As Marcus effectively demonstrates, however, this is not necessarily a legitimate concern. Queer theory questions the stability of gender as well as sexual identities, and while this challenge to

identity-based theory and politics may be problematic in addressing certain real-life situations (identity-based crimes such as the 1998 murder of Matthew Shephard, to use Marcus's example [196]), it is also an important theoretical innovation given the increasing call to move through and beyond identity-politics in current scholarship and activism. "By expanding the range of visible, plausible, and livable sexualities, queer studies expands the meanings of *woman* and *man*," Marcus asserts; "We can see this at work in the ways that public discourse about sexual practices in print, in conversation, on the Internet, and on television has changed in the past two decades" (orig. emph. 200). Though Marcus does not specifically name drama as a public discourse, this study attends to the importance of gender difference in post-gay drama as a way to elucidate the potential intersections of feminist and queer work in the contexts of these plays.

As Marcus points out, the "encounter between gender and sexuality" is vital to the interaction of feminist and queer theory, and the attempt to explore these two subjectivity-constituting phenomena without eliding or collapsing one into the other dates back to the emergence of queer theory. Marcus explains that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick¹² endeavored to move the sexuality/gender encounter contained by feminist theory into a broader context by "synthesizing feminist theory with scholarship on male homosexuality," and that gender theorist Judith Butler endeavored to open a similar conversation by "confront[ing] feminism with a homosexuality represented primarily by lesbianism, but a lesbianism that included the butch-femme configurations dismissed by earlier thinkers" (199). Furthermore, Marcus argues that this work of finding ways for feminist and queer theory to productively engage with each other across difference is on-going:

Women's studies scholars may be inclined to dismiss queer studies as only about men, but to do so neglects women's foundational work in the field and assumes a polarization between men and women that queer studies itself disproves. Much queer work now focuses on men and women together, and even queer work that concentrates on men

¹² Sedgwick's work in developing and defining queer theory as an applicable framework is discussed in Chapter 1.

draws on feminist insights and models, attesting to feminism's powerful influence beyond women's studies. (199)

It is true, however, that queer theory historically tends to emphasize the white male subject, as the plays in this study will demonstrate. Differences of gender, race, ethnicity, and ability are often excluded or obfuscated not only in contemporary queer scholarship, but in queer drama. The project of this study is to examine the ways that characters engage with each other across gender difference, which is clearly a significant matter given the relationship between feminist and queer theory.

Gay Drama and Other "Others"

While the last century of American drama includes numerous plays featuring lesbian female and gay male characters, there are also many plays that exclude characters of the opposite sex (strictly "lesbian" or "gay" plays), presumably in order to represent and interrogate the particular circumstances of one group without complicating it with the presence of another. Similarly, there is a case to be made against collapsing the particular circumstances of heterosexual females and gay males—Othered by gender and by sexual identity, respectively—into a unified narrative or a unified alliance against hetero-patriarchal power. From a more traditional, psychoanalytical perspective, the notion of males who are not potentially aroused sexually or erotically by the female body may be perceived as threatening to the power and/or socio-cultural status allowed straight women by hetero-patriarchy; gay male lack of interest in/aversion to the female body may even be perceived, in certain frameworks, as misogynist, and there exists "gay male" dramatic literature which represents gay men who have no need for, are disgusted by, and/or are simply not interested (sexually or otherwise) in straight women. Because

of this conversion of overlapping markers of subject- and object-hood—not forgetting the overlapping of racial, ethnic, ability, age and class difference within gender and sexual identity categories—the relationship of queer male to straight female characters in plays provides a rich nexus for examining identity-based criticism (such as “feminist” and “gay male”) and their accompanying politics. As Leo Bersani explains in *Homos* (1995), “Gay men are an oppressed group not only sexually drawn to the power-holding sex, but belonging to it themselves” (66). Similarly, queer theorist Cathy J. Cohen argues in her 2005 essay, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?,” that contemporary “queer activism” leaves privilege unexamined in many cases, particularly with regard to the ways that race and gender affect queer politics (21-2). “Queers who operate out of a political culture of individualism,” Cohen explains, “assume a material independence that allows them to disregard historically or culturally recognized categories and communities or, at the very least, to move fluidly among them without ever establishing permanent relationships or identities within them” (34). The visibility of queerness often relies on overt performance and/or “outing,” unlike other marginalizing markers such as a female body, a raced body, or a disabled body; therefore, queers – particularly queer white men – can claim Othered status while maintaining certain privileges.

Women—queer and straight—have a complex relationship to male queerness, not only in dramatic literature but in a broader socio-cultural sense. There is in contemporary U.S. culture a repeated image of friendship between women and gay or queer men, seemingly because of their shared Otherness to the monolith of heterosexual-male privilege. For the same reason, there would appear to be a logical cultural alliance between lesbian women and gay men, but as the political history of either group demonstrates, the issue of gender-based privilege has the potential to complicate this relationship. The archetypal character of the female-best-friend or the “fag hag” (which sometimes carries a pejorative connotation) works in numerous gay plays

and films to support the male main character, occasionally as a match-maker. In other cases, such as Lanford Wilson's *Burn This* (1987) and Wendy Wasserstein's *The Heidi Chronicles* (1989), the gay male character's most significant relationship is his friendship with the straight female rather than with another gay male; in such plays, a gay man is represented but male/male attraction and sex are not depicted.¹³ In these situations, much of the gay male character's sense of self is invested in the straight female character, not necessarily because this is stated in the text but because the audience views the gay male character through the eyes of the straight female character; her gaze implicitly legitimizes the gay male character for other women as well as for straight men by providing a coherent female/male relationship. In *Homos* (1995), Leo Bersani posits that "the very maintaining of the couples man-woman, heterosexual-homosexual, serves to break down their oppositional distinctions" (61). In this sense, friendship between straight females and gay males in drama both reinscribes and subverts heterosexist norms:

These binary divisions help to create the diversified desiring field across which we can move, thus reducing sexual difference itself—at least as far as desire is concerned—to a merely formal arrangement inviting us to transgress the very identity assigned to us within the couple. (61)

Bersani's claim suggests that the gay male and straight female are able to collude, through a direct subversion of heteronormative coupling, in normalizing queerness for a mainstream/heterosexual audience. It is important to consider, however, the specific overlaps and separations between such characters: gay men and straight women share their object of sexual desire (that is, men), and while this object of desire is what marks gay men as transgressive, it is what endows straight women with elements of heterosexual privilege. However, as Bersani points out, gay men belong to and also desire members of the privileged gender, and so gay male erotic and sexual experience is contained within the privileged gender's sphere. For this reason, gay male literature and queer scholarship have been criticized for ignoring other types of Others.

¹³ The fact that both of these plays premiered in the late 1980s, when male/male sex was widely associated with AIDS, is noteworthy.

In older gay male studies scholarship, a significant female character who is present in a play that includes male/male desire tends to be read as a block or as a “beard”¹⁴ to that desire, that is as a way to preclude or resolve male/male desire for audience members who do not wish to see it. In *Still Acting Gay*, John Clum identifies a number of plays—including *Design for Living* and *Entertaining Mr. Sloane*—which he claims use female characters to code and/or closet a homosexual relationship. For instance, Gilda’s relationship to both men prevents Otto and Leo’s relationship from being exclusively homosexual in Coward’s play, and Orton depicts an overtly sexual relationship between Sloane and Kath while implying (but not explicating) a similar relationship between Sloane and Kath’s brother, Ed. According to Sam See’s critique of Clum’s reading of these plays, Clum “believes that these plays vacillate between hetero- and homosexual representations because such variability allows the audience to choose what sexual expressions they will and will not see” (34). Female presence as a means of precluding male queerness echoes another, older trope in U.S./UK drama, which is the disruption or dissolution of male/male friendship by a female character, examples of which can be seen in plays ranging from 19th century melodramas (*The Fair Penitent*) to Elizabethan classics (*Much Ado About Nothing*). This historical precedent of the negative effect of female presence on male relationships may account for why, in the majority of gay drama, female characters are insignificant if not absent from the stage.

The plays in this study reflect the historical exclusivity of American gay and queer drama as all were written by white male playwrights and feature primarily white characters from America or England. It is also an important consideration that the straight female characters in these plays, as well as their relationships to queer male characters, are written by queer males. While this study does not attempt to account for authorial intent, and while suggesting that a

¹⁴ A “beard” is a female who is affiliated with a gay male in a way that makes him appear to be heterosexual to external parties. For instance, if a male character is married to a woman but has a secret male lover, his wife could be called a “beard.”

female playwright would better represent a “female” perspective or experience is gender essentialism, the representational implications should be acknowledged. In some respects, however, the post-gay nature of these plays lends them to better accommodation of diversity than “coming-out” or AIDS plays, as the narratives in these types of drama largely reflect exclusively white male experience. “Scholars of African American sexuality like Roderick Ferguson and Marlon Ross,” say Jordan Schildrout in his essay, “The Closet Is a Deathtrap” (2011), “have argued that race, class, and other social differences affect the construction of sexual identities, and that the closet is not the appropriate paradigm for all queer subjects” (59). Post-gay drama does not focus on the “closet” narrative, and so it does not include this particular structure that elides differences of race and class, or additional Othered subjectivities delineated by gender, ethnicity, age, or ability. This is not to say, though, that post-gay drama does not tend to exclude or elide other important differences and Others. Given these considerations, is it possible to dramatize intersections of divergent types of Otherness without forcing certain marginalized subjects into inappropriate paradigms? This study seeks to address this question by looking specifically at intersections of differently-gendered characters in post-gay plays.

Post-gay and Post-gay Drama

As discussed in Chapter 1, the definition of post-gay remains contested, and some regard the term as problematic. “To be post-gay,” says queer theorist Michael Warner in his 1999 book *The Trouble with Normal*, “means to define oneself by more than sexuality, to disentangle gayness with militancy and struggle, and to enjoy sexually mixed company” (61-2). Similarly, David Alderson says in his essay “Postgay Drama” (2012) that for some, post-gay “signals assimilation and a conviction therefore that militancy is redundant” (863-4). Both of these assessments reflect the earliest and most widely-known use of the term by *Out Magazine* editor

James Collard, who explained that a post-gay outlook is about “no longer thinking solely in terms of struggle. It’s going to a gay bar and wishing there were girls there to talk to” (qtd. in Ghaziani 99). Since its earliest usage, then, the term “post-gay” has indicated a move toward engagement with another Other, a move past definition-by-exclusion. Alan Sinfield cogently expresses this point, and the implications of “post-gay” for drama criticism, in his 1998 book *Gay and After*. Referencing his own criticism of Joe Orton for not writing overtly gay characters, Sinfield acknowledges the validity of Marjorie Garber’s criticism that he (Sinfield) was writing from a “particular time and hence a particular gay identity” (14). Due to socio-political shifts, Sinfield surmises “that we may now be entering the period of *the post-gay*—a period when it will not seem so necessary to define, and hence to limit, our sexualities” (orig. emph. 14). Sinfield also points out that the post-gay/queer thrust attempts to reach across boundaries of race, ethnicity, and culture that gay pride tended to obfuscate:

Lesbians and gay men need to recognize that, for all out anti-essentialist theory, we have imagined sexuality to be less diverse and less mobile than, for many people, it is. Our current identities will never account for more than a proportion of the same-sex passion in our society, let alone in other parts of the world. (14)

Despite his optimism about the post-gay moment, however, Sinfield expresses concern regarding the viability of establishing “an effective political movement on dispersed subjectivities” (17). This concern reflects those of Weed, Schor, and Walters regarding the threat the queer theory poses to identity-based politics.

In his essay “Post-gay Collective Identity Construction” (2011), Amin Ghaziani examines the various implications of post-gay for identity and political action:

The conventional wisdom is that an internal us (the in-group) is solidified against an external them (the out-group) [...] This taken-for-granted “us versus them” framework fit gay collective identity construction during the closet and coming out eras [...], but it provides an inadequate conceptual framework to account for the changes that are transpiring today. (101)

Post-gay is a conceptual framework that moves beyond the “us-versus-them” definition of gay identity and works to destabilize the homo/heterosexual binary. One of the major characteristics that make the four focal plays of this study post-gay, therefore, is that each of them includes a distinct interrogation of gay identity. In this sense, post-gay reflects post-structuralist theoretical principles in that it is ultimately self-reflexive. Ghaziani explains that “in a post-gay era, activists construct their collective identity using an inclusive, distinction-muting logic of ‘us *and* them,’” and says this “shift from opposition (us ‘versus’ them) to inclusion (us ‘and’ them) implies that activists today are motivated less by drawing boundaries against members of the dominant group and more by building bridges toward them” (orig. emph. 102). If gay identity is not defined against heteronormative structures, how can it be politically solvent? This question reflects the major criticism against post-gay, which is that it implies that gay political activism is no longer necessary, and risks allowing gay and queer individuals and culture to be absorbed by the dominant, heteronormative group. Ghaziani and others, for instance, define a “post-gay moment” as one in which activists intentionally “emphasize their similarities to straights” (101).

This is not, however, the way that the plays in this study perform a post-gay action; rather, they challenge the hetero/homosexual binary by destabilizing the either/or, by diversifying the ways that a character and/or relationship may be different from heterosexual. Ghaziani defines a “post-gay society” as “distinguished by an increasing assimilation of gays into the mainstream alongside rapid internal diversification,” and says furthermore that “in a post-gay context, diversity more often signifies the celebration of different sexual ways of life within LGBT communities” (104). Because the term “gay” doesn’t encompass all of these “different sexual ways of life,” the term “queer” emerges. These plays are not post-gay in the assimilationist sense; rather, they are post-gay in that they move beyond coming-out narratives or narratives of tragic struggle. They continue to define queer sexualities against heteronormativity

and generate not assimilated gay men and straight women, but radical queer subjectivities that are only possible through the interaction of gay men and straight women, two Othered groups with distinct differences. Ghaziani, writing in 2011, cautions against conflating post-gay with post-discrimination, though he maintains that this notion is a potential exegesis of post-gay:

Post-gay could entail a multiculturalist blurring of modernist boundaries and a move toward expanded tolerance and freedom—or it could entail a neoliberal, class- and racially inflected, and surface blurring that redefines the contours of hetero- and homonormativity. Which of these two models is more valid is as of yet inconclusive. (121)

The plays included in this study reflect the latter model of post-gay discourse: a movement toward engagement of multiple Othered subjectivities that interrogates the hetero/homonormative binary.

How, though, does post-gay appear when contextualized in the proliferation of “post-” frameworks? “Enter the brave new post-everything world,” pronounces Mary McNamara in a 2003 article for the *Los Angeles Times*, “in which we mark our rejection of past cultural movements, and our refusal to commit to new ones, with one little word: ‘post’” (qtd. in Ghaziani 121). In his discussion of Mark Ravenhill’s plays as examples of “Post-gay Drama” (2012), drama critic David Alderson compares post-gay to post-feminist: whereas Ravenhill associates “postgay” with “negative images” of “gay people” as opposed to the “positive images” of the gay pride era, Alderson claims that post-feminism “has been accused of representing precisely the opposite tendency, of embracing commercially generated images of femininity and thereby prematurely abandoning a political project” (863). This criticism of post-feminism reflects the concern that post-gay suggests assimilation, a premature abandonment of gay pride and its associated struggle. Post-colonialist scholar Kwame Anthony Appiah, in his 1991 essay, “Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?” does not specifically engage post-gay, but he discusses the “post-” thrust of contemporary theory in ways that reflect

productively on post-gay and its potential relationships to other kinds of “post-” theorizations. In all of the “domains” to which postmodernism can be applied, reasons Appiah, there is “an antecedent practice that laid claim to certain exclusivity of insight, and in each of them ‘postmodernism’ is a name for the rejection of that claim to exclusivity, a rejection that is almost always more playful, though not necessarily less serious, than the practice it aims to replace”

(341-2). This description is similar to the internal-diversification and redefinition model of post-gay. Appiah also calls the postmodern thrust a “distancing of the ancestors” (342), not to disregard their existence or importance, but to decentralize conventional narratives to create space for something new:

Postmodernism can be seen, then, as a retheorization of the proliferation of distinctions that reflects the underlying dynamic of cultural modernity, the need to clear oneself a space. Modernism saw the econimization of the world as the triumph of reason; postmodernism rejects that claim, allowing in the realm of theory the same proliferation of distinctions that modernity had begun. (346)

Appiah concludes that the “*post-*” of post-colonialism “like that of postmodernism, is also a *post-* that challenges earlier legitimating narratives” (orig. emph. 353), much like post-gay challenges “earlier legitimating narratives” of coming-out and crisis that developed in response to previous historical circumstances. “For the *post-* in postcolonial, like the *post-* in postmodern,” Appiah explains, “is the *post-* of the space-clearing gesture,” and asserts that post-colonial is “concerned with transcending, with going beyond, coloniality” (orig. emph. 348). Though it is not in any way a direct correlation, the post-gay drama featured in this study is “concerned with transcending, with going beyond” the conventions and assumptions of gay drama to engage many types of queer subjectivities as well as other Others that tended to be absent from or at least without agency in conventional gay drama. Appiah also identifies a trend in post-colonial African literature “that the postulation of a unitary Africa over against a monolithic West—the binarism of Self and Other—is the last of the shibboleths of the modernizers that we must learn

to live without,” attributing this postulation to the “postcolonial critique of what we might call ‘alteritism,’ the construction and celebration of oneself as Other” (354). This aspect also reflects the post-gay interrogation of the heterosexual/homosexual binary and illustrates that this interrogation need not imply a movement toward and into the dominant group but a resistance against definition by the dominant group. Rather than “building bridges toward” the dominant group (Ghaziani 102), these plays depict two Others building bridges to unseen and often unspecified utopias, and in this regard they can be said to “clear space” for radical queer subjectivities. This study approaches the subject of “post-gay” through evidence rather than theory: these plays were not written with the intention of being “post-gay” in a theoretical sense, but a close comparison of these plays through the lens of post-gay as an expression of an ideological shift reveals that they all feed into this “space-clearing” project in similar ways.

Engagement Through Difference

As both feminist and queer theory are historically associated with a particular marginalized group, the difficulties of engagement between them could be attributed to identity-politics. How, ask feminist and queer scholars, can we theorize productively across these differences, without identities or identificatory theories to use as throughlines and anchors? Moreover, the entire notion rejecting or dissolving identity categories in scholarship and political activism remains contested. As discussed earlier, feminist theorist Suzanna Danuta Walters sees “the criticism of identity politics” as the “heart of queer theory,” and sees this criticism as antithetical to feminist scholarship and activism (485). However, many prominent contemporary feminist theorists—particularly those who attend to racial, ethnic, and geographic differences among women—have problematized the efficacy of identity-politics. Feminist and queer theorist Amalia Ziv, in her essay “Performative Politics In Israeli Queer Anti-Occupation Activism”

(2010), describes how the performance group Black Laundry uses signs of audacious, radical queerness to advocate for Palestinian refugees:

Black Laundry offered a new formation of politics that was neither universalist (like traditional Israeli Left politics) nor identity politics (like mainstream LGBT politics), but rather a politics of identification rooted in a marginal positioning, which emphasized the corporeality of the political subject. (543)

Similarly, contemporary feminist and post-colonial theorist Chandra Mohanty makes a distinction between “solidarity” and “sisterhood,” a “reflective solidarity” which, like Ziv’s conception of “politics of identification,” allows different types of Others to interact collaboratively toward mutually beneficial ends without reducing or collapsing important issues of difference. “Rather than assuming an enforced commonality of oppression,” Mohanty explains, “the practice of solidarity foregrounds communities of people who have chosen to work and fight together. Diversity and difference are central values here—to be acknowledged and respected, not erased in the building of alliances” (7).

Mohanty is specifically addressing solidarity among women in a global context, and her discussion in *Feminism Without Borders* (2003) is grounded in the notion that multiple types of differences affect various individuals’ experiences of being female. Mohanty joins other contemporary feminist scholars in recognizing that Caucasian, upper/middle-class American and European feminists historically attempt to impose their particular needs and desires onto all women, and she calls for attention to the particulars of class, race, ethnicity, and location in developing trans-national feminist solidarity. It is impossible, therefore, to directly apply Mohanty’s theorization of solidarity to the interactions between women and queer men featured in this study without eliding important specificities of difference in the very way that Mohanty discourages. However, Mohanty’s notion of solidarity provides criteria for productive, non-reductive engagement across difference that is useful for examining the relationships in these

plays. Actual solidarity, Mohanty suggests, does not assume commonality between two Others simply because they are both oppressed by the same power (in this case, patriarchal heteronormativity). Rather, solidarity exists among individuals who choose to collaborate in defying power to improve their own material circumstances. Mostly importantly, solidarity does not transcend or ignore difference among Others – in this case, gender difference – but rather foregrounds difference as the primary way of developing new schemas for living and struggling. Mohanty advocates “engagement” rather than “transcendence” as the “model for future social change” (111) and advocates “networking across local specificities toward universal objectives, not assumptions of universal sisterhood or experiential ‘unity’ among women across cultures” (120). While the specifics of this type of networking are entirely different among women of divergent races than between women and queer men, it is true that one of the major conflicts between queer and feminist activism and theory is the tendency to collapse the particulars of one oppression into the other in an attempt to create unity. This is the problem, for instance, that arises in some gay male drama which might include female characters but not the particulars of their political circumstances,¹⁵ or in drama that focuses on female characters and may include a gay male character but only as an accessory to the female character’s struggle against patriarchy;¹⁶ in such plays, one character’s difference is conflated with the other. In the plays featured in this study, however, the different socio-political disparities experienced by women and by gay men are separately acknowledged, even as these differently-gendered but Othered characters interact. For this reason, Mohanty’s discussion of solidarity is an applicable theoretical framework to this study, though the significance of race to Mohanty’s argument must

¹⁵ For example, Larry Kramer’s *The Normal Heart* (1985) features a number of male characters and one female character whose sole purpose is to encourage the protagonist to promote gay male sex abstinence. This female character is not developed beyond her authority as a medical doctor, the specific consequences of her femaleness are not explored. This character is discussed further in Chapter 3.

¹⁶ Examples of such plays include Lanford Wilson’s *Burn This* (1987) and Wendy Wasserstein’s *The Heidi Chronicles* (1989) which both follow a female protagonist with a gay male best friend whose trajectory is largely defined by the female protagonist.

be emphasized. In sum, Ziv's conception of a politics of identification versus identity politics and Mohanty's conception of solidarity are concerned with honoring specificity and difference in order to create circumstances that are ultimately improved for multiple types of Others. If we understand "universal objectives" (Mohanty 120) as circumstances that are optimal for all individuals in a given system, then this term takes on a utopian connotation. As this study demonstrates, the majority of these plays lead to or at least look toward a queer utopia.

The differently-gendered characters in these plays cannot necessarily be described as working and fighting together for political purposes; in fact, as this study demonstrates, many of the focal characters in these plays form relationships and communities in order to seek personal happiness and utopian living conditions that are often apolitical in ways that perhaps problematically excludes struggle. However, the "diversity and difference" between the differently-gendered characters is observably "acknowledged and respected" rather than erased in the focal plays of this study. The radical queer subjectivities that emerge from these plays arise from an attempt on the part of the queer male and straight female characters to develop a way of living that accommodates both/all of their specific and divergent needs and desires. Is it actually possible, however, to develop solidarity, as Mohanty and other feminist and queer scholars conceive of this notion, in a dramatic world in which political struggle is de-emphasized, as is the case in the majority of these plays? In what ways might these post-gay plays explore formations of solidarity among Othered individuals distinguished by gender similar to the type of productive solidarity that Mohanty describes? In what ways are the queer subjectivities generated in these plays the products of engagement with rather than transcendence of difference? Do these subjectivities, developed through the interaction of women and queer men, represent utopian alternatives to identity-based theorization and politics? Post-gay plays are distinct in that they do not exclusively attend to the marginalization of the gay male subject but

instead engage with gender difference and the multiple ways that it intersects with sexual otherness. Chandra Mohanty's injunction to engage with difference rather than attempt to transcend it has fundamentally changed feminist theory in recent years, and this shift is also visible in gender and queer theory. While these plays are in no way responses to Mohanty's injunction, when considered together, they do provide hypothetical, theatrical schema for this type of engagement. In her essay "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" (2005), Cathy J. Cohen points out that for individuals who occupy "the margins, operating through multiple identities and thus not fully served or recognized through traditional single-identity-based politics, theoretical conceptualizations of queerness hold great political promise" (24). Speaking particularly from the position of queer theory, Cohen advocates a similar form of solidarity through and not in spite of difference:

I envision a politics where one's relation to power, and not some homogenized identity, is privileged in determining one's political comrades. I am talking about a politics where the nonnormative and marginal position of punks, bulldaggers, and welfare queens, for example, is the basis for progressive transformative coalition work. Thus, if any truly radical potential is to be found in the idea of queerness and the practice of queer politics, it would seem to be located in its ability to create a space in opposition to dominant norms, a space where transformational political work can begin. (22).

Though the plays in this study do not depict engagement across a comprehensive variety of intersecting differences, the ways in which the differently-gendered characters in these post-gay plays interact generates radically queer, utopian spaces where transformational possibilities can be dramatically imagined.

Chapter 3

Queer Community and Shared Knowledge in Kushner's *Angels in America*

Tony Kushner's Pulitzer Prize-winning two-part play *Angels in America* (1993) continues to be one of the best known contemporary American plays, if not one of the most popular queer plays ever written. In *Still Acting Gay* (2001), his comprehensive study of gay male drama in the twentieth century, John M. Clum credits *Angels* with marking "a turning point in the history of gay drama, the history of American drama, and of American literary culture" (324). In his widely-cited 1995 essay, "Ambivalence, Utopia, and a Queer Sort of Materialism: How *Angels in America* Reconstructs the Nation," David Savran claimed that *Angels* had "resuscitated a category of play that has become almost extinct: the serious Broadway drama that is neither a British import nor a revival" (207). Kushner's *Angels* is not only a landmark play in the history of gay and queer theatre but also in American theatre, and the fact that his epic play "foregrounds explicitly gay men" (Savran 226) and deals directly with the AIDS crisis makes its mainstream success all the more remarkable. Additionally, the notion of a play that deals with AIDS revitalizing American theatre was revolutionary in the early 1990s when the gay community was still largely associated with disease and death. In addition to addressing a subject that had previously alienated mainstream audiences, *Angels* also depicts a large cast of characters who represent difference in sexuality, gender, race, religion, and politics, all of whom embrace "startling changes and shifts in identity" (16), as Ranen Omer-Sherman describes in his 2007 essay on "The Fate of the Other" in this play. Not only does *Angels* present an investigation and destabilization of identity, but it also, as Natalie Meisner observes in her 2003 essay on the "Performance of Femininity" in this play, serves as a "rich site for investigation of the interstices between feminism and queer theory" (177). As a foundational play to queer drama, the key contribution that *Angels* brings to this study is the notion that, in order to envision truly radical

political change and truly radical ways of being that lead to utopia, the messiness of difference has to be confronted and embraced, and gender difference is a major factor in this progression.

Angels in America is the story of seven individuals whose lives overlap in unexpected ways in 1985 New York City as the new millennium looms. Prior reveals to Louis, his long-time lover, that he has contracted AIDS; Louis, unable to cope with Prior's deteriorating health, leaves him. Harper, a young Mormon house-wife who is addicted to Valium, confronts her husband, Joe, about his latent homosexuality. Joe, chief clerk to a Federal Justice, is conflicted about whether to leave Harper behind and move to Washington at the request of his mentor, infamous right-wing lawyer Roy Cohn. At the end of part one, *Millennium Approaches*, Harper leaves Joe for her hallucination of Antarctica, Roy is hospitalized for AIDS, and Joe and Louis begin a sexual relationship with each other. Prior is visited by the Angel of America who tells him that God has abandoned heaven to go travelling, and that he has been chosen as a prophet to tell the rest of humanity to stop moving and changing so that God will return. In part two, *Perestroika*, Joe's mother, Hannah, moves from Utah to New York to help her son and daughter-in-law; Belize, Prior's close friend who is a nurse, finds that Roy Cohn is one of his patients. Louis finds out that Joe was mentored by Cohn and personally wrote court decisions that negatively affected gay men and other marginalized groups, and leaves Joe. Harper, after a mystical encounter with the spirit of a 19th-century Mormon woman, takes a repentant Joe's credit card and leaves for San Francisco. Prior, aided by Hannah, journeys to heaven and tells the Angels that humanity will not and cannot stop moving and changing. Roy Cohn dies of AIDS, and Belize and Louis steal the AZT that the well-connected Roy was able to procure and give it to Prior. In the final scene of the seven-hour play, Prior, Belize, Louis, and Hannah gather at Bethesda Fountain in Central Park and leave the audience with a message of hope and renewal.

A Queer/Post-Gay Play

Angels in America was the first widely-known play to feature the characteristics that now define post-gay drama. John M. Clum, for instance, calls *Angels* a “queer play” as opposed to a “gay play” (263) and explains that “to be queer is to deny the assimilationist goals of much of gay politics” (264). Clum compares *Angels* to Terrence McNally’s 1994 play *Love! Valour! Compassion!* which exclusively concerns the struggles and relationships of eight gay men living in New York in the early 1990s. Also a highly popular play, it presents one prominent type of gay culture to an audience and focuses on the particular lives of men belonging to this culture, defined by their sexual and romantic relationships with other men and the political marking that accompanies these relationships. In his summation of major critical writings on *Angels*, *Tony Kushner’s Angels in America* (2008), Kevin Nielsen explains that “theatrical representation of gay male sexuality basically followed two trends beginning in the late 1960s,” including mainstream productions which “broke down barriers by the way they gave visibility to the existence of gay men on stage and in society,” and “more underground” plays which “offered new modes of production of a certain gay sensibility, a certain gay style, a certain way of seeing the world” (51). McNally’s *Love! Valour! Compassion!* reflects the influence of both of these trends. *Angels*, however, depicts gay male characters in the context of gay culture in the mid-1980s, but these characters share focus with other characters of various identity-markers. The cultural and political circumstances of gay American men is of great importance in *Angels*, but this importance lies in the ways that these men’s lives intersect with those of other cultures, political affiliations, and, most importantly, with individuals belonging to multiple Othered groups.

Moreover, the depiction of gay men in *Angels* breaks away from the conventions of the previous two decades. When Louis and Prior are introduced, for instance, it is not explained to

the audience that they are a gay male couple; rather, they interact with each other in such a way that assumes the audience can understand their relationship. Nielsen also points out similarities between *Angels* and mainstream plays such as *The Boys in the Band* (1968), the first off-Broadway hit play to overtly depict gay male characters, leaving out the “self-loathing” that characterizes the gay men in *Boys*. Though Louis experiences “self-loathing,” it is not directed at his “sexuality but his actions” (51), namely his decision to leave Prior after Prior grows ill from AIDS. Theatre critic Richard Hornby includes Kushner among revolutionary contemporary American playwrights who “present homosexuality not as a metaphor for something else, but simply as a fact of life” (279). In fact, he calls *Angels* “the best of these” types of plays in the ways that it references and then subverts previous conventions for depicting gay male characters:

Tony Kushner’s matchless *Angels in America* (1992), does include a latent homosexual, Joe Pitt, who is in the traditional, angst-ridden mode, but rather than kill himself, he comes to terms with his sexuality. The other gay characters, including the outrageous political boss Roy Cohn, simply accept themselves. They are neither to be pitied *nor* censured. [...] Otherwise, the fact that the principal characters, all males,¹⁷ were attracted to others of their own sex was presented as no big deal, just part of a complex overall makeup in which other psychological forces were usually much more important than sex. (orig. emph. 279)

Angels not only breaks with the narratives established in previous gay plays but also presents gay men and the political and cultural anxieties that affect their lives as known entities rather than something foreign that must be explained to a mainstream audience. It moves beyond the narratives of visibility and coming-out that characterize Gay Pride plays as well as the narratives of struggle and tragedy that characterize AIDS Crisis plays.

¹⁷ Hornby’s claim that the principle characters of *Angels in America* is erroneous, as is discussed at length in this chapter. His claim, however, illustrates the popular misconceptions regarding the significant roles of female characters in this play.

Breaking the Conventions of the AIDS play

One of the primary ways in which *Angels* both engages and challenges previous conventions of gay male drama is in its depiction of a gay male character with AIDS and this character's trajectory. "AIDS drama may not be erotic," Clum describes, "but it is unabashedly romantic" (62); *Angels*, conversely, has moments of great eroticism (Prior and Hannah's orgasmic encounters with the Angel, for instance) and elements of romance, but it is ultimately not romantic as couples that exist during the play are dissolved by the play's end. According to John Clum, the "question in AIDS drama is, 'Will you still love me when I'm deathly ill and covered with lesions?'" and that the "sign of moral failure is to give up on a relationship," (62). Prior expresses the prevalence of this motif to Louis:

There are thousands of gay men in New York City with AIDS and nearly every one of them is being taken care of by ... a friend or by ... a lover who has stuck by them through things worse than my. ... So far. Everyone got that, except me. I got you. Why? What's wrong with me? (220)

Louis is not the first gay male character in a mainstream AIDS play to abandon his AIDS-afflicted lover, but he is the first to be refused when he attempts to repent. When Louis asks to come back to Prior near the end of the play, Prior forgives him but says they cannot be a couple again. The most revolutionary aspect of the depiction of AIDS in *Angels* is that Prior not only survives the play but we are also left with hope that he will survive long after the play's end, supported by a group of friends rather than by a monogamous lover.

To emphasize the extent to which *Angels* altered the narrative of AIDS Crisis plays, it is useful to compare Kushner's play to what Clum calls "the most commercially successful AIDS play" (66), Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart* (1985). Joseph Papp, who produced the play's original production, claims that *The Normal Heart* takes "a burning social issue and hold[s] it up to public and private scrutiny so that it reverberates with the social and personal implications of

that issue” (29). Indeed, Kramer’s play follows Ned Weeks (a character based on Kramer) as he struggles to politically activate gay men during the AIDS crisis while his own lover, Felix, suffers and eventually dies from the disease. As Omer-Sherman describes, *Normal Heart* was revolutionary in 1985 as it “investigated the indifference of the government and gay community alike to the AIDS catastrophe” (27). This aspect of the play reflects the controversy that surrounded Kramer himself, as he not only encouraged gay men to directly address AIDS but insisted that they must do so by rejecting the promiscuous sexual activity associated with the Gay Pride movement. Prominent gay male drama scholar Alan Sinfield also identifies *The Normal Heart* as an essential play for discussing “AIDS and politics” due to its “prominence” (Out 321), but he also points out the importance that Ned gives Emma, “the straight doctor” (321) who tells Ned that gay men must “stop having sex” or risk total annihilation (Kramer 37). Emma is also the only other person at Ned and Felix’s deathbed marriage which ends the play; ultimately, Ned is isolated from other gay men due to his unpopular political stances, has lost his lover to AIDS, and is left with his heterosexual female doctor friend and his straight brother. “What passes for politics here,” Sinfield says of *The Normal Heart*, “and in some other writings on AIDS, is little more than casting round for someone to blame” (322). The play is strongly rooted in the intense political situation of 1985, but it garnered significant attention for the situation of gay American men during the AIDS Crisis, and had an acclaimed 2011 Broadway revival. In essence, *The Normal Heart* reads as a rallying cry and call for immediate action; *Angels*, the other most prominent American play to depict gay men and AIDS, is more concerned with the future.

While previous plays such as *Normal Heart* addressed both the political and personal consequences of the AIDS Crisis, *Angels in America* interrogated these consequences in an

unprecedentedly broad context. Theatre critic Daniel Mendelsohn describes the response of audiences to this innovative epic play:

The admiration and, in a way, relief that immediately greeted its premier [...] had to do with the general sense that finally someone was saying something grand [...] and important not just about AIDS, but about AIDS as a symptom of a profound rupture in American life. (42 qtd. in Omer-Sherman 10)

Omer-Sherman further explains that when *Angels* premiered in 1993, it “spoke up for those who saw the fatal contradiction in a nation that claimed the enlightened mantle of equality for all and yet was still bent on excluding homosexuals from the full rights of citizenship” (10). While audiences and critics may have made this type of association, the play itself is not actually as directly political as such quotations would suggest. Characters (Louis, Joe, and Roy, in particular) discuss politics and their own divergent political views throughout the play, but none of the characters engage in the kind of aggressive, didactic political action that Ned does throughout *The Normal Heart*. Rather, *Angels* “concerns a cluster of intersecting individuals whose lives are profoundly touched by the epidemic of AIDS deaths in New York in the mid-1980s” (Omer-Sherman 7), and focuses on how these characters cope with their own political and cultural circumstances. According to Clum, “[t]o ‘change and not forget’” is the “epitome of what is essential to survival and growth in AIDS drama” (62), and while *Angels* is markedly different from traditional AIDS drama, this phrase certainly describes the theme of Kushner’s play as it both references various kinds of oppression and looks forward to a utopian future. Omer-Sherman compares Kushner to Jewish comic-book artists in the 1930s and ‘40s who “masked ethnic and immigrant difference in the guise of superhuman traits with redemptive capacities for humanity,” pointing out that “Prior’s affliction transcends its social stigma, proving transformative for society as a whole” (9). Prior is a prophet not in spite of but because he is afflicted with AIDS, and it is his desire for “more life” (267) in spite of his suffering that impresses the angels with the power of human vitality. In fact, several characters’ afflictions and

marginalized identities transcend their social stigma to prove transformative: Harper has visions because of her addiction, and Hannah is able to give Prior invaluable advice about the angel because of her Mormon background. Without ignoring the material consequences of marginalization, *Angels* depicts a world wherein Othered status—including being a gay man with AIDS, previously considered a death-sentence—becomes a transformative tool.

Gender difference contributes significantly to the process of transformation that occurs throughout *Angels in America*. David Savran points out that not only “the apocalyptic location of U.S. gay men in the AIDS crisis makes them authorities at the millennium” (207), but that another radical aspect of *Angels* is that it extends this authority to women and to people of marginalized racial and ethnic heritage. In her 1988 essay “AIDS, Gender, and Biomedical Discourse,” feminist theorist Paula Treichler explains that the spread of the AIDS epidemic revealed that “gay men were everywhere” in American society, not only in the visible gay community, and that many of these men “were silent and invisible—unlike women and racial minorities. Part of the shock of AIDS was thus the shock of identity” (200). Here, Treichler references the fact that biological sex and race are typically more difficult to publicly conceal than non-normative sexual practice. This phenomenon is referenced in *Angels* through the character Roy who, when his doctor informs him that he has AIDS, responds that, “AIDS is what homosexuals have. I have liver cancer” (52). Roy makes a distinction between himself, someone who has immense “clout,” and “homosexuals” who he defines not as “men who sleep with other men,” but as “men who know nobody and who nobody knows” (51). Roy and Joe both have sex with other men but are able to disassociate themselves from the gay community and therefore from political marginalization to enjoy the privileges of being white, ostensibly heterosexual American men. Belize, however, is not only an openly gay man but is also African American and therefore visibly marked as Other; similarly, Harper and Hannah are not only Mormon, a

stigmatized religious group, but are also visibly marked as Other because they are female. Treichler identifies the ability of AIDS, as a cultural and political phenomenon, to expose “the artificiality of the categories and divisions that govern our views of social life and sexual difference” (233). Not only does *Angels* break with many of the conventions of AIDS plays, but it also utilizes this ability of the AIDS crisis to interrogate and destabilize identity. Roy, for instance, is ultimately subject to the ravages of AIDS and the accompanying stigma that prevents those infected with this disease from accessing adequate healthcare, regardless of his racial and gendered privilege. AIDS in *Angels* is therefore not exclusively a harbinger of suffering and death but a leveling tool that allows characters to see how their own oppressions intersect with those of other marginalized groups.

The majority of American gay drama is historically problematic as far as its inclusion (or lack of thereof) of other types of difference. In *The Normal Heart*, for instance, there is a discussion about whether or not to include lesbians in a political action campaign regarding AIDS. One of the gay male characters asks another, “how do you feel about Lesbians?” to which he replies, “Not very much. I mean, they’re ... something else” (55). Here, the characters acknowledge that the particular needs and interests of lesbians cannot be collapsed into those of gay males, but they also dismiss and ignore lesbians as a group. In fact, the single female character in *The Normal Heart* is Emma, the heterosexual doctor who warns Ned that gay men must stop having sex with each other. While only two of the main characters in *Angels* are female,¹⁸ these women contribute more significantly to the overall drama and have more complex trajectories of their own than is typical of gay plays. Sinfield points out in *Out on Stage*, his analysis of twentieth century gay drama, that Harvey Fierstein’s *Torch Song Trilogy* (1982) is similar to *Angels* in that it features “the discarded female partner, and mother flying in to sort

¹⁸ The Angel can be considered a female main character, but her gender is contestable, as is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

things out” (205). *Angels* includes these motifs, but it also subverts them: Harper is not only Joe’s “discarded female partner” but has a crucial relationship with and parallel journey to Prior; Hannah, Joe’s mother, is not able to “sort things out” for her son and Harper, but is instrumental to Prior’s struggle with the angels and has her own journey of awakening. Nielsen also points out that *Angels* is very different from *Torch Song Trilogy* and other, more traditional gay plays in its dealings with gender: while the gay male protagonist in *Torch Song* “only wants what his mother has,” the male and female characters in *Angels* “have been radicalized by AIDS,” and therefore the “Utopian dream in *Angels in America* is not a dream of assimilation but rather a dream of equality and citizenship based in recognition and valuation of difference” (52). For example, Hannah and Prior found their relationship on mutual respect for the reality that they cannot know what the other thinks, feels, or needs based on the categories into which each other fits. When Prior admits that much of what Hannah, a Mormon, believes is “repellent” to him, she responds:

HANNAH: What do I believe?

PRIOR: I’m a homosexual. With AIDS. I can just imagine what you ...

HANNAH: No you can’t. Imagine. The things in my head. You don’t make assumptions about me, mister; I won’t make them about you.

PRIOR (*A beat; he looks at her, then*): Fair enough. (235)

Acknowledging their differences but relinquishing their assumptions, Prior and Hannah form a lasting relationship that is beneficial to both characters.

The female characters in *Angels* have positive effects on the gay male characters, but this play is radical in its depiction of gender difference because these women have equally complex and significant journeys to those of the gay male characters. Their lives intersect, but they are not collapsed into one another in the interest of solidarity. Natalie Meisner, who criticizes the depiction of the female characters in this play, claims that the male characters “gain power

through the performance of homoerotic, homo-social, and homo-political engagement,” and uses Joe’s “much-anticipated emergence from the closet” as an example (178). What Meisner fails to notice, and what is one of the revolutionary aspects of this play, is that Joe’s emergence from the closet does not automatically solve his problems nor leads him to a happy resolution; he has caused intentionally harm to marginalized groups, and this proves to be a much greater obstacle than his initial denial of his same-sex desire. Meisner also fails to observe that the female characters in *Angels* also “gain power” through these avenues, such as Hannah’s hetero/homoerotic encounter with the Angel and Harper’s homo-social interactions with Hannah and the Mormon Mother, all of which increase these female characters’ agency within the play. Summarily, *Angels in America* marked a turning point for gender difference in drama featuring gay men and AIDS. In *Angels*, women are not only important to the gay male characters but also have separate, significant trajectories of their own that connect with but are not collapsed into the trajectories of the male characters.

Gender and the Angel

Gender is in fact destabilized in *Angels* through the character of the Angel of America, and this destabilization is used to fracture other categories of identity. Prior calls Belize immediately after his first visit from the Angel and tells Belize that he has had a “wet dream” and that, “[i]t was a woman;” Belize responds, “You turning straight on me?” to which Prior replies, “Not a *conventional* woman” (orig. emph. 153). The fact that Prior, who self-identifies as a gay male throughout the play, has a sexual encounter with the unconventionally-gendered Angel contributes to the overall queerness of this play. When Prior later describes this sexual encounter to Belize, he again responds incredulously: “Whoa whoa whoa wait a minute excuse

me please,” Belize says, “You fucked this angel?” Prior replies, “She fucked me. She has ... well, she has eight vaginas” (174). In addition to her plethora of female sex organs, the Angel tells Prior that she is “Hermaphroditically Equipped as well with a Bouquet of Phalli” (175). Though the Angel’s hermaphroditic nature is established in this exchange, the Angel is intended to be played by a female actor and is referred to by female pronouns both by other characters and in the play’s stage directions. David Savran compares Kushner’s queerly-bodied Angel to Walter Benjamin’s Angel of History and explains how the Angel fractures conventional binaries:

In Kushner’s reading of Benjamin, the hermaphroditic Angel becomes the most crucial site for the elaboration of contradiction. Because her/his body is the one on which an impossible—and utopian—sexual conjunction is played out, s/he decisively undermines the distinction between the heterosexual and the homosexual. With her/his ‘eight vaginas’ and ‘Bouquet of Phalli’ (2:48), s/he represents an absolute otherness, the impossible Other [...]. (212)

Theoretically, then, Prior’s Angel powerfully associates utopia with the subversion of heteronormative binaries and with Otherness, reinforcing the queer resonances of the play. However, the fact that the Angel is played by a female has a significant effect. Though she is meant to be hermaphroditic, the Angel’s femaleness is likely the most prominent visual feature of this character, and so an analysis of her actions must be considered when studying the depiction of female characters in this play.

As a female character in a play featuring AIDS, the Angel bears a surprising resemblance to Emma from Kramer’s *The Normal Heart*. In the first scene of this play, Emma examines Ned to assess whether or not he has AIDS and encourages him to take action as a member of the gay community in New York. “What is it exactly you’re trying to get me to do?” Ned asks, to which Emma replies, “Tell gay men to stop having sex” (37). While Emma is specifically addressing the threat of AIDS, her words are paralleled by the Angel’s message to Prior that humanity “MUST STOP MOVING!” (orig. emph. 178). Like the Angel, Emma is imbued with a great deal

of authority, not only because she is a doctor but because she is wheel-chair-bound due to polio, which is compared to AIDS as another fear-inducing plague. The parallel between Emma's and the Angel's warnings becomes particularly strong in light of Prior's later correlation between movement and "desire" (264). Both plays also feature a second meeting between doctor/angel and their prophets, Ned and Prior, at the mid-points of each story, and in both meetings the authoritative female character berates her prophet for failing to effectively spread his message. The crucial difference between these plays, however, is that Ned redoubles his efforts to spread Emma's warning while Prior wrestles with and ultimately resists the Angel.

While Emma is certainly imbued with authority and treated as a valuable female voice of solidarity in *Normal Heart*, her warning as well as her depiction are potentially problematic. Firstly, it is controversial from a representational perspective for Ned, a gay man, to ask a straight female to instruct him about the needs of the gay community. It must also be acknowledged that Emma's words potentially reinforce the heterosexist association of male/male sex with automatic death, an association which was prevalent during the AIDS Crisis. The fact that Emma is in an electronic wheelchair throughout *Normal Heart*, a result of childhood polio, seems intended to lend her warning more credence. Indeed, Emma admits to Ned that her colleagues are "terrified" of her, refer to her as the "holy terror in a wheelchair," and that she "scare[s] the shit out of people" because of her disability (81). Emma's visible disability gives her authority, much as Prior's illness (and his angelic visions) gives him authority, or at least energizes him to take action. However, there is a fragile delineation between depicting a disability as a source of transformative power, as is the case in *Angels*, and exploiting disability to strengthen a particular political perspective. Emma is not significantly developed beyond being a woman, a heterosexual, a doctor, and wheel-chair-bound, and it could therefore be argued that her disability is employed as a means to prevent the other characters (and possibly

audience members) from feeling that they can be angry and offended by her equation of male/male sex with death. Despite this, the fact that Emma speaks from her prior, personal experience with a plague mirrors another motif in *Angels*: individuals using their knowledge of and experience with marginalization to aid other characters in their own struggle.

Just as Emma's warning may reflect problematically on the depiction of women in *The Normal Heart*, the Angel's reactionary insistence on stagnation and immobility may similarly reflect on the depiction of women in *Angels*. David Savran, for example, admits that while "it is clear that Kushner is making some effort to counter the long history of the marginalization and silencing of women in American culture generally and in American theatre, in particular," the play also "seems to replicate many of the structures that historically have produced female subjectivity as Other" (215). As an example, Savran points out that though the Angel is meant to be "hermaphroditic," the "stage directions use the feminine pronoun when designating the Angel"¹⁹ and the Angel has been portrayed by a woman in all of the major American productions of the play (216); therefore, Savran concludes that femaleness is made to signify "'STASIS' and collapse, while a divine masculinity is coded as being simultaneously deterministic and absent" which "guarantees that the feminine remains Other" in this play (216). Similarly, Meisner suggests that it is crucial to the "integrity of the play's vision that The Angel of History, who is described as a 'cosmic reactionary,' be constructed as emphatically female despite being 'Hermaphroditically Equipped...with a Bouquet of Phalli'" (178). Such an argument could certainly be made about a play wherein the singular female character is a reactionary voice for the cessation of desirous activity, as is the case in *The Normal Heart*, but because *Angels* features

¹⁹ Since Savran uses this fact as part of the premise of his argument, it must also be considered that male actors play the other angels who Prior encounters in heaven (*Perestroika* V.5), and that these angels also advocate stasis. If it is significant that the Angel of America is played by a female, it must be significant that another four angels are played by males. Furthermore, the Angel that Joe wrestles with in his recurring dream is "a beautiful man" (55).

multiple significant female characters, these voices must also be considered before stagnation can be called a “female” wish.

The hermaphroditic Angel is therefore a queer figure who also, somewhat paradoxically, represents a reactionary approach to destruction, risk, and apocalypse; she advocates stasis, echoing Emma in *Normal Heart*. Prior, though he is afflicted with disease and is semiotically associated with death, resists the Angel, unlike Ned in *Normal Heart* who takes Emma’s message up as his own political banner. It is noteworthy, however, that Prior is not the only character in *Angels* to resist the Angel’s message of stasis; rather, this message is undermined and resisted by Belize as well as by Hannah and Harper who all move forward themselves as well as aid Prior in his struggle against the Angel’s fatalistic command.

(De)Pathologized Woman and Gay Man

“I’m not that crazy. Just upset.” – Harper, Perestroika, V.2

Prior and Harper undergo separate but parallel journeys throughout this two-part epic play. Both begin the play with fearful and fatalistic outlooks, but both characters are ultimately energized to resist through encounters with other disenfranchised characters, and it is this equation that generates *Angels*’ central image of confronting apocalypse to push through it to the utopia on the other side. In Harper’s first scene, she describes to the audience her vision of “beautiful systems dying, old fixed orders spiraling apart” (23). She envisions the ozone layer as a “gift, from God,” and “a shell of safety for life itself,” a thin barrier between the earth and destruction; “But everywhere,” she tells us, “things are collapsing, lies surfacing, systems of defense giving way” (23). Harper’s anxiety about apocalypse and the destruction of systems is later linked to her discovery that her husband, Joe, is a closeted gay man, a revelation to which

she responds by saying that “something just ... fell apart” (40). Similarly, in Prior’s first scene, he tells Louis that he is infected with AIDS and declares, “I’m going to die” (27). Even after Harper, who he meets in his dream/her hallucination, tells him that she senses that the deepest part of him is “entirely free of disease,” Prior insists, “I don’t think there’s any uninfected part of me. My heart is pumping polluted blood. I feel dirty” (40). By the play’s end, however, Harper envisions the “souls of the dead” rising into the sky and holding hands to repair the hole in the ozone (275), and Prior says that he intends to live to see the new Millennium and blesses the audience with “*More Life*” (orig. emph. 280). What are the specific processes by which these two characters change so dramatically, and how does their gender difference affect these processes?

After Harper and Prior are introduced as characters struggling with despair as they face immense obstacles, the two characters encounter each other in a liminal theatrical space: Prior’s dream, and Harper’s Valium-induced hallucination. Jeff Johnson, in his 2006 essay comparing Kushner to William Inge, says that Prior and Harper “hallucinate their ways into each other’s unconscious,” and in this “surrealist moment, both characters are able to reveal critical truths to one another that would otherwise be denied them” (46). Indeed, though Harper and Prior only meet twice after this initial encounter, what they reveal to each other in this scene influences both characters’ trajectories significantly. The liminal, dream/hallucination-space allows Harper and Prior to have an automatic understanding of each other’s circumstances; for instance, Harper acknowledges that Prior is “really sick,” and when Prior asks how she knows this without his telling her that he has AIDS, she explains that they are at “the very threshold of revelation” where they can “see things” (39). Harper, who has experienced many Valium-induced hallucinations, has an understanding of the significance of the liminal space that she now occupies with Prior. Prior is also afforded special knowledge in this space: when Harper asks if he sees anything about her, he tells her that she is “amazingly unhappy,” and that her “husband’s

a homo” (39). Harper initially dismisses this revelation, telling Prior she doesn’t think he “intuit[s] well at all,” but then asks if “homos take, like, lots of long walks?” Prior replies, “Yes. We do. In stretch pants with lavender coifs” (39-40), implying that there are no tell-tale signs by which one can identify someone’s sexual desire. Rather, he tells Harper he knows that Joe prefers sex with men because of the same phenomenon that let her see that he is infected with AIDS, which is the threshold of revelation:

PRIOR: I just looked at you, and there was ...

HARPER: A sort of blue streak of recognition.

PRIOR: Yes.

HARPER: Like you knew me incredibly well.

PRIOR: Yes.

HARPER: Yes. (40)

Before leaving, Harper tells Prior: “Deep inside you, there’s a part of you, the most inner part, entirely free of disease. I can see that” (40). Though Prior has difficulty believing this, the fact that everything else he and Harper saw about each other was true lends legitimacy to her words and provides hope that helps Prior resist despair. When Harper and Prior meet again, this time when both of them are awake and lucid, they do not remember their shared dream/hallucination but soon discover that they automatically understand each other:

PRIOR: Imagination is a dangerous thing.

HARPER (*Looking at the father dummy*): In certain circumstances, fatal. It can blow up in your face. If it turns out to be true. Threshold ...

PRIOR AND HARPER: ... of revelation.

(*They look at each other.*)

PRIOR: It’s crazy time. I feel ... this is nuts. I feel ... this is nuts. We’ve never met, but I feel you know me incredibly well. (201)

It is noteworthy that Prior does not say, “like I know you incredibly well,” but that he feels that Harper knows *him* incredibly well; she has occupied a space before him, and already, though he does not remember, revealed something to him about himself. While their interactions with each other are characterized by commiseration and encouragement, Prior and Harper’s parallel journeys take both characters to dark and difficult places, and their visions are not unilaterally positive, as Omer-Sherman aptly describes:

Harper’s sexual dissatisfaction and growing suspicions about her husband’s sexual identity lead her into a downward spiral of Valium-induced hallucinations that include blissful escapes to a serene Antarctica. Prior, the other abandoned party, also experiences visions, apocalyptic intimations of books consumed by flames, celestial messengers, nurses suddenly spouting ancient Aramaic. It would be tempting to conclude that these two suffering souls are granted respite through mystical visions were it not for the increasingly nightmarish quality of the revelations that Prior receives. (21)

In his study, Omer-Sherman emphasizes the correlation between Jews and gay men, and between Mormons and Jews, which are unquestionably crucial elements in this play. These are the grounds on which he analyzes Harper and Hannah as Others, but it is more productive for the purposes of this study to analyze Harper and Hannah as women in a religion that disenfranchises and silences women and to look at how this disenfranchisement influences their solidarity with Prior, a gay man.

Some scholars argue that despite its highlighting of heteronormative and religious structures that silence and restrain women, *Angels* ultimately produces silent and restrained female characters. Nielsen argues that while Harper “proves to be central to the play’s staging of the powers of imagination in progress,” she is “ultimately removed from the very world in which progress takes place, suspended, as she is, in thin air” (43).²⁰ Here, Nielson references Natalie Meisner’s critique of the play (Meisner 180) and her claim that “the plays’ action revolves around Prior, Louis, Joe, and the other male characters” (177). Unfortunatley, Meisner’s

²⁰ In actuality, Harper is last seen on a plane to San Francisco, a city which earlier in the play is associated with heaven.

disregard for the crucial role that not only Harper but Hannah plays in the action of *Angels in America*, and the degree to which it is Harper's story as much as it is Prior's, is not isolated. David Savran argues that "*Angels* launches a critique of the very mechanisms that produce pathologized and acquiescent female bodies; it represents yet another pathologization and silencing of women" (208). Does Harper only appear to have a significant role in this play? Is the agency which she seeks and appears to attain by the play's end negated by a patriarchal pathologization of this female character?

Savran and Meisner's arguments are undermined by a close reading of this play, as this study is not the first to point out. To support her argument, Meisner claims that once Joe leaves Harper, "she retreats further and further from the social, sexual, and political spheres" (178); in actuality, it is Harper who leaves Joe behind in their apartment (84). This is the first time in the play that Harper leaves the domestic space, and it catalyzes a chain of events that progressively increase her subjecthood. Upon leaving her home, she meets Prior in real life instead of only in a dream and has another connected vision with him, and she has her significant encounter with the Mormon Mother that ultimately enables her to leave Joe behind for good. Surely Harper's escape from the prison of her home and her connection with other marginalized characters cannot be considered a step backwards for a female dramatic character. In fact, once Harper and Joe separate, both the female and gay male character are able to experience the wider world.

If Harper is configured as pathologized in *Angels in America*, then so is Prior as a close reading of the play reveals that their journeys, including their experiences with supernatural visions, are intrinsically connected. Nielsen describes Harper as "a sexually active Mormon woman who is married to a gay man who does [not] (sic) want to, or cannot, have sex with her without closing his eyes and pretending she isn't there" (42); because of Harper's intense desire for Joe that is complicated by his lack of desire for her, Meisner claims that "Harper's

appearance as a sexually thwarted and politically detached female figure constructs Joe's emergence, by contrast, as all the more reasonable, brave, and lively" (178). Indeed, shortly after Joe comes out to both Hannah and Harper, he begins a sexual relationship with Louis. However, what Meisner identifies as characteristics that undercut Harper's importance are also characteristics that emphasize her connection to Prior, who has far less sex than Louis during the play and who is far less political than Louis, Joe, or Roy.²¹ Harper and Prior, therefore, both have inexplicable visions, are sexually and romantically neglected, and engage in political discussion to a lesser degree than other characters. Both characters resist these restraining factors, however, to become audaciously resistant figures who ultimately push the play forward.

In his analysis of *Angels*, Nielsen identifies textual evidence that refutes some scholars' characterization of Harper as passive and pathologized:

In Harper's refusal (or inability) to be normal, in her defiance of the odds, in her Valium-induced clarity, in her outspoken longing for sex (actually, Harper seems far more sexual than all the gay men that interrupt her life), she becomes the ultimate resistance against Reagan's America. (42)

To further support this argument, Nielsen points out that "Harper is also the one who is set free in the end and escapes to San Francisco" (42) and that it is Harper, rather than the more politically-loquacious Louis, who delivers "the final neo-Hegelian words that 'In this world, there is a kind of painful progress'" (42-3). In her 2005 essay on the importance of mothers in Kushner's work, Catherine Barnes Stevenson points out that Harper "provides an antithetical running commentary that reveals the underside of the ideal" (762) to the recorded narration that plays in the Mormon Visitor's Center; in this moment, Harper demonstrates an acute awareness of the patriarchal structures embodied by her religion and the ways that they functioned not only historically but also to restrict her personal agency. Nielsen acknowledges that Harper "does

²¹ As opposed to Joe, Roy, and Louis, who talk about political theory a great deal, Harper, Prior, Hannah, and Belize are more concerned with action.

function as the most clearly pathologized character,” as Meisner and other feminist theorists have claimed, but he argues that Harper also “serves as a reminder of the ongoing oppression of women so often produced by pronouncements that women are hysterical and psychologically weak” (43). Nielsen’s argument can be extended, however, to claim that Harper not only reminds the audience of the historical oppression of women but also audaciously enacts resistance against this type of oppression, a resistance made doubly potent because of her connection to another marginalized subjectivity through Prior.

Harper’s trajectory is not made important *because* of its connection to Prior, but both characters’ trajectories are strengthened and influenced by the other’s without either being collapsed or reduced into the other’s. Savran admits that “Harper’s hallucinations are crucial to the play’s articulation of its central themes” but that they “also give her a privileged relationship to Prior, in whose fantasies²² she sometimes partakes” (215). Here, Savran suggests that Harper is privileged to be allowed access to Prior’s visions. However, does Harper “partake” in Prior’s dreams/visions, or does Prior “partake” in Harper’s? The two characters argue this point when they first meet: “What are you doing in my hallucination?” Harper asks, to which Prior replies, “I’m not in your hallucination. You’re in my dream” (37). When the two meet again at the Mormon Visitor’s Center’s Diorama Room, Prior sees a vision of Joe as the dummy Mormon Father (and of Louis interacting with Joe as if in real life) which Harper has already seen multiple times (*Perestroika*, III.3). How, then, can it be claimed that Harper “partakes” in Prior’s visions? Rather, as Kushner scholar Steven Kruger assesses, Harper’s and Prior’s “fantasies and imaginations are conceived of as not solely his or hers. These gather their full meaning only in relation to, even interpenetration with, one another” (154 qtd. in Omer-Sherman 25-6). Kruger

²² Calling Prior’s supernatural experiences “fantasies” is problematic since, given their context within the play, they may be more accurately called “visions.” Harper’s hallucination of Antarctica may more accurately be called a “fantasy” as she goes there to escape the reality that Joe does not desire her. However, Harper’s visions cannot be exclusively called “fantasies” any more than Prior’s, an example of which is her vision of the Mormon mother.

takes this inter-dependency of Harper and Prior's visions as indicative of the inter-dependent nature of identity itself in *Angels*, wherein "one is not oneself in isolation but only in contrast to, in solidarity and negotiation with a variety of other selves" (154 qtd. in Omer-Sherman 25). The examples in *Angels* of this process of meaning-making through "solidarity and negotiation" across gender difference, such as Harper and Prior's intersecting journeys, are of particular import to this study.

Harper and Prior progress through the play in "solidarity and negotiation" with one another, and this interaction legitimizes each of their experiences while also providing each encouragement to continue moving forward. Prior, for instance, tells Harper that she's making sense when she asks him (38), as if she is accustomed to not making sense to others. Similarly, when Prior admits to Harper that an angel crashed through his bedroom ceiling, Harper responds, "Huh. That sort of thing always happens to me" (194). Because Harper and Prior meet in liminal spaces as well as in real life (the Diorama Room), both of their visions are legitimized by their interactions. These two characters are also linked by their advocating desire as a means of resisting stagnation and decay. Meisner argues that "Harper's desiring female body" poses a "menace" to the "socio-political heart" of this play (178). However, Prior finds his rejection of the angels' commands in a validation of desire. "We desire," Prior explains to the angels about humanity, "Even if all we desire is stillness, it's still desire *for*. Even if we go faster than we should. We can't *wait*" (orig. emph. 264). Prior makes a correlation between mobility and desire and between stillness/stasis and the absence of desire; if Harper is primarily characterized as desirous, as Meisner suggests, then she does not "pose a menace" to the "socio-political heart" of this play but to the reactionary injunction from the angels, the same injunction to "stop moving" that Prior resists. Harper, it could be argued, embodies desire and therefore resistance. Joe even admits that he married Harper because he "loved it that she was always wrong, always doing

something wrong, like one step out of step,” while he, “never stood out, on the outside, but inside, it was hard for me. To pass” (59). This implies that Joe feels solidarity with Harper because of her more visible subversiveness/queerness and connects it to his own invisible, closeted queerness. Harper is not crazy, as she reminds us multiple times; she is addicted to Valium because she was abused as a child and because she miscarried (59). Rather, she, like Prior, is dealing with trauma and neglect as best she can, and her “pathology” allows her access to the “threshold of revelation” which is the secret to making impossible, audacious connections and utopian imaginings in this play.

It could be argued that because Harper’s resistant female body does not fit neatly into the queer family, she is gently removed; such an argument, however, negates the agency and bravery that Harper demonstrates in making a decision and striking out on her own. When Joe first asks Harper to move to Washington with him, she refuses in fear of change (29); she begins the play as a fatalistic character who is crippled by fear of apocalypse. The fact that she audaciously embraces change and hope at the play’s end is tremendously important and makes her a significant character in feminist and queer dramatic history. Savran implies that because god is male and has abandoned heaven to travel, change and mobility is embodied by maleness in this play (216). Savran fails to account for the fact that Prior is abandoned as much as Harper or the Angels; also, at the play’s end, Harper, like god, leaves to travel and change. Harper, it could be argued, repossesses mobility for femaleness. Her decision to overcome fear, trauma, and despair to move forward into an unknown future—the type of journey which is made by Hannah and by Louis’s grandmother, Sarah Ironson—also importantly influence’s Prior’s journey. When the two of them meet each other for the third and last time in heaven, they discuss their relative fear of death versus the pain they endure in life: “Heaven is depressing,” Harper admits, “full of dead people and all, but life,” trailing off to imply that life is unspeakably difficult (253). When Prior

says that the world is “too hard” and asks Harper to stay with him in heaven, however, she replies, “I can’t. I feel like shit but I’ve never felt more alive.” Harper shares with Prior her realization that “[d]evastation” is “what makes people migrate, build things” and that she hopes he chooses to come back to earth and life (253). Her words have a profound effect on Prior; he seems to be leaning toward staying in heaven, but after her words about heartbreak and pain as mobilizing and enlivening, he tells the angels that he wants to live. In the same scene, Prior inspires Harper for her own Great Migration; after saying that heaven resembles San Francisco after it was devastated by the Great Earthquake, Prior tells Harper that the “real San Francisco, on earth, is unspeakably beautiful,” to which she responds, “Unspeakable beauty. / That’s something I would like to see” (254). The final two scenes of the play feature Harper and Prior delivering similarly uplifting speeches directly to the audience; Harper, as she is flying to San Francisco, dreams of the “ragged and torn” ozone repaired by the “souls of the dead;” only she is able to see this, she says, because of her “astonishing ability to see such things” (275). Harper no longer sees her visions as a sign of pathology but as a kind of queer privilege that sets her apart in a positive way. Prior, similarly, no longer thinks of himself as fatally infected, but blesses the audience with life and hope. The profound journeys of these differently-gendered characters are dramatically affected by each other’s presence.

Mothers and Care-Takers

Harper and Prior are not only significantly affected by their interaction with each other but by the influence of mothers and care-taking figures in their lives. Savran points out that both Hannah and Belize are “given the role of caretaker” (215), a role that risks re-inscribing racist and sexist conventions but that in this play also leads to opportunities for radical confrontation.

Hannah is installed in the role of mother and care-taker, but this installation highlights her non-motherly traits. For instance, Nielsen describes both Hannah and the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg (who haunts Roy as he nears death) as mothers who do not forgive (48). Similarly, Catherine Barnes Stevenson points out that “Hannah’s behavior to her son undermines any sentimental vision of the warm and forgiving mother figure” (762). When Joe calls his mother in the middle of the night and tells her that he is “a homosexual,” Hannah tells him that he is “being ridiculous” and hangs up on him (81-2). Mothers in previous gay drama, such as Fierstien’s *Torch Song Trilogy*, tend to be sources of love and understanding, whereas Hannah is comparatively cold. Unlike mothers in much of gay drama, Hannah is not instrumental in helping her son adjust to life outside of the closet. She seems less concerned with his coming out, in fact, than with his abandonment of Harper. When Joe insists that his and Harper’s separation has been difficult for him as well, Hannah retorts that “[b]eing a woman’s harder” (229); later, when Joe is trying to reconnect with Harper and cannot find her, Hannah responds, “Then she escaped. Good for her” (230). Stevenson points out that after arriving in New York, Hannah “spends no time with Joe, yet ironically she comes to the aid of the needy children, Harper, her [daughter-in-law], and Prior, the young man struggling with AIDS” (762). While she is instrumental to Harper’s journey, Hannah also quickly becomes a vital presence in Prior’s life.

Hannah is able to comfort and encourage Prior, not in spite of her non-motherly traits but because of these traits. Prior is overcome by pneumonia while at the Mormon Visitor’s Center, and Hannah—though they are perfect strangers—takes him to the hospital, her reason being that she is “useless” at the Visitor’s Center (232). Once he is stable, Prior tells her about his encounter with the Angel, and Hannah tells him that he clearly “had a vision;” when Prior responds, “I’m not so far gone I can be assuaged by pity and lies,” Hannah retorts, “I don’t have pity. It’s just not something I have” (235). Whereas Hannah’s unsentimental nature alienates her

from Joe, it allows Prior to confidently take her advice about how to resist the Angel. “You comfort me,” he tells her, “you do, you stiffen my spine” (237). Savran claims that “Hannah, despite her strength, is defined almost entirely by her relationship to her real son and to Prior, her surrogate son” (215). Indeed, though Hannah’s depiction denaturalizes maternal-ness in female characters, she is defined for the majority of the play by her role as care-taker to younger characters. Rather than reduce her strength, however, this serves to reveal the heteronormative structures that have governed Hannah’s life as a Mormon woman, making the radical subjectivity that she claims by the play’s final scene all the more remarkable. Instead of being “defined by” her relationships to men, it could more accurately be said that Hannah is defined *against* these relationships, particularly to her dead husband and living son. When Hannah is describing to Prior her reaction to Joe’s coming-out, she admits that she finds men “ungainly” in “any configuration” (236). Additionally, to say that Hannah is “defined almost entirely” by her relationships to Prior and to Joe is to egregiously diminish her encounter with the Angel. Not only does Hannah instruct Prior to wrestle with the Angel and insist that she bless him—tactics that gain him access to heaven (250-1)—but Hannah is the only other character in the seven-hour play who encounters the Angel. Like Prior, Hannah “gets a taste of those angelic orgasms” (Stevenson 47); the Angel “*kisses her on the forehead and then the lips—a long, hot kiss,*” and repeats to Hannah what she told Prior after their first encounter: “The Body is the Garden of the Soul,” and “*Hannah has an enormous orgasm, as the Angel flies away*” (252). For Hannah, just as for Prior, this explosively sexual encounter is transformative, as Kevin Nielsen explains:

By her orgasm, induced by the erotic encounter with the Angel, Hannah becomes transformed into herself. Unlike Harper, who we never see as sexually fulfilled, Hannah’s personality changes once the Angel breathes life into it. (47)

Though it may be overstating to say that Hannah's "personality changes" after her angelic orgasm, this moment is certainly a turning point for the character, and in its queerness is a confrontation and challenge to the heteronormative structures against which Hannah struggles.

One of the many controversial bits of wisdom that Roy imparts to Joe is that "[w]omen are for birth, beginning, but the father is continuance" (62). The play undermines this and many of Roy's expressed beliefs in that it depicts mothers as catalysts for change, development, and resistance. Stevenson, in her essay "Seek for Something New" (2005), argues that in Kushner's plays, "brave 'leaps' are performed by mothers or mother figures whose actions generate the physical and imaginative energy that allows forward movement to take place" (758). Using *Angels in America* as well as *Homebody/Kabul* and *Caroline, or Change* as examples, Stevenson demonstrates how mothers in these plays "perform actions that disrupt the status quo and the fixity of identity," "serve as catalysts for change," "encourage acts of resistance to a stagnating patriarchal, homophobic, racist" culture, and thereby "open avenues for new potentialities to emerge" (759-60). In other words, mothers in Kushner's plays open pathways for pursuing radical queer subjectivities.

Two Mormon mothers—Hannah and the diorama mannequin who comes to life and speaks to Harper—serve this radically resistant, creative function in *Angels*. Stevenson specifically identifies that Hannah "enables" Prior "to resist the Angel's dangerous demands," while the mannequin Mormon mother "counsels Harper [...] about the process of change" (760). Hannah not only counsels Prior about resistance but embodies a "process of change" from the beginning of *Perestroika*, the part of the play in which she emerges as a major character. Stevenson succinctly describes this embodiment:

In her early appearances Hannah resists the dictates of the status quo; she refuses Sister Ella Chapter's urgings to "stay put" (later, of course, revealed to be the Angel's seductive

message) and moves to Manhattan because there is “no harm looking someplace else” [...] [H]er journey proves to be one of a number of refusals to “stay put” individually or socially—refusals that are presented as essential to the process of becoming. [...] One of the multiple migrations in *Angels in America*, Hannah’s journey both echoes the nineteenth-century migrations of the Europeans like Sarah Ironson [...] and it foreshadows the westward movement of Joe’s wife, Harper, toward a new life at the play’s end. (761)

Stevenson’s analysis further undermines critics like Savran and Meisner who claim that only the male characters are identified with mobility, activeness, and change in this play. Joe, Louis, Prior, and Roy do not undertake great migrations, while Hannah, Harper, Sarah Ironson (Louis’s deceased grandmother), and the Mormon mother have made and make significant geographic journeys, and they lead by example. “Hannah, the actual Mormon Mother,” Stevenson points out, “and her dummy double ‘leap’ [...] forward themselves and also energize Prior and Harper to do the same” (763). Not only does this observation reinforce the parallel nature of Prior’s and Harper’s journeys, but it demonstrates that solidarity operates both between women and gay men as well as between women and other women in this play. “Are you just going to sit here forever,” Hannah asks Harper, who has done nothing but eat junk food in the Diorama Room for days, “trash piling higher, day after day till. ... Well till what?” (199). Shortly after this confrontation, Harper has a mystical encounter with the mannequin Mormon mother, who tells her to leave her heavy heart behind so that she can move forward (201). Particularly in the second part of the play, mother figures emerge as “catalysts whose actions release new creative energy that empowers children to rewrite individual and social history” (Stevenson 764). Most importantly, the play does not frame Hannah’s and the mannequin mother’s creative influence as a natural product of their biological ability to give birth but as a practical result of their experiences as part of a group historically marginalized by patriarchal heterosexism. Hannah has more experience dealing with the painful consequences of reduced agency than Harper, which she demonstrates when she tells her daughter-in-law that “it can be very hard to accept how disappointing life is,” but that “that’s what it is and you have to accept it” (184). The mannequin Mormon mother has

more experience still, and she gives Harper an unflinchingly visceral description of the agony of change (211) which noticeably influences Harper's realization about the "painful progress" that characterizes the world (275). Throughout this play, women exchange—with other women as well as with gay men—parts of their knowledge and experience to find new techniques of resistance and new means of mobilizing forward movement. Hannah is not a token addition to the final group at the play's end; she is an essential part of the "great work" that Prior speaks of in his final lines.

Exchanging Knowledge Across Difference

The exchange of knowledge and experience across lines of difference is essential to the characters' processes of change in *Angels in America*. James Fischer, who has written extensively about Kushner's work and specifically about *Angels*, asserts that Prior's "revelations occur through a series of encounters with those who have also experienced disenfranchisement—Harper, Hannah, Belize—and who offer moral guidance as he resists his death" ("Fructification" 34). As previously discussed, one of the primary characteristics that makes *Angels* a post-gay and queer play is that it features characters marked by multiple kinds of oppression based on gender, race, ethnicity, and religion. In her essay, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" (2005), Cathy J. Cohen argues that while identity-based politics tends to be myopic, analysis that "focuses on the intersection of systems of oppression" is preferable because it "is informed by a consciousness that undoubtedly grows from the lived experience of existing within and resisting multiple and connected practices of domination and normalization" (26). Cohen describes black lesbian feminists as demonstrating experience and knowledge of multiple types of intersecting oppressions, and *Angels* demonstrates a way that

characters can share knowledge and experience of oppression across difference to build a shared knowledge base of different types of marginalization—from an individual marked as a female in a deeply patriarchal religious society and an individual marked as gay and AIDS-afflicted in a homophobic nation.

Individuals from these Othered groups with a longer history of being systematically identified and marginalized help Prior, a gay male marked by AIDS, through their experience and knowledge. However, this “guidance” that Fischer references is not mono-directional. Rather, it is more accurate to say that *Angels* fore-grounds multiple Others negotiating a connection when they have not previously interacted in a concerted way. For instance, rather than Harper and Hannah interacting with Prior across gender difference only, they also interact with him across religious/philosophical difference, which both highlights the separation between the two groups and bring their commonalities into sharper relief. The exchange of identities that occurs in Prior and Harper’s first encounter exemplifies this effect:

HARPER: I’m a Mormon.

PRIOR: I’m a homosexual.

HARPER: Oh! In my church we don’t believe in homosexuals.

PRIOR: In my church we don’t believe in Mormons.

HARPER: What church do ... oh! (*She laughs*) I get it. (38)

Here, Prior and Harper reference and move past the ideological difficulties that might affect their relationship. This exchange is echoed later between Prior and Hannah when they agree not to “make assumptions” about what the other thinks based on the socio-political categories into which they fall (235). The type of mutual agreement that Prior has with Harper and with Hannah does not erase or attempt to transcend difference, but rather acknowledges the differences of experience and ideology that lay between the characters.

While some critics insist that Harper's depiction as a traumatized and abandoned woman with "emotional problems" (32) is sexist and reductive, it is Harper's experience of this disenfranchised position that she shares with Prior. In Act III Scene 3 of *Perestroika*, Harper and Prior see a scene from Joe and Louis's real life in the diorama depicting the Great Migration of the Mormons.²³ Prior, shaken by this vision on top of his recent angelic encounter, as well as from finding out in this strange way that Louis has a new lover, says, "I never imagined losing my mind was going to be such hard work," to which Harper wisely replies, "Oh, it is" (198). Harper has occupied the marginalized space of pathologization, of feeling isolated and silenced because of supposed mental instability, before Prior. However, she is not altogether enthusiastic about sharing this space. "Find someplace else to be miserable in," she tells Prior as he weeps in the Diorama Room, "This is *my* place and I don't want you to do that here!" (orig. emph. 199). Harper's territorialism problematizes the notion of an AIDS-stricken gay man and a pathologized woman occupying the same space: though they have commonality, their specific grievances are different, and so their interests conflict. If the play depicted solidarity between gay men and women as natural and without difficulty, it would elide important issues of difference as well as character specifics. Harper, for instance, is further in her process of grief than Prior; when Hannah enters this scene, sees Prior crying, and assumes Harper did something to him, Harper responds, "He just can't *adjust*, is all" (orig. emph. 199). This signals that Harper is beginning to adjust to her situation and is ready for change, while Prior is still struggling to do so. Toward the play's end, Harper similarly serves as a guide to Joe. "Sometimes, maybe lost is best," she tells him before she leaves for San Francisco, "Get lost. Joe. Go exploring" (273). Ultimately, Harper's story is not collapsed into Prior's or Joe's, though she imparts valuable knowledge based on her experience to both gay male characters.

²³ Louis also hears Prior in this scene, which further substantiates Harper and Prior's visions.

Hannah also serves as a kind of “spirit guide and spiritual mentor” to Prior, as Stevenson describes (762), much as Harper does when she and Prior share visions; rather than her knowledge of gender-based oppression, however, Hannah’s knowledge as a member of a stigmatized religious group is what she shares with Prior. “Her Mormon beliefs in angels,” Stevenson explains, “serves as a counter-weight to Prior’s skepticism in the face of his nightly visions” (762). After Prior describes his encounter with the Angel, Hannah tells him that he “had a vision” similar to Joseph Smith’s vision on which Mormonism is founded:

HANNAH: One hundred and seventy years ago, which is recent, an angel of God appeared to Joseph Smith in upstate New York, not far from here. People have visions.

PRIOR: But that’s preposterous, that’s...

HANNAH: It’s not polite to call other people’s beliefs preposterous. / He had great need of understanding. Our Prophet. His desire made prayer. His prayer made an angel. The angel was real. I believe that. (235)

Though Prior admits to Hannah that he finds much of Mormon belief “repellant,” her willingness to accept that his encounter was real is significant for Prior. Even Belize, arguably the character who is most supportive of Prior, takes his visions as manifestations of Prior’s disease and his personal trauma of abandonment, while Harper and then Hannah take them as legitimate. “Through her, he approaches another ‘threshold of revelation,’” says Stevenson of Hannah and Prior, “through an act that negates the despair and emotional paralysis into which he has been thrown by his illness” (762). Summarily, Harper tells Prior about the “threshold of revelation,” and Hannah helps him to it; both women walk what Stevenson calls the “path of resistance and life” (762) for themselves, and are able to use their experience to help Prior do likewise.

Harper and Hannah, both disenfranchised in different ways, have commonality with Prior in their resistance to objectification. “I’m tired to death of being done to,” Prior tells the Angel during their first encounter (179). It is Hannah, however, who gives Prior specific means of resisting the role that the Angel thrusts upon him. When Prior asks Hannah if “prophets in the

Bible [...] ever refuse their vision,” she replies that there is “scriptural precedent” but that God feeds such resistant prophets to whales (236). In spite of this dire scriptural evidence, Hannah insists to Prior that an “angel is just a belief” and “naught to be afraid of,” and tells him that if this manifested belief “lets you down, reject it. Seek for something new” (237). When the Angel returns, angry at Prior’s defiance, Prior asks Hannah, “WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO...” and Hannah replies, “You ... you ... wrestle her” (orig. emph. 250). She tells Prior to “grab hold” and say, “‘I will not let thee go except thou bless me!’ Then wrestle with her till she gives in” (250). Prior follows Hannah’s instructions and is allowed to visit heaven where he refuses his prophecy and where the angels, unbeknownst to him, bless Prior with “more life” (267). When Belize asks Prior where he found Hannah, he replies, “We found each other,” and “She saved my life” (270).

Hannah and Harper have significant positive effects over Prior’s process of change via their special knowledge of marginalization, but Prior also shares knowledge with the two of them from his Othered perspective. As previously discussed, it is Prior, via the threshold of revelation, who confirms Harper’s suspicion that her “husband’s a homo” (39). Prior cannot give Harper specific insights about Joe beyond this revelation, however, because Prior and Joe have little in common besides their mutual desire for other men. Prior, for instance, has lived with Louis, his male lover, for years, and is afflicted with AIDS, both of which would be understood in 1980s America as signifiers of gay male identity. Joe, however, has closeted and repressed his desire for men, and he has almost no cultural or political commonality with Prior or Louis. As Mormon women, however, Harper and Hannah have little experience with or access to information about gay men, and so they regard Prior, at least initially, as a source of knowledge. For instance, after she has taken Prior to the hospital, Hannah asks:

HANNAH: Are you a ... a homosexual?

PRIOR: Oh is it *that* obvious/ Yes. I am. What's it to you?

HANNAH: Would you say you are a typical ... homosexual?

PRIOR: Me? Oh I'm *stereotypical*. (orig. emph. 231)

While Prior's status as a gay male does not give him automatic knowledge of Joe that he can share with Hannah, he is the only character with whom Hannah discusses her reaction to Joe's coming out:

HANNAH: My son is ... well, like you.

PRIOR: Homosexual.

HANNAH (*A nod, then*): I flew into a rage when he told me, mad as hornets. At first I assumed it was about his ... (*She shrugs*)

PRIOR: Homosexuality.

HANNAH: But that wasn't it. Homosexuality. It just seems ... ungainly. Two men together. It isn't an appetizing notion but then, for me, men in *any* configuration ... well they're so lumpish and stupid. And stupidity gets me cross.

PRIOR: I wish you would be more true to your demographic profile. Life is confusing enough. (orig. emph. 236)

During this exchange, Prior not only admits that Hannah's attitude toward gay male sex surprises him, but he actually says the word "homosexual" until Hannah is able to say it herself. As she belongs to a religion that condemns male/male sexual desire, this linguistic act is significant for Hannah. Just as her knowledge enables Prior to successfully resist the Angel's message of stagnation and fatalism, Prior allows Hannah access to queer knowledge and resistance.

Catherine Barnes Stevenson suggests that the core political tenet of *Angels* is "that the ability to move toward the new involves being able to leave behind stultifying master narratives—like Mormonism, or the Angelic construction of cosmic history, or Bolshevism, or Reaganite Republicanism—even when these are close to the character's heart" (764); in this play, the synergy of two marginalized groups—gay men and (Mormon) women—is instrumental

in allowing characters to leave these narratives behind. In the play's final scene, Hannah is with three gay men—Belize, Louis, and Prior—and is “engaging in political discussion” (Stevenson 763); as Stevenson points out, Hannah's “final sentences in fact answer the query” (763) raised at the beginning of *Perestroika* regarding theory and action:

HANNAH: You can't live in the world without an idea of the world, but it's living that makes the idea. You can't wait for a theory, but you have to have a theory. (278)

This demonstrates that Hannah is intrinsically important to the political, theoretical, and philosophical underpinnings of this play, contrary to the claims of critics like Savran and Meisner. Stevenson also argues that Hannah essentially delivers the message of the epic play, if any such message exists: the “necessity of forward movement” (763); this is similar to Harper's presentation of the notion of “painful progress” that moves the world forward (Kushner 275). In his confrontation with the angels in heaven, Prior also references oppressions beyond those he has personally experienced, citing them as a reason to persevere in spite of suffering:

PRIOR: I want more life. I can't help myself. I do.

I've lived through such terrible times, and there are people who live through much much worse, but. . . you see them living anyway. (266)

Angels is tremendously important for multiple reasons, but one of the most significant reasons is that it sets up a schema by which members of one marginalized group share knowledge and experience with another marginalized group in way that creates forward movement, or movement towards utopia. In *Angels*, neither of these marginalized groups are absolutely dependent upon or collapsed into the other, and the resulting community is presented as a group of individuals with divergent subjectivities engaged in negotiation with one another.

Utopia and Queer Family

As is true of the majority of plays discussed in this study, interaction across gender difference in *Angels in America* yields a type of queer family that points to the possibility of queer utopia. In fact, when Belize tells Roy his personal vision of heaven, he describes it as “everyone in Balenciaga gowns with red corsages, and big dance palaces full of music and lights and racial impurity and gender confusion” (209). Here, Belize importantly includes a proliferation of differences in his image of utopia, an inclusion which is echoed by gay male and queer scholars regarding the post-gay era. “Gay was a response to a situation which we have transformed,” says Alan Sinfield, “If it is time to negotiate the post-gay, we need to build on what we have done so far, and to take as many people with us as possible” (*Gay and After* 16). While the image of gay men (presumably the “us” to which Sinfield refers) “taking” others with them into the post-gay era might be problematic, he is essentially advocating engagement with multiple types of differences and subjectivities. Omer-Sherman summarizes the dramatic personages of *Angels* as “a web of characters, men and women, gay and heterosexual whose ambivalent relation to those that depend on them are revealed in troubling flights from, and journeys toward, the true meaning of responsibility and community” (8). Similarly, David Savran suggests that “*Angels* finally sets forth a liberal pluralist vision of America in which all, not in spite but because of their diversity, will be welcomed into the new Jerusalem” (221). Savran frames this utopia image of diversity, however, as an insidious erasure of important and irreconcilable difference, a collapsing of “politics and history” into “the theological” (216). However, while *Angels* does exemplify, as Omer-Sherman describes, “openness to change and transformation—and the generosity to Others that such adaptiveness affords,” and while it is “organized around the theme of a universe and a human society receptive to changes that bring about redemption” (16), the play also depicts change and movement as risk-ridden. Throughout

the plays, the future is characterized by anxiety over apocalypse: Harper fears the disintegration of the ozone layer, and the angels despair over a transmission of the Chernobyl disaster. “What will the grim Unfolding of these Latter Days bring?” (265) asks the Angel of America. Omer-Sherman connects this anxiety to the play’s original historical moment:

The title of the first part of his drama, *Millennium Approaches*, strongly suggests that, at the beginning of the 1990s, the dramatist was anxious about both the apocalyptic traditions and anxieties that would be expressed unpredictably across a broad spectrum of global and American culture as the year 2000-2001 approached. (13)

Angels, therefore, does not present an unexamined, idealized image of forward movement, nor does it present the development of a diverse community as easy or simple. Even in the final scene, Belize, Louis, and Hannah continue to debate from their different political positions: when Louis claims that “no one supports Palestinian rights more than I do,” Belize, who has previously criticized Louis for his myopic understanding of racial and ethnic oppression, retorts “like not even the Palestinians are more devoted” (280). Omer-Sherman points out that the “notion of unending struggle” is prominent not only in *Angels* but throughout Kushner’s body of work, suggesting that “the defining human characteristic is a struggle towards improvement and a struggle towards, even if it’s unreachable, perfection” (13). Even given that *Angels* recognizes the difficulty and hard work of engaging with difference, especially among individuals from various Othered groups, it is possible to present such a utopian image of community without negating the material consequences of difference?

To identify the specific characteristics of the individuals included in *Angels*’s final queer utopian community, it is productive to examine the characters who are not included in this group. Harper, for instance, is not with Hannah, Belize, Louis, and Prior in the end, but immediately before their scene she is shown on a plane to San Francisco and delivers to the audience her realization that life is “painful progress” and that “[n]othing’s lost forever” (275). Roy and Joe,

then, are the main characters who are conspicuously absent from the final, positive resolution, and they are also the only main characters who lack the courage or willingness to move forward. While both Roy and Joe practice male/male sex, and while Joe does so with another main character during the course of the play, neither of them overtly claims a gay male identity. Savran argues that the “good” characters in *Angels* are depicted as those who embrace “a conventional gay identity” (192), suggesting that this failure to claim gay male culture is why Roy and Joe are excluded. However, the issue is not actually that Joe and Roy do not perform the same gay cultural identity that Prior and Belize or even Louis perform; rather, Roy and Joe are excluded because they are both complicit in the material and political marginalization not only of gay men but of multiple disenfranchised groups. When Louis discovers that Joe is responsible for unethical and heterosexist court decisions, he angrily confronts Joe, who in a fit of rage punches Louis repeatedly (*Perestroika*, IV.8). Louis presents his injuries from Joe’s attack to Prior as evidence that he has suffered, and this prompts Prior to forgive him. Louis, though he abandoned Prior, is present in the play’s final group because he ultimately spoke up to and resisted heteronormative power. Though Joe is left alone at the play’s end, Harper’s parting advice to “[g]o exploring” (273) leaves the possibility of a positive resolution for Joe. “Only the morbidly cynical Roy Cohn remains unredeemable,” Omer-Sherman claims, citing the fact that Roy, unlike the rest of the play’s main characters, “remains indifferent to the fate of others. In this sense, he is set apart, the drama’s sole Cain” (17). Omer-Sherman concludes from this that in *Angels*, “radically disavowing either Self or Other wreaks terrible violence on the individual and society” (17). Hannah, Belize, Louis, Prior, Harper, and even Joe ultimately avoid this radical disavowal of their own and of each other’s differences.

What, then, characterizes the queer utopian family presented at the end of *Angels in America*? Stevenson simply describes the final group at the fountain as Prior and “some of his

friends who have helped him survive” (763). Meisner adds that in this final queer family, “the system of compulsory heterosexual marriage is abandoned, in favor of an idyllic new world of gay erotic affiliation” (177). Savran also uses the term “erotic affiliation” to describe what connects the members of *Angels*’ queer family, but he also points out that in the end, “none of the interlaced couples survives the onslaught of chaos, disease, and revelation” that occurs during the course of the play:

Prior and Louis, Louis and Joe, Joe and Harper have all parted by the end of the play and the romantic dyad (as primary social unit) is replaced in the final scene of *Perestroika* by a utopian concept of (erotic) affiliation and a new definition of family. (209)

Not only, then, is “heterosexual marriage” abandoned, but monogamous, two-person couples are abandoned in general. Destabilizing the “romantic dyad” is a queer action in that it subverts the major heteronormative structure of the dyadic couple, replacing it with the queer family. However, queer theorists such as Robert F. Gross express anxiety about plays (such as *Raised in Captivity*, discussed in Chapter 4) wherein a new queer family is born seemingly at the expense of sex and desire. In fact, the only characters who are significantly sexually active during the course of the play are Joe and Louis, who spend “a month in bed” (197) after abandoning Harper and Prior. Sex, in this case, is a manifestation of selfish desire and abandoned responsibilities; this is not, however, the only example of sex or eroticism in the play. Belize reveals in *Perestroika* that he has a long-term and presumably sexual (or at least romantic) relationship with “a man, uptown” (228), Joe and Harper engage in sex when they briefly reunite in *Perestroika*, and Hannah and Prior both have orgasmic encounters with the Angel. Nevertheless, at the play’s end, none of the characters in the queer family are sexually active with each other. This does not mean, of course, that the characters are not sexually active at all, but it is important to note the absence of sexual interest within the queer utopian family, particularly given the

depiction of sex (or lack thereof) in the post-gay plays discussed in subsequent chapters. The place of sex and desire in queer utopia is, in fact, a question that arises throughout this study.

Conclusion

Angels in America provides a rich point of reference for this study since, as one of the first and certainly one of the best-known post-gay and queer plays, it engages gender difference as an interrogative and progressive tool. Like the plays subsequently discussed in this study, *Angels* also includes a queer family, which is a group of mixed-gender characters not related biologically but by solidarity, mutual support, and affection, which subverts heteronormative family structures. In *Angels*, this family and the process of audacious forward movement that it symbolizes includes the audience. Omer-Sherman claims that, during Rabbi Chemelwitz's first speech about the migration of Jewish people to America, "the theatre audience itself is implicated, as a sort of extended family of undetermined proportions and untested solidarity" (18). This implication of the audience as an "extended family" of "untested solidarity," which is also invoked by Prior's blessing the audience in the final moments, is one of the innovative features of the play and a major part of its power as a post-gay play; this point will become increasingly important later in this study when compared to Adam Bock's *Swimming in the Shallows* which also attempts to include the audience in a queer family. However, neither *Swimming* nor the other plays examined in this study are as politically-minded as *Angels*. Kushner's play references a multitude of political views and ideas, and it also condemns certain political agendas (signified primarily by Roy Cohn and Ronald Reagan). Despite this, Omer-Sherman argues that "*Angels* posits an imaginatively porous America of open-mindedness and open-endedness" (26) but above all emphasizes "[s]truggle and process" over the "consolations

of transformation and certainty” (27). Though it ends with an affirmation of life, hope, and community, it acknowledges the difficulty of arriving at such an ending and indicates that the characters, though they are no longer paralyzed by fear and despair, will continue to struggle. In his 2007 essay, “The Advantage of Controversy,” Fischer claims that Kushner “is acutely aware that there are no easy answers or simple endings, but he insists that the possibility of, and the hope for, change, justice, and moral progress is always possible if we can break away from the rigid, calcified conservative-versus-liberal positions that separate us” (129). Fischer’s analysis suggests that while *Angels* does not shy away from political discussion, it does not have a politicizing effect on its audience, therefore creating a space in which the audience can feel included in the final queer family. It could be that the demographics of the play’s original audiences in major cities such as San Francisco, London, and New York were conducive to this kind of audience response, but as audience response is impossible to quantify or prove empirically, this claim is difficult to substantiate. If such a de-politicizing process was to occur, however, would it not ultimately reduce important political and cultural distinctions? Are race, religion, and gender collapsed into a community that privileges the particular interests of gay males in the interest of creating a de-politicized, communal sensibility?

Some critics, the foremost of whom is David Savran, argue that rather than establish community through engagement with difference, the characters in *Angels* establish community by finally treating difference as unimportant. Savran and other critics such as Meisner suggest that the treatment of the play’s female characters belies this obfuscation. It is perfectly valid to point out that there are only two genuinely female main characters in this play and that, therefore, their journeys receive less attention overall than those of male characters, but it is unproductive—if not actually sexist—to overlook the importance of these women’s roles in the plays and the ways that their journeys interrogate heteronormative gender structures. Harper, as

discussed earlier in this chapter, moves from a pathologized female in a private space to a mobile and agentive visionary with a trajectory that is not defined or confined by that of any male character. Through Hannah, *Angels* manages to maintain the special significance that mothers have in queer drama while not reducing all women to mothers or suggesting that mothers are the only type of women relevant to gay men. Female characters, as well as a gay male character infected with AIDS, become purveyors of resistance and vitality because of their interaction with each other, opening up new ways of imagining queer subjectivities as well as utopia. This type of mutually-beneficial interaction reflects Cathy J. Cohen's description of ideal solidarity:

Far too often movements revert to a position in which membership and joint political work are based on a necessarily similar history of oppression—but this is too much like identity politics. Instead, I am suggesting here that the process of movement building be rooted not in our shared history or identity but in our shared marginal relationship to dominant power that normalizes, legitimizes, and privileges. (43)

The events of this play suggest that change happens not when we ignore or attempt to eradicate history or the circumstances in which history positions us, but when we move audaciously within and from those circumstances. *Angels* is, in fact, unique to other plays discussed in this study as it includes not only gender in its examination of difference but also race and religion. Belize's assertion that "we black drag queens have a rather intimate knowledge of the complexity of the lines [of oppression]" (100) echoes Cohen's argument regarding black lesbians' knowledge of intersecting Othered identities (26). Omer-Sherman observes that the final scene of *Perestroika* "does seem to drift toward a utopian closure in which outcast blacks, Jews, Mormons, and gays learn to come to terms with the messy reality of human existence" (24). Though he neglects to mention gender difference here, the characters' interactions across and through gender as well as raced, religious, and sexuality-based marginalization are what render *Angels* radical drama.

Chapter 4

Sex, Death, and Child-Care in Silver's *Raised in Captivity*

The plays examined in this chapter continue several of the major themes found in *Angels in America*, including the recuperation of gay community and gay identity from the AIDS crisis, and the development of queer family which includes male and female characters with complex sexual and political subjectivities.²⁴ Whereas *Angels* is set in the midst of the AIDS crisis and the political marginalization of gay men that characterized the 1980s, Nicky Silver's *Raised in Captivity* (1995) is set in the aftermath of these cultural cataclysms. As a result, *Raised* focuses on interrogating the very notion of gay identity to a greater extent than *Angels*, which though it breaks away from conventional narratives, still treats homosexuality as a relatively stable identity that conflates culture/politics and desire. While *Angels* breaks the previous AIDS drama narrative of gay men bravely and tragically dying from the disease, *Raised*, as well as Richard Greenberg's play *Last Hurrah* (1999), explores the ways in which the trauma of AIDS and its emotional, political, and material consequences follow gay male characters into the post-gay era. In addition, *Angels* depicts queer family as a group of individuals united by friendship, shared experience, and political solidarity, while *Raised* examines the relationships of a post-AIDS, post-gay queer male to the conventionally heterosexual task of child-raising. Shelagh Delaney's 1958 play *A Taste of Honey* also features a queer male helping a heterosexual female care for her child, and the particulars of this arrangement as well as the depiction of the queer male character remain controversial among scholars of gay drama. Through these avenues, *Raised in Captivity* not only contributes to this study as to how male and female characters generate radical queer

²⁴ In both *Angels* and *Raised*, the moment of coming out to the Mother is important but not central; it is something that happens or that has happened, but does not magically resolve the male character's internal conflicts or identity struggle. In *Raised*, the issue between mother and son is only peripherally about his sexuality; Sebastian's vision of his mother is not about her response to his homosexuality.

subjectivities in post-gay plays but also elucidates many of the major issues and questions that define the post-gay dramatic moment.

Raised In Captivity

Like Kushner's *Angels in America*, Nicky Silver's *Raised in Captivity* deals with significant issues of identity politics in highly theatrical ways and found great success with its original audience. "By the mid-1990s, [Nicky Silver] had become one of the most widely produced American playwrights," points out queer theorist Jordan Schildcrout in his 2008 essay on *Raised in Captivity* titled "No Tragedy" (96). Like many of Silver's plays, *Raised in Captivity* is about a gay man dealing with his feelings of alienation from others, including his own family, and this alienation usually manifests in mental crises and failed attempts at communication that are as humorous as they are troubling. *New York Times* theatre critic Ben Brantley, who compares Silver to celebrated queer playwrights such as Christopher Durang and Oscar Wilde, says that, "*Raised in Captivity* is about guilt, redemption and self-punishment, and against all odds, it is also very funny" (13). Silver is also frequently compared to Joe Orton (Savran 213; Schildcrout 96), whose darkly humorous queer drama is discussed in Chapter Five of this study. "Like these playwrights," American theatre scholar David Savran says of Silver, "he delights in pushing the bounds of propriety, in celebrating the inanities that crowd his characters' lives and in dredging up the desires and enmities we are taught to repress" (213). Clearly, Silver's plays reflect the history of dark and witty humor in queer English language drama, carrying this tradition into contemporary theatre.

Raised In Captivity is the story of Sebastian, a young man emotionally paralyzed by the trauma of losing his lover to AIDS eleven years before the play begins, and his sister Bernadette,

who struggles with self-esteem issues and purposelessness in the wake of their mother's death. When the siblings encounter each other at their mother's funeral after years without contact, both of their lives change: Sebastian, inspired by his sister's determination to engage with life in spite of her unhappiness, cuts ties with his therapist since he hasn't made progress in the four years he's been seeing her, and Bernadette realizes she's not entirely satisfied with her marriage to Kip, her dentist-turned-painter husband. Sebastian also continues to write his pen-pal, Dylan, who is a convicted murderer. After Sebastian is robbed and nearly killed by Roger, a prostitute who he brought home, Bernadette brings Sebastian to live with her, Kip, and their new-born child. Because Sebastian barely leaves the nursery, spending all his time taking care of the baby and writing long letters to Dylan, Bernadette invites his former therapist, Hillary, to live with them in the hope that she can help Sebastian. Hillary, however, is arguably more in need of professional help than Sebastian, having put out her own eyes with a screwdriver due to her feelings of guilt and abandonment after Sebastian stopped seeing her. Kip decides that he, Bernadette, and the baby will move to Africa, leaving Sebastian in the care of Hillary. Sebastian reacts with outrage and reveals that Kip and Hillary have been sleeping together. Bernadette insists that Kip go with Hillary to Africa since they are in love while Bernadette and Kip are not, and she and Sebastian remain to raise the baby together.

Raised ends with an image of a queer family: a straight woman, her gay brother, and her child, who they will raise together. *Raised*, like *Angels*, also includes brutal depictions of the darker aspects of gay male culture, such as AIDS and prostitution, aspects which are often elided by Gay Pride. Unlike *Angels*, however, *Raised* makes no significant references to the political situation of gay men in context of the AIDS crisis or the post-gay era; like Bock's *Swimming in the Shallows*, discussed in Chapter 6, *Raised* does not deal with its gay male character as part of a larger political group but only as an individual with personal affiliations, not as a member of a

cultural gay community connected by political solidarity. This play is less about Sebastian as a representative of the post-AIDS male (though he has been construed as such) but about Sebastian as an individual dealing with trauma, loneliness, and the specter of death. Like Bock's gay male protagonist in *Swimming*, Sebastian is also riskily drawn to dangerous males, in this case a convicted murderer and a hustler rather than a handsome shark. Ultimately, Sebastian's journey is highly personalized, as he not only deals with his response (or lack thereof) to his lover's death and to his mother's more recent death.

From a political standpoint, Sebastian does represent the exegeses of the first decade of the American AIDS Crisis and the evolution of gay politics. He cared for Simon, his deceased lover, through his struggle with AIDS, and has been paralyzed during the eleven years since Simon's death, no longer able to define himself through struggle. Coming out is not an issue in the play, and it does not appear to be an issue about which Sebastian or any of the play's characters are concerned. Sebastian is in limbo and seems compelled toward men who represent danger and death. Robert F. Gross, who analyzes *Raised* in his 2008 essay "The Last Gay Man," emphasizes this fatalist theme as the most primary aspect of the play as well as of post-gay drama:

If *Glass Menagerie* can be described as "pre-gay," in that it begins to sketch out a coming-out narrative without the language, concepts, or political tools of a post-Stonewall gay awareness, *Raised in Captivity* can be described as a moment that is "post-gay" in that it represents gay culture as obliterated, traumatized, and presenting no opportunities for sustenance or healing. (162)

Gross, therefore, defines "post-gay" drama as depicting the aftermath of the destruction of gay culture. As is demonstrated throughout this chapter, however, Gross's analysis is skewed by his unsupportable insistence on treating dramatic characters as if they are non-fictional people: Sebastian is not meant to represent a "real" gay man, let alone the entirety of post-AIDS Crisis

gay men in America. He is, rather, a fictional character in a highly theatrical play, and Silver's story concerns this particular fictional character's recovery from his specific trauma, a recovery which includes a temporary withdrawal from romantic and sexual relationships. Additionally, this play ends on an overtly hopeful note for Sebastian as well as for Bernadette and her child. Rather than "obliterated" and hopeless, *Raised* depicts gay culture as in flux, an alternative definition of "post-gay" that is a better fit for the post-gay drama discussed in this study. The rites which came to define gay culture in the 80s (coming out, asserting visibility, fighting AIDS) are no longer as potent as they once were, at least for Sebastian. This play could also be considered post-gay in that it addresses certain actions, situations, and types of people who tended to be obfuscated by the Pride movement which was defined by the development of a politically-active gay community. Regardless, the end of play finds Sebastian and Bernadette in what is arguably a queer imitation of heteronormative domesticity, leading scholars like Gross to justifiably question what this adoption of a heterosexual convention to replace gay community may portend. Does this queer family, with brother and sister as mother and father, constitute a radical queer subjectivity or merely an approximation of a traditional, heteronormative structure?

A Taste of Honey and Hurrah at Last

Richard Greenberg's *Hurrah at Last* (1999) and Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* (1958), though very different from each other and from *Raised* in both form and content, provide rich points for comparison regarding the major themes of disease and death as well as queer family that both ultimately reflect on the material situation of queer male characters in heterosexist environments. Delaney's *Honey*, a much earlier play than *Raised* or *Hurrah* and certainly not a post-gay play, is frequently engaged by scholars of gay drama and contributes

significantly to a discussion of queer male characters and family, specifically a domestic, care-taking arrangement involving a woman and child. Helen, Jo's mother, elopes with a wealthy man, leaving her teenage daughter pregnant and alone. Jo meets Geof, an art student, and the two form a fast and intimate friendship. Geof plans on caring for Jo and helping her care for her child until Helen returns, prompting Geof to leave. Whereas *Raised* ends with a queer male character and straight female character raising a child together, *Honey* presents this possibility, but it is not ultimately realized. "Through Helen's abominable career as a mother as well as Jo's resistance to traditional gender roles and motherhood," says theorist Sam See in his essay "Other Kitchen Sinks" (2004), "Delaney revolutionizes familial normativity and depicts a world where conventional family units are destructive and queer families/communities are life-sustaining" (45). This is exactly resistant to the effect of heteronormative power as described by Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner:

A complex cluster of sexual practices gets confused, in heterosexual culture, with the love plot of intimacy and familialism that signifies belonging to a society in a deep and normal way. Community is imagined through scenes of intimacy, coupling, and kinship; a historical relation to futurity is restricted to generational narrative and reproduction. A whole field of social relations become intelligible as heterosexuality, and this privatized sexual culture bestows on its sexual practices a tacit sense of rightness and normalcy. This sense of rightness—embedded in things and not just sex—is what we call heteronormativity. (554)

See argues that *Honey*, then, is radically queer in that it denaturalizes the heteronormative conflation of heterosexuality and familial happiness. Arguably, this is also what occurs in *Raised* where a brother and sister reclaim their relationship from their troubled pasts with their distant mother and form a new, nurturing family for a child. Greenberg's *Last Hurrah* is about Laurie, an impoverished writer, whose difficult relationship with his married sister and her husband as well as with his parents comes to a head when he is hospitalized with a mysterious disease. Though Laurie does not take on the role of care-giver for a child, his place as a vulnerable queer male with access to the benefits of heteronormative domesticity via his sister forms the major

conflict of the play and reflects significantly on this issue in both *Honey* and *Raised*. Comparing Silver's *Raised* to both of these plays, paying special attention to how they interrogate gay identity, how they depict the interaction of queer male characters with female characters, and how they differently negotiate these characters' relationships to heteronormative family structures, will reveal how this post-gay play generates radical queer subjectivities that are importantly shaped by gender difference.

Interrogating Identity in the Post-Gay Era

“You think you can erase your past and live without roots,” Bernadette says to Sebastian early in *Raised in Captivity* after he repeatedly refuses her requests that he come live with her and Kip (17); this accusation reflects the major theme of family in this play, but it also resonates significantly with the question of gay identity in the 1990s. In an interview for *American Theatre Magazine*, Nicky Silver acknowledges that questions of personal and political identity are important not only in *Raised* but in all of his work: “[M]y plays are about self-acceptance,” says Silver, “as I look at my work, I can see a change in my own self-acceptance as it's reflected in the plays. What was self-loathing 10 years ago has become outwardly directed. As a writer, I'm angrier now at the world than I am at myself” (27). In this interview, Silver is speaking about *Pterodactyls*, his play immediately before *Raised*, in which a young gay man reconnects with his family only to bring about each of their deaths. Can Sebastian's journey, and perhaps also Bernadette's journey, be characterized as a movement toward self-acceptance and a rejection of the external structures that caused the characters to feel inferior? Certainly, one of the driving forces behind the development of a gay political and cultural community in the 1970s was the abdication of the internalized homophobia which ostensibly kept queer individuals closeted for

the majority of the twentieth century. Silver's words, as well as the journeys of the characters in *Raised*, suggest that in the post-gay era, this movement continues beyond the formation of a political community to combat the heterosexist majority and toward a more comprehensive paradigmatic shift. In his analysis of *Raised*, Schildcrout elegantly expresses this point, asking "whether the goal of a queer movement is to change the position of queer people within the symbolic order, or is the goal to change the order itself" (95). Through their interrogation of the stability of gay identity, these plays reflect the post-gay attempt to revolutionize existing orders rather than simply live within them, though the characters ultimately do not resolve all of the questions they raise in this regard.

The isolation and alienation that characterizes the queer males in these plays brings the question of gay community and its associated identity into sharp relief. Gross refers to Sebastian as an "impoverished, gay, traumatized writer-hero" (158), a description which largely applies to Laurie and Geof as well, though Laurie is not traumatized (at least at the play's beginning) and Geof is a visual artist rather than a writer. It is also equally true of all three plays that "the gay protagonist is situated in a milieu that is almost exclusively marked as heterosexual; there are no gay friends or community to which the protagonist can turn in his traumatized state" (Gross 159). In *Honey*, Geof's isolation from other men like himself is not remarked upon, though his and Jo's negotiation of the heterosexual "milieu" that exists outside of their flat is evident. In *Raised* and *Hurrah*, the gay male characters' general isolation and alienation is verbally acknowledged, perhaps because these plays were written in the latter half of the 1990s rather than in 1958. "I have no real contact with anyone, including myself," says Sebastian (24); "I'm sorry to contribute to your alienation," teases Thea, Laurie's sister (213), in a playfully self-reflexive suggestion that the alienated-gay-man has become a cliché. In place of "gay friends or community," Gross claims that in *Raised* and *Hurrah* the "dysfunctional" family "provides a

haven for the recovering gay man”²⁵ (159) who he says “flounders at the edge of virtual nonexistence” in both plays (168). In Gross’s estimation, the heterosexual family, a symbol of what those involved in the Gay Pride movement defined themselves against, reclaims the gay male in the wake of the AIDS Crisis. Sebastian is recovering from the trauma of losing his lover to AIDS, and Laurie, by the end of the play, finds relief in allowing his family to take care of him after his harrowing experience with a mysterious illness. Gross reductively claims, then, that these plays demonstrate how the gay community failed to provide the support system needed by traumatized gay men, which creates the isolated and alienated gay men who these protagonists represent. What these plays actual demonstrate, however, is the isolating effect of identity-based politics, not the “failure” of a monolithic community constructed through the conflation of desire and culture. Rather than suggest that these plays demonstrate a need for a renewed gay community, as Gross does, it is more accurate to suggest that these plays demonstrate the interrogation of the entire notion of gay community and identity that emerged after the initial Gay Pride movement and AIDS Crisis. Gross also argues that there is a lack of a “foundation of shared truth on which to build a gay community” in these plays (162); if by “shared truth” Gross means shared experience and/or shared political situation, then his point highlights the heteronormativity represented by the characters surrounding the gay protagonists, most directly by Bernadette and Thea, Sebastian’s and Laurie’s married sisters. Gross seems to assume that a “gay community” built on “shared truth” is the “great work” referred to at the end of *Angels*, as he begins his essay with this quotation and then suggests that drama has not fulfilled this calling (158). Is gay community truly the only or best-imaginable positive outcome for these queer male

²⁵ It is unclear whether or not Gross is being deliberately enigmatic by employing the phrase “recovering gay man.” Does he refer to the fact that Sebastian and Laurie are recovering from trauma, or is he suggesting that they are “recovering” from being gay? Given Gross’s argument that these men relinquish their queer desire to be re-integrated into a heteronormative family, it is likely that Gross intends both meanings to resonate.

characters, as Gross suggests? It is difficult to make such a claim when the queer male characters' identities appear to be in flux to begin with.

In the absence of a gay community based on "shared truth" in these plays, what is it that marks these male protagonists as queer? A close look at the ways that Sebastian, Laurie, and Geof's subjectivities are depicted reveals how these plays interrogate the notion of a discrete gay identity. For instance, when Sebastian objects to Hillary's declaration that she loves him, she reassures him that it is not sexual or romantic love she feels for him, then clarifies, "Anyway, I know you're a homosexual," which Sebastian counters with, "Maybe I'm not. Maybe I was hasty! It's possible that all of my encounters, longings and sexual dreams have been an aberration, and that's why I seem so stuck" (25). Gross might suggest that Sebastian's questioning his homosexual identity is a consequence of his separation from a gay community, but this assumption would reduce Sebastian to a narrative based in conventional identity politics rather than a queer interrogation of gay identity. It is unquestionably, however, a moment when sexual identity is destabilized; Sebastian feels that the identity "homosexual" is another mode in which he is stuck. What is even more curious is Hillary's response to his self-questioning:

HILLARY: You're a homosexual.

SEBASTIAN: Because I don't love you?

HILLARY: Because you are. [...] You are what you are. I am what I am. Ad infinitum!
(25-6)

Is Hillary trying to reassure Sebastian for his benefit, or is she trying to keep him in the particular mold that best serves her needs? However one takes this conversation, Sebastian's ambivalence regarding his sexual identity and Hillary's insistence that he is homosexual mirrors a major question in post-gay discourse: is identity a stable category? The question for which Gross fails to account is, what is lost or gained in forming a discrete gay community based on shared identity in the interest of solidarity? It is significant that Sebastian is re-evaluating his personal

erotic desire, not his sense of belonging to a cultural/political gay community. “I’m not sure what I want,” he later tells Roger, the male prostitute who he brings home, “I mean, I know what I want in general” (54). Laurie in *Hurrah at Last*, on the other hand, knows what he wants very specifically and gives this cogent explanation to his friend, Oliver:

LAURIE: I find men sexually appealing but, with two or three exceptions—you’re one—I am bored to tears by them as people, while I really *like* women. Whereas you seem to be endlessly fascinated by the workings of men’s minds but desire only women to sleep with. Which, I believe, is why you’ve married a woman who has no English and you call *me* “darling.” (orig. emph. 242)

Here, Laurie’s separation of sexual attraction from affection, love, and romance constitutes another kind of interrogation of gay identity. Laurie is attracted to men but is unlikely to enjoy a man’s company enough to sustain a long-term relationship, and this may partially account for why he is not depicted as a member of a larger gay community. Oliver, conversely, seems unable to stop having children with his wife, Gia, but he is enamored with Laurie. Which of these men, therefore, is the queer male in this play? The great distinction between the two, of course, is that Oliver has a heterosexual family as well as the associated political and material privileges; Laurie, however, is alienated and impoverished. Because Laurie and Sebastian interrogate their own as well as others’ identities so specifically, these plays raise the question of political/cultural gay identity versus male/male desire.

Geof in *A Taste of Honey* is a particularly useful example of an enigmatically queer character, though his story, unlike Sebastian’s or Laurie’s, takes place before the advent of a political/cultural Gay Pride movement. At no point in *Honey* is Geof overtly called homosexual or gay, but Jo indicates the possibility that he has had sex with other men when she asks why his landlady evicted him: “Who did she find you with?” Jo asks, “Your girl friend? It wasn’t a man, was it?” to which Geof replies, “Don’t be daft” (48). Jo then tries to blackmail Geof into telling her about his sex life:

JO: You can stay here if you'll tell me what you do. Go on, I've always wanted to know about people like you.

GEOF: Go to hell.

JO: I won't snigger, honest I won't. Tell me some of it, go on. I bet you never told a woman before.

GEOF: I don't go in for sensational confessions.

JO: I want to know what you do. I want to know why you do it. Tell me or get out. (48)

There are several indications in this short exchange that Geof regularly has sex with men, or at least that Jo has reason to believe that he does so. When Geof calls Jo's bluff and goes to leave, she recants, saying, "I don't care what you do" (48), and the subject is dropped for the rest of the play. What is it about Geof, then, that marks him as queer? It is evidently a visibly observable divergence from the norm in how he performs his gender. Helen, for example, calls Geof a "pansified little freak" (63); Helen's husband Peter, upon seeing Geof for the first time when Helen visits her pregnant daughter, says, "What's this, the father? Oh Christ, no!" and proceeds to address Geof with female names (65). "She always looks at me as though I should be put away for treatment, doesn't she?" Geof remarks to Jo about Helen (73). Clearly, Geof is marked visibly as different from heteronormative males in this culture, and this forms a connection between himself and Jo who while she is pregnant resists being seen by anyone except Geof for fear of similar castigation. While Geof's depiction cannot be called post-gay given its original historical moment, the enigmatic nature of his identity and of other characters' responses to him (as well as the fact that he kisses and attempts to seduce Jo in the play's middle) make him similar to both Sebastian and Laurie, particularly in their complicated relationships to the heterosexual family.

The relationship of marriage, family, and children to queer identity is significant to the male protagonists of all three plays. Geof's place in the life of Jo and her child is tenuous

because of his visible non-conformity to heterosexual masculinity, and Sebastian ultimately finds purpose and solace in acting as father to his sister's child. Laurie, however, criticizes marriage and domesticity as antithetical not only to queerness but to individual identity in general, claiming that his sister Thea pleases their parents "only at the expense of your identity: *She married well* is what they love about you. You had authentic perversity once upon a time" (orig. emph. 212). Laurie further asserts that the "domestic fascist" of marriage has negatively affected his sister's entire generation:

LAURIE: I wonder, aren't you at all inclined to ask yourself, *what's happened?* To review your own history? To re-shape the arc and plan of your life according to some worthier wisdom? (orig. emph. 212)

A queer man on stage in 1999 encouraging his straight sister to "review" her own history and revise her personal relationship to the identity of her generation constitutes an extension of the post-gay questioning of gay identity to a heterosexual individual. Resisting and reevaluating the conventions of heteronormative marriage, domesticity, and family, Laurie suggests, should not be restricted to individuals who claim homosexual desire. He also conflates his sister's "identity" with the "authentic perversity" that he claims she has lost. Are we meant to understand that this "perversity" constitutes a type of queer identity that Thea has given up? This would suggest that, at least in Laurie's mind, queer identity is defined not by a certain type of sex and desire but by a political, social, and material resistance of heteronormative conventions.

One of the ways in which Laurie's and Sebastian's alienation manifests is in their lack of (and seeming disinterest in) sexual activity and/or romance. In Sebastian's case, this is associated with his general emotional paralysis since his lover's death: "I haven't had sex in eleven years," he admits, "I haven't held or kissed or cared for anyone, in anything but the most superficial way, in so long that I no longer know if I know how" (19). It is noteworthy that Sebastian puts sex and caring for someone in the same affective category, and he makes this same association

again later in his fantasy about Dylan. The only moment in the play when we see Sebastian as a sexually-desirous being is when he reads his erotic letter to Dylan (Silver 98), but the two characters are never actually in the same room, let alone share a sexual encounter; Sebastian brings home Roger, a prostitute, but seems reluctant to engage sexually with him and delays by having Roger read his writing and by asking Roger if he's ever been in love (Silver 53-9). Laurie tells us that he is sexually attracted to men, but we do not see him interact sexually or erotically with another male character during the course of the play. Like Sebastian and Laurie, Geof is not depicted as sexually active with other men; Geof, however, is an ambiguously queer male character written in 1958, whereas Laurie, a queer male character in 1999, is the least sexual of the three. It is not accurate to claim that this is a typical depiction of gay men in American and British drama in the late 90s, but it does demonstrate that same-sex engagement is not an infallible means of tracking queer visibility in drama. In all three plays, the male protagonist at least temporarily abstains from male/male romance and sex before being reintegrated into the family,²⁶ but same-sex desire, according to Gross, is in these plays disguised as "melancholia" from trauma (169). In Gross's analysis, then, "melancholia" takes primacy over or even replaces male/male sex as a marker of gay identity, effectively replacing sex and desire with the cultural marker of trauma; Gross implies, therefore, that to be gay in the post-gay era is to be melancholy. "Laurie himself," says Gross of *Hurrah's* protagonist, "at once gay and without desire, assimilated and oddly invisible, is symptomatic of this post-gay moment" (173). Like many of Gross's claims regarding these characters, it is problematic to suggest that because Laurie does not have sex with or demonstrate desire for a man during the play that he is therefore "without desire;" after all, Laurie tells us he finds men "sexually appealing" (242). Gross brings up an important issue, however, regarding desire and sexual interest in post-gay plays since, in several

²⁶ In Geof's case, the integration into a family does not succeed, but the attempt is made, and it does involve his giving up the company of other men (though not, perhaps, permanently) and even attempting to show sexual affection to Jo, a female.

of the plays included in this study, the development and sustainment of queer family seems to rely on the absence of sexual interest between male and female characters.

While these characters' queerness, that is their professed attraction to and history of sex and love with other men, is certainly of import, to read these men exclusively as representations of "the gay male" is to create a monolithic and reductive interpretation that risks obfuscating important specifics of these dramatic personages. We are told that these male characters have had sex with and/or are desirous of men, but within these plays, their primary emotional relationships are with women. Given this, it makes sense that their sexual and erotic interaction with men does not feature heavily in these plays. Sam See's criticism of classic gay male critics like John Clum and Alan Sinfield for suggesting that sex is the only valid marker of queerness, and that a person cannot be queer unless they are overtly and visibly having queer (and for Clum, specifically male/male) sex (40), could also be applied to Gross. For instance, Laurie's professed same-sex desires certainly influence how his mysterious and life-threatening illness is understood, but as is discussed at length later in this chapter, his economic status is arguably given more weight as a marginalizing factor in the play. All three of these queer male characters' subjectivities are complex, individualized, and, most importantly for this study, *in flux* during the course of their plays. In *Raised in Captivity*, Sebastian's same-sex desire is not overtly stigmatized by the rest of the play's characters; what causes concern is his isolation as well as his determination to spend time with dangerous men rather than with people who care about him. "Boundaries are for countries on a map, not people,"²⁷ Hillary tells him when he tries to cut ties with her (29); this exact line is echoed by Dylan in a subsequent scene (38), increasing its significance. While Sebastian keeps Hillary, Kip, his mother, and his sister at a distance, he seems drawn to characters like Dylan, who is potentially a murderer, and Roger, who robs him

²⁷ The notion that it is inappropriate to apply boundaries to people also strengthens the interrogation of stable, discrete gay identity that emerges in this play.

and cuts his throat. His identity in flux, Sebastian seems unwilling or unable to pursue pleasure that doesn't threaten danger and death. However, to assume that this is an expression of the situation of the post-AIDS Crisis/post-gay gay male, as Gross does, is to elide the wealth of detail that defines Sebastian and his experiences; while Sebastian and Laurie are both isolated from any kind of community, the greatest similarity between the two is that they are audaciously self-reflexive regarding their own and others' psycho-sexual matrixes.

The Post-Gay AIDS Play

A significant exegesis of gay culture that these plays revisit and renegotiate is the narrative of the AIDS Crisis as depicted through drama, which in *Raised* and in much post-gay scholarship manifests as a preoccupation with guilt, trauma, and death. In his groundbreaking essay "Is the Rectum A Grave?" (1987), queer theorist Leo Bersani suggested that collecting "information necessary to lock up homosexuals in quarantine camps" was more valuable to the "family-oriented Reagan Administration than saving the heterosexual members of American families from AIDS" (201). This notion of families as an ideological vessel for heteronormativity to be preserved and protected from infected undesirables, homosexuals in particular, is key to the depiction of illness, danger, and death in these post-gay plays. Nicky Silver echoes Bersani's summation of the prevailing attitudes in America during the early years of the AIDS Crisis and the consequences of that attitude:

In *Pterodactyls*, the characters--like all of us--have learned to survive in this grotesque world of disfigurement and dysfunction through denial. Well that's fine, except now we have a situation, because of AIDS, where our denial could end up eliminating the species. As a culture, America condemned itself to be in this precarious state because we didn't care about the people who were dying to begin with--these were homosexuals, minorities, people of color, drug abusers, and we said, "Well, good, let them die. Who cares, we'll weed out the race. It's Darwinism." Because we didn't care, this disease expanded exponentially. (qtd. in MacColl 1)

AIDS is treated differently in *Raised in Captivity* than it is in *Pterodactyls*, but the association of death and violence with same-sex sex is still present. In *Raised*, not only is AIDS an aspect of Sebastian's back-story, but vivid images of disease, death, and decay are threaded throughout the play. Hillary, for instance, describes her ill-fated marriage as "rotten and falling apart from the inside" (28), and Kip describes the carcass of a dead horse that he saw in gory detail (46). The theme of punishment and purification is also potent in *Raised*, particularly for Hillary, who exclaims "I WILL BE CLEAN!!!" before putting out her own eyes with a screwdriver (orig. emph. 51). Sebastian's attraction to dangerous men could be construed as a desire for punishment, perhaps caused by guilt from surviving AIDS instead of his lover. However, Sebastian's assertion that, "[t]here are no 'bad' people. [...] There are unhappy people; people with problems" (27) implies a different motivation, particularly once he reveals that Simon, his lover, slept with other men knowing that he was infected (113). Sebastian knows that Simon was not only unfaithful to him but tried to deliberately harm other people, and he holds out hope that Dylan, who is being punished for murder, is not actually a murderer. Schildcrout claims that in *Raised*, "the guilt and stigma of the criminal is inseparable from the guilt and stigma of the queer, struggling with shame, familial rejection, the loss of love, etc." and that through the course of this play, "queer villainy in the form of the queer killer is confronted and psychically released" (101). Rather than reject or deny the guilt and stigmatization forced upon the gay community during the AIDS Crisis, *Raised in Captivity* and other similar post-gay plays acknowledge and embrace the association of male/male sex with disease and death, perhaps as a way to acknowledge and move through apocalypse and toward utopia, as we see in *Angels*.

Gross also addresses the issue of disease and death in *Raised* as well as *Hurrah* but describes it in different terms. "The movement out of the heteronormative unit into a gay world has been obliterated by eruptions of the death drive" (161), claims Gross, essentially saying that

these plays show the reintegration of queer men into their heteronormative families from which they had previously disconnected to join a larger, visible, proud gay community which is now defeated by the trauma of AIDS. Therefore, Gross sees Sebastian as the “melancholic and traumatized collateral damage of AIDS in gay America” (163) and points out that the only other characters in *Raised* who are “identified with male same-sex desire are dangerously pathological, each marked at once as both victim and victimizer” (Gross 162). It must be pointed out, however, that though the play’s heterosexual characters are not observably dangerous, Bernadette, Kip, and especially Hillary are far from well-adjusted. They, like Sebastian (and arguably Dylan and Roger), struggle to reconcile themselves to structures of authority, particularly their parents, with whom each character professes to have had a negative relationship. While Sebastian is certainly not different from the rest of the play’s characters because of his psychic angst, his struggle is specifically shaped by his experience with AIDS, particularly the fact that his lover, Simon, slept with other men knowing that he was infected. “I don’t want to believe,” he says, speaking of Dylan, “that someone I care about, because I do, is so basically ... bad” (42). Sebastian attempts to recuperate Simon through his relationships with Dylan, the convicted murderer, and with Roger, who he tries to console even after Roger cuts Sebastian’s throat. Schildcrout suggests that *Raised* crystallizes the psychological after-effect of the AIDS Crisis by asking, “Are the men we love murderers?” (100).

Greenberg’s play *Hurrah at Last* is interestingly enigmatic with regard to queerness, disease, and death. During the first act, Laurie is sick with what appears to be a cold, though he starts losing consciousness for increasingly longer periods as the act progresses. At the beginning of the second act, he is in the hospital with a serious but seemingly unidentifiable illness:

LAURIE: The doctors come in, their faces go white, and they scream, “God, you look like shit!” Thank you, I could get that from my friends. They’re at a complete diagnostic impasse. They tell me I’m a fascinoma. (258)

In 1999, the trauma of AIDS is still close enough for a queer male character with a mysterious disease to resonate significantly. However, the fear of AIDS is also undercut in this play:

THEA: They were so excited when they thought you had AIDS.

LAURIE: Oh.

THEA: I said, “Oh, please, what, from a *toilet* seat?” (orig. emph. 259)

This exchange not only neutralizes the threat of AIDS but also suggests that Laurie is unlikely to contract an STD of any kind; in this play, gay male characters are not configured as specially vulnerable to AIDS, and Laurie mentions no previous experience with the disease. What is the effect of having a gay male sick with a strange malady that is not AIDS during a cultural moment not entirely extricated from the crisis of the 1980s? Such a choice removes the historical and emotional associations that an audience might have with AIDS and focuses on the material circumstances of an alienated, queer, and impoverished character. This element of *Hurrah*, then, could be called post-gay since it disentangles the history of gay identity from an individual character’s trajectory. For instance, late in Act Two, Laurie proclaims: “I am not *sick!* / I am not *dying!* / I have *health!* / I have *strength!* [...] I have *money!*” (orig. emph. 277). In this play, money is associated with health, happiness, and heterosexuality: all of the married characters (that is, every character besides Laurie) are relatively wealthy, particularly Laurie’s sister, Thea, and her husband, Eamon. In Act One, Laurie’s criticism of heteronormative domesticity and his refusal to accept monetary help from his married family and friends is treated as innocuous; they all ignore or laugh good-naturedly at his diatribes. In Act Two, however, when Laurie is in the hospital, the line between reality and medication-induced hallucination is blurred and the other characters become overtly hostile toward Laurie. “I used to think the world was indifferent to my existence,” Laurie admits, “but, as it turns out, it’s actively opposed” (279). While it may be inaccurate to read Laurie as representative of a larger gay male community in this play, he is

distinguished from the rest of the play's characters by his failure to adhere to heteronormative structures such as marriage, children, and domesticity; the implication is, therefore, that rejection of heteronormativity leads to death, not because of AIDS but because of the material consequences of living without heterosexual economic privilege. "I EXIST!" Laurie exclaims desperately as both his health and his financial situation worsen at the end of Act Two, "I am *separate* from you! [...] I AM REAL! I AM *SICK!* I AM ... BRO-O-O-O-O-KE!" (orig. emph. 283). Here, Laurie "flounders at the edge of virtual nonexistence" (Gross 168) as his family and friends are ambivalent to his circumstances: Thea suggests that his life is trivial, his mother Reva admits that she wishes he and Thea would die so that she could start again, and Oliver reveals that he deliberately sabotaged the screenplay he was adapting from Laurie's book, which represented Laurie's only real economic hope. All seems lost until Laurie's father, Sumner, asks if Laurie will let him give Laurie money, and Laurie finally accepts. In Act Three, we learn that Laurie's illness is the "most curable cancer known to man" (294), and his health is improving with chemo therapy. Laurie confesses to his sister:

LAURIE: ...I feel...good. / I don't know how to describe it...I don't know what the word
for it is...

THEA: Darling?

LAURIE: Yes?

THEA: You're happy.

LAURIE: (*The color draining from his face.*) Oh God, I hope it isn't *that*.

(orig. emph. 295)

Laurie then suggests that he feels "good" because of all that was revealed during his traumatic time in the hospital, "Because the facts are out" (295). However, the correlation between Laurie's happiness and his acceptance of his heteronormative family's monetary help cannot be ignored, nor can his distress at the prospect of being happy. This distress is particularly significant in light of Gross' point suggesting that "melancholia" is a metaphor for same-sex desire in both *Hurrah* and *Raised* (169). Does allowing himself to be happy mean, for Laurie,

giving up his “authentic perversity” in return for conventional domesticity, as he accuses Thea of doing in the play’s first scene?

Sebastian’s journey is very different from Laurie’s, but he similarly trades danger, disease, and death for domesticity. “Like Albee,” says Schildcrout, “Silver is often concerned with the intertwining of sexual desire and death, and how these elements play out in the Freudian family romance” (96). In *Raised*, the male objects of Sebastian’s desire represent potential danger; Bernadette, Sebastian’s only remaining family, admonishes Sebastian for his friendship with Dylan, but takes him into her home for care and supervision after he is nearly killed by Roger. All that Sebastian does, according to Bernadette, is play with her baby and write “page after page” of letters to Dylan, which she calls “insane, rambling indictments of my brother’s sanity, documents to the depths of his erotic perversions” (80-1). This pejorative reference to Sebastian’s “erotic perversions” is loaded because he is marked as a queer male; does Bernadette call his desires “perverse” because they involve a convicted murderer or because they are directed at another man? However the character means this sentiment, the association between male/male desire and mortal danger is evident. When Dylan finally responds to Sebastian’s letters describing his affection and desire for Dylan, he rejects Sebastian, apparently not because he is opposed to male/male desire but because he shares Bernadette’s opinion of himself: “I am sick,” Dylan writes to Sebastian, “truly sick, with poison in my bowels because I am *me*. I am dying, knowing there is something wrong in *me*. Something missing in *me*!!” (orig. emph. 99). Here, Dylan uses disease as a metaphor for his guilt as a murderer; he also echoes Sebastian’s inability to feel, admitting, “I have thought I am not human when I wanted to cry and found I could not” (99). There are parallels, then, between Dylan and Simon, Sebastian’s dead lover, but also between Dylan and Sebastian. Ultimately, Dylan tells Sebastian that he will no longer read or respond to his letters, insisting that it is in Sebastian’s best interest: “You have *nothing else*

and see *nothing else* and want *nothing else*, because I am everything and it is KILLING YOU” (orig. emph. 100). Like Laurie in *Hurrah*, Sebastian is not only paralyzed by disease but is also impoverished: “He has no money, no home—they terminated his lease—no friends, but this!” (81) says Bernadette, lamenting her brother’s obsession with a convicted murder. After Dylan terminates their relationship, all that Sebastian has left is caring for Bernadette’s child, and he takes great joy and pride in this task. According to Gross, “sexual desire is ultimately erased in favor of domesticity” at the end of *Raised in Captivity* (171), and a similar claim could be made regarding *Hurrah at Last*. Berlant and Warner address this phenomenon in their 1998 essay “Sex in Public,” claiming that heteronormative power mobilizes the American public around protecting a “zone of heterosexual privacy,” effectively organizes citizenry around sex while accomplishing the “spectacular demonization of any represented sex” (550). “People feel,” say Berlant and Warner, explaining the consequences of this mobilization, “that the price they must pay for social membership and a relation to the future is identification with the heterosexual life narrative” (557). The reintegration of the gay man into society in de-sexualized form echoes other observances of how the AIDS crisis both facilitated the “acceptance” of gay men into the mainstream through political activism but marginalized queer sex in favor of heteronormative structures: marriage, child-raising, and domesticity, which may account for why Gross so vehemently condemns what he interprets as the desexualization of the gay male subject in these plays. Contrary to Gross’s assumptions, however, there is nothing in *Raised* that suggests Sebastian will never again engage in male/male sex; rather, this play concerns a moment in Sebastian’s life when he focuses on cultivating a care-taking relationship that does not involve sexual interest, a choice which makes sense given his recent traumatic experiences with sexually-interested relationships. *Raised in Captivity* does not “erase” queer subjectivity with heteronormativity but rather sets forth a type of queer family, similar in some respects to a

conventional family but subversive in its flouting of norms, particularly in how it negotiates gender difference—Bernadette and Sebastian as parents—in a non-heteronormative way.

Gender Difference and Queer Family

In *Raised in Captivity*, gender difference highlights the ways in which a domestic arrangement that seemingly imitates heteronormativity actually constitutes a radically queer family. Bernadette rejects Kip, her husband and the biological father of her child, but lets her brother take on the role of father to her child; here, she makes a similar move to what Gross claims that the gay male characters in *Raised* and *Hurrah* make, relinquishing a relationship that involves sex and erotic desire for non-sexual domesticity. Therefore, the queer family at the end of *Raised in Captivity* is characterized by parents who, though they are male and female, do not desire each other erotically and will almost certainly never have a sexual relationship, in this case not because the male character is exclusively desirous of other men but because the male and female parents are brother and sister. Is it the case, however, that queer family is contingent upon a lack of sexual interest between men and women? Is it possible to have a queer family wherein the possibility of desire and sex exists between a male and female character?

The relationship between Geof and Jo in Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* is particularly relevant to this question of how gender difference and sexual interest functions in a queer family. For Jo, Geof represents not only a willing partner in caring for her child but also an antithesis to all of the heteronormative structures that restrict her freedom. "You can get rid of babies before they're born, you know," (49) Geof tells Jo after she reveals that she is pregnant. A character saying this onstage in 1958 is revolutionary in and of itself, but it also demonstrates how Geof challenges compulsory heterosexuality (and, importantly, the fact that he does not encourage Jo

to be a mother against her will so that he can be a parent). Though Jo does not want to terminate her pregnancy, she remains unwilling to be a mother, and refuses to go outside because she “doesn’t like people looking at her” (61). As previously mentioned, Jo is visibly marked as aberrant to heteronormative morality, just as Geof is subjected to mockery because of something aberrant in his appearance and behavior. Rather than simply hide their aberrance from the world, Jo and Geof celebrate that they are “unusual,” “extraordinary,” “unique,” a “couple of degenerates,” and the “devil’s own” (50-2). “There’s only one of me like there’s only one of you,” Jo says to Geof proudly as they forge solidarity through their shared queer pride. In this sense, Jo and Geof are similar to Prior and Harper in *Angels in America*: they forge a queer solidarity through their own Othered statuses and encourage each other to resist structures of power. For Jo and Geof, queerness is recuperated as a positive attribute rather than an affliction, similarly to how Prior’s illness and Harper’s addiction allow them privileged access to visions and prophecy.

In addition to both being Othered and marginalized, Jo also finds Geof an ideal companion because he is not sexually interested in her. In their first scene, Jo tells Geof that she is allowing him to live with her because he “won’t start anything,” to which Geof responds, “No, I don’t suppose I will” (53). Jo’s first and only sexual experience resulted in pregnancy and so Geof is “safe” from her perspective. After they have been living together for some time, however, Geof asks Jo how she would react if he “started something,” and then kisses her (without her consent) and asks her to marry him. Jo expresses disgust with “all this panting and grunting,” telling Geof that she likes him but that she is “not marrying anybody” (57-8). Geof remarks about not being able to compete with the “black beast of a prince” who impregnated Jo. “I bet you didn’t struggle when he made love to you,” Geof accuses, to which Jo replies, “It might have been better if I had” (58). Geof not only relinquishes the companionship (sexual and

otherwise) of other men to be a parent with Jo but also relinquishes any further attempts at developing a sexual or romantic relationship with Jo; to be part of a family with Jo and her child, Geof not only abstains from interacting with other queer men (as Jo will not leave the apartment, and Geof will not leave Jo) but also gives up heterosexual sex and romance.

Geof's situation is particularly intriguing when compared to Gross's assessment that "sexual desire is ultimately erased in favor of domesticity" (171) in *Raised in Captivity* and *Hurrah at Last*. In Laurie's case, however, Gross also argues that sexual desire is obfuscated or simply absent from the play's beginning. "[Laurie] admits that he is sexually attracted to men but bored by the way most of them think, and prefers the asexual company of women," (165) Gross points out; "[c]haracterized by an absence of animating desire, he is presented as a eunuch, a feminized presence from infancy" (166). As discussed earlier in this chapter, the fact that Laurie does not express desire for nor have a sexual relationship with another man in the play does not necessarily mean that he is asexual, but the subversive performance of male/male desire and sex is notably absent, and in this absence, Laurie's poverty, alienation, and illness mark him queer. The primary relationships of all three queer male characters discussed in this chapter are not with other men but with women, though these relationships are overtly non-sexual. Does this fact decrease the queerness of these characters? Jo makes an interesting observation in this regard:

JO: I used to think you were such an interesting, immoral character before I knew you. I thought you were like that ... for one thing.

[*GEOFFREY chases her with the mop all through this speech.*]

You're just like an old woman really. You just unfold your bed, kiss me good night and sing me to sleep. (72)

In Jo's estimation, Geof becomes less queer—that is, less "interesting" and "immoral"—when he takes on a domestic, care-taking role. This does not result, however, in her losing all interest in

Geof, considering that a care-taker is what she and her child need most. Unlike Bernadette, who sees marriage as a “torture rack” (75) but is enthusiastic about being a parent, Jo is entirely unwilling: “I don’t want this baby, Geof,” she confesses, “I don’t want to be a mother. I don’t want to be a woman” (75). Geof offers Jo non-judgmental support that is not contingent upon sex or marriage, and Jo offers Geof the opportunity to be a parent. Neither are completely fulfilled by their arrangement, but their shared marginalization creates solidarity between them. Like many of the plays in this study, *A Taste of Honey* features the queer relationship of a male and female character united not by heterosexual desire but by their status as Others, though this relationship is not as mutually beneficial as Prior’s and Harper’s relationship in *Angels*. Bernadette and Sebastian’s parallel (though very different) trajectories are significantly influenced not by shared marginalization but by the fact that they are brother and sister; what connects them is a shared, traumatic past.

Brothers and Sisters

The queerness of the family presented at the end of *Raised in Captivity* is both reinforced and challenged by the fact that the male and female parents are brother and sister; though Laurie and Thea do not form a similar family unit in *Hurrah at Last*, their brother/sister relationship provides a fruitful point of comparison for Sebastian and Bernadette. Gross claims that in both of these plays “the return of the protagonist to his sister’s home is presented in an energetic comic register, but the comic tone does not eliminate the problems of the return” (170). What exactly are these “problems” that Gross sees? What is the significance of the brother/sister relationship in these plays, and what effect does this cross-gender relationship have on queer subjectivity?

The answer lies, perhaps, in the brothers' and sisters' different access to heteronormative privilege in these plays.

In the course of the play, Bernadette and Sebastian (who are, it should be noted, not only siblings but twins [21]) both move from a traumatized state to a relatively stable one as they grow closer to each other. "I would like to know that you have problems," says Bernadette to Sebastian at their mother's funeral (18); not having seen or spoken to her brother since he left home as a teenager, Bernadette does not know about Sebastian's experience with Simon, nor his financial struggles. While Bernadette's enthusiastic response to hearing about her brother's problems may not immediately help their relationship, a connection is forged between the two: neither are completely happy. Gross points out that Sebastian and Bernadette both come from a home which "owes its origin and its dynamic to traumatization" and "emotional starvation" (164). After their mother's death, their adult problems and shared childhood trauma draws them together, at least in Bernadette's mind: "We only have each other now," she tells Sebastian, "Well you have me and I have—Kip. We're so alone! We're random, drifting orphans!" (16). It is noteworthy that Bernadette, though she enjoys the legal privilege of heterosexual marriage, does not consider Kip a source of emotional support. Though Simon is long dead, Sebastian and Bernadette are both victims of unfaithful lovers, and it is Sebastian who reveals that Kip and Hillary have been sleeping together. However, Bernadette, unlike Sebastian, realizes that she is not in love with her unfaithful partner. While Bernadette gives up her marriage to Kip by choice, however, Sebastian lost his partner in a traumatic fashion, and this difference highlights the disparity between heterosexual sister and homosexual brother.

In some respects, the sister characters in these plays function to bring the marginalization of the brother characters into sharp relief, primarily through their unequal access to heterosexual privilege. Clearly, Bernadette and Sebastian have a wealth of shared experience, much of which

is negative, but whereas Bernadette is married, a mother by choice, and financially secure, Sebastian is isolated and impoverished. This is largely true of Thea and Laurie, as well. Gross asserts that the “gay man is the unintentional product of the reproductive process” (169), referencing anxiety that many heterosexual parents regard queer children as somehow flawed. This is also evident in *Angels in America* when Joe asks Hannah whether or not his father loved him, though in Joe’s case, there is no sister character with whom to make a comparison. “Note that although both families contain a heterosexual daughter and a gay son,” says Gross of *Raised and Hurrah*, “it is only the gay son who is marked by sterility, inertia, poverty, melancholia and alienation” (169). Gross’s analysis seems to ignore the fact that Bernadette experiences pronounced anxiety if not alienation akin to Sebastian’s and that Thea is unable to become pregnant. In both plays, brother and sister experience emotional stress; it is the fact that they have a shared background but pronounced differences in their material circumstances that highlight heterosexual privilege and queer marginalization. Berlant and Warner offer a cogent explanation of the linkage between heteronormativity and material privilege:

Queer social practices like sex and theory try to unsettle the garbled but powerful norms supporting that [heterosexual] privilege—including the project of normalization that has made heterosexuality hegemonic—as well as those material practices that, though not explicitly sexual, are implicated in the hierarchies of property and propriety that we will describe as heteronormative. (548)

Clearly, there are certain cultural as well as material privileges that result from being marked as heterosexual in a heteronormative society. Cathy J. Cohen, however, calls attention to the “unchallenged assumption of a uniform heteronormativity from which all heterosexuals benefit” (37). In *Hurrah* and *Raised*, the sisters’ access to heteronormative privilege is evident, but it is not uniform, and the ways that these female characters are disadvantaged by heteronormativity because of their gender are also evident, as are the ways that their brothers are marginalized because of their queer status but are privileged in other ways by their gender.

In both *Raised* and *Hurrah*, the queer male character is impoverished and isolated but has access to money and companionship through his sister; in both plays, the sister benefits her queer brother as a result of her heterosexual marriage. For instance, in *Hurrah at Last*, Laurie's brother-in-law, Eamon, offers Laurie money as soon as he hears Laurie say that he has none, but Laurie refuses to accept (212); he also initially refuses monetary help from his parents and Oliver because he does not want to be indebted to them. Though he finally accepts money from his father, Thea is to Laurie a constantly available and secure source of financial support:

LAURIE: You don't have any money.

THEA: I'm married to a rich guy.

LAURIE: It's *his*.

THEA: And what's his is mine and what's mine is yours—

LAURIE: And God bless the child that's got his own. (orig. emph. 262)

Thea insists to Laurie that she has unlimited access to Eamon's money because he loves her, but it is also true that as a heterosexual married couple, Thea more than likely has legally-supported access to Eamon's money. "I don't want to start relying on the idea that my problems will be solved by the geyser of your great love trickling down on me," Laurie explains (263), saying, in essence, that he does not want access to heterosexual privilege by proxy. Bernadette also enjoys financial security because of her inheritance from her mother, which is evidently prodigious enough to support her, her child, Sebastian, and Kip and Hillary for the rest of their lives (111). Sebastian has as much claim to this money as Bernadette; however, the life-changing benefit to which he has access because of his sister's heterosexual marriage is her child. Much like Jo to Geof, Bernadette's ability to procreate provides an opportunity for Sebastian to be a parent.

In these plays, it is implied that the sister and brother's circumstances could be reversed if not for seemingly minor differences of gender and desire. If Sebastian was not a gay male but

rather a straight female, he might be married to a man who did not die from AIDS and have a child of his own; however, due to heteronormative gender structures, he also might have felt less able to leave their mother and strike out on his own. Is the fact that females in a heteronormative, patriarchal society are pressured to rely on parents and then husband for financial security a factor in why brother and sister's material circumstances are so different despite their many commonalities? Though she clearly has access to plenty of money thanks to her mother, Bernadette panics when Kip announces that he wants to be a painter instead of a dentist: "I want to be taken care of," she admits (44). Both Laurie and Sebastian are depicted as in need of care-taking—Laurie due to his illness and poverty, Sebastian due to his supposed mental illness and poverty—but have no romantic or sexual partner to fill this role; in both of these plays, caring for the queer male protagonist falls to his sister and brother-in-law. "We're going to take care of you ... if you let us," Thea says to Laurie (264). However, neither Laurie nor Sebastian ever overtly accept their sister's offer of care; Sebastian, in fact, is ultimately the character most successful at care-giving.

Queer Men as "Natural" Nurturers

In both *Raised in Captivity* and *A Taste of Honey*, women fail at (or simply are not as adept as heteronormativity insists they should be at) mothering, and a queer male character teaches them nurturing skills. Geof in particular provides a sharp contrast with not only Jo, who does not want to be a mother, but with Jo's mother, Helen. "Have I ever laid claim to being a proper mother?" Helen asks Jo when Jo complains that Helen does not clean, cook, or do any of the care-taking tasks that Geof eventually fulfills for her; "If you're too idle cook your own meals you'll just have to cut food out of your diet altogether," Helen tells her teenage daughter,

“That should help you lose a bit of weight, if nothing else” (35). While Helen is not always so actively cruel to Jo, she makes little effort to be a supportive parent. This is likely because for Helen, as for Jo, motherhood is antithetical to happiness; returning after initially abandoning her pregnant daughter, Helen confesses to Jo that while she was away with her latest man, “I never thought about you! It’s a funny thing, I never have done when I’ve been happy” [sic] (81). Helen reveals that she has only returned to Jo because her new husband left her (80), and there is little if any evidence that Helen will be more supportive of Jo at the play’s end than at the beginning, leading Jo to muse that the two are “back where we started” (81). The ending of *Honey* is diametrically opposed to the end of *Raised* in that the child has two unwilling parents, Jo and Helen, bound to it by heredity rather than by genuine desire to be care-takers.

Geof, unlike Jo or Helen, is adept at and enthusiastic about caring not only for Jo but for her unborn child, and seems perplexed that neither woman shares his ability or desire to nurture. “Your mother should know,” Geof says when Jo tells him that she is pregnant; when Jo asks, “Why?” Geof replies simply, “Well, she’s your mother” (50). Geof’s belief in this idea is what brings Helen back into Jo’s life at all, as Geof visits Helen without Jo’s knowledge to inform her of her daughter’s pregnancy (59). “Motherhood is supposed to come natural [sic] to women,” Geof insists to Jo, to which Jo responds, “It comes natural to you, Geoffrey Ingram. You’d make somebody a wonderful wife” (55). Despite this, Geof does not attempt to impress heteronormative gender traits on Jo, but simply helps her take care of herself and prepare for the arrival of her baby. He does, however, openly criticize Helen’s poor parenting:

HELEN: [B]earing a child doesn’t place one under an obligation to it.

GEOF: I should have thought it did.

HELEN: Well, you’ve got another think coming. If she won’t take care of herself that’s her lookout. And don’t stand there looking as if it’s my fault.

GEOF: It’s your grandchild.

HELEN: Oh, shut up, you put years on me. Anyway, I'm having nothing to do with it. She's more than I can cope with, always has been.

GEOF: That's obvious. (61)

Though Bernadette never expresses antipathy about motherhood, Sebastian does instruct her in child-care, much as Geof instructs Helen. For instance, Bernadette tells Kip that Sebastian says she “shouldn’t talk to [the baby] in my natural voice. My natural voice probably gives the baby headaches” (93). Sebastian also has seemingly miraculous success as a parent, teaching Bernadette’s baby to walk at only four months old (113). Whereas Bernadette responds with appreciation and a willingness to learn, Helen responds to Geof’s parenting her child with hostility, calling him a “[b]loody little pansy,” an “arty little freak,” and saying she thought Jo could find herself “something more like a man” (79). The fact that Helen attacks Geof’s gender performance in all of her insults toward him suggests that she feels threatened by his success at a gendered skill, mothering, at which she has failed. Surprisingly, Helen does listen to Geof’s request that she not “frighten” Jo about childbirth. Though she accuses Geof of “trying to tell me what to do with my own daughter” (83), after Geof leaves, Helen tells Jo that she will be all right, just as Geof asks her to do, and even shares her own memories of giving birth to comfort her daughter (84-5).²⁸ However, when Jo tells Helen that Jimmie, the father of her baby, was black, Helen once again becomes hostile. “I ask you, what would you do?” she says, according to the stage directions, directly to the audience, and then leaves Jo to get a drink. It is unclear whether or not Helen or Geof will return to help Jo, who is in labor at the play’s end.

To suggest that queer males are naturally good at nurturing is to make a heterosexist association between gay men and stereotypically feminine traits, but by juxtaposing queer male characters and female characters, these plays avoid such a reductive suggestion. *A Taste of*

²⁸ It is noteworthy that Helen provides a resource to her daughter that only another woman can provide: first-hand, physical knowledge of the birth process. The fact that she only provides this resource at the insistence of a queer male is doubly noteworthy.

Honey, as demonstrated above, separates biological sex from essentialist characteristics: Jo and Helen both have the physical experience of motherhood, but this does not make them able or willing to nurture a child. Sebastian's adeptness at care-taking relative to Bernadette can be connected to the fact that he has experience taking care of another person, Simon, while Bernadette has not had this experience. Nothing in the play suggests that Sebastian is a "natural" nurturer, and neither he nor Bernadette learned how to nurture or support from their mother. Here, the trauma of the AIDS Crisis transforms from a paralyzing wound to a significant skill learned through experience, much like AIDS and valium addiction are configured not as absolute afflictions but as conduits of special abilities in *Angels*. An equivalent reason is not given for Geoffrey's skill as a nurturer, however, nor for his desire to serve this function.

Hurrah at Last, conversely, features a queer male with no interest children or nurturing, and a female who is adept at nurturing but unable to bear a child. "You are *such* a mother," Laurie says to Thea when she nags him about catching a cold (orig. emph. 210); he immediately apologizes for this slip, and Thea confides to him, "There's no baby. We have to start all over again," (211) referring to Eamon and her attempt at artificial insemination. "Oh God, that's so expensive, I mean heartbreaking," says Laurie (211). Thea's femaleness is in flux not because she, like Jo, is unwilling to be a mother, but because she is physically incapable. Thea's barrenness also threatens the security of her heterosexual marriage: "I think he's started to see my body as a sort of—broken machine," she says of Eamon, "or something that rejects part of him that can't be—subsumed by me—" (216). Thea and Eamon appear to have worked through their marital tensions by the play's end, and they will continue using their significant financial resources to attempt to have a child. Laurie, on the other hand, is completely ambivalent to children as well as to the practice of procreation. He is far from a nurturer, as he sneezes in Oliver's baby's face when the infant is foisted upon him (229). When Laurie's mother asks him

why his sister has not yet given her grandchildren, Laurie responds, “I suspect because she doesn’t want to carry this conversation into another generation” (252). As in *Raised* and *Honey*, concern about perpetuating unhealthy parent and child relationships is featured in *Hurrah*, as is anxiety about unwilling mothers directing their unhappiness at their children. When he is in the hospital, and potentially hallucinating from medication, Laurie hears his mother wish that her husband and children would die so that she could have a life that was not necessarily happy but merely “not awful” (276-7). This anxiety is strongly connected to compulsive heterosexuality, or the pressure to procreate which is exacted on individuals in a heteronormative structure.

Queer family, as depicted in *Raised in Captivity* and *A Taste of Honey*, works to remedy this anxiety, not by rejecting child-care but by rejecting the heteronormative compulsion to procreate. Sebastian and Geof not only *want* to be parents but actively fight for parenting rights, unlike Kip, Jo, or Helen. This, perhaps, is what Sam See means when he says that queer family in *Honey* is presented as a positive alternative to the failed heteronormative family (45) which forces women and men into compulsory roles that they do not necessarily want and at which they are therefore likely to fail at the expense of their child. For queer characters in these plays, parenting is a transgressive and positive choice rather than an acceptance of heteronormative convention.

Gay Men Identity Via Care-taking

In Silver’s *Raised in Captivity*, Sebastian’s movement out of traumatized paralysis is signaled by his attention to Bernadette and Kip’s child, and he is not the only character for whom the baby represents a vital change in stasis. For instance, when Hillary asks Bernadette if she still aspires to alcoholism, Bernadette replies:

BERNADETTE: The baby has changed everything. [...] You can't imagine how the world changes. Everything goes from black to white and vice versa. I used to worry, when I was younger, because I was completely without goals of any kind. [...] Now I recognize my lack of ambition was a blessing. I'm a breeder! (74)

Despite Bernadette's enthusiasm for being a parent, she spends far less time with her child than does Sebastian, which Bernadette takes as yet another sign of her brother's unstable mental condition. Bernadette tells Hillary, Sebastian's ex-therapist, that "he lives in the nursery. I mean he *lives* in there. In the nursery. Do you think he's trying to return to a state of innocence he associates with infancy?" (orig. emph. 80). This is not only humorously clever but noteworthy for two reasons: firstly, Bernadette's assessment self-reflexively calls attention to our (the audience's) analytical processes and teases us for attempting to assign such a simple, trite explanation to Sebastian's behavior. Secondly, this may be exactly what Sebastian is doing. However, he also combines caring for Bernadette's child with writing letters to Dylan, and these letters contain fantasies that combine eroticism with care-taking:

SEBASTIAN: And you look peaceful. Like a child, asleep next to me. I wish you would be peaceful. I would love you and protect you. I would take away everything that hurts you. I would have you curl up, inside of me, and stay there forever. [...] I run my fingers over your face and your skin is smooth. Your hair smells clean. I put my mouth on your mouth and on your neck and your cock and I taste you. You smile, groggy, because you are happy and safe. (98)

Sebastian assigns child-like innocence and purity to Dylan in his fantasy. After Dylan ends their correspondence out of concern for Sebastian, Sebastian turns all of his attention to the baby. When Bernadette and Kip finally tell Sebastian that they plan to go to Africa and take the baby with them, Sebastian responds emphatically:

SEBASTIAN: YOU CANNOT TAKE THE BABY! He's special! He needs special attention! He has gifts you don't understand. He's BRILLIANT! [...] And he's more intelligent right now than you'll ever be! He loves me. I play with him and teach him things. He stares at me with no judgment, or fear, or anything. He looks at me like sad dogs playing poker. Total acceptance. You don't even know him. (orig. emph. 105-6)

Here, Sebastian expresses a solidarity between himself and baby, similar to what Geof and Jo celebrate between themselves in *Honey*. According to Sebastian, he and the baby have mutual queerness: the baby is special and needs someone who understands him, and the baby understands and accepts Sebastian, both providing each other with the specialized attention and understanding that he needs.

The mutual needs of parent and child is a theme that appears in all three plays discussed in this chapter. In *Honey*, for example, Jo needs as much care as her child, and Geof fulfills this need. *Raised*, however, sets forth the notion that a parent has needs which can only be met by their child. When Sebastian's dead mother, Miranda, appears to him when he is close to bleeding to death, she chastises him for leaving home and barely communicating with her: "Did you think I didn't need you?" she asks, to which Sebastian replies, "You're not supposed to need me. I'm the child. I'm supposed to need you" (63). Sebastian's later expression of a need for the baby's unconditional acceptance suggests that he has come to understand his mother in this respect. Laurie and his mother, Reva, have a similar conversation in *Hurrah at Last*:

LAURIE: I'd rather not be your confessor in this situation anymore—

REVA: I have to talk to *somebody*—

LAURIE: But to *me*?

REVA: I don't have anybody else—

LAURIE: That's just *weird*. (orig. emph. 246)

Unlike Sebastian, Laurie never expresses an understanding of this uni-directional need for support and understanding between parent and child.²⁹ Sebastian, however, "finds a new purpose through domesticity" (Gross 161), or as Schildcrout more specifically describes:

²⁹ It is worth noting gender difference here: in both *Raised* and *Hurrah*, the mutual needs of parent and child are confined to mother-son relationships. A similar need for mutual support and understanding is not expressed between mother and daughter, and Bernadette recalls only ever receiving criticism from Miranda. "She *adored* you,"

In the end, Sebastian withdraws from sexual relationships and embraces his nurturing side, choosing to care for his sister's newborn baby, whom he names after his dead lover. The final note is both mournful and hopeful, with Sebastian perhaps being released from his romantic obsession with pain and death, and finding comfort in his love for an innocent child. (100)

Though the ending of *Raised* has a positive, hopeful tone, this happy ending does come about, as Schildcrout and Gross both point out, at the expense of the queer male character's sexual activeness. Unlike Gross, however, Schildcrout does not assume that this withdrawal from sex is permanent, and there is no evidence in the play to suggest that Sebastian has unequivocally relinquished sex. In exchange for the valuable understanding that the baby provides him and the sense of purpose that he derives from caring for the baby, does Sebastian give up his queerness for heteronormative family? The fact that the family Sebastian, Bernadette, and the baby make up is assembled rather than formed through procreation subverts compulsive heterosexuality, rendering this family queer rather than heteronormative.

Throughout *Hurrah at Last*, Laurie is a constant voice of resistance against not only procreation but also parenting. After Thea confides to him that her attempts to become pregnant have failed, Laurie tries to comfort his sister by decrying babies in general:

LAURIE: And what is this mania for babies, anyway? I know I speak outside the realm of—philoprogenitivity—and all—but, so what, a baby / I mean, yes, I know they're awfully charming—for *people*—but that stops—and then you have this—irreversible event—reflecting badly on you—for the rest of time. I don't think I've ever given a moment of joy to Mom and Dad. (orig. emph. 212)

Laurie's sentiments can be compared to Geof telling Jo that abortion is an option; in both cases, the queer male works against heteronormative discourse to discourage a female from feeling compelled to procreate. The fact that Laurie, unlike Geof or Sebastian, is seriously ill throughout his play, influences his aversion to children in a way that cannot be ignored. Laurie's illness combined with his antipathy toward babies evokes the homophobic archetype of the gay male

Bernadette tells Sebastian. "You were some perfect, abstract figure in the alcoholic blaze of her imagination" (orig. emph. 17).

and male/male sex as signifiers of disease and death, as the antithesis of birth and life. During Act Two, Laurie's attitude toward children also appears to have infected another character: "I don't know what this mania for babies is, anyway," says Oliver, a father of two, "are they supposed to be redemptive or, as it usually turns out, merely repetitive?" (279). Thea (or potentially Laurie's drug-induced hallucination of Thea) uses Laurie's lack of a family to suggest that his death would not be a significant loss: "I mean, what is your life, really?" she muses, "Take-out dinners and Nick-At-Night?" (273). Thea suggests that because Laurie does not and, as his mother points out, is unlikely to ever have his own family (250), his life is expendable compared to rest of the play's characters who are either already or are potentially biological parents. Laurie's relatively positive ending is a result of more securely integrating with his sister and parents through financial support, unlike Sebastian who finds renewed purpose through helping to raise a child.

Geof, like Sebastian, willingly takes on the role of parent, but he is prevented from fully occupying this role due to heteronormative power, both because it is wielded by Helen and because it absolutely controls the culture in which he lives. Geof admits to Jo that he "like(s) babies," but Jo also points out that he doesn't "show much sign of coming fatherhood" (57); Geof wants to be a father, but if Jo's assessment is correct, he is unlikely to have a biological child with a woman. Geof's sexual preferences remain enigmatic, but his attempt to begin a sexual relationship with Jo and the brutality with which Helen and Peter mock his lack of stereotypical masculinity suggest that he might have difficulty securing a heterosexual female partner in this culture and time period (1958). In another slightly enigmatic exchange, Jo makes this implication:

JO: If you don't like it you can get out, can't you? But you wouldn't do that, would you, Geoffrey? You've no confidence in yourself, have you? You're afraid the girls might laugh ... (56)

If Jo is correct, then she is perhaps his best opportunity for parenthood, and though he says he does not want people to think he is her baby's father (57), living with a woman and helping her raise a child could potentially act as a veneer of heterosexual conformity in a society wherein he is obviously vulnerable to constant verbal attacks. Jo and her baby present a possibility for Geof to have an approximation of heteronormative familial bliss, his access to which is limited either because of his sexual preferences and/or because of how he performs his gender. Though she refuses to marry him, Jo does formally ask him, "Would you like to be the father of my baby, Geoffrey?" to which he replies, "Yes, I would" (57). This queered version of a proposal, wherein Jo has agency over the connection between man and woman due to her reproductive power, is the closest that Geof comes to having a legitimized place in Jo and her child's lives. Geof has tenuous access to parenthood via Jo, but his place in her life exists because she needs care, cannot care for herself, and has no one else to care for her but him (57). However, Geof later expresses the mutual need-fulfillment between care-taker and the cared-for that is expressed in *Raised* and *Hurrah*: "Before I met you I didn't care one way or the other," he tells Jo, "I didn't care whether I lived or died. But now..." (59); this sentiment could apply to two people in love as much as it could apply to parent and child. What exactly is it about Jo that has given Geof's life meaning? When he says this, she has already negated sex or marriage between them. Is it the fact that she needs him to take care of her, or the fact that she is having a child for whom he can care? We are never given a clear picture of who was in Geof's life before Jo and her baby; could it be that he, like Laurie and Sebastian, was characterized by isolation and alienation? Whatever his circumstances before the play begins, those are presumably the circumstances to which he returns when Helen, Jo's heteronormatively-proper care-taker, comes back into her life. When Geof tells Helen that Jo only wants him rather than a woman to be with her when she has the baby, Helen condemns this as "disgusting;" when Geof counters that "[h]usbands stay with their

wives,” she asks, biting, “Are you her husband?” Geof replies that he is not, and Helen tells him to leave, which he does (84). The power of heteronormative mores prevent Geof from crossing certain intimacy thresholds with Jo unless he is her husband, and he is therefore ultimately unable to assert the place in her life that has given him new-found purpose.

Cultural castigation is not as significant a specter in *Raised* as it is in *Honey*. The greatest obstacles facing the characters’ happiness in *Raised* are themselves, and each character is ultimately able to go in the direction that will make them happiest, at the expense of heteronormative structure: Kip leaves his wife and child to go with Hillary to Africa, and Bernadette stays to raise her baby with her brother. Gross references Lee Edelman’s assertion in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* that the “Child has become the embodiment of the Future” to demonstrate how the image of the Child has also “emerged as an increasingly important figure in the ‘90s gay imaginary” (164-5). Rather than a symbol of the vitality of heterosexuality versus the fatality of homosexuality, the child in *Raised in Captivity* represents hope for both Sebastian and Bernadette. To assuage Kip’s guilt before he leaves with Hillary, Bernadette assures him, “you gave me what I wanted when I didn’t know I wanted it. A child, A chance to do something right [sic]” (111). The implication is that a “chance to do something right” is also what the baby represents for Sebastian, a chance to recover from the trauma of caring for Simon, who died horribly in spite of Sebastian’s care. When Sebastian and Bernadette watch the four-month-old baby walk (111), it constitutes proof that Sebastian’s presence in the baby’s life has been miraculously positive. In an exchange with Kip before he leaves, Bernadette elucidates the fact that being a progenitor does not automatically signify love or care-taking:

KIP: He needs a father.

SEBASTIAN: I’ll be the father.

KIP: You?

SEBASTIAN: I love him.

BERNADETE: Did you ever really want the baby? Do you want the baby?

KIP: Yes.

BERNADETTE: Do you hold him?

(No response.)

BERNADETTE: Do you let him know?

(No response.)

SEBASTIAN: I'll be the father. I'll do a good job. I'll do my best. (111)

Gross contends that the “baby becomes enthusiastically adopted as the way to remedy the psychological woes of both brother and sister” (164), but it must be acknowledged that part of what Sebastian and Bernadette mean to remedy is their own traumatic upbringing by an unwilling parent. In his vision of her, Miranda reveals to Sebastian that he and Bernadette are the product of rape (65), and though the truth of this revelation is questioned, it highlights the particular vulnerability of women to heteronormative compulsory motherhood. Bernadette’s child, unlike Bernadette and Sebastian themselves or Jo and Jo’s baby, will be raised by people who choose to be its parents and are not compelled by biological or hereditary interest. However, as discussed earlier in this chapter, it must be acknowledged that there is no sexual interest between the parents of this family, and that both Sebastian and Bernadette have relinquished sexual/erotic relationships—Dylan for Sebastian, and Kip for Bernadette—in order to make this queer family. Do the events of *Raised in Captivity* suggest that a utopian queer family must be composed of opposite-sexed characters who have no sexual interest in each other? This question of sexual interest in queer families becomes increasingly important in Chapter 5 with *The Credeaux Canvas* since this play features a queer family that *includes* sexual interest and is not centered around a child, making it distinct from both *Angels* and *Raised*.

Queer Family

In what way, specifically, does the mother-father-child unit that coalesces at the end of *Raised* constitute a queer family? The parents of this family are not sexually interested in each other, not only because Sebastian seems primarily attracted to men but also because they are brother and sister.³⁰ In *A Taste of Honey*, there is evidence that Geof may have some level of sexual interest in Jo, but he relinquishes or suppresses any extant interest in order to maintain their queer family. Unlike Bernadette and Sebastian, there is no shared family history or biological connection between Jo and Geof, but there is, as previously discussed, queer solidarity in that they are both contrary to and castigated by heterosexist structures. For this reason, it is viable to call the unit of Jo, Geof, and Jo's child a queer family. Furthermore, Sam See explains that *A Taste of Honey* depicts "a world where conventional family units are destructive and queer families/communities are life-sustaining" (45); is this also true of *Raised in Captivity*?

In that they both resist or disconnect from heteronormative structures, Bernadette and Sebastian do share a kind of queer solidarity. Bernadette rejects the foundational heteronormative convention of marriage by telling Kip to leave, and when Kip questions Sebastian's right to act as father to her child, Bernadette supports her brother and undercuts Kip's claim to their child. Though Kip is not portrayed as a villain in this play, his exit from the family does constitute an expulsion of the Father "in order to dismantle hegemonic, patriarchal heterosexism and to revolutionize systems of normality" (36), which See claims also occurs in *Honey*. Whereas in *Honey* the biological father of Jo's baby is merely absent, in *Raised* brother and sister collaborate to encourage the biological father to leave. Given what we are told about Bernadette and Sebastian's experiences with their mother and the fact that Kip admits to not

³⁰ It must be acknowledged, in the interest of respecting all types of queer visibility, that being siblings does not absolutely preclude two characters from being sexually interested in each other. However, Bernadette and Sebastian show no signs toward this end during the course of the play.

showing affection for the baby, it is valid to claim that *Raised* also depicts the queer family as a positive alternative to the conventional family, particularly when that conventional family emerges from compulsory procreation.

Rather than a hostile attack against the notion of family, *Raised in Captivity* works to recuperate the positive effects of familial bonds. “In this country, in this culture children turn on their parents,” Hillary dismisses Kip’s claim that he did not hate his parents, “Maybe not everywhere, but here, burdened down as we are, stooped over, under the weight of Freud, it’s true” (87). Here, Hillary depicts the heteronormative family as a harmful structure which must be obliterated. Indeed, Schildcrout points out that the majority of Nicky Silver’s plays “feature a prodigal gay son who returns home, bringing with him some shameful crime (incest, murder, pedophilia), and this transgression creates a rupture in the façade of familial stability and happiness” (96). *Raised*, however, deviates from this trend in that the “prodigal gay son” is marked not by a crime but by trauma. Sebastian is associated with “shameful crime” via Dylan and Simon, but he commits no crimes himself. Additionally, Sebastian is not directly responsible for the “rupture in the façade of familial stability and happiness” in this play. In fact, it is unlikely that Sebastian would have reconnected with his sister, Bernadette, and her family at all if their mother had not died in a freak accident. A close examination reveals that there is not so much a rupture of family life in this play as there are shifts: Kip gives up dentistry, Kip and Bernadette have a child, Sebastian comes to live with them (at Bernadette’s insistence), Sebastian secludes himself with their child, Sebastian’s therapist comes to live with them and has an affair with Kip, and finally Hillary and Kip go away to Africa together, leaving not a ruptured but a new (and radically queer) family of Bernadette, Sebastian, and the child. In the play’s final moments, Sebastian asks Bernadette if they can name the baby after his deceased lover, Simon:

SEBASTIAN: I held his hand and helped him. And I really cared for him. He was very smart. And very beautiful. To me.

BERNADETTE: He sounds very nice.

SEBASTIAN: He wasn't. Really. Before he died, he slept with several people. I think. Willfully.

BERNADETTE: Oh?

SEBASTIAN: I think he killed them. (*He turns away from her.*)

BERNADETTE: Oh.

SEBASTIAN: I never said that before. I think he did. I think he meant to. (*He starts to cry*) But I love ... (*Inaudible*) him. (113)

After this confession, Sebastian is finally able to mourn Simon as well as his mother. “Only when Dylan terminates his correspondence with Sebastian,” Gross summarizes, “and Sebastian can admit the roots of his conflicted feelings about Simon, can he begin to mourn [...] and the play can come to its conclusion” (160). Gross sees this as Sebastian rejecting not only his gay identity but also sex and desire, and he claims that the final message of the play is that the post-AIDS gay man must reject the previous conventions of gay culture, including sex with men, in order to find solace in the conventions of heterosexual family. “[Sebastian’s] movement from his biological family to gay existence is from the first an impoverishment,” says Gross (160), referencing the fact that Sebastian left his wealthy family and does not have financial stability until he returns to his sister’s house. This is similar to the movement made in *Hurrah at Last*, wherein the queer character is distinguished from the heterosexually-married characters via poverty. Gross points out that returning to the family is, in essence, a reverse-coming-out for Sebastian:

Raised in Captivity reverses a common narrative of modernity—one that recounts the emergence of the individual out of a stifling and inhibiting world of domesticity [...] The emergence of the individual out of a constricting domestic world found particular resonance within the coming-out narrative. Indeed, *Raise in Captivity* can be seen as an inversion of that delicately closeted proto-coming-out drama, *The Glass Menagerie* [...] But whereas Tom Wingfield leaves home in pursuit of his desire, Sebastian renounces desire and returns home. (161)

The biological family as a source of comfort, safety, and support is a potent image in the wake of the hideous trauma of the AIDS Crisis. Does the recuperation of these positive effects of family—comfort, safety, and support—necessarily signal or require the abdication of queer desire, as Gross suggests? Can a family be queer without queer desire? The families that emerge in these plays are queer because they subvert compulsory heterosexuality by featuring individuals who take on certain care-taking roles without the biological/hereditary component attached to these roles in heteronormative family structures. The question remains, however, of whether male/male desire or same-sex desire in general need to be obliterated or removed in order for these families to function.

Geof in *A Taste of Honey* does not return to his biological family to escape the poverty, illness, and trauma of queer life in a heterosexist world but rather partners with another adult to raise a child. “It’s a bit daft talking about getting married, isn’t it?” Jo asks Geof in the play’s final scene, “We’re already married. We’ve been married for a thousand years” (76). Jo’s home is a safe space where she and Geof are “married” because they feel and declare that they are. In this way, Geof and Jo’s queer family is very similar to the queer relationships explored in Chapter 5 which are defined by the exclusion of external individuals and structures in order to protect the legitimacy of the queer community. It is noteworthy, however, that Jo says the above line to Geof immediately after he tentatively brings up her refusal to marry him again, saying, “Oh well, you need somebody to love you while you’re looking for someone to love,” and Jo responds by saying that Geof would “make a funny father” (76). It is unclear whether Jo means to deride Geof’s ability to be a parent to her child or if she is only commenting on the uniqueness of their queer family. Soon after this exchange, Helen returns unexpectedly, and Geof says he doesn’t “mind moving out” (78), whereas earlier he said that he would rather die than be away from Jo (59). Ultimately, it is difficult to identify any lasting benefits that Geof receives from his

time with Jo, and it is noteworthy that his exit occurs soon after Jo once again negates the idea of marriage and says he would make a “funny” father. Jo, on the other hand, demonstrates an increase in happiness and confidence as a result of her time with Geof. When Helen questions the appropriateness of her living arrangement, Jo tells her mother:

I've been performing a perfectly normal, healthy function. We're wonderful! Do you know, for the first time in my life I feel really important. I feel as though as though I could take care of the whole world. I even feel as though I could take care of you, too!
(81)

Does this statement imply that Jo will take care of both her baby and Helen in the new arrangement? Regardless, the notion that a family unit comprised of a queer male, an unmarried woman, and her child is “perfectly normal” and “healthy” is a radically queer declaration, particularly in 1958 England. Though the positive effects of queer family are evident for Jo, however, Geof is ultimately excluded from even a queer family. This, perhaps, is the root of what some scholars find problematic about plays such as *Raised in Captivity* and *Hurrah at Last*: can such a heteronormative emblem as the family, even if it is unconventional, ever truly coexist with queerness without obfuscating or diffusing it? This question is of particular important to this study since all four of the focal plays generate a type of queer family through the interaction of differently-gendered characters.

In his 1987 essay, *Is the Rectum a Grave?*, celebrated queer theorist Leo Bersani examines the ways in which family was used to justify the marginalization of queer individuals during the AIDS crisis. “The media targets ‘an imaginary national family unit which is both white and heterosexual,’” Bersani quotes from Simon Watney’s 1987 book, *Politicizing Desire: Pornography, AIDS, and the Media* (203). Furthermore, Bersani explains, media works to create specific heteronormative criteria for family that are more powerful than biology:

TV doesn’t make the family, but it makes the family *mean* in a certain way. That is, it makes an exceptionally sharp distinction between the family as a biological unit and as a

cultural identity, and it does this by teaching us the attributes and attitudes by which people who thought they were already in a family actually only *begin to qualify* as belonging to a family. (orig. emph. 203)

Just as gay culture developed out of the revolutionary politically project of gay pride, in 1980s America, heteronormative power developed a cultural identity of family in opposition to gay culture and as a way to juxtapose gay identity with the vitality of birth and life associated with family, insidiously aligning gay culture and same-sex desire with disease and death. The exegeses of this reflected in both *Raised in Captivity* and *Hurrah at Last*. Bersani points out that the “definition of the family *as an identity* is, inherently, an exclusionary process, and the cultural product has no obligation whatsoever to coincide exactly with its natural referent” (orig. emph. 203) which means, essentially, that the queer male can be made to have no place even in his own biological family. It is noteworthy, therefore, that in *A Taste of Honey* and *Raised in Captivity* (as well as in the plays featured in Chapter 5), queer family is also formed through an exclusionary process, separating the queer family unit from heterosexist culture and its affiliated castigation and harmful processes, such as compulsory procreation. Essentially, the queer family excludes the uninitiated and judgmental privileged, those belonging to heteronormativity. Therefore, while the notion of the post-AIDS queer male rejecting gay culture to return to the family is not unproblematic, the family unit represented in *Raised in Captivity* is queer in that it audaciously redefines the “attitudes and attributes” that define family, commandeering a definitional power that was formerly controlled by heteronormative discourse. Additionally, if we are to take these plays as well as *Angels in America* as characteristic of the post-gay era, then it must be the case that this era is animated by a need to revisit, fracture, and explore previous notions of gay identity, and queer family is one permutation of this process.

Chapter 5

Queer Triangles and Bunin's *The Credeaux Canvas*

Queer family involving male and female characters emerges as a major post-gay characteristic in *Angels in America* as well as in *Raised in Captivity*. Whereas Chapter 4 specifically deals with queer family and the act of caring for children, particularly a queer man helping a straight woman care for a child, Chapter Five examines another kind of queer family wherein the family does not develop because of or around a child, though care-taking is not irrelevant in these relationships. Each of the plays examined in this chapter includes a relationship not between a male and female but among a male, male, and female character, each of them equally well-developed and significant to the play's action. Though children are not a factor in these three-person relationships, these relationships similarly mimic and subvert heteronormative family structure in that they intertwine sexual desire, non-sexual affection, and parental care-taking, but it is the fluidity of these types of affect—as well as the degree to which these feelings and actions flow among the three characters—that makes these relationships queer. Within each of these three-character units exists both male/male and male/female desire and affection, often simultaneously. Whereas the queer families featured in the culminations of *Angels* and *Raised* do not involve sexual interest between male and female characters—or even, indeed, between male and male characters³¹—the queer families in this chapter are catalyzed and sustained by male/female sexual interest, and so the implications of gender difference in these relationships are profoundly different from those in the plays discussed thus far.

Keith Bunin's play *The Credeaux Canvas*, which enjoyed a successful off-Broadway run at Playwrights Horizons in 2001, focuses on the relationships of three young people who scheme

³¹ In *Angels*, Louis and Prior are both in the final queer family and have a past romantic and sexual relationship, but this relationship is concluded at the play's end.

to create and sell a fake painting. Jamie, who makes little money in his real-estate job and has been left out of his recently-deceased father's will, commissions his best friend and roommate, Winston, a struggling visual-arts graduate student, to paint Jamie's girlfriend, Amelia, a waitress and aspiring singer, in the style of the master artist, Credeaux. Passing the painting off as part of his father's secret collection, Jamie offers to sell it to one of his father's rich, elderly clients. In addition to the obvious moral qualms, Winston and Amelia are initially hesitant about Jamie's plan because Credeaux is famous for his paintings of nude prostitutes, which puts the two of them in a compromising position that eventually leads to an affair. Due to the complicated nature of these characters' relationships, the fluid movement of desire and love among the three of them, and the hermetic nature of their bond, *The Credeaux Canvas* features what some scholars call a "queer community," a type of radical queer subjectivity which is defined by its inclusion of male/male as well as male/female desire.

Noel Coward's *Design for Living* (1933) and Joe Orton's *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* (1964) are extremely helpful in contextualizing *Credeaux* and for elucidating its distinctness as a post-gay play. Though neither Coward nor Orton's play can be called contemporary, both still enjoy healthy production lives and both hold a significant place in queer theatre history. In *Still Acting Gay* (2000), John Clum calls *Design* "revolutionary" for its overt references to subverting codes and labels which defined queer life in 1930s America and Great Britain (103); in Coward's play, three friends – Otto, Leo, and Gilda – wrestle for each other's companionship before deciding to flout social mores and live as a threesome. Though it is produced less frequently than *Design*, *Sloane* is equally revolutionary, if not more so. In Orton's play, siblings Kath and Ed compete for the attention and affection of Sloane, a handsome young man with no family and a dark past; after Sloane murders Kath and Ed's father, the two of them blackmail Sloane into a three-way sharing arrangement. Queer literary theorist Sam See, in his article "Other Kitchen Sinks, Other

Drawing Rooms: Radical Designs for Living in Pre-1968 British Drama” (2004), argues that *Sloane* “anticipates the unambiguous vocality and physicality of post-1968 queer plays” (46). In Great Britain and the United States, the end of the 1960s saw the end of the Lord Chamberlain’s censorship and the momentous Stonewall Riots, and while *Sloane* certainly indicates a movement toward openness and visibility, its audacious queerness and dark humor distinguishes this play even today.

These three very different plays have in common three main characters, two men and one woman, who are connected to each other and isolated from others by a complex, ambiguous conflagration of desire, affection, and transgression. Is it justifiable, however, to call these relationships examples of radical queer subjectivity? Might these relationships simply be called complex love triangles? This chapter will examine this highly specific form of queer subjectivity in drama, paying special attention to the position of the single female character in these triangular configurations. By exploring the ways that the specialized mechanics of these m/m/f triangles intimately connect the characters in ways that almost paradoxically reinscribe and subvert heteronormative structures of gender, desire, and intimacy, this chapter will demonstrate how these plays not only fall into the post-gay category but also contain a radical critique of identity-based politics.

Radically Queer?

One of the difficulties in discussing the unusual relationships featured in these plays, which is also a primary reason why these relationships are radically queer, is that they resist familiar definitions. The term *ménage a trios* does not necessarily describe the interaction of the

male/male/female trios in these plays;³² while at least two of the three characters share a sexual relationship in each play, it is not clearly the case that they each have sex with each of the other members, nor that they all three engage in sex simultaneously. This is not absolutely outside the realm of possibility for these characters, particularly in *Design*, but it is not as prominent as other aspects of the relationships. These are also not love triangles for two major reasons: firstly, the two male characters are not simply competing for the affection of the female character in any of these plays, and more fundamentally, these relationships are not defined by competition but by intimacy and connection among the three characters (even if that connection is murder or fraud). Another possible term for describing these relationships, though it still does not satisfactorily meet all of the aspects of these fictional relationships, is polyamory.

Polyamory is a highly codified form of real-world queer life that includes a variety of types of relationships and communities. Elisabeth Sheff's doctoral thesis, "Exploring Polyamorous Community" (2005) provides an in-depth ethnographic study of contemporary polyamory in the United States with attention to gender. The polyamorous communities/queer triangles featured in these three plays may bear certain resemblances to real-life communities, but they are not meant to represent or reference actual polyamorous individuals. Though these characters' relationships are certainly queer, and though certain characteristics of polyamory are useful for categorizing them as such, these characters do not call themselves polyamorous or consciously use any of the terms associated with real-world poly- configurations. There are, however, useful similarities between polyamory and the m/m/f relationships in these plays, both in the ways that polyamory can be defined as a queer practice and paradoxically reinscribes and subverts heteronormative, patriarchal structures.

³² These three plays also subvert the heteronormative "male fantasy" of a threesome with one man and two women, which is a configuration that Sheff discusses frequently in her study of real-world polyamorous communities. The creation of the m/m/f "family" is another significant way in which these fictional queer triangles subvert heteronormative structures without eliding the implications of gender difference.

Like the triangular relationships in these plays, a major feature of polyamory is, ironically, exclusion, even the exclusion of certain other Others. Real-life polyamorous communities, as well as the fictional triangles depicted in these three plays, exclude multiple types of other identities, including gay-identifying men and women. As Sheff summarizes, “the dearth of gays and lesbians, working class people, or people of color denies the polyamorous movement a more varied opinion base that might make it relevant to a broader social segment beyond the confines of its own small universe” (298). Here, Sheff underlines the hermetic, exclusive nature of polyamorous communities. “The racial and ethnic composition of the polyamorous communities in my sample,” Sheff goes on to explain, “both reinforced and reflected racial and class power arrangements by allowing whites greater access to deviant relationship forms” (299). A correlation between Sheff’s findings and theatrical representation can be made on the point of race/ethnicity: the play texts as well as dominant casting choices suggest that the characters in these triangular relationships are white and of European descent. That the majority of mainstream gay, lesbian, and queer plays feature white, American/European characters is a factor that many contemporary theorists have said both reflects and reinforces the lower socio-political risk that this group faces when exhibiting queer subjectivity. If *Design*’s Otto and Leo were not white, British, and relatively well-off, their open disregard for societal rules might generate more serious consequences in a realistic play. Though women are not excluded from polyamory or from the three-person relationships in these plays, both Sheff’s study and a close-reading of these plays demonstrates gender-based marginalization. As Meg Barker and Darren Langdrige point out in their introduction to *Understanding Non-Monogamies* (2010), scholars remain conflicted regarding whether polyamory is primarily a “potentially feminist, queer or otherwise radical way of structuring and managing relationships” or a practice that works to insidiously “reproduce and reinforce hetero- and mono-normativity in

various ways rather than challenging them” (4). In addition to excluding (intentionally or not) non-white, non-European, lower-status individuals, Sheff also points out a “glaring absence of lesbians and gay men in the mainstream polyamorous subculture” (175). While this factor may appear to undermine polyamory’s status as a queer practice, Sheff also suggests that “awareness of polyamorous possibility may allow some men to conceive of new modes of relationship previously unimagined. It is this proliferation of choice that challenges hegemonic masculinity far more than any individual counter-hegemonic act” (241). Though it problematically excludes and/or marginalizes a variety of Others, polyamory also subtly destabilizes heteronormative gender structures, though not, Sheff suggests, in a politically-oriented way. “[P]olyamory is such a fluid relationship style, with such passionately contested boundaries, that it is difficult to use as a base for identity politics” (Sheff 181). Here, Sheff is discussing why polyamorists and gay/lesbian activists typically do not mesh well as political or identificatory allies. However, this apolitical tendency of polyamorous configurations makes this type of relationship particularly relevant to this study as the interrogation of identity and identity-based politics is affiliated with post-gay theorization, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Polyamory, as well as the relationships in these three plays, presents unconventional ways of living queer. While sex with multiple partners may not necessarily be a radical act, what is radically queer about the polyamorous communities in these plays is the importance of emotional/affective queerness in addition to sexual/erotic queerness. The friendships in these plays, such as the male/male friendship between Winston and Jamie, do not necessarily have an erotic/sexual component but are tied to sexual/erotic relationships via the third person (in this case, Jamie’s sexual relationship with Amelia). In these three-person units, sexual/erotic flavor radiates out to influence emotional/affective relationships in a queer way. For instance, it is as Amelia and Winston progress toward sexual intimacy with each other (both of them naked) that

Amelia brings up Winston's sexuality and Jamie's suspicion that Winston "might be gay" (31). Polyamory is also relevant to *Credeaux* in that this practice is built on the notion that all of an individual's sexual, erotic, romantic, intimate, and emotional needs cannot necessarily be fulfilled by a monogamous relationship as it is defined by heteronormative hegemony. In her essay "What's Queer About Non-Monogamy Now?" (2010), Eleanor Wilkinson argues that "compulsory monogamy disadvantages not just the polyamorist, but a whole host of people whose lives and loves fall outside of this conventional dyadic ideal" (243). In the scene referenced above, Amelia seeks intimate information about Jamie from Winston; she begins by asking about Jamie's former girlfriends, and culminates in asking whether Winston thinks Jamie genuinely loves her (30-1). This implies that while Amelia is sexually intimate with Jamie, she believes that Winston shares stronger emotional intimacy with him. Indeed, even after Winston and Amelia begin a sexual relationship with each other, neither Winston nor Jamie treat the other as a rival for Amelia's affection; in fact, when Jamie finds out about their affair, Winston is more concerned about preserving his relationship with Jamie than with Amelia. While polyamory may not be a direct correlative to the relationships featured in these plays, the fluidity of emotional, erotic, and sexual intimacy that defines polyamory is a major part of what makes these dramatic relationships radically queer.

In "Other Kitchen Sinks, Other Drawing Rooms: Radical Designs for Living in Pre-1968 British Drama" (2004), queer theorist Sam See examines *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* and *Design for Living* and explains how the three-person communities in these plays make them radically queer. Notably, he opposes well-known gay male studies scholars such as John M. Clum (*Still Acting Gay*) and Alan Sinfield (*Out Onstage*) who consider these plays examples of closeted or incomplete depictions of male/male love. See's insightful essay is essential to this study as he not only sets forth criteria for identifying these "queer communities" but also presents a compelling

argument for alternative ways of identifying queerness in drama. Though the plays that See discusses were written pre-1970, his reasoning can be productively applied to *The Credeaux Canvas* and other post-gay plays, as his argument that queer visibility need not be restricted to same-sex-couples-in-love is certainly post-gay. See argues that these plays “are being misread in the present political climate because of their questionable ‘queer visibility,’ as their less than flag-bearing queer characters hardly fit the narrow margins of ‘positive representation’ that queer theorists and gay/lesbian scholars seem to so desire in queer literature,” focusing his analysis “on how the rigid binary definition of heterosexual/homosexual cannot and does not account for the people these communities include;” the exclusion of queer communities such as those presented in *Sloane* and *Design*, says See, “reinforces the need, strength, and difference (visibility) of those communities” (32). See’s assessment reinforces the notion that the male/male/female relationships in these plays are examples of radical queer subjectivities.

See’s argument, and indeed the queer/post-gay theoretical movement, can be linked to the Foucaultian notion that opposing a dominant discourse while still using the structures of that discourse does not destabilize but rather validates and perpetuates that discourse. For example, championing homosexuality as a stable political and identity category which is defined by its opposite, heterosexuality, may seem to be a revolutionary act; however, it risks reducing the visibility of any other subjectivity which is not heterosexuality. Some queer scholars argue that, in an effort to forge politically-productive solidarity, the Gay Pride movement created a restrictive structure in which only certain types of relationships—namely exclusive male/male or female/female relationships which involve sex—are deemed queer. Specifically, because the two male characters in *Sloane* and *Design* do not end up in monogamous, sexual relationships with each other but rather in ambiguously erotic relationships that involve a female, scholars such as Clum claim that these plays remain closeted. Alan Sinfield, however, cautions against viewing

this play “as a mask for the ‘real’ feeling between the two men” and insists that “the queer interest is in the threesome” (103). See goes further, arguing that these are “queer plays: they cleave, fracture, and remold conventional identity models; they resist monolithic conceptions of both hetero- and homosexualities” (33). See also offers a highly cogent definition of the term “queer”:

“Queer” is a word appropriated by contemporary queer theorists to embrace all forms of sexual otherness, not just the gay/lesbian lives indicated by “homosexual.” It is the most apposite term to describe the polyamorous, frequently bisexual characters in these works and the unconventional communities that those characters create. After all, not all queers are gay. (34)

It is the ambiguity of the male characters’ relationships, both in *Sloane* and in *Design*, that causes Clum and others to call them closeted: are these two men in love? Do they have sex with each other? Do they desire each other sexually? These questions are not explicitly answered in these plays.³³ However, it is this ambiguity which See identifies as powerfully queer. For instance, See maintains that Otto and Leo in Coward’s *Design* are, “for all their variability and indefinability, *queer*” (orig. emph. 41), whereas Clum views these traits as a lack of commitment to homosexual representation and claims that “Coward, like Harold Pinter and Joe Orton, removed the danger of homosexual relationships by making his characters bisexual” (87). Clum acknowledges, however, that Coward’s play is “most revolutionary” in that its focus is “the freedom not to be defined by codes of sexual behavior—not to have to be heterosexual or homosexual” (87). Despite this, Clum ultimately frames the “triangle” as a technology for concealing and diffusing male/male desire (87). See calls *Design* an example of a “fautline” play (36), using Sinfield’s term to delineate plays that “address the awkward, unresolved issues [and] hinge upon a fundamental, unresolved ideological complication that finds its way, willy-nilly, into texts” (*Cultural* 4). *Credeaux*, perhaps even more than *Sloane* or *Design*, includes

³³ It is arguable that Ed and Sloane’s relationship in *Sloane* is overtly sexual, or at least erotic. As discussed later in this chapter, their first encounter involves a conversation about Sloane exercising naked and wearing leather trousers without underwear. However, this conversation is composed of euphemisms and codes.

“awkward, unresolved” complexities of character relationships, and there is certainly a fine line between ambiguous homoerotic desire and none at all. However, See rejects the need to prove that same-sex sexual desire exists in order to call these three-person relationships queer, emphasizing instead the hermetic, sealed-off nature of these relationships which tie the three characters together in isolation from the rest of their society.

The three characters in these relationships share connections that cannot be understood by and/or would provoke punishment from the outside world. “By challenging social norms through the creation of a hermetic queer subculture,” See explains, plays such as *Sloane* and *Design* present “revolutionary ways of thinking about sexual identities and sexual lives” (39). It is not the specific practices or emotions involved in these three-person relationships that render them queer, but the fact that these relationships are non-normative in a way that isolates their participants. See calls for queer theorists to develop “a strategic essentialist perspective in critical theory that allows for variability in identification and that, above all, *denormalizes* sexual practices and sexual identities” (orig. emph. 41). In her 1997 book *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life*, queer and gender theorist Marjorie Garber supports See’s argument:

The question of whether someone was “really” straight or “really” gay misrecognizes the nature of sexuality, which is fluid, not fixed, a narrative that changes over time rather than a fixed identity, however complex. The erotic discovery of bisexuality is the fact that it reveals sexuality to be a process of growth, transformation, and surprise, not a stable and knowable state of being. (66)

Garber also calls bisexuality “not just another sexual orientation but rather a sexuality that undoes sexual orientation as a category” (65). This perspective is contrary to Clum’s assessment of bisexuality as a cover for homosexuality. See asserts that the relationships in these plays are examples of “polyamorous *bisexuality*,” and that scholars’ preoccupation with “the monolithic *homosexual*” eclipse this powerful type of queerness (orig. emph. 42). In his essay “The

Transforming Power of Queer Love” (1997), Brad Wishon explains that “in queer relationship[s] [...] old structures, by and large, do not work. Therefore a change in the way we create relationship is mandated by the very nature of queer relationship” (109). A dyadic relationship, though between same-sex individuals, is not the most potent way to resist heteronormativity. Though a same-sex dyad may be the most direct opposite of a heterosexual dyad, it is still a dyad, an “old structure,” which prompts scholars such as Garber and Clum to emphasize the resistant power of non-dyadic/non-monogamous desire and relationships that include differently-gendered individuals.

Though these plays do not mirror polyamory in a real-world context, Sheff’s findings in her ethnographic study of polyamorous communities suggest that this practice subverts heteronormativity though they, like the communities in these plays, are not strictly homosexual. Citing contemporary theories regarding masculinity, Sheff claims that “[m]en who deviated from norms of masculinity—be they gay, disabled, short, polyamorous, or anything but white—transgress hegemonic expectations” (210); though few of the men (or women) in her study self-identified as gay, she reports that “virtually all polyamorous men” in her study “experienced stigma, and some the unintended loss of privilege that accompanied rejection of hegemonic masculinity” (211-2). This implies that being involved in a polyamorous relationship has the effect of Othering the participants, even if they are not necessarily engaged in same-sex sex. I would like to posit that to be Othered due to your intimate relationships—affectionate, erotic, or sexual—is to be queer, and that the hermetic nature of the triangular relationships in these plays marks the characters as Others, though they cannot be neatly categorized into conventional Othered identities such as homosexual. “Instead of forcing their sexual desires into conventional models,” See explains, “these characters scorn those models and create a community of their own, using whatever terms and models they see fit” (47). The non-normative, polymorphous-

affective models that form the queer communities in *Sloane*, *Design*, and *Credeaux* render them radically queer.

Mechanics of a Queer Triangle

What specifically, are these non-normative models, the particular mechanics that govern the queer communities (or as I will refer to them from here on “queer triangles”) featured in these plays? Some of the terminology used to describe real-world polyamorous relationships are useful for this purpose. For instance, in her study, Sheff found that “Vees were loosely structured, three-member relationships with one member who was intimately connected to each of the two others” (108). According to this definition, the three principle characters in *Credeaux Canvas* comprise a Vee, since Amelia is sexually involved with both Winston and Jamie. It could be argued that the queer triangles in *Sloane* and *Design* are also Vees: Gilda in *Design* has been at least romantic with both Otto and Leo, and Kath and Ed both desire Sloane intimately. However, sexual or at least erotic intimacy is implied between Otto and Leo and between Kath and Ed much moreso than between Winston and Jamie, which would make them more triangular than Vee-shaped. In the real-life Vees that Sheff encountered, “[t]he relationship between the other two non-lovers ranged from strangers, who were aware of and cordial with each other, through casual friends, to enemies” (108). Even in *Credeaux*, wherein Jamie and Winston do not appear to have an erotic or sexual relationship, the two men are much more than “casual friends,” so Vees do not encompass the nuances of these dramatic relationships. “Triads,” another model which Sheff encountered in her study, “generally contained three sexually-involved adults, commonly understood as a *ménage-a-trio*” (109). Though it connects the three characters more strongly, this model also does not adequately describe the relationships among these characters,

which may be intimate and erotic though not explicitly sexual. However, Sheff also invented her own term, a “*polyaffective triad*” (Sheff’s emphasis), to describe “a group of three people who were not all sexually involved, but who related on an emotionally intimate level and considered one another family” and feature a “much higher degree of emotional intimacy between the non-sexual partners” (110-1). In his essay in *Understanding Non-Monogamies* (2010), Barry D. Adam also describes “triads” as consisting of “three equal members,” distinct from other types of “three-way” relationships wherein one member is usually “secondary” to the “primary couple” (63). All three of the plays in this chapter might be said to include characteristics of a polyaffective triad, though the particulars of equality, affection, and sex may differ.

Because the sets of three characters in these plays are certainly linked in a queer manner but do not fit neatly into either a Vee or Triad category, I will refer to them as queer triangles. This term engages both the notion of a queer community, as discussed by See, and triangulated desire, as discussed by Girard. Rene Girard’s model, as described in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (1972), “consists simply of a subject, an object, and a mediator of the subject and object’s desire; the role of each person in the triangle can shift depending upon how the participants’ affections flow” (See 37). The fluidity of this model is appropriate to the shifting and ambiguous connections among the characters in all three plays discussed here. In *Between Men* (1985), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explains that Girard’s erotic triangle is “structured by the relation of rivalry between two active members of an erotic triangle” (21) and points out that Girard emphasizes the bond between the two rivals whose desire often has less to do with the object itself but with the fact that their rival desires it. Sedgwick argues, therefore, that “it is the bond between males that he most assiduously uncovers” (21), as the typical configuration in Girard’s example is male/male/female with the female as the desired person. However, Sedgwick also demonstrates that, since Girard did not point out the gender trends in his own examples, his model of subject,

object, and mediator “would be relatively unaffected by the power difference that would be introduced by a change in the gender of one of the participants” (23). See claims that Sedgwick “reconfigured” Girard’s triangle to focus on “how homosocial desire between two men is accentuated by the presence of a female in the triangle” (37). In other words, rather than a triangle in which the gender of certain occupants of certain positions (two desirers and one desired) is irrelevant, Sedgwick points out that since a female occupies the desired position in the majority of Girard’s examples, it is significant that two males occupy the desiring positions between which, Girard maintains, there exists the strongest bond (21). “[T]he whole question of arrangements between genders,” Sedgwick claims, “is deeply and inescapably inscribed in the structure even of relationships that seem to exclude women—even in male homosocial/homosexual relationships” (25). In essence, Sedgwick frames the erotic triangle as a model of patriarchal power: women are present as objects of desire, but they form the axis of the more potent and active relationships between men. This essentially describes the trajectory of the queer triangle in *The Credeaux Canvas*: ultimately, Winston’s relationship with Jamie is stronger and more significant to him than his relationship with Amelia. The two male characters also interact with the external world, while the female character intrudes and disrupts their transaction, inadvertently causing the dissolution of the triangle.

While Sedgwick’s configuration may seem most appropriate to this study as it attends to how gender difference affects queer subjectivity, See points out that Sedgwick’s model “risks reducing our reading of this triangular relationships to a homosexual bond that is merely mediated by a token female” (37). Sedgwick’s model reduces the female to a mediator of male/male desire and does not accommodate male/female desire or simultaneous desire, both of which are implicit in these plays. Girard’s shifting model also excludes the possibility of simultaneous desire since each of the three must be occupying a subject, object, or mediator

position at any given moment. The relationships in these plays, therefore, exhibit characteristics of literary models such as Girard's and Sedgwick's "triangular desire" as well as real-world polyamory terms such as "Vees," "Triads," and "polyaffective triads," but none of these pre-existing terms describe these dramatic relationships exactly. Therefore, the term I will use to refer to the particular type of male/male/female relationships in these plays is a queer triangle. A queer triangle is a three-person relationship in which desire is fluid, connecting the three participants in different and unpredictable ways, but the defining characteristic of a queer triangle or a queer community is its exclusivity: the community is hermetically sealed off from the outside world, usually in an effort to protect or conceal things about the community and its members that the external world does not condone or understand. Each of these plays features a queer triangle, but each triangle relies on its own set of shared rules and mechanics.

While the particular circumstances that influence and direct each of these queer triangles is distinct, *Sloane*, *Design*, and *Credeaux* have in common a hermetically sealed condition. See uses this aspect to delineate the plays in his own study:

One of the queerest aspects of these plays' depictions of queer lives is that those depictions come in the form of exclusive, nearly hermetic family structures. In all three plays, the characters establish isolated communities or subcultures where who is kept in the group is just as important as who is kept out. (36)

In *Credeaux*, this exclusivity resonates on every dramatic level: the entire play takes place in Jamie and Winston's small, isolated, idiosyncratic apartment (the dishes are in the bathroom, and knowing this signals familiarity and belonging [24]), and the only other character in the play only appears once, in the climactic scene, which constitutes a disruption that ultimately leads to the disintegration of the queer triangle. In addition, the three principle characters are joined not only by the crime they intend to commit, but by their shared knowledge that Amelia has posed nude for the fake painting. When Jamie proposes this plan, Amelia points out the non-normative

nature of this aspect to Jamie: “You want me to take off my clothes for your roommate?” to which Jamie replies, “Winston and I will be the only ones who’ll ever know it was you” (19). This queer triangle, then, is united by a double-secret which they must keep from the rest of the world or risk legal repercussions as well as shame. Speaking of Orton’s *Sloane*, See claims that queer theorist Leo Bersani would call the “play’s emphasis on the forbidden and on the ‘outlaw’ nature of this play’s sexual Others makes those characters all the more distinct from the majority and, hence, all the more conspicuously queer” (48). Here, See is referencing Bersani’s conception of queer resistance:

There are some glorious precedents for thinking of homosexuality as truly disruptive—as a *force* not limited to the modest goals of tolerance for diverse lifestyles, but in fact mandating the politically unacceptable and politically indispensable choice of an outlaw existence. (orig. emph. 76)

Amelia, Winston, and Jamie are outlaws, but not in the unrepentant and malicious way that Kath, Ed, and especially Sloane are outlaws. The three of them, however, also occupy the fringes of the mainstream, just as Kath’s house is next to a garbage dump, just on the edge of civilization. Amelia, Winston, and Jamie are young, poor, and pursuing goals that might be criticized as idealistic, frivolous, and impractical. Similarly, See calls the characters of *Sloane* “queers who reject all standard notions of relationality and community to create a truly radical space in which to live, a space in which they can, as Orton himself says, ‘reject all the values of society and enjoy sex’ (quoted in Lahr, *Diaries*, 251)” (See 49). Much like Geoff and Jo in Delaney’s *A Taste of Honey*, the characters who composed the queer triangles in *Credeaux* and *Sloane* risk castigation from the outside world because of their non-normative and queerly familial relationships. However, these characters’ queer relationships are paralleled by their very real crimes, fraud in *Credeaux* and murder in *Sloane*. These queer triangles, therefore, disrupt not only heteronormative structures but actively resist external law and morality.

These triangles are sealed-off by a common secret or understanding, but how do the characters negotiate power and desire within the triangle itself? In all three plays, jealousy becomes an issue among the characters because one character has sex with and/or is romantically involved with the other two characters in the triangle. In *Design* and *Sloane*, the queer triangle forms partially in order to deal with this conflict by creating a type of relationship that can accommodate simultaneous and fluid desire. Sam See describes how in *Design for Living*, “the trio’s desires are contained within the erotic triangle,” for instance, “but the fluidity (read: queerness) of their desires permits for shifts in who plays which role when and between whom the ‘primary’ (subject/object) bond exists” (38).³⁴ This containment of desire is also true of *Credeaux* because Winston, Jamie, and Amelia never express desire or affection for anyone besides each other,³⁵ but the switching of “primary” partners that occurs in their triangle is somewhat more precarious. Though jealousy arises in *Design* and *Sloane*, it does so because Kath and Ed and Otto and Leo each know that the other is their rival for the affection of Mr. Sloane and Gilda, respectively. In *Credeaux*, Jamie encourages Amelia and Winston to become closer because he loves them both, but he does not appear to consider the possibility that the two of them will begin a sexual relationship once Winston starts painting Amelia nude; when Amelia reveals this to him, Jamie takes it as a tremendous betrayal. In *Design for Living*, the fluidity of desire in the queer triangle precludes the need to establish one primary relationship between two characters, which is what ultimately becomes the contention point in *Credeaux*. See explains how this equality of relationships, regardless of their sexual or romantic nature, reinforces the queer power of the *Design* triangle:

³⁴ See also uses the term “hinge” to describe the “mediator” character, a term from real-life polyamorous practice (38).

³⁵ This is true until the play’s last scene when Amelia tells Winston about her husband. However, at this point, their queer triangle has long since disintegrated.

Leo's "everyone loves everyone" speech is stylistically paratactic: each love relationship is placed on equal ground with the next; love for Gilda is not seen as "superior" or "more real" than the men's love for each other. As Leo tells Gilda, "It doesn't matter who loves who the most; you can't line up things like that mathematically. We all love each other a lot, far too much" (*DFL* 19). And since we know that "love" for Gilda is both erotic and friendly (both men at one point sleep with Gilda), why should we not assume that "love" between Otto and Leo is equally composed of both *eros* and *philia*? And more to the point, since they have already proclaimed that they "love" one [an]other, what do we really care what these men choose to do in bed? (See 40)

As Leo astutely observes, conventional relationship mathematics cannot be applied to these queer triangles, and this disconnect between societal norms and the desires of these characters is what functions to hermetically seal them off from the rest of the world. However, this disconnect does not mean that the queer triangles are free from conflicts of desire and power.

While the hierarchy of desire in these queer triangles may be fluid so that one type of love is not above others, a separate, more strictly power-based hierarchy develops within these triangles to structure the often delicate negotiations that occur among the characters. "Our lives are diametrically opposed to ordinary social convention," Otto asserts in *Design*, "We've jilted them and eliminated them and we've got to find our own solutions for our own peculiar moral problems" (58). What is most noteworthy about Otto's claim here is the implication that a queer community cannot use "normal" morals or power structures, either to judge themselves or to direct their behavior. A set of ethics that was created by or applies to persons external to the triangle has no value or authority within the queer triangle. Therefore, according to Otto, the community must find its own answers and develop its own code of conduct, but how to do so? Where does the power to establish and enforce these specialized morals lie in the community? The answer, at least in these plays, depends entirely on the queer community. In *Credeaux*, the group's coherence depends on Amelia and Winston's deference to Jamie, whereas in *Sloane*, Ed and Kath negotiate their shared power over Sloane to maintain their arrangement.

Sloane is particularly rich with overt power negotiations that involve the specific boundaries of Kath's and Ed's relationships with the shared object of their desire, Mr. Sloane. For instance, when Ed calls Sloane "a good boy" in front of Kath, she presses to see if she can also wield this linguistic power:

KATH: Mr. Sloane.

SLOANE: What?

KATH: Can *I* call you Boy?

SLOANE: I don't think you'd better.

KATH: Why not?

ED: I'm his employer, see. He knows that you're only his landlady. (orig. emph. 109)³⁶

Therefore, one of the rules that governs this queer triangle is material-based: Ed pays Sloane to work for him (though what kind of work he actually does is left ambiguous), and thus he has more authority over Sloane than Kath, who is paid *by* Sloane (ostensibly) to live in her house. The characters of *Sloane* use social structures, titles and (gendered) status more than *Credeaux* or *Designs*, and it is this mimicking of normative structure that makes this play distinctly subversive, as is discussed further later in this chapter. See points out, additionally, how Kath and particularly Ed use heteronormative rules to negotiate power within their queer triangle: "Ed knows how social stigma works, and he works it to one-up Kath in the game of winning Sloane's affection" (47). Though Ed is initially more adept at this game, Kath uses the threat of judicial authority to stake her own claim to Sloane at the play's end. In the final scene, Ed has Sloane leave the room while and he and Kath discuss the specifics of their "partnership:" each gets him for six months at a time, "[a]s long as the agreement lasts" (148). This is the most specifically and overtly codified queer triangle in this study as Ed refers to a physical contract, whereas the triangles and the structures that govern them in *Design* and *Credeaux* are more subsumed, though equally significant.

³⁶ The fact that Kath explains that she would not call Sloane by this diminutive nick-name "in front of strangers" (110) reinforces the hermetic quality of the triangle.

Aping and Subverting Heteronormative Structures

Authority and affection in these queer triangles often mimics familial structures and relationships. See describes the three-person relationships in *Sloane* and *Design* as “surrogate or anti-conventional (read: non-nuclear) family units that, while they may mimic conventional families in interesting ways, resemble communities in a more general sense than they do traditional families” (32). This mimicking of heteronormative conventions such as nuclear families and gender roles resonates in real-life polyamorous communities, as well. In her study, for instance, Sheff observed that, “[p]olyamorous women skirted the boundaries of commingled identity characteristics, by simultaneously challenging and participating in, aspects of sexual subjectivity and objectification” (183). By both “challenging and participating in” heteronormative conventions of family structure, the characters involved in these queer triangles reflect the pervasiveness of these structures while simultaneously undermining them.

Each of the three plays examined in this chapter features a Father figure who serves as a monolith against whom the queer triangle defines itself. In his discussion of queer communities, See engages Julia Kristeva’s “Law of the Father” model, pointing out how instead of the Father expelling queerness, in these plays “queer communities expel the Father in order to dismantle hegemonic, patriarchal heterosexism and to revolutionize systems of normality” (36). In *Credeaux*, Jamie’s dead Father is an unseen antagonist who pushes the three of them into the situation that drives the play’s action, and Jamie’s actions in particular are all motivated by his father’s rejection. Kemp, who See identifies as the Father in *Sloane*, similarly condemns both of his children, Ed and Kath, as well as Sloane for immorality, “a common reaction of Fathers” in plays featuring queer communities (See 48). Whereas Jamie attempts to negate his father by forming his own family, and the characters in *Design* merely send Gilda’s fiancé away, the characters in *Sloane* take more direct and permanent action. See argues that the fact that Sloane

kills Kemp on stage “enhanc[es] this family’s queerness” and makes their “depiction all the more radical” (48); presumably, Kath and Ed’s nonplussed complicity in covering up Sloane’s crime contributes to this queer radicalness. While Jamie’s father and Gilda’s fiancé are powerful psycho-emotional forces in their plays, they only condemn the characters for violating social mores. Similarly, Kemp judges both of his children for sexual deviance, Kath, for having a child out of wedlock, and Ed, for “committing some kind of felony in the bedroom” (71), presumably with Kath’s child’s father. Kath and Ed live with Kemp and his disappointment, and Ed even seems desperate to reconcile with his father, but Kemp’s objection to Sloane is significantly more serious. While he is suspect of Sloane throughout the play, it is not until he remembers that Sloane committed a murder that Sloane kills him to protect his secret. It is this murder of the Father figure, the ultimate expulsion of not only heteronormativity but also conventional justice, that allows Kath and Ed to coerce Sloane into a structured queer triangle.

Entertaining Mr. Sloane differs most dramatically from *Design for Living* and *The Credeaux Canvas* in that it depicts familial relationships—queer and otherwise—as manipulative and dysfunctional rather than affectionate and nurturing. “In contrast to Coward or Delaney’s more positive depictions of relatively ‘happy’ or ‘well-adjusted’ queer families,” says See, speaking of *Design* as well as Shelagh Delany’s *A Taste of Honey* (featured in Chapter 4), “Orton perverts both conventional morality and conventional family structures by creating a queer community where violence, duplicity, and betrayal rule the day” (46). See aptly sums up the play’s plot with this statement: “Sloane, a young bisexual man, enters and disrupts the brother/sister/father family community” (46), which suggests that Sloane’s intrusion dissolves a heteronormative, biological family to make way for a queer family composed of a child/sex object (Sloane), a father/brother/husband (Ed), and a mother/sister/wife (Kath). In fact, Sloane immediately uses the fact that he “never had no family” to manipulate Kath into inviting him to

live with her and her father “as one of the family” (67). In this first scene of the play, Kath also immediately starts making Sloane a proxy for both her child and her husband. “My husband was a mere boy,” she tells him, “That sounds awful doesn’t it?” (66). Kath also intimates to Sloane that her biological brother and father do not constitute family, from her perspective, likely because they were responsible for separating her from her young husband:

KATH: Poor boy. Alone in the world. Like me.

SLOANE: You’re not alone.

KATH: I am. (*Pause.*) Almost alone. (*Pause.*) If I’d been allowed to keep my boy I’d not be. (*Pause.*) You’re almost the same age as he would be. You’ve got the same refinement.

SLOANE (*slowly*): I need ... understanding.

KATH: You do, don’t you? (68)

Kath’s connection with Sloane, which she imbues with the lost connection to both her child and husband, is more valuable to her than biology because it involves specialized emotional understanding. Kath employs no subtlety in describing her relationship with Sloane, telling Ed “I’m to be his mamma” (83). Sloane plays into this conflation of motherly and erotic affection, engaging in sex with Kath at the end of the first scene. As the play progresses, this conflation becomes more pronounced as Kath couches her jealousy of Sloane’s other lovers in terms of a concerned mother:

KATH: I hope you behaved yourself.

SLOANE: One of the hostesses gave me her number. Told me to ring her.

KATH: Take no notice of her. She might not be nice.

SLOANE: Not nice?

KATH: She might be a party girl.

Pause.

SLOANE: What exactly do you mean?

KATH: Mamma worries for you.

SLOANE: You’re attempting to run my life. (97)

Though it is never as overt as the above exchange, Ed also assumes a parental air with both Sloane and Kath. Regardless, Sloane maintains the upper-hand in both relationships until he

murders Kemp and must rely on Kath and Ed to cover up his crime. Because they are both parental figures and lovers and therefore occupy neither role completely, Kath and Ed seem unable to exert enough force from either role to affect Sloane's behavior; it is only the threat of external, legal consequences (imprisonment or execution) that allows them to dominate him in the end. In *Look Back in Gender: Sexuality and the Family in Post-War British Drama* (1987), Michelene Wandor describes Sloane as a victim in this queer triangle:

Sloane becomes the child (property) in this unholy semi-incestuous brother-and-sister-parent relationship, as if the presence of tabooed sexualities, mother/son, brother/sister, man/man, have themselves totally overthrown all standard familial and sexual values, but can still only be justified if they ape the semblance of a conventional family structure. (56)

I argue, however, that this “aping” is what generates aggressive, radical queerness not only in *Sloane* but in *Design* and *Credeaux*: it is the overlapping of familial relationships with fluid sexual/erotic desire and multiple kinds of immorality that gives this play its subversive teeth. Orton's *What the Butler Saw* employs a similar tactic, though the incest in this play is accidental. “Orton does anything but try to ‘justify’ his characters’ lives through obedience to social norms,” See insists, “On the contrary, the playwright perverts those social norms” (47). Clum makes a similar claim and attaches it to Orton's use of farce:

In raising questions about the gender order assumed and policed by the closet, farce also raised questions about the stability of hetero and homosexuality, terms that imply their opposites but that also imply a stability of desire counter to the language and vision of farce. (96)

Though *Credeaux* and *Design* do not employ farce, both plays flout order and undermine stability in similar ways to *Sloane*: the characters in these plays not only audaciously reject social and legal rules but do so for the sake of their queer family. “What kind of freedom is there in an evil,” asks Leo Bersani in *Homos* (1995), “that makes each of its moves in response to an accepted virtue?” (162). In this chapter, titled “Gay Outlaws,” Bersani discusses Jean Genet's assertion that immorality—including betrayal, deceit, and murder—are implicit in queer sex (and

for Genet, specifically in male/male sex) because of its symbolic rejection of accepted rules, laws, and ethics. Queer sex, according to Genet, is as incomprehensible to heteronormative society as betrayal is to conventional morality. What these plays do that is radical is depict queer outlaws in queer families, conflating immorality and criminals with family, the wholesome, foundational structure that is supposed to prevent and protect against such aberrations. Even though Gilda, Otto, and Leo do not deliberately participate in crime on the level seen in *Credeaux* and *Sloane*, their cavalier rejections of external values, rules, and structures makes them outlaws in their own right. If this queer triangle of characters rejects such a basic social tenet as the sanctity of dyadic relationships, we might ask, who's to say they wouldn't also commit fraud or cover up murder to protect the interests of their hermetic family unit?

Does *Credeaux* feature a similar “aping” of the heteronormative family which generates queerness? Jamie certainly describes the conspiracy that he wishes to undertake with Winston and Amelia in terms of care-taking and love. After telling them that his father completely left Jamie out of his will, leaving him destitute, Jamie proclaims to Winston and Amelia:

But suddenly this morning it's crystal clear to me precisely how I should be spending my days. I should spend them helping you. I want to help the two of you. [...] I love the two of you more than anything else in this world. So it's my fondest desire to dedicate all my resources to being your guardian angel. (20)

Whereas the solution to the condemning Father in *Sloane* is murder, Jamie fights his father's rejection by creating his own family of which he is a nurturing, affectionate father. Later, after the painting scheme has fallen through and Jamie believes Amelia is pregnant with his child, he is eager to move from his proxy-family (Amelia and Winston) to a heteronormative family, despite Amelia's reservations about his motives:

AMELIA: Anyway, in the end all you want is some girl to wrap her arms around you and protect you from your father who's dead anyway.

JAMIE: I know I'm a mess about my father.

AMELIA: And it infects everything you touch.

JAMIE: Right, screw him, I should leave him in the dust, I should build a family for myself, I should do it right, that would be the best revenge, don't you think? (48)

Shortly after this exchange, Amelia reveals that she and Winston have been having an affair, and Jamie is so absorb in his role as self-appointed Father that he takes responsibility even for this. After physically attacking Winston, Jamie laughs and says, “*I did this, didn't I?*” (orig. emph. 49) before offering to leave the two of them alone together. Like Kath in *Sloane*, Jamie's family-fantasy-fulfillment depends on the other characters accepting their roles in relation to his; while Jamie is not as literal and overt as Kath about his desire to parent Winston and Amelia, this queer triangle relies on their willingness to accept his care-taking. According to Michelene Wandor, family “proxies” such as this are “sustained by private ritual, by ways of speaking and behaving which constitute a private replacement for a real social milieu in which they can be themselves” (67).³⁷ In both *Sloane* and *Credeaux*, characters deliberately construct a queer family-proxy to replace unsatisfactory and/or absent heteronormative family.

To suggest that the queer triangles in these plays are merely failed substitutes for heteronormative families is to ignore the resistant power of these configurations. Referring to Wandor's claim that the characters in *Sloane* “ape the semblance of a conventional family structure” (56) in order to validate their lives, See argues that there is a distinction between emulating and mocking:

Wandor's use of the verb “ape” [is] an astute word choice insofar as aping means not so much just imitating (though this is the sense in which Wandor uses it) but mocking, scorning, and deriding through imitation [...] *Sloane*, Ed, Kath, and Kath's baby do not create a queer version of a heterosexual family; they quite simply create a queer family, a group in which all standards are overthrown. They do not try to justify their lives, but in challenging systems of normality, they quite radically ask the dominant ideology to justify itself. (48)

³⁷ Here, Wandor is specifically describing Charles Dyer's 1996 play *Staircase* which features a male/male relationship rather than a queer triangle. However, because these two male characters share “a sexual identity which is socially problematical and therefore cannot be clearly defined or named with comfort” (67), See's comparison is appropriate.

While See's observations are astute, it is also important to recognize that Ed, Kath, and Sloane enter into their queer triangle not in a concerted effort to challenge "dominant ideology" but to serve their own desires and needs, and using the devices and structures with which they are familiar. Similarly, Amelia, Jamie, and Winston use their knowledge of a world that preexists and influences them to take control of their own destinies. Jamie's father unfairly left him with nothing, and he and his friends are helpless to the whims of a social structure that does not care whether or not they are happy and fulfilled, or even whether or not they eat more than one meal a day (Bunin 17). They live in squalor, and it is becoming apparent to each of them, at the play's beginning, that their hard work will never pay off. "I know we've been proceeding under the rubric that talent will out," Jamie says after revealing his scheme, "but I'm terrified you'll both work your fingers to the bone for years on end and nothing will ever happen" (20). If they cannot live honestly and succeed, then they will use their combined knowledge and resources to manipulate the system which confines them. Each of their success (in the schema that Jamie creates, at least) relies on their connection to the other two; like Kath, Ed, and Sloane, they form a queer community to serve their own needs and desires when normative structures fail them.

Out of the three plays discussed in this chapter, *Design for Living* references heteronormative family structures the least, and also ends with what is arguably the happiest, healthiest queer triangle. Sloane is objectified and marginalized at the end of *Sloane*, and *Credeaux* ends with Jamie's suicide and Winston and Amelia living unfulfilling lives. Does *Credeaux* imply, then, that queer community is an unhealthy and unsustainable substitution for a normative family? Given the way that Jamie's relationship with his father is depicted, this seems unlikely. Furthermore, Amelia's husband and children give her "peace" and "relief" but she admits that she can occasionally "*feel* the life draining out" of her (orig. emph. 57). Amelia, Winston, and Jamie's queer community forms and exists while they are all three still in a phase

of their lives when achieving their dreams (of being a famous painter/singer, of being a capable and beloved provider) still seems possible, and the queer triangle they form is depicted as part of this potential, ideal (utopian) reality. Aping heteronormative family relationships is only one aspect of the radical queerness of these plays, and it is only part of the complex connective tissue that binds these triangles together.

Sharing and Power

Though the members of a triangle may have very different relationships, each of the queer triangles in these plays is connected by a crucial shared element that leads to equal agency among the three members. In *Design for Living*, this connection is love, affection, friendship, and a shared delight in flouting society's rules. In *Sloane*, Kath, Ed, and Sloane are connected by erotic desire, self-preservation, and shared knowledge of a crime. The characters in *Credeaux* also share knowledge of a crime, but they also share a need to be recognized and validated. In each play, the other members of the queer triangle are the only people who can possibly fulfill this need for each other, and it is this shared need that hermetically seals the queer community from outsiders. However, the shared elements of each triangle are also what create vulnerability and risk for each character involved, generating mutual investment as well as mutual power. Though at certain points in each play two characters may appear to grow closer at the expense of both of their relationships with the third, this coupling is always temporary and heavily influenced by the third person. For instance, though Amelia and Winston appear to cut Jamie out of the triangle when they begin their affair, in actuality he remains a crucial presence between them, even after his death. See uses Girard's model of triangular desire to describe this effect:

[R]egardless of the modifications, there is always a subject/object bond and always a mediator of that bond in the three characters' relationships. In fact, this queer family

depends upon the presence of a mediator between the subject/object bond, even though that mediator may be physically absent from the relationship and even though the subject/object bond is ostensibly the “strongest” of that present moment. (orig. emph. 38)

While See is specifically discussing *Design* here, the subject/object/mediator structure is equally relevant to *Credeaux*. Just as Gilda and Leo “think and speak constantly of Otto” even after moving away together (See 38), Amelia and Winston talk almost exclusively about Jamie and their relationships with him when they are alone together. Though Kath and Ed treat each other as rivals for Sloane’s affection, each spends a significant amount of time discussing the other when alone with Sloane. It is also revealed that Sloane is not the first young man for whose affection the brother and sister have competed: “She married a mate of mine,” Ed tells Sloane about Kath, “a valiant man – we were together in Africa” (85). It is heavily implied that Kath’s young husband, with whom she had her child who was taken away, is the same person with whom Kemp caught Ed committing a “felony in the bedroom” (71). Whereas their shared desire for this man lead to Ed’s domineering treatment of Kath visible at the play’s beginning, their common desire for Sloane and knowledge that he is a murderer leads to equal power between the siblings. “Perhaps we can share you,” Ed says to Sloane after Kath threatens to go to the police if Ed takes Sloane away from her (146). The brother and sister then specifically negotiate the terms of this sharing plan (147) and part decidedly amicably. In *Design*, Otto, Leo, and Gilda similarly go through a process of competing with each other for each other’s attention, but ultimately overcome this competition by forming a queer triangle wherein sharing is possible. In both plays, the triangular sharing is cemented by the expulsion of an outsider, Kemp in the case of *Sloane*, and Gilda’s husband Ernest in *Design*.

The queer triangles of *Sloane*, *Design*, and *Credeaux* are characterized by conflict over the characters’ shared desire, but threats from outside forces creates solidarity among the characters in spite of this conflict. The stability of the queer triangle depends, it seems, on having

something or someone to define itself against. For instance, See points out that Gilda, Otto, and Leo successfully put forth “unified resistance” against Ernest, Gilda’s husband who neither understands nor approves of her relationship with the other men (or the men’s relationship with each other), which “emphasizes the triad’s solidarity” (39). This resistance not only strengthens the characters’ connections to each other but also lends them queer power. “By disrupting the hermetic unit just as a foreign organism disrupts the animal body,” See explains, “Ernest forces the broken family to reunite *en masse* in order to purge its ‘invader,’” and this “unified resistance emphasizes the triad’s solidarity and, as such, amplifies its visible queerness” (39). When Amelia, Winston, and Jamie’s communal space is invaded (and it is noteworthy that they, unlike the characters of *Sloane* or *Design*, invite this interloper), this invasion leads to the disintegration of their queer community. Tess, one of Jamie’s father’s former clients, comes to the threesome’s apartment to look at the fake Credeaux painting which Jamie is attempting to sell to her. It is also noteworthy that only Winston and Jamie are present when Tess invades, and it is Amelia’s unplanned presence that gives up the game. Tess’s presence in the triangle’s shared space, the apartment where the painting forgery was planned and executed, constitutes a risk: the apartment is no longer a safe place for triangle but a place where they might be revealed. While Tess is there, in fact, Amelia cannot be present at all, since she is the subject of the fake painting. By barging into the apartment, Amelia thwarts the shared scheme which originally bound the three of them, but she also reasserts the agreement on which the triangle was founded: “If any one of us isn’t happy with the results,” Jamie says in the play’s first scene, “we’ll call the whole thing off” (19). Tess leaves the apartment, and the plan by which Jamie hoped to financially support all three of them fails, but their queer triangle is not destroyed by this failure. In the case of *Credeaux*, it is the conflict over shared desire—both emotional and sexual—that ultimately separates these three characters. Whereas in *Design* and *Sloane*, the members of the triangles rise

above their conflicts to protect against outside forces, in *Credeaux* the sealing of the queer triangle at the play's beginning creates a pressurized environment in which the characters' competing desires intensify and explode.

Love versus Sex

Physical and emotional intimacy are interestingly conflated in these queer triangles. In award-winning writer/director D. R. Hood's film *Wreckers* (2011), a dark triangle of power, love, and desire develops among a newly-married couple and the husband's younger brother; in the final act, the wife confronts her brother-in-law and insists that he leave, ending the disruption his presence has caused in her marriage. She claims that her husband hates his brother, to which the brother replies, "He fucks you, but he loves me." Though Winston would never express this so directly, this separation of sex and love is implicit in *The Credeaux Canvas*, and it becomes truly problematic once the three characters are sealed together by their scheme. Jamie appears to demonstrate great trust in both of the other members of the triangle when he leaves Winston to paint Amelia nude. From a conventional, heteronormative perspective, the risk for Jamie in this situation is that Winston will seduce or be tempted by Amelia. However, this and the other queer triangles discussed in this chapter subvert heteronormative conventions by endowing each of the three characters with power to challenge the love between the others. For instance, although Jamie and Amelia obviously share a romantic and sexual relationship, Winston and Jamie share a connection that is equally if not more intimate and vulnerable to attack. Amelia demonstrates this when she asks Winston about Jamie's past girlfriends, then asks if Winston believes Jamie is in love with her; this implies that not only is Winston a doorway to Jamie's sexual/romantic history for Amelia, since he has known Jamie much longer than she, but also that Winston shares a

deeper connection to Jamie than she (30). Furthermore, after Amelia presses, Winston finally tells her, “No. I don’t think he’s in love with you. I think he’s just looking at you, because you’re so pretty” (31). Amelia takes this to heart, and the fact that she believes Winston is a better judge of their relationship than she is belies a deep, significant connection between the two men. It is also implied that Jamie’s (and therefore Winston’s) relationship with Amelia is fleeting since so many of Jamie’s girlfriends have come and gone while he and Winston remain connected.

Though Jamie is absent during this scene, Winston and Amelia do not function only as subject and object with Jamie as a hinge; rather, they both at different points in the scene mediate the other’s relationship with Jamie. Amelia asks Winston to objectively evaluate her relationship with Jamie, and he confirms her doubts about Jamie’s love for her, destabilizing Amelia and Jamie’s bond. However, Amelia also objectively evaluates and destabilizes Winston’s relationship with Jamie, though more subtly so:

AMELIA: (*Suddenly very incisive.*) Listen: Do you ever feel that there’s something maybe a little suspicious in the way Jamie thinks we’re both so brilliant? Given how little either one of us has actually managed to accomplish thus far?

WINSTON: I’m not quite, um, I’m not sure what you mean.

AMELIA: It’s just, the reasons Jamie so fervently insists that we’re geniuses, sometimes I think they have a whole lot more to do with him than they do with us. (28)

This can be construed as a moment where Amelia, perhaps unintentionally, undermines Winston’s relationship with Jamie, much as he tells her that Jamie does not love her. After both characters’ relationships with the third are destabilized, they move into subject/object positions with each other, making love at the scene’s end.

In the cases of all three plays, it could be argued that the relationship between the two male characters in each triangle is not overtly sexual, erotic, or romantic. As discussed earlier in this chapter, gay male studies critics have contended that *Sloane* and *Design* are, for this reason,

closeted and therefore unsatisfactory depictions of queer relationships. In his rebuttal of these critics, See specifically challenges the “troubling assumption” that queer characters must “physically demonstrate their affection for one another in order to be recognized as queer” (40). Queer theorist George Haggerty, in his 1999 book, *Men in Love: Masculinity and Sexuality in the Eighteenth Century*, asserts that “[l]ove as *eros* and love as *philia* cannot be readily distinguished” in all cases, and that “it is too easy to eliminate the erotic when dealing with relations between men” (40). In other words, the fact that we do not see male characters interact physically in a sexual manner does not mean that no sexual desire exists between them; moreover, the intimacy and affective significance of a male/male relationship should not be dismissed if sexual/erotic desire is not overtly present. We see Sloane and Kath in a sexual embrace, but Sloane and Ed’s conversation about gym habits and leather is arguably more erotic than any of Kath and Sloane’s interactions. After giving Ed a detailed description of his fitness regimen, Sloane assures Ed of his flexibility:

SLOANE: Yes, yes. I’m an all rounder. A great all rounder. In anything you care to mention. Even in life.

(ED *lifts up a warning finger.*)

... yes I like a good work out now and then.

ED: I used to do a lot of that at one time. With my mate ... we used to do all what you’ve just said. (86)

SLOANE: I’ve got a full chest. Narrow hips. My biceps are—

ED: Do you wear leather ... next to the skin? Leather jeans, say? Without ... aah ...

SLOANE: Pants?

ED: (*laughs*). Get away! (87)

While critics such as John Clum call this exchange coded and closeted, it is equally if not more likely that this exchange is directly referencing and poking fun at the coding and closeting that defined queer depiction in pre-1970s British and American drama. Ed and Sloane may not have sex in view of the audience, or at all during the course of the play, but their relationship is brimming with erotic desire.

Though Winston and Jamie do not have a comparably erotic exchange, *Credeaux* is unique to both *Sloane* and *Design* in that the characters explicitly acknowledge the possibility of *eros* between the two males:

AMELIA: Jamie thinks you might be gay.

WINSTON: (*Laughs lamely.*) Yeah, I sort of figured Jamie might think that.

AMELIA: (*A little waspishly.*) Well, who do you like better, girls or boys?

WINSTON: (*with a weak smile.*) That, you know, that's like asking a man crawling across the Sahara desert whether he prefers Poland Spring or Deer Park.

This exchange features two post-gay traits: it normalizes gayness as a possible identity, and it then challenges the hetero/homosexual binary. In fact, Winston then implies that he is asexual, which is another type of queer sexuality:

I grew up watching my brothers maul cheerleaders in the back seat of our Malibu Classic, or I look at you and Jamie wrapped around each other on his futon, theoretically I understand what you all get out of it but I've never been able to see how it applies to me. (31)

Later in the play, when Winston insists that his and Amelia's affair was meaningless to him, she wonders aloud, "Or maybe you want to fuck Jamie, and I'm the closest you could get," to which Winston replies, "Now you're just trying to be hateful" (53). What sets this play apart from *Sloane* and *Design* and simultaneously supports See's argument regarding physical love and queer visibility is that Winston *tells* Amelia that sex does not carry the same kind of emotional meaning for him that it does for her and, apparently, for Jamie. For Winston, sex does not signify *eros*, and it cannot, therefore, be used as a marker of queer desire.

What is perhaps most radical about the queer subjectivity in *Credeaux* is that it overtly disentangles love and sex. Speaking of *Design*, See argues that this separation is necessary to the progress of queer dramatic criticism:

[T]he queer *philia* Otto and Leo share is the very sort of non-overtly sexual demonstration that needs to be acknowledged and embraced by gay/lesbian and queer scholars [...] Are we to assume from this argument that the sexual act itself is the only “real” or “radical” (in the face of heterosexism) expression of queer affection? For Clum, Medhurst, and Sinfield, it would seem that saying “I love you” is not a sufficient expression of queer love. (40)

Just as the lack of overt sexual affection between Jamie and Winston does not preclude queer love between them, sex does not necessarily indicate love between Winston and Amelia. Whereas Amelia believed that she and Winston’s sexual relationship and close friendship meant that they were in love, Winston implies that he slept with and spent time with Amelia in service to Jamie’s plan (51). “I don’t want you to go,” Winston begs when Jamie is packing to leave after learning of Winston and Amelia’s affair. “Believe it or not,” Winston insists, “I was, um, just trying to help” (54). Winston’s primary loyalty, and the relationship that he values most, is with Jamie. Similarly, Sloane explicitly agrees to Ed’s desires and terms in the play’s final scene while he never willingly consents to Kath’s claim on him:

I’m very bad. Only you can help me on the road to a useful life. (*Pause.*) A couple of years ago I met a man similar to yourself. Same outlook on life. A dead ringer for you as far as physique went. He was an expert on the adolescent male body. He’s completed an exhaustive study of his subject before I met him. During the course of one magical night he talked to me of his principles – offered me a job if I would accept them. Like a fool I turned him down. What an opportunity I lost, Ed. If you were to make the same demands, I’d answer loudly in the affirmative [...] Any arrangement you fancy. (135)

It is likely that Sloane’s consenting to Ed rather than Kath is just as motivated by Ed’s greater social and economic status than by any kind of love, but he does couch his consent in decidedly erotic terms. Not only, then, do the male characters in these plays demonstrate deep though potentially non-physicalized affection and desire for each other,³⁸ but they occasionally do so at the expense of the triangle’s only female participant.

³⁸ Though the physical enactment of male/male desire is not explicitly written into either *Design* or *Sloane*, a physical relationship between Leo and Otto or between Ed and Sloane could, of course, be explicitly depicted on stage, depending on the particular production.

Desire Between a Man and Woman

While each of these plays includes an overt romantic/sexual relationship between a male and a female character, the female character is also the most likely to be marginalized in each of the queer triangles. *Sloane* is the most overt about this marginalization, depicting Kath as well as Sloane's unseen female lovers as untrustworthy. "Give me your word you're not vaginalatrous," Ed insists to Sloane early in the play (88), ostensibly to protect his sister's reputation since Sloane will be staying in her home as a lodger. A subsequent conversation between Ed and Kath, however, reveals that Ed is more concerned about Kath's corrupting influence on the young man:

KATH: I love him 'cause I have no little boy of my own. And if you send him away I shall cry like the time you took my real baby.

ED: You were wicked then.

KATH: I know.

ED: Being rude. Ruining my little matie. Teaching him nasty things. That's why I sent it away. (*Pause.*) You're not doing rude things with this kiddy, are you, like you did with Tommy? (107)

Ed's ultimate fear, it seems, is that Kath will become pregnant by Sloane as she did by Ed's friend Tommy in the past. For this reason, Ed warns Sloane against all women:

ED: You never know where you are with half of them.

SLOANE: All the same it's necessary.

ED: Ah well, you're talking of a different subject entirely. It's necessary. Occassionally. But it's got to be kept within bounds.

SLOANE: I'm with you there. All the way. (113)

This, like many of the exchanges in *Sloane*, is fascinatingly enigmatic: why is it necessary to "occasionally" have sex with women? Does this refer to procreation, or simply to the maintenance of heteronormative appearances? In either case, Kath's (and all women's) place in Ed and Sloane's world is peripheral, to be limited, because they are not trustworthy and because

they, unlike men, can become pregnant. “I warned you against women, didn’t I?” Ed says to Sloane when he learns that Kath is (according to her) pregnant with his child, “They land you in impossible predicaments of this nature” (147). When Ed and Sloane plan to go away together, leaving Kath alone to deal with Kemp’s death and with her unborn child, she employs heteronormative notions of gender essentialism—that women are necessary because men and women have different and complimentary inherent traits—to convince Sloane to stay:

KATH: Can’t manage without a woman.

ED: Let him try.

KATH: Women are necessary.

ED: Granted.

KATH: Where’s your argument?

ED: In limited doses.

KATH: You’re silly, Eddie, silly...

ED: Let him choose. Let’s have it in black and white, boy.

SLOANE: I’m going with Ed. [...]

KATH: Is it because I’m pregnant?

SLOANE: No. Better opportunities. A new life. (141).

Ultimately, Kath asserts her place in the triangle in spite of this, using the same opportunistic methods as Sloane.

At first glance, it may seem that all three of these queer triangles are actually examples of male/male love (*eros* and/or *philia*) complicated and disrupted by a female character. For instance, Winston berates Amelia for ruining his and Winston’s friendship by revealing their affair, saying that she should have simply disappeared from both of their lives:

Jamie would’ve cried for a week, but then he would’ve gotten over it, and we could all, you know, get back to our lives. [...] I don’t want to have to find a new roommate, I’m used to Jamie, I can work around him, and, you know, I hate meeting new people. (50)

Winston suggests that he at least viewed his and Jamie's apartment as a hermetic universe which excluded "new people," and that Amelia was an interloper, a disruption in their lives. However, a closer look at the specific way that gender difference functions in these plays reveals a more complex effect of female presence. In her ethnographic study of real-world polyamorous communities, Elizabeth Sheff observed that "[p]olyamorous men's embodiment of both hegemonic and unconventional forms of manhood challenges a monolithic construction of masculinity and augments the understanding of alternative forms of masculinity" (212). How does the female presence shape this radically queer masculinity? Because it unbalances the hetero/homosexual binary, a binary which, in Foucauldian terms, allows heteronormative power to be pervasive in that it provides a stable Other—the homosexual male—against which heteronormative masculinity can define itself. The men in these plays harbor more-than-platonic feelings and desires for the other male in the triangle, but the inclusion of the female character, their desires for and relationships with her, as well as *her* desires for and relationships with them, makes the subjectivities of all three characters in the triangle radically queer.

Though the female characters in these plays are most easily marginalized, this does not mean that they function exclusively to highlight the male characters' queer visibility. In fact, the gendered power dynamics in these plays reflect the conflicted nature of gendered power in real-world non-monogamous communities. In his essay "Paradoxes in Gender Relations" (2010), Christian Klesse reports that while many women involved in polyamorous relationships see "their personal relationships as fairly egalitarian" (118) and feel that they are allowed greater freedom in their sexual expression than men (114), others experienced "harassment," "hypersexualization," and unequal "gendered division of labor" (119). While asserting that women

appear to have less agency overall than men in polyamorous communities,³⁹ Sheff found that many of the polyamorist women she interviewed in her study “felt they had increased their sexual subjectivity through their engagement in non-traditional relationships and attempts to reject sexual objectification” (183). Sheff describes a female subject in her study who “saw polyamory as fundamental to her larger interrogation of social norms and values,” explaining that “[r]ejecting such a fundamental social tenet as monogamy often granted polyamorous women self-permission to question other norms, as well” (186). Indeed, Kath’s assertion of her right to Sloane is what forges the queer triangle in Orton’s play, just as Gilda’s rejection of her husband in favor of Otto and Leo is what solidifies the queer triangle in Coward’s. In these plays, the female character’s involvement not only subverts the homo/hetero binary by making simultaneous m/m, m/f, and f/m/m desire visible but also ultimately lends the female character greater agency, though not necessarily with the full cooperation of her male partners.

Does involvement in the queer triangle ultimately allow Amelia to assert subjectivity? Does having a sexual relationship with both men give her the impression of possessing greater agency, since she terminates her pregnancy and subverts the painting scheme after sleeping with Winston? Or rather, does the triangle enclose her in the structures of male desire to a greater degree? Jamie professes traditional, monogamous desires for his relationship with Amelia, though he somewhat reverses patriarchal norms in wanting to stay home and care for their child while Amelia pursues her singing career (47). Winston does not profess or apparently harbor possessive or monogamous desire for his relationship with Amelia; when forced to choose, he chooses his non-sexual (but deeply emotional) relationship with Jamie. Amelia, in a sense, projects similar desires and ideals onto Winston and their relationship as Jamie does to her and

³⁹ It is noteworthy, in fact, that real-world polyamorous communities tend to emphasize male/female/female combinations and value bisexual women over bisexual men (Sheff 2005), whereas all three of these plays feature female/male/male combinations.

their relationship: she says she is in love with him and believes that they are special to each other, in spite of Winston's previous explanation that to him sex does not equal emotional attachment. Through her study, Sheff concluded that, "both men and women involved in polyamorous subcultures tended to view women as retaining more power in polyamorous relationships" (200), but that some polyamorous women only experienced this power "after they reluctantly agreed to attempt polyamory" in the first place (209). Though it does not negate the agency that these women report experiencing, the fact that they felt pressured to enter into polyamory problematizes the notion of gender equality in these relationships. In *Credeaux*, for instance, Amelia is the most reluctant participant in the trio's scheme, which is understandable given the particularly precarious role she is assigned.

While Kath and Gilda are enthusiastic participants in their queer triangles, Amelia expresses reservations, not only because of the potential legal repercussions of Jamie's scheme but because it will require her to post nude for Winston. She is also arguably more vulnerable in this situation than either of the male characters as she must not only allow one of them to look at her nude body for an extended period but her image will be depicted in a forgery for an indeterminate amount of strangers to view for an indeterminate length of time. Amelia is also more vulnerable than either male because she can become pregnant; like Kath's pregnancy, Amelia's pregnancy (or rather her decision to terminate it and then tell Jamie) presents a complication for the queer triangle. If Kath and Amelia were not involved, Sloane, Ed, Winston, and Jamie could potentially live happily together, as Winston indicates to Amelia after she reveals their affair to Jamie. It is noteworthy that in *Sloane* and *Credeaux*, the female occupants of the queer triangle are included by necessity: Kath has to blackmail Ed and Sloane, and Amelia

is simply the artist's model and does not participate in the actual transaction with Tess.⁴⁰ Both situations are unlike the triangle in *Design*, wherein Gilda, Otto, and Leo are all included as equally desired and beloved participants. In both Kath's and Amelia's case, pregnancy supports the female character's ability to assert her place in the triangle. In Amelia's case, however, this assertion leads to the triangle's dissolution.

The Breaking of the Fellowship (Why the *Credeaux* Triangle Collapses)

Entertaining Mister Sloane and *Design for Living* both depict the formation of queer triangles, whereas in *Credeaux* we see a triangle form and then disintegrate. The characters in *Sloane* and *Design* arrive at a queer triangle as a solution to the problems with which they have struggled and the negotiations in which they have engaged throughout the plays, but whereas the queer triangles of *Sloane* and *Design* are at least partially influenced by desire, the pact made at the beginning of *Credeaux* which seals Jamie, Winston, and Amelia together is motivated significantly by economics. However, it is certainly an idea born out of love, at least as Jamie expresses it. Unable to support himself, let alone the three of them, he has decided that he wants to be Winston and Amelia's "guardian angel," which for him means helping them become famous in their art forms (20). Jamie expresses sincere and strong affection for both of them, which lends power to his drawing them into a conspiracy to commit fraud. However, the failure of this conspiracy does not directly cause the collapse of the queer triangle.

Sloane and *Design* emphasize the expulsion of an outsider as crucial to their queer triangles, but it is not the failure to expel an outsider that dooms the triangle in *Credeaux*. We

⁴⁰ It must be acknowledged that a similar argument can be made about Winston. Though Winston chooses Jamie over Amelia, it is unlikely that Jamie would make the same choice as he is determined to create a heteronormative family with her. Jamie expresses love for Winston, just as he does for Amelia, but he is arguably using Winston's skill in order to fund his and Amelia's future together.

can assume that, if she had not seen Amelia, Tess would have fallen for the fake Credeaux. Is it, then, the male characters' use of the female character as a passive and absent object that destroys the triangle? Though the trio might speculatively have broken down in the future due to Jamie and Winston's use of Amelia (and/or, arguably, Jamie's exploitation of Winston's skill), this is not what causes the revelations that so quickly dissolve their ties. If everyone had gone along with Jamie's plan (as Winston seemed content to do, though it involved giving up credit for his work), the community would have continued to exist and thrive for at least a while longer. Amelia's actions are what, ultimately, dissolve the community: she demands an equal playing field, not only among the three of them but for Tess, the intruding outsider. The survival of the triangle depends on Amelia remaining passive and absent, except for her painted image, and she intentionally asserts her active presence. Even after the scheme falls through, however, the threesome could continue to function; Jamie insists that he can provide for Amelia and their child, and Winston seems perfectly content to keep his and Amelia's affair a secret. Amelia, however, completes her assertion of agency by terminating her pregnancy and confessing her and Winston's affair. The queer triangle cannot recover from this rupture; as it turns out, not only the painting scheme but the three-person-relationship itself relied on both Amelia and Winston remaining passive and not fully visible. *Sloane* also ends with the triangle's one female character asserting agency, but Kath's assertion leads to the establishment of the queer threesome rather than its disintegration. However, the existence of a queer triangle does not necessarily rely on the three participants living together in relative happiness; for instance, Sloane, Kath, and Ed will never co-habit for significant amounts of time according to their sharing arrangement. It is arguable, in fact, that they do not constitute a triangle so much as two dyadic relationships. Similarly, Amelia, Winston, and Jamie maintain significant emotional and psychic ties after they separate. In the final scene of *Credeaux*, Amelia visits Winston in his and Jamie's old apartment,

and Winston attempts to comfort her (and himself) by saying that they were not the reason Jamie committed suicide. “[H]e did it entirely because of me,” Amelia replies “It was you and me.” (56). Though the three of them separated, they maintained a strong affective, familial bond. Similarly to Kath’s baby in *Sloane*, the painting—which Winston and Amelia look at together in the play’s last moments—is a lasting, physical reminder of the queer triangle.

Conclusion: Happiness and Queer Utopia

Each of these triangles constitutes a hermetically-sealed queer utopia, or at least a plan for queer utopia, wherein the characters’ desires and connections are protected from the pressures and stigma of a heteronormative world into which they do not fit. The fate of the characters in *The Credeaux Canvas*, however, suggests that isolation from external forces is not what maintains a queer triangle; rather, all three members must share the same knowledge and agentive power in the triangle. Ed is upset to learn that Kath and Sloane have been sexually involved, but this revelation precedes the formation of the sharing arrangement, and it is this open acknowledgement of each others’ interactions with Sloane that allows Kath and Ed to stop competing and negotiate. The implication herein is that for a queer triangle to work, differences must be accounted for rather than overlooked, just as the queer family that emerges at the end of *Angels in America* develops through a process of negotiation and knowledge-exchange across racial, religious, and gender difference.

Like *Angels, Raised in Captivity*, and *Swimming in the Shallows*, Keith Bunin’s *The Credeaux Canvas* depicts an image of queer family which serves as a microcosmic imagining of queer utopia. In his analysis of queer communities in Delaney’s *A Taste of Honey*, Coward’s *Design for Living*, and Orton’s *Entertaining Mr. Sloane*, See observes that each of these plays

“revolutionizes familial normativity and depicts a world where conventional family units are destructive and queer families/communities are life-sustaining” (45). Rather than let the consequences of gender difference, jealousy, and competition separate or destroy them (as is the case in many famous heteronormative love triangles wherein at least one of the three characters involved is killed by another), these queer communities are distinct in that the characters ultimately decide to share rather than compete, to exclude the rest of the world so that each of their needs and desires can be fulfilled. In *Design*, these relationships are described in terms of love: “The actual facts are so simple,” Leo explains to Gilda, “I love you. You love me. You love Otto. I love Otto. Otto loves you. Otto loves me. There now! Start to unravel from there” (19). Even in *Sloane*, with its dark circumstances and amoral characters, the final solution is to share and negotiate rather than compete.

The only triangle among these plays that has an unequivocally unhappy end is the triangle of *The Credeaux Canvas*. At the end of this play, all three characters are alone, Winston and Amelia separated from each other in relatively unfulfilling lives, and Jamie a suicide victim. If we were to assume happiness as the indicator of progressive queer representation, as does John Clum, then *The Credeaux Canvas* could be called a major step backwards. However, given the strong criticisms of the happiness assumption put forth by queer theorists such as Sam See, it may be more productive to look instead at the way that queer desire is integrated into this play rather than at its outcome. As Winston tells Amelia, the attempt at such a complex achievement as queer utopia in a heteronormative world is more important than the result:

But it's not about being a genius, is it? I mean, if you know you have a calling ... well, then, the whole point is to be tremendously vigilant, be ruthless in exposing your weaknesses, flagellate yourself until you overcome them. And even if after all that, the world doesn't want you—so what? At least you did what you were called to do. (28)

To be radically queer is to support the post-gay motion of destabilizing the hetero/homosexual binary; it is to complicate the ability of hegemony to define queer identity and to easily interpolate individuals into this category. Like *Raised in Captivity*, *The Credeaux Canvas* features an affective configuration that resembles heteronormative family but is not contingent upon biological links or essentialist impulses: Jamie's, Winston's, and Amelia's desire to care for and support each other is not exclusively motivated by their sharing the same genetic material or their intention to procreate with each other. "In queer love today," claims Brad Wishon in his essay, "Transforming Power of Queer Love" (1997), "we find then that we are learning how to 'build' families, rather than inherit them" (112). The queer family depicted in *Credeaux*, like those in *Angels* and *Raised*, is built; *Credeaux's* family is distinct, however, not only because it dissolves but because it includes sexual interest among the members. As is effectively demonstrated by applying Sam See's arguments to *Credeaux*, however, this inclusion of both male/male and male/female in the triangular relationship does not diminish its queerness but rather increases it. In "What's Queer About Non-Monogamy Now?" (2010), Wilkinson moves to reposition non-monogamy as "more than a personal preference," but rather as part of a "broader queer political agenda" in which the "rejection of monogamy" is a "political act" (243). The inclusion of fluid and overlapping kinds of desire and affection in these triangles, particularly because they include differently-gendered individuals, constitutes an audacious and radically queer resistance to heteronormativity.

Chapter 6

Bestial Desire and Queer Utopia in Bock's *Swimming in the Shallows*

Like *Angels*, *Raised*, and *Credeaux*, Adam Bock's *Swimming in the Shallows* (2005) features a familial queer community made up of differently-gendered individuals. This queer family includes couples, but desire is not fluid within the community as is the case in the queer triangles featured in Chapter 5, neither is child-care a factor in this queer family, as is the case in *Raised in Captivity* or *A Taste of Honey* (discussed in Chapter 4). This queer family is united by mutual support in overcoming interpersonal (though not political) struggles, including commitment anxiety between two lesbian women; in this way, *Swimming* is most similar to *Angels* as far as the structure of the queer family. What makes *Swimming* radically queer in a distinctive way, and what makes its rendering of utopian imaginings remarkably innovative, is its inclusion of a romantic and erotic relationship between a young gay man and a shark.

Adam Bock's *Swimming in the Shallows*, which premiered in NYC at The Second Stage Theatre in 2005 to critical and popular success, is an innovative exploration of the difficulties of forming and sustaining significant romantic relationships. Barb—a middle-aged nurse, wife, and mother—wants to scale her life down to only eight possessions and is frustrated that her husband, Bob, responds by buying her a new car. Donna wants to marry her girlfriend, Carla Carla, but Carla Carla insists that Donna quit smoking before they do so. Donna also wants Nick, her friend who identifies as a gay male, to get married so that the four of them can go camping together. Nick seems unable to sustain a relationship for longer than one night, until he meets a handsome Shark and is instantly smitten. Because Nick's relationship with The Shark (which progresses to multiple dates) moves beyond both male/male desire and polyamory as markers of queerness, and because Nick's female friends all encourage and facilitate his relationship with The Shark, *Swimming* contributes a unique example of queer subjectivity formation to this study.

Swimming is not the only play that features human/animal eroticism to have enjoyed a recent, successful NYC production. Edward Albee's *The Goat*, which ran on Broadway for 309 performances in 2002, is the story of an affluent husband and father whose off-stage love affair with a goat named Sylvia destroys his family and possibly his career. Peter Shaffer's *Equus*, which originally premiered on Broadway in 1974 and ran for 1,209 performances, was revived on Broadway in 2008. Though this production only ran for 156 performances, it generated a great deal of publicity. Much of this publicity surrounded Daniel Radcliffe, the star of the *Harry Potter* film franchise, who bared all in the role of Alan Strang, a teenage boy who blinded six horses with a metal spike due to his religio-erotic relationship with the animals. What is remarkable about *Swimming*, especially in comparison to *The Goat* and *Equus*, is the way that it resists a discretely literal or metaphoric frame for the human/animal relationship.

Bestiality: The Queerest of the Queer

There are few high-profile plays that directly reference bestiality, let alone focus on an erotic relationship between a human and an animal, which makes the presence of these plays in early-21st century NYC theatre doubly noteworthy. What about bestiality, beyond mere shock value, is particularly dramatically potent in the post-gay era? When same-sex desire has become more visible (if still marginalized), does bestiality become the crucible in which we test our cultural boundaries for accepting "alternative" sexual practices? The three plays discussed here deal very differently with human/animal eroticism, but they have in common that the revelation of this desire marks a significant departure from the norm which demands the attention of every major character. After this initial departure, the treatment of bestiality in these plays varies from

exciting and exotic to tragic and horrifying, but the animal-desiring character remains the ultimate Other in all three.

Shaffer's *Equus* uses human/animal eroticism as an exotic challenge to a culture obsessed with normalcy and conformity. As Dean I. Ebner explains in his essay "The Double Crisis of Sexuality and Worship in Shaffer's *Equus*" (1982):

Alan Strang, growing up in a contemporary English home and culture which render both worship and sexual expression problematic, is thrown back on himself, and so out of the archetypal depths of his own psyche creates *Equus*, his horse-god, object of both religious worship and sensual enjoyment. (31)

Alan's deeply personalized sexuality/spirituality only comes to the attention of Martin Dysart, the play's protagonist and narrator, because it ostensibly drives him to blind six horses with a metal spike. Dysart, a child psychiatrist, is asked by his friend Hesther, a magistrate, to treat Alan in the hopes that it will prevent him from going to prison. Alan's violent crime suggests that his idiosyncratic fascination with horses combined with his conflicted relationship to religion (his mother, Dora, is devoutly Christian while his father, Frank, is a socialist atheist) have made him fundamentally different from those around him in a way that Dysart both fears and envies. The action of the play is driven by Dysart's extraction of the story behind this crime.

By his own admission, Peter Shaffer was inspired to write *Equus* after learning of a real-life incident similar to Alan's crime in the play. Unable to learn the full story, Shaffer felt compelled to make sense of the event through theatricalization: "I knew very strongly that I wanted to interpret it in some highly personal way. I had to create a mental world in which the deed could be made comprehensible" (Shaffer 4). Part of the explanatory "mental world" developed in *Equus* is religious eroticization of animals, an act which is treated by the play's characters as equally incomprehensible to the brutally violent act of blinding, if not more so. The unthinkable nature of human/animal eroticism is also prominent in *The Goat*, as is discussed in depth below. In both cases, given the characters' responses to the bestial relationship, it seems

that the play assumes its audience will find this desire incomprehensible; not only the taboo but also its label as an inconceivable act is what apparently gives these stories their power to challenge the dividing line between normative and deviant sex.

The gradual revelation of Alan's particular psycho-sexual matrix is the driving force of *Equus*, creating an underlying tension and exhilaration as the audience vicariously un-closets Alan through Dysart. Alan, we discover, has been "especially" interested in horses since he was a small child: his mother repeatedly read a story to him about a horse who would allow only his "young master" to ride him, he "loved the idea of animals talking," and he seems to have appreciated the Bible primarily for its passages depicting powerful images of horses (Shaffer 21-22). In Act I Scene 10, Alan tells Dysart the story of his first encounter with a horse which, it seems, is the cause of his strange fixation: when Alan was six and visiting the beach with his family, he was given a ride on a horse by a "college chap" (30); in the reality of the story, the Horseman held Alan in front of him to ride, but the onstage visual is of Alan sitting on the Horseman's shoulders, walking slowly around the stage with Alan's "*legs tight around his neck*" (31). Alan later admits, not to Dysart but to a tape recorder, that the experience was "sexy" (39): "I was pushed forward on the horse. There was sweat on my legs from his neck. The fellow held me tight, and let me turn the horse which way I wanted. All that power going any way you wanted" (39). As he describes it here, Alan's erotic experience was an integration of sensations from contact with the horse's body as well as the Horseman's body. Similarly, Alan's father reveals that he may have inadvertently contributed to Alan's psycho-sexual conflation of horses, sadomasochism, and worship. When Alan was young, and extremely influenced by his mother's stories from the Christian Bible, he took a pronounced liking to a particular portrait of Jesus. "The Christ was loaded down with chains, and the centurions were really laying on the stripes," says Dora of the painting, which she allowed Alan to hang on the wall in front of his bed. Frank

Strang, uncomfortable with the sexual as well as religious nature of the portrait, forcibly removed the painting, and placated a grief-stricken Alan by replacing the picture of Christ with a picture of a horse staring straight out at the viewer, which Alan hung “in exactly the same position” as the painting of Christ (35-6). This incident served to galvanize Alan’s particular queer subjectivity, which is an amalgamation of religious imagery, the male body, the equine body, and sadomasochism.

While the queer desire of human for animal is exoticized and treated highly theatrically in *Equus*, Albee’s *The Goat* frames this desire as brutally literal and destructive. In her 2003 essay “Animal Geographies: Zooesis and the Space of Modern Drama,” Una Chaudhuri describes *The Goat* as a “shame-filled, guilt-ridden mess of bestiality that spills out on stage [...] shattering the attractive lives that have been holding a flattering mirror up to the audience” (649). These characters whose “attractive lives” are destroyed by queer desire are Martin, a fifty-year-old award-winning architect, his wife Stevie, his friend Ross, and his son Billy, who Martin describes as “gay as the nineties” (11). When it is revealed that Martin has been having an affair with a goat, with which he insists he has a mutual love relationship, Martin’s other relationships explosively deteriorate. Whereas Alan’s queer desire is only revealed after he commits a violent crime, however, Martin seems compelled to disclose his secret from the play’s beginning. In an “*exaggerated Noel Coward*” style, Stevie and Martin act out a faux confession scene during which Martin actually tells her that he is having an affair with a goat called Sylvia (Albee 9-10). Stevie laughs off this confession as an obvious joke, however, and so Martin reveals his secret to Ross, who then informs Martin’s family. The notion of not only engaging in sex with but forming an emotionally significant romantic relationship with a goat is, to the characters in this play, so absurd as to be both horrifying and humorous, creating an extremely grotesque tone.

More so than in *Equus*, the human/animal relationship in *The Goat* is repeatedly and emphatically marked as incomprehensible. Martin insists throughout the play that the other characters do not, will not, and cannot understand his relationship with Sylvia because it is “love of a[n]... un-i-mag-in-able kind” for which the other characters have no frame of reference:

Don't you see the ... don't you see the “thing” that happened to me? What nobody understands? Why I can't feel what I'm supposed to!? Because it relates to nothing? It can't have happened! It did but it *can't* have! (orig. emph. 39-40)

Like Alan, Martin claims that he “can't *talk* about” his relationship with Sylvia (orig. emph. Albee 21); where Alan has Dysart to create the façade of hypnosis and drug therapy which allow him to disclose his secrets, Martin's confession is agonizingly forced from him by his shocked wife and son who respond similarly to Ross. “THIS IS A GOAT!” Ross exclaims when Martin shows him a picture of his new lover, “YOU'RE HAVING AN AFFAIR WITH A GOAT! YOU'RE FUCKING A GOAT!” (orig. emph. 23). Incomprehensibility seems to define Martin's “crime” just as it does the crime which inspired Shaffer to write *Equus*: “Knowing it – know it's true is one thing,” Stevie attempts to explain her reaction to finding out Martin's secret, “but *believing* what you *know* ... well, there's the tough part” (orig. emph. 29). Stevie equates this revelation with events that happen “outside the rules” such as unexpected death, a stroke, or—significantly—an ostensibly heterosexual spouse taking on queer sex practices:

You've read about spouses [...] who all of a sudden start wearing dresses [...] wives gone dyke ... but if there's one thing you *don't* put on your plate, no matter how exotic your tastes may be is ... bestiality. (orig. emph. 29)

This deviant sex act, it seems, is beyond exotic and resides in the realm of the unimaginable: “No, that's the one thing you haven't thought about,” Stevie continues, “nor could you conceive of” (29). Martin's queer desire is, according to him, outside of the frame of reference of even bestiality fetishists because unlike them, Martin is in love with Sylvia and does not feel wrong in his desire. “Why can't anyone understand this,” Martin ultimately exclaims in the play's final

moments (54). Whereas Alan's desire is arguably fetishized and eroticized by Dysart, who envies the young man's tortured vitality, Martin's desire is drawn as culturally inconceivable, a depiction which is reinforced by comparing Martin's relationship with Sylvia to other forms of queer sex practice. It could be argued, in fact, that Martin himself fetishizes his own isolation, even from other individuals who are Othered by their queer desires.

In *The Goat* and *Equus*, the focal characters are marked as aberrant to the rest of the world, both inside and outside of the play, because their desire is so queer as to be incomprehensible. Much of the action of these plays is an effort to make sense of this desire, and in both plays this effort involves revelation, shame, and painful purgation. While Nick is certainly set apart from the others in *Swimming* because of his infatuation with a shark, his female friends do not treat Nick's attraction to or relationship with The Shark as incomprehensible. In fact, though Nick's relationship with The Shark is consistently treated as the most exciting and interesting event in the play, Barb's desire to live with only eight possessions is the only one which is treated as truly difficult for the other characters to understand. When Nick announces, "I'm in love with a shark" (45), there is no pause indicated in the dialogue,⁴¹ though they do take a moment to clarify what Nick has told them:

CARLA CARLA: You are?

BARB: You are?

DONNA: Naw.

CARLA CARLA: You're in love with a shark. (46)

They also clarify whether Nick is in love with a "particular shark" (46) or to sharks in general. Once it is established that Nick is in love with the mako shark that he saw at the aquarium where Donna works, however, they quickly begin talking about The Shark as sentient ("You know the shark?"/ "Well not well" [46]) and even express concern that The Shark will "end up hurt" like the majority of Nick's boyfriends (47). Donna's greatest fear about this human/animal

⁴¹ In Bock's play, pauses are specifically indicated when something is said that forces the other characters to stop and consider before speaking again.

relationship is that Nick will stop coming to see her at the aquarium if he and The Shark break up. The only moment when Nick's attraction to The Shark might be labeled incomprehensible is immediately subverted:

BARB: You're not in love with that shark.

NICK: I am too.

BARB: You have a crush on it. [...] It goes crush THEN infatuation THEN like. Love takes time. (46-47)

Barb's objection is not to the inter-species attraction but to Nick's habit of falling in love too fast. They proceed to discuss The Shark as a potential romantic interest for Nick and decide that Donna should introduce the two of them.

Like Alan and Martin, Nick is set apart from the rest of the play's characters (predominantly, in this case, his female friends) from the play's beginning. The audience of *Equus* first sees Alan embracing another male (in an abstract horse costume) and soon after hears of the violent crime he committed. In the first moments of *The Goat*, Martin is behaving so strangely that both Stevie and Ross remark on it, well before his revelation of his relationship with Sylvia. Before Nick appears onstage in *Swimming*, Carla Carla and Barb express concern regarding his serial romances:

CARLA CARLA: Nick has a new boyfriend.

BARB: Another one?

CARLA CARLA: Yup.

BARB: He keeping the old one too? [...] Where does he find them?

CARLA CARLA: Outside. He walks outside he finds a new boyfriend. This one sells ballpark hotdogs. Nick went to a Pawsox game. Now he's in love. (14)

Later, Donna encourages Nick to stop "picking up guys" and resolves that she will stop smoking and also find him a boyfriend. Neither problem is solved so easily. However, once he becomes infatuated with The Shark, Nick deliberately alters his pattern. After Donna introduces him to The Shark, Nick tells her he's "taking it slow":

My therapist said that maybe I sleep with people before I am totally emotionally prepared. Physically I'm ready fast and so I sleep with them fast but then I wake up and I'm freaked cause who the hell is this guy? see [sic] I'm slower emotionally. And so then I push them away and then get sad cause I'm all alone again. [...] Unless I just want to have sex which is ok my therapist says. But. If I want to develop something then I have to develop it. Which is slow. Weird huh. (56)

Whether is it because of The Shark that Nick is ready to “develop something” or because he, like Barb, simply feels a need for change, Nick’s relationship with The Shark marks a deepening of his self-knowledge and a significant difference in his behavior. On his first date with The Shark, when their kissing begins to turn sexual, Nick asks The Shark if they can “wait;” The Shark assents, confessing that he also tends to “jump too fast” (69-70). Much to Nick’s surprise, The Shark calls him and agrees to go to Carla Carla and Donna’s wedding with Nick. Like Alan and Martin, Nick experiences a significant life change because of his queer desire for an animal, but in this play, the change is overwhelmingly positive. Rather than a shameful secret that renders the queer character incomprehensible to his fellow characters, the example of bestiality in *Swimming* serves to bring Nick into better harmony with his community.

Throughout The Shark and Nick’s eventual interactions, traits of both a literal animal and a sentient being are assigned to The Shark, and though the other characters treat this relationship as something new and different, they do not respond with the level of awe and fear found in *Equus* nor the revulsion and disbelief found in *The Goat*. In fact, when Nick ecstatically announces that The Shark called him, Carla Carla orders him to “SHH” (74) to give attention to Barb’s difficulties with Bob. At this late point in the play, the human/animal relationship is no longer exotic enough to distract the characters from a heterosexual marriage. The only people who may potentially find the human/animal relationship in *Swimming in the Shallows* incomprehensible are the audience as the play constantly vacillates between a literal and non-literal interpretation of The Shark.

“Maybe the Shark’s a shark”: Animals as Animals or Animals as Metaphor?

The Goat, *Equus*, and *Swimming* feature three distinct representations of the animal which is the object of human desire: literal and unseen, literal but seen as theatricalized, and ambiguous. Albee’s play, potential staging choices aside, tells an absolutely realistic story; the complexity of Martin’s situation and his family’s severe reactions to it rely on his sexual relationship with Sylvia being a material reality.⁴² The story that Dysart tells us about Alan’s relationship with horses in *Equus* is meant to be realistic, and Alan is meant to have interacted with literal horses. However, what the audience sees is Alan interacting with human actors (usually male)⁴³ in highly theatricalized horse costumes, usually a wire mask that rests on top of the actors’ heads. In his notes, Shaffer warns that any “literalism which could suggest the cosy familiarity of a domestic animal—or worse, a pantomime horse—should be avoided” (Shaffer 101). The desired animal in *Swimming* is also meant to be played by a male actor in a non-literal, highly theatrical costume (“I like it when the Shark has a fin,” says Bock [6]). However, the literality of The Shark in the world of play is consistently elusive. For example, The Shark is first seen swimming in a tank at the aquarium, but he later talks about the aquarium as his place of work and says that he was previously a door-to-door salesman for Avon. Before his Avon job, however, The Shark says he lived in the ocean and implies (to a frightened and titillated Nick) that he considered eating swimmers (68). The ways that these plays frame (or consciously refuse to frame) the desired animals have a dramatic effect on the way that the male character’s queer subjectivity is framed within the plays.

⁴² The subtitle of Albee’s play, *Notes on a Tragedy*, suggests a metaphysical component to this story, as do references to The Furies and other elements of ancient Greek tragedy. However, the events and circumstances featured in the play remain strictly literal.

⁴³ Though it is not specified in the script or in Shaffer’s notes on the play, Nugget and the six Horses were played by male actors in the original Broadway production as well as in the 2008 revival. Nugget, with whom Alan has the most intimate and affectionate physical interaction, is specifically male as this actor doubles as the Horseman who gave Alan his first experience riding a horse.

It is Martin's assignation of human traits and emotions to a literal animal which brings him into sharpest disharmony with his community, including others who engage in sex with animals. Una Chaudhuri points out that Martin's description of his first encounter with Sylvia "stands in stark contrast to every other character's attitude toward Sylvia in the rest of the play, where the fact of her animal body utterly outstrips any interest in her face" ("(De)Facing" 12). For example, Stevie responds to Martin saying he loves her by comparing the bio-physiological realities of her own body with that of the goat: "But I'm a human being; I have only two breasts; I walk upright; I give milk only on special occasions; I use the toilet. [...] How can you love me when you love so much less?" (25). This is one of the most significant differences between *The Goat* and *Equus* or *Swimming*: Sylvia is never represented (alive) on stage, and therefore her specifically animal biology remains an offstage imaginable reality; when the audience is prompted to imagine Martin having intercourse with Sylvia, the image evoked is of a literal goat with no human actor surrogate to make an anthropomorphic linkage. Alan's erotic ritual with horses is theatricalized with male actors, and Nick can speak to and kiss The Shark; in these instances, the audience sees a human/human interaction in place of the implied human/animal interaction. In *The Goat*, the bestiality relationship remains utterly bestial, so much so that it cannot be depicted onstage. Though it is impossible to speak conclusively about audience reaction, this implies that the audience may eroticize the human/animal relationship in *Equus* and *Swimming* as a human/human (and, in both plays, male/male) interaction, whereas Sylvia remains, for the characters as well as audience, an animal.

It is noteworthy that *The Goat* not only treats Sylvia as a literal (if unseen) goat but also directly refers to bestiality as an aberrant sexual practice in the real world. Unlike *Equus* or *Swimming*, *The Goat* refers to human/animal sex practiced by people besides the main character. Martin explains to Stevie that when he "realized people would *think* something was wrong"

(orig. emph. Albee 32), he found a support group for bestiality fetishists; the major difference between Martin and the others, however, is that they all felt “ashamed” or “conflicted” and wanted to be “cured” of their desire for bestial sex, whereas Martin didn’t understand “what was wrong with [...] being in love ... like that” (34). Martin also explains that one of the support group attendees began having intercourse with pigs “*naturally*” when growing up on a farm, another had been brutally raped by human men, and another was so “hideously ugly” that attracting another human was not a possibility (orig. emph. 35). Unlike these individuals, however, Martin does not have a comprehensible reason for his attraction to Sylvia; he looked into her eyes and fell in love (21). According to Tanya Gold, Albee claims that *The Goat* is “not so much about bestiality as the prison of sexual convention;” in the same article, however, Albee is quoted as saying that bestiality “happens with a greater degree of frequency than we are prepared to realize” (32). Arguably, then, bestiality itself (that is sex between a human and animal) is not the queer problem in this play, but rather it is Martin’s emotional connection with Sylvia which he equates with his love for his human wife.

As in *Equus* and *Swimming*, specific characteristics possessed by the animal love interest are identified as attractive to the human gazer in *The Goat*. Una Chaudhuri describes this play as “the story of Martin and Stevie, a sophisticated, successful and happy Manhattan couple whose perfect life is shattered when Martin confesses to an unthinkable transgression, his love affair with the enchanting but unfortunately nonhuman Sylvia” (“(De)Facing” 11). Here, Chaudhuri reiterates the emphatic incomprehensibility of Martin’s deviant sex act. In this description, however, Chaudhuri also makes an inaccurate assumption: Martin does not love Sylvia *in spite of* but rather *because of* her non-human, specifically animal, and specifically goat biology. To say that Sylvia is “unfortunately nonhuman” is comparable to describing a male/male attraction as being between characters who are “unfortunately of the same sex;” to assume that the specific

bio-physiological aspects of these characters and objects of desire is coincidental is to make an assumption which potentially obfuscates important particularities of the characters' queer desires. Martin confesses to Stevie that he fell in love at first sight of Sylvia because she is “[g]uileless; innocent; pure” (39), and while these traits could be attributed to a human as well, they are in this context products of Sylvia’s animal-ness.

In *Equus*, the horses are physically and viscerally depicted as males who move as and who are costumed to evoke horses; in *The Goat*, Sylvia is not seen alive onstage, and so remains literally a goat in the imagination of the characters and audience. *Swimming*, however, playfully resists a literal or metaphorical depiction of The Shark by combining human and animal characteristics. As previously mentioned, the only guidance Bock gives regarding the depiction of this character in his “Staging Notes” that accompany the play is “I like it when The Shark has a fin” (6). This expression of an opinion rather than imperative is as enigmatic as The Shark’s sentience in the play text. However, the fact that Bock’s first question of an interviewer who recently directed *Swimming* is, “How’d you do the shark?” (Berger Int. 46) suggests that this is of interest and import to the playwright. In *Equus*, it is only the audience who experiences the horses as anthropomorphized, though the fact that the horses are played by men could suggest that Dysart and/or Alan think of them this way.⁴⁴ The characters of *Equus* respond to each other as if they are literally horses and humans, though their theatricalization lends ambiguity to these relationships. The characters in *Swimming*, however, directly address this problem of literality, though they do not ultimately resolve this tension, nor do they seem concerned with doing so. “Maybe the shark’s a shark,” suggests Carla Carla when Barb asks if The Shark is sensitive (48). The women do express concern, however, regarding the possible risk involved for Nick if The Shark is in fact a literal shark. “Love from afar with a shark might be good,” Carla Carla admits (48). Unlike a goat or a horse, a literal shark carries a strong connotation of violent death for a

⁴⁴ It is also noteworthy that Alan and Dysart refer to the horses with exclusively male pronouns.

human, largely because of popular culture. It is curious, then, that the play in this study featuring an animal that presents a serious literal threat to humans is the most ambiguous about that animal's literality.

Though *Swimming* is ultimately ambiguous about The Shark, it does not ignore the possibility of danger in a human/shark interaction. In fact, while *The Goat* and *Equus* do not call for realistic images of animals onstage, *Swimming* suggests that “*projections of National Geographic shark closeups*” be shown to the audience (51). Specifically, these projections are suggested as part of Nick's nightmare/fantasy about meeting The Shark: according to the stage directions, The Shark is dancing to club music, Nick enters in swimwear and dances an “[u]nderwater courtship dance” with The Shark which turns erotic, then violent: “*Blood in water. Shark attack. Not dancey. More muscular. Water eddying. Swirls. Music slows*” (51). It is unclear whether The Shark attacks Nick in the dream or the projection only implies the possibility of violence associated with Sharks. In either case, Nick's dream overtly interweaves eroticism and danger. During his and Nick's first date, The Shark implies that he also finds the risk of violence in human/shark interaction erotic: “I liked swimming in the shallows. I liked being near people in the water. I liked feeling the blood vibrating in their bodies. I liked the heat. I liked the thrash” (68). While The Shark admits to considering biting swimmers, he says he refrained because that would have “ruined a good day at the beach for someone” (68). After he and Nick begin kissing, however, he describes more intimate encounters with humans:

Sometimes I'd swim way far out there. / Late at night Empty and I'd get lonely and that blue and blue forever and then a swimmer and / we'd circle each other looking at each other and he'd look back and I'd follow him and I'd feel that / (*Pause*) / and after I'd swim again. Looking. And I'd be lonely again. (69)

The Shark's description here is noticeably similar to Nick's descriptions of his own serial sexual encounters, and it continues the interweaving of eroticism and threat that we see in Nick's

dream. However, *The Shark* also implies that Nick, or at least Nick's friends, should be wary of his dating a shark:

THE SHARK: Go out with a shark you going to get bitten. Or shark today gone tomorrow. Or I knew a guy who dated a shark he's got one leg and a big chunk missing out of him. / *(Pause)* / That scare you? (68)

The Shark seemingly baits Nick several times with frightening facts about himself, each time asking, "That scare you?" to which Nick replies "No." This testing of boundaries evokes a bad-boy motif, which, given Adam Bock's take on *The Shark* and Nick's relationship (discussed below), is likely deliberate. The Shark could, therefore, be compared to rough trade as the potential for violence that he represents is eroticized. According to the logic of the play, *The Shark* is employed by the aquarium to allow himself to be looked at; "People stare a lot," he says when Nick asks if he likes his job (65). The Shark is the object of others' gaze, both of the characters onstage and of the audience; like literal sharks, he attracts the attention of humans' gaze because he is dangerous. When Nick looks at *The Shark*, however, this danger is combined with desire and attraction. Unlike Nick and his female friends, *The Shark* never directly addresses the audience,⁴⁵ which further limits his subject-hood. *The Shark* is not, however, reduced to a mere object of desire and wonder; in Nick and Barb's conversation that ends the play, we learn that *The Shark* and Nick are "infatuated" with each other and on their way to being in love (76-7). As Nick develops his relationship with *The Shark*, *The Shark* evolves from an exciting and frightening unknown to a potentially permanent part of Nick and his friends' queer family.⁴⁶

Given the complexity of *The Shark*'s depiction, which vacillates between literal and non-literal traits without resolving this tension, it is clear that *The Shark* is not simply a symbolic

⁴⁵ Bob is the only other character in *Swimming* who does not directly address the audience. However, Bob, unlike *The Shark*, is not eroticized and exoticized.

⁴⁶ *The Shark*, unlike Bob, attends Carla Carla and Donna's wedding.

character. When asked about the “metaphor” of The Shark, Bock explains that, for him, this character is “The Other:”

The Other as possibly scary. And why I liked it was that it was a person that might be dangerous to go out with. So that could be anyone. That could be a guy with HIV if you were negative. That could be a guy from another race. Could be someone who is poorer than you...or richer. [...] I just wanted it to be Other enough. And also dangerous, but that you might be afraid...so then again could be someone that you might fall in love with...and that could be dangerous. (qtd. in Berger 52)

Regardless of The Shark’s literal or metaphoric significance, he represents a dangerous “Other” and therefore an increase in the risky, non-normative nature of Nick’s queer subjectivity. Desire for and sex with other men is as old-hat and unsatisfying for Nick as Barb’s middle-class marriage is for her,⁴⁷ and this is perhaps why the play ends with these two characters bonding over their scary, exciting forays into the uncomfortable and unknown. More significantly, *Swimming* presents characters who represent two typically Othered groups (women and homosexuals) responding to another Other who is a completely unknown entity to them. Chaudhuri references animal studies theory which situates “the animal as Other to be faced, the animal face as inscrutable mask, the animal gaze as a window on to alternative epistemologies, even ontologies” (“(De)Facing” 12). Here, Chaudhuri is discussing the animal’s transformative Otherness in relation to *The Goat*, but, she could easily be discussing *Equus* or *Swimming*, as the horse-god represents a “whole new track of being” (8) for Dysart and a long-term relationship for Nick. However, the animal character is used most potently to indicate “alternative ontologies” in *Swimming* as The Shark’s literality is never resolved. *Swimming* asks its audience to relinquish the need to understand The Shark as either animal or human-metaphor because this understanding is secondary to the significance of The Shark and Nick’s relationship. “The Shark and Nick illustrate the vulnerability of starting a relationship,” says Bock. “Of course, even being

⁴⁷ In the world of this play, Bob and The Shark could be considered the Others since, as Debra A. Berger points out in her discussion of her production of *Swimming*, they are the only two characters who never directly address the audience (12). Nick, Donna, Carla Carla, and Barb possess and agentive voice, therefore, that Bob and The Shark do not, making them unknown to the audience in a distinct way.

near a shark could make any situation vulnerable and risky” (qtd. in Berger 18). When asked about the genesis of this idea, Bock explains, “I thought, ‘What would happen if you fell in love with a shark?’ It works on a lot of levels to ask the question of ‘who should you fall in love with?’” (Bock *NY Times* Int.). The Shark and Nick’s relationship is, therefore, an usual theatrical example of non-normative desire, and as The Shark’s animal status is consistently ambiguous, *Swimming* presents a uniquely queer way of looking at a queer relationship.

Though these three plays treat the literal nature of the desired animal differently, each frames certain traits associated with the literal animal as erotic: in *Equus*, the horses’ contained power arouses Alan; in *The Goat*, Sylvia’s guileless innocence causes Martin to melt; in *Swimming*, The Shark’s dangerous nature attracts Nick. Despite having a name, Sylvia stays a literal goat both in the onstage reality and in the minds of audience. In *Equus* and *Swimming*, it is important that these characters are animals but also equally important that they have human male attributes which are eroticized. What might the bodies of male actors playing animals cause as far as an audience’s affective response? Though it is impossible to conclusively account for audience reaction, this means the audience is seeing the animal characters as presumably attractive male humans in *Equus* and *Swimming* whereas Sylvia remains a goat; the only onstage erotic interaction between male bodies in *The Goat* is between Billy and Martin, and that interaction is loaded with its own taboo resonances.

“Just a substitute, really”: Bestiality and Male/Male Desire

The human/animal eroticism in each of these plays is linked in some way to male/male eroticism: either the character implicated in bestiality also exhibits homoerotic desire (as in *Equus* and *Swimming*) or the character’s human/animal desire is contrasted with same-sex erotic

desire (as in *The Goat*). All of Nick's "boyfriends" who are mentioned prior to *The Shark* are male, and *The Shark* is referred to with male pronouns and played by a male actor. The erotic aspect of Alan's fixation on horses stems at least in part from his encounter with a "college chap" who gave him a ride on the beach; when Alan recalls this experience to Dysart's tape-recorder, he describes it as "sexy." Martin's son Billy identifies as gay-male, and tensions erupt over this when Billy expresses disgust at his father's relationship with Sylvia. Toward the end of *The Goat*, Martin and Billy share an embrace and a kiss that, according to Albee's stage direction, is sexual (50), which is an instance of not only male/male but also incestuous affection, layering more queer markers onto the human/animal relationship. It could be argued that the link between human/animal and male/male eroticism in these plays is not simply tangential but is deliberately metaphorical. In *Still Acting Gay*, for instance, John M. Clum refers to Alan's fixation on horses (as well as Dysart's fixation on Alan) as "sublimated homosexuality" (112). A nuanced analysis of each play and the linkages between animal/human and male/male desire and sex in these plays, however, reveals complex and varied implications not reducible to (though also not exclusive of) such sublimation and substitution.

In the text of *Equus* as well as in production, Alan's interaction with the horses is significantly layered with male/male affection and desire. "With one particular horse, called Nugget, he embraces," Dysart describes; "The animal digs its sweaty brow into his cheek, and they stand in the dark for an hour—like a necking couple" (7). Increasing the anthropomorphism of the animal character, Dysart explains that his main curiosity is about "the horse, and what it may be trying to do:"

I keep seeing that huge head kissing him with its chained mouth. Nudging through the metal some desire absolutely irrelevant to filling its belly or propagating its own kind. What desire could that be? Not to stay a horse any longer? Not to remain reined up for ever in those particular genetic strings? Is it possible, at certain moments we cannot imagine, a horse can add its sufferings together—the non-stop jerks and jabs that are its daily life—and turn them into *grief*? What use is grief to a horse? (orig. emph. 7)

Not only is the horse played by a person and its interaction with Alan compared to the familiar affection of a human couple, but it is also attributed human emotions that imply longing, possibly romantic or erotic; whatever the grief is, it is notably expressed through the horse “kissing” Alan “with its chained mouth.” Clum points out that the horses in this play are “always masculine (portrayed by tall, athletic men with metallic headpieces in the shapes of horses’ heads)” (111). Although Dysart is ostensibly talking about a literal horse, the character who the audience is associating with this desire, this grief, is visibly a human male in an embrace with another human male. This visual component becomes especially significant when considering the enactment of Alan’s ritual which the audience sees at the end of Act I, during which Alan, completely nude, rides the horse Nugget while praying ecstatically for *Equus* to make horse and rider “One Person” (65). The male bodies involved in this ritual are certainly not inconsequential, as numerous gay male studies theorists, including Clum, have discussed.

Clum’s analysis of *Equus* in *Still Acting Gay* focuses on the male/male eroticism that he views as disingenuously subsumed. At the end of Act II, we learn that Alan blinded the horses after nearly having intercourse with a girl, Jill, in the stable where he performed his ritual; Clum situates this violence as a response to Alan’s failure at heterosexual intercourse (111). Similarly, Clum labels Dysart’s societal directive as the job of curing Alan of his “passionate eroticizing of masculinity” (112). Going so far as to call Alan’s religion “sublimated homosexuality” (112), Clum claims that by covering Alan’s naked body in the play’s final scene, Dysart “covers the boy’s passionate, aberrant sexuality and his own closeted homosexuality, which has led him to fixate on the boy” (112). He then links *Equus* to Shaffer’s earlier *Royal Hunt of the Sun* and later *Amadeus*, asserting that all three “present a closeted vision of experience and a vision of closeted individuals thrown into crisis by a young man whose very presence challenges their hard-won normality,” all without overtly depicting homosexuality so as not to limit “their commercial

potential” (112). The important difference between *Equus* and Shaffer’s other plays, however, is that *Royal Hunt of the Sun* and *Amadeus* do not imply bestiality, and while unrealized homosexual desire is arguably present in this play, the human/animal eroticism must be taken into account rather than dismissed as a direct metaphor for male/male desire. As is evident from Alan’s detailed description in Act I Scene 13, his erotic fixation on horses is remarkably specific and polyvalent, incorporating sadomasochistic and religious eroticism. Thus, it can be argued that Alan’s desire is not simply “sublimated homosexuality” which could be satisfied entirely by a sexual relationship with another male, but is rather a highly unusual and individualized queer desire that cannot be replicated because it is composed of his particular experiences and the particular temporalities in which they occurred.

In *The Goat*, Martin’s son Billy, who is identified as “gay” from his first mention in the play, provides an opportunity for comparing bestiality with more “conventional” queer sex as well as for suggesting the pervasiveness of “deviant” desire. Almost immediately after the revelation, Martin attempts to link bestiality with homosexuality; when Billy condemns him for “fucking a fucking goat,” Martin replies that Billy’s “own sex life leaves a little to [be desired],” to which Billy responds, “At least what I do is with ... persons!” (25). Billy then calls Martin a “Goat-fucker!” which prompts Martin to call him a “Fucking faggot!” (25), an epithet which profoundly offends both Stevie and Billy. Martin also references “public urinals” and “death clubs” which he seems to believe are part of a secret gay male subculture to which Billy belongs but that he, Martin, can only access by reading about them (26). Herein seems to be a comment about the stigma of same-sex desire compared to other, “less natural” sex practices, of which bestiality appears to be the most extreme example. As Billy implies, it is illogical and hypocritical for Martin to reject his same-sex desire when Martin is having sex outside of his species, and yet Martin’s aversion to his son’s sex practices does not seem tempered by his own

sexual otherness. Though Martin states that he does not feel that his relationship with Sylvia is wrong or something from which he must be cured, he nevertheless attempts to keep his non-normative eroticism (aroused by Sylvia and, as he later reveals, his infant son) secret from at least certain characters. This demonstrates awareness that these desires, or more accurately the revelation of these desires, will have an alienating effect, separating him from those to whom he is close. Though he fears ostracism, Martin responds to Ross's shaming attempts by suggesting that "deviant" eroticism is more pervasive than most people are willing to acknowledge: "Is there anything anyone doesn't get off on," Martin asks, "whether we admit it or not—whether we *know* it or not?" (orig. emph. 52). By arriving at this point about queer pervasiveness, *The Goat* significantly engages not only male/male desire but also a type of eroticism that is potentially more aberrant than bestiality.

Unlike *Equus* or *Swimming*, the only onstage erotic interaction between male bodies in *The Goat* is between Billy and Martin, and that interaction is loaded with its own taboo resonances. After Martin and Stevie's violent argument, Billy and Martin attempt to reconstruct the family living room, and Billy describes to Martin the degree to which this revelation has impacted his internal sense of well-being. Overcome with emotion, Billy confesses that he loves Martin in spite of this, and embraces his father, giving him "*a deep, sobbing, sexual kiss*" (orig. emph. 50). When Martin tries to defend Billy's action to Ross, who enters the room at the most inopportune moment, Billy openly admits that the kiss was erotic:

It clicked over, and you were just [...] another man. I get confused ... sex and love; loving and ... (*To Ross.*) I probably *do* want to sleep with him. (*Rueful laugh.*) I want to sleep with everyone. (orig. emph. 51)

Martin's successive description of having an erection caused by an infant (presumably, Billy) quickly overshadows Billy's admission. However, Billy's status as the "gay" character in this play makes the above admission potentially problematic as it risks re-inscribing the harmful

stereotype of the nymphomaniac, poly-perverse homosexual. There are, arguably, other potential causes for Billy's desire to "sleep with everyone" (his age being the most obvious), but the fact that he is labeled "gay" and that the audience is given this information before he actually appears onstage (11) suggests that this identity will be foremost in audience members' minds, and as such, all of his words and actions will presumably be read through this identity. This performance of an incestuous act between two males who have been marked with "homosexuality" and "bestiality" is also potentially problematic as it suggests that queer desire is compounding, or that breaking one sexual taboo may lead an individual to break all sexual taboos: bestiality and male/male sex are, by this logic, queer "gateway drugs." Conversely, and perhaps more in line with Albee's intent, this scene might create the impression that all individuals have the potential for all kinds of queer desire. Though Martin's implication that there is nothing "anyone doesn't get off on" suggests a much broader message regarding sexual conventions, this play, like *Equus*, develops a highly specific eroticism for the focal character.

Potentially problematic implications aside, *The Goat* features the distinctively post-gay characteristic of normalizing homosexuality and de-pathologizing the gay-male character, characteristics also featured in *Swimming*. When discussing Nick's worrisome romantic life, Carla Carla and Barb unselfconsciously refer to his "new boyfriend" (14), coherently marking him as a gay male without a coming-out moment. The same is true of *The Goat*, and like Billy, Nick is identified as gay⁴⁸ before he is seen onstage. Human/animal eroticism in *Swimming*, however, is not employed as a metaphor for male/male desire or as a marginalized sexuality with which to compare male/male desire. Rather, it is one of several ways that the characters in *Swimming* step out of their comfort zones as Nick takes a similar journey to his female friends, all of whom rely on each other's support and influence.

⁴⁸ Unlike Billy, who Martin refers to as "gay as the nineties" (11), Nick isn't specifically labeled "gay" before he appears onstage. Rather, Carla Carla lists off his recent boyfriends, implying that he dates men predominantly if not exclusively.

The Influence of Female Characters

The influence of the female characters over Nick in *Swimming* can be characterized as up-front, unselfconscious, and laden with good intentions. Barb, Carla Carla, and Donna are each engaged with their own tribulations, but all show concern for Nick's happiness throughout the play, as he does for theirs. As discussed above, the three women encourage Nick to act on his infatuation with The Shark, and their support is integral to actualizing the human/animal relationship. It is noteworthy, however, that going on a date with a shark is not the most transformative decision that Nick makes during the play, but it is his decision to change his typical behavior in order to develop a long-term relationship that is risky and significant. Nick's female friends also encourage him toward this decision, but it is not their influence in this matter that makes the difference. When Nick informs Donna that he is "taking it slow" with The Shark in order to develop a lasting relationship, she is perplexed by his sudden resolution; "I TOLD YOU THAT TWO YEARS AGO," she reminds him (orig. emph. 57). The implication here is that Nick had to decide on this behavioral change of his own volition, and that perhaps his feelings regarding The Shark are remarkable enough to catalyze this change. Adam Bock explains that *Swimming* is "about how gay people create family. Barb is one of the people Nick and his friends pull into their family. She's also doing something in her life that she needs her friends to understand and Nick's made a switch from not being in love to being in love. They're both in the middle of change and growth" (Bock *NY Times* Int.). Nick and Barb, a young gay man and a middle-aged straight woman, reflect and support each other as they step out into the unknown. Barb, however, has the critical (though not unsympathetic) audience member of Bob to complicate her decision while Nick's only audience in the world of the play are Barb, Carla Carla, and Donna, all of whom are consistently supportive and non-judgemental. Bob, the play's only heterosexual male character, is the Other in this world. While The Shark attends Carla Carla

and Donna's wedding, the communal celebration in which the play culminates, Bob does not, indicating either/both his rejection from and/or rejection of all that this wedding signifies. In *Swimming in the Shallows*, women (both straight and queer) are the natural and effortless allies of queer men, and vice versa, and while all of the characters express regret that Bob does not fit into their community, they move forward without him.

The women of *Swimming* provide support and encouragement for Nick as he develops a radically queer relationship; for *Equus*'s Alan, however, while female characters enable and feed his queer erotic matrix they also generate (though accidentally and, perhaps, indirectly) the moment of shameful revelation that incites his violent crime. Hesther, a magistrate and Dysart's close personal friend, is compassionate toward Alan but also marks him as aberrant in significant ways, encouraging Dysart to look past the exotic lure of Alan's worship in order to normalize him. Alan's mother, Dora, deeply influenced his queer subjectivity but rejects it as immoral and inexplicable. Jill, a young woman who befriends Alan, is possibly most intriguing as she paradoxically alleviates and exacerbates Alan's internal conflict over his religio-sexuality. Unlike *Swimming*, in which female and male characters share parallel journeys, Dysart and Alan ultimately have only each other for support in confronting their non-normative desires.

Hesther, who is the only representation of government authority in this play, also wields a great deal of authority in framing characters and situations. For instance, her words render both Dysart and Alan set-apart, special, and queer at the play's beginning. Hesther, brings Alan to him because there is something "different" about Dysart which sets him apart from the psychiatrists he works with as well as the majority of English citizens (9-10), which makes him ideal to treat Alan, who she describes as "very special." When Dysart asks her to elaborate, she only replies, "[v]ibrations" (10-11). This implies that Dysart and Alan are intrinsically different from other people in inexplicable ways, an implication that immediately exoticizes both characters. While

Hesther is apparently supportive of both Dysart and Alan's "special" qualities, she is also the play's strongest advocate for normalization. Hesther insists that Dysart make Alan well:

DYSART: What am I trying to do to him?

HESTHER: Restore him, surely.

DYSART: To what?

HESTHER: A normal life.

DYSART: Normal?

HESTHER: It still means something. [...] You know what I mean by a normal smile in a child's eyes, and one that isn't—even if I can't exactly define it. Don't you?

DYSART: Yes.

HESTHER: Then we have a duty to that, surely? Both of us. (54)

Ebner calls Hesther "without worship and without any realized sexuality," claiming that "Shaffer places [Hesther] gently but clearly as a dramatic foil to the rich, red discoveries of soul and body which emerge during Alan's therapy with Dysart" (32). At no point does Hesther deploy shame in order to persuade Dysart, which justifies the trust that he shows in confiding to her about his deteriorating marriage and doubts about his profession. Unlike the majority of characters, Hesther does not respond with fear or revulsion to Alan or his crime. Her goal in bringing Alan to Dysart, and the goal to which she encourages Dysart throughout the play, is rehabilitation and restoration. Arguably, she represents the more responsible, ethical approach to Alan's situation compared to Dysart, who verges on using the seventeen-year-old to vicariously experience an extreme worship. As far as the treatment of queer subjectivities, however, Hesther is unquestionably a force for normalization rather than radicalization.

Alan's mother's strong influence in his life is readily apparent from the play's beginning, a factor which implicates her in his psychosis; rather than form solidarity between mother and son, however, this implication ultimately dissolves their relationship. When Dysart first visits Alan's mother and father, Dora calls it "unbelievable" that her son would harm animals, saying that he has "always been such a gentle boy" (21). Clearly, she feels implicated by Alan's crime as she appears to interpret all of Dysart's questions as accusations: "Westerns are harmless

enough, surely?" (22) she asks, for instance. At the end of this early scene, when Dysart asks about Alan's sexual education, her guilt manifests as fear that her son is irrevocably abnormal:

DORA: I told him the biological facts. But I also told him what I believed. That sex is not *just* a biological matter, but spiritual as well. That if God willed, he would fall in love one day. That his task was to prepare himself for the most important happening of his life. And after that, if he was lucky, he might come to know a higher love still . . . I simply . . . don't understand. *Alan!* (orig. emph. 26)

It is noteworthy that Dora's grief seems to be a response to her son's irreparable deviance which will prevent him from not only falling in love but also from spiritual fulfillment.⁴⁹ Even this ostensibly wholesome, maternal wisdom, however, can be linked to Alan's conflation of the erotic and religious. Speltz goes so far as to describe the play's major dramatic question as "how Alan could have taken his mother's obsession with religion and turned it into his own obsession" (5). Indeed, most substantial analyses of *Equus* point to Dora as the main contributor to Alan's psycho-sexual religion. Ebner points out the "strange intimacy between mother and son over such obscure but grand stories about horses," calling Dora "crucial to our understanding of Alan and of his violent act" as she "had much to do with forming his religious sensibilities and with the linkage he makes between horses and worship" (33). Though Dora and Alan's relationship includes a variety of imaginative narratives (including television-watching, to which Alan's father objects), Christian myths emerge as the most significant narratives that Dora imparts to her son. Mustazza explains:

The maternal influence surfaces in the young man's descriptions of his own aberrant religious practices. In his account, Alan conflates material from a variety of recognizable sources—the delightful stories about horses that his mother once told him, the Bible, his loathing of the job he held in an appliance shop, and others—but the main portion of Alan's delusion, his belief in his god's suffering and triumph, are decidedly biblical, specifically Christian. (177)

While Dora shares her Christianity with her son both as a bonding activity and to ensure his happiness, she ultimately uses her religion to absolve herself of any responsibility for his crime

⁴⁹ It is noteworthy that, despite Alan's otherwise turbulent relationship with his father, he comes to feel a connection with Frank after running into him unexpectedly at an adult cinema.

and to reject him. Later in the play, Dora visits Alan in the hospital, and their interaction is so explosive that Dysart asks her to leave. Dora responds defensively, accusing Dysart of regarding Alan as a victim of poor parenting. She then insists that Alan's upbringing is in no way the cause of his criminal act or his aberrant desire:

DORA: I want you to know that I deny it absolutely what he's doing now, staring at me, attacking me for what *he's* done, for what *he* is! [...] You call it a complex, I suppose. But if you knew God, Doctor, you would know about the Devil. You'd know the Devil isn't made by what mummy says and daddy says. [...] I only know he was my little Alan, and then the Devil came. (orig. emph. 69)

Dora's status as a woman, mother, and religious devotee renders her Other to the patriarchal and at least moderately secularized world of 1970s England. Her feminine, maternal influence over Alan is characterized as subversive and transgressive. When her son's queer subjectivity manifests in a violent act, however, their secretive bonding becomes a source of shame, and instead of standing in solidarity with her son on the grounds of their shared Otherness, Dora dissolves this connection.

Dora's role in Alan's imaginative life is particularly significant in light of contemporary scholarship regarding matrocentrism and queer male subjects. In his essay "I Remember Mama: Cinema, Memory, and Gay Male Matrocentrism" (1998), Brett Farmer examines the cultural structures by which film-watching becomes a signifier of both maternal-bonding and queerness:

With the provision of all sorts of culturally illicit or perverse pleasures—not the least of which is the chance to rebond, both literally and figuratively, with the maternal—film spectatorship has long functioned for me as an important sign of "queerness," a sign of sexual, social and psychic difference, and, as such, it has become as central to the production and performance of my gay identity as any more specifically sexual sign or act. (364)

Farmer links spectatorship with desirous gaze, connecting the son's adoption of his mother's spectatorship to the adoption of queer desire:

Thus cinematic spectatorship acts as a potential site for the repetition of those forms of *maternal identification* that are theorized by psychoanalytic critics as a central fantasy of, and for, gay male desire. By following the mother's lead and joining her as a spectator

before the screen, the gay subject takes up a position of spectatorship that has been defined, prepared and occupied by the mother before him. Her gaze becomes his gaze, her pleasures his pleasures. (orig. emph. 376)

While Alan, unlike Farmer's subject, may not be labeled a gay male, he certainly exhibits the "sexual, social and psychic difference" that Farmer calls "queerness" above. Alan's entire understanding of the world—from religion and history to sexuality and popular culture—are structured by or at least mediated through his mother. His imagination is almost exclusively stimulated by material provided by Dora, and it is this material that composes and shapes his queer worship, making this character an excellent illustration of Farmer's point. This connection between the feminine and the subversive suggests a distinct psychoanalytical influence in *Equus*, and Farmer points out that the notion of "gay matrocentrism" has been deployed in "homophobic and misogynist ways" (365) through Freudian analysis. This reinforces the possibility for solidarity across gender lines, between mother and son, based on shared Otherness. In *Equus*, this solidarity disintegrates, perhaps because of the particularly potent stigma of bestiality that is implicit in Alan's queer subjectivity.

Since the implication of animal/human desire is strong enough to sever Alan's connection with his mother, it is noteworthy that Jill not only sees Alan's erotic appreciation for horses but attempts to normalize it. Many analyses of *Equus* dismiss Jill as a cipher, or as a representation of normalcy similar to Hesther. "Alan's relationship with Jill is presented in a straight-forward, uninteresting way," claims Dianne Taylor-Williams in her discussion of *Equus* as an example of psychodrama, "Jill holds no mystery; she just supplies innuendos. She has no difficulty in conveying her wants, although she is sensitive and tactful" (68). Certainly, compared to Alan's night-time rides with *Equus*, Jill's blunt propositioning is less than ecstasy-inducing. However, it is this very "straight-forward, uninteresting way" that allows her to point out Alan's aberrant desire without triggering his defenses. Taylor-Williams asserts that it is "the incompatibility

between Alan's 'normal' desires for sex with a woman and his bondage to Equus" (68) that leads to his crime, and since sadomasochism⁵⁰ makes frequent and colorful appearances in this play, her word choice is apropos. However, it is not Jill's reaction to Equus that sends Alan into a shame-fueled, violent rage, but Alan's reaction to Equus seeing him with Jill.

Jill is the ostensible witness of Alan's non-normative sexual matrix, but this assessment risks obfuscating the very important fact that Jill is the first person to bring up the erotic qualities of horses to Alan, and she does so in a way that is straightforward and non-judgmental. Jill tells Alan that she caught him "staring into Nugget's eyes," prompting Alan to tell Dysart, "Sometimes, it was like she knew" (81). Alan refutes Jill's implication, but she presses:

JILL: I love horse's eyes. [...] D'you find them sexy?

ALAN: (*outraged*) What?!

JILL: Horses.

ALAN: Don't be daft! (*He springs up and away from her.*)

JILL: Girls do. I mean, they go through a period when they pat them and kiss them a lot. I know *I* did. I suppose it's just a substitute, really. (orig. emph. 81)

This exchange may constitute Jill's most significant influence over Alan's understanding of his own queerness. It is also the most direct conversation that Alan has with anyone besides Dysart about animal eroticism, and the only one that isn't under feigned coercion by hypnosis or drugs. Jill "others" herself first, presumably as a tool to make Alan comfortable by coming-out about her own erotic fascination with horses. In this moment, Jill attempts to forge a connection between Alan and herself, as well as all "girls," based on queer desire. It is also noteworthy, however, that she then gives Alan a normative frame in which to view this queer desire, which is as a "substitute." Though she doesn't expound on what horses are substituting, the fact that she then successfully talks Alan into a date suggests that it is a relationship with a human of the

⁵⁰ Direct and indirect references to sadomasochism (Dysart calling his office "the torture chamber" and Alan's self-flagellation, for example) are woven through the play, often in association with religion, both of which are fundamental parts of Alan's relationship with Equus. As S&M functions as a kind of cultural short-hand for deviant, dangerous sex, this reinforces the point that Alan's queer practice is exoticized in this play, which distinguishes *Equus* from both *The Goat* and *Swimming*.

opposite sex. If this is the case, then Alan does fail to move from the substitute to the real thing when he does not engage in sex with her at the stable. Like Hesther, however, Jill never directly deploys shame; she treats sex and desire as complex, compared to the majority of “outside” characters in Shaffer’s play, and she—like Hesther—seems concerned with socializing Alan by alleviating his shame.

The roles of female characters in shaping Nick’s and Alan’s queer subjectivities are equally significant, though *Equus* arguably presents more variety and *Swimming* presents overwhelmingly positive, supportive examples. Women are figures of nurturing and understanding in Dysart and Alan’s lives, but their influence falls short, in each case, of accepting or perpetuating the male characters’ queer subjectivity. Unlike *Angels* and *Raised*, *The Goat* and *Equus* do not feature differently-gendered characters engaging with each other for their mutual benefit. Hesther, Dora, and Jill each ultimately belong to normalcy, advocating happiness over ecstasy that causes shame and pain. In Albee’s *The Goat*, shame and pain characterize Stevie’s, and therefore Billy’s and Martin’s, reactions to Martin’s aberrant desire.

Shame as Identity-Constituting

Each of these three plays features a revelation with the potential to be shocking and shameful: Nick announces that he is in love with a shark, Alan blinds six horses, and Martin’s relationship with Sylvia is revealed to his family via a letter from his best friend. In all three cases, female characters hold significant (if not total) agency over how these revelations are framed, both for the audience and for the play’s other characters. Hesther decides that Alan will be treated by a psychiatrist while his mother insists that he is influenced by the Devil; Barb, Carla Carla, and Donna facilitate Nick’s meeting The Shark while helping the audience negotiate

the line between literal and nonliteral. Similarly, Stevie's reaction not only shapes Martin's self-conception but also provides a framework for the audience to view both Martin and his actions.

Shame is powerfully present in *The Goat*, as a weapon and as a shaper of identity. In her highly influential 2003 essay "Shame, Theatricality, and Queer Performativity," Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick discusses the importance of shame to queer identity; "for certain ('queer') people," she explains, "shame is simply the first, and remains a permanent, structuring fact of identity: one that [...] has its own powerfully productive and powerfully social metamorphic possibilities" (61). Shame is one means by which queer desires and acts are delineated from the normative, and these non-normative characteristics become inextricably attached to people who exhibit them, effectively constituting their identity. Before Martin's relationship with Sylvia is revealed, he is an average, upper-middle-class father, husband, and friend; his queer actions, once they are revealed, negate his previous identity and replace it with a radically queer subjectivity.

As the majority of the play concerns the aftermath of Martin's revelation, much of the action of *The Goat* is concerned with the destruction and reconstitution of identity. In his essay "Chasing a Myth: The Formulation of American Identity in the Plays of Edward Albee," James Frederick Kittredge refers to the "peeling away of identity that has accompanied the play's action" (107) in *The Goat*. Martin's identity, according to Kittredge, has been "torn asunder by this spiritually transformative act" (105) of falling in love with Sylvia. More significantly, perhaps, Kittredge sees a connection between Martin and Stevie forged by the identity-obliterating power of shame, or of Martin's queer actions: "Her identity effectively obliterated," he asserts, "Stevie is now just as isolated as her husband" (105). Kittredge further extrapolates the co-dependent nature of Stevie and Martin's identities, claiming that "Stevie's sense of self was decimated when her love was equated with that of a goat," but that "Martin experiences loss as his new spiritual identity with Sylvia is destroyed" (110). Before his act was revealed to his

wife, Martin regarded his relationship with Sylvia as sacred and beautiful, but the shame that Stevie and Billy deploy out of their own pain and feeling of betrayal⁵¹ reshapes Martin's conception of the "spiritual identity" he previously associated with his queer desire. More specifically, the image of himself that he sees reflected by his wife conflicts with his own self-image. "His tragedy," Kittredge explains, "lies in his inability to make himself understood by a woman whom he still professes to love deeply" (105). Michelle Robinson echoes Kittredge's assessment in her 2011 article "Impossible Representation: Edward Albee and the End of Liberal Tragedy," identifying the central problem of the play as "Martin's unmitigated commitment to a socially excluded position and Stevie's inexorable condemnation of it" (74). Both scholars highlight the pivotal role that Stevie plays in framing Martin's queer transgression.

The power of shame in generating and shaping queer subjectivity is present in each of these three plays, though in drastically different forms. Shame, secrecy, and the ability of both to increase erotic exoticism are present in *Equus* to an arguably fetishistic degree. Alan's refusal to discuss anything relating to his crime except under hypnosis or to a tape-recorder indicates shame and/or spiritual awe; his relationship to horses is either too shameful, too sacred, or a combination of both to discuss under normal circumstances. Comparatively, Nick's attraction to *The Shark* is de-pathologized; there is no fetishizing of sexual shame or conflation of eroticism and religious awe, though the inherent dangers in dating a Shark are eroticized. Nick's female friends do, however, have the same opportunity as Dora and Stevie to deploy shame in response to Nick's revelation of his desire for an animal, and their shame-less response is what sets *Swimming in the Shallows* apart, opening the possibility for radical queer subjectivity.

⁵¹ It is noteworthy that Stevie and Billy deploy shame out of their personal feelings of betrayal as members of Martin's heteronormative family. Ross, however, does not have this motivation for shaming Martin, though he does so almost as vehemently as Martin's family. Ross has a vested interest in the preservation of Martin's "public face" (Albee 12) as demonstrated by their first scene when he expresses frustration with Martin's strange behavior during their interview taping. In this situation, then, Ross, represents external, cultural social mores; even if Martin's family comes to accept and understand his queer subjectivity, Ross and the external world will continue to reject and shame him, as is demonstrated when Ross walks in on Martin and Billy's private moment (50).

The Goat and *Equus* have the common goal of making sense of a character's action that does not line up with coherent transgressions; it is not "The Way The Game is Played," as Stevie would say. Alan murdering Jill or taking a gun to school would make more sense to us than his bizarre sexual-religious obsession with horses, and the most strange part of Martin's transgression, apparently, is the fact that he professes to love Sylvia, and that his relationship with her has a spiritually significant component. This is what primarily spurs Stevie to violence. In *Equus*, it is Dysart who has the most agency in contextualizing Alan's queer actions: they are amazing, terrible, and awesome, defying his (and presumably our) unimaginative and uninspiring sexual/religious matrixes. "I sit looking at pages of centaurs trampling the soil of Argos," Dysart laments, "and outside my window he is trying to *become one*" (orig. emph. 74). *Swimming*, however, does not share this goal of sense-making; the female characters who frame Nick's queer desire for The Shark are not concerned with the fact that their friend is in love with an animal.

In all three plays, it is a female character who brings about the ultimate shaming moment (Jill and Dora for Alan, Stevie for Martin), or a female character who most actively alleviates shame. While Dysart succeeds at revealing Alan's story and desires, Jill makes a more direct attempt to de-pathologize his desire for horses. While Ross harshly condemns Martin's aberrant sex practices, it is Stevie who brings Martin "down" with shame and grief. The women in these plays control shame, which is an affect generated by public gaze; shame is felt when the subject is looked at by an audience, and these shame-wielding-women therefore shape the frame through which each play's audience looks at the male character's queerness. Why is it that, in these plays which reference a particularly striking brand of sexual deviance, female characters shape the audience's perspective? Perhaps it is because of the potency of one Other (women, and queer women in *Swimming*) looking at another Other's difference and deciding whether or not to

stigmatize or normalize that difference. In this respect, *Swimming* is distinct from both *Equus* and *The Goat* not only in that the man/animal relationship is depathologized but in that Nick, the queer male character with bestial desire, is not isolated from his family in the way that Alan and Martin are isolated from theirs. Nick's family, which is a queer family similar to Prior's in *Angels in America*, is made up of differently-gendered characters struggling with their own processes of transformation; *Swimming*, therefore, is not about Nick struggling with aberrant desire but about four friends supporting each other through their individual development as they move, as a unit, toward a utopian way of life.

The Other and Transformative Imaginings

In these three plays, bestiality serves as a catalyst for significant change, for transformation and metamorphosis, for jumping onto an unknown and unknowable “new track of being” (Shaffer 8). Whatever the particulars of Alan's erotic matrix, the revelation of his rituals and fixations catalyze a paradigmatic shift for Dysart. In the play's first scene, when Dysart is preparing to recount his experience with Alan to the audience, he compares himself to the horse that seems to show human affection as if longing for metamorphosis, calling himself “reined up in old language and old assumption, straining to jump clean-hoofed on to a whole new track of being I only suspect is there” (8). At the play's end, Dysart laments that he must “take away” Alan's deviant desire so that Alan might “feel himself acceptable;” this process, however, will apparently render sex “[t]rampled and furtive and entirely in control” for Alan, but he will also be “be without pain” (98-99). Here, Dysart affiliates heteronormative sexuality with painlessness and therefore implies that queer sexuality, the invigorating kind of religious-erotic ecstasy that he envies, is characterized by pain. Dysart does not manage to jump on to a “new track of being”

through the course of this play, but he has been forced to confront his own disharmony with his wife, his colleagues, and his society, a trope which is repeated in *The Goat*. However, Nick, unlike Martin or Alan (or Dysart), is not severed from his community as a result of the transformative power of his human/animal relationship.

In *Swimming*, love and commitment characterize this new track of being: Carla Carla and Donna have their commitment ceremony despite their anxieties, and Nick and The Shark make a concerted effort to hold off on their physical relationship as they fall in love. At the play's end, Barb is changing—although she has decided that she needs more than eight things, she is down to 147 things, and leaves her shoes on the beach to make it 145. Each play similarly ends with the characters in flux: *The Goat* ends with Billy's half-asked question about what will happen now that Stevie has killed Sylvia, Dysart is left with a "sharp chain" in his mouth that "never comes out" (99), and Nick's new relationship with The Shark is still in the "infatuation" stage (though *Swimming*, unlike *The Goat* or *Equus*, is unambiguously optimistic). The new track of being, unknowable and unknown, is a distinctly queer space: it resists definition, and only after "old assumption" (Shaffer 8) has been destabilized can the characters even perceive that it exists.

Why is bestiality, or at least implied eroticism between human and animal, such a potent marker of queerness in these plays? Perhaps it lies in the power of the "gay pride" model of political visibility and identity politics as a framework of progress for all strains of queer sex, even what many—or at least the majority of characters in these plays—consider the most incomprehensible sexual desire. "We await a furry Oscar Wilde and a barnyard Stonewall," says Tanya Gold in her review of *The Goat*, referencing the growing visibility of "zoophiles," or people who romantically love animals (32). Adam Bock also identifies a correlation between the human/animal desire in *Swimming* but, like the play itself, on a less literal level. "It's a friendly play," says Bock of *Swimming*:

I think people actually want to like gay people. [T]hey want to be allowed to, and be in a good place where the[y're] you know ... where it's not considered weird [...] cause there's nothing gay about the play in a weird way ... even though there is[.] (qtd. in Berger 51)

Because the world of *Swimming* is composed of three women (two of whom are in love), one gay male, and one straight male who has almost zero representational power, *Swimming* lacks the political context in which queer desire is embedded in the real world. In *Equus*, Alan and Dysart are aberrant to their society, and the humor and horror of *The Goat* relies on its literality. *Swimming*, however, uses its theatrical medium to create a queer utopia, where dating a Shark is excitingly ambiguous, both for the characters and for the audience.

At this point, it is useful to reflect on how *Swimming*, for all of its esoteric features, demonstrates the most fundamental characteristic of post-gay plays, which is that it treats same-sex desire as a known entity. Bock explains this decision:

I tried to write past stereotypes in a way ... I tried to write past the idea that Nick has come out. It was sort of he sleeps around ... he slept around too much. Rather than ... you know like any guy ... and I am going to stop doing that or not? [...] and how [am I] going to deal with loneliness? (qtd. in Berger 52)

As many post-gay plays demonstrate, however, writing “past” the gay identity of a character requires surrounding that character with others for whom same-sex desire does not need to be explained. Bock’s solution is to fill his plays with characters who occupy the margins:

I like writing about women ... I like writing about people who aren't normally onstage to be honest. So ... [...] I guess I find it quite easy to write women. I find it easy to write gay men. And I like writing straight men, but they're onstage all the time so I just don't feel like I have to. Like it's just ... I don't look in that direction all the time to write. I write about the people that ... you know it was kind of fun to write the receptionist because it was a 55-year-old woman who's a receptionist who isn't normally the center of the play. Usually it would be a doctor or a politician ... or someone who's successful, you know ... quite high status. So I like writing the fringes and I like writing the edges a little bit more. (qtd. in Berger 55)

Focusing on “the fringes” allows for the post-gay treatment of gay identity as de-pathologized. Furthermore, and most importantly for this study, giving Othered characters absolute agency in a

play allows the creation of a theatrical utopia: “They remind us that the world is made-up and we can make it up, too,” Bock explains. “A lot of plays say, ‘This is the way the world is, get used to it.’ I want to show the possibilities for anybody who isn’t on the winning team, that they can imagine a new world. We can remake it” (qtd. in Berger 18). In a fantastic theatrical world governed by characters who represent the fringes of the real world, radical ways of enacting queerness can exist.

Though *Swimming* goes the farthest in leaving the literal world to explore a queer utopia, *The Goat* and *Equus* also attempt to create worlds where incoherent actions are made coherent. According to Albee scholar J. Ellen Gainor:

[*The Goat*] confronts the dominant, hetero-normative culture with its designation of gay sexuality as aberrant, and challenges it to rethink not only these categories, but also the impossibility of making clear distinctions among the manifold, polymorphously perverse expressions of sexual desire. (qtd. in Kittredge 108)

While *Swimming* exists in a queer utopia from the play’s beginning, *The Goat* focuses on the destruction of the preexisting world which must occur before new realities can be conceived. In her essay on liberal tragedy in Albee’s work, Michelle Robinson explains the apocalyptic notions embedded in this play:

The pit Billy describes is an abyss into which the nuclear family will be drawn despite itself, and the unearthing of the foundations of the home signals a collapse. His father’s tunneling involves falling out of the world but arriving some other place, its very dimensions beyond comprehension; all that is known is that it can, it will swallow us all. And this suggestion is at once horrifying and strangely exciting. (75)

Though the radically queer act of bestiality does not propel the characters of *The Goat* into a queer utopia, it points at the possibility. Similarly, Shaffer was inspired to write *Equus* upon hearing the story of a “highly disturbed young man” who committed an act that, to Shaffer, defied “any coherent explanation” (4). Is the project of these plays, ultimately, to render the incomprehensible and un-relatable coherent and tangible?

Though *Equus* and *The Goat* also look toward the unknown, attempting to create a coherent narrative for seemingly incoherent actions, both plays do so in a realistic way. The storytelling of *Equus* is highly theatrical, but the events of the play could all happen in the real, known world. *Swimming in the Shallows*, however, is a fantasia which explores radical queer possibilities in a world that is not confined by literality. This touches upon the notion raised by many feminist and queer theorists that a patriarchal/heteronormative culture can only visualize a feminist and/or queer world outside of realism. Not only, then, does *Swimming* engage the radical queer desire of human for animal, but it does so in a way that frees this desire from the rules and consequences that constitute “coherence,” inviting us to imagine a radically queer utopia. The project of *Swimming* is not to solve the problem of or make sense of Nick’s bestial desire but to break out of destructive habits in order to live a happier, more satisfying life; as the characters discover, mutual support is vital to this project.

Like the other focal plays of this study, *Swimming in the Shallows* features a radically queer subjectivity supported by a queer family of differently-gendered individuals. This play is also similar to *Angels in America*, *Raised in Captivity*, and *The Credeaux Canvas* in that it explores the possibility of queer utopia; *Swimming*, however, does so in an apolitical, fantastically theatrical world. This removal from real-world consequences that would, for instance, require the resolution of The Shark’s nature, allow the queer family in *Swimming* to explore radically queer ways of living. Some scholars, however, find such apolitical fantasia suspect. David Savran, for example, argues that in *Angels in America*, “contradiction is less disentangled than immobilized” (223). Though *Angels* is decidedly more political than *Swimming*, Savran’s concern is that while *Angels* does not attempt to transcend or elide difference, it treats the political consequences of difference as unimportant compared to the personal affiliations among characters. While the ways that fantasia that can be insidiously

detrimental to depictions of real-world political circumstances are apparent, it is noteworthy that all four focal plays in this study seem to approach post-gay queer utopia through the personal, sometimes completely removed from a political context, as is the case with *Swimming in the Shallows*. Can productive interaction of straight women and queer men only occur in drama that is non-realistic and apolitical? The fact that these post-gay plays feature similar technologies by which queer family, radical queer subjectivities, and queer utopia are explored suggests that the question of apolitical resistance in post-gay drama must be addressed.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

“Theatre, by its nature, reveals and revels in the very angst the antitheatricalists were frantically trying to quell: the notion of identities as contingent and malleable and the suggestion that categories can be playfully transgressed—queered.” – Alisa Solomon⁵²

The four plays featured in this study have in common not only that they are contemporary, mainstream American drama, but that they each feature interrogations of identity, queer family units, utopian imaginings, and radical queer subjectivities. The project of this study has been to examine these characteristics within and among these plays, and what this examination reveals is that these characteristics are not only linked to and interdependent upon each other but are also fueled by the interaction of differently-gendered characters. What accounts for this dramatic formula? What particular aspects of gender difference facilitate these subjectivities, and how do these plays use dramatic techniques and theatrical fantasia to imagine queer life beyond identity politics and struggle? What this study demonstrates is that gender difference facilitates the depiction of radical queer subjectivities and queer utopian family in post-gay drama because it allows the audience to approach and experience Others without the mediation of heteronormative, patriarchal power. Gender difference in these plays allows the telling of a story that can end up in a radical, resistant queer utopia. This suggests, therefore, that the engagement of multiple types of Others across difference is not only a necessity of political solidarity but a mutually beneficial act of resistance; these plays demonstrate that Others need each other in all of their specificity and conflict in order to effectively subvert hegemonic discourse. In these plays, the Other is not configured in opposition to a monolithic subject, but in relation to another Other, challenging the binary system intrinsic to heteronormative power.

Why specifically does gender difference create such an effect? It is one thing to observe that females and queer males forge significant relationships across gender difference in these

⁵² “Great Sparkles of Lust: Homophobia and the Antitheatrical Tradition” 13

plays, but does this action necessarily create and sustain radical queerness? In *Swimming in the Shallows*, for example, no female characters are part of the relationship that is radically queer; Donna introduces Nick to the Shark, but her gender is not necessarily what allows her to do this. Could she not just as easily be a male character and serve the same dramatic function? Arguably, no; Nick does not appear to have male friends. He has boyfriends and lovers in quick succession, but his friends and confidants are women. In this highly original play is a relatively conventional motif of close friendship between gay men and women, a suggestion (though it is not referenced in the play) of solidarity due to common Otherness. Shared Otherness is the key to why gender difference is essential to the radically queer elements of these plays. Each of these plays features interaction between queer men and straight women that do not elide but rather highlight the significance of gender difference between these two Others. In each play, the differently-gendered characters must confront the specificities of this difference in order for each of them to move toward a more desirable state of being. The danger of placing such emphasis on the specificities of gender difference among characters, however, is that such emphasis could reinscribe a binary view of gender, which is to say discrete categories of male and female. In essence, while these plays are post-gay, they are not post-gender, though they may challenge notions of gender essentialism and expose gender-based oppression. It is this implicit binary of male/female, however, that lends gender its potency in post-gay drama. Gender itself is a binary construct implicit between the Othered characters (female and gay male) in these plays, and part of the radical queerness of these plays is this referencing of gender binarisms combined with the subversion of gendered traits and discrete gender differences. Each of the plays included in this study expose the fallacy of biological gender essentialism (i.e., Sebastian teaches Bernadette to “mother” her child) as well as the material and political consequences of gender interpellation (i.e., Amelia’s ability to become pregnant makes her specially vulnerable compared to her male

counterparts). By referencing heteronormative gender characteristics and also working to destabilize such categories, similarly to the way each play interrogates the supposed markers of gayness/queerness, these plays produce radically transformative stories.

The interaction of differently-gendered characters emerge, through these plays, as a major post-gay characteristic because post-gay is part of a movement past identity politics and toward what Amalia Ziv calls a politics of identification: looking to other types of Others and acknowledging differences as well as mutually and intersecting oppressions in order to exchange knowledge and experience with each other. As a result, these post-gay plays all contain queer family units, though the family in each play is very different. Family, in these plays, emerges as a tool for engaging both difference and solidarity in way that is personal but that can relate to public and political discourses. The notion that characters who are separated by such a significant difference as gender, particularly given the tumultuous history of gender-based oppression in the United States, can interact in a way that elides neither character's agency or visibility toward mutual happiness is utopian; this does not mean that such interaction is not possible, but that it compels fantastical and radical imaginings. Theatre lends itself to such stories, then, because although the audience is aware that the characters and their actions are not real, they physically occupy the space in which these fictional people make audacious moves toward utopias. The implicit suggestion of such drama, therefore, is that what can be achieved live on stage before witnesses can conceivably be achieved in the non-fictional world.

Theatrical Fantasia and Queer Utopia

With the exception of *The Credeaux Canvas*, each of the focal plays of this study feature elements of theatrical fantasia. The events of *Raised in Captivity* could actually occur, but the

way that they are depicted in the play itself is highly theatrical, whereas *Angels in America* and *Swimming in the Shallows* feature characters and events that are well outside of psycho-realism. *The Credeaux Canvas* is connected to these plays in that it similarly explores gender-difference, queer family, and radical queer subjectivity, but it remains completely within the realm of psycho-realism. It is noteworthy, then, that while *Credeaux* includes a utopian idea in Jamie's scheme for his queer family, this is the only play that ends with the queer family disintegrated and the utopian possibility dissolved. Furthermore, this disintegration and dissolution can be traced to issues of gender-difference. What is implied by this difference is not that characters cannot work across gender difference to reach queer utopias in the real world, but that reaching toward queer utopia in solidarity across gender difference is more easily facilitated when realistic structures are disregarded.

What is the significance of utopia for post-gay drama and for feminist and queer theory? In their 1998 essay, "Sex in Public," Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner suggest that the project of queer theory and radical queerness is to materialize utopia: "Heterosexuality involves so many practices that are not sex that a world in which this hegemonic cluster would not be dominant is, at this point, unimaginable. We are trying to bring that world into being" (557). Because heteronormativity pervades society through multiple strains of discourse, it is seemingly impossible to conceive of a system outside of heteronormative influence. This impossible task is the project of queer resistance, which is perhaps why theatrical fantasia is instrumental to configuring queer utopia in drama. "The queer world," Berlant and Warner describe, "is a space of entrances, exits, unsystematized lines of acquaintance, projected horizons, typifying examples, alternate routes, blockages, incommensurate geographies" (558). In her manifesto, "Feminist Performance and Utopia" (2007), feminist drama theorist Jill Dolan asserts that "feminism, performance, and utopia" are specially suited to working in concert with each other and that

these terms should be “reinvigorated as rallying calls for the twenty-first century” (213). Performance is the ideal means of connecting theoretical/political projects such as feminism with utopia, Dolan explains, because “art helps us imagine new worlds” (213). The particular plays featured in this study imagine new worlds through the development of a variety of types of queer families, composed of characters marked by multiple types of difference.

The theme of family runs through all of four focal plays as representative of a life-affirming, positive aspect of queer utopia. This is true even of *Credeaux*: though the queer family ultimately dissolves, all three participants are happiest and most optimistic during the moment when all three have agreed to Jamie’s plan. This plan, though it fails, links all three of them together in a queerly criminal undertaking, and the possibility of succeeding in their joint endeavor promises happiness for each member. The queer family featured in *Credeaux* is not only the exception to the others in this study in that it ultimately disintegrates, but in that it is the only queer family in all four focal plays to include sexual interest between male and female characters. Nick, Donna, Carla-Carla, and Barb (*Swimming*) are involved in couples, Barb in a heterosexual couple, but heterosexual desire is not contained within the queer family itself. The same is true of Sebastian, Bernadette, and baby Simon (*Raised*) as well as of Prior, Louis, Belize, and Hannah (*Angels*). These queer families, though they include characters of different genders, do not involve desire across gender, as does *Credeaux*. Does this difference suggest that queer family, and therefore queer utopia, relies on the absence of sexual interest between men and women? It is noteworthy that gender-based inequality—specifically Amelia’s exclusion from active, present participation in the threesome’s plan—is what destroys the queer family as well as the possibility of utopian happiness in *Credeaux*, which could suggest that gender conflict and

inequity is generated by heterosexual interest.⁵³ Winston's non-normative attitude towards sex and desire renders him queer, but his interaction with Amelia is still affected by issues of gender, though the two of them are both Others to the heteronormative desires represented by Jamie.

Feminist Theory versus Queer Theory

The implications of queer family and queer utopia in these plays brings up questions of gender, sex, and power, subjects which are emphasized in the analytical frameworks of feminist and queer theory. These two theoretical frameworks should ostensibly collaborate well together, having many similar characteristics and goals; however, the relationship between feminist and queer theory is often fraught with conflict, largely because they pursue similar goals in different ways. My interpretation of the main contention between these two theoretical constructs is that feminists perceive that queer theory often risks eliding important political differences in an effort to destabilize identity. If everyone is queer, that notion risks obfuscating the significant differences in power and privilege allowed to certain individuals and groups based on gender, race, ability, and geography. However, contemporary feminist and queer theorists largely agree that movement beyond identity-politics is necessary, but how to do so while still respecting differences that affect privilege?

In these plays, particularly those which employ theatrical fantasia, mixed-gender queer families form and move toward utopia. While performing utopia has been called an efficacious transformative practice, these plays, especially the fantasias, seem removed from real-world political contexts. In *Swimming*, Donna and Carla Carla's conflict over getting married has to do with their own trust and commitment issues, not the fact that they do not enjoy the same

⁵³ While this study does not attempt to account for playwright intention, it is noteworthy that these plays, and therefore the utopias that they put forth, are created by queer men.

marriage rights as opposite-sex couples. As previously discussed, these plays (besides *Angels in America*) focus on individuals and their personal conflicts, not on queer individuals in a larger political schema. These queer families form without intervention by external political forces. Are they, therefore, politically productive? Need they necessarily be politically productive in order to be valuable, as both feminist and queer theorists might suggest? In *Queer Family Values* (1999), Valerie Lehr asserts that families are “important because they serve as mediating institutions that ‘connect the public and private’” (77). Similarly, Berlant and Warner point out that “the family form has functioned as a mediator and metaphor of national existence in the United States since the eighteenth century” (549). In what way, therefore, do the mixed-gender, queer families in these post-gay plays connect the public and private? One of the most prominent manifestations of this element of family is that while these stories may focus on the personal and private, they are viewed publicly, that is onstage. Accounting for how audiences might be affected by viewing these plays is impossible, but the fact that these stories that point toward queer utopias are performed live in public forums is significant. Because family, or at least the strong affective bonds associated with family, is an accessible and visceral image for audiences, the structure of queer family in these plays mediates between the personal lives of the characters and the public view of the audience. *Swimming* suggests that the utility of a queer family is that together the members of such a family can overcome problems of transgressing conventions, such as a human dating a shark (who can talk); this is part of mediating the public and private for the individual, as Lehr describes. Rather than legitimize the national citizenship of the characters, queer family in these plays serves as a “mediator and metaphor” of citizenship in queer utopia, both for the characters in the queer family and, vicariously, for audience members.

Why does queer family emerge as such a strong image in all of these plays that are concerned with radical queer subjectivity? It is noteworthy that the majority of classic American

plays are about families, likely because this subject lends itself to emotionally-complex dramatic conflict, and because a broad number of audience members can relate to some aspect of family drama. However, in many well-known American plays about heteronormative families, the family is often depicted as a difficult or even damaging structure from the which the characters must emerge and/or recover; examples of this type of destructive heteronormative family include multiple plays by Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Eugene O'Neill, as well as Tracy Letts' Pulitzer Prize winning *August: Osage County* (2007). In the plays featured in this study, however, queer family emerges in response to the needs and desires of the characters, and it is the most potent symbol of utopia. This type of positive, "built" family has a potentially powerful draw for the audience, and the marginalized characters of the play, because it is built from and predicated on inclusion and is easily extended to the audience. In this sense, the queer family has the potential to mediate between the audience's personal and public identities as well, creating a road to solidarity that is not pre-determined as political but is not completely apolitical. Berlant and Warner cogently explain the links among family, intimacy, community, and utopia in the American cultural imagination:

A complex cluster of sexual practices gets confused, in heterosexual culture, with the love plot of intimacy and familialism that signifies belonging to a society in a deep and normal way. Community is imagined through scenes of intimacy, coupling, and kinship; a historical relation to futurity is restricted to generational narrative and reproduction. A whole field of social relations become intelligible as heterosexuality, and this privatized sexual culture bestows on its sexual practices a tacit sense of rightness and normalcy. This sense of rightness—embedded in things and not just sex—is what we call heteronormativity. (554)

If a place in heteronormative family (private) secures the individual's place in a future shaped by heteronormative power (public), then it follows that queer family functions as a vehicle for individuals to move toward queer utopia. "Making a queer world has required the development of kinds of intimacy that bear no necessary relation to domestic space, to kinship, to the couple form, to property, or to the nation," Berlant and Warner explain (558). Not only, then, is queer

family in these plays a necessity for imagining queer utopia, but queer family and queer utopia are characterized by species of intimacy that do not necessarily correlate to heteronormative familial relations, including sexual interest. What critics like Robert F. Gross interpret as desexualization in plays such as *Raised in Captivity* is therefore in fact the development of queer intimacy intrinsic to queer family. As discussed in previous chapters, the fact that the characters within the queer families featured in these plays do not practice sex with or express sexual desire for each other does not mean that these characters have relinquished sex and desire. If sex and desire is not included within these queer families, however, and if queer families are the vehicles by which characters reach utopia, does this mean that queer utopia is necessarily devoid of sex and desire? Though the focal plays of this study do not actualize it, it is conceivable that queer utopia includes multiple types of sex and desire simply because of the ways that these plays generate radical queer subjectivities.

Personal versus Political

The negotiation of the personal and political via queer family is highlighted in *Angels in America*. Omer-Sherman claims that, during the rabbi's first speech about the Jewish migration, "the theatre audience itself is implicated, as a sort of extended family of undetermined proportions and untested solidarity" (18). This implication of the audience as an "extended family" of "untested solidarity" is one of the stand-point features of the play and a major part of its power as a post-gay play that moves beyond diametric struggle, much as *Swimming* creates a "friendly" space for its audience to engage with the queer characters' trajectories. *Angels*, unlike *Swimming*, is a very political play, but it does not politicize in a way that alienates or interpellates audience members. It is possible, however, that creating a fantastic theatrical space freed from the political and material circumstances and conflicts of actual life could work to

elide and obfuscate significant issues of difference, particularly gender difference. This, as discussed in Chapter 3, is the major argument made by scholars such as David Savran. Savran uses Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's phrase "kinda subversive, kinda hegemonic" (224) to describe what he believes is the effect of *Angels in America*. In fact, this phrase could be used to describe many of the plays in this study as they seem to simultaneously attempt to imitate and subvert conventional and heteronormative structures, such as gender difference and family. Feminist and queer theorist Lauren Berlant makes a similar argument regarding the notion of utopia, claiming that "the temporal and spatial ambiguity of 'utopia' has the effect of obscuring the implications of political activity and power relations in American civil life" (32). Do the plays in this study, in an attempt to move beyond identity politics, simply obscure them in pointing toward utopia?

Based on the evidence of the plays examined in this study, when we look at marginalized characters—Others—interacting across difference that would tend to keep them from inhabiting the same plays as fully and agentive characters, we see imaginatively energizing pictures of utopia. In addition, these stories lend themselves to "fantasia," or at least to non-realism. The only focal play that doesn't have a happy ending is *The Credeaux Canvas*, which is also the only strictly psycho-realistic focal play;⁵⁴ *Angels*, *Raised*, and *Swimming* all take place in worlds wherein seemingly impossible things happen: an Angel appears and a panorama dummy comes to life, an infant can walk on his own, and a young man and a shark can start a serious romantic relationship. The scheme that will give the characters happy endings in *The Credeaux Canvas* falls through. Though these plays are certainly imaginatively energizing, are they politically energizing? It could be argued that imagination can lead into political action, but is that

⁵⁴ Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* (1958) bears several important similarities to Bunin's *Credeaux Canvas*: both plays are set in a realistic world, both include sexual interest between the queer male and heterosexual female, and the queer family dissolves in both plays.

necessarily so? Do the fantasias and utopias imagined in these plays politically de-activate audiences by removing real-life polemics surrounding queer subjectivity?

In order to appreciate the significance of these plays to queer drama, it is necessary to make a distinction between political activism and resistance. Cathy J. Cohen elegantly articulates the difference between a “civil rights strategy, where assimilation into, and replication of, dominant institutions are the goals” and a radical approach that “seeks to transform the basic fabric and hierarchies that allow systems of oppression to persist and operate efficiently” (21). The tendency of queer activism to employ the binary rhetoric of identity-politics (us-versus-them) has, according to Cohen, inhibited this transformative effect, but she maintains that queer theory and politics contain the potential for radical resistance. In his essay, “Promiscuities” (2010), Andrew Samuels calls the “massive individualism of promiscuous sex” which Leo Bersani recuperates in *Is the Rectum a Grave?* (1987), “a very specific and powerful form of resistance precisely because there is no overt political agenda” (217). How, though, can this form of resistance do any work if it is not coherent within a political context? Renowned Foucault scholar Barbara Biesecker explains that “resistant practices are gestures that defy translation, throw sense off track and, thus short-circuit the system through which sense is made” (357). Whereas traditional (identity-based) political activism directly opposes (and therefore forms a dyad with) a certain dominant political ideology or stance, resistance rejects the very paradigm that power generates. By rejecting reality and real-world politics for fantasia and utopian possibility, these plays generate resistance rather than political opposition, inviting audiences to imagine new paradigms characterized by radical queerness.

These plays are politically energizing in a way that is unique to theatre and drama: they allow us, as artists and as audience members, to imagine possible paradigms. By creating a theatrical world that is not bound by real-world politics or socio-cultural circumstances, these

plays allow us to entertain radical subjectivities. What these plays also demonstrate is that it is neither necessary nor beneficial to elide or transcend significant real-world differences, particularly when multiple subjectivities intersect in a majority of individuals, in order to generate these radical, utopian ways of life. The project of the post-gay era is to make visible the realities and possibilities of radical queerness, and in the way that these plays engage characters of multiple gender expressions as well as divergent and enigmatic forms of desire and affection, they are remarkably productive examples of radically queer drama.

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