

From Whitman's Nationalism to Stoddard's Expatriatism: The Emergence of a Modern Gay Male American Subjectivity

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American writers Walt Whitman and Charles Warren Stoddard exchanged a series of letters between 1867 and 1870. These five letters, published as part of Whitman's collected letters, have not been critically evaluated for the insight they offer into the emergence of a modern gay male American subjectivity. Once established, this insight holds the potential to contribute to a productive analysis of an under-analyzed aspect of American literature — a modern gay male literary aesthetic. Whitman's sexual orientation occupies a contested space in the academy, and it was not until Gary Schmidgall's 1997 biography that the first book-length examination of Whitman's homosexuality was published. Indeed, in spite of this groundbreaking work, Jerome Loving's 1999 biography largely excludes or minimizes the homosexual consideration of Whitman's life to other concerns.¹ Schmidgall claims a simple rationale for his unapologetic focus on sexuality: 'My justification—my defense, if you will—for preferring to concentrate on the gay Whitman is simply that it is about time' (1997, p.xxviii). With this quote, Schmidgall acknowledges his desire to speak into the silence surrounding Whitman's homosexuality. Flanked by denial and

¹ Despite Schmidgall's study of Whitman's homosexuality predating Loving's biography, Loving continues the tradition of minimizing Whitman's sexuality to the conventions of nineteenth-century friendships. Although Loving discusses the possibility of Whitman's homosexuality in the chapter 'Calamus and the National Calamity,' he largely minimizes the topic as being unlikely given that Whitman lived primarily before the proliferation of homosexual discourse. Such negotiation allows Loving to contain, minimize, and largely overlook the probability of Whitman's homosexuality, and he does as much throughout the book. Writing when the homosocial is as familiar as the homosexual, Loving cautiously errs on the side of the homosocial: 'The Irish-born Doyle may or may not have been Whitman's lover, but it is certain he became Walt's dearest friend' (1999, p.297). Another book of interest that considers the role of men in Whitman's life is Charles Shively, 1991. *Calamus Lovers: Walt Whitman's Working-Class Camerados*. San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press.

politics, the discussion of Whitman's homosexuality often becomes lost, but at least it has been considered. Other than Whitman, the student reading the textual deployment of a gay subjectivity is directed to Oscar Wilde, whose work is often positioned as the epitome of modern homosexuality.² Wilde has come to dominate the discussion of modern homosexuality, whereas Whitman simply has not. Recently, the focus on Wilde has come under question as scholars have begun questioning how this tradition may have delimited the reading of homosexuality and overshadowed its consideration in other times and places. The centring of Wilde as the modern homosexual may well be informed by an American homophobia, which prefers to consider homosexuality—if it considers it at all—as being 'there' not 'here.' Such questioning has yet to bear results, and this essay hopes to add to the project of identifying the specificity behind the appellation 'modern gay male' in American fiction. The specificity of this aesthetic has been elided in the movement from Whitman to Wilde, as there were significant differences in the writings of these two men—specifically cultural and temporal dissimilarities. The Whitman-Stoddard correspondence evidences how these differences influenced the textual expression of male-to-male desire in America and, within this difference, a nascent and distinctly modern gay male American subjectivity can be detected.

The Context of the Whitman-Stoddard Correspondence

Answering Cornel West's call for a new cultural politics that demystifies the construction of difference, a contextual analysis of the Whitman-Stoddard correspondence provides what Stephen Greenblatt would term a thick description.³ Such an analytic tool allows for a demystified reading of the

² Continuing the modish tradition of the contemporary academy, Loving cites the Wilde trial as an historic event to mark the emergence of homophobia, which he posits as necessary before it would be possible to read Whitman's homosexuality (1999, p.48).

³ Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt offer a rigorous discussion of thick description as an interpretive strategy (2000, pp.22-31).

correspondence.⁴ Demystification calls for the interrogation of all categories of difference to craft a critical political project to resist and alter the systems that create and control difference. However, before such a prophetic criticism can be achieved, overlooked categories of difference must be brought under consideration. This contextual reading of the correspondence hopes to meet this goal by providing an apparatus by which to read a modern gay male American subjectivity during the moment of discursive interpellation.⁵ Moreover, it contributes to an understanding of how interpellation creates tension between subaltern bodies by evidencing how individual resistance can itself partake in the discourse it seeks to resist. The Whitman-Stoddard correspondence illuminates a crucial moment in the construction of American difference and evidences the emergence of a modern gay male American identity.

By the time of this exchange of letters, neologisms for homosexuality were already under development.⁶ Through this dissemination, male-to-male desire became delimited by discourse. This development bifurcated the nineteenth-century expression of male-to-male desire and marked the end of romantic passionate friendship as a trope for any male-to-male desire that exceeded friendship. The era of American Victorian male friendships, thoughtfully explored by Caleb Crain in *American Sympathy: Men, Friendship, and Literature in the New Nation* (2001) had come to a close, and male friendships were now under surveillance. The loss of this trope forced a shift from sublimation to

⁴ West defines demystification as a critical project that considers all categories of difference as they are included, excluded, or formed by social structures of power: 'Demystification tries to keep track of the complex dynamics of institutional and other related power structures in order to disclose options and alternatives for transformative praxis; it also attempts to grasp the way in which representational strategies are creative responses to novel circumstances and conditions' (1992, pp.19-36).

⁵ Louis Althusser discusses interpellation, particularly as it hails the subject's identity (1989, pp.53-61).

⁶ Michel Foucault dates the emergence of the homosexual to 1870 (1990, p.43); however, John Lauritsen and David Thorstad point out that the scientific interest in what would become known as homosexuality started as early as the 1860s (1974, pp.8-10).

repression in the textual expression of genital male-to-male desire and helped forge the modern gay subjectivity of silence. Lord Alfred Douglas's 'Love that dare not speak its name' became unspeakable with the removal of the Platonic ideal (1986, p.264). Unlike Whitman, who began writing in a culture that could not linguistically label his male-to-male desire a 'homosexual' desire, Stoddard wrote during and after the genesis of proscriptive homosexual discourse. This formation prohibited Stoddard from deploying the same degree of metaphoric play regarding the male body as his predecessor. However, there is evidence to suggest that Whitman felt the regulating pressure of the emergent discourse, and it may well have influenced the edits and reductions of the later editions of *Leaves of Grass*—those editions after the infamous 1860 edition. What read as crass sexuality at the beginning of Whitman's career became homosexuality by the time he offered the concinnity of his cathedral-making argument, which cast the criticism surrounding the sexuality of his earlier work as little more than a hasty response to an early stage of poetic construction. However, having deployed his adhesive tropes for male friendship prior to the discursive emergence of the homosexual, Whitman was free to fill the margins with the ambiguous reeds of Calamus and other metaphoric play. In contrast, Stoddard was unable to rely upon the ignorance of the reading population, for by the time of his first publication in 1867, the 'unspeakable' was being spoken. This development greatly impacted upon Stoddard's ability textually to describe a pleasure both he and Whitman shared: a pleasure in the company of men.

Another important note of context is found in the evolving ideology of 'manifest destiny', which altered the American symbolic economy of frontiers.⁷ Stoddard and Whitman lived on opposite sides of the transcontinental railroad's last spike — geographically, temporally,

⁷ John O'Sullivan is credited with having coined the neologism 'manifest destiny' to express a sense of America's providential mission. For an analysis of the ideology behind the neologism, see Anders Stephanson, 1995. *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of the Right*. New York: Hill and Wang.

experientially, and ideologically. This difference negated the ability of the West to function as a frontier for Stoddard, forming an important archetypal and aesthetic difference between the writing of the two men. Whitman was still able to envisage a westward movement that would include relocating the White House. To Whitman, who never travelled further west than Denver, America was still a wide-open country with an expanding western frontier. In contrast to Stoddard, who resided on the East and West coasts of America and travelled overseas to England, Italy, Egypt, Panama, and Nicaragua, the world was an experientially smaller place. Whitman may have walked the infamous Broadway of 1850s Manhattan, but Stoddard experienced that street as well as the Market Street of 1850s San Francisco. Stoddard's conception of a new frontier necessarily extended further west than the western coast of the United States, for the west coast ceases authentically to signify as frontier once the transcontinental railroad reduced the westward journey from a voyage to a trip. This change initiated a significant conceptual change in the experience of American geography for Stoddard's generation. Particularly for Stoddard, Whitman's western frontier was as familiar to him as his parents' house on San Francisco's Powell Street. By 1870, the American symbolic economy of frontiers had changed, and Stoddard had to rework the geography available to him for frontier projections and, as the correspondence will evidence, Whitman chastised Stoddard for transgressing American national borders.

Having reached the west coast, America's manifest destiny had been completed, but the project of national domestication had just begun. This ideological shift held significant social and material ramifications for the cultural ordering of gender, sex and sexuality, and these changes forged another fundamental difference between Whitman and Stoddard.⁸ If the

⁸ The terms sex and gender are deployed here as separate categories, which require and dictate a separate set of analytic considerations, regardless of overlap. For an analysis that unyokes sex from gender, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1999. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press and/or Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political" Economy of Sex' in Carole Vance (ed), *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*. Boston: Routledge (1993), pp. 267-319.

zeitgeist of America's nineteenth century was the movement from an agrarian to a commercial culture, a domestic working class had to be mobilized for the industrial production of goods, especially given the East-West trade the transcontinental railroad was expected to produce.⁹ The construct of the bourgeois nuclear family met this need. This domestication required men to move to the factory, women to remain at home, and the family to function as the primary unit for the stabilization of production. Productivity and procreation became the nation's social mandate, and this imperative positioned the nuclear family as the primary unit for procreative production. Via this formation, heteronormativity became situated as the ideological normative centre for American culture. This calibration structured the sexual division of labour as being secondary to America's industrial market concerns, and crafted the sexually determined sex and gender roles that would come to dominate American culture until World War II. For the purposes of this discussion, it is important to note that the changing construct of the American male citizen now dictated that he needed to work, marry, and procreate to be viable as an American male subject. This triangulated cultural formation negated the domestic expression of a male-to-male sexuality and compelled men like Stoddard to look beyond the national borders Whitman bolstered throughout his career. In contrast to Whitman, whose trope of adhesiveness expressed a male-to-male desire within America, by 1870 Stoddard realized this desire held no positive or productive social role or status in America.

With only twenty-five years between their first published works, and despite their similar interest in the company of men, important socio-cultural differences separate Whitman and Stoddard. Certainly, Whitman and the men of his generation did not live without a regulating cultural pressure regarding their carnal and domestic habits, but they did age into procreational maturity before the deployment of an increasingly

⁹ Stephen Ambrose offers a judicious discussion of the trade and economic expectations surrounding the completion of the transcontinental railroad (2000, p.370).

heteronormative cultural pressure, which was attendant on the changing mid-nineteenth century ideological and material concerns of nation building.¹⁰ These changes were bolstered by the discursive specification of homosexuality, for the development of the homosexual gave birth to the central binary of sexual orientation.¹¹ Whitman was able textually to craft what Stoddard could not - a space for male-to-male desire within the United States of America. By 1870, Stoddard had to explore a new frontier for, once culture's interpretive lens was calibrated to the prescribed existence of the homosexual male, America became an increasingly dangerous place for the expression of male-to-male desire. Unable to actualize or narrate a proscribed aspect of self, Stoddard looked beyond American borders and located his body and narrative projects on a new geographic and linguistic frontier. In this way, Stoddard may be interpreted as a precursor to the modern American expatriate. Stoddard's sublimation can be productively interpreted via an understanding of the socio-cultural context by which it was constituted. To this end, an analysis of the respective contexts of the Whitman-Stoddard correspondence has been offered to support a productive explication of the correspondence, for such an approach provides the potential for a demystified reading of content.

The Whitman-Stoddard Correspondence in Context

The Whitman-Stoddard correspondence began on February 8 1867, when Stoddard wrote to request Whitman's autograph. Unfortunately for Stoddard, his request was not granted, and Whitman's lack of an immediate and effusive response set the tone for subsequent correspondence, revealing a foundational difference between them. At the time of this initial letter,

¹⁰ The variance between Whitman and Stoddard may be productively interpreted using Michel Foucault's work regarding the specification of bodies and the incitement to discourse which follows discourse formation (1990, p.101). With this formation, the difference between the two men can be interpreted as a variance that elucidates a degree of cultural disparity and avoids the taint of nostalgia.

¹¹For a discussion that challenges the hegemonic conception of heterosexuality, see Jonathan Ned Katz, 1996. *The Invention of Heterosexuality*. New York: Plume.

Stoddard was twenty-four and Whitman was forty-eight. With nearly a quarter of a century between them, the two men approached their correspondence from very different age-graded cultural perspectives. Stoddard, a young recently-published poet, looked to Whitman for acceptance and guidance while Whitman sought to bolster, if not protect, his place in the yet-to-emerge history of American *belles-lettres*. This latter motivation may have tempered Whitman's avuncular relation with the young poet. Such a relationship may be, in part, formed by a generational difference. For the younger generation, the difference was an opportunity for the expression and exploration of non-normative sexualities before being imbricated into the hegemonic sexual order upon which the older generation had come to depend. Such transgressive potential is an intrinsic aspect of adolescence and/or young adulthood during the liminal years between puberty and matrimony. The younger generation's experience of relative and transgressive sexual freedom—the dream of which haunts the elder psyche—also fuels the elder generation's crises of underutilized erections. Such a concern may have informed Whitman's resistance here and in the later letters.

Stoddard wrote his second letter to Whitman on March 2 1869 from the Sandwich Islands (modern day Hawaii) and spoke of national borders. He claimed the island location permitted him an autonomous individuality: 'for the first time I act as my nature prompts me. It would not answer in America as a general principle,—not even in California, where men are tolerably bold' (Traubel, 1953, IV p.268). Stoddard's formation served as a response to proscriptions on male-to-male desire in America, even among men who are 'tolerably bold'. The exactitude of what would not answer in America was explicated when Stoddard recounted his experiences with the islanders. There, after greeting a male islander, Stoddard found himself in bed with the young man and described the *mise en scene*: 'his arm over my breast and around me' (Traubel, 1953, IV p.268). Stoddard's tumescent

recollection was conceivably cast as coital via the punning potential of his phrase ‘intercourse with [the] natives,’ which was how Stoddard framed such interactions with indigenous males (Traubel, 1953, IV p.268). Stoddard informed Whitman that this intercourse had altered his reading of Whitman’s poetry: ‘I read your Poems with a new spirit, to understand them as few may be able to’ (Traubel, 1953, IV p.268). The few Stoddard spoke of were men who experience male-to-male desire in a similar fashion.

Whitman’s first response to Stoddard was dated June 12 1869. Whitman enclosed a photo and a newspaper and commented positively on Stoddard’s interaction with the natives: ‘those tender and primitive personal relations away off there in the Pacific Islands (as described by you) touched me deeply’ (Traubel, 1953, IV p.269). Whitman acknowledged the import of Stoddard’s letters, but privately, in a conversation during the sharing of this letter with Horace Traubel—Whitman’s daily late-life visitor and *de facto* biographer. Whitman also acknowledged the limits of such intercourse: ‘he is right: occidental people, for the most part, would not only not understand but would likewise condemn the sort of thing about which Stoddard centers his letter’ (Traubel, 1953, IV p.269). Whitman not only concurred with the national limits in Stoddard’s observation, he went as far as to extend it to the whole of Western civilization. History has shown that Whitman’s assessment of occidental civilization was correct. The West would condemn men like Stoddard, who centre their letters on such matters. Whitman read his culture’s bias accurately; moreover, he saw the sexual economy behind its condemnation, which prohibited any expression of a male-to-male desire which exceeded friendship, and as Whitman obliquely noted, Stoddard centred his letters precisely on this proscribed desire.

Whitman’s relation to the occident may be the crux here, and it is interesting to consider how this exchange of letters appears in Traubel’s reportage. Although this was the first exchange of letters between the two men, it was the second Whitman shared with Traubel. Whitman reordered

the correspondence when sharing it, and I read this chronological reordering as a narrative ploy. Whitman's biographer Gary Schmidgall comes close to interpreting what I term Whitman's contrapuntal letter-sharing strategy. Whitman often deployed this strategy, which revealed the existence of a secret while simultaneously concealing the secret's contents, when sharing letters with Traubel. Schmidgall implicitly acknowledged this strategy when he recounted Whitman's teasing Traubel with the 'great secret' of his life only to cover his failure to reveal the secret by sharing a letter from Bayard Taylor—a late nineteenth century American author whom recent scholarship has begun to claim as a gay writer (1997, p.xvi).¹² In addition to reversing the chronological order of the letters, a second narrative impulse can be detected in the presentation of the letter itself. By placing the letter second in a bundle of five letters, which were pinned together, Whitman framed the letter within a context of audience and economics. Stoddard's letter follows one from R. Brisbane, an English publisher, who wrote to Whitman to discuss publishing a British edition of *Leaves of Grass*. This arrangement places Stoddard's 1869 letter in Whitman's consciousness twenty years after its receipt and in the midst of an 1889 discussion in which Whitman refuses to defend the lack of 'some plausible worldly estate' for his life's literary production (Traubel, 1953, IV p.267). Presenting Stoddard's letter in this context suggests that Whitman was defining, instead of defending, his legacy. Whitman may have been motioning, albeit cautiously, toward his literary legacy. The existence of men like Stoddard may have suggested to Whitman that a readership for his work had begun to appear. This new reader was a man like Stoddard, who centred his letters on the pleasures of male company.¹³

¹²John Hollock speculates that Bayard Taylor's *Joseph and His Friend* (1870) can be interpreted as being a novel about the homoerotic attraction between the early nineteenth-century poet Fitz-Greene Halleck and his friend Joseph Drake (Hallock, 2000, pp.162-68).

¹³ Whitman often hinted at being out of place and time, and it is therefore reasonable to think he would also feel out of place and time for the contemporary reading public. This feeling is perhaps best represented in his quote to this effect: 'the time for me hasn't come yet: some are born posthumously' (Schmidgall, 1997, p.xvii).

Whitman may well have anticipated the existence of men like Stoddard, but he would not go gently into that future, for he foresaw the paradoxical relationship between subjectivity and objectivity being constituted by homosexual discourse.¹⁴ The objectifying aspect of this paradox is perhaps best captured via Foucault's infamous hyperbolic dictum: 'the sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species' (1990, p.43). However, the same discursive pressure, which constitutes this process of specification, also allows for a subjective potential within what Foucault terms the tactical polyvalence of discourses.¹⁵ Nonetheless, such a project of specification ran contrary to Whitman's lifetime poetic project. For a poet whose work rested upon interpretation not interpellation, the subjective and the objective are not separate poles of experience. Whitman makes this point whilst discussing Stoddard:

It's wonderful how true it is that a man can't go anywhere without taking himself along and without finding love meeting him more than half way. It gives you a new intimation of the providences to become the subject of such an ingratiating hospitality: it makes the big world littler—it knits all the fragments together: it makes the little world bigger—it expands the arc of comradery. (Traubel, 1953, IV p.269)

Between the words 'subject' and 'comradery', two words of significance to Whitman's concordance, we find the interpenetrative Whitman. Via this interpenetration, Whitman appears to perform an essentializing act, for he acknowledges the self as inseparable from experience and casts this insuperable self as a generative point for interaction with the external world. Here, the self precedes the external object. This is an important distinction,

¹⁴ For the purposes of argumentation, I have attempted to delineate my exact meaning here, but I mean nothing more and nothing less than to acknowledge the contentious divide between the subject and the object that rests at heart of Western philosophy. In contemporary literary theory, this has taken the form of the debates over essentialism versus constructionism.

¹⁵ As previously referenced, Foucault productively theorized the paradox of subjectivity as being a process of reverse discourse (1990, pp.100-02).

for Whitman accords within such a formation the potential for comradeship, a formation bordering on his concept of adhesion. A reversal of this process would negate his entire poetic project, for Whitman's democratic 'I' is a movement outward from the first-person—a process of unification not subjection. To Whitman, the subject is symbolic not symptomatic. Here, at the conclusion of Traubel's recollections, Whitman resists a nugatory relationship between subject and object. A similar understanding can also be detected in Whitman's response to Traubel's speculation that Whitman incorporated personal experience into his response to Stoddard: 'yes—and some views: don't you like views? I think you and Doctor always itch for views. Laughed' (Traubel, 1953, IV p.269). Whitman's laughter was a nervous laughter resulting from the negation of his interpenetrative preference, for such a formation subordinates the experience of self to the objectifying potential of Traubel's speculation. As much as Whitman anticipated his future readers, he was also wary of being subjected to their reading.

Stoddard's final letter to Whitman is dated April 2, 1870. With this letter, Stoddard pleadingly invoked the term 'Calamus', enclosed a copy of his story 'Chumming with a Savage: Kana-ana', and asked for Whitman's blessing for his planned exile to Tahiti. Having realized there is no future in America for his kind of male-to-male desire, Stoddard looked further westward for what he calls the 'real life', a life in accord with his libidinal reality. Stoddard did not mince words and centred his letter very firmly: 'I know there is but one hope for me. I must get in amongst people who are not afraid of instincts and who scorn hypocrisy. I am numbed with the frigid manners of the Christians; barbarism has given me the fullest joy of my life and I long to return to it and be satisfied' (Traubel, 1961, III p.444). Stoddard sought Whitman's approval and attempted to explain his rationale: 'may I not send you a prose idyll wherein I confess how dear it is to me?' (Traubel, 1961, III p.445). Having sent 'Chumming with a Savage: Kana-

ana', a story suffused with an orientalizing homoeroticism, Stoddard explicitly outed himself to Whitman. Stoddard closed the letter by asking for forgiveness and promising future silence, suggesting he anticipated his revelation would elicit an evasive response from Whitman.

Again, it is interesting to consider how Whitman shared this exchange of correspondence with Traubel, especially since this final exchange was the first Whitman shared. Notwithstanding his reference to the existence of the other letters, Whitman's contrapuntal letter-sharing can once again be detected and interpreted as an attempt to delineate Traubel's reading of him. Such an effort may be a function of Whitman's discomfort with Stoddard's revelation, for he admitted finding the letter disquieting: 'it's a rather beautiful letter: startling, too, I should say: not offensively so, however: but read it first' (Traubel, 1961, III p.444). At the least, Whitman's response evidences that Stoddard's letter provoked a prolonged meditative response about Stoddard, Traubel, and 'their kind':

'I have had other letters from him,' said W.: 'when they turn up you shall have them: he is your kind of a man some ways: I would like to have you meet him some day: he is still alive—somewhere: he did go off I believe as he threatens in the letter: he is of a simple direct naïve nature—never seemed to fit in very well with things here: many of the finest spirits don't—seem to be born for another planet—seem to have got here by mistake: they are not too bad—no: they are too good: they take their stand on a plane higher than the average practice. You would think they would be respected for that, but they are not: they are almost universally agreed to be fools—they are derided rather than revered: why, Horace, you are a good sight such a sort of a fool yourself.' He thought I [Traubel] might be hurt. Laid his hand on mine: 'You know what I refer to in you? I mean your other worldliness, as they call it: you have that in you: the disposition to sacrifice yourself to others—to ideas, ideals—all that: it means hell for you maybe here and there but heaven too for sure. Stoddard was, is, that sort of a man, they tell me: I have felt it in his letters'. (Traubel, 1961, III pp.445-46)

With this passage, Whitman offered a telling taxonomic reading of Stoddard. This process of abjection helped Whitman avoid a taint of homosexual contamination. Kristeva contends that the abject pulverizes the subject, and so it pulverizes the subject's speech (1982, p.2).¹⁶ Evidence of Whitman's abjection lies in his shifting pronoun use when referring to Stoddard. The shift from singular to plural pronouns suggests an anxiety that extends beyond the body of Stoddard to the idea of a number of bodies like Stoddard's. By indicating that he was also speaking of Traubel's body, Whitman may have been attempting to distance himself from Traubel as well. By sharing his containment of Stoddard before sharing the rest of the letters, Whitman may have been attempting to delimit Traubel's reading him as being one of *them*.

Stoddard's 'kind' threatened Whitman's sense of self and violated the American nineteenth-century symbolic order of which Whitman was product and producer. As a result of this disturbance, Whitman deployed an astral metaphor to abject the threat to his identity. Whitman moved from a discussion of Stoddard's body to a discussion of bodies in an effort to stabilize the reception of a projected self and to respond to the disruption of identity by resisting the contamination of a subaltern identity. Despite Whitman's fairly reverential tone, the result is the same; Whitman viewed Stoddard and 'his kind' as other. Whitman's response is in keeping with the process of abjection, which, according to Kristeva, precedes the subject's relation of self to external objects and is a response to a breakdown in identity and/or meaning secondary to the loss of distinction between subject and object.¹⁷ The failure of an undesired object to read as separate from self threatens the self with undesired qualities of the object via a lack of

¹⁶ Kristeva contends the abject itself prompts a discharge: 'Without a sign for him (for him), it beseeches a discharge, a convulsion, a crying out. To each ego its object, to each superego its abject' (1982, p.2).

¹⁷ Regarding abjection, Kristeva contends: 'There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated' (1982, p.1).

distinctive boundaries. In the response to this slippage, we find either horror or fear. Whitman's abjection of Stoddard established a fulcrum from which he could repel the taint of homosexual contamination for, by 1870, Whitman's expression of a male-to-male desire did not flow in this direction. His deployment of centrifugal metaphors projected the bodies of Stoddard's kind beyond the geography of the earth to the margins of the cosmos. Whitman's response indicated that the world was not enough to express the distance Whitman saw—or needed to see—between self and this kind of body.

The *mise-en-scene* of Whitman's epistolary response revealed his foundational concerns. Having just reread 'Chumming with a Savage: Kanaana', Whitman staged himself in Washington D.C., writing his response before a window which overlooked the Potomac. Invoking the river that runs through American history from Harper's Ferry to Mount Vernon, Whitman directed Stoddard stateside: 'as to you, I do not of course object to your emotional and adhesive nature, and the outlet thereof, but warmly approve them—but do you know (perhaps you do,) how the hard, pungent, gritty, worldly experiences and qualities in American practical life, also serve?' (Miller, 1990, p.149). Whitman suggested that what Stoddard sought beyond the American borders could be found within them, but that it was to be found within a certain class of men. Here, Whitman performed his oft-discussed border-crossing, a transgression of class borders. Whitman's project of adhesion was itself predicated upon the very roughs of whom he spoke here, and this vision of American adhesion left him unable to support Stoddard's border-crossing. Whitman informed Stoddard that he offered this rejoinder to help 'prevent extravagant sentimentalism' (Miller, 1990, p.149). Here, Whitman may have been attempting to direct Stoddard away from separatism, for such an act contradicted Whitman's desire for a unified America. However, the implicit limits of Whitman's advice had been made very clear; Stoddard's expatriation violated Whitman's national, rational and

aesthetic sensibilities, and Whitman was unable to support Stoddard's transgressions. By 1870, Stoddard found no leeway in America for the expression of his kind of male-to-male desire, and Whitman's response underscored this limit.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the high-water mark had been reached for the culturally acceptable expression of male-to-male desire in America, and anything in excess of friendship was at risk of being labelled homosexuality. The demarcation between the homosocial and the homosexual divides the nineteenth century, and this bifurcation greatly informs the Whitman-Stoddard correspondence. Unlike Whitman, who was able to frame a domestic male-to-male desire in terms of male comradeship, Stoddard had to repress his stateside expression of male-to-male desire, for the power of this proscriptive discourse extended throughout the reach of America's manifest destiny. Having reached the West Coast of America, Stoddard found no space for the actualization and expression of his sexuality, so he ventured further west—literally and figuratively. Stoddard's expatriation anticipates the silence surrounding gay male American literature during the last decades of the nineteenth century and helps explain why the first novels of the early twentieth century, which hold even a remote claim to being a gay male American novel, were primarily set abroad. Stoddard establishes a distinctly defiant gay male modern American response to oppression, a subjectivity based, not on the negotiated feelings of the margins, but on the determined expression of desire.

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