

very different way) are really sentinels that signal this passage in course, and in this regard are indispensable.

TRUTH COMMISSIONS

It is salutary to remind ourselves that postmodernist and postcolonial discourses are effective only in very specific geographical locations and among a certain class of the population. As a political discourse, postmodernism has a certain currency in Europe, Japan, and Latin America, but its primary site of application is within an elite segment of the U.S. intelligentsia. Similarly, the postcolonial theory that shares certain postmodernist tendencies has been developed primarily among a cosmopolitan set that moves among the metropolises and major universities of Europe and the United States. This specificity does not invalidate the theoretical perspectives, but it should make us pause for a moment to reflect on their political implications and practical effects. Numerous genuinely progressive and liberatory discourses have emerged throughout history among elite groups, and we have no intention here of questioning the vocation of such theorizing *tout court*. More important than the specificity of these theorists are the resonances their concepts stimulate in different geographical and class locations.

Certainly from the standpoint of many around the world, hybridity, mobility, and difference do not immediately appear as liberatory in themselves. Huge populations see mobility as an aspect of their suffering because they are displaced at an increasing speed in dire circumstances. For several decades, as part of the modernization process there have been massive migrations from rural areas to metropolitan centers within each country and across the globe. The international flow of labor has only increased in recent years, not only from south to north, in the form of legal and illegal guest workers or immigrants, but also from south to south, that is, the temporary or semipermanent worker migrations among southern regions, such as that of South Asian workers in the Persian Gulf. Even these massive worker migrations, however, are dwarfed in terms of numbers and misery by those forced from their homes and land by famine and war. Just a cursory glance around the world, from Central America to Central Africa and from the Balkans to Southeast Asia, will reveal the desperate plight of those on whom such mobility has been imposed. For them, mobility across boundaries often amounts to forced migration in poverty and is hardly liberatory. In fact, a stable and defined place in which to live, a certain immobility, can on the contrary appear as the most urgent need.

The postmodernist epistemological challenge to "the Enlightenment"—its attack on master narratives and its critique of truth—also loses its liberatory aura when transposed outside the elite intellectual strata of Europe and North America. Consider, for example, the mandate of the Truth Commission formed at the end of the civil war in El Salvador,² or the similar institutions that have been established in the post-dictatorial and post-authoritarian regimes of Latin America and South Africa. In the context of state terror

2. The civil war in El Salvador followed a military coup in 1979; it lasted until peace accords were signed in January 1992. That treaty established the Commission on the Truth for El Salvador,

whose U.N.-appointed commissioners investigated civil rights abuses by all participants in the conflict (about 85 percent of the acts of violence were attributed to agents of the state).

and mystification, clinging to the primacy of the concept of truth can be a powerful and necessary form of resistance. Establishing and making public the truth of the recent past—attributing responsibility to state officials for specific acts and in some cases exacting retribution—appears here as the ineluctable precondition for any democratic future. The master narratives of the Enlightenment do not seem particularly repressive here, and the concept of truth is not fluid or unstable—on the contrary! The truth is that this general ordered the torture and assassination of that union leader, and this colonel led the massacre of that village. Making public such truths is an exemplary Enlightenment project of modernist politics, and the critique of it in these contexts could serve only to aid the mystificatory and repressive powers of the regime under attack.

In our present imperial world, the liberatory potential of the postmodernist and postcolonial discourses that we have described only resonates with the situation of an elite population that enjoys certain rights, a certain level of wealth, and a certain position in the global hierarchy. One should not take this recognition, however, as a complete refutation. It is not really a matter of either/or. Difference, hybridity, and mobility are not liberatory in themselves, but neither are truth, purity, and stasis. The real revolutionary practice refers to the level of *production*. Truth will not make us free, but taking control of the production of truth will. Mobility and hybridity are not liberatory, but taking control of the production of mobility and stasis, purities and mixtures is. The real truth commissions of Empire will be constituent assemblies of the multitude, social factories for the production of truth.

JUDITH HALBERSTAM

b. 1961

Judith Halberstam combines queer theory, cultural studies, and popular culture to speak to activist as well as academic audiences. Building on the work of such theorists as LOUIS ALTHUSSER, JUDITH BUTLER, and EVE KOSOFSKY SEDGWICK, Halberstam shows that intellectuals can draw on the products of mass media to deconstruct narrow binary systems of gender and sexuality and generate new, more expansive understandings. Her work examines texts ranging from Victorian literature to 1980s lesbian pornography to contemporary Hollywood films. "Masculinity" is a category of behaviors, asserts Halberstam, that can be studied and understood apart from individual men. Furthermore, masculinity can be performed by and linked to bodies other than those of white heterosexual males (the dominant model in Western culture). Women can access masculinity as well, and they can do so without surgically altering their bodies. This category of "female masculinity" is Halberstam's major critical contribution. By separating masculinity from the male body, Halberstam restructures popular and frequently negative portrayals of masculine women, particularly so-called butch

lesbian women. Such work has implications that reach beyond the academy, by using personal and popular culture narratives of sexuality it can, in Halberstam's words, both "rewrite . . . psychoanalytic theories of desire and scientific theories of sexuality" and dispel "homogenizing notions of gay and lesbian desire."

Halberstam earned a B.A. in English from the University of California at Berkeley in 1985 and a Ph.D. in English literature from the University of Minnesota in 1991. The author of four books to date and numerous articles, Halberstam is currently a professor of English, American studies and ethnicity, and gender studies at the University of Southern California, where she has served as the director of the Center for Feminist Research. In addition to lecturing at universities across the United States and Europe, Halberstam has been a visiting professor at Duke University, Harvard University, Yale University, and the University of Basel in Switzerland. Her book *Female Masculinity* (1998) received the Publisher's Triangle Judy Grahn Award for Lesbian Non-Fiction in 1999, and *In a Queer Time and Place* (2005) was nominated for a Lambda Award in 2006.

Drawing on the critical theories of ANTONIO GRAMSCI and MICHEL FOUCAULT, among others, Halberstam not only dissects hegemonic gender systems and their operations but also "theorizes the alternative" (the counterhegemonic). She uses gender, queer, and cultural theory to address the "silly archive"—animated movies, television shows, and other popular culture texts that might seem far removed from theory and socially significant interpretation. Halberstam's method, which engages both scholarly and popular audiences, addresses a frequent criticism of queer theory: that its reliance on complex deconstructive and psychoanalytic terminology obscures meaning and alienates nonacademic readers. In interviews, Halberstam explains that her drive to connect to a broad audience emerges, in part, from a sense that her work represents a community. This sense links her style and approach to that of African American scholars such as HENRY LOUIS GATES JR. and BELL HOOKS.

Halberstam's work—most notably in *Female Masculinity* and in the essay printed below—resembles that of Gramsci in stressing counterhegemonic groups. At the same time, it embraces the Foucauldian notion that medical and scientific categories attain cultural "realness" when individuals embody them as elements of their identities. Gender is one such category that is taught and performed in the process of socialization. Whereas Butler acknowledges this reality and evinces suspicion toward the taxonomical boundaries of gender (which she links to dominant heteronormative values), Halberstam surprisingly retains the existing taxonomy but seeks increased complexity within it. Masculinity and femininity, as performative acts and codes that can be associated with numerous kinds of bodies, allow *all* bodies to disrupt gender or to represent queer deviance. Halberstam's designation "female masculinity" is fluid and complex, identifying a frequently ignored or abjected category of identity. Her "taxonomical impulse" to retain the categories of masculine and feminine leads not to confinement but to the recognition of varied erotic and identity categories, and she focuses especially on cross-identifying females who do not fit into categories of "transgender" or "transsexual": masculine females. She associates them with female sports icons, butch roles, lesbian fatherhood, and drag kings. In this regard, Halberstam aligns herself with Eve Sedgwick, whose influential *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) lists methods of categorizing desire beyond the hetero/homo binary. Rather than completely deconstructing gender, Halberstam makes nameable identities that were previously unacknowledged or disenfranchised.

In our selection, "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Men, Women, and Masculinity," originally published in the anthology *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory: New Directions* (2002), Halberstam examines the relationships that exist between dominant and alternative forms of masculinity and between the men and women involved in both. She begins by considering a series of films released between 1996 and 1998, all of which function as "heterosexual conversion narratives or fantasies": they present sexual triangles that associate "good masculinity" with straight men's

bodies, while gay male, lesbian, or bisexual female bodies represent merely "a backup but not a substitute" for what good masculinity provides. Such films display panic about the contemporary crisis of masculinity, a crisis linked by others with such developments as men's need to compete with women in the workplace, new ideals for the male body, and changing definitions of fatherhood. They support the narcissism of white male heteronormativity by ensuring that all available sexual beings (including gay men and straight women) desire the "heroic" straight white male. In the second section, Halberstam meditates on "bad," nonmale masculinities (lesbian, female, racialized) and their potential superiority in enacting phallic masculinity. She points out that the very need of normative masculinity to constantly substantiate its location in maleness reveals its own dissociation from the male body. This claim sets up Halberstam's final observation: that anxieties about masculinity's attachment to other nonmale bodies has historically led to the abjection—the rendering as Other—of those alternative bodies, which are cast as ugly, hairy, or repulsive. This is especially likely to be the fate of those who participate in female masculinity.

While Halberstam's work has been widely praised and deployed by queer theorists, it has not been accepted by all critics. Some question the language of Halberstam's gender taxonomies, objecting to her use of the terms "masculine" and "feminine," binaries that are always already hierarchically ranked. A number of critics also point out that not all disruptive gender performances are "queer" in the sense of being counternormative. Others assert that queer theory should work to disavow and deconstruct gender identities rather than freezing them within categories that, though they may seem more fluid, are ultimately just as limiting and rigid as those they are intended to replace.

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Halberstam's first book, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (1995), traces the cultural object of the monster from nineteenth-century Gothic novels like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* up to contemporary Hollywood movies like *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Using this broad range of texts, she argues both that the monster is rewritten over time to reflect "historically and culturally conditioned fears" which emerge from ideas about otherness and difference and that graphic violence empowers readers. Her second book—and her most influential—is *Female Masculinity* (1998), which explores butch/femme lesbian roles, transsexual and "transgender dyke" communities, and contemporary drag king performances, as she articulates her larger project of examining gender construction and pursuing a concept of masculinity without men. *The Drag King Book* (1999), which Halberstam coauthored with Del LaGrace Volcano under the name Judith "Jack" Halberstam, investigates drag king communities and performances for a broad audience. Her next book, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005), considers the transgendered body's representation in the media and in queer art.

One important critical response to Halberstam is Pat Califia's "Dildo Envy and Other Phallic Adventures," in *A Dick for a Day: What Would You Do If You Had One?* (ed. Fiona Giles, 1997). Taking issue with Halberstam's classification "butch" (which straddles the line between lesbian and transgendered), Califia claims that it blocks the flow of desire and reflects self-hate rather than self-definition and understanding. Halberstam responds to Califia's criticisms in *Female Masculinity*, in a chapter titled "Lesbian Masculinity: Even Stone Butches Get the Blues." Chris Beasley's *Gender and Sexuality: Critical Theory, Critical Thinkers* (2005) argues that Halberstam's work on masculinity "stands at an interesting remove from Queer": because her work enables and includes transgender desire and all its physical manifestations, her position is distinct from that of other queer theorists, who set "queer" and "transgender" in opposition to one another. Halberstam addresses some of these issues in "Within the New Moment," an interview by Vicki Crowley in *Discourse* 25

gender, politics, publicness, class, sexuality, and race can be engendered, I argue here, by refusing once and for all the marks of total abjection and dysfunction that make female masculinities seem uninhabitable.

Female masculinity, I have argued in a book by the same name,⁵ disrupts contemporary cultural studies accounts of masculinity within which masculinity always boils down to the social, cultural and political effects of male embodiment and male privilege. Such accounts can only read masculinity as the powerful and active alternative to female passivity and as the expression therefore of white male subjectivities. The term *female masculinity* stages several different kinds of interventions into contemporary gender theory and practice: first, it refuses the authentication of masculinity through maleness and maleness alone, and it names a deliberately counterfeited masculinity that undermines the currency of maleness; second, it offers an alternative mode of masculinity that clearly detaches misogyny from maleness and social power from masculinity; third, female masculinity may be an embodied assault upon compulsory heterosexuality, and it offers one powerful model of what inauthentic masculinity can look like, how it produces and deploys desire, and what new social, sexual and political relations it can foster. Finally, I hope that female masculinity can be provocative enough to force us to look anew upon male femininities and interrogate the new politics of manliness that has swept through gay male communities in the last decade.

The Good: As Good As It Gets and Heterosexual Conversion Narratives

Nineteen ninety-seven and 1998 saw the release of a series of films structured around triangles made up of two men and a woman. But unlike the triangles described and analyzed so well by Eve Sedgwick⁶ in *Between Men* as homosocial competitive relays of desire between seemingly heterosexual males, the desiring relations in these neo-homosocial triangles place an overtly gay man or a lesbian in the position of rival for the woman's affections. In either case, the gay man or the lesbian becomes a masculine competitor with the potential to unseat the white male as the object of the heterosexual woman's affection. These new triangles show some potential for reimaging dominant masculinity through alternative masculinities; unfortunately, they mostly sidestep this radical option in favor of a decidedly conservative narrative that props up heteromasculinity as "good" masculinity and casts both the gay man and the lesbian as "bad" substitutes. In this narrative structure, the straight homophobic man learns from the queer bonds between the others how to attain a fully human and socially viable model of manhood, and he achieves his "humanity" at the expense of theirs.

Films in the 1990s that deploy this neohomosocial narrative structure include *As Good As It Gets* (1997, dir. James L. Brooks), featuring a homophobic straight man, a gay man, and a straight woman, *Chasing Amy* (1997, dir. Kevin Smith), featuring a straight man, a bisexual woman, and a homophobic straight male friend, *The Opposite of Sex* (1998, dir. Don Roos), with a

5. Published in 1998, the postmodern critical lexicon in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985; see above).
6. American feminist theorist (1950–2009; see above); she introduced the term *homosocial* into

(2004). In *Beauty and Misogyny: Hateful Cultural Practices in the West* (2005), Sheila Jeffreys asserts that Halberstam's notion of female masculinity is both apolitical, in that it fails to grapple with masculinity as "the product of male dominance," and antifeminist, in that liberation for women is identified with performing masculinity and disavowing femininity.

Several interviews helpfully introduce and supplement Halberstam's written work; see Ammarie Jagose's detailed "Masculinity without Men," *Gender*, no. 29 (1999) and Mathias Dambolt's "The Eccentric Archive," *Trikster—Nordic Queer Journal*, no. 1 (2008), in which Halberstam discusses the rationale behind her choice of texts.

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Men, Women, and Masculinity

This essay explains the relationships of men and women to dominant and minority forms of masculinity through a discussion of three very different sets of debates. The first debate is about a perceived late-twentieth-century crisis in heterosexuality and dominant masculinity, and I take as my texts a series of films that I call "heterosexual conversion narratives." The second debate is the explicit focus of this volume,¹ namely, the relationship between feminism and masculinity studies. And my final section addresses the topic of female ugliness and the history of the abjection² of female masculinity.

In general terms, as we begin the twenty-first century, the minority genders and sexualities that were categorized as pathological at the twentieth century's beginning have come to undermine the authority and authenticity of the genders and sexualities they were supposed to mimic. The early twentieth century's invert³ has become the model for the constructedness of desire and embodiment. But this does not signal some magical end to homophobia or genderphobia. Rather, to keep pace with changes in the social and political recognition of queers, homophobic response has become ever more subtle and devious. In what follows, I pay particular attention to the history and the fate of minority masculinity—female masculinity in particular—and the special forms of political and cultural animosity that it inspires. While mainstream media acknowledge the existence of queer masculinities, they do so only to reassert the hegemony of white male masculinities. And while masculinity studies as a field has largely been formed in response to a perceived neglect of the topic in feminism, the work produced there has largely and almost exclusively addressed men and maleness. Finally, the fierce protection of white male privilege from minority encroachments rounds out a century of discourses of manliness and manhood, all of which have been designed to make white male masculinity equivalent to political personhood and public power.⁴ A profound shift in our understandings of

1. *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory: New Directions*, edited by Judith Kegan Gardiner (2002), where this essay first appeared.

2. That is, the horrified rejection. In the writings of JULIA KRISTEVA (b. 1941), the subject is both what threatens to break down meaning by confusing the distinction between subject and object, self and other, and the individual's visceral reaction to that breakdown.

3. A term for "homosexual" introduced by sexologists in the late 19th century.

4. For a detailed analysis of this history see Gail Berdman, *Manliness and Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). And for specific consideration of the effects of this history of manliness on female homosexuality see Lisa Duggan, *Supphie Slashers* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000) [Halberstam's note].

straight woman, a gay man, and a bisexual man, and, finally, *The Object of My Affections* (1998, dir. Nicholas Hytner⁷), which uses the same formula as *As Good As It Gets* of a homophobic straight man, a gay man, and a straight woman. In nearly all these films, a heterosexual conversion narrative is set in motion by the desire of a heterosexual person for a seemingly unattainable gay person, and in some of them the conversion comes to fruition: *Chasing Amy*, *The Opposite of Sex*. This fairly repulsive genre of films has had enormous success, and *As Good As It Gets* even won Oscars in 1996 for its particularly cynical variation on the theme. The problems inherent to the genre however speak precisely to the problems produced by encounters between masculinity studies and feminist theory. In both the heterosexual conversion films' and in masculinity studies, in both popular culture and academic discourse, maleness remains a protected provenance for the cultivation of privileged forms of masculinity, while feminism becomes in both arenas a diluted discourse about women's desires for domestic security, love, and family. By analyzing the structural contradictions of the new and popular genre of heterosexual conversion films, I believe we can attend to some of the problems that emerge from unsuccessful encounters between feminism and masculinity studies. Throughout, I will be offering a historically located model of female masculinity as one alternative site for feminist reformulations of masculinity.

Let us call the genre of films released between 1996–1997 and featuring neohomosocial triangles "heterosexual conversion fantasies."⁸ Within the genre, stock characters act out their parts in a complex drama involving gender identity, class position, race, and sexuality. The straight woman in the heterosexual conversion fantasy is at least nominally a feminist; she is also a woman who (to use pop therapy lingo) loves too much, a Venetian who (to continue in this vernacular) inevitably ends up with a Martian (*Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*) and wonders whether she can find someone to love who at least seems to inhabit her own planet.⁹ Enter the gay man. The gay man in the heterosexual conversion fantasy plays the sensitive but masculine guy; he is a gay man who can pass for straight, and therefore becomes attractive to the leading lady, but he is also a male who does not demand sex from the woman. The gay man, unlike his heterosexual counterpart and rival, seems fully domesticated (except for the occasional episode of anonymous sex) and, again unlike the heterosexual man, he loves to cuddle, dance, eat out, cook, shop. In short, the narrative presents the masculine gay male as an ideal mate for the heterosexual woman in every aspect except sexual compatibility, and this is represented as a nonissue by casting women as domestic and asexual. The gay man ultimately offers perfect companionship for the heterosexual woman by being willing to do everything the "Martian" will not do with the woman. Enter the Martian. The alpha male within this triangle desires the woman but despises everything that goes

with being with a woman—family responsibilities, financial obligations, domesticity, shopping, emotional exchange, and so on. But, when he finds himself in danger of being supplanted by the gay man, the heterosexual feels justified in articulating his rage in protracted bouts of loud homophobic reaction followed by loud sexist outbursts.¹ By the narrative's end, the gay man rejects the woman and she either accepts the boorish straight man back into her life, having reformed him slightly, or she moves on from both the straight man and the gay substitute to a more realistic object of affection, one who, unlike the gay man, may want to have sex with her every now and then; and, unlike the bullying straight man, treats her with some respect. The new object of the heroine's affection is often coded as a minority masculinity and as neutralized in some way: in *Object of My Affection*, for example, Jennifer Aniston ends up with a sensitive black man; in *The Opposite of Sex*, Lisa Kudrow² eventually marries a working-class shy guy. Curiously, in both films these alternative lovers are policemen—the connection between minority masculinities and the law, of course, leaves the space of outlaw or rogue male available for the insensitive, unloving, and utterly attractive (according to the film's logic) white heterosexual. In almost every case, the films find alternative masculinities to be compromise choices, and this confirms once again the originary and authentic nature of white male heteromascularity. The straight belligerent guy may not always get the woman he seems to desire, but he usually takes solace in a younger version of her for the time being. With everyone coupled up, at least temporarily, the gay man is no longer necessary and so he is also paired off.

So how is any of this relevant to the topic of feminism and masculinity? In all these films, the heterosexual conversion fantasy rests upon two crucial factors: first, heterosexual white male masculinity appears as naturally attractive and desirable despite any socially repulsive behaviors that may accompany it. In fact, the presence of a gay masculine rival allows the heterosexual to voice his most homophobic and misogynist sentiments without repercussions of any kind. And, second, the heterosexual male is never really challenged by the alternative male masculinities with which he competes, and the choice of an alternative masculinity by the heroine is always cast as a compromise rather than a romantic resolution. These two factors, the naturalization of a particular form of heteronormativity and the elimination of the threat of alternatives, combine with a weak feminist discourse in the narratives to produce profoundly conservative models of both masculinity and feminism. These films cast themselves as feminist by trying to depict the heroine as an agent in the drama of finding a mate and by representing her struggle to mate as a process of domesticating male sexuality. Audiences are supposed to recognize the heroine as feminist only in relation to her desire for self-determination, but the films are careful not to extend her feminist critique of male sexuality beyond what is necessary to her desire to reproduce and have a family.

1. Jack Nicholson as Melvin in *As Good as It Gets* provides the most paradigmatic example of this role. Melvin is an obsessive compulsive and a misogynist. The spectator is asked to believe that Melvin has no particular objects for his hostility; he is just a weird and reclusive guy who happens to vent his anger upon women and gay men. The film depicts this behavior as rudeness or male primitivism rather than as a politically motivated

form of hate speech. One measure of the appeal of this kind of role lies in the fact that Nicholson was awarded an Oscar for playing America's most endearing racist, homophobic, sexist white guy [Halberstam's note]. Nicholson (b. 1937), American actor.
2. American actor (b. 1963). Aniston (b. 1969), American actor.

7. English film and theater director (b. 1956). The other three directors named—Brooks (b. 1940), Smith (b. 1970), and Roos (b. 1955)—are all Americans, and all are also screenwriters.

8. Heterosexual conversion fantasies were not limited to the realm of popular culture in 1996–1998. In 1997, a right-wing Christian group took out an ad in the *New York Times* claiming to have converted willing homosexuals into reformed het-

erosexuals. These conversion narratives are fascinating, since the right wing has always accused gays and lesbians of trying to convert youth from straight to queer [Halberstam's note].
9. John Gray, *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus: A Practical Guide for Improving Communication and Getting What You Want in Your Relationships* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992) [Halberstam's note].

This narrative trajectory varies only slightly when a lesbian rather than a gay man challenges the straight hero. In *Chasing Amy*, an avowedly bisexual woman, whom we would never recognize as queer outside the film's narrative frame, receives the attention of a very obnoxious straight male and, at first, she articulates all the right sentiments about his arrogance and her sexual preferences, but she then succumbs quickly and completely to his embrace. Our heroine is rarely seen interacting with lesbians, but she immediately invites her suitor to meet her at her local lesbian bar and then swaps oral sex stories with him and his buddy afterward. This woman never challenges the heterosexual suitor at the level of either sexuality or gender because she appears to have been straight all along. He feels good about having converted her, she feels good about being true to herself rather than following blindly the rules of a supposedly dominant and overbearing lesbian community, and her new boyfriend's roommate now gets to play the role of obnoxious and homophobic straight guy. The suitor's roommate, indeed, plays the very traditional triangulated role of the misogynist who masks his desire for his pal by mouthing the most woman-hating sentiments in relation to his bisexual girlfriend. However, this same character also articulates the dangerous truth that lies at the heart of the film: namely, that the heroine's bisexuality is merely a sexual ruse that amplifies her heterosexual attractiveness, and that real lesbianism has much more to do with masculinity. While one would not want to confirm the idea that authentic lesbianism requires masculine identification, lesbian masculinity in *Chasing Amy*, nonetheless, would have completely intervened in the heteromale fantasy of two feminine women that the film elaborated ad nauseam. *Chasing Amy* in fact deliberately refused even to imagine, outside of the roommate's homophobic imaginary, what lesbian masculinity would look like. In the case of most heterosexual conversion fantasies, the insertion of a viable female masculinity at any point in any of the narratives would be or could be cataclysmic. For example, how might the narrative play out in *As Good As It Gets* and *Opposite of Sex* or *Object of My Affection* if the gay rival for the heterosexual woman's affection was not a gay man but a gay masculine woman: in this scenario, the straight male rival would be forced to acknowledge an alternative version of masculinity that threatened him, if only because the sexual relationship between the heterosexual woman and the masculine woman would be far more possible.

I have only mentioned the most recent heterosexual conversion fantasies here, but there are numerous other queer and mainstream films that work around and within this triangle. When a serious model of female masculinity does emerge—as in *French Twist* (1995, dir. Josiane Balasko³), for example—the threat deployed by the butch will inevitably be reduced to another form of femininity or else violently eradicated (she will be impregnated or killed or sexually humiliated). But despite their unrelentingly conservative sexual agendas, heterosexual conversion narratives do indicate a prevailing crisis in heterosexuality that affects both men and women: in the conversion films, the straight man may exhibit all the symptoms of crisis and social/sexual impotence, but the straight woman is the one left at the end of the day with only dwindling opportunities for sexual and emotional satisfaction.

The title of one of these films suggests that heterosexual crisis emerges from a slippage between sexual aim and sexual object: by naming both a gay

man and a straight man “the object of my affection,” this film of the same title implies a psychoanalytic model of desire within which the woman's sexual aim (heterosexual sex) becomes trained upon an inappropriate sexual object (homosexual male). Freud discusses “deviations in respect of the sexual object” only in terms of same-sex objects of desire, but he does not mention the selection of an inappropriate opposite sex object—an object, in other words, constitutionally unwilling to return the woman's affection. The woman's perverse selection of an inappropriate sexual object can be best described as masochistic in the sense that, in Freud's words, “It appears to be that in which satisfaction is conditional upon suffering physical or mental pain at the hands of the sexual object.”⁴

More often than not in the heterosexual conversion fantasy, the heroine chooses only between hetero- and homomale sexualities, a gay man and a straight man, with lesbianism left completely out of the picture. In these rivalries, the superiority of the straight male is predicated always upon his natural assumption of masculinity and in contrast to the strained quality of the gay man's masculinity. Male narcissism also plays a huge role in these dramas, since the male lead never doubts that he is attractive nor that he is entitled to social power, social dominance, and all available sexual objects. In *As Good As It Gets*, the heteromale assumes that both the woman and the gay man desire him, and the film confirms his social reality but also exceeds his overtly narcissistic hopes by showing that even the gay man's dog is naturally (instinctually) drawn to the straight man over the gay man.

These heterosexual conversion films depend heavily upon a gay male character who presents as both masculine and respectable in order to offer some kind of challenge to the male heterosexual lover. The resolute depiction of gay maleness as properly masculine may lead us to ask what has happened to even the stereotyped versions of male femininity in contemporary queer discourse and popular representation. As masculinity is ever more naturalized in heterosexual, homosexual and transsexual male bodies, femininity becomes ever more degraded as a subject position and female masculinity becomes simply unimaginable. Good masculinity throughout these films is located in heterosexual male bodies and gay masculinity serves as a backup but not a substitute for the good and real masculinity of the hero. In my next section, I want to look at how “bad” masculinities—lesbian, female, racialized—might be far more suited to the task of representing phallicized masculinity.

The Bad: Masculinity Studies

Any number of feminist theorists have remarked that the 1990s has witnessed a crisis of masculinity.⁵ In the various accounts produced by white feminists, this crisis revolves around inconsistencies in the function of fatherhood, competition in the workplace, new standards of sexual conduct as a result of sexual harassment discourse, new ideals for the male body, and the internalization of feminist ideologies by a new generation despite

4. Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* [1905], ed. and trans. by James Strachey (New York: Basic, 1975), p. 24 [Halberstam's note]. Freud (1856–1939), Austrian founder of psychoanalysis.
5. Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (New York: William Morrow, 1999).

Susan Bordo, *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and Private* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999); and Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997) [Halberstam's note].

3. French actor, writer, and director (b. 1950); in *French Twist* (Gazon maudit), she plays a lesbian.

public backlashes against feminism. Crises in masculinity have also been analyzed by feminists of color in relation to the development of movements like the Million Man March,⁶ where a strengthened black masculinity comes at a high price for black women and accompanies conservative ideologies of family and culture. But the response to this widely acknowledged crisis from feminists has failed to deploy some of the most trenchant observations produced by queer theory about the liabilities of conventional masculinities within heteronormativity. The responses also assiduously refuse to acknowledge even the existence of fully realized nonmale masculinities, which come in the form of lesbian fatherhood, butch identities, drag king performances, female sports icons, and so on.⁷

Similarly, masculinity studies, I would venture to assert, has made little progress in generating either explanations for a perceived crisis in masculinity or imagining new social arrangements of gender, race, class, and sexuality that can compensate for and replace the binary gender systems that support and produce male dominance and heteronormativity. Almost without exception, the topic of masculinity and feminism has been reinterpreted as men and feminism. The work on men and feminism is wide-ranging, indeed, and makes many important contributions to gender studies. However the seamless translation of masculinity into men should give us pause. I propose that work on masculinity and feminism may want to begin (but not end) in the future with serious considerations of female masculinity in order not to reiterate the inevitable coupling of men and masculinity that I believe constitutes a serious obstacle to new and creative thought on gender and its relationship to social change.

This is not to say that there have been no developments of note on men and masculinity. Indeed, the most interesting work in recent years on male masculinity may not have taken female masculinity into consideration, but it has attempted to locate masculinity historically in relation to class and racial formations. While the work most typical of masculinity studies has depicted feminist work on masculinity as male bashing and has tended to call for "sympathy for the devil," in the words of one masculinity studies proponent,⁸ other essays have tried to move away from individualistic accounts of the burden of white maleness in order to examine the pressures, the conventions,

6. A mass demonstration (led by Louis Farrakhan, head of the Nation of Islam) that promoted black unity, self-reliance, and personal responsibility; its exclusive focus on black men was controversial.

7. The emergence in the 1990s of public debates over female sports has created a complicated discourse about female masculinity and the threat of sports activity to conventional femininities. The creation of a Women's National Basketball League in 1996, an unprecedented public interest in the Women's World Cup Soccer series of 1999, and the appearance in women's tennis of well-built, strong female athletes, however, suggests that U.S. spectators might be willing in the near future to support women's sports even where the petite femme is replaced by the built butch (Halberstam's note).

8. See Fred Pfeil, "Sympathy for the Devils: Notes on Some White Guys in the Ridiculous Class War," in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, ed. Mike Hill (New York: NYU Press, 1997), pp. 21–34. Pfeil argues that we have generalized too much in our depictions of white males and, as with any

and the structural conditions that have organized white masculinities in the last few decades. Eric Lott's work on Elvis impersonation, for example, uses Elvis impersonation performances to talk about "how white working-class men currently live their whiteness."⁹ Lott sees these acts of impersonation as both the repository of a particular kind of cultural envy of black culture and black masculinities and as the imaginative response to "post white male politics," and to post-Fordist-era¹ changes in the meaning of work. As he makes clear, when "work" for working-class men no longer simply signifies in terms of factories and manual labor then the terms *working class* and *masculinity* shift perceptibly in meaning. Lott's essay would have been richer for even a cursory examination of female masculinities, female Elvis impersonations, and female class identities and labor histories, but the attempt to map the effect of the emergence of "office styles of manhood"² upon male class identities provides a richly complex account of the interlocking structures that connect class to gender.

One way of shifting the discourse on masculinity might be to ask questions about the powerful forces that bind masculinity to realness. While normative masculinity depicts itself quite simply as real masculinity, it simultaneously exhibits some anxiety about the status of its own realness: male masculinity as an identity seems to demand authentication: Am I real? Is my masculinity real? The fact that male masculinities of all kinds seem to require recognition of some kind also has the counterintuitive effect of marking their instability and their distance from the real. This need for verification in the realm of male masculinity is so widespread and endemic to the identity that it is even readable within some female-to-male transsexual (FTM) narratives; indeed, transsexual theorist Henry Rubin, in his contribution to *Men Doing Feminism*, insists: "In general, I want to be unambiguously recognized as an authentic man even though I was not born with a male body. . . . I want to live manhood with the same authenticity as a man born with a male body."³ But what constitutes the referent of Rubin's phrase "the same authenticity" in this desideratum? Do male bodies living male lives add up to authentic masculinity? Do heterosexual white men experience their masculinity as authentic most of the time or any of the time? In the age of viagra and penile enlargements, we might argue, male sexuality and male masculinity in general tends to be a mediated affair in all kinds of situations, and the apparent fragility of erectile function might stand as a symbol for other kinds of masculine vulnerabilities that move far beyond the psychoanalytic formulation of castration anxiety.⁴

Perhaps not surprisingly, psychoanalysis has not been a very popular model for rethinking masculinity in masculinity studies. Paul Smith's essay, "Vas,"

9. Eric Lott, "All the King's Men: Elvis Impersonation and White Working Class Masculinity," in *Race and the Subject of Masculinity*, ed. Barry Stepanopoulos (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 192–230 [Halberstam's note]. Lott (b, 1959), American scholar of American studies and cultural studies. The hugely popular American singer Elvis Presley (1935–1977), born in poverty, was powerfully influenced by the music of black artists.

1. That is, the era after the 1940s–1960s; during those decades, the U.S. economy was characterized by mass consumption and mass production, associated with the development of the assembly line by the automobile manufacturer Henry Ford (1863–1947).

2. Lott, "All the King's Men," p. 196 [Halberstam's note].

3. Henry Rubin, "Reading Like a (Transsexual) Man," in *Men Doing Feminism*, ed. Tom Digby (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 316 [Halberstam's note].

4. That is, the response, according to Freud (see *Three Essays*), of the male child who learns that females lack "normal" human (i.e., male) genitalia and fears that he might be similarly "castrated."

stands out as one successful attempt to use feminist psychoanalytic formulations of desire to try to produce new models of masculine desire and embodiment that can respond to the shifting social landscape against which those desires play themselves out. In "Vas," Smith writes: "Male sexuality is both difficult and deadly easy,"⁵ and he tries to return to what he thinks psychoanalysis has repressed, namely, the topic of masculinity. Since psychoanalysis is a model of human sexuality that takes the male subject as normative and understands the female body as the terrain for neurotic symptoms, he argues, then male failure will always be received as the presence of femininity. In this sense, the female body becomes a theater for the tragedy of embodiment, while the male body functions as a site of health and perfection. The male body is feminized when sick and the female body is masculinized when healthy, invigorated, and active. While Smith is adept at showing the liabilities and advantages that accrue to males within this metaphoric schema, his essay leaves aside the question of whether the masculinization of the female body can ever be recuperated for a new sexual politics of gender.

One immensely useful result of Smith's essay lies in his attempt to dislodge the phallus from its place as the primary signifier of masculinity.⁶ The phallus, he suggests, serves only as a metaphor for masculine power; what then can serve as a metaphor for masculine vulnerability? The term *vas* for Smith manages to avoid the singularity of the phallus and it includes the other stuff of masculinity, the other genital signifiers of maleness, all of which add up to an apparatus rather than an organ. He defines *vas* as: first, male genitalia in general, the testicles (site of vulnerability) as well as the penis (site of power); second, *vas* marks maleness as gear, stuff, equipment and not as the expression of an essential masculinity; finally, he discusses *vas* in terms of male orgasm, as a mode of spending or loss.⁷ Useful reformulations, like Smith's, of psychoanalytic readings of the male body, recognize that psychoanalysis is not a transhistorical model of human variability. Indeed, in order to continue to have meaning over time, the set of symbolic models created by Freud to refer to the internalization of dominant systems of meaning must be updated in order to remain relevant to the social and political systems they describe. As gender relations shift and change over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, so too must the explanatory models we use to examine them. Accordingly, masculinity at the beginning of the twenty-first century can be recognized (in much the same ways as femininity was by Freud at the twentieth century's beginning) as a dynamic between embodiment, identification, social privilege, racial and class formation, and desire, rather than the result of having a particular body. And female masculinity, as Judith Butler's⁸ work has amply shown, provides a far better and more representative model for the workings of masculinity in a postmodern society.

In a pragmatic reading of Freud, we could say that he talks about phallic power as the representation of the power that seems to be available to men

in social and political terms in a male-dominated culture.⁹ Because we have so thoroughly naturalized and accepted the inevitability of male power, we might say, the coincidence of having a penis, performing heterosexual maleness, and accessing political power makes it unclear as to what comes first—the penis or the social power. Obviously, for Freud, the social power structure enables a reading of the penis as generative of social power; so, if the penis does not on its own generate social power, other body parts can also be phallic and other bodies can access the social power that seems to have been reserved for white males. This power can be accessed by female-bodied people not only by making the feminine livable and powerful but also by making maleness nonessential to masculinity. In *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler rereads Freud in order to highlight a slippage in his text between the penis and phallic power.¹ Freud, Butler argues, cannot really sustain the possibility of the nonmale phallic body, and so he lapses into essentialism. Butler, however, stresses that in modern and postmodern society, where power works through bodies and desires rather than through repression, we can talk of the "transferability of the phallus," and even of the "lesbian phallus," by way of breaking down the seemingly insuperable bond between white male bodies and white male power.²

In "The Lesbian Phallus," Butler returns to Lacan to reveal the structures of "normative heterosexuality" that undergird his descriptions of sex and sexual difference: Lacan, according to Butler, recognizes the subject as one founded upon lack, but, at the same time, he assumes that, in some sense, heterosexuality works: in other words, Lacan describes the way that threat (of castration) constitutes sex, but he assumes that the threatening and abject figures of the feminine male and the masculine female who represent the consequences of unsuccessful identifications will be sufficiently terrifying to the gendered subject to ensure normative gender identification. Butler asks of Lacan: "But what happens if the law that deploys the spectral figure of abject homosexuality as a threat becomes itself an inadvertent site of eroticization?"³ In other words, the figures deployed by the unconscious to guarantee heteronormative gender and sexuality could themselves become cathected;⁴ Butler takes this one step further, however, and shows that even in terms of the mechanisms of identification that Lacan himself has

9. By "pragmatic" I mean to signal here a reading of psychoanalysis that recognizes its ability to comment upon social and political realities. Many psychoanalytic critics are drawn into an insular world of psychoanalytic terms and mechanisms, and they forget completely about the relationship between the social and the psychic. I want to use psychoanalysis to talk about how people internalize social structures that are neither inevitable nor necessarily permanent. One critic who has mobilized psychoanalytic methods for the purpose of social inquiry is Avery Gordon. Method, according to Gordon, cannot be an "abstract" and "bloodless" professional question; method is where investments of the discipline are readable; for sociology, method is the imagined route to pure knowledge, distilled from reports of human experience; for psychoanalysis, method is the mode of legitimizing morbid interest in pathology; for Gordon, sociology needs to recognize the spirits that haunt it, and psychoanalysis needs to recognize the constraints of the social. Perhaps

the best example of a pragmatic use of psychoanalysis occurs in GAYLE RUBIN, "The Traffic in Women," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly Review, 1975). Rubin writes: "Psychoanalysis contains a unique set of concepts for understanding men, women, and sexuality. It is a theory of sexuality in human society. Most importantly, psychoanalysis provides a description of the mechanisms by which the sexes are divided and deformed, of how bisexual, androgynous infants are transformed into boys and girls. Psychoanalysis is a feminist theory manque" (p. 185) [Halberstam's note].
1. Judith Butler, "The Lesbian Phallus," in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993) [Halberstam's note].
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 57–67 [Halberstam's note].
3. *Ibid.*, p. 97 [Halberstam's note].
4. Undergo cathexis—a psychoanalytic term that denotes the process by which psychic or libidinal energy invests in and attaches to an object.

5. Paul Smith, "Vas," in *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robyn Wiegman and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), p. 1028 [Halberstam's note]. Smith (b. 1954), British-born scholar of cultural studies.
6. Both Freud and the French psychoanalyst JACQUES LACAN (1901–1981) distinguish between the physical penis and the phallus, which operates as a signifier of male privilege.
7. *To spend* is old slang meaning "to ejaculate."
8. Halberstam draws heavily on her theory of gender as performative, most influentially set forth in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990; see above).

pinpointed, maleness cannot be located as a privileged place for the development of masculinity. The body in Lacan's work, Butler emphasizes, is always a phantasmatic body; it always entails (as the mirror stage confirms) a misrecognition of self as coherent.⁵ Butler comments: "Lacan establishes the morphology of the body as a psychically invested projection, an idealization or 'fiction' of the body as a totality and locus of control."⁶ If all bodies are phantasmatic, then what makes the "lesbian phallus" impossible and the male phallus primary? Nothing, except Lacan's unconscious investment in the notion of a superior male body that produces male power; moreover, as Butler shows, neither Lacan nor Freud can really conceive of a powerful female masculinity.

The reading of female masculinity in "The Lesbian Phallus" is actually elusive, difficult, and hardly explicit, but it can be reduced more simply to three main points: first, the "lesbian phallus" signifies the possibility of a female body both being and having phallic power; this possibility is both a consequence of Lacan's theoretical framework and denied by him as a credible outcome of socialization. The lesbian phallus, moreover, intervenes in the relation between body parts and the body as a whole, which Lacan tends to essentialize. In other words, if, in the mirror stage, the image of the whole body is a fantasy within which the coherent body stands in for the coherent self, then the symbolic version of this misrecognition of coherence occurs when the phallic body stands in for social order. Butler's second main argument about the viability and suppression of female masculinity concerns forms of male narcissism that allow men to misrecognize their penises as proof of their superiority and guarantor of their privileged relations to power, language, sexuality, desire. To the extent that they are unable to access the power they feel has been reserved for them, men tend to project their own misrecognition of the relationship between penises and male power onto the world around them.⁷ Finally, for Butler, if the phallus symbolizes the penis, then it cannot be the penis. The phallus must therefore NOT be the penis and is bound to the penis by "determinate negation."⁸

Butler's work has been immensely useful to many different projects on gender and sexuality, but only rarely is it discussed directly in relation to "female masculinity." As my reading of "The Lesbian Phallus" hopefully shows, however, Butler's ability to finally, after years of debate among feminist psychoanalytic theorists, disassociate the phallus from the penis owes everything to a submerged but readable investment in the viability of nonmale masculinity. Because her example of gender performativity in *Gender Trouble* drew from the mostly gay male cultures of drag and female

5. Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I" (1949 [see above]), in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977) [Halberstam's note]. "The mirror stage": according to Lacan, the stage (6–18 months) during which a child gains a sense of self through a (mis)recognition of his or her unified image in a mirror.

6. Butler, "Lesbian Phallus," p. 73 [Halberstam's note].

7. A good example of this form of projection—violent projection—would be the recent phenomenon of the outraged white male supremacist who has misrecognized both his whiteness and his maleness, his skin and his penis, as signifiers

impersonation, theorists have perhaps tended to overlook the crucial focus of her intervention into psychoanalytic models of the gendered self—the butch body. The Butlerian phallus is above all accessed through a phallic dyke body, the butch body that has been repudiated by both psychoanalysis and feminism.⁹

If we return for a moment to the heterosexual conversion narratives from the last section, we can see how the threat of the lesbian phallus, male narcissism, and the misrecognition of the part for the whole completely informs the models of masculinity and femininity that the films produce and affirm. Women, in these narratives, simply cannot be masculine; or, if they seem to present some form of credible masculinity, as occurs in *French Twist*, for example, it is still tempered by the notion that the butch resembles more closely the female object of her affection than the male object of her competitive instincts. In *French Twist*, the butch rival's temporary success with the heroine is explained by her willingness to play the male part in a domestic arrangement (fix a clogged drain, take out the garbage) in the temporary absence of a real man. Her threat to the heterosexuality of the heroine is tempered by, first, showing the heroine to be still fixated on male masculinity and settling for a supposedly counterfeit masculinity when the real thing is unavailable. But, second, the film continuously plays upon the butch rival's female and therefore "inadequate" body, showing her naked repeatedly and never allowing her body to become sexually phallic (through the use of a dildo, for example). Furthermore, the fact that the butch rival is able to please the heroine at all becomes the ground for outrageous degrees of punishment that her character is forced to undergo.

The fact that male masculinity seems to stand, as I commented earlier, in constant need of verification confirms Butler's premise that all bodies are phantasmatic but that the male body has engaged in the most fabulous and extensive misrecognition of the realness of embodiment. In the next and last section of this essay, I want to consider the ways in which female masculinity has been cast historically as a completely abject, aesthetically displeasing, and uninhabitable position. In a culture that positively celebrates white masculinities of many different kinds, it is not obvious how masculinity can be reserved for white men over and against the threats levied by powerful and affirmative forms of female masculinity. The discourse of ugliness, I will argue, locates masculinity in females as abhorrent, repulsive, and unsustainable.

The Ugly: Hairy and Scary Masculine Women

One indicator of changes in prevailing social attitudes to female masculinity has been the acceptance or rejection of women's sports. In 1999 women's sports took a huge step toward becoming viable entertainment in America. The women's U.S. World Cup soccer team and Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) both signify the presence of sizable paying audiences willing to watch, play, and appreciate women's sports. Some have expressed amazement that it has taken this long to develop public acceptance for women's athleticism, but, then again, even in the masculinist space of the

9. *Ibid.*, p. 86 [Halberstam's note].

newspapers' sports pages, journalists have confirmed that a joint fear of lesbianism and masculinity in women has animated continued opposition to a serious appreciation of women's sports. During the Women's World Cup soccer finals, the *New York Times* journalist Robert Lipsyte, for example, wrote an editorial about the U.S. women's soccer team and the history of female sports. He commented: "For the World Cup team to crack into the male-dominated merchandising mart as a group and as individuals, they must dispel the aura of homosexuality that was hung on women's athleticism as a way of stifling their emerging physical and political power."¹

Lesbianism has long been associated with female masculinity and female masculinity in turn has been figured as undesirable by linking it in essential and unquestionable ways to female ugliness. The dilemma of the masculine and therefore ugly woman functions as the specter that haunts feminine identification in order to ensure that few women cathect onto female masculinity through either identification or desire. One obvious signifier of the equation between ugliness and female masculinity can be traced through the association of female hirsute bodies with essential ugliness. Literature and history are full of examples of women with beards or women with excessive body hair. Many of these women have been dubbed "witch" or "freak" and displayed in circuses and fairs; some have married, some have had children, some were expelled from their communities, and others were adopted as divine figures.²

An early version of the heterosexual conversion narrative that revolves around a rivalry between a masculine/ugly woman and a male suitor for the heroine's attention can be found in a Wilkie Collins³ novel, *The Woman in White*. The discussions of female masculinity as a primary signifier of unattractiveness in this text also hint at the long history of social prejudices against even slight masculinity in women, prejudice, moreover, that lives on today in discussions of athletic and strong women. Collins's 1860 novel features a curious character, Marian Halcombe, whom Collins represents as both a sexual threat to the novel's heroine and a sexual rival to the novel's hero. Unlike contemporary heterosexual conversion fantasies, Collins's novel actually runs the risk of representing the figure that he wants to disdain and whom the reader will want the heroine to reject. Halcombe, like other masculine women in nineteenth-century literature, symbolizes not only the emergence of a model of active female sexuality but also a predatory form of female desire. In her first meeting with him, Marian is described by the hero Walter as follows. Walter has entered a room, and he sees a beautiful woman with her back to him. Observing her from behind, Walter observes her "easy elegance," her "comely shape," her "pliant firmness." He is filled with burning curiosity to see the beautiful woman face to face: "She left the window—and I said to myself, the lady is dark. She moved forward a few inches—and I said to myself, the lady is young. She approached nearer—and I said to myself

(with a sense of surprise which words fail me to express). The lady is ugly!" Walter goes on to explain his definition of the ugly as it applies to Marian:

Never was the old conventional maxim, that Nature cannot err, more flatly contradicted—never was the fair promise of a lovely figure more strangely and startlingly belied by the face and head that crowned it. The lady's complexion was almost swarthy and the dark down on her upper lip was almost a moustache. She had a large, firm, masculine mouth and jaw; prominent, piercing, resolute brown eyes; and thick, coal-black hair, growing unusually low down on her forehead.⁴

Significantly, Marian has a perfect figure and a lovely form; it is her face, with its dark skin, firm mouth, and shadow of a moustache, that gives her away and allows for Walter's singular exclamation, "The lady is ugly!" This remarkably explicit depiction of female ugliness also makes clear the ways in which masculinity and racial otherness tend to be linked within aesthetic displeasure. Marian is hairy and dark—"swarthy" in fact—and her ugliness is as much a function of not being "fair" (with its own double meaning) as it is of not being feminine. Quite obviously, then, in this sensational tale of sexual secrets, corrupt aristocracy, evil foreigners, and social climbers, the love and natural union between the hero and his "woman in white"—his fair heroine—is secured at the expense of the other characters, who all fall under the headings of either foreign, working class, oddly gendered, or sexually corrupt. Whereas the heroine's uncle is too effeminate to protect her, Laura's friend and companion Marian is too masculine to be safe with her. Laura and Walter's romance turns upon the ability of the novel to render the foreign Count Fosco, the effeminate Uncle Fairley, the butch Marian ugly and sexually deviant. Against this backdrop of freaks, Laura and Walter achieve beauty, harmony, and romantic union.

In an essay on the sensation novel, D. A. Miller has addressed the reading and writing effects of gender confusion in *The Woman in White*. Miller argues that the novel "produces the configuration of incarcerated femininity" and simultaneously "cathects the congruent configuration of phobic male homoeroticism."⁵ By employing the figure of "the woman in the man" or "the man in the woman," Miller shows that these twin fantasies of one gender locked up inside of the other serve the disciplinary purpose of defeminizing the man and refeminizing the female. While Miller is primarily concerned with the homoerotic tension between men in the text, and with the homosexual panic of the "nervous" or sensationalized man, *The Woman in White*, through the character of Marian, also predicates horror upon the masculinization of women rather than upon the feminization of men. The masculine woman in *The Woman in White*, Marian Halcombe, remains for Miller "a man in drag."⁶ But Marian represents much more than a man in drag or the opposite of the contaminating femininity embodied in the novel's twinned heroines, Laura and Anne. Indeed, it is significant that Miller actually overlooks the configuration of "incarcerated masculinity" in this text, preferring

1. Robert Lipsyte, "Sports and Sex Are Always Together," *New York Times*, "Sports Sunday," July 11, 1999, C13 [Halberstam's note].
 2. For more on the essential freakishness of the hairy female body see Rosemary Garland-Thomson's informative work in *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture*

4. Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* (1860; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 25 [Halberstam's note].
 5. D. A. Miller, "Cage Aux Folles: Sensation and Gender in Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*,"

