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abstracts (May 1),
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About

Gender forum is an online, peer reviewed academic journal dedicated to the discussion of gender issues. As an electronic journal, *gender forum* offers a free-of-charge platform for the discussion of gender-related topics in the fields of literary and cultural production, media and the arts as well as politics, the natural sciences, medicine, the law, religion and philosophy. Inaugurated by Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier in 2002, the quarterly issues of the journal have focused on a multitude of questions from different theoretical perspectives of feminist criticism, queer theory, and masculinity studies. *gender forum* also includes reviews and occasionally interviews, fictional pieces and poetry with a gender studies angle.

Opinions expressed in articles published in *gender forum* are those of individual authors and not necessarily endorsed by the editors of *gender forum*.

Submissions

Target articles should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition) and should be between 5,000 and 8,000 words in length. Please make sure to number your paragraphs and include a bio-blurb and an abstract of roughly 300 words. Files should be sent as email attachments in Word format. Please send your manuscripts to gender-forum@uni-koeln.de.

We always welcome reviews on recent releases in Gender Studies! Submitted reviews should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition), have numbered paragraphs, and should be between 750 and 1,000 words in length. Please note that the reviewed releases ought to be no older than 24 months. In most cases, we are able to secure a review copy for contributors.

Article Publishing

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Editorial

1 When we talk about gender or Gender Studies, it is often assumed that the experiences being discussed are exclusively those of women. This assumption is likely owed to the close relationship of Gender Studies to Women's and Feminist Studies, as well as Gender Studies origins in Women's Studies departments. While Women's Studies is concerned primarily with the experiences of women, however, the basis of Gender Studies is the idea of all genders as socially, historically and culturally specific constructs.

2 This issue of Gender Forum is dedicated specifically to the field of Masculinity Studies. In their contributions, our authors explore masculinity in a wide variety of different contexts, such as gay masculinity, constructions of male friendship, Arab-Muslim Masculinity and Fascist ideals of masculinity.

3 Our first article, Patrick Fischer's "Textual and Sexual Revision: The Dynamics of Queer Identification(s) in Henry James' *The Middle Years*", is concerned with the queer identity formation process engaged in by the protagonist of James' novella. More precisely, it will be set forth how the story's central motifs, the reading and the revisioning routine, can be considered as allegorizing a quest for signification of which an unambiguous meaning can never be ascertained. Fischer argues that the resulting defamiliarization of the self leads to the emergence of a more diffuse and dissonant self, a queer self.

4 In his article entitled "The Question of the Jamesian Presence in Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty*", Wisam Abdul Jabbar reads Alan Hollinghurst's novel through the lense of Henry James. The paper explores the presence of James as a figure in the fictional world of the book via the protagonist's academic studies on James, and examines how Hollinghurst employs the Jamesian presence through the literary techniques of ironies and implications.

5 In the article "Of Male Friendship and Spirals in *The Lion King*, *Vertigo* and the *American Pie* Saga", Marc Demont presents an alternative to Freudian readings of *The Lion King* and focuses on the film's depiction of the threat of male homosocial bonds. He posits that, if in the *Lion King* as well as in *American Pie*, male friendships can sometimes become a threat to the patriarchal organization, it is due to their particular temporality, defined here as the timeless *jouissance* of friendship, which jeopardizes the temporality of the Circle of Life.

6 Gibson NCube, in his article "Arab-Muslim Masculinity on Trial: Gay Muslim Writers Broaching Homosexuality", examines the importance of masculinity in Arab-Muslim societies before analysing the qualities that these societies deem imperative of masculinity.

Ultimately, the paper will attempt to theorise the manner in which homosexuality destabilises these preconceptions about Arab-Muslim masculinity and male sexuality.

7 Ryan Stryffeler, in his contribution entitled “Masculinity and Fascism in Three Dystopic American Novels”, focuses on novels by Sinclair Lewis, Philip K. Dick and Philip Roth that examine the ways in which a Fascist regime appropriates the masculine discourse to legitimize its hold over the people and justify repression against marginal groups. In all of these works, the regime firmly controls both access to and definition of normative male behavior, promotes traditional Victorian concepts of manhood, and alienates and marginalizes “other” men outside this homogeneous concept.

8 The final contribution comes from Talel Ben Jemia, and is entitled “‘Not Like the Rest of Us’ – Masculine Idyll and the (Im)possibility of Love in Gore Vidal’s *The City and the Pillar*”. In this article, he deals with Gore Vidal's controversial fourth novel *The City and the Pillar* (1948), which has been noted for its explicit portrayal of homosexuality in post-World War II. Ben Jemia focuses on an examination of how the relation of homosexual individual and the external world, including homosexual subculture as well as heteronormative mainstream culture, is regulated by culturally and socially prescribed narratives of manhood. The aim of this essay is to explore how Vidal's novel negotiates the struggle of the homosexual individual to express and pursue love and desire while still adhering to a standardized normative masculinity.

9 This issue also features a book review by Lauren Specht, of J. Jack Halberstam’s *Gaga Feminism. Sex, Gender and the End of Normal*.

Textual and Sexual Revisions: The Dynamics of Queer Identification(s) in Henry James' *The Middle Years*

By Patrick Fischer, Hamburg, Germany

Abstract:

As one way of approaching the heterogeneity of potential textual meanings, the present discussion on one of James' earlier short stories, "The Middle Years," serves the objective of reading a self-questioning and ultimately queer identity formation process into the protagonist's pursuit of meaning. More precisely, it will be set forth how the story's central motifs, the reading and the revisioning routine, can be considered as allegorizing a quest for signification of which an unambiguous meaning can never be ascertained. Moreover, within this process of identity formation the developed pursuit of signification will be deliberated as marking an internal negotiation process of the central and unfixed self's various failed and/or queer identity possibilities. Ultimately, the close considerations of the process of introspection will be substantiated as intensely unsettling, but also as opening up ways to generate a complex and dynamic concept of the self, which constantly strives to repudiate other possibilities and which struggles to set up boundaries against alternative selves. By means of defamiliarizing the self, a new, more diffuse and dissonant, in other words, queer self is given birth to.

1 In the 1898 preface to his most renowned ghost story "The Turn of the Screw", Henry James writes:

There is not only from beginning to end of the matter not an inch of expatiation, but my values are positively all blanks save so far as an excited horror, a promoted pity, a created expertness – on which punctual effects of strong causes no writer can ever fail to plume himself – proceed to read into them more or less fantastic figures. (128)

James goes on explicating that, by these said terms, the author of the text himself is not only "released from weak specifications" about any monstrous and possibly outrageous details, but the "utmost conceivability" is fashioned by the "appreciation, speculation, and imagination" of the reader (ibid.). By aspiring to leave or purposely create absence at the very center of the text, James, in his theorizing of signification, evacuates the idea of essence against the realist assumption that there always is an essential core. As the absence of value is distinguished as the true resource and the blank is considered precious, only "fantastic figures" remain, whose specification is left to the reader's own interpretative authority in order to create the best possible effect. Following this argument, signification in James' writing is to be largely appreciated as a production rather than as a product, ultimately leaving the pursuit of the core meaning and the excitement generated by this knowledge-seeking experience at the heart of James' theory of representation that fundamentally evades definiteness and, in doing so, inexorably propagates ambiguity.

2 In her wistful opening reflections in *Tendencies* on the high rates of suicides among queer youth, Eve Sedgwick describes the intent attachment queer children cultivate to cultural objects and those queer adults maintain to cultural texts, “whose meaning seem[s] mysterious, excessive, or oblique,” as the prime resource for queer survival (3). For Sedgwick, the “irreducible multilayeredness and multiphrasedness of what queer survival means” demands that the “seamless and univocal whole,” in which sexual identity and all its multifarious characteristics are supposed to be organized, be called into question (ibid.). Within the strategy for queer survival, pursued in all segments of day-to-day life, unitary significations of sexual identity, aligning and molding together the numerous and most diverse dimensions of one’s sexuality, need be disarticulated and disengaged. Sedgwick, therefore, outlines an approach of queer (mis)reading practices, i.e. reading queer. This is finally brought to a conclusion by her potent definition of queer: “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically” (8).

3 Considering the two ruminations on evasive signification in relation to each other, one is soon tempted to posit Sedgwick’s reading project as the perfect corollary of James’ reflections about his writing. The coincidence is not all too surprising. Writing positively queer textual subjects in an era which aims at the constant generation and rigidification of clear-cut definitions and which, in particular, goes out of its way to read “homosexuals” in terms of “a radically potent, if negatively charged, relation to signifying practices” and which subjects them to “a cultural imperative that viewed them as inherently textual – as bodies that might well bear a ‘hallmark’ that could, and must, be read” (Edelman 6), can finally only be achieved by writing blanks and, consequently, by leaving “more or less fantastic figures” to the conceptualization of the reader.

4 Given the absence of definite signifiers what remains central within James’ practices of representation is not so much the (missing) signifier itself but the *pursuit* of signification. Especially in many of James’ tales in which he shows a self-ascribed “predilection for poor sensitive gentlemen” the main characters set off on pursuits of such a kind in which they seek to explore their own signification, their identification (Preface to “The Altar of the Dead” IX). What is clear in these narratives in the first instance, then, is that a multiplicity of meanings and textual levels leave open the possibilities of myriad readings and interpretations. The protagonists’ projections of their own identity upon various screens can be seen to allegorize their distinct disputes with their alternative selves. This is why as one

way of approaching the heterogeneity of potential meanings, the present discussion on one of James' earlier short stories, "The Middle Years," shall serve the objective of reading a self-questioning and ultimately queer identity formation process into the pursuit of meaning. More precisely, it will be set forth how the story's central motifs, the reading and the revisioning routine, can be considered as allegorizing a quest for signification of which an unambiguous meaning can never be ascertained. In accordance with James' contention about leaving his "values" all blank, thereby creating excitement, "punctual effects" and prevailing "fantastic figures," it will be demonstrated that incongruity and ambiguity remain James' critical objectives in respect to identity construction. Moreover, within this process of identity formation the developed pursuit of signification will be deliberated as marking an internal negotiation process of the central and unfixed self's various identity possibilities that fail to consolidate themselves within a conventional fixed frame of notions of identity, and that, consequently, might dually be termed queer. Ultimately, quite analogous to Sedgwick's positing queer as both an "identity-constituting" and an "identity-fracturing discourse," the close considerations of the process of introspection will be substantiated as intensely unsettling, but also as opening up ways to generate a complex and dynamic concept of the self, which constantly strives to repudiate other possibilities and which struggles to set up boundaries against alternative selves (*Tendencies* 9). Indeed, for this latter process of queer self-constitution, identity-fracturing, which Sally Munt characterizes more succinctly in her understanding of queer as "a project of defamiliarization, a sexed-up version of the Russian Formalist's conception of *ostranenie*," will prove to be a precondition (23). By means of defamiliarizing the self, a new, more diffuse and dissonant, in other words, queer self is given birth to.

5 "The Middle Years" stands out as a particularly pertinent starting point for the present discussion of queered Jamesian identity formation due to its thematic footing, which involves the scrutinization of a self-examination endeavor surfacing as a demanding and strenuous process of revisioning. "The Middle Years" leaves the exact makeup of the self as a text blank and rather shows by what means and in which way the negotiation of identity is engendered and advanced through a homosocial and homoerotic bond between two men, a writer and his admirer. As will be demonstrated, the screen and the reference point for this examination and negotiation of self is to be discerned within Dencombe's own fictional writing because it is within the protagonist's literature that he comes to negotiate his identity by means of studying and re-evaluating his own fiction through the lenses of an accomplice, another man who is deeply fascinated and obsessed with the writings. The self-negotiation,

then, works through a set-up of a purely homosocial triangular structure involving the writer's own as well as the reader's passion for Dencombe's pieces of fiction, which will further be considered as a trope for the author's creative self. As a result, the infatuation with the younger creative self can be read as having homo- and autoerotic underpinnings, a fixation, which will not only be established as the driving force behind the process of self-examination, but which will further have warrant to regard the textual revisioning in terms of sexual revisioning.

6 "The Middle Years" opens with a close description of the mediocrity and mundanity of the setting and, supported by James dense prose, already allows for constitutive inferences concerning its protagonist. Bournemouth, a seaside and health resort, shows "pretensions of the south", yet only "so far as you could have it in the north" ("The Middle Years" 211). Although the resort seems to have disappointed him initially, within the present picture of languor, the slowly convalescing writer Dencombe, who is immediately exhausted when climbing the stairs in the garden, "was reconciled to the prosaic" of the scene (ibid.). At a first glance, these tranquil contemplations indicate that for Dencombe contentment has been achieved by his mere growing accustomed to his present circumstances. However, despite his happiness at his currently "reasserted strength," he suddenly hesitates in his thoughts realizing that "he was better, of course, but better, after all, than what?" (ibid.). His abrupt recognition of his mere relative recuperation at once goes beyond the physical, marking a similar regret for the loss of his potency as a writer: "He should never again, as at one or two great moments of the past, be better than himself" (ibid.). In order for the said proposition to have any sensible communicative substance, one has to assume that Dencombe compares his present self ("he") to his past existence, the younger, creative writerly self, which is expressed through the reflexive pronoun "himself." At this point the distinction and indeed the confusion of pronoun reference already indicate the split between the current self and the personal reflection. In a swift flow of consciousness prompted by his first self-query, his frame of mind rapidly dwindles as he further becomes aware of or rather retrieves the recognition of his lost potentials: "The infinite of life had gone, and what was left of the dose was a small glass engraved like a thermometer by the apothecary" (ibid.). More accurately, what he seems to have lost is his capacity to grasp the profundity of the "spirit of man," whence his present and real self can do nothing but sit and stare "at the sea, which appeared all surface and twinkle, far shallower than the spirit of man" (ibid.). Above all, he regrets to no longer possess the potent capacity to access "the abyss of human illusion that was the real, the tideless deep" (ibid.). The ostensibly oxymoronic combination of human illusion as

reality does not only underscore the impressive insightfulness of the artist, but it serves to demonstrate that it is the writer's unique talent to penetrate the abyss of "human illusion" – by way of creative imagination – in order to recuperate the reality of the "spirit of man" (ibid.). Lamenting his lost creativity, Dencombe seems to plunge into his own abyss. At the end of the opening paragraph, the atmosphere has moved from the unassuming description of the mediocre setting at the outset to a strangely gloomy mood of world-weariness and melancholy, finally paving the way for the reader to gain access to and to descend into the protagonist's abyss, his downright depressive condition that further consolidates itself thereafter.

7 Despite his affliction concerning his own lost qualifications, "poor Dencombe sighed for" having "a second age, an extension," for "[a]h for another go! – ah for a better chance!" ("The Middle Years" 214). Then again, he deeply feels "the pang that had been sharpest during the last few years – the sense of ebbing time, of shrinking opportunity; and now he felt not so much that his last chance was going as that it was gone indeed" (213). Dencombe's expressed grief over his art finally culminates in his first look at his newly published novel, *The Middle Years*, and his inability to recollect anything of its content: "he had become conscious of a strange alienation. He had forgotten what his book was about" (212-3). The "strange alienation" from his own work is certainly remarkable, as it posits an estrangement of the personal and the literary self, i.e. the authorial self. This division of selves is further disclosed, moreover, when Dencombe, exhausted and burned-out, goes on grieving over all the sacrifices he has made for his art – "He had done all he should ever do, and yet hadn't done what he wanted" (213). Within this statement, then, Dencombe discriminates between a literary career or existence and a private reality, whereas the former has clearly developed at the expense of the author's personal life, an actuality about which Dencombe seems to have rather agonizing feelings. Still, although he regrets having "struggled and suffered for it [the literary career], making sacrifices not to be counted," even at this rather cheerless state of his life he contemplates that "[t]here was an infinite charm for [him] in feeling as he had never felt before that diligence *vincit omnia*" (214). These last words are, of course, a paraphrase of Virgil's proverbial "amor vincit omnia," potentially indicating Dencombe's complacency about his life's work.

8 The proposition about the division of the selves is further enhanced by the protagonist's reading of his own work of fiction, which has just arrived as a pre-published volume. Despite the lack of details concerning the contents of the book, the analogy of the title of James' tale, which, after all, relates to the affairs of the middle-aged Dencombe, and

that of Dencombe's novel, clearly implies that *The Middle Years* is similarly concerned with autobiographical idiosyncracies of the protagonist. The two works of fiction seem to be polysemous only to the degree that "The Middle Years" first and foremost examines the mature writer's reflection on his younger, literary creative self. The literary expression of his younger self he finds in his autobiographical novel. These compositional features, then, leave Dencombe with a split sense of self; one involving his present existence and one his literary self finding its expression in a semi-fictional text, his autobiography. The predicament of his complete detachment from his creative self falls into place when he begins to read his own novel which leaves him astonished at the fact that "it was extraordinarily good" (213). By means of reading his own literature, he "lived once more into his story" and "was drawn down" by the force of his literary self as it were, "as by a siren's hand, to where, *in the dim underworld of fiction*, the great glazed tank of art, strange silent subjects float" (ibid.; own emphasis). This dense passage on Dencombe's extraordinary self-reading experience allows for several paramount readings. Firstly, it demonstrates the power of the detached literary reflection of the self to entice the personal, the reader self, into its own separate world. Secondly, notwithstanding Dencombe's sacrifices in the actual world, he seems to have one source of reparation as he is able to actually "live" in the fictional (under-) world, down "the abyss of human illusion," with all the vast possibilities and "strange subjects" that the creation of art allows (ibid.). The exact pattern of how the relation to the literary other by way of reading is established will have to be further explored, noting for now that at the moment of Dencombe's diving into the underworld, he has already made eye contact with a man who is completely absorbed with a book bound in an "alluringly red" cover (212).

9 As the plot further unfolds, distortions owing to the mode of focalization leave the reader to assume that Dencombe's certainly cannot be considered an objective version of the proceedings. This leaves Perry Westbrook to contend that Dencombe, in his character and his struggle, merely be viewed as an instance of pure irony (137). However, it might sooner be useful to consider the tale in terms of "dream and myth, fiction on the brink of dissolving into abstraction" as Joyce Carol Oates suggests (259). Regardless of these limitations on reliability, some of the protagonist's central qualities are clearly discernable already at the outset of the story where Dencombe proves to be intensely self-absorbed, even nearing solipsism through a mindset that regards other characters as only "perform[ing]" for his "recreation" (212). Moreover, he appears to be suffering from his constant solitude and, finally, he shows a distinctive melancholic (dis)connection to his literature / his literary self, whose loss he grieves and who has the force to lure and absorb him still (ibid.). Undoubtedly,

to the extent that Dencombe experiences a deep anxiety about his improbable “extension” and “second chance” in order to “better himself”, and to the extent that his coming to terms with his own literary self appears to be beyond his control, the reader, through the present mode of focalization, is indeed led to feel sympathetic with “poor Dencombe” (“The Middle Years” 211; 214; 225).

10 Dencombe’s strained connection to his literary reflection, his past, younger and ultimately fictionalized self, takes a sudden turn as soon as he meets the young physician Dr. Hugh. As has already been alluded to, Dencombe, initially, is unable to make out his own text. Only when he sees Dr. Hugh and when Hugh reads passages from the novel to him is Dencombe able to reconnect to his seemingly lost self and, consequently, to rehabilitate his creative self. On a more material level, Hugh draws Dencombe out of the depression by means of making him appreciate his self / himself once again. Dencombe is psychologically restored through a more comfortable and more immediate relation of his selves, facilitated through another man’s reading of his own work as well as the other man’s admiration, his “infatuation” with Dencombe’s literature and his literary creative self (“The Middle Years” 217). Regarding this triangular structure of desire, Leland Person’s queer reading of the short story can be essentially subscribed to when he contends that “Dencombe’s creative rejuvenation depends in large part, then, upon the mirroring effect of another man’s admiration. Hugh serves not only as Dencombe’s double but also as the subject of a homo-aesthetic desire that renders Dencombe a desirable object” (140).

11 At their first meeting, Dencombe is amazed and seemingly bewildered when he realizes that Dr. Hugh, while neglecting the company of the women during their stroll on the beach, is completely absorbed with reading Dencombe’s novel. When they eventually meet face to face, Dr. Hugh clarifies straight away that he is not the reviewer for whom Dencombe has originally mistaken him, but Dencombe refrains from giving away his own identity as the author of the text. As a consequence, they both inhabit the similar, or the shared position of the passive reader sitting on the bench by the shore and enjoying the pleasures of reading literature. The ostensibly identical status as readers of a mutually appreciated text allows for the ensuing dialogue in which Dr. Hugh, “the greatest admirer in the new generation,” who is “enamoured with literary form,” opens his heart about his “infatuation” with Dencombe’s oeuvre, in particular with his last novel, which “is the best thing he has done yet,” as well as with the novelist as a “man” (“The Middle Years” 216, 217). While reading to Dencombe, [Dr. Hugh] grew vivid, in the balmy air, to his companion, for whose deep refreshment he seemed to have been sent; and was particularly ingenuous in describing how recently he had

become acquainted, and how instantly infatuated, with the only man who had put flesh between the ribs of an art that was starving on superstitions. (“The Middle Years” 217)

The metaphor of art, and specifically of Dencombe’s autobiographical *The Middle Years*, recognized as a physical body elicits several implications. First of all, it once again equates the piece of literature with the author figure. On yet another level, it makes the fiction and, crucially, the reader’s relation to it “gr[o]w vivid” (ibid.). The body of Dencombe’s writing becomes the object of a fixation, betraying the homoerotic relation to this object on Dr. Hugh’s part.

12 Dencombe, on the other hand, cannot be deemed above suspicion seeing that Hugh’s frank confession has been set in motion by Dencombe’s own scheme of hiding his identity. Seemingly unperturbed, he takes in Hugh’s cordial corroboration of his admiration, acknowledging that “his visitor’s attitude promised him a luxury of intercourse” (218). In fact, in due course of their conversation, it becomes obvious how Dencombe perfectly controls the situation avowing that “[t]his young friend, for a representative of the new psychology, was himself easily hypnotised, and if he became abnormally communicative it was only a sign of his real subjection” (ibid.). Subsequently, Dencombe plainly takes advantage of Hugh’s amenability to influence him seeing that Hugh follows his instructions, although Dencombe is not yet known as the adored writer. How exactly Dencombe can make use of Hugh is notably explicable within the outlined economy of desire: Through Hugh’s “infatuation” with Dencombe’s creative literary self, Dencombe is able to desire his own body of work again, a corpus from which he had been alienated just until Hugh’s arrival (ibid.). Given the division of selves, one might recognize Dencombe’s as either homo- or autoerotic desire, induced and redirected through Hugh. It is this desire which appears to be vital for the convalescence of the writer when it becomes manifest as a compensation for his previously unobtainable “second chance”, “his extension,” as it empowers him to integrate his personal with his creative self, and, moreover, to come to terms with the worth of his work of art as it stands (211; 214).

13 What seems to be singular and crucial to the all-male exchange of desire is its one-dimensional direction to a desired object that is “merely” fiction, an aesthetic piece of art. Hence, the cover of the object of desire is rather extraordinarily described as “alluringly red” and further as “duly meretricious” (212). It seems to be equally important, moreover, that the core of the book, its content, remains void, so that Hugh’s infatuation is primarily owed to the literary style of the prose. Nevertheless, reading and discussing *The Middle Years* with his friend, leave Dencombe “lost, he was lost, he was lost if he couldn’t be saved” and with “a

deep demonstration of desire” (220). Regarding these characteristics of the object of desire, its aesthetics and style over content, the homo- and autoeroticism outlined so far ought to be more accurately defined in terms of the shared aesthetic fascination with art, all of which seems to be captured pointedly by Person’s expression of “homo-aestheticism” (140 ff). Along these lines, homo-aestheticism might furthermore be apt to describe the nonce-core of Dencombe’s fiction, a space that is located by the writer only now: “Only to-day, at last, had he begun to see, so that what he had hitherto done was a movement without a direction” (221). Through Hugh he has learned “to find the point of view, to pick up the pearl,” which, in Dencombe’s own words, signifies the “unwritten” (226).

14 In view of this hermeneutics it still needs to be discussed to what degree Dencombe’s scheme of redirected and enforced self-absorption in his affiliation with Dr. Hugh works to rehabilitate him psychologically. Undoubtedly, through his own writing adored by and read to him by another man, he has moved from a deep feeling of alienation to a restoration of his own self. This recovering occurs all of a sudden in a virtual epiphany: “Everything came back to him, but came back with a wonder, came back, above all, with a high and magnificent beauty” (213). He has clearly sought redemption through Dr. Hugh, an appeal which is underscored by the mystically religious language permeating the text. Hugh as the “servant of the altar” with “the old reverence in faith,” is similarly labeled as “an apparition [...] above the law” that allowed Dencombe to be “charmed [...] into forgetting that he looked for a magic that was not of this world” (222). With Hugh retaining all these competences, “[w]ho would work the miracle for him but the young man who could combine such lucidity with such passion?” (ibid.). Through the more than sympathetic reading of Dencombe’s *The Middle Years*, his fictional and literary self, Dr. Hugh seems to embody Dencombe’s chance for salvation, a miracle that essentially comprises Dencombe’s recognition that “[h]is career was over, no doubt, but it was over, after all with *that*” (213). The highlighted “that” on the surface refers to Dencombe’s reading of his newly published work and, more immediately, to “an emotion peculiar and intense,” made possible through a homo-aesthetic reading practice implemented by the strong faith of the altar’s servant (ibid.).

15 Notwithstanding the reparative faculty owing to the erotic force of the sketched reader-relationship pattern, complete reconciliation seems to be thwarted by several arising complications. Naturally, the palpable predicament is given through the doctor’s “rid[ing] two horses at once,” his concentration on the writer when, in fact, the expected and financially rewarded attention ought to be directed to the countess, “who paid so much for his fidelity that she must have it all: she refused him the right to other sympathies” (223).

Dencombe is deeply upset by Miss Vernham, the only non-queer character in the anecdote and hence an emblem of fierce heteronormativity, who rigidly demands that he “leave Doctor Hugh alone” (ibid.). When she further informs him about the inheritance apparently intended to be bequeathed on the doctor, Dencombe weakly acquiesces to abandon Hugh for good, which, he is sure, would denote “the probable sacrifice of his ‘extension’” (224; 225). However, Dr. Hugh’s devotion is set not on the factual life and his future, but on Dencombe’s fiction and his past: Still in high spirits, he declares “I gave her up for you,” “I chose to accept, whatever they might be, the consequences of my infatuation [...]. A fortune be hanged! It’s your own fault if I can’t get your things out of my head” (227). From worldly (and female) troubles and contracts the pair seems to be utterly secluded so that this first obstacle to Dencombe’s reconciliation can easily be overcome.

16 Nonetheless, within the male-male taxonomy of desire a first complication arises through Dencombe’s textual revising of his novel, a practice which can be seen to correspond to the modification of and negotiation with the desired object, the creative literary self. Deeply engrossed in putting forward exceptionally beautiful expressions from *The Middle Years*, Dr. Hugh mistakably consults Dencombe’s own volume and is completely taken aback when finding that it has been significantly amended. Hugh “looked grave an instant” and “suddenly change[d] colour,” and Dencombe, who, apparently having been caught in the act, directly mirrors the marker of shame – “for an instant [it] made him change colour” – when Hugh reproachfully remarks “I see you’ve been altering the text!” (219). Dencombe “stammered, at any rate ambiguously, [...] before, stretching out a hand to his visitor with a plaintive cry, he lost his senses altogether” (ibid.). The forceful suspension that transpires and ascends to a climax, leaving the younger stunned and speechless, and the elder losing his consciousness altogether, certainly corroborates the significance of the revelation at hand. The secret discovered, is, of course, the authorial secret, Dencombe’s identity. In fact, having recuperated from the first shock, Hugh’s countenance expresses “more than a suspicion of his [Dencombe’s] identity” (ibid.). Dencombe, in turn, after having regained consciousness, realizes that “[t]hat identity was ineffaceable now” and, what’s more, that he was “disappointed, disgusted” about it, reproaching himself ostensibly in a reference to his physical health that “[h]e oughtn’t to have exposed himself to strangers” (ibid.). Finally, Dr. Hugh, sitting by his bedside when Dencombe wakes again, remarks frankly: “I know all about you now” (ibid.).

17 The protracted postponement for divulging his identity and the final culmination through its revelation, in the first instance, provide evidence for Dencombe’s strained relation

to his seemingly alienated and lost younger creative self. By way of disavowal, Dencombe's personality clearly seems to portray a lacking sense of completion. After all, through Dr. Hugh, Dencombe has just been able to reestablish a (homo- and auto-aesthetic) relation to his younger self, apparently only by means of feigning and sustaining the façade of a shared reader position. Moreover, deferring the self-acknowledgement of his real authorial identity has sustained the deployment and exchange of homo- and auto-aesthetic desire whose dynamic seems to have increased precisely through the suspension of both exposure and of closure. Person's analysis complements this reading as it explains that Dencombe's fainting at another man's gaze at his "fingering" his own style, an undertaking that Person somewhat daringly specifies as "an act of writerly masturbation," is explicable through the violation of privacy on the one hand, and the power shift that being "outed" entails on the other (141). As a consequence of the now outed "ineffaceable" identity, Dencombe, having tasted "a patch of heaven," slides back into his abyss of despair: "He felt as if he had fallen into a hole too deep to descry any little patch of heaven" ("The Middle Years" 219). Then again, as the events unfold, we learn about "gallant Dr. Hugh's" leniency and that his compassion towards Dencombe's writerly self remains unmitigated: "I prefer your flowers, then, to other people's fruit, and your mistakes to other people's successes" (221). Hence, despite the rupture through the revelation of Dencombe's authorial identity, which has changed their relation forever, the circulation of desire has not come to a halt. Quite to the contrary, only now Dencombe appeals to Dr. Hugh for an "extension," an extension of their romance which serves to nurture Dencombe's relation and reconnection to his younger self.

18 The persistence of the interchange of erotic energy, then, is mainly explicable through the fact that the object of desire, the text of the anthropomorphized *The Middle Years*, defers closure exactly through Dencombe's unrelenting rereading and revision of the text. By the same token, re-vision can be construed as an important channel for connecting Dencombe's personal self with his creative literary/fictional self, and it does so by maintaining a dynamic of volatility and changeability to the text, and thus to the eroticized younger self. As to revision as such, Julie Rivkin in her essay "Doctoring the Text" finds that "The Middle Years" "characterizes revision as the hallmark of literary authority," seeing that it is not merely treated as a project undertaken at some point during a writer's career but instead is seen as "intrinsic to the activity of writing itself" (152). Along these lines, Dencombe's revision can be regarded as strengthening his powerful authorial position and his right to the altering of his text. Rivkin further adds, however, that the tale "also treats revision as a source of authorial vulnerability" (ibid.). The author's susceptibility resulting from the public

exposure of the very private practice of revision to the reader, Hugh/You, has already been spelled out. After all, the exposure amounts to the author's own confession of the imperfection of his, and, to be more precise, of his younger self's genius. However, if regarded from a different angle, this seemingly shameful confession of artistic deficiency is easily excusable.

19 All the same, the revisiting of the text seems to be a very sensitive matter on a personal level as well, seeing that the writer submits his own 'body' of work to a rather dangerous surgery, as it were, in which the whole organism can potentially be upset through incising the body at one spot. Besides the complexity of the process, the merit of this operation appears to be significant, at least for James, who acknowledges himself that revision – just like for the newly rejuvenated Dencombe – constituted a "living affair," the key figure for James' reading and revisionary practice: "I couldn't at all [...] forecast these chances and changes and proportions; they could but show for what they were as I went" (qtd. in Murphy 177). Living revision further served to secure James' legacy, although one has to admit that, ironically, he desperately failed this latter intention in the long run as his pre-revised texts have been preserved and as they oftentimes gain far higher regard among contemporary James scholars than his later edits (163-4).

20 Considering once more the scene of identity exposure through revision between Dencombe and Hugh in conjunction with the concomitant manifestations of inner turmoil and outward expressions of deep shame on both sides, the "passionate corrector's" revisionary practice can truly be considered as providing a supplementary impetus to the economy of desire in general and to Dencombe's negotiation with his alienated and recovered creative self in particular ("The Middle Years" 219). As has already been suggested, revision as the shameful confession of the creative self's imperfection does certainly not estrange the present re-reader from his alternative self, but his weak spots only seem to render the younger literary self all the more alluring. Given their paralleled fixation on the identical object figure, Dencombe's sentiments reverberate in Hugh's expression: "It's for your mistakes I admire you" (221). The seemingly paradoxical enforcement of the dynamics of erotic desire through the unintended exposure can be properly elucidated through Eve Sedgwick's eminent work on the significance of James' retrospectiveness, "Shame, Theatricality and Queer Performativity." In it Sedgwick examines the complex shame-stricken connection between the middle-aged author, James, and his younger literary self by consulting James' later written prefaces. James' revisionary practice, the argument goes, is as much an intersubjective as it is an intergenerational, and, by extension, a homoerotic one (cf. 40). In a

line of reasoning complementing the present reading, Sedgwick contends that for James “the younger author is present in these prefaces as a figure in himself, but even more frequently the fictions themselves, or characters in them, are given his form” (ibid.). What results is a “sanctioned intergenerational flirtation” that is situated and originated within what she terms “the narcissistic circuit of shame” (ibid.) The affect of shame, Sedgwick argues, is the prime constituent of the relation between the two Jamesian selves because “the persistence with which shame accompanies their [the embarrassments of the past] repeated conjuration is matched by the persistence with which, in turn, he describes himself as cathecting or eroticizing that very shame as a way of coming into loving relation to queer or ‘compromising’ youth” (41). In James’ prefaces, then, she distinguishes two interlinked circuits of shame, one referring to James’ relation to his readers, the other to the narcissistic relation of the speaker and his own past self (39). Although this is not to equate James with his fictional creation, evidently, both of these intersubjective relations prove adequate to describe Dencombe’s relation, firstly, to the reader via the outward expression of shame and, secondly, to his creative younger self, whose compromising work he revises. However, the latter analogy is somewhat oblique as for Dencombe the affect of shame seems to be not so much instituted through the younger writer’s “impudence”, which constitutes the major source of attraction for the elder James, but, Dencombe, conversely, appears to be primarily ashamed in the face of his present weakened artistic potency. This type of manifestation of shame, however, does not only serve to leave the interactional dynamics intact, but even fuels it the more by way of an unrelenting reciprocal dynamic which works through an exchange of tacit reproach and attraction.

21 In her theorizing on shame Sedgwick finally stresses its importance for the establishment and negotiation of identity. Building on Silvan Tomkins’ contributions on affect theory, she finds that it is shame which “is now often considered the affect that most defines the space where a sense of self will develop” (37). Shame exerts its greatest influence during experiences where the present self is subjected to intense distress within both mentioned circuits of shame. Dencombe’s revelation of authorial identity appears to portray this exact incidence, where “[s]hame floods into being as a moment, *a disruptive moment*, in a circuit of *identity-constituting identificatory communication*” (36 emphasis added). It is precisely the interruption of identity that, through affectual communication engenders a new and enforced identification. The contagiousness and the interaction of shame has already been located within Dencombe’s and Hugh’s mutual reflections of “blazons of shame,” a type of affect communication which has been confirmed to result in a boundless proliferation,

indeed in an escalating spiral of distress, finally culminating in Dencombe's fainting. These shame interactions, then, mark typically Jamesian threshold experiences, and, consequently, support Sedgwick's case considering "shame as the affect that mantles the threshold between introversion and extroversion, between absorption and theatricality" (38). Shame is thus positioned at the interface between Dencombe's introspection, his relation to the creative self, and the outward expression of shame through the revelation of this connection to another man, who in turn mirrors the shame reflection. Within this procedure, the latter expression constitutes an externalization which Sedgwick conceptualizes as the setting of performativity or performative theatricality. The outlined triangular interchange of the affect, ultimately, sees Dencombe's shame toward the reader intensify his own shame-laden affection to his creative self. Moreover, as much as the distinction and, indeed, the distance to the own creative self is eroticized, the tenderly loving relation – that Sedgwick detects between James and his younger self, too – merges Dencombe's two selves into one configuration of selves, which, however, through the constant revisionary practice, remains in a permanent circulation. In this way, shame as it finds its expression in "The Middle Years" as a representation of identificatory communication ultimately possesses a disruptively driven integrating force: Through the disruptive force of shame, a new form of intimacy is communicated.

22 If Dencombe's revisionary practice can be regarded as an identity establishing communication that works within the circuits of shame, it has to be established what the implications of such a queer affect are in the face of the queer subject. Positioning the younger literary, fictional and sexualized self within his pieces of writing, Dencombe's revision ought to be posited as a demonstration of the constant re-gazing and recognition and, first and foremost, as an expression of the changeability and malleability of the sexual self. To begin with, it is the "passionate corrector's" constant revision that will forever defer textual and sexual closure: "the last thing he ever arrived at was a form final for himself" (219). Garry Hagberg identifies this incapacity as the central point of concern to the story, making a case that Dencombe cannot acknowledge what he has done as an expression of his own self and, consequently, cannot achieve self-integration (227-30). Dencombe's alterations, in his view, are an emblem of the refusal, or incapacity to see the self in his own work (*ibid.*). Hagberg goes on perusing the tale's moral meaning about the dangers of leaving parts of ourselves, and in particular our imaginations, aspirations and ideals, in a "hermetically sealed compartment of consciousness" (230). The ideal, then, is to synthesize the divided, compositional parts of ourselves, which Dencombe eventually achieves through

Dr. Hugh, who, through his appreciation of both selves, helps Dencombe realize that he, in fact, is his work, “that his real life is manifest in that body of work” (ibid.). Dencombe’s newfound understanding results in an integration of self, so that the “last-minute triumph over self-alienation eradicates the existential crisis” (ibid.). Notwithstanding all the outlined processes, means and individual characters augmenting Dencombe’s self-conceptualization through reconnecting him to his previously alienated creative self, it appears to be rather unpromising to assume that the new subjectivity creates “a whole identity where before there was only a fragmented, composite self” (ibid.). Quite to the contrary, there is no end put to the persistent revisionary practice of the self, which has further been elaborated as holding significant reparative capacities. All things considered, the continuing Sedwickian “identificatory communication” seems to be much more desirable than a resolved and static identification because only constant personal revision does justice to Dencombe’s unstable, erratic and malleable sexual self.

23 Reading the textuality of Dencombe’s fiction in terms of sexuality, a link substantiated through the characterized homo-aesthetic circulation of desire, it is particularly striking that, just like the text, sexual identification, too, is considered in the light of an absent or untraceable tangible core. In his preface to “The Middle Years,” James writes that the end of his efforts in determining the “little situation here” was “to follow it as much as possible from its outer edge in, rather than from its centre outward” (414). This, James’ “fond formula,” is obscured by the master brewer’s efforts to “set as many traps in the garden as its opposite may set in the wood; so that after boilings and reboilings of the contents of [his] small cauldron”, he is convinced of having produced one of “the most expensive of its sort” (ibid.). Considering the bewitched contents of the text and the means with which the writer concocts meaning in the first instance, the seizure of a core is a truly intricate or altogether impossible task. Rather than extricating the core meaning, what remains is that “one can follow from the outer edge in,” one can undertake the demanding journey whose end, however, one is not likely to reach, but during which one is liable (and meant) to get lost (ibid.). Hence, the textual reading and modes of interpretation, practiced by the two male characters of the story as much as by the extradiegetic readers themselves, can easily be seen in analogy to the pursuit of a substance of sexual identity, whose center appears to be as untraceable, yet still craves to be followed constantly.

24 As an explanation of this intractability and untracability of meaning, Priscilla Walton suggests that attempts to know and to discern meaning are doomed to failure in James’ short story because it puts the protagonist *and* his art in the space of the feminine, a space which,

according to Cixous, is one which cannot find representation at all (cf. 81). Therefore, Walton convincingly argues, the tale privileges feminine over masculine modes of textual production since it foregrounds the unknowability of art (ibid.). The masculine and realist mode of textual interpretation is first indicated by Hugh, who, initially, insists on the presence of a single meaning, of “picking up the pearl” (“The Middle Years” 226). Dencombe, however, is completely aware of the intangibility of meaning, which becomes manifest in the pervading imagery of the sea and Dencombe’s awareness of the dark “underworld of fiction” (213). He, too, desires the pearl, yet for him “the pearl is the unalloyed, the rest, the lost” and, significantly, “[t]he pearl is the unwritten” (ibid.). Hence, on his search for the pearl, the reader will only discover the treasure in what remains unmentioned, i.e. in what is subject to (his own) imagination, a proposition which obviously creates a link back to the introductory paragraph, where the “abyss of human illusion,” potentially manifested in fiction, is established to be the real. “The Middle Years” therefore stresses the indeterminability, the decenteredness, and, in Walton’s words, the “absence” and “unwritability” of the realist text (84). The only enterprise the reader may undertake is “the search for the presence of something which will elucidate the absence of meaning” (ibid.). In brief, the story makes a forceful point about the general difficulty of reading textuality and sexuality as well as about the impossibility to determine and define it more specifically.

25 Finally, the constant exchange through practices of writing, re-writing and reading can be considered as a demonstration of the interrelational nature of textuality/sexuality. Evidently, the story lays bare the limits of authorial intention when concluding with Dencombe’s winged words: “We work in the dark – we do what we can – we give what we have. Our doubt is our passion and our passion is our task. The rest is the madness of art” (“The Middle Years” 227). Hence, literature cannot be unreservedly designed through the writer’s consciousness alone. The pearl will only be recovered through the joint imaginary endeavor of writer and reader, who connect via a composition which, in all its complexity and unpredictability of the effects owing to the mixing of the contents in the cauldron, surpasses the pure original intent of the writer’s pen by far. This intersubjective dynamic creates a pool of unstable entities – e.g. words, thoughts, interpretations – that are beyond the control of the author-reader circuit, i.e. which are subject to pure “madness of art,” yet, in their own enigmatic fashion, contribute to the economy of desire (ibid.). For all the established limitations of authorial intention and control, the reader (Hugh/You) and his strategic position within the circuit of desire, by implication, must not be underestimated. In the end, after the authorial reconsiderations have been incorporated in the publishable edition,

the final version of the piece of fiction will always be subject to the readers' interpretation. It is their personal reading and re-reading experience which establishes meaning for the individual reader, thus providing manifold versions of textual bodies which will never be subjected to general definition and, therefore, always defer closure. Just like the textual production necessitates a complex interchange between writer *and* reader, one who expresses and one who perceives the mystical concoction, the homo-aesthetic desire cannot be fixated, but is shown to be convoluted, indirect, dynamic and, ultimately, incalculable just like the "madness of art" (ibid.). The creation and expression of the desire, moreover, strictly depends on the subject positions of either of the involved seeing that Dencombe's writing is as individual a production as is Hugh's reading of it. As a consequence, the representation of subject positions here ascertains Richard Dellamora's claim, which he puts forward in his study on Victorian masculinity, that "there is no unitary 'gay subject' just as there are no unitary 'masculine' and 'feminine' subjects" (4). Seeing that Dellamora, however, comes to this conclusion "despite the fact that representations are often shaped so as to induce an impression to the contrary" (to the inconsistency of gay subject positions), James' character illustrations clearly flout contemporary 19th century conventions and prove great variation.

26 Ultimately, reference will have to be made to James' further distinct dealings with identity constitution, which always proves to be a highly contested terrain in his writing. What Dencombe finds in his writing, the protagonist of "The Altar of the Dead", for instance, finds in the altar and Brydon ("The Jolly Corner") in a deserted house: the projection of their other selves, which have here been more closely defined in terms of their queer alterity. In "The Middle Years", just like in "The Author of Beltraffio", surreal connections to the selves established within works of fiction are correlated to 'real' relationships of two men within the actual story world. Hence, in both cases the prime reference for self-examination is located within and generated through novelistic creations by venerated writers. In contrast to the "The Middle Years," where the text of the other self is left entirely blank, in "The Jolly Corner" the exact physiognomy of the abominated alter ego is described and the instability of the self as text gains even greater focus. Bearing analogy with "The Middle Years," where revision has been identified as a "Living Affair," which is forever subject to amendment, in "The Altar of the Dead" the candles of personal relations are constantly tended to (qtd. in Murphy 177).

27 What all of these tales have in common, though to different degrees, is their charting of a protagonist that strives to establish a coherent self, a stable autobiography, or a self unchallenged by alternative possibilities. However, all of them are shown to ultimately fail in

their efforts. Although Stransom indubitably aspires to institute some synthesis of meaning in his text, he later has to admit that his altar yields “multiplied meanings” (“The Altar” 39). To some degree these correlations of these Jamesian queer selves, who “aren’t made to signify monolithically” and in whose constitution “gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning” loom large (*Tendencies* 8), and contemporary Queer Theory, explain James’ representational popularity within postmodern culture and his sheer celebrity status within Queer Studies. Crucially, the discussion in this paper has sought to elucidate that, although classifications are beyond James’ representational doctrine, seeking self-definition is crucial for an understanding of self, for individuation. If to be labelled at all, James’ characters certainly can be assigned “queer”, especially if, as Sedgwick has put forward so evocatively, “‘queer’ can signify only when attached to the first person” (*Tendencies* 9). Definitely, this holds true for James’ self-defining queer selves more than for any other: what might be called a queer self-identification has been shown to be floating in a state of suspense within the elusive text, “the dim underworld of fiction” (“The Middle Years” 213).

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The Question of the Jamesian Presence in Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty*

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Abstract:

Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* explores the social spectrum of 1980s Britain, with a focused account on the gay life in London. The novel is a coming out story, which observes the social milieu and psychological nuances under Thatcherism. The paper explores the presence of James as a figure in the fictional world of the book because of Nick's studies. Hollinghurst uses Henry James as a literary agent in order to bring about the moral ambiguities of the characters. This paper examines how Hollinghurst employs the Jamesian presence through the literary techniques of ironies and implications. Alan Hollinghurst has seemingly built a bridge between a contemporary novel and a canonical figure, Henry James, who is growingly recognized as the author of "the gender confusion". This paper, therefore, contributes to gender issues and the Jamesian legacy in contemporary fiction, which enriches the literary heritage.

1 Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* (2004) is a portrait of a privileged gay life in the 1980s. The general perception is that the early years of 1980s were a time of great change, socially and politically, in which a large number of young people were carefree and enjoyed excessive lifestyles. Casual sex and drug use were prevalent and the affluent class of society hosted excessive parties. However, as the 1980s came to an end, the discovery of AIDS, to a large extent, closed the door on sexual freedom and self-indulgence. By exploring the implementation of ironies and implications, this paper argues that Hollinghurst draws on the queer Henry James, as a literary presence, to comment on the lifestyle and the anxieties of a decade of moral decadence in Thatcher's England. Principally, the author utilizes the literary tropes of ironies and implications to explore Nick Guest's homosexuality and penetrate into the secret lives of the other characters as they live in an amoral, high class society, which reflects the troubled status quo of the whole country.

2 In response to an interview question by Charles Kaiser (2010) about his own view of Mrs. Thatcher, Hollinghurst's reply was in complete denunciation:

It was a terrible time on almost all fronts. I suppose her main antigay action was Clause 28, which was passed in 1988. Local authorities were prohibited [by that law] from spending money on anything which 'promoted homosexuality', which is actually an amazingly Thatcherite view of sexuality.

In view of that comment, "the discriminatory politics and double morality of Thatcherism are overly denounced" in the novel (Yebara 178). In this sense, the personal correlates with the political as sexuality and politics overlap. Hollinghurst's novel addresses this political view

by introducing the London gay scene, which is not as celebratory as Hollinghurst's earlier novel, *The Swimming Library* (1988), where partying pervaded. As the ominous clouds of AIDS encroach, the narrative is mystified by its sense of predictable, tragic inevitability and therefore the question of moral ambiguity comes to the surface.

3 Nick's is a sort of coming out story, which resists the familiar Bildungsroman trope of a triumphant outcome in favour of something darker and more complex. The author's propensity to subvert the readers' expectations, as the novel moves from romance to impending tragedy, complicates the question of morality in the novel:

Encountering the romance of a London life in all its tantalizing beauty, Nicholas lives as much in denial of AIDS as he does in denial of the corruption and greed and other unsavoury elements of the decade. That it all catches up with him, that all the high figures come tumbling down like the stock market on Black Monday, makes the novel a bit of a morality play. (Rivkin 288)

In a sense, Hollinghurst confronts gay lifestyle through the elegiac; indeed through a deep sense of something that has been lost or gone tragically wrong, which invokes a question of moral ambiguity. Does loss in this novel, whether the loss of life itself, opportunity or reputation, represent the inevitable consequence of moral decadence? Does the novel really function as a morality play assuming that the characters, having led indulgent lives, deserved what they got in the end even if it is public scandal or death? The answers to these inquiries are related to the way Hollinghurst stylistically deals with the question of morality in the novel and how that question is intricately related to the Jamesian presence.

4 In his response to an interview with Stephen Moss (2010) in *The Guardian*, when asked about the moral nature of the novel, Hollinghurst remarked that Nick is as morally compromised as the rest who were tempted by the affluence of the 1980s:

‘I don't make moral judgments,’ he says. ‘I prefer to let things reverberate with their own ironies and implications. That was one of the interests of writing this book from the inside and not just writing something that broadly satirised or bashed up the 80s. To tell it from the point of view of someone who was very seduced by it.

Hollinghurst here refers to his dealings with the moral theme in terms of style. Since the Jamesian presence itself largely implies moral ambiguity, Hollinghurst resorts to “ironies and implications” as part of the literary machinery in the novel. The Jamesian presence, therefore, stylistically explored through ironies and implications, reveals and questions the characters' moral stance in a rapidly changing and highly affluent decade. Since many of James's characters are known for their abrupt involvement in high class societies in Europe such as Fleda in *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897), the unnamed public servant in *In the Cage* (1898), the

governess in *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) or Merton Densher in *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), the Jamesian presence implicitly invokes the notion of someone who is seduced by high class society and is about to give up his or her moral high grounds. The Jamesian presence is utilized in such a way that it may serve as a background commentary on the characters as they confront sexual and worldly allurements.

5 In this context, the nature of the moral tradition in literature should be just briefly clarified in order to see how the work of Henry James himself fits into it. The moral tradition referred to in literature is generally Hellenistic and Judeo-Christian:

It [the Hellenistic and Judeo-Christian tradition] was and is philosophical, theological, or both, and political, social, and economic in extension. Inevitably its roots are moral and these roots extend to all human endeavor. Since at least the late seventeenth century this tradition has tended to become more secular, individualistic, and ethical, as distinct from sacred, communal, and religious or theological. (Hynes 28)

More broadly, in his article, “Poetry and Morality,” Tzvetan Todorov captures how the intricate relationship between aesthetics and ethics has undergone an evolutionary process. He argues that there are three conceptual theories to pin down that relationship. The first is classical in nature, as it was propagated by Plato, which “considers art in the service of moral principles, and argues that aesthetic values should be subjected to ethical values” (68). Todorov explains that novels that fall under the category of “socialist realism” (69) are the best case in point. The second is instated by the European Romantics and extended by the English Victorians in which “art and poetry open the way to a knowledge superior to the abstract and rational knowledge science and philosophy confer” (70). Todorov observes “an increasing autonomy of both ethics and aesthetics as the main characteristics of the third stage” (Yebara 175), which informs most of postmodern novels including Hollinghurst’s *The Line of Beauty*.

6 In a society informed by secularism, we are increasingly disinclined to be judgmental about anyone’s lifestyle. Hynes responds to this question of modern disinclination to provide an ethical commentary of any nature by giving two reasons: “we wish not to be judged ourselves, but more likely, I suspect, because we’ve been repeatedly taught that no basis exists on which to ground moral judgments” (29). Part of this disinclination is the preference of modern fiction to employ either the first-person or the limited third-person point in order to avoid the omniscient point of view:

[Using omniscient point of view] would come closer to committing the author himself to a particular moral stance. Using a character’s point of view involves the reader in the act of personally working out where the character stands with respect to right and

wrong behavior and motives, and of deciding whether the reader agrees or disagrees with the narrating character's choices, morally speaking. (Hynes 30)

To James, however, the question of morality corresponds to our sense of life. In a way, a moral vision of life is not synonymous to virtue or good deeds; instead, living well is the hard task of making ourselves people "on whom nothing is lost" (Nussbaum 169). It is still an ethical task and to James "the novel is itself a moral achievement, and the well-lived life is a work of literary art" (Nussbaum 169). In other words, James defines any sense of moral appeal in terms of the novelist's ability to deliver an earnest picture of reality, which entails emotions, intelligence and consciousness.

7 In his "Introduction" to his book *Henry James*, Harold Bloom points out that James's stylistic approach in delineating his characters' moral sense is exceedingly subtle. In his discussion of James's view of Hawthorne's Hester Prynne, Bloom discerns a stylistic pattern in which James allows himself to be quite "evasive towards his authentic American predecessor, a pattern he repeated in writing about George Eliot" (9). Judith Woolf, on the other hand, in her *Henry James: The Major Novels*, draws attention to a certain technique that James uses to guide the readers through the complexities of characters: "James must blindfold the reader ... until the moment of vision comes" (47). This method speaks to the way Hollinghurst unravels the complexities of his characters through irony and implication as both methods similarly invite the reader to participate in the act of eliciting meaning and disclosing the characters' consciousness. Moreover, in her book, *Henry James: The Crooked Corridor*, Elizabeth Stevenson identifies a particular image that defines the Jamesian picture of the artist: "There is irony in James' picture of the artist, who is anything and everything in his own mind, attempting anxiously to be something or someone in the social world" (69). This description of the deluded artist, which Stevenson finds in *The Death of the Lion* (1894), *The Author of Beltraffio* (1884) and *The Velvet Glove* (1904), serves as a very appropriate description of the disenchanted life of Hollinghurst's Nick Guest, an artist who struggles to be like the rich Feddens. To Stevenson, for instance, *The Velvet Glove* provides the perfect example of this dilemma of the artist's attempt to blend with the rich: "The story is a good example of one of James' favorite contrasts, between the people who lead rich personal lives and never think, and the writer who is all reflection and who upon occasion envies the shining ones" and ultimately "only deceives himself if he thinks he can live their splendid lives" (70). In Hollinghurst's novel, when Nick surveys the Feddens' home, he takes great delight in the opulent furnishings. At this point when he pretends to be the owner showing the house to a new friend, the narrator observes: "Like his hero Henry James, Nick felt he could

‘stand a great deal of guilt’” (5). In effect, the “irony” of the image of the artist in some of James’ works, which Stevenson explicitly addresses, is exactly what Hollinghurst accentuates through the incongruity of Nick’s infatuation with the upper class as he struggles with his sexuality, which also wittingly provides a subtle commentary on the morality of the characters involved.

8 Henry James makes it clear that the artist’s task is “a moral task ... so much as the world is rendered well by some such artist” (Nussbaum 187). He explains that the moral content of a work is an expression of the artist’s sense of life: “The question comes back thus, obviously, to the kind and the degree of the artist’s prime sensibility, which is the soil out of which his subject springs. The quality and capacity of that soil, its ability to ‘grow’ with freshness and straightness any vision of life, represents, strongly or weakly, the projected morality” (James 45). James holds the novelist (morally) accountable to achieve this excellence in portraying his/her sensibilities and impression of life. Moral experience is an interpretation of the seen, “our apprehension and our measure of what happens to us as social creatures” (James 65). In a sense, as James explains in *The Art of the Novel*, focused attention becomes our “active sense of life,” which is our moral faculty. The characters’ “emotions, their stirred intelligence, their moral consciousness, become thus, by sufficiently charmed perusal, our own very adventure” (James 70). It is the way we identify ourselves as readers with those fictional characters, learn from them as we observe and share their condition rather than dismiss them as ethically right or wrong, that sums up the moral experience from James’s point of view.

9 In a similar line of argument, Hollinghurst has one of his high-living characters, Penny, ask, “What would Henry James have made of us, I wonder?” Nick replies that, “He’d have been very kind to us, he’d have said how wonderful we were and how beautiful we were, he’d have given us incredibly subtle things to say, and we wouldn’t have realized until just before the end that he’d seen right through us” (123). That is exactly, to his credit, what Hollinghurst does in this novel following the Jamesian ethical task of apprehension, which invokes awareness of the active sense of life. However, what James seeks to apprehend through gradual, authentic exposure by virtue of “the artist’s prime sensibility,” Hollinghurst seeks to capture through the schematic employment of implications and ironies in which the Jamesian presence is invoked to comment on the contemporary scene. The conversation between Kessler and Nick is a good case in point. In response to Lord Kessler’s question “And what is your chosen field?”, this conversation arises after mentioning James’s style as a topic:

“Mm. I want to have a look at style,” Nick said (...) “Ah,” said Lord Kessler intelligently: “style as an obstacle.” Nick smiled. “Exactly ... Or perhaps style that hides things and reveals things at the same time.” For some reason this seemed rather near the knuckle, as though he were suggesting Lord Kessler had a secret. “James is a great interest of mine, I must say.” “Yes, you’re a James man, I see now.” “Oh, absolutely!” and Nick grinned with pleasure and defiance, it was a kind of coming out, which revealed belatedly why he wasn’t and never would be married to Trollope. (49)

The implication is that Nick is a “James man” which suggests a homosexual behaviour. Hollinghurst here draws on the queer James in order to expose certain characters and negate the seemingly heterosexual mainstream in society: “Nick’s academic discipleship appears to function here as code for his own homosexuality” so the phrase “a James man” seems to invoke homosexual connotations (Hannah 85). In another conversation, Leo responds to Nick by saying, “I thought, he’s a shy one, a bit stuck-up, but there’s something going on inside those corduroy trousers, I’ll give him a go. And how right I was, Henry” (91). Denis Flannery draws attention to this episode where “someone called Henry is colloquially, jokingly invoked as a part of the sexual tribute and banter between Nick and Leo on a summer night in 1983 London” (295). Although Flannery interprets the remark as apostrophic, he agrees that the addressed could be “a far-away lover, a dead friend, an urn, the wind, an author” (295). The reference to James here as somewhere else invokes the queer connotations associated with James as the conversation itself is saturated with sexual implications.

10 The emphasis on James’s style in the conversation with Kessler comes again in Nick’s conversation with Jenny about James where “the style question might lose her completely” and therefore concealed from Jenny because it is either perplexing or deviously ironic (121). There are so many concealments in the private lives of the characters that manifest themselves through homosexual implications and thus we can see more into the hidden thoughts and secrets of the characters involved through the strategy of implied commentaries: When, in the second chapter, Toby brings up the subject of Hector Maltby, a junior minister caught “with a rent boy in his jaguar at Jack Straw’s castle,” Nick finds himself “blushing as if he’d been caught in a Jaguar himself ”: “It was often like this when the homosexual question came up” (24). Nick’s life amongst the Feddens involves the constant concealment of his attraction to Toby and, later, of his cocaine-fueled relationship with Wani, who, in public, is engaged to the social heiress, Martine. (Hannah 86) In effect, Nick feels that his homosexual tendency is implicated in the conversation. On another occasion, he tells Monique that he is attracted to *The Spoils of Poynton* and wants to make a film about it: “I think it could be rather marvellous, don’t you. You know Ezra Pound said it was just a novel

about furniture, meaning to dismiss it of course, but that was really what made me like the sound of it” (187). Nick perceives and refers to the Jamesian presence through *The Spoils of Poynton* as that of implications; a novel which is aesthetically revealing of high society lifestyle, although it seemed quite blunt and insubstantial to Pound. The irony is that, despite the dismissive general opinion supported by Pound, Nick still believes that James’ novel can be a movie hit.

11 In “A Tribute to Henry James,” chaired by Deborah Moggach, Hollinghurst has talked about his use of James in *The Line of Beauty* in terms of a structural approach to plot. He is “drawn to James because of his stern precepts about what conditions should govern the novel as a work of art; the relevance of everything in it; the coherence of the point of view.” In *The Line of Beauty*, Hollinghurst reasserts this Jamesian structure of relevance and coherence, which transforms itself into some sort of a dominating presence through implications and ironies. Accordingly, the first section of the novel details Nick’s first date with a man he meets for sex through a personal ad. Their relationship deepens into something more meaningful, drawing Nick into the working-class life of his lover even while he floats into the lavish lifestyle of his host family, which gives him an opportunity to mingle and get an active sense of life. When the story proceeds again in 1986, the sense of coherence and relevance is still keen and congruent in which ironies prevail.

12 In this part of the novel, Nick is still living with his host family, but he has moved on from his first lover to a Lebanese millionaire who is engaged to be married. Ironically, they are movie producers, but mostly they watch pornography, pick up young men, and snort cocaine with the implication of being a different “line of beauty.” Nick has a vague sense that this is not a satisfying way to live, but he is mesmerized by the glare of so much money and sensuality and terrified by the prospect of loneliness. At this stage, references to Henry James mirror by implication a sense of decadence in Nick’s personal and academic life: “He was reading Henry James’s memoir of his childhood, *A Small Boy and Others*, and feeling crazily horny, after three days without as much as a peck from Wani. It was a hopeless combination. The book showed James at his most elderly and elusive, and demanded a pure commitment unlikely in a reader who was worrying excitedly about his boyfriend” (273). The tragic irony, however, is that when AIDS ravages the gay community and scandal rocks the Feddens household, Nick finds himself as abandoned as he always feared. Thus the tragic end implies a sense of moral judgment:

Ironically, despite all its graphic sex, a Puritanical piety seems to animate the novel. Rather than challenge any mainstream prejudices about homosexuals, *The Line of*

Beauty confirms them. The most socially conservative reader won't be surprised to see here that gay men are emotionally oversensitive, sexually voracious, desperately lonely, and finally doomed. (Charles)

Moreover, the way Henry James, as a running commentary, coalesces the subplots of the novel also implies a fading moral value at least in relation to Nick's respect to and interest in art. The use of James collapses from a constructive and intellectual commentary into that associated with drug addiction, which betrays a time of decadence. In that respect, the early years of eighties represent a time of promise, and the mid-eighties are the peak of life and prosperity for Nick, the Feddens and politics. The end of the eighties mirrors the end of the carefree decade and reflects the downward turn that threatens Nick with disease and the Feddens with scandal. Similarly, as the book opens, Henry James is a positive reference for Nick. It serves as an indicator of the speaker's intellectual pursuit and interests. In the middle, the Jamesian presence is reduced to a means to an end; Nick uses his knowledge of Henry James to socialize and exhibit his intelligence at parties with the Feddens' wealthy friends and constituents in order to feel that he belongs to their high class. By the end of the 1980s, Henry James's face, on a book cover selected from "the stack of library books ... which had a sleek Mylar sleeve protecting its dark jacket" (222), is now ironically a surface upon which Wani cuts cocaine:

When Hollinghurst has Nick and his lover use a copy of *Henry James and the Question of Romance* as the surface on which to cut a line of cocaine, one sees how he places James - and Jamesian *romance*, no less - in relation to the elevations and addictions of the decade. Ironic, yes, and yet it's unlikely that James is the target of the irony. Rather, James is invoked as the knowing figure who comprehends all too well what the romance and rapacity of this decade are all about. (Rivkin 289)

By implication, the literary and aesthetic deterioration of the Jamesian presence is now complete. More interesting is the notion that Nick's UCL thesis is concerned with "something about style" in the works of Conrad, Meredith and Henry James. It is a vague topic that is never clear and suspiciously open-ended, which speaks to the kind of dicey life Nick himself was leading. The constant parroting of "the Master" reveals Nick's anxiety to emulate Henry James who is "both the model for Hollinghurst's narrative method and the sign of a peculiar kind of ironic aesthetic sensibility which is central to the novel" (Eastham 509). There is also a subtle humour in order to reveal the moral stance in dealing with Henry James as Nick is reduced from the ostensibly Henry James scholar to a sheer puppeteer who throws gimmicks about James or just quotes James to impress the young men at the Ogee office.

13 What is characteristically Jamesian about Hollinghurst's narrative style is the way he proposes that a character should not be defined "by sharp ethical distinctions but by a shared condition: the susceptibility to being 'seen right through' is, he insists, universally distributed, and thus the morality tale he sketches seems haunted by a vision of a collectivity where moral distinctions are strangely irrelevant" (Kurnick 214). This "shared condition" is largely Jamesian in nature, as the readers partake in the life of the characters. Hollinghurst shares this vision of collectivity as his characters, marching towards the end, carve up a shared condition of scandal and exposure regardless of whether they survive it or not. As the novel moves to the end, everything comes tumbling down. Leo dies of AIDS, and Wani now look ghastly; his parents continue their concealment plan by saying that he caught AIDS from a lavatory seat. Gerald Feddens has difficulty keeping his parliamentary position in 1987 as he is already being investigated for financial wrongdoings. Moreover, word reaches the press, already gathered outside his Notting Hill mansion, that Gerald's tenant is the lover of Wani Ouradi, the son of a millionaire. Again ironically enough, as things start falling apart for the Feddens, they lash out at Nick. Clearly enough, Nick's homosexuality is tolerated by the Feddens household as long as it is not threatening. Gerald and Rachel do not really mind keeping Nick in their house as long as they can turn a blind eye about his sexual activity. The novel ends with Nick's ejection from the house and family. It is a moment of self-fulfilling prophesy. When Nick answers the question of how James would have treated them, by saying "we wouldn't have realized until just before the end that he'd seen right through us" (123), it becomes sheer premonition as all these characters are exposed, whether justifiably or not, to public scandals. Standing outside, homeless and probably sick, Nick is terrified by a surge of "emotions from every stage of his short life, weaning, homesickness, envy and self-pity" (438). Together with James, Nick has now seen right through himself.

14 The Jamesian presence in the novel, as sustained by ironies and implications, projects a conscious commentary that demoralizes characters. In a conversation with Howard and Simon, Nick feels that "he was prostituting the Master, but then there was an element of self-mockery ... He was at the height of a youthful affair with his writer, in love with his rhythms, his ironies, and his idiosyncrasies, and loving his most idiosyncratic moments best of all" (182-183). Again the reference to ironies as a Jamesian approach is stressed in relation to the moral sense as Sam comments that it "sounds like Henry James called everyone beautiful and marvellous" (183). In response to that, Nick asserts the moral sense as part of the James's moments: "Oh, *beautiful, magnificent ... wonderful*. I suppose it's really more what the characters call each other, especially when they're being wicked. In the later books, you

know, they do it more and more, when actually they're more and more ugly – in a moral sense" (183). The use of irony and implications is unequivocal here. James has his characters say something, such as "*beautiful, magnificent ... wonderful*" when they actually mean the opposite as they know how wicked they have become. By using this technique James implies that characters describe each other pleasantly although they are conscious of their moral deterioration. What they describe becomes an ironic comment on who they really are. To James, the aesthetic sense and moral awareness are tantamount: "The consciousness most sensitive to impressions is liable to be the most moral. So in James there is an equation between the aesthetic and the moral sense, and the individual who most appreciates the beauty of a Renaissance painting is also the most moral" (Raleigh 111). In other words, Nick's failure to maintain an aesthetic and academic interest in James accentuates by implication his inability to speak from a moral high ground as he swings between his homosexual private life and the heterosexual household where he believes he wants to belong. Consequently, Hollinghurst puts the gay experience at the centre of a panorama of British society in that decade, with sexual freedom and AIDS symbolising the transformation of society and the concomitant sense of moral uncertainty. The notion of culture and beauty in relation to the economic and political status "remains both in and beyond Nickolas' fate and it is Alan Hollinghurst's preoccupation with this relation that marks his common ground with Henry James" (Rivkin 289). James and Hollinghurst are both inclined to see morality as the playground of culture and beauty. Both James and Hollinghurst introduce characters who are vividly alive and yet are struggling in their imperfect ways to realize their destinies in a world that lacks moral clarity. Henry James's presence in *The Line of Beauty* translates itself through the lives and acts of pretentious characters who fail to come to terms with who they really are. They are the product of a world in which what seems is not always what is real. The final exposure that the novel brings at the end is not a moral tragedy as much as a dramatic representation of the inevitable consequence of living a self-lie. The attempt to actualize Henry James as a literary vehicle exposes the characters' collective and excessive indulgence and questions their sense of identity, which is largely torn between the illogical and the incoherent and, therefore, is rendered morally susceptible.

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Of Male Friendship and Spirals in *The Lion King*, *Vertigo* and the *American Pie* Saga

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Abstract:

In this article, I will argue that the real originality of 'The Lion King' is not to reproduce an umpteenth version of a somewhat dubious Freudian reading of the oedipal complex, but the fact that the threat depicted in the movie is not a Freudian regression or a Lacanian forclusion of the Name-of-the-Father, but the threat of male homosocial bonds. In the first part, it will be established that, if in the 'Lion King' and as we will see also in 'American Pie', male friendships can sometimes become a threat to the patriarchal organization, it is due to their particular temporality, defined here as the timeless jouissance of friendship, which jeopardizes the temporality of the Circle of Life. In a second part, I will carry on with the construction of a graphic model of the straight time (patriarchal and familialist) with the figure of the spiral. It will suggest that this model of the spiral of time allows regrouping under a single model, different (patriarchal) temporalities and their relations to particular narratives. Finally, in a last part I will apply this figure of the spiral to Hitchcock's 'Vertigo' in order to illustrate its work.

1 In a heavy Oedipal reading of *The Lion King* L. Dundes & A. Dundes argue that “it is precisely this basic Oedipal plot that accounts for the remarkable popularity of *The Lion King*” (483). Without denying the importance of previous readings focused on race, ethnicity or gender, the authors conclude that “critics who limit their analysis to such issues, in our opinion, are mistakenly overlooking the importance of this modern rendering of a classical Oedipal story” (484). Even if L. Dundes & A. Dundes generously expose Hollywood and Disney's producers' ready-made recipe for popular success, the familialism promoted by this oedipal reading also tends to ignore other psychosocial dynamics.

2 In my opinion one approach to the movie has been particularly ignored. Interestingly enough *The Lion King* (Roger Allers) released in America in June 1994 is, in terms of release date, caught between different movies released the very same month and soaked in testosterone: the revengeful *The Cowboy Way* (Brian Grazer), the Shakespeare-in-the-army *Renaissance Man* (Penny Marshall), the boosted *Speed* (Jan De Bont), the oedipal *Getting Even With Dad* (Howard Deutch), the furry and musky *Wolf* (Mike Nichols) and the gunfight-at-the-O.K.-Corral-ish *Wyatt Earp* (Lawrence Kasdan). Even if read as an accidental calendar effect, it shows without a doubt that masculinity as a theme has saturated the movie production of this period. The variety of male bonds pictured in these movies makes the theme of male friendships particularly obvious and popular. If *Top Gun* (Tony Scott, 1986) and *Lethal Weapon* (Richard Donner, 1987) were arguably the archetypal productions of the

buddy movie of the 80's depicting the fortunes and misfortunes of hegemonic masculinities, the buddy movies of the 90's such as *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994) exposed a masculinity that required sensitive relations between men.

3 I will argue that even if the themes of friendship and masculinity have been mentioned in passing, most analyses of *The Lion King* have fail to systematize these insights, especially in relation with gender and sexuality. Borrowing Michel Foucault's skilful expression, I will show that a "Friendship as a Way of Life" is represented in this movie not in opposition to an oedipal reading, but as the negative of an oedipal narrative marked by the seal of reproduction. Therefore the success of the movie, to use Dundes' expression, cannot be separated from what the movie accounts *for*, clearly the superiority of a patriarchal and familialist Circle of Life, but also from what the movie stands *against*, that is to say, non-reproductive modes of relations and organizations. More precisely, I will argue that the real originality of the movie is not due to the reproduction of an umpteenth version of a somewhat dubious Freudian reading of the oedipal complex, but to the fact that the threat depicted in the movie is not a Freudian regression or a Lacanian foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father, but the threat of male homosocial bonds. In the first part of the essay, it will be established that, if in the *Lion King* and as we will see also in *American Pie*, male friendships can sometimes become a threat to the patriarchal organization, it is due to their particular temporality, defined here as the timeless *jouissance* of friendship, which jeopardizes the temporality of the Circle of Life. In a second part, I will suggest a graphic model of the straight time (patriarchal and familialist) through the figure of the spiral. It will suggest that the spiral model of time allows different (patriarchal) temporalities and their relations to particular narratives to be regrouped within a single model. Finally, in a last part I will apply this figure of the spiral to Hitchcock's *Vertigo*.

4 In his successful and somewhat polemical *No Future* (2004) Lee Edelman forges the sharp-edged word *sinthomosexuality* in reference to Lacan's *sinthome* and to homosexuality. In his lacanian anthropology, Lee Edelman stresses the different literary and cinematographic avatars of the *sinthomosexual*¹ who embodies the forces that threaten the symbolic order constructed for and by futurity, the family and their metonymical figure, the Child. As stated by the author: "*Sinthomosexuality*, then, only means by figuring a threat to meaning, which depends on the promise of coming, in a future continuously deferred, into the presence that reconciles meaning with being in a fantasy of completion - a fantasy on which every subject's

¹ For example Scrooge from *A Christmas Carol*, Leonard from *North By Northwest*, The Birds from *The Birds*, Silas Marner from *Silas Marner: The weaver of Raveloe* but also Captain Hook from *Peter Pan*.

cathexis of the signifying system depends” (114). Therefore the *sinthomosexual* opposes the hopeful and lyrical naturalizing discourse of reproduction with “the lack or loss that relates to the Real” (115), the depersonalizing *jouissance* and death. The Child as a figure has a particular meaning in this heteronormative fantasmatic economy: “Because the Child of the hetero-reproductive Couple stands in, at least fantasmatically, for the redemption of that loss, the *sinthomosexual*, who affirms that loss, maintaining it as the empty space, the vacuole, at the heart of the Symbolic, effectively destroys that Child and, with it, the reality it means to sustain” (115). Therefore, the Child and the *sinthomosexual* are opposite figures that sustain the symbolic order by the promise of a future recovery from the rift into the Symbolic and simultaneously, by the affirmation of a death-bearing force curled up within the Symbolic explaining the perpetual deferring of the promise of the realization of meaning. It is with this theoretical background that I would like to offer a reading of *The Lion King* that would go beyond the classical Oedipus complex. This opening interpretation will allow drawing, literally, a first representation of a hetero-reproductive representation of time - the mythical *Circle of Life* - that I want to push toward a dynamic and three-dimensional model, in relation to the *American Pie*'s saga, in order to highlight the different narratives belonging to this hetero-reproductive temporality.

5 By its very construction *The Lion King* has a circular organization. The movie opens with the celebration of straight sexuality through the exposition of the new-born Simba, and closes with that very same celebration, with the exposition of Simba and Nala's new-born offspring. The song *Circle of Life* is chanted during these liminal moments, opening and closing the circle of the narration. By its very own structure, *The Lion King* associates straight sexuality and the eternal return, through a circular and mythical representation of time. This eternal repetition of the same that the narration promises and that is sustained by the reproductive straight sexuality, is therefore threatened by any non-reproductive sexuality that would interrupt this symbolic ordering of time. And it is around the eternal return and the life-negating dark forces that lurk in the kingdom and threaten the circle of life that the plot of *The Lion King* is organized, transforming this charming and tender story into a battle for the preservation of life, that is to say for the preservation of reproduction and straight sex. These dark forces are first embodied in the very spaces of Mufasa's kingdom. In a scene saturated by the figure of the King and the Father, Mufasa introduces to his son his realm, which will become, at his death, Simba's kingdom. The kingdom is delimited by another cyclic phenomenon, the light of the sun. As Mufasa underlines: “Look Simba. Everything the light touches is our Kingdom”. However, this luxuriant and lively space is delimited by a

shadowy zone, the elephants' graveyard, mysteriously untouched by the light. The threat of something resisting light, of a rift into the Symbolic, of the Real, is represented as a space of death. It is therefore not surprising that it is literally in a rift that the king Mufasa, betrayed by its brother, Scar, will find death.

6 The spaces of the movie acknowledge the anxious presence of a threat within the symbolic order and it is in these spaces that these other embodiments of Edelman's death drive - the drive aiming at the destruction of the congealed organization of the ego as well as the Symbolic order that props up ego's fossilization - will appear. The hyenas, the foes of the Kingdom, countless but metonymically represented by three Hyenas, Shenzi, Banzai and Ed, appear for the first time in the graveyard, slowly emerging from the skull of the elephant traditionally depicted as a wise animal. We do not get to know much about the hyenas except that they tend to favor a kind of fascist organization², aptly depicted in their march mimicking the military parades of the Third Reich while Scar, Führer-like, sings in the darkness of the night, *Be prepared* (see 1). Scar, the *sinthomosexual* figure of the movie is associated with these hyenas. The well-mannered, delicate, dandy-like, back-stabbing, and physically weak figure of the movie, embodies different stereotypes of the unmanly man (and therefore queer)³, but he also is another vehicle of the death drive that threatens the hetero-normative order of the King's realm. After having successfully plotted the death of the king and almost successfully killed Simba, Scar will rule with the hyenas on Pride Rock, showing no interest in the Queen Sarabi or in producing any offspring, but suddenly turning the surrounding space into an infertile wasteland. This transformation of the land into a place of death happens as soon as Scar becomes King (see 2), but nothing illustrates better the link between infertile queerness and life producing straight sexuality than the last images of the movie. After the death of scar, the wasted land is seen for a last time in its full desolation (see 3). The following shot appears in a cross fade where the luxurious greenness of Pride Rock is finally restored (see 4), followed by the happiness of the straight couple and the birth of the child (see 5⁴). In short, we can read the movie *The Lion King* as a catastrophic scenario that depicts the danger of a queer, and therefore death-bearing, governance.

² For a more in depth analysis of the references to fascism see Giddings (1999); Kramer (2000); Roth (1996).

³ Scar's queerness is even highlighted by an inside joke. In a conversation between Scar and Simba, the latter let out a "You're so weird" to what Scar answers "You have no idea". Jeremy Irons, Scar's voice, embodying the mysterious and accused of murder Claus Von Bülow, knew perfectly how to play this dramatic answer, since in *Reversal of Fortune* (Barbet Schroeder, 1990), his lawyer not convinced by his innocence, describes him with a "You're a very strange man" to what he answers the same "You have no idea".

⁴ All images are taken from *The Lion King*. Dir. Roger Allers & Rob Minkoff. Walt Disney Pictures, 1994. Film.



Figure 1.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.



Figure 4.



Figure 5.

7 It is in this particularly hétéronormativité child-like fantasy, that the theme of male friendships developed in the movie is particularly eloquent. After escaping from the deadly claws of the hyenas following the death of his father, the child Simba, meets the meerkat, *Timon* and the warthog, *Pumbaa*. These two male friends will adopt him and show him a somewhat *contra naturam* way of living for a lion, feeding on juicy worms and crunchy beetles, as well as enjoying leisure time by singing what has since become the international anthem of indolence *Hakuna Matata*, meaning “There are no worries” in Swahili. And time passes quickly with these two new friends since we see Simba beginning to sing the song still a cub, and finishing it as a young adult. This problem of the passing of time, also apparent in *American Pie*, seems a particular feature of masculine friendship, and I should add, of foregrounding anxieties of masculine friendship. The friendship with the Meerkat and the

Warthog evades the duty of reproduction that the circle of life demands, rather turning the mythical time of the eternal return into a timeless *jouissance*. This contraction of future and past in a perpetual *now* threatens to definitively ravish Simba from the hetero-reproductive circularity of time⁵. In that sense this friendship is organized by a queer temporality (“queer temporalities [...] are points of resistance to [a] temporal order [seen as seamless, unified, and forward moving] that, in turn, propose other possibilities for living in relation to indeterminately past, present, and future others” Freeman, xxii). It is clearly Simba’s moral and reproductive duty that is at stake when the little cub gets caught in this web of friendships, and the film insists enough on this to make it clear. When the grown up Simba meet Nala by chance, who is destined to be his wife, she invokes his duty as a king to reestablish order. But Simba hesitates and thanks to the shaman-like figure, Rafiki, Simba will contact his father who demands that Simba take back his place in the circle of life. Even in particularly humoristic moments, male friendship in the *The Lion King* is depicted as potentially threatening, as timeless *jouissance* defies the circular and repetitive duty of reproduction.

8 Keeping in mind this reading of a potential *queer* dimension in male friendships, it is no wonder that in *American Pie II*, even if the movie was released 7 years after *The Lion King*, the old-fashioned but wise advisor, Jim’s father, in an off-screen conversation, recommends *The Lion King* to Nadia. This otherwise anecdotal advice is far from being insignificant in a movie saturated by male-to-male friendships. Nadia, being the archetypal figure of the eastern European woman that is the object of Jim’s clumsy desires, embodies the otherness toward which the compass of straight desires has to point. However, Jim, being plagued by bad luck, always postpones his *jouissance*, while the only gratification that he receives, comes from his close friends. Confronted to an always-postponed access to straight sexuality, Jim faces a danger, the one of being eternally caught in the web of male friendships. Therefore Nadia, whose name and function are close enough to the female savior figure of Nala in *The Lion King*, is the recipient of a message coming from Jim’s father - once again as in *The Lion King* - that Jim has to take his place in the Circle of Life. Throughout the *American Pie* saga there is this anxiety about participating in a straight sex-life. If *American Pie* focuses mainly on Jim’s misfortunes, *American Pie II* focuses on Kevin’s existential struggles with time and friendship. Having been deeply in love with

⁵ It is therefore not surprising if in his Shakespearian analysis of *The Lion King* and Disney’s *The Little Mermaid*, Richard Finkelstein draws a comparison between Timon and Falstaff following the axis of time : “Timon is also like Falstaff because he has no memory or knowledge of time”. (188)

Vicky in the first movie, Kevin has some difficulty coping with their separation. Without other sexual relations in college his life is depicted as been stuck in the past. When all the whole crew of friends gathers for summer break, they experience a kind of temporal displacement. But the burden of the past always weighs on the flourishing of their sexual life. Jim's video from the first movie and the exposure of his pre-ejaculations with Nadia, another problem of timing, still haunt Jim's life when he discovers that his freshman's aura has no impact on High school girls since the video has become an intergenerational moment of ridicule.

9 If the past and people living in the past are depicted as opposing the straight flow of time especially in relation to girls, *American Pie I* and *II* also coined a very particular relation to time, and I would say a straight relation to time. Kevin, in *American Pie I* inherits a book, called "The Bible", hidden secretly in the Library's high school and containing the secrets of female orgasm. The text of "The Bible", which is passed from one generation of straight male to another, is not a mere retelling of the past, but it is also augmented by the sexual discoveries of each generation. If the *American Pie* saga is based, like *The Lion King*, on the celebration of cyclic time of reproduction, the movie also depicts another temporality based on homosocial organization. Thanks to his older brother, Kevin becomes the heir of the knowledge of previous generational cycles about female orgasm as a symbolic attempt to continuously reduce the Real of its otherness. The circle, figure of straight sex, turns into a cumulative spiral in the world of male-to-male friendships. To the closure of the circle, being both closed and opened by the birth of the Child, denying death and *jouissance*, that is to say denying the existence of something undoing its ordering, straight male friendship opposes the acknowledgement of the presence of a threat, here symbolized in the anxiety of not being able to satisfy the female partners. Therefore it is no surprise that Kevin will, once again, turn to his older brother at the beginning of *American Pie II*, when he will again have to face his nostalgia for a passed time.

10 Although throughout the *American Pie* saga each character has his own problematic relation to time throughout the saga, it is probably with Stifler that the scope of the danger of time is most obvious. Among the five friends, Stifler is the one who thoroughly resists the ordering of time and the hetero-reproductive figure of the circle. No need to say that Stifler is also the one who is constantly marginalized in the group of friends, and also the figure most connected to homosexual jokes in the movies. In other words, Stifler is the dark (ass)hole who, bending time by the density of its developmental inertia, attracts the glittering of Uranus jokes but who also threatens to swallow the whole Milky Way of the symbolic order. By

literally swallowing Kevin's sperm in a hilarious moment of confusion, Stifler enacts the particular threat that circulates around him, namely, the swallowing of these children-to-be because of his fixation to the timeless *jouissance* of friendships. It would probably be excessive to see in Stifler a reenactment of Uranus' devoration of its own children, but it is true that his refusal of the Circle of Life and his praise of immediate *jouissance* evokes the specter of *sinthomosexuality* and the fantasy of an Uranian castration.⁶

11 I would like to develop the idea of the spiral of time with the sequel *The Lion King 1 ½* (Bradley Raymond, 2004), and the spin off movies of the American Pie saga, especially *American Pie presents: The book of Love* (John Putch, 2009), the last production under the title *American Pie*. Recalling the plot of *American Pie I*, a group of three seniors studying females' geometry of forms and shapes at the very same East Great Falls High try painfully to get rid of their virginity. Accidentally, after having burnt down part of the library, Rob (Bug Hall) discovers "The Bible" while cleaning the mess produced by his incontrollable ardent desires. Unfortunately, the water coming from the sprinklers during the fire has destroyed most of the book. Trying to use the remaining sexual wisdom of the past generations of unknown straight buddies, the three friends are shortly disappointed and recognize soon enough that the Bible can only be efficient as a whole. Using the library stamp card to keep trace of the previous owners of "The Bible", the three stooges decide to reconstruct the knowledge of the book getting in contact with them in order to share their love secrets. Interestingly enough we discover that the creator of "The Bible" is no one other than Jim's dad, who jokingly is metaphorically associated with God himself. Therefore, time is associated here with the linear transmission of a particular knowledge that his creator will define in one sentence recalling *The Lion King's* Circle of Life, "The Bible is not about sex, it is about Life",. Therefore, it is important to challenge Sharyn Pearce's happy-go-lucky reading of "The Bible", a narrative device already introduced in *American Pie I*:

American Pie is in part, a tongue-in-cheek parody of man-to-man sex talks, of "secret men's business" generally. For instance, Kevin's older brother tells him of the whereabouts of a book, an instructional bible of sex techniques handed down from one generation of high

⁶ Stifler, as a *sinthomosexual* figure, can be however associated with the redeemed figures like Scrooge and described by Edelman. If Stifler is the fifth element that resists the heteronormative narrative of the organization of life, he eventually gets integrated in the group of the four friends. At the end of Stifler's unexpected wild party, the four friends reproach him for always ruining things. Stifler's destructive aspects echo his resistance to the mermaid's voices of the *Circle of Life*. But in the following scene, the group decides to make up with Stifler. Stifler acknowledges that he is a "dick", but the group finally integrates him by saying "yes, but you are our dick". The constitution and integration of Stifler as a phallic figure, signs its entrance in the Symbolic order. From that point in the movie Stifler supports the values of Love and Compassion to the point where he will organize the gay wedding of his two friends of his High School's lacrosse team.

schools boys to the next. But Kevin is worthy of this only when he proves to his brother that he is concerned to make the sexual experience happy for his girlfriend as well, that he wants “to return the favor”, as he puts it. His credential having been verified, his visit to the secret place to find the book is cued in with the portentous music associated with the pursuit of a noble quest, and this music continues later as Kevin reads the dusty tome and notes in particular pages dealing with the “tongue tornado” (77).

12 If I cannot completely acknowledge Pearce’s reading of *American Pie* as a “manual for self-formation, as a means whereby young men can progress relatively smoothly toward adulthood with particular reference to the management of sexual conduct” (70), it is because for her omission of what “The Bible“ does not account for, namely, queer sex, but more generally *sinthomosexuality*. Caught in the hetero-reproductive imaginary narrative of a sexual *relation*, her interpretation forgets the impossibility of a sexual *relation*, forgets the presence of the death drive within this enchanting narrative of straight sexuality and therefore subscribes to the fantasy of a meaningful sexuality supported by the unity of a regained symbolic order. The very necessity of transmitting a sexual knowledge from one generation to another implicitly exposes the meaninglessness of sexuality. That is to say that it not only reveals that sexuality is ultimately better defined and sustained by cultural and social than by “natural” (biological) variables, but also that, for the same reason, sexuality lacks any stable ground on which its meaning could stand. In other words, the necessity of a transmission of a sexual knowledge underlines the necessity of a policing of desire. Therefore the spatial representation of time that would embody at the same “time” the linear transmission of knowledge *and* the mythical Circle of Life based on the fantasy of a unity of the Symbolic order and the foreclosure of the Real, is the figure of the spiral.

13 This figure will usefully summarize the previous interpretations of these movies and will give a visual representation of different straight temporalities of the Circle of Life and the discreet line of male-to-male transmission. In other words I suggest that chronobiopolitics⁷ as defined by Freeman has is structured as a spiral since it “harnesses not only sequence but also cycle, the dialectical companion to sequence, for the idea of time as cyclical stabilizes its forward movement, promising renewal rather than rupture” (5). As

⁷ Concept Initially defined by Luciano as “The sexual arrangement of the time of life” (9), Freeman borrows the idea of life as being normatively organized through time and states that “Chrononormativity is a mode of implantation, a technique by which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts. Schedules, calendars, time zones, and even wristwatches inculcate what the sociologist Evitar Zerubavel calls “hidden rhythms”, forms of temporal experience that seem natural to those whom they privilege. Manipulations of time convert historically specific regimes of asymmetrical power into seemingly ordinary bodily tempos and routines, which in turn organize the value and meaning of time.” (3)

stated earlier, *The Lion King* offers a cyclic mythical representation of time threatened by the queerness of Scar and by the timeless *jouissance* of friendship as well. In *American Pie*, time is ordered by the linear transmission of hetero-normative knowledge about sex and love. The threatening figure of the *American Pie* saga is Stifler, as he refuses to participate in the narrative of reproductive sex. Interestingly enough, throughout the eight *American Pie* movies (including the spin-offs), Stifler (nicknamed Stifmeister) is the only character other than Jim's Dad who is present in all the films. Opposed to the patriarchal figure, symbolically associated to God as he is the creator of "The Bible", the Stifmeister as *sinthomosexual* of the movie, refuses - in the same gesture - not only the circularity of hetero-normativity but also the linear organization of sexual knowledge transmission. For example, in *American Pie presents: Band Camp* (Steve Rash, 2005), Stifler's brother, Matt Stifler (Tad Hilgenbrink) is a wannabe a Stifmeister and devotes a strong admiration to his older brother. But the movie stresses that Stifler ignores his brother's calls. This brotherly relationship stands in sharp contrast with that of Kevin's as depicted in *American Pie I* and *II* where his older brother recognizes Kevin as a truthful heir and bearer of "The Bible".

14 Hence if we consider that each loop of the spiral, as a hetero-reproductive representation of time, symbolizes a generation, the queer figures are situated in the intervals between two loops. Stifler, refusing the heteronormative ordering of time, situates himself out of time. The movies affirm the timelessness of this figure and its exclusion from the spiral. Similarly, the couple Timon/Pumba in *The Lion King* is represented as out of time enjoying a timeless *jouissance* blind to the imperative of the *Circle of Life*. When Disney producers chose the title *The Lion King 1½* they recognized, even if unwillingly, the "in-betweenness" of queerness in the movie. If *The Lion King* tells the story of Simba from his birth to his realization as a father, *The Lion King II* follows Kiara, Simba's daughter, from a young cub, to her consecration as a Queen. *The Lion King 1½* decides to retell the story of the first *The Lion King* from the point of view of this queer/friendly couple of the movie Timon and Pumba. If nothing in the Disney movie is explicitly outing the couple as gay, allowing for the prude spectator to ignore this dimension, the accumulation of signs of their queerness (sharing bed, raising a child, etc...) demands another reading. Jeffery Dennis best illustrates this logic of avoidance, to talk about the relation without specifying it, logic sometimes adopted by queers in relation with their parents or friends, in his analysis of the signs of queerness in cartoons:

Where no characters are specifically identified as gay or lesbian, we can locate same-sex desire in an interaction between two characters of the same sex, which is

elsewhere coded as romantic but is not an obvious parody of heterosexual desire : for instance, sharing a living space or a bed; participating in social activities as a couple; being accepted as a couple by others; failing to pursue other substantive relationships, especially those with the opposite sex; rejecting romantic overtures from others; or overtly expressing desire through flirting and sexual talk. (133)

15 What is particularly interesting here is that both movies, *The Lion King* and *The Lion King 1 1/2* depict and associate the “bromantic” couple with the queer couple, playing with the porous borders between homosociality and homosexuality. This in-betweenness however does not belong to the spiral, or to be more precise, is an effect and a condition of its own structure itself. Stifler and our gay/friendly couple are the condition for a particular narration of time. This narration, demanding a specific organization of time and knowledge, can be named a *narratime* as defined by James Winders as “yok[ing] together three concepts central to history: Knowledge (the Latin *narrare* meaning to know), time and history” (27). The narratime of the spiral is one possibility of the organization and representation of time, it is one particular *syuzhet*, and allows thinking about other orderings of time that would escape chronobiopolitics and reprofuturity⁸. At the very beginning of *The Lion King 1 1/2*, Pumba and Timon are sitting in front of a movie screen and they have an argument, rewinding and forwarding the movie, about where to begin the story in order to make sense of the *whole* story of *The Lion King*. They finally decide to tell their story since they, as Simba’s parents, who have supported the whole circle of life.

16 The narratime of the spiral also allows accounting for the notion of Derrida’s *différance* and is present in its temporal version in Edelman’s work with its critique of futurity. When a spiral is set in a rotational movement, it creates a kind of optical illusion. The end of the spiral seems to continually move forward, and seems to dig endlessly in the surrounding void, when in fact the spiral stands still, promising nothing else than its incessant repetition of the same. The spiral therefore defers the promise of a future where the unity of meaning will take its organization as a whole, which is in fact mere illusion, and is only due to the fact that the spiral is whirling around a hole, a lack. This hermeneutics of the spiral can be illustrated with Josh Chavetz’s commentary on Gadamer hermeneutics when he states that

⁸ Who can better sum up Edelman’s concept of repro-futurity than Freeman? : “His *No Future* declares that queers should, to paraphrase, just say no to the future. This is because even the idea of a queerly intergenerational relationality is based on what he calls repro-futurity: ultimately, it stakes its hopes on those not yet born or grown up. Repro-futurity is a political orientation that depends on the sacrifice of adult needs, the desexualization of children, and the disavowal of the negating potential of queerness itself. Edelman writes that queer politics and theory must refuse the expectation or promise of a better society, even one formulated in the negative or abstract. In his view, queers must embrace the death drive, exploit their status as avatars of the antifutural, “fuck... the Child.” (2007, 178)

“Gadamer’s hermeneutics circle is thus a *spiral* process: it moves in circle, but they are directed circles. They ultimately aim at a point—the *Gedanke* of the text” (26). Although it is not Chavertz argument, but this isomorphism of the spiral of reproduction, and the spiral of access to truth are merged in reprofuturist discourse. The access to truth hangs on a future depending on reproduction, as much as, the access to reproduction depends on an access to truth⁹. This conflation of reproduction with a hermeneutics leads to the second aspect of the process of *differentiation*. The spiral, and its narrative device of exclusion, the elipsis¹⁰, differs, in the sense that the illusion of its movement creates a space between each loops of the spiral as to exclude what does not belongs to its organization, that it is to say anything that does not belong to its repetition. The narratime of the spiral appears therefore to define any particular narrative centered on reproduction and acknowledging a certain positivity of knowledge. However, this spiral is also a tool of exclusion, denying access to the *sinthomosexuals* and to a specific understanding of friendship.

17 Chris Marker, in his famous essay on *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958), a movie which itself is structured as a spiral, notices that “The vertigo the film deals with isn’t to do with space and falling; it is a clear, understandable and spectacular metaphor for yet another kind of vertigo, much more difficult to represent – –the vertigo of time” (184). This reading associated with the presence of a “spiral of time” (191) will be used here as an interpretation of the second part of the movie as a dream or a fantasy. The spiral, from the very beginning of the movie, is understood as the visual correspondence of sensation of vertigo, but also as a metaphor of time, which is associated with the female characters of the movie. At the end of the opening credits, Kim Novak’s face appears and the camera focuses slowly on her right eyes. Slowly a spiral is formed from her iris and spins like the famous black and white cardboard device belonging to this other queer figure, the hypnotizer. The spiral is associated with desire throughout the movie, an attraction/repulsion dynamic close enough to Lacan’s *hainamoration*, which seems to appear with the pursuit of straight desire. However, interestingly enough, the cause of the activation of John Ferguson’s latent acrophobia, begins when, pursuing an unknown character, the object *a*, the detective slips from a roof and holds to a gutter while feeling the vertiginous call of the void. A policeman, a common symbol of order, attempts to rescue him but instead slips, and ends his deadly fall a few stores lower.

⁹ It would be interesting here to see how sciences, especially psychoanalysis has thought non-reproductive sexualities as stubbornly stuck in a denial of reality.

¹⁰ Not surprisingly the ellipsis is both the favorite tool of censorship, as well as the main narrative device of the *Hakuna Matata* scene. We learn thanks to *The Lion King 11/2* that what the ellipsis was concealing is a particularly flamboyant moment of queerness: the narrative of Simba’s education by his two adoptive fathers.

John Ferguson's Freudian unconscious resistance to order is stressed when having a discussion with his old buddy from college, Gavin Elster (Tom Helmore), during which we learn that Ferguson has never been married, but spends most of his time with his ex-girlfriend (Barbara Bel Geddes). These details allow us to understand the latent text of the film's acrophobia. The vertigo that Ferguson suffers from is the vertigo that appears in front of the spiral of time and that anyone who wants to commit to the spiral of reprofuturity can feel. From that point in the movie onwards every feeling of vertigo will be associated with the time ordering of straight sex life. For example, the spiral in Madeleine/Carlotta's (Kim Novak) hairdo signals the female character as belonging to the circle of reproduction. Therefore Madeleine/Carlotta embodies different conflicting desires for Ferguson. On one hand, his desire for participating in straight sex life, on the other hand, his refusal of death as a condition for the reproduction of generations. The scene of the church bell tower is another example of this subconscious text, which runs through the movie. When Ferguson and Madeleine/Carlotta fall in love, he unexpectedly lets her go into the bell tower even though it is clear that she will attempt to commit suicide once again. His actions are incomprehensible without taking into account his anxiety about the spiral of reproduction. This anxiety is signified by the few seconds that he takes before deciding to run finally after her in a desperate attempt to save her from the spirit pushing her toward death. In his pursuit for the participation in straight sex life, he is once again victim of his vertigo causing the stairs to take the shape of a fascinating, yet deadly spiral. Unable to overcome his vertigo, he fails to prevent Madeleine/Carlotta's fatal jump from the tower. His vertigo functions as a symptom, hiding his refusal of the spiral of reproduction and allowing him to not save his love without facing its responsibility in her death.

18 Following Chris Marker's argument, it is possible to read the second part of the movie as Ferguson's attempt to queer time in a fantasy of recovery, that is, a recovery from is vertigo but also recovery from death. This refusal is already present in Carlotta spirit, coming back from death in order to haunt Madeleine's body. But to this refusal of the structure of the spiral necessarily invoking death Ferguson adds the denial of Madeleine's suicide, when he obsessively tries to recreate Madeleine's presence from Judy's body (Kim Novak). Read as a fantasy as in Chris Marker's interpretation, it is no wonder why Ferguson, will finally get rid of its acrophobia, since death can be overcome that way. From this point of view, the trick he has been victim of is a paranoid attempt to deny the traumatic death of his love. Therefore, when he asks Judy to repeat the scene in the tower bell, his denial of death allows him to overcome his acrophobia and to access to truth without paying the price of his own death that

the spiral of reprofuturity demands. However this hermeneutical ecstasy falls short since the movie ends in a very puzzling way. While Jefferson and Judy kiss each other after Jefferson has stated, “there’s no bringing her back”, a shadow slowly emerges from the stairs, and Judy jumps from the tower out of fear and dies. However, the explanation of Judy’s death being caused by the fear of a killer (or Gavin, or the ghost of Madeleine) reducing them to silence seems to be a particularly artificial *deus ex machina*, especially when the killer (or whatever else it may be) turns out to be the inoffensive yet unexpected figure of a nun. However, we can make sense of this surprising final, if we understand the sudden entrance of the nun as a figure of death. The nun is the return of the repressed - the reality of death - expressed in Jefferson’s last sentence of the movie “There is no bringing her back”. Indeed, the figure of the nun can be read as a figure of death, since she does not participate in the spiral of time. Therefore, the uncontrollable fear that invades Judy and pushes her into the void can be read as another trick of Jefferson’s mind, or more precisely of the Real coiling inside the death drive.

19 I would like to return to my initial critique of Dundes & Dundes’ reading of *The Lion King*, which, focusing on the traditional psychoanalytical interpretation, fails to account for what really makes *The Lion King* so successful. Beyond the reactivation of a somewhat eroded Oedipal presence on the movie, there is also a body of different network of fantasies that the movie successful ties together through a particular representation of time and its association with the celebration of traditional straight sex life. Any straight audiences subscribing to its imperatives can easily fall into the complaisant self-celebration of straight sexuality that the film calls for.

20 As I have shown in my discussion of these different movies, there are always different temporalities that sustain different organization of gender and sexualities at play. Whether it is in the circle illustrated in *The Lion King*, or in the line of transmission of male knowledge in *American Pie*, or in the *sinthomosexual* friendships, or finally in the temporality opened by the denial of death in *Vertigo*, I have shown that time, understood as a narratime, is subjected to a diversity of different narratives sweeping along knowledge and legitimizing certain social practices (among them sex) and excluding others. I have suggested that Freeman’s chronobiopolitics can be understood as a spiral that creates its own process of legitimization and exclusion. Moreover, connections must be drawn between this notion of narratime and Carolyn Dinshaw’s arguments developed in *Getting Medieval*. The *othering* process of the spiral sustains the construction of a modern (or post-modern) subject, but also prevents critiques from looking at texts with present eyes. The co-relations between narrative,

temporality and knowledge defined as narratime allow excavating “potentially productive site of new times; cultural locations, and identifications” (19) by denaturalizing dominant representations of time and its associated narratives and knowledge. By reducing modernity to one of these possible narratimes (or a cluster of different narratimes) possible bridges can be built between texts that belong to different time periods opening “temporal dimension of the self and of community” (21).

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Arab-Muslim Masculinity on Trial: Gay Muslim Writers Broaching Homosexuality

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Abstract:

This paper will initially examine the importance of masculinity in Arab-Muslim societies before analysing the qualities that these societies deem imperative of masculinity. Ultimately, the paper will attempt to theorise the manner in which homosexuality destabilises these preconceptions about Arab-Muslim masculinity and male sexuality. Drawing on the hermeneutic readings of Lawrence R. Schehr in his book 'The Shock of Men: Homosexual Hermeneutics in French Writing', this paper sets out to reveal that masculinity in Arab-Muslim societies of the Maghreb “can be seen through other eyes, interpreted through other figured, or opened up to different possibilities if the mechanics of sexual reproduction are not given transcendental cultural meaning” (Schehr viii). Homosexuality will be viewed as an important locus of exerting “pressure on simplistic notions of identity and [disturbing] the value systems that underlie designations of normal and abnormal identity” (Day xi).

1 In an article entitled “Violence, Sexuality and Women’s lives”, Lori Heise makes the astute observation that in numerous cultures, men fight daily to prove to themselves and to others that they qualify to belong to the esteemed category of male. She attests that by not being a man, one is reduced to the status of woman or queer. Three overarching arguments can be deduced from Heise’s reflections. To begin with, she brings to light the question of the perceptible difference between being a male and being a man. Secondly, she draws a clear distinction between “man” and the inferior category of “woman”. Ultimately, there is the question of the orientation of desire and eroticism as expressed by the heterosexual and homosexual binary. These questions are undoubtedly key in the construction of masculinity in the predominantly heteropatriarchal Arab-Muslim societies of North Africa. Lahoucine Ouzgane justly identifies in the introduction to his book *Islamic Masculinities* that “at a time when masculinities studies is experiencing a tremendous boom in the West, masculinity in Islamic cultures has so far remained an underexamined category that secures its power by refusing to identify itself” (1). Maxime Cervulle and Nick Rees Roberts concur, adding that masculinity subsists by making itself unrecognisable and by acquiescently not saying its name (53). Arab-Muslim masculinity as a field of inquiry and research has persisted a *terra incognita* in that by remaining “unrecognisable”, it poses a daunting task to comprehend what it is, how it is constructed and how it is regulated. There is however need, as suggested by Ouzgane, to deconstruct the sacrosanctity that Islamic masculinity has created about itself so

as to “render Muslim men visible as gendered subjects and show that masculinities have a history and are part of gender relations in Muslim countries” (1).

2 A brief presentation of the four writers as well as their works would be a convenient point of departure. Rachid O. is considered the contemporary pioneer of openly writing about homosexuality in North Africa. Born in 1970 in Rabat, he studied in Marrakech before obtaining a scholarship to study at the Villa Médicis in Rome in the year 2000. To date, he has published five novels; *L'Enfant Ébloui* (1995), *Plusieurs Vies* (1996), *Chocolat Chaud* (1998) and *Ce qui Reste* (2003) and *Analphabètes* (2013), which form a series detailing fragmented memories of the protagonist-narrator's attempt to assume his homosexuality in a Muslim society in Morocco. Abdellah Taïa was born in 1973 and he studied in Rabat before moving to Geneva where he studied for a semester in the mid-1990s. He thereafter moved to pursue further studies in Paris at the Sorbonne. In four of his autofictional novels namely, *Mon Maroc* (2000), *Le Rouge du Tarbouche* (2004), *L'Armée du Salut* (2006) and *Une Mélancolie Arabe* (2008) he confronts the difficulty of assuming a homosexual identity in a homophobic Arab-Muslim society that is deeply entrenched in piety and cultural practices. The action of the novels fluctuates between Morocco and France and the narrator of the four novels is called Abdellah Taïa like the author and the four books depict different stages of the narrator's quest to construct and adopt an exclusively “gay”¹ identity. As for Eyet-Chékib Djaziri, he was born in Tunis in 1957 of a Turco-Tunisian father and a French mother. Aged sixteen, he moved to France with his mother upon the divorce of his parents. He cut short his studies, at the age of twenty-two years, in order to join an airline in which he travelled around the world and only retiring after sixteen years. It is then that he devoted himself to writing. His autofictional diptych *Un Poisson sur la Balançoire* (1997) and *Une Promesse de Douleur et de Sang* (1998) portrays the sexual awakening of the protagonist-narrator named Sofiène in a Tunisian society which, as Eric Levéel states, condemns queer sexuality even though it is obsessed by it (88). Finally Ilmann Bel, the youngest of the four writers. He was born in 1982 in Paris to Algerian parents. He has worked as an actor and model. *Un Mauvais Fils* (2010) is his debut novel and it chronicles the challenges faced by a young protagonist, Zacharia, as he grapples with his (homo)sexuality in the neighbourhoods of Paris. In addition to his sexuality, the protagonist has to face stigmatisation and racial profiling in the country of his birth. All

¹ The term “gay” is used in inverted quotes given its contentious nature vis-à-vis Arab-Muslim societies of the Maghreb. Sophie Smith summarises in such terms the problem surrounding the use of the term “gay” in reference to the Maghreb: “Established scholarly consensus on the subject has traditionally asserted that a ‘gay’ identity as it has emerged in recent decades in the West does not exist in cultures of Muslim heritage. Though this area of enquiry is rife with terminological problems and cross-cultural misunderstandings, most critics agree there is no ‘gay’ identity in Islamic countries” (2012: 36)

the writers, except Ilmann Bel, are on some form of self-imposed exile in France. This exile is certainly not permanent because they oftentimes return to their countries of origin for short visits. The exile is largely motivated by the need to fully assume their homosexuality, which is evidently impossible to do in the Maghreb. These writers, as is the case with their protagonists, frame their identity construction within particular socio-historical and cultural contexts and backgrounds be it in the Maghreb or on the other side of the Mediterranean sea in France.

3 Portraying Arab-Muslim masculinity is central to the novels of the four contemporary gay writers of Maghrebian descent as they openly broach male homosexuality, a subject area which in the countries of the Maghreb remains not simply a taboo but also a crime punishable by a prison sentence or fine or both². The novels of this burgeoning canon of gay writers are synchronous with the mounting interest in various aspects of and potential common points between literary production and the deconstruction of homosexuality and masculinity in the Arab-Muslim countries of North Africa.

4 It is herein posited that the novels of Rachid O., Abdellah Taïa, Eyet-Chékib Djaziri and Ilmann Bel fearlessly challenge and intently interrogate simplistic and often monolithic definitions of Arab-Muslim masculinities. The novels of these writers, through an open broaching of male homosexuality, question the roles and performance of masculinity in predominantly Arab-Muslim communities, in North Africa and to a smaller extent in France³. Their novels embody the “distinction made by modern Western ‘sexuality’ between sexual and gender identity, that is, between *kinds* of sexual predilections and *degrees* of masculinity and femininity, [which] has until recently had little resonance” (Dunne 8) in Arab-Muslim nations. They also provide a vital alternative not just of masculinity but also of male sexuality and eroticism. This paper centres on the questions posed by Abdessamad Dialmy who asks: “*Qu’est-ce qu’un homme? Naît-on homme? Suffit-il de naître male pour être un homme? Le devient-on? Est-on homme indépendamment de l’orientation sexuelle? À quoi donc réfère l’identité masculine?*” (5) [What is a man? Is one born a man? Does it suffice to be born male

² Article 338 of Algerian law states that “anyone guilty of a homosexual act is punishable with imprisonment, and a fine of between 500 and 2000 Algerian Dinars. In Morocco, homosexuality is equally illegal and according to Section 489 of its penal code, it carries a penalty that ranges from six months to three years in prison as well as a fine of 120 to 1200 Dirhams. As for the situation in Tunisia, Article 230 of the Penal Code of 1913 (which was largely amended in 1964) punishes private acts of sodomy between consenting adults with a prison term of up to three years.

³ This article examines Arab-Muslim communities of North Africa and France because the action of the novels that are herein analysed takes place in these two geographical locations separated by the Mediterranean. Due to migration, a considerable Maghrebian community is currently found in France, which had previously colonised the three Maghrebian countries of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia.

to be a man? Or does one become it? Is one a man regardless of sexual orientation? To what therefore does masculine identity refer?]⁴. Drawing on Simone de Beauvoir's assertion "one is not born a woman, but one becomes one" (1941: 31), Dialmy ponders on the constitution of masculine subjectivities and identities. The literary characters of the four writers grapple with similar questions as they seek to define their masculinity and show that it is not cast in stone but rather that it has several shades.

5 Through an initial examination of the centrality of masculinity in Arab-Muslim societies as well as the defining qualities of masculinity, it is herein theorised that homosexuality destabilises the traditionalist and neo-traditionalist perceptions of masculinity and male sexuality. Drawing on the hermeneutic readings of Lawrence R. Schehr, it will be revealed that masculinity in Arab-Muslim societies of the Maghreb "can be seen through other eyes, interpreted through other figured, or opened up to different possibilities if the mechanics of sexual reproduction are not given transcendental cultural meaning" (viii). Furthermore, it will be argued that homosexuality is an important locus of exerting "pressure on simplistic notions of identity and [disturbing] the value systems that underlie designations of normal and abnormal identity" (Day xi).

6 In Muslim communities a rigid separation between the sexes exists and as noted by As'ad AbuKhalil, "male supremacy is assumed to be an integral part of the faith, nay of the moral obligation of worship. Not that Islam favours full gender equality; it does not, and the view that culture is solely responsible for the oppression and repression of women in the Middle East ignores the dynamic interaction between culture and religion over time" (93). He further posits that "the construction of modern masculinity in Western societies was not similar to that in Eastern societies. The rigid lines of separation and distinction between males and females, or between homosexuals and heterosexuals, were lines of qualitative moral designation. Males and heterosexuals represent the ideal social and natural roles, from the standpoint of established clerical opinion" (101). Notwithstanding these gender inequalities, Durre Conway-Long find that what is of principal importance in the understanding of Islamic sexuality, as might be the case of any form of masculinity, "is the perception of the relations between men and women in their society" (145).

7 Abdessamad Dialmy and Allon J. Uhlmann characterise masculinity as "the capacity to act, and the capacity to act is not only the ability to sexually penetrate but also the ability to prevent sexual penetration" (2005: 19). They go on to develop that:

⁴ This and other translations in this paper are my own.

Within the Arab epistemology of sexuality that reduces sexual activity to penetration, this act becomes a fundamental condition for the construction and empowerment of the Arab male ego and for securing his mental health. This pattern in the integration of sexuality into the personality of the Arab man makes sexuality the basic determinant of the masculine personality and, moreover, turns sexuality into a pivotal meaning of life for the Arab man.

The male child is socialised so as to glorify his penis. Its circumcision marks an important step in the creation of the masculine identity. Through circumcision, the boy is delivered from the prepuce, liberated from the female province and thereby acquiring virility (Bonnet 838). In this socialisation of the male child, the female is viewed as an object of sexual desire and in a blog article published in 2009, Dialmy remarks that “to be a man is to be a king, and to be a king is to be a man. To be a man sultan means to be virile, it means to dominate the wife, it means first to be married. Therefore, the male (*rajal*) is the harsh man, as opposed to the lenient man (*rouijel*). The man is the master who must sexually initiate the wife and control her later on the sexuality of his female offspring (the preservation of virginity)”.

8 Although there has been discernible change in the hierarchical relationship between the sexes especially considering that Maghrebian societies have undergone considerable transformation, specifically in relation to issues on sexuality and reproduction, masculinity still holds sway to its hegemonic position. The education and employment of women has done little to destabilise masculinity’s dominance. The predominantly Arab-Muslim societies of North-Africa continue to be hétéropatriarcal in the sense that they are essentially based on male supremacy which is intrinsically constructed on a system of gender binaries that assumes heterosexuality as a social norm.

9 Besides, in the predominantly conservative and heteropatriarchal societies of the Maghreb, male children are held in considerably high esteem. According to the protagonist-narrator Abdellah in Abdellah Taïa’s novel *L’Armée du Salut* (2006), “*un garçon est, quoi qu’il arrive, un signe positif, synonyme de bonne fortune, de richesse, de bonheur*” (27) [A boy, whatever happens, is a positive sign, a synonym of good fortune, wealth, happiness]. The same narrator explains in another novel, *Mon Maroc* (2000) that his father had been oddly dejected, awfully frustrated and peculiarly disappointed because before the birth of the said narrator, he had just one son and many female children. The birth of Abdellah is celebrated because a male child augured well for the honour and the name of the family: “*on me gâtait; je l’étais le centre d’intérêt, l’être le plus important de la famille, le plus aimé. Leur fierté à plus d’un titre et surtout grâce à mon sexe: masculine. Désiré, j’étais depuis des années et des années*” (14) [I was spoiled, I was the centre of attraction, the most important

person in the family, the most loved. Their pride in more ways than one, and especially because of my sex: male. Desired, I was for years and years]. Abdellah was a child for whom the family, the father in particular, had exceedingly verdant hopes and expectations in as far as perpetuating the family name and honour. These hopes and expectations are certainly more pronounced in modest and impoverished families (Dialmy & Uhlmann 25).

10 It is important to enumerate at this point the different qualities that are considered fundamental in the construction of a “man” and a masculine identity. What is profoundly interesting is how the protagonists of the four writers obstinately refuse to espouse the Arab-Muslim ideals of the conception of masculinity. To begin with, two directly contrasting forms of masculinity are presented. The first, superior and reified, is manifested through intelligence, action, virility, power and the propensity for dominance. The other model, comparable to femininity, is characterised by passivity, submission and affective predisposition. Instead of exhibiting the manly traits of virility and physical fortitude, the four protagonists effortlessly embrace their “feminine side”. Abdellah, in the novel *Le Rouge du Tarbouche* (2004), is reproached by his elder brother because he carries himself in an “unmanly” fashion: “*tu vois comment tu parles, et ces gestes, et ces manières: les homes, les vrais homes ne font pas comme ça, ils se tiennent bien, ils sont virils...*” (82) [you see your way of talking, and your gestures, and your mannerisms: men, real men do not do that,

La grâce qui accompagnait ma démarche et tous mes gestes ne provoquait que les quolibets de ceux qui me croisaient, voire parfois une certaine agressivité dont quelques-uns accompagnaient leurs moqueries. La voix féminine, qui s’envolait de ma gorge en notes cristallines, déclenchait des vocations d’imitateurs chez ceux qui m’entendaient parler. (Un Poisson sur la Balançoire 5)

[The grace which accompanied my gait and all my gestures simply aroused jeers from those who crossed my path, and sometimes aggressiveness accompanied some of their mockery. The feminine voice, which flew from my throat in crystalline notes, triggered off many imitations from those who heard me speak].

Sofiène’s behaviour is heavily marked by a feminine grace and this is also similar for Abdellah who accepts that he is mawkishly effeminate and even expresses the desire to be a woman: “*j’aurais aimé être une femme. Une vraie femme. J’aurais aimé être un fou. Un vrai fou. C’est ce que j’allais devenir, un jour*” (*Une Melancolie Arabe* 30) [I would have loved to be a woman. A real woman. I would have loved to be mad. A real mad person. This is what I would become]. What is distinctly interesting in this assertion is how Abdellah refers to his desire to be a woman to be madness. Deviance from what is assigned to one’s sex and gender is considered madness because it goes against the established order of social behaviour. Sofiène also expresses a similar desire to be a woman:

Je regardais mon ventre plat. Je posais la main dessus et, tout en me caressant, je prenais conscience que malheureusement jamais je ne porterais son enfant. Ni le sien, ni celui de qui que ce soit. Dans le fond, la nature était très injuste de priver les hommes du plaisir de donner la vie. De ce côté-là, les femmes pouvaient s'estimer largement favorisées. (Un Poisson sur la Balance 37)

[I looked at my flat tummy. I put my hands on it, and caressing myself, I realised that unfortunately I would never carry his child. Neither his nor that of anyone else. In essence, nature had been very unjust in depriving men the pleasure of giving life. On this one, women could consider themselves largely fortunate].

Durre Conway-Long describes this aching desire by a man to want to bear a child as “the uterus envy” (147). This “uterus envy” in the case of the two above-mentioned protagonists is in itself a clear subversion of the status quo which requires of men to be virile, dominating and macho. In so doing, these protagonists render themselves less than men because in the words of Abdellah he was “*un homme qui a oublié d'être un homme*” (*Une Mélancolie Arabe* 32) [a man who had forgotten to be a man].

11 In spite of the protagonists being in touch with their feminine side, they refuse to be identified as women. What is however unfortunate is that their societies do not reason in the same way as them. In fact, young sexually frustrated men take advantage of these effeminate boys who treat them as substitutes for women, who remain inaccessible to them.⁵ Abdellah for example when an older boy tries to abuse him sexually, demands to be treated as an equal and not an inferior: “*j'ai voulu un moment lui donner mon vrai prénom, lui dire que j'étais un garçon, un homme comme lui... Lui dire qu'il me plaisait et qu'il n'y avait pas besoin de violence entre nous, que je me donnerais à lui heureux si seulement il arrêta de me féminiser*” (*Une Mélancolie Arabe* 21) [For a moment I wanted to give him my real name, to tell him that I was a boy, a man like him... To tell him that I liked him and there was no need for violence between us, I would happily give myself to him if only he stopped feminising me]⁶. This scene embodies two conflicting discourses on the definition of masculinity. On the one side is the patriarchal discourse that defines masculinity in terms of biology, physique and the social roles that a man has to fulfil. Simone de Beauvoir terms this the “eternal

⁵ Abdellah Taïa suggests in an op-ed piece in *The New York Times* of 25 March 2012 that in Arab-Muslim societies of the Maghreb, particularly in his home country of Morocco, so as to safeguard the virginity of girls before marriage, there is a strict separation of boys and girls as they grow up. Such a separation is aimed at ensuring that girls are virgins when the time arrives for their marriage and also to assist boys to resist “temptation”. The fact that premarital sexual encounters are vastly reduced subsequently creates sexual frustration in some individuals. Taïa points out in this respect that “by the time [he] was 10, though no one spoke of it, [he] knew what happened to boys like [him] in [his] impoverished society; they were designated victims, to be used, with everyone's blessing, as easy sexual objects by frustrated men”. Given the difficulty, though not impossibility, of sexual encounters with members of the opposite sex, one of the available alternatives is sexual encounters between members of the same sex.

⁶ Although anal sex between men and women is considered to be a way to maintain virginity and is therefore rationalised as being not “haram” (sinful), anal sex between men is deemed a “liwat” (sin of Lot's people).

masculine” (485) which is primarily characterised by the capacity to think, act, work and create. This discourse relegates any individual who lacks virility and physical robustness to the status of non-masculine. This discourse is contrasted by one that surpasses the limits of the bio-physical as it is up to the individual to construct and define his own masculinity. This masculinity is different from the first in that instead of being fixed and stagnant, it is a phenomenon that is in a constant of becoming and of redefining itself.

12 By bringing into conversation the theories of Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler on the construction of identities and genders, it is possible to better understand the manner in which the second discourse briefly described above comes into being. When de Beauvoir asks the question, “what is a woman” (13), she implicitly questions the categories of feminine and masculine. From her existential theoretical framework, she responds that one is not born a woman but becomes it because each subject firmly arises through such projects of transcendence as she accomplishes her liberty by perpetually overshooting other liberties. As such, identity and gender are not stable phenomena but are constituted in a perpetual interaction with both space and time. This blends in perfectly with the postulations of Butler in that she insists that identity is established through a stylised repetition of social acts (1990: 4). For the protagonists in the novels of the writers under consideration, it is a question of repetition of general modes of operation that are socially deemed masculine.

13 Another important factor in the definition of masculinity is the question of activity and passivity. The male has by default been assigned the active role in contrast to the female that is reduced to passivity. Activity is often accompanied by the insatiable desire to dominate and there is in this a patriarchal operation which emphasises that the male is active and domineering. He notes that to be an active agent is to simply mechanically reproduce heteropatriarchal norms that define masculinity as domination. The protagonists in the novels of the four previously mentioned writers of Maghrebian origin categorically refuse to perfunctorily reproduce these societal demands, whether in everyday life or in the sexual act, they are not ashamed to assume the role called passive. Abdellah says repeatedly that he was not made either to direct or to dominate. His young brother, Mustapha, must remind him time after time that being a “man” is to be aggressive and to be domineering: “*tu comprends? Réponds quand je te parle, ne sois pas mou. Il faut se battre dans la vie... Tu me suis*” (Mon Maroc 43) [do you understand? Answer when I speak to you, do not be soft. In life you have to fight for yourself. Do you follow me...].

14 In as far as the (homo)sexual act is concerned, the four protagonists readily assume the passive position. Talking about his boyfriend Khélil, Sofïène explains: “*je me faisais un*

devoir de satisfaire son désir. Je devais me soumettre à ses assauts virils. Ces pensées de soumission, cette idée que l'homme que j'aimais s'était planté dans mon corps pour en jouir, m'amènèrent au paroxysme de l'excitation" (*Un Poisson sur la Balançoire* 35) [I made it a point to satisfy his desire. I had to submit to his manly assaults. These thoughts of submission, the idea that the man I loved had penetrated my body to find pleasure, brought me to a paroxysm of excitement]. Sofiène accepts to be penetrated and is proud of the fact that he is able to bring pleasure to his lover. In this way, he is delighted in taking on the role that his Tunisian society would label as a female one. For him, what is important is the sexual pleasure he gets and provides.

15 Abdellah expresses similar sentiments as he is also happy to become a “woman” as he accepts to be penetrated. In a letter to Slimane, a former lover, Abdellah says: “*tu as fait de moi ce que tu as voulu. Je suis devenu une femme arabe soumise à toi*” (*Une Mélancolie Arabe* 130) [you did what you wanted with me. I became a submissive Arab woman for you]. He concludes a few paragraphs later that: “*j’ai tenu comme j’ai pu. J’ai arrêté de travailler. Je suis devenu une petite femme. Ta conception de la femme. [...] Je suis devenu une sculpture entre tes mains*” (132) [I held on as much as I could. I even stopped going to work. I became a little woman. Your conception of a woman. [...] I became a sculpture in your hands]. To please his lover, Abdellah explains above that he is literally transformed into a submissive Arab-Muslim woman who is reduced to doing menial and ensuring that the “man” is sexually satisfied.

16 Zacharia in Ilmann Bel’s novel *Mauvais Fils* (2010) even though he accepts to be penetrated, his reasons are somewhat different. Zacharia is driven primarily by his desire for money:

Je ne dis rien. Je songe à la façon dont je gagne mon argent de poche. [...] Qu’importe pas où il faut en passer, il n’y a que le résultat qui compte. Qu’est-ce que c’est que d’offrir son corps, juste une heure de sa vie, pour donner du plaisir à quelqu’un tout en accédant à ses ambitions? (42)

[I say nothing. I think of how I earn my pocket money. [...] What does it matter what one has to do, only the result counts. What is it to offer one’s body, just an hour of one’s life, to give pleasure to someone whilst achieving one’s ambitions?].

Money is what is important to Zacharia and if obtaining it involves being passive and being penetrated by another man; he gladly accepts that as a means to an end. Despite his enjoyment of his (homo)sexual exploits, it is undeniable that there is a commodification of his Arab body, eroticism and sexuality by mostly white Frenchmen who see in him an exotic spectacle.

17 It is interesting to remark, as did Dialmy, that sexual identity is constructed in two manners in traditional Arab-Muslim societies: masculine and non-masculine (2009, 18). Active and macho men compose the masculine grouping whilst the non-masculine group includes women, children as well as sexual minorities like homosexuals. The main characteristic of the masculine the ability to penetrate and the act of penetration is an essential element that gives power to the Arab-Muslim male ego. As for Stephen O. Murray, he finds that sexual identity in Arab-Muslim communities is concerned with the question of domination and submission and not necessarily the sexual orientation of the participants in the sexual act (41). Therefore when two men have sexual intercourse, it is not viewed as a homosexual act because the penetrator is considered “the masculine” whilst the penetrated is “the non-masculine” (Ibid). Dialmy also attests that to penetrate the other is to be active, it is to be masculine, it is to be valued (2009, 40). However, to be penetrated is to be passive, to be feminine and to be devalued. Masculinity is thus perceived as the all dominant and all penetrating construction as opposed to femininity which is viewed as submission and passivity. What is therefore essential to ask at this point is how the protagonists of the four writers can lay claim to their masculinity when they are content with assuming the submissive role of passivity in the sexual act? Rachid O. problematizes this question of dominant versus dominated in his last novel *Analphabètes* (2013) in which he describes a young Moroccan called Assel who feels emasculated after having been penetrated by a French man. Assel confides in the protagonist-narrator that: “*le choix de coucher avec un homme est vraiment minable, de toute façon. La prochaine femme que je baisera, crois-moi, elle va morfler. Je serai sur elle comme un vautour et je ne la lâcherai pas avant de me sentir le roi du monde*” (63) [the choice to sleep with a man is quite insignificant. The next woman with whom I will sleep, believe me, will be in for it. I will be on her like a vulture and I will not let her go until I have felt like the king of the world]. Assel’s story presents an interesting phenomenon in Arab-Muslim societies where men are involved in homosexual activities although they do not identify as being homosexual, in the Western sense of the term⁷. For these, there is a clear distinction between “performance” and “being” because it is possible to perform homosexuality without necessarily being homosexual. In Assel’s case, being penetrated by another man leaves him with a feeling of being less than a male. To overcome this feeling of emasculation, he directs his anger on women. Through having sexual relations

⁷ cf. footnote number one of the present article.

with women he regains his masculinity given that he in turn is able to dominate a presumed “non-masculine” (Murray 41).

18 As previously noted, the protagonists of the four writers subvert, in spite of themselves, the established order as they demand a redefinition of identities and normative genders. It should be remarked that there is indeed, in the novels of the four authors, the emergence of a new form of Arab-Muslim masculinity that is not reliant on heteropatriarchal dictates. This new masculinity which is directly connected to the open acceptance of a homosexual subjectivity is constructed by the individuals through a dialogical interaction with a particular social and historical context. Marcia-Claire Inhorn considers these “emergent masculinities” (300) as an attempt to capture all that is transformative in the personality and being of a man who, consciously or unconsciously, defies religious, cultural and societal orthodoxies and dogmas. When Abdellah poses the question “ça sert à quoi d’être un homme ?” (*Mon Maroc* 24) [What use is it to be a man?], he interrogates the system of values that is used to moderate and categorise identities and sexualities in predominantly Arab-Muslim settings.

19 Rachid O., Abdellah Taïa, Eyet-Chékib Djaziri and Ilmann Bel present in their autofictional works, a subversive masculinity through their presentation of characters that are comfortable with their feminine side whilst firmly acknowledging their masculinity. The apocalyptic vision of the novels emanates from the melancholic air that pervades them owing to the difficulty of imposing this emergent Arab-Muslim masculinity on both sides of the Mediterranean. For the characters, the Maghreb presents itself as a cherished yet homophobic place which refuses to accept their difference. Although, France offers a more accommodating milieu in as far as the free expression of their difference is concerned, the characters have to contend with stigmatisation, exclusion and being stereotyped in their country of exile. The protagonists are condemned to languish in an eternal form of physical, spiritual and emotional exile. It is in this exile, this “*mélancolie arabe*” (Arab melancholia) as Abdellah Taïa terms it, that the protagonists have to attempt to make sense of not just their masculinity but also of their sexuality and nationality. This melancholia, which is brought about by the subversive nature of this emergent Arab-Muslim masculinity, should not be viewed as a negative phenomenon. It should be regarded as a positive force which undermines heteropatriarchal categorisations of sexualities, identities and genders.

20 The novels of Taïa, O., Djaziri and Bel call for a change in the consideration and definition of masculinity. It is interesting that this redefinition of masculinity is done not just within existing definitions of Arab-Muslim masculinity but also in relation to femininity.

Lawrence R. Schehr rightly acknowledges the importance of this dialogue between emergent masculinities and feminism:

Feminism has taught us that there are ‘other’ voices that are disfigured or compromised by their relation to the power structure and the signifying system. Feminism has also taught us that that this ‘otherness’ is not at all secondary. [...] It has also expounded upon the differences in form and detail that an ‘other’ discourses might have, unique to itself and as valid as the forms of the dominant discourse. (viii)

The novels of the four writers present homosexuality and emergent masculinities not as inferior to the hegemonic and dominant masculinity. They call for a reconceptualised consideration of homosexuality and emergent Arab-Muslim masculinity as phenomena that are complete in themselves and not necessarily subsumed to the dominant and culturally idealised form of masculinity which has asserted itself as having a transcendental primacy and supremacy.

21 Homosexuality and anal penetration, we can argue in conclusion, destabilises the sacrosanct position that has been occupied by macho masculinity. As such, homosexuality undoes “the symbolic machinery of repression, making the rectum a grave [...] in which the masculine ideal of proud subjectivity is buried” (Bersani 29). Homosexuality, and the inherent emergent masculinity, challenges not only the salience of gender in social stratification but more importantly the policing of desire and sexuality.

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Masculinity and Fascism in Three Dystopic American Novels

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Abstract:

Many American authors of the 20th century, concerned by their era's proclivity for idealization and archetypal behavior, published nightmare visions of America under Fascist rule. Three American dystopic novels, Sinclair Lewis' 'It Can't Happen Here', Philip K. Dick's 'The Man in the High Castle', and Philip Roth's 'The Plot Against America', all examine the ways in which a Fascist regime appropriates the masculine discourse to legitimize its hold over the people and justify repression against marginal groups. Government restriction of the access to masculinity marks those outside the "normal" system as subhuman and encourages violent repression, and constitutes the necessary mindset for mass slaughter. In all of these works, the regime firmly controls both access to and definition of normative male behavior, promotes traditional Victorian concepts of manhood, and alienates and marginalizes "other" men outside this homogeneous concept. These dystopic works illustrate the absolute necessity to construct gender expectations and ideals outside of Victorian criteria. Ultimately, each of the male protagonists finds a way to resist subjugation through alternative forms of masculinity based within a different, less Victorian concept of manhood.

1 The particular "voice" of a civilization is often represented in its conscious construction and articulation of normative gender roles. Gino Germani elaborates: "One of the characteristics of modern society is the substitution of deliberate, programmed behavior for that which in nonmodern societies occurs naturally and spontaneously" (245). So, if previously the "voice" of a particular element of culture was authentic, determined only by those individuals within that particular grouping, in modern societies this authentic voice has been usurped and silenced and in its place exists a fabricated, artificial voice that only broadcasts an agenda, not an experience. The volumes of discourse regarding idealized perceptions of American manhood in the late 19th and early 20th century aptly document the conscious attempt to define male function in society. With the closing of the American frontier in the 1890's and the devastating effects of The Great War still fresh in the minds of the populace, new ideas concerning the proper male role in society were being challenged and distorted. Michael Gordon succinctly defines the presiding gender expectations for the Victorian period, stating, "The husband was supposed to be dominant, the wife submissive; the husband was asked to provide for his family, his wife was called upon to care for the home and children. [. . .] ideals are doubly important as the standard to which many men held themselves, and as the standard by which deviance was defined" (145). This standard of

ideals¹ and corresponding definition of deviance played an instrumental role in shaping both the political and social structure of modern America.

2 In many ways, concern in early 20th century America regarding proper gender roles was only heightened by the looming cloud of Fascism which had begun to envelop Europe. The Fascist state stressed the importance of proper gender expectations, and carefully constructed normative behaviors to solidify and legitimize its hold on the populace. Germani notes that in many Fascist regimes, “there was a deliberate effort to socialize the youth according to values, attitudes, beliefs, and models of behavior considered essential to the preservation and the future of the system” (246). Many American authors of the 20th century, concerned by their era’s proclivity for idealization and archetypal behavior, published nightmare visions of America under Fascist rule. These dystopic novels explore the American propensity for violence and repression of marginalized groups through their depiction of masculinity.² And yet Michael Kimmel observes that “interestingly enough, these common characteristics—violence, aggression, extreme competitiveness, a gnawing insecurity—are also the defining features of compulsive masculinity, a masculinity that must always prove itself and that is always in doubt” (93). Three American dystopic novels, Sinclair Lewis’ *It Can’t Happen Here*, Philip K. Dick’s *The Man in the High Castle*, and Philip Roth’s *The Plot Against America*, all examine the ways in which a Fascist regime appropriates the masculine discourse to legitimize its hold over the people and justify repression against marginal groups. In all of these works, the regime firmly controls both access to and definition of normative male behavior, promotes traditional Victorian concepts of manhood, and alienates and marginalizes “other” men outside this homogeneous concept.

3 Published to wild critical and popular acclaim, Sinclair Lewis’ dystopic novel, *It Can’t Happen Here*, reestablished the author’s reputation and defended his distinction as the first American ever awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature (in 1930). Although Lewis’ emotional work contains many insights into American culture immediately preceding World War II and its perception of Fascism and Germany before the full horrors of totalitarian repression were widely acknowledged, it also aptly depicts the tension regarding new gender roles and attitudes in the Progressive era. In “Sinclair Lewis and Fascism,” Stephen L. Tanner notes, “[Lewis] implies that in the bowels of every nation is a kind of archetypal pattern of

¹ For a comprehensive discussion of Victorian gender ideals and expectations, please see “Sexuality, Class, and Role in 19th-century America” by Charles E. Rosenberg in *American Man*. Eds. Elizabeth and Joseph Pleck. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1980. 321-37.

² The categorization of these texts as dystopic is not novel to this study; for a comprehensive view of dystopic fiction, please reference John Joseph Adams’ introduction to his *Brave New Worlds* (2010) anthology.

terror simply awaiting the proper impetus to articulate itself” (61). Certainly, there was a large segment of the population who desired to return to the Victorian ideals of previous decades which concretely ascribed specific and regimented social spheres to both men and women. This gender tension greatly informs every aspect of Lewis’ text, especially in his representation of the American political capacity for Fascism.

4 When discussing the conscious attempt to dictate and determine the perception of male roles by a Fascist government in the dystopic novel, it is first necessary to look at the kinds of values revered and promoted to the public by the leader of the regime. In *It Can’t Happen Here*, the American masses are spellbound by the simple and rustic rhetoric of Berzilius “Buzz” Windrip, who easily wins the popular election and then immediately secures a dictatorial role for the executive branch of government, imprisoning opposing legislators, judges, journalists, and, eventually, ordinary citizens in his quest to consolidate power. During his demagogic campaign, Windrip appeals to the traditional Victorian ideals of masculinity in order to mould public perception and craft a new ethos of normative behavior. In his memoir, *Zero Hour*,³ Lewis’ antagonist claims that his “one ambition is to get all Americans to realize that they are, and must continue to be, the greatest race on the face of this old Earth, and second to realize that...we are all brothers, bound together in the bonds of National Unity, for which we should all be very glad” (Lewis 69). Here, Windrip appeals to his audience’s patriotism and isolation, while reminding them of the male bond of brotherhood and sacrifice. Carol Town notes, that “insecurity and nostalgia combine to make the lure of personal restoration and cultural hegemony impossible to resist” (195). However, this appeal to nationalism obviously excludes females; an observation which is further supported by Windrip’s own “planks” or ambitions for his new government which include removing women’s voting rights, participation in the workforce, and public presence (Lewis 61-62). The assertion of male superiority appropriates the masculine discourse of the Victorian era with its emphasis on separate spheres of existence and male social dominance (Gordon 145). Throughout the work this understanding of gender is consciously crafted to inspire males to support the regime and repress those “others” who fall outside of the normal male perceptions and are increasingly marginalized. Kimmel astutely notes that, “masculinity in the United States is certain only in its uncertainty; its stability and sense of well being depend on a frantic drive to control its environment” (96).

³ In his introduction to the Signet Edition of *It Can’t Happen Here* (2005), Michael Meyer explains the myriad cultural references throughout the novel. For example, Lewis’ audience would have read the antagonist’s memoir, *Zero Hour*, as a blatant reference to Hitler’s manifesto, *Mein Kampf*.

5 Windrip's own personal paramilitary forces, the Minute Men (MMs), are constantly exhorted to accept traditional male virtues, behavior, and attitudes in defense of their own culture and regime. At the beginning of the novel, a general exclaims: "This gospel of clean and aggressive strength is spreading everywhere in this country among the finest type of youth...who themselves demand the *right* to be trained in warlike virtue and skill" (Lewis 8). These young men are encouraged to forgo academic learning for the benefits of real-life experience, with the American founding fathers as a somewhat dubious example. Other literature of the period also reflects a desire to turn young men away from education in favor of experiential action. "Indiana Senator Albert Beveridge's *Young Man and the World* (1906) counseled boys to 'avoid books, in fact avoid all artificial learning, for the forefathers put America on the right path by learning from completely natural experience.'" (qtd. in Kimmel 97). Certainly the Progressive age in general took great pride in "doing and accomplishing" as opposed to theory and philosophy.

6 This aggressive sentiment clearly echoes the common rhetoric concerning the virtues of violence and war in shaping the male character of the Progressive era. Peter Filene states,

Whether any of these experiences produced "finer" and "cleaner" men is dubious. Yet Americans insisted vehemently that the war purified the young men who took part. War produced not simply stronger, more courageous, more honorable men, but purer men. Indeed, many Americans made it an extension of the purity crusade that Victorian reformers had been directing for half a century against vice. (330)

This extension of Victorian morality also ennobled deeds of action, for these contained the spirit of the country's foundations. This association between violent action and male development was obviously a close one and Lewis uses this same sentiment in his description of Windrip's exhortations to his private army:

I am addressing my own boys, the Minute Men, everywhere in America! To you and you only I look for help to make America a proud, rich land again. You have been scorned. They thought you were the 'lower classes.' They wouldn't give you jobs. ...I tell you that you are, ever since yesterday afternoon, the highest lords of the land—the aristocracy—the makers of the new America of freedom and justice. Boys! I need you! Help me—help me to help you! Stand fast! Anybody tries to block you—give the swine the point of your bayonet!" (Lewis 136-37)

Here the ideal of violence is directly asserted by the Fascist leader, not merely by the system itself. Windrip orders his men to fire on a crowd of protesters and later executes those few men who refuse to slaughter innocent civilians. These young men are pushed to act out with violence against the demonstrators and rebuked for their idle tolerance. The more noble masculine virtues of duty, loyalty, obedience, and patriotism are associated with repressive

violence in the Fascist regime of the American dystopic novel. By distorting the gender discourse of the era towards his own goals, Windrip is able to equate sadistic violence with traditional Victorian male roles, an extension of logic which was supported from historical experience. Filene notes, “In war Americans found, for the time being, peace of mind about their national morality—in large part because men were manly again” (333). By applying a familiar mentality concerning military, state-sanctioned violence, Windrip is able to mould a large segment of the population into the willing agents of political and social repression. This scenario aptly illustrates the ultimate function of the Fascist appropriation and perversion of traditional male gender expectations; in firmly controlling both the attitudes about and access to masculinity, they are able to legitimize their rule among the majority and violently alienate and suppress other subversive or minority groups. Interestingly, the repressive and marginalizing role of Fascist masculinity in dystopic American fiction is also illuminated in a much more recent novel, Philip Roth’s totalitarian nightmare, *The Plot Against America*.

7 Philip Roth’s dystopic novel, *The Plot Against America*, originates from much the same premise as *It Can’t Happen Here*. Published in 2004, this recent addition to Roth’s influential body of work imagines that Americans, caught up in an isolationist and ethnocentric fervor in the years immediately after the Great Depression, elect Charles Lindbergh on the Republican ticket in 1938 over Franklin D. Roosevelt. History illuminates Lindbergh’s Fascist ideals through his own diaries, and Roth combines these intimate reflections with the popular hero worship surrounding the Lindberghs’ personal triumphs and the family’s heartbreaking loss of a kidnapped child to color his portrait of the famous aviator. From the first pages of the novel, Lindbergh is portrayed as a masculine archetype whose daring adventures place him within the triumphant ranks of the divine (Roth 5). While the American people hail Lindbergh as a savior and immediately forget about the struggles of the Great Depression and reforms of FDR’s New Deal, the Jewish communities fear the ultimate outcome of his anti-Semitic rhetoric. Herman, the narrator’s father states: “They live in a dream, and we live in a nightmare” (76). In “Philip Roth’s Populist Nightmare,” Matthew S. Schweber notes that “above all, the Lindbergh presidency haunts because it taps a durable paranoid undercurrent in American politics visible even today” (129-130). Roth, who places his boyhood persona in this story as both a character and primary narrator, describes the populace’s emotional response to the barnstorming pilot:

It was Lindy all over again, straight-talking Lindy, who had never to look or sound superior, who simply was superior – fearless Lindy, at once youthful and gravely mature, the rugged individualist, the legendary American man’s man who gets the impossible done by relying solely on himself. (Roth 30)

A majority of the American public epitomizes the traditional Victorian gender constructs of courage, vitality, honesty, and rugged individualism through this heroic and paranoid figure.

8 Lindbergh's personal ideal of manhood seems the most realistic and perhaps benign of the dystopic novels examined in this discourse, and they are certainly the most uniquely American. These idyllic male traits are grounded in the Victorian American desire to achieve self-reliance and a patriotic isolation from the world outside one's chosen community.⁴ These qualities, fully articulated in Roth's dystopic vision/nightmare, seem to be a violent and distorted extension of the American Romanticism embodied by many Victorian writers, such as Emerson, Whitman, and Thoreau, with a hefty sprinkling of the cynical resistance found in myriad of figures of the period, including Hemmingway, Teddy Roosevelt, and even John Steinbeck⁵. Schweber observes that, "President Lindbergh and his administration's ethos—the heartland isolationism; rugged frontier individualism; plain-spoken, agrarian folk idolatry, anti-intellectualism [. . .] comes straight out of our Romantic populist heritage" (133). In the novel, many Americans seem to become enamored with this masculine myth and find its manifestation in their new hero. Roth states:

what Charles A. Lindbergh represented was normalcy raised to epic proportions, a decent man with an honest face and an undistinguished voice who had resoundingly demonstrated to the entire planet the courage to take charge and the fortitude to shape history and, of course, the power to transcend personal tragedy. (Roth 53)

However, it is not the masculine ideals which Lindbergh represents which become particularly menacing as this text unfolds; rather it is the assertion by the increasingly Fascist government that these constructed masculine characteristics are required criteria of good, decent, "normal" citizens which grows to be so frightening later on.

9 As witnessed in the previous dystopic novels, *The Plot Against America* also portrays a conscious attempt by a totalitarian state to influence and pervert male development to reflect traditional masculine expectations. Lindbergh's government creates the Office of American Absorption in order to assimilate and forcibly relocate local ethnic majority groups to areas comprised of "average" white Christian Americans, such as the Midwest (Roth 85).

⁴ The Progressive era's obsession with "rugged individualism" is very well documented and shapes most historical surveys of the period, as well as much of the criticism concerning the Naturalist writers of the era, and is aptly discussed in "The Mountain Man as Western Hero: Kit Carson" (1980) by Henry Nash Smith. For comprehensive discussion of Teddy Roosevelt's personification of this virtue and its relationship to popular gender reforms in the Progressive era, see Joe L. Dubbert's *Progressivism and the Masculinity Crisis* (1978) or the chapter entitled "The Cult of Masculinity," in Kimmel's *History of Men* (2005).

⁵ For more associations between American Romanticism and Victorian masculinity refer to Kimmel's *History of Men* (2005) or the *Closing of the Frontier: Naturalism and the Environment* (2002).

One of these assimilation programs is called “Just Folks”, and is “described by Lindbergh’s newly created Office of American Absorption as ‘a volunteer work program introducing city youth to the traditional ways of heartland life’” (Roth 84). However, this program only includes the boys of racial and religious minorities and is a thinly-veiled attempt to remove these males from their parents in order to instill traditional Victorian principles of white masculinity and replace existing cultural values and hegemony. An example of this same policy occurred under German Fascism, where “a court deprived one German mother of custody of her 15-year-old son in February of 1937, on the grounds that the boy was not being brought up in a properly ‘manly’ way” (Deuel 147). Roth echoes this sentiment, stating: “It was the intention of Just Folks to remove hundreds of Jewish boys between the ages of twelve and eighteen from the cities where they lived and attended school and put them to work for eight weeks as field hands and day laborers with farm families hundreds of miles from their homes” (85). This sinister plot to remove Jewish boys from their communities and encourage them to adopt new perceptions about manhood directly affects the narrator’s own family and illustrates the damage wrought by such blatant gender construction. Herman, Philip’s father, maintains, “that Just Folks was the first step in a Lindbergh plan to separate Jewish children from their parents, to erode the solidarity of the Jewish family” (Roth 86). The ultimate goal of this nefarious project is eventually witnessed through Herman’s own son and serves as a startling illustration of the Fascist regime’s consistent success in transforming gender discourse and construction to secure their hold on political power.

10 Sandy, the character/narrator Philip Roth’s older brother, is particularly enamored with the idea of seeing another part of the country and experiencing farm life. With the help of his Aunt Evelyn, the firebrand mistress of Rabbi Bengelsdorf, Sandy manages to receive permission to participate in the program from his doting mother and suspicious, reluctant father. The results of this experience are exactly what Herman had predicted and aptly demonstrate the Fascist government’s conscious attempt to assimilate and divide Jews by appropriating both the access to and experience of manhood. Philip describes his brother’s return from the Kentucky farm:

At the station, Aunt Evelyn was the first of us to recognize Sandy when he stepped from the train to the platform, some ten pounds heavier than when he’d left and his brown hair blondish from his working in the fields under the summer sun. He’d grown a couple of inches as well, so that his pants were now nowhere near his shoe tops, and altogether my impression was of my brother in disguise [. . .] He flexed his biceps so I could feel them. In the car, when he began answering our questions, we heard how husky his voice had become, and we heard for the first time the drawl and the twang. (Roth 91)

Sandy is a new man, indoctrinated into the Protestant work ethic, and self-sufficient lifestyle of a farmer and nearly unrecognizable by his own family. The conscious attempt to forge and shape the masculinity of the Just Folks programs is illustrated by Sandy's physical transformation from a boy into a young man in the mere two month spent in Just Folks. His voice is beginning to change, and he has developed the muscular physique of a man. His speech has altered to imitate that of the white Christian farmers who have spent the summer ushering him into their idealized brand of masculinity. His Jewish identity and appearance have been "disguised" and this metamorphosis is so complete that his hair color has begun to lighten, perhaps symbolizing his Aryan indoctrination.

11 Sandy's new assimilated value system is concretely articulated in his description and adoration of Mr. Mawhinney, the Kentucky farm owner and surrogate father for the summer. The comparison between this "all-American" archetype and their Jewish father signifies the sharp contrast between those "normal" men who embody the Fascist construction of masculinity and those "other" men who are marginalized and humiliated by that very system, such as Herman, the boys' father. Philip recalls:

my father was stymied, said almost nothing, and at the dinner table that evening looked especially glum when Sandy go around to reporting on what a paragon Mr. Mawhinney was. [. . .] Mr. Mawhinney owned not just one farm but three...and my father owned nothing more impressive than a six-year-old car [. . .] Mr. Mawhinney was able to make a living right out of the earth and then at Sunday dinner [. . .] eat only food that he himself has raised, and all my father could do was sell insurance. It went without saying that Mr. Mawhinney was[. . .]one of the good, clean, hard-working Christian millions who settled the frontier, tilled the farms, built the cities, governed the states, sat in Congress, occupied the White House, amassed the wealth, possessed the land, owned the steel mills and the ball clubs and the railroads and the banks, even owned and oversaw the language, one of those unassailable Nordic and Anglo-Saxon Protestants who ran America and would always run it – generals, dignitaries, magnates, tycoons, the men who laid down the law and called the shots and read the riot act when they chose to - while my father, of course, was only a Jew. (Roth 93-94)

The stark contrast between Mr. Mawhinney and Herman distinctly illuminates the ultimate goal of the Fascist state in their appropriation of masculine discourse. After his participation in Just Folks, the relationship between Sandy and his father Herman rapidly deteriorates. Sandy yearns to escape back to the farm in Kentucky and his father practically forbids him to mention the experience. Sandy continues his initiation into manhood alone, spending more and more time with young women and away from his distressed family and impressionable younger brother. Philip notes, "a new life began for me. I'd watched my father fall apart, and

I would never return to the same childhood.... [I experienced] a sense that my family was slipping away from me right along with my own country” (qtd. in Schweber 127). Sandy and his father barely even speak to one another as the novel reaches its climax, signifying the Fascist regime’s success in using access to masculinity to shape minds through their idealized perceptions of what it means to be a man. By resisting the state’s appropriation of the male discourse and opportunity, Herman loses influence over his son and becomes disconnected from his own family.

12 Herman also feels his access to traditional forms of masculinity cut off by the Fascist Lindbergh government in myriad other ways. Jeffrey P. Hantover states, that “masculinity is a cultural construct and adult men need the opportunity to perform normatively appropriate male behaviors. [. . .] Masculine anxiety can arise when adult men know the script and wish to act but are denied opportunity to act” (288). Herman desperately attempts to hang on to his own sense of importance and masculinity, increasingly at his own peril. He refuses to move his family to Canada, against the wishes of his terrified wife, because he does not want to admit that his beloved country has rejected him. As a result of this, he unwittingly submits his family to an American *Kristallnacht* and is nearly beaten to death by his own nephew. He is singled out for relocation by the OAA as a result of banishing Aunt Evelyn from his house for undermining his authority. However, when he attempts to stand up against the state’s new policy and refuses to go, he is fired from his insurance job. He then humbles himself and takes a job driving a produce truck at night for his domineering brother, who barely pays him enough to survive. Throughout the work, Herman tries to resist and oppose anti-Semitism and emasculation with words and intellect, but his raging diatribes are met with social humiliation, threats, jeers, and physical violence. Schweber notes, “Suddenly, Philip’s father is no longer the ‘indestructible bulwark’” (131). The state’s control of the access to traditional forms of masculinity is so complete that the marginalized male figuratively castrates himself in the attempt to gain some semblance of agency. Resistance only serves as a painful reminder of one’s social impotence and engenders even more persecution from the state. This crushing effect of gender and social marginalization on the psyche of the modern male is especially well documented in Philip Dick’s seminal work, *The Man in the High Castle*.

13 Philip K. Dick’s dystopic vision, *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), directly illustrates the idealization of masculinity through its portrayal of the men who make up the German fascist regime which controls the eastern half of the United States in post-World War II America. Childan, a subjugated male character, marvels at the German’s, “science and

technology and that fabulous talent for hard work; the Germans never stopped applying themselves. And when they did a task, they did it *right*” (Dick 25). The fascists also embody other intangible virtues: “What the Nazis have which we lack is—nobility. Admire them for their love of work or their efficiency [. . .] but it’s the dream that stirs one; if that isn’t the oldest yearning of mankind, our finest hope for glory” (Dick 25). In vast contrast to the subjugated male characters in the novel, the Germans contain an access of confidence. A Jewish man masquerading as a German observes,

They want to be the agents, not the victims, of history. They identify with God’s power and believe they are godlike. That is their basic madness. They are overcome by some archetype; their egos have expanded psychotically so that they cannot tell where they begin and where the godhead leaves off. It is not hubris, not pride; it is inflation of the ego to its ultimate – confusion between him who worships and that which is worshiped. Man has not eaten God; God has eaten Man. (Dick 41-42)

Again, the Fascist regime in *The Man in the High Castle* attempts, and largely succeeds, to promote an idealized form of masculinity. The dominated men in this novel honestly believe that the Germans are “real men” and inherently superior to themselves. In fact, Star notes that this type of acceptance may be seen as a metaphor for Dick’s own post war generation: “Dick was already proposing that the 50’s themselves were a kind of pacifying fantasy available for the nostalgia of future generations” (37). This assertion further illuminates the ultimate function of male idealization; even if this nightmare fails to pacify, it sends a clear message about which groups have access to normative gender behavior. The Fascist men in the novel embody traditional masculine characteristics, which are portrayed in sharp contrast to the “other” subjugated American men in the work.

14 Joe Cinnadella, the Swiss Fascist assassin, embodies many of the masculine stereotypes appropriated by the German fascist regime which controls the eastern half of the United States in this post-World War II dystopic book. He is sexually experienced, virile, and a mysterious danger and power smolders behind his pale eyes. Juliana, Frank Fink’s estranged wife, is instantly attracted to Joe’s primal masculinity: “The intensity all around him disturbed her judgment. [. . .] There’s something special about this man, she thought. He breathes – death. It upset her, and yet attracted her” (Dick 37). This unsettling power continues to define Joe and becomes a focal point of their sexual relationship. Joe is so sexually experienced that he claims that he can cure Juliana’s fear of men. He states, ““But I know I’m right. Listen; I’ll never hurt you, Juliana. On my mother’s body – I give you my word. I’ll be specially considerate, and if you want to make an issue out of my experience – I’ll give you the advantage of that. You’ll lose your jitters; I can relax and improve you, in

not very much time, either’” (Dick 89-90). Joe’s virility gives him the confidence to claim that he can unlock a women’s latent sexual desire, and this boast can be interpreted as the ultimate representation of idealized masculinity in this Fascist character. What man would not desire the opportunity and ability to teach any woman he meets to release her sensual potential? Joe also appropriates the exact same masculine principles as Indiana Senator Beveridge when he states: “Listen, I’m not an intellectual – Fascism has no need of that. What is wanted is the deed. Theory derives from action” (Dick 161). This assertion solidifies Dick’s ironic portrayal of traditional manhood through Fascist characters. Joe’s overwhelming sexuality, physical power, and mysterious mental domination illustrate his representation of the masculine ideal and function as a distinct contrast to Frank, Juliana’s alienated, pathetic, and emasculated husband.

15 Juliana’s husband, Frank Fink, the Jewish industrial craftsman, serves as the complete antithesis to the fascist male ideal embodied by Joe. He is painfully aware of his physical weakness, ugly appearance, and indecisive self-loathing. “[Juliana] had always told Frank that he was ugly. Large pores. Big nose” (Dick 33). Fink’s social isolation and personal failures are magnified by his inability to satisfy Juliana, his estranged wife. “Juliana, Frank thought. Are you as alone as I am?” (Dick 136). His emasculation is so pronounced that it informs nearly all of Juliana’s recollections of her husband. She wonders: “Did he fall dead without me? A fink is a finch, a form of bird. And they say birds die” (Dick 33). Later, comparing Joe’s behavior to her husband, she remembers, “that’s Frank who’s afraid” (Dick 79). This failure to provide for Juliana’s needs humiliates Frank and he obsesses over the possibilities of her finding gratification in the arms of another man. “I know she’s living with some guy, Frank said to himself. Sleeping with him. [. . .] I hope to hell she’s not with some older guy. That’s what I couldn’t stand. Some experienced mean guy with a toothpick sticking out of the side of his mouth, pushing her around” (Dick 135). Of course, the reader knows that this is precisely the type of man that Juliana is currently sleeping with, an irony which only accentuates the difference between Frank and Joe.

16 Fink’s lack of confidence and emotional despair are the direct result of his social marginalization and emasculation at the hands of the fascist oppressors. The narrator notes, that “he felt defeated and hopeless” (Dick 46). Frank’s lack of “place” status triggers a deep sense of failure, which only serves to further distance him from the established ideals of masculinity embodied in the German characters. “Fear, he thought. This whole jewelry venture. *What if it should fail? What if it should fail?*[. . .] I’m scared, he realized. [. . .] Suppose they laugh at us. What then?”(Dick 137). In his article, “Men and Jobs,” Elliot

Liebow notes the destructive cycle of insecure masculinity, stating that: “the man’s low self-esteem generates a fear of being tested and prevents him from accepting a job with responsibilities or, once in a job, from staying with it if responsibilities are thrust on him, even if the wages are commensurately higher” (370). Fink’s lack of confidence and self-doubt are not realistic conclusions concerning his skill or abilities; rather they are an ingrained response to his lack of access to masculine feelings and, as such, will probably continue under state’s carefully constructed repression. Frank’s unconscious musings link his lack of economic, professional, and marital success to his alienation from traditional forms of manhood. He states: “Right now I’m nothing, but if I can swing this, then maybe I can get Juliana back. [. . .] she deserves to be married to a man who matters, an important person in the community, not some *meshuggener* [‘crazy fool’]. Men used to be men, in the old days; before the war for instance. But all that’s gone now” (Dick 53). Fink verbalizes the established mores of the male social role through his assertion that achieving professional success in his independent jewelry business will allow him to regain the manhood that has been usurped by the fascist regime and, consequently, the affections of his beautiful wife.

17 Fink is marginalized as a result of his ethnic heritage and he is unable to participate in his own life because he must hide his Jewish identity, which he attempts to do by modifying his surname, among other things. Towards the end of the novel, Frank Fink (aka Frink) is identified by the police and arrested because of his ethnic status. Dick writes,

As [the cops] got out of the car, one of them said to Frink, ‘Is your real name Fink?’ Frink felt terror. ‘Fink,’ the cop repeated. ‘You’re a kike.’ He exhibited a large grey folder. ‘Refugee from Europe.’ ‘I was born in New York,’ Frank Frink said. ‘You’re an escapee from the Nazis.’ The cop said. ‘You know that that means?’ . . . ‘Back to Germany,’ one of the cops said, surveying him. ‘I’m an American,’ Frank Frink said. ‘You’re a Jew,’ the cop said. (195)

Frank’s exclusion from masculinity is symbolized by his Jewish ethnicity. He must constantly assert another identity in order to stay alive, just as the emasculated male under fascist rule must not act according to traditional male roles if he expects to live; to do otherwise would comprise a direct threat to the totalitarian regime.

18 These three dystopic novels, written in vastly different eras of American history with unique social concerns and cultural influences, all display a hauntingly similar vision of gender roles under a Fascist regime. These novels illustrate the conscious reversion back towards idealized Victorian attitudes and expectations of masculinity which devalue women, promote repressive violence, and alienate and persecute those “other” groups and persons who refuse to swallow the rhetoric. The male protagonists ultimately resist the state’s

construction of penultimate male behavior, but they do so at their own peril: Doremus is placed in a concentration camp, Frank is arrested and suffers economic and emotional humiliation, and Herman loses parental influence over his sons and must live through American pogroms. This portrayal of the appropriation of traditional masculine discourse by a Fascist regime in works by different American authors from diverse ethnic backgrounds and separate periods of culture suggests a sobering warning concerning gender conflict in the modern world. It seems quite apparent that these writers see something very dangerous in any one group asserting superiority over another, whether it be in the form of race, religion, or gender. These dystopic works illustrate the need to transcend the types of ethnocentric thinking that lead to terrible atrocities, both in the imaginary realm of the texts themselves and in the real life Jewish Holocaust and other, more recent, genocides. Certainly the Nazis could not have perpetrated the Holocaust on such a wide scale without first implementing a system which clearly defined male roles and expectations and marginalized other groups. Government restriction of the access to masculinity marks those outside the “normal” system as subhuman and encourages violent repression, and constitutes the necessary mindset for mass slaughter. These dystopic works illustrate the absolute necessity to construct gender expectations and ideals outside of Victorian criteria. This new conception of constructed manhood may be witness through the endings of these dystopic visions.

19 Each of these men ultimately finds a way to resist subjugation through alternative forms of masculinity based within a different, less Victorian concept of manhood: work. Doremus is displaced from his beloved newspaper and forced to instruct the enemy in churning out propaganda; he quits and begins an underground resistance newspaper. Frank finds renewal and hope by making his own “hand wrought” jewelry, asserting the value of craftsmanship and unique expression over the faceless conformity of Fascist oppression.⁶ Herman reasserts control over his own family through the help of his marginalized community and his own labor. He defends his family from anti-Semitic violence and undertakes a journey across the Midwest to save another child. These men are also aided by women, creating the emotional partnership, community, and respect necessary to resist coordinated repression. Doremus escapes with the help of his daughter and romantic interest. Joe is killed by Juliana in a hysterical frenzy. Herman’s wife stoically manages to support the household by going into the workforce, saves and plans for their escape to Canada, and

⁶ For more information on this topic refer to Andrew P. Hoberrek’s fascinating study on the value and role of work in the stories of Philip K. Dick, “The ‘Work’ of Science Fiction: Philip K. Dick and Occupational Masculinity in the Post-World War II United States (1997)”.

ultimately functions to hold the family together emotionally. These endings all hint at a new society in which masculine value is ascribed by merit and utility of labor, where men and women work together towards the common good, and where relationships between gender groups can finally be devoid of fear, oppression, and domination. Although this viewpoint may seem a bit optimistic for the dystopic genre, it also reminds humanity of the necessity for tolerance and respect.

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'Not Like the Rest of Us' - Masculine Idyll and the (Im)possibility of Love in Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar*

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Abstract:

Gore Vidal's controversial fourth novel *The City and the Pillar* (1948), has been noted for its explicit portrayal of homosexuality in post-World War II. America and its investment in dissolving the asserted dichotomy of masculinity and same sex desire. Its protagonist Jim Willard has been mostly characterized as self-involved in his endeavor to reconcile dominant gender narratives and his sexual attraction to other men. The masculine idyll he fetishizes in his imagination, in most existing analyses of the novel, seems to paralyze his ability to actually engage with others, to direct his desire outward and render love and kinship impossible. In the following essay, I will offer a reading that circumvents a definition of desire as being intrinsically tied to the self-contained ego. I seek to show how the relation of homosexual individual and the external world, including homosexual subculture as well as heteronormative mainstream culture, is regulated by culturally and socially prescribed narratives of manhood. R.W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity will be incorporated in this analysis to account for the constitutive power of masculinity in constructing a subject position that tries to mend the gap between gender and sexual identity. The aim of this essay is to explore how Vidal's novel negotiates the struggle of the homosexual individual to express and pursue love and desire while still adhering to a standardized normative masculinity.

1 I think you're the unluckiest type. (...) You'll attract everybody, yet you won't be able to do anything about it. Not really. Oh, maybe someday you'll find a woman, but not a man. You're not like the rest of us, who want a mirror. It's exciting in a way but it's also sad. (85)

On the onset of their affair, Paul Sullivan confronts Jim Willard, the protagonist of Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar* (1948), with these observations. These statements address the ongoing struggle Jim faces: the perceived gap between him, a young man who is sexually attracted to other men and the "rest of us", as Sullivan points out, those who identify as homosexual. In fact, Sullivan suggests that Jim might be a better fit for a woman, after all. His ability to "attract everybody" when he is not "able to do anything about it", constitutes both his allure as well as his tragedy, what makes him both "exciting" and "sad": not being "able to do anything about it" coevally denotes Jim's failure to control the signals and impulses he sends to others as well as his inability to properly act on the reactions he stirs. Jim is reduced to the passivity of being desired and rendered incapable of truly desiring anything or anyone else. There is an implicit accusation of Jim being self-involved and a narcissist, which is, at once, contradicted by Sullivan's claim that those who Jim is different from, really just "want a mirror". Sullivan is unaware that Jim's driving aim, leading him up

to this point, has been his desire to be reunited with his "twin" (72), his mirror, Bob Ford, the boy from high school that Jim spent a night with at a deserted cabin and whom he has been longing for ever since. In this respect, contrary to what Sullivan believes, Jim appears to be very much like the "rest of us". What is revealed and spearheaded by Sullivan's description is the intricate and troubling relation between the individual experience of homosexuality and a socially constituted sexual identity. This tension seems to render a stable self-knowledge impossible.

2 Set in 1940s, *The City and the Pillar* (henceforth abbreviated as *City*) chronicles the journey of protagonist Jim Willard, mapping both his geographical as well his psychological itinerary. After his first sexual encounter with Bob, Jim traces Bob's footsteps by following his example of going to sea. His travels on the West Coast lead him to Los Angeles where he works as a tennis instructor before eventually becoming the lover of film star Ronald Shaw. Through Shaw he meets and begins a relationship with the unsuccessful writer Paul Sullivan whom he follows to Mexico and then finally to New York City. After the end of their romance and a brief stint in the army, Jim settles in New York City permanently, again working on a tennis court. He drifts through gay subcultures of casual sex before finally being reunited with Bob, who has returned to their home in Virginia and is now a husband and a father. Jim visits home to see Bob and invites him to New York in hopes of rekindling their relationship that he has since idealized as the only possible image of love between him and another man, which does not challenge his normative understanding of masculinity, one that is tied to heteronormative conventions of kinship. His desire of picking up where he and Bob left off is disappointed as Bob trenchantly rejects his advances. In the novel's original edition, Jim strangles and kills Bob in the end. In the revised version, which will be treated as the definitive one in this essay, Jim rapes Bob, neglects him in his apartment and drifts off into the night, continuing on a journey that is prospectively as restless as the one depicted over the course of the novel.¹

¹ Vidal rewrote the novel's ending for a 1965 edition since, as he notes in its introduction, many had deemed the original ending too "melodramatic" (xvi). He concedes: "I had always meant the end of the book to be black, but not as black as it turned out" (xvi). While changing the novel's conclusion from Jim killing Bob to raping and then neglecting him, is a significant modification, Vidal maintains that the character of Jim Willard remains unchanged; the emotional ramifications, namely the violent dissolution of his imaginary romantic counterpart, are virtually the same, yet, in not turning his protagonist into a murderer in the end, Vidal argues to have alleviated the dramatic effect of the original final chapter. This notion could be contested elsewhere but will not be the focus of the present essay. As most subsequent analyses, the revised version will, here, be taken as the definitive version.

Flat Prose and a Gay Male Subjectivity

3 Upon its publication in 1948, Vidal's forth novel was met with, as Stephen Adams describes it, "shock and disbelief" (15) at its frank depiction of homosexuality. Vidal remembered the critical reaction to *City* as hostile, which neither stopped the novel from becoming a bestseller nor did it, as predicted by some critics then, end Vidal's literary career. Even though the novel has since been recognized as an important entry into the canon of early gay literature, a sense of repudiation and reservation prevails in discussions of the book. Especially its style, which Vidal himself called "flat gray prose" (xv), has been a recurring point of critique. In his review "The Fate of the Novel" (1948), Leslie Fiedler describes Vidal's controversial work as "self-effacing, underwritten and resolutely dull" and notes its display of the characteristic "flatness of naturalism" (523). Further the novel has been compared mostly unfavorably to Truman Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms* which was published the same year and tackles similar controversial topics - Vidal was well-aware of this comparison, in which his work was likened to gay pulp fiction opposed to Capote's more sophisticated prose.

4 Reading *City* as a naturalist narrative means to subscribe to the notion of a determinist project at hand, that is to suppose the novel is making absolute claims concerning societal and cultural structures and the homosexual subject within this structure. The emphatic portrayal of masculinity in this work, as in many other early gay novels, becomes instrumental in arriving at essentialist interpretations of their representation of homosexual identities and the experiences they produce. Robert J. Corber's "Gore Vidal and the Erotics of Masculinity" (1994) pursues the aim of allocating a "gay male subjectivity" along the lines of binary conceptions of gender and sexuality, specifically, masculinity and homosexuality. The negotiation of this binary is interlocked in protagonist Jim Willard who is depicted as an athlete and typical middle-class boy - two categories seemingly conflated in a standardized conception of masculinity - but who also desires men at the same time. Yet, as Corber points out himself, Vidal's larger project appears to be the deconstruction of limited and limiting narratives of homosexuality and arguably the dissolution of homosexuality as a category of identity altogether. Hence the conception of *gay* male subjectivity remains troubling as it

suggests complacency with an idea of a deducible gay experience, that is an essentialized experience that is transferable from the individual homosexual to all homosexuals.²

5 Other analyses of the novel, especially from the 1960s have undertaken the paradoxical task of interpreting the naturalism of Vidal's novel metaphorically. The symbolism invoked by the novel's title - a reference to the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorra, also quoted in the epigraph -, but that is notably absent in its plain style, is applied to the narrative and opens out into a deterministic reading of the novel. Stanton Hoffman ascribes gay literature at large the task of creating a "gay world" (195) that is, in his reading, "not only the only place where the individual homosexual is made to feel he can exist but also is the result of his guilt over his choice of a way of life, the result of his acceptance of the stereotypes of a culture and an obsessive consciousness of effeminacy and masculinity." (196) Here, the dichotomy between masculinity and homosexuality resurfaces - through guilt and the threat of effeminacy - and, in Stanton's analyses "transforms a theme of homosexual love into a theme of the impossibility of love in America" (195). Individual desires, in this instance same sex desire, which are at odds with norms that are held to be commonly accepted, have to be suppressed and remain liminal. In short, Stanton reads the "gay world", the different gay subcultures protagonist Jim traverses as provisional spaces of short-lived recognition that offer no durable relief and, more importantly, no love or meaningful kinship. Taking the novel's stylistic flatness at face value and interpreting the lack of redemption and tangible foreclosure of its protagonist - what has he learned in the end? - as programmatic for and symptomatic of the "gay world", Stanton arrives at a conclusion of an "impossibility of love". As most of these analyses note, Vidal's proclaimed aim with *City* was to present homosexuality not as pathological, or a disease, as was widely held at the time of its publication, but as something natural - an aspect that only engenders deterministic and essentialist readings, leading Hoffman to extend this grim interpretation of the "gay world" to all of America.

Hegemonic Masculinity and the Sociality of Desire

6 I want to return to Corber's essay once again, to establish the point of departure - in a double sense - for the argument I want to sketch in the following. The pervasiveness and negotiation of masculinity or, as Corber writes with respect to Vidal's novel, the practice of

² Corber anticipates this criticism, conceding that Vidal project is "anti-essentialist" and terms the subjectivity Vidal imagines in the novel as "utopian" rather than "minoritarian" (48). The distinction remains as elusive as the subjectivity it seeks to describe and appears rather as a terminological appropriation that still tries to transcribe a communal experience of homosexuality in post-world war II. America.

"masculinizing" subjects, which pointedly highlights the perpetual state of becoming in the performance of gender, plays an integral role in discussing gay literature, both with respect to its narratives told and the framework, the demarcating notion of a *gay* literature. I want to modify a statement by Corber which I believe gravely impacts the way we understand masculinity as a regulating structure of social lives, cultural imaginaries and an individual marker of identity. Corber maintains: "Despite their relative autonomy, sexuality and gender function in *The City and the Pillar* as mutually constitutive categories of identity" (34). What appears as just another rather uncontroversial configuration of addressing the asserted binary relation of gender and sexuality actually brushes over a contradiction of vital importance. How could these "mutually constitutive categories" exist in "relative autonomy"? The world "relative" deemphasizes what I seek to stress, namely, the highly relational and dependent nature of masculinity and homosexuality. If, as Corber concludes, "patriarchal forms of masculinity provide the greatest obstacle for gay liberation" (50), there clearly is an imbalance in distribution of power in the interplay of the two which means that rather than being mutually constitutive, at their intersection one seems to overpower the other. The creation of a gay subjectivity is complicated by the privileged position of masculinity over sexual desire, one negating the legitimacy of the other. Recognizing this actually allows for a clearer understanding of the political stake in Corber's argument, which he calls "gay liberation". The struggle between the individual homosexual and the external frameworks of heterosexist culture and subordinated gay subcultures is clearly rooted in the hegemonic application of an idealized manhood that appears incommensurate with same-sex desire.

7 The concept of hegemonic masculinity, as introduced by R.W. Connell (1987, 2005), is highly instructive in the analysis of these power relations and their repercussions for the homosexual individual, in Vidal's novel. Connell defines hegemonic masculinity not as "a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same" but rather as "the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable" (2005, 76). She points to the existence of "multiple masculinities" (76) that are constituted in a field of cultural relations and notes that especially in the individualist culture of the United States, the tensions between individual configurations of such masculinities and the larger realm of possibilities and practices have to be taken into account to understand the dominance of particular masculinity types.³

³ Connell first developed the concept of multiple masculinities in her work *Gender and Power* (1987). The notion of a hegemonic masculinity, which has been integral in the formation of the field of masculinity studies,

8 I want to enhance this approach, which stresses the relational dynamic of masculinities in shaping subject positions against the backdrop of culturally enforced gender practices, by including Leo Bersani's work in his essay "Sociality and Sexuality" (2010), which examines how individual desire comes to interact with the social. Bersani offers a definition of desire that is no longer confined to a psychoanalytical conception, which establishes desire as always expressing a lack that cannot be satisfied and inevitably always refers back to the self-contained structure of the ego. Bersani suggests that desire is object-bound and directed outside the self and is constituted in and constitutive of social practices. Opposed to a conceptualization of desire "as the mistaken reaction to a loss" (105), as held in psychoanalytical thought, Bersani notes how "[d]esire mobilizes correspondence of being." (113) This comprehension of desire opens up new readings of Vidal's novel and particularly its protagonist. Jim's inability of enlivening his desire and extending it to the outside world can be read as more than mere narcissism but shows how sexual identities are governed and reigned it by the forces of dominant gender narratives. Desire comes to be recognized as acting upon or being delimited by the social.

9 I want to present a reading of *The City and The Pillar* that accounts for the struggle of reconciling individual sexual identities and socialized gender practices. Rather than differentiating these two poles by characterizing the individual as hermetically closed, I want to conceptualize both structures as open to social dynamics while still recognizing that the hegemonic force of masculinity is integral in regulating both and becomes defining in the production of meanings and self-knowledge.

Mirrors and the Masculine Idyll

10 "I do my traveling on the other side of town" (20), Jim Willard replies to his younger brother John's inquiries concerning his lack of romantic involvement with girls. This statement is uttered in passing, as Jim prepares to spend a night at a remote cabin with his high school buddy Bob Ford and bears implications Jim himself at this point does not openly acknowledge or is seemingly unaware of. A popular kid in his school and a successful athlete on the tennis squad, Jim discards bewilderment over his disinterest in going on dates, by claiming Bob and him, as well as the entire baseball team, do not like to "mess around with the 'nice girls'" (20) and therefore seek pleasure elsewhere - a claim that rings defensive and hardly truthful. Jim deflects the line of questioning he is subjected to, by referring to a world

was further explored in the first edition of *Masculinities* in 1995 and has since been subject to revision and reconfiguration. My analysis is based on the most recent use of the term in the revised edition from 2005.

of mature manhood that is impenetrable and cannot be challenged by his inexperienced younger brother. Jim's knowledge of this world, though, appears rather as a claim to an external idea of manhood than being founded in a personal familiarity with it.

11 The presence of mirrors and Jim's frequent inspection of his reflection saliently recurs throughout the novel. He evades his brother's interrogation by studying his image in the mirror. "Was he handsome? His features were perfectly ordinary, he thought; only his body pleased him, the result of much exercise" (20). The ordinariness of his features and the masculine composition of his body consolidate Jim's adherence with the hard and fast rule of manhood. To be "ordinary" means, in Jim's case, successful impression management and defying suspicions and dangers of effeminacy looming in his desire for Bob, or at later stages of the novel, his relations to other men. As he becomes exposed to homosexual men who fail to meet these masculine standards, the mirror becomes a site of anxious self-examination. "Often after he had been among them, he would study himself in a mirror to see if there was any trace of the woman in his face or manner; and he was always pleased there was not" (66). Jim's obsession with his image in the mirror, by virtue of the image of the mirror, could easily be read as narcissist, though, rather than self-indulgence, this appears to be a practice of reassuring himself that he is still in accordance with socially normative masculinity. What Jim is looking for is not necessarily beauty, even though his lovers frequently confirm his attractiveness, but what looks ordinary, meaning what bears no trace of effeminacy. His anxiety to be perceived as effeminate increases more and more as he is exposed to homosexuals who display stereotypical characteristics and heighten his fear of recognizing himself in them.

12 Just as much as Jim has to reaffirm his masculinity to himself, he is only able to endure the instabilities of his compliance with this ideal, by creating Bob as his mirror image. Both sustain their manhood, which allows Jim to frame the nature of their relationship as natural, as an amalgamation of two parts that make up a whole. Their encounter in the cabin is described as their bodies colliding "with a primal violence, like to like, metal to magnet, half to half and the whole restored" (29). Bob complies with Jim's reasoning by deflecting their passionate encounter as "awful kid stuff" and contending "guys aren't supposed to do that with each other" (30). While Bob is able to compare their intimacy to his experience with women, and clearly maintains that it is different from that and not right, for Jim this incident sets the template for a conception of idealized sexual relations. This ideal manifests in what Jim himself realizes is not reality but only materializes in dreams.

Jim Willard's erotic life took place almost entirely in dreams. Until the day with Bob beside the river, he had dreamed of women as often as of men, and there had seemed no boundary between the two. But since that summer day, Bob was the constant dream-lover, and girls no longer intruded upon their perfect masculine idyll. He was aware that what he dreamed of was not what normal men dreamed of. But at the same time he made no connection between what he and Bob had done and what his new acquaintances did. (...) Finally, he decided that he was unique. He was the only one who had done what he had done and felt the way he did. (66)

This passage encapsulates the mutually besetting of Jim's internality and his relation to the outside world, his object of affection Bob and the cultural narratives and norms he in turn is subjected to. His acknowledgment of being "unique" reveals the ambiguity of reconciling ideals of masculinity with his desire for Bob. The two can only coexist in Jim's fantasy, where a "perfect masculine idyll" can be preserved. Women are explicitly excluded from this idyll, as Jim seeks to imagine a masculinity that does not require the affirmation of manhood through a female counterpart.⁴

Being Ordinary in a World of Multiple Masculinities

13 So far, I have focused on aspects of Vidal's protagonist Jim Willard that would qualify as rather internal than relational, such as his investment in preserving appearances and impressions, as well as imaginative acts of idealization and masculinization with respect to making sense of his attraction and devotion to Bob. Yet, as I have shown, all of these aspects are less linked to a self-contained and ego-driven notion of desire but is in constant interaction with an idea of masculinity that seems external. What feels natural to Jim, such as his feelings towards Bob, is contested by the threat of effeminacy, a threat embodied by other homosexuals who openly display the stereotypical characteristics Jim resent. To distinguish himself from these homosexuals and misleading them not to recognize him as one of them, becomes an incessant goal in the way Jim manages his external appearance. Jim's internality and the externalities of the gay worlds he encounters, painfully seem to affirm the

⁴ For a thorough analysis of Jim's relationship or rather state of alienation towards women, I want to refer to Corber's essay which is particularly concerned with the similarities between the constitution of gay male and female subjectivities. Whereas Corber emphasizes potential alliances that could be formed in challenging the preponderance of straight male vesting in cultural narratives, I would read the narrations commentary on Jim's view on women as expressing his affliction by pressures to participate in heteronormative practices of masculinity. Women are usually shown as disrupting homosocial moments and represent a set of expectation to perform something that actually seems unnatural to Jim. This becomes apparent after Jim and his fellow seaman Collins pick up women at a bar in Seattle. They head to the girls' apartment where one of the women, Emily, tries to seduce Jim. An image of Bob stops him from having sex with her and he flees. The narration concludes: "At the moment when what should happen was about to happen, the image of Bob had come between him and the girl, rendering the act obscene and impossible. What to do? He would not exorcise the ghost of Bob even if he could. Yet he realized it would be difficult matter to live in a world of men and women without participating in their ancient and necessary duet" (53).

contradiction of what looks "ordinary" on the surface but contains something that is "unique". The idyll Jim imagines is tied to a past that is perpetually tried by the present.

My two lovers in this novel were athletes and so drawn to the entirely masculine that, in the case of one, Jim Willard, the feminine was simply irrelevant to his passion to unite with his other half, Bob Ford: unfortunately for him, Bob had other sexual plans, involving women and marriage. (xiii)

14 The differentiating aspect of Jim's and Bob's desire lies in their "sexual plans". "Women and marriage" designate more than just another end of the spectrum of sexual orientations but also symbolize a constitutive unit of a cultural narrative of masculinity that is shifting in the historical moment after WWII. The "masculine idyll" that Jim continues to fetishize throughout the novel represents not only an event of his past but also points to a romantic history of the homosocial that is overturned by what Corber refers to as "domestication of masculinity" (38) in the looming 1950s and the emergence of family life in the American suburbs. Masculinity in this post-war moment becomes increasingly affiliated to the role of the patriarch, head of the nuclear family, more so than through relations and mutual affirmation between men.

15 The notion of a "masculine idyll", emblematically enshrined in Jim's experience with Bob by the river, is historically contingent with larger narratives of the homosocial, specific, and as postulated by Leslie Fiedler in his work *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1970) characteristic of American literature and culture. Along the lines of Fiedler's thesis, Stephen Adams recounts the reading of their romantic episode in their isolated idyll of manhood as reproducing a narrative of "homoerotic romances between runaway males who escape the "civilizing" influence of woman and the adult sexual relation she symbolizes, by retreating to some primordial wilderness" (16). This romance between runaway male stands in staunch contrast to the life Jim knows at home: the relationship with his father is notably strained, whose patriarchal role is endowed through its investment in domestic life. As he notes to Jim, the morning before his "escape" with Bob: "It is amazing to me why you want to sleep away from our own home which we have tried at such expense to make comfortable..." (17). Bob, on the other hand, lives in a far less comfortable home, which, after his mother's death, is headed by an alcoholic father. The expectations set in him as "the son of the town drunk" (17) are far less pressing and unlike Jim, who should be bound for college after graduation, thinks "[c]ollege is too much work" (26) but dreams of going first to New York City and finally to sea. Jim is drawn to this less constrictive type of masculinity that Bob comes to embody but struggles to follow his desire to go with him. "I'm afraid to leave home and the family, not

that I like them all that much ..." (27). Not only does Bob in this moment represent a fixture of sexual desire for Jim but simultaneously and by extension becomes an ideal for a masculinity that remains unattainable but profusely tempting.

16 In stressing the socially and structurally open nature of both masculinity and sexual desire, I want to draw upon Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's contribution to the notion of the homosocial in her work *Between Men* (1985). She argues that "[t]o draw the homosocial back into the orbit of 'desire' of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual" (1). For Jim and Bob this continuum is far more than hypothetically unbroken but actively transgressed. The demarcating line between the homosocial, a male bond and companionship, and the homosexual, marked by active desiring and physical intimacy, is blurred and in Jim's imagination legitimized as co-extensive of one another. Yet, he realizes and is constantly reminded that this rupture of the continuum can only take place outside stipulated regulations of masculinity. His peaks into other gay worlds expose the instability of his justifications and can only prevail through insistence that he and Bob are different, he is even "unique", but ordinary all at once. The oscillation between these poles, the compartmentalization of desire and masculinity, never stabilizes and forces Jim to constantly drift and then stop to reexamine whether his uniqueness is still balanced in an ordinary surface, one that does not give away his desire to be with other men.

17 In her definition of hegemonic masculinity, Connell establishes the plurality of narratives revolving around manhood based on social and historical context. "With growing recognition of the interplay between gender, race and class it has become common to recognize multiple masculinities. (...) To recognize more than one kind of masculinity is only a first step. We have to examine the relations between them"(76). I have touched upon the tension of the masculinity as enacted in Jim's socio-cultural environment which is contrasted by a less restrictive and traditional masculinity as engendered in what Bob and their sexual experience comes to embody. These two narratives, of a domesticated masculinity on the one hand and a "runaway" masculinity on the other, represent two powerful counterparts that meet eye to eye in the cultural realm of possibilities, even though one appears to be in process of replacing the other. Connell further differentiates these multiple masculinities, acknowledging that not all types of masculinity are accepted in contesting these dominant types. The concept of hegemony eminently entails practices of subordination and also produces marginalized forms of masculinity, which are oppressed and stigmatized within the larger sphere of sexual policing (78-80). Effeminacy, as described earlier, is among these

marginalized masculinities and is represented through the homosexuals Jim encounters when moving to the Los Angeles and eventually in his relationship with Actor Ronald Shaw.

Performing Masculinities

18 Upon his arrival in Los Angeles, Jim begins to work as a tennis instructor at a hotel and soon learns of the existence of a gay subculture in Tinseltown. Despite being warned about being corrupted by this underworld, Jim is eventually drawn into it.

Jim went through several stages after his discovery that there were indeed many men who liked other men. His first reaction was disgust and alarm. He scrutinized everyone carefully. Was he one? After a while he could identify the obvious ones by their tight, self-conscious manner, particularly when they moved, neck and shoulders rigid. (...) Finally, one tried to seduce him. Jim was quite unnerved, and violent in his refusal. Yet afterwards he continued to go to their parties, if only to be able to experience again the pleasure of saying no. (60)

After an initial reaction of disdain and shock over the ruthless subversion of masculinity, Jim gradually gives in. His practice of observation and examination, so often applied to himself, receives a tangible counterbalance from an external world that transgresses what he has so far held to be a given and was only foiled by an imagined stereotype he never truly encountered for himself. He becomes used to their "tight, self-conscious manner" and when he is introduced to renowned actor Ronald Shaw, he finally gives in. His own transgression beyond the ordinary passes with remarkable ease as one of his homosexual friends notes with respect to the famous Shaw: "So maybe you're not queer, but *this* is an exception. Why, this is something people dream about. You could make a fortune out of him" (65). Jim is able to conceal his attraction - less to Shaw in particular but the social and sexual world he signifies - by legitimizing his affair with a man through its financial advantages and the opportunity to share Shaw's affluent lifestyle. Status and upward mobility, at least temporarily and within the context of a status-oriented and fame-worshipping community, allow Jim to circumvent his ideals of masculinity.

19 Jim's relationship with Shaw is marked by ambivalence, because he is both taken by Shaw's success and esteem but equally notices his vanities and desire for incessant validation. Still, Jim complies with what Shaw desires, especially after moving into his mansion. Shaw, in fact, very similar to Jim, is driven by sustaining an exterior ideal that his lovers have to facilitate. "If a boy came to love him (and disregard the legend) Shaw was affronted and endangered"(62). Scrutinizing this "legend" poses a threat to Shaw who while selecting his lovers "for a combination of physical beauty and hard masculinity" (62), only offers male

dominance through nourishment and accommodation but is susceptible to being exposed as feminine. The relationship of Jim and Shaw is less founded on authentic interaction or intimacy but rather a mutual affirmation of successful gender and social performance. For Shaw this entails proclaiming his love to Jim, who is able to tell, is seemingly even relieved to recognize this as "acting" (72). Shaw's profession as a movie star offers both allure for Jim to explore new social circles while also commenting inscriptively upon the performative and surface-based nature of gender enactments.

20 Sullivan, whom Jim meets in Shaw's circle of Hollywood friends, offers an ostensibly different impulse that draws Jim to him and away from Shaw and leads them to take up a contemporary companionship. Upon their first meeting, Jim is struck by how Sullivan digresses from the patterns of homosexual performance he has grown accustomed to in Shaw's company. "Most of the people that visited Shaw were alike. (...) Sexually they were obvious, unlike Sullivan, who appeared perfectly normal" (81). With his "perfectly normal" appearance, Sullivan offers Jim a new possibility of imagining a homosexuality that is not at odds with masculinity, after all. Yet, as their affair progresses, Jim becomes aware of both the pending dangers of being with someone who is similar to him, as well as the cracks in Sullivan's appearance and the vulnerabilities they brush over. Throughout the conversation, from which the quote at the beginning of this essay is taken, Jim recognizes himself in many of Sullivan's assessments of him. This leads him to fear his external performance is failing and he begins to feel endangered by the insights Sullivan offers. Though Jim is initially drawn to their similarities and the fact that there was truthfulness possible between him and Sullivan, their intimacy begins to bare the danger of having the authenticity of his appearance and masculinity challenged. "With self-knowledge came alarm" (85). The danger of being confronted with his internal conflict leads him to defensively conclude that Sullivan has "revealed himself as just like the others" (85).

The (Im)possibility of Love

21 Jim's profound fear of being confronted with the tension and discrepancy of his internal life and its external manifestation is what blockades his relationships with Shaw and Sullivan and causes most of his other sexual encounters to remain fleeting. After he moves to New York City, he frequents gay bars and cruises strangers. He refrains from having steady partners and makes few friends as "[i]t was easier to have sex with a man than to acquire a friend" (166). Only dealing with bodily surfaces and their sexual force appears less threatening than actually engaging in any emotional intimacy, even if this confirms a

trepidation which occurs to him in his relationship with Sullivan: He might end up living a life of "[e]ndless drifting, promiscuity, defeat" (85). Hoffman's argument of the "impossibility of love" rings through these passages, illustrated for example by Jim wondering whether he is indeed "unfeeling in his relationships" (85). However, I want to relativize his fatalistic and deterministic reading. Even though Jim believes to only be "capable of love, at least with someone who could be his brother" (85), his desire for love, the longing for a brotherhood in which such a love is possible should not be dismissed as an inwardly directed assurance of his ego. Rather, the terminology, conceptualization and limitations of his desire are confined by the few and restrictive narratives available to him to makes sense of an identity that tries to both entail a maintainable masculinity as well as his desire to be with men. His dream world, revolving around the pastoral ideal of him and Bob by the water, bundles an unassailable masculinity and his sexual longing for a man. It is not only a phantasmal construct, though, but also an expression of the limitations stressed upon his individuality by hegemonic masculinity.

22 The novel's ending, his reunion with Bob, represents a violent intervention into in Jim's imagined idyll, as it confronts the unattainable idea of his union with a reality that sees Bob resisting him astutely. Now married and a father, Bob has complied with the domesticated masculinity that he and Jim had rejected during their isolated moment of intimacy and that Jim has revisited so frequently and perfected in the years following their parting. When Bob comes to visit him in New York City, Jim purposefully takes him to a gay bar, tensely anticipating Bob's reaction and expecting him to recommit himself to joining Jim in this new outlying gay world. His strategy yields no response and he tries to seduce Bob back at his apartment. Bob angrily resists his advances - "Let go of me, you queer!" (202) - leading Jim to violently force himself upon him. The "masculine idyll" he had imagined is destroyed when he rapes his twin and thereby undermines Bob's manhood irretrievably. For Jim this event marks "a circle completed, and finished" (203). Upon leaving, he touches the pillow Bob's face had been pressed to, recognizing it drenched in tears, a final blow and sign that he has emasculated the man that had represented the idealized manhood he had aspired to and clenched onto throughout his journey.

23 Drifting through the New York night, Jim comes to acknowledge that there is no returning to the love and manhood, he had imagined and had measured himself and his partners against. "The lover and brother is gone, replaced by a memory of bruised flesh, tangled sheets, violence" (207). Instead of reading this ending as final disillusionment and recognition of the impossibility of love, I want to suggest that the frustration of his

internalized conception of masculinity and its perseverance in a confined idyll opens the possibility to finally circumvent the demarcating lines of hegemonic masculinity. By no longer subscribing to an ideal which he himself so violently deconstructed, arises the chance of transcending types of homosexuality and directing desire at external objects. Returning to Bersani's statement of desire "mobilizing correspondence", the final sentence of the novel suggests that the collision and subsequent dismembering of his romanticized object of affection, will not render Jim immobile after all. "Soon he would move on" (207).

24 The tension between individual desire and the cultural narratives of masculinity that condition social practices remains unresolved at the novel's conclusion. In raping his "brother", the idyll of Jim's fantasy is exposed as finally unattainable and ruptured by the violent masculinity that had confined this imaginary to begin with. Despite the climax of having destroyed the aim of his desire, an impossible illusion as it turns out, Jim is shown to continue on. Bob can no longer function as the vanishing point of his desire, which actually opens the possibility for love and recognition by forcing Jim to assert himself differently. At the historical point in time of *The City and the Pillar's* publication, the narratives available to imagine same sex desire within hegemonic discourses of masculinity were lacking. Yet, Jim's moving on seems liberated from wanting a mirror, a lover in his image and a beginning self-knowledge of rather than having to pass as ordinary he will come to grips with not being "like the rest of us".

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History, Theory and Practice in J. Jack Halberstam's *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal*

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1 With a general audience of the non-academic public and a specific audience of feminists in mind, the author presents the overall book as an opportunity to embrace a new and radical type of feminism called “Gaga feminism.” Halberstam uses popular culture, mass media, and the consumer capitalist entertainment culture of America to demonstrate where Gaga feminism fits into the heterosexual culture of a changing but as yet unchanged gender scheme, why feminist and queer theory needs to consider the radical feminism as a possible solution, how Gaga feminism can help re-define or eliminate the concept of normal, the ways in which Gaga feminism can inform our national presumptions about marriage and the “natural,” and the recommendations and practices that someone can try when embracing Gaga feminism. Though he may not intentionally do so, Halberstam tends to develop the following three processes of support for Gaga feminism (not in any particular order in the book): foundational development, theoretical musings, and practical application.

2 Because this book is created for beginners—whether that means the beginner of Gaga feminism or the beginner of feminism in general—Halberstam makes an effort to address the foundational thinkers and texts of feminism from which this idea stems. *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal* is situated directly among works of modern, postcapitalist writers like Judith Levine, who argues that the control of children’s sexuality results in dire consequences (14). More indirectly, *Gaga Feminism* is situated among a wide array of seminal theorists like Foucault and Marx. Readers find Halberstam in conversation with such writers as *Atlantic* reporter Hanna Rosin, among others, who argues that there is a great “role reversal,” where women work and men become obsolete. Halberstam finds that Rosin's work is lacking this specific "gaga" elements, as she did not follow up the implications of her claims. Halberstam’s Gaga feminism is also situated in direct opposition to authors like Susan Faludi, who openly disagreed with Halberstam’s claims for Gaga feminism after a conference and whose work, though considered fundamentally feminist, is not in line with most of the postcapitalist gender and sexuality changes that Halberstam would like to see feminism—Gaga feminism, to be

precise—embrace. Because his focus is not singularly academic, though, and the author incorporates a good deal of media-related cultural artifacts into his analyses, he is careful to include a wide variety of examples from multiple different genres.

3 Halberstam begins his overview of media related gendering by looking at examples of gendered relationships from children’s television shows like *Spongebob Squarepants*, of which Halberstam claims, “SpongeBob SquarePants and his crew of spongy life forms all experience a soft relation to reality, and (...) life (...) operates according to its own set of rules, code violations, morality, and propriety” (xviii). This claim reinforces Halberstam’s idea that the media contributes to our understanding of gendering or, in some cases, lack thereof from an early age. The book also analyzes the way mainstream media models like Lady Gaga, Lil’ Kim, Rihanna, Nicki Minaj, Jenni Rivera, and Ke\$ha portray feminism, and gender, in different ways than society expects. Also contributing to the development of gender in media and the need for Gaga feminism is the analysis of examples of mainstream and alternative—also known as mumblecore—films like *Baby Mama* and *The Kids Are All Right*. All of these analyses of academic arguments and social portrayals of gender and sex contribute to a better understanding of the world into which Gaga feminism will enter, should it be put into practice by feminists anywhere, giving readers a better conceptualization of the foundation upon which the theory of Gaga feminism is built.

4 Halberstam acquaints his audience with the theory surrounding Gaga feminism and its general category, feminism, in several ways. The book spurs readers to understand why reading about and understanding Gaga feminism is important in any way on page xx of the introduction, saying that “[change] should *interest* us (...) and should engage us enough to spur a reconsideration of the terms, the names, the categories we use to understand our bodies,” continuing by saying that we should care about the way change affects “our relationships, our bond with others, our connections to strangers, our intimacies within and beyond biological relation, and our imagination about the future” (emphasis original). By also analyzing several real instances of relationships, like heterosexual role reversal and male pregnancies, gender politics, and sex, Halberstam creates a relatable framework by which the audience may understand feminist theory and its faults that call for a theory like Gaga feminism, as well as to understand the ways in which Gaga feminism helps to break down societal expectations of

relationships and gender in a productive manner. Similarly to the author's development of the foundational basis of Gaga feminism, his analysis of Gaga feminism helps the audience, most of whom are expected to be non-academic readers, understand how Gaga feminism works, at least theoretically. To completely pose Gaga feminism as a viable option for would-be feminists, Halberstam's next step is to introduce possible practical applications for Gaga feminism.

5 The practical application for Gaga feminism is found in *Gaga Feminism* most often in the form of recommendations. For those new to Gaga feminism, these nudges are critical to developing a more versatile impression of what it is. In the preface, the author provides a vaguely worded recommendation for subscribers to Gaga feminism, which, he says, "hints at a future rather than prescribing one; it opens out onto possibilities rather than naming them; it gestures toward new forms of revolt rather than patenting them" (xiii). This recommendation is that Gaga feminism be treated as revolutionary and constantly changing rather than well-theorized, but static. Halberstam encourages readers to look toward models of popular culture who refuse to be categorized by culture and normality and, as he puts it in the manifesto chapter of the book, "do agitate, do make things worse, do run screaming through the street, and do refuse to return to business as usual" (132).

6 While much of what the author discusses proposes plausible and acceptable background, theory, and practice, the means by which he argues for Gaga feminism experiences the same limitations of binary that his text argues against. In some ways, the author's presentation of normal gendered structures, or normalized societal structures, as the bad that exists in society and of the currently abnormal—the other—as the good to which society must aspire is similar to the broken heterosexual structures critiqued by Halberstam throughout much of chapter three. However, Halberstam's theory of Gaga feminism does not present the feminism as anything that has been thoroughly understood by anyone, including Halberstam himself, which is why a more fitting style is not to be expected and the comparative writing style in which tension develops the concepts most fully is often still the most effective.

7 Though *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender and the End of Normal* is not likely the next feminist foundational text due to its radical and very new introduction into the American world of feminism, the text is certainly useful in accessing the less scholarly audiences for whom it is written and activating questions and responses among most open-minded individuals who also

enjoy taking part in to the entertainment industry. Fortunately, the book is also quite well constructed for this particular audience by not only theorizing media relations with the general public, but also by presenting the names and corresponding theories of those who are scholars in the area of feminism and, even, Gaga-related feminism.

List of Contributors

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