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Citation

Kessel, L. van. (2019, December 4). *Savage embraces: James Purdy, melodrama, and the narration of identity*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/81091>

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Issue Date: 2019-12-04

Savage Embraces: Melodramatic Tension and Disidentification

A recurring theme throughout Purdy's oeuvre is characters who simply refuse to adhere to social demands to fit in. His novels often house characters at the margins of society who, rather than conform to dominant social narratives, challenge the ways in which their identities are narrated by others. So too do the characters of *Eustace Chisholm and the Works*. This 1967 novel introduces the reader to a cast of down-and-out characters in Depression-era Chicago who belong to the inner circle of the eponymous Eustace Chisholm. Among Eustace's "works", as he calls his self-appointed protégés, are Daniel and Amos, the principal characters of the novel's tragic narration. As is the case with many of Purdy's characters, Daniel and Amos refuse to comply with societal norms and fantasies about sexual identity. Often the identity that the social world of Purdy's novels wants such characters to conform to is a homosexual one. That is, in most of his novels, same-sex practices of the main characters are narrated as a sexual identity. As such, Purdy's novels often act out the tension between identity production and the sometimes violent effects it has on those whose identities are narrated. This violence comes about most clearly in *Eustace Chisholm and the Works*, in which both Daniel and Amos are eventually killed because they refuse to adhere to social demands that they proclaim themselves homosexual. The novel, then, dramatizes a violent tendency within discourses that demand homosexuals to publicly confess to their sexuality. Such a demand for exposure manifests itself often as the imperative to "come out of the closet", to make one's sexual identity public and fixed through a ritualized confession.

Although "coming out" is often cast as a moment of liberation in which one can finally show one's "true self", Purdy would contend that the exact opposite is the case. That is, throughout Purdy's novels and plays we find that he challenges the notion of a "true self" altogether. Moreover, he also seems highly suspicious of the rhetoric behind the presumably liberating speech act of the confession. Instead of liberating her- or himself from a suffocating and oppressing regime of the closet, the confessant remains within the confines of an equally oppressive regime of identity. Thus, categorization for many of Purdy's characters works against their wishes to act out or express their desires on their own terms. The claims of liberation through

confession hinge on certain assumptions about identity that are at stake in the politics of coming out. First, the narrative of liberation from sexual oppression assumes that there is such a thing as a true self which exists prior to social subject formation. Secondly, it assumes this true self to be a stable and fixed identity which can be covered or hidden from the social subject, nor is this true self affected by, or changed because of this concealment. Finally, this true self can make itself available to the subject on its own terms without having to be translated back into discursive frameworks that govern society's understanding of sexuality.

Underneath the surface of *Eustace Chisholm and the Works*'s narrative we can discern a conviction that assumptions about one's sexuality merely displace one form of oppression for another. While the rhetoric of the closet – its demand to publicly feign heterosexuality – can be marked as homophobic, I argue that Purdy's novel demonstrates that the same is true for the imperative to confess to non-normative sexual identities. By confessing to what is considered an "open secret" (Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 67), a person makes him or herself legible to others, which subjects that person to yet another set of normative demands and prohibitions that organize the ways in which we can understand sexual identification. To understand the way in which Purdy's novel develops into a critique of the confessional mode in the social construction of identity, I propose to read it through the lens of melodrama. My aim in this chapter is to show that *Eustace Chisholm* is organized around a melodramatic emplotment that foregrounds its resistance to an understanding of sexuality as an identity that can be made legible and to which one should confess.

The melodramatic sensibility in Purdy's novel operates in at least two ways. On the one hand, *Eustace Chisholm and the Works* offers ample stylistic and plot-motivated elements that allow for interpretation through a melodramatic lens. On the other hand, such a reading draws attention to the play with speech acts and *mise-en-scène* in a way that emphasizes unresolved tensions in the novel. Purdy's play with melodramatic conventions not only adds to the excitement of his writing – there is a certain lurid style in his prose that aligns his writing with melodrama – but can also be seen as a way of challenging the dominant notion of sexuality as an identity category. The fantasy of sexuality as identity, I suggest, is constituted by displacing speech acts and gestures, or the exteriority of a character, onto the fantasy of a coherent interiority. This displacement hinges not only on the repeated verbal confession to one's sexual identity, but also on the normalizing violence that the act of reading for someone's sexual identity entails.

Indeed, the act of reading for someone's identity, the novel shows, can be particularly violent. Daniel's tragic storyline reaches its apex when he succumbs to the

vicious assaults of his army superior, Captain Stadger. The latter has played a cat-and-mouse game with Daniel, trying to force a confession of homosexuality out of him. When the eventual confession does not match Stadger's expectations, he finds motive to punish and ultimately kill Daniel. Stadger's persecution of Daniel is preceded by similar demands of other characters for Daniel to confess to what they conceive of as his sexual identity. These attempts of casting Daniel's visceral desires as something legible to others in the shape of an identity form a recurrent motive throughout the novel. While Daniel does not seem to coherently act out his sexuality and thus refuses to be categorized, he is also vigorously and overtly read by others, so that his sexuality seems always overdetermined and prone to being misread. Daniel engages in sexual acts that can be described as both heterosexual and homosexual. Moreover, outside of the binarism of heterosexuality and homosexuality, he also engages in sadomasochistic and non-genital sexual acts. The multiple ways in which he acts out his visceral desires drives others to demand for confession and categorization. Daniel eventually submits to being forced out of the closet, even though what he confesses to is never the same sexual identity: he evades each attempt to categorize his sexual identity by variably complying or denying so that he never confesses to a single sexuality. Yet, by refusing one way of making his sexuality legible, he inadvertently makes himself legible in another way.

Underlying my analysis in this chapter is the assertion that the mode of confession produces what in Foucauldian terms is called a "regime of truth". These regimes of truth organize our understanding of sexuality to the extent that there is no outside of the discursive frameworks of these very same regimes that enables us to talk about sexuality in the first place; that is, these frameworks are all encompassing. In Michael Foucault's terms, the truth about our sexuality is a "truth" that "is linked by a circular relation to systems of power which produce it and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which redirect it" ("Political Function" 14). Once made legible within the epistemology of these regimes, the potentially infinite series of sexual acts is reduced to sexual identities. Sexual practices are evaluated and fermented into an identity through prohibitions and injunctions that evaluate sexual acts and object choices as either "good" or "bad" sex (Rubin, "Thinking Sex" 13). It should come as no surprise that I consider the works of Foucault, Eve Sedgwick, and Judith Butler to be cornerstones of my analysis, as their theorizing of discursive practices of these regimes of truth – among which the practice of confession remains one of the most dominant exponents in the structuring of sexual identity – underline my own melodramatic reading of the novel's challenge to the notion of sexuality identity.

In this chapter I read several instances that are framed by the mode of confession. At stake in these scenes are the ongoing attempts to make Daniel's sexuality legible to others, whether or not the confessions in question are performed by Daniel himself or are even about him. Among the many confessions in the novel, we find one that could be considered central to plot, but which at first glance has nothing to do with Daniel's sexuality. In this scene Eustace narrates the sexual history of Amos as a classic Oedipal scene. Read as the archetypal narration of psychoanalysis, the scene becomes emblematic for the relationship between psychoanalysis and the confession. The Oedipal fantasy not only construes sexual identity through an enactment of libidinal desires, but also depends heavily on the verbal witnessing of one's transgressions that produce sexual identity in the first place. The confessional logic that undergirds the psychoanalytic understanding of identity invariably criminalizes those who deviate from the norm by treating their sexual acts and object choices as pathological. Here we see that the confession works in conjunction with those regimes of truth that organize the conception of sexual identity through a psychoanalytic convention that assumes an interior truth of the subject that has to be made explicit, but which treats this interiority simultaneously as a terrible secret: a criminal act that permeates the subject's entire constitution as pathology.

Besides demonstrating the confessional logic at the heart of the Oedipal fantasy, this particular scene is rendered in such a style that it exposes the Oedipal plot as an archetypal melodramatic scene. Similar to the narration of "Mr. Evening", in which the highly stylized use of spatial descriptions takes over the narration of the plot, the Oedipal scene in *Eustace Chisholm and the Works* can also be read as a demonstration of melodramatic *mise-en-scène*. This scene exemplifies the novel's use of melodramatic emplotment to demonstrate how a regime of truth that consolidates the fantasy of stable identity categories is produced by the mode of confession.

Many scholars of queer theory and gay and lesbian studies have made explicit the relationship between the confession of sexuality and the mechanics of inclusion and exclusion from society through state institutions such as citizenship, marriage, and the right to serve in the army. Purdy's work implies the same to be true for the rhetoric of what we in retrospect have come to call the "Gay Liberation Movement". The use of rhetorical strategies that stress visibility and the explicit disavowal of normative sexual identities – the injunction to come out of the closet – are tantamount to similar strategies of inclusion and exclusion that these rhetorical strategies contest. In the literary world of Purdy, the imperative to "come out" is just as oppressive as its prohibition.

Finally, the treatment of sexual identity in *Eustace Chisholm* not only offers a harsh criticism of and bleak outlook on the social imperative to “come out of the closet”, it also gestures towards the possibility of opening up the understanding of sexuality in multiple ways. Toying with conventions of melodrama and confession, Purdy both exposes the oppressive nature of the modern understanding of sexuality and offers a means for repudiating that same oppressive regime of truth. For Purdy, melodrama is a means to render confession and identity suspect, and as such it encourages us to think of sexuality beyond the constraints of identity and confession. In the novel’s final scene, Daniel gives in to melodramatic excess and leans into his own torture as a strategy to reclaim control over the ways in which he acts out his sexuality, while refuting the burden of identity. In conclusion, then, I make a case for the irony invoked by a melodramatic reading to bring about the potential for what José Esteban Muñoz calls *disidentification* as a strategy to reclaim one’s self-determination within oppressive regimes of sexuality.

The Excess of the Unconscious

Despite other characters constantly coaxing Daniel into confessing his sexual identity, he refuses to see himself as a homosexual. When Eustace confronts him with the suggestion that he might harbor a sexual desire for Amos, Daniel resolutely exclaims that he “couldn’t be in love with a man” because he has “never been, and [he] couldn’t be now” (ECW 84).¹ The reason Eustace tries to persuade Daniel into a confession is that he sees himself as the narrator of the lives of those around him. Daniel and Amos, as well as Maureen O’Dell and Reuben Masterson, are regular visitors at Eustace’s Chicago apartment where they seek advice. Eustace, who calls himself a narrative poet and works on a “long poem about ‘original stock’ in America” (5), takes his role as advisor very seriously; so seriously, in fact, that he drops his long narrative poem to devote his narration fully to the tragedy of Daniel and Amos. He provides the narrative with a running commentary by gossiping with others, by writing letters, and even in visions that he receives after a strange encounter with a fortune teller. Critic Bettina Schwarzschild identifies Eustace’s role in the novel as that of a Greek chorus, and, indeed, much of the novel’s melodramatic emplotment is driven by Eustace’s narration (63). His narration produces, to a great extent, the sexual identity to which other characters expect Daniel to confess.

1 Where deemed necessary I use ECW to indicate that I refer to *Eustace Chisholm and the Works*.

Eustace's confrontation with Daniel is the direct result of his urge to narrate or manipulate the lives of those around him. He has heard from Amos that Daniel has a history of sleepwalking and visits Amos's room every night in his sleep (82). During these sleepwalking spells, he tenderly holds and kisses Amos while the latter, apparently more at ease with his sexuality than Daniel, relishes in these moments.² Eustace interprets Amos's story as a confession of both his desire for Daniel and vice versa. Seeing himself as a matchmaker who should bring Daniel and Amos together, Eustace tries to provoke a similar confession from Daniel, even if it means that he needs to confront Daniel with his own sleepwalking. It is significant to point out that these expressions of desire for Amos only occur when Daniel sleeps – when he is without a sense of (self-)consciousness. In his discussion of Peter Brooks's work on melodrama, William Morse points out that despite his attempt to “redeem the melodrama by positing for it a disruption of consciousness, repression, and the reality principle”, this emphatically does not reveal “the unconscious as understood by Freud, and certainly not Lacan's linguistic unconscious” (26). Instead, Morse argues that Brooks's treatment of the melodramatic dream world allows for an “unambiguous identification with the Manichaean moral structures of the mode” (25). As he accuses Brooks of subscribing to a transcendental identity, in which “virtue exists as virtue” (24), Morse reminds us that in psychoanalytic theory the unconscious should be understood as a process. “A process,” he specifies citing Anthony Easthope, “of ongoing ‘interaction multiply determined or overdetermined between different levels and mechanisms in the psyche’” (26). Melodrama does not present us with an identity that transcends desire, but rather one that interacts with desire in a way that can only find expression in the excessive mode of the unconscious.

By sleepwalking, Daniel acts out a desire that cannot consciously metabolize into the category of identity. It is here that melodrama's tendency to exteriorize tensions becomes manifest. Whenever Daniel has a spell of somnambulism, it coincides with a tension that arises within him. That is, whenever he is torn between admitting to and denying his libidinal desires, he is acting out these desires in his sleep. Daniel finds himself in what Jonathan Goldberg calls an “impossible plot situation” (11) that cannot be resolved and sustains itself by taking recourse to the aesthetics of

2 The fact that Amos relishes in Daniel's caresses does not demonstrate Amos's unambiguity about being identified as a homosexual by others. Just like Daniel, he responds negatively to the suggestion that his desires are aligned with the category of sexual identity. In fact, although Amos is aware of Daniel's actions and might even long for these caresses, he remains hesitant to make his desires known to Daniel.

melodrama. If resolution of a tension in the plot leads up to the disintegration of the character – that is, brings about a situation in which the character can no longer sustain her- or himself – melodramatic excess provides relief from this tension and forestalls the imperative to decide upon one or the other resolution. Yet, melodrama always violates the very thing it seems to be stabilizing. As melodrama manifests itself in excessive and uncontrollable exteriorization, it places the melodramatic character outside the norm of the coherent and classifiable subject. Melodrama, then, forgoes the either/or of categorization and keeps firmly in place the potential of a character to occupy a space between or outside of fixed identity categories.

The moment that Daniel finds out he has been sleepwalking brings about his first major crisis. The excessive exteriorized expression of his visceral desire makes way for the imperative to resolve the question of his sexuality by either affirming or rejecting the category of a homosexual identity. For him, the realization that he cannot control his visceral desires comes “as a final unhinging of the self” (82). Why this realization comes as such a shock that he feels as if “the scaffolding of his life was falling” (82) can be explained by looking at his previously held self-image and the way in which the unconsciously acting out of his desire makes this self-image unsustainable: “He once said of a newspaper scandal story about two men who had killed themselves over their love that he was opposed to physical relations between members of the male sex, and that they ought to electrocute faggots” (31). As he publicly declares his contempt for homosexuality, he now finds himself in a position in which his actions no longer correspond to what he believed to be true about himself. Although his actions stand in stark contrast with his opinion about homosexuality, he finds it impossible to repudiate these actions altogether. On the other hand, accepting these actions to be part of his sexual life runs completely counter to his previously held self-image, which he also refuses to repudiate. The impossibility of this situation results in the contradictory statements about his sexual identification. While at first he denies Eustace’s suggestion that he is in love with Amos (84), a little later he says the exact opposite to his friend and former lover Maureen (106). Eventually, Daniel sees no way out of the impossible situation in which he finds himself. Unable to comply with the demand to make himself legible in terms of sexual identity, but also unable to give up his desire for Amos, Daniel decides to take drastic measures to escape the confession that is expected of him. After some soul searching, Daniel decides to turn to the one institution that, he thinks, can restore his previous self-image: the army.

In this novel, but also in other novels written in the same period that touch upon the topic of homosexuality, the army introduces a set of assumptions about sexual identity and the mechanics of inclusion and exclusion that is relevant in the light of

my discussion on Purdy's critique of sexual identity. Historians such as Allan Bérubé (1990/2010) and literary scholar Robert Caserio (1997) have shown how semi-liberal wartime attitudes and policies towards, and post-war repression of, homosexuality within the army not only ensured a proliferation of homophobic discourse, but also shaped the rhetorical strategies with which the Gay Liberation Movement would seek to push for the expansion of civil rights for homosexual men and women (Bérubé 128–148). Just as the forced silencing and punishing of homosexuals in the post-war McCarthy years hinged on oral admissions or denials of subversive charges, so too did the strategy of coming out of the closet, albeit with different political goals in mind. "Coming out" as a tactic to form a politically coherent constituency based on sexual identity falls back on similar mechanics of inclusion and exclusion that homophobic persecution employed about a decade earlier.

Despite enlisting, Daniel nevertheless cannot escape from the impossible situation that triggered his sleepwalking. Already on his first night at his posting, he has another spell of somnambulism and walks stark naked into the sleeping quarters of his superior, Captain Stadger. As long as the expression of his desire is borne out in the mode of sleepwalking, Daniel is able to forestall resolving any questions about his possible sexual identity. Yet, here too other characters attempt to read his sleepwalking as a sign of his sexual identity. Stadger becomes fascinated by Daniel's peculiar demeanor, which makes him different from other privates. He interprets Daniel's sleepwalking as the expression of a homosexual identity which he cannot reconcile with his heterosexual and masculine presentation. The fascination for Daniel's behavior soon becomes an obsession. Abusing his position as superior officer, Stadger forces Daniel to engage in an increasingly violent carnal relationship in which he tries to subject Daniel fully to his own desires.

The impossible situation in which Daniel finds himself leads to his forcible attempts to present his own sexual identity to others as hyper-masculine and heterosexual. These attempts are constituted through the theatrical display of hyper-masculine behavior and thus Daniel becomes known among his fellow soldiers for his abundant and illicit visits to prostitutes and his brawls in segregated "negro sections of town" (209). The excess of these actions again points to the impossible situation that tries to sustain itself by suspending the moment at which the plot must come to a resolution. Daniel constantly redefines his sexuality in opposition to the sexual identity that others try to impose upon him. That these attempts are not enough to contain his desires becomes clear as his continued sleepwalking slowly turns into a cat-and-mouse game between Stadger and himself. Time and again Daniel tries to escape his army posting. Just as many times, however, Stadger makes sure Daniel returns to

him again. While Daniel continues to fail in his attempts to escape Stadger, the reader can never be sure whether these attempts fail because of Stadger's determination, or whether Daniel voluntarily returns to Stadger's suffocating embrace. As was the case with Daniel's sleepwalking, there is an excess in the way he acts out both his masculinity and his relationship with Stadger.

Throughout the novel, then, Daniel keeps returning to that impossible plot situation. Whether this situation is constituted by his sleepwalking or by his relationship with Stadger, each time Daniel tries to resolve it by presenting himself as heterosexual or masculine, he unconsciously returns to the situation that he tried to escape. Besides sustaining the impossible plot situation in which Daniel finds himself, these returns share another thing in common: these moments are always commented upon by the narration of Eustace, who maintains his role as Greek choir even after Daniel has left for the army. While Eustace does not talk to others about Daniel's situation, he corresponds with Daniel directly and provides a running commentary for his life. The continuation of Eustace's narration is key to the way in which the novel interrogates the confession as an identity-producing mode. To demonstrate the consequences of Eustace's narrative interventions for the way Daniel's sexual identity is produced, I turn to a brief scene in which Eustace's narration focuses on a different character: Amos.

Psychoanalysis and *Mise-en-Scène*

About two-thirds into the novel, the focus of the narration shifts to Amos, Daniel's object of desire and the other character who also resists being made legible as homosexual. After Daniel enlists in the army, we learn that Amos has begun a relationship with the millionaire playboy Reuben Masterson. Unhappy with this particular arrangement, Eustace seeks to warn Reuben to not get too deeply involved with Amos, as he is the bearer of a dark secret. In the scene that follows, Eustace discloses a story about Amos's youth that details an incestuous scene between Amos and his own mother, Cousin Ida.

Eustace's narration of the incestuous scene in which Amos was involved seems to follow the pattern of a traditional, albeit heavily condensed, Oedipus complex. Amos, who grew up without knowing his father, is suddenly confronted with him at age fifteen. As they go to an ice cream parlor, his father admonishes him not to eat ice cream "like a girl" (154). A brief struggle ensues in which Amos cuts his father with the shards of a broken glass: his father's clear attempt to castrate Amos is immediately

responded to with attempted patricide. Subsequently, Amos's transgression is both punished and rewarded: punished in the sense that he falls ill and is disturbed by a Ku Klux Klan march that passes his house which he thinks is led by his vengeful father; rewarded, because in an attempt to comfort her son, Amos's mother joins him under his bedcovers, which eventually results in their lovemaking. Amos's Oedipal desire for his mother seems to be *literally* acted out. That is to say, nowhere in the narrative is it affirmed that an incestuous act actually occurs. Only the suggestive exclamation uttered by Cousin Ida, "Amos, not your own Mother, for God's own sake!" (156) – a highly dramatized elision that urges us to read for the thing that is not uttered – indicates that a taboo has been broken. However, there is little doubt about what Eustace is suggesting: "It was right after that," Eustace continues, "that Amos came to Chicago and into our arms ..." (156). In Eustace's narration, Amos's incestuous transgression leads directly to his fraternizing with the group of sexual outcasts that surround Eustace, in turn becoming one of them.

The brief scene – it runs for a mere five pages – already runs over with lurid excitement when merely read for the plot. A half-orphan is suddenly confronted with his estranged father who verbally abuses him.³ There is a violent struggle in which the son tries to harm his own father. Finally, the scene closes with that most sensational and transgressive act of all: incest. Taken at face value, the scene seems to relay conservative and reactionary accounts of the constitution of homosexuality in the child subject. Eustace's narration follows the rhetorical strategies of popularized psychoanalysis to account for Amos's homosexuality, while also distancing himself from that same homosexuality by framing this narrative as a cautionary tale. This is a strategy that Roel van den Oever identifies in the psychoanalytical explanations of homosexuality that were popularized in post-World War Two American culture. The phenomenon largely understood as *momism* sought to explain psychosocial disorders by looking at the relationship between mother and son. In this context of popular psychoanalysis, the Oedipus complex provided an explanation that placed the cause of homosexuality with the mother. However, of this American reframing of the Oedipus complex, van den Oever writes: "whereas Freud tried to refrain from condemning his patients and their disorders, his American followers exercised less restraint in this area" (21). Eustace's narration of Amos can be read in a similar vein. The narration follows a very crude Oedipal pattern, and through it Eustace seemingly wants to draw attention to the troubled and even pathological relationship Amos has with his

3 "Half-orphan" is Frank Baldanza's term for the many youthful characters in Purdy's novels who do not grow up in the traditional nuclear family ("James Purdy's Half-Orphans").

mother. Still, the heavily condensed narration of the Oedipal fantasy is riddled with stylistic devices that facilitate a reading for the melodramatic that undermines and contradicts the reactionary popularized psychoanalytical explanation of the scene. Looking more closely at the way in which the narrative is told, we find that the scene is less about Amos's sexual transgression than about the way in which Eustace uses his narration to cast Amos in social narratives that make his identity legible to others. Of interest, then, in this seemingly traditional Oedipal fantasy is how this fantasy flows over into actualization through stylistic and formal devices, such as speech acts and *mise-en-scène*, that in their particular use align with the aesthetics of melodrama. This passage from *Eustace Chisholm and the Works*, as with most other of Purdy's writings, invokes a sense of melodrama that complicates a reading for the plot and demands that the reader interpret the scene otherwise.

Purdy uses stylistic means that are usually associated with melodramatic writing not only to lay bare American society's double standards regarding sexuality, but also to play with archetypal melodramatic characters – the ingénue, the orphan, the villain, the victim – in order to foreground social norms associated with the notion of sexual identity. These archetypes underscore the exteriority onto which identity is projected, while leaving blank the interiority of the novel's characters. What is at stake, then, is the conception of identity as an interiority. In *Eustace Chisholm and the Works*, sexual identity attaches itself to the exterior of a character, while leaving blank their psychological make-up, or their interiority. Yet, the narration presents its characters in such a stylized fashion that it draws attention not to the truthfulness of identity, but rather to the very construction of identity. The novel proposes to treat the formation of identity as *mise-en-scène* by raising the questions of where we should locate identity, and how its spatial conception congeals into the assumption of identity. The lens of melodrama, as a genre that hinges on its *mise-en-scène* as a signification device, allows us to scrutinize the spatiotemporal procedures of identity production, and the ways in which Purdy tries to undermine these in *Eustace Chisholm and the Works*.⁴

Purdy's work, and *Eustace Chisholm and the Works* in particular, draws from the kind of American Hollywood melodrama that has prompted Thomas Elsaesser's theory of representation of internal struggles through the substitution of style and *mise-en-scène* for plot development (79–80). Ernst Van Alphen's repositioning of

4 The question of identity's location – whether identity is interior or exterior to a person, or whether there is a difference between interior and exterior identity at all – returns in the following chapters, as I identify it as one of the central concerns of Purdy's interrogation of identity as such.

Elsaesser's theories is a productive touchstone for this particular scene ("Legible Affects" 32). As is the case in Wyeth's painting *Christina's World*, in which the *mise-en-scène* produces a narrative that lies outside of what is directly represented, Eustace's narration depends on the spatial and temporal configuration of separate elements that together produce a familiar narrative of homosexual pathology. The Oedipal fantasy through which Eustace narrates Amos's sexual development serves as such a *mise-en-scène*, as it depends on a specific constellation of representational elements – characters (the son, the mother, the father) and actions (patricide, incest) – which in pre-scripted conjunction fix the protagonist's subject-formation onto a pathology, or sexual identity. Without making explicit claims about Amos's sexual identity – claims that he nevertheless makes elsewhere in the novel – Eustace's use of stylistic devices, such as formalized plots, speech acts, representation of character traits, and a frantic rhythm, provide an excessive quality to the narration. As the narration's style seems to overflow from the plot, Amos's subject formation also becomes exteriorized as it is reduced to a series of formal and aesthetic commonplaces. Nothing in Amos's perceived identity is assumed by himself, but instead results from a fantasy projected onto him by Eustace.

Mise-en-scène in melodrama can thus be understood in two ways. First, *mise-en-scène* can be considered a part of the excessive expression of that which is unrepresentable in the melodramatic narrative. Daniel's libidinal desire, as we have seen, can only find expression in his sleepwalking, in his unconscious state. The uncontrollable and excessive nature of his sleepwalking enables Daniel to enter into those spaces that he would not deign to acknowledge in a conscious state. The excess of sleepwalking literally opens up the space in which Daniel's desires can be acted out: a space that remains unavailable to him as long as he refuses to conform to the framework of a coherent and legible sexual identity. *Mise-en-scène* can then be understood as the literal space that is opened up, or traversed by, the excessive expression of libidinal desire. Alternatively, *mise-en-scène* can be understood as a configuration of previously known scenes, characters, actions, and spaces that together activate a narrative that goes beyond the represented elements. The whole of the narrative is greater than the sum of its parts. As we have seen in the Oedipal plot, *mise-en-scène* allows us to narrate that which falls outside the scope of representability. The alterity of someone else's libidinal desire is subsumed by shared preexisting assumptions that are activated at the moment the Oedipal plot is invoked. Shared knowledge of the Oedipal plot makes it possible to narrate the unrepresentability of sexuality and subsequently cast someone's actions and behavior as a coherent and stable identity.

Family Melodrama

In my discussion of the melodramatic excess of Daniel's sleepwalking, I alluded to it as a suspension of what Goldberg calls an impossible plot situation. The imperative to either acknowledge or disavow a homosexual identity puts Daniel in the impossible situation of having to conform to the constraints of identity regardless of his resistance against doing so. He either conforms to an openly homosexual identity by confessing his desires, or, by denying the suggestion of homosexuality, is framed by the open secret of the closet into which Eustace and others force him. That impossible yet decisive moment is postponed by his sleepwalking, which allows him to act out his libidinal desires without having to make a decision that is detrimental to his self-image. Goldberg too locates the impossible plot situation of melodrama with its excessive representation of *mise-en-scène*, as he extends his definition of melodrama from the musical accompaniment to theater (*melos* + drama) to "the impossible plot situation, and the music that accompanies it" (155). "Melodrama," he writes, "is an aesthetic of the impossible situation, where 'of' means both 'derived from' and 'representing'" (155). If we conceptualize melodrama as an aesthetic dramatization of the moment in which the impossible plot situation is suspended, we should first consider which tension is introduced by Daniel's sleepwalking.

We have seen how Daniel's crisis is provoked by the realization that his unconscious actions do not correspond to his consciously held beliefs. At the moment the imperative to confess to a specific sexual identity arises, what seems to be at stake is whether Daniel denies or confesses to a homosexual identity. However, while Daniel contradicts his own confessions, sometimes admitting to a homosexual identity while denying it in other instances, he continues to act out his sexual desires in the mode of sleepwalking. At issue is not the categorization of his desires as either homosexual or heterosexual, but rather this demand for categorization itself. Daniel is uncomfortable with identifying as either heterosexual or homosexual since both identity categories confine him to the same restrictive identity model. By presenting both homosexuality and heterosexuality as being part of the same oppressive identity categorization, *Eustace Chisholm and the Works* decidedly breaks with the structure of popular melodramas in which the resolution of (sexual) identity crisis either results in condemning the given identity, as is the case with conservative melodramas, or celebrating the sexual identity, in the case of coming-out/coming of age melodramas (e.g. Nowell-Smith 272; Schatz 154; Leo 35–36; Padva 369).

The oppositional structure that *Eustace Chisholm and the Works* subverts from is perhaps best represented in the family melodrama, a subgenre that was popularized

by Hollywood in the postwar period. Melodramatic films by Douglas Sirk, Nicholas Ray, and Vincente Minnelli centered on the suburban nuclear family, which became the emblematic battleground onto which intergenerational and ideological struggles were fought. Similar to Eustace's use of popularized psychoanalysis, these family melodramas often drew on "the dominant intellectual fashions of the postwar era [...] Freudian psychology and existential philosophy" (Schatz 153). According to Thomas Schatz, family melodramas were drawn to these theories as "each stressed the alienation of the individual due to the inability of familial and societal institutions to fulfill his or her particular needs" (153).

The figure of the family in melodrama then occupies both the site of the American Dream of middle-class fantasies, as well as its undoing. It is within the ideal nuclear family situation that melodrama's tragic hero is confronted by the confines of normative social roles and expectations that construe his or her individual desires as deviant. In a more recent re-imagining of American melodrama, director Todd Haynes challenges the burden of normativity by framing the question of sexual identity in the film *Far From Heaven* (2002) through the framework of gendered and racialized social differences. One of the impossible plot situations revolves around Frank, a suburban father who desires men and lives in fear of becoming a social outcast if this secret is discovered. However, as Goldberg points out, in comparison with Cathy, his wife, and Raymond, her black lover, Frank is able to retain his position of white male privilege even after he is outed. "Haynes will not claim Frank for gay liberation," Goldberg writes, "will not simply celebrate Frank's coming out; he is still able to call the shots in a way that neither Raymond nor Cathy can" (70). Haynes's intersectional reconsideration of popular American melodrama illustrates how even in suburban family melodramas social norms affect people differently based on their social position. Not all families are struck equally hard by the tragedy that befalls the melodramatic subject. *Eustace Chisholm and the Works* subverts the genre of family melodrama in a similar fashion, not by focusing on the intersections of race and class identities as Haynes does, but by questioning the primacy of the suburban nuclear family as the cornerstone of American social life.

Indeed, if there is a place for any familial configuration in Purdy's vision of middle-class America, this can only be in the form of a perversion of the nuclear family. In *Eustace Chisholm and the Works* none of the familial relationships adhere to normative patriarchal structures. Instead, Purdy seems to parody the primacy of the middle-class nuclear family by introducing a long series of deviations in which each character occupies a different perversion of the American family ideal. Eustace Chisholm is in an on-again-off-again relationship with his wife Carla, and during a lull in their marriage

he finds a male lover, Clayton Harms; Reuben Masterson, who takes on Amos as a lover after Daniel has re-enlisted, is orphaned, but treats his grandmother as if she were his actual mother; Daniel, we learn, had lost his father in early childhood and has since had to assume the role of family patriarch by undertaking his father's job in the coal mine; Amos was raised by only his mother, and construes a family romance in which she figures as a non-immediate family member whom he consistently calls Cousin Ida, which might have enabled their incest; and finally, Maureen, who is impregnated by Daniel, has their child aborted in a gruesome scene that epitomizes Purdy's dystopian vision of middle-class American family values. What she gives birth to is what Purdy holds true for America at large: a "bleeding mucous of severed embryo" that signifies first and foremost as a "proof of manhood" (74-75).

Since the nuclear family is parodied in Purdy's imagination, homosexuality is no longer necessarily featured as a subversion of the normative family structure. Instead, it is because the normative family does not exist in *Eustace Chisholm and the Works* that homosexuality is no longer pitted against heterosexuality as an opposing term in a Manichean scheme. Eustace and Reuben Masterson openly express their same-sex desires while still living out the familial fantasies that they have built for themselves. Eustace swaps his wife for a male lover, yet he just as easily takes his wife back. The gender of his sexual or romantic partner is clearly no issue in his promiscuous lifestyle. Neither does gender seem to matter for Reuben in living out his familial fantasies: when he brings Amos into his home, he introduces him to his grandmother as his new lover, expecting nothing less than her approval. Yet, while for Eustace and Reuben same-sex desire is not at issue, to Daniel it seems to pose a threat. The question is, however, whether this threat is provoked by homosexuality itself, or by the way this identity is criminalized by popularized psychoanalysis and the mode of the confession. The impossible plot situation that we encounter in *Eustace Chisholm and the Works* resides in Daniel's refusal to adhere to the social demands of sexual identity, while simultaneously acting out the same-sex desires in a way that inadvertently feeds into the social fantasy of a sexual identity. There appears to be no satisfying resolution to the impossible situation in which Daniel finds himself since the choice for either plot resolution brings him back to the very thing he seeks to escape.

In this reading, Eustace might in the end become a less progressive character than he appeared at first glance, and which the novel misleadingly suggests by making him the eponymous character. Despite his own promiscuity, Eustace remains attached to stringent categories of sexual identity and seems to be the person who is most invested in claiming a homosexual identity for Daniel. I argue that Eustace's attempts

to illicit confessions from Daniel and Amos acknowledging their category of sexual identity signals a broader concern of the novel, and ultimately Purdy's whole oeuvre. *Eustace Chisholm and the Works*, 63: *Dream Palace*, and *Cabot Wright Begins* all dramatize the ways in which already existing narratives about sexuality are superimposed onto the fantasy of identity. Because of these preexisting narratives, characters in Purdy's novel seem not to have any choice but to acknowledge the assumption of a sexual identity, whether or not it is detrimental to their own integrity. To illustrate this, I will return to Eustace's Oedipal narration of Amos's sexuality. I have already suggested that the Oedipal plot can be read as a *mise-en-scène* that allows for the narration of what is at heart unrepresentable: the constitution of one's sexuality. By using the Oedipal plot, Eustace transforms the actions of Amos into confessional speech acts that can only be read from the perspective of that very same narrative.

A Closer Look at the Oedipal Plot

If we read Eustace's narration of Amos's sexuality as family melodrama, we cannot help but notice how it hinges on excessive speech acts and stylized gestures. We read, for example, how the characters in his narration cry out, whisper, and "flush beet red" upon speaking (154). Emotions, too, are exaggerated, as a Ku Klux Klan march "fill[s] both Amos and Ida with vague concern and uncertain terror" (155), Amos's father cries in "anguished surprise," and Amos threatens to kill his mother when she asks about the incident with his father (154). Rather than merely representing the plot, this use of language propels its events. It is through the speech acts and gestures narrated by Eustace that the implications of the Oedipal fantasy are evoked. Amos's father calling him a girl evokes the fear of castration, which is central to Freudian theory. Similarly, Amos's parallel attempt at patricide occurs when he stabs his father with a broken bottle. Finally, and perhaps most evocatively, the incestuous act is only suggested by Ida's whispering: "Amos, not your own Mother" (156). While never fully spelled out, the sequence of events obviously reads as an Oedipal scenario. Better still, the events suggest an Oedipal scenario in which Amos fails to sublimate his love for his mother, including its correspondent, albeit strangely contradictory, suggestion that this failure has led to his current sexual desire for men.

Eustace's melodramatic narration actualizes gestures and speech acts in such a way that these are inevitably read as signs of an Oedipal plot: the castrating father figure, the son's excessive attachment to his mother, the symbolic Law that prohibits incest. This dramatization gives a literal sense to what is happening. Amos's desire

does not remain on the level of fantasy, but becomes actuality when his mother voices the prohibition against incest. In doing so, Cousin Ida becomes an accomplice to the act which her words invoke. As the scene ends at the moment of her exclamation, the lack of closure in Eustace's narration implies that although Ida is well aware of the transgression about to take place, she still gives in to her son's sexual advances. Whereas in psychoanalysis the Oedipal fantasy is treated as phantasmatic – something that the child imagines but never acts out – that fantasy now transgresses into actuality. This transgression requires reconsideration of the function of the Oedipal scenario in social narratives about sexual identity formation: it is the narration of the Oedipal scenario itself, rather than the actions it describes, that produces sexual identity.

Such reframing has consequences for other narratives in *Eustace Chisholm and the Works* that constitute sexual identity. At the beginning of the novel, we read about Amos's violent response to allegations of being queer (19), yet he continues to be drawn to Daniel. Even after he becomes involved with Reuben, Amos remains reluctant to acknowledge his homosexual desires, and their budding relationship is mostly framed in terms of prostitution: Amos is in dire need of money and hence becomes the lover of a homosexual millionaire (116), a narrative which, again, is enforced by Eustace. Amos's disavowal of categorization engenders his categorization by others. The lack of a self-confessed narrative framework in which to contextualize his behavior is again taken up by Eustace as an invitation to invent the narrative of Amos's sexual identity. What at first seems an attempt to understand Amos's sexual behavior soon turns into the enforcement of a sexual identity due to its incessant repetition.

As van den Oever demonstrates, the doting mother's relationship with her son was put forth by popularized psychoanalysis as a means to explain and disqualify the increased visibility of homosexuality in American culture (5–36).⁵ Of course, such popularized accounts of psychoanalysis do no justice to the complexity of the psychosexual development that Freud described. Indeed, as Jane Gallop recounts, it is against this popularized American reduction of psychoanalytical theory that poststructuralists such as Jacques Lacan began to develop their own interpretation of Freudian theory (56). Nevertheless, it is exactly this popularized account in movies such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945) and Otto Preminger's *Whirlpool* (1947) that captured the American popular imagination.⁶ These popularized psychoanalytical

5 See Sedgwick for an account of how the mother-son relationship has taken root in fantasies of the closet (*Epistemology* 248–249).

6 Significantly, both Alfred Hitchcock and Otto Preminger are known for their melodramatic style,

narratives of sexual identity continued into the 1960s in the movies of Woody Allen and in novels such as Philip Roth's *Portnoy Complaint* (1969).⁷ If we consider Purdy's novel to be a critique of the categorizing impulse with which society imposes an identity upon those who behave differently, this critique consists of the performative rather than the descriptive function of the narrative. At stake in this narration is not how a popularized Oedipus complex is used as a means to account for Amos's same-sex desire, but instead, Eustace's use of the narrative's performative purchase in American society to produce an identity for Amos. The prevalence of the Oedipal fantasy as a cornerstone of mainstream American psychoanalysis, argues van den Oever, has resulted in the production of a narrative framework that categorizes a perceived deviant sexual identity *a priori* (21–22). Eustace does not wish to understand the reasons behind Amos's behavior, but rather frames Amos in a manner that excludes any motivation for his behavior other than a pre-existing narrative of a pathologized and criminalized identity.

Looking more closely at the Oedipal fantasy as told by Eustace, we can distinguish a difference between an account of the Oedipal fantasy as thematized by mainstream psychoanalysis and the literalizing effect of his narration. By taking the symbolic Law literally – that is, by having Amos live through and act out the Oedipal fantasy – Eustace's narration also allows for the possible transgression's actualization. The Oedipal fantasy is taken literally to the extent that it is suggested that a sexual encounter between mother and son, members of the opposite sex, will inevitably result in homosexuality. This is why, as Eustace tells Reuben, Daniel “skiddooed” and fled from his relationship with Amos (151). However, the melodramatic mode in which Eustace narrates this history renders suspicious the consequences of this literal acting out of the Oedipal fantasy by confusing the phantasmatic with the actual, as popularized accounts of psychoanalysis are wont to do.

Eustace's penchant to represent the incestuous encounter of popular psychoanalysis in a literal fashion renders this narrative suspicious since it raises the question of how a heterosexual encounter can result in the constitution of a homosexual identity. This tension, which we find at the heart of many popularized accounts of the Oedipal scenario, warrants a return to the Freudian thesis that every human psyche is constituted by its bisexuality (Freud 141–142). If in the case of Amos his homosexuality

even if their movies are usually regarded as *film noir* or thrillers (Elsaesser 81, 88; Affron 111).

7 See Van den Oever (147–179) for a detailed analysis of psychoanalysis and the Oedipus complex in Roth's novel.

is the result of a heterosexual encounter, then Eustace's narration suggests that there is a parallel between the transgression of the incest taboo and the transgression from heterosexuality into homosexuality.

Eustace's literal account then exposes a tension within the categorizing impulse of the Oedipal scenario. In her seminal study of the construction of male subjectivity, Kaja Silverman locates this tension in a doubling of the initial Oedipus complex. She argues that the male sexual subject goes through both a positive and a negative Oedipus complex to warrant a production of normative exogamous heterosexuality (361). The male subject's primary cathexis for the mother is deflected towards the father, which in turn should be deflected outward to prevent this new libidinal energy from turning into incestuous or homosexual desire. Butler understands this as "an infinite displacement of a heterosexualizing desire" (*Gender Trouble* 38). The incest taboo not only compels the male subject to direct his libidinal energy outwards, but also prohibits the homosexual desire that is produced by the displacement of the mother-as-object to the father-as object. Failure to adhere to this prohibition is, as Butler has pointed out, often construed as a criminal and punishable act (*Bodies* 100).

The threat of punishment construes the occurrence of non-normative sexuality as the subject's failure to adhere to the desirable outcome of the Oedipal scenario. However, the simultaneous occurrence of both the positive and negative Oedipal phases renders imaginable a homosexual desire within the production of the normative heterosexual subject (Silverman 360). If the subject's identification with either the mother or the father originates from a libidinal energy that, through a series of prohibitions, is ideally transformed into normative heterosexuality, it also always engenders a latent homosexual desire. The male subject who is denied the mother instead turns to an identification with the father. This new identification can, in the words of Silverman, "be read either as 'resolved' love for him [the father] or as a concomitant of love for the mother" (361). The process that should secure masculinity in the male subject results in a phantasmatic identification with the father: a displaced remnant of "an earlier desire for the mother" (361). The displacement of identification between the mother and the father is significant, especially if we follow Silverman's assertion that "desire cannot be scrupulously differentiated from identification" (317). The dividing line between identification and desire becomes particularly narrow in the infinite displacement of libidinal desire, and Eustace seems barely able to distinguish one from the other when he draws up a homosexual identity for Amos after the latter has had sex with his mother.

A crucial point of difference between Eustace's narration and Butler's and Silverman's accounts of the Oedipal fantasy, is that for the latter two the identification

with the mother and father is always phantasmatic. That is to say, insofar as the child desires his parents, this desire is always imaginary. It “cannot be sustained,” as Laplanche and Pontalis explain, “when it is confronted with a correct apprehension of reality” (315). Eustace’s narration does not treat incestuous desire as mere fantasy, but makes it literal by having Amos act out the full Oedipal fantasy. The act of lovemaking that occurs between him and Cousin Ida is the actualization of a libidinal desire that under normal circumstances should remain imaginary. However, at the moment of its actualization, the narration also makes apparent the constructed nature of this fantasy. While Cousin Ida’s exclamation makes the transgression manifest, it also causes the reader to question the transgressive, or even criminal, nature of this scenario.

If we return to the lens of melodrama we recognize how Eustace’s narration actualizes Amos’s phantasmatic desire through the dramatization of speech acts and gestures. Moreover, the lens of melodrama produces the added effect of ironic distancing, which is both an intricate aspect of melodramatic aesthetics and sensibilities, and is also often used as a deprecating reading strategy that discredits melodrama as a serious genre (Klinger 15; Williams 324; Willemsen 64). The genre’s larger-than-life quality often frustrates the possibility of the reader’s full identification with its characters. Instead, the reader will respond to the narrative with uncomfortable laughter and disavowal. That which is so excessively represented in melodrama quite easily becomes a thing of ridicule. Eustace’s narration, too, can be read simultaneously as too strong an identification with, and a distancing from, the narrative’s subject matter. Eustace, if anything, is portrayed in the novel as a character in the perpetual process of distancing: he distances himself from his wife; he distances himself from his own epic poem to keep up with the tragedy that befalls Daniel; and, as Stephen Guy-Bray observes, he even distances himself from the novel – in which he is the eponymous character – by forfeiting his role as protagonist in favor of Daniel’s narrative (112). As such, the reader cannot be entirely sure whether his narration should be taken seriously; does Eustace display another instance of ironic distancing by narrating the scene in melodramatic fashion, or is he so wrapped up in the narrative that he cannot help but use excessive language to convey the gravitas of the scene? The tension between these two positions leads to reevaluation of the transgressive sexual act’s function, since both positions imply different consequences for the production of Amos’s sexual identity. This is certainly true when the narrative is regarded as Eustace’s ironic distancing, since that position questions whether the criminalization of non-normative sexual behavior through the Oedipus complex is self-evident.

Questioning the seeming self-evidence with which non-normative behavior is construed as deviant is an important position for Purdy, who throughout his work

had sought to interrogate the oppression of identity. In classic psychoanalysis, the desiring subject is by no means in control of its own desires. Instead, the formation of subjectivity, originating in the Oedipus complex, is argued to be universal (Laplanche and Pontalis 283). This suggests that what is considered to be deviant sexual desire is produced under the same symbolic Law that organizes normative heterosexual desire. The invocation of “God’s own sake” by Cousin Ida both establishes the taboo on incest and allows for its transgression. Butler understands this principle as the moment in which the Law that forbids incestuous desire inevitably makes this desire possible by its sheer prohibition (*Gender Trouble* 104). The Law’s prohibition of the desire for an object inevitably eroticizes it, making it desirable (*Bodies* 61). In light of this argument it is telling that Cousin Ida’s gesture in effect points towards the possibility of her own desire for Amos. Her half-hearted opposition, which enables this transgression in the first place, invokes only the Law of the symbolic order in the guise of “God’s own sake.” While her own desires remain unspoken, the mere fact of its possibility, enabled by her invocation of the symbolic Law, makes Amos desirable to her. If the Law needs the possibility of transgression to be effective as Law in the first place, Cousin Ida’s desire, which is evoked by the prohibition, is as self-evident as the prohibition itself. The transgression of the Law is no longer necessarily just a criminal act, but also an act of reciprocation.

By dramatizing the interdependency of the prohibition and the transgressive act, Eustace’s narration destabilizes the concept of a constant and criminalized homosexuality produced through this narrative. This not only happens in Eustace’s narration of the Oedipus complex, but also in other instances in which characters in the novel repudiate the normative concept of same-sex desire as transgressive. Daniel, and to a certain extent Amos, tries to suspend the moment in which he must confess to a homosexual identity. The suspension of this confession is key to the way in which he resists the criminalizing purchase of the Oedipal fantasy. The melodramatic mode, and the ironic distancing that this occasions, bring into view the mechanics of confession. Just as Eustace tries to establish Amos’s sexuality by narrating his sexual identity in a certain way, the confession that is part and parcel of the Oedipal fantasy is yet another strategy of those who attempt to construe the sexual behavior of others as an identity. The centrality of the confession and its criminalizing logic in Eustace’s narration of the Oedipus complex bears strong resemblance to the closet as a metaphor for the recognition (or disavowal) of same-sex desires. While the phrase “coming out of the closet” has become the dominant metaphor framing the transition from non-recognition to openly admitting to non-normative desires or gender identifications, the public admission that is so central

to the closet metaphor operates as a pathologizing strategy similar to that of the confession. It transfixes sexual behavior to the fantasy of identity. In *Eustace Chisholm and the Works*, I recognize a strategy of writing against the closet as an epistemological marker for sexual categorization. The confession becomes a pivotal site in which Daniel suspends the necessity to occupy a sexual identity – even if it comes at the cost of his self-preservation.

Confessing “Out of the Closet”

One of the factors that caused a proliferation of sexual identities, Foucault famously argues, is the transformation of the confession from religious to secular and medical discourse. In the course of the nineteenth century sodomy was no longer understood as a sexual act between members of the same sex, but turned itself into an identity that tethered sexual desire to one’s role in society. This was made possible by an explosion of discourse on sexuality. One had to repeatedly bear out her or his sexual object choice, and through these repetitious confessions sex acts increasingly coincided with conceptions of identity. Foucault indeed pinpoints the birth of homosexuality as identity to the precise date of 1870 in a widely cited, and often criticized, passage of his *History of Sexuality*: “Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (43).⁸

For Foucault, sexual identity is the product of discourse and psychoanalysis has, in turn, played a significant part in the production of that discourse. It is important to consider the implications of this assertion for Eustace’s melodramatic narration of the Oedipal scenario. As noted, this scenario plots out several stages of sexual development. However, popular psychoanalysis seems less interested in the cases in which this development follows the normative course, that is, the one producing exogamous heterosexuality in the subject. The cases that are most often narrated are those in which the Oedipal scenario is not resolved as it should be. Psychoanalytic studies focus exactly on those patients who failed to produce their sexuality in a normative way.

⁸ See Sedgwick for a critique of such pinpointing of a date, as it presents an oversimplification of experiences and practices that made up and continue to make up narratives of sexual identity (*Epistemology* 44–48).

Here we see a doubling effect within the production of discourse on sexuality: more discourse on non-normative sexual identities is produced because there is more discourse on non-normative sexual identities. For one, most accounts of psychoanalysis are concerned with the pathological construction of sexual deviation. Freud's most famous cases, such as Dora or the Wolf Man, recount the subject formation of those who failed to adhere to the social norm. Interestingly, in psychoanalytical discourse, what is considered to be the norm is defined negatively: the conception of normative sexuality needs deviant sexualities in order to establish itself as the norm. By the same token, psychoanalysis demands that the transgressions of patients are transferred into language, cementing their reality in literal terms. Psychoanalysis as the 'talking cure' not only produces medical discourse on sexual identity, but also ensures that its patients keep producing discourse by repeatedly talking about episodes in their past that might point towards the cause of their pathology. The compulsion towards discourse in psychoanalysis has often been likened to confession. Aptly described by Brooks, "[p]sychoanalysis, one of the most conspicuous inventions of the twentieth century, offers a secular version of religious confession: it insists on the work of patient and analyst – comparable to confessant and confessor – toward the discovery of the most hidden truths about selfhood" (*Troubling Confessions* 9). In its proliferation of discourse, psychoanalysis produces both a norm from which the patient is compelled to deviate and the imperative to constantly confess to this deviation.

In the next chapter I return to the performative power of the confession in the novel 63: *Dream Palace*. In it, an "anal speech act" is misread as a confession to a passive sexual identity. The novel dramatizes how the demand for a confession produces a sexual identity even in the absence of sexual acts. In a similar way in *Eustace Chisholm and the Works*, Daniel and Amos are compelled to bear themselves out. In these and other of Purdy's works, characters can hardly ever contain themselves. Their speech overflows and keeps being projected into their world. Even if speech is made impossible, even if characters have no direct addressee, their urge to speak up still gets the better of them. Yet seldom do these characters confess to something that could constitute a coherent notion of the self. In one instance Daniel will acknowledge a certain desire for Amos, while at others he strongly disavows the slightest possibility that such desire could exist. Thus, during an argument with Eustace, Daniel exclaims "I couldn't be in love with a man [...] I've never been, and I can't be now" (84), while soon after he confides in Maureen: "I love him. I love Amos" (106).

The resulting confusion of these contradictory confessions is part of the reason why Daniel decides to break away from his life and start anew in the army. However, when Daniel re-enlists, he cannot help but to continue confessing: "some people

confess in the flesh, others on paper. Daniel, a mumbler or a mute in company, could pour himself out on a blank sheet of paper in a P.X. waiting-room to an invisible correspondent" (112). While Daniel returns to the army precisely to escape the demand to confess to his desire for Amos, he nevertheless returns to the confessional moment. The bodily metaphors that are used to describe Daniel's urge to confess are doubled as Daniel is hunted down by Captain Stadger. The latter continues Eustace's attempts to elicit a confession from Daniel, and in doing so literally inscribes what he takes for a confession onto Daniel's body with a medieval-looking torture device. I return to this scene in a moment, for it illustrates the performative power of the confession and the discursive violence that organizes the confessor-confessant relationship. For now, I want to focus on confession in terms of melodramatic *mise-en-scène*, as it opens up a spatiotemporal understanding of the speech act that dramatizes the social consolidation of identity.

As we have seen, melodramatic characters consist of archetypes, devoid of any semblance of individuality and psychological development, onto whom ideological struggles are acted out. Melodramatic characters are constituted through their exteriority. They are wholly made up of the language that describes them and projects archetypal character traits onto their personas. The *Ingénue*, the *Villain*, and the *Hero* are recognizable as such because they do not show any sign of interiority, but rather consist of the projection of *topoi* onto a seemingly coherent character. For these characters there is no inner truth to which they can confess in the first place. We see, instead, that what they confess to is the projection of external fantasies and ideologies onto them. Eustace's rejoinder to Daniel's denial is telling: "You've never been, and you *are*" (84, original emphasis). Just as Eustace narrates Amos's sexuality as an Oedipal fantasy in order to transfix it onto his identity, so too does he fix Daniel's same-sex desires in terms of identity. Both Amos and Daniel assume a homosexual identity because others project their own fantasies of sexuality upon them. Purdy's use of melodrama, then, problematizes the performative force of the confession by making his characters confess to an identity that is void of any interiority that could harbor truth claims. Confession seen through the lens of melodrama exposes identity as an empty canvas onto which the fantasies of others are projected.

The way in which sexual identity is projected onto a character's exterior is foregrounded by the specific language situation in which the confession is grounded. The performative nature of a confession construes the thing that is confessed to as what Sedgwick has called, in relation to the figure of the closet, an "open secret" (*Epistemology* 22). This open secret entails a reality that can only be produced by the speech act of the confession itself, but which is retroactively constituted as a previously

existing reality. While the speech act of the confession produces a new reality, this reality is immediately assumed to have existed before its utterance. This renders the confession as speech act highly suspect by definition, since the truth-claim that motivates the confession can only exist by the grace of that very same confession. The open secret of the closet, once again, figures as an example of how this unstable, and often untenable speech act self-implodes, as coming out of the closet makes it at once impossible to be in it (or ever having been in it) as well as being out of it. David Halperin explains this paradox from an epistemological perspective: “one effect of being in the closet is that you are precluded from knowing whether people are treating you as straight because you have managed to fool them and they do not suspect you of being gay,” while at the same time “those who have once enjoyed the epistemological privilege constituted by their knowledge of your ignorance of their knowledge typically refuse to give up that privilege, and insist on constructing your sexuality as a secret to which they have special access, which always gives itself away to their superior and knowing gaze” (34–35). Halperin singles out the gaze of the other as the epistemological marker that makes it impossible to be either in or out of the closet.

Halperin frames the closet as a space that is impossible to occupy. In addition to this observation, I add that the state of being in the closet implies a temporal condition that is impossible to embody. In the logic of the confession, the temporal relation between the transgression and its confession becomes reversed. While the act that leads up to the confession historically precedes the moment of the confession, it can only be regarded as transgression after it is confessed to. The time of confession is, then, what Susannah Radstone describes as a “temporality that folds the future back onto the past” (201). For Brooks, this circular temporal logic is reflected in the transformation of the speech act itself. He argues that “confession may best be conceived as a speech-act that has a constative aspect (the sin or guilt confessed to) and a performative aspect (the performance of the act of confessing), and that the performative aspect can produce the constative, creating guilt in the act of confessing it” (*Troubling Confession* 52). Such a reversal is also implied when we consider the confession as a speech act that establishes the relationship between speaker and listener as the relationship between confessant and confessor. While the transgression can only be established retroactively after the utterance of the confession as a performative speech act, this speech act fails if the confessor does not recognize it as such. The confessor then plays an active part in the temporal reversal of transgression and confession, an effect that is further amplified in the psychoanalytical confession.

In *Troubling Confessions* (2000), Brooks describes how Freud in an essay written later in his life insists that the analyst constructs a truth for the analysand based on the latter's confessions. This "construction" is then fed back into the subject of analysis so that the analysand can incorporate it into his or her own narrative. "The analyst," writes Brooks, "constructs part of the story in order for the analysand to find more of the story – to produce a fuller confession" (53–54). In psychoanalysis, much more than in other instances of secular confession, the confessor is foregrounded as an active participant in its truth-production, for the confessor participates actively in the production of discourse on the transgression. Or, in Brooks's words, "the real test of truth in constructing the analysand's confessional story is simply the production of more story" (54).

What is ultimately at stake in this "production of more story" is the truth claim that lies at the heart of the confessional mode. In his seminal essay "Confession and Double Thought: Tolstoy, Rousseau, Dostoevsky", J.M. Coetzee interrogates the very notion of truth, and especially for whom this truth is produced. "The end of confession," he writes, "is to tell the truth to and for oneself" (230). The truth-claim of the confession is always compromised by the posture of the confessant. The confessant who is self-aware in the moment of confessing "raises intricate and [...] intractable problems regarding truthfulness, problems whose common factor seems to be a regression to infinity of self-awareness and self-doubt" (215). Although the confession presents itself as a mode of speech that aims to unburden the confessant of a sense of shame, this burden is only intensified by a self-awareness inherent to the confessional mode that immediately renders suspect the thing to which is confessed.

Considering Halperin's spatial understanding of the closet through the temporal reversal that is inherent in the complex confessional speech act, and considering the way in which the mode of confession always renders its own truth-claim suspect, I recognize strong implications for the social production of the confessant's identity through the act of confessing. While the act of coming out of the closet implies a movement from inside to outside, the temporal condition of the confession and the relationship between confessant and confessor reverse this movement. What is considered the innermost confessed truth indeed only becomes this innermost truth after it is spoken. The outwardly directed speech act constitutes both the confessant's and the confessor's understanding of what lies within the confessant. This is what Linda Anderson, in her analysis of Rousseau's *Confessions*, calls the "radical internalization' of personal identity" (43).

Yet, this reversal also challenges the validity of the construction of the "inside" as one's "true identity". As I argue more thoroughly in my chapters on 63: *Dream*

Palace and Cabot Wright Begins, Purdy's suspicion of identity production stems from the naturalization of an inner identity as the "true self", while this notion of inner identity is wholly the result of narration. If the mode of confession presents itself as a form of unmasking, this inevitably leads to an unlimited regression of unmasking. For, as I argue in my chapter on *Cabot Wright Begins*, if both inner and outer identity are constructed through narration, we can no longer speak of an epistemological difference between the two fictions. Inner and outer identity are then ultimately the same. Or, in Coetzee's words, we find "behind every motive another motive, behind every mask another mask" (220).

Confessing and Disidentification

We have already seen how the novel's impossible plot situation is dramatized by Daniel's sleepwalking. The impossible dilemma that the metaphor of "coming out" entails is further made explicit by the contradictory confessions that both he and Amos make. Their confessions oscillate between identification and disavowal, and these conflicting positions underline how the figure of the closet enforces the fiction of identity onto their behavior, regardless of the position that they confess to. But, perhaps even more importantly, their conflicting statements often suggest a coexistence of disavowal and identification. In a matter of a few pages, Daniel both repudiates and admits to harboring same-sex desire. Daniel continuously switches positions as if to confuse his interlocutors and leave them guessing which confession is the "true" one. Amos, on the other hand, turns his confessions into violent outbursts. Upon his introduction to the reader, the external narrator notes that "nobody could be sure on meeting Amos whether he was queer or not, because he was so fierce to approach and those who did so uninvited were injured" (19). The extreme aggression with which Amos at the beginning of the novel denies Eustace's suggestion that he could be homosexual invites confusion regarding his sexual self-identification, especially when later in the novel he seems to openly enjoy same-sex relationships.

Queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz calls this playing-out of the tension between disavowal and acknowledgment "disidentification". He considers this a "descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship" (4). That is, to navigate a space hostile towards minoritarian identifications, the minoritarian subject will find ways to attach to the identification under scrutiny, while simultaneously

publicly performing its repudiation. In the space that opens up between these two positions, Muñoz recognizes the meaningful dramatization of the subject's refusal, or failure, to fully identify with a normative subject position by resting on the contradictory attachments that the subject embodies (*Disidentifications* 12). Disidentification as a practice of resistance, then, is closely tied with melodrama's dramatization of the impossible plot situation. Indeed, in the space opened up by melodramatic excess, Goldberg theorizes instances of frustrated identification, non-identification, cross-identification, destabilization of personal identity, and identifications that are too intense (34, 127–128, and 134–135). It is in the performance of disidentification that the fantasy of stable identity sees its own undoing. "The journey of self-transformation is one of undoing," Goldberg argues of this melodramatic space, "not a place of knowledge that can be claimed as one's own; not a place of identity, but of identification" (126).

The strategy of disidentification is easily recognized in Daniel's confessions, be they in the form of speech, gesture, or even voiced through the external narrator's use of free indirect discourse. The switching back-and-forth between identifications causes the fantasy of stable identity to give way as Daniel comes to embody both contradictory identifications at the same time. For example, in anticipation of his argument with Eustace, the external narrator reflects on Daniel's sexuality by reiterating Daniel's troubled feelings for Amos. As the external narrator does so, it evokes Daniel's sexual history.⁹ The result is an ongoing oscillation between admission and disavowal, present and past. This narrative space is further troubled by the external narrator's tendency to switch in and out of free indirect discourse, which presents itself as inner "truth", a notion that is always rendered suspect in Purdy's novelistic worlds. For example:

None of Daniel's tenants had interested him – indeed he hardly knew their names – until Amos. Unable to take his eyes off the boy's face, he could not admit that the feeling which seized him was love—he regarded it as some physical illness at first. Indeed, from the first beginning and hint of his manhood he had always had girls, had passed for girl-crazy in his family, and had continued his fornications like a good soldier until the present with habitual tireless regularity.

⁹ Throughout my dissertation I understand the external narrator as a function of the text instead of as a gendered character, which is why I have chosen to refer to the external narrator with the impersonal pronoun "it".

He could not feel he wanted the body of Amos (who was a thin boy, though his buttocks had beautiful shape), but he could not deny to himself in his hours of blinding self-revelation that he needed Amos, that it was Amos who dictated everything he felt and represented all he needed. (81)

This fragment employs several disidentifying strategies that illustrate how Daniel attempts to negotiate the terms in which he can attach to his same-sex desire. The narration rehearses homophobic and heteronormative topoi that seek to establish Daniel as a proponent of the dominant heterosexual culture. As his same-sex desire is cast as an illness, his history of sexuality is portrayed in an exaggerated fashion as if to say, “someone with such a rampant history of heterosexuality couldn’t possibly harbor same-sex desire”. Yet, this same fragment attests to same-sex desire. He is said to be unable to take his eyes off of Amos and, in parenthesis, the external narrator remarks upon Amos’s behind in a way that can only be taken as Daniel’s opinion. However, here too Daniel’s desire is framed by narratives that cast his sudden desire for Amos as a one-off incident. Indeed, Daniel does not seem to be in control of his emotions, as it is Amos who dictates “everything he felt”. Even if Daniel admits to his desire for Amos – after all, he does have beautiful buttocks – he admits only to carnal desire while repudiating that this desire could be love. This, too, ties in with a homophobic rhetoric that allows for sexual intercourse between men, as long as this intercourse only serves the purpose of bodily satisfaction without the involvement of romantic emotions. In this brief moment, then, while Daniel’s desire for Amos is expressed, the broad register of homophobic and heteronormative discourses allows Daniel’s continued navigation of a cultural space that would otherwise cast him out because of his identification.

Besides showing the operations of Daniel’s disidentification, the scene also contributes to the destabilization of the confession’s truth-claim and the juxtaposition of inner and outer identities. It does so by making the external narrator wholly complicit in its use of free indirect discourse, a narrative strategy that, because of its mediated nature, complicates the “truth” advanced by adopting Daniel’s point of view. As the external narrator continuously slips in and out of Daniel’s character-bound focalization, the narrative presents itself as Daniel’s very own train of thought. The parentheses, asides, and ruminations on Daniel’s past are presented as free indirect discourse: the external narrator, in the space of their own narration, not only gives way to Daniel’s point of view, but also claims to share something to which the reader would otherwise have no access.

The use of free indirect discourse in this passage suggests a truth-claim that is motivated by the external narrator's brief adoption of Daniel's voice. After all, the mode of free indirect discourse requires the reader to assume that the external narrator has temporarily given way to character-bound focalization. However, while the genre of confession necessitates that the reader accepts its truth claim, this truth-claim is problematized by the free indirect discourse that the external narrator employs to represent Daniel's innermost feelings. Certainly, the external narrator of Purdy's fiction is already suspect as it often purposefully misrepresents or confuses events, actions, and emotions. The adoption of free indirect discourse in the above scene works to present Daniel's thoughts as if they were unmediated, while at the same time shows that the genre of the confession is wholly incompatible with free indirect discourse.

Although free indirect discourse might present itself as an unambiguous suspension of the external narrator's voice in order to make space for the seemingly unmediated transmission of character-bound focalization, the double focalization that is always presented in this narrative mode questions the validity of the truth that is spoken. While the mode of free indirect discourse implies that the external narrator has unmediated access to Daniel's thoughts, these thoughts become part of the external narrator's broader organization of the narrative. The disidentification strategy with which Daniel seeks to distance his same-sex desire from what he perceives to be an impossible identification is then doubled by the external narrator's use of free indirect discourse. As the narrator covertly intervenes in the representation of Daniel's speech, the "truth" of his confession is further destabilized. In doing so, the external narrator assists Daniel by opening up a melodramatic space in which the tension between two impossible plot resolutions are temporarily suspended, and in which Daniel can continue to navigate a hostile dominant culture through acts of disidentification.

Liberation through Disidentification

Daniel's flight to the army has an ambiguous status. Although Eustace believes that Daniel fled Chicago to escape his own same-sex desires, once at the army camp he continues sleepwalking and even begins to confess profusely in his letters to Eustace. Critics of the novel have always interpreted Daniel's escape as an expression of internalized homophobia (Adams, *Homosexual Hero* 66; Austen 357–358; Chupack 104; Schwartzschild 59; Snyder, "Original Stock" 182–183;). Of these critics, only Michael

Snyder regards Purdy's overt use of the "internalized homophobia" topos as a means to challenge homophobic responses to his earlier novels. He interprets Daniel's homophobic remarks throughout the novel as an ironic foreshadowing of his own death at the hands of Captain Stadger (168). I want to extend Snyder's assessment of Daniel's flight as more than the expression of internalized homophobia. Rather, I believe that this flight is both a continuation and an intensification of Daniel's disidentificatory practices. In the army, and especially in his relationship with Captain Stadger, Daniel is able to inhabit a space in which he can act out his same-sex desire, while attempting to survive in the homophobic dominant culture that he himself also embodies. That Daniel does not survive in the end does not diminish his attempts to navigate the hostile space in which he finds himself. Instead, I argue that his death can be seen as another act of disidentification. After all, as Muñoz reminds us, "disidentification is not always an adequate strategy of resistance or survival for all minority subjects" (*Disidentifications* 5, original emphasis).

If anything, Daniel is vividly aware of his potential demise at the hands of Captain Stadger. There are moments at which he attempts to free himself from Stadger's bind or tries to resist his hold over him. Yet, at the same time, Daniel longs for the disciplinary measures that Stadger asserts over him, and acknowledges Stadger's authoritative power as a means to normalize his own sexuality. In a letter to Eustace, Daniel writes:

I need it, and the army I can see sees I need it. I am under, I understand, a Captain Stadger, who is death in circles, and I hear from beforehand he will exercise all the authority he has over me, well, let him, let him put me on the wheel if he has to and twist until I recognize the authority of the army so good there will be nothing but it over me, over and above Amos and even all the pain – Give me news of him. (115)

Within the same frantically written sentence, Daniel expresses a complex desire to be punished, only to have that punishment testify to his wish to hear from Amos. Giving in to the army's authority, Daniel seems to believe, produces a space in which his desire for Amos is simultaneously repudiated and acknowledged. As he continues to correspond with Eustace, "Daniel Haws, who in 'life' (by which he meant civilian life) had been morose, taciturn, bitterly reserved and almost inarticulate, poured out everything. He did not even hesitate to touch on the master passion of his existence – Amos" (167). It is, perhaps ironically, the army that provides for him the framework in which he can more fully admit to his same-sex desires.

It is true that many midcentury gay-themed novels stage the army as a repressive and homophobic institution in which homosexual characters perish under the demands of heterosexual masculinity (Caserio 171, Austen 354–355). James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* (1956), Carson McCuller's *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1941), and Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar* (1948), arguably the best-known gay-themed midcentury novels, can only thematize same-sex desire at the expense of their homosexual protagonists, who inevitably perish in a hostile and homophobic environment. However, following Bérubé, Michael Bronski argues that with the disruption of traditional sex and gender roles in the United States army during the Second World War, authors of gay-themed pulp novels were also emboldened to situate their pornographic writing within army life (26). Purdy, too, sees a space for Daniel's same-sex desire in the army, exactly because of its heterosexist and masculinist organization. In the army Daniel can act out his same-sex desires by compensating for them with displays of excessive heterosexually coded behavior.

During his encounters with Stadger, the latter physically assaults Daniel with increasing intensity. His body becomes literally inscribed by Stadger's passion for him, resulting in a "crazy quilt of cuts, slashes and bruises" (208). Yet, his fellow soldiers interpret these inscriptions without exception as affirmations of his heterosexuality. They assume these are the marks of frequent visits to prostitutes in the nearby town, or even the results of brawls in which Daniel asserts his masculinity, as the following passage makes clear:

The enlisted men who shared their tent with Haws had decided, when they had seen him return after Stadger's assault on him, that the soldier had again been beaten up by outsiders on one of his regular visits to the out-of-bounds Negro sections of town. They left him strictly alone, in grudging silence, perhaps admiration, and considered him probably too tough even for the regular army. (208–209)

Daniel is, then, able to act out his same-sex and masochistic desires, because in the space of the army, the traces of his encounters with Stadger are immediately interpreted as extensions of his masculinity. Daniel is even perceived as being too masculine, which suggests that within the framework of the army his behavior cannot be interpreted as anything other than signaling heterosexuality. The army offers Daniel a structure in which he can continue his disidentificatory practices as

it automatically creates a space in which he can at once give in to Stadger's "savage embraces" and distance himself from the very thing that made him run away from Chicago: a homosexual identity (214).

Eventually, Daniel's acts of disidentification, while allowing him to act out his desires on his own terms, do not ensure his survival. Because Daniel needs his bruised body to be interpreted as masculine in order to navigate the homophobic space of the army, he cannot ask for help from his fellow soldiers when his relationship with Stadger becomes too perilous. The very strategies that he needs for his survival become a liability as he is left on his own to defend himself against Stadger's ever-tightening clutches. Yet, even in the moment Daniel perishes at the hands of Stadger, we can recognize acts of disidentification that liberate Daniel from the demand to confess, to "come out of the closet", while still acting out his sexual desires.

When Stadger finds out about Daniel's history with Amos, he falls into a jealous rage and demands Daniel confess to his love for Amos. However, through his relationship with Stadger, this initial desire for Amos has changed into a masochistic desire for corporeal punishment. "Kill me", he demands of Stadger (232). In order to get what he desires – that is, in order to be punished by Stadger – Daniel needs to play off Stadger's jealousy and he does so again by subverting the genre of confession. This time Daniel does so by leaving out a confession altogether. In the face of Stadger's threats, Daniel remains silent:

"How did you show Amos Ratcliffe your love?" Captain Stadger's voice came like the thunder behind them, with pitiless savagery he held open the mutilated man's eyelids.

"I never gave him love," the soldier said, "I failed him as I failed myself."

Pulling out of his pocket a photograph of the dead boy, Captain Stadger thrust it in front of the soldier.

"Prefer me to him now, and you're free, Haws."

When Daniel did not reply, he rained one blow after another upon his prisoner until the bark of the tree ran red.

Leaving the soldier for a few moments then, he returned with the weapon he had shown him a short while before.

A pink sheet of lightning illuminated the weapon's sharp edges and the captain without a word more began his work, pushing like flame with the instrument into Daniel's groin upward and over, and

then when its work was nearing completion he put his face to Daniel's and pressing said something, in bloody accolade, that not even Daniel heard. (233)

It is the implied preference for Amos over Stadger which is read into Daniel's silence that turns the lack of speech into a powerful "truth"-producing speech act. The "truth" that Daniel denies, or forestalls by his silence, is established by Stadger. Purdy here perverts the relationship between confessor and confessant, as identified by Brooks, in having the confessor produce a "truth" out of the lack of confession. Stadger is so blinded by jealousy that his desire to hear a certain "truth" becomes more important than that to which Daniel would have confessed. Indeed, whatever confession Daniel might have volunteered, Stadger would have interpreted as Daniel's preference for Amos. The impossible situation in which Daniel finds himself is then ironically resolved by his rejection of confession. As such, this final scene illustrates the effect of melodramatic tension that Goldberg foregrounds in his discussion of *Fidelio*. *Melodrama*, he argues, "[calls] into question the assumption that action is tied to true identity". Moreover, it calls into question "the singularity of identity" (9). It is here that Purdy most emphatically foregrounds the violence that is inherent to the genre of confession, but also allows for its potential disidentification. The violence is undeniable: whether or not Stadger's interpretation of Daniel's silence is correct, as confessor he produces a "truth" that is lethal for Daniel. At the same time, through his subversion of the confession, Daniel himself leaves open the question of identity while still submitting to the punishments he so desires. As a final act of disidentification, Daniel liberates himself from the yoke of identity – the demand to "come out" and admit his love for Amos – while claiming the possibility of acting out his sexual desires in his own way. Finally, Daniel experiences "the most exquisite torment he could have ever imagined his body capable of" (214).