

Contextualizing Gender
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Lecture - 19
Queer Theory and Literature in Eve Sedgwick

Welcome dear friends. We will discuss Eve Sedgwick in this module, an influential and paradigmatic figure in Queer Theory and LGBTI studies. In the majority of feminist work exploring the influence on social relations and identity, it has been assumed that gender and sexuality have to be examined together with gender taking precedence over sexuality.


This notion remained relatively unchallenged until the advent of queer theories and queer ideas on the theoretical scene. Key critics such as Eve Sedgwick and Gayle Rubin influenced by poststructuralist thinkers, called for a radical separation of gender and sexuality.

This approach can aid in understanding the internal dynamics with which homosexuality and heterosexuality are produced in a society. Sedgwick agrees with Rubin in her argument that although sexuality and gender are completely intertwined with each other. ‘The study of sexuality is not co-extensive with the study of gender’ and that, as a consequence ‘anti homophobic inquiry’ and feminism can be usefully separated.


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Eve Sedgwick (1950-2009)

- Known as one of the architects of queer theory, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, is an American academician whose work in the areas of literary criticism and feminist analysis has had a major impact on the queer theories.
 - Her works reflect an interest in queer performativity, experimental critical writing, non-Lacanian psychoanalysis, and the affective theories of Tomkins and Melanie Klein.
- Drawing on feminist scholarship and the work of Michel Foucault, Sedgwick uncovered purportedly hidden homoerotic subplots in writers like Charles Dickens, Henry James and Marcel Proust.



Source: David Shankbone



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Foucault's work had emphasized that demanding the recognition of a distinct homosexual identity inevitably reaffirms a binary and unequal opposition between homosexual and heterosexual. So, rather than attempting to invert binary oppositions, queer theory can be seen as examining the ways in which the opposition has shaped moral and political hierarchies of knowledge and power.

Some of the most detailed work in this area has been done by Eve Sedgwick the literary critic, whom rolling stone had called the soft-spoken queen of gay studies.

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- Sedgwick's work does not offer a way beyond the binary, rather it unpacks the ways in which the enormous conceptual privilege of heterosexuality is embedded in a broad range of discourses.
- In doing so, she reveals the extent of the promotion of normative heterosexuality's dependence on a stigmatised homosexuality.
- Sedgwick argued that an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture would be incomplete or damaged if it failed to incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition, coining the terms "antihomophobic" and "homosocial".
 - Her single-authored monographs are:
 - The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (1980),
 - Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985),
 - Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), *Tendencies* (1993), and
 - Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2005).



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homo or heterosexual definition, coining the terms “antihomophobic” and “homosocial”. Her single-authored monographs include: ‘The Coherence of Gothic Conventions’, ‘Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire’ which was published in 1985 and ‘Epistemology of the Closet’ which was published in 1990 and is considered to be her most significant contribution along with ‘Tendencies’ and ‘Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy and Performativity’ which came out in 2005.

Critics cite Sedgwick questioning of the meaning assumed in binary definitions of sexuality in her works, particularly ‘Between Men’ and ‘Epistemology of the Closet’ as they scholarly works most closely associated with the acceptance of queer theory in academia.

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Beginning of Queer Theory

- As the terminology of queer theory emerged, postmodern and post-structural theories had also taken hold in the academy, and many feminists and queer theorists were turning to methods of subversion and deconstruction in their writings about gender.
- Along with Butler and Sedgwick, feminist thinkers such as Diana Fuss (1995), Denise Riley (1988; 2000) and Elspeth Probyn (1993; 1996) offered complex engagements with questions of subjectivity, desire and identification.



Elspeth Probyn
Source: University of Sydney

Diana Fuss
Source: Princeton University


Denise Riley
Source: Rose Riley

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As the terminology of queer theory emerged, postmodern and post-structural theories had also taken hold in the academy, and many feminists and queer theorists were turning to methods of subversion and deconstruction in their writings about gender. Along with Butler and Sedgwick, feminist thinkers such as Diana Fuss, Denise Riley and Elspeth Probyn also offered complex engagements with questions of subjectivity, desire and identification.

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- The transnational “SlutWalk” phenomenon, calling for an end to rape culture and victim blaming, can be understood as adopting a feminist pro-sex position.
 - It simultaneously offers a critique of women’s sexual oppression; and engages with questions of sex and sexiness that neither fully reject, nor wholly endorse mainstream models of sexuality.
- Both Butler and Sedgwick take a poststructuralist approach to sex, gender and sexuality, seeking to deconstruct the relationships between these categories and problematise normative models of identity.
- Though de Lauretis coined the term, as William Turner writes in *A Genealogy of Queer*, Butler and Sedgwick, “laid much of the conceptual groundwork for the emerging field in the early 1990s” (106).



The first SlutWalk in Toronto, Ontario, 2011
Source: Anton Bielousov



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The phenomenon of transnational “SlutWalk”, which calls for an end to rape culture and victim blaming, can be referred to here and it can be understood as adopting a feminist pro-sex position. It simultaneously offers a critique of women’s sexual oppression; and engages with questions of sex and sexiness that neither fully reject, nor wholly endorse mainstream models of sexuality.

Both Butler and Sedgwick take a poststructuralist approach to sex, gender and sexuality, seeking to deconstruct the relationship between these categories and problematize normative models of identity. Though de Lauretis is credited for coining the term, as William Turner writes in his work ‘A Genealogy of Queer’, Butler and Sedgwick “laid much of the conceptual groundwork for the emerging field in the early 1990’s”.

Sedgwick had brought to queer theory a methodology for deconstruction that enabled a deep interrogation of sexuality, gender, bodies and pleasure in an across the western culture. In a dialogue with the New York Times in 1998 explaining the function of queer theory, Sedgwick had said that “it is about trying to understand different kinds of sexual desire and how the culture defines them. It is about how one cannot understand relations between men and women unless one also understands the relationship between people of the same gender, including the possibility of a sexual relationship between them”.

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- Gender is taken by Sedgwick to define 'the space of differences between men and women' (29). She points out that gender categories are generally understood as co-constructed and relational.
- She identifies a number of inadequacies and problems in the analysis of sexuality within radical feminist work.
- First, that sexuality is seen as operating as a function of gender relations, denying that the symbolic and individualised meanings that people may attribute to sexuality can revolve around other processes.




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Gender is taken by Sedgwick to define the space of differences between men and women. She points out that gender categories are generally understood as co-constructed and relational. She identifies a number of inadequacies and problems in the analysis of sexuality within radical feminist work. First, that sexuality is seen as operating as a function of gender relations, denying that the symbolic and individualized meanings that people may attribute to sexuality can revolve around other processes.

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- Second, that feminist approaches to sexuality have betrayed a homophobic response to gay male desire.
 - She castigates feminist accounts that contrast gay male desire as more permissive, masculine and superficial in comparison to lesbian spirituality and connection.
- Third, by analysing lesbian experiences of oppression through the feminist fixation on gender, feminists fail to acknowledge the shared oppression lesbians face with gay men and other sexual minorities, which revolves around sexuality rather than gender.
- Fourth, that the 'anti-sex' approach towards pornography and sado-masochism (S/M) takes feminism back to 'the most repressive nineteenth-century bourgeois constructions of a sphere of pure femininity' (37).



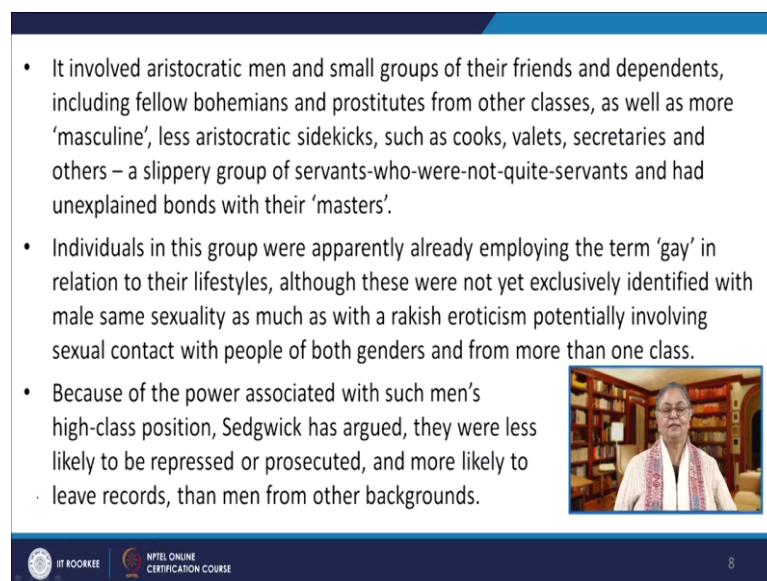
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Secondly, that feminist approaches to sexuality have betrayed a homophobic response to gay male desire. Sedgwick castigates feminist accounts that contrast gay male desire as more permissive, masculine and superficial in comparison to lesbian spirituality and connection.

Third, by analyzing lesbian experiences of oppression through the feminist fixation on gender, feminist fail to acknowledge the shared oppression lesbians face with gay men and other sexual minorities, which revolves around sexuality rather than gender. Fourth, that the anti-sex approach towards pornography and sado-masochism takes feminists back to the most repressive 19th century bourgeois constructions of his sphere of pure femininity.

And finally, the legitimacy of transgender role playing and identification is denied by feminist accounts that attribute butch- femme relationships and identities to replications of male oppression and hierarchy. Understandings of sexuality in early modern Europe were also highly stratified in terms of class. For example, Sedgwick has argued that there seems to have been a genuine reasonably consistent European subculture of aristocratic male same sexuality from the mid 17th century onwards that was at once courtly and also in touch with the criminal.

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- It involved aristocratic men and small groups of their friends and dependents, including fellow bohemians and prostitutes from other classes, as well as more 'masculine', less aristocratic sidekicks, such as cooks, valets, secretaries and others – a slippery group of servants-who-were-not-quite-servants and had unexplained bonds with their 'masters'.
- Individuals in this group were apparently already employing the term 'gay' in relation to their lifestyles, although these were not yet exclusively identified with male same sexuality as much as with a rakish eroticism potentially involving sexual contact with people of both genders and from more than one class.
- Because of the power associated with such men's high-class position, Sedgwick has argued, they were less likely to be repressed or prosecuted, and more likely to leave records, than men from other backgrounds.


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In the next slide we have a video clipping from Downton Abbey. It is a British historical drama television series set in the early 20th century. It portrays the character of Thomas Barrow a footman, who is also one of the central characters of the series having an affair with an aristocratic guest The Duke of Crowborough. The series Downton Abbey will be taken up in a later module for a fuller analysis of the queer elements.

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- The structure of class in terms of same-sex relationships is also discernible in this scene.
- Although Thomas aspires to be a Butler in the household of Duke, the Duke refuses to acknowledge their previous relationship and refuses to be tied down.

Source: Downton Abbey [YouTube]

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In the same we can also see the structure of class in terms of same-sex relationships. Although Thomas who is a footman aspires to be a Butler in the household of the Duke, the Duke refuses to acknowledge their previous relationship and also refuses to be tied down.

Are you forgetting something?


What [Laughter] are you threatening me because of a youthful dalliance a few weeks of madness in a London season you would know that against me surely.

No, what if I have to?

And who believe a greedy footman over the words of a Duke if you are not careful you will end up behind bars.

I have the proof.

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- The structure of class in terms of same-sex relationships is also discernible in this scene.
- Although Thomas aspires to be a Butler in the household of Duke, the Duke refuses to acknowledge their previous relationship and refuses to be tied down.

Source: Downton Abbey [YouTube]


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You mean these you know my mother is always telling me never put anything in writing and now thanks to you I never will again.

How did you get them you bastard?

(Refer Time: 13:03) Thomas go to bed unless if you want to stay.

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The slide features a screenshot from the TV series *Downton Abbey*. The title "Downton Abbey" is overlaid on the image. A white circle highlights a character in the foreground, and a white square highlights a character in the background. To the right of the image, there are two bullet points:

- The structure of class in terms of same-sex relationships is also discernible in this scene.
- Although Thomas aspires to be a Butler in the household of Duke, the Duke refuses to acknowledge their previous relationship and refuses to be tied down.

Source: Downton Abbey [YouTube]

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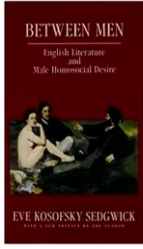
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In her 1985 work 'Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire', Sedgwick examined the ways in which male homo-social bonding is structured around hostility to homosexuality. At the time of its first appearance in 1985, the book was viewed as an important intervention into feminist as well as gay and lesbian studies. It laid out her initial thoughts and her methodology for deconstruction.


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Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire (1985)

- In this influential work, Sedgwick examines the power dynamics of the erotic triangle of two men and one woman found throughout British literature.
- Patriarchal heterosexuality can be understood as a "traffic in women," where women are used to cement the bonds of men with men (26).
 - In her introduction to the book, Sedgwick argues that changes in the "male homosocial desire" (4) were closely associated with visible changes in the class structure of mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century England. These changes are in relation to women and the gender system.



Source: Columbia University Press



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in her opinion can be understood as a “traffic in women”, where women are used to cement the bonds of men with men. In her introduction to the book, Sedgwick has argued that changes in the “male homosocial desire” were closely associated with visible changes in the class structure of mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century England.

These changes are in relation to women and the gender system. The book is quite detailed as the given outline suggested clearly. We will discuss only a few chapters, but shall welcome queries on any part of this book.

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Outline

- Introduction
- CHAPTER ONE: Gender Asymmetry and Erotic Triangles
- CHAPTER TWO: Swan in Love: The Example of Shakespeare's Sonnets
- CHAPTER THREE: *The Country Wife*: Anatomies of Male Homosocial Desire
- CHAPTER FOUR: *A Sentimental Journey*: Sexualism and the Citizen of the World
- CHAPTER FIVE: Toward the Gothic: Terrorism and Homosexual Panic


BETWEEN MEN
EVE KOSOFSKY SEDGWICK
English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire

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In this slide, and in the next one.

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- CHAPTER SIX: Murder Incorporated: *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*
- CHAPTER SEVEN Tennyson's *Princess: One Bride for Seven Brothers*
- CHAPTER EIGHT: *Adam Bede and Henry Edmond: Homosocial Desire and the Historicity of the Female*
- CHAPTER NINE: Homophobia, Misogyny, and Capital: The Example of *Our Mutual Friend*
- CHAPTER TEN: Up the Postern Stair: *Edwin Drood* and the Homophobia of Empire
- CODA Toward the Twentieth Century: English Readers of Whitman




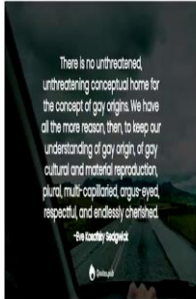
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We can look at the detailed outline of this work.

Sedgwick analyzes ancient and modern texts in this work from Greek poetry to the relationship between Kirk and Spock in *Star Trek* to late 20th century American film television and fiction. She gives detailed attention to the ways in which male friendship, mentorship, entitlement, rivalry and hetero and homosexuality have structured themselves in relation to shifting patterns of class and gender.

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- "Homosocial" she explains, is a neologism meant to be distinguished from "homosexual" and connotes a form of male bonding often accompanied by a fear or hatred of homosexuality.
- Sedgwick differentiates between a male homosocial and a lesbian continuum.
- Although women love and affirm other women in both private and public spheres, male bonding often involves the disruption of such continuity and may provoke a homophobic reaction to candid expressions of passion or to explicit sexual bonding with other men.



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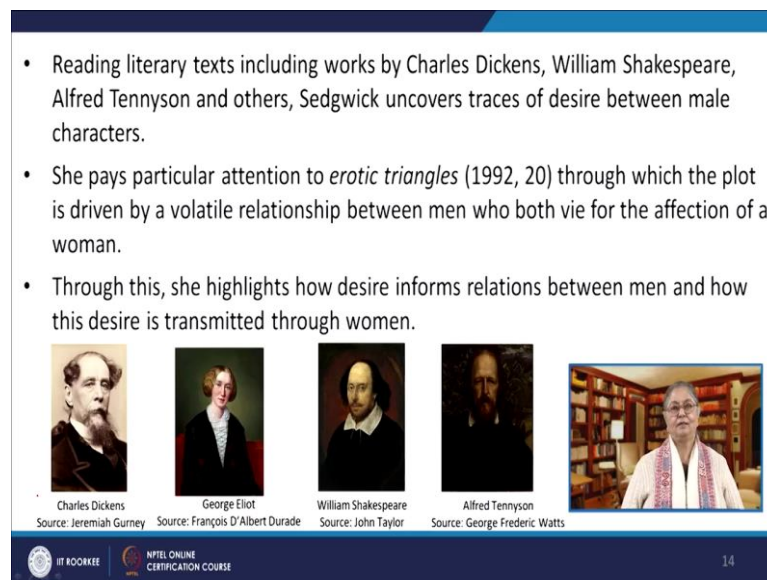
She explains that “homosocial” is a neologism meant to be distinguished from “homosexual” and it connotes a form of male bonding often accompanied by a fear or hatred of homosexuality. Sedgwick differentiates between a male homosocial and a lesbian continuum.

Although women love and affirm other women in both private and public spheres, male bonding often involves the disruption of such continuity and may provoke a homophobic reaction to candid expressions of passion or to explicit sexual bonding with other men. Sedgwick emphasizes that this discontinuous homo-social end or heterosexual spectrum takes on different cultural shapes in different historical eras.

And she argues conclusively for this differentiation based on her methodology that borrows from both Marxist and radical feminist points of view. Sedgwick has persuasively argued that virtually every important debate in the 20th century western thought has been marked, structured and fractured by the centrality of issues of modern homo oblique heterosexual definition.

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- Reading literary texts including works by Charles Dickens, William Shakespeare, Alfred Tennyson and others, Sedgwick uncovers traces of desire between male characters.
- She pays particular attention to *erotic triangles* (1992, 20) through which the plot is driven by a volatile relationship between men who both vie for the affection of a woman.
- Through this, she highlights how desire informs relations between men and how this desire is transmitted through women.



Charles Dickens
Source: Jeremiah Gurney

George Eliot
Source: François D'Albert Durade

William Shakespeare
Source: John Taylor

Alfred Tennyson
Source: George Frederic Watts


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Reading literary texts including works by Charles Dickens, William Shakespeare, Tennyson and others, Sedgwick uncovers traces of desire between male characters. She pays particular attention to erotic triangles through which the plot is driven by a volatile relationship between men who both vie for the affection of a woman. Through this, she

highlights how desire informs relations between men and how this desire is transmitted through women.

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- The purpose of this is to interrogate the relationship between power and sexuality, carefully teasing out the limits of a cultural system wherein desire between men emerges only under the pretence of heterosexuality.
- Sedgwick's 'male homosocial desire' refers to the entire spectrum of male bonds and potentially includes everyone from overt heterosexuals to overt homosexuals.
- In coining the neologism, however, Sedgwick strategically and powerfully rejected all of the then-available lexical and conceptual alternatives to challenge the idea that hetero-, bi- and homosexual men and experiences could be easily differentiated.
- They could not be distinguished readily from one another, she suggested, since what might be conceptualised as erotic depended on an unpredictable, ever-changing array of local factors.




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In coining the neologism; however, Sedgwick is strategically and powerfully rejected all of the then-available lexical and conceptual alternatives to challenge the idea that hetero, bi and homosexual men and experiences could be easily differentiated. They could not be distinguished readily from one another she suggested, since what might be conceptualized as erotic depended on an unpredictable, ever-changing array of local factors. Another influential neologism by Sedgwick is male homosexual panic.

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- Sedgwick derived the term 'male homosexual panic' from a relatively rare psychiatric diagnosis which she subsequently discovered had been used as a legal defence by people, usually men.
- These men were accused of anti-gay violence and were seeking to persuade the judge that they had diminished responsibility because they were suffering from a pathological psychological condition, perhaps brought on by an unwanted sexual advance from a person of the same gender.
 - Even 21st century popular TV shows like "The Big Bang Theory" (aired between 2007-2019) and "The Odd Couple" (aired between 2015-17) display a slight dread of gay relationships while displaying bromance.



Simon Helberg and Kunal Nayyar in "The Big Bang Theory" (CBS)
Source: Sonia Saraiya



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Sedgwick derived this term from a relatively rare psychiatric diagnosis. She later came to know that it had been used as a legal defense by people, usually men. These men were accused of anti-gay violence and were seeking to persuade the judge that they had diminished responsibility as they were suffering from a pathological psychological condition, perhaps brought on by an unwanted sexual advance from a person of the same gender.

Even the 21st century popular TV shows like "The Big Bang Theory" or "The Odd Couple" display a slight dread of gay relationships while displaying bromance. Continuation of such tropes suggests the intensity with which the social psyche has internalized the dread of same sex desire.

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- Solidarity between men within patriarchy generates and requires certain intense male bonds that are not readily distinguishable from the most reprobated homosexual bonds.
- Sedgwick's analysis insists that male homosexual panic is not only cripplingly knotted into the guts of men, but through them, into the lives of women too.
- She argues that this is a terrain from whose wasting rigours only the most consciously and self-acceptingly out gay men are exempt; although these men will almost certainly still might fear being the victims of homophobia.



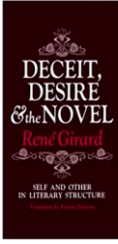
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Sedgwick believes that an endemic, almost in eradicable state of male homosexual panic was the normal condition of male heterosexual entitlement from the late 19th century onwards. Thus, the relationships between all, but the most out gay men potentially force individuals into the frighteningly unsettled, coercively incoherent and murderously self-contradictory quick sense of homosexual panic.

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- In the first Chapter of *Between Men*, titled “Gender Asymmetry and Erotic Triangles”, Sedgwick focuses on male homosocial desire within the structural context of triangular, heterosexual desire.
- She revises the erotic triangles which René Girard dexterously analyses in his book *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* (1961).
- Girard discovers that in any given love triangle the choice of the beloved may depend more upon the predilection of one’s rival than it does upon unmediated desire for the beloved.
- In such erotic rivalry the forces connecting the two rivals are often as passionate and perhaps more cohesive than those connecting the rivals to the love-object.



Source: Johns Hopkins University Press



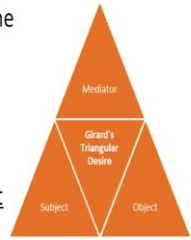
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In the first chapter of ‘Between Men, titled’ “Gender Asymmetry and Erotic Triangles”, Sedgwick focuses on male homosocial desire within the structure context of triangular, heterosexual desire. She revises the erotic triangles which René Girard dexterously analyses in his book titled ‘Deceit, Desire and the Novel’ published in 1961.

Girard discovers that in any given love triangle the choice of the beloved may depend more upon the predilection of one’s rival than it does upon unmediated desire for the beloved. In such erotic rivalry the forces connecting the two rivals are often as passionate and perhaps more cohesive than those connecting the rivals to the love-object.


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- Girard offers this geometric analysis (in which the sides of the erotic triangle are read as equilateral) as a synchronic paradigm: he assumes that these patterns of rivalry for and bonding through the body of another reveal symmetry with respect to class and gender.
- Sedgwick points out that the triangle Girard describes, is not equilateral; that the structure Girard talks about most frequently involves two captious males battling for a less captious female, and that the acting out of this sexual geometry reinforces the mapping of social power.
- Girard omits from his analysis, "... categories that in fact preside over the distribution of power in every society"(22).



The diagram is an orange triangle with three vertices. The top vertex is labeled 'Mediator', the bottom-left vertex is labeled 'Subject', and the bottom-right vertex is labeled 'Object'. In the center of the triangle, the text 'Girard's Triangular Desire' is written.

Source:
Journal of Popular Romance Studies



A small portrait of a man with glasses, wearing a white shirt with a patterned scarf, standing in front of a bookshelf.

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Girard offers a geometric analysis given here in which the sides of the erotic triangles are read as equilateral. As a synchronic paradigm he assumes that these patterns of rivalry for and bonding through the body of another reveal symmetry with respect to class and gender.

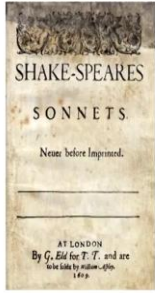
Sedgwick; however, points out that the triangle which has been described by Girard, is not equilateral that the structure he has talked about most frequently involves two captious males battling for a less captious female and that the acting out of this sexual geometry reinforces the mapping of social power.

Girard omits from his analysis categories that in fact, preside over the distribution of power in every society. Sedgwick points out the real gender asymmetries in Girard's erotic triangles, she also shows that this farcical insistence on symmetry is itself a power device, it is an illusion useful in maintaining male power relations which are not at all illusory.

The imaginary even handedness of Girard's reading of the erotic triangle gives a distorted version of how mediated desire functions. And at the same time Sedgwick is aware of the symmetrical disproportion and uses Girard's geometry to discover points of contention within a given class and gender system. With this she examines the changing ratio of homo and hetero social desires in any given cultural period.


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- After explaining Girard's shortcomings, Sedgwick analyses Shakespeare's sonnets in order to investigate the "organizing power" of this triangular drama.
 - She comments that the Sonnets make good illustrative material because both the symmetry of the sexual triangle and the asymmetry of gender assignment are startlingly crisp in them.
- She emphasizes the love and the presence of a deep bond between men in the Sonnets, suggesting that in the world sketched in these sonnets, "there is not an equal opposition or a choice posited between two such institutions as homosexuality (under whatever name) and heterosexuality".



SHAKE-SPEARES
SONNETS
None before Imprinted.
AT LONDON
By G. Eld for T. T. and are
Sole-Sellers by William-Clowes
1609.

Source: Thomas Thorpe, London




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She emphasizes the love and the presence of a deep bond between men in the sonnets suggesting that in the world sketched in "those sonnets there is not an equal opposition or a choice posited between two such institutions as homosexuality under whatever name and heterosexuality".

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- According to Sedgwick, the sonnets are “homosexual documents” containing four major characters. These are:
 - The poet
 - A fair youth
 - A rival poet
 - A dark lady
- The speaker is equally concerned with the fair youth as with the dark lady in the concluding collection of sonnets.
- Murray Krieger insists that the sex of the beloved is irrelevant to the meaning of the Sonnets—at least of sonnets 1–126 (the ones usually thought to be addressed to a man).



Source:
Nicholas Hilliard



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According to Sedgwick the sonnets are “homosexual documents” containing four major characters and these are: The poet, a fair youth, a rival poet and a dark lady. The speaker is equally concerned with a fair youth as with the dark lady in the concluding collection of sonnets.

It would be pertinent to refer to Murray Krieger who insist that the sex of the beloved is irrelevant to the meanings of the sonnets at least of sonnet 1 to 26 the ones usually thought to be addressed to a man. The sonnets present a male-male love that like the love of the Greeks is set firmly within a structure of institutionalized social relations and these social relations are carried out via the bodies of women through marriage, name, family, loyalty to progenitors and posterity.


All depend on the youths making a particular use of women that is not in the abstract, that is not seen as opposing deny or detreating from his bond to the speaker. The sonnets reproduce the desirability of male-male love a phrase, which Sedgwick has used and this love is founded in organized social arrangements.

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- Sedgwick emphasises on the difficulty of imposing heterosexuality on the youth.
 - “The first group of sonnets is notable for the almost complete absence of mention of women; women are merely the vehicles by which men breed more men, for the gratification of other men”(15)
- If any attitude toward women is presumed in the youth, it is indifference, perhaps active repulsion, as suggested in Sonnet 8.
 - “The argumentative trajectory of these early sonnets is via the heterosexual, the manly, toward the homosocial, or men”
- In the context of those earlier poems, it seems to be part of the hetero-sexualizing campaign. You can have women and still keep loving me, the speaker seems to say: “Mine be thy love, and thy love’s use their treasure”.



Source: Devereil Walter Howard



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Sedgwick emphasizes on the difficulty of imposing heterosexuality on the youth. And I quote “The first group of sonnets is notable for the almost complete absence of mention of women; women are merely the vehicles by which men breed more men, for the gratification of other men unquote”.

If any attitude toward women is presumed in the youth, it is indifference, perhaps active repulsion, as suggested in sonnet 8. “The argumentative trajectory of these early sonnets is via the heterosexual, the manly towards the homosocial, or men”. In the context of these earlier poems, it seems to be part of the hetero-sexualizing campaign.


You can have women and still keep loving me, the speaker seems to say: “Mine be thy love and thy love’s use their treasure. Women are introduced into these early sonnets mostly as suggesting possible obstacles. On the whole the endeavour of instilling in the fair youth a socialized heterosexual identity is conducted firmly under the aspect of male relationships and solicitations.

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- Sedgwick's in her analysis of Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675) points out that cuckoldry, which involves the acting out of a sexual bond (but one which is performed by one man upon another through the body of a woman) foregrounds heterosexual love "chiefly as a strategy of homosocial desire."
- Men can continue to participate "in the sum of masculine power" even if this act results in the degradation of one member of the masculine party because women continue to be exchanged as property, although as property "of a labile and dangerous sort."
- The plot of the novel revolves around Horner's impotence trick and the married life of Pinchwife and Margery.



Source: Scolar Press




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After analyzing Shakespeare's sonnets, Sedgwick scrutinizes the motives of cuckoldry in her analysis of Wycherley's *The Country Wife*. Sedgwick points out that cuckoldry which involves the acting out of his sexual bond foregrounds heterosexual love "chiefly as a strategy of homosocial desire".


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(Refer Slide Time: 28:13)

- The witty Harcourt, Horner's friend, wins the hand of Pinchwife's sister Alithea, who is, when the play opens, engaged to the shallow fop Sparkish.
- Horner, unlike Sparkish and Pinchwife, can manipulate the rules of the symbolic circulation of male power through women's bodies because he is willing to risk this liability.
- He feigns powerlessness and feminization in the very moment he is seizing control over the system of sexual exchange that leads to mastery over other men.
- Sparkish, on the other hand, fails to reach this position of mastery because he is too obvious about his desire to circulate any women in his "possession" to gain power, while Pinchwife is completely obsessed by the possibility of being cuckolded.



Source: Sergio Reynoso



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The witty Harcourt, Horner's friend, wins the hand of Pinchwife's sister Alithea, who is, when the play opens, engaged to the shallow fop Sparkish. Unlike Sparkish and Pinchwife, Horner can manipulate the rules of the symbolic circulation of male power through women's bodies because he is willing to risk his liability. He feels powerlessness and feminization in the very moment he is seizing control over the system of sexual exchange that leads to mastery over other men.

Sparkish, on the other hand, fails to reach this position of mastery because he is too obvious about his desire to circulate any women in his "possession" to gain power, while Pinchwife is completely obsessed by the possibility of being cuckolded. Horner, the man who seizes the role of male androgen who stands in what appears to be a symmetrical relation halfway between men and women is actually at the asymmetrical epic of power.


In concluding this analysis Sedgwick notes that the women in the country wife are compulsorily involved in male homosocial bonds. Despite a reliance on hierarchy cuckoldry is a structure of desire nevertheless prolongs the homosocial bond not as a moment of brotherhood, but is a harbinger of exaggerated mastery and required subordination between men.

(Refer Slide Time: 29:51)

- In her chapter on Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) Sedgwick introduces a new historical valence.
- The family becomes available as the sentimental context for power relations which becomes more instrumental and manipulative than those in the sonnets or *The Country Wife*.
- Sedgwick describes this new mode of power as "imperialism with a baby face" and analyses the "glamour of familial pathos" which settles over men's designs for self-empowerment in eighteenth and nineteenth century novels.
- Sedgwick notes, for example, that working folk are "pastoralized" and the aristocracy expropriated for bourgeois ends by the narrator of the novel.



Source: Nabu Press



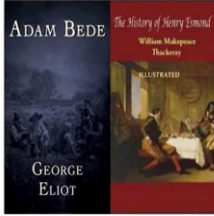
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In her chapter on Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*, Sedgwick introduces a new historical valence. The family becomes available as the sentimental context for power relations, which becomes more instrumental and manipulative than those in the sonnets or *The Country Wife*. Sedgwick describes this new mode of power as "imperialism with a baby face" and analyses the "glamour of familial pathos" which settles over men's designs for self-empowerment in 18th and 19th century novels.


She notes for example, that working folk are "pastoralized" and the aristocracy expropriated for bourgeois ends by the narrator of the novel. The mobilization of a new narrative celebrating the repetitiously privatized bourgeois family becomes one way of instituting a new and more delicately painful misogyny as well as explicitly economic mode of bonding between men.

(Refer Slide Time: 31:00)

- Sedgwick suggests that in later works, class becomes a more important term in the analysis of an exchange of masculine power.
- In the context of *Adam Bede* (1859) and *Henry Esmond* (1852), Sedgwick concludes that "in the presence of a woman who can be seen as pitiable or contemptible, men are able to exchange power and to confirm each other's value even in the context of the remaining inequalities in their power" (160).



Source: Open Road Media Romance | Source: Independently Published




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Sedgwick suggests that in later works, class becomes a more important term in the analysis of an exchange of masculine power. In the context of *Adam Bede* and *Henry Esmond*, Sedgwick concludes that “in the presence of a woman who can be seen as pitiable or contemptible, men are able to exchange power and to confirm each other’s value even in the context of the remaining inequalities in their power” unquote.

This paradigm aptly summarizes the homosocial dynamic of *Esmond* and *Adam Bede* and seems instantly and terrifyingly applicable to several other narratives.

(Refer Slide Time: 31:45)

- What is masked in these novels' sexual pyrotechnics is not only an unattractive machismo, but a covert pacification for painful class differences:
"The sexually pitiable or contemptible female figure is a solvent that not only facilitates the relative democratization that grows up with capitalism and cash exchange, but goes a long way - for the men whom she leaves bonded together -toward palliating its gaps and failures" (160).
- Sedgwick shows how triangular relationships involving the exchange and degradation of women have become a central and destructive paradigm in the lives of people, as well as in the homosocial divagations of English literature.



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What is masked in the sexual pyrotechnics of these novels is not only an unattractive machismo, but a covert pacification for painful class differences. I quote “the sexually pitiable or contemptible female figure is a solvent that not only facilitates the relative democratization that grows up with capitalism and cash exchange, but goes a long way - for the men whom she leaves bonded together towards palliating its gaps and failures”.


Sedgwick shows how triangular relationships involving the exchange and degradation of women have become a central and destructive paradigm in the lives of people as well as in the homosocial divagations of English literature. The structures of homosocial desire that Sedgwick uncovers are ubiquitous in western literature even if they are often read through other ideologically screens. Her ideas invite a new critical vigilance and yet strikes so close to home that they invite their own palliative repression.

Sedgwick also pointed to the absence of lesbianism in between men noting that her extended reading of Thackeray’s novel ‘Henry Esmond’ was the only one that explicitly considered women’s homo social relations. Her earlier work seems to subscribe to the influential second wave feminist notion of the lesbian continuum.


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The Lesbian Continuum and Female Homosocial Desire

- Deriving from poet and theorist Adrienne Rich’s influential 1980 essay, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Experience”, the idea of the lesbian continuum was that female homosocial and homosexual bonds were relatively continuous.
- Sedgwick felt that the diacritical opposition between the homosexual and homosocial was much less thorough and dichotomous for women than for men.



Adrienne Rich
Source: npr.org




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The idea of the lesbian continuum was that female homosocial and homosexual bonds were relatively continuous, this idea has been derived from Rich’s essay which was published in 1980 with the title of “Compulsory heterosexuality and Lesbian

Experience”. Sedgwick felt that the diacritical opposition between the homosexual and homosocial was much less thorough and dichotomous for women than for men.

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- In *Between Men*, Sedgwick asserted that there was an intelligible continuum of aims, emotions and valuations linking lesbianism with other forms of women’s interrelation, such as the bonds of sisters, friends, mothers and daughters, women’s aunts and nieces’ networking and feminist activism.
- Sedgwick pointed to the homophobia and power relations undermining the would-be solidarity of many women’s groups, where white bourgeois women sometimes felt threatened by the experiential authority of more visibly oppressed women, who in turn sometimes suffered from palpable double disempowerments such as discriminations on the grounds of their race, class or sexuality.



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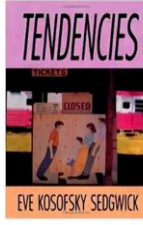
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In *Between Men, An Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick pioneered the usage of a set of conceptual tools for deconstructing assumptions about sex, gender, sexuality and desire and thereby demonstrating the pervasive mechanisms of operation and homophobia.

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- These tools were part of an intellectual tradition of “inveterate, gorgeous generativity”, “speculative generosity”, “daring”, “permeability” and “activism” which Sedgwick describes as queer reading .
- In the introduction to her third book, *Tendencies*, Sedgwick explains it further.
- She begins by describing the childhood experience of forming intent attachments to “a few cultural objects” (3).
- Sedgwick described how the ‘egalitarian bliss of girls undressing together’ for ballet was subsequently turned into the ‘rapt recital and celebration of a rigorously meritocratic hierarchy’ (186).



Source: Duke University Press



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These tools were part of an intellectual tradition of “inveterate gorgeous generativity”, “speculative generosity”, “daring”, “permeability” and “activism” which Sedgwick describes as queer reading. In the introduction to her third book ‘Tendencies’, Sedgwick explains it further and begins by describing the childhood experience of forming intent attachments to “a few cultural objects”.


Sedgwick described how the egalitarian bliss of girls undressing together for ballet was subsequently turned into the rapt recital and celebration of a rigorously meritocratic hierarchy. It was not just that women’s homosocial bonds were fractured by lesbian panic. Lesbian communities were also fractured by differences in class, ethnicity, ability and desirability.

(Refer Slide Time: 36:06)

- According to Sedgwick, it was not just that women's homosocial bonds were fractured by lesbian panic, lesbian communities were also fractured by differences in class, ethnicity, ability and desirability.
- For instance, in her discussion of the first season of the popular lesbian television show "The L Word", Sedgwick emphasised the differences in generation, ethnicity, class and single/ couple status within the overall 'lesbian ecology' (10).
- Ultimately, Sedgwick's approach to queer reading positions the strategy as a means of survival for LGBTIQ people who are confronted with exclusion, marginalisation, homophobia, shame and violence on a regular basis.



Source: IMDb



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Sedgwick illustrates it further by referring to the popular lesbian television show “The L Word” and points out the differences in generation, ethnicity etc within the overall lesbian ecology. Ultimately, Sedgwick’s approach to queer reading positions strategy as a means of survival for LGBTIQ people who are confronted with exclusion, marginalization, homophobia, shame and violence on a regular basis.

So, in this module we have looked at Sedgwick’s contribution to the queer theory and analyzed her work *Between Men*. Her third book *Epistemology of the Closet* pays more significant attention to the mutilating effects of male homosocial desire. We shall analyze this major work in the next module.

Thank you.

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