

Cross-Class Escape and the Erotics of “Proletarian” Masculinity in Thomas Painter’s
Sexual Record and Visual Archive

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines the sexual journal and visual archive of Thomas N. Painter (1905-1978), an informal collaborator of Alfred C. Kinsey’s Institute for Sex Research, who since the 1930s documented in writing and photography his commercially-based homosexual relations. One of the largest sexual records ever produced, it focuses on Painter’s lifelong erotic interest in lower-class men whom he idealized as paragons of masculinity and sexual uninhibitedness. It chronicles Painter’s history of sexual contacts with these men, driven by his philanthropic ideal of socially beneficial cross-class friendship, and his attempts to reform his often delinquent lovers and rescue them from the life of poverty and crime.

Analyzing Painter’s autobiographical and auto-ethnographic writing as well as his erotically-themed collection of drawings and photographs, this dissertation explores the practice of sexually motivated cross-class escape, evident in the personal histories of many upper- and middle-class homosexual men living in the mid-twentieth-century Europe and North America. One such man, Painter eschewed the cultural demands of marriage and bourgeois domesticity and, relinquishing his upper-middle-class background, sought to spend his life among the hyper-virile and sexually open “urban proletariat.” Tracing the influence that philanthropic discourses of “social brotherhood” and subcultural eroticization of “proletarian” masculinity had on Painter’s understanding

of his same-sex desires and his vision of sexual and romantic relationships with his lower-class partners, the dissertation poses critical questions about the complex power dynamic in these relations, the changing notions of masculinity in the period, the role of commercial sex in early male homosexual communities and the alternative forms of intimacy and kinship fostered by their members.

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Table of Contents

Introduction: “My Lust Has Always Been Directed at Simple Muzhiks”	2
Part One. The Context	43
Chapter 1. Same-Sex Desire and Social Escape	44
<i>“Eros and Altruism”</i> : Cross-Class “Brotherhood” and the Homoerotics of <i>Philanthropy</i>	50
<i>Sexual Travel and Social Escape: Homosexual “Pilgrims,” Exiles and Tourists</i>	80
Part Two. The Story	101
Chapter 2. “A Level of Society Which Is Willing to Accept Me for What I Am”: From Middle-Class Puritanism to Homosexual Emancipation in the Urban Underworld	102
Chapter 3. The Naked Proletarian: Amateur Photography and the Erotics of Lower-Class Masculinity	152
Chapter 4. “Us Puerto Ricans”: Thomas Painter’s “Puerto Rican Era”	202
Chapter 5. “The Caresses That Last As Long As the Money Does”: The Pleasures, Dangers and Frustrations of Commercial Sex	250
Conclusion	305
Bibliography	322
Appendix. Thomas Painter’s Visual Archive: A Selection	355

List of Figures

1. Thomas Painter, untitled drawing, ca. 1944-1945.
2. Thomas Painter, untitled drawing, ca. 1944-1945.
3. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, ca. 1954.
4. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, 1945.
5. Thomas Painter, untitled drawing, 1948.
6. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, 1955.
7. Henry Faulkner, untitled photographs, ca. 1940s.
8. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, 1936.
9. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, 1949.
10. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, 1950.
11. Tom Clifford*, untitled photograph, ca. late 1920s.
12. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, 1950.
13. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, 1951.
14. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, 1951.
15. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, 1955.
16. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, 1955.
17. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, 1954.
18. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, 1957.
19. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, 1956.

Between the luxurious mansion of *pater familias* and this dingy dive, give me the latter! For here alone I might be able to pass as a *puella* [a young girl, a sweetheart]. In my own cultured, Christian circle, female-impersonation is castigated. But would not the attitude of the offscouring of our mundane sphere—the Pugilists' Haven gunmen—be different?

Ralph Werther—"Jennie June," *The Female-Impersonators* (1922)

Introduction: “My Lust Has Always Been Directed at Simple Muzhiks”

Reflecting back on the sources of my academic interest in cross-class sexual relations between men, I can now see how this dissertation stemmed, in a way, from my long-ago encounter with the published excerpts from the private diary of Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich of Russia, the cousin of Tsar Nicholas II. A patron of the arts, a head of the Russian Academy of Sciences in 1889-1915 and a minor poet and translator, now mainly remembered for his lyrics to some of the most famous sentimental ballads written by Piotr Tchaikovsky, Konstantin Konstantinovich left a rather candid diary in which he chronicled his inner struggle with his erotic attraction towards young and invariably lower-class men—coachmen, servants, subordinate military personnel and the ever-present bathhouse attendants (*banschik*).¹ The Grand Duke was married, a father of nine children, but throughout his life had sexual relations with men and contemplated them in his diary, repeatedly resolving to fight his “passions” but equally often giving in to his “impure thoughts and desires.” The following is the entry from April 19, 1904:

I feel uneasy again, once more sinful thoughts, memories and desires are haunting me. I dream of visiting a bathhouse on Moyka [Street] or ordering to prepare a bath at home, imagine the familiar attendants—Aleksey Frolov and especially Sergey Syroezhkin. My lust has always been directed at simple muzhiks, outside their circle I have never looked for and never found partners in sin. When passion is speaking, the arguments of conscience,

¹ On Konstantin Konstantinovich’s diaries, see Kseniya Sak, “Dnevnik velikogo kniazia Konstantina Konstantinovicha kak pamiatnik dukhovnoy kultury Rossii vtoroy poloviny XIX—nachala XX v.” [The diaries of the Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich as a record of the Russian spiritual culture of the second half of nineteenth and early twentieth centuries], in *Aktualnye problemy istoricheskikh issledovaniy: Vzgliad molodykh uchenykh*, ed. Roman Romanov (Novosibirsk: Parallel, 2011), 81-87. Konstantin Konstantinovich began writing a diary when he was eleven years old and continued until his death in 1915. It is preserved in the State Archive of the Russian Federation (Moscow). Only short excerpts have been published so far, and the ones concerning his sexual contacts with men date from 1903-1905.

virtue and prudence subside.²

A month later, the occasion arose, and Konstantin Konstantinovich could not resist the temptation:

Sinful thoughts overcame me during the meeting. On Morskaya [Street], before reaching the corner with Nevskiy [Avenue], I let the coachman go and continued on foot towards Politseyskiy bridge and, crossing it, turn left on Moyka. I passed twice, up and down, in front of the entrance to a private-room bathhouse [*nomernye bani*]; the third time, I went in. And here I come again, sinning the same way. My moral state is deplorable...³

Such sexually motivated visits to a bathhouse or the private baths prepared at Konstantin Konstantinovich's home, of which "sin" was a frequent component, are a regular feature of his sexual history that attests to the existence in the turn-of-the-century Russia of the regime of cross-class male sexual contact integrated within gentry households and organized around strict hierarchies of power. When the Grand Duke felt overcome by his lustfulness, he sent for a *banschik*, a "simple muzhik" always at his disposal, and indulged in sin without worrying about being rebuffed or fearing his "debauchery" could be exposed.

It is possible to argue that this regime of sexual contact between men of higher social standing and their lower-class subordinates has been historically the most widespread form of cross-class male intimacy. These often casual and situational encounters did not demand one's participation in the urban homosexual subculture, if such existed, but were incorporated into the daily fabric of social interaction between men who

² Konstantin Romanov, "Dnevnik 1903-1905 gg." [The diaries, 1903-1905], *Moskovskiy komsomolets*, December 6, 1998. Translation mine.

³ Ibid.

belonged to the different social classes and were in unequal relations of power.⁴ Domestic servants submitted to sexual advances of their masters, waiters or bellhops were ready to supplement their income by providing sexual services to their affluent patrons, common soldiers accepted sexual propositions from their military superiors, willingly or under duress. Some members of the gentry chose lower-class partners out of convenience, as those were readily available but, at the same time, comfortably removed from their own social circle; the latter could be given a small tip for their silence or even handsomely rewarded, in the course of a long-lasting relationship, to ensure their loyalty. For others, sexual pleasure and social domination were deeply intertwined. Using their social inferiors as vehicles for sexual release, they engaged in the kind of behavior that should be indisputably characterized as sexual abuse and exploitation. The individual attitudes that the masters exhibited towards their subordinate lovers certainly varied. Konstantin Konstantinovich was tormented by the feelings of guilt and remorse, as he wondered if he had corrupted a newly brought bathhouse attendant whom he “led into sin.”⁵ The Maharajah of Chhatarpur, visited by British writer J. R. Ackerley in 1923-1924, on the other hand, regularly beat his valet, a barber’s son performing the duties of the Maharajah’s

⁴ Many large-scale studies outlining the diversity of male-to-male sexual relations across cultures and historical periods attest to the importance of status asymmetry between partners—the hierarchy rooted chiefly in age or/and gender but usually further underlined by the difference in social position, power and wealth—in most pre-modern forms of male homosexuality. See, for instance, Louis Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006); Stephen O. Murray, *Homosexualities* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000). As Stephen O. Murray remarks, describing the economic aspects of both age- and gender-stratified male homosexuality, “Most everyone took for granted that the older and richer would sexually use the younger and poorer.” Murray, *Homosexualities*, 12.

⁵ On June 23, 1904, he noted in his diary: “I again refused to fight my lust, I could but did not want to. In the evening, a bath was prepared for me; attendant Sergey Syroezhkin was busy and brought in his brother, twenty-year-old fellow Kondraty who serves as an attendant in the Usachevs bathhouse. And this fellow I led into sin. It might be that I forced him to sin for the first time in his life, and only when it was too late did I remember the horrible words: woe betide him who seduces one of these little ones.” Romanov, “Dnevnik.”

personal “God,” when he failed to adequately “sodomize” his master.⁶ What distinguished these relations, both consensual and forced, from the modern forms of cross-class male-to-male intimacy that I discuss in this dissertation was the fact that they occurred within the already existing social structures (the patriarchal household or the homosocial institutions of tavern, army, workshop, bathhouse, etc.) and were guided by the power hierarchies that similarly organized non-sexual interaction between the two parties.

Analyzing the changes in the social organization of male-to-male intimacy in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Russia, Dan Healey examines the diary of a Moscow merchant Pavel Medvedev, in which he chronicled the story of his unhappy marriage that led him regularly to give in to “lustfulness” under the influence of alcohol.⁷ Medvedev’s sexual excesses included solitary masturbation as well as extramarital contacts with both women and men. Be it sex with female prostitutes, intercourse during the periods of religious fast or mutual masturbation with other men, they all equally made him feel the intense qualms of conscience, which he pondered in his diary. Male-to-male sex appears to not have had a special status in the merchant’s mind; it did not indicate to him his abnormal, or otherwise unusual, sexual nature and was merely one of many “sinful” acts he indulged in when drunk. Furthermore, Medvedev’s sexual encounters with men took place in the context of his everyday social interaction, what Healey described as the relations “between masters and apprentices, householders and their servants, clerics and male

⁶ J. R. Ackerley to E. M. Forster, 23-29 April 1924, in *The Ackerley Letters*, ed. Neville Braybrooke (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 10-13; For the autobiographical account of Ackerley’s visit to India, see J. R. Ackerley, *Hindoo Holiday: An Indian Journal* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1952).

⁷ Dan Healey, “Masculine Purity and ‘Gentlemen’s Mischief’: Sexual Exchange and Prostitution between Russian Men, 1861-1941,” *Slavic Review* 60, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 239-240. On Medvedev’s diary, see also Alexandr Kupriianov, “Pagubnaia strast’ moskovskogo kuptsa” [A pernicious passion of a Moscow merchant], in *Kazus 1996: Individualnoe i unikalnoe v istorii*, eds. Yuriy Bessmertny and Mikhail Boitsov (Moscow: RGGU, 1997), 87-106.

novices, and between bathhouse attendants and the customers whose backs they scrubbed.”⁸ He sought sex with men as a part of his regular homosocial activities, such as a visit to tavern or bathhouse, and these contacts remained thoroughly embedded in the traditional family and economic structures of the time. About one such encounter, Medvedev wrote, for instance:

For some time now my lust leads me to pick up a younger cab driver, whom I make fun of along the way; with a little nonsense you can enjoy mutual masturbation [*vzaimnaia onaniia*]. You can almost always succeed with a 50-kopek coin, or 30 kopeks, but there are also those who agree to it for pleasure. That’s five times this month.⁹

As evident from Medvedev’s diary, manservants, grooms, coachmen or waiters were willing to accept, often for a small compensation, homosexual advances from their masters, viewing them as the masters’ harmless eccentricities—the attitude that Healey fittingly encapsulates with a popular Russian phrase “gentlemen’s mischief” (*barskie shalosti*).¹⁰ What Medvedev’s diary illustrates is that one did not have to be a nobleman like Konstantin Konstantinovich to take advantage of the sexual opportunities that everyday contact with subordinate males allowed. For a young illiterate *banshik*, even a third-guild merchant (the lowest merchant rank in the Tsarist Russia) like Medvedev was a *barin* (a

⁸ Healey, “Masculine Purity,” 238.

⁹ “Dnevnik moskovskogo kuptsa Pavla Vasil’evicha Medvedeva, 1854-1864 gg.” [The diary of a Moscow merchant Pavel Vasil’evich Medvedev, 1854-1864], unpublished manuscript, quot. in Healey, “Masculine Purity,” 239.

¹⁰ In his ethnographic overview of homosexual practices across the world, Magnus Hirschfeld remarked about Russia: “Visitors to Russia often tell me that at the baths, attendants of different ages and types were presented to them. ... Besides the bath attendants, cab drivers, then janitors and skilled manual laborers are especially inclined to participate in homosexual intercourse. All the latter, like the working classes in general, very placidly regard ‘his lordship’s playing or fooling around’ or ‘the nobleman’s game,’ as they call it among themselves, and in no way are insulted by a proposition, but more likely are flattered; they accept or reject it, hardly ever turning to the police.” Magnus Hirschfeld, *The Homosexuality of Men and Women* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2000 [1919]), 673-674.

man of good social standing, a land owner, gentleman) whom he was expected to service well, including sexually.

Although coming from a well-to-do upper-middle-class family, Thomas Painter, whose sexual record is examined in this dissertation, was no Grand Duke. And yet, in what he called his erotic “day-dreams,” he regularly entertained the idea of being one, a rich and powerful ruler who, much alike to the aforementioned Maharajah, could assemble a harem of semi-naked servants ready to provide him with sexual services of all kinds. As I discuss in the following chapters, this was a frequent theme in Painter’s homoerotic drawings, but his real-life sexual behavior was driven, it seems, by a rather different set of ideas, fantasies and desires. Throughout most his life, Painter pursued young virile-looking “proletarians” for sex and sought to find among them that “ideal friend” with whom he could settle in a permanent relationship. The way Painter imagined, organized and explained his sexual interaction with these men differed in several important aspects, however, from the traditional, hierarchic regime of cross-class sexual contact, which I briefly outlined above, and represented a new, profoundly modern form of cross-class homosexual relations.

First of all, the lower-class youth with whom Painter desired to associate and have sex were essentially strangers to him, encountered in the anonymous urban space of the modern metropolis. These men clearly differed from Painter in their social position and the economic resources they possessed, but they were not in any direct relation of power to him, as sexually obliging servants were to their master. Second, his interest in these “urban proletarians” was not only situational or pragmatic. They were indeed more open to sexual contact with men and, when paid, pleasantly compliant with Painter’s desires, but what

attracted Painter was much more than that. In Painter's mind, they embodied a whole array of personal, social and sexual characteristics that he admired, idealized and yearned to develop in himself: from spontaneous and authentic masculine expression to the capacity for direct and unreserved enjoyment of life to sexual uninhibitedness. He did not merely look for sexual release in paid encounters with lower-class youth but strived for a complex emancipatory experience, a self-discovery and self-realization that he thought was unavailable to him in his native upper-middle-class milieu. The trajectory of Painter's sexual history, as he constructed it in his sexual record, was that of cross-class escape—the narrative of relinquishing and extirpating one's social background and re-imagining one's identity in the social and cultural environment fundamentally different from that one was originally born into. Finally, the relationships that Painter attempted to develop with lower-class men were organized according to his ethically informed understanding of social divisions, economic inequality and cross-class interaction. The dynamic of some of his contacts with the “urban proletariat” was often morally problematic or downright exploitative, but his intentions were near always idealistic: to reform a delinquent lover, to rescue those socially marginalized and economically disenfranchised from the life of poverty and crime, to bridge the gap between social classes.

This vision of cross-class male intimacy was expressed by Painter in a set of his faux-historical pornographic drawings that depict what initially looks like an example of the traditional regime of sexual interaction between an affluent and powerful member of the gentry and his subordinate male lover. In his commentary, Painter introduced this series:

A result of my Russian history readings. Serfs were for sale like slaves in the 18th century. Here is a young noble with his favorite boy and two

hustlers—breaking in a brand new serf just bought out of a country village. The orgy is about to commence. Here the noble is portrayed as the typical, contemptuous, bored aristocrat, using peasants as things—typifying the Russian expression of homosexuality as the “gentlemen’s amusement.”¹¹

While the *barin* remains fully dressed in a rather modern-looking suit, the newly brought serf is ordered to undress and provide his penis to be fellated by his master. Somehow, the sexual intimacy results in more good-natured, non-exploitative relations between the two.

In the final drawings from the series, both partners are naked, stripped of the visual signs of their social position, and join each other in passionate embrace. Painter provided the following explanation:

The serf now likes his young master, wants to symbolize it by raising him from fellator and pedicant [“passive” partner in anal penetration] to equal lover. The noble is gratefully incredulous at this gift which is more than his money could buy. ... They lead to mutual embrace—serious now, because friendship and love is so much greater than mere sex.¹²

As I discuss in the first chapter of this dissertation, the ideal of egalitarian cross-class couple was central to many middle-class homosexual men’s understanding of their same-sex desires and romantic and sexual relations they strived to develop with other men. The ideal already figures prominently in the last decades of the nineteenth century, reaches its heyday in the interwar years of the twentieth century, often energized by leftist activism of the time,¹³ and then gradually, though by no means completely, disappears in the

¹¹ Thomas Painter, commentary on drawings “70-72”, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, D.1., vol. 2 “Drawings 1: 1944-45.”

¹² Thomas Painter, commentary on drawings “77-78”, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, D.1., vol. 2 “Drawings 1: 1944-45.”

¹³ The case French anarcho-communist writer and journalist Daniel Guérin is, perhaps, the most prominent example of the homosexual leftist activists’ idealization and romanticization of working-class masculinity. The scope of this dissertation, which specifically limits itself to the examination of the Anglo-American context, does not allow me address Guérin’s writing in detail. For Guérin’s autobiographical accounts, see Daniel Guérin, *Autobiographie de jeunesse. D’une dissidence sexuelle au socialisme* (Paris, Belfond, 1972); Daniel Guérin, *The Brown Plague: Travels in Late Weimar and Early Nazi Germany*, trans. Robert Schwartzwald (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994). See also a highly informed discussion of Guérin’s

postwar years. It survives nowadays in niche markets of gay erotica celebrating exaggeratedly and aggressively virile “rough trade”¹⁴ or in the politically informed projects of queer activists to reclaim working-class sexual cultures of the past, albeit usually within lesbian and transgender context of “female masculinities.”¹⁵ Some canonical texts of gay-themed fiction, like E. M. Forster’s *Maurice* (1913-1914, published 1971) or Christopher Isherwood’s *Christopher and His Kind* (1976), long since established the idealistic fantasy (as well the more complicated realities) of cross-class romance as an important part of the subcultural history, maybe irrelevant today but nonetheless fascinating. And yet, the subject remains, for the most part, unexplored in sexuality research, be it now fashionable queer theory, which remains generally silent on the subject of social class and the intersection between sexuality and economics, or more traditional cultural and historical studies, which focus primarily on the legal control and discursive (literary, medical, political, etc.) constructions of male homosexuality. The latter includes some notable exceptions, such as Florence Tamagne’s discussion of the interwar “fantasy of the working-class lover”¹⁶ or George Chauncey’s and Matt Houlbrook’s analysis of the working-class sexual culture of the first half of the twentieth century in New York and

ideas in David Berry, “‘Workers of the World, Embrace!’ Daniel Guérin, the Labour Movement, and Homosexuality,” *Left History* 9, no. 2 (Spring-Summer 2004): 11-43.

¹⁴ See, for example, the David Hurles’s photographic work in David Hurles, *Speeding: The Old Reliable Photos of David Hurles* (San Francisco: Green Candy Press, 2005); David Hurles, *Outcast: David Hurles’ Old Reliable in Living Color* (San Francisco: Green Candy Press, 2010). On Hurles, see Jack Fritscher, “Old Reliable, A Legend in His Own Time: The Photographer Whose Boys Made *Drummer* Fresh...and Scary!” (1982), available at <http://www.jackfritscher.com/Drummer/Research%20Note.html>; John Waters, “Outsider Porn,” in *Role Models* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 217-258. For an analysis of the “rough trade” aesthetics in homoerotic visual culture, see José Esteban Muñoz, “Rough Boy Trade: Queer Desire/Straight Identity in the Photography of Larry Clark,” in *The Passionate Camera*, 167-177.

¹⁵ See Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

¹⁶ Florence Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe: Berlin, London, Paris, 1919-1939* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2004), vol. 2, 76-85.

London respectively.¹⁷ The subject of cross-class relationships is also addressed in the explorations of individual literary figures who showed preference for proletarian lovers and explored this theme in their work; among them are, apart from aforementioned Forster and Isherwood, John Addington Symonds, Edward Carpenter, Stephen Spender, W. H. Auden, J. R. Ackerley, Truman Capote, Gore Vidal and Tennessee Williams.¹⁸ Besides the inherent limitations that such studies have in relation to the examination of the lives of those who did not belong to literary and artistic circles, they also frequently focus on these writers' distaste for bourgeois intellectualism and its concomitant sexual inhibitions as the roots of their attraction towards uneducated workingmen. This was indeed a very important component in such relations but certainly not the only one. Contemporary sexuality studies have yet to develop a rich and multi-faceted understanding of the connection between male homosexuality and cross-class relations in the period, especially as it manifested itself in the everyday lives of ordinary "queer" men and their lower-class sexually "normal" partners. Hopefully, this dissertation is a step in that direction.

For someone interested in cross-class male intimacy, Thomas Painter's sexual record is a priceless resource. It is particularly valuable in exploring such relations in the rather complex setting of the mid-twentieth-century United States, where class divisions were not as rigidly enforced as on the continent and democratic ideologies strong but economic inequalities nonetheless widespread, further exacerbated by the problems of

¹⁷ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

¹⁸ On E. M. Forster, see Wendy Moffat, *A Great Unrecorded History: A New Life of E. M. Forster* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010). On J. R. Ackerley, see David Bergman, "J. R. Ackerley and the Ideal Friend," in *Fictions of Masculinity: Crossing Cultures, Crossing Sexualities*, ed. Peter Murphy (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 255-267; Clayton J. Whisnant, "Masculinity and Desire in the Works of J. R. Ackerley," *Journal of Homosexuality* 43, no. 2 (2003): 127-142. On Isherwood and Auden, see Norman Page, *Auden and Isherwood: The Berlin Years* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

immigration and racial discrimination. Here is the case of an upper-middle-class New Yorker whose sexual life was organized around cross-class commercially-based relations with “urban proletarians” and who, moreover, saw his documenting it for science and posterity as his personal mission. The mammoth size of Painter’s personal archive is indeed one of its most striking characteristics: thirty volumes of the sex journal covering the years from 1944 to 1973, the three-volume “Index of Persons” (1961) comprised of brief biographical accounts of Painter’s sexual partners and other individuals mentioned in his journal, the two-volume unpublished ethnographic manuscript “Male Homosexuals and Their Prostitutes” (1941) based on Painter’s own relations with male hustlers and his ethnographic observations about the male prostitution milieu of the 1930s, fragments of Painter’s early diaries (1934-1937), personal documents (1928-1974) and personal correspondence (1935-1936), family memorabilia, autobiographical essays and life chronologies written by Painter in the early 1970s. The written material is supplemented by an extensive visual collection: the photographs that Painter took of his sexual partners (more than 400 subjects and over 2,700 photographs and photographic negatives, dating from 1938-1961), his sexually themed artwork produced in the period of 1944-1966 (studies of the male nude figure and various pornographic drawings totaling over 800 images), his homoerotic scrapbooks (donated to the Kinsey Institute in 1947), his collection of physique magazines from the 1950s and 1960s and his home movies shot in 1939-1940. This variety of autobiographical material, preserved together at the Library of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction and organized with the help of Painter himself, makes his archive unique. The archive’s sheer scale (reading Painter’s journal in its totality is a month-long endeavor) and the restrictions on copying it

imposed by the Institute with the purpose of protecting the anonymity of its subjects, are the only hindrances to a researcher.

The circumstances under which Painter's sexual record was produced were particularly conducive to its truthfulness and meticulousness. Written at the request of sex researcher Alfred C. Kinsey, it could be seen as one of the "elicited confessions" famously analyzed—and critiqued as mere discursive effects of the institutional production and regulation of human sexuality—by Michel Foucault.¹⁹ Painter's sexual record, however, differs very much from Foucault's sources, the psychiatric case studies of sexual "perverts" produced by French doctors and criminologists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was addressed to a scientist who held an unshakable belief in the benign nature of sexual variation and explicitly rejected the psychiatric notions of sexual "abnormality" or "perversion." Kinsey's sex-positive approach and sympathetic attitude towards people persecuted by society for their "deviant" sexuality disposed Painter to be completely frank with him about his sexual behavior. Furthermore, adhering to the behaviorist methodology in sexuality research (Kinsey's main interest was in raw data about one's sexual "outlets," which he obtained through face-to-face interviews and sexual records like Painter's), Kinsey never developed an intricate theory of human sexuality, similar to that of psychoanalysis, whose postulates could explicitly influence his research subjects' understanding of their sexual behavior. On the contrary, Kinsey repeatedly encouraged Painter to shed whatever pathologizing psychiatric concepts he adopted from his readings of Richard von Krafft-Ebing or his treatment with psychoanalyst Alfred Adler, and

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 17-35. See also Michel Foucault "The Confession of the Flesh," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 194-228.

describe his sexual life to him in a direct, matter-of-fact manner. Finally, as insightfully discussed by Henry L. Minton in his pioneering study of Painter's archive, Painter saw himself not only as a subject of Kinsey's research but as his unofficial collaborator, an amateur ethnographer of the world of male homosexuality and prostitution.²⁰ While Painter clearly lacked training in social research and tended at times to personally colored pronouncements and romantically infused musings on his sexual life, he was also an avid and perceptive informant and a highly articulate writer.

This dissertation builds on Minton's analysis of Painter's work on male homosexuality and prostitution as an important example of amateur community-rooted emancipatory sexual science, exploring the topic of social escape and cross-class sexual relations between men, and adopts as its principal methodological approach life document-based critical humanism. This choice may seem out of place in contemporary sexuality studies, informed by queer, postcolonial and feminist theories and characterized by their proponents' postmodern sensibility, but it is my strong persuasion that it is the only productive way to analyze Painter's sexual record, which is moreover fully faithful to its author and main subject. The documentary tradition in social research, using detailed life records to explore broad social phenomena and, what is more important, the dynamic of their change in the course of an individual life, is as old as social research itself. In fact, the groundbreaking classic of social research that inaugurated the sociological discipline in the United States, William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki's five-volume *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918-1921), presented one of the richest and most fascinating life records in social science, that of a Polish immigrant Władek Wiszniewski, and argued for

²⁰ Henry L. Minton, *Departing from Deviance: A History of Homosexual Rights and Emancipatory Science in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).

the fundamental role that analysis of individual lives played in understanding culture and society.²¹ This life document-based approach continued to occupy a central place during the interwar years, mainly associated with the University of Chicago's ethnographic studies of urban delinquency of which Clifford R. Shaw's *The Jack-Roller: A Delinquent Boy's Own Story* (1930) and *The Natural History of a Delinquent Career* (1931) are probably the most prominent examples.²² It is particularly fitting that these books, widely publicized at the time, possibly inspired Painter's own attempts at an amateur ethnography of male prostitution and his numerous "case studies" of male hustlers and delinquent youth. My own background in sociology, in particular its Eastern European tradition where the study of autobiographies and personal documents (*pamiętniki*) continued to be highly influential due to the work of Polish sociologists Józef Chalasiński and Jan Szczepański, helps me to examine Painter's sexual record from this perspective.

In the recent decades, however, this life document-based approach came under harsh criticism from the various poststructuralist theories, especially in the humanities (in sociology, the analysis of detailed individual records became more and more marginal in the mid-twentieth century, as quantitative methods came to dominate the discipline). The main critique came from the aforementioned argument of Michel Foucault and the extensive scholarship it inspired in the burgeoning field of gender and sexuality studies. Foucault argued that the modern "incitement to discourse" about sex, of which scientific studies of "deviant" individuals was one manifestation, were essentially power mechanisms

²¹ William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America: Monograph of an Immigrant Group. Volume III: Life Record of an Immigrant* (Boston: Richard D. Badger, 1919).

²² See Clifford R. Shaw, *The Jack-Roller: A Delinquent Boy's Own Story* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1930); Clifford R. Shaw (with Maurice E. Moore), "Sidney's Own Story," in *The Natural History of a Delinquent Career* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1931), 51-223.

that social institutions used to describe and analyze—and, at the same time, contain, regulate and even construct—human sexuality. In the situation of “incited confessions” about sex, something similar to ventriloquism took place, according to Foucault; people’s voices were not indeed their own, and the truth of their sexuality was a mere effect of the all-permeating regime of “biopolitics” aimed to produce thoroughly docile human subjects. This view was already critiqued at the time by many historians who identified a much more complex picture of interaction between individuals and medical institutions who incited confessions from their patients,²³ but it somehow made it into a near dogma in contemporary queer theory and sexuality research, despite a number of very erudite studies that challenge Foucault’s view.²⁴ While some of Foucault’s insights about Western discourses on sex are indisputably valuable, his broad generalizations inevitably hide the fact that not all “confessions” were the same. The patients of psychiatric asylums or sex offenders turned over to psychiatrists for diagnosis of their condition certainly possessed little chance to define and defend themselves against the institutional power of medicine

²³ The seminal critique of Foucault’s “medicalization” theories is Roy Porter, “The Patient’s View: Doing Medical History from Below,” *Theory and Society* 14, no. 2 (March 1985): 175-198. See also his analysis of the subject, as applied specifically to sexual science, in Roy Porter and Lesley Hall, “The Authority of Individual Experience and the Opinions of Experts: Sex as a Social Science,” in *The Facts of Life: The Creation of Sexual Knowledge in Britain, 1650-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 178-201.

²⁴ See, for example, the study of the patients and correspondents of Richard von Krafft-Ebing, whose encyclopedic compendium *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886-1903) appears as an epitome of psychiatric pathologization of “perversion” in Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality*. Oosterhuis openly challenges Foucault’s understanding of Krafft-Ebing’s “case studies,” arguing the following: “The case history method was not just a means of categorizing and pathologizing deviant sexualities; it also offered a space in which uncertain individuals could articulate their predicament in the form of personal narrative. Their stories were not only told by the expert voices “from above” but also “from below,” by those who had lived or were living them in their role of the story’s protagonist. ... Lay views and medical views of sexuality overlapped, so that shared knowledge and judgments tended to structure and mediate interactions between the psychiatrist and the pervert. This facilitated medical treatment and other forms of restraint and intervention, but it also stimulated self-awareness and, in the longer term, emancipation.” Harry Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry, and the Making of Sexual Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 279-280. The above-mentioned study by Minton is another example of a more balanced and interactive view of the relations between early sexologists and their sexually “deviant” patients.

and law, although some nonetheless did.²⁵ At the same time, the often educated, self-conscious and articulate individuals who actively and voluntarily participated in the studies of sexual behavior undertaken by scientists committed to objective knowledge and social tolerance produced a very different kind of autobiographical accounts. When preserved unedited and unabridged, as was the case with Painter's archive, they present a complex multifaceted picture of their authors' sexual lives and enable us to explore not only how various discourses organized these men and women's understanding of their sexual subjectivities but how they employed their individual agency, adaptability and creativity to pursue sexual pleasure, romantic companionship and personal self-realization.

As argued by Ken Plummer in his methodological manifesto *Documents of Life 2: An Invitation to a Critical Humanism*, our new sensitivity about the role of social institutions and expert discourses in the production of life documents, brought about by the theorists like Foucault, by no means undermines such documents' validity or curtails the potential for their use in social research.²⁶ Quite the opposite, it opens the possibilities for their more nuanced interpretation and analysis. Plummer's methodological perspective, which he calls "critical humanism" emphasizing the importance of the critical treatment of

²⁵ See, for example, the "case study" of one Charles Double, a son of a shopkeeper from Troyes, who was arrested in 1904 for murdering his mother and persuaded by criminal psychiatrist Alexandre Lacassange to write autobiographical notations on the nature of his sexual condition and the motives of his crime. While he clearly adopts some psychiatric concepts, such as that of "mental hermaphroditism," to justify his crimes, he is also using them to essentially affirm and vindicate his "deviant" sexual subjectivity. Charles Double, "Mental Hermaphrodite and Other Autobiographical Writings," in *Queer Lives: Men's Autobiographies from Nineteenth-Century France*, eds. William A. Peniston and Nancy Erber (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 129-163.

²⁶ Ken Plummer, *Documents of Life 2: An Invitation to a Critical Humanism* (London: Sage, 2001). My approach to analysis of sexually-themed life documents is further informed by Plummer's other works that focused specifically on "sexual stories" and their use in contemporary sexuality research and queer theory. See Ken Plummer, *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Ken Plummer, "Critical Humanism and Queer Theory: Living with Tensions," in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (London: Sage, 2011), 195-206.

life documents as well as their unparalleled value in understanding the role that the embodied and self-conscious individual and his/her experiences play in the functioning of broader social structures and their historical change, is at the foundation of this dissertation. Plummer advocates “reclaiming the humanities” for social research and sees the analysis of individual life documents from a critical humanist perspective, which understands the human subject as embedded in his/her social and historical context but at the same time dynamic, active and contingent, as enabling such an interdisciplinary turn. Plummer’s critical humanist standpoint is rooted in the methodological and theoretical works across several disciplines, including those of sociologist Norman Denzin, a great proponent of the use of interpretative biography and auto-ethnography in social research, social historian Paul Thomson, one of the pioneers of the oral history method in historical analysis, and literary theorist James Olney, whose studies of autobiography and self-narrative remain highly influential in the field.²⁷ The understanding of life documents developed by these scholars informed my methodological approach to analyzing Painter’s sexual record, as did the works of other social researchers examining autobiographies and personal records from a similar perspective.²⁸

Following Plummer’s interdisciplinary approach to studying individual life records, this dissertation examines Painter’s personal archive, exploring the early-twentieth-century history of middle-class homosexual men’s erotic attraction and sexual relations with lower-

²⁷ Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretative Biography* (London: Sage, 1989); Paul Thomson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); James Olney, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972); James Olney, *Memory and Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

²⁸ Among other important works on the use of life documents in social research, see *Biography and Society: The Life History Approach in the Social Sciences*, ed. Daniel Bertaux (London: Sage, 1981); *The Turn to Biographical Methods in Social Science: Comparative Issues and Examples*, eds. Prue Chamberlayne, Joanna Bornat and Tom Wengraf (New York: Routledge, 2000); *Lives in Context: The Art of Life History Research*, eds. Ardra L. Cole and J. Gary Knowles (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2001).

class men and focusing on the social and sexual practice of cross-class escape pursued as a means of homosexual emancipation. Despite being envisioned in relation to the cultural and political discourses of the time, of which philanthropic and socialist are the ones most frequently adopted, and often following the established pattern of commercially-based sexual relations between men, cross-class escape was, in its foundations, an individual endeavor. It was, in simple terms, an individual's revolt against the place prescribed to him/her within the existing social structure, an attempt to free oneself from the accident of birth and establish an alternative way of living conducive to self-realization and sexual freedom. Life documents are a perfectly fitting source of material for exploring and understanding this phenomenon, which exhibits a profoundly modern tension between individual agency and the increasingly subtle but, due to that, even more deep-rooted and all-encompassing forms of social control. Detailed personal records, like that of Painter, allow the researcher to explore the complex logic of the interaction between individual and society in the sexually motivated project of cross-class escape as well as to analyze it in the light of the dynamic change that characterizes the individual's understanding of his/her sexual identity and behavior.

In my exploration of Painter's sexual record, I do not merely select, organize and present the information it contains but examine it, according to the five main elements in life history, whose integrated and interdisciplinary analysis Plummer identifies as indispensable to constructing a multifaceted and scientifically valid picture of the individual life in the face of its "unknown and unknowable" truth.²⁹ These elements, as applied to Painter's archive, are (1) Painter himself as the producer of his life record and

²⁹ Plummer, *Documents of Life* 2, 36-45; Ken Plummer, "Herbert Blumer and the Life History Tradition," *Symbolic Interaction* 13, no. 2 (Fall 1990): 125-145.

Kinsey as its main “coaxer,” an expert figure with institutional power to “provoke stories”;³⁰ (2) Painter’s record as “reified” texts, varying from the journal accounts of small events and one-time sexual encounters to consciously constructed life narratives evident in Painter’s retrospective autobiographical essays; (3) Painter’s correspondents at the Kinsey Institute and the implied and generalized reader of his sexual record, a sympathetic researcher and biographer “Mr. X” whom Painter expected to make use of his personal archive for scientific study; (4) local and immediate context of Painter’s sexual life that includes, besides his family background, education, work experience and friendship networks, the regime of male-to-male sexual contact dominant in the period, the characteristics of the urban male homosexual subcultures of which Painter was a member, the social and economic circumstances of his lower-class sexual partners; (5) the broad context of “meta-narratives,” among which are those of sexual self-discovery and emancipation, socially conscious vocation and personal mission, travel and re-imagining oneself in the foreign setting, finding love and companionship, etc. Situating Painter’s sexual record in relation to these principal life history elements, this dissertation carefully reconstructs Painter’s sexual life, addressing the issue of cross-class sexual relations between men and sexually motivated escape into the urban underworld.

In the preparation of this dissertation, several existing works analyzing Painter’s sexual history and using his personal archive at the Kinsey Institute were examined. The

³⁰ Plummer describes the figure of a “coaxer” in the following way: “These folk possess the power, at least momentarily, to provoke stories from people. Their line of activity is to seduce stories: coaxers become listeners and questioners. They probe, interview, and interrogate. They send out questionnaires and solicit ‘problem letters.’ Sometimes they gather in groups to make others tell their stories and sometimes as individual therapists they just simply clasp their hands, smile and listen. They are the oral historians, the life story interviewers, the researchers. They are also the courtroom interrogators, the doctors, the therapists, the chat show hostesses, the tabloid journalists. They coax, coach and coerce people to tell their stories. Coaxers can play a crucial role in shifting the nature of the stories that are told.” Plummer, *Documents of Life 2*, 42.

aforementioned study of Henry L. Minton *Departing from Deviance: A History of Homosexual Rights and Emancipatory Science in America* (2002), exploring homosexual men and women's active participation in early sexuality research as amateur ethnographers, research assistants and key informants, was my introduction to Painter's autobiographical and auto-ethnographic work. While acknowledging the often pivotal role that science played in creating and legitimizing the view of homosexuality as a mental and physical abnormality, Minton looks at the cases of sex researchers who strongly resisted such pathologizing theories and regarded their work not as an instrument of social control of sexuality but an avenue of sexual reform and liberation. A crucial component of such an approach, best illustrated by Kinsey's research, was its inclusion of the sexually "deviant" research subjects as unofficial consultants that enabled a more accurate and balanced picture of their lives to be produced. This collaboration also led to a number of amateur research projects, usually consisting of participant observation in homosexual communities and informal interviews with their members, undertaken by homosexual men and women themselves. Characterizing this kind of scientific work as "participatory research on homosexuality," Minton discusses Painter's involvement with the Committee for the Study of Sex Variants and Kinsey's Institute for Sex Research as one of its most fascinating and well-documented examples. Minton's analysis centers mainly on Painter's unpublished manuscript "Male Homosexuals and Their Prostitutes" (1941), a result of Painter's amateur study of New York's male homosexual subculture of the interwar years. In his presentation of Painter's work, Minton is careful to separate Painter's most eccentric statements and personally colored observations from the historically valuable material contained in the manuscript, focusing on its parts that provide rich accounts of homosexual life in the

period. He specifically examines Painter's findings about the underworld of male prostitution, analyzing Painter's descriptions of the hustlers' sexual behavior and identity, their exaggeratedly masculine demeanor and their attitude towards their "queer" clients. On the whole, *Departing from Deviance* succeeds in producing a detailed, nuanced and multifaceted picture of Painter's amateur ethnographic research that helps the reader understand not only Painter's own life and work but the lives of many homosexual men of his generation.

Despite being balanced in its analysis and insightful in its main argument, *Departing from Deviance* also shows several limitations inherent in the nature and scope of the book. Discussing the undoubtedly valuable information contained in Painter's autobiographical and auto-ethnographic writing, Minton nonetheless fails to address in detail the circumstances under which this material was produced or collected and its connection to Painter's own sexual history. Minton only briefly analyzes the kind of relations that Painter, as an amateur sexuality researcher, has with his informants, most of whom were also his paid sexual partners, and does not explore how the sexual and economic aspects of these relations influenced Painter's practice of ethnographic observation. While emphasizing Painter's determination to contribute to public knowledge about homosexuality as the key incentive for his sexual research and self-documentation activities, Minton overlooks the broader and more complex nature of Painter's philanthropic and reformist mission, rooted by his religious work in the 1920s and early 1930s, and its close connection to his lifelong erotic interest in lower-class delinquent youth. Moreover, in Minton's account, Painter's sexual biography unfolds in a kind of social vacuum and is driven by the universal human desire for affection and

companionship; the fact that Painter specifically sought as sexual partners hyper-masculine and sexually “normal” lower-class men Minton characterizes as merely “looking for love in all the wrong places.”³¹ While he rightfully identifies this preference as originating in the aversion towards effeminacy characteristic of mid-twentieth-century homosexual subcultures, he addresses this subject only in passing and, on the whole, treats the class and gender configurations of Painter’s erotic desires as peripheral, if not accidental, to his sexual history. This approach further results in Minton’s only cursory discussion of the socioeconomic background and sexual history of Painter’s lovers and often disregarding the commercial nature of their relationship. All in all, while presenting an informed and sympathetic portrait of Painter as a diarist and lay ethnographer, Minton overlooks important aspects of his sexual history, such as his lifelong involvement in commercially-based sexual relations, his eroticization of “proletarian” masculinity and his idealization of lower-class communities as sexually open and tolerant of male-to-male sex.

Following Minton’s pioneering study of Painter’s archive, two books have appeared that make use of Painter’s accounts of male prostitution in the mid-twentieth-century United States. The first is Mack Friedman’s *Strapped for Cash*, a popular illustrated history of what he calls “American hustler culture,” published in 2003.³² In his book, Friedman draws a historical overview of male prostitution in North America from the colonial period until the 1990s, but focuses specifically on the postwar decades that saw the increased visibility of the sexually ambiguous figure of “hustler” in both popular culture and the artistic production and documentary records of urban male homosexual communities. To

³¹ Minton, *Departing from Deviance*, 216.

³² Mack Friedman, *Strapped for Cash: A History of American Hustler Culture* (Los Angeles: Alyson, 2003).

present a multifaceted picture of this period in the history of the “hustler culture,” Friedman employs Painter’s numerous semi-ethnographic and autobiographical observations included in his sexual journal that deal with the changing patterns of commercial sex between men in these years. Friedman supplements his presentation of these accounts with extensive visual material from Painter’s archive and, reflecting on his own experience of casual prostitution, adopts a first-person approach that mirrors Painter’s personally invested writing style. Despite its fascinating and highly readable discussion of the subject, there are numerous drawbacks to Friedman’s analysis that ultimately compromise the scientific value of his book. Describing male prostitution as practiced by varied categories of men, from children to transgender women to drug users, in different historical periods, *Strapped for Cash* inaccurately suggests a cultural unity to these rather diverse experiences of sex work, formulating its subject as one homogeneous “American hustler culture.” In large part, this approach results from the broad scope and exploratory nature of Friedman’s analysis that does not allow for a detailed discussion of the specific cultural, social and economic contexts in which different men participated in commercial sex. It is further influenced by Friedman’s frequent reliance in his research on homosexual men’s written and visual documentation of their commercial sexual partners and sensationalist media reports on the issue of male prostitution. In such case, the configurations of the “hustler culture” that Friedman delineates only partially reflect the contexts and dynamic of hustlers’ experience of prostitution but rather describe how these men figured in the imagination of their clients and the general public.

Similar problems impair another study of male prostitution, Barry Reay's *New York Hustlers: Masculinity and Sex in Modern America* (2010).³³ Reay's main argument concerns the issue of sexual categorization; he uses the history of male prostitution in mid-twentieth-century New York, mainly of young sexually "normal" men (frequently described as "trade") to "queers," to problematize the applicability of current binary concepts of "homosexual" and "heterosexual" to their sexual interaction. To Reay, men who regularly engaged in male-to-male sex, both for money and for pleasure, but simultaneously retained their identity as sexually "normal," epitomize the kind of sexual fluidity and indeterminacy that he finds historically fascinating and theoretically challenging. Engaging with an impressive range of sources, many of them archival, and providing numerous literary and artistic examples, Reay suggests that in the early- and mid-twentieth-century United States there existed a system of male sexual interaction and a matrix of sexual meanings that defied simple classification of men according to mutually exclusive categories of "homosexual" and "heterosexual". To support this argument, Reay makes extensive use of Painter's unpublished manuscript "Male Homosexuals and Their Prostitutes," his sexual journal and his photographic collection, all of which attest to frequent commercially-based sexual contacts between "queer" men and lower-class sexually "normal" youth. In his book, Reay recounts various episodes of Painter's sexual history and discusses Painter's accounts of the intricate sexual lives of his heterosexually identified lovers.

Although well informed and theoretically challenging, Reay's study suffers from a series of drawbacks that seriously limit the scope of its analysis and ultimately undermine

³³ Barry Reay, *New York Hustlers: Masculinity and Sex in Modern America* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010).

the possibilities for its use in historical research. First of all, in his overall treatment of the subject, Reay follows Friedman's mistake of grouping together, perhaps unintentionally, men with different sexual histories, of different socioeconomic backgrounds and with different reasons for engaging in prostitution, into a wide category of "hustlers" or "trade." He repeatedly speaks of "hustler culture" or "trade culture" suggesting a more or less uniform experience of sex work for these men. This totalizing approach appears highly contentious because, even though there existed relatively standard codes of sexual interaction between hustlers and their clients, the casual nature of male prostitution, which allowed men to enter and leave sex work relatively easily preserving their identity as sexually "normal," precluded them from forming an established lifestyle or identifiable subculture.

Even more problematic is Reay's failure to address the social and economic aspects of male prostitution in the period. While discussing at length hustlers' sexual behavior and gender identity, Reay blatantly avoids the questions of these men's poverty and economic marginalization, the frequent cause of their entrance into prostitution, and their belonging to the urban underworld whose cultural norms made sex with "queers" for money (as well as the widespread practice of robbing and assaulting them) relatively acceptable. Finally, in his theorization of the male prostitutes' sexuality as "flexible," without providing the necessary social and economic context to their experience of sex work, Reay at times falls into trap of romanticizing the hustler figure as an epitome of a sexually fluid urban world. Even though frequently expressed in the literary and artistic works produced by homosexual men in the period (and of which Reay makes extensive use in his book), such a view hardly allows for a historically accurate understanding of male prostitution. On the

whole, while demonstrating the widespread presence of male-to-male sex, often commercially-based, between men who did not necessarily identify as homosexual, and discussing the confusion of sexual taxonomies such contacts spawned—what Reay describes as hustlers “sexually travers[ing] homosexuality and heterosexuality, continually negotiating the boundaries of pleasure and self through acts that refuse easy attribution of identity”³⁴—Reay’s book falls short of presenting a comprehensive picture of these men’s sexual lives.

Though extensive, Reay’s use of Painter’s archive in his study of the urban world of male prostitution also demonstrates a number of limitations. In his research, Reay discusses a really extraordinary array of sources covering nearly every work in the social sciences, sexology, literature and visual arts dealing with “hustlers” or “trade.” His engagement with these sources, however, often remains merely illustrative. Reay’s book is crowded with anecdotes attesting to the ubiquity of sexual contacts between men where at least one of the partners did not identify as homosexual but the contexts of such relations remain obscured, since Reay rarely provides an in-depth analysis of the works he refers to. This is the main problem that characterizes Reay’s discussion of Painter’s manuscript on male prostitution and his sexual journal. Painter’s erotic interest in young masculine-looking sexually “normal” men and his long history of sexual relations with them naturally provide Reay with countless illustrations for his central argument about the existence of a large population of heterosexually-identified men available for commercially-based male-to-male sex. Throughout his book, Reay presents various episodes of Painter’s sexual history and discusses sexual habits of his many lovers, as recounted by Painter, but rarely delves

³⁴ Ibid., 17.

deeper into his sexual history to understand the gender- and class-based nature of Painter's erotic attractions and does not thoroughly engage with the rich ethnographic material about the lives of Painter's sexual partners that his sexual record contains. For instance, in discussing Painter's social association and sexual relations with young Puerto Rican immigrants in New York, Reay outlines key aspects of these men's sexual behavior related to masculinity and penetration, mainly their willingness to engage in male-to-male sex if their role in the anal intercourse remained that of an inserter. He, however, fails to address broader questions about the sexual culture of the lower-class Puerto Ricans, including its economic determinants and its modifications effected by the social and sexual contacts with Americans both on the island and in the United States.³⁵ Such omissions makes Reay's analysis of Painter's material highly uneven and ultimately compromise the value of the historical and theoretical arguments he derives from it.

In addition to Painter's sexual record and the already existing literature on it, a variety of primary autobiographical and auto-ethnographic sources, produced by homosexual men in the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, was consulted in preparation of this dissertation. Some of these first-person homosexual testimonies were indispensable for understanding the key themes with which Painter engaged in his writing and the narrative tropes he employed to discuss his homosexual self-

³⁵ Ibid., 114-118. The context Reay provides to Painter's experiences with Puerto Rican men is that of some universal Latin American sexual regime of "penetrative masculinity" that he identifies across the region, based on the anthropological studies in Costa Rica, Guadalajara, Mexico and Salvador, Brazil. His reading of these works is, however, rather cursory (he, for instance, mistakenly describes Brazilian transgender prostitutes *travesti* as adopting insertee role in anal intercourse resulting from their effeminacy, while, in fact, they regularly penetrate their clients, according to Don Kulick's research) and leads to a rather idealistic attribution of sexual flexibility to male sexual cultures throughout Latin America. Reay does not discuss any of studies on Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican immigration to New York overlooking, for example, Oscar Lewis's research in the San Juan shantytown of La Perla, where Painter travelled repeatedly in search of sexual partners in the 1950s. For my discussion of Painter's "Puerto Rican era," see chapter 4 of this dissertation.

discovery and his sexual contacts with “urban proletarians.” Among such works are John Addington Symonds’s *Memoirs*, written in 1889-1890, which recount Symonds’s struggle with his homoerotic desires, his travel in Italy and expatriation to Switzerland and his sexual relations with working-class men in Britain and abroad;³⁶ Edward Carpenter’s autobiography *My Days and Dreams* (1916), which discusses Carpenter’s sexually and politically motivated escape from his native bourgeois environment and the socialist ideas behind his erotically invested cross-class alliances, as well as his unpublished “study in psychology” of his working-class partner George Merrill (1913);³⁷ E. M. Forster’s “Locked Diary” (1909-1967) chronicling the intimate details of his relations with several of his working-class lovers and his correspondence with Florence Barger regarding Forster’s affair with Egyptian tram conductor Mohammed el Adl.³⁸ Particularly valuable to my research was J. R. Ackerley’s autobiography *My Father and Myself* (1968), which documents his search for the “Ideal Friend” in sexual contacts with countless young workingmen, sailors and soldiers in the 1920s and 1930s, and the excerpts from his 1948-1949 diary published as *My Sister and Myself* (1982).³⁹ Several other homosexually-themed diaries, autobiographies and collections of correspondence were also consulted. They are “The Black Diaries” of Roger Casement that documented his commercially-based

³⁶ John Addington Symonds, *The Memoirs of John Addington Symonds*, ed. Phyllis Grosskurth (New York: Random House, 1984).

³⁷ Edward Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams, Being Autobiographical Notes* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1916); Edward Carpenter, “George Merrill: A True History and Study in Psychology” (1913), unpublished manuscript, <http://www.edwardcarpenter.net/ecmerrll.htm>.

³⁸ E. M. Forster, *The Journals and Diaries of E. M. Forster*, ed. Philip Gardner (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011), vol. 2 “The ‘Locked Diary’ (1909-1967)”; E. M. Forster, *Selected Letters of E. M. Forster*, ed. by Mary Lago and P. N. Furbank, 2 vols. (London: Collins, 1983-1984).

³⁹ J. R. Ackerley, *My Father & Myself* (London: The Bodley Head, 1968); J. R. Ackerley, *My Sister and Myself: The Diaries of J. R. Ackerley*, ed. Francis King (London: Hutchinson, 1982).

sexual relations with men in Italy, Brazil and other countries in 1903-1911;⁴⁰ the autobiography of G. Lowes Dickinson, rather explicit on the subject of Dickinson's homosexuality;⁴¹ the multi-volume diaries of poet and early homosexual rights advocate George Cecil Ives.⁴²

Alongside a variety of British diaries and autobiographies, several American examples coming from ordinary homosexual men were also used. They include Claude Hartland's *The Story of a Life* (1901), the first homosexual autobiography published in the United States that presents a rather melodramatic account of the attempts of its author, a St. Louis school teacher, to find a romantic connection with another man and his erotic attraction to "uneducated laborers."⁴³ Ralph Werther's autobiographical trilogy recounting his sexual adventures as "fairy" in the lower-class immigrant neighborhoods of the early-twentieth-century New York was another important primary source from the period.⁴⁴ Two homosexual diaries from the mid-twentieth-century United States, those of Washington bureaucrat "Jeb Alexander" (Carter Newman Bealer) and minor New York playwright

⁴⁰ *Roger Casement's Diaries, 1910: The Black & the White*, ed. Roger Sawyer (London: Pimlico, 1997); *Roger Casement: The Black Diaries, With a Study of His Background, Sexuality and Irish Political Life*, ed. Jeffrey Dudgeon (Belfast: Belfast Press, 2002).

⁴¹ G. Lowes Dickinson, *The Autobiography of G. Lowes Dickinson, and Other Unpublished Writings* (London: Duckworth, 1973).

⁴² Because George Ives's diaries remain unpublished, several critical works examining them were consulted instead. Among them are John Stokes, "Wilde at Bay: The Diaries of George Ives," *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 26, no. 3 (1983): 175-186; Matt Cook, "Sex Lives and Diary Writing: The Journals of George Ives," in *Life Writing and Victorian Culture*, ed. David Amigoni (London: Ashgate, 2006), 264-291.

⁴³ Claude Hartland, *The Story of a Life, For the Consideration of the Medical Fraternity* (San Francisco: Grey Fox Press, 1985 [1901]).

⁴⁴ Ralph Werther, *Autobiography of an Androgyne*, ed. Scott Herring (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008 [1918]); Ralph Werther—Jennie June, *The Female-Impersonators*, ed. Alfred W. Herzog (New York: The Medico-Legal Journal, 1922); Ralph Werther—Jennie June, "The Riddle of the Underworld" (1921), unpublished manuscript, [http://outhistory.org/wiki/Earl_Lind_\(Ralph_Werther-Jennie_June\):_The_Riddle_of_the_Underworld,_1921](http://outhistory.org/wiki/Earl_Lind_(Ralph_Werther-Jennie_June):_The_Riddle_of_the_Underworld,_1921).

Donald Vining, were also used.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the “Stud File” and sexually themed autobiographical and auto-ethnographic writing of Samuel Steward, a university professor turned tattoo artist and erotic writer, provided a fascinating parallel to Painter’s sexual record.⁴⁶

In addition to self-produced first-person testimonies of homosexual men, a number of “incited confessions” and “case histories” written for early sex researchers were consulted, as some of them include rich accounts of cross-class homosexual relations and reveal the complex dynamic of interaction between the experts and the subjects of their research in the latter’s practice of sexual self-documentation. The collection of the nineteenth-century French sources was examined in detail, especially the aforementioned autobiographical writing of Charles Double in which he attempted to explain and vindicate his “insane love” for “poorly educated lovers from a vulgar social stratum.”⁴⁷ Several case studies included in Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis*, showing a cross-class direction of the patients’ same-sex desire,⁴⁸ were consulted as well as similar life

⁴⁵ *Jeb and Dash: A Diary of Gay Life, 1918-1945*, ed. Ina Russell (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1993); Donald Vining, *A Gay Diary*, 5 vols. (New York: Pepys Press, 1979-1992).

⁴⁶ Samuel M. Steward, *Chapters from an Autobiography* (San Francisco: Grey Fox Press, 1981); Samuel M. Steward, *Bad Boys and Tough Tattoos: A Social History of the Tattoo with With Gangs, Sailors and Street-Corner Punks, 1950-1965* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1990); Samuel M. Steward, *Understanding the Male Hustler* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1991); “Obscene Diary: The Secret Archive of Samuel Steward, Professor, Tattoo Artist, Pornographer,” exhibition curated by Justin Spring and Sarah Forbes, The Museum of Sex (July 14, 2011—January 15, 2012, New York).

⁴⁷ Charles Double, “Mental Hermaphrodite,” 150.

⁴⁸ See, in particular, the cases of an unnamed German official attracted to “young laborers dressed in trousers of Manchester cloth or English leather, particularly masons,” and Mr. X with a fetish for “lackeys wearing shining boots.” Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis: With Especial Reference to the Anthipathic Sexual Instinct; A Medico-Forensic Study*, 12th ed. (New York: Rebman Company, 1922 [1906]), 291, 359-360.

histories in Havelock Ellis's *Sexual Inversion* (1897-1925).⁴⁹ Finally, the forty life histories of male subjects of the sex variant study, among them those of Painter and some of his acquaintances, were also used in this dissertation.⁵⁰

In addition to primary autobiographical and auto-ethnographic sources, a large body of secondary literature was used in my analysis of Painter's sexual record. Much of it concerns the history of male-to-male sexual contact in the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries and discusses the emergence and rising visibility of the urban male homosexual subcultures across Europe and North America. The key texts include George Chauncey's and Matt Houlbrook's aforementioned studies of the social organization of homosexual relations in New York and London of the period.⁵¹ Similar works include Nan Alamilla Boyd's study of San Francisco,⁵² David K. Johnson's and Allen Drexel's of Chicago,⁵³ Marc Stein's of Philadelphia,⁵⁴ The History Project's and

⁴⁹ Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex. Volume II: Sexual Inversion*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis Company, 1925); Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds, *Sexual Inversion: A Critical Edition*, ed. Ivan Crozier (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

⁵⁰ George W. Henry, *Sex Variants: A Study of Homosexual Patterns* (New York: Paul L. Hoeber, 1948 [1941]).

⁵¹ Chauncey, *Gay New York*; Houlbrook, *Queer London*. Among other important works on London's homosexual subcultures are Matt Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Sean Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861-1913* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Richard Hornsey, *The Spiv and the Architect: Unruly Life in Postwar London* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

⁵² Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

⁵³ David K. Johnson, "The Kids of Fairytown: Gay Male Culture on Chicago's Near North Side in the 1930s," in *Creating a Place for Ourselves: Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community History*, ed. Brett Beemyn (New York: Routledge, 1997), 97-118; Allen Drexel, "Before Paris Burned: Race, Class, and Male Homosexuality on the Chicago South Side, 1935-1960," in *Creating a Place for Ourselves*, 119-144.

⁵⁴ Marc Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

David D. Doyle's of Boston,⁵⁵ Esther Newton's of Fire Island,⁵⁶ John Howard's on Mississippi,⁵⁷ Peter Boag's on Portland⁵⁸ and Brett Beemyn's on Washington, D.C.⁵⁹ Among broader overviews of the history of male homosexuality in the United States consulted for my research were Jonathan Ned Katz's and Martin Duberman's excellent primary sourcebooks on the subject,⁶⁰ John D'Emilio's pioneering study of early homosexual rights activism,⁶¹ a variety of scholarship on male homosexuality in the Cold War era,⁶² Allan Bérubé's and Paul Jackson's works on influence of World War II on formation and development of male homosexual subcultures.⁶³ While male homosexual subcultures in Europe differed in several important aspects from those in North America,

⁵⁵ The History Project, *Improper Bostonians: Lesbian and Gay History from the Puritans to Playland*, ed. Neal Kane (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998); David D. Doyle, Jr., "The Dandy and the Aesthete: Middle and Upper Class Homosexual Identities in Late Nineteenth Century America" (Ph.D. diss., The City University of New York, 2004).

⁵⁶ Esther Newton, *Cherry Grove, Fire Island: Sixty Years in America's First Gay and Lesbian Town* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993)

⁵⁷ John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

⁵⁸ Peter Boag, *Same-Sex Affairs: Constructing and Controlling Homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

⁵⁹ Brett Beemyn, "A Queer Capital: Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Life in Washington D.C., 1890-1955" (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1997); Brett Beemyn, "The Geography of Same-Sex Desire: Cruising Men in Washington, DC in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Left History* 9, no. 2 (Spring-Summer 2004): 141-159.

⁶⁰ Jonathan Ned Katz, *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.*, 2nd ed. (New York: Meridian, 1992); Jonathan Ned Katz, *Love Stories: Sex between Men before Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Martin Bauml Duberman, *About Time: Exploring the Gay Past* (New York: Gay Presses, 1986).

⁶¹ John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

⁶² Robert J. Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); David Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Craig M. Loftin, *Masked Voices: Gay Men and Lesbians in Cold War America* (New York: SUNY Press, 2012).

⁶³ Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: Plume, 1990); Paul Jackson, *One of the Boys: Homosexuality in the Military during World War II*, 2nd ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010)

their examination by historians of sexuality often included insightful, if generally brief, observations on the organization and dynamic of cross-class sexual contact. Among such works are Richard Cleminson and Francisco Vásquez García's study of Spain,⁶⁴ Harry Oosterhuis and Hubert Kennedy's anthology on the early-twentieth-century Germany as well as the work of Clayton J. Whisnant on Germany's postwar period,⁶⁵ Jens Rydström's research on Scandinavia,⁶⁶ Dan Healey's on Russia,⁶⁷ William A. Peniston's and Julian Jackson's on France.⁶⁸ These works, some of them outstanding in the depth and extent of their analysis, provide an important historical context for my examination of Thomas Painter's sexual history.

Regarding the specific issues pertinent to my analysis of cross-class escape in Painter's sexual history and his eroticization of working-class masculinity, a variety of other secondary sources were analyzed. On the subject of Painter's religious work with lower classes and early-twentieth-century philanthropic discourses of "social brotherhood," John Donald Gustav-Wrathall's work on same-sex eroticism and the YMCA,⁶⁹ Seth

⁶⁴ Richard Cleminson and Francisco Vásquez García, *'Los Invisibles': A History of Male Homosexuality in Spain, 1850-1939* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007).

⁶⁵ *Homosexuality and Male Bonding in Pre-Nazi Germany*, eds. Harry Oosterhuis and Hubert Kennedy (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1991); Clayton J. Whisnant, *Male Homosexuality in West Germany, 1945-1969* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

⁶⁶ Jens Rydström, *Sinners and Citizens: Bestiality and Homosexuality in Sweden, 1880-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); *Criminally Queer: Homosexuality and Criminal Law in Scandinavia, 1842-1999*, eds. Jens Rydström and Kati Mustola (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2007).

⁶⁷ Dan Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Healey, "Masculine Purity."

⁶⁸ William A. Peniston, *Pederasts and Others: Urban Culture and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2004); Julian Jackson, *Living in Arcadia: Homosexuality, Politics, and Morality in France from the Liberation to AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

⁶⁹ John Donald Gustav-Wrathall, *Take the Young Stranger by the Hand: Same-Sex Relations and the YMCA* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

Koven's on "philanthropic slumming" in Britain,⁷⁰ and Kevin Murphy's on the sexual and gender dimensions of the Progressive era's reform movements⁷¹ were especially useful. Other important works in the field include Philip Sidney Bagwell's, David Brown McIlhiney's and Nigel Scotland's studies of the Church's evangelistic and charity work in the slums⁷² as well as Scott Herring's and Chad Heap's analyses of the sexual dimension of recreational slumming.⁷³

Thomas Waugh's encyclopedic study of the homoerotic visual culture before Stonewall was indispensable in my analysis of Painter's visual archive.⁷⁴ Other general works on the subject of homoerotic photography and image-making practices of the early male homosexual communities include Deborah Bright's anthology on sexual representation in photography,⁷⁵ Peter Weiermair's, Emmanuel Cooper's and Allen Ellenzweig's historical overviews of the male nude in photography,⁷⁶ David Deitcher's study of the nineteenth-century American photographs of male couples and their

⁷⁰ Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁷¹ Kevin P. Murphy, *Political Manhood: Red Bloods, Mollycoddles, and the Politics of Progressive Era Reform* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

⁷² Philip Sidney Bagwell, *Outcast London, a Christian Response: The West London Mission of the Methodist Church 1887-1987* (London: Epsworth Press, 1987); David Brown McIlhiney, *A Gentleman in Every Slum: Church of England Missions in East London, 1837-1914* (London: Pickwick, 1988); Nigel Scotland, *Squires in the Slums: Settlements and Missions in Late Victorian Britain* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007).

⁷³ Chad Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009); Scott Herring, *Queering the Underworld: Slumming, Literature, and the Undoing of Lesbian and Gay History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007).

⁷⁴ Thomas Waugh, *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from Their Beginnings to Stonewall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

⁷⁵ *The Passionate Camera: Photography and Bodies of Desire*, ed. Deborah Bright (New York: Routledge, 1998).

⁷⁶ *The Hidden Image: Photographs of the Male Nude in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Peter Weiermair (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988); Emmanuel Cooper, *Fully Exposed: The Male Nude in Photography* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990); Allen Ellenzweig, *The Homoerotic Photograph: Male Images from Durieu/Delacroix to Mapplethorpe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

potentially erotic meanings.⁷⁷ Besides these works, a large body of scholarly sources on individual homosexual image-makers and image-collectors were consulted, including Jason Goldman's and Stefano Evangelista's analyses of Wilhelm von Gloeden's photographs,⁷⁸ Chris Brickell's work on private photographic archive of Robert Gant,⁷⁹ James Small's book on Carl Van Vechten's photography and Jonathan Weinberg's article on Van Vechten's scrapbooks,⁸⁰ James Gardiner's presentation of Montague Glover's photographic collection of working-class men,⁸¹ Justin Spring's work on Samuel Steward's sexually explicit Polaroids produced in the 1950s,⁸² James Crump's and William E. Thompson's studies of George Platt Lynes,⁸³ Jennifer V. Evans's work on Herbert Tobias,⁸⁴ studies of Swiss amateur photographer Karlheinz Weinberger who produced a large archive of photographs of delinquent and counterculture youth in the 1950s and

⁷⁷ David Deitcher, *American Photographs of Men Together, 1840-1918* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001).

⁷⁸ Jason Goldman, "'The Golden Age of Gay Porn': Nostalgia and the Photography of Wilhelm von Gloeden," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12, no. 2 (2006): 237-258; Stefano Evangelista, "Aesthetic Encounters: The Erotic Visions of John Addington Symonds and Wilhelm von Gloeden," in *Illustrations, Optics and Objects in Nineteenth-Century Literary and Visual Cultures*, eds. Luisa Calè and Patrizia Di Bello (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 87-104.

⁷⁹ Chris Brickell, "Visualizing Homoeroticism: The Photographs of Robert Gant, 1887-1892," *Visual Anthropology* 23, no. 2 (2010): 137-156.

⁸⁰ James Smalls, *The Homoerotic Photography of Carl Van Vechten* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006); Jonathan Weinberg, "'Boy Crazy': Carl Van Vechten's Queer Collection," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 7, no. 2 (1994): 25-49

⁸¹ James Gardiner, *A Class Apart: The Private Pictures of Montague Glover* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1992).

⁸² Justin Spring, *An Obscene Diary: The Visual World of Sam Steward* (New York: Antinous Press, 2010).

⁸³ James Crump, *George Platt Lynes: Photographs from The Kinsey Institute* (Boston: Bulfinch Press, 1993); William R. Thompson, "Sex, Lies, and Photographs: Letters from George Platt Lynes" (master's thesis, Rice University, 1996).

⁸⁴ Jennifer V. Evans, "The Long 1950s as Radical In-Between: The Photography of Herbert Tobias," in *Queer 1950s: Rethinking Sexuality in the Postwar Years*, eds. Heike Bauer and Matt Cook (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 13-28.

1960s,⁸⁵ Hubert Kennedy's study of amateur and professional photographers and illustrators publishing their works in Swiss homosexual magazine *Der Kreis* (1932-1967).⁸⁶

In my examination of Painter's relations with young lower-class Puerto Rican men in New York and San Juan, the following key secondary sources were used: Oscar Lewis's study of San Juan's shantytown of La Perla ("La Esmeralda" in Lewis's book) that Painter visited half a decade before Lewis,⁸⁷ Elena Padilla's urban ethnography of New York's Puerto Rican neighborhood of the Lower East Side ("Eastville" in Padilla's book), one of Painter's favorite cruising ground in New York,⁸⁸ Rafael L. Ramírez's work on Puerto Rican masculinity and sexual cultures,⁸⁹ Eric C. Schneider's on Puerto Rican youth gangs in New York.⁹⁰ On the subject of Latin American male homosexualities, Stephen O. Murray's extensive work is essential.⁹¹ Other important studies include Joseph Carrier's ethnographic study of male homosexuality and male-to-male sexual contact undertaken in

⁸⁵ *Karlheinz Weinberger: Photos, 1954-1995*, eds. Ulrich Binder and Pietro Mattioli (Zürich: Andreas Züst Verlag, 2000); *Rebel Youth: Karlheinz Weinberger*, eds. Patrik Schedler, Martynka Wawrzyniak and Bruce Hackney (New York: Rizzoli, 2012).

⁸⁶ Hubert Kennedy, "Illustrations," *The Ideal Gay Man: The Story of Der Kreis* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1999), 205-212.

⁸⁷ Oscar Lewis, *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty—San Juan and New York* (New York: Vintage, 1965); Oscar Lewis, *A Study of Slum Culture: Backgrounds for La Vida* (New York: Random House, 1968).

⁸⁸ Elena Padilla, *Up from Puerto Rico* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958); *Latino Urban Ethnography and the Work of Elena Padilla*, ed. Merida M. Rua (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2011).

⁸⁹ Rafael L. Ramírez, *What It Means to Be a Man: Reflections of Puerto Rican Masculinity*, trans. Rosa E. Casper (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999).

⁹⁰ Eric C. Schneider, *Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings: Youth Gangs in Postwar New York* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

⁹¹ Stephen O. Murray, *Male Homosexuality in Central and South America* (San Francisco: Instituto Obregón, 1987); *Latin American Male Homosexualities*, ed. Stephen O. Murray (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

the 1970s in the Mexican city of Guadalajara,⁹² Lionel Cantú, Jr.'s on sexuality of Mexican immigrant men in the United States,⁹³ Annick Prieur's and Don Kulick's studies of transgender sex workers in the 1990s Mexico City and Salvador, Brazil.⁹⁴ Among key texts in the field of cultural and literary studies of Latino sexualities are those by José Quiroga and Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes⁹⁵ as well as the recent anthology on gay Latino studies informed by queer theory.⁹⁶

My analysis of commercially-based sexual relations in Painter's sexual history was also informed by a variety of scholarly studies of male prostitution. The most important among them are Albert J. Reiss, Jr.'s pioneering examination of the patterns of interaction between delinquent youth involved in prostitution and their "queer" clients,⁹⁷ Kerwin Kaye's overview of the history of male prostitution in twentieth-century North America,⁹⁸ Steven Maynard's study of male prostitution in early-twentieth-century Toronto,⁹⁹ Jeffrey Weeks's study of male prostitution in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century

⁹² Joseph Carrier, *De Los Otros: Intimacy and Homosexuality among Mexican Men* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

⁹³ Lionel Cantú, Jr. *The Sexuality of Migration: Border Crossings and Mexican Immigrant Men*, eds. Nancy A. Naples and Salvador Vidal-Ortiz (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

⁹⁴ Annick Prieur, *Mema's House, Mexico City: On Transvestites, Queens, and Machos* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Don Kulick, *Travesti: Sex, Gender, and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

⁹⁵ José Quiroga, *Tropics of Desire: Interventions from Queer Latino America* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, *Queer Ricans: Cultures and Sexualities in the Diaspora* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

⁹⁶ *Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader*, eds. Michael Hames-García and Ernesto Javier Martínez (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

⁹⁷ Albert J. Reiss, Jr., "The Social Integration of Queers and Peers," *Social Problems* 9, no. 2 (Autumn 1961): 102-120.

⁹⁸ Kerwin Kaye, "Male Prostitution in the Twentieth Century: Pseudohomosexuals, Hoodlum Homosexuals, and Exploited Teens," *Journal of Homosexuality* 46, no. 1-2 (2004): 1-77.

⁹⁹ Steven Maynard, "'Horrible Temptations': Sex, Men, and Working-Class Male Youth in Urban Ontario, 1890-1935," *Canadian Historical Review* 78, no. 2 (June 1997): 191-235.

Britain,¹⁰⁰ Don Romesburg's insightful analysis of the methodological problems in studying the history of male youth sex work,¹⁰¹ Peter Aggleton's anthology on male prostitution,¹⁰² Kevin Walby's work on physical and emotional intimacy in male-to-male commercial sex.¹⁰³

This large body of primary and secondary sources on male homosexuality and prostitution provided an interdisciplinary context for my examination of Painter's sexual record and visual archive. Some of them were used extensively to situate Painter's case in relation to the cultural and political discourses of the era, while others illuminated some key aspects of Painter's sexual history, such as his practice of sexual self-documentation or his engagement with erotic photography. Yet others supplied detailed information on specific historical processes pertaining to Painter's biography, for instance, the immigration of Puerto Ricans to the mainland United States and their daily lives in 1950s and 1960s New York. Used together with the material from Painter's sexual record, these sources allowed me to reconstruct and present his sexual history in all its complexity and address it from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, including those of social history, visual culture studies, literary analysis and sociology.

¹⁰⁰ Jeffrey Weeks, "Inverts, Perverts, and Mary-Annes: Male Prostitution and the Regulation of Homosexuality in England in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, eds. Martin Bauml Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey (New York: New American Library, 1989), 195-211.

¹⁰¹ Don Romesburg, "'Wouldn't a Boy Do?': Placing Early-Twentieth-Century Male Youth Sex Work into Histories of Sexuality," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 18, no. 3 (September 2009): 367-392.

¹⁰² *Men Who Sell Sex: International Perspectives on Male Prostitution and HIV/AIDS*, ed. Peter Aggleton (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999).

¹⁰³ Kevin Walby, *Touching Encounters: Sex, Work, and Male-for-Male Internet Escorting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

This dissertation is divided into two parts: the first one outlines the historical and social context of middle-class homosexual men's practice of cross-class sexual relations and the second specifically examines Painter's sexual record. Part One "The Context" is organized around the two modes of social escape—"philanthropic" and "colonial"—evident in the histories of men who, some for explicitly sexual reasons and others because of more ambiguous motives, eschewed the demands of bourgeois domesticity and chose to spend their lives in the communities of men they perceived to be more tolerant and sexually emancipated. It addresses institutionalized and culturally legitimized forms of cross-class contact, such as evangelist activities in the slums, settlement house reform or social work with delinquent youth ("work with boys"), as well as a variety of popular, political and scientific discourses that surrounded them. It then traces their influences on the individual life trajectories of men who, like Painter, were fascinated with young lower-class men's social mores and sexual behavior and saw their contact with them as both personally liberating and socially beneficial. In contrast to cross-class homosexual relations, cross-cultural ones have received more scholarly attention, especially in their colonial aspects; they have also more frequently become subjects of autobiographical and auto-ethnographic writing. Analyzing them, I focus on the important role that economic inequalities played in these encounters, identifying parallels between "philanthropic slumming" and sexual travel and exile. My discussion of cross-cultural homosexual relations is necessitated by the fact that the "urban proletarians" Painter had sex and developed romantic relationships with were nearly always immigrant youth, at one period exclusively Puerto Rican. It also allows me to explore the history of Painter's travel to Puerto Rico and his sexual contacts with the young male inhabitants of San Juan's slums.

Part Two “The Story” is entirely devoted to the analysis of Thomas Painter’s sexual record and is divided into four chapters that partially correspond to the main “eras” of Painter’s life, as he identified them himself, and examine the key issues related to cross-class homosexual relations that arise during these periods. Chapter 2 addresses what Painter described as his gradual dissociation from the upper-middle-class milieu he was born into and his first contacts with the urban underworld in the mid-1930s. It examines both individual and social factors—among the latter are the middle-class ideologies of manhood, the reformist discourses of the Progressive Era, the notions of “social brotherhood” promoted by the Christian youth movement—that resulted in Painter’s adoption of the “philanthropic” model of cross-class relations. Chapter 3 discusses the erotics of lower-class masculinity, as evident in Painter’s sexual history, taking as its main subjects Painter’s practice of urban cruising and what could be termed his cross-class voyeurism as well as his engagement with erotic photography. It explores the changes in the dynamic of urban space in mid-twentieth-century New York that facilitated cross-class contact and sexual relations and discusses the important role that photographic technology and the networks of erotic image-making and image-exchange played in the formation of the male homosexual subculture of the time. Chapter 4 focuses on the period that Painter described as his “Puerto Rican era.” It addresses the intersection of economic inequalities and cultural differences that organized Painter’s history of sexual interaction and social association with young Puerto Rican immigrants in New York and his sexually motivated travel to Puerto Rico. Analyzing the configurations of the sexual encounters between foreigners and natives as well as the specificity of the lower-class Puerto Rican sexual culture, it identifies the reasons behind Painter’s belief in Puerto Rican “homosexual

tolerance” and his professed cross-ethnic identification with the Puerto Rican community. Chapter 5, in a way, comes back to where Part 2 left off. It examines the details of the many relationships Painter had with his lower-class lovers, situating them in relation both to Painter’s idea of reciprocal and socially beneficial cross-class companionship and to the realities of male prostitution and more casual commercially-based male-to-male sexual encounters in the period. Finally, the conclusion outlines the insights that the analysis of Painter’s record could provide to our understanding of male-to-male sexuality in the early- and mid-twentieth-century United States. It also engages with the contemporary debates about the notions of queer identity, kinship, relatedness and affect, attempting to show how an in-depth analysis of an individual life record, informed by the documentary and critically humanist approach in social research, could illuminate some of the issues they raise.

Commenting on his sexual record, Painter was adamant about its confidentiality. “I don’t care too much—what happens to me is unimportant. ... But remember,” he wrote to Wardell Pomeroy, “that it has names attached and addresses and photographs with detailed accounts of what after all are crimes attached to each of scores of people. ... We are obligated to protect them absolutely.”¹⁰⁴ Many of the activities discussed in Painter’s journal are no longer considered crimes, and homosexual behavior of some of the individuals mentioned in it is no longer a secret. To protect the anonymity of others, however, their last names have been changed, in accordance with the confidentiality policies of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction. When mentioned for the first time, altered, last names are marked with asterisk.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas Painter to Wardell Pomeroy, 14 August 1962, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 19.

Part One. The Context

Chapter 1

Same-Sex Desire and Social Escape

The personal archive of Thomas N. Painter includes a peculiar biographical profile of one of his acquaintances from the 1930s, a young homosexual man known to other “queers” as Bill Berg^{*}. According to Painter, Berg led a double (or even triple) life. He worked as a clerk in the antique furniture store by day but at nighttime, dressing up as a “shoeshine boy,” roamed around the poor immigrant neighborhoods of the downtown Manhattan in search of sexual contacts with lower-class men living there. Painter met Bill Berg for the first time in a homosexual brothel in his “shoeshine boy” persona of “Smoky Carlton,” wearing dungarees and a work shirt, and thought him a hustler. He was surprised to discover later that he was, in fact, a “pleasant, ‘cleancut’ looking, college boy type,” supposedly “of good middle class family from Ohio,” who merely presented a carefully constructed lower-class appearance to “hang around the Bowery and South Ferry” and “[make] love to, in their way, to husky young hobos and tramps, or dock and railroad workers.” Berg maintained two residences, a room on top of the antique store where he regularly stayed and another where he took his lower-class partners for sex, and used his friend’s apartment to clandestinely change clothes. Painter also mentioned the persistent rumors that even his identity of Bill Berg was an imposture and remarked that, according to the confidential information he received from the brothel’s owner Matty Costello, the young man was “really a Vanderbilt.”¹

¹ Thomas Painter, “R.—, Bill” entry in “The Index of Persons” (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 4.

An equally interesting account from Painter's archive describes another of his friends, painter Edward Melcarth in whose studio Painter lived for several years following his return to New York after the war. In the essay Painter wrote for Kinsey in 1944, he related Melcarth's sexual sojourn in the Middle East, where he briefly resided in the early 1940s. According to Painter, trying to avoid being drafted into the Army, Melcarth left the United States to move to Iran where he worked as a truck driver for a construction company building roads in the region. Painter knew Melcarth as a sexually adventurous and highly promiscuous "queer" with the similar taste for young and muscular "proletarian" men and, in the essay, recounted his homosexual exploits abroad. Painter emphasized that, as witnessed by Melcarth, commercially based sexual contacts between men were "a settled part of the social pattern" in Iran but remarked about Melcarth's discontent with his partners' too young ages.

Y. [Melcarth] wanted an older, more muscular type, and drove the local pimp frantic. He would produce them eight, ten and twelve years old, and Y. wanted none of it. Finally they found a handsome and muscular youth of 18 who filled the bill with complete satisfaction, and he was installed as "house boy," did the cooking and cleaning, and provided sexual service as a matter of course as part of the job. As for a dollar and an half a day—which was very high wages too, in Iran.²

In fact, Melcarth was hardly the only homosexual foreigner in the region; there were many European and American "queers" who "made quite a colony, all with house boys and the services of the local pimps."³ In the 1950s, escaping the politically repressive atmosphere in the United States, Melcarth, who was a member of the Communist Party and was in constant trouble with the FBI, also regularly traveled to Venice where he found a

² Thomas Painter, untitled essay ("Update on H. Pr. [homosexual prostitution] manuscript," 5 April 1944), Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 34, series II, D.2., Folder 20, 6.

³ Painter, "Update on H. Pr.," 6.

welcoming community of homosexual expatriates and enjoyed cheap and easy-to-arrange sexual relations with the local young men.

These accounts of cross-class sexual relations in “proletarian” disguise or homosexually motivated travel abroad are remarkable but hardly uncommon in the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. They illustrate the important role of escape for men who found their erotic natures to be at odds with the society’s dominant idea of sexual normalcy and thus felt the need to get away from one’s ordinary social world and transgress the existing boundaries of class or/and nation. In communities lacking institutionalized and culturally sanctioned forms of sexual contact between men and characterized by strong prejudice against homosexuality and negative attitudes towards sex in general, a double life, social dislocation, sexually motivated travel and expatriation inevitably figured as organizing elements in the logic of homosexual subjectivity and functioned as practical strategies for realizing same-sex desires. For some men, this practice of sexual escape was limited to occasional “slumming” sprees or vacations abroad, and they often maintained a double identity, like Bill Berg, with their social and sexual lives carefully separated. Others, however, strived to completely extirpate their social background or national identity and find a new home in the sexually emancipated urban underworld, rural communities untainted by bourgeois puritanism or foreign locales they thought more accepting of homosexual contact. What united these men was their desire to temporarily avoid or completely reject the demands of bourgeois domesticity, inherently hostile to any kind of sexual nonconformity—a practice particularly characteristic of Western modernity. On a very basic level, a homosexual man’s erotic desires automatically establish a profound disconnect between his (heterosexual) family and himself; a practical

and symbolic parting was necessary for his developing an identity and lifestyle true to his sexual difference. This separation, not unknown in the earlier periods, became especially widespread, however, from the late nineteenth century on, as the discourses of individual autonomy and self-determination achieved a new cultural currency and the social and economic conditions of modernity encouraged and facilitated independent living. This life strategy of escape was, of course, mainly available to the members of economically and culturally privileged professional and upper classes. Their material resources allowed for a high degree of individual autonomy, while their cultural capital enabled and encouraged such personal projects of self-discovery and self-realization.

As discussed by John Tosh in the case of middle-class Britain, the late Victorian period saw a complex and ambivalent attitude towards family life.⁴ On one hand, there existed an all-permeating cult of domesticity based on the sanctity of marriage and the naturalness of procreation. This cult was rooted in ideals of comfort and stability, promoted against the stresses of rapid economic change brought about by industrialization, and the popular image of turbulent and vice-ridden urban life. Alongside this domestic model of the bourgeois family, however, an equally strong opposition to its constraints had developed among many middle-class men who objected to its monotony and discipline, its puritanism and hostility to daily pleasures, the oppressive responsibilities over numerous live-in dependents and the overall emasculating effects of the life devoid of adventure. Disenchanted with such a prospect, these men chose instead the life of bachelorhood and professed celibacy, joining the military, leaving for the colonies or opting for the all-male

⁴ John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

environment of public schoolmastering and gentleman's clubs.⁵ As persuasively argued by Tosh, this homosocial lifestyle was not inherently conducive to homosexual relations, as the Victorian notions of purity remained no less strong among those who chose to dispense with the cultural expectations of marriage and domestic life. It nonetheless allowed far more practical opportunities for contact with the urban underworld of male prostitution at home or abroad and provided a cultural alibi for male-to-male sexual contact disguised or earnestly imagined as an extension of affectionate friendship between men.

This "flight from domesticity" was not limited to late Victorian Britain, however, but also characterized the United States of the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. It originated in the similar conflict between the traditional ideal of masculinity, rooted in notions of courage, self-reliance and individual pursuit and closely related to cultural images of the pioneer, and the increasing bureaucratization of male labor and suburbanization of the middle-class family life. In fact, fantasies of masculine escape seem to have had an even stronger cultural currency in the American context where they functioned as something of a national myth.⁶ Best illustrated by Henry David Thoreau's venture into the wilderness to recapture and reclaim his manhood, this myth was regularly evoked in response to social campaigns aimed to "domesticate" the man, from the moral reforms of the Progressive Era to the Cold War cult of middle-class domesticity and consumerism. In the popular imagination, the frontier figured a romantic ideal of masculine agency, a setting that provided a chance to rediscover one's true self in solitary contact

⁵ Ibid., 170-194. For a detailed and insightful survey of recent scholarship on late Victorian and early Edwardian "flight from domesticity," see Martin Francis, "The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity," *The Historical Journal* 45, no. 3 (September 2002): 637-652.

⁶ Michael Kimmel, "Born to Run: Self-Control and Fantasies of Escape," in *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 43-78.

with nature, outside of the restrictions of family and religion. It was also associated with all-male fellowship and its pleasures of drinking, gambling, fighting, practical jokes and sexual licentiousness—a life uncontaminated by the middle-class conventions of decency and respectability.⁷ The possibilities of male-to-male intimacy were inevitably inherent in these fantasies of masculine escape into homosociality. Walt Whitman’s ideals of democratic comradeship between men, for instance, were regularly deployed by the early advocates of homosexual emancipation as a cultural apology for “male love,”⁸ while the images of all-male life outside of society were an important element in homoerotic utopias, of which William S. Burroughs’s *The Wild Boys*, inspired by his adolescent experiences at Los Alamos Ranch School, is probably the most pronounced example.⁹ In practical terms, the bachelor subcultures of well-to-do “sporting men,” casual and transient laborers or young immigrant gangsters were, despite their members’ exaggerated masculinity, often relatively tolerant of male-to-male sex. It is among these men that the early-twentieth-century “fairies” and “third-sexers” found their “husbands” and one-time sexual partners.¹⁰

Two models of such “flight from domesticity” are especially pertinent to the history of cross-class homosexual relations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; they can be tentatively subtitled philanthropic and colonial. Both models concern a type of

⁷ On nineteenth-century American homosociality, see Richard Stott, *Jolly Fellows: Male Milieus in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

⁸ Michael Robertson, “John Addington Symonds, Edward Carpenter, Oscar Wilde: Whitman and Same-Sex Passion,” in *Worshipping Walt: The Whitman Disciples* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 139-197.

⁹ William S. Burroughs, *The Wild Boys* (New York: Grove Press, 1971). Los Alamos Ranch School was a prestigious boarding school in New Mexico inspired by the ideas of Theodore Roosevelt and designed to help sickly boys in regaining their health through the Boy Scout-like activities: horse riding, mountain-climbing, camping, outdoor sleeping, nude swimming, etc.

¹⁰ On the role of bachelor subculture in enabling sexual contacts between “fairies” and “normal” men, see Chauncey, “Trades, Wolves, and the Boundaries of Normal Manhood,” in *Gay New York*, 65-97. See also my discussion in the last chapter of this dissertation.

social dislocation practiced by middle-class men who eschewed the expectations of marriage and fenced-off family life and preferred instead the companionship of other men in the outside setting of working-class neighborhood or foreign country. Situating themselves away from the dominant regime of heterosexual domesticity, these men explored alternative forms of association and cohabitation and fostered new modes of male fellowship, in which same-sex desire and eroticism often occupied a central place.

“Eros and Altruism”: Cross-Class “Brotherhood” and the Homoerotics of Philanthropy

In his detailed and insightful analysis of cross-class contact in the nineteenth-century London, Seth Koven argues about the close connection between sexuality and philanthropy—“eros and altruism”—in both the popular imagination and the real-life activities of various charity workers, moral reformers, investigative journalists and “fashionable slummers.” Mentioning the centuries-long history of upper-class men’s ventures into urban underworlds to pursue illicit activities like drug use or commercial sex, he at the same time defines the nineteenth century as the period when, in parallel to such exploitative pleasure-seeking in the slums, there also developed a large constituency of philanthropist slummers who lived and worked among the urban poor, motivated by the noble ideals of civic duty and social welfare. These two kinds of cross-class contact are not easy to separate, and the individual cases of Victorian philanthropists often exhibit a complex entanglement of the earnest desire to help others with the obvious pleasures of transgressing existing social boundaries, living in the world so different from that one was born into and observing (and even participating in) the disreputable activities of slum

dwellers. Just as travel and expatriation to the colonies, which I discuss below, became to many middle-class men an instrument of self-discovery and corporeal emancipation, philanthropic work became a similar means of liberating oneself from the bourgeois conventions of marriage and domesticity. As argued by Koven:

The metropolitan slums provided well-to-do philanthropic men and women with an actual and imagined location where, with the approval of society, they could challenge prevailing norms about class and gender relations and sexuality. These men and women may well have needed the freedom the slums offered them more than the poor in their adopted neighborhoods benefited from their benevolent labors. Such claims capture the complex social dynamics of philanthropic encounters between rich and poor. . . . Reformers' creativity and passion, their sincerely felt and lived ethos of service, inspire admiration. At the same time, many were deeply invested in the titillating squalor of the slums, which they used as stages upon which they enacted emancipatory experiments in reimagining themselves. Synonymous with squalid tenements and soiled lives, the slums of London ironically functioned as sites of personal liberation and self-realization—social, spiritual, and sexual—for several generations of educated men and women.¹¹

An interesting example brought up by Koven to illustrate the “conflation of male same-sex desire with cross-class philanthropic social investigation”¹² is the homosexual awakening of poet and literary critic John Addington Symonds prompted by his reading of James Greenwood’s “A Night in a Workhouse,” a sensationalist journalistic exposé of lower-class mores. Masquerading himself as a homeless pauper, Greenwood spent a night in one of London’s workhouses and recounted his exploits in a series of articles, published in *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1866. Greenwood’s exposé immediately caught public attention and inspired scores of similar pseudo-ethnographic investigations of urban poverty in cross-class disguise. What it revealed, besides the unsanitary conditions of the workhouse, was

¹¹ Koven, *Slumming*, 4-5.

¹² *Ibid.*, 70.

the commonness of poor men sleeping together in the same bed; it also hinted at the “unnatural practices” that they possibly engaged in as a result. With obvious erotic overtones, Greenwood described fifteen-year-old Kay, an attractive if slightly feminine-looking homeless youth, and mentioned his own discomfort as the boy offered to join him in his bed; he then depicted a scene of fully naked Kay washing himself under the water pump. This was the image that completely enthralled and emotionally shattered Symonds who, inspired by the article, wrote an erotically charged “Uranian” poem “John Mordan” (named after a newsboy he saw around Piccadilly Circus), one section of which was devoted to Kay.¹³ “A Night in a Workhouse” established a clear connection between extreme poverty and sexual contact between men. The latter was naturally viewed by Victorian puritans as the utmost form of moral depravity; the Vagrancy Act of 1898, discussed by Koven, essentially equated homosexual solicitation with homelessness and situated those who practice sex with men at the very margins of society, along with beggars and vagabonds. But for the upper- and middle-class homosexual men who, for whatever reasons, were unable to satisfy their erotic desires with members of their own class, Greenwood’s articles and the popular discourses it set in motion suggested lower classes’ sexual openness and uninhibitedness. Something that Koven does not discuss is the political currency that the visual image of men sleeping together had for the early advocates of homosexual emancipation. Working to culturally vindicate “male love” by

¹³ Ibid., 70-74. In his *Memoirs*, Symonds mentions an incident, which occurred to him several weeks before reading “A Night in a Workhouse,” when roaming around Regent’s Park, a locale notorious for male prostitution, he encountered an obscene wall graffiti depicting two penises and reading “Prick to prick, so sweet.” “It was so concentrated, so stimulative, so penetrative a character—so thoroughly the voice of vice and passion in the proletariat—that it pierced the very marrow of my soul. ... The vague and morbid craving of the previous years defined itself as a precise hunger after sensual pleasure.” Prior to encountering Greenwood’s article, Symonds was also reading John Seeley’s *Ecce Homo* (1865), an analysis of the life of Christ as a religious reformer, that interested him “by reason of ... its philanthropy.” Symonds, *Memoirs*, 187.

divesting it from the “vulgar” connotations of penetrative sex, men like Symonds or socialist writer Edward Carpenter advocated a Whitman-inspired vision of male-to-male sensuality: two naked “comrades” spending the night together, often in a pastoral outdoor setting, in mutual embrace.¹⁴

“A Night in a Workhouse” further cemented in the popular imagination the connection of cross-class dislocation with social investigation and reform. For those bourgeois men who sought contact with the sexually emancipated lower classes, philanthropy appeared a culturally legitimate and morally noble endeavor, a form of mutual and socially useful cross-class engagement that allowed these men to avoid being seen as lust-driven “mashers” in the urban underworld. As argued by Koven, “for Symonds, benevolence was intimately wedded to eros,” and “philanthropy was both figuratively and literally the ‘love of men’ in [his] lexicon.”¹⁵ The main theme that organized all of Symonds’s writing on “sexual inversion” was the question of how homoerotic desires could be expressed and realized in a socially beneficial and morally wholesome fashion, devoid of neurotic “morbidity” or vulgar sensuality. Engaging with a variety of cultural antecedents, from the pedagogical model of “Greek love” to Whitman’s celebration of democratic male “comradeship,” Symonds vindicated “homosexual passion” as a physical

¹⁴ Carpenter remarked, for example: “It would be a great error to suppose that the homogenic love takes as a rule that extreme form vulgarly supposed; and ... it would also be a great error to overlook the fact that in large number of instances the relation is not distinctively sexual at all, though it may be said to be physical in the sense of embrace and endearment.” Edward Carpenter, “Homogenic Love, and Its Place in a Free Society” [1894], in *Nineteenth-Century Writings on Homosexuality: A Sourcebook*, ed. Chris White (New York: Routledge, 1999), 128. This statement may have also represented Carpenter’s own preference for close bodily contact and mutual caress over anal intercourse in his sexual relations with men. In Carpenter’s “Self-Analysis,” prepared for Havelock Ellis’s *Sexual Inversion* study, he wrote, “I have never had to do with actual pederasty, so called. My chief desire in love is bodily nearness or contact, as to sleep naked with a naked friend; the specially sexual, though urgent enough, seems a secondary matter.” Edward Carpenter, “Self-Analysis for Havelock Ellis,” in *Selected Writings, Volume 1: Sex* (London: GMP Publishers, 1984), 290.

¹⁵ Koven, *Slumming*, 71.

extension of affectionate friendship between men.¹⁶ An important element in Symonds's theories of male homosexuality was his understanding of bourgeois mores as profoundly inimical to such relations, an obstacle to "the free currents of male sympathy." He regularly expressed his frustration at the hypocrisy, righteousness and emotional self-restraint of the British middle class and described its members as adhering to "the hedge-row scheme of existence," living within "the hard ring of selfishness, calculation & established comfort" and "hiding their real selves under shells of convention."¹⁷ In Symonds's view, the escape from the suffocating environment of his social class was a necessary prerequisite for the realization of his romantic ideal of intimate and ennobling comradeship with a man.

It was with this purpose that Symonds relocated in 1880 to Switzerland where he was able to freely associate with men from all walks of life—"peasants of every description, postillions, drivers, carters, conductors of the *diligence*, carpenters, doctors, parsons, schoolmasters, porters in hotels, herdsmen on the alps, masons, hunters, woodmen, guides, hotelkeepers, shopkeepers, stableboys, artisans"¹⁸—and found among them many who were open to homosexual intimacy. Symonds believed that by attending these men's social events, inviting them over to his house, helping them in work and assisting financially he was able to rise above "the petty pens of ... castes & creeds & prejudices"¹⁹ and cross the social and cultural boundaries that separated him, an affluent

¹⁶ John Addington Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics, Being an Inquiry into the Phenomenon of Sexual Inversion* (London: Private publication, 1901 [1883, written 1873]); John Addington Symonds, *A Problem in Modern Ethics, Being an Inquiry into the Phenomenon of Sexual Inversion* (London: Private publication, 1896 [1891]).

¹⁷ John Addington Symonds to Margaret Symonds, 10 August 1891, in *The Letters of John Addington Symonds, Volume III: 1885-1893*, eds. Herbert M. Schueller and Robert L. Peters (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), 594.

¹⁸ Symonds, *Memoirs*, 267.

¹⁹ Symonds to Horace Traubel, 21 February 1891, *Letters, Volume III*, 552.

foreigner, from his Swiss “comrades.” He also regularly “escap[ed] into crude life” of drinking in taverns with his young peasant friends and even famously joined them in haymaking. Living in Davos, Symonds was an active member of the local community, a highly respected if slightly eccentric figure, and was instrumental in advertising health tourism to the region. He founded the town’s gymnasium, organized athletic competitions, built a church for the growing colony of English tourists, promoted winter sports like skiing and bobsleigh and improved the drainage system in the area.²⁰ Symonds’s philanthropic activities were closely related to his erotic infatuations. In 1878, “enter[ing] into bonds of Comradeship” with a nineteen-year-old sleigh-driver Christian Buol, the “young Achilles” of his homoerotic fantasies, he helped to finance the hotel owned by his family which soon became the center of expatriate community in Davos. By the end of his life, Symonds was not only confident that fraternizing with members of the simple-natured lower classes was an important means of corporeal and emotional emancipation but even speculated that erotically charged “comradeship” between men of different social standing could eventually bring about a true democracy. He wrote about this to Edward Carpenter, whose theories about the democratic potential of “homogenic love” were very much inspired by Symonds:

The blending of Social Strata in masculine love seems to me one of its most pronounced, & socially hopeful, features. Where it appears, it abolishes class distinctions, & opens by a single operation the cataract-blinded eye to their futilities. In removing the film of prejudice & education, it acts like the oculist & knife. If it could be acknowledged & extended, it would very much further the advent of the right sort of Socialism.²¹

²⁰ Phyllis Grosskurth, “Davos Platz,” in *John Addington Symonds: A Biography* (London: Longmans, 1964), 180-207; John Addington Symonds and Margaret Symonds, *Our Life in the Swiss Highlands* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1907 [1892]).

²¹ Symonds to Edward Carpenter, 21 January 1893, *Letters, Volume III*, 808.

Despite the pioneering quality of Symonds's works on "sexual inversion" and "Greek love," because they were privately published, they did not have the same popular influence as the writing of Carpenter who was widely read in both England and the United States throughout the first decades of the twentieth century and became something of a cult figure in socialist communities and the homosexual milieu. In general terms, his understanding of "homogenic love" followed Symonds's, albeit with fewer references to its Ancient Greece antecedents and with more emphasis on contemporary social and sexual reform. In Carpenter's autobiography, one encounters the same laments about the way of life practiced by his middle-class parents, their preoccupation with the formalities of social intercourse and cultivation of emotional reticence and self-control—"the idiotic social reserve and Britannic pretense."²² Again, the idea of class escape is vital to the development of the ability to fully express one's inner nature and honestly and intimately relate to other men. When in 1874, after graduating from Cambridge, Carpenter went to work as a lecturer in the University Extension circuit, his friendships with his working-class students offered him a first true respite from the artificiality and emotional emptiness of bourgeois life. He described his experience of living among laborers and artisans:

I was ... reaching down ... into the actual society of the manual workers; and beginning to knit up alliances more satisfactory to me than any I had before known. Railway men, porters, clerks, signalmen, ironworkers, coach-builders, Sheffield cutlers, and others came within my ken, and from the first I got on excellently and felt fully at home with them—and I believe, in most cases, they with me. I felt I had come into, or at least in sight of, the world to which I belonged, and to my natural *habitat*.²³

²² Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, 94.

²³ *Ibid.*, 101-102.

Since this time and till the end of his life, young working-class men, especially independent artisans or farmers who led the outdoor life of heavy manual labor, became the principal objects of Carpenter's erotic interest and comradely affection. He viewed such men as "natural" people unspoiled by middle-class upbringing and intellectual pretenses—"powerful uneducated," as he sometimes referred to them—who retained spontaneity in their relations with nature and other people and possessed masculine vigor and strength. Among Carpenter's working-class "comrades" were scythe-maker and riveter Albert Fearnough, razor-grinder and socialist activist George Hukin and uneducated casual laborer George Merrill who eventually became Carpenter's lifelong lover and companion.

Carpenter not only strived to establish intimate and affectionate relationships with these men, realizing his ideal of noble and emotionally enriching "homogenic love," but also advocated their style of life and mode of labor as more natural, communal and conducive to human happiness. In fact, it was Carpenter's experiments with the "simplification of life" that won him fame as a social and sexual reformer. Carpenter's popular pamphlet *Civilization: Its Cause and Cure* described the effect of capitalism on human nature as profoundly corrupting and alienating. In his view, contemporary man, driven by the desire for material property, lost his ability to exist in organic unity with nature and harmonious relations with others; his life has become that of misery and disease. To restore man's mental and physical health, Carpenter advocates the project of a "simple life" consisting of manual labor in the outdoors, pagan-like spiritual connection with nature, liberation of body from the "mummydom" of clothing and a diet of vegetables and

fruits.²⁴ This ideal was rooted in Carpenter's own experience of rural life. In 1883, when Carpenter became economically independent following the death of his parents, he purchased seven acres of land in Millthorpe, ten miles south of Sheffield, and moved there with Fearnough to practice farming and market gardening and lead a "a life close to Nature and actual materials, shrewd, strong, manly, independent, not the least polite or proper, thoroughly human and kindly, and spent for the most part in the fields and under the open sky."²⁵ By the 1910s, Carpenter's house in Millthorpe achieved legendary status, becoming a place of pilgrimage for his numerous followers among socialist activists and homosexual men. It was E. M. Forster's visit to Millthorpe in 1914 that inspired his novel *Maurice* portraying a love affair between two "ordinary affectionate men" belonging to different social classes. Just as Symonds described his life in Davos with a strong emphasis on his uncomplicated daily interaction with Swiss men of all social positions, Carpenter spoke of Millthorpe as the utopian democratic space where social divisions dissolved. He wrote in his autobiography:

I had by this time made acquaintances and friends among all the tribes and trades of manual workers, as well as among learned and warlike professions. Architects, railway clerks, engine-drivers, signalmen, naval and military officers, Cambridge and Oxford dons, students, advanced women, suffragettes, professors and provision-merchants, came into touch in my little house and garden; parsons and positivists, printers and authors, scythesmiths and surgeons, bank managers and quarrymen, met with each other. Young colliers from the neighboring mines put on the boxing-gloves with sprigs of aristocracy; learned professors sat down to table with farm-lads.²⁶

²⁴ See Edward Carpenter, *Civilization: Its Causes and Cure and Other Essays* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1891) and Edward Carpenter, "Simplification of Life," in *England's Ideal and Other Papers on Social Subjects* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, Lowrey & Co., 1887), 79-99.

²⁵ Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, 104.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 164.

Symonds's and Carpenter's were essentially individual experiments in life outside of one's social class and conventional family structures but theirs were hardly isolated cases. In fact, one of the most prominent philanthropic endeavors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the settlement house movement, promoted as a socially beneficial alternative, undomestic model of cohabitation, was often conducive to same-sex eroticism. As remarked by Tosh, settlement housing was one of the main bachelorhood retreats for the late Victorians, especially those politically-minded and idealistic university men who were looking for a kind of life that was free from domestic restraints but also possessed a great social meaning and use—to bridge the gulf between rich and poor and establish universal human brotherhood that would transcend social divisions and economic inequalities.²⁷ The settlement house movement originated in the long tradition of all-male clubs, guilds and trade unions and was influenced by the anti-industrialist ideas of John Ruskin, the Christian Socialism of theologian Frederick Denison Maurice, founder of the Working Men's College and proponent of the all-encompassing brotherhood of men, and Carpenter's theories of democratic cross-class male "comradeship." It began in 1884 with the founding of the two "university settlements," pan-denominational Toynbee Hall and High Anglican Oxford House, in London's most notorious slum neighborhood of the East End. Modeled after the all-male collegiate environment of Oxbridge as well as religious missions in the colonies, they were designed as the Church's outposts in the slums and the social and cultural centers of neighborhood life working towards improving living conditions in the area, participating in local politics, educating and providing recreational activities to its residents. The idealistic goal of the settlement house movement was to

²⁷ Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 170-194.

allow upper- and middle-class settlers to create intimate bonds of friendship with slum dwellers and thus forge a new sense of social unity between men in the face of the challenges brought about by industrialization.²⁸

Analyzing the political and cultural context of the “settlement impulse,” Koven argues about its twofold nature. On one hand, it demonstrated a genuine desire on the part of the intellectual and religious elites to find new solutions to the problem of urban poverty, radically different from the potentially demoralizing handouts of money and goods practiced by the traditional charity organization. On the other, it served an important purpose for the settlers themselves as a testing ground for “distinctly heterodox conceptions of masculinity and male sexuality.”²⁹ According to Koven, settlers represented a large contingent of Victorian upper- and middle-class men who temporarily avoided or entirely rejected the cultural precepts of marriage and moneymaking and opted instead to remain in an all-male environment and engage in socially conscious and community-oriented philanthropic work. “Choosing to live outside what they took to be the geographical, psychological, and social boundaries of respectable society ... these men carved out for themselves a social space where, with the approval of society, they could place fraternity before domesticity.”³⁰ The homosocial club-like atmosphere of settlements and the settlers’ direct exposure to the reputedly depraved sexual mores of the lower classes inevitably entailed complex renegotiations of their potential sexual dissidence. As analyzed by Koven, these, for the most part, concerned asceticism and celibacy as

²⁸ On settlement house movement in Britain, see Nigel Scotland, *Squires in the Slums: Settlements and Missions in Late Victorian Britain* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007).

²⁹ Koven, *Slumming*, 229.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 281.

professed by the movement's religious leaders, but even their ideals of brotherly love between members of opposite social classes could not escape dangerous connotations of physicality and eroticism. Koven discusses, for example, the philanthropic directive of "personal touch" propagated by founder of Toynbee Hall Samuel Barnett that evoked the idea of tactile contact between men, stripped of the artificial veneer of their social differences, as a means of establishing truly human connection across class lines.³¹ Barnett's ideal of "personal touch" was obviously figurative and rhetorical, but it was also precariously close to Carpenter's erotic image of two naked "comrades" in mutual embrace and was understood as such by those for whom the celebrated cross-class intimacy of philanthropy became an instrument of homosexual self-discovery and emancipation. One such man, discussed by Koven, was C. R. Ashbee, architect, designer and the leading figure in the Arts and Crafts movement, whose understanding of his erotic attraction towards men in terms of socialist "comradeship" was directly influenced by Carpenter, whom he visited at Millthorpe on several occasions. Inspired by Carpenter's ideas and his life among farmers and artisans, Ashbee took residence in Toynbee Hall and later opened the Guild and School of Handicraft nearby to teach arts and design to East London slum boys. He delighted in the company of "rough lads," taking them out for excursions to the country and organizing other recreational activities together. While Koven or Ashbee's biographer do not address the actual affairs he possibly had with his apprentices, the homoerotic pleasures of his pedagogical and philanthropic work are apparent.³²

³¹ Ibid., 264.

³² Ibid., 264-269. On Ashbee, see John Potvin, "Crafting Bodies of Desire: C. R. Ashbee and the Lads," in *Material and Visual Cultures Beyond Male Bonding, 1870-1914: Bodies, Boundaries and Intimacy* (London: Ashgate, 2008), 49-80; Alan Crawford, *C. R. Ashbee: Architect, Designer and Romantic Socialist*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

The flight from domesticity, exemplified by the settlement house movement and similar social reform projects, was not only limited to their proponents' residence in the slums but was also directly connected to the objects of their activities with whom they felt a particular kind of masculine affinity. Discussing the fascination, at times explicitly homoerotic, that upper- and middle-class philanthropists had with lower-class adolescents, Koven argues that the cultural image of the "rough lad" represented to them "aboriginal boyhood uncorrupted by an emasculating civilizing process." The "rough lad" was regarded as a figure of individualistic protest, unselfconscious but therefore unmistakably genuine, against "the blunting and stultifying conformity of Victorian respectability."³³ The rowdiness, toughness and brutality of "rough lads" were the signs of these young men's "natural," effortless and spontaneous, masculinity that held a special appeal for their upper- and middle-class mentors. Many of the latter were deeply anxious about the feminizing effects of bourgeois domesticity and found in cross-class philanthropic work a temporary respite or a lifelong escape from it. This rather contradictory logic—on one hand, the civilizing impulse of philanthropic activities and, on the other, the erotically charged adoration of the same "rough" qualities that these activities are supposed to tame and extirpate—is one of the most prominent features of cross-class homosexual relations. Rooted in middle-class men's worship of lower-class men's masculinity but, at the same time, imagined and organized around the philanthropic goal of reforming these men and rescuing them from the life of poverty and crime, these relations exhibited an inherent

³³ Seth Koven, "From Rough Lads to Hooligans: Boy Life, National Culture and Social Reform," in *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, eds. Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer and Patricia Yaeger (New York: Routledge, 1992), 374.

tension between the erotics based on difference and the desire to erase this difference by bridging the gulf between social classes.

The close connection between homoeroticism and cross-class social investigation and philanthropic work was by no means only characteristic of late Victorian Britain. As discussed by Kevin P. Murthy, the reform movements of the Progressive era in the United States exhibited similar tensions around cross-class solidarity and same-sex desire.³⁴ Analyzing the biographies of two important figures in New York settlement house reform, Charles B. Stover of the University Settlement and John Lovejoy Elliott of the Hudson Guild, he identified the same themes of discontent with the constraints of bourgeois domesticity and lifelong bachelorhood in the company of working-class youth. Both men were sexually ambiguous. Stover, a rather mysterious and self-effacing figure, studied at the Union Theological Seminary but in his thirties went through a period of severe depression, related to his loss of faith and the issue of marriage. He resolved this crisis by becoming involved in the social reform movement. In 1887, he took up residence in the tenement house on Forsyth Street on the Lower East Side that became the headquarters of the Neighborhood Guild (later transformed into the University Settlement) and spent his life living there with his assistant, printer and trade unionist Edward King. Because Stover left no records of his personal life, we can only speculate about the nature of their relationship; Lillian Wald described them as an “unconventional couple” and mentioned Stover’s “peculiarities,” a result of “a probable deeper struggle within.”³⁵ John Lovejoy

³⁴ Murphy, “Socrates in the Slums: ‘Social Brotherhood’ and Settlement House Reform,” in *Political Manhood*, 104-124.

³⁵ J. K. Paulding, *Charles B. Stover, July 14, 1861 - April 24, 1929: His Life and Personality, Together with Some Tributes from His Friends* (New York: The International Press, 1938), 132-134. Stover achieved great success as a social reformer and in 1910 was appointed New York City’s Park Commissioner. He was particularly devoted to improving recreation facilities for working-class youth and opened over thirty public

Elliott, one of the leaders of the Ethical Culture movement, showed a similarly strong interest in association with young lower-class men and was particularly drawn to the crowded and violent Chelsea slums. In 1895, befriending a gang of Irish youths from the neighborhood who called themselves the “Hurly Burlies,” he rented an apartment in the area that became their social club and later the foundation of the Hudson Guild. He soon moved to Chelsea himself, living in a cold-water room in the dilapidated tenement house, just as his immigrant neighbors did. His philanthropic work in the neighborhood included educational, recreational and athletic activities, and his approach was famously casual and nonjudgemental. Elliott was also deeply invested in the cause of rehabilitating former convicts, especially young delinquents, and was an outspoken proponent of juvenile justice system reform. Just like Stover, he remained a bachelor but developed intimate friendships with some of the young men he worked with. One of them, a member of the “Hurly Burlies” Mark McCloskey, became a special object of Elliott’s affection and patronage; he sponsored the young man’s education at Princeton and supported his work at both the Hudson Guild and the Ethical Culture School.³⁶

As argued by Murphy, the project of cross-class solidarity promoted by the American settlement house movement was, to a large degree, energized by strong currents of homoeroticism, both in its settlers’ rejection of conventional middle-class domesticity and their daily intimate association with “sexualized” lower classes.³⁷ Such homoerotic

playgrounds in the course of his four-year term. Murphy, *Political Manhood*, 114; Jeffrey Scheuer, “New York’s Vanishing Visionary: The Quiet Mysteries of Charles B. Stover” (2008), unpublished paper.

³⁶ Murphy, *Political Manhood*, 114-115, 121-122. See also Tay Hohoff, *A Ministry to Man: The Life of John Lovejoy Elliott* (New York: Harper, 1959); Ellen Salzman-Fiske, “John Lovejoy Elliott and the Social Settlement Movement,” *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* 30 (September 2005): 383-393.

³⁷ There exists a large body of scholarship related to women’s participation in the settlement house movement that analyzes their often ambiguous sexuality and a variety of unconventional domestic arrangements and

investment in social work was not limited to settlement house movement, however, but characterized other kinds of philanthropic and pedagogical activities with lower-class boys and young men. Arguably the most influential and long-standing non-governmental institution providing a variety of religious and recreational services to British and American youth, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) established in 1851, was similarly rooted in the understanding of same-sex romantic friendship as a means of religious conversion and community building and was notorious for sexual contact between its members. According to John Donald Gustav-Wrathall, close emotional bonds between two men were encouraged and celebrated by the YMCA's leadership as a kind of interpersonal relationship conducive to evangelism and spiritual enlightenment and therefore crucial to the organization's expansion and development.³⁸ Something like the "personal touch" approach promoted by the settlement house movement as an instrument of establishing affinities across class lines, the program of "personal work"—one-on-one, private and spontaneous interaction, resulting in spiritual exchange between men and

romantic relationships they developed with each other. There are important differences, however, in women's and men's experiences in the movement, mainly in the fact that, while male reformers mainly associated with young lower-class men they worked with, women establishes closest connections with other female reformers. The two most notable figures discussed in this context are Jane Addams of Chicago's Hull House and Lillian Wald of New York's Henry Street Settlement. Wald was close friends with Elliott and, according to Murphy, there was obvious mutual recognition of their unconventional lifestyle and sexual ambiguity (they, for instance, excitingly corresponded about German lesbian-themed movie *Mädchen in Uniform*). Murphy, *Political Manhood*, 123-124. For a detailed treatment of the subject of women's participation in reform movements, see Robin Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). See also an insightful analysis of Jane Addams's autobiographical writing in Scott Herring, "Terra Incognita: Jane Addams, Philanthropic Slumming, and the Elusive Identity of Hull-House," in *Queering the Underworld*, 25-64. Despite her highly prominent public persona, Addams, like Stover, was very reticent about her personal life and developed something of an "incognito" persona (Stover also notoriously disappeared at times—once, during his term as New York's Park Commissioner, for four months, prompting a nationwide search). Addams's relationship with her companion Mary Rozet Smith was obviously erotically invested, however, and was imagined by the two women as an alternative to marriage and conventional domestic life. Herring quotes a poem that Addams inscribed to "M. R. S.": "The 'mine' and 'thine' of wedded folk / Is often quite confusing / And sometimes when they use the 'ours' / It sounds almost amusing / But—You and I, may well defy / Both married folk and single / To do as well as we have done / The 'mine' and 'thine' to mingle." *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁸ Gustav-Wrathall, "Intense Friendship," in *Take the Young Stranger*, 45-69.

mutual commitment to the mission of religious work—was equally important to the YMCA’s outreach activities. While the possible risks of “immorality,” for instance in “personal work” with outsiders, were regularly emphasized, the overall idea of long-term intimate and passionate connection between the YMCA’s young unmarried members or bachelor secretaries, who forewent marriage and domesticity in order to live in all-male Christian fellowship, was inherently sexually charged. Presented in embodied terms and imbued with tropes of intimacy, such as bedroom conversations, YMCA friendships might not have included actual physical contact (though many reportedly did) but inevitably verged on the homoerotic.

At the same time, as discussed by Gustav-Wrathall, these intense friendships remained, for the most part, class-homogeneous and were, in fact, motivated by the organization’s desire to consolidate young middle-class men and protect them from the immorality of urban life associated with sexually depraved and dangerous lower classes.³⁹ The YMCA’s activities were not only limited to middle-class men, but they targeted young laborers in a particularly patronizing manner and entirely from the point of view of their employers, the local business community with which the YMCA had strong financial ties. The purpose of the YMCA’s programs for railroad and industrial workers was to promote among them the middle-class values of individual responsibility, hard work, sobriety and discipline and, in this way, prevent labor unrest and the spread of immoral habits like drinking, gambling, theft and sexual “vice.”⁴⁰ In the course of these activities, cross-class friendships were formed sometimes but rarely achieved a truly reciprocal nature. Gustav-

³⁹ Ibid., 53-54.

⁴⁰ See a detailed analysis of the YMCA’s programs for railroad and industrial workers in Thomas Winter, *The YMCA and Workingmen, 1877-1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).

Wrathall discusses, for example, the private journal of YMCA missionary Charles Conrad Hamilton who worked among lumbermen in Wisconsin and developed a close connection with some of them, speaking about their rugged physicality in a manner suggesting of homoeroticism. Yet, Hamilton's experience in the all-male culture of lumbermen camps was rather that of discomfort and class tension; he was disturbed and repulsed by these men's coarseness and attempted to instill in them his own "respectable" vision of Christian manliness.⁴¹

If the leaders of the YMCA regarded lower-class masculinity as dangerous and immoral and sought to replace it with a more restrained and compliant version, the advocates of "self-government" reform, another of the Progressive era's philanthropic movements, concerned with reorganizing juvenile penal and educational institutions, saw lower-class boys and young men in a more positive light, identifying socially beneficial potential in their rough masculine culture. Analyzing sexual scandals involving two important figures in the movement, the founder of the George Junior Republic, a self-governing farming community of juvenile delinquents, William R. George and his collaborator and later an influential prison reformer Thomas Mott Osborne, Murphy argues about the important role that these men's erotically charged fascination with "bad boys" played in their philanthropic activities and their vision of cross-class social unity.⁴²

William R. George appears as something of a prototypical figure of a middle-class social reformer with lifelong obsessive and erotically charged interest in the urban underworld and its all-male gangs of young lower-class immigrants. Born in 1866 in a

⁴¹ Gustav-Wrathall, *Take the Young Stranger*, 54.

⁴² Murphy, "Daddy George and Tom Brown: Sexual Scandal, Political Manhood, and Self-Government Reform," in *Political Manhood*, 125-170.

family of farmers, George relocated to New York as an adolescent and, being a rather emotional, timid and self-conscious youth, he was restlessly looking for his vocation in life, unable to hold a regular job, until he found himself in religious reform. He became active in the charity work of the Methodist Church and became involved with the Christian Endeavor movement, working with street children and disenfranchised immigrant youth. He soon drifted away from the church but continued his philanthropic activities as a freelance social worker and investigator. George was particularly interested in youth gangs and the “street arab” and regularly undertook “knight-errant tours into the uttermost penetralia of the worst slum districts,” looking for informants and collecting observations. He posed as a police reporter to gain entrance into the Daffyville gang in Harlem and in 1893, renting a loft on Eleventh Street in the Lower East Side, established connection with the ex-convict Graveyard gang that controlled the area. Winning boxing fights with the gang’s toughest members, George gained the young men’s confidence and respect and, turning his loft into their social club, worked to convert the group into law-abiding neighborhood militia, a “law-and-order gang.”⁴³ It was George’s interest in reforming “bad boys” that led him to establish in 1895 the George Junior Republic, an experimental reformatory school in Freeville, New York run by its young delinquent “citizens” with little outside supervision, that gained international recognition in the early decades of the twentieth century as an example of successful self-government practice. While the Republic’s reputation remained generally positive, it was not the case with George who in 1913 was subject to internal investigation by the State Board of Charities regarding the

⁴³ William R. George and Lyman Beecher Stowe, “Mr. George Studies the Street Boy at Close Range,” in *Citizens Made and Remade: An Interpretation of the Significance and Influence of George Junior Republics* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1912), 1-29 (quote from page 3). See also Murphy, *Political Manhood*, 136-138; Jack M. Holl, “William R. George: The Making of a Reformer,” in *Juvenile Reform in the Progressive Era: William R. George and the Junior Republic Movement* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), 35-85.

allegations of improper conduct. George was rumored to share beds with his students of both sexes and hypnotize them for no obvious reason. He was eventually cleared of all charges but his “memory lapses” about the events only confirmed popular suspicions about the potentially immoral motives of his philanthropic work.⁴⁴

The professional and personal behavior of George’s main collaborator at the Junior Republic, Thomas Mott Osborne, caused an even more serious and widely reported scandal. In 1916, Osborne, who worked as the warden of Sing Sing prison where he attempted to introduce the same principles of self-government, was charged with practicing sodomy with prisoners. Like George, he was found not guilty, but the case resulted in a large-scale public controversy about the true nature of his unconventional activities. The most peculiar aspect of Osborne’s engagement with social investigation and reform was his lifelong penchant for cross-class masquerade and his incognito jaunts into the slum areas of New York to associate with vagrants. While it was by no means unknown practice among journalists and philanthropists of the period, Osborne went about it with extraordinary meticulousness and enthusiasm. He developed a repertory of lower-class personae (“Dude,” “Old Gent,” “Colored Gent,” “MacDonald,” “Mexican,” etc.) and mastered the art of impersonation to the degree that even his coworkers could not recognize him in disguise. There was an obvious practical use to these activities; during his tenure as the Public Service Commissioner, he, for instance, carried out a very successful investigation of the railroad conditions in the state of New York, freight-hopping dressed as a hobo. But, judging from the frequency with which he engaged in such behavior and its unclear motives, his fascination with cross-class masquerade went much further than that—it was

⁴⁴ Murthy, *Political Manhood*, 128.

fulfilling his strong need to feel accepted as an equal by lower-class men, especially transient laborers and vagabonds, whom he studied and worked with. Osborne's companion in these sojourns was a young man, Louis Schaedeline, a former elevator boy he met in a reform school. He made Schaedeline his protégé, installing him in his house as his "handyman" (by the time of their meeting some time in the mid-1900s, Osborne was already a widower) and sponsoring his varied hobbies, from painting to aircraft building. The two formed a long-term intimate relationship that many thought was homosexual in nature.

Osborne's practice of cross-class impersonation was also instrumental in his penal reform activities. In 1913, assuming the persona of "Tom Brown," he committed himself to the Auburn Penitentiary and lived there one week as a regular inmate with the purpose of researching the conditions in prison and studying prisoners' psychology. Osborne recounted his experiences in the diary he published the next year, where he advocated the introduction of self-government principles into prison management. In 1915, Osborne was appointed warden of Sing Sing Penitentiary, and it was there that a major sex scandal soon broke out. The investigation of the situation at Sing Sing was initiated by Osborne's political opponents who disapproved of his unorthodox methods (Osborne's biographer argued about a conspiracy on their part to remove him from his post) but it assumed larger proportions when the charges of improper conduct were brought against Osborne himself. The allegations of sodomy were based on the testimony of a "degenerate" James Harvey who previously confessed to Osborne about prostituting himself to more than twenty inmate in the course of his three-month imprisonment at Sing Sing. The case, for whatever reasons, was not reported by Osborne to the outside authorities and, when exposed, this

episode lead to serious doubts about the motives behind his “democratic” management approach. He was thought to be a “sodomite” himself who covered up “degenerate” activities and made advances to inmates; his previous exploits in lower-class disguise and his unconventional relationship with Schaedeline were also brought up.⁴⁵ As argued by Murphy, the scandal surrounding Osborne’s reform work exposed rising concerns about the sexual effects that close association with the lower classes, perceived as brutalized and sexually licentious, had on social reformers who advocated the kind of “personal touch” connection with the objects of their activities. The suspicions of sexual deviance remained inherent in all kinds of unorthodox domestic arrangements and made them subject to popular rumor and, in the case of government-affiliated work, especially with minors, increased legal scrutiny.

The work of another social investigator and reformer Alfred A. Gross further demonstrates the kind of sexual opportunities inherent in cross-class research and philanthropic contact.⁴⁶ Gross was born into an affluent New England family and received a very good education: he studied at Amherst College and Yale Divinity School and held a Ph.D. degree from the University of Edinburgh. He taught ethics at Harvard and Oxford and was an ordained priest in the Church of England, but around 1937 was defrocked under unknown circumstances, possibly related to his homosexual activities. Seeking help, Gross met psychiatrist George W. Henry, one of the leading experts on homosexuality and the head of the Committee for the Study of Sex Variants (with which Thomas Painter was also involved at the time). Impressed with Gross’s credentials, Henry hired him as a research

⁴⁵ Ibid., 144-167. For a detailed account of the investigation, see also Rudolph W. Chamberlain, *There Is No Truce: A Life of Thomas Mott Osborne* (New York: Macmillan, 1935).

⁴⁶ Minton, “Henry and Gross and the Study of Sex Offenders, 1937-72,” in *Departing from Deviance*, 94-121.

assistant for the study of “underprivileged homosexuals” he was designing at the time at the request of the Committee for the Study of Sex Offenses created by mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia to investigate sex crimes in the city.⁴⁷ In order to find research subjects, Gross employed the familiar technique of cross-class disguise; he roamed around the lower-class neighborhoods “roughly dressed,” producing “the impression he was an idler with a good bit of worldly knowledge.”⁴⁸ There is no evidence if, in the course of the fieldwork, Gross established more intimate contacts with his interviewees, but it was his fraternizing with the homosexual clients that caused complaints about his work in the following years. During the war, Gross was employed by the Selective Service System to conduct psychiatric screening of inductees suspected of homosexuality and reportedly used the opportunity to arrange “dates” with some of the men. Likewise, in the late 1940s, continuing his work with sex offenders through the Quaker Emergency Service, he was accused of having too intimate a relationship with the men referred to him by the court for the probation casework. In his later career, providing legal aid and psychological counseling to homosexual men through the George W. Henry Foundation (headquartered at and operating in collaboration with the University Settlement founded half a century before by Charles B. Stover), Gross mostly worked with “underprivileged” clients and again,

⁴⁷ For the Committee’s final report, see William R. Bayes, “Report and Analysis of Sex Crimes in the City of New York for the Ten Year Period 1930-9,” in *Report of Mayor’s Committee for the Study of Sex Offenses* (New York, 1940), 17-100.

⁴⁸ George W. Henry and Alfred A. Gross, “Social Factors in the Case Histories of One Hundred Underprivileged Homosexuals,” *Mental Hygiene* 22, no. 4 (1938): 600. The article mentions a curious incident when Gross’s cross-class disguise was exposed by one of his interviewees, “an unkempt young man, who was dressed in rags, but who had very evidently attended a university graduate school, [and] wanted to know if the investigator were collecting material for a doctor’s thesis.” While the motives of the young man’s own class-inappropriate dress are not clear, he seems in a way very similar to Painter’s friend Bill Berg, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, who also regularly visited poor neighborhoods dressed as a hobo, searching for sexual partners.

according to Minton, had “trouble separating his private from his professional life.”⁴⁹ It is not clear whether Gross’s own erotic interests were specifically in lower-class men, but what his case illustrates once again is the discursive and practical junction of same-sex desire, cross-class contact and philanthropic impulse in the lives of many upper- and middle-class homosexual men in the first half of the twentieth century.

As it is evident from all these examples, by the early twentieth century, philanthropy had established itself a culturally legitimate, even celebrated form of cross-class contact that allowed middle-class men to live outside of the dominant regime of marriage and domesticity and perceive their romantic and sexual relations with “bad boys” in noble terms of socially beneficial patronage. As argued by Michael Moon in his examination of Horatio Alger’s “rags-to-riches” boy stories, which encapsulated popular understanding of private philanthropic and reformatory endeavors aimed at transforming a dangerous and unruly street urchin into a respectable adult, same-sex eroticism was inherent in the humanitarian discourses of the time. Alger’s repeated emphasis on his heroes’ physical attractiveness contrasted with the shabbiness of their clothing, the ubiquitous trope of mutual seduction that he employed to portray the initial encounter between a street boy and his affluent older benefactor, the important role of physical touch in the development of intimate friendship between them—all attest, according to Moon, to a strong homoerotic dynamic that characterized Alger’s books.⁵⁰ The theme of an erotically charged cross-class philanthropic alliance is even more prominent in the writings of the British “Uranian” poets of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As analyzed by

⁴⁹ Minton, *Departing from Deviance*, 104.

⁵⁰ Michael Moon, “‘The Gentle Boy from the Dangerous Classes’: Pederasty, Domesticity, and Capitalism in Horatio Alger,” *Representations* 19 (Summer 1987): 87-110.

Timothy d'Arch Smith, the popular fantasy of "the boy who, thanks to man's intervention in his life, overrides and supersedes his lower-class birthright and becomes a boy of great beauty and intellect" was not only frequently employed by the "Uranians" as a representational device to portray cross-generational relationships but was at the core of their literary celebration of pederastic love.⁵¹ It is important to stress, however, that this junction of "eros and altruism" in both the popular and subcultural understanding of cross-class homoeroticism was not a mere discursive effect of the fervent Christian teachings on "social brotherhood" or a polemical contrivance used by the early advocates of homosexual emancipation to argue for the social benefits of same-sex love. To many homosexual men living in the period, of whom Thomas Painter was only one example, it became a practical strategy of cross-class contact and a real-life ethical model according to which they organized and made meaning of their sexual relations with men.

One of the most fascinating first-person accounts of erotically motivated descent in the urban underworld is contained in the autobiographical trilogy of Ralph Werther, a self-described "fairie" or "androgyne" who passed much of his adult life in the slum neighborhoods of turn-of-the-century New York under the name of Jennie June, pursuing sex with the "tremendously virile" lower-class men. Werther was born in 1874 in an "eminently respectable" and "exceptionally pious" middle-class family and spent his childhood and adolescence "in the most refined section of a large village within fifty miles of New York City."⁵² Werther's early years were characterized by his strong interest in religion. He described himself, from the age of fourteen to seventeen, as a "religious

⁵¹ Timothy d'Arch Smith, *Love In Earnest: Some Notes on the Lives and Writings of English "Uranian" Poets from 1889 to 1930* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 191-195.

⁵² Werther, *Autobiography*, 35.

prodigy [who led] the congregation in church in extempore prayer ... and [spent] a full two hours daily in private religious exercises.”⁵³ He aspired to a career in “the Christian ministry in a heathen land,” and, after moving to New York to start his university studies in 1891, attended church daily and was involved in mission work in the city’s slums. “I preached about twelve times from the pulpit,” he remarked, “besides being the leader of about a hundred secondary church services.” It was about that time and, by Werther’s own admission, because of his exposure to “the loose morals of the slums” that his “androgynous” nature began “calling louder and louder for expression,” after being suppressed during his teenage years.⁵⁴

In a great city, the temptation to a double life is exceptional. One can so easily hide a disgraceful act. ... The adolescents there [in the slums] attracted me powerfully, and suggestions came into my mind repeatedly to accost them with an indecent purpose.⁵⁵

These sensual desires, which Werther worked hard to restrain through religious prayer, fast and flagellation, continued to haunt him, causing painful mental conflict and constant doubts about his future path as a Christian philosopher and preacher. Then, one night in June 1892, he gave in to his sinful urges and undertook his first “nocturnal ramble” in New York’s lower-class neighborhoods of Hell’s Kitchen and the Bowery. He changed into old ragged clothing, “a cast-off suit” and “a cast-off soft cap,” so as not to be conspicuous in the slums, and ventured in search of sex with young and virile ruffians. Though unsuccessful (Werther was rebuffed by the neighborhood youths he approached and then beaten and mugged), this first escapade in the underworld marked the beginning of his two-

⁵³ Ibid., 48.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 49, 50. On Werther’s church work see also, Werther, *The Female-Impersonators*, 76-81.

⁵⁵ Werther, *Autobiography*, 49-50.

decade-long career as a “fairie.” He regularly went slumming, encountering “rough burly adolescents” who, while occasionally violent, were also willing to submit to Werther’s sexual advances.

Probably extrapolating from his own experience, Werther remarked that “as a rule, male bisexuals [here persons of the third sex, “androgynes” or “mental hermaphrodites”] are goody-goody boys who develop into ultra-religious adolescents” and are “enthusiastic to better the race morally and spiritually.”⁵⁶ He acknowledged that, in society’s view, the pursuit of carnal desires and sensual gratification was absolutely incompatible with the morally noble vocation of spreading the Christian teachings among the poor. In his own mind, however, at least during his youth, the two impulses—erotic and philanthropic—were thoroughly intertwined. In a journal entry written in the aftermath of another of Werther’s “rambles,” in the course of which he spent an evening flirting with a gang of Mulberry Street “sports” before being robbed and sexually assaulted by them, he expressed this religiously infused erotic attraction towards young inhabitants of the city slums.

I cannot yet repent of my conduct last Friday night, yet on the Sunday following I had one of the happiest experiences of nearness to God that I ever had. That afternoon I presented the Gospel in love for my Savior and for perishing souls. I have in my heart an intense desire to save from their lives of sin those in whose company I was Friday night, especially my Bill, so young, and yet so deep in sin. I want to rescue him, and make of him a strong educated champion for Christ. My heart yearns to carry blessings and peace to all those who are suffering in the slums of New York.⁵⁷

In his later years, as Werther’s grew more and more disheartened by the Church’s negative attitude towards the “androgyne,” such philanthropic rationalizations for his frequent

⁵⁶ Werther, *The Female-Impersonators*, 43.

⁵⁷ Werther, *Autobiography*, 73. About his relationship with his first regular “husband,” a nineteen-year-old Irish-American man, Werther remarked, for example: “My purpose was to draw him away from his environment, and bring him up to my own social level, but my effort met with complete failure.” *Ibid.*, 76.

association with lower-class youth became less and less pronounced. Yet, he continued to imagine it in the terms that clearly suggested middle-class discourses of social investigation and reform. In his autobiographical works, he spoke of himself as “fated to be a Nature-appointed amateur detective” whose “innate appetencies and avocation of female-impersonator”⁵⁸ provided him with the ability to access, understand and blend in with the social class that was not his own by birth. Noting down his experiences in the lower-class milieu, he strived to enlighten the general public about the daily sufferings of “Nature’s Step-Children”⁵⁹ and educate it about the sexual mores of the urban underworld where middle-class “fairies” like him found refuge and acceptance.

Werther’s escape into the lower-class milieu of immigrant laborers and delinquent youth was clearly motivated by his inability to find sexual partners within his own “puritanical” social circle. In summer 1894, when on vacation from his studies, he spent several months in his native town and, experiencing “sexual starvation and melancholy,” attempted to proposition his cousin, “an honorable and intelligent young man.” He wrote him a long letter, describing his unusual sexual constitution and his longings for intimacy and affection from a male, but his requests for a date were met with indifference and “harsh words.” When approached in person, the cousin threatened to shoot Werther with a revolver unless he left the young man’s house immediately.⁶⁰ Such treatment was in striking contrast to the amiable attitude Werther encountered from his lower-class companions who showed a greater tolerance towards male-to-male sex and were happy to treat him as a “French baby-doll.” On the other hand, Werther also emphasized that it was

⁵⁸ Werther, *The Female-Impersonators*, 4-5.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, iii.

⁶⁰ Werther, *Autobiography*, 92-96.

his rejection from respectable middle-class society that propelled him into the life of a “low-class fairie.” In 1896, Werther was expelled from the university when a physician he had consulted about his sexual problem divulged the information to the university’s president. He was left without any means to live on, as he was also employed by the university, occupying a small administrative position; when he tried to find other work, two previously friendly professors now refused to provide him with references claiming he “[could not] be trusted.”⁶¹ Werther eventually found a job as a private secretary but, prior to that, had to spend two months in a shelter for the poor on the Bowery. It was among the poor, however, that Werther found a much more casual, matter-of-fact outlook on gender nonconformity and sexual deviance; he described the urban underworld as “democratic, frank, and liberal-minded,” denouncing “Overworld” as “‘classy,’ hypocritical, and bigoted.”⁶² He encapsulated this outlook in the introduction to the last volume of his autobiographical trilogy:

The reasons that I explored the Underworld so extensively, and, for the six years of my physical prime (age nineteen to twenty-five), took as my bosom friends prostitutes, “fairies,” burglars, gunmen and other atavics were not because I was morally depraved. Mother Nature caused me always to be a “goody-goody.” I could not help being so. I deserve neither praise nor blame. The reason I chummed with the atavic lasses named was solely that I was born bisexual. The Overworld makes of the bisexual a pariah. The Underworld gives the bisexual a hearty welcome.⁶³

The cross-class trajectory of Werther’s biography—his rejection of bourgeois puritanism, his interest in religious work with “the poor and the afflicted,” his sexual emancipation in the urban underworld—is representative of the way philanthropic and

⁶¹ Ibid., 117-118.

⁶² Werther, *The Female-Impersonators*, 97.

⁶³ Werther, “The Riddle of the Underworld,” 6.

reformist discourses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries informed the personal attempts of many middle-class homosexual men living in the period to understand their sexual difference, find sexual partners and make meaning of their same-sex relationship and unorthodox domestic arrangements. For some of these men, the choice of lovers among the lower classes was thoroughly pragmatic; their stigmatized and illicit sexual practices could be kept completely secret and a comfortable double life easily maintained. For others, genuine reformers and socially conscious “workers with boys,” philanthropy allowed to elevate, or even sublimate, their ambiguous, erotically charged attraction towards “rough lads” into a morally noble and culturally legitimate form. For yet many others, the practical and the idealistic were inextricable. Like Thomas Painter, whose sexual history I analyze in this dissertation, they oscillated between a blatantly voyeuristic eroticization of the “urban proletarians” and a romantically infused celebration of cross-class friendship and companionship, between the sexual exploitation of those socially marginalized and economically disenfranchised and the earnest desire to rescue “lost boys” from the life of poverty and crime. What underlay these inevitably diverse individual cases of joining “eros and altruism” in one’s homosexual self-discovery and self-realization were the ideas that there existed another, more fascinating, stimulating and sexually open world, profoundly different from suffocating and emasculating bourgeois domesticity, and that escape into it was not only possible but could become a means of personal liberation.

Sexual Travel and Social Escape: Homosexual "Pilgrims," Exiles and Tourists

Even more than philanthropic activities among the lower classes, colonial travel, work and expatriation functioned as important, culturally legitimized forms of the middle-class "flight from domesticity." Leaving one's homeland and venturing into a foreign world required courage, perseverance, self-reliance, adventurousness and a strong will—the qualities closely connected with manliness in the public imagination but hard to attain and demonstrate living inside "the gentle yoke of matrimony." As argued by Tosh, "for those who were bored by feminine domesticity, or frightened of being drawn into marriage, the wide-open spaces of prairie and bush and the rough democracy of the frontier stood for a world which was free of the constraints of respectability" and provided a space in which "masculinity could be lived out without compromise."⁶⁴ Residing abroad was also associated with sexual freedom unavailable at home. In the words of Ronald Hyam,

Many young Victorians going overseas expected to indulge in casual sex as a routine ingredient of life. Moreover, empire unquestionably gave them an enlarged field of opportunity. Greater space and privacy were often available; inhibitions relaxed. European standards might be held irrelevant. Abstinence was represented as unhealthy in a hot climate. Boredom could constitute an irresistible imperative.⁶⁵

Hyam describes the erotic allure that Asian prostitutes exerted over British colonists, the near universal sexual abuse of African slaves on the West Indies plantations, the important role that marriage and concubinage with indigenous and mixed-blood women played in the development of the Canadian fur trade, the sexual licentiousness that characterized penal

⁶⁴ John Tosh, "Manliness, Masculinities and the New Imperialism, 1880-1900," in *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family and Empire* (London: Pearson, 2005), 208.

⁶⁵ Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 88.

settlements in Australia, the widespread sexual contact between the Pacific Island missionaries and young local converts of both sexes.⁶⁶ Whether it was exposure to the “vices” of sodomy or polygamy allegedly endemic in foreign locales, the colonial power that allowed sexual exploitation of indigenous populations or the liminality of cross-cultural sexual encounter in which the norms of ordinary sexual behavior could be disregarded by both foreigner and native alike, empire functioned, according to Hyam, as “an unrivaled field for the maximization of sexual opportunity and the pursuit of sexual variation.”⁶⁷

Sexual opportunities were not only limited to colonial situations, however, but were equally present in more ordinary travel (health-seeking holidays in southern locales, scholarly pilgrimages, the upper-class “grand tour” and its more contemporary versions, regular vacation trips to the seashore, etc.) as well as literary expatriation to the cities with large bohemian colonies like Paris or Berlin. As argued by Ian Littlewood, travel to foreign lands, by its nature, “tends to undermine moral absolutes.” Exposure to foreign customs demonstrates to a traveler “a provisional nature of any particular cultural arrangement,” thus potentially weakening or completely upsetting the moral precepts of his own society.⁶⁸ Furthermore, in the Western imagination, travel abroad has been frequently understood as a personal journey of self-revelation and self-expression; learning about the ways of others was ultimately a means to discover and understand oneself. As sexuality came to be perceived as fundamental to one’s sense of true inner self by the end of the nineteenth

⁶⁶ Ibid., 88-114 and passim.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 211.

⁶⁸ Ian Littlewood, *Sultry Climates: Travel and Sex since the Grand Tour* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2001), 20-21.

century, sexual self-discovery appeared as a frequent motive for travel and expatriation, especially for those men who found their erotic desires to be at odds with the dominant moral climate of their native land. Littlewood describes such travelers as “sexual pilgrims” and identifies homosexual men as a significant contingent among them. Discussing the cultural legacy of the romantic and sexually ambiguous figure of Byron, “a rebel against English values” whose wanderings around Europe and residence in Italy were prompted by his rejection of the conventional morality of the British, Littlewood remarks:

Behind the romantic posturing that created the image of the Byronic traveller, there had been a hard core opposition to the sexual norms of a hypocritical and punitive society. Out of this came a tradition of tourists, for the most part homosexual, who have quite consciously used the pursuit of forbidden fruit as a form of guerrilla warfare against the conventions of their own society. It is the homosexual tourist, more than any other, who has promoted the interplay of sex, travel and subversion.⁶⁹

Specific locales have been historically associated with the homosexual proclivities of their male inhabitants, explained in racial, climatic or religious terms, and greater tolerance of sexual variation in general. In the late 1880s, British orientalist and explorer Sir Richard Francis Burton proposed the existence of what he called the “Sotadic Zone,” the geographical belt where “the [pederastic] Vice is popular and endemic, held at the worst to be a mere peccadillo,” and contrasted it with the countries outside the zone where pederasty was practiced “only sporadically” and whose inhabitants were “physically

⁶⁹ Ibid., 128-129. A similar argument is made by Rudi Bleys who discusses traveling as “a privileged territory of homosexuals and of a particular group among them, defending its integrity against a western strategy directed towards the ‘domestication’ of sexuality—domestication, as a way of both excluding all forms of social and sexual life that don’t fit the imperatives of procreative family, and promoting the house as its privileged, exclusive and private domain against an ambulatory, nomadic and dionysiac sexuality.” Rudi Bleys, “Homosexual Exile: The Textuality of the Imaginary Paradise, 1800-1980,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 25, no. 1-2 (1993): 166.

incapable of performing the operation and look[ed] upon it with the liveliest disgust.”⁷⁰ According to Burton, the zone encompassed the Mediterranean region, Mesopotamia, Central Asia, Afghanistan, contemporary Pakistan and northern India, Southeast Asia, China, Japan, the South Sea Islands and all of the pre-Columbian New World. Burton’s discussion of the origins and nature of pederasty in these regions is contradictory and confusing, combining psychological causes (“a blending of the masculine and feminine temperaments”⁷¹ prevalent in hot climates) with historical explanations (Persians introduced “the passion for boys” to Greeks, Greeks to Romans, Romans to North Africans, etc.) and the purely physiological (“luxurious” sodomy “preferred on account of the narrowness of passage”⁷²). Burton did not explicitly denounce or condemn pederasty, even speaking of it as “one of the marvellous list of amorous vagaries.”⁷³ By presenting a cross-cultural overview of sodomitical practices, replete with first-hand observations, including his investigation of male brothels in Karachi in 1845,⁷⁴ erudite references to classical literature as well as rather obscene anecdotes, Burton outlined a sexual map of a different and, in many respects, more open and emancipated foreign world.⁷⁵ If for an average Victorian reader, Burton’s writing only confirmed the Orientalist idea about the

⁷⁰ Richard F. Burton, “Terminal Essay,” in *A Plain and Literal Translation of the Arabian Nights’ Entertainments, Now Entitled The Book of The Thousand Nights and a Night. With Introduction Explanatory Notes on the Manners and Customs of Moslem Men and a Terminal Essay upon the History of the Nights*, vol. 10 (Benares: Kama Shastra Society, 1885-[1887?]), 207.

⁷¹ Ibid., 208.

⁷² Ibid., 209.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 205-206.

⁷⁵ See a discussion of Burton’s “sexual geography” in Richard Phillips, “Writing Travel and Mapping Sexuality: Richard Burton’s Sotadic Zone,” in *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing*, eds. James Duncan and Derek Gregory (New York: Routledge, 1999), 70-91.

“perverse” sexual mores of the colonized nations,⁷⁶ for his homosexual enthusiasts in Britain and abroad, it constituted a historical and ethnographic apology of same-sex love and provided practical directions for homosexually motivated travel and expatriation.⁷⁷

Burton’s Sotadic Zone included not only such faraway exotic locales as Japan or Brazil but also the long since familiar and routinely accessible Southern Europe, a popular holiday destination for many Northern Europeans and a well-established place of artistic and intellectual pilgrimage for those upper- and middle-class men interested in Hellenism and Renaissance culture.⁷⁸ Since the time of the Enlightenment and until recent days, Italy and Greece had held a special appeal to homosexual men as the glorious homeland of same-sex love, a romantic world of unbridled sensuality and corporeal emancipation and a place notorious for male prostitution.⁷⁹ Southern Europe attracted writers, artists and scholars who found inspiration in classical culture and its homosexual overtones and visited the region to experience the “seduction of the Mediterranean” first hand. Early in the nineteenth century, German Romantic poet August von Platen, famous for his

⁷⁶ Dane Kennedy, “‘Captain Burton’s Oriental Muck Heap’: *The Book of the Thousand Nights* and the Uses of Orientalism,” *Journal of British Studies* 39 (July 2000): 317–39.

⁷⁷ Collette Colligan, “‘A Race of Born Pederasts’: Sir Richard Burton, Homosexuality, and the Arabs,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 25, no. 1 (2003): 1-20. In her article, Colligan traces the influences that Burton’s theory of the Sotadic Zone had on the early British advocates of homosexual emancipation, including John Addington Symonds and Edward Carpenter (whose 1914 *Intermediate Types among Primitive Folk* was organized in the way similar to Burton’s “Terminal Essay” on pederasty), and the scores of homosexual tourists to North Africa. One of the most fascinating examples of Burton-influenced homosexual travel is the trip that British bisexual writer and mystic Aleister Crowley undertook in 1909 to the Sahara, where, with the help of his assistant Victor Neuburg, he performed “sex magick” rituals searching mystical revelations and the ultimate abnegation of self. Crowley’s journey was modeled after the adventures of Richard Burton, his lifelong hero (Crowley’s *Confessions* were dedicated to Burton, “the perfect pioneer of spiritual and physical adventure”), especially Burton’s famous 1853 trip to Mecca in a Muslim disguise. Alex Owen, “Aleister Crowley in the Desert,” in *Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 186-220.

⁷⁸ A detailed examination of the British tradition of leisure travel to Southern Europe is John Pemble, *The Mediterranean Passion: Victorians and Edwardians in the South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁷⁹ Robert Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean: Writing, Art and Homosexual Fantasy* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

homoerotic sonnets, moved to Italy practically permanently. Living there, he was as fascinated by the region's cultural riches as he was by its handsome men, the embodiments of the classical ideal of male beauty, and its openness to homosexual romance—"in Naples love between men is so common that one cannot choose to refuse the most daring demands," he remarked.⁸⁰ Symonds, who wrote the canonical nineteenth-century study of the Renaissance and used the notion of "Greek love" to advocate the moral superiority and social benefits of sexual relations between men, frequently traveled to Italy and in the last decade of his life developed an intimate "comradeship" with a Venetian gondolier Angelo Fusato.⁸¹ Southern Europe was also a comfortable retreat to those who were persecuted for their homosexuality at home; while in Germany and Britain sex between men was punishable by law, in Italy it was not. Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, a renowned latinist and homosexual rights activist, moved to Italy in 1880, fleeing from the oppressive regime of Bismarck's Germany, and resided in Naples and later Aquila until his death.⁸² Wealthy French novelist Jacques d'Adelswärd-Fersen permanently relocated to Capri in 1904 after he was arrested in Paris on the charges of indecent conduct with minors. It was discovered that Adelswärd-Fersen organized costume parties in his apartment, called "black masses" by the press, that involved semi-naked schoolboys enacting classical scenes and

⁸⁰ August von Platen, *Tagebücher*, ed. Rüdiger Görner (Zurich: Manesse Verlag, 1990), 457, quot. in Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean*, 65. On von Platen, see Xavier Mayne, "The Life and Diary of an Uranian Poet: August von Platen, 1796-1835," in *The Intersexes: A History of Similisexuality as a Problem in Social Life* (New York: Arno Press, 1975 [1908]), 563-620; Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean*, 57-68.

⁸¹ On the role of Italy in Symonds's life and work, see Grosskurth, "Symonds's Italy," in *John Addington Symonds*, 236-261. On his relationship with Fusato, Symonds, *Memoirs*, 271-283; Ian Littlewood, "Symonds and Fusato," in *Sultry Climates*, 74-85.

⁸² Hubert Kennedy, "Last Years in Italy: 1880-1895," in *Ulrichs: The Life and Works of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, Pioneer of the Modern Gay Movement*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Peremptory Publications, 2002), 249-281.

masturbated some of them to orgasm. Moving to Capri after his six-month imprisonment, Adelswärd-Fersen built himself a Roman-inspired Villa Lysis where he lived with his Italian lover Nino Cesarini, a fifteen-year-old construction worker from Rome whom he brought to the island as his secretary.⁸³ The rich aristocrats and the eminent men of letters were followed by their less famous acquaintances, often eccentric hangers-on like Frederick Rolfe (“Baron Corvo”), a minor writer whose *Venice Letters* describe his sexual escapades with Italian men and his work as a gondolier.⁸⁴

Besides Venice, two main homosexual colonies had developed in Italy by the turn of the century: Capri and the village of Taormina in Sicily. Since the late 1890s, the island of Capri had been famed throughout Europe for its impressive natural beauty as well as its sexual licentiousness, and attracted numerous foreign residents. One of the first to arrive was German artist Christian Wilhelm Allers who, after coming to the island in 1890, had a number of affairs with local youths (which eventually caused a scandal and prompted his relocation to German Samoa) and drew them in a variety of both realist and classical settings. Several British visitors arrived in the aftermath of Oscar Wilde’s 1895 trial, among them Somerset Maugham with his former lover John Eddingham Brooks, who remained on Capri until his death, becoming one of the permanent figures in the island’s expatriate community of homosexual men and lesbian women. German aristocrat and

⁸³ The most detailed and well-informed biography of Adelswärd-Fersen is Will H. L. Ogrinc, “A Shrine to Love and Sorrow: Jacques d’Adelswärd Fersen (1880-1923),” *Paidika: The Journal of Paedophilia* 3, no. 10 (Winter 1994): 30-58. See also a fictionalized account of Adelswärd-Fersen’s life in Capri in Roger Peyrefitte, *The Exile of Capri*, trans. Edward Hyams (London: Secker & Warburg, 1961 [1959]).

⁸⁴ Frederick Rolfe, *The Venice Letters*, ed. Cecil Woolf (London: Cecil & Amelia Woolf, 1974). On Rolfe, see also A. J. A. Symons, *The Quest for Corvo: Genius or Charlatan?* (London: Cassell, 1934) and Miriam J. Benkovitz, *Frederick Rolfe, Baron Corvo: A Biography* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1977). Rolfe was also a prolific photographer of semi-naked Italian youths, in the manner similar, if more casual and sexually explicit, to that of Wilhelm von Gloeden discussed below. On Rolfe’s photographs, see Donald Rosenthal, *The Photographs of Frederic Rolfe (Baron Corvo), 1860-1913* (Hanover: Elyseum Press, 2008).

industrialist Friedrich Krupp was instrumental in developing and promoting Capri as a tourist destination but fell victim to his homosexual escapades with Capresi boys in 1902 when his behavior was exposed in Germany by his political enemies. Adelswärd-Fersen was equally notorious for the extravagant parties he organized in his villa, his opium use and his overall decadent lifestyle. Personal gossip and literary portrayals of the sexually permissive atmosphere on the island reinforced its image as a mecca for wealthy and cultured homosexuals who continued to visit Capri throughout the first decades of the twentieth century.⁸⁵ If Capri was a homosexual resort of a sort, Taormina was rather a place of pilgrimage to meet and buy pictures from its most famous resident, German photographer Wilhelm von Gloeden who moved to Sicily in 1879, suffering from tuberculosis. His work, which included peasant scenes, landscapes and homoerotic portraits of local boys, was highly praised at the time and was especially popular in the British “Uranian” circle.⁸⁶ The image of a Sicilian youth in classical costume and sexually suggestive pose has since become the most famous visual incarnation of the homosexual “Mediterranean myth.”

Robert Aldrich, in his insightful examination of sexually motivated travel to the Mediterranean, describes the “Mediterranean myth” as a “cultural and political creed” of many homosexual men living in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁸⁷ In many respects, young Italians were primitive others, little different from the “savages”

⁸⁵ On the homosexual colony in Capri, see Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean*, 125-134; James Money, *Capri: Island of Pleasure* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1986).

⁸⁶ Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean*, 143-152. On the role of von Gloeden’s photographs and those of his followers and imitators in the early homosexual networks in Britain and on the Continent, see Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 71-102.

⁸⁷ Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean*, 116.

encountered in the colonial lands or the uneducated lower classes at home. For many British and German visitors from the turn of the century, however, they were also conveyors of the classical culture in search of which homosexual men travelled southward. Italian youths were guides, literal and metaphorical, to the vestiges of Antiquity and the embodiments of the classical physiognomy—local fishermen and peasant boys were near universally described as Antinouses and Ganymedes. Their sexual complaisance and at times enthusiasm suggested the bygone era of culturally endorsed and celebrated pederastic love. The ignorance of many homosexual travelers about local social and economic realities, rather characteristic of tourist experiences in general, was only reinforced here by the fact that these men were essentially visiting an open-air museum of the homosexually tolerant classical past. Aldrich writes:

The South as visited by the northerners became a reincarnation of Antiquity, a classical theater in which they cast themselves as heroic actors. The visitors, modeling themselves on the ancients, were kings and philosophers, while the Italian youths were athletes, warriors, students and cup-bearers. The Northern homosexuals emotionally became the *erastai* [older mentors], the local boys the *eromenoi* [younger lovers]. ... These were exactly the terms ... in which homosexuality could be historically and culturally justified.⁸⁸

The “Mediterranean myth” is probably the most representative example of the crucial role that the self-liberating and self-affirming fantasy of erotically charged foreign land played in homosexual men’s experience of travel and expatriation. As correctly, if briefly, discussed by Aldrich, to be fulfilled such fantasy has to be projected on a particular kind of society: relatively distant, different in culture and religion, economically impoverished and characterized by traditional mores that allow some degree of sexual freedom to male

⁸⁸ Ibid., 167.

adolescents and young unmarried men.⁸⁹ These conditions enabled travel to such places to become a means of sexual and corporeal emancipation for those foreigners who, tormented by personal inhibitions and the fear of exposure at home, were able act on their unorthodox erotic desires abroad.

Probably the most famous literary example of sexual self-discovery in a foreign culture and, in Jonathan Dollimore's words, "one of the most significant modern narratives of homosexual liberation"⁹⁰ comes from the opposite side of the Mediterranean Sea and concerns prominent French novelist André Gide. What Italy was to British and German travelers, North Africa was to the French. It was a land of sun and sensuality, suggestive of the mysterious and luxuriant Orient, inhabited by the sexually uninhibited, if coarse and primitive, populace. It was also a place easily accessible from metropolitan France, while its Continental-style hotels and cafes and a large community of European settlers, at least in late-nineteenth-century Algiers, "made the exotic hospitable."⁹¹ North Africa, like the Orient in general, was associated in the popular imagination with a perverse sensuality that threatened and enticed and ultimately overwhelmed a visitor, prompting a dangerous but profound self-revelation.⁹² This was exactly the experience of twenty-four-year-old Gide, a middle-class Protestant struggling to reconcile his homosexual desires with a strict moral code of Christianity. Gide's sexual initiation took place on his trip to Algeria and Tunis in 1893-1894, where he met Oscar Wilde who arranged for Gide to have a private meeting

⁸⁹ Ibid., 172-178.

⁹⁰ Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 12.

⁹¹ Robert Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 338.

⁹² Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 186-190; Joseph A. Boone, "Vacation Cruises; Or, the Homoerotics of Orientalism," *PMLA* 110, no. 1 (January 1995), 89-107.

with a young flute player he saw in a cafe.⁹³ The boy's body was "so wild, so ardent, so somberly lascivious," and Gide's sex with him was deeply liberating to the writer. After living for years in "a frightful desert, full of wild unanswered appeals, aimless efforts, restlessness, struggles, exhausting dreams, false excitement and abominable depression," Gide at last experienced true sensual emancipation—"No scruple clouded my pleasure and no remorse followed it."⁹⁴ Gide's experiences in North Africa inspired his highly acclaimed novel *The Immoralist* that describes the sensual awakening and corporeal emancipation of its protagonist Michel, ill with tuberculosis, as he travels through Algeria. Opening his body to the sun and the pleasures of associating and having sex with Arab boys, Michel regains his health and loses his intellectual inhibitions, embracing the instinctual, "immoral" side of life.⁹⁵

North Africa retained its homoerotic appeal throughout the first half of the twentieth century, attracting numerous homosexual visitors, including writers François Augiéras and Jean Genet.⁹⁶ Its main lure, especially in the early postwar years, was the International Zone of Tangier, the biggest hub of expatriate communities on the African continent. The city, situated on the Strait of Gibraltar, possessed a special political status since 1923 as a neutral territory of shared Moroccan, French, Spanish, British, Italian, Belgian, Dutch, American and Portuguese jurisdiction; it remained an unregulated

⁹³ On Gide's homosexual self-discovery, see André Gide, *If It Die...: An Autobiography*, trans. Dorothy Bussy (New York: Vintage, 1957 [1920]), 237-310. On his meeting with Wilde, see Dollimore, "Wilde and Gide in Algiers," in *Sexual Dissidence*, 3-20.

⁹⁴ Gide, *If It Die...*, 288-289.

⁹⁵ André Gide, *The Immoralist*, trans. Dorothy Bussy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1930 [1902]).

⁹⁶ For a detailed discussion of French homosexual men in North Africa, including Gide, see Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality*, 329-363.

economic zone until 1956.⁹⁷ Free trade brought to Tangier financial speculators, smugglers and semi-legal entrepreneurs of all sorts, while the city's lenient law enforcement, particularly favorable to foreign residents, and its reputation as a morally permissive no man's land appealed to sexual renegades of all sorts. By the early 1950s, Tangier harbored a large cosmopolitan colony of homosexual men that included prominent men of letters like Paul Bowles, wealthy aristocrats like David Herbert ("the Queen of Tangier") as well as a motley crew of misfits and lowlives like the notorious brothel owner Anthony Reithorst ("Dutch Tony") or journalist-cum-police informer David Woolman who introduced William S. Burroughs to the city's male prostitution scene.⁹⁸ These men found young male Tanjawi willing and uninhibited—and cheap⁹⁹—sexual partners, in many respects representative of the Western idea of vigorous, free-floating, untiring and perverse "Arab" sexuality, uncontaminated by the puritan morality of the Christian world. Such notions were inevitably projected upon local teenagers by many homosexual residents of Tangier or travelers to the region, and the former reportedly showed an unparalleled degree of sexual precocity and enthusiasm.

The difference between Western and non-Western sexual mores clearly played an important role in these cross-cultural homosexual relations but what really organized them

⁹⁷ On the political history of the early-twentieth-century Tangier, see Graham H. Stuart, *The International City of Tangier*, 2nd ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1955).

⁹⁸ On expatriate communities in Tangier, see Michelle Green, *The Dream at the End of the World: Paul Bowles and the Literary Renegades in Tangier* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991). For the analysis of the literary accounts of Tangier in the period, see Greg Mullins, *Colonial Affairs: Bowles, Burroughs, and Chester Write Tangier* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002); Michael K. Walonen, *Writing Tangier in the Postcolonial Transition: Space and Power in Expatriate and North African Literature* (London: Ashgate, 2011).

⁹⁹ While individual economic arrangements in long-term commercially based sexual relations with local young men certainly varied, a brief one-time encounter could cost as low as \$1 in the mid-1950s, according to Burroughs. This still seemed to have been a rather significant sum of money for the locals; the monthly wage of Bowles's Moroccan maid in 1958 was the meager \$8.33, food not included. Paul Bowles, "Worlds of Tangier," in *Travels: Collected Writing, 1950-93* (London: Sort Of Books, 2010), 237.

was a particular situation of cultural liminality that characterizes sexual encounters between foreigners and natives in general and of which the International Zone of Tangier was an epitome, historical as well as geographical. “The sins are finished” motif, frequently present in Paul Bowles’s writing on Tangier, sums up in the best way the kind of moral exemption that life in the International Zone made possible.¹⁰⁰ William S. Burroughs’s notion of “interzone,” a “composite city” originating not in the traditional family structures but in the disorderly migration of social outsiders from elsewhere who form an autonomous zone of depravity and debauchery, was also inspired by his life in Tangier in 1954-1958 and is a pervading theme of his most famous novel *Naked Lunch*.¹⁰¹ In the cultural loophole of the International Zone, both European moral precepts and local codes of behavior could be disposed of, producing a laissez-faire environment that offered unlimited sexual opportunities to the city’s expatriate community and was readily taken advantage by the impoverished local population who bartered sex, social company and overall noninterference into foreigners’ lives for various economic benefits, from money to household jobs. This setting was naturally conducive to individual quests of sexual self-discovery and rejuvenation of Gide’s *The Immoralist* kind, but the demand for such experiences very soon produced a large and organized sex market, with brothels, bathhouses and established patterns of solicitation and payment easily understood by both

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, Paul Bowles, *Let It Come Down* (New York: Random House, 1952). Set in Tangier, the novel tells a story of the moral corruption and downfall of an American bank teller who becomes involved with money thief and murder, as he attempts to make his way through the dark and chaotic life in the International Zone.

¹⁰¹ William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch: The Restored Text*, eds. James Grauerholz and Barry Miles (New York: Grove Press, 2003 [1959]); William S. Burroughs, *Interzone*, ed. James Grauerholz (New York: Viking, 1989). On Burroughs in Tangier, see Ted Morgan, “Tangier: 1954-1958,” in *Literary Outlaw: The Life and Times of William S. Burroughs* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1988), 234-271; Alan Hibbard, “Tangier and the Making of *Naked Lunch*,” in *Naked Lunch @50: Anniversary Essays*, eds. Oliver Harris and Ian MacFadyen (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2009), 56-64; Kurt Hemmer, “‘The Natives Are Getting Uppity’: Tangier and *Naked Lunch*,” in *Naked Lunch @50*, 65-72.

parties. The diary of British playwright Joe Orton, who visited Tangier in May-June 1967, presents, for example, a rather sordid picture of a hashish-infused sexual sojourn filled with countless Mohammeds (they are distinguished by nicknames “Mohammed (1),” “Mohammed Yellow-jersey,” “Mohammed Gold-tooth,” etc.) who persistently harass foreign visitors with obscene propositions and are “had” by Orton in large numbers and with little excitement. Orton’s diary communicates no self-revelation and much boredom.¹⁰² As remarked by Edward Said in his discussion of the Western travelers to the “Orient,” “what they looked for ... was a different type of sexuality, perhaps more libertine and less guilt-ridden; but even that quest, if repeated by enough people, could (and did) become as regulated and uniform as learning itself.”¹⁰³

The often blatant manner in which Orton described his sexual escapades with Moroccan youths is, to a certain degree, characteristic of the new forms that sexually motivated travel and exile took by the mid-twentieth century. Not all homosexual Westerners were as unabashed and practical in their sexual relations with the natives as was Orton, but the late Victorian elevated longings for self-revelation in the foreign lands certainly subsided, as the urban male homosexual communities became stronger and more visible in interwar Europe and United States. Mid-twentieth-century homosexual travelers to Italy, among whom were composer Cole Porter, writers Truman Capote and Gore Vidal, poet W. H. Auden, artists Carlyle Brown, Pavel Tchelitchew and the aforementioned Edward Melcarth, were representative in this regard. These men were certainly attracted to the cultural heritage of the Mediterranean and the large expatriate communities of other

¹⁰² Joe Orton, “Tangier: May-June 1967,” in *The Orton Diaries*, ed. John Lahr (London: Methuen, 1986), 155-225.

¹⁰³ Said, *Orientalism*, 190.

artists and literary men, but their relations with the local population lacked both the exotic and the emancipatory aspects of the earlier “sexual pilgrims.” The organizing logic of their contacts with young Italian men was, first and foremost, economic and resembled more and more the dynamic of commercial sex in their native countries. The classically informed rationalizations about the Mediterranean sensuality became less prominent and local boys were increasingly seen not as more homosexually tolerant in their innocence and lack of puritanical inhibitions but merely “wise,” experienced in sexual trade and thus easily approachable.

The diary of American poet and writer Charles Henri Ford who resided in Grottaferrata, Frascati and other small villages near Rome in the late 1940s and early 1950s, provides an insight into this changing reality of cross-cultural commercially-based sexual contacts. Ford was by no means a repressed or sexually tormented “urning” of the turn of the century. He actively participated in the urban homosexual subcultures of the interwar Paris and New York, producing with Parker Tyler in 1933 a controversial homosexually themed novel *The Young and the Evil*; he also lived openly with his partner Pavel Tchelitchew. His stay in Italy was motivated by Tchelitchew’s fragile health, not their idealistic desire for finding a land of sexual freedom or experiencing the liberating “seduction of the Mediterranean.” Ford merely took advantage of the numerous sexual opportunities presented to him and, following the already established pattern of sex tourism, enjoyed the cheapness and availability of local teenagers in the picturesque setting of the Southern Italy, particularly impoverished in the postwar years.

Ford's diary provides the details about the numerous sexual encounters he had with young Italian men.¹⁰⁴ Among them was, for example, Sisto, a twenty-one-year-old shepherd whom Ford met on his walk in the country. He casually approached the youth with questions about his family and work and proposed a picnic together on a secluded beach, during which he took his photographs and attempted to seduce him into having sex. The description of Sisto in Ford's diary—"teeth perfect, eyes rather as if he'd had a Chinese grandmother (Italian father), height medium, hair black as coal, smiling always, talking, lonesome, makes 200 lire a day (32¢)"¹⁰⁵—is typical in its blatant emphasis on the man's physicality as well as its mention of his meager pay; both were the necessary prerequisites for befriending Sisto and obtaining sex from him. Ford further remarked: "Sisto is the prettiest thing I ever saw in the world—to be so lonely! How to make him fond of me? By giving him presents, of course."¹⁰⁶ Ford encountered other peasant boys in a similar manner. Some days after, during another picnic, he spotted a nineteen-year-old goatherd Luigi and invited the youth to join him. They ate, went for a swim and, after drying off naked, engaged in mutual oral sex. Ford made a date with Luigi, arranging to see him the next day on the same beach, but, when Luigi did not show up, he approached another boy he saw swimming alone nearby, a seventeen-year-old Francesco, also a goatherd. Ford invited Francesco to eat with him and after lunch the two had a "masturbation party."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Charles Henri Ford, *Water from a Bucket: A Diary, 1948-1957* (New York: Turtle Point Press, 2001).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 87-88.

Ford's interest in the local peasant boys was, to a large degree, practical; they were the only sexual partners available in the remote rural villages where he stayed. But his erotic fascination with them was also rooted in his understanding of these villages' young male populace as "primitive," unrestrained in their sexual expression and uncomplicated in their sexual behavior towards him. He saw the boys as being close to nature due to their life in the country and work among animals, and therefore having a natural and spontaneous relation to their bodies. Writing about his sex with Luigi, for instance, Ford raved about Luigi's "unabashed simplicity and uninhibited impulse."¹⁰⁸ The thirty-year-old Carmen, brother of the caretaker of the house where Ford and Tchelitchew stayed, Ford characterized as a "real pagan" who was free from the repressive influence of puritanical morals.¹⁰⁹ Writing about Italian boys, Ford frequently compared their appearance and behavior to those of animals. He described plumber boy Ricardo as looking "slightly like a monkey that's had a human face grafted on."¹¹⁰ Quoting Tchelitchew saying that a fourteen-year-old milkboy Guerrero resembled to him "an animal that bites," Ford himself described Guerrero as a "pink-headed, dark-balled, hairy-based animal."¹¹¹ Vito "the Baby," a fifteen-year-old printer's apprentice with whom Ford developed a long-term relationship, he repeatedly referred to as "a beautiful animal," "a pretty animal," "an animal only."¹¹² Ford also described Vito as a "cat-boy," referring to his sometimes unruly behavior, and once wrote about him: "An animal, an animal—and, like an animal, he

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 88.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 180.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 182.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 76, 78.

¹¹² Ibid., 220, 235, 231.

doesn't always obey."¹¹³ On the other hand, it is clear from Ford's diary that his attitude towards Italian boys was twofold and combined the perception of them as "primitive," innocent and unrepressed with the awareness that, despite their often early age, they were "wise" about homosexuality and "sensible" about commercial sex. Ford regularly paid them and gave them gifts, from small things like cigarettes, candy or "paper-pictures" to costly items like a Swiss wristwatch that he presented Vito for his birthday. This traffic in money and material goods, however insignificant to Ford, was one of the main factors that enabled his sexual relations with these men.

Homosexual relations between foreigners and natives, as illustrated by Ford's case, were organized along the line of race/ethnicity/culture as well as that of class. Material inequality between homosexual visitors to economically underdeveloped countries and the young men living there played a fundamental role in the social and sexual interaction between the two. Even those men who in their native countries were far from well-off often found themselves treated "like gentry" when abroad; as foreigners, they were automatically assumed to be rich and were so, in fact, when compared to the destitute local population. The categories of race/ethnicity/culture and class further intersected, as both popular and scientific discourses, especially in the early decades of the twentieth century, regularly constructed the lower classes at home and colonial subjects abroad as fundamentally similar. Both were culturally alien, the "primitive" and "uncivilized" others whom Western bourgeois society was to surveil and regulate.¹¹⁴ This "otherness," even when re-imagined in more positive terms as sexual openness, versatility and the lack of puritan inhibitions

¹¹³ Ibid., 234, 212.

¹¹⁴ See, for example, an interesting discussion on the similarities in the racial and economic dynamic between colonial sexuality and cross-class relations in late Victorian Britain, in Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

about nakedness, was at the core of the erotic fantasies that homosexual Westerners had about sensual Sicilians, morally unscrupulous Arabs or animal-like Africans. When handsomely rewarded, these “others” were willing to enact such fantasies for foreigners, being released from the often strict norms that guided their sexual behavior with fellow compatriots. What was not allowed within their culture could be practiced for money and/or for pleasure with foreigners, leading the latter to believe that homosexual licentiousness was endemic and completely accepted in the erotic paradise of the faraway land.

With a diversity of primary sources documenting sexually motivated travel and exile of homosexual Europeans and North Americans, it is easy to see that their individual experiences naturally varied. There was no uniform “Westerner” or interchangeable “brown boy,” and the dynamic of the relations between the two inevitably varied, depending on the nature and scale of the traveler’s involvement in the foreign society, the purpose of his trips abroad, the sexual culture of the country he visited, his views on Western colonialism and many other factors. Alongside sex tourism reports, such as Joe Orton’s diaries, there are also numerous accounts of men who permanently relocated to colonial lands and became thoroughly integrated into a local society, like palm oil trader John Moray Stuart-Young who resided and worked in Nigeria in the 1920s and 1930s and was highly respected by local population for his contribution to the intellectual and economic development in the region.¹¹⁵ There are also examples of men for whom cross-cultural sexual relations and their anti-colonialist beliefs and political activism were closely connected; such is the story, for example, of Roger Casement, a prominent humanitarian

¹¹⁵ Stephanie Newell, *The Forger’s Tale: The Search for Odeziaku* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006).

who investigated labor exploitation in Congo and Brazil but also had sex with many foreign young men and chronicled these encounters in his private diaries.¹¹⁶ D. E. Mungello's recent study of the Western homosexual travelers and exiles to China, including Magnus Hirschfeld, W. Somerset Maugham as well as lesser known figures like Vincenz Hundhausen or Rewi Alley, similarly suggests the complexity of the individual men's motives, in which political sympathies, cultural fascination and sexual opportunity were thoroughly intertwined.¹¹⁷ What underlay all these experiences was the desire to escape the restrictions of one's native society and find in the foreign land and its racially and culturally "other" populace a different mode of living conducive to sexual pleasure and personal liberation.

Both the philanthropically inspired descent into the urban underworld and sexual travel and expatriation represented an important feature in the histories of many upper- and middle-class homosexual men in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Europe and North America. The effects of Western homophobia and bourgeois puritanism, they formulated homosexual subjectivity as deeply rooted in social escape, the desire to discover and realize one's unorthodox sexuality outside of one's community of birth. This logic was inevitably ambiguous and ethically problematic, as proletarian or colonial "others" were often nothing but passive actors paid to participate in the drama of self-revelation and emancipation enacted by their benefactors in the foreign space of the slum neighborhood or faraway exotic land. With near lack of first-person testimonies coming from lower-class or non-Western objects of desire, the other party in these cross-class and

¹¹⁶ Sawyer, *Roger Casement*; Dudgeon, *Roger Casement*.

¹¹⁷ D. E. Mungello, *Western Queers in China: Flight to the Land of Oz* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).

cross-cultural relations (see my discussion in the conclusion), it is difficult to say what they thought of their more affluent patrons and lovers. What we can argue with relative certainty, however, relying on a significant number of autobiographical accounts of upper- and middle-class homosexual men, is that for many of them the practice of sexually motivated “flight from domesticity” became an important means of understanding themselves and validating their unorthodox sexuality.

The study of Thomas Painter’s sexual record, which documents its author’s association with the world of “urban proletarians” and his search for sexual freedom in the community of lower-class Puerto Rican men allows one to trace the complex configurations of cross-class and cross-cultural relationships and analyze the role that the notion of sexually motivated social escape played in the lives of homosexual men of his class and generation. Painter’s record presents a first-hand testimony of a “queer” for whom the flight from an oppressive middle-class environment was something of a mission, a personal project of finding identity and freedom as well as love and companionship among the men who were very different from him in their social position, economic situation and cultural background. It also conveys a far less romantic story of a man who regularly used his economic privilege to obtain friendship and sex and was deeply embedded in the male prostitution milieu. It is this juncture of idealism and exploitation, the romantic and the commercial in Painter’s life and his personal attempts to negotiated these oppositions that this dissertation aims to explore.

Part Two. The Story

Chapter 2

“A Level of Society Which Is Willing to Accept Me for What I Am”: From Middle-Class Puritanism to Homosexual Emancipation in the Urban Underworld

In 1962, Wardell Pomeroy, who became Thomas Painter’s main addressee in the Institute for Sex Research after Alfred Kinsey’s death in 1956, asked Painter about the meaning of one of the photographs in his visual archive. The picture in question dating from 1960 depicted Painter together with a young Puerto Rican man, the “war lord” of the Fourth Street gang of “Dragons” Manuel Muñoz*. The two men were photographed in the mirror completely naked, their arms on each other’s shoulder, proudly showing their erect penises. This image was rather unusual among Painter’s photographs. He rarely took pictures of himself, and never in such a sexually explicit context, and preferred to photograph men in a more neutral, “artistic” manner, typical of the homoerotic physique photography of the period. His photograph with Manuel, on the contrary, was not only “obscene” but also served as a visual evidence of sexual relations between them. Why, after years of taking “safe” pictures that did not directly implicate him in having sex with his models, Painter decided on making one so different was Pomeroy’s question. Responding to it, Painter wrote in his journal:

I did it “for kicks,” shall we say. This is a phrase delinquents use. It usually means “in defiance of the Establishment.” And I guess that is as good a real reason in my case as any other. “Fuck the world” it means. And that sort of a photograph expresses it about as clearly, concretely and succinctly as possible. And I must confess—no, not confess but announce—that is about how I feel.¹

¹ Painter to Pomeroy, 26 April 1962, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 19.

Painter began the journal entry that discussed his photograph with Manuel with a recollection of his troubled relationship with his father who held rather conservative views about his family's social position and his sons' future careers. Wanting to challenge his authority as well as the whole middle-class system of expectations about respectability and success, Painter believed he was, at long last, able to do so by openly posing nude with his young lower-class lover. "What would he [the father] do—just plain go into orbit, I guess—if he saw that picture of me," Painter pondered in his journal.² Through this symbolic gesture, Painter attempted to finally break away from the dominant conventions of the social class he was born into, but it also represented his more intimate protest against the incapacitating bourgeois puritanism that tormented him for a larger part of his life. Throughout his youth, Painter remained pathologically shy of his nudity, uncomfortable about the physiology and bodily mechanics of sex between men and experienced conflicted feelings about reciprocity and affection in homosexual relations. Now, in his fifties, he took a bold step of being photographed completely naked and visibly aroused while embracing an equally naked man, whom he further described as one of the most responsive among his many sexual partners. This man's lower-class status—his being an economically marginalized immigrant and a member of the criminal underworld—played a fundamental role in the personal narrative of social rebellion and sexual liberation that Painter attempted to outline in his journal and autobiographical essays. Viewing lower-class men as "primitive," uncontaminated by the puritanical conventions and intellectual inhibitions of the middle class, Painter delighted in his daily association, for the purpose of sex and "research," with countless street hustlers, sailors, petty thieves, ex-convicts, gangsters and

² Ibid.

transient laborers. Defying middle-class norms of propriety and proscriptions against social mixing, Painter regarded his cross-class friendships as an avenue of homosexual self-discovery and corporeal emancipation.

Painter was born on November 6, 1905 in New York, the second son of Henry McMahon Painter, a prominent obstetrician and a member of the Social Register, a public directory of America's high society, and Carrie Stevens Painter of an old New England family, tracing its origins to the Puritan colonists of the *Mayflower*, who worked as a schoolteacher prior to her marriage. Before succeeding in his career, Painter's father went through a period of financial difficulties but, by the time his sons were born, he was making over fifty thousand dollars a year and his family enjoyed a more than comfortable lifestyle, first in their New York residence on Fifty-Fifth Street and Fifth Avenue and later in the wealthy suburb of Hawthorne, New York. Painter's accounts of his childhood and adolescence are striking in their repeated emphasis on his overwhelming loneliness as a boy and the debilitating boredom of his daily life. In different parts of his sexual record, Painter would reflect back on his early years but always with a feeling of sadness, disappointment and even anger; it was the life he did not enjoy at the time and later came to profoundly resent. "I read about 'happy childhood days' and about 'school days' and about the fun of adolescent days," Painter wrote to Kinsey in 1944. "Mine weren't especially miserable but they were blank, uneventful, time-killing years."³ Being a sickly child who was forced to stay home for long periods of time, Painter experienced very little social contact besides his immediate relatives, had no friends among his peers and rarely took part in outdoor activities. His relations with his parents were equally difficult. The

³ Thomas Painter, "Autobiography" (1944), unpublished essay, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 1, 12.

father, who from the time Painter was born had an affair with another woman, singer and folklorist Loraine Wyman, grew estranged from the family and was hardly ever at home. The mother, distressed by the situation, emotionally withdrew and refused to entertain her husband's affluent friends and partake in child-rearing or household chores. According to Painter, she suffered from the "excessively puritanical background" (as a young girl, she was not allowed to play with dolls on Sunday and made to read the Bible) and was an "icebox" with her children.⁴ Having no visitors at their place and no school "buddies" to play with, Painter felt shut away from the outside world and deprived of affection and everyday companionship. "I had no childhood, no adolescence. No home. No mother," he lamented. "Just years, a house and a preoccupied woman."⁵

Describing his dysfunctional home environment and his social isolation as a child, Painter held his puritanical upbringing and his childhood experiences living in the highly disciplined upper-middle-class household responsible for what he saw as the problems in his adult sexual development: his inhibitions about nudity, his late sexual awakening, even his erotic attraction towards men. Pondering the roots of his homosexuality and trying to explain his preference for a particular kind of sexual partners, Painter often returned to his early years, looking for the influences that could account for the cross-class trajectory of his sexual biography. Two themes appear as the most prominent in these accounts. The first is the young Painter's timidity, obedience and deeply installed respect of conventions that, according to him, coexisted with his idealization of masculine defiance in literary heroes and other boys. The second is Painter's profound discomfort with exposing his

⁴ Henry, *Sex Variants*, 373, 374.

⁵ Painter, "Autobiography," 12.

naked or semi-naked body, especially during his adolescence, that was similarly paralleled by his strong erotic interest in the muscular male physique and its nonchalant public display. Foregrounding these two aspects of his early life in his sexual record, Painter desired to convey to its readers a story of homosexual self-discovery and corporeal emancipation rooted in his rebellion against middle-class puritanism and enabled by his escape into the more open and accepting urban underworld.

Writing about his childhood and adolescence, Painter described himself as a timid, self-effacing, excessively self-conscious and insecure boy, prone to daydreaming, anxious about contacts with peers and dominated by his older, more assertive brother Sidney. He emphasized what an obedient son and a dutiful student he was—“a serious-minded, shy, zealous, God-awful teacher’s pet, a namby-pamby, very much in the society of middle-aged women.”⁶ At the same time, Painter admitted his admiration for his more disobedient peers and mentioned his romantic infatuations with them, such as his repeated, emotionally intense attempts to befriend “a tough, muscular, [and] independent” classmate whose smoking made him look “delinquent” in the twelve-year-old Painter’s eyes.⁷ He also discussed his fantasy alter ego that he developed at the time, that of the rebellious “Will Finch.” Will Finch was an ebullient and fearless youth who, revolting against bourgeois society, escaped to become a sailor and lead a life of freedom and adventure.⁸ This romantic idea of rebellion as an individualistic act of self-affirmation that presupposed rejection of authority and disregard for social expectations was fundamentally gendered. It was specifically masculine attitude and comportment that Painter felt he was lacking in his

⁶ Henry, *Sex Variants*, 375.

⁷ Painter, “Autobiography,” 18.

⁸ Thomas Painter, “Will Finch” (ca. 1973), Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 3, series II, D.2., Folder 1.

early years and suggested this lack was the cause of his lifelong attraction towards dominant, thoroughly virile young men. This “pet theory” of his Painter summed up in an early autobiographical essay he wrote for Kinsey: “You wanted to be unlike the proper model your family set but didn’t have the nerve—so you worshipped strong, young, delinquents. This worshipful attention finally set into a sexual attitude.”⁹ Eventually, pursuing such men as lovers, living and associating with them became, to Painter, an important means of realizing his ideal of sexual rebellion and social escape. At the end of his life, as he came to fully identify with the sexual underworld he was a part of, seeing the lawless living of his sexual partners being little different from his open life as a homosexual man, he wrote: “So perhaps I did become Will Finch, became what my earliest sexual urges wanted me to become. ... I revolted against my parents and the whole establishment they represented.”¹⁰

Painter’s adoration of robust and audacious youths was hardly uncommon for the boys of his social class and generation who, just like him, were avid readers of contemporary juvenile fiction in which Will Finch-like characters abounded. Stories like Louis Becke’s *Tom Wallis: A Tale of the South Seas* (1903) or Edward Stratemeyer’s *The Fort in the Wilderness: The Soldier Boys of the Indian Trails* (1905) described colonial explorations in exotic lands or rough life at the American frontier and promoted the masculine ideal of independence, courage and physical strength. It is no wonder that, feeling restrained, bored and unhappy in his middle-class surroundings, young Painter delighted in such fantasies of escape and adventure and imagined himself as a muscular

⁹ Painter, “Autobiography,” 18.

¹⁰ Painter, “Will Finch,” 4-5.

sailor in the open seas. Painter's adolescent identification with heroic masculine figures was deeply rooted in the ideologies of "muscular Christianity" and "strenuous living" that dominated the American social and political landscape of the early twentieth century and of which "boy literature" was one of the most effective cultural vehicles. Stemming from the popular anxieties about the emasculating effects that domestic life, urban environment and the mechanization of labor had on middle-class men, these ideologies of the new "mighty manhood" found its most influential proponent in Theodore Roosevelt, the "rough rider" of turn-of-the-century American politics. Roosevelt's biography was an adventure story in itself. His life as a ranchman in North Dakota, raising cattle and serving as a deputy sheriff, his heroic participation in the Spanish-American War of 1898, his 1909 safari in British East Africa with the purpose of collecting fauna specimens for the Smithsonian Institution and his 1913-1914 scientific expedition into unexplored regions of the Amazon jungle were widely publicized in the press and Roosevelt's own autobiographical writing. These accounts enjoyed mass appeal, reproduced in books like Hermann Hagedorn's *The Boys' Life of Theodore Roosevelt* (1918), and naturally captivated the young Painter's imagination. He described Roosevelt as his adolescent hero, and in 1918 even visited him in his house in nearby Oyster Bay, New York.¹¹

Roosevelt's ideas about "strenuous living" originated as a response to the supposedly diminishing masculinity of middle-class men brought about by their participation in modern life, devoid of competitive environments of aggressive warfare in which true virility could be developed and maintained. The story of Painter's gender anxieties exemplified the sense of masculine inadequacy that haunted many middle-class

¹¹ Thomas Painter, "Roosevelt, Theodore" entry in "The Index of Persons" (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 4.

boys and young men who found bourgeois styles of emotional reserve and physical restraint feminizing and disempowering. The Roosevelt-inspired cult of masculinity sought to reformulate the established opposition between respectable “civilization” and dangerous and immoral “primitiveness,” advocating escape from emasculating domesticity into the open arena of real-life battle, both literal (military conflict) and metaphorical (athletics, entrepreneurship, political service, etc.), in which manhood could be regenerated and re-energized. In her analysis of Roosevelt’s “politics of desire,” Sarah Watts outlines the discursive figure of the “cowboy soldier” as encapsulating the masculine ideal promoted by Roosevelt:

Enter a new type of charismatic male personality after 1870, a cowboy soldier operating in the new venue of the American West on sheer strength of will and physicality. Eastern readers immediately recognized him as more masculine precisely because he met the psychological desires in their imagination, making them into masters of their own fate, propelling them into violent adventure and comradeship, believing them at home in nature, not in the hothouse interiors of office buildings or middle-class homes. Writers pitched the cowboy ethos against ... domestic responsibility and the job demands that complicated men’s lives and dissolved their masculine will. ... Readers suspended ordinary morality as they fantasized about life at the margins of civilization and sampled forbidden pleasures of taming, busting, subduing, shooting, hanging, and killing.¹²

The concept of “primitiveness” (which, as I will discuss below, came to play a crucial role in Painter’s erotic fascination with lower-class men) acquired a new, more ambiguous meaning by the end of the nineteenth century. Previously associated with the evil and immorality of savagery, it was now understood as a valuable, if precarious, source of masculine renewal. As discussed by E. Anthony Rotundo, the middle-class male culture of the 1890s and 1900s was imbued with notions of men’s primal instincts and animal essence

¹² Sarah Watts, *Rough Rider in the White House: Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of Desire* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 124.

that were evoked to counterbalance the restraining authority of reason. Men compared themselves to “primitive” people, delighted in acting like “primitive” people and encouraged each other to learn from “primitive” people; “inner savage” had become the repository of masculine qualities of strength, dominance and self-reliance.¹³ These discourses inevitably influenced Painter’s views on his own and other men’s masculinity and his worship of hyper-virile heroes of the Will Finch kind. In fact, the adult Painter’s ideal erotic object—“a person defiant of convention, ruggedly individualistic, independent, frank, slightly coarse, even slightly brutal, outspoken, strong-minded, virile in every way”¹⁴—was very similar to the “cowboy soldier” figure celebrated by Roosevelt.

These new ideologies of masculine invigoration concerned not only the man’s character but his physical body as well. As discussed by Rotundo, the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries saw a renewed preoccupation with male embodiment re-imagined as central to one’s sense of manhood.¹⁵ The doctrine of “muscular Christianity” advocated a close connection between flesh and spirit and championed physical strength and health as crucial to one’s moral well-being and a necessary prerequisite for Christian deeds.¹⁶ The interest in athletics and fitness also increased dramatically in the face of public concerns about enervated and “flat-chested” middle-class men and boys. The Boy Scouts of America, founded in 1910, aimed to bring weakly house-bound “sissy” boys to the outdoors, where camping, vigorous exercise and team-building activities could mold

¹³ E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 227-232.

¹⁴ Henry, *Sex Variants*, 379.

¹⁵ Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 222-227.

¹⁶ Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

their body and character in accordance with the ideal of a strong-willed and hard-bodied man. Attending gymnasiums and participating in team sports was one of the most appealing of the recreational activities provided by the increasingly popular YMCAs, which used athletics to bring young men closer to the church and promoted physical culture as an instrument of combatting moral and physical sickness. A great admirer of Roosevelt, young Painter was inevitably exposed to these ideas of muscular manliness. He was familiar with Roosevelt's own story of transforming himself, though boxing, weight lifting and horse riding, from a sickly boy into a "cowboy soldier." His fascination with the virile protagonists of juvenile adventure stories also possessed an obvious corporeal dimension; their muscular bodies and physical strength appealed to him as much as their independent character.

In his sexual record, Painter identified male casual undress in public, in sports or during summertime outdoor activities, as the main focus of his earliest erotic memories. To Kinsey, Painter wrote about his first "mental picture ... [with] sexual content" dating from his early teens that involved his watching a classmate wearing a shirt with its sleeves rolled up so high as to expose the boy's well-developed biceps.¹⁷ In his late adolescence, the objects of Painter's erotic interest remained equally muscular and semi-naked; they were young handsome movie heroes who "kept having their shirts torn off, or removed in some ways"¹⁸ or bare-chested variety performers. He also mentioned writing stories for the school newspaper, with their protagonists being "always wonderfully muscled young athletes, as nearly naked as possible, undergoing desperate adventures as gladiators, slaves,

¹⁷ Painter to Alfred C. Kinsey, 22 June 1944, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 1.

¹⁸ Painter to Pomeroy, 7 May 1961, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 18.

pirates and explorers.”¹⁹ While Painter stressed that he was not conscious of any physical desire towards such men, he also remarked that, while at school, he often persuaded other boys to engage in semi-naked roughhousing that allowed him to observe and touch their bodies. He wrote about it, “I made a point of challenging such [athletic] boys to such ‘wrestling,’ and they innocently responded—and I got great pleasure from the close contact with their fine, young, muscular bodies, usually almost naked.”²⁰

While Painter was obviously excited about observing his muscular peers or engaging in casual body play with them, he also felt “desperately miserable” about what he saw as his own “physical and athletic limitations”²¹ and remained deeply anxious about undressing in front of others. According to Painter, his mother viewed the naked body as indecent and his father forced his sons to always “dress like gentlemen”—to wear a jacket, a tie and a hat—around the house.²² He described his brother as adhering to highly conservative views about male clothing even in the 1950s, for instance, strongly objecting to men wearing T-shirts in public.²³ Painter mentioned how the male members of his family would rarely appear bare-armed, let alone stripped to the waist or naked, in front of each other and emphasized the fact that he had never seen another person fully nude until the age of eighteen.²⁴ The result of his growing up in such a prudish environment was, according to Painter, his extreme self-consciousness about his physique, which he, in addition, viewed as “miserable, flabby, unmuscle” in comparison to his more athletic

¹⁹ Painter to Kinsey, 22 June 1944, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 1.

²⁰ Painter, “Autobiography,” 22.

²¹ Henry, *Sex Variants*, 376.

²² Painter to Cornelia Christenson, 21 June 1966, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 23.

²³ Painter to Pomeroy, 9 July 1957, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 14.

²⁴ Painter, “Autobiography,” 16.

peers.²⁵ While at boarding school, for example, Painter was so embarrassed about showering with other boys in the common shower area that he would go for months without bathing. “I don’t know whether I was more afraid of showing myself naked or seeing them,” he later wrote about this.²⁶ He also recounted an episode from his adolescence of his being terrified of exposing his naked body in front of a friend at whose house he was staying overnight—“frightened as a woman is of a brute.”²⁷

Painter considered this adolescent discomfort about nudity to be of prime importance to his sexual biography; he believed it was caused by his excessively puritanical middle-class upbringing and held it responsible for his sexual inhibitions as an adult. While such emphasis was certainly motivated by Painter’s desire to construct his biography as a narrative of cross-class escape into sexually emancipated world of “urban proletarians,” many of his assertions about the conservative atmosphere of his parents’ household could, in fact, be very close to the truth. In their study of the norms and rituals of bourgeois homes of the late nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth centuries, Jonas Frykman and Orvar Löfgren discuss the organizing role that the interrelated notions of moral decency and physical hygiene played in the formation of the middle-class regime of domestic self-discipline.²⁸ Frykman and Löfgren argue about the twofold status that the human body occupied in this regime: on one hand, the object of vigilant scrutiny and regulation, motivated by the desire to maintain physical cleanness and moral purity, while,

²⁵ Painter to Kinsey, 8 December 1944, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 1.

²⁶ Painter to Pomeroy, 4 December 1960, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 17.

²⁷ Henry, *Sex Variants*, 375-376.

²⁸ Jonas Frykman and Orvar Löfgren, “Bourgeois Discipline,” in *Culture Builders: A Historical Anthropology of Middle-Class Life*, trans. Alan Crozier (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 221-263.

on the other, something that was persistently denied its existence and concealed from public view. Bourgeois prohibitions, of course, concerned bodily functions (flatulence, belching, urination, etc.) but also casual undress; Frykman and Löfgren outline, for example, an intricate choreography of bathing with one's underclothes on, so as to prevent embarrassing exposure of one's "indecent" body parts. The naked body was hidden even from one's parents, spouses or children, and sleeping or having sex in the nude remained relatively rare until the mid-twentieth century. A similar picture of the zealous privatization and domestication of the human body arises from Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher's study of British sexual mores in the interwar period. The study's subjects reported being, for the most part, completely unaccustomed to seeing fully or partially naked bodies, both inside and outside the home, while growing up or even during their adult years.²⁹

The young Painter's near complete ignorance about his own genital functioning and the relatively late age of twenty-six at which he discovered masturbation and had his first orgasm suggest that, quite possibly, the atmosphere at his family home was indeed very conservative and prudish and, consequently, caused such belated sexual awakening. At the same time, Painter's late adolescence and early youth were not devoid of emotionally intense infatuations; he might have not been sexually active but he developed romantic relationships with other boys, which were clearly homoerotic in nature. These early affairs received little attention in Painter's sexual record (probably because, being originally written for Kinsey, it adopted his behaviorist, "outlet"-centered approach to sex) but seemed to play an important role in his erotic life at the time. Around the age of nineteen, while studying at Taft, a prestigious prep school in Watertown, Connecticut, Painter had a

²⁹ Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher, "Bodies," in *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution: Intimate Life in England 1918-1963* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 268-316.

“love affair” with another student three years his younger. Painter wrote about the boy: “He was very beautiful, an ideal youth, an athlete—everything I wasn’t. I called him my son and used to write poetry about him.”³⁰ It is possible that this affair, if rather typical of the boarding-school environment, prompted Painter’s interest in sexual matters. Later that year he read Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis*, which he encountered in his father’s library, and became for the first time aware of the sexual nature of his romantic interest in other boys. Confiding to his father that he might be homosexual, he was sent to see neurologist Stoddard Kennedy who, after two sessions, declared Painter’s homosexuality to be an adolescent phase;³¹ “He pooh-poohed it because I had hair up to my navel,” remarked Painter later.³²

This episode left Painter in an ambiguous position. On one hand, the exposure to the medical notion of homosexual “perversion” (Painter maintained that before reading Krafft-Ebing he had no idea that such thing as homosexuality even existed) only reinforced his already strong inhibitions about sex. On the other, being pronounced “normal,” he felt free to develop intimate friendships with other men, as long as they remained of an ostensibly spiritual nature and did not involve genital contact. The next six years of Painter’s life spent in Yale (1925-1931), first studying for his bachelor’s degree and then working as a graduate secretary of the Yale University Christian Association, reflected this somewhat ambivalent convergence of sexual repression with elevated same-sex friendships. As Painter described this period:

³⁰ Henry, *Sex Variants*, 376.

³¹ Thomas Painter, “Sexual History 1932 on. In spots.” (ca. 1937), Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 35, series IV, D. 2., Folder 22, n.p.

³² Henry, *Sex Variants*, 376.

All this time I went on with the feeling that I wasn't homosexual because the doctor said I couldn't be. I did nothing about it and kept on being more and more homosexual. Now and then I had affairs with college boys with some of whom I fell in love. One of the boys was very nice, very sensitive spiritually, loved poetry, had the highest ideals, was an athlete, had a beautiful body. The love was mutual, spiritual and intellectual, with little of the physical. In school you can stroke hair and rough-house and get away with it.³³

This pattern of same-sex relationships based on erotic longings unacknowledged by both parties and sublimated into a spiritual domain was relatively egalitarian, if sometimes characterized by a strong element of mentorship, and socially equal. It was rooted in the long-standing tradition of intimate friendships between men that thrived in the all-male boarding school or collegiate environments and were generally accepted by society, at least until the beginning of the twentieth century when the emerging medical discourses of sexual abnormality made them more and more questionable.³⁴ Painter's work in the University Christian Association further allowed him to develop and maintain such intimate and emotionally intense relationships without admitting to oneself their erotic nature or raising suspicions in others. As discussed by Gustav-Wrathall, close bonds between men were regarded positively by the YMCA leadership who saw them as instruments of evangelism and building blocks of Christian solidarity.³⁵ Working with

³³ Ibid., 377.

³⁴ See an example of such friendship, recorded in the diary of Albert Dodd who, while studying at Washington (now Trinity) College in Connecticut in the 1830s developed an intimate friendship with a fellow student John Heath and wrote about it: "It is not friendship merely which I feel for him, or it is friendship of the strongest kind. It is a heart-felt, a manly, a pure, deep, and fervent love." Katz, *Love Stories*, 26. This "love" caused Dodd a great deal of anxiety, but not so much because of its possibly "perverse" physical nature (although some concerns about "M. O." [mutual onanism?] were expressed by him) but because of rather mundane relationship issues like casual disagreements or concerns over reciprocity in affection. Being transferred to Yale in 1837, Dodd developed a similar affair there with a freshman Jabez Sidney Smith. Again, the emotional intensity of Dodd's "love" towards the young man did not bother him significantly but their age disparity did (Dodd was a senior). See a detailed discussion of Dodd's diary in Katz, "Dear Beloved Trio," in *Love Stories*, 26-32.

³⁵ Gustav-Wrathall, *Take the Young Stranger*, 45-55 and ff.

freshmen and having romantic affairs with some of them, Painter remained protected by this culturally legitimate paradigm of Christian fellowship as well as his own earnest adherence to the religious ideal of chastity. With some mental maneuvering, Painter could easily persuade himself that if there was no sex (and there still was none, not even masturbation), there was no homosexuality.

This situation was to change dramatically in 1931-1932 when Painter had his first encounter with the urban homosexual subculture, discovered masturbation and was initiated into sex with men. Some elements of the “spiritual” model of intimate male friendship remained important in Painter’s understanding of his subsequent sexual history, especially when it concerned his goal of reforming his lower-class lovers, but, on the whole, the transformation was radical, in many respects traumatic and eventually affected all aspects of Painter’s life. Despite Painter’s repeated statements about his exposure to lower-class communities being the cause of his sexual emancipation, his sexual awakening was, in reality, prompted by his travel abroad; all the events mentioned above happened when Painter was studying at Oxford University and visited the continent during school vacations. As I discussed in the previous part of this dissertation, one’s dislocation to a place where one’s identity is not known is naturally conducive to sexual experimentation and transgression. Sexual opportunities are inherent in traveling, be it expatriation to the faraway colonial locales or a weekend getaway to the nearby resort town. For Americans, Europe, of course, had long since possessed a reputation for its sexually permissive atmosphere, attracting many well-to-do visitors who traveled to London, Paris or Berlin in search of bohemian communities and easy sex. This was by no means the reason for

Painter's going to Oxford but, at the end, Europe had the same stimulating and liberating effect for him as it had for other homosexual men of his generation and social class.

Planning to pursue a career in teaching biblical history, Painter arrived in Oxford in October 1931 to begin his studies for a Bachelor of Divinity degree in Mansfield College. In December, during the Christmas "vac," he traveled to Munich where his friend from Yale took him to a homosexual tavern called "Swatzer Fisher" in one of the city's lower-class neighborhoods. In Munich, Painter also came across the homosexually-themed magazine *Die Insel* and assorted nudist publications, all of which he brought with him back to Oxford. It was while tracing nude figures from these magazines and making them into sadomasochistic drawings that Painter discovered masturbation and had his first orgasm,³⁶ he found it "very exciting" but was "shocked at the thought that [he] was a masturbator."³⁷ Painter's first sexual contact with another man occurred several months later. In July 1932, Painter went bicycling across Germany and Austria and in Vienna frequented its many open-air swimming pools, observing local young men in revealing "proletarian" swimsuits ("gee-string" trunks with no top) that he had never seen in the United States. Visiting a men's bathhouse in Gänsehäufel, Vienna's popular lido on the Danube river, Painter was approached and seduced by a "magnificent youth," a male prostitute Lajos Halász*, who clandestinely masturbated him till orgasm.³⁸ "I remember wondering why he did that," Painter remarked later,³⁹ emphasizing his profound ignorance about sexual matters at the time and his complete unfamiliarity with the routine of male-to-male sexual contact in

³⁶ Thomas Painter, "Brief Chronology, 1918-1945" (n. d., ca. 1970?), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 1 ("Chronologies/Indices/Keys"), n. p.

³⁷ Henry, *Sex Variants*, 377.

³⁸ Painter, "Brief Chronology," n. p.

³⁹ Henry, *Sex Variants*, 378.

anonymous urban settings.⁴⁰ On their second meeting, they went to Halász's apartment and had sex again, now in the manner that included mutual body rubbing—the sexual technique of “frictation” that was to become Painter's favorite.⁴¹ Finding bodily contact with a man to be immensely satisfying, Painter was, at the same time, deeply upset about the fact of his engaging in the “sinful” homosexual relations. He mentioned being so shaken by what had happened that, while the young man was still in the room, he started crying and went down on his knees praying and promising himself to never do it again.⁴² He did it, nevertheless, several times while traveling with Halász to Venice and Florence but was tormented by a profound sense of guilt. Describing the emotional turmoil that accompanied his sexual relations with Halász, Painter observed later:

I was severely traumatized by my summer experience and its intense conflict with my puritanism of up-bringing, my religious idealism of purity and chastity, even my sense of the aesthetic and good taste. (As Father called it—it was “sordid.”) I was so disturbed, in fact, it was physically visible, and an observer who had no idea anything was wrong ... asked ... if I were ill.⁴³

⁴⁰ In summer 1931, prior to coming to Oxford, Painter went to the University of Chicago Summer School and occasionally visited the Jackson Park beach, a popular cruising locale for homosexual men and male hustlers at the time, where he innocently chatted with some of the beach's young male visitors. Being “completely ‘green’ and uninitiated,” however, Painter remained oblivious to this fact. He wrote about one such episode: “At the beach were the youths of Chicago, as it was Depression and no one—well, almost none—were working. There was a very handsome dark haired youth who had been in jail it seems, as he (pointedly, I now see) told me tales about the homosexual goings on in jail. It wasn't that I was timid or unwilling or shy or stupid, as I was none of them, it just never dawned on me that I was being indirectly propositioned. I had no idea at all that such beautiful and desirable youths would or could be available. ... Such casual sexuality, by such ‘nice’ looking boys was wholly unimaginable to me and beyond my comprehension.” Painter to Pomeroy, 4 December 1960, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 17.

⁴¹ Painter wrote to Kinsey about it: “My first act with the male prostitute in Vienna ... was to embrace him and caress his upper body. The next time I fondled his handsome abdominal muscles. With him in Italy I learned what became ritual with me, the simple technique of the frictator. He was an uncommunicative youth and obviously totally heterosexual, so allowed me to continue in this simple manner without suggestion or emendation. I got on top of him and rubbed my penis on his belly till I came, and that was the most of it. My hands and face stayed above his waist. I did not lick and had not even learned to kiss. I stroked his biceps and pectorals, embraced his chest, and that was all.” Painter to Kinsey, 22 June 1944, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 1.

⁴² Henry, *Sex Variants*, 378.

⁴³ Painter, “Brief Chronology,” n.p.

Painter confessed his sexual problems to his father, who was at the time living in France, and was advised to leave Oxford and return to New York to seek treatment with psychoanalyst Alfred Adler.

Coming back to New York in September 1932, Painter entered Union Theological Seminary where he continued his graduate research on the Old Testament. He also began regularly seeing Adler who by then had immigrated to the United States and was practicing in New York. Adler regarded homosexuality, as he did about everything in his clinical practice, as being caused by one's inferiority complex and problems in social adjustment. He described Painter's "struggle as a second and youngest child against his older brother" as well as his admiration for his father as critical factors in his sexual development; he, therefore, considered Painter's choice of men as objects of desire to be a compensation for his own inadequacy as a man.⁴⁴ Adler attempted to resolve what he perceived as the conflict between Painter's "striving for superiority" and his fear of failure and in this way overcome his homosexuality but was not very successful at it. After seventy-five sessions, Adler pronounced Painter "too obstinate" and terminated the treatment.⁴⁵ Discouraged about his chances of being cured, Painter resumed his cautious explorations of the urban homosexual subculture, looking for places where he could observe naked men or encounter male prostitutes. In October 1933, he had two unsatisfying experiences with other

⁴⁴ Alfred Adler, *The Collected Clinical Works of Alfred Adler*, ed. Henry T. Stein, vol. 12, *The General System of Individual Psychology* (Bellingham: Classical Adlerian Translation Project, 2006), 171-172. Painter's name is not used in the presentation of this case study but the details of its subject's early life, for instance the imaginary kingdoms that the two brothers were competing about, make it clear that Adler was discussing Painter's life history.

⁴⁵ In his presentation of Painter's case study, Adler claimed he was able to "bring him nearer to the other sex, to remove his resistance, to get him give up his homosexuality." Adler, *General System*, 172. Judging from Painter's own account, this seems completely untrue.

homosexual men who cruised him near Riverside Drive; he fellated one and anally penetrated the other but enjoyed neither practice. Seeking masculine-looking hustlers instead, he consulted his homosexual friends from Yale and was informed they were frequenting Times Square.

In November 1933, Painter met his first hustler Bill Flaherty*, “a big, tall, husky blond with a cheerful, pleasant all-American looking face,”⁴⁶ whom he spotted on the street, followed into a Forty-Second Street movie theater and, after a brief conversation, took to a nearby hotel for sex. Flaherty was instrumental in initiating Painter in the ways of commercial sex; he acquainted him with the bars in the Times Square area frequented by hustlers and explained the routine of approaching them for sex. Another man, the “macho-ruggedly virile, independent-spirited, ... coarse and brutal” George Jansen*, whom Painter met in March 1934, introduced him to his many hustler friends and brought him to Matty Costello’s “peg house,” a homosexual brothel of which Painter was to become a regular customer.⁴⁷ Finding in George’s gang his ideal of aggressive, tough, masculine-looking and sexually “normal” young men, Painter began a period of close social and sexual association with them. After graduating from Union Seminary, where he lived in the dormitory with another student, Painter rented in September 1934 an apartment in a tenement building on 109th Street near Riverside Drive, where he could now freely and safely entertain such company. Hiring an Italian man “Blackie,” whom he met at Matty’s brothel, as a live-in lover and cook, Painter made his place into an open house for a group of Forty-Second Street hustlers who were coming over at random hours to eat, sleep, socialize and have sex

⁴⁶ Thomas Painter, “D.—, Bill” entry in “The Index of Persons” (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 2.

⁴⁷ Thomas Painter, “K.—, George” entry in “The Index of Persons” (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 3.

with him. Writing about the “ranch,” as he referred to his 109th Street place, Painter described it as “simply a den of prostitutes and thieves, with [him] as their meal ticket—and as one of them.”⁴⁸ According to his sexual record, in the period from March 1934 until March 1935 when Painter lived at the “ranch,” he had sex with more than thirty different men—a striking contrast to the near-celibacy of his youth.⁴⁹

In his sexual record, Painter identified the period of 1934-1935 as the turning point in his biography that marked the beginning of his radical dissociation from the upper-middle-class milieu he was born into. This dissociation was, in large part, motivated by Painter’s conscious and voluntary decision to distance himself from the puritanism of the rich and privileged among whom he could not be open about his homosexuality or find the kind of sexual partners he found attractive. In many respects, however, it was also a forced separation, prompted by the extremely negative reaction of Painter’s relatives, friends and colleagues to his unconventional (and, in their view, “immoral” and “perverse”) sexual desires and behavior. As much as Painter was lured by the sexual freedom of the urban underworld, he was also propelled there by the all-permeating homophobia of the upper and middle classes. In comparison with the intricately choreographed double lives of many homosexual men from the early-twentieth-century America, who went at great lengths to hide their sexual relations with men and protect their public image as sexually “normal,” Painter’s outspokenness about his homosexual “problem” seems exceptional.

Some time upon returning from Europe, Painter visited his friends at Yale and, being naive about the possible consequences of such a confession, he informed them that

⁴⁸ Thomas Painter, “Tucker, Luther” entry in “The Index of Persons” (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 4.

⁴⁹ Thomas Painter, “Diary 1935,” 17 March 1935 entry, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 34, series IV, D.2., folder 19.

while away he had become an “overt homosexual.” “I wanted to be honest and open and frank,” he remarked. “I was an idealist and impractical and unworldly.” A major scandal naturally ensued, especially in the light of Painter’s previous work with freshmen at the University Christian Association; the new graduate secretary, Robert Brank Fulton, “declared he would resign if [Painter] were to set foot again on Campus.”⁵⁰ Through YMCA channels the news of Painter’s homosexuality reached Union Seminary and, while he was allowed to graduate, he soon discovered that he was effectively banned from any kind of religious or teaching work. The seminary administration made sure to notify all potential employers about Painter’s “idiosyncrasy” on the ground that it was “one of those things that [did] not affect merely [Painter], but the others.”⁵¹ When Painter, for example, applied for a teaching position at Mount Hermon School in Massachusetts, a Christian prep school for boys well-known for providing elite education to students from poor families, he was informed that, on account of his “problem,” “it would not be advisable for [him] to come [there]” and he was advised to “seek other kind of employment.”⁵² This social opprobrium did not entail immediate financial consequences for Painter; his father died in March 1934, leaving him a substantial inheritance with which he could enjoy a comfortable lifestyle and sponsor his numerous lovers. Psychologically, however, these events had a profound effect on Painter making him for the first time painfully aware of society’s unjust treatment of homosexual men.

⁵⁰ Painter, “Brief Chronology,” n.p.

⁵¹ Henri Sloane Coffin to Painter, 16 May 1936, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 34, series IV, D.2., folder 19.

⁵² Dave Porter to Painter, 15 July 1935, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 34, series IV, D.2., folder 19.

Feeling rejected by the religious community and his Yale friends, Painter found social acceptance and plentiful sexual opportunities in the lower-class semi-criminal milieu of male prostitution. Several reasons made “hustlers”—and by this name Painter identified a group of economically disenfranchised and socially marginalized lower-class men, often immigrant youth left without employment in the aftermath of the Great Depression, who lived off various semi-legal and illegal activities, including casual prostitution—particularly attractive to Painter as sexual partners and social companions. First of all, they epitomized Painter’s masculine ideal of independent-minded, strong-willed men, thoroughly virile in their appearance and demeanor. They existed outside of the dominant society, showing defiant disregard for its norms and conventions and living according to their own principles of male honor, resourcefulness and courage; they were real-life embodiments of Painter’s Roosevelt-inspired romantic figure of “Will Finch.” Furthermore, contemptuous of middle-class values of respectability and social decorum, these men were tolerant of all kinds of sexual deviance and unorthodox domestic arrangements and showed no squeamishness about nudity. Being effectively bisexual, many of them had a long history of premarital and non-consensual sex with women and were willing and uninhibited partners in homosexual relations. Finally, regarding hustlers as social outcasts propelled into semi-criminal life in the urban underworld by their lack of education and employment opportunities, Painter was able to imagine his commercially based relationships with them in philanthropic terms and realize his otherwise frustrated ambitions of a social reformer. He deeply sympathized with their hardships and, driven by the religious ideal of cross-class “social brotherhood,” attempted to rescue them from poverty and dissuade them from delinquent activities.

One of the earliest entries in Painter's private diary dating from spring 1934 records his excitement about associating with hustlers and demonstrates the romantic nature of his fascination with the lower-class milieu of male prostitution. He characterized it as "an entire demimonde ... of virile, lawless natures floating about in a chaotic society" and called its members "rebels at heart," adding:

New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco—fleet about, no matter. Hand to mouth. Hustling, conning, rolling, skipping out on overdue rent, having a woman support him, riding the rails, working (but in no menial task—no these are proud and free spirits) as mechanics, harvesters, lumbermen, actors, etc., in and out of jail, drunk often, sexually utterly promiscuous, contemptuous of convention, of regulations and ordinances, and of, in general, the rights of other people.⁵³

Hustlers were hardly Roosevelt's nation-building "cowboy soldiers," but they possessed the same qualities of independence of mind, self-reliance and masculine pride that Painter had long since admired in men.⁵⁴ According to Painter, previous to his contact with hustlers in New York, he had the idea, possibly a result of his exposure to the German homosexual press, that "a male prostitute must look slinky and furtive, be skinny and pale and vicious-looking"⁵⁵—the image that essentially signaled his sexually perverse and gender deviant nature. Associating with George Jansen and his hustler friends, however, Painter was surprised to discover that they were essentially no different from other "proletarians"—the "primitive" figures regularly evoked by the Roosevelt-inspired

⁵³ Thomas Painter, "A diary written covering the Union Seminary period," 15 April 1934 entry, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 34, series IV, D.2., folder 18.

⁵⁴ Writing to Kinsey in 1944, Painter portrayed his ideal erotic object in the following way: "My type had been clearly demonstrated by the boys with whom I had lived and to whom I had been particularly attracted. ... They were big, tall, heavily muscular virile extroverts, extremely masculine and with all the usual male characteristics of thought and action of the rough and tumble, devil-may-care type of adventurous, feckless, fiercely independent, strong minded young athlete. They were tough, and had none of the niceties and refinements such as careful dressing and appearance, gentility of speech, behavior or manner." Painter to Kinsey, December 1944, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, D.2., vol. 1.

⁵⁵ Painter, "D.—, Bill."

discourses as the epitomes of true manliness and the sources of masculine renewal for the effete middle classes. Many of them were, in Painter's view, "sound and hard-working individuals," only "*faute de mieux*" engaged in prostitution.⁵⁶ Paying these men for sex and sponsoring their social activities, Painter was able to establish friend-like relations with the "urban proletariat" and valued them as conducive to his personal project of releasing himself from the restraining conventions of his social class, deeply installed in him since early childhood. He described the world of hustlers as "gorgeously refreshing—for the one who [had] been brought up as [he had]."⁵⁷

Several decades later, staying with his then lover and companion Efraín Rivera* in the "Puerto Rican" tenement building on Forsyth Street, Painter discussed the liberating effects of his living among the "primitive" people in the Lower East Side slum. He spoke of them as "frank and unaffected, open and simple" and used a German word *einfach*—literally meaning "one-fold" and, in Painter's own interpretation, "not concealed below the layers of civilized veneer"—to describe their "natural" approach to everyday situations.⁵⁸ Observing Efraín's younger brother Junior spending time with friends at the neighborhood bar, Painter contrasted the directness of the lower-class men's social manners with the emotional self-restraint and highly formalized rituals of social interaction of the upper and middle classes. He wrote about this:

I like to watch the abrupt, casual, primitive (I still haven't got the word) way they do things. He sits on a bar stool, takes his glass in his hand, drinks. There is a complete lack of elegance, refinement or poise (socially correct demeanor) about it. He flops, sprawls, straddles, perches on the stool any odd way. He grabs the glass, he pours, gulps it down. He enjoys it. He is

⁵⁶ Painter to Kinsey, 6 January 1952, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 9.

⁵⁷ Painter, "A diary," 15 April 1934 entry.

⁵⁸ Painter to Pomeroy, 9 June 1962, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 19.

doing, obviously, what he wants to do in the easiest, most direct and comfortable manner. If you stop to think of it, we don't. We were early taught to "sit properly," not "grab," not "gulp"—it is refined to pretend (by every bodily nuance) that you don't really need to eat or drink or that you don't really, primitively, enjoy it. ... And take Maxim [Junior's friend]. He was having a ball. He swayed and danced to the music, sang, bounced about all over the place, talking with companions he enjoyed. ... Of course this is not refined either. Certainly not in my family's Puritanical tradition, or Anglo-Saxon in general. You may enjoy a thing but quietly.⁵⁹

Of course, Painter never behaved in the way his lower-class lovers did and hardly ever exhibited the same unselfconscious attitude about things and spontaneity in social interaction; his frankness was, it seems, not instinctive but intellectual, rooted in his complex and regularly reappraised personal code of ethics. Yet, he felt a profound affinity with lower-class men, stemming from his erotic fascination with "primitive" masculinity and his personal quest for sexual freedom. "Being a frank soul myself, and desiring to be einfach," Painter declared, "I like this sort of thing very much, find it congenial and stimulating. In fact I am finding a level of society ... which is willing to accept me for what I am, without requiring of me that I pretend and sham and mask myself."⁶⁰

An important element in Painter's lifelong interest in hustlers was the alleged sexual openness of the lower-class communities to which they belonged. Describing the period of his living in the Lower East Side slum, he noted its inhabitants' exceptional tolerance of all forms of unconventional sexual behavior. He brought up an example of his female neighbor who lived in a common-law marriage and was in no way ashamed about this fact. "The woman across the hall doesn't 'admit' she is not married to the man living with her, she takes it for granted one knows and mentions it as a sort of problem like

⁵⁹ Painter to Pomeroy, 29 July 1961, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 18.

⁶⁰ Painter to Pomeroy, 9 June 1962, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 19.

measles or the high cost of, well shall we say, meat.” He also remarked about the building’s superintendent who, while fully aware of Painter’s unorthodox domestic arrangement with his younger male lover, was “not horrified, or distressed nor regard[ed] it as a dreadful secret.”⁶¹ Similar stories abounded in Painter’s biography, especially during the period of his association with young Puerto Rican immigrants whose families, despite their knowledge of Painter’s homosexuality, showed little concern about the nature of his relations with their sons and were, on the whole, friendly and welcoming. As I argue, discussing these relations in detail in the following chapters of this dissertation, there were strong economic reasons behind this sexual tolerance. For people existing at the very bottom of the socio-economic ladder, the question of morals were subjugated to material considerations and the outward laxity of their sexual mores was, in fact, a moral opportunism of sorts, a pragmatic acceptance of sexual deviance in the face of poverty and destitution. Remaining, for the most part, oblivious to the economic dimension behind the alleged sexual openness of the lower classes, Painter believed he had found a community of truly emancipated and liberal-minded people and thus could become a person like that himself.

At the same time, some aspects of the young lower-class men’s sexual norms and behavior did make them relatively open to homosexual contact, at least in comparison with men of higher social standing or older age group. In his analysis of the sexual cultures of the early-twentieth-century New York, George Chauncey argues for the commonness in the lower-class bachelor milieu of sailors, casual laborers and hoboes of the more

⁶¹ Ibid.

traditional, gender-stratified understanding of male-to-male sex.⁶² Viewing sexual “abnormality” not in terms of genital acts but gender deviance (essentially, various forms and degrees of effeminacy), lower-class men, often young and unmarried, were permitted to engage in sexual relations with other men as long as they remained normatively masculine themselves and adopted an “active,” insertive role in sexual intercourse. This lower-class regime of same-sex relations was based on what Chauncey calls the “male quest for pleasure and power” characterized by direct and, to some degree, indiscriminate attitude in obtaining sexual release and the close connection of male sexual pleasure to domination and even violence. Chauncey maintains that “a man’s occasional recourse to fairies did not prove he had homosexual desire for another man, as today’s hetero-homosexual binarism would insist, but only that he was interested in the forms of phallic pleasure a fairy could provide as well as a female prostitute could.”⁶³

Painter observed a similar openness to same-sex relations and overall sexual licentiousness in the life histories of his numerous lower-class lovers and companions. One Jimmy Stack*, for example, “a real tough 100% male young lout” whom Painter met hustling in a Times Square bar, was a former prizefighter and merchant marine. While in the Navy, he was often felled by other men and enjoyed the experience but usually preferred sex with women; his “heterosexual life” was, according to Painter, “extensive, rough and primitive, promiscuous and obscene.” Divorced from his wife, he regularly went “cunt hunting” with friends but would not turn down a sexual offer from a man, especially if handsomely rewarded. He saw “nothing at all wrong, shameful or deplorable about the

⁶² Chauncey, “Trades, Wolves, and the Boundaries of Normal Manhood,” in *Gay New York*, 65-97.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 97.

homosexual. Just less fun, that's all."⁶⁴ Another of Painter's sexual partners, "an ultra-virile, lower-class, hyper-sexed" boxer Howie Duval*, not only had sex with nearly all of Painter's homosexual friends but, being "equally uninhibited and enthusiastic" about sex with women, at one point had an affair with the wife of Painter's bisexual roommate Gerric Reid* (with whom he also had sex).⁶⁵ The sexual life of Jimmy Healey*, another of his lovers, Painter described as "as perverted as possible—old women, young boys, the homosexual; anything to defy society."⁶⁶ Alfred C. Kinsey's study confirms Painter's personal impressions about the widespread male-to-male sexual contact among the members of the urban underworld. According to his data, only 14% of his "underworld" interviewees never had sex with men, in comparison with 60% of working-class men, and 57% admitted "extensive" homosexual experience (more than twenty partners and/or fifty incidents).⁶⁷

Viewing lower-class hustlers as real-life embodiments of his erotic vision of hyper-virile youths while, at the same time, finding them to be unusually open to male-to-male sexual contact, Painter naturally considered these men ideal sexual partners. As far as his finances allowed, he was willing to have sex with as many as he could, and his life in the mid-1930s was characterized by an extraordinary degree of sexual promiscuity. Painter cruised the streets on a daily basis and thus met countless men; he also used the services of

⁶⁴ Thomas Painter, "D.—, Jimmy" entry in "The Index of Persons" (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 2.

⁶⁵ Thomas Painter, "S.—, Howie" entry in "The Index of Persons" (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 4.

⁶⁶ Thomas Painter, "F.—, Jimmy" entry in "The Index of Persons" (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 2.

⁶⁷ See a detailed analysis of Kinsey's data on his "underworld" subjects in Reay, *New York Hustlers*, 111-114.

procurers and frequented homosexual brothels. Writing about the brief period in the fall of 1935 when he lived together with his homosexual friend Al Zappone* (“Zaza”), he described it as a succession of “mad parties with strangers filling the place; both of us bringing home trade—and in the morning exchanging beds and partners.”⁶⁸ Yet this life was hardly an unrestrained pursuit of sexual pleasure, in Painter’s view. In fact, despite his idealization of what he saw as the lower-class men’s uncomplicated, matter-of-fact attitude about sex, he never really adopted it himself but instead understood his sexual escapades in the complex intellectual terms related to his interest in homosexual research work and social reform. To Painter, his sexual relations with hustlers were never about physical pleasure only (the “sex for sex’s sake” approach that he admired in the uninhibited “proletarians”) but were a means to other, non-physical goals—those of professional realization and romantic companionship. Associating and having sex with hustlers was, to him, something alike to fieldwork for his amateur ethnographic study of male prostitution that he began as an independent project in 1935 and continued for several decades with the support of Alfred C. Kinsey and his Institute for Sex Research. His promiscuity was similarly motivated by a higher purpose; it was a lifelong search for the “ideal friend,” a “lost boy” with a golden heart, troubled but morally sound, whom Painter could educate and reform in exchange for sex and companionship.

To understand how the discourses of philanthropy and social investigation influenced Painter’s personal vision of his cross-class homosexual relations with hustlers and other delinquent youth, it is important to briefly examine the history of his involvement in religious work in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Despite his early disillusionment with

⁶⁸ Painter, “Brief Chronology,” n. p.

the church, many of the ideas promoted by the Christian youth and reform movements, from the importance of building religious alliances across class lines to the social responsibility of the privileged and well-to-do towards disenfranchised youth affected by urban poverty, continued to shape his understanding of his interaction with young lower-class men. Prior to entering Yale in 1925, Painter already described his views as those of “a social reformer and ... an absolute pacifist,”⁶⁹ but his interest in social welfare and community work became even stronger when, as a sophomore, he joined the Yale University Christian Association. He soon rose to prominence in the Association and was elected its president in 1928; after graduation, he continued working as its graduate secretary for two years. Whereas Painter left practically no accounts of his religious work on campus, the records of the Christian Association’s activities from the period shed some light on the kind of ideas he might have been exposed to as its leader.

The Yale University Christian Association, founded in 1879, was one of the most influential student organizations on campus.⁷⁰ Closely affiliated with the Church of Christ of Yale University and the nationwide YMCA network, it provided a variety of religious, recreational and community services to Yale students with the purpose of helping them in “becoming more familiar with the active life of Christ, in applying His teachings in every day life and in spreading them further among their friends.”⁷¹ The Christian Association organized weekly Sunday classes and regular informal gatherings where freshmen could study the Bible and socialize with other Church-minded peers; it also worked with foreign

⁶⁹ Henry, *Sex Variants*, 377.

⁷⁰ On the history of intercollegiate YMCA and its role in the campus life of American universities, see David P. Setran, *The College “Y”: Student Religion in the Era of Secularization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁷¹ “Large Budget Share Goes to Christian Association,” *Yale Daily News*, October 18, 1928.

students through its Cosmopolitan Club. The Association's activities were not only limited to the university campus, however, but targeted the town of New Haven as well, especially its working-class and immigrant communities. One such activity was the "Deputation and Americanization" work with immigrant populations that "consist[ed] in the explanation and teaching of English and Civics to persons applying for citizenship examinations."⁷² Another involved charity work in the Yale Hope Mission providing food, lodging and temporary employment to the homeless men of New Haven.⁷³

One of the most popular activities among the members of the University Christian Association was volunteer work in the New Haven Boys' Club, the first and one of the largest boys' clubs in the country, founded in 1874 by John C. Collins, a prominent Christian social reformer. Educated as a minister at the Yale School of Religion, Collins never served as clergy but instead devoted himself to city mission work with boys and young men of poor and immigrant backgrounds. In 1906, he inaugurated "The Friends of Boys," a nationwide movement for the education and welfare of lower-class teenagers. Aimed at preventing delinquency by providing the boys with more wholesome recreational opportunities and instilling in them the values of "good citizenship," Collins organized more than twenty-five boys' clubs across New England and promoted them as more efficient alternatives to reform schools.⁷⁴ By the 1920s, the Boys' Club had become an established institution in New Haven, operating in collaboration with the local YMCA and Yale University from its new building on Jefferson Street in the area mostly populated by

⁷² "Freshman Bible Class Is Opened by Dwight Hall," *Yale Daily News*, October 13, 1928.

⁷³ W. R. Chappell, "The Yale Hope Mission," *Yale Sheffield Monthly* 20, no. 7 (May 1914): 351-354.

⁷⁴ Everett Gleason Hill, *A Modern History of New Haven and Eastern New Haven County* (New York: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1918), vol. 2, 814-816.

Italian immigrants. The Boy's Club had over two hundred members, boys aged from twelve to seventeen, and arranged a variety of activities, from discussion groups and school tutoring to athletic coaching and outdoor camping in the summertime; most of them were supervised by Yale volunteers affiliated with the University Christian Association.⁷⁵ The philanthropic work in New Haven's lower-class neighborhoods was very popular among the Association's members, being presented as a mutually beneficial cross-class friendship between respectable college men and young underprivileged local boys. Praising the Association's projects with the Boy's Club, B. R. Ryall, one of the national YMCA's leaders, described their reciprocal, comradely spirit:

The Yale men enjoy it all quite as much as the boys do, and the result is that the boys, under the constant influence of high ideals, learn not only to excel in sports but also the practical meaning of American life and citizenship, while the college men frankly admit that they learn very many valuable and practical lessons from the boys.⁷⁶

While Painter left no records that would explain the specific details of his involvement in the philanthropic activities of the Yale University Christian Association, it is obvious that it significantly influenced many of his ideas about his cross-class sexual relations with hustlers and his homosexual research work. Much of what Kinsey later identified as Painter's "romantic idealism"—his understanding of homosexuality as a social problem, not a biological phenomenon, or his quixotic quest for the "ideal friend" among the lower classes—possibly sprang from his religious work at Yale. As discussed by Emily Mieras in her analysis of the settlement house projects of the University of Pennsylvania Christian Association in the early decades of the twentieth century, the

⁷⁵ "Social Welfare Work Described in Booklet," *Yale Daily News*, February 13, 1928.

⁷⁶ B. R. Ryall, "Where Yale Men Help," *Work With Boys: A Magazine of Methods* 16, no. 10 (December 1916): 409-411.

changing middle-class notions of gender and the cultural anxieties about the emasculating influences of civilization played an important role in Protestant Churches' activities on college campuses.⁷⁷ Fostering a new, both physically vigorous and socially conscious vision of masculinity, the YMCA encouraged the students' social welfare work with underprivileged youth as a means of, on one hand, reinvigorating their own sense of manhood through contact with the tough and virile lower classes and, on the other, reaffirming their masculinity through leadership in the reformist ventures aimed to rescue these unruly and criminally-inclined boys from the streets. Looking at Painter's own lifelong fascination with lower-class masculinity one cannot help but notice strong parallels with the ideas promoted by the Christian youth movements of the time. Equally present in Painter's life history is the theme of a socially useful mission, be it promoting research on homosexuality or helping "problem children" stop stealing and find honest work. The exceptional degree of Painter's personal investment in these endeavors and his overall commitment "to be 'good' and to do good,"⁷⁸ however incongruent with his real-life actions, attest to the roots of his missionary zeal in the Christian notion of moral action and Progressivist ideas about the social value of practical work.

Writing to his brother Sidney in February 1937, Painter described his frustration at the impossibility of pursuing a career in religious teaching but mentioned a different, equally socially useful vocation he had chosen for himself—that of an amateur social investigator of male homosexuality and prostitution.

The only possible reason for enduring life as fate and society have delimited

⁷⁷ Emily Mieras, "Tales from the Other Side of the Bridge: YMCA Manhood, Social Class and Social Reform in Turn-of-the-Twentieth-Century Philadelphia," *Gender & History* 17, no. 2 (August 2005): 409-440.

⁷⁸ Thomas Painter, "Long Search" (ca. 1973), unpublished essay, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 3, series II, D.2., folder 1, 5.

it for me is that I may some day be useful, useful in a great and enduring way. I had thought that that way was by teaching religion, but society has said no. So I must find that usefulness in my work, the homosexual research work.⁷⁹

The work Painter was referring to concerned his involvement in the activities of the Committee for the Study of Sex Variants, established in 1935 with the purpose of coordinating a variety of research projects on male and female homosexuality.⁸⁰ Painter's association with the Committee began in 1934 when he met Jan Gay (née Helen Reitman), an openly lesbian author and nudist activist who, inspired by her visit to Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute of Sexual Science in Berlin, was working on collecting homosexual life histories for a scientific study. Gay's research was supported by a medical doctor and birth control advocate Robert L. Dickinson who initiated the formation of an expert committee consisting of psychiatrists, physicians, sociologists and psychologists that was to supervise Gay's work and similar projects. Painter was enthusiastic about his participation in the Committee's activities; he willingly contributed his own life history and was instrumental in obtaining additional histories from hustlers and other homosexual men. Encouraged by Gay and Dickinson, he also decided to conduct his own study of homosexuality focusing specifically on the male prostitution milieu. This research project was completed in 1941 and took the form of a two-volume manuscript Painter called "Male Homosexuals and Their Prostitutes in Contemporary America."⁸¹

⁷⁹ Thomas Painter to Sidney Painter, 27 February 1937, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 35, series IV, D.2., folder 22.

⁸⁰ For a detailed analysis of the research activities of the Committee for the Study of Sex Variants (1935-1941) and Painter's participation in them, see Minton, "Jan Gay and the Sex Variants Committee, 1935-41," in *Departing from Deviance*, 33-57. See also Jennifer Terry, "Committee for the Study of Sex Variants," in *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 178-219.

⁸¹ See a detailed, insightful and sympathetic analysis of Painter's manuscript in Minton, "Thomas Painter and the Study of Male Prostitution, 1935-43," *Departing from Deviance*, 122-158.

During the mid-1930s, Painter's involvement in his amateur research work remained, for the most part, sporadic; it was sidetracked by Painter's continuous romantic and financial difficulties, and he actually began writing his book only around 1939. Back in 1935, he persuaded his friend from the Yale University Christian Association Luther Tucker, a son of a millionaire Carl Tucker, to sponsor his research with a private grant of five hundred dollars and then, by his own admission, proceeded to "[have] a ball—in the name of 'field research.'" ⁸² He was living with Zaza and turned their apartment into an "open house to [hustlers], with the result that [he] was sleeping with a different one most every night." ⁸³ These encounters would eventually form the basis of Painter's analysis of the underworld of male prostitution, as he portrayed it in his study, but at the time his ideas about his future book were rather vague and his commitment to writing it not particularly strong. ⁸⁴ However, thinking of himself as a social investigator and reformer and occasionally conducting library research or noting down his experiences with hustlers, he was able to believe that he was doing a socially significant and useful work, albeit unrecognized and unpaid, that was denied to him by the church. In this respect, Painter's life path was similar to that of Alfred A. Gross, another homosexual man associated with the sex variant study discussed in the previous chapter of this dissertation, who after being defrocked continued his social welfare work as a researcher of sex offenders.

⁸² Thomas Painter, "Biography VIII" (n.d., ca. 1970), Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 3, series II, D.2., Folder 1, 7.

⁸³ Painter, "Biography VIII," 8.

⁸⁴ After Painter asked his brother Sidney to provide him with additional finances for his male prostitution research, Sidney responded mentioning his doubts about Painter's project. "I hope that you are working at your book and that you have a clear purpose there, but I can feel confident about neither one. There also your object has changed every time you have told me about it. I should like to think you were going to do something and not just fritter the years away." Sidney Painter to Thomas Painter, ca. February 1937, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 35, series IV, D.2., folder 22.

Painter's social reform approach to the subject of male prostitution is already evident in the earliest of his autobiographical records, which attest to his exaltedly romantic view of the hustling world and the strong parallels he identified between the rough economic realities of lower-class life and his own experience of social exclusion as a homosexual man. Soon after meeting George Jansen and his gang of Forty-Second Street hustlers, he wrote in his diary:

Principally I am shocked at the social waste. There are [Jansen] and [Flaherty]—who in Russia would be shock-workers on a dam or giant farm or factory. Their musculature, strength, virility, enthusiasm, potential idealism, independence, pride and spirit of liberty. Here they are just a social menace. Fierce, proud spirits are not wanted in this social order. . . . The social order is wrong. And these disowned are part of the wreckage caused by its viciousness. . . . The social order is helling, sinful, blasphemous, intolerable. It does not give a decent chance; it warps, corrupts, crashes, emasculates, murders—and worse murders, say, tortures to death, the souls of men. . . . Criminals? Society is the criminator. Greedy, ruthless, feckless, calloused. Society is a hideous monstrum tremendum, engaged in devouring its own young, pausing now and then to scratch a flea and murmur “I believe in God the Father.”⁸⁵

In similar terms of social injustice and in the same language of a social problem exposé, he began his manuscript on male homosexuality and prostitution, depicting homosexual men as victims of popular prejudice and legal persecution.

Of this two million [homosexual] men and boys every individual is a living tragedy. . . . Inevitably it is a life of disillusion, bitterness, sordidness, frustration, loneliness and strangled hope. Always is the hand of society against him; any slight misstep or ill luck can bring arrest, blackmail, prison, social and financial ruin. And all this horrid thing comes upon him without his will and he is helpless to alter it.⁸⁶

Painter's writing was profoundly different from titillating journalistic accounts of city “vice,” for it inherently necessitated practical action: to improve the living conditions

⁸⁵ Painter, “A diary,” 15 April 1934 entry.

⁸⁶ Thomas Painter, “Male Homosexuals and Their Prostitutes” (1941), unpublished manuscript, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II.D.1., vol. 9 [1] “The Homosexual,” 4.

of the “urban proletariat” and provide decent employment to those involved in delinquent activities, to combat society’s intolerance of homosexual men, to promote medical research that would identify the causes of homosexuality and find a “cure” from it. As such, this approach was clearly influenced by the notion of active and socially conscious middle-class manhood promoted by the Christian youth and reform movements. This notion was at the core of what Painter described as his “deep but rather nebulous religious impulse”⁸⁷ and it was employed by him to envision a socially useful purpose in life (a particularly pressing issue for Painter in the second half of the 1930s when he did not have a regular job) and find a morally noble rationale for his cross-class contact with the urban underworld of male prostitution. Describing the motives behind his involvement in the homosexuality research work, Painter wrote to Kinsey in 1943:

I am primarily and unalterably motivated by a special brand of religion (of my own rational and emotional development) which leads me to believe that I must live in a certain manner. Circumstances have so grouped themselves in my life (as you know) so that homosexuality has been presented to me as my major problem. As I see it as a personal tragedy in my own life I similarly see it in society, multiplied by the number so effected. My religion impels me to do something about this mass tragedy. It impelled me ten years ago, and it still does.⁸⁸

Painter saw himself as a spokesperson for those “afflicted” by the homosexual “condition” and, in his book, advocated the creation of a special agency that would coordinate medical and social studies on homosexuality and disseminate their findings among the general public.

Painter’s ambitious plans were to never materialize; his manuscript remained unpublished, and the Committee for the Study of Sex Variants, unable to obtain additional

⁸⁷ Thomas Painter, “De Profundis,” addendum to “Male Homosexuals,” vol. 9 [1], 1.

⁸⁸ Painter to Kinsey, 30 December 1944, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 1.

funding, ceased its activities after the publication of the *Sex Variants* monograph in 1941. Painter did not, however, abandon his goal of scientifically informed sexual reform but rather found a more private and indirect way to work towards its accomplishment. This work was his unofficial collaboration with sex researcher Alfred C. Kinsey.⁸⁹ Kinsey, who had recently begun his large-scale study of the sexual behavior of Americans, was looking for contacts in the homosexual community and, through Dickinson, became acquainted with Painter's manuscript. Kinsey expressed serious reservations about its scientific value; he found it highly subjective and impressionistic and criticized Painter's view of homosexuality as a medical pathology and his desire for science to find a treatment for it. He nonetheless found Painter to be an avid observer of the homosexual world and suggested he keep a detailed journal of his sexual experiences, to which Painter enthusiastically agreed. In Kinsey, Painter found a scientific expert who was not only completely nonjudgmental of all kinds of sexual behavior but was also undertaking a important research project that could improve the legal and social situation of homosexual men. "I found him interesting, his ideas sound, his work eminently valuable," wrote Painter about the first time he met Kinsey. He described him as becoming something like a "father figure" towards whom he had the feelings of "respect, admiration and a sort of fond tolerance." Painter mentioned that Kinsey was doing the kind of research work that he wanted to do himself and, unable to join Kinsey's team because of his lack of qualifications and his openness about his homosexuality, he "used the side door" by

⁸⁹ For a detailed examination of Painter's relationship with Kinsey, see Minton "Towards Participatory Research on Homosexuality: Painter, Kinsey, and the Kinsey Institute, 1943-73," in *Departing from Deviance*, 159-218.

starting to write his sexual record.⁹⁰ This journal began in 1944 and took the form of Painter's correspondence with the Institute for Sex Research, averaging three letters per week. It was regularly emended and systematized by Painter into what eventually became his 11,000-page sexual record.

Kinsey was particularly curious about Painter's experiences with lower-class male prostitutes, and his regularly expressed affirmation of the great scientific value of Painter's autobiographical and auto-ethnographic writing, reassured the latter of the larger significance of his cross-class sexual relations. Painter was not only having sex with the "urban proletarians" but was, in a way, researching their sexual mores and behavior and thus contributing to broadening public knowledge on homosexuality and advancing the cause of sexual reform. Kinsey's interest in male-to-male commercial sex was rooted in his research hypothesis about a greater prevalence of sexual contact between men than had previously been thought and the fact that many of these men did not identify as homosexual. Lower-class hustlers, who saw themselves as sexually "normal" but regularly engaged in homosexual relations for money (and also for pleasure), were an important group in Kinsey's study, illustrating his thesis about the inapplicability of the rigid categories of homo- and heterosexual to the complex reality of human sexual behavior, famously theorized as his "heterosexual-homosexual rating scale."⁹¹ Painter reported to Kinsey all the details of his sexual experiences with lower-class hustlers, collected information about their social background and personal histories and provided ethnographic observations about the urban locales they frequented. He became one of the

⁹⁰ Painter to Pomeroy, 24 September 1961, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 18.

⁹¹ Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy and Clyde E. Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia and London: W. B. Saunders, 1948), 638-641.

most prolific contributors to Kinsey's research, supplying him with numerous contacts among hustlers and eventually producing a sexual journal and visual archive so large that Wardell Pomeroy characterized it "probably the most complete record of a human sexual life ever compiled."⁹² Painter himself described his sexual self-documentation project, undertaken with the support of the Kinsey Institute, as "the only valuable and lastingly valuable thing [he had] done in life."⁹³

There was, however, another, more private side to Painter's morally invested social and sexual interaction with the "urban proletarians"—his desire to establish mutually beneficial friend-like relations with his lower-class lovers that would transcend social and economic differences between them. Viewing society as unjust towards its most disenfranchised and marginalized members, he took it as a personal mission to help those at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder, albeit in a rather questionable way of paying them for company and sex. The earliest of Painter's accounts of his erotic interest in lower-class men already contain the idea of private philanthropy that would organize many of his cross-class affairs in his adult years. Recounting his adolescent infatuations with his less privileged (and inevitably more masculine) peers, he mentioned his desire to "reform" one of them, "a tough, muscular, independent sort of Irish kid" who smoked cigarettes and associated with "evil characters," and described the motives of his friendship with another as "the Squire's son aiding a poor peasant."⁹⁴ His romantic affairs at Yale were with the young men of a similar social background but the element of mentorship was present there

⁹² Wardell B. Pomeroy, *Dr. Kinsey and the Institute for Sex Research* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 169.

⁹³ Painter to Pomeroy, 27 September 1960, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 17.

⁹⁴ Painter, "Autobiography," 19-20.

as well, since these men were usually freshmen with whom Painter worked as a graduate secretary of the Christian Association. Whether Painter had any personal contact with the lower-class members of the New Haven Boys' Club we do not know, but he was clearly exposed to the ideas of spiritual guidance and religious fellowship promoted by the leaders of the YMCA. These ideas, however transformed to fit a rather different reality of male prostitution, were at the core of Painter's understanding of his romantic and sexual relations with hustlers.

The relations that many upper- and middle-class homosexual men, including Painter's own friends, had with "rough trade," to use the subcultural vernacular of the day, were often limited to a simple exchange of sexual services for money, uncomplicated by social interaction or emotional involvement. Painter, on the contrary, described himself as "almost unique in liking to associate with [his] sex objects, in enjoying their company."⁹⁵ To him, lower-class men were more than mere objects of erotic desire, and their appeal was not only physical but social and psychological as well. As I discussed earlier, Painter romanticized hustlers as embodiments of his ideal of social revolt and outcast living and regarded his everyday association with them as a way towards personal freedom and sexual emancipation. His open relations with them became a form of personal protest against the constraining conventions of his social class and the realization of his desire to spend his life among those he considered independent-minded and sexually uninhibited. The question that necessarily arises here is what did Painter have to offer these men? Why should they have found his company interesting and worthwhile, besides the obvious considerations of material gain? Attempting to envision the kind of cross-class relations that could be

⁹⁵ Painter to Pomeroy, 29 July 1961, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 18.

mutually beneficial and ethically unproblematic, Painter adopted a philanthropic approach that would allow him to think of his financial patronage as a means of rescuing his lower-class sexual partners from the life of poverty and crime.

One of Painter's favorite books, Willard Motley's bestselling novel *Knock on Any Door* (1947) provides an insight into the kind of relationship that he hoped to establish with his "proletarian" lovers. Described by Painter, as "the only treatment of an enlightened, realistic and sensible nature in English of the relationship between a slum boy ... and homosexuals,"⁹⁶ the novel tells the tragic story of Nick Romano, an Italian-American teenager from Denver whose family lost their business in the aftermath of the Great Depression and relocated to Chicago slums where Nick became involved with street delinquents. Living off muggings, robberies and hustling, Nick ends up killing a policeman in the holdup of a liquor store. He is soon caught, put to trial and sentenced to death by the electric chair.⁹⁷ Motley portrays the character of Nick Romano with great sympathy as a young man who, despite his antisocial activities and proneness to violence, is essentially a good person and merely a victim of the social-economic circumstances that propelled him into the life of crime. The figure of a "bad boy" with a heart of gold had an obvious appeal to Painter who viewed his lower-class lovers in a similar way, idealizing them as modern-day rebels against an unjust American society. What particularly attracted Painter in Motley's book was his portrayal of Nick's relationship with an older homosexual man Owen, "the unhappy man" he met at the cheap diner popular with "bums, tramps, drunks,

⁹⁶ Painter to Kinsey, 20 December 1947, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 4.

⁹⁷ Willard Motley, *Knock on Any Door* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1947). In 1949, the book was made into a motion picture, a dark courtroom drama of the same name directed by Nicholas Ray and starring Humphrey Bogart as Nick Romano's lawyer.

panhandlers, jackrollers, road-kids, [and] a few phoneys.”⁹⁸ Together with his delinquent friends, Nick often mugged and beat up “queers,” threatening to report them to the police for sexually assaulting minors if they complained. But with Owen, who showed kindness and concern for Nick’s troubles by buying him shoes, giving him money for food and letting him stay at his place, he developed intimate, friendly relations. Nick characterized Owen as “the only real friend he had” and “a guy he could depend on any time for anything.”⁹⁹ Painter possibly identified with Owen as the figure of a homosexual man who, by being genuinely sympathetic towards the hardships of street boys and very careful and considerate in sexually approaching them, could win their trust and become their true friend, not just another “phoney” they treated with contempt. Likewise, he was hoping to find a troubled but morally sound youth of the Nick Romano kind who was able to see beyond society’s prejudice against “queers” and was ready to reciprocate his affection.

The story of the intimate friendship between Owen and Nick Romano was not a fanciful literary concoction but was based on Willard Motley’s own experiences of everyday association and sexual relations with lower-class men.¹⁰⁰ An African-American writer renowned for his naturalistic depictions of slum life, Motley was, in fact, born into a relatively well-to-do Roman Catholic family, a single “colored” household in Chicago’s South Side, a German and Irish American middle-class neighborhood. His artistic and political interest in the urban underworld stemmed not from the personal experience of

⁹⁸ Ibid., 140. “Phoneys” was the slang term Nick used to describe homosexual men.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 295.

¹⁰⁰ On Willard Motley, see Robert E. Fleming, *Willard Motley* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978); Alan M. Wald, “Willard Motley (July 14, 1909—March 14, 1965),” in *Writers of the Black Chicago Renaissance*, ed. Steven C. Tracy (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 250-273; Alan M. Wald, “Red, Black, and Gay,” in *American Night: The Literary Left of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 201-215.

growing up poor but, rather similarly to Painter, from a conscious, romantically infused rebellion against the bourgeois aspirations and lifestyle of his parents.¹⁰¹ In his youth, Motley spent many months traveling across the country as a hobo, working odd jobs, eating at mission soup kitchens and even spending some time in jail, and in 1939 settled in Chicago's slum area of Maxwell Street, much to the dismay of his family. Living there, Motley became connected with the social workers and lower-class visitors of the nearby settlement project, the famous Hull House, and participated in founding of *Hull-House Magazine* in which some of his earliest fiction, mostly sketches of colorful multi-ethnic life in the neighborhood, was published. One of Motley's first short stories "The Beer Drinkers," written in 1940, already explored the theme of cross-class relations, portraying the relationship between an upper-middle-class girl and her proletarian lover, and expressed Motley's own conviction that "it is in the lower class, with all its apparent rough edges, that the true warmth and vigor are to be found in the modern world."¹⁰²

While particularly private about his sexual life, Motley, according to his friends' testimonies, had a number of both platonic and physical affairs with young lower-class men, mainly Italian and Latin American immigrants.¹⁰³ The character of Nick Romano

¹⁰¹ Motley's conflict with his parents was also related to the confusing and disturbing circumstances of his birth of which he became first aware as a teenager. His "parents," Pullman porter Archibald John Motley and school teacher Mary Frederica Huff Motley, were in reality his grandparents and raised him as their son, because of their daughter Florence Motley's young age of fourteen when she got pregnant. There were also rumors that Motley's biological father, who was a boarder at his family house, was also his grandmother's lover and infected her with syphilis. As remarked by Alan M. Wald, the discovery of these facts brought about Motley's "suspicion that the strong moral professions of his grandparents actually masked questionable behavior on their own part" and made him "convinced of the profound hypocrisy of the Black middle class, a principal ingredient of his proud self-identification as an outcast and partisan of all those on the bottom rung of society." Wald, "Willard Motley," 252.

¹⁰² Fleming, *Willard Motley*, 31.

¹⁰³ There are other curious parallels between Painter's and Motley's lives, related to their shared fascination with Latino immigrants and their erotically motivated travel to Puerto Rico and Mexico, respectively. Motley had been interested in Mexicans as friends, companions and sexual partners since his early youth. On his travel to California in 1937, he befriended some of the young Mexican immigrants living in Los Angeles,

was, for example, based on one Joe Nuaves, a Mexican teenager whom Motley met in August 1937 when the boy was in the Denver Detention Home for stealing a bicycle. He befriended Joe, corresponding with him and his family upon returning to Chicago, and visited him again in Denver in July 1938. In his diary, Motley noted:

We went out to Golden, Colorado, to the Boy's Industrial School this morning—12 miles distance—to see “my son”—Joe. . . . I feel that I've got to get Joe away from here and to Chicago—and soon—before it's too late. I feel that it was meant that I meet him so I could have an influence on his life. I believe that I could straighten him out, get him started right. He needs a chance. He has never had anything. He's been hurt and misunderstood and like most children has felt that the only way to get even is by hurting back. If I could take him to Chicago and raise him and get him started toward a useful place in the world I feel that I shall never accomplish a more worthwhile thing.¹⁰⁴

Motley got the chance to try and realize this ambition several years after when in May 1941 Joe, now seventeen, came to Chicago fleeing from the police. He moved in with Motley and the two lived together for several months until Joe, bored with his job, decided to quit and return to Denver. Around the same time, Motley met another lower-class youth, an eighteen-year-old Mike with whom he also developed a close friendship and attempted to dissuade from criminal activities. The plan backfired when Mike, having the key from

meeting their families and spending time together at the neighborhood poolrooms. In his diary, Motley recorded his great excitement about the “positively handsome” Mexican youths with “brown, dreamy, aloof eyes” and “Roman spear”-like carriage, describing them as “young princes of noble blood” and praising their politeness, friendliness and hospitality. Willard Motley, *The Diaries of Willard Motley*, ed. Jerome Klinkowitz (Ames: The Iowa State University Press, 1979), 134-136. Traveling in Mexico in 1951, Motley decided to settle there permanently, buying a house in a village near Mexico City and “adopting” two local boys, Raul and Sergio as his sons. While little is known about Motley's sexual life in exile and the nature of his relationship with these boys, his posthumous novel *Let Noon Be Fair* (1966), inspired by his life in Mexico, explores the corrupting effects of the sexual exploitation of the inhabitants of a tourist town of Las Casas by American visitors, both homo- and heterosexual. On Motley's Mexican writing, see Rebecca M. Schreiber, “Resort to Exile: Willard Motley's Writings on Postwar U.S. Tourism in Mexico,” in *Adventures into Mexico: American Tourism Beyond the Border*, ed. Nicholas Dagen Bloom (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 35-57; Aaron S. Lecklider, ““Get the Gringo Drunk’: Sex Tourism, Race, and Empire in Motley's Las Casas” (paper presented at the American Studies Association Annual Meeting, San Juan, Puerto Rico, November 2012); Fleming, *Willard Motley*, 117, 125.

¹⁰⁴ Motley, *Diaries*, 160-161.

Motley's apartment, stole his camera and typewriter; Mike returned them later, after Motley reassured him in a letter that he did not believe him "bad" or "criminal." Motley's sympathetic attitude towards "the poor, oppressed, young," rooted in his conviction that the unjust society was to blame for these men's criminality, was best expressed in the diary entry from October 1941, written in the aftermath of the episode with Mike:

I had encountered a "boy criminal's" vicious instincts; and I had found the "boy criminal" just a boy—neither good nor bad. A boy. And I like Mike and go on believing in him. And I know that there is a great good or—great evil—in Mike; that he is almost completely split between "good" and "bad." ... I wish that I could help bring the good in him to the surface.¹⁰⁵

Both Joe and Mike became the prototypes of the character of Nick Romano; "[Mike's] problems are Nick's problems, [and] Nick's problems are those of every "Nick" in the world, of almost every boy in a slum neighborhood," declared Motley.¹⁰⁶ Motley's philanthropic impulse was based not on his desire to instill in his young delinquent friends the moral values of the middle class but rather on his willingness to see through the tough realities of lower-class life and uncover the profound goodness in "boy criminals" like Joe or Mike.

Similarly to Motley, reforming his delinquent lovers became, to Painter, a personal mission, a goal that gave a noble meaning to his relationships that were otherwise morally suspect in their commercial basis and, on the whole, chaotic, dangerous and romantically unfulfilling. As he mentioned, discussing one particularly frustrating affair with a young Puerto Rican gangster:

I like problem children best. Their very recalcitrantion [*sic*] appeals to my

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 174.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. On the real-life prototypes of Nick Romano, see also Ann L. Rayson, "Prototypes for Nick Romano of *Knock on Any Door*: From the Diaries in the Collected Manuscripts of the Willard Motley Estate," *Negro American Literature Forum* 8, No. 3 (Autumn, 1974): 248-251.

appreciation of the rebel, being myself essentially a rebel and non-conformist I like a hard job, a problem, something that makes me work for my reward. Such as liking a hateful person until he likes you in spite of himself.¹⁰⁷

Aggressiveness, impulsiveness, recklessness and irresponsibility, chronic truancy and reluctance to work, criminal proclivities, proneness to drinking, gambling and drug use—all these social characteristics and personality traits of the street hustlers were naturally exasperating to Painter, but he also saw them as challenges he could work on trying to help these men, not merely take advantage of their poverty. Hosting casual get-togethers at his place or arranging various social activities together (road trips, visits to the beach, picnics, etc.), Painter aimed to establish a more intimate connection with “urban proletarians” and thus better understand their mores and psychology. He also believed such “treating” was the first, “getting-to-know” step toward developing a longer-lasting, sustaining and affectionate relationship, of the kind Owen had with Nick Romano, with some of them.

This juncture of cross-class homosexual relations and philanthropic work with “bad boys” became even stronger in the postwar years when Painter, after spending more than a decade essentially unemployed, began working as a probation officer in the New York City Children’s and Family Court.¹⁰⁸ This was, in many respects, the socially meaningful career Painter envisioned for himself. “Here I am paid for doing what I have been doing all my

¹⁰⁷ Painter to Pomeroy, 3 December 1960, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 17.

¹⁰⁸ Two years after his discharge from the Army, Painter was still showing little interest in finding regular employment; except for his military service in 1942-1945, he had not been working ever since his graduation from Union Seminary, living off inheritances and, after the war, his GI Bill payments. This fact increasingly worried Kinsey, with whom Painter by then established friendly relations, and he urged Painter to start working and become self-supportive as soon as possible. Refusing to leave New York, Painter rejected an offer to teach in a Negro college upstate but in April 1947, obtained a position as a probation officer through the Veteran’s Employment Agency. He continued to work first at Queens and later Brooklyn Probation Departments of the city’s Children and Family Court until February 1956 when he was asked to resign, when his homosexuality became somehow known.

life at my own expense—trying to help floundering boys,” he remarked about it.¹⁰⁹ Painter was very devoted to his probation work and, while it did not directly affect his sexual relations with his lower-class partners (he never sexually approached any of the boys he supervised and did not reveal his homosexuality to his colleagues), the parallels between the counseling services he provided to the parents of young offenders and his own efforts to help “problem children” are apparent.

In the last chapter of this dissertation I discuss the specific details of Painter’s history of commercially based sexual relations with lower-class men, situating them in the context of the complex realities of male prostitution in the period and analyzing the tensions and incongruences between Painter’s idealistic vision of cross-class friendship and his actual behavior towards his lovers. What I would like to emphasize here is that it is impossible to fully understand Painter’s sexual biography without taking into consideration the importance of his lifelong personal project of social rebellion and homosexual emancipation through philanthropic contact with the “urban proletariat.” Driven by his desire to break away from moral puritanism and emasculating influences of his social class, he wanted to spend his life among the hyper-virile and sexually emancipated “proletarians,” the rebels and outcasts reminiscent of his adolescent Roosevelt-inspired romantic figure of Will Finch. Deeply preoccupied with the moral side of his sexual behavior, however, Painter wished to see his daily association with lower-class men as mutually rewarding. He recognized these encounters to be immensely satisfying and liberating but, uncomfortable about their “sordid” exploitative underside, strived to

¹⁰⁹ Painter to Kinsey, 15 April 1947, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 4.

imagine and organize them as private reformatory endeavors that would equally benefit his paid lovers and companions.

Despite a number of individual circumstances that determined these rather idiosyncratic configurations of Painter's sexual history, his cross-class sexual relations with lower-class delinquent youth can also be seen as an example of the long-standing practice of erotically motivated escape into the urban underworld of "rough lads" as undertaken by the sexually ambiguous "workers with boys," discussed in the previous chapter of this dissertation, or homosexual members of the leftist artistic circles like Motley or Painter's close friend Edward Melcarth, whose influence on Painter's understanding of cross-class relations I will analyze below. The desire to be "one of the boys" in the community of sexually emancipated "urban proletarians" was at the core of Painter's sexual history. He delighted in the company of the men whom society considered dangerous outcasts—gangsters, petty thieves, hustlers, juvenile delinquents and assorted other lowlife characters—observing their exaggeratedly masculine styles of behavior and participating in their social activities. Frequenting working-class taverns or urban resorts, like Coney Island Beach, provided Painter with an easy opportunity to approach their young and muscular patrons for sex. But he also enjoyed everyday casual contact with these men for itself; at these moments, he felt himself to be Will Finch who managed to escape the hothouse environment of bourgeois life and found himself among young, virile and often semi-naked "proletarians."

Chapter 3

The Naked Proletarian: Amateur Photography and the Erotics of Lower-Class

Masculinity

In an autobiographical essays written in the early 1970s as an aid to his future biographer, Thomas Painter discussed one of the most prominent aspects of his sexual history: his lifelong interest in the male nude and his amateur practice of homoerotic photography. “No account of my [homosexual] career is really complete without the role photography played in it,” declared Painter and continued:

About 1950 I found it was simple to develop, print and enlarge at home. And I was very good at taking pictures. ... You ask a boy—any boy—to pose for you. It is legitimate, noncommittal, “decent,” respectable. He poses. You see him naked. ... You have a couple of hours to gauge his personality and behavior—see if you like him or not, to me a vital prerequisite to sex. If not, you pay him his posing fee and he leaves—perhaps surprised, even annoyed, at not being “propositioned,” but without recourse to complaint. If you do want him you can ask him, politely, at the end of the posing session. If the answer is no, that is that, but he gets his posing fee and no hard feeling—and certainly no surprise and indignation is in order: he expected it. ...

Photography I find, in short, a wonderful and almost indispensable adjunct to “making” any boy but a hustler. And finally, I take extreme pleasure in the taking of the pictures. I have almost no interest in the completed product other than satisfaction in having done a good job—maybe one, at times, could call it “a work of art.” I believe it is a creative function and satisfaction. All nicely mingled with sex.¹

Throughout his life, Painter produced a monumental archive of more than 2,700 photographs and photographic negatives of more than 400 subjects, most of them his “proletarian” lovers and companions, that served as a record of his engagement with

¹ Thomas Painter, “Biography V” (n.d., ca. 1970), Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 3, series II, D.2., Folder 1, 7-9.

amateur erotic production, a visual ethnography of the hustling world of the period and a pictorial complement to his sexual journal. He was also a part of a large network of homosexual men, a diverse coterie that included popular physique photographers like Lon of New York, members of the artistic circles like painter Edward Melcarth or otherwise undistinguished individuals like printer Alan Reimer^{*}, who regularly took erotic pictures of their sexual partners, exchanging them with their friends or selling them on the underground pornography market. Enjoying documentary-style erotic imagery, Painter was an avid collector of such photographs, and his scrapbook archive includes not only clippings from the commercially available physique magazines but countless private pictures taken by his homosexual friends and acquaintances.

Painter's practice of photographing "urban proletarians" for his private erotic use may seem slightly at odds with his religiously-inspired romantic ideal of cross-class philanthropic friendship. Admiring the muscular physique of a lower-class youth in the course of a nude posing session was clearly a kind of cross-class interaction rather different from "getting-to-know, a discovery, an exchange with him of our personalities ... achieved by quiet talk [and] observation"² that Painter posed as the foundation of truly intimate contact with his "proletarian" acquaintances and a prerequisite for his private reformatory endeavors. And yet, these two modes of cross-class engagement—philanthropic and what tentatively could be named "ocular" or even "voyeuristic"—were by no means incongruent or mutually exclusive.³ They both stemmed from the same aspects of Painter's biography:

² Painter to Christenson, 29 May 1966, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 23.

³ This difference between philanthropic and voyeuristic modes of contact with "proletarian" men is, of course, more of an analytical distinction, which is rarely clear-cut in the actual situations of cross-class interaction. This distinction is based, essentially, on whether the focus of the middle-class men's interest in lower-class youth is on their "character," often psychological and behavioral "badness" that requires social work intervention of institutional or private kind, or on their appearance and physicality. Thus, the episodes

his discontent with bourgeois puritanism and his perception of the lower classes as sexually and “sartorially” emancipated, his interest in religious work with youth, in which physical development was seen as inextricable from spiritual guidance in accordance with the doctrine of “muscular Christianity,” his adherence to the Progressivist ideal of manhood as at the same time socially active and physically strong. As a result, philanthropy and cross-class voyeurism appear deeply intertwined in Painter’s sexual history—the altruistic and the erotic facets of his lifelong association with the “urban proletariat.”

As argued by Seth Koven in his study of the sexual politics of Victorian slumming, visual representation of the deplorable living conditions of the poor had been an important element in the welfare activities of British philanthropists. The photographs of “street arabs” in ragged clothing exposing their naked limbs functioned as a visual evidence of the squalor and destitution that charities aimed to combat and, when juxtaposed with the images of rescued and reformed children, served as an advertisement of their success in this endeavor. According to Koven, the imagery of the lower-class “raggedness” became an inextricable part of the philanthropic discourse. The before-and-after photographs of waifs and strays were regularly used by philanthropist Thomas Barnardo in marketing and fundraising for his homes for poor children, while the widely publicized slum photographs by social investigator and reformer Jacob A. Riis, the author of *How the Other Half Lives*:

when Painter encouraged his lower-class lovers to find honest work or helped them when they were in jail could be classified as philanthropic but his erotically invested observations of the “urban proletariat” at Coney Island Beach as voyeuristic. Many situations discussed in his sexual record, however, are rather ambiguous, such as, for example, the picnics he organized for his Puerto Rican companions in Connecticut. They were obviously his attempts to provide delinquent youth with more wholesome types of recreational activities, away from the criminal milieu of the city, but in the course of them he delighted in observing these men swimming naked in the river or roughhousing in their undershirts. The difference between “ocular” and “voyeuristic” is even more uncertain; I use the former to describe the situations when Painter participated in the social activities he observed and the latter for his anonymous wandering around the lower-class neighborhoods or “proletarian” resorts.

Studies among the Tenements of New York (1890), is the most famous American example of this kind of work.⁴ Despite their ubiquity as visual capsules of the philanthropic narratives, such images, according to Koven, were nonetheless perceived as sexually ambiguous and ethically problematic; “raggedness” was “not only an effective visual marker of poverty but could also be a disturbingly erotic sign.”⁵ The focus on semi-nakedness of street children, whether real or artificially manipulated (as it was the case with Barnardo who deliberately dressed some of his subjects in rags), suggested the obscenity of poverty and constructed a transitional narrative of reform as “the physical and spiritual movement between indecency and decency, damnation and salvation, lost and found, homeless and domesticated.”⁶ While this imagery was supposed to evoke in the respectable middle-class viewers a sense of disgust and moral indignation and thus propel them into philanthropic action, it also provided a titillating spectacle of lower-class debasement and vice that encouraged another, erotically charged response to such pictures.

The private erotic appropriation of the images produced with the purposes of philanthropy and social investigation is best illustrated by the case of Victorian barrister Arthur J. Munby, famous for his diaries in which he documented his fetishistic obsession with large, robust, masculine-looking women engaged in hard menial work and his

⁴ On Barnardo’s photographs, see Alec McHoul, “Taking the Children: Some Reflections at a Distance on the Camera and Dr. Barnardo,” *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 5, no. 1 (1991): 32-50; Koven, “Dr. Barnardo’s Artistic Fictions: Photography, Sexuality, and the Ragged Child,” in *Slumming*, 88-139. On Riis, see Keith Gandal, “The Tourist Ethic and Photography,” in *The Virtues of the Vicious: Jacob Riis, Stephen Crane, and the Spectacle of the Slum* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 61-73; Christopher Carter, “Writing with Light: Jacob Riis’s Ambivalent Exposures,” *College English* 71, no. 2 (November 2008): 117-141.

⁵ Koven, *Slumming*, 118.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 120.

clandestine affair with maid-of-all-work Hannah Cullwick.⁷ Munby was an avid collector of the photographs of working-class women (scullions, dustwomen, fisherwomen, mudlarks, colliers, milkwomen, female plowmen, etc.), deliberately seeking the ones that depicted them “au naturel,” in the realist manner that highlighted their dirtiness, ragged clothing, rough and reddened skin, especially on their hands. He amassed a large archive of the photographs of “pit brow lasses,” young female colliers notorious for their “indecent” habit of wearing trousers while working at the mines, as well as house maids, often with the sleeves of their uniform rolled up exposing their large muscular arms.⁸ These photographs were commercially available, sold as tourist souvenirs by the photographic studios and local shops, but were purchased by Munby for quite a different use than originally intended. Their subjects’ working dress, the casualness of their naked body exposure, their musculature and physical strength—all these markers of class difference were perceived by Munby as erotically invested visual signs and reconstructed as such in his sexual role-play with his working-class mistress.

In his discussion of the history of homoerotic visual culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Thomas Waugh emphasizes the fact that, due to the legal and cultural censorship of sexually explicit (or even suggestive) photography, much of homosexual men’s engagement with the visual representations of male nudity and semi-nudity in the period was characterized by the subcultural appropriation of the imagery

⁷ On Munby, see Derek Hudson, *Munby, Man of Two Worlds: The Life and Diaries of Arthur J. Munby, 1828-1910* (London: John Murray, 1972); Leonore Davidoff, “Class and Gender in Victorian England: The Diaries of Arthur J. Munby and Hannah Cullwick,” *Feminist Studies* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 86-141; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

⁸ Sarah Edge, “The Power to Fix the Gaze: Gender and Class in Victorian Photographs of Pit-Brow Women,” *Visual Sociology* 13, no. 2 (1998): 37-56; Sarah Edge, “Urbanisation: Discourse Class Gender in Mid-Victorian Photographs of Maids—Reading the Archive of Arthur J. Munby,” *Critical Discourse Studies* 5, no. 4 (November 2008): 303-331.

originally produced with non-erotic purposes in mind. According to Waugh, nude is “automatically and fundamentally an erotic discourse”⁹ and, even if represented in the context of scientific illustration, photojournalism or an artistic aid, retains its potential of arousal—the quality that attracted to it the viewers who were principally interested in the erotic content of such images. Analyzing, for example, the mid-nineteenth-century market of semi-licit photographs of academic nudes (*académies*), Waugh describes how, originally produced for the purpose of assisting artists in drawing human figure, they soon attracted a large non-artistic audience of erotically motivated consumers. He further mentions that at the end of the century, when photographic technology became increasingly accessible, making it possible for the artists to take their own photographs, the market not only did not diminish but was flourishing instead, responding to the demands of non-artistic consumers by producing even more explicit images under the legal and cultural alibi of artistic aid.¹⁰ As I will demonstrate below, this artistic alibi—a system of image-making formulas and representational codes aimed to disguise the erotic intent and use of nude imagery behind the veil of the artistic—was regularly invoked by Painter in his practice of photographing the male nude and was a crucial element in the operation of the subcultural network of amateur pornographers of which he was a part. Before analyzing Painter’s own photographs and the context of their production, however, I would like to discuss what can be termed his erotic consumption, his appropriation of the mainstream imagery of male undress for his private erotic use.

⁹ Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 61-71.

Undoubtedly, the pleasures of collecting and contemplating the photographs of naked and semi-naked men occupied a central place in Painter's sexual biography. As I have mentioned above, the discovery of homosexual and nudist publications while in Germany prompted Painter's sexual awakening. His large scrapbook collection, consisting of mass-market images of the male nude as well as private photographs made by other homosexual men, attest to the continuing importance of homosexual erotica in his later life. Looking through these images and reading Painter's commentary about them, one cannot but notice one of the prominent features of the men depicted in them: that very class-marked "raggedness" of their clothing. Already in 1935, outlining his ideal sexual object in the notations he prepared for the sex variant study, Painter identified casual undress as a highly erotic attribute in the young men he desired:

A casual defiance of convention as to wearing of clothing—i.e. wearing too few, too light, or too much *en deshabille* clothing to suit the place or occasion is most erotic. A very "tough" youth in dress and manner, if otherwise physically desirable, is more exciting than one more conventional.¹¹

This remark followed Painter's description of the personality of his preferred lover—a hyper-virile, aggressive, frank, independent-minded "proletarian"—and established a profound connection between the lower-class youth's rebellious spirit and its outward expression in his disdain for the middle-class norms of appearance and dress. Bold and revealing styles of dress and the brazen exposure of naked body parts in public, characteristic of the "urban proletariat," not only allowed Painter an ocular access to these men's muscular and strong bodies but further confirmed his perception of them as

¹¹ Henry, *Sex Variants*, 379.

uncontaminated by bourgeois morals. In his view, their sexual openness and uninhibitedness best manifested itself in their “sartorial emancipation.”

Painter’s archive of erotic drawings, many of which depicted raggedly dressed “proletarian” men and various situations of forced stripping and public nudity, opens with the following statement: “My homosexuality is largely sprung . . . from my worship of the uninhibited, feckless, lusty contempt of convention, especially the taboo on exposure of the body.”¹² An early sketch included in this collection portrays what was a paradigmatic erotic figure for Painter: a young male in tattered clothing, his shirt so torn as to completely expose his muscular torso and arms (figs. 1-2). This image regularly reappears among Painter’s own photographs; he owned a number of similar garments (a shirt with its sleeves cut out, a nearly shredded polo shirt, etc.), which he often used as costumes for his models (fig. 3). What he enjoyed the most, however, was finding realist photographs of men in these clothes. With his penchant for documentary-style erotic imagery, he was looking for representations of lower-class undress that confirmed his view about the relaxed closing mores of the underclass.

Painter’s scrapbooks include a number of such photographs. One portrays “a worker on Boulder dam” dressed in a ragged undershirt, another a teenager standing in the middle of a playground wearing nothing but swimsuit and a cap.¹³ There is also a picture of one Edmund Marmur, a twenty-one-year-old “muscled Tarzan” who shot a stewardess in an attempt to “commandeer the plane to get to Africa to live in a jungle”;¹⁴ the clipping

¹² Thomas Painter, “Preface” to volume “Drawings 1: 1944-45,” Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, D.1., vol. 2, n. p.

¹³ Clippings “PPP-2” and “NNN,” Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 28, series IV, D.1.a.

¹⁴ “Escapes Gunman,” *Lethbridge Herald*, July 26, 1954.

from *The New York Post*, which Painter preserved, depicts the young man “show[ing] off his muscles in Seattle jail.”¹⁵ A number of “ethnographic” images are present in the collection as well. One is of a “somewhat negligently attired youth of Venezuela,” another of a topless “delinquent Mexican youth,” yet another of an Indian boy in rags whose pants “one feels ... would be shed easily and in good humor.”¹⁶ Painter’s scrapbooks also include countless photographs of boxers, swimmers, bathing soldiers, bodybuilders, wrestlers and other young men in various states of undress. Such archives of the pictures of semi-naked men collected from the popular press are by no means unknown to historians of homosexuality; the scrapbooks of writer and photographer Carl Van Vechten are probably the most famous example of such a practice of the homoerotic re-appropriation of mass-market imagery.¹⁷ Painter’s engagement with visual representation of male nudity possessed, however, a rather distinct feature; the photographs he collected not only provided him with aesthetic and erotic pleasure but also functioned in his imagination as a documentary evidence of the frank and unselfconscious attitude of the lower classes toward the human body. On the basis of his examination of the images of semi-naked “proletarians” published in popular magazines (two sailors wearing particularly skimpy trunks in 1937, bricklayers working shirtless outdoors in 1874, etc.), Painter, for example, produced an essay titled “Male American Costume, 1850-1950,” in which he expounded on his idea about the “sartorial emancipation” of the “urban proletariat,” illustrating it with his own drawings of lower-class costume, such as “Laborer, 1870 vs. 1950” or “Hoodlums,

¹⁵ Uncatalogued clipping, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 28, series IV, D.1.a.

¹⁶ Clippings “1,” “7” and “30-e,” Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 28, series IV, D.1.a.

¹⁷ On Van Vechten’s scrapbooks, see Weinberg, “‘Boy Crazy’.” See a brief discussion of the less known homoerotic scrapbooks from the first half of the twentieth century in Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 33-40.

1907 vs. 1940.” The essay communicated his view that clothes were a sign of “civilized” morality; those who were “savage” or “primitive,” and whose sexual norms were therefore more permissive and sexual behavior more uninhibited, were particularly prone to revealing their naked bodies in public.¹⁸

The images of semi-naked “proletarians” Painter collected for his scrapbooks or the drawings he made inspired by them were by no means philanthropic in the sense that Koven uses discussing slum photographs of the nineteenth-century reformers. Yet, the visual codes of nudity and social class they employed (or rather the codes Painter identified in his process of selecting and organizing the images and supplying brief notations about them) were strikingly similar; it was the same binary opposition between morality and licentiousness, clothing and undress, bourgeois home and undomesticated urban underworld that organized before-and-after charity postcards of Thomas Barnardo or the illustrations to the reformatory endeavors of the early-twentieth-century “workers with boys.” In his private erotic re-appropriation of this imagery, however, Painter radically reformulated these codes: “licentiousness” became sexual freedom, “undress” corporeal emancipation, “non-domesticity” an alternative form of all-male companionship and even kinship. The vector of his cross-class relations became, therefore, profoundly reversed. While the ideal of rescuing his delinquent lovers from the life of poverty and crime, and thus raising them in their social position, was repeatedly foregrounded by Painter in his accounts of his sexual history, the realities of his contact with lower-class men more often attest to his own regular descent into the world of the “urban proletariat.”

¹⁸ Thomas Painter, “Male American Costume, 1850-1950” (1950), unpublished essay, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 4, series II, D.2., Folder 11.

This “descent” was motivated, first and foremost, by Painter’s need to find sexual partners; it was, in simple terms, a practice of “cruising,” erotically motivated anonymous wanderings in the urban locales (parks, beaches, public restrooms, street corners, etc.) notorious for the presence of male prostitutes and other homosexual men in search of potential sexual partners. At times, Painter cruised “‘like demented,’ an average of seven hours a day—a couple of days twelve hours;”¹⁹ it was a monotonous, wearisome and unrewarding experience, rather different from its often romanticized portrayal in contemporary queer theory. “I find it highly futile and unsatisfactory,” lamented Painter, “an almost continuous frustration and humiliation, with no useful end served anyone.”²⁰ But it also contained its pleasures, the pleasures of contact, often merely ocular, with the world of lower-class men. The search for anonymity in homosexual cruising—what Chauncey, in his analysis of the sexual topographies of the early-twentieth-century New York, calls the “privacy found in public”²¹—situated middle-class homosexual men, like Painter, in the same urban spaces used by the lower classes for recreation. Living in the crowded and dilapidated tenement houses, underprivileged youth spent most of their leisure time outside, in the poolrooms, dance halls, neighborhood taverns, amusement arcades, beaches, public parks, swimming pools and playgrounds. (The public pattern of social life was particularly characteristic, for example, of the lower-class Puerto Rican immigrants who, being used to communal, open-door and open-air living in Puerto Rican slums, transposed it onto the streets of New York.) Public places of lower-class recreation

¹⁹ Painter to Kinsey, 1 November 1946, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 3.

²⁰ Painter to Kinsey, 5 October 1946, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 3.

²¹ Chauncey, “‘Privacy Could Only Be Had in Public’: Forging a Gay World in the Streets,” in *Gay New York*, 179-205.

became the main locus of Painter's interaction with the "urban proletariat." These contacts were often directly motivated by Painter's desire to befriend some of the young men he encountered sunbathing in Central Park or working out on the parallel bars in a Lower East Side playground and then approach them for photographs and sex, but equally often he was merely content with observing them in their routine activities, deriving a great aesthetic and erotic pleasure from what he regarded as an urban spectacle of casual male nudity. "I do really enjoy each preliminary contact for its own sake," he remarked, "and if I don't get to bed, a terminus which is never a sine qua non nor exquisitely essential, I have enjoyed the amount of contact I have had. Which is why I enjoy Coney Island."²²

A predominantly working-class summertime resort in Brooklyn, Coney Island was one of Painter's favorite cruising locales (fig. 4). He went there nearly every weekend of the summer season, roaming around looking for potential models and sexual partners, socializing with his acquaintances among bodybuilders who frequented "Muscle Corner," photographing young semi-naked beachgoers, suntanning in the nude in the nearby bathhouses. Easily accessed by public transportation and adjacent to a tenement-house neighborhood populated with Eastern and Southern European immigrants, Coney Island Beach was a popular place of recreation for the poor, the "slum New York transported to the sea front," in the words of a disgruntled contemporary observer.²³ It was divided into separate "Bays" corresponding to the city's ethnic neighborhoods and was frequented by working-class youth and families alike. An average weekend in the 1930s or 1940s brought more than a million of New Yorkers to "the People's Playground," allowing for less than

²² Painter to Kinsey, 5 July 1953, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 3.

²³ Sir Percival Phillips in *London Daily Mail*, quot. in Michael Immerso, *Coney Island: The People's Playground* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 127.

two square meters of sand space per bather.²⁴ With groups of semi-naked young people swimming in the ocean, roughhousing in the sand, dancing to juke boxes or loitering around the food stands, the beach was famous for its jubilant, carnivalesque and erotically charged atmosphere, famously captured in paintings by Reginald Marsh and Paul Cadmus and photographs by Henri Cartier-Bresson and Sid Grossman. Coney Island was regularly denounced for its huge crowds, dirt, noisiness and vulgar amusements but it was also celebrated for its particularly democratic sense of place and the open interaction between different social classes and ethnic groups it encouraged. One Italian immigrant, recounting a trip to Coney Island in 1925, described his feeling of personal liberation from the puritanical conventions of dress and everyday norms of interaction between social classes:

When you bathe at Coney Island you bathe in the American Jordan. It is holy water. Nowhere else in the United States will you see so many races mingle in a common purpose for a common good. Democracy meets here and has its first interview skin to skin. The garments of Puritanism are given a kick that sends them flying before the winds. Here you find the real interpretation of the Declaration of Independence. The most good for the greatest number. Tolerance. Freedom in the sense that everyone minds his business. In no place have I seen so many lovers as on this beach. On no beach so many wonderful children. Muscles that develop from labor, and beauty that sweats in factories meet here.²⁵

This quotation perfectly encapsulates the kind of pleasures Painter found in his visits to Coney Island, the social and sexual space that directly appealed to his interest in contact with the “urban proletariat” and his erotic fascination with casual male nudity. The beach setting was naturally conducive to unabashed body display; lower-class “Adonises” strutted down the boardwalk shirtless or in their undershirts, exposing their muscular

²⁴ On Coney Island in the period, see Immerso, *Coney Island*, 148-171; Stephen Weinstein, “The Nickel Empire: Coney Island, and the Creation of Urban Seaside Resorts in the United States” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1984), 272-300.

²⁵ Giuseppe Cautela, “Coney,” *The American Mercury* 6, no. 23 (November 1925): 283.

bodies, and sported skimpy bright-colored swimsuits when near the water. They were Painter's scrapbook photographs of raggedly dressed laborers and almost naked prizefighters brought to life. These men's frank, ebullient and erotically charged interaction with each other and especially with the young women who visited the beach attested to the laxity of the "proletarian" norms of courtship and the overall sexual uninhibitedness of the lower classes. Hanging around the stretch of rathskellers serving beer and food under the boardwalk, Painter observed its partially naked habitués, most of them immigrant youth from South Brooklyn, and delighted in the "demented, ... madly sexy, uninhibited and incredible"²⁶ ambiance of the place, its "atmosphere of sex, delinquency, sex, sordidness, and sex."²⁷ In his sexual journal, Painter described one afternoon he spent at such a rathskeller at the predominantly Italian "Bay 15":

The greater part of all this galaxy were attired in very brief trunks (which are becoming more and more usual—about 4 inches high on the flank starting at just about the pubic hair, and cut high in the back—so that the youth is wearing, actually, practically nothing, and tight at that). The two major beauties were wearing least, and in white (the most erotic color, especially in contrast to the brown body). They were standing around draped in all sorts of poses of relaxation, or dancing, or wrestling or "fighting," or pawing and fondling girls. A bunch of the boys in the bar were, with loud shouts of mirth, pouring the whole bottles of beer over each other (this was the tougher, tattooed group as opposed to the more calm and statuesque beauty group.) Swaggering young bucks were slapping, arm-twisting, kicking and tossing about and generally abusing screaming girls (who loved it). Everyone in sight (hundreds) was under 30, mostly male, all Italian, and about 80% sexually exciting in their muscularity and virility. ... Edward [Melcarth] and I both left gasping, ogling and incredulous.²⁸

²⁶ Painter to Kinsey, 12 July 1953, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 10.

²⁷ Painter to Kinsey, 9 September 1951, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 8. Adding pornographic "emendations," Painter portrayed this sexually charged atmosphere in a series of his drawings that portray the rathskellers at Coney Island Beach during nighttime, with naked men fellating and masturbating each other (fig. 5).

²⁸ Painter to Kinsey, 30 August 1953, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 10.

With its large and diverse crowd, Coney Island allowed a degree of anonymity that enabled middle-class homosexual men like Painter to mingle with predominantly lower-class beachgoers without discomfort or trouble. Moreover, many of the rathskellers were connected by underground passages to the nearby bathhouses some of which, like Washington or Stauch's Baths, were "queer"-friendly. Many homosexual men who visited the baths stopped by the downstairs taverns to escape from the sun, to have a drink and spend time in the company of masculine lower-class youths.

Another place Painter regularly visited to observe "urban proletarians," especially in the postwar years, was the immigrant neighborhood of the Lower East Side, New York's "classic" slum that attracted him for its predominantly Puerto Rican populace that was, according to him, "leading the way in sartorial emancipation."²⁹ As I discuss in the following chapters, one of the main appeals of Puerto Rican men to Painter was their penchant for light, revealing and colorful garments, often sported by the young members of delinquent gangs. He spoke of them as "flam[ing] and stroll[ing] about like peacocks, in silks and satins of striking designs and colors" and contrasted such appearance with that of middle-class "Americanos" who wore "a dull, most uncomfortable uniform of drab sameness and dreariness."³⁰ Furthermore, repeatedly denouncing an ordinance introduced by "[his] *bête noire*," New York City Parks Commissioner Robert Moses, that required visitors to the city parks and playgrounds to be covered from shoulder to knee,³¹ he delighted in Puerto Rican youth's nonchalance and ingeniousness in disobeying it. He wrote about it:

²⁹ Painter to Kinsey, 4 September 1953, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 10.

³⁰ Painter to Kinsey, 12 July 1953, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 10.

³¹ Painter to Kinsey, 4 September 1953, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 10.

I am fascinated as much as anything in watching the PRs combatting the heat, and the direct methods some assume. For instance standing, lounging on the corner of Third Avenue and 19th Street the other night was a young man, about 25, handsomely muscled, with tattoos, wearing nothing but a pair of pants—stripped to the waist and barefoot. Another of my drawings and vain imaginings came to life. PR boys open shirts completely to the breeze (if any), or they push t-shirts up from the waist till they are barebellied and to up above the nipples. Always there are bare brown arms, and the swellings of pectorals.³²

Walking around the Lower East Side, Painter was fascinated to observe men clothed in such a way hanging around street corners, working out in public playgrounds, drinking soda and playing the jukebox in the bodegas. He photographed many of them (see fig. 6) and even entertained the idea of making a documentary film that would record what he called the Puerto Rican “annual striptease,” the brazen, sexually inviting undress of the neighborhood’s youth in the hot summer months.³³

Painter’s rambles around lower-class neighborhoods and “proletarian” resorts opened to him an urban space imbued with countless erotically charged visual stimuli: a “splendid specimen shirtless, just a small towel on his shoulders” riding the subway from Coney Island,³⁴ a group of scantily clothed young men boxing in the park,³⁵ a shirtless pin boy, with his pants falling down, in a bowling alley.³⁶ As such, his engagement with the world of the “urban proletariat” remained, in many respects, ocular or even voyeuristic; it was a practice of walking and looking, observing the visual styles of “proletarian”

³² Painter to Kinsey, 19 July 1952, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 9.

³³ Painter to Kinsey, 9 February 1956, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 13.

³⁴ Painter to Kinsey, 7 August 1948, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 5.

³⁵ Painter observed this scene in the early 1930s in Depression-ridden Chicago, at the “Bughouse” Square Park, where unemployed youths “would strip up to the waist and box when the crowd put up enough money to make it worth while.” It is reproduced, with Painter’s sexually explicit “emendations,” in one of his erotic drawings. See drawing “148” (ca. 1949), Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 21, series IV, C.

³⁶ This scene, probably witnessed in Miami in the late 1930s, inspired another of Painter’s erotic drawings. See drawing “5” (1945), Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 20, series IV, C.

physicality and masculine expression. Despite being deeply embedded in the regime of the erotic gaze, Painter's way of inhabiting the streets was nonetheless different from that of the nineteenth-century *flâneur* who, essentially detached from the crowd surrounding him, watched the sexualized spectacle of the modern metropolis with a disinterested, even alienated attitude.³⁷ Painter, on the other hand, longed for connection with the lower-class men he encountered and, when being invited to join them in their social activities or merely having a pleasant but inconsequential conversation with a muscular stranger, delighted at being accepted as "one of the boys." He did not seek urban anonymity as a prerequisite for unobstructed and undisturbed cross-class voyeurism but pursued friendly contact with semi-naked "proletarians" in the course of which the subject of homosexuality could be casually brought up and sexual exchange comfortably negotiated. In this way, Painter's practice of "cruising" was closer to the neighborly cross-class sociality of the kind celebrated by Samuel R. Delany in his discussion on his sexual encounters in the Times Square porn theaters of the 1960s and 1970s.³⁸ Its power dynamic was inevitably defined by the cultural, economic and age differences between Painter and his lower-class objects of desire, but his face-to-face interaction with them was, at least in Painter's idealistic vision, aimed to suspend or even surpass these differences through mutually expressed amiability and respect.

Painter's hobby of amateur photography supplied him with countless practical opportunities for such casual friendly contact with the "urban proletarians" he observed in the lower-class neighborhoods of New York, whereas the situation of nude modeling

³⁷ On *flâneur*, see *The Flâneur*, ed. Keith Tessler (New York: Routledge, 1994). For an insightful discussion of the difference between the figures of *flâneur* and "queer cruiser," see Mark W. Turner, *Backward Glances: Cruising the Queer Streets of New York and London* (London: Reaktion, 2003).

³⁸ Samuel R. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

provided a safe and comfortable setting to sexually proposition them. When he spoke of photography being “a wonderful and almost indispensable adjunct to ‘making’ any boy,” Painter alluded to its twofold status as at once a culturally legitimate pastime that justified prolonged presence in the streets and contact with strangers and a convenient subcultural alibi for commercial sex. With the rise of physique photography networks in the interwar years, this alibi was regularly employed by homosexual men in their practice of urban cruising and easily understood as a pretext for sex by the lower-class sexually “normal” youths they pursued, especially those who were experienced and “wise” about the ways of the queer world. Painter described this style of homosexual approach in his “Male Homosexuals” manuscript:

Many homosexuals are amateur or professional photographers. They will accost any attractive youth and ask him to come to their studio to pose. Some say candidly that they want boy to pose in the nude, and most boys will, especially if paid. It is flattering and seems harmless enough. Often homosexuals begin by asking for head poses or clothed poses, perhaps poses naked to the waist, suggesting completely nude poses only after the boy is in the studio. By these methods, the homosexual may see the boy naked and decide if he is his “type” or if he is equipped with the properly sizable genital or gluteal anatomy. If so, by conversation, liquor and pictures etc. of an erotic nature, the homosexual brings the conversation around to sexuality, then homosexuality, finds the boy’s reactions, and then “propositions” him or not as he sees fit. If not, he has at least procured nude photographs for fantasy, arousal, and perhaps masturbation later when the photographs are developed and printed.³⁹

Painter used this rather innocuous tactic of seduction regularly throughout his sexual history, as did nearly all of his homosexual friends. Some models naturally protested posing in full nude or worried, often rightfully, about their sexually suggestive photographs

³⁹ Painter, “Male Homosexuals and Their Prostitutes,” vol. 9 [1] “The Homosexual,” 90-91.

being sold to other “queers.”⁴⁰ Many, however, were excited about having their pictures taken or immediately recognized a sexual proposition behind a posing offer and were even disappointed when Painter decided for one reason or another not to have sex with them.⁴¹

A number of surviving archives of homosexual men’s private photographs of their long-term lovers, one-time sexual partners or anonymous objects of desire attest to the prominent role that the practice of amateur erotic photography played in the formation, development and everyday operation of early homosexual subcultures. Amateur photography facilitated sexual approaches in an urban setting and allowed unparalleled opportunities for creating homemade erotica, but its broader functions exceeded such pragmatic uses. As argued by Waugh, both the production of homoerotic images and their distribution through subcultural networks and underground pornography markets (the systems of image-making and exchange which very often overlapped), were of “enormous mobilizing import” for what he calls the early “gay collectivities of image-sharers,” the protocommunities of homosexual men connected with one another by their interest in visual representations of male nudity and same-sex eroticism.⁴² Furthermore, in contrast to “iconic” drawings that essentially depicted imaginary bodies, situations and sexual acts, photographs, in their “indexical, evidentiary aura,” served as a collective documentary

⁴⁰ See, for instance, the discussion of Painter’s incident with one Luis Orta*, a nineteen-year-old Puerto Rican gymnast whom he photographed in September 1953. The young man was, according to Painter, “puzzled” about his motives for photographing him semi-naked and questioned Painter repeatedly about what was going to happen to the pictures of him afterwards, “intimating” that Painter was “[selling] them to queers.” Painter to Kinsey, 14 September 1953, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 10.

⁴¹ In his sexual journal, Painter recounted an episode when, after befriending an Italian bodybuilder Tony Savoia* at Coney Island Beach, he invited him to pose for photographs at his apartment. When at Painter’s place, the man immediately asked if Painter had some pictures of naked women and was generally irritated at Painter’s prolonged “technical discussion, from artistic-anatomical point of view, of the superiority of the male vs. female model”; he clearly expected to be “felled” and not to pose for “artistic” photographs. Painter to Kinsey, 19 August 1950, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 7. On his second visit, he continuously hinted at his sexual availability by opening his fly.

⁴² Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 31-33.

record of the sexual desires and acts deemed immoral and illegal and thus largely silenced in the mainstream culture; they were also private keepsakes of often fleeting homosexual encounters.⁴³ Stefano Evangelista's discussion of one of the earliest examples of private homoerotic photography, the pictures John Addington Symonds arranged to have taken of his male lovers in Switzerland and Italy, fully supports Waugh's argument. Analyzing the influences that Symonds's contacts with Wilhelm von Gloeden, whose pictures of naked Sicilian youths Symonds avidly collected and sent to his homosexual friends as gifts, had on his own engagement with photographic practice, Evangelista argues about its community-building and identity-shaping role. To Symonds, "the photograph preserve[d] the perfect memory of a private desire, which [could] be endlessly reproduced and circulated, in the form of erotica, among a community of homosexual men, for whom it provide[d] a material referent to cement a shared sexual identity."⁴⁴

Discussing the primary sources for his wide-ranging study of the homoerotic visual culture of the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, Waugh analyzes several private photographic archives from Europe and North America that suggest, in their communal conditions of production, the ubiquity of the image-making and image-collecting practices among homosexual men in the period.⁴⁵ One such man was C. Glenn Carrington, a leftist African-American journalist, social worker and amateur photographer who, beginning in the 1930s, took more than 2,000 snapshots of mostly Black men, both casual street scenes and more private photographs of lounging male couples or

⁴³ Ibid., 11-12.

⁴⁴ Evangelista, "Aesthetic Encounters," 93.

⁴⁵ Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 33-40.

bodybuilders posing in gee-strings.⁴⁶ Another, a salesman “Piet” from The Hague, an active member of the European homosexual networks of the interwar years, not only photographed his lovers and casual “tricks” but, being an enthusiastic collector of male erotica, preserved the private photographic archives of two of his homosexual friends. Yet another, New York film publicist Martin Michel took dozens of sexually explicit Polaroids of his sexual partners in the 1960s. The recently published “obscene diary” of university professor turned tattoo artist and one of Kinsey’s “unofficial collaborators” Samuel Steward provides additional evidence of homosexual men’s personal and erotic engagement with photographic technology. With the help of a Polaroid camera, which he purchased in 1951, Steward created a kind of visual sex diary that incorporated casual snapshots of his sexual activities, portraits of his sexual partners in the nude, and various homoerotic scenes, carefully staged with the use of costumes and props to represent Steward’s fantasies about sadomasochistic sex with hyper-masculine sailors and other “rough trade.”⁴⁷

The homosexually themed photographic collection of British architect and World War I veteran Montague Glover is particularly pertinent to my discussion of Painter’s

⁴⁶ There are some interesting parallels between Carrington and Painter in their shared interest in youth delinquency and their probation work. During the 1930s and 1940s, Carrington worked as a New York State parole officer and maintained personal correspondence with some of the young men he met in the detention centers. His archive includes, for example, a diary sent to him by a teenage member of the gang of “Socialistic Dukes,” in which the boy documented his gang activities. With no published biography of Carrington, however, one can only speculate about a possible connection between his professional career as a social worker and his personal life as a homosexual man. On Carrington, see brief account in Tracy D. Morgan, “Pages of Whiteness: Race, Physique Magazines, and the Emergence of Public Gay Culture,” in *Queer Studies: A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Anthology*, eds. Genny Beemyn and Michele J. Eliason (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 293-294. See also “Finding Aid for Carrington, Glenn Papers, 1921-1971,” Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, <http://www.nypl.org/ead/3537>.

⁴⁷ Spring, *Obscene Diary*. On Steward’s photography, see also Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 347-350; Justin Spring, *Secret Historian, The Life and Times of Samuel Steward, Professor, Tattoo Artist and Sexual Renegade* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 129-132.

visual archive in its exclusive focus on young “proletarians”: Glover’s principal objects of desire.⁴⁸ Similarly to Painter, Glover’s interest in photographing working-class youth was closely related to his practice of erotically motivated urban cruising. The status of a middle-class amateur photographer—“just a toff with a camera”⁴⁹—allowed him to roam the streets without raising suspicion and observe the men he found sexually attractive, often partially naked. Wandering around the crowded squares of central London, the East End slums, the swimming places around the Thames’s Dockland, the Serpentine River and Victoria Park Lake, Glover was able to find subjects for his photographs among young tradesmen and laborers: “builders, roadworkers, milkmen, delivery boys, dockers, farm laborers, in fact any and all classes of tradesmen and outdoor workers.”⁵⁰ He documented them in their everyday work setting (selling newspapers or fruit, working at the docks, laying bricks, driving carriages, delivering mail, etc.) or at leisure, for instance, bathing or suntanning in public parks.

Viewed together, Glover’s interwar portraits of young “proletarians” present an erotically invested semi-ethnographic panorama of male working-class occupations and their corresponding physicality and clothing styles (the collarless shirt with rolled-up sleeves of outdoor laborers and peasants, the tight and sexually suggestive sailor uniform, the ragged dress of street urchins, etc.). Other images, however, depict men in the privacy of Glover’s home, in various stages of undress or with erections clearly noticeable under their clothes, and thus suggest that, to him, just as to Painter, photography and sex were

⁴⁸ On Glover, see Gardiner, *A Class Apart*; Steven Maynard, “Review of James Gardiner, *A Class Apart: The Private Pictures of Montague Glover*,” *Left History* 2, no. 1 (1994), 145-146.

⁴⁹ Gardiner, *A Class Apart*, 72.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

deeply intertwined. The sexual side of Glover's photographic practice is evidenced, for example, in the set of pictures that recorded what had been very likely Glover's encounter with a male prostitute. They depict the young man displaying his erect penis under his pants while being photographed both outdoors, in the notorious "meat rack" (an outdoor locale popular with male hustlers) at Trafalgar Square, and inside Glover's apartment. In some of his pictures, Glover also captured the scenes of sexual cruising itself, photographing, for instance, a group of men lingering around the Trafalgar Square fountain, some with their hands crossed over their crotches and one with a conspicuously protruding erection. While little information is available about the context in which many of Glover's photographs were taken as well as his relationships with their subjects, the images themselves attest to Glover's erotic fascination with working-class masculinity styles and provide rich evidence about the erotic dynamic of cross-class interaction in the urban space of the modern metropolis.

In its focus on young semi-naked "proletarians," captured in their urban surroundings or in the intimate situations of sexual interaction, Painter's photographic practice was very similar to Glover's but it also possessed an important communal aspect that Glover's erotic image-making lacked. Unlike Glover whose engagement with photography was, judging from the available sources, very much a private endeavor, Painter belonged to a large informal network of homosexual New Yorkers producing, collecting and trading male erotica, one of the "gay collectivities of image-sharers" discussed by Waugh. Its members were diverse and included underground pornographer Dave Latimer who specialized in sexually explicit "action" pictures depicting male-to-male

fellatio, anilingus and anal penetration;⁵¹ “alleged sculptor” Tom Clifford*, a rich homosexual “mixoscopic” [voyeur] who regularly organized orgies at his apartment, photographing their participants, and possessed a large collection of erotic literature, photographs and films;⁵² amateur illustrator and photographer Arthur Carter* who sold his homoerotic graphics through mail-order advertisements in physique magazines and produced a large personal archive of “obscene snapshots” of his lovers, mostly Black and Puerto Rican teenagers;⁵³ professional printer Alan Reimer, Painter’s closest friend in the 1960s, who extensively photographed his lovers and even published a small samizdat physique magazine *Chevere* that specialized in erotic portraits of Puerto Rican men;⁵⁴ Robert Gebhart (“Gebbe”), a pioneering physique photographer whose services Painter used to develop and print photographs, prior to learning the technique himself,⁵⁵ and from whom he bought the pictures of “naked orgies involving six or eight naked sailors and queers fucking and being fucked”;⁵⁶ Painter’s roommate Henry Faulkner, a former female impersonator and later a prominent figure in the Midwest art scene, who took a large

⁵¹ Thomas Painter, “Latimer, Dave” entry in “The Index of Persons” (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 3.

⁵² Thomas Painter, “H.—, Tom” entry in “The Index of Persons” (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 3.

⁵³ Thomas Painter, “L.—, Arthur” entry in “The Index of Persons” (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 3. Carter produced a large collection of photographs of underage boys masturbating outdoors, in the park near the Harlem River, which Painter procured for Kinsey’s collection. See 51.800 “Harlem River Documentary Photos” (1947-1949, obtained 1955) at the Kinsey Institute Library, Documentary Collection. He continued taking pictures throughout the 1950s and 1960s, photographing men “masturbating or sitting or standing about displaying erections.” Painter to Christenson, 26 January 1967, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 24.

⁵⁴ Thomas Painter, “W.—, Alan” entry in “The Index of Persons” (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 4. About *Chevere*, see Painter to Pomeroy, 28 December 1959, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 16.

⁵⁵ Painter to Kinsey, 29 August 1950, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 7.

⁵⁶ Painter to Christenson, 12 March 1966, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 23. Painter bought these photographs around 1952-1953. On Gebbe, see Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 208-209.

number of private photographs of his sexual partners, many of them sailors (fig. 7);⁵⁷ Alonzo Hanagan (“Lon of New York”), a popular physique photographer who published his photographs in the leading bodybuilding publications of the day but also sold illicit images (full nudes, including with erections) clandestinely;⁵⁸ pornographic trader J. D. Stamm from whom Painter obtained such male erotica classics as Roland Caillaux’s *Vingt lithographies pour un livre que j’ai lu* or Friedrich Krupp’s collection of “Neapolitan male nudes”;⁵⁹ Painter’s friend from Yale Ned Jackson* who regularly photographed his sexual partners, many of them procured by Painter, “in a completely unornamental but wholly informal manner ... primarily with the face in mind.”⁶⁰

Painter’s practice of amateur erotic production was undoubtedly shaped by his participation in this network of homosexual photographers, pornographers and collectors. He bought pictures from Latimer and Lon, published his own photographs in Alan Reimer’s magazine, sold his erotic drawings to Tom Clifford, safeguarded Faulkner’s personal archive. The main influence on Painter’s erotic photography, especially in its cross-class and communal aspects, however, was his friendship with artist Edward

⁵⁷ Thomas Painter, “Faulkner, Henry” entry in “The Index of Persons” (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 2. Faulkner gave Painter over 200 negatives, which Painter later developed and printed. Faulkner’s photographic archive is included in Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 16, series IV, A.1.b. For Painter’s commentary on Faulkner’s photographs, see Painter to Kinsey, 28 August 1954, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 11. For Faulkner’s biography, see Charles House, *The Outrageous Life of Henry Faulkner: Portrait of an Appalachian Artist* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1988). The book, however, does not discuss the time Faulkner spent in New York in 1949-1950, staying with Painter, and is, on the whole, rather evasive on the subject of Faulkner’s sexual life.

⁵⁸ Thomas Painter, “Hannigan [*sic*], Lon” entry in “The Index of Persons” (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 3. On Lon’s “obscene” photographs, see Painter to Pomeroy, 24 September 1961, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 18. See also Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 208-209, 221-222; Reed Massengill, *The Male Ideal: Lon of New York and the Masculine Physique* (New York: Universe, 2004).

⁵⁹ Krupp’s collection is mentioned in Painter to Kinsey 18 December 1948, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 5.

⁶⁰ Painter to Kinsey, 23 May 1956, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 13.

Melcarth, at whose studio he lived in the late 1940s and early 1950s. A proponent of a radical pedagogical approach in art, Melcarth was devoted to teaching everybody, from his homosexual roommates to male prostitutes he picked up at the nearby Times Square, the basics of artistic representation; he instructed Painter about drawing and sculpting the human figure and wholly encouraged his attempts at erotic illustration and photography. A militant communist, Melcarth also introduced Painter to his leftist vision of both socially conscious and erotically invested artistic practice aimed to surpass class divisions and promote social justice through personal, and very often sexual, contact with working-class men, the nearly exclusive subjects of his paintings. Seeing Melcarth regularly having sex with the models who posed for him, many of them street hustlers and other delinquent youth, Painter witnessed the model of artistic production thoroughly embedded in one's sexual life and enthusiastically adopted it in his own practice of erotic image-making.

Edward Melcarth was born in 1914 in Louisville, Kentucky, a son of a Bourbon whiskey magnate Epstein, and studied in Chelsea School of Art in London and Harvard University.⁶¹ As I have mentioned above, he spent the wartime years in Iran working as a truck driver for a road-construction company,⁶² but continued his artistic pursuits after returning to New York in 1944. Throughout the following decade, Melcarth's career as painter and graphic illustrator had been advancing significantly. He had several solo exhibitions at Durlacher Brothers Galleries (1945, 1947, 1950 and 1953), which sold well

⁶¹ On Melcarth, see Virgil Burnett, *Edward Melcarth: A Hercynian Memoir* (Stratford, Ontario: Padeloup Press, 1995); Jay Boda, "Edward Melcarth: An Essay on An Enigma," *The Archive: The Journal of the Leslie/Lohman Gay Art Foundation* 29 (Winter 2008): 15-16; Erin Griffey and Barry Reay, "Sexual Portraits: Edward Melcarth and Homoeroticism in Modern American Art," *History Workshop Journal* 73, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 66-97.

⁶² See Melcarth's drawings of the construction project to build a road from the Persian Gulf to the Caspian in "Road to Russia: A Truck-Driving Artist's Record of a Crucial Construction Job," *Fortune* 28, no. 5 (November 1943): 150-154.

and received favorable reviews, and was featured as one among nineteen America's "best artists under 36" in *Life* magazine with his painting *Coney Island*.⁶³ In 1951, he won the Watson F. Blair Prize at the Art Institute of Chicago's 60th Annual American Exhibition with his painting *The Sleepers* and was awarded a grant from the Institute of Arts and Letters. Melcarth had been interested in Marxism since the 1930s and was a member of the Communist Party, the National Maritime Union and the American Labor Party. He was outspoken about his social and political beliefs and often expressed them in his work, depicting the Spanish Civil War (*The Red Earth of Spain*), workers' strikes and social protests (*Force and Violence*, *The Demonstration*, *Sit Down Strike*) and everyday scenes of working-class labor (*Man-Hole*, *Movers*, *Litter*, *Workmen on Scaffold*) in his paintings; he also did several murals for trade union buildings. As the 1950s progressed, however, Melcarth's association with communist groups became a source of continual trouble with the FBI and, according to Painter, eventually "deprived him of teaching positions, scholarship abroad (Guggenheim) and who knows how much patronage."⁶⁴ At one point, Melcarth's passport was confiscated by the FBI during a night raid on his studio and, although no charges were pressed against him, he could not travel abroad for several years.⁶⁵ He held a regular teaching job at the Art Students League of New York and also taught art at Columbia University, the Parsons School of Design and the University of Louisville but, judging from Painter's accounts, led a rather impoverished existence

⁶³ "19 Young Americans: *Life* Presents a Selection from the Country's Best Artists under 36," *Life* 28, no. 12 (March 20, 1950): 82-93.

⁶⁴ Thomas Painter, "Melcarth, Edward" entry in "The Index of Persons" (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 3.

⁶⁵ Burnett, *Edward Melcarth*, n. p.

throughout these years. He frequently traveled to Italy and permanently settled in Venice in 1969.

Critics described Melcarth as both a social realist and a “great baroque romantic.”⁶⁶ A passionate admirer of the Renaissance, especially the Venetian school of Titian, Tintoretto and Veronese, Melcarth praised the humanist ideals of the Italian masters and followed their visual style in his reliance on color, movement, dramatic composition and colossal canvas size. The subjects of his paintings, however, were modern and invariably working-class: factory men at strike, scaffolders, street urchins, Venetian gondoliers and canal workers, couples at a country fair, young garbage men, the crowd at a Times Square cafeteria, Mexican immigrants watching a cockfight. Using Renaissance techniques to portray contemporary situations was rather idiosyncratic, as was Melcarth’s overall view of the artistic canon and practice that lay in direct opposition to the modernist, increasingly non-representational and non-figurative approach that came to dominate American art scene in the postwar years. Among Melcarth’s most accomplished works were, for example, the aforementioned *Sleepers*, a five-by-twenty-foot painting of three sailors sprawled together, sleeping on a stone bench on Columbus Circle after a night out on shore leave, or *Sit Down Strike*, a twelve-by-thirty-six-foot mural-style rendition of the events of the 1936-1937 Flint Sit-Down Strike, which depicted strikers, their wives, children, and mounted police in dramatic interaction.⁶⁷ His most famous painting was probably *Last Supper*, an homage to Leonardo’s and Tintoretto’s treatment of the theme, a beautifully composed scene that portrays a group of young virile-looking construction workers eating

⁶⁶ “Edward Melcarth’s Oil Paintings Shown at Gallery 14,” *Palm Beach Daily News*, March 18, 1959.

⁶⁷ “Rugged Detroit Strike Scenes Are Being Painted in Venice,” *Lewiston Morning Tribune*, January 4, 1953. The painting was intended for the United Automobile Workers Union.

lunch at a diner counter. Although Melcarth had many devoted followers, especially among his students, by the 1960s his work began to be seen as archaic and irrelevant in the art market dominated by Abstract Expressionism, which Melcarth considered fundamentally anti-humanist and puritan in its rejection of the human form in art. The *New York Times* review of his 1962 exhibition described Melcarth as “an esthetically displaced person” and his paintings as “attempts to revivify traditions with ... appalling innocence,” “disasters of sincerity,” and “ill advised.”⁶⁸ Such criticism notwithstanding, Melcarth’s commitment to the artistic and pedagogical ideals of the Renaissance and his belief in a popular audience for his socially realist artwork remained unchanged.

According to Virgil Burnett, Melcarth’s celebration of the human form in art and his rejection of what he saw as the puritanism of the modernist project were not only “theoretical and idealistic” but also “to some degree a function of his homosexuality.”⁶⁹ Burnett emphasizes the influence that Melcarth’s sexual life had on his artistic practice and remarks about the prime importance that he attributed to instructing his lovers and friends in painting and sculpture. Painter described Melcarth as a person for whom sexuality, in both its physical and romantic aspects, was an indispensable and highly gratifying part of life; he was a promiscuous man, cruising the streets for hours in search of sexual partners and spending his last money on “trade.” Painter also characterized him as a sensual and temperamental lover who thrived on “emotional scenes and the high drama of great passions and jealousies” that inevitably entailed continuous “shouts, crashings, furious debates and assorted wild carryings-on.” Melcarth was attracted to “young, tough, and

⁶⁸ Brian O’Doherty, “Edward Melcarth Work Echoes Renaissance: Painter Tries Backward Leap,” *New York Times*, March 31, 1962.

⁶⁹ Burnett, *Edward Melcarth*, n.p.

heavily muscular men,” often “violently upset and confused and even sexually twisted youths” whom he found, just as did Painter, hustling at nearby Times Square or loafing around Coney Island Beach.⁷⁰ Many of these men—“window washers, roller skaters, waiters, dancers or actors between engagements, petty thieves, grifters, hustlers”⁷¹ and, according to Painter, a great many sailors and bodybuilders—became Melcarth’s models, posing for his paintings and photographic studies of the male nude, and even students of sorts. Burnett mentions Melcarth’s “quixotic efforts” at teaching his sexual partners about art and quotes him saying, “It’s not enough to give them dinner and fuck them. You have to teach them the trade as well.”⁷²

Painter met Melcarth, who was living on the second floor of Matty Costello’s brothel, in 1941 and commissioned him to make a portrait of his then boyfriend Peter Dubrava*.⁷³ The arrangement fell through because of the war, but they remained friends and, when Melcarth offered Painter a spare room in his large studio at 1364 Sixth Avenue at Fifty-fifth Street, he gladly agreed and moved there in October 1945. Painter enjoyed the low rent of fifteen dollars a month and the company of a fellow “queer” who joined him in cruising and never protested his bringing men over for sex. In fact, he occasionally complained about the frequent parties held in the apartment and countless “seamen, strange foreigners, and the oddest characters of every sort” regularly staying over, describing his

⁷⁰ Painter, “Melcarth, Edward.” One of Melcarth’s long-term partners was one Steve “bastard-orphan-foundling” whom he met at Times Square when the youth was only fifteen and “adopted” him in the philanthropic-cum-pedagogic manner, similar to that propagated by Painter. The two remained lovers, albeit in no way exclusive, until Steve got married, sometime in the 1950s. He divorced several years later, however, and returned to live with Melcarth.

⁷¹ Burnett, *Edward Melcarth*, n. p.

⁷² Edward Melcarth, unidentified source, quot. in Burnett, *Edward Melcarth*, n. p.

⁷³ Painter, “Melcarth, Edward.”

room as resembling Grand Central Station and his living there as “a sort of mental exercise.”⁷⁴ On the other hand, he acknowledged that “privacy [was] not required or expected” at Melcarth’s studio, which was essentially an open house for his bohemian friends and current and former lovers, and characterized it as “all very much a communal enterprise, including [their] private lives.”⁷⁵ Invited to Melcarth’s apartment while visiting New York, Alfred Kinsey was fascinated by its sexual goings-on and the mix of people the place attracted—from semi-literate Times Square hustlers to homosexual literati like Gore Vidal. In April 1946, Painter had to move out of the apartment, as his room was taken by Melcarth’s new lover, but he returned in October 1948 and stayed until December 1952, when a series of violent incidents involving hustler Jimmy Healey, discussed in the last chapter of this dissertation, prompted him to look for a different place where his whereabouts would not be known.

While living with Melcarth, Painter enthusiastically participated in the artistic activities that took place at “1364,” as he referred to the apartment in his sexual journal. He observed Melcarth’s daily painting and sculpting routine and, trying his hand at sketching the human figure from live models and photographs, was introduced by Melcarth to several drawing techniques. Melcarth also took Painter to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and, while showing his favorite paintings and discussing what he liked about them, explained to Painter the artistic categories of line, color and perspective as well as the differences between drawing and photography.⁷⁶ Similar conversations were a frequent part of the

⁷⁴ Painter to Bill B.— [Graham], 6 November 1945, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 2.

⁷⁵ Painter to B.— [Graham], 4 October 1945, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 2.

⁷⁶ Painter to B.— [Graham], 21 October 1945, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 2.

regular drawing classes held by Melcarth for his friends on Monday evenings, which Painter humorously described to as the “Melcarth Happy Hour for Art Lovers,”⁷⁷ and spontaneous get-togethers to draw or photograph a young male model. These gatherings were, in fact, held in Painter’s room which, being the largest and most easily accessible, became a drawing parlor and a clay workshop. During these weekly sessions, Melcarth taught his friends about drawing the male nude and provided extensive critique of their work, assisting them in rendering particular body parts or working with perspective. Painter mentioned, for example, receiving “excellent instruction” from Melcarth in the wash and ink technique which he often used for his erotic illustrations.⁷⁸ Even more valuable to Painter was Melcarth’s advice about photography. An enthusiastic and prolific photographer himself, Melcarth instructed Painter about lighting and composition and helped him in developing and printing the pictures. They often hired the same models and, cruising together, “sneak snapped” semi-naked “proletarians” at Coney Island Beach.

Painter’s interest in erotic photography dated back to the prewar years. Around 1936, he purchased a Graflex camera and used it occasionally to take pictures of his lovers and companions, often in some kind of beach surroundings that allowed him to capture them in partial undress. On his travel to Florida in January-March 1936, for example, he photographed one nineteen-year-old Hugh Brown*, “a glorious youth in a light, wide-open polo shirt, tanned and blond,” whom he gave a lift while driving around Miami and then invited for a picnic to a deserted beach near Boca Raton.⁷⁹ The photographs, preserved in

⁷⁷ Painter to Kinsey, 4 March 1947, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 4.

⁷⁸ Painter to B.— [Graham], 12 October 1945, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 2.

⁷⁹ Painter to Dan R.— [Berg], 30 January 1936, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 35, series IV, D.2., Folder 21.

Painter's archive, show a masculine-looking young man strolling around the beach in his undershorts, frolicking naked in the water, sunbathing, building a fire, climbing palm trees (fig. 8). This imagery, at once very informal and erotically charged, is rather typical of Painter's early photographs which were essentially private documents of his erotic desire, visual keepsakes of the time spent together with "glorious youths," whether his regular lovers or casual acquaintances like Hugh. With their outdoor setting and the men's "natural" nudity, they hardly suggested sexual interaction as did some of Painter's later images that depicted their subjects in the intimacy of his home, in "obscene" undress and sexually inviting poses. While clearly homoerotic, they had little illicit about them; even when snapping the men fully naked, Painter was careful to make sure their genitals were somehow obscured. These photographs recorded Painter's erotic objects in a rather elevated, aesthetic fashion, highlighting the young men's masculine physicality and the rhythm of their movement. They usually lacked recognizable markers of social differences and portrayed Painter's muscular companions as embodiments of an abstract ideal of the well-developed male form or the classless figure of a wholesome all-American athlete.

Painter's account of his erotic fascination with Hugh Brown demonstrates the kind of romantic vision of male beauty that lay behind his early photographic practice.

It so happens that Hugh fits into the "ideal boy" for whom I have been searching: tall, blond, handsome, beautifully muscular, tanned. . . . Nineteen years old. Bold, free, happy, independent, proud. He is not brilliant, witty or intellectually stimulating, cosmopolitan or suave. But when a boy is those last things it takes the freshness off his blooming youthfulness—and it is Youth I worship, which is so rare, so endlessly invigorating in its new hope, life and idealism. . . . Perhaps it is because I am myself underneath a seething sea of naive optimism and idealistic hope, and in Youth, youths of Hugh's sort, I find a rest, an assurance, a stimulus.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Painter to R.— [Berg], 16 February 1936, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 35, series IV, D.2., Folder 21.

Translated into visual form, these rather exalted longings for youthful grace and ebullience were expressed through the aesthetic codes close to those of “naturist” photography, which was popular in the period and to which Painter was exposed while in Europe. German nudist magazines were Painter’s first erotica, and their portrayal of the human body stripped of its social costume and celebrated in outdoor exercise and nude bathing clearly influenced his early approach to photographing men. He owned several issues of *Die Insel*, a popular homosexual periodical, as well as various “free body culture” (*Freikörperkultur*) brochures, such as Emil Shaeffer’s *Der männliche Körper* (1931); he also had a number of photographs by Kurt Reichert and Gerhard Riebicke in his scrapbook collection.⁸¹ Painter’s pictures had a more intimate feel and were artistically much less accomplished, but they engaged with the same iconography of the “light and sun” (*Licht und Sonne*), portraying naked or nearly naked young men against the backdrop of ocean waves, bright sky and tropical vegetation, often in low-angle silhouettes. Some of the home movies that Painter took in the period engage with similar themes, documenting the acrobatic routines of his athletic lovers, informal wrestling matches on the beach or divers’ leaps at the famous 300-meter-long Fleishhacker Pool in San Francisco.⁸²

This outdoor naturism-inspired approach to visual representation of the male body is evident, for example, in the collection of Painter’s photographs of his long-term

⁸¹ On German “free body culture” photography and its homoerotic currency, see Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 191-205. See also Arnd Krüger, “There Goes This Art of Manliness: Naturism and Racial Hygiene in Germany,” *Journal of Sport History* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 135-158; Chad Ross, *Naked Germany: Health, Race, and the Nation* (London: Berg, 2005). On homoerotic potency of all-male bathing spaces, see John Potvin, “Vapour and Steam: The Victorian Turkish Bath, Homosocial Health, and Male Bodies on Display,” *Journal of Design History* 18, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 319-333.

⁸² See movie reel “PN Muscle Beach” (ca. 1940) in Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 19, series IV, B, DVD6. The reel includes the scenes of male gymnasts doing summersaults, headstands and trampoline flips at the “muscle beach” in Santa Monica and the footage of two unidentified muscular men wrestling, boxing and doing acrobatics on a solitary beach.

boyfriend Peter Dubrava whom he regularly captured in daily situations during their travels together in 1939-1940. Peter was photographed playing golf in his swimming trunks, doing acrobatics, suntanning naked on the beach or swimming in the ocean. But there also appears in this collection a different kind of imagery: single indoor studies of the naked male figure, formally posed according to “Classical” conventions of the academic nude and American physical culture photography of the prewar years. These pictures were taken of Peter with the help of one Elliot Clarke, a commercial photographer in whose studio Painter invested \$3,000 in 1940 to be able to use its facilities for his private photographic experiments. Painter described his attraction to Peter’s body in highly aesthetic terms; he was an Ancient Greek statue of a handsome shepherd in sleep come to life.

His bodily beauty was in his lines and his overall grace. I have taken some 400 pictures of him in every conceivable pose, mostly in the nude, and have yet to see an unbecoming, formless, ungraceful shot. However you saw him, from whatever angle or whatever position he assumed, it was a statuesque pose. I used to awake nights and watch him sleeping naked on the next bed—always, in all positions, a model for Endymion, a dream of a dreaming beauty.⁸³

These pictures portray Peter, whose bodybuilding practice Painter encouraged by purchasing him a gym membership and taking regular measurements of his muscle development, in carefully arranged heroic poses—his knee bent, arm raised, head gracefully lowered or turned to the side. The rigid statue-like figure, the absence of eye contact with the camera and the use of “Classical” props (staff, sword and shield, mesh drapes, leopard rugs, etc.) desexualize his nudity, with his genitals strategically concealed or otherwise de-emphasized, and give the photographs the appearance of guileless artistic studies of the ideal male form. These images share obvious similarities with studies of the

⁸³ Painter to Kinsey, 23 September 1944, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 1.

superstar bodybuilders of the prewar era, such as “the most beautiful man in America” Tony Sansone whose elegant nude photographs taken by Edwin F. Townsend and published in popular booklets like *Modern Classics* (1932) and *Rhythm* (1935) Painter also collected.⁸⁴ In a way, Painter found in Peter his personal version of Sansone and used photography to record his erotically charged vision of male beauty.

This “aesthetic and idealist” approach demonstrated by Painter in his early photographic practice was surprisingly different from the type of images he found sexually arousing and collected for his private erotic use. While photography and sex remained separate in his own life (he did not use the “photographic alibi” in sexually approaching strangers at the time and did not portray his models in sexually explicit settings), they were thoroughly intertwined in the “obscene” pictures one finds in his private archive of male erotica. What principally attracted Painter in them were the models’ “lewdness”: their brazen genital exposure, their sexually inviting poses and seductive facial expressions, their overall bravado about being photographed naked or while engaging in sexual activities. He remarked about it:

In homosexual obscene photographs the thrill is largely, for me, “Imagine being so contemptuous of convention as to pose for a camera naked, in erection, irrumating, fellating, or whatever it may be. At their age,” I go on thinking “I would have been painfully embarrassed to have exposed as much as the nipple of my breast before others, to say nothing of its being photographed. While they sprawl naked for the camera, showing not only their penis but erected—with another naked boy’s penis in their mouth.” Such contempt for convention!⁸⁵

⁸⁴ On the prewar physique photography, including Townsend’s pictures of Sansone, see Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 205-214. See also, John Massey, *American Adonis: Tony Sansone, The First Male Physique Icon* (New York: Universe, 2004).

⁸⁵ Painter, “Preface” to “Drawings 1: 1944-45,” n. p.

Furthermore, Painter found particularly exciting the “documentary” images which attested to sexual interaction between the photographer and his model. Some of such photographs were obtained by Painter from his homosexual friends, together with detailed accounts of the circumstances under which they were taken as well as information about the models’ sexual availability and behavior.⁸⁶ In others, anonymous or commercial ones, Painter tried to identify the visual signs (the man being photographed in bed, his penis showing the traces of saliva, etc.) that suggested sexual acts off camera. Contemplating these photographs, Painter wondered how the model got his erection and fantasized “what happened after the picture.”⁸⁷

With the gradual erasure of Painter’s inhibitions about physical intimacy with men in the postwar years, in some part due to his exposure to Kinsey’s views about homosexuality as a completely normal variation of human sexual behavior, his photography became more and more explicit. As he summarized its history in 1965:

Before the war I never photographed genitalia (unless specifically requested). In fact, on my own, went out of the way to avoid doing so. (To prove to myself I wasn’t interested.) (The pictures of Peter are an exception but that was because the sheer beauty of his body demanded no obstructing drapery. . . .) Then, with the muscle men, after the war, I began to photograph nude when I was allowed to—not always for such pure reasons. Finally, it would be observed, I not only required nudes but encouraged erections. The sexual component in my pictures increased and the art component decreased. My latest pictures were almost all verging, and many more than just verging, on pornography.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Safeguarding his private erotic archive with Painter, Henry Faulkner supplied him with numerous raunchy anecdotes about the young men captured in his photographs and his sexual relations with them. Faulkner’s photographic archive is preserved in Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 16, series IV, A.1.b., Folder 1. For Painter’s commentary on these photographs, including Faulkner’s accounts of how they were taken, see Painter to Kinsey, 28 August 1954, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 11.

⁸⁷ Painter to Kinsey, 19 September 1946, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 3. Painter discussed one of his favorite erotic series depicting a Mexican lifeguard (“animal, primitive, no inhibitions, no conventions”) posing naked outdoors. The photographs were taken by a “queen” from Guadalajara and given to Painter by a mutual friend.

⁸⁸ Painter to Christenson, 13 March 1965, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 22.

An important source of this change was also a radical transformation of the physique photography scene, with which Painter became even more closely associated, from the fitness-oriented networks with a large but inconspicuous homosexual constituency to the mere athletic camouflage for the burgeoning “collectivities” of homosexual image-makers and image-consumers.⁸⁹ The previously dominant visual regime of the “Classical” nude with “genitals occupy[ing] an unprivileged Michelangelo-esque place”⁹⁰ were increasingly discarded throughout the 1940s in favor of more unabashed and sexually invited body display, and Painter naturally adopted these new relaxed codes of representing male body in his own erotic photography. Finally, Painter’s friendship with Edward Melcarth introduced him to the practice of casually combining commercial sex with amateur erotic production as well as a more realist approach to photographing men. Living with Melcarth, Painter discovered the great opportunities afforded by the artistic alibi in approaching men for sex, as both of them regularly hired models for drawings and photographs among street hustlers, “muscle boys” and other young lower-class men and had sex with them. He also joined Melcarth in casual “sneak snapping” of the “urban proletarians,” documenting their styles of dress and modes of undress he found erotically exciting.

Painter saw in Melcarth a thoroughly legitimate artist (as opposed to his “alleged sculptor” friend Tom Clifford who merely used the pretext of artistic practice to hire models-cum-prostitutes and collect “obscene” pictures) who frequently engaged with the subject of the male nude and argued for the great aesthetic value of the urban scenes of working-class male interaction, representing them in his paintings. One can say that

⁸⁹ On the postwar physique photography, see Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 215-283.

⁹⁰ Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 210.

Melcarth opened to Painter an artistic vision in which “proletarian” masculinity styles, which they both profoundly eroticized, appeared not only as subcultural “fetishes” but as aesthetic ideals worthy of cultural celebration. Melcarth introduced Painter to the works of Paul Cadmus whom Painter came to appreciate for his sexually suggestive portrayal of lower-class masculinity (several reproductions of Cadmus’s paintings appear in Painter’s scrapbook collection with commentary about their male subjects’ wide-open shirts and protruding genital bulges) and his friend, painter Walter Stuempfig. A romantic realist working in the tradition of Thomas Eakins, Stuempfig, just like Melcarth, openly rejected the increasingly dominant conventions of modernist, non-objective art and experimented instead with depicting human form (invariably male) within both rural and urban landscapes, painting literally hundreds of masculine figures of sailors, woodmen, quarrymen, rowers, lifeguards, bathers and shirtless delinquent-looking teenagers in blue jeans. Describing the artist as “queer as a kite,” despite his being married with two children, Painter found in his work a culturally sanctioned portrayal of his own erotic ideal of a lower-class “boy in torn shirt.”⁹¹ Painter’s exposure to the artistic representation of “proletarian” nudity had little effect on his attempts at sexually-themed drawings, which remained for the most part pornographic, but significantly influenced his photographic work, which became closely connected to his practice of urban cruising and had as one of its principal subjects lower-class strangers captured in their daily activities.

Painter began actively photographing urban scenes of lower-class undress around 1949 when, in addition to his Graflex, he purchased a small portable Ansco camera that allowed him to casually and candidly “sneak snap” unsuspecting bathers at the beach or

⁹¹ Painter to Kinsey, 13 March 1947, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 4.

male prostitutes loitering around Times Square. Produced as a visual adjunct to his sexual journal, these photographs possess a strong documentary feel but they also exhibit an aesthetic appreciation of urban space abounding with erotic signs and sexual opportunities. Even the most informal snapshots of cruising locales aimed to provide Kinsey with a general sense of the place (the layout of Coney Island, the strip of hustler bars on Forty-Second Street, etc.) occasionally contained the familiar erotic figure of a young virile-looking “proletarian.” Other photographs, specifically intended to capture the examples of unabashed public body display and sexually charged interaction between “queers” and their lower-class objects of desire, were even more explicit in their homoeroticism. Painter often took pictures from the distance, sometimes without even looking at the viewfinder pretending to be merely carrying the camera in his hands, and thus photographed his subjects in the most direct way with little regard for lighting or composition. The resulting images, while lacking the intimate quality and reciprocal dynamic of the photographs Painter took of his lovers and companions, recorded nonetheless the fleeting moments of his ocular contact with semi-naked strangers and thus formed a visual diary of his erotically motivated practice of urban cruising and a catalogue of his ideal sexual type in the outdoors.

While at Coney Island, Painter observed young lower-class beachgoers and, upon spotting one with an outstanding physique or in a particularly revealing swimsuit, attempted to stealthily take a picture of him. One such image depicts, for instance, a tall and well-built “specimen of rough trade,” wearing nothing except for skimpy light-colored swimming trunks, which make him appear “stark naked” in the photograph, eating a hotdog on the boardwalk. The erotic appeal of the young man’s brazen near nudity,

contrasting with the passersby's regular attire (the knee-to-shoulder body covering on the boardwalk was systematically enforced by the local police), is further heightened by the suggestiveness of his meal.⁹² Another photograph from this collection, taken from the top of the boardwalk, shows two heavily tanned muscular youths, their skin Painter's favorite "deep Italian olive color," lying on the beach blanket. One man is sprawled perpendicularly to the other, with his legs spread wide and his head resting on his friend's thighs, while another man, possibly a "queer," walks by and turns his head staring at the couple in such a daring pose (fig. 9).⁹³ Yet another photograph captured a group of male friends chasing a girl in the sand. One, a "blond, laughing, spirited [youth with] ... fine pectoral definition" wearing only a towel around his waist was "sneak-snapped" several times by Painter, including while changing into an equally erotic white-colored swimming trunks.⁹⁴ Painter photographed muscular youths strolling down the boardwalk with their shirts unbuttoned, topless bartenders at the food stands, groups of bodybuilders doing acrobatics on the beach or Italian immigrants sporting swimsuits of particularly revealing designs.

Some of the most interesting among Painter's "candid" photographs depict his "queer" friends and acquaintances conversing with handsome beachgoers and thus capture the scenes of homosexual cruising in the public places of lower-class leisure. Painter recorded Melcarth observing young men on the beach before approaching them with offers to model for his paintings. He also "snapped" physique photographer Lon "engaged in his

⁹² Painter to Kinsey, 16 June 1949, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 6. See photograph "Coney Island 7—49 PNT 6.16.49" in Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 16, series IV, A.1.d, Folder 1.

⁹³ Painter to Kinsey, 28 June 1949, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 6. See photograph "Coney Island PNT 6.28.49 #5" in Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 16, series IV, A.1.d, Folder 1.

⁹⁴ Painter to Kinsey, 16 August 1949, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 6. See photograph "Coney Island PNT 8.16.49" in Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 16, series IV, A.1.d, Folder 1.

profession and pastime of taking picture of a muscle boy” and “go[ing] off with the boy” afterwards.⁹⁵ One especially fascinating photograph of this kind portrays Melcarth’s homosexual friend and cruising companion Larry Sorel with an Italian bodybuilder and physique model Frank DiSalvo* (fig. 10). An example of the visual theme of clothed “queer” and naked “trade,” recurrent throughout Painter’s archive, it depicts Sorel dressed in a t-shirt, with camera on his neck and wallet in his hand, “in the act [of] picking up the boy,” a youth in swimming trunks standing near the pier. A highly suggestive aspect of this picture is the superimposed image of DiSalvo’s bare genitals appearing on top of his elbow, a fragment of the photograph Painter took of him fully naked soon thereafter in the nearby Washington Baths.⁹⁶ A mere technical flaw, this detail inadvertently adds an erotic dimension to the seemingly innocuous image of casual conversation, alluding to the possibilities of more intimate, explicitly sexual interaction between “queers” and semi-naked “Adonises” frequenting the beach.

This one-on-one sexual interaction with lower-class youth, many of them members of the bodybuilding milieu, was captured by Painter in the photographs he took of these men in the privacy of his home, often as pretext and prelude to commercially based sexual relations with them. As I have mentioned above, Painter’s friendship with Melcarth introduced him to the strategy of sexually propositioning strangers by claiming to be an amateur artist in search of male models with well-developed muscular physique. For this purpose, Painter even put together a portfolio of female nudes and non-erotic drawings “to

⁹⁵ Painter to Kinsey, 14 August 1949, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 6.

⁹⁶ Painter to Kinsey, 19 August 1950, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 7. See photograph “178 (R) + 179-1 (L) PNT 12.50” in Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 10, series IV A.1.a.

show doubtful persons to try to convince them that [he was] an artist.”⁹⁷ Furthermore, with the proliferation of physique magazines, which regularly employed the “artistic alibi” to legitimize visual representation of the naked male form, the widespread use of nude modeling as a euphemism for casual prostitution became something of homosexual folk knowledge by the 1950s. These magazines, of which Painter was an avid collector, constructed the figure of their reader as an amateur graphic artist, allegedly using nude pictures to substitute for live models, or a “physique enthusiast” who regularly took such pictures himself. However implausible and tongue-in-cheek, this alibi allowed both parties, the sexually ambiguous “artist” and his supposedly innocent “model,” to comfortably negotiate the acts of commercial sex and disguise payment as a modeling fee (see fig. 11).⁹⁸ In fact, by the 1960s, many of the physique photography “studios” operated as prostitution networks, supplying their trusted customers not only with more “obscene” versions of their nude imagery but also providing contacts of sexually agreeable models.⁹⁹ Judging from Painter’s accounts and the subcultural gossip of the time, many bodybuilders moonlighted as casual prostitutes; some were particularly open and businesslike about their trade and even ran their own brothel-like establishments.¹⁰⁰ In the period of his living with

⁹⁷ Painter to Kinsey, 6 May 1949, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 6.

⁹⁸ On the use of “artistic alibi” in physique photography, see Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 219-227.

⁹⁹ Many of physique photographers discussed by Waugh reportedly had sex with their models and some were homosexual procurers. Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 232. In his biography of Samuel Steward, Justin Spring mentions Steward using the services of physique photographers, first those of Charles Renslow of Chicago’s Kris Studio and later in the 1960s of one J. Brian Donahue of Golden Boys mail-order and escort agency in California. Spring, *Secret Historian*, 266-271, 337-339.

¹⁰⁰ Such was, for example, Arthur Wyrsh*, a popular physique model in the early 1950s who worked with Lon of New York. Painter wrote about Wyrsh, whose modeling and sexual services he and Melcarth regularly used: “As was the vogue at the time (maybe it still is) the muscle boys were all whores, and so Arthur became one too. I don’t say that like my PR’s [Puerto Ricans] they obliged sexually if approached nicely—they were aggressive and common whores to anyone to do anything. ... Well Arthur didn’t stop being a whore as almost all other boys do at a certain age (they get a good job, marry or just tire of it). ... The sex business (and I mean business) is not a hobby; it is another job, moonlighting so to speak. His own

Melcarth, “muscle boys” were Painter’s frequent models and sexual partners, but equally often he approached lower-class strangers, complimenting them about their good looks and athletic bodies and suggesting they pose for his drawings and photographs.

Most of the photographs Painter took of the “professional male beauties” or less experienced bodybuilding model wannabes followed a visual style that oscillated between the dominant iconography of physique photography and the more relaxed, intimate and reciprocal formulas of what Waugh described as the “anonymous single study,” a genre of homoerotic representation that became especially prominent in the early postwar years.¹⁰¹ The former naturally focused on the young models’ bodies, carefully posed as to highlight a particular muscle group, or photographed in dynamic interaction, most often in sexually suggestive wrestling grip. The latter, on the other hand, was an erotically charged variation of an informal “boy-next-door portrait,” a casual snapshot of a lover or one-time sexual partner, posing informally in the privacy of one’s home. While physique photography tended to full body studies in neutral setting, such as the “abstract” studio space, the anonymous erotic portrait also engaged with the model’s face and often contained everyday social markers (the model’s clothing, the photographer’s bedroom, etc.) that implied personal interaction as well as sexual exchange. Some of Painter’s nude photographs clearly followed the visual conventions of the “muscle” magazines. Such were, for example, his pictures of South Brooklyn bodybuilder and physique model Fred Randazzo whom he photographed both alone, showing his extraordinary figure in front of a

apartment is the whore house all the time cluttered with hustlers and/or queers.” Thomas Painter, “U.—, Arthur” entry in “The Index of Persons” (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 4.

¹⁰¹ Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 156-159.

mirror, and wrestling with another young man.¹⁰² Others were exactly the opposite: the photographic souvenirs of Painter's sexual relations with muscular "proletarians," often portrayed in post-coital undress and with their genitals brazenly exposed. It was in this manner that Painter photographed an unnamed dark-haired youth, whom he picked up in a Times Square bar under the same modeling pretext in 1950; the pictures depict the man sprawled in a chair, looking at "obscene" photographs, with his erection clearly visible (fig. 12).¹⁰³

The larger part of Painter's visual archive exhibits, however, something of a mixture between these two modes of representing male nudity. An enthusiastic consumer of physique imagery who worshipped well-developed musculature in men, Painter wanted to record it in his photographs, whose subjects often appear as nothing but carriers of "splendid pectorals," "bulging biceps" and "fantastic latissimus dorsi." But he also frowned upon "the horrid custom of full lighting in wholly unimaginative poses"¹⁰⁴ followed by many physique photographers, including Lon of New York, and tried to capture men in a more casual fashion. With strong erotic fetishes about "proletarian" masculinity styles, clothing and public undress, he also favored more realist images that served as visual evidence of the lower-class men's "sartorial emancipation." Furthermore, engaged in a life-long project of sexual self-documentation, Painter enjoyed documenting his sexual partners

¹⁰² See photographs "206-1 PNT 8.19.54" to "206-9 PNT 8.19.54" in Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 12, series IV A.1.a.

¹⁰³ About this episode, Painter noted in his journal: "First I took portraits fully clothed, then in his T-shirt, then I suggested nudes, to which he easily complied. So easily and with so much of presentation of his genital area, that I suspected he wouldn't mind being taken in erection. So I prelingued [fellated] him very easily into erection and did take several shots that way—while he sat in the chair and looked at female nudes." Painter to Kinsey, 28 May 1950, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 7. See the images attached to this letter.

¹⁰⁴ Painter, "Hannigan [*sic*], Lon."

in a variety of daily situations and relaxed poses; despite being produced with Kinsey's scientific research in mind, such photographs often appear as the most personal in Painter's collection. The pictures Painter took of bodybuilder Gus Mayor, the object of his intense but short-lived infatuation in the summer of 1951, are representative of this juncture of the personal (intimate erotic portrait) and the athletic (commercial "beefcake") in Painter's photographic output. In contrast to the photographs of Mayor produced by Lon that depict him rigidly positioned in the familiar setting of Corinthian columns and leopard rugs (Mayor went on to become a successful physique model, appearing on the cover of *Tomorrow's Man* and starring in the physique films of Richard Fontaine's Apollo Productions), Painter captured him in a more natural context, highlighting not only his stunning figure but also his handsome face. Painter photographed Mayor at Coney Island Beach, flexing muscles surrounded by other bodybuilders, as well as in Inwood Hill Park where he took the young man for a Sunday picnic and an informal picture-taking session. Painter also made several portraits of Mayor, looking dreamily into the camera and wearing Painter's favorite light and revealing "proletarian" garments, a tight polo or an unbuttoned short-sleeved shirt exposing his strong protruding chest (fig. 13). Despite Mayor's occasional formal "artistic" poses (fig. 14), the mundane setting of Painter's apartment suggests the intimate interaction between the photographer and the model and portrays the latter not as a self-absorbed "muscleman" but an amiable and unassuming "boy next door."¹⁰⁵

The pictures Painter took throughout the 1950s of his Puerto Rican lovers and companions remained deeply embedded in the physique photography's conventions of full

¹⁰⁵ See photographs "207-1 PNT 8.24.54" to "207-22 PNT 8.24.54" in Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 12, series IV A.1.a.

body display and accentuated muscle exposure but, at the same time, showed an even more informal, realist quality. Though powerfully built, most of the young Puerto Rican immigrants with whom Painter had sex were not bodybuilders or physique models, as were many of his sexual partners in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and they did not expect to be photographed in the style of the “muscle” magazines. According to Painter, they often regarded photography as an unavailable luxury and were naturally delighted to have their picture taken, especially if it was a beautifully composed portrait (see fig. 15). One of Painter’s Puerto Rican acquaintances, a boxer Julio Puente^{*}, did not own a single photograph of himself except for a few clippings from a local sports newspaper, for example, and was very happy to pose for Painter.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, as I will discuss in the following chapter, Painter was extremely fascinated with Puerto Rican “machismo,” as exhibited in the young men’s clothing mores, social manners and everyday behavior, and wanted to capture some of its aspects for his visual archive. The resulting photographs, while often adhering to the pattern of a single full-body nude study, nonetheless engage with a variety of visual markers of class and ethnicity, depicting not an abstract male form but a realist figure in the social setting of a public playground or neighborhood soda fountain. Finally, finding young Puerto Rican immigrants to be less inhibited and more “generous” about sex with men, Painter felt more confident about suggesting to them more sexually explicit scenarios and “obscene” poses. It was with his Puerto Rican lovers that Painter was, for the first time, willing to photograph himself as well, including naked and with erection in the aforementioned picture with gangster Manuel Muñoz.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas Painter, “R.—, Julio” entry in “The Index of Persons” (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 4.

Some of his Puerto Rican lovers, especially those with “superb” musculature such as “the Great Beauty” Benny Rodríguez*, Painter portrayed in the manner of the “muscle” magazines; they flex their naked bodies, posing impassively in front of heavy studio drapes. Such images, however, became rarer and rarer in Painter’s archive as the 1950s progressed, in part because the magazines themselves adopted a more forthright approach to representing male nudity, rejecting rigid poses and “Classical” allusions as anachronistic and unappealing to their now recognizably homosexual readership. Full body display remained at the core of Painter’s photographic work but the “artistic alibi” was gradually discarded, giving way to more informal imagery. A typical example of such photograph is one of Painter’s lovers Dionisio “Indio” Regalado* fully nude, taken during the trip to Connecticut Painter organized in July 1955.¹⁰⁷ It captures the young man standing near the river bank, his swimming trunks on the ground nearby, smiling while exposing his muscular body to the sun and Painter’s camera (fig. 16). A similar informal photograph depicts Hector and Eddy Martínez*, two brothers who were Painter’s favorite companions in the second half of the 1950s, sporting tight undershirts, a type of garment Painter found intensely erotic when worn in public (fig. 17).¹⁰⁸ Other photographs of this kind depict Painter’s sexual partners at his home, leisurely reclining on his bed, taking a bath, drinking beer and socializing with friends while casually displaying their naked torsos and, in more private situations, their erect penises. Even the photographs Painter took at his place using costumes and props became with time more playful or downright tongue-in-cheek. Intended to portray his erotic ideal of a raggedly dressed “proletarian,” these images

¹⁰⁷ Photograph “281-9 PNT 12.7.55” in Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 13, series IV A.1.a.

¹⁰⁸ Photograph “264-1 + 232-13” in Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 13, series IV A.1.a.

instead attested to the frolicsome interaction between the photographer and his models who, at their own fancy, dressed up as tattooed pirates (fig. 18) or decorated their pubic hair with rhinestones.

“It is no end of pleasure making the pictures, and looking at them—as art, or memoirs, or handsome bodies,” remarked Painter in his journal in 1964, recounting the two decades of his photographic practice.¹⁰⁹ In fact, amateur photography became such an indispensable part of Painter’s everyday routine of sexual approach that, when in the early 1960s having no money he was forced to sell his camera, he found his sexual activities heavily curtailed. “I am badly handicapped by [the unavailability] of my best technique, modus operandi, lure—my camera,” he lamented in 1966, describing his virtually nonexistent sexual life at the period.¹¹⁰ Photography allowed Painter to easily establish contact with lower-class strangers, to invite them to his home under a legitimate pretext and negotiate the acts of commercial sex in a comfortable setting. It also provided him with an opportunity to add casual social interaction to impersonal sexual exchange, as he conversed with his models about their lives and discussed possible costumes and erotic scenarios for his photographs. Photography’s other task was sexual arousal and sexual self-documentation. Visually recording young, muscular and virile-looking “proletarians” who embodied his ideal erotic type, Painter created a large personal archive of semi-licit homosexual erotica, using the pictures privately as a masturbation aid and sharing them with his homosexual friends and fellow amateur photographers. In the absence of the culturally sanctioned representations of same-sex desire, these pictures also functioned as a

¹⁰⁹ Painter to Paul Gebhard, 19 February 1964, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 21.

¹¹⁰ Painter to Christenson, 10 September 1966, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 23.

self-validating communal record of sexual behavior made invisible and deemed immoral in mainstream culture of the time. Finally, by taking photographs, Painter was able to express his artistic vision of male beauty and his erotic appreciation of lower-class masculinity styles with relative ease, in comparison with the technically demanding drawing.¹¹¹ Painter's enjoyment about capturing "glorious boys" in partial undress was sometimes shared by the models themselves who, like his Puerto Rican lover and companion Eddy Martínez (the one who used rhinestones as penis decoration), delighted in every picture of themselves and took them all home.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Painter elaborated on that in his journal: "I wasn't able to reproduce what I saw accurately enough to satisfy me. That is why I turned to photography—after a couple of years of drawing (free hand), my models, from life. I found that photography did what I could not do—reproduce the human figure accurately—then, that done, the drudgery over, I could express my artistic creativeness by means of pose, lighting, color, etc. including costuming, background and dramatic matter." Painter to Christenson, 17 January 1966, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 23.

¹¹² Thomas Painter, "C.—, Eddy" entry in "The Index of Persons" (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 2.

Chapter 4

“Us Puerto Ricans”: Thomas Painter’s “Puerto Rican Era”

As I have mentioned above, young Puerto Rican immigrants in New York were among Painter’s favorite models and sexual partners, attracting him with their exaggeratedly masculine demeanor, their penchant for public undress and their openness to homosexual contact. In fact, Painter’s lifelong desire to find true companionship among the “urban proletariat” had its best expression in his history of sexual relations and everyday association with young lower-class Puerto Rican men in the 1950s and 1960s. His interest in Puerto Rico coincided with the dramatic increase of Puerto Rican immigration to New York in the postwar decades; 1953, the year that Painter called the beginning of his “Puerto Rican era,” saw the largest number of Puerto Ricans leaving the island to come to the mainland United States, more than 74,000 people.¹ Painter saw groups of young Puerto Rican immigrants at Coney Island Beach or in the bars around Fourteenth Street and was fascinated by their ebullience, friendliness and direct social manners as well as their colorful and revealing clothing. Approaching these men with offers to pay them for photographs and sex, Painter discovered they were open and congenial as companions and uninhibited and “sexually generous” as lovers. Taking some of his Puerto Rican acquaintances as guides, Painter traveled to Puerto Rico several times between 1956 and 1959 and visited the San Juan shantytowns of La Perla and El Fanguito, where he befriended and had sex with many of the neighborhood youths. Throughout the 1960s,

¹ César J. Ayala and Rafael Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History Since 1898* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 195.

Painter continued his association with Puerto Rican men in New York and established close relations with the members of the Puerto Rican gang of “Dragons,” photographing them extensively and holding their social gatherings at his place. He also lived in several “Puerto Rican” tenements on the Lower East Side and in Chelsea, sometimes together with his lovers and even their families.

With his social contacts, for the most part, limited to his sexual partners, who were universally Puerto Rican in the period, Painter came to see himself as, in some way, belonging to their community. In November 1961, he wrote about it:

Not only do I feel myself more *en rapport* with the young male proletariat, preferably brown skinned, than with any other social group, but I find me identifying myself with Puerto Ricans: “Us Puerto Ricans” is not too unusual a thought with me. And I feel a kinship with them—as I did in jail, you remember, and as in Coney Island, so in public places in the city in general. Of people in general I feel the most kindly for them, most friendly, willing to help them, be nice to them—I mean even strangers in the crowds or subways.²

Undoubtedly, this statement about Painter’s cross-class and cross-ethnic identification with Puerto Ricans spoke more about his own desire to escape the restrictive norms and conventions of his social class than about any real similarities between his life situation and that of Puerto Rican immigrants in New York. By Painter’s own admission, his contacts with the Puerto Rican community were first and foremost motivated by his sexual interest in young Puerto Rican men and were therefore inevitably limited. “I, and they, know I like them *primarily* because they are sex objects, and they associate with me because I give them money, primarily,” he acknowledged.³ Unlike “Americano” hustlers, many of Painter’s Puerto Rican acquaintances were indeed willing to introduce him to their

² Painter to Pomeroy, 30 November 1961, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 18.

³ Painter to Kinsey, 3 March 1956, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 13.

families, but these contacts hardly ever turned into intimate friendships. It is true that Painter's travels to Puerto Rico provided him with an opportunity to experience first hand the conditions of life on the island and the everyday culture of the lower-class inhabitants of San Juan slums, but these trips were more about buying sex from men than about ethnographic observation. Furthermore, Painter's poor knowledge of Spanish frequently prevented him from fully understanding the situations he was observing or communicating with his lovers.

All this notwithstanding, Painter remained deeply convinced about the special connection he had with young Puerto Rican men in New York. Associating with them, Painter witnessed "the grossest, most vulgar, mindless and cruel prejudice"⁴ that many white middle-class New Yorkers as well as municipal authorities and the police had towards Puerto Rican immigrants and recognized the parallels between these men's experience of economic oppression and racial discrimination and the persistent homophobia he himself faced on a daily basis. He took it as a personal mission to be kind, respectful and cordial with Puerto Ricans and deeply appreciated an equally amicable and welcoming attitude they showed towards him. "Most white people fear, hate or deplore them," he remarked. "But being a friendly folk, they are pleased to be accepted and liked by a white 'Americano.' ... The PR not only accepts it as a genuine desire on your part to be friendly, hospitable and to make him enjoy himself, but does enjoy it."⁵ The particularly casual nature of many Puerto Rican men's engagement with commercial sex, in which the acts of sexual-economic exchange were thoroughly embedded in the ordinary patterns of

⁴ Painter to the editor of *New York Post*, July 1961, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 18.

⁵ Painter to Institute for Sex Research, 25 May 1970, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 27.

social interaction and were often indistinguishable from non-paid encounters, further disposed Painter towards them. He felt he was treated like “a person, a person trying to be friendly,” not a predatory “old faggot,”⁶ and delighted in the company of men who, while obviously well aware of the sexual motives of his interest in them, were not bereft of human warmth and affection.

This erotic fascination with immigrant youth was not at all unusual in the histories of philanthropic contact with lower classes. Many of the accounts of cross-class homosexual relations I discuss in the first chapter of this dissertation exhibit a similar intercultural dynamic and envision the exoticism of the proletariat not only through its place in society’s economic structure but its (literarily and figuratively) alien social and sexual mores. In early-twentieth-century popular and official discourses about lower-class immigrant population, informed by Social Darwinist theories, themes of urban poverty and crime, sexual perversion and racial degeneracy were thoroughly intertwined. The foreign-born Italians, Slavs or Chinese were imagined as predisposed to immorality and crime as a result of their inferior racial constitution and “primitive” culture as well as their exposure to the corrupting influences of slum life and their gender-skewed pattern of immigration.⁷ Italian immigrants, especially those arriving from the underdeveloped rural regions in the South and thus regarded as racially different from the more superior “Alpine” northerners, were widely perceived as uneducated and intellectually deficient, emotionally unbalanced,

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Matthew Frye Jacobson, “Anglo-Saxons and Others, 1840-1924,” in *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 39-90; Margot Canaday, “‘A New Species of Undesirable Immigrant’: Perverse Aliens and the Limits of Law, 1900-1924,” in *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 19-54.

sexually unrestrained and prone to violence.⁸ Arriving in America single or unaccompanied by their families, living in all-male boarding houses and spending their leisure time in the homosocial environments of lower-class poolrooms and saloons, Southern Italian immigrants were also notorious for their openness to homosexual contact, an effect of not only their bachelor way of life among other casual and transient laborers but also their native sexual culture in which sex with men in the “active” role was, to some degree, tolerated.⁹

These nativist discourses stirred public anxieties about racial takeover due to the immigrants’ high fertility rates and the ensuing disintegration of the traditional moral fabric of American society, but they also alluded to sexual opportunities that contact with “uncivilized” foreign-born populace could provide. The autobiographical writing of Ralph Werther, chronicling his sexual adventures in slum areas of turn-of-the-century New York, attests to the intersection of class and ethnicity in sexually motivated social escape into the urban underworld. Most of Werther’s lovers and companions were “rough burly adolescents of the foreign laborer quarters”¹⁰ who attracted him with their “savage”-like virility and their willingness to treat him as a “French baby-doll” and have sex with him. Werther described himself as a mixture of “Alpine” and “Nordic” races but mentioned that he “always considered the highest human beauty to reside in adolescent Irish-Americans or Italian-Americans of approximately pure Mediterranean stock.”¹¹ His “apprenticeship” as a

⁸ Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Giorgio Bertellini, “Black Hands and White Hearts: Italian Immigrants as ‘Urban Racial Types’ in Early American Film Culture,” *Urban History* 31, no. 3 (2004): 375-399.

⁹ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 72-76.

¹⁰ Werther, *Autobiography*, 119.

¹¹ Werther, *The Female-Impersonators*, 52.

“fairy” began in 1893 in the predominantly Italian neighborhood of Mulberry Street and most of his sexual partners in the following years remained Italian roughs or “stalwarts of Irish parentage.”¹² Werther’s accounts of his contact with these men show a typically ambivalent attitude. He characterized them as the “lowest, most ignorant, most animal, and most vicious of all the inhabitants of the modern Babylon”¹³ but, at the same time, admitted that he “counted it as happiness to suffer thus [being aggressively penetrated] and endure pain when inflicted by a strong, brave, and rough young blood.”¹⁴ These men were both the objects of fear (thoroughly justified, as violence was a frequent component of their social interaction and sexual relations with “fairies”) and the objects of desire as the embodiments of the “tremendously virile” physical and psychological type. Despite (or because of) their “primitiveness,” they were also much more accepting of sexual deviance than “the ‘classy,’ hypocritical and bigoted Overworld.”¹⁵

Lower-class immigrant youth figures prominently in Painter’s sexual history ever since his initial encounter with the underworld of male prostitution in the mid-1930s. Among his long-term lovers and one-time sexual partners were Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Polish, Italian, Irish, Jewish and German immigrants, and his practice of urban cruising involved aesthetic and erotic appreciation of the ethnic and racial variety that characterized a cosmopolitan city like New York. “In any other nation one might tire of one stock,” he remarked about visiting the ethnically diverse Coney Island Beach, “but here a beautiful blond Swede is succeeded by a lithe mulatto, by a white-skinned black-haired Irishman, by

¹² Werther, *The Riddle of the Underworld*, n. p.

¹³ Werther, *Autobiography*, 130.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁵ Werther, *The Female-Impersonators*, 97.

a brown classic Italian, by a stocky Polish peasant boy, by a handsome young Negro.”¹⁶ Most of these men were second-generation immigrants; they spoke fluent English and were relatively assimilated into American society. Some, like his first boyfriends Tony Bielskis* and Peter Dubrava, moved to New York during the Great Depression in search of work and were therefore separated from their ethnic communities of birth (both came from small industrial towns in Pennsylvania with a large population of Eastern European immigrants). What distinguished young Puerto Rican immigrants, with whom Painter began closely associating in the 1950s, was the fact that they were recent newcomers, usually brought to the United States as children in the early postwar years. For several decades, they remained deeply embedded in their Spanish-speaking ethnic enclaves due to economic marginalization, frequent travel to their native land and the desire to distinguish themselves from lower-class African Americans (see my discussion below). These factors determined the nature of Painter’s involvement with Puerto Rican immigrants. As he developed close relations with some of them, he easily gained entry into their communities, became acquainted with their everyday culture and was introduced to their families and friends.

Painter’s first encounters with young Puerto Rican men took place in the summer of 1952 when, frustrated with the delinquent, criminally inclined Times Square hustlers, he began exploring downtown New York in search of new sexual contacts. Cruising around the Bowery, Painter visited the Clock Bar on Twelfth Street near Third Avenue, whose relaxed atmosphere and the mixed crowd of middle-aged “queers,” bohemian-looking students and neighborhood youths appealed to him. There Painter observed two darker-skinned young men in tight and bright-colored clothing who were offered drinks by some

¹⁶ Painter to Kinsey, 18 May 1954, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 11.

of the customers. He followed the youngsters outside and struck up a conversation with them in a nearby restaurant where they went to eat. It turned out that one of them, fifteen-year-old Danny Vasquez*, was briefly on probation with Painter several years earlier on juvenile delinquency charges and was put in a reform school from which he later ran away. It also turned out that both Danny and his friend “Little Indio” occasionally hustled. Painter brought Danny to his place and was “pedicated” [anally penetrated] by him.¹⁷ On Painter’s suggestion, they continued seeing each other regularly for photographs and sex. In his journal, Painter pondered what was the special attraction that Danny—“positively ghostly” youth with a “quite homely” face and no muscles—held for him. He remarked how he turned down the sexual offers of bodybuilding models who kept telephoning him and instead wanted to have sex with Danny. Why? “He is simple, ‘primitive,’ humble, very sexual (‘sexy’), pleasant and friendly, and enjoys sex with no affectation,” explained Painter.¹⁸ He specifically emphasized Danny’s sexual precociousness, responsiveness and his easygoing, matter-of-fact attitude about hustling. According to Painter, while middle-class Puerto Ricans saw prostitution as degrading, for “lower level” ones like Danny it “might [have been] of little if any ethical significance, nor harmful, nor ‘wrong.’”¹⁹

In March 1953, Painter was transferred to Brooklyn Family Court and soon moved to Hotel St. George in Brooklyn Heights where he stayed until 1956. Away from the Times Square scene, he now completely focused his attentions on the Fourteenth Street area, visiting neighborhood bars and observing Puerto Rican youths strolling around “*en déshabille*.” “It is rather like finding and exploring for sexual purposes a new city,”

¹⁷ Painter to Kinsey, 17 June 1952, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 9.

¹⁸ Painter to Kinsey, 28 June 1952, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 9.

¹⁹ Painter to Kinsey, 7 July 1952, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 9.

remarked Painter.²⁰ Here he saw his erotically invested vision of lower-class urban space materialize, describing, for example, a street scene that reminded him of his fantasies of erotically charged interaction among the semi-naked male “proletariat”:

Strikingly more than ever shirts are wide open unbuttoned, even pulled out and flapping in the breeze, if any, showing a major portion of bare torso. . . . The other evening I strolled up and down the Lower East Side and saw over a dozen, or two dozen, young males on the street bare in the waist, with no excuse except it was warm. They were walking, standing, sitting, just being about, not working or anything. . . . Of course the ones doing it now were largely Puerto Rican.²¹

The atmosphere on the streets and at Painter’s now favorite Clock Bar was convivial and abounded with sexual opportunities. Approaching some young Puerto Rican men for sex, Painter found them polite and congenial; they were also cheap, “satisfied with a dime beer or hamburger for entertainment, and five dollars as a fee.”²² In September 1953, after spending an evening drinking and socializing at the bar with two Puerto Rican teenagers (and deciding not to proposition them at the end), Painter remarked: “It was sort of a make-believe evening, if you will, where I was what I would like to be—an accepted buddy and peer with two nice, beautiful, half-naked, friendly boys.”²³ Furthermore, these men were not only open and direct in social interaction but showed the same attitude towards sex. According to Painter, being “uncivilized” and “animalistic,” they not merely submitted to his sexual advances but but were willing, passionate and affectionate as lovers. As Painter noted about one Manuel, a carwash employee whom he picked up on Fourteenth Street, the

²⁰ Painter to Kinsey, 21 June 1952, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 9.

²¹ Painter to Kinsey, 1 August 1953, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 10.

²² Painter to Kinsey, 21 June 1952, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 9. Painter remarked that professional hustler from Times Square were now requesting “whiskey, a full dinner and at least ten dollars.”

²³ Painter to Kinsey, 5 September 1953, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 10.

man was “reek[ing] with sex” and this quality fully compensated for his being at the same time “ugly, coarse, stupid, fat, vulgar.”²⁴

The main feature that attracted Painter in young lower-class Puerto Rican men was what he saw as their “primitiveness”: their effortless and unaffected masculine expression, the directness of their social manners and their lack of inhibitions about nudity and sex. In contrast to some of the Times Square hustlers whose manliness Painter came to regard now as something of a studied pose, assumed for the purpose of attracting homosexual clients with special preference for “rough trade,” or bodybuilding models who were only superficially masculine, Puerto Rican teenagers exhibited, according to him, that “natural,” even “feral,” virility untamed by the demands of adulthood or “civilized” lifestyle. This quality was particularly appealing to Painter who romanticized lower-class masculinity and found in Puerto Ricans its most spontaneous and pure expression—these men were “macho” through and through. In Painter’s view, Puerto Rican “primitiveness” also manifested itself in these men’s capacity for simple and immediate enjoyment of life, completely devoid of shame or pretense, that he thought was unavailable to upper and middle-class Americans restrained in their everyday behavior by the norms of propriety and self-reserve. Despite their terrible poverty and continuous troubles with the police, employers, families and girlfriends, Puerto Rican men showed a great zest for life; they were adventurous, extroverted, friendly, fun-loving people. Painter wrote of that “peculiar essential Puerto-Rican-ity” that attracted him in these men: “their happy, frolicsome, utterly tolerant friendliness, their joy in life, their capacity to have fun from so little, to

²⁴ Painter to Kinsey, 3 August 1953, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 10.

create fun, their warm response to being liked for themselves, their ‘sing, dance and fuck’ philosophy of life.”²⁵

In 1962, after reading James Baldwin’s *Another Country*, Painter discussed in his journal the open and sympathetic attitude shown by one of the book’s protagonists, Cass Silenski, towards young Puerto Rican men she encountered on the streets of New York. When these men “whistled after her or said lewd things as she passed,” Cass did not see these remarks as sexually aggressive or malicious. “They were not cursing something they longed for and feared,” Baldwin remarked, “they were joking about something they longed for and loved.”²⁶ Painter found this passage to offer a perfect insight into the kind of playful, good-natured and sexually charged interaction he himself had with young Puerto Rican men he met roaming around the Lower East Side. He recounted an incident that reminded him of the one described in Baldwin’s novel and illustrated the kind of charm exerted on him by the ebullient, affable and outgoing Puerto Rican youths.

Remember (I do with photographic clarity) I was sitting in the Clock Bar, years ago, and this handsome youth whom I didn’t know but was watching—as he left he lightly laughed and blew a kiss to me. And I was charmed. Though every instinct in me, every trained response, every prejudice, every reflex of my “dignity,” all my pride of my man-being (my macho?), I knew I should have been revolted. But he really, frankly, openly and utterly unashamedly meant it.

From an Americano it would have been an insult, a sneer, a leer. From him it was a happy gesture of pleasure and, not friendship exactly but “I’d like to fuck you, it’d be fun and we’d both enjoy it, but I gotta go on now. Happy landings, anyway.” I still haven’t hit the primitive, light hearted, friendly lilt of the spirit of the gesture, but it represents to me the essence of the Puerto Rican attitude towards the homosexual which I found so utterly refreshing.²⁷

²⁵ Painter to Kinsey, 3 March 1956, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 13.

²⁶ James Baldwin, *Another Country* (New York: Dial Press, 1962), 104.

²⁷ Painter to Pomeroy, 12 November 1962, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 19.

However limited, the matter-of-fact acceptance of homosexuality that Painter saw in young Puerto Rican men offered him a relief from the all-permeating homophobia of the time and allowed for a chance to establish friend-like relations with his paid sexual partners. To Painter, Puerto Rican conviviality and openness to pleasure brightened the often sordid reality of buying sex and transformed the situation of sexual-economic exchange into friendly intercourse, mutually beneficial and equally enjoyed by both parties.

Another aspect of lower-class Puerto Rican communities that Painter found fascinating and gratifying was their members' lax sexual mores and their matter-of-fact acceptance of unorthodox domestic arrangements and various forms of sexual deviance. In his contacts with the families of his Puerto Rican companions, Painter observed sexual precocity, early and unstable marriages, illegitimacy, sexual abuse, incest, prostitution or homosexuality, to be common occurrences and tolerated, to a greater or lesser degree, as a normal if unsavory part of these people's lives. In his sexual journal, Painter described, for example, an episode when in 1966 his former lover Efraín Rivera, now married, invited him to stay at his place as a boarder and proceeded to introduce to him his younger brothers as potential new boyfriends.

Imagine the 25 year old father of five children, living with them and his "wife" (and her two children by some previous gentleman), she is a Negro and he a Puerto Rican. Some years ago he lived with this homosexual old enough to be his grandfather (in the same building with his sister and family), and now he has this same man living in his home. He invites his younger brothers around to be presented to this man with the open intention of his choosing one of them to live with him. They do come, one with his wife and one with his fiancé, and strip half naked for his edification. The others come unattended but for the same reason to do the same thing. All in full view of children, "wife" and anyone else. This is all done, also with the full knowledge and approval of their mother and father (as they know this man well, his having spent the night some years ago in their apartment, and visited numerous other times.)²⁸

²⁸ Painter to Christenson, 6 December 1966, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 23.

Painter witnessed a similar “laissez-faire attitude about sex” from the inhabitants of the San Juan slums, his other Puerto Rican acquaintances in New York and the parents of his friend Alan Reimer’s Puerto Rican lovers. Reimer’s case was particularly striking.²⁹ A homosexual man with erotic preference for adolescent boys, he turned his apartment into a “clubhouse,” with “a pool table, an electric guitar, an aquarium, ... a TV, radio, record player ... [and] a barbell set,”³⁰ for Puerto Rican teenagers. According to Painter, the mother of his “husband,” a fourteen-year-old Che, not only “[thought] Alan’s relationships with the boys [was] a fine thing, encourag[ed] it and regard[ed] Alan highly” but even defended Alan when he was arrested in 1960 and took care of his things while he was in jail.³¹ When he was released on parole around 1963, he moved to an apartment in Bedford-Stuyvesant, several blocks away from where Che lived with his mother, and took Che’s younger brother Robert as his new “husband,” with the mother’s full knowledge and support. Such a permissive outlook on the sexual behavior of adolescent boys and such a friendly attitude towards their homosexual lovers-cum-patrons were unprecedented in Painter’s sexual history. He acknowledged that they were possibly determined by the straitened circumstances in which most Puerto Rican immigrant families lived (Che’s mother was separated from her husband and treated Reimer as a father figure for her sons, who supported them financially and made sure they did not get involved with drugs or

²⁹ Alan Reimer was born in 1916 in Michigan in a working-class family and spent his youth traveling across the country as a hobo and occasionally hustling. He went to jail for vagrancy several times and was institutionalized in a psychiatric asylum because of his homosexuality; he had spent eighteen months there before he managed to escape. He worked as a printer throughout his adult years and, in his spare time, took erotic pictures of his lovers and wrote mystically themed books, with titles like *Belial, the Rebel Angel: A Handbook for the Individualist among the Masses* or *Elohism: The Mind’s True Liberation*, which he privately published.

³⁰ Painter to Gebhard, 1 December 1964, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 21.

³¹ Ibid.

street gangs) but he also saw it as an indication of the profound openness of Puerto Rican sexual culture. He witnessed it regularly as he visited San Juan slums or was invited to spent time with his Puerto Rican lovers' relatives and friends.

Who were these young Puerto Rican men who attracted Painter's erotic interest and were willing to engage in commercially based sexual relations with him? What were the cultural norms about masculinity and sex and the socio-economic situation, both on the island and in the Puerto Rican neighborhoods in New York, that resulted in these men's and their families' markedly different approach to male-to-male sex and casual prostitution? To fully understand the "Puerto Rican era" in Painter's sexual history it is critically important to address these questions in some detail.

From the biographical "case study" accounts of Painter's Puerto Rican lovers included in his sexual record, it is clear that most of these men were born in Puerto Rico and came to New York as children or adolescents in the years following World War II. They belonged to the large postwar wave of Puerto Rican migration to the mainland United States that reached its peak in the mid-1950s. Several factors precipitated what came to be known as "the Great Migration." The persistent poverty and chronic unemployment and underemployment of much of the island's population were a result of Puerto Rico's monocultural plantation economy that was based on seasonal labor and was vulnerable to sugar price fluctuations. The postwar industrialization program, Operation Bootstrap, while modernizing the island's economy, nonetheless failed to provide work to all the people who were left jobless as agricultural employment declined. The unemployment rate remained high (it reached 16% in 1951 and decreased to 11% only in 1963), the wages low (the average hourly wage in manufacturing was \$0.42 in 1950, in comparison to \$1.50 in

the mainland United States) and the problems of inadequate housing and sanitary facilities, food shortage and malnutrition, disease, illiteracy and crime, were widespread, especially among the agricultural workers who migrated in large number to metropolitan areas in the aftermath of the Great Depression and were living in the slums and shantytowns of San Juan.³² Taking advantage of the job opportunities and higher pay on the mainland was the predominant reason for leaving the island but escaping family pressures, marital complications or problems with the police was an equally frequent motive.³³ The fact that Puerto Ricans were American citizens and needed no special documents to work in the United States facilitated their immigration, as did the introduction of affordable air travel (in 1950, the airplane ticket from San Juan to New York could cost as low as \$35); the trips were easy and required little planning. During the 1950s, around 470,000 Puerto Ricans left the island.³⁴ Most of them settled in the New York area, in the South Bronx, East Harlem (“El Barrio”) and Manhattan’s Lower East Side.

Arriving in New York, few Puerto Rican migrants were able to significantly improve their economic situation and living conditions. Because of the newcomers’ low educational level and poor knowledge of English, they, for the most part, could only obtain low-prestige jobs that required no special skills or education (factory operators, service workers, dishwashers, laborers, etc.) and very few had a chance to rise in occupational status. On average, the migrants were able to increase their earnings more than twofold by

³² James Dietz, “Migration and International Corporations: The Puerto Rican Model of Development,” in *The Commuter Nation: Perspectives on Puerto Rican Migration*, eds. Carlos A. Torres, Hugo Rodríguez Vecchini and William Burgos (Río Piedras: University of Puerto Rico Press, 1994), 153-170.; César J. Ayala, “The Decline of the Plantation Economy and the Puerto Rican Migration of the 1950s,” *Latino Studies Journal* 7, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 61-90.

³³ C. Wright Mills, Clarence Senior and Rose Kohn Goldsen, *The Puerto Rican Journey: New York’s Newest Migrants* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), 43-59; Lewis, *A Study of Slum Culture*, 116-121.

³⁴ Ayala and Bernabe, *Puerto Rico*, 196.

coming to the United States but, due to social marginalization as well as ethnic and racial prejudice, they nonetheless remained at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder.³⁵ Most of them lived in small, crowded apartments in dilapidated, vermin-infested tenement buildings in low-income immigrant neighborhoods, until the 1960s slum clearance brought about massive relocation to project housing. For many of the darker-skinned Puerto Rican migrants, racism also became a serious issue. Upon coming to the United States, the visibly racially-mixed *trigueños* (light mulattoes), *morenos* (dark mulattoes) or *indios* (dark-skinned “Indians” with straight hair), who in Puerto Rico were classified as intermediate types different from *negros*, found themselves grouped together with African Americans and experienced the same racial prejudice and discrimination the latter did.³⁶ The problem of social marginalization that characterized slum culture in San Juan was often only exacerbated by relocation to New York. Living in segregated ethnic “islands in the city” allowed the newcomers to preserve their native language and culture but made assimilation difficult; contacts with outsiders were often limited to landlords, employers, doctors or government agents who were generally seen as exploitative authority figures and mistrusted as such.³⁷ New York provided Puerto Rican migrants with superior educational opportunities but economic pressure to find immediate employment and earn money prevented many from taking advantage of them. Only about one-tenth of the Puerto Ricans in New York finished high school (throughout the 1950s and 1960s, they remained the least educated ethnic group in the city), and the high dropout rate continued to be a major

³⁵ Mills, *The Puerto Rican Journey*, 60-76; Lewis, *A Study of Slum Culture*, 144-157.

³⁶ Mills, *The Puerto Rican Journey*, 132-136; Padilla, *Up from Puerto Rico*, 67-81; Clara E. Rodríguez, “Puerto Ricans: Between Black and White,” in *Historical Perspectives on Puerto Rican Survival in the U.S.*, eds. Clara E. Rodríguez and Virginia Sánchez Korrol (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1996), 23-36.

³⁷ Lewis, *A Study of Slum Culture*, 111, 204.

problem for the migrants' children. Seeing little incentive and practically no opportunity to go to college, most of them quit school as soon as they were able to legally work and contribute to their families' finances.³⁸ Furthermore, juvenile delinquency, the proliferation of youth gangs, street violence, drug use and prostitution were a constant feature of neighborhood life in Puerto Rican enclaves in New York. As argued by Oscar Lewis in his study of lower-class Puerto Rican families in San Juan and New York, migration to the mainland changed little in these people's ways of living. They remained deeply embedded in what Lewis called "the culture of poverty" and their sense of social alienation was only more acute in the foreign, English-speaking environment.³⁹

Despite a large number of sociological and ethnographic studies of low-income Puerto Rican communities produced in the 1950s and 1960s,⁴⁰ practically none of these works discusses in any detail the sexual behavior of their members (except for the issue of birth control) and the changes to it brought about by migration to the mainland. In fact, Lewis's in-depth ethnographic study of the Ríos family (three households in the San Juan slum neighborhood of La Perla and two households in New York) is the only available record of the sexual mores of the lower-class Puerto Rican migrants. In *La Vida*, Lewis emphasizes the important role that sex played in the lives of Puerto Rican slum dwellers and their overall lack of emotional self-reserve and inhibitions about nudity or genital

³⁸ Ibid., 157-159; Padilla, *Up from Puerto Rico*, 208-211.

³⁹ Lewis, *La Vida*; Lewis, *A Study of Slum Culture*.

⁴⁰ Besides the works mentioned above, see Beatrice B. Berle, *80 Puerto Rican Families in New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958); Christopher Rand, *The Puerto Ricans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958); Oscar Handlin, *The Newcomers: Negroes and Puerto Ricans in a Changing Metropolis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959); Dan Wakefield, *Island in the City: Puerto Ricans in New York* (New York: Corinth Books, 1959); Clarence Senior, *The Puerto Ricans: Strangers—Then Neighbors* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1965); Patricia Sexton, *Spanish Harlem: Anatomy of Poverty* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

functioning. In his general introduction to the life histories of the Ríos family, Lewis remarks:

The Ríos family is closer to the expression of unbridled id than any other people I have studied. They have an almost complete absence of internal conflict and of a sense of guilt. They tend to accept themselves as they are, and do not indulge in soul-searching or introspection. ...

There is an overwhelming preoccupation with sex ... [which] is used to satisfy a great variety of needs—for children, for pleasure, for money, for revenge, to express *machismo* (manliness), and to compensate for all the emptiness in their lives. ... There is a remarkable frankness and openness about sex, and little effort is made to hide the facts of life from children. Although the children in the Ríos family have many problems, they do not suffer from parental secrecy and dishonesty about sex. The male children are erotically stimulated by their mothers and by other members of the family, who take pride in the child's every erection as an indication of his virility and *machismo*. Masturbation is generally not punished. In the Ríos family early sexual experience for boys and girls is accepted as almost inevitable.⁴¹

Lewis's examination of the individual life stories of the members of the Ríos family also revealed the commonness of early marriages, concubinage, common-law unions, illegitimacy, prostitution and homosexual contacts in the community. The mother, forty-year-old Fernanda, was at the time of the research living with her sixth husband, a teenage man Junior whom she began dating when he was in the eighth grade. She separated from her former husband, Héctor, because he was, in her words, a *bubarrón* (an "active" partner in homosexual relations) and infected her with a venereal disease.⁴² One of her daughters, Cruz, had already had three husbands by the time she was seventeen. Moreover, Fernanda and her two other daughters Soledad and Felícita all had previous experience working as prostitutes. Lewis argues that, in this respect, the Ríos family was not unusual in the slum

⁴¹ Lewis, *La Vida*, xxvi.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 103-104.

of La Perla where free unions were a rule rather than an exception and one-third of households had a history of prostitution. The latter was naturally perceived as reprehensible but did not entail a significant loss of status in the community. The women of the Ríos family were generally not discriminated against by their neighbors and were able to find husbands despite having been “in the life.”⁴³

Unfortunately, *La Vida* includes only very brief mentions of male-to-male sexual contact in La Perla. While Lewis remarks about “confusion of sexual identification” and “high tolerance for psychological pathology of all sorts” as typical features of the “culture of poverty,”⁴⁴ he does not address them in detail. On the other hand, several incidents discussed in the life stories of the Ríos family allow one to reconstruct, however tentatively, the picture of the slum dwellers’ attitudes towards homosexuality. First of all, it is clear that male-to-male sexual contact was in no way unknown or silenced in the community and effeminate homosexual men were its recognizable and familiar, if inevitably ostracized, members. The ethnographic account of “a day with Fernanda in San Juan” includes an episode of her visiting a neighbor, an old man who was being looked after by a young “faggot,” previously a transgender prostitute, who lived with him and took care of his house. In her interaction with the “faggot,” Fernanda showed courtesy and interest, complimenting him on his helping the old man but, as soon as she left her neighbor’s house, she expressed to the social worker she came with her disapproval of homosexuality. “I’d a thousand times rather see my son dead, with his legs stretched out stiff and candles lit around him, than have him become a queer,” she remarked.⁴⁵ It seems

⁴³ Ibid., xxx-xxxii.

⁴⁴ Ibid., xlviii.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 18-19.

that “queers” were highly visible because of their effeminate self-presentation and encountered regularly but were viewed with pity and contempt and, possibly, assaulted verbally and physically at times.⁴⁶ In the life stories of *La Vida*, “queer” (*maricón, pato, loca*) frequently appears as a term of insult directed at boys and young men who for some reason failed to show the proper *macho* attitude and demeanor; it also functions as a figure of gender and sexual deviance against which normative masculinity is constructed and reaffirmed. Fernanda’s grandson Gabriel complained, for example, of being called “pansy” at school because of the girl’s shoes he had to wear and having to fight his bullies back. Similar jokes were frequent at home too (“A queer goes by our house sometimes and Felícita tells me I’m going to marry him,” mentioned Gabriel) and were used to encourage more masculine behavior from one’s children.⁴⁷

Homosexual relations in La Perla seemed to follow the pattern of gender-stratified male-to-male sexual contact between heterosexually identified and conventionally masculine men, usually young and not married, and effeminate or transgender “queers” who were seen by the former as surrogate female prostitutes. Describing her ex-husband Héctor as *bubarrón*, “a man who gives it to a faggot in the ass ... [and] plays the part of the

⁴⁶ The short story of Puerto Rican writer Luis Rafael Sánchez “Jum!” (1966), the only fictional work from the period dealing with homosexuality, illustrates the persistence and brutality of verbal and physical assaults on “queer” men in Puerto Rican rural communities. See Luis Rafael Sánchez, “Hum!” *Grand Street* 61 (Summer 1997): 130-135 and the analysis of the story in Agnes Lugo-Ortiz, “Community at Its Limits: Orality, Law, Silence, and the Homosexual Body in Luis Rafael Sánchez’s ‘Jum!’,” in *¿Entiendes? Queer Readings, Hispanic Writings*, eds. Emily Bergmann and Paul Julian Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 115-136; John Perivolaris, *Puerto Rican Cultural Identity and the Work of Luis Rafael Sánchez* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 99-114. It is possible that in La Perla, an urban community where various forms of social deviance (prostitution, drug use, etc.) were widespread and traditional gender and sexual norms not as severely enforced, there was more acceptance of “queers.” At the same time, Lewis remarks that the status of homosexuals, as well as drug addicts and thieves, in La Perla was lower than that of female prostitutes; “queers” were at the bottom of the social hierarchy of the slum. Lewis, *La Vida*, xxxi.

⁴⁷ Lewis, *La Vida*, 380.

man” in homosexual relations, Fernanda clearly established the difference between him and “queers” with whom he had sex. The word *bubarrón* was a Puerto Rican variation of the term *bujarrón* (“bugger,” *bugarrón* in the more popular Cuban variation),⁴⁸ frequently used around the Caribbean to describe a man who engaged in homosexual intercourse with “queers,” for pleasure or money (the term was often synonymous with hustler), but only in the active role of oral and/or anal penetrator. A *bubarrón* presented an exaggeratedly masculine appearance and had sex with both women and “queers,” from whom he clearly distinguished himself.⁴⁹ According to Fernanda, Héctor had sex with her in the manner that was thoroughly masculine and dominant and therefore “was not a queer.” She remarked:

People had told me that Héctor used men as if they were women, but I never believed it. I asked Héctor himself and he said, “Who, me? Oh no, not me!” And the truth is that he behaved like a real he-man, with me. I mean, he was really and truly a *macho* in bed. So how could I believe those stories?⁵⁰

Later, however, Fernanda became aware that Héctor was indeed having sex with one Luis the Queer⁵¹ whom he was bringing to their house while she was away on the mainland.

This man, Luis, was also infatuated with Fernanda’s new husband Junior whom he repeatedly approached with sexual offers. Once Junior, who grew “fed up with this queer,”

⁴⁸ Stephen O. Murray and Wayne R. Dynes, “Hispanic Homosexuals: A Spanish Lexicon,” in *Latin American Male Homosexualities*, 187.

⁴⁹ Ramírez, *What it Means to be a Man*, 96-97. The relations between “queers” and *bubarrones* had an important commercial aspect. According to Ramírez, “sex with *bubarrones* requires payment, whether it be in money, favors, alcohol, food, drugs, gifts or a combination of these.” The logic of exchange, however, might have been more complex. The episodes discussed in *La Vida* suggest that at least some “queers” worked as prostitutes and expected to be paid for sex. The “faggot” Fernanda met at her neighbor’s house was previously hustling and, “dressed up like a woman,” he “made more money than any whore.” Luis the Queer, mentioned below, had once a violent conflict with Fernanda’s husband Héctor because the latter refused to pay him for sex. At the same time, Luis was offering money to Junior, trying to persuade him to submit to his sexual advances. Lewis, *La Vida*, 19, 103-104.

⁵⁰ Lewis, *La Vida*, 104.

⁵¹ This man, Luis the Queer, is possibly Luis Alvarez*, a “passive” homosexual man who, during Painter’s first trip to Puerto Rico in 1956, served as his guide and interpreter in La Perla. See my discussion of Painter’s visits to La Perla below.

tried to physically assault him but was stopped by the other men in the poolroom where this incident occurred.⁵² What these accounts show is that sexual contacts between “queers” and sexually “normal” men in La Perla were common and tolerated, to a certain degree, within the community (“Why do you want to hit him?” the men asked Junior as he tried to attack Luis). It does not seem, nevertheless, that having sex with “queers” had absolutely no implications for the men who practiced such relations. Héctor was subject to malicious gossip and the fact that Junior was not like him suggested to Fernanda his higher position in the community and reaffirmed his truly *macho* nature. She mentioned: “Naturally I feel proud of Junior, knowing that nobody could say, ‘Look at him, he’s a *bubarrón*.’ Nobody can say that Junior has ever gone to bed with a faggot.”⁵³

It is difficult to say to what degree these patterns of homosexual behavior were preserved or modified as the male residents of La Perla or other slum neighborhoods in San Juan relocated to New York. On one hand, upon moving to the mainland in the 1950s, Puerto Rican migrants encountered the culture that was, in many respects, far more sex-negative and emotionally restrained than their native one. On the other, the anonymity of New York allowed more freedom to engage in a variety of deviant practices outside of the community’s gaze and without the fear of public disapproval, gossip and ostracism. Oftentimes, as both parents worked but still did not earn enough to afford household help, their children were left unsupervised and had more opportunities to become involved with the street world of neighborhood gangs, in which contact with “queers” for the purposes of sex and/or robbery was not unknown.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the economic difficulties of life in

⁵² Lewis, *La Vida*, 104.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Schneider, *Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings*, 134-135.

New York could propel some young Puerto Rican migrants into casual prostitution. In many respects, they were similar to the “Depression boys,” frequently mentioned by Painter throughout his sexual record—young immigrant men with no education and little employment opportunities who moved to New York in search of better life but, unable to find a regular job and establish themselves in the city, resorted to hustling and other semi-legal activities. Encountering young Puerto Rican men on the streets of the Lower East Side, Painter saw them as an embodiment of his erotically charged notion of the “urban proletariat”—a socially marginalized and economically disenfranchised group of chronically underemployed lower-class youths who, because of their financial difficulties and lax cultural norms about sex, were open to casual sexual contact with “queers.” As the new generations of European immigrants were gradually assimilating into American society in the postwar decades, leaving Manhattan’s ethnic neighborhoods and moving to the suburbs, Puerto Rican migrants became, to Painter, that urban underclass within which he could find potential sexual partners.

Painter’s first important contact among young Puerto Ricans migrants living on the Lower East Side was Hector Martinez (fig. 17), whom he met in July 1953 through his brother Andy. The brothers came from a well-off Puerto Rican family (one of Hector’s uncles owned a hotel in Ponce and another a large ranch near Manatí, in the north of the island) who immigrated to New York in the postwar years and lived downtown in Alphabet City. Despite the family’s middle-class background, upon coming to New York, all five sons, of which Hector was the second oldest, became involved with the Fourteenth Street lowlife milieu and lived off criminal or semi-criminal activities. Painter described the oldest of Hector’s brothers as “a drunkard, delinquent and general no-good,” Andy as “a

casual street and bar prostitute, thief, mugger and drunk” and Hector himself as a “hustler (in the non-sexual sense).”⁵⁵ Both Andy and Hector later ended up heroin addicts.

Socially, the Martinez brothers were little different from the Times Square hustlers; they hardly, if ever, worked and remained at the very bottom of the socio-economic ladder (how, coming from a relatively well-to-do family, the brothers became involved with the underworld of hustling and crime, Painter was never able to figure out). Sexually, however, they were strikingly different—uninhibited, responsive and “generous.” Painter’s encounters with these men followed his by then established pattern of homosexual approach: he invited them to pose for photographs at his place and, in the course of the posing session, offered to pay them extra for sex. What Painter got for his money (usually five to ten dollars), exceeded all his expectations, as the Martinez brothers were willing to be photographed in the nude and in various kinds of homoerotic scenes and were passionate and affectionate sexual partners. About his experience photographing Hector’s younger brother Eddy (fig. 17), Painter wrote:

Eddy was one of those models (usually Puerto Rican) who object to wearing anything at all. As a sop to his (assumed) modesty I had given him a cloth to cover his penis. He at once readjusted it as a belt, leaving his genitals bare. ... He also was the one who conceived of wearing a rhinestone star I had as a penis decoration, resting in the pubic hair. He also was fond of varying degrees of an erection—made his penis look larger and more impressive in the pictures. ... His idea also was the full erection picture laying supine.⁵⁶

Sexual relations with these men were even more rewarding, as they expressed no reservations about bodily contact (except the buttocks area that, in Painter’s words, was

⁵⁵ Thomas Painter, “C.—, Andy” and “C.—, Hector” entries in “The Index of Persons” (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 2.

⁵⁶ Thomas Painter, “C.—, Eddy” entry in “The Index of Persons” (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 2.

“the Puerto Rican taboo”) and showed initiative and signs of pleasure in sex. About Hector, Painter remarked:

Ostensibly Hector didn't have what Andy had—a big musculature, penis, and handsome face. . . . But Hector made love—as no one has with me before or since. He treated me, in bed, as a girl he was seducing: tongue-kissing, ear-licking, nipple-nibbling; embracing and fondling. But the unique addition was the line of sweet nothings (in Spanish) he murmured to me the while, caressing me with words, or, more exactly, his voice.⁵⁷

Painter continued to see Hector Martinez regularly for photographs and sex throughout 1953-1954 and developed close, friend-like relations with him. Eventually Hector “graduated” to become Painter’s procurer; he was arranging for Painter to meet other young Puerto Rican men from the neighborhood and made sure he was free from any trouble with them. Painter described Hector as his “devoted and sworn protector” and prided himself on being able, due to Hector’s backing, to walk “the notorious 4th Street, where weekly shootings and stabbings occurred, safe and sound among friends.”⁵⁸

It was through Hector, for example, that Painter was introduced in July 1955 to Puerto Rican boxer Dionisio “Indio” Regalado (figs. 6, 16), whom he first spotted near the swimming pool on Pitt Street and then saw again working out shirtless at the playground on the corner of Stanton and Sheriff Streets. Captivated by the young man’s dark-skinned body and his “Indian” facial features,⁵⁹ Painter approached him, through Hector, and invited him to join them on their trip to the Housatonic River in Connecticut the following

⁵⁷ Painter, “C.—, Hector.”

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ In the “Index of Persons,” Painter recorded his first impressions about Indio: “I had never seen anything so magnificent in my life (note ‘magnificent,’ not ‘beautiful,’ as he wasn’t). The first thing that came to my photographic-associated mind was ‘Montezuma!’—as in the priceless humming-bird-wings (wasn’t it?) off-the-shoulder robe, decked with gold and rubies (and nothing else)—and Imperial Indian if I ever saw one. His amazing torso a deep red-brown, his fine smile—I was overwhelmed.” Thomas Painter, “Indio” entry in “The Index of Persons” (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 3.

weekend. Indio's social-economic background was, in many regards, typical of Painter's Puerto Rican lovers. He was born in San Juan's slum of El Fanguito, but also briefly lived in La Perla as a child, and was brought up in New York by his mother (the father stayed in El Fanguito where he ran a *colmado*, a neighborhood variety store). As a teenager, Indio joined the New York Golden Gloves boxing club and participated in its numerous tournaments. He was also, as Painter later discovered when Indio was arrested for burglary, robbery and assault, a sort of gangster who was involved in various criminal activities. Growing up a street boy, Indio had contacts with "queers" since the early age of ten, having sex with them for money as well as occasionally robbing and beating them, together with his friends. In his sexual relations with Painter, Indio was as uninhibited, willing and "generous" as the Martinez brothers. Recounting their first night together (in a hotel during their trip to Connecticut), Painter mentioned that, while he himself showed his usual cautiousness and sensitivity about initiating sex, Indio was in no way surprised or put off by his offer. "Then [after taking the pictures of Indio] I spoke of sex—but emphasized that if he had any hesitancy about it I would rather just keep him as a model and friend. ... 'But I want to!' he answered, and jumped naked onto the bed, ready."⁶⁰ Furthermore, despite his delinquent lifestyle, Indio was "gentle, polite, [and] considerate" with Painter. Their affair continued for a few months until Indio went to jail in the fall of 1955.

Even if to a large degree financially motivated, the friendship of the Martinez brothers and their acquaintances in New York made Painter feel a strong sense of belonging to the community of young Puerto Rican men. Uncomfortable with direct and emotionless sexual exchange, Painter's Puerto Rican lovers preferred to develop more

⁶⁰ Painter, "Indio." For the account of Painter's "Housatonic picnic" and his first time having sex with Indio, see also Painter to Kinsey, 15 July 1955, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 12.

friend-like relations with him, inviting Painter to join (and pay for) their social activities, introducing him to their buddies, taking him to their homes to meet families, organizing trips together. While many of the Times Square hustlers expressed contempt at their homosexual clients, the relations Painter was having with Puerto Ricans made him feel, for the first time, accepted and genuinely liked by his sexual partners. Describing their road trip to Connecticut, he remarked, for example, how open and unprejudiced were his Puerto Rican companions about their sexual relations with him:

The boys now have developed a special meaning of this [the word “union”] in reference to me: one has or has not “joined the union” depending on whether or not he has been to bed with me. There was some comment in the car that Perez has joined the night before, and veiled speculation as to whether Indio would that night, as he now was the only non-union member of the group. This all in the spirit of good clean fun, in a kidding, humorous manner, which I can only imagine is Puerto Rican on such a topic. Usually it is “what I do with you is our business only,” and one’s buddies are to be kept thoroughly uninformed—among “white” boys, or “Americanos.”⁶¹

Excited about his sexual relations and everyday association with young lower-class Puerto Rican migrants in New York, Painter prided himself on being called *chévere*, a Spanish word meaning “good” or “cool,” by them.⁶² He wanted to be seen as a friend by his sexual partners—not as a sexual “pervert” only worthy of contempt and exploited for whatever he had got—and believed he was able to achieve this status among young Puerto Rican men by approaching them with sympathy and treating them with respect.

⁶¹ Painter to Kinsey, 15 July 1955, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 12.

⁶² Painter mentioned an incident, for example, when he overheard a Puerto Rican man referring to him as “a nice guy” in conversation with his friend. He wrote: “I visited him [Indio] several times while he was living with his mother again, and one time when he was not there I stayed and talked with her and a couple of youths whom I had never seen before—one of whom, just before I left, after nearly two hours, said to his friend ‘El Americano e’ chevere, ‘eva’?’ [The American in a nice guy, isn’t he?—not knowing I could understand.” Painter, “Indio.”

Painter's status among the "queers" who had sexual relations with young Puerto Rican immigrants in New York may have been, in fact, rather special. As it was the case with many of Painter's lower-class sexual partners, he introduced some of the most reliable ones to his homosexual friends who shared his taste for "rough trade," for instance, his friend Ned Jackson. Discussing Ned with one of his Puerto Rican lovers, Painter was surprised to learn that the young man did not like him, despite his being "kind, gentle, well-intentioned, friendly, loyal and scrupulous." Pondering over the reasons for such antipathy in his journal, Painter speculated that it could be his and Ned's different approaches in their relations with lower-class Puerto Ricans. Painter admitted that the principal motive for his friendship with these men was their sexual availability, whereas financial opportunities were the main reason why they accepted him as lover and companion. Yet, he also mentioned liking these young men "for themselves" and "accept[ing] them totally"—the attitude that, in his view, was strikingly different from that of Ned. He elaborated:

Neddie and I both pay these boys. They like me and don't like him. ... I think the difference is (a) that he, as he tells me, does not trust them, is afraid of them and (b), as he also, indirectly, tells me, he doesn't want them as "companions, guests, and friends," but as sex objects only. ... My trips and picnics and excursions with them last summer held no interest for him, nor would eating, drinking, playing pool or "hanging around" with them. He wants to suck their cocks, period.⁶³

Furthermore, according to Painter, this difference was not only a matter of social manners or politeness but lay in the broader approach to cross-class social and sexual interaction. According to Painter, Ned was a "cultural snob" who saw his Puerto Rican lovers as socially inferior and was suspicious of them. He acknowledged that, at times, Ned would become interested in these men's problems but to a very limited degree—"in the peculiarly

⁶³ Painter to Kinsey, 3 March 1956, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 13.

detached way in which a kind and considerate employer is in the personal concerns of his domestic servants.” Painter speculated that being “proud” and “highly sensitive,” Puerto Rican men sensed such attitude and responded with equal mistrust and even aggression.⁶⁴ In contrast to Ned, Painter tried to establish more intimate, affectionate and supportive relationships with his Puerto Rican lovers, in which social differences between them could be, at least partially, surpassed. While the question to what degree he was successful in this endeavor is difficult to answer with certainty, having only Painter’s own writing as evidence, it is clear that he was treated with more respect and affability by his Puerto Rican companions than the other “queers” whom they oftentimes robbed or assaulted.

In February 1956, Painter was unexpectedly asked to resign from his job as a probation officer with no explanations given.⁶⁵ Having recently inherited around \$30,000 from his closest friend Bill Graham* who committed suicide in November 1954,⁶⁶ Painter decided to undertake his first trip to Puerto Rico, taking with him Indio’s friend Tony Flores*, whom he met earlier that year, as a guide. Born and raised in La Perla, Tony introduced Painter to some of the slum’s inhabitants, including his cousin, “passive” homosexual Luis Alvarez (fig. 19) who became Painter’s translator and procurer.⁶⁷ Living in the Palace Hotel in the downtown San Juan, Painter spent his days in La Perla, observing

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ His dismissal could be related to his collaboration with Kinsey and Robert L. Dickinson on the research on homosexuality, about which he was questioned a year before by some “Investigation Committee,” or his friendship with Melcarth who was known to the FBI as a Communist Party member. On Painter’s questioning by the Investigation Committee, see Painter to Kinsey, 7 March 1955, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 12.

⁶⁶ See my discussion of Painter’s friendship with Bill Graham and his suicide in the following chapter.

⁶⁷ On Luis Alvarez, see Painter to Ned J.— [Jackson], 10 April 1956, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 13. According to Painter, Luis only had sex in the sexual role of an insertee, enjoying being anally penetrated by large penises. He claimed being often propositioned by the local boys and young men and had sex with them on the beach at the outskirts of La Perla.

the daily life of the slum's dwellers: young men hanging around "half-naked or with shirts flapping wholly open," drinking and dancing in the *colmados* ("the tiny-bar-eating-place-grocery-store-places"), swimming in the ocean (see fig. 19). With Luis's help, Painter was able to approach the men he was interested in and bring them to his hotel for sex, under the pretext of photography or English lessons. Through Luis, he was also invited to various social gatherings in La Perla, which he deeply enjoyed, finding that the slum's "primitive" and uninhibited inhabitants manifested at best what he saw as the easy-going and fun-loving nature of the Puerto Rican nation. Rather ignorant of the economic realities of life in La Perla and completely unaware, it seems, of the important role prostitution to Americans played in the slum, Painter considered his being thus accepted, including by the young men's families, to represent the openness and hospitality of the Puerto Rican culture.

Painter's first trip to Puerto Rico lasted for about two months; he arrived in San Juan on March 8 and returned to New York only in May, spending most of this time with La Perlans. The letters he sent from Puerto Rico to Ned Jackson show his fascination with the "primitive" mores of the slum's dwellers and his excitement about associating with them. He described the ubiquitous public nudity of children who played on the streets completely naked; the universal enjoyments of music that blasted out at full volume from the jukeboxes, spurring "everybody from four to ninety" into singing and dancing energetically;⁶⁸ the laxity of social norms of eating and sleeping ("They eat when, if and as they can and feel like it, instead of any set time and place. And sleep the same way.");⁶⁹ the

⁶⁸ Painter to J.— [Jackson], 15 March 1956, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 13.

⁶⁹ Painter to J.— [Jackson], 15 April 1956, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 13.

commonness of violence, especially among the male population of La Perla.⁷⁰ Painter occasionally expressed his bourgeois distaste for the various aspects of life in the slum that he found disagreeable (overall lack of sanitation and conventional regimen of life, men urinating in public, chaotic traffic with people walking in the middle of the road and getting hit by cars and buses, etc.) but, on the whole, he was fascinated by a way of life so different from the American one and rich in community feeling. While Painter later discovered how La Perla was perceived by the more well-to-do Puerto Ricans as an urban refuge that attracted economically marginalized and socially dysfunctional individuals (chronically unemployed, mentally ill, prostitutes, alcoholics and drug users, thieves, gun smugglers, etc.) who, in fact, refused or were unable to conform to the norms of social life on the island,⁷¹ at the time he saw the slum as “intensely Puerto Rican” and “essentially typical.” La Perla was, to Painter, Puerto Rico “magnified in minuscule and intensified and drawn in primitive, uninhibited terms.”⁷²

Painter’s travel to Puerto Rico had commercial sex as its primary purpose, of course. Because he was not visiting a resort and did not hire professional prostitutes, but participated in the daily life of the non-tourist slum community and disguised his paid sexual encounters with men living there as casual friendships, his trips cannot be described

⁷⁰ Painter wrote about this: “They [La Perlans] fight. Almost all males I know have been in jail one time or another for fighting—more with fists than knives, unless outnumbered or overpowered. No one seems quite clear why So and So fought—it is a sort of berserk, impulsive meaningless aggression. (I feel this is based on economic as well as sexual frustration, a primitive form of protest.)” Painter to J.— [Jackson], 15 April 1956, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 13.

⁷¹ In 1969, discussing with one Tony Ortiz*, a middle-class Puerto Rican teenager and a drug addict, “the extreme tolerance of PRs to the H. [homosexual],” for example, Painter was surprised to hear Tony’s protests against Painter’s opinion and his saying that “it was just the opposite.” Painter writes: “Then when I explained that my experience with PRs in PR was in El Fanguito and La Perla he said well that explained it. With them it was true enough. But not with the slightly upper classes.” Painter to Christenson, 6 February 1969, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 26.

⁷² Painter to J.— [Jackson], 27 March 1956, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 13.

as sex tourism in the contemporary sense. Instead, his visits resembled the sexually motivated travel and exile of homosexual men to Italy, North Africa, Latin America or the Middle East, the “colonial” mode of sexual escape I analyzed in the first chapter of this dissertation as a hybrid form of cross-class and cross-cultural homosexual contact. Living in isolated expatriate communities, often with a significant homosexual contingent (as were the cases of homosexual colonies in Capri or Tangier), these men enjoyed cheap and easy to arrange sexual relations with local male teenagers or young unmarried men, often camouflaged as domestic labor or combined with it. Judging from Painter’s sexual record, it seems improbable that he was aware of the history or contemporary realities of this practice. Yet, from Melcarth who, as I have discussed above, previously lived in Iran and often visited Italy where he had sex with countless local men, Painter knew about the sexual opportunities provided by travel to societies where homosexual relations were, to some degree, accepted, and widespread poverty contributed to the proliferation of prostitution to foreigners.⁷³ Finding Puerto Rico to be one such place, Painter spent much of his time there associating with young male inhabitants of lower-class neighborhoods and pursuing them for sex.

While in La Perla, Painter often lamented the fact that many of the young men living there were, in his words, “undernourished”—thin, without the strong musculature that erotically excited him. He therefore found his main sexual partners among longshoremen, many of whom resided in La Perla because of its closeness to the city docks and, due to their heavy manual work involving “lifting and hauling,” possessed more well-

⁷³ On Melcarth’s travel in Iran and his sexual relations with young local men, see Thomas Painter, untitled essay (“update on H. Pr. [homosexual prostitution] manuscript,” 5 April 1944), Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 34, series II, D.2., Folder 20 and my brief discussion in the first chapter of this dissertation.

developed physiques than the neighborhood's average male. Longshoremen also were among La Perla's more well-off inhabitants but their employment was of a casual nature and, when there were no ships in the port to unload, the men and their families were left with absolutely no income, often for long stretches of time. This was the situation with a young man Euladio "Yayito" Pena* who worked as a longshoreman, but frequently without work and thus with no means to survive, considered relocating to New York to live with his family there. Painter met Yayito through his homosexual procurer Luis Alvarez, after spotting the young man on the street and being impressed by "his pectorals swelling out of the sweater" and his overall "delectable body." Painter invited Yayito for a beach picnic and then offered to tutor him in English at his hotel. The young man agreed, spent two hours studying English in Painter's hotel room and then had sex with him in a rather passionate manner; he wanted to anally penetrate Painter (as did most of his Puerto Rican lovers) but eventually agreed to orgasm in Painter's preferred "friction" manner. According to Painter, "he seemed pleased and satisfied, especially with the five dollars."⁷⁴

A rather typical incident occurred the next day in the neighborhood's *colmado* that Painter visited with Yayito and Luis. The latter informed Painter that Yayito had been out of work for some time and his family had not had a proper meal in several days, in reaction to which Painter gave him another five dollars. Yet another five dollars were requested, as Yayito's parents came to the *colmado* to eat there. Painter mentioned he was "embarrassed and confused" by these persistent demands for money, as Yayito's father "was there observing" and everybody in the store knew of Painter's relations with his son. But Luis reassured him that "it was all right" and, as he gave the money to Yayito, his father "bowed

⁷⁴ Painter to J.— [Jackson], 18 March 1956, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 13.

to [Painter] and beamed his thanks.”⁷⁵ The fifteen dollars, given to Yayito by Painter in two days (or rather in several hours), was clearly a large sum for La Perla’s inhabitants; it could pay a monthly rent in the slum and was more than some people living there could make in a week.⁷⁶ It is, of course, impossible to say if Yayito’s family was actually without food for several days or if the young man, viewing Painter as a rich foreigner, decided to take maximum advantage of that fact. What struck Painter the most, however, was the fact that all these requests and transaction were made in the broad daylight, in the presence and with the assistance of the openly homosexual Luis and with everybody’s full knowledge of the sexual nature of Yayito’s relations with Painter. To Painter, this was a clear indication of how open and accepting the slum’s inhabitants were of male homosexuality and prostitution—the quality that he associated with the sexually “primitive” and uninhibited lower-class people. He completely disregarded the possibility that it could be the utter poverty and destitution of La Perla’s dwellers that propelled them to consent to whatever morally suspect activities to procure money, but instead saw this “amazing episode of PR homosexual tolerance” as a sign of these people’s open-mindedness and lack of prejudice about sex. Writing to Ned Jackson, Painter expressed his amazement at the level of acceptance of his presence and sexual exploits by the hospitable and tolerant La Perlans:

Imagine a relatively rich homosexual entering any equivalent neighborhood (actually only comparable to a small town or a large village) in the United States, openly and to the gossiped knowledge of all (and believe me I am indeed a 9-day wonder in that quiet, simple community) having sex with

⁷⁵ Thomas Painter, “Yayito” entry in “The Index of Persons” (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 4. For the account of the incident included in Painter’s journal, see Painter to J.— [Jackson], 19 March 1956, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 13.

⁷⁶ The U.S. Census data from 1960, quoted by Oscar Lewis in his study of La Perla, estimates average rental in the slum as \$15 per month. According to the U.S. Census, 69% of the families living in La Perla earned less than \$2,000 a year and 22% less than \$500. In Lewis’s own sample of thirty-two families in La Perla, the median annual income was \$1,100. Lewis, *La Vida*, xxxiv-xxxv.

one of the nicest, most decent boys in town, showering him with most conspicuous financial favors (sending him [Yayito] to New York, the departure in a taxi being almost a brass band affair), in the full knowledge of his family and friends and their families, being visible nightly (and sometimes daily, photographing) surrounded by the town's most handsome males. Does father get a shot-gun? Does anyone complain to the police? Are the women or better citizens outraged? Am I denounced or ridden out on a rail? ... "No, we don't mind that at all," observed Ñeco.⁷⁷

Completely enamored with La Perla, Painter spent 1956-1957 going back and forth between San Juan and New York. In August 1956, after spending summer in the United States traveling with Hector Martinez and his friends to Bloomington to work on his sexual record and then to New England and Montreal, he visited Mexico City and Havana where he expected to find the same "homosexual tolerance" among lower-class Latinos as he did in Puerto Rico. Without a guide like Luis, however, Painter was unable to gain entry into local communities or meet men otherwise and left disappointed.⁷⁸ He decided to go back to Puerto Rico and traveled there three times over the next year, taking with him one of his first acquaintances among Puerto Rican men in New York Little Indio. During this period, Painter also worked on an essay about the national character of Puerto Rico, which he considered publishing,⁷⁹ and attempted to find a teaching job on the island that would allow him to relocate there permanently, yet both projects fell through. By July 1957 Painter had

⁷⁷ Painter to J.— [Jackson], 31 March 1956, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 13. Painter's "lessons" with Yayito continued in the following week but, as the man demanded Painter to be "faithful" to him and not to meet other men in La Perla, Painter sent him to New York at the end of March 1956.

⁷⁸ On Painter's trip to Mexico, see Painter to J.— [Jackson], 10 August 1956, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 13. On his time in Cuba, see Painter to J.— [Jackson], 18 August 1956, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 13.

⁷⁹ See Thomas Painter, "The Puerto Rican: An Essay Towards Understanding" (1958), unpublished essay, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, D.1., vol. 12. The essay deals with the social and economic history of Puerto Rico and is based on Painter's library research, which he undertook in 1957 during the period he did not work. It does not address, however, the topic of sexuality and does not engage with Painter's personal experience of visiting Puerto Rico.

spent all the money he inherited from Bill Graham, but in July 1959, after receiving the last installment of \$7,000 from Graham's estate, went to San Juan for the last time in July-August 1959 with Indio Regalado as his companion and chauffeur. They drove around the island together, stopping at the beaches and picturesque small villages and visiting Indio's friends and relatives in El Fanguito, the other city slum where Indio grew up. "It was one of the happiest, most pleasant time of my life," confessed Painter. "No sex (I was past that with him) but I felt a content and comfort and even joy being with him. He was delighted driving about and seeing his [land] and found me interesting apparently, too."⁸⁰

This last trip to Puerto Rico was not without problems, however. In fact, coming to San Juan, Painter was confounded and saddened to discover that he was all of a sudden treated as persona non grata. Previously, Painter contacted Puerto Rico's Bureau of Tourism, looking for employment opportunities, but when he met with its employees in person he was received very coldly, possibly because his homosexuality and his doings in La Perla became somehow known to them.⁸¹ Similar troubles awaited for him at the hotel he regularly stayed in.

Now I found the clerks being cool, and difficult. They finally found the room all right (as they certainly should in August and I had even telegraphed in advance). Then there was clerical admonitions and "requests" that I have no "visitors." ... Then one time Indio and I were going upstairs and I glanced down the staircase to a place that branches off from the lobby. There were two employees, bell boys, say, engaged in a disgusting pantomime of fellation, obviously for my benefit. (The one stands, grinning; the other bends his knees from a half to a full crouch, tongue grossly extended, repeated a dozen times).⁸²

⁸⁰ Painter, "Indio."

⁸¹ Painter to Pomeroy, 23 August 1959, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 16.

⁸² Painter to Pomeroy, 10-17 August 1960, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 17.

Even more upsetting to Painter was the fact that he was no longer welcomed in La Perla either, shunned and made fun by his acquaintances there. His previous lovers declined to see him and one of them Paco, with whom Painter traveled together to the Virgin Islands and whose family he knew rather well, when approached in private, confessed that “people were ‘talking’ and making things impossible.”⁸³ Painter never learned the exact reasons for such a drastic change in La Perlans’ attitude towards him but this unexpected hostility made him, at least for some time, doubt what he previously considered to be Puerto Rican “homosexual tolerance.”

Painter’s views on Puerto Rican sexual mores are central to understanding his association with young Puerto Rican men, both in New York and on the island. As I mentioned above, what excited Painter the most about the sexual behavior of his Puerto Rican lovers was these men’s readiness to engage in sexual relations with “queers” and their frank, matter-of-fact attitude about it. As evident from Painter’s sexual history, not all of his Puerto Rican acquaintances were as willing to participate in homosexual relations as his more generalized reflections on Puerto Rican sexual culture suggest; some of them were as contemptuous of “queers” and as suspicious of Painter’s photographing them in the nude as his white lower-class partners had been in the previous decades. However, by dismissing these incidents as exceptional (these reluctant partners were characterized by Painter “un-Puerto Rican” in their sexual attitudes),⁸⁴ he retained the view of Puerto Rican

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Painter’s brief affair with one Octavio, a young man whom he met in May 1958 around Times Square, is exemplary in this regard. Describing the first time they had sex, Painter mentioned that the youth “demurred as to removing his pants completely—and his shoes, even. Held back and stiffened his body. Turned his face away. Then he told me he objected to my ‘pengo’ [penis] touching his body.” Painter to Pomeroy, 26 May 1958, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 15. Later, Painter remarked how Octavio was, in fact, embarrassed of even being seen around “queers.” “He is not only ashamed to be seen walking with me on the street, forbid me to touch him in public, but is ashamed of the whole thing. ... This homosexual

men as, on the whole, sexually “generous” and unprejudiced—very much in line with the popular racist stereotype of Puerto Rican migrants as “primitive,” backward, “animalistic” and sexually unrestrained. On the other hand, Painter’s understanding of Puerto Rican men’s sexuality was also directly rooted in his own first-hand experience of sexual relations with many of them and observing them in daily situations. As Painter’s journal testifies, the degree of initiative and responsiveness in sex exhibited by his Puerto Rican lovers was, in fact, a striking contrast to the much more restrained and inhibited attitude of white “Americano” hustlers. The reasons for this difference are, of course, not easy to decipher, having only Painter’s sexual record as an evidence, but several observations should be made about the sexual behavior of young Puerto Ricans and especially the changes brought to it by their migration to the mainland.

As I discussed above and as it is attested by Painter’s own accounts of his time in La Perla, “queers” were relatively accepted, if inevitably stigmatized, in lower-class communities on the island and, as a rule, had sex not between themselves but with young heterosexually identified men (*bubarrones*), generally according to a strict protocol of sexual non-reciprocity. “Queers” were effeminate in appearance and adopted a “passive” role in sex, whereas *bubarrones*, who were conventionally masculine, treated “queers” as surrogates of female prostitutes limiting their sexual contacts with them to “active” anal and oral penetration. Painter confirmed this view in his own observations about Puerto Rico, writing to Kinsey:

The Puerto Rican boy is not only willing but eager for sex with a male ... but he expects pedication, to be the pedicator. ... Hence when they

guilt feeling and shame and wholly un-Puerto Rican, as you must realize, and must come from some personal experience of his own. And I find it extremely undesirable. And quite unnecessary to endure.” Painter to Pomeroy, 15 June 1958, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 15.

encounter my requirements they undergo several reactions: (1) they find they are not going to get detumescence, which is serious disappointment and frustration for them, as they are all in a terrific state of sexual starvation. ... (2) They find themselves called upon to allow me to make love to them, especially involving body and face, by my hands and mouth. This (as noted above) is, generally, foreign to their experience. Moreover it is psychologically repugnant: instead of being the dominant, aggressive, primitive pedicator, they become the passive object of my sexual attentions. Bad enough, but I want them, if they will, to make love to me—to embrace, intertwine, even kiss me. This is wholly foreign and seems homosexual to them, making love to a man, or even having him make love to them.⁸⁵

Painter's encounter with one Angel Salinas* (fig. 19), a "gambler and loafer" from La Perla whom he met and had sex with during his first trip in 1956, illustrates the expectations *bubarrones* had of sex with homosexual men. Angel saw Painter in La Perla often and was well aware of his being "queer." When he met him on a San Juan street, outside of the slum, he propositioned Painter rather directly by bringing his attention to "a big hard on ... sticking out in his pants." Painter brought him to his hotel room, where the following events ensued:

He entered the room with his bare cock in his hand, still erect, requiring immediate attention on my part. He wanted my ass hole presented at once, even, I gather, without removing his pants. I thought all this somewhat precipitant and a trifle too primitive. I wanted him to shower. He wanted to fuck. I wanted to photograph him (I did, hard on and all). He wanted to fuck. I wanted to fool around. He wanted to fuck. This got monotonous, especially, as you know, I didn't want to fuck at all—be fucked, that is. I think some masturbation and \$5 settled his nerves—but not his feelings. He resented me, I think.⁸⁶

Judging from Painter's account, Angel was a quintessential *bubarrón*, as described by Rafael L. Ramírez and other scholars of Latin American sexualities who discuss the

⁸⁵ Painter to Kinsey, 2 May 1956, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 13.

⁸⁶ Thomas Painter, "G.—, Angel" entry in "The Index of Persons" (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 2.

similar figures of *mayate* in Mexico⁸⁷ or *hombre de verdad* (also referred as *chapero*) in Costa Rica,⁸⁸ who expected to play the insertor role in sexual intercourse with “queers.” Ramírez provides the description of the figure of *bubarrón* (*bugarrón*) that follows a strict gender-stratified logic of sexual contact between men and effeminate “queers”:

In his physical appearance, voice, dress, and gestures, the *bugarrón* incorporates and exaggerates all of the distinguishing characteristics of the Puerto Rican male. During sex, he is always the penetrator, both oral and anal. His usage of sexuality is highly ritualized to conserve his manhood and avoid being questioned about it. Any exchange or violation of rituals by the sex partners is punishable, and the *bugarrón* has no qualms about resorting to physical aggression to defend his male image. The ritualization of the *bugarrón*'s sexuality, in addition to his always being the penetrator, is expressed in the following acts: he may not kiss another person or allow the other person to kiss him on the mouth or face; he does not allow his face or buttocks to be touched; only the front part of the body between his neck and thighs may be touched; some *bugarrones* allow only the penis and testicles to be touched; and he will never touch the other person's genitals. Although the *bugarrón* may allow himself to touch his partner's buttocks, not all do. The strict observance of these rules of the game is essential to be able to have sex with a *bugarrón*. His sex partners have to assume an attitude that appears subordinate and feminine in gestures, speech, and in any social and sexual interactions. Some *bugarrones* who have relationships of relative stability with a *loca* [an effeminate homosexual], after developing much trust, will allow some of the rules to be violated, as long as the violation is always kept in total secrecy.⁸⁹

The adherence to this formula of male-to-male sexual contact is evident not only in Painter's incident with Angel Salinas. In fact, many of Painter's Puerto Rican partners, even the most “sexually generous” ones, exhibited similar desires and modified their

⁸⁷ See Prieur, “*Machos and Mayates: Masculinity and Bisexuality*,” in *Mema's House*, 179-233; Carrier, *De Los Otros*.

⁸⁸ Paul Kutsche, “Situational Homosexuality in Costa Rica,” *Anthropology Research Group on Homosexuality Newsletter* 4, no. 4 (1983): 6-13; Paul Kutsche and J. Bryan Page, “Male Sexual Identity in Costa Rica,” *Latin American Anthropology Review* 3 (1991): 7-14; Paul Kutsche, “Two Truths about Costa Rica,” in *Latin American Male Homosexualities*, 111-137. For an insightful overview on the subject, see Stephen O. Murray, “Machismo, Male Homosexuality, and Latino Culture,” in *Latin American Male Homosexualities*, 49-70.

⁸⁹ Ramírez, *What it Means to be a Man*, 96-97.

behavior only to comply with Painter's requests. The very first Puerto Rican man Painter met in New York, Pedro Morales*, had "hotter pants than [Painter], and at once was determined to fuck [him];⁹⁰ he did fuck Painter, on their second meeting. Another man from the early period of Painter's "Puerto Rican era," Danny Vasquez mentioned above, also "pedicated" Painter.⁹¹ Yayito wanted to "pedicate" Painter but fortunately for Painter was not too insistent about it, and a similar attitude was shown by another of Painter's lovers from La Perla, boxer Julio Puente.⁹²

On the other hand, Painter's sexual record equally abounds with the episodes when his Puerto Rican lovers (at times, exactly the same men who only wanted to "pedicate" him) showed a degree of responsiveness and mutuality in sex, unprecedented in Painter's sexual history, and were willing to abandon the strict gender-defined sex roles and engage in "passive" sexual practices. The reasons for that could be several and have to be addressed in some detail. One possible explanation concerns Painter's outsider status among young Puerto Rican men, both in New York and especially in La Perla.⁹³ As insightfully analyzed by Stephen O. Murray, the liminality of cross-cultural sexual contact allows more freedom to both the "foreigner" and the "native" to engage in genital practices that are considered taboo within their own cultures.⁹⁴ He further argues that, in the case of

⁹⁰ Painter to Kinsey, 2 April 1952, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 9.

⁹¹ Painter to Kinsey, 17 June 1952, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 9.

⁹² Thomas Painter, "R.—, Julio."

⁹³ I see Painter's status as that of a "foreigner" and his Puerto Rican lovers in New York as the "natives" (despite their being foreign migrants in New York), because of the nature of his relations with them. During his "Puerto Rican era," Painter became more and more estranged from the community of other "queers" and associated as individual with groups of young Puerto Rican men to whom he was, essentially, an outsider. In his travel to Puerto Rico, Painter's status of a foreigner is, of course, obvious.

⁹⁴ Stephen O. Murray, "Sleeping with the Natives as a Source of Data," *Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists Newsletter* 13, no. 3 (October 1993): 49-51; Stephen O. Murray, "Male Homosexuality in Guatemala: Possible Insights and Certain Confusions from Sleeping with the Natives," in *Out in the Field:*

the “natives,” the desire to perform these “deviant” acts could stem from a variety of non-sexual factors and may be not representative whatsoever of their ordinary everyday sexual culture or the patterns of sexual behavior with their peers. Murray remarks that “almost as much as the foreigner, the native who has sex with the foreigner is ‘away from home’ and released to some extent from the cultural constraints that affect intracultural sexual behavior.”⁹⁵ The setting within which Painter’s sexual contacts with Puerto Rican men took place could justifiably be seen as such a liminal zone between cultures where sexual freedom in general and flexibility in roles and practices in particular were possible. It is quite plausible that the openness towards male-to-male sex that Painter observed in his Puerto Rican lovers was, in fact, a function of his own position of a “foreigner” in relation to these men, while their contacts with “queers” inside their native communities were less reciprocal and more strictly followed the traditional active/passive division of sexual roles. The fact that Painter interpreted this permissiveness as the inherent quality of Puerto Rican sexual culture is in no way surprising. As discussed by Murray, even respected and experienced anthropologists often tend to find in foreign cultures the world of sexual freedom unavailable in their own. For Painter who spent all his life searching for a social and cultural milieu accepting of male nudity and male-to-male sexual contact, such thinking was natural and understandable.

Painter’s economic privilege and the commercial nature of his relations with his Puerto Rican lovers could be another reason for these men’s alleged sexual uninhibitedness and versatility as well as the “homosexual tolerance” he witnessed from their parents and

Reflections of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists, eds. Ellen Lewin and William Leap (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 236-260.

⁹⁵ Murray, “Male Homosexuality,” 243.

other relatives. The fact that Painter, in his writing on sexual mores of lower-class Puerto Ricans, regularly generalized from his own experience without addressing the role that money played in these encounters is, of course, highly problematic. It is possible to explain, however, by the fact that the overall prevalence of commercial sex seemed to be much higher in the urban male homosexual communities of the early and mid-twentieth century than it is today (see my discussion in the following chapter). Because much of homosexual contact, not only Painter's but also of every single "queer" friend or acquaintance of his mentioned in his journal, involved sexual-economic exchange in some form, it is not surprising that the economic aspects of the sexual behavior of Painter's Puerto Rican lovers and companions were generally overlooked in Painter's journal. In his view, what lower-class Puerto Rican men did in bed for money more or less equalled what they did for pleasure.

This was, without doubt, not the case. As Murray remarks, essentially describing Painter's situation, "In a postcoital, soft glow—a state of mind that easily can extend to writing 'fieldnotes' or even to writing reports of research and analyses of cultures—it is easy to forget that people engage in sexual acts for reasons other than their desires and preferences."⁹⁶ Murray identified upward social and economic mobility as the most frequent and important of these reasons and argues that even in the cases of scholarly-motivated ethnographers their coming from a more affluent society made them potential patrons in the natives' mind. For Painter who openly admitted and even advertised his status of a rich *gringo*, flaunting his money, especially on his first trip to La Perla after receiving Graham's inheritance, and not hesitating to give some to sexually compliant and

⁹⁶ Ibid., 244.

friendly La Perlans, this status of a patron and benefactor was even desirable, as it allowed him to disguise and rationalize the often sordid reality of homosexual seduction and sexual exploitation. Seeking a sense of companionship with his Puerto Rican lovers, Painter rather intentionally used money to obtain and secure their friendships and delighted in the (semblance of) cross-cultural and cross-class intimacy such situations allowed.⁹⁷ The commercial nature of Painter's relations with his Puerto Rican lovers inevitably determined their sexual behavior to a great degree. The features of it that he saw as inherent in their native sexual culture could, in fact, be situational—an economically motivated compliance with Painter's own erotic desires or his partner's ideas of what practices, technique or styles of sexual behavior he would most enjoy. Paying for trips to New York to several of his La Perlan lovers as well as their bail and lawyers, in the frequent situations when these men got into problems with the police,⁹⁸ Painter was naturally seen as a valuable economic resource by his sexual partners as well as their families. Living in utter poverty and destitution, they were ready to extend their hospitality to wealthy foreigners and cultivate such contacts for the purpose of possible economic mobility or material rewards.

⁹⁷ An interesting observation on the subject is included in Murray's article. He quotes British anthropologist Nigel Barley arguing that an important pleasure of fieldwork, especially for "left-wing anthropologists," lies in the change of their status from impoverished academics in their native countries to affluent foreigners in the underdeveloped locales they study. These scholars are "prone to the seductions of being able to behave like local gentry and dispense benefaction. It provides an immediate and entirely false feeling that you have got close to the people." Nigel Barley, *Not a Hazardous Sport* (New York: Holt, 1988), 61, quot. in Murray, "Male Homosexuality," 244. One can see strong parallels with Painter's case who similarly, albeit deliberately, used his financial privilege to gain entry into lower-class communities.

⁹⁸ Painter paid Yayito's and Julio Puente's tickets to New York as well as Julio's bail of \$150. He also paid for a lawyer for Indio and his early 1960s lover Efraín Rivera (see my discussion of Painter's relations with Efraín in the following chapter). Taking his New York acquaintances and friends Tony Flores, Little Indio, Indio Regalado and Hector Martinez to Puerto Rico and paying all their expenses there was a significant material stimulus for these men to do whatever was requested of them as well, since they naturally wanted to visit their native land and often did not have financial means to do so.

The “homosexual tolerance” that Painter witnessed from the parents of his or Alan Reimer’s Puerto Rican lovers could also be a much more complex phenomenon than mere open-mindedness about sex and the lack of prejudice against various forms of sexual deviance. Some insights about the situation could be provided by the studies of the relationships between homosexual and transgender prostitutes and their families in the lower-class communities of Mexico City and Salvador in Brazil.⁹⁹ In her analysis of the everyday interaction of Mexican *jotas* with their parents, Annick Prieur argues about the conjunction of economic, social and moral factors in the development of the parents’ relatively accepting outlook on their sons’ sexual and gender nonconformity. She acknowledges that higher visibility of deviance in the slums may contribute to their inhabitants’ matter-of-fact attitude about homosexuality and prostitution.¹⁰⁰ But she also mentions that it is the money *jotas* make, working as homosexual prostitutes, and spend on their families that allow them to earn the respect of their parents and siblings.

The message of the money is above all a moral one. What is important is not to earn money in itself, nor how the money is earned: what is important is how the money is spent. To spend it on your family, your brothers’ and sisters’ schooling or for your old parents’ health—that is a sign of feelings of responsibility, of gratefulness towards the parents who brought you up, and respect for them. Doing this, showing respect, *jotas* may remain perfectly integrated in the family structure. They gain respect through money.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Prieur, *Mema’s House*, 42-57; Kulick, *Travesti*, 178-183.

¹⁰⁰ Prieur remarks: “The cramped quarters and the nearness of neighbors [in the Mexico City’s shantytown of Nezahualcóyotl] leave few possibilities for privacy ... [and] people get used to seeing those who deviate in some way or another. With families being so big, there is a high probability in every family that there will be at least one child who will not live up to the parents’ expectations. There are sons who run away, sons who do not want to work, who drink and fight or are put in jail, and daughters who get pregnant at early age.” Prieur, *Mema’s House*, 56.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

A similar argument is developed by Don Kulick in his research on Brazilian *travestis* who, being rejected by their families, attempt to regain their parents' support and acceptance by regularly providing them with money and expensive gifts. Kulick also mentions, however, that "few travestis delude themselves into thinking that this acceptance is unconditional. ... The moment that support stops, the door to the family home is likely to shut tight."¹⁰² He provides a chilling example of the mother of one *travesti*, who was accepting of the fact that her son was now "Rita Lee" and showed love and affection towards her, but, when Rita Lee became ill with AIDS and could no longer work as a prostitute and give money to her family, she was soon thrown out of the house and forgotten about.¹⁰³

This logic of exchanging economic support for familial affection and respect could possibly underlie the interaction of Painter's Puerto Rican lovers with their parents who showed a friendly attitude towards Painter as long as he contributed to their finances. This does not mean that they were mercenary hypocrites who cared for money no matter where and who it came from (including from what could be termed the sexual exploitation of their children) but that economic and moral considerations were, to them, thoroughly intertwined. This moral opportunism was an inevitable effect of their poverty and similarly dictated their choice of marital partners and their relations with some of their family members. They were obviously grateful for Painter's efforts to help their sons to get out of jail, to find honest work or quit drugs but had he not provided them with money it is possible that their attitude would be completely different. Painter's final experience in La Perla, when he was unexpectedly avoided and ostracized by the slum's dwellers, showed

¹⁰² Kulick, *Travesti*, 181.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 179-181.

him the limitations of their “homosexual tolerance.” As his money, for whatever reason, was no longer needed, he was treated with the same prejudice and contempt he had encountered before in his own culture and among his social peers, when in the early 1930s he decide to “come out” to his family, his Yale friends and fellow students at Union Seminary.

Painter was, of course, not completely ignorant of all these factors that may have contributed to his Puerto Rican lovers’ sexual openness and versatility or their families’ “homosexual tolerance.” As I discuss in the following chapter, he was, in fact, continuously pondering the questions of morality of prostitution and the role that money played in his sexual life. It seems, at times, that he himself understood that his idealistic notion of cross-class and cross-cultural companionship with his paid sexual partners was nothing but an illusion that was doomed to shatter every time. However, as he admitted in his late years, his life had been “bleak enough,” and these illusions—the “false hopes [and] unrealistic dreams” and the enjoyment that they nonetheless brought about—were the only thing that prevented him from leading a “dreary” life of utter loneliness and becoming a “complete misanthrope.”¹⁰⁴ Till the end of his life, Painter carried with him the fantasy of Puerto Rico (and Puerto Rican enclaves in New York) as a land of sexual freedom, where young men strolled around half-naked eager to have sex with whomever, including other men, without unnecessary concerns and reservations. A story of personal escape from the middle-class puritanism, Painter’s biography was a search for the community of “real men” who were erotically appealing in their authentic and spontaneous masculinity and showed the “laissez-faire attitude” about sex, being tolerant of homosexual contact and friendly

¹⁰⁴ Painter to Christenson, 28 August 1966, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 23.

towards “queers” like him. Young lower-class Puerto Ricans remained, to Painter, the real-life embodiments of this romantic ideal.

Chapter 5

“The Caress That Lasts As Long As the Money Does”:

The Pleasures, Dangers and Frustrations of Commercial Sex

Among the miscellaneous personal memorabilia included in Thomas Painter’s archive at the Kinsey Institute, there is an unusual document dating from June 1935—the poem entitled “Broadway Love. Homosexual.” It is devoted to the fleeting encounters homosexual men have with street hustlers and expresses Painter’s profound discontent with the difficulties of finding meaningful and reciprocal relations in commercial sex. The poem reads:

Bought and paid for.
 The smile, the caress that lasts
As long as the money does.
It is an opiate to a soul tied with wire thongs that
 Bite and choke and canker?
We buy love.
 Because a gulf and a cliff sunder us from love.
 Because we have waited and sought so long for a
 Love possible to us but elusive:
 Wait longer we will not
 To seek longer we cannot bear.
And to those who cannot even buy—
 They may stand and dumbly want
 Or they may haggle and cheat
 Or they may weep, dry tears.

Hell was at its most fiendish moment
 When it devised a heart full of and hungry for love
 Then twisted the mind and body thus endowed so it must
 not find end to its yearning.
 And finally put in the same world glorious boys
 Who will imitate the Goal, willow-the-wisps,
 For a time, for money.
 Then are gone.
 And we see ourselves merely

In a chocking mire
Alone.¹

Written a year after Painter graduated from Union Seminary and began actively exploring the world of male prostitution in New York, the poem communicates his feelings of frustration and loneliness, a result of his one-sided infatuations with the men who could not respond to his feelings and sometimes only ruthlessly exploited his erotic interest in them. The perfect embodiments of Painter's erotic ideal of muscular hyper-virile youth, hustlers nonetheless failed to appease the desire they aroused; they were only a ghost-light that led Painter into a mire of lowlife and inevitably left him unsatisfied and dispirited.

Nearly forty years later, in an attempt to systematize his sexual record for a future biographer, Painter wrote an autobiographical essay in which he characterized his life history as a search for mutuality in love, often sidetracked and generally disheartening but eventually realized; he called the essay "Long Search." In it, he provided a brief summary of the main periods of his life: his homosexual self-discovery and first sexual contacts with men, his failed relationships with the two boyfriends he "kept" in the late 1930s, his being "drunk with sex" in the late 1940s and early 1950s, his "Puerto Rican era." In part an apology for the "forty years of paying poor boys to have homosexual relations,"² in part an earnest attempt to give logic and meaning to his story of dashed hopes and failed ambitions, this essay demonstrates the great importance that Painter attributed to romantic companionship in achieving happiness in life as well as the despondency he felt throughout much of it, unable to establish such relations with the men who were, as a rule, much

¹ Thomas Painter, "Broadway Love. Homosexual" (1935), Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 34, series II, D.2., folder 19.

² Painter, "Long Search," 6.

younger, sexually “normal” and mainly interested in money. Yet, he concluded the chronology in the following way:

1963-1968 Search Culminated (“Fulfilled” is better probably) (or some such term to mean goal achieved, if in as strange and beautiful and deeply satisfying a way. I became a “companion,” I find myself completely needed and useful, I find reciprocated love, response, as never before.)

I meet and fall in love with a youth who is my physical ideal, intelligent, sensitive, gentle, responsive—and a heroin addict for 10 years. We live together, go hungry together, struggle against his “monkey,” he goes in and out of jails and hospitals, subsists by stealing. Finally we get him on methadone—and he abandons me.³

Despite the emotional turmoil and financial difficulties caused by the drug habit of this man, his last boyfriend Gilbert Aguilera^{*}, Painter wanted to believe that in this relationship he finally approached his ideal of mutual love, if only in relatively old age and for a rather short period of time. It was, to Painter, a long-awaited relief from the promiscuous life of hasty, unsatisfying, often one-time encounters with casual prostitutes and as such answered his profound need for a friendly response from his partners and reciprocity in sex.

Painter’s sexual record is a personal account, rare in its truthfulness and commitment to detail, of a homosexual man who spent most of his life paying other men for sex; it is also a poignant story of someone who tried to find intimacy and affection in these encounters and was repeatedly let down. Approaching Painter’s journal from a contemporary perspective, it is easy to regard him as a naive romantic who was looking for love in all the wrong places and failed to see behind the true motives of his mercenary partners or establish real connection with the lower-class youths he idealized. His desire to befriend the young men from whom he bought sex and companionship—some of them hardened professionals with dozens of regular clients, others cash-strapped teenagers

³ Ibid.

agreeing to his sexual propositions but ultimately uncomfortable with them and ashamed of their contact with “queers”—often seems pathetic. His frequent disappointments, as another of the “nice boys” robbed him, stood him up, turned out immature, irresponsible, disrespectful, violent, “psychopathic,” boring or not masculine enough, are exasperating for the reader. A quiet and cordial man, willing to help those in need and careful in his sexual advances, Painter also appears, at times, too finicky about his partners’ physical appearance, inattentive to their sexual needs and limitations, impatient with their antics. However, these aspects of Painter’s sexual history are not just a consequence of his personality flaws or his impractical attitude in the matters of love, but also reveal the social and emotional complexities of commercially-based sexual interaction between homosexual men and their sexually “normal” partners, a prominent feature of many early male homosexual subcultures. The individual specificity of Painter’s life story notwithstanding, it also enables one to take a closer look at the intricate power dynamic in this regime of male-to-male sexuality, based on asymmetrical gender-stratified sexual roles, and examine the related phenomena of sexual exploitation and homophobic violence, robbery and blackmail.

In his study of New York’s early homosexual subcultures, George Chauncey analyzes this gender-based organization of male-to-male sexual contact, attributing its heyday to the late nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century.⁴ Describing the working-class sexual culture of the period, he examines the widespread practice of sexual relations between sexually “normal” and conventionally masculine workingmen and their gender-deviant partners of the “intermediate sex.” Known as “fairies,” “queens” or “third-

⁴ Chauncey, “The Fairy as an Intermediate Sex,” in *Gay New York*, 47-63.

sexers,” the latter viewed themselves as womanlike in their psychological constitution and expressed it through markedly feminine self-presentation and a “passive” role in sexual intercourse with men. They sported bright, extravagant clothing, used makeup and dyed their hair, adopted women’s names, cultivated effeminate mannerisms, talked in the “obvious” high-pitched voice. While some of these men did consider their inner self to be that of a woman or an “androgynous,” for many others adopting the gender persona of the “fairy” was a cultural strategy, similar to that of female prostitutes, of advertising their sexuality in the streets and attracting “normal” men for sex. According to Chauncey, “the fairies’ style ... was not so much an imitation of women as a group but a provocative exaggeration of the appearance and demeanor ascribed more specifically to prostitutes. As a result, many men seem to have regarded fairies in the same terms they regarded prostitutes.”⁵ This is not to suggest that all “fairies” engaged in sexual commerce (who paid whom remains, in fact, a difficult question to answer),⁶ but rather that the system of gender

⁵ Ibid., 61.

⁶ The autobiographical writing of Ralph Werther is representative in this regard, attesting to several vectors along which material resources were transferred in the relations between fairies like Werther (female name “Jennie June”) and their sexually “normal” partners. Werther described his adoption of the style of the fairy as a passage similar to that of entering the “life” of prostitution; he regularly spoke of his “career as a female-impersonator,” by which he meant not performing in drag but cruising lower-class neighborhoods in search of sex. Earning money, however, was not the only reason for his sexual encounters with “burly” young laborers. As he mentioned: “I was decidedly averse to making a gainful occupation of the life. I wanted my freedom of action, and was unalterably opposed to intimacy for pecuniary gain with any one whom I did not adore. ... I accepted what was voluntarily proffered, but otherwise left money entirely out of consideration.” Werther, *Autobiography*, 119. He also admits to buying the company of sexually “normal” lower-class men by “treating” them in the same way they “treated” women. “On my fortnightly hegiras, I was well supplied with money,” he remarks, “so that I could give all [a gang of Bowery “savages”] a first-rate treat in exchange for their wonderful kindness. They kept good friends because I loaded them with gifts.” Werther, *The Female-Impersonators*, 208. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, an equally multi-directional system of economic exchange characterized the relations between effeminate homosexual men and *bubarrones* in Puerto Rico, as well as, it seems, in many other cultures where a gender-stratified regime of male-to-male sexual contact remained dominant. In his study of Brazilian *travestis* mentioned above, Don Kulick identifies a similar pattern. *Travestis* would make money from sex work and robbing clients and then spend a large amount of their income supporting the leisurely lifestyle of their heterosexually-identified masculine boyfriends, most of them lower-class teenagers (*boyzinhos*), paying all their expenses, buying them clothes and expensive gifts, etc. Kulick, “A Man in the House,” in *Travesti*, 96-133.

difference and sexual-economic exchange that underlay everyday interaction of working-class men with female prostitutes was translated into their encounters with “fairies.” “Fairy” could be a one-time pickup, a surrogate woman willing, when paid, to provide a “normal” man with fellatio (what some female prostitutes would not do) but it could also be a regular live-in partner supporting her “husband” and performing female duties at home. In both cases, physical and emotional intimacy was thoroughly intertwined with economics and organized around strict gender norms of masculine dominance and feminine submission. The working-class “normal” men regarded “fairies” with the same mixture of fascination and contempt, desire and violence that characterized their attitude towards female prostitutes. This enabled them to reaffirm the dividing line between themselves and their gender-deviant sexual partners and thus retain their masculine identity and their self-image as sexually “normal.”

Discussing the emergence of the middle-class “queer” identity in the first half of the twentieth century, Chauncey argues that it was, in many respects, developed in opposition to the working-class figure of the “fairy.”⁷ Unlike “fairies” who expressed their sexual difference by inverting the dominant codes of masculine appearance and demeanor, “queers” defined their sexual subjectivity through their same-sex attraction, not gender deviance, and assumed normatively masculine self-presentation. They forged a new model of sexual identity that differentiated between homo- and heterosexuality solely on the basis of the direction of one’s erotic desire; they were “unwilling to become virtual women ... [but] sought to remain men who nonetheless loved other men.”⁸ The flamboyant effeminate

⁷ Chauncey, “The Forging of Queer Identities and the Emergence of Heterosexuality in Middle-Class Culture,” in *Gay New York*, 99-127.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

persona of “fairy” was one of the reason why “queers” sought to dissociate themselves from them, but the issues of social class played, according to Chauncey, an equally important role. Striving for respectability and adhering to middle-class norms of decorum and self-restraint, “queers” rejected the blatant, “obvious” effeminacy and sexual brashness of “fairies,” the styles of behavior they associated with the criminal underworld and street prostitution. Furthermore, while “fairies” hardly ever had sex with one another and generally adhered to dichotomous gender-based sexual roles and a strict protocol of sexual nonreciprocity, “queers” were more disposed towards having other “queers” as their sexual partners and long-term lovers.

Painter’s case is, in many respects, a story of a man who adopted this new model of homosexual identity but found it difficult to establish romantic relationship with men and fully realize his erotic desires according to its configurations. Like “fairies,” Painter was erotically interested in virile, tough, sexually “normal” men but, at same time, felt strong aversion to effeminacy and thought of himself as a conventionally masculine man. Furthermore, repulsed by the idea of performing oral sex on his partners or being anally penetrated by them, Painter was equally put off by them assuming the “passive” role in sex; the latter indicated their being “queer” and made them sexually unappealing to him. Painter found himself in the position where he desired the impossible. He wanted a masculine “proletarian” lover, heterosexual in his appearance and behavior, but refused to perform the gender-deviant role of “fairy” that generally enabled such couplings in the lower-class milieu. He also wanted to have sex only with the men who were in no way “queer”; the lack of homosexual inclinations on their part was the precondition of Painter’s

own erotic desire towards them. To this erotic deadlock Painter found a solution that was, in fact, common among homosexual men of his generation: money.

Two important figures in Painter's biography, brothel owner Mario Esposito* ("Matty Costello") and Painter's closest "queer" friend Bill Graham, illustrate the opposite models of homosexual identity and lifestyle, defined by these men's class position and gendered self-presentation, in between which one can situate Painter's own understanding of his sexual subjectivity and the type of relationships he strived for. Born in Naples in a family of peasants, Mario immigrated to America at the age of eight and had sexual experiences with men since the age of fourteen; his first partners were a neighborhood garage mechanic, a fisherman he met at Coney Island, several sailors. In his late adolescence, Mario discovered a group of effeminate "fairies" who frequented Bryant Park prostituting themselves. He joined them and began to regularly use makeup and wear female clothing to attract men, adopting the female name of "Dolores Costello." At around eighteen, he met a "big, husky" sailor who became his first regular lover, a "husband" with whom he lived together for four years performing household chores and occasionally dressing as a woman at home. Together, they began a successful business of procuring male prostitutes, carefully chosen by them for their masculine looks and good reputation, to homosexual men. Mario used the pseudonym "Matty" for his work as a madame.⁹

Mario/"Dolores" was a rather typical example of the "fairies" that Chauncey discusses in his book. Deeply embedded in the working-class culture of gender-stratified homosexual

⁹ On "Matty Costello," see his case study as "Victor R." in Henry, *Sex Variants*, 438-450. Among his customers were composer Cole Porter, actor Monty Woolley, lyricist Lorenz Hart, writer Christopher Isherwood and others. At the time of the interview (1935), "Matty" operated from a three-room apartment in midtown Manhattan but regularly changed places (for which he earned the nickname "Nomad") to avoid police detection. His establishment was eventually closed down by the authorities in 1942, after which Mario went into the antique business. Thomas Painter, "Costello, Matty" entry in "The Index of Persons" (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 2.

contact (just like many examples in Chauncey's study, Mario was a South Italian immigrant), he exhibited a distinct transgender persona, entertaining in drag,¹⁰ preferring "passive sodomy" in sex with men and enjoying "female" activities like cooking, sewing and decorating.

Bill Graham, on the other hand, was representative of the "queer" subculture that, according to Chauncey, began to develop in the mid-twentieth century, mainly in the middle- and upper-class milieu. Graham was Painter's roommate at Yale, and the two men, after revealing their homosexual feelings to each other (at the time, neither had yet had sex with men), became close friends and confidants. Unlike Painter, however, who was unusually open about his sexuality and in this way jeopardized his career in religious teaching, Graham remained, in contemporary terms, "closeted" and lived a comfortable bachelor life of a rich businessman, conventionally masculine in appearance. Unsuccessful in cruising men for sex, often beaten and robbed by the "trade" he picked up on the streets, Graham came to rely on Painter for supplying him with sexual partners; he was, according to Painter a "fellator" who enjoyed performing oral sex on young muscular men.¹¹

Graham's most long-lasting affair was with the "smooth, intelligent [and] quite stable" Duke Bannan*, an "apparently homosexual" brother of one of Painter's sexually "normal" working-class partners. The relationship between Graham and Duke Bannan was that of sexual patronage. Duke was a "kept" lover who entertained the idea of becoming an actor

¹⁰ Among Painter's home movies, there is a short silent narrative clip dating from around 1940 that depicts Mario in full drag as "Dolores." She is surrounded by a group of young muscular men, naked except for jockstraps, who are offering themselves to her. She playfully refused awaiting her "husband." When he arrives, the two embrace and dance together. See movie reel "PN Parties" in Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 19, series IV, B. DVD6. Painter also described the party he attended in 1939, given by an Indian merchant prince in the eight-room suite in The Waldorf Towers in New York. Mario, who attended the party in drag, performed for the guests his famed "dance of the seven veils," with his male genitals strategically tucked. Painter to Kinsey, 23 September 1944, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 1.

¹¹ Painter, "Biography VIII," 11.

or a singer and was financially supported by the millionaire Graham in this endeavor until Graham's death in 1954, allegedly from suicide.¹²

Painter's sexual biography shares some similarities with the life histories of both men: like Mario/"Dolores," Painter was exclusively interested in young hyper-virile sexually "normal" men and, like Bill Graham, coming from an upper-middle-class background, he presented a normative gender identity. However, several critical aspects in Painter's understanding of his erotic desires distinguished him from the models of homosexual identity and lifestyle embodied by these two men. He resented the blatant effeminacy of "fairies" and could not imagine himself in the role of a homosexual "wife" to a heterosexually identified young man. Throughout his sexual journal, he always commented negatively on homosexual men who exhibited effeminate appearance and demeanor in public and, as late as 1970, remarked about being "disgusted and annoyed" at "flaming faggots" hanging around Forty-Second Street, applauding the police cleanup of the area.¹³ Painter also refused to have sex or a romantic relationship with other "queers," even if they possessed the muscular physique and masculine appearance he desired. In 1938, for example, he met through "Matty" an attractive homosexual man Harvey Young and installed him as his "kept boy," just as Bill Graham did Duke Bannan. Very soon, however, Painter found him boring; the young man "wanted breakfast in bed [and] affected

¹² Painter believed that Bill Graham's death might not be a suicide. In his sexual record, he described the last months of his life as marked by his continuous quarrels with Duke over finances. Duke was leading a luxurious life, requesting more and more money. After he complained of being tired driving a Jaguar and demanded a Cadillac, Graham announced to his lover that he was taking him out of his will, from which he was entitled to one-fourth of his estate amounting to over \$250,000. Soon after that, and before Graham was able to remove Duke from his will, he allegedly committed suicide in his apartment. Thomas Painter, "C.— —, Duke & Porter" entry in "The Index of Persons" (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 2.

¹³ Painter to the Institute for Sex Research, 19 September 1970, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 27.

an ennui.”¹⁴ Furthermore, Painter did not enjoy any kind of penetrative sex. Feeling himself to be in the submissive position of a virtual woman when fellating the man or being anally penetrated by him, Painter equally refused to be fellated by or “pedicate” his partner, because such acts suggested that the partner was, in fact, not sexually “normal” but a “queer” like himself. Throughout his life Painter attempted to reconcile these conflicted aspects of his erotic desires and find romantic companionship with a heterosexually identified “real man” without adopting the effeminate gender persona of “fairy” or assuming a passive, “female” role in sex.

The personal notations included in Painter’s 1935 interview for the sex variant study, describing the characteristics of his ideal erotic object and his preferred sexual techniques, already suggest a profound conflict between Painter’s attraction towards sexually “normal” young men and the mechanics of male-to-male sex that risked compromising these men’s masculinity and undermining their heterosexual status. Painter maintained that his partner “must not be ‘unwilling,’ antagonistic or repulsed” but this was about the maximum of sexual response that he expected from the man when engaging with him in his desired act of genital rubbing. He stated that “in the act of sexual intercourse an almost statuesque lack of cooperation on the part of the object is satisfactory” and further remarked:

Mutual spontaneity in kissing is highly exciting, however—unless the person be homosexual. ... I must be on top of him. When he is on top of me orgasm or even pleasure is usually impossible. Orgasm in him is of no interest to me. The erection of his penis is usually undesirable. ... These rules generally apply so far that I have four times fulfilled orgasm on objects

¹⁴ Harvey Young was then introduced by “Matty” to Christopher Isherwood who became his lover and took him to California where they stayed together until 1941. Thomas Painter, “Young, Harvey” entry in “The Index of Persons” (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 4. Harvey Young, as a Hollywood gym owner, appears on a photograph by George Platt Lynes dating from ca. 1947.

who were actually asleep throughout the entire process.¹⁵

In one of the earliest entries in his sexual journal dating from June 1944, Painter elaborated on these aspects of his erotic desire. Unlike many of his fellow homosexual men who seduced “normal” youths into performing oral sex on them, Painter was not interested in what he called “sexual conquest . . . by fellation” and was not aroused by “observing a boy go through the passions & spasms of orgasm.” To Painter, the signs of his partner’s pleasure in male-to-male sex exposed his possible homosexual nature, a highly unappealing quality that ruled out his desire to have sex with him again. Painter described it as a “charmingly inverted whim” of his—“unless I have visible evidence that he is the sort of boy who does not want to do it I’m not interested in having it done.”¹⁶ To Kinsey, Painter outlined the intricate and rather contradictory formula of sexual response that allowed him to truly enjoy sex with men:

Actually I like the boy [to] handle my penis . . . [but] only if he is apparently the sort of a boy who would not *sua sponte* do it. (And the more I know that he is unwilling the more pleasure is derived from this. It is in ratio to his real heterosexuality.) Similarly I enjoy other caresses, and similarly in ratio to the youth’s heterosexuality. I like to have them undress me, and the more clumsy (and hence male) they are about it, the more pleasurable it is. . . . The perverse desire that the [man’s] pleasure be not legitimate, not be part of his real nature, remains. He must not be homosexual. I am pleased in arousing the interest in a person who expectedly and properly should not be interested. The more unexpected and genuine the interest the better, but at the same time I must be sure that he is properly all male, all man. . . . I do not want him to enjoy it psychically, but animally, physically.¹⁷

Seeing homosexual pleasure and true masculinity as mutually exclusive and attracted solely to partners who had nothing “queer” about them, Painter found himself in the

¹⁵ Henry, *Sex Variants*, 379.

¹⁶ Painter to Kinsey, 22 June 1944, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

situation where his erotic desires, in Marcel Proust's famous words, "would be forever unsatisfiable were money not to deliver real men to [him]." ¹⁸

In 1964, responding to the question of sex researcher John Gagnon about why he always paid men for sex instead of trying to establish a reciprocal and financially equal relationship, Painter provided a straightforward explanation: "Non-paid I must please him. To do so I must fellate or be pedicated neither of which do I enjoy. ... So I want to pay and command." ¹⁹ This statement, unusually blunt for Painter who generally devised more elaborate and nuanced rationalizations of his sexual behavior, attests to an important aspect of his sexual history that defined his social and sexual interaction with his young lower-class lovers. Painter's view of money as an always available resource with which one could obtain whatever one wanted from other people was clearly an effect of his upper-middle-class upbringing. He described himself as growing up in "complete disregard of money," considering it "some sort of token stuff that you passed people when you wanted something." ²⁰ With Painter's tendency to discuss his paid sexual contacts with lower-class men in the idealistic terms of financially helping his partners and reforming them, he addressed the issues of economic power and sexual submission in such encounters only rarely throughout his sexual record. His collection of erotic drawings, however, reveals that

¹⁸ Marcel Proust, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, trans. John Sturrock (New York: Viking, 2004), 17.

¹⁹ Painter to Gebhard, 1 February 1964, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 21.

²⁰ Painter to Pomeroy, 20 November 1962, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 19. This attitude inevitably changed, as Painter became more and more impoverished in the postwar years, but only to some degree; he remained careless and irresponsible about financial matters, regarding money as a rather unpleasant subject better to be avoided. Painter admitted himself being something of a "financial moron," unable to budget his expenses, regularly overspending and, on several occasions, not paying his debts. This unfortunate quality often led him into financial troubles from which he was repeatedly rescued by Bill Graham. After Graham's death, however, his situation became much more precarious—in the spring of 1964, for example, he nearly starved himself to death, unable to find employment or any source of income while in Los Angeles. The detailed account of this episode in Painter's life is included in Minton, *Departing from Deviance*, 204-210.

economic coercion was, at least in his fantasy, an important motive for his involvement with male prostitutes and even an erotic stimulus in itself.

Painter identified “forcing sex on an unwilling person ... by giving (or withholding) money which he needs” as one of the predominant themes of his homoerotic artwork.²¹ Many of his drawings presented a young protagonist who seemed reluctant to engage in male-to-male sex, “apprehensive and depressed by the prospect,”²² but, under the threat of violence or because of his financially desperate situation, was made to undress and submit to homosexual advances. Spending much of his free time reading popular history books, Painter was particularly interested in the subject of sexual domination and servitude and researched historical examples of military and ritual rape, sexual abuse of slaves, sexual relations between aristocracy and peasants, colonists and indigenous population, etc. In his sexual journal, he mentioned, for instance, his reading a book about Ivan the Terrible and finding erotically fascinating its discussion of sexual debauchery that the tsar and his guards, “the virile, reckless, brutal Oprichniki,” engaged in; he described Ivan as “to a remarkable extent, living [his] less admirable fantasies.”²³ These fantasies found their visual expression in the drawings that depicted a powerful ruler offered captured enemy soldiers or newly purchased slaves whom he ordered to be stripped, raped and tortured, while overlooking the process.²⁴ In these images, Painter frequently represented economic

²¹ Painter to Christenson, 8 May 1966, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 23.

²² Thomas Painter, commentary on drawing “171,” Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 22, series IV, C.

²³ Painter to Christenson, 9 February 1967, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 24.

²⁴ One such scene depicts a group of naked men kneeling in submissive poses in front of soldiers in Middle Eastern costume and was described by Painter as “Arabs or Tunisian pirates capturing Christians and giving them the choice of advancing into a spear or backing into an unsheathed and ready penis (Sir Richard Burton).” See drawing “135” in Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 21, series IV, C. Among other examples of such scenarios of sexual domination are “At a Roman banquet two slave boys are about to be forced to submit to pedication” or “The wicked Sultan orders his Negroid slave to pedicate his new blond Christian

coercion as one-sided nudity and portrayed forced stripping and nakedness in front of clothed persons to suggest sexual submission and humiliation. Painter openly admitted that he regularly entertained such sadistic fantasies of absolute control over another person's body, its unconstrained sexual exploitation afforded by his imagined social and economic power. It is important to stress, however, that he never attempted to carry them out in his real-life sexual encounters. Adhering to the middle-class norms of courtesy, respect, consent and non-violence, Painter remained, for the most part, careful and sensitive in his sexual dealings with prostitutes; in comparison with some of his "queer" friends, he seemed much less blatant and forceful in his sexual advances. One can only speculate about the role that the scenarios of sexual domination, evident in Painter's homoerotic artwork, played in his erotic imagination. One explanation could be that they allowed Painter to retain, at least in his mind, his status as a dominant masculine partner and distance himself from the subcultural image of submissive "fairy" who was ready to get down on his knees and sexually service a "normal" man, only to be beaten and robbed by him afterwards.

More representative of the type of cross-class homosexual relationship that Painter hoped to establish in his real life was the description of his erotic "daydreams" that he recounted in his sexual record. These philanthropic fantasies similarly involved the image of him as someone who possessed power and superior economic resources but used them not merely to obtain sexual pleasure from those economically disenfranchised but was willing to rescue and "reform" these men and only expected sex and companionship as a return gesture of gratitude. Painter wrote:

slave" are other examples of such scenarios. See two uncatalogued drawings in Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 27, series IV, C., Folder 5.

My “day-dreams,” my erotic fancies however are all with me wholly dominant. Over strong, independent spirited, muscular, dominant youths. My dominance, in these situations, arises from vast wealth and power, which I exert to rescue and raise them from the most extremely low and desperate social situations—intense poverty, slavery, imprisonment, threat of death. Thus I can be dominant, in a way, while allowing them to be dominant personalities at the same time. They need me unequivocally, due to their situation . . . and I need them for their sexual attraction and to need someone to help, who needs me. Eventually, due to living with me (the rich and powerful person), they become educated, sophisticated, suave and able-to-take-care-of-themselves-very-well-thank-you—and I release them and find another who needs me.²⁵

This scenario of sexual patronage provided Painter with a more “noble” formula of sexual-economic exchange, in which he was not merely taking advantage of a sexually “normal” youth’s poverty to entice him into having sex but attempted to build a more intimate connection with the man and support him in everyday troubles. As I discussed above, Painter considered lower-class men to be sexually uninhibited and licentious, exposed to sex since the early age and exhibiting a lighthearted, matter-of-fact attitude about it. He therefore viewed their providing sexual services to him, especially in such “soft” forms as body rubbing or mutual masturbation, as something rather insignificant to them—a small reward for his financial favors.

With his personality of a religious romantic, Painter sought to find a mutually beneficial arrangement with his commercial sexual partners that allowed him to maintain his self-image as a moral man. In some respects, such position was an effect of Painter’s middle-class discomfort with sex, especially in such socially condemned, “sordid” forms as prostitution. Commercially-based homosexual encounters were rarely seen by Painter as simple means of satisfying his sexual needs but had to be organized and rationalized as personal friendship, social work, photographic session or even sexuality research. Despite

²⁵ Painter to Christenson, 9 February 1966, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 23.

the extremely specific demands that Painter had toward his partners' clothing, physique or manners, he emphasized that he was also genuinely interested in their personalities and individual life stories and tried to establish a connection with them that transcended the simple exchange of money for sex. In his correspondence with Painter, Wardell Pomeroy argued, for example, that these were Painter's mental inhibitions about genital contact between men and sexual pleasure in general, but Painter himself repeatedly protested such a view and insisted that he found genuine satisfaction in the non-physical aspects of commercially-based companionship.²⁶ He wrote:

If I want a boy enough to have sex with him at all I want sex with him to be getting-to-know, a discovery, an exchange with him of our personalities—only to be achieved by quiet talk, observation of him, action and reaction: sousing his personality, his feelings, his aura.

In the same letter, Painter recounted an episode from the late 1950s when, after receiving some money from Bill Graham's inheritance, he decided to order a "call boy" using the service of his old time acquaintance, homosexual procurer Danny Rogers, but was put off by the prostitute's businesslike attitude.

[He] almost at once stripped, showing a truly handsome body, and said "Well, what should we do?". Like, shall we say, a bartender saying "What will you have?" A boy is not a cocktail, or a fried chicken. ... Of course, I am in a tiny minority. Most homosexuals (I speak only of those who seek ht. [heterosexual] partners) are of the other school. A boy is a cock, a "piece of trade," a "number," a "piece of meat." ... Boys know this—and treat them as "johns" or "tricks," and respond with contempt and dislike. ... Quite possibly this is one important reason we are so lowly regarded. Because we act like hungry swine.²⁷

²⁶ Painter called this view "Pomeroy's profound misunderstanding" of his sexual nature, possibly due to Pomeroy's "personal incapacity to appreciate this sort of sexual pleasure—the non-physical part of it." "He called it 'inhibitions' and urged me to shed them. I think he was all wrong." Painter to Christenson, 29 May 1966, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 23.

²⁷ Painter to Christenson, 29 May 1966, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 23.

In his sexual life, Painter clearly relied on money to find sexual partners, especially of the conventionally masculine and sexually “normal” type which he found attractive, but in his interaction with these men he tried to counteract the dominant stereotype of commercial sex as ruthless exploitation and adhered to his philanthropically informed “moral code.”

Written in the summer of 1961, the essay entitled “Moral Code” reads as Painter’s earnest attempt to explain and redeem the fact that his sexual record essentially chronicled the several decades of his paying his partners, often economically marginalized young lower-class men, for sex. Such a lifestyle was, in the popular view, positively immoral; Painter was a depraved man who either corrupted innocent youths or associated with equally depraved professional prostitutes. Hoping to challenge such an opinion and persuade the reader of his decency and high moral standing, Painter outlined the main elements of his personal ethical system—“never hurt anyone” and “try to be good”—and wanted to show how his daily interaction with commercial sexual partners did not violate the fundamental principles of his moral code.

Living a life of paying for sex with teenage underprivileged boys makes for thin ice skating on the “coercion for money” part of it [the “moral code”]. I have always avoided it when I sensed it, have only had boys who were perfectly willing and in no sense unhappy about it. . . . I have always verbalized my approach and taken no for an answer at once, without discussion (even if they didn’t mean it, as it later developed). I have never used stimulants (erotic pictures) or drugs (alcohol) to “make” a boy. Frequently I have been so careful and hesitant and sensitive that the boys have been vaguely irritated. I have tried to minimize, in the sex act, my role down to necessity, never be greedy or boring or demanding. I stop at any slightest sign of disapproval of any detail. I try, as you know, to be friendly and interested in the person, fair in my dealings, respectful of their dignity as persons, sensitive to their feelings and attitudes.²⁸

²⁸ Thomas Painter, “Moral Code” (1961), unpublished essay, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 2, series II, D.2., vol. 18, n.p.

On the near absence of outside accounts of Painter's sexual life, it is impossible to ascertain whether Painter was, in reality, as respectful, understanding and friendly as he wanted to portray himself in his autobiographical writing.²⁹ What such preoccupation with the morality of prostitution demonstrates, however, is Painter's genuine desire to find a type of commercially based relationships with a sexually "normal" young man in which he could assert his status of a dominant partner but avoid the implications of moral corruption and sexual exploitation.

As I discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, the philanthropic paradigm of cross-class contact to which Painter was exposed during his theological studies and religious work in the late 1920s and early 1930s provided him with a reformatory model of sexual relationship and everyday companionship with economically disenfranchised and delinquent lower-class youth that he adhered to throughout most of his life. As late as 1964, for example, Painter expressed his disapproval at the permissive, "quasi parental" attitude of Alan Reimer who, in the relationship with his teenage Puerto Rican "husband" Robert, adhered to a "philosophy of total laissez-faire" and refused "to educate him or attempt to influence or help him at all."³⁰ He complained that Alan was spoiling Robert "outrageously" with expensive gifts, from electric guitar to barbell set, while the boy, "quite conscious of his beauty," rarely touched them but instead "tend[ed] to lounge around

²⁹ Henry's *Sex Variants* monograph contains two case histories of Painter's acquaintances and sexual partners who comment on their association with Painter. One, homosexual Salvatore N., was "disgusted" at the goings-on at Painter's place that he described as a meeting place of "mercenary" male prostitutes. Another, hustler Leonard R. ("Theodore Wade" in Painter's prostitution study), who had sex with both women and men, characterized Painter as "a hell of a swell roommate" but remarked that their relationship was that of "pure friendship" with no sex involved. Henry, *Sex Variants*, 179, 460.

³⁰ Painter to Gebhard, 1 December 1964, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 21.

like Theda Bara and look voluptuous.”³¹ Painter contrasted Alan’s indifference with his own personal investment in the life of his then boyfriend Gilbert Aguilera, whom he attempted to help in quitting drugs, leaving the streets and finding honest employment. He similarly defended his noble motives in his relations with lower-class youth when in 1959 Edward Melcarth confronted him about the possibly exploitative nature of his contacts with Puerto Rican immigrants. Painter maintained that he was not a “fly-by-night soulless lustful exploiter of helpless minorities” but attempted to establish meaningful and mutually beneficial relationships with his younger underprivileged lovers.³² This idea of private reformatory endeavor became something of a life mission for Painter, as it satisfied his often thwarted desire to feel needed and respected by his sexual partners and provided him with a moral framework through which to image his everyday social and sexual interaction with them.

Among the few letters addressed to Painter that he preserved in his archive, there exists one that he seemed to particularly value. A brief one-page note, it was written by one Charlie O’Rourke, a gangster whom Painter met in October 1934. O’Rourke was brought in to Painter’s “ranch,” his 109th Street tenement apartment where he regularly entertained a group of Times Square hustlers, by Painter’s live-in lover and cook Blackie. O’Rourke was a typical “street tough,” a member of a Jersey City gang; he was involved in many robberies and even a murder, went to prison for burglary and was, at one point, addicted to

³¹ Painter to Gebhard, 17 August 1964, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 21. Painter’s observation was exactly truthful, as he himself described the period when Alan helped one of their mutual Puerto Rican acquaintances, Little Indio, to quit heroin. Robert’s mother also, by Painter’s own admission, thought very positively about Alan’s influence on her son.

³² Painter to Pomeroy, 11 June 1959, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 16.

heroin.³³ However, upon meeting Painter, who took a special fancy to him and encouraged him to make an honest living, O'Rourke resolved to go back to work as a merchant marine and returned to sea in the spring of 1935. In June, he wrote to Painter the following letter:

Dear Tom

am doing very nice with my job, and just can't wait till the ship leaves, I did not think that it was so easy to work for a living, but I have you to thank for that. I have received my first pay yesterday, then went up town to pay Bill [Graham] the money I owed him, we had a few drinks then had dinner, then we _____.³⁴

By preserving this letter among his personal memorabilia, as well as underlining the above sentence, Painter wanted to communicate to the potential reader of his sexual record that he sought to positively influence his socially delinquent or even downright criminal lovers and at times succeeded in reforming them. As Painter wrote to psychologist Alan Bell in 1967, his relationship with O'Rourke was his "greatest success in helping someone."³⁵ This letter was also a proof that, while true sexual reciprocity was perhaps impossible in the commercially based encounters with sexually "normal" lower-class men, these relationships did not necessarily involve coercion and exploitation but could instead resemble regular, non-sexual friendship. O'Rourke is mentioned repeatedly throughout Painter's sexual journal as an example of a person who was viewed by society as immoral and criminal but, when approached with sympathy and understanding, turned out kind, loyal and grateful. He acted as Painter's protector in his dealings with other hustlers, some of them dishonest and violent, and, for example, helped Bill Graham to get rid of a

³³ Thomas Painter, "O.—, Charlie" entry in "The Index of Persons" (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 4.

³⁴ Charles O.— [O'Rourke] to Painter, 22 June 1935, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 34, series IV, D.2., Folder 19, underlining Painter's, probably in 1961.

³⁵ Painter to Alan Bell, 14 August 1967, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 24.

blackmailer who had been terrorizing him.³⁶ Even when Painter went broke in February 1935 and was quickly deserted by his other lovers, O'Rourke remained living with him (they moved together to a different apartment) and later, after receiving a large insurance settlement for a work trauma, gave some money to Painter in an attempt to recompense him for his previous help. The last incident especially reaffirmed Painter in his belief that "queers" could "love [their] boys, not just suck their semen" and that "the boys will, in their fashion, respond with friendliness and liking, some of them."³⁷

"Some of them" is the key phrase here. As I will demonstrate below, Charlie O'Rourke was a rather exceptional figure in Painter's sexual biography that was largely populated by either rough and sinister characters who ruthlessly exploited Painter's attraction to them, at times resorting to robbery and extortion, or "glorious youths" who, even if sexually available for money, showed little amiability and affection and naturally had no interest in establishing romantic relations or friendship with older "queers." Furthermore, despite Painter's idealistic pronouncements about the positive role that he wanted to play in the lives of his "proletarian" lovers, the effects of his paying them for sex were often demoralizing, and the money they obtained from Painter were used by them to support a desultory semi-criminal lifestyle of drinking, gambling and drug use. Painter regularly pondered over this issue, very much in the line of the social reformers of the time preoccupied with the question whether dispensing money and material goods to the poor had any positive impact on their life situation or merely made them dependent on charity, but he never really changed his pattern of buying companionship from those who were

³⁶ Painter, "Biography VIII," 11.

³⁷ Painter to Pomeroy, 27 May 1963, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 20.

economically marginalized and depended on him financially. Painter's own life circumstances and his attitude towards financial matters were far from virtuous as well. As I have already mentioned, except for his military service in 1942-1945, Painter remained unemployed until 1947 and spent most of the prewar years living off inheritances or the funds he borrowed under the pretext of doing field research for his male prostitution study. These aspects of Painter's own financial situation hardly had any positive influence on the delinquent lovers he had sex with and attempted to reform. Encouraging them to work, he himself did not and even engaged in rather unscrupulous plots to procure money from his relatives.³⁸

The danger of spoiling young men with his money instead of reforming them is well illustrated by the history of Painter's relations with another of his prewar lovers, Peter Dubrava. Painter described Peter as one of the "Depression boys," young men from rural areas or impoverished industrial communities who were driven to large cities in search of employment and, unable to find a job, resorted to casual prostitution. These men perfectly corresponded to Painter's ideal of the sexually "normal" lower-class lover. They were

³⁸ Barred from religious work, Painter relied on a succession of inheritances to support himself, while his attempts to find other work were rather half-hearted and did not lead to anything until after the war and upon Kinsey's intervention. By February 1935, Painter had already spent all the money he received in March 1934 after the death of his father, but in the fall of 1935 was able to obtain \$500 from a friend, ostensibly to undertake research on male prostitution which he, however, did not begin until 1939-1940. In July 1936 Painter went completely broke again and took a two-month job as a relief elevator operator. Painter's brother Sidney offered him a position in a silk factory in Connecticut owned by his friend but Painter turned down the offer, refusing to leave New York. Instead, after discovering that his father's second wife was dying from cancer and was expected to leave him and Sidney a large estate, Painter decided to borrow money from his future inheritance. Sidney found such an attitude towards their stepmother's illness "cold-blooded and ghoulish," but nonetheless endorsed his brother's borrowing of \$2,000 (attained on the condition of signing away \$10,000 of the estate) when Painter promised to learn stenography and do library research for his book about homosexual prostitution with this money. After less than three months, Painter had spent all the money but neither learned stenography nor showed any progress with his book. Instead, in February 1937, he wanted to borrow another \$2,000, which Sidney also allowed, however reluctantly. Painter's stepmother died in the fall of 1937 leaving him around \$60,000. After his own mother's death in 1940, Painter received even more money and these funds sustained him until he joined the Armed Forces in April 1942. On Painter's conflict with his brother about their stepmother's inheritance and Painter's refusal to work, see their correspondence dating from February 1937 in Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 35, series II, D.2., folder 22.

involved in the urban underworld of hustling because of their dire economic circumstances, not some inner depravity, and therefore were essentially “nice boys” whom Painter could rescue from poverty with his financial help. One such youth, Peter came to New York from Palmerton, Pennsylvania, a small Depression-ridden industrial town where his Ukrainian immigrant parents worked in a zinc plant. He left the town in 1937 and first travelled to Miami where he began occasionally hustling, since no regular job materialized. Painter met Peter in August 1939 through a procurer who was providing him with contacts among male prostitutes, ostensibly for the purpose of Painter’s ethnographic research. Initially Painter found Peter “gentle, graceful and refined and rather too pretty,”³⁹ not as masculine as he preferred his partners to be, but soon fell in love with the man and installed him at his place as a “kept” lover. Discovering that Peter possessed a well-developed muscular physique, Painter suggested he start training regularly and become a bodybuilding model. He paid for Peter’s gym membership and, “to maintain his self-respect and give him the feeling that he was not being kept,” found Peter a job posing nude for his friend, “alleged sculptor” Tom Clifford. They spent most of 1940 vacationing together, driving across the country in Painter’s newly purchased Packard, visiting Florida in March and California later in the summer.

In his relationships with Peter, Painter attempted to reform and socially elevate the young man who, according to him, “acquired a hatred for books, school and reading in general, and for every thing connected with learning,” being raised by the poor and backward immigrant parents.⁴⁰ As Peter was unwilling to devote time to what Painter

³⁹ Painter to Kinsey, 22 June 1944, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, D.2, vol. 1.

⁴⁰ Painter to Kinsey, December 1944, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, D.2, vol. 1.

called “self-improvement” and, it seems, rather put off by Painter’s overtly patronizing manner in recommending that he did so,⁴¹ hardly anything came out of Painter’s “educational” efforts. A series of letters that Painter received from Peter’s friend in 1941 suggests that the effect that their relationship had on Peter was, in reality, harmful, turning a young man into a complete loafer without any serious goal in life. These letters were written by one “Mother Campbell,” Peter’s homosexual friend in Miami whom he went to visit in the winter of 1940-1941, as he grew more and more dissatisfied about his life with Painter. The first of these letters contrasts so much with the one written to Painter by O’Rourke and shows the kind of the problems inherent in the type of commercially based relationships Painter strived to develop with his lower-class lovers. “Mother Campbell” wrote:

I am really concerned about his [Peter’s] attitude and mental outlook, on things in general. Having known Peter before you, I feel I am in a fairly good position to note the amazing change that has come over the kid. ...

He has lost all sense of values, both in money, and people. He doesn’t seem to realize, who his real friends are, and if he did, not particularly impressed with the knowledge. ... As I see it, Pete wasn’t mentally equipped to keep up with the pace, that he has traveled this past year. His life for the past year, has been one beautiful vacation, after the other. He acts exactly like a movie star, who actually believes all the things that are said about them. In the house, on the street, he always seems to be conscious of himself.

He [Peter] told me, that he really wanted to do something constructive for himself, and that pleased me very much. Ned [Campbell’s roommate] told him, before leaving, that he would assist in obtaining him a position. Ned has kept his word, he’s even worried himself sick over it, but La Peter has

⁴¹ In his sexual journal, Painter repeatedly expressed his frustration, often in a rather condescending manner, about his lower-class partners’ linguistic incompetence. This usually concerned young Puerto Rican men whose poor mastery of English made Painter incomprehensible to them. Similar remarks, however, were directed by Painter towards other lower-class men as well; he found them inarticulate, vulgar in their expressions and was generally annoyed by their “monosyllabic English.” About Peter, Painter commented that his spelling was “weak” but speech “grammatically correct without any sort of accent or vulgarism.” He volunteered to help Peter to enlarge his vocabulary but “this suggestion [was] met with silence.” Painter to Kinsey, 22 June 1944, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, D.2, vol. 1.

shown a definite lack of interest. . . . It's apparent—that he doesn't want work. . . . So the kid—is just drifting along. Gets up in the afternoon, about one o'clock, usually spends couple of hours before the mirror, then takes a little stroll, has a lovely dinner, the price of which is of no consequence. Takes in a movie, the price, still of no consequence. Then he goes to bowl, in an alley, the location of which, I definitely don't like. It's one North Miami Ave. And long about, two or three in the morning, he comes strolling in, makes a careful toilet, and goes to bed. That has been going for days and days.

We both know—that it was partly your money, that brought about such a state of mind. . . . And I for one, would appreciate your taking him in hand, and try and mold him into something—very different.⁴²

The situation depicted in Campbell's letter was a far cry from Painter's ideal of helping an economically underprivileged lover to establish himself in life and illustrated the negative consequences that "keeping" a lover could entail. Peter's conflicted feelings towards his relationship with Painter—he clearly enjoyed financial opportunities it afforded him, demanding more and more money and flaunting luxuries but remained averse to physical contact with Painter (or other men) and was ashamed about being his "kept boy"⁴³—further complicated the case and eventually led to their separation. Later in life, Painter regretted

⁴² Campbell to Painter, 1 January 1941, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 35, series IV, D.2, Folder 24. Painter took personal offense from this letter, in part because he thought he was not to blame for Peter's laziness and lack of effort in finding work, in part because of his jealousy of Campbell who, despite his being "queer," succeeded in becoming Peter's intimate friend—"Mother Campbell"—while he did not. An unpleasant exchange of letters between the three ensued, further exacerbated by Peter's demands for more money from Painter and his pawning Painter's camera to pay his expenses in Miami. Eventually, an agreement was reached that Peter was to come back to New York and try to find a regular employment.

⁴³ Painter remarked that Peter was physically repelled by his preferred "friction" technique and neither allowed himself to be masturbated or fellated by him; soon into their relationship, he refused to have any sexual contact with Painter whatsoever. In this respect, Peter was rather unlike many of Painter's lower-class lovers who, confident in their heterosexuality, had an easygoing, matter-of-fact attitude about sex with men. Because Peter also showed little interest in sex with women (again, unlike Painter's other lovers who had ongoing heterosexual affairs), Painter speculated that he might have been homosexual himself but suppressed his erotic desires, being deeply troubled by them. Painter to Kinsey, 23 September 1944, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, D.2, vol. 1.

ever beginning this affair and described it as “a horrible, complete waste of time, opportunity, money and everything else.”⁴⁴

The fiasco of Painter’s relationship with Peter was, in many respects, a result of their different life circumstances and conflicting personality issues; it represented a familiar trouble of commercially based companionship, in which money failed to obtain one love and affection. Painter’s frequent problems in his relationships with other paid lovers, however, were rooted as often in the particular social configurations of male prostitution in the period, its complex multi-directional power dynamic and its close connection to homophobic assault, sexual blackmail and robbery. In his discussion of the organization of sexual encounters between men in interwar and postwar London, Matt Houlbrook provides an insightful analysis of “poof rorting” (the British analog of the American expression “rolling queers”) practiced by the same lower-class men who were willing to have sex and even form romantic relationships with older and wealthier homosexual men.⁴⁵ Describing the gender-stratified logic of sexual contact between recognizably effeminate “poofs,” “queans” or “bitches” and their conventionally masculine sexual partners (the erotic couple similar to that of “fairy” and sexually “normal” man examined by Chauncey), Houlbrook argues that the notion of masculinity, prevalent in working-class communities of the period, both allowed for casual sex with “painted and scented” homosexual men and encouraged their physical abuse and economic exploitation. Houlbrook forwards a groundbreaking argument that these two types of behavior were in no way incompatible; they were not, as homosexual folk knowledge often suggests, practiced by two different kinds of

⁴⁴ Painter to Bell, 24 September 1967, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 24.

⁴⁵ Houlbrook, ““London’s Bad Boys’: Homosex, Manliness, and Money in Working-Class Culture,” in *Queer London*, 167-194.

men (the honest “renters” and the unscrupulous blackmailers and brutal “mugs”), and violence and robbery were not psychological compensation for engaging in deviant sexual acts. In reality, as Houlbrook maintains, the young workingmen’s gender identity and reputation among peers was defined by their personal qualities of dominance, independence and resourcefulness and was enacted against women (and by extension womanlike “poofs”) and other men in situations of daily interaction. Within this regime of masculinity, the biological sex of the man’s sexual partner mattered little but his position in the relationship a lot. He was expected to be assertive, tough, aggressive or even brutal, and this attitude underlay both his “active” penetration of the unmanly “quean” and his acts of homophobic assault and robbery; both affirmed his reputation as a real man. Houlbrook writes:

In sliding between intimate friendship and brutal assault, workingmen’s encounters with the queer transcended contemporary understandings of “homosexuality” *or* “homophobia.” Intimacy, sex, blackmail, theft, and assault constituted a continuum within the *same* cultural terrain, underpinned by dominant conceptions of masculinity as toughness and resourcefulness. . . . Men played roles that reproduced a *difference* from their sexual partners, articulating a toughness that asserted their physical and moral superiority.⁴⁶

As Houlbrook observes, analyzing a variety of court records and first-person testimonies from the period, “poof rorting” often occurred as a part of an established relationship or following physical intimacy with the “queer,” and offered working-class men a chance to enact their dominant masculinity, just as unreciprocated intercourse did. “Imagining the queer as effeminate or subordinate,” argues Houlbrook, “simultaneously actuated the desire for homosex and emotional intimacy . . . and rendered him an object to be targeted in other

⁴⁶ Ibid., 178-179.

ways.”⁴⁷ Imagined not in the contemporary terms of mutuality and consent but organized around aggressive pursuit of genital “relief,” male sexual pleasure, as sought by young working-class men, was fully reconcilable with physical violence and commercial exploitation of those who provided them with this pleasure.

This complex system of social and sexual interaction between “queers” and their young lower-class sexually “normal” partners determined the fact that these encounters exhibited a very intricate power dynamic. Many “queers” possessed an economic privilege that allowed them to obtain sex from socially marginal and economically disenfranchised youth, but the great social stigma attached to homosexuality and the risk of legal persecution for engaging in “deviant sexual intercourse” made them, at the same time, easy targets for violence, robbery and blackmail. Their partners, for the most part less affluent and often of a much younger age, were naturally in a much less advantageous position but their culturally legitimized “rough” forms of masculine expression also allowed them to physically attack those they considered inferior and weak and extort additional financial rewards from them either by force or in more subtle ways of threats and blackmail. This criminal and semi-criminal behavior was not seen by them as morally wrong; it was their instrumental response to poverty, a “smart” and resourceful way of navigating urban space and benefitting from their good looks and muscular physicality, highly valued by their homosexual pursuers.

Accounts of homophobic violence, robbery and sexual blackmail abound in Painter’s sexual history. Since the beginning of his association with the urban milieu of male prostitutes, he was regularly robbed by them, exposed to threats of blackmail and, on

⁴⁷ Ibid., 180.

several occasions, physically assaulted. Painter's very first sexual partner Hungarian hustler Lajos Halász deserted him on their trip through Italy, taking with him Painter's camera, and later, when Painter returned to New York, was sending cables from Hamburg to Union Seminary demanding that Painter pay him fifty dollars—"or else."⁴⁸ Many of the hustlers whom Painter met in New York equally showed "an utter lack of financial morals." They were, as he angrily wrote after being once again robbed by one of his lovers, "chiselers de luxe, dead beats and lazy loafers and scroungers."⁴⁹ Bill Flaherty, Painter's initial contact among lower-class male prostitutes in New York, managed to swindle him out of 300 dollars. George Jansen, another member of the group of Times Square hustlers with whom Painter thought he had established close personal relations, at the end robbed Painter to his face of all his money; to Painter's protests about their friendship, he told him "to stick [his] 'friendship' up [his] ass."⁵⁰ Clearly not all of Painter's sexual partners behaved like this (O'Rourke was one exception), but similar incidents were far from rare in his sexual history and, as Painter got more and more impoverished after the war, they became increasingly frustrating to him. Writing to Kinsey in 1948, Painter summarized the two years he lived at his Second Avenue apartment:

I have been robbed pretty regularly, and thuroly [*sic*] at time, in the time I have been living here. (Some 2 ½ years.) You remember the loss of my typewriter by a boy named Angelo. He also took a wrist watch. Later a boy who was here only a week—whom Red introduced me to—while I was at work cleaned up the place suit-case full. An electric clock (a handsome \$15 one), a lot of clothes (mostly old, as I never get around to buying new ones), the radio Roger has left here. ... Johnny Rhetinger needed a raincoat one

⁴⁸ Painter, "Brief Chronology," n.p. The telegrams addressed to "Herr Painter" were preserved by Painter as a part of his personal archive.

⁴⁹ Painter to Kinsey, 6 January 1952, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 9.

⁵⁰ Painter, "Brief Chronology," n.p. The incidents occurred in December 1933 and November 1934 respectively.

cold, wet night. I lent him my brand new \$25 one. He has never returned it. I also lent him \$25. I have never seen any of that either. I “lent” Red \$25 to pay fine to avoid going to jail. ... One boy pretended to understand his price was \$10 rather than \$5, and I gave it to him—such things disgust me more than anger me. ... Another stole another wrist watch.⁵¹

Painter commented that he “hate[d] the whole subject” but “regard[ed] the matter as necessary expenses” involved in his lifestyle of having sexual relations with male prostitutes, many of whom belonged to the criminal underworld and were unscrupulous in the ways they obtained money from their “queer” clients.

What is most striking about Painter’s sexual history is the fact that being robbed or otherwise harassed by his sexual partners did not dissuade him from trying to find his “ideal friend” among such men and tolerating their criminal behavior for extensive periods of time. Extortion, robbery and blackmail were not only characteristic of Painter’s one-time encounters with hustlers but also his long-time affairs with lower-class men. In these relationships, the difference between his lovers’ requesting their payment for sex and taking money from Painter under threat or duress was often blurred, confirming Houlbrook’s observation about “the line between emotional friendship, casual fuck, and predatory assault [being] never clear” in such relations.⁵² With his idealistic outlook on life and highly sympathetic attitude towards “lost boys” (or the lack of common sense, as some of his friends would argue), Painter often went to great lengths to justify his partners’ incessant demands for money and violent behavior and only terminated his contacts with them when they came to pose a direct physical danger to his life or health—and sometimes not even then. Till the very last, critical moment in these affairs, Painter wanted to believe

⁵¹ Painter to Kinsey, 21 August 1948, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 5.

⁵² Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 181.

that he might have become that one special person towards whom these delinquent youths had developed genuine feelings of affection and friendship and therefore was different from all the other “queers” whom they robbed and assaulted (and informed Painter of these incidents afterwards). Painter wished to see himself as Owen, the “queer” character in Willard Motley’s *Knock on Any Door*, who succeeded in winning the fondness of the sexually “normal” slum boy Nick Romano. As I discussed above, Nick treated other “queers” with rancid contempt, regularly mugging and beating them, but found in Owen a true friend, to whom he could turn for help and whose support he appreciated. Trying to become such a friend to his lower-class lovers and companions, Painter was, however, repeatedly disillusioned, as his loyalty and affection often only allowed these men to treat him like a “sucker” and repeatedly rob and bully him.

Painter’s relationship with Jimmy Healey, whom he first met in a homosexual brothel in the mid-1940s and continued seeing on and off until 1952, was one example of his increasingly frustrating and dangerous involvement with criminally inclined male prostitutes. Healey came from a broken lower-class family and spent his childhood in reform schools and his youth “bumming around the Depression-ridden country, living by [his] wits and muscles, in and out of local jails for ‘vagrancy’ and similar charges.”⁵³ The man attracted Painter by his sexual uninhibitedness. Having sex with women of all ages and races, young boys and “queers,” he embodied to Painter the “perverse” openness of lower-class men to any kind of sexual contact. Healey was, according to Painter a “compulsive criminal,” involved in several holdups and frequently robbing and burglarizing “queers,” including Painter’s friend, homosexual pornographer Dave Latimer.

⁵³ Painter, “F.—, Jimmy.”

He was also, in Painter's words, a "full-blown psychopath" prone to heavy drinking and sadistic outbreaks. Painter described himself as Jimmy's only friend. Despite the fact that rather early into their relationship he decided that the young man was "beyond hope," he highly valued his "drunken, weeping or somber" confidences and thought that he was able to establish the kind of trust and understanding that Healey's other "queer" customers or his criminal companions failed to provide him with.⁵⁴ Painter believed that Healey, finding himself a complete social outcast, could see in him that only person who was willing to listen to him, sympathize with his ordeal and help him in the time of adversity.

These idealistic hopes were repeatedly undermined by Healey's violent behavior and his manipulative lies—what Painter called "a performance of conning and veiled extortion and unveiled extortion ... [and] fantastic dramas incredibly well-acted."⁵⁵ Painter's relationship with Healey finally came to a bitter end when, after being terrorized by him for several weeks in a row, Painter was forced to move out of his place. This series of events, which Painter referred to as "the 1952 Nightmare," began when Healey, telephoning Painter to ask to meet him in a nearby bar, broke into his apartment and robbed him.⁵⁶ Several days later, he arrived in the wee hours drunk, announcing that he had just killed a "queer" and demanding money to flee town; scared and in panic, Painter gave him twenty dollars.⁵⁷ A week after that, he again appeared at night and, in the drunken rage, destroyed Melcarth's painting and hanged their cat.⁵⁸ These frightening events not only

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Painter to Kinsey, 19 November 1952, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 9.

⁵⁷ Painter to Kinsey, 24 November 1952, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 9.

⁵⁸ Painter to Kinsey, 1 December 1952, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 9.

made Painter change residences, making his whereabouts unknown to Healey, but also stop for some time any contact with the group of Times Square hustlers, using instead the sexual services of “muscle boys,” bodybuilding models involved in casual prostitution.

Even more disappointing and distressing was Painter’s relationship with Efraín Rivera, a young Puerto Rican gangster who was Painter’s lover, roommate and procurer in 1958-1962. A younger son in the family of eleven children, Efraín was born in Bayamon, Puerto Rico in the poor family of a longshoreman and spent his childhood in New York begging on the streets and working as a shoeshine boy. When Painter first met seventeen-year-old Efraín, he was a member of the Fourth Street gang of “Untouchables” and was involved in its various criminal activities. At the age of thirteen he was introduced to sexual contacts with “queers” by an older man who regularly masturbated him in exchange for gifts and money handouts.⁵⁹ He continued “playing the queers” later in life, for the most part simply robbing them. As Painter summarized Efraín’s situation, “He was pronouncedly heterosexual and disliked queers and sex with them, but his handsomeness and macho [demeanor] were always attracting them. So he solved the problem quickly and profitably.”⁶⁰ Painter speculated that because he treated Efraín “royally,” taking him to the Dixie hotel and presenting him with a portable radio as a gift (their first meeting took place in August 1958, soon after Painter received another installment from Bill Graham’s inheritance), he was not robbed “then and there” but instead was able to develop a more long-term affair with him.⁶¹ Several weeks after their meeting, Efraín was arrested for

⁵⁹ Painter to Pomeroy, 30 October 1960, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 17.

⁶⁰ Thomas Painter, “S.—, Efrían [*sic*]” entry in “The Index of Persons” (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 4.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

assault and robbery and put in jail. Driven by his idealistic desire to “reform” another of the “lost boys” in trouble, Painter hired a lawyer who helped to get Efraín a probation sentence. The episode brought Painter in close contact with Efraín’s family and his gang and allowed him to win their trust; he began seeing him and his friends regularly, hosting their get-togethers at his place. Efraín was arrested again in July 1959, however, and stayed in jail until March 1960.

On Efraín’s release from jail, there began a new stage in Painter’s relations with him which now became more intimate and, at the same time, more abusive. Painter saw Efraín more often and enjoyed the company of the thoroughly “macho” heterosexual young man and his numerous gangster friends whom he brought along. In March 1961, Painter, along with eight members of the “Dragons” gang, was arrested for driving a stolen car and imprisoned at the Tombs, the New York infamous detention jail.⁶² This incident resulted in Painter being now treated as “one of the boys” by the hyper-virile gangsters he idolized; he saw himself as having been able to establish with them that special intimate connection unavailable to outsiders. About his relationship with Efraín, he wrote, “I hold the unique position of receiving the intimate confidences and the willing cooperation in answering my questions of a boy whom no other educated, upper-class person could even approach. (Not even as a queer, as he loathes them.)”⁶³ Painter took pleasure and pride in this exceptional status and thought himself immune to violence directed by Efraín and his friends at other “queers.” He further remarked, “I am sure that part of my pleasure in Efraín is in his very dangerousness—and the fact that I can sit by him and stoke his hair and talk soothingly—

⁶² Painter to Pomeroy, 30 March 1961, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 18. Because the car had not been reported as stolen, everybody was released from the Tombs four days later. Efraín, who had violated his parole, was the only one held in jail but was released a year later, in January 1962.

⁶³ Painter to Pomeroy, 7 October 1960, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 17.

and he will smile his nicest back at me. ... Like having a pet panther who slashes anyone else but purrs for me.”⁶⁴ While Painter acknowledged that “queers” were the “natural prey” of men like Efraín, “brutes and criminals, thieves and beaters-up,” he saw himself as a “wild-animal trainer” could “tame” them—not only remain safe from their harassment but even be protected by them in dangerous situations.⁶⁵

To what degree these were only Painter’s illusions is hard to say, but the fact was that his relationship with Efraín began to degenerate very soon into the same series of violent confrontations and incessant requests for money that Painter thought himself protected against by his status of a “special friend.” In Painter’s own words, Efraín was an unbalanced and aggressive youth, “sullen and intractable, argumentative and nasty.” In the “case study” of the young man’s personality, Painter remarked that “his abnormal sensitivity and low boiling point, his hatred of authority, his aggressive pride and independence, all conspire and overwhelm his controls.”⁶⁶ Efraín was, moreover, a drunkard and a compulsive gambler and demanded more and more money from Painter who, now living off the small salary of a bookstore clerk, could hardly pay his own expenses. The conditions of Efraín’s parole required him to hold a steady job and, using this situation as a pretext, he made Painter sponsor his numerous, usually fictitious, projects of obtaining work. In January 1961, threatening to have Painter “hospitalized” by his gang in case he goes to the police, Efraín took all his rent money, supposedly to go to New Jersey to work on a farm.⁶⁷ He did not go anywhere and instead continued extorting

⁶⁴ Painter to Pomeroy, 24 November 1960, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 17.

⁶⁵ Painter to Pomeroy, 29 July 1961, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 18.

⁶⁶ Painter to Pomeroy, 7 October 1960, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 17

⁶⁷ Painter to Pomeroy, 22 January 1961, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 18.

money from Painter, alternatively using promises to find Painter a cheaper accommodation or threats of physical violence. On one occasion, he showed up with what he called his “strangling rope” and demanded Painter give him the thirty-three dollars he had recently received from the Institute for Sex Research for a bus fare to go to Indiana.⁶⁸ Though they had long since ceased having sex, Efraín also regularly threatened to rape Painter and on one occasion did, holding a hammer over his head.⁶⁹

In January 1962, in an attempt to save money, Painter moved in with Efraín in a cheap tenement house on the Lower East Side. There, Efraín took complete control of Painter’s finances, gambling all of Painter’s meager income. He also stole some of the sexually explicit photographs Painter made of his lovers, including himself, and used them as a means of blackmail to extort more money from Painter and prevent his going to the police.⁷⁰ The situation became completely intolerable when Painter, who began “peculating” small amounts of money from the bookstore to give to Efraín, was now seriously risking being discovered and fired.⁷¹ He decided to flee New York and relocate to California and, with financial help from the Institute, was able to do so in July 1962, going to San Francisco and then Los Angeles. Painter’s relationship with Efraín was not only dangerous and financially straining but, first of all, left him profoundly disillusioned about his lifelong ambition of reforming his delinquent lovers and establishing with them a genuine and mutually beneficial friendship. He wrote about it:

What peculiarly depresses me about the whole thing is the complete failure

⁶⁸ Painter to Pomeroy, 14 February 1961, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 18.

⁶⁹ Painter to Pomeroy, 13 May 1961, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 18.

⁷⁰ Painter to Pomeroy, 14 June 1962, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 19.

⁷¹ Painter to Pomeroy, 19 June 1962, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 19.

of my thesis that understanding and love can always win. I have given him [Efraín] six months of it, and he is still as calloused, cold and calculating, a pure mercenary as he was, wholly without shame or guilt and stopping at no degradation in the line of lying, cheating or begging to get money.⁷²

At the end Painter felt that despite his earnest, if to a large degree sexually motivated, attempts to “do some good” to Efraín by getting him out of jail and helping him in finding work, he was never treated as his equal—at most, as an eccentric hanger-on—and was ruthlessly and repeatedly exploited. An older man with no family or close friends (a series of deaths, Bill Graham’s in 1954, Kinsey’s in 1956 and his brother Sidney’s in 1960, left Painter devastated and painfully conscious of his loneliness), he wished to have “someone to worry about and care about—and to talk to now and then.”⁷³ He not only failed to find such a person in Efraín but, moreover, saw this relationship destroy the little peace he had in life.

One of the most poignant entries in Painter’s journal concerns his going to watch *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1959, dir. Joseph L. Mankiewicz), a film that portrays the horrible end of its homosexual protagonist at the hands of the street urchins from whom he bought sex while vacationing in a Spanish seaside resort. In the late 1940s, through his roommate, painter Edward Melcarth, Painter met both Tennessee Williams, on whose play the movie was based, and its screenwriter Gore Vidal and was well aware, by way of private confidences and subculture gossip, of their sexual tastes that were very similar to his: young and sexually “normal” lower-class hustlers. Painter was very impressed by the film; a year and a half after seeing it, he still remembered it “scene by scene.”⁷⁴ Just as Willard

⁷² Painter to Pomeroy, 16 June 1962, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 19.

⁷³ Painter to Pomeroy, 7 October 1960, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 17.

⁷⁴ Painter to Pomeroy, 28 July 1961, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 18.

Motley's *Knock on Any Door* represented his romantic ideal of cross-class companionship, *Suddenly, Last Summer* depicted its possible real-life finale. It is interesting to note how this movie, later frequently criticized for its morbid, horror story-like portrayal of homosexuality, was seen by Painter as a realistic (if inevitably characterized by what he regarded as the outlandish narrative twists typical of Tennessee Williams's work) portrayal of his erotic desires and his dangerous life of commercially-based sexual contacts with lower-class men, many of whom were mercenary, brutish and criminally inclined. Painter sarcastically commented that "the cheery and apt message" he identified in the film was that its homosexual protagonist, "obviously brilliant and talented," had his life ruined by "the half-wild boys he chose to devout [*sic*] himself to."⁷⁵ He further remarked, "The 'moral,' that that sort of homosexual (as also are Williams and Vidal, of course, and hence ought to know, as surely do I, and my life is a proof) is devoured by its sex objects, as surely as if literally, is stunningly put."⁷⁶ The parallels with Painter's own life were striking, and he continued his reflections on *Suddenly, Last Summer* over the next entries of his sex journal and referred to it repeatedly in the following years, especially as his affair with Efraín began to more and more resemble the tragedy depicted in the film. In 1962, when he already felt that their relationship was to become his final ruin, he wrote that what Efraín was trying to do was to devour him, just like the boys devoured the homosexual protagonist of *Suddenly, Last Summer*.⁷⁷

Painter's status in his relationship with young lower-class men was inherently ambiguous. He was hardly a typical "queer" victimized by delinquent youths; in fact,

⁷⁵ Painter to Pomeroy, 21 January 1960, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 17.

⁷⁶ Painter to Pomeroy, 24 January 1960, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 17.

⁷⁷ Painter to Pomeroy, 19 June 1962, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 19.

violent incidents so frequently present in homosexual men's life histories dating from the same period are remarkably absent from his, except for a relatively few episodes mentioned above. Describing his relations with one Pete Roberts*, a teenage "hustler and clip artist" who briefly lived with him in 1952, Painter mentioned, for example, his and his friends' regular activity of "rolling queers," about which they often bragged to him afterwards.

Pete has told me of gang invasion of a queer's apartment, of beating, robbing and deliberately wrecking his apartment, of terrorizing him into not complaining; of gang fucking; of muggings and robberies—all with that gleeful, detached attitude towards the victims as if they were subhuman somehow (when I protested he said they were "just faggots"—and was surprised of my question.)⁷⁸

Painter was clearly viewed by Pete and his gang as different from those "faggots" they robbed and beat up but neither was he fully immersed in their semi-criminal milieu nor shared the same values and norms of behavior. Painter's repeatedly expressed frustrations at his lower-class partners' failure to be respectful, reasonable in their financial demands and honest in their dealings, showed his deep adherence to the middle-class codes of social interaction and his inability to fully comprehend lower-class notions of masculine independence, toughness and resourcefulness. While Painter, in fact, idealized and romanticized these qualities, he regularly misinterpreted some of their less agreeable manifestations as signs of these men's utilitarian and opportunistic approach towards other people. He wrote about Pete, for example:

Pete has no faintest conception of friendship or affection or appreciation: he uses me for his convenience, as a comfort station, a flop, a refuge, and a source of small contributions of cash in emergencies—but never has he come around without wanting something. Social and friendly intercourse are beyond his ken. ... He has no friends—as none of these people do,—merely

⁷⁸ Painter to Kinsey, 14 September 1952, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 9.

companions who are temporary useful and convenient.⁷⁹

As evident from Painter's sexual journal, this attitude was not unusual among his lower-class lovers but it does not automatically suggest that they were thoroughly ungrateful or insensitive. Such behavior was, in large part, their response to destitution and powerlessness. They procured money the fastest and easiest way they could and treated "queers," whom they considered weak and womanlike, with derision and contempt that allowed them to affirm their position of masculine dominance. Furthermore, all this did not prevent some of them from exhibiting towards Painter the acknowledgment and appreciation he so much desired. Several years later, upon incidentally meeting Painter who complained about being completely broke, Pete gave him all the money he had. He reassured him that he would make more that night, hustling around the Times Square, but wanted Painter to get himself some food and cigarettes.⁸⁰

Painter's exasperation at the troubled and often unfulfilling affairs that he had with the men who belonged to the urban underworld of male prostitution and crime made him, at times, turn his attention to a different contingent of potential sexual partners: safe and easy to deal with "nice boys." The category of "nice boys" represented Painter's idea of sexual partners who were kind, respectful and trustworthy and relationships that were free from violent altercations, financial cunning and problems with the police. On several occasions throughout his sexual history, he resolved to stop associating with street hustlers and instead pursue young men who came from decent, if poor, families, held regular jobs

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Thomas Painter, "R.—, Pete" entry in "The Index of Persons" (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 4.

and were not engaged in delinquent activities.⁸¹ In the late 1940s, for example, after spending several years in close contact with Times Square hustlers, Painter decided to turn to “muscle boys,” a group of bodybuilding models frequenting South Brooklyn YMCA gym and the “muscle” section of Coney Island Beach, whom he regarded as more reliable, considerate and uncomplicated in sexual dealings. According to Painter, these men were, “as opposed to hustlers, boys living at home, going to school (and even college), honest, non-delinquent, otherwise decent and well-behaved boys.”⁸² The alibi of physique photography allowed Painter to comfortably approach them, without risking unpleasant misunderstandings and violent rebuffs: “One had their telephone numbers and made appointments if they were not home—‘to pose for me.’ They used the photographs as proof [to their parents].”⁸³ With their businesslike approach, “muscle boys” also preferred steady arrangements and held on to a standard fee, rarely engaging in extortion or blackmail. To Painter, the contacts with “muscle boys” provided a temporary relief from the chaotic, dangerous and mentally draining affairs with “psychopathic,” criminally inclined hustlers like Jimmy Healey. These relations, at the same time, exposed the frequent characteristic of commercially based sexual encounters that Painter soon found to be even more

⁸¹ Writing in 1954, Painter complained of the dangerous overlap between the street prostitution milieu and semi-criminal communities. He further remarked: “Most customers would, like me, prefer nice boys (or girls) in a nice relationship, provided in a decent, private, gentle atmosphere (tho many, including myself to an extent, have acquired a taste for the sordid atmosphere and environments of low resorts and areas, but only because we were forced there to find sex and now associate the two).” Painter to Kinsey, 1 August 1954, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 11.

⁸² Thomas Painter, “R.—, Fred” entry in “The Index of Persons” (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 4. One of Painter’s “muscle boy” lovers, Jewish teenager Cliff Blum, for example, was introduced to male prostitution by the fellow bodybuilders at South Brooklyn YMCA; he came from a “good home” and had no contacts with the criminal underworld. According to Painter, he used the money he earned from modeling and prostitution (he had a weekly arrangement with Bill Graham for several years and provided sexual services to other homosexual men as well) to support himself though college and, after obtaining a degree in law, quit hustling and got married. Thomas Painter, “L.—, Cliff” entry in “The Index of Persons” (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 3.

⁸³ Painter, “R.—, Fred.”

disheartening than the violent antics of his delinquent lovers: the complete lack of emotional rapport with these men and their unresponsiveness in sex.

Painter's history of paid sexual contacts with non-delinquent "nice boys" contain some of the most poignant accounts of his failures to obtain affection from his sexual partners and develop friend-like relations with them. For one thing, the "niceness" of many of these men merely meant their professionalism in sex work: they appeared when called for, performed the agreed-on sexual activities, collected their fee and left. In these relations, the exchange of sexual services for money was negotiated in rather explicit terms and followed the strict pattern of an economic transaction; on the whole, such encounters were consensual, uncomplicated and quick. Their relative safety and the opportunities they provided for no-nonsense gratification of one's immediate sexual needs appealed to Painter, especially at the times when he felt weary of his too close involvement with the urban underworld. However, just as he expressed his delight at the atmosphere of "good clean fun" that characterized such encounters, he lamented the fact that they were devoid of affection and intimacy and never developed into long-term companionships.

"He would visit, say nothing, strip and the whole thing would be over in twenty minutes."⁸⁴ This is how Painter summed up his encounters with one such "nice boy," a young Puerto Rican man Wilson, whom he described as "decent and hardworking" and distinguished from the delinquents he usually associated with. Painter's idea of establishing friendly relations with his sexual partners was based on the assumption that they were willing to open up to him but Wilson "would never talk about himself or indeed anything."

⁸⁴ Painter to Pomeroy, 29 July 1960, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 17.

As Painter remarked, “he allowed no rapport at all.”⁸⁵ Painter further elaborated on the lack of reciprocity that he always felt with Wilson and acknowledged the limitations of commercial sex in enabling the sort of emotional reciprocity that he desired in his interaction with his lower-class lovers. He wrote:

As far as he could see I should be wholly satisfied. If he had remotely comprehended, and tried to satisfy [Painter’s desire for more intimate connection], it would be wholly artificial, and useless. You can pay people to make love to you, and can instruct them in the rudiments of response, but the vital part, friendship (or its mask, its appearance, its semblance) cannot be instructed. The boy must have some imagination, initiative ... or provide some rapport in conversation, self-revelation, companionship and friendliness and apparent interest.⁸⁶

The failures to establish this kind of rapport were particularly frustrating to Painter. When his efforts to become friends with his lower-class lovers were ignored or turned down, he found himself in the unpleasant and morally suspect position of someone who was merely exploiting young men in financial need. Furthermore, because these men were “nice,” meaning honest and respectful, Painter could hardly blame them for refusing his friendship, as he often did with his delinquent lovers, denouncing those as unreliable and ungrateful. In this case, he felt that it was he who “should have known better” than trying to persuade “nice boys” to see a friend in the insistent, immoral and predatory “queer” with whom they naturally wanted nothing to do.

The situations when Painter became deeply infatuated with some of these “nice boys” and soon found out that his feelings could not be in any way reciprocated by them are some of the most heart-rending in his sexual history. These rejections were usually subtle and polite but nonetheless left him crushed, disillusioned and bitter. Recounting his

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

sexual experiences in his journal, Painter in general attempted to keep the facade of optimism. He wrote about the everyday pleasures of living the life full of sexual adventure, the beauty of his young lovers, who maybe did not last very long but were universally handsome and well-built, the excitement of associating with bohemian circles or the lawless communities of street hustlers.⁸⁷ Yet, on rare occasions, there appear in his sexual journal the entries that convey his deeply felt discontent about the one-sidedness of commercially based sexual encounters with men.

Such is, for example, Painter's entry from May 1953, which discusses an evening he spent with seventeen-year-old Italian bodybuilder Carmine. A muscular youth with stunning good looks, who later went on to become a minor movie star, Carmine was one of Painter's favorite models, regularly photographed by him in the nude. They had a standard five dollars a session arrangement but did not have sex because of Carmine's too young age. Soon developing strong feelings of sympathy and affection towards the man, Painter tried to express them in rather innocuous ways but his actions were met with coldness and indifference. In his journal, Painter noted:

Speaking of curious sensations. The last time Carmine was here, as we were about to leave and both were fully clothed, for the street, and he was standing there, I felt an impulse and went up to him and "hugged" (embraced) him—rubbing my face and mouth against his neck and ear. This was an impulsive expression of affection, of the purest sort. And as I did so I felt the constriction of my throat which comes in deep emotion (related to

⁸⁷ This is especially characteristic of the period in which Painter corresponded with Kinsey who was famously unromantic in his approach to sexual matters. Kinsey held the view that love and romance did more harm than good to human sexual self-expression; they were the source of inhibitions, obstacles, restraints and unrealistic expectations, and ultimately prevented people from fully realizing their sexual potential and simply enjoying various types of sexual activity. See Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, *Alfred C. Kinsey: Sex the Measure of All Things* (London: Pimlico, 1998), 382-384. In his correspondence with Kinsey, Painter, it seems, tried to adopt such an approach when documenting and examining his sexual life. In both pre- and post-Kinsey periods, his writing tended to more generalized observations and broad reflections about his homosexuality, in which he often addressed his romantic disappointments. Painter is different with Kinsey; he focuses instead on specific incidents of cruising and sex, providing detailed, even graphic accounts, and, on the whole, speaks positively of the sexual opportunities afforded by living in New York City.

weeping). And I felt the emotion too, instantaneously—for about five seconds, I guess. Then he responded by placing his arm around me—routinely, in the utter minimum of response suggested to my action. At this point I had the reaction: I could have wept, raged, or laughed, as I did, a sort of bitter, ironic half-laugh, as if to say “I should have known better than to give way to my affection to this paid boy who can’t, and couldn’t possibly, respond any other way than he did, but who did what he felt was required, in his own lazy, half-hearted, boy way.” ... It is a bitter, bitter cup that I, so full of love and outgoing, must express it only in bought sex with a boy by natural inclination and training and personal taste as well as by immaturity and by egocentrism totally incapable of even sensing my need, let alone meet it.⁸⁸

Such episodes left Painter heartbroken. It was one thing to be disappointed at his lovers’ violent antics or their “lack of financial morals” but another to find oneself rebuffed for being an older “queer” by the young man who was otherwise decent, respectful, “nice.” Painter spoke of this constant feeling of rejection and disillusionment to another of the “nice boys,” bodybuilder Cliff Blum*. Responding to Blum’s questions about the possible reasons behind Graham’s suicide in 1954, Painter bitterly remarked that it was natural that his and Graham’s paid lovers remained, for the most part, ignorant about “those deepest things” that characterized the daily life of “queers”—“loneliness, bought love, doubt of even liking on the part of the object of [their] fondness, the deprivation of family, of love, of ‘home,’ of companionship, of reciprocated affection, of sons and daughters, of dignity, honor and piece.”⁸⁹

Because of his old age and the lack of finances, Painter’s sexual life in the second half of the 1960s became much more tranquil. Working as a clerk in a Doubleday bookstore midtown, Painter returned to regularly cruising Times Square, often dining at “Child’s,” a popular homosexual-friendly restaurant on Forty-Second Street, or visiting the

⁸⁸ Painter to Kinsey, 7 May 1953, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 10.

⁸⁹ Painter to Kinsey, 23 January 1955, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 12.

movie theaters in the area. He merely observed the goings-on around Times Square and socialized with his old acquaintances in the prostitution milieu, but did not participate in the sexual activities in the theaters. He could not afford buying sex from hustlers and, without his camera, no longer felt able to casually approach young men. It was in this period, however, that Painter developed a relationship with a man that, in his view, approached the most his ideal of cross-class friendship and provided him with intimacy and reciprocal affection he so much desired. This was his relationship with “half-queer” heroin addict Gilbert Aguilera that he later characterized the “culmination” of his “Long Search” for love and companionship.⁹⁰

Painter met Gilbert soon upon his return to New York in July 1964, after spending two years in California running away from his by then more and more perilous relationship with Efraín Rivera. Walking around Times Square in late August of 1964, Painter spotted a young attractive Hispanic-looking man who was wearing only an unzipped bright-colored windbreaker above his waist—a popular style among Puerto Rican youth that Painter found highly attractive—and later took it off completely to roughhouse with his friends, exposing a strong and well-defined torso.⁹¹ Several days later, Painter saw Gilbert again on the Square and approached him with the offer to pay ten dollars for sex. He agreed and the two had a very pleasant time together at Painter’s place, having dinner and sex and conversing about “sex, religion, Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans, history.”⁹² Gilbert was twenty-eight years old and was not, in fact, Puerto Rican; his father was Venezuelan and mother Syrian but, growing up in Spanish Harlem, he culturally identified with the Puerto Rican migrants

⁹⁰ Painter, “Long Search,” 3.

⁹¹ Painter to Gebhard, 31 August 1964, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 21.

⁹² Painter to Gebhard, 5 September 1964, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 21.

who lived in “El Barrio.” Gilbert had been a heroin addict since the age of fourteen and was involved in petty thievery and hustling to procure money for drugs. He was at one point a friend of John Rechy, and the two hustled together in New York in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Painter remarked that he “never knew a so well informed [and] educated” Puerto Rican as Gilbert, mentioning that he went to college for a year and even worked in an advertising agency but was fired after his drug use had been discovered.⁹³

Besides the fact that Gilbert was nice and friendly to “queers” (being a “half-queer” himself, according to Painter) and a great conversationalist, what attracted Painter the most about their relationship was Gilbert’s sincere enjoyment of sex with men, especially mutual non-penetrative practices like kissing, erotic caresses and body rubbing. After the first time they had sex, Painter mentioned in his journal that Gilbert “loved it—verbally as well as physically” and maintained “a full erection” throughout the process.⁹⁴ Moreover, Gilbert seemed to enjoy Painter’s preferred sexual technique of “friction,” about which Painter noted:

The love-making was more extensive than intensive and suited exactly to my tastes. ... Just what Kinsey would call “petting”: embracing, pawing, stroking, tickling, nibbling (his nipples—he likes it). He loves to be stroked and “massaged” all over his musculature—and I love to do it. There was much embracing and body-to-body contact, with mild kissing. ... I have never experienced anything quite like it—in that I have never had extensive contact with another homosexual—if that’s what he is.⁹⁵

Sexual relations with Gilbert, which Painter continued throughout the following months, were not only completely satisfying to him but, according to his own statement, significantly contributed to further erasure of his sexual inhibitions. The degree of

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Painter to Gebhard, 10 September 1964, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 21.

responsiveness and cooperation in sex shown by Gilbert exceeded even the “sexual generosity” of Painter’s Puerto Rican partners. Painter found in the young man a lover who not only complied with his sexual demands but was willingly made love to him (even though Gilbert regularly took money from Painter to buy drugs, their relationship did not involve explicit payments for sex), showing seemingly genuine signs of pleasure. Despite the numerous troubles brought about by Gilbert’s drug use, it made him, at the same time, more receptive to Painter’s caresses, which he especially enjoyed in the periods of withdrawal. One such incident Painter recounted in his journal:

He came to bed normally Friday night, but Saturday morning I found him muzzling up to me. (The drug, you remember, makes his skin itch.) Well, I was naked anyway and shortly he was and I proceeded to give him two hours of massage of his muscles, tickling, scratching, rubbing, stroking, combined with body-to-body friction. He was utterly delighted by the whole procedure (“I love it”), moaning, giggling, grinning, sighing, writhing, responding to body contact with the same. To my surprise he allowed, encouraged, massage of his buttocks and adjoining muscles.⁹⁶

In his late years, Painter himself showed a more relaxed and accepting attitude about sex with men—probably, a combined effect of his contacts with sexually uninhibited Puerto Rican men, the growing cultural acceptance of homosexuality in the 1960s and his old age, in which the prospect of approaching death made him enjoy life without unnecessary reservations. Painter came to believe that having sex with Gilbert completely released him from the “throbbing bundle of inhibitions” that characterized his early life; in his view, he at long last encountered a person with whom he could fully realize his erotic desires. As

⁹⁶ Painter to Gebhard, 14 February 1965, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 22.

Painter wrote around 1970, analyzing his relationship with Gilbert: “For the first time in my life I had reciprocated love. And it was wonderful.”⁹⁷

Gilbert’s drug addiction inevitably caused a lot of problems in his relationship with Painter. Upon their first meeting, Gilbert admitted to having been “taking dope” but claimed that he had been trying to quit and promised to go to the hospital for treatment. It is not clear whether this ever happened, but soon he began using drugs again, buying them with the money he got from Painter. He refused to be paid for sex but regularly asked Painter for a five-dollar “carfare” or “candy money” with which he was able to “get a fix.” In the periods when he did not use heroin, either attempting to quit or having no money to buy it, he resorted to cough syrup containing codeine. Soon into his relationship with Painter, he began stealing from him. In October 1964, coming back home on Sunday evening after visiting Alan Reimer, Painter discovered that in the meantime Gilbert broke into his apartment and robbed him of the few things he could find there. Painter recorded in his journal: “When I returned from Alan’s, about 10:30, I found all my canned goods gone (about \$15 worth), my socks (2 of them), even my spare soap and toilet paper. Everything which was new and could be sold.”⁹⁸ Despite Gilbert’s claims of feeling remorse about what he had done, lies and stealing soon became a constant feature of his relationship with Painter. He lied about finding a job, about not using drugs, about where the stolen goods he regularly showed up with—“all sorts of things: suits, briefcases, assorted luggage, coats, radios, what not”⁹⁹—had come from. Other troubles ensued as well. In summer 1965, as

⁹⁷ Thomas Painter, “5 Years” (1970), unpublished essay, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 27, 13.

⁹⁸ Painter to Gebhard, 29 October 1964, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 21.

⁹⁹ Painter to Gebhard, 20 April 1965, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 22.

Gilbert began another round of heavy drug use, he started bringing his junkie friends to the building in which Painter lived, where they would shoot up heroin together in the entrance hall. This naturally led to serious troubles with the building's superintendent, and Painter was soon evicted from his apartment.¹⁰⁰ He found another place for Gilbert and himself, but less than three month thereafter an even more unpleasant episode occurred. Knowing that Painter had just received his paycheck, Gilbert stole all his money while Painter was asleep, leaving him without any means to live on for the coming two weeks. Following this incident, Painter packed his things and, borrowing fifteen dollars from his friend Charlie Phelps, moved to another apartment.¹⁰¹

Despite the incessant troubles brought about by Gilbert's heroin use, it also served an important function in Painter's relationship with him. Painter regarded Gilbert's drug addiction as a disease, and, as such, this disease explained and justified Gilbert's unreliability, erratic behavior, criminal activities or involvement with the urban underworld—all the features that previously marred Painter's commercially based sexual relations with lower-class men. Painter believed that in Gilbert's case, it was his drug problem, not some some inner moral corruption, that caused him to behave as he did, and he therefore could not be held responsible for his actions. Painter wrote that Gilbert's "only sin [was] a mortal sickness he [could not] control" and described him as "a gentle, sensitive, intelligent, high-minded youth lost among thieves."¹⁰² Furthermore, regarding Gilbert as truly a "troubled youth," not just another morally unscrupulous and willingly delinquent "product of city slums," who needed love and support in fighting his addiction

¹⁰⁰ Painter to Gebhard, 3 August 1965, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 22.

¹⁰¹ Painter to Gebhard, 23 October 1965, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 22.

¹⁰² Painter to Gebhard, 20 April 1965, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 22.

problem, Painter fully devoted himself to this task. After even Gilbert's mother deserted him, unable to tolerate his constant lies and stealing, Painter remained by his side, seeing this relationship as his grand chance to realize his life-long desire to rescue and reform his young lower-class lover. Furthermore, as Gilbert was naturally left without friends and with his social contacts limited to other junkies and thieves, he came to see Painter as his only trustful and reliable companion. Painter enjoyed this special status of their friendship, in many ways similar to that of the protagonists of *Knock on Any Door*, feeling needed and cared for.

Painter's main mission was, of course, helping Gilbert to get off drugs. Initially, Painter felt confident about this prospect, being inspired by the story of his Puerto Rican acquaintance Little Indio, who in the mid-1950s quit heroin, albeit for only six months, with the help of Alan Reimer who took him away from New York and assisted throughout the "cold turkey" period.¹⁰³ On the other hand, Wardell Pomeroy, whom Painter consulted about the problem, was "realistic [and] tough," admitting to Painter that even "with psychiatric treatment, at unavailable prices, the chances [of curing Gilbert] were astronomically 'no'." Yet, despite Pomeroy's pessimistic prognosis, Painter declared: "I choose to believe I can, and am going to give it all I have."¹⁰⁴ Painter supplied Gilbert with money and food (at least to the extent he could afford to with his meager salary), visited him in hospital and in jail, where Gilbert ended up on several occasions for stealing, used his contacts with Pomeroy and the Institute for Sex Research to get Gilbert into a methadone program and even briefly moved in with Gilbert's mother to save money for it.

¹⁰³ Thomas Painter, "Story of [Little] Indio R.—, by Himself as Dictated to Me" (1957), unpublished essay, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 14.

¹⁰⁴ Painter to Gebhard, 6 October 1964, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 21.

He was repeatedly disappointed, as Gilbert would time after time promise to quit and then start using drugs again soon, but he continued to believe that the cure was eventually possible. In August 1965, Painter noted: “If there is enough patience and faith and fondness I think it can be done. An inch at a time, with slips and falls.”¹⁰⁵

Throughout most of his relationship with Gilbert, Painter retained an extremely sympathetic attitude towards Gilbert’s plight and, even in the cases when he was robbed or cheated by him, showed great understanding and compassion. His journal entries from the period are even more sentimental than usual, attesting to the profoundness of his love for Gilbert and his desire to justify his behavior at whatever cost. One of the most representative is the entry Painter made several days after the above-mentioned incident when Gilbert took all his money and disappeared. The entry reads:

I haven’t seen [Gilbert] since that brief time Friday (this is Wednesday). I wonder how the poor thing is surviving (literally—physically) without food or shelter—and how he must miss my fond petting and soothing. (He did like it, immensely, even if very brief—showing some one still cared, was fond of him, and interested.) It was dreadful, appalling, horrible. I know I can’t live with him, that he is now, of his own admission (as well as by his act) beyond the pale of living even with someone like me—any normal person. But that doesn’t make the facts any less awful. He was so sick and sad, so thin and hang-dog, standing bent over, hand and neck drooping, his eyes big holes, his cheeks sunken. And I, fed and warm in my bed at night, think of him driven, sick, cold, dragging about in the night searching for something to steal—for his fix. Not for food or shelter or clothes, but only his fix.¹⁰⁶

The emotionality of Painter’s writing is characteristic of the way in which he regarded his relationship with Gilbert. In Painter’s own words, he saw himself as the young man’s

¹⁰⁵ Painter to Gebhard, 3 August 1965, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 22.

¹⁰⁶ Painter to Gebhard, 27 October 1964, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 21.

“mother,” a parental figure of unconditional love and support, on whom Gilbert could rely in difficult times.

After getting back together with him in December 1965, Painter wrote about their meeting: “He was like a child putting his head on his mother’s breast and being soothed and loved. Like a lost boy who had come home to the tender care of his—well, his mother. ... He keenly need a ‘mother’—as I need to be one.”¹⁰⁷ To Painter’s joy, these feelings seemed to be reciprocated by Gilbert who on one occasion even left Painter a photograph of himself with the inscription “For the father I never had”;¹⁰⁸ he also offered to steal a typewriter, so that Painter could continue his journal and edit his sexual record for the future biographer. They continued seeing each other, on and off, until 1969 when Gilbert left after a small argument and did not come back; he, however, briefly reappeared in 1971, allegedly cured from his heroin addiction. Despite a rather disappointing finale of their relationship, Painter kept the memory of it as the most affectionate and reciprocal he had ever had in his life.

In one of the final volumes of Painter’s sexual journal, he inserted a handful of faded Polaroid shots depicting him and Gilbert in Central Park. The only photographs of Gilbert in Painter’s visual archive, the images possess a strikingly intimate quality, exhibiting no masculine bravado or nonchalant body display that characterized Painter’s homoerotic photographs from the earlier years. The two men, the much aged, round-shouldered Painter in a worn-out brown suit and his tall and large-framed but no longer youthful-looking lover, stroll through a deserted area of the park and casually take pictures

¹⁰⁷ Painter to Christenson, 16 December 1965, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 22.

¹⁰⁸ Painter, “5 Years,” 14.

of one another. One cannot help but wonder if that could be one of their last meetings. In contrast to Painter's photographs taken during his travels in Puerto Rico or leisurely weekends at Coney Island Beach, there is little joy and excitement in his eyes. He indeed looks like the "unhappy man" from Motley's *Knock on Any Door*, a lonely and destitute "queer" Owen, hanging around a greasy-spoon diner. Gilbert does not seem a "glorious youth" either; his face appears sad and tired, marred by his drug addiction and the years of down-and-out living, and his once stunning musculature gone. And yet, there is something very touching about these Polaroids. They inadvertently convey that closeness and mutual care, unprecedented in Painter's sexual history, that he was able to achieve in his relationship with Gilbert. However exhausting, dangerous and financially straining, their life together was so emotionally rewarding to Painter that he mentioned Gilbert as "the only reason [he saw] for continuing to live."¹⁰⁹ Since Painter grew more and more impoverished during the last decades of his life and became completely dissociated from the upper-middle-class environment he was born into, his relationship with Gilbert could hardly be classified as a cross-class patronage of the kind he professed as the model for social and sexual interaction between rich "queers" and sexually "normal" lower-class youth. As he was no longer able to financially support his lovers, he seemed to have discovered, however, that money handouts were not what men like Gilbert needed. Loyalty, human warmth, moral support in the times of adversity, loving care were the things that brought them together and enabled to stay close friends and lovers, despite continual troubles.

¹⁰⁹ Painter to Gebhard, 5 August 1967, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 24.

Conclusion

The casual, journal form of Thomas Painter's sexual record—what he himself described as its “immediacy, [its] ‘diary’ effect, its extreme informality, the fact that it does not know its tomorrow, ... its flash enthusiasms, its seven-day-wonder taken seriously”¹—often conceals a rather disheartening, if not tragic, trajectory of Painter's biography. In fact, reading Painter's journal, I frequently found myself amazed at the buoyancy and positive outlook he managed to maintain despite the incessant problems he encountered in his career, his daily life and his relationships with men. Painter was lucky to avoid troubles with the police and was very rarely physically assaulted by the strangers he picked up on the streets. He was able to find a community of other “queers” like himself with whom he developed close friendships and from whom he received everyday moral support. In his journal, he reflected on the pleasures of cruising together, photographing men together and joining his friends in a variety of social activities, from attending bodybuilding competitions to visiting hustler bars. Painter was also fortunate to meet progressive and sympathetic sex researchers like Kinsey (and his successors at the Institute, Wardell Pomeroy and Paul Gebhard) who valued and encouraged his autobiographical and auto-ethnographic work and, on many occasions, helped him in his financial difficulties. Finally, he had a very diverse sex life, full of excitement and adventure, and even managed to form emotionally rewarding and mutually satisfying relationships with a few of his young lower-class lovers. All this notwithstanding, Painter's sexual record also presents a rather typical account of the hardships faced by men who refused to conform to society's expectation

¹ Painter to Pomeroy, 21 October 1961, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 18.

about marriage and domesticity and chose to be open about their same-sex desires and behavior. The punishment was severe and manifold, from professional exclusion to family opprobrium, and Painter felt it personally and in full force.

Painter in his twenties was a promising young man from an affluent New England family, Ivy League-educated, well traveled, successfully pursuing a respectable career. By his own admission, he was rather unhappy as a teenager in his puritanical upper-middle-class surroundings and struggled with his awakening erotic attraction towards men, but he also found a culturally legitimate way of rebelling against his parents by choosing a vocation of religious teaching and sublimated his same-sex desires into innocuous platonic mentorships. Painter in his sixties was a very different person. He worked as a bookstore clerk on a meager salary of two hundred dollars a month, lived in low-income rooming houses and associated mainly with poor delinquent youth, most of them Puerto Rican immigrants. He had no contacts whatsoever with the upper-class friends from his youth (some time in the 1960s, for example, he tried to get in touch with Gordon B. Tweedy, his old-time friend from Taft and Yale and by then a prominent lawyer and the vice president of C. V. Starr & Co. of the multinational insurance giant American International Group, and was explicitly told not to call him ever again), while the family of his brother, the professor of medieval history at Johns Hopkins University Sidney Painter essentially shunned him. When Sidney died in January 1960, his wife did not even notify Painter because, “according to her, [he] deliberately chose to live a sort of life of which she intensely, deeply disapproved with all her Scots Presbyterian upbringing”; Painter only learned of his brother’s death from an obituary in *The New York Times*.² As much as

² Painter to Pomeroy, 18 January 1960, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 17.

Painter stressed his emotional affinity with lower-class communities and the urban underworld, he was also ultimately driven there by the strong disapproval of his homosexuality shown by his family and “respectable” friends.

Painter was highly sensitive to the dominant cultural image of the homosexual man as a social outcast destined to loneliness, ignominy and ultimately suicide and, like many “queers” of his generation, came to identify with it to some degree. (The suicide of Painter’s best friend Bill Graham caused him an emotional shock from which he never fully recovered.) He was, however, adamant that being homosexual was not what caused this depressing fate but society’s reaction to it. In a journal entry from 1961, Painter declared:

I did not “fail in life,” deteriorate, degenerate, or what have you, because I was homosexual, because there is a part of the complex which causes or is the homosexual personality which is degenerative. I was pushed, shoved, propelled, edged by exclusion after exclusion, systematically denied, by having doors slammed in my face, a useful, socially significant career, which I tried to achieve and ardently wanted.³

A year earlier, contemplating suicide, he also expressed his painful sense of despondency at not being able to pursue his life goals in the face of society’s vehement hatred and callous persecution of homosexual men, which he experienced firsthand.

I have been regularly rejected by society in any attempt I have made to make my life socially useful: Union Seminary barred me from any work related to it, as did the Yale Christian Association just previously; I found I couldn’t do homosexual research: both hard facts and Kinsey closed that door; I was thrown out of my probation officer’s work; finally I was even turned down by the Puerto Rican people (the government and travel people I am referring to).⁴

³ Painter to Pomeroy, 11 July 1961, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 18.

⁴ Painter to Pomeroy, 14 September 1960, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 17.

Analyzing Painter's life record, one can speculate that had he been less idealistic, less determined to be open about his sexuality and more wise about the ways of "double life" adopted by some of his homosexual friends, he could have led a much more comfortable existence and avoided some of the social troubles and financial difficulties that haunted him for much of his adult life. He could have remained "closeted," to use a current term, and yet chose not to.

Why did he not? Painter's religious background and his ethically invested vision of his sexual life can provide an answer. Analyzing Painter's practice of sexual self-documentation, one is struck by his lifelong commitment to it and his view of his homosexual research work, first in the capacity of amateur ethnographer and later as Kinsey's unofficial collaborator and informant, as a personal mission that allowed him to be useful to society, in particular to the community of fellow homosexual men. As I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, to form a reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationship with a lower-class man was as important to Painter as was to record it for science and posterity. This ideal of being "useful in a great and enduring way"⁵ was at the core of the early-twentieth-century notion of socially responsible manhood, and it was further energized by Painter's religious education and work. Being open about his sexual nature, examining and documenting it for the purpose of changing society's unjust treatment of homosexual men, was, to Painter, a life goal similar in many respects to the Christian idea of vocation or calling. This idea appears to imbue Painter's philanthropic endeavors of reforming his delinquent lovers and rescuing them from the life of poverty and crime as well as his autobiographical and auto-ethnographic writing, which he saw as

⁵ Thomas Painter to Sidney Painter, 27 February 1937, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 35, series IV, D.2., folder 22.

“vastly instructive.”⁶ To let his life speak, both figuratively and literally, was Painter’s ethical precept that guided his sexual behavior, despite the frequent lapses from the postulates of his personal “moral code,” and his extraordinary project of sexual self-documentation.

Painter’s sexual record conveys therefore not a sad tale of self-sabotaging idealism or even naiveté, as it may seem on the surface, but presents an account of a brave and persevering personal journey towards self-acceptance and self-realization in the face of societal hostility and stigmatization. In my own experience of reading page after page of Painter’s journal, I often had an impression that his life had been indeed a never-ending succession of “failures” and bitter disappointments. One can easily see how his romantic illusions, his unyielding stubbornness and his deeply instilled middle-class notions of honesty and responsible living were at least partially accountable for that. On occasions, I felt like Wardell Pomeroy who repeatedly suggested Painter throw away his mental inhibitions and self-defeating moral preoccupation about sex and just enjoy life for what it gave him. With time, however, as I dug deeper into Painter’s archive and approached it in the context of the historically and culturally specific configurations of sexual contact between men in the mid-twentieth-century United States, I have developed a different understanding of his biography. I came to see it as an earnest struggle to reconcile one’s ideals of homosexual emancipation and socially beneficial cross-class friendship with the harsh realities of all-pervading homophobia. Despite being “pushed, shoved, propelled, [and] edged by exclusion after exclusion,” Painter pursued his lifelong mission of sexual self-documentation and amateur homosexuality research and found sexual pleasure,

⁶ Painter to Pomeroy, 27 May 1963, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 20.

emotional intimacy and moral satisfaction in the relationships deemed perverted and corrupting by the respectable middle-class society. In such light, Painter's life appears as a story of personal integrity, self-determination, sincerity and courage. For all Painter's daily troubles, mental conflicts and romantic disillusionments, it was a great achievement for him to be able to say: "I am not going to masquerade, to 'pass' (to use the Negro expression), to lie, to deny my identity. ... I am not ashamed to be homosexual or of anything I do and I'm not going to crawl and pretend I am."⁷

This sexual self-affirmation was both the goal and the effect of Painter's rejection of the oppressive and hypocritical middle-class society and his association with the "urban proletariat" whom he regarded as more tolerant, unprejudiced and sexually uninhibited. Such cross-class direction of social escape, evident in Painter's biography, was not thoroughly voluntary (as he lost his probation officer job and became more and more impoverished in the last decades of his life, he hardly had any choice but to live among the poor), yet its result was an unprecedented sense of sexual freedom. By openly eschewing the society's expectations about domesticity and respectability, Painter discovered the erotic lure of the urban underworld and the greater opportunities for self-discovery and self-realization afforded by one's marginal status in society. Existing in the liminal zone between his native upper-middle-class Anglo-Saxon environment and the lower-class communities of mostly immigrant young men, Painter was essentially an outsider to both, and this position on the fringe was, as I have argued discussing his contacts with young Puerto Rican men, particularly conducive to his sexual emancipation.

⁷ Painter to Pomeroy, 11 July 1961, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 18.

Social escape was at the core of Painter's sexual history. It was, of course, a practical means of finding sexual partners who corresponded to his ideal of a dominant, aggressive, exaggeratedly masculine "proletarian," but it was also a personal strategy of understanding and validating his same-sex desires and making meaning of his sexual identity. This dissertation has sought to explore this complex, multifaceted role that the idea of social escape played in Painter's sexual history. It examined the social and cultural setting in which Painter became fully aware of his same-sex desires, the influence of the variety of popular and scientific discourses about masculinity and sex on Painter's understanding of his sexual difference, and the economic realities of cross-class sexual contact between men that organized Painter's own sexual and romantic relations with "urban proletarians." It has thus attempted to reconstruct a life of an extraordinary man, his quest for acceptance, community, sexual pleasure and love.

Ken Plummer's critical humanist approach to analyzing life documents, adopted in my dissertation, enabled me to trace this quest from the interdisciplinary perspective that attributes great epistemological value to the richness and complexity of the individual's lived experience. It allowed me to uncover a multifaceted picture of Painter's erotic desires and sexual life organized according to the intricate logic of class- and ethnicity-based fantasies of "primitive" masculinity and sexual tolerance behind what a police record (a frequent source of material for historians of homosexuality) or Kinsey's quantified interview data would characterize as simply a regular client of male prostitutes. As much, however, as this approach demonstrates the importance of analyzing sexual histories "from below," it also brings on more abstract questions about the social processes and phenomena that such histories reveal or illuminate. Tackling the details of Painter's biography, at times

outwardly trivial, this dissertation discussed broad, theoretically significant questions about the gender aspects of same-sex desires, as they were experienced and understood in the period, as well as the forms of urban contact between members of different social classes and commercially based sexual relations between men dominant in the period. The dissertation's specific focus on Painter's sexual record does not provide one a chance to answer them in full, but it nonetheless problematizes some of their key foundations and reformulates them so as to encourage a more informed and sophisticated analysis of the main issues at stake.

These issues can be grouped into two principal categories. The first one concerns the erotic potency of hyper-masculinity styles and well-developed physique in male homosexual subcultures in the past as well as today. A phenomenon of inherently complex nature (rooted in the seemingly unanswerable question of why individual X finds individual Y erotically appealing, and not Z), it is often addressed in two ways—both of them rather simplistic. The first, especially prominent in popular discourses on male homosexuality, sees attraction to masculinity, especially in its most visible, emphasized and even exaggerated forms, as intrinsic to homosexual desire directed at men, and therefore manliness, by definition.⁸ The other, typical of many scholarly studies informed by social constructivist and feminist theories, on the opposite, regards eroticization of masculinity as an effect of patriarchy, the homosexual men's internalization of the culturally dominant ideal of hegemonic masculinity.⁹ The latter argument is easily

⁸ See, for instance, historian Rictor Norton's remark that the phenomenon of homosexual attraction towards "macho" men should not be "overtheorized." He argues, if rather playfully, that "such desire often rises for the rather simple reason that macho men are cute and sexy." Rictor Norton, "Class-Based Erotics" (2008), unpublished paper, <http://rictornorton.co.uk/class.htm>.

⁹ See, for instance, Tim Edwards, *Erotics and Politics: Gay Male Sexuality, Masculinity and Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

supported by the analysis of subcultural discourses, in which the image of virile-looking and muscular man retains its currency even today. The detailed and historically sensitive examination of individual records of same-sex attraction and relationships, like Painter's archive, reveals, however, a much more intricate logic of homosexual desire and thus challenges such simple notion of the homoerotics of masculinity. The "roughest" of masculinity styles turn out to be characteristic of men whose social position could hardly be described as "hegemonic," the power dynamic of submission and domination appears to be paralleled by the negotiations of reciprocity and identification with the object of desire, the immediate social and economic circumstances prove to be as constitutive of this desire as the discursive domain of the cultural. The example of Painter's eroticization of "rough," "primitive" and animal-like lower-class masculinity may not be typical (if it is even possible to speak of this phenomenon as homogeneous across cultures and historical periods). It nevertheless shows the multiplicity and interrelatedness of assorted personal and social factors that should be taken into account if one is to develop a balanced and nuanced understanding of the question why homosexual men found (and sometimes continue to find) the masculine "proletarian" an erotically potent figure.

Another equally important issue is that of the role that social and economic inequalities played in commercially-based sexual relations between men and the personal projects of homosexual self-discovery and emancipation through cross-class (as well as cross-cultural) escape. What I worked to demonstrate in this dissertation by analyzing in detail the different relationships Painter that had with his many lower-class partners was essentially a great variety of forms that cross-class sexual contact could assume—even within an individual life history. With the mostly casual and transient nature of men's

involvement in prostitution and the assorted “alibis” that were used to disguise such relations, from nude modeling to philanthropic “adoptions,” the exchange of money and material goods for sex hardly followed a uniform pattern—the fact that precludes a simplified understanding of cross-class contact as something akin to “sexual colonialism.” The terminology of sexual exploitation, often employed in scholarly analysis of (and even more in outraged public response to) upper- and middle-class homosexual men’s sexual relations with economically disenfranchised and socially marginalized youth, seems hardly applicable to many of Painter’s affairs with “urban proletarians.” This certainly shows that we need to develop a more elaborate understanding of power relations, as Foucault-influenced scholarship encourages us to. But it also means that we need to move away from the presentist vision of the egalitarian couple as the only ethically unproblematic kind of same-sex intimacy (the view that contemporary queer theorists, opposing what they call “homonormativity,” also begin to challenge and criticize) and, furthermore, strive to uncover and examine individual accounts of cross-class commercially-based contact that enable us to reconstruct them in all their richness and complexity. In basic terms, we cannot engage in theoretical discussion, however sophisticated and intellectually impressive, about the power dynamic of cross-class relations before we acquire more autobiographical and ethnographic material that documents such relations.

And here the main hindrance comes: the lack of first-person testimonies from the lower-class men who engaged in relations with more affluent partners. There are bits and pieces of correspondence, for instance letters written by East London “rough lad” Ralph Hall to his middle-class lifelong partner Montague Glover (whose photographs were

discussed in chapter 3 of this dissertation),¹⁰ or the autobiography of Harry Daley, the “policeman friend” of J. R. Ackerley and E. M. Forster,¹¹ but on the whole we have very little information coming from the “proletarian” side of cross-class homosexual relations.¹² In this light, the studies like that by Barry Reay of Painter’s lower-class lovers and their sexual behavior (see my discussion in the introductory chapter), based solely on Painter’s sexual record, are inevitably problematic. Analyzing Painter’s autobiographical and auto-ethnographic writing, one can reconstruct how he viewed his partners and imagined his sexual and romantic relations with them, but it is nearly impossible to say how they perceived him and what they thought of their sexual contacts with wealthier “queers” like Painter. This is an inherent limitation of my dissertation that analyzes Painter’s understanding of his homosexuality and his philanthropic vision of socially beneficial cross-class friendship, but approaches the realities of his relationships with men with necessary reservations, acknowledging that, in the absence of testimonies from the other party—other than their ambiguous corporeal performance they often presented to Painter’s camera—it would be erroneous to take many of Painter’s accounts at face value. In this way, the nature of Painter’s sexual record establishes what kind of issues can be analyzed

¹⁰ *My Dear Boy: Gay Love Letters through the Centuries*, ed. Rictor Norton (San Francisco: Leyland Publications, 1998), 240-248.

¹¹ Harry Daley, *This Small Cloud* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1987). There are also several notable autobiographical accounts of non-Western men’s sexual contacts with Westerners. The most well-known (and exquisite in their literary qualities) among them are Larbi Layachi’s *A Life Full of Holes* (1964), an oral tale of its poor and illiterate author’s work as a servant in the household of a French homosexual couple in Tangier, and Mohammed Mrabet’s *Love with a Few Hairs* (1967), a story of a young Tanjawi involved in a long-term commercially-based relationship with an older Nazarene, a hotel owner “Mister David.” See Driss Ben Hamed Charhadi (Larbi Layachi), *A Life Full of Holes*, trans. Paul Bowles (New York: Grove Press, 1964); Mohammed Mrabet, *Love with a Few Hairs*, trans. Paul Bowles (New York: George Braziller, 1967).

¹² See an insightful discussion on the limitations of autobiographical studies in this regard in Philippe Lejeune, “Life Story and Social Classes,” in *On Autobiography*, ed. Paul John Eakin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 198-215.

using it, but it also reveals which questions remain unanswered, showing us possible directions for future research.

For a historian of sexuality, Painter's archive is a priceless resource providing a first-hand perspective of the ordinary (by which I mean not a member of the artistic elites) "queer" man on homosexual subcultures and male prostitution milieus of the mid-twentieth-century New York. Painter's autobiographical and auto-ethnographic work confirms George Chauncey's groundbreaking argument about the existence of two different modes of organization of male-to-male sexual contact in working- and middle-class milieus and the roots of the homosexual ("queer") identity in the middle-class culture of the time. It also provides evidence supporting Matt Houlbrook's thesis about the working-class notion of masculinity, as it was understood and expressed in the period, allowing for homophobic violence and economic exploitation of "queers" as well as, simultaneously, sexual relations with them. Painter's record also attests to the importance of the subcultural practice of image-making and image-collecting in the formation of the early homosexual communities, corroborating the findings of Thomas Waugh's study of pre-Stonewall homoerotic visual culture. There is plenty of other, no less significant and fascinating, historical information that Painter's monumental sex journal and large photographic collection contain. Its value, however, is not only limited to the academic discipline of the history of sexuality. A unique document, chronicling an individual's sexual life throughout several decades and including Painter's lengthy personal reflections on his same-sex desires, gender identity and sexual relations with men, it can provide insights into some of the contemporary debates in the fields of sexuality studies and queer theory.

The issue of sexual identity is probably at the foreground of Painter's sexual record. He rarely questioned himself about what it meant to be homosexual (he used this term throughout his journal, occasionally substituting it with "queer" as its vernacular analog devoid, however, of any negative connotations), but frequently pondered the origins of his same-sex desires and their consequences for his social and romantic life. These autobiographical accounts demonstrate a profound tension between social construction and embodied experience of sexual identity that preoccupies many scholars of sexuality today. Analyzing Painter's sexual history, one can see how the psychiatric notions of sexual abnormality organized his understanding of his homosexual identity and trace the changes brought to it in the 1940s and 1950s by his exposure to Kinsey's progressive views on human sexual variation and his sympathetic attitude towards sexual "deviants." On the other hand, it is clear from Painter's record that he engaged with the scientific theories of homosexuality in a highly creative manner, adopting and reformulating them (and contributing to them through his amateur auto-ethnographic work) to construct a rather idiosyncratic vision of his homosexual nature that would explain his preferences in sexual partners and practices and suit his broader ideas about his personal mission in life. Painter did not simply internalize the "expert" discourses on sex but appropriated and renegotiated them in the complex process of actively constructing his self-image as a homosexual man. This dynamic and interactive engagement with outside concepts of same-sex desire and identity does not, however, alter the fact that Painter experienced them as core elements of his personality and unchangeable givens of his sexual life. While Painter described some of his lower-class sexual partners as heterosexual but open to sex with men or "half-queer" (bisexual), it was clear to him that he was different from them in his erotic attraction

directed exclusively at men. His own “queer” identity was comparatively stable, even fixed, and had nothing of the sexual openness and fluidity suggested by the contemporary use of the term. It was a deep and invariable truth of his sexuality, of which he was painfully aware and which defined his sense of self and determined various aspects of his social and romantic life. This ambiguous logic of sexual identity—at once conditioned by the oppressive social forces and actively shaped according to the individual’s specific (and always changing) life circumstances, at once consciously formulated and corporeally experienced—is the subject of diverse scholarship in sexuality studies.¹³ Painter’s sexual record provides a rare opportunity to explore this logic in all its complex tensions between the social and the individual, the political and the embodied in the case of a homosexual man living in the period of dramatic changes in the organization of sexual contact between men and the gradual emergence of homosexual identities as we know them today.

Even more prominent in Painter’s life history is the topic of kinship, belonging and the ethics of sex and relationships between men. It is clearly evident from his sexual record that the demands of sexual release and pleasure were, at least in his mind, completely subjugated to the issue of mutually rewarding and socially beneficial cross-class friendship and companionship. Rooted in Painter’s experience of religious work, this philanthropic ideal of forming an unorthodox domestic arrangement with a lower-class delinquent youth, financially supporting and reforming him in exchange for occasional sex, was central to Painter’s understanding of his life as a homosexual man. This model of cross-class (and

¹³ Among many works on the subject, see, for example, *Forms of Desire: Sexual Orientation and the Social Constructionist Controversy*, ed. Edward Stein (New York: Garland, 1990); Vera Whisman, *Queer by Choice: Lesbians, Gay Men, and the Politics of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1996); *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, eds. Paula M. Moya and Michael Roy Hames-García (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); William S. Wilkerson, *Ambiguity and Sexuality: A Theory of Sexual Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); *Identity Trouble: Critical Discourse and Contested Identities*, eds. Carmen Rosa Caldas-Coulthard and Rick Iedema (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

cross-generational) coupling was, to a large degree, a response to the early-twentieth-century regime of sexual contact between men, in which difference in age and sexual identity and the commercial basis of encounters were much more important than they are nowadays. Yet, Painter's profoundly moral approach to such relations and his desire to organize them in a way that surpasses their often exploitative dynamic clearly resonates with the current debates about the ethics of queer living and the alternative forms of kinship developed by sexual nonconformists of all kinds. Numerous scholars working in a variety of disciplines ranging from anthropology to visual culture studies have recently turned their attention from the isolated queer subject to the modes of relatedness between them that challenge the dominant system of heteronormativity.¹⁴ Painter's sexual record chronicles the various alliances, grounded in sexual-economic exchange but ultimately aimed to transcend this limited formula, that he established with some of his young lower-class sexual partners who graduated to become his everyday companions, friends and even something akin to adopted sons. These relationships were driven by Painter's explicit rejection of middle-class conventions of marriage and domesticity and his deeply felt longing to belong to a community he consciously chose as his own—that of hyper-masculine and sexually uninhibited “urban proletariat.” Approached from the perspective of contemporary kinship studies, Painter's case can illuminate some of its critical issues, demonstrating the diverse and ingenious strategies that homosexual men living in the mid-

¹⁴ See Kath Weston, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Janet Carsten, *Cultures of Relatedness: New Approaches to the Study of Kinship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); *Relative Values: Reconfiguring Kinship Studies*, eds. Sarah Franklin and Susan McKinnon (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Judith Butler, “Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?” *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 13, no. 1 (2002): 14-44; Elizabeth Freeman, “Queer Belongings: Kinship Theory and Queer Theory,” in *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Studies*, eds. George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 2007), 295-314; David L. Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

twentieth-century United States used to find intimacy, affection and reciprocal support with other men.

Yet another aspect of Painter's sexual record—his extensive reflections on the emotional side of his sexual behavior and his everyday life as a homosexual man—provides an equally rich material for the contemporary sexuality studies and queer theory increasingly involved in the theoretical discussion of queer feeling and affect.¹⁵ Much of the scholarly work done in this paradigm engages with what researchers describe as “queer archives,” the private collections of textual and visual artifacts documenting the intimate experiences of queer individuals. One can argue that Painter's sexual record is such a “queer archive” *par excellence* and possibly one of the largest and most detailed from the pre-Stonewall era. Despite Painter's Kinsey-influenced behaviorist approach to sexual self-documentation, his journal includes, along with factual reports on his sexual “outlets,” lengthy personal accounts of his emotional life. With persistence and determination, Painter chronicled his erotic infatuations and romantic disappointments, his mundane concerns about money and work, his idealistic visions of philanthropic cross-class friendship as well as his “self-exculpations” for not following his “moral code,” his aesthetic delight at observing semi-naked “proletarians,” his frequent frustrations and his overarching loneliness. An in-depth analysis of Painter's writing from the perspective of queer feeling and affect can open numerous possibilities for better understanding of homosexual subjectivity and the complex net of intimate relations and affective reactions it is rooted in.

¹⁵ For key works in this “affective turn” in queer theory, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004); Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

These diverse directions for continuing the research on Thomas Painter’s sexual record and visual archive—and that of many other still untapped first-person, visual and autobiographical archives—attest to its great potential as an interdisciplinary scientific resource. This dissertation is only a small step in making Painter’s story public, showing the great value of his autobiographical and auto-ethnographic work and putting his name prominently among the pantheon of queer pioneers who chronicled their lives—from John Addington Symonds to Samuel R. Delany—often strikingly different from those of homosexual men living today, for posterity. The personal strategy of cross-class escape that underlay Painter’s homosexual self-discovery and self-realization and the philanthropic logic according to which he imagined and fashioned his relationships with “urban proletarians” were by no means unproblematic, as I have repeatedly argued elsewhere. Exploring and analyzing the complexities of Painter’s sexual history, including its often “sordid” underside, this dissertation is nonetheless grounded in the great personal respect for a man who devoted his life to such an unparalleled project of sexual self-documentation and gave us a chance to take a look into a queer world long since gone.

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Appendix

Thomas Painter's Visual Archive: A Selection

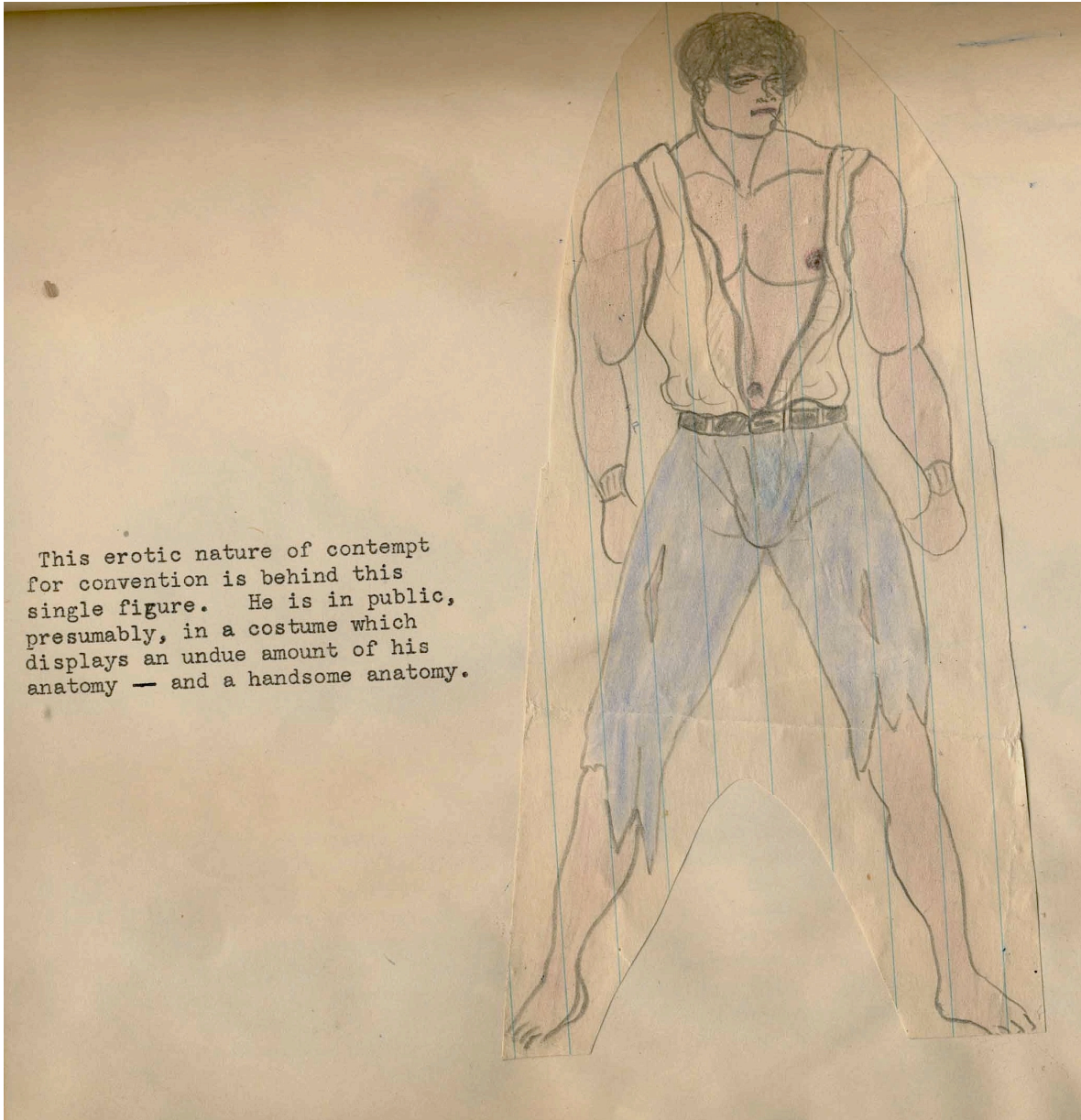


Figure 1. Thomas Painter, untitled drawing, ca. 1944-1945.

One of Painter's earliest drawings, this image engages with the theme of lower-class "sartorial emancipation," depicting a young muscular man in rugged costume. The relaxed clothing mores of "urban proletarians" suggested to Painter not only these men's sexual uninhibitedness but also their rebellious nature, their "contempt for conventions" of respectable middle-class society.

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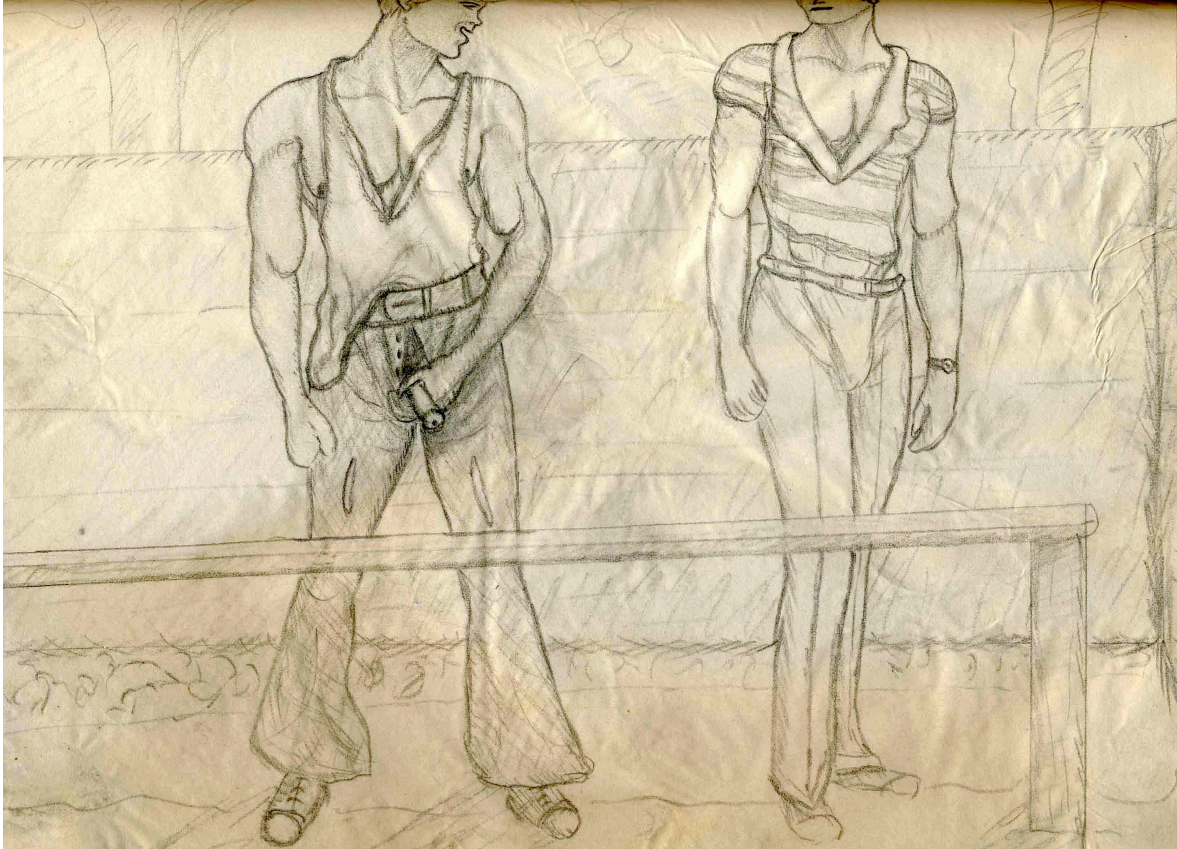


Figure 2. Thomas Painter, untitled drawing, ca. 1944-1945.

This erotic scene depicting sexual interaction between a “proletarian” hustler (on the left) and a “queer” illustrates Painter’s belief in the connection between public semi-nudity and sexual invitation. The hustler is sporting a revealing undershirt and unzips his pants to signal his sexual availability.

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Figure 3. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, ca. 1954.

Painter owned a number of ragged garments, like the tattered undershirt depicted, and photographed many of his models wearing them.

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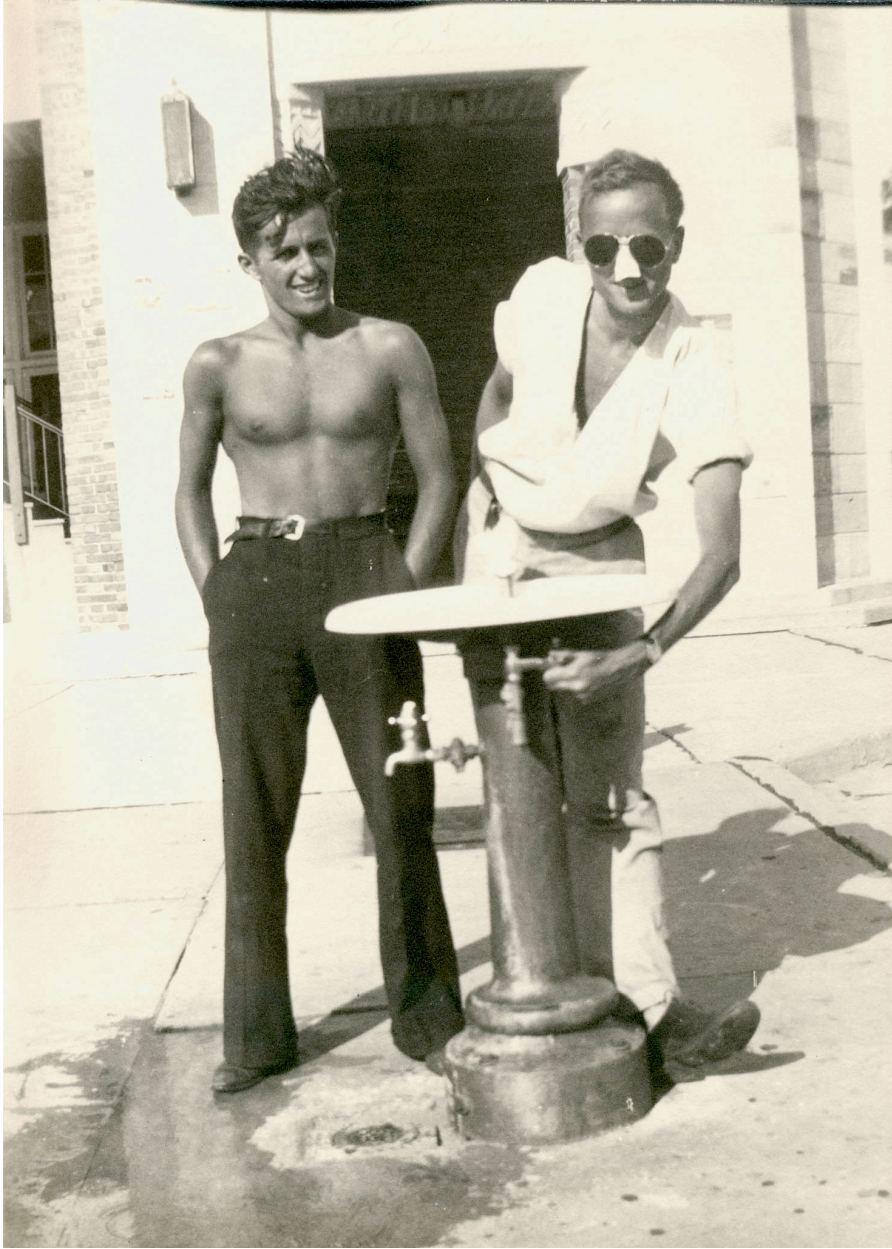


Figure 4. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, 1945.

Painter (on the right) visited Coney Island religiously for many years, enjoying spending time with muscular—and often semi-naked—working-class bathers. Here he is depicted with one of his shirtless “proletarian” companion, an old-time acquaintance from Chicago.

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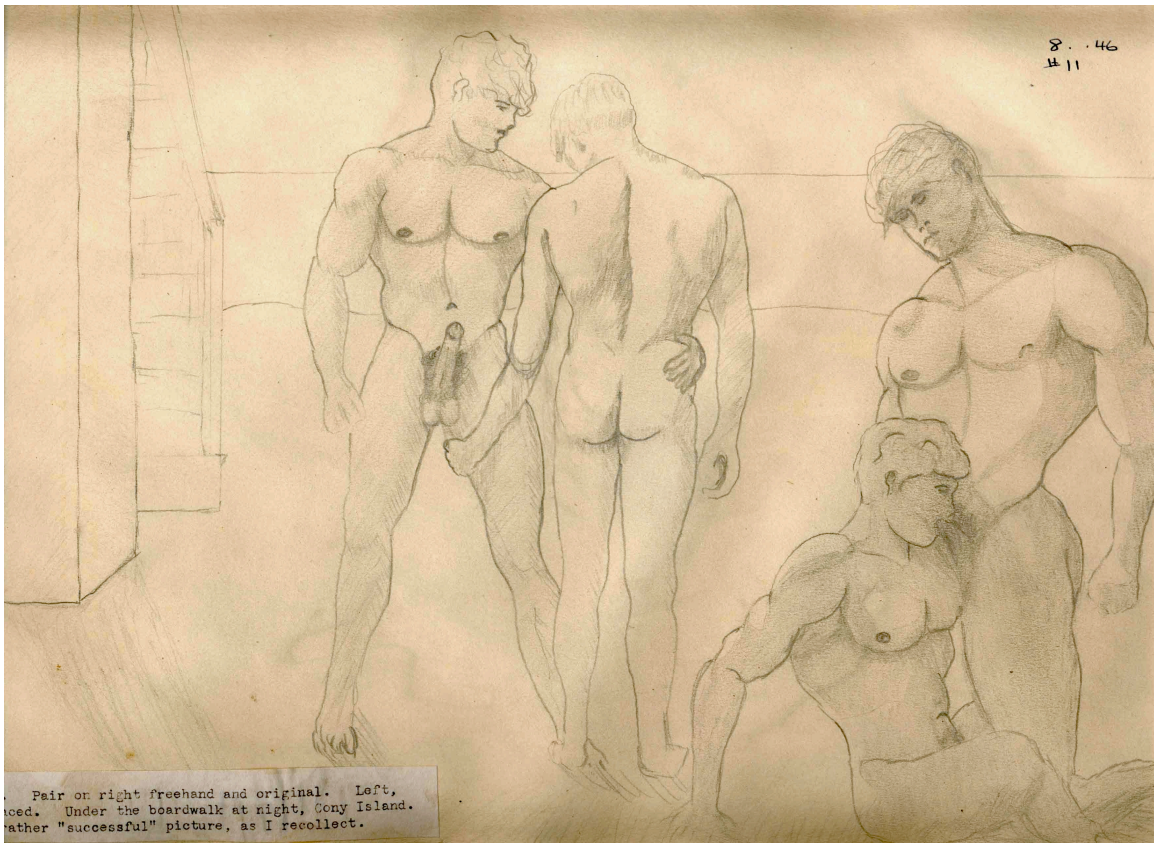


Figure 5. Thomas Painter, untitled drawing, 1948.

This drawing, described as “Under the boardwalk at night, Coney [sic] Island,” illustrates Painter’s erotic fantasies about the sexually charged ambiance of the Coney Island rathskellers, the “atmosphere of sex, delinquency, sex, sordidness, and sex.”¹

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¹ Painter to Kinsey, 9 September 1951, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 8.



Figure 6. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, 1955.

An example of Painter's casual photographs of lower-class places of leisure, it depicts the public pool and playground at the corner of Stanton and Sheriff Streets on the Lower East Side. "In this corner are parallel bars, and the PR boys work out on them. They get half-naked doing this, then trot across the street to the Colmado and have sodas, and hang around."² The man on the photograph is Indio Regalado on the day Painter first met him, visiting the playground with his friends.

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² Photograph "290-1 (+ 281) PNT 12.7.55" in Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 14, series IV A.1.a.

PNT



C



E



D



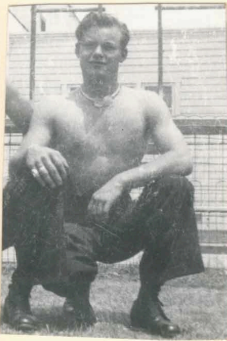
G



F



L



I



K



J

(opposite page)

Figure 7. Henry Faulkner, untitled photographs, ca. 1940s.

Painter printed these photographs from the negatives that Henry Faulkner (photograph “K,” in the middle) had given him before leaving New York in 1950. Painter then organized them into a scrapbook, from which a page is reproduced here. He preserved these photographs for his private erotic use, and was excited by the stories Faulkner told him about how these photographs had been taken. About the images “C” and “D”: “Faulkner tells of picking up these two young beauties, spending the night with them, and here photographs them naked as they wake in the morning. Here we have an added obscene fillip of two friends, known to each other, nakedly being fellated and slept with. C+D represents the morning after spending the night with these two boys. This, especially D, is intensely erotic in that the subjects (what one can see of them) are very attractive, and both are naked there in one small bedroom with Faulkner while he fellated. They (the boys) were neighbors and friends, and young (18, about)—and yet they do this sort of thing before each other, with relaxed abandon.”³

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³ Painter to Kinsey, 28 August 1954, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 11.



Figure 8. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, 1936.

One of the earliest images from Painter’s archive, this photo illustrates Painter’s use of photographs of his lower-class lovers and companions as visual keepsakes of the time they spent together. The subject depicted is Hugh Brown, captured on the beach near Boca Raton, Florida. “The pictures show what happened there—all of it I regret to state,” remarked Painter in his record, referring to Hugh’s unwillingness to have sex with him.⁴

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⁴ Thomas Painter, “S. —, Hugh” entry in “The Index of Persons” (1961), Thomas N. Painter Collection, series II, vol. 4.



Figure 9. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, 1949.

An example of the “candid” snapshots Painter clandestinely made while visiting Coney Island Beach. It captures two muscular beachgoers who attracted Painter by their “highly suggestive and erotic pose.”⁵

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⁵ Painter to Kinsey, 28 June 1949, Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 6.

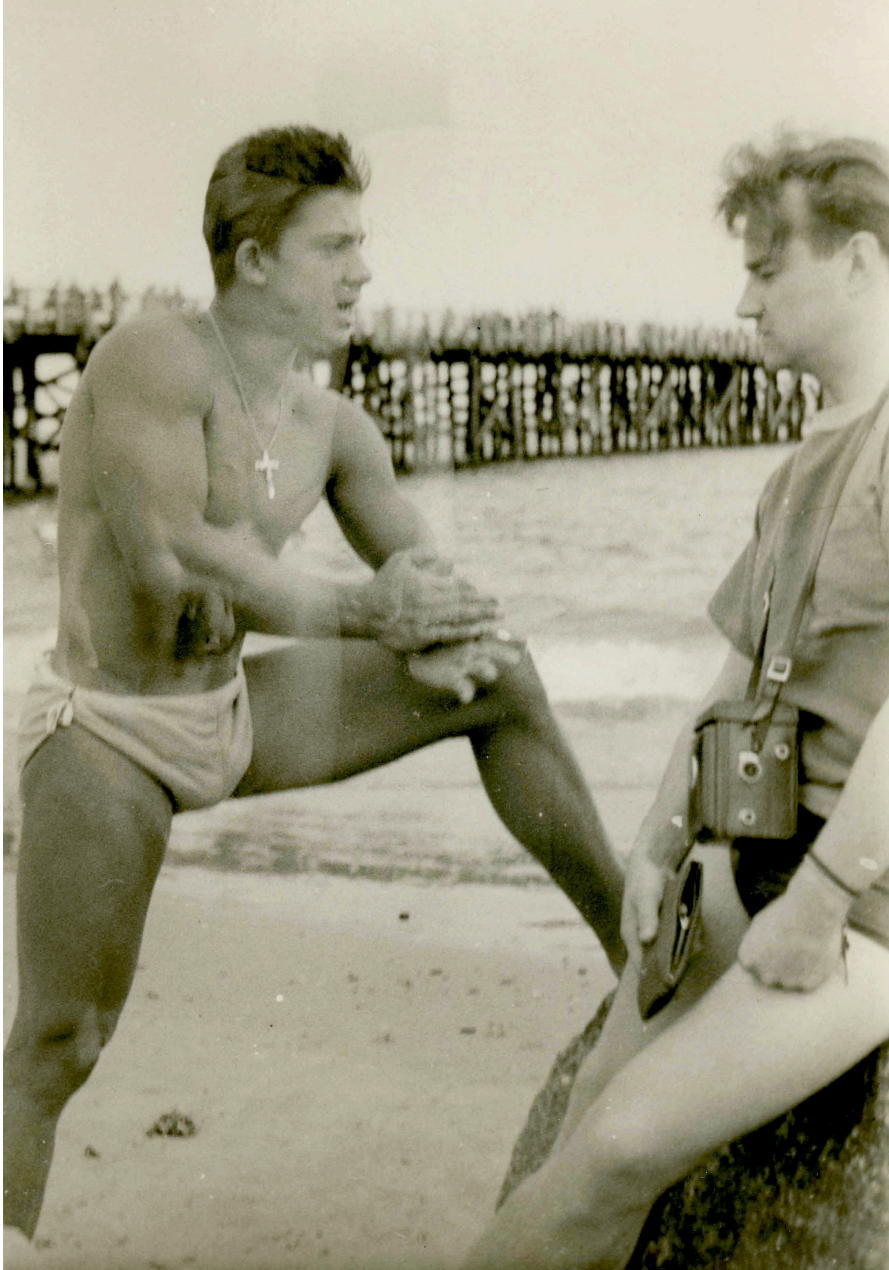


Figure 10. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, 1950.

The photograph captures sexual interaction between “queers” and “proletarian” bodybuilders at Coney Island Beach. The man on the right is Painter’s friend and cruising companion Larry Sorel chatting with an Italian muscleman, one of Painter’s favorite models.

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Figure 11. Tom Clifford, untitled photograph, ca. late 1920s.

This photograph, the first in the series of nineteen, was obtained by Painter from his friend, “alleged sculptor” Tom Clifford. It is an example of the privately produced erotic images that circulated in early male homosexual communities as homemade erotica. It also illustrates the frequent use of the “artistic alibi” in homosexual men’s cross-class photographic practice and sexual relations with “trade.” “The story Tom gives is that one summer about twenty years ago (I regret to state—what is this wonderful boy come to now?) he was in New England somewhere and met this boy who was with an ‘artist’ [depicted on the right] and who was serving as his ‘model.’ Maybe, but it seems certain he had other uses too. Anyhow Tom seems to have gotten somehow an afternoon with this young faun, and fortunately preserved it on film.”⁶

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⁶ Thomas Painter, “Commentary on Photographs,” Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 1, series II, C.1., vol. 6.



Figure 12. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, 1950.

A visual record of Painter's sexual encounter with the young man depicted above, the photograph is an example of the documentary use of erotic photography in early male homosexual communities. It also shows the use of images (here, a collection of female nudes) for the purpose of seduction.

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Figure 13. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, 1951.

An example of the erotically charged portrait, the photograph depicts the object of Painter's intense, if short-lived, infatuation, bodybuilder and physique model Gus Mayor.

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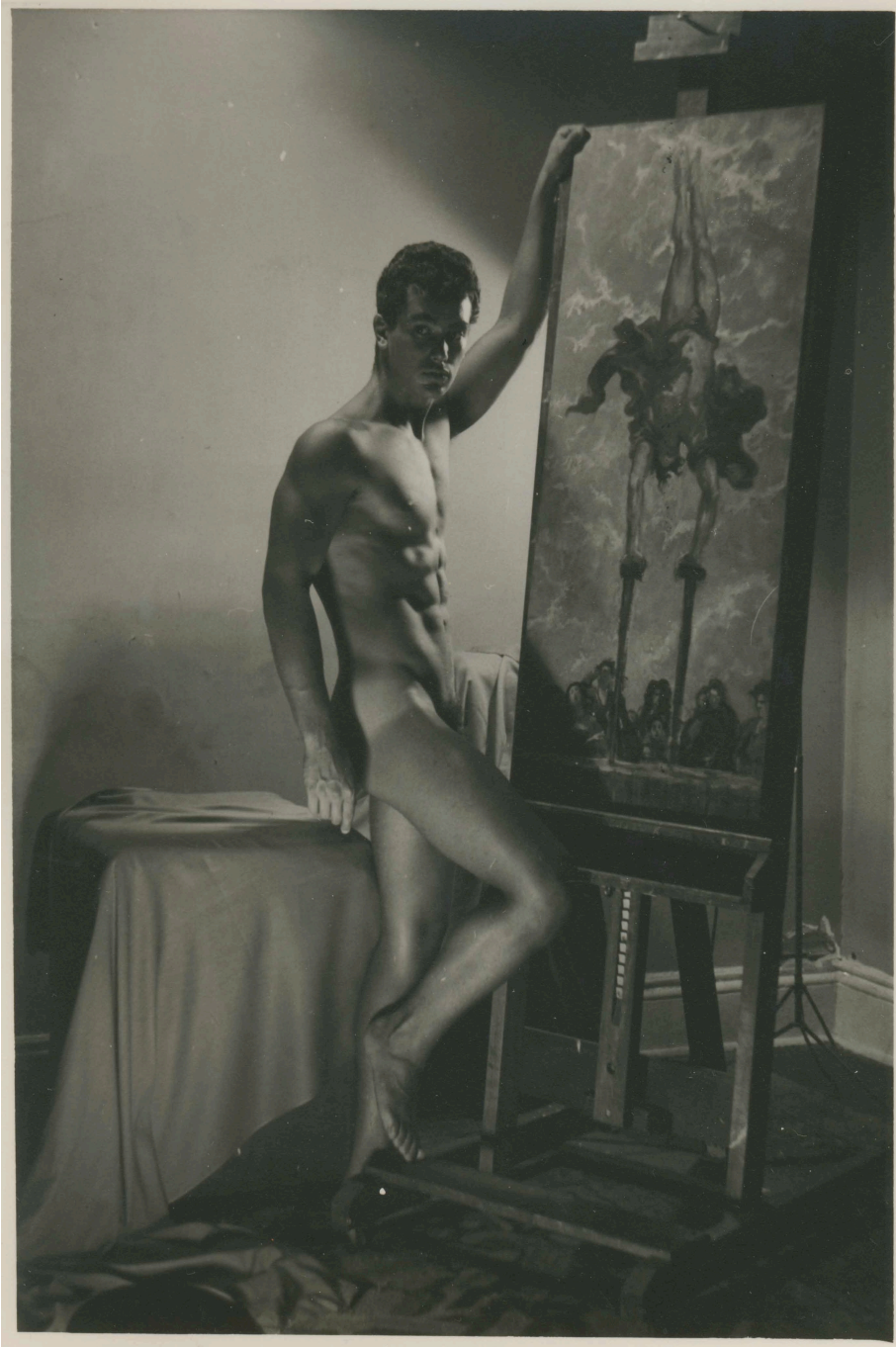


Figure 14. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, 1951.

The model, Gus Mayor, is photographed next to Edward Melcarth's painting *Country Fair* in the manner reminiscent of mid-twentieth-century physique magazines.

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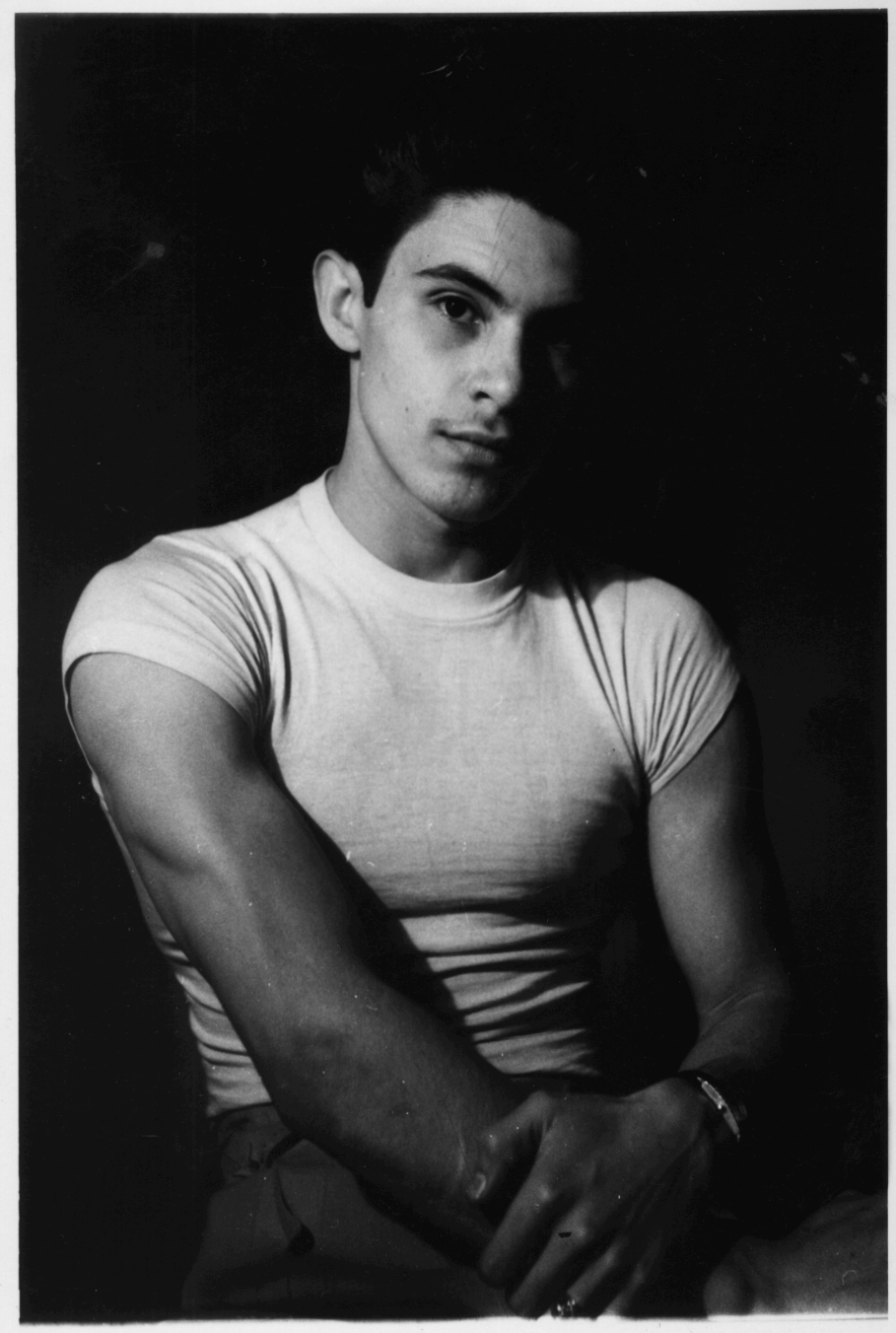


Figure 15. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, 1955.

The photograph that Painter considered one of the most “artistic” in his visual archive. The subject is his all-time favorite model Benny Rodriguez.

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Figure 16. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, 1955.

The subject is Painter's Puerto Rican lover and companion Indio Regalado, photographed near the Naugatuck River in Connecticut. "The costume was unsolicited by me," remarked Painter, "but not rejected (the swim trunks repair on the rock foreground)."⁷ A full-body nude study, it shows the influence of the outdoor physique photographs of the period, but also suggests a more casual and private practice of erotic image-making.

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⁷ Photograph "281-9 PNT 12.7.55" in Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 14, series IV A.1.a.

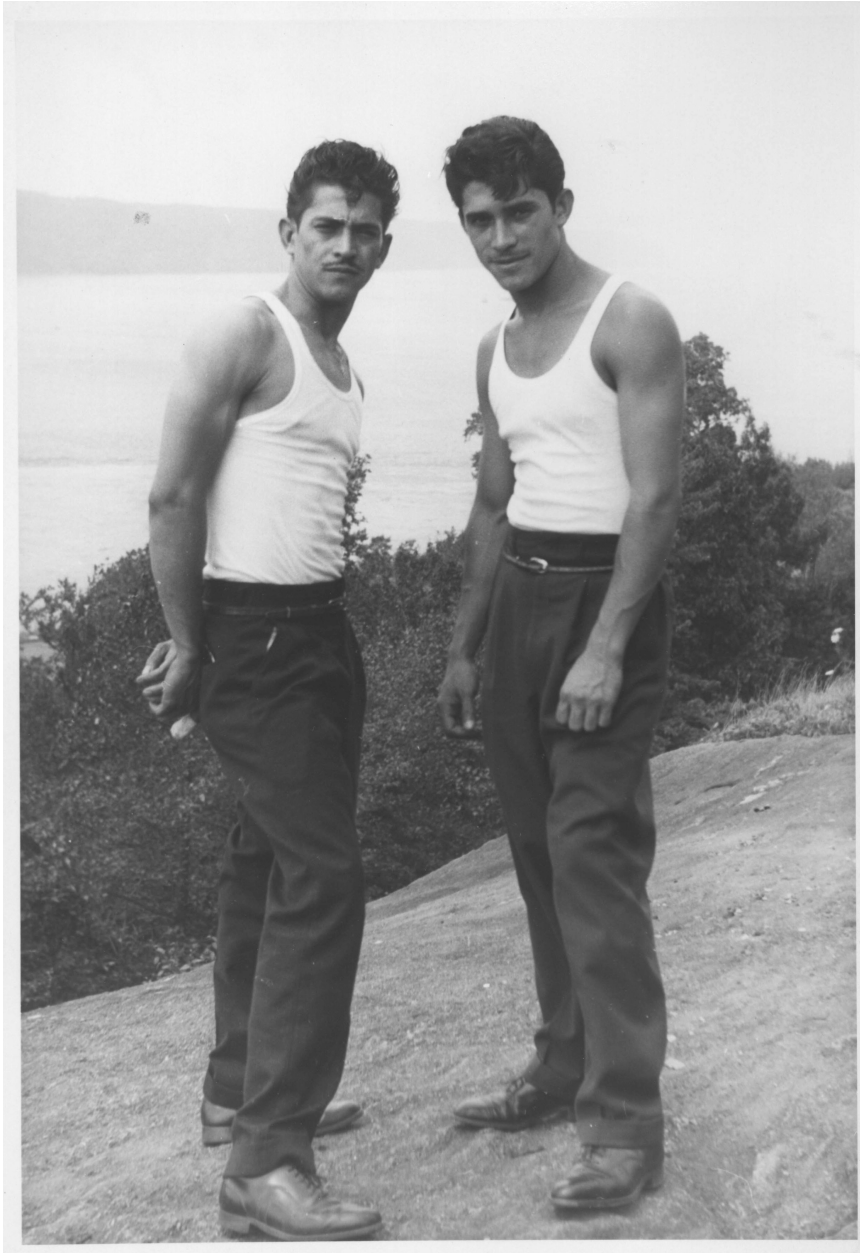


Figure 17. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, 1954.

The subjects depicted are Hector (on the left) and Eddy Martinez photographed during the picnic Painter organized with them in Inwood Hill Park in August 1954. A photographic memento of their social activities together, the image also records the relaxed clothing styles of the “urban proletariat.” Both brothers are wearing undershirts, the garment Painter found intensely erotic.

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Figure 18. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, 1957.

An example of the playful interaction between Painter and his models during a photographic session. At the suggestion of the man depicted, one of Painter's Puerto Rican acquaintances, Bobby Guerrero*, Painter portrayed him as a pirate. "Death's head, with two snakes emerging and about to bite his nipples. 'Muerte' is of course 'death.' On his abdomen a woman (very crudely done), with his navel as a vagina, supposed to be looking and [illegible] to his penis. With the legend of 'Ojo de daga'—'Beware of the dagger.' Daga is also slang for penis. ... His expression here is supposed to be fierce. I remarked as he was posing that if I must be captured and raped by a pirate give me one like him."⁸

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⁸ Photograph "345-18" in Thomas N. Painter Collection, box 14, series IV A.1.a.



Figure 19. Thomas Painter, untitled photograph, 1956.

A typical of documentary photographs Painter took during his travel in Puerto Rico, this image shows his acquaintances in La Perla spending an afternoon at the neighborhood store, Colmado Fontan. Among the men depicted are Luis Alvarez (third from the right) and Angel Salinas (first from the right).

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