

queer
sex
life

*Autobiographical Notes
on Sexuality, Gender and
Identity*

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And to skinny white girl. Always to skinny white girl.

Introduction

I don't think I'm trying to create a neologism with the title of this book, but rather a melding of three words to represent how those things have jammed together in my experience. The last two parts do not need much explanation: this is my view of sex from the vantage point of my life, my life according to its sexual experience. On the other hand, I think “queer” needs some elucidation.

Gentle reader, you might be sick of explanations of the term “queer.” While almost anyone who is a part of the panoply of sexual diversities will be happy that sexual freedom has advanced considerably in the last forty years, some of us might be less pleased that “queer” has developed with it, along with endless discussions of its meaning. Like participants in other twentieth-century liberation movements, homosexual activists embraced labels that had previously been used to attack them, from the Radical Faeries to Dykes on Bikes; the most ubiquitous example today is “queer.” Two prominent contemporary usages by the homosexual community are in “Queer Nation,” the sexual radical in opposition to social norms, and in queer theory, an intellectual position that acclaims the ultimate instability of all received assumptions about gender and sexuality. As I note in the chapter on bisexuality, Jonathan Dollimore worries that this can turn into “facile postmodernism.”¹ (14)

A quick perusal of the *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests the base of the word. The earliest example comes from 1508: “Heir cumis our awin queir Clerk.” In other words, “queer” as strange or slightly off. Then from 1561, “A Quire bird is one that came lately out of prison.” 1740 provides “Instead of returning the good Guinea again, they used to give a Queer One.”² The earliest usage that specifies a homosexual meaning is from 1922, noted as coming from the delightfully named *The Practical Value of Scientific Study of Juvenile Delinquents* (Children's Bureau, US Depart-

1. For more extended discussions of the term “queer,” look at Chapters Five and Nine:

2. The 1508 reference is from William Dunbar, *The flyting of Dunbar and Kennedy*; 1561, from John Awdelay, *The fraternite of vacabondes*; and 1740, from *Ordinary of Newgate, his Account III 15/1*.

ment of Labor): “A young man, easily ascertainable to be unusually fine in other characteristics, is probably ‘queer’ in sex tendency.”

I am uncomfortable applying to myself the recent meanings of queer. I don’t consider myself in opposition to society, but rather I am afraid that I am in most ways insufferably bourgeois. On the other hand, perhaps my identity in some ways flirts with the “facile postmodern.” I don’t like this thought, but whenever I assert an identity I always think of it as a relative category rather than an absolute. Thus I am “gay” not because this is the essence of my being, but because I view myself as more homosexual than those who are not “gay.” On the other hand, the earlier dictionary meanings of “queer” strike me as perfectly suitable to who I think I am. I know that I have always been considered by others to be a rather different person, some kind of “queir Clerk.” While I have luckily never been imprisoned, various people have suggested that I have come from some alien place and thus am a “Quire bird.” Both gay and straight have suggested that I am somehow counterfeit, deceiving the world in claiming to be part of either group. I cherish the day when two women asserted, hours apart, that “You have always looked like a fag,” and “You aren’t really gay, you know.” Neither seemed to think I was the “good Guinea,” although the latter believed I was not the good Guinea because I claimed not to be the good Guinea. And as I note below, my greatest interest in this book is my own “sex tendency.”

This of course raises the question of why should my “greatest interest” be of interest to you? The answer is primarily to provide a specific focus to the discussion. K.M. Colby says of the autobiographical ‘I’:

‘I’ can thus refer to an observed or an observer. (Naturally, an observer cannot observe itself but must be taken for granted by transcendental argument.) Introspection of what is referred to as ‘I’ is a process of retrospection, i.e., inspection of something which has already been produced by a preceding cycle of mental activity. It can be reacted to in the next cycle like any other content of awareness.

(Stoller 233)

Colby’s argument is a bit opaque, primarily because the process is as well. The observer cannot be the observed. Thus the “transcendental argument” is that someone must be doing the observing in order for observation to happen, but in order to avoid a perpetual *mise en abîme*, the observer must be “taken for granted.” Even if there is a chain of observers, the final one must be accepted without dissection. If the observer and the observed are the same person then the separation is accomplished by retrospection. The observer and the observed are not “the same” because the observer observes who the observed was in the past, although that past might be seconds before. My argument here is that even if this is the case, retrospection approximates combining the observed and the observer, in a fashion particularly suitable when the observer is attempting an analysis of the sexual experiences of the observed.

As in that reference to Colby, much of this book is an evaluation and assessment of the analyses of others. Partly this is a continuation of the usual academic process; this book is a “review of the literature.” Thus while the reason for the book and the commentary that shapes it are the product of my experiences, the substance, what I am tempted to call the “meat” of the book, is the work of scholars from a variety of fields, first and foremost sexology but also psychology, sociology, anthropology, medicine, history, geography, philosophy, and other disciplines. My process is one that I have found useful throughout my life, both professionally and personally. I consider a problem and then look for some text that reflects on something similar. Then I respond to that reflection and attempt to come up with at least partially enlightening conclusions.

In many cases I have found insights from unlikely sources. Thus Bruno Latour, in *Pandora’s Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*, states that “The actor does not yet have an essence. It is defined only as a list of effects—or performances—in a laboratory. Only later does one deduce from these performances a competence, that is, a substance that explains why the actor behaves as it does.” (308) In other words, the actor is only a series of actions until the observer sums up these actions with explanations that create a person who has done these actions. I find this

a compelling summary of my own process of becoming. I have seen actions, my actions, over the years, and my continuing introspection or, according to Colby, retrospection, has led to the conclusions that I present in this study. This is Latour's "substance."

The autobiography, especially the coming out story, is the generic gay narrative. A recent book, *First Person Queer: Who we are (so far)*, presents no less than forty brief examples (Labonté and Schimel). But as the subtitle of the present volume suggests, this is not an "autobiography" but rather "autobiographical notes." I am under no delusion that my life is sufficiently unusual to justify an autobiography, although I cannot deny that I have at times been a figure of note. In his memoir, *Dr. Delicious*, Robert Lecker states, "if only I had dressed more like Terry Goldie, a CanLit specialist who routinely showed up at conferences wearing thong-like bikini briefs and sandals" (166). The sandals are true, but the "bikini briefs" are not. Still, I seem to have been sufficiently remarkable to Dr. Lecker to be part of his autobiographical lament.

More to the point of the present book, while I make no claims to be a sartorial model, even in the chapter on drag, I will claim that my perspective on sexual matters might be of interest because of the various ways it is framed, as a public statement of certain sexual points of view. Ruth Behar encapsulates her ideal anthropologist in an observer who is emotionally marked: *The Vulnerable Observer*. She agrees that autobiography in academic work must be justified: "Skeptics might reasonably ask: At a moment when the autobiographical voice is so highly commodified—most visibly in the talk shows of Oprah and Geraldo Rivera—shouldn't scholars write against the grain of this personalizing of culture, rather than reproduce it?" (25) Her answer is that the attempt to share the inside of the self observing enhances rather than detracts from scholarship.

Frank Browning, in *A Queer Geography: Journeys Toward a Sexual Self*, sees a particular value in the perspective employed by gay journalists: "By observing (and coming out is a public self-observance) the queerness of ourselves, we inevitably change how and what we observe in the world as well." (140) Jerome Bruner, in his essay "The Autobiographical

Process," suggests why "public self-observance" is important in autobiography:

... one's reflections on both one's self and one's world cannot be one's own alone: you and your version of your world must be public, recognizable enough to be negotiable in the 'conversation of lives.' So emerges the classic criterion of what constitutes 'good' autobiography—that it be communicable through its representativeness." (43)

That representativeness is important if the text is to be "negotiable," but still more if it is to be named, to be "recognizable" as fitting a certain niche, in this case that of "gay." Browning justifies why Michel Foucault avoided such naming:

His mistrust of calling himself 'gay,' I think, was not fear of personal embarrassment or lost prestige, but that by adopting a category of sexual identification, he would have sacrificed his own ruthless quest for knowledge for the security of a new regime of normalcy. To be normal was to be dead. (161)

I hesitate to disagree with any praise of Foucault, especially of his "quest for knowledge." Like thousands of others, the present book would not exist if not for how Foucault has changed writing and thinking. However, I certainly hope Foucault's avoidance of the label had a more reasonable impetus than some pseudo-radical assumption that "to be normal was to be dead." Presumably every aspect of Foucault's life was sufficiently documented—or at least the object of enough flagrant rumours—that he was in little danger of being considered "normal." In any case, many of the Foucauldian concepts, most particularly his version of genealogy, are about reconfiguring the norm in order to understand it a different way. My suspicion is that rather than avoiding the normal, Foucault was avoiding exactly the representativeness that Browning praises above. To be "gay" is a complex life—as is any other—but for

most people, both gay and straight, those complexities are contained within a package conceived a certain way by each observer. I'm sure that he found that just being labeled "Foucault" was insufficiently expansive, much less to accept being trapped within the category of "gay."

Another thinker who is no doubt too absent by name in this book but ever present in thought is Sigmund Freud. While Freud is constantly asserted to be sexist and often represented as homophobic, his ideas on sex permeate anything written on the subject. One of my students once gave an anti-Freud presentation in which she made a number of *ad hominem* statements about Freud's biography in order to buttress her dismissal of his ideas. When I pointed out to her that all of her interpretations were based on theories created by psychoanalysis, she thought I was being unfair. If you can't attack Freud without being Freudian, what hope is there? As so many have observed, it is easy to dismiss Freud's claims of scientific rigour and objectivity, but almost impossible to escape the grasp his ideas have over every concept we have on sexual psychology, very much including our views of homosexuality.

To assess the complexities of "the homosexual" with precise scientific objectivity is beyond me, and I think probably beyond anyone. Throughout this study there are references to many who have tried, with various degrees of success. Someone who has been for me an inspiration, a trial, and even at times a source of laughter is the late John Money. He has come to fascinate me sufficiently that I am now beginning a book devoted to his work, its amazing successes and thundering—even cataclysmic—failures, all in pursuit of *scientia sexualis*. He has become a prime example of blind scientism in sexology. Thus his attempt to depict clear descriptions in *Gay, Straight and In-Between: The Sexology of Erotic Orientation* is arguably even more plagued than others:

Many social science writers and sex therapists differentiate object choice, gender identity, and gender role. This enables them to say, for example, that a man is masculine in his gender identity and gender role, but homosexual in orientation and object choice. The alternative is to say

he has a masculine G-I/R [Gender Identity/Role] except for the sexueroetic imagery and ideation of his romantic life, love life, and sex life in dreams and fantasies, and in their translation into actual practices (and vice versa for a lesbian). This alternative formulation circumvents the scientific fallacy inherent in the term object choice, namely that heterosexuality and homosexuality have their origin in voluntary choice and are therefore already fully explained by fiat, without the superfluous addition of more research—which constitutes the fallacy of scientific nihilism. (85)

One need not be a scientific nihilist to decide this is not a satisfactory explanation.

Most of these theorists are seeking explanations that are not just satisfactory but general, applicable to a category such as "gay" or "homosexuality." As the title suggests, Edward Stein's *The Mismeasure of Desire: The Science, Theory, and Ethics of Sexual Orientation* is less convinced than Money that scientific positivism can provide answers, but that does not mean I find easy agreement with his assessments: "The general point is that just because there are different social structures surrounding some human phenomenon in the past and the present does not necessarily mean that the two phenomena are different. Consider the example of pregnancy." (96) I am sure there are deep reasons why pregnancy is so often the example of full truth but perhaps it is not the best analogy for male homosexuality. If homosexuality means only some sort of sexual activity between males then the term might apply in different spaces at different times, but it always means more. Two manifestations may be argued to be the same "phenomena," although this is not because the manifestations are the same but because the observer views them as such. This is only one reason why the present study seldom posits general answers about identity, but rather examines actions and suggests the implications of those actions.

The autobiographical elements of this study are admittedly navel-

gazing—or perhaps self-microscopy. I have chosen to act in certain ways and I am interested in attempting to discover why I have so acted. I have made choices and wish to understand those choices. Thus one of the most basic truisms about sexual orientation seems to me worth questioning. This is one “fact” that Stein presents as a given: “Sexual orientations are immutable, that is, beyond a certain point in a person’s development, a person’s sexual orientation cannot be changed. Immutability is a distinct claim from determinism.” (291) In other words, while Stein is cynical about the various hypotheses as to what determines sexual orientation, he has no doubt it is an unchanging truth of personhood. The momentary mutations in this immutability, that one drunken night when a heterosexual acted homosexually or a homosexual heterosexually, can be fully incorporated merely by stretching the boundaries of bisexuality. Of course, sufficient stretching of bisexuality would erase sexual orientation and make its immutability a moot point. Instead, in reflecting on my own life I see much more that is mutable. There are sexual opportunities that I would never pursue, many others that I have not pursued, and some I have pursued and found unsuitable. I have yet to see any of these, however, as so foreordained by something called “sexual orientation” as to be outside the space of mutability. My sexual world has been a mutable sphere, and parts of this book explore this mutability.

Mutability and contradiction. One of the first readers of this manuscript stated that the most evident theme is contradiction of what one might assume to be the case. This can be seen in each chapter. Thus the homosexual child is not sexual, the penis belongs to the other not the self, there is no bisexual, anal sex is for the self not the other, the dinge queen is not a racist, the drag queen is emphatically a male, stranger sex is a pursuit of love, and coming out of the closet is never a full truth. Even the chapter on *The Crying Game* produces the ultimate object as subject. I am not making a claim such as Walt Whitman’s:

You say I contradict myself. So I contradict myself

I am large. I contain multitudes. (“Song of Myself”)

I do not have the grandeur to contain contradictions. Rather my experience has been that contradictions are the primary truth of my sexuality. Thus to explore the complexity of one “gay” experience is often to explore the elements that seem hardly “gay” at all.

Gary Dowsett’s *Practicing Desire: Homosexual Sex in the Era of AIDS*, a sociological study of a number of Australian men, offers the following assessment of one of his cases:

Harriet exemplifies the active construction of the self within a discursive framing of a homosexual desire. Yet the frame is very pliable and without its contents it threatens to collapse. To some extent being gay, that is, clarifying a sexual identity, is a discursive practice providing sufficient direction to enable men to cluster with like others; it is a collective resolution of individual desire. It becomes the vantage point from which the rest are assessed. But Harriet’s example calls for a different conceptualization of sexual identity. To stretch the concept to include a preoperative transsexual prostitute, a dragon [drag queen], a gay man with a sluttish sexual appetite, these experiences of transgressive male sexual interests renders the term unwieldy. The term ‘sexual subjectivity’ offers a larger conceptual space to encompass the ingredients Harriet illustrated. (107-108)

Thus, like Harriet, all of Dowsett’s cases, including those who consider themselves “gay,” demonstrate the impossibility of “gay” as a sexological description. As Dowsett asserts:

Being gay emerges in these case studies as a different kind of struggle, at one level more cultural than personal, more social than sexual, related to an ongoing reordering and resurfacing within larger discursive frameworks and in practices; it is of an order different from that of the pursuit of homosexual sex itself. (142)

With the possible exception of the chapter on the closet, and even including the chapter on *The Crying Game*, this book is less about “being gay” than about the meaning of that pursuit.

In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak reflects on her position as an “Indian.” Many observers, including those who are Indian themselves, have seen her either negatively or positively as a representative—or anti-representative—of the expatriate Indian. She herself provides a more complex explanation for using Indian examples:

I turn to Indian material because, in the absence of advanced disciplinary training, that accident of birth and education had provided me with a sense of the historical canvas, a hold on some of the pertinent languages that are useful tools for a *bricoleur*—especially when she is armed with the Marxist skepticism of ‘concrete experience’ as the final arbiter and with a critique of disciplinary formations.

(209)

I can claim “advanced disciplinary training” in neither sex nor sexology. I share Spivak’s doubts as to “concrete experience” as a final arbiter, although most gay autobiographies seem to assert just that. I consider this book to be the work of a *bricoleur*, and the various chapters, from penis worship to stranger sex, are reflections of the “pertinent languages” in which I have had conversations.

Spivak rejects the label either of herself as an expert Indian or of her experience or anecdotes as perfectly exemplary. In the same way, I cannot see myself as representing “gay” in a fashion that either suits most gay readers or even that will help non-gay readers understand what it means to be gay. Instead I explore a variety of experiences of sexuality from one perspective, my own. I am less interested in what it means to be “gay,” “homosexual,” or even “bisexual” than in my own role in various experiences, from coming out to anal sex. Browning states of young people: “More and more they ask of themselves and of their mates not ‘who am I?’ but ‘How should I act?’” (221) Rather than explor-

ing ethical issues, this book tries to answer the question: “How have I acted and what does that mean?”

To some extent I am responding to the attitude Calvin Thomas considers at the beginning of his book, *Male Matters: Masculinity, Anxiety, and the Male Body on the Line*:

The issue, in other words, becomes not writing about the body but writing itself as a bodily function. Thus the book concerns an unease about the male body as a material site of linguistic production, a corporeal tension between (gendered) identity and (self-) representation. This tension, particularly as it is exacerbated by the visibility of writing, troubles the construction of normative, hegemonic masculinity; it disturbs what Kaja Silverman calls ‘the dominant fiction’—the ‘ideological belief [through which] a society’s “reality” is constituted and sustained, and [through which] a subject lays claim to a normative identity’ (*Male Subjectivity* 15). My argument is that males accede to the dominant fiction and identify with normative masculinity and its fictions of dominance by learning how to assuage this anxiety; the mechanisms of assuagement are ideologically embedded in cultural modes of representational containment that govern and restrict the visibility of male bodies and male bodily productions.

(3)

This book refuses once again the “taken for granted,” that “dominant fiction” of an unconsidered masculine point of view, a writing without a body. Instead, it emanates from a male body sexualized in different ways and examines how this non-normative masculinity works.

Jeffrey Weeks’ *Sexuality and its Discontents: Meanings, Myths & Modern Sexualities* lurks behind much of this book. His comment on how to understand the body is particularly relevant: “the body can no longer be seen as a biological given which emits its own meaning. It must be understood instead as an ensemble of potentialities which are given meaning only in

society.” (122-123) Still more important to me is a later comment on how that meaning can be understood:

We are left with the body and its potentialities for pleasure. This is a particularly ambiguous phrase which states an ambition without specifying its means of attainment. I intend to take it as a metaphor for the subjectivisation of erotic pleasure, for the willingness to explore possibilities which may run counter to received definitions but which nevertheless, in context, with full awareness of the needs and limits of the situation, can be affirmed. (245)

This book is an exploration of that subjectivisation of erotic pleasure, quite specifically in the chapter on anal sex, situationally in the chapter on stranger sex, potentially in the chapter on the homosexual child, and responsively in the chapter on coming out.

I constantly return to myself not as a being but as a doing. This book is less about “me” and more about the way I perceive what I have done, in the light of a variety of studies and analyses by sexologists, sociologists, psychologists, and various other scholars and commentators. My focus on personal actions and experiences is thus that slippery being of cultural studies, the subject position. Slavoj Žižek, in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, describes Fichte’s view of the subject:

the subject ‘posits’, sublates-mediates, transforms the given positivity of objects: he transforms it into a manifestation of his own creativity; but this positing remains forever bound to its presuppositions—to the positively given objectivity upon which it performs its negative activity. (224-225)

While I cannot claim anything such as a general truth in my comments in that I am bound by my presuppositions, I would argue that there is a “given positivity of objects,” in this case a number of experiences, which provides the material of this book. The objects are the justification, and

the subject position is the explanation for how these objects are seen.

As all reading this will note, one of the chapters is not like the others. The chapter on *The Crying Game* was the genesis of this book. As a professor of English who has written a number of books on various texts, I was interested in a text-based study that used autobiography in an explicit fashion. When the opportunity arose to give a plenary lecture to scholars from various aspects of literary studies, it seemed a good occasion to try this out. Thus the *Crying Game* chapter is a reading of the film that uses my personal experience as a lens, as an analogy, at times as a homology. As a result of this process, I decided to do a book on sexuality, using an approximation of the same method.

In both cases, I was stimulated by what I saw as a significant absence in scholarly studies. In discussing the *Crying Game*, I explore the tendency for the critic to slip by the nuance of his or her own subject position. It seems easy to label yourself as “gay” or “lesbian” and assume this is sufficient explanation, but in my own experience as a reader, this is not enough. Michael King has written a brief biography of John Money, which concludes as follows:

Inevitably, there was curiosity, in the United States and in New Zealand, about sexuality and lifestyle choices made by the man who had built a highly visible career studying and writing about the sexuality of others. Of that dimension of his own life, Money, who was briefly married in the early 1950s, had this to say:

“By trial and error, I discovered the unstressfulness of self-sufficiency in both living and working... I have never worked in total isolation but always with assistants and colleagues. Nor have I lived sexually abstinent, but in a give-and-take of sexual visitations and friendly companionships with compatible partners, some women, some men, some briefly, some with continuity ending only in death.” (43-44)

This brief quotation seems to be the only explanation in print of his own sexuality, from a man who has published thousands of pages on the sexuality of other people. I don't believe it is only my prurient curiosity that wants to know more about the experience of the observer and analyst.

While many of the comments are brief, I appreciate the various times that Spivak has used her situation and experiences in order to elucidate the position from which she writes. When, in *The Critique*, she refers to herself as a "postcolonial informant," I have a strong sense of how that space is shaped. I am still more impressed with the extensive use of autobiographical fragments by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Her "White Glasses," on how she learned to read as a gay man, continues to be an inspiration for me, as do her various examinations of what it means to be a "fat woman." To my knowledge, there are few books in which a theorist has explored his own sexual subject positions this way. The prime example is probably Patrick Califa, but the one who has always appealed most to me is Samuel Delaney. While his *Times Square Red*, *Times Square Blue* uses a very different methodology than I do, his fearless practice is always a model for me.

The more common approach is that presented by theorists such as Judith Butler. In *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, Judith Butler refers to the importance of "the injurious word . . . that not only names a social subject, but constructs that subject in the naming, and constructs that subject through a violating interpellation." (49) But what is the word that has constructed her as a subject? Is it just "lesbian," or is it something else? Could it be something about her sexual practice? I have often noted that for me the equivalent to Fredric Jameson's "always historicize" has been "always homosexualize." In other words, I tend to reconfigure each observation, each thought, according to homosexuality. As I reflected on this process, however, I realized that it is seldom so simple. As well, I often "bisexualize," I sometimes "de-closetize," and there are even times, times that seem far removed from the topic, that I "penis-observize."

While I usually find the theories of Gilles Deleuze to be too free-floating to be useful, his analysis of "Bergson's Conception of Difference" includes an assessment of the subject that seems particularly appropriate to the present study:

It is tendencies that are dually opposed to each other [s'opposent deux à deux], that differ in nature. It is the tendency that is the subject. A being [être] is not the subject but the expression of the tendency, and furthermore, a being is only the expression of a tendency in so far as this is contrasted with another tendency. It is in this way that intuition presents itself as a method of difference or division: that of dividing the mixture into two tendencies. This method is something other than a spatial analysis, more than a description of experience and less (in appearance) than a transcendental analysis. It certainly raises itself to the conditions of the given, but these conditions are tendency-subjects, they are themselves given in a certain way, they are lived. Moreover, they are at the same time the pure and the lived, the living and the lived, the absolute and the lived. (46)

Thus, the following chapters describe the lived not as a transcendental self, but as the experiences of just such a tendency-subject. Rather than emanations contained within the dominant normative depicted by Thomas, they are vectors, often ones that contradict each other.

There are various ways that I represent subject positions here that many may find shameful. This is not just the obvious, the homophobia of "God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve" and such. It is also the shame in various gay cultures associated with bisexuality, with being anal passive, with stranger sex. George Chauncey notes that in the 1930s the criminalizing of homosexuality was specifically associated with shame:

Numerous articles warned that in breaking with

social convention to the extent necessary to engage in homosexual behavior, a man had demonstrated the refusal to adjust to social norms that was the hallmark of the psychopath, and he could easily degenerate further. (359)

Thus, another part of the agenda here is to use self-revelation of aspects of sexuality traditionally hidden as shameful. This is one more area in which that term “queer” fits as a title, in its embrace of the pejorative. This book provides an insider’s view of topics rarely explored in academic studies and, when explored, are usually without any acknowledgment of inside knowledge. Yet this is not to suggest that “shame” is in some sense a motivation. Rosamund Dalziell, in *Shameful Autobiographies: Shame in Contemporary Australian Autobiographies and Culture*, provides this assessment:

When the process of confronting shame and loss and of reviewing a life is represented in a text intended for the gaze of a benign reader, the autobiographer’s narrating self is no longer isolated, having aligned him/herself with the other in regarding the shamed and abandoned narrated self. (263)

If I were writing an actual autobiography, this could be an interpretation. I would be writing from the couch, an analysand providing a narrative of shame as I storytell my way to psychic health. However, not only am I not writing an autobiography, I actually have not felt this shame from which I must recover. I have known that I must hide aspects of my life from parents, other relatives, even from partners; this has not been from fear of shame but rather from anxiety at how their assumption of shame might make them treat me. At the age of fifty-seven I feel sufficiently immune from such repercussions that I can allow my shamelessness to be used in this exploration.

In this case, “shamelessness” is all about sexual desire. In *The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and the Formation of Concepts*, Arnold Davidson states:

Although Foucault is not everywhere consistent in his

terminology, I would claim that we should draw the conclusion from his discussions, here [*History of Sex* vol. 1] and elsewhere, that while *ars erotica* is organized around the framework of body-pleasure-intensification, *scientia sexualis* is organized around the axis of subject-desire-truth. It is as if one could say that the imposition of true discourses on the subject of sexuality leads to the centrality of a theory of sexual desire, while the discourse of pleasure and the search for its intensification are exterior to a science of sexual desire. (211)

In my original concept of this book I had intended to title it “theoretical thoughts,” but I then decided that “theory” is too value-laden and open-ended to be useful in this context. However, throughout this book there lurk Foucauldian and Freudian theories of sexual desire. The list of “Works Cited” is primarily composed of books on such theories. Many of them make rather large claims towards “truth.” In this case, I claim no “truth” beyond my own subjectivity. However, the exploration throughout follows that axis of subject-desire-truth. And the discourse of pleasure is at least anterior to this “science.”

Ah yes, pleasure. Is anyone having any fun here? I make a number of references to Douglas Sadownick’s *Sex Between Men: An Intimate History of the Sex Lives of Gay Men Postwar to Present*. Anyone who has read it will know that he and I do not have similar approaches to processing information. Still, as one often finds when reading the text of someone “other,” there are many moments when his version of the truth is all too applicable to my own practice: “Rational thinking, which some gay men have perfected as a tool for living almost second to sex, is no help when it comes to understanding sex.” (5) Ouch. This book is intentionally, incessantly rational. I have taken what often seems one of the most irrational aspects of human life, sexual desire, and applied to it as much reason as I can bring to bear. My hope for this process is that more than forty years of sexual desire and more than thirty years of being a professional intellectual will add up to some interesting analysis. To a certain extent I agree

once more with Sadownick:

... homosexual libido (one's vital energies) is the motivating energy that informs this book and informs, at least from my perspective, gay life. It is largely an error in judgment (and one from which I suffered) that sees sex as the defining principle of this libido. I would argue instead that sex is an effect of libido, or the extroverted end result of it. (12)

Still, *queersexlife* is not so much about “my life”—or even “gay life”—as it is about one sex life. There are many aspects of my “libido,” at least in the Jungian sense, which have little to do with the present volume. Thus, while most of my sexual activity has had nothing to do with reproduction and my introspection of my retrospection can find no drive to reproduce, I seem to have been born to be a parent. Much of my life has been spent avoiding sexual activity that could interfere with that parenting, including a three-year period of what I would call “involuntary celibacy.” Yet I lament none of this. And thus while I formally dedicate this book to my colleague and friend Michael Hurley, there is also some subliminal dedication to my children and grandchildren, people who I presume will never read this and probably have little interest in it, except as one more example of the strange things their father—and grandfather—does with his time. Still, I include them here as a recognition that, as Jung suggested, there are more instinctual drives than sex.

2. Life (Re)Writing: Identifying or Identity Defying

“Who knows the secrets of the human heart?”
—*The Crying Game*

*Thirteen ways of looking at Dil and Me*³

1. Life re: writing

The opening credits of *The Crying Game* offer a long slow pan, viewing a small funfair through the darkness under a bridge. They remain my favourite part of the film. When I first saw it, I enjoyed the way it sets an atmosphere, but on repeated viewing I have come to love the perhaps less than subtle symbolism: “bridge,” “carnival,” “shadow.” Another noteworthy element is the soundtrack, which includes Percy Sledge singing “When a Man Loves a Woman.” Like the image, that title, and the lines of the song, offers many significant connections. One of the most important ones is that I bought the LP in 1966.



The first image here is my mother, in approximately 1918. The story I was told is that she is playing Peter Pan in a school production in Weyburn, Saskatchewan. But perhaps the central thing in her mind was that her father had just died in the trenches in France. Or perhaps not. I have no record of her thoughts then or even her thoughts about the photograph. I am performing the usual critical function of interpreting her text, in a way that exceeds that which the text might

3. Some of the associations in this article are obvious, some oblique. I have offered references for those that seem to belong under the usual heading of “works cited,” but for the most part other intertexts are left without notes or reference. To begin, however, I offer Wallace Stevens’s poem “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” as a remnant of my thirty years teaching English in universities.